



## 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  
164

Box  
59

Folder  
890

Are there still worlds to conquer?, 1953.



812  
ARE THERE STILL WORLDS TO CONQUER?

January 18, 1953

Our generation, dear friends, has been characterized by a mood of approaching pessimism. There have been many people who have deprecated this age in which we live as being not only materialistic and lacking in idealism and in vision, but also as an age which is drifting helplessly to disaster. There are those who feel that we are at the edge of a wilderness, and that there is nothing beyond us, but an

a land of barrenness and of the shadow of death. We hear people talk of the imminence of some economic collapse which will engulf the world. Men speak of an irrepressible conflict between the East and the West, of a third World War wherein atomic bombs and hydrogen bombs will destroy almost the whole of mankind, wherein there will be no victors and no vanquished, but all will perish.

Very few people indeed think of this age of ours as a pioneering age, an age of vast prospects. Our young people especially, unlike previous generations of young people, are not inspired or uplifted by the hope of new worlds to conquer. They are afraid that even this old world of ours will collapse in smouldering ruins over their heads. They are fearful lest what they have may be taken away from them or lost to them. The prospect of adventure into new worlds, of rich rewards in the days to come and deep satisfactions, is not really within their purview.

I personally have never shared this fatalism, this mood of hopelessness and despair, which is induced by the terribly unsettled state of the world in which we find ourselves. I have been inclined to see this age of ours - and I have frequently said it - as a great age, turbulent, to be sure, and beset with grave dangers, but withal, a very creative age; an age of rapid acceleration, of human progress and evolution. I have refused to see this age of ours as one of social disintegration such as philosophers of doom have characterized it, but rather, as an age in which we are privileged to behold, if we have eyes to see not only things but see into the heart of things, a new social reintegration and one of boundless and immeasurable promise.



And I base my conviction not merely upon the amazing scientific progress which the world is making almost every day before our very eyes in every field - in scientific discovery, in invention, in technology, in Physics and in chemistry and in medicine - in modes of communication, transportation. I base my conviction not so much upon our scientific progress as upon our social progress, upon all that is going on in the world tending to improve the lot of the common man; upon all that is going on in our world tending to contribute more equitably what is being produced by the hand of man; by all that is being done in the world to achieve greater freedom and self-determination for more and more peoples and nations and races.

I base my optimism upon this amazing phenomenon of the rapid disappearance of imperialism and colonialism in our day, and of the surging forward of the backward peoples of the world into greater literacy and greater health and better conditions of living. And also - and this might seem strange and sound strange in your ears - also, upon all the efforts that are being made in the world today to put an end to war. I am persuaded that the twentieth century, or what remains of it, will solve the problem of war, of for no other reason than the fact that it is dawning upon people everywhere that in the coming war, nobody will be spared. There will be no victors; they will be no gains for anyone, any group or any people or any system; but all will descend into universal disaster.

I have been enheartened in my thinking on this subject recently by what I read from the spoken words and the written words of four men - a philosopher, an historian, a poet and a political head of the greatest democracy on earth. In one way or another these four men, representing four departments of human life, if you will, have had an opportunity to express themselves on this very subject, and they all seem to feel that we are not moving to disaster, but to a brighter and happier future, that there are great new worlds to conquer, and there is the opportunity and the challenge



to people today still to be pioneers in the real sense of the word.

Bertrand Russell who in 1950, you will recall, won the Nobel Prize for Literature, one of the most thoughtful men of our age, and one of its foremost philosophers, recently wrote a brochure or a book called "The Impact of Science on Society", and in this volume Professor Russell examines the changes in modern life which have come about as a result of science, and comes to the conclusion that its work in the remoulding and refashioning society is only just beginning, and that science offers in the days to come the possibility of far greater wellbeing for humanity than at any time in the past. He almost gives the impression that it is his feeling that we are on the eve of the establishment of the good society on earth. Let me read a sentence or two from his book, "The Impact of Science on Society".

