



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
67

Folder
635

Hadassah, 1943.

RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER

ADDRESS



HADASSAH CONVENTION DINNER

Oct. 28, 1943

HOTEL WALDORF ASTORIA,

NEW YORK, N.Y.

The study of Jewish history always fascinated me for many reasons and for one especially, because it covers so large a canvas, and one is able to discern certain definite patterns upon that canvas, certain achitectural rythms, as it were.

Those who do not know Jewish history, and, therefore fail to observe these recurrent designs and rythms in our millennial experience, are very often confused in their thinking about Jewish life and are very confusing when they assume leadership in Jewish life.

Leadership in Jewish life, if it is to be helpful, must be predicated not on one's leadership in his own chosen professional calling, or in secular activities, or even in the general politics of the country in which he lives; but helpful Jewish leadership must be predicated upon an understanding by that leader of Jewish experiences, which, in many ways, are unique experiences through the ages.

Personal prestige and the power which comes from the possession of wealth are, unfortunately, not enough for Jewish leadership, and frequently leaders who base their authority upon these what I call "extraneous factors" have turned out to be the most near-sighted, the most baffled and the most disastrous leaders for the Jewish people.

There are patterns in Jewish history. If you read Jewish hisotry, for example, you will come across a recurrent phenomenon, such as this: There is a prominent Jew who

occupies a high position in the court of the King, the Monarch, a caliph, who may be the great financier of that country, a good man, and who, because of the high position which he occupies, is able to benefit his people. The people bask in his benevolence for a time.

And then the very prominence of the position which that man occupies arouses jealousies within the court circles; or because of his position, he becomes involved in some dynastic controversy or conflict, and then he is overthrown, and he brings disaster, large-scale disaster upon his people.

For example, in the 13th century in Persia, there was a prominent Jew by the name of Sadudala, a physician, who became the most powerful minister in the court of Argun Khan.

He became master of the whole financial structure of the Persian Kingdom, so prominent and so influential that an envious Arab poet wrote: "Turn Jews- for Heaven itself hath turned the Jew".

And during the fatal illness of Argun Khan, Sadudala was assassinated because of the jealousy which he had aroused, and his death was the signal of a vast massacre of the Jews of Persia.

This was in Persia. A Century later, way out in the West, in Spain, we have the same phenomenon appear again. A name which is perhaps better known to you than that of Sadudala, Samuel Ben Mayer Halevi, who lived in a Castle under King Peter in the 14th Century, was in charge of the Royal finances. He became the most prominent man under King Peter, and he was a good Jew, and he became the protector of the Jews of Castile. You will recall that it was he who built the famous synagogue in Toledo, which later became a church when the Jews were exiled from Spain.

But certain elements in the court conspired against Samuel Ben Mayer Halevi and he died on the rack because he had become entangled in a dynastic controversy. His enormous fortune was confiscated. The Jews of Castile were massacred. Their wealth was confiscated, because he had committed his fellow-Jews by implication, by his association with Peter, to one side of a dynastic quarrel.

This was the 14th Century. In the 19th Century in Western Europe, we have the same pattern. The Jews in Western Europe became largely identified with the progressive political and economic movements of their day in their respective countries. Most of them became Social Democrats. They became identified with these great social movements in their respective countries, first, because of the great prophetic tradition of their own people, and second, because the well-being of their people depended upon progressive political action.

But when reaction set in--because there is always a swing from progressive to reactionary movements in the political and economic life of the people, then the first and the greatest victims of the triumph of reaction were the Jews.

In the days of Bismarck in the 70's in Germany, in the days of Dreyfus in the 90's in France, and with the triumph of Fascism in post-bellum Europe, well, you know what happened. Whenever Nazism triumphed, there the Jew was broken, upon the wheel.

Now, what does this pattern point to? This recurrent pattern in the 13th, 14th, and 19th ~~centuries~~ and 20th Centuries, whether it is in Persia, in Spain, Germany or France, what does it point to? Why, it clearly points to the insecure position of the minority group which has no national center to turn to for

help, for refuge, for status.

