

## Abba Hillel Silver: A Personal Memoir

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My first recollection of Abba Hillel Silver goes back to the age of sixteen. I had gone with my father, who had heard about his oratorical prowess and admired the skill, to hear him preach. My impression of that morning, even though I heard him innumerable times thereafter, is vivid and indelible. The tall, lean, gaunt figure in the cutaway coat — he never permitted himself or me to wear any other apparel in the pulpit or on ceremonial occasions — the dark eyes on fire with passionate conviction, occasionally tightly closed as though peering intently inward, the arms outstretched, the long talon-like but beautifully molded fingers seeming to encompass the entire audience which sat tense and utterly silent for fear of breaking the hypnotic mood, the incomparably beautiful voice gliding over the tonal range: It seemed to me as though the ancient prophet of Tekoa had been reincarnated before my very eyes. The awe of that moment has never really left me.

I was then beginning my first year at Western Reserve University in Cleveland, lukewarmly intending to study law in the absence of any real, convinced choice of profession, but unable to shake off the suggestion planted in my mind a few years earlier by my mother that I consider the rabbinate. That Sunday morning probably decided me. My family had in the meantime joined the Temple. My father, no more than I, could resist the spell of that young — although he never really seemed young — overpowering personality. He suggested that I solicit Rabbi Silver's advice. Neither of us had ever even heard of the Hebrew Union College.

Rabbi Silver — I have never been able to bring myself to address him or even think of him in more familiar terms — neither encouraged nor discouraged me. In retrospect, it occurs to me that, having been in the ministry barely four years, he was hardly in a position,

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or perhaps he did not want, to give such crucial and definitive advice. His attitude was that if I was determined to prepare for the rabbinate — the decision had to be exclusively mine — he would help and guide me. He recommended a Hebrew teacher, suggested that I take some courses in Jewish history being offered by his friend and neighbor, the Conservative Rabbi Solomon Goldman, with whom there would later be an irreparable and regrettable break, and offered to place at my disposal the annual Temple Sisterhood scholarship. Without this financial help, I could not even have entertained the idea of going out of town to school.

The following September, 1920, at the age of seventeen and in my Sophomore university year, I entered the Hebrew Union College. I was the first of a long series of rabbinical candidates whom Silver sponsored. Probably no other rabbi sponsored as many. My contacts with him during my student years were quite regular, and — as far as that was possible with this, to me, awesome, silently strong, and not always outgoing man — fairly intimate. During midyear and Passover vacations, I would lunch with him at least once or twice. These meetings followed a set and rather curious pattern. There would be a few laconic inquiries about the progress of my studies. He would then unfold a newspaper, often one of the daily Yiddish papers then being published and of which he was a regular and careful reader, and generally leave me to my food and our separate thoughts. He almost seemed to take a special kind of delight in flaunting that esoteric Yiddish type before the gaze of the non-Jewish diners around us. It seemed to be a kind of symbolic act expressive of his fierce Jewish pride. I soon got used to this procedure — I suppose indulging my own pride in being in the company of this already prominent public figure — and so I did not feel neglected. There was always a sort of unspoken communion between us, at least I liked to think so, which did not require much verbal communication. During the summer months, when he was often abroad with his family, I conducted Sabbath services and officiated at funerals. I dared to hope, and I was not wrong, that this was my preparation for my later association with him in the rabbinate of the Cleveland Temple.

During Passover of my Senior year, I was summoned to a

luncheon meeting with him and four or five members of the Temple board. I suspected the reason for the occasion, but I could not be certain, since I had not been informed. There was some informal conversation, not too much of it relevant to the purpose at hand. The meeting, so far as I could tell, was largely devoted to eating, and he did not let much interfere with that pleasure, but when it broke up and we found ourselves on the sidewalk outside, Rabbi Silver turned to me, proffered his hand, and congratulated me upon just having been elected his assistant. I was, if one can describe it that way, pleasantly and excitedly taken aback and mumbled something probably incoherent in response. I had been through an experience which was to become typical of our lifetime relationship and certainly characteristic of Abba Hillel Silver. He had not consulted my wishes in the matter. He had assumed, correctly, of course, that I wanted to be his assistant. Nor, as far as I could gather, had there been any lengthy consultation with the board. I was to be his first assistant. He simply told them that I was his choice. The rest was formality. Their function was to get acquainted with me, not to approve of me.

