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My Visit to the Soviet Union, Part II, 1961.

The regime in Russia is hostile to religion. Its leaders boastfully avow their atheism. They do not seem to be as rabid in their opposition as formerly, but everything that the government can do to eradicate it from among the people, short of completely closing down all places of public worship, is done. Public worship is permitted, but the number of churches, mosques and synagogues has been drastically reduced under one pretext or another. The noblest of the church edifices, like St. Basil's Cathedral in Moscow's Red Square, and the Uspensky Cathedral have been turned into museums. So has St. Isaacs Cathedral in Leningrad, the third largest in the world, and the Khazan Church which is now a museum of religion, or rather of anti-religion and atheism, and the famous Sofisky Cathedral in Kiev. Many un-used churches are being carefully restored to preserve them for their artistic and historic value. You see their onion-shaped domes newly covered over with bright gold and glistening in the sun. This should not, however, lead any one to the conclusion that the Russian communists have ^{reverted} ~~selected~~ and are changing their views on church and religion. They are not. All religious instruction is still strictly forbidden, except where a parent teaches his own child. This has been going on for more than forty years -- so that the present generation of Russians has grown up not alone without any positive religious instruction, but with an hostile or negative attitude towards religion which they received at school. The book least read or known in Russia is the Bible. The intelligent young guides, who took us through the Hermitage in Leningrad and other fine art museums, were well-informed about the secular paintings of the world's great masters which hang in the galleries, but were at an almost total loss to explain those masterpieces whose characters or episodes derived from the Old or the New Testament.

We attended services in a Greek Orthodox Church on a Sunday morning *in Moscow*. It was crowded with some fifteen hundred people. They stood closely-packed and reverently joined in the chants of the beautiful and colorful ritual. We saw practically no young people among them. In the evening of the same day, we attended a Baptist service. Here again, the church was packed; and the service of song, prayer and sermon was very impressive. There were some young people to be seen in this congregation. But, bearing in mind the paucity of churches which are still functioning in these cities of millions of inhabitants, the number of worshippers in these churches should not mislead anyone. The relentless anti-religious indoctrination which the children and *and the fact that church attendance is definitely not a recommendation for advancement anywhere, but a sharp liability* young people are receiving makes one feel that the future of the church, the mosque and the synagogue in the U.S.S.R. is dismal indeed. But religion in the past has shown remarkable recuperative powers under the most unfavorable conditions. The deep mystic faith which is a heritage of the Russian people may yet break through the shackles and the persecutions of the present time.

I attended Sabbath morning service in the Moscow Synagogue in the company of the Israeli Ambassador to the U.S.S.R. Here, too, the Synagogue was filled -- but again with elderly people. The service was impressive. There was a good cantor. I was honored by being given "Maftir" and I chanted immortal words of the prophet Isaiah in a land which was resolved to make *its people* ~~the world~~ forget them. Only this one synagogue, and two other very small and dilapidated "Bate Midrah", like those which used to exist in the "shtetel" long ago in Eastern Europe, exist in the whole of Moscow, a city where ~~there~~ live close to a half-million Jews. There is only one synagogue in Leningrad -- a city of three-hundred Jews; and ~~only~~ one in Kiev -- a city with over one hundred thousand Jews. On the wrought-iron gates of the beautiful synagogue of Leningrad, which was built

before the Revolution, one can still read the Hebrew inscription from Psalm 90:

לחזור אלהינו לך יהוה עד כמה זמן "Return, O Lord! How long?"
לחזור אלהינו לך יהוה עד כמה זמן

→ "Makes us glad for as many days as Thou hast afflicted us, ^{for} ~~and~~ as many years as we have seen evil." There seemed to be something of a hope, a wistful prayer and a prophecy in these words.....

