



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
158

Box
56

Folder
556

Jewish Service to Humanity, 1938.

506

JEWISH SERVICE TO HUMANITY
Israel's Contribution to the Culture and Civilization of Mankind
in Modern Times

By
Dr. Abba Hillel Silver

At
The Temple

On
Sunday morning, March 27, 1938

WRHS



At this time, my friends, when the propaganda machine in so many governments are menacing our people, it is important for the sake of ourselves and our children to recount readily, factually, the services which our people has rendered to humanity. So many organized peoples today are seeking to justify their intolerance, their barbarism by devaluating Jewish contributions to civilization. But it is important for the sake of our own morale, if not for the sake of re-educating the world, to retell the story of Israel's contribution to the development of humanity.

Generally speaking, the world - that is, that part of the world which is not poisoned by prejudice and hatred - does acknowledge Jewish service to mankind in the early days. It does acknowledge the pioneering role of Israel in religion and education. It does appreciate Judaism because out of Judaism stemmed two other religions. It does acknowledge the Bible as a Jewish contribution to literature.

Of course, the rabid anti-Semite does not accept even that. To him, all Jewish contributions are either evil or unimportant. Generally speaking, the most prejudiced of the non-Jews is quite ready to accept Jewish service in pre-Christian times. But somehow, in the minds of most of them, that service ceased with the coming of Christianity. Somehow, Jews stepped off the stage in the First Century. Israel's career in the world in the mind of most historians is that of a wandering gypsy people, to be ordered around as the attitude of the historian happens to be.

But of course this is utter nonsense, gross distortion of facts. Jewish life did not cease in the year 1, with the Common Era. Jewish people did not abdicate then, which by the way, was one of the most productive periods in Jewish history. It did not abdicate

in favor of any other people, or religion. Jewish talent and Jewish genius did not dry up. The dispersion of our people in the first and second centuries did not destroy the Jewish people, its religion or cultural enterprise. It simply increased and extended the Jewish diaspora, and made possible even greater interplay and interpenetration with Jewish and non-Jewish world. Unfortunately the degree of Jewish contribution to civilization in the last two thousand years is obscured because the world is a divided world, ^{to} ~~into~~ two groups - the Jewish group and the non-Jewish group. On the one side we have a little group of people - the Jewish group. On the other hand, we have all the rest of mankind. It is sought, therefore, to establish a proportionate relation between this group and the rest of mankind. In the one pan of the balance is Jewish achievements, fifteen million souls. In the other pan of the balance are the achievements of mankind, perhaps some two billions of people.

But it is conveniently overlooked by the world in dividing the Jews from the non-Jews that the Jews constitute one small people among numerous other peoples, one small race among many other races. The fair way to evaluate is to compare them to other people of the same numerical strength. When that is done, and when that just measure is adopted, you will discover what an amazing contribution this one people has made to civilization, how far beyond its proportion, how abundantly gifted and talented this one people seems to be. In fact, so abundantly talented that the world in our day has come to resent not the backwardness of the Jewish people. Quite the contrary. It resents its abundant talent, super-abundant talent. They resent our unusually large number of excellence in every field. They try to discredit that fact or disparage the quality of that excellence. It is in the nature of sour grapes of defeated

competitors.

When they get into power they employ measures of force in an effort to equalize that which nature has not equalized.

The Jewish people have showed a remarkable capacity in all things of human endeavor. Jewish genius is not limited to religion. Somehow men have gotten into the habit of generalizing about the Jews, about his character, his mental equipment, ambitions, etc. Very often even Jews accept this world generalization about the Jews. These generalizations are not at all warranted by the facts of history.

Thus, for example, a ten-times retold generalization about the Jew is that he is by nature and disposition a clever businessman. According to history, he is a man of trade, commerce, a capitalist. Some years ago, Professor Sonibard said that the idea that the Jews historically were men of trade, capitalists, is false, that for thousands of years, the Jews knew nothing about trade and business. The Bible knows of our people as an agricultural people. The Biblical legislation has to do with Jewish festivals of the soil. In the first century of the Common Era, Joseph said: "Ours is not a maritime country. Neither commerce nor the intercourse which it promotes with the outside world has any attraction for us." When the Jews went to Palestine, the Jews in the Babylonian days were farmers.

In the sixth century, a non-Jew had this to say about the Jews in his day: "The Jews are a people endowed by divine grace with special aptitude for handicrafts." Any one who has studied Jewish history, any one who has studied Jewish life in the Middle Ages, the life of the Jews around the Mediterranean knows that they were farmers, skilled workers in glass, dyeing, in silk weaving, as silver smiths, and gold smiths.

