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What has the Jew Contributed to the Cause of Freedom?, 1919.



LECTURE BY RABBI ABBA H. SILVER ON "WHAT HAS  
THE JEW CONTRIBUTED TO THE CAUSE OF FREEDOM,"  
AT THE TEMPLE, EAST 55th STREET AND CENTRAL  
AVENUE, (SUNDAY MORNING, APRIL 20th, 1919.)

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We are in the midst of the Passover season, and a host of sacred memories throng in upon us whenever this season rolls around, for the festival of the Passover rings so true to the spirit of the people that celebrate it; and the festival of Passover is celebrated at a time when nature itself sings the song of redemption. The Passover commemorates the great epic of emancipation, and the world waited three thousand years before another such epic was written. And Passover occurs at a time when nature itself seems to throw off the shackles of winter and break forth into the triumphant strains of new life and liberation.

I think that it is characteristic of the genius of the Jew that he identified Passover with spring, and it is furthermore characteristic of the genius of the Jew that he placed among the most important festivals of his religious calendar a festival which celebrates freedom.

*Begin here*

I think freedom, more than anything else, is the very theme in the symphony of Jewish life, the constantly recurring refrain in his manifold experiences.



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→ freedom, freedom, from the day that Abraham smashed the idols of his father, breaking the chains of idolatry and superstition, unto this very day when the sons and daughters of Israel are in the forefront fighting against the evils of injustice and unrighteousness, smashing the chains of inequality, Freedom has been the pulsating motive of Jewish life.

Men have frequently said that the mission of Israel was to preach monotheism, but monotheism means nothing else than perfect freedom. I want to elaborate a bit on this thought this morning. There is more in monotheism than mere negation of polytheism; it is more than a numerical controversy. I maintain that monotheism spelled the doom of serfdom, of slavery, of servitude, religious, intellectual, political and economic; and when I say that the Jew has preached monotheism for three thousand years, I say that the Jew has preached freedom unto the world in all <sup>departments</sup> ~~walks~~ of human life.

Let me explain myself. Once upon a time men thought that the status of the primitive man was the ideal one, that his condition was an enviable one; primitive man knew nothing of the confining laws, of binding conventions, of stultifying religious dogmas, of creeds and ~~crafts~~ and priest-craft. Primitive man was perfectly free, roaming the beautiful world of God, knowing no restricting and delimiting hand of society. Today we know better. We know that the life of the



primitive man was very far from perfect freedom. It was the very verity of slavery. The primitive man was hemmed in by the minutest and pettiest social conventions; he was the slave of tribal habits, ~~of tribal deifications~~ and tribal taboos. His world teemed with spirits and deities and gods, benevolent and malevolent, that he had to propitiate or control. Every act of his was determined by some power; he was the slave of fear and dread; the unknown stalked at his side like a terrible terror every day; his life was lean and starved and destitute and uncertain; idolatry and superstition <sup>swathed</sup> ~~swayed~~ his life as if in an element.

When monotheism came to man it came like a great liberation, like a breaking of chains--from slavery to freedom, from sorrow to joy. Monotheism spelled the doom of those spirits that hovered over the life of man, those dreads and fears--the fear of the unknown, the fear of the nether world, the fear of devils and spirits ~~and gnomes~~, the fear of priests and dervishes, ~~the practices of demonism~~. Monotheism was a purifier of the atmosphere of human life. Monotheism permitted the great spirit of God to sweep clean and free <sup>through</sup> ~~from~~ the great soul of man. Monotheism was freedom to man.

And it was freedom <sup>in</sup> yet another way. You recall the religions of antiquity. What were <sup>most of them?</sup> ~~they?~~ Religions of death. The classic textbook of the Egyptians was called the ~~Book~~ of the ~~Dead~~. Osiris was the god of the dead; <sup>his</sup> Unas was the patron saint of the dead;



formula

Thoth was he who supplied the dead with the magic to overcome the powers of darkness. It was a religion of death, a religion of the netherworld. Man was the slave of the terrors of the grave; his very life was merely a preparation for a sojourn into the realms of darkness.

