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American Jewish unity cannot be disrupted, 1958.

AMERICAN JEWISH UNITY CANNOT BE DISRUPTED

The Unifying Forces Are Stronger Than the Elements
Sowing Dissension. — By Rabbi ABBA HILLEL SILVER

The American Jewish community is well organized, perhaps even over-organized. Over-organization and over-building are a distinct liability. Not every good idea warrants a new building or a new campaign. While there exist, of course, many groupings and divisions among our people, such as are to be expected among more than five million people and especially among more than five million Jews, who have never been noted for their coagulatory propensities, there is presently not evident any catas-

that score. Even the Prime Minister of Israel, Mr. David Ben Gurion, claims that he himself is not a Zionist . . .

The Lingering Few

There remain, of course, a lingering few on the American Jewish scene, actuated either by fear or self-hatred who are resolved to keep the dying embers of the old controversy smoldering at all costs. At times they resort to reprehensible acts of defamation and of bearing false witness against their fellow Jews. Fortunately, their numbers are too few and their bombilations too synthetic either to impress or to disrupt the unity which has been measurably achieved in American Jewish life.

It would be well for all American Jews to bear in mind that Israeli citizenship is not an article of export. The identification of the Jewish people, however, with the land of Israel and the hope of its restoration have been an article of faith of our people everywhere throughout the ages. Our aim in the future should be to maintain relationships with Israel which are friendly, fluid and non-dogmatic. It is easy to bedevil a spiritual and historic situation with clever or malicious dialects but the consequences of it can only be harmful for everyone.



RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER

trophic disunity which might prove dangerous in an emergency.

A generation or two ago, before the rapid deproletarianization of our immigrant Jewish population and before our people became predominantly members of the American middle class, their ideological differences were far sharper, more numerous and more stridently vocal than they are today. The economic shift has softened and moderated their one-time irreconcilabilities.

Former Rifts Gone

The major rift in the American Jewish community between Zionists and anti-Zionists, which filled our household with the clamor of dissension for more than a generation, has been planned and bridged by the establishment of the State of Israel. A sense of historic responsibility, as well as of Jewish pride and loyalty came to prevail over abstract ideologies once the fateful chips were down. In the heroic struggle which immediately preceded the momentous decision in the United Nations and in the desperate battle days which followed, American Jews who were known as lifelong opponents of the cause of the reestablishment of the Jewish State, turned out to be among its most helpful friends. Many of them have since become leaders in many reconstruction tasks in behalf of Israel. It is true that some of them still wish to be known as non-Zionists. But no one will quarrel with them on

The Ultra-Orthodox

Of late, another small group, belonging to a belligerent ultra-orthodox wing, has attempted to sow dissension. It has blusteringly rejected any form of cooperation with other Jewish religious bodies and it has publicly excommunicated rabbis who do not subscribe to their tenets. This form of fanatical clericalism, the American Jewish community cannot tolerate. There is room on the American scene for all sincere religionists, but they must win adherence and influence in an open and competitive field of ideas on the basis of their intrinsic merit and appeal and not through words and acts of bigoted contentiousness. They must learn to work together, and, while remaining firm in their conviction,

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tions, be respectful of those of others.

The annual campaigns in our communities for welfare funds of all kinds have greatly helped to bring Jews together — Jews of all shades of opinion and from all walks of life. By so doing they have greatly integrated our community life. Jews have become acquainted with one another

er under most favorable circumstances while engaged in benevolent enterprizes — at which time they are at their best. They have discovered many bonds of understanding and mutual respect. This has been one of the most gratifying by-products of our large-scale fund-raising activities. This, you will recall, is foretold in our Torah: "The effect of Zedakah will be peace and the result of Zedakah quietness and trust always."

Mutual Reinforcement

The establishment of the State of Israel, a decade ago, has undergirded Jewish life everywhere. No new Torah has come forth from Zion, and no new Torah is needed, but a new spirit has most certainly come forth which has uplifted the hearts of our people everywhere. A new grace, compounded of pride, vindication and victory has come into our lives. For the first time in the many long and weary centuries our people is eating not the bread of affliction, of exile and homelessness, but the nourishing bread of freedom and independence which is as honey in our mouths and in the mouths of our children. Whatever is presently resurgent in American Jewish life cannot be disassociated from what has so astoundingly happened in Israel. The hands which laid the foundations of the new Jewish life over there and defended it with such superb and unimagined valor, have also strengthened the spiritual foundations of our Jewish life here. We are richly indebted to them as they, indeed, are indebted to us. May this mutual reinforcement never cease!

One Fraternity

American Jews are part of world Jewry. We have no historic goals other than those of the Jewish people elsewhere and everywhere. We abide as comrades of their spirit, even if we do not share in all the vicissitudes of their fortune. We feel the pulse of one fraternity. Not all Jews, of course, are conscious of these goals, nor were they in the past. But the people, as a whole, at no

time abandoned these goals, nor questioned its covenanted role in history. The people as a whole, remained steadfast. It was the sustained and collective rhythm of its life. Various and conflicting explanations have been offered for this remarkable steadfastness—some chose to call it incredible obstinacy, and for the vigor and inner force which maintained the people in its high resolve to live in the world and yet apart from it, to go forward alone, to be different and yet strive always for unity and brotherhood! But the steadfastness was an incontrovertible fact.

No Cultural Pluralism

If ever the American Jewish community should isolate itself from the rest of world Jewry and from the spiritual and cultural past of the world Jewish community and reject the eternal mandates and the binding collective responsibility of Judaism, it will disintegrate slowly or swiftly, as the case may be, but disintegrate it will. We cannot long endure an existence without horizons. As a secular, ethnic or nationality group on the American scene, it is certain to be assimilated, after a time, as is the case with all such groups. Attractive ideologies apart, there is really no significant ethnic group on the American scene which is dedicating itself consciously to the concept of cultural pluralism.

The goals are set. How faithfully our descendants will follow a course which will lead to their attainment is unpredictable. There have been generations of Jews in parts of the world whose spirit was not steadfast. There have been others who "gave their backs to the smiters" and died as martyrs for their faith. There have been still other generations which were neither rebellious nor dedicated but which drifted aimlessly about in a spiritual no-man's-land. Whether the coming generations of American Jews will accept their historic assignments, and to what extent, will depend upon the nature of their Jewish education, their enlightened convictions and their undefeated Jewish pride.