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A definition of patriotism, 1925.

"A DEFINITION OF PATRIOTISM."

RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER.

THE TEMPLE, SUNDAY MORNING,

MAY 17, 1925, CLEVELAND, OHIO.



There has been in recent years a great deal of loose thinking of this thing we call patriotism. Some have exalted patriotism into the highest dogma and made it the supreme virtue of social life; others have taught us to regard patriotism as an antiquated superstition--the source of all the ills which afflict the world; some have thrown the cloak of patriotism over some very unsightly things, such as militarism and predatory interests, economic exploitation and racial selfishness; to others patriotism was accounted guilty of all the sins of international political life. Everybody used the word patriotism for almost everything. If a man advocated compulsory registration of aliens in the United States, it was out of regard for patriotism; if one advocated the compulsory reading of the Bible in the public school, it was as a patriotic duty. The klan, of course, was a patriotic organization.

Those who advocated a larger army and navy, an aggressive nationalism, were prompted by the highest patriotic motive. Every economic reformation in our life was to be shunned because of patriotism. Soviet Russia was to be denounced and universally damned as a patriotic duty; every political charlatan, every economic carpet-bagger, every religious fanatic, used patriotism as a sales argument. Not so very long ago a man asked me to buy a set of American histories--rather poorly written, second-rate, a set of twelve

volumes, which at a generous price of a dollar and a half per volume would have cost eighteen dollars; he asked me to buy them for seventy dollars as a patriotic duty! It was patriotism to buy American histories!

In no country in the world is the word patriotism so lightly used and so frequently used at the slightest provocation as in the United States, and with it of course the word "Americanism." I am very suspicious, to be frank, of the man who continuously and loudly proclaims in public his love for his wife; there is something wrong with that man. I am equally suspicious of this perennial protestation of one's love for one's country. One does not parade one's deepest loves and loyalties; it is quite vulgar; it is quite cheap; because this constant reiteration is evidence not of a profound spiritual love but of some ulterior purpose.

What is patriotism? Why, simply love of one's country, of course. What is this love based on? It is based on the inherent love for home, for one's kin and kinsmen, for those near to us. As such patriotism is one of the indispensable and the most essential instincts, I might say, of human life, and, when not abused, one of the most beautiful, one of the most helpful. When people live together for a long period of time in one locality and share common political fortunes and common political experiences, they will before very long evolve a certain community of interests, certain loyalties, certain traditions, certain institutions, certain

aspirations. These things, these loyalties and traditions and institutions and interests shared in common are what we call a nation. A nation is not a physical reality; it is a spiritual reality. A nation is not built upon race, for there are nations composed of three and four races; a nation is not even built upon a common language, because there are nations, like Belgium and Switzerland, which have three or four official languages. A nation is the result of a community of interests and loyalties and devotions and attitudes and sentiments. Those who would wish to base American nationalism upon homogeneity of race or uniformity of language entirely, are both misguided and misinformed.

Two people of different races, speaking different languages, can claim one country as their own, their very own, and both be truly patriotic. In other words, patriotism is loyalty to spiritual values common to a people which thinks itself one--loyalty to principles, to ideas, to ideals which a group of people share in common and regard as their unique characteristic.

Now patriotism is not an exclusive virtue; it is not the only virtue in life; it is not the only loyalty in life; there are other loyalties equally as great, equally as sacred. There is, for example, loyalty to the inalienable rights of man, which man never surrendered to the state and which man is duty bound out of patriotic loyalty to defy the state in defending these inalienable rights. There is loyalty to one's family; there is loyalty to one's religion;

there is loyalty to humanity; there is loyalty to God.

So that those who speak of one hundred per cent Americanism and have in mind, however vaguely, the thought that loyalty to the state or the nation must be exclusive of every other form of loyalty, have no intelligent conception of patriotism. There were thinkers, there were philosophers, who exalted the state above everything else. There were philosophers who said that the individual has no rights except those rights which derive from the authority of the state; there were those who said, and there are those who maintain today, that the state is supreme--supreme over man's private life and over man's political life and over man's religion. The state can do no wrong; the state is absolute in its authority. The great German philosopher, Haeckel, for example, said, "The state is the divine will; it is the absolute power on earth; it is its own end and object; it is the ultimate end which has the highest right against the individual."

