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

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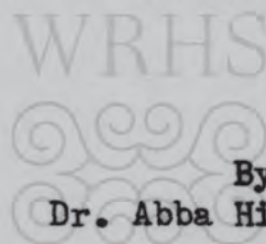
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Some of our Faults and Some of our Virtues, 1938.

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SOME OF OUR FAULTS AND SOME OF OUR VIRTUES  
Some Qualities in Jewish Life Worthy of Praise and Some of Condemnation



By  
Dr. Abba Hillel Silver

At  
The Temple

On  
Sunday morning, April 24, 1938



What we do not want others to do unto us, we should not do unto ourselves. We do not want others to condemn us as a unit, to attribute to all of us the shortcomings of any one of us. The principle that you cannot indict a whole nation because of the shortcomings of any individual is a generally accepted thing. It is also recognized because a country is ruled politically by its statesmen, the members of that nation are not necessarily responsible and should not be judged adversely because of the action of their political leaders and statesmen, and that the evils which individuals commit are not necessarily due to any inherent racial qualities or defects.

And to the Jewish people, that principle - that you cannot indict a whole nation - is not as generally conceded. In fact it is a favorite past-time of the foes of our people to indict us as a nation. It is an old past-time of the enemies of Judaism. The Rabbis knew of it: "One member of the household of Israel sinned and they all are made".

We ought not to judge ourselves morally and ethically as a unit. To the attacks from without there is among our people a twofold reaction. On the one hand, in answer to the attacks upon us, we are inclined to counter-attack by extolling ourselves, by magnifying our virtues, by ignoring and minimizing our difficulties. On the other hand, there is a second reaction to this sort of an attack: that is, to offset it by accepting this low estimate of ourselves, by groveling in self-abasement.

Both of these reactions are abnormal, pathological. Our prophets, sages and Rabbis never permitted our people to indulge itself at any time in moral complacency, in self-satisfaction, in moral priggishness and arrogance. Our Bible is filled with plain, caustic denunciations,



with the sinned against and the sinners of our people. Our sins were catalogued and itemized. Our people were continuously summoned to repent, to reform. The whole "Musal" literature developed among our people, a literature of ethical admonition, preachment, which was sharp, incisive, in calling attention to the failures and shortcomings and delinquencies of individuals of our people. In fact, the Hebrew word for ethics, "Musal", also means chastisement.

In fact, the Jew is always ready to justify the ways of God by accepting responsibility for sin. God was always righteous.

And if, today, we spend more time in defending ourselves than in criticising ourselves, it is due entirely to the fact that so many foes have arisen in the world attacking our people so visiously, cruelly, unjustifiedly. We are called upon to expose the false and wicked libelous charges made against our people.

We never ignore or minimize the shortcomings among members of our people. On the other hand, we are nevertheless admonished to spiritual self-adulation. We ought not needlessly to debase ourselves and to say that we are worse than other people. The truth is that we are a people like every other people. We, too, have our good, bad indifferent ones, our virtuous and vicious ones.

And, in so far as we are different from other people, in so far as our racial experience is different, in so far as we were compelled to spend two thousand years in wandering, exile, subject to persecution in every conceivable form, in so far as unfriendly legislation forced us into certain economic patterns of living, this is reflected in our virtues and in our vices. Our virtues are accentuated and some of



our vices are aggregated.

Also our long ethical tradition is reflected in some of our virtues. Beyond this fact, we are human beings sharing with all other people the same virtues, the same strength, the same frailties, the same ambitions, the same desires. We are subject to the same limitations, choices and the same capacities.

Those who are our friends, do not permit the shortcomings of some of our people to eclipse the virtues of our people. Those who are our enemies see only the shortcomings and not the virtues. The Rabbis say that Moses loved his people and likened them unto the stars in the heavens. "You are like unto the stars of heavens". Balaam who did not like the people, likened them unto the dust.

We are like all other people. We have our men of genius, our great men. We have our great scholars, scientists and artists, great statesmen, philanthropists, humanitarians. We can put them alongside the great of any country and lose nothing by comparison. We have given and will give to the world names which are beacons and torches to mankind. In fact, we have great men and great women far beyond the quota for our people, based on its numerical strength. In fact, that is one of our troubles in the world today.