I dwell upon this episode because it is somewhat revelatory of his attitude toward the laymen of his congregation. He was often accused of being arrogant and high-handed with them. I think this is an oversimplification. Once having made up his mind, he had supreme confidence in his own judgment, particularly in the areas of Jewish life where he considered himself the expert and, therefore, the authority. He was the leader, laymen were the followers, and where he believed a principle was at stake, he seldom brooked opposition. That was likewise later true of his relationship with his peers in the rabbinate and in the political arena of the Zionist movement. He feared no man and no opponent, no matter how highly placed. When his eyes flashed anger and his voice seethed with indignation, the opposition generally wilted and faded away. It was only in the Zionist world, where the views of others were equally dogged and the tactics were rough, that he was not always, although remarkably often, the winner. He did not know how to compromise with or to conciliate his opponents. This may have been a weakness, for his adversaries often became his enemies, determined at the

opportune moment to strike back. This was the case with Stephen S. Wise, Chaim Weizmann, David Ben Gurion, and Nahum Goldmann. Whether it was a public weakness, history will have to judge. He was far more frequently than not vindicated by events. His talent for making enemies was, of course, the reason why he failed to achieve his ambition to become the formally elected leader of World Zionism. After a short period of frustration, he was quite able to adjust himself. He had no obsession about office holding. If official honors came to him, he accepted them as his due. If not, that was that. He wasted very little time brooding. Though a very complex person in many ways, he was in this way, as Mrs. Silver once commented, a very simple and uncomplicated man. But we are getting a bit ahead of the story.

#### A SPIRIT TO ABSORB

I served with Rabbi Silver at the Cleveland Temple from June, 1927, until January, 1935. While there was no real practical difference in my status, he insisted that I bear the title Minister of Religious Education; he suggested that, in view of my youth — I was twenty-four — this would give me an added aura of authority with the faculty and supervisors, most of whom were older. He apparently later changed his mind about this, because none of my successors bore the title. He also insisted that I must have an automobile, and since I did not have the money with which to purchase one, he loaned me three hundred dollars for which he later refused repayment, brushing me off with the remark that he did not recollect the loan. The car was a used Chevrolet, and I have fond memories of that automobile with its defective, whistling clutch. I courted my wife in it, and when he officiated at our wedding in 1929 during my second year with him, he was visibly pleased with my choice. He had confirmed her, therefore he approved of her, and a kind of camaraderie grew up between them. One of her ways to his affections was through her ability to cook and to consume potato pancakes, and between them they were able to make unbelievable quantities disappear. He was a gargantuan eater, and at midnight after an emotion-packed address or a tension-filled meeting he could

and did frequently sit down to a full meal without any untoward result or any ill effect on his sleep. This ability to relax almost instantaneously accounts for the amazing and almost profligate way in which he could discharge energy in speaking, working, and traveling, especially during the crucial years of the Zionist struggle for the establishment of the Jewish State. He paid a price, of course, in the illness of his last few years and in his sudden and unexpected death. But in those earlier years he often teased me about my more delicate digestion. It was a favorite joke of his that “they don’t make rabbis like him anymore.” Do they? I doubt it. He had a robust sense of humor to match his appetite, and was especially fond of Jewish dialect and Yiddish stories, often bursting into second and third rounds of laughter which convulsively shook his large frame.

As I have already indicated, he was exceedingly generous in financial matters. He could not resist a bearded *shliach* or a Hebrew book vendor. He had the means and never spared them. This may have been a kind of defiant reaction to a poverty-ridden boyhood on the East Side of New York and virtually penniless years as a student. He was always a lavish tipper. His contributions to charity were unusually large. He and his family lived very comfortably and took almost yearly trips to Europe or Palestine, later Israel. He must have made during his lifetime at least twoscore visits to the Holy Land, and a trip there always seemed to reinvigorate his strength and refresh his spirit. Travel generally was a source of intellectual replenishment for him and a means for satisfying his avid curiosity about history and other lands. Some of his best sermons drew their material from the observations and impressions he garnered on these trips.

