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The advantages and disadvantages of being a Jew, 1932.

"THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF
BEING A JEW"

BY

RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER
THE TEMPLE, SUNDAY, JAN.
17th, 1932.

When I came to write the address of this morning, "The Advantages and Disadvantages of being a Jew" I found that I had great difficulty in discovering what the disadvantages are. I could enumerate any number of advantages, but I couldn't find any disadvantages until I realized that every condition in life, however desirable, brings with it as attendant circumstances, certain disadvantages, - that no condition is quite perfect.

To be rich is desirable, of course. Everybody strives to be rich. And yet the sages of mankind have warned men of the enticements and weakening influences of wealth. It is as difficult for the rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven as for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle.

To be learned is a desirable condition of life much to be preferred to ignorance and yet one of the great sages of the Bible declared: (Hebrew) "He who increases knowledge increases headaches."

To be a ruler is more preferable than to be a subject. Yet a great poet warned us that: "Uneasy rests the head that rules the

crown." The position of rulership brings with it certain definite disadvantages.

And so it is with all conditions of life. To belong to any group, any nation, or any race is to take on the advantages and the disadvantages of those conditions in which the group, race or nation finds itself at the given moment, as well as its history and its political, economic and social setting.

It is not particularly advantageous, if one were to strike a balance, for a person to be a German today with all the economic upheavals of that country with the burden of defeat upon the people. Yet I am inclined to think that the German in Germany today would not wish to be a Frenchman any more than a Frenchman would want to be an Englishman.

A loyal member of a group does not weigh the advantages against the disadvantages of belonging to a group. He is not an accountant. He is not calculating. He is a member of a group and he is resolved to endure and attempt to surmount the difficulties. It is only the weaker members of a group that desert it when they find that the minuses are greater than the pluses.

Now the Jew has never been of the calculating kind. He has never audited his account with destiny. He has never set up the advantages of being a Jew as against the disadvantages. Not that he did not know, - was not aware, of the definite deprivations and liabilities of being a Jew. He was always a realist. He faced the

facts of his own life as well as the facts about him, quite soberly and realistically. He was never given to ecstatic emotionalism. He did not eagerly pursue or welcome masterdom. He did not enjoy that satisfaction of self-affliction. He was a normal person who loved life. He loved the joy and the laughter of life. He believed that God who loves men, also loves their laughter. He hated pain, hated humiliation. He was very proud and sensitive as a people. Some people welcome pain. Some people love to be humiliated. There is a definite psychosis, a definite morbidity which craves self-humiliation and self-torment. But this was never characteristic of the Jew.

Nevertheless, though his life held all these things which the Jew abhorred, pain, persecution, humiliation, he never attempted to flee from his destiny. He never really lamented his fate.

No group was ever so self-searching as the Jewish people. You know that, of course. No people is as self-analytical as the Jewish people, particularly in recent years. Every cranny of the Jewish soul every Jewish experience, every nuance of the Jewish character has been analyzed by the Jew himself. Nobody has ever said as biting things about the Jew as the Jew himself. The Jew has a gift of being able to objectivize himself, to see himself in the offing, as it were, and to watch himself living and moving in the world. So that the Jew knows

every advantage there is in being a Jew and every disadvantage. And yet he was not tempted to strike a balance and to calculate that the disadvantages exceeded the advantages and therefore the business of being a Jew should be liquidated.

Let me enumerate some of the disadvantages, which I had so much trouble in discovering.

First of all to belong to a minority group is to be disadvantaged. A minority group is always subjected to the will or whims of the dominant majority. It can never fully control its own destiny. It must cater. It must compromise. It must plead. It must intercede with the controlling majority. A minority group must always be satisfied with less than what it is legitimately entitled to of human rights and privileges. It is frequently used as a scape-goat for the sins and failures of the majority. Every country which was defeated in the last war blamed the Jew for its defeat.

