



## 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.

Sub-series B: Sermons, 1950-1989, undated.

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Freedom and Law, 1970.



FREEDOM AND LAW  
Daniel Jeremy Silver  
April 26, 1970

In our tradition freedom is the original virtue. Freedom stands at the very core of our Jewish existence. It was at the time of our deliverance, freedom's time, that we became a self-conscious people.

Before the Exodus we were a ragtag of semi-Bedwin tribesmen sweating as serfs and slaves and an anemity in Egypt, with freedom rose to a place of historic consequence. We assumed a role in the unfolding of the world's destiny and so as we celebrate this week's Maha ru tenu, the time of our deliverance, the time of our freedom, we are celebrating not only this elemental virtue of freedom but the blessing of freedom which gave mission, dignity, consequence to our historic identity. Before freedom Israel's awareness of God was uncertain and vague. The God of the Patriarchs was an aimless tribal god, the god of Abraham as he was called, the god of Isaac, or the god of Jacob. God who reveals Himself simply as the god of creation can be seen and known in many ways. The god who is seen through the miracle of redemption is ever after so defined and so it is with the one God: I am the Lord Your God, who delivered you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. And the God of freedom, of course, proclaims the rule of freedom for all mankind: Proclaim ye freedom unto the land and to all who dwell therein. Hebrew law was etched in freedom. They could not completely eradicate slavery but they limited slavery to six years and the slave who on the seventh year would not accept his manumission, that man or that woman was to be brought to the great courtyard of the city, the Public Square, and there they would have taken all and they were to pierce his ear lobes as a visible symbol that this was an ear that was somehow damaged, less than whole, for it had heard God proclaim the law of freedom, but it had not heard, it had not been



willing to listen. So much of the sensitivity of our people to the needs of others and the rights of others begins in the experience, the primal historic experience of bondage, of slavery and the contrast between freedom and slavery. The Bible tells us that we are not to bend justice, not to pervert justice, to deny it to the powerless and to the poor, to give extra opportunity to the rich and to the well-placed. Why? For you were once the stranger, the powerless in the land of Egypt. We are told again and again that we are not to mock, to scorn the alien, we are not to laugh at his strange dress or to make fun of the awkwardness of his speech. Why? Because we know the heart of the alien, for you were once yourselves aliens in the land of Egypt. And on this Passover, when our fathers came together to eat as a communal meal the paschal sacrifice they were to see to it that anyone was to be made welcome, the stranger, the foreigner, the immigrant, the wanderer, as well as the homes-born. There was to be no outcast, no pariah, - why? "For you, too, were once the outcasts in the land of Egypt. "

Our history begins in the history of a slave people. We have no pretense as to dignity of birth, as to the roots from which our family tree is drawn. We come from what the Bible describes as a motley, a mixed anonymous rabble, ordinary peoples, sweating slaves and serfs. There is no myth in our Bible which describes Jews as having come down from the gods, as having come from a race of great heroes, superior to any of the other races of men - not at all. We were simply slaves amongst ordinary ordinary folk. You will not find in our tradition any glorification of the state, any ~~divine~~ sanctification of the divine right of kings - why? Because history begins for us with a bruised back beaten and bloody by the whip of the taskmaster of



Pharaoh's army, Pharaoh who believed himself the god incarnate, the divine man, assuming office. The sense of democracy, the thirst for freedom, the sensitivity to the needs of others, all these begin in this original primary experience. We were once slaves. We know what it has been to be beaten, to be degraded, to be debased, to be defamed, to be bruised, to be condemned. We have an obligation, therefore, to treat others with dignity, to permit others their freedom, to give to others the same rights which when we enjoy them we are fortunate enough to enjoy. <sup>Arnold Heine</sup> ~~Harner Kinah~~ once observed that ever since Sinai, ever since the Exodus, freedom speaks with a Hebrew accent. What he meant was simply this -freedom, the idea, the hope, the aspiration for freedom, seems to have penetrated only where the voice of the god of the exodus has penetrated. Cast back your eyes to the long scheme of history. Look into the history of peoples of Asia and of Africa and you find there that though there are many wars between nations and between classes within a nation, there is no central aspiration of the people, no central thrust towards freedom for all. When one group displaces another the leaders of that group simply become the new mandarins, the new gromens, caste, class, privilege, are accepted in the elemental order of things. And the god who defines himself as the god who delivered the children of Israel, who delivers mankind and wills mankind to be free, that god speaks to the subversive. He speaks to the rebel, he speaks to the restlessness in man which is not satisfied with being another's flunkey and servant. He legitimizes his aspirations, his reaching for opportunity and it is where the voice of the god of the exodus is reached that men have searched for freedom, searched for the rightful place of all



men and a free and equal society.

