



## Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project

Featuring collections from the Western Reserve Historical Society and  
The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives

### **MS-4787: Abba Hillel Silver Papers, 1902-1989.**

Series IV: Sermons, 1914-1963, undated.

---

Reel  
162

Box  
58

Folder  
798

The First Anniversary of the State of Israel, 1949.

WRHS

AMERICAN JEWISH  
ARCHIVES

THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF THE ESTABLISHMENT  
OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL

By  
Dr. Abba Hillel Silver

May 1, 1949



A year ago, according to the Hebrew calendar, it was my great privilege to announce to the United Nations meeting at Lake Success the establishment of the State of Israel. On that day I declared, addressing the representatives of all the members of the United Nations:

At ten o'clock this morning the Jewish State was proclaimed in Palestine. The hour was advanced out of respect for the sanctity of the Jewish Sabbath. The statement - and I read only one sentence of that statement - is as follows:

"We, the members of the National Council representing the Jewish people in Palestine and the Zionist movement of the world, meeting together in solemn assembly by virtue of the natural and historic rights of the Jewish people and of the resolution of the General Assembly of the United Nations, hereby proclaim the establishment of the Jewish State in Palestine, to be called 'Israel'."

And in reading this proclamation to the United Nations, I stated,

Thus, what was envisaged in the resolution of the General Assembly, which was overwhelmingly adopted by the United Nations last November, has been, as far as the Jewish State is concerned, implemented. Thus, too, there has been consummated the age-old dream of Israel to be reestablished as a free and independent people in its ancient homeland.

The Jewish State is grateful to the United Nations for having placed the stamp of its approval, and the stamp of the approval of the world community, upon the historic claims of Israel, and for the efforts which it made in face of opposition to achieve that which the Jewish people have accomplished. The Jewish State, in setting out upon its career, is conscious of the many grave problems foreseen or unanticipated, which confront it. It prayerfully appeals, therefore, to all freedom-loving peoples, and especially, to those who gave their fullest endorsement to the establishment of the Jewish State a few months ago, to give a full measure of their support and of their strengthening to this newest republic established by this, the most ancient of peoples. The Jewish State will strive to be worthy of the confidence which has been placed in it by the nations of the world, and will endeavor to realize, as far as it is humanly possible, those prophetic ideas of justice, brotherhood, peace and democracy which were first proclaimed by the people of Israel in that very land.

The new Jewish State is being threatened - threatened by neighboring states, threatened with invasion. Invasion will mean war. The Jewish State will be compelled to defend itself. And the world community may be faced with a widening and dangerous area of conflict, which everyone deplores.



It is not yet too late to avert such an eventuality. The Jewish State of Palestine seeks peace with all peoples, and will dedicate itself, under Providence, to the ways of peace and to the friendliest cooperation with all peace-loving peoples.

This was a year ago. This coming Wednesday the Jews of the world everywhere will celebrate the first anniversary of the establishment of the State of Israel. And they will be joined in this celebration, I am sure, by many non-Jews, men of goodwill everywhere throughout the long year of struggle, striving, who gave of their sympathetic understanding and their support to the cause of the reestablishment of the State of Israel. Great events in Jewish history of this type have always been celebrated - celebrated from year to year: the Exodus, the victory of the Maccabees, the salvation of the Jews in Persia in the days of Mordecai and Esther. And I am inclined to believe that this date, too, the reestablishment of the Third Commonwealth, will remain a day which will be commemorated, celebrated by the household of Israel from year to year.

The proclamation of a year ago was an historic act of incomparable grandeur, the majestic climax of a profound millennial drama; the hope of centuries which was voiced in prayer and custom among our people throughout the ages was finally realized. The faith which sustained our people in the dark and weary centuries was finally proudly vindicated. The people which had been consigned to death time and again, and in our own day witnessed more than one-third of its sons and daughters exterminated - this people finally rose from its immemorial crucifixion and returned to independent, sovereign national life. Quite naturally, there was great rejoicing in the household of Israel. And when a few short moments after the proclamation of the State at the United Nations, word was flashed that this new State had received the de facto recognition of the government of the United States, which recognition proved to be the forerunner of recognition of more than 50 other states since - I say, when that news flashed throughout this country, the hearts of American



Jews filled with pride and gratitude because of this historic and decisive act on the part of the oldest and most powerful republic on earth - this act on the part of our beloved country. The oldest republic was reaching out a helping hand to the youngest republic.