What I do want to stress is that the kind of lethargic despair which is now not uncommon, is irrational. Mankind is in the position of a man climbing a difficult and dangerous precipice, at the summit of which there is a plateau of delicious mountain meadows. With every step that he climbs, his fall, if he does fall, becomes more terrible; with every step his weariness increases and the ascent grows more difficult. At last there is only one more step to be taken, but the climber does not know this, because he cannot see beyond the jutting rocks at his head. His exhaustion is so complete that he wants nothing but rest. If he let go, he will find rest in death. Hope calls: "One more effort - perhaps it will be the last effort needed." Irony retorts: "Silly fellow! Haven't you been listening to hope all this time, and see what it has landed you." Optimism says: "While there is life there is hope." Pessimism growls: "While there is life there is pain." Does the exhausted climber make the one more effort, or does he let himself sink into the abyss? In a few years those of us who are still alive will know the answer.

Dropping metaphor, the present situation is as follows: Science offers the possibility of far greater wellbeing for the human race than has ever been known before. It offers this on certain conditions: abolition of war, even distribution of ultimate power, and limitation of the growth of population. All these are much nearer to being possible than they ever were before. In Western industrial countries, the growth of population is almost nil; the same causes will have the same effect in other countries as they become modernized, unless dictators and missionaries interfere. The even distribution of ultimate power



economic as well as political, has been nearly achieved in Britain, and other democratic countries are rapidly moving towards it. The prevention of war? It may seem a paradox to say that we are nearer to achieving this than ever before, but I am persuaded that it is true.

These are the words of an eminent philosopher, a student of society.

You all the name of Professor Arnold J. Toynbee, one of the foremost historians of our day, who has probed deep into the history of mankind and has studied its trends. Writing in the "Atlantic Monthly" of this month, Professor Toynbee states that "history is now moving at a rapidly accelerating speed, that we must not look backward". To look backward is to suffer the fate of Lot's wife who, you will recall, was turned into a pillar of salt because she looked back. "We are moving in the right direction. We are moving in the direction of the World State." Of the struggle between the East and the West, which has been most responsible for the mood of despair among people today, Professor Toynbee writes:

We cannot yet foresee the day when the West and Russia will be able to live together as one flock with one shepherd because - as every citizen of any federal polity knows - it is impracticable for people to cooperate politically unless they already share a common way of life. Until they have grown together to that degree, the best political relation with one another that they can hope to achieve is one of live and let live. It is of vital importance for all of us that, in the dangerous age in which we are still strangers to one another, the West and Russia should maintain a "modus vivendi" that will save them from drifting into an atomic Third World War; and the United Nations is the forum in which the Elephant and the Whale can continue to do business until they have had time to digest the truth that however alien from one another they may look, the Elephant, the Whale, and the Bat are nevertheless three fellow members of the mammalian order.

There is no reason why our Western Community should not expand, as the United States has expanded, by successively admitting new states to membership as they qualify for this. Nor need we foresee any limits to a progressive political unification of mankind; for the same technology which, by inventing the atom bomb, has now made world unity Man's only ultimate alternative to self-destruction, has also made world unity feasible for us by placing in our hands physical means of communication which we can use as tools for demolishing the pre-air-age psychological barriers between us.

If only we school ourselves to be patient and forbearing, as well as inventive and constructive, we can look into the future, not indeed without anxiety, but also not with a heartening hope.



Many of you know of the great American poet, Carl Sandburg, who has recently celebrated his 75th birthday, or to put it more exactly, the American people have celebrated his 75th birthday. One of our great poets, perhaps the outstanding poet of the American spirit, one who has given us deeper insights into the foremost American, Abraham Lincoln, than has any writer up to this day. Carl Sandburg's life has spanned all these turbulent decades in which so many changes have taken place in our life and in the life of the world. His most recent book, which he calls "Always the Young Stranger", is a great poem of faith in the essential greatness and strength and soundness of America. The very title, "Always the Young Stranger", ~~keeps~~ who keeps coming, is indicative of his faith in the constantly refreshing streams of inspiration, strength which comes to a free people, and the un-failing renewal which is its heritage.

On the occasion of his 75th anniversary, Carl Sandburg, among other things, said the following:

I have spent as strenuous a life as any man surviving three wars and two major depressions, but never, not for a moment, did I lose faith in America's future. Time and time again, I saw the faces of her men and women torn and shaken in turmoil, chaos and storm. In each major crisis, I have seen despair on the faces of some of the foremost strugglers, but their ideas always won. Their visions always came through.

