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Facing the future, 1921-1922.

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# Address

BY

Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver



Before the Twelfth Annual Convention of  
The National Pipe & Supplies Association  
Cleveland  
May 10, 1921

## INTRODUCTION

By PRESIDENT GEO. V. DENNY, Savannah, Ga.

It has always been our custom to close our opening session with a speaker of prominence, who is qualified by experience and by study to touch upon some of the national problems in which all of us are necessarily interested. In past years we have been favored by the presence of men of national reputation, such as Senator Watson, Mr. Harry A. Wheeler and Senator Beveridge, and the messages they have brought to us have been of great interest and value.

This year we are to hear from one who, while younger in years than those who have preceded him, has established himself in the life of his own city and in the life of his own people to a degree that has hitherto been unknown in one so young. The career of this man has been nothing short of phenomenal, and it is my privilege to sketch hurriedly for you what he has accomplished and the position he has attained not only in this community, but throughout the Jewish world.

Having attended the public schools of the city of New York he pursued his studies at the University of Cincinnati and the Hebrew Union College. Upon graduation he accepted a call to the Congregation in Wheeling, W. Va., where he served from 1915 to 1917. Since that time he has been the Rabbi of The Temple in the city of Cleveland, a large and prosperous organization, and one that is fully representative of this faith. He went to France in 1918 as a representative of our Government, and while there in 1920 was declared "Officer de l'instruction publique" by the French Government.

He is also a member of the Executive Committee of the Zionist Organization of America, and associated with Justice Brandeis of the United States Supreme Court and Judge Mack, represented the American Zionists at the Zionists' World Convention, held in London in 1920. During this visit he was honored by being selected as the American orator at Albert Hall, London. He is also the author of a well-known poem entitled "America," which has been included by Dr. Spaulding in a text book of English Literature.

It is, therefore, with great pleasure, and with full appreciation of our privilege, that I introduce to you this morning, Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver of The Temple, this city, who will speak to us on "Facing the Future."

**ADDRESS BY  
RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER**

**Before the Twelfth Annual Convention of The National  
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It is mighty good, Mr. Chairman, to see yourself as others see you. Listening to this biography of myself and to the many nice things said there concerning me, I am reminded of that story that Bishop Burch, the late lamented Bishop of New York, was fond of telling. He said a husband in an off moment once called his wife an angel, and the wife, being taken aback, turned to her hubby and said, "Now hubby, tell me just why did you call me an angel?" Well, he said, "Dearie, in the first place you are always up in the air," (laughter) "and in the second place you are always harping upon something, and in the third place you are eternally in need of clothes." (Laughter and applause.) I do not know, men and women, why I was called to address this convention. The nearest I ever got to your line of business was the pipe organ. (Laughter.) I know as much about your particular line of endeavor as the priest did in that story that I am fond of telling. Pat and Mike went to church one Sunday morning, for a change, and heard the priest deliver a magnificent sermon on the bliss of matrimony. After mass was over and the sermon was ended, Pat and Mike left the church and Pat turned to Mike and said, "Now Mike, how did you like the father's sermon on the bliss of matrimony?" "Well, you know, Pat, I thought it was great, I thought it was just great, but I wish I knew as little about married life as the father does." (Laughter and applause.) I chose as my subject, "Facing the Future," and I want to say now that in spite

of the fact that I am a minister, I am optimistic. (Laughter.) You know that during the dark moments of the war many of us really felt that the cherished things of our civilization would be destroyed. I need not tell you of the magnitude and of the vast destructive powers, of the multitudinous sacrifices of the last war. It was a war unprecedented in human annals; with two-thirds of mankind engaged in it, with an expenditure of two hundred billion dollars representing so much of human effort and human labor, with the slaughter of ten millions of God's children, this war we thought would mark the end of our civilization, even as the civilizations of ancient Babylon and Egypt and Rome ended in ruins and dust. Yet it is a remarkable thing, is it not, friends, that here scarcely three years after this vast cataclysm, the world is fast recuperating, the world is quickly, quickly, I say, becoming normal. I am not altogether unacquainted with conditions abroad. It has been my portion to be in Europe three times during the past three years. I know of the vast perplexing problems and the difficulties, economic, political and industrial, confronting nearly every nation in Europe. I know of the vast misery that is afflicting the countries of Eastern Europe, and yet, in spite of these facts and with a full cognizance of these facts, I say that Europe is fast resuming its place in the concert of civilization. It will take some time before it will become completely normal, but the trend, the tendency is steady, sure, unbroken, and that is very encouraging; because it reveals how wonderfully sound, after all, our present day civilization is, in spite of all its failing and all its weaknesses. In spite of its abuses and its injustices, our present day civilization has been able to withstand the terrific onslaught of six of the bloodiest years in human history, with all the revolutions and all the unrest and all the disturbances and all the disorganization which resulted from the universal struggle. Our civilization is emerging whole. And for one who is concerned with human well-being, I say it is a very encouraging and happy omen. (Applause.)

