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

Sub-series B: Sermons, 1950-1989, undated.

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Two Sermons I Didn't Deliver, 1980.

Two Sermons I Didn't Deliver: The World and Its Headaches
Daniel Jeremy Silver
May 4, 1980

Over the last week there have been a lot of warm greetings, and once we have met each other again and caught up with family, almost inevitably, the next question is was it hard to get back to work; and the answer is no, simply necessary. We landed in Cleveland late of a Monday night. Our inner clocks were still on Japanese time. Early the next morning I got up and came here out to the Branch to confront the four feet of letters and correspondence that awaited me on my desk only to find myself in the middle of the first Budget Committee meeting for the next year. It was not hard to get back into the swing of things. And then the next question: is there a cultural shock in coming back to America after half a year? And the answer is no, it's all very familiar, but there are experiences that come along that you see with fresh eyes. I've been surprised, for instance, at the number of broken-down and run-down cars on our roads. I spent the last month in Japan. In Japan every car is painted and cleaned and whisk-broomed and brushed off every day. You never drive down a road in Japan and see a car with its radiator hub open as a sign that it's broken down. As a matter of fact, if a car breaks down on a Japanese road the owner must not only pay the towing company for services rendered but he must also pay a very stiff fine to the police. And then there was the first morning I sat down to read our Cleveland newspapers. I was finished in six minutes, and I kept remembering the Manchester Guardian and the London Times where I really learned something about the news of the world. Reading the Cleveland newspapers I learned something about the scandals of Cleveland and murder in Cleveland, and also what had been printed the day before in certain columns of the New York Times, but I was back in a world which is very parochial, a world of headline news with almost no background information, no information in depth is given. But I think that the sharpest impression which I've had since I've been home comes from our conversations. We've talked, we've reminisced, we've caught up with each other, and then as the conversation broadened out inevitably, somehow, it came to include anxiety, worry, complaint about the state of the country, the state of the economy, the disarray of the administration.

I found my friends concerned, deeply concerned, about our country, about the future, about eighteen percent a year inflation, about the unemployment rate that has risen into seven percent of the work force, about what all this means for their lives and the lives of their children, but most of all, I found a vague mood of despair, almost of self-pity, as if America isn't what it used to be and will never be again and there's really not much that we can do about it. I've yet to meet anybody who is excited about any of the presidential candidates. I have yet to meet anybody who had a good word to say about the administration's handling of the Iranian hostage crisis. I have yet to meet anybody who believes deep down that this administration, or any other group within the society, has a meaningful plan to deal with our financial and economic woes.

I found many believing that the fiasco with the helicopters in Iran was somehow symbolic of American power and of American policy today; power which is impotent, policies which are inconsistent, policies which even when they are explained do not seem to have any chance of success.

Now, some of this I expected. You can't have read the European press or talked with Europeans or Asians for any length of time without recognizing that they, too, have lost confidence in this administration. I was abroad when the President finally decided after the Afghanistan invasion that he knew what the Russians were really like. And I was home again when the President announced that the helicopter episode in Iran was an incomplete success. And I was both abroad and at home when periodic announcements appeared in the public press that our economic problems were really almost behind us. Europeans are terribly disturbed by the erratic nature of American leadership. You hear a great deal in the European press, even in the press of Great Britain which, more than any other country on the face of the globe, has supported American policy in Iran and has been willing to go along, at least the government, with the boycott of the Olympics and has insisted that the fellow NATO countries cooperate with the United States in economic sanctions against Iran, even in England the conversations and columns all reflect the need to separate out somehow a new center of political decision making in the

West of the leadership of the United States. The litany is, we were not consulted. The litany is, we were told one thing and the government here did another. The litany is this government speaks with many voices and we're not quite sure which voice speaks for the government.

So, I was prepared somewhat for the sense of distance which I sensed to have increased in America between this administration and the citizenry, but I was not prepared for the sense of hopelessness which I've heard a little bit in the conversations.

You know, it's interesting that when Europe seeks to create independent centers of decision-making, part of that, of course, is to be explained by our own failures and part of it is to be explained by European adolescence; they feel that they're coming into their own and every country, every people in the world wants somehow to master its own destiny, part by greed. If we impose economic sanctions on the Soviet there are computer sales and grain sales to be made to the Soviet. If it can find a rationalization or justification for an independent policy, so much the better.

