



## Daniel Jeremy Silver Collection Digitization Project

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### **MS-4850: Daniel Jeremy Silver Papers, 1972-1993.**

Series III: The Temple Tifereth-Israel, 1946-1993, undated.

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The Sages of Our People: Hillel, 1966.

## One of a Series

## The Temple

Sunday, December 18, 1966

Rabbi Daniel Jeremy Silver

Two thousand years ago, during the first pre-Christian century, the scholar Hillel broke ground for what we now call Rabbinic Judaism. Until his day Jewish life was governed by the specific rules and regulations of the Biblical law and by a body of law which was of some antiquity, and which had been passed down by word of mouth, from teacher to student, from jurist to young lawyer. There was law but no accepted principle of interpretation; consequently there was no elbow room for the development of Judaism so that it could adjust to changing social and economic situations. Hillel pioneered, what I would like to call, constitutional Judaism. Hillel looked upon the Bible as we look upon our own constitution; as a document of basic principles which must be abided, as a document of infinite depth and dimension from which, by correct logic, common sense and interpretation, those skilled in the law can draw rules appropriate to their day. Hillel was Justices Holmes and Brandeis rolled into one. He gave Jewish life flexibility - living space, and he assured at the same time the continuity of Jewish life.

If we were to list the classic reformers of Jewish life, those men who, more than any other, set Judaism on its modern course, Hillel would necessarily be pre-eminent among them. But it is not to Hillel the jurist that I would turn your attention this morning. I shall speak of Hillel the man, and I shall present him to you as you might be presented to another generation, as a man of more than ordinary parts who wrestled with one of the common and familiar problems of life, how to maintain his simplicity, his integrity in a corrosive and corrupting age, how to



maintain his dignity and his decency in a vulgar and callous society.

Hillel was born at about the time that Pompeii made Palestine a Roman province. During his lifetime the armies of Pompeii, Cassius, and Caesar and later the armies of Octavius and Anthony, marched and countermarched throughout the land, ravishing and pillaging as their generals sought the royal purple. When they left the Jews were wont to say that there was not a blade of wheat left standing in the fields and not an animal left alive in its pen. This was a time of devastation and constant warfare, and as a local counterpoint there were minor, yet bloody battles between Jewish patricians and noblemen scrambling for the power to rule in the name of Rome.

We observed last week the holiday of Chanukah. Chanukah celebrates the establishment of the second Jewish commonwealth by the loyalists who fought with Judah Maccabee. During the fourth decade of the first pre-Christian century the last of the Hasmanians fought among themselves for the crown and destroyed much of Israel in the process. Shortly afterwards Antipater overthrew these petty pretenders and wiped them out root and branch and established the rule of his house. For the remainder of the century he and then his son Herod ruled dictatorially and cruelly over Israel. Theirs was a police state. Bribery was open. Royal Judges expropriated the holdings of the small farmers to add them to the crown land. Heavy taxes were demanded by Caesar, but even more tax money remained in the grasping hands of Herod.

Herod was a murderous man. He murdered his wife, two of his sons, all of his brothers and sisters. When the Sanhedrin opposed his dictates, forty-five of them were summarily executed. When the High Priest became too popular Herod's palace guard drowned this worthy in the Jordan. Such was the age of Hillel, a time



of chaos, turbulence, and violence, of urban violence and class struggle.

During the previous century the cities had been relatively peaceful. Differences in life style between the very wealthy and the very poor were yet gross. In Roman times the patricians became like little gods, with their retinues of attendants, sycophants and courtiers. They were above the law. They could expropriate whatever they wanted. If a man was in their debt, and he faulted on a payment, he was sold into slavery. There was conspicuous consumption, license, luxury; but, only for the very few. The artisan, the craftsmen, the farmer were impoverished and the poor were driven further into wretchedness. They became a mob, the proletariat. This is Hillel's age and his problems. How does one set a useful and meaningful course for himself when all around is darkness and confusion.

We first hear of Hillel as a young graduate student in the academy of two well-known Pharisaic teachers, Shemayah and Abtalyon. The legend of the young student is well known, how Hillel worked all day as a woodcutter in order to earn his course fee and in order to provide for his wife, and children. Even in those days the young people married young and had families before they had their degrees. One day Hillel was ill and could not go into the hills around Jerusalem to gather wood. He lacked the admission fee, but he would not lose the continuity of the lectures. So he climbed up to the roof of the lecture hall and lay down across the skylight. He lay there so long he was paralyzed by the cold and saved only because the lecturer looked up and saw the shadow of a man on the skylight. Hillel was brought down and revived and given a scholarship to future lectures.

