



## Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project

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

Series IV: Sermons, 1914-1963, undated.

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Death - and its Hallowed Grace, 1937.





My Friends: The Books of the Bible are singularly free from any pre-occupation with the subject of death. There is a remarkable sanity here as in so matters in the approach to this subject which in some other religions occupies such a position of pre-eminence as to crowd every other subject into the background. It subordinates life itself to death. The thought of death, the fear of death, punishment after death, how to escape such punishment are the every present themes in the great religions of mankind.

Not so in the Old Testament - in the Bible. The Bibles does not build man's faith or his ethical aspirations on the fact of death - rather on the nature of life. God is worshiped because he is the God of life. He is the will, the intelligence, the purpose of life everlasting and men should aspire to lead the ethical life because it is the ethical life which realizes the highest potentialities of his being, gives him the largest measure of happiness and brings him in harmony with the God who is the source of all ethics and of all morality.

The faith of the writers of the Bible is not predicated upon the idea of ressurection from death or upon the belief in the immortality of the soul. The early writers of the books of the Bible know nothing about these concepts of ressurection or of immortality. Those who wrote after the First Exile, when the political life of the nation became disrupted and beset with much suffering and also largely because of foreign influences particularly, ~~xxx~~ took a characteristic position on this subject, and refused to accept these ideas. It is only as we



approach the closing years of the Bible that these ideas become important ideas in the beliefs of these men, not as the *sina qua non*, but as the hopes, the treasured, cherished hopes of the individual.

Generally speaking, my friends, death is accepted by the writers of the Bible as an inevitable natural fact, even as life itself. To them it is part of the law of universal existence. Both life and death are phases of one reality. There can be no birth unless there is death. There cannot be love and reproduction in the human species unless the old make way for the young. The earth would soon become so replete, so over-crowded with living beings so as to be unable to sustain them. Men and women cannot at the same time be parents and have offspring and be immortal. This, you may recall, is the recondite and the prophetic meaning of the story of the Paradise which is found in the Book of Genesis of the Bible. As long as Adam and Eve were content to live alone in the Garden of Eden, they could be immortal. But as soon as they ate of the Tree of Knowledge, which of course means the tree of sexual knowledge, they became mortal men and women - they and their descendents. And immediately follows that phrase: "Dust thou art; to dust must thou return. And so forever after, we are told in the Book of Genesis, there is a flaming sword of irrevocable destiny which guards the way to the Tree of Immortal Life.

This being the case - death being an inescapable phase of life - the writers of the Bible tried to impress upon people



to look upon death as one of the primary data of human experience, without undue alarm, without fear and without too much pre-occupation with the subject and to plan his life accordingly. That fact that there is a definite terminus to human existence, the fact that every human life has a definite human ending here upon earth gives point and urgency to human effort, to human striving, because life were immortal if/there would be no particular point to striving. They would have a whole eternity. Life has a definite period of termination.

"The day is short and the work is great." Therefore the human being must learn how to economize his days. We must learn the urgency of living. "We count our days so that we will be able to accomplish even a small share, a small part of the work which is to be done."

Among the earlier writers of the Bible, the dead were looked upon, descending into the netherworld - when men died, they descended into a netherworld where they carried on a ghostlike wraith-like existence, silent, without memory, without hope. That realm of the netherworld was in their eyes as it was in the eyes of most of the people of antiquity beyond the sovereignty of God - ruled over by the King of Sheol.

As the religious concepts of the people ripened and matured, as their God-idea developed, they came to realize that God is a universal data and that his realm exists not only over the world above but over the world below. So gradually, the thought developed among the people that the God of life and the God might is also the God of the dead and the God of the netherworld. And so we read in that magnificent Psalm 139:



Whither shall I go from Thy spirit?  
Or whither shall I flee from Thy presence?  
If I ascend up into heaven,  
    Thou art there;  
If I make my bed in the netherworld,  
    behold, Thou art there.  
If I take the wings of the morning,  
And dwell in the uttermost parts  
    of the sea;  
Even there would Thy hand lead me.  
And Thy right hand would hold me.  
And if I say: "Surely the darkness  
    shall envelop me,  
And the light about me shall be  
    night';  
Even the darkness is not too dark  
    for Thee,  
But the night shineth as the day;  
The darkness is even as the light.

