



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
165

Box
60

Folder
945

High fidelity living, 1955.

HIGH FIDELITY LIVING

February 27, 1955

The term, "High Fidelity" has become a popular technical term in the world of lovers of recorded music. It is such an apt and meaningful term that I believe that it should be carried over into the world of the intellectual and the spiritual among all lovers of truth, beauty, and goodness.

The term High Fidelity has to do with a wide effort which is now being made to bring about a more faithful reproduction of music by improving the equipment for the making of records and for their play-back in the home. Through a combination of the condenser type of microphone in the studio, through the use of magnetic tape, a sharper stylus to etch the sound on the master disk, and similar devices, and through better amplifiers and their control in the phonograph in the home, it is possible to obtain far greater "naturalness" in recorded music. On listening to High Fidelity records and instruments, the music comes to you as if you were listening to a live performance in a concert hall; you hear the true sound of each and every instrument without any distortion, with complete fidelity.

And so progress is being made in our day towards perfection in the communication of music which, I am sure, will mean much in the musical education and enjoyment of our people. And this effort in High Fidelity music is a tribute to the unending quest of man for improvement and advancement in every scientific and mechanical direction. One must say a far more successful, because far more determined, progress than in man's spiritual and social life.

Along with this movement towards High Fidelity in reproduction of sound, there is also the tendency towards the long-playing record - that is to say, towards putting more and more of play time, more and more of music on each single record - finer grooves and more music.

Wouldn't that be wonderful if that were also the tendency in our daily lives -

if we tried to get more and more playing time, more and more meaningful and content-
ful living on the one fixed and unexpandable disk of life which is allotted to us?

Unfortunately, most of our lives move through coarse and not through fine grooves,
and much of the disk unfortunately has nothing on it - where it is not scratched, or
nicked, or blurred.

There is a reaching out in this High Fidelity effort of recorded music, a reaching
out for accuracy and sensitiveness, for range and depth, amplitude. Many of our
lives unfortunately lack this trend towards High Fidelity - many of ^{our} lives lack range
and depth; we are satisfied with surface living, shallow existence, we do not live
in depth; we do not fulfill ourselves; we do not try to think with power and accuracy,
and so we do scant justice to our minds. We are not sufficiently sensitive to the
human situation about us and to the world about us, and so we do scant justice to
our souls. Many vital human interests which should be heard clearly and distinctly
in our orchestrated lives are not heard at all but are muted and muffled.

What do I mean by High Fidelity living? I can best illustrate by pointing to
the life of a great man whose 80th birthday the whole civilized world celebrated
recently in gladness and thanksgiving. I am referring to Albert Schweitzer, a man
who knew the art of High Fidelity living.

Schweitzer was born in a parsonage in a small Alsatian town, 80 years ago; he
grew up in a happy and comfortable home, and he studied for the Protestant ministry.
He was ordained and became a pastor in a church in Strasbourg. Later on he became
a teacher of religion, and still later a principal of a Protestant theologic college.
He was an extraordinarily gifted man, forceful, a very pleasing personality. He wrote
with creative power and originality important books on theology and on philosophy,
but more than an important theologian, Albert Schweitzer was a great musician. While
still in his 20's he became famous as an organist of genius. His organ recitals
won acclaim all over Europe. He became an authority on organ structure, organ music,
organ history. He became the foremost authority on Bach. Suddenly at the age of

thirty, this Doctor of Philosophy, this Doctor of Theology, this Doctor of Music decided to study medicine with the avowed intention of qualifying as a doctor and a surgeon so that he could go to central Africa to help alleviate the suffering of the helpless and uncared-for African natives.

He himself gives the explanation for this radical decision which he made: "It was not right that I should accept all the happiness which I enjoyed as if it were due me; I must render immediate service as a return for all that I enjoy." It was the weary, suffering look on the face of a negro on a statue which he saw in Colmar that turned Sweitzer's attention to Africa. There was to be the field for the giving of himself in repayment for what life had given him. He had been reaching out for High Fidelity all his life in living, and this was to be the crowning effort of his life.

So at the age of 38, having completed the course of study for a doctor of medicine, he set out by himself, accompanied by his faithful wife, with a few thousand pounds in his pocket, to French Equatorial Africa, there to establish a small hospital for the natives.

