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"Why Build this Wall?" March-April 1966.

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American Jewish Archives website.

"WHY BUILD THIS WALL"

Speech at dedication of Wall
to Six Million in Temple Beth Am,
Los Angeles, 24 April 1966

We Jews ^{burned} in the heat of a thousand
ovens - and the world was cold. We
gagged in the gas of a thousand chambers-
and the world was silent. A million
bullets thudded into inert flesh until
it was no novelty - and a thousand bull-
dozers heaved the frozen, starved and
mangled bodies into gaping holes in the
exhausted earth. Soil could not shriek
in protest. It could only accept and
swallow the awful refuse. The smoke
dissolved in the sky. The ashes were
scattered on the winds. The bones dis-
appeared - and when the whole hideous
mess was over - mankind was indicted
forever. The mark of Cain was burned

into the brow, not only of jack-b^otted Nazis who were the active criminals, but of every single human being on earth who had failed to protest.

Nothing like this has ever happened before in the entire recorded history of the human race. The human animal is a fighting animal - worse than absolutely any other - and the rivers of blood spilt during millenia in wars over land or gold or religion or trade, spilt through torture and inquisition and gladiatorial combat, spilt through hatred and greed and fear and pride, have been far greater than all the rivers of water on all the continents. But, never in all the fantastic episodes which have marked man's incredible eagerness to harm his brother, has there been one to match the murder of the Jews in the mid-20th century.

Deliberate, calculating, announced long in advance, described in detail, broadcast widely for all to know, and performed in an age when the technical means of communication were such that today's news reached the farthest point on earth by tomorrow, this mass murder was possible not because the victim was willing, but because his neighbor was. The criminal shot in the dead of night - there was no policeman to prevent him - and the neighbors closed their doors and windows in order not to become involved. The victims died - 6 million of them - at the hands of two kinds of murderers, active and passive.

There are some who say that the victims themselves must share in the guilt of the crime, for they did not fight back.

Especially the young, those born since the holocaust, and the free, those living in Israel and America, have made some savage and biting comments. Asking the question - why did the victims allow themselves to be led like sheep to the ovens? - they imply that there was cowardice or paralysis or some innate weakness. They suggest there was an alternative or a way of escape which the weak-livered Jews of Central Europe were not strong enough or clever enough to employ.

The victims need no defense on this point. It is well known that they fought back in many ghettos - that they joined partisan and resistance groups - that they utilized all sorts of ingenious methods to avoid the enemy. And furthermore, it is historically clear

that the long preparatory years of Nazi propaganda, the ceaseless transports from one area to another, the masquerading of death camps as work camps, the morale-cracking effect of hunger, the separation of families, the herding into ghettos and a hundred other devices all designed to confuse, harass and weaken - resulted in the unarmed civilian Jews being an unequal match for the greedy sadism of the Gestapo and the SS.

This wall is erected to the memory of those victims. What purpose does it serve? Why build it?

First of all, to cause us to remember the crime. Human memory seeks to erase that which is painful. There cannot be an Eichmann trial to remind every new generation. So there must be

symbols, employing poetry, imagery and illusion, to remind us of the harsh reality. This wall is such a symbol. We place it here, right in front of our noses, so that we shall see it as often as possible. It is not put off in some remote park or plaza which might be visited, at best, infrequently. It stands in this sanctuary where multitudes will be confronted by it constantly. We must never allow ourselves to forget the pain and horror it signifies.

Secondly, to cause us to understand the meaning of our existence. We were not accidental victims - but deliberately chosen for the slaughter. Our collective, existential presence in the world is an obstacle to the force of barbarism. So long as we exist, with our moral code and our set of values and our capacity to

give birth to additional religions and our beliefs in justice and righteousness, we are a bone in the throat of all those who seek to organize the world differently. The world could not be dominated by Hitlerian philosophy so long as we existed in it. He understood this and kept on trying to destroy us up to his dying day. If he understood it, we certainly should. The wall will remind us of the ideals which must survive if civilization is to endure.

Third, to cause us to know that our fate is largely in our own hands. Almost no one - with some remarkable exceptions - lifted a finger to help us. We can protect ourselves mainly by ourselves. This is the metaphysical interpretation of the creation of the State of Israel within three short years

after the destruction of European JEWry. It is almost as though history were saying that a sovereign independent Jewish political and military power was necessary in order to ensure that never again would any portion of world Jewry be defenseless. Should some future attack ever again be launched - and should the rest of the world again stand idly by - a free and independent Jewish commonwealth would rise as a powerful ally to aid the stricken. The wall reminds us that we must do all possible to keep our destiny in our own hands.

Fourth, to cause us to think always of those who stood silently by, and not to seek vengeance in our hearts against them, but to realize how weak and fragile most men are. The Christian world did not act with Christian love or charity.

