

FROM THE SHEARITH ISRAEL ARCHIVES

The Shearith Israel Archives contain a treasure of documents going back to the early eighteenth century. The papers of Rabbi Dr. David de Sola Pool are an important collection within the Archives. Dr. Pool was associated with Shearith Israel for a period spanning sixty-three years, from 1907 until his death in December 1970.

The following material is drawn from the Pool Collection of the Shearith Israel Archives. It is primarily from Dr. Pool's correspondence relating to the Orthodox Union and the Rabbinical Council of America, and offers interesting insight into community matters during the 1930's and 1940's.

We thank Ms. Susan Tobin, Shearith Israel's archivist, for her assistance in gathering this material. It is published with the permission of the Board of Trustees of Shearith Israel.

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April 15, 1930

Rabbi Leo Jung, President
Rabbinical Council, U.O.J.C.A.
131 West 86th Street
New York City

MY DEAR DR. JUNG:

At the recent celebration of the Two Hundredth Anniversary of the Consecration of this Congregation's Synagogue on Mill Street, the President of our Congregation, Mr. Henry S. Hendricks, took occasion to urge the need for a reconvening of a Sanhedrin, to deal authoritatively from the point of view of Jewish Law with many of the practical questions which are arising in Jewish life.

This question of the Sanhedrin is constantly coming up. Some years ago, at the convention of the Orthodox Union, I brought up the matter, and a committee consisting of Dr. Drachman was appointed to negotiate with Rabbi Kook. I do not know whether anything came of Dr. Drachman's conversations with Rabbi Kook, but I do know that if there is the slightest possibility of a Sanhedrin assembling to deal, for example, with the question of Agunoth, and with the numerous other questions which are perplexing us, it would be a most desirable thing.

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I am therefore turning to you, as the head of the Rabbinical Council of the Orthodox Union, with the suggestion that the Rabbinical Council formally enter into written relations with Rabbi Kook, urging the convention of a world Sanhedrin.

Sincerely yours,
RABBI DAVID DE SOLA POOL

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April 26, 1936

Mr. William Weiss
President, Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations

MY DEAR MR. WEISS:

To my real regret I find myself unable to be with you at today's convention. May I therefore send you this word in connection with the main theme of the convention?

It is my mature conviction that the only Judaism which has a future in America is traditional (Orthodox) Judaism. Reform is by its very nature a progressive adaptation of Judaism to the non-Jewish standards of the environment. In its process of reforming, it has no logical stopping place, and its history in this country demonstrates that it has led eventually outside of Jewish life.

Conservatism, notwithstanding its name, is but the prelude to reform, the first step in that progressive adaptation of Judaism to the Christian standards of the environment.

Orthodoxy, on the other hand, has a definite and firm anchorage in the traditions of the Torah which prevent drift. These moorings give it clean, firm and definite historical character. It retains this character generation after generation without danger of deformation through a principle of progressive reforming away from its inherent character. It gives room for inner, organic development through a living *Torah Sheb'al Pe*—an altogether different thing from the surgical lopping off and abandonment of essentials of Judaism which have marked the self-styled liberal movements in Judaism.

The history of my own synagogue, Shearith Israel, is the best illustration of the truth of this thesis. Those of its members who in the past compromised with Jewish traditions have over the generations been lost to the Jewish community. But those who have held indeflectibly to the historical Judaism of the Torah are in their descendants still today active members of the congregation. Among the most vigorous and most loyal

of the leaders of the congregation today are men and women descended from those who were members of the congregation two centuries and more ago. This record of the past gives to all Jews in America the assurance of a future for loyal historical, traditional Judaism in America.

RABBI DAVID DE SOLA POOL

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February 2, 1943

Dr. Samuel Nirenstein, President
Union of Orthodox Congregations
305 Broadway
New York, N.Y.

MY DEAR DR. NIRENSTEIN,

The work which the Orthodox Union has done for Kashruth and for education, if not adequate, has at least had perceptible and notable influence for good. I would like to see the Orthodox Union concentrate on another branch of work which has been sadly neglected, but which is at least as urgently needed as are its activities for Kashruth and education. I refer to the Synagogue.

Just as the Union has had a committee work on its educational textbooks and just as it has had a continuing interest in Kashruth, so should the Union organize a permanent Commission on the Synagogue. You know full well how perhaps the basic weakness of Orthodoxy in this country is the weakness of the Synagogue. What I would like to see this Commission do is to organize itself so that it could in short order work out standards for the Orthodox American Synagogue.