Only after restrictions began piling in on the Jews forcing them into narrow channels, nothing remained for the Jew to do but what was not permitted to the non-Jews by law - money-lending. So these generalizations that Jews, by taste and predilection are devoted to business and trade are pure fiction.

Similarly, the generalization that the Jew is not a pioneer, not a colonizer, not a manual laborer is also a popular falsification, on the part of the anti-Semite. The fact is that most of our people today in Central and Eastern Europe are engaged in the handcraft trades, manual labor. And as for colonization - look what the Jews have accomplished in Palestine in the last twenty years. When they went there no other colonists wanted to go there. When the Slavs left their country, they didn't go to the nearby country of Palestine, they went to North and South America where there were possibilities. It was as Mark Twain said: Sand blasted land shot through with

To that barren strip of land the Jews came, many untrained, and in twenty short years they cleared the swamps, they cleared the land, built towns and villages. They built hospitals, a university. They made of that land the most progressive country of the Near East.

Let us not generalize about the Jew's ability. He is pretty able in almost every field. Often you hear that "the Jew is talented, but he has no genius." Of course, genius is a matter of taste. You might call one man a genius. Another man may not like him and say that he has no claim to genius.

Clearly some of the pathfinders of modern times have been Jews who have been the pathfinders in human thought and who have cultivated new highways of thought. Spinoza is a genius, Freud is a genius. Einstein is a Genius. Heine is a genius. The Nobel prize winners of the last generation were geniuses.

And so, with this generalization of Jewish genius being limited to Religion. Here, too, they excelled in religion. They were not limited to it. Religion, Ethics, will be our major contribution, but not our exclusive contribution. The Jews served mightily in every field, in the field of letters, art, music, the stage, in scientific progress, in medicine, in the economic sphere, in statesmanship, in social reform, in discovery, exploration and invention, as soldiers in war, as soldiers for peace!

Perhaps one of the most significant services which the Jews rendered to the world is that of ~~an~~ intermediaries, that of bridging between cultures of civilization. That is especially true of the era of the Middle Ages when the Jews served as links between the Arabic world and the Christian world. They contributed to the intellectual revival of the 15th century. They traveled both in Arab lands and in Christian lands. They linked the two worlds. The Arabs had conserved the philosophy and science of the Greeks. The Jews moved about. They inhabited the world of the Middle Ages. They knew science and literature of the Arabs. They translated the works of these Arabs. They translated them first into Hebrew and into Latin. That was of value to the ~~Greek~~ Christian world. Without that service the Renaissance would not have taken place or would have been delayed for

centuries.

Jewish scholarship was responsible, to a degree, for the Protestant Reformation. The Reformation, you will recall, was a reaction against the Catholic tradition and led to the Bible. They started to go back to the Holy Book. The original Bible was Hebrew and was in the hands of the Jews. So they went to Jewish scholars and it was Jewish scholarship, the Hebrew Bible, Talmudic interpretation which set the spiritual flame of the Protestant Reformation.

We seldom associate the Jews with discovery and exploration. Of all that made possible the discovery of America, the Jews played the most decisive role. Up until the 14th and 15th century people could not venture out on the sea because they did not have the proper technique of seamanship. And it was a Jew who developed and perfected the astrolabe and astronomical charts which made possible the great voyages of Vasco da Gama, Magellan and Columbus. Rabbi Jacob ben Makhir ibn Tibbin and Rabbi Ibn ben Gersham perfected the Quadrant without which sailing on the high seas was impossible in that day. Columbus himself, if not a Jew himself was ^{and} a Marrano/^{and} was assisted in every way by the Jews. Jews were with him on the voyage. Land was first sighted by a Jew. A Jew was the first to land.

The trade routes to India and China were opened up by Jewish merchants in the Middle Ages. How readily the world forgets that. The Jews were associated with many of the most important voyages of exploration and discovery of modern times.

The part which the Jews played in the literature of Europe is a highly significant one. One could devote more than one lecture to it. Suffice it to say that there is hardly a great literature developed in Europe in which the Jews did not have a part and did not achieve distinction.

One need but point to one country, Germany, where books written by Jewish authors were burned. All men of genius now are being driven from there. From the days of Moses Mendelssohn to our own day, to the days of Heine, Wasserman, Zweig, Werfel, Toller, Feuchtwanger - Jews have played an outstanding role in German literature, in the development of the German Essay, in the development of the German novel, German poetry, in the development of German and Austrian journalism. That is true of most of the literature of the rest of the countries of Europe.