I was there at that electric moment when the news was flashed to members of the United Nations. I saw the amazement which filled the ~~R~~all - I saw the consternation in the eyes of some - I saw the ecstasy in the eyes of many - I felt the full impact of that dramatic denouement - and I shall never forget, as long as I live, that Messianic moment.

Well, now a year has passed since that time, since that memorable day. World Jewry is now celebrating the first anniversary. And what a year this has been. How much of history has telescoped in these twelve months. During this past year the people of Israel never wanted in that sustained hopefulness, that exaltation which was induced by the great political achievement. That act was like an inspiring musical accompaniment to all that happened <sup>during the</sup> past year. But nevertheless it was a year of great testing and searching, a year of hard struggle and <sup>bitter</sup> fighting, a year of trial and danger for the Israeli. The old adage proved true again that freedom is never given to a people - for that matter, to an individual. Freedom is always won. It has to be purchased and the price is very high. The rabbis say that three precious things were given to the people of Israel by God, and none of these three was given without the price of sacrifice - the Torah, immortality, and the Land of Israel.

During the past year the men of Israel had to pay a high price in terms of war casualties. Much blood was spilled. Immediately after the proclamation, the country was invaded - invaded by the armies of five neighboring Arab states, who sought to alter by violence the decision of the United Nations. And the United Nations was powerless to check these invasions. The successive truces which were imposed upon the country proved ineffective. Tel Aviv and many cities in Palestine



were bombed. The Jewish wall in the old city, intramural Jerusalem, was attacked by the armies of Trans-Jordan and was destroyed. The whole city of Jerusalem was besieged. For a time it looked as though that population of 100,000 Jews would be starved into surrender, but it did not surrender. And in July and August of last year the Jewish forces began to beat back these invaders, and began to score one military triumph after another. They were poorly equipped, these Jewish forces.

When I <sup>returned</sup> ~~came~~ from Israel a year ago, after having had an opportunity to observe what the equipment was of the Jewish forces, I was greatly disturbed, and shared my fears with people here in this country who were in position to help. The Mandatory regime made it impossible for the Jews of Palestine to arm properly and to prepare for the inevitable struggle. Nevertheless, these poorly equipped forces, these young men and <sup>these</sup> young women of Israel, fought with amazing valor and skill and resourcefulness which, before long, decisively discomfited and defeated the enemy. Later in the fall came the victories in the Negev against the forces of the Egyptians. It was in January of this year, '49, that the first break in the war took place, and armistice talks with Egypt were inaugurated. And today an armistice has been established with all but one of the neighboring Arab armies, and even on the Syrian border there is a cease-fire order in effect. Final peace negotiations are even at this moment being discussed between the Israeli representatives and those of the neighboring Arab peoples in Lausanne, Switzerland. There is peace in Palestine today.

And so, the first anniversary marks the end of the war in a real sense - the end of fighting and the <sup>coming</sup> ~~beginning~~ of peace. But the Israeli did not spend the year merely in defensive fighting for freedom and survival. During this <sup>brief</sup> ~~great~~ period of 12 months, they set up the whole machinery ~~for~~ government, a complete apparatus for self-government. In January of this year the first general elections were held in Israel and a half million voters went to the polls to select the first government <sup>in</sup> ~~of~~ Israel. The manner of voting, the precision, and the orderliness which attended the voting bespoke a maturity <sup>a</sup> political maturity - on the part of the people, <sup>which amazed the world.</sup> The



constituent assembly of 120 was elected known as the Kneseth - the Assembly - a name borrowed from the Kneseth of the Second Commonwealth <sup>of</sup> more than 2,000 years ago. In all that has happened, therefore, there is a sense of continuity which links the ages together. The code of arms, the seal, which the new government adopted has enclosed within olive branches the Menorah, seven-branched candlestick, which Titus took from the Temple in Jerusalem and a replica of which was put on the Ark of Titus, now in Rome. <sup>It</sup> ~~That~~ was a symbol of <sup>Judea destroyed.</sup> ~~The reborn Judea~~ <sup>re-</sup> ~~which~~ <sup>has</sup> placed its Menorah. It was first in the Tabernacle of the Wilderness, and then in the Temple, and then ~~on~~ the arch of Rome, and now again, on the seal of the new State.