And as a counterpoint to this history I will remind you that most of the arrogant vicious tyrants of mankind have looked upon the children of Israel, we who have been loyal to the god of the exodus, as a living reproach to their overweening ambition. Haman and Kaligula, Hitler and Stalin, all of them, from beginning to end, have not only feared the voice of astringency, the voice of the god who demands freedom for all men, but they have feared the living symbol of this tradition, the Jew, even though he was few and weak and often necessarily silent, somehow by our very being we were a standing reproach. We gave the lie to all the false aspirations and the false claims of these dictators and these tyrants. We spoke of another tradition. We spoke of a better and gentler and more open way of life.

In the early part of this century a Czarist Prime Minister by the name of Podo Deneshev said that the Jews must be cut out of Czarist Russia. Why? Because we represented the yeast, the poison of freedom. If we were not present people would not dare to hope to be free of the iron rule, to get out from under the iron boot.

Now freedom is a very precious possession. It's a very rare possession. I'd like to suggest this morning that part of our problem with freedom is that we tend to be romantic about it. We enjoy freedom, perhaps a larger freedom than any other people in the history of the world have ever enjoyed. Perhaps our enjoyment of freedom has made us somewhat too comfortable with it. We assume it as the inevitable companion of life. We assume that we enjoy it now and must ever hereafter enjoy it. We assume that because we have come to our freedom all other nations in time will



come to theirs. Hopefully they may, but inevitably they need not.

To stand, dear friends, at a time when the lights of freedom far from going on all over the world are often being extinguished. And why are they being distinguished? Because the tyrant is powerful, because the tyrant has the swords and the tanks and the guns, and because timidity is always the companion of tyranny. The masses are the many, but the masses tend to be timid. Ultimately many a tyrant has been rescued by the timidity of the masses. When the children of Israel received Moses back from Midian, Moses who had been commissioned by God to return to the court of Pharaoh, to deliver his people, what did they say to Moses? 'Be quiet, don't you dare go before the court, all that will happen if you appear before Pharaoh is that Pharaoh will double our burden, he will double the toll of the quota of bricks which we must carry and lay every day. We want no part of your deliverance.' And when Moses had brought about the miracle of the deliverance, the children of Israel were actually on the way, when they heard behind them the spinning wheels of the chariots of the pursuing police what did they say? Instinctively, immediately, are there no cemeteries in Egypt? Did you have to bring us out here in the wilderness to die? And when the deliverance had finally been accomplished, when the Jews stood on the other side of the Red Sea and the whole Sefaro had been flooded over, when Miriam had sung her great song of deliverance - "Sing unto the Lord for He has done mightily, the horse and the chariot he has cast into the sea." When the first night was cold and the first day the rations were sparse and lean, what did the children of Israel do? They appeared before Moses in protest and said: "Return us to the flesh pots of Egypt" and these flesh pots, a morsel of bread, some gruel, between the security



of a lean meal, of a tyrant's dormitory or prison, and the uncertainty of the long trek, the many have always chosen minimal security and I'm afraid they still do. Freedom requires courage, high character. Those who have sought freedom for their people have always known this even those who sought without the sword, who sought it in non-violent ways. When Thomas Mazerick was asked once how it was that the Czechs had won their freedom and what advice he could give to other nationalities seeking their freedom he said simply this: "Have the courage of your convictions. Do not only speak about politics, but be prepared if necessary to die." And when Ghandi, the great liberator of India, the great apostle of a kind of belligerent non-violence, when Ghandi was asked what a nation required as spirit as a pre-requisite for freedom he said only that nation will become free which is prepared to lie down each night with death as its pillow. ~~XXXXXXXX~~ Freedom is a risk, death is too. Freedom is a terrible risk. One cannot hedge one's bet. One must be prepared to strike out, to put all one's security, one's possessions, one's relationships behind. Many a hero of freedom has died dangling on the end of a hangman's noose. Many of those who fought for freedom had their hopes aborted because the tyrants are powerful. It is not inevitable that those who seek freedom must achieve it. Freedom cannot be won simply by prudence. Soviet tanks stand in the city of Prague today because the Czechs were prudent but they had no freedom. The colonels are in power in Greece because the Greeks at that moment three years ago were prudent but they had no freedom. There is no guarantee that the Czechs or the Greeks would have won out. This way they have lost their freedom. Freedom requires courage and high character. Freedom requires a willingness to dare and a willingness to sacrifice and that is why freedom is so rare. And what is true in the public arena is equally true



