



## Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project

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

Series V: Writings, 1909-1963, undated.

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The total program, 1932.

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# The Total Program.

## "THE CLASSIC BALANCE"

Abba Hillel Silver

Havelock Ellis in his introduction to J. K. Huysmans' "A Rebours" makes the interesting observation that the essential distinction between the classic and the decadent in art and literature is to be found in the fact that in the classic the parts are subordinated to the whole, whereas in the decadent the whole is subordinated to the parts. "The classic strives after those virtues which the whole may best express; the later manner (the decadent) depreciates the importance of the whole for the benefit of its parts, and strives after the virtue of individualism."

This is a fair distinction; and I should like to apply it to the philosophy of Zionism.

Zionism, as I see it, aims at the classic balance in Jewish life. Judaism is a compound of many elements. Many tributaries flow into its historic channel - prophecy, legalism, mysticism, nationalism. In recent years some zealous and mostly uninformed partisans have attempted to reduce Judaism to what is only a fraction of itself - to race or nationalism or folk-ways or theologic abstractions. Quite unconsciously they are falsifying Judaism. It is a mark of our decadence in the diaspora that so many of our people have lost the

sense of the classic harmony in Jewish life and are attempting to substitute a part for the whole.

Zionism is the national effort to restore the lost harmony of Jewish life. It aims at a reconstituted totality of Jewish existence.

Politically we are deficient because we lack a national home. Therefore Zionism strives to fill this want for the sake of retrieving the true equilibrium of our corporate life, not because nationalism is the "sumum bonum" or the sole goal of our existence. The Jewish people never idealized nationalism per se. The idolatry of race and nation is neither pagan nor Jewish. It is one of the pathological aberrations of the decadent civilizations of Western Europe.

Culturally, we are disadvantaged. The shelter of the ghetto walls is gone and the sharp winds of alien cultures are sweeping over our group life and scattering it. The culture of a minority needs the security of isolation, - political, economic and religious. Such isolation is no longer possible for the Jewish group even in this mad, intolerant, post-bellum world of ours. Zionism would therefore give to our national culture the security of a home, as well as the matrix of a national soil.

But Jewish culture is not just another culture, a replica of the cultures of the peoples of Europe. It differs from them not only in content but in spirit. In a sense it is their challenge

and their condemnation. One of the tragic casualties of assimilation has been the surrender of the sovereign inherency of our unique culture to a simulated identity with other cultures. Our terrestrial Jerusalem is a replica of the Heavenly Jerusalem. Our classic cultural creations of the past were tipped with the fires of a uniquely Jewish world-purpose - prophecy... Both the Written and the Oral Law were aimed at making Israel "a holy nation" - not just another nation. This is a conception as astounding as it is unique.

The Bible is not just literature. Neither is the Apocrapha, the Apocalypses, the Talmud or the abundant writings of the philosophers, scholars, mystics and poets of the Middle Ages. All the purely "secular" literary writings of the Jewish people up to modern times would not entitle us to a tenth place in the literary estimation of the world. Our literature is, in the broadest sense, religious literature. It is hortative literature, if you will, the championing, in preschment, song, law or philosophy of a few vital and transcendent moral and religious ideals.

A Jewish culture which is devoid of its Messianic theme, its moral passion and its profound spiritual faith, is a delusion and a mockery.

Zionism never lost sight of this quintessential truth. Its roots were always in the Messianic ideal of our people. This ideal in turn, is bound up with the prophetic vision of "acharit ha-yamim" - the ultimate vision of a perfect society. Up to the latter half of the nineteenth century the restoration movement was entirely and avowedly

religious in character. Towards the close of the century, the influence of certain European philosophies of nationalism upon some of the leaders of our movement introduced into Zionism a note of secular nationalism and the pseudo philosophies of race and culture.

There is not enough of truth or vitality in these concepts of nation, race or secular culture to inspire or to hold a generation of Jews to Jewish loyalty. They are a scant viaticum for so hard a journey. The total Jewish program - the moral idealism, the religious values, the cultural treasures and the national aspirations of Israel might achieve this miracle.

Perhaps the student youth of "Avukah" might find in this total program the satisfying way of Jewish life which they are so earnestly seeking.