In February of this year the first sessions of the Kneseth, the constituent assembly, were held. The President was elected, Dr. Chaim Weizmann; the cabinet was appointed, and all the departments of government <sup>began to</sup> ~~were~~ functioning smoothly. And the draft constitution of the new State was <sup>announced to</sup> ~~published for~~ the rest of the world, a model of democratic, progressive government; a constitution in which the dignity and the inalienable rights of man are proclaimed; a constitution in which there is no discrimination between Jew and non-Jew, no discrimination whatsoever on the basis of race, creed, color, or sex; a constitution in which the absolute equality of all men is established in this secular, non-theocratic State of Israel. The Bill of Rights of our <sup>Constitution</sup> ~~country~~ and of which we are so justly proud <sup>and</sup> those heroic declarations concerning basic human freedoms <sup>which we find</sup> in our Declaration of Independence - are in essence <sup>faith-</sup> ~~fully~~ reflected in the new constitution of the newborn State of Israel. And the conceptions of social and economic justice which are reflected therein are those which are grounded in the ancient teachings of the prophets of Israel, teachings concerning justice and equality and brotherhood. We were not disappointed when this constitution was made known to the world. We had a right to expect that type of constitution from the hands of Jews.

And <sup>new</sup> ~~the~~ State was determined to seek peace, not to be caught in the desperate struggle between the East and the West, between the perils of Scylla and the perils of Charybdes. <sup>will, if left alone, not</sup> ~~It does not want to~~ take sides, does not wish to be drawn into the game



of power politics.

And so, the first anniversary marks the completion of the apparatus of self-government on the part of this new republic. And when one realizes how very often states go through long periods of unrest and revolution and disturbance before any stable government is established, and how quickly this new State of Israel was set up and <sup>is</sup> functioning in the peaceful ~~public~~ <sup>country</sup> men and women who go about their business in a normal way, where authority is established, maintained - one cannot but reflect that here, too, is something almost approaching a miracle *of achievement.*

Second only to the historic political achievement of setting up the State and making it function during the past year, is the truly amazing social achievement which has been recorded by the new State in terms of rescuing tens of thousands of fellow-Jews, who have given them a new life and a new hope in the Jewish National Home. Since last May, that is, within the last 12 months, 200,000 Jews - refugees, war-ravaged, camp-wearied, storm-tossed men and women who <sup>for years</sup> have traveled the broken roads of exile and homelessness, have found a sanctuary at last - a home, at last, in Israel. They are pouring into the country at this very moment at the rate of 1,000 a day. I know of no comparable saga in the whole history of the migration of peoples like this which is now taking place <sup>which</sup> - has taken place within the last year in Israel. Israel is emptying the D.P. camps of Europe and is solving the problem of the Jewish refugees which all the great powers of the earth, with all their vast empty territories, were unable or unwilling to solve.

In 1943 at the sessions of the American Jewish Conference, which was held in the Waldorf-Astoria in the City of New York, to which representatives of all the Jews of the United States came to consider what had to be done to help solve the Jewish problem, I urged at that Conference the adoption of a resolution in behalf of the Jewish State - Jewish Commonwealth. I was opposed by those who insisted that no word should be said of a Jewish State in the resolution, but that we should concentrate upon opposition to the White Paper and talk only of the right of Jews to migrate to Palestine. I said at the time, and I quote:



We cannot truly rescue the Jews of Europe unless we have free immigration into Palestine. We cannot have free immigration into Palestine unless our political rights are recognized there. Our political rights cannot be recognized there unless our historic connection with the country is acknowledged and our rights to rebuild our national home is reaffirmed. They are inseparable links in the chain. The whole chain breaks if one of these links is missing.

