



## Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project

Featuring collections from the Western Reserve Historical Society and  
The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives

### **MS-4787: Abba Hillel Silver Papers, 1902-1989.**

Series IV: Sermons, 1914-1963, undated.

---

Reel  
157

Box  
56

Folder  
526

Love - and its Strange Ferment, 1937.

476  
LOVE - AND ITS STRANGE FERMENT  
"Love is strong as death"



Delivered By  
Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver

At  
The Temple

On  
Sunday morning, March 7, 1937

2nd in series on PROBLEMS OF HUMAN LIFE REFLECTED IN THE BIBLE



The universal impulse of love finds its perfect testament in the Bible. In one of the very first chapters - in the Book of Genesis - it is written: "It is not good for a man to be alone - I will make for him a help-mate." Right through the books of the Bible, all the manifestations of love receive their perfect exposition and commentary. And here again the subject is treated as in the case we discussed last week - evil, wickedness, suffering - not naively, but maturely, with profound insight, understanding, with wisdom born with having lived long and seen much.

The authors of the Bible certainly can look deeply into the hearts of men and women and search out, as it were, the innermost recesses of their beings, and they know the love which fills the hearts of men and women, in all types, in all degrees, in all qualities. They know the love which ennobles. They know the love which degrades. They know the love which makes of men, Gods. They know the love which makes of men beasts. They know the love of men which make them heroes, which make men sacrifice. They know the love which drives men to deeds of infamy, cruelty and shame. They know the love which is a blessing. They also know love which is a cross.

In the books of the Bible you will find no frothy romanticism, no false grandeur, no spurious chivalry. Pose and affectation, generally, are foreign to the spirit and the mind of the people who wrote the Bible. They simply do not exist in their world of thought. Love to them is like the sun and soil, like bread and wine, like life and death itself, overwhelmingly real, essential, mysterious.



"Set me as a seal upon thy heart,  
As a seal upon thine arm.  
For love is strong as death,  
Jealousy is cruel as the grave;  
The flashes thereof are flashes of fire,  
A very flame of God.  
Many waters cannot quench love,  
Neither can the floods drown it.  
If a man would give all the substance of his  
house for love,  
He would utterly be condemned."

Love, of course, is infinitely more than sex. Yet the very subject of sex is treated in the books of the Bible with reverence, solemnity, in basic sanity. Some religions, as you well know, look upon sex as something evil, a stumbling block in the way of saintliness. And these religions prescribed monasticism and ascetism for those people who wanted to attain perfection. Marriage itself was looked upon as a literature of the concession to the weakness of human nature. In some of the ancient world as in some of our modern literature, sex is treated with indecent frivolity. In many circles today the whole subject of sex is unspeakable and taboo. Now none of these attitudes is reflected in the Bible. Sex, mating, generation are treated with a reverence and a naturalness which puts to shame the prude and the lewd and the finicky pietist. It is an ordinance of the living God. It is a necessity in the scheme of God's creation. Therefore it is holy. "And God created man in His image, in the image of God created He him - male and female created He them - and God blessed them and said - Be fruitful and multiply- fill the earth." It is God's blessing. It is of the very essential sacredness of existence itself.

According to the inspired teachers of the Bible, sex is exalted through love. It is degraded through lust. And we are admonished over and over again not to confuse the two. Story after story is told in the Bible to bring home the lesson of how much devastation is caused in the



life of men and women because of unbridled lust and by lawless passions. Many of these stories are familiar to you. They are included in the Bible not for entertainment. There is a moral treatise with each story and each story illustrates, drives home a great moral and ethical truth.

Thus, you have the unholy love of the wife of Pittiphas for her slave Joseph whom she sends to an Egyptian dungeon falsely accused by this woman driven to hate and vengeance. You have the story of the mighty Samson, shorn of strength, his eyes blinded, thrown into a filthy dungeon to turn the millstone for the Philistines, his bitterest foe because of his passion for Delilah. You have the story of David the King, who committed a despicable sin - a crime against a most loyal and devoted soldier with whose wife he became infatuated. He sends that servant to sure death into the battle and his love for Bathsheba brings death, tragedy into the circle of his family. You have the story of the king's son, Amnon, who dishonors his beautiful step-sister, Tamar, and who after this act of lust, comes to hate her with a degree of hate even greater than he once loved her, which, by the way, is a profound insight into the psychology of love and hate. You have another story of King Solomon who betrays his God and who brought into the land the ~~mx~~ ultimate destruction of the Kingdom because of his love for the many strange wives which filled his royal harem.

