



## 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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The sovereignty of law and method, undated.



THE SANCTITY OF METHOD  
Dr. Abba Hillel Silver

One of the essential contributions of <sup>method</sup>ethical religion to human progress is the concept of method. There is not only God and the Good Life but there is also a definitive way - the "good way" - which alone leads from one to the other. To Judaism this was the "way of the Lord". To Christianity, Jesus was the symbol of "the way".

Religion offered a new method by which men might attain morally desirable ends - a method worthy of the ends. Ethical religion outlawed the notion that moral ends justify immoral means. Each step on the way towards the realization of a noble objective must be a noble objective in itself. Means have a way of integrating themselves into the ends and of determining their quality and pattern. Therefore, to establish justice, men must employ the ways of justice, and to establish peace, the ways of peace.

The more exalted human goals are, the less likelihood is there of their complete attainment. When impatient and desperate measures, measures of ruthlessness and brutality, are employed, they not only make the attainment of the goals impossible, but they turn man's long weary way towards them into a misery and a horror.

Ethical religion has been careful to define the character of this "way".  
(It is the way of obedience to a supreme moral law which is binding upon groups and governments as well as upon individuals. It is the way of allegiance to a sovereignty which is higher than that of any state, party, or majority. It is the way of acceptance of a law ~~which~~ which overarches all human groupings and their temporary and shifting political or economic interests.) The just way calls for a curbing and control of all concentrated power. It demands the safeguarding of the spiritual integrity and freedom of the individual. Nothing must be done, even in our eager quest for the perfect society, which will reduce the stature of the individual and trespass upon his inalienable rights. It is the



way which uses good will and tolerance between peoples, classes, and races for the establishment of justice and peace in the world.

This classic way of religion has never been fully tried in the world and today it is being rejected more thoroughly than at any time in human history. Insolent and cynical state and class autocracies have proclaimed that there is no law superior to theirs and that their way <sup>is</sup> infallible because their vast punitive force has made it uncontradictable. The individual is being terrorized into spiritual and intellectual subjection, and every precinct of his life is being invaded and possessed.

The Middle Ages were theo-centric. The Modern Age has been anthropo-centric. Our post-bellum Age is dangerously politico-centric. The first was an age of faith. The second, an age of reason. Ours is in danger of becoming an age of abject servility both in faith and reason.

The economic life of mankind is fast resolving itself into a bitter class war. Each class is resorting without much compunction or hesitancy to methods of violence, suppression and civil war. Each class justifies its tactics in the name of some great ideal. The shame of our age is that men are committing the most infamous acts of immorality in the name of the highest morality. Methods which are abhorred and denounced in one's opponents are rationalized into moral imperatives when employed by one's self. Men talk of justice, a classless society, patriotism, nation, race, culture and peace but they act as if these noble ideals were demons out of hell lashing them on to furious acts of injustice, hatred, chauvenism, arrogance and blood.

By their way shall ye know men, not by their objectives. Men seem to have forgotten that democracy, too, is unique because of a characteristic method. In the philosophy of democracy, the process is as important as the objective.

*It seems as if idealism spoils morals. People who are moral in their private lives become unscrupulously immoral when in pursuit of some national or party ideal.*



Democracy is a way, even as religion is a way. When, therefore, you meet a person who is fighting fascism in the name of democracy, and that person does not, in the same breath denounce communism, you may know that he is an enemy of democracy. When you meet a person who is fighting communism in the name of democracy, and that person does not in the same breath denounce fascism, you will know that he, too, is an enemy of democracy. And not only of democracy, but of religion as well. For at the heart of religion is the reality of a new and different method which both fascism and communism, in the employment of their characteristic method, are grossly violating.

A church that will launch a vigorous crusade against communism and withhold its thunder-bolts from fascism is not really fighting the spiritual evils and the irreligious methods which it complains ~~of~~ in communism, for these identical evils and methods exist also in fascism. Such a church gives the impression, unfortunately, of fighting not for basic religious principles, but for vested ecclesiastical interests.

Method and not objectives is what distinguishes propaganda from education. The way of propaganda is the way of bias, deceit, distortion of facts, appeals to prejudice and hysteria. The way of education is the way of truth, reason, fairness and calm deliberation. Therefore, propaganda serves dictatorship and education serves democracy. Our age has too much of propaganda and too little of education. The war of Shaddai upon Diabolus today is the war of education upon propaganda.



## THE SOVEREIGNTY OF LAW AND METHOD

By

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Ethical religion has been careful to define the character of this method, of the "Good Way". It is the way of obedience to a supreme moral law which is binding upon groups and governments as well as upon individuals. It is the way of allegiance to a sovereignty which is higher than that of any state, party, or majority. It is the way of acceptance of a law which overarches all human groupings and their temporary and shifting political or economic interests. The just way calls for a curbing and control of all concentrated power. It demands the safeguarding of the spiritual integrity and freedom of the individual. Nothing must be done, even in our eager quest for the perfect society, which will reduce the stature of the ~~individual~~ individual and trespass upon his inalienable rights. It is the way which uses good will and tolerance between peoples, classes, and races for the establishment of justice and peace in the world.



This classic way of religion has never been fully tried in the world. Today it is being rejected more thoroughly than at any time in human history. Insolent and cynical state and class autocracies have proclaimed that there is no law superior to theirs and that their way is infallible because their vast punitive force makes it uncontradictable. The individual is being terrorized into spiritual and intellectual subjection, and every precinct of his life is being invaded and possessed.

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Our generation has not only forgotten the sanctity of method, it has also lost the sense of a universally recognized and accredited code of moral conduct. All our moral ideas have again been thrown into the crucible. There is hardly a single moral concept in private or in public life which may be said to receive the universal sanction and endorsement of our generation. Marriage, industry, patriotism, tolerance, liberty, peace, democracy - these moral principles which a previous generation accepted almost axiomatically, as fixed ~~m~~ rules of life and guiding principles, have in our day become the subject of the most bitter controversy and negation. It is not that everybody does not observe them in practice. It is that they are being denied in essence and rejected in principle by so many - and by organized groups, classes and governments even more than by individuals. What should be the natural source of moral guidance and authority - governments - are today polluted cesspools of moral iniquity. Organized governments are today, through their moral license, their opportunism, cynicism, terrorism, broken pledges and piracy confounding the moral lives of their citizens, and undermining whatever authority the moral law may still possess among them.

The break-down of both Law and Method in the Modern World has given us the kind of a world which we have today - a world tense, apprehensive, in a continuous mood of crisis and full of aberrations. The challenge to the hard-pressed spiritual forces of our day is to hold aloft in a confused and darkened world the banners of spiritual law and the Good Way. Else mankind's struggle today for economic justice will lead to greater injustice; and for universal peace, to greater and more terrible war.



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