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The Year 1919 - Its Triumphs and Its Failures, 1919.

LECTURE BY RABBI ABBA H. SILVER ON, "THE
YEAR 1919--ITS TRIUMPHS AND ITS FAILURES"
AT THE TEMPLE, EAST 55th STREET AND CENTRAL
AVENUE, CLEVELAND, OHIO, SUNDAY MORNING,
DECEMBER 28, 1919.

Now that the year 1919 is about to become a memory, it is well that we look back upon the great events and incidents which characterized the year. The year 1919 has been one of great triumphs and one always of great failures. Perhaps the greatest triumph of the year has been not one particular event but a process which many of us dreaded but which has fortunately exceeded our fondest expectations.

You remember, of course, that the year 1919 has been a year of re-adjustments, and how much we all dreaded the period of re-adjustment you well know. A year ago most of us were frightfully nervous concerning the future. We dreaded the latent powers within the people. We feared a great unrest. Some of us even thought of possible calamity as a result of a wide-spread unrest.

Many prophets of evil prophesied doom and revolution and the over-turn of our complete political and economic organization, and all of us were in a frightfully timid mood.

The triumph of the year 1919 consists in this: that democracy has stood the test; that democracy has stood the strain; that democracy has passed through a period fraught with the greatest dangers, full of uncertainties,

full of unrest, and that it has emerged triumphant.

I do not mean to say that all the unrest of the past year has now definitely come to an end. I do not mean to say that the year 1920 will be one of complete peace, one that will have no aggravating and irritating problems--economic, social and political. Far be it from me to declare that. But I do say that this most critical of years following a universal cataclysm, a year that has challenged every ounce of essential truth that is in democracy, has placed its seal of truth, of enduring truth, upon our cherished ideal of democracy.

We can now face all the problems that tomorrow holds for us with greater confidence, with greater faith, and with greater dignity, for because of our doubt, because of our nervousness, some of us became necessarily intolerant; some of us grew unpleasantly suspicious of men and women who expressed sentiments that were more liberal, perhaps more radical, than the sentiments commonly expressed; and some of us in our great enthusiasm and in our great zeal to protect our sacred institutions committed unnecessary wrongs.

During the past year there was too much of this spirit of suppression of opinions foreign to our own. There was too much of that desire to solve great problems immediately by the use of force. There was too much of the suppression of free speech and free press, and the right of public assembly--all, I believe, the result of our lack of

faith in the essential wholesomeness and soundness of our own institutions. And now that we have stood the strain of a year, I feel quite confident that we shall return to our mental sanity and our poise and our balance, and that we shall maintain and protect the institutions of our land with a dignity, a self-contained dignity which has always characterized the American people.

I say, then, that one of the greatest of the triumphs of the year 1919 has been the vindication of the soundness of our democratic institutions. They can stand the tug and the strain, the wear and the tear of the ages, because they have stood the strain of the most critical year in American history.

I can single out a great number of incidents during the past year that are inspiring and encouraging. And yet we are not interested in a catalogue of events. I want to speak of one, however, which to my mind is important, not because of the fact it self, but because of its vast implications. I refer to the two gifts to the American people --the one of Mr. Frick, of Pittsburgh, and the other of Mr. Rockefeller; the one a gift of perhaps one hundred and twenty millions to American educational and philanthropic institutions, and the other likewise a gift of one hundred million dollars to American institutions--medicine and education.

I speak of these two gifts because they reveal, to my mind, the real object in the accumulation of great wealth on the part of American business men, and the high

sense of responsibility which has grown up in the minds of the wealthy American business men to the public. Now, it is frequently maintained, especially by our dear friends across the ocean, that the American business man is essentially a materialist, a worshiper of the dollar; that he sacrifices everything--art, literature, and even his own health, to the acquisition of money. But nothing is farther from the truth. Were the American business man essentially a materialist, hankering after money, he would be penurious, close-handed, miserly, niggardly in his philanthropy. But the American is anything but that, because the American loves not money but the making of money. The American business man loves the game, the zest of it, the adventure of it, and when he has made it he spends it lavishly. He is the least of the worshipers of Mammon in the world. He is the most permeated by a spirit of real altruism, and the finest thing about it is that he himself is not conscious of it.

Now, it is true, perhaps, that the American business man would do better if, instead of accumulating great wealth and then towards the end of his days or after his death to have that money distributed, if he would distribute that money as he goes along to the men that work with him and for him, and to the public, of whom he makes his wealth. But that is beyond the point. The thought that I wish to express is that these gifts mentioned before, which are not isolated incidents, but are characteristic of a whole line of American philanthropists, who gave almost their entire wealth to public institutions, are indications of a

fine idealism latent in the soul of the American people.

This distribution of wealth is a wholesome thing in yet another way. It makes impossible the establishment upon our shores of an incrustated aristocracy of wealth whose only claim to recognition is inherited wealth. If the process becomes more universal, if the father loves his children well enough not to leave them rich, the process will do away with that bane of European society, the class of idle rich.

