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

Series IV: Sermons, 1914-1963, undated.

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The book of the great love, 1945.

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THE BOOK OF THE GREAT LOVE

The last of a series of Three Sermons on Books of the Bible



By  
Dr. Abba Hillel Silver

At  
The Temple

On  
Sunday morning, March 18, 1945



The Rabbis say that King Solomon wrote the three books of the Bible -- the Song of Songs, the Book of Proverbs, the Book of Ecclesiastes. When he was young, say the Rabbis, King Solomon composed the Song of Songs. When he reached his middle years he wrote the Book of Wisdom -- the Book of Proverbs and when he was an old man he wrote the Book of Ecclesiastes..

Actually, of course, King Solomon wrote none of these. The authorship of these books was ascribed to him as a literary device common in those days. Solomon was known to be the wisest monarch of antiquity, the King of Kings. It is quite natural that certain books of unknown authorship should be attributed to this wise great ruler of ancient history. King Solomon might have written it in his youth for it is the song of youth and of love and of Spring, and <sup>it</sup> has been regarded by many as perhaps the most perfect anthology of lyrical love in the whole literature of mankind.

Against the rather somber background of much of the Bible, its solemn meditations on human destiny, its stern moral commandments, and its earnest prophetic preaching this little scroll, the Song of Songs, tucked away in the closing sections of the Bible fairly shimmers with light, joy and the beauties of nature, and glows with the passion of life and of sensuous love.

Here, too, as in the case of Koheleth, or Ecclesiastes, but for another reason the Rabbis were worried. They were worried about the inclusion of this book in the frame-work of the Bible. What place has <sup>a</sup> idyll <sup>love</sup> among the stately religious texts of the Bible? But the people loved this little book and frequently sung its haunting, kindling melodious refrains. They wanted to preserve this book. The wise teachers of ancient Israel knew that, either sacred or profane, was of the very warp and woof of human life. They knew that much of its ecstasies and its tragedies, its delights and its torments, its sacrifices and its sins make up so much of the life of man, that the Book of Books, the Bible would remain forever incomplete if there was not found room in it for a book on the exaltation of life.

In order to pave the way for its inclusion and to allay the more puritanical views, the Rabbis announced that the book was not just a love song or a collection of



love poems. It was a profound allegory. The bride spoken of in the Song of Songs was actually the people of Israel and God himself, the groom. The songs of love which appear on the surface as the love of man is really the spiritual love of God for the people of Israel. This, by the way, is not an uncommon simile of the Bible. The great prophet, Hosea, the prophet of love is quoted in the Bible as having God say unto Israel: "I will betroth you to myself forever. I will betroth you to myself in righteousness, in justice in mercy." The great Akiba, the great teacher of the Talmud in the second century before the Common Era is quoted as having said: "The entire age from the beginning until now is not worth as much as the day when the Song of Songs was given to Israel. And if all the books of the Bible are holy, the Song of Songs is the Holiest of Holiest." The great mystics sang and read it with the most mystical connotations.

The Song of Songs was read by our forefathers throughout the ages every Friday evening, and like all the other little scrolls (there are five in the Bible) on the various holidays during the year. The Song of Songs is read in the synagogue on Passover, probably because the motif of the Song of Songs is Spring.

"For lo, the winter is past  
"The rain is over and gone;  
"The flowers appear on the earth;  
"The time of singing is come."

This is the spirit of Passover.

I have called this Song of Songs the "Book of the Great Love." Actually the entire Bible may be called that. We do not customarily think of the Bible in terms of a great literature of love. And yet, as we come to reflect on it, every quality and manifestation of love, every experience of love, divine, human, pure or depraved, every problem which love brings to the heart of man or woman is portrayed in the Bible. The Rabbis knew that.

One of the great rabbis declared that the Torah, the Five books of Moses, begins with an act of love -- creation of the world and closes with an act of love:



God, himself, lovingly puts his beloved Moses to rest in his nameless grave."

There is the great love, for example of a father for his son, the love of Abraham for Isaac, the child of his old age, the struggle of that love which was transcended by a greater love -- the love of a man for God, the triumph of that love which finally makes Abraham take his son, his only son whom he love to Mt. Moriah to offer him as a sacrifice.

There is the tender love of ~~x~~ faith and constancy, the love of Jacob for the beautiful Rachel which makes Jacob toil for seven long years to win the right to wed Rachel his beloved. When Jacob is deceived and deprived of the right to wed Rachel, he seven toils another/years for that love.

There is, for example, the doting love of a fond parent for his favorite child -- the love of Jacob for Joseph and the jealousy which such a love aroused and the tragedies which it entailed.

