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A Tribute to President Roosevelt, 1938.

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A TRIBUTE TO PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT  
For His Superb Moral Leadership in an Hour of Crisis  
and Breakdown

By  
Dr. Abba Hillel Silver

At  
The Temple

On  
Sunday Morning, December 4, 1938



My Friends: One of the heartening things in these days of moral chaos and breakdown has been the superb morale of the President of the United States. This chosen leader of the greatest democracy of the world today has through these years of confusion not stooped to the sort of compromise of moral principles affecting international relationships which unfortunately have characterized so many of the leaders, heads of governments, in the Western World today. He has not stooped to that sort of chicanery, double-dealing which has been leading the world in the last few years to what appears to be inevitable disaster. The President of the United States may not have been effective in determining the course of mankind away from chaos but at least he has kept high and clean and unspotted the banner of Humanity and Civilization. That is a great deal, because as long as there are banners gleaming over the heads of mankind, unsullied, towards which the wearied eyes of mankind may look up in their hour of tribulation, so long is there hope for mankind.

In a world tragically bereft of great statesmanship, in a world in which great nations are being led by little men, in every sense of the word, here is a man who has stuck undeviatingly to fundamentals in international relationships, the fundamentals of decent civilized living among people, here is one man who has not betrayed the embattled ways of mankind even as he has not betrayed the great traditions of his own great continent.

I believe that a word of tribute and appreciation should be spoken to such a man. You know that in a democracy we are very niggardly in our praise of public servants, especially in periods of economic disturbances and unsettlement, when regardless of what is



being done, so much remains undone that people are prone to become impatient and embittered and visit upon the shoulders of the Chief Executive all the sins of commission and omission, in fact all their own sins and blunders. This is especially true in such a time of economic unrest when certain measures advocated to improve a situation do not happen to coincide with the specific interests of certain classes, then the members of those classes are prone to become violent in their opposition and to lose all sense of proportion. Then they are prone to begin to hate with a black hate and to say that nothing that this man has ever done or is likely to do has any merit whatsoever. And they are prone to take this whole complex problem, this whole complex of economic difficulties which confront our nation, highly involved, tremendously difficult, they are prone to take this entire composite of economic difficulties and personalize it, stupidly simplify it and reduce it to the shortcomings of one man - the Chief Executive - and to say that if only we can get rid of that one man who is the source of all evil, then salvation is sure to come.

I have heard men speak, as you have undoubtedly heard men speak of the President of the United States, in terms so low and contemptible that I have sometimes wishes that these people would be put for a little time at least, in one of those countries where they have no "Reds", no radicals, no brain-trusters - in a country like Germany or Italy to learn what happens under such circumstances, to see how business in such an ideal state is so regulated, so dominated and controlled that the business man is just a lackey of the state, a brain-truster is without brains and where free speech is so absent



and the right of criticism is so non-existent that a man looks about twice or three times before saying good morning to his neighbor.

I have heard Jews, and you have undoubtedly heard Jews who belong to the same business class - employers - and who take their cues and slogans from the same class of people, from lobbyists, from corporation lawyers, from so called public relation experts who join this chorus of defamation in the most irresponsible and uncontrolled speech and I have sometimes wished, though I am not a cruel man, I have sometimes wished that these men would find themselves for a spell, only for a spell, in a country where there are no Reds, labor agitators, in a country like Nazi Germany, for instance and let them taste the sweetness of that land - how peaceful a country can be that does not suffer from the horrors of the New Deal.

Frankly, I am amazed by the Jews who are so forgetting themselves as to join this snarling, howling pack of irresponsible critics, that they will permit themselves because of what they fondly regard as their economic interests, so to prejudice them against the man who has been championing them, the cause of their people and country, the cause of mankind in this desperate hour.