There is reason to be concerned about an administration which seems to veer erratically month after month, from one policy to another, unable to articulate to us the goals which are really theirs. There's reason for a citizenry to be concerned about such leadership and how it supports policies when they are not clear to it. But, somehow, I have a feeling, coming back to this country, that this sense of despair, the anxiety, is exaggerated. Wherever I went I found no one who was willing to exchange his passport for mine; and wherever I went I found countries whose problems were much, much worse, more aggravated than our own.

I remember talking with an Oxford don. He said to me, you know, America tends to be the favorite whipping boy of the world press and many of the world leaders, but somehow, when a world leader is ousted from office, or when there are refugees in the world, everybody wants to come to the United States. And I was reminded while I was in England that it was English policy, a matter of pride, that any citizen of the commonwealth who wanted to come to England to settle would be granted automatic immigration

rights and a work permit and, ultimately, citizenship, very much like the Israeli law of return. Before we got to England most of those rights had been limited, and while we were in England the government put down a regulation to the effect that even if a British citizen marries a member of one of the commonwealth nations and wants to bring their husband or their wife back to England, there is no guarantee of a visa and no guarantee of working papers.

America's willingness to accept Soviet Jews and the Cuban boat people and 120,000 Cambodian refugees is not being matched by any other country on the face of the globe. And when you get to feel that somehow we are a nation that has lost its sense of direction, recognize that even in this moment where we seem to be lacking in leadership, stumbling along, we're doing many, many fine things no other nation on the face of the globe is doing. The Soviet are in Afghanistan. The Cubans are in Ethiopia and Yemen and Angola and many of them want to come to the United States. And we've got open doors and we're the only country left on the face of the globe with open doors. Of the 180 thousand Cambodian refugees who will be resettled this year two out of three will come to the United States. Australia is an empty continent. Australia is going to take less than ten thousand. France and West Germany periodically import workers from Italy, from Spain, from North Africa for their plants, yet, each of those countries is taking less than a thousand or two thousand of these refugees. How long our doors will remain open is another question, and open they have been; decency has been shown. We have, obviously, the ability to assimilate poverty and human need and use the human talent we gain in the process and turn them into valuable citizens.

I'm troubled by a nation of people, ourselves, once we lose a sense that we can roll up our sleeves and go to work and do something about our problems. What I've heard is complaint, not of volunteering. What I've heard is, why are such inadequate people running for office, not, I'm going to run for office or I'm working actively in some worthwhile person's meaningful campaign - there's some of that, of course, but not enough. We seem to be preoccupied with our personal problems. Businesses are trying desperately to stay sound; unions are trying to maintain employment; families are

trying to maintain a budget; and there's every reason for all of those concerns, but we should have learned long since the 1980's were not going to be the era of great abundance that we have known in the post-war years; that the nation was going to have to take hold of itself and find new directions and find new satisfactions; the ultimate satisfactions can no longer be having more things, indulging one's self in more luxuries. What I lack, what I've not yet found, or heard or read, is the voice, you know, successfully suggesting the nature of the new world which we are about to enter and what we have to do to enter into it.

I don't understand, frankly, after half a year abroad, the passivity of a nation which is going ahead simply because it's a routine, nominating for a presidency of the two major parties men the majority of the American people seem not to be excited about or to care about. I don't understand it. Why are we so passive, so willing to go along with the familiar? Where is the anger expressed constructively? Where are the programs which we could follow meaningfully?

Let me put this into another context, a more rabbinic one, a more Jewish one. It's not hard being a Jew to be a little bit paranoid, that perhaps we are part of a people who are the world's chosen victim. After all, our history has not been an easy one. Many of you remember Dr. Abraham Sacher, the great fund-raiser President of Brandeis University, former head of National Hillel. In one of his earlier incarnations Dr. Sacher was Professor of History at the University of Illinois, and in that role he wrote a number of popular histories of the Jewish people. He entitled one of them, Sufferance Is The Badge. The reference, of course, is to Shakespeare, to the Merchant of Venice, to Shylock's speech or soliloquy of self-justification in which he tries to show how he has endured the taunts and the anti-semitism of the world in which he lives, has lived. "Still have I borne with a silent shrug for sufferance is the badge of all our tribe." Sufferance implies a passive acceptance, resignation before the slings and arrows of an outrageous fortune. Dr. Sacher wrote this book, or published it, in 1939, at a time when it was perhaps possible to see the dominant theme of Jewish life

