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

Series IV: Sermons, 1914-1963, undated.

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Looking for Security in an Insecure World, 1962.



LOOKING FOR SECURITY IN AN INSECURE WORLD

Two weeks ago there appeared in the Saturday Evening Post the results of an extensive Gallup Poll on the attitudes of American young people towards their world, themselves and society. The young people who were questioned were of both sexes, ranging in age from fourteen through twenty-two -- high-school sophomores and seniors, juniors and seniors from American colleges, and young adults under twenty-three who quit school and are now in the labor force. The young people who were questioned were an accurate cross-section from all regions of the nation, from all kinds of family income, education and occupation.

The results of this Poll revealed some very interesting and some very disconcerting things. To quote from the findings: "The American youth is a pampered hot-house plant and likes it that way. He will settle for low success rather than risk high failure. He has little spirit of adventure. He wants very little because he has so much and is unwilling to risk what he has. He is most unlikely to rebel or involve himself in crusades of any kind. He likes himself the way he is, and he likes things as they are."

"How did our youth become so bland? So cautious? So self-satisfied, secure and un-ambitious," the authors of the Poll ask. The answer is found in some of the replies which they received from the young people.

One young man said: "Our parents led a tougher life -- they fought a depression and a war. And they've protected us. They've made sure that we have more than they had. We're pampered." An Eastern college girl said simply, "Of course we're soft. We got too much too soon. There isn't much we want that our parents don't give us." A California high-schooler says, "Goals? We've got no goals. Our parents have achieved them all for us."



One is reminded of the account which is given in the Talmud of a Rabbi who was wont to say: "What labours Adam had to carry out before he obtained bread to eat! He ploughed, he sowed, he reaped, he bound the sheaves, he threshed and winnowed and selected the ears, he ground them and sifted the flour, he kneaded and baked, and then at last he ate; whereas I get up and find all these things done for me. And how many labours Adam had to carry out before he obtained a garment to wear! He had to shear, wash the wool, comb it, spin it and weave it, and then at last he obtained a garment to wear; whereas I get up and find all these things done for me. All kinds of craftsmen come early to the door of my house, and I rise in the morning and find all these before me....

Certainly parents must share the blame, say the authors of the Poll.

But there are other contributing factors. The world is constantly confronted with overwhelming crises -- Berlin, Laos, Cuba, Algeria, Tunisia, the Congo, South Vietnam -- and our youth, unhardened in the crucible of struggle, might well turn inward to escape responsibility.

Allan Wicker draws the following conclusion: "We've got to teach our children to think, and you don't do this in front of T.V. We have to make them excited about ideas. And we've got to convince them that there's nothing shameful in being different. I don't mean they should be different just to attract attention, but they should know that every great person is different; that you can't do extraordinary things and be like everybody else."

Our young people believe, if the Gallup Poll's conclusions are correct, that they have found security in lack of ambition, in conformity, in acceptance of the world as it is, in avoiding any responsibility for what is wrong in the world and in shutting their eyes to the political and social crises and upheavals which are all around them.



This, I am afraid, is false security, for it is based on false assumptions. You do not get out of the way of an onrushing locomotive simply by shutting your eyes to what is coming on. The world which is being so drastically re-cast before our very eyes will not permit any one to withdraw to some care-free island of private security where he will be safe from all its rifts, twists, and dislocations. *No generation is free to decline its encounter with destiny.*

It is one thing to recognize the besetting dangers and resolve to go on in spite of them. It is quite another thing to fiddle while <sup>the</sup> Rose is burning.

In the former case, one may try to check the danger, to overcome the evils, to try to make the world secure by removing the causes of its insecurity. In the latter case, one will fiddle away until the flames engulf and consume him.

*in a sense no age was ever entirely secure, though none has been threatened with such total destruction*  
If our world is ever to be made secure, it will not be achieved by men who have little spirit of adventure in them, who do not wish to involve themselves in any crusade, who like all things as they are. Such people are likely to bring about the fall of their world. The dynamics will then remain with the hungry peoples of the earth, <sup>those</sup> who are not satisfied and unambitious, ~~conservative~~ and ~~cautious~~, who want many things because they have so few, who do not like things as they are, who are willing to take every risk -- actually no risk at all -- for what have they to lose? There is a terrific drive, a flaming passion, a ~~choked~~ <sup>pent</sup>-up resentfulness and rebelliousness in the souls of the masses of the earth, the masses who have been burdened with the misery and the injustice of the centuries, and who have now begun to clamor for their ~~basic~~ human birth-right. How will the more favored peoples of the world confront them? With what? Will a pampered, soft, spiritless, goal-less generation be able to meet their furious challenge with blandness and indifference, <sup>or</sup> simply by ignoring them?



