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Man's hopes in the atomic age, 1957-1961.

MAN'S HOPES IN THE ATOMIC AGE

by
DR. ABBA HILLEL SILVER

THE TEMPLE
CLEVELAND, OHIO

My dear friends: This age in which we live is a truly great age, one of the greatest in human history. We are too near our times properly to appraise them. One requires distance in order to see great objects in their proper perspective. We ourselves are too much involved in the turmoil, the fears, and the conflicts of our day to see objectively the amazing new patterns of life which are emerging. In a generation or two, when mankind will have entered quieter waters and a period of consolidation will have followed this explosive and revolutionary age of ours, men will be able to look back upon it and evaluate it properly.

Many people today are filled with dark forebodings and are quite pessimistic about our times. They are quick to describe them as materialistic, as lacking in idealism, in aim and purpose, and as drifting helplessly to disaster in a flaming sea of atomic horror.

I am persuaded that ours is truly a great age. Great and historic things are coming to pass in our day. I am not thinking at the moment of the new worlds which science is continually disclosing, the new insights into the nature of matter and energy, the new sources of power and wealth, the new methods of production, distribution, transportation and communication. I am not referring to the amazing progress in the medical sciences which has so markedly improved the health of the human race and increased the average length of life, nor to the marvels of engineering and the miracles of construction all over the globe. Inventions and discoveries come in such rapid succession in our day that they no longer excite any unusual comment. We take it all in our stride - the flying age, the television age, the atomic age - and what next? The inter-planetary age, perhaps. Certainly, man is achieving in our

day in the scientific fields more in one decade than in ten heretofore.

In characterizing our age as great, I am thinking in terms of social progress and welfare, in terms of human advancement and civilization. More is being done in our day for the improvement of the conditions of the life of the common man, for the raising of his standard of living, his health, his education, and for his protection against the disabilities of sickness, unemployment and old age, than in any generation - than in any five generations in the past. Never were peoples and governments so much concerned with the improvement of the lives of the men, who had lived in unrelieved poverty, ignorance and disease through the long and weary centuries. Never were more determined efforts made to bring about a fairer sharing of the wealth produced and a better way of life for all.

Never have the submerged races and peoples of the earth, who for centuries groaned under foreign or native tyranny, risen as they have risen in our day to demand and to achieve, as they have to a large measure achieved, freedom and self-determination. Within the last fifteen years one-fourth of the earth's population - more than five hundred million non-self-governing people - have obtained sovereignty and self-government. Imperialism and colonialism are in their death-throes. Backward peoples are pressing forward into the light of a new day, and the exploitation of the dark races of the earth is rapidly drawing to a close.

What we are witnessing in our day, if we have eyes not only to see things but to see into the heart of things, is not social disintegration, but a radical new reintegration of humanity, a profound change in the social evolution of man, a change not free, of course, from dangers, but one of boundless and immeasurable potentialities.

I do not wish to overdraw the picture. I am not suggesting that the millenium is just around the corner. There is not a spot on the face of the globe today where social wrongs and injustices do not still exist, and where the masses of mankind are not, to a greater or lesser degree, still underprivileged and disadvantaged. There is no country on earth, including our own, which is altogether free from class conflict, from bigotry, intolerance, slums and privation. It will take centuries, not decades or generations, before all the peoples of the world will possess even that measure of well-being, far from the optimum, which some of the most favored peoples of the world already possess.

The important thing to consider, however, is not whether we are on the eve of the millenium, but whether the major trends of our age are in the direction of the hoped-for good society, or away from it. Is our age purposefully trying to eradicate poverty and illiteracy and to raise the standard of living of all peoples, regardless of race or color or creed? Is it trying to satisfy the legitimate aspirations of peoples to national freedom and independence? Is it trying to organize the world for peace and for international cooperation? I believe that in all these major trends, our age has given welcome evidence of great determination and of considerable progress. It is moving purposefully in the right direction - the abolition of war, the reduction of poverty, and the elimination of racial barriers and inequalities. These are the three major trends of our century. And because they are the major trends of our day - there is great hope for man in this atomic age.

What we need is a strong faith which will serve us best in the great, critical and challenging days which lie ahead, a faith which will sustain us in the long, hard struggle to establish this good society towards which we all wish to move.

Such a faith, in my judgment, is built upon three postulates: the reality of purpose in the universe, the significance of the individual, and the sanctity of method. Within such a faith man will find that measure of dignity, confidence and courage without which the struggle for social progress cannot long be maintained and the promise of human life must be abandoned to defeat.

Somewhere Professor Einstein writes: "What is the meaning of human life or of organic life altogether? To answer this question at all implies a religion. Is there any sense, then, you ask, in putting it? I answer, the man who regards his own life and that of his fellow creatures as meaningless is not merely unfortunate, but almost disqualified for life."

As man develops in awareness of himself and of the world about him, and gains in sensitiveness and comprehension, he acquires also glimpses of purpose in the universe. He comes to sense what the Prophet Isaiah sensed when he declared: "He is a God who created the world not for chaos, and formed it to be inhabited." Like all human insights into fundamentals, this one, too, of purpose and meaning is not clear beyond any peradventure of doubt. It is seen as through a glass darkly, but it is sufficiently persuasive and responsive to basic human needs to be enheartening and strengthening.

