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Ten years later - Was it worth while?, 1927.

"TEN YEARS LATER--WAS THE WAR WORTH WHILE?"

RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER.

THE TEMPLE, SUNDAY MORNING,

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JOSEPH T. KRAUS
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Ten years have now elapsed since that fateful April the 6th, when the United States entered the World War, after remaining neutral for more than two and a half years. We had remained neutral in the World War up to April, 1917, believing that the war was none of our concern, and exercising our best offices to terminate the war. Towards the end of 1916 President Wilson was re-elected on the slogan: "He kept us out of war." In December of that year the President declared that there were no moral issues involved in the war. The following month, in January, 1917, the President summoned the warring powers to a "peace without victory," indicating at the same time the United States means to continue its neutrality. And yet less than three months after this, in April, 1917, we were in the war lock, stock and barrel.

This is not the occasion to ask for the reasons which prompted this reversal of policy, whether it was due to the continued unrestricted submarine campaign of Germany, or to the ripening of anti-German sentiment in the United States, or to a stupendous pro-Ally propaganda in the newspapers during that quarter of a year. Suffice it to say that we entered the war and remained in the war for nineteen months until its victorious consummation. We poured out our substance most generously--some twenty-five thousand millions of dollars;

we mustered under arms over four million men, and we sent overseas two million men--the largest trans-oceanic expeditionary force known to history. Some sixty-five thousand we left there, slain on the field of battle; some two hundred thousand returned to us, wounded and maimed. We disorganized our entire national life for the sake of the war, as well as the lives of our individual citizens. We abrogated many free practices and introduced many restrictive and oppressive measures for the sake of the successful prosecution of the war. We burdened ourselves for generations to come with the burden of taxation. We took on all the sad psychic maladies which result from war. Our political progress was checked by the years of war. And now, after ten years, we are tempted to strike a balance; we are tempted to ask ourselves whether it was all worth while.

Did the world benefit by our entrance into the struggle? Did we benefit? Is the world better because of our entrance into the war? Are we better? Have the objectives of the war been achieved? When we speak of the objectives of the war we are tempted, strange to say, at this late day, to ask ourselves: what were the objectives of the war? And here we come up against a puzzling matter. We know what our objectives were. In 1917 we stated them through the eloquent, winged words of our great leader. We entered the war to make the world safe for democracy, to safeguard the rights of smaller

nations, and to establish permanent peace in the world. We know exactly what our objectives were. But clearly these were not the objectives of the European powers when they entered the war in 1914; nor were these their objectives in 1917 or '18 or '19.

The peoples of Europe--and one ought to be a realist in discussing history; there is no need now of romanticism; it can serve no real purpose--the peoples of Europe were dragged into the war through the conflicting economic and political ambitions of Russia, France, Germany and England. It was a struggle, part of the old, old struggle, the ancient struggle for dominion and supremacy. There was not a scintilla of idealism involved in that war. Everybody in Europe knew long before the war actually broke out that the war was coming, and every nation in Europe was armed to the teeth and prepared for it. It was a jungle war and the objective was political and economic supremacy.

Now that objective was gained in the war. As a result of the war it became manifest that supremacy belonged to the Allied Powers, and that from the day of the armistice on the Allied Powers were to direct the destinies of the world,--at least, until their power was again challenged. Now, when we entered the war in 1917 we either knew of these objectives, these aims of the peoples of Europe who were engaged in the struggle, or we didn't know. But clearly we tried to introduce a new objective

into the struggle, a new aim,--an objective which the Allies never really acknowledged, nor the other powers in the war, an aim to which at best they paid lip service from time to time. We tried, as it were, to raise the moral tone of the struggle, to elevate it to the realm of an historic conflict for great human ideals--for democracy, for freedom and for enduring peace.

