



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
1170

Jewish Situation, Yom Kippur, 1934.

I spoke on New Years Eve to you about the general conditions and the general problems which confront us today as men and women without reference to our particular status as Jews. I spoke to you as citizens of this country and as members of the world-wide human family, and dwelt upon the tasks which face us and of the intellectual and spiritual attitudes which we should adopt towards them. To-night on Yom Kippur Eve I wish to address you as Jews. I wish to speak to you of the problems which face us, ^{in our capacity} particularly as members of the Household of Israel. It is not often that we are assembled in such large numbers and in such ^a ~~receptive~~ ^{for such a discussion} mood. I shall speak simply and quite frankly for the times in which we live are serious times and they call for forthrightness of speech and utmost candor.

The past year was not a happy one for our people. It was one of refection in many parts of the world. In the wake of world-wide Fascist movements the fortunes of our people suffered almost everywhere a sharp decline. The disease of anti-Semitism became more aggravated and contagious than ever before. The story of Germany is all too well-known to you to require a rehearsal at my hands. Hitlerism continued to trample upon the prostrate body of that unfortunate Jewish community. German refugees by the thousands fleeing from the wrath that was let loose in the land of the Nazis wandered over the face of the world in search of new homes. For the five hundred thousand Jews who still live in Germany there has been no surcease from oppression, and no let-up in the barbaric restrictions and discriminations which are slowly grinding them into complete economic ^{annihilation} collapse. Their future is dark and uncertain. Some say hopeless. With the latter view, I do not agree. Jewish life acknowledges no hopelessness ^{at any time and in any circumstances.}

Austrian Jewry passed through a terrible year of fear and of impending doom. In the welter of political upheaval which engulfed that unhappy land, Austrian Jewry never ~~knew~~ knew whether the dark horrors of Berlin would not

be repeated in Vienna. The Austrian Nazis failed this year in their putsch for which the assassination of Chancellor Dollfuss was the signal. The Austrian Jews were thus saved by a hair's breath and for the time being from the calamitous fate which befell their German brethren.

Polish Jewry, of which we had almost lost sight because of our all-absorption in the German situation, continued its disastrous economic retreat in the midst of much anti-Jewish hostility and incitement. Polish anti-Semitism fortunately was not fostered by the Government but was instigated by a large group of extreme national ^{and} members of the National Radical Camp, the notorious Nara, who ~~who~~ sought to emulate in Poland the example of their confreres in Germany.

Anti-Semitism reared its ugly head even in countries which had ^{traditionally} been lands of broad tolerance. To the ranks of the Brown Shirts in Germany were added the Black Shirts in England, the Silver Shirts in America and their shirted brethren in South America and South Africa. There were anti-Jewish riots in Algeria, Turkey and Greece. There was Jew-baiting in Canada. Truly this has been a year of bitterness, stress and heartaches for our people! The almanac of the past year was not a happy one.

And yet the picture should not be painted in too dark colors. Fidelity to truth demands that the lights as well as the shadows should be included, and that the chiaroscuro should not be distorted. There were lights in the darkness of the past year. There were gains and achievements.

In the first place the anti-Semitic onslaught on our political and economic positions which drew its inspiration and direction from Germany was not everywhere successful. It met with powerful resistance on all ^{fronts} ~~frontiers~~. In some countries, organizations and parties of the Nazi brand and program were suppressed and outlawed. Leaders of thought throughout the world, statesmen, writers, priests and ministers of all denominations rose in defense of Israel

and denounced the madness and viciousness of Nazi racialism and ~~national~~ intolerance. Nearly all important churches of Christendom through their assemblies or through their outstanding spokesmen rallied to our cause which they knew was in this instance identified with their own cause -- the preservation of ~~both Judaism and Christianity~~ ^{the essential values of all religions.} Even in Germany itself some brave spokesmen at the risk of their ~~possessions~~ ^{positions} and of their very lives dared to oppose the inclusion of the Aryan clause into the their church doctrines and polity and resisted the campaign of defamation of the Bible and of all ^{which the Nazis had initiated.} the Jewish sources of Christianity. Hundreds of pastors followed the leadership of Pastor von Bodelsching, Pfarrer Niemoeller, and Professor Karl Bart, in strenuous opposition to the clerical arch-anti-Semite of present-day Germany, ~~Arch~~ ^{Bishop} Ludwig Moeller who has disgraced his church and degraded ^{betrayed} ~~degraded~~ ^{his} their faith and his God.