There is the ternal mother love -- the love of a mother who knows her child must die. But she loves her son and she hides him for three months, procures an ark of papyrus reeds, and daubing it with ~~and~~ pitch, puts the child in it and places it among the reeds on the bank of the Nile. And the child's sister is put some distance away to see what would happen to him.

There is the destroying and betraying love, sheer lust, and the wild desire and treachery -- the love of Samson and Delilah, an impure love which leaves Samson a broken and betrayed man, eyeless.

There is the love of beautiful friendship, the love of a prince and a shepherd boy, the love of Jonathan and David whose vow of eternal friendship lives beyond the grave.

There is the love which darkens he hearts of ~~xxx~~ men and destroys their sense of justice and leads them to sin and infamous deeds, even to murder -- the love of King David for Bath Sheba and the slaying of her husband Uriah the Hittite.

There is the unrequited love of a child for parent, of Absalom and his father, King David. Absalom conspires and revolts against his father and when David is finally



forced into battle because of the arms raised against him, David pleads with his general: "Deal gently for my sake with the young man, with Absalom." During the battle in the forest of Ephraim, Absalom fled on his mule and was caught in the branches of an Oak tree. Joab slays him. And when he comes to report victory in battle, David asks: "Is it well with the young man Absalom?" When finally told that Absalom is dead, the king goes up to the attic and weeps and as he weeps, he says "My son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom. O that I, even had died instead of you. Absalom, my son, my son."

There is also the love of country, the love of a people for their land, the love of Israel for Jerusalem. "Seek ye the peace of Jerusalem. May all those who love thee prosper." If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget her cunning.

And above all there is the love of country for man and the love of man for country and the love of man for his fellow men. The Bible speaks of the spiritual love of God for man. God loved man therefore he created him in His image. "It was with an eternal love that God loved man. And man responds: "As a deer longs for the water-courses so my whole being longs for Thee, O God. My whole being thirsts for God, for the living God." Thou shalt love thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy might. And the love of man for his fellow men -- that is the highest rule of the Bix Bible, declared the Rabbis: "Love thy neighbor as thyself - not only thy neighbor, not only thy children, love thou also the stranger.

Yes, the Bible is replete with the theme of love. It is its regnant, domant theme. In the Book of Proverbs and elsewhere there is more sound advice of a practical nature to be found on the subject of love. Thus we read in the Book of Proverbs:

"Better a dish of herbs, where love is  
"Than a fatted ox, and hatred with it."

Hatred stirs up strife but love draws a veil over all transgression. Love overlooks, love forgives.

The Song of Songs is a collection of love songs, possibly a collection of poems



composed and compiled in the third century B.C.E. sung at wedding feasts in ancient Israel, songs in honor of the bride and the groom which friends and guests recite or sing at wedding celebrations, and songs which the lovers sing to each other as if responsively, deriving their inspiration from the rustic songs of shepherds and peasants in ancient Palestine. The physical charms of the bride and the groom are likened to a King, are praised and extolled in the rich imagery of Oriental ardor - exuberance. Here is all the yearning, the ardor, the passion of irrepressible faith and irresistible love.

The Bible, dear friends, does not disapprove or deprecate such love. It does not frown upon all physical love. Judaism is not a religion of ascetism, which despises the body and condemns all the physical enjoyments of life. It establishes no impassable gulf between physical and spiritual love.

All love which is tender, considerate, free from cruelty and excess is spiritual love and is blessed by God! God wants men to enjoy life, and the gifts of life, and the beautiful things of the earth. What is hateful is lust, and uncleanness and grossness and obscenity and dissipation -- all that degrades and cheapens and debauches human relationship.

The love of the Song of Songs is clean, good, undefiled, even in its frank, sensuousness and bodily exaltation. Love here is like a flaming banner. It is the joy of life which young hearts experience in the spring time of the year. It is a love framed in a beautiful Palestinian countryside; against a background of flowers, trees, vineyards, a pasture and flocks at a time of the year when the grapevines bud and pomegranates bloom and at the time of the year when the voice of the turtle is heard in the land.

There is also here a full realization of the power and strength of love and of the fury and consuming fire of jealousy sometimes misunderstood.

"Place me like a seal upon your heart, like a seal upon your arm  
For love is mighty as death, as strong as  
As for jealousy, its bolts are bolts of fire, furious flames;  
Many waters cannot quench love, nor rivers overcome it.  
If one were to offer all the substance of his house for love  
It would be utterly despised."



No, love cannot be bought. He who tries to buy love is despicable. Love is a gift of heart to heart, of spirit to spirit. Love can not be quenched, by trials, suffering, misunderstanding. Many waters cannot quench love." It is mighty, indefeasible even as death.

Love is not jealousy. Jealousy is a consuming fire. Jealousy destroys, ravages the spirit of man.