The condition of belonging to a minority group forces upon the members of that group an inferiority complex, namely that the discriminations practiced against the group are justified because of the inherent faults and deficiencies of the members of the minority group. So that frequently self-respect, self-pride and

dignity are burned up, consumed within certain members of a minority group. And that drives the weak in that group to become sycophants, climbers and toadies and drives others to seek escape from the frustrations of the group, to assimilation, to self-abnegation, to camouflage their identity and to sail under false colors.

These are all disadvantages which accrue to members who belong to a minority group, such as the Jewish group.

Again they are compelled to bear a greater share of group responsibility than the individual who belongs to the majority. The individual who belongs to the majority is never blamed for the acts of the members within the dominant group. He is held for his own good deeds or mis-deeds. If, however, he belongs to the minority, he is held responsible not only for his deeds but for the deeds of the other members of that group. If there happens to be a Jewish criminal, the whole group is held responsible.

Then, too, belonging to a minority group frequently inhibits one from pursuing his ideals to their utmost for fear of being misunderstood and bringing down upon the entire group the hatred of the entire majority.

The Jewish people were the first people who preached world peace. Twenty-seven hundred years ago our prophets were the first men who projected in the conscience of the world the thought that war is a sin and a crime and that the idea of life was to abolish war: "Nation shall not learn war anymore."

We were the first people pledged to a program of international peace and yet as a people in the last generation or two we have played a very insignificant role in the world of bringing about world peace, certainly not greater or any more significant than the role of any other people. Why? Because the preaching of peace on the part of the Jew, especially in critical times, in times of tension, frequently brings down upon the Jew the charge of being unpatriotic, an alien, a foreigner, not interested in the fate of his country. So that frequently the Jew who would like to follow this idea and preach it from the housetops as being his idea, hesitates because he is afraid of the evil consequences which will come, not merely to himself, but to the group.

Because he preached liberalism in Germany in the last few decades of the century the whole anti-semitic movement began. Bismark who became a traitor to the liberal forces of Germany after he exploited them, found in the Jew his greatest enemy. Consequently he turned against them as Jews and initiated or stimulated a vast anti-Jewish propaganda.

Now as regards the material disadvantages of being a Jew, I don't have to dwell on them. You know them quite as well as I do. There are two kinds of physical persecution - the pogroms which persisted all through the ages and persecutions which take many

kinds of manifestations, desecration, the ghetto, the yellow badge, exile, legal disabilities, massacres, economic boycotts, the numurus clausus, all the vile medievalism which comes with hatred of the minority.

Then there is what Prof. calls the higher anti-semitism that takes the form of pseudo metaphysic preaching of hate against the Jew, because the Jew belongs to an inferior race, the literary anti-Jewish crusades. That by the way, is not entirely of recent origin. We find it two thousand years ago. The great Jewish historian Josephus was compelled to write a defense of the Jew against the anti-semit^{ism} of his day, "Against Apion." The same charges as Hitler is now making against Jews in Germany, namely sedition, that the Jews hate the non-Jews, that the Jews like to have the blood of non-Jewish children for religious purposes; that they produced no great men, etc. etc., anti-semitic small change. You already find that in the writings of Josephus.

I say I will not expatiate upon these forms of disadvantages. You know them well. But there is one other which I wish to speak of and that is the political homelessness of the Jew as a people, of lacking a strong national center. That is the great disadvantage of the Jew today. Of lacking a place where the Jew is a majority and therefore a place where the Jew can live his own life without interference with the people about him; a place

where he can produce his own culture undiluted, unadulterated. We haven't that as yet. And because we are politically homeless, because our national life is not secure in any territory, we have to spend too much of our racial energy in the simple elementary task of survival. That's a great disadvantage. Too much of our energy as a people has to go into the mere task of survival, of not being destroyed. The American or the Frenchman doesn't have that problem. His problem is what to do with his life. Our problem is how to preserve our life. And that takes up too much of our time and our energy.

What are the advantages then of being a Jew? I guess you have trouble to find them.

