



## 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  
169

Box  
62

Folder  
1155

Succoth, 1962.

SUCCOTH - 1962

IN ONLY A FEW SHORT DAYS, FROM THE TENTH TO THE FIFTEENTH OF TISHRI, WE PASS FROM THE SOLEMN SEASON OF PENITENCE AND FASTING TO THE SEASON OF REJOICING AND THANKSGIVING --FROM YOM KIPPUR TO SUCCOTH -- FROM *עונת התשובה* TO *עונת ההודיה*.

HERE THE EMPHASIS IS DIFFERENT. PERHAPS WE MAY BEST CHARACTERIZE THE DIFFERENCE BY SAYING THAT IN THE ROSH HASHANAH-YOM KIPPUR PERIOD, OUR FAITH STRESSES OUR KINSHIP WITH GOD; IN SUCCOTH, OUR KINSHIP WITH NATURE, THE HANDIWORK OF GOD. IN THE "TEN DAYS OF RETURN" WE LIFT UP OUR HEARTS WITH OUR HANDS UNTO GOD", ASKING FOR FORGIVENESS FOR WHAT WE <sup>may</sup> HAVE DONE WRONGFULLY. ON SUCCOTH WE LIFT UP THE PALM, THE CITRON AND THE FRUIT OF GOODLY TREES AND THANK GOD FOR THE BEAUTIFUL THINGS WHICH HE HAS CREATED IN HIS WORLD FOR THE DELIGHT AND SUSTENANCE OF MAN.

BUT WHILE THE EMPHASIS IS DIFFERENT, THE SUBSTANCE IS THE SAME. FOR THE GOD OF THE MORAL LAW, WHOM THE SOLEMN HOLY DAYS PROCLAIM, IS ALSO THE GOD OF NATURE TO WHOM THE HARVEST FESTIVAL OF SUCCOTH IS DEDICATED. JUST AS GOD IS MADE MANIFEST IN THE MORAL LAW OF JUSTICE, FREEDOM AND COMPASSION, AS DEFINED IN OUR TORAH, SO DOES GOD REVEAL HIMSELF IN NATURE, WHICH CAN ALSO BE FOR US A TORAH. FROM IT, TOO, WE CAN LEARN MANY DEEP LESSONS.



[ONE MAJOR LESSON WHICH WE MAY LEARN <sup>from nature</sup> IS THAT NOTHING IS STATIC ~~IN NATURE~~, NOTHING IS CHANGELESS. IN SOME PHENOMENON OF NATURE, CHANGE IS VERY SUDDEN AND DRAMATIC, SUCH AS VOLCANIC ERUPTIONS, EARTHQUAKES, TORNADOES; IN OTHERS, CHANGE IS HARDLY PERCEPTIBLE, LIKE THE QUIET ACTION OF WINDS AND WAVES AND THE SLOW MOVEMENT OF GLACIERS. BUT CHANGE, NEVERTHELESS, GOES ON. IN ALL ORGANIC LIFE THERE IS CEASELESS ADAPTIBILITY; CYCLES OF GROWTH AND DECAY. IN PLANT LIFE THERE IS THE BUD, THE BLOSSOMING, THE FRUIT AND THE WITHERING. IN MAN THERE IS BIRTH, GROWTH AND DEATH. NOTHING REMAINS INDEFINITELY THE SAME.

THERE IS A LESSON IN ALL THIS FOR MANKIND. THERE ARE TWO FORCES WHICH ARE CONSTANTLY AT WORK IN HUMAN SOCIETY -- THE INSTINCT TO CONSERVE AND THE DRIVE TO CHANGE. THE INSTINCT TO CONSERVE, TO KEEP THINGS AS THEY ARE IS VERY STRONG AMONG MEN. THEY KNOW THAT CHANGE IS FRAUGHT WITH UNCERTAINTY, AT TIMES WITH DANGER. WHY RISK EXPERIMENTATION? WHY NOT STAY WITH TRADITION? SOCIAL HABITS ARE DEEP GROOVES. IT IS EASIER TO STAY IN GROOVES THAN TO GET OUT OF THEM. IT IS FAR SIMPLER TO DO A THING BECAUSE THAT IS HOW IT HAS BEEN DONE RIGHT ALONG, OR THAT IS THE WAY ALL OTHER MEN DO IT. WE FEEL OURSELVES SAFE AND WE LIKE TO THINK OURSELVES FREE WITHIN OUR CUSTOMARY ROUTINE OF THOUGHT, ATTITUDE AND ACTION. PEOPLE FIND PSYCHOLOGICAL SECURITY IN CONSERVATISM, REGARDLESS OF WHAT ELSE THEY FIND.