Now, we were very sincere about it. In this effort to transevaluate the values of the war, to give it a new motif, our leaders and our people were really, earnestly sincere about it. We did want to salvage something from the universal wreckage for mankind. We did really attempt to turn this universal holocaust, this slaughter of millions of God's children, to some humanitarian worth and purpose. Whatever our allies may have had in mind in continuing the struggle, we at least were quite sincere, without guile. We entered the war; to quote our great immortal dead President Wilson, in his war message to Congress on April 2, 1917: "We shall fight for the things which we have always carried nearest our hearts--for democracy, for the right of those who submit to authority to have a voice in their own governments, for the rights and liberties of small nations, for a universal domination of right by such a concert of free peoples as shall bring peace and safety to all nations and make the world itself at last free."

These were our objectives--democracy, the

rights of the small nations, and peace. We went out on a crusade for mankind, and it is not our fault that Sir Galahad in quest of the Holy Grail was transformed before the war was over, and certainly during the peace conference, into a Don Quixote tilting with windmills. We were proud of the fine response, of the ardor and enthusiasm of the American people who were thus summoned into war. We were proud and are proud of our young men who responded to the call of duty readily, and whose loyalty and sacrificial valor remained steadfast throughout the struggle. We were proud of our own boys who went from this, our own Temple--168 of them--to war at the call of their country.

But ten years later, now, we are inclined to take stock and to ask ourselves how many of these, our objectives, our aims, so glowingly and fervently expressed by our President, were achieved in the war. Democracy! We shall fight for the things which we have always carried nearest our hearts--for democracy! In 1927, ten years after our entrance into the war, democracy stands repudiated in two-thirds of Europe, and timid and apologetic at home. In Portugal, in Spain, in Italy, in Greece, in Turkey, in Persia, in Hungary, in Poland, in Russia, democracy has abdicated. In our own land it stands in need of apologists and defenders. Our democratic enthusiasm has slumped considerably since the exalted and heroic days of 1917. I suppose there are more people in the United States today who admire Mussolini than those

who admire the Declaration of Independence. And the strange thing about conditions abroad today is that these usurpers, these autocrats who have established themselves in power in these countries, are justifying their usurpation of power not on the basis of the existence of an emergency which they feel called upon to correct, but on the basis that democracy has failed utterly as an adequate system of government for peoples today. Democracy is futile, without efficacy, without value, these maintain, for society today. I have frequently quoted the saying of Lenin--that democracy is "a mere bourgeois superstition." And Mussolini very often spoke of the Goddess of Liberty as "that more or less putrescent corpse."

The champions of democracy in Europe today are justifying their actions, their suppressions of freedom, not on the basis of the existence of a desperate momentary emergency which they aim to correct, but on the basis that the whole philosophy and dogma of democracy are no longer of value. There are millions of people in Europe today who agree with these spokesmen of autocracy, and it was inevitable that the war would lead to this slump and this deflation of democratic sentiment. War is the enemy of democracy; war makes for rigid centralization and autocratic administration; war makes for conservatism, for chauvinism, for reaction; war demands uniformity in thought and in action on the part of all men, and that

uniformity is deadened in real liberty and democracy.

Again, this last universal war left the peoples of Europe in a complete upheaval--physical, economic, political, emotional. There were two types of nations left in Europe as a result of the war: the victorious and the vanquished. The victorious people turned to their leaders and demanded of them those prizes of war which they were promised and in whose behest they were beguiled and tantalized into the war, and these prizes ranged all the way from an economic millennium to some sort of social equality in the world. These prizes were in their very nature impossible of achievement, and so the victorious peoples turned in resentment and anger against their leaders and diplomats, and there was confusion. The vanquished nations felt themselves betrayed and humiliated by their chosen leaders. They held them responsible for the tragedy into which they had been led; and so they turned against their leaders in anger, in fury and in madness, and revolution ensued. Now, in the midst of this universal chaos, fury and madness democracy had no chance. Democracy is the offspring of peace and tranquility; democracy depends for its very sustenance upon calm reason, the spirit of compromise, the willingness to cooperate, and so in this chaldron, this seething chaldron of unrest, democracy had no chance, and minority, highly organized, capably led minorities, who knew what they were after and knew how to get it, jumped in in all these

