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God in the social crisis, 1935.

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GOD IN THE SOCIAL CRISIS

Delivered By
Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver
At
The Temple
On
Sunday morning, April 7, 1935.



In one of the Psalms - the 42nd - we hear the complaint: "I will say unto God my Rock: Why hast thou forgotten me? Why go I mourning under the oppression of the enemy? As with a crushing in my bones, mine adversaries taunt me when they say unto me all the day: "Where is thy God"?"

Now in times of prosperity, men do not say unto others, "Where is your God?" Men do not say unto themselves, "Where is our God?" But in times of adversity, in times of trouble, they frequently say, "Where is your God?" Men doubt. Men deny. Men blaspheme.

The great Maimonides of whom I spoke last week, says in his classic Guide for the Perplexed: "We generally extol God in words and praise Him as righteous and benevolent when we prosper and are happy, and when the grief we have to bear is moderate; but it is otherwise when such trouble as are described in Job come over us. Some of us deny God and believe that there is no ruler in the universe even if their property alone is lost. Others retain their faith in the existence of justice even when suffering from loss of property, whereas loss of children is too much affliction for them. Others are made firm in their faith even with the loss of their children. But there is no one who can patiently bear pain that reaches his own person. He then murmurs and complains of injustice either in his heart or with his tongue."

And how very true this all is! We quite readily accept the benefits that come to us and the blessings, even when we do not deserve them but when evil comes upon us, even if deservedly, we complain and become rebellious. This attitude of mind on the part of most people

dates itself back to the idea of primitive man, of a barter with destiny, in terms of contractual relationship with his divinity. He would say to his God: If you will prosper me, if you will bring me victory, if you will protect me against my enemies, I will sing praises unto you. If, on the other hand, you fail me, if misfortune comes upon me and I am vanquished, then I will destroy all which I am building. That same attitude prevails in this day among the masses of the people. It is a quest of religion which one might characterize of trades people, religion as an insurance policy against accident and illness.

The whole concession, of course, is based upon an error and that error is this: We assume that God rewards and punishes human beings quite in the same way as we mortals do -- that is, in a physical way. If I am charitable, I expect that God will grant me health, wealth and long life. Adversity he will deny me. That is physical. Of course that cash and carry justice which is operating among human beings is not God's way with his world.

I know many people and you know many noble people who are deserving of all the good things in life but who are nevertheless very poor, who suffer much and whose life is darkened by many tragedies. On the other hand, you and I know of many unworthy people who live in the lap of luxury and who live to a ripe old age and enjoy the blessings of life. Physical suffering, unless contracted in sin, is no punishment nor is prosperity unless achieved through labor and industry any reward for real merit. Seldom is there any relationship between physical reward and merit.

God's code is different from ours. His rewards are in terms spiritual. It is within ourselves, within our inner lives that we must look for the compensations of life. Thus the man who has lived nobly, whose life has been determined by wisdom and courage and idealism and altruism will find his reward in terms of nobility, in terms of beauty, in terms of the satisfaction of having played the game squarely, in terms of meaning and significance found in life, in terms of his ennoblement, in terms of respect and honor of his fellow men.

He who has lived ignobly will find his sure, certain and inevitable punishment in the devastation of his inner life, opportunities wasted, in terms of loss of the respect and admiration of his fellow men. In other words, rewards are real, definite, sure, not to be looked for in material substances but in real values. In this sense the innocent never suffer and the wicked never prosper.

There are evils, of course, in our human life which are inherent in the very nature of our humanity. We are mortal men. We are subject to the loss of health, sickness, death, decay. There is no particular sense in asking ourselves, "Why is this so? Why were we created men instead of angels?" We might as well ask ourselves, "Why were we created at all? Why was the universe created at all? Why this infinite solar system?" Only the creator of all these knows. The purpose and meaning of all this we do not know and never shall know.

