



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

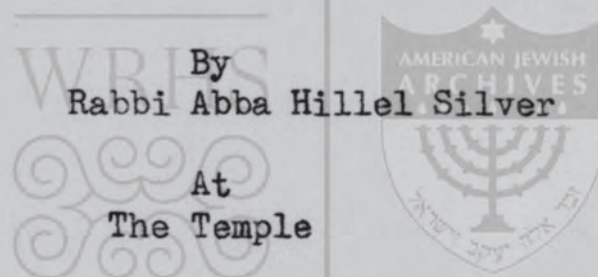
Folder
532

Twentieth Anniversary Service, 1937.

482

TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY SERVICE

ADDRESS TO CONFIRMANTS



By
Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver

At
The Temple

On

Sunday morning, April 18, 1937

My Friends: I find it rather difficult to speak to you this morning when the mind is somewhat clogged up and doesn't function very smoothly. This throng of my former confirmants really warms my heart. I can think of nothing that could have given me greater pleasure than this rally.

This tribute is more acceptable to a teacher or a minister than that of being remembered by his pupils or disciples. All through these last days and weeks I have been receiving messages, letters, telegrams from my former confirmants who live away from Cleveland or those who are at school. They have brought me a profound satisfaction. They rekindled some very happy memories and they gave me keen delight.

You know, a minister or a teacher really has no way of evaluating the affectiveness of his work because he deals of necessity with the intangible. Other professions are perhaps more fortunate. An engineer, for example, after completing twenty years or more of his life in his profession can point with pride to so many structures, achievements, so many bridges built, so many dams, so many highways constructed. A physician can point to the number of people he has cured, operations performed. The lawyer can point to the number of cases tried and won, the architect can point to the number of buildings - private and public which he designed and built. But a teacher or a rabbi, of necessity, deals in imponderables, in guidance, in instruction, in counsel, inspiration. And these are not concrete things that you can't point out in visible isolation, to which you can point a finger. Very often those who receive that counsel are not aware of it. You see so many streams run into the sea of man's personality and the influence of the teacher and the minister is only one of them.

And it is gratifying and soul-satisfying indeed for a rabbi to receive the kind of a tribute which you are offering this morning. It is a very strengthening and a very reassuring act. It makes me feel that perhaps my ministry has not been without merit or effectiveness, that perhaps I have succeeded in reaching some lives, in transmitting the sacred fire of our faith to some welcoming hearts.

I look upon this service this morning not as a tribute to me but rather as an act of material re-dedication to those ideals which I tried, during those years of your schooling here, to hold up as a light and vision. The teacher's great reward is the acceptance of his teaching of the part of his pupils. Some of you are by now twenty years removed from the day when I led you into the sacred presence of our faith and revealed to you the high altars of our exalted religion and the noble teachings of our faith. I suppose in those days the principles which I sought to emphasize because you were young seemed somewhat abstract, not immediately relating to your lives then. But you are older now. Many of you are twenty years older, have lived more, have experienced more, have seen more of the ways of the world. And I am sure that you realize now how very real and very sound and very essential were those ideals which I tried to inculcate in those years and how much sorrow and tragedy comes into the life of men and of nations when these ideals are flaunted.

When, for example, in the years gone by, I spoke to you, on your Confirmation Day of the privileges and the responsibilities of being a Jew, you accepted my words without perhaps grasping their full import. But I am sure that today you realize the privileges, the

responsibilities of Jewish life, the challenge of Jewish destiny, all that is involved in being Jewish for much has happened in Jewish life in the last twenty years to sharpen the outline of our status in the world and to open your eyes to the implications of our Jewish destiny.

These last twenty years through which you and I have passed have not been quiet years. As you look back upon them you will find that they have been rather turbulent. The first class which I confirmed in the Old Temple on E. 55th and Central Avenue was confirmed during the World War when the nations of the world engaged in one of the bloodiest massacres in mankind. The group which I am confirming this year will be confirmed in ~~an~~ a world full of crises and in a world which is armed to the teeth preparing for a new world war which most men fear/^{war}is inevitable, in a world in which a miniature world war is now taking place in Spain.

