



## Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project

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

Series IV: Sermons, 1914-1963, undated.

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Yom Kippur, 1959.

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The liturgy of Yom Kippur is orchestrated like a great symphony. / The day-long service has a remarkable dramatic unity in spite of the ~~rich~~ variety of its meditations and the sharp contrasts ~~in~~ <sup>which one finds in</sup> ~~their~~ <sup>in</sup> moods. ~~THE~~ several movements, as it were, are held together by an unmistakable tonal ~~unity~~ <sup>quality</sup>. All the major chords are related to <sup>one</sup> dominant key-note. One hears in the <sup>is</sup> service ~~an~~ <sup>a</sup> ~~harmonious~~ concord of many of the ageless ~~and deathless~~ teachings of our religion. stop.

The pervading mood of the day is a somber one. It is a fast day. We are asked to fore-go food and drink and all the customary activities of our daily lives. "You stand this day before the Lord, your God". In the presence of the



great Tribunal, in the judgment hall of God, where our past is reviewed and our deeds are weighed as in a scale, <sup>how</sup> can ~~we~~ <sup>one</sup> be anything else but deeply earnest <sup>and</sup> solemn, <sup>way</sup> ~~and~~ more than solemn - troubled and disquieted? / For who among us has not sinned during the past year? Who among us has no bitter memories or sharp regrets for things done or left undone, for words spoken or left unspoken, for wounds inflicted wittingly or unwittingly? Every human soul is a mixture of light and darkness, of black and white and all the colors in between. "There is no man who sinneth not," and he who believes himself to be altogether sinless is the greatest sinner of all.

As long as we are unconscious of our short-comings, we remain unaware of our



possibilities, <sup>It is only</sup> ~~but~~ when we <sup>realize</sup> ~~acknowledge~~ that a great distance lies between where we are and where we <sup>or ought to be</sup> might be, <sup>that there</sup> ~~then we~~ ~~are on the way, with a high hope of~~ <sup>is</sup> ~~pressing forward and of some day reaching our destination..~~ <sup>our</sup> ~~getting there.~~ If we are persuaded, however, that where we are is <sup>our</sup> ultimate best and we are pleased and satisfied with ourselves - and that is ~~quite~~ often the case with people of great affluence <sup>and high position</sup> who regard their wealth <sup>and their position</sup> as a reward for <sup>pure</sup> merit - then we have come to the end of the road. We will never climb the higher trails towards loftier summits, and we will never see new vistas of fairer, nobler worlds. ~~The greater part of ourselves may never even be~~ While we may <sup>applied</sup> ~~continue to exist, we~~ <sup>shall certainly</sup> have stopped living.

And so the pervading mood of this day is a very pensive and reflective one. We are admonished to confess our sins, —



to confess them not to other men but to ourselves and to our God, for only we can correct them and only God can absolve us. We are urged to unburden our troubled consciences, to ask forgiveness of those whom we have wronged, and of God Who gave us <sup>the</sup> life which we may have wasted, and <sup>the</sup> gifts which we may have squandered, and <sup>the</sup> powers which we may have abused. / These <sup>exhortations</sup> all belong to the major theme of our Yom Kippur service; <sup>they</sup> ~~and~~ are a dominant movement in this day's majestic symphony. It is sad music, in the main, moving as it does in a world of shadows and drifting memories where the spirit of man grieves over lost opportunities and over things which might have been.



Into these solemn reflections on our moral inadequacies enter also additional reflections on our physical ~~frailties~~ <sup>weaknesses</sup>, <sup>infirmities</sup>, on our limited human strength, the brevity of our days upon earth, the unpredictable accidents and sorrows which cast their shadows over them, and the certain and inevitable end which awaits all men.

