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Is the Treaty of Peace a "Peace Treaty"?, 1919.

LECTURE BY RABBI ABBA H. SILVER, ON " IS THE
TREATY OF PEACE A 'PEACE' TREATY," AT THE
TEMPLE, EAST 55th STREET AND CENTRAL AVENUE,
SUNDAY MORNING, JUNE 1st, 1919.

✓ If what I say this morning will sound a bit strange to ears that have been accustomed to hear of the constant unity of the aims and purposes of the Allies in this war, ears that have been accustomed to hear almost nothing but praise for the motives of the Allies from this pulpit, I hope that you will attribute the strangeness to the sense of disillusionment which I have experienced since the publication of the abstract of the Treaty of Paris. Perhaps I, myself, and the millions like me who are experiencing a certain amount of disillusionment are in a sense responsible for it. We want a bit too much of emotional idealists and too little of political realists. We flung our vision too far, winged our hopes too high. One is not justified in expecting perfection in an all too imperfect world. We dreamed, of course, you and I, and millions like unto us in all parts of the world, that this war would mark the end of the thousand years of war and usher in the thousand years of peace. We hoped that this war would see the end of imperialism and the beginning of real democracy. We spoke enthusiastically about self-determination of small peoples, about open covenants openly arrived at, about a league of nations

embracing all free and sovereign peoples. We spoke of the end of scheming diplomacy and the beginning of real democracy in the world.

Well, perhaps we were a little too innocent of the wiles and the labyrinthian maneuvers of European diplomacy. Perhaps our hope was a fond hope, but it certainly was a holy hope. We were not entirely to blame for this enthusiasm of ours. Did not our leader and our spokesman feed the flames of our enthusiasm? Did not Mr. Wilson himself speak eloquently, classically, enticingly of these same things, and did not his words imply that the other Allies had accepted his ideals, and did not the universal acceptance of the fourteen principles as a basis for the termination of hostilities and the signing of the armistice give assurance to our convictions that a new day was dawning? We were not entirely to blame. The pathetic thing of it all, the tragedy of it all is that our ideals could have been realized if in the high quarters of our government there was resolution in place of vacillation, plan in place of theory, foresight in place of ignorance, prophetic statesmanship in place of compromise. For the treaty of peace as we have it cannot, by any stretch of the imagination, be called a peace treaty. There is no promise of peace in it. It has many of the ear-marks of the Peace of Vienna of 1815 and the Treaty of 1871. It is imperialistic to a degree and vindictive in a frightful measure. The spirit of vae victis (woe unto the vanquished) is written large in it.

One looks in vain for this spacious generosity, that spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation, that healing sympathy which one was led to anticipate from the words of our leaders and our spokesman. One tries to catch in vain the accents of such sentiments as these from the mouth of our leader spoken during the days of the war: "You catch with me the voices of humanity that are in the air. They insist that the war shall not end in vindictive action of any kind, that no nation or people shall be robbed or punished because the irresponsible rulers of a single country have themselves done deep and abominable wrong." // *cont p6*

It is this thought that has been expressed in the formula--"No annexations, no contributions, no punitive indemnities." Lest you think that I am exaggerating, that I am unfair and extreme in my expression, let me quote you some of the sentiments of men and groups of men and of women concerning this treaty, opinions that to my mind are worthy of respect and consideration. Mr. Felix Adler speaks of the "moral bankruptcy of this treaty." Bishop Gore, the most learned religious thinker of England, who favored our city last year by visiting us, and who has since resigned his bishopric, says this: "Since the armistice was struck, we seem to have looked in vain among the nations of the world for any better spirit than that of the old national individualism. The secret treaties have not been disowned but are still effective, and I ask you to cast your eyes over the nations.

Where do you see a spirit larger than the old selfish spirit of claiming as much as you can get? Out of the spirit of claiming as much as you can get can arise nothing except a universal scramble. It is hard to resist the oppression of each other, however you distribute the blame, and the league of nations ^{is} in the greatest peril of becoming an organization of the Allies to keep Germany permanently crushed. The league of nations and the Council of Ten and the Council of Four appear to be identified with the Council of Victors. The league itself is really causing the distrust of all who really care for democracy, showing as it has the least possible provision for the real representation of the minds of the nations, and substituting for it an autocracy of the ruling powers.

George Brandes, the eminent European critic, when asked what were the prospects of a lasting peace, said, "Horrible! Horrible! I fear we shall have more wars than ever. War cannot bring peace; only love and mercy can bring peace. And where are love and mercy? You see only the terrible weapon of blockade and civil wars in more than one country. A peace between thirst for vengeance on the one side and exhaustion and prostration on the other side will now be a dryness under famine and shouts of triumph. This new-born peace is not permanent."

