

TR-3820 Transcription

Friedman, Herbert A. Address to United Jewish Appeal Student

Mission trip. 24 December 1975.

Herbert A. Friedman: [0:00:01] The western democracies failed.

The Christian Church failed. The Jews of America failed.

Everybody failed. And that's how six million of us wound up in the oven. The saga and the story of the failure of the western democracies you should learn and study. Soon, most papers are becoming declassified after twenty-five, thirty years, the papers even of presidents of kings. The papers of Winston Churchill are now beginning to be made public, and you can go into the library and get them and start to read them.

There's one book now called *While Six Million Died*, which describes the failures of the State Department and of President Roosevelt [0:01:00]. Bloody awful hypocrite, by the way. Terrible man in regard to this whole Jewish question. Dreadful. My father and mother, like every Jew in America of that generation, adored him, revered him. The Jews loved him. He was a bloody hypocrite. He sold us down the river. Read the book *While Six Million Died*. Tells you the bankruptcy of American policy in the thirties and forties.

Tell you just one point. How many times England and America were asked by Jewish leaders to go in and send bombers from the

American bases in Italy over to southern Poland, not as far away even as the bombers were going into Romania [0:02:00] to bomb the oilfields that were feeding the German war machine. And we sacrificed many bombers and many crews to bomb out the fields at Ploesti. We asked for bombers to go in and bomb out the camp at Auschwitz. And yes, if you bombed it well, you might kill the 20,000 or 30,000 people who were in it at that moment. But you would then destroy it, and it could never be rebuilt. And now in retrospect, as we look back, maybe about two million people would have been saved.

And we got these lousy, hypocritical answers that neither the American Air Force or the British Air Force was willing to risk planes or crews to go in to bomb a camp out, because it wasn't the military objective. No, it wasn't the [0:03:00] military objective. It was just a Jewish crematorium.

The failure of the church -- the failure of the church begins in 1938, when the Pope made a concordat with Hitler. I won't say anything against you, so long as you don't touch the Catholics in Germany. That's morality, isn't it? That's high religious ethics, isn't it?

I think, and here I give you just my own personal opinion, I think this bankruptcy, this moral and ethical bankruptcy on the part of the church in the twentieth century, is going to

cause its death. And we won't live long enough to know [0:04:00]. But if you ever have any way, depending on how science fiction works, of taking a look back along about the twenty-second or the twenty-third century, to see the state of affairs of the Christian Church of the world, and if it is indeed by that time, as I suspect it will be, an irrelevant institution, and you look back at the beginnings of its weakness and the origins of its death, you'll find them in the middle of the twentieth century, in my opinion. The Pope was a bloody hypocrite.

American Jews? Don't get me started. Just don't get me started. If I asked you where were most of your fathers when this was going on, you will tell me, quite rightly, that they were fighting in the army in World War II [0:05:00]. That would be about the right timing, I would think, plus, minus. If I were to ask you what were your grandfathers doing, they were probably sixty or sixty-five years old at that time. If any of them are still alive so you can ask them, you go back home and ask them what they did in America in the 1930s and 1940s, earlier forties, to protest and to try to break Hitler, and to try to save Jews in Europe. I think the record is going to turn out to be just as dismal as I know it to be, but maybe you don't know it, because you haven't asked anybody. But you go ask.

Okay, I'd like [0:06:00] to finish, just by making the last point. If we understand Hitler's methods, and if we understand that the Jews couldn't do anything about it, because once you're trapped, you're trapped, and if we understand that the rest of the world didn't do anything about it, and the whole hideous thing came to its end, then the last question that's left for you to put to me is, "Okay, what shall we do about it from now on?" The past is the past. It's over. It's happened. What should our posture and our position be now?

