



## Daniel Jeremy Silver Collection Digitization Project

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### **MS-4850: Daniel Jeremy Silver Papers, 1972-1993.**

Series III: The Temple Tifereth-Israel, 1946-1993, undated.

Sub-series A: Events and Activities, 1946-1993, undated.

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35

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Adult Institute, Great Trials of Jewish History, "Dreyfus," speech  
by Ellis Rivkin, 1965.

MONOTONE MAKES IT IMPOSSIBLE  
TO TRANSCRIBE FROM TAPE  
CORRECTLY. SENTENCES  
CANNOT BE PROPERLY  
CONSTRUCTED.

Rabbi SILVER 11/5/65 mjm  
ADVISED NOT TO CONTINUE



## The Great Trials

Dr. Rivikin

February 19, 1965

since I distribute what is made available for introductions I generally fare quite well. When I was a student, long before I had any degrees, I had already been attracted to the mind of your former distinguished Rabbi, Rabbi Silver and throughout the years as my learning increased, my admiration for his accomplishments grew with it. It is very, very rare that an individual could have ~~the~~ so many powers, be blessed with so many powers and so many different realms. As a rabbi you knew him - I had very little opportunity to know him as a rabbi. All of us have benefited from the work that he did with the state of Israel and I would most like to speak of a scholar's appreciation of a great scholar. Had he been only a scholar and made the contributions that he had made, he would be well worth our memory. When he is along with this, an accomplished and distinguished career in the rabbinate and in world politics, it's truly an amazing achievement. I regret that I really had no opportunity to know Rabbi Silver personally but I've been an admirer from afar. Therefore I was very delighted when at the Hebrew Union College I had the opportunity of meeting Daniel Silver, at that time not yet a rabbi but already quite distinguished even among the students of the Hebrew Union College who by definition are distinguished on entry. I was very much impressed at that time by not only his learning the independence of his mind. This is many ways brought an affection for his mind that I have always appreciated and I am very thrilled to see, just a few moments ago the proofs of his book which indicates that he is following in the footsteps of his father in terms of great scholarship along with the greatness of the rabbinical calling. I felt that before speaking this evening it would only be proper to let you know that something at least of learning, that I may have, I owe to your distinguished Rabbi of blessed memory.

This evening I am supposed to deal with the cashiered captain, Dreyfus, and I



must make it clear that the title was not mine. I knew I was supposed to really speak about Dreyfus, I know I could go back to Dreyfus days, I knew I ~~had~~<sup>would have</sup> to deal with the problems of anti-semitism but I was delightfully surprised to note that your rabbi had the poetic touch which I saw in the other titles as well, to really give the title a flair that I wonder whether my lecture can measure up to. It really wasn't entirely fair for me not to have known the very beautifully selected title prior to the publication of the brochure. If the lecture falls short, the title is still a good one.

In trying to deal with cashiered captain, to try to deal with the problem of the Dreyfus case in a single hour is likewise a kind of project that is in any way unfair to set before a speaker because there are so many different facets that involve the Dreyfus case that one is tempted to explore in full. Each of these facets in turn would lead not merely to a single lecture but could well lead to a series of lectures. One has in this case almost everything that one could see. One could fasten one's primary concern and attention of the suffering of an individual human. An individual who suffered in a most cruel fashion not merely because he was sent to Devil's Island, not merely because he lived there in dreadful isolation, not merely because he was literally chained at night in this isolated confinement, and hemmed in by not only guards but specially protected walls. The suffering that this would impose on any human being is of course worthy of interest and concern from all of us but that it should occur to an individual who from virtually the very moment that he was born was dedicated to a love of France, who rare for a Jewish boy even in France, decided on a military career when he was still extremely young. Who sought to excel in every manner possible in the various schools that he went to in order that he might achieve recognition as an officer not only worthy of France but worthy of the highest ideal that the French army and the French officer should represent. An individual who so dedicated his life should have been accused of treason much less to have been sent off to Devil's Island for a crime which he did not commit - sent off on the basis of evidence which was no evidence at the beginning of the trial and suddenly with no evidence in the many, many years that