In the first place while there are distinct disadvantages in belonging to a minority there are also distinct advantages. To belong to a minority is to be challenged, to be compelled to be on the alert all the time; to be forced to excell. To belong to a discriminated or persecuted minority is to belong to a group which is consistently being winnowed and the weaker are being weeded out and the stronger survive. There is such a thing as the survival of the fittest. The Jew has been forced to pass through a millennial experience of the most exacting kind which eliminated the weak and preserved only the strong.

To belong to a discriminated minority is to understand other minorities and therefore to have tolerance. "Know ye the soul of the stranger for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt" says the Bible. The Jew is always with the underdog because he is an underdog himself.

I have been frequently asked, why as a Rabbi do you always speak for the disadvantaged, the poor and the needy. Aren't there other people in the world? Of course there are. But they can take care of themselves. I know what it is to be disadvantaged politically or economically or socially, therefore I am supremely sympathetic to others in a similar plight.

The ancient Greeks disliked strangers. They were given to what Plato taught, 'not only to hate but to dispell the stranger from their midst.' The Jew was taught to welcome the stranger, "know ye the soul of the stranger because ye were strangers."

To belong to the Jewish people is to belong to what has been called "The Veteran of History" to a people which has survived some four thousand years and therefore ~~to~~ a people which must have in it a spiritual, intellectual wholesomeness to have been able to survive. And it has survived not as a museum people, as

the ancient Greeks, a broken torso here an arm there. It has survived as a living organism and is today as prolific, maybe more so, than it was in the thousand years preceding.

Now it is good to belong to a people whose roots reach down to such nourishing, fructifying soil. It's a healthy people to belong to. And it is good to belong to an old people which is antiquated because old people have the ancient wisdom that young people do not have. The Jews, like the people of China, have a patient wisdom which comes only with the age. They are never given to that impetuosity, that ruthless simplicity, that primitive belligerency, that passionate naivete which go with young people who haven't cut their wisdom teeth. Though individual members of the Jewish people may be high strung, the Jewish people, as a people, seldom gets excited. They are patient, they deliberate; they have seen much, have learned much.

It is good also to belong to a people which has been so amazingly creative through the ages. We have given mankind not only the Bible, the greatest literature of mankind, but through the ages we were enabled to give to the world men of leadership, pathfinders in almost every department of human life, -science, the arts, philosophy and literature. If you have any doubt about it, make up a list for your own satisfaction of the leaders of

world thought today in the year 1932 and you will be amazed to find how many of those are Jewish names. Those who write today the text books of the great movements of the world are in many instances Jews.

And then too, my friends, I believe that it is good to belong to a people which has always revered learning, a people of students, scholars and books. The Jew has always placed the scholar above the high priest, certainly above the man of wealth.

The Jew was the first people to have instituted a universal system of education. Before the fall of the Temple, more than two thousand years ago, the Jew had built up in Palestine a universal system of education. Europe didn't do it until less than a thousand years ago.

Whereas the church through the middle ages suppressed the Bible, didn't want laymen to read the Book, the Jew said (quote Hebrew) "Teach it dilligently unto thy children," to every child, especially to the children of the poor. The Jewish idea of study was not to study for a profession. You ask a young man today what he is studying for and he will say he is studying to be something, a doctor a lawyer, an engineer. The Jew who studied in the Yeshiva and in the academy did not study for any profession.

It was study for the sake of study. In fact the Rabbis warned the people (quote Hebrew) "Make not the Torah a spade with which to dig." And to this day there is nothing the Jew respects as much as intellectual brilliance, genius. And a people which has this dominant position is a good people to belong to because it is mind which moves the world.

And lastly it is good to belong to an international people. After we have made allowances for the disadvantages of belonging to a people which is territorially not integrated, there also ~~XXXXXX~~ are advantages. You gain the world outlook. You come in contact with other points of view. You are continually stimulated and challenged. An isolated people is usually a backward people. It is a people who comes in contact with other people and exchanges ideas that is usually the progressive people of the world. And if the Jew today is a progressive citizen it is due to the fact that he has been an international people, a people which was not isolated in any one spot of the world, but has travelled and communed and touched every spot in every ~~XXXXXX~~ section of the world. Because the Jew is an international people he is the enemy of national chauvenism and the champion of world peace and because the Jew is an international people he was able to be the cultural intermediary between peoples.