That love represents - that love which is lust, which is unbridled passion - receives its complete exposition in the Bible and the authors of the Bible are unsparing in their denunciation even of kings who held themselves up to this type of desecrating love.



But there is this other love, amply represented in the Bible - the love which makes something royal out of our common clay - the love which exalts. There is the love, for example of Jacob for Rachel, for whom he slaves as a shepherd in the house of Laban for seven long years and again for seven years more - years full of hardship. "By day the heat consumed him - and in the night the frost". Yet, as the Bible puts it these long hard years were in the eyes of Jacob just like a few days out of the love which he bore Rachel. And that love, tender and deep - deep as the deepest waters hovers over his life like so e sweet benediction from the very moment he spies Rachel at the well and is moved to tears at her beauty to the sad hour when he stands beside her grave many years later, his heart still with grateful memories for the many years of blessedness which she gave unto him.

And the love of his father, Isaac for his mother Rebekkah. Isaac did not know Rebekkah before he married her. She was chosen for him from his distant kinsfolk by the wise old retainer of his father Abraham, Eliezer. "And she became his wife, and he loved her. Love followed marriage as it frequently does. -A love which is borne out of common experiences and shared companionship, borne out of common triumphs, achievements, suffering, a love which, therefore becomes a lasting and abiding love.

Generally speaking, the love which the authors of the Bible speak of is not a strange wild ferment, a passing ecstasy. They always speak of a love which is like a warm steady glow, comfort, love which is born out of understanding and sympathy and respect and which is the consecrated daily food of every-day men and women, as a thing to walk with hand in hand through the every-dayness of this work-day world. This kind of love, my friends, can go and does go with youth and beauty. But



it also goes undiminished gratefully and ably with age. This type of love seasons well. It mellows like a deep rich wine because it is a knightly, kingly love, a love blended with reverence. In youth, this love walks with hope; in old age, with memories. For aging men and women, this love is always the warmth for their winterdays. It is the tender song in the twilight, the ministering angel on the homeward journey.

Such love, my friends, is built out of loyalty, out of tenderness, out of sacrifice. Above all it is unbounded mutuality. "I belong to my beloved and he belongs to me." It overlooks much and forgives much. It is a love "which covereth all transgressions." This love, fashioned out of tenderness and sacrifice must have in it a large element of wisdom. It must be wise. It must not expect a fool's paradise. It must not hanker after nectar and ambrosia for everyday diet. It must understand a soul's inherent love. This type of love is not shaken by a first mistake. It is not broken by a first difference nor by a first disappointment. This type of love which goes through life with men and women is never allowed to become casual and commonplace. There must always be in it what the poet of poets called "the preserving sweetness."

And it is of such a love that the wise author of the Bible, Kohelleth, speaks when he says: "Enjoy life with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of thy vanity which he hath given thee under the sun, for that is thy portion in life - and in thy labor wherein thou laborest under the sun." This is the supreme good of human existence. For this is the refuge from the storms of life, my friends. This love is the habitation of rest for the soul of a man or a woman. In this love, this complete, wise understanding consecrated love which is not ethereal, which is not beyond



reach of the average normal man or woman - in this love of men and women, pride and courage are restored, are re-charged, wherein we are loved, admired, appreciated even if perhaps the outside world deprecates and discourages.

There are other kinds of love known to the Bible and equally exalted. There is the love of parents for children, of children for parents, that love which sanctifies. Over and over again we have exquisite bits of narrative in the Bible to bring home the profound human affection which exists between fond mother and child. The love of parents for children is assumed in the Bible. It isn't advocated. It is assumed. It is a love which reaches through the uttermost boundaries of human strength. When the Bible wants to illustrate God's love for mankind, the author uses the simile "As a father pities his child."