followed. Evidence which was known to those who made the evidence available to the military court knowing that this was something which certainly was not the sort of thing that any individual could be convicted of, much less an individual whose record had been so clear in dedication to France and to the traditions of the French army so complete was the case of Captain Dreyfus. The humiliation and the hurt that this kind of charge could be leveled against him, probably was equal in torment to the physical sufferings that he went ~~through~~ thru, the many years that he was at Devil's Island because this physical sufferer was continuously compelled with this deep, deep hurt of someone whose most dedicated commitment is denied, ~~could~~, the very reverse of it is assumed to be true. So one could want to dwell on the human factor. Dreyfus and the humiliation and the degradation that he went through. One could wish it well if one had time for all these facets of how an individual, again an individual who wanted ~~to~~ to fasten our attention on the individual elements of human tragedy and of human drama - of how the man most responsible for opening up the Dreyfus case - for making it possible that ultimate freedom would be achieved happened to be an individual who had been Dreyfus's teacher in one of the military schools who had never particularly cared for Dreyfus - who was an anti-semite. An anti-semite who didn't care for Jews at all but when quite by accident he fell upon the evidence of Dreyfus was no evidence at all. When he discovered that the guilty party, the individual responsible for the handwriting in the so called list that Dreyfus supposedly handed over to the German government - that when he discovered this he went to the general, General ~~at the time~~, and confronted him with a clear indication of Dreyfus's innocence and when the general told him to forget about it and pay no heed to it he turned to him and he said 'but General this man is innocent'. The General was supposed to have responded 'and what of that', The honor of the army is of greater consequence, and drawing himself up to the full stature of his pride as a soldier in the French army, he said to the General "This is abominable. This man is innocent."



In the effort to achieve the recognition of this innocence this Colonel Picquart, himself was to suffer, removal from his post in the Intelligence Area, was sent out literally to be shot in North Africa. This too would be something that one would want to ponder over. Of how an anti-semite, but an anti-semite who himself ~~was~~ had a certain personal integrity and concern for truth - was willing to defy ~~his~~ all of his officers and the men in command and to put the innocence above the so called needs of state and the needs of the army

an individual and the suffering - one could deal with Picquart, an individual and his suffering - one could deal with theme - one could deal with the theme of how the Dreyfus case almost by accident became the means by which all of France was turned into two camps - a camp in which anti-semitism was the basic driving force - the dedication to the army - dedication to the needs of state and reigned in opposition against the army and against the church and by large against much of the state. Some of the great spiritual, intellectuals and creative souls of France in the 1890's - a great novelist such as Zola calling forth for war - being supreme over the interests of the state and even over the army - calling for the need to reorder the French Republic around traditions of the Republic and the rights of man. That man Dreyfus, being a man, being an individual was not to be sacrificed for interests of state or for the interest of the army or for the interests of any other kind of group. So one could concentrate in dealing with this theme. And one could even concentrate if one so sought. One could even concentrate on or how strange it all turned out to be that here this Dreyfus case that stirred up France for five, six, seven years suddenly dissolves and is virtually of no consequence - to see for example that Dreyfus himself was much later in life, after he had been freed, after he had been exonerated, after his honor had been once more restored when some other instance involving treason came up and some reference was made to the possibility that the man might



be innocent. It is reported at the end that he said, shrugging his shoulder, "Where there's smoke, there's fire". An unwillingness on the part of Dreyfus even when he was standing up for his own rehabilitation - to stand willingly behind Picquart, because Dreyfus in accepting a pardon, a pardon mind you which indicated that presumably he had been guilty was in effect turning his back on Picquart who by virtue of his pardon himself might never be exonerated of the charges that were launched against him because he had attempted to make available Dreyfus's innocence for his own career in the army having been shattered by the virtue of for Dreyfus and here Dreyfus, in a sense, turning his back on the very individual most responsible for . That this man Dreyfus who became in many ways a heroic idea was a person of literal