I spent nearly eight years at The Temple. The length of my service was not unusual, though it may seem so in these days of two- and three-year apprenticeships. This was the average tenure for Silver’s assistants. It will not be easy, but I must try to telescope my recollection of those years into a few vivid impressions of the remarkable and also in ways strange personality with whom I had become associated during the formative years of my professional life. His influence over me was, and over the years would increasingly

become, deep and pervasive, conscious and subconscious. My views about Jewish life, about human problems generally, my philosophy of the rabbinate, my reactions to people and events, were immutably fixed during those years. I am aware now that my days at the College had simply been a prelude to this period of my real training for the rabbinate. There was very little that was planned or formal about my learning. Rabbi Silver never had enough spare time for that. The experience was for me rather a kind of sustained mood, an intellectual environment, a spirit that I was expected to absorb. It consisted largely of listening, observing, learning what to do or to refrain from doing and when. Whatever tasks were assigned to me had to be executed as nearly perfectly as possible. He was very intolerant of mistakes or errors of judgment. Youth and inexperience were no excuse. Even so seemingly trivial a matter as a misprint in the weekly bulletin which I edited could arouse in him a Jovian and to me fearsome wrath. I am told that as the years and assistants wore on, he grew more amiable about his colleagues' shortcomings. I was like the oldest son who paves the way for his brothers.

#### STARCHED COLLARS AND BLACK TIES

This is probably the place to dispose of a myth about Silver which I have frequently run across, that he really did not care much about his rabbinical vocation or his congregation, but merely exploited them as bases from which to pursue his career as platform orator, public personality, and Zionist leader. There could be no greater distortion of the truth. Every Sabbath morning when the upper grades of the Religious School were in session — on Sundays he was in the pulpit — and prior to the Sabbath morning service, he would visit classrooms and after the service would present me with a list of critical notes about teachers, texts, classroom methods, and even the temperature in the rooms. He believed profoundly in Jewish education, with considerable emphasis upon the Hebrew language, as the chief instrumentality of Jewish survival. He was an advocate of straight, forceful, well-informed teaching and business-like learning, a program which he personally applied to his own sons who, during the year as well as during their summer vacations, had

to spend a number of hours daily studying Hebrew sources. He had nothing but contempt for “projects” and playmethod pedagogy, and the currently popular proposition that the school was a place for “pleasant Jewish experience” often aroused his ireful scorn.

Every program of every Temple organization, adult or youth, was carefully scrutinized and had to have clear relevance to what he considered the main business of a synagogue — the teaching of Jewish values and their applicability to current issues. He was uncompromisingly opposed to the institutional or synagogue center philosophy. Activities for their own sake or for their “folk” value had no appeal for him. He might be said to have been at the opposite end of the spectrum from the Reconstructionists. Because of his intense Jewish nationalism, he was certainly not a “classical” Reformer. Nevertheless, he shared with that school the conviction that Judaism as a religio-ethical way of thinking and living was the central fact of human existence, superior to all other religious and philosophic systems. Rational and pragmatic about most matters, he possessed more than a touch of mystical passion about this view and about his God faith. Even his Zionism must be viewed in this light, as a perusal of his writings and addresses will clearly reveal. It was the incarnation of the Messianic drive of the people of Israel, rooted in a long past of racial experience and dreaming, for spiritual hegemony in the world.