And certainly America has given, to my mind, superb evidence of a fundamental soundness which even we who are always optimistic about our American democracy, did not suspect. How quickly we have returned to our peaceful pursuits. How quickly our military institutions have given way to the normal institutions of peace. How quickly our men have discarded their military uniforms and taken on their civilian garbs and returned each one to his task and each one to his job. If ever there was a doubt in the minds of men concerning the wholesomeness and eternal validity of democracy, this war, to my mind, has forever dispelled that doubt. We have proved to the world that in moments of crises, in moments of need, we can become a most vigorous, a most effective, a most deadly instrument for the suppression and destruction of every enemy of civilization, and we are giving evidence to the world that when the danger is past, we can as quickly and as effectively return to the peaceful and the sacred pursuits of civilization. (Applause.) I know, and in listening to the reports that have been given here this morning, I can readily see that you all know of the abnormality that still exists in your line of endeavor as it exists in every line of industrial enterprise in this country; one can readily understand it. With the disorganization of the war, with the need for a radical deflation, with the shutting down of foreign markets, with the lack of credit, it was inevitable that we would suffer a temporary economic depression, but to my mind it is just as inevitable that in the course of time, and that very soon, the wealth, the industry, the spirit of enterprise, and initiative, the go, the optimism of the American business man is bound to tell and we shall return to normal and prosperous times. (Applause.) What is needed, my friends, above all, is the spirit of great faith and optimism in all our lines of endeavor, not merely our economic endeavor but our political and social and economic endeavor. I believe that if at any time in our history the American people should have been devoting itself assiduously, almost religiously to the task of making

democracy real, vital and telling in the lives of the men and women of this land, it has been during the past few years and it is today. Some of us during the past few years grew a little restless and discouraged; we were afraid of that spectre that arose on the steppes of Russia and in Asia. We were afraid of a tide of Bolshevism inundating our own continent and destroying our own institutions. I have never feared Bolshevism in this land; I have never feared it in Russia; I have always said—I say so now—that Bolshevism is doomed to failure even in Russia. Bolshevism is the child of misery, the offspring of tyranny and oppression, and it was inevitable that after centuries of suppression, of autocracy, of tyranny, that the first lurch, the first plunge, of the peoples of Russia for freedom would be to the extreme of communism or Bolshevism. But it is equally certain that after the first few hectic years will have passed away, that the normal, invariable and universal laws of economics and politics will begin to work in Russia even as they work the world over. The Russian people is essentially an agricultural people, a nation of peasants, and the peasant is by temperament, by inheritance, by disposition, an intense individualist, and loves his strip of soil. The peasant wants his bit of ground to be his own without interference, without let or hinderance from any government, even if it be a communistic government, and the peasant today in Russia is slowly but surely organizing himself into one vast body to destroy the power of that small handful of so-called proletariats in Russia. Russia is a population of 85% peasantry, and a country like that will become conservative and steady as far as civilization is concerned. I have never feared for Bolshevism in Russia; I have certainly never feared for it in America. I believe, first of all, in the soundness of our institutions. I believe in their soundness so much that I am ready to have them challenged. I believe that a nation such as ours, blessed by God with plenty, where there is a surplus, where there is no need for poverty or misery, where every man has a chance to rise to the height of his own capacity and gifts, a

nation which extends infinite opportunity to all its children to realize the highest and best that is in them, a nation of homes, of cherished traditions, where men have the right of the ballot and the free exercise thereof, such a nation, in spite of sporadic outbursts of hectic revolutionaries, will never, can never, welcome or tolerate Bolshevism. (Applause.)