Now, this is one hundred per cent nationalism. But the American government is based on no such philosophy. Quite the contrary. Our government is based upon this fundamental thought: that government is a means, not an end in itself; that government is established to safeguard the inalienable rights of man, of the seat of authority. The goal, the object of government, is man, his rights, his destiny, the protection of his liberty. So that under our system of government it is not unpatriotic to criticize

government, and to criticize government officials when we believe that that particular government policy or that particular government official is not serving the highest needs of man. Under our system of government it is not unpatriotic to attempt to change government--government policy, by lawful and prescribed means when we feel that that particular governmental institution or policy no longer serves the advancing needs of man, of the citizen; and under our system of government it is not unpatriotic to resist government, by force, if necessary, when we feel that government is trespassing upon those inalienable rights which were never given to the state and in which the state has no right to meddle.

Thus, for example, if government should attempt to interfere with my religion, a sphere which was preempted from government control ab initio--from the very beginning,--if government should attempt to interfere with my religious convictions and my religious practices, I would be duty bound, out of a sense of highest loyalty and patriotism, to resist government, even by force and violence; for such a government is not an American government and therefore not my government. Such a government is violating the essential principles which gave it the right to be; it forfeits my devotion and my loyalty when it sets out to trespass upon those rights and prerogatives which man preserved for himself and refused to turn over to the state. The Protestants found it necessary in the centuries gone by to revolt against governments which attempted to dictate their religion; the Catholics have done

likewise. It is a supreme moral and patriotic duty to confine government to its legitimate sphere, and to fight government when it seeks to pass beyond the limitations of its own constitution. Governments are not always right. If governments were always right that dark history of the monumental blunders and stupidity of nations would never have been written; wars would never have afflicted the world if governments were superior intellectually and infallibly wise and right.

So that patriotism does not mean unquestioned and blind worship of the state; the unquestioned, uncritical endorsement of any and every government policy. Patriotism means loyalty to the highest ideals of the nation. Governments change, nations abide, and the supreme patriotism is loyalty to the highest ideals of the nation. I emphasize the words, "the highest ideals of the nation"--not the lowest. Nations have low wishes and low cupidities and low desires, and when a citizen blindly serves these lower instincts of his people he is not a patriot; he is a chauvinist--that kind of patriotism Ruskin called an absurd superstition founded on an extended selfishness. That kind of patriotism is nothing more or less than egoism raised a few million-fold; it has no moral sanction; it has no moral justification.

When a nation, for example, sets out immorally, at the behest of empire, to conquer and subdue an unoffending weaker nation, it is not the patriotic duty of its citizens unquestionably to give that government their undivided

allegiance, their substance, their very lives. Patriotism is loyalty to the highest ideals of a nation.

Mark Twain writes in his Autobiography this epoch-making paragraph. He was questioned what he would do when his nation declared war, and he writes: "Suppose the country is entering upon a war; where do you stand then? Do you arrogate to yourself the privilege of going your own way in the matter, in the face of the nation? 'Yes,' I said. That is my position. If I thought it an unrighteous war I would say so. If I were invited to shoulder a musket in that cause and march under that flag, I should decline; I would not voluntarily march under this country's flag, or any other, when it was my private judgment that the country was in the wrong. If the country obliged me to shoulder the musket, I could not help myself, but I would never volunteer; to volunteer would be the act of a traitor to myself, and consequently traitor to my country. If I refused to volunteer and I should be called a traitor, I am well aware of that, but that would not make me a traitor; the unanimous vote of the sixty millions could not make me a traitor. I should still be a patriot, and, in my opinion, the only one in the whole country."

I regard this sentiment as one hundred per cent American and one hundred per cent patriotic.

Again I must emphasize this fundamental thought of American democracy: the state does not own the individual. Once upon a time it was thought that the church owned the individual, and at another time it was thought that the king

owned the individual, and still another time it was thought that the feudal lord owned the individual; and now men blindly think that a democracy owns the individual. But the individual is not owned by anyone but by his God and by his conscience. Government is voluntary association of individuals bound by contractual and mutual duties and responsibilities; when government is within its rights, the citizen is duty bound to give to it his undivided allegiance, even to the point of sacrificing his substance and his life; for that is part of the agreement, that is part of the original understanding. When government violates the letter and the spirit of the contract, the individual is under no such restraint or obligation. The independence of the individual in his relation to government, it must, however, be borne in mind, has to do with the fundamentals only--with the bill of rights, with the inalienable rights of man. When these are in danger man must resist even government in their defence; but as far as all other things are concerned, it is part of the patriotic duty of a citizen, as well as part of basic wisdom, to obey all laws freely arrived at by the vote of the majority. There can be no government, there can be no social life, if the individual will on every occasion assert his independence, and say, "This law is not to my liking, and therefore I will not obey it." There can be no community life, only anarchy and the result. The majority must govern; there is no other way.

