



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
170

Box
62

Folder
1185

Day of Atonement, 1950.

"MAKE MINE EYES TO SEE"

By Dr. Abba Hillel Silver

The mission of Judaism is to help us to find meaning in a universe where ultimate meaning is forever hidden from us. I came across the other day this statement of Professor Albert Einstein: "What is the meaning of human life, or of organic life altogether? To answer this question at all implies a religion. Is there any sense then, you ask, in putting it. I answer, the man who regards his own life and that of his fellow-creatures as meaningless is not merely unfortunate, but almost disqualified for life."

This quotation of Professor Einstein brought to my mind another quotation from a much older source, from the Book of Psalms: "Make mine eyes to see, lest I sleep the sleep of death." Make mine eyes to see! The function of Judaism, the function of all great ethical religions is to make our eyes to see lest we sleep the sleep of death.

There was a time when scientists were confident that they would soon find the solution for the riddle of the universe. It was only a matter of time, they thought, only a matter of adding one fact to another, one new discovery to another, until the required total is reached, and then men will know fully all that they wish to know. By probing deeper and ever deeper, by research and investigation, they would soon find the key to the solution of all the mysteries of creation.

In our generation scientists are far less confident. The most erudite among them today acknowledge that objective reality may forever elude the grasp of men. As one scientist put it recently: "There is no mystery of the physical world which does not point to a mystery beyond itself. All highways of the intellect, all by-roads of theory and conjecture lead ultimately to an abyss which human ingenuity can never span." The reason for it is quite simple. "Man himself is involved in everything which he tries to understand, and man is his own greatest mystery."

Although man has been denied the knowledge of ultimate reality - the how and why of things - he is nevertheless permitted to learn much, very much, of the relations which exist between things in the universe and the forces in the universe. While he may never be able to explain because he may never be able to understand electricity or gravitation or magnetism - their nature, their origin - he may come to understand a great deal about their operation, and thus, be enabled to use them to his advantage, to increase his power and his security in the world. It is in this field, which is unlimited, of profitable research and investigation, into the relationships of things and forces, in learning how things operate and how we can use them, that man can find great reward and abundant satisfactions. Thus, even though scientific knowledge may never be absolute for man, it nevertheless offers him a world of enterprise, challenge and meaning to satisfy a purposeful and victorious life.

This is true also of man's spiritual life. Man can never learn the nature of God. Man can never understand the ultimate purpose and plan of creation. The greatest religious thinkers have been the first to point this out, to re-state it time and time again. "Verily Thou art a God who hides Himself," we read in the Bible. Our religion speaks of God as "hidden". Nevertheless man has not been left by God in utter darkness concerning those matters which affect his destiny in this basically unknowable universe. Much has been made known to him through seers, prophets and his own revealing experience. Thus, while he may never know the true nature of God or the ultimate purpose of creation, he may learn much about the operations of God's laws of justice, love, truth and selflessness in the world of men, and living by these laws, he may prosper and be blessed.

"The secret things belong to the Lord our God."

"But the known things belong to us and to our children forever." And what are these known things?

"To do all the works of this Torah",

of this code of ethical life which the God-inspired seers and sages of mankind and mankind itself have evolved through the long centuries of living.

Within a hard, unyielding frame-work of the unknown and the unknowable there is a vast world of ascertainable, moral truth, and opportunities for moral and spiritual growth and fulfillment wherein man can find a sustaining purpose in life, and challenge to noblest ambitions. You may recall that very profound and dramatic story which is recorded in the Book of Exodus concerning the greatest of all the prophets of Israel, Moses. Moses was sorely tried and troubled. He was harassed by the bickering and ingratitude of the people, and heart-sick over their apostasy. They have turned away from God to worship the molten calf. He was lost in black doubt and confusion. He resolved upon a desperate measure. He would demand God to reveal Himself to him. "Shoe me, I pray Thee, Thy glory. Reveal unto me Thy self. I want to know Whom I am serving and for Whom I am enduring all these tribulations. I want to see God." The answer came back, "Thou canst not see My face for no man can see Me and live." But out of the cleft of a rock, continues this superb narration of the Bible, Moses was permitted to see "all the goodness" of God pass before him, to hear a voice proclaiming the ethical attributes of the unknowable and invisible. "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth..." If man wishes to know God, let him seek Him in moral enterprise, in spiritual adventure, in those ethical disciplines which approximate "all the goodness" of God.