We also have our criminals, our gangsters and racketeers and unscrupulous politicians, dishonest businessmen, cheap lawyers, and shoddy folks of all classes. We are proud of our great ones. We are ashamed of the others. We like to pride ourselves on the great ones. We must also accept the others. And we must do our utmost to reduce that second category, the undesirables, the anti-social, not because they are Jews, but in spite of the fact that they are Jews. We must reduce that



number to an absolute minimum not because they are a distinct liability to us in our fight against anti-Semitism. They are not really the cause of anti-Semitism. I would venture to say that our great and good ones cause more anti-Semitism, in a sense, than these others.

Anti-Semitism has other roots - in the hatred of our minorities and particularly in the hatred of a minority which has no homeland. Anti-Semitism has its roots in racialism, in religious and racial imperialism, in business and professional rivalries, in the servcability of anti Semitism today as a political weapon in the economic struggles which are going on in the world today.

Nevertheless, the moral delinquencies of certain of our people are seized upon by anti-Semites by way of justifying their attack upon us, by way of rationalizing their intolerance, by way of fanning the flame of anti-Jewish sentiment. I say, we owe it to ourselves to reduce the number of these social undesirables, not only because they are a distinct liability to us. We owe it to ourselves.

We are the heirs of the greatest and oldest ethical tradition in the world. We are the pioneers of mankind in ethics and morality. We gave to the world the Ten Commandments, the Bible and the preachments of the Bible. We not only challenged the paganism, the polytheism and idolatry of the ancient world, we also denounced and challenged the moral insensibility, the cruelty in the ancient world, its indifference to human life, to human suffering, to the poor, to the enslaved and the oppressed.

The great Roman philosopher, Seneca said that most Romans who met a poor man on the street regarded that as an evil omen. No Roman would give anything to the poor for fear of contamination of themselves. They would throw pieces of money to the poor.



The great poet, Virgil, says that "the ideal man knows naught of the pang of pity for the poor."

Another Roman poet, Quintillian wrote: "How can a man lower himself and not drive the poor man away as a despised creature?"

Another ancient poet wrote: "To what end does one give to the poor? We deprive ourselves and only help to prolong life of the poor man."

That was the attitude of the old ancient world to the poor, to the weak. Compare that with the Jewish attitude to the poor and the weak and the defenseless. Compare that with the injunction in the Bible to respect the stranger, open your home to the poor and not to oppress the poor. Charity is a greater mitzvah than prayer. In every one of our holidays, we are taught as a first duty to give gifts to the poor - on Purim, on Chanukah, on Pesach - all who are hungry, come in and eat -.

Similarly, in many other ways, we set standards in a world which found its enjoyment in the arena, in seeing men tear one another in bloody sport. In such a world, the Jews projected a new ethical code, a new set of moral and ethical standards. And we Jews today are the heirs of that tradition which has revolutionized the ethical code of mankind.

And I say that we can vindicate our people's religious status in the world as we exert ourselves to live up to the high ethical mandates of our own tradition, not by an appeal to the past, to what our fathers did, but to the far more convincing testimonial of our own life and conduct.

What are some of the faults of our people, of many of our people today? I think many of our people are too intense, too eager. The Rabbis called us "an impetuous and impatient folk". And this tenseness, and impetuosity expresses itself at times among certain Jews in restless and vehement ambitions, ambitions which are often not sufficiently



mindful of the means employed in their realization, nor of the human values, human interest and human association sacrificed in the process of these realizations.

Our Jews are altogether too eager for success and success is too often conceived in terms of money and the things which money can buy. At times this quality expresses itself in a social aggressiveness, in a forwardness, in a climbing and pushing into circles, places, groups or neighborhoods where they are not welcome. And at times, this quality expresses itself in ostentatious display, in provocative showiness, in the flaunting of possessions in a foolish desire to impress, to establish a certain quick equality. The same quality expresses itself at times in an over-eagerness, in self-advertisement. We are too eager to be noticed, too readily become spokesmen of unpopular causes. All of which defeats our own purpose. These are written off as bad manners, as boorishness and vulgarity. We are resented.

There is an element of extremism unfortunately in the lives of our people, fostered, I am sure, by the kind of life our people were compelled to live, shot through with change and uncertainties, rootless, urban, lacking the calming and tranquilizing influence of the soil, of stability. There is not enough of balance, poise of spiritual ~~equilibrium~~ equilibrium in our lives.