"What is man that Thou art mindful of him?" "He comes from the dust and unto dust he returns; he is <sup>וְהוּא כְּעָפָר</sup> like unto a broken shard, <sup>כְּעָפָר וְכִדְמָה</sup> like grass that withers ~~and like a flower that fades. He is like a fleeting shadow, a passing cloud,~~ <sup>וְכִדְמָה וְכִדְמָה</sup> like floating dust <sup>כְּעָפָר וְכִדְמָה</sup> and like a dream that flies away". <sup>step</sup>

<sup>Included in</sup> ~~As part of~~ the ritual of Yom Kippur is ~~also~~ a memorial service, when we are led to think of death and to recall



our dear departed. <sup>Sorrowfully</sup> There is borne <sup>in</sup> upon  
us the <sup>realization</sup> ~~ineluctable~~ fact that there is  
no life without death and no love without  
loss. We are faced with the impenetrable  
mysteries which surround our lives, the  
unseen hand of God which holds us as the  
potter the clay, the weaver the loom, the  
mason the stone which he fashions. stop

As part of this memorial service we <sup>are</sup>  
<sup>also asked to</sup> recall, ~~too~~, the men and women of Israel,  
the great and the good who died in many  
lands, in distant ages and in our own time,  
for the sanctification of God's name.  
Why did these martyrs die? What purpose  
did their innocent deaths serve? What is  
the meaning of sacrifice? And where is  
the reward for righteousness?



All these thoughts are focused in our Yom Kippur liturgy. Not one is missing. All the pathos and tragedy of life, all the bafflements of the human mind, all the paradoxes of the human <sup>situation</sup> ~~story~~. stop

But is that all? Is that the <sup>real</sup> ~~compelling~~ keynote of the day, <sup>and</sup> the full score? Is there no contrast in mood, no answering chords and no ultimate reconciliation? Decidedly there is! For if there were not, ~~the day of~~ Yom Kippur would be altogether a melancholy day ~~of dejection~~, and the spirit of the worshipper would be drained <sup>of hope</sup> and wrung with desolation.

<sup>But</sup> Our religion does not wish us to be cast down but <sup>to become enriched and inspired of soul.</sup> ~~to be~~ uplifted. Through dark corridors we are led on this day, from even-tide to even-tide, to resplen-



dent chambers which are filled with <sup>radiant</sup> sun-  
<sup>light</sup> ~~shine~~ and peace. <sup>TP</sup> At the very outset of  
the day's service, before the solemn  
chant of the Kol Nidre is heard, there is  
announced as the very text and <sup>summary</sup> ~~resume~~ of  
all that is to follow the great words of  
the Psalmist, " <sup>אור נזרע ליראים ושמחה תוליד להם</sup> " <sup>אור נזרע ליראים ושמחה תוליד להם</sup>

"Light is sown for the righteous and  
gladness for the upright in heart". And  
at the conclusion of the day - twenty-  
four hours later - the service rises to  
a mighty crescendo - " <sup>אור נזרע ליראים ושמחה תוליד להם</sup> "

"There is God!"

~~"The Lord He is God!"~~. Then the chal-  
lenging, triumphant notes of the Shofar  
are sounded, as if to say: <sup>"O son of man,</sup> "Be not afraid!  
Be not cast down! There is God! And be-  
cause there is God, there is ~~wise~~ purpose  
<sup>and meaning</sup> in the universe, and goodness will triumph,



and justice and brotherhood will some day be established on earth and there will be light for the righteous and joy for the upright in heart". stop

To be sure, there is sin in the world, but there is also repentance and forgiveness. Our day is called not Yom Haḥataim, the Day of Sins, but Yom Haḳḳipurim, the Day of Forgiveness, ~~and Atonement~~. "For on this day you shall be forgiven for all your sins, before God you shall be pure". It is a day of היום and הסליחה - of forgiveness and grace. No man is doomed because of his past mistakes. The gates of repentance are never shut. God waits for us at every cross-road of our lives, however long we may have been away and however far we may



have ~~wandered~~<sup>strayed</sup>, and in love He welcomes us back to His paternal arms. Until the very day of our death, He waits for us. ~~Though men forsake Him, no one is ever forsaken of God.~~ For such is His mercy and compassion. "He is our Father and we are His children; He is our shepherd and we are His flock."