I'd like to suggest just two or three things [0:06:59]. I never can think of more than two or three answers to any question. Everything is one, two, three, and that's enough. Number one, the lessons. The lessons that we are to learn out of this thing, the attitudes we are to develop, number one, remember what happened. Study it. Learn it. Never forget it. Teach it to your children from generation to generation until the end of time. The motto of this place is in a little one-word Hebrew -- it's in a pin which they put on you for twenty *agaot*. The word is *zaho*, which in Hebrew means remember. And every single one of you ought to be sure to get a pin and put it on. The UJA can afford to spend twenty *agaot* on each one of you and buy you a pin. *Zaho*.

Remember what happened. If [0:08:00] you don't know what happened, learn it. Once you learn it, don't forget it. Ignorance is an unforgivable sin in regard to this subject. Indifference is an unforgettable sin. The cheap argument that I don't want to hear about it, it's too ugly, uh-duh-wuh-wa. That's disgusting. Any Jew who says that ought to get out of the Jewish people. It happened to you! The same thing that you read in the *Haggadah* about every Jew, when you read the *Pesach* story, it's as though you left Egypt! Learn it, remember it, don't ignore it. Don't say it's too evil or too hard to stomach. Stomach it. Puke over it if you have to, and stomach it, and learn it, and remember it.

Number two [0:09:00], don't waste time on revenge. That's a negative, wasteful emotion. I think it's stupid for Jews to ventilate their feelings on the Holocaust by saying, "Boy, you never see me buying a German car." What the hell is the difference? You know when the time was not to buy a German car? When Stephen Wise tried to organize a boycott against Germany in 1935, and to break Germany, economically. But the Jews of America wouldn't go along with it, because they didn't want to get into a big hassle. Nineteen-thirty-five, if you didn't buy a German car, you were doing a good deed. Nineteen-seventy-five, if you don't buy a German car, what's the difference? You can't

break Germany economically anymore. And the people from whom you don't want to buy [0:10:00] the car are not even guilty of the crime forty years ago, so forget it. This is a stupid ventilation.

Look, I understand it from one point of view. It's just pure emotion. I'm never going to set foot on German soil. I'm not going to talk the German language. I won't buy German products. I won't have anything to do with Germans. I won't listen to German music. Look, come on, if you get your kicks out of that, that's okay by me, but that's a totally useless -- that's negative. It's not a constructive attitude. Isn't going to help us.

Number one, you learn the story and remember it. Number two, don't waste your time on revenge. Number three, the main thing -- the main thing -- you learn the lesson that Jews can rely only upon themselves, and that Jews have to have a center [0:11:00] of power and independent force to protect themselves with, if they have to rely on themselves and if nobody else is going to help them.

We are creating such a center of power and an independent force for the protection of Jews and, I hope, Judaism here in Israel. You do the same in America. Build your American communities into power centers of independent Jewish force. And

Jewish force is definable in many ways. Here in Israel, it includes carrying a gun. I don't know whether in Des Moines, Iowa, you can make it in through carrying a gun or not, or whether you think you have to or not [0:11:59]. But if it doesn't mean carrying a gun, it certainly does mean teaching your kids Hebrew, because that's a source of power and force. Because that means if you get in trouble in Des Moines, Iowa, and you haven't got a gun, you've got the next-best thing with which to defend yourself, which is the language which will enable you to jump here, blend in here, and pick up a gun here.

Interruption: Nineteen forty-eight, people coming here out of the camps in Germany and off the camp in Cyprus in the month of July, six weeks after independence, being given guns in their hands to go and take part in the battle to liberate the road up to Jerusalem [0:13:00]. Being stopped at that police station at that police station at Latrun, which battle we lost. That's why we never had the road to Jerusalem for the next nineteen years. And one of the reasons for the failure of the battle at Latrun was A, that they were inexperienced in the use of weapons. Okay, you can't blame them for that.

But the second thing is they didn't understand the commands of the commanders. And the tragedies that took place because there was no communication between these hundreds and thousands

of eager guys who, for the first time, were able to fight for themselves, but it was Tower of Babel. The battlefield was carnage with hundreds of dead, because people were going right, and people were going left, and people didn't know where to go.)