"Place me like a seal upon your heart. True love is a seal upon the heart, upon the earth, the seal within and without. It is an ordination. It is a consecration. True love is a testament of everlasting devotion.

This is the song of songs all through the human heart, of ecstasy, of exaltation.. Blessed is the man and the woman whose banner over them is love.





1) King Solomon 3 Books of Bible. When he was young -  
Did not write any of these - ascribed - liter. device. IK. <sup>3000 psalms</sup> 1005 Songs  
This Superlative Song - Book - is surely a Song of Youth, of Love, of Spring.  
regarded by many as the most perfect anthology of lyrical love in all lit.

2) Against the smoky background of much of the B - its robust well-taken  
in human destiny, its stern moral commandments, and its earnest pro-  
phetic preaching - this little scroll tucked away in the closing  
sections, the B. fairly shimmers with light, joy and the beauties  
of nature - and glows with the passion of life and several  
love.

Now, too, as in the case of a song, but for another reason Rabbinic canon.

What place has this love idyll <sup>among</sup> the stately rel. exts of the B.?  
But the people loved that little volume, and sang its haunting,  
kindly, melodious refrains - <sup>whether sacred or profane</sup>  
And love, the wise teacher, knows, <sup>was</sup> the very heart of the  
human life and thought - its ecstasies and its tragedies -  
its delights and its torments - its joys and its  
pains, make up so much, the life of man - that the  
Book of Books would be incomplete and deficient - if it <sup>did</sup> not  
find room for a book on the great love.

3) To have the way for its inclusion - and <sup>along the subliminal currents</sup>  
the most prudent - the Rabbis survived that the Book was  
<sup>in fact</sup> a profound allegory - the exalted love songs of the bride  
and groom, whose professions of love say things  
the world, the lil - and Israel and God - and what  
appears on the surface as the severest love of man is  
really the sp. love of God. Not difficult. Hosea - "I will



be the gift you to yourself forever - I will be with you to myself in upholders, in faith, in the closer on every (2)  
Then Abraham; The entire age from the beginning until now  
is not worth as much as the day when God was given to Israel

- perhaps God - Kabalah.

Church Fathers - Hippolytus, Jerome, St. Augustine, Bridgman is

It was read by Francis Jones every Friday evening - Christ - Bride is Church.

It is read in the Synagogue on 1000 - long life of the

Scrolls - be of its work of Spring.

"For lo, the winter is past,

"The rain is over and gone;

"The flowers appear on the earth;

"The time of singing is come.

4) I have called it the Book of the Secret Love.

Actually - the entire Bible may be called that.

We do not customarily think of B - in terms of a letter of love.

And yet - every quality & manifestation of love, every exper. of love

divine, human, ~~and~~ pure or depraved, every problem

which love brings to the heart of man or woman is

portrayed in the Bible.

The Book of the Secret Love, begins with an act of love -

Creation, and ends - God, himself, lovingly puts his

beloved Moses to rest in his narrow bed.



5/ There is the great love of a Father for his Son - Abraham for Isaac - <sup>child of his old age</sup> (3)  
① and how a greater love transcends it. (1) ~~of~~ 17

② There is the tender love of faithfulness and constancy - Jacob tiding for 7 long years to win the right to wed the beautiful Rachel - years "which seemed but a few days be. his love" - and having been deceived and denied the right to wed her - he toils another 7 years for her.

③ There is the doting love of a fond, old parent for a favorite child - the love of Jacob for Joseph - and the jealousies which it arouses and the tragedies which ensue. ~~that~~

④ There is the eternal Mother love - the love of a mother - whose knows that her child must die - she hides him for 3 months - procures an ark of papyrus reeds, and dandles it with her <sup>little</sup> man, ~~him~~ and pricks, puts the child in, & places it among the reeds beside the bank of the Nile - and the child's sister is posted some distance away to see what would happen to him.

⑤ There is the despotic and betraying love - when lust, and wild desire, and treachery - the love of Samson and Delilah - ~~and~~ an impure love which leaves Samson - a broken and betrayed man, eyes in Sack.

⑥ There is the love of beautiful friendship - the love of a friend <sup>and</sup> for a shepherd boy - Jonathan & David - whose vow of platonic and eternal friendship has begotten the Clave.



① There is the love which ~~blinds~~ <sup>darkens</sup> the heart of the  
 worst of men, and destroys their sense & further ~~and further~~  
 and leads them to <sup>sin and</sup> infernal deeds - even to murder -  
 The love of ~~David~~ <sup>David</sup> for Bath Sheba - and the  
~~lovely~~ slaying of her husband Uriah the Hittite

⑧ There is the unrequited love - of child for parent.