These standards might include building standards. You know how the question of the placing of the almemar and the women's gallery, etc., is always coming up, especially when a new synagogue is being built. The Union ought to be able to give authoritative guidance in this direction.

The Commission should also work out standards of Synagogue administration, such as through preparing a standard constitution. The Commission could also work out a typical Synagogue budget for guidance as to the proportionate importance of various Synagogue functions and obligations.

It should define the relationship between the secular administration of the Synagogue and the rabbi and *hazan*, so as to avoid conflict between the lay and the spiritual leadership, and so as to safeguard the dignity of the religious leadership.

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The Commission should also work out standards for the conduct of services with their specific recommendations, looking towards the elimination of those unesthetic and irreverent popular practices in Synagogue which distract so sadly from the religious services of so many Orthodox Synagogues.

As these and similar carefully thought out standards would be defined and made available to Orthodox congregations throughout the country, the influence of such a Commission on the Synagogue would become pervasively stronger, and would thereby help potently towards preserving Orthodox Synagogues in their true character.

Sincerely yours,
RABBI DAVID DE SOLA POOL

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January 3, 1944

Mr. Arthur La Vine
La Vine Printing Co.
45 East 28th Street
New York, N.Y.

MY DEAR MR. LA VINE,

I have received the enclosed letter from Mr. Hilsenrad, the Executive Director of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America. I am sending it to you because it is a subject within your field, and because you can either answer it, or suggest what the answer should be, far better than can I.

The manual as I envisage, and as I suggested it to the Orthodox Union, can be of very far reaching value to the cause of Orthodox Judaism, compensating for the organizational weakness of the Union and its lack of personnel to travel and visit communities. This manual can come into the hands of rabbis scattered far and wide throughout the country and presidents of their congregations, and give them just the guidance which it is really the function of the Orthodox Union to give.

In connection with my work for the procurement of Jewish chaplains, and for providing Jewish religious facilities for men in the army and navy, I have had occasion to travel extensively in the outlying regions where camps are. There is an altogether new generation of Orthodox congregations in the South, Southeast, and Southwest, headed by graduates of the Yeshiva, or of the Chicago Hebrew Theological College. These men and their congregations are working isolatedly, and

working against the general tendency towards neglect, and if I may use the figure of the yachtsman, slipping from their moorings, and drifting with the current. Such a manual as I have suggested, and as has now been virtually worked out, would give the necessary strength to the rabbi and the Board of Trustees on such questions as the sitting of the sexes together, the indecorum which undermines so many Orthodox congregations, late Friday evening services, and all sorts of other questions which have been becoming burning problems, and on which there is no local guidance.

Therefore, I see great importance in the publication of this manual, and the Union should be in a position to distribute it for the most part without charging for it. It is an essential piece of propaganda which we have to bring to our rabbis and our presidents, without asking them to pay for it.

RABBI DAVID DE SOLA POOL

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April 17, 1949

Mr. William Weiss
1440 Broadway
New York 18, N.Y.

MR DEAR MR. WEISS:

I have read your letter of April 8th addressed to Commissioner Herlands with great interest.

I am in thorough accord with you in the point that you make that the Orthodox Union should not segregate itself and run away from cooperating with organizations and movements, so long as these movements are not anti-Jewish. The weakest and most futile thing we can do is to step out of movements. The strongest and most effective thing we can do is to remain in them and fight for our principles. This applies to such organizations as the American Association for Jewish Education, the Synagogue Council of America, on such questions as the local synagogue councils, and the Central Synagogue in Jerusalem. The runaway attitude which some of the members of the Union seem to favor is both cowardly and recreant to those Jewish interests which we hold most sacred. Unless we are to condemn the Union to sheer futility and ghettoism we must stay in the Jewish community and fight for our principles.

Sincerely yours,
RABBI DAVID DE SOLA POOL

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April 28, 1949

Mr. William Herlands, President, Orthodox Union
70 Pine Street
New York 5, N.Y.

MY DEAR MR. HERLANDS:

The American Association for Jewish Education will be holding its annual meeting at Atlantic City over the weekend of May 27-29. I understand that Rothstein will be the speaker for the Conservative group, and Eisendrath will represent the Reform group. It is to my mind most desirable that the Orthodox Union be adequately represented by its spokesman. It is my hope, therefore, that if you personally cannot be present, you designate someone who is fully representative of the Union and who has status in the community.