That is an unpleasant fact, and comfortable people do not like to be disturbed by these unpleasant facts and by these warnings of history, and they bitterly resent those people who remind them of those facts, and they come to think that it is these people who remind them of the facts, who are in some strange way responsible for the facts, where in reality, it is the implicable fact of the status of our people as a minority group everywhere in the world, which cannot turn to a national center for refuge, for help or for status, that is responsible for this pattern.

And, instead of trying to correct the status, leaders who are not acquainted with Jewish history, and who do not receive their inspiration and guidance from the fact of Jewish experience, turn hysterically to fight the surface manifestations, the result of this status, anti-Semitism and not the correction of the status itself.

Here is another pattern I would like to call to your attention. In a few days, the Jews will be celebrating again Balfour Day. Balfour who, near the end of his days, said that on the whole, he felt that what he had been able to do for the Jews had been the thing he looked back upon as most worth his doing.

Here is a man who, in some period of his ~~life~~ life, controlled the destinies of the great British Empire, who, in his long career, achieved so many notable successes in so many fields of human endeavor, and yet, looking back in his old age, over his long and distinguished career, he said that he felt that on the whole, what he was able to do for the Jews had been the thing he looked back upon as the most worth his doing.

A few days ago, I re-read the biography of Arthur Balfour written by his niece, and I came across this very significant

passage which I will read to you, as indicative of another pattern which I would like to call your attention to, which has immediate application to a subject which absorbs us at this moment.

This has reference to the early Zionists in England in the days before the issuance of the Balfour Declaration.

"They fought their case," writes the niece of Balfour, "under heavy handicaps by comparison with united peoples, such as Czechs, who were also struggling for recognition of their claims during the Great War. In England, the most formidable foes of Jewish Nationalism were themselves Jews. In social and political circles especially, indifference or hostility of the Jewish aristocracy of wealth worked actively against the Zionists.

"The cabinet contained the very spearhead of the anti-Anglo-Jewish Zionist movement in the person of Mr. Edwin Montague, Secretary of the State of India. Mr. Montague could not extend to his people the sympathy he evinced later for Nationalism in India. He saw the spectre of anti-Semitism in every country if the Jews were permitted to dream of a territorial center or national political existence outside their present citizenship.

"Such aspirations in English Jews he looked upon as traitorous, disloyalty to their native land. In the case of Jews living under less happy conditions, he believed the conditions of their birth would only be worsened. This was not a point of view which every appealed with great force to the non-Jewish populations of the British Empire, many of whom, as for example, The Scotch, are perfectly accustomed to combining strong separate consciousness with a wider loyalty."

Do you discern the pattern here thirty years ago in England, today in the United States, the same pattern which occurred years ago in Germany, when the reformed Jewish leaders in Germany struck out all mention of Zionism, Palestine, rebuilding of Israel national life from the payer book, who proclaimed that Germany was their Zion?

The same pattern and the latest people to illustrate this pattern have been the members of the American Jewish Committee, who recently withdrew from the American Jewish Conference out of their opposition to Zionism.

What I say, I say not at all in bitterness of spirit or in denunciation; I say it merely as illustrative of a pattern of Jewish experience which we ought to bear in mind.

Some years ago, the leaders of the American Jewish Committee, under the inspiration of a great Jew and a great American, Mr. Louis Marshall, were able to agree upon a formula which united Zionists and non-Zionists in the work for the upbuilding of Palestine, and as a result of this happy arrangement, the Jewish Agency for Palestine was enlarged so as to include 50% non-Zionists.

Why this arrangement possible between Zionists and non-Zionists? It was possible because the non-Zionists accepted the fact, the internationally accredited fact, of the Jewish National Home in Palestine. They accepted the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate.

What were the three basic ideas of the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate, the acceptance of which made it possible for Zionists and non-Zionists to work together for Palestine?