Because there is unlimited repentance for man and boundless forgiveness in God, man is free. He can renew himself, he can start fresh again. Nothing is irrevocable; nothing is final and terminal. Man can regain mastery over his moral destiny; and with mastery and freedom come dignity and honor.



This is why the Book of Jonah is read as part of the service of this day.

Nineveh, that exceedingly great and exceedingly wicked city, was doomed. God

had decreed its destruction. / Jonah, the *who discerned much of the ways of God, but not enough.* prophet, *was* greatly pleased. At long

last this city of sin and crime, the enemy of Israel, the capital of the Assyrian

Empire which had terrorized the whole world, was about to receive its just de-

serts. It would be destroyed by a just and righteous God. / But God, Who is not

only just and righteous, but also gracious ~~and merciful~~ and abounding in love, wished <sup>d</sup>

to give Nineveh another chance; and so He commanded Jonah to go to Nineveh and warn its people of their impending fate. Per-

haps they <sup>will</sup> ~~would~~ repent, and the evil



decree would be averted. Jonah, however, unwilling to be the messenger of a warning which might <sup>possibly</sup> save them, fled to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord. But he was brought back by the hand of God and forced to proclaim what he had been commissioned to proclaim. The people of Nineveh did repent. They proclaimed a fast, cried mightily unto God, turned away from their evil ways and from the violence which was in their hands. "God repented of the evil which He said He would do to them, and He did not do it". Jonah was exceedingly displeased, but the heart of God, the Father, <sup>of all men</sup> Who has pity on all his children, even the erring and the sinful, rejoiced because they <sup>had repented and</sup> ~~did~~ <sup>would not</sup> ~~not have to~~ be destroyed. <sup>TP</sup> Always another



chance!... <sup>R</sup>This is why in ancient Israel the Jubilee Year - the fiftieth year of freedom and redemption - was proclaimed on Yom Kippur. This is why the Shofar is still sounded at the conclusion of our Yom Kippur services. " On the Day of Atonement you shall send abroad the trumpet throughout the land and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. Each man shall return to his property and each one to his family....the land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is Mine. If your brother becomes poor, and sells part of his property, then his next of kin shall come and redeem what his brother had sold. And if a man has no one to redeem it, then in the Jubilee Year it <sup>must</sup> ~~shall~~ be released and be returned to him.



If your brother becomes poor and sells himself to you for service, he shall serve <sup>only</sup> until the year of the Jubilee. Then he shall go out from you, he and his children with him, and go back to his own family, and return to the possession of his fathers. For they are My servants, whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold into perpetual slavery."

Whether the provisions of this law of the Jubilee, which ~~are~~ <sup>is</sup> based on the highest principles of justice and humanity, were ever fully carried out in ancient Israel, it is difficult to say. But their noble spiritual motive is clear. Men must not be shackled forever to poverty, to debts which they cannot pay.



They must not forever be landless and uprooted, forever hopeless slaves. There must be a time for a new beginning! *There must always be another chance!*

Here is brighter and happier music - set to a more confident and heartening theme. It, too, is part of the heroic symphony of Yom Kippur.

*And* When we are made aware by the ancient prayers of this day of our physical limitations - that "our strength is not the strength of stones, nor our flesh brass" - it is <sup>only</sup> to point out to us, by contrast, that in mind and spirit, in purpose, quest and aspiration, we are but a little lower than the angels, and are endowed with power and strength. We are co-workers of God, and in His strength we



can find our strength and our song. When we do God's work in the world, we become "like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters fail not".