It is the privilege of the individual to attempt to persuade the majority that a given law is undesirable, but

as long as that law is law, as long as that law is operating, as long as that law has the sanction and authority of that duly constituted legislative will of the majority of the people themselves, that law is binding and final and ultimate as far as a citizen's obedience is concerned. There can be no doubt about this point. The prohibition law may not be to your liking or to my liking or to my neighbor's liking, but it is law duly enacted by the will of the people, by the majority of the people, and as such it is our patriotic duty of the supreme kind to obey it. We may even, while we obey that law, seek its repeal if we feel that that law is undesirable, but until it is repealed it is the law of the land and the law of everyone within the land--final and absolute. For the individual, my friends, may be in the wrong just as often as government; the individual may be mistaken just as frequently as government is, and the individual must, for the sake of the commonalty of life, and for the sake of the experiment in democratic government, submit to the government of the majority.

What, now, is patriotism? Patriotism is loyalty to principles, especially to those principles which are expressed first and foremost in our Constitution and in our Bill of Rights; loyalty to them, readiness to give to those principles our consecrated lives, readiness to sacrifice the things we hold dearest for their preservation and their perpetuation; for freedom, equality for our democratic institutions, remembering at all times that our own constitution

makes provision for change and development; that the desire to amend laws and change laws is not inherently an unpatriotic wish. Our founding fathers had marvelous vision, great vision; they realized that life is constantly advancing, that new conditions arise and new problems present themselves and new institutions are necessary, and so they made possible within the constitution itself this constant experimentation with new legislation as time may dictate.

Those who would hold up the constitution as the infallible, unchangeable and absolute law of the land, are not serving the highest interests of patriotism; nor are they true to the spirit of the monumental minds of a Washington and a Jefferson and a Hamilton, who framed that constitution. Life is an evolution, life is a growth; and so is government. The constitution is not a moribund doctrine; it is a living organism which can grow with life. There are certain basic principles within that constitution which, if discarded, alters completely the whole contour and complex of American government; there are certain principles there enunciated which, if disregarded, change completely American democracy. The principle of self-government; the principle of political equality; the principle of the right to hold office without any religious qualifications; the principle of the right of man to his life and his liberty and the opportunity to pursue happiness,--if these things are changed or altered in the slightest, we no longer have American democracy. We may have a different form of government, but it is not

American democracy.

And so I take patriotism to be loyalty to those mighty principles expressed in our constitution which are the bases upon which our democratic government is established. I regard patriotism as loyalty to America's destiny. There is such a thing as the religion of America; there is such a thing as a national faith and a national hope and a national aspiration. What is it? What is the peculiar faith and aspiration of the American people? Why, it was that faith which was enunciated by Washington, by Lincoln, by Roosevelt and by Wilson; that faith that somehow the American people were fashioned by a great God to extend the benediction of free government to all the nations of the earth; that it is our peculiar mission to champion the rights of peoples and the rights of individuals to live their own lives.

We waged one great war--the Revolutionary War--to free ourselves; and we waged another bloody Civil War to free slaves; and in our own day the American people engaged in another war, not for conquest, not for territorial rights or aggrandizement, but for the self-determination of smaller peoples. Whether we succeeded or not is not relevant to the thought; the thought is that we plunged into the world war not out of a desire for gain or conquest--we gained nothing and we conquered nothing--but a desire to serve the interests of the submerged and the suppressed peoples of the earth. Three wars we waged for human emancipation, and these three wars somehow attest in blood the missionary character of

American democracy.

Now, I say that loyalty to this mission of America, loyalty to our manifest destiny, is patriotism. Anyone and everyone who serves a fadeless spirit to extend the blessings of democracy, political, economic and social, to his fellow citizens, or to the peoples of other lands, is an American patriot in the highest sense of the word. Anyone who gives of himself, of his services, of his energy to break shackles, to destroy dungeon walls, to extend the dominion of the human spirit, to free God's children who may still be groaning under suppression and persecution in the four corners of the earth,--anyone who is caught up by that translating purpose is an American of the very blood and bone of American democracy; he is a patriot.

I regard American patriotism as faithfulness to the American sense of fair play and to the American sense of opportunity for every child of God; freedom for a man to live his own life and to expand to the limits of his capacity without let or hindrance, without any circumscription, without any stultification or confinement. That is American patriotism.