as sufferance, resignation, a passive faith despite the pogroms, despite the concentration camps, and even then there were three generations of halutzim in Palestine, and even then there were six or seven generations of men and women in Western Europe and the United States and Canada of Jews who had taken leadership roles in programs of reform, economic justice, fighting tyranny and oppression. Passivity, resignation, sufferance is not the only badge of the tribe. Sufferance has been our lot when we couldn't act otherwise, but when there was opportunity we took our lives in hand and did what we could do. Since '39, of course, there has been great reason to feel persecuted and oppressed: the Holocaust, Soviet anti-semitism, anti-semitism in Latin and South America, the unsettling of Jewish life in Asia and Africa, four Arab wars, fear of a fifth, the unwillingness of the Arab world, much of it, to even admit the right of the State of Israel to exist. And as a rabbi I read week in and week out the Jewish material which crosses my desk that deals always with these kinds of problems, and it's very easy to come to believe that somehow we are the world's sufferers. And from that point of view it's very easy to become pessimistic and resigned. You know the old phrase: it's hard to be a Jew, tends somehow to become an assumption in our lives. One thing that travel teaches you is that it's hard to be a Jew. Our problems are real. The cruelties of the world are many against us, but it's also hard to be a Cambodian or an Indian or a citizen of Bangladesh or one of the billion earthlings who lives in China; it's simply bruising to be alive.

When we reached Narita Airport in Tokyo our thoughts were on leaving Asia behind and of coming back home. We were going to fly over the north, through Alaska, down to Chicago, and there, in the corner of the waiting room, I saw a group of what looked to be children, very small, slight-statured people, and they were put on the plane before us and I realized most of them were not children. There were some eighty or so Cambodians, Campuchians as they are now called, part of the 120 thousand who were being resettled in the United States, men, women, grandparents, children. And I thought to myself what these people have gone through. Let's just take this century. When this century began the country we now call Campuchia, we used to call Cambodia, was part of

the French Empire in Indochina, but it wasn't a secure part of that empire. Siam, which we now call Thailand, coveted the land and fought a nearly forty-year war with the French for control of Cambodia. The so-called Franco Siamese war lasted from 1904 to 1941, and it ended only with the Japanese conquest of Cambodia. And no sooner was Cambodia liberated than the Cambodians had to fight for about five years in order to free themselves of French rule; and then they had a year or two of peace before the North Vietnamese began to use Cambodian territory to bring down their arms and their men into South Vietnam, and before America, in retaliation, began to bomb these so-called Vietnamese military routes, and so there were infiltrations and search missions, bombings. And when America finally pulled out of Vietnam and peace seemed to come to that part of the world, immediately there was this socialist revolution led by the Pat-Pol government, a government beholden to the Chinese, which set about in the most ruthless way, the most murderous way of any government on the face of this earth, to re-educate and to socialize the Cambodian people. Killing grounds were opened not unlike the trenches in which Jews were slaughtered, Kiev and throughout eastern Europe. They say there were about eight and a half million, seven and a half million Cambodians ten years ago. They say, and no one really knows, that there's less than half that number of Cambodians today. There are 180,000 Cambodian refugees, legal refugees, in Thailand. There are 500,000 Cambodian refugees in camps pressed up against the Thai border. The Pat-Pol government was overthrown by the Hunseng government, a socialist government, communist government, sponsored by the Vietnamese, and again there was bloodletting. And there wasn't a day we were in southeast Asia that we didn't read about a fight in the refugee camps between various Cambodian war lords over who was going to take over the trucks loaded with food and other materials of survival which were being sent in by international agencies that could be resold to these poor people for whatever they had. And there was hardly a day that we didn't read about some set of atrocities. One group of the free-komer were fighting the Pot-Pol, were fighting the Hunseng, and the innocent were always caught in the middle. Many of the headlines dealt with acts of piracy in the Gulf of Siam as boatloads of refugees seeking to flee from Cambodia would be boarded by pi-

rates, looted, women raped. It's hard to be a Jew, but believe me, it's been hard to be a Cambodian.