Lastly it is good to belong to a people which gave

the world its God and its morality. Whatever the Western world has today of religion and ethics is the gift of the Jews.

You will recall a few weeks ago I quoted the words of an eminent professor of economics and sociology who said that the Western world is facing collapse and the only thing that could save Western civilization is Judaism. For Judaism, possesses, or the Jewish people possess three things which are indispensable to the survival of Western civilization. A God idea which is the only God idea acceptable to modern man, a practical, every day morality only the Jewish morality possesses and the sense of social solidarity, of social responsibility, human interdependence which Judaism preached.

And so our gifts are not antiquarian gifts but vital needs of mankind in the year 1932.

Now it is good to belong to a people that is still so vital and essentially needed in the world and whose great contributions are daily sought after.

And so, my friends, we close our stock taking. There you have the advantages and the disadvantages of being a Jew. But the Jew has not been a bookkeeper, striking balances. He has been the keeper of The Book. He has a way of life which he loves and which he thinks is the best way of life for a man. He has an ancient wisdom which he loves to follow through light and through darkness, through

joy and through sorrow. He has a destiny set for him by his ancient seers which draws him like a magnet, irresistible, and he is ready to go through all the vicissitudes and misseration which life may hold for him for the sake of this vision, this way of life. For him it is the satisfaction of being a Jew.

The strong among us do not wish to exchange.

The strong among our people, through the ages much darker than ours were able to say (quote Hebrew) "Look down Oh Lord from heaven and see that we have become the mocker of peoples, we have been led like sheep to a slaughter. We have become the object of shame." (Hebrew) "But in spite of it we have not forgotten Thy name. Do not forget us."

That's how strong we are. That's the secret of Jewish survival.

The weak, the weak, always fall by the wayside. We have always lost them. We are losing them now. They prefer the tinsel and glamour, the social advantages of the other camp. They will leave us. The strong remain and it is with the strong that the eternal caravan which is the Jewish people, marches on.

AN ABSTRACT OF THE ADDRESS BY
RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER
ON

"THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF BEING A JEW"

SUNDAY, JANUARY 17th, 1932.

The Jew belongs to a minority group everywhere and this in many ways is a disadvantage. Minorities are subject to the will and the whims of the dominant majorities. They never fully control their own destinies. They must be satisfied with less than their legitimate rights. They must cater and compromise. Frequently they are made the scape-goats for the misfortunes and failures of the majorities. They serve as a convenient vicarious atonement for their sins and failures.

To belong to a minority group which is discriminated against over a long period of time is to be in danger of developing an inferiority complex. Self respect and pride are burned up in the furnace of continued degradation. Members of a minority group are in danger of being driven to self-abnegation, to camouflage their identity and to sail under false colors. Frequently they are inhibited from pursuing their ideals for fear of incurring the hostility of the majority.

To belong to a minority group is also to bear a greater sense of group responsibility than otherwise. Within the dominant group each individual is judged by his own acts. But the members of the minority group are held to an implacable group responsibility. The whole group is blamed for the sins of any member of it.

Physical persecution and political and economic disabilities have been and in many countries still are among the most apparent disadvantages of Jewish life.

One of the great disadvantages of Jewish life has been its political homelessness, its lack of a strong national center and therefore the lack of unity and of cultural autonomy. Too much energy has to be consumed in the task of mere survival.

But there are also definite advantages in belonging to a minority group. Its members are constantly challenged. They must be on the alert. They are compelled to excell. To have an equal break they must be twice as good.

Prolonged persecution and discrimination against the Jew have weeded out the weak. No people has been subjected to such a struggle for survival as the Jew.

