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How to Forget about Anti-Semitism, 1936.

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HOW TO FORGET ABOUT ANTI-SEMITISM A Return to Normalcy

By ARCHIV
Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver

At The Temple

On Sunday, November 29, 1936 How to forget about anti-Semitism. How gladly we Jews would forget about anti-Semitism if the world would only let us. How gladly we would like to be left in peace. Jacob wanted to be left in peace and quietude when the wrath of Esau crashed down upon him.

Anti-Semitism is served up to us almost daily with our morning newspapers which record its progress all over the world in terms of anti-Jewish legislation and demonstrations, student riots, mob violence, literary and journalistic excursions against our people. Never was anti-Semitism so aggressive and so insolent and so largely subsidized and so politically motivated as it is today.

Within the last week we read in our newspapers of student riots in the Universities of Warsaw, Wilno and Kracow whose purpose was to force Jewish students in those universities to occupy ghetto benches in the classrooms. During the last week in Germany the Institute for the promulgation of Anti-Semitism was officially dedicated and the dedicatory address was delivered by a Nobel Prize winner. Daily the columns of the press bring to us the record of anti-Semitic agitation throughout the Western world.

Is it not therefore unreasonable to ask the Jews to forget about anti-Semitism? I think it is unreasonable if by that you mean they should ignore it or refuse to recognize it or make light of it. That is neither feasible, my friends, nor if feasible, advisable.

It is/wise for our people to live as if we are in a fool's paradise. On the other hand, it is quite definitely reasonable and helpful to advise Jews to forget about anti-Semitism if we mean that they should recognize anti-emitism as a fact in their lives and then to pass on beyond it, into the field of constructive Jewish service and activity. Lingering too long upon the fact of anti-Semitism, allowing oneself to become too much absorbed it it or too dolorously lamenting upon this fact tends to demoralize a people or an individual and to paralyze action. Many Jews never get beyond this hurdle of anti-Semitism. To them, Jewish life begins and ends with anti-Semitism. They can't see beyond it. They can't see around it. Jewish thought, Jewish history, Jewish philosophy, Jewish learning are not entities by themselves - all these things blend into one amorphous gelatinous mass of prejudice. They have a definite anti-semitic complex and that is bad for the individual. Too many individuals have such complexes which are bad for people as a whole.

There are groups and interests which have capitalized on this Jewish ascetic propensity for the anti-Semitic .

Some of them have done with good intention and not maliciously and others have done it not so innocently.

Thus, for example we have found in various relief campaigns which we put on annually throughout the country to relieve distress among the people abroad or to help rehabilitate them - we have found in these campaigns that one of the surest ways to get Jews to give liberally is to scare them with anti-Semitism, make them feel that anti-Semitism is ready to spring on them. -If you don't give enough,

then the big bad wolf will get you. That has been a device almost universally resorted to in our relief and charity campaigns.

There are fraternal orders, lodges, who have Jewish property.

There are fraternal orders, lodges, who have Jewish programs, who are devoted to Jewish purposes. What fraternal organization doesn't require members. It has been discovered that one of the most effective arguments in solicitation for membership is anti-Semitism.

You frighten the prospect and tell him that by belonging to this group you will help to stem anti-Semitism so that all in all anti-Semitism becomes an excellent sales talk.

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Even Jewish magazines who send out solicitors to get magazine solicitations, in their eagerness to get them, approach people and say "Look, the country is flooded with anti-Semitic literature. Subscribe to our magazine and we will fight anti-Semitism.

During the last election, anti-pemitism was peddled about by political partizans of both parties as a means of filching

Jewish votes. A so-called whispering campaign started and then a so-called counteracting campaign against the whispering campaign.

The purpose of both was to scare the Jews into voting for this party or that party. On that anti-Semitism Jews have always stood up as Jews because they were certain that the fate of the Jewish people in America depended on the outcome of the campaign.

There are publishers in the United States, printers of books who found that a book which treats of Jewish problems, particularly of anti-Semitism will have a sales appeal, particularly among Jews and so the publication of books on anti-Semitism has become a good business.

There are magazine editors who know that publishing articles on anti-Semitism and the spread of anti-Semitism

would boost the sales of the magazine because they know that Jews would snatch up that publication, with the result that editors, publishers and others, many of them quite innocent and quite unconsciously are contributing to the fixation in the minds of the American people that the Jews are a problem in America, a problem which must be discussed daily and hourly, about whom books must be written, about whom articles must be written.

The Jews are no more a problem than the millions of Italians, and Germans and Spaniards who live here. Anti-Semites may make anti-Semitism a problem to us Jews but certainly we Jews are not a problem to America.