countries and seized the reins of government in every country--the Bolsheviks in Russia, the Fascists in Italy, the military oligarchy in Spain, the autocracy in Hungary. They seized control of democracy and they victimized democracy; they trampled upon every principle of democracy; they suppressed free speech and the right of free assembly; they suppressed parliaments and suffrage; they trampled over those democratic ideals which ten years ago we entered the war to make secure. We entered the war for the rights and the liberties of small nations ten years ago. Yet during these last ten years the rights and the liberties of small peoples were flagrantly violated. Morocco was crushed, Syria was subdued by massacre, Egypt, India, was held down by armed forces of alien invaders; the free spirit of China, which is today struggling to express itself, is being frustrated and thwarted by the combined powers of Europe and the United States.

And we ourselves, who spoke these flaming words and held them up to the eyes of mankind, we ourselves are not without guilt in the violation of the right and the liberty of small peoples. We victimized Hayti and made it tutelage to our interests; we sent our marines to Nicaragua to keep in power a puppet government manipulated by a few American business interests, and we are supplying that government with Krag rifles and machine guns to keep itself permanently in power and permanently under our power; we bullied and ragged a weaker people, our neighbor

Mexico, and we are still dangerously near an open break, a war of conquest with Mexico.

So that the closing of 1926 finds the second objective of the war which we proclaimed not fully achieved --a peace, a concert of free peoples which shall bring peace and safety to all nations. I had occasion yesterday hastily to tabulate the wars and the revolutions which took place in the world since 1917. After I had gone up to thirteen revolutions and eight wars I stopped. Since 1917 there have been revolutions in Russia, in Ireland, in Greece, in Persia, in Turkey, in Bulgaria, in Spain, in Portugal, in India, in Egypt, in Germany, in Italy and in Mexico,--in some of these countries three or four revolutions. Since 1917 there have taken place the war between Greece and Turkey, the war between Russia and Poland, the near war between Greece and Italy in the shelling of the defenseless island of Corfu; war in Morocco, war in Syria, war in Nicaragua, and war still going on in China. And the significant thing is not this disturbing record of revolution and war; the significant and the disturbing factor is this: that Europe in 1927 is no further removed from the possibility of war, the imminence of war than it was in 1914. There has been no physical disarmament and there has been no spiritual disarmament in Europe,--the same hates, only more of them; the same suspicions, only more of them; the same slogans of national insurance through armament, which led to the old

competition between peoples and which in turn led to the war; the same cries for more cruisers and more submarines and more airships, more and more of them; the same voices prophesying war. The budgets of the peoples of Europe are still largely spent upon war, past, present and future. Seventy cents out of every dollar which the United States government spends annually are spent upon war, past, present and future.

Lest the picture be painted too dark, one ought to indicate some of the gains of the last ten years abroad. I count among the gains the liberation of some of the countries which have for years struggled for independence. I think of Poland; I think of Czechoslovakia; I think of Turkey; I think of the emancipation of Russia,--not directly as the result of war but indirectly as one of the concomitants of European disturbance. I count among the gains of the last war--an uncertain gain, perhaps--the organization of the League of Nations and the World Court, agencies which may or may not in the future help mankind.

Perhaps the most important gain within the last ten years has been this: that more and more of thinking men and women throughout the world have become disillusioned about war and about the efficacy of war in settling any vital problem of mankind. Millions of men the world over--not those in authority, to be sure; not the diplomats, not those who are actually controlling the

affairs of government, but millions of the rank and file, the common people, have learned to hate war, have learned to suspect those who speak of the glory and the romance and the splendor of war, and are working, millions of them, individually or collectively, through institutions and organizations, working to make war less and less possible in the world.

This spiritual gain is perhaps the most significant gain in the last ten years.

