



## Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project

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

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Some Books You would Enjoy Reading, 1947.

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SOME BOOKS YOU WOULD ENJOY READING  
Dedicated to Jewish Book Month



By  
Dr. Abba Hillel Silver

At  
The Temple

On  
Sunday morning, November 23, 1946 [1947]



Our people has always loved books. We have been called The People of the Book. This designation, of course, refers to the fact that of all the religions of antiquity, the religion of Israel alone was the one which confined and embodied its doctrines and its teachings in a book, in a Sepher Torah. Because of this very fact, the Jewish people was made early aware of the importance of the written word. In a sense our entire vast literature of nearly 3000 years, which is largely a religious literature, is based upon the interpretation both of the letter and the spirit of a written book, as a result of which, our people has learned how to read a book.... "Turn it about and turn it about again and again, for everything is in it."

We learned the various ways and techniques for probing into the real meaning of a book. One must know how to read a book. We learned also -- our people learned also how to make a book live forever, by unfolding it from generation to generation, by letting it grow, as it were, by applying its teachings, its precepts to contemporaneous circumstances. We learned also how to study a book. "Thou shalt meditate. Learn day and night." A good book is to be meditated over, to be poured over, to go back time and again and to get the whole meaning of a great book, one must work on it, as it were. It is not a matter of reading pages as fast <sup>as</sup> you can, then throw the book aside -- finished.

We also learned how to care for a book. Love and attention was lavished on it. Its physical form was cherished.

All of this, of course, was applied primarily to the Holy Book, the Sepher Torah. But many other books, many other derivative books came to share in this holiness. And 9/10 of our literature -- religious literature, whether Talmud, Midrash or codes of Medieval homiletics or prayer books -- they all came to share in this over-arching sanctity allied to "The Book."

And some of this reverence for books among our people passed over even to secular books. The products of the human mind and spirit recorded in books evoked respect. It was assumed, of course that "while of making of many books there is no end," as the preacher of the Bible said, it was assumed that only matters of import only worthwhile matters would be put into a book. Our forefathers did not anticipate



that along with worthy matters, much mental trash would come to be wrapped up in the printed form as it is today. Such books they would have regarded as weeds in the garden of books and would be rejected and cast aside as worthless and harmless. But that in no way depreciated the value and beauty of real flowers in the garden -- the real books. A good book they looked upon as food, bread and wine for the mind and heart of man. They actually compared a book to bread. "Open thy mouth, said the Lord to Ezekiel, "and eat that which I give thee. And when I looked a hand was put forth unto me, and lo, a scroll of a book was therein...Then I did eat it, and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness." The good book that you read, consume, as it were, is like honey for sweetness.

Our people were urged by their wise men to acquire many books, to acquire a garden of books for sustenance, for delight, for refreshment or enrichment of mind and spirit.

Judah ibn Tibbon of the 12th century was a Spanish Jew who fled as a result of persecution to Southern France, to the Provence, and established himself. He was a great lover of books. In those days books were not printed. They were manuscripts. They were very difficult to obtain, very expensive. Judah ibn Tibbon is called the Father of translators. He was one of the great translators of the Middle Ages. He had a great collection of Jewish philosophy. These were written in Arabic and translated into the Hebrew. He translated Saadia's Opinions and Doctrines into the Hebrew. It was the same ibn Tibbon who translated the Kusari of Judah Halevi into Hebrew.

Before he died, he wrote a testament to his son who himself became a famous scholar. This testament is called an admonition of a father to his son. They were not concerned with leaving money in those days, but a fine example, a good piece of ethical advice, something worth much more than money. Among the noble admonitions which he gives to his son he advises him also about books. I wonder how many people today put into their wills advice about books -- I don't mean bankbooks -- just books.



"Thou knowest, my son, how I swaddled thee and brought thee up, how I led thee in the paths of wisdom and virtue. I fed and clothed thee; I spent myself in educating and protecting thee. I sacrificed my sleep to make thee wise beyond thy fellows, and to raise thee to the highest degree of science and morals. These twelve years I have denied myself the usual pleasures and relaxations of men for thy sake, and I still toil for thine inheritance.