First of all, there was the acceptance of the fact that there is in the world a Jewish people, not merely Jews. There is a Jewish people, just as there is an English people and a French people and an Italian people; so there is in the world a Jewish people, a collective, organic, historic unity, a people which is like unto every other people in every essential regard, but differs from all other people in one essential regard,

and it is that difference which has been the millennial tragedy of the Jewish people; namely, of all the peoples in the world, the Jewish people alone did not possess a National Home of its own.

And so the Balfour Declaration speaks not merely of Jews, but it speaks of the Jewish people.

The second principle inherent in the acceptance of the Balfour Declaration was the acceptance of the idea of the historic connection of this Jewish people with Palestine. Palestine is not to be just another place where Jewish refugees can go, an asylum for immigrants. Palestine is not to be the place where the Jews should have the right to immigrate, in the same way as every people should have the right to immigrate to other lands.

In Palestine, the Jews possess a unique status. They are linked in a unique fashion with this country, as they are not linked with any other country in the world. They have an historic connection with it. It was theirs once upon a time; ~~it is to be theirs again.~~ it is to be theirs again.

The United States is not a national home of the Jewish people, any more than it is the national home of the Italian people or the French people. Jews come to the United States like all other peoples; members of other nations come and settle here and become integrated in the life of the United States, become citizens of it completely and thoroughly. This is their national home.

But Palestine is uniquely the home of the Jewish people. With that country, they have an historic connection.

The third principle in the Balfour Declaration was that Palestine was not to be just another home for Jews, but a national home, a Jewish national home. And it is because the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate were accepted as a basis, that it was possible to work out under the inspiring leadership of men like Louis Marshall, Felix Warburg and others, an harmonious collaboration between Zionists and non-Zionists.

It might interest you that in 1929 in Zurich, at the first meeting

the statement issued by the American Jewish Committee following its meeting last Dunday, explaining the reasons for secession from the American Jewish Conference. It has now been printed and in the public press. I read it very carefully.

There is not a single reference in a three-page document, not a single reference to the Balfour Declaration, to the Mandate for Palestine, or to the Jewish National Home, not a single reference to the Jewish people.

Jews are spoken of. There are some references to a Jewish settlement in Palestine, as though it were another Jewish settlement in Santa Domingo or in the Crimea.

A new regime, I am afraid, of "bitter-enders" has come into control of the policies and the attitudes of the American Jewish Committee; a new regime which falls into that pattern which Balfour's niece spoke of when she wrote of the experience of Zionists in Great Britain in 1916; new leaders of the type of Lessing Rosenwald, the man who has consistently refused to contribute to the United Jewish Appeal because part of its funds go to Palestine.

He voted for the secession of the American Jewish Committee from the Conference. Mr. Lessing Rosenwald, the only and original Jewish American Firster; the man who wanted our country to refuse aid to Great Britain when Great Britain was fighting Hitler. He was not very much concerned about the overthrow of one citadel of democracy after another in Europe. It was only after he became aware that the America First Organization was shot through with anti-Semitism that he withdrew from that body, and since transferred his isolationism to the Jewish Scene.

He has become the foremost lay leader in the Council for American Judaism. It is his spirit, not that of Louis Marshall nor Felix Warburg nor Cyrus Adler, which is today controlling the policies and attitudes of the American Jewish Committee, I am afraid; the spirit of Arthur Hays Sulzberger of the New York Times, the only American newspaper which has set for itself the mission of fighting Zionism; the only American newspaper

which has become the mouthpiece of the American Council for Judaism; the only American Newspaper which has become the channel for all of the anti-Zionist propaganda which has been emanating in recent months from the Palestine administration; the only American newspaper which has given such wide publicity to the recent gun-running trials in Palestine, deliberately calculated to smear the Yishuv.

That is the spirit, I am afraid, which is today controlling the American Jewish Committee, the spirit of Judge Proskauer, that very amiable and very adroit gentleman, who would like to stab Zionism with such finesse as to leave the unsuspecting American Jewish public actually applauding his act.