BUT THERE HAS ALWAYS BEEN ANOTHER FORCE AT WORK IN SOCIETY -- A DRIVE TO CHANGE, TO EXPERIMENT, TO PROBE INTO THE UNKNOWN. PERHAPS THERE IS A BETTER WAY OF DOING THIS THING. PERHAPS THERE ARE <sup>lovelier</sup> ~~MORE~~ GREEN VALLEYS ACROSS THE MOUNTAINS. PERHAPS THERE ARE NEW LANDS BEYOND THE SEAS, PERHAPS THERE ARE HIDDEN SOURCES OF POWER IN NATURE WHICH WE SHOULD EXPLORE. PERHAPS SLAVERY AND POVERTY AND WAR AND RACIAL HATE ARE NOT THE LAST WORD AND CAN BE DONE AWAY WITH. THIS IS THE SPIRIT OF INQUIRY WHICH IS AT WORK IN MAN, THE PIONEERING SPIRIT, THE ADVENTURING URGE WHICH IS NOT AFRAID TO STRIKE OUT ALONG NEW AND UNFAMILIAR ROADS.

THESE TWO FORCES HAVE BEEN AT WAR, MORE OR LESS, WITH EACH OTHER SINCE THE BEGINNING OF TIME. THEY ARE STILL AT WAR TODAY -- THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN WHAT IS AND WHAT OUGHT OR MIGHT BE, BETWEEN SHELTER AND PROGRESS, BETWEEN CAUTION AND ENTERPRISE.

IN OUR DAY THOSE WHO FEAR ALL CHANGE AND WHO ARE CONVINCED THAT SOCIAL SECURITY IS TO BE FOUND ONLY IN CONSERVING THE OLD, IN REMAINING INTRENCHED IN THE OLD WAYS, HAVE RESORTED TO DESPERATE WEAPONS TO STOP ALL POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGE. <sup>They</sup> ~~have been responsible for~~ FASCISM, NAZIISM, AND RACIAL VIOLENCE. THESE MEN ARE BLIND TO THE INEXORABLE LAW OF CHANGE WHICH GOVERNS ALL NATURE AND ALL LIFE -- AND THEY ARE DOOMED! BUT THEY WILL NOT LET GO BEFORE THEY CAUSE MUCH MISERY AND RUIN IN ~~SOCIETY~~. <sup>the world</sup>



ON THE OTHER HAND, THERE ARE THOSE IN OUR DAY WHO WELCOME  
ALL CHANGE, REGARDLESS. <sup>these men</sup> ~~THEY~~ ALSO RESORT TO DESPERATE WEAPONS,  
TO BLOODY REVOLUTION AND DICTATORSHIP, TO <sup>force the change which they desire</sup> ~~BRING IT ABOUT~~. BUT  
~~THIS~~ BLIND IDOLATRY OF CHANGE, ~~THIS~~ POINTLESS AND UNINTELLIGENT  
DESTRUCTION OF OLD WAYS AND TIME-HONORED INSTITUTIONS JUST  
BECAUSE THEY ARE OLD, AND NOT BECAUSE THEY ARE FALSE, <sup>only</sup> LEADS  
TO CHAOS, NOT TO PROGRESS. THESE MEN, TOO, ARE DOOMED, BUT  
THEY, TOO, WILL NOT RELINQUISH THEIR HOLD BEFORE THEY CAUSE  
MUCH SUFFERING IN THE WORLD.

SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN IS THE GOLDEN MEANS. OUR FESTIVAL  
OF SUCCOT SYMBOLICALLY SUGGESTS THIS GOLDEN MEANS. SUCCAH IS  
A BOOTH -- A TEMPORARY DWELLING PLACE -- WHICH OUR FOREFATHERS  
BUILT ON THEIR WAY TO THE PROMISED LAND. A SUCCAH IS NOT A  
PERMANENT DWELLING PLACE. A SETTLED COMMUNITY DOES NOT LIVE  
IN TENTS. OUR ANCESTORS WERE TOLD TO DWELL IN BOOTHS -- TO BE  
ALWAYS READY TO MOVE ON -- NEVER TO STAY PUT UNTIL THEY REACH  
THIS GOAL -- <sup>until - 1801 -</sup> THEY MARCHED, THEY RESTED, AND  
THEN THEY MARCHED ON AGAIN. THIS IS THE LAW OF HUMAN PROGRESS.

BUT EVEN IN THEIR WANDERINGS AND AT THE VERY OUTSET OF  
THEIR WANDERINGS, THEY WERE GIVEN A TORAH -- A SET OF GUIDING  
MORAL PRINCIPLES FOR PROGRESS. THEY WERE ALSO COMMANDED TO  
BUILD AND TO CARRY ALONG WITH THEM IN THEIR WANDERINGS A SANCTUARY -  
A <sup>tabernacle</sup> -- A MOVEABLE TABERNACLE -- TO REMIND THEM ALWAYS OF



THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN THEIR MIDST. THEIR PROGRESS WAS TO BE DISCIPLINED BY THE CONSIDERATION OF MORAL LAWS, CARRIED OUT IN THE SIGHT OF GOD, AND DIRECTED TOWARDS THE GREAT GOAL -- THE PROMISED LAND.

MERE BOOTH-BUILDING IS SHEER NOMADISM, AND NOMADISM NEVER BUILT A CIVILIZATION. MERE "GOING PLACES", MERE "CHANGE FOR ITS OWN SAKE", MERE RECKLESS ADVENTURE IS AIMLESS WANDERING, ~~WHICH~~ LEAVES THE HEART WEARY AND THE MIND EXHAUSTED, AND FREQUENTLY LEAVES THE WANDERER LOST IN A BRUTAL WILDERNESS OF SCORPIONS AND FIERY SERPENTS...

BUT WHERE THERE IS A DEFINITE OBJECTIVE AND A VALID GROUND FOR CHANGE, AND WHERE THE METHODS TO BE EMPLOYED ARE MORALLY SOUND, THEN, MOST ASSUREDLY, MEN SHOULD MOVE FORWARD. THEN IT IS WISE TO REGARD THE PRESENT POSITION AS ONLY A STAGE IN A PROCESS, A STOPPING-PLACE ON THE WAY TO SOMETHING BETTER AND NOBLER.

"FOR I CAUSED THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL TO DWELL IN BOOTHS, WHEN I BROUGHT THEM OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT". ON THEIR WAY FROM SLAVERY TO FREEDOM, FROM EGYPT TO THE PROMISED LAND, THERE WAS TO BE NO PERMANENT RESTING PLACE, AND NO FIXED ABODES. NOTHING MUST DETER THEM, FEAR, DANGER OR THE ENSNARING MEMORIES OF THE SECURITY OF SERFDOM AND THE FLESHPOTS WHICH THEY ENJOYED



IN THE LAND OF THE PHARAOHS, WHEN <sup>the Israelites</sup> ~~THEY~~ FACED DEATH AT THE RED SEA, WITH THE IMPASSABLE WATERS BEFORE THEM AND THE <sup>avenging</sup> EGYPTIAN HOSTS BEHIND THEM, THE DIVINE COMMAND WAS GIVEN:

<sup>.הווי ואלוהים יצאנו</sup> "SPEAK UNTO THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL AND LET THEM GO FORWARD!" ALWAYS GO FORWARD! THIS IS THE ORDINANCE OF HUMAN PROGRESS. THIS IS THE LAW OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH IN MAN. AND THIS IS ONE OF THE BEAUTIFUL LESSONS WHICH THE TEMPORARY SUCCAH SO QUICKLY ERECTED AND SO QUICKLY DISMANTLED, SUGGESTS. AT NO STAGE IN LIFE MUST WE REGARD OURSELVES AS HAVING REACHED PERFECTION, COMPLETION AND ARRIVAL. WE MUST NEVER SAY: "THIS IS IT!. I AM THROUGH STRUGGLING, STRIVING, ASPIRING. THIS IS THE PLACE WHICH I HAVE CHOSEN AS MY PERMANENT DWELLING PLACE."

THE RABBIS HAVE DECLARED: <sup>לדור ודור לא ינוח</sup> <sup>לדור ודור לא ינוח</sup> "THE RIGHTEOUS HAVE NO ULTIMATE REST NEITHER IN THIS WORLD, NOR IN THE NEXT." THE RIGHTEOUS OF THE EARTH AND THE WISE AMONG MEN FIND THEIR HAPPINESS NOT IN COMPLACENCY, "SHUT UP IN MEASURELESS CONTENT", COMPLETELY SATISFIED WITH THE FRUITION OF THEIR LIFE'S PROJECTS AND PURPOSES, BUT IN CARRYING ON, ALWAYS GRATEFUL FOR WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED, ALWAYS EAGER FOR WHAT MIGHT YET BE ACHIEVED, NEVER DISQUIETED, BUT ALWAYS ARDENT, EXPECTANT, FORWARD-LOOKING.



4

NOTHING IS CHANGELESS

Sermon, The Temple, Succoth 1962

One major lesson which we may learn from nature is that nothing is static, <sup>or</sup> ~~static~~ changeless. In some phenomenon of nature, change is very sudden and dramatic, such as volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, tornadoes; in others, change is hardly perceptible, like the quiet action of winds and waves and the slow movement of glaciers. But change, nevertheless, goes on. In all organic life there is ceaseless adaptability; cycles of growth and decay. In plant life there is the bud, the blossoming, the fruit, and the withering. In man there is birth, growth, and death. Nothing remains indefinitely the same.

There is a lesson in all this, ~~for man~~. There are two forces which are constantly at work in human society -- the instinct to conserve and the drive to change. The instinct to conserve, to keep things as they are, is ~~very~~ strong. <sup>Men</sup> ~~they~~ know that change is fraught with uncertainty, at times with danger. Why risk experimentation? Why not stay with tradition? Social habits are deep grooves. It is easier to stay in grooves than to get out of them. It is far simpler to do a thing because <sup>because</sup> that is how it has been done right along, or that is the way all other men do it. We feel ourselves safe and we like to think ourselves free within our customary routine of thought, attitude, and action. People find psychological security in conservatism, regardless of what else they find.

~~But~~ There has always been another force at work in society -- a drive to change, to experiment, to probe into the unknown. Perhaps there is a better way of doing this thing. Perhaps there are lovelier <sup>and</sup> green valleys across the mountains. Perhaps there are new lands beyond the seas. Perhaps

9d  
22



there are hidden sources of power in nature which we should explore. Perhaps slavery and poverty and war and racial hate are not the last word and can be done away with. This is the spirit of inquiry which is at work in man, the pioneering spirit, the adventuring urge which is not afraid to strike out along new and unfamiliar roads.

These two forces have been at war, more or less, with each other since the beginning of time. They are still at war today  $\frac{I}{M}$  the struggle between what is and what ought <sup>to be</sup> or might be, between shelter and progress, between caution and enterprise.

In our day those who fear all change and who are convinced that social security is to be found only in conserving the old, in remaining entrenched in ~~the~~ <sup>familiar</sup> ways, have resorted to desperate weapons to stop all political and economic change. They have been responsible for Fascism, Nazism, and racial violence. These men are blind to the inexorable law of change which governs all nature and all life  $\frac{I}{M}$  and they are doomed!