Tower of Babel is something we shouldn't have today in this world. Strong community in America [0:13:59]. Build your day schools. Build your educational institutions. That's also a form of defense. Education is defense. And if you people are going to be leaders of the American communities in the future, then you've got to know where the priorities are, and they are not with such things as hospitals, and maybe even not with community centers. But defense is with education, and don't you ever forget it.

Okay, those are the lessons. Learn what happened, don't bother to take any revenge on anybody. Just make damn sure that in the future, we are stronger and able to rely on ourselves than we were before. Okay, it's 9:30. Let's take a few minutes for questions, and then we'll take a few minutes for the film, and then we'll be okay [0:15:00]. Questions. Yeah, okay, from the back, number one here in the middle, number two, number three. Shoot.



M: One of the things you just kept on saying was no revenge, and as far as [inaudible] is concerned --

Herbert A. Friedman: As far as what?

M: As far as that is concerned, as far as all of this is concerned, that added to -- I can see the graphical, but in my opinion, [inaudible] prevalent. We have a large concentration of the Neo-Nazi movement, and I'm from Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Herbert A. Friedman: Milwaukee, Wisconsin, large contingent of Neo-Nazism.

M: Right. And lately, they've been getting their kicks vandalizing synagogues, and bumper stickers, and putting booths up in fairs and local conventions, and things like that [0:16:00]. And we've been trying to get a coalition started of various organizations.

Herbert A. Friedman: You've been trying to do what?

M: We're organizing a coalition --

**Herbert A. Friedman**: Coalition.

**M**: -- of all the various Jewish organizations on -- student organizations and the ZOA and [inaudible]. I was wondering about your reaction to that as far as dealing with that kind of situation.

**Herbert A. Friedman**: I think you have to do every legal means to put them out of business. And then, let's not get to the next question of what to do if legal means don't work. Hold that, until you have exhausted all legal means. Legal means include picketing. Legal means include legally getting a license to obstruct something that they're doing. Legal. Everything legally. If they're setting up a booth [0:17:00] and you want to run a demonstration in front of that booth to smother it, get a police permit to have a demonstration and bring 1,000 people there, and smother that booth, legally.

What disturbs me was your last sentence, because it was reminiscent of something which is so crucial in this whole business. You said, "We're trying to get a coalition together of all the Jewish organizations." And while you were saying those words, what flashed through my mind was Warsaw Ghetto, 1943, and how it took months and months and months for the Jewish

organizations inside the Warsaw Ghetto -- inside the ghetto!  
They were already in prison! How it took months for them to try  
to work out their differences [0:18:00] in order to create a  
Jewish fighting organization against the Nazis. And when did  
they finally get it created? The last month.

Five hundred thousand people were packed into the ghetto.  
You know who created the fighting organization finally? The last  
50,000. It took 450,000 dead bodies to convince Zionists and  
Bundists and religionists and secularists all to get together in  
a coalition. Boy, oh boy, if you want to make a coalition, make  
it in fifteen minutes, and anybody that doesn't want to join,  
you forget it and go fight with what you've got! Okay, sorry for  
the explosion, but that's always a dreadful thing, that goddamn  
Jewish business of trying to get everybody to agree [0:19:00].  
Yeah.

**M2:** I was just curious about the statement you made about the  
man [inaudible] carry a gun. I was just curious, what is your  
personal opinion of Rabbi [Hanan's?] thesis that there could be  
a Holocaust in the United States? What is your personal opinion  
about that?

**Herbert A. Friedman**: First of all, I don't know that he said that, that there could be a Holocaust in the United States. But if he did, okay, maybe I just missed it somewhere.