Addressing the Harvard Law School Association of New York back in 1913, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes gave expression to just such a strong, mystic, conviction: "I think it is not improbable that man, like the grub that prepares a chamber for the winged thing it never has been but is to be - that man may have cosmic destinities that he does not understand. And so beyond the vision of battling races and an impoverished earth, I catch a dreaming glimpse of peace." And he voiced his faith "in a universe not measured by our fears," but one "that has thought and more than thought inside of it."

A confident faith in a controlling and beneficent purpose, unfolding in the universe, of which we and our struggles and our aspirations are an integral part is, in my judgment, an essential ingredient of that faith which will serve us best in the long struggle for the building of the good society and the attainment of man's hopes. It is the conviction of purpose which alone can bridge for man the gulf between his isolated and homeless self and the apparently alien and indifferent world about him. Man will feel at home in the cosmos only if he believes that it is his Father's house. "Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place. . ." Without this faith, he will fall victim to one or another form of moral nihilism as his mind comes to the edge of the wilderness. Atheism has never built any great civilization. It has been responsible for breakdowns, not for break-throughs.

Belief in the significance of the individual is another essential element of that faith which will serve us best in our propulsive age.

In one of his published "Unpopular Essays", Bertrand Russell writes: "The importance of Man, which is the one indispensable dogma of the theologians, receives no support from a scientific view of the future of the solar system." To which one is prompted to reply, so much the worse for the so-called scientific view, which doubtless will go through many revisions and corrections in the future, as it has in the past. Time and again science has been tardy in arriving at conclusions which the intuitive religious genius of mankind postulated long before.

But Bertrand Russell is entirely correct when he states that "the importance of Man is the one indispensable dogma of the theologians." It is also the one indispensable dogma of democracy; and it is at the heart of the terrible crisis which is tearing our world apart today.

To the great religions of the Western world, man has immense significance in the scheme of things. Man is very important to God in the unfolding of His purposes - each man, every man, rich or poor, wise or simple, black or white, saint or sinner. Sin is voluntary abandonment of status, self-degradation, descent into unworthiness and the lower life from which Man has emerged. Religion challenges Man to live and act always as if his life were tremendously significant and endlessly ascendant.

Religion demands much of man in terms of duty and sacrifice, but it also gives much to him in terms of high and independent status, dignity and inherent rights. "Every man has the right to say," declared an ancient teacher of Israel, "for my sake was the whole world created," and another teacher declared that "man is a co-worker of God in creation."

Religion has endeavored to give man a sense of greatness in a universe in which he physically is very small. The world of the ancients was, of course, far smaller in scale than our world of expanding immensities - "one hundred thousand million galaxies in space and each galaxy containing on an average of on hundred thousand million stars," wherein man's racial history is less than a moment in geologic time. Yet, even in relation to their vastly smaller universe, man appeared pitifully puny, lost and unimportant. "When I look at Thy heavens," declared the Psalmist, "the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars which Thou hast established - What is man that Thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that Thou dost care for him?"

But no moral aspiration is possible and can be looked for in man as long as he regards himself as of little account. No moral aspiration ever springs from the soil of belittlement and disesteem. Hence, the Psalmist climaxes his hymn with an apostrophe to man's unique distinction and the assurance of his worth in the world which God created for him. "Yet hast Thou

made him little less than God, and hast crowned him with glory and honor. Thou hast given him dominion over the works of Thy hands; Thou hast put all things under his feet." Man's high and noble estate imposes upon him the obligations of aspiration. "Be ye holy for I, the Lord your God, am holy!"

In primitive society the individual counted for very little. But as life moved on, the despotism of the organized group was slowly attenuated. The individual began to discover his own private life. As against his heritage of mass tradition, he became aware of personal sources of judgment and sanction.

But man's hard-won victories against corporate authority are never permanently secure. We witnessed in our life-time the most massive and ruthless onslaught of "Gleichschaltung", of "Vermassung" and of totalitarianism every experienced by man within historic times. Fascism and Naziism scored terrifying victories before they were broken on the battlefield, but their ideologies are not dead. And Communist dictatorship is today established in a fourth of the globe.

Men are being handled in many parts of the world and in many departments of life impersonally in the mass. Increasingly they are becoming statistics in the hands of a predatory collectivism. They are shunted about like herds of cattle. They are coordinated and subjugated to the state until the last vestige of their freedom and their rights vanishes. Because the religious basis of our society has been denied, and materialistic theories of life and history have taken hold of the thoughts and actions of many men and governments, the stature of the individual, and with it, his rights and inherent dignity have suffered tragic abatement and diminution in our day. Every precinct of his life is invaded and violated. Having denied man the image of God, he is being given the mask of the robot.

The faith that will serve us best, as free men in this great age, is faith in the worth and significance of the individual, and his inalienable rights. Without such faith which was written as a dogma into the heart of our Declaration of Independence and our Constitution - "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal and that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights" - man's stature will be progressively reduced, the free domains of his mind and spirit will speedily come under iron-clad controls, and man's dignity will be dragged into the dust. With such a faith, we will be strong enough to accept all necessary social controls and still remain a free society. It will help us to set our course by a dependable compass.

