



**Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project**  
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**MS-4787: Abba Hillel Silver Papers, 1902-1989.**  
Series IV: Sermons, 1914-1963, undated.

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163

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850

Israel Re-Visited, 1951.

773  
ISRAEL REVISITED

May 20, 1951

It is in a sense too early for me to attempt to organize the impressions which I received on the occasion of my visit to Israel, and to bring them all within the framework of an organized pattern. The impressions were so numerous and the emotional reactions from time to time were so strong that if they had been spread over a much longer period, it would have been easier to arrange them all into some satisfactory pattern. So much was telescoped in so short a time. The three weeks, or the approximately three weeks, which I spent in Israel were very strenuous weeks, not only because of the traveling and the many places which I visited, but also - and perhaps more so - because of the many speeches which I had to make. When I left this country, I was told that I would have just three speeches to make - one in Tel Aviv and one in Haifa and one in Jerusalem - maybe a fourth one. As it turned out to be, I had about 30 or 40 speeches during those three weeks. I thought very often during that time of how Moses was able to reach the good old age of 120 years, seeing that the good Lord said to him so often, "Speak unto the children of Israel," and particularly since Moses, according to the text, was "rather difficult of speech", as was my case in Israel when I had to speak exclusively in Hebrew. When you have to speak hours on end in Hebrew, you have to watch your step. You see, you get yourself a bit entangled in your grammar and syntax and your idiom, and particularly your pronunciation, and that's a very fatiguing business.

The reception which I received in Israel was quite unforgettable. It was moving and unprecedented. It frequently brought tears to my eyes and I felt myself very humble. I had been away from that country for over  $2\frac{1}{2}$  years, and I thought I had been more or less forgotten because  $2\frac{1}{2}$  years is a long time. But from the beginning to end, it was something like a triumphant procession, from the moment that I set foot at the airport at Lydda, where my plane was to have arrived at 5 o'clock in the morning and where over 1500 people waited from 5 o'clock in the morning until 9,

when my plane arrived, the largest crowd that ever came to the airport - and they came from all parts of the country - and through the time that I spoke in Tel Aviv one Saturday morning and some 30,000 blackened the streets around the hall where I spoke - through my visits to Haifa and Jerusalem to the very last evening when I was made honorary citizen of the city of Tel Aviv in a very moving and impressive ceremony in the Tel Aviv Museum. The whole experience was something that I hadn't, in my wildest imagination, looked forward to.

I was able to meet with all classes of people and with all parties in Israel, and partisanship, as you probably suspect by now, runs very high in Israel, very rife. I had the pleasure of having lunch with the President of the State of Israel, President Weitzmann and Mrs. Weitzmann, and while I found the President physically rather feeble now, his mind is as alert as it ever was, and we were able to spend a few hours together discussing problems of mutual interest.

I had the pleasure of meeting with the Foreign Secretary, with other ministers of the Israeli Cabinet, with many mayors of the municipalities of Israel, with the Chief Rabbi, the President of the University, I had a delightful lunch with the American Ambassador and spent some four hours with him discussing vital problems affecting the peace in that part of the world in which the United States is greatly interested. I was able to meet with working men and with farmers. One of the most moving experiences that I had was one day at a meeting, when a group of farmers, who were in Israel just one year, came to present me with the first harvest which they raised from the first crop which they planted in Israel.

The whole experience personally was an unforgettable one, and the three weeks spent there was one long, though very strenuous Yontiff. I looked upon it more than as a personal tribute, although the personal element did not escape <sup>me</sup> I am, after all only a human being, and those kind of experiences are very rare in human life. But it was more than a personal experience, I felt - a personal tribute. What the citizens of Israel were expressing to me and through me was their appreciation for what American Jewry had done for them and for the State of Israel. Occasionally, the leaders of this

or that party in Israel, when they speak over there - not here, forget to mention the contribution which American Jewry has made politically and economically to the new State of Israel, but the rank and file of the Israeli are keenly and gratefully aware of it all the time.

