

TR-3801 Transcription

Friedman, Hebert A. Speech at French Lick, Ind. 3 March 1962.

Herbert Friedman: [00:00] I appreciate that introduction, very much. Because I don't suppose there are 25 people in the room whom I haven't had the privilege of meeting or addressing, at some point or other, back over the course of the years. And it's quite superfluous for old friends to be introduced and reintroduced to each other. I do appreciate the fact that Herb Schiff said that I would try to make some keynote remarks here tonight. I'm not sure what that means. At a political convention, a keynote speaker is usually the person who either is called upon to fill in time while they decide, in the back room, who the candidate is or he is the person whose function it [01:00] is to whip up the crowd by a great act of demagoguery and virtuosity, into the snake dance where they carry the signs around the floor of auditorium, also while the fellows in the back room decide on the candidate. [laughs] This will not be a keynote speech in that sense.

We have here the intimacy of a gathering of people who know each other, who have worked for a long time in a common cause, who have come here, under the aegis of this banner, which they all respect, to meet with very important people, who have come

perhaps from greater distances than anyone in our audience.

[02:00] Those who've come from greater distances have been happy to accept the invitation. You do them honor by coming to listen to what they have to say. In the course of the time that you will spend together, one thing and only one thing must emerge, in order for this conference to be a success. What must emerge is the most intensified sense of conviction about the purpose which brings us together. And if that emerges, then you will have, in addition to the facts and the figures, the statistics and the logic, the rationale, and the argumentation, all of which will [03:00] be laid out for you by the scalpels of the very capable dissectors, in addition to the facts and the argumentation, you will have a purpose or a sense of purpose, which I think is more important than any statistical data. And it's that sense of purpose that I would like to try to inject into our gathering.

Very often, as we work from campaign to campaign, from crisis to crisis, from contributor who wants to cut to contributor who doesn't want to give enough, as we work from problem to problem in our communities, where we lose a chairman or gain a chairman, where the biggest giver moves out of town or dies and then this throws the whole community into gloom, [04:00] where there is always a Cassandra voice emerging to say

that we cannot possibly do again what we did last year, because last year we extended ourself, as we fight the campaign from year to year, we very often become so immersed in the day-by-day details of the fight that we do not pay the proper respect or attention to the basic question why do we bother. And it seems to me that it's necessary periodically to retreat from the enormity of the fray, from the battlefield on which the wounds occur every day, [05:00] it's necessary to retreat from that and go back for replenishment, for nourishment, for reinvigoration to the basic philosophical principle which lies behind the effort. There must be a philosophy behind every great cause or that cause is not great. There must be a rationale, there must be a sense of destiny, or that cause will not long embrace people. There will be fair-weather friends who will come to it briefly, for the thrill, the excitement, the fireworks. They will stay a year. They will stay two, they will drift off. They are fair-weather friends. They are summer soldiers. [06:00] They are not good for the long fight. And so I think it's very important, particularly in this year, where we already, as early as the 1st of March, have fallen into a cliché of saying that this is a great campaign of destiny, one of the most important in many years, perhaps the most important in ten years, speaker after speaker... Kill it, Harry. It's no good. Can't fight over

it. Where speaker after speaker will say that and it will fall on deaf ears, if you don't really retreat back to the prime cause.

And so what I want to talk about tonight is this question of the philosophy behind this [07:00] enormous enterprise, which is now on the brink of a quarter of a century of continuous effort. And it seems to me that, when you ask the question why do we bother, year after year, the best among us, to exert ourselves to the full limit of our capacity, why do we want to do this, I think, even though we were to verbalize it in the way in which I will or not, I think we would find agreement on the outlining of the basic philosophy as I should now like to submit it. We are a very small, a very integrated, and a very stubborn people, who have remained upon the scene of history for several millennia, in the face of all efforts to obliterate us, by vast and great powers who themselves have long since crumbled. The stubbornness of ours, the persistence of ours, the determination of ours to play out the role, to the end of time... Because we say very defiantly, in the very prayer that we read tonight, on that day, referring to the messianic end of time, God will be one, his name will be one, whatever we believe, we believe that something will happen on that day and we will be here until that day. This is the assigning to oneself of a role, not just in