Many a young Jew from the East Side was encouraged by this story when he set out for college with less than the price of a bus ticket in his pocket. If Hillel could support his wife and family by cutting wood and earning a few cents a day, then surely by bussing tables or working in a department store he would make out.



Hillel's indefatigable zeal to learn, his persistence and perserverance are paradigmatic of Israel's love for and veneration of learning. There are two kinds of poverty. There is the hovel, which is dismal, dank, dark, where there is no physical dignity and little amenity for those who live here and the only escape is violence, and drunkenness. And there is a hovel which is dank, dismal, and dark which lacks all the physical amenities of life, and yet, where there is certain dignity. Why? Because those who live here are spiritually and mentally alive, because in it some minds remain alert. Poor wise men can travel far, beyond the confining walls, across the face of the earth, across the breath of civilization. Learning has graced our exile. It has given impoverished lives dimension, excitement, purpose, charm. It has literally saved the dignity of our people, and thus our people.

When Hillel was later to teach, "The more Torah, the more life;" he meant it quite literally. The more man is aware of his world, the more knowledge he has of his surroundings, the more he lives. The animal knows only the little narrow plot in which he hunts, feeds, and builds his lair. The man of learning knows the world. His mind probes the heavens. He meets exciting people. He is excited by many ideas, colors, the harmonies and the beauties of life. Hillel would say: "The man who does not study deserves to die." Indeed, he is already dead.

Hillel would have been bemused by some of our young people. He spent every energy he possessed to earn the money to go to school. Today there are beautiful schools, free to all, yet how many in these ivied halls daydream, dawdle and work indifferently. Learning passes them by as if it had not been spoken. He would have wondered at the sons of his people, for whom all is provided but who lack the simple understanding that without learning, though they be alive, it is as if they were dead.



Hillel's unquenchable thirst for education should not be understood simply as a childish moralism. The important concept about this story is that learning is a self-imposed discipline. The Talmud tells us that Hillel had a brother Shebna who was a successful silk merchant. The brothers were very close and Shebna offered Hillel a full tuition scholarship. All that he needed to provide for his wife, his children, his books and his admission fees. Hillel turned him down, graciously and thankfully, but he turned him down. The Talmud does not indicate why Hillel refused his brother's generous offer, but it does tell us that Hillel quoted to his brother a line from the 'Song of Songs,' which reads, "if a man give all the wealth of his home for love, he will be utterly scorned!" Love can not be bought. Love is an experience. Love is an awareness. Love exists only in relation to other human beings. You can not learn of love by reading all the Psychology manuals in the world. You must feel it, be intimate with it, enjoy it. What is true of love is true of wisdom. The school in which Hillel was enrolled was not simply a technical school where you learned a mass of information to make you professionally competent, it was a school of Torah, of Judaism. Judaism is not simply theology, philosophy, history, law--it is awareness, experience, a life stance, a basis for judgment. Hillel knew that if he moved from the sheltered existence of his childhood into the shelter of the ivory tower and then into the shelter of professional organizations he would lack some awareness, some sensitivity which he needed in order to be effective as jurist, teacher and a human being.

Hillel reminds me of some of our young who deliberately put on the clothes of the poor and during summer vacations or by taking a year or so off from their college work, go out into the center city, live in the tenements, join the Peace Corps. They sense that to mature they must touch bed rock. That, if you want to wage a war on poverty, you must first know what being poor means;



how people feel, how poor people think and respond. Before you judge the stumblings, the lack of initiative of the poor; you, yourself, must have drunk from the cup of bitterness and have lived in hopelessness, constantly frustrated, lacking simple amenities. Hillel set out to understand what life was about. He had no patience with the suave judgments of the very bright who learn from books all there is to know about sociology, philosophy and political science - who can draw up quick panceas for every and all social problems, but who do not understand that men are not integers who can be simply shuffled and reshuffled to the convenience of some social plan. Schooling can give you some facts, the basis for judgment, but not the grace, the wisdom which is the mark of a truly wise man. Hillel sought that wisdom. It is a wisdom that can be found only by experience, only by exposing yourself to the cruel chilly winds of life. This experience made a great difference in Hillel's life.