I travelled through Israel from the Lebanese border in the North down to the new town or port of Elat on the gulf of Acaba in the extreme South on the Red Sea. Elat is an interesting new town that is being constructed in a place where there never existed a city before since creation, I assume, in total wilderness - on the shores of this perfectly beautiful gulf of Acaba. The idea is to construct there a port through which the minerals which they hope to find in the Negev will be able to be exported by-passing the Suez Canal directly of the Indian Ocean to India and to the Far East. I was present when the first ship entered the port of Elat, the first cargo boat, and the laborers who were unloading the ship invited me to help them in the unloading of that first ship. Well, I looked on with a great deal of interest. Already they have constructed there a fishing village - there is considerable fish in the gulf of Acaba - and an experimental station to find out what plants, what vegetation can grow best in that part of the world where there is, of course, a minimum of rainfall and water.

I visited numerous colonies and settlements, those constructed as recently as a month before I arrived, many of them within the last year or two. I visited quite a number of factories and plants, interesting new industrial developments, some of them on a small scale, some of them on a considerable scale, and some of them established by some of the large industrial organizations in the United States, like Ford and Kaiser-Frazier - some of the rubber tire companies in the United States.

I saw there large-scale reclamation, irrigation and reforestation projects. I visited the reception camps where the immigrants/<sup>who</sup>were coming into the country by plane, by boat, by railroad, are received, medically screened and retained at first for a few days in these temporary reception stations, and then distributed "Mabarot" as they call them, the larger camps, where they stay a few months and where efforts are made to adjust them to the life of the country and then to re-distribute them again

to the more permanent working camps. And it's an amazing sight to see these immigrants. They are coming in to Israel today at the rate of 1,000 a day. I saw some of the planes, the shuttle planes that come in every day, sometimes twice and three times a day from Bagdad - Bagdad to Lydda and back again - Bagdad to Lydda. They represent an amazing, colorful group of people, the like of which I never expected to see. I am more or less acquainted, as we all are, with Jews from Western Europe, from Eastern Europe, even from some of the Moslem countries. To see Jews from Iraq, from Kurjisdan, from Persia, from out-of-the-way communities of whose existence we were not even aware, who have lived there for hundreds and hundreds of years in small, isolated communities within a sea of alien peoples, and yet have retained their faith, their Jewish loyalties, and their amazing love for the country of Israel. People who are different entirely from us in speech and in background and in culture and in ways of life and in outlook. Some of them are 2,000 years behind us in civilization; and yet, they are Jews who are now coming to Israel to become fused and integrated in the new State.

I visited the army camps and saw the Jewish soldiers being trained, the Jewish officers being trained. I saw their drilling and saw their equipment, and it was very gratifying to see how these young men and women of the new State are being trained to defend that which they won with so much sacrifice and at such great cost.

I visited the new cities and the expanding old cities of Israel, the new areas and suburbs of cities like Safed and Haifa, Jerusalem, Tel-Aviv, and it is these cities which are absorbing the largest number of these new immigrants that are pouring into the country. I saw the schools, the new schools, museums, and the theaters which have been established, and the general impression which I received after 2½ years of absence from the country is one of amazing vitality and dynamism and confidence. To be sure, life is not easy in Israel today and in spots it's quite rugged. One misses there the flesh-pots of Cleveland or New York, I assure you. But no one is starving in Israel. There is austerity and the people there have tightened their belts in order to make it possible for them to give food and housing and services of all kinds to the 600,000 new

immigrants who have come in within the last two years. Nevertheless, life there is quite liveable for a Westerner. It's a civilized life, it's a progressive life, it's an unfolding and it is an exciting life, in Israel today. It is far more than an asylum for refugees, and it's too bad that the necessities of campaign in this country have forced an over-emphasis upon this phase of the up-building of the country; namely, that it is at the moment an asylum for poor and helpless refugees who are fleeing persecution from certain parts of the world. It is far more than that. It is a beautiful and challenging country which may well attract and does attract men and women, even from lands of freedom who are blessed with the pioneering spirit and who would like to participate in this heroic adventure, one of the most exciting and breath-taking adventures in state-building that is going on in the world today.

