



## 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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Day of Atonement, 1960.

Our Yom Kippur morning service is introduced by a beautiful poem which was composed by the famous Hebrew poet of the eleventh century, Solomon Ibn Galirol of Spain. The opening lines of this poem are:

לֵיל חַר אֶצְדֶּקֶלְךָ  
 "At dawn do I seek Thee, My Rock and refuge strong."

-- יָצִיחֶיךָ אֶפְרוֹחַ לַיִל וְאֶפְרוֹחַ הַבֹּקֶר --

"I set before Thee both my morning and my evening song."

This poem of Ibn Galirol directly echoes the moving opening lines of Psalm 63:

אֵלֹהִים אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹתֵינוּ, אֵלֹהֵי אֲבֹתֵינוּ  
 "O, God, Thou art My God, early do I seek Thee"

לִי נִפְשִׁי תַשְׁכָּח  
 "My soul thirsts for Thee"

לִי נִפְשִׁי תַשְׁכָּח  
 "My flesh faints for Thee" כִּי כַּמֶּלֶךְ בְּאֶרֶץ חֲדָשׁ  
 "As in a dry and weary land where no water is".

The quest of God is the constant theme and refrain of many of the great prayers and songs of our sacred literature. Now why does man seek God? Why does he reach out for God as a thirsty man reaches out for water in a dry and weary land? Why does man really need God?

There are men who think that they do not need God. They can get along without God. They act as if there were no God. Such men, seemingly sufficient unto themselves, nevertheless often choose ~~for themselves~~ lesser gods to whom they dedicate both their morning and their evening prayers. For no man lives without some god to adore. It may be money that is their idol before which they prostrate themselves. Or power, or title, or position, or some other supreme desire or some work of their own hands. Some make an idol of intellect and ascribe to it all power and value. It <sup>is</sup> usually people who have enjoyed prolonged periods of material stability, whom prosperity has made insensitive to the dark mysteries of life and to the unpredictable accidents of fortune, who become "full and deny and say, "Who is the Lord?" It is



of such men that the prophet Isaiah spoke: "Their land is filled with idols; they bow down to the work of their own hands, to what their own fingers have made"... These people are religious in a sacrilegious sense... They do sacrifice but to spirits and demons which are not God *אלהים ילדיו ילדיו ילדיו*. They build altars to gods who often turn out to be cruel and consuming ~~holochs~~ *holochs*. The prophet Jeremiah warned men against such heathen worship. "Thus says the Lord: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, the Lord who exercises mercy, justice and righteousness in the earth"."

But why do men who do not glory in their wisdom or their might or their riches, why do they seek God? What does He give them? What great need does He satisfy in their lives? *Such* ~~The~~ seekers are many, greater by far than the number of those who <sup>would</sup> acknowledge it, even to themselves. *There are many reasons. I wish to speak (to-night) of three major ones.*  
In the first place, God satisfies man's need for hope. Man must have the confidence that the struggle in which he is engaged all his life against forces within and without is neither futile nor meaningless. Science cannot give him that assurance. A scientific age, reared in materialism, may, and frequently does become, as our own age has become, a pessimistic age. Our modern pessimism is based not on the belief that knowledge will not increase, but on the belief that increased knowledge brings ~~us~~ only decreased happiness, nobility and security. In the last fifty years science has advanced more than in the previous two thousand years, and yet tension and fear of universal catastrophe has never been as great as it is in our generation. Mankind never felt itself to be so close to the brink of disaster. Man's personal <sup>too</sup> life is beset with many frustrations, disappointments and defeats. No life is ever <sup>unbroken</sup> an ~~even~~ road of success and serenity. How often do the things we strive for most



and with <sup>so much</sup> ~~such~~ effort and sweat of soul escape us! Where shall we find the wings to rise again after we have been beaten down? Only faith can help us build upon ruins. Job's bitterest complaint was "My days are spent without hope". He would feel secure if only there were hope. On the gates of Hell, Dante found ~~inserted~~ <sup>inscribed</sup> these dread words: "Abandon hope, all ye who enter here".

The belief that there is a good God who sustains and rules the universe, in Whose hands are our lives and destinies, nourishes confidence in man, creates a climate of hope at all times, and gives him courage for ideals and aspirations. It may even give <sup>the solitary spirit in its struggle after truth</sup> ~~him~~ the strength for martyrdom, the strength not only to seek truth but to be prepared, if need be, to die for it.