Judaism came and said, "Now, God is not a God of death; God is the fountain of life. God is the *King* ~~keynote~~ who desireth life, and God is everywhere. If I ~~send~~ <sup>ascend</sup> into heaven, *Thou* art there, if I make my bed in the nether world, *Thou* art there also; ~~and~~ the idea <sup>of</sup> the religious life is not to prepare yourself for death, but to walk before God in the land of the living." And you recall that beautiful sentence in the song of praises of King Hezekiah, read this morning, "The living, the living, <sup>he</sup> ~~who~~ shall praise thee." Judaism freed man from the ~~chains~~ <sup>deities</sup> of death, ~~peculiar not to the Egyptians,~~ but ~~also~~ common to other peoples. Judaism smashed the shackles of death and liberated man.

And Judaism was freedom in yet another sense. Orthodox Christianity for hundreds of years has preached a religion whose dominant note was the hereafter. Life was a preparation for the hereafter; salvation must be gained in this world so as to be ready for the next world. ~~And~~ wise theologians and divines knew so much about the hereafter, Heaven and hell were something that they had traversed thoroughly; they had plotted it and mapped it and <sup>had</sup> ~~bedecked~~ <sup>Bae</sup> it; they knew all about it; they



knew more about heaven and hell, which are after all figures of speech, than they knew about their own internal anatomy which they carried around with them daily:

Judaism cut through all these trappings of the fevered imagination of man and said, "The heavens belong to God, and the earth he gave to man, and that is all man knows and that is all he need to know." And the great thinker of the modern world, the Jew who left the imprint of his titanic mind upon the intellectual life of Europe--Spinoza--in his ethics, <sup>truly speaks for Judaism when he</sup> ~~he~~ says, "A free man thinks of nothing less than of death, and his wisdom is a meditation not of death but of life."

And Judaism meant freedom in yet another sense--freedom from intolerance, freedom from racial hatred, freedom from bigotry. The ancient <sup>ancient</sup> called the stranger "barbaroi"; and religions of antiquity and of medieval times, and <sup>even modern times</sup> of the present, call the religions of other peoples <sup>false</sup> and those who <sup>follow</sup> ~~observed~~ them, infidels, ~~the~~ and accursed, ~~and the damned infidels~~. Judaism said, "Are we not all brothers? Hath not one God created us all? Why then should we deal treacherously with one another? <sup>//</sup> Your religion is merely a groping towards some light, just as is the religion of your neighbor. God sits above and sees our groping and credits us not with the truth which we have achieved, but with the earnestness and sincerity of our groping." You recall that wonderful statement of the rabbi who said, "I call heaven to witness that be he an Israelite or a non-Israelite,



a man or a woman, a manservant or a maidservant, according to their deeds will the spirit of God rest upon them." Now, that is true religion, and that is freedom, the emancipation from all the lies of chauvinistic religion. It is a broadening of our mental outlook, it is a widening of our horizon, it is freedom, ~~again~~.

Yes, and Judaism contributed something else to the cause of freedom. Some people thought, some people still think, that religion is a matter of solemnity only, of sadness; ~~and sobriety~~; that this world is a vale of sorrow and man is sinful. The religion of medieval Europe looked upon life as something very ugly, and upon religion as something very solemn and sad. The religion of medieval Europe drove men to renunciation, to monastic vows, to the hair shirt, to self-castigation. Judaism says religion is ~~a~~ joy, religion is real happiness. "In thy presence," says the psalmist, "is joy; in thy right hand is bliss forever more." Judaism says in its liturgy, "Thou didst give us, oh Lord, seasons for joy and festivals for happiness." Judaism says this world is not a vale of tears unless we make it so. There is life in this world. There is happiness in it for men to attain. Judaism says there is in life a resurgent, a resurrecting power; there is the thrill of song, there is the climbing impulse of the sap to ~~the~~ new life; ~~there is the happiness~~; there is ~~the~~ love, there is ~~the~~ friendship, there is ~~the~~ hope." Arise, my beloved, and come away, for lo! The



winter is past, the rain is over, the flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in the land". The world is not full of sadness and tears. Why, then, cast a pall, in the name of God, over the world? God does not delight in dispeptic religion. There are some divines who think that the more a man frowns in this world the more the angels of heaven smile upon him. There are some divines who think that every innocent amusement of human life, anything that helps to lighten <sup>a bit</sup> the burdens of human life ~~is it~~--a little entertainment, whether it be singing, dancing, theater or games, <sup>is sinful</sup> because the majority of people delight in them, ~~it is sinful~~; and anything which men do not like, such as dreadful sermons, and prayer meetings, and blue laws, ~~they~~ are the highest and <sup>sublimest</sup> ~~supremest~~ types of virtue.