"I have honored thee by providing an extensive library for thy use, and have thus relieved thee of the necessity to borrow books. Most students must bustle about to seek books, often without finding them. But thou, thanks be to God, lendest and borrowest not...Seeing that thy Creator had graced thee with a wise and understanding heart, ~~for~~ I journeyed to the ends of the earth, and fetched for thee a teacher in secular sciences. I minded neither the expense nor the danger of the ways. Untold evil might have befallen me and thee on those travels, had not the Lord been with us!

"My son! Make thy books thy companions, let thy cases and shelves be thy pleasure-grounds and gardens. Bask in their paradise, gather their fruit, pluck their roses, take their spices and their myrrh. If thy soul be satiate and weary, change from garden to garden, from furrow to furrow, from prospect to prospect. They will thy desire renew itself, and thy soul be filled with delight!

"Never refuse to lend books to anyone who has not the means to purchase books for himself, but only act thus to those who can be trusted to return the volumes. Thou knowest what our Sages said in the Talmud, on the text: 'Wealth and riches are in his house; and his merit endureth for ever.' But, 'withhold not good from him to whom it is due,' and take particular care of thy books. Cover the book-cases with rugs of fine quality; and preserve them from damp and mice, and from all manner of injury, for thy books are thy good treasure. If thou lendest a volume make a memorandum before it leaves thy house, and when it is returned, draw thy pen over the entry. Every Passover and Tabernacles call in all books out on loan."

That is very sound advise. Whenever I have a book that I like particularly well, I always buy an extra copy -- one to keep, and to lose by lenders.



There was a very eminent Christian bibliophile in the 14th century in England, Richard De Bury, who was the Bishop of Durham. He was a famous collector too. He wrote a treatise on the love of Books, "Philobiblon". In this fine little volume he calls attention to the fact that Moses, the great Law-giver, who gave the first great book to Israel, was very careful/~~with~~ <sup>how</sup> that book was looked after. He left instructions that books be placed on the side of the Ark of the Covenant, which was made of imperishable acacia wood, and was covered within and without with gold.

About 200 years ago, an eminent scholar in Italy, Eliezer Papo, wrote a compendium of ethical teachings. In that interesting book there is a chapter devoted to books. It stated that one of the 613 commandments that Jews must observe is to must "honor the Book." A book should be well-backed, properly dusted. It must not be defaced. It must not be insulted by putting it on the floor. One should never sell a book except to buy another book. He said he once sold a book, a very famous book of the Zohar -- a great mystical treatise of the Middle Ages. At night he had a terrible dream and in his dream he heard a voice. And the voice called him "Behamah" -- cattle. When he woke he wondered why he was called that. The Hebrew word for cattle is "Behamah". (meaning of the 4 Hebrew letters). You have driven out the holiness from your home. To sell a book is regarded as if something very holy was driven from one's habitation.

One must buy as many books as he can afford. Just as there are no good artisans without good tools, so there are no wise men without books. One should help people to publish books. If you are privileged to write a book, said a scholar, "his lips shall speak from the grave."

The love and devotion to a book among our people is well illustrated by a simple folk-tale found in a book of ~~papers~~. A poor and lonely man, according to the tale had no possessions at all except one book. On this book he lavished all his affection. He cherished it and read it and reread it. He had nothing but that book. When he died, says the legend, this volume was transfigured into a radiant maiden who led him to the gates of Paradise. One of the simple folk tales which says so much to the understanding heart.



No, of course, such admiration can only be lavished on good books, books we want for life companionship, not for a moment's pastime, or to while away a dull hour. A lot of what we read today is sort of chloroforming the mind, escapist literature which has no survival value. They do not nurture us. They do not satisfy us. They do not open new worlds to us. They just help to make us fall asleep. A great book is a challenge to the greatness in us. It makes us eager to transcend ourselves like many great majestic phenomena in nature. Like everything fine in the world, a great book makes us exalted. It stimulates us. It makes us proud and at the same time humble. It does something to us. There are many such books in all fields of literature and in many languages. Some of them are modern, contemporary, quite recent. Great literature has been produced in this generation as in the past generations. But many of these great books which exalt and stimulate and regenerate and satisfy us are old books, from past centuries, books which have been tested by time. And "books tested by time," said Emerson, "are the best advertisements." Time has criticized these books for us, screened them. What is left is blessed residue which successive ages have found desirable and helpful and necessary and good and blessed companions. These are the books of all time as distinguished from books of this time.

