

Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project

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

Series IV: Sermons, 1914-1963, undated.

Reel Box Folder 165 60 963

The open mind - can we overcome prejudices and indecisions?, 1955.

THE OPEN MIND CAN WE OVERCOME PREJUDICES AND INDECISIONS?

December 4, 1955

There are noble prayers, dear friends, in our liturgy, for knowledge and for wisdom and for understanding. In our service this morning, you will recall we read the beautiful prayer

Gracious and merciful God! Thou has dowered us above all earth-born creatures with a spark of Thy spirit. We thank Thee, O God, for the gift of reason whereby we may search after knowledge and gain mastery over nature. Let us not misuse this gift to darken Thy light and defeat Thy sacred purposes.

and that prayer closes with the words, you will recall

Praised be Thou, O Lord, gracious Giver of knowledge.

Judaism held high the gift of the human intellect. It urged men to treasure it and to cultivate it in the service of God and of men. Judaism taught men to combine knowledge and wisdom and to employ both in the conduct of life and in order to gain the enduring satisfactions of life. It encouraged men to reinforce their faith with true knowledge, to make their knowledge secure and useful through true faith. Judaism never disdained reason - never sought refuge in obscurantism, or in any radical scepticism of the intellect. The most common word in the Hebrew language for the function and the product of the mind is Chochma - creative intelligence - Chochma. * * * * God created His world through Chochma. Blessed is the man who has acquired, or who is endowed with Chochma, we read in the Bible. It is more precious than pearls. And the first fact about Chochma is, as we read this morning from the book of Proverbs, * * * * Chochma * * * * Chochma - the first thing about Chochma is - get it - get Chochma.

The teachers of our religion were called Chachameem. Chachameem means not so much wise men, but men who are seekers of wisdom - learners - men who understand that the first business of life is to acquire Chochma. And in our Bible and in the

Apocrypha, in the Talmud and in the various Midrasheem of later ages, there are to be found copious instructions on just how to acquire Chochma - just how to learn, how to study, how to acquire knowledge and wisdom and how to transmit them. Our literature abounds in suggestions for techniques for learning and teaching. Even as our teachers wanted us to guard the wells of pity - of the human heart, so they were eager for us to guard the wells of truth - of the human mind. Truth - * * * * the very seal of God is truth.

In the race between civilization and catastrophe, friends, it is Chochma that is, the morally inspired free mind of man seeking the truth which will play
the decisive role. Not arms or weapons the H Bomb or the A Bomb nor any discovery which science is likely to bring forth from the many laboratories where it
is at present working. What will decide the race between civilization and catastrophe
in the last analysis will be the power of man to use his mind creatively and morally,
and that is Chochma.

Our Rabbis gave men a few very helpful and sound rules to guide them in cultivating the "Open Mind", the inquiring mind, the questing mind, the creative mind. The mind which alone bespeaks man's highest estate and which alone gives dignity to human life. It is not what is in our pockets that gives dignity to our lives but what is in our minds and in our hearts. In the first place, they said - and that is found in the ethics of the fathers in the * * * * which is a compendium - a collection - of/wise and ethical sayings of generations and generations of teachers, rabbis. In the first place, they said * * * * a bashful man, a timid man, a diffident man, a man who is easily put out of countenance by criticism, such a man will never learn. A man who is afraid to make a mistake, afraid to be corrected, afraid of being criticised or rebuffed, or even laughed at by the unmannerly who consider any slip or error an occasion for merriment at the expense of someone else - a man who is afraid of these things is in danger of locking up his mind, of retiring within himself, of refusing to venture forth on the open fields of trial and error

where alone the victories of the mind can be won. One must have the courage to make mistakes - to err in judgment - to invite correction and to be grateful for it.

Learning is for the valorous - not the timid or the shamefaced * * * * the shamefaced will never learn - only the brave win out in learning as in love.

And in the second place, our sages declared * * * * "With the humble is wisdom". That's in the Bible * * * *. The proud man, who already knows everything and has no doubts about his opinions or convictions and doesn't feel that he needs to check on them from time to time, to re-examine his conclusions - the intellectually proud man who knows everything, and does not have to learn anything - will never learn anything. Just as there is a purse-proud man, so there is a mind-proud man, selfsufficient, conceited, -like those friends whom Jobe you will recall, rebuked, "no doubt you are the people and wisdom will die with you." You have it all! Unless there is a great humility in one's heart, a recognition of how little you really know, (the most learned of us) how much there is to be learned -unless we possess a readiness to be enlightened, to acknowledge that we can be in the wrong, or partially in the wrong, and that the other man may be in the right, or partially in the right -- unless there is this humility in our spirit, then the possibility of every acquiring an 'Open Mind' that is of life replenishing truth, of growing intellectually, that possibility is pretty well excluded. This kind of false intellectual pride frequently goes with half-baked knowledge, with somehow with a feeling of lack of confidence in one's own equipment which we cover up by a good deal of arrogance. The truly great learners of mankind who become the truly great teachers of mankind are very humblein the presence of the great and the difficult and the eternal quest for truth. Wisdom begets humility and is acquired through humility. * * * * WITH THe humble is wisdom.

