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What is Israel's contribution to the modern world?, 1927.



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"WHAT IS ISRAEL'S CONTRIBUTION  
TO THE MODERN WORLD?"

RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER.

THE TEMPLE, SUNDAY MORNING?

DECEMBER 11, 1927, CLEVELAND.

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JOSEPH T. KRAUS  
Shorthand  
Reporter  
CLEVELAND



In our first lecture, The Role of Israel in the Ancient World, we saw how Israel reevaluated the religious and spiritual value of the ancient world; how it waged war upon idolatry and all forms of superstition; how it developed the concept of the one spiritual God as the source of all physical phenomena as well as spiritual phenomena; and how Israel in the ancient world gave to mankind a new code, a higher code, of private and public morality, of national and international morality.

In our second lecture, The Contribution of Israel to Christianity, we saw how Israel gave to Christianity its three essential elements: the personality of Jesus, the sacred Scriptures, and its code of ethics.

In our third lecture on The Contribution of Israel to Mohammedanism and to the Middle Ages, we saw how Mohammedanism borrowed its essential concepts concerning God from Judaism, as well as many of its vital parts, its personalities, its heroes, its legends, its laws, from Hebraic sources. We saw that in the Middle Ages Israel served as the avenue of communication between the two civilizations of the Middle Ages: the Arabic and the Latin. We saw how the Jews, through their numerous translations of Arabic works into Latin made possible the transmission of Greek learning, Greek science, Greek thought, which the Arabs had taken over,--made possible the passing or



the transmission of that wealth of stimulating knowledge into Europe, thereby preparing the way for the revival of learning, for the Renaissance.

We dwelt, too, on the contribution of Judaism on the Protestant Reformation and to Puritanism.

*Begin* *What are the contributions of Israel*  
This morning I wish to speak on the

*I should like to*  
Contribution of Israel to the Modern World. ~~Had I the~~

~~time~~ I would dwell a moment upon the contribution of Israel to the economic life of the peoples of Europe.

Israel made essential contributions both to the economic practice and ~~economic~~ theory of the European peoples. In the

development of modern capitalism, for example, Israel

played a decisive role. In the Middle Ages the Jew

because of his international connections, ~~and~~ because of his

constant migrations, both, forced *as a result of* ~~through~~ expulsion, and

voluntary at the behest of trade, -- the Jew became a leader

in commerce and trade, ~~and because~~ *Because of* he was forced out of

many activities in which he might normally engage, and was more or less restricted to the one occupation of money-

lending, the Jew became the ~~great~~ banker of the Middle

Ages, ~~and~~ *He* developed nearly all of our modern agencies of

credit upon which ~~our~~ commercial life today is built.

(Professor Sombart wrote a very interesting book on the Jews and Modern Capitalism, which will repay you a careful reading. And it is interesting, too, that)

*And* just as the Jews played a creative role in the development of modern capitalism--banking, credit, corporations--so did



<sup>he</sup> Israel play in the <sup>recent</sup> last few decades a decisive <sup>role</sup> in the development of the theory of socialism, which is the very antithesis of private capitalism. The <sup>classic</sup> great text book of modern socialism is that of a Jew--Karl Marx; <sup>was written by</sup> and Leninism, <sup>or Communism</sup> which is today triumphant in Russia, <sup>half the world</sup> is a copy almost in detail <sup>copy</sup> of the theory of Karl Marx. <sup>Thus</sup> So in both spheres of economic thought--in capitalism and in socialism, <sup>the Jews</sup> the Jewish mind played a most decisive role. <sup>and for the sake of both</sup> Jews have been made to suffer terribly. <sup>should like to print</sup> Had I the time, too, I would dwell upon

