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### **MS-4787: Abba Hillel Silver Papers, 1902-1989.**

Series IV: Sermons, 1914-1963, undated.

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Oil for the Lamps of the World, 1936.

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OIL FOR THE LAMPS OF MANKIND

A Chanukah Sermon



By

Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver

At

The Temple

On

Sunday morning, December 13, 1936



My dear Friends:

This joyous Festival of Chanukah which the household of Israel celebrates today throughout the world calls attention to some of the great principles of life which Israel defended through the ages and which principles became the sacred oil of the lamps of mankind. In the record which you have read of the events which were responsible for the Festival of Chanukah you will not find a mere military victory, the kind of victory with which the pages of human history are filled. The history of mankind is replete with tarnished pomp and rusty bravery, of battles and victories which in their day seemed so tremendously important that people erected monuments to commemorate their happenings.

The struggle which is the story of Chanukah involved some of the most important issues of mankind and <sup>in</sup> that struggle between the Maccabees and Antiochus was involved not merely the survival of Israel, not merely the faith of Judaism but the faith of all that stemmed out of it. Christianity, for example and the whole Judeo-Christian tradition molded and determined the culture and civilization of the world. Had Antiochus, for example, been successful, had his principles prevailed that "they all should be one people" that all the nations and peoples in the vast Empire over which he held sway should become one uniform monolithic people, each people surrender its laws, its customs, its own peculiar customs and all become merged or submerged in one uniform religion and culture of Paganism and of a kind of Aryanism which was represented by the Empire - I say, if Antiochus had prevailed in his struggle, Judaism would have disappeared. Her great monotheism would have disappeared and the one people



and the one religion which preserved for future generations monotheism, prophecy, the idealism of the Bible would have disappeared and the whole turn of history would have been different. And that Maccabean principle that was threatened and which was fought for was not incidental but one of the major battles of mankind.

Now what were these principles ~~for~~ which this small company of Maccabeans defended? They are not unknown to you. They are the principles which the prophets of Israel proclaimed in the sacred text of the Bible, and which have survived to this day - God, the spiritual order of the Universe, law and justice and freedom and brotherhood and peace - those were the seven branches of the Menorah fashioned out of the solid gold substance of Monotheism which Israel kindled thousands of years ago and which Israel is endeavoring to keep alive in the present day when so many lamps of mankind are being extinguished.

It was Paganism which derived from polytheism and idolatry and which was built upon materialism and force and slavery and tyranny and hatred of the stranger and war. It was this Paganism which threatened these great principles of Judaism and in those terrible battles fought in the plains and hills of Judea - these two world forces came into mortal combat - the light of the Menorah and the darkness of Paganism. Praised be God for the light which again vanquished the darkness, for the spirit of Israel which triumphed.



My friends, as I look on these Chanukah lights, slender tapers which have somehow kept their flame steady through the long dark centuries, I can't help but think of that imperishable dream which was born into the soul of our people which has made us what we are and which has given us our strength and our suffering, which has made us a unique and peculiar people in the history of the world.

We had a dream. It was a dream which had to do with the end of days, with a new world order, a dream which concerned the coming of a day when oppression and tyranny will cease on the earth, when hatred will vanish, when every man will sit under his vine and fig tree, a dream of mankind regenerated, a dream of a world of peace and compassion and justice and good will. That dream was somehow born in the soul of Israel. It took hold of the spirit and mind of our people. That dream has survived to this day.

Now there were other people who dreamed of Utopia. Plato wrote in his "Republic" of an ideal society. There were others who conceived of an order of Society which would be noble and just.

Israel was not unique in that. Israel was unique in that to them this Utopia was not an idle dream or an empty day-dream of an Utopia. For the Jew Utopia was progress. It was a challenge. He was called on to exert himself to the utmost to make it real. His sacrifice was incidental. He was to become a builder of a perfect order of Society - this Kingdom of Heaven. He reconciled himself to the fate of his people. Men despised and hated and spat upon him in order to make <sup>real</sup> this dream of a perfect society. That is the uniqueness



about this dream which has been the age-old dream. And that dream has never let us rest. Even when we sink into a dream of complacency that dream troubles our sleep. That is why throughout the ages, Israel sent out her children to champion all liberal movements. There is not a single liberal movement, social, political or economic where the sons of Israel are not found in the vanguard. There are those who hate lamps of light. There are those who fear candle power. All these forces have always hated the Jews, not the physical Jew, but the spirit which is the Jew, this spirit which is represented by the Chanukah lights, by the oil for the lamps of mankind. Wherever you will find militarists, as in Germany today, who would like to detract the attention of the nation, the first people they turn against are the Jews because they know that Jews have always, by instinct, hated war, despised war. Wherever you find reactionaries striking to suppress the masses, break the back of labor, the first people turned against are the Jews. Why Hitler, Goebbels, were afraid of the spirit of the Jews, they were afraid of the dream which has been the precious oil in the lamps of Israel.

The American poet, Whittier, has a beautiful phrase in one of his poems. He speaks of those people who see the common forms of life with unanointed eyes, the people who see the common forms of life but who see them with "unanointed eyes". Unanointed eyes see only things, not thru or into the heart of things, not into the spiritual reality behind physical appearances, cannot see God in the burning bush.



Israel has given mankind oil to anoint the eyes so that mankind can see a new order of things, a new reality, so that mankind can see through hate into love, through war into peace, through oppression into justice, through the hatred of the stranger into brotherhood. That is the whole difference.

