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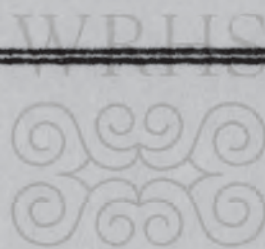
"CHILDREN OF LIGHT."

A Chanukah Sermon

RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER.

THE TEMPLE, SUNDAY MORNING,

DECEMBER 5, 1926, CLEVELAND.O.



The festival of Chanukah, friends, is symbolized by light, the kindling of tapers in increasing number through the eight days of the festival. It is very appropriate that this holiday, of all holidays, should be symbolized by light. You will recall the legend, how upon entering the sanctuary which had been desecrated by the hosts of the Syrian invaders, the victorious armies of Judah the Maccabee found one small cruet of oil which was sufficient to burn in the sanctuary but one day, but through a miraculous potency it burned the eight days of the festival. It was a light that did not fail.

You will recall the other legend which tells that upon the entering of the sanctuary they found eight spears which the defeated enemy left in its hurried departure from the city, and that Judah took these eight spears and turned each one of them into a torch so that they gave light in the darkened sanctuary.

That, to my mind, is an even more charming legend than the first, for it seems to be prophetic of the whole destiny and career of Israel,--this beating of swords into plowshares and spears into torch-lights. Light is appropriately the symbol of this festival, for the festival commemorates freedom, and freedom is always symbolized in light. Our own Statue of Liberty holds aloft the flaming torch, and it is perhaps very likely that the light of that

torch which illumines the free people of this land, was borrowed from the light of the burning bush before which Moses saw a revelation and heard the voice saying, "Go forth and lead my people out of slavery into freedom." And it is not out of the way to say that the light of this torch that shines on the great harbor, the portal of the New World, was borrowed from the light which Judah the Maccabee kindled in the darkened sanctuary; for Israel gave to mankind the gift of the ideal of freedom and emancipation; Israel, whose God created the world and whose first fiat was "Let there be light"; Israel, whose national career began in Egypt in the first great human revolution for freedom and emancipation.

Light, my friends, was very dear to the heart of our people; hence so many of the fine ritualism of our faith is built around the symbol of light. Our forefathers, wandering in the wilderness, were commanded by God to fashion a menorah, a seven-branched candlestick, which shall burn in the tabernacle. And another great symbol of our faith is the נר חנוכה the perpetual light, the light that burns before our sacred ark day and night throughout the world. And we welcome our Sabbath, our beautiful day of peace and rest, with the kindling of lights. Our Rabbis caught the meaning of this preponderance of light in our faith when they said that Israel was commanded to kindle a light out of oil, for oil symbolizes Israel. When God said unto the people, "And ye shall take unto yourselves pure oil for the burning," there was in it a mystic symbolism, a reference to the life

history and the destiny of our people. For they said, "Israel is likened unto oil. Just as the olive does not give up its oil until it is crushed and beaten, so Israel does not yield up the pure oil of the spirit until it is beaten and crushed by suffering."

Israel is at its best when it is under the stress and duress of suffering and oppression. Then the Rabbis said, "Israel is likened unto oil. Just as oil refuses to mix with all other liquids, so Israel refuses to assimilate itself among all other peoples." And lastly, they said, "Israel is likened unto oil; for just as oil gives light unto men, so Israel gives light unto the nations." "The nations shall walk in thy light." There is in this homily of our ancient sages a profound reading of Israel's history. Just as oil does not mix with other liquids, so Israel does not and dare not lose its identity among other peoples.

The keynote of this festival of Chanukah, my friends, is the preservation of national individuality. But what was it that Judas Maccabeus and his valient brethern and the whole hosts of Israel fought for? They did not wage a war for territorial conquest. They did not wage a war of aggression. They fought to preserve their identity,-- the spiritual and religious and cultural identity of Israel in the midst of the ancient world which threatened to engulf and absorb them. Judea was faced with an invasion of a great civilization which had much about it which was charming

and beautiful and attractive, but which had also much in it that was poisonous to the pure life of Israel. The whole of Asia succumbed to the influences of this civilization, whose home was Greece; and Israel, enclaved by these people, was likewise being swallowed up by this pagan civilization of Hellas. But Israel wanted to preserve its identity, to maintain its individuality; Israel wanted to be different and separate. Israel remembered the old phrase: "Israel is a people that must dwell alone." And so the forces of Israel arose in revolt, and for three long, dreadful years of conflict they struggled against overwhelming odds to preserve the sanctity of their own personality, of their own soul,--to be themselves.