My personal opinion of that is that I don't agree with it. I don't think there could be a Holocaust in the United States. Holocaust means genocide, means destruction. If you choose in the United States -- six million of you allow yourselves to be rounded up again and be led to the pen again, I think I would go out of my mind in insanity. I do not think that a Holocaust in America is possible, because I think that you have learned the lessons of the first Holocaust and would not permit a second one to take [0:20:00] place, A.

B, we wouldn't, either. And if there were a dictator in America who were attempting to create genocide among you and you were not organizing yourselves to fight back, we would have to try to figure out how some of us could go over there and fight back for you, or with you. I think the possibilities of another genocide, another Holocaust, are not realistic.

If you're asking me, is there the possibly of a Hitler developing in the United States, that's a whole, complicated, political question and we haven't got the time to go into it now. If you guys have got any more time left on your itinerary -- and I'm not fudging now -- but that's a political question

which I would like to try to answer. We can't do it this morning. If you guys got any more time on your itinerary and you want to have me spend another hour or two with you, I'd be glad to come any time that your organizers [0:21:00] can organize it, and we'll go into questions like that.

Yes.

**M3:** You mentioned the failure of the western democracies and the church, and then the Holocaust. But I don't remember catching anything about the European Jewry during the Holocaust. Why did you --

**Herbert A. Friedman:** European Jewry? They were the victims.

**M3:** Yeah, but they had all of the 1930s to do something about it. They were very in very influential positions in Germany. (Inaudible) --

**Herbert A. Friedman:** Whoa-whoa-whoa-whoa-whoa, excuse me. No, you're shifting ground. I've got to insist on definition. European Jewry didn't do anything about it, and then suddenly, you said, "German Jews were in very influential positions." Separate the problems. Separate the problems.

German Jews were in influential positions. There were 600,000 German Jews out of about 80 million Germans. They were less than 1 percent of the population. You are about 3 percent in the American population, so you know what I'm talking about, relative weight [0:22:00]. The German Jews indeed did not. Some few spiritual leaders did. Rabbi Leo Baeck, whose name is known to you, I'm sure. Few others. Most of the German Jews temporized at the beginning. From the middle twenties until the early thirties -- Hitler came into power in '33, but he made his first push in '23. So for ten years, they knew he was on the horizon. Thirty-three he came in. The war didn't start until '39, so they still had even six more years after he was in power.

What happened was half of those 600,000 left the country. Half of German Jewry left Germany. Got out. Escaped. Where did they go? Large numbers went to England, where they were put in alien camps because they were German citizens, even though they were Jews. Went to England, went to the United States. Large numbers went to the United States [0:23:00].

I have two brothers. There were three boys of us in the family. We were very, very poor. We're talking about the Depression in America in the middle thirties, if you remember it. My father had no work. We had no bread in the house. My father signed an affidavit for three young German refugee boys,

and so instead of becoming three of us, there were six of us. And my mother tried to find bread for six of us, instead of three of us. So that there were lower-middle class, and poor Jews in America who rallied to the cause of bringing into the United States by signing affidavits around 100,000 or 150,000 German Jews in 1933, '34, '35, '36, '37. My family saved three, because we were three. That's as much as she thought she could do. I think it was pretty damn good.

So that [0:23:59] the German Jews didn't do anything to stop Hitler. The rest of European Jews there was no power. Okay, listen, hey, hey, hey, time. There was a -- yeah, you and then I saw a hand in the back -- you -- and that's it.

**F:** You made the point that [inaudible] disgusted at talking about it as too emotional. I think another problem that we should talk about is a present-day problem of Jews who are still prisoners -- Jews in the Soviet Union, Syrian Jews. We're forgetting about them.

**Herbert A. Friedman:** No, we're not forgetting about them. You can't talk about everything at once.

**F:** I know. I know that, but I'm saying in the States as a whole, particularly in the school that I'm in in Chicago, there's nothing going on.

