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My holiday of joy - a Passover sermon, 1931.

"MY HOLIDAY OF JOY"

A Passover Sermon

BY

RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER
AT THE TEMPLE, SUNDAY,
APRIL 5th, 1931

At this season of the year at least three great historic religions are celebrating one of their great festivals. The Jews are celebrating Passover, the Christians are celebrating Easter and the Mohhamedans are celebrating the Festival of Nebi Nusa.

Whatever be the historical reason given by the worshippers in each one of these three religions to bring forth the celebration, back of the historical reasons is one fact which they share in common, namely, the celebration of Spring, the coming Spring, - of resurrected life, - the new year.

There is joy in the hearts of all men when Spring comes quite regardless of their religion or of their race. They are glad Winter is over, the cold Winter and ice and sharp winds and snow, dead nature. Now Spring is here and the warm sun covers the earth, blossoms appear, with their fragrance, the birds come back with their songs. A man's heart grows lighter in the Spring, new hopes appear that perhaps the new year will be better than the old year. There is a throb and a climbing sap and the surge of a new impulse throughout all nature and in the heart of man.

No wonder then, that man wants to celebrate at this season of the year; that he wants in some fitting ritual

to dramatize these sensations of gladness and hope which he experiences. No wonder then that all the peoples of antiquity placed their myths of resurrected Gods at this season of the year. The myths of the Open Dam, of Unlocked Nature centered around Spring naturally.

The Festival of Easter anti-dated by far the calendar and it is no wonder either that our people placed its Festival of Emancipation, of Freedom, at this season of the year. For the Festival of the Unleavened Bread, the Festival of the Pascal Lamb anti-dated by far the Exodus from Egypt.

In our Passover there is a double measure of joy because the holiday has a two-fold significance. Passover as you well know, is an agricultural festival, one of the three festivals of the Pilgrims, - Shabuoth, Succoth and Passover, when our ancestors in Palestine would make a pilgrimage to the holy Temple at these three seasons of the year, bringing with them their offerings, the yield of their flock, their orchard and their field as thanksgiving offerings to God.

It was an agricultural festival. It was also an historical festival (quote Hebrew) "A memorial of the coming out of Egypt."

When on Passover our ancestors made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Their hearts rejoiced. Passover was a joyous festival. It was not a Bacchanalian revel such as was given many peoples at this season of the year. It was a festival of whole-hearted, wholesome joy. The

Pilgrims who found themselves in Jerusalem on the week of Passover were happy. God's warm sun was poured over the hills of Jerusalem, the golden dome of the Temple glittered in the radiance of the sun. The streets were thronged with gaily attired men who brought their gladsome offerings to God. They sang for joy. And in the precincts of the Temple, itself, was heard the voice of the harp and the psaltery, the song of the priests and the Levites who offered thanks unto God for His bountiful gifts to his people Israel.

And back in Gallilee, in the valley of Jezreel, many mountain passes of the Hills of Judea they knew that the splendid days of Spring had come:

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 in blossom give forth
their fragrance.

That was the Song of Songs which their hearts sang out at this season of the year. How good life was. How good God was to them. How fine and precious it was to belong to God's people whom he had redeemed from the slavery of the Egyptians. Hallelulah. Sing unto the Lord.

Now much of this spirit of joy of ancient times has been handed down as a legacy to us in the Seder service of our homes. In a sense the Seder service takes the place of the holiday

service in the Temple in Jerusalem, of the holiday of the Pascal sacrifice in the Temple.

The Temple no longer stands, the priest and Levite have finished their songs, the people of Israel is now scattered over the four corners of the earth; it is no longer an agricultural people, but rather an urban people. But the echoes of the joy of Passover still reverberate through the holiday even to this day, especially in the Seder ceremony, - the home is bright with light, the family is reunited, the humdrum man of the shop, on the night of Passover becomes a king and his wife a queen and his children princes of the royal dynasty (quote Hebrew)
"This night we all drink wine. We are all important."