The foolish man will fret. He will beat his hands. He is a foolish man. The wise man reconciles himself to the inescapability of life. He will utilize his God-given mental faculties to ease his way

through life, to smooth the road through life, to protect himself, safeguard himself, adjust himself to the order of physical life so as to make his way through life as painless and smooth as possible. In so doing he will grow, develop and will become enriched. His intellect will ripen. These very limits turn out to be the goal which move him on to knowledge and self-improvement.

"For every evil under the sun
There is a remedy, or there is none.
If there be one, try to find it.
If there be none, never mind it.

But most of the evils, my friends, which are forced upon us as individuals we bring on ourselves. But we like to blame others for it, or God. Man creates the evils he endures. We are intemperate. We over-indulge ourselves. We do not restrain our appetites and so we undermine our health. We become subject to the afflictions of our bodies and to diseases and we blame God for our illness. We are morally unclean and we devastate our own lives and the lives of our families. When sorrow and disaster come into our lives we blame God for our misfortune. We are over-ambitious. We are over-rich. We are never satisfied. We desperately reach after superfluous things of life. We center all our hopes on the acquisition of more and more things. When we fail to achieve them and lose them after we have striven so arduously, we blaspheme our maker. We are selfish. We are self-centered. We do not think of others, of our friends. We find ourselves lonely in the world and unhappy. We God blame/for the evil in the world.

But God is not to blame, my friends. If we wish to be free agents, then there must be the possibility of evil in our lives as well as the mandate to overcome that evil. God made that kind of a world for us and gave

us the privilege of choosing the one or other as well as the capacity to overcome evil and to achieve good.

And it is so also with social evil. We look about us today and see a world full of poverty, misery, conflict and hate and war and alarms of war and we say, "Where is God? How does he permit all that? If he is omnipotent, omniscient and sees all, why does he permit any unhappiness and evil to exist?"

The answer here is exactly the same for the race as for the individual. Evil which has been in the world is no argument against the existence of God's will and no argument as to God's indifference to the world. Inherent in society are imperfections, some of which are incorrigible. Some of them can be rectified and ameliorated. Unfortunately these evils which can be corrected, man has as yet failed to utilize his intellect, his virtues, his powers to correct. And mankind has no one to blame but itself. Our social destiny, my friends, lies just in this amelioration of society, the improvement, the perfection of our world. Otherwise social existence has no significance.

If men have so far failed to employ their intellectual and spiritual resources to correct these evils, they have no one to blame but themselves. The goals have been revealed. The truth has been made known to the human race long, long ago. It is largely due to our own stupidity, to our own indolence that we do not follow along those ways which lead to the ultimate kingdom of justice, peace and happiness for the whole universe. God is not to blame for their misfortunes. Thousands of years ago mankind was instructed ^{by} inspired seers to seek peace and pursue it. Nations were taught that war is their undoing and is their misfortune.

And throughout the ages the spokesmen of religion have taught mankind to follow the ways of peace and not war, to beat their swords into ploughshares, to seek reconciliation, not with the sword but with institutions and agencies which have been built up to seek peace -- world courts, leagues of nations, pledges and conferences. Nevertheless they do resort to war. They bring the blackest misery and misfortune on the human mass.

Is it God's fault? Is God in the social crisis? He is summoning mankind but mankind is reluctant to obey his summoning.

Long, long ago, the human race was taught the ways of happiness and the ways of social and economic equality, that the rich should not oppress the poor, that God has given unto the human world an abundance of all things necessary for the happiness of all men. God has given us of his bounty. He has given us an earth capable of maintaining and sustaining all living things in comfort. But we, in our self-weakness, in our lust, in our greed, have refused to share equitably the goods which God has given us. Masses are deprived of patrimony so that most of God's bounty has been appropriated by the few and the many have been denied access unto things they need. Is it God's fault or is it the fault of mankind?

Long, long ago, the human race was taught the idea of freedom, liberty, brotherhood. Beacon lights were kindled and held aloft. But their hands were strengthened by faith in God. Mankind has refused to follow these leaders that God inspired, these pathfinders. It chooses to listen to the silent voices of demagogues who teach them a narrow sinful type of loyalty instead of brotherhood and peace and compensation so that mankind has become fragmentized, disintegrated. Then we blame God for the evils which afflict society.