Less than eight weeks ago, he stood upon this very platform and announced that while he dissented from the Palestine Resolution, he and his group were not seceding from the American Jewish Conference, and he was properly applauded, because men realized this was real democracy and real sportmanship. You fight your case, you lose, you dissent from the judgment of the majority, but you remain within the group to fight for your cause. (Applause)

But it seems, unfortunately, that that announcement was only strategy for the moment.

This is the pattern of opposition to our cause which recurs periodically, and which, now as our movement approaches the Eve. of fulfillment, has become, on the part of the opposition, very determined very bitter and very desperate.

But there is another pattern to which I would like to call your attention, perhaps the bravest and noblest pattern in Jewish History, the Messianic pattern, the pattern of the will and the effort of the Jewish people for National self-emancipation. (Hebrew Quotation)

The day that the temple was destroyed nearly 1900 years ago, was the hope of redemption born among our people, and throughout the dark and weary

centuries, that hope never left our people, and the efforts never ceased to free ourselves from the tragedy of national homelessness and to rebuild our shattered lives as people upon the soil of our historic home.

This brave and noble pattern persistently through the ages, received its most effective expression in the last 50 odd years in the Zionist movement.

It is this will and determination, defeated time and again but forever reasserting itself, like the onsurging waves of a limitless ocean and driven by the same inevitable necessity, that has sent in the last generation wave upon wave of Jews from all over the world who brought to Palestine their hopes and their dreams and their tears and their sweat and blood, and have built and converted that land into what is today the most progressive, the most modern, the most promising center of human effort and enterprise in the whole middle-East.

Your great organization, the Hadassah, has had a magnificent share in this glorious pattern of national survival and national revival and its ideal which has rallied around it, as was so amazingly demonstrated in this very halleft weeks ago; the le-rov minyan and le-rov binyan of American Jewry, quantitatively and qualitatively is has attracted to it, the best and the finest, the most courageous and most intrepid spirits of our people, and it is this movement which is going forward, in spite of the "little foxes" which are spoiling the vineyard.

It will not be denied. Nothing will stop it. The Palestine administration will not stop it; The White Paper will not stop it. (Applause)

An eminent member of the House of Lords recently declared that if, today, the White Paper was brought before Parliament, it would not have the ghost of a chance of being approved, and every responsible statesman here and abroad knows the policy of the White Paper is both morally and legally indefensible. It is a complete repudiation of obligations which the mandatory government voluntarily assumed under international sanction to facilitate--not to curb--to facilitate Jewish immigration into Palestine in

order to build up the Jewish National Home, and it was those obligations which alone justify the granting of the mandate to Great Britain in the first place.

Further more, the White Paper introduces inequities, discriminatory racial legislation against Jews, and of all places, in the Jewish National Home; for immigration and land purchases restrictions are, under the terms of the White Paper, imposed not on Arabs or any other people, but exclusively on Jews.

To such depths have the self-willed obstructionist policies of the Palestine administration and have the small clique of imperial schemers in the Colonial Office sunk.

A reluctant Parliament in the tragic appeasement era was maneuvered into recording these policies, but the moral sense of the English people never approved of them. The moral sense of the English people spoke eloquently through men of the type of Winston Churchill, who branded the White Paper as a breach and repudiation of the Balfour Declaration.

The English people have always had a lively and sympathetic interest in the Zionist movement and have defended unfailing friendship for the Jewish people. It is no accident of history that it is England which first gave approval to the national aspirations of the Jewish people, and in our struggle against the White Paper, we are not losing sight of this never failing sympathy of the brave and courageous people of England, and we are confident that the great heart of England will speak again soon in total rejection (Applause) in total rejection of this unworthy and dangerous deviation from a noble and historical political position.

The present Palestine administration realises full well that the policy of the White Paper is doomed, especially now that all Nazi and Fascist troops have been expelled from Arab countries, and the overworked arguments for appeasing the Arabs have petered out.

Many things are accordingly being done to save the White Paper. A panic propaganda has been set in motion to convince the world that the enforcement of the White Paper is imperative for the peace of the Holy Land.

