

# Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project

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Series IV: Sermons, 1914-1963, undated.

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Once Upon a Time There was a . . ., 1961.

Reel #73 No. 966

SUNDAY MORNING SERVICE

March 5, 1961

DR. ABBA HILLEL SILVER

## ONCE UPON A TIME THERE WAS A....

### The Recurrent Purim Theme

I have been something of a schlemiel this week and that is why I am pampering myself a little this morning.

Purim, my dear friends, is a gay holiday -- a

a day of feasting and joy. It's a day of parties and masquerades and plays and
buffoonery, a day for exchanging gifts, giving gifts to the poor. One is even permitted to get a little shicker ( ) on Purim. It is one holiday when one urged to get a little shicker.

But the holiday was never lightly regarded. A whole book is devoted to it in the Bible -- the Book of Esther. A whole tractate is devoted to it in the Talmud. All the festivals, say the Rabbis, will in the future be abolished -- not Purim. All the books of the Prophets and the Writings, the will, in the future days of the Messiah, be abolished -- not the Book of Esther. Everyone must listen to the reading of the Megillah -- young and old, men and women. The priest in the Temple must interrupt his service to listen to the reading of the Megillah. The scholar must interrupt his studies. Why is all this profound seriousness attached to a holiday and whose mode of celebration is one of hilarity,/jubilation?

I read the Megillah last Wednesday evening -- Purim evening -- even as I have done all through these years and I was again impressed with the strange, unreal character of the story. It reads like an Oriental tale of of "A Thousand and One Nights" -- like one of those store which begins: "Once upon a time there was a... and then off you fly on a magic carpet into a fabulous realm of make believe where the most unbelievable things happen in a most unaccountable way.

As you read the Megillah, before you lies ancient Persia, peopled with satraps and viziers, with princes and nobles, ruled over by a most powerful potentate who reigns over 127 provinces and sits high on his throne in Susa, the Capital. Fabulous banquets are held in the royal palace, some of them lasting 180 days, where the King displays the riches of his royal glory and the splendor and the pomp of his majesty to his guests. Drinks are served and in golden goblets, each of a distinctive design, and the royal wine flows lavishly according to the bounty of the King. And to one of these banquets the Queen is summoned by the King when his heart was merry with wine to show the people and the princes her beauty! And the Queen refuses to come and forthwith she is deposed and forthwith the King orders his officers in all his provinces to gather all the beautiful young madens to his harem in Susa. From among them the King selects his new Queen -- a maiden by the name of Esther -- who does not at first make known that she is Jewish. Her uncle's name is Mordecai and he promptly discovers a plot to assassinate the King and his meritorious act is recorded in the Royal Chronicles. After these things, a prince by the name of Haman is elevated by the King to the highest rank in the Empire. Everyone bows down to him except Mordecai. Haman is filled with fury but he disdains to lay hands on Mordecai, but learning that Mordecai was a Jew, Haman decided to destroy all the Jews throughout the Empire and he quickly persuades the King: "It is not for the King's profit to tolerate the Jews". The King then promptly takes his signet ring from his hand and gives it to Haman. The edict is promptly issued to destroy, to slay and to annihilate all Jews, young and old, women and children, in one day -- on the 13th of Adar.

By this time, as you read the Megillah, you are prompted to cry out: "This isn't history -- this couldn't have happened. This is a story-teller's invention or exaggeration. How could a ruler of the greatest empire of ancient times, Persia, which is remarkable for its administrative organization, its arts and its skills --

You get the same reaction when you read in the Book of Exodus that a certain Pharaoh of Egypt once issued a decree that every son born to an Hebrew shall be cast into the Nile. Fanciful! Bizarre, you say. How could the great empire of ancient Egypt, the cradle of civilization, stoop to such barbarism? It is one of those "Once upon a time" stories.

his rule, and who were guilty of no crime against the state! Impossible!"

And then you are suddenly struck as if by a bolt! Why, no! This isn't fantastic at all-- it's real! It happened! It happened not so long ago -- it happened in my own life-time. "Once upon a time there was a Hitler and children were thrown into a crematoria -- hundreds of thousands of them -- Once upon a time there was an Eichmann and an Auschwitz, and a Maidanek and a Buchenwald, and a Belsen..."

This is why we are so firmly urged to read the Megillah -- to remember a basic law of our history. Things that can never happen do happen! We must never rule out the impossible. We must never rest easy on pat, logical calculation.

It was the great Maimonides who said: "Long after the memory of the last persecution is forgotten, the lesson of Purim should be remembered!"