No instruction in Judaism, in Jewish history or literature, in Hebrew or Yiddish is allowed anywhere in the Soviet Union. A small Yeshivah was recently opened under the supervision of the Moscow Rabbi to train rabbinical functionaries for the Jewish communities of the Union. Some ten students are enrolled. Hebrew prayer-books, Bibles and other ritual objects, such as scrolls of the Law and Hebrew Calendars, are very scarce. The Soviet government has ^{not} ~~rarely~~ permitted the printing of Hebrew books.

As individuals, Jews have equal rights in the U.S.S.R. with all other citizens. It would be untrue, ^{however} to say that all anti-Semitism has been eradicated there. This would be a Utopian assumption even for the United States. Cases of discrimination have occurred and do occur. Officially, anti-Semitism is outlawed in the U.S.S.R., but ^{as we all know,} ~~the~~ practice does not always keep pace with what is written in the statute books. Anti-Semitism in Russia has had a long and dark history and the October Revolution did not uproot it. The urbanized status of Russian ^{Jews} ~~Jews~~ and their concentration in the large cities, their disproportionate numbers in the professions and key positions, their very ability, have aroused, as was the case so often in the West, competition and antagonism, especially among the new generation of Russians who are now trained and qualified -- as they had not been previously -- for the positions which Jews ^{Human nature has not changed much here as elsewhere,} have come to occupy. I was told that Russian Jews are being steadily pushed

out of ~~high~~ ^{top} positions in the governing bodies of the State and the Central Committee of the Communist Party, the higher echelons of the Red Army, the diplomatic services, and the ~~top~~ ^{higher} brackets of academic professions and plant management.

The conscience of the Russian ^{intelligencia} ~~people~~ on the manifestations of anti-Semitism in their midst seems to be troubled. Recently, the eminent young Russian poet, Yevgeny Yevtushenko, published an eloquent poem, called "Babi Yar" in the organ of the Soviet Writers' Union. Babi Yar is the ghastly ravine outside Kiev where forty thousand Jews -- men, women and children -- were slaughtered by the Nazis and their Ukranian collaborators in the last war. Time and again the Russian government was asked and did promise to erect a monument at Babi Yar to these Jewish victims. But nothing was done. Babi Yar is neglected and forsaken. The Jewish dead have no memorial. Yevtushenko, in his poem, laments this tragic neglect, for he sees in it evidence of anti-Semitism, the same anti-Semitism which has plagued mankind through the centuries, and which, he had ~~finally~~ ^{again} hoped, would never rise in his beloved country, the "international" Union of the Russian people.

I do not know how widespread this type of anti-Semitism ^{actually is} ~~exists~~ in the U.S.S.R. today. ^{Its existence} ~~It~~ is being vigorously denied by the government. But, cultural and religious discriminations directed against the Jewish nationality ^{groups} ~~as~~ such, is certainly being practiced. The fundamental law of the U.S.S.R. grants cultural autonomy and equality to all nationality groups. They have a right to their own language, schools, press and other cultural activities. This has been one of the honorable and proud boasts of the Soviet Union. The Jewish ^{a nationality} ~~nationality~~ group is recognized as ~~such~~. Every Jew in the Soviet Union is required to indicate on his internal passport that ~~by nationality~~ he is a Jew -- just as every Ukranian is required to indicate that he is a Ukranian, and every Georgian that he is a Georgian. But unlike all the other nationality groups in

the Union, ^{and} ~~when~~ there are many, the Jewish ^{group} ~~nationality~~ enjoys none of the rights of these nationalities.

Because it is an extra-territorial community, so to speak, not centered in any one territory or region of the Union, it has been denied these rights. Those who wish or wished to enjoy such rights, it is argued by the apologists of the regime, should or should have migrated to the autonomous Jewish region of Birobidjan which the Soviet established. This argument, of course, ignores the historic realities of the Jewish position in Russia. Jews, though widely scattered over the country, always constituted a separate, ethnic and cultural group in Russia which, even in the darkest days of the Tzars, were free to exercise their religion, and free to teach and develop their own Hebrew and Yiddish culture. The argument also overlooks the fiasco of Birobidjan which should have been foreseen. Nor were the motives which prompted the Soviet ~~and~~ authorities in 1927 to set up Birobidjan as an autonomous Jewish region, bound up with the ^{thought} ~~hope~~ of stamping out Jewish cultural activities in all other parts of the Soviet Union where Jews would remain in considerable numbers.

