



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 V: Writings, 1909-1963, undated.

Reel
180

Box
66

Folder
567

Beyond the Jewish State, 1940.

BEYOND THE JEWISH STATE

Dr. Abba Hillel Silver.

- - - - -

Writing soon after the Zionist Congress in 1897, Ahad Ha-am stated that Israel was ready to assume the role of a political nation. Furthermore, that even if it were prepared and even if permission were granted to Israel to assume its place as a political entity in the world, he was not at all sure that this would represent the fulfilment of its destiny. Israel, he argues, has a higher destiny to achieve. Two thousand years of heroic suffering and martyrdom cannot find their compensation in the right to play the role of a pitifully small state in a world of political intrigue, a pawn in the hands of scheming international diplomats. "The reward must be according to the suffering." An ancient people which has been "a light unto the nations" cannot and should not content itself with the moiety of political autonomy enjoyed by peoples many of whom are culturally and historically insignificant, and none of whom suffered as Israel has suffered. It was neither a matter of accident nor of slight moment that prophets arose in Israel who visioned "the end of days" when righteousness would be established in the world. This universal humanitarian ideal has been and must continue always to be an integral part of the ideal of Jewish nationalism. "The salvation of Israel will come to pass through prophets and not through diplomats..."

Ahad Ha-am was, of course, a severe critic of the de-nationalized "mission" ideology in vogue among Western European Jews. He called for a normal, full-blooded national life for his people in Palestine which should become the seed-bed of a cultural renaissance. Unmistakably, however, Ahad Ha-am's "culture" was suffused with prophetic Messianism.

/

Cultural Zionism could not make much headway in the post-Dreyfus and pogrom eras which were co-terminous with the first years of Herzlian Zionism. Uppermost in the minds of the people at that time was the desperate thought of "escape", not the constructive thought of "return". But in the quieter years which followed cultural Zionism gathered strength. It became the most persuasive argument in Zionist propaganda. It proved far more effective than Herzlian political Zionism in converting the intellectual classes of our people. It responded to the deeper cravings of the Jewish soul.

A perusal of the literature of cultural Zionism covering a period of more than a quarter of a century cannot fail to impress one with the note of prophetic Messianism which is constantly sounded there. These protagonists of cultural Zionism avowedly, are not thinking of just another secular culture, but of ^a quite unique and extraordinary culture, which ages ago was touched with the live coal of a prophetic inspiration whose glow has not been quenched in the long and wearying centuries. They are thinking of a crusading culture which will transform the world, a culture of social imperatives which will reach out for "new things, things kept in store, not hitherto known..." It is the same ancestral hunger for malchuth shamayim. The new Jewish State must be an expression of the historic social idealism of the race. The visions of the prophets must have in the nascent Jewish commonwealth a local habitation and a name." Palestine must become the workshop of our people's highest ethical aspirations and mankind's experimental laboratory for social reconstruction.

It is well that the political phase of Jewish Messianism is coming to a close in the upbuilding of the National Homeland. We shall not have to lay so much stress in the future on the importance of nationalism. We shall henceforth be confronted not with its lack but with its consequences. Hitherto wanting the full complement of the attributes of nationalism, we were constrained to over-emphasize its virtues. Many of the spokesmen of our cause were driven to extol nationalism, per se, which is after all a quite recent and, demonstrably, a quite inadequate human

concept . It is not mankind's ultimate vision. Certainly it is not the substance of our own ancestral tradition, whose motif is not nationalism but prophet-ism. Nationalism is not enough. It is a minimum requirement, not a maximum programme. Our national rebirth was made possible by a war in which nationalism was thoroughly exposed and discredited. Nationalism is a means, not an end. "What is great in a man," said Nietzsche, "is that he is a bridge and not a goal." This is true also of men collectively - of nations and of national cultures.

Nationalism will not suffice the eternally questing soul of our people. After its national life is secure Israel must push on to the frontiers of the new world - the world of internationalism, of economic freedom, of brotherhood and of peace. It must resume the burden of its Messianic career. "He shall not fail nor be crushed till he have set the right in the earth; and the isles shall wait for his teaching...."