Just think what has happened. Think how many crises our nation and the world generally has passed through. Communism, Fascism, Nazism were unknown to you twenty years ago. Many long cherished ideals - democracy, freedom, tolerance have been trampled under foot in the last two decades. Organized efforts have been made to re-enslave ^{through} the human mind, to educate people/~~to~~ propaganda, to submerge the individual, to establish autocratic absolutist governments, to break up the human family into little provincial nations through narrow chauvenist racialisms of all kinds and set up new religions, blood-cults, the old pagan religion of long time ago.

During the last twenty years anti-Semitism has been unleashed in the world. Great Jewish communities of a half million souls have been

broken during these two decades - in fact during the last five years - broken on the wheel of a medieval barbarism. And during these years, too, a world-wide economic depression which reached our own country affected all our lives. Many of your careers were retarded because of this economic collapse. Many of the hopes you looked forward to on your day of confirmation you found constricted because of this economic debacle from which in this country we are just beginning to emerge. And so, yours has not been, by and large, a care-free generation. But you faced your day manfully.

I trust that you did not fail to benefit from some of the lessons which history in the last years has been writing on the large canvas of world events, lessons which re-emphasize somewhat lessons which I tried to teach you out of the sacred text-books of Judaism.

One of the lessons for example which I tried to stress over and over again when you were in my confirmation classes was that no one can permanently hurt, harm us as Jews. No one can betray us to defeat, to disaster except that which is false within ourselves. As long as we remain loyal to the best in our tradition, so long are we indefeasible, so long need we never be afraid. I tried to remind you in those days, and I remind you again today that Jewish life is ~~not~~ a burden only to those who will not see the richness, the glory, the color, the worth of Jewish life. I tried to tell you then and I am telling you now that there is no escape from Jewish destiny in flight but there is victory in Jewish destiny and exaltation and soul satisfaction and happiness if you would try to make the most of the rich teachings of your Jewish destiny. I tried to tell you then and I tell you again this morning, my dear friends, that if you wish to be respected

and honored as an equal among people, respect yourself first, respect your people, the whole of it, your traditions, your faith, this Temple.

I tried to tell you then and as I tell you now, that you belong to a great and goodly fellowship, that you belong to a race of sumptremely men, a race which achieved mightily in the past and which in this day is achieving mightily in every department of human thought in spite of resistance and oppression and persecution and discrimination, perhaps because of these very forces, and that you will find the supreme satisfaction in life in trying to live up to the challenge of being a member of such a great and goodly fellowship. That was the lesson which I tried to teach you then.

Was it a true lesson or was it a false lesson? You are now ready to bear witness to these things - all that has happened in Jewish life in the last twenty years proves that it was and is absolutely true!

And so I summon you this morning, my confirmants who have for the first time rallied in twenty years to rededicate yourselves anew to all that is fine and noble in your faith - your God, your people, your Temple, the great teachings of your religion, justice, peace, brotherhood, good will among men, righteousness. Your people needs you and you need your people.

I have been very happy, during these years, to see that many of you as you grew older came and took your places in the life of this congregation and in the life of this community. I have seen many of you join in the fellowship of The Temple, become active members in the Temple, in the Alumni Association. Some of you have become teachers in our Religious School. Many of you, of course, are married. And now I rejoice to see your children come and occupy the classrooms in the Religious School that you once occupied. That is very gratifying. This

is our link with the future. During the years, many distinguished members of this congregation and this community have passed away and to see you come in and take your places in their stead is of course a draught of strength to us.

We used to hear about the drifting of the young away from Judaism, that Israel has no future, that Judaism is dying. I have no reason to feel that way at all. I am sure that these prophets of doom have no reason to say this. I have no reason to say that this generation is less loyal, less idealistic, less concerned with the finer and nobler aspirations of humanity than the generation of a decade or two ago.

What I appeal for this morning is an intensification of loyalty, an extension and increase of your contacts of Jewish life, an enrichment through greater learning and study and research in Jewish life, an identification on your part with more important movements which are going on in Jewish life. That is what I appeal for this morning. If you have been indifferent, arouse your interest. If you have been distant or estranged, draw nearer, and you will receive refreshment of soul. All of us, sooner or later come up against things which try our souls, disappointments, failures, tragedy.