Under Lenin, and for a time thereafter, Jewish nationality rights were not only recognized, but encouraged. The teaching of Yiddish and Hebrew was not interdicted. There was a Yiddish press and a Yiddish and Hebrew theatre, and in localities where Jews were predominant, there were Jewish Soviets and courts of law whose business was conducted in Yiddish. There were Yiddish schools attended by tens of thousands of Jewish children. Under Stalin, these rights were brutally abrogated and a campaign of persecution set in. All Yiddish schools and cultural institutions were outlawed. Yiddish writers were liquidated. Many obstacles were placed in the way of Jews who wished to practice their religion.

With the death of Stalin and his official down-grading, at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956, the situation eased somewhat. ~~But, many of the obnoxious practices still remain.~~ Yiddish writers who had been executed during the Stalin terror have been posthumously re-instated and some of their works have been recently published. Some of the works of Sholom Aleichem, Mendele Mocher Seforim and I.L. Peretz have also been published. I purchased in the principal book-shop of Moscow a volume of the Selected Works of the noted Yiddish writer, David Bergelson, who had been liquidated ^{under} ~~on one of Stalin's purges.~~ It was published this year. Also a volume of the poetry by the Yiddish poet Asher Schwartzman, who died on the field of battle fighting as an officer in the Red Army. A few weeks ago, the very first Yiddish periodical since 1948, a bi-monthly literary review, made its appearance in Moscow.

But much still remains to be corrected. I had occasion to discuss these matters at great length with some important Soviet officials. In urging upon ^{these} ~~some of the~~ officials of the State Committee for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, ~~and~~ the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and others, ^{that} a change in the attitude of their government towards the cultural rights of the Jewish nationality ^{was in order,} ~~group,~~ I drew attention to the inner contradiction which existed ^{in their country} ~~when on the one~~ ^{where} ~~hand~~ the work of Yiddish writers ^{are} ~~were~~ now being published, but ~~the~~ young generation of Jews ^{are} ~~were~~ not permitted to learn the language ^{in order to be able} ~~so as to enable them~~ to ~~know~~ ^{those books!} read Yiddish! Why were they doing it? Why were they determined to consign to ultimate death the culture of ^{this} ~~a~~ nationality group within the Soviet Union? It was ~~certainly~~ not part of the basic ^{Israeli} ~~nationality~~ ^{policy} ~~attitude~~ of communism. Lenin certainly did not approve of it. I furthermore drew their attention to the ^{permitting} illogic of ~~presenting~~ Hebrew services in the Synagogue and yet making it impossible for Jewish children to learn ~~the~~ Hebrew language, so that they may be able to

^{those} understand ~~the~~ prayers. How would ^{a knowledge of Hebrew} ~~that~~ endanger the communist regime?

Why should not the Jews of Russia enjoy the same nationality rights as do all other nationalities -- no more and no less? Certainly, they do not

wish to give the world the impression that there ^{exists} ~~is~~ a Jewish problem in

the Soviet Union as there ^{was} ~~were~~ in the days ^{of} the Tzars! I received ^{the official} ~~a~~

^{Party line} ~~variety of~~ answers. No communist is ever ^{caught} ~~caught~~ short of an answer. But, I got the

^{unpleasant} ~~suspect~~ that ^{these answers} ~~they were~~ given without much conviction. I got the impression

that further ^{serious} ~~consideration~~ is being given to this matter in the circles of the Party.

I am inclined to the belief that further progress in the direction of granting the Jewish minority in the Soviet Union the same cultural and religious considerations which are accorded all other nationality and religious groups can still be made, given a friendly and insistent world Jewish opinion.