to the influence of Israel upon the literature of the modern world. There is hardly a literature which does not bear evidence of the imprint of the Hebraic spirit upon it. <sup>Jews</sup> That is especially true of English literature since the <sup>King James</sup> classic translation of the Bible into the classic version of 1609, the famous King James version. Hardly a master of English but what <sup>was</sup> had his style moulded to a remarkable degree by the idiom and the imagery of Hebraic literature. <sup>that book</sup> You think of Milton; you think of Wordsworth; you think of Carlyle; you think of Macauley; you think of Lincoln; you think of Walt Whitman,--you think of <sup>us</sup> all the great masters of English literature (and you cannot disassociate their style, in many instances their mode of thought, from the Hebraic style and the Hebraic mode of thought. They were <sup>and you see at once how</sup> steeped in the language of the Old Testament, <sup>they are</sup> and <sup>they have</sup> caught some of its rhythm, its majesty, its ~~role~~, its nobility. <sup>affected their writing</sup> <sup>can people in the enlightenment--</sup> The Jews have enjoyed emancipation in



modern times only since the French Revolution; ~~and it is~~  
only within the last ten years that half of the Jewry of  
Europe obtained political equality, -- Think of it! -- It is  
only a matter of the last decade that half of the Jews  
of the world obtained their rights as human beings, since  
the Russian revolution.) And yet inspite of disabilities,  
in spite of the restriction of educational opportunities  
in spite of physical degradation, in spite of being  
ghettotized and isolated from contact with the cultures  
of the world, the Jewish mind continued to function  
~~aggressively and creatively~~ in almost every department <sup>of</sup> human  
thought from the Middle Ages down to ~~this~~ <sup>our</sup> day;  
~~and it is~~ quite immaterial whether the contributions ~~are~~ <sup>were</sup>  
those of individual Jews or collectively the contribution  
of the Jewish people as such.

I ~~assume that~~ <sup>have a right to</sup> if the English people ~~claim~~  
credit for Hume and Berkeley, and the French for Descartes,  
and the German for Kant, ~~and the American people for~~  
~~William James,~~ <sup>then</sup> that the Jewish people has equal right to  
claim credit for Spinoza, in spite of the fact that the  
contributions of all these philosophers, as well as the  
contributions of all thinkers and scientists, are, in a  
sense, international; for knowledge is international in  
scope. Spinoza was a Jew, born a Jew, educated as a Jew.  
His first books were Hebrew books; his first contact with  
philosophy was through Hebrew philosophic works. And ~~what~~ <sup>no</sup>  
man influenced European thought more in the last three



hundred years than did this God-intoxicated philosopher, Benedict Spinoza?

(His thought was essentially Jewish, quite regardless of the fact that ~~the synagogue~~ <sup>the synagogue</sup> ex-communicated him,--There were political reasons for that excommunication, ~~not so much theologic reasons,~~--His theocentric thought, his exalted ethical idealism, his noble faith, ~~his almost mystic faith in the beauty and in the dignity of human life and in the capacity of man to rise to limitless heights of self-development--they are all essentially Jewish ideals--~~ in consonance with the best traditions of Jewish thought.

And when you add to the name of Spinoza the name of Moses Mendelssohn, who, in a sense, was the founder of German esthetics; the names of Solomon Maimon and Alexander, who were the best students and critics of Kant; and the name of ~~Andre~~ <sup>Hans</sup> Bergson, the leading philosophic mind in the modern world, you will realize that in this great department of human thought Israel has in the last two or three hundred years played a primary role, a most decisive role.)

It was a Jew, David Ricardo, who founded the science of political economy; it was a Jew, Lazarus, who founded the science of racial psychology; it was a Jew, Freud, who founded the science of psychoanalysis; it was ~~two~~ <sup>a</sup> Jews, Michaelson and Einstein, who pioneered in the field of mathematical physics in our own generation;

and descended the speed of light. I am another Jew  
Albert Einstein who lived in the atomic age



~~It was a Jew, Heine, who taught German lyric poetry.~~

Were one to attempt to enumerate the pioneering role which Jewish physicians played in the science of modern medicine, one would need more than a short hour merely to enumerate the names of those who contributed to vital discovery <sup>ies</sup> ~~to~~ in this branch of human knowledge, in which ~~Israel~~ <sup>Jews</sup> ~~somewhat~~ <sup>was especially</sup> ~~have even, but~~ <sup>always excelled</sup> from the earliest days of the Middle Ages to this day.