Really, my friends, there has been too much of this thing going on in the last few years. We Jews are entitled to a little bit of "menucha". We are entitled to a little bit of privacy. We hate to be taken in every day into the dissecting room, in the anatomical laboratory.

Surely this thing of anti-Semitism should have worn off its novelty. It is more than two thousand years old. Surely there is much more to Jewish life than what non-Jews think about us. Surely the Jewish people has survived not because of anti-Semitism but in spite of it. Isn't it time for us Jews to accept anti-Semitism as a more or less constant factor in Jewish experience and then move on into the realm of Jewish thought and action based not on this one factor of life but on all factors of Jewish life - spiritual, social. We have a long history and that should give us have perspective. We have a millennial experience and that should/distilled in us a little wisdom and patience and confidence.

Why act as thought this business of anti-Semitism was something new, in the last few years, unpredictable, a situation which we never confronted in the past for which we have no strategy and plan of action. Why write new books, articles on this subject when everything that could have been said has been said over and over again.

Mr. Hitler is not the first anti-Semite in history.

2600 years before there was a Haman. A thousand years before him a Pharoah. In between there have been thousands of little Hamans and little Pharaohs. There is nothing in the villifying life of the Nazis that you cannot find in old anti-Semitic literature of the Grecco-Roman world of 2000 years ago like Afron of Alexandria against whom Josephus wrote his defence of the Jews.

A perspective is what we need on this subject and if
we win such a perspective, we will discover first that a measure
of prejudice is inseparable from our lot in the diaspora. As long
as we live as a minority people among other people them will be
a measure of anti-emitism inescapable, inevitable. The 28th Chapter
of Deuteronomy contains a long list of maledictions. It is a frightful
chapter of maledictions and of all these maledictions and curses the worst
that can befall man is the curse of "exile".

Living as a minority among other people there will always be a degree of suspicion, of prejudice of manifest condemnation which in periods of stress and crisis and war and depression and unrest will be terrifically intensified. Peace and prosperity and good times will reduce that prejudice. War and depression and unemployment and hard times will intensify it.

Now that is an axiom of Jewish existence in the diaspora.

There is no use fighting it. There is no use bucking our heads against a stone wall.

A perspective on this question will also tell us that there are certain races and peoples who are less addicted to intolerance and Menophobia - that is hatred - than others. Some peoples have an historical experience that is more tolerant of other peoples. Contrast the attitude of England towards Disraeli and Germany towards Rathenau and you know what I mean. Some people are more tolerant than others.

Those sections of our people who lives in less tolerant lands are naturally less fortunate than those who live in more tolerant lands. Therefore you cannot apply the samerule to all Jewish groups living throughout the world.

Furthermore, this perspective will tell us that antiSemitism is but one form of human intolerance. This is the one
from which we suffer, perhaps, the most. But still, it is only
one. All forms of human intolerance die hard. As the ideals of
Democracy, liberty, human equality make headway in the world,
anti-Semitism recedes and vica versa. There is an unclean spirit
rampant in the world today. Therefore we have the brutalization
of anti-Semitism in our day.

I should like to emphasize this thought that while apparent, is somehow overlooked. Anti-Semitism is a form of universal intolerance. Who are the enemies of the Jews? The liberals? the progressives, the men of high class, the movements of peace? No! Who are our enemies? The militarists, the reactionaries,

the enemies of human progress, the enemies of these ideals of which I speak. In other words, we our problem, as far as anti-Semitism is concerned, is inseparably tied up with the whole problem of human civilization.

Recently I had occasion to go through two books both written by non-Jews, on anti-Semitism, one by a Swedish Professor, Hugo Valentin, and the other by Count Heinrich Goudenhove kalergi on "Anti-Semitism Throughout the Ages". It is interesting to note the complete agreement of both of these writers when they come to summarize the whole subject after devoting to it hundreds of pages.

I quote from rofessor Valentin's concluding chapter: "It is a Nazi dogma that Jews and "Aryans" are divided by the nature of their beliefs, their scepsis, and consequently by their "myths" (dogmas) The dream of a realm of peace, which of course presupposes nothing less than a gradual modification of human mentality, is regarded as one of these Jewish myths. But this has been a hope and a guiding star for many millions of men of different races and nations and one of the leading ideas of Christianity, indissolubly united with the great human traditions of mankind, in which, too the greatest thinkers and poets of the German people once lived and breathed. The idea triumphantly surmounts the boundaries which race and nation have raised among men, nor will it submit, we may be sure, to be confined in the future in the strait waistcoat of racial dogmatism. We are not concerned here with the conflicts of today, for the goal lies in the mists of the future and it is doubtful if it can be attained, but rather with a tendency, a mentality, an ideal aspiration, an evolution continuing through thousands of years, though often checked.

towards a human solidarity elevated above nations, races and religions, a dream which was once shared by an Alfred Nobel. National minorities and among them the Jewish people, who are everywhere in a minority, are above all dependent on this evolution. But it concerns us all. Is mankind, as Grillparzer feared, to complete its course 'from humanity through nationality to bestiality'? Or will the Caliban of national hatred finally be vanquished by the bright powers of life? The fight for and against Antisemitism is but one phase of this ancient conflict.