One of the evil forces at work in the world today which tend to undermine the individual and destroy his intellectual integrity is the force of organized propaganda whose objective is to stampede men to think uncritically and emotionally in the way some special interest wants them to think. Through slogans, catch-words, cliches and cleverly coined half-truths, it drives men or panics them into attitudes and actions which men would not take if they were given accurate facts and information upon which to base judgments and attitudes. Propadanda in our day has been developed into a dangerous pseudo-science. Through the readily available mass media of communication, it can undo overnight, as it were, generations of slow, patient, and pains-taking work of education. Our great danger today is not illiteracy. The overwhelming majority of our people knows how to read and write. The great danger of our day is propaganda, whose aim is to confound and to confuse and by misinformation to misdirect our literate population.

The third element in the faith which will serve us best in our exciting new age is faith in the sanctity of method - the method of human progress.

Spiritual religion defined a method by which men might attain morally desirable ends, a method worthy of such ends. It outlawed the notion that moral ends justify immoral means. Each single step on the way toward the realization of a worthy objective must, as far as is humanly possible, be a worthy objective in itself. To establish justice or freedom or peace, men must employ the ways of justice, freedom and peace.

The more exalted human goals are, the less likelihood there is of their early or complete attainment. Accordingly, when ruthless, brutal, impatient and desperate measures are employed, they not only make the attainment of these goals impossible; they also turn man's long journey towards them into one of unmitigated misery and horror.

The classic way of religion has never been fully tried in the world. Today in an evolving atomic age wherein man's power is vastly augmented, including the power of self-destruction, it is being ignored more thoroughly than at any time in human history. State and class autocracies have proceeded on the theory that there is no law superior to theirs, and that their brutal methods are justified by their results.

The shame of our age is that men are committing the most shameless acts of immorality in the name of high morality. Methods which are abhorred and denounced in one's opponents are rationalized and justified as moral imperatives when employed by oneself. Men talk of justice and brotherhood, of a classless society and universal peace, but they act as if these ideals were demons out of hell, lashing them on to the most horrible acts of injustice, hatred and violence.

It is clearly the part of sound method in our atomic age to look for a workable formula which will regulate the differences between the East and the West and discover a "modus vivendi" for the two great sections of humanity which are now so dangerously riven and separated by seemingly irreconcilable ideologies.

It is clear that the rivalry between these ideologies cannot be decided on the battlefield. Both power-blocs are in possession of the globe-destroying power of the A-bomb and the H-bomb. Neither will be intimidated by the preponderance of arms on the part of the other. It is inconceivable that the statesmen of the world will be so made as to try to win a decision through atomic warfare. The alternative confronting mankind today is co-existence or non-existence. This being the case, it is clearly the part of patriotism, of enlightened self-interest, and of altruism to seek ways of living together on this one earth in spite of the opposing and irreconcilable ideologies.

In the field of religious controversy it was once thought that the existing differences were irreconcilable and that opposing religious persuasions could not live on the same earth, not to speak of the same country or city. During the seventeenth century Europe was drenched in blood by religious wars. The stakes then were even higher than in our day, for it was not only this world that was involved, but the next world as well. And yet after much bloodshed and the ruin of towns and provinces, it was found necessary at long last to work out ways of toleration and co-existence, leaving the ideologies to take care of themselves. No religion abandoned its position, its claims to being the sole repository of true religion or of its missionary activity, but somehow ways were found for all to live together. Today in many parts of Europe and America they have learned not only to live together but to work together in amity and friendship for the paramount objectives common to them all.

There is no other solution to the political and economic differences which are now tearing our world apart. The dread alternative is universal destruction.

For our civilization to survive, it is clearly necessary to revise the mood and thought pattern of our age, and to recharge our world culture with a new devotion to the sanctity of method in human progress.

With such a faith, built upon the reality of purpose in the universe, the significance, the individual and the sanctity of method, we can spread wide our adventuring sails and plow resolutely into the surge and thunder of our unpredictable odyssey, confident that our high hopes will, from time to time, find their blessed anchorage in some harbor of our hearts' desire.



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THE COLUMNS

Lakewood

Congregational

Church

Vol. X

Cleveland, Ohio, Post Office, Lakewood 7, Ohio, March 6th, 1959

No. 25

CLEVELAND'S GREAT RABBI TO SPEAK

Rabbi Silver just returned from World Tour

We will have the honor of hearing one of America's leading Rabbis on our School of Religion on next Thursday, March 12th. Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver will be our Sanctuary speaker at 8:30. He has been the Spiritual Leader of the Temple in Cleveland for over thirty years, has been World President of the Zionist Movement, and is an author and lecturer on many subjects. The Jewish group has something powerful to offer to us on the subject of "Religion and the Home in the Space Age."



In the course on "Handling Modern Marriage", Miss Mary Donovan, Budget Editor, Cleveland Press, and Budget Advisor for Society for Savings, will speak on "Money, One of Marriage's Worst Problems." Many of all ages will want to hear this popular speaker.