It should be clear to everyone that for many years to come our world will be profoundly disturbed and unsettled. Mr. Walter Lippmann summed up the other day, and I believe quite accurately, mankind's present predicament: "For as long a time as one can see into the future, we shall be living between war and peace, between a war that cannot be fought, and a peace that cannot be achieved. The great issues which divide the world cannot be settled by a war that could be won, and they cannot be settled by a treaty that can be negotiated." The prophet <sup>2</sup>Zacariah spoke of such a time as *על כל ימי הלילה* -- not day and not night. <sup>the coming</sup> ~~our~~ days will be full of frustrations, confusions and alarums. The waves will run high and the tides will be treacherous. Those who will have no stamina, no fighting spirit and no compass will go under. There will be <sup>very</sup> few <sup>refuge</sup> smug and safe cubicles, indeed for men who like themselves the way they are, and who like all things as they are.

But, while insecure and uncertain, it will by no means be a hopeless world, Abounding in great risks, it will be rich in even greater rewards. There will be new horizons and new frontiers to challenge the adventuresome spirit of youth. In science and industry, in invention and discovery, in the arts and the humanities, progress will be unlimited. We are far from having reached the ultimate stage in the evolution of mankind. The twentieth century is building a better <sup>and ampler</sup> world for man, and the twenty-first century will advance and improve upon it. There will be more of the good <sup>things</sup> ~~days~~ of life for everyone. A society will emerge which will be free from <sup>the dark heritage of the past,</sup> the age-old curses of poverty, misery and exploitation, of inequality, racialism and intolerance. It will be an exciting world, and for the man of courage and faith, a welcome and challenging world. *Throughout the ages such men of faith and courage have never been afraid to build their houses and plant their vineyards ~~even~~ on the <sup>very</sup> slopes of volcanoes.*



It is told of Alexander the Great that he wept when, at the age of thirty, he discovered that there were no more worlds for him to conquer. Alexander, I am afraid, would have wept if there were more worlds to conquer. One stops weeping <sup>only</sup> when he gives up the dream of conquest for the dream of ~~service~~ <sup>mission</sup>.

One of the chief functions of religion, my friends, has been, and is to tell men what to put ~~their~~ trust in, and what not to put their trust in. The word trust comes from the same root as the word true. In other words, it has been the function of religion to tell men what is true, on which they can rely. In our search for ~~happiness and~~ security in life, there are many roads open to us, but most of these roads end in the wilderness. Religion has pointed the way to the one road which will lead ~~us~~ to the true goal which we seek. Unfortunately, most men ignore this road, for it is not an easy road.

There are numerous things which men ought not to trust in, for those that trust in them unwittingly build their lives upon foundations of shifting sand.

One of the things which men should not trust in, says the Bible, is power. Man's security should not be grounded in physical power. Man is often inclined to do just that, especially men collectively, that is, nations. Nations pin their hopes for security on their vast striking power, upon their powerful armies, navies and their air-foce -- <sup>upon</sup> their atomic stock-piles. Our Bible cautions nations not to put their trust in armies, in horses and chariots --

אלון המלך נולד זרז חזק, וזלזל אל ויגד זרז כח  
לקר הסוס! אלסדר - וזרז חזקו אל ויגד

"A king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength. The war-horse is a vain hope for victory. And by its great might it cannot save."



There are people who put their trust in wealth, riches, money. Money is to be their strong fortress. Wealth will be the sure road which will lead them to happiness. The older among you may recall how many people who put their trust in wealth were, by a sudden turn of fortune, left bereft, broken and utterly defenseless. Our Bible admonishes, "He who puts his faith in his wealth, that man will fall."

Some rely entirely upon themselves, their own knowledge, <sup>talents</sup> ~~wisdom~~ and judgment. They are sufficient unto themselves. They do not feel the need of undergirding by <sup>their lives</sup> the support and experience of other men. They do not realize that most of what a man is, is what <sup>others</sup> ~~they~~ have invested in him. They, accordingly, lack both gratitude and humility. Here again our Bible admonishes us: *לֹא נִלְוֶה לְחַיִּים*

"The man who trusts in his own mind is a fool."

Some people rely too much on other men. They make themselves too dependent upon the good-will or favor of others. That, too, is a mistake, because while some people are worthy of our trust, many are not. In times of trouble, when you most need them, they vanish. Relatives become as unstable as water. Our closest ones very often turn out to be slender reeds upon which to lean. Therefore, the Bible again admonishes us: "Cursed is the man that trusts in man and makes flesh his arm."