An Amalek is always a possibility. We have a special Sabbath known as when we are asked to remember what Amalek once did to the children of Israel when they were fleeing from Egypt. Amalek attacked them on the way when they were faint and weary and especially did he attack those who lagged behind and killed them. When why did Amalek do it? What had Israel done to Amalek? Nothing!. What had the Israelites done to the Egyptians? Joseph had saved the people of Egypt from famine but a new Pharaoh arose who did not remember Joseph, who said to himself: "Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us", and so he he cast them into the Nile, the new-born and he devised a policy of extermination. And what had the Jews of Persia done?-- and most of the Jews of the fourth century

Jews of Palestine and Egypt and Babylonia, not merely of Iran. But they were loyal subjects, many of them occupied high positions -- Ezra, Nehemiah -- but one man in a seat of power, one man of inordinate pride and jealousy, one man who had become made by a consuming hate against one Jew evolved a plan to destroy all the Jews! There is always an Amalek.

The motives differ. The men and the occasions differ. But there is always an Amalek! At times he is frustrated -- at other times he succeeds. It may be a King or an Emporor or a to-sergeant. It may be a religious zealot leading a crusade, or a fanatical leader of a national uprising. It may be a statesman who policies failed and is seeking a scapegoat. It may be a man driven by envy, or lust for power or hate and in every society there is always an inescapable number of ready followers, of men who enjoy sadistic work -- killers, psychotics, perverts, adventurers. Peaceful times pass them by but they sprout like dragon teeth when a country is disturbed and its people are unhappy. An Amalek is always there, always a possibility! This is what Purim wishes to bring so forcebly to our attention. This is the over-tone, it is above all the ringing of the bell, of jubilation.

I finished reading last week another Megillah -- a Megillah of bood and tears and fire and death -- "Last of the Just" by Andre Schwarz-Bart. It's a scroll of Jewish martyrdom in the middle ages, culminating in the Nazi holocaust. It is written surrealistically, brilliantly, with a pathos which frequently moves you to tears, with a realism that fills your heart with terror and with a compassion that humbles and purges your soul, "The Last of the Just". It is constructed around an ancient legend of our people, the legend of the thirty-six righteous ( ) the unknown men whose piety sustains the world. The origin of the legend may be traced back to the famous Babylonian Rabbi Abaye in the third and fourth centuries who said: "The world contains no less than thirty-six righteous men in each generation

who are vouchsafed the sight of the -- as% it is written in the Book

of Isaiah "Blessed are all they who wait for him -
the Hebrew word -- the numerical value of it is thirty-six."

There are, of course, other righteous men in each generation, many more, but these

thirty-six see God through a bright speculum ( ) while all

the others see Him only dimly. They have a clouded vision of Him.

Now the author of "The Last of the Just" exercises the privilege of a novelist and reconstructs the legend in two ways. In his novel, the thirty-six righteous belong to an heriditary spiritual dynasty, as it were and the rare grace descends from the father to sons through the generations. The first of the just was a Rabbi Yantov Levi and of York in England/during the crusading period in 1185, he gathered all the remaining Jews of York into the Tower and exhorted them not to surrender their faith because they were given the choice of life or surrendering their faith. All died as martyrs -- Yan Tov Levi wielding the knife by which he himself perished. That was the first of the thirty-six righteous. The last is Ernil Levy, who died in the gas chamber of Auschwitz.

The second reconstruction of the legend is even more drastic. According to the author, the thirty-six righteous took upon themselves all the sins of the world. They suffered willingly, silently, uncomplainingly, and it is through their suffering that the world was somehow saved. "For the are the hearts of the world multiplied, and into them, as into one recepticle, pour all our griefs". This is a rather Christilogical concept and is not out of the essence of the original tradition at all. In the old tradition a might suddenly appear in cases of an extreme danger to the people and avert the disaster. "The Last of the Just" is Ermil Levy, who is really the six million Jews martyred by the Nazis and all the martyred Jews who preceded them. The author would have you think, without saying it

in so many words, he would have you see the Jewish people who are walking the bitter roads of Europe through the centuries -- the Crusades, Plack Plague, the Expulsions, the Inquisition, the de-Fe, the Cossak blood-baths =- he would have you see in the Jewish people walking through the centuries and through hate and through shame and coming at last in the person of Ernie Levy to the gas chamber of Auschwitz -- he would have you see in the Jewish people the Christ of the Ages, suffering in silence for the sins of the world and as yet unable to redeem the world.

It's a sad Megillah to read, "The Last of the Just". I was left with the impression that something has somehow been over-stated in the book. Too much, in my judgment, is made in the book of the virtue of resignation, of silent submission to example evil and violence, of self-immolation. To be helpless in the face of over-powering brute force is one thing. To seek helplessness as a way of salvation is another thing. The Jewish people never willingly accepted the role of the suffering servant of YHVH as the guide for their career among the nations of the world. The defenders of the were Warsaw ghetto, in my judgment, was closer to the Jewish tradition of resistance to evil. Unfortunately there were too few of them. Unfortunately resistance to the Nazis began too late -- not only for Jews, but for the world. Many Jews were beguiled "it couldn't happen here, this couldn't happen in the land of Schiller and Goethe" --"surely not this!" Put By their own conceptions of basic human standards of decency they were finally trapped and destroyed.them.