Many a story is told in our Talmud in which Hillel opposed the general consensus of the Rabbis, and generally we can see that his opposition was based on his knowledge of what it means to be frail, weak and poor. What higher virtue is there than truth? The Rabbis taught that if a scholar is not on the inside as he is on the outside, he has no place in the house of study. "Let your 'yes' be a true 'yes.'" Let your 'no' be a true 'no'. No one could disagree. However, young scholars placed this problem before their teacher; "You teach us to be truthful, yet you go to weddings and sing songs of praise to the beauty of the bride, and the glory of her wedding dress, and often the bride is quite plain and the dress may not fit. How can you sing, my teacher, such songs?" One teacher admitted his error: 'The bride must be described as she is. Let not a scholar be overly-enthusiastic.' Scholars began to absent themselves from the wedding feasts. Hillel came along and said; 'She must be praised for the beauty of her love, let wearing him down, so he simply disappeared from Jerusalem. He was no longer



her be known as she thinks herself to be. Life is bruising and gray, there are few moments of full happiness. When you are poor there are few moments of undiluted joy. You must allow people to rejoice on those rare occasions and not deny them their hour of pleasure.' That is the higher truth.

Once an admirer gave a scholar a well-shaped calf. He announced to his students he would not slaughter the calf until the Sabbath when it would provide his Sabbath meal. The students came to Hillel and said, 'what a fine example of religious piety this teacher sets. He will not slaughter the calf until Sabbath; would that all Israel would follow his example.' Hillel shook his head and quoted to them a verse from the Psalms which reads: "Blessed be the Lord. Day by day he beareth our burden." Let us live and enjoy life in love with our fellow men day by day. Enjoy each day. 'Sufficient unto each day is the evil thereof.' You know not my children what it means to live in the crowded streets. Before the Sabbath comes a child may die of malnutrition, the animal may sicken, the animal may be stolen. Let the poor enjoy what they need now. The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. It was not that Hillel loved the Sabbath less, but that poverty taught him to love man more.

Hillel was not only a genius among jurists, but a saint among saints. But you know, even a saint needs a vacation. There are times when you are used and used and used again, until you are ultimately used up. There are times when this world wears you down, you lose your temper, and the best of us are no longer gentle and sympathetic. We have all felt harrassed. Some retreat to an ivory tower. Some immure themselves behind monastery walls. Some close the door to their home and throw themselves into an orgy of reading. Some simply pack their valise and leave for a few weeks. Once Hillel too, found that life was wearing him down, so he simply disappeared from Jerusalem. He was no longer



to be seen at the Academy. He went out into the wilderness and joined there one of the ascetic communities of the pious, a community of spiritual discipline, and of study. He went to seek his soul. Even as Dr. Schweitzer went to seek his soul in Africa and Thomas Merton went into a monastery to find his.

Hillel went to find his soul in one of those little communities like that of the Dead Sea covenant people. Recent discoveries have told us much about these communities. The first principle of the Qumram community was the regulation to devote one's self to turning away from evil, to hold fast to everything that God has commanded. The brotherhood was to separate itself from the assembly of the men of deceit. They were to be a community with Torah study. The wilderness was Hillel's Walden pond. He lived there for a number of years seeking steadfastness, seeking his soul, seeking to find balance, seeking to find that unending inner strength which alone leads a man to a life of continuing service, which alone frees him from moments of anger, frustration, bitterness and fear. He seemed to have found in the wilderness what he sought, for when he returned to the larger world his patience, his gentleness was proverbial.

There is a story told in the Talmud about two sophisticates who decided to ruffle the feathers of the saintly sage. One bet the other one hundred dollars he could make Hillel angry. It was Friday afternoon, Hillel was preparing himself for the Sabbath and was deep in study. There was a knock on the door. The young blades presented himself. Hillel welcomed him courteously, had him sit down and listened to him patiently. The young man asked a stupid question. Hillel gave a long and patient answer, and the young man left. Hillel went back to his studies. Ten minutes later the young man was back pounding on his door. He was welcomed, invited to sit down, courteously listened to. Again a question more stupid than the first. Again Hillel gave him a courteous and full response. The young man



left. A third time, and a fourth, and finally when he had been answered gently by this scholar a fourth time the young man burst out; 'May there be no other like you in Israel.' 'Why?' 'Because I lost a month's wages because I could not make you angry.' To this news Hillel is reported to have said: 'Better to take the month's wages and spend them for a year's tuition at the academy. There you will learn what is truly worth knowing.'