In Art, too, the Jews achieved quite a great deal. Another generalization is that Jews are not artistically inclined. You must remember that at first Jews were not permitted to do many things. They lived in ghettos in the Middle Ages and had no opportunities. Poverty made it impossible to produce any art. But whenever the doors were opened to them, Jewish creative genius expressed itself in that generation as much as in any other. Three-fourths of all the works of art in Europe, certainly up to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were Biblical subjects which inspired the creative genius of all the great artists. - Michaelangelo - biblical figures, etc. In modern times when restrictions were removed, the Jews entered the field of Art.

In the field of sculpting, Autokoski - the greatest sculptor of his age.

In the field of Music Jews have figured most prominently in the last hundred years as composers, ~~xxx~~ instrumentalists, singers, patrons of music - Mendelssohn, Halevy, Bloch and others.

One of the greatest conducts is Walter Damroch.

In the Theatre, too, Jews have figured prominently not only actors but as producers, dramatists.

The Cinema, too, is to a large extent a Jewish creation.

But most significant was the contribution of the Jews in the realm of thought. The three greatest philosophers were Plato, Aristotle and Spinoza. In the field of philosophy more recently are Bergson, Hermann Cohen, Husserl and Alexander.

In the realm of physics are Einstein and James Franck and Gustave Hertz.

In Psychoanalysis - Sigmund Freud.

In Economics, Ricardo and Karl Marx.

In Law - Brandes and Cardozo.

In Mathematics, Jacob, Cantor and Fuchs.

In Chemistry - Fritz Haber, Adolf Frank and Victor Meyer.

In Electricity - Heinrich Herz.

These are the men who molded the modern world.

The Jews pioneered in railroading and transportation and aviation.

The earliest electrical automobile was driven by a Jew, Davidsohn, in 1854.

The earliest benzine driven vehicle was driven by Siegfried Marcus in 1875.

One of the earliest pioneers in the field of Aviation was David Schwartz from whose widow, Count Zeppelin purchased the patents.

The telephone - Philip Reiss.

The microphone - Emil Berliner.

And so in Botany, Zoology, Astronomy there are found many famous Jewish names.

Medicine may almost be called a Jewish science. Way back in

the days of the Apocrypha, we find in the Old Testament, in the Book of Ecclesiastes, as far back as the third century before the Common Era mention of contagion and prophylaxis. All the through the ages, the Old Testament, we already have medical provisions for the protection of life. The Old Testament knew all contagious diseases and their prophylaxes. There were a great many physicians in the Middle Ages. Many of them were heads of medical colleges - Montpellier, Salerno. The Jews in the Middle Ages were physicians to popes, kings, emperors.

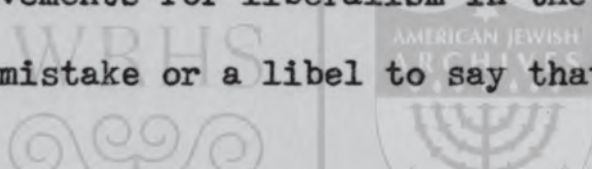
Their number today is legion and their service to medicine incalculable. A non-Jewish medical man summed up in a paragraph the attitude of the conscientious anti-Semite who refuses to avail himself of any remedy made by Jews. He says this:

"A Nazi who has venereal disease must not allow himself to be cured by Salvarsan, because it is the discovery of the Jew Ehrlich. He must not even take steps to find out whether he has this ugly disease, because the Wasserman reaction which is used for the purpose is the discovery of a Jew. A Nazi who has heart disease must not use digitalin, the medical use of which was discovered by the Jew Ludwig Traube. If he has toothache he will not use cocaine or he will be benefitting by the work of a Jew, Carl Koller. Typhoid must not be treated, or he will have ^{to} benefit by the discoveries of the Jews Vidal and Weil. If he has diabetes he must not use insulin, because its invention was made possible by the research work of the Jew Minkowsky. If he has a headache he must shun pyramidon and antipyrin (Spiro and Eilege). Anti-Semites who have convulsions must put up with them, for it was a Jew, Oscar Liebreich, who thought of chloral-hydrate. The same with psychic ailments: Freud is the father of psycho-analysis. Anti-Semitic doctors just jettison

all discoveries and improvements by the Nobel Prizemen Politzer, Baranji, Otto Warburg; the dermatologists Jadassohn, Bruno Bloch, Unna; the neurologists Mendel Oppenheim, Kronecker, Benedict; the lung specialist Fraenkel; the surgeon Israel, the anatomist Haele and others."