He exercised the same scrupulous care with regard to the selection of congregational personnel to man the boards and committees of The Temple, Brotherhood, and Sisterhood, as he did about activities and programs. No matter how occupied he might be with larger and more urgent affairs, he took a personal hand in their choice. Ability, popular following, tested loyalty to the institution and the effort to maintain family continuity in the congregation were the chief criteria. It might be said with some justification, although not altogether, for Jews are not that easily regimented, that these people simply served as rubber stamps for Silver policies. On the other side of the coin, the result clearly was a congregation and a program functioning with an unusual degree of smoothness, efficiency, and cooperation, with a minimum of internal bickering and politicking, and with all eyes focussed on the main objectives. There

was no question, of course, as to who was the boss of the total operation: the rabbi. It has been said of Silver that to him people were secondary to causes. In a sense this is true. I myself heard him on several occasions paraphrase that sentiment. It was not that he was lacking in the softer human emotions and sympathies. That would be a grave misjudgment, as I have personal cause to know. But he had sternly disciplined himself to maintain outer calm and composure — inwardly he was as tensely wound as a watchspring — and the ability to reason logically and carefully to face the many crises and emergencies of his public life. He believed firmly that people, especially Jews — and he was his own hardest taskmaster — were put upon earth to serve great causes and to achieve noble goals and that, therefore, they had to be prepared to face and to endure whatever exigencies or hardships ensued. He expected this kind of service of me and of his other associates. I think the secret of his influence over us, the reason for the lengthy terms we remained with him, is to be found in the fact that he exacted nothing of us by way of work that he did not expect of himself, sometimes manyfold. Not one of his assistants ever worked as hard as the senior rabbi.

I learned a great deal about preaching from him. Yet I cannot recall that he ever reviewed in detail the contents of a sermon with me. Just a suggestion here and there, mainly his theory that during the first five years of preaching sermons should be carefully written out and memorized. The vocabulary thus acquired, he contended, would provide the flexibility that would enable one to become emancipated from the written manuscript, to speak from notes or outline. The technique has worked, at least for me. He himself took sheaves of notes into the pulpit or onto the platform, but so great was his mastery of words, of timing, of dramatic pause, of voice inflection, that the audience was rarely, if ever, conscious of their presence. I even heard him read addresses or papers, at the rabbinical conferences, for example, so effectively that he could make his hearers forget that he was doing so. He was neither particularly critical of my preaching nor offered any special commendation. He always took my achievements, whatever they may have been, more or less for granted. I do not remember receiving a note of congratulation from him when I was elected vice-president of the Central

Conference of American Rabbis. I think that he just assumed I would be elected, and that he would have been surprised, if not disappointed, had I not been.

He was very insistent that religious services should be conducted with the proper dignity and solemnity, that rituals like confirmation should be executed as perfectly and impressively as possible. To this day I follow the habit, acquired from him, of drilling confirmation classes until they have reached the peak of mastery. He often said it was much better to work to avoid slipups and to worry about them ahead of time than to regret them later. Generally his view was that it was not new liturgies we needed, but the reading of prayers in the kind of earnest and exalting way that could not help but uplift the mood of the worshippers. He himself conducted every service as though it were fresh, revelatory, almost with a Hasidic touch of intensity — with *kavvanah*, which was one of his favorite words. He constantly urged me to read, to study, and to write. It was during my service in Cleveland that I collaborated on the preparation of a confirmation manual and a two-volume anthology of post-biblical literature, begun as experimental texts in our school. I was forced to acquire the habit of painstaking attention to detail. He simply would not endure sloppiness or shoddiness in work, in personal appearance, or even in the condition of the Temple building. He had a strong sense of the dignity of the pulpit. He insisted on the same formal attire in the pulpit, for weddings, and for funerals: cutaway, striped trousers, starched collar, and black tie. It is not an apocryphal story that in an effort to introduce some variety into his dress, his wife once asked a haberdasher for the “loudest” black ties in his stock. He once looked rather crossly askance at me because I went into the pulpit with a black and white patterned tie. His devotion to his rabbinical duties set a pattern for me which I have not always been able to emulate, but which, when I have failed, has always given me a severe case of bad conscience. He often preached with a high temperature, being subject to frequent bouts of colds and sore throat. During the hectic period of the 1940's, when he was leading the Zionist campaign for American support and was compelled to spend nearly every week from Monday to Thursday in New York and Washington, he insisted upon being home except in

emergencies every weekend, to meet with his confirmation class which he disliked missing, and to occupy his pulpit on Sunday mornings. I wondered then how he stood up under the strain. I know now what the cost was. I have often been amused by the disbelieving reaction of colleagues when I would tell them that it was his weekly custom to inspect the Temple building from furnace room to dome, and God help the staff if everything was not in place and spic-and-span.

