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Silver, Abba Hillel. Address. 10 October 1953.

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Cheshbon
10/10/53

While it is of course entirely true that what we are witnessing in Israel today are growing pains which might well have been anticipated, it is equally true that the situation has been seriously aggravated by the fact that there is no peace on the borders of Israel. The Arab states are unwilling to make peace. Were there peace on the borders of Israel, were those borders open to normal trade and commerce and to the exchange of goods, were Israel not compelled to channel so much of its budget into self-preservation, the economic situation of the country would be far more advanced than it is at this moment. Unfortunately, the situation throughout the world is such that nations prefer, nations which have differences as between them, they prefer a state of calculated and deliberate suspense rather than an amicable settlement. We call this the age of the cold war. The idea behind it, if you can call it an idea, is that you get more by refusing to settle international issues than by negotiating a settlement. The major powers have set the pattern in Germany, Austria, in Korea and elsewhere around the world, and the smaller powers are following that pattern. And as you can well see, this is a technique of sustained tensions, of accumulated tensions, a worsening of the situation and of disastrously mounting costs. And the Arab league is applying this tension in Israel, it is refusing to negotiate a peace, rebuffs every attempt to reach an overall settlement of the outstanding issues between the Arab states and Israel. Four years after the signing of the armistice the Arab league still prefers to keep high tensions by closed borders around Israel which are made dangerous by frequent infiltration and death. It prefers an armaments race with Israel which can only drain its own resources still further in the hope that such a race will completely undermine the economy of Israel. While declining peace with Israel the Arab league is trying to steer friendly governments against Israel, employing rash methods of diplomatic blackmail ^{against} to governments which are all too eager to make friends and influence people. And fictitious issues are exploited in the public press and in the United Nations to arouse people and nations against Israel. A favorite propaganda theme has been the internationalization of Jerusalem, the insincerity of which becomes patent when one recalls the one Arab

state which is concerned in the matter is adamant in its opposition to the internationalization of Jerusalem. But everything is grist to the mill of a group of governments unwilling to make peace but hoping to get by way of a cold war what even a shooting war will not get them.

A two-fold misfortune is bedeviling the situation. The failure of the great democratic powers, principally the United States, to tell these governments with unmistakable firmness to get on with the business of making peace, instead of which they are sending them or planning to send them arms, wooing or cozening them in the hope that they will some day use these arms in the defense of the free world. This is bizarre statesmanship. And the second unfortunate fact in the situation is the failure to appear in the midst of these Arab peoples of some statesman of vision and courage to lead these peoples and governments to see the larger ^{PER} ~~prospective~~s of the problems and possibilities of the Near East. Their problem is the raising of the standard of living of their millions of impoverished and largely illiterate peoples and the development of the vast territories which are capable of supporting ten times their present population. This cannot be accomplished by throttling the small state of Israel, which represents one-two hundredth of the territory of that part of the world. And to concentrate the attention and emotions of the peoples of the Near East upon Israel is, I am afraid, a calculated strategy on the part of the ^{feudal} ~~futile~~ exploiters of the Arab masses to divert their attention from their oppressors, their real grievances and their real needs.

The opportunities in the Near East which in ancient days was the home of vast and prosperous empires, are vast, and through peaceful collaboration between the Arabs and the people of Israel that area of the globe, that tremendously strategically important area of the world in the sense of civilization, important economically and socially, through collaboration, can flourish and prosper behind the imaginings of the little politicians who are retarding the progress of that important segment of the globe. Arab and Jew can cooperate; did cooperate brilliantly in the past and created great cultures and civilization. They can cooperate again. And all peoples who bear no ill will toward the Arabs or the Jews are prayerfully hoping at the moment for such cooperation. No concessions can be made except through negotiations and few concessions on

either side will probably need to be made once real cooperation is agreed upon.

What shall be our attitude, the attitude of the Jewish people of the diaspora the world over, especially the United States, while this cold war, this present tension, this favorite and deliberately ~~and~~ sustained tension, which is now the technique, almost the routine of international relationships in the world today. What shall be our attitude in the situation today towards Israel, which is thus beset and encompassed by this kind of strategy. Why, what else can our attitude be but one of vigilance, of mobilized alertness and of maximum support to help this little state consolidate its statehood. The foreign policy of our own government, the greatest and most powerful government on earth, is unfortunately based on the principle of strength and how can a small state like Israel base its foreign policy in relation to its neighbors on weakness. Economic weakness spells military weakness and military weakness is an invitation to aggression and that aggression might endanger what we have built in Israel and what we have built in Israel in a profounder sense we have built for ourselves the world over. We have created a spiritual Israel, as it were, a non-territorial Israel around all of our lives everywhere, by the mere fact of having established this real center, this political center in Israel. And this we cannot prevent. Our good judgment will not permit it. Our sense of responsibility, our pride will not permit it. What we have achieved in status and in dignity after so many centuries of lack of status and indignity we are not going to forfeit now by any short-sightedness, by any loss of interest, by any lack of generosity. We shall not turn away from our brothers in Israel who have performed, as everyone acknowledges, Jew and non-Jew alike, a veritable miracle of state building, of pioneering, of establishing settlements, of rehabilitating wastelands which have been waste from the beginning of time, because we have grown weary. We shall not betray ^{the} hopes of the ages, we shall not acknowledge defeat to our children or the future generations and shall not permit ourselves to stand abashed and discredited in the eyes of our fellow Americans, in the eyes of the world. That fairly simply sums up the whole situation. You can fill it in in a thousand ways, but that is the story.