The recent gun-running trials in Jerusalem, with all the prearranged world-wide publicity which attended it, were ~~exhibited~~ calculated, on the one hand, to suggest that the Jews of Palestine, in spite of their amazing military record to help win the war effort of the United Nations, and, in the second place, to proclaim that Palestine is a very caldron of unrest, on the verge of civil war which might greatly embarrass the allied forces who are in the Near East.

That has been the propaganda, and Washington has been flooded with this sort of propaganda; for military reasons now, Zionism must be liquidated.

We are confident that this new line of propaganda will fail as quickly & completely as the old. We are confident that there will be no trouble in Palestine if the Palestine administration does want it.

The one people in the middle-East which rallied to the War effort of the very first and as one man, and which is straining at the leash to do more and more and more, the Jews of Palestine, that one people has been systematically thwarted in their recruiting efforts; has been denied the right to organize a Jewish fighting force to fight under its own flag, and has been subjected to the repeated humiliation of Jewish infantry units assigned to non-combat duty.

The Jews of Palestine who built it so well and at such great sacrifice in the last 60 years, will not permit themselves to be broken in the process of imperial maneuvers in the Middle East. (Applause)

The Jews of Palestine and of the world wish the Arab lands and peoples all success in their national and economic development. The Jews of Palestine and the rest of the world stand ready to cooperate with them fully in the development of that vast world of theirs which is still so sadly undeveloped and under populated. We are the people who are pro-Arab, perhaps ~~underpopulated~~ the only people who are, for we realize that the future prosperity of the Jewish National Home is bound up inextricably with the prosperity of the entire Arab World.

But the progress and development of the Arabs need not be achieved at the sacrifice of the Jewish National Home, which, at best, occupies a fraction of the lands open to Arab growth, development and cultivation, but which to us, to Israel, is thrice precious and thrice important, in spite of its diminutive size, in spite of being, as Balfour put it, "A little niche in the great Arab World."

To us, it is thrice precious and important as the historic home of our people, the only possible locale of our national rebirth and renaissance, the land in which we have invested so much labor and sacrifice, and the sole place to which our martyred brothers from the hills of Europe can escape to life and to freedom.

Finally, I would like to call your attention to just one other pattern, a hopeful one, and that is the pattern of the traditional friendship towards our cause and the sympathetic understanding of our movement by the government and the people of our own beloved country. (Applause)

From the days of President Wilson, who saw the Balfour Declaration before it was issued and approved of it, through the time when the Congress of the United States unanimously expressed its approval of the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate, through every succeeding President of the United States, there has been manifest at all critical moments a helpful, sympathetic interest, an understanding of our movement.

Our movement was hailed by the people of America. Our own country is becoming today increasingly more interested in the Near East, both economically and politically, and we therefore hope that this pattern of friendship and cooperation will continue unbroken through the critical years ahead.

We hope that our officials in Washington will not now take their line and their information from bureaucratic sources which have always been hostile to the Jewish Homeland; rather should they follow the traditional American policy which heartily approved the establishment of the Jewish National Home and hailed it as an epochal event.

Our beloved country is fighting today for the freedom of the world,

for the freedom of the world, for the freedom of ~~the~~ all people, for the freedom of the Czechs, of the Poles and the Dutch, the Danes, of every great people, whether it be great or small in size. We do not want to be overlooked. We are also a people which has suffered more than any other people in this war and in every past war. As a people, we have been conquered people for nineteen centuries. We want, at long last freedom, emancipation from the shackles of homelessness, a chance to live as a people free and independent within the concert of the free democratic peoples of the world.

Will the United States of America, fighting for the freedom of all peoples--will it also help us in our national struggle for freedom? I pray that it will; I hope that it may.

As for us, fellow Zionists, we have come upon finally the great hour of decision. The next twelve months, the next two or three years will decide the fate of our national existence in Palestine.

This is the time for us to marshal our resources, to consolidate our ranks, to weed out the weak, the untrustworthy. This is the time to welcome our friends and to fight our enemies. This is the time for the last great forward attack upon the foes of Israel, for freedom and emancipation.
(Applause and audience arose)