Quite a number of our people, in order to fit in harmoniously with the world in which they live, in order not to be sources of constant friction and irritation, must learn not only to acquire, for to forego, to be satisfied with half a loaf of bread for the sake of happiness, to slow down the fiery steed of our ambitions in order to enjoy the scenery through which we are riding. Greater moderation, a slower tempo, a more even and considerate progress in the quest of success, or pleasure, or place,



or position, and a debouching of surplus energy into other tributaries of human life, in the intellectual, spiritual, artistic would help to correct this fault.

There are altogether too many law-breakers today, too many racketeers, too many gangsters, too many racketeers among our people in this country. Their number is not greater, possibly less, relatively, than that of other people, but altogether too many for us. This, my friends, is a strangely new and tragic phenomenon in Jewish life. We used to boast of the fact that jails and penitentiaries were devoid of Jews. We cannot boast of that any longer. They have their full share of Jews. The reason is not far to seek. A recent sociologic survey of crime establishes the fact that the second generation of immigrants contributes an unusually high proportion of this country's juvenile delinquents, youthful offenders and adult criminals, due to maladjustment of that generation to European life. The first generation still has the discipline of the old world. The new generation lacks that in the new ~~new~~ world and looks on parents as old-fashioned, as belonging to the old world. As a result, there is an unusually high percentage of criminals - most of them children of immigrants.

It is good to know the cause, but to know the cause is not the cure.

There are too many Jews who are the proprietors of night clubs, of certain kinds of gambling houses. There are too many Jews who are proprietors of vulgar shows and theatrical establishments, or editors of vile and sexy magazines in this country. There are too many Jewish names that figure in vice exposes. Again, not beyond their due proportion. But proportion is no moral standard and no moral justification as far as the Jew is concerned.



Jews have given to the United States many public servants of the highest stability, in government, the in/judiciary, in civil service. In the higher brackets they have been almost always men of exceptional ability and unimpeachable character, an honor to themselves, their country and to their people. But in numerous local political offices, Jews have been very often of the common run of the mine - of the well known stamp and brand of petty politician, ward-heeler and small-time grafters. They have been no credit to themselves, to their country or to their people. Cleveland has had more than its share of that type of politician.

Jews have given to the legal profession outstanding, brilliant men of exemplary character and also a great number of conscientious, honorable, public spirited members of the profession. But also there have been altogether too many of us who prostituted their high calling for gains, to serve their gratifications by defeating the law, who are unmindful of their primary obligation to society, to justice and to law.

This is true of other professions as well, whether it is the legal profession, the medical profession or the rabbinical profession. It is true of the profession of business in which so many of our people are represented. Businessmen come in daily contact in a vital way, perhaps in a more vital way than any other profession with the Jew and non-Jew. It is from these contacts, involving the most prolific source of conflict in the world - money - that the average non-Jew gets his impression of our people. To that extent, every Jewish merchant, businessman, is an emissary either of good will or of ill will to the non-Jewish world. If he deals, uprightly, justly, he educates the non-Jew into a respect for the Jewish people. That is true of the over-whelming number of Jewish business people. If he deals dishonestly, if he violates the accepted standards and ethical practices of business by driving a



sharp bargain, cheating, defrauding, causing loss to an innocent man or woman, he may lick his chops over the miserable few dollars which he made but he is a blight and a curse to his people, and forever so.

There is another fault which we ought to keep before our mind's eye. We are a little too individualistic. We have too many would-be leaders and too few followers. Our people are too much fragmentized. There are too many divisions. I don't know of any nation or group in American life which has so many "societies," clubs, lodges, so many local, state and national organizations, so many programs, so many platforms, so many papers, so many causes, so many leaders in American Jewish communities. It has been said that whenever two Jews meet, you have three opinions.

It isn't enough for a Jewish community to have, for example, one orphanage. It must have two. It isn't enough to have one home for the aged. We must have two. It isn't enough to have one united organization to defend Jewish life. There are many of them, all united, but in their own way, all asking for unity of American Israel on their basis, on their platform, with their leaders. It isn't enough to have one powerful organization in America to fight the Nazis. We have to have four or five Nazi organizations. It isn't enough to have one Fund to raise money for our unfortunate brethren in Eastern and Central Europe. We have half a dozen of them. It isn't enough to have one special appeal for Palestine. We have to have ten of them.

Individualism has its virtues, of course. But this fragmentization not over of life/~~is over~~ real issues, but over imaginary issues, over personalities, prestige, for the sake of power and office. That is a great liability, a great fault of human life.



