

### Daniel Jeremy Silver Collection Digitization Project

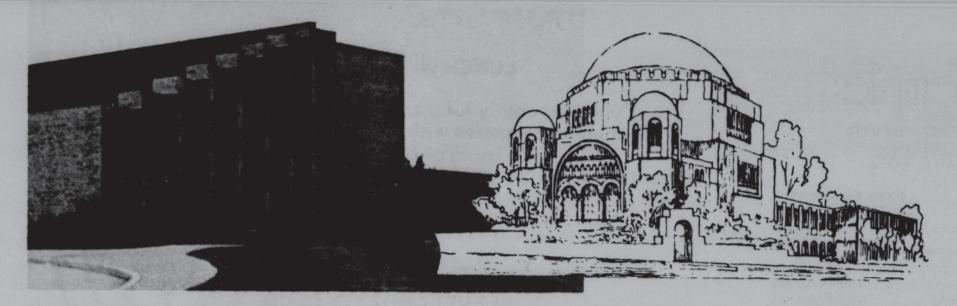
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#### MS-4850: Daniel Jeremy Silver Papers, 1972-1993.

Series III: The Temple Tifereth-Israel, 1946-1993, undated. Sub-series B: Sermons, 1950-1989, undated.

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Religious Problems in Israel and America, 1981.



December 6, 1981 Vol. LXVII, No. 7

# The Temple Bulletin

From the Rabbi's Desk: THE RELIGIOUS PROBLEM IN ISRAEL AND AMERICA The sermon of November 7, 1981 is produced here in response to numerous requests.

In the last several years, a new phrase has appeared in the vocabulary of Jewish life, the label Torah True. Torah means instruction. More specifically Torah designates God's instructions to Israel. We use Torah as a shorthand word to describe the mandates and commandments of Jewish life. Over the centuries each generation has understood Torah to be the God defined form of Jewish life as it was known in their day. An ancient piety encouraged them to ascribe all that they called Torah to a single occasion: Moses' receiving God's instruction on Mount Sinai.

A few years ago, some within the traditional community began to call themselves Torah True. They used the label to separate themselves from all others from us; and to suggest that everyone else had fallen away from the true way. They alone had remained faithful. They were the true Israel and we were the faithless. The label was based on a criteria of observance. A good Jew was a Jew who followed the traditional rabbinic forms. They deny that any other kind of Jew can be a good Jew and given their perspective and concerns many forgot that the form of Jewish life has never been the full measure of devotion. An unhappy truth about the Torah True is that an inordinate number of them have been involved in currency scandals and the misappropriation of government funds in Israel while in United States a number have been involved in nursing home scandals and the like.

I hasten to add that the Torah True do not represent the entirety or even a majority of those who are Orthodox. Some months ago the quarterly Judaism published an autobiographical piece by a former Chief Rabbi of Johannesberg. This pious and learned man had been on the train from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. A young Torah Truenik had sat down next to him and they had talked of matters Talmudic. As he got off the train he went to put on his hat and, accidently, knocked his head covering off. He took a few steps to pick up the hat. The young Torah Truenik began to berate him for having violated the law. There is a rule in the depths of the tradition that no one should take more than four steps bareheaded. But there is also the rule to respect age and learning. This was chutzpah. Youth berating age. Ignorance berating learning. There was more to the story. The Torah Truenik and the rabbi got on a city bus. The young man's seat was directly under a no-smoking

sign, but without a second thought he lit a cigarette. The rabbi couldn't avoid saying, "Nu?" The answer came quick, "What's that to do with us." Many of the Torah True are as contemptious of the rules of a Jewish state as they would be of the rules of a non-Jewish society. The only rule which they recognize is the four ells of the halacha and they tend to pay attention only to the formal elements of that tradition.

Many learned Orthodox scholars and rabbis would agree with many of the structures which I will speak this morning — though obviously not with the point of view from which I speak. Why then are Torah True worth our time and concern? Because they have become a political force in Israel. There they affect many areas of private life and there they have become a major factor among those who seek to limit Israel's options in the West Bank which they regard as God-given and therefore nonnegotiable. Further some of their actions in Israel encroach on Jewish life outside of Israel.