one's own [09:00] parochial or sectarian history but in all of world history, namely in the destiny of nothing less than the entire human race. This is an arrogant assumption, say many people, who willfully or through ignorance misunderstand it. We say that there is some special quality or attribute which inheres in us, which we transmit from one generation to another, by mood and emotion, by intellect and by heart, which we teach to our children, which causes us to endure, in the face of no matter who or what tries to destroy us. We say that this role which we have assigned to Israel is a [10:00] role which will be spelled out, during the unfolding of the centuries, as man attempts to climb higher and higher and higher, to the destiny for which his capabilities must ultimately bring him, if he does not destroy himself.

When we say that there is some unique and special value in Israel, we talk about the people of Israel, we talk about the ideas and ideals of Israel, and we talk also about the land of Israel. This is a most peculiar, fantastic term! Because it embraces everything. When you say Israel, you mean land. When you say Israel, you mean faith. When you say Israel, you mean people. Land of, faith of, people of Israel. This Israel has, for mankind, [11:00] a message of supreme and transcendent importance, that mankind would not long exist if Israel did not

long exist. This I believe with every fiber of my being. We are the civilizing agent. We have given to the Western world its politics, its ethics, its religion, its sense of democracy, its conviction of optimism, its belief in progress, its conception that the world can be made better, its elementary sense of decency as between man and man, its fundamental family life. All of the qualities and virtues that we call civilized have come from this fantastic small people, perched on a rocky spit of land, bridging [12:00] three continents, who have no logical reason whatsoever for having outlived Greece and Rome, Persia and Babylon. But we have. And it is the per--during quality, the persistent insistence upon remaining alive, surviving that I think, whether each of us uses these words and these images or not, it is this quality which maintains each of us in the state of tension, vis-à-vis the world, which enables us to exist and not to submit, not to submit.

If we have these ideas and these values and these ideals, [13:00] which we choose to contribute to the world, then there is one way for us to protect them. That way is to protect the hard shell of the flesh and blood of the people who bear those ideas in its genes and in its chromosomes. For I tell you this. Just as firmly as I believe that the ideals and ideas of Judaism are immortal and eternal, so I believe that they are vulnerable

only in one sense, namely, that, if there are no longer walking on two legs on the face of this earth Jews to carry those ideas, within their breasts and hearts and minds, those ideas will perish, as those Jews perish. Survival of something as intangible as an idea depends upon the survival of something as tangible as a Jew. [14:00] And you know who understood this best of all? Hitler. If he could have destroyed all the Jews on the face of this earth, he would then have destroyed their ideas and their values and civilization would have crumbled and he would have his 1,000-year *Reich*, dedicated to a completely different set of value. He understood it, just as any genius, maniacal, ghastly, horrible but genius, understands where the heart of the matter lies and for what jugular vein he must go, if he -- ach-- if he is to achieve what he wants. He wanted to control the world. You cannot control the world when there are Jews walking on the face of this globe who believe what they believe. And so, if you want to control the world, [15:00] you go for the jugular vein of the world, which is the Jew. You try to cut it. You hemorrhage it. You drain it out.

In a much simpler way, I learned that lesson before I knew much about Hitler. I learned that lesson in 1941, 20 years ago, down in some wild fields in Louisiana. I was a young student chaplain. This was before the United States had entered the war.