"If man maketh his bed in the Shoel - God is there." And so  
those who dwell in darkness and <sup>in</sup> the shadow of death also dwell in God  
for God is everywhere and the dead as well as the living are in  
his keeping. "Lord, Thou hast been in our dwelling place in all  
generations."

Does man survive death? Is the soul of man immortal?  
Does man have a personal conscious existence after the death of  
his body? This question presented itself very late to the writers  
of the Bible-when calamities began to befall our nation and much  
evil and suffering came upon them and the individual could no longer  
merge his personal destiny with that of nation, when he could no  
longer reconcile his own personal destiny with the destiny of the  
race. That is when the problem of the hereafter came into the  
minds of the thinkers of ancient Israel and it was then that then  
began to ask the question: "If a man dies, shall he live again?"



And in the Bible we find both answers, the negative and the positive. In the Book of Job, that amazing text of so much that is profound in human life, we find the doctrine of immortality negated. In his day the idea of immortality had not yet gained acceptance among the people. So Job expresses the thought that if he could believe that after death, all wrong would be righted, that the fullest amends would be made for the years of his suffering and privation on earth, then the whole problem would be simple for him - for the earth is only a brief spell of life after all. But he says:

For there is hope of a tree,  
If it be cut down, that it will  
    sprout again,  
And that the tender branch thereof  
    will not cease.  
Though the root thereof wax old  
    in the earth,  
And the stock thereof die in the  
    ground;  
Yet through the scent of water it  
    will bud,  
And put forth boughs like a plant.  
But man dieth, and lieth low;  
Yea, man perisheth, and where is he?  
As the waters fail from the sea,  
And the river is drained dry;  
So man lieth down and riseth not;  
Till the heavens be no more, they  
    shall not awake,  
Nor be roused out of their sleep.  
If a man die, may he live again?  
All the days of my service would I  
    wait,  
Till my relief should come --

And again in the Book of Job, in the seventh chapter he pours forth the bitterness of his soul:

O remember that my life is a breath;  
Mine eye shall no more see good.  
The eye of him that seeth me shall



behold me no more;  
While Thine eyes are upon me,  
I am gone.  
As the cloud is consumed and  
vanisheth away,  
So he that goeth down to the grave  
shall come up no more.  
He shall return no more to his house,  
Neither shall his place know him  
any more.

And so, also, in the Book of Ecclesiastes, to which I frequently referred, we have a vehement negation of the idea of immortality. Man is doomed to total oblivion. And yet in the Bible, too, we have this positive affirmation - in the Book of Kohelleth, evidently put there by later editors: "And the dust returneth to the earth as it was and the spirit returneth unto God who gave it."

You have a different concept in many books of the Bible. In the Book of Proverbs we have that amazing theme: "The soul of man is eternal of the light of God, that inextinguishable/light of God, and just as that is eternal, so is the soul of man eternal. We have the same idea reflected in earlier chapters of Genesis. "God took of the dust and the earth and fashioned him and put breath into him, the spirit of life and that made him in 'the image of God'". In the Book of Isaiah we find this magnificent passage:

He will swallow up death forever;  
And the Lord God will wipe away  
tears off all faces.

In the Book of Daniel we read: "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life..." "But go thou thy way till the end be, and thou shalt rest, and shalt stand up to thy lot, at the end of the days."



And so, my Friends, increasingly as we come closer and closer to the fuller development of Judaism - always the subject of immortality remains wrapped up in mystery. Always it remains a subject of faith. We do not know. We believe. And always we are admonished, believing or unbelieving in immortality, to put our supreme faith in God, with the God of the living and of the dead. "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will have no fear for Thou art with me, my rod and my staff."

