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Judaism and the Religion of the East, 1919.

LECTURE BY RABBI ABBA H. SILVER ON "JUDAISM
AND THE RELIGIONS OF THE EAST," AT THE TEMPLE
EAST 55th STREET AND CENTRAL AVENUE, SUNDAY,
FEBRUARY 17, 1919, CLEVELAND, OHIO.

The East has always been considered the spiritual teacher of the West. The East, in a sense, is the home of religion. We have been accustomed to think of the East as the hinterland of civilization. Because of our own ignorance, and because of the stupid reports of missionaries, and because of some novels written by western authorities full of untruth concerning the East, we have come to regard the great East as the backwood^{ward} part of the world. We have come to look upon the races of the East as upon the submerged masses of the world,--the unredeemed, the benighted heathens. It is only of late years that a ray of truth has begun to pierce this cloud of ignorance and prejudice. We have come to see through study and observation the vast spiritual treasure stores of the East. We have come to realize what a remarkable culture the East has produced, and how truly idealism permeates the lives of the people of the East.

I venture to say that religion is taken seriously nowhere in the world but in the East. The East has been the spiritual teacher of the West. I believe that

it still has much to teach--the wise, knowing, patient East. So that when I speak of the religions of the East, I do not speak of semi-barbaric religions. I speak of religions that (in a sense) have reached ^{a very} the highest point of development; religions that antedate Christianity by five or six or ten centuries, and religions whose standard of ethics is as high, if not higher than the standard of Christian ethics. Of course, it is difficult, in fact impossible, to speak of all the religions of the East in one lecture. One cannot speak of any one of them in one lecture, but my object is not to define each and every religion of the East, but rather to bring out the contrasts, to show the differences which exist between the religions of the East and Judaism. And I shall speak this morning of a few of these religions.

First of all I shall speak of Islam, the religion of Mohammed. Now, Mohammedanism is looked upon, or has been until recently, with ^{little or no} a certain amount of contempt. Christian apologists have been very profligate in their denunciatory criticisms of Mohammedanism. They attribute to Mohammedanism the backwardness of many of the races of the East. The fact of the matter is this: that Mohammedanism today, or Islam, is the religion of over two hundred and seventy-five millions of men; that Mohammedanism has supplied these human beings with all the needs of their ^{spiritual} lives; it has sustained them and inspired them; it has been the food of their daily

lives. Any religion that can help two hundred seventy-five millions of God's children has great truth, inherent truth within it. Then, again, the phenomenal spread of Mohammedanism has in itself evidence of a certain great truth, of a certain inherent strength. Within one hundred years after Mohammed, Mohammedanism had spread through Arabia, through Palestine, through Syria, through Asia Minor, through Egypt, through northern Africa, through Sicily, through Spain, then through southern France where it was checked. And eastward, to India, to China, and through the islands of the southern Pacific.

It is true that Mohammedanism was propagated by the sword, also. It is true that it was a religion of conquest. But there certainly was some dynamic force, some propelling and driving power back of this conquering people that thrilled them and inspired them with a purpose to go forth and conquer the world. Then, again, we must not forget that during the dark ages of Europe, when the nations of the earth were actually steeped in ignorance of the awfulest sort, in superstition, in intellectual gloom, when a pall of darkness spread over Europe for eight centuries, it was Mohammedanism that carried the torch of civilization and science, of learning and of philosophy. Wherever Mohammedanism came a university of learning was established, and the knowledge of the ancient Greeks, which was disregarded completely by the Church, was preserved by Mohammedanism, and through Mohammedanism, it came into Europe and hastened the day

of the Renaissance and the Reformation. Greek culture, Greek philosophy, the philosophy of Aristotle and Plato were unknown to Europe in the dark ages, but were taught in the schools of Mohammedanism, and through Arabic, Syriac and Hebrew translations, they were carried ultimately into Europe. The seeds germinated into the revival of learning which meant the Renaissance, the Reformation and modern Europe..