"'In God's eyes,' runs a saying of the Talmud often
quoted in Jewish educational literature, 'the man stands high who
makes peace between men: between husband and wife, between fathers and
children, between masters and servants, between neighbour and neighbour.
But he stands highest who establishes peace among the nations.'"
Thus writes Professor Valentin.

Count Goudenhove alergi sums up his resevations in the same way:

"The outburst of anti-Semitism in the Third Reich has opened the eyes of the world and shown to what an extent the Jewish question is bound up and connected with the general questions of human progress, of Western culture and civilization. The treatment of minorities in general and of the Jews in particular is a barometer for the degree of culture of an epoch, a nation and a State. For every minority and, above all, a defenceless minority is a living appeal to justice, to the chivalry and loyalty of the majority, and the answer to this appeal is a sentence not against the minority but against the majority.

"The Jewish question is a question of humanity. Every step in advance has ameliorated the lot of the Jews, while every step backwards has made it worse. The Jewish question is bound up with the questions of tolerance, human rights and individualism; with the questions of respect for the personality and its achievements, of the free course for the most efficient and the most gifted, irrespective of either race or religion. From the national point of view the Jewish question will be solved the more promptly the sooner the comprehension will ripen that a nation is a Kingdom of the Spirit and not of blood; that the nations in Europe are intermixed to such an extent that there could be no question of a pure race. As great schools and by means of great doctrines, the nations have therefore united the peoples in spiritual communities, and everyone who is participating in this mysterious communion of the spirit is an equal and full member of the nation.

"When such thoughts will have become general, Anti-Semitism will disappear."

stop

This being the case, my friends, our perspective will tell us not to expect a disappearance of anti-Semitism in the near future, in our life time, or in the lifetime of our children.

It is here to say for a long time receding or advancing as the tide of human progress advances or is checked. Therefore this anti-Semitism is here to stay quite regardless of what we Jews do.

Occasionally you hear people say that if all the Jews were honest, if there were no racketeers among the Jews or over ambitious

Jews among us, or if there were no Jewish gangsters, racketeers among us, then anti-Semitism would disappear. Not so, my friends.

If we were all angels, strumming on harps or guitars, or whatever

angels strum on, the anti-Semite would still not like us. Those who hate us hate us not for our worst, they hate us even more for our best.

Prior to the election, I received a dodger, a pamphlet which had on it the photographs of some twenty or thirty Jews and on the strength of these photographs and the literature accompanying the photograph, called upon the gentiles of America to defeat a certain candidate because he was friendly to these Jews. Who were these Jews whose photographs were displayed on this pamphlet, Jewish bootleggers, racketeers? Oh, no, my friends. The finest, noblest Jews we possess - Supreme Court Justice, governors, leaders in American social and philanthropic life - these were held up as a menace to American life. These men to were out/capture and dominate America at the expense of the unsuspecting, innocent gentiles.

Professor Valentin makes this comment:

"For it is not the Jews who are hated, but an imaginary image of them, which is confounded with the reality, and the Jews' actual "faults" play a very unimportant part in the matter."

The anti-Semite would blame the Jews for anything that would happen. In the early centuries of the Common Era, they blamed the Christians in the self-same way that they are now blaming the Jews. One of the great Church Fathers, Tertullian, in one of his books writes the following:

"If the Tiber rose to the walls of the city (of Rome), if the inundation of the Nile failed to give the fields enough water, if the heavens did not send rain, if an earthquake occurred, if famine

threatened, if pestilence raged, the cry resounded: "Throw the Christians to the lions." Christians were then in the minority.

This being the case, my friends, and this being the perspective in our history, what should be our attitude? Should we run away from it? No, there is no escape. That is impossible.

That is our destiny. Shall we become pathologically absorbed in it so as to exclude all other thought? That is the way of demoralization.

Shall we spend our time lamenting and bemoaning? That is both weak and unworthy. Shall we bluster about it? That too is undignified.