The story of the Exodus is recounted with pride. Here is the bread of affliction which our fathers ate in the land of Egypt. Here is the symbol of the bitterness which was their lot in the land of bondage. Here is this brown mixture, the Charosis, which reminds us of the labor of our forefathers, in brick and mortar. Here dramatically and proudly the story of the great revolution and the great emancipation is recounted. The children sit about. They ask questions. They sing. They frolic. There is joy in the air and joy in the hearts of men.

The stranger must not be forgotten. We were strangers in the land of Egypt. We know the heart of the stranger, therefore we open wide the doors (quote (Hebrew)
anyone who is in need is welcome to come in. No joy unless it be shared, no feast unless the hungry first partake of it. Joy can be and frequently

is very selfish. Jewish joy must not be selfish. Remember Abraham who stood at the door of his tent in the heat of the day waiting for strangers to come by so that he could run to meet them and welcome them into his tent and serve them food and drink. (quote Hebrew)

"Love the stranger, offer him hospitality and kindness, remember how you stood in need of kindness and compassion when you were strangers in the land of Egypt therefore love the stranger." That is Jewish precept and Jewish lore.

Then the Agada is read. From the old pages of the Agada there springs to life another joy, the joy of hope. The joy of hope! (quote Hebrew) This year we are slaves, next year we shall be free. This year in Egypt slaves, under the lash of the task-master, next year perhaps freedom, perhaps the Promised Land. This year exiles in Babylon, next year perhaps a great restoration. This year a dark gloomy ghetto lane, branded with the yellow badge, hunted, persecuted, driven, hated, this year, next year, ah, next year, who knows, perhaps freedom, rights, restored human dignity. This year under the heel of the Czars, pogroms, Siberia, next year - and so the story ran throughout the ages. Hope, always hope.

Set aside a cup for Elijah on your Seder table for Elijah is the forerunner of the Messiah. Any day he may come, the Redeemer, the Emancipator - hope!

We built the cities of Pithom and Ramsees for the Egyptians. Those cities are now in ruin. We built the Pyramids, they are now the home of the dead. We are alive! We hung our hearts on the willow branches besides the waters of Babylon. We could not sing God's

song on stranger land. Babylon is dead. We are alive. We were gally slaves in the hands of the Romans, we were beaten, harried slaves working in their salt mines. We were held in chains in the triumphant procession in the ark of Titus. Rome is dead. We are alive! The czars and the Romonoffs huddled us into holes, treated us as pariahs and outcasts, massacred us, the foot-prints of our sons and daughters were in the snow wastes of Siberia - the Romonoffs are dead. Israel is alive! Hope!

(quote Hebrew) "Fear not for I am with thee. When thou wilt go through the fires thou wilt not be burned; when thou passest through the waters, they wilt not overcome thee. Fear not."

I sometimes think that something of the immortality of Spring, something of the imperishable youthfulness of Spring has entered the soul of Israel.

We always associate age with the Jew. We always represent the Jew as a long-bearded, patriot. Why? Why not associate youth with the Jew? Why do we always associate the spirit of lamentation with the Jew? Was there not the spirit of "The Song of Songs" light and youth, love and adventure?

I like to think of Israel as young (quote Hebrew)
"Israel is young and I love him." Israel likened itself not as an old man. The most challenging image or symbol of Israel given in the Bible is that of the Phoenix, the bird that was burned and rose again from its ashes, perpetual rejuvenation, perpetual ressurection. (quote Hebrew)
"Thou shalt renew thy youth as the phoenix."

When you think of Abraham, for example, you undoubtedly have a mental picture of him as an old man, in long-flowing garments, probably a hundred and twenty years old. Why not think of Abraham when he was a young man? Abraham when he was one hundred and twenty was ready to die, but Abraham when he was a young man in the city of Ur in the Chaldees, when his mind was teeming and throbbing with new ideas. One of the things about his youth was that when the new conviction overpowered him, when he sought a greater truth than that which was known to the Babylonians, that truth siezed hold of him with all the passions of youth and he set forth, young, adventurous, left his fathers' home, went to a strange, distant, unknown land to found a new religion and a new race. Why not think of Abraham in that light and if you do, you will understand something about the Jew.