"I keep the Lord always before me. He is at my right hand.

Therefore I shall not be moved."

אני אהיה ביד ימינו  
לכן לא אנוח

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"I shall not be moved". In God man finds the strength to with-stand trial. He accepts whatever comes without undue murmuring and questioning because he regards them as the dispensation of the wise Master of the Universe, Who does not willingly afflict His children. The meaning of God's actions is not always clear to him -- but he believes in all trust that they are not blind or cruel or purposeless.

Judaism has often been characterized as a Messianic faith -- that is, a religion of boundless hopefulness. It always spoke of what will happen in the End of Days -- <sup>אשר יבוא ביום ה' אלהינו</sup> . The present is never the last moment in history. Today may be trouble and darkness but -- <sup>אך לא תהיה חשך</sup>

<sup>אני אהיה ביד ימינו</sup> -- "I will turn the darkness before them into light, and the rough places into level ground." There is a tomorrow, which men, by their efforts and exertions can hasten, when "nations will beat their swords into plowshares",



when "every man will live under his vine and under his fig-tree and none shall make him afraid", "When the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea". There is hope for peace and unity and human brotherhood. There is hope for man, even for the sinner and the transgressor. This is the very meaning of our Yom Kippur. The gates of repentance and return are always open. There is always the *דלת פתוחה* -- the door of hope which is never shut. No human life need forever remain shut up in its own darkness. Open the door, and there is the new life!

Our people spoke of God as

*תקוה ישראל* -- "the Hope of Israel."

There were certainly many dark stretches of misery and suffering in our people's ~~of~~ history when, without this hope, it would certainly have succumbed. But because there was God, there was hope; and the mystery of suffering was sanctified through a ministry of service, and made endurable by the divine promise:

*והיית בלתי נשבר* -- "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you -- *אני אהיה עמך*  
"and the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you," *והנהרות לא יכריעוך*.  
"When you walk through fire you shall not be burned," *והאש לא תשרףך*.  
"and the flame shall not consume you," *והאש לא תאכלך* for I am the  
Lord, your God."

Yes, man needs God, and nations need God, because they need hope -- not a single, specific hope, but an attitude, a climate of confident hopefulness.

Again, man needs God because he needs a sense of dignity in his life. There is so much *about him* which suggests to him that he is ~~mere~~ mere driftwood *carried along* on swift currents *accident,* beyond his direction or control. He is finite and mortal, subject to disease, ~~and~~ death and decay. He is a speck of palpitating dust in a vast universe, held captive



by dark, impersonal and often hostile forces. How can he live with and thrive upon such depressing and demoralizing ideas? He must surmount them if he is ever to create anything worth-while in the world; for without pride in one's self and one's work, nothing is ever achieved. Faith in God gives man this spiritual pride, the assurance that he is the co-worker of God in creation, that he has been endowed by the Creator of the universe with <sup>tasks and</sup> powers which give him dominion over the works of ~~God's~~ <sup>His</sup> hands. He is linked with the Eternal in carrying out His creative purposes. He is therefore crowned with glory and honor. For <sup>a</sup> ~~the~~ man who does God's work in the world is ennobled by that service. *With faith a man can walk on earth and yet live among the stars.*

A man never rises above the god whom he worships. If the god is himself, then that is his final height and stature. If it is money -- that is his final worth. If it is position, that is his final stopping place. But all of these goals are too small and insufficient for man whose soul is fashioned in the image of God. If a man, however, worships and reveres the infinite God, he rises to a dignity which nothing else in the world can give him. He may be poor and unknown, but he belongs to the humble in God, of whom it is said in our Holy Writ, that they will inherit the earth.

And man needs God too, in order to have an authority, higher than himself, with which to challenge and defend himself against tyranny, whether it be the tyranny of the ruler, the state, the class, or society itself. ~~We~~ <sup>He</sup> must claim kinship with One Who is above all, and from Whom all men derive their basic human rights. In His name, and in the name of His higher moral law, he can then challenge all the usurpers of society who would rob him of his freedom or would put shackles upon his body or mind.

How often have men who rebelled against tyranny marshalled religious faith and authority to justify their political revolutions! How often have they proclaimed that resistance to tyrants was obedience to God!