"After the Lord your God shall ye walk." The Rabbis ask, how can a mortal, finite, human being imitate God - the infinite, the omnipotent, the omniscient. The answer is given. "Just as God is merciful and compassionate, you, too, be merciful and compassionate." Just as God clothes the naked, feeds the hungry, you do likewise." This is to imitate God. This is to seek God. This is to know God.

This walking in God's way is not too difficult if the will is there. It is not easy. A man cannot do it without effort; but it is not so arduous and forbidding that a man need to be discouraged from trying. God does not ask of us the impossible. God does not judge us by canons of absolute perfection. The Torah was not given to the angels. When God breathed His spirit into man, He breathed into a body which was fashioned out of earthly clay and dust.

Walking in God's way does call for perseverance, courage and sacrifice, but these are not beyond the reach of man, provided he employs all the spiritual resources which are available to him.

It is in the pursuit of these ethical objectives that the real meaning of human life is to be found and the real meaning of human destiny. He who understands this, his eyes are opened. He who does not, sleeps the sleep of death in the midst of life. "They do not know, they do not understand. They walk in darkness." Most people, unfortunately, walk through life in darkness. They see, but they do not observe. They hear, but they do not comprehend. To some "a primrose by the river's brim a yellow primrose was to him, and it was nothing more". "To others there is a clearer vision which finds tongs in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones and God in everything."

To which class do we belong? Do we look for meaning in all things? Do we see "all God's goodness" pass before our eyes as we behold His world pass before us? Do we hear a voice calling to us out of our manifold experiences? - the voice of the Lord which, to those who have ears to hear, "shaketh the wilderness and heweth out flames of fire..."

It is not only the written and spoken words which have meaning. Words are perhaps the least successful to convey deep meaning. Music and painting, sculpture and landscape frequently convey far deeper meanings to us. "Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night declareth knowledge, though there is no speech, though there are no words." Human acts speak eloquently and human relations have meaning. Our attitudes, ambitions, pursuits, careers all have meaning or should have meaning.

This age in which we live is full of activity, but I am afraid is possessed of little meaning. We travel very fast in our day and are eager to travel even faster. We can speak further, see further, hear further almost every day. The tempo of life has been amazingly accelerated. We are taking ever deeper soundings in the mysterious realms of matter and energy. But what is the meaning of all this stupendous exertion of mind, this furious movement and commotion, these phenomenal advances which we are making in speed and power?

There would be a meaning to all of our extraordinary activity if it was all related to "all of God's goodness". But is it? With the advent of these numberless inventions and discoveries and the vast accumulation of scientific knowledge, death through wholesale slaughter has come to dwell more intimately with the human race, and wars on a scale unknown in the past have become a commonplace in our lives, and political and economic strife are tearing our world apart, and we are helplessly beset with insecurity and fear.

There are those who go traveling through life and those who go tramping through it. We can either go traveling or we can go tramping. Our generation has been tramping rather than traveling. The traveler has a purpose and he has a goal. The tramp has neither. He just goes. If there is a purpose and a goal, then there is unity in what we do, and direction and interest. Then we can draw inspiration from the goal which we are trying to reach. Then we know how to husband our resources, to gauge the measure of our success or our failure.

It was the wise Roman philosopher, Seneca, who said: "Our plans miscarry because they have no aim. When a man does not know what harbor he is making for, no wind is the right wind."