#### PRIMUS INTER PARES

One of the difficulties — perhaps the only unpleasant aspect — of my stay in Cleveland was the strained situation which existed between him and some of his local rabbinical colleagues, first Solomon Goldman and then Barnett R. Brickner. I sometimes found myself in the middle, because I liked both of them. I thought that he was at times unnecessarily unyielding and stubborn in both of those situations, and sometimes I even summoned up enough nerve to say so. As is always the case in these tangled, personal rivalries and relationships, it is impossible to assess any share of the blame one way or the other. Part of it was certainly due to the psychological difficulty with which a rabbi who is himself quite capable struggles when he finds himself in the same community with an outstanding personality like Silver whom he cannot hope to overtake in popular esteem and prominence. So he falls victim to the temptation to indulge in acts of petty jealousy and backbiting. As a completely overshadowed assistant, I could be sympathetic at times — but not always. They should have reconciled themselves to the fact that in his generation he was *primus inter pares*. Perhaps he should have been more generous in his understanding of them.

I do not believe that I would ever have known whether my service during those years had been satisfactory to him. I was confident that there was a basic understanding and affection between us, but I was never really certain how he felt until the night of the farewell dinner tendered me by the Temple Brotherhood. During his address he was clearly swallowing a few lumps, and one or two tears trickled down his cheeks. When the tender of the pulpit of Colling-

wood Avenue Temple in Toledo, to which he had recommended me without my knowledge, had come and I solicited his advice, his response was that it would be much more convenient for him if I remained, but that, on the other hand, he felt that it would be much better for me to accept, that the time had come for me to strike out on my own. When I told him that some of my friends, including members of the College faculty, had advised me against accepting because that congregation had a rather poor reputation, his characteristic reply was: "There are neither good nor poor congregations. Jews are the same everywhere. There are only good or poor leaders."

In January, 1935, he installed me as rabbi of Collingwood Avenue Temple. Thereafter he was with me and I with him on virtually every important milestone in our professional lives. Our families spent several summer vacations together in a rustic camp in Maine to which he was very fond of going when he did not go abroad. There he could relax and become informal enough even to wear a soft-collar shirt. He enjoyed walking, swimming, card playing in the evening, and most especially fishing. He loved to boast of his prowess as an angler. Outdoor picnics were a regular feature, and he always insisted that our wives forage for the makings of potato pancakes. Our guide became an expert in Jewish cookery. A regular part of each day was spent in perusing the daily press, study, writing, and his sons' Hebrew lessons. The kindling of the Sabbath lights and the recitation of the Kiddush were always observed by our two families in the Silver cabin before we went to the public dining room.

In 1943, he assumed the chairmanship, during the most dreadful and dangerous period of modern Jewish history, of the American Zionist Emergency Council, the action arm of the various cooperating Zionist organizations and groups in the United States. He was to lead the effort to win American support for the abolition of the British White Paper of 1939 and then for the establishment of a Jewish Commonwealth in Palestine. This was to be the climactic and, both physically and emotionally, the most desperately difficult period of his life and Jewish leadership. I do not propose to go into any detailed recital or analysis of the events of those years, except