My Friends, there are some very wise things said in the Bible touching man's attitude to the subject of death - how to regard it and how to face it. In the first place, we are admonished not to grieve too much over the death of departed ones, dear as they are to us. And this is beautifully illustrated in one of the most touching stories in the Bible. King David had a boy, a lad whom he loved with every fiber of his being. He was a beautiful lad and David loved him overwhelmingly. And the child fell sick and died. When the child was ill, the King besought God to save the child and he fasted and remained all night upon the cold ground and he would not be comforted and on the seventh day the child died. And the servants of the king were afraid to tell him because they feared he might do himself some harm. The king read the truth on the faces of his servants and he asked one of them: "Is the child dead?" The answer came: "The child is dead." The king arose and washed himself and anointed himself with oil, changed his apparel went into the House of God and worshiped, returned home and requested that bread be put before him. And he ate. His servants were amazed and they



questioned him. The child was yet alive and you fasted and refused to be comforted and now tht the child is dead you weep not. And the king answered. While the child was still alive, I fasted and prayed, hoping that perhaps the Lord would have mercy on me. Now he is dead. Wherefore should I fast. Can he be brought back to me again? I shall go to him. He will never come back to me.

"One who grieves too much," say the rabbis, "challenges the justice of God Almighty and calls his law into question."

And there is another beautiful thought suggested in the Bible, especially for those who have felt death. You know the phrase used in the Bible for dying is a magnificent phrase. They seldom speak of dying. They speak of a man being "gathered to his people". A man does not die alone. A man does not step out of life, to a world removed, alone. He joins that endless caravan of time.

That beautiful poem, "Thanatopsis", familiar to all of you, captures this sense which is suggested by the Biblical writers:

"Yet not to thine eternal resting-place  
Shalt thou retire alone, nor couldst thou wish  
Couch more magnificent. Thou shalt lie down  
With patriarchs of the infant world -- with kings,  
The powerful of the earth -- the wise, the good,  
Fair forms, and hoary seers of ages past,  
All in one mighty sepulcher."

Do not be afraid!

And still another thought is suggested in the Bible that when you have lived your life, be satisfied. Don't be a glutton of life. You have had your fill at the tables in life's banquet hall. Be satisfied! Make room for others. Listen to this sentence in



the Bible which describes how a man dies. Again - about our Father Abraham: And Abraham expired - and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years, and was gathered to his people." No tears, no regrets, no lamentations - quietly you slit your moorings and you sail away. No more fires of combat and hate and crowding and heartaches and thorns. At last, peace, rest, eternity - "Gathered in to his people."

Then, friends, we are admonished that death is the final meeting place of all. One cannot bribe. No one can buy himself an exemption from death. In death, my friends, all are equal - the small and the great are there alike. Kings and debtors alike face the bitter democracy, if you will, of death. There is no snobbishness in the grave, no pride, no honor. The master and the servant, the tyrant and his humblest servant, the wealthiest and the poorest go down into the grave to share a common grave. Why, then, should mortal man act upon earth as if these distinctions, these honors for which he gives his life-blood - these prejudices, pomp ~~and~~ are nothing else than self-delusion, paltry self-deception. Sober up, man! And see all your hankersings and ambitions and strivings against that dark damp grave which is your ultimate end. Be yourself! So we are told in the Book of Proverbs: "It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go the house of feasting; For that is the end of all men, and the living should lay it to his heart."

And finally, we are advised not to build for ourselves costly monuments and not hope to buy ourselves into the remembrances of posterity



into the affections of future generations by providing for ourselves costly caskets and mausoleums. That is not how men are given to immortality.

Moses died somewhere among the mountains and no one knows where is his burial place unto this day. The Bible says: "Somewhere among the unknown hills Moses found his unknown sepulchre." No costly tomb, no vast mausoleum built by the hands of man enshrined his immortal remains. God, we are told, imprinted a kiss upon his lips and he died. And yet Moses has remained the most known, the most revered, the most profound friends of mankind, through hundreds of thousands of years.

How does one build for himself immortality? Through service, sacrifice, suffering for others, living for others, through social enterprises, social effort - that is how we build for ourselves a remembrance among those who survive us. We must leave a name which remains sweet upon the lips of those who survive.

