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East is East and West is West, 1923.

LECTURE BY RABBI ABBA H. SILVER ,
SUBJECT: EAST IS EAST AND WEST IS WEST.
AT THE TEMPLE - SUNDAY MORNING,
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WRHS



JOSEPH T. KRAUS
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To most Americans the Orient commands interest only when it breaks into print dramatically and suddenly because of some riot or revolution or war. To many of us Asia has the attenuated interest such as a tourist might have towards it; as a land of monuments and ancient ruins, a land of strange peoples and their unfamiliar ways, a land such as the poet describes--"The whispering desert winds and tinkling camels' bells."

The Orient seems so far removed from contact with our daily lives, it bears so lightly upon the course of our lives, that we easily disregard it; and it is only since the astounding upthrust of Japan as a great world power that we, here in the United States, began to formulate our international policies with an eye to Asia. And yet Asia, the cradle of the human race, has a way of influencing our lives at every turn. I do not refer now to the spiritual influence which Asia constantly exerts upon us; I do not refer now to the two great religions which have come out of Asia--Judaism and Christianity, which are today molding lives and characters in Europe and America; I have in mind more specifically the way Asia has of injecting itself into all great policies of government and empire from earliest times to the present day.

From earliest times Asia has been the trysting place of empires. It was to Asia that Alexander the Great went in order to establish his Macedonian empire; and it was to Asia

that Pompey went in order to establish his Roman empire. From Asia the great Persian hosts poured across the Hellespont into Europe, and but for the victory at Thermopylae, you will recall, these Asiatic armies would have inundated the whole of Europe. And from Asia came the ancestors of the Carthaginians--Carthage, the great rival of Rome; Carthage, that fought centuries long with Rome for the supremacy of the world. Out of Asia, the home of the teeming, untold millions, came the Arabs, you will recall, in the eighth century, and swept over northern Africa, crossed the strait of Gibraltar and conquered Spain. Towards Asia went the Crusaders, prompted not alone by a religious ideal to reconquer the land where the founder of Christianity is buried, but prompted, perhaps, more so by an economic reason: to safeguard the overland route to India. And it was India that was responsible for the discovery of America, you will recall.

And out of Asia came the great Mongolian hosts that swept over Europe, settled in Hungary, and went as far west as Germany; and out of Asia came the Turks, who conquered Constantinople, destroyed the Byzantine empire, and twice knocked at the gates of Vienna. And it was Asia that destroyed the German empire; it was the lure of Bagdad that drove Germany into a relentless naval competition with England; and it was to conquer Palestine, that flank on the highway of England's route to India, that brought Allenby and his cohorts into Asia.

So that Asia has a way, removed as it is from

contact with our daily lives, of injecting itself into every great policy of government which ultimately touches the lives of every one of us. The importance of Asia for us becomes at once apparent when we realize that Asia holds one-half of the human race today; that the population of Asia is twice the population of Europe; that Asia is four times the size of Europe, and that therefore it is only one-half as populated as Europe.

The wealth of Asia, which is now beginning to drive European nations at each other's throats, still remains untold and untouched; and it is very likely that these eight hundred millions of human beings, this slumbering monster, may come to life at any time. What Japan, an Asiatic people, accomplished in thirty years, India, with its 315 millions of human beings, may, and China, with its 400 millions, may; and if it is possible for hundreds of thousands of Indian soldiers to fight in France and Mesopotamia for the British empire, it is very possible for these same soldiers or their kin or descendents to fight for India in India.

Now this contingency I should not like to have you think as being remote. The saddest thing about our lives is that we deliberately delude ourselves; we wish a thing to be so and so we believe that it is so. And so it is until it breaks in upon us with some cataclysm or catastrophe, and then we wake up, startled and astounded.

I say, the contingency is not remote. When you think today of Turkey, triumphant Turkey, in the Near East

defying all the allied powers of Europe; when you think of Japan in the Far East, unaffected by war, ambitious and powerful; when you think of India seething with rebellion in the south of Asia, in the grip of an intense, extreme nationalism; and when you think of a sovietized Siberia in the north of Asia, and then when alongside of that you put an intense pan-Mohammedanism that has swept over the whole of Asia and Africa, a gathering together of Mohammedan forces, spiritually and culturally, and ultimately politically, you realize that in this rebirth of Asia there lies either a great, great promise, or a great, great menace for civilization. And I believe that it may become a promise and may become a menace according to the attitudes which the European peoples establish towards Asia.