Now, friends, it is this insistence of Israel upon being an individuality that has brought down upon it all the hatred of accumulated animosities of the world. That is why Antiochus sought to destroy Israel. He had no particular grievance against the people except this: that while all other peoples fell in with his scheme of consolidation, of consolidating his empire through establishment of a uniform system of belief and faith and practice throughout the countries over which he ruled, this little people of Judea alone persisted in challenging, in flaunting him. You will recall the old plaint of Haman who, a few hundred years before Antiochus Epiphanes, sought to destroy the children of Israel in Persia,--the self-same plaint. "Behold," said Haman to the king, "here is a people whose

laws and customs differ from that of all other people."

"They are different." When Caligula, the Roman emperor, the imperial mad man, sought to make himself the worshipped deity of the great Roman empire, all the peoples over whom the armies of Rome swayed yielded without murmur and prostrated themselves in worshipping this imperial madman as god. Israel alone refused, and thereby, as it was once so keenly stated, Israel saved the honor of the human race, because Israel dared to be different. During the dark Middle Ages, when the world discovered that it could not destroy Israel's will to be alone and different, the world set about to make that individuality, which ought to be a badge of honor for all peoples,--the world set about to make that individuality a brand of shame; and so they put a yellow badge upon the Jew and said, "Here, you wish to be different; we will make you an object of mockery and taunt for all the world, and men will spit upon you when they will see you because you are different; and we will segregate you in a filthy quarter of the city, place you in a ghetto because you will to be different." And the world held out to the Jew all the glitter, all the prizes if but the Jew would submit to the majority and become like unto all other peoples.

But Israel remained mindful of the old charge: "Israel is not to be like unto other peoples." Now, some men regard this persistence as a sort of a stiff-neckedness, a sort of a stubbornness. Well, in a way, it

is. In our Talmud we are told that Israel was given the Torah; Israel alone of all other peoples, because the children of Israel were "hard" and stubborn and persistent. It is the individual, my friends, who becomes the savior of mankind. It is the man who dares to stand alone who becomes the pathfinder of the human race. It is the man who dares to rise above the conventions and the prejudices and the superstitions and the thoughts of his day, to rise above them and to stand alone, who becomes the pillar of fire guiding mankind through the dark night. It is the prophet, the lonely man, the man who knows but one thing, and that is the vision which beckons him, the ideal which tantalizes him, the truth which possesses him and who follows that whithersoever it might lead him away from the masses.--it is the prophet who ultimately brings the benediction upon mankind. And what is true of the individual is true of groups of people who have an individuality. Only those peoples have given spiritual values to mankind, only those peoples have served the world who have dared to be themselves, who in the midst of corrosive, undermining and assimilative forces, persisted in retaining their uniqueness, their own character.--those peoples alone were able to bequeath unto mankind precious legacies of cultural values.

Now, it is our firm conviction that Israel through force of character, retaining its individuality, remaining "a different people" - for it is only in that

sense that we speak of a "chosen people" - it is Israel that succeeded in saving, in salvaging its faith for mankind. Had Israel yielded to Antiochus Epiphanes back in the days of the Maccabees, Judaism would have ceased to exist; Christianity would never have appeared; Mohammedanism would never have arisen, and the three great religions which are today moulding the thoughts and the lives of two-thirds of mankind would never have come to be the force in modern civilization which they now are. It is Israel's stubbornness, if you will, which saved religion for the peoples of Europe.

Now we come down to the twentieth century an historic individuality. Today the world is more or less content to let us be. The world has discovered that it cannot break us or destroy us, and the world has now reached a point in its intellectual development where it has learned that the destruction of individuality is harmful to the progress of mankind. The world is now doing its utmost to preserve the self-determination of peoples and races and creeds. The world has now learned that mankind will forever be a mosaic made up of many stones of many sizes and of many colors; that the ideal of human life is not uniformity but unity; not sameness and monotony but cooperative effort on the part of all peoples. And the world today is content to let the Jew be himself. But here is the tragedy of the twentieth century: that we, ourselves, today are beginning to yield; that we, ourselves,

are beginning to destroy our uniqueness; that we, ourselves, are beginning to assimilate.