It was Rosh Hashanah in September and October of 1941, before Pearl Harbor, when several of us were sent down there at the time of the great maneuvers which were held. So half of the state of Louisiana was under occupation of two great armies, which America was testing and trying to begin to use. [16:00] The Reds and the Blues, we called them. And since these maneuvers were so serious and national security was involved, the Army violated its normal procedure of granting leaves of absence to Jewish men over the High Holy Days and instead asked for some young student rabbis to come down to conduct services for the men, who would not be allowed to leave the field

I went in the company of a good Catholic. We came to a place called Lake Charles, Louisiana. And there he drew up his command car, let down the tailgate, proceeded to set up the paraphernalia of his altar, the chalice and the paten and all of the things which he required, and said mass, with no single, solitary Jewish -- Catholic soldier [17:00] standing behind him. When he'd finished reciting his mass, I said to him, "How is it possible that you could perform this, the most sacrosanct of all your services, with no men?" And he said, "We don't require men to say mass. I am the intercessor between my men and God. I celebrate the mass in his presence, venerate him. I do this as surrogate for my men. They may be here or they need not be." And

you said, "You know, I can't do that. I've got to go out and try to get together a bloody *minyán*." And he laughed and said, "Why?" And I said, "Because in Judaism, we do not express our ideas or our ideals or our worship [18:00] in the absence of our people." We require our people, the flesh and blood of our people to make concrete the prayers or the petitions or the thanksgiving.

And so he gave me his driver, an Italian Catholic boy from Brooklyn. We set out across the field. That boy had listened to this explanation. He was a very religious boy. He was determined to execute his mission well. And so in the command car we went bumping across the fields and the bayous and the maneuver areas of the state of Louisiana, never on a paved road once, for 12 days, bumping across the state, night [19:00] particularly, because the maneuvers would be over and we could see the campfires around the field. And he would come charging out of the darkness in this command car, with the headlights boring a tunnel through the blackness ahead of him, up to a campfire, with the motor racing, jump out, and yell, "Any Jews here?" And this was not designed to produce a one, as you can imagine.

[laughter] The boys had no idea what was being asked of them. He was so serious and furious in his intention to gather the clan, that he was not temperate in his approach. And then I would come

out and say, "This is not the Ku Klux Klan. Relax." And we would get two and we would get six and we would find where there were some more and then we would have ten. And we prayed. And we, in this solidarity of the people, in the solidarity of the people, we reaffirmed all [20:00] of the things for which we have perennially stood.

This is the philosophical base behind the whole thing. Why do we fight so hard for every single Jewish life? Because having lost one-third, within a matter of -- las-- of the last two decades, we're in deadly peril every time we conjure with the possibility that we might lose more. And therefore, every one who can be saved becomes the most crucial and precious object of our most careful attention. Every Jew we save, we save Judaism, and its ideals and its faith and its future. And we save the whole human race. [21:00] That's what I believe.

And therefore, when this generation comes along, with its most unbelievable opportunity, to rescue and rescue and rescue and to support, in those countries from which we cannot take out, by the rescue process of migration... For I will say we have learned that lesson at last, in this century, that the solution to Jewish survival is migration. It has always been that way. Sometimes Jews have run and fled in terror from pogrom. They've been migrating. Sometimes they can be saved my

migration, in a positive and helpful way, as we are now in the position to assure, since Israel is here and since we've created this instrument of ours [22:00] which does the job. You rescue where you can. You support, through the JDC, domestically, inside countries, where you cannot take out. It's all part of the same whole. If you support for ten years children in Morocco and make them better and stronger and healthier, then, when the opportunity comes to rescue and you move them over to Israel, the ten years' work that you've put in with them inside Morocco is perfectly part of the organic whole. You save that person in a better physical condition than he was ten years ago.

This then, it seems to me, is the meaning of the excitement which is in this year's campaign. Against that background which I've tried to portray, a sense of excitement can authentically be felt, [23:00] can easily be created, is self-generated, as a matter of fact, with no one having to generate it by means of publicity. Because there was no publicity in this year's campaign and there won't be any. A sense of excitement is self-generated, against the backdrop of this philosophical position, when political opportunities occur for a larger and larger rescue operation. And that's what everybody is so excited about.