Are these businessmen, I wonder, these employers so blind as not to understand that their chief problem is not today how to insure for themselves greater profit or less taxes or more income, that their greatest problem today is how to protect themselves against a movement world-wide in scope, directed and financed by one of the greatest nations in the world who is pledged to uproot and destroy them root and branch, that the one man in this world who has risen like a knight in shining armor to defend them and



thereby the cause of America, the democracy of mankind, this man whom they so foolishly and stupidly malign, thereby weakening the prestige one of of/their greatest spokesmen in the world?

Who has spoken, in recent years, as clearly or unmistakably as he has spoken up against religious and racial persecution? Mind you, he is not an individual but an official, a head of a government of one hundred and thirty millions of people. Who has shown greater sympathy and understanding for the plight of refugees than our President? Who has facilitated the coming of refugees into this land more than he? Who has summoned all the nations of the world to discuss this problem of refugees than the President of the United States? What leader in recent weeks, what head of a government saw the unspeakable horrors in Nazi Germany and spoke as frankly as did Franklin Delano Roosevelt?

"The news of the past few days from Germany has deeply shocked public opinion in the United States. Such news from any part of the world would inevitably produce a similar profound reaction among American people in every part of the nation.

"I myself could scarcely believe that such things could occur in a twentieth century civilization.

"With a view to gaining a first-hand picture of the situation in Germany I asked the Secretary of State to order our Ambassador in Berlin to return at once for report and consultation."

Do you know of any other President or head of a government who ordered his Ambassador to return at once, not merely for important consultation but to demonstrate to the nations of the world the moral horror and repulsion of what was happening there? What man, what head of government spoke up and appealed in the name of his government



in behalf of the open doors in Palestine for Jewish refugees and for Jewish settlers as did the President of the United States? Who is the most hated man in Nazi Germany today? The President of the United States and that is the greatest tribute you can pay to the man. Jews, even Jewish businessmen, Jewish employers ought not to forget that.

What is gratifying in this situation is not that President Roosevelt has risen to the defense of the Jews because he especially favors the Jews - not at all! It is his broad humanity, his great love of his fellow men, his fine sense of human brotherhood, justice, decency, sense of beauty and compassion for all men that has prompted him to act in this particular situation in behalf of them. What he has done for the Jews is would be likely to do for other races for other peoples in the world.

My friends, today the voice of President Roosevelt is not only the strongest voice raised in the world in defense of democracy, but I am afraid the only important voice in the world. England and France have abdicated. Since ~~the~~ Munich they have ceased to be nations fighting dictatorship. They have been flirting with dictatorship. The heads of those governments have called on the heads of the public press to please mute attacks on those governments that are headed by dictators, in fact to refrain altogether because we do not wish to antagonize that country which we have just now attempted to appease by throwing to them the remains of one of the noblest democracies in the heart of Europe.

President Roosevelt today remains the one great leader of a great country who is aggressively championing the cause of democracy



against all forms of absolutist dictatorship and tyranny. He is trying today to rally the whole of Latin America in one united front against the Western Hemisphere, from those alien and hostile agents of Fascist and Nazi governments.

He did hope for a united front of the great democracies against the onrush of dictatorship. That has not succeeded because the other democracies have not cooperated. They are talking in terms of peace but sacrificing democracy and the ideals of democracy. Yesterday they celebrated in triumph the appeasement of Munich, a blood sacrifice to appease the modern molochs, the molochs Hitler and Mussolini. They were finally appeased. Two, three days, ago, the whole canard, the whole shame was revealed in the eyes of the people, when in the Chamber in Rome, spontaneously, as it were - and you know how spontaneous things are in dictatorships - just as spontaneous as the smashing of the windows of shops and the burning of temples in Berlin - all the members of the House arose and began to clamor for Tunisia, Corsica, Nice. That is how appeased these hungry lions are. The Popular Front government which arose has so far failed because of the lack of vision, because of the blind leadership and because of the blind followers in those two other democracies in the world.