You recall that story of the trial before King Solomon, how a mother is ready to sacrifice the thing she loves most in the world - her child - in order to save the life of that child, to wrench that love out of her life in order to give life, in order to give love to the one she loved most, a love which reaches to death and beyond death.

You recall that moving story of Rizpah, the widow queen of King Saul whose children were executed because Saul violated an oath given to the Gibeonites. Because of that faithlessness, God visited famine year after year on Judea. In order to atone for that sin, some of his children had to be sacrificed. They were hung on the mountains. And Rizpah went out day by day and night by night, all through the harvest season. She stood there to see to it that the birds of prey did not alight upon the corpses of her children that the of love of beasts did not attack them. That is the exquisite tragedy of a mother for her children.



Because this love is so great, the authors of the Bible frequently counsel men and women to guard themselves against unintentional favoritism, not to pamper their children, not to deny them the harsh experiences which alone build character in young men and women. "He that spareth the rod hateth his son - But he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes." And because ~~xx~~ such a love is sometimes blinded, we are admonished over and over again to see that it is not blinded and not to show favoritism.

The old father loved Joseph more than his other sons because Joseph was the son of Rachel whom he loved. Upon Joseph he transferred all the love of Rachel. He gave him a coat of many colors. His brothers were jealous; this led to their selling Joseph and resulted in tragedy in the family. We are admonished to guard ourselves against the unintentional abuse of this love.

There is still another kind of love, a love which does not depend upon blood relationship, which does not depend on physical attraction. It is a spiritual and intellectual affinity - "friendship". "There is a friend who is greater even than a brother." In the ancient world the virtue of friendship was stressed far more than it is in the modern world and the Bible lays a great deal of emphasis upon it. And so you have the perfectly charming manifestation illustrated of perfect friendship in the case of Jonathan and David, Jonathan the prince and David the shepherd - Jonathan who prefers the friendship of David to the throne of his father. David swears an oath of eternal friendship when Jonathan is slain upon the battlefield. "I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan. You are very sweet unto me. Your love is more wonderful to me than the love of a woman."

And you have that other illustration in the case of Ruth and Naomi, her mother-in-law. Naomi with her husband and sons went



into Moab. Her sons married there. Naomi's husband dies and also her two sons die. Naomi remains alone with her two daughters-in-law and she determines to return to Judah. One daughter-in-law after a time returns to her people but other one, Ruth insisted on staying with the lonely old woman. Ruth said: "Entreat me <sup>not</sup> to leave thee, and to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people and thy God my God; where thou diest, will I die, and with thee will I be buried; the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me." That is love, my friends.

The Bible knows of still other types of love - the love of one's fellow men, the love of one's neighbor, the love of the stranger, the love of the poor and the needy, the love of mankind. "Love thy neighbor as thyself." Love thy neighbor as thy self - just as you love yourself, in spite of all your shortcomings, in spite of all your own faults, in spite of the fact that you know you are not perfect - nevertheless love your neighbor in same way as you would have him love you.

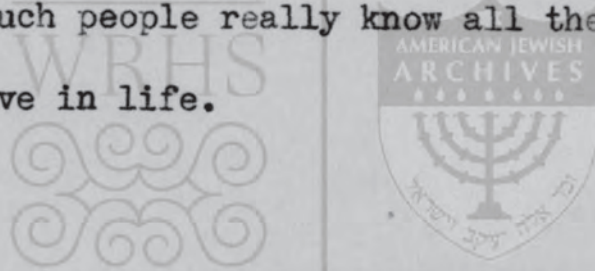
Transcendent over all these loves is the love of God. That is real religion. - "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One". "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy might and with all thy soul."

The rabbis say that Job the afflicted, of whom I spoke at great length, last week, never worshiped God except out of love. You could not take it away from him. Wealth taken away, health taken away, he becomes a broken, miserable leper shunned by man and yet he was able to say - "even though God slay me, yet will I keep my faith



in him." That is the love of man for God which makes martyrs of men. That is the love which has sustained our people through the ages, through suffering. Because they loved their God, they were able to take a book like the "Song of Songs" a lyric book of love, and translate it into the spiritual love of Israel. The one who has that love, my friends, is like the man or woman who has the love I spoke of, at first, which is like a haven of rest, a shelter against the storms of life.

