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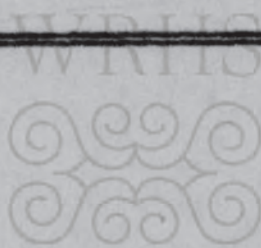
What is citizenship?, 1927.

"WHAT IS CITIZENSHIP?"

RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER.

THE TEMPLE, SUNDAY MORNING.

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JOSEPH T. KRAUS
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The human being is of course a social being, and therefore a bundle of allegiances. No man is born into an unpeopled world, into an empty world, which he then proceeds to people and to replete. A man is born into a family or a tribe or a community or a race or a nation, a man is born into an environment, into a group possessing certain customs, traditions and standards and history and a certain culture, and therefore every man, whether he wills it or no, quite unconsciously is born into a set of loyalties or allegiances. He has allegiance as a son, as a father, as a husband, as a member of an economic group, as a member of a religious group, as a member of any other voluntary or compulsory association, and very often the man is the focus or the point of conflict between these loyalties and allegiances.

Now, one of the most essential allegiances of all men is that of citizenship--the relationship of a man to his government or to his group as an administrative agency for the maintenance of peace and order and security. There is no civilization without government. In the most primitive forms of society we have intimations of some form of government, intimations of a state, and when people advanced in the state of civilization, began to live in cities, then there evolved a very elaborate system of administration, of government; and our word "citizen" comes from words meaning the city--the city as a unit of human organization, the city

in which the individual lived, and which necessitated a certain set of regulations as between himself and his fellow citizen.

Now, one of the most interesting and instructive bits of history is the struggle between the rise of the individual on the one hand, the man, the unit, and the rise of the state or the group, of the government, on the other hand. From earliest times we have that struggle, and it has persisted to our own day. In the main, there have been two theories presented. The one maintains that the state is fundamental, that the state is primary; the one maintains that all that a man has is derived from the state, and that therefore man is duty bound to submit, to subject himself to the will of the state on all occasions. This notion of the primacy of the state has through the ages assumed various colorings and manifestations. The state became in the minds of some people a sacrosanct institution, a holy institution. They spoke of the holy Roman Empire. At times when the state was a personal government, expressing itself in the personality of a monarch, people spoke of the divine rights of kings. In all these terms there was the fundamental thought that first and foremost comes the state, the institution of government, and only secondarily comes the individual. In our own day this emphasis upon the authority of the state one can discover in such political systems as socialism or communism, which seek to throw greater control over the destinies of the individual

into the hands of the state.

This is the first theory of government in all its ramifications and modifications. The second theory of ^{that} government has from time immemorial been in conflict with the first is this: that fundamental is man; that the primary unit is the individual; that the state derives its authority only from the consent of the governed; that the state has no authority, has no sanctity other than that which the individuals grant unto it, and that therefore the state should serve the needs and obey the will of the individual. In the extreme forms that has led to such political doctrines as anarchism--no government at all; no organization has a right to interfere with the individual in the expressions of his personality and of his will. In other forms it has expressed itself in that doctrine which became popular a hundred years ago,--the laissez-faire doctrine: let the state keep out of, as much as possible, human activity, of business and all other human enterprises. The individual can develop himself best and be happiest if the government interferes least in his life.

Now, in our own day we have discovered a sort of a golden mean between these two extreme theories of government. If I were to summarize the judgment of modern society on the subject of government, I could do no better than quote the words of Thomas Jefferson, who summed up the idea of good government. He said, "A wise and practical government is one which shall restrain men from injuring one

another and shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned. This is the sum of good government," declared Thomas Jefferson. In other words, a government which restrains government from injuring one another, maintains tranquility, security and all else, leaves men free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and takes care not to deprive a man of the bread which he earns.