In October of last year, speaking in Chicago, the President of the United States made an appeal, he was ready to move, backed by Great Britain in a trade blockade against Japan because of its invasion of China. That would have been an act which would have stopped dictatorship in its tracks. England refused to move just as in 1932 she refused to act in the case of Man

I mention these things to you not because I am an apologist for Roosevelt. I am not a political partisan. My interest is never with people as much as with principles. President Roosevelt has made mistakes, some very



serious mistakes in domestic affairs. They are as a result of error of his judgment and none, I am persuaded, are as a result of error of motive. He wanted to accomplish so much in so little time. He tried to introduce so many reforms in such a short space of years. He was perhaps a bit too impatient with the slow rather lumbering democratic process, a little too insistent upon the word "now".

Some wise statesman, many years ago, said that "in statesmanship, to strike too soon is oft to miss a blow." In a democracy you must spend time in educating the people up to a certain view. That process of education is quite as important as the measure itself. In democracies the method is quite as important as the end. Perhaps the President of the United States, in his eagerness to serve his people, to solve the pressing and difficult problems, oftentimes reached out for a shortcut which is not always a classic highway for democratic procedure. He has perhaps kept our nation too long on an emergency basis, too long psychologically mobilized.

Should have, for example, been slower in pain for reconstruction of Supreme Court.

He has perhaps been impatient to opposition in his own party. He sought to drive men out of his party who opposed measures he favored. I recognize these facts, these mistakes. However, I don't know of any many who would have been placed for six critical years in his position who would have done something about that which was done who would not have made errors.

I also know, and I believe that history will credit Mr. Roosevelt with many things achieved, with many things partially achieved which will become part and parcel of the tradition of American life, of the practice of American life in years to come regardless of the party in control.



In 1933, Mr. Roosevelt saved the nation from what someone has called the mental climate of the land. Many of us have forgotten, some intentionally the mental climate of 1933 when Roosevelt was in office. You were facing economic collapse and disaster. You were facing a blank wall of despair. Business houses shut down. Millions of men were being thrown out of employment. The banks were closing. Hopelessness was gripping at the very heart of the American people. Mr. Roosevelt stepped into the situation and almost as if by a miracle there came a sudden surge of confidence, a new hope into American life. People took hold of themselves, and there ensued a period of reorganization, a stabilization, a resumption of activities, a new mood in American life. That will remain to his eternal credit.

During his six years of office, he has endeavored to arouse the conscience of the American people concerning the evils which exist in our economic structure. He has called attention to the abuse of other people's money through speculation, to the unsteadiness of the stock exchange and he has sought to introduce a certain measure of control of that security. He took over the relief problem and envisaged it as a federal problem. It cost a lot but men did not go hungry in the United States in the last six years. Perhaps our country was saved from desperate revolution. He launched public works. They are expensive - slum clearance projects, long over due. He launched the CCC camp project. He took our young people off the streets of the big cities and saved them from becoming gang leaders and racketeers. All of which has been tremendously expensive. But I have yet to hear of a substitute the critics of the President have offered or are offering for this problem.

If industry cannot absorb workers, if industry throws people out of work and thrusts them upon the nation, the nation must take care of



them. He introduced a measure of control over Public Utilities and sought to correct some of the evils of holding companies long over due. He defended the right of the American people to control our own water power and electric power and has saved that vast Tennessee Valley for the American people.

During his administration, one of the most forward steps in humanitarianism was enacted - social security, old age pensions, protection for motherhood, unemployment insurance; an hour and wage measure has been introduced to establish the principle of a minimum living wage for our workers; labor relation acts have been passed aiming to protect the worker in his right of organization and also to establish the machinery for the adjudication of differences between employer and employee. Most of these measures are imperfect. They will need much rectification in the days to come. But that most, if not all of these measures are necessary, and in a democracy inevitable, no one can deny. The direction has been a true one. The movement has been a true movement in the right direction. And I make bold to say that no administration that will ever come into the United States will drastically change them, certainly not void them.