And it is to some of these books that we ought to turn more often if we really seek the treasure world which books can unfold for us. The average man ~~man~~ today does not move much in the society of those books, of that kind of book. The average man today has but the time to read his newspaper, magazine, trade journal, perhaps an escapist novel. He hasn't time for anything else with the result that he lives in a narrow attic room on top of a spacious many-chambered mansion of the literature of mankind, rooms which are ever to be closed and dark to him.

As far as our own people is concerned, I find this to complain of. The People of the Book is not reading its own great books which the genius of its own people produced. Jews are by no means illiterate. They read much. How well, of course, I do not know. But certainly they read much. But certainly not the literature of their own people. It is a rare thing to find a Jewish book shelf in



a Jewish home today, or to hear a Jew or Jewess discuss a Jewish book unless it is one recently composed on inter-marriage or on anti-Semitism -- a sort of self-flagellation, I suppose.

Because Jews don't read Jewish books, they are not well-informed about themselves, about their own history, past or present. All the information they have is scattered, fragmentary. You find in it far more heat than light, far more prejudice than knowledge. They simply will not take the trouble to sit down and read a book on a Jewish theme. Our Jewish literature is vast and rich and colorful, a literature nearly 3000 years old, written in many languages and in many lands.

I think it was Bacon who said: "Books are ships which pass through the vast seas of time." I don't know of a single literature that can provide ships to traverse the seas of time as the Jewish literature. Before Chaucer, Beowulf of England, before Dante, of Italy, before Virgil in the Latin, Jews were already writing immortal literature for mankind. Someone said: "If a book is always a book of travel -- it is about a life's journey." The journey of a human life. I can't conceive of a more fascinating book of life's travel than the life of this people's journey -- a whole wealth of recorded history from the ancient Greek, Arabic, European world to the world of today. What an amazing galaxy of poets, sages, philosophers and historians this people produced! I don't know why Jewish people don't read Jewish books. Most of these books not written in the language of today. Nevertheless, many great books are translated and are available. These books should not be read as chores, duties. They are to be enjoyed. They should give one pleasure.

I would recommend to every Jewish home a Jewish bookshelf. Among the books I would recommend upon this bookshelf and to be used -- I would recommend first of all a good Bible. It is a literature all in itself. A thousand years of literature in that book, the greatest book of all times written by Jews, read today more by non-Jews than by Jews. This Bible should be read all through one's life regularly, not merely for its tremendous spiritual value, but for its cultural value. So much of the literature, so much of the art of mankind -- painting, ~~sculpture~~,  
sculpture,



sculpture, poetry, drama are built upon the text, themes of the books of the Bible. A man who wants to be known as a cultured man cannot deserve that title unless he is at home in the Books of the Bible.

For some, a commentary which helps one over the difficult places, would be helpful. It is not an easy book to read. None of the ancient classics are easy. But a little effort brings a tremendous reward for you.

I would have the Apocrypha on my bookshelf -- also the early books written by Jews -- and not included in the Bible -- like the Book of the Maccabees and the Ecclesiastes -- which has gems of thought in them.

I should like to see on your shelf the Talmud; the Midrash, which is translated into English. It is a sort of commentary of the Talmud. There is, for example, Everyman's Talmud, edited by Dr. <sup>A.</sup> Cohen of England which gives you the thinking of the Rabbis over a period of 500 years on such things as God, Man, Revelation, Domestic life, Social life, Moral life, folk lore, Law, the hereafter.