Israel is at its best when it is beaten and crushed, said the Rabbis. It is then that it gives oil, the oil of the spirit, the oil of salvation. But Israel in prosperity, Israel in the midst of possessions and wealth and unbounded ambitions, Israel in the midst of a materialistic, competitive world, is an Israel that quickly loses its sense of loyalty and its sense of devotion, and quickly begins to copy, to imitate. We are no longer leaders in the world, friends. We are prone to copy, to imitate. We go through life apologetic, and we seek the protective coloration; we want to wash out our distinctiveness; we want to be like other people so that we will not be recognized and differentiated. We have come to look upon Jewish individuality as a handicap rather than as a badge of honor, rather than as of the very essence of our life as a people.

And that is a tragedy, a tragedy in a two-fold sense. First, because this desire to wash out one's own personality, to lose one's own identity, is a manifestation of spiritual slavery, of inferiority, of self-depreciation. When your forefathers and mine were cowed and beaten and crushed in medieval Europe, branded with the mark of Cain, crowded into dirty ghettos, hounded from place to place; when their life was impoverished and stunted, they were physical slaves, they were the playthings

of the whims of tyrants, but spiritually they were themselves; spiritually they were free; spiritually they could say, "Thou hast chosen us from amongst all peoples." Spiritually they were not merely the equals but the superiors of the peoples who dominated them physically. They were free men even though their bodies and their physical lives were shackled by a thousand legislations and laws which hampered them and restricted them. They knew the freedom of being oneself; they did not cater spiritually; they did not seek to placate the world spiritually; they did not cringe before the culture of other peoples. They had their faith and their ideals and their standards of living and their culture and their literature, and in that world of their own they were princes and kings. It gave them the strength to endure and the patience to carry on. But we, in the midst of equality and freedom and prosperity, we, in this desire to obliterate ourselves, are giving evidence of a spiritual enslavement which is, to my mind, quite tragic.

And in the second place, we are helping to destroy, consciously or unconsciously, that which mankind needs very much. Mankind needs Israel today even more than it needed Israel two thousand years ago. It needs our faith; it needs our prophetic idealism; it needs our conceptions of the holiness of life and the purity of life; it needs the example of a group living and enduring for the sake of ideals in spite of all the hardships and the terrors

of life.

Dr. Schechter, who for years was head of the Jewish Theological Seminary of New York City, in one of his essays, has this to say about the tragedy of Jewish assimilation. He says: "What I understand by assimilation is loss of identity. It is this kind of assimilation, with the terrible consequences, that I have dreaded most, even more than pogroms. It is a tragedy to see a great, ancient people, distinguished for its loyalty to the religion of its forefathers, to its sacred law, losing itself every day by the mere process of attrition. It is a tragedy to see a language held sacred by all the world . . . which served as the depository of Israel's greatest and best thoughts, doomed to oblivion. It is a tragedy to see the descendents of those who revealed religion to the world and who developed the greatest religious literature in existence, so little familiar with real Jewish thought that they have no other interpretation to offer of Israel's scriptures, Israel's religion, or Israel's ideals and aspirations and hopes than those suggested by their natural opponents, slavishly following their opinions, copying their phrases and repeating their idioms. I am not accusing anybody," said Dr. Schechter, "I am only stating facts. We are helpless spectators of the Jewish soul wasting away before our very eyes."

Now in the twentieth century, my friends, we shall have to wage the same battle that Judas Maccabee

waged in the second century before the common era, and I pray to God that his victory may be ours. The situations are exactly the same; the conditions are exactly the same. In ancient Judea our fathers faced assimilation with Hellenism, which offered them as many attractions and as many rewards as our Western European civilization offers us, their descendants, today. They were offered equality; they were offered prosperity; they were offered an attractive culture and philosophy and art. And many of them succumbed to temptation; many of them left the fold of their faith and their people and cast in their lot with Hellenism. The self-same situation confronts us today, and the battle which we have to wage--not a battle of swords but a battle of spirits, from now on is just this: whether Israel will remain a distinctive unit, a distinctive cultural unit in the world, as a potent, vigorous, creative force, as a unit which has a mission, a purpose to serve, an ideal to establish, or whether gradually, through this process of attrition and assimilation, through a growing indifference, through a destruction of discipline, through the laxity which is invading every department of our Jewish life, we will slowly, slowly but surely, succumb to the forces of conquest.

