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Zionist activities, journals, The Gates of Zion, articles about  
Silver's activities by Emanuel Neumann, 1953.



# THE GATES OF ZION

A QUARTERLY REVIEW OF JUDAISM  
AND ZIONISM

TWO SHILLINGS AND SIXPENCE

VOL. 8

OCTOBER 1953

No. 1





RABBI DR. ABBA HILLEL SILVER

# THE GATES OF ZION

A QUARTERLY REVIEW OF JUDAISM AND ZIONISM

VOL. 8

OCTOBER 1953 — TISHRI 5714

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## EIGHT

WITH this issue our Quarterly Review enters the eighth year of its existence. The first days of our publication were sad days for our people. The ashes in the extermination camps were still warm; the embittered Yishuv was preparing for a desperate struggle against the British Labour Government which had repudiated its solemn promises to Jewry. The past seven years have been hard but victorious years for the Jewish people. Many difficulties still face us; peace is not yet established on the borders of Israel; assimilation is still

strong and continues to devastate the ranks of the Jewish people in many countries; anti-Semitism is not yet finally dead. But with the Almighty's help we are sure of a future victory. With courage and hope *The Gates of Zion* looks forward to continuing the struggle for a bright future for our eternal people and for our Holy Land thus serving the cause of humanity.

For unavoidable reasons no issue of *The Gates of Zion* was published in July 1953. The present number, therefore, follows the issue of April, 1953 (Vol. 7, No. 3).



## Abba Hillel Silver: History Maker

by DR. EMANUEL NEUMANN\*

### I

#### A BOYS' CLUB TO A MAN'S JOB

THE sixtieth anniversary of a great leader is a festive occasion but not necessarily the most appropriate for a definitive appraisal of his life-work. In the case of Dr. Silver it is obviously too early—and too hazardous. Dr. Silver is in his prime, at the height of his powers, one of the most dynamic personalities of our generation; and experience has taught that any period of relative calm in his life may be but a lull in an eventful and often stormy career.

Moreover, a truly objective evaluation could only come from someone less involved and more detached than myself. My association with Dr. Silver goes back to childhood days and I could hardly escape a subjective tone or resist the lure of personal reminiscence.

Reviewing it in its entirety, I am struck by a certain wholeness or integrity about Silver's Zionist career. It began in the Herzl Zion Club, one of the earliest boys' groups in the history of American Zionism formed in 1904, the year of Herzl's death. It met on the East Side and the meetings—at least its "literary programmes"—were conducted in Hebrew. I joined a few years later, on a wintry Saturday evening, when the club was celebrating the Bar Mitzvah of the president. Its president then and its natural leader for years thereafter was Abba Silver. His was a firm rule, tempered always with a saving sense of humour. He was loved, admired and obeyed. His word at the end of a long debate had the ring of finality and was accepted without demur. The very quality of his voice brought conviction.

It was as a delegate of the Herzl Club that Silver, still a boy, attended his first convention of the Federation of American Zionists. Without precocity but with mature self-confidence,

he addressed the convention, demanding greater financial support for the Zionist youth movement. He got little or no money but his appearance was a harbinger of a new and younger generation who were soon to claim their place in the movement and its leadership.

Then came an interruption—or what seemed like one—in Silver's Zionist life. He went to Cincinnati to study at the University and train for the rabbinate at Hebrew Union College. With him went several other alumni of the Herzl Club. Many of us had unhappy forebodings about his move; for Hebrew Union College was reputed to be not only a nursery of Reformed Judaism, but a stronghold of anti-Zionism. To those who remonstrated with Silver, he replied somewhat jauntily that if Cincinnati was an anti-Zionist fortress, he and his friends would capture it from within.

The years passed and a new Silver emerged, whom we did not easily identify with the boy we had known. Elegant in dress, polished in manner, faultless in speech, he appeared to have undergone a transformation. He had shed the habits and manners, the accents of his earlier environment. He seemed "goyish." It all smacked of "assimilation."

But it soon became evident that the changes were external: they had not touched the core of the man—his inner spirit. The fires, kindled at the parental hearth and in the company of his youthful comrades, were not smothered but had been banked against the time when they were to burst into ardent flame. Before long he found his place in the galaxy of distinguished personalities gathered about Louis D. Brandeis, and he began to appear on Zionist platforms in many cities. His reputation as an orator grew, but his role in the councils of the movement were still modest. He was a loyal and disciplined follower of Brandeis.