There are other Rabbinic anthologies such as the one by Montefiore that have been made -- interesting collections of post-Talmudic literature, excellent <sup>Gems</sup> ~~books~~ of Jewish Thought by Hertz, The Golden Treasury of Literature, the Jewish Caravan, an Anthology of Medieval Literature by Millgrim.

In Chassidic lore, the interesting fascinating stories and legends of that amazing interesting sect of Chassidim there is the one by Rabbi Newman. One of these books ought to be on your bookshelf to pick up from time to time to read a chapter or two.

Steep yourself in the lore of your people in their culture. You ought to have a good Jewish history on your shelf. If you are a lover of history, Graetz is still the classic set of volumes. If you haven't time to read so extensively in Jewish history you will find one volume books on Jewish History -- The History of the Jews, by Dr. Sachar, A Bird's Eye View of History by Cecil Roth, A Century of Jewish Life, by Elbogen, the History of the Jews of the United States, by Levinger, Jewish Contribution to Civilization, by Cecil Roth. There is a fine book called the Legacy of Israel published by the Oxford Library. One of these books, or two or three



of these books ought to be in your own home to be read.

You ought to have a book too on Judaism, on our Religion. What are its teachings, what is the story of its development? There are fine books on this subject in English. One by Kohler on Jewish Theology. What does the Jew believe about labor, peace, or the Hereafter, or any other concept of society? There is a small volume called "What we Jews Believe" by Dr. Cohon. If you are more scholarly inclined there is a splendid book by George F. Moore on "Judaism in the First Century of the Christian Era." There are dozens of books on Judaism. One or two or three ought to be on the book shelf.

You should know something about customs and practices of Jewish life. Jewish Festivals, illustrated by Chayim Schauss is excellent. There is one on ceremonies of Judaism by Dr. Idelsohn. If you come on Jewish Holiday and want to know why--there is a book to go for. You can reach out for the History of Art by Landsberger. It is a valuable addition to the books in any home.

You may be interested in Judaism's relationship to Christianity -- what is the Jewish conception of the role of Jesus. On that subject there is Jesus of Nazareth by Klausner; and Who Crucified Jesus? by Zeitlin. Those are things you want to know about.

Palestine, Zionism today is on everybody's lips. ~~in~~ I wonder how many of you have actually read a book on Zionism. You have read many pro and con articles here and then. But I mean how many of you have sat down and read a book on Zionism -- how ~~it~~ it originated, why it originated, who originated it? Such books are available by the dozens. One of them ought to be on your shelves. A good one is "The Jews of Palestine" by Revusky. This is the record of Jewish achievement in Palestine, quite objectively written.

Of course I would recommend a Jewish Encyclopedia, there is one in twelve volumes and a more recent one in 10 volumes. If you haven't room on your shelf for that number, there is an excellent one volume <sup>cy</sup> encyclopedia by Valentine -- something about the life and biography of Jews in many parts of the world. It gives you facts, figures, knowledge. I could recommend many books to you on



Jewish themes -- books of biography, novels, books of essays. But I am interested first in that you should make a start of a book shelf. Some of you have, I know, a start in your homes a shelf of books devoted to the literature, history, religion of your own people. If you read some of these books which I have indicated, you will develop a taste for many others. Once you get a taste of it you will be able to satisfy this taste without much difficulty.

A good institution in Jewish life is Jewish book month which calls the attention of the Jews first to the need of reading Jewish books and secondly to the need of Jewish books and third to the need of the publication of Jewish books, not to make scholars of all, but the object is to enlighten Jewish man and women.





- 1) Our people has always loved books.
- We have been called "the People, the Book" -
  - Refers, of course, that vulgar -
  - Because, it early made aware of importance of <sup>the</sup> written word - with what care it must -
  - In a sense, our vast rel. liter of 2500 - based upon interpretation, of bitter spirit, of a written book -
  - We learned how to read a book - >>>>>> -
  - Various ways + techniques for probing its meaning,
  - How to make it live - for ever - by applying - unfolding - letting it grow, as it were.
  - How to study a book - x 1800
  - How to care for a book - love lavished on it.