Because I have loved life, I shall have no sorrow to die.  
I have sent up my gladness on wings, to be lost in the blue  
of the sky.  
I have run and leaped with the rain, I have taken the wind  
to my breast.  
My cheek like a drowsy child to the face of the earth I have  
pressed.  
Because I have loved life, I shall have no sorrow to die.  
I have kissed young Love on the lips, I have heard his song  
to the end.  
I have struck my hand like a seal in the loyal hand of a  
friend.  
I have known the peace of heaven, the comfort of work  
done well.  
I have longed for death in the darkness and risen alive out  
of hell.  
Because I have loved life, I shall have no sorrow to die.  
I ~~shall~~ give a share of my soul to the world where my course  
is run.  
I know that another shall finish the task I must leave undone.  
I know that no flower, no flint was in vain on the path I trod.  
As one looks on a face through a window, through life I have  
looked on God.  
Because I have loved life, I shall have no sorrow to die.



1. B. is singularly free from any preoccupation with the subject of death. There is a remarkable sanity in its approach to the subject which, in some respects, seems so large, as to crowd all other subjects to the background. <sup>Death</sup> ~~Life~~ itself is subordinated to ~~death~~. The that (I) - the fear (I) - the punishment after (I) - these and preparations to escape them - are the ever-present themes, some of the great ~~r.~~ <sup>r.</sup> ~~main~~ <sup>main</sup> ~~land~~. Not so J.!

2. B. does not build their ~~r.~~ <sup>r.</sup> ~~faith~~ <sup>faith</sup>, or their ethical aspirations & imperatives, on the fact of D, but on the nature of L. - J. is to be worshipped, because He is the source of life. He is life - its eternality, its intelligence, its will, and its purpose! Men ~~should~~ <sup>should</sup> lead ethical lives, because such lives realize the highest capacities <sup>ever</sup>, and yield the greatest measure of happiness, and are in harmony with the purpose <sup>of God</sup>.

3. Their faith in God and Goodness was not founded upon the idea of man's redemption from death or immortality. The early writers of B. knew nothing of either concept. Following the Exile B. writers ~~have~~ <sup>are</sup> aware of these ideas but generally refuse to accept them. As we approach nearer to the closing centuries, the B. canon, and largely under Roman influence, these ideas come to be accepted - not as essential <sup>of God</sup> ~~dogmas~~, but as pious hopes.

4. D. is accepted as an inevitable natural phenomenon - like life itself. It is part of law of life. Birth and D. are phases, ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~one~~ <sup>one</sup> & the same mystery of existence. There cannot be birth - unless there is Death. There cannot be loss and the reproduction, the species, unless the old make room for the young. Men ~~live~~ <sup>live</sup> ~~cannot~~ <sup>cannot</sup> at the same time be parents & have offspring, and be immortal. There would soon be no room upon earth to sustain them support all the living.







6 But even immortality - spiritual - not material - popular belief  
אמת אלהים - Idleness.

אין אמת אלהים - Enables Sp. Odyssey - a journey which  
never closes.

7. Some very wise things said about man's attitude to it - How  
to regard it - How to face it?

① Not to grieve too much over dear departed -

David - laid child of Bathsheba - Very rich - lamented God  
for dead - fasted - lay all night upon the earth - Wailed  
and he comforted - On 7th day child died - Feared to  
kill him - Might do himself some harm - David un-  
derstood - "Is the child dead? And they said 'He is dead'"

- Arose - worked - anointed himself - changed his appearance -  
came into house and sat at his feet - Returned - regretted  
bread to set before him - and he did not eat ?

While the child was yet... "But now he is dead, where  
should I fast? Can I bring him back again?"

I shall go to him - but he will not return to  
me !

Resignation - Courage - "Take up your burden, brother,  
and carry on !" -

18 "Gathered to his Father" 1. 18. 13. 1. - Abraham - Beautiful -  
One does not die alone - step out of life into utter loneliness  
one joins the company of departing ages - a populated void -  
the heart of the dead.