Taking a purview of conditions of mankind today, in 1927, and putting the gains on one side and the losses or the lack of achievements on the other side, and asking ourselves, has the last war been worthwhile? - I think the honest, unprejudiced observer and student of history would be forced to acknowledge that looking at things from the vantage point of 1927 the war has not been worthwhile. I say, looking at conditions from the point of view of the three major objectives defined by our spokesman and leader in the war--democracy, rights and liberties of small nations, peace--the war has not been worth while.

And when we turn our eyes inwardly to conditions in the United States, and ask what the war has done for us, I think we are likely to arrive at the same conclusion. The war left us emotionally deflated. Our failure to achieve these objectives has left many of us in a mood of utter indifference to these aims themselves.

We no longer thrill at the mention of these ideals of freedom, democracy and peace. We have become practically indifferent to government. During these ten years in one of our national administrations one of the most disgusting of scandals in government occurred, and yet the American people, far from being stirred and outraged, determined upon pulling down the very pillars of that administration, just continued to smile and select the successor in office. There has been an increase in crime as a result of the war, an increase in lawlessness, an increase in coarseness and vulgarity throughout the land. There has been an increase in intolerance as a result of the war. The war gave us the Klan; the war gave us all these hundred-percent Nordic cliques; the war gave us the immigration law based upon a selective arrangement, where peoples of one race are given preference over peoples of another race. The war has sharpened differences between groups, creeds and races. The war put a stop to the progressive political thought which went on apace in our land before 1917. You remember that in those days the American people was making magnificent progress in real political thinking in the decade before the war. Woman suffrage was achieved; the direct election of the senators was achieved; the initiative and referendum, the recall, were in many instances made part of the law of the land. There was a fine spiritual ferment in our political life; there was organization of liberals and progressives throughout the land,

who sought to make America as American should be--the workshop, the proving ground of new democratic experiments. And the war put a sudden and sharp stop to it, and today our liberals and our progressives seem to have gone into retirement. Some of them have grown disillusioned and abstract, while others are "dwelling at ease in Zion." And a reaction has set in; political conservatism and political indifferentism has set in in our land as a result of the war. And in 1927 the United States stands hated by almost all of Europe, by our neighbors in Central America and in South America, and the moral leadership of which we prided ourselves in the days before the war and during the war, the moral spokesmanship which was ours for a time, has disappeared.

We are no longer the moral leader of the world for the nations refuse to be led by us; and we ourselves have lost our faith in these very things which we once sanctified by the blood of our youth and by the sacrifices of the millions of our people.

Here, too, the picture ought not to be painted entirely black. We did make two or three magnificent gestures and earnest efforts for humanity and for peace. I am now thinking of the Washington conference summoned by the late President Harding. That that conference did not result in much tangible good is not to the discredit of the nation which convoked it. President Coolidge, be it said to his credit and to his praise, has

consistently refused to lead in a new desperate naval competition in the world, and has now summoned another conference for naval disarmament and perhaps for other forms of disarmament. But if at this day, April 1927, we were to strike a balance as between the gains and the losses--our own gains, now, and our own losses--we, too, if we are honest with ourselves, will be forced to acknowledge that the war has not been worth while. Perhaps it is rather a foolish thing to do--to ask ourselves whether a great historic event was worthwhile or was not worthwhile. It happened; it is history; it is there, fixed for all time, and its consequences are here and there is no use triumphing or lamenting about what took place or hankering after what might have taken place.