Our penitential season which is climaxed by Yom Kippur, confronts us with this challenging question: Are you aware of any real meaning of what you are doing? Are you looking for a meaning? What does it mean to you, for example, that you are you

and not someone else? What does it mean to you that you are alive, that you have the privilege of living? What does it mean to you that you belong to this family and not to another, that you have been educated, or that you have enjoyed this or that special opportunity? Does it imply a specific challenge to you, a summons, a mandate? What does it mean to you that you are husband or father, wife or mother, brother or sister? What obligations does it entail? In a hundred ways you are different from your neighbor. What meaning do you ascribe to this distinctiveness?

What does living in the year 1950 mean to you? What does being an American mean to you? What does being a Jew mean to You? America is certainly more than a country. It is an idea, an erkindling idea, an historic, revolutionary idea. Men have spoken of the American dream. It is a dream. It is a vision of something new and spiritually majestic. It has a meaning. It is more than land, population and riches. Those who founded this republic spoke of certain self-evident truths, certain fundamental ideas touching freedom, human equality, and the rights of man. They were thinking of much more than a land mass called America. America is Bunker Hill and Valley Forge and the Bill of Rights. America is Gettysburg and the Second Inaugural and the Emancipation Proclamation. America is the covered wagon, the pioneering spirit, and triumphant confidence in unending human progress. America is the fair deal and the square deal, and the sharing of the things which we have with those in need. America is tolerance and good will and cooperation between men of all races and creeds. Assuredly, America has meaning.

But how many Americans are aware of this meaning in their daily lives? Certainly the bigot is not. The fomenter of racial hatreds is not. The champion of the poll tax and Jim Crow laws is not. The demagogue and the political witch hunter is not. Certainly those who abuse our free institutions to serve foreign dictators or those who have lost their faith in America so that by panic, fear and apprehension they would blindly destroy the very institutions which they wish to conserve - certainly they are not aware of the meaning of America. Nor the economic exploiter, the corrupt labor

agitator, the grasping cleric who would confound church and state, the professional militarist who would make of our country an armed camp and pour out our national resources to arm half the world against the other half! Certainly these people, though they are Americans living in America, do in every way ignore or betray the essential meaning of America.

What does it mean to be a Jew? Some people accept the fact of their Jewishness resignedly; others, indifferently; still others, regretfully. Some wish to ignore it; others, to evade it; still others, to obliterate it. They find no eager commitment in being Jews and no special consecration. But to be a Jew meaningfully is to live in such a way as to sanctify all life, to be loyal to a millennial tradition of high moral idealism which time and again revolutionized and molded the civilization of mankind. To be a Jew means courage to stand alone, if need be at the behest of great mandates given to us by the prophets of our people: "to be a light unto the nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon and those that sit in darkness out of the prison-house."

When one becomes consciously aware of the meaning of his Jewishness, he ceases to be an apologist, or a terrorized assimilationist. He becomes a proud champion and a joyous, living exponent of a confident and creative Jewish life. Then he becomes interested in conserving and in advancing all that has contributed to the enrichment and the effectiveness of Jewish life through the long ages. Then the criterion in all matters is not expediency, but service!

In the same way, when one becomes consciously aware of the meaning of his Americanism, he ceases to be a bigot, a patrioteer, a witch-hunter or just a drifter, tramping through life. He becomes a crusader for the American ideal. He becomes a fighter for true freedom and democracy at home, a champion of the fair deal and of social justice, a protagonist of racial equality and cooperation, a builder of the One World of which America is to be a great and glowing component part.

Let us learn to look at the meaning in all things. Let us not be too busy for wonderment and for quest. "Seeing many things, thou observest not" - is the solemn warning of this holy day. "And thou shalt grope at noonday as the blind gropeth in darkness" - is a grievous evil which applies to many people.