The situation today is one in which two important countries, in two blocks of the world, have opened quite

substantially, relative to the previous position, and we are in the position to help to save thousands and thousands [24:00] of persons a month, three times as many as we were in the position to save just a couple of short years ago. If you accept the premise, good friends, that the saving of the life of a Jew is the saving of Judaism and the saving of Judaism is the saving of mankind, then, when one Jew walks off a train onto a railroad platform in the city of Vienna, you and I had better be there. Or if we're not, then we're lying when we say we accept the premise, we're cheating when we pay lip service to the ideals, we're being immoral if we give hollow tribute to some phrases in a prayer book and then invalidate them on the field of action, whether that's a [25:00] railroad station or a port or an airfield or a ship coming in or a new house to be built or a table and a chair at which a man and woman are to be sat down at and to be told, "You are now home and free." All of the professions of faith are hollow and mockery, if we're found wanting on the field of action. And we know it. This is one good thing about us. We are the *vatikim*. We are the veterans in this thing. Those of you who came are those who have been fighting and struggling in this for many years. And so you don't kid yourself. You know when that sense of excitement grips you, as it has this year. You know when, down deep inside, to your very

fingertips, you have a feeling that this moment is it and we ought to grab it. Knowing that, don't anyone fool himself by any [26:00] conduct of lesser quality than the maximum of which he's capable! Otherwise, don't say that you're excited. Otherwise, don't let the heart race and thrill at the stories as they unfold. You have no right to enjoy 100 people stepping off a train to freedom, if you don't put your hand out and make su-- you -- make sure you are there to escort them off that train and onto that boat, and off that boat and up that port of Haifa and onto that bus and down the road, to Ashdod or to Nazareth or to anywhere to which they're going. You can say you're not interested. Clear. You cannot say [27:00] that this is a moment of glory, at which you feel the excitement, if you don't participate in the action required to make it real.

These moments are rare. And they're not always present. These countries open and close. Romania has been opened and closed four times, I think, since 1948. In between the closings, it's true, there may have been a few dribblets of a few tens or a few scores, now and then. But the tap goes on for hundreds or thousands and then it goes off and then it goes on. No one is the master of this. There is no single, solitary backdoor in the entire free Jewish world, not in Israel, not in America, not in England, nowhere, which controls this immigration situation.

This in controlled internally by the [28:00] countries in question. They are sovereign. They decide -- in the logic or the perversion of logic which motivates them. And if the Communist Party Central Committee will decide to let Jews out, it will let them out. And if it decides not to, it won't. You could put \$10 million on the table here tonight and, if they didn't want to let them out, you couldn't force them out. Therefore, when, in their wisdom, they say, "Open the door. If a Jew wants to go, let him apply. Let him go down the MVD. Let him walk up and put his name on the line. Let him run the risk of losing his job. Let him pay off all the taxes and all the things he's got to pay. Let him pay all the assessments and the levies that he has to do. Let him do everything. And if he wants to do that and if he wants to go out, then he can go out, in those circumstances"... [29:00] That's a sovereign decision, made by that country, not made by you or me. And our role in the matter is quite, quite passive. Our role in the matter is to decide whether this is important enough for us to help with or not.

Same thing happens in a country like Morocco. If for many years it's closed and the only migration that takes place, the only rescue, the only exit that takes place is that which is self-engineered, in some more or less illegal form, then that's all you can get! And if then they decide, for reasons and

motives best known to them, that they will permit it, at double or triple the amount that was occurring before, then our choice is a simple [30:00] one. We either say, "[Bochabot?]," every Jew who comes out, and pick him up or we say, "This is too much. We can't handle it. We've got that other country, that Romania to worry about. We don't know what'll happen with Algeria. It may explode. We have problems on our hands. We're not sure what'll happen in Israel. They've got troubles there. So we can't take all these people." That's our only other second option.

No one, good friends, has asked you, no one has come to you and has said, "What would you like to do?" When I say no one, I mean no one in the hierarchy of the United Jewish Appeal. This is what we have done. We have said, "There is that quality of constraint upon us which forces us to answer in the affirmative, because we think it's the correct and honorable and desirable and most cherished thing to do." We come and say, "The right thing to do is to try to raise more money this year and to raise \$35 million more money and to raise it through a special fund." We've tried, that far, to provide guidance and leadership and direction. You can either accept this recommendation or you can reject it.