2) All this, of course, applied to Holy Book -

But many other books, derivatives, came to share -  
 and 9/10 - religious - Talmud - Midrash - Codes - Prayer Books  
Responsa - ethics - Homiletics - Revered -

And some of this reverence passed on, among our people,  
 even to secular books -

Any product of the human mind - recorded in a book -  
 evoked respect -

A reader of books was an honored man.



3/ It was assumed of course that while "making new books there is no end" - only matter <sup>in fact</sup> with while would be put into books -

They did not anticipate <sup>that</sup> ~~so~~ much printed trash <sup>that along with matter</sup> would be wrapped up in printed form - as is the case to-day -

~~Such~~ Such books they could regard as weeds in the garden - to be rejected and cast aside - <sup>without in</sup> any way depreciating the value and the beauty, the flowers

4/ A good book is food - bread and wine - for the mind and heart, man -

"O per thy mouth, said the poet to Ezekiel, 'and eat that which I give thee. And when I looked, a hand was put forth unto me, and lo, a scroll of a book was therein... Then, I did eat it, and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness'"

5/ Our people were urged <sup>each</sup> to acquire a garden of books for maintenance, for delight, for enrichment and soul.

(a) <sup>Exch. for Prof. Ruvner</sup> David Ibn Tibbon - Physician - <sup>Local</sup> Valuable library - <sup>12c</sup> father of <sup>Translator</sup> - <sup>1220s</sup> <sup>1250s</sup> <sup>1350s</sup> <sup>1380s</sup> <sup>1400s</sup> <sup>1450s</sup> <sup>1500s</sup> <sup>1550s</sup> <sup>1600s</sup> <sup>1650s</sup> <sup>1700s</sup> <sup>1750s</sup> <sup>1800s</sup> <sup>1850s</sup> <sup>1900s</sup> <sup>1950s</sup> <sup>2000s</sup> <sup>2010s</sup> <sup>2020s</sup> <sup>2030s</sup> <sup>2040s</sup> <sup>2050s</sup> <sup>2060s</sup> <sup>2070s</sup> <sup>2080s</sup> <sup>2090s</sup> <sup>2100s</sup> <sup>2110s</sup> <sup>2120s</sup> <sup>2130s</sup> <sup>2140s</sup> <sup>2150s</sup> <sup>2160s</sup> <sup>2170s</sup> <sup>2180s</sup> <sup>2190s</sup> <sup>2200s</sup> <sup>2210s</sup> <sup>2220s</sup> <sup>2230s</sup> <sup>2240s</sup> <sup>2250s</sup> <sup>2260s</sup> <sup>2270s</sup> <sup>2280s</sup> <sup>2290s</sup> <sup>2300s</sup> <sup>2310s</sup> <sup>2320s</sup> 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6/ Chase 7 books -

(3)

In 14c. a chr. bibliophile - "Richard De Bury" Bishop  
of Durham - a lover of books - & famous collector  
"Philobiblon" - A Treatise on the love of books -  
calls attention - Moses - taught to us how to  
take care of a book - place it on the side of the  
Ark, the Covenant - which was made of unspiced  
beaten wood, and was covered within & without  
with gold -

- 7/ Eliezer Papo - He has his books - well-bound,  
properly placed, well-dusted, not defaced, not to  
wrinkle them by putting them on the floor.  
① not to sell a book - except to buy another  
② not to spend money - to buy -  
"No artisan with art tools - no wise man without  
books"  
③ Help others to publish books.  
④ If you can write on yourself -  
2272 x 122/3 1,110 1.51



8/ Love & devotion to a book - Wright - have precious - (4)  
Lowly poor man - for forgotten man - so possession  
- No other book. Because his world - had the - val it -  
guarded it - loved it - When he died - transferred

9/ Such education can only be lavished as good  
books - book we want for life-long companions

but for a moment's part-time - to whel away a  
dull hour -

- A lot of what we read are by way of various  
chance pieces literature - the world - Especially disrupt

- They have no intrinsic value - for as - for as

- They do not brood us - a universe us - a  
permanently satisfies us - an open new world  
for us -

- They make us weather wiser, war better, they  
help us to fall asleep.