No, the legendary thirty-six righteous of our people were never suffering pacifists. They were not chosen to die for the world, but to live for it. And in our position there is never the <u>last</u> of the just. In every generation there are just men and women have have received an added measure of grace, of leadership, of insight, of courage, and of faith to give unto their people.

Mordecai was such a man. He may have been one of those legendary righteous men. He was a humble man he was just a Jew, an unknown man, but in a moment of danger he would not rest. He sent word to his cousin, the Queen Esther, secure in the palace "Act now! Face danger and even death. Speak up now in behalf of your endangered people". Mordecai is the Jewish ideal of the in each generation who comes to the defense, to the salvation of the people.

Purim is a reminder to hit at evil, to hit at bigotry -- whenever, wherever and as soon as it raises its head. This is the pestilence of the just of our people throughout the ages. He who must be destroyed and never assume that times are so secure, so safe that this one evil man or this one evil group is of no consequence.

Remember the story of Purim -- of all the Purims of our people. "Once upon a time there was a...." There always is. Because there always is, there must always be a generation of men and women who care enough to face the evil man, to act! This is the important message of the Festival of Purim.

Amen.

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# THE TEMPLE

CLEVELAND, OHIO March 5, 1961 Vol. XLVII No. 20

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Purim Greetings

## SUNDAY MORNING SERVICE

March 5, 1961 10:30 o'clock

# RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER

will speak on

# ONCE UPON A TIME THERE WAS A . . .

The Recurrent Purim Theme

Mr. Ernest Kardos, Assistant Concertmaster of the Cleveland Orchestra, will assist with the Purim music

# The Temple

Rabbis:
Abba Hillel Silver
Daniel Jeremy Silver

Associate Rabbi: MILTON MATZ

Staff:

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ELI GOLDSTON	.Vice-President
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EDWARD D. FRIEDMAN Asso	ciate Treasurer

## THIS SUNDAY

Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Hartzmark will be hosts for the Social Hall coffee hour preceding the worship service. Mr. Hartzmark is a member of The Temple Board of Trustees. Coffee is served each Sunday morning from 9:30 to 10:20.

The flowers which will grace the pulpit are contributed in memory of Rose Bubis Roskoph by her husband Clarence, and children, Jane Lewis, Suzette Steuer, Robert and Ralph Roskoph, and in memory of Wilbur A. Steuer by his wife, Suzette, and children Sandra and Patricia.

The Temple Religious School Purim Carnival will be held from 3:00 to 5:00 P.M. in the Social Hall. An afternoon of fun for all has been planned by the Religious School Committee under the Chairmanship of Mrs. Samuel Pressman.

# In Memoriam

The Temple notes with deep sorrow the passing of

#### VIVIAN G. BLOCH

and extends heartfelt sympathy to the members of her bereaved family.

## THE TEMPLE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION

# OPEN MEETING

Wednesday, March 8th

1:00 P.M.

Luntz Auditorium



Margaret Mead

## COME THINK WITH ME The Lure of Mass Media

Dr. Mead is one of America's foremost anthropologists and social critics. In addition to her academic work, Dr. Mead publishes frequent articles expressing her views of American life today. Cosmopolitan, The New York Times, The Atlantic, and many other magazies and their readers look forward to her trenchant and astute observations of American society.

Her present positions include Visiting Professor of Anthropology in the Department of Psychiatry, the University of Cincinnati, Visiting Professor of Menninger Foundation at Tokepa, Kansas, Associate Curator of Ethnology, American Museum of Natural History, New York, and Adjunct Professor of Anthropology, Columbia University.

Tea will be served

Nursery care available

## THE MR. AND MRS. CLUB

## THE REGENCY BALL

Saturday, the eleventh of March Seven-thirty P.M. Ball Room, The Somerset Inn

Cocktails, dinner, dancing Fourteen dollars per couple Black tie optional

Music for the Ball by Clint Noble's Orchestra A combo will entertain during the cocktail hour

All past and present members of The Mr. and Mrs. Club are invited

The Dance Committee

Chairmen—Mr. and Mrs. Lionel Greenbaum—for reservations, call WY 1-1344 Co-Chairmen—Mr. and Mrs. Albert Pickus Mr. and Mrs. Henry Goodman

#### FROM THE RABBIS' DESK

Fate is unpredictable. Lord Acton deserved immortality for his legal genius, but his name remains current largely for a single acerbic observation. How many discussions of political chicanery are finished off when some parlor skeptic parrots, "Power corrupts. Absolute power corrupts absolutely."