I go back to Moses, the most inspiring figure in our history. Moses was a shepherd in the wilderness of Horeb. There were other shepherds there. A bush began to burn. Moses saw the burning bush. The others presumably did not see it. It was there before their eyes. Moses alone saw it. Moses said: "I will approach. I want to see this marvelous spectacle. Why is this bush burning, and not being consumed?" Then, records the Bible, , when God saw that Moses was sufficiently taken with the wonderment and the desire to inquire and to understand the meaning of it all, "then God called unto him out of the midst of the bush" and gave him the mission and the mandate of his life.

The purpose of religion is to open our eyes to see through things into the heart of things, to infuse all knowledge with the glow of spiritual insight and ethical purpose, to see in blessed wonderment "all God's goodness" pass before our eyes and to be moved to eager emulation. Then our lives will have meaning, purpose and direction, and our years on earth, whether they be many or few, will never be empty years.

1) Holiest - 22nd - Casket - Recapitulation -

YK-50 1950 4

When we are asked to confess - measure - Targets -

Not to drag us - cover - lift our eyes - guide - compass

2) Awe and Solemnity - Fear - all that is Majesty - Sp. Majesty

In awe and solemnity we are asked to contemplate -

The themes of Sin - secondary - essential - day aim

3) Freedom! - a religion of F. Its purpose - Atonement -

Sin is serfdom - guilt is the enslavement

all forms of lust - heavy chains - retard -

Jud. wants men to be free! אין חסד - אין חסד

In summary vs. to acknowledge, abandon - masters - galling

(a) But also Social Freedom - Econ. + Pol. F.

10th Tishri - 22nd - Jubilee quote

3000 yrs ago - uprooted proletariat. The land belonged

In our day, farm asunder - farmers - "communism"

Who can deny behind social upheavals starved

and land-hungry - patrimony - Jubilee ?

Archbishop quote

(b) Here is one great goal - square up - ind. + soc. Justice

Also to remind us - hard to achieve - long.

Many ways - Fear! Russia - In panic - protect

by methods - Bills - Instalment - "Police State"

Terrorize - orthodox + conformists -

Gestapo - Concentration camps -

Iron hands - Butcher Frames - Nazi

(c) There can be F. only - Dem. can be preserved only
within a process of tested security - Bill of Rights

4/ Justice - Rel of - 1100 / 1000 / 1000 p38 - Moral edifice - (2)

Here is another - Are we just? As a Nation? F.E.C. - Jim Crow

5). Universal Brotherhood - Rel. & Brotherhood - not for Jews only.
חסד ורחמים . Torah - Nineveh - Let them perish! Flee

Should I not have just, "?

Jerusalem and Church - Working Ten and Muscov!

The Prophet - speak words - not divided world - Sacred

- welder - welding light -

It is not religion to preach preventive war - thunder

prestige - saving men - restoring broken harmonies

And rel. men must fear - great place time - dangerous

It is w/ in spirit, YIC. - harker - "yet 40 days..."

wise & compassionate hope - wide turn - all kinds

poli Cp lxxi - (Pirate)

6). Freedom - Justice - Brotherhood - Personal Morality - Chaucer

Sovereignty - Stability & Unity of Family life

Svd. holds hq soered - PL2 - Keep car free - defilement

+ immortality

Lev. 18 - Justo - perverseis oímputes - pagar

Revelation - identifying - defining - degraded way

קולת אדם

Jud. held marriage - divine institution - per nro war

exalted faith, piety, loyalty, purity & family life

Divnes - Permanent Ages - solidity & stability (Just)

Presented our ^{people} ~~mission~~ - alien concepts - approximately
its non-J. counterpart - weakening & rel. disaffection
along with econ. & social changes - undermining
- (loss of beauty - wholesomeness - love)

9/. Freedom - Justice - Brotherhood - Moral Integrity - it
is of these things that Y.K. speaks - resolutely -
These are the (Targets)! Train + discipline ourselves
- to shoot close to the mark -
- to walk straight towards the goal -
And in moving towards the goal - these are the ^{at the price of} ~~these are~~ lives -
deepest meaning and deepest satisfactions