One thing ought to be stressed: it is folly to delude ourselves with the thought that these Asiatic peoples are decadent, degenerate; that they are a mongrel group of peoples, unorganized, chaotic; that they are not politically minded; that they are physiologically defective, and that therefore the European peoples need never fear them. These racial pseudo-scientific notions are becoming very popular today. The Asiatic peoples are backward not because of any physiological defects, not because they are innately inferior but simply because they have gone to seed, like every great race, after a period of intense activity and creativity has a habit of doing. No race remains permanently superior; every race has a period of adolescence, maturity, creativeness, and

then a period of senility that weakens its hold; it goes to seed and may slumber for a thousand years and then come to life again. Because if these Asiatic peoples, my friends, were innately inferior, how comes it that the European nations, Germany, France and England, remained barbarians for thousands of years while Asiatic peoples were building empires, organizing governments, developing arts and crafts and sciences and literature.

Remember that five great empires that once dominated the world were fashioned in the heart of Asia by Asiatics; the empire of Babylon, and the empire of Assyria, and the empire of Persia, and the empire of Mongolia, and the empire of the Arabs all were fashioned in Asia by Asiatics, and all dominated the world, each in its turn, and all built marvelous cities and organized government and developed art and science and literature and culture. And what was done once may yet be done again.

I say that when these nations of Asia come to life again, as they are coming to life today, when they become politically self-conscious, when they mature, the question is: will they join amicably and in a spirit of cooperation the great family of European nations; or will they, as they did in the past, sweep over Europe, with tide upon tide of destructive invasion with all their untold millions, in one vast inundation of destruction?

And that, to my mind, is a very real problem, a very threatening problem, and one which the European nations

alone can solve. Heretofore the attitude of Europe towards Asia has been one of greed and rapacity and exploitation and cynical diplomacy. One cannot, in the brief time allotted, cover the entire history of the rape of Asia by European people. I will not dwell this morning upon the successive attempts made by Christian nations to dismember China; I will not dwell this morning upon the attempt of a Christian nation to force a war upon China in order to keep alive the opium trade; I will not dwell this morning upon the successive attempts to dismember Turkey and Asia Minor, and annex territory there under the guise of missionaries and under the guise of protecting Christian minorities. It has now become a commonplace, an international morality, that the missionary alone very frequently led the imperialistic lion into foreign territories.

I will not speak this morning of this last disaster, the Greek debacle in Smyrna, an adventure instigated and inspired by Western European nations, which resulted in the slaughter of tens of thousands and the burning of cities and in the exile of untold tens of thousands; I will not speak this morning of these campaigns which England has carried on in the last few years in Mesopotamia for the sake of gaining control of the oil wells lying between Bagdad and Mosul--oil wells which patently and clearly do not belong to England; I will not speak this morning of Egypt and the sad story of the exploitation of Egypt up to this day.

I will apply myself this morning to one instance

and one instance only; the most important instance of all-- that of India. Because in India an European nation has been in control the longest period of time, and in India we can see the results of the contact of the East and West, and study carefully what the West has meant to the East, and how the East attitudinizes itself today towards the West.

Now I am not a captious critic; I realize that it is a very simple thing to find flaws, especially in such a vast and varied enterprise as that of administering the political institutions of a people of three hundred and odd millions of human beings. Even if India were one people, one nation, the task would be colossal; but India is a motley conglomerate of races and peoples and creeds and castes and languages and dialects. In one-third of India there are seven hundred native cities; and there are a hundred and fifty languages and dialects in India, and in every turn of the road one meets deep-rooted traditions, customs, superstitions, rivalries and antipathies and hates, and almost complete illiteracy and heart-breaking ignorance on the part of the masses.

So that one need not cavil if, in this great task of governing a people so vast and so varied and so confused, and for centuries so abused, one finds small failures here and there. But besides the small failures there are great failures--notorious, criminal failures, which England must not attribute to India but to England.

In the first place, Great Britain always exploited

India. There is a phrase or saying common in India that the Irish conquered India in order that the English may rule it for the benefit of the Scotch. And that is almost literally true. The British penetration of India began, as you will recall, through the medium of the East India Company, a trading company, and it was only much later--in 1858--that India passed from the control of this company, a privately owned stock company, to the crown.

Now India offered two great economic prizes to the British people, one, almost endless reserves of raw material, and, two, a most enviable market for manufactured goods. And so England systematically drew from India its vast resources of raw materials, which it bought at very low cost because of the cheap labor, and poured back into India manufactured goods to broadcast, with this result: that it destroyed Indian manufacture.