\* \* \*

IN 1920, the war against Germany having been won, a large delegation of American Zionists went to London, to the first international Zionist Conference in seven years. There a rift developed between the Weizmann

and Brandeis forces. Our American delegation was divided, Silver standing firmly behind Brandeis. At this Conference Silver first attained international prominence. Though one of the youngest delegates—still in his twenties—he was called upon to address a great public meeting at the Royal Albert Hall, where he shared the platform with such established celebrities as Balfour and Weizmann, Max Nordau and Lord Cecil. He also addressed the closing session of the Conference, as spokesman for the American delegation pledging the continued support of American Zionism.

In the succeeding years of controversy between Brandeis and Weizmann, originally over the Keren Hayesod, Silver eventually found his way back to participation in the mass movement. He accepted Weizmann's leadership though he differed with him strongly from time to time on important questions of policy.

In 1939 Silver assumed the leadership of the United Palestine Appeal and of the United Jewish Appeal as well. In the same year he attended the Zionist Congress in Geneva when Europe and the world stood on the brink of the Second World War. It was shortly after the publication of the White Paper—the last and most deadly of a long series of policy pronouncements by the British Government. In Palestine the Yishuv was seething with indignation and the first stirrings of active rebellion and even the official leadership of the Yishuv had begun to promote illegal immigration.

\* \* \*

IT was not, however, until the war had run half its course, and the ghastly rumours of the mass slaughter of European Jews had become accepted fact, that Silver's career entered upon its historic and heroic phase. During the first three years of the war he took no prominent part in Zionist political affairs, devoting himself assiduously and with success to the great fund-raising campaigns which were his immediate responsibility. But he could not suppress the authentic Zionist note and the Herzlian heritage which were part of his innermost self. Essentially he was concerned not with philanthropy but with statesmanship. He gradually converted the platform of the Appeal into a political forum, giving incisive and compelling expression to the Jewish demands for national freedom and a secure national existence on the

ancestral soil; he grew increasingly outspoken and critical both of the statesmen of the world and of sundry Jewish organisations concerned with Jewish rights, but too weak and ineffective to influence the mighty forces at play.

Meanwhile, the Zionist movement had a greater awareness of its role than any other Jewish organisation. With the approval of the World Executive, the American Zionist Emergency Council, representing all of the major parties, was established in New York in 1940 to undertake whatever steps appeared necessary, in view of the crisis. Slowly the Council got under way and initiated a number of activities—notably, the formation of the American Palestine Committee, numbering hundreds of United States senators, representatives, cabinet members, governors of States and influential personalities in all walks of life. Regular official contact was established with the State Department. Public meetings were organised and the first steps taken to secure the ear of the American press. It was a brave beginning but far from that all-out effort some of us had hoped for and anticipated. Above all we had made no dent, not the slightest, upon the State Department and the White House. Roosevelt was at the height of his power and popularity. His sympathy and friendliness toward the Jews was beyond dispute; but for the Zionist cause he had little thought and less time. Actually we were moving in circles and getting—nowhere.

During Weizmann's second wartime visit to America in 1942, he suggested a reorganisation of the Emergency Council and the drafting of Silver to its leadership. The latter had just returned from a successful tour in England and had won Weizmann's admiration both by his platform appearances and his dealings with British statesmen—and a warmer relationship developed between the two. However, Weizmann's plan met with resistance and nothing came of it at the time.

### II

#### A REVOLUTION IN POLICY

But the stage was being set for Silver's emergence into leadership. The necessary and inevitable political struggle preoccupied his mind and invested his speeches with increasing dignity and importance. The orator was ripening

\*Dr. Neumann, a former president of the Zionist Organisation of America and at present a member of the Jewish Agency and the World Zionist Executive, was a close collaborator of Dr. Silver in the forefront of the struggles he now describes. His article draws on material which will furnish the basis of a comprehensive book on the subject.



into the statesman. The climax of this development came on May 2, 1943, in a memorable address which he delivered before the National Conference of the United Palestine Appeal in Philadelphia. It was a turning point in the evolution of American Zionist policy. For the first time a leader of commanding importance dared to challenge not only the State Department but the attitude of President Roosevelt himself. Dr. Silver's speech was a mercilessly frank and honest analysis of our own weakness and the unfriendliness of the American Government, however veiled in polite and meaningless gestures. It was a clarion call for a new approach based upon political realism and militant action. It was a full-scale programmatic speech and stirred thoughtful Zionists who sensed in it something new—a revolutionary note!

