



Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project

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

Series V: Writings, 1909-1963, undated.

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Judaism, History of, circa 1925.

A History of Judaism.

1. The rel. we call jud., or the rel. of the Jewish people, has passed thru the stages of 3500 years of development. It changed and developed as ~~every living organism~~ the J. people changed and developed, as every living organism change and develop. It will be better understood as the progressive religious speculation of a people, rather > a creed, a set of dogmas or an unchanging theology. The essential chord which binds together the numerous phases of its development is the peculiar religious genius of the race.
2. I shall trace for a moment the history of Judaism which is the history of the religious experiences of Israel, and then I shall speak of the doctrines and beliefs which may be regarded as being basic and fundamental to Jud. in all its phases.
3. When Jud. emerges as a religion of ethical monotheism it had already passed through the cycles of earlier and more primitive religious concepts and practices. The Jews, in their earliest times, shared with all other people the beliefs common to all primitive men concerning which Urban Frohman spoke last Monday: Animism, heroism, polytheism, magic, divination, tokens and fetiches. In the great Arabian desert, from which all Semitic peoples hail, the nomadic Hebrews lived for uncounted centuries, and practiced primitive rites and tabus, and entertained primitive ideas concerning the nature of the universe and man's relations to it. From the life of the modern Bedouins we may get a picture of what their practices & ideas were - for the East changes but little. These nomadic Heb. tribes, quite unconnected and not federated, did ~~hold in common~~ look upon Yahweh.

the god who causes all things to be - as their supreme god, their
supreme deity. He was the god, the deity. His dwelling
place was perhaps a mountain in that wilderness. He was
wrapped as the giver of life, the source, the fecundity, the pluck.
To him the chief sacrifices were offered - his ritual was ^{very} ~~simple~~
^{simple}. ~~This may be said to be the first stage, the humble~~
beginnings of Judaism.

4. The second stage began when these tribes, attracted by the
fertility of Palestine, began in the 12-14c. B.C. to ~~move~~ invade that
country. Their way was upon the peoples already settled there.
Their way was in the name of their deity, Yahuweh, and
they were victorious. i.e. Yahuweh was victorious and He, accordingly,
established His domain over Canaan - and His prestige was
immeasurably increased.

@ The Canaanites were an agricultural people, and their
gods were agr. deities, the gods of the fertility, the soil, of the
shires from which rain and sun-light come. They worshipped
Ba'al, ^{the Sun god} and Ashtoreh - the mother goddess, and Tammuz, the offspring -
the produce, the soil. The Hebrews believed that in order to re-
new the success of their own agr. efforts in the new country
they must also propitiate the gods of the country. So that, while
not abandoning their deity god Yahuweh - they took also to
the worship of the Canaanite deities, and their rituals -
which in many instances were grossly immoral and
coarse. Thus a ~~syncretism~~ ^{syncretism} was taking place which if
not checked would have made just what the rel. of Ba'al
& Ashtoreh were - and nothing more. But here something
happened which turned the ~~side~~ course of rel. from its old
channels, and ushered in a new era in the rel. progress of
mankind. A stern and determined resistance to this syncretism
appeared, and with its appearance ^{among} the early prophets
such as Elijah & Elisha, the 3rd stage of Jud. dev. begins.

5. Elijah, who presented the unwavering loyalty to the Yahuweh

B. Tenets of Judaism

① will take jud. at highest point, expression - only way to judge a faith, or the culture & civilization of a people, is an artist's work. - Prophetic Judaism - what no accretions of later time could obscure - the dynamism of J. faith - man's contribution to civilization.

① God - one - spiritual - creator & ruler of universe - Source of all phys. and all moral law. In Him all things find their source, meaning and destiny - He is the Universal God -

לֵאמֹר יְהוָה אֶחָד -

J. destroyed idolatry, polytheism, dualism, ^{- strong phyl. suffering from}

② God is justice. He hath established world upon justice. - But also love - אֱלֹהִים אֵל חַי וְקַי
אֵל חַי וְקַי - He is a living God - He is near - אֵל חַי וְקַי -

③ - He is transcendent - but also immanent -
He is near - אֵל חַי וְקַי -

~~① Because God is Spirit - His worship~~

② God created man in His image. אֱלֹהִים בְּצַלְמוֹ בָּרָא אֶת הָאָדָם

① Man's destiny to perfect himself - אֱלֹהִים בְּצַלְמוֹ בָּרָא אֶת הָאָדָם

② This world is not Vale, Heaven & Hell.