Again we seem to touch on the issue about which William Weiss wrote you recently. Unfortunately there are among us some who feel that because the A.A.J.E. is comprehensive in its Jewish interest, and does not bear the Orthodox label, it should therefore be shunned by the Union. This policy is most harmful to Orthodoxy. It takes away from us the opportunity of expressing our legitimate influence. The contrary policy is the one that we should follow, that is, designating our strongest and most influential representatives to express our point of view in such a general Jewish organization.

It is therefore my hope that either you may be able to be present or someone else who can bring added prestige to traditional Judaism by his presentation of our point of view at the meeting of the A.A.J.E.

Sincerely yours,
RABBI DAVID DE SOLA POOL

Each year, before Rosh Hashana, Dr. Pool would send a "pastoral message" to the members of his Congregation. The following are excerpts from these messages, spanning the period from 1922-1948.

1922

I am coming back to you after three years contact with the Holy Land, the Land still glowing with the memories of the birth of Judaism and the spirit of its growth, the Land still echoing the voices and the language of our patriarchs, poets and prophets, of our heroes of the past

and present. I am coming to you after eleven years of work alongside of our beloved Rabbi Emeritus, Dr. Mendes, whose staunch faith and unswerving service of God have guided our Congregation for over forty years. I am coming to you after twenty years of uninterrupted absorption in the study and service of Judaism. I bring to you the fruits of these years of preparation, eager to give to each of you the best that is in me, joyously, with warm affection, and with high personal regard. To each and every one, to the old, to the young, to the children—yes, particularly to the children—I desire to come close in spirit, ready to serve you, to help you, to work with you. I have no misgivings for the future. We know each other well, and I know that you will be kind and patient with me, sympathetic, tolerant, and generous in judgment as I stumble forward. But it is more than passive patience and generous friendship that I ask; I ask your active co-operation in work for Judaism and for Jewry, that I may be something more than a hollow voice crying to the winds from a lonely rock, and that Shearith Israel may be assured of renewed life worthy of the best in its past.

To make Shearith Israel live its historical claim and fulfill its duties of Mother Synagogue in the United States is the common obligation of us both. Our country needs Shearith Israel, the historic and impregnable shrine of Jewish loyalty to America and to Judaism, the symbol of the best and purest of Judaism in America. It has been our fortune to initiate many of our finest Jewish communal undertakings. We may not lag behind today in our duties toward the community in general, more specifically toward the thousands of Sephardim who within the last two decades have strengthened our numbers in the city. It is for us as brothers to help them meet their problems of adjustment; it is for them to share in the renewal of the strength of Shearith Israel.

1923

If ever organized religion had a message and a mission for the world, it is at this tense and critical moment in human history. It is supremely the duty of you who are enrolled in the Synagogue under the banner of Zion, the banner of Moses, the Prophets, Psalmists and Rabbis, to make your influence felt, speaking and working for the elevation and consecration of man to peace, humanity and justice. It was the people of the Synagogue who at the dawn of history gave birth to these ideals and preserved and enriched them through the centuries. The Synagogue of today does not abandon them. Along the obscure and arduous path of the purification of man's spirit, the Synagogue casts these

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signal beams of light. Mankind's saving ideals are in your keeping. Vigorously and effectively to make the light of peace, humanity and justice to shine forth is an obligation which your membership in a Synagogue imposes on you.

Yes, indeed, that membership is no light thing. It sets you in the organized ranks of the brave, hopeful and upbuilding spirits on whom depends the preservation of Judaism and the Jew, and it sets you in the organized ranks of those heroic bearers of a far-seen ideal who will yet save mankind from his own destruction and lead him to God.

1925

From Zion, the Holy City, I send you greetings—the greetings of Zion and of Jerusalem. What are the greetings of our Ancient City? The voice of Jerusalem speaks in unmistakable tones. It bids us be strong and of good courage. It recalls the past to stir us to hope, and dreams of the future.

Here past and future merge. This morning I was standing on a mound of earth, alongside of which a trench uncovers a broad wall of magnificent monoliths—the newly discovered wall of the Jewish King Agrippa. Nineteen hundred years ago that wall was built as the out-most defense of the Holy City and its Temple. A generation later, the Roman Army breached, and after a long assault, destroyed it. Its massive base was buried, and for hundreds of years it lay forgotten under the debris which alone remained as the monument to the victory of Roman military force. But the frail people who built that mighty rampart live on. On the same holy site the descendants of the heroic defenders of Zion and its Temple are facing today a still more distant future—eager, unconquered, undaunted.