Cleveland's own Lewis Propulsion Laboratory of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration makes it possible for us to have near to us some of the country's top experts in this field. In our course on "Frontiers in Modern Science", Dr. Herman H. Ellerbrock, Jr., of N.A.S.A., will speak on "Frontiers in Science of Space."



Dr. MacLeod in his course on "Problem Areas of the Bible", has the intriguing theme "Thunderbolts before Breakfast", for his fifth presentation in the Roy E. Bowers Chapel.

Dr. Drew will lead a discussion on "New Directions for the Church", in his course on "Inquirers' Class on Church Membership." He will cover the church unity movement, including our own Merger situation.

MAKE YOUR RESERVATIONS NOW

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DePauw University Chapel Service

Gobin Memorial Church

MARCH 13, 1957

THE ORGAN PRELUDE: *Bible Poem* . . . Weinberger
Professor Arthur Carkeek, playing the Lilly Memorial Organ

¶THE PROCESSIONAL: Hymn No. 5, "The God of Abraham Praise"

¶THE CALL TO WORSHIP:

The Lord is in His holy temple.

Let all the earth keep silence before Him.

He is not far from any one of us.

Let us worship Him in spirit and in truth. Amen.

¶THE UNISON PRAYER:

O God, by whom the meek are guided in judgment, and light riseth up in darkness for the godly; grant us, in all doubts and uncertainties, the grace to ask what Thou wouldst have us to do, that the Spirit of wisdom may save us from all false choices, and that in Thy light we may see light, and in Thy straight path may not stumble. Shed abroad Thy peace upon the world. By the might of Thy Holy Spirit quench the pride, and anger, and greediness which cause man to strive against man, and people against people. Lead all nations in the ways of mutual help and good will, and hasten the time when the earth shall confess Thee indeed for its Saviour and King. Amen.

THE READING OF THE SCRIPTURE

THE ANTHEM:

"Hallelujah Amen," from the Oratorio, *Judas Maccabeus* . . . Handel

The Chapel Choir, directed by Professor George W. Gove
Judy Borling, accompanist

THE ADDRESS: "Man's Hopes in the Atomic Age"

Rabbi Silver

THE CHORAL BENEDICTION

¶THE ORGAN POSTLUDE

¶The Congregation standing.

Welcome to the DePauw Chapel this morning is Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver of The Temple, Cleveland, Ohio. Rabbi Silver has served as university preacher at Harvard, Cornell, the University of Chicago, Syracuse, Purdue, and New York; and is a leader in many civic and cultural organizations.

Doctor Robert S. Eccles, who is conducting the service, is associate professor of Philosophy and Religion.

John Stieper, a member of the senior class, is reading the Scripture.

The Reverend "Bob" Richards, the famous athlete and minister, will speak in Gobin Church at 8:30 P. M. on Thursday.

UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

BACCALAUREATE

SERVICE

1959



CABELL HALL

11 o'clock

SUNDAY, JUNE 14TH

ORDER OF SERVICE

PRESIDING

PRESIDENT COLGATE W. DARDEN, JR.

SERMON

RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER
THE TEMPLE
CLEVELAND, OHIO

ASSISTANT

RABBI BERNARD M. HONAN
THE HILLEL FOUNDATION
CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA

ORGANIST

DR. FRANK W. FINGER
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

ACADEMIC PROCESSION (*Congregation standing.*)

INVOCATION (*Congregation standing.*)

SCRIPTURE LESSON—LEVITICUS 19 (*Congregation seated.*)

PRAYER (*Congregation seated.*)

HYMN (*Congregation standing.*)

- 1 God of our fathers, whose almighty hand
Leads forth in beauty all the starry band
Of shining worlds in splendor through the skies,
Our grateful songs before Thy throne arise.
- 2 Thy love divine hath led us in the past;
In this free land by Thee our lot is cast;
Be Thou our Ruler, Guardian, Guide, and Stay;
Thy word our law, Thy paths our chosen way.
- 3 From war's alarms, from deadly pestilence,
Be Thy strong arm our ever sure defense;
Thy true religion in our hearts increase,
Thy bounteous goodness nourish us in peace.

- 4 Refresh Thy people on their toilsome way,
Lead us from night to never-ending day;
Fill all our lives with love and grace divine,
And glory, laud, and praise be ever Thine. Amen.

SERMON—"A GREAT AGE"

HYMN (*Congregation standing.*)

- 1 My country, 'tis of thee,
Sweet land of liberty,
Of thee I sing;
Land where my fathers died,
Land of the pilgrims' pride,
From ev'ry mountain side
Let freedom ring.
- 2 My native country, thee,
Land of the noble free,
Thy name I love;
I love thy rocks and rills,
Thy woods and templed hills;
My heart with rapture thrills
Like that above.
- 3 Let music swell the breeze
And ring from all the trees
Sweet freedom's song;
Let mortal tongues awake;
Let all that breathe partake;
Let rocks their silence break,
The sound prolong.
- 4 Our fathers' God! to Thee,
Author of liberty,
To Thee we sing:
Long may our land be bright
With freedom's holy light;
Protect us by Thy might,
Great God, our King! Amen.