The Christian veneer proved to be awfully thin. There are some who say that the Christian religion displayed a terrible bankruptcy and impotence in the years of fearful testing. It was found wanting. But what is the sense of our going forward into the centuries ahead merely hating? Rather must we understand that people are morally weak and thus it is all the more imperative for us to maintain our strength and faith in Judaism's eternal role of civilizing mankind.

Fifth, to cause us to know that there is still a great mystery about God-but that, like Job, we must not be discouraged in the search to understand His relationship to man. Many people will look at this wall and it will turn them into atheists for they will not understand why He was silent at Aushwitz

and all the other places named here. Others will recall that the religious faith of the victims themselves was not disturbed for they went to the flames singing Ani Ma'amin - I believe with perfect faith. The fact is that God is most often hidden from man - and never more so than during this frightful time of murder. Does He exist? Yes? No? Where was He? Was he powerless? The wall will not provide answers - but at least it will remind us to keep asking the questions. Without that, all is certain to be lost.

So, these are some of the purposes to be served by the building of this wall - to remember the crime; to understand our role as the victim; to develop our independent strength; to be tolerant

of human weakness; to keep searching for a God to make human life more meaningful.

May the men who built this wall accept our gratitude for their wisdom in doing so; may those of us in this generation who actually experienced the searing agony seek most forcefully to record it and interpret it so that its meaning shall never be lost; and may the anonymous millions of the past memorialized here, inspire the unborn millions of the future to live as Jews should, so that the whole human race can progress to the messianic time when such insane explosions as this will appear to be part of the frenzied infancy of man still not yet in control of himself.

When the time finally comes that all men will be truly ashamed of what happened in this century - then we will be able to take down this wall for it will have served its purpose.



Nathan Shapell

March 29th
1966

Herbert A. Friedman
Executive Vice Chairman
United Jewish Appeal
1290 Avenue of the Americas
New York, N.Y. 10019

Dear Herb:

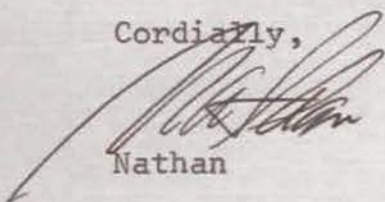
As always, it was a pleasure speaking to you on the phone last week and I want to tell you that speaking for myself as well as for Temple Beth Am, I was very happy to receive your telegram advising you would be able to be here for the Dedication and take part in the ceremony.

For your information, I am enclosing a fairly current list of names of those people who have consented to act as Honorary Chairmen, to which, of course, your name is being added. As you know, the Dedication will take place on Sunday, April 24, 1966, from approximately two thirty o'clock to four o'clock in the afternoon. When you have had a chance to glance over this list, I will write to you again and furnish you more detailed information on the tentative program.

I personally feel that it would give much more meaning to the entire cause to have a man like you who was so greatly involved in every aspect, the war, the camps, the D.P. problem, and who took part more so than almost any other man I know, to have an opportunity to express his experiences and feelings so many years later. Naturally, Herb, you are one of our key speakers for that day.

I shall be in touch with you very shortly and, until then, be well and give my very best regards to your lovely wife.

Cordially,



Nathan

NS:raa
Airmail
Enclosure

Nathan Shapell
PRESIDENT

Temple Beth Am

1039 S. LA CIENEGA BLVD.
LOS ANGELES, CALIF. 90035

April 14, 1966

Herbert A. Friedman
Executive Vice Chairman
United Jewish Appeal
1290 Avenue of the Americas
New York, N.Y.

Dear Herb:

As the date for the dedication of the Memorial to the Martyred Six Million draws near, I felt it would be well to send on to you as much information as I have available, including recent press releases, for your enlightenment. I hope that this will give you some of the background and details.

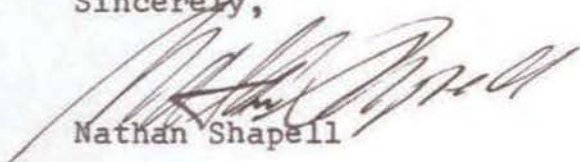
I am also enclosing a photograph of the Wall itself as well as a copy of the tentative program. You will note that you are scheduled as our key speaker and we have held approximately fifteen minutes for your address.

I know that the press would like to have some advance notice of what you intend to say so if you feel it is possible, we would greatly appreciate your sending us at your earliest convenience an advance copy of your speech and I will see to it that the proper people get it in time.

I know that Ernie Michel is meeting you Sunday and we are expecting both of you at the reception at 1:30 P.M. which will precede the ceremony. I cannot tell you how much I am looking forward to seeing you, nor how very much I appreciate what you are doing for Temple Beth Am and for the memory of the Six Million we will gather to honor.

Only a man of your stature and friendship could understand how much this will mean to everyone involved, and most especially to me, my dear friend.