LEVITICUS 25

- 8-10 ~~And thou shalt number seven sabbaths of years unto thee, seven times seven years; and there shall be unto thee the days of seven sabbaths of years, even forty and nine years.~~ Then shalt thou make proclamation with the blast of the horn on the tenth day of the seventh month; in the day of atonement shall ye make proclamation with the horn throughout all your land. And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land unto all the inhabitants thereof; it shall be a jubilee unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family.
- 23 And the land shall not be sold in perpetuity; for the land is Mine; for ye are strangers and settlers with Me.
- 35 And if thy brother be waxen poor, and his means fail with thee; then thou shalt uphold him: as a stranger and a settler shall he live with thee.
- 39-42 And if thy brother be waxen poor with thee, and sell himself unto thee, thou shalt not make him to serve as a bondservant. As a hired servant, and as a settler, he shall be with thee; he shall serve with thee unto the year of jubilee. Then shall he go out from thee, he and his children with him, and shall return unto his own family, and unto the possession of his fathers shall he return. For they are My servants, whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as bondmen.

NEW YORK TIMES 9/13/50 (Archbishop of Canterbury)

"We who can see the black tyranny of its creed fully revealed naturally denounce it. But we must frankly realize that in the Far East it can easily be seen not as a tyranny, but at present as a liberation. It does, indeed, offer in certain conditions and bring about a release from social evils too long and unheedingly accepted."

ISAIAH 58

- 3-7 "Wherefore have we fasted, and Thou seest not?
Wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and Thou takes no knowledge?" -
~~Behold, in the day of your fast ye pursue your business,~~
~~And exact all your labours.~~
Behold, ye fast for strife and contention,
And to smite with the fist of wickedness;
Ye fast not this day
So as to make your voice to be heard on high.
Is such the fast that I have chosen?
The day for a man to afflict his soul?
Is it to bow down his head as a bulrush?
And to spread sackcloth and ashes under him?
Wilt thou call this a fast,
And an acceptable day to the Lord?
Is not this the fast that I have chosen?
To loose the fetters of wickedness,
To undo the bands of the yoke,
~~And~~ to let the oppressed go free,
And that ye break every yoke?
Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry,
And that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house?
When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him,
And that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?

LEVITICUS 18

- 3 After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do; and after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, shall ye not do; neither shall ye walk in their ~~statutes~~ *customs*.

UNIVERSAL JEWISH ENCYCLOPEDIA - ~~In Talmudic and Medieval Times~~

~~"The legal status of woman under Jewish law compares to its advantage with that of contemporary civilization, and represents a development of the biblical legislation consistently favorable to woman."~~

"Family chastity, affection, piety, forbearance and joyousness, form the base of the pyramid on which the communal life was securely erected. Hence, the life of Jewry in the Ghetto period was independent of, and rose superior to, restrictions which must otherwise have proved demoralizing."



- 1) Death knocks on every door. - Woman brot dead child to the Buddah - "Go find a black mustard seed but not from any house where some one died - could not find. And when death knocks at doors where love was deep, the anguish of bereavement is difficult to assuage. ~~How often~~ How often has the cry burst forth from ravaged hearts: "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would I had died for thee, O Absalom my son, my son!"

2) But no one lives for another life, and no one dies for another death.

* When love is deep - ~~more tender~~ ^{there is a passionate wish} ~~that~~ would with to bury them dead back to life. Orpheus ^{might be intended to} ~~prayed~~ ^{prayed} that his young and beautiful bride, Eurydice ^{might be intended to} ~~he descended~~ ^{he descended} to the underworld, death, and there he ~~saw~~ ^{saw} her with his ^{own} ~~eyes~~ ^{eyes} which no one could resist - neither man nor beast - he ~~tried~~ ^{tried} to charm the gods, the underworld, so that they too would be given back to him. (Jude). Almost he succeeded - They gave her back to him on one condition - "that he ~~must~~ ^{must} not look back at her as she followed him, until they had reached the upper world." - They began their climb up from the darkness - But as they reached the threshold - he turned to her - It was too soon - she was still in the darkness. He held out his arms to clasp her - but she was gone. All he heard was one faint word, "Farewell"

4) Our faith would have us accept in resignation what cannot be changed by longing or remembrance.