This morning, my dear friends, I am interested far more in prospect than I am in retrospect. I am thinking of the years ahead, the years which lie ahead for me and for you, and I counsel this morning as I perhaps counselled you on your Confirmation morning to have faith, hope and optimism. I have always tried to keep my faith in man and in his power ultimately to master his most difficult problem intact and after twenty years in the ministry I have no reason to abandon that faith. Short of some universal calamity, short of some cosmic

derangement, if you will, there is nothing that can stop the progress of the human race and the progress of the Jewish race. Nothing! The future belongs not to reaction, not to barbarism, not to intolerance, not to war, not to hate. The future belongs to freedom, justice, brotherhood and for the classic ideals of civilization/which mankind has fought.

Mankind has in its possession the key that will unlock all the doors of the future - that is the key of science, the key of knowledge. We are just at the beginning. Where we have lagged has been in the social sciences. "e have made marvelous progress in physics, chemistry. We have not made as great progress in those sciences which have to do with human relationships - sociology.

We have made the beginning. We are now beginning to establish social security for our people, security for the hazards of sickness, of unemployment. It is becoming clear to our people of today that the masses of the world must have greater security if society is to be stable. The standard of living of our people will rise to a level undreamed of. And this curse of our age - war - which is responsible for so much of the derangement in the world, in Jewish life as well as in the lives of all of mankind will be liquidated in the 20th century. The 20th century will do for war what the 19th did for slavery - abolish it.

We have begun to think definitely about war. In olden days we sacrificed our children to the God Moloch, and continued to sacrifice children to that god until the idea of Moloch was destroyed. Then they ceased to sacrifice their children to it. For endless generations men have been sacrificing their children on the altars of war. Now the idea is proving itself bankrupt in the world. Soon our people will cease to

sacrifice human beings upon its altars.

Don't let the increased armaments which are going on all over the world discourage you. The Temples of Paganism were never more resplendent and magnificent and impressive than at the very hour of their collapse.

So I am persuaded that the world is building today a new civilization, in suffering and in blood. But it is building a new civilization from which economic chaos and racial and religious bigotry will be banished. You and I in our humble ways will help to build it even though our work is feeble, faulty and uncertain. A famous Rabbi, long ago, declared: "Thine is not the duty to complete the task but neither art thou free to desist from it."

There are trumpets of life sounding. There are marvelous things ahead. There are new horizons and voices calling you. And to you who are younger than I who am now more than halfway on the road between the dawn and sunset of man's life, I say that it is good to be alive in the world and good to listen to the challenge. It is good to work in this world.... May God bless us all.

This thing, my conf. truly warms my heart. As they could have found no more than your rally here this morning. No tribute can be more welcome to a teacher than to be remembered by his pupils and disciples. All these the recent weeks I have been receiving letters from former confidants who were here away from the city - or are at school, and their letters renewed the happiness of memories and filled me with pride and happiness. A minister really has no way of evaluating his work. He deals in such intangibles. He engineers, often points to such and such laws or bridges or highways or power stations which he built - an architect - to his noble handiwork in buildings - or a lawyer - to cases tried and won, a doctor to success in cures and operations. But a minister or a teacher - cannot take stock of his life work in any such tangible terms. He deals in the indefinable of guidance, instruction, inspiration - which never stand out in visible isolation in the life of any man, and of which the recipients themselves are not always aware. Many streams run into the sea of a man's personality. The teacher and minister influence is but one, there.

It is a profoundly satisfying thing for a teacher or a minister to receive such an expression of appreciation as you are tendering me this morning. It is a strengthening and a reassuring act. It makes me feel that my ministry has not been entirely without merit or effectiveness, that, perhaps, I have succeeded in reaching some lives, in transmuting the sacred fire of our faith, to some ~~eyes~~ ^{as} welcoming hearts.

I look upon the service this morning as a service not, I submit to me, but one of creative reeducation to those ideals which in your Conf. Year - I sought to hold up before you for a light and a vision. A teacher's reward is his pupils' acceptance, his instruction. Some of you

others has
an unbroken record, from the days when I began with the
social movement, your people, faith and resolute to your high
altars of exalted faith and noble human conduct. The principles
of Judaism which I then tried to impart to you - may then have
seemed rather abstract and vague - somewhat removed from the
immediate content of your young lives. I am sure, however, that
now that you are older - lived more, learned more and seen more of
the world - you realize how very real, and vital and essential
these ideas are for the world's safety - and how much sorrow
& tragedy come into the world, even nations, when they are
plundered or ignored.

