



## Daniel Jeremy Silver Collection Digitization Project

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The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives

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

Series IV: Writings and Publications, 1952-1992, undated.

Sub-series A: Books, 1961-1990, undated.

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Come On In, the Water's Fine, unpublished manuscript,  
correspondence, 1979, 1982.



May 30, 1979

Mr. Sidney Caplan  
Big Four Lumber Co.  
7000 Granger Road  
Cleveland, Ohio 44131

PERSONAL

Dear Sid:

This will confirm our conversation of last Thursday. I will produce a book of between forty and sixty thousand words, designed for senior high school students and undergraduates at the university under the working title "Why Be Jewish?" (This will not be the final title.) The book will be an honest attempt to wrestle with the problems of Jewish identification and identity as they are faced by this generation. The focus will be one of ideas rather than sociological. I do not propose to analyze the problems as much as to suggest solutions or, rather, helpful ways to approach the questions being asked and the doubts being expressed. The book will not be a theological manual so much as a guide through a difficult set of religious issues.

A finished copy will be delivered to you within two years. I am to be paid twenty thousand dollars for the book. Half is to be paid at this time and half upon completion of the work. I will be as helpful as I can in finding a publisher, but I cannot guarantee that I will be successful on the terms that a publisher may offer. The text is to be published as delivered. I will be happy to help with copy editing, and to work with you on questions of distribution, publicity etc.

It would be nice to have a confirmation from you of these arrangements. This all sounds rather formal but I am happy to undertake this task and will invest the energy and attention in it that it deserves.

I trust this finds you in good health. With all good wishes I remain

Sincerely,

Daniel Jeremy Silver

DJS:mp



THE S. W. AND ELEANOR CAPLAN  
CHARITABLE FOUNDATION

903 Aintree Park Drive  
Suite 101

Mayfield Village, Ohio 44124

May 31, 1979

Personal

Rabbi Daniel Jeremy Silver  
The Temple  
University Circle at Silver Park  
Cleveland, Ohio 44106

Dear Rabbi Silver:

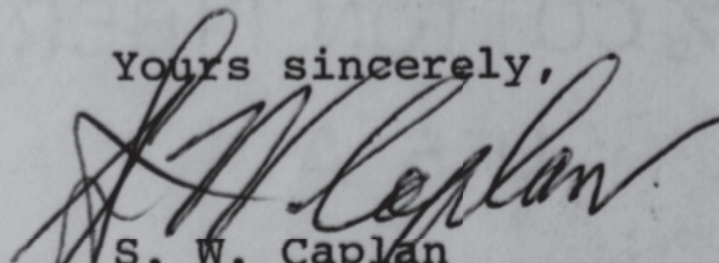
I have your letter to me of May 30, 1979, which pursuant to our various discussions I have transmitted officially to Eleanor Caplan and myself as Trustees of The S. W. and Eleanor Caplan Charitable Foundation. I am pleased to confirm to you that the Foundation agrees to the terms and conditions contained in your letter and is prepared to underwrite the project. The Foundation will send you a check shortly in the amount of \$10,000.

The Foundation agrees with you that the text will be published as delivered. However, as we have discussed the Trustees of the Foundation should have the opportunity to review and comment to you on the text before you complete your manuscript, but the final text will be solely yours.

The Foundation is delighted that you have undertaken this project on its behalf.

With all good wishes,

Yours sincerely,



S. W. Caplan  
Trustee



July 12, 1979

PERSONAL

Mr. Sidney Caplan  
Big Four Lumber Co.  
7000 Granger Road  
Cleveland, Ohio 44131

Dear Sid:

I finally cleared the decks as far as my summer work is concerned and will be able to begin our project. However, I have not received your written response to my letter of May 30. I would like to have the agreement and initial payment so that I can plunge ahead.