They began to rally about him. Within a few weeks a self-constituted delegation called upon Dr. Silver and urged him to assume the direction of American Zionism. As a result of the steps initiated by his friends, he was invited to become the active head of the Zionist Emergency Council that summer, thus ushering in a new era of American Zionism—the era of political “activism.”

A decisive test came within a few weeks, at the first session of the American Jewish Conference convened at the Hotel Waldorf-Astoria in New York. The principal and dramatic issue was a resolution endorsing the Zionist demand for a Jewish Commonwealth. Virtually all American Zionist groups had conducted their election campaign for delegates to the Conference on the basis of this programme. Yet, when confronted with the intransigent attitude of a small non-Zionist minority, some of the most prominent Zionist leaders wavered and sought a way out. On the plea of “unity,” a compromise was in the making by which reference to Jewish statehood was to be eliminated from the resolution. Silver was incensed by what he regarded as an unwarranted retreat. Behind closed doors there was a brief but violent scene between him and some of his colleagues. He went before the Conference and delivered one of the most masterly addresses of his career. When the vote was taken, it resulted in an overwhelming victory. The Jewish Commonwealth resolution was carried with but four dissenting votes out of a total of the 502 assembled.

SILVER is a born orator—one of the greatest of our generation—with all of the orator's gifts and techniques at his command. There are few in our time who can stir mass emotion so deeply, when he chooses to do so. But it has been one of Silver's minor misfortunes that his remarkable oratorical talents have tended to overshadow his higher qualities and superior gifts: his powers of analysis, political insight and statesmanship. If he had chosen a legal career he would easily have been one of the most brilliant advocates of the American Bar. When he took over the political leadership of the movement, however, he abandoned more and more the rabbinical manner and the emotional stimulus, in favour of closely woven argumentation and cogent appeals to reason.

If Dr. Silver neglected his personal affairs at the call of Zionism, he brought an even greater sacrifice by interrupting his scholarly pursuits. He was devoted to the world of letters and ideas and in his earlier years loved to immerse himself in research and philosophical speculation. He had produced important works distinguished by sound scholarship and yearned for the peace and quiet of his library, for his books and his unfinished manuscripts. This deprivation was perhaps the hardest to bear.

THE story of the great mobilisation of American Jewry which followed, the prodigious effort to win American public opinion, the dramatic struggle to secure passage of a pro-Zionist resolution in the Congress of the United States, the conflict between Dr. Silver and President Roosevelt, and the pitched battle between the “Silver militants” and the “Wise moderates”—all that is a chapter too recent and familiar to be detailed here. Dr. Silver had not underestimated the magnitude of the task he had undertaken or the strength of the powerful forces arrayed against him: the Arabs, the British, the U.S. State Department, the missionary circles, the oil interests and others. What he had underrated was the power of inertia within the Jewish camp and the iron grip which conventional ideas and established political traditions held upon the Zionist movement. He found that no revolutionary change could be brought about in the international arena without a revolutionary change on the internal front. He had to undergo profound changes of

outlook himself and destroy many cherished illusions among his followers before he could strike out on new paths and in new directions.

Such radical revision of long-accepted viewpoints and habits of mind is a painful process, irritating and upsetting. And, it must be admitted that Silver was none too gentle with his critics and opponents. He was impatient. He could flay with his tongue and bear down opposition with crushing effect. He did not do this deliberately, out of any desire to hurt, but behaved like a general leading his army in desperate battle, with too much at stake to brook disobedience or insubordination. He acted impulsively at times, in disregard of the “human equation”—and repeatedly the “human equation” rebelled and backfired.

It had long been accepted orthodox doctrine that Zionist policy must continue to be based on a British orientation. But as time passed Silver was forced to the conclusion that this was an illusion: Britain would not return to her original pro-Zionist line in the face of Arab opposition unless she was compelled to do so by a force greater than Arab pressure.