In July 1913, he commenced work in Africa. All that was given to him was a small bungalow, and with that he must begin. Despite strict orders that for some weeks no patients were to attend until the doctor had a building ready, so great was the need of the natives that at once patients arrived. He could not turn them away. They must be attended to in the open air, outside the bungalow, and so a few shelves in his own house had to serve as a dispensary. As necessity soon demanded surgical work, a disused hen house was promoted to serve as an operating theater, and there operations on tumors, other serious cases were successfully treated. Soon Albert Sweitzer, in the face of many difficulties, sets about building his first hospital building. Dense vegetation had to be cleared away. The ground had to be leveled. Much of the physical work he had to do himself. The climate was intolerable,

especially for a European. In the hot season the air was full of mosquitoes and the deadly tsetse fly, and in the wet season days on end of rain and more rain and cloudbursts. But Sweitzer proceeded to build his hospital, a corrugated iron shed with two rooms, 13 feet square, with two small rooms for a dispensary and sterilizing. Soon thereafter another unit for patients suffering from the sleeping sickness.

And so he served - the only doctor in a radius of 200 miles. In the first nine months 2,000 patients were examined - rheumatism, pneumonia, abdominal dropsy, tumors, skin eruptions, malaria, sleeping sickness, heart disease - a catalogue of misery and pain. Sweitzer insists that the African is just as sensitive to pain as the European.

His work was interrupted by the First World War. Having been born in German Alsace, he was considered by the French as an enemy; he was arrested and confined in a prison for the duration of the war. After the armistice he returned to Strasbourg where he himself underwent a very serious operation. For a few years in Europe he lectured, wrote, played the organ; Sweitzer was offered an important professorship, but in 1924 he decided to return to Africa and to resume his life's mission and to fulfill himself. He found his hospital practically ruined. "Grass and brushwood are growing where once stood the wards which I constructed with so much trouble. Above what is still standing are stretched the boughs of big trees which I remember as little saplings. There are still standing the building of corrugated iron in which we had our operating room, consulting^{room}, and dispensary, and another in which we housed some of the patients. These two are still in fairly good condition, though their roofs of palm leaves are hopelessly damaged." And so Sweitzer begins to rebuild the hospital. But he needs more room for his work, and so in 1927 he decides to build a larger hospital. Now a new doctor has arrived to help him and a small nursing staff. And he proceeds to build a hospital. "For his third hospital he decided to build on piles so that water, the river rising or the floods

descending, might pass under the building, but this meant that he must set every single pile himself to make sure that they were true to the perpendicular, set at the correct level. And so physically, this man works with the natives to help build his hospital.

He returns to Europe to recuperate, for no whiteman can stand that climate for more than two or three years at a stretch. He is now recognized for his services. He is greatly honored. But he decides to return to Africa. Frequently during his years of service in Africa he re-visits Europe but always returning. He was at his post during the Second World War. His 70th birthday found him at his post and again his 80th birthday. On November 4, 1954, last year, Albert Sweitzer received the Nobel Peace Prize for his services to mankind.

Someone has called him "an artist of living." I think that it an excellent characterization of the man, an artist, I would say, of High Fidelity living. He was faithful, he has been faithful all his life to the best in him, to his ideals, to the high hopes of mankind. He reached out always for amplitude and depth and range in living, for sensitiveness to human needs, for "naturalness" and "realism" in his relation to the human situation in which he found himself. He reached out for a profound and resonant harmony of living. He was not given to heroics. He was not just a spiritual adventurer. His claim to this specific interest of his in caring for the natives in Africa derived from a reverence for life as such and for each and every activity and enterprise in life. Everything that a human being does if he does it well with intent, with consecration is holy, is significant, is High Fidelity living. He himself wrote: "Only a person who can find a value in every sort of activity and devote himself to each one with a full consciousness of duty has the inward right to take as his object some extraordinary activity instead of that which falls naturally to his lot. Only a person who feels his preference to

be a matter of course, not something out of the ordinary, and who has no thought of heroism but just recognizes a duty undertaken with sober enthusiasm is capable of becoming a spiritual adventurer such as the world needs."

Not all men or woman are Albert Sweitzers - in genius and endowments. Not all land formations are mountain peaks and not all mountain peaks are of the same elevation. But striving for High Fidelity living is the privilege and the opportunity of every human being. Every human being should strive to have a fine theme in his life and a fine tone to his life. Every human being can strive to be dedicated to the best.