On the other hand, there are those in our day who welcome all change, regardless. <sup>#</sup> These men also resort to desperate weapons, to bloody revolution and dictatorship, to force the change which they desire. But a blind idolatry of change, a pointless and unintelligent destruction of old ways and time-honored institutions just because they are old, and not because they are false, ~~leads~~ leads to chaos, not to progress. These men, too, are doomed, but they, too, will not relinquish their hold before they cause much suffering in the world.

Somewhere in between is the golden mean. Our festival of Succoth symbolically suggests this golden mean. <sup>a</sup> Succah is a booth  $\frac{I}{M}$  a temporary dwelling place  $\frac{I}{M}$  which our forefathers built on their way to the Promised Land. A Succah is not a permanent dwelling place. A settled community



65-92

does not live in tents. Our ancestors were told to dwell in booths - to be always ready to move on - never to stay put until they reached this goal. ~~וְהָיָה יְהוָה עִמָּךְ~~ They marched, they rested, and then they marched on again. This is the law of human progress!

But even in their wanderings and at the very outset of their wanderings, they were given a Torah - a set of guiding moral principles for progress. They were also commanded to build and to carry along with them in their wanderings a sanctuary, ~~מִשְׁכָּן~~ a moveable tabernacle - to remind them always of the presence of God in their midst. Their progress was to be disciplined by the consideration of moral laws, carried out in the sight of God, and directed towards ~~the Promised Land~~ the Promised Land.

Mere booth-building is nomadism, and nomadism never built a civilization. Mere "going places", mere "change for its own sake", mere reckless adventure is aimless wandering. It leaves the heart weary and the mind exhausted, and frequently leaves the wanderer lost in a brutal wilderness of scorpions and fiery serpents. But where there is a definite objective and a valid ground for change, and where the methods to be employed are morally sound, then, most assuredly, men should move forward. Then it is wise to regard the present position as only a stage in a process, a stopping place on the way to something better and nobler.

"For I caused the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt." On their way from slavery to freedom, from Egypt to the Promised Land, there was to be no permanent resting place, and no fixed abode. Nothing must deter ~~the~~ <sup>the people</sup> fear, danger, or the ensnaring memories of the security of serfdom and the fleshpots which they enjoyed.



in the land of the Pharoahs. When the Israelites faced death at the Red Sea, with the impassable waters before them and the avenging Egyptian hosts behind them, the divine command was given דבר אל בני ישראל ויסעו

"Speak unto the children of Israel and let them go forward!" Always go forward!

This is the ordinance of human progress. This is the law of spiritual growth in man. And this is one of the beautiful lessons which the temporary succah, so

quickly erected and so quickly dismantled, suggests. At no stage in life must we regard ourselves as having <sup>arrived</sup> ~~reached perfection, completion and arrival.~~ ~~We must~~

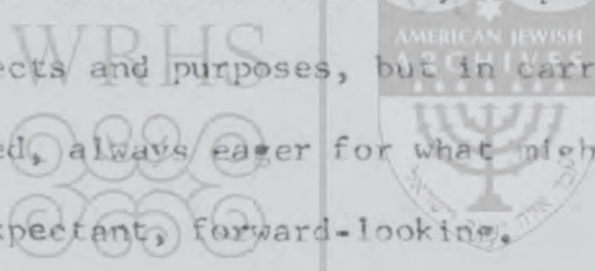
Never say: this is it. I am <sup>through</sup> ~~struggling~~ struggling, striving, aspiring. This is the place which I have chosen as my permanent dwelling place.

START →

The Xabbis have declared:

~~צדיקים אין לכם מנוחה, לא בעולם הזה ולא~~

"The righteous have no ultimate rest, neither in this world, nor in the next". The righteous of the earth and the wise ~~are~~ among men find their happiness not in complacency, "shut up in measureless content", completely satisfied with the fruition of their life's projects and purposes, but in carrying on, always grateful for what has been achieved, always eager for what might yet be achieved, never disquieted, but always ardent, expectant, forward-looking.