These loves, these high devotions of human life are sacred books. Blessed is the man and blessed is the woman who drinks of this chalice of love for such people really know all there is know and have all there really is to have in life.





1. Universal compass of L. finds its complete testament in the B. — From very first Ch. of Gen. "It is not good for man to be alone — I will make him a help meet for him" the subject of L. in all its manifestations receives its exposition and corroboration. And here again, as in the case, ~~to~~ evil human suffering, the subject is treated not narrowly but materially — with profound insight <sup>and</sup> realization, ~~and~~ <sup>with a</sup> wisdom which comes from having lived long and seen much. The authors, the B-hls can certainly look into the hearts of men tomorrow & search out their inmost recesses & their beings. And they know, the love which fills their hearts — all kinds, all degrees, all qualities: the love which enables and the love which degrades: — the love which makes men good and the love which makes men bad: — the love which exalts men to deeds of heroism, grandeur & sacrifice and the love which drives them to deeds of infamy, cruelty and shame; — the love which is a blessing and the love which is a curse.

You'll find no frothy romanticism in the treatment of L. in B -  
no false gallantry - no ~~assumed~~ <sup>spurious</sup> chivalry. Pose and affectation generally are  
foreign to the type & mind of B. writers. They simply <sup>cut</sup> deeper their words &  
that - to them L. is like sun and soil, like bread and wine, like life  
& death itself - overwhelmingly real, essential, mysterious  
(Just S. S. P. 6 ff.)

2. Love is infinitely more > Sex - and yet the subject of sex itself is treated in the B. with a reverent solemnity and a basic sanctity. Some religions regarded it as Evil, a stumbling-block in the way of sanctification, and self-perfection. The marriage and ascetic life was prescribed for those seeking perfection. Marriage was a concession to the weakness of human nature. In some, the liter., the ancient world, sex is treated with utmost fervor. In many other circles to this day it is a subject unspeakable and taboo. Here, their attitude is reflected in B. Sex, mating, procreation are ~~the~~ treated with a reverent naturalness that puts to shame the prudish and the prudish pietist. They are <sup>necessary to the scheme</sup> ~~advantages~~ <sup>as much holy</sup> ~~for~~ <sup>and God</sup> ~~as much holy~~ <sup>created man in this image, in the image of God created the human - male and female created he them - and God blessed them and said to them</sup> <sup>be fruitful and multiply.</sup> b2











That <sup>is the refuge port chest</sup> ~~all~~ there is to man's life upon earth - That is an  
 portion <sup>in a sorry word</sup> ~~in the midst~~ of all the vain struggles & trials of life - That is  
 is an haven from the storms - the habitation of our souls true rest -  
 where our pride & envy are restored - where we are loved, understood  
 appreciated, even when the world hates or misunderstands and  
 hurts and bruises us.

There are ~~very~~ certain wholesome courses how to keep that  
 love unspoiled - ~~power~~ "like a green isle in the sea, a fountain  
 and a shrine"  
 ①

7. There are other and equally exacting ~~for~~ duties, love. The love of  
 parents for children, & children for parents. The love which sanctifies  
 family life. It reflects with pictures of family life, with reflection on the  
~~the~~ relationships which prevail within the family. The love of fathers  
 & mothers for their children is, of course, assumed - a love which reaches out  
 to the utmost boundaries of human strength - to the uttermost limits  
 of sacrifice. God's love for mankind is likened to a father's love for his  
 children - ~~2 N 2 L 2 H 2 D 2 S~~ -

① Trial of Solomon - True mother - Sacrifice.

② Mother pleading with Eliphaz - ~~Widow of Zaphnath~~ Shunammite woman

③ Famine - for King Saul against Gibeonites - oath - atonement -  
 7 of sons, Saul hung - 2 sons, Rizpah - S of Michol -  
 Took rock - cloth - and she suffered weather the bones, the  
 in to rot on them by day - under the bark, the field by night

(A) 21 to pauper -

20 L 13 L 12 L 11 - 132 131 L 162 21 L

"He that spareth the rod hateth his son  
 But he that loveth him chasteneth him beloveth"

(13.1) Favouritism - Jack - Coat of many colours.