Familiarity breeds acceptance. We tend to accept the familiar without question, because, being familiar, it does not excite our critical faculties. Despite its currency, Acton's observation does not bear careful analysis. Power can corrupt. It need not. Man is corruptible, but not contemptible. There are at least some few who are no different in power than out. Admit human frailty, and we recognize some who discharge power with humility, honesty, and humor. Their occasional outbursts of rashness, jealousy or petulance are part of their nature, not a byproduct of their power. Power increases temptation, but not all have large appetites.

Historians sometimes overlook one of the most significant sources of power—knowledge. So powerful is knowledge that those who possess it have consistently opposed its dissemination. The ancient astronomer-priests hoarded knowledge, coded it in complex cipher, passed it only to the initiate, and demanded wealth and reverence before revealing its secrets. The Egyptian and Akkadian priest-astronomers, Greek mathematicians, Arab doctors, European artisans, and medieval masons became rich from the knowledge they refused to share.

Our scientists control today's most marketable knowledge. Yet the first principle of modern science is the open and immediate publication of research. Pure science admits neither copyright nor patent. Pure science recognizes that progress is dependent on knowledge willingly and promptly shared. If science had followed any other discipline, if its knowledge had been hoarded, restricted, or coded, mankind would still be in the pre-industrial, rather than the atomic, age. Those who apply scientific research have not been as unselfish. Companies and inventors use a variety of protective devices to secrete new devices and processes for personal advantage. Engineering is more profitable than research, but the research is surely the more valuable.

Can science sustain its self discipline? It is difficult to say. Today there is increasing complaint against the principle of open and immediate publication. Such complaint emanates from defense departments, from generals and atomic energy commissioners, who seek to padlock this knowledge, arguing that publication gives aid and comfort to the enemy. Government agencies on both sides and straddling the Iron Curtain spend their days stamping "classified" on scientific documents.

Individual scientists and many academic research centers have so far withstood any severing of scientific communication. Some few universities have refused government research grants because of the security restrictions involved. But as research becomes increasingly costly and Federal subsidies increasingly basic, such abnegation will be more and more difficult. Scientific notebooks are more and more being put under lock and key. Increasingly long delays occur before these notebooks are declassified and publication achieved. As a result, not only is there costly and unnecessary duplication, but the bond of scientific adventure which united academics is being sundered, and science is becoming a tool of national protection rather than of human progress.

This is not a plea that weapons technology be declassified. Our knowledge of the science of murder is already far too refined. But if the Cold War forces science to harden along national lines one of the few remaining means of communication between men will have sundered, the pace of human progress will be slowed, and science will develop a self seeking hierarchy to promote its secrets to selfish personal or national advantage.

Science and Mr. Acton are about to have a go at it.

Daniel Jeremy Silver

THE TEMPLE MEN'S CLUB

#### TRI-TEMPLE FELLOWSHIP

Wednesday, March 8th

8:30 P.M.

Temple Emanu El

GEORGE M. LOW Chief, Manned Space Flight Programs National Aeronautics and Space Administration

PROJECT MERCURY—MAN'S FIRST STEP INTO SPACE

George Michael Low is Chief of the Manned Space Flight Programs of the National Aeronautics and Space Admistration and coordinator of the manned satellite program, Project Mercury.

The author of numerous technical papers and articles, Low is an Associate Fellow of the Institute of the Aerospace Sciences, and a member of the American Rocket Society.

Social Hour-Refreshments

Reservations \$1.50

Temple Men's Club Members are urged to save the evening of March 29th for a special screening. Details to follow.

Fifty cents per annum. Published weekly except during the summer vacation.

SSLL-I MS CLEVELAND 6, OHIO EAST 105th ST. & SILVER PARK THE TEMPLE

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#### DATES TO REMEMBER

Sunday Morning Services Sunday,

Purim Carnival

March 7 - Temple Women's Association Tuesday Activities Tuesday,

Temple Women's Association Open Meeting 8 - Temple Men's Club Tri-Temple Fellowship Wednesday, March

Saturday, March 11 - Mr. and Mrs. Club Regency Ball

Sunday, March 12 — Sunday Morning Services

- THE TEMPLE LIBRARY is open Tuesday through Friday 9:00 A.M. to 5:30 P.M., Saturday 9:00 A.M. to 12:00 noon, and Sunday 9:00 A.M. to 10:30 and at the close of Sunday morning worship.
- THE TEMPLE MUSEUM will be open at the close of Sunday morning services in addition to all occasions of organization meetings. Arrangements to view the Museum by special appointment may be made through The Temple Office.
- THE ISRAELI GIFT SHOP is featuring a newly arrived display of Passover Kiddush cups, trays and matzoh platters. The Israeli Gift Shop is open during all Tuesday Activities sessions. Selections can be made at all times from the display case in the lobby through The Temple office.