Those of you who attended the synagogue over the weekend, and I am sure most of you did or were on the way there, listened to the reading from the Bible on the Sabbath morning of the story of the flood. The vast flood swept over the world, destroyed the world. When the waters of the flood subsided God placed a rainbow in the skies -- "I place my rainbow in the sky, in the clouds, and it shall be a covenant between me and the earth that the waters shall never again flood the earth."

My good friends. In our own days a veritable flood, not of water, but of blood ^{and} with tears, of hate and of brutality swept over the Jewish world and more than six million of our people perished. And as the waters subsided God placed a rainbow of promise in the clouds as a covenant, a covenant of life and of destiny that never again shall the floods sweep over the world of the household of Israel and that rainbow in the clouds, dear friends, was the little state of Israel. That is our covenant with life, with our future. And one end of that rainbow is over there in the settlements, in the colonies, in the Negev, in Galilee -- over there in their hearts, in their courage, and the other end of the rainbow is here, in our good will, in our loyalty, in our steadfastness, in our helpfulness, and I pray to God that the arc of this rainbow will never be broken because that is our covenant with the future.

I want to say to you this one word before I sit down, friends. Fate does not work in trivialities. There are a few moments in any people's history which are fraught with fate, with destiny, when a people is called upon to make fateful decisions, and upon these decisions depends its future -- whether it will be a great future or a paltry future, and the decision which it makes reveals the character of the people, whether it is a great people or a paltry people.

Four or five times in our long history our people was called upon to make such fateful decisions. Usually other people made decisions for us. Hitler made decisions for us, other tyrants made decisions for us. But there were four or five moments in our history when we were called upon out of our own free will to make fundamental decisions and our people instinctively at those moments made the right decisions and in so doing they revealed character, the character which is the key to our survival.

No one dictated those decisions. They were spontaneous, they ^{walled} ~~wald~~ up from the deep mysterious realms of the life of our people.

I think the time when our forefathers stood by the Red Sea after they left Egypt facing the sea, the Egyptians approached ^{me} them from the rear, there was a moment of critical decision. Shall they move forward into danger and possible death, or shall they go back to the flesh pots of Egypt? They instinctively moved forward into the sea, into danger and into life.

I sometimes think when our forefathers stood at Mount Sinai and were offered the chance of either becoming like all other people or taking the step which would make them a misunderstood and a persecuted people through the ages, when they were asked if they would accept the yoke and the burden of the Torah and with one voice they cried out, we will do as we have heard. And when they were in Babylonia they had a choice of whether to remain there in comfort or to return to a poverty-stricken, enemy-beset Judea, and they had to make a decision, no one forced them. They decided, "If I forget thee, oh Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its cunning." And they moved back to Jerusalem.

Some centuries later when they were confronted with the choice of losing themselves in that beautiful pagan Hellenistic world and give up ^{their} ~~that~~ burdensome identity, they could have decided to lose themselves in that world ~~which was not at all antagonistic toward them~~, and be like all other peoples, the Maccabees arose and made a decision which saved Judaism and which, as a result, gave the world its Christianity and Moham^umedanism and which opened new highways for civilization.

And later they could have permitted themselves to lose themselves in the Greek or Roman world which was not hostile to them at all in those days, and yet following the destruction of the Temple our people decided to go forth on the broken highways of exile into darkness and uncertainty carrying the Menora, their Torah, the arc of the covenant, they made a decision.

There was another decision in which you participated. The decision was clear. Shall the Jew assimilate or work for the rebuilding of his national homeland. ^{For} ~~It~~ was

much in favor of not doing it and many voices raised against it and there were no forces to compel our people to make that decision, but voluntarily and instinctively our people decided to rebuild Israel. And now, my good friends, all this leads up to this point. We are now at the crossroads when we have to make another fateful decision, not only for 1953 but for quite a number of years to come. Are we going to see through what we have begun or are we to say to ourselves, it is too hard, we have done enough. Are we going to see it through until Israel is established firmly and securely and independent in its sovereign strength and economic confidence? We can make a decision one way or another and we Jews of the United States, in our hands is the making of that decision.

Well, I believe knowing my people, knowing its character, knowing its stubbornness and heroism, knowing its unquenchable faith, its pride, I believe it will make the right decision. And the decision will be -- for the sake of Zion I will not be silent. And for the sake of Jerusalem I will not rest until its vindication goes forth as a beacon light to the world, a crown of jewels, a diadem, as the prophet Issaiah said, until it becomes a crown of jewels in the hands of God.

And so, as I look upon a gathering like this, I see much more than just Jews gathered at another Jewish gathering. I see history here. I hear the beat of the wings of destiny. You are making a decision fraught with tremendous significance for the generations to come, for our people and for mankind and so God bless you all.