(No. 139) we reach the climax of the development! (Deuter)  
God is every where - and the dead are in His keeping, even as the living  
He is the dwelling place of all. - /'N -

Does man's spirit survive death? Is there personal immortality?  
This question presented itself very late to the writer, the 15 - when  
a calamity befell nation - and evil & suffering increased - and the mind  
could no longer merge his personal destiny with that of nation -  
but demanded the proper equation bet. merit and retribution in his  
own life - it was then that man began to ask the question -  
וְיִשְׁכַּח עַל הָאֲדָמָה

(1) Answered with negatively & positively.

(2) Job. (Jude) (1)

(3) Kohelet (Jude) - utter oblivion (2)

On the other hand

(a) Kohelet: "And the dust returneth to the earth as it was  
And the spirit " unto God who gave it"

(b) Prov. עֲלֵה אֶשְׁכֵּךְ עִמָּךְ וְיִשְׁכַּח עַל הָאֲדָמָה

(c) Gen. עֲלֵה אֶשְׁכֵּךְ עִמָּךְ וְיִשְׁכַּח עַל הָאֲדָמָה

(d) Isaiah (Jude) (3)

(e) Daniel: "And many of them that sleep in the dust, the  
earth shall awake, some to Everlasting life...  
"But go thou thy way till the end be, and thou  
shalt rest, and shalt stand up to thy lot,  
at the end of the days" -

Increasingly the faith gained headway - integral part of faith.  
Still - Faith enveloped in mystery. Trust in God! Job. 28



1/ Singularly - preoccupation - / Sanity in approach - In some  
crowds - introduces - The thought of D. ever-present  
B. does not build - faith - fact of D. - Nature of life  
God is worshipped -

This faith not predicated - Resurrection - Immortal  
Early writers - Post-exilic - As we approach  
accrued - dogma

2/ D. accepted as inherent nat. phenomenon - all life they -  
Part of law of life -  
Both life & D. phases  
There cannot be birth  
Men Women cannot be parents - Room  
© Paradise - 228 - 2222 666

3/ D. being inescapable - primary data - without undue  
alarm - plan his life accordingly  
The fact - Terminus - point & urgency - קריקט  
Call for an efficiency -  
We must learn how "to count" אין -

4/ Among earlier writers - concept common -  
- the - beyond - אין -  
Steadily - material -



and self-deepth - fond & foolish days - Sober up, O man!

See all your <sup>your bloody - accompanying - passions</sup> ~~haughty~~ <sup>ambitions</sup>, your hates, passions,  
weaknesses, against the back <sup>ground</sup> of the death, dark years  
destined for you — and save a little now!

"It is better to go to the house of mourning,  
than to go to the house of feasting,  
For that is the end of all men.  
And the living ~~will~~ <sup>should</sup> lay it to his heart"

11/ Build no costly monuments to yourself. That will perish  
your memory. You cannot buy your way into the affections  
& gratitude — & into their remembrance — by surrounding  
your decay by only with a costly <sup>costly - touch a!</sup> monument,  
Moses died — and no one etc — and Moses  
is unforgotten —

✓ 2001 1133 225 —

Build yourself a statue monument than deeds whose  
reminis will echo down the corridors, time —  
their children —

14/ Poem (Read) 5



(a) Thanatopsis - (Read) (4)

1,000th book - The species among the immortal race  
enfold him - Do not be afraid!

And when you have lived your life - be satisfied!  
Don't be a flutter of life. You have fed at the banqueting table  
of life - and you have had your fill. Make room for  
others!

Listen to this. בְּכֹחַ וְעִלְיָהּ וְעִלְיָהּ וְעִלְיָהּ וְעִלְיָהּ וְעִלְיָהּ וְעִלְיָהּ  
1,000th

"And Ab. expired - and died in a good old  
age, an old man, and full of years, and was  
gathered to his people"

No tears - no lamentations - no regrets. Truly slip  
your mourning and sail away."

No more fires of combat, no more hark and hurray  
and lurrying and heartaches and craves and thorns - but  
peace - deep, eternal, elemental rest - "at home with your  
people"

(D) D. is the final meeting of all living. וְעִלְיָהּ וְעִלְיָהּ וְעִלְיָהּ וְעִלְיָהּ וְעִלְיָהּ וְעִלְיָהּ

No man can buy death, or buy an exception.