Hillel's patience became proverbial. He spent the better part of his long career teaching Jews what we call Hesed, the principal of loving kindness-- to deal with other men as you would have them deal with you. Hillel is then a scholar-saint. But, Hillel, like all of us, had moments of frustration. Better than most of us he knew when to withdraw and turn in on himself. It is not wise just to keep going come what may. Withdraw for a while, find yourself, 'If I am not for myself, who will be for me?' 'If I don't watch after my own soul no one else will watch over it for me. And if it is corrupted there is no healing. But he also learned in the wilderness that withdrawal is a luxury. We need silence and quiet and privacy, but, too much silence and too much privacy is selfish. 'If I am for myself alone, what am I?' 'If I do not go back to the world, if I am not part of the action and passion of my age, it is as though I have never lived. I am useless.' 'Never permanently separate yourself from the community.' You have responsibilities to your home, to your family, to your community, to your nation, and these can not be shrugged off simply because you are concerned with your soul. If you would understand why Judaism never exalted monasticism here is the answer. The Hillels of our people learned that you can not care well for your soul when you deny it the relationships and the challenges of family and community life.

Hillel, like a teacher of Christianity whose birthday will be celebrated next week, taught through parables. Hillel once told of a young rosebush, very resplendent in its colors, growing under a large, old, gnarled apple tree. Its buds preened



themselves: 'where have you seen such color as mine" Notice my fragrance, there is none like it in the world. Look at the old beaten up apple tree up there, those plain leaves, those spreading branches, ugly and misshapen. And look at us!'

And the apple tree replied: 'true, there is beauty in you, but you are young, and you have not yet learned how to give man your blossom without drawing blood with your thorns. If a man takes a stone and throws it at me, I give him my apples. "

Hillel learned to appreciate the apple tree. He was willing, steadfastly, to give of his learning, and counsel, whether they thanked him or no, whether they approved of his teaching or not, whether they praised him or threw stones at him. This is the wisdom of age and the wisdom of experience, and perhaps this is the answer to the question that Hillel faced and that we face again: How can I find myself in a corrosive and corrupted world? By dignity, innocence, simplicity. Learn what life is all about, not simply what is in the books. Live, and when life is too much for you, withdraw. Find God, find perspective, find your soul. Having found it, return. Return to the habitations of men, strong in your conviction of what is right and necessary, unperturbed by criticism and undeterred by objections, walking a straight line, a line you have set for yourself.

Hillel died. He was mourned by Israel as the gentle one, the man of wisdom, the man who had left life to the living. If we too want to add to the store of life of those with whom we live we would do well to follow his example.



# Kaddish

Friday

Sunday

Dec 16 1966  
Dec 18 1966

Those who passed away this week

DR. JOSEPH H. GOODMAN

ARTHUR J. MILLER

HENRY KLEIN

SADIE BRESSMAN

## Vahrzeits

THOMAS BRENNAN

IGNATIUS SCHOENBERGER

ADOLPH KOHN

ISADORE D. WERTHEIMER

SENTA R. BERGER

MINNIE FULDAUER

BENJAMIN MESHORER

JOSEPH HAYS

SAMUEL KANGISSER

BERNARD A. RUBIN

CATHERINE S. WEGLEIN

JEROME JAMES NEWMAN

KENNETH H. SCHWARTZ

SIGMUND KORACH

SARAH FAIGIN WEISS

HERBERT NEUBAUER

MORT S. SILBERGER

LOIS M. SCHUR

EDWARD I. WEISBERG

SOLOMON S. FIRTH

SAMUEL FRIEDMAN

BENJAMIN LOWENSTEIN

MINNIE WEINBERGER

READ ON FRIDAY DEC. 16 ONLY

SOL R. BING



This is the regulation for the men of the community who devote themselves to turn away from every evil and to hold fast to everything which God has commanded as His pleasure: they shall separate themselves from the assembly of the men of deceit, they shall be a community with Torah study.





2000 yrs. ago - during the 13th per x cent ult. He had made the ground  
for what was new case rulebook. Until his day Jud. was regulated  
by the Torah law & by a body of ancient rulings which were passed on  
orally from ancestor to ancestor. Jud. reached an acceptable method  
for managing the necessary changes in rules & ritual brought about by  
changes society & condition. He planned what I like to call  
Constitutional Jud. . He showed how a carefully concerned interpretation &

logic the Rules - made a constitutional document - could be made to  
yield <sup>helpful</sup> ~~judicial~~ guidance for new & necessary sound & structure,

He had seen Isaiah & Jeremiah rolled into one; he taught Israel to see  
the Rules as a test of <sup>depth</sup> infinite dominion which could be moved &  
moved again for guidance and direction. He permitted Jud. to  
survive by providing clauses - room - flexibility - for growth - and at  
the same time he assured the continuity of the fundamental teaching  
& form. He must be listed among the classic & significant figures  
in Jewish history.