Fortunately that can all be overcome. There is nothing in herent, fatalistic inevitable about these faults. It happens to be the result of our lives experiences, of the kinds of things we have been compelled to do, the ways we were compelled to follow. Through education in the home, in the synagogue, in the community centers, many of these faults can be eradicated. Much of the criticism collapses when you see it for what it really is.

I have spoken of some of our faults. I intended to speak too of some of our virtues. I want to reveal to you just one saying of the Rabbis. With that, I shall conclude.

By three qualities you can distinguish our people. We are merciful. Our people hate human oppression, cruelty. They hate war and the destruction of human life. Secondly, they are compassionate. They are a people of moral delicacy. Our people held up the ideals of moral cleanliness. And lastly, charity - the care of the weak and the orphaned. Our people regard that as the supreme privilege and obligation in life, to be a co-worker with God, to help the weak become strong.

Our virtues, my friends, are far greater than our faults or we could not have survived. No people whose life is shot through with vice and wickedness <sup>could</sup> ~~can~~ come through the the storms of the 20th century, of trials, persecution, tribulation as we have. There must be an overwhelming reservoir of <sup>moral</sup> power. But that fact ought not to blind us to our faults and shortcomings. We ought to do our utmost to reduce them to an absolute minimum.



1/ Lewisohn - summary 508

What we do not want others

Judge as a whole. Attribute to all

"You cannot indict..." - There are Good... Bad... Times, statesmen

The Evils which ind. commit - not necess. due to Racial

of Jews - not conceded -

אוליגן | אוליגן - אוליגן אוליגן אוליגן

2/ We ought not to judge ourselves - & this really - as one

2 Fold Reaction:

(a) To extol - Ignore, minimize - reprehensible

(b) To accept lowest - Good - flapellato

Both reactions are abnormal + pathological

(a) Our prophets.. never allowed... moral complacency.. self satis.  
Irishness + arrogance.

From Moses -

{ Flaming - Catalyzed + stung - Called for Repentance  
a whole 2011 - moral - "Chastisement"  
- Logic fil - Always - 133 135.

And if to-day - we spend more time defending > criticizing

(b) Self-flapellato - Masochism - Fiering Coal

3/ The Truth! We are a People! like every other people!

Good - Bad - Indiff. - Virtuous, Vicious -

In so far as we are Different - exile - experienced persecutions -  
forced into def. econ - reflect -



Our long ethical Tradition - will also reflect - in certain Virtues  
strongly in evidence among our people.

Beyond that - We are human beings - Sharing same strength  
frailties - Ambitions, desires - capacities, limitations

Those who love us - eclipse -

Moses - prophets, sages, philosophers / Babylon - 2781 708 714 1M

4. We have our Men of Genius etc - Put them along side -  
Names are beacons & torches - Far beyond Justa

{ But we also have - Criminals etc - unscrup. politicians -  
shyster lawyers - Unethical Med. practitioners - dishonest bus. men  
our shoddy press of all classes

We are proud - We must do our utmost -

5. Not only bec. they are a distinct liability - Aut.  
Not really the cause - Our great grief -

A. has its roots - hooked y all humankind - esp. a minority  
Rel. & Racial Imperialism, bus. & prof. Rivalry - Seriously

But the moral delinquencies are seized - justly - For

6. We owe it to ourselves - here's

Carved Highway - on 10 C-



29 Just as we challenged paganism, polytheism & cruelty of ancient world -  
So we denounced the moral callousness, <sup>+ cruelty</sup> indiff. to lot of poor - the  
enslaved - the oppressed.

Seneca. Most Romans - met- 80/100.  
" " would not touch - throw

Vergil. "Ideal Man, 'knows naught of the pang of pity  
for the poor'".

Quintilian. "How can a man lower himself - and not  
drive the poor man away - as a despised creature"

Plautus. "To what end does one give to the poor? We  
defame ourselves - only help to prolong life of  
poor man".

cf - Injunctions in Bible - Respect - Help - Open your  
home - Not oppress poor - Charity - supreme 2/3/4 - Exhortations  
Purim - Chanukah - Pesach 1/2/3 6 - 2/3/4/5

in a world which found its entertainment in bloody arenas - war  
Similarly in many other ways - we set new standards -  
No moral values - Heart of our Religion -

8/ We can vindicate our separate <sup>rel</sup> status in the world - as we  
exist needs to link up to the high ethical mandates of our own  
tradition - not by an appeal to the past - to what our fathers  
did - but to the far more convincing testimonial of our own  
life & conduct.