Even the reflections upon death which the memorial service of this day induces in us are designed not to plunge us into <sup>the things which do not die; of immortal love and ~~dear~~ memories</sup> despair but to remind us of <sup>and ~~hope~~ shores beyond the carrying tides of death. We are alerted</sup> ~~how~~ precious <sup>ness to</sup> ~~life is~~ and how purposefully we should use each passing day and each fleeting hour. ~~and~~ <sup>It is not of death that we should be</sup> ~~use them to the utmost. We should be~~ afraid, ~~not of death~~, but of never having lived, and of never having lived in such a way as to leave behind us proud and blessed memories to accompany our dear ones through their life. Death, <sup>should be thought</sup> ~~too, is~~ <sup>of as</sup> only a mysterious <sup>new</sup> beginning in the everlasting mercy of God.



Similarly the recollection of our martyred dead is a call to the unconquerable spirit of man. Our religion was the first in all the annals of mankind for which men were prepared to die. We gave the first martyrs to religious faith and loyalty. ~~Our religion lives because men died for it.~~ This is a proud heritage. To fore-go all the prizes of the world and to cling unflinchingly through long dark centuries to the faith of a despised and persecuted minority - is not this the <sup>very</sup> crowning triumph of the human spirit, and does it not challenge us to admiration and emulation? <sup>TR</sup> There is no wasted sacrifice in God's world, and every act of high courage lives in the immortality



of its influence upon the lives of on-  
and is absorbed in the unseen essence of all that is noble, free and  
beautiful in the flowering life of ~~mankind~~ <sup>humanity</sup> coming generations. <sup>^^</sup> "Precious in the  
sight of the Lord is the death of His  
saints" - and equally precious in the  
sight of all mankind. stop.

The keynote of this day is, therefore,  
far from being one of unrelieved sadness, <sup>all in the minor key.</sup>  
<sup>It is not one dark reverie. Rather it is a hymn to life, life</sup>  
<sup>rising on the ruins of pain, sin and sorrow to victory and achievement.</sup>  
Our Rabbis declared that on "Yom Kippur"  
one should not appear depressed and in  
somber clothes, as suppliants before a  
human judge, but joyous, dressed in fes-  
tive white, betokening a cheerful and  
confident spirit". / Many things remain  
hidden and unresolved. With every new  
insight comes a new obscurity. <sup>and we remain forever incomplete and at first.</sup> But there  
is God! "וְלֵךְ בְּלֵב חָזָק" And because there  
is God - "My hopes, my thoughts, my fears,  
Thou seest all....When Thou upholdest,



who can make me fall? Thy hand will  
hold me fast and draw me near to Thee,  
my King and my Lord". <sup>אֱלֹהֵינוּ הוּא</sup> There is  
<sup>אֱלֹהֵינוּ הוּא</sup> God! and, therefore, "Return, O my soul,  
to your rest; for the Lord will deal  
bountifully with you. He will deliver  
your soul from death, your eyes from tears,  
your feet from stumbling. Walk, there-  
fore, before the Lord, in the land of  
the living".

Abba Hillel  
Silver

October  
1959



The liturgy of Yom Kippur is orchestrated like a great symphony. The day-long service has a remarkable dramatic unity in spite of the rich variety of its meditations and the sharp contrasts in moods. The several movements, as it were, are held together by an unmistakable tonal unity. All the major chords are related to a dominant key-note. One hears in the service an harmonious concord of many of the ageless and deathless teachings of our religion.

The pervading mood of the day is a somber one. It is a fast day. We are asked to fore-go food and drink and all the customary activities of our daily lives. "You stand this day before the Lord, your God". In the presence of the



great Tribunal, in the judgment hall of God, where our past is reviewed and our deeds are weighed as in a scale, can we be anything else but deeply earnest, solemn and more than solemn - troubled and disquieted? For who among us has not sinned during the past year? Who among us has no bitter memories or sharp regrets for things done or left undone, for words spoken or left unspoken, for wounds inflicted wittingly or unwittingly? Every human soul is a mixture of light and darkness, of black and white and all the colors in between. There is no man who sinneth not - and he who believes himself to be altogether sinless is the greatest sinner of all.