One finds Jewish men and ~~Jewish~~ women in the forefront of the arts,--decorative arts, pictorial arts, plastic arts, in the composition and the interpretation of music, in dramatic interpretation; in fact, there is hardly a branch in science or art to which you can turn today but what you will find some member of the household of Israel in the van--a leader in that specific human enterprise. And in the great struggles for the liberation of mankind, in the revolutionary struggles of the last <sup>five</sup> hundred years for greater freedom and ~~greater~~ justice, in Hungary, in Austria, in Germany, in France, in Russia, you ~~will~~ find the sons and daughters of our people, leaders, heroes, martyrs, for the cause of human emancipation.

<sup>There were many, such as the present Dr. Hertz, who have said: (Gut)</sup>  
~~So that our race enters the modern world~~

<sup>too</sup> ~~without any apology~~; our race has ~~taken~~ <sup>to</sup> its place in the modern world as a ~~preludic~~ <sup>vital</sup>, creative, ~~and~~ <sup>but</sup> contributing people. <sup>Fe</sup>

When you realize that our numbers <sup>were and</sup> are relatively few in comparison with the vast population of the races of



mankind, you are filled with a sense of pride when you reflect upon the ~~number of intrinsically~~ vital gifts which the mind and <sup>spirit</sup> ~~the soul~~ of Israel have made to ~~the assets~~ of mankind in modern times. (And these contributions have been not only the contributions of individual Jews. Dr. Roth, in a very illuminating essay, makes this profound observation--and I believe it to be true--that it was Israel's doctrine of the unity of God and its corollary, Israel's doctrine of the unity of the creative world, which made possible two things in modern life: first, the development of science, which must have as its basis the concept of the unity in the structure of the physical world without which science is impossible; and in the second place, it made possible the development of a unified code, a standard of ethics, which, too, must be grounded in the concept of the unity of the ethical source, of the ethical authority, which means the one God.

So that both modern science and modern ethics were <sup>advanced</sup> ~~made possible~~ by Israel's <sup>contributions</sup> ~~existence~~ throughout the ages ~~to modern times on the basis oneness of the~~ physical world, which is held together, as it were, by the ~~basic oneness--which is God.~~ So that it was not Hellenism which is responsible for modern scientific development but it is Hebraism nurtured through the ages by Israel which is making possible the efflorescence of scientific thought in our life today.)

<sup>I believe,</sup>  
Collectively, ~~too~~, Israel's greatest



contribution to mankind, ~~(from my point of view)~~ <sup>and constant</sup> is that it remained true ~~right~~ through the ages to two ~~luminous~~, ~~immovable~~ ideas: God and ethical idealism. If there is one ~~golden~~ strand which runs clear through the entire historic tapestry of our people, it is this: God and morality; ~~man's relation to Divinity; man's relation to humanity.~~ In the ancient world of idolatry, superstition, slavery, despotism, Israel preached God and ethical idealism; in the Graeco-Roman world of decadence, ~~of growing barbarism~~, Israel preached God and ethical idealism; in the Dark Ages of cruelty, brutality ~~and vulgarity~~ and ignorance, Israel held aloft the torch, -- Israel, ~~mocked at and hated and branded and tortured, yet~~ <sup>held aloft the torch</sup> ~~held aloft the torch of God, of ethical aspirations.~~ <sup>And in the modern world of materialism, of machinery, of imperialistic madness, of over self-indulgence,</sup> Israel still holds aloft the ideals of God and morality. ~~And this~~ <sup>under the</sup> continuity of a spiritual ministry, this heroic persistence through the ages, is perhaps Israel's greatest gift to mankind, and it is only as we remain true, ~~friends,~~ <sup>ideas of our heritage</sup> to these two simple, strong, dynamic ~~heritages, only as we remain true to them~~ <sup>only as</sup> that we carry on ~~our~~ <sup>this</sup> tradition ~~and~~ <sup>shall</sup> that we continue to play our role in civilization.