The long and bitter struggle in our own country to free the slaves received its irresistible momentum and drive, not from science or economics or any materialistic interpretation of history, but from a profound religious conviction, which could not be permanently denied or suppressed or contradicted, that the enslavement of human beings was contrary to the law of God!

"Love thy neighbor as thyself" -- did not come out of any scientific laboratory. The authority for it was *אני ה' אלהי*, I, the Lord, ordain it as the guiding principle for human existence on earth.

It was in the name of divine, not human, authority that a prophet dared challenge a king who had done wrong; that Nathan, the prophet, could hurl the indictment of sin against King David, crying out <sup>to him</sup> "thou art the man", guilty of having slain a faithful servant, out of lust for his wife, and move the king to humble contrition and repentance. It was in the name of a God of justice that Elijah could condemn King Ahab, and his scheming Queen, Jezebel, for having destroyed a good man because they coveted his ancestral vineyard. A single man, however weak and defenseless, with God on his side, <sup>is always on the right</sup> is always in the majority, and his cause will always be vindicated. <sup>Then</sup> ~~They~~ were not idle words, no ecstatic hyperboles, which the Psalmist uttered: "The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer, my God in whom I take refuge, my shield and my stronghold."

There are times when strong men are curbed and wise men are humbled, not by being told that they are not strong or wise, but that their action is sacrilege, an insult to God. The Talmud tells <sup>of a</sup> ~~that the~~ noted scholar, Rabbi Eleazar ben Simeon, <sup>who</sup> was coming one day from the house of his teacher and was riding leisurely on his donkey by the riverside, feeling happy and elated because he had studied much Torah. There chanced to meet him an exceedingly ugly man who greeted him, 'Peace be with you, <sup>Rabbi</sup> ~~sir~~!'. Rabbi Eleazar, however, did not return the salutation. <sup>he</sup> ~~Instead,~~ replied <sup>in contempt</sup> "Raca", Good-for-nothing, how ugly you are! The poor man, <sup>shakes</sup> replied: 'I do not know, but go and tell the craftsman who made me, "How ugly is the vessel which you have made!"....



Rabbi Eleazar realized what a horrible thing he had done. This "Raca" -- this Good-for-nothing -- did not answer insult with insult. He did not enter into an altercation with the Rabbi. He asked that his case be taken before God! He appealed to a higher tribunal which they both acknowledged. Was he not also a child of God? Let the Rabbi tell God, how ugly is the vessel which He had made! The sorely afflicted man found his refuge and vindication in God. God was the source of his authority. The learned Rabbi who had studied much Torah -- but <sup>who</sup> had forgotten that love of God and man was the very heart of it, the Rabbi who had felt himself so secure in his great learning, dismounted from his donkey, knelt down before the man and said to him: "Forgive me. I have sinned. I <sup>absent</sup> ~~submit~~ myself to your compassion, forgive me". And in the name of a God of forgiveness, the humble man forgave the noted scholar.

Why do men need God? For hope, to sustain them in all the checkered vicissitudes of their lives. For dignity, to endow their brief and vulnerable lives with meaning and mission, with power and dominion. For authority, to resist and combat all the evil forces of society.

Yom Kippur reminds us of these major human needs and of how they can be met in God. It also reminds us that those who ~~wish to~~ seek God will find Him always near at hand; that, in fact, God is always waiting for man, nay, seeking him <sup>on the way</sup>.

21 (13 N) - 1383.8 k "If you seek Him, He will/ <sup>be</sup> readily found," And, further, that the road upon which man ~~may~~ can find God, winds through fields of righteousness, and highlands of love, ~~through doing justly, loving mercy and walking in probity with~~

DR. ABBA HILLEL SILVER

YOM KIPPUR  
September, 1960



THE QUEST OF GOD

Sermon, The Temple

Yom Kippur, 1960

Our Yom Kippur morning service is introduced by a beautiful poem which was composed by the famous Hebrew poet<sub>x</sub> of the eleventh century, Solomon ibn Gabirol of Spain. The opening lines of this are:

Shachar avakeish'cha tzuri u'misgavi

"At daw<sub>n</sub> do I seek thee, my Rock and refuge strong

E'eroch l'fanechah shachari v'gam aravi

"I set before Thee both my morning and my evening song."

This poem of Ibn Gabirol directly echoes the moving lines of Psalm 63: "O, God, Thou art my God, early do I seek Thee, my soul thirsts for Thee, my flesh faints for Thee. As in a dry and weary land where no water is."