THIS superior force was America! Here again Silver realised earlier and more clearly than others the extent to which Britain was growing dependent upon American strength. He was therefore convinced that the key to Palestine's future lay in Washington, that this was the point upon which to concentrate all the strength, the influence, the pressure, we could muster.

But he also had no illusion about the difficulty and the dimensions of the task. Britain was America's closest ally. For many decades the policy makers of State Department had regarded the Near East as a British sphere. They were prepared to extend and consolidate Britain's influence in the region even at the expense of France. They were certainly not prepared to override British policy in favour of the “vociferous Zionists” and their “quixotic plans” for a Jewish State.

Moreover, as we have seen, Silver was the first of the Zionist leaders to shed his illusions about Roosevelt's demeanor toward the Zionist idea. With keen insight he came to realise sooner than others, that behind Roosevelt's suavity and charm, and despite his humanitarian

friendliness for the Jews as people, there lay a deep-seated scepticism about Jewish Palestine and a cool indifference, which Silver described as an attitude of “uninvolved benignancy.” Roosevelt was ready to listen but unwilling to act and firmly opposed any step which might involve him in difficulties with the Arab rulers.

But to the Jewish masses of America and throughout the world, Roosevelt loomed as the great friend and champion of their people. How could such a friend oppose and ignore Jewish national aspirations? Not only was it difficult to accept such a painful thought—there was a strong psychological need to reject it. In a tragic hour and a hostile world there simply had to be a champion and protector. If it was not Stalin or Churchill, it had to be Roosevelt. This emotional dependence on Roosevelt was reinforced by eminently practical considerations. He might be re-elected, and he was re-elected for a fourth term. His would be the power to shape the postwar settlement. To cross him, to offend him, to alienate his affection, was to court disaster for the Zionist cause.

When Silver persisted in his attempt to force the passage of the Palestine Resolution through Congress after Roosevelt's re-election in November 1944, he was forced to resign as Chairman of the Emergency Council. He and his friends carried the issue to the American Jewish community; but it was not until Roosevelt's death in the Spring of the following year, and the revelation of his secret correspondence with Ibn Saud, that the tide turned and Silver was recalled to leadership through the pressure of public opinion. His judgment had been vindicated and his leadership more firmly established than before.

(To be concluded)

#### DR. & MRS. I. S. FOX AND FAMILY

*wish the State of Israel and the people of  
Israel and all their relatives and  
friends a peaceful and  
prosperous  
New Year*



# שני שנה

אוהב ה' שערי ציון מכל משכנות יעקב (תהלים פ"ז ב').  
שערי ציון — אלו שערים המצוינים בהלכה (ברכות ח' א').

רבעון לתורה ולציון

שני שילינגים ושש פרוטות

חוברת א'

תשרי תשי"ד

שנה ח'



A decorative border surrounds the central text area, featuring various Jewish symbols and motifs. At the top left is an open book. To its right is a menorah. Further right is a shofar. On the left side, there is a menorah, a scroll, and a menorah. At the bottom left is a menorah. At the bottom center is a Star of David. At the bottom right is a menorah. The border is filled with floral and leaf patterns.

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in Weizmann's time a copy of British monarchy, and I have little doubt that he will become more like British monarchy as time goes on. They have hurried, building up a Knesset of one Chamber; the only consolation being that the President gets the cheers, even if the government cannot always rule the state with the wisdom required of it.

I think that the Israel Government rid itself of the Zionist Organisation too rapidly, even as regards such matters as national security. To its great loss, it was deprived of Weizmann's help too soon. Weizmann was the greatest Jew of his generation because he was fully equipped with the wisdom necessary to maintain the freedom of Jewry.

I worked with Weizmann for twenty years. I often admired the wisdom of this man in meeting all kinds of difficulties and opposition. We need this wisdom now, for never have our national problems been so vitally affected by external difficulties and opposition. We are

nervous about the U.S.A., about the Arabs seeking a second round, about opposition from here and from there. We need the wisdom of Weizmann to deal with them. A short talk with that wise old man would have saved the State from difficulties and dangers that beset it.