And it's hard to be a Thai. They're fleeing to Thailand. Thailand is the border. The Thais themselves are beset with guerilla activity. There's China on the north infiltrating; there's Vietnam on the east infiltrating. We went from Chingmai which is far in the north to one of the tributary rivers of Mekong to see what the hill country of north Thailand was really like. There, at the place where we rented a boat to go down the river, was a sign which said; You may go south but don't go north because in the last several weeks a number of boats have been ambushed by guerillas. And when we drove down from Chingmai, across Thailand, towards Bangkok we stopped at one of the great medieval sights of Thailand, a place called Sukotai, and before we could visit the pyramids and the zigurats and the temples and the shrines of Sukotai we had to go to the police station and hire a national guardsman with a carbine to sit in the car with us just to visit the sights. There had been attacks. And in southern Thailand there's constant guerrilla warfare by Muslims trying to break away from the Buddhist majority in Thailand. Ideologically and religiously the Thais have their problems. They don't know what to do with the people who are on the border. They have no facilities for them if they come over. They could accept many refugees but they are racially different and they really do not want to. Bangkok, the one big city in Thailand, is doubling its population every ten years. The city has a beautiful, modern, downtown area and vast square miles of slums, and in those slums you know what's festering, violence, illiteracy, poverty, anger, revolution. It's not easy to be a Thai and to live, or try to live, with some degree of grace in the middle of this kind of violence. There isn't a Thai home where the fence isn't ten feet high, with barbed wire, often electrified, on the top, with a Doberman Pinscher, another violent dog, guarding the premises. It's not easy to be a Thai.

When we were in China, in Canton, we went one day to meet a Professor of Philosophy at the university there, Dr. Shiah, who is a friend of friends of ours, and he was a gracious man, a gentle man, about sixty or sixty-two. He was waiting for us at

the entrance of the guest house. Tea was set for us at the table. You would have thought it was a pleasant afternoon with a scholarly gentleman who had spent his lifetime in the libraries and among the books and who would talk with us about higher things and the kinds of things rabbis and professors are supposed to be interested in. We did, but in the process we also learned that Dr. Shiah had spent the better part of the last decade knee deep in mud in a rice paddy being re-educated by the cultural revolution. His crime? That he spoke English. He had been educated in part in the United States. He had been sent to a rehabilitation camp. He had been separated from his wife, from his family. They had been sent to different camps. Now the cultural revolution, for the moment, was over. The university wanted good students, good teachers, and he was allowed to return. He didn't speak bitterly of the past, but it was a past in which, to consider the great leap forward and the cultural revolution, literally tens of millions of Chinese died. All lost control of their lives and have very little control of their lives now. It's not easy if you value yourself and powers of decision, if you want some certainty of the future, to be a Chinese.

Alright, so it's not easy to be an Asian. It's also not easy to be a European. England's economic woes are far worse than our own. Inflation is higher. Productivity is lower. The divisions between the union leadership and the employers is broader and more ideological. They were fighting over theory as well as working hours, working conditions and levels of pay. No one seems to know how to bridge the growing ideological gap within England despite the North Sea oil and English conservatism which is standing that country in good stead. The country does not have a plan, really, to meet the problems which would give it security and resource and prosperity again. There's a great deal of anger in England, frustration, concern. Taxes are higher than they for us here. Believe me, London is twice as costly to live in as Cleveland. It's not easy to be an Englishman. You remember the devastated cities of the war. Remember the greatness of the empire and you're living in a country which is struggling hard to maintain freedom and tradition in a cold and difficult world.

It's not easy to be a North African. Morocco is the freeest country in North Africa. It's been, until recently, the most prosperous. It's had some natural resource. Industry has gone in. There are people there who have made a good bit of money and there are a lot of Moroccans who have made it from the village into the city and from the city into the middle-class. But there is now the war in the Sahara, the war with the polisario which is bleeding Morocco of several millions dollars a day, dollars that they need to spend on schools and hospitals and the whole economic infrastructure of being bled by this war which is largely being sponsored by the more radical countries to the east, Libya and Algeria, eager to overthrow the king, eager to add another country to their political lineup. And those who are in the middle-class, advantaged intellectually in Morocco, have a sense that their days are numbered. They wonder about the future. They send their children to school in France so that they will have an escape. It's not easy to be a Moroccan.