I believe in democracy, men, the democracy which is more than the right of suffrage. I believe in the soul of democracy, in the philosophy of democracy, I believe in a dynamic, aggressive kind of democracy. I know its failings, I know its shortcomings, I know the inequalities, I know the injustices; I know that we have not as yet today that perfect type of democratic institutions which we should have, but in spite of it I believe in it. I believe that one Lincoln, one Lincoln of the earth earthy, of the very soil of America with all its crudeness and all its roughness, but with all its strength and all its innate power and greatness—I say that one Lincoln is worth a hundred disillusionments. (Applause.) What is democracy at bottom? Democracy at bottom means this: the right of every child of God to live his own life, to develop those capacities that are innate in his soul. Democracy means self-expression; democracy means self-realization; democracy is the challenge to every individual to rise and raise others; and therein is the radical difference between democracy and autocracy, between democracy and any form of dictatorship, even if it be a dictatorship of angels. I would not have a dictatorship, my friends, with God as the dictator. We grow through our experiences, through our failures, through our trials and tribulations. We grope, we stumble, we rise again and move on. In an autocracy, in a dictatorship where our initiative is stunted, where the opportunity for experimentation, for enterprise, for experience, is denied, the moral development of human beings is impossible. It is as if you would take your child and instead of permitting him to learn by experience to find things out for himself, you were to

be the absolute dictator, you were to tell your child "this you must do, this you must not do." You were to regulate in hard and fast discipline and regimen his every movement and act. Your child would grow up, not immoral nor moral, but unmoral; he would grow up morally stunted. In a monarchy, an autocracy, a dictatorship, whether it be a dictatorship of the Czar or of Lenine, the average individual is not given that sacred opportunity to learn by experience, to express that which is within his soul. An autocracy makes for uniformity, an autocracy would like to have all the children of men drilled into a sort of a goose-step regiment so that they will all move alike and act alike and think alike and speak alike, because then they can be used more readily as the tools, the blind tools of the state; but in a democracy we lay the premium upon individuality and upon personality, upon that which in you is different from that which is in your neighbor. A democracy is a sort of a beautiful mosaic made up of many blocks and many sizes and many colors, but all blending into one perfect pattern of harmony, a sort of a rainbow made up not of one color but of many colors blending and fusing into one perfect unity. That is the ideal of democracy, that is the only ideal for civilization and that is why I believe democracy, in spite of all its crassness and in spite of its crudeness and in spite of all its imperfections, is the only agency ever invented by the groping soul of man to reach the throne of God.

That is why, my friends, we who live in a democratic country must zealously, zealously and jealously, guard our democratic institutions. And how shall we guard them? Not by saying that the status quo is the last word; that there is need for no improvement, for no advance, for no change. Reaction, my friends, is just as dangerous as revolution. Revolution is a blind plunge into the future. Reaction is a blind plunge into the past. No society can remain static; it must either move forward or backward; there must be either progression or retrogression; we cannot stay put; we cannot stay fixed. I some-

times believe that the reactionary is the father of the revolutionist; I sometimes believe that the man who would dam the stream of human life and keep it from flowing freely to its appointed destiny is just as much an enemy of human progress and civilization as the man who blindly and furiously and in passion would destroy that delicate fabric of our present day civilization. Democracy is not revolutionary, it cannot be revolutionary, but democracy is not reactionary. Democracy believes in reformation, in progress, in experimentation, in free movement. Our political conditions today, my friends, are much better than what they were twenty-five years ago, than what they were fifty years ago, and we want to make them infinitely better in the days to come. We need men of stronger character, of stronger personality, of greater experience; we need successful business men to enter into our political life, to take control of it, to mold it, to purify it. We dare not leave our political organizations to fall into the hands of cheap professional politicians. (Applause.) It is a sacred duty, a duty incumbent upon every business man. Perhaps it is only a dream of mine that some day the American business man, after he shall have reached a certain period of life and a certain status of success in his particular calling, will then dedicate his experience, his capacity for organization, for management, his knowledge of men to the difficult and essential problems of our political life. That is the kind of democracy I ask for.