1931

The Synagogue offers the Jew a quiet haven wherein he may relax from life's tension and unburden his soul. Withdrawing into its calm, we may take our bearings in the light of the day or endless time, and ponder on our course, whence we come, whither we are going. There in the sacred fane we may think and feel our way out of the bewildering perplexities of life's combat, with our minds and hearts freed for a while from economic competition's violent whip, from vocational pressure, from the clamor of workshop and warehouse, the wear of pleasure and pastime, the comedy and tragedy of the passing show. There in musing aspiration we may

unravel the knots in our heartstrings, span with eternal purpose the gap between the oblivions of birth and death, and slake our thirst for immortality. There we may attain a serenity of understanding that gives beauty to life and peace to the spirit, come weal, come woe, come life, come death. In a world strident with clamorous, ruthless pushing and pounding, the Synagogue is the needed haven of peace where one may hear the whisper of the soul, the still small voice of God.

1932

The Jewish ship in which we find ourselves as passengers through life can be saved only as we individually and collectively work to save it. Our Jewish homes and Jewish values can be preserved only as we individually and collectively work to protect them against the devastation of the engulfing flood. Our Jewish tree of life, the Torah, can be rescued from the flaming forces of destruction only as we individually and collectively rally to its defense. There is no one who can save Judaism, none who can defend the Jewish people, but ourselves.

Therefore, in this message to you for the coming year, 5693, I needs must appeal to you individually first to respond to the call of your grievously stricken people. It matters not how insistent, how implacable are the demands made on you by the inexorable business of living and the work which each intransigent day brings. Your own flesh and blood needs you, and it is your loyalty and the loyalty of hundreds of thousands of true hearted Jews like you which alone can carry Jewry through this storm, flood and devouring flames. In every fiber of your Jewish being that is living and responsive, you feel a tingling of kinship with your people that is born of centuries of community of tradition and of suffering shared for a common ideal. It is a craven, insincere voice which expresses this Jewish consciousness in hollow words alone. In times such as these, it must be expressed sacrificially in every form of Jewish service. Catastrophic times call for a heroic quality of living. Not for us in these years may there be a placidity and passivity of Jewish living. We must give of ourselves to our weakened brethren here, to our pitiful brethren abroad, to our brethren of hope in the land of Israel. Give, then, of yourself unstintingly to Israel. It is no time to count the cost.

1934

Our acrimonious dissensions are shaking the very foundations of organized Jewish life. A Jewish Palestine can be only a repudiating mockery

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of our inspiring historic ideal if the Land of Israel is to be rent by factional violence. A spirited and statesmanlike meeting of the heart-searing problems of German Jewry and of world Jewry is impossible while inveterate and obstinate divisions render common counsel futile. The call of the hour is for brotherhood.

Brotherhood involves no concession of loyalty or conviction, no compromise of principle. One can not hope to establish cooperation between nations through a sacrifice of their specific loyalties, or between Orthodox, Reform, and non-religious Jews through a compromise of their essential convictions. But when each people remains loyal to its patria and respects that of others, a true League of Nations will be born; and when each Jew remains loyal to his own convictions and respects those of others, there will be set up the only possible basis for fruitful cooperation in Jewish life.

1936

The social salvation of man is the antecedent to his spiritual salvation. "He hath told thee, O man, what does the Lord require of thee, but to do justice, to love mercy and walk humbly with thy God." First we must achieve justice and humanity in our social relations; only then may we be deemed worthy of walking humbly with our God.

Similarly the rabbis teach that the Day of Atonement cannot atone for sins between man and man. First make your peace with man; then Yom Kippur will help you make your peace with God. We must first do what in us lies to establish heaven on earth. Then religion will help us lift the earth-born to heavenly heights. Our synagogues must labor and serve so that "the people that walk in darkness shall see a great light." God's first command was "Let there be light." Into the groping darkness of society's chaos the Synagogue must bring that first message of religion.

