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The democratic impulse in Jewish history, 1928.

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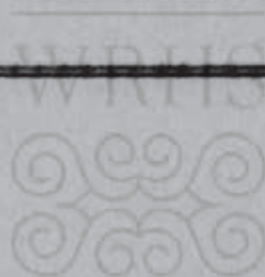
"THE DEMOCRATIC IMPULSE IN JEWISH HISTORY."

RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER.

THE TEMPLE, SUNDAY MORNING,

NOVEMBER 4, 1928, CLEVELAND, O.

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JOSEPH T. KRAUS  
Shorthand  
Reporter  
CLEVELAND



I selected to write and to speak of the theme "The Democratic Impulse in Jewish History" because the conviction has been growing upon me in recent years that not enough stress has been laid by students upon the role which democracy, the principle, or, as I choose to call it, the impulse of democracy, played throughout Jewish history, and that sufficient stress has not been laid upon what I regard as perhaps the outstanding contribution of Israel to the thought of mankind--democracy. Democracy not only in the political life but in the social, the economic, the religious life as well.

When our forefathers appeared on the frontiers of Canaan ready to begin their amazing career in the world as an historic people in the case of Israel, they had already been fashioned and moulded by countless centuries of desert life. You know, of course, our forefathers before they came to Palestine were nomadic peoples wandering through the great Arabian desert for endless centuries. The home of our forefathers was that great mysterious land known as the Arabian desert, the Arabian wilderness.

Now, in the desert there are no kings. In the desert to this day there is no aristocracy of birth or of wealth; no military hierarchy, no priestly hierarchy. The leader of the tribe was the shofa, the primus inter pares--



the first among equals. Among wandering tribes there is a rude elementary democracy, and our people was fashioned and moulded by that democratic spirit for endless cycles of time before they came into the settled agricultural life of Palestine, and they never lost that desert tradition of equality and mutuality.

I would like to have you bear this thought in mind. Throughout their history to this very day, our people, which had been imbued through countless generations with a democratic passion, never quite lost it throughout its checkered and turbulent career. When our forefathers entered Palestine, and for some centuries of turbulent conquest and settlement, they lived without rulers and without kings. Whenever an emergency presented itself and they were compelled to ward off an invading enemy, they would choose one of their numbers to be their shofa, their judge, their leader, who led them into battle. When the emergency was over that shofa, that judge, that leader, returned to common civil life. There was no king in Israel.

It was only with the menace of a new and desperate enemy,--the Philistines--that the scattered tribes of Israel in Palestine were compelled to consolidate, and it was then that the demand arose on the part of the people for a king. "Let us be like all other people. Let us have a king who will be the symbol of our unity." At that time the prophet Samuel was the judge, the shofa, and when they came to him and asked for a king Samuel was



outraged. It was unheard of that the children of Israel, these freeborn men of the desert, should permit themselves voluntarily to be enslaved by a king and a dynasty, and he told them that their demand for a king was an apostasy from God; it was a culpable mimicry of the heathen. He told them that the king will enslave them. He pointed out to them what these exploitations and these spoliations of royalty are. He warned them not to ask for a king, and through Samuel that genius of the race, that democratic genius of the race spoke. But necessity compelled Samuel to yield to the clamor of the people, and they chose a king.

But the king in Israel, from the time of Saul to the time of the last king, Zedekiah, never, never occupied that role of Oriental potentate and despot which was held by the kings of Egypt, of Assyria, of Babylon, of Syria or the other kings of antiquity. Frequently you read in the Bible of revolutions and rebellion; frequently you read in the Bible that the prophet, who was the monitor of that desert tradition of freedom, denounced the king to his face; and it was in the name of a law greater than that of royalty that Samuel faced Saul, that Nathan denounced David, that Shemaiah imprecated Rehoboam, that Elijah cursed Ahab, and that Jeremiah pronounced doom upon King Zedekiah, because "he hearkened not to the voice of the prophet speaking in the name of God."

The king in Israel was always subject to the



same moral law binding upon common man. There was no king worship in Israel. That is very significant because among all the peoples of antiquity the king was worshipped as divine. Thus the king, the Pharaoh of the Egyptian, was always addressed in the following terms: "Lord of heaven, lord of earth, sun, life of the whole world, lord of time (remember, this is addressed to a human being, the king), creator of the harvest, maker and fashioner of mortals, giver of life to all the host of gods." This is how an Egyptian king was addressed.

The king of Israel was denounced by a prophet. The highest compliment which the Bible can pay to a king is this: that he did that which is pleasing in the sight of God. And when the Syrian general Naaman came to the Hebrew king to cure him of leprosy, thinking that the Hebrew king possessed the same divine attributes that the king of other peoples were said to possess, the Hebrew king replied: "What am I, a God to kill or to make alive?" You will understand exactly what I am trying to emphasize this morning when you contrast this point of view of Israel as regards royalty with that of the enlightened and the advanced Greeks--Plato and Aristotle, the finest flower of Hellenic thought. Plato in his "Republic" declared that the ideal polity was a monarchy and that the ideal ruler was a king, who was at the same time a soldier and a philosopher. Aristotle maintained that kingship is the most divine and primary form of political organization. And when you contrast Plato and



Aristotle with Samuel, who looks upon kingship as apostasy from God, you will realize the essential difference in outlook between Israel and other people.

After the first Babylonian exile, or after the first destruction and the Babylonian exile, when our forefathers returned from Babylonia to Palestine and rebuilt their country, they had no kings at all, and for hundreds of years, for nearly a half of a millennium, they governed themselves by the political autonomy they possessed, they themselves exercised. They had no king. And then there was a short interlude of the Hasmonean dynasty, which lasted for a comparatively short time, and then the second destruction of the Temple took place, and Israel was exiled from Palestine, and now for nearly nineteen hundred years Israel has lived, scattered to the four corners of the earth, a fairly united, a fairly integrated people, but possessing no king and no potentate and no pope, no central authority in the hands of a privileged group or a privileged individual. That is an amazing thing. For Israel lived during these last nineteen hundred years not as a host of gypsies without any internal organization or control or discipline; there was a very strong inner control and inner discipline, but it was not a control superimposed by a reigning family or a feudal lord or by a religious autocrat. It was the authority voluntarily assumed by people in a democratic organization. For Israel believed--and this is essential to a understanding of our religion--Israel



believed that every human being had a worth and a dignity comparable to the worth and the dignity of the highest human being, and therefore Israel declared: "All the children of Israel are sons of kings!"