When I spoke to you then of the perhaps over-
weight of the burden of your destiny and the
glory of our heritage - you accepted my words without perhaps
grasping their full import. But you have grown up - for much has
happened in J. life in the last 20 years - to sharpen the outline of
our status in the world - and to open your eyes to the implications
of Jewish destiny.

These 20 years - have not been quiet, placid years. They have been
turbulent, thunderous years - my first class was composed during
the World War - which millions of men were engaged in the bloodiest
struggle in human history - and my 1937 class will be being
composed in a profoundly disturbed, fear-ridden world - with
nations crying for the birth in preparation for a new war which
most men fear is inevitable, and with a bloody civil war - which
has taken on the character of a universal world war - actually raging
in Spain - But the first conf. & the last - so much has
happened in the world to try men's souls - Can - For. Naz - ^{long} ^{cherished}
the underlying, Antisemitism - world-wide econ. depression which

retarded for many years. your careers and conducted your
affairs -

By and large, you have not had a gay and carefree generation -
but most of you met your hour manfully - and many of you,
I trust, have read with attention some, the lessons which life
write on the large canvas of history, in the part which
re-enforced some, the lessons which I sought to teach
you out, ^{to} text-books of Judaism.

One, the ~~these~~ lessons which I tried to drum home to you -
has been the lesson of experience -

- (1) that we are ^{permanently} ~~born~~ ^{born} the Jew but the Jew himself
- (2) " we can "be betrayed only by that which is false within"
- (3) " as long as we remain loyal to the noblest teachings of J - we
need never be afraid
- (4) " Jewish life is a burden only to those who do not know its
inner richness & beauty & value.
- (5) " there is no escape from destiny though in flight - but
there is victory to those who master their destiny.
- (6) " that you will not be respected more by others, if you
do not respect yourself - your people - your traditions -
your faith - and the institutions, your people, command
life.
- (7) That you belong to a great and worthy fellowship
of to a race of men who are truly men - who have
achieved greatness in the past and are ^{great and} ~~are~~ ^{creative}
not in the present - ^{in spirit + perhaps, too, of opportunity & generation} men among men, leaders among
leaders - pioneers in every field of human endeavor -
and that you will find the deepest satisfaction & your
life in living up to the challenge ~~and~~ of such a
fellowship - and in trying to be worthy of it.

Was this a true lesson that I taught you? Only this, that
happened in J. life in Cent. 20 yrs. proves that it was & is absolutely
and unchangeably true!

I call you to rededicate yourselves anew to all that is fine
and noble in your faith. Your soul, your people, your Temple -
the Jewish ideals of justice, of peace, of brotherhood, of freedom.
If you have been indifferent - arouse your interest. If you
have been distracted - draw near. You need your people. Your
people need you.

I have been happy to see many of you, ~~but~~ as you grow
older, take your place ~~actively~~ in the ~~active~~ life, the Temple
and of the J. community. I find you among the active & every
member, the Temple or the Museum - among the teachers, our
phil. - among the officers and active workers in the numerous
social ^{cultural} agencies of the J. Comm. in Cleveland. This is gratifying.
In it we see our future. You are our link with our
future. During the last 20 yrs. many, the former leaders, leaders,
thinkers - the ones - have passed away - to know that you
are stepping in to ^{take} their place - is to feel confident of the future.

Dolorous prophetic doom - No reason for such forebodings.
Youth, the Jew - no less Jew. or rel. & past generation - My
appeal to you my young friends is to continue your J. interests -
in your J. contacts - read deeper into rich life, study
of your people - ~~and~~ ^{and} ~~study~~ yourself ever new with worthy workmen
in J. life - and make the Temple your ^{permanent} ~~constant~~ place of sp. richness.
Your future is bright - past. The years ahead, I believe,
will ~~have~~ ^{bring} new sunshine for our troubled world -

I am interested for you in progress & in retrospect. I am thinking
of the years which lie ahead for you and me - and I cannot
faith - course, pleasure - I have always tried to keep my
faith in man & in his power ultimately to overcome his most diff.
problem intact. I see no reason for abandoning that faith now.
That's some -

Key -

Leveled - sound as - for education. This work will not wait.