And unforgettable and forever treasured ^{to us} ~~remains~~ ^{was} the ~~example of the heroic words~~ ^{stands} of championing and defense which the Prince of the Catholic Church, Cardinal Fulhaber of Munich spoke for our people in their hour of tribulation. Alone in terror-ridden Germany he dared outspokenly and continuously to defend the Jews of the Reich and to denounce their persecutors. As recently as last month on the very day of the plebescite when Hitler asked for a vote of confidence of the German people and for a universal "Ja" for all his policies, Cardinal Fulhaber uttered these words:

"When I stood out a few months ago against the inhuman race-hatred which has seized hold of a part of our German brothers, they wanted to stone me. My life was in peril. But I was not afraid, for what I do is out of absolute conviction. The Jews are being persecuted everywhere in the world. But the methods of History teaches us that God always punishes those who persecute His Chosen People, the Jews. No Catholic agreed to the persecution of the Jews in Germany.

"When God sent June 30th as a Court of Judgment for a part of those who persecuted the Jews, the punishment was well-deserved. My Catholic brothers do you not see that this was God's punishment? Hatred and persecution will never exterminate the Jews. The oldest people of the world has suffered much; it suffers and will always suffer, because it has remained true to its great faith. We should take an example from the Jews. We should honour and respect them for they have given the world its most precious possession, the Bible. Make it clear to your brothers that race-hatred is a poisonous canker in our life. Exterminate this dreadful, inhuman prejudice against the eternal suffering people.

No Jewish leader in Germany dared to utter words one-tenth as courageous as those of the Cardinal.

The free press of the world, too, was zealous in exposing the horrors of the Hitler regime and in presenting the case of the Jews of Germany with utmost fairness, sympathy and understanding. ^{These} We are not without our powerful friends and allies in the world, even if the number of our enemies increases. We are not helpless or isolated in a hostile world.

Perhaps the most gratifying ^{fact} of the past year and the one which should be ^{put} first on the credit side of our ~~national~~ national inventory is the unbroken and unimpaired morale of our people in the face of all the hostile attacks.

5

World Jewry was not demoralized. The world did not see in us a panic-stricken herd in fearful stampede--a condition to which our enemies had hoped to reduce us. Rather there transpired^d an amazing manifestation of Jewish solidarity and loyalty and a determination to fight resolutely with every legitimate political and economic weapon available in self-defense. For every political blow we suffered we returned an economic blow. We ^{ed} join^d with all outraged classes, peoples and religious groups of the world. in inflicting a crushing economic boycott on Nazi Germany. ^{So far} Here and there we encounter^{ed} a few timid Jews who believed in hiding their heads in the sand until the storm would blow over. Here and there we encountered Jewish merchants who thought more of their profits than of the fate of their people and who found all sorts of excuses for continuing to trade with the most dangerous and relentless foe of their people. But our people as a whole responded instantaneously, almost instinctively, to the challenge of the hour. Our people spoke to the conscience of the civilized world with courage and with dignity and the world listened.

Israel refused to look upon the German affair as just another case calling for commiseration, charity and material relief. It realized that ^{this} ~~here~~ was a political struggle into which Israel had been forced--a life and death struggle. Our elementary human rights were at stake. Our right to live as equals everywhere in the western world was challenged. And Israel took up that gauntlet dauntlessly. And Israel is determined to see that fight through--if it takes a century.

Another gratifying fact of the past year was that the doctrine of assimilation among our people was ^{almost} universally discredited. Assimilation as a solution of the Jewish people is liquidated. The hope that so many

Jews entertained that a minimum of Jewishness would avert a maximum of Jew-hatred has been completely dissipated by the tragedies which overtook the most assimilated Jewish community ⁱⁿ of the world--that of Germany. It is clear now that that portion of the non-Jewish world which does not want the Jew, most certainly does not want the assimilated Jew. There is no special advantage today in being a de-Judaized Jew, a crypto Jew, *a man and a Jew.* There's nothing to be gained by the man who has greater wealth or a little more culture in ~~making~~ ^{regarding} himself superior to or separated from the rest of Israel. There is no escape from Jewish destiny. We must fight it out on the political and intellectual battlefields of the world for our elementary and inalienable rights to live as citizens in every state of the world and we must win as Jews or lose as Jews.

It is gratifying, too, to know that the mood of indifference to the problems of Jewish existence and survival which prevailed among so many of our people has yielded so generally to one of vital concern and alertness. There are still Jews who hover on the periphery of Jewish life. There are still Jews who think that by contributing to a Jewish charity they are discharging their ^{full} ~~few~~ obligations to the Jewish people. There are still Jews who think that by belonging to a Jewish social club, when in reality they cannot belong anywhere else, or by being formally affiliated with a temple and a synagogue to which they ~~a~~ resort once or twice a year to renew their acquaintance with the Lord God of Israel, ~~that~~-they ^{should} ~~may~~ properly ^{be} regard themselves as loyal members of the Jewish community. Many of these Jews have, fortunately, become aware of the inadequacy of the Jewish content of their lives. They are now entering more vitally into the activities and institution of Jewish communal life. They are drinking deep of a new Jewish inspiration. And thank God for that ! We need them. We need all our forces for the hard days ahead.