Now there is a profound thought in that phrase. To look upon every human being, the humblest of the humble and the lowliest of the low, as the son of a king, a prince, is to get a totally different conception of life than those peoples had who enslaved millions, and who had castes and gradations and social stratification. Israel established a perfect equality, a basis, a level of supremacy for all human beings.

When you leave the realm of the political and enter the realm of the economic, you find that same autocratic impulse at work. When you read your Bible, when you come across the numerous social legislations enacted to protect the individual against exploitation, against monopoly, against the loss of patrimony--and the Bible is full of these progressive legislations; I say progressive because they were far in advance of their day, and they are far in advance of our day,--those marvelously progressive social legislations of the Bible, when you read them you will understand them only as you know that book, and that is the tremendous conviction that all human beings are entitled to the same rights and privileges and opportunities. "For unto me (God) are the children of Israel slaves; they are not slaves unto slaves."



Unless you bear this fact in mind, that in the soul of Israel there was always a vibrant, democratic passion, you will not understand the prophets of Israel at all; because it was in the name of that imperishable and invincible desert tradition of democracy that the prophets of Israel denounced the oppressors of mankind, those who ground the faces of the poor and turned aside the way of the humble. It was in the name of that democratic principle that they wielded the scorpion whip of their fury upon all those who exploited their fellowmen, and it is in the name of that tradition of equality and human responsibility that they championed the cause of the denied and the dispossessed and the broken and beaten of life; and that same democratic principle is essential for an understanding of the entire religious history of Israel.

The whole struggle between the priest and the prophet which rings through the pages of the Bible is comprehensible only as you remember that the priest represented a privileged class, and that the prophet was the spokesman of the Jewish laity. He challenged the prerogatives and the privileges of the priesthood. Prophecy in Israel, my friends, was not merely a protest against idolatry. It was that. It was not merely a protest against the supremacy or primacy of ritual and cult in religion. It was that. Prophecy was not only the upreaching of a sensitive soul of the race "for the Kingdom of God." It was that. But it was something more, too. Prophecy



in Israel was the passionate crying of the Jewish layman for full lay participation and leadership in the life of the people.

The priest maintained that he is to be the teacher of the law. Well and good. Let him teach the law. But so may a layman not of Aramaic family, not of the priestly family, become a teacher of the law and the literature in the religious life of the people, provided he is prepared for it; provided he has prepared himself for that function. You will probably recall from the reading of your Bible that story of the rebellion of Korah. That is a story that has been frequently misunderstood. We hear of a rebellion against Moses led by a man named Korah, and yet when you read the chapter of the Bible closely, analytically, we find in that story an amazing revelation of just that of which I am speaking.

Who were the rebels under the leadership of Korah? They were not a non-descript people. The Bible speaks of them as the elect men of the group, men of renown. What was their complaint? "And they assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron"(whose names are of course here used by the priestly scribe for his own ends) --these princes of the congregation, these men of renown, these leaders of the laity assembled themselves and said unto Moses and unto Aaron, who are here assumed to be the representatives of the priestly class: "'Ye take too much upon yourselves seeing that all the congregation are holy,



every one of them, and the Lord is among them; wherefore, then, lift ye up yourselves before the assembly of the Lord."

The whole congregation is holy, not merely the priest. There you have one reflex of that bitter struggle that was waged through the ages between the class and the masses of the people. When, later on, two laymen, Eldad and Medad, began to prophesy in the camp, Joshua cried unto Moses, "Moses, shut them in!" Here are laymen trespassing. They dare to prophesy. They have no right. Moses replied: "Art thou jealous for me? Would that the whole people of the Lord were prophets, and that God, the spirit of God were upon them."

That same struggle between democracy and autocracy is reflected again in the centuries old struggle between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, those two Jewish sects of Israel in the centuries before the destruction of the second Temple. What was the struggle between these two sects? Why, it was simply this: the Sadducees, who, as the name indicates, were the party of the priesthood, maintained that the priests were the sole monitors of religion and the sole legislators in matters of religion; that laymen had no right to trespass. The Pharisees, who represented the masses, whose rallying place was the synagogue, just as the Sadducees' rallying place was the temple,--the Pharisees maintained that God gave to all the law and the sanctuary. "The Torah which God gave unto us is the heritage of the whole house of Israel." And that every layman, every human



being has a right to read the law, to teach the law, to interpret the law, to evolve new laws than the existing law to meet the advanced needs of life.

This is significant because this attitude on the part of the masses of Israel that the Torah was given to all, not merely to a small group of functionaries, led to a remarkable fact in Jewish life. The Jewish people was the first to establish a universal system of education, for young and old, for rich and poor. Josephus two thousand years ago makes the statement: "Our chief concern is to educate our children well." And there was hardly a town in ancient Israel, in Palestine, that could not boast of a school or of an academy, and in fact, the town which did not have a teacher and a school was looked upon as a curse.

Learning was democratized. There was no small group at the top that monopolized learning and study and religious authority, and handed down its decisions to the masses. The faith and the lore and the learning of Israel became the possession of the whole house of Israel; and that has continued to this day. When people tell you that Jews are individualists; when people tell you that Jews are more or less rebellious; when people tell you that Jews question always, that is part and parcel of a racial temperament which has been developed through endless centuries of education. Every individual Jew was encouraged to be an individualist, to be an authority by himself.



Had I the time I would indicate to you how such great movements in the Middle Ages as Karaism, the movement of the Scripturalists, those who challenged the authority of the Rabbis, who denied the authority of the Talmud, who claimed that our only authority is the Bible,-- how that movement, just as the mystic movement in Israel during the Middle Ages, both had their source in this democratic passion of the people.

Had I the time I should indicate to you how a great movement like Chassidism, the movement of the Chassidim, in the last 150 years also had its roots in the democratic life of the people. For at that time, 150 years ago, in Eastern Europe, the Rabbis had become an aristocratic class possessing great power and influence in Jewish life, and they looked upon those who were not rabbinic scholars with a certain amount of contempt. The masses of the people, who could not, because they did not have the time, devote themselves to rabbinic dialectics and to the finesse of rabbinic speculation, felt themselves sort of excluded from the house of Israel. There arose a great movement among the masses, led by Israel Bal Shem, who said that real Judaism is not this dry, sunless, cold legalism of the Rabbis. Real Judaism is the warmth and the passion of faith, and that belongs to everybody. The essence of Judaism is to worship God with sincerity and without any subtlety, he said. And like wildfire a vast movement swept through the great masses of Israel known as the



movement of the Chassidim, which was nothing more than an upthrust of the same ever-present democratic passion of the race claiming that the glories of faith belong to all,--to the rich and the poor, to the learned and the unlearned,--to all.