I got the impression that these Israeli were definitely on their way and that they are making good. There's no doubt about it. Of course, there is no light without shadow. And there are shadows in the picture, and no one knows them better than the Israeli themselves. There is an inflation, cost of living is very high, there is a lack of foreign exchange, the Israeli pound has depreciated on the world market, the imports are still running far ahead of the exports - the ratio is probably 7 to 1 or 8 to 1. There is a feeling in certain sections of the population that business and private enterprise and investment are being hampered, that the collective sector is being favored against the private sector of industry. There has been sharp criticism of government, that the government is too eager to establish Socialism in their lifetime, and this has, as you know, expressed itself in the recent municipal elections when the General Zionist Party scored such significant gains because of this dissatisfaction with certain economic policies of government.

But I got the impression that they will find their solution for all these problems. They are learning from their mistakes. They are making mistakes, but they are learning from their mistakes. What we can do for them during this process of trial and error, as they are engaged in this colossal task of building their state and absorbing the immigrants which call for such terrific expansion all along the line in housing

and schooling and hospitals, in a thousand ways, when you have to take care of 30,000 immigrants every month - the best that we can do for them is to extend to them our maximum support in these critical formative years, and help them find their own solutions for the problems of which they are most keenly aware.

I was privileged to be in Israel and in the city of Jerusalem on Independence Day, Thursday, May 10th.

It was an exalting experience for me. It was the first Independence Day of Israel which I was privileged to attend. On the evening before, Wednesday evening - for as you know, the holiday begins in the evening - I was taken by the mayor of Jerusalem as his guest to Haar Herzl, Mt. Herzl, one of the highest peaks around Jerusalem where the body of the great leader of Zion, the builder of the State of Israel, lies interred, his remains having been removed from the city of Vienna a few years ago. It was dusk and on the top of this mountain in the presence of the foremost leaders of the State of Israel the solemn ceremony of flag-raising took place, and then tribute was paid to the members of the Zva Haganah Yisrael, the fighting armies of Israel who died in the battles for the liberation of the country. And when that was over, a huge torch was kindled on top of this Mt. Herzl, and when this torch was seen by the peoples on the neighboring hills around Jerusalem, they in turn kindled their torches and bonfires. And from Jerusalem it travelled all through the land so that before long on every elevation and every hill top in Israel, torches were burning in the night, symbolizing the beginning of Independence Day.

And there was dancing and there was singing all night in the streets of Jerusalem. As I wandered around through the crowds and saw the joy visible upon their faces and their lips ringing with song, I recalled that beautiful prayer,

"May there be heard speedily in the cities of Judea and in the streets of Jerusalem, the sound of joy and the sound of gladness." I have never seen Jews quite that happy, but never. Some of them were very shabbily dressed, and I knew that many of them had nothing in the world, many of them were recent immigrants, and life was hard. And yet

their joy seemed to be boundless, as though it were welling up from the deepest springs of their souls. Because they were aware of the fact that they had compensations, great compensations for the physical things of which they were wanting. They were finally at home. They had a Fatherland, their own country. There was peace of soul and peace of mind which they were enjoying. They were enjoying equality of citizenship among their own people, and all that expressed itself in these spontaneous outbursts of joy and happiness.

The next morning, the morning of Independence Day, I visited another mountain top around Jerusalem, the Haar Zion, Mt. Zion, where the traditional tomb of King David is. And there is a somewhat different picture. They took me down some steps into the heart of the mountain, into a cave, or what seemed to be a cavern, a dark cave. They call it the Martov Ha-shoa, the cellar of destruction. And in that cavern there is entombed 31 urns, each containing the dust from the 31 concentration camps of Europe, and in front of these 31 urns containing the unknown dust of our perished brothers and sisters, there is a perpetual light of six branches, each one dedicated to one million Jews who perished at the hands of Hitler. I was taken into another room adjoining it where ~~are~~ are contained the desecrated Holy Scrolls that were brought by refugees, some of them blood-stained from the various centers of destruction in the Old World, parchments of the Torah which the Nazis had converted into shoes and bags and jesters' gowns for the edification of their people.