And they said a third thing, these sages of our people * * * * who is the wise man? He who learns from everybodyfrom everybody *****. A wise Hebrew Poet of

the Middle Ages, Moses Eban Ezra, said, "Take pearls from the sea. Take gold from the dirt. Take wisdom from everyman." Truth has no aristocratic lineage. Truth does not come with any patent of nobility. Like gold it is often found in dust and in the dirt and must be looked for there. I remember a few years ago I visited South Africa, the city of Johannesburg, the gold city of South Africa, and went down into the mines to see how gold is mined, ten thousand feet underground, in slime and dirt and water, and it takes tons upon tons of rock to be mined before an ounce of gold can be extracted. And around the city of Johannesburg, as you approach it, you will see mountain-heaps, literally mountain-heaps, of slack, of dirt, which had to be removed before the gold could be won.

The intellectual pathfinder of humanity was as a rule not a man of great social distinction, whose very status gave authority to his words. Most of the pathfinder of mankind were men quite unknown, from the humblest walks of life and their new insights and revelations had to depend upon their own intrinsic truth — and had to fight for their recognition in an unheeding and hostile world.

* * * * the wisdom of the poor man is frequently despised. But the wise man learns from everybody. The Open Mind does not inquire of a doctrine or of a proposition — who said it — but how true it is. What are the proofs — what is the evidence, regardless who announced that truth.

And then our sages also said ******** He who engages too much in business, will never acquire Chochma. And they did not dispise business - some of them were business men themselves. Judaism never despised any occupation which gave a man an honorable livilihood. What they said was * * * * who becomes too much absorbed in business, will not acquire Chochma, because he is too busy and Chochma requires time for reflection, for meditation, for study, for sifting. Chochma is an intellectual pursuit which requires energy and time and part of our lives. The very busy man is likely to drift into the habit of intellectual shortcuts and what has been called

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tabloid thinking - of resorting under pressure of preoccupation to cliches, to catchwords, to slogans. But all of these are sorry substitutes for thinking. One of the real dangers to constructive thinking to the Open Mind is the danger of over-simplification. Making an easy and rapid classification of things. These things are good, these things are bad. This is right, this is wrong. white, this is black. Truth is not simple. Facts, in their origin and in their consequences are very complex things. Those situations which arouse discussion among men and controversy are as a rule very much involved and complicated. There are many shadings to white and many to black - many gradations - many qualifications to what is right and what is wrong. It is seldom a case of either/or. the other day an article on this very theme of either/or. Too frequently we set up two extremes and say that everyone must be one or the other. We assume that the two extreme positions that counts were all the possibilities, when as a matter of fact they may not. Either you are a capitalist or you are a communist. Either the labor unions are always right in their disputes with management, or they are always wrong. But right and sometimes

Berhaps they are sometimes/wrong. We often assume that there is no middle ground between all or nothing. That it is not the case that a man either believes that our present social system is perfect or he is a communist. One may want to correct certain imperfections in our present system without being a communist. It is not the case that I am either for you one hundred percent. or I am against you. I may be fore you minety mine percent. or I may be neither for you nor against you. is a middle ground between love and hate, which is called indifference, just as beindifference tween is a region called dislike. We cannot say of a man that he is either an angel or a devil - either a God or a beast. Many human beings are middle-of-the-roaders. One may have the truth, but not the whole of it. the famous story of the three blind men who were taken to an elephant and asked to describe the elephant, and the one blind man who touched the leg of the elephant described the elephant in terms of the shape and size of a leg. And the other one