History has proven us right and has proven those right who believed as I did at the time, and that number represented the overwhelming number of those who attended that Conference. The Mandate had to be terminated and the Jewish people had to establish its own government in Palestine which, of course, carried with it control over immigration before the Jews of Europe could be rescued. There was no other way out! Even President Truman's insistent request for admission of 100,000 Jews to Palestine failed as long as a foreign government remained in control over Palestine. There was no way of solving the problem of Jewish D.P.'s without the establishment of the <sup>Jewish</sup> State. On this I was frightfully opposed by those who seemed to know better - at least, they claimed they knew better. The American Jewish Committee and Mr. Proskauer were violently opposed to this position which I took. He said at the Conference that he had just spoken to Washington that very afternoon and was assured from sources that he could not disclose that at this particular moment it would be a tragedy to put forth this maximal demand. It was unwise and dangerous to ask for statehood now! And over this issue the American Jewish Committee withdrew from the Conference, and a great controversy ensued on the American Jewish scene. And the American Jewish Committee for years opposed us in Washington where we tried to persuade the American government to take the initiative in the establishment of the State of Israel.

Well, history demonstrated how wrong they were. They <sup>see</sup> ~~know~~ it now, and be it said to their credit that they have become warm friends of the State of Israel. Unlike the irresponsible and self-hating die-hards of the American Council for Judaism who are still sowing discord in the Jewish camp and are still stimulating anti-Semitism



in the United States by casting reflections upon the loyalty of American Jewish citizens. They are now concerned about the future relationship of the Jews of America with the State of Israel. At first they were terribly concerned about the establishment of the State, and they used every method, every conceivable method, every scurvy and shameless device of sabotage and slander to defeat the establishment of the State of Israel. Now that it is established and they can't do anything about it, they have turned their attack in another direction. The State of Israel, it is now <sup>maintained</sup> ~~being said~~, is interfering in the affairs of American Jews. And American Jews are linked up in some way with the State of Israel, thereby becoming guilty of a sort of a dual allegiance. There are no haters in the world like self-haters, and there are no anti-Semites in the world like Jewish anti-Semites.

At the Convention of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations several months ago in Boston, I had the privilege of speaking on this very subject, and I spoke, of course, not as an individual - I wasn't asked to speak merely as an individual - but speaking as the spokesman of American Zionists - the head of the Jewish Agency, the head of the Emergency Council of the United States. And I stated then to that gathering of representatives of reform Jews from all over the United States:

If History is any guide, the Jews of today who will continue to live in other lands will, by and large, maintain the same attitude towards the State of Israel as their forefathers did, ~~xTheirs~~ ~~xx~~ centuries ago, for even when the Second Commonwealth was in existence, there were Jews who lived outside of Israel. That is no new phenomenon in Jewish history. Theirs will be a most sympathetic relationship towards that land. They will materially help it to absorb as many Jews as will wish to go there or may have to go there. They will help to build up its cultural, scientific, and spiritual institutions, as well as its economic life so that it may become a land of which Jews ~~everywhere~~ can be proud. For the eyes of the world will be on the land of Israel to see what Jews, as a people, can accomplish on their own.

Israel will come to be again the non-political center of world Jewry. Pilgrims will go there as of old - and not merely the pious. There will be a free flow of manifold communications, of mutual stimulation, of give and take. Israel will again come to exercise a unifying and sustaining influence in Jewish life everywhere.



We shall remain one people, one historic community, as of old. But the Jews of Israel will be Israeli citizens and the Jews of the United States will be citizens of the United States, and similarly with Jews in other lands.

They will owe undivided allegiance to their respective countries and they will discharge loyally their full duties as citizens, as Jews have always done. But they will retain a special attachment to the land of Israel which will in no way interfere with their duties and obligations as citizens of their respective countries.

It was Voltaire who said that every cultured man should have two fatherlands - his own and France. In an even more profound sense, but equally non-political, it may be applied to the Jew and Israel. Israel will be the Sabbath in the life of our people when, according to a beautiful tradition, an additional soul is vouchsafed unto man.

