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Series IV: Sermons, 1914-1963, undated.

Reel	Box	Folder
152	54	346

What to remember on Memorial Day, 1929.

Western Reserve Historical Society 10825 East Boulevard, Cleveland, Ohio 44106 (216) 721-5722 wrhs.org American Jewish Archives 3101 Clifton Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio 45220 (513) 487-3000 AmericanJewishArchives.org "WHAT TO REMEMBER ON MEMORIAL DAY." RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER. THE TEMPLE, SUNDAY MORNING, MAY 26, 1929, CLEVELAND, OHIO.







Memorial Day, my friends, is a day set aside in loving tribute to the memory of those who, in the days of great tribulation, were not found wanting. On Memorial Day our nation lays its wreaths of affection and tribute on the graves of those who died in the great Civil War for the preservation of our Union; on this day the nation honors those fast thinning ranks of the Grand Army of the Republic, which once heard the call of Father Abraham and heroically responded; and on Memorial Day, too, our nation honors the heoric dead of all of its wars, on land and on sea, at home and abroad.

Now it is altogether helpful, spiritually stimulating, to pause in the midst of the rush and the hurry and tumult of our daily lives, and to think, if only for a brief moment, of those who loved life so dearly that they were willing to lay down their lives in order to make life more beautiful. To think of the departed ones is to find ourselves ennobled. We return from the borderland of memory chastened, to the perspectives of life a bit better set, focused. When men give up the rich red blood of their youth for the sake of an ideal; when young men whose lives are glamourous with rich expectancy, lay down these lives in order that some new and nobler covenant may be written among the children of men, there is a challenge in all this for all who survive and for all who are moved by memories.

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Memorial Day, my friends, commemorates not only the deathlessness of the heroes but also, and perhaps more so, the deathlessness of the ideals for which these heroes fought. Memorial Day brings to mind this great sustaining thought: that the ideals which drive men to the supreme sacrifices are enduring and indestructible. The ideal of freedom, for example, which was the driving force of the Civil War, the ideal of the political equality of all peoples, the ideal of the emancipation of all those enslaved by unjust laws, that ideal had been frustrated and thwarted for generations, thwarted by legal enactments and judicial decisions; that ideal had been bitterly fought by word and pen and sword; that ideal passed through four bloody wars; that ideal had its martyrs, -- its Garrisons and its Lincolns. But that ideal triumphed in the end, as every great ideal for which men are ready to lay down their lives is destined to triumph in the end; and in that thought there is tremendous hope, sustenance and comfort for human beings.

We ourselves may be broken by life; we ourselves may be victimized by all the tragic accidents of the world; we may be spent and broken and scrapped, but the ideals for which we live, the things we aspire to achieve, the levels we aspire to reach, these things are eternal as God is eternal.

That is one of the things we ought to remember on Memorial Day, and this other thing, namely,

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that war, while it may clear the jungle and prepare the way for building, does not of itself build. War is not a constructive enterprise; war solves no problem; it creates problems. The great Civil War was fought to emancipate the slaves. It was not the direct cause of the war, but certainly the indirect cause of the war. The slaves were politically emancipated as a result of the victory of the North, and yet only by the widest stretch of the imagination can we say that the millions of Negroes in the United States were really emancipated by the Civil War. A moral, legal, political emancipation was granted to them , which, too, by the way, was in the course of time curbed. Real emancipation, real equality, real freedom, the millions of Negroes in the United States will have to achieve through the long, patient, almost heart-breaking years to come.

A spiritual gain can never be achieved through the mouth of a canon or at the spear point of war. It takes building, slow, patient building. It takes the accumulative labors of tens of thousands of people over long stretches of time; it takes thinking and planning and sacrificial loyalty to achieve a real spiritual gain for mankind. Wars do not achieve these things. The last world war, in which some 65,000 of our finest young men were killed, in which more than a quarter of a million of our finest young men were wounded and mutilated, in which ten millions of God's beautiful children were slain,--the

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last great war, too, was to achieve some spiritual gains for mankind, -- the extension of freedom, self-determination, the safeguarding of democracy. And the war for these ideals was actually won, and yet only by the widest stretch of the imagination will one maintain today, ten years after the war, that these things have been actually achieved.