And so, ~~the Bible~~ throughout, as you read its immortal pages and listen to its exalted teachings, <sup>the Bible</sup> admonishes us: Put not your trust in power, in wealth, in yourself or in other men." Do not lay the foundation of your life in swampland and morass.

Wherein, then, shall a man put his trust? On this the Bible is crystal clear, positive and abundantly assertive: *אֱמוּנָה וְעוֹשֵׂה צְדָקָה* Trust in God and do good."

There are two parts to this formula, as you see. Trust in God and do good. This formula was written, I suppose, some twenty-five hundred years ago. If a man were

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to write a formula for security today, I doubt whether he could write a better or more comprehensive one ~~than this~~.

Faith, my friends, is not a luxury! It is a desperate need for men who are involved not only in great undertakings, in mighty enterprises, in tasks which try their very heart and reins, but in the every-day business of living. Faith is power! There are many forms of faith but all other faiths are energized by this primary faith -- the most fundamental -- faith in God. <sup>the author of the total scheme of things</sup> No significant living or undertaking or adventure is possible without faith.

Some years ago, Dr. Lowell of Harvard preached a Baccalaureate Sermon in which he said to the young men of his day <sup>who were</sup> about to go out into their world, a much quieter, more stable and secure world by far than the world into which the young men of this generation are entering: "By faith Columbus sailed across the unknown waters trusting to find land at the other side. By faith the Pilgrim Fathers migrated to the new world, seeking a home for a free exercise of their religion. By faith the frontiersmen penetrated deeper and deeper into the wilderness until the whole continent was opened to civilization. By faith Washington endured the hardships of Valley Forge that a new and independent nation might survive. By faith the framers of the Constitution devised a form of government that this nation might be united, prosperous, and permanent. By faith Lincoln persevered through the dark days of the Civil War, that the unity of the nation might be preserved and slavery abolished. By faith Fulton invented the steamboat, and Morse the telegraph. By faith Morton, yearning to reduce human suffering, relieved pain through anaesthesia and made modern surgery possible. By faith Dr. Carroll offered himself up for exposure, and died, to take away the scourge of Yellow Fever. And what shall we say of others who by faith have planted industries, built railroads, made inventions and discoveries, added to knowledge, healed the sick, purified politics, and improved social relations, of whom often the world was not worthy."



No! Faith, my friends, is not a luxury. It is the <sup>very</sup> motive power of *all that is creative in* ~~all~~ life. What do we mean when we speak of faith in God and trust in Him?

The answer is found in the formula: "Trust in God and do good." In the doing of good we demonstrate our faith in a good God. In <sup>useful and well-intentioned</sup> action we testify to our faith and trust <sup>in Him</sup>. Whatever our work in the world may be -- if we know it to be good, true, honest -- then it is God's work and we can proceed confidently on our way. We are co-workers of One Who is eternal, who created His world to endure and to be inhabited. If our design for living is to do good, then our security rests within that very design. With every new undertaking of ours, there will come a new accession of power. *no | ואלו | כי | יקלו |* "Those who trust in the

Lord, renew their strength, again and again." Such men are secure in themselves, <sup>precisely</sup> ~~probably~~ because they do not rely entirely upon themselves, or upon power or <sup>or other men</sup> wealth, but upon the God-approved integrity of their work. They are doing God's work and will in God's world, and none that put their trust in Him are ever desolate.

That is their shield ~~against every form of~~ <sup>anxiety and apprehension - honest, faithful work in the workshop, the world where</sup> ~~There will always be room in their lives for new and nourishing visions,~~

for there is no limit to the good work which a man can do in his world -- regardless how narrow his assigned domain, how seemingly circumscribed his sphere of in-

fluence. No human being, not even the humblest, need go through life without <sup>some</sup> ~~a~~ dream of splendor. <sup>For the wise man will be thinking not so much</sup> ~~We should not dream of security but~~ of fulfillment. In

seeking fulfillment, that is, in doing what we want to do, and what we ought to do, and in doing it to the best of our abilities -- we shall find life's deepest satisfactions and <sup>to</sup> highest compensations, and we shall not be afraid "though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea, though its water roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult...

For God will be <sup>our</sup> ~~his~~ refuge and <sup>our</sup> ~~his~~ strength, a very present help in trouble."



The poet, Victor Hugo, once wrote down his philosophy of life:  
"You say, 'Where goest thou?' I cannot tell,  
And still go on. If but the way is straight  
I cannot go amiss: before me lies  
Dawn and the day; the night behind me; that  
Suffices me; I break the bands; I see,  
And nothing more; believe and nothing less.  
My future is not one of my concerns.