8. Friendship - not dep. on blood ties or on phys. attractions -  
mind and soul affinity - drawn by inner unexpressed, unspoken.  
 Fr. was a virtue more highly extolled in ancient times in ancient  
 world. - B. has supreme example of it.

✓ (A) Jonath David - Prince of Shiloh led - refers to them  
sworn eternal friendship - David's lament.  
 וְיָמֵינוּ וְיָמֵיךָ - שְׁלֵמָה וְשָׁלוֹם - שְׁלֵמָה וְשָׁלוֹם  
 only revelation of

(B) Ruth & Naomi - mother-in-law - Orpha -  
Ruth cleaved unto her - "Eternal etc. to return - gent-  
le - they people - God - direct -

(C) Friendship : וְיָמֵינוּ וְיָמֵיךָ שְׁלֵמָה וְשָׁלוֹם

9. Love of neighbor key blue - וְיָמֵינוּ וְיָמֵיךָ - וְיָמֵינוּ וְיָמֵיךָ  
 " " Mantent - וְיָמֵינוּ וְיָמֵיךָ

10. Love of God - וְיָמֵינוּ וְיָמֵיךָ Highest Religion!  
Higher and unmediated followed by וְיָמֵינוּ וְיָמֵיךָ  
Worship of God - out of Love! "Love is the fire of the spiritual life"  
"וְיָמֵינוּ וְיָמֵיךָ" וְיָמֵינוּ וְיָמֵיךָ  
Mystics - burn in fire - martyrdom -  
Reward - Fear - "Refuge" - וְיָמֵינוּ וְיָמֵיךָ

11. Blessed - Chabie - desert - He will know all there is to know of the  
glory of life - will have, all there is to know, of meaning of life



1- Universal impulse - Testament.

From very first chapters - all manifest - Expos - Comment  
And here again - naively - with profound  
Authors certainly look - search - and know of L. - all kinds  
- enables - Gods - inspires - blessing.

Yoiel find no frothy roman - false gallantry - Spuri. chivalry  
Pose and affectation foreign -

To them L. is like sun - overwhelming real, essential, mysterious  
(Just)

2- L. > Sex - reverent solemnity - basic sanity

Some religious - Evil - stumbling block - Monastic - prohibited  
Marriage -

In some literature - indecent familiarity - Under.

None of these attitudes -

Sex, mating generation - reverent naturalness - pride  
Ordinances - marriage - as one Holy - just - will

3- Sex is exalted than L.; degraded than just - Confound -  
Story after - unbridled

(1) Wife of Potiphar.

(4) Amnon - afterwards to "Hak"

(2) Samson - shown

(5) Solomon - betrays -

(3) David commits

4. But there is a L. which exalts - royal

(a) Jacob - Rachel - for whom he served ? - 1,002 1/2  
- a L. tender, deep, - hovers -



④ And the L. of his father Isaac - Rebecca - How tenderly - not seen  
דודי אבי אבי אבי - L. follows marriage  
Out of experiences - blossoms + flowers - aliding - grounded  
Generally speaking - L. steady warmth + comfort -  
Consecrated daily food of every day frets  
(Just)

5. This kind of L. can go with youth - beauty -  
Seasons will - Mellow  
It is a knightly L. blent with Reverence  
In our youth it waits - Hope - meadows  
For aging - it is warmth - Tender song - Mirth, Angel

6. Such L. built - Loyalty, Tenderness, Sacrifice  
It is unbounded Mutualty - comradeship - אבי אבי אבי  
Overlows much - Forgive - אבי אבי אבי  
Wise - For Paradise - meta tamheria - Sea - shells  
Not shaken - mistakes; embittered by differences; broken, disappointed  
Not allowed Casual, Comradeship - "Preserving sweetness"  
Of such a love, not ethereal, not beyond - אבי אבי  
This is supreme good - Portals in midst -  
Haven - habitation - Pride + Courage - Where we are loved