Ex-ambassador Morgenthau, addressing the soldiers at Coblenz, said, "America ought to begin at once to prepare for the next war, and for a greater and a more terrible

war than this, for the treaty of peace has not solved the vital problems."

The Women's International Conference, which met recently in Switzerland, after carefully studying the treaty of peace said this: "The treaty of peace condemns one hundred million people of this generation in the heart of Europe to poverty, disease and despair."

The British labor party, the most powerful progressive party in England, speaks of the treaty as "a betrayal of democracy." The Italian Socialists call the treaty "unjust and oppressive and conducive to more war." And the French Socialists are most vicious in their denunciation of it. They speak of it as "a criminal breach of the sworn word," and as "an outrage upon morals and rights."

Now, none of these individuals or groups of individuals can be accused of too much love for Germany. We have consistently during the war and before the war spoken of the menace of German militarism. We have urged its absolute destruction. We said that Germany as it was then constituted was a stumbling block in the way of human progress. During the war when Germany manifested a spirit of ruthlessness, a spirit of brutality, we said that Germany must be held to account, that Germany must make good everything that she had wantonly and all brutally destroyed. We urged, during the dark days of the war, when the Allied cause seemed to be lost, to stand firm, because our cause was just, that God was with us.

We never wasted words, or sympathy, or love, or kindness upon Germany; but we never spoke of a war of revenge, or a war of extermination, nor did our leader, Mr. Wilson, in voicing the sentiments of America, ever speak of a war of vengeance. I remember quite clearly one of his most abquent statements: "We are not at war with the German people, we are at war with the German rulers and the rulers of the Central Powers. As soon as the German people wake up from their nightmare, throw off the yoke of militarism, democratize themselves, repent of their crimes, make good their wrongs, and come hombly and repentent and seek the fellowship and the unity of free peoples, we shall welcome them."

Immediately after my return from France, where I had more than one occasion to witness the horrible imprints of the heel of the Hun, yet knowing that peace can never be based upon hate, I said, in addressing a large body of citizens here in the city, "After the war, during the terrible months of peace discussion, and during the coming years of universal reconstruction, we shall need a type of patriotism which soars higher, is more universal, more encompassing and one more hard to achieve, for remember, friends, it is much easier to sacrifice one's life than to sacrifice one's prejudices." If the peace which we shall establish will be established on the abiding rock of permanence and not upon the shifting sands, then it must be a peace based upon universal justice, on reconciliation, on mutual helpfulness among all the

peoples of the earth. We shall simply have to slough off the accretions of war so that we may with clearer mind and finer insight treat successfully with the weighty problems of peace.

✓ If this war is not to be the beginning of a chain of terrible catastrophes, if this is not to be an open sesame to a universal calamity of centuries, then we must take into our lives and into our souls the big, all-embracing spirit of our land, which is "With malice to none and with charity to all." I thought of it then; I hoped for this spirit throughout the months of peace discussion, not because I loved Germany, but because I loved humanity and I loved peace; because I knew, because every student of history knows full well that any beaten nation that feels embittered and abused thinks not of peace but of war and plans vengeance, and history is always ready to supply such a nation with such an opportunity, and no nation is so utterly beaten and so thoroughly broken but that time and change strengthens it and give it the desired opportunity. Napoleon reduced Prussia to impotence after the Battle of Jena. He reduced her army to forty thousand. Germany waited until 1871 to avenge herself. France was humbled and broken and reduced to a second or third rate power in 1871. She waited until 1919 to avenge herself. We prayed for this because we knew that Germany would prove a greater menace weak, prostrate, beaten than even when she was all-powerful and mighty, because a weakened Germany, a Germany that can^{not} rehabilitate herself

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economically, will become the hotbed of radicals, of wild economic doctrines, of incessant and unremitting revolution. It will become a plague spot in Europe, and plagues do not stop at national borders and boundaries, but they transcend them and infect other peoples. That is why we had hoped and prayed that the statesmen in Paris would not only manifest the spirit of broad generosity which they proclaimed so loudly and so eloquently during the war, but that they would manifest common sense and knowledge of history. No peace can last when its foundations are hatred, vengeance, and "to the victor belong the spoils."

The treaty of peace, to my mind, is fatally weak in two essential things. First of all, in its relation to Germany, and, secondly, in its relation to the rest of the world. By the treaty of peace Germany is deprived in Europe of close onto forty-five thousand square miles of Europe, and much of it justly. Alsace-Lorraine is not German, and Schlewig is not German. There is very little that we ought to regret in this rectification of an ancient wrong. But I venture to say that the Saar valley and Danzig, and the segregation of East Prussia, and the surrender of ^{upper} Silesia and West Prussia will be a bone of contention for generations to come, a festering wound in the very body of Europe. And not only that, but Germany is deprived of all her colonies, of all her rights and privileges, and every extra-European land. Now, Germany is a people of seventy-five million souls, a people that

is constantly increasing in population, and you simply cannot throw a ring of iron around a people and try to hold it in. It does not last. The economic burden which is placed upon Germany is frightful in the extreme.