The only solution that has been thought of in connection with the Zionist Organisation is to convert our policy from propaganda to education. The solution of the loss of Chaim Weizmann is to learn more from others who can teach us from their experience as rulers of states, and builders of industry. Not everything told us is necessarily useful to us, for conditions differ from country to country, from industry to industry. But Israel has much to learn about civic obedience, respect for the law, how to husband its resources. And there are lands from which we can learn these things, if only we return a little to the wisdom of Chaim Weizmann, and for each thing look to the proper country from which to learn it.

Few figures in the life of a people stand out for maintained respect. Leaving out the great figures till the end of last century, two men stand out from the years which many of us call our own time: Herzl and Weizmann. Herzl began to receive wide recognition, but his early death denied him the universal recognition that Weizmann obtained. Weizmann lived long enough to see in the State of Israel the fulfilment of his life's work, but not long enough for the benefit of Israel.

But it is not for us to choose: the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. It is in this sense that we must look at Weizmann's life. Some enjoyed him more than others; they were the lucky ones chosen by the Jewish people to join with him in the common fight for Jewish liberty. Some despised him, having no notion of what they were missing by not working with him. Jewry as a whole frustrated him, opposed him, but worked with him till the last day of our national struggle. Let then all Jewry show how it appreciates this gift by remembering Weizmann's first Yahrzeit; because through Weizmann, the ordinary Jew threw off the limitations of birth and honour, and joined with all other Jews in forming the State with which our future is so intimately connected.

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## Abba Hillel Silver

(Continued from October 1953 issue)

By DR. EMANUEL NEUMANN

### III

#### THE POLITICAL OFFENSIVE

The struggle in Washington went on during the early part of the Truman Administration, but the going became easier as Truman gradually became convinced that the overwhelming majority of the Jewish citizens were now solidly behind the Zionist programme. Truman was moreover a far less complex personality than his illustrious predecessor—less adroit and sophisticated, simpler and more straightforward. He accepted the Zionist line reluctantly and under pressure, at first, but having accepted it, he followed through honestly and firmly. In the end he found himself in direct conflict with Britain's Bevin. He did not shrink from the encounter, but supported by popular opinion, he stuck to his guns and forced the State Department to acquiesce in his pro-Zionist policy.

By this time Silver's sagacious policy of building up support in Republican as well as Democratic circles and his skilful bi-partisan strategy was earning its reward. Taft and Dewey were equally outspoken and unhesitant in their backing of Zionist aspirations. The Republican Party as a whole was openly competing for Jewish support; and the attitude of millions of American citizens, roused and vocal, proved more potent than the prejudices and manoeuvres of career diplomats and oil magnates.

Making the fullest allowance for Truman's gradual but genuine conversion to the Zionist cause, as well as the beneficent influence of some of his personal friends and supporters, the record leaves no room for doubt that he would never have gone as far as he did were it not for the constant pressure exerted upon his Administration and the prospect of wholesale defection from the Democratic Party.

The whole procedure represented a revolutionary change in Zionist policy and political technique. From Herzl's earliest diplomatic ex-

plorations down to the days of the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate, and Weizmann's latest efforts, political Zionism was political mostly in the sense that it pursued political objectives. It sought to achieve these objectives largely by diplomacy; and considering how few and doubtful were the cards in their hands, Zionist diplomats had played them skilfully and at times brilliantly. But in the final analysis, diplomacy, to be successful, must be backed by something more concrete and substantial than ideas, sentiments and remote potentialities. It is a game of give and take, and the would-be diplomat must have something of value to offer or withhold. He must be in a position to benefit his friends and inflict injury on his adversaries. Herzl had grasped this principle firmly, but lacked the counters with which to negotiate. The greatest diplomat our people had produced since Disraeli died of a broken heart—for lack of bargaining power.

Weizmann was more successful in the circumstances of the first World War. For all his personal charm, persuasiveness and skill, he would have failed like Herzl—but for the fact that Britain, hard-pressed in the struggle with Germany, was anxious to gain the wholehearted support of the Jewish people: in Russia on the one hand, and in America, on the other. The non-Jewish world regarded the Jews as a power to reckon with, and even exaggerated Jewish influence and Jewish unity. Britain's need of Jewish support furnished Zionist diplomacy with the element of strength and bargaining power which it required to back its moral appeal.