Let me quote the words of the greatest patriot that ever lived--Abraham Lincoln. Abraham Lincoln, in addressing the soldiers the last year of the great war, said to them: "I beg you to remember this not merely for my sake but for yours. I happen temporarily to occupy this big White House. I am a living witness that anyone of your

children may look to come here as my father's child has. It is in order that each one of you may have, through this free government which we have enjoyed, an open field and a fair chance for your industry, enterprise and intelligence; that you may all have equal privileges in the race of life with all its desirable human aspirations. It is for this that this struggle should be maintained, that we may not lose our birthright. "

That is the birthright of the American--the right to the free expression of his life, the right to have a chance in the race of life with all the good things that men value--the right of not being discriminated against because of position or wealth or lack of wealth, or race or creed or color; the right to face the world as men and to live one's life as a free human being. I say, that devotion to that principle is real patriotism, and I say that any one who in the slightest would qualify that right,--I say that any one or any group of individuals who out of prejudice or hate or ignorance or superstition would delimit a man's privileges in this land because of race or because of religion or because of his extraction or ancestry, is a traitor to American life and American thought, because he would deny a man his birthright, because he would deprive men of full freedom.

This is patriotism--nothing else. It is the sacred love of those noble principles and traditions of our government, it is the undying devotion to the holy institutions of our government, it is devotion to America's destiny and

America's mission, to America's sense of fair play, to America's sense of the right of free opportunity--that, and that alone, is patriotism. That kind of patriotism can well claim, as it does claim, our complete, our unquestioned, our supreme devotion.

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1. There has been a great deal of Comm. Thorough in recent years about this thing we call patriotism. Some of them raised it into ^{an} ineluctable dogma - the supreme & exclusive virtue of social life. Others have denounced it as an antiquated superstition - the source of most of the evils which afflict nations to-day. By some the cloak of patriotism was thrown over the unpalatable appearance of militarism, econ. exploitation, predatory interests, racial selfishness. By others it was accounted guilty of all wars, and all forms of inter. culture.
- Es - (1) The compul. registra. of arms is endorsed as a "patriotic" duty. (2) The Comp. reading of the Bible in the P.S. is demanded in the name of patri. (3) The Plan is a "patriotic" organization. (4) The advocate of an - Grand army & navy is the champion of "patriotism". (5) Swiss Russia is to be attacked as a "patriotic" duty, and (6) all forms of Econ. reform. are to be shunned as un-Am. & unpatriotic. Every fil. charlatan, every Econ. carpet-bagger, every rel. fanatic, appropriates "patriotism" and ~~uses it~~ ^{uses it} as a sales argument - together with the word "Americanism".
- Recently a book-agent tried to ~~induce~~ ^{sell} me ~~to buy~~ a set of Am. hist., written second-rate, worth at the rate of 1.50 a vol. \$18.00 for 10 vols on the ground that I would be performing a patri. duty if I got that particular set of books at that particular price - The next thing I ~~thought~~ ^{thought} for no country in the world do people speak so much, so often, of the rights of patri.

So to do, or else all just. becomes impossible, & all social life unworkable. Laws promulgated by will, the people, freely expressed, are binding on all. Every citizen must obey them, even if they are not to his liking. It is his patriotic duty. It is privileged to seek their repeal. But as long as they are in operation - the higher loyalty to the common good & duty. Just. Must dictate his absolute obedience.

1) For the individual may ~~be~~ ^{be} not always be in the right. ~~Most often~~ ^{He} he is in the wrong. It is ~~that~~ ^{wisdom} to abide by the dec. & the majority, unless prevented by highest moral scruples - and seek to persuade men of the correctness of our position. This is the only way possible if men are ever to live in decent communities.

8. What now is Am. Patriotism:

1. It is loyalty to those principles which first and foremost are embodied in the Const. & the U.S. & in the Bill of Rights. - It is to defend those principles with our consecrated lives & if need be, with the highest sacrifices. - But it is to bear in mind, however, that the Const. makes provision for its own change & modification, for its own expansion & re-interpretation. For the Const. was meant to be an evolving organism, not a moribund ~~and~~ antiquity - The founding fathers had vision - great vision. They saw

life, advancing. They did not wish to hamstring
the future. They desired gen. principles to guide
all future dev't. — These principles they
safeguarded by making provision for the
amendment of specific laws when such
laws were found to be no longer desirable.
They most def. & tal. the right of a free
people to experiment in democ., always
employing democ. tools, & always never
trespassing the inviolable right, the citizens.