I see America, not in the setting sun of a black night of despair ahead of us, I see America in the crimson light of a rising sun, fresh from the burning creative hand of God. I see great days ahead, great days possible to men and women of will and vision.

And finally, the faith of a man who is next Tuesday relinquishing the office of the Presidency of the United States. President Truman, last Thursday, spoke to the American people by way of a valedictory. He has been the key figure in the great world-shaking events of the last 7 years, perhaps more than any other man on the face of the globe. He has been close to the problems and the dangers of our day. How does President Truman feel about the state of the world, the state of the Union? Does he leave his office after the exhausting and arduous tasks of seven



years of leadership discouraged, disheartened. Well, this is what he said to the American people:

I have a deep and abiding faith in the destiny of free men. With patience and courage we shall some day move on into a new era - a wonderful golden age - an age when we can use the peaceful tools which science has forged for us to do away with poverty and human misery everywhere on earth.

Think what can be done, once our capital, our skills, our science - most of all, atomic energy - can be released from the tasks of defense and turned wholly to peaceful purposes all around the world.

There is no end to what can be done.

I can't help but dream out loud a little here.

The Tigris and Euphrates Valley can be made to bloom as it did in the times of Babylon and Nineveh. Israel can be made the country of milk and honey as it was in the time of Joshua. There is a plateau in Ethiopia some six to eight thousand feet high, that has 65,000 square miles of land just exactly like the corn belt of Northern Illinois. Enough food can be raised there to feed a hundred million people.

There are places in South America - places in Colombia and Venezuela and in Brazil just like that plateau in Ethiopia - places where food could be raised for millions of people.

These things can be done, and they are self-liquidating projects. If we can get peace and safety in the world under the United Nations, the developments will come so fast we will not recognize the world in which we now live.

This is our dream of the future - our picture of the world we hope to have when the Communist threat is overcome.

Four men - a philosopher, an historian, a poet, a political leader of his people - all speaking in the year 1953 in the midst of our great fears, yearnings - all speak nevertheless with the same confidence as I am sure the Founding Fathers of this Republic must have spoken more than a century and a half ago.

Can we still be pioneers? Is there room for the pioneer? Are there still worlds to conquer? Definitely. As long as there is still poverty in the world to overcome and slums to eradicate and inequalities to set aside and suspicions to allay and chains to strike off the hands of peoples, there are worlds to conquer. There is room for the pioneer.



Certainly, in the fields of the arts - music, literature, painting - why, there is everlasting opportunities there for new creations, for new adventure, for the pioneering of the mind and the spirit and the soul of man. Here is where God renews His world every day.

The fact that there was a Plato and a Shakespeare and a Beethoven in the past does not mean that there cannot be Platos and Shakespeares and Beethovens in the years to come, for centuries to come - tomorrow, for that matter. This, by the way, good friends, is the genius of our faith - Judaism. The most persecuted religion in the world has always been the most optimistic. In the darkest hours, our faith and our people looked forward to the coming of the better day, , the ultimate day, "And the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea, where each man will live under his vine and under his fig tree and none will make him afraid; when nations will beat their swords into ploughshares."

Always in the darkest centuries and under the most terrible persecutions, the ghettos and inquisitions, in the midst of pogroms, exile, our people kept within it as within a shrine, undimmed, the Messianic hope, the hope of a better day for all men. The Messianic hope was not tied up with the coming of a man to redeem the world. It was tied up with the ideal of the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth, the good society which all men, by their labors and their sacrifices and their constancy will help to bring about.

I once said that if somebody could have told the primitive man who lived in a cave or in a jungle, 50,000 years ago or 10,000 years ago - if somebody had told him that some day there would be in and around him, in his world, the world of man, all the marvels of science which we take for granted today - our wireless and our radio and our television and our sources of power and our great music and our great art, our marvelous architectural structures - if we had told that primitive man that some day all these things would come to be, he would have had every reason to deny it.