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possibilities, but when we acknowledge that a great distance lies between where we are and where we might be, then we are on the way, with a high hope of getting there. If we are persuaded, however, that where we are is our ultimate best and we are pleased and satisfied with ourselves - and that is quite often the case with people of great affluence who regard their wealth as a reward for merit - then we have come to the end of the road. We will never climb the higher trails towards loftier summits, and we will never see new vistas of fairer, nobler worlds. While we may continue to exist, we have stopped living.

And so the pervading mood of this day is a very pensive and reflective one. We are admonished to confess our sins,



to confess them not to other men but to ourselves and to our God, for only we can correct them and only God can absolve us. We are urged to unburden our troubled consciences, to ask forgiveness of those whom we have wronged, and of God Who gave us life which we may have wasted, and gifts which we may have squandered, and powers which we may have abused. These all belong to the major theme of our Yom Kippur service and are a dominant movement in this day's majestic symphony. It is sad music, in the main, moving as it does in a world of shadows and drifting memories where the spirit of man grieves over lost opportunities and over things which might have been.



Into these solemn reflections on our moral inadequacies enter also additional reflections on our physical weaknesses, on our limited human strength, the brevity of our days upon earth, the unpredictable accidents and sorrows which cast their shadows over them, and the certain and inevitable end which awaits all men.

"What is man that Thou art mindful of him?" "He comes from the dust and unto dust he returns; he is like unto a broken shard, like grass that withers and like a flower that fades. He is like a fleeting shadow, a passing cloud, like floating dust and like a dream that flies away".

As part of the ritual of Yom Kippur is also a memorial service. When we are led to think of death and to re<sup>call</sup>



our dear departed. There is borne upon us the ineluctable fact that there is no life without death and no love without loss. We are faced with the impenetrable mysteries which surround our lives, the unseen hand of God which holds us as the potter the clay, the weaver the loom, the mason the stone which he fashions.

As part of this memorial service we recall, too, the men and women of Israel, the great and the good who died in many lands in distant ages and in our own time for the sanctification of God's name. Why did these martyrs die? What purpose did their innocent deaths serve? What is the meaning of sacrifice? And where is the reward for righteousness?



All these thoughts are focused in our Yom Kippur liturgy. Not one is missing. All the pathos and tragedy of life, all the bafflements of the human mind, all the paradoxes of the human story.

But is that all? Is that the compelling keynote of the day, the full score? Is there no contrast in mood, no answering chords and no ultimate reconciliation? Decidedly there is! For if there were not, the day of Yom Kippur would be altogether a melancholy day of dejection, and the spirit of the worshipper would be drained and wrung with desolation.

Our religion does not wish us to be cast down but to be uplifted. Through dark corridors we are led on this day from even-tide to even-tide, to resplen-



dent chambers which are filled with sunshine and peace. At the very outset of the day's service, before the solemn chant of the Kol Nidre is heard, there is announced as the very text and resumé of all that is to follow the great words of the Psalmist, "

"Light is sown for the righteous and gladness for the upright in heart". And at the conclusion of the day - twenty-four hours later - the service rises to a mighty crescendo - "

"The Lord He is God!". Then the challenging, triumphant notes of the Shofar are sounded, as if to say: "Be not afraid! Be not cast down! There is God! And because there is God, there is wise purpose in the universe and goodness will triumph,



and justice and brotherhood will some day be established on earth and there will be light for the righteous and joy for the upright in heart".

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and - of forgiveness and grace.

No man is doomed because of his past mistakes. The gates of repentance are never shut. God waits for us at every cross-road of our lives, however long we may have been away and however far we may



have wandered, and in love He welcomes us back to His paternal arms. Until the very day of our death, He waits for us. Though men forsake Him, no one is ever forsaken of God. For such is His mercy and compassion. He is our Father and we are His children; He is our shepherd and we are His flock.

Because there is unlimited repentance for man and boundless forgiveness in God, man is free. He can renew himself, he can start fresh again. Nothing is irrevocable; nothing is final and terminal. Man can regain mastery over his moral destiny, and with mastery and freedom come dignity and honor.