BENEDICTION (*Congregation standing.*)


RECESSIONAL (*Congregation standing.*)

The congregation is requested to remain standing until the graduates and the faculty have left the hall.

SELECTED SERMONS, ADDRESSES
AND WRITINGS OF
ABBA HILLEL SILVER

VOLUME ONE

THEREFORE
CHOOSE
LIFE



THE WORLD PUBLISHING COMPANY
CLEVELAND AND NEW YORK

SECTION 2

THE WAY



"To Blaze a Trail through Life..."

Sermon, The Temple,
February 1, 1920

I BELIEVE IN MYSELF. *I believe in the dignity and the nobility of the soul which God has implanted within me.*

Even as I believe in myself I believe in my fellowmen, for they are like unto me in gifts and capacities.

I believe in work.

I believe in the adventure of life.

I believe in saving my soul from wealth and from poverty, and from all the physical circumstances of life. They must not touch my soul.

I believe in never growing old.

I believe in never growing surfeited with life, in never drinking too greedily and too hastily of the cup of life.

I believe in disciplining myself to hunger for things.

I believe that I owe a debt to my God and my fellowmen for the soul which God has given me and for the education which society has afforded me.

I believe in service, first as a payment of a just debt, and secondly, as the only avenue by which men and women ever can find or ever have found real, soul contentment and happiness.

I do not believe in being ordinary and average and commonplace. The one ambition of my mortal days would be to break through all the confining circumstances of my world to rise above the dead level of mediocrity, and to raise others; to lead, even as I first am content to follow, to be a pathfinder, to blaze a trail through life. . . .

"Choose Life That You May Live"

ABBA HILLEL SILVER was an optimist, a believer in the imminent dawning of a glorious future, a determined "yea-sayer" to life.

Wherever he looked, he beheld the "irresistible upsurge" of creation. All nations on earth should participate in this upward thrust. America must continue to be the "land of the rainbow promise." Judaism must ever renew its dream of a new heaven and a new earth. Jewish communities in all lands must have faith in their ability to build a vibrant and creative existence. The ancient land of Zion was destined for a new birth of body and soul.

This kind of optimism would not have been extraordinary in the nineteenth century. But it was Rabbi Silver's lot to speak and lead during an age which saw bitter economic depressions, gigantic world wars, and the annihilation of six million Jews. An optimism which could survive such facts had to be based on something deeper than visible surface phenomena.

Abba Hillel Silver drew his faith from a commitment to the classical tenets of Judaism—its command to choose life; its belief in the existence of a Supreme Designer Who wanted his creation to be based on foundations of justice and mercy; its assertion that man could and must help God to complete His design. The proofs he offered for these root commitments also ran along classic lines. He sought testimony from man's intuition, from the example of great souls and the lesson of history.

Of course, with Rabbi Silver, as with any strong and creative personality, these fundamental Jewish doctrines took on the flavor of his own temperament—a temperament which William James would have quickly classified as "healthy-minded." And it was a youthful brand of healthy-mindedness that Silver called for—called

The Way

for with as much vigor in his sixties as he did in his twenties. He rejected morbidity and despair. He called again and again for the "lift" which goes with youth. He fought old age wherever it appeared—be it in the tendency of an individual to surrender dreams, or the inclination of a religion to settle in "deep grooves of habit." Rabbi Silver liked the Hasidic interpretation of the Biblical phrase ". . . and Abraham travelled." "Yes, Abraham travelled—he travelled and travelled—from level to level."

This vision of life as a constant reaching for a new, a higher level appears in Abba Hillel Silver's earliest sermons. It is maintained with unyielding tenacity to the end of his life.

H.W.

NOTHING IS CHANGELESS

Sermon, The Temple,
for the Festival of Succoth, 1962

ONE MAJOR LESSON which we may learn from nature is that nothing is static, nothing is changeless. In some phenomenon of nature, change is very sudden and dramatic, such as volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, tornadoes; in others, change is hardly perceptible, like the quiet action of winds and waves and the slow movement of glaciers. But change, nevertheless, goes on. On all organic life there is ceaseless adaptability; cycles of growth and decay. In plant life there is the bud, the blossoming, the fruit and the withering. In man there is birth, growth and death. Nothing remains indefinitely the same.

There is a lesson in all this for mankind. There are two forces which are constantly at work in human society—the instinct to conserve and the drive to change. The instinct to conserve, to keep things as they are is strong among men. They know that change is fraught with uncertainty, at times with danger. Why risk experimentation? Why not stay with tradition? Social habits are deep grooves. It is easier to stay in grooves than to get out of them. It is far simpler to do a thing

because that is how it has been done right along, or that is the way all other men do it. We feel ourselves safe and we like to think ourselves free within our customary routine of thought, attitude and action. People find psychological security in conservatism, regardless of what else they find.

But there has always been another force at work in society — a drive to change, to experiment, to probe into the unknown. Perhaps there is a better way of doing this thing. Perhaps there are lovelier green valleys across the mountains.

