

Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project

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Series IV: Sermons, 1914-1963, undated.

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New Year, 1960.

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MAKE THY WAY STRAIGHT

Sermon for the New Year,
1960 Temple 7.

There is a beautiful prayer in that most beautiful of all the books of the Bible - the Book of Psalms, " 7077 'GE' Make Thy way straight before me."

In life we do not always know the straight way. We do not always know where we are going. At times we find ourselves wandering in a pathless wasteld.

Some of us travel fast to no purpose, and so end up nowhere. Ofttimes when we know least where we are going, we are most eager XX and determined to get there.

Sometimes we get lost and we do not even know that we are lost. For years we may have been following a road which we believed would lead us XXXX to happiness, only to discover much later that this road has led us through dust and heat, not to the happiness which we had hoped for but away from it, to heartaches, loneliness and desolation. "Where and how have we gone astray?" we ask ourselves, when it is almost too late, when our day is nearly spent and the long night comes relentlessly on.

Once a year we are especially summoned by our religion to check both on our goal and on our compass - to make sure that we are moving in the right direction, along God's way, the only way which leads to the dwelling place of peace and contentment of soul. On this day of Rosh Hashanah we are taught to pray: "Make Thy way straight before me".

God's way is XNX a straight way. It is not difficult to find, even though it is often difficult to follow. He who does what is right, speaks the truth from his heart and does no evil to his friend, is on God's highway. The road, however difficult, lies straight before him TY TINT TITTE THE Path of the righteous is like the light of dawn which shines brighter and brighter until full day."

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There is no man living who always follows the straight way of God, who never turns aside from the good and the right way to the false way - the Therefore this holy season is given us to check on ourselves, our roadmap and our direction, and if we find that we have gone the wrong way and have detoured, to return to the broad, clear highway which is God's way.

We are assured by our religion that we can always return! There is nothing wrong, which, in the sight of God, cannot be righted. Nothing crooked which cannot be made straight. No sin which cannot be forgiven - provided we seek forgiveness in sincerity and in true repentance, provided we really wish to return to Him of Whom our seers and prophets said: "Though desirest not the death of the sinner but that he should return from his evil way and live".

We should examine ourselves honestly: introspection is good for the soul, but we should not depreciate, disparage or belittle ourselves. Rather out of a confident sense of inner power and self-worth, we should make those needed rectifications which our dignity and destiny as children of God call for.

And what is good for the individual to take bearing and to find his way back to the highway is good also for the nation. Self-examination and self-criticism is a wholesome national tonic. As a nation, we have been searchingly examining ourselves in recent years, though, I am afraid quite involuntarily. This self-examination has been forced upon us by unexpected world events which made us suddenly feel less secure and less self-assured.

In recent years Americans have been chewing the bitter cud of frustration and disquiet. We have been searching our souls and beating our breasts.

"What is wrong with us?" we have been asking ourselves. As a people we are frequently given to self-criticism -- sometimes to excess. In moments when our self-confidence is shaken and we are suddenly stabbed into an awareness of some serious short-coming in our national life, we become severely critical of ourselves. The mood, unfortunately, does not last long. After a time we return to our customary complacency, but as long as the mood lasts we do flagellate ourselves, sometimes quite unmercifully.

Some have put the blame on what has happened upon the American people as such -- the American people has waxed fat, slothful, smug and complacent. It is the victim of a "neurotic compulsion for gadgets, comforts and conveniences. It is lost to all things and to all values except those of the market place".

I doubt this very much. The American people are still the most charitable and the most generous people on earth. Their generosity is not limited to their own, nor does it stop at their national boundaries. The American people are still spending -- and increasingly so -- billions of dollars upon education and religion and social welfare and upon the care of the aged, the sick and the handicapped. The American people are still waging

war, determinedly, upon disease and poverty and slums, yes, and upon intolerance and discrimination. I do not think that we ought to indict ourselves utterly and in terms of such rash abandon. There is really nothing wrong with wanting to be well-fed and well-clothed and well-housed and to have the comforts of life.

Austerity and frugality are not the answer to the serious problems which confront us today. A people can be poor and vicious. A people can be prosperous and socially minded. We may not have been wise in our foreign diplomacy -- we certainly have not been corrupt.

of course, there is much room for improvement in our national life -in every department of it, as there is in the national life of every people. What
is wrong with us has to do with the alarming incidents of crime and juvenile
delinquency, with our mounting divorce rate and with racial intolerance. It has
to do with the need for firmer disciplines in education, whether in the sciences or
the humanities. These call for candid confession and contrition, and for immediate
efforts at correction.