So, in saying a word of tribute and appreciation to a great American, to a great man, I am perfectly free to acknowledge the errors which I believe his office is not entirely free of, but I am also happy to say that facing a tremendous job, this man did not shirk his responsibility. Just as he was not discouraged by his own physical handicaps, so he was not discouraged by multitudinous, terrifically difficult problems which faced this country in the last six years and he has tried to give earnest leadership, courageous leadership to the best of his judgment to America.



And certainly as far as international relations are concerned, he stands so completely shoulder high above anyone in sight in the world today that it makes the heart of the American proud that the United States is being led by a man of his moral character.

So my closing words, my friends, are that I urge you not to stop criticising the President of the United States. It is one of the necessary functions of democracy. I urge you not to cease pointing out wherein in your judgment this measure and that measure may be faulty. Quite the contrary! I urge you not to <sup>join</sup> the party of the President of the United States or to refuse to join this party or that party. I urge that in your criticism you exercise a measure of fairness, judgment, that you do not lose sight of big things. What is of the utmost of importance this hour is that we, you, we Americans and men throughout the world have at the head of this great government, a man who sticks true to fundamentals, upon whom you can rely when basic questions affecting basic questions of humanity are involved. We can all have that confidence proved by his years in office that in Franklin Delano Roosevelt, I say, the American people and the world as a whole, have an inspired spokesman. We hope that sooner or later, because of the leadership of such a man the cause of and peace will be re-established in the habitations of mankind.



1/ One of heartening - in these dark days of chaos & breakdown - superb moral leadership of F.D.R. The chosen leader, the greatest country on earth has not stooped to the darkness, double-dealing and pot. chicanery which have charac. most of the leaders, old world. He may not have been effective in determining the course of events away from chaos - no one else has, for that matter - but he has kept clear, high and unspotted the banner of Humanistic Civilization - for many eyes to see, and take <sup>heart</sup> comfort that a better day may yet come.

In a world largely hostile, great statesmanship - great virtues led by little men - who fuss and stew, and entangle us - (quits) - here is a chief executive - who has understanding, clarity to the fundamentals of civilized life, and the moral obligations of internat. relationships. He has not betrayed the great American traditions in the embattled life of mankind.

2/ A word of tribute & approval. should be spoken to such a man. For a democrat. prone to criticize our public officials. One phrase, except on rare occasions, is invariably. our blame, excessive. Esp. in periods of econ. distress and unsettled ment, when, regardless of what is being done to relieve the situation, so much ~~work~~ remains undone, or not done well, as our frame to be. even better in our impatience, and visit upon the shoulders, the chief Exec. all the sin, <sup>in</sup> commission and omission. Esp. if certain measures of reform a long. ~~happen~~ advocated by the Pub. - happen not to coincide with our own econ. interests or theories - we become violent in our criticism, & are prone to lose our sense, proportion and values. Then nothing which the Pres. has done, is doing or is likely to do, is any good. We begin to look with a real black hate, and the whole complex diff. problem of pol & econ. restoration become <sup>personalized</sup> and stupidly simplified in our minds. ~~with~~ It is all due to one <sup>utterly bad</sup> man - and the salvation will come with the removal from office, that <sup>one</sup> man. ~~the~~

3/ I have heard men speak of the Pres. V. S. - as being so low & contemptible - that he worked for a moment that these men found <sup>for a while</sup> ~~him~~ in some 7. State - where there is no real lead to beate, but where Pres. is so <sup>very</sup> ~~so~~ regulated & controlled, - or, ~~down~~ - that he was - is just a lackey, stoic - and where men



look further around twice before they say - send - down, to their  
neighbors.

I have heard Jews who belong to bus. class and who also follow the  
<sup>+ their slogans</sup> one from the big business lobbyists, cupholders, buyers & pub. relations  
specialists - join in the chorus of hate & defamation - and I am sure  
watch them for a spell in Nazi Germany - to taste the swiftness of  
a land freed from racketeering, labor organizations & agitators and  
all the horrors, the new world.