Then, again, Mohammedanism actually taught and teaches today an exalted and perfected and complete monotheism. The creed of Mohammed: "There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is his prophet," is a very different thing from, "I believe in the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost." Mohammedanism taught an absolute monotheism, and the tradition which tells of the death of Mohammed is significant. A Mohammedan tradition says that when Mohammed died, Abu Behr, his closest disciple and friend, went out to worship with a host of men, and said unto them: "Let those who worship Mohammed, know that Mohammed is dead, but let those who worship Allah know that Allah lives and will never die." And because of this absolute monotheism that Mohammedanism taught, the Christian communities of Egypt and Asia Minor easily succumbed to its influence, because in Asia Minor and Egypt the trinitarian Christianity never took a foothold. There were always heresies, in Asia Minor and Egypt; but Mohammedanism coming with its creed, "There is no God but Allah," naturally appealed to those communities,

and within a generation or two both of these Christian communities had become Mohammedan.

So that we need ^{not} indulge in the ancient pastime of denouncing another faith because we have one of our own. There is a great deal of truth and grandeur and nobility in Mohammedanism. Mohammed came at a time when the tribes in Arabia were heathens, when the ancient local cults of Arabia still held sway over the people. Mohammed, himself, an ignorant man, and yet a great enthusiast and impassioned dreamer, of a contemplative frame of mind, came to realize the weakness of the faths of his peoples, the tribes of Arabia, and he conceived the idea of preaching the ideal of one Allah, one God. Of course, he received that belief from the Jews, who dwelt in Arabia at the time, and the Koran is full of allusions, not only to the old testament but many of the traditions that were passed orally among the Jewish people. Mohammed was ready to make great concessions to the Jews, in order to win them over. He was ready to make Jerusalem instead of Mecca the center of the Mohammedan world; he was ready to make the tenth of Tishri the day of the pagan, the universal fast day in the Mohammedan world; he was ready to accept certain dietary laws of the Jews as binding upon his followers, providing the Jews would regard him as the last of the prophets. The Jews were not ready to do that, and that is why the Koran abounds in so many attacks upon the Jews. However, be that as it may, Mohammedanism was an

offspring of Judaism in its fundamental, basic doctrine of the community of God. Of course, there are great differences between Mohammedanism and Judaism, and I shall point out a few.

First of all the status of man in the faith of Islam is much inferior to the status which man occupies in the religion of the Jew. Islam means the surrendering of one's self to God, submission--absolute submission. Man is insignificant; man is small; God is the only realty and man must submit absolutely and unquestioningly to God. The idea of the indwelling of God in man, the idea that man was made in the image of God, the idea that man is the son of God, that man is a co-worker of God in creation, that idea which exalts and dignifies man in the concepts of Judaism, which gives motive and impulse to man's efforts and endeavors,--that does not exist in Mohammedanism at all. Man is the grain of dust on the wide stretches of the desert--he is insignificant. And because of that and out of that follows the terrible fatalism of Mohammedanism. Man has no control over his life and destiny; he is merely a puppet in the hand of fate or Kismet--fate; the inalterable, unvarying, eternal law which controls all the actions, morally and physically, of man. Man has no choice. He is grooved from the beginning of age. He is the plaything of cause and effect--fate.

But because Judaism accepts no such doctrine,

because the idea of fate destroys the most necessary and the morally fundamental idea of freewill,--if everything is predetermined, you have no free will, you have no choice; if you have no free will, you have no morality. It means nothing. You cannot speak of morality at all unless you presuppose that you have a definite choice or alternative, unless you can choose the good or the evil. If there is no such choice, if your action is predetermined, morality is merely a word meaningless. Judaism insists upon the doctrine of free will. You can see where the ideal of predetermination would stultify the onrushing spirit of man. It is pessimistic; it is discouraging. If you cannot mould and determine the world about you, if you cannot take the forces of nature and drive them into channels suitable to your welfare, what use, what purpose, what object is there in human strivings and aspirations? And so Judaism cannot agree with the doctrine of fatalism, of Mohammedanism.