Wherever wrong is enthroned; wherever injustice devastates life; wherever tyranny oppresses mankind; wherever hate ~~antagonizes and disunites~~ <sup>sets war against war</sup> ~~there is~~ <sup>should be</sup> the challenge to the sons and the daughters of Israel to



carry on the ~~mission and the heroic~~ role of their people. Wherever materialism dominates human thought; wherever moral laxity sets in; wherever self-indulgence and vulgarity begin to make life ugly and desolate, there ~~our~~ <sup>should an</sup> people ~~ought to be found~~ <sup>among it and</sup> ~~the choicest of its spirits,~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~finest of its minds~~ <sup>best</sup> ~~ought to be found~~ <sup>far better</sup> standing immovable like the rock of Gibraltar, championing these ideals which have ~~come down~~ <sup>been</sup> through the ages, carried by our people in the ark of its covenant across the burning sands of adversity for three thousand years, <sup>and were</sup> --there our sons and daughters ought to be found championing these ideals in the midst of a world of shifting standards, of changing fads and notions, defending these ancient ideals which are our people's own, ~~the~~ flesh of our flesh and ~~the~~ bone of our bone.

That is why, when I behold Jews who try to compete with non-Jews, not in the fields of service, of intellectual enterprise, but in the fields of materialism, -- ~~that is why,~~ when I find Jews trying to be smarter than the smartest set, trying to outdo and outplay, out-build and outshine the non-Jew, I feel that these Jews have lost contact with the spirit of their race; ~~I feel that they are pathetic Orientals who are attempting to aid clumsily the indecencies which seem to come more naturally to the Occidental people.~~ Whenever I find Jews who are being beguiled by pseudo-ethical notions of free love and easy divorce, and that new paganism which goes by the name of



companionate marriages, I know that these people have lost the theme and the rhythm of Jewish life; because Jewish life in three thousand years has built itself upon purity and modesty and sexual reticence and restraint. That is why, when I find Jews devoting themselves exclusively to the accumulation of things--to money-grubbing, I know that <sup>they</sup> ~~they, too,~~ have somehow broken a connecting link ~~between themselves and the great people of which they are derived; that somehow~~ <sup>and</sup> they cannot claim spiritual kinship with Micah and ~~Isaac~~ <sup>Isaac</sup> and Maimonides and Bachya and Halevi and <sup>Speranza</sup> ~~Mendelssohn~~; that somehow they are aliens and strangers in the camp of Israel, <sup>even though they are</sup> ~~in spite of the fact~~ ~~that~~ racially ~~they are~~ of the very blood of the people which gave these giants of the spirit, these champions of social justice, of spirituality <sup>to</sup> ~~in the world to mankind.~~

We have a two-fold role, my friends, to play in the modern world. This is perhaps the summary of <sup>I have said in these</sup> ~~all that these four~~ lectures of mine ~~yield~~. We have a two-fold role to play in the modern world. We are still very much alive after three thousand years. (Israel today is stronger in numbers than it ever was in its history, in spite of the fact that it is scattered over the four corners of the world; there is still a bond of unity strong which unites the household of Israel. And <sup>four parts</sup> ~~in spite of all the tribulations, the vicissitudes of fortunes, the mind of~~ Israel today is <sup>so</sup> alert, keen, aggressive, searching, and <sup>unhappy</sup> influence in civilization, and it is my firm conviction



that <sup>as Jews</sup> ~~Israel~~ has not yet said its last word in the world.

Rome is dead; Greece is dead; Babylon is dead; Egypt is dead. These peoples whom we knew two thousand years ago and three thousand years ago; with whom we lived, ~~with whom we waged war~~, against whose ideas we struggled, those peoples are dead today. Israel lives, lives affirmatively in the world today. ~~And Israel~~ has yet much to say to the world in the endless years to come. ~~(Our sap is not dry)~~ our youth has not departed from us. Somehow we are in possession of the secret of eternal rejuvenation and <sup>eternal</sup> survival.

We have two things to do in the world: first, as individual Jews, to see to it that we are always walking with, marching with, the best thought of ~~the world~~, <sup>and</sup> the most advanced thought of the world; that individually we try to develop ourselves to the highest point mentally, spiritually, morally. Our strength through the ages has been the strength of ideas. Our fortress was never the physical citadel, never the <sup>world</sup> ~~feudal~~ castle, never armament. ~~(We were always defenseless, always weak.)~~ Our strength was always in the <sup>future</sup> ~~citadel~~ of the mind, <sup>and</sup> ~~in the fortress of the heart~~, and there we were impregnable; ~~there we were indefeasible~~; there no armies could reach us. ~~And~~ <sup>our</sup> greatness in the future and our safety in the future lie in the self-same sphere: the mind and the heart.

