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The saga of the exodus, 1929.

"THE SAGA OF THE EXODUS."

RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER.

THE TEMPLE, SUNDAY MORNING,

APRIL 28, 1929, CLEVELAND, O.



Three distinct things are woven into the immortal saga of the Passover: an event--the emancipation of the people; the hero--the colossal figure of Moses; and an occasion--spring and the resurrection of nature. Each one of these three things could make a magnificent story and a magnificent festival. The three combined make of Passover a unique and imperishable holiday. The breath of spring is in the festival of Passover, and it is therefore a joyous festival. The genius of the synagogue decreed that on this festival the most perfect love lyric of all literature, the Song of Songs, be recited in the synagogue, and it is of renaissance--Nature, of the revival of all things unto life, that this Song of Songs sings.

"Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away, for lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone, the flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land. The fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with their blossoms give forth their fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away." That is the spirit of the Song of Songs, and that spirit breathes with the festival of Passover.

The people celebrate the coming of spring, for spring is the symbol of the triumph of life over

death. Spring is immortality written large over the face of the universe. Every fresh bud and every fresh blade of grass and every strange stirring in tree and flower proclaim there is no death. And so eager were the peoples of ancient days for the coming of spring that they performed many strange and beautiful ceremonies in order to insure by their secret sympathies the coming of spring.

Magic, which is mankind's first experiment in the mastering of nature, was performed by the peoples of ancient days in order to drive away the gloom of winter and smoothly to pave the way for the return of spring, and some of the most beautiful myths of ancient peoples are built around the idea of spring and of man's hunger for a dependence on and joy in spring.

We city dwellers, with stone and steel walls all about us, and with hard pavements under our feet, are no longer as sensitive to the change of the seasons as our ancestors were, or as people still living close to mother earth are. One of the great advantages of urban civilized living is that the rigors of the seasons are very much attenuated. In our cities we are more sheltered, feel ourselves more secure, but at the same time we lose that sensitiveness to the changing moods, to the subtler moods of an ever changing nature, which is one of the supreme gifts of life.

We who dwell in our machine-made cities, in the midst of the rush and turmoil and the hard

surfaces and the many artificialities, are coming to miss the touch, the feel of the soil in our lives, and perhaps one of the great tasks of civilization tomorrow will be just this: how to bring the green fields of God closer to the tired hearts of men who live in these great, boisterous, noisy, clamorous cities.

Well, Passover speaks of sun and rain and sky and earth. Passover brings that spirit into our lives, and with it comes renewed hope and healing. It reminds us that outside, beyond our offices and our shops and our hard streets and our rails and our wires; beyond our jobs and our desks and our furious concern, and our busy, well-ordered, and yet somehow rather monotonous lives,--beyond all that there are the endless and plains of God, the eternal mountains, the rivers flow and the sap climbs in the trees, and all things grow. Out there there is a teeming, throbbing, creative life of infinite variety, and infinite patience, and infinite fertility; and somehow this thought which spring whispers to us brings with it joy and hope and a vast humility.

The second theme is an historic event. A people which had been enslaved for four centuries knocked off the shackles of its enslavement and set itself free. The Jewish revolution in Egypt is the first recorded revolution of a people, the first rebellion of men against tyranny and oppression, and to this day the epic of the exodus has remained the symbol and the holy

cry of all peoples struggling for freedom.

The Puritans in England, when they sought to break the yoke of an oppressive royal tyranny, called themselves the children of Israel, and looked upon the tyrant as the Pharaoh of their day, and regarded their revolution as a new exodus from a new Egypt; and our own Revolutionary war found inspiration in the story of Israel's exodus from Egypt, and the first seal proposed for the New America, the newly established free United States, bore on its obverse side the picture of Moses leading the children of Israel out of Egypt.

This historic event, which is the second theme of our Passover holiday, speaks of freedom. Freedom is one of the most desirable things in human life. Perhaps it is the highest goal of human aspiration; and yet it is one of the most difficult things to achieve, and even more difficult to use wisely when achieved. Freedom is not an endowment of the human race; it is an achievement. Man is not born free except in the very limited sense of some of them being born into a free government. Freedom is the result of knowledge and experience and training. A man is born without experience and without training, and lacking these things man's freedom is nothing more but a blind groping along unknown ways to satisfy the elementary desires, appetites and passions of physical man.

Freedom is an achievement for the individual, a life-long task and enterprise; and it is also true of

freedom for collective individuals, for a nation. It is one thing to be formally free through a revolution; it is quite another thing to become actually free through a long process of education. It is easier to knock off the shackles of the body than to free oneself from the shackles of the mind and the soul. There are vast psychological continents separating the free man from the free man, or the free nation from the truly free nation. Many a state in the Balkins has been recently freed; that is, these states have won political independence, and yet it will take them, I venture to say, centuries before they will acquire the art of free living, the qualities of tolerance and cooperation which are of the nature of freedom. It will take them centuries before they will learn how to use their new found freedom worthily and wisely; how to guard themselves against the destructive influences of freedom unwisely exploited.