There is this one final thought I should like to leave with you. You have heard it said that liberal Judaism emphasized the ideal of the mission of Israel, and some of our luminant fellows of the intelligentsia have, in recent years, elected to make sport of this ideal of the mission of Israel, thinking thereby to attack liberal Judaism at its most vulnerable point. Now the fact of the matter is that liberal Judaism placed itself in direct line of descent from the prophets and the Pharisees in making the ideal of the mission of Israel focal in its ideology. Because what is this ideal of the mission of Israel? It is nothing but democracy applied to religion. That's all it is in its profoundest implications. Among all peoples of antiquity there was a small class known as the priestly class, who were looked upon as possessing a certain prophecy, moral status, a certain exclusive sanctity. You know that to be true among all peoples. The priest was singled out as a man possessing a higher degree of sanctity and holiness than the rest of the people. Well, the genius of Israel would not tolerate that distinction; the genius of Israel maintained that if there was anything at all to this concept of holiness in life, if human beings can raise to a level



of holiness in life, then that holiness is the prerogative not of the few but of all. And so the democratic genius of Israel placed as its goal to make of the whole people of Israel "a kingdom of priests and a holy people."

Now that was an amazing and revolutionary concept. Among no people in antiquity or in this day do you find this thought dominant: that a whole people, mind you,--not merely a few within the people, but a whole people, young and old, men, women and children, are to become priests of the living God, holy men devoted to an ideal. That is the ideal of the covenant of Israel. God made a covenant with the whole people of Israel to be his emissaries, his missionaries, his spokesmen, his prophets in the world.

Now it may be that we are no longer fit to be God's spokesmen in the world. I don't know. It may be that the time has come for us to abandon our historic role of a covenanted, consecrated people. It may be that we no longer have the desire or the will or the capacity to function as the shock troops of the Almighty. That may be so. But we must always remember that we cannot re-write history or revamp that which has already taken place. What has been is. The Jew throughout the ages did conceive of himself as a covenanted people, as being subjected to a mission in life. That mission was the work not of the Rabbis but of the whole people. Why our synagogue? What was it but a layman's institution? At the altar any layman could come up and worship and lead the congregation in



prayer; at the reading of the Torah any layman of clean hands and pure heart could come up and read; to preach to a congregation any layman qualified to do so.

That democratic religious conception you find among no people in the world, and that is the most exalted expression of the genius of our race. Whenever ten people met they could build a synagogue; they could take a room and convert it into a synagogue--anywhere. We have no sacramentalism in Jewish life. The whole people became a people of priests. Where liberal Judaism appeared, where it made its great mistake, was not in retaining the ideal of the mission of Israel; not in challenging every Jew to a type of life consistent with the role of a religious teacher and leader. Where it made the great mistake was in underestimating the importance of the people of Israel, the group discipline. It spoke of the mission of Israel but it forgot to preserve or to develop a mode of living which would constantly remind the Jews that they are a covenanted and a consecrated people.

Liberal Judaism began under the incantation, the influence of the ideas of the French Revolution,--liberty, equality, fraternity. People at the close of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, when mission reform Judaism began, actually believed that the great day of Jehova was near at hand; a new dawn was breaking for mankind; the old order was giving way to a new one; all religious differences will be wiped out; all



national antipathies will disappear. Consequently Israel, instead of retaining its distinctiveness and its uniqueness in custom, in observances, in practices, ought to give them all up and join in one great family of mankind.

You know, every great revolution is a seed bed for apocalyptic dreams, for vast impractical vision. Well, those who followed that thought through were soon lost to Israel, because the day of liberty, equality and fraternity did not materialize. It has not materialized yet. And the same apocalyptic dreams are in the air today as a result of the World War. The World War, too, spoke in terms of universal peace and universal brotherhood and universal righteousness,--one mankind, one great family, one great religion. So that some of our Jews have been stampeded into a pathetic self-abdication. Why remain Jews? Why insist upon our own identity when the world is fast marching to a day of universal peace? Other people are not believing as the Jews do. Why not join in one great family?

But the patient, sober Pharisee, the patient sober Jew who knows his history, who knows what has happened and can draw conclusions as to what will happen, that patient, sober Jew will not permit himself to be stampeded. He will know that many and many a sharp and desperate battle will yet have to be waged in the centuries to come before the ideals of our people, for which we shed our blood, before the sacred dreams of our race will ever be approximated. And so that patient and sober Jew will bethink himself not only of



the abstract ideals of his people but of his people itself. He will think not only of the faith of Israel but of Israel. He will think not only of prophecy in Israel but of Israel which gave birth to prophecy and to prophets. In other words, he will die to maintain a strong group loyalty, a strong group discipline which will conserve him for his tasks of tomorrow.

There is a beautiful phrase of the Rabbis. The prophet Elijah was once asked by a man--the prophet Elijah, you will recall, was one who solved all very difficult problems,--the prophet Elijah was approached by a Jew who said, "Prophet, I have two great loves in my heart, and I do not know to which one to devote myself most. One is the Torah and the other is the people of Israel. Which of the two is greater?" And the prophet Elijah answered: "Most people would say to you the Torah is more important. I say unto you the holy people of Israel is more important." For it is of that people that prophets came to mankind, and it is that people that may yet give another Bible to mankind; but it is out of the soul and genius of that race that many a new and startling revelation will come to mankind.

So that, my friends, in a renewal of Pharisaic Judaism lies the hope of our faith, in the renewal of a democratic, disciplined, religious community lies the hope and the promise of Judaism. There is, to my mind, enough of power and enough of beauty and enough of glory



in the three major concepts of Israel--the faith of Israel, the people of Israel, the land of Israel--there is enough of beauty and power and magnificence in these three concepts to enkindle the enthusiasm of our people and of our youth. We must conserve them all. Everything which contributes to the enrichment, to the intensification of Jewish life,--our customs, our tradition, our hope of national rehabilitation, our language, our law, our literature,--everything which can serve as a bulwark, a prop and a mainstay in Jewish life, liberal Judaism ought to serve, and we ought to challenge our youth of tomorrow with a faith exalted, imperial, majestic, "a flaming faith," if you will, a faith of a mission.