It's the most thrilling thing to see the way this thing has started around the country. The tempo has grown, has

accelerated. There is an acceptance in city after city. There's a joyful, happy acceptance. There's a struggling with techniques. There's a problem of how to get this man up or that man up. [32:00] But in terms of the solidarity of the people, in terms of the great affirmative shout of "Yea!" the Jewish communities of this country have begun a rapid rallying around this challenge, which has been before them now some two or three months.

In the course of that time, there have been some people who've asked questions. There have been some people who've said, "Well, why is this any different from any other year?" And my answer's as unequivocal as it can be. There is absolutely no difference between this year and any other year, except in the most important detail of all, namely, volume! There is no difference between saving 75,000 Jews this year and 25,000 [33:00] Jews some previous year, except that one situation is three times greater than the other, thank God.

Some people have said, "Why can't Israel help more? She's growing very strong and she's progressing and she's economically powerful and she's fighting her way into the Common Market. And I was just there last week and you should see the hotels." There isn't a person in the room here who hasn't heard that story. I don't know whether Israel can help more than she's helping now.

Perhaps Mr. Sharett will tell us something about that tomorrow night. To the best of my knowledge, she is helping up to the point of such severe strain in the economy that there are those very careful observers who say that they do not think there is a possibility of imposing any more taxes, even [34:00] another 1% or 2%. There are those dispassionate and objective observers who say that the Israeli taxpayer has had it. His government has now taken from him all he can give. If that's the case, then where there is left for him to go, I don't know. Because he, that taxpayer, knows, as well as I know, that there are going to be even greater demands upon him, for defense and security reason, in which we do not share at all. And even though there may be some economists who think that the Israeli taxpayer is up to the limit of his ability, I think that taxpayer will find, in a year or two, that his limit will be stretched even further. Because as security and as water come to be more and more serious problems in Israel, [35:00] more burdens will be put on that taxpayer. And therefore, he who says, "Why doesn't Israel do more?" I think, is simply not being fair, decent, or even realistic.

There's a third argument that people throw. And I'll bet there isn't of you in this room who hasn't used it or thought of it, namely, "What about next year? You're asking me for such an

extraordinarily extra gift, because you're telling me that the volume is so great and the opportunity is so precious and the moment must be seized when it's here and cannot be allowed to vegetate." Fine. Suppose then, by some measure, I manage to meet your request. What about next year? Good friend, [36:00] caution about the future which inhibits action in the present is unworthy of a people of faith. If your caution about the future causes you to hold back in the present, then you have little faith. For I do not know nor does anyone what will be the problem of next year. I have no idea whether next year we will come to you and talk to you about 70,000 or 20,000 or 420,000. What will you do, when Russia opens, and we come and we talk to you not about 70,000 but 370,000? And what if you made a great effort the year before, [37:00] because of some situation, and the following year then we come to you and say, "Ten times..."? Is there any one of you who can guarantee that you will be here next year? We face it then, good friend. I think it's a very, very uncourageous answer to say, "What about next year?" "I would like to keep giving you this money," said a man who was 75 years old, in Miami, to Mr. Meyerhoff and me, when we solicited him for more than his usual \$5,000 -- "I would like to keep giving you this money for ten years to come!" says he, at 75, "And therefore, I can't give you any more than \$5,000 a year.

But believe me, you're going to get it, \$5,000 a year for the next ten years. Whether I live or die, you're going to get it."

[38:00] This is a posture not designed to carve out a country, to create a new dignity and position in the world, to win a war, or to empty countries of Jews who can move. This is a posture of caution, of retreat, of conservation of the past position, not attacking the future. And I think we should simply dispense with it in this manner, if the question comes up. What about next year? I just don't know! I do know about this year. And that's what we're talking to you about. That's what every one of the men at this table says, when he goes out and works. And I would urge you to use that same response.