And that great phrase comes to my mind: "Sound the alarm!" We are no longer faced by enemies without. They have failed to destroy us. If Israel--God forbid--will ever be destroyed, it will be not by the

world without but by Israel within. It will be ourselves who will destroy ourselves. It will be a tragic national suicide. And our age, my friends, with its indifference and its laxity; its love of comfort and of plenty; its unwillingness to be different, is preparing the way for this national suicide and assimilation.

As we kindle the Chanukah lights, friends, let us kindle anew, one by one, the light of loyalty, the light of devotion, the light of consecration, the light of faith, the light of steadfastness. Let us kindle a great enthusiasm for historic values, for historic associations, for historic purposes, which will keep us and our children steadfast, persistent, stiff-necked, if you will, "hard" and stubborn in the midst of a world which is supremely assimilative of all individuality.

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1. Feast of light. ① Curse of Oil ② Eggs עין חור . turned into torches
 This last part. charming - magic destiny to transform seeds into
 plums & pear into torches - ③ It is a Festival of
 Freedom - & no finer symbol than light. Our History
 of liberty holds aloft the torch. And who knows but
 what this torch borrowed its light from the burning
 bush - scattering forth my people - and gave the Mosaic
 Law torches. The world's precious heritage of the ideal
 of freedom was given to it by that little people
 that when God's spirit first came down, and
 when Nat. existence began in a revolution for freedom.

2. Symbol of oil - only at frequently employed.

① Menorah - pure oil - and a Ner Tameid - Sabbath
Chanukah.

② Rabbit - meal is likened unto Oil לחם מן הדיש
 ① Beaten ② will not mix with the
liquor ③ Keeps bright לחם מן הדיש

3. Individual.

① Job, 33:21 or Job - ② Job
 ③ - Plowing, sowing (2 kinds of seed); Harvest, gleanings, vintage
 ② Chanukah struggle against assimilation
Hellenism

4. Jews hated for it

① Antiochus - say at to consolidate Empire then
was for much -
 ② Haman - say at to consolidate Empire then
was for much -

③ I used to be different - Caligula - Fuere - "they cared honor of human race", when all other people slavishly obeyed them & the Imperial madman.

④ When world learnt that this will to be diff. would not yield, they set about making indistinct - abhorrent and shameful - Yellow Badge - Segregation - special taxes - special legislation - so that ind. far from being a mark of honor - would become a brand of shame, on the other hand offered guarantees of surrender -

5. Individual as saviors of mankind. They are light-bearers -

Those who rose above prej. & savant. & super - & then lay - and dared to be diff. - to stand alone - they were pathfinders

① The majority never loves the prophet - prophets in all ages were beaten & stoned & crucified. But they stood in the new day -

② There are 2 parts which give him power to mankind

① His Religious discernment ② Himself. The Example of a community which persecuted - whole for sake of ideals - would not a trap - no surrender -

6. We come down to 20 C. as historic individuality. And it is now new or less content to let us be. But now we ourselves are assimilating. Freed from outer pressures we are disintegrating. We are imitating - worst of best. We do not lead. We copy. We go apologetic, of seeking protection & coloration. Our fathers were phys. slaves - never spirit. slaves -

① Just Scholke and.

7. Channukah recalls us to ourselves - All that would offer us new, ancient world of our fathers - Referred to sell birth-right for a pot of gold. Because they refused - God was same - Christ. The world was made possible - The whole of life of Europe was altered.

① We must still persist in our old - with our conception of God & our own - our concept of human and justice - our standards of conduct -



"CHILDREN OF LIGHT."

Sermon 224

A Chanukah Sermon

RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER
DECEMBER 5th, 1926, CLEVELAND

The festival of Chanukah, friends, is symbolized by light, the kindling of tapers in increasing number through the eight days of the festival. It is very appropriate that this holiday, of all holidays, should be symbolized by light. You will recall the legend, how upon entering the sanctuary which had been desecrated by the hosts of the Syrian invaders, the victorious armies of Judah the Maccabee found one small cruet of oil which was sufficient to burn in the sanctuary but one day, but through a miraculous potency it burned the eight days of the festival. It was a light that did not fail.