It is man's world - to work in -

③ Not Perfection - But Action - Universal Good

③ Bec. God is Spirit - God's worship must be spiritual

① "Thou hast been told O, Man etc"
ritual + Cerim. help - The heart of man is justice,
Love + humility -

④ Ethical code of Judaism

① Justice -

② Love - *אֱהֵב*

③ Brotherhood - "Hain we not all one father."

④ Peace -

~~⑤ Messianic times - Golden Age - Progress~~

C. Judaism is a universal religion - Its message is for mankind. Its peculiar code of ^{its physical laws are neglected} ~~practical legislation~~ is for Israelites - so as to describe them ~~to~~ ^{But} righteous & un-gentle who they universal law - has now in world to come.

D. It is not a faith or a creed. Which ~~makes~~ ^{marks} the true adherent of Judaism - but a practice - a moral life -

E. It is mother religion of Christianity & Islam - It continues to find affiliated cases in the world -

the desert, dissociated from the earlier, primitive beliefs, the
desert and unadulterated by Canaanite influences, appears
as the scene ^{in the G.C.} ~~had~~ champions the cause of a single, undivided
alliance to Jehovah - "One God will go etc etc." - There
can be no compromise. Jehovah is God, Pal. Id. & other
gods are false gods - There can be but one God. This battle
against syncretism in J. was waged bitterly for 4-500
years - that these ^{years} constitute the heroic epoch in the hist. of
Judaism - the age of the prophets - and out of this struggle
there emerged in its full glory and perfection that spiritual
ethical monotheism which we call Judaism. That is the
age of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel
and that whole ~~to~~ group of titanic spirits whose genius
saw to mankind the highest conceptions of God, & of
human destiny. That age gave us the heart, our
Bible.

6. The 4th stage - may be called the Torah Stage - the stage in which the
Law as expounded in the Books, Moses for gains supreme
authority in J. life. The laws found in these books date from
various periods. Some are pre-exilic and date back to primitive
desert life; some were borrowed from Canaanite
Mesopotamian Egypt. and refined and Judaized. Some were
enacted as a direct result of the teachings of the prophets.
Some are pre-exilic. Some post-exilic. These laws are
of 2 kinds. (1) Moral laws - such as those of 10 Commandments; Thou
shalt not kill etc; or, Code of Holiness - in Lev. Chap. 19 - (2)
Others are ceremonial and ritual laws - laws of clean &
unclean, laws for the observance of Sabbaths & Festivals;
These ^{ceremonial} ~~latter~~ laws came to ~~have~~ play an important part
in rel. life of people as the doctrine of priestly
character of the entire people gained headway among
them. - Must be attributed to prophets - etc. etc.

Many ceremonial laws, originally meant only for priests, were now looked upon as obligatory upon all laymen. The law was to help people to walk in the way; to whiten, to suppress their appetites and to preserve as a unique god-serving people in the midst, the idolaters & abominations, the heathen — The Torah, the holy book, laws, whose ~~authorship~~ ^{authority} was attributed to God Himself ^{& Exalted} came to hold place of supreme reference, & final authority in Judaism. The people, Israel became the people, the Book.

7- In course, time - Torah insufficient - written law in-adequate. New laws developed - out ^{still further to Jews in J. life} of old, by teachers who no longer claimed privilege of revelation as prophets had, but all privilege of interpretation. These sages, or scribes, or rabbis ^{Hillel, Shammai, Tanna} interpreted written law and thus evolved a secondary code of unwritten law. This process went on from about the 3rd BCE. to S.A. 1 - an epoch of 600 years - and at end - The Talmud. This is 5th stage. Talmud came to have an authority in J. life second only to Bible. Not ^{mainly} significant contribution to the law; more, certainly ^{very} important ^{mainly dark ages} vestiges were made up to 19 C. The middle ages, spent esp. ^{on the one hand} in still further strengthening the law - increasing its minut. & detail regulation, and on the other hand in ~~extending~~ justifying Jud. philosophically.

① liberal pol. 19C.

② I am curious that I have no covered journal -
- Myths, chandris, Cabala, Karais - indeed
~~main~~ principle stages of development.

orders.