Clearly, in all this which I have said there is a distinct challenge to all the loyal sons of mankind; there is a distinct challenge to us here in America. We must realize, as the peoples in Europe are coming to realize, that war never settles anything; that war solves no problem but aggravates existing problems and creates new ones; that human advancement, that these human ideals of democracy, freedom and peace, cannot come by way of the bayonet and the trench and poison gas, but only by the long, arduous, tortuous way, the slow, patient way of work and education and organization, and more work and more education, and more work and education; that human progress comes desperately slowly, and comes not with the blare of

the trumpet or the shriek of shrapnel; not with the beating of the drum and the fanfare of moving armies, but by the still small voice of the human spirit in triumphal devotion, working constructively, here and there and everywhere, to consolidate the ranks of mankind, to create better understanding and more opportunities for cooperation among peoples. That new realization of how progress comes about must become part and parcel of the thinking of this nation, ingrained through deliberate and definite education in our schools, in our high schools, in our colleges, in our homes. And, secondly, we here in America must resume our democratic leadership in the world. We must not become discouraged, and I believe that we shall, before very long, the finest and the best of us, resume our victorious progress to the approximation of democratic ideals. We shall grow tired of money-grubbing, and we shall grow disgusted with this crass materialism that has overwhelmed and inundated our life since the war. The fine innate, beautiful idealism of the American people will soon assert itself again, that idealism which was Jefferson's and Washington's, that idealism which was Lincoln's, that idealism which centers into three wars, nay, four wars, for human rights and human freedom. That has not been stifled but only dormant; that will assert itself again. And I ask myself whether the time has not already come now, a decade after we entered the war, to resume the cross and the crown of

democratic leadership; whether in this day, when Europe, tired and spiritually exhausted, is turning back to the mood of the Middle Ages, turning its back upon those very ideals which it purchased with blood and suffering over hundreds of years, turning in weariness of soul to the desperate autocratic mentors of the Middle Ages,--whether at this time it is not the particular opportunity and the particular challenge to the American people to proclaim anew that faith which has been its faith for one hundred and fifty years or more--that we hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal, and that all men have the right to their own life, to their own liberty and to their own way of achieving their destiny.

I ask whether the time has not come for us to lay less emphasis upon Americanization, concerning which the Founding Fathers had nothing to say, and lay more stress upon democracy, concerning which the Founding Fathers had so much to say. I wonder whether the time has not come for us to reinvest the democratic dogma with that same glamour and splendor which it had in the days of Jefferson and Lincoln and Roosevelt and Wilson; whether we ought not to begin to speak anew of that old conception that old American conception of government based not upon force and not upon class struggle but upon the gratitudes and the voluntary consent of the governed, upon our conception of a broad and free commonwealth, whose aim is to insure the rights and the liberties of its citizens, and

whose greatest glory is not wealth or power or territorial aggrandizement, but the well-being of its citizens, the spiritual and the moral well-being of its people; fairness, the square deal, honesty, kindness, service and helpfulness. I wonder whether the time has not therefore come for us to begin to preach this ideal to our young men and our young women, many of whom seem to be so terribly disillusioned in our day, and many of whom stand before the mystery of life and the future, so confused, not knowing whither to go, nor what is for them in life, and many of them seeking fulfillment by steeping themselves in coarseness and sensuality, not having been shown the glorious road of spiritual adventure which may become the opportunity of the American youth. I wonder whether the time has not come for us to inspire our youth with a crusading zeal for democracy, for political emancipation, for economic emancipation, for social emancipation for all the children of God, and whether the time has not come for us to send them forth into the world as we sent them forth ten years ago into a physical war which yielded very little to them or to us; to send them forth into the one and only holy war of mankind--the one and only war of mankind, a war which is waged without steel and without challenge, but with human ideals and with consecrated purposes; a war in which men are not slain, for all are healed and resurrected to a new and higher life; a war in which the leaders are not generals and majors but the

thinkers, the seers and the men of vision, and the men of beautiful dreams of mankind; the one holy war of mankind-- the war upon slavery, the war upon autocracy, the war upon everything and anything which denies the child of God his rightful patrimony; the war upon poverty, the war upon ignorance, the war upon intolerance, the war upon hate and international suspicion and rivalry; the war to eliminate war, the war to establish real and abiding peace among all the children of God.

That, friends, ought to be the vow we ought to take in the year 1927, ten years after we took a vow to achieve these very ideals, but through the wrong method. Let us now choose the right method.