Because of the peculiarities of the Israeli coalition system of Government, the Torah True, although a small minority of the population, have been able to make the government policy adopt many parts of their program. Their way impacts on everyone's life.

Perhaps the best way to introduce this problem to you is to read a few brief paragraphs by a fine Orthodox Jewish scholar, a former rabbi of Montreal, David Hartman. Hartman retired from his pulpit some years ago and is now a professor of philosophy at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He wrote this piece during the frenetic negotiations after the last election when the religious parties were in the position of holding the balance of power and so gained an inordinate voice in the formation of Begin's coalition cabinet.

"During the past few weeks, Israeli society has witnessed a secretive and sinister attempt by certain political forces in Israel to form a government that would allegedly further religious interests and values.

"Undoubtedly, the major political parties, which are predominantly secular in spirit, have always made arrangements with so-called religious groups in order to further their own secular goals and aspirations.

"Nonetheless, because of the current behaviour of the rabbinate and other political power groups, the majority of Israelis are more convinced than ever that Judaism in Israel is an instrument with which (Continued inside)

#### SUNDAY MORNING SERVICES

December 6, 1981 10:30 a.m. The Temple Branch

Rabbi
DANIEL JEREMY SILVER
will speak on
EDUCATION FOR WHAT

December 13, 1981 10:30 a.m. The Temple Branch

Rabbi
DANIEL JEREMY SILVER
will speak on
THE MYSTERY OF THE ARK

Dedication of Ricky Levine Memorial Ark

Friday Evening Service — 5:30 - 6:10 p.m. — The Temple Chapel Sabbath Service — 11:15 a.m. — The Branch

### FROM THE RABBI'S DESK (Continued)

to strike backroom political deals rather than a prophetic call to intense love of God and moral integrity.

"Judaism has thus been disgraced in the eyes of the community by its so-called religious leadership. Instead of bringing the message of Judaism free and openly into the market place of Jewish life, it has turned Torah into an object of political agreements between ministers in the Israeli government and so-called religious sectors of the community, who believed that love for Torah demands detachment from community.

"Whereas the Torah teaches us that the greatest commandment is study and reflection and that only through learning can one develop love of God, our government believes that through political pressure we will bring Judaism to the Jewish people.

"There is a feeling of shame among people genuinely committed to Judaism. They are embarrassed by the way Judaism has been vulgarized and exploited by political pressure groups. The secular forces in Israel must be gloating with joy at the triumph of secularism in Israel.

"Thanks to the coalition discussions and agreements, another great wall has been established between God's word and the people of Israel. Once again the name of God has been disgraced in the public marketplaces of Jewish life.

"The way we have dealt with the problem of conversion illustrates this ugly process. . ."

I will speak of the conversion issue shortly. I want first to make it clear that this talk is not a gratuitous attack by a reform rabbi on Orthodox Judaism and that I raise a concern being expressed by many across the spectrum of Jewish life about a group who emphasize custom and form at the expense of the moral and spiritual reach of our tradition, who are willing and eager to use political power to effect their narrow ends, and whose actions are causing bitter and unnecessary divisions within the Jewish community.

Let me give you some background. When Israel came into being in 1948 the Labor Party had a clear majority of seats in the Kenesset. Nevertheless Ben Gurion and his party decided to bring the religious Zionist parties into a coalition. There is a Jewish principle called Shalom Bayyit, do everything you can to keep peace in the house. At the time the Labor Party, made up largely of secular socialists, also agreed that the practice in matters of personal status should be kept as it had been under the Mandate and for centuries before. The Middle East has long been accustomed to a form of social organization which is called the millet community. There is a national government which has the power of taxation and controls foreign and military policy. This government, however, allows the various ethnic groups under its authority to control their domestic affairs. Each "nation" governs itself by its religious law. This patchwork pattern of social and legal control has existed for centuries in the Middle East and was continued by the British when, at the end of the First World War they took over from the Turks.

