



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 V: Writings, 1909-1963, undated.

Reel
171

Box
62

Folder
32

Installation address, The Temple, 1917.

THE OFFICERS AND TRUSTEES OF TIFERETH
ISRAEL CONGREGATION CORDIALLY INVITE YOU
AND YOUR FAMILY TO ATTEND THE INSTALLATION
OF RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER, AT THE TEMPLE,
ON SUNDAY EVENING, SEPTEMBER THE NINTH,
NINETEEN HUNDRED AND SEVENTEEN, AT SEVEN-
THIRTY O'CLOCK.

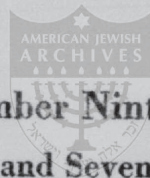
17-1

Installation

of

Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver

WRHS



Sunday, September Ninth

Nineteen Hundred and Seventeen

Seven-Thirty P. M.

At The Temple
Cleveland, Ohio

Program

Organ Prelude - - - - Mr. Emil Ring

Invocation - - - - Rabbi Louis Wolsey

Quartette, "Be not Afraid" -   *Elijah* - *Mendelssohn*
The Temple Choir

Opening Address - - - - Mr. Benjamin Lowenstein

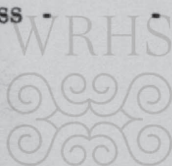
Address - - - - Dr. Kaufman Kohler
President, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, O.

Program

Solo, "Lord God of Abraham" - *Elijah* - *Mendelssohn*

Mr. Francis J. Sadlier

Installation Address



Rabbi Moses J. Gries

Inaugural Address

Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver

Solo, "Hear Ye, Israel" - *Elijah* - *Mendelssohn*

Mrs. Rachel Frease-Green

Benediction - - - - - Rabbi Jacob Klein

At the Temple
Cleveland

Sunday Evening,
Sept. 9, 1917.

17-1

Inaugural Address.

A passing thought or fancy can be seized and imprisoned in words. A flitting emotion can be vocalized. But the thoughts that startle our minds are silent and the sentiments that stir our souls to their depths remain inarticulate. Some emotions are "too full for sound or foam". Standing tonight before this vast congregation of men and women whom I have called upon to serve in faithfulness and to lead in love, listening to the inspirational word of colleagues and friends and reflecting upon the solemnity of the occasion and the tremendous significance which it holds for me, a host of confused emotions come surging through me which feign would seek expression but which cannot abide the narrow confines of words.

A soul so burdened oft finds refuge in prayer, for prayer is the language of the inaffable. So, that I too, lost in the midmost sea of emotions would seek refuge in prayer. At this sacred hour I would pray to Him who is my strength, my fortress and my refuge that I might prove worthy of the service to which I have been called and deserving of the faith which men have placed in me, that His spirit might descend upon me, granting to my work and my ministry an enkindling enthusiasm and a power which will enable me to touch the lives of some of you, wing some soul to higher aspirations and to guide some hand in its out-reachings for the higher gifts of God.

I would pray for the men and women of this congregation and for their earnest efforts to rise and to raise to ever higher altitudes, to widen the circle of their life's interests, so as to include a segment of the infinite. I would pray that their loyalties and sincerities may reveal unto them the purposefulness of life and the glory of service, that they may drink deep of the waters of contentment at the fountains of spiritual salvation.

And I would pray that Tifereth Israel - rededicated and reconsecrated, may in a still larger measure serve the cause of Israel and of Israel's faith; that it may continue to be a blessing unto men, reaching out into their lives, molding their higher ambitions, and inspiring their finer motives; that the young men who shall be reared under its influence may grow into splendid manhood and womanhood and into a supreme and transcendent devotion to their people and to its great imperishable mission.

But a little while ago I stood in the halls of my Alma Mater and received the blessing and the godspeed of my master and teacher who has this night graced my installation by his presence. The faith which I then proclaimed in valediction is the faith which I would now proclaim in inauguration.

My active service in the ministry since that day may have mellowed my views and softened somewhat the temper of my convictions but they have not destroyed my faith in them nor chilled the ardor of my enthusiasm for them. Experience has strengthened these convictions and has given to them an added cogency.

I believe in perfect faith that Judaism, in order to remain faithful to its prophetic destiny, must hold fast to the spirit of eternal progress which was its glory in the past and which is its promise for the future. Judaism must not only evolve in an evolving world, but must be its driving impulse. It must not yield to dreams but to visions. In an age tortured by doubts and perplexities, in a world iconoclastic and a universe daily transformed a Judaism blind to visions and dead to impulse must remain a tragic inanity. To function beneficently in a world of shifting standards and changing values, Judaism must be at all time creative, esoteric, revolutionary. And I believe that Reform Judaism in so far as it responds to the vital urge of the world, in so far as it dares to affirm the supremacy of life over law and of the spirit over the letter is in very truth the rightful heir of Israel's sublime tradition.

And because I believe in the inherent need and rationality of Reform Judaism, because I know of its mighty achievements in the past and can image its triumphant progress in the future, I am extremely sensitive of its every shortcoming, I am studiously in search of every weakness which threatens its future efficiency. I detect two baneful influences at work in its life which if not corrected may ultimately turn this splendid experiment of American liberal Judaism into a tragic failure.

Of the one I have already spoken to you in the past. It is the tendency to conform Judaism to a system of ethical formalism, to define it as a code of moral platitudes.

There is something more in religion than morality just as there is something more in art than form and line. An artist may draw the lines of an object ever so finely and accurately and yet fail to convey its color its substance, its light, its atmosphere and the sense of motion.