That was the Galut, that was exile. And that is being kept in the capital city of the new State of Israel as a memorial. The people of Israel do not wish to forget the past. It must never be forgotten, and they want their children to know what their forefathers had experienced in lands of exile. And it is on that past that the people in Israel have built and are building their new, glorious and resplendent life.

At noon that day I attended religious services in the principal synagogue of Jerusalem where in the presence of all public officials and all the religious leaders of the city and of the country, a great service of thanksgiving was offered unto God and the Hallel, the triumphant psalms of gratitude were recited. And late that afternoon I watched the military parade. It was a thrilling sight. The people of Israel are a peace-loving people. They want nothing but a chance to continue their work of construction and up-building. That's what their heart is set on. But they know the kind of a world in which they live and they know that around their borders are still the unreconciled enemies who just a few short years ago invaded their borders, and whom they had to drive out. And so they are building up an army. There is compulsory military training in Israel for young men and women. And that afternoon I saw the military parade, as smart and as efficient looking and as capable looking a group of soldiers as one can see anywhere in the world, with their weapons and their tanks and their airplanes flying overhead. They need that army there.

While I was there, as you probably know from your own newspapers, there was considerable trouble on the Syrian border, fighting and shooting, and all due to the fact that the Israeli wanted to drain a marsh which is entirely within Israeli territory, a marsh which is today nothing but a breeding place for malaria and pestilence, stagnant with slime and buzzing with disease, and which by draining they hope to convert into thousands upon thousands of valuable acres of fertile soil upon they will be able to settle new immigrants. But out of this thousands of acres in this region, there are 7 acres in which Arabs still live, Arabs of the State of Israel, and the drainage cannot proceed until these settlers upon these 7 acres move, and the State has undertaken to compensate them for the lands. The right of eminent domain to appropriate the land and adequately compensate these settlers. But the Syrians took it upon themselves to become the protector of these few Arab landlords and settlers, and have urged them and goaded them on in not moving from that land, with the result that

there has been fighting on the frontier which is in the demilitarized zone, and the United Nations has been brought into the picture, and at the moment the status is beclouded. I mention this fact to point up what I am saying, that the people of Israel understand full well that they are not living in a fool's paradise, and that they must be prepared to defend themselves and their state and their lives, and they are prepared to do it.

Their problems in abundance, as I indicated a moment ago, one I have just referred to, the fact that there is no peace as yet with the neighboring Arab peoples, that they can't trade with them, which is their normal trading area in the Near East. They must trade, they must increase their exports now by doing business with countries, some of them thousands of miles removed from Israel, whereas their natural customers are right along their border. That's one of the gravest problems confronting the new State.

There are others as I pointed out in one of my addresses in Israel, that in my judgment there are two dangers which confront the new State of Israel. One is war, not war with the Arabs - that they can take care of quite handily. They know it and the Arabs know it - but a world war, which of course, they cannot control. They have not the final say about it, but a world war would involve the new republic in great danger as it would involve many other parts of the world. The second danger which confronts them is excessive political partisanship, which brings with it what we call

unwarranted fraternal hate and strife which, I am afraid, has not been decreasing in Israel, but increasing, and the present leadership, both inside government and outside government, has done little to attenuate the austerity and the sharpness of this political partisanship.

There is need in that country for a statesmanship which would lessen political tensions among these 9 political parties in that little country. One of their major problems is to amalgamate this heterogeneous population which derives from so many different parts of the world and from so many different background and cultures. In

a sense, their problem is very much what our problem was in this country. This, too, was a melting pot of peoples and races who came from all parts of the world. But fortunately, here we have been able to a large extent, though not entirely, to solve that problem through a unitary school system. The children all went to one school to learn the same things and came, as a result, to think alike. It was not long before a united people emerged from this conglomerate of different peoples who poured into the United States.