This is so elementary that it is disheartening that it has to be spoken of, argued about, repeated over and over again. The Irish in the United States fought for years to establish a Free Ireland. A Free Ireland was established. No one questioned the loyalty of the Irish in the United States to the American government. And the Irish did not find it necessary to keep an Irish organization in the field to teach the Irish how to be loyal to the United States. It is a sickly inferiority complex, a sense of insecurity and a self-hate which is behind such organizations as the American Council for Judaism, which has really nothing to do with Judaism. And at the moment it is a good excuse for not giving to the United Jewish Appeal.

To go back to our main argument, this last year has witnessed the coming into Israel of tens of thousands of Jewish refugees. This most welcome large-scale immigration, however, has imposed the most severe burdens upon the young state. The cost involved is colossal - it runs into the hundreds of millions of dollars per year. The young republic is exerting itself to the utmost to meet this, this tidal wave of impoverished human beings - men, women and children who are coming into the country. It is taxing itself to the utmost. The Israeli are imposing upon themselves a regime of austerity in order to conserve their dollar reserves to make it possible to provide reception, housing, care for these human beings that are coming into the country, thousands of whom are still living in tents, thousands of whom are living under the open



sky in Israel. There have been incipient food demonstrations in the country. The Jews throughout the world are assisting in a substantial way to take care of these immigrants, who really are no responsibility of the State of Israel - who shouldn't be! They're our responsibility! Much has been done by the Jews of America to help in the problem, but <sup>much</sup> more must be done. The Jews of Cleveland will have the opportunity during the coming few weeks to indicate the degree of their solicitude, their sense of responsibility to this great humanitarian act which is being carried on in Israel.

There are other problems which on this first anniversary confront the State of Israel. Permanent peace has not yet been established; the boundaries have not yet been fixed; the status of Jerusalem has not yet been finally determined. At the moment the Israeli hold in control the new part of the city of Jerusalem *& the forces of Trans Jordan* ~~and to~~ the old city where are the principal holy places. A year ago last November the United Nations voted to internationalize the city of Jerusalem. There are those who are pressing for internationalization today. The Catholic Church has become very active in asking for the internationalization of the city of Jerusalem. But there are serious difficulties involved in the implementation of what seems to be a logical solution. Internationalization of the city means the establishment there of a large police force and an army, and there seems to be no one ready to provide that police force or army, and to leave the city inadequately protected would subject the Jewish community of that city of whom there are over 100,000 to the same danger of siege and starvation to which they were subjected less than a year ago.

Perhaps the solution lies in the direction of establishing international supervision over the sacred places. The President of the State of Israel, Dr. Weizmann, a few days ago pledged that "the State of Israel is prepared to insure full security for religious institutions with exercise of their functions, to grant the supervision of the holy places to those who held them sacred, and to encourage and accept fullest international safeguards and controls for their immunity and protection".



The Jews of Israel want the new city of Jerusalem to remain part of the State of Israel. They are eager to provide and join with other nations absolute safeguards for the immunity and free access to all the sacred places of Jerusalem which are dear to the hearts of the three religions of mankind. This problem remains a serious problem.

There is the problem of the Arab refugees who left their homes during the war. And that is a serious problem, too, of grave concern to the new State of Israel. The government of Israel has indicated time and again that the Israeli are ready to cooperate in any practical scheme which will permanently solve this problem. The suggestion for the resettlement of Arabs in other countries, or a transfer of population - a voluntary transfer - which has been advocated by former President Hoover, seems to be receiving considerable favorable thought today. It will clearly be impossible for most of the Arab refugees to return to their original homes. Many of their homes have been destroyed, and many of the towns and cities are now crowded with these hundreds of thousands of Jewish refugees who have come in. The State of Israel is prepared to compensate the owners of property and to join in a scheme for their resettlement in other neighboring Arab countries where there is land in abundance. Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, a day or two ago, writing in her column declared - wisely, in my judgment: "There was a time when perhaps the best solution would have been for these people to return to Israel. However, now that the great influx of Jewish immigration from Cyprus and central Europe, the Arabs probably will be better off if the funds already at hand are used to resettle them in some of the Arab countries where there are vacant lands that need people to work them." There are many Jews in Arab lands, particularly in North Africa, who might be released to go to Israel.