4). I am amazed that you so far forget even as to join this hallowing <sup>overstep</sup> pack.  
That they know what they boldly assume to be their econ. interests  
above to prejudice them so greatly against a man who has  
championed their cause, the cause, their people, brethren, and the  
cause, humanity so valiantly, so consistently, so admirably.  
Are they blind to fact - that their real problem at the moment is not  
whether they should have greater income taxes profit a <sup>share</sup> ~~less~~ taxes but  
whether a world-wide movement aimed at destroying their root  
and branch shall be checked, shall be kept from our shores - and  
that in this deep struggle facing them & us & the whole human -  
they have had on, the most courageous, and loyal champions and  
defenders -

5). Who has spoken up against Hitlerism etc. more nobly  
" " shown greater sympathy & understanding - victims - refugees -  
" " summoned Evian Conf -  
" " caused to facilitate the coming of Refugees to our country  
" " denounced pub. & rel. persecution as an instrument of hat.  
policy -

What great leader - spoken more courageous words - or acted  
more drastically (Read)

Who has warned both Gov. & Italy - not to discriminate  
ag. Amer. & citizens -



who has interceded - open door - Palestine

who is most hated man in Nazi Land to-day?

- 6/ Jews - ~~the~~ even J. bus. men & employees - ought not to forget this.  
What is putting in all this is not - that R. for Jews - It is  
part, his broad humanity - his unselfish love for justice & fair play -  
his devotion to Am. ideals, liberty, democ. & brotherhood.  
He is equally concerned with the fate of other - non-Jews -  
He is the friend of all men.

- 7/ To-day - strongest single force <sup>only</sup> against Dictatorship in World -  
He is rallying forward Am. to resist F. & N. invasion  
He had hoped to rally F. & B. - in a strong anti-F. front.  
with little success - Today - They let him down -

Chicago Speech - Oct-1937 - Invitation Aggravation - Japan - Econ.  
sanctions - Place Navy & P. Canal Singapore - Stop flow of goods -

Ambassador Wilson - April - Berlin - Conceivable that U.S. would  
come into a future war -

Secy <sup>which</sup> was working denounced Dictators with approval pres.  
Chamberlain & Blenheim - praising - approvement

Recognized Ethiopia - Now "Tunisia" "Corsica" - Mis

His eagerness to cooperate - led him into mistakes

Back then Am. maneuvers (1) Embargo - (2) Austria

(3) Munich - peace plea to Hitler - negotiate - Benes



8/ I am not an apologist for R. - not a partisan politically -  
He has made, what I regard as mistakes in the

Errors in judgment - not motives -

He would like to accomplish so much in so short a time. Too many  
I am impatient. - <sup>reform in too little time - too much emotional security upheaval -</sup> process is slow - one of its virtues - "Now"

Victory Volume  
- Mar. 4-57

Time to persuade & educate a people - majority

"In Statesman's hands, to strike too soon, is apt to miss the blow"  
Left nation too long "on an emergency basis". Mobilized

Supreme Court - Compromising - Stubborn.

- Impatient / Opposition - Purges.

9/ But I also know - and history will record it -

(1) 1933 - saved nation - "changed mental climate, the land"

~~to save the nation~~

(2) Aroused Conscience, Nations - "Other People's Money" & "Sec" - speculation

~~"Forget the Man"~~

(3) Relief - ~~the man~~ Federal Reserve - State Rel. is separate. Cost much  
How. Shaver - Revolution - <sup>Partial</sup> Democ

{ Public Works - { C.C.C. - what substitute?  
{ Slum Clearance { - roadwork  
{ How many projects { projects

(4) Break the stranglehold, the Gold Standard on Am. Currency  
Denominated Am. dollars - placed it on unchangeable gold basis

(5) Union of Control over Public Utilities - attack ends of  
holding companies.

(6) Helped right, Am. people to produce its own water &  
elec. power. - like TVA.