“Yes, and it is an old, homely-looking book, modest as nature and as unaffected, a book that has a work-a-day and unassuming look, like the sun that warms us, like the bread that nourishes us; a book that seems to us as familiar and as full of kindly blessing as the old grandmother who reads daily in it with dear, trembling lips, and with spectacles on her nose. And this book is called — quite briefly — “the Book”, the Bible. Rightly do men also call it the Holy Scriptures; for he that has lost his God can find Him again in this Book and towards him that has never known God it sends forth the breath of the Divine Word. The Jews, who appreciate the value of precious things, knew right well what they were doing when, at the burning of the Second Temple, they left the gold and silver implements of sacrifice, the candlesticks and lamps, even the breastplate of the High Priest adorned with great jewels to their fate, but saved the Bible. This was the real treasure of the Temple, and, thanks be to God! it was not left a prey to the flames or the fury of Titus Vespasian . . .”

Long before Heine, the great teachers of Israel said, concerning the Bible, **הפך בו והפך בו** turn it round and round and yet round again, for everything is in it. The Bible is the mirror of the whole life of man and every one of man's problems and every one of man's moods are reflected in it.

There are quite a number of synonyms in the Hebrew language in the Bible for anger, corresponding to the preva-

The Way

lence of that passion among men and the frequency of it. There is אף and חמה and כעס and רגז and עברה and סף and many others to describe a passion which is responsible for so much of tragedy in the world and also for so much of greatness.

"What Does The Lord Demand Of You..."

THERE WAS NEVER ANY QUESTION in Abba Hillel Silver's mind as to where our civilization could find firm ground for its values, where his own people could find their "elixir" of life, and where the individual could find steady inspiration and guidance. Torah—the word which in its narrow sense means the Five Books of Moses, in a broader sense, all of Jewish sacred literature, and in an even broader sense, all learning and wisdom—this was the fundamental ingredient of the Jewish way of life.

Rabbi Silver was born into a home and family where the study of Torah was framed in its traditional religious framework. He was never able to agree with the many in his day—both in America and in Israel—who tried to take Torah out of its religious context. Even as a young man, he personally succeeded in making a bridge between the pull of the old Jewish sources and the call of the new age—the bridge which many in his own generations were unable to build. He attended a traditional Talmud Torah as a child, was active in the formation of groups trying to revive Hebrew as a modern tongue, and was an avid reader of every genre of Western literature.

The section which follows offers a sampling of sermons and public discourses illustrating the "root" values which Rabbi Silver derived from his religious tradition and which helped him to "steer steadily" through the "deep and turbulent cross-currents of his day."

H.W

Social Values

*Interview, Cleveland Press
January 8, 1934*

BEING BY TEMPERAMENT A RADICAL, *trying to cling to "root" values and basic principles, I have endeavored not to lose my course in the turbulent but surface cross-currents of my day but to steer steadily down the sure and deep channels of human progress. I am convinced that there certain human ideals which are indispensable to any age, regardless of its intellectual, policitical or economic complexion.*

These abiding social values are quite oldfashioned. 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 lined 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.

THE WORLD RESTS UPON THREE THINGS

*Sermon, The Temple,
April 15, 1956*

I READ YOU THIS MORNING the first Chapter of the *מסכת אבות* "The Sayings of the fathers". It is the custom in our Synagogues to read these Chapters of The Fathers, or The Sayings of the Fathers during the weeks between Passover and Shavuot. There were places and times when these Chapters were read every Saturday afternoon in the Synagogues. It is found in our Mishna and it is a collection of the ethical sayings which are attributed to famous rabbis from the time of

the assembly—the Great Assembly—until the time of a period of some five hundred years. Its a compendium of the great principles of Judaism as expressed in characteristic ways maxim—dicta—by one or another of these great luminaries among the sages of our people. In the Talmud we come across a saying of Rabba that he who wishes to become a truly pious man—a true Chassid—should study. These Chapters were so popular among our people that they became incorporated in our Prayer Book—in our liturgy. And they helped to mold and fashion the ethical thinking and conduct of our people through the ages. Of one of these sayings I wish to speak this morning. It is included in this first Chapter which we read this morning—“Simon the Just” was one of the last survivors of the men of the Great Assembly, and he used to say, “Upon three things the world rests: upon Torah—upon Avodah (worship)—and upon (acts of loving kindness). Now the Great Assembly, of which “Simon the Just” was one of the last survivors, was the legislative body which was brought into existence after the return from the Babylonian captivity by Ezra and who preceded them. “Simon the Just” was a High Priest who lived around the year 300 Before the Common Era. Quite a number of interesting legends are connected with his life. Alexander the Great, in his conquest of the Orient, also came to Palestine and was determined to destroy the Temple in Jerusalem, having been incited to do so by the Samaritans. Whereupon “Simon the Just” who was the High Priest at the time, according to this legend, put on his priestly garments; and some of the noble men of Israel went with him, carrying fiery torches in their hands; and they walked all through the night until the dawn, and came to the camp of Alexander the Great. And when Alexander saw the High Priest, “Simon the Just”, legend has it that he bowed down before him and the men standing around Alexander said to him, “A great King, like yourself, should bow down before this Jew?” Whereupon Alexander answered, “His image it is which wins for me in all my battles.” Whatever the truth of this legend is Alexander *did* conquer Palestine *and* Jerusalem, but did *not* destroy the Temple. A contemporary of “Simon the Just”, an eminent physician by the name of Jesus Ben Sirach, whose Memoirs and wise sayings are contained in that

noted Book of Ecclesiasticus which is found in our Apocrypha, describes "Simon the Just" —his appearance as he officiated in The Temple, and I read from the Book of Ecclesiasticus — 50th Chapter:

"Simon the high priest, the son of Onias, who in his life repaired the house again, and in his days fortified the temple:

And by him was built from the foundation the double height, the high fortress of the wall about the temple:

In his days the cistern to receive water, being in compass as the sea, was covered with plates of brass:

He took care of the temple that it should not fall, and fortified the city against besieging:

(that sentence that he took care of the Temple that it should not fall was probably responsible for this legend which I just recounted to you)

"How was he honoured in the midst of the people in his coming out of the sanctuary!

He was as the morning star in the midst of a cloud, and as the moon at the full:

As the sun shining upon the temple of the most High, and as the rainbow giving light in the bright clouds:

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VOLUME ONE 07

THEREFORE CHOOSE LIFE



*Selected Sermons, Addresses,
and Writings of*

ABBA HILLEL SILVER

EDITED BY HERBERT WEINER,
WITH A MEMOIR BY SOLOMON B. FREEHOF

THE WORLD PUBLISHING COMPANY

CLEVELAND AND NEW YORK

THE WAY



"TO BLAZE A TRAIL THROUGH LIFE"

MAN'S MOTIVATION
TYPE

I BELIEVE IN MYSELF. I believe in the dignity and the nobility of the soul which God has implanted within me.

Even as I believe in myself I believe in my fellowmen, for they are like unto me in gifts and capacities.

I believe in work.

I believe in the adventure of life.

I believe in saving my soul from wealth and from poverty, and from all the physical circumstances of life. They must not touch my soul.

I believe in never growing old.

I believe in never growing surfeited with life, in never drinking too greedily and too hastily of the cup of life.

I believe in disciplining myself to hunger for things.

I believe that I owe a debt to my God and my fellowmen for the soul which God has given me and for the education which society has afforded me.

I believe in service, first as a payment of a just debt, and secondly, as the only avenue by which men and women ever can find or ever have found real soul contentment and happiness.

I do not believe in being ordinary and average and commonplace. The one ambition of my mortal days would be to break through all the confining circumstances of my world to rise above the dead level of mediocrity, and to raise others; to lead, even as I first am content to follow, to be a pathfinder, to blaze a trail through life. . . .

FROM A SERMON, THE TEMPLE
FEBRUARY 1, 1920

"Choose Life That You May Live" We begin with two addresses—delivered almost forty-five years apart, yet trying to evoke the same mood. Between the valedictory sermon delivered at the Hebrew Union College in 1915 and the 1959 address at the University of Virginia, the world saw two disastrous global wars, and the development of armaments which could annihilate the human race. But the mature Abba Hillel Silver clings to the same root conviction that he held as a young man. It is the song of his life, his portion in the Messianic faith of his people—namely, that the future can be wondrously good.

This is Abba Hillel Silver's root affirmation—a full-hearted "Yes" to the possibilities of life. Wherever he looked, he saw the "irresistible upsurge" of creation. All nations on earth should participate in this upward thrust. America must continue to be the "land of the rainbow promise." Judaism must ever renew its dream of a new heaven and a new earth. Jewish communities in all lands must have faith in their ability to build a vibrant and creative existence. The ancient land of Zion was destined for a new birth of body and soul.

This kind of optimism would not have been extraordinary in the nineteenth century. But it was Rabbi Silver's lot to speak and lead during an age which witnessed bitter economic depressions, global conflicts, and the annihilation of six million Jews. An optimism which could survive such events had to be based on something deeper than visible surface phenomena.

Abba Hillel Silver drew his faith from a commitment to the classical tenets of Judaism—its command to choose life; its belief in the existence of a Supreme Designer who wanted His creation to be based on foundations of justice and mercy; its assertion that man could and must help God to complete His design. The proofs he offered for his commitment also ran along classic lines. He sought testimony from man's intuition, from the example of great souls and the lesson of history.

Of course, with Rabbi Silver as with any strong and creative personality, these fundamental Jewish doctrines took on the flavor of his own temperament, a temperament which William James would have quickly classified as "healthy-minded." And it was a youthful brand of healthy-mindedness that Silver called for—called for with as much vigor in his sixties as he did in his twenties. He rejected morbidity and despair. He called again and again for the "lift" which goes with youth. He fought old age wherever it appeared, whether in the tendency of an individual to surrender dreams, or the inclination of a religion to settle in "deep grooves of habit." Rabbi Silver liked the Hasidic interpretation of the Biblical phrase ". . . And Abraham traveled." "Yes, Abraham traveled—he traveled and traveled—from level to level."

This vision of life as a constant reaching for a new, a higher level appears in Abba Hillel Silver's earliest sermons. It is maintained with unyielding tenacity to the end of his life.

H.W.