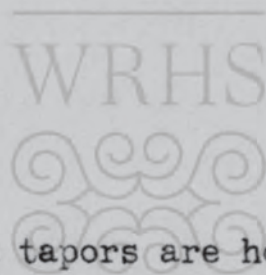
That was Israel's gift to mankind - oil for illumination. Whenever I look on the Chanukah lights, I can't help but see some of the strong characteristics of my people emphasized and re-emphasized - Israel's utter disregard for number, Israel's distrust of size, Israel's tremendous faith and its amazing confidence in the invincibility of an idea.

If you read the story of Chanukah found in the Apocrypha you will find a phrase echoed and re-echoed - the Jews were a small company, few in number. The generals of Antiochus had thousands of trained soldiers to fight with. When the great day of battle arrives, the people turned to Judas and said "How shall we be able, being so few, to fight against so great a multitude and so strong?" And Judas answered: "It is no hard matter for many to be shut up in the hands of a few; and with the God of heaven it is all one, to deliver with a great multitude, or a small company."

The nations of modern times are clamoring for, shouting for increased population, larger and greater and better armies. Strength as an advantage. is not in number. Size is oftentimes as great a handicap. Progress, human progress, history tells us, is always the story of minorities - never a majority - sometimes it is the story of one man, one family. Mattathias illustrates that. When the people came to him and said to him, Why should you hold out against the king's commandments



Mattathias answered and spoke with a loud voice: "Though all the nations that are under the King's dominion obey him - and fall away every one from the religion of their fathers, and give consent to his commandments - yet will I and my sons and my brethren walk in the covenant of our fathers. God forbid that we should forsake the land and the ordinances. We will not hearken to the King's words, to go from our religion either on the right hand, or the left." ...  
That is the genius of Israel.



These little tapers are holy. They are mankind's holy fires. There are harsh winds in the world that are likely to blow them out. There is a new spirit of paganism in the world, a new spirit of totalitarianism and brutality and injustice and war in the world. No one can foretell the future but if we have in us, my friends, something of the spirit of the Maccabees we will keep kindling these Chanukah lights and out of their little fires and small flames there will come great fires. They will illumine in the coming days the sanctuary of mankind.

If we have faith, the faith which was the faith of Mattathias, we shall live to see the day, my friends, when there will be a new temple dedicated and in that temple mankind will kindle anew those lights for which we gave of our spirit and of our suffering, of the spirit of life of the universal moral law, of freedom and justice and brotherhood and peace.



"Then M. answered and spoke with a loud voice: Tho all the nations that are under the King's dominion obey him - and fall away every one from the religion of their fathers, and give consent to his commandments - yet will I and my sons and my brethern walk in the covenant of our fathers. God forbid that we should forsake the land and the ordinances. We will not hearken to the King's words, to go from our religion either on the right hand, or the left."





1/ Ch. calls attention - developed - oil.

Here is no more military victory -

" " Struggle - involved - Thermopole - hung -

Had Antiochus - "that all should be one people" -

Here Great principles - challenged

2/ What were these principles? Lamps? Prophets

(1) God (2) The Spiritual Order (3) Universal Moral Law

(4) Freedom (5) Justice (6) Brotherhood (7) Peace

UN - 7 Branches -

1st job

All these threatened - Paganism - founded -

(1) Materialism (2) Force (3) Slavery (4) War (5) Hatred

3/ There was a dream - prophetic - repeated -  noble

UN - "They shall not lust"

No Utopia - "idle singer of an ~~idle~~ empty day"

Plato - Dynamic program - UN - UN

UN - philosophy - UN

4/ Dream - not let us rest - Forget - Troubled

Young - Fascists - Lamps - Militarists - Labor

5/ Whether - cannot see - 1st job -



1/ Send H.U. pamphlet to Loewen  
2/ Add Loewen name to Paterson's list  
3/









6. Whithers - speaks, then who view the concave form, left "with unaided eyes" - unaided eyes see only things, not them - or into heart of things - cannot see the sp. reality behind the physical appearance - cannot see food in the burning bush - Israel had a plan, job - to avenge eyes, wanted to that would see them was to pass, then hate to let, then slavery to freedom, then oppression to justice; then

7. I never read story, 2 ideas so central to Is. sp. out work - forcibly reemphasized

(1) Its utter disregard of numbers. Its distinct of size - its amazing confidence in the unreliability of an idea - if it is true.

(1) Outnumbered "a mighty host, the army only vs. small company"

(a) Beth Bath & Beth Horon

How shall we be able, being so few, to fight against so great a multitude & so strong!" (Judith)

(b) Encourages

"Fear ye not their multitude, neither be ye afraid, their assault."

8. Not unproven with Judas -

(1) Jonathan - Philistine. And he was with him

(2) Gideon - Midianites. And he was with him  
32,000 / 300.

(3) And he was with him

(4) And he was with him







Then M<sup>o</sup> answered and spake with a loud voice: Tho all the nations  
that are under the Kings dominion obey him - and put away every  
one from the religion, their fathers, and give consent to his  
commandments - yet will I, and my sons and my brethren  
walk in the covenant of our fathers. God forbid that we  
should forsake the law and the ordinances. We will not  
hearken to the Kings words, to go from our religion,  
either on the right hand, or the left."

"And they fought with cheerfulness the battle of Israel -

① Serap - a prince, the army - "a mighty host of the  
king's army"

"Judas went forth to meet him with a small company

"How shall we be able, being so few, to fight against  
so great a multitude and so strong

"To destroy the root and the strength of Israel"

Antiochus - son to Ptolemy

② Lysias

Ptolemy  
Nicanor  
Georgios

40,000 footmen  
7,000 horsemen

} at Ecbatana - "buy the children of  
Israel for slaves"



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