What am I saying? Simply this, I think. We live in a difficult world, in difficult times. The simplicities of the post war world are over. The great prosperous era of prosperity is behind us, but we are still the most prosperous nation, by far, on the face of the earth. Our power at the end of the second World War had no match. Perhaps the Russians can match our power now, but our power is still vast, and I suspect that more than any other country on the face of the globe we have some control over our destiny. There are very real problems for America, but we have the resources and the trained personnel to deal with them if we are willing to do so, if we're willing to roll up our sleeves and forget the romantic dreams of affluence of the last twenty-five years, and remember that man was born to work and that we cannot escape responsibility; and that our lives were not meant to be a pleasant Sunday afternoon every day of the week, that each of us has his appointed place in the social order, his appointed contributions to make depending upon talents and opportunity. If we become active enough and angry enough about our social system to see to it that people of quality, people of principle, not simply people of piety and people of quality, are elected to senior office; if we begin to deal with the larger questions without feeling that they must be

solved with quick fixes, quick solutions - there are none. I've said it to you before. Our children will not live materially as well off as we do, and their world is going to be filled with as many problems as we face and, I suspect, more, but it's a world which is manageable, it's a world which can be full of amenity and full of satisfaction and it's a world in which the freedoms we enjoy can be maintained if - if - if we're willing to go to work and commit ourselves, and recognize our strengths, and recognize the possibilities which exist in American life to handle the problems which confront us.

I can't bring myself to say it's hard to be an American, and that's an interesting psychological fact. It's good to be an American. To have that little blue passport in your pocket gives you a freedom and a security that nothing else can provide you while you're abroad. To be part of a system which is one of the few countries of the world which believes in cultural pluralism, believes in economic justice, believes in political freedom and seeks to put these into practice is a rare opportunity, indeed, and what a tragedy it would be if we began to despair so much that we cease to really pull ourselves together and try.

Was there cultural shock in returning to America? No, not really, but there was the sharp recognition that we're doing more complaining than action, that there's a good bit of self-pity in our conversation and self-pity never never solved a single personal human or social problem.

I read from the Sayings of the Fathers with you today. It is not upon you to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it.

And I emphasize in closing that last phrase - neither are you free to desist from it. America can no longer afford those who have opted out of the political system. America can no longer afford those who have opted out of their social responsibilities. America can no longer afford to do the business of politics as usual or to let the political machines run on simply because they're there and they're running and we're too busy, many of us, even to vote. It's a good country to come back to and I'm glad to be home.

Daniel Jeremy Silver

From the desk of—

RABBI DANIEL JEREMY SILVER

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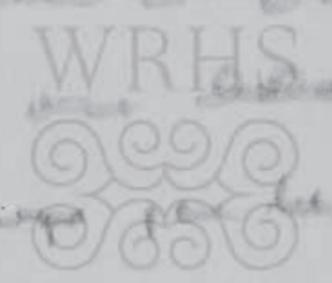
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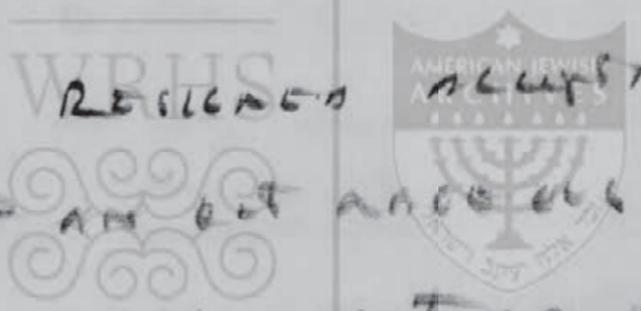
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Reader

Our rabbis taught: six hundred and thirteen commandments were given to Moses. Then came Micah and based them upon three: "Do justly, love kindness, walk humbly with your God."

Isaiah based them upon two: "Keep justice and righteousness." And Amos based them upon one: "Seek me and live."

Habbakuk too based them upon one: "The righteous shall live by his faith."

Akiba taught: "The great principle of the Torah is expressed in the commandment: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself."

Ben Azzai found an even greater principle: "This is the book of the generations of man. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God."

And Hillel summarised the Torah in this maxim: "What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow-man. The rest is commentary: go and study it."

All reading

May it be Your will, O Lord our God and God of our fathers, that no man may hate us and that hatred of others may never enter our hearts. Unite us in the reverence of Your name; keep us far from whatever You hate, and draw

יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ
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שְׂנֵאתֵנוּ עַל-לֵב אָדָם, וְלֹא
שְׂנֵאת אָדָם תַּעֲלֶה עַל לִבֵּנוּ.
וּתְיַחַד לְבַבֵּנוּ לִירְאָה אֶת-
שְׁמֶךָ, וּתְרַחֲקֵנוּ מִכָּל-מָה
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