In other words, it has become part of our thought today that the state is not society, that society is something more than the state; that the citizen is not the entire man; that man is more than the citizen. In other words, that man has many more interests in life than the political one. It has become part of our political thought today that the state has one supreme function to perform, namely, to maintain order, peace, justice, to promote freedom, to regulate the relationships between human beings insofar as these relationships may threaten peace, justice and freedom. Within that sphere the state may be said to be supreme, and within that sphere the individual citizen owes a complete allegiance to the state. Outside of that sphere the state has no right to encroach, to trespass. Thus the state has no right to say what shall be the religion of its citizens, because it is not the function of the state to regulate religious thinking. Thus the state has no right to declare what shall be the type of art which the citizens

shall accept, because it is not the function of the state to meddle with art. Thus the state has no right to declare what scientific truth its citizens shall accept, learn or teach, because it is not the function of the state to regulate scientific thought, and when the state presumes to encroach upon these provinces of the human mind and soul, the individual citizen has a right, nay, a sacred duty, to challenge his own state, to demand that it restrict itself to its legitimate province.--government.

In other words, we look upon government today as just another agency of social existence. It has no monopoly and it has no superiority. It is one of the great agencies which human life has evolved for the sake of enhancing itself and for the sake of improving itself. Now, when we say this we do not in the least make the function of the state unimportant. On the contrary, by pointing out the real function of the state we direct its tremendous powers constructively to a social end. We look upon the state today not merely as an organization for policing, for maintaining order; we look upon the state today as an expression of the corporate will and the corporate intelligence of the people for the sake of promoting freedom, for the sake of establishing greater justice in society. We do not believe any more that it is the exclusive or the only function of the state to see that citizens do not fight among each other or to maintain the status quo. We demand of the state, so marvelously endowed with power and prestige, a means to see to it that

all of its citizens have the freest and fullest opportunities to live their own lives and to express the best that they are capable of. It is not the only function of the state, which belief and modern political thought maintains, to keep its people at peace, or even prosperous; it is the supreme function of the state to supply its people with those opportunities which shall enable its people to develop themselves physically and mentally and spiritually to their highest capacity. The state has more to do than to supply people with bread and circuses. The state has the mandate to make peace the fullest realization of the native capacities of its people. The state has the mandate to see that economic justice is established among its people; that abuse and wrong and exploitation cease, and that each man be given his patrimony.

Now once we assume that that is the function of the state, it becomes a very serious problem as to how far the state can go. On the one hand, we will have those who say that the state monopolize all the economic activities of its citizens so as to insure absolute economic justice. That is socialism; that is communism. On the other hand, there are those who say that when the state presumes to do that it stultifies the growth of its citizens; it destroys initiative and enterprise; it levels excellence down to the grade of the least competent, and instead of helping its people it hurts. Therefore the state should not meddle at all in the economic life of the people entirely; it can be of very little help in

establishing greater justice and greater freedom.

Now that problem has not yet been solved; the formula has not yet been discovered. How far can the state go? How far can the state interfere without establishing a complete monopoly and despotism over the lives of its citizens? And it will be, I believe, the supreme function of the twentieth century to discover formulae which will regulate the rights of the state and the rights of the individual. There is this danger, which ought to be called to the attention of people, especially in this day when state rights, whether it be in the form of a despotism, in the form of the dictatorship of an individual, or the dictatorship of a class, is gaining headway around the world,--it becomes imperative to call the attention of people to the danger of over-centralization of authority in the state; whether that state be a democracy or an oligarchy or a monarchy, it matters not. There is a fundamental menace involved in giving too much power to the state.

The first danger, of course, is that the over-centralization of power makes for a bureaucratic system of government, and a bureaucratic system of government in the long run makes for corruption and nepotism and internal rivalry and rottenness. The machinery becomes too cumbersome and crushes the people. In the second place, over-centralization in government means a larger and larger staff of officials, which in turn means a greater estrangement between the ruling or the governing class and the people, which in

turn means a dehumanizing of government. And that leads to an often more serious fault; as government assumes greater and greater control over the lives of people the people themselves, the citizens, lose the sense of responsibility in government which ought to be theirs. They agree to let the government regulate their lives; they abdicate political responsibility, and they lose all the moral value which comes with political responsibility. In our own land, in our own day, we are all too eager to turn over those problems which fret and irritate us to the government. If we do not know what to do about our private morals, we want the government to make laws, prohibitions of one kind or another. If we do not know what to do with our education, with the education of our youth, we want the government to take complete charge of the education of our youth. We want censorship, we want external governmental control of things which we, our selves, as individuals, should be controlling.