What has happened in the last few years may well work out to our advantage, if -- if it sobers us, as a people -- if we come to realize, for example, that we are not sitting on top of the world any more, but rather on the top of a powder keg. What has happened may prove all to our good if it teaches our elected servants in government the quality of humility. A realization that we cannot go it alone -- that we no longer have, if we ever did have, a monopoly of wealth, or power or scientific skill, or genius. Our public officials, who are charged with the conduct of our foreign affairs, need the humility to realize that the enemy whom we are facing is neither politically weak nor scientifically backward nor economically on the verge of collapse and that all talk of Soviet weakness as a consolation for

what has happened is an act of self-delusion. The enemy we are facing is too powerful to be ignored. He cannot be quarantined and we must find ways of living in the same world with him. The only road open to civilization is the road to mutual accommodation and reconciliation and cooperation. Every other road leads to chaos and ruin and death.

After all is said and done, and this includes Sputniks and Echoes and mice, dogs, monkeys and men placed in orbit -- the major problem of our day is not how to match our artificial moons and our intercontinental ballistic missles with those of the Russians but how to live in the same world with them. The persistent human problem is not how to make interstellar space safe for artificial satellites but how to make this world of ours safe for man! The fundamental human problem is how to do away with the need for ballistic missiles and the A-bombs and the H-bombs altogether. The human situation remains what it was before the Russians launched their satellites and we ours. The human problem still remains how to accommodate ourselves one to another -- hation to nation, system to system, race to race, religion to religion. Surely there must set in, sooner or later, unless we are resigned to catastrophe -- I might almost say to annihilation -- surely there must set in sooner or later, some rapprochement between the East and the West consequent upon the realization -- the simple realization -- that one power bloc cannot destroy the other without destroying itself. Surely the time must come, sooner or later, when the war-obsessed in both camps, the East and the West, and their incessant war-scares and war-cries must be pushed aside, and others who are not war-obsessed, but peace-inspired, must come to take their place of leadership in their respective worlds. Surely the time must come when the concept of co-existence which has been derided and held in contempt and made tantamount to black heresy and disloyalty -- when this concept of co-existence about which the Russians have been far more cynical, though much more vocal, than we, will come to be regarded not merely as practical, but also as mandatory -- as inevitable.

Our responsible public officials must, in a new spirit of humility and in dedication to our country's and to mankind's supreme good, move resolutely in the direction of finding ways of mutual accommodation and reconciliation. And if that happens, then inter-stellar rivalry and scientific victories in outer space may well be a welcome overture to the pacification of our world.

What has happened may prove to our good in the long run, IF it helps us to raise up a new generation of men and women who will be more reverent of learning and more devoted to the exacting disciplines of the mind, not only in the field of science but also in the field of humanities.

We need a new reverence for learning, for the human intellect. We must demand more of our schools, of our colleges and of our children in terms of hard, exacting disciplines of education. Education, like virtue, like art, deals constantly with what is hard to do. And here, I am affaid, is where we have gone soft.

Only hard-disciplined work is the key to any real education. Every advanced country makes such demands. We have not, in many instances, made similar exacting demands.

We have the brains and, in the main, the educational facilities are here, but the basic attitudes and disciplines and the standards are not all here.

We must find our way back to a great reverence for doing supremely competent work in whatever field of study we are engaged. Here is where we must take ourselves in hand and set our house in order.

There is nothing that is wrong with us that cannot be righted. We should not listen to the cynic, the sceptic and the scoffer. There is nothing that man has made crooked that he cannot make straight. Behind every system is man. On the world scene it is possible to banish war and eradicate poverty. It is possible, even though difficult, to reconcile the sharp and bitter contradictions of our day -- nationalism with inter-nationalism, collectivism, accelerated by our industrial technology and mass production, with the rights and liberties of the individual.

It is possible to give men economic security without robbing them of their political freedom. What the world needs is inspired new leadership, and the welling up from within of a new faith and a new courage.

The dictators of our day who are flocking this week to the United Nations are not in any sense the inspired new leaders for which the world is waiting. They are as old as Nero and Caligula. They prate of a new world order. Actually, they are reaching out for new empires which can only be laid in blood and at the cost of the rights and freedoms of other peoples. To the youth of the world they offer nothing but chains and death. They have no faith in man or humanity, nor in the power of men to transcend themselves, and through their own initiative and experience to achieve higher and nobler forms of a free and secure society. They have the instincts of slaves -- and I confidently believe that in time they will be on their way out. Their own people will tire of them. They and mankind generally will not long tolerate those who, under the pretext of achieving equality and the good life actually bring them enslavement, labor camps and the police state.