What shall we do about it? That attitude is clearly indicated. It should be one of quiet pride and dignity, of moral earnestness and strong faith, the attitude of a people who know that they are innocent of these false accusations, who know their inner strength. Jews have outlived similar attacks in the past with attitudes of the same confident dignity, moral earnestness and strong faith.

What should be our attitude in the face of this more or less constant factor in our experience?

It is a twofold one. First to strengthen our inner defenses, to work for an inner spiritual regeneration of our people so as to be able to withstand what fate will bring to us. First, the strengthening of our inner defenses of Jewish life and secondly to fight with might and main together with all men of good will for the preservation of the great ideals of humanity, for the establishment of a social order

Our two-fold task calls for Jewish solidarity, a sharp sense of Jewish responsibility towards our own. It calls for help to be given generously for our brothers who at this time find themselves ground down by the heel of tyranny, of anti-Semitism. Help others - the great masses of our people who have been so terribly impoverished in the last few decades, particularly the Jews in Eastern Europe. Help them to rationalize their lives. Help productivize those sections of our people whom an changing economic order is forcing into unemployment and wretchedness. This is one constructive task which any intelligent Jew would clearly see and understand.

The first task calls for organization, for a long-range program of education of the non-Jew about ourselves, our life and history and achievement, our specific problem. The first calls for the quick upbuilding of the Jewish homeland in Palestine not merely as a place of refuge for tens of thousands and hundreds of thousands of our people who must migrate, who mustfind homes in other lands when the gates of their own lands have been shut in their faces, not merely as a place of refuge for these people but as a homeland, where Jewish life may be normalized in its own milieu and which may help tonormalize the political status of our people everywhere. That is constructive, my friends.

The second task, the old prophetic task "to improve the world so that it will become a Kingdom of God, a kingdom of the wisest human values, where men and women can live in peace and good will. To achieve that we Jews must align ourselves with all

which have that as their objective. Whenever there is wrong, we Jews must be found on the battlefield to fight it. Whenever there is discrimination against others, whenever the masses are ground down under the heel of tyranny, wherever political rights are being denied that is where the intelligent Jews must be found fighting, for in fighting for those ideals, he is fighting for humanity and for his own self-preservation.

Let us forget about anti-Demitism, my friends. Let's stop talking about it. Let's not become hysterical about it. When certain pamphlets and dodgers of anti-Demitic nature are shown to you, push them aside. Bevote your energy and your enthusiasm and your labor to these great constructive tasks to Jewry and to mankind to help strengthen the Jewish home, the Jewish synagog, the Jewish school, Jewish academies of learning, Jewish philanthropy—all Jewish movements which tend to strengthen and normalize, so that our children will grow up into fine men and women, good citizens and good Jews. Devote yourself to all these great causes around you—world peace, economic justice, against exploitation, against tyranny, and in so doing, you will be too busy and too happy to worry about anti-Semitism. "Don't be afraid, my servant, Jacob, as long as we are in the service of God, there is no room for fear."

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How to Forget About Anti-Semitism

By RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER



RABBI HILLEL SILVER

Excerpts from an address delivered by Dr. Abba Hillel Silver at the Temple on Sunday morning, November 29, 1936, which appeared in the Cleveland Plain Dealer on November 30.

I advise my fellow Jews to forget anti-Semitism, not in the sence of ignoring or making light of it, but in passing beyond into the field of constructive thought, action and service.

Anti-Semitism is only one of the forms of intolerance, all of which die hard. Anti-Semitism recedes cedes or advances. In our day, manity.

civilization has sharply receded; therefore, anti - Semitism h a s sharply advanced.

The solution of anti-Semitism is bound up with the triumph of the fundamental values of brotherhood, equality and international

justice.

The correct attitude which Jews should take toward anti-Semitism should be one of, quiet dignity moral earnestness and strong faith. Jews must regard prejudice as a more or less constant factor in their group experience for a long time to come.

They should not try to run away from it. That is impossible. They should not make it central in their

thinking.

In quiet pride they should accept it as a byproduct of a great racial experience covering centuries. which has won for them powerful friends and powerful enemies.

The Jewish people would appreciate a little privacy at the hands of writers, journalists and publishers who have found anti-Semitism to be profitable. We dislike to be taken into the dissecting room for anatomical study every other day.

There is much necessary work to be done to regenerate the Jewish home. synagog and religious school. There are the great movements for peace, freedom and economic justice to which thoughtful Jews should give their earnest adherence.

To do all this is to forget anti-Semitism in the urgency and joy of great constructive service, for or advances as civiluization re- Israel, for America and for hu-