7 - Other - equally exalted. Parents children - Sanctifies  
B. uplift - Assured - reaches out  
① אבי אבי אבי



① Trial of Solomon - Sacrifice

② Mother pleading with Elsha - Shunammite

③ Rizpah - birds - rest on them

(A.) Counsel

① Not to Pauper - 16th 2<sup>nd</sup> in

② Favoritism - Coat





Set me as a seal upon thy heart,  
 As a seal upon thine arm;  
 For love is strong as death,  
 Jealousy is cruel as the grave;  
 The flashes thereof are flashes of fire,  
 A very flame of God.  
 Many waters cannot quench love,  
 Neither can the floods drown it.  
 If a man would give all the substance of his house  
 For love,  
 He would utterly be condemned.

וְהָיָה זֶה כִּסֵּם לְבָבוֹת וְאֵימָה לְכָל הָאָדָם

וְהָיָה זֶה כִּסֵּם לְבָבוֹת וְאֵימָה לְכָל הָאָדָם

"It is a thing to walk with, hand in hand,  
 thru the everydayness of this work-day world." J.R. Lowell

וְהָיָה זֶה כִּסֵּם לְבָבוֹת וְאֵימָה לְכָל הָאָדָם

וְהָיָה זֶה כִּסֵּם לְבָבוֹת וְאֵימָה לְכָל הָאָדָם

"Enjoy life with the wife whom thou lovest all the  
 days of thy vanity which he hath given thee under the  
 sun - for that is thy portion in life - and in thy labor  
 wherein thou laborest under the sun"  
 שְׂפָרֶת - חַשְׁתֶּנָּת הֵינָּה בְּעֵינֵינוּ -



ABSTRACT OF ADDRESS DELIVERED BY RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER AT THE TEMPLE, ANSEL ROAD  
AND EAST 105TH STREET ON SUNDAY MORNING, MARCH 7, 1937.

## LOVE - AND ITS STRANGE FERMENT

The universal impulse of love finds its complete testament in the Bible - the love of men and women, of parents and children, of friends, of our fellow men, of God. All the manifestations of love receive their fullest exposition and commentary.

The subject is treated not naively but maturely, with profound insight and realism and with a wisdom which comes from having lived long and seen much. You will find no frothy romanticism in the treatment of the subject of love in the Bible, no false gallantry, no spurious chivalry. Pose and affectation are foreign to the type of mind of the authors of the Books of the Bible. To them love is like sun and soil, like bread and wine, like life and death, overwhelmingly real, essential, mysterious.

Love is infinitely more than sex but even the subject of sex is treated in the Bible with a reverent solemnity and a basic sanity. Sex, mating and generation are treated with a reverent naturalness that puts to shame the prude, the lewd and the finicky pietist. They are the ordinances of God, necessary to His scheme of creation, and as such, holy. "Sex is exalted through love and degraded through lust" - that is a frequent theme of the Bible and a story after story is told to illustrate it.

Generally speaking, the true love of which the Bible speaks is not a moment's ecstasy, but the consecrated food of every-day life of every-day folks. This love can go eagerly with youth and beauty but it <sup>can</sup> ~~may~~ also go gratefully and undiminished with age. It seasons well. It mellows like a deep rich wine. In our youth such a love walks with hope. In our old age, with memories. For aging men and women it is the ministering angel on their homeward journey.

Such enduring love is built out of loyalty, tenderness and sacrifice. It is unbounded mutuality. It is a love which overlooks much and forgives even more. "Love covereth all transgressions." It is steadied by a wisdom which



does not expect a fool's paradise or nectar and ambrosia for an every-day diet. It is a love which is not shaken by the first mistake or embittered by the first difference or broken by the first disappointment. It is a love which is never allowed to become casual or commonplace.

Of such a love which is not ethereal nor beyond the reach of earthly men and women, the Sage of the Bible speaks. "Enjoy Life with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of thy vanity which He hath given thee under the sun, for that is thy portion in life, and in thy labor wherein thou laborest under the sun."

There is little else of value in life. Within that love is the habitation of our soul's true rest, pride and courage. In it the world's hurts and misunderstandings are forgotten.