in our private lives. Between the security of family, between a stable personality within a given known context in a community, between the familiar and the unknown, almost always we will choose the familiar, the warm and the known. Rebellion, a striking out for freedom in our society, is generally limited to the adolescent and to the young adult. Why? Because they are in the one position in life where they can hedge their bets. If they stumble and if they falter they will always be welcome home. If they speak excessively, if they offend too many, they will be forgiven because of their youth. But when the stakes are higher we become more cautious. We are less willing to strike out and I confess that I am sick to death of what I see around me of the pretense of freedom. Because we lack the willingness to commit ourselves to our basic beliefs and to follow these wherever they will lead us so many of us have defined freedom simply as an erratic occasional breaking of the law, an occasional flaunting of convention. Now there may be good reason to flaunt a convention and there may be a valid reason to break a law, but in and of themselves this does not establish us as a free man. It establishes us only as petulant, mischievous. Freedom is not made simply by ~~taking~~ signing a petition. A beard does not a young rebel make. A love affair does not make us necessarily more sensitive to other human beings. Perhaps they may. The question is why we came to this position in the first place. Is it part of a life-long program of concern, of commitment? Or is it simply a posture, dramatics, an attempt to tell ourselves that we are free but holding fast, close, all our little security and our few possessions. Freedom is not living it up, but living up to the best of what we are capable of. Freedom is not simply breaking



the law, but breaking down our pretenses, breaking down our fears, finding out who we really are, what we are really committed to and living up to those ideals, following them wherever they may lead us. That's what freedom is, consistency, character.

One of  
 How many of us have it? How many of us practice it? ~~What is~~ the paradoxes of our lives today is that we are surrounded by more freedom than any society has ever known. And those in our society who are precisely the freest, the young, are precisely those who are complaining most bitterly about the coerciveness of modern society, about the manipulation of our economy, about the evil kabal of the establishment against their lives. This is a paradoxical kind of position. Why do they take it? In part because our society is coercive; in part because the economy does manipulate people; but largely because it's far easier to complain that we are prisoners than to break the shackles and act as free men, in part because most of us of any age lack the courage of our convictions, lack a willingness to follow them wherever they may lead. And so we complain despite our opportunity because we are not willing to take advantage of the chance that is ours because it is a chance, because we may lose, because we may stumble and fall and bloody our nose, because we may find our nose rubbed in the mud. That's the chance that you have to take in life. That's the chance that free men must take. Unfortunately no course is taught in our schools about the necessary sacrifices of freedom. We tell our youngsters about the American Revolution, the French Revolution, the great glorious revolutions of the world and how we show them the flags being carried on the barricades; we tell them



glory is won by these revolutions; we don't talk of those died that others might be free; of those who were maimed that others might have their opportunity; of those young hopes that were forever dashed that other young hopes might find their day in the sun. If you want to be a free man you must be prepared to bleed and you must be prepared to lose and that's what most of us are not prepared to do. We want to be cautious heroes and that, dear friends, is a contradiction in terms. What is the cost of freedom? We celebrate the exodus, but we don't tell the other half of the story. The Jews wandered for forty long bitter difficult years in the wilderness. Not a single slave who broke out of the land of Egypt entered the Promised Land. The freedom of Israel was built on the bones of the emancipated slaves. They died that Jewish people might ultimately live. And so it is with all great causes. Causes are built on the back of the sacrifice of pioneers, of men who did not live to enjoy a land flowing with milk and honey, the sunshine, the security, the vacation, the freedom. They had the freedom of their self-possession; they had the freedom of knowing they were doing what had to be done, what was right for them to do. There are no guarantees. There are no certainties. Passover begins a long history of wandering. Our world wanders still. You want to be free? Be it. Freedom may be for you the carrying of a placard. Freedom may be for you sitting in someone's office. Freedom may be for you leading a revolution. Freedom may also be for you the teaching of children; who would otherwise not be taught, the lending of the helping hand to those who would otherwise be in want; the giving of love to those who would otherwise be lonely. Free men are not identified by any uniform. A man can wear jeans and an open shirt



and be a slave. A man can wear a tie and a suit and a vest and be a free man. Freedom is a way of life, a deep courage, the courage to be, to be yourself. And that's the message of Passover. We wish, we pray this day to be the sons of freedom. Within the grasp of every one of us if we but dare, if we but do.









Wes!

Land of Egypt

Original at Dept. of War

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is always well used - successful. Why? Because a suit  
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WRHS

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[illegible]

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significant - partially WRHS social order ought &

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 police.

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 out of the car was the smell of the sea.

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 a little more in my heart committed - Get out my  
from a committed Some of the needed most needed  
I affected me I have not more and - Some



There were a number of people who were of the opinion that  
they were being treated in a very different way than they had  
before - and that was a very good thing.

When did the situation of things begin to change for them? -  
They began to feel that they were being treated in a different way  
and that was a very good thing. They began to feel that they were  
being treated in a different way and that was a very good thing.  
They began to feel that they were being treated in a different way  
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There was no one who was not of the opinion that they were  
being treated in a different way and that was a very good thing.  
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They began to feel that they were being treated in a different way  
and that was a very good thing. They began to feel that they were  
being treated in a different way and that was a very good thing.



Freedom, justice, and the right to live in peace - these are the  
goals of the Jewish people. They are the goals of the Jewish people.  
They are the goals of the Jewish people. They are the goals of the  
Jewish people. They are the goals of the Jewish people. They are the  
goals of the Jewish people. They are the goals of the Jewish people.



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search of the last century before

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to friction of the last century before - in the last century

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search -