But God gave us freedom of choice - not absolute - but enough freedom of will to mold our will after a sign and pattern -- and the pattern itself God gave unto us. God gave us the vision of after which to fashion ourselves. The program is there. The goal is there. We have the capacity, if so we will, to build a beautiful and just and noble civilization upon this of God Almighty.

God is good, my friends. And mankind is progressing, slowly to be sure, haltingly, falteringly, at times receding and retrogressing, but steadily advancing. "Evil often triumphs", the poet said, "but never conquers." This is the great confidence which God has placed in the life of the human race. Evil may triumph, but evil never conquers. And the way mankind progresses, God's pedagogy, is the way of suffering. God fashions our futures on the "anvil horns of pain."

Every epoch of revolution, of unrest, conflict, struggle yields mankind some new boon, some new lesson. And God raises us out of this epoch of ours, out of this fateful hour of poverty, of clashing between peoples, of growing intolerance, of increasing fear and suspicion among nations. We, ~~will~~ in this Twentieth Century of ours, so harassed, so perplexed, moving from one crisis to another, must solve the problem of war, can solve the problem of war. By the end of the century, people will look upon war in the self-same way we look upon the institution of slavery.

Out of the economic struggle of our age there will emerge a better economic system. There will be much suffering in the process. Christian will fight Christian and brother will be turned against brother.

Many a bloody conflict awaits the human race, but out of that very suffering mankind will learn how to apply the ancient truths which were revealed unto it. "Thou shalt love Thy Neighbor as thyself, for I am the Lord."

My friends, the fact that the human race is aspiring, the fact that the human race is reaching up in spite of the fact that frequently it fails to achieve, the very urge for the triumph, the impulse which is within for a better and juster way of life, is proof that God is present in our world, that he is present in the social crisis. He is the impulse. He is the goal which is driving us on. He is the goal toward which we are moving. It was a great German mystic who once declared that "God is the unutterable sigh in the depth of the soul." God is that which we wish to be in our supreme moment of goodness and inspiration. We are aspired out of darkness into light. God is ourselves. He is our best reaching out of the mountain top. God is the yearning of the human soul for perfection.

And as long as in the human race there is a yearning for justice, a longing for a better and finer way of living, as long as within the human race there are men and women combatting injustice and brutality, striving for a better social order -- so long can we be sure that God is a living dynamic presence within us.

And the wise man, my friends, in these fateful times, will strive for a better social order, confident that it is God's will that he should strive for it, that it is God who is summoning him, that it is ~~the~~ God made manifest in the social crisis in the self-same way that God called unto Moses in the burning bush and summoned him to leadership in the emancipation of our race. And the wise man will be confident as was

the Psalmist who wrote "God is our refuge and our strength, a very help in time of trouble."



1. Psalmist:

"I will say unto God my Rock: Why hast thou forgotten me?
Why go I mourning under the oppression, the enemy?
As with a crushing in my bones, mine adversaries taunt me
When they say unto me all the day:
"Where is thy God?"

2. In propriety - men do not ask - god be with
"adversaries" - they do! They rebel! They deny! They
blaspheme!

Main motives (Just)

→ How true! Just ready - do not deserve! But evil
Religion as a sort of barter with fate!
A contractual relationship with divinity! Primitive!
If you will be good unto us - prosper - victory - altars
" " fail us - misfortune - vangelisch - Rechnen..
{ Still held by unwiss to-day! Not religious!
{ Trades people! traffic Insurance Policy!

3. Based on Error - God rewards & punishes in
a physical way.

If I am charitable - health, wealth, long life -
God's way should be based on our Code built upon
the exigencies & necessities of an imperfect
human organization

→ Code - & carry Justice! Not God's way!

4. I know many worth people - poor - tragedy -
worthless people - laps of luxury - old age -

~~Suffering~~
Physical suffering, unless contracted in sin, is an
unpaid merit.
Prosperity - ^{and} achieved thus with industry & ability
no reward.
not related to quality and moral worth

5. Inner rewards & punishments -
within ourselves, we must look for compensations
There they are invariable - sure - certain!
He who has led a life of utility - courage -
- inner life filled with beauty, meaning, interest
- satisfaction -
no suffering can befall -
For this reason innocent never suffer.
Wicked never prosper!