touched the tail of the elephant and described the elephant in the terms of the shape and the size of a tail. And the one who touched the trunk of the elephant described the elephant in terms of the trunk. They were all true - but they were only partially true. The truth was the composite and more. We may know the truth but we may not be aware that it is only part of the whole truth. It takes time and study and close and patient application to approximate the whole truth. And the busy man - the busy man has no time for it. * * * * * . The Open Mind, dear friends, guards itself against pre-judgments of all kinds. We call that prejudice. and these prejudices are not always easy to detect. And these prejudices do not always belong to ignorant people. It is a mistake to assume that. Educated men are not free from prejudices. And frequently educated men and women employ a vast amount of erudition, but of selective erudition, to justify their prejudices, just as sometimes an insane man will employ great logical acumen to persuade you that he is Napolean or God Almighty. If we have special interests, privileges to defend we are likely to rationalize our attitudes. Thats a very challenging term - to rationalize our attitudes. Our minds are no longer open - they are biased. The Racist, The Chauvanist, The Bigot - they are not without a measure of sincerety. and they do not reject all facts and all truths. The trouble is that they can no longer - that they are no longer seeking TRUTH. What they are seeking are those scattered fragments of facts or truths which will justify their preconception their prejudices - their suspicions and their hates. You can always find them by a process of careful selection. In each one of our lives irrational factors are at work and we are often not at all aware of them that fact. Quite unconsciously we deceive ourselves into thinking that what we are saying or what we are doing our attitudes or our judgments are motivated exclusively by sound truth and objective reasoning. That is not the case at all very often. And it is a prime requirement of the Open Mind that we haul out all of our prejudices and confront them and see them for what they are. And then try to do something about it. There is one thing

which we must be severely intolerant about if we wish to have an Open Mind. We must be severely intolerant of self-deception. That is the unpardonable sin of the intellect. If you must dislike someone - if you must dislike certain people or a certain group - or a certain race - or a certain religion - for no real reason - why acknowledge this fact to yourself. Put the responsibility where it belongs - in yourself - not in them. This at least will save you from becoming self-righteous, and might ultimately lead to your reformation and your redemption. Everybody has prejudices, but the man who seeks the Open Mind brings them forth out of himself and faces them and sees them for what they are - dark inheritances for selfish rationalizations and tries to get rid of them.

I have spoken of the Open Mind - of the mind that welcomes all truth - of the mind that is humble and not proud. But it would be a mistake to conclude therefore, that the Open Mind is the inconclusive mind. Broadmindedness is not indifference or indecision. The man who has an Open Mind or tries to have an Open Mind carefully examines the data before him - all the available facts - all the information and then makes his decision, firmly, based upon the best available truth that he has and then lives by his decision and for his decision. The Open Mind is not an excuse for inaction. Nor for the refusal to take a stand on an issue. There are people who go through life, taking no sides, out of fear or expediency or excessive caution. And when they are invited to express an opinion they very skillfully marshal all the facts on one side and all the facts on the other side, on the one hand, but on the other hand -- and let it go at that. They refuse to declare where they themselves finally take a stand on a vital issue. This is not the Open Mind. This is the white feather mind. This is the mind you will recall of the donkey who stood between two bales of hay and being unable to decide which one of these bales he should eat he starved to death. There are people who think twice - and it is good to think twice and more than twice. There are people who think twice and thrice - but don't act once! And their lives remain forever impaled upon the horns of irresolution.

There are two things we must remember. We must, not only learn how to think straight, which is in itself a very arduous and difficult thing to come to learn, but we must also learn to want to think straight - want to think straight. There can be no Open Mind unless there is a strong will to exercise our God-given faculties forthrightly, fearlessly, independently, humbly to be true, reverently, but nevertheless to exercise the faculties of our mind, fearlessly, regardless of consequences, for the sake of truth. We must want to think straight. It is sometimes much more comfortable to on great social issues to avoid thinking straight on them. The Open Mind believes firmly that in the free encounter, truth will ultimately prevail. But only in a free encounter. And therefore, people who believe in the Open Mind will see to it that nothing is done by society to curb this free encounter of mind with mind - of fact with fact. In a society where the State decides what a man should read, what a man should think - there can be no open mind - there results herd-thinking, - not the Open Mind. Democracy and freedom mass reaction, conformity and the free society are built upon the foundations of the free exchange of knowledge.

And therefore, those who believe that the race between civilization and catastrophe will ultimately be decided by Chochma, by the truth which the free mind of man minds out of experience, will do their utmost to defend the institutions of free discussions and free education, so that facts will be readily available to the questing mind upon which that mind can base sound judgments and sound course of action.

And my good friends I can't think of any age that is so desperately in need of the open mind as our own age. Great forces are at work to destroy the Open Mind. Powerful governments are at work to manacle the human intellect. Those who are still able would render a supreme service to themselves, to their country and to mankind, if they themselves cultivate for themselves the Open Mind — free of preconceptions — open—eager—to the four winds of the earth. Learning truth from everyone—determined to learn the truth—not being shamefaced about it—not being too proud to learn it, but humbly acknowledging it when you see it. Amen.