The circumstances of World War II were radically different. Jewry was destroyed in Central Europe and politically immobilised in Soviet Russia. Hitler carried out his programme of extermination without effective opposition from any quarter. In the eyes of practical politicians he had demonstrated that Jewish power and influence were a myth. What was really



crucial in the new circumstances was the fact that the Jews of the world were now perforce solidly arrayed with Britain as the leader of the democratic world in the war against Hitler. There was no need to woo the Jews, for they had no alternative. On the contrary, it was the Arabs who had to be wooed, for they could flirt with the Axis—as they did. Disaffected, they had to be appeased; loyal, they had to be rewarded. So overwhelmingly were the British convinced of the reality of Arab power and the complete loss of our bargaining position, that our cause in England became hopeless.

The official Zionist leadership realised the position and sought anxiously for new political leverage—but found none. The one hope was, of course, America. And Weizmann once went so far as to say—in a closed circle—that “the next Balfour Declaration” had to come from the United States.

But Weizmann's error, shared by a large part of the movement and most of the American Zionist leaders at the time, was to hope that

effective American intervention for the solution of the Palestine problem could be brought about by nothing more compelling than a somewhat diffuse humanitarian sympathy for the Jewish plight.

The essence of Silver's revolutionary approach lay in the new realism which he introduced. He came to perceive that diplomacy, unsupported by some form of power, degenerated into mere *shtadlanut*—backstairs intercession—humiliating and futile. There was no other way but to recreate for Zionism the bargaining position it had lost, building it up out of such elements of strength as the Jewish people still possessed. Virtue did not suffice and weakness was no virtue. The chief positive elements in our position were two: first, the growing strength of the Yishuv, its ability to resist and its offensive power to strike; secondly the potential power of five million American Jews, if properly organised and led and if their collective strength was fearlessly employed. Activism—here and in Palestine!

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The moment the war was won in Europe Silver favoured full support for the resistance movement in Palestine. If the rebelliousness of the Arabs was a factor, Jewish rebelliousness could be no less a factor, even more embarrassing to Britain in her international relations. Activism and resistance in Palestine had to be matched and supported by an equally aggressive and relentless policy in America—on the political plane. It meant abandonment of an apologetic and defensive attitude in favour of an “offensive spirit” sustained by striking power. The political offensive was to be directed in the first place against the British Government, but also against anti-Zionist influences entrenched in Washington. Both the British and American governments were to feel the full impact of an aroused and militant body of opinion comprised of millions of American citizens, Jews and Christians alike. Under Silver's leadership they did.

A classical example of this aggressive policy was the stand Silver took on the first post-war loan to Britain, about to be voted by the Congress of the United States. Inter-governmental loans, he argued, were not mere commercial transactions, but political measures to achieve political ends; and it was common practice for the leading power to exact political conditions. Should the representatives of the American taxpayer vote millions to be used by Britain in repressing the Yishuv and hunting down Jewish refugees in the Mediterranean? Shrewdly, he did not propose to defeat the loan but to delay its passage—which seemed a feasible objective. No more brilliant or effective stroke could have been devised. Had we pressed the issue with full force, it might possibly have brought Bevin to his knees. But even after years of political education, not all American Zionists were ready for so drastic a step. It was one of many opportunities we lost.

In the same vein Silver opposed any co-operation with the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry. He correctly appraised it as but another delaying tactic designed to relieve the British and American governments from relentless pressure in Palestine and the United States, and personally he refused to testify before the Committee. After months of hearings, investigations, and more hearings, the Committee pro-

duced a report containing some positive recommendations, which Truman promptly approved. But Bevin raged and fumed. The American Government, he felt, was subservient to “New York Jews.” More specifically, he meant—a rabbi from Cleveland. Unceremoniously he rejected the report. The outcome of this affair again vindicated Silver's judgment. The Anglo-American Committee was a fiasco. If it had served any purpose, it was to point out the paramount issue: could or could not a satisfactory settlement be achieved by diplomatic negotiation with the British?