9. A serious fault of many of our people is that they are too intense, too eager. Rabbin called them שטראק & רוב. "an impetuous, impatient folk".

It expresses itself in at times, in restless and vehement ambitions - which are often <sup>not</sup> ~~careful~~ <sup>careless</sup> or mindful of the means employed in realizing their ambitions - or the human values, <sup>interests & sacrifices</sup> which are sacrificed in the process.

They are too <sup>too hot</sup> eager for success - and success is too often conceived in terms of money and the things which money buys.

At times, it expresses itself, in a forwardness, a social aggressiveness, a climbing and pushing into centers, & places, & clubs, & neighborhoods where one is not welcome.

At times, it expresses itself, in <sup>ostentatious</sup> ~~garish~~ display, provocation however, the flaunting of possessions, in a foolish desire to impress to establish <sup>a certain equality</sup> ~~parity~~.

We advertise ourselves too much - we are too eager to be noticed. <sup>To be readily known. Spoken of in the popular camps</sup> All, which defeat their own purpose. They are written

off as bad manners - or boorishness & vulgarity. They are resented.

~~Part~~ <sup>has</sup> ~~It has been often remarked that~~ There is an element of extremism in our lives - fostered by the kind of a life we have been compelled to live - <sup>that time with their days & haunted</sup> rootless <sup>without</sup> lacking the repose, the calmness <sup>& tranquillity</sup> of civil stability -

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not enough balance - poise - sp. equilibrium -



We must learn not only to acquire - but to ~~forgo~~  
to ~~surrender~~ with be satisfied with a half loaf &  
bread for the sake of a whole loaf of happiness -  
to ~~slow~~ slow down the fever speed of our ambitions  
in order to enjoy the <sup>scenery</sup> ~~world~~ thru which we are riding.  
Greater moderation, a slower tempo, in a more even and  
considerate progress in the quest of success, a pleasure,  
a place, a position, and a <sup>outlet</sup> debouching of surplus  
energy into other tributaries, human life - intellectual,  
physical, artistic - would help to correct this fault.

11) There are too many gangsters, racketeers and other criminals among Amer. Jews. Their number is not greater <sup>relatively</sup> than among other ethnic groups in Am. life. But they are too many for us. They are a strangely new & tragic phenomenon in J. life. We used to boast of Jew-boss jails & penitentiaries. We cannot boast any longer. ~~The~~ They have their full share of Jews.

The reason is not far to seek. A recent sociologic survey of crime - established the fact long suspected "that the second generation of immigrants contributes an unusually high proportion of this country's juvenile delinquents, youthful offenders and adult criminals - due to maladjustment, that permeates to easier life.

It is good to know the causes. "Felix qui potuit  
cognoscere remm causas" — But causes are not cure.







in person & our people. Every <sup>man</sup> ~~man~~ is in that sense an  
 emissary of good will or ill will for <sup>his</sup> ~~the~~ people. If he  
 deals upfairly - he ~~gives~~ <sup>educates</sup> the non-Jew in respect  
 for our people. If he deals dishonestly <sup>violates accepted her ethics</sup> - drives a  
 sharp bargain - cheats - ~~can~~ defrauds - causes loss  
 to an innocent man or woman - he may lick his lips  
 over ~~the~~ <sup>that</sup> miserable few dollars which he made - but  
 he is a blight to increase to his people -

15/ Too individualistic! Too many voted - he leader not enough followed.

Too much fragmentation! Too many divisions!

No group in Am. has so many "Societies", clubs, lodges, so many  
 local, state, regional & nat. organizations - so many programs, so many  
platforms, so many papers - so many causes.

If there is one sphere - there must be 2

... .. Old Home - " " 2

... .. Nat. Org. to help Am. Jews - " " 3

... .. Nat. Anti-Nazi ... 3

... .. one Fund - J.D.C. - 4

... .. Palatine - 5

Individualism has its virtues - Fracturizes b/c no real  
virtues - personalities - prestige - power - it is a past liability.

16/ Can be overcome! Education - Home school - Settlement -  
Community organization - Franklin self criticism & temperance - "New Culture"

17/ Person 23 Honesty Courtesy Slaves - war.  
Person 22 Morally Chaste Family - Moral delicacy & purity.  
Person 11/11 - charitable Generousness & pagan world - grossness  
and impudency - poetry & in literature.