There is one more feature of these gifts that I wish to dwell upon before I pass on to my next thought. One of the principal items of Mr. Frick's will was a gift of fifteen million dollars to Princeton University, and one half of Mr. Rockefeller's gift, that is, fifty million dollars, but added to his already large donations to his own educational fund. This, to my mind, implies that American philanthropists are coming to realize that it is just^{as} important to extend opportunities of education to the well and the sound and the normal as it is to supply the needs of the sick and the abnormal; that it is just as much philanthropy to feed the mind and the soul of a people as it is to feed the bodies of the hungry.

I emphasize this fact because we Jews are still waiting for our great philanthropists to realize this fact. But while we have adequately and completely taken care of the needy, the delinquent, the destitute, the poor, they have permitted the soul and the mind of Israel to be starved. We are still waiting for the generous gifts to our educational

institutions, to our religious institutions. We are so frightfully in need of a complete curriculum for our educational institutions, for our religious schools, for text-books, for teacher colleges, and we have not the wherewithal. Some day our benefactors will realize the truth which non-Jewish philanthropists have realized long ago--that a university is just as important as a hospital for the welfare of a community.

But the year 1919 has not been without its failures. Perhaps the most signal failure of the year has been the failure to ratify the peace treaty. Now, it has become fashionable in recent weeks to put the blame upon this shoulder or that for this failure. I believe that the real responsibility lies not with the senate and not with the president, but with the treaty itself. We ourselves would hesitate to sign a treaty that embodies so little of the fondest anticipations of humanity, that reeks so much with the old and, we thought, discarded traditions of the European foreign offices, and which holds within it so little promise for lasting peace. And we would hesitate very long to underwrite a league of nations whose moral authority was almost completely destroyed when it became evident that the purpose which actuated it was not peace, reconciliation, real human brotherhood, but a defensive imperialism.

Now, moralists are fond today to remind us of America's responsibility to Europe. That is true. But what of Europe's responsibility to America? America has never

shirked its responsibilities; America has given freely of its wealth, of its generosity, yea, of its blood, to Europe, in the hope that these sacrifices would make possible a new order of civilization, dominated by a spirit of fairness and justice.

Now, how have the lawyer, politicians of Europe redeemed the promise? They are asking America to sign a treaty that festers with ugly injustice, the injustice of a dismembered Hungary, of a sacrificed Montenegro, of a robbed China,--a treaty whose silence spells a continuation of chaos and anarchy in Russia, and sanctions by its silence the imperialism of England, France and Italy in Africa, Asia and the Pacific.

No wonder that the senate of the United States has hesitated? But the year 1920 will see the treaty ratified and ratified with reservations--reservations that will safeguard our independence, and our initiative, and that will protect us from becoming a tool in the hands of European schemers, propagandists and diplomats. We have not lost faith in a league of nations in spite of this league of nations. We believe that peoples are better than their governments, and that men are more honest than statesmen. We believe that the struggling masses of the world will ultimately achieve that which they have hoped was so near to achievement during the war. Perhaps a new conference of the nations, after a new war, perhaps, may undo the evils of the treaty of 1919 and may pave the way for a real, healing,

binding, lasting peace.

Another failure of the year 1919, I believe, is the failure to check the constantly rising cost of living. Now, it is very difficult to find one cause to account for the high cost of living. A phenomenon so universal and so complicated cannot be explained by one cause. It is undoubtedly true that our inflated currency has, to a large degree, been responsible for the high cost of living. It is undoubtedly true that decreased production, not only in Europe where the slaughter of millions and maiming of millions more and the disorganization of industry through five years of war took place, but also in our own land production has been cut down through the shortening of hours, through an artificial restriction of production, by employers in some instances, through strikes in other instances.

It is true that the high cost of living may be attributed in some small measure to the profiteer and the horder and the artificial price-fixer, and yet no one act of ours and no one law will cure it. The high cost of living will be reduced in the course of the coming years, first by a gradual deflation of our currency, secondly by an increased production, first on the part of the European nations, to whom we shall have to extend credit to enable them to resume industry, and, secondly, on our own part by meeting the decreased hours of labor with greater efficiency in our plants, by the avoiding of strikes, by granting to the men the things for which they strike before they strike, if the things are justified; by raising the morale of labor

by granting him a sense of partnership in the control and in the profits of the industry; by co-operative buying on the part of groups in our communities, eliminating the speculator and the middleman. That will come to pass.

But there is something that we can do immediately and something that should be done immediately, and that is the enforcement of drastic measures of effective laws against those men who are arbitrarily and deliberately horders of necessities, those who at will fix prices for the community, and the second mortgage sharks in the communities, and the private money-lenders. England has such a law, and England is actually reaching the profiteer. But we here have a great deal of noise and tumult and threats in Washington on the part of those men who are grooming themselves for 1920, but we have no results.