We ought to train our young people, my friends, into an unflinching and invincible conviction that they have been born into a community of priests, into a household of a holy people dedicated to the holy ideals of mankind; that it is their crown and their immortality to be identified with a group of men who long ago, at the foot of Mt. Sinai, pledged themselves to be "the servant of God." That therefore their lives must be different, finer, nobler, harder, if you will. The weak among them will reject it; the strong and the high spirited will accept the challenge and the opportunity.

This is what I mean when I speak, friends, of the democratic impulse in Jewish history. A real Jew is a passionate democrat, not only as regards political life



but as regards economic and social and religious life. In all the departments of the world he seeks the fulfillment of the individual's life; he seeks expansion, growth, freedom, opportunity for all the children of God. And it is the peculiar mission of our people to be the spokesmen of that democratic ideal to mankind.

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# *The* TEMPLE BULLETIN



THE TEMPLE  
East 105<sup>th</sup> St. and Ansel Rd.  
CLEVELAND, OHIO

Abba Hillel Silver, D.D.  
RABBI

Rabbi Leon I. Feuer  
Minister of Religious Education

(41)  
SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 1928

10:30 A. M.

RABBI SILVER

will speak on

"The Democratic Impulse in  
Jewish History"

A Digest of Rabbi Silver's Recently Published Book  
by that Name

The Sabbath Eve Service  
5:30 to 6:10

The Sabbath Morning Service  
11:00 to 12:00

My Book  
Friday Eve Service  
Section Subject -



The Temple Bulletin, published weekly from the middle of September to June, by Tifereth Israel Congregation, E. 105th Street at Ansel Road, Cleveland, Ohio. E. E. Wolf, Pres.; Emanuel Einstein, Treas.; Rabbi Leon I. Feuer, Editor. Subscription price, 50 cents per annum.

Entered as second-class matter, Dec. 11, 1925, at the Post office at Cleveland, Ohio, under the act of March 3 1879.

## **Music for Sunday Morning, November 4th**

Organ (10:15 A. M.)

Prelude

Allegro con brio (First Sonata  
in E. Minor).....Rogers

Scherzo (Canon) ....Jadassohn

Clair de Lune.....Bonnet

Paul Allen Beymer

Alto Solo

"Render your Hearts and not your  
Garments" .....Rogers

Alice Shaw Duggan

## **The Democratic Impulse**

Dr. Silver's address this Sunday morning will be in the nature of a digest of his recently published book, "The Democratic Impulse in Jewish History." This work is an elaboration of an essay which Dr. Silver read before The Central Conference of American Rabbis at its last convention in Chicago. At the request of many of his colleagues he developed his thesis into a small volume which The Bloch Publishing Company of New York has just published.

## **T. W. A. Exhibit— A Great Success**

The success of the Exhibit and Sale of the work of The Temple Women's Association held on Sept. 23rd and 24th far exceeded the fondest expectations of all. Great

throngings of people, members of the Temple, visitors and out of town guests attended the Exhibit on both days and were loud in their praise of the fine array of articles exhibited, the beautiful manner in which Mahler Hall and the numerous booths were decorated, the efficiency with which the whole arrangement was carried through, the enthusiasm of the workers and the fine spirit of fellowship which prevailed.

It is impossible to praise too highly the work of Mrs. Benjamin Lowenstein and Mrs. Walter Goldsmith who were Chairmen of Arrangements and who devoted many weeks of hard work and careful planning to insure the success of the Exhibit.

Limited space does not permit us to print the names of all those who have by their labor and service contributed to the success of the undertaking, but special mention should be made of the Chairmen and Vice Chairmen of the various Departments: Women's Exchange, Mrs. H. Auerbach and Mrs. C. Levison; Quilting, Mrs. M. Koch and Mrs. H. Auerbach; Arts, Mrs. J. L. Jaffe; Lilliputians, Mrs. C. Taussig and Mrs. H. Steuer; Apron, Mrs. Sam Klein and Mrs. I. Spiegle; Lingerie, Mrs. Louis Rheinheimer and Mrs. S. Bialosky; Toys, Mrs. S. Goldhammer and Mrs. L. Goldhammer; Garden Club, Mrs. Benj. Lowenstein and Mrs. Nathan Weisenberg; Fish Pond, Mrs. Sylvester Flesheim and Mrs. Raymond Deutsch; Confection Booth, Mrs. Carol Levison; Purchasing Department, Mrs. M. L. Lappin; Deliveries, Mrs. A. Greenfield and Mrs. A. Fischer. The Tea Room which was a delightful feature of the Exhibit and which was attended by hundreds of people was in charge of Mrs. Lester Miller and Mrs. Sidney Dryfoos.

Thanks are also due in full measure to the officers of the Association who faithfully co-operated.



**SPEND AN ENJOYABLE EVENING**

at the

**TEMPLE MEN'S CLUB ANNUAL LADIES NIGHT  
AN ELECTION NIGHT PARTY**

**Tuesday, November 6th, 6:30**

**JUDGE FLORENCE E. ALLEN**

will speak on

**"Back to the Constitution"**

Other Features

**MUSIC**

**MOVIES**

Screen Announcements of Election Returns

**Reservations are \$1.25 Per Person**

The Meeting is Open to Members of the Temple Men's Club  
and Their Immediate Families

Mail Your Reservations at Once

The Capacity of Mahler Hall is Limited

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**TEMPLE MONDAY EVENING LECTURE COURSE**

presents

**DR. THOMAS WESLEY GRAHAM**

speaking on

**"THE RELIGION OF PRIMITIVE MAN"**

**Monday Evening, November 5th, 8 P. M.**

**MAHLER HALL**

Single Admission 35 cents



## *Temple Religious School     Dean Graham*

### **Report for the Week**

Total enrollment, including the High School—1415.

Number of pupils, Kindergarten to 9th grade, inclusive—1262.

Average attendance for the week, 94%.