I do not believe that Russian Jewry should be written off. ^{It is true that} ~~Many~~ Jews in Russia have ~~undoubtedly been~~ assimilated in the past forty years, having been denied Jewish cultural and religious education, and having been cut off from contact with world Jewry. In some instances, this assimilation ^{was}

^{and quite rapid} ~~was eager and quite~~ self-willed. But many ^{other} Jews have retained an unshaken

racial loyalty and an historic attachment, which, though not vocal, are strong

and unmistakable. Many ^{of them} ~~Russian Jews~~ are poorly informed about Jewish life

abroad. They have been isolated so long. ^{But they} ~~The Jews I spoke to~~ were eager to

hear about Jewish life in America, and especially in Israel. They kindle at the very mention of Israel. When news somehow reached them of the rocket which

the Israeli had sent up, they greeted each other ^{then} ~~in the~~ Synagogues on Shabbos

with a meaningful Mazel Tov. We were in Moscow during the International Film

Festival. Israel also exhibited. The evening when the Israeli film was shown -- just a documentary about the progress and development of the country -- crowds of Jews milled around the large Cinema, thousands could not get in, ~~the~~ tickets had all been sold out and at a premium. Inside the hall, the viewers cheered and applauded and wept.... ^{Last year on} Simchas Torah Eve -- the Festival of the Rejoicing with the Law -- in the street before the Synagogue in Leningrad, thousands of Jews, many of them young Jews, danced and sang....

There is still an unextinguished spark of Jewish loyalty among ^{many of} the three million Jews of the Soviet Union which some day may yet burst forth into the brightness of a new day....

^{in previous} Let me summarize my general ~~conclusions~~ ^{about the attitude of the Russian} about the Soviet Union and our ^{people turn over} country. What do the Russian people really think of us? Well, they are as confused about us as we are about them. I am not now speaking of ^{then} government officials and spokesmen. These naturally follow the official Party line. They turn on the spigot of praise or denunciation, frowns or smiles as the political moment dictates. They are ^{only} a temporary barometer. Their endless propaganda has undoubtedly influenced the masses of the ^{Russian} people, but not to the point of automatic acceptance of all that is told them. Not all of them are quite that gullible. Not all of them, by any means, are persuaded that the American workers live in slums and on the brink of starvation, or that all ~~xx~~ Americans are race-obsessed, or that our people hate Russia and want war. ^{for the contrary,} They seem to like Americans. They are very friendly to American visitors. They harbor, I believe, a secret admiration for the great ^{They would like to do as well if not better} achievements of our country. They know that the United States has never been at war with the Russians. Some of them recall the generous aid which America extended to ^{them} the starving millions of ~~Russians~~ following the First World War; they remembered ^{we were} that/their country's ally in the ^{Last war.} ~~Second World War~~. They welcome most enthusiastically our artists and cultural emissaries, as we do theirs. They want to live in peace and friendship with us.

The people to whom I spoke, men and women in all walks of life, academicians, professional people, directors of factories and collective farms, and working people generally, all expressed a most earnest hope for peace. Peace seemed to be on everyone's lips. They know war, far more intimately and tragically than we do. Our fighting front in the last war was thousands of miles away from our homes. Their homes, and towns, cities and villages were the actual battle-grounds. Many were laid in ruins by the last war. Russia lost over twenty million people. In Leningrad alone, six hundred thousand men, women and children starved to death during the dreadful siege of a thousand days. So ^{the Russians} ~~they~~ are very sincere when they talk about peace and peaceful co-existence with the rest of the world. Their country has not yet recovered from the appalling ravages of the last war. They want years of quiet in which to re-build, in which to raise their low standard of living, in which to give their children a quieter and happier life than was their lot.