Equally so is a moral delineation of religion most insufficient. It lacks color, motion, quality. It reasons with us but it does not rouse us. It argues, but it leaves us cold. Man never prayed at the altar of a categorical imperative! Man never wore a crown of thorns for the sake of a debit and credit system of ethics! Man did suffer and agonize for the sake of a God whose living presence he felt. Man did endure the hates and toements of the world and walked with bleeding feet on the stony pilgrimage to the shrine of truth maintained by an unfaltering trust in a God who revealed himself to him in those rare and awful moments of spiritual ecstasy.

The chief function of the Synagogue is to serve as the repository of this God-idea in the world, as the oracle of divinity, as the prophetic voice calling men to prayer, to duty and service and sacrifice in the name of one who is Father and King. And it is a curious reflection on the religious trend of our times that this needs must have emphasis or even mention. Yet no one who is familiar with the grandiose evasiveness of pulpit utterances and the frantic experiments in sociological endeavor undertaken by religious leaders can doubt the pertinence of this restatement of the Synagogue's supreme function.

And there is yet to my mind another tendency against which we must guard ourselves. the tendency to impoverish the content of Jewish life. I hold now and I have held in the past the the Beth-Hakkeneseth- the Synagogue is not a synonym for the Keneseth Israel, the community of Israel; that the Jewish community is something more than the Jewish Synagogue. The Jewish community possesses a physical and spiritual uniqueness which has in the past served as the fountainhead of all its cultural and religious achievements and which must be preserved for the future if these spiritual endeavors are to continue. For be it remembered that every institution which is dear to, the Jewish home, the School, the synagogue draw their vital force from this mystic entity which we call the community. No one of these institutions completely exhausts the spiritual content of Jewish life, nor do the three of them combined. The community is greater than the sum of its parts. There can be no strong, virile Judaism, abundant in promise, alert to its tremendous possibilities without a powerful sense of community life, without a group consciousness and a group loyalty.

For that reason Jewish community life must be preserved and energized. On its native soil in Palestine, Jewish life and the Jewish community spirit, with but few temporal exceptions, were never in real danger of extinction.

Geographic isolation, national interests and aspirations, historical associations, a common tongue and common fortune safe guarded the integrity of Jewish life. In the diaspora physical barrier, ghetto-walls and civil disabilities helped to preserve the identity of the Jewish spirit. But with the dawn of the new day of social and political equality, Jewish communal life suffered exceedingly, and the process of denuding it of all content and significance has continued with celerity to our own day. The external physical agencies which, for centuries encompassed and protected the Jewish communal life have been destroyed. It remains for us now to intensify the inner spiritual agencies if we wish it to be preserved. Out of the infinite spiritual resources of our people, out of its faith and its fancy, out of its art and its literature, out of its prayers and its songs, out of its law and its lore we must build a mighty fortress around the spirit of our people, a fortress which will withstand the onslaughts of time.

To this end it behooves us, not to remain religious aristocrats looking with disfavor upon all movements in Jewish life which do not directly emanate from the temple or synagogue. We must realize that there are certain cultural movements among our people which, while they touch, like a tangent, the circumference of the synagogue at some one point, do nevertheless possess a vision and an extension of their own. Blind, indeed is he who, in a spirit of theologic intolerance, would suppress these evidences of the inner strivings and agitations of the soul of our people. It is not the logical soundness of these new tendencies and movements which should recommend them. Rather is it their functional value as spiritual and emotional dynamics that render them of value to us.

It is the saddening thing to behold the discord which some of these movements have brought into our camp. In each case the poetry of the ideal has been lost in the prose of propaganda. Men have lashed themselves into bitterness and intolerance. The frenzy of the protagonist of a movement is met with the fury of the antagonist and Israel presents the sorry spectacle of a crazy-quilt of loud and clamant theories each struggling for dominance. Now all these movements be they Nationalism, or Universalism, Zionism, the Hebrew Renaissance, or the esthetic revival which is seeking expression in a new Jewish art, all these loyalties and aspirations may remain discordant notes in our life or they may with sympathy and tolerance be welded into a great spiritual symphony.

This then is my faith and my consecration. I believe in Israel and Israel's God.

I believe in the manifest destiny of Israel to be a servant unto the Lord and a light unto the nations. I believe that Israel will live as long as it remains true to the spirit of eternal progress. It must rivet its soul to visions and must not surrender itself to dreams. But it must not shut its life to the benign influence of days that were, to the inspiring memories of a stirring past; for a people that does not look very far back cannot look very far forward. It must link the past to the future with a chain of glorious continuity.

To this task then, shall I devote my humble efforts:- to be a faithful servant of my God and my people; to transmit my love and my enthusiasm for the grand cause of my people to the men and the women whom I shall be privileged to serve, and more especially to the young men and the young women-the blood and sinew of the future. I shall serve the people of Israel, not a faction, not, a group, but the whole people. I shall work for spiritual harmony in the camp of Israel and in so doing I shall be always mindful of the fact the harmony in life as in art is produced by a contrast of opposite or of complementary colors-that men may differ in their visions and outlooks and out of their very difference a fundamental unity may be established. And for Israel to live worthily and do rightly such a fundamental unity is essential. The whole people must be thrilled by one transcendent purpose. The whole people must be carried away by one supreme theme.

A rivulet cannot carry a ship. A river can. To carry an ideal so majestic as ours we must have the deep channels of conviction and the strong currents of enthusiasm. A race of titanic soul must be ours, strong men and women of noble character, faithful in service, sublime in aspiration, devoted sons and daughters of the blood-sealed covenant of Israel. For this consummation shall I labor, for this hope shall I live, And upon these my hopes, and my purposes I invoke the favor and the grace of a kind Providence.