The following classes had 100% attendance for the week: 2C, Miss Grodin; 3A, Miss Markowitz; 3C, Miss Savlon; 3D, Miss Curtis; 4F, Miss Bernstein; 5B, Miss Pogust; 5F, Mr. Dryer; 6A, Mrs. Blinder; 6C, Miss August; 6F, Miss Wertheimer; 7A, 7B, Miss Gimp; 8A, Miss Copenhagen; 8D, Miss Rosen; 8E, Miss Fink; 9C, Miss Krause; 9F, Miss Ruben.

### **Sunshine Fund**

The collection of the Sunshine Fund for the week amounted to \$39.39.

The second lecture on the Temple Monday Evening Lecture Course will be delivered by Dr. Thomas Wesley Graham on Monday evening, Nov. 5th. This is the second of a series of eight lectures on The Great Religions of Mankind. The subject of the lecture is "The Religion of Primitive Man."

The study of early religion is a fascinating one. Not only do we obtain from it an understanding of many of the beliefs which we hold today and a knowledge of how they originated, but also a deeper appreciation of the true nature of religion.

Dr. Graham is Dean of the Graduate School of Theology at Oberlin College and an authority in the field of Primitive Religion. He is widely known both as a preacher and a lecturer.

## *The Temple Wishes to Acknowledge with Thanks the Following Contributions:*

### *To the Floral Fund*

Mrs. N. L. Dauby  
Mrs. Morris L. Arnold  
Robert Hays and Lincoln  
Hays Gries

In memory of father, Louis A. Braham  
In memory of Helen Goodman Altman  
In memory of father, Rabbi Moses J. Gries

### *To the Scholarship Fund*

Mrs. N. L. Dauby  
Mrs. A. E. Bernstein  
Mrs. Henrietta Miller  
Miss Eleanor Garson  
Mrs. A. J. Mandel  
Mrs. Henry Auerbach

In memory of father, Louis A. Braham  
In memory of husband, Adolph E. Bernstein  
In memory of brother, Adolph E. Bernstein  
In memory of mother, Faanie S. Garson  
In memory of brother, Nathan Kluger  
In memory of Rabbi Moses J. Gries



THE DEMOCRATIC IMPULSE IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sermon, The Temple, November 4, 1928

I <sup>have</sup> selected to write and to speak <sup>on</sup> of the

theme "The Democratic Impulse in Jewish History" because the conviction has been growing upon me in recent years that not enough stress has been laid by students upon the role which democracy, ~~the principle~~, or, as I choose to call it, the impulse of democracy, <sup>has</sup> played throughout Jewish history, and that <sup>not enough</sup> ~~sufficient~~ stress has ~~not~~ been laid upon what I regard as perhaps the outstanding contribution of Israel to the thought of mankind. ~~this contribution is~~ <sup>democracy</sup> ~~democracy~~ not only in ~~the~~ political life but in ~~the~~ social, ~~the~~ economic <sup>and</sup> religious life as well.

When our forefathers appeared on the frontiers of Canaan ready to begin their amazing career in the world as an historic people, ~~in the case of Israel~~, they had already been fashioned and moulded by countless centuries of desert life. You know, of course, <sup>that</sup> our forefathers before they came to Palestine were nomadic peoples wandering through the great Arabian desert for endless centuries. The home of our forefathers was that <sup>vast</sup> ~~great~~ mysterious land known as the Arabian desert, the Arabian wilderness.

Now, in the desert there are no kings. In the desert to this day there is no aristocracy of birth or of wealth; no military hierarchy, no priestly hierarchy. The leader of the tribe was the ~~chief~~ <sup>shofet</sup> the primus inter pares.

shofet



the first among equals. Among wandering tribes there is a rude elementary democracy, and our people was fashioned and moulded by that democratic spirit for endless cycles of time before they came into the settled agricultural life of Palestine, and they never lost that desert tradition of equality and mutuality.

~~I would like to have you bear this thought~~  
~~in mind.~~ Throughout their history to this very day, our people, which had been imbued through countless generations with a democratic passion, never quite lost it throughout its checkered and turbulent career. When our forefathers entered Palestine, and for some centuries of turbulent conquest and settlement, they lived without rulers and without kings. Whenever an emergency presented itself and they were compelled to ward off an invading enemy, they would choose one of their numbers to be their ~~chief~~ <sup>shofet</sup>, their judge, their leader, who led them into battle. When the emergency was over, that ~~chief~~ <sup>shofet</sup>, that judge, that leader, returned to common civil life. There was no king in Israel.

It was only with the menace of a new and desperate enemy, <sup>the Philistines</sup> ~~--the Philistines--~~ that the scattered tribes of Israel in Palestine were compelled to consolidate, and ~~It~~ was then that the demand arose on the part of the people for a king. "Let us be like all other people. Let us have a king who will be the symbol of our unity." At that time the prophet Samuel was the judge, the ~~chief~~ <sup>shofet</sup>, and when they came to him and asked for a king, Samuel was



outraged. It was unheard of that the children of Israel, these freeborn men of the desert, should permit themselves voluntarily to be enslaved by a king and a dynasty, ~~and he~~ told them that their demand for a king was an apostasy from God. ~~It~~ <sup>a</sup> <sup>would</sup> was a culpable mimicry of the heathen. He told them that ~~the~~ king ~~will~~ <sup>would</sup> enslave them. He pointed out to them what these ~~exploitations~~ and these ~~spoliations~~ of royalty are. He warned them not to ask for a king, and through Samuel that genius of the race, that democratic genius of the race, spoke. But necessity compelled Samuel to yield to the clamor of the people, and they chose a king.

But the king in Israel, from the time of Saul to the time of the last king, Zedekiah, never, never occupied that role of Oriental potentate and despot which was held by the kings of Egypt, of Assyria, of Babylon, of Syria or <sup>by</sup> the other kings of antiquity. Frequently you read in the Bible of revolutions and rebellion; frequently you read in the Bible that the prophet, who was the monitor of that desert tradition of freedom, denounced the king to his face; and it was in the name of a law greater than that of royalty that Samuel faced Saul, that Nathan denounced David, that Shemaiah imprecated Rehoboam, that Elijah cursed Ahab, and that Jeremiah pronounced doom upon King Zedekiah, because "he hearkened not to the voice of the prophet speaking in the name of God."