1939

We are living in a period of crisis when forces of violence have proclaimed the degradation and extermination of the Jew and Judaism in lands which Jews have served and benefitted for a thousand or two thousand years and these malignant forces are succeeding in this purpose of insensate hatred. At such a moment of unspeakable human suffering when even no-man's land refuses a refuge to the hounded Jew, with "all pity choked by custom of fell deed," there rests upon every Jew the sacred obligation of meeting the challenge facing him as an

American Jew. Destiny has brought within our ample borders the largest Jewish community on the face of the earth, and the American experiment dedicated to human equality of Jewry. Therefore each of us free Jews in America must contribute in his own way to saving the remnant of Israel. In the face of the destruction of Jews and Judaism abroad, each of us is called upon not only to give such aid as we can to our hapless fellow Jews across the water, but also to strengthen Jewish life in America. It is no time for the laggard, the recreant or the renegade. Everyone of us must meet the challenge.

1940

Overshadowing every aspect of our life is the stupendous upheaval that has brought catastrophic ruin to Europe, and that casts ever deepening shadows over the whole world and the days to come. We have lived through the year as in a nightmare trance of incredible horror. The traditional madness, cruelty, bloodiness and vileness of war have been unleashed in unprecedented extent and intensity, and with a scientific thoroughness and efficiency unknown to the most sanguinary chapters of history. It is war which is mankind's supreme catastrophe and supreme blasphemy. My conviction that war is incompatible with the essential and the ultimate teachings of religion has not been weakened by the realities of today; it has been strengthened a thousandfold.

We have seen the vast tragedy of human suffering, the crashing of homes, the blotting out of fair villages and towns, the gaunt specter of famine, the breaking of millions of human lives, the slaying of human personality, the murdering of states and of freedom, and all the panorama of horror and of madness that lying, injustice, cruelty, violence, lust, robbery, murder and all that goes with war have brought to the world. Whatever may be deemed to be the immediate needs of the moment, ultimately there is but one policy of armament and defense that can meet and overcome this stupendous challenge, and that is not the armaments of violence called for today, but moral armament and religious defense. Only this will ultimately save us and our children from chaos and cataclysm, and give us a social order and a moral order not of darkness but of light and life.

1942

When the death of Moses left his people a horde of refugees facing powerful enemies, the challenge which sprang to the lips of Joshua was,

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“Art thou for us or for our enemies?” Everyone of us today who would not bear the name of renegade or traitor is faced with the same ineluctable decision. Today again the call is going forth as Moses sounded it thirty-two centuries ago and as Mattathias proclaimed it twenty-one centuries ago in similar moments of crisis when Israel and Judaism were facing destruction, “Whoso is for the Lord, let him come unto me.”

There is no room in Jewish life today for the laggard, the lukewarm or indifferent Jew. None may stand on the sidelines while his own brethren are being ground into extinction and while Judaism’s fundamental moral law and eternal teachings are being traduced, befouled and outlawed. We Jews of America have not responded as we should have done to this challenge. If we had, there would have been such an outpouring of our manpower, our energies and our concentrated service through our synagogues and other instruments of Jewish dedication and upbuilding that in the eyes of all men we should be living witnesses of a purifying Jewish generation. We would have shown a revival of Jewish faith and renewal of Jewish vision and a rebirth of Jewish self-help that would make us worthy of Jewish survival on a plane in keeping with the noblest moments of our past.

1948

The rebirth of the State of Israel proclaims for us a new hope, but it brings us also a new challenge. This summer I stood in the gas chambers of Dachau. I lived in a camp of Jewish Displaced Persons. I saw hundreds of those who survived the atrocious Odyssey of the refugee ship Exodus as they were setting out for the land of Israel. With a depth of emotional understanding that I could not have had before such experiences, I know that brilliant as is the new-born hope of the State of Israel, it does not end the Jewish problem. It does not liquidate the Galuth. We still must hearken to the word of God given through Jeremiah to the Jews in Babylon, “Build ye houses and live in them, plant ye gardens and eat the fruit of them . . . Multiply there and be not diminished, and seek the peace of the city whither I have carried you away and pray unto the Lord for it, for in its peace shall you have peace.” We still must harken to the urging that was addressed some generations later to our ancestors remaining in Babylon, that they should give support to those returning to rebuild the Jewish temple and state. It is for us with consecrated energy to help the surviving spiritual children of the gas chambers rebuild Zion as the historic shrine of the spirit of the Jew.

It is from Zion that world Judaism must receive the life giving

breath of a living people. No longer will our Judaism find its only source of life in the printed pages of books. It will not be a Judaism that lives but chokes in the dark and narrow streets of a ghetto, nor one engaged in a life or death denaturing through adjustment to foreign influences and ideas. It will be a Judaism that lives and grows naturally on its own lifegiving soil in the fields of a sunbathed land and in the streets of its free cities.