What, then, is citizenship if all of which I have spoken is government? If the state is called upon to maintain order and peace and justice and to promote freedom, then what is citizenship? And what are the duties of the citizen? Well, citizenship, in the first place, is a man's allegiance to the state which devotes itself to these things-- peace and order and justice and freedom. Citizenship means loyalty to the highest purposes of the state when the state is within its sphere of activity; loyalty which expresses itself not only on the battlefield but loyalty which expresses

itself in a daily observance of the law of the land, in a willingness to live on the highest point of moral living for the sake of the general will of the commonwealth; loyalty to those ideals for which the state is called into existence. And in a democracy the ideals are these: first of all, the equality of all men. True citizenship means an acceptance, eager and voluntary, of this informing ideal of government: we hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal,--equal not in physical equipment, not in mental endowment, not in spiritual attainments; no two people are alike and no two people have been equipped by nature and nature's God with identical gifts of qualities. If there is one law that is absolutely invariable and inviolate in nature it is the law of absolute diversity. There are no two things alike and there are no two human beings alike. Democracy does not ask one to accept or to believe in such a formal and artificial uniformity, but it does demand of the citizen to accept as a guiding and motivating fact in his life that all men are created equal before the eternal verities of life,--equal as far as the sanctity and the holiness of his personality is concerned; equal as far as the inviolability of his life is concerned; equal before the God who dwells in the soul of man.

Society must put no artificial values in the way of one man, nor extend special privileges and prerogatives to another. Loyalty to this principle of absolute equality, as far as it is humanly possible of achievement,

that is one of the great duties of citizenship. Belief in the free exchange of ideas, in the free intercommunication of spirits, in the give and take of thought, and free press and free platform and free speech,--that is another ideal to which the real citizen in a democracy subscribes, and which he makes part and parcel of his living and his thinking and his being. And yet another principle is that of settling all differences, whether they be political differences or economic differences--and the struggles of tomorrow will be more economical than political--of submitting all these differences to a popular referendum, to the adjudication of the people and not to force, and not to the arbitrament of the sword. No one living in a democracy, availing himself of the advantages of a democracy, could fail to subscribe to this basic principle: that in a democracy all disputes, of whatever character, however vital those issues may be, must be submitted to the ultimate judgment of a popular referendum. One who has no faith in the ultimate wisdom of a collective group has no faith in a democracy.

And so the second prerogative of citizenship, I would say is adherence to the ideals of government; and the third, sharing in the responsibilities of government, in suffrage and in the holding of office. That is something about which the American people need to learn a great deal. We have been all too engrossed in the economic phases of our development to think of the political phase, of the duty, of

the obligation of a citizen not merely to vote, not merely to express his best judgment on a given issue, but to prepare himself for holding an office of responsibility with the government. We sneer at our land and office holder politician, and the word "politician" has taken on an unsavory connotation. When we sneer at these people we sneer at ourselves and at the stage of our long political development. For in Athens they did not sneer at their politicians. Where government is vital and real people do not sneer at it but regard it as the supreme privilege of a citizen to be asked by his fellow citizen to accept an office of responsibility in government. We speak about our officials as being very mediocre people, and we criticize our ward heelers and our grafters, and yet we shall always have these ward heelers and these grafters and these exploiters and these political marauders until such time as the decent citizen realizes that it is part of his duty as a citizen to prepare himself for office and to hold office.