Then, again, there is also this difference, and a very important difference: Mohammedanism believes in one God, but that is an intellectual concept. It is a negative concept. The peoples believe in many gods. Mohammedanism denies the existence of many gods but insists upon the existence of one God; but it is not an emotional concept; it is not the God who is the source of morality; the God as the holy God. You do not find in Mohammedanism the concept such as this: "Be ye holy, for I, the Lord, your God, am holy." You don't

find in Mohammed an idea such as this: "Ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." You don't find in Mohammedanism, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts." Holiness in the sense of perfection, of moral qualities; holiness in the sense of being a pattern, a model for all the children of man to follow. In fact, the idea of Allah as a moral god is almost foreign to Mohammedanism. You see, a good deal of the sensuality of the East has crept into Mohammedanism, and Mohammed himself was not free from this corrosive sensuality of the East. So that in his personal life, in his vision of the hereafter, the paradise which he holds out as the bait for all the faithful, you have a concept of a hereafter that is so material, so sensual, so voluptuous, so entirely different from the Jewish idea, that in the hereafter there will be "No eating and no drinking. Only the righteous ones will sit with the crowns upon their heads and partake of the glory of the Divine Presence,"--an absolute spiritual conception of future life, which Mohammedanism cannot, because of its materialism, have.

And lastly there is this other difference between Mohammedanism and Judaism--the fearful intolerance of Mohammedanism. It divides Islam, divides the world into two parts: the territory of Islam and the territory of war. The territory of Islam and the territory of the sword. Strange, is it not, how religion, God's greatest gift to man, was at all times the source of so much

intolerance and hatred and bigotry? Strange, is it not, that every religion that came to preach love--"Love thine enemies"--kindness, forgiveness, preach that only as far as these things concern the faithful and the believers? The heathen, the unbeliever, the heretic, he belonged to another world entirely; he should be cast into outer darkness where there is "weeping and gnashing of teeth." I am quoting the new testament now. And Mohammedanism, likewise, in its passion of conquering the world for the idea of the one God, stopped at no act of brutality and intolerance to force people into an acceptance of it. Judaism has never preached the doctrine of intolerance because Judaism has never, to any large degree, been a religion of missionaries. Judaism has preached what I have referred to in my last address--the righteous, even among the heathens, will partake of the world to come. Taken all in all, Mohammedanism has been an instrument of God in the world. A daughter religion of Judaism, it has preached the ideal of one God, and it has also preserved intellectual pursuits, cultural learning and science for the peoples of the world. As such it was a real boon, a real gift of God to the world.

Now, a word about the religions of India. India is the home of many religions, and one cannot in this brief moment left to us take up each one of the great religions separately, whether Brahminism, or Hinduism, or Buddhism. But, fortunately, there are some

basic principles underlying all these religions of India and of these basic principles, in so far as they contrast with the principles of Judaism, I will speak this morning. There are three things that are fundamental in all the religions of India, and they are these: first of all the absolute, unquestioning conviction that everything that is is bad; that existence is absolutely evil; that all effort and all life and all being is pain and suffering. That is a fundamental concept in the religions of India. Existence of any and every form of nature, every desire, every human striving even for the good things of life, is evil. That is an axiom. And even death is no release from this evil, because death does not put an end to human existence. Death is only a transformation, a passing from one existence into another, and that other existence is also evil because it is existence. It may be a little less painful because of the good acts that you performed in this existence, but it is evil just the same. Hence the idea of the transmigration of souls from one existence into another. Man, then, is caught in a chain of living or being from which he must free himself if he wishes to escape the evil of existence. So that the real purpose of religion in the east is this: to show the way to the children of man how to release themselves from the shackles and the chains of existence. How can man release himself from the fetters of existence? Why, simply by relinquishing every hope, every desire, every ambition, every aspiration; simply by becoming indifferent to everything in this world

to joy and pain and sorrow and everything. The goal of life, then, in the East is annihilation, the loss of conscious individuality--the perfect fusing of our individuality, of our soul with the world soul, like a drop of water fuses and blends with the waters of the ocean. That is the ideal of the East,--forgetfulness, self-annihilation, self-destruction.