When you think of Moses you also think of him as an old man, don't you? Sometimes, an old man with horns, rather an image of Michaelangelo's Moses, with a long beard running clear down to his toes. When Moses was old he was ready to lay down his life's task. Why not think of Moses when he was a young prince in the palace of the Pharoes? Why not think of him when as a young prince he went down to see his brothers groaning under the yoke of the masters and rising in fury he slew the Egyptians? Why not think of him as the passionate revolutionist, the first great revolutionist of history? When you do that you will understand Moses better. You will also understand Moses' people better.

When you think of David, you probably also think of him as an old king. Why not think of David as a young man, as the friend

of Jonathan, the prince, singer of beautiful songs, who played upon his harp and spoke with the spirits that harassed the soul of King Saul. Why not think of him as the conqueror of the Philistines? Think of him as a man who by his courage, fashioned dynasties which endured for centuries. When you think of David as a young man you will understand David better and David's people better.

The Prophets of Israel were not men bent with age, crushed with the burden of years, who went about sorrowed and lamenting the fate of mankind. Such men do not create the ruling ideals of humanity. They were men of youth, courage, faith, power, strength.

And our poets, The Gabirols and the Halevis did not sing old men's chants.

I wish we could in our mind bring back a bit of the (Hebrew) into our concepts of Israel because if Israel was old three thousand years ago it would not have survived to this day. If you want proof of the imperishable youthfulness of this people look about you.

On the tomb of Sir Christopher Wren is inscribed these famous words. "If you require a monument for this man's life, a testimony, look about you, there is this Cathedral."

If you want proof of the youthfulness of the life eternal of Israel, look about you. Seventeen millions of us. After two thousand years of agony, wandering, pogroms, discriminations, seventeen millions forging to the forefront in every human enterprise, the sciences, the arts, the industries, commerce of the world, creating values, spiritual

intellectual and physical, in a most amazing and astounding proportion. Youth, why Israel is a miracle of youth in the world.

So there is the joy of hope and the joy of youth in our holiday of Passover. There is also the joy of freedom.

Whenever I read the Hagada I seem to hear the distant clank of broken, grating chains, I seem to hear the sigh of relief that comes from thousands of hearts who for the first time straighten out their bent backs burdened with labor and for the first time look up at the sun. The coming forth from Egypt of our forefathers was the first great revolution known in the history of the world, a revolution much more important than the American or the French or the recent Russian revolution. Much more of human history came to depend upon that one effort. Historians frequently fail to recognize it.

Not long ago a prominent magazine held a contest to determine what were the ten most important dates in history and very prominent men like H. G. Wells, etc. were asked to submit what they regarded as the ten most important dates in the history of mankind and some gave dates like the date of the Code of Hammurapi or the beginning of the Egyptian calendar or the reign of Charlemagne or Luther or the burning of John Huss, but none of them gave the date of the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt and yet if the Jews had remained slaves in Egypt there would have been no Judaism and there would have

been no Old Testament and no New Testament. There would have been no Jesus, no Luther and no John Huss. How narrow historians can be.

The Exodus gave to mankind two things. It gave them the people of Israel and all that that people produced of spiritual and moral values for mankind.

If it is true that Western European civilization has been influenced by two main currents, the Greek and the Hebrew, then the Exodus made possible one of the two major, molding forces of the whole of Western European civilization. So that the watch-night of the Lord, the Passover eve, was in a sense the watch-night of the whole of mankind. (quote Hebrew
"And the Exodus gave to mankind the ideal of human freedom, the conception of revolution against tyranny, the conception of the right of men to live their own lives and to control their own destinies. And that conception entered into the stream of human thought to this day. And to this day whenever and wherever people struggle to break off the chains of servitude, whether political or economic servitude, incidentally they turn to the story of the Exodus and hold that up as an example and as a challenge of their revolution.