Well, unfortunately in Israel they have not a unified educational system; in fact, there are four educational systems. The Papa who belongs to the Mapam has to send his child to the Mapam school, and the Papa and Mama who belong to the Mapai send their children to a Mapai school, and the General Zionists send them to a General Zionists school, and the Religious Bloc send them to two different educational systems, one by the Mizrachi and one by the Agudath Israel. And in nearly each one of them, with the possible exception of the General Zionist school system, which is a national school system, the children almost from kindergarten up are indoctrinated ideologically so that they will become when they grow up good and proper party members. And there is the danger, and I pointed it out there, and I wasn't the first one to point it out, but they took it from me rather kindly - there is the danger there of building up in Israel a collection of separate tribes, ideologically differentiated one from another although they are all Jews, instead of building up one united and integrated people.

Now, individualism is very strong among our people, and always has been. It has its virtues and it has its definite dangers.

Another one of their problems is a spiritual problem. Up to now the young generation - and there is a marvelous generation of young people - has found enough spiritual sustenance and idealism with concomitant moral strengthening in the building and in defense of the State - that is the all-absorbing ideal which took them out of themselves and elevated them to high levels. But now that the State has been established and life is settling down, there is in my judgment a vacuum, a spiritual

vacuum being created, particularly in the lives of the young generation. They need a spiritual anchorage. They are aware of it. They and the older generation is aware of it, that the younger generation needs it. Up to now many of them have not turned to their synagogue and to their religious institutions for it because the synagogue in Israel is of the old type, and somehow it is not ready as yet to satisfy the needs of this young modern generation which has been going secularistically, if I might use that term. But there is need for them and for the young generation to follow them, a spiritual idealism which will compensate for that which is already past, for the exultation and the exhilaration which came with the building of the State and the fighting in its defense. Nationalism is not enough either for them or for us or for any other people, and the ideal of Israel was never merely the establishment of a State, although that was always an integral part of the vision of Judaism. The state, too, was not an end in itself but a means and the means was something higher. Israel, by having finally a normal, healthy, independent life of its own may then continue to attempt to realize the exalted spiritual and ethical ideal of the prophets of Israel.

"To improve the world according to the pattern of the kingdom of God." The ideals of justice and brotherhood and peace and righteousness and the unity of mankind - these are the things which have made up the covenanted ideal of Israel's dark ages, and I am sure that once the newer generation in Israel will grope its way to the realization of this total program of life, they will make a major contribution to that which we look upon as essentially Jewish.

Well, good friends, I have spoken of some of these problems, but I'd like you to feel as I did that they are the growing pains of a young nation. I should like you to feel as I do that the people over there have the ability and the brains - there is greater concentration of brains in Israel per foot than in any other part of the world. They owe it to Mr. Hitler, of course, but intelligence, skill, scientific training, artistic ability - I haven't seen so much in such a concentrated form than in that little country. And given free scope, removing the shackles from their hands, bringing peace in that part of the world - why, those Jews are going to revolutionize the whole

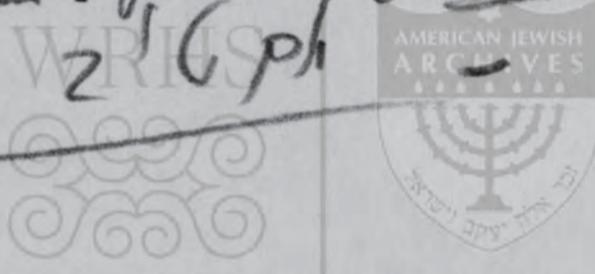
Middle East, and that, in one generation. It's like diked up, dammed up energy that is waiting to burst forth and inundate and sweep over the entire section.

I always recall that phrase of Wordsworth, when he traveled around and watched the ~~poor~~ people in their work and in their struggles and in their hardships. "Thou hast great allies. Thy friends are exultations, agonies and love, and man's unconquerable mind." It was a thrilling experience, dear friends, to have had these three weeks in Israel. To me, it was a refresher, a charging up again. And all that I wish for you is that if you have three weeks to spare, go to Israel.