Now, that is absolutely basic of all the religions of the East. So that in Buddhism, which, by the way, is a religion that has an exalted code of ethics, a code of ethics that is dominated by a beautiful moderation, the four noble truths are, the four principal doctrines of Buddhism are as follows: First, the noble truth of suffering, that everything is pain and everything is evil; and, secondly, the noble truth of the cause of suffering. The cause of suffering is desire; desire is the cause of existence; existence is evil; thirdly, the noble truth that releases from suffering. Release from suffering consists in relinquishing desire, in absolute surrender of every ambition and hope for this existence and hereafter, for all of it is evil; and, lastly, the noble truth of the way of release from suffering, and the way of release from suffering consists first in realizing a certain truth, the truth concerning the ultimate of life, and, secondly, in devoting one's life to some saint, some master, some teacher, who will point the way to the attainment of this truth, of this enlightenment, that will lead to Nirvana, and, lastly, asceticism,

the monastic life, the giving up of everything that you hold dear and living the life of the hermit, of the ascetic. Now, that is the basic principle of all the religions of India.

The idea of Judaism challenges all that. Judaism does not say at all that the world is evil. Judaism says, "When God saw creation He said that it was good." And Judaism says in the language of Akiba, "All that the Lord doth is for the good." Judaism even said that death itself is very good. Judaism does not deny the existence of evil in the world at all. It is too practical a religion, for it pays too much deference to man's mind, logic, reason and experience. It is not a mysticism to deny the practical experience of human life. Judaism says that there is evil in the world, but Judaism also says that evil is not ultimate, it is not final, but that evil itself may, through human effort and striving, become an instrument for the good; that evil is the impulse, the driving power of human life to obtain greater good and greater perfection; that it the discipline of evil, the educative, elemental evil that makes life possible and worth while. Judaism does not depreciate existence. Judaism does not say that man is a bundle of evil and errors and suffering and sorrow. Judaism says, "What is man that Thou art mindful of him? And the son of man regardeth him yet Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels and hath crowned him with glory and honor." The majesty of man, the dignity of man, the divinity of man, that is what Judaism emphasizes.

And so while the religion of Buddhism, Brahminism, or Hinduism, tells man to cease from effort, from labor, from endeavor because it is all useless, it is all evil, Judaism says unto him to labor is to pray; work because your work will tell effectively in the world; struggle and strive because through your struggles and striving you are making a more beautiful and a more perfect world. That is one fundamental difference between the religions of India and the religion of Judaism.

One of the cardinal doctrines of almost every religion of India is the caste system. The caste system is not a social system in India only--it is a religious system. It is based on the idea that God created distinct types and classes of men. So that in the religion of Brahminism, for example, the lowest casts of society are not even admitted to the performance of the religious rites and ceremonies. They are too low to be permitted to indulge in the sacred rites of Brahminism. They are outcasts of society. Even Buddhism, which is the Protestant religion in India, the reforming religion, also accepts this idea of the division of society into castes. Of course, Judaism has never tolerated any such notion. God made man in His image, not a certain class of men, but men of men. And the rabbis very poignantly comment on a sentence of the bible--these are the laws and the statutes which men should perform. These laws and statutes were not given to the Aaronites, to the priests or to the Levites, or to the Israelites, but to man to perform the

them--all people, all ranks, all classes of society.

The absolute democracy of Judaism is one of its crowning glories, and because of that it differs again from the religions of India.

Let me sum up because of the brevity of time.

