



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
176

Box
64

Folder
332

My design for living, 1934.

(My Design For Living -- Printed in the Cleveland Press on Jan. 8, 1934)

My active ministry has run parallel to an age of unprecedented ferment and change. I began my ministry in the second year of the World War. I have watched revolutions sweep over the world unsettling governments, economic systems, social traditions, moral standards and religious beliefs. I have seen new forces emerge changing the face of the earth. I have not been unmoved or uninfluenced by many of them.

Being by temperament a radical, trying to cling to "root" values and basic principles, I have endeavored not to lose my cause in the turbulent but surface cross-currents of my day and age but to steer steadily down the sure and deep channels of human progress. I am convinced that there are certain human ideals which are indispensable to any age, regardless of its intellectual, political or economic complexion. They are the quint essential values which carry a civilization along, conserve its best traditions and successfully effect the adjustments which new conditions make necessary.

These abiding social values are quite old-fashioned. They are not new, or clever or smart or heady like a new wine. They are as unsensational as a mathematical formula, quite like the mathematical formulae to which physicists are now attempting to reduce this whole complex and exciting universe of ours.

It is with these social tasks that I have linked my ministry. My loyalty to them derives from an overmastering faith in a universe that is not a blind mechanism but a divine personality manifesting itself eternally in wisdom, beauty and goodness.

One of these immemorial tasks is the quest for truth. I have learned how difficult it is for man to overcome his own resistance to truth and his dislike for new and disturbing ideas. Nevertheless it is in the difficult quest for truth in all the realms of the physical and the ethical that the unique significance of human life lies.

The world of human relations today is full of half-truths, of slogans and catch-words, of stupidities made sacrosanct by age and of absurdities decked out in the glittering raiment of modernity. Special interests have perfected the art of befuddling the minds of men by cunning propaganda. Tradition, convention and mass-judgments as well as lack of mental discipline keep men from distinguishing the true from the false, the fact from the fiction and expediency keeps others from acknowledging the truth even after they have discovered it.

Another basic ideal is the quest for justice. It is for me the inescapable mandate of my faith. I have always envisaged my religion in terms of its prophetic program: "to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God." The fullness and freedom of human life is possible only under a socially-organized and socially motivated economic system. Ours has been one of ruthless competition, bordering on anarchy and motivated by profit. I have therefore identified myself with all those movements which aim at the progressive socialization of our economic system.

I suspect that some very desirable human values which are the products of the older individualistic civilization will be lost under the new centralized,

inevitably bureaucratic system which will supplant it. Perhaps our nation in its approach to socialization, which has now tentatively begun under the New Deal, will be able to discover ways of conserving some of those cherished values.

The quest for world peace is another basic ideal. War is bad. The aftermath of war is worse. I have lived through one war and I have become a confirmed pacifist. I know now that war solves no problems but aggravates old problems and creates new ones. We entered the war to make the world safe for democracy and we actually succeeded in making it safe for autocracy. I know now that preparedness for war is no insurance against war but a provocative to it. Pacifism as a spiritual movement will not reach the masses of the Western World and can therefore not be counted on to destroy militarism. Only adequate international machinery for settlement of disputes and the enforcement of peace will accomplish this. The choice for men today is clear: either aggressive nationalism with its need for military preparedness, leading to alliances, secret diplomacy and war or interdependent nationalism with its agencies for compulsory arbitration, leading to disarmament, the outlawing of war and peace. I have chosen the latter.

I am a liberal. I have not lost faith in liberalism as a way of life and thought. The mood of our present age is hostile to liberalism. Dictatorships either of the Left or of the Right are ^{now in} the vogue. A disillusioned and unhappy world is rushing headlong to saviours and seeking shortcuts to salvation. Its apocalyptic hopes are doomed to tragic defeat. There

are no superment and no messiahs available. Humanity must be its own messiah.

I hold fast to my belief in man, in his slow ascendant progress, in the primacy of his ^{moral} claims to those of State or class. I hold fast to my belief in freedom, - the fullest measure of freedom compatible with social responsibility, - in the free exchange of ideas and ^{man's} ~~the~~ inalienable right to heresy and non-conformity.

So much for my social program. As far as my private world is concerned, I prefer the old sanctities and the old loyalties. I am not impressed with the moral vagaries of our day. I have seen one or two "revolts of youth" come and go. I have seen the wild groping of an age for freedom and happiness outside the boundaries of self-discipline and responsibility where no happiness and no freedom lies. The simple truth remains that, given ^{deepest} health and physical well being, the ~~deepest~~ satisfactions of life come from congenial work, from warm friendships, from contact with the best that has been achieved by the mind and hand of man, and above all from the love of a woman and the pride of children. All else is vanity and a striving after wind.