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Sunday Morning Service

10:30 o'clock

(a) Wrapping of them land

RABBI SILVER

> 90r. McKeldin

will speak on

The Open Mind

Can We Overcome Prejudices and Indecisions?

Friday Evening Services 5:30 to 6:10

Saturday Morning Services 11:15 to 12:00

Organist and Choir Director A. R. WILLARD

SOPHIA LEVINE

A.	M.	LuntzPresident
L.	W.	NeumarkVice-President
A.	J. 1	KaneTreasurer

Published weekly, except during the summer vacation. Entered as second-class matter November 12, 1931, at the Post Office, Cleveland, Ohio, under the Act of March 3, 1879. Fifty Cents per Annum. Member, Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

Ansel Road and East 105th Street SWeetbriar 1-7755

SUNDAY MORNING SERVICE

For his address this Sunday morning Dr. Silver will speak on the subject "The Open Mind—Can We Overcome Prejudices and Indecisions?"

It was gratifying to see so many of the members of the Mr. and Mrs. Club at services last Sunday morning. The Club breakfasted at Wade Park Manor prior to the services.

MUSIC FOR SUNDAY

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Organ Fantasia	Pachelbel		
	Stebbins		
Cantalina			
Meditation	Klein		
Opening Psalm			
Tov l'hodos	Bloch		
The Service			
Bor'chu (Congregational)	Sulzer		
Sh'ma - Boruch	Traditional		
(Congregational)			
Mi Chomocho (Congregationa	1) Sulzer		
Kedusha - (Service No. 3)	Grim		
Silent Devotion - Yihyu lerotzon	Bloch		
Before the Address			
The God of Hosts	West		
The Choir			
After the Address			
En Kelohenu	Arr. Weiner		
Mr. Cammock			
Let Us Adore - Va-anachnu	Helfman		

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The flowers which will grace the altar on Sunday morning, December 4th, are contributed in memory of Ann Frankel, by her husband, Al E. Frankel, and children, Mrs. Eleanore Skall, and Morton Frankel.

WHEREAS, it is an established fact that Dr. Abba Hillel Silver, distinguished leader of the American Jewish Community, statesman, rabbi, orator, scholar, teacher and humanitarian, has labored diligently and persuasively for the establishment of the State of Israel, and:

WHEREAS, his great gifts of statesmanship and diplomacy have been decisively dedicated for the realization of the long-cherished dream to reconstitute a Jewish National Homeland, politically secure, sovereign state now known as the State of Israel, and:

WHEREAS, all assembled members representing a cross section of our Chicago Jewish Community desire to honor his unstinting and devoted efforts in permanent form which will record for all time the valiant service he has rendered to the Jewish people and the cause of freedom and democracy; therefore

BE IT RESOLVED that this distinguished and representative assemblage votes to establish a special Abba Hillel Silver Fund in the amount of One Million Dollars, said Fund to be turned over to the authorities of Hebrew University of Jerusalem, through the medium of the American Friends of the Hebrew University, for the purpose of erecting an Abba Hillel Silver edifice to house the archives of Iudaica. the archives of the six million—the history of the European Jewish Communities, the Dead Sea Scrolls, Reading Rooms, and other educational facilities as a part of the Jewish National and University Library in tribute to this our beloved leader of the American Jewish Community.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that all new monies pledged or contributed during the course of this Campaign in the city of Chicago for the Hebrew University become a part of this Fund and that we call upon all American Jewish Communities to participate in the early completion of this undertaking until such time as its goal is totally attained.

The Israeli Gift Shop has received a new shipment of beautiful Menorahs at all prices, as well as a variety of other unusual gift pieces from Israel.

The Kandy Kitchen will not only take your order for their delicious candies, but will deliver it. Call Mrs. Maurice Weiskopf, YEllowstone 2-9028 or The Temple Office, SWeetbriar 1-7755.

Colorful gift wrapping is offered free—and delivery can be made upon request. Patronize The Temple Women Association's Gift Shops!

REMEMBER

Wednesday-December 14th

MAHLER HALL

8:30 P.M.

JOINT MEETING

TEMPLE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION

TEMPLE MEN'S CLUB

MUSICALE

Temple Memorial Book

The name of

NATHAN R. CORNSWEET

has been lovingly inscribed in The Temple Memorial Book by his wife, Mary.

Temple Memorial Book

The name of

ISADORE D. WERTHEIMER

has been lovingly inscribed in The Temple Memorial Book by his wife, Pauline, his daughter, Ruth Fox and his son, Monroe Worth.