You will recall the other legend which tells that upon the entering of the sanctuary they found eight spears which the defeated enemy left in its hurried departure from the city, and that Judah took these eight spears and turned each one of them into a torch so that they gave light in the darkened sanctuary.

That, to my mind, is an even more charming legend than the first, for it seems to be prophetic of the whole destiny and career of Israel, - this beating of swords into plowshares and spears into torch-lights. Light is appropriately the symbol of this festival, for the festival commemorates freedom, and freedom is always symbolized in light. Our own Statue of Liberty holds aloft the flaming torch, and it is perhaps very likely that the light of that torch which illumines the free people of this land, was borrowed from the light of the burning bush before which Moses saw a revelation and heard the voice saying, "Go forth and lead my people out of slavery into freedom." And it is not out of the way to say that the light of this torch that shines the great harbor, the portal of the New World, was borrowed from the light Judah the Maccabee kindled in the darkened sanctuary; for Israel gave to

mankind the gift of the ideal of freedom and emancipation; Israele, whose God created the world and whose first fiat was "Let there be Light"; Israel, whose national career began in Egypt in the first great human revolution for freedom and emancipation.

Light, my friends, was very dear to the heart of our people; hence so many of the fine ritualism of our faith is built around the symbol of light. Our forefathers, wandering in the wilderness, were commanded by God to fashion a menorah, a seven-branched candlestick, which shall burn in the tabernacle. And another great symbol of our faith is the the perpetual light, the light that burns before our sacred ark day and night throughout the world. And we welcome our Sabbath, our beautiful day of peace and rest, with the kindling of lights. Our Rabbis caught the meaning of this preponderance of light in our faith when they said that Israel was commanded to kindle a light out of oil, for oil symbolizes Israel. When God said unto the people, "And ye shall take unto yourselves pure oil for the burning," there was in it a mystic symbolism, a reference to the life history and the destiny of our people. For they said, "Israel is likened unto oil. Just as the olive does not give up its oil until it is crushed and beaten, so Israel does not yield up the pure oil of the spirit until it is beaten and crushed by suffering."

Israel is at its best when it is under the stress and duress of suffering and oppression. Then the Rabbis said, "Israel is likened unto oil. Just as oil refuses to mix with all other liquids, so Israel refuses to assimilate itself among all other peoples." And lastly, they said "Israel is likened unto oil; for just as oil gives light unto men, so Israel gives light unto the nations." "The nations shall walk in thy light." There is in this homily of our ancient sages a profound reading of Israel's history. Just as oil does not mix with other liquids, so Israel does not and dare not lose its identity among other peoples.

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and his valient brethern and the whole hosts of Israel fought for? They did not wage a war for territorial conquest. They did not wage a war of aggression. They fought to preserve their identity, - the spiritual and religious and cultural identity of Israel in the midst of the ancient world which threatened to engulf and absorb them. Judea was faced with an invasion of a great civilization which had much about it which was charming and beautiful and attractive, but which had also much in it ^{that} that was poisonous to the pure life of Israel. The whole of Asia succumbed to the influences of this civilization, whose home was Greece; and Israel, enclaved by these people, was likewise being swallowed up by this pagan civilization of Hellas. But Israel wanted to preserve its identity, to maintain its individuality; Israel wanted to be different and separate. Israel remembered the old phrase: "Israel is a people that must dwell alone." And so the forces of Israel arose in revolt, and for three long dreadful years of conflict they struggled against overwhelming odds to preserve the sanctity of their own personality, of their own soul, - to be themselves.

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Now we come down to the twentieth century, an historic individuality. Today the world is more or less content to let us be. The world has discovered that it cannot break us or destroy us, and the world has now reached a point in its intellectual development where it has learned that the destruction of individuality is harmful to the progress of mankind. The world is now doing its utmost to ~~ENP~~ preserve the self-determination of peoples and races and creeds. The world has now learned that mankind will forever be a mosaic made up of many stones of many sizes and of many colors; that the ideal of human life is not uniformity but unity; ~~EEEE~~ not sameness and monotony but cooperative effort on the part of all peoples. And the world today is content to let the Jew be himself. But here is the tragedy of the twentieth century: that we, ourselves, today are beginning to yield, that we, ourselves are beginning to destroy our uniqueness; that we, ourselves, are beginning to assimilate.