A summary of it reads as follows: "What the aggregate amount of indemnities and reparations is to be has not yet been determined, but whatever it is Germany is to go on paying for thirty years, beginning with an initial payment within two years of a billion pounds sterling. At the same time it is required to devote its economic resources directly to the restoration of the invaded regions of Belgium and France, to deliver annually for ten years to these countries and to Italy great quantities of coal from one of its principal coal fields, the Saar valley, and to grant to the Allies and associated powers preferences and concessions in trade, which will go far toward destroying Germany's competition in any branch of industry." That would not have been so bad, enormous as the penalty is, if Germany had not been deprived almost entirely of a merchant marine and of her submarine cables. In other words, crippled and yet forced to pay the terrific indemnities, so that it is no surprise when the London Daily News speaks of this treaty as "Stripping Germany naked, cutting off one of its arms and then ordering it to empty its pockets." So much for Germany.

The regulation that Germany must completely surrender her navy and reduce her army to a hundred thousand is a

splendid thing provided the Allies had seized upon this auspicious opportunity to reduce their armament as well, else the menace is just shifting from one country to another. Of course, the league of nations promised such a reduction of armaments, but that is an entirely voluntary reduction and not a compulsory one. How far have the fourteen principles been realized by this treaty? How far has the treaty gone to solve the perplexing and propelling problems of Europe, Africa and Asia? I say very little. In fact, it has abrogated the treaty. The treaty of peace has deliberately taken a large tract of territory belonging to a peace-loving people that fought in this war (China), a tract of land holding millions of people (Shantung) and surrendered it entirely to Japan. Japan, in many respects, is the Prussia of the Pacific. (Yao Chow with its beautiful city of Kaio Chow, which is the key to the entire peninsula of Shantung, is surrendered to Japan.) Why? Because Japan "permitted" China to enter into this war, and because of that Japan is to be paid. What has become of the principle of self-determination of peoples? What is happening to it in Korea? We read there of the bloody suppression of revolution by peoples struggling to be free, suppressed by a nation that fought for democracy. What has the treaty of peace to say concerning Egypt? Why, revolutions have raged for over a year, but which the censors stifled as far as we are concerned. What has the treaty of peace to say concerning Ireland, a people

struggling to be itself and live its own life? Nothing. It would not even countenance a presentation of the claims of Ireland. What has the treaty of peace to say concerning Russia? Nothing. Its policy has been the policy of the council of three or four or ten, the same policy of watchful waiting, of blundering, as it has been since the days of the Russian Revolution. They failed with the Kerensky government; they supported the Korniloff uprising and they failed; they failed to come to an understanding with the Soviet government, thereby prolonging the war another bloody year, and now they are endeavoring to back up Kolchak. I hope they have greater success than they have had heretofore.

Has the treaty of peace brought peace to Europe? There is war in Russia, in Poland, in Roumania, in Hungary, in Austria, in Czecho-Slovakia this very moment, and all the loud protestations of peace are denied by these facts. What has the treaty of peace to say concerning religious freedom and toleration in the world? Have they spoken a word? Have they had the courage to announce for all time the right of peoples to enjoy their own religious convictions, unmolested? They have not. They are now seeking by subterfuge to try to introduce this principle in individual treaties, which have not the binding power, nor the authority, nor the grandeur of a declaration from a peace conference.

The prospect to me seems rather unpromising. Our hopes have not been realized, and our spokesman and leader,

the man who for two years was the arbiter of the destinies of the world, is coming back a sadder and a smaller man. Perhaps a league of nations may rectify some of these errors. It is rather doubtful. The league of nations would have been a strong binding institution if the rights of all peoples had first been established and the desires of all had first been satisfied, but as long as questions of life and death, questions which are close to the very life of a people, remain unsolved, this mechanism of a league of nations can little avail. (It might prove to be a house of glass for all we know) As it reads at present the league of nations is very little more than an instrument to protect and defend the integrity of four great powers-- England, France, Italy and Japan, and it is rather questionable in my mind whether the United States of America is ready to subscribe to such a league, is ready to bind itself, if not absolutely, legally, or even morally, to such a promise and such a program. Perhaps the real hope lies after all with the future, with the liberals of the future. Perhaps the governments of these great powers will get sooner or later into the hands of people who really love peace and desire it and are ready to satisfy national egoism, national imperialism and national ambitions to get it. Then there is a possibility of the treaty being modified and enlarged, improved and cleansed to meet the real problems of the world, satisfy the cravings and yearnings of all people, and bring about a hallowing reconciliation among all the troubled and

tortured peoples of the earth. May the time of
hallowing redemption be not far distant. 