War cannot bring them to pass. It is by soul sweat and mind sweat, it is by the laboring of the human spirit, in times of peace, and through long generations, through experimentation, through courage, through initiative, through sacrifice, that the human race can ever hope to achieve these goals of life. And so perhaps this is the second thing we ought to remember on Memorial Day: that war, if it serves any purpose, is never an end but a means, and mankind is fast learning the lesson that even as a means war is unnecessary.

And perhaps on Memorial Day we should remember some of the great, simple, homely eternal truths which the immortal figure of the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln, sought to engrave upon the hearts of the American people. We have had no philosopher of democracy as keen, as incisive, as Abraham Lincoln,--this man who grew up from the soil of American life; this man who was earth of its earth and blood of its blood; this man who had all the roughness and all the ruggedness of American democracy, along with all its strength and all its sublimity, this

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man, himself a common man fashioned in the image of divinity, who understood the common man, gave to the American people a creed, a freedom, a democracy which, to my mind, holds true in our own day, and thus continues to hold good in the days to come. He knew the limitations of democracy, did Abraham Lincoln; he understood its danger, but he also understood its indispensable quality and its inevitableness in the lives of future generations. Over and over again Abraham Lincoln speaks of "the good old central ideas ." And by these good old central ideas , of course, he meant human equality and freedom.

He had faith in them. Many of us are fast beginning to lose our faith in these good old central ideas. We have entered a new era in the development of America, -- great prosperity, great wealth, which have brought with them some of the effeminate qualities of culture. Many of us are becoming cynical about these ideals of human quality and freedom; many of us are questioning the dogma of democracy. Abraham Lincoln believed profoundly and unswervingly in the good old central ideas. He said, when questioned whether democracy can ever triumph in the world, "We can do it. The human heart is with us. God is with us. We shall again be able to declare, not that all states as states are equal, nor yet that all citizens as citizens are

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equal, but to renew the broader, better declaration, including the both of these, and much more, -- that all men are created equal."

Whenever he saw his people drifting away from these good old central ideas, swiftly and sharply he brought them back to them. Once he declared: "We are not what we have been. When we were of the political slaves of King George and wanted to be free, we called the maxim that 'all men who are created equal' a selfevident truth, but now when we are grown fat and have lost all dread of being slaves ourselves, we have become so greedy to become masters that we call the same maxim a self-evident lie. The Fourth of July has not yet quite dwindled away; it is still a great day,--for burning fire crackers:"

Abraham Lincoln knew the dangers which beset free government, and he warned his people against the slow, insidious invasion of freedom. A people does not lose its freedom suddenly, overnight. A people that loosely permits itself to fritter away its freedom little by little, to make concessions for the sake of expediency, over a long period of time, suddenly awakens to the disillusionment and realization that it has that loosely enthralled and enshackled itself, ensalved itself, lost its charter of freedom.

And Abraham Lincoln warned his people, a

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warning that holds good in our own day: "If the safeguards of liberty are broken down, as is now attempted, when they have made things of free negroes, how long, think you, before they begin to make things of poor white men? Be not deceived. The founder of the democratic party declared that all men were created equal. His successor in the office has written the word 'white' before 'men,' making it read 'all white men are created equal.' Pray will or may not the Know-Nothings, if they should get into power, add the word 'Protestant' making it read 'all Protestant White men are equal.'"?

What marvelous perspicacity this man had, and how he could look into the future with a prophetic eye: We have had in our own day hosts of men and women who arose in the name of America and the name of the Father of our country, to demand that only Protestant white men shall have a share and a voice in our government; that all others who may live and toil here and build this great republic are interlopers, aliens, don't belong here.

Someone has said, and the phrase has become

trite through repetition, that eternal vigilence is the price of liberty; but there is no more apt phrase which can condense this truth so pointedly enunciated by Abraham Lincoln,--eternal vigilence. Throughout this land today there are minorities, highly organized and well financed, of determined and fanatical peoples, who,

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for the sake of serving some hobby of theirs, political or religious or what not, wish, by law, to enslave men, to deprive them of their freedom, to superimpose their will upon the American people. And many of us are so sunk in the obesity of our prosperity, and so concerned, so absorbed in our own business, that we pay little heed to these attempts which are being made. It is a slow, insidious attempt to check, to curb, to narrow the freedom which is the birthright of the American people.

And, lastly, Abraham Lincoln, the saint of American democracy, the one great spirit which rises from the Civil War, perhaps the one great gift of the human personality which the American people has given to mankind, knew that the greatest foe to human freedom is religious intolerance, because nothing so plumbs the depths of a man, nothing reaches down so deep into the almost primitive, atavistic instincts and passions of a man as religious passions. When these are aroused men permit nothing, no scruples, to stand in their way. The bloodiest wars of all times have been waged in the name of religious convictions and religious ideals, because religion seems to give a sanction to human brutality when it lets itself loose in war.