Their leaders also want peace and co-existence with the non-communist world, but they have not fully thought through the implications of co-existence in terms of self-restraint which they must ~~constrain themselves to~~ exercise in foreign affairs, in ^{terms of not} fostering communist penetration in the guise of ^{encouraging} so-called movements of national liberation in other countries. As I told one of the leading academicians in Russia: "You cannot ^{ask} ~~call~~ for co-existence and in the same breath talk of burying capitalism." ^{RP} Mr. Khrushchev indicated a few days ago, in his policy statement before the twenty second Congress of the Communist Party, that ~~this~~ is really the crux of the problem. He found it necessary to deny that Communists had any right or desire to export revolutions to non-communist countries. If this is so, ~~and this is~~ ^{also} a radical departure in communist doctrine, and if the West ^{also} refrains from exciting counter-revolutions in Socialist countries,

and both East and West agree to channel their ^{future} aid to under-developed countries through the United Nations, instead of seeking competitive advantages in these countries through ^{such} ~~the~~ aid, ~~which they give~~, then the way is open for real progress towards world peace. But how far the communists are actually prepared to put ~~this~~ ^{their revised} doctrine into practice has not yet been demonstrated.

The Russian people ^{to whom} I spoke ^{to}, however friendly disposed towards us, are confused. They cannot understand us. Why does the United States insist on re-arming and re-uniting Germany, their former deadly enemy, and ours? Can the ~~re~~ ^{former} Nazis, who ravaged the world just a few short years ago, now be trusted, ^{and} should they now be re-armed to preserve the peace of the world? Why did the United States send the U-2 into the very heart of Russia at the very time when ^{Russian} ~~their~~ leaders were on their way to a Summit peace conference with the leaders of the United States? Why have we surrounded their country with military bases? Why, while urging self-determination for peoples, did we finance and equip the invasion of ^S Cuba?

Our people, too, I tried to tell them, however friendly disposed they are towards the Russian people, are confused. They cannot understand the Russians. Why did the Soviet intervene and in a most ruthless and bloody manner ^{to} suppress the Hungarian uprising? Why has Russia consistently refused to accept controls and inspection if it is really in earnest about disarmament? ^{Why have they opposed a ban on bomb testing?} Why is the U.S.S.R. putting difficulties in the way of the United Nations and keeping it from carrying out its legitimate functions.

^{Confusions on both sides and} these confusions and misunderstandings are contributing to mutual distrust.

This distrust may get out of hand, even though basically neither people wants war.

^{to Cleveland} Upon my return, on August tenth, ~~you may recall~~ I issued a statement to the press in which I said:

"We must learn to live on the same globe with the Soviet people and they with us. Neither they nor we are always in the right. The leaders of both countries must try to reduce tensions. The peoples of the world are waiting for signs of a new and inspired statesmanship both in the Kremlin and the White House. The old is leading us nowhere, only from one crisis to another. Let us not be afraid to trade with each other in goods or in ideas. Let us compete in ~~ix~~ only one way - which system can do more for its people."

"Certainly there are great differences between their ^{system} and our system, but these differences cannot be resolved by the sword. The problem before the world today is not which system is the better, but how the two can keep from destroying each other -- and mankind. Both are strongly entrenched and sufficiently powerful that one cannot destroy the other without destroying itself. The question is then not which will bury the other, but whether a war, once unleashed between the East and the West, will not bury them both."

Was I exaggerating? Six weeks later, the President of the United States, addressed the General Assembly of the United Nations on September 25th and declared:

"Unconditional war can no longer lead to unconditional victory. It can no longer serve to settle disputes. Mankind must put an end to war -- or war will put an end to mankind."