That summer, 1946, saw the arrest of many leaders of the Yishuv in Palestine, including members of the Jewish Agency—and shortly thereafter a fresh attempt at diplomatic negotiation. A group of Agency members met in Paris, Silver being absent. Behind-the-scene conversations were going on with Bevin in London. The British Government was proposing a round-table conference with Jews and Arabs. The bait for Jewish participation was an alleged willingness on the part of the British to entertain proposals for the partition of Palestine emanating from the Jewish Agency. Silver was furious over what he regarded as a political and tactical blunder—an untimely and futile gesture, undermining our own position. In protest he resigned from the Executive and prepared for a showdown at the forthcoming Zionist Congress.

As it happened, Foreign Secretary Bevin visited America that fall and Silver saw him on two occasions: the first, on his own initiative; the second, on the invitation of Mr. Bevin. The effect of these conversations was to convince Silver, more fully than before, that Bevin had no intention whatsoever of assenting to a Jewish State even in a minor part of Palestine and that the proposed round-table conference was another British manoeuvre. The coming Congress, he felt, would be decisive. Zionism was at the crossroads: it would either go on fighting or negotiate itself into defeat and surrender.

It was indeed a fateful Congress, that winter of 1946, painful and dramatic. On one side were ranged the Weizmann forces, clinging to the hope of a negotiated settlement with Bevin on the basis of partition; on the other, the “activist” forces led by Silver and in part by Ben-



Gurion. The Socialist Zionists, torn between their conflicting loyalties to Weizmann and their own leader, Ben-Gurion, divided and split. Silver was named to the key position of Chairman of the Political Committee, on which he had a bare majority. It was touch and go. The outcome of the Congress was in doubt until the very last session. When the vote on the resolutions was taken in the small hours of the morning, the atmosphere was tense and bitter. As usual, personal loyalties and antagonism came into play, as well as party rivalries and factional disputes. But the main issue remained clear: confidence or lack of confidence in the British and in the leadership which stood for continued co-operation with them. We were warned that failing a negotiated settlement with the British, the question would be thrown into the United Nations where we risked final and irretrievable defeat. The Congress took its courage in its hand, decided to disregard the warning and accept the challenge. Silver's policy won; the die was cast.

#### IV

##### THE UNITED NATIONS—AND AFTER

Silver's victory at the Congress of 1946 imposed upon him new tasks and burdens of unprecedented gravity. As head of the American Section of the Jewish Agency, he was now charged with the duty of organising and directing the defence of the Zionist position in the forum of the United Nations. Bevin had made good his threat to refer the issue to the community of nations. In the spring of 1947 and again in the fall, the "Palestine Question" came before the General Assembly. Politically and internationally this was the court of last resort.

The responsibility for handling the Jewish case was a crushing one. But Silver rose to the new challenge. Without abandoning the technique of mass action and public pressure, he also resorted to the arts of the accomplished diplomat. Skillfully and sagaciously he sought to isolate Britain and the Arabs by building up a majority for Jewish independence out of widely desperate elements: the United States,

the Soviet Bloc, the Catholic countries of Latin America, the British Dominions, and Western Europe. Silver's colleagues on the Agency Executive worked feverishly as a team at his side and under his direction. Every avenue of support was thoroughly explored. Every clue was meticulously checked and pursued. Not the smallest or the remotest of nations, but was contacted and wooed. Nothing was left to chance.

Even so, it was once more touch and go. Three days before the final vote in the Assembly of the United Nations we were just short of the required two-thirds majority to carry the Partition Resolution. Providentially Thanksgiving Day intervened, giving us a respite of twenty-four hours for the last supreme effort to corral the additional votes. By Saturday, the 29th of November, we had succeeded. For the first time in history the nations of the world, in council assembled, gave moral and legal sanction to the re-establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine. One by one we left the hall and drifted into the lobby. We were all overcome by emotion, I glanced at Silver and saw what I had never seen before—he wept!