**Herbert A. Friedman:** Start it.

**F:** We are.

**Herbert A. Friedman:** Okay.

**F:** I just wanted to say that [inaudible].

**Herbert A. Friedman:** I think that you shouldn't just pass this issue off with one sentence like this, see. I don't know how many days [0:24:59] you're going to be here, and I don't know how much time you're going to have to get into discussions of what you should do when you get back to America. But you ought to spend some time on that. I would really beg your organizers to give you some time. And I repeat, if you want me to come back, I'm going to be here until the thirtieth. The morning of the thirtieth, next whatever it is, Tuesday, Wednesday, I've got to go to America. But I'll be here until then, and if you want



me to come and join you on any discussion on that or any other subject, I'll be glad to. You should take it up, yes.

Yes. Last question.

**M4:** [inaudible] my question, I would make the statement about [inaudible] learning [inaudible] not everyone has forgotten. Could you reminisce a little bit on the death of Dr. Arendt?

**Herbert A. Friedman:** Hannah Arendt? Rather not talk about her. Bad woman, in my book. For one very simple [0:26:00] statement that she made. She says the Jews were slaughtered, and they themselves agreed with the slaughter. Now, that's nuts, as far as I'm concerned. Her description of them as being willing victims by their non-resistance, I mean, it just flies in the face of reality. It's the kind of German psychoanalysis that causes me to vomit. I can't stand it. I think she was a self-hating Jew, period, full stop.

And if that's not a satisfactory answer to you, I'm really sorry, but I can't stand those who blame the victims. It's just too cheap and easy a way out [0:27:00]. Blame the people who are to blame. The most you can say about the victims is that they maybe didn't fight back enough -- enough! Although they even fought back without weapons. They fought in the partisan units.

They fought in the underground units. They fought -- the largest number of people in the *Maquis* were Jews in France, in the underground against the Nazis.

But I'll finish the point by saying this, and you can think about this in terms of Des Moines, Iowa. The point at which a Nazi soldier in uniform bangs on the front door of your house and tells you to get outside and get in the truck is the point at which you have to decide whether to go into the kitchen and grab a knife and try to stab him [0:28:00]. Because no, that's your last chance. Maybe you should have done it five years earlier, or ten years earlier, but leave that alone for the moment. If you don't do it then, you certainly are late, because you never have another chance. And nobody did it then. Because why don't you do it then? Because you figure while there's life, there's hope. And you don't know what will happen, and maybe you can jump off the truck. And anyway, if you stab him, all that he'll do is shoot your wife and kids right there in the kitchen in front of you, and so that finishes the whole ball game. And everybody thinks of it in personal terms.

But perhaps if 1,000 people did that in some big town, then maybe the Nazis wouldn't have been able to round up everybody in that town. It's always the difference between the [*pratte?*] and the [*cloud?*]. You never know how to balance it between the

[0:29:00] private individual and the whole community. So the most, the most you can accuse anybody of is to say he didn't resist at the moment of capture. And I think that accusation is unfair, because it goes against human nature.

But for her to make the general accusation that she does, that the Jews somehow by their nature and their inner psychological convulsions, and all the other garbage that she's talking about, were really willing co-conspirators with the murders, ugh, don't get me started.

Listen, I didn't say one word about the UJA. [laughter and applause]. All I want to tell you is that [0:30:00] for the rest of your life, you never have to use that word so long as you agree with two things. The Jewish people is a united people, and we're all responsible for each other, and you and I are responsible for those six million. And so long as you say the second thing, that the Jewish people has created a vehicle for itself in the middle of the twentieth century, this state of Israel, and that also belongs to all of us, you and me. And you can do everything you can to try to keep that strong. So if you just have those two basic premises, you never have to utter those three ugly initials until the day you die. I don't care, because you'll act, you'll act in accordance with those two principles, and you will become [0:31:00] the defenders of the

Jewish people and the Jewish nation and the Jewish religion, and that's really what we're asking you to do. Thank you very much.

[applause]

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