That's what we gave to the revolutionary world. Every pulpit in the thirteen colonies from which the cause of American independence was championed and the tyranny of King George renounced, every pulpit rang with the story of the Exodus. In fact the first seal of the United States which was suggested to George Washington, the first official seal of the United States of America, had on one of its sides

a representation of Moses leading the children of Israel out of Egypt. Freedom from tyrrany!

That was a Jewish contribution, tyrrany from mankind, tyranny of the king, tyrrany of the state. In the holy Roman Empire in the days of the Caesars, every nation submitted to king worship. Every people set up a bust of an Emperor in its most sacred shrine and worshipped the emperor as a symbol of Rome. Every people except one - the Jews. They refused. There is no one to be worshipped, king, ruler, class, state, no one and no thing is to be worshipped, except God.

And so we have today, four thousand years after the event, thousands of miles removed from where the event took place, in a city by a strange lake, unknown to our forefathers who crossed the Red Sea, we have a hundred thousand Jews celebrating the Festival of Passover and catching a little of that joy which is associated with it, - the joy of Spring, reborn nature, the joy of hope, the joy of youth, the joy of freedom.

May God grant that Israel may continue to celebrate this Festival of Passover throughout all future time. May God grant a universal Festival of Freedom of all peoples. Amen.

1. At This season - Back of diff. hist. reasons.

2. There is joy in the hearts of men when Sp. comes. The long
 - Now the sun - Blossoms - Saps - Birds return -
 - Heart grows lighter - New hopes - No wonder men ^{celebrate} want
 ① No wonder people place their myths -

3. There is a double-measure of joy - agricultural - historical
 755 -

① On the 3 festivals, our ancestors - Jews - offerings
 They were joyous feasts - Bacchanalia - The pulpit
 who shouted - were filled with joy - God's warm sun -
 Back home - Sweet days of Spring - 712011 -
 - The heart was full to overflow - How good is life -
 How kind - How precious - 712011 - 712011 - 712011
712011 is told.

4. Much of that spirit of joy - Feeder - Whisk in a sense,
 - No longer Temple - But Echoes - The house is
 bright with light - family - drum-drum man - 712011
 712011 - Story of Exodus - Here is Broad Affliction -
 Children -

① And the Stranger - "Wa wa - We know - open wide
 the door - 712011 - Never a joy - Joy may
 be selfish - Abraham - 712011 712011

5. And from pages of Agada - beatitude yamoth joz - Hope
 - 328 אלה - This Year in Egypt... - Babyl - Spain
 - 278 אלה אלה אלה אלה -
 - Set aside a Cup for Eljah - Messiah
Hope! we built Pithon - ruins! Pyramids - ^{Harp}
הלל לך אלהים

6. Something of the immortality of Spring in Soul of Israel -
 - We associate Age with Jew - why not youth?
 - Too much אלה - Not enough people in
 - Flute to think - אלה אלה אלה אלה אלה אלה אלה אלה
 - Phoenix - אלה אלה אלה אלה אלה אלה אלה אלה
 (1) Abraham (2) Moses (3) David -
Prophets - Gabriel, Haniel did not say Old Men cland
 X Proof - Chr. Men - Si Monumentum requiris, circumspice

7. There is joy, Spring - But also Freedom - Sound of ~~be~~
chains breaking! - First Revolution! American
 - A Turning Point! - Much new imp. of R. in Pers. Rev.
 - Important Dates - But not Epochs!
 - The Pillars of - of Mankind.
 8. Exodus gave Israel to mankind - Other Nations & Jews
 (1) Ideal & Modern - 13 columns - Roman Empire

10- And so 4000 yrs. after the event- Israel celebrates same Passover-
and deem same sense & joy

- (1) Joy & Spring - a renaissance nature
- (2) " " Emancipation - joy in continuing struggle for Emanc.
- (3) " " Hope - underlying - in coming day when ^{the universal} ~~all men~~ ^{will be able to say} Passover, Freedom for all men will
be celebrated—