Now the story of the exodus of our forefathers from Egypt, as narrated in the Bible, gives us a profound understanding and altogether true account of how difficult a thing it is for a people to win freedom, and how much more difficult it is for that people to use that freedom wisely. The whole technique of revolution is presented to us in that simple, marvelous and straightforward, yet keen and shrewd account in the Book of Exodus.

In the first place, we are told that the

Jewish slaves who had been oppressed by their task masters in Egypt for over 400 years had to be educated to win freedom. Slaves are not only submissive but frightfully conservative and timid and suspicious. They had to be taught to desire their own freedom. When Moses first came to them with his message of redemption, the Bible says, "They did not listen to Moses," because of their constricted spirits and because of the harshness of their labors. Their spirits had become slaves' spirits. And so Moses had to plead and coax and promise in order to awaken an interest in freedom among these slaves. And then the story tells us that these slaves lacked confidence, not only in themselves but in their leaders. They did not trust leadership; and that is true of all slaves. Leadership is the result of organized experience. Slaves are unorganized, and therefore they do not recognize leadership and do not trust it.

When Moses first appeared on the scene and began to evince his interest in these slaves, the first cry which reached his ears was, "Who made you a leader over us?" When Moses' first effort to persuade Pharaoh not to oppress the people so harshly, failed, these slaves immediately turned upon Moses. "May God look upon you and judge you, because ye have spoiled our favor in the sight of Pharaoh. You have done us a great deal of harm with Pharaoh by going to him and pleading for us."

When they came finally to the Red Sea, the sea before them, the pursuing Egyptians behind them, in danger of being overtaken, at once they turned viciously upon their leader Moses. "And the children of Israel began to clamor and complain. Are there no graves in Egypt, that thou hast taken us to perish in the wilderness? What is this that you have done unto us, to bring us out of Egypt? Wasn't this the very thing which we said unto you in Egypt? Let us alone. Let us serve the Egyptians; for it is much better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness."

That is how slaves speak. Free men say, "Give me liberty or give me death." Slaves say, "We would rather remain slaves than perish in a great adventure to set ourselves free."

When later on in the desert there was no water to drink, "the people complained against Moses." And when later on still there was no food to eat, "and the whole congregation began to complain." And they complained so much and so frequently that the sorely harassed Moses appealed to the Lord and said, "In a little while longer these people will stone me."

There is the psychology of slaves presented; and Moses realized that. Moses realized that having redeemed the people from the physical slavery in Egypt was but the first step in their emancipation; that he

must now set about to redeem them from their psychological slavery; he must train them; he must discipline them in the art of freedom; and so he leads them to the foot of Mt. Sinai and gives them a law, so that through the law and within the law they may become free men.

But four hundred years of slavery cannot be eradicated in a day, or a month, or a year. That accursed heritage remains with the people. Slaves will not only turn against themselves, their own interest, their own ideals, their own leaders, but they will turn against their own God. And the moment Moses leaves them they turn and make unto themselves a golden calf, which was the symbol, for them, of Egypt, of Egypt's idolatry, and of Egypt's slavery. And Moses then realized that this people, tainted with the curse of slavery, can never become a free people and can never be permitted to enter a free land; and so the decree is issued: "In this desert shall ye perish", - a whole generation of them, and for forty years Moses leads them across the burning sands of that endless wilderness, from one oasis to another, and from one hostile tribe to another, for forty long and dreadful years, until that "generation of the wilderness" who knew Pharaoh and knew slavery and knew the fleshpots of Egypt and knew the sound of chains, perished. Their children were born in freedom, who did not know the lash of the taskmaster and the cringing psychology of the

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slave. Their children, now grown to manhood, were ready to enter the promised land.