Abraham Lincoln warned his people, -- and that warning should be sounded today and in the years to come, -that unless they learn to differ in matters of religion,

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amicably to tolerate one another, they will sooner or later come to distrust one another and to hate one another, and sooner or later the magnificent experiment of human beings living together in a free government will be destroyed. And so he said, in an effort to keep our government secular: "The legitimate powers of government extend to such acts only as are injurious to others, but it does me no injury if my neighbor had twenty gods or no gods. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg. Constraint may make him worse by making him a hypocrite, but it will never make him a truer man. It may fix him obstinately in his error, but it will not cure him. It is error alone which needs the support of government; truth can stand by itself. Subject opinion to coercion, and whom will you make your inquisitor? Why. fallible men, -- men governed by bad passions, by public as well as by private reasons. And why subject him to coercion to produce uniformity? But is uniformity of opinion desirable any more than uniformity of face or stature? And then as there is danger that the large man may beat the small, make these one size by limiting the family? But stretching the latter, difference of opinion is advantageous in religion; the several sects perform the office of a censor over each other. Is uniformity attainable? Millions of innocent men, women and children since the

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introduction of Christianity, have been burnt and maimed and imprisoned, yet we have not advanced one inch towards uniformity. What has been the effect of coercion? To make one-half the world fools and the other half hypocrites. * * *

Really, a remarkable statement, -- direct, pointed, meaty, as all of Lincoln's comments on life and men and government were. That is agreat lesson, my friends, which we ought to remember on Memorial Day, and carry with us into our lives through the year. There is growing up in our land, as a result of the industrialization of our life, a mechanization of everything, a clamor for uniformity. Somehow we want all men in matters of opinion to think alike and to act alike and to speak alike. We are suspicious of the man who differs. The man who dares to challenge the hordes, who dares to express an opinion not held by the majority, is looked upon with great suspicion and distrust, and in moments and hours of crises he is looked upon as the enemy of society. And yet it is frequently, my friends, these very people who dare to be different, who dare to be independent in thought and judgment when the mass is carried away by the fury of an emotion or a passion, -- it is very often the few men who face contumely and mockery and martyrdom in opposing the majority, it is very often

these men who are the pioneers of the new day, the heroes of a new civilization.

In this day, when all things are being subjected to an external uniformity and conformity, because the machine demands it, let us make a determined effort to be tolerant of differences in opinion, in judgment, in outlook, in attitude, nay, more, let us try to foster individuality in thought and in judgment. War and war times make necessary rigid discipline, but peace ought to make possible, for the sake of the flowering of a noble and beautiful civilization, the free, untrammeled development of human beings, each according to his native bent, to his innate capacities, true to himself, to the image of his own God in him.

Let us not try to coerce opinion, to be intolerant of those who in matters of economics, of equality, differ from the rest of us. And let us try to remember, finally, my friends, on this Memorial Day, the good old central ideals which were once embodied in that immortal document which America gave to mankind, -- the Declaration of Independence, the doctrine which we read too seldom and live by almost not at all, the doctrine to which Lincoln and the leaders of the Civil War and the leaders of the World War in our own land constantly referred, a document which has been the clarion call of revolutionaries in the last 150 years of all those who tried to break the shackles and to emancipate human beings

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from the disabilities of tyrants and aggressors, -- "We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal." Self-evident. A dogma, an article of faith requiring no proof, perhaps impossible of proof, but like all the dynamic impulses of life, real, perceived intuitively by the human race, not requiring proof.

We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men,--white and black and poor and rich,--all men, the favored and the disfavored,--all men, friend and enemy, Christian and Jew, Mohammedan and Buddhist,--all men are created equal. Not equal in physical endowments, not equal in mental endowments, but equal as regards their right to live, to fulfill their destiny, to establish themselves upon this throne of God; equal as regards their right to seek opportunity, equal as regards those inalienable rights, as the Declaration puts it, with which they were endowed by their Creator; the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

That last is a great phrase---the pursuit of happiness. The right of a man to seek his happiness in the world; his life, his mode of life, which will make him happy. These are good old central ideals which, in this day of sophistication, in this day of pseudo-culture, in this day of cynicism, which is fast developing in our day, in this day of irony, it is well that we cling to, as we cling to the basic, imperishable sanctities of our lives. "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal." A half million young men from the North and the South died upon the fields of battle, underscored with the blood of their hearts these self-evident truths, and ten millions of God's beautiful children very recently again underscored with the rich red blood of their beautiful lives these inalienable rights of men.