There is the problem of the admission of the State of Israel to the United Nations which has not yet been solved. The Security Council approved of the application. It must now receive favorable vote of two-thirds of the members of the Assembly of the United Nations. On May 8, 1947, nearly two years ago, when I first presented



the case of Israel to the United Nations, I concluded my appeal to them in the following words:

The Jewish people belongs in this society of nations. Surely, the Jewish people is no less deserving than other peoples whose national freedom and independence has been established and whose representatives are now seated here. The Jewish people were your Allies in the war, and joined their sacrifices to yours to achieve a common victory. The representatives of the Jewish people of Palestine should sit in your midst - representatives of a people and a land which gave to mankind spiritual and ethical values, inspiring human personalities, and sacred texts which are your treasured possessions. We hope that that people, now rebuilding again its national life in its ancient homeland, will be welcomed before long by you to this noble fellowship of the United Nations.

It is my hope that this will be consummated within the next few days, although in political life there is never any guarantee.

And so, good friends, we and Jews everywhere - non-Jews of good will everywhere - today and this week salute the first anniversary of the establishment of the State of Israel. And although that state is beset with many grave and serious problems, I am confident - I think we all might well be confident - that they will solve these problems with the same skill and determination and capacity for improvisation to meet new situations, the same sacrificial loyalty which enabled them to come through this last year of bitter fighting which sustained them during the many discouraging years of the Mandatory regime, which sustained our people during the long bitter centuries of Exile and national homelessness. We pray for the new State, for wisdom, courage, strength to carry on. We, Jews of the United States, loyal citizens of America, continue our deep interest and our support to the new State of Israel.



# THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL

Sermon, The Temple

~~May 1~~, 1949

April 29,

A year ago, according to the Hebrew calendar, it was my great privilege to announce to the United Nations meeting at Lake Success the establishment of the State of Israel. On that day I declared, addressing the representatives of all the members of the United Nations:

"At ten o'clock this morning the Jewish State was proclaimed in Palestine. The hour was advanced out of respect for the sanctity of the Jewish Sabbath. The statement -- and I read only one sentence of that statement -- is as follows:

"We, the members of the National Council representing the Jewish people in Palestine and the Zionist movement of the world, meeting together in solemn assembly by virtue of the natural and historic rights of the Jewish people and of the resolution of the General Assembly of the United Nations, hereby proclaim the establishment of the Jewish State in Palestine, to be called 'Israel'."

And in reading this proclamation to the United Nations, I stated:

"Thus, what was envisaged in the resolution of the General Assembly, which was overwhelmingly adopted by the United Nations last November, has been, as far as the Jewish State is concerned, implemented. Thus, too, there has been consummated the age-old dream of Israel to be re-established as a free and independent people in its ancient homeland.

The Jewish State is grateful to the United States for having placed ~~in~~ the stamp of its approval, and the stamp of the approval of the world community, upon the historic claims of Israel, and for the efforts which it made in face of opposition to achieve that which the Jewish people have accomplished. The Jewish State, in setting out upon its career, is conscious of the many grave problems foreseen or unanticipated, which confront it,. It prayerfully appeals,



therefore, to all freedom-loving peoples, and especially to those who gave their fullest endorsement to the establishment of the Jewish State a few months ago, to give a full measure of their support and of their strengthening to this newest republic established by this, the most ancient of peoples. The Jewish State will strive to be worthy of the confidence which has been placed in it by the nations of the world, and will endeavor to realize, as far as it is humanly possible, those prophetic ideas of justice, brotherhood, peace and democracy which were first proclaimed by the people of Israel in that very land.

The new Jewish State is being threatened -- threatened by neighboring states, threatened with invasion. Invasion will mean war. The Jewish State will be compelled to defend itself. And the world community may be faced with a widening and dangerous area of conflict, which everyone deplures.

It is not yet too late to avert such an eventuality. The Jewish State of Palestine seeks peace with all peoples, and will dedicate itself, under Providence, to the ways of peace and to the friendliest cooperation with all peace-loving peoples.