10/ A great book is a challenge to features <sup>in us</sup>  
like everything fine in the world - it works on eye to hand  
it exalts - stimulates - makes us pride themselves in it







But they certainly do not read the literature, then  
any people - (6)

It is a rare thing to find a Jew who  
is a J. now to-day -

a to hear a Jew or Jewess discuss a J. book -  
- unless it is one recently composed or interwoven  
in Antisemitism - critique - propaganda

13/ Jews are not well-informed about their own  
history - past or present -

- Scattered - fragmentary - confused -

- They approach a discussion of a problem with  
hatred & bigotry - with prejudice & knowledge -

- They seldom take the trouble to sit down and  
read a book on contemporary J. life -

14/ J. liter. is vast - rich - colorful - 3000 yrs  
old - in many languages - in many lands

= "Bibles are ships which pass through the vast

Seas of Time" - Bacon -

No liter. can <sup>provide</sup> ~~offer~~ so many ships to travel  
so many seas of Time -

= Before even Chaucer or Bernard - mentioned in the  
divine light - a Dante - St. Augustine or  
in St. Augustine - St. Augustine etc. - Jews were



writing great literature —

17

= If a book is always a book, travel — it is about a life's journey —

What were fascinating <sup>books</sup> travel — & life's journey  
of our people over the sea, the land — and its  
magnificent messiah — in ancient world — in B. —  
Babel — Egypt — Babylonia

Roman world — Arabi — West. Europe — Eastern Europe

What a galaxy of poets — sages — philosophers — historians —

15%. Why don't you read J. G. Wells? Will say  
then — Feed your heart & mind — Enrich your



A Jewish Book Shelf

① J. G. Wells — That one book — It has inspired  
Read it — repeatedly — but regularly —

② Apropheta — Maccabees — Esdras

③ Proph. Book — (Rev. S. Singer)

④ Talmud — 24 vol — Tidra — digests — them

① Early Talmud — Rev. Dr. G. Cohen

God — Man — Revolution — Down to the — Social life  
Moral life — Talmud — Law — Jewish Heritage



(2) Dobson - A Rabbinic Anthology of Montefiore<sup>8</sup>

(5) ~~History of J. Liter~~ Talumde Anthology Louis J. Hama  
A comprehensive work on J. Liter. is Waxman's  
History of J. Literature

(6) Jews & Jewish Thought - Herzl<sup>(1)</sup> "Book of J. Thought"

(2) Schwarz Leo "Golden Treasury of J. Literature"

(3) Millgram - "Jewish Caravan" - Anthology of Mod. Heb. Literat.

(4) Kennan's  
Hebrew Anthology

(7) Jew. History (1) Maatz - 6 vol.

(2) Roth's - A Bird's Eye View of J. Hist.

(3) Sachs Almanach - History of Jewry  
Elbogen - Anthology of J. Lit.  
(4) Alminger - History of Jew in U.S.

(5) Geel Roth - The Jew. Contribution to Culture

(8) Jordan - (6) Abraham Fraad ed. Legacy of Israel  
(1) Kohlen - Jewish Theology

Cohen - What We Jews Believe

Gray & Mann - Jordan in the First Century, the  
Chr. Era - teaching, Rabbi

(9) Jewish Festivals - Hayyim Schauss  
Ceremonies of Jordan - A. Z. Idelson



(10) Palestine & Zionism -

19

(1) The Jews in Palestine - A Revue - a record

(2) Zionism - on a dozen - Israel Cohen  
The Jewish Movement

(11) Encyclopedia - J. Emy - Universal Jew

(1) One Volume - Valentines

(12) A History of Jewish Art - Fray Landsberg  
Contemporary Jewish Art - Contest, Jarkit

(13) On Judaism Relative to Christianity

Joseph Klausner - Jesus, Nazareth

S. Zentgraf - Who crucified Jesus

(14) I could recommend many other  
biographies - novels - books, poems

(Mendel, Mendel) - Essays

(15) 2nd Scholers - Enlightened Jews