It is good to die in old age, when the cycle of life has completed its course. But there are lives of long years but of empty days. And again, there are lives of short years of crowded and richly deserved days. Who knows whether a pattern is taken from the loom too quickly?"

(a) The brilliant R. Abin bar Hozal - died very young. The famous R. Ze'ira came to preach the funeral address. He used the verses Kohel 3:19 - "Sweet is the sleep"

of the laborer, whether he eat little or much." Abram bar Hizzab (2) had eaten little of his in the brief years allotted to him but by his labor he had achieved more than other men who are satisfied with time & years. He did not die before his time! He had completed his time! The world was complete & perfect. ~~like~~ that even as is the orbit of him who comes to the grave in ripe old age, as a shock of pain comes up in its season!

57 For no significant life ends with the grave. It lives on in
fruitful remembrance. How many of our lives continue
to be guided by the unseen hands of those who forewarned
us and those who influenced us? It is the remembrance and
invisible conduct, the powerful spiritual radar which guides
our life's craft to its destination.

6/ The Memorial Hour is to comfort us with the thought that ~~the~~ ^{our} dead whom we cannot ~~recall~~ ^{bring back to us} ⁱⁿ their bodily presence, have not been lost to us completely - as long as we reach out to remember them, if they merited remembrance.

memory is a form of immortality. As long as we remember and are remembered we are alive. Some wish to forget and some are quickly forgotten. It is not good to forget. It is tragic to be forgotten. Even the unpleasant & unhappy experiences of life - it is not good to forget. It is wise to profit from them and bravely to transcend them.

7/ In the 1st myth - Lethe was the river of Forgetfulness. It was on the way to the Underworld. The dead before they were ferried across the River Styx to the land of no return, were offered by ^{by Charon} a drink, the water of Lethe. A woman once came to the...
"I will forget how I have suffered" - "But ~~remember~~ you will forget also how you have rejoiced"
"My failures" "Your victories" — "Been hated" "Been loved"

the left untouched the cups of forgetfulness - inspired to retain ⁽³⁾
memory - suffering, pain, sorrow - love, triumph & joy.

8). It is good to remember - It is inevitable to be remembered!

We must want and achieve Remembrance!

Most lives are greatly forgotten, be. they have done nothing Memorable

- not on world-scale - not on stage of history -

For the closer, more intimate world of our families, circle
of our friends, community - where a life can be greatly
significant - thence memorable.

9). It is enough that a child remembers us in love & gratitude -
a husband or wife, a brother or sister, a parent, a friend.

We have not drifted out of life - We are in the world of the

living - ^{It is enough} (Lushchik) - community: Some dead, some survive.
Lights which never fail!

10/

10). Blessed is memory! Blessed are those who are remembered!



O Gods who rule the dark and silent world,
To you, all born of woman needs must come.
All lovely things at last go down to you.
You are the debtor who is always paid.
A little while we tarry up on earth.
Then we are yours forever and forever.
But I seek one who came to you too soon.
The bud was plucked before the flower bloomed.
I tried to bear my loss. I could not bear it.
~~Love was too strong a god. O King, you know~~
~~If that all tale men tell is true, how once~~
~~The flowers saw the rape of Proserpine.~~
① ~~Then~~ weave again for sweet Eurydice
Life's pattern that was taken from the loom
Too quickly. See, I ask a little thing,
Only that you will lend, not give, her to me.
She shall be yours when her years' span is full.

-Eu-ry'-di-ce