Perhaps at some future time I shall have occasion to speak of the religion of Confucius, the religion of hundreds of millions in China. For the present we shall content ourselves merely with the religion of Mohammed and these three great religions of India--Buddhism, Brahminism and Hinduism. Each one of these religions teaches great truths concerning God. Each one of them has exalted systems of ethics; each one of them has helped hundreds of millions to a better and a fuller and a richer life, and yet Judaism, while acknowledging all these things and saying that each one of them is an instrument in the hand of God, still maintains that it has within itself ideals and standards even more exalted and even more perfect. Judaism does not say that it is the perfect religion. The perfect religion is still in the making. The perfect religion belongs to the future and not to the past. To say that we have a perfect religion is to say that all the future efforts of the children of men are useless, because we already have perfection. Nothing is perfect. But we do say that the study of all the religions of the world, the oldest and the newest, leads us to the conviction that after all in Judaism we have the religious idea of the unity of God pure and simple; and an ethical

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standard of human life and human worth which is as high,
if not higher than that contained in any of the religions
of the world. So that while the Mohammedan will say,
"There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is His prophet,"
and the Christian will say, "I believe in the Father, the
Son, and the Holy Ghost," and the Buddhist will say, "I
seek refuge in Buddha, I seek refuge in the law, I seek
refuge in the congregation," the Jew will continue to
say unto the end of time, "Hear O, Israel, the Lord our
God. The Lord is One." Amen.



II. East and West: East is home of Religion. SERMON-2

II. Cannot do justice to all or to any one; The Religion
of the East in one lecture. Will but point out
some of the contrasts - i. In Ethics all have high
standards. They differ from one another and from Jud.
is the motive for the ethical life and in their theological
speculations.

III. Mohammedanism -

- 1- Christians found speaking with him a ~~challenge~~ attempt of M.
 Echo of those charmingly stupid days when to believe
 in one faith was to hate or condemn another.
2. M. is faith of 275 millions of men.
3. His phenomenal spread is of truly indicative of inherent
 strength -
4. Carried back of science & learning. When Christendom
 was sinking into 1000 yrs of intellectual lethargy.
 a. Damascus, Baghdad centers of learning - Conservers
 of Greek culture. By way of M. the Arabic translation
 of Aristotle by Jews - ~~the~~ the great classics
 transmitted to Western Europe - thereby
 hastening the day of the Renaissance & the
 Reformation in -
5. Preached a complete monotheism - Jan
 excels Christianity. Its Creed - There is no
 God but Allah and M. is his prophet is
 a very different thing from "I believe in the
 Father etc." -
- a. when M. died - tradition says that Abu
 Bakr one of the first disciples of M. told
 those who would not believe that M. died -
 "He who worships etc."

2. M. is fourth of 275 million of men.

2. It is partly of 2/3 nature. Truly indicative of inherent
3. Its phenomenal spread is 2/3. When Christendom
bring th -

4. Carried back of science & learning. When Christendom
was sinking into 1000 yrs of intellectual lethargy,
as - Damascus, Baghdad centers of learning - Conservers
of Greek culture. By way of ~~14th~~ Arabic translations
transmitted to the West by Jews - ~~the~~ the great classics
transmitted to the West by Jews - thereby
helping the day of the Renaissance & the
Reformation in —

5. Preached a complete monotheism - I am
excellent Christianity - Its Creed - There is no
God but Allah and M. is his prophet is
a very different thing from "I believe in the
Father etc." -

a- when M. died - trad: his supp. that Abu
Bekr one of the first disciples of M. told
those who would not believe that M. died -
"He who worships etc.

b. That is why the Chr. communities of Egypt, Asia Minor, where Trinitarian Chr. never had a strong hold and where heretical sects abounded, succumbed so easily to it.