They have not yet been achieved, and in order that these sacrifices which have been made, may not have been made in vain, you and I and the generations yet to come, must with consecration work day by day and year by year, each in its sphere of influence, each one among his circle, in his group, and through his calling, work for the ultimate realization of peace, the good old central ideals of mankind.

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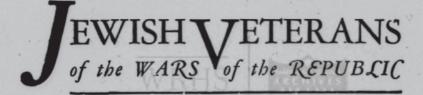
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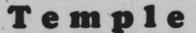


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AT THE



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AMERICA

My country, 'tis of thee, Sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. Land where my fathers died! Land of the Pilgrim's pride! From ev'ry mountain side, Let freedom ring!

Our father's God, to Thee, Author of liberty, To Thee we sing. Long may our land be bright, With freedom's holy light; Protect us by thy might, Great God, our King!

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Program

10:30 A. M.

Organ Prelude	Paul Allen Beymer
Entrance of Veterans Ladies Auxiliary Garretson Car	
To the Colors	Ed. Rubinstein
Blessing of the Colors	Rabbi Abraham Nowak
Service—Union Prayer Book	Page 314—335
Solo-"The Prayer Perfect"-Stenson,	Leona Brown Woodcock

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SPEAKER

RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER

"What to Remember on Memorial Day"

10.00

Anthem "Souls of the	Righteous"-Noble The Temple Choir
Roll Call of Departed	A. I. Hausman
	J. Goldsmith-Ed. Rubinstein
America	Assembly

Assembly Please Remain Standing Until Veterans Leave

10.00

We wish to acknowldege our appreciation of the assistance given by The Temple and its choir, the Temple on the Heights, the Euclid Avenue Temple, Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver, Rabbi Abraham Nowak, County Commissioner J. H. Harris, Park Director Newman, the Jewish Federation and Comrade C. E. Herst, President Municipal Council U. S. W. V.

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10.000

- 1. Man born of a woman is short of days, and sated with harrowing trouble
- 2. Like a flower he cometh forth, and is cut down: and he fleeth like a shadow, and remaineth not.
- 3. And yet on such a one dost thou open thy eyes, and me thou bringest into judgment with thee?
- 4. Who can make a clean thing out of an unclean? not one (thing).
 - 5. Seeing that his days are determined, the number of his months are (fixed) with thee, that thou hast set his bounds which he cannot pass.
 - 6. Turn thyself from him that he may recover from his pain, and be able to enjoy like a hired laborer his day.
 - 7. For there is hope for the tree: if it be cut down, it may still sprout again, while its young shoot will not cease.
 - 8. If even its root become old in the earth, and its stock die in the dust:
- 9. Yet through the scent of water will it flourish (again), and produce boughs as though it were newly planted.
- 10. But man dieth, and lieth powerless: yea, the son of earth departeth and where is he?
- 11. The waters run off from the sea, and the river faileth and drieth up.
- 12. So doth man lie down, and riseth not; till the heavens be no more, they will not awake, and will not be roused out of their sleep.
- and that thou mightest conceal me, until thy wrath be appeased, that 13. Oh who would grant that thou mightest hide me in the nether world, thou mightest set for me a fixed time, and remember me then!
- 14. Or, when a man dieth, will he live again? all the days of my time of service would I then wait, till (the hour of) my release were come.
- 15. Do thou call, and I will truly answer thee: have a desire for the work of thy hands.
- 16. Yet now thou numberest my stpes; and thou waitest not with (the punishment of) my sin.
- 17. Sealed up in a bag is my transgression, and thou yet addest to my iniquity.
- 18. But truly a falling mountain will crumble, and (even) a rock is moved out of its place.
- 19. The water weareth out stones: thou sweepest away their fragments (like) the dust of the earth; and so thou destroyest the hope of man.
- 20. Thou assailest him with might without ceasing, till he passeth away; thou changest his countenance, and sendest him off.
- 21. His children acquire honor, but he knoweth it not: and they are esteemed little, but he perceiveth nothing of them.
- 22. But his body, on him, feeleth pain, and his soul will mourn for him.

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