That is the second theme of the Passover,-- the theme of freedom and emancipation; what it means to be free, what the obligations of freedom are, and how desperately one must struggle throughout his days to achieve real freedom. And the third theme of the Passover is a personality, one of the most dramatic, one of the most heroic, surely, one of the most colossal figures of all time--Moses. And the spirit of Moses and the epic of Moses hovered over this festival of Passover. Jews are not given to celebrate the birth days of great men, or the anniversaries of their dead. The work of a man is his monument; and yet we cannot think of Passover without Moses; and what a strange and beautiful and moving story that is, the story of Moses. A child cast upon the waves of the Nile, a prince who leaves the palace to return to the slave quarters of his brethern to help them; an avenger who slays the Egyptian whom he finds beating a weak and labor-exhausted brother of his; an exile who becomes a shepherd; a dreamer who sees God in a burning bush, and hears the mandate to return to Egypt and face death and suffering in order to bring forth his people from slavery; a leader who arouses his people from slavery to win freedom; a spokesman, a tribune of his people before Pharaoh and his court; an emancipator leading out the hosts

from darkness to light, from slavery to freedom, from sorrow to rejoicing; a law-giver at Mt. Sinai; a warrior through forty years in the wilderness, fighting to save his people, a sorely tried and harassed man, so often abused, so often misunderstood, crushed by his burdens and yet always the patient, loving father and shepherd of his people; a lonely man on the top of Mt. Nebo, straining his old, tired eyes to catch sight of the promised land into which he will never enter. What a marvelously moving story that is, the story of Moses, a giant radiant personality, whose refulgent rays illumine the world to this day.

That is the third theme of Passover.

One is spring, a nature resurrected; the other is freedom and a people redeemed; the third is Moses, the first revolutionist of humanity; the great law-giver of mankind; the builder of an eternal people; the loving shepherd of Israel.

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The Saga of the Exodus.

Sermon 301

1. Three distinct themes are woven into the immortal saga of the Passover: An event - the liberation of an enslaved people. A hero - the colossal figure of Moses and an occasion - Spring - and the resurrection of nature. Each theme by itself would make an ^{magnificent} story and a festival. The three combined make of the Passover a truly unique & unrepeatable holiday.

2. The spirit of Spring breathes thru it - and it is a joyous festival. The genius of the Spring decreed that the Song of Songs - the most perfect love ~~lyric~~ of all literature - shall be recited ~~in~~ on Passover - For it is of radiant nature that the song sings:

~~I send thee away,~~

Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.

For lo, the winter is past

The rain is over & gone

The flowers appear on the earth

The time of singing is come

And the voice of the turtle is heard in our land

The fig-tree putteth forth her green figs,

And the vines in blossom give forth their fragrance

Arise, my love, my fair one, & come away -

~~Real~~ Urban dwellers in the machine-made cities
of stone, hard surfaces, and artificiality
are beginning to miss the warmth of the earth.
Perhaps an advancing civilization will discover
how to keep food fields warm to the touch
heart of man, leaving them with the rest &
harmony of ~~the~~ ^{vast, unpopulated} ~~unpopulated~~ cities. (Dust)

5. With the breath of earth & sky, sun & rain
is in our Passover Festival - and it keeps hope
and waking with it. It reminds us that
outside, beyond our fires & shops, & hard
shuts, and rails & wires; beyond our jobs and
tasks & the furrows of our well-ordered,
busy & yet somehow monotonous lives - there
stretch the endless plains, ^{of God} and the eternal
mountains ~~of the East~~, the rivers flow
on - and the soft clouds ^{in the sky} and all things grow.
~~Nature's patient, silent, infinite variety, infinite patience, infinite~~
~~infinite possibility.~~ ^{infinite possibility.} ~~all there - but there~~
is joy in the thought, and hope and
a vast humility.

6. The 2nd theme of Passover - is an historic event.
Here a people endured for 4 centuries, thrown off
the yoke of bondage & emancipated Israel.
© The Eg. Exodus is the first recorded rebellion
against tyranny & slavery - It ~~was~~ ^{became} the symbol

and the battle-cry for all future ~~revolutions~~ ^{revolutions of the} own
Rev. Huxley found inspiration in the saga, The Exodus
— and the real ~~role~~ of the newly formed Great Am
which was first presented had on the other side
the picture of Moses leading the children of Israel
out of Egypt. The Pharaoh in Egypt ^{was} then
seen in the role of the children of Israel ^{in bridge} — and
their hated king as a new Pharaoh, and thus depicted
as an escape from Egypt.

(2) One of the most desirable things in life is
freedom. It is perhaps the highest goal of human effort.
It is one of the most difficult things to ~~achieve~~ ^{achieve} and
even more difficult to use properly, when achieved.
This is true of nations as well as of individuals —
Freedom is not an endowment, the human race
but an achievement. Men are not born free —
except in the very limited sense, these people
who are born into a free government. Freedom
comes with knowledge — and men are not born
wise or experienced, or trained. But ignorant,
unexperienced and untrained. In such people
freedom is only a blind groping, along unknown
ways, for the ~~fulfillment~~ ^{gratification} of their elementary desires &
appetites. It is so with nations. A people may
become formally free through revolution. It can
become actually free only through education. It
is easier to ~~the~~ cast off the chains of the body
than the chains of the soul — ~~There are vast~~