In Palestine Jews were governed by rabbinical law and rabbinical courts, Copts by their Coptic law and priests, Cadis and the Shariyah ruled in the Muslim community. The secular socialist majority who founded Israel allowed the rabbinate to retain the authority which they had enjoyed under the British because they didn't really know what else to do and they weren't particularly worried. They were a majority. They didn't think the religious parties would be able to extend their privileges beyond the narrow limits which were allowed them. In the Mandate era if Kibbutzniks didn't like the rabbi's rulling about their marriage, they simply lived together as common-law man and wife and that was end of the matter.

Here was a case where Ben Gurion's judgment failed him. Instead of rabbinic power gradually withering away, it grew helped along mightily by the vagueries of Israel's multi-party political system. The number of people who vote for the religious parties has remained constant, never more than 10% of the population; but the power of these small groups has grown from election to election. By the Fourth Kenesset, the Labor Party could not form a coalition without the National Religious Party. This year Mr. Begin could not form a government without the support of the three religious parties. As their political importance grew, their demands grew apace. Israel found itself not only with a calendar which established the Sabbath as the weekly day of rest but with rules which prevent all movement by public transport on the Sabbath. Hospitals found themselves challenged on their rights to perform autopsies. Schools had to include rabbinic materials taught according to rabbinic interpretations.

As is usually the case power corrupts. The religious parties began to use power highhandly. Their students and women were to be excused from military service. All schools must enlarge the Judaic content of their curriculum. Archeologists were not to be given site permits without the authorization of the Chief Rabbi. After the last election the religious parties won an unprecedented number of major concessions. Begin agreed that the Sabbath must be fully observed by all industry and transport. The ports must be closed on the Sabbath. El Al must not fly. Two years ago El Al lost 40 million dollars - a sum of money which a little state like Israel can ill afford. Last year the airline undertook a program of retrenchment and El Al was beginning to come out of the red and to fly on time. Because of the time changes between New York and Paris and Israel, when and if the Sabbath rule is fully enforced, El Al will have to close down two of seven days of the week. El Al cannot survive under such economic restrictions and we must remember that a national airline is not simply a source of revenue but an important military asset. If this happens it will be increasingly difficult and undesirable for tourists to visit Israel. In Israel sea and airports must be closed sufficiently early for the workers to be home for the Sabbath and remain closed sufficiently long to allow them time at the end of the Sabbath for them to get back to the port. Tourists will be unable to leave for a 48-hour period. Schedules will become cumbersome and those who have no business in Israel besides the desire to visit there for a week or so will find reasons to go elsewhere.

Mr. Begin also agreed that hospital administration is to be governed by the halacha; which is to say

that the rabbis will have final say in many areas in which they ought not to have any say. They will decide whether an autopsy may be permitted; whether an abortion may be performed; whether certain kinds of medical research may be undertaken. These decisions are to be left to a highly politicized rabbinate who can be counted on to be more sensitive to attacks from the Torah True on their right then sensitive to the ethical niceties of modern medicine. Great sums of money are to be used to support Israel's religious schools. Money is to be provided for the housing of married yeshivah students even if other segments of the population may not have such housing provided for them. The exemption of religious women from the military has been enlarged and there is an interesting new exemption from military service of those who are euphemistically called the "newly enlightened" - those who suddenly become observant.

Potentially the most damaging element in the agreement Begin reached with the religious parties was his promise to submit to the Kenesset, if he can find the votes, a bill which will amend the Law of Return to limit its application to Jews who have been born of a Jewish mother or been converted to Judaism according to rabbinic form. This would mean that anyone whom I have converted, or any Reform or Conservative rabbi has converted. would be considered non-Jews under this new law - they and their children and their children and their grandchildren. You can see the confusion and division such a rule would introduce into our communities and the anger it would cause. Why should Jews in America who believe themselves to be loyal Jews be concerned about the security and safety of that state which declares them to be non-Jews? Why should they give to the United Jewish Appeal? Already there have been pressures in some of the communities to have local Federations take strong and effective political action to induce Mr. Begin not to do what he has undertaken to do. For the time being the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds has taken a hands-off stand. Understandably it wants none of the fall out of this quarrel, but ultimately if the religious parties persist there is no way such groups can escape this unwanted battle. How long will it be before the large Reform and Conservative constituencies in the United States say, and with some justice: 'why should we continue to support a government which spits in our face?"