No, religion is not that. Religion is not a confining and <sup>an</sup> ~~incarcerating~~ thing. It is a liberating, an emancipating thing. It says to man, "Go forth and seek your happiness, for happiness is to be found." I say unto you men and women that our land is drifting today into the hands of a group of religious cranks, who would like to restore those beautiful and blissful days when a man was jailed for kissing his wife on Sunday..... Freedom--that is the keynote of Judaism. The righteous will live by his faith, not die, or starve, but live ~~for him~~ richly, abundantly, supremely, That is the object of religion.



And yet one more way did Judaism contribute to the cause of freedom, and that is by telling people that religion itself means freedom. Without God you are not free. Without God you are in a world that is unintelligible to you, a world that is more or less chaotic, a world irrational, a world in constant conflict, an arena of struggle, a world full of hate and strife and enmity and war and bloodshed and lust--a world that can lead you to nothing but soul depression and melancholy, ~~for~~ you are lost in the diversity and the terrible complexity, in the blind, foolish complexity of it all. But when your faith can place in this ~~great~~ complexity of life, in this diversity of phenomena, ~~when your faith can place~~ the unity of a steadfast purpose, the presence <sup>an</sup> of intelligent, guiding, controlling force, when your faith can posit, back of it all ~~is~~ a purpose wise, intelligent and kind,--when you can unify the world by your faith in God, then you are suddenly liberated. Your shackles of doubt and uncertainty and hopelessness and depression fall from off you and you become a free man, breathing the free atmosphere of life. That is what religion is; it is freedom. <sup>It</sup> And it is more than that--it is more than a mere <sup>mental</sup> intellectual freedom. ~~It means~~ <sup>is</sup> true freedom for our emotions also. ~~it is an emotional freedom.~~ In daily life you and I are the slaves; ~~we are the slaves~~ of our passions, ~~and~~ the slaves of our desires, <sup>and</sup> the slaves of our ambitions. We are the slaves of fate, and the slaves of public ~~without God~~ opinion, and the slaves of our neighbors, ~~we are serfs~~



~~without God.~~ But as soon as we, after some transfiguring experience of our life, feel the inrush of God's spirit in us, as soon as we become really conscious of this ever-present, ~~omnipresent~~, palpitating reality, which is God, the Infinite, the All-embracing-~~all~~, the shackles fall from off of us as with a clash to the ground, and ~~then~~ we are free, ~~and then~~ <sup>then</sup> we can lead our own lives as we want them; we are not longer the slaves of passions, desires, or ambitions; these things dwindle into insignificance; they are <sup>as</sup> nothing; ~~they are as if they were not;~~ We are free in the fullest sense of freedom, for we have found God. ~~and~~ And unless God means that to you, unless God means an emancipation, a liberation of your <sup>souls</sup> energy, of your personality, you have not found Him at all.

That is the contribution of Judaism to the cause of religious freedom. But Judaism has contributed even more than that. It has contributed mightily to the cause of intellectual freedom. The religion of the Jew, my friends, has never demanded of its adherents subservience, intellectual slavery. Judaism has never said, "I believe because it is <sup>absurd</sup> ~~observed~~." Judaism has never opposed science, it has welcomed every new discovery of science, because Judaism believes that the more we know the more will the truth of Judaism become <sup>manifest</sup> ~~known to the world~~. Judaism says that religion is ultra-scientific, ~~and~~ not anti-scientific. We welcome all knowledge and all learning, and all discovery,



and we cast around all of them the halo of religious truth. "Know the Lord thy God, ~~hope to know Him, strive to know Him,~~ seek to know Him, <sup>do not</sup> you may never know Him, but ~~never~~ stultify your intellect, because a ~~religious~~ dogma demands it of you. " <sup>his reverence for human reason</sup> And because of ~~that~~ the Jew became the intellectual <sup>evangel</sup> ~~mediary~~ of medieval Europe.