~~This replaces face page called~~

67  
face page

② "The Lord is My Shepherd"

I think of God as a creative energy, as of the creative energy of the human universe, the source of all that is and is to be, the substance and the form and the purpose of everything. I think of God as of the personality of the universe, whose wisdom integrates the world, holds it together, directs it to His own ultimate purposes. I think of God as of the omnipotent goodness, as of the ultimate and absolute truth, as of the moral ultimates, the best in the universe...~~...~~

④ My conception of the universe is not dualistic nor pluralistic but monistic.

It is one. God is omnipotent; God is omniscient. For God is all, and in all. It is I who am impotent in many things, and finite and weak and struggling; and God meant that I should be finite and weak and struggling, for without these things human life is unimportant. ~~Infinite~~ <sup>Infinite</sup> life, eternal life, divine life, does not require struggle, but human life, finite life finds its whole meaning and significance in passing from the lower to the higher, from the bad to the good, from the good to the better...~~...~~

④ At times my vision of Him is not clear. At times I feel like a man lost in a fog. At times when I behold about me great sorrow or the tragedies which come into the dwelling places of the children of man, I am full of doubts and fears; I am troubled and bewildered, and shadows fall athwart the broad path which leads to Him. Every man and every seeker after God will have these moments of doubt and fear and loneliness. But

as he meditates, as he retraces his steps along the path which he has followed; as he reasons through the problem anew, his faith returns stronger and more healing than before. And on his lips come the words of the ancient Psalmist, beautiful words, healing words: "The Lord is my light and my salvation; what need I fear."

from: "My Quest of God,"  
The Temple, December 12, 1926

23  
in regular  
attractable  
phase



(BRACKETS AND ITALICS)

3 "The Lord is My Shepherd —."

Rabbi Silver felt that "the accent in Judaism is never on abstract speculation but on an ethical message and a program." There is an occasional talk or sermon which wrestles with the standard theological insolubles — the nature of God, the paradox of free will and determination, the problem of evil. But, on the whole, names like Barth, Heidegger, Sartre or even Buber — so dear to many religious thinkers of our time — scarcely appear in Rabbi Silver's public discourses.

On the other hand, his faith in God was real. And though he avoided hair-splitting definitions of that faith, he knew when it encountered an enemy. Wherever he met the counsel of despair, or the call to base faith upon absurdity rather than reason, he knew that "Judaism differed." He <sup>did not</sup> see any point in substituting the concept of a "struggling God" for Judaism's monotheistic Deity, in order to resolve the problem of evil. And whether or not evil was real and man possessed of free will in an ultimate sense, man ought to act as if evil were real and <sup>he</sup> man were free to battle with and overcome it.

One semi-theological issue did engross Rabbi Silver through all the years — the matter of science and religion. A sizeable number of his talks and references are attempts to show that there is no conflict between them. On the contrary, belief in God is the most rational of hypotheses when one looks at nature, man, and history.

This is the way of Biblical and classical Judaism — (to both) deduce what we can about the nature of the Creator from the evidence of his creation, and to avoid overmuch speculation about that which is hidden



(The Lord is my Shepherd.... ---2)

from the <sup>grasp</sup> ~~grasp~~ of the finite man. And Rabbi Silver was very much a Jew in the Biblical and classical tradition. Not that he was unfamiliar with or unattracted to the religious moods of Judaism's fringe elements. His doctoral thesis dealt with the speculations, <sup>often</sup> ~~often~~ cabbalistic and fantast<sup>ic</sup> ~~ic~~ of Messianic groups. His library was filled with well-thumbed and annotated books of the ~~esoteric~~ Jewish tradition. But personally he was a "main-stream" Jew, committed to the classical tenets of the Jewish faith.

Abba Hillel Silver's God is, then, the old Jewish God, who refuses to be caught in any theologian's definition. He is a Deity whose relationship to finite man can be expressed in changing ways and felt on many levels. He is the transcendent and mysterious God whose "thought is not our thought and whose ways are not our ways." But He is also the God who exhorts, weeps with, and comforts the individuals. The Jew of old found no difficulty in having a relationship with God who was at one and the same time the mysterious "other" and the intimate "Thou." Neither did Rabbi Silver.

H.W.