We have already come to the point where men and women do prepare themselves to hold office in our philanthropic institutions, to volunteer for social service. The time will come, the time must come, when the same men and women will prepare themselves to hold office after they will have acquired their economic competence and have established themselves securely in life in the material needs. They will come to regard it as the supreme opportunity to devote the remaining ten or twenty years of their

active life to the political service of their country.

And lastly, I will say that it is the sacred duty of a citizen to criticize his government when such criticism is constructive and helpful. You see, when you start out with the old conception of the state as being divine and sacrosanct, then any criticism of it is heresy--punishable. When you start out with the modern conception of the state as an agency of social development, then any criticism of that agency tending to improve it, to accelerate it, to facilitate it, is a service to the state. Now, since the war there has grown up in our midst, and I suppose in other lands, this thought which we believed had been discarded, as were so many of the trappings of the Middle Ages, that a good citizen is a hundred per cent citizen; that is to say, that he whitewashes his government at all times and does not criticize it, or speaks with bated breath whenever he wishes to voice a criticism of government; and anyone who does criticize his government is suspected of all sorts of things from bolshevism down. George Washington criticized his government, and Thomas Jefferson did, and all the Founding Fathers did; and up to ten years ago every true citizen who loved his country and was interested in its progress and its development felt called upon to offer criticism and suggestions. And when we cease to criticize our government we indicate that we have lost interest in government, or that we have become bondsmen in slavery.

We have not reached the last stage in our political development. There is yet many an experiment in which we ought to engage, we of this generation, and certainly many new experiments in which the men and women of tomorrow will engage. This is a growing government; it was meant to be an evolving government. The framers of our constitution made possible within the organic law of the land machinery for the changing and the modifying of the instrument of government, and it is one of the chief duties of citizenship to be alert, critical, searching of the faults of government, and at the same time to be constructive and helpful and with suggestions for improvement. And with that must go also this: that every citizen must be jealous of his own rights as against the encroachment of the state; that every citizen must defend the other provinces and domains of social life which have been preempted from the control and the dominion of the state, that these shall remain preempted.

There are certain inalienable rights which no majority has control over. There is possible in a democracy a tyranny as vicious and as harmful as in any government of a personal character. There is a tendency to transfer to a democracy that absolutism of control which was once upon a time vested in personal government, and against such a tendency the true citizen of a democracy will guard himself and his country. There are rights which are ours by virtue of our being human beings. Freedom of conscience, freedom

of thought, freedom of communication,--these are the dynamic convictions of man which no state, no majority, no government has a right to abrogate, to interfere with, and it is well for a citizen when such attempts are being made as were made in one of our states, and since copied by other states, to declare what shall be taught in schools and what shall not be taught of a scientific nature,--it is the duty of the citizen then and there to declare to the state: "Thus far shall ye go and no further. You are trespassing; you are encroaching." And it is a sacred duty, when the state does encroach, for citizens to rebel. There is sometimes the sacred duty of revolution when the state loses its sense of proportion and its sense of limitation of function and sphere, and sets about to measure it in all other spheres of human life.

When Socrates was about to be put to death on the spurious charge of corrupting the youth of Athens, he was accused of not being a loyal Athenian. He replied that he was not a citizen of Athens or a citizen of Greece, but he was a citizen of the world. That, perhaps, is the supreme conception of citizenship. Not a narrow group loyalty, not a national chauvinism which centers my interest only in my own sphere, in my own group, in my own community, but a citizenship which leads me to believe that my country is part of a federation of peoples, a note in a symphony of nations, and that it is my duty and opportunity not only to serve my people but to serve through my people all other

peoples of the earth. For after all a man is a citizen of the world because he is a child of God.

The war has bequeathed unto us a legacy of narrowed nationalism. Peace must restore to us the higher and nobler conception of nationalism as a means to a perfect internationalism--the ultimate federation of all peoples and all races and all religions into one community of purpose for the greater glory of all: the love of country which leads to the love of mankind.

That perhaps is the best definition of citizenship.