Sincerely,



Nathan Shapell

NS:raa
Enclosures
Airmail

P.S. I am sending Ernie Michel your ticket as well as his.



THE WALL OF THE MARTYRED SIX MILLION

Telephone: 652-7353

TEMPLE BETH AM

1039 S. La Cienega Blvd.
Los Angeles, California, U.S.A.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

EMINENT JEWISH AUTHORITY & INTERNATIONALLY FAMOUS

ARTIST TO HIGHLIGHT MEMORIAL WALL DEDICATION

Rabbi Herbert A. Friedman, the eminent authority on Jewish needs and problems, and Cantor Sholom Katz, the Internationally famous cantor who owes his life to his magnificent voice, will be but two of the outstanding highlights of Temple Beth Am's dedication of its Memorial Wall to the Martyred Six Million, Sunday, April 24th, 2:30 p.m., at the Temple, 1039 South La Cienega Blvd., Los Angeles.

Rabbi Friedman is noted for his ability to communicate in stirring fashion, the complex facts about refugee and immigrant matters. In the course of his work, he has made numerous and exhaustive on-the-spot studies of the critical needs, as they arose, among Jewish refugees overseas, visiting many refugee trouble spots.

It was as Chaplain with the 9th Infantry Division in Germany, in 1945, where he spear-headed efforts to help survivors of the Nazi death-camps and later served as Assistant Adviser on Jewish Affairs to General Joseph T. McNarney, Commander of the United States Occupation forces in Germany, that brought Rabbi Friedman into close contact with thousands of Jewish displaced persons. It was an association which was never relinquished for Rabbi Friedman soon became one of the most articulate spokesman for the Jewish survivors of war and persecution and for the establishment of statehood for Israel.

Sholom Katz, Cantor of the Beth Sholom Congregation of Washington, D.C., has attained world-wide fame through concerts he has given throughout Europe, United States and Canada. If Sholom Katz did not possess a truly magnificent voice he would still command interest

(more)

In Loving Tribute to the Memory of the Six Million Martyrs . . . We Shall Not Forget

and respect for the role he played during the annihilation of his Jewish compatriots by the Nazis during the Second World War.

While serving as Chief Cantor of Kishineff, Bessarabia, one of the largest Jewish communities in Europe, Cantor Katz found himself not excluded from the Nazi persecutions. He found himself dragged with his fellow Jews to a concentration camp where escape was only considered possible through death. After four horrible years in the camp, some 2000 Jews, including Sholom Katz, were given shovels and pick-axes, and told to dig their graves. He made a plea that he be allowed to sing during these last mortal moments alive. Permission granted, Cantor Katz began raising his tragedy-shaken voice with the Hebrew prayer for the dead-the "El Molei Rachamim." His accompaniment was the rapid stuttering of machine-guns and his chorus, the screams, as the bullets tore through the bodies of his fellow Jews. It was an experience which Cantor Katz says he will never forget and which mankind should never forget. He sang all night and, perhaps, because of the drunken carousing of his captors in celebration of the elimination of "some more Jews," Sholom Katz was finally told by the commandant, "Vanish, Jew; a voice such as yours should not be stilled."

Among the selections to be sung by Cantor Katz at the Memorial Wall dedication are: a Yiddish selection which concludes with a portion of the big Av Horachamim - "The holy communities with their pious and saintly ones, whose souls were wrenched from them, in cruel martyrdom by the hands of him whose name should be erased from the memory of mankind," and, the very appropriate "Ani Maamin," the song They sang as They walked towards the gas chambers and which expressed Their complete faith in G'd.

What is the purpose of this wall?

1. To cause us to remember
2. To remind us of the absolute lonesomeness of the Jew - no one lifted a finger.
3. To teach us to keep our destiny in our own hands.
4. To remind us of the mystery of God - There is no satisfactory answer to his silence - like Job. He is often hidden.
5. To teach us the absolute fragility of so-called civilized development of man. He is really close to the beast.

Walls divide = and walls join.

This one should serve to join - man to man and Jew to Jew.

The purpose of a symbol is to employ poetry, imagery and illusion to remind of the harsh reality.

We Jews burned in the heat of a thousand ovens - and the world was cold.

We gagged in the gas of a thousand chambers - and the world was silent. A million bullets thudded into inert flesh until ~~ix~~ it was no novelty - and a thousand bulldozers heaved the frozen, starved and mangled bodies into gaping holes in the exhausted earth. Soil could not shriek in protest. It could only accept and swallow the awful refuse. The smoke dissolved in the sky. The ashes were scattered on the winds. The bones disappeared - and when the whole hideous mess was over - mankind was indicted forever. The mark of Cain was burned into the brow, not only of jack-booted Nazis who were the active criminals, but of every single human being on earth who had failed to protest.

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