C. M. (his history) b. 520 c. d. Hysia 622, d. 632

- a. Ignorant, impassioned contemplative -
- b. Saw heathenism of Arabs + abuses; austere
- c. Preached Monotheism + Morality -
- d. In Medina devotes himself to organization - identifies his mission with the destiny of the Arab world - gives it a mission to conquer the world in name + for Allah - founding Empire -

IV. Its weaknesses. when compared with Judaism.

a. deprecates status of man - Islam = surrender to God - The idea of the individuality of God - "Son-ship" is not found in Islam.

b. Hence its fatalism - Kismet - everything free will + initiative.

c. God is not source of holiness - The holy food pattern of human life - "Be ye holy etc" is not found in M. - It is intellectually mono. but God is not the stimulus to holy perfect life. The sensuality of the East which M. himself detested & escape is felt in M. hereafter - of ^{all the world} _{the world}

d. Intolerance

a. divides world 1 - Territory of Islam

2 - Territory of war -

b. shares it with Chr. "outer darkness"

V. Judaism teacher of M. - accepts Jew. teachings -
1. M. knew Jesus - accepts Jew. teachings -
2. was willing to make concessions - (3)

VIII In Buddhism - The four noble truths ;
Buddhism are

- I. The noble Truth of suffering - all life is suffering.
- II. The noble Truth of the Cause of suffering - desire.
Root of existence, hence, evil.
- III. The noble Truth of the Release from suffering - complete
cessation of desire. relinquishment etc.
- IV. The noble Truth of the way to the Release from
suffering - eight-fold.

1. Right belief (in 4 truths).
2. Resolve to renounce sensual pleasures
3. speech
4. behavior
5. occupation
6. effort.
7. Contemplation (not to be affected by joy & sorrow)
8. concentration - mystic trance,
pranayama & Nirvana

IX. Pessimism shares this with Christ -

Jewish view - Optimist & Unrelenting.

1. Existence is not evil - There is evil in existence
1. And Job saw that it was good.
2. A world created by God must be good.
3. Akiba - ... 2nd Nisan 3, 283 AD
4. What not deny evil but said that
evil serves an ultimate good.
to struggle overcome

2. Hence call not to cessation but to Effort.
1. To become co-workers of God. To have
3 good ; life is not annihilation but progression
inward, purification & perfection

4. Jude Psalm -
"What is man, that Thou art etc."

XI. Caste System - Religions were then racial,
1. In Brahmanism - lower castes are excluded
2. Even in Buddhism:

XII. Judaism.
1. I have we are all one father. I have
and we first created us all -
2. "The statutes and ordinances which
man shall do and live thereby" -
Final aim of Jud. is not attained
by commandments or by the Law
but by all mankind / supra. above.
13. p. 86.

XIII. Conclusion - All religions are good & true
but we feel that Jud. is whole and perfect &
nearest approximation to Rel. & ethical
truth - so that the
1. Christian may say - I believe
2. Muslim - "There is no god -
3. Buddhist - "I go to the Law for refuge"
for refuge, I go to the Law for refuge
I go to the congregation for refuge -
4. Judaism - I believe in God -

VI It has been influence for good. (1) Taught men (2) Preserved science —

VII India - Brahmanism, Hinduism, Buddhism

1 - we cannot discuss each separately. But almost all the religions of India have and the far East (with the exception of Confucianism) have a common world-outlook which is basic religions —

2. (a) All existence is Evil. - all life is base.

(b) Transmigration of soul - death is passing from one existence to another. Other existence is also bad, it may be a little less painful because of our good deeds in this existence because of our Karma. Rebirth. State of each existence is conditioned by acts & life in previous existence.

one must free himself from this too

(c) Salvation - the aim of religion is to show how man can free himself from this round of existence - The goal of Nirvana - complete self-annihilation or less of conscious individual existence or perfect passing of the ind. soul in the world - soul - like ship, water returning to sea.

a. means of attaining this knowledge realization of truth, existence is intellectual - moral life itself is insufficient. Devotion to some god or saint like Buddha (3) Ascetic life.