The portion of the Torah which was read in our synagogue is the story of the building of the sanctuary in the wilderness, and as a symbol of this holy place was the menorah, the seven-branched candlestick, and the Bible prescribes the construction of this menorah. It is to be (Hebrew) - the whole of it is to be of one piece, of hammered work, of pure gold. One piece, of pure gold! And the true life of a human being ought to aspire to be of one piece and of purity - pure gold, each branch of it part of a whole, and each giving forth its own gracious light. And this is the privilege and the opportunity of every human being.

High Fidelity living in home life, living up loyally to our responsibilities and opportunities as parents, children, husband, wife, with sensitiveness, with naturalness, with utmost faithfulness. This creates fine music in a home. High Fidelity living.

High Fidelity living is friendship, loyalty to friends in prosperity and in adversity, helping friends, not using them; giving them and sharing, not exploiting. Such friendship, such high fidelity, high faithfulness friendship, enriches, ennobles our lives.

High Fidelity living in business, absolute integrity, absolute rectitude; never ruthless or coarse in the pursuit of gain. If an employer, just and considerate; if an employee, loyal, honest. Such fidelity gives dignity to our work, our occupation,

over and above what the occupation itself may be; our attitude to it, the way we live in it and through it, the way we use it and for what we use it, and our manifold relationships in our business associations. It is that which gives a degree of artistry and dignity and worth to what we do. Otherwise it is cheap money grubbing, and nothing more.

High Fidelity living in community life, living up to one's fullest responsibilities as a citizen, as a member of the community, carrying one's fair share of the burdens and responsibilities of community life and all of its enterprises - their growth and development - not standing on the sidelines, not waiting for other people to do what should and must be done; not finding out and discovering ways of getting away with a minimum of contribution of self or substance to the growth and development of a community; High Fidelity living, as a member of a community. This is what builds a good society.

Sweitzer could have gotten away with much less. He was a successful and happy man. There he was, in the midst of the comforts of Europe and his numerous friends and associations; a successful man in his chosen field and a great musician. Why in the world did he want to go into the wilds and crudities, the dangers of the African jungle? Because he felt himself to be a member of a community of human beings, and many of them were in need. Instead of saying let others do it, he felt the challenge spiritually directed to himself, and himself responded and dedicated his life, his High Fidelity life.

High Fidelity living as far as one's intellectual and cultural life is concerned. Always seeking the truest, always seeking to know more, to understand more, never content to be second rate in our thinking, never satisfied with snap judgments, with pet prejudices, but always sifting and examining, tooling one's mind for finer receptivity as you tool the instrument for finer receptivity of music. The world today is organized to attack the human mind, through propaganda of all kinds, vast campaign

to compel people through subtle ways to think as other people want us to think, to give us cliches and pet phrases and slogans and formulas to keep us from thinking critically and incisively and accurately. If we yield to that, we are lost; we have surrendered the royal domain of our lives, the domain of our mind and of our intellect. We are not thinking with High Fidelity.

High Fidelity living in our religious life. Not religion through lip service but religion which in deepest sincerity seeks the nearness of God, seeks to come close to the great mysteries of living, seeks in true humility of spirit, in true worship of the Creator the glories and the depths of the religious life. Our religious life is a life, unfortunately. It is not the faith which weights us down into the mystic spiritual depths of true religion.

And so I think, friends, that the term High Fidelity might be used by all of us when we come to think of ourselves in our relation to ourselves and to others. High Fidelity belongs to the true pattern of a good life. It is good to strive for High Fidelity living. Amen.

1). High Fidelity has become ~~such~~ a popular technical term⁽¹⁾ in the world of ~~se~~ lovers of recorded music. It is such an apt and meaningful term that it should be introduced also into the world of the mind and the spirit among all lovers of truth, and beauty and goodness!

2) H.F. has to do with a wide-effort now being made to bring about a more faithful reproduction of music by improving the ^{equipment} ~~machinery~~ records and their play-back in the home. ~~The~~ through a combination of ~~better~~ ^{the condenser type of} microphones in the studios ~~where the records are made,~~ though the use of magnetic tape, a sharper stylus to etch the sound on the master disk, and similar devices, and better play-back amplifiers ^{and their coupling} in the phonograph in the home, it is feasible to obtain ^{in far greater} ~~a~~ "naturalness" in ~~that~~ recorded music. ~~as possible.~~ On listening to it the ~~so~~ music comes to you as if you were listening to a live performance in a concert-hall. You ^{hear} ~~feel~~ the true sound of each and every instrument without any distortion, with complete fidelity.