6. Some the Evil which even criminals are inherent
in the very nature of man's humanity. Man is born
man - not angel! He is material subject to growth
and decay, bound by iron laws which govern
all living & perishing beings.

It is idle and fruitless to ask why was man
created man, & not perfect gods - just as it
is just idle to ask why was he created at all?
Why was man created? What is it for? What
is it tending to? Man's system
Why?...

Only the Creator knows the purpose & meaning of his creation.
We do not know! We cannot know! We shall never know!

- ~~man~~ foolish man - will feel heat his hands
when man remembers

And will use his post-gift mental faculties
to save and smooth his way thru life - brave
pain - protect even against disease - even
chances, accident - and can with confidence
with honor & experience

It is so long - he will grow deeper! intellect
super - personality enriched -

The very early limitations will press God
adverse him to new discoveries - truth

Strive (Just) For every evil under the sun
7. Just, the Evil we bring on ourselves but
we blame others - & God!

"Man creates the evil he endures!"

We are intemperate - health unimpaired - diseases
over-exhausted and afflictions -
We are uselessly useless - we devastate our lives
and disrupt our families

We are over-ambitious & over-ambitious - but
merged in worldly pursuits.
Hungering after superfluous
things

If, by chance, we lose our
possessions - we feel utter
benefit - whereas all that we
need, physical things, are
very few and hard to obtain
- whereas things are few in no
- superfluous " are without end

We are selfish -

Perfect good will of people -
Always - never understood.

8. If we wish to be free agents then the possibility of such evils must be in human life - as well as the means to overcome them.
God built this kind of a world for man to live in - and put good and evil in it - and gave man the power to choose the good and the capacity to overcome the evil and to achieve the good.
9. It is no also with social evil.
Our world to day full of injustice - oppression - poverty - hate - conflict -
20th c. etc. - If God is, + if He is omnipotent
Why does He permit it?
When is God in our social crisis to day?
10. Answer is same for collective group as for individual.
Imperfections of man are no argument for God's
non-existence - as for His inability to fight
of truth.
Imperfections in society are imperfections - as in
man - Some of these are external circumstances.
Some can be rectified and corrected.
Social destiny lies in amelioration and
improvement

Most social evils are conspicuous - avoidable.
Men have so far failed to employ their intellect
and resources - their virtue & power -
to combat them.

✓ We have no one to blame but ourselves!

✓ It is not as if mankind knew us better!

There has been revelation to us - to inspired
seers & seers - the good way revealed
to humanity -

✓ Too many of us are too selfish, or too
carelessly, or too indifferent to strive for the
better social order!

✓ Ideal of Universal Peace - thousands of years
old - Even tried the agencies for
achieving it - World Court - League of Nations -

first is necessary us - we are reluctant
to follow!

✓ Ideal of Peaceful World - Econ. justice
- old - ways are here - Plenty is here!
Classes are keeping masses from their patrimony

✓ Ideal of Human Brotherhood - truth -
- clear our hearts - open our eyes to
sins - sons of denegators & patriots!

11) But God is a good God - and mankind
does preper - slowly - haltingly - falling -
occasional whisperings -
God's presence for many - is lasting -
Then God faithful under future on the ancient horns of pain -
man leaves

"Evil often triumphs but never conquers"

14. Out every epoch of suffering struggle
comes a new born for mankind

(1) Our present social crisis - will find us
under even future.

(2) Our present world belonging - will find
us peace -

13) Our own social aspiration - our cry for
better things - are proof of God's presence
in our midst.