I don't want to minimize the complexity of the synagogue-state issue. Most of us believe implicitly and simply in the separation of church and state. (We never thought we would have to face the problem of the separation of church and synagogue.) As American's we're proud that our Constitution stipulates that Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or the free exercise thereof. We take separation for granted. But even in America, especially in America, we ought not to. Even in America, the problem remains a live issue. I give you the Moral Majority.

When the founding fathers spoke of the disestablishment of religion they probably meant only that every religious community should have the right to worship in its own way. In the colonies almost everybody was a Christian and they certainly assumed that Christian values would always be basic

(Continued)

## FROM THE RABBI'S DESK (Continued)

to their community. When they spoke of disestablishment they meant the right of Methodists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists and Puritans to have their own churches. They did not mean public schools where the Lord's Prayer and Christmas pageants were not permitted.

The problem is that religion is not simply what one does two hours a week on the Shabbat. Religion is a cluster of ideas, institutions, laws, rituals, hopes and values by which a society sanctifies a certain set of values and defines purpose and meaning. Inevitably every religious tradition has its unique vision and special understanding of right and wrong. Inevitably every religious tradition has its own ideas about how the social order should be shaped. And, inevitably, these assumptions conflict with the hopes and plans of other religious groups. Last week a right-wing Conservative rabbi and representatives of the Council of Bishops of the Roman Catholic Church testified in Congress in favor of laws which would prohibit abortion. At the same session liberal Christian and Jewish leaders testified against the proposed constitutional amendment which would have that effect. In United States liberals fought for a century and a half before most states accepted the idea that public schools should be public schools and not Protestant schools. Many still cannot understand that Christian values, and I don't mean simply ritual practices, cannot be promulgated in the public school curriculum; vide, the crusades to return prayer to the daily schedule. creationism to physics classes and to remove sex education from the curriculum. Two days ago our papers reported that the school board in a county outside of Columbus had agreed in Federal court to abolish the practice of beginning school with fifteen minutes of devotion and of having students memorize lines from the Bible as useful mottoes in character formation.

Jews believe in separation because it is our values which are omitted and our holidays slighted; but let us recognize that everyone assumes that his religious values ought to be encouraged by the institutions of his society. Those who fight for the public school as we know it do so because its approach is congruent with their own.

The small social units of earlier societies - the clan, the family, the tribe - were religious and homogeneous and no one sensed any conflict between religion and the social unit. The Near Eastern model of the millet community also handled this problem fairly well. The government allowed every religious group enough lattitude to govern its domestic relations. But around the 16th century Western man decided to create something called a nation-state and something called citizenship. Citizenship gave the individual a say he had never had before: one person, one vote; but it precluded the separate religious communities from governing themselves. There was to be only one law for all citizens. The nation structure forces people of different religious feelings to come under a single law at the same time that it gives to each person the right to have a say in how the law should be formulated. It presumes for conflict and resolution and no democratic nation has successfully solved the problem of how to adjust the difference in religious vision and values which

exist in a heterogeneous society. Given human nature many are not satisfied with the freedom to turn off their television set or not buy a book or to enroll their child in a parochial school. They want the state to control programming and curriculum their way. The evangelical crusade to reintroduce prayer into our schools is evidence of a significant movement to return the public schools to what they were fifty years ago when they were extensions of the Protestant religious schools. The problem is basic and unresolved and there are no neat solutions - only political ones and that means gains and losses - adjustments and accommodations. I can't come before you and say that if only the rabbis of Israel are deprived of their authority over the rules of private status that will resolve Israel's synagogue-state problem. That's not true. It would help, of course, but there would still be Torah-Treuniks whose needs have to be considered and there would still be the problem of the Jewishness of a Jewish state. Nor can I condemn out of hand those who have strong commitments which are different than my own. I have strong commitments also. What I can say is that the direction Begin and the Agudah have taken is unfortunate for many reasons not the least of which is that it rides roughshod over the sensibilities and rights of the majority. The Torah True raise the specter of Iran and since every strong action breeds an equal strong reaction they raise the possibility of a renaissance of militant secularism.