I do not know whether you are at all acquainted with that magnificent chapter in Jewish history. The Jew was the harbinger of the new civilization ~~of renaissance~~ in Europe. The Jew brought the learning of the Arabs, the science of mathematics, ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> philosophy, ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> astronomy of the Arabs into dark Europe, <sup>by means of</sup> ~~into the~~ hundreds ~~of~~ <sup>the</sup> thousands of translations made from Arabic into ~~the~~ Hebrew, and from the Hebrew into Latin. The Jew hastened the day <sup>the Renaissance</sup> ~~when the dark ages came to a close~~ by his original contributions in the <sup>fields</sup> ~~realm~~ of medicine, of science, of astronomy, of geography, of philosophy.

Some day the full chapter will be written and <sup>men</sup> ~~you~~ will realize ~~see~~ how much the Jew is responsible for the Renaissance, and how much <sup>he</sup> ~~the Jew~~ is responsible for the Protestant Reformation. The Protestant Reformation went hand in hand with the revival of Hebrew learning, and Hebrew culture, and the great intellectual leaders of the Protestant movement were men who studied the Hebrew and from the Hebrew Bible gained their inspiration for the <sup>work of</sup> reformation. <sup>a</sup> Mimonides <sup>through Aquinas</sup> ~~and even Koderah~~, determined the trend of Catholic theology for six hundred years ~~through~~ ~~their revelations~~, and Spinoza, another Jew, influenced



European thought unto the present day, so that a philosopher like Hagel said, "A man must become a Spinozist before he can become a philosopher." And Bergson, another Jew, is molding the thought of the *present-day* world and will determine it for generations to come. The Jew is truly called the people of the book. Learning,-- that was the great desire of his life. ~~And let me say here that it~~ *It is* frequently said that the great ambition of the Jew is to become a successful business man, ~~that the financier~~ *that* the financial ~~passions and desires~~ *ambitions* are uppermost in his mind. That is not true. The ideal of the old mother of Israel throughout the lands of Europe for centuries was not to make her child a prosperous business man or a millionaire, but to make him a ben torah, a student, a scholar, a rabbi. It was a love of learning that sustained the Jew through all the hurtful visitations and vicissitudes of the exile. Intellectual freedom--that ~~is the thing we fight for,~~ *the passion of Jewish life.* ~~too.~~

And yet another freedom--economic freedom! "Ye shall not oppress one another." That is the keynote of the Old Testament. The Jew did not tolerate slavery among his own people. A man was hired for six years, but the seventh he was to go free, ~~and if~~ *and if* he insisted upon ~~being~~ *remaining* a slave he was to be humiliated by having his ear bored through the door post. "They are not servants unto servants". ~~And the land, too.~~ The first great experiment in economic equality and justice was an Old



Testament experiment--the land must never be sold in perpetuity. At the end of fifty years it must be returned to the original owner, so that there be none deprived and none destitute in the household of Israel. You will recall the terrific denunciations of the prophets against economic <sup>oppression</sup> ~~law~~, "Why do you wrong my poor," says the Prophet Isaiah, "and why do you grind their faces?" "Justice! Justice! shalt thou pursue!" That is the contribution of the Jew--economic justice.

Let me read a sentence or two from a Christian writer who is one of the very few who <sup>have</sup> ~~has~~ succeeded in overcoming centuries-old theologic prejudice, ~~to see~~ what he has to say about the Jewish contribution to the cause of economic freedom and justice. Professor Baldwin, in his book "Our Modern Debt to Israel," says, "Little by little the ideals of ancient Israel are becoming the ideals of the modern world. Gradually social justice and righteousness are becoming to a degree, hitherto unknown, the ideals of when they do become, as they seem destined to, the dominant, spiritual possession of our race, their transforming power will inevitably bring about a realization more or less complete of some of the hopes of ancient Israel. That such a transformation will actually occur, and that comparatively soon, is not a mere fancy. Already the scenes of a great moral awakening are apparent. Within the last decade, America, at least, has been swept as the forest of the north are



annually swept with autumnal fires by the flame of a new zeal for righteousness; never before in our natural history has there been such a longing for permanent, emancipating national righteousness is that which is borne in men's hearts in recent years, and yet we see only the beginning of a movement that will have as its culmination, at least in portion, a realization of the hope of Israel for a time when that righteousness shall cover the earth as waters cover the sea". <sup>R</sup> The main thesis of this author is that the greatest discovery of the nineteenth century has been the rediscovery of the Old Testament, and the rediscovery of the Old Testament is directly responsible for all the social and economic movements toward liberation which have swept over the world.