If I had more time I would dwell on the Jewish contribution to the world in economics, finance, the technique of modern business. We have nothing to apologize to the world for the role played by these people. The Jew made possible the modern development of trade, modern enterprize. He made possible the extension of the modern credit system in the world.

If I had time, I would tell of the part the Jews played as leaders of reform, in movements for liberalism in the 19th century. And there, too, it is a mistake or a libel to say that Jews, politically, are revolutionists.



The Jews figured in the 19th century not so much as revolutionists but as liberalists for the rights of man.

Their role in the field of philanthropy, of building up organizations and institutions for the alleviation of human suffering, foundations to advance scientific research, to lessen the evils of poverty is one of pride. We Jews of America have a proud record in that field of service. Its leaders were the Rothschilds, The Schiffs, Julius Rosenwald and Nathan Straus and others.

My conclusion, friends, is this - that such a people, so abundantly gifted, which twenty centuries of hate and persecution could not destroy, and which after twenty centuries was able to pour itself out in the 19th century in such an overflow of intellectual

and artistic creativeness, is a people that cannot be doomed by the intolerance of the political system which has arisen in this part of the world and in that part of the world. Such vitality, such positive strength, indefeasibility, such initiative and courage and ability to cope with all situations! It is a remarkable record of what Jews did in times of persecution as well as in times of emancipation, a record of working, of research, of thinking.

When one reads the newspapers today of the plans to outlaw our people, to restrict them, to force them back to the ghetto, it is good to read our history, the history of our people, how they did not succumb to those situations in the past but patiently bided their time and worked on. This is our salvation - work.

That kindly teacher who faced a schoolyard full of Jewish children in Vienna, last week and had to tell these children of their new status, the status which consigned them to the ghetto bench and which will consign them later on to expulsion, that teacher who told his children, boys and girls to study hard, gave them good helpful council.

I sometimes think that we contributed much of genius to the world just because we had to work ten times as hard as others. That has called forth from the Jews something that enabled him to hold his own in spite of mankind and circumstances at all times.

Read your history, my fellow Jews. There is pride for us there and comfort and hope. And don't accept offhand generalizations about the world and your people. Our record is there, written down. The future we cannot control. But the past is an historic achievement, forever written down. That past tells of your people that has been gifted and endowed with gifts of character and spirituality. Do your

best to work in the world faithfully in cooperation with the rest of the world and to the best of your ability.

In spite of the resistance of the rest of the world, Jewish life is not abdicating, Jewish genius is not liquidating, Jewish enterprise is not coming to a close now any more than it did two thousand years ago when the Temple lay in ruins. We survived that calamity.

I am confident that our people will continue to work, build, achieve and create.



1/ Propaganda - children - justify -

2/ Generally speaking - Valid Aut-

But in minds - ls' services cease - stage - Veer-
sympy -

3/ Then non-sense - distorted -

J. life did not cease in the year on!

J. people - abdicate -

Talents - dry up - 20 C.

J. Despotic in 1-2 C. did not destroy - extended

Our Talmud - By far - great men

4/ How much - unjustifiably - observed - habit of dividing
these 2 vastly disproportionate groups -

For one part of the balance

It is conveniently overlooked - Jews constitute only one part

When this is done - esp. in 19 C. - restrictions

5/ So much so - resent - on large no.

They try to discredit - disparage - current arbitrary

"Sam-papers of defeated competitors" -

When Am. get into power - for - correct

excellence, inventing the most ^{arbitrary & equally false} preposterous ^{lies} branding them as "descriptive influences". "Sun-grapes" defeated competitors (2)
When the A. get into power - they brutally drive their great men from their positions which their abilities had earned - and use force ^{+ prescriptive eg.} in the hope of converting their ^{untold} inequalities which nature created -

6/ Great in all fields - J. genius limited to Religion.
No time! Men glibly generalize about Jews - & Jews frequently accept these unwarranted generalizations as facts.

① By nature & temperament = Business men & Traders
Sombard - Capital -

① Bible = agricultural - NT - Messiah after 600
Josephus - 1C. - Greece is not a maritime country.

Neither commerce nor the urbanism which it promotes with the outside world has any attraction for us".

Mesopotamia - after exile - agriculture -

6 C - "The Jews are a people endowed by divine grace with special aptitude for handicrafts".

Farmers - skilled workers in glass - dyeing, in silk - weaving - as textile workers, a goldsmith Hebrew work

② No colonizers & pioneers - no manual labors - 20C. Pol.
- Mark Twain -

④ Talent but no genius! A matter of taste | Text-books!
- Spinoza is genius
- Freud is genius
- Einstein is genius
- Heine is genius
- Most busy writers - as men & genius

(3) And so with limitations & J. sense to Religion - Exalt (3)
but not limited - Per major but not our exclusive God.
Served mightily in every field - in letter - art - music - the
shape - in sc. figures in modern in the econ. sphere - in
statesmanship - in social reform - in discovery, exploration,
and invention - as solider in war - as solider for peace!