England deliberately and systematically discouraged and destroyed Indian enterprise; even hand-spinning and hand-weaving was discouraged for the benefit of British merchants and British manufacturers; with the result that India, which is the **second** largest cotton producing country in the world, and once upon a time produced the finest cotton goods in the world, is producing next to nothing today, with the result that poverty is as rampant in India today as it ever was. I am told that at least thirty millions of Indians live on one meal a day; and it was a very common sight in periods of famine, which periodically grip India, that boatloads of

foodstuffs and provisions would leave Indian harbors for England, while the peoples of India were dying by the tens of thousands of starvation.

In other words, England governed India not for the sake of India but for the sake of England.

Another very serious failure is the failure to establish, after these many years, a common school system of education in India. There is no elementary system of education in India today, and illiteracy is just as widespread as it was a hundred years ago. The higher classes do attend school, some of them private institutions and some of them English schools, where Indians are trained for the Civil Service, so that upon their graduation they are given some of the less important posts in the Indian Civil Service system.

England taxes India very heavily, but out of these taxes, wrung from the toiling masses, something like 275 millions are spent annually on the British army in India, something less than 20 millions on education, and something less than four millions on sanitation.

Perhaps another great failure has been this: there has always been discrimination in the Civil Service of India. Very few Indians rise to the high posts in government, and, what is more important, socially. The Indian has always been made to feel that he belonged to an inferior and subject race. No Indian, however refined and cultured, is ever admitted to a British social club in India. No attempt has been made to

develop the spirit of self-pride in the Indian; no attempt has been made to foster Indian art and Indian culture and Indian language and Indian literature; and many an Indian, unconsciously, had been taught to look upon himself and his own and the cultural achievements of his own people contemptuously. And the Indian is a proud people; the Anglo-Saxon has no monopoly on racial pride. The Indian is very sensitive, and he resents that deeply, though sometimes his resentment is not articulate.

Gandhi--of whom I shall speak in a moment--said that the history of British rule in India is a history of broken promises; and it is almost literally true. Every concession made was a concession wrung from England--not freely offered; it was wrung through riots and threats and revolutions; and when concessions were made formally they were not carried out but in part.

In 1919 England, afraid of the threatening, rumbling discontent of India, passed what has come to be known as the Government of India Act, an act which gave a large measure of self-determination to the Indian peoples, and which promised a gradual complete self-determination; and swift upon the steps of the enactment of this act came what we all know as the Punjab horror, the massacre of Amritsar and the cruel order of General Dyer.

Do you know what that was? After the massacre at Amritsar, when some fifty thousand Indians gathered together in a public square in a peaceful anti-English demonstration,

General Dyer led his troops to the square and ordered them to fire on this unarmed mob until their ammunition would be exhausted, and some hundreds were killed and thousands were wounded; and following that General Dyer ordered that if an Indian must pass through the street where the general lived, he was not to pass it as a human being but he was to crawl on all fours; and you can imagine the humiliation and resentment of the people.

And so the Indians have come to distrust the sincerity, the good will, of England; and the spokesman of this revolution and the man who organized this startlingly new technique of revolution--non-violence, non-cooperation--is this strange, tantalizing, almost legendary, figure who is today the hero of young India--Gandhi. Only the Orient can produce a man of the type of Gandhi. We cannot understand him even in the West. Gandhi is that strange combination which the mystic of the East produces--a saint, a saint who is also a politician, a mystic who is also an intense Nationalist, a prophet who preaches resistance but without violence--resistance and pacifism.

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Gandhi is today the man, whom the spirit of India is being crystalized, and who today, in spite of the fact that he is in prison, is organizing this spiritual revolt of the Indian peoples. Gandhi was a friend of Great Britain up to 1919; Gandhi fought for England in the Boer war; Gandhi organized an ambulance corps of Indians for England during the 1914 war; Gandhi wanted cooperation but he could get none;

and the events of 1919, what happened in India and what happened in Turkey, the attempt on the part of Christian nations to destroy the last political stronghold of Mohammedanism,--these events turned Gandhi into an implacable enemy of Great Britain in India.

Gandhi resents not alone the exploitation of India by foreigners; Gandhi resents not alone the fact that a hundred thousand foreigners are ruling and controlling the destinies of 300 millions of his brothers; Gandhi resents even more--and that is tremendously significant--that spirit of imperialism, that spirit of industrialism, that spirit of competition, of greed, with which the West, through England, is beginning to indoctrinate his people.

Gandhi sees in the continued domination of England a menace not to the bodies of India so much, and not to their political institutions as much as to their spiritual selves; they are becoming spiritually polluted by the incursion of Western European standards, which, to Gandhi, are coarse and crass and materialistic, which have to do with wealth and things rather than with the spirit and the soul.