We must unify and strengthen our communal life. We must maintain unimpaired all our institutions. Our Jewish people of Cleveland have not been as generous in their support of the many important agencies ^{of defense, relief and education} for which our Welfare Fund has ^{every year} appealed as they should have been. Not once in the last eight or ten years has our community done its full share when a call came for ^{such} support. There are all too many among us who deny themselves very little of ^{the} comforts and pleasures ^{of} life but who at the first hint of a depression reduce their offerings to charitable and Jewish causes to a vanishing point. We must vitalize our temples and synagogues and use them as places of continual spiritual renewal and cultural enrichment, and not merely as places for occasional pilgrimage. We must educate our children, the generation of tomorrow which will probably have to bear more keenly the brunt of the anti-Jewish attack than we have had to bear--we must educate them in the faith, ^{the} of ideals, the history, the epochal achievements of our people and ^{teach} inculcate them in love, faithfulness and enthusiasm ~~xx~~ into the life of the Jewish group, so that they will be prepared and fully armored, intellectually and spiritually, for the tasks ahead of them. We must make our homes more beautiful and more proudly Jewish, restoring the charm and poetry of those age-old Jewish customs and ceremonies which are ~~not~~ in very truth the color and fragrance of the flower of faith and piety. ^{are} We must give of our time, thought and energy to all the important movements, national and international, ~~xx~~ in scope, which aim to defend Jewish rights all over the world, to assist the great masses of our people to a more normal economic status, to foster Jewish learning and scholarship, to create good will and better understanding among races and creeds and to help in the continued growth and up-building of Palestine. 40,000 Jews ~~xxxxxxx~~ entered Palestine last year. 50,000 Jews will enter Palestine this year. In a very real sense, Palestine has become a haven of refuge for the homeless of our people. Thousands of

exiles from Germany have found a new life and a new hope in the ancient land of Israel. The development of Palestine materially and culturally has been one of the truly bright and luminous spots in the somber picture of Jewish life in the last few years. All of these duties and tasks go to make up what to my mind constitute the requirements of a real purposefulness, intelligent ^{satisfying} Jewish life. The day of Jewish provincialism is over. The day of Jewish indecision and drifting is over.

With our ranks made up of Jews who meet ^{these} such requirements ^{and} who ^{eagerly} ~~equally~~ submit to such a discipline, we can enter the battle of the future ^{menace} unafraid. Persecution has never been a real ~~menace~~ to our people. When night descended upon our forefathers they knew how to kindle lamps in their darkness.. No weapon has yet been forged to destroy us. The real danger to our survival lurks within ourselves. Disloyalty, indifference, the love of ease and pleasures, cowardice, flunkeyism. These are the climbing dry-rot which may eat at the heart of our ^{national life} ~~being~~ and destroy it. Against this danger let us guard ourselves; and thus forewarned and forearmed let us face the future confidently. Our fortunes are in the last analysis bound up with the fortunes of the whole of humanity. With the fate of mankind, enduring ideals of freedom, justice, tolerance and brotherhood. When these ideals shall be vindicated and firmly established we too shall be vindicated and firmly established in peace and security. ^{This ultimate triumph is certain.} Until then we abide in faith and in our ancestral covenant of battle and struggle, ^{putting our trust} ~~finding our refuge in~~ ~~him~~ Him Whose truth is ~~unshakable~~ a shield and a buckler.

All people revere their dead - even the most primitive. Ancestor worship is not uncommon among races and peoples - Instinctively men do not wish to break all ties ^{which bound them to} with their dear departed. They know that their lives had their origin not in themselves but in those who lived before them. They are merely the present flowering of a life which has passed through the frames of endless generations since the beginning of time. Those who have lived before us have a part in us, and in revering them, we revere ~~the life~~ ^{the life which we live with them} ourselves. We honor life - its mystery and its holiness.

Among our people - Altk 227 - the graves of our ancestors were highly revered. The traditional family loyalty of our people reached beyond the grave - and those who once lived with us never quite left us. Our precious dead merely departed to another shore. There they await us. When our turn comes, we shall join them. ~~The belief when a man died, the Bible says, he~~ ^{and our people believe the Hebrew phrase} ~~the Bible speaks of a dying man as one who goes to his~~ ^{down to rest with his fathers.}

Our Memorial Service is not so much a meditation as the transference of life as a helpful reminder, the unbroken continuity of life. That which has lived, lives as in us and will continue to live in those who follow us, and together, all of us, then, the past of the present and the future are linked together in deathlessness.