7/ Jews as intermediaries - bridge - bet between J. sense - Arab & Europe -
Conducit to intell. revival 15C - Renaissance -
Were travellers - both in Arab land & Christ land - linked 2
world - Arabs had conserved phil. sc. & arts Jews knew &
Jews translated these by hundreds copies & made ec available
to Chr. world - With - wisdom - accuracy - phil.

8/ J. scholarship influenced Reformation - Bible vs Catholic
tradition -

Heb. original in hands ; Jews - went to Jewish scholar -
Studied Hebrew - Luther - Jeremi - Melanchton, Tyndale -
Chr. Heb. Scholarship -

9/ Voyage, Discovery - which opened up new World, made
possible only by improvement of nautical instruments
& astron. charts -

Jews played a decent role.

They perfected the Quadrant - R. Isaac ben Moshe de Tibber

+ R. bin ben Jerhuan - without their work - Vasco da (4)
Gama, Magellan, Columbus - impossible.

To use the improved astrolabe + reliable astron. charts
They were also the best cartographers the world be
Columbus himself may have been a Jew - Certainly
voyage financed by Jews - Jews were along with him
on voyage - land first sighted by Jew - First to
land = a Jew. Astron. tables + instruments - These
of Abu. Zarubba + other Jews -

11. Trade routes to India + China were opened up
by J. merchants in medieval times - Jew was associated
with all the most important voyages of exploration + discovery
(modern times).

12. Letters - ① Influence of Bible on literature -
② Hardly a Europ. liter. in which Jews have not
achieved distinction - (a) Moses Mendelssohn - Aesthetics -
③ Montaigne - father of Essay - (J. origin) - to Max Perle
④ Heine - to Heine, Wasserman, Zweig, Frankfurter, Hayft
⑤ England - Journalism - first newspaper - Heine series -
~~⑥ Germany - Journalism - first newspaper - Heine series -~~

12/ Art - Dura Europos - Indus & Rom. & Pers. Empire - 3C. B.C. ⁽⁵⁾
French - Art scene - No galleries, art houses & per

3/4 of Europ. paintings before 1500 + high prof. after
deal with Wb. = Kobler = characters
→ Jacob Israel - Max Klinger
himself - Jacques Pissaro - France

20C - Modigliani -

Antikoliki - modern sculpture his age - and modern, modern

13/ Mus - composer - premodern conductors - instrumentalists - Singers
Felix Mendelssohn Bachelder, Mazurka, Italy, Gershwin

Soldman - WRHS

Widener - Schönberg



Ernest Bloch

Conductors Danzon - Brum Walter - Otto Klemperer
Orup Salomonitch

Theatre - Aetas - Perkins - Wramatic - Byron
Rechel - Sarah Bernhardt - Wagner

Cinema - leading role -

14/ Thought - Phil - Maimonides = Christian Theology

(1) Spinoza - with Plato & Aristotle

(2) Bayan & Wernheim Cohen - + Hassel + Abraham
in philosophy

Their number - begin. (Just p. 215)

(7)

18/ Emmuni - France - Banting - Teelugw, under Bureau
Center, Trade shift with Jews -
Wohlsh - under. connections - Commerce -
Channelled into it -

19/ Public life - Statesmen - Reformers - Leaders, St. Carter
Middle Ages - Vezes -
Figured in struggle for rights in 19c. + in Nationalist
Movement. 90 Cat mov. per. hunt (Eng - Italy -
Egyptians - not revolutionaries - Eng. + France
Abraham Commission
Isaac Herzl in Germany
Ferdinand Lassalle
Edouard Lasker in Austria
Reading. Samuel
Reyn. D. is rail, - in England - / Herzl - New South
Leaders & Carter
Ferdinand Lassalle
Edouard Lasker
Friedrich Julius Stahl - nochnary
See wa - Pruss - Rathenau -
~~Hammer~~

20/ ^{Robert} Charity - Both the child - Renowned Nathan R. Hauer 18
Phil. Agnew

21/ Said a people - ^{ahmadgates} sefted - 20 way-sched
destry - dry up wall & us/maker -
After 19 C. amazing outburst of creativity
- not downed - Vitality!

22/ Pride - Comfort - Confidence & Hope