I ask for democracy in our social life. I ask for that wholesome, honest spirit of real democracy which pervaded our country a hundred years ago and fifty years ago when we did not have all that wealth and all that luxury which we have today. What we need is the democracy of simplicity, the democracy of self-discipline and self-restraint, the democracy that permits no snobbishness, and no social caste. A nation that permits wealth to vaunt and sway, is a nation that is following in the footsteps of Rome and Greece and Babylon. I am sometimes afraid,

friends, that our arriving generation is becoming too pampered and too weakened, morally weakened, by the vast profusion of comforts and luxuries. What our nation needs today, my friends, is that same sturdy, rigorous, disciplinary life of the frontiers men of the old days, of the Pilgrim fathers who came here and faced nature in all its hostility and conquered it. Moral stamina, physical strength, self control, discipline—that is what our nation needs today. Snobbishness, pride, social caste systems, corrode and undermine the strength of a great nation. That is my democracy.

I would have democracy in religion; I would have men realize—Oh, how much, I would have them realize that their religious convictions are, after all, merely so many gropings in the dark. We know not if what we have is the ultimate and absolute truth, and our kind Father above who watches us gives us credit, my friends, not for the truths we have but for the honesty and the sincerity of our strivings. I would have men of all faiths and all religions realize that the things that separate them are much less important and significant than the things which hold them together. I would have them become aware, if I could, of the fundamental human needs that underlie all the strugglings and strivings of God's children. I would have them realize that in the sight of God there is but Man, that race and creed and caste and position and antecedents and influence and all the tinsel show of our conventional life are nothing in the sight of Him who rules the world. Only the soul purged of its dross, only the mind keen and alert on its task to benefit the world, only the holy sentiments and the fine emotions—only these things that are common to all men of every clime, of every race, of every religion, the democratic things of life, are of any value in the sight of God. (Applause.) That is democracy, my friends, that I appeal for.

I would appeal for a similar democracy in our industrial

life. I would bring you back, and men like you, to those mighty days of the war, when all of us seemed to have been thrilled and exalted by a holy passion, when we lost a little of our selfishness and a little of our smallness and pettiness in the great common task of saving civilization. I wish that I could retain a bit of that pure, fine passion which dominated our thinking and our action in the days of the great struggle. I wish I could retain them for these days of reconstruction, for we need them, my friends, today, even more than we needed them then. We need the same spirit of sacrifice and the same spirit of mutual trust and the same spirit of give and take and the same spirit of love adequately and peacefully to solve the difficult problems of our industrial life. I tell you men and women that anyone who preaches class struggle, whether it be on the part of labor or on the part of capital, is an enemy of society. I tell you, my friends, that anyone who in this hour, when we are laboring so painstakingly to build upon the ruins of six years of destruction, anyone who preaches hatred, passion, exploitation, autocracy, dictatorship, is not a friend of civilization. What we need today—and this shall be my last word to you this morning—what we need today, my friends, is a spirit of sympathetic and friendly cooperation. The need of one is the need of the other; the opportunity of one is the opportunity of the other, and the success of the one is the success of the other. In this land no business man need become rich at the expense of the workingman, but both of them may grow into greater prosperity, through greater production, through greater efficiency, through greater opportunities. Don't you realize how God has blessed this land? What a profusion of wealth there is here, almost untapped and untouched? Why, in this blessed continent of ours, we can make real the visions of the prophets of old, that every man shall dwell under his own vine and his own fig tree. Every honest workingman of this land may grow into full independent and economic competence, if all of us unite in approaching our industrial problems, sanely, calmly, dispassionately, honestly, religi-

ously. I once read an article by Mr. Babson saying that the greatest need of our age today is religion. The greatest need of our age today is religion. I wish I could underscore that statement. I do not mean the religion of the creed, I do not mean the religion of the sect, I do not even mean the religion of going to church on Sunday; I do not even mean the religion of formal prayer, I do not mean the religion of church affiliation, but this is the religion I mean: "Thou hast been told, Oh man, what is good and what the Lord doth require of thee, only to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." Justice, mercy, humility—these are the three cardinal needs of our age, and the business man, my friends, needs them just as much as the man of the cloth.