Social struggle, our day - proof -

Man has just begun to emerge. First steps

Process will continue - Standard -

But the first -

War - 20c. will do - cannot be tolerated

Began to think diff - which - large ornament

There is suffering - civilization - one from which

You & I are among the builders -

7/10/11

Trumps are standing in new horizons. It is just
to be alive and to hear their challenging call

import - You know now! So much

4- Not placid - turbulent, thunderous years -

My first class - My 1937 class -

Bet. first and last - so much - to try -

Commun. Fasc. Nazi

Forg. cherished -

Organized attempts

Antisemitism

World wide depression



5- Yours has not been a gay and carefree generation
By and large you met your hours manfully
I trust - read lessons - reinforce

One of the lessons -

No one can permanently hurt - betray. false

Loyal - Burden - No escape - Respect

That you belong great and goodly fellowship

- to a race of men - achieved - men among men

- find supreme satisfaction - living up -

1- Difficult - clogged - This through, warms - Nothing ^{pleas}
No tribute more welcome - teacher - remembered by -
All these recent days - rekindled - filled - pride, happiness
A minister - no way of evaluating - intangibles - Eng. men
unpardonable of guidance, instruction, inspiration
Never stand out in visible isolation -
Many streams

It is \therefore profoundly gratifying for a Teacher. To receive
It is a strengthening and reassuring act.

It makes me feel - without merit or effectiveness
that perhaps - needed in reaching some lives
transmitting

2- I look - not as a tribute - Mutual rededication

A teacher's reward - acceptance of his instruction
Some of you - to you removed - precepts

The principles which - abstract - vapor

I am sure, however, that now that you -

3- When I spoke - Invites + Responses - What it
wants - challenge or destroy - play - lentos

Was it a true lesson - Every thing -

6- I call you - If undifferent - arouse, distant
you need your people!

7. Happy to see - as you grew older - I find
Link - During 20 yrs - many died -

8. Dolorous Prophets - emblem for!



ABSTRACT OF ADDRESS DELIVERED BY RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER AT THE TEMPLE
ANSEL ROAD AND EAST 105TH STREET ON SUNDAY MORNING, APRIL 18, 1937

Nothing could have pleased me more than this rally of my confirmants this morning. No tribute can be more welcome to a teacher than to be remembered by his pupils and disciples. A teacher or minister really has no way of evaluating his work. He deals in such intangibles - guidance, instruction, inspiration. Many streams run into the sea of a man's personality. The teacher's and minister's influence is but one of these.

It is therefore a strengthening and a reassuring act to a Rabbi to receive such an expression of appreciation as you are tendering me this morning. It makes me feel that my ministry has not been entirely without merit or effectiveness, that perhaps I have succeeded in reaching some lives, in transmitting the sacred fire of our faith to some welcoming hearts.

By and large, yours has not been a gay and care-free generation. But you met your hour manfully. These twenty years have ~~not~~ not been quiet and placid years. They have been thunderous years. My first class was confirmed during the World War. This year's class will be confirmed in a world profoundly disturbed and fear-ridden with a miniature world-war actually going on in Spain. During these two decades much has happened in the world to try men's souls. Besides the political upheavals there occurred a world-wide economic depression which retarded for many of you your own careers and constricted your opportunities.

I trust that you have read attentively some of the lessons which life wrote on the large canvas of ~~our~~ history during these last two decades, lessons which re-enforced some of those which I tried to teach to you out of the sacred textbooks of your faith.

I call upon you, my young friends, to rededicate yourselves anew to all
that is fine and noble ~~in your life and in the life of the world~~ ^{TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY SERVICE} ~~in your life and in the life of the world~~ ^{in the life of the world} justice, peace,
brotherhood and freedom. If you have been indifferent - arouse your interest.
If you have been distant - draw near. I have been happy to see many of you as
you grew older taking your places in the life of your Temple and of your
community. You are our link with the future. During the last twenty years
many of the former members and leaders of this congregation and of this
community passed away. To know that you are stepping in to take their places
is to feel confident of the future.

I am interested more in prospect than in retrospect. I am thinking of
the years which lie ahead for you and me and I counsel faith, courage and
optimism. I have always tried to keep my faith in man and in his power
ultimately to solve his most difficult problems, intact. I see no reason for
abandoning that faith now. The world is building a new civilization in struggle
and blood; but it will be a better and freer and nobler civilization, one free
from economic exploitation, spiritual chaos, racial and religious intolerance.
Each one of us, in his humble way, can help in the building if we listen attentively
to the trumpets that are sounding on the new horizons.