And in death all are equal. וְעִלְיָהּ וְעִלְיָהּ וְעִלְיָהּ וְעִלְיָהּ וְעִלְיָהּ וְעִלְיָהּ

- No pride, no mobbing, no distinctions - Things beggar all  
smooth into the utter the litter democracy of death.

Why, then, should mortal man on earth act as if these  
earthly distinctions are anything but deceptions.





## A SONG OF LIVING

Because I have loved life, I shall have no sorrow to die.  
I have sent up my gladness on wings, to be lost in the blue  
of the sky.

I have run and leaped with the rain, I have taken the wind  
to my breast.

My cheek like a drowsy child to the face of the earth I have  
pressed.

Because I have loved life, I shall have no sorrow to die.  
I have kissed young Love on the lips, I have heard his song  
to the end.

I have struck my hand like a seal in the loyal hand of a  
friend.

I have known the peace of heaven, the comfort of work  
done well.

I have longed for death in the darkness and risen alive out of  
hell.

Because I have loved life, I shall have no sorrow to die.

I give a share of my soul to the world where my course is  
run.

I know that another shall finish the task I must leave undone.

I know that no flower, no flint was in vain on the path I trod.

As one looks on a face through a window, through life I have  
looked on God.

Because I have loved life, I shall have no sorrow to die.



4  
Yet not to thine eternal resting-place  
Shalt thou retire alone, nor couldst thou wish  
Couch more magnificent. Thou shalt lie down  
With patriarchs of the infant world -- with kings,  
The powerful of the earth -- the wise, the good,  
Fair forms, and hoary seers of ages past,  
All in one mighty sepulcher.

From THANATOPSIS

William Cullen Bryant





For there is hope of a tree,  
 If it be cut down, that it will  
     sprout again,  
 And that the tender branch thereof  
     will not cease.  
 Though the root thereof wax old  
     in the earth,  
 And the stock thereof die in the  
     ground;  
 Yet through the scent of water it  
     will bud,  
 And put forth boughs like a plant.  
 But man dieth, and lieth low;  
 Yea, man perisheth, and where is he?  
 As the waters fail from the sea,  
 And the river is drained dry;  
 So man lieth down and riseth not;  
 Till the heavens be no more, they  
     shall not awake,  
 Nor be roused out of their sleep.  
 If a man die, may he live again?  
 All the days of my service would I  
     wait,  
 Till my relief should come --

JOB - Chapter 14

①

O remember that my life is a  
     breath;  
 Mine eye shall no more see good.  
 The eye of him that seeth me shall  
     behold me no more;  
 While Thine eyes are upon me,  
     I am gone.  
 As the cloud is consumed and  
     vanisheth away,  
 So he that goeth down to the grave  
     shall come up no more.  
 He shall return no more to his house,  
     Neither shall his place know him  
     any more.

JOB - Chapter 7

①

*See next page 2*

He will swallow up death for ever;  
 And the Lord God will wipe away  
     tears off all faces;  
 And the reproach of His people will  
     He take away from off all the  
     earth;  
 For the Lord hath spoken it.

ISAIAH - Chapter 25



Whither shall I go from Thy spirit?  
Or whither shall I flee from Thy presence?  
If I ascend up into heaven,

Thou are there;  
If I make my bed in the netherworld,  
behold, Thou art there.  
If I take the wings of the morning,  
And dwell in the uttermost parts  
of the sea;

Even there would Thy hand lead  
me.

PSALM 139

And Thy right hand would hold me.  
And if I say: 'Surely the darkness  
shall envelop me,  
And the light about me shall be  
night';

Even the darkness is not too dark  
for Thee,  
But the night shineth as the day;  
The darkness is even as the light.

WRHS



He will swallow up death for ever;  
And the Lord God will wipe away  
tears off all faces.

ISAIAH - Chapter 25

For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts;  
even one thing befalleth them; as the one dieth, so dieth the other;  
yea, they have all one breath; so that man hath no pre-eminence  
above a beast; for all is vanity. All go unto one place; all are  
of the dust, and all return to dust. Who knoweth the spirit of  
man whether it goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast whether  
it goeth downward to the earth?

Kohelleth