The king in Israel was always subject to the



same moral law binding upon common man. There was no king worship in Israel. That is ~~very~~ significant, because among all the peoples of antiquity the king was worshipped as divine. ~~The king, the~~ The Pharaoh of the Egyptian, was always addressed in the following terms: "Lord of heaven, lord of earth, sun, life of the whole world, lord of time, ~~(remember, this is addressed to a human being, the king),~~ creator of the harvest, maker and fashioner of mortals, giver of life to all the host of gods." This is how an Egyptian king was addressed.

The king of Israel was denounced by a prophet. The highest compliment which the Bible can pay to a king is this: that he did that which is pleasing in the sight of God. ~~And~~ When the Syrian general Naaman came to the Hebrew king to <sup>be</sup> cure ~~him~~ of leprosy, thinking that the Hebrew king possessed the same divine attributes that the kings of other peoples were said to possess, the Hebrew king replied: "What am I, a God to kill or to make alive?" You will understand exactly what I am trying to emphasize ~~this meaning~~ when you contrast this point of view of Israel as regards royalty with that of the enlightened and the advanced Greeks <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> Plato and Aristotle, the finest flower of Hellenic thought. Plato in his "Republic" declared that the ideal polity was a monarchy and that the ideal ruler was a king, who was at the same time a soldier and a philosopher. Aristotle maintained that kingship is the most divine and primary form of political organization. ~~And~~ When you contrast Plato and



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Aristotle with Samuel, who looks upon kingship as apostasy from God, you will realize the essential difference in outlook between Israel and other people.

~~After the destruction of the First Temple, or~~ After the ~~first~~ destruction and the Babylonian exile, when our forefathers returned from Babylon to Palestine and rebuilt their country, they had no kings at all. ~~and~~ For hundreds of years, for nearly a half of a millennium, they governed themselves by the political autonomy they possessed, ~~and~~ they themselves exercised. ~~They had no king. And~~ Then there was ~~a short~~ <sup>the</sup> interlude of the Hasmonean dynasty, which lasted for a comparatively short time, ~~and~~ <sup>After</sup> the ~~second~~ <sup>Second</sup> destruction of the Temple took place, and Israel was exiled from Palestine, ~~and~~ for nearly nineteen hundred years Israel has lived, scattered to the four corners of the earth, a fairly united, a fairly integrated people, but possessing no king and no potentate and no pope, no central authority in the hands of a privileged group or a privileged individual. That is an amazing thing. For Israel <sup>has</sup> lived during these last nineteen hundred years not as a host of gypsies without any internal organization or control or discipline. <sup>has been</sup> There ~~was~~ a very strong inner control and inner discipline, but ~~it was~~ not a control superimposed by a reigning family or a feudal lord or by a religious autocrat. It <sup>is</sup> was the authority voluntarily assumed by people in a democratic organization. For Israel believed--and this is essential to a understanding of our religion--Israel



believed that every human being had a worth and a dignity comparable to the worth and the dignity of the highest human being, and therefore Israel declared: "All the children of Israel are sons of kings!"

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~~Now there is a profound thought in that~~  
~~passage.~~ To look upon every human being, the humblest of the humble and the lowliest of the low, as the son of a king, a prince, is to get a totally different conception of life <sup>from that of</sup> ~~than those~~ peoples ~~had~~ who enslaved millions, and who had castes and gradations and social stratification. Israel established a perfect equality, a basis, a level of supremacy for all human beings.

When you leave the realm of the political and enter the realm of the economic, you find that same *democratic* ~~social~~ impulse at work. When you read your Bible, ~~when~~ you come across ~~the ancient~~ social legislation enacted to protect the individual against exploitation, against monopoly, against the loss of patrimony, ~~and~~ The Bible is full of *this* ~~the~~ progressive legislation; I say "progressive" because *these laws* ~~they~~ were far in advance of their day, and they are far in advance of our day. ~~the ancient~~ ~~progressive social legislations of the Bible,~~ When you read them you will understand them only as you know that *in that* ~~book,~~ *is* the tremendous conviction that all human beings are entitled to the same rights and privileges and opportunities. "For unto me [God] are the children of Israel slaves; they are not slaves unto slaves."



Unless you bear this fact in mind, that in the soul of Israel there was always a vibrant, democratic passion, you will not understand the prophets of Israel at all. <sup>B</sup>Because it was in the name of that imperishable and invincible desert tradition of democracy that the prophets of Israel denounced the oppressors of mankind, those who ground the faces of the poor <sup>into the dust</sup> and turned aside the way of the humble. It was in the name of that democratic principle that they wielded the scorpion whip of their fury upon all those who exploited their fellowmen, <sup>#</sup>and it <sup>was</sup> ~~is~~ in the name of that tradition of equality and human responsibility that they championed the cause of the denied and the dispossessed and the broken and beaten of life, ~~and that same democratic principle is essential for an understanding of the entire religious history of Israel.~~

The whole struggle between the priest and the prophet which rings through the pages of the Bible is comprehensible only as you remember that the priest represented a privileged class, and that the prophet was the spokesman of the Jewish laity. He challenged the prerogatives and the privileges of the priesthood. Prophecy in Israel, ~~by Isaiah~~ was not merely a protest against idolatry. It was that. It was not merely a protest against the supremacy or primacy of ritual and cult in religion. It was that. Prophecy was not only the upreaching of a sensitive soul of the race "for the Kingdom of God." It was that. But it was something more, too. Prophecy



in Israel was the passionate crying of the Jewish layman for full lay participation and leadership in the life of the people.

The priest maintained that he is to be the teacher of the law. Well and good. Let him teach the law. But so may a layman not of ~~the Aaronic family~~ <sup>the Aaronic family</sup> ~~become a teacher of the law and~~ <sup>of</sup> ~~the religious life of the people, provided he is prepared for it; provided he has prepared himself for that function. You will probably recall from the reading of the Bible that story of the rebellion of Korah. That is a story that has been frequently misunderstood. We hear of a rebellion against Moses led by a man named Korah, and yet when we read the chapter of the Bible closely, analytically, we find in that story an amazing revelation of just that of which I am speaking,~~ <sup>about.</sup>

Who were the rebels under the leadership of Korah? They were not a nondescript people. The Bible speaks of them as the elect men of the group, men of renown. What was their complaint? "And they assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron" (whose names are of course here used by the priestly scribe for his own ends). ~~these~~ <sup>these</sup> princes of the congregation, these men of renown, these leaders of the laity assembled themselves and said unto Moses and unto Aaron, who are here assumed to be the representatives of the priestly class: "Ye take too much upon yourselves seeing that all the congregation are holy,



every one of them, and the Lord is among them; wherefore, then, lift ye up yourselves before the assembly of the Lord.