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And that is a tragedy, a tragedy in twofold sense. First, because this desire to wash out one's own personality; to lose one's own identity, is a manifestation of spiritual slavery, of ~~inferiority~~ inferiority, of self-deprecation. When your forefathers and mine were cowed and beaten and crushed in medieval Europe, branded with the mark of Cain, crowded into dirty ghettos, hounded from place to place; when their life was impoverished and stunted, they were physical slaves, they were the playthings of the whims of tyrants, but spiritually they were themselves; spiritually they were free; spiritually they could say "Thou hast chosen us from amongst all peoples." ~~XXXXXXXX~~ Spiritually they were not merely the equals but the superiors of the peoples who dominated them physically. They were free men even though their bodies and their physical lives were shackled by a thousand legislations and laws which hampered them and restricted them. They knew the freedom of being oneself; they did not cater spiritually; they did not seek to plaitate the world spiritually; they did not cringe before the culture of other peoples. They had their faith and their ideals and their standards of living and their culture and their literature and in that world of their own they were princes and kings. It gave them the strength to endure and the patience to carry on. But we, in the midst of equality and freedom and prosperity, we, in this desire

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Dr. Schechter, who for years was head of the Jewish Theological Seminary of New York City, in one of his essays, has this to say about the tragedy of Jewish assimilation. He says: "What I understand by assimilation is loss of identity. It is this kind of assimilation, with the terrible consequences, that I have dreaded most, even more than pogroms. It is a tragedy to see a great ancient people, distinguished for its loyalty to the religion of its forefathers, to its sacred law, losing itself every day by the mere process of attrition. It is a tragedy to see a language held sacred by all the world - which served as the depository of Israel's greatest and best thought, doomed to oblivion. It is a tragedy to see the descendants of those who revealed religion to the world and who developed the greatest religious literature in existence, so little familiar with real Jewish thought that they have no other interpretation to offer of Israel's scriptures, Israel's religion, or Israel's ~~IDEAL~~ ideals and aspirations and hopes than those suggested by their natural opponents, slavishly following their opinions, copying their phrases and repeating their idioms. I am not accusing anybody," said Dr. Schechter, "I am only stating facts. We are helpless spectators of the Jewish soul wasting away before our very eyes."

Now in the twentieth century, my friends, we shall have to wage the same battle that Judas Maccabee waged in the second century before the common era, and I pray to God that his victory may be ours. The situations are exactly

the same; the conditions are exactly the same. In ancient Judea our fathers faced assimilation with Hellenism, which offered them as many attractions and as many rewards as our Western European civilization offers us, their descendents, today. They were offered quality; they were offered prosperity; they were offered an attractive culture and philosophy and art. And many of them succumbed to temptation; many of them left the fold of their faith and their people and cast in their lot with Hellenism. The self-same situation confronts us today, and the battle which we have to wage - not a battle of swords but a battle of spirits, from now on is just this: whether Israel will remain a distinctive unit, a distinctive cultural unit in the world, as a potent, vigorous, creative force, as a unit which has a mission, a purpose to serve, an ideal to establish, or whether gradually through this process of attrition and assimilation, through a growing indifference, through a destruction of discipline, through the ~~XXXX~~ laxity which is invading every department of our Jewish life, we will slowly, slowly but surely, succumb to the forces of conquest.

And that great phrase comes to my mind: "Sound the alarm!" We are no longer faced by enemies without. They have failed to destroy us. If Israel - God forbid - will ever be destroyed, it will be not by the world without but by Israel within. It will be ourselves who will destroy ourselves. It will be a tragic national suicide. And our age, my friends, with its indifference and its laxity; its love of comfort and of plenty; its unwillingness to be different, is preparing the way for this national suicide and assimilation.

As we kindle the Chanukah lights, friends, let us kindle anew, one by one, the light of loyalty, the light of devotion, the light of consecration, the light of faith, the light of steadfastness. Let us kindle a great enthusiasm for historic values, for historic associations, for historic purposes, which will keep us and our children steadfast, persistent, stiff-necked, if you will, "hard" and stubborn in the midst of a world which is supremely assimilative of all individuality.