

More on Abba Hillel Silver

Cincinnati, February 6th, 1968

The Editor
American Jewish Archives

Dear Sir:

I ought not enter into any controversies. I think I still have much to do, and not enough time in which to do it.

But I find it difficult to pass over one passage in Leon Feuer's memoir on [Abba Hillel] Silver, in your November [1967] issue (page 116). Though the wording is careful in not implying that Silver was without blame, yet it leaves the impression that [Solomon] Goldman and [Barnett] Brickner, in their relation to Silver, were animated largely or primarily by jealousy. This I do not believe to be true. Nor does this rest upon conjecture. From Sol. Goldman I heard directly the reasons because of which he had come to feel he could not remain in Cleveland, and on many occasions, both from Brickner and from members of his official family, I was told the numerous causes and occasions for their feeling about Silver. A not inconsiderable list (headed, for example, by [Louis] Wolsey, Stephen S. Wise, Chet Aleph Friedland, and many others) could be drawn up of those who had the same kind of "jealousy" in regard to Silver. I shall not forget a remarkable occasion, during the Second World War, at the Zionist Emergency Council, of which Silver was then Chairman, when he was severely assailed by almost all his colleagues. In his long plea in defense, he came to a point when he conceded that almost all his life he had had real difficulty in "getting along with people."

Perhaps by this time, Leon Feuer regrets having let this passage creep into his memoir. Certainly, it is trite to say, he is fully entitled to his estimate of Silver as Jewish leader, rabbi, and man, and to have feelings of gratitude and admiration for him. But was it wise — or good — to exalt Silver by denigrating his colleagues?

At any rate, all of this belongs to the past. All three of them, Silver, and my friends, Goldman and Brickner, are now at the board of the *yeshivah shel ma'alah* ["Heavenly Academy"], under the refulgence of the *shekhinah*, "with none to make them afraid," and — it is to be hoped — without "jealousy."

JAMES G. HELLER

The above letter elicited the following reply:

Toledo, May 21, 1968

Director
American Jewish Archives

Dear Sir:

I am taking advantage of your kind offer to reply to the caveat by Rabbi James G. Heller on my article, "Abba Hillel Silver: A Personal Memoir."

There is no desire on my part to enter into a controversy with my friend, Rabbi Heller. As he himself suggests, these old unpleasanties might as well be forgotten. Nevertheless, this was not possible in my essay. There *were* relationships and controversies, and I was intimately involved in them. It would not have been quite frank of me not to refer to them and to describe them as they seemed to register in my memory. That is why I did not and cannot regret "having let this passage creep" into my memoir. I put it there, and I stand on it.

Incidentally, I was present at the session of the Zionist Emergency Council to which Rabbi Heller refers, and that is not quite how it was, or at least how I remember it. Rabbi Silver was not pleading a defense nor conceding anything. That would have been very unlike him. He was making it clear that in leading the Zionist cause he would not placate or appease anyone who was not as militant in its championship as he was, or who was seeking to make compromises that he thought disastrous. This could be described as stubborn and uncompromising, but that was Silver. You either admired or resented him. I admired him.

Sincerely yours

LEON I. FEUER

ISRAEL'S TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY

The editors of the AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES ask readers to bear it in mind that a file has been initiated at the Archives to document American Jewry's observance of Israel's twentieth anniversary. Material for this file — newspaper and magazine clippings, brochures, posters, organizational news releases, photographs, letters, etc. — will be very welcome.