The whole congregation is holy, not merely the priest. There you have one reflex of that bitter struggle that was waged through the ages between the class and the masses of the people. When, later on, two laymen, Eldad and Medad, began to prophesy in the camp, Joshua cried unto Moses, "Moses, shut them in!" Here are laymen trespassing. They dare to prophesy. They have no right. Moses replied: "Art thou jealous for me? Would that the whole people of the Lord were prophets, and that God, the spirit of God were upon them."

That same struggle between democracy and autocracy is reflected again in the centuries-old struggle between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, those two Jewish sects of Israel in the centuries before the destruction of the second Temple. What was the struggle between these two sects? Why, it was simply this: the Sadducees, who, as the name indicates, were the party of the priesthood, maintained that the priests were the sole monitors of religion and the sole legislators in matters of religion; that laymen had no right to trespass. The Pharisees, who represented the masses, whose rallying place was the synagogue, just as the Sadducees' rallying place was the Temple, the Pharisees maintained that God gave to all the law and the sanctuary. "The Torah which God gave unto us is the heritage of the whole house of Israel." And ~~that~~ every layman, every human

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being has a right to read the law, to teach the law, to interpret the law, <sup>and</sup> to evolve new laws ~~than the existing~~ <sup>to</sup> meet the advanced needs of life.

~~This is significant because~~ <sup>The</sup> attitude on the part of the masses of Israel that the Torah was given to all, not merely to a small group of functionaries, led to a remarkable fact in Jewish life. The Jewish people was the first to establish a universal system of education, for young and old, for rich and poor. Josephus two thousand years ago makes the statement: "Our chief concern is to educate our children well." ~~And~~ There was hardly a town in ancient ~~Israel~~ Palestine, that could not boast of a school or of an academy. ~~And~~ In fact, the town which did not have a teacher and a school was looked upon as accursed.

Learning was democratized. There was no small group at the top that monopolized learning and study and religious authority, and handed down its decisions to the masses. The faith and the lore and the learning of Israel became the possession of the whole house of Israel; and that has continued to this day. When people tell you that Jews are individualists; when people tell you that Jews are more or less rebellious; when people tell you that Jews question always, that is part and parcel of a racial temperament which has been developed through endless centuries of education. Every individual Jew was encouraged to be an individualist, to be an authority by himself.



Had I the time I would indicate to you how <sup>such</sup> ~~an~~ <sup>an important</sup> ~~such~~ movement in the Middle Ages as Karaism, the movement of the Scripturalists, those who challenged the authority of the Rabbis, ~~who~~ <sup>and</sup> denied the authority of the Talmud, ~~who~~ <sup>and</sup> claimed that our only authority is the Bible, <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> how that movement, ~~just as~~ <sup>and</sup> the mystic movement in Israel during the Middle Ages, both had their source in this democratic passion of the people.

Had I the time I should indicate to you how a ~~great~~ <sup>Hasidism</sup> movement like ~~Chassidism, the movement of the~~ ~~Chassidim~~ in the last 150 years also had its roots in the democratic life of the people. For at that time, 150 years ago, in Eastern Europe, the Rabbis had become an aristocratic class possessing ~~great~~ <sup>tremendous</sup> power and influence in Jewish life, and they looked upon those who were not rabbinic scholars with a certain ~~amount of~~ contempt. The masses of the people, who could not, because they did not have the time, devote themselves to rabbinic dialectics and to the finesse of rabbinic speculation, felt themselves ~~spiritually~~ <sup>spiritually</sup> excluded, ~~from the house of Israel.~~ There arose a ~~great~~ movement among the masses, led by Israel ~~Shem~~ <sup>Baal-</sup> Shem, who said that real Judaism is not this dry, sunless, cold legalism of the Rabbis. Real Judaism is the warmth and the passion of faith, and that belongs to everybody. The essence of Judaism is to worship God with sincerity and without any subtlety, ~~and~~ <sup>Hasidism</sup> And like wildfire, ~~it~~ <sup>communities</sup> swept through the ~~the masses of the people.~~



a movement ~~of the Church~~ which was nothing more than an upthrust of the same ever-present democratic passion of the race claiming that the glories of faith belong to all, ~~to~~ to the rich and the poor, to the learned and the unlearned, ~~to~~ to all.

There is this one final thought I should like to leave with you. You have heard it said that liberal Judaism emphasized the ideal of the mission of Israel, and some of our luminant fellows of the intelligentsia have, in recent years, elected to make sport of this ideal of the mission of Israel, thinking thereby to attack liberal Judaism at its most vulnerable point. Now the fact of the matter is that liberal Judaism placed itself in direct line of descent from the prophets and the Pharisees in making the ideal of the mission ~~Israel~~ focal in its ideology. Because what is this ideal of the mission of Israel? It is nothing but democracy applied to religion. That <sup>is</sup> all it is in its profoundest implications. Among all peoples of antiquity there was a small ~~class~~ ~~as the~~ priestly class, who were looked upon as possessing ~~certain~~ ~~status~~, a certain exclusive sanctity. ~~That~~ ~~was~~ ~~the~~ ~~case~~ among all peoples. (The priest was singled out as a man possessing a higher degree of sanctity and holiness than the rest of the people. Well, the genius of Israel would not tolerate that distinction; the genius of Israel maintained that if there was anything at all to this concept of holiness in life, if human beings can raise <sup>themselves</sup> to a level



of holiness in life, then that holiness is the prerogative not of the few but of all. And so the democratic genius of Israel placed as its goal ~~to make~~ <sup>to make</sup> of the whole people of Israel "a kingdom of priests and a holy people."

~~Here~~ <sup>Here</sup> was an amazing and revolutionary concept. Among no people in antiquity or in this day do you find this thought dominant: that a whole people, mind you, ~~not~~ merely a few within the people, but a whole people, young and old, men, women, and children, are to become priests of the living God, holy men devoted to an ideal. That is the ideal of the covenant of Israel. God made a covenant with the whole people of Israel to be his emissaries, his missionaries, his spokesmen, his prophets in the world.