This is why the Book of Jonah is read as part of the service of this day. Nineveh, that exceedingly great and exceedingly wicked city, was doomed. God had decreed its destruction. Jonah, the prophet, was greatly pleased. At long last this city of sin and crime, the enemy of Israel, the capital of the Assyrian Empire which had terrorized the whole world, was about to receive its just deserts. It would be destroyed by a just and righteous God. But God, Who is not only just and righteous, but also gracious and merciful and abounding in love, wished to give Nineveh another chance and so He commanded Jonah to go to Nineveh and warn its people of their impending fate. Perhaps they would repent, and the evil




decree would be averted. Jonah, however, unwilling to be the messenger of a warning which might save them, fled to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord. But he was brought back by the hand of God and forced to proclaim what he had been commissioned to proclaim. The people of Nineveh did repent. They proclaimed a fast, cried mightily unto God, turned away from their evil ways and from the violence which was in their hands. "God repented of the evil which He said He would do to them, and He did not do it". Jonah was exceedingly displeased, but the heart of God, the Father, Who has pity on all his children, even the erring and the sinful, rejoiced because they did not have to be destroyed. Always another



chance! This is why in ancient Israel the Jubilee Year - the fiftieth year of freedom and redemption - was proclaimed Yom Kippur. This is why the Shofar is still sounded at the conclusion of our Yom Kippur services. " On the Day of Atonement you shall send abroad the trumpet throughout the land and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. Each man shall return to his property and each one to his family....the land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is Mine. If your brother becomes poor, and sells part of his property, then his next of kin shall come and redeem what his brother has sold. And if a man has no one to redeem it, then in the Jubilee Year it shall be released and be returned to him.



If your brother becomes poor and sells himself to you for service, he shall serve until the year of the Jubilee. Then he shall go out from you, he and his children with him, and go back to his own family, and return to the possession of his fathers. For they are My servants, whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold into perpetual slavery."



Whether the provisions of this law of the Jubilee which are based on the highest principles of justice and humanity were ever fully carried out in ancient Israel, it is difficult to say. But their noble spiritual motive is clear. Men must not be shackled forever to poverty, to debts which they cannot pay.



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can find our strength and our song. When we do God's work in the world, we become "like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters fail not".

Even the reflections upon death which the memorial service of this day induces in us are designed not to plunge us into despair but to remind us of how precious life is and how purposefully we should use each passing day and each fleeting hour, use them to the utmost. We should be afraid not of death, but of never having lived, and of never having lived in such a way as to leave behind us proud and blessed memories to accompany our dear ones through their life. Death, too, is only a mysterious beginning in the everlasting mercy of God.



Similarly the recollection of our martyred dead is a call to the unconquerable spirit of man. Our religion was the first in all the annals of mankind for which men were prepared to die. We gave the first martyrs to religious faith and loyalty. Our religion lives because men died for it. This is a proud heritage. To fore-go all the prizes of the world and to cling unflinchingly through long dark centuries to the faith of a despised and persecuted minority - is not this the crowning triumph of the human spirit, and does it not challenge us to admiration and emulation? There is no wasted sacrifice in God's world, and every act of high courage lives in the immortality.



of its influence upon the lives of on-coming generations. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints" - and equally precious in the sight of all mankind.

The keynote of this day is, therefore, far from being one of unrelieved sadness. Our Rabbis declared that on "Yom Kippur one should not appear depressed and in somber clothes, as suppliants before a human judge, but joyous, dressed in festive white, betokening a cheerful and confident spirit". Many things remain hidden and unresolved. With every new insight comes a new obscurity. But there is God! "And because there is God - My hopes, my thoughts, my fears, Thou seest all.....When Thou upholdest,



who can make me fall? Thy hand will hold me fast and draw me near to Thee, my King and my Lord". There is God! and, therefore, "Return, O my soul, to your rest; for the Lord will deal bountifully with you. He will deliver your soul from death, your eyes from tears, your feet from stumbling. Walk, therefore, before the Lord, in the land of the living".

Abba Hillel  
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