The menace of Arab invasion and British sabotage threatened the implementation of the United Nations decision, which was to take final effect on the termination of the British Mandate, May 14, 1948. In March the American Government suddenly reversed its position and declared for an international trusteeship over Palestine in place of partition. Silver threw himself into the struggle all over again, summoned a nationwide conference for political action in Washington, and resumed public pressure upon the President and the State Department. There followed a perilous period of behind-the-scenes negotiations. Representatives of the State Department offered a new plan of mediation if the proclamation of the Jewish State would be postponed. The offer of the State Department was coupled with dire threats if it was rejected. We believed that Ben-Gurion had every intention of proceeding with the proclamation of the State but we also knew that the leadership of the Yishuv and his own party were divided. What we did in New York would either strengthen his hands or weaken them. The Agency Executive in New York was similarly divided but we rallied behind Silver

drawing courage from his unshakable resolution. The offer of the State Department, reputed to have come also from the President himself, was rejected—though the course smacked of defiance. To be more precise, we informed Ben-Gurion of our vote in favour of rejection, leaving the ultimate decision, as we felt we must, to the Yishuv itself.

The State was duly proclaimed; and for the moment, politics and diplomacy gave way to the test of war. The ultimately decisive victory of the cause was won on the field of battle, by the valour of the Yishuv and the sacrifice of its heroic youth. Without the War of Independence the Jewish State would not have arisen. But without the political victory at Flushing Meadow and the international sanction it conferred the War of Independence might never have been fought. On this point there can be no doubt about the verdict of history. Silver's resolute leadership, his vision and statesmanship, his militant and audacious policy, his over-all strategy and brilliantly executed tactics and the prodigious activity he unfolded—these were largely responsible for the triumphant outcome. That this victory was snatched from impending defeat, enhanced the magnitude of the historic achievement. He had moved and acted in the great tradition of Herzl and Weizmann; the achievement was perhaps greater than they had dared to hope for.

It is one of the tragic ironies of Zionist history that immediately following the greatest triumph of his career, another internal conflict forced Silver to resign his position of leadership. Its overt and surface cause was disagreement with the leadership of Israel over fund-raising activities in the United States. The real and deeper issue was the attitude of that leadership toward the Zionist movement in general and American Zionism in particular. Silver realised that the establishment of the State had by no means secured its future existence, and he insisted upon a strong Zionist movement as its chief bulwark in the difficult years which he foresaw. Unless the State of Israel and its Government, created by the Zionist movement, reciprocated by placing their full strength and prestige behind the movement, both the movement and the State would suffer. And though the matter was belittled at the time, as of minor

consequence, it has become a burning issue which has agitated the Zionist and Jewish world during the past few years.

In this too, Silver's judgment has been vindicated by the events. A change of heart has been taking place in Israel. Only a few months ago, the Knesset finally enacted a measure which, though not in the precise terms unanimously requested by the last Zionist Congress, granted official status to the organisation. But more important, a significant change has been taking place in the personal attitude of leading members of the Israel Government—one expressive of a renewed desire to strengthen the Zionist movement and retrieve its commanding position in Jewish life.

As clouds gather again on Israel's horizon and as the international situation grows more tense and menacing than ever, one can only hope that Silver will not remain for long on the margin, but will be drawn back into the full tide of affairs. He has steadily refused and will perhaps continue to refuse to seek leadership once more. But neither Israel nor Zionism can afford to be deprived of his galvanizing force. His place in Jewish history is already secure—but another chapter is still to be written.

Whatever the future may have in store for him personally, there is a postscript to be added. The long and often fierce struggle waged under his leadership for the Zionist cause has yielded a by-product of inestimable value in itself—its permanent and tonic effect upon the Jewish community in this country. Silver had found American Jewry a slumbering giant: he roused the giant from his lethargy, made him conscious of his strength. To that extent the Jewish scene has been transformed. He taught us to stand up like men, to fight on our feet in the tradition of American freedom, without the paralysing inhibitions of fear and inferiority. We dared. We risked open conflict with powerful forces and with men in the highest authority. We gained not only victory, but self-respect, a new awareness of our worth. If ever the time should come—and it may come soon—when we shall have to gird ourselves once more in defence of the Jewish position, we shall be more courageous, more confident and effective, and the better prepared, because of the lessons we have learned under Abba Hillel Silver.



# שער ציון

אוהב ה' שער ציון מכל משכנות יעקב (תהלים פ"ז ב').  
שער ציון — אלו שערים המצוינים בהלכה (ברכות ח' א').

רבעון לתורה ולציון

שני שילינגים ושש פרוטות

חוברת ב'

טבת תשי"ד

שנה ה'