Absalom - <sup>conspires and</sup> revolted - ag. his father -

"Deal gently for my sake with the young man, with Absalom's"  
 battle in the forest of Ephraim. - abs. fled - ruled -  
 Head caught fast in the thick branches of an oak  
 Joab slays him - Wachman - news - "all is well!"

"Is it well with the young man Absalom?"

"My son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom. O that I, even I  
 had died instead of you. Absalom, my son, my son."

⑨ Love of Country -

about all -

אֶלֶּם כָּל־אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־יָצָא אֶלֶּם כָּל־אֶרֶץ  
 - אֶלֶּם כָּל־אֶרֶץ

⑩ Love of God for man - God loved man, for He created him in His image -

וַיֵּצֵא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־אָדָם מִן־הַגָּן אֲשֶׁר־עָדַן אֱלֹהִים בְּעֵדֶן אֶרֶץ־חַיִּי

⑪ Love of man for God = Prophets  
 God, for the living God. (Ps. 42).

"As a deer longs for the water-  
 courses, so my whole being longs for  
 thee, O God" my whole being thirsts for

⑫ Love of man for his fellowman - אֶלֶּם כָּל־אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־יָצָא אֶלֶּם כָּל־אֶרֶץ  
 - אֶלֶּם כָּל־אֶרֶץ



6// yes, the Bible is replete with ~~idios~~<sup>the theme</sup> of love- It is its regnant, dominant theme. (5)

In the wisdom liter. & Bible reveal sound advice, and  
many penetrating observations on the subject of love as to  
be found -

① Proverbs

"Better a dish of herbs, where love is

"Then a fattened ox, and hashed with it.

Harred stir up strike

But love draws a veil over all draws union

7/ Col l - 3C - a collection of love songs - possibly a collection of poems sung at wedding feasts in ancient Israel.

Songs of in honor of the bride and the groom which  
friends & guests meet a ring at wedding  
celebrations - ~~and thus~~ <sup>as if</sup> where the lovers sing to  
each other - ~~as if~~ <sup>as if</sup> respectively  
Deriving their inspiration from the songs of  
shepherds and peasants in ancient Palestine

The physical channels, the birds & the ~~curious~~ <sup>curious</sup> ~~birds~~ <sup>birds</sup> to a thing, are praised & extolled in the rich imagery & ~~in the language~~ of Oriental art & exuberance. the richness of

X v herance

New is all the passing the order,  
Faith, ~~and~~ months love

You person &  
representable



8/ The Bible does not <sup>disapprove</sup> ~~disapprove~~ such love. It ~~does~~ <sup>does</sup> not  
~~do violence to~~ <sup>finds</sup> ~~finds~~ all physical love - Jud. is not a  
rel. of asceticism the which ~~despises~~ <sup>despises</sup> the body and con-  
demns all the phys. enjoyment of life. It ~~is not~~ <sup>is not</sup> ~~impossible~~  
good but phys. & of love. It is love which is tender,  
considerate, free from cruelty and excess is sp. love  
and is blessed by God. God ~~desires~~ <sup>wants</sup> men to  
enjoy life, and the  joys of life, and the beautiful things of  
the earth. What is hateful is lust, and unclean and  
gross and obscenity and destruction - all that  
degrades + cheapens and ~~degrades~~ <sup>debauches</sup> human relationship.

9/ The love of C<sup>2</sup> is clean and undefiled, even in its  
frank surveys and bodily exaltation. For her is  
like a flaming banner. It is the joy of life which every  
heart experiences in the spring time of the year.  
It is a love framed in a beautiful country;  
against a background of flowers, trees, vineyards and chards,  
pastures and flocks. Love does not degrade  
even the year when the grass is dead and the flowers are gone  
and the voice of the turtle is heard in the land.

10/ And a full realization is here, too, of the power and strength of love  
and strength of love that can be of power -  
& the consuming



Place me like a seal upon your heart, like a seal upon  
your arm

For love is mightier as death, as strong as steel  
As for ~~passion~~ <sup>jealousy</sup>, its bolts are bolts of fire, furious  
flames;

Many waters cannot quench love, nor rivers ~~extinguish~~ <sup>extinguish</sup> it.

If one were to offer all the substances of his house for love,  
it would be utterly despised.

- ① No, love cannot be bought - desireable
- ② It cannot be quenched by trials, suffering, misadventure,  
many waters cannot quench love. It is avivah -  
undefeatable as death
- ③ It is not ~~passion~~ <sup>jealousy</sup> - jealousy is consuming  
fire. It destroys.
- ④ Place me like a seal upon your heart - with or without  
True love is a seal upon the heart - It is  
an ordination, a consecration, a testament of  
everlasting devotion -