(Go to page one, paragraph two. Begin with "The quest of God. . . ")



"The Quest of God"

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לֵיל אֶרְבֶּה לְךָ "At dawn do I seek Thee, My Rock and refuge strong."

-- אֶשְׁחִיזְךָ אֶפְתּוֹק לְפָנֶיךָ וְלֵיל עָרִיב --

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→ The quest of God is the constant theme and refrain of many of the great prayers and songs of our sacred literature. Now why does man seek God? Why does he reach out for God as a thirsty man reaches out for water in a dry and weary land? Why does man really need God?

There are men who think that they do not need God. They can get along without God. They act as if there were no God. Such men, seemingly sufficient unto themselves, nevertheless often choose ~~for themselves~~ lesser gods to whom they dedicate both their morning and their evening prayers. For no man lives without some god to adore. ~~It may be~~ <sup>maybe the</sup> money ~~that is their~~ idol before which they prostrate themselves. Or power, or title, or position, or some other supreme desire or some work of their own hands. Some make an idol of intellect and ascribe to it all power and value. <sup>those</sup> It is usually people who have enjoyed prolonged periods of material stability, whom prosperity has made insensitive to the dark mysteries of life and to the unpredictable accidents of fortune, who become "full" and ~~deny~~ and say, "Who is the Lord?" It is



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The belief that there is a good God who sustains and rules the universe, in Whose hands are our lives and destinies, nourishes confidence in man, creates a climate of hope at all times, and gives him courage for ideals and aspirations. It may even give <sup>the solitary spirit in its struggle with death</sup> him the strength for martyrdom, the strength not only to seek truth but to be prepared, if need be, to die for it.

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BAAL Empt  
Boal Emot

~~Chap 62 - 13/11/12~~  
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He accepts whatever comes without undue murmuring and questioning because he regards them as the dispensation of the wise Master of the Universe, Who does not willingly afflict His children. The meaning of God's actions is not always clear to him -- but he believes in all trust that they are not blind or cruel or purposeless.

Judaism has often been characterized as a Messianic faith -- that is, a religion of boundless hopefulness. It always spoke of what will happen in the End of Days -- ~~and the world will be at peace~~. The present is never the last moment in history. Today may be trouble and darkness but -- ~~the light will come~~ -- "I will turn the darkness before them into light, and the rough places into level ground." There is a tomorrow, which men, by their efforts and exertions can hasten, when "nations will beat their swords into plowshares",



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Baal Emot: "I shall not be moved". In God man finds the strength to withstand trial. He accepts whatever comes without undue murmuring and questioning because he regards them as the dispensation of the wise Master of the Universe, Who does not willingly afflict His children. The meaning of God's actions is not always clear to him--but he believes in all trust that they are not blind or cruel or purposeless.

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when "every man will live under his vine and under his fig-tree and none shall make him afraid", "when the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea". There is hope for peace and unity and human brotherhood. There is hope for man, even for the sinner and the transgressor. This is the very meaning of our Yom Kippur. The gates of repentance and return are always open. There is always the ~~דלת תמיד פתוחה~~ <sup>Petach Tikvah</sup> -- the door of hope which is never shut. No human life need forever remain shut up in its own darkness. Open the door, and there is the new life!

Our people spoke of God as ~~מקוה ישראל~~ <sup>Mikveh Yisrael</sup> -- "the Hope of Israel." There were certainly many dark stretches of misery and suffering in our people's of history when, without this hope, it would certainly have succumbed. But because there was God, there was hope; and the mystery of suffering was sanctified through a ministry of service, and made enduring by the divine promise: ~~כי תא'avor b'mayim Ta'avur, b'mayim~~ <sup>ki ta'avavor b'mayim</sup>

~~וה' איתך~~ -- "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you -- ~~ואני אהיה עמך~~  
"and the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you," ~~ואני אהיה עמך~~  
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Lord, your God."

Yes, man needs God, and nations need God, because they need hope -- not a single, specific hope, but an attitude, a climate of confident hopefulness.

Again, man needs God because he needs a sense of dignity in his life. There is so much <sup>about him</sup> which suggests to him that he is ~~mere~~ <sup>carried along</sup> driftwood on swift currents beyond his direction or control. He is finite and mortal, subject to <sup>accidents</sup> disease, death and decay. He is a speck of palpitating dust in a vast universe, held captive



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# MISSING PAGE (S)





The long and bitter struggle in our own country to free the slaves received its irresistible momentum and drive, not from science or economics or any materialistic interpretation of history, but from a profound religious conviction, which could not be permanently denied or suppressed or contradicted, that the enslavement of human beings was contrary to the law of God!