We should prize commitment, even those commitments which differ from our own and misprize political coercion even when it is on behalf of ideas that we cherish. We should treat with contempt those who teach a theology of contempt and, unfortunately, much Torah True activity derives its energy from a teaching of contempt towards other Jews. Just before Rosh Hashanah this year the Agudah, one of the religious parties in Israel and the group most identified with the Torah True phenomenon, published a rabbinical diktat to the effect that no one should worship in a Conservative congregation because God doesn't hear the prayers of Conservative Jews. Shades of Reverand Smith, but it was the Council of Torah Sages not a Bible-Belt minister who spoke this They didn't mention Reform. aren't even considered Jews.

A word about our own attitudes. The Torah True play up the idea that non-traditional Jews live as they do because they are weak and uncaring. They play on the idea that there is only one way to be a Jew - their way; and unfortunately many of us unthinkingly accept this argument even if this opinion doesn't force us to change our ways. It's time we accept the truth that liberal Judaism is a wholly legitimate modulation of our tradition as legitimate a modulation as rabbinic Judaism, which significantly reshaped the Biblical tradition. Yes, some Reform Jews became Reform Jews and some Conservative Jews became Conservation Jews because the many rules put unwanted limits on their lives, but many others became liberal Jews in order to revive the prophetic spirit of our past because they felt that the limited curriculum of many Yeshivot denied the modern Jew learning which a modern should master; and because they felt that the halachic norms were life restrictive rather than life enhancing in the changed

conditions of modern life. Whether they and we made the right decision or not is not the crux of the issue. The issue is that any religious tradition remains dynamic only as long as it is alive. Change has always been of the essence. Moses never knew most of the rules rabbinic Judaism affirms as essentially Jewish. Moses never met a rabbi of any persuasion. Moses never entered a synagogue. Moses never saw a Sefer Torah. If I took him to our ark and opened a Torah scroll he couldn't read it. His Hebrew was written in a different script. Moses was a Biblical Jew. Mainonides was a rabbinic Jew. Daniel Silver is a Reform Jew. And we are all good Jews. Yet on innumerable occasions I've visited with you and I've heard you say of some fine loyal member of The Temple: he was a good person, but he wasn't pious. He was pious by his standards and ours, and they are legitimate standards.

Recently we have brought into being in Cleveland a Congregational Plenum consisting of the senior rabbis and presidents of all our congregations. I'm very proud of this group which is the only group of its kind in the country and I've worked hard to give it strength. We have been able to establish it because there are Reform rabbis like myself who recognize the intellectural integrity of modern Orthodoxy and because there are Orthodox rabbis who are willing to see Daniel Silver as something other than an Epikoros. Last week we sponsored a meeting of young leaders from all the congregations. Our aim was to provide a forum which would allow religious Jews of all kinds to meet as religious Jews. During the discussion many among the young people wanted to define who is a good Jew. Implicit in that thrust was the assumption that a good Jew is my kind of Jew. I tried to say to them that only God can know whether we are good Jews or bad Jews. Whether we took the right way or the the wrong way. What we must decide is what kind of Judaism fits us, whether it's a way through which we can grow, whether we are serious about the commitments we talk about.

Definitions create division. That's the problem with the attempt to reformulate Law of Return in Israel. There are only twelve or thirteen million Jews in a world of four billion people. A little community like ours which is struggling to survive cannot afford the luxury of disqualifying anyone who doesn't agree with our peculiar ideas.

A final paradox and with this I close. The group in Israel which is sponsoring Torah Trueism is called the Agudah. The Agudah community developed in Eastern Europe and consists largely of Hasidic traditionalists who fought against the establishment of the state of Israel on the claim that only the Messiah was to establish the state. They still care little about the state. That's why the youngster on the bus payed no attention to a no-smoking sign. That's why their youngsters do not serve in the military and have never agreed to serve in non-military functions. What we have is an anti-Zionist group dictating policy to the state of Israel.

It shouldn't be this way.