Now to an Indian these things are supreme. We in the West look upon the poverty of the Indian or the Asiatic in his mud hovel and we pity him; he lacks all the conveniences of modern life; and yet as B. . . . once said, an Indian in rags, half starved, will sit in front of his mud hovel, look at the stars and meditate upon life and death and the destiny of life, upon the hereafter and upon his soul,

while here in the West, surrounded by an age of steel and concrete, with wealth and luxuries in profusion, with lives accelerated, furiously rushed, we have not even the time, not to say the inclination, to think of these eternal and enduring values of life.

And so Gandhi calls for Indian self-determination; and his technique is purely Oriental. I very frequently say that Western Europe will never be Christian. Western Europe will never understand Jesus; it cannot understand Him because Jesus is an Oriental, and Jesus preached the ideals peculiar to the Orient. When Jesus said, "If a man strike thee on one cheek turn the other," He was not preaching an impossible ideal for an Oriental. That is the spirit of the Orient, as you will see in a moment. When Jesus said "If a man rob thee of one cloak, give him the other," He was not speaking as a mere visionary; He was giving the soul of the East.

And Western Europe, rightly or wrongly, not alone will never practice it but may never even appreciate and understand it; it lacks the spiritual sympathy which turns a fact into a poem; it lacks the reach and the profoundness of spiritual depths to understand it. Now Gandhi does; Gandhi says to his people, "Resist, but not through violence. Violence is the tool of the coward; terrorism is the instrument of the weak. When a man is weak, when a man is not sure of his cause, he rushes to instruments of destruction, to tools, to terror. England is weak in numbers in India, and therefore England needs a vast standing army. England's cause

is unrighteous, and therefore England needs terrorism in the Punjab horror to keep us in subjection; but we are strong in numbers and we have a righteous cause with us, and we need no armies and we need no violence. They have schools; we will send none of our Indians to them; they have law courts; we will not enter them or bring our cases to them; they have armies; no Indian will be a soldier in the Indian army; they give you decorations; throw them into the mud; they want taxes; refuse to pay them; they will throw you into prison; by all means go to prison. Let them torture you; let them agonize you; let them ultimately become ashamed and confounded because of the agonies which they are imposing upon a defenseless people. Do not buy their merchandise; go back to your hand loom; boycott them, ignore them." Non-violence, non-resistance.

It is one of the great ironies of history, one that brings a smile to one when one thinks of it, that the greatest militaristic nation in the world--Germany--the one that depended most on armies and arms and all that, is today trying this theory of Gandhi in the Ruhr.

Will Gandhi succeed? What will be the outcome if he would succeed? It is very difficult to say. One thing is clear: India as it is today constituted, is not ready for absolute self-government. One must look reality squarely in the face; but this, too, is certain: that this program of exploitation, of discrimination, is driving India into the ranks of the extremists, and revolution is brewing. It is

my belief that only a complete reversal of policy on the part of the European nations, wherever they are in Asia, only an attempt to substitute helpfulness for exploitation, service for profit, will avoid a terrible catastrophe in the future, and will bring lasting peace to the world.

I believe that it is the duty of the Christian nations of Europe to lead, to carry the white man's burden; but the white man's burden is not to oppress and to exploit, not to rob other people; the white man's burden is to lead the way by practice and example, by moral practice and ideal example to the backward nations of the earth.

Asia has not yet said its last say. The East has yet much to give to the world. Eight hundred millions of God's children have within them many gifts to bring to mankind. I believe the East needs the West even as the West needs the East. The West can give much to Asia; the West can give to Asia scientific attitudes, the West can teach Asia self-government, universal equality; the West can destroy the nefarious caste system which today bleeds the lives of millions of Indians; the West can teach the East orderliness, administration, efficiency, cleanliness, sanitation.

But the East can pay back and pay back richly and generously for such gifts. The East is the home of the spirit of mankind; the East is the home of all the religious sentiments of the world. The East will for all time remain the home of poesy and romance and spirituality. The West, in its imperialistic organization, the West, in its

mechanicalistic conception today, needs the inrush of the spirit of the East; the West needs the attitude of the Orient; the West needs the opening up of new horizons of spirituality; the West needs the charmed life of contemplation and reflection, which is the most priceless possession of the Oriental; the West needs must understand that mastery over self is infinitely superior to mastery over things; and the ancient wisdom of the East teaches you that. So that East and West, attuned to one another in a spirit of cooperation, supplementing and complementing one another, inspiriting and energizing one another, may, as it is our hope and as it is our prayer, both set forth upon that endless pilgrimage which leads mankind through slow and arduous stages to the far off shrine of human perfection.

East is East and West is West, and yet there is beneath them both, above them both, certain great ideals which are not mutually exclusive, which may be harmonized to the greater glory and the greater happiness of both.

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