perhaps as a different perspective may be cast upon them, for some curious twisting and rewriting of history have emanated in connection with them from certain quarters. How he swung the temporarily assembled American Jewish Conference to the support of the aim of Jewish political independence, despite the opposition of the leaders of the American Jewish Committee and others, is a matter of record. His forthright public criticism of the Roosevelt Administration for its inaction in the face of the European Jewish tragedy is also clearly on the record. He did not altogether trust Franklin D. Roosevelt's public professions of support for the Zionist movement, and said so publicly. The recent publication of State Department papers dealing with the Roosevelt-Ibn Saud consultations amply justifies the position which he took. He was severely critical of Zionist leaders, whom he described as being in the pockets of Tammany Hall and the Democratic Party. He made strenuous and successful efforts to cement personal friendships and to win political, nonpartisan support from both political parties. This gave rise to another Silver myth, the amusing notion that he had become a Republican conservative because he opposed the third-term candidacy of Roosevelt to support Wendell L. Willkie and later endorsed Dwight D. Eisenhower. This is indeed an ironic and very wide of the mark estimate of a man who had voted for Norman Thomas, Robert M. LaFollette, Alfred E. Smith, and Roosevelt himself for two terms; who throughout his life had been an advocate of radical social and economic reforms, and in the last years of his life was even charged with being pro-Soviet. In this struggle for Jewish statehood, Silver also strongly opposed as futile the conventional, *shtadlanut*, back door approach of Jewish leadership, and argued for and succeeded in developing mass Jewish pressure upon the United States Government. That this could be done in war time was, to put it mildly, phenomenal. Newspapermen and political figures in Washington were unable to contain their astonishment at the effectiveness of it.

#### PUT NOT YOUR TRUST IN PRINCES

The plight of European Jewry and the desperate urgency for opening the gates of Palestine brought Silver and me back into intimate daily association. He requested the board of my temple to

grant me a year's leave of absence, so that I could become the Washington representative of the American Zionist Emergency Council. He spent part of every week with me, in Washington, discussing the Jewish situation with leaders of the Executive and Legislative branches of the government, the press, and other influential personalities and directing there and in New York the strategy of the campaign by which he hoped to mobilize American public and official support for combatting the British White Paper and for a Jewish State. We organized branches of the American Zionist Emergency Council in scores of American cities and towns, concentrating on larger urban centers where there were substantial numbers of Jewish voters with whom senators and representatives running for election had to reckon. Then we arranged to have bipartisan resolutions proclaiming American sponsorship for the objective of the establishment of a Palestine Jewish Commonwealth introduced in both the Senate and the House. Our local councils were charged with the task of organizing their Jewish communities and of obtaining help and moral support for our cause from non-Jewish sources — the press, civic and church groups, and academic circles. To aid in this general effort, we sponsored nationally, with numerous local chapters, an organization known as the American Christian Palestine Committee.

I went to Washington in the fall of 1943. My job was to interview, to solicit, and to organize the support of senators and congressmen, to pave the way for interviews by Silver of the more influential Congressional and governmental leaders, to arrange for local deputations to come to Washington to speak with their representatives, and, along with my colleagues in the Emergency Council who were operating out of our New York office, to stimulate the sending of messages from local communities to the national capital. I also arranged for the presentation of our case before the Foreign Relations Committee of the Senate and the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House.\*

\* Parenthetically, I should like to make at least this passing reference in gratitude to the enormous assistance which we received from the late Senator Robert A. Taft, whose contribution to the Zionist cause has been unjustly obscured and should someday in all fairness be brought to historical light.

It was during this year and those which followed that I really had an opportunity to gauge Silver's ability as a popular leader. His single-minded devotion to the task is simply indescribable. He traveled constantly, addressed literally hundreds of meetings, interviewed scores of prominent personages, and fought like a tiger to make the cause and his judgment of events prevail. His political acumen and sense of timing were faultless. Again and again things happened and people reacted as he said they would. Not only his sweeping eloquence, but the sheer logic and cogency of his arguments, as well as his mastery of the facts, were irresistible. I recall particularly his appearance to testify before the Foreign Relations Committee of the Senate. The impressive figure, the compelling voice, the earnest argument, the verbalizing of the desperate plight of the Jewish people, held that group utterly spellbound for more than an hour. Afterwards, senators from all over the country, in agreement or not, crowded around to congratulate him on his presentation. Nevertheless, the Resolution was tabled for the time being. Testifying both to the efficacy of our organized efforts and the loyal response of American Jewry, both that year and in 1946 when the Joint Resolution was finally passed, hundreds of thousands of messages poured into the mailrooms of congressmen. One Washington reporter told me that he had never seen a more efficiently organized lobby in operation. Responding to the urging of the British Government, Army Chief of Staff George C. Marshall took the unprecedented step of going up on the hill to request that the Palestine resolution be tabled. His argument was that it would cause an Arab uprising which would hamper the war effort. Using personal pressure, President Roosevelt persuaded several New York Zionist leaders to come personally to Washington and to testify before the Foreign Relations Committee that they did not think it would matter too much if the Resolution was postponed for a time. I do not believe that I have ever seen Silver so agitated as on that day. He paced back and forth, complexion white, teeth clenched, lips pale and trembling. He literally regarded them as traitors to the cause. My own reaction was akin to that which I had felt some weeks previously, when hearings of the House Foreign Affairs Committee were in progress, on seeing American Arabs and spokesmen for the American Council for Judaism in whispered consulta-