It is very fortunate that we have prosperity in our land today, that men are not suffering, and the high cost of living hasnot become the menacing problem that it might bbecome. But it will demand on the part of our government and on the part of our people alertness, intelligent management and effective administration to check this mounting by leaps and bounds of the cost of necessities.

Another failure of the year 1919 has been our failure to adjust amicably our relations with Mexico. It seems that for the last decade our relations with Mexico have been strained to a point where the slightest incident of no importance may lead to a diplomatic break. Our sensitiveness is so wrong that anything may lead to un-

pleasantness and to war. This last Jenkins affair, which ought never to have assumed the menacing proportions which it did assume, has revealed to us how dangerously near we were to another war.

Now, unfortunately, we are not very well informed on Mexico. Our government has not taken the trouble to inform us, but I suspect--and I am not alone in my suspicions--that the American people is again being victimized by a pernicious propaganda on the part of certain oil interests in Mexico, aiming at armed intervention, and a few more bandit raids on our border and a few more unfortunate assassinations of Americans will be the spark that is looked for to explode.

Now, there is nothing vitally at stake between Mexico and the United States, certainly nothing that cannot be amicably arbitrated, nothing that should lead to war. I was pleased to read where conservative bodies, like the Foreign Mission of the Methodist Episcopal church, have called upon the state department to lay all facts before the public, stating categorically that there was nothing between Mexico and the United States that should necessitate armed intervention. This last Jenkins affair has left a bad taste in the mouth of the American people; and the notes of our state department, which for truculence and peremptory character, are rather unique in our annals, left much to be desired in self-contained national dignity and international courtesy.

Let us not be stampeded, let us not be victimized,

and let us not strain our relations with all the republics of Central and South America by an unnecessary act of aggression, by losing our fine sense of magnanimous, patient and dignified relationship with all peoples, even if we are strong and great and powerful.

One more failure of 1919 that is worthy of note, the failure which, to my mind, spelled disgrace for the American people, is that record of contemptible race riots that swept over our land during the past year. Now, no words are strong enough to condemn this infamous pastime of some American communities. The race riots in Chicago startled our communities because of their enormity. But the thing is going on daily. Every week at least two members of the colored race are lynched.

Now, these mob riots are not only a complete denial of the fundamental principles of America, but they make of our intentions and contentions a mockery. We set out as some mighty cavalier championing the cause of all the suppressed and oppressed races of the world, a knight errant of civilization, and we tolerate the scandalous, contemptible, mob rule in some of our own states. Now, if our states are incapable of seeing the fundamental laws of our land enforced, and safeguarding the rights, the basic, elemental human rights of individuals, then it is time for our federal government to intervene.

And lastly, to my mind, one of the grossest and most tragic failures of the year has been the failure of the Allies and of America to put a stop to the frightful

butchery of our own people in Europe. Since the middle of 1919 close onto one hundred thousand Jews have been massacred in southern Russia. Now, the slaughter of a hundred thousand Jews might not be of any importance to the supreme council at Versailles, that is concerned more with concessions and mandates and coal fields and oil rights than the rights of human beings, but it is of supreme importance to the men and women, Jews or non-Jews, who love justice and human life, and who are cut to the quick at the sight of tens of thousands of innocent men and women and children being exterminated cruelly, ruthlessly, by invaders who use the money and the munitions of the Allies.

We have waited, and we are still waiting to hear the authoritative voice of the Allies, the champions of human freedom in behalf of these cruelly decimated, almost exterminated, Jews of eastern Europe.

We hear of interchange of notes, and we read of commissions being sent to investigate whether the Jew that was killed is really dead or not. But we are still waiting for someone, whether in Washington, or London or Paris, to speak the authoritative word and call a halt to this disgrace of civilization. Perhaps 1920 will be privileged to hear the voice of humanity finally speak. It is our hope, our deep-most prayer.

To summarize, to me the year 1919, in spite of all its deficiencies, in spite of the many things left undone, has been a year of inspiration in revealing first of all the essential soundness of American democracy, and, secondly,

in revealing the progressive nature of the American people. We are marching forward in our industrial life, in our political life and in our social life. There has been a most commendable spirit among the rank and the file, the business element and the working element of America. There is a desire to get together, to meet, to talk things over, not to snap at one another. There is the honest conviction growing upon the various contending elements in our industrial life heretofore that the best interests of the employer and the employe are served when they approach one another in a spirit of friendliness, of sympathy, of understanding, of co-operation, and that spirit will continue during the coming years.

We shall solve all our problems without heat or anger, but with thoughtfulness and sympathy, and without revolution, but with a slow, steady, sure evolution in all the departments of our national life. We can face the coming year in confidence and in hope. It will have much in store for you, for me, and for everyone. It will challenge the initiative and the intelligence of every man and woman. It will call upon you to give all your thought, all your effort, all your devotion to the cause of a America and to the cause of humanity.

May the year bring to all of us those opportunities for service and usefulness which will bring increased happiness to ourselves and to our people.