It has always been my dream of America, it has always been my vision of America, that here on these blessed shores, we would evolve a type of society and a type of man such as the world has not yet seen. To me America, my friends, is not a stretch of territory from the Atlantic to the Pacific. To me it is not even an aggregate of a hundred million souls; to me it is an ideal; to me it is a spiritual essence; to me it is that something for which the ages have waited, that something for which the submerged and the suppressed peoples of the earth have prayed and longed for with tear-dimmed eyes. To me it is the last great hope and the last burning wish of humanity—that in this land the miniature of the world, the gathering place of all the races and all the peoples, the fineness and the strength of them, the glory and the enterprise of them, that here in this new land unshackled by ancient tradition, unencumbered by ancient prejudices, free as God's heaven is free, big as the vastness of this continent, we would evolve a social organization so perfect, so just, that peoples will bless themselves by it. And I still believe that if a true passion of religion would take hold of the workingmen and the business men of our land, a veritable religious revival, a mutual consecration to the highest and the noblest in

our history, that we could, in the years to come, perfect such an organization upon this sacred footstool of God.

During the heat and the stress of the war, some asked me to give my definition of America, and I gave them this definition: It has helped me tremendously in my small labor in behalf of making America the blessed of the world, and it might help others.

"God built Him a continent and filled in with treasures untold.

He studded it with sweet flowing fountains and traced it with long winding streams.

He carpeted it with soft rolling prairies and columned it with thundering mountains.

He planted it with deep shadowed forests and filled them with song.

Then he called unto a thousand peoples and summoned the bravest among them.

They came from the ends of the earth, each bearing a gift and a hope.

The glow of adventure was in their eyes and in their hearts the glory of hope.

And out of the bounty of earth and the labor of men, out of the longing of hearts and the prayer of souls, out of the memory of ages and the hopes of the world,

God fashioned a nation in love, blessed it with a purpose sublime and called it AMERICA."

(Audience arose and applauded the speaker.)

1922 21-2

# FOR SERVICE

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FROM AN ADDRESS MADE BEFORE THE CLEVELAND  
ASSOCIATION OF CREDIT MEN BY ABBA HILLEL  
SILVER, RABBI OF THE TEMPLE OF CLEVELAND

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**W**HY are such agencies as Babson and the Wall Street Journal proclaiming doctrines heretofore proclaimed only by ministers of religion and for the most part unheeded?

I think I know the reason. It is because there is something wrong fundamentally with our economic organism. Our entire system is basically ill-founded. The spirit of our life is not service but profit, not man but money, not God but Mammon.

Every human institution must function if it is to live. Science must explain life, medicine must protect life, art must beautify life, literature must interpret life, religion must exact life. What about business? What function does it perform? In each of these phases the man who is great is the man who has rendered service, not wor-

shipped money. The great scientist is he who has made a discovery of benefit to mankind. The great artist is he who has painted a great picture which has inspired humanity. How about business? Is the great business man one who has made a lot of money, or one who has produced value to society? Why do we think of success in business in terms of money? Because we have been accustomed to say "business is business". We've set a special standard for business that doesn't apply to these others. The doctrine of "business is business" is the most damnable ever invented. If business means simply exploitation and making money, it is a social menace and must be destroyed.

Great corporations in the beginning were socially desirable because through their great organizations they could extend vastly enlarged service to society. Then they became drunk on their own power.

I still believe in our system of private property, but if it is to be preserved, the time has come for business to organize for service as business has been organized for

profit. We need not a new law but a new heart. In organizing that system there are three things we have got to recognize:

*First*—Human happiness is meant for all. There are no favored children in the sight of God. Business must so organize as to enable men and women to find happiness in their work as well as away from it. Business must set that as its goal. That sounds idealistic but it is basic. When a business man plans his week's work on Monday, he must think not only of how much he is to increase production and cut overhead, but also how much he will enlarge the happiness of the people entrusted to his keeping.

*Second*—Human life is worth infinitely more than any other factor. Business is a means, not an end. The duty of business is to preserve the sanctity of human life, not to starve or stultify it. A man's job must enable him to grow mentally, physically, spiritually. That may be visionary, but the only real things in life are the visions. If I were a business man I would try to ask myself, not how much can I get out of my

men but how can I organize my business so my men can get the most out of it?

*Third*—Wealth will be the reward of service and nothing else if business is organized for service.

If business men will recognize their responsibility as leaders and Americans to fashion new ideals, to throw themselves into this task and to recognize that this is a definite, concrete piece of work, they can organize industry so it will yield the maximum of human happiness, the maximum of human opportunity, and the maximum of equitable distribution of wealth. This is what I mean when I speak of organizing for service.