And lastly political freedom! The act of <sup>The</sup> Exodus is the first act of emancipation known in the history of the world. The Jew throughout his exile did not have the opportunity, as long as he was denied ~~the same kind of~~ equality, to fight for the political freedom of the countries in which he dwelt, but with the coming of the nineteenth century, with the gradual breaking up of the church empire, and with the gradual emancipation of Israel, the Jew leaped to the forefront, fighting for the political freedom of peoples and of the world. You trace the history of liberalism in Europe and you will see that in the vanguard the sons and daughters of Israel are to be found.



Young Germany began a great movement for liberalism in the nineteenth century. Young Germany was inspired by two Jews--Heine and Börne, and the revolutionists of 1848 in Germany, in Hungary, in France, knew the power of the Jew, and Russia to a supreme degree knew and profited from the unstinted sacrifices of the children of Israel to free Russia. And in this last great war of liberation how much has the Jew contributed to the cause of freedom? In this glorious land of ours how freely and generously did our sons offer themselves upon the altar of America? The facts are not yet all told. We are estimating that close on to two hundred thousand Jews fought in the Army and Navy of America--high officers and petty officers and privates, who ~~won~~ <sup>won</sup> sought honor and glory and distinction upon the field of battle. The Jew constitutes three percent of the population of America, and he constituted six percent of the Army and Navy of the United States, ~~and~~ <sup>and</sup> Seventy-two percent <sup>of his numbers were</sup> ~~was he~~ represented in the combat divisions of the Army, while the average is only sixty percent. That lying insinuation that the Jew flocked to the non-combatant branches of the service, to the Ordnance and Quartermaster's departments has been refuted by the telling facts <sup>of</sup> ~~and~~ statistics. The percent <sup>of</sup> ~~of~~ those in the Quartermaster's department in relation to the Army is six and two-tenths; the percent <sup>of</sup> ~~of~~ Jews in the Quartermaster's department in relation to the total is five and one-tenth, ~~and~~ the greatest epic which this



war has written for America, the epic of the so-called  
*to a large degree*  
Lost Battalion, is the epic of the Jew. *Forty* ~~Eighty~~ percent  
*and also*  
of those six hundred sixty men went into that hell trap,  
and for six days hungered and starved ~~and died~~, burying  
their dead at night or in the morning before sunrise,  
~~some of them in their own dug-outs~~, searching the dead  
for scraps of food, *suffering and dying* ~~reaching out to the aeroplanes that~~  
~~dropped packets of food~~ but never surrendering,--that  
epic is a glorious record in the history of the Jew.  
*proved again*  
The Jew has ~~shown~~ how he can fight for the cause of  
freedom.

And you ask me, friends, what has the Jew  
contributed to the cause of freedom? I will say to  
you, mightily, mightily. His very life was a protest  
and cry for freedom and emancipation. He brought  
a message of freedom in the religious world, <sup>in</sup> the  
intellectual world, <sup>in</sup> the economic world and <sup>in</sup> the political  
world. ~~and~~ <sup>he</sup> will continue unto the end of time to  
preach the one God because the one God means the end  
of superstition, which is slavery; <sup>because</sup> ~~and~~ one God means  
~~freedom of thought, the end of superstition, which is~~  
~~slavery; and the one God means economic justice, the~~  
end of economic injustice, which is slavery; <sup>because</sup> ~~and the~~  
one God means the <sup>end of human tyranny</sup> ~~right of every people to live its~~  
~~own life, the end of imperialism, which is slavery.~~  
The Jew will continue to preach the one God, because the  
one God spells absolute, perfect, <sup>and eternal</sup> ~~ultimate~~ freedom.

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We are in the hands of the G. Sec

1. Chanukah - Festival of Dedication  
& Independence

2. History of Jew life from Abraham  
down to this day -

3. Monotheism - spell of freedom.

4. Life of Primitive man in idolatry  
1. Monotheism came as a great  
liberation

5. Religious Antiquity - religious  
death -

1. Judaism taught a god of life

2. Rel. as preparation for Hereafter -

~~Rel.~~ and Judaism's - The Heavens belong  
to god - Rel. of this world.

6. Rel. of Antiquity - Futurist. Barabai  
infidels -

1. Judaism - 'Are we not all brothers