Of course men are often forgotten. ^{Many} ~~most~~ ^{some} lives sink into unremembered dust. But events of history are also soon forgotten; but ^{and yet they are not without} ~~that does not mean that they have~~ ^{had} ~~no influence on the course of human events or~~ ^{that} ~~that unperpetrated and unnoted influences~~ ^{are not now} ~~operating in the world, men's~~ ^{favorable hands are}

past generations, & ancestors unknown to us, are following
 us here daily and hourly, without our suspecting it.
 The influence, the ever-present dead is real, has
 much more so the influence, the remembered dead.—
 those who we loved and honored so much that we
 cannot and do not wish to forget—
 of such our Rabbin said: *עליונים וקדושים*
עליונים —

For in life we knew them in all their human strength - but also their human weaknesses. At times the latter obscured the former. We could have no true perspective on them - tho we loved them with love and forgiveness. But death is merciful. Or rather when we look at death there is a veil of gloom, which effectively blots out their faults - and leaves their virtues with undimmed. In the distant darkness we see only the plane, the fact. The ^{is} ~~is~~ ^{no longer} ~~is~~ visible.

"... greater is the influence, the reputation etc. in their death than in their lives."

Our lives are measured in years, very short, in happiness
not very rich, in achievements, not very great. (Nov 1st
> 20 Bo - Rugby Chapel - Matthew Arnold). How
few men ^{ever} indeed, fail sooner or later to join the
circle of the bereaved and the sorrowing of the free-
masonry's tried, weary hearts. — Blessed
is the man, who when his days are over, can depart
in peace, and leave something of his life, ^{his} meaning,
his mission - its beauty - its ^{earned} & cherished sp.
character among those whom he loved in life and who
to be a monument among them - to recall to them
that he had once lived - and lived worthily.

Blamed as we if some day, when we are gone, a
child of ours will think ^{of us for a moment} ~~us~~ in fondness, trustful-
ness - ~~not~~ in loving - if a son or daughter of
ours will some day say - in pride, in gratulation -
My father - My mother - (Annie)

You cannot estimate influence. Some are
so humble as to believe God without any
influence upon us in life or in death. They are mis-
taken. The Harp has many strings - some long
some very short - all have diff. sounds but
all are important. Each has its own ~~note~~ tone
and octave. - (Given by Mr. Chip)



ABSTRACT OF YOM KIPPUR EVE SERMON DELIVERED BY RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER
AT THE TEMPLE, ANSEL AND E. 105TH STREET ON TUESDAY EVENING,
SEPTEMBER 18, 1934

Our Day of Atonement is set aside for men to take spiritual stock of themselves. This great Fast Day commemorates no historic event and no change in the seasons of the year such as most holidays celebrate. It is dedicated exclusively to religious consecration by way of self-searching and solemn reflection on human destiny. It is the great Judgment Day when we are summoned to judge ourselves in the light of what we might have been and might have done. Our real self is brought face to face with our ideal self and the measure of our defection from the ideal is established. We are asked frankly to confess our sins and shortcomings to ourselves and to God, and with strong hands to lay hold upon the course of our future lives and redirect it into nobler ways of thought and action.

The Day of Atonement comes to remind us that there is no one among us who is altogether righteous, that we have all, in one way or another, wittingly or unwittingly, transgressed during the year against the very moral principles which we acknowledge. We have all fallen short of the high standards of justice, honor, kindness, fair-dealing, integrity and tolerance which we profess to believe in. We have all been guilty at one time or another of selfishness, false pride and meanness of spirit. "There is no man living that sinneth not."

The Day of Atonement reminds us also while we as a people have suffered much from the sins of the world against us, we have likewise suffered much from our sins against ourselves. We have not been as faithful to the high ordinances of our religion and to the noble traditions of our race as we might have been. For many of us our Judaism has been a formality, not a tremendous aspiration which one must cling to with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might. Many of us think more of our pleasures and comforts than of our social responsibilities and of the duty to perfect ourselves morally and spiritually. Our homes in many instances are not the sanctuaries of spiritual beauty, purity and piety such as the homes of our fore-fathers were. We have yielded too much to the aberrations of the age.

As a people we have nothing to fear from persecution from without. No weapon has yet been forged to destroy us. Our real danger is from within, from the spreading dry rot of disloyalty, faithlessness, indifference and materialism.