*Courtesy, Rabbi Daniel J. Silver, The Temple, Cleveland, Ohio*

Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver  
Presenting the case for a homeland for the Jews in Palestine  
before the United Nations, 1947  
(see p. 124)



President Harry S. Truman and Frank L. Weil  
President Truman recognized the State of Israel on May 14, 1948

(see p. 125)

tion. The Resolution was passed about a year and a half later after the exertion of considerably more political pressure during the next Congressional elections of 1946 and the influx of a phenomenal number of additional messages both from Jews and from non-Jews. Except for the intervention of the Executive Branch, there can be little doubt that it would have passed the first time around.

Silver was now convinced that there had to be a showdown on policy and leadership, and that the only way to achieve it was to capture direct control of the largest of the Zionist bodies, the Zionist Organization of America. He resigned his chairmanship of the American Zionist Emergency Council to campaign for the presidency of the Z. O. A. Emanuel Neumann, his lifelong friend and in those days his second-in-command; Harold Manson and Harry Shapiro, who had been officials of the Emergency Council; and I managed the campaign, visiting Zionist districts and debating the opposition verbally and in the Jewish press. Silver was overwhelmingly victorious at the Zionist Convention of 1945. The Jewish masses demonstrated that they were with him and supported his policy of popular political expression and action. "Put not your trust in princes," was the rallying slogan. The opposition literally melted away. We were now preparing to go to the Zionist Congress in Basle where, in 1946, the battle was to be joined on a larger front. The issue again was whether to engage in militant, public agitation on a worldwide scale including Palestine or to follow the Weizmann policy of reposing confidence in Winston S. Churchill's promises and in the good faith of the British Government; whether to attempt to achieve a united front of the Haganah, the Irgun, and other groups which were conducting the struggle for independence and for a Palestine open to hundreds of thousands of Jewish refugees, or to follow Weizmann's advice to placate the British by condemning the "terrorists." Silver led the Z. O. A. delegation, and I was acting in the capacity of delegation whip. What transpired at the Congress is history. In a superlative address, he castigated British policy, scored Weizmann's reliance on British friendship, and pleaded with the Congress not to denounce the militants, whom he characterized as Jewish patriots. Repudiated by the Congress vote against him, Weizmann had no choice but to withdraw from the presidency.

Silver emerged as chairman of the American Section of the Jewish Agency. He was now the undisputed leader of American Zionism and one of the most powerful Zionist leaders, perhaps the most powerful, in the world. The climactic hour of his career came with his dramatic and unforgettable presentation of the case for the Jewish State before the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1947, and then the two-thirds majority vote by which the Assembly adopted the report of its Palestine Commission setting up Jewish and Arab States. It was just prior to and following this epochal event that Silver made one of his few errors in political judgment and tactics. After his victories in the United States and at the Zionist Congress, he could have placed his supporters in every key Zionist position in this country. We who were his advisers strongly urged him to do so. We knew that David Ben Gurion, who had emerged after independence as the head of the government in Israel, feared that, if Silver became the president of the World Zionist Organization, he might decide to settle in Israel and become a dangerous political rival. Whether such an ambition was ever in Silver's mind is unknown, at least to me. My own guess is that he was quite ambivalent about it. At any rate, Silver decided to conciliate his erstwhile opponents by supporting them for a number of crucial leadership posts. The complicated details of the manoeuvring which followed need not be recounted. Using his American supporters, still smarting from their previous defeats, Ben Gurion took advantage of the earliest opportunity on a difference of policy to see to it that Silver was outvoted and thus forced from public Zionist leadership. I was with him on the night of that vote, taking the train back to Cleveland with him. He said very little. He was too stunned and unbelieving of what had happened so suddenly. I had an instinctive feeling that he was also in some measure relieved. The difficult decision about the future course of his life had been taken out of his hands.