Man's Hopes in the Atomic Age

BACCALAUREATE
UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA
JUNE 14, 1959

This age in which we live is a truly great age, one of the greatest in human history. We are too near our times properly to appraise them. One requires distance in order to see great objects in their proper perspective. We ourselves are too much involved in the turmoil, the fears, and the conflicts of our day to see objectively the amazing new patterns of life which are emerging. In a generation or two, when mankind will have entered quieter waters and a period of consolidation will have followed this explosive and revolutionary age of ours, men will be able to look back upon it and evaluate it properly.

Many people today are filled with dark forebodings and are quite pessimistic about our times. They are quick to describe them as materialistic, as lacking in idealism, aim, and purpose, and as drifting helplessly to disaster in a flaming sea of atomic horror.

I am persuaded that ours is truly a great age. Great and historic things are coming to pass in our day. I am not thinking at the moment of the new worlds which science is continually disclosing, the new insights into the nature of matter and energy, the new sources of power and wealth, the new methods of production, distribution, transportation, and communication. I am not referring to the amazing progress in the medical sciences, nor to the marvels of engineering and the miracles of construction all over the globe. Inventions and discoveries come in such rapid succession in our day that they no longer excite any unusual comment. We take it all in our stride—the flying age, the television age, the atomic age—and now the interplanetary age.

MAN'S HOPES IN THE ATOMIC AGE

In characterizing our age as great, I am thinking in terms of human advancement and civilization. More is being done in our day for the improvement of the conditions of the life of the common man, for the raising of his standard of living, his health, his education, and for his protection against the disabilities of sickness, unemployment, and old age than in any generation—than in any five generations in the past. Never have peoples and governments been so much concerned with the improvement of the lives of the men. Never have more determined efforts been made to bring about a fairer sharing of the wealth produced and a better way of life for all.

Never have the submerged races and peoples of the earth, who for centuries groaned under foreign or native tyranny, risen as they have risen in our day to demand and to achieve freedom and self-determination. Within the last fifteen years, one-fourth of the earth's population—more than five hundred million non-self-governing people—have obtained sovereignty and self-government. Imperialism and colonialism are in their death throes. Backward peoples are pressing forward into the light of a new day, and the exploitation of the dark races of the earth is rapidly drawing to a close.

What we are witnessing in our day, if we have eyes not only to see things but to see into the heart of things, is not social disintegration, but a radical new reintegration of humanity, a profound change in the social evolution of man, a change not free, of course, from dangers, but one of boundless and immeasurable potentialities.

I do not wish to overdraw the picture. I am not suggesting that the millennium is just around the corner. There is no country on earth, including our own, which is altogether free from class conflict, from bigotry, intolerance, slums, and privation. It will take centuries, not decades or generations, before all the peoples of the world will possess even that measure of well-being, far from the optimum, which some of the most favored peoples of the world already possess.

The important thing to consider, however, is not whether we are on the eve of the millennium, but whether the major trends of our age are moving toward the hoped-for good society, or away from it. Is our age purposefully trying to eradicate poverty and illiteracy and to raise the standard of living of all peoples, regardless of race or color or creed? Is it trying to satisfy the legitimate aspirations of peoples to national freedom and independence? Is it trying to organize the world for peace and for international cooperation? I believe that in all these major trends, our age has

MAN'S HOPES IN THE ATOMIC AGE

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given welcome evidence of serious determination and of considerable progress. It is moving purposefully in the right direction—the abolition of war, the reduction of poverty, and the elimination of racial barriers and inequalities. These are the three major trends of our century. And because they are the major trends of our day, there is great hope for man in this atomic age.

What we need is a strong faith which will sustain us in the long, hard struggle to establish this good society toward which we all wish to move.

Such a faith, in my judgment, is built upon three postulates: the reality of purpose in the universe, the significance of the individual, and the sanctity of method. Within such a faith man will find that measure of dignity, confidence, and courage without which the struggle for social progress cannot long be maintained and the promise of human life must be abandoned to defeat.

Somewhere Professor Einstein has written: "What is the meaning of human life or of organic life altogether? To answer this question at all implies a religion. Is there any sense, then, you ask, in putting it? I answer, the man who regards his own life and that of his fellow creatures as meaningless is not merely unfortunate, but almost disqualified for life."

As man develops in awareness of himself and of the world about him, and gains in sensitiveness and comprehension, he acquires also glimpses of purpose in the universe. He comes to sense what the Prophet Isaiah sensed when he declared: "He is a God who created the world not for chaos, and formed it to be inhabited." Like all human insights into fundamentals, this sense of purpose and meaning is not clear beyond any peradventure of doubt. It is seen as through a glass darkly, but is it sufficiently persuasive and responsive to basic human needs to be enheartening and strengthening.

Addressing the Harvard Law School Association of New York back in 1913, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes gave expression to just such a strong, mystic, conviction: "I think it is not improbable that man, like the grub that prepares a chamber for the winged thing it never has been but is to be—that man may have cosmic destinities that he does not understand. And so beyond the vision of battling races and an impoverished earth, I catch a dreaming glimpse of peace." And he voiced his faith "in a universe not measured by our fears," but one "that has thought and more than thought inside of it."

A confident faith in a controlling and beneficent purpose unfolding



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