He would have been justified in a total pessimism, and yet, within that imprisoned mind of his, there were already the seeds of all the blossoming and the budding of these great civilizations that have come to me. He didn't know it. He could not penetrate into the future.

In a sense, we, too, we cannot penetrate into the unpredictable future although we have far less reason to be totally pessimistic than the primitive man was because, after all, we have already a great mass of achievements to look back upon. Mankind has traversed a long road. It has climbed many heights, it has learned much, it has built much, it has eradicated much wrong. It has mastered much, and all past can be prologue.

And so, the question which people may ask - are there still worlds to conquer? The answer is, most assuredly. We have just begun the real conquest of nature. Is there room for the pioneer? Most assuredly, for any courageous, adventuresome human spirit, who believes in God, who believes in man, who believes in the power of man to refashion his world to his heart's desire - there is room for every enterprising spirit in every field of human endeavor, to pioneer and to achieve great rewards, deep satisfactions for himself and great blessedness for mankind. We are not at the edge of a wilderness by any means, as these men have indicated. We are on the threshold of a great land of promise for the whole of mankind. Amen.



1) Quite Pessimistic - not only as materialists, and  
looking in vision and idealism - but as  
drifting helplessly to disaster -

- Edge of the wilderness - nothing beyond but folk  
1/13/31 513

- Men talk of an inevitable econ. collapse  
- of an unpressible conflict bet. East & West  
- a 3rd world war - wherein the Atlantic +  
hydrogen bombs - with deadly weapons  
- leaving neither conquerors nor victors alive

(a) Few people indeed think of us as a Pioneer  
age - lost prospects

Our young people - unlike previous generations  
YOUTH - are not inspired by the life of new worlds  
to conquer.

They are afraid that <sup>even</sup> this old world may collapse  
in shocking ruins on their heads -

They are fearful lest what they have won  
be taken away or lost to them -

The prospect of adventure into new world  
- of rich rewards + deep satisfaction is not  
with in their purview -



2/ I have never shared this fatalism and despair  
induced by the vastness of the state of our world.  
Have been inclined to see our age as a great age -  
- turbulent to be sure - beset with grave dangers -  
but a creative age - one of rapid accelerations  
of human progress - not of social disintegration  
but of a new reintegration - one of boundaries  
and unmeasurable progress.

3/ And I base my conviction - not on any  
Scientific progress - social progress -  
- improvement - fairer theory - freedom + self-  
determination - Imperialism - Colonialism - Backward  
abolition of war - unmeasured dangers - Do

4/ Enlightened reality - 4 men - enlightened reality,  
historians, poet - + poet head of protest democracy  
on earth  
All - seem to feel - that we are not moving to  
disaster - to brighten the future

5/ Bertrand Russell - 1950 Nobel Prize for Literature  
- present phil. of our age - "The Import of Science  
on Society" examines the changes in modern life  
brought about by Science - and concludes that its  
work is only just beginning. Science offers



the possibility of far greater well-being for humanity (3  
than it has ever known before. (Jude/92-93)

(control population - avoid war - destitute ppl. (see how)

6/ Eminent Historian Arnold J. Toynbee, - picked deep  
into history & mankind - writing in the San Antonio  
States that "history is now moving at a rapidly  
accelerating speed." We must not look back and

Toynbee's wife, We are moving in the direction of the  
World State - if only as a means of saving ourselves from  
'geno-socide', of struggle but. East & West be  
soy (Jude)

7/ Carl Sandburg - poet - husband - 75 - his life spans  
so many changes in times. life  
- "Always the young stranger" - keep coming  
(Jude)

8/ Pres. Truman - valiant - a key figure in  
world events - descent to the problem - dangers -  
Thursday Oct (Jude)

9/ Can we still be producers? Are there still  
world to conquer?

And in the field, the arts - music, literature,  
painting - unbroken houses -



Has the last great say been say 2  
for the 3/11/62 12/62 13/62

4. So much yet to be done - enough family  
- equality - intolerance - 3/11/62 12/62 13/62  
~~3/11/62 12/62 13/62~~

11/ Judaism - most persecuted - 3/11/62 12/62 13/62  
Jewish people - Adam - first world  
primitive man