The democratic faith alone can provide the new leadership; for democracy has faith in man and mankind, in an advancing human society and in a cooperative commonwealth of free and equal peoples. Only democracy can achieve this good and gracious life for mankind. But only a democracy which remains continuously and vividly aware of its spiritual origin and destiny, and of the underlying and indispensible spiritual principles of brotherhood and justice, which alone can sustain the free life of man and society.

Let our nation continue the wholesome process of self-examination.

Let it courageously face up to all the short-comings which it finds, and at the behest of its own noble history, traditions, and destiny set out to correct them.

But let it have faith in its own strength. The future belongs not to the revolutions of dictatorships, but to the revolutions of democracy, not to Lenin and Marx, but to Jefferson and Lincoln. The future belongs to those who declared, in the hearing of the whole world: "We hold these truths to be self-evident -- that all men are created equal, and that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of happiness!"

The future belongs to those who a hundred years ago in a tragic civil war died so that this nation under God might have a new birth of freedom and "that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth"....

By an act of will, our nation should return to the highway of its own heroic past. For however difficult it is, it is the straight way of human progress. Our nation should eschew all promptings of expediency, all fear of propoganda and all wooing of dictators to help us against dictators. We should forego our present mood of resentment against dictators who have forgotten or perhaps had never learned the art of restraint and good manners in international speech and conduct. We should not yield to the temptation of returning insult for insult.

There is already too strong an odor of the fish-market in the stately conference halls of our diplomats. Let us not compete in the race of the unbridled tongue with governments who have broken Olympic records in these events. We should carry on undiverted and undeterred in our confident tradition of freedom and good-will towards all. We should assist wherever we can the peoples of the world /5 TeT

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This is an hour in which we should, as a nation, pray in all humility:
"Make Thy way straight before us".

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ABBA HILLEL SILVER

ROSHHASHANA SERMON

September, 1960

MAKE THY WAY STRAIGHT

The Temple, a Rosh Hashanah Sermon, September 1960.





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But we need not be pessimistic either about our present or our future. There is nothing that is wrong with us that cannot be righted. We should not listen to the cynic, the sceptic and the scoffer. There is nothing that man has made crooked that he cannot make straight. Behind every system is man. On the world scene it is possible to banish war and eradicate poverty. It is possible, even though difficult, to reconcile the sharp and bitter contradictions of our day -- nationalism with inter-nationalism, collectivism, accelerated by our industrial technology and mass production, with the rights and liberties of the individual.

It is possible to give men economic security without robbing them of their political freedom. What the world needs is inspired new leadership, and the welling up from within of a new faith and a new courage.

The dictators of our day who are flocking this week to the United Nations are not in any sense the inspired new leaders for which the world is waiting. They are as old as Nero and Caligula. They prate of a new world order. Actually, they are reaching out for new empires which can only be laid in blood and at the cost of the rights and freedoms of other peoples. To the youth of the world they offer nothing but chains and death. They have no faith in man or humanity, nor in the power of men to transcend themselves, and through their own initiative and experience to achieve higher and nobler forms of a free and secure society. They have the instincts of slaves -- and I confidently believe that in time they will be on their way out. Their own people will tire of them. They and mankind generally will not long tolerate those who, under the pretext of achieving equality and the good life, actually bring them enslavement, labor camps and the police state.

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But let it have faith in its own strength. The future belongs not to the revolutions of dictatorships, but to the revolutions of democracy, not to Lenin and Marx, but to Jefferson and Lincoln. The future belongs to those who declared, in the hearing of the whole world: "We hold these truths to be self-evident -- that all men are created equal, and that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of happiness!

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We should continue to build within our own borders the most perfect society that we are capable of, free from all forms of injustice, discrimination and intolerance, wherein all our citizens will fell themselves secure in their human rights and dignity. Our example to the world, in this workshop of democracy, will mean even more than our material aid. We should assist, through our Point Four Program, wherever we can, the peoples of the world who are in need of help. Our Point One Program, however, should be to take every legitimate risk for peace and world cooperation in the society of nations.

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ROSHHASHANA SERMON
September, 1960



NEW YEAR'S GREETING

I send my good wishes for the coming year to all the members of the Jewish community and I wish them a year of peace, prosperity and happiness.

May the coming of the holy season remind us all of our obligations to our faith and to the noble heritage of our people. May we dedicate ourselves anew to the noble, ethical demands of Judaism and to the disciplines of Jewish life. May we look more closely to the spiritual up-bringing of our children and their integration as loyal citizens in the life of America and as proud Jews in the household of Israel.

Grave problems confront our world. May our Heavenly Father give wisdom, counsel and vision to the leaders of our nation that they may help in their solution and advance the progress of mankind toward greater brotherhood and a peaceful world order.

THE TEMPLE

CLEVELAND, OHIO

SEPTEMBER 7, 1960

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