~~Now~~ <sup>not</sup> It may be that we are no longer fit to be God's spokesmen in the world. I ~~do~~ <sup>not</sup> know. It may be that the time has come for us to abandon our historic role of a covenanted, consecrated people. It may be that we no longer have the desire or the will or the capacity to function as the shock troops of the Almighty. That may be so. But we must always remember that we cannot re-write history or revamp that which has already taken place. What has been is. The Jew throughout the ages did conceive of himself as a covenanted people, as being subjected to a mission in life. That mission was the work not of the Rabbis but of the whole people. Why our synagogue? What was it but a layman's institution? At the altar any layman could come up and worship and lead the congregation in



prayer, ~~At~~ the reading of the Torah any layman of clean hands and pure heart could come up and read <sup>and</sup> preach to the congregation, ~~and laymen qualified to do so.~~

That democratic religious conception you find among <sup>other</sup> no people in the world, and that is the most exalted expression of the genius of our race. Whenever ten people met they could build a synagogue; they could take a room and convert it into a synagogue--anywhere. We have no sacramentalism in Jewish life. The whole people became a people of priests. <sup>When</sup> liberal Judaism appeared, where it made its great mistake was <sup>in</sup> not retaining the ideal of the mission of Israel, not in challenging every Jew to a type of life consistent with the role of a religious teacher and leader; <sup>its</sup> where it made the great mistake was in underestimating the importance of the people of Israel, the group discipline. It spoke of the mission of Israel, but it forgot to preserve or to develop a mode of living which would constantly remind the Jews that they are a covenanted and a consecrated people.

Liberal Judaism began under the ~~incantation~~, the influence of the ideas of the French Revolution, <sup>liberty, equality, fraternity.</sup> People at the close of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, when <sup>modern</sup> reform Judaism began, actually believed that the great day of Jehovah was near at hand; a new dawn was breaking for mankind; the old order was giving way to a new one; all religious differences <sup>would</sup> be wiped out; all



they felt that

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national antipathies <sup>would</sup> disappear. Consequently Israel, instead of retaining its distinctiveness and its uniqueness in custom, in observances, in practices, ought to give them all up and join in <sup>the one</sup> ~~great~~ family of mankind.

~~Y~~ Every ~~great~~ revolution is a seed bed for apocalyptic dreams, for vast impractical vision. Well, those who followed that thought through were soon lost to Israel, because the day of liberty, equality, and fraternity did not materialize. It has not materialized yet. And the same apocalyptic dreams are in the air today as a result of the World War. The World War, too, spoke in terms of universal peace and universal brotherhood and universal righteousness, -- one mankind, one great family, one great religion. <sup>LM</sup> ~~Some~~ Some of our Jews have been stampeded into a pathetic self-abdication. Why remain Jews? Why insist upon our own identity when the world is fast marching to a day of universal peace? Other people <sup>do</sup> ~~not~~ believe ~~as~~ as the Jews do. Why not join in one great family?

But the patient, sober Pharisee, the patient, sober Jew who knows his history, who knows what has happened and can draw conclusions <sup>about</sup> ~~as to~~ what will happen, that patient, sober Jew will not permit himself to be stampeded. He will know that many and many a sharp and desperate battle will yet have to be waged ~~in the centuries to come~~ before the ideals of our people, for which we shed our blood, before the sacred dreams of our race will ever be approximated. ~~And~~ that patient and sober Jew will bethink himself not only of



the abstract ideals of his people but of his people itself. He will think not only of the faith of Israel but of Israel. He will think not only of prophecy in Israel but of Israel which gave birth to prophecy and to prophets. In other words, he will die to maintain a strong group loyalty, a strong group discipline which will conserve him for his tasks of tomorrow.

There is a beautiful <sup>legend</sup> ~~story~~ of the Rabbis.

The prophet Elijah was once asked by a man--the prophet Elijah, you will recall, was one who solved all very difficult problems,--the prophet Elijah was approached by a Jew who said, "Prophet, I have two great loves in my heart, and I do not know to which one to devote myself most. One is the Torah and the other is the people of Israel. Which of the two is greater?" ~~The~~ prophet ~~answered~~ answered: "Most people would say to you the Torah is more important. I say unto you the holy people of Israel is more important." For it is of that people that prophets came to mankind, and it is that people that may yet give another Bible to mankind. ~~It~~ It is out of the soul and genius of that race that many a new and startling revelation will come to mankind.

~~It is in~~ <sup>It is in</sup> a renewal of Pharisaic Judaism lies the hope of our faith. In the renewal of a democratic, disciplined, religious community lies the hope and the promise of Judaism. There is, to my mind, enough of power and enough of beauty and enough of glory.



in the three major concepts of Israel--the faith of Israel,  
the people of Israel, the land of Israel--there is enough  
of beauty and power and magnificence in these three concepts  
to enkindle the enthusiasm of our people and of our youth.  
We must conserve them all. Everything which contributes  
to the enrichment, to the intensification of Jewish life,  
our customs, our tradition, our hope of national rehabili-  
tation, our language, our law, our literature; everything  
which can serve as a bulwark, a prop and a mainstay in  
Jewish life, liberal Judaism ought to serve, and we ought  
to challenge our youth of tomorrow with a faith exalted,  
imperial, majestic, "a flaming faith," if you will, a  
faith <sup>in</sup> a mission.

We ought to train our young people ~~in~~  
<sup>the</sup> ~~in~~ unflinching and invincible conviction  
that they have been born into a community of priests,  
into a household of a holy people dedicated to the holy  
ideals of mankind; that it is their crown and their  
immortality to be identified with a group of men who long  
ago, at the foot of <sup>Mount</sup> ~~the~~ Sinai, pledged themselves to be  
"the servants of God." ~~That is the~~ Their lives must be  
different, finer, nobler, harder, ~~and more~~. The weak  
among them will reject it; the strong and the high-spirited  
will accept the challenge and the opportunity.

This is what I mean when I speak, ~~of the~~  
of the democratic impulse in Jewish history. A real Jew is  
a passionate democrat, not only <sup>in</sup> ~~in~~ regards <sup>to</sup> political life



but ~~as~~ <sup>in</sup> regards <sup>to</sup> economic and social and religious life.

In all the departments of the world he seeks the fulfillment of the individual's life; ~~he~~ <sup>he</sup> seeks expansion, growth, freedom, opportunity for all the children of God. ~~And~~ <sup>It</sup> is the peculiar mission of our people to be the spokesmen of that democratic ideal to mankind.