We must never put our faith in possessions,



in wealth, in richness, in numbers, or even in the good will of ~~the peoples in whose midst we live~~, because these are shifting things. We must put our confidence in the future, as we have in the past, in intellectual and ~~in~~ spiritual ~~enterprises~~ <sup>commitments</sup> and ~~devotions~~ <sup>dedications</sup>. There we are eternal.

And ~~secondly~~, as I believe, ~~collectively~~ <sup>in the world, to build in into society</sup> we must work to establish more and more, these two ideas which emanate from the soul of our people: God and humanity. We must keep on, ~~living~~ <sup>lighting</sup> the torch through the darkneses of the world, through all conditions and circumstances. We must keep on preaching God, ~~and~~ ethical idealism, to mankind. The world needs these two ~~simple~~, <sup>strong</sup> verities today as much as it needed them in the pagan world, in the Graeco-Roman world, in the Middle Ages.

Men ~~are drifting~~ <sup>have drifted</sup> away from ~~feeling~~ God today, <sup>they</sup> and ~~are drifting~~ <sup>have</sup> into a ~~new~~ materialistic paganism, ~~in~~ which ~~they~~ <sup>have</sup> place their faith in themselves and in the creations of their own hands--~~in machines~~ <sup>in machines</sup>. The day of recompense will come when ~~these~~ selfsame machines which ~~the~~ hands of men builded and in which they have put their trust ~~will turn~~ <sup>have now turned</sup> upon them and ~~rend them and~~ <sup>threaten to rend and</sup> destroy them!

The world needs God today as it never needed him before. ~~The conception of the basic spirituality of life as against the conception of the crass materialism of life.~~ And ~~the~~ world today needs the Jewish ideals of justice and brotherhood and peace perhaps



more than it needed it any time in the past. ~~The next~~  
bloody struggles ~~of mankind~~ <sup>which has now</sup> which are likely to engulfed  
the whole world <sup>is the</sup> will be economic struggles; ~~The next~~ <sup>the struggle</sup> ~~desperate wars~~ <sup>to day</sup> of mankind will be the wars of the ~~classes~~ <sup>masses</sup>  
against the ~~masses~~ <sup>classes</sup>; of the denied and the dispossessed  
against ~~the~~ <sup>them</sup> exploiters and the possessors. Israel's  
truths of justice and fairness, <sup>to day</sup> ~~of the rights of labor~~  
~~and the rights of the employer; of the rights of the rich~~  
~~and the rights of the poor;~~ Israel's code of moral sanity;  
Israel's economic ethics, are desperately needed in the  
world today.

("Thou shalt not respect the person of the  
rich, neither shalt thou respect the person of the poor,  
but in justice shalt thou judge them." There is a law  
which rises above the law of majority and the law of  
minority; there is a law which rises above the law of  
power and force, whether that force be in the hands of  
the classes or the masses.) There is an eternal law which  
is God's law, which demands fairness for all and freedom  
for all. <sup>This is the heart of</sup> ~~That is~~ Jewish ethics, (and through a sea of  
blood mankind is waiting for the acceptance of Jewish  
standards, of human relationships.)

And so <sup>it is</sup> with peace. <sup>We want not for peace, for</sup> ~~Isaiah spoke not~~

~~yesterday nor a generation ago, nor at the close of the~~  
~~World War.~~ <sup>V. S. and</sup> ~~Isaiah spoke~~ twenty-seven centuries ago; but  
what he spoke is still the desperate hope of suffering  
mankind, when he said that the time must come when the



nations shall beat their swords into plowshares and their knives into pruning hooks. The President of the United States calls for naval <sup>armament</sup> ~~armament~~. Isaiah twenty-seven centuries ago called for disarmament,--for the beating of swords into plowshares and not of plowshares into swords. And as Isaiah must triumph, mankind will pass through a series of world wars and will offer millions more of its choicest sons upon the altar of Moloch, and millions more will be mutilated in the filthy, dirty trenches, and millions more of defenseless civilians will be destroyed by bombs thrown through the air by airplanes.