#### THE FINAL YEARS

In the meantime, of course, the State of Israel had been proclaimed and established in 1948 and the War of Independence fought and won. This is as good a place as any to dispose of a legend assidu-

ously cultivated by Silver's opponents, by President Harry S. Truman whom it suited, and by the B'nai B'rith which benefited from the public relations angle, namely, that it was B'nai B'rith member and haberdasher Eddie Jacobson's friendship with the President which caused him to defy the opposition of the State Department and to recognize Israel on the day of its proclamation as a state. Those kinds of political gestures simply do not take place. This was no miracle stemming from the coincidence that a man from Missouri named Truman happened to be President and his erstwhile partner and friend, Jacobson, happened to be a Zionist. What occurred was more prosaic but far more in line with the political realities. Truman was a candidate for President. He knew that the election of 1948 would be, as it was, uncomfortably close. He suspected that the Jewish vote in the populous states would be crucial. He knew all about, and as a politician respected, even if he was often visibly annoyed by, the pressure of the tremendously effective and responsive nationwide organization which Silver had created. He had an opportunity, by recognizing Israel, to make a grab for those votes, State Department or not. He saw his main chance and he took it. It was as simple and natural as that.

Silver settled back in Cleveland, as I had two or three years earlier in Toledo, to be what he was born to be, a rabbi. He wanted to write, and produced several fine books. Although no longer holding office, he was still the most prestigious Zionist personality in the country. He attended Zionist conventions and was carefully consulted on policy and leadership. Whether he hoped for a comeback and whether this was behind his constant urging of me to become a candidate for the presidency of the Z. O. A., I cannot tell. This counsel he kept to himself. He visited Israel frequently, and was immensely heartened by her remarkable growth and achievement. Relations between him and the prime minister, Ben Gurion, at first cold and hostile, later became more formally correct, and in the last years of Silver's life there was something of a reconciliation between them. Because of his known friendship with President Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, his services were often utilized, especially during the Suez crisis, by the Israeli Government and its embassy in Washington.

During the final years of his life, he traveled widely, wrote constantly, continued his studies in the Hebrew books which he loved so much, and enjoyed his family and the growing roster of his grandchildren. The last large project in which he engaged, significantly, was the expansion of the physical facilities of The Temple. He was especially interested in its lovely museum of Jewish art and antiquities. His formerly robust health and constitution had declined, unquestionably the price of the severe strain which he had placed upon them in the Zionist effort. He preached, but less frequently, and took a less active part in the administration of congregational activity, being content to leave this in the hands of his son Daniel, who had now joined him in the rabbinate of The Temple and in whose maturing abilities he took great pride. In January, 1962, I represented the Central Conference of American Rabbis on the occasion of the seventieth birthday tribute tendered him by the congregation and the Cleveland community. It was a remarkable outpouring of affection and esteem. An overflow congregation attended the Sunday morning service, and that evening the huge ballroom of the Cleveland Hotel was filled to capacity. As program chairman of the C. C. A. R., I also persuaded him to make what in my heart I felt would be his final appearance before that body which he had also served as president from 1945 to 1947. He was very reluctant, because public appearances were becoming a difficult chore for him as well as a severe drain on his emotional resources. The program was to take the form of a dialogue on the subject of their rabbinical careers between him and Solomon B. Freehof, his distinguished classmate and lifelong intimate friend. I believe that most of the large audience of rabbis who attended that evening at the Conference of 1963 in Philadelphia will recall it as an unforgettable experience. I last saw Rabbi Silver alive on Sukkoth of that year, when our grandchildren were consecrated, a service in which Daniel and he, my son and I, participated. On Thanksgiving Daniel called to tell me that his father had passed away. I recited the Kaddish at the graveside committal service, the final duty his first assistant was called upon to perform and the end of nearly half a century of association.