But it is not of interpretation or ritual <sup>depth</sup> ~~clauses~~ that I would  
speak this morning. My theme is Heil, the man. My purpose is to  
suggest how one side of rare talents solved one of the central problems  
of every human life: How can I be part of my world; yet not <sup>corrupted</sup> ~~corrupted~~  
or <sup>not</sup> ~~submerged~~ by it? How can I maintain integrity  
and a sense of concern in a greedy & <sup>callous</sup> ~~indifferent~~ age?



killed him because at about the time Pompey changed Palestine  
 to a Roman Province. For the next 60 years Pal. was a suffer-  
average & plunging as the name of Pompey, Caesar, & Brutus -  
 of Galley & Octavian fought and others for the people. These  
men to be seen. When Caesar's army moved through Palestine  
 not a skull of a dead man left standing in the field - not an unburied  
 removed alone for the poor. These were the major wars - in  
 the interval between these campaigns between particular  
 fought between these generals for dominance & the right to  
 rule in the name of Rome. The last Roman war destroyed  
 the other intended & led to bloody interventions & cycles  
 The Idumean Antipater was seen after a decade of barbaric slaughter and murder  
between palatine princes, judicial murders, & murders in public places  
 for human life. When a majority of the population appeared for  
 justice, 45 of these murders were recorded. When a B.P. became too  
 popular, he was hounded off the public ground. During his reign  
 thousands murdered the murderer a single day - 2 years - 2 murders &  
 a dozen murders



killed's eye was an eye of murder. It was clear an eye  
 of carbon murder & murdering parent & blay. City life in  
 earlier times had had a calm stitch & year, based on the  
magnified public city's and its life became a hard



The city became a place of privilege & conspicuous display to  
the wealth & of delectable pleasures & luxuries for the rich.  
Hitherto under the rule of the king the support was found in the  
revenue of about 1400000. The population was great  
but not in the same degree as previously

~~They have spent they - but certainly we are not  
likely to recover money on the regulation of society - and  
even more of results and the effect of the machine - and the  
become a source of the economic effect of hydrogen - as the  
the whole way of the world is a source of the  
the whole of the world is a source of the  
the whole of the world is a source of the  
the whole of the world is a source of the~~

We first met HALL at the ...  
 by 2500 West ...  
Sharon & Calvin. Every ...  
individual ...







The valued idea of and is really in broken pieces scattered in new from the fog of ignorance.

If a man would give all the members of his house ten cents he would be utterly rewarded.

Love is an emotion - conscious, it can not be taught by smuggling & psychology courses or taught by reading philosophy manuals. & what a little of love is an act of understanding. Books & lectures give no information but not judgment. The lecture of Shuman & utilitarian offered little knowledge of jud. science & history - what other had taught - but not what he must teach as a responsible teacher in his particular situation. Hill reminded me of young people of 65 who pick up concepts off the campus daily paper - concepts as accidents & read on with the claim to know & work until the poor. Those show show how much of Hill's instinct that you can not manage a man on poverty until you know what it is to be poor - but you can not judge the sterile and empty utilitarianism of the underprivileged until you have been down from the top of high frustration. In Hill's case, in fact, even the most bright young men & women under poverty and political judgments based on the values of their own culture & values can not be taught to learn what life was like then. After & again he reminded me of unconscious consequence until the whole remains

INIPNF V'JOP PY P DDP 211 1'20 711 - judge not another until you have actually placed yourself in his situation.

Hill was known in his circle as a leader - with. Some shared his views. Few shared his sympathy - that was the problem of human need which he had so deliberately & unconsciously neglected after. One day a friend to be given a job call. With honesty & prudence, he announced that he would not accept it only if he did, but















[illegible]

anyone who wanted care - could get it - but not  
 & confusion of the country must have been completely abolished -

& confirmed by the second most recent unpublished testimony

No need be able to present details memorandum, for

Example - Victor came to land by private - one of his friends.

don't you know how much I love you and how much I love you?

~~please~~ please present ~~the~~ document - see serials of Journal -

How long will you - wait when we return, just another

[illegible]

1. The plan here - it looked good - The

Apple has replaced celery : Yams do not grow year

men until you have access to the file and you

Stamp later; subject of the same at

~~Notes~~ - 2 years - 1000 copies

most of us are ~~too~~ ~~much~~ ~~under~~ - ~~important~~ - ~~the~~

have reasons to give - but we are all pretty - even

layered - sentence - ~~these~~ <sup>eye</sup> ~~stand~~ = 6 way at all  
last one

agreed - sentence - ~~sent~~  
 done to see - one of ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~reason~~ <sup>reason</sup> ~~was~~ <sup>was</sup> ~~lost~~ <sup>lost</sup> ~~in~~ <sup>in</sup>

to report no further - to give a final report -

an help - give of new class - look at my -