"Love thy neighbor as thyself" -- did not come out of any scientific laboratory. The authority for it was ~~Am Adonai~~ Ani Adonai, I, the Lord, ordain it as the guiding principle for human existence on earth.

It was in the name of divine, not human, authority that a prophet dared challenge a king who had done wrong; that Nathan, the prophet, could hurl the indictment of sin against King David, crying out <sup>to him</sup> "thou art the man", guilty of having slain a faithful servant, out of lust for his wife, and ~~move the king to humble contrition and repentance~~. It was in the name of a God of justice that Elijah could condemn King Ahab, and his scheming Queen, Jezebel, for having destroyed a good man because they coveted his ancestral vineyard. A single man, however weak and defenseless, with God on his side, <sup>is always on the right</sup> ~~is always~~ in the majority, and his cause will <sup>those</sup> ~~always~~ be vindicated. They were not idle words, not ecstatic hyperboles, which the Psalmist uttered: "The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer, my God in whom I take refuge, my shield and my stronghold."

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"Love thy neighbor as thyself"--did not come out of any scientific laboratory. The authority for it was Ani Adonai--I, the Lord, ordain it as the guiding principle for human existence on earth.

It was in the name of divine, not human authority that a prophet dared challenge a king who had done wrong; that Nathan the prophet, could hurl the indictment of sin against King David, crying out to him, "thou are the man", guilty of having slain a faithful servant, out of lust for his wife. It was in the name of a God of justice that Elijah could condemn King Ahab, and his scheming Queen, Jezebel, for having destroyed a good man because they coveted his ancestral vineyard. A single man, however weak and defenseless, with God on his side, is always in the right, is always in the majority, and his cause will always be vindicated. Those were not idle words, nor ecstatic hyperboles, which the Psalmist uttered: "The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer, my God in whom I take refuge, my shield and my stronghold."

There are times when strong men are curbed and wise men are humbled, not by being told that they are not strong or wise, but that their action is sacrilege, an insult to God. The Talmud tells of a noted scholar, Rabbi Eleazar ben Simeon, who was coming one day from the house of his teacher and was riding leisurely on his donkey by the river-side, feeling happy and elated because he had studied much Torah. There

chanced to meet him an exceedingly ugly man who greeted him, "Peace be with you, Rabbi." Rabbi Eleazar, however, did not return the salutation. Instead, he replied in contempt, "Raca", Good-for-nothing, how ugly you are! The poor man, shaken, replied: "I do not know, but go and tell the craftsman who made me, How ugly is the vessel which you have made!"...



Rabbi Eleazar realized what a horrible thing he had done. This "Raca" -- this Good-for-nothing -- did not answer insult with insult. He did not enter into an altercation with the Rabbi. He asked that his case be taken before God! He appealed to a higher tribunal which they both acknowledged. Was he not also a child of God? Let the Rabbi tell God, how ugly is the vessel which He had made! The sorely afflicted man found his refuge and vindication in God. God was the source of his authority. The learned Rabbi who had studied much Torah -- but <sup>who</sup> had forgotten that love of God and man was the very heart of it, the Rabbi who had felt himself so secure in his great learning, dismounted from his donkey, knelt down before the man and said to him: "Forgive me. I have sinned. ~~I submit myself to your compassion,~~ <sup>who</sup> forgive me". And in the name of a God of forgiveness, the humble man forgave the noted scholar.

Why do men need God? For hope, to sustain them in all the checkered vicissitudes of their lives. For dignity, to endow their brief and vulnerable lives with meaning and mission, with power and dominion. For authority, to resist and combat all the evil forces of society.

Yom Kippur reminds us of these major human needs and of how they can be met in God. It also reminds us that those who ~~wish to~~ seek God will find Him always

near at hand; that, in fact, God is always waiting for man, nay, seeking him <sup>on the way</sup> <sup>to</sup>

~~"If you seek Him, He will be readily found," And, further, that the road upon which man can find God, winds through fields of righteousness, and highlands of love.~~

DR. ABBA HILLEL SILVER

YOM KIPPUR  
September, 1960

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