It is an advantage to belong to such a people which is "The Veteran of History": to have survived so long it must be a physically, intellectually and spiritually healthy people. After four thousand years it is not decadent. The Jew today is not a museum people like the Greeks. It has come down through the centuries as a living organism and is today more productive than at any time in the last twenty centuries. It is good to have one's roots in such a racial soil.

It is good to belong to an ancient people which knows the wisdom and patience of age from which the wild weeds of rashness, impetuosity, primitive belligerency, passionate naivete, ruthless simplicity have been plucked by the hands of time. It is an advantage to belong to a people that has been intellectually creative through the ages, one which has given the Western Civilization its Bible, its God and its morality and one which today has its brilliant sons as leaders in almost every field of human endeavor, - in the arts as well as in the sciences.

It is an advantage to belong to a people which has always revered learning

the people which placed the scholar above the ruler and the high priest, which established the first universal system of education in the world and which praised study for its own sake and not as a means to an end; a people whose sons are today crowding the centers of learning of the world avid for knowledge.

It is an advantage to belong to an international people for that brings the international outlook and the sense of world community. Because the Jew has been through the ages an international people he was able to be the cultural intermediary between peoples, the enemy of national chauvenism and the champion of world peace.

But whatever the advantages or disadvantages of being a Jew may have been or are today, the Jew has never sought to strike a balance or to weigh the one against the other. He has never attempted to keep books. He has been the keeper of The Book. He loved his way of life and the vision which he followed through darkness and through light. The weak members of the group always fell by the wayside, the strong always carried on -

And so the eternal caravan moved on.

2
~~was he the keeper of~~ The Book.

4. The Jew was always a realist. He faced the facts of his life soberly, frankly. ~~and~~ There was no glamour of ecstatic emotionalism nor eager martyrdom, nor morbid delight in self affliction. As all times he was normal, sane. ^{was not ascetic. He believed that "God who loves men, loves this 'glorious too'"} He loved life. He hated pain, suffering, poverty, humiliation. He was proud and sensitive. He was ambitious and enterprising. Some people welcome pain and relish humiliation - not so the Jew. Nevertheless though his life was full of all qualities and conditions which he hated, though destiny forced upon him the unwelcome role of martyr, of the despised and rejected, he never fled from his destiny, and never lamented the fact that he was a Jew.

5. No group has been so self-searching and self-analytical. Particularly in recent years. Every cranny of the Jewish soul and every phase of Jewish experience has been probed into, dissected. More than any other people the Jew can objectively himself, stand off and observe himself in every situation. Indulge in unbounded criticism, cynicism

jest and admiration of himself. No people has uttered more lying things about the Jew than the Jew himself.

b. So that the Jew knows full well what the advantages and disadvantages in his life in the world are.

(A) To be a minority is to be disadvantaged. Minorities are subject to the will and the whims of majorities. They never fully control their own destinies, they have to be pleaders and intercessors. They must be satisfied with less than their legitimate rights - They must cater and compromise

Frequently they are made the scape-goats ^{over} for the misfortunes of the majority. They serve as the convenient vicarious atonement for the sins and the failures of the dominant group.

This frequently forces upon members of the minority a inferiority complex. They come to think that the discriminations practices against them are really due to their own faults. It burns up and destroys self-respect and one's pride. It makes of people sycophants and climbers. It drives the more ambitious to assimilation.

All the countries which were defeated in the
World War ascribed their down-fall to the Jew-



4.
to desert their group, to camouflage their identity, to sail under false colors.

B. To belong to a minority is to bear a greater share of group responsibility than otherwise. Within the dominant group each individual is judged on the basis of his own acts. But the members of a minority group are held to an implacable group responsibility. The whole group is blamed for the sins of each member by the group. The individual vices are at once generalized. The Jewish criminal is always related to his group, while the Jewish man of genius frequently is not. The dominant group being eager to claim him as its own.

D. The physical disadvantages of Jewish life need not be expatiated upon. They are apparent on all sides. - In forms - I physical persecution - Ukraine - Hitler - age old - Ghetto - economic bay - Cott. - numerous clauses - social isolation - Race.