These will come because men are stupid, men are blind. But it is the code of Israel announced ever so long ago, and kept alive by this people--which was never a conquering people, which never worshipped force,--it is this code of Israel--"Peace, peace unto those who are near and unto those who are far"--that must triumph in the world. And it is this code which we Jews, collectively as a people, must preach.

I rejoice when I read the founder of the idea of the outlawry of war was a Jew. I expect that. I anticipated that that should be so. That is Jewish; that is the genius of Isaiah speaking in the twentieth century. I rejoice when I see a Jew building schools for Negroes. That is Jewish. I rejoice when I see Jews leading in movements of social betterment, of greater opportunities for all. That is the voice of Micah speaking in modern



accents in ~~life~~ today.

A marvelous heritage is ours, <sup>and</sup> friends, a  
~~marvelous heritage~~, a marvelous history, <sup>I believe that an equally</sup> and a marvelous  
future awaiting us. <sup>If we</sup> Let us prove <sup>ourself</sup> worthy of our past  
and of our future. <sup>we shall be worthy of our future.</sup>

--o--









6. Not only isolated incidents - Roth -  
then Hebraism + not Hell. is rock out  
which whole Phil. & Soc. is based.

7. Lost Collecting - Our greatest contri-  
bution here to find - & 5th Ideals  
- torch, to Present world -

8. It is only as we remain true -  
that we carry on -

① Wherever wrong is enthroned -  
- there desc. of prophet - Wherever that -  
indulgence - laurels, subaltern

9. Jews of Smart Set - outside -  
lost contact - pathetic Oriental - aping  
10. Jews beguiled by sham moral fashion,  
- Purty - modesty -

10. Many - subtle - lost contact with  
Moral -

11. It is in Soc. Effort - in Ref. Ideals



12. A wonderful New Year! A  
wonderful History! A wonderful  
Promise -





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LECTURE OF  
RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER,  
GIVEN ON  
SUNDAY, DECEMBER 11, 1927.  
AT  
THE TEMPLE  
CLEVELAND, OHIO

WHAT IS ISRAEL'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE MODERN WORLD

The emancipation of Israel did not begin until the French revolution and for half of the Jews of the world, it did not take place until the Russian revolution. Yet, throughout the last three centuries, the sons of Israel were active in every field of human thought.

No figure has influenced human thought in modern times, as profoundly as Spinoza and no philosopher's ideas are as challenging in our own day as are those of <sup>Henri</sup> ~~Andre~~ Bergson.

It was a Jew, David Ricardo who founded the science of political economy. It was another Jew, Lazarus who founded the science of racial psychology. Another Jew, Freud who is the founder of the science of psychoanalysis. Michelson and Einstein are the present day pioneers in the present day field of mathematical physics. In medicine the Jews have an amazing record of vital discoveries and contributions. Jews are to be found in the forefront of the decorative, pictorial <sup>and</sup> plastic arts; among the leaders <sup>ing</sup> of musical composers and interpreters and among <sup>the chief</sup> exponents of the drama. <sup>tic art.</sup>



What was said of Moses may be said of Moses's people after three thousand years, "his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated". The race is today forceful, creative and abundantly vital.

Collectively Israel's role in the present and in the future must be one with Israel's <sup>role</sup> ~~world~~ throughout the ages, to hold aloft the torch of God and ethical idealism ~~in~~ <sup>of</sup> the world. As a community, we are dedicated to the unity and spirituality of God and to the unity and spiritual values of mankind.

Wherever wrong is enthroned, wherever injustice devastates human life, wherever tyranny oppresses and hate dis-unites, there, the faithfulness of our people must be found as champions of our ancient dogmas of justice, freedom, brotherhood and peace.

Our secret of survival and rejuvenation lies not in our numbers or in our power, but in our hearts and in our minds and in our undying faith in God and in the ultimate triumph of righteousness.