I trust this finds you in good health. With all good wishes I remain

Sincerely,

Daniel Jeremy Silver

DJS:mp



BASIC BOOKS, INC.  
PUBLISHERS

10 EAST 53d STREET, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10022

593-7057

Daniel Jeremy Silver  
The Rabbi  
The Temple  
University Circle at Silver Park  
Cleveland, Ohio 44106

Dear Dan:

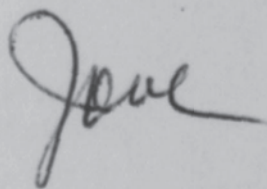
I've spent some time mulling over the precis that you brought along to our delightful lunch, and I want you to rethink the book slightly. At this point it is too literary and intellectual -- I want stories, stories, stories. The practical usefulness of the book will come from its ability to be a source book for teachers, rabbis, and laypersons. You can organize the stories in the categories you describe in the outline -- but you have to tell them, quote them, translate them -- in some way present them. Otherwise, the book is nice, but I don't think it will sell.

Give this some thought, and when you have let me know what you conclude, and also please give me a table of contents.

OK?

I hope you agree with my ideas -- and can see your way clear to doing them.

Best,



Jane Isay

9 July 1982  
JI/mek



## STORYTELLING AMONG JEWS

I propose a readable introduction to the rich treasury of stories Jews have told each other over the centuries. This volume will relate the story of the Jewish story, describe the storytellers, and discuss the importance of the story as a formative element in Jewish consciousness. This medium length book should be attractive to anyone interested in fiction, fable or folklore; Jewish studies; comparative literature or contemporary writing. It will have value for rabbis, religious school teachers, and parents who use such stories regularly in their preaching, teaching and everyday life. As far as I know, no similar manual exists.

Jewish literature can be divided between formal and theologically self-conscious works and those which are popular and exuberant rather than artful. These are the stories the mothers told their children, preachers their folk, and wandering professionals their paying customers. Some stories are homegrown. Most originated elsewhere - the ocean of story is wide and most cultures touch its shores - but were changed significantly as they were appropriated and so exhibit particular Jewish attitudes and interests.

We will begin with the stories which somehow found their way into the Bible. After a paragraph or two about storytelling in the ancient Middle East and the difficulty of disentangling folk literature from a formal text, I'll report what can be told of the legends, fables, parables and epic materials which are found in Scripture and of what happened to these stories once they became, what they were never intended to be, part of a sacred literature.

The next section will describe the development in Greco-Roman times of a Diaspora Bible which included scrolls and stories not found in the received text. The Diaspora Bible includes stories which describe the hero as virtuous patrician (Tobit, Daniel), illustrates the wisdom of the wise (Susanna and the Elders), or preach the value and faith in God as Redeemer (Judith). I will discuss where these stories came from and why the Jewish people took them in - and, as in every section, present a number of these stories.



As was to be expected, teachers, writers and parents in each generation added stories to the sacred traditions to fill in gaps, explain away embarrassing incidents, clarify a person's character, or simply drive home a lesson. This process is called midrash aggadah, story commentary. I will describe what we know of the origins of aggadah and analyze some of the stories which surface at this time in the narratives of such historians as Artapanus and Josephus and the writings of the early rabbis. In time some of these stories became so familiar that they came to be accepted as Scriptural by most Jews and, being so credited, altered subtly and significantly the Jewish understanding of the Biblical message.

I plan to present brief descriptions of the well-known collections of ancient legend and story from which Jews drew much of their material (Aesop, Panchatantra, the Ocean of Story) and to discuss what they took and what they left. I will illustrate what was borrowed and try to show how the message and content of these stories was changed in that process. We will have to face the question what, if anything, makes the story Jewish. Do Jewish stories have a particular form? A particular message? The answer, I believe, is simply that a Jewish story is one told by Jews to Jews using terms which Jews would understand, and avoiding terms Jews would instinctively disapprove.