[39:00] All these arguments, what about next year, all the arguments why can't Israel do more, all the arguments why is this different, these are all arguments of logic. These are all arguments of the intellect, of the mind. These are not arguments of the heart. And as far as I'm concerned, we end where we began. We began with an article of faith! We began with a philosophical position. We come full circle and we end there. If we believe deeply enough, this cause, this building of a land and saving of a people is so [40:00] extraordinary that it has every right to command our every fiber of being and strength and attention. We do not answer things with the intellect. We answer

things with the heart. We answer things with the feeling! We answer things with the soul.

Immigration is coming. We don't control it. Every Jew is worth saving. Israel is ready and willing to take them. Her defense is a continuous problem. She'll deal with it. The land must continuously be built. She'll deal with it. Her citizens are straining. They will strain more. We can [41:00] do more. We want to do more. We're just a little bit afraid of doing more. We started with an enormous tempo. If we can keep this going, if we can maintain it and expand it, then there's nothing that can hold us back.

I would like to close with the word of deep faith and deep belief and deep conviction. The joy of doing this will transcend all the other joys that you will ever accomplish. With your sons, your daughters, the free Jews in this Western hemisphere, the joy you will get from building [42:00] them, educating them, nourishing them, having them grow full and strong and beautiful is the greatest joy that you can have, that I can have. All other pleasures are ephemeral and passing, sensual and temporary. The deed, the deed, the lasting, the eternal, is that which we leave for the next generation, what we do with our son, our daughter. I tell you, there is a greater joy which transcends even that. It's the joy that we have in taking every

son of Israel and embracing him in a great collectivity -- and talking about 12 million sons of Israel, on the face of a globe of 2 and a half billion people. [43:00] We're a speck! We're the little bit of leaven in the dough, that makes the bread rise. Twelve million of us, protected, warm, close together, huddled not in fear, not in negative response against somebody who is trying to do something to us but tightly girded together in the most affirmative, positive, creative yearning. If it takes us 10 years, if it takes us 20, if it takes us 30, we'll build a country! We'll save the whole people. We'll put it together as well as any human beings can, for all eternity. And maybe it'll get smashed in 500 years. We'll build it up again. Because we'll leave a heritage. We have something fantastic that we believe [44:00] in. We will not be denied the creative urge! Seventy thousand, 75, 65. More Jews in 1962. Seventy-five more in '63, 100 more in '64, 20 more in '65, 300 more in '66. On we go until we have this family, warmly and safely sheltered, within its own sovereignty, within its own dignity, within its own capacity to create what it wants for itself and for the human race!

And I tell you that, when you and I can go beyond our own flesh and blood, of our own son and daughter, and think of every son and daughter of the Jewish people on the face of the whole

globe, then the joy that you get in watching your son and your daughter, you will get double and double and double and [45:00] double in watching the sons and the daughters of all of the children of Israel reach this happy day. Do you think it's far off, in the day of the messiah? No. I tell you now, this is ours to have and to hold, to taste and to savor. This is ours to have and to hold, in your and my lifetime. If we continue the way we've started in the past quarter of a century, long before another quarter of a century is out -- long before! -- you and I will live to see the day when Israel will be green and free and safe and self-sufficient and quite, quite on her own! [46:00] And we will live to see the day when every Jew on the face of this earth will live in a land of freedom, where no one will be able to tamper with him!

And if we can achieve that, that's our final payback, in historic terms, to Hitler. We can then lay down our arms and fold up all these UJA signs and go home, knowing that we've licked the job of this century, even though it may have taken us a generation to do it. But when we finally do put down our arms, we'll put them down with a firm conviction that there's nothing we could have done with our lives -- nothing! -- that's more important than this, [47:00] nothing we could have done with our money more important than this. And when we lay down our arms to

that feeling, we lay ourselves down to sleep, in peace and comfort and in the deep conviction of being satisfied with ourselves, as Jews and as men, that we did the right thing. Thank you, very much. [applause]

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