2. Second form. Higher anti-semitism - Race. Preaching of hate - Literary crusades - persisted thru' the ages - Josephus -

C. Belonging to a minority group frequently inhibits an individual from pursuing his ideals to the utmost - Ideals that run counter to the prevalent conception of the majority -

Jews and world peace -

Jews and liberalism - German antisemitism
(Bismarck. pseudo-ethnology
(France - Dreyfus - Junkers



5.
E. Political Homelessness - lack of strong national centers - lack of unity of culture - Too much energy consumed in problem of survival.

7) Advantages of belonging to a minority -
(a) Challenge - on the alert, German Jerry 1%
Compelled to excel -

(b.) Discrimination acts as a winnowing -

xenelasia c. Discrimination of survival of fittest all others eliminated.
teaching tolerance 225 225

8.) Belong to a people, which is the Believer of history
Toughest of peoples - Must have inner strength
to have survived - A physically, intellectually,
and spiritually healthy people - not decadent
after 4000 years - not a museum people, like
Greece etc. - giant fossils - more prolific and
creative today than the past - Good to have
ones roots in such a soil.

9) Belonging to a people which becomes the
wisdom and patience of age - from which
the wild weeds of rashness, impetuosity,
primitive belligerency, passionate narrowness,
reckless simplicity have been plucked by
the hand of time - (Chinese)

6.
10/ Belonging to a marvelously creative people.
Bible - to this day - leaders - writing great
texts of man kind -

11/ Belonging to a people which has always
revered learning - a people of students, scholars
and books - greatest average power -

Scholar above high priest - above the rest -
1st universal system of education
Church suppressed Bible, Judaism, P.W.Y
Study for its own sake - only this
1377 - why did they study?

To this day crowding universities -

12/ Belonging to an international people -
International outlook - World community
world - his school - African
A cultural intermediary -

The enemy of race nationalism
The champion of world peace -

13/ Belonging to a people which gave religion
and morality to world
Jewish God idea - Jewish moral code -

14/ And so we close our stock taking - It should be
remembered however - the Jew has never been a book-
keeper - He was the keeper of The Book - He loved his

way of life - He had a precious vision -
which he followed - through darkness and light.
A destiny which drew him as a magnet -
He would not abjure it for all the material
ease and comfort. When 63.7 The strong
said ← The weak have always fallen by the
wayside - and so. the eternal caravan moves on -



1/ Had difficulty -

2/ Every condition -

Possibly - riches

learned - ignorant

rules - subject

② To belong to any group - entails - German - will not
exchange - Do not calculate - weigh - surmount
only weather decent - minuses

(2) Jew was calculated - audited -

3/ Jew always a realist -

Faced facts - soberly

Glamour of ecstatic Enot - Eager martyrdom - world

normal - loved life - (God).

Hated Pain - Same people wisdom -

nevertheless, tho his life - never fled his destiny -

nor lamented

4/ No Group so self searching - Part in recent

years - Every craving - probed -

- objectivize

- uttered more biting

- So that he knows advantages -

5/ To belong to a Minority is to be disadvantaged

① M. subject to will

- never fully control - pleaders - cats - crashers

- satisfied with his

- Scapegoats - all defeated countries

- True inferiority complex

- burns up self respect - Toddies, climbers
- more ambition - assimilation - deut - camouflages

(2) To belong to M- bears greater share of group responsibility
 - within dominant group - Jewish criminal

(3) " " inhibits a man from pursuing ideals
Jews & World Peace
" & Liberalism - Bismark.

(4) The material disadvantages used as a
 - 2 kinds (1) Phys. persecution of William Hitler -
Sheth - Economic Boycott - minor classes
social isolation

(2) Higher Ambitions - Preaching & Hartz -
to the very crusade - Josephine - Apr in
 (1) Sedition (2) Heck non-jew (3) he put them (4) blood
accusations -

(5) Political Homogeneity - lack of strong nat. center -
lack of unity & culture
- too much then consumed - Survival