"God is the unutterable right in the depth
of the soul"

14) The wise man will struggle for worldly
mind order - only that it is the
truth for - and also that

"God is our refuge and strength, a
very present help in time of trouble"

"We generally extol God in words and praise Him as righteous and benevolent when we prosper and are happy, and when the grief we have to bear is moderate; but it is otherwise when such trouble as is described in Job come on us. Some of us deny God and believe that there is no ruler in the universe even if their property alone is lost. Others retain their faith in the existence of justice even when suffering from loss of property, whereas loss of children is too much affliction for them. Others are made firm in their faith even with the loss of their children. But there is no one who can patiently bear pain that reaches his own person. He then murmurs and complains of injustice either in his heart or with his tongue."

For every evil under the sun
There is a remedy, or there is none.
If there be one, try to find it.
If there be none, never mind it.

1.) Psalmist - "I will say unto God my Rock - why hast - mourning - under

in prosperity - Maimonides

Quite ready -

Barter with fate - contractual arrangement - Puritan

Still held by masses - Trades people - Insurance Policy

2.) Based on Error - If I am charitable -

Our Code - "cash and carry justice".

Not God's way - I know noble people

Physical suffering, unless

3.) Inner Rewards & Punishments

Within ourselves - Inevitable

He who has lived nobly - No suffering can be seen

In this sense - Innocent never suffer!

4.) Some of the Evil - inherent - Idle.

Only the Creator

Foolish men will put - will use - In so doing

Good - Stoicism = "For every evil under

5.) Most of the Evil - we lay on ourselves

"Man creates the evil he endures"

We are intemperate
Morally unclean
Over-ambitious
Selfish

6/ If we wish to be free agent - possibility - God built -

7/ It is so also with Social Evil
Our wild bull - If God is - 7th 11th 21st

8/ Answer same
Imperfections no argument
Inherent in Society are Imperfections -

Social destiny
Most Social evils are corrigible
So far failed - No one to blame

It is not as if - Real - God is summing - reluctant
Poorly-lens - Class are keeping - Brotherhood

9/ But God is good God - Mankind does progress slowly
"Evil often triumphs - never conquers"
God's Pedagogy - fashion - avert-horror of pain

10) Our every epoch of suffering -
Out of present social crisis

11) Our very aspirations - (cry) - proof -
"God is the unutterable sigh in the depth of the soul"

12) The wise man will struggle for nobles - confident
that it is will of God -
"God is our refuge and strength - O very present



ABSTRACT OF ADDRESS DELIVERED BY RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER AT THE TEMPLE,
ANSEL ROAD AND EAST 105TH STREET ON SUNDAY MORNING, APRIL 7, 1935.

GOD IN THE SOCIAL CRISIS

Our world today is full of injustice, oppression, poverty, hate and conflict. In such times of adversity men ask, where is God? If God exists and if he is omnipotent, why does he permit all this evil to exist? The answer is the same for the race as for the individual man. If we are to be free agents in a world which we helped to make and not mechanical robots in the hands of an Absolute Dictator, then the possibility of evil must exist in human life as well as the mandate to overcome it. God built this kind of a world for man to live in and he put good and evil into it and gave man the power to choose and the capacity to overcome the evil and to achieve the good -- all within the framework of the inevitable limitations of mortal existence.

Inherent in social organization are certain imperfections some of which are incorrigible. Most of them can be rectified. Social destiny consists in the never ending work of rectification. If men have so far failed to employ their intellectual and spiritual resources to correct those evils, they have no one to blame but themselves. The goals have been revealed to mankind by their own inspired seerers -- universal peace, human brotherhood, freedom and an equitable and povertyless economic order. The ways of reaching these goals have also been revealed. It is our greed, cowardice and indolence which keep us from resolving our recurrent social crises into a juster and nobler forms of social existence.

The man of faith believes that God wishes mankind to advance and that mankind does advance slowly and falteringly but with frequent retrogressions. The human race advances to the promised land through suffering. This is God's immemorial pedagogy for man. On the anvil horns of pain the future of our race is fashioned. Out of our present social crisis a larger measure of economic

equality will come for the children of man. Out of the universal belligerency of the nations today a more peaceful world will emerge. Our social aspirations and our urgency for juster nobler ways of living are of themselves proof of God's presence in our midst.