4. Top early - spread over - about 3 weeks - telescope (1-2)  
Strenuous - 30-40 weeks - Moses - 23-32  
- watch your steps - raw was idiom - prominent

4. Baptism - unforgettable - moving (Tears) Humble  
From beg. to end - triumphal procession - Ly Ida  
- all classes - all parties - 24/12  
- Harpe  
- Jewels  
- Ministers - mayors  
- O.S. Ambassador  
- branch - hers  
- Prof. Weyman - Sherritt - Minister - mayors  
- Prof. Robb - Univ. Heads - O.S. Ambassador  
- writing men - paper - (Hawert)  
- one big



5. War > personal interests - 2 1/2 absence - propaganda - (3)  
Evidently - "Jewish people is not easily fooled."  
Don't like attempts at recasting history  
to suit - who claim monopoly

Tentative to Am. Zionism - Am. Jewish - Official  
leaders - one there - but Rand + Feil Knew -  
- deep operation - and in America.

6. Travelled - Lebanon border - Eilat - ships - Minerals  
Fishing village - plants -

Colonies - Settlements - Factories - plants -  
- Public holidays - Relaxation - Amusements - affordable  
① Army camps - Travelling equipment  
② Cities - new areas & villages - thousands of new  
houses - absorption - Schools - Theaters - Museums

7. General impression - Vitality - Dynamism - Confidence.

① To be new - life is not easy - in spots scraped  
on measures the fish pots developed - but us on  
is starving - existence - high prices hills -  
But - life is just breathable - a civilized life.  
preparation, upholding and making -

② It is new > asylum for the refugees -  
a beautiful and challenging land - which

①  
has  
received  
Camp  
Temp.  
with  
villages  
85,000

② X 211

may well attract men women even from lands of freedom who are blessed with pioneering spirit -  
- participate - ~~with~~ <sup>heroic</sup> adventures

③ 'On their way!' They are making good! - Preference for  
p. 314  
Nat. Dev. Plan

8/ No light without shadows - Inflation - Loek 7

Foreign Exchange - Israeli pound devaluated

Exports

- Bus. + ~~the~~ private investment hampered
- collective sector as a giant private sector
- Bitter criticism of post - "scorches in an life"

Time

- Growth of Gen. Zionist Party

9/ But they will work out their situation, I am sure,  
Learning from their mistakes -

Need of maximum support during these critical,  
formative years

10/ Independence Day <sup>חג העצמאות</sup> Jerusalem - Thursday May 10

- exalted - שלוש ימים - Dusk -

- Stem in ceremony of flag raising
- Tribute to שירי
- Kindly touches - on all hills

Duray + Guryy all night. מורה ב' כ' כ' כ' (5  
- joy and pleasure -  
life is enjoyed - how we they - compensates - 'at  
home' -

11). That Indep. Day morning - /18 10 -  
310 runs - numerous to have  
- deterated to be - top - thos - just deals  
(X/12) - Part - must never be logether  
- On that part - on people in Israel had been  
a new life!

(a) at noon - Religious service - Sho -  
(b) Military parade - no large defences - flaws

tanks -  
① Syrian border - visited it  
- unfaded drainage of marsh - after I had been in Syria several times  
territory - 'stayant with them and busy with their'  
'Deng, malaria but everywhere' - most visibly defeat  
in country - Demilitarized zone - 15000 acres - poor  
- just on roads

12). Problem in abundance - ① no peace with Arab Neighb  
- no trade

(a) Two dangers - has - stol. partizansky -  
on xhd - / 2000 - not less but more! - Present  
leadership - cannot afford luxury / more parties

13/ Need for amalgam - Meeting Post (Lush)  
gen-union; Social - 1930s

School systems 4-1 - Sports - arts  
① Sever / on peopl - o/bel -

Libyan  
2hr.  
drawn to  
loyal party  
unifier

14/ Spiritual Ambrose - Nat. is not enough!

cooperation  
for  
survival  
children  
overcome

13/ Among pains / young nations  
They have ability - Basis - (Lush)

unhappy  
for  
East =  
religion  
Wofai -  
Wofai  
central  
1920s

Prof



"Thou hast great allies:

Thy friends are exultations, agonies,  
And love, and man's unconquerable mind"

- Wordsworth