"Today, every inhabitant of this planet must contemplate the day when it may no longer be habitable. Every man, woman and child lives under a nuclear sword of Damocles, hanging by the slenderest of threads, capable of being cut at any moment by accident, miscalculation or madness. The weapons of war must be abolished before they abolish us. "

"We cannot expect all nations to adopt like systems -- for conformity is the jailer of freedom, and the enemy of growth. Ladies and gentlemen of this Assembly -- the decision is ours. Never have the nations of the world had so much to lose -- or so much to gain. Together we shall save our planet -- or together we shall perish in its flames."

the President's solemn warning
If ~~this~~ is not an exaggeration, then the only alternative to annihilation *is* war is mutual accommodation. Many of the ~~serious~~ differences between us will have to be left to the solvent of time. They will ~~continue to exist~~ *persist* for a long time, and will cause us and them much concern. This should be accepted as an axiom. *Neither the communists nor we are getting off the globe.* by this generation and the next and the next. *As* We must all, therefore, make every effort to free ourselves from the emotional climate of the cold war. *over* As a people, we should learn to live more wisely and less excitedly, and to act more circumspectly and cooperatively in world affairs. We can never have it all our own way. *As a rule,* It is better to study our adversary -- at times even to learn from him -- than to abuse him. *As* No one will rob us of our cherished way of life, nor will time rust our spiritual treasures, if we cherish them lovingly, and in unshaken faith, in our own hearts.

understand
We should go about our national business without faintness, certainly without false pride, in the full knowledge that while the worst can happen, it will in all likelihood it will not; doing what we feel we ought to do at the behest of our national traditions, *and bringing* helping where we can, seeking no ~~political compensation~~ *political compensation* in return, ~~political recognition~~ *political recognition* in return, ~~praising no great~~ *praising no great* deed, craving no praise and deterred by no threats, looking first to the ~~survival~~ *survival* of our own country and the well-being of our own people.

emotional climate of the cold war. This, of course, applies also to the communists, for the cold war cannot be ended unilaterally. As a people, we should learn to live more wisely and less excitedly, and to act more circumspectly and cooperatively in world affairs. ~~We~~ ^{we} can never have it all our own way. As a rule, it is better to study our adversary -- at times even to learn from him -- than to abuse him. We should go about our national business without emotional tautness, certainly without false pride, in the full knowledge that while the worst can happen, in all likelihood it will not; doing what we feel we ought to do at the behest of our ^{own} national traditions and ^{for} principles, helping where we can, seeking no political compensation in ^{re} turn, craving no praise and deterred by no threats, looking first to the soundness ^{and justice} of our own economy and the well-being of our ~~own~~ people. No one will rob us of our ^{chosen} cherished way of life, nor will time rust our spiritual treasures, if we cherish them lovingly.

ABPA HILLEL SILVER

SUNDAY MORNING
October 22, 1961

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the world today is not which system is the better, but how the two can keep from destroying each other -- and mankind. Both are strongly entrenched and sufficiently powerful that one cannot destroy the other without destroying itself. The question is then not which will bury the other, but whether a war, once un-leashed between the East and the West, will not bury them both."

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// If the President's solemn warning is not an exaggeration, then the only alternative to annihilationist war is mutual accommodation. Many of the differences between us will have to be left to the solvent of time. *concurrently* *the two systems* *will certainly* persist for a long time. This should be accepted as an axiom by this generation and the next and the next. Neither the communists nor we are getting off the globe. We must all, therefore, make every effort to free ourselves from the

emotional climate of the cold war. This, of course, applies also to the communists, for the cold war cannot be ended unilaterally. ~~As~~ As a people, we should learn to live more wisely and less excitedly, and to act more circumspectly and cooperatively in world affairs, exploring every avenue of possible agreement and bearing in mind that we can never have it all our own way. As a rule, it is better to study our adversary -- at times even to learn from him -- than to abuse him. We should go about our national business without emotional tautness, certainly without ~~false pride~~ ^{Self-righteousness}, in the full knowledge that while the worst can happen, in all likelihood it will not; doing what we feel we ought to do at the behest of our own national traditions and principles, helping where we can, seeking no political compensation in return, craving no praise and deterred by no threats, looking first to the soundness and justice of our own economy and the well-being of our people. No one will rob us of our chosen way of life, nor will time rust our spiritual treasures, if we cherish them lovingly.

SUNDAY MORNING
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