



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
184

Box
69

Folder
846

Introduction to "The History of the Jews", 1952.

INTRODUCTION

By Dr. Abba Hillel Silver
Rabbi of The Temple
Cleveland, Ohio

52-17
to new edition of
Paul Goodman's
History of the Jews
Mar. 1952

Students of Jewish history will welcome the appearance of an American edition of Paul Goodman's HISTORY OF THE JEWS. This concise, authoritative and very readable volume has passed through eight editions since it first appeared in 1911, the most recent of which, revised and enlarged by Israel Cohen, in 1951. It is fitting that an American edition should now be issued, and made more readily available to the largest Jewish community in the world.

It is of utmost importance for the preservation both of the Jewish people and of its faith that the Jews of the United States should become better acquainted with the past experiences of their people, with the problems which they faced and the manner in which they confronted them, with the techniques for survival which they evolved as well as with their contributions to the progress of mankind. For the major responsibility for carrying on the burden of their people's proud heritage in the Diaspora will from now on, because of their numerical strength and favorable situation, be theirs.

The American Jewish community is one of the more recent among the Jewish communities of history, albeit the largest and by far the most prosperous. It has many distinctive features. It is set in a distinctive environment. Nevertheless, its experiences are not entirely unique. Its organizational structure has precedents, and its problems of survival are not without parallel in Jewish history. It would, therefore, be wise on the part of American Jews to take into account the experiences of other Jewish communities in the long past, and to consider well the years of many generations.

In the past, centers of Jewish life shifted from one part of the world to another. At times, several important centers existed simultaneously. In our day we saw the oldest and noblest centers of Jewish life in Europe practically destroyed.

Providentially, two other centers are rising today and are growing in strength and significance - the national center in Israel, and the Diaspora center in the United States.

The American Jewish community owes it to itself and to history to mobilize its spiritual resources for carrying on the historic work of Judaism. It will have to find these resources in the future largely within itself. It will no longer be able to live on borrowing. It can no longer expect its spiritual and cultural provisions to come to it from the Old World. Old World Jewry no longer exists as a provisioning center. American Jewry will have to prepare its own victuals. Fortunately, it seems to be a law of Jewish existence that the "turning down of one lamp always reveals another burning".

American Jewry is not altogether unprepared or unequipped for this task. American Jewry is organized, perhaps over-organized. It possesses if not a sufficient, at least not a meager quota of synagogues, schools, libraries, Rabbinic seminaries, and social agencies. More are in the process of building. American Jews have also demonstrated a fine sense of solidarity and loyalty, particularly in the recent desperate years when unprecedented disasters swept over their fellow Jews in Europe and when the historic challenge reached them to assist in the restoration of the State of Israel. Their reactions were those of a sound and healthy organism. A great hour did not find them a small people. All this is good building material for the future, and encourages the hope that these fine qualities will be utilized for the spiritual and cultural tasks of tomorrow which will mean a worthy and fruitful career for this, the largest Jewish community in history.

The most recent chapters of our history are among the darkest and the brightest recorded. They tell of appalling disaster as well as of miraculous resurgence. The tragic story of the ravage and devastation of the European Jewish communities and the isolation and nigh-total eclipse of Russian Jewry stand in almost parallel

columns alongside of the glorious story of the rebirth of the State of Israel, the Hebraic renaissance, the remarkable growth of the Jewish communities in the Western Hemisphere, and the strong recoil from weakness to strength anywhere. The most powerful forces converged to destroy the Jewish people in recent years, and they took a frightful toll, but the Jewish people has again emerged from the deep shadows and has resumed its march through history. Much of the story of that march of destiny will in the indeterminate future be recorded by the Jewish community of the United States.

There is ground for confidence, not only because of its present inner soundness, but also because of the American democratic milieu in which it will continue to move and have its being. It is a friendly and stimulating environment. There is a strong concordance between the spiritual and ethical traditions of the two peoples. The Founding Fathers of the American Republic, and many before them who established colonies on the shores of the New World were greatly influenced by the heroic ideals of human freedom and human equality of the Hebrew Scriptures. Their "self-evident truths", their dogma of inalienable human rights, the doctrine that "resistance to tyrants is obedience to God", are key ideas of the Bible, and it was the Bible that gave political sanction to their political revolution. These ideas have never been wanting in American life from its inception to this day. They have constituted the classic elements which have given uniqueness and distinction to the American way of life. They have passed through many crises, including the world-wide crises of Fascism, Nazism and Communism, and have survived.

The Jewish community finds itself in the midst of a people which for a hundred and seventy-five years has maintained a government, built on the foundations of human rights and on consent, not constraint. The American genius strives to achieve the best possible way of life for the largest possible number of citizens through their own voluntary enterprises, through free experimentation, and step by step

through the evolutionary processes of trial and error. It rejects all proffers of ready-made milleniums at the spearpoint of revolution and dictatorship, and it has succeeded in avoiding the horrors of purges and liquidations, of terrorism and expropriation, of espionage and slavery, from which the Jewish minority has suffered so catastrophically in recent years.

American life possesses the grace of tolerance. The American people is a composite people. Many races shared in the discovery, exploration, colonization and development of this great country. It is a nation made up from its very inception almost entirely of immigrants. American life is a mosaic in which many peoples of varying backgrounds have found cohesion in a unified pattern. Despite occasional and, at times, serious lapses, there has prevailed a wholesome attitude of good will, tolerance and cooperation among the American people.

It is in the midst of such a people, dowered with such kindred and accordant traditions and institutions, that the Jewish community will live, grow and develop in the future. The Jews of the United States are not unaware of their favorable position, nor are they unmindful of the challenge to worthy and loyal participation inherent in it. They have already made significant and substantial contributions to the social and cultural progress of America, to its economic development, and its military defense.

The five million Jews of the United States have also given clear indication that they are wanting neither in loyalty to Judaism and world Jewry, nor in generous support of the reestablished State of Israel. There is, of course, much that needs to be done by them to achieve a full and creative Jewish life and to insure survival, but "they may rest in trust because there is hope."

March 26, 1952.