3/. Thus progress is being made towards perfection in the communication of music which will mean much in the musical education of our people. It is a tribute to the unending quest of man for improvement and advancement in every scientific and mechanical direction. Far more successful, because far more determined, than is man's spiritual & social life.

4/. Along with this movement towards H.F. is reproduction, sound, is also the tendency towards the long-playing record - towards getting more and more playing time, more music on each single record - ~~record~~

finer grooves and more music.
57. Wouldn't it be exciting if that were also the tendency in
our daily lives. - if we tried to get more and more play-
time, more and more music, more and more meaning-ful and
content-ful living on the fixt and unexpandable disk of
life which is allotted to us?

Most of our lives move thru coarse grooves -
and much of the disk unfortunately has nothing on it -
where it is not scratched, and matted and blurred.
6/. ~~What is behind the H. F. movement~~ ^{is} ~~in~~ rushing out
for accuracy and sensitivity, for range and amplitude
Many of our lives lack range and depth.
We are satisfied with surface living - shallow existence
We do not live in depth - We do not fulfill ourselves
We do not try to think with ^{power and} accuracy. We do scant
justice to our minds -
We are not sufficiently sensitive to the human situation
and to the world about us - We do scant justice to our souls.
Many vital human interests which should be heard
clearly and distinctly in our orchestrated lives
are not heard at all or
are muffled and muffled.

7/. H. F. Irving? What do I mean - Illustrated - Albert Sweetzer
whose 80th birthday - whole civilized world ^{recently} celebrated with
gladness and thanksgiving.
Born in a parsonage in a quiet Alsatian ~~village~~ ^{town}, grew up in
a happy comfortable home - studied in the Protestant University -
was ordained & became pastor of a Church in Strasbourg. Later - a
teacher - still later principal of a theological College. Gifted, cheerful, pleasant

Wrote of theology - philosophy - original - ^{and rules} ~~but~~ but he was a greater ~~university~~ ^{university} than a theologian. ~~By~~ ³
While still in his 20s he became famous as an opponent of
Jemmes. His writings were here ~~acclaiming~~ ^{acclaiming} all over
Europe - He became the frequent authority on ~~books~~ ^{books}.
Suddenly at the age of 30, he turned to the study of medicine
and surgery - with the avowed intention of qualifying as a
doctor & surgeon so that he could go to Central Africa
to help alleviate the suffering of the heathen and ~~uneducated~~ ^{uneducated} for
natives.

He hereafter gives the explanation - "It was not right that he
should accept all the happiness which he enjoyed or if it were
his due - he must render ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ ~~material~~ ^{material} service as a return
for all that he enjoyed: It was the weary suffering look
on the face of a Negro on a ~~stage~~ ^{stage} in ~~Colon~~ ^{Colon} that
turned his attention to Africa - Then as to the
field for the giving of himself, in ~~reparation~~ ^{reparation} for what life
had given him. — H. Sp. Fidelity

X. ~~In Africa~~ at age 38 - now a doctor - ~~to~~ ^{to} ~~be~~ ^{be} ~~set~~ ^{set} ~~out~~ ^{out} ~~as~~ ^{as} ~~a~~ ^a ~~missionary~~ ^{missionary} ~~among~~ ^{among} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~negroes~~ ^{negroes} - alone, ~~with~~ ^{with} ~~his~~ ^{his}
wife - ~~without~~ ^{without} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~support~~ ^{support} ~~of~~ ^{of} ~~any~~ ^{any} ~~other~~ ^{other} ~~person~~ ^{person} ~~or~~ ^{or} ~~organization~~ ^{organization} ~~to~~ ^{to} ~~establish~~ ^{establish} ~~a~~ ^a ~~hospital~~ ^{hospital} ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ ~~barbary~~ ^{barbary}
Africa -

(46)

Soon, in fact, many difficulties he builds the first hospital. Dense
vegetation had to be cut away. ~~Some~~ ^{Some} ~~cleaned~~ ^{cleaned} - levelled. Climate
was ~~unpleasant~~ ^{unpleasant} in the hot dry season with ~~mercurial~~ ^{mercurial} & the ~~heat~~ ^{heat}
flew - and in the wet season - how ~~often~~ ^{often} a bad rain, were ~~very~~ ^{very} ~~cloud~~ ^{cloud} ~~lower~~ ^{lower}