Daniel Jeremy Silver

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DURING THE PAST few weeks, israeli society has witnessed a secretive and sinister attempt by certain political forces in Israel to form a government that would allegedly further religious interests

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Nevertheless, because of the current behaviour of the rabbinate and other political power groups, the majority of Israelis are more convinced than ever that Judaism in Israel is an instrument with which to strike backroom political deals rather than a prophetic call to intense love of God and moral integrity.

Judaism has thus been disgraced in the eyes of the community by its so-called religious leadership. Instead of bringing the message of Judaism freely and openly into the marketplace of Jewish life, it has turned. Tora into an object of political agreements between ministers in the Israeli government and so-called religious sectors of the community, who believe that love for Tora demands detachment from community,

Whereas the Tora teaches us that the greatest commandment is study and reflection and that only through learning can one develop love of God, our government believes that through political pressure we will bring Judaism to the Jewish people.

There is a feeling of shame among people genuinely committed to

# The political path to observance

David Hartman, an Orthodox Rabbi, says that people genuinely committed to Judaism are embarrassed by the way religion 'has been vulgarized and exploited by political pressure groups.'

Judaism. They are embarrassed by the way Judaism has been vulgarized and exploited by political pressure groups. The secular forces in Israel must be gloating with joy at the triumph of secularism in Israel.

Thanks to the coalition discussions and agreements, another great wall has been established between God's word and the people of Israel. Once again the name of God has been disgraced in the public marketplaces of Jewish life.

The way we have dealt with the problem of conversion illustrates this ugly process.

I DO NOT question the importance of making conversion an act expressive of Jewish values. I fully appreciate the need for a greater understanding of why the covenantal values of Judaism embodied in the Halacha should serve as a condition for serious conversion. The concept of conversion acts as an anti-racist principle in Judaism. The possibility of giyur shows that membership in

the Jewish people is not dependent upon such secular factors as language and nationality. One is Jewish not because of blood or soil but because of one's convictions.

While I feel the force of the pathes of Chief Rabbi Enterno Goren's with giver according to transcha, I am repelled by the concrete political form this pathos takes.

It is not through coalition agreements that we must convince Jews that giver should be according to Halana but rather through the patient rocess of checation in community centres, synagogues and educational frameworks throughout the Jewish world.

The spiritual renewal of the Jewish people will not be furthered by political pressures on Prime Minister Menachem Begin but only through a massive educational project to speak to the whole Jewish world on the meaning of Jewish identity in the modern world.

Nothing changes in the hearts of

people through coalition agreements. On the contrary, such agreements promote estrangement and alienation from Judaism. Judaism is committed to, and believes in, the education of a people to embrace its values. Otherwise the rabbis would not have stated categorically that the learning of Tora is the greatest commandment.

We are a community constituted by practice and not simply by faith. God seeks to be revealed in the total way of life of community. And this ideal is only realizable if the community understands and shares the god and aspirations of Judaism.

when Israel could serve as the source of spiritual renewal, when Israel could mirror Judaism as a way of life that embodies the sanctifying power of Toward mitzvot. Instead of its providing a manework for kiddush ha'shem, sanctification of God, it continues to promote the secularization of Jewish consciousness and the alienation of the Jewish people from its spiritual roots.

Judaism will become a living reality in Israel only when we regain faith in the power of the educational process. The Knesset and the wielding of political power cannot be substitutes for the patient spiritual processes of learning.

The strength of Judaism throughout its history was contained in our people's firm belief in the capacity to learn, understand and thus internalize the values of Judaism. Attempts at forcibly bringing Judaism to the community

through backroom politition agreements are no inblatant indications of of faith in the power of Toral hearts of our people back

ONE CANNOT at the believe in the eternal sign Tora yet be unwilling to inherent power to influe who know it. Those who mitted to Judaism must crude dealings of the pre government — a governmay contribute to the a of the Jewish people by utter lack of faith in the Tora to inspire a people respect and mutual undamong people.

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Dr. Hariman is the di Shalom Hariman Institu ced Jewish Studies and Jewish philosophy at University. Rythe may reclaim themen prossure i have relieured and current security and come and

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