The next section will describe the major published collections of Jewish stories, tell something of the anthologists, and report on the ongoing role of oral traditions in Jewish culture. The place of the story in everyday life will be described: sermon; school lesson; sophisticated allegory; political satire; entertainment, etc. I want to make the point that midrash aggadah was not simply a technique to enliven the Jewish message but a means of altering the Bible to fit the needs and assumptions of different communities of Jews. To make this point I will tell a number of stories from the Story Bible, particularly those which deal with classic themes: the miracles of God, the actions of the Messiah, the danger of evil spirits and how to deal with them, the power of faith heroes and holy men,



the proper roles of men and women, and the proper conduct of a Jew. In many ways one can learn more about Judaism from the popular Bible than from the published text. I hope in the process to suggest a typology of stories by content, if not by form.

- a) Exempla - the hero as model of virtuous behavior whom Jews named as heroes and why (patriarchs, David, Alexander, Hillel, Akiba).
- b) Commentary - the enrichment of the text meaning.
- c) Tales mysterious and macabre - Lilith, the Golem, the Dybbuk, the Sambatyon, power of the supernatural.
- d) Tales of trial and ultimate vindication - Daniel, the martyrs (Akiba, Meier), the lost Ten Tribes, the Elijah stories.
- e) Adaptations and translation - the story for the story's sake - King Arthur as a Jew, the many versions of Aesop, Sinbad.
- f) Tales of Heaven and Heavenly visitors - (Kaballah, Raphael and Michael, the pious who visit Heaven).
- g) Parody and Satire - the Maquama (Al Harizi), the Purim spiel, the role of the Maggid as social critic.
- h) Allegory - Philo and Suppurei ha Maasayot to Nachman of Bratislav.

A final section will discuss stories and storytelling in modern times. As education broadened horizons and Jews heard and read the stories of other cultures, the Story Bible ceased to be a constitutive factor in Jewish consciousness. Anthologists like Louis Ginsberg and Bin Gorion set about collecting these tales from printed sources so that they would not be lost, and once the tape recorder was available researchers set out to record the oral literature of exotic Jewish communities before these traditions disappear (Don Noy).

Unexpectedly, the Jewish story refused to die. Its renaissance began among the Hasidim who set great importance on the story as a teaching device. Their stories often dealt with the immediacy of religious experience, and so fit well with the experiential and existential temper of the times. The first modern Jewish story-



teller was the early nineteenth century Hasidic master, Nahman of Bratislav, whose complex and extended allegories set a pattern which was followed by such writers as Kafka and Babel. In our century Martin Buber fumigated and popularized the Hasidic story, made them available to a European audience, and suggested that the story form was possibly the best, if not the only, way to describe the inner life of man. The more traditional midrashic approach also has been revived by writers (Bialik, Fleg, Agnon) while a clutch of Yiddish writers have continued the tradition of the story as a vehicle for satire and social comment (I. B. Singer, Peretz, Sholem Aleichem).

I will close with a word or two about the future of the Jewish story - if it has one.





July 23, 1982

Ms. Jane Isay  
Basic Books, Inc.  
10 East 53d Street  
New York, N.Y. 10022

Dear Jane:

Let's put the story-telling book on the back burner for awhile. I am going to do some more work in and around this field and then I will see how it sets up in my mind. We may have two different books in mind, we may not. At this point it will take some months before I know really how I want to proceed.

In the meantime, I want to ask a favor. I have, off and on over the last year, plugged away at a book which tries informally, but seriously, to raise the questions which trouble non-orthodox Jews if they think seriously about being Jewish. I have set the book up as a discussion between myself and members of a five to six day camp institute. It is not a book Basic would want. I didn't intend it for your audience, but I do need a professional editor's advice on my approach which has proved to be a difficult format. I wonder if you would be willing to give it a quick read so you could tell me if the book should be reshaped and how. If you haven't the time could you recommend someone? I know that I am asking for professional guidance and I would be willing to pay for the advice. The typescript could be sent on sometime in late August.

I trust this finds you in good health and that the office has settled down in its restyled quarters.

As always,

Daniel Jeremy Silver

DJS:mp