(7) Total Security Measures - Unemployment - Old Age Pensions  
& Ins.

(8) Hours & Wages Act - Minimum Wage. ~~the~~ Long Wage Principle



(9) Labor Relations - negotiations instead of conflict. Right of Org.

10/ Imperfect most of us all. - Direction time - no Admin. will  
grow them

Movement forward!

11/ Is not afraid of size of job.  
Overcame his own phys. handicaps. —

14/ In Conciling Struggle —

Look to the Masses — stay close to basic Principles  
of Humanism

13/ Thank God — in this dark hour — a man — like  
Franklin D. Roosevelt





**FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT**, President of the United States: "The news of the past few days from Germany has deeply shocked public opinion in the United States. Such news from any part of the world would inevitably produce a similar profound reaction among American people in every part of the nation.

"I myself could scarcely believe that such things could occur in a twentieth century civilization.

"With a view to gaining a first-hand picture of the situation in Germany I asked the Secretary of State to order our Ambassador in Berlin to return at once for report and consultation.



"The princes of Zoan are become fools, the princes of Noph are deceived; they have caused Egypt to go astray.. The Lord hath mingled within her a spirit of dizziness. And they have caused Egypt to stagger in every work, as a drunken man staggereth in his vomit".





1/ One of Heartening -

Chosen leader - not stooped - chicanery - double-deal - charlat -

may not have been effective - away from chaos - Banners

In a world tragically bereft - statesmen - (Just) - here is an  
- undeviatingly - fundamentals -

He has not betrayed.

2/ A Word of Tribute + Affire - should be - In a Democ -  
misguidedly -

Exp. in Periods - when, regardless, become bitter + impatient  
Visit upon shoulders - all sins of omission & commission

Exp. if certain measures - advocated - become violent

lose sense of proportion - No thanks that he has done

Hate - black.

White complex of diff - "personalized" - stupidly multiplied  
- salvation

3/ I have heard men speak - in terms so low + contemptible

wished - Forrest state - No Reds - But to separate

lockey -

When men look around furiously

I have heard Jews - belong - take their cue - lobbyists

join chains - Nazi era - all sweetness of a land  
"homas" of New Deal



4/ I am amazed Jews - so far forget - join swarming pack  
that they permit what they fondly regard - to prejudice  
them against a man - Chamferud -

Are they blind to fact - that their real problems

5/ Who - spoken up - demonstrated

- greater sympathy - Refugees - facilitate - Evian  
Wym C. Taylor

What leaders - spoke (note)

who warned - Both Italy & Germany

" Palentine

" - most hated

6/ Jews - Even J. Bus. men & employees - ought not forget  
What is gratifying - not Jews -

7/ To-day, hardest - only - against Diet -

Engl. France - Munich - Flunking - own doors

He is Rallying hastily America -

World like United Front - let him down - "Apprehension"  
"Tunisia"

Chicago - Oct. 1937 - Insurance - England -

Eagerness to cooperate with G.B. led him into misstatements

(1) Embargo (2) Austria - Munich - Berlin -



8/ Not Apologist for R. - Partisan - Mistakes - Errors of Judgment  
Accomplish so much in such - Too many reforms -  
Important - Mem. Process 'Now' - Mar. 4-37.

"In Statesmanship, to strike too soon, is apt to miss the blow"  
Kept nation too long on Emergency basis - mobilized  
Supreme Court - Compromised  
Important of Opportunities - Purges

9/ But I also know - History

1933 - Saved nation - "changed mental climate, the land"

Aroused Conscience - "other people's money" - Speculation

Relief - Federal Res. - State aid inadequate  
Cost much - how started - Revolution

Public Works - Shum Clearance, Home Mfg. Program

C. C. C. - Reclamation - Sanjosters

What substitute?

Measure of Control over P. Utilities - Evils of Holding Con.

Depended right to produce its own water (Electric Power TVA)

Social Security Measures

Hours and Wages Act

Labor Relations -