2. It is loyalty to our destiny — ① Cham.
berlain, democ. in the world — Revolt. — Civil War.
— The World War — To assist in all movements
which tend to free mankind from its
ancient bondages — with making
turns none, with charity for all —

(2) Opportunity — Fair Play —

grounded on an extended selfishness". It is nothing
but (Eggs) multiplied a million fold. It has
no moral sanction. Two justifications —
When a nation engages in an unmanned war
to conquer a weaker neighbor, it is not the
pat. duty of the citizens to give it their
life and substance in support of that unjusti-
fied enterprise — the higher loyalty to truth
and justice abrogates this loyalty to State
which the ^{nation} State is really perverting the
moment it ~~sets~~ ^{sets} out upon its immoral
campaigns. (Twain) The State or the nation does
not own the individual — It was once held
that the Church owned him — or the King or
the feudal lord. It is not held that the
democr. owns him — This is a fallacy. No
one owns man but God — His allegiance to
the State is a voluntary association, of a
Contractual Character — As long as the
State lives up to its highest obligations,
the citizen is bound to give it his
allegiance, if need be his substance & his
life — When it breaks faith with man —
man owes no fealty to it —

9. This (indeed) the ind. in relat. to his part. concerns
only with fundamentals — with the values
right, life, liberty & the pursuit of happiness. In
all ^{other} matters the ind. in a democr. must submit to
the will of the majority — & it is his part. duty

institutions if we feel that such a change is demanded by the changed conditions of the life of the nation —

3. And it is not unpat. — to resist the govt. when we find that the State is trespassing on those rights which all citizens were left unto themselves refusing to grant the State power to meddle in them —

4. was the govt. to attempt e.g. to interfere with my (rel.) I would unquest. resist it to the uttermost — with force if necessary. That would be my patriotic duty — for such a govt. would not be an Am. govt. but one + ∴ not my govt. The Prots. have been compelled to wage war on govts in the past. I do have the Constitution.

5. Govts. are not always right. Hist. is the dark record of the masses. Blunders + stupidities of Government — Wars are the indications of nat. wisdom + perverse morality. Govts change. The People's ^{Nations} Endures. + Pat. is loyalty to the highest ideals of the ^{nation} people — not to the temporary policies of govt. when there are found to be in conflict with the highest ideals of the people.

6. And yet I emphasize the words loyalty to the highest ideals, the nation. Loyalty to its current wishes & thoughts. This is not patriotism — but chauvinism — This type of Nationalism (Huxley) called "an abominable prejudice

are other loyalties beside loyalty to the State. There is
loyalty to those inalienable rights which man needs
inherent to the State & in the protection which
man is morally bound to obey the State - There
is loyalty to family - to his religion - to
humanity -

1. There have been phil. who regarded the State
as supreme in all matters, supreme over a
man's private & public life, supreme over his religion.
The State is a law unto itself - can do no
wrong - must be obeyed in all things - They

apotheosized the pol. government - we call this

Nepel said: "The State is the divine will.... It is
the absolute power on earth: it is its own end
and object. It is the ultimate end which has
the highest right against the individual" - This
is the 100%

2. Our govt is based on no such philos. - govt.
is a means not an end. Our Const. clearly defines
& delimits the scope of the State. It is to protect
man's inalienable rights that govt's are established.
Govt. is to serve Man. Patronage is: not
a blind worship of govt, but a critical service.
Man thru govt. -

3. It is not unpat. to criticize govt. Govt
officials when we find a when we think we
find them not fully serving the needs of human
life. It is not unpat. to seek to change
by lawful & peaceful means, any govt dept. or

as in the U.S. - I am suspicious of the man who loudly and ostentatiously proclaims his love for his wife. - There is something wrong there. I am equally suspicious of this perennial protestations of love for his country. One does not carry his love & his loyalties on his shirt - & it is vulgar constantly ^{mechanically} to proclaim them -

2. What is Patriotism? It is love for one's country. It is based on man's love for his home, and his ^{these men} kin. As such it is one of the most fund. instincts of human life - & when it is not abused, one of the most valuable.

(1) When people live together for a longer period of time cooperatively, and share common pol. fortunes and experiences, they will evolve common traditions and loyalties and aspirations. These constitute the national life and devotion to them is patriotism - It is not race which makes a nation. There are nations composed of many races.

It is not language which makes a nation. There are nations which have 3 or 4 lang. - It is rather the having of a community of interests & attitudes and social aspirations, the same being one.

(2) Those who would base Amer. on race honor - or unanim. ^{language} ~~speech~~, are misguided and misinformed. Pat. is a thing quite apart and 2 men of diff. races, speaking diff. languages can love the same country & claim it as their very own -

3. Pat. is not an exclusive virtue. It does not require one to renounce all other loyalties. - There