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Taking stock of 1940, 1941.

WRHS
TAKING STOCK OF 1940



By
Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver

At
The Temple

On
Sunday, January 5, 1941

When you come to take stock of the past year and read over the record of the past twelve months, you are amazed how much actually transpired during that relatively short period of time. You hardly realize how little time has elapsed covering so many important events. We talked about these events so much. We felt about them so deeply. We somehow come to feel that these events must have happened a long time ago.

Actually ten months ago, Finland was still fighting Soviet Russia. Eight months ago, Belgium and Holland were still free and independent countries who believed themselves secure within their neutrality. Seven short months ago, France still stood undefeated behind her impregnable Maginot Line. Italy's invasion of Egypt occurred only four months ago, and her invasion of Greece only two months ago.

Great human emotions which are aroused by great events have a way of making these events recede in time, and seem more remote than they are. When you come to think of it, our world began its dizzy spin in chaos with the Nazi conquest of Austria less than three years ago, and all the shattering events which have shaken our world to its foundations have occurred within the brief period of a few months. That is why men and women today live much more -- mpt in point of duration but in point of intensity and experience. This generation is living a five-fold life compared to some of the generations of the past.

It is, of course, impossible to strike a balance of the year 1940. All you can do today is to issue, as it were, a day by day communice. For the world is still at war, and no balance can be struck on a war until the last battle is over. The individual episodes during a war which may loom up at the moment have tremendous importance, which at the moment may seem terrifically important, may, when the war is over, become of little historic significance. For it is the last battle which determines the significance and proporation of everything which preceded.

Thus, for example, if the Allies win this war, the defeat of France, the invasion of the Lowlands, the conquest of some of the Scandinavian countries may prove of little or no significance at all -- just incidents in a war. On the other hand, if the Allies lose, these self-same events may have tremendous historical importance. And so it is impossible to draw a balance sheet for the past year.

The year 1940 began in an ominous pause. All was quiet on the Western Front. The Allies stood behind their Maginot line. The Nazis stood behind their Siegfried line. Nothing seemed to happen. Many came to believe that this was a make-believe -- a phoney war. Some of the great statesmen in Washington believe that this is a phoney war. There was no fighting. The Allies had not come to the aid of Poland a few months before the 1940 began. The Allies contented themselves with flying over Berlin and dropping leaflets while Poland was destroyed. It appeared as if the fighting will of France had become paralyzed. They were perhaps looking for an easy victory. Perhaps they hoped to win the war with methods short of war. England relied upon the breaking power of the Blockade, perhaps upon the propaganda influence of the leaflets dropped from the sky. France decided to wait it out behind the fortifications. Seemingly neither the political nor the military leaders of these two countries understood the character of the foe facing them and of the fixed purpose of that foe. And so, for eight long months, from September 1929 to April 1940, the war was at a standstill.

And then swiftly and suddenly, in April, came the invasion of Denmark and Norway, and as swiftly and suddenly in May, the invasion of Belgium and the Netherlands. Blood began to flow in earnest. The war then came to the West - that war which had been in the making for years - that war which had been coming out of China, Ethiopia, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland - the war which they had hoped would always strike elsewhere, on battlefields far removed from their beautiful cities - that war finally settled with all its fury and devastation upon their own countries.

It was a swift and crushing Blitzkrieg. It was amazingly short, amazingly crushing. Holland was conquered in four days. Belgium capitulated after two weeks. The battle of France lasted seventeen days. And it was all over! The English were driven into the sea off the continent. The Nazis now controlled the whole coast of Europe from the Arctic Ocean to the Bay of Biscay. England was about to be invaded.

By the middle of 1940, Nazi-Fascist power reached its peak and the fortune of the Allies touched bottom. The end of 1940, however, finds the prospects of the Axis powers not nearly as brilliant as they were six months before, and the fortunes of the Allies, although still very very grave but not nearly so desperate and seemingly so hopeless.

In the last six months certain events occurred which indicate that the triumph of the axis in the future will not be an easy one, nor a swift one. First of all the evacuation of Dunkirk - an amazing tale of a defeated army in retreat - that was the first event. Though it was a defeat, nevertheless it revealed certain amazing resourcefulness, certain amazing recuperative power on the part of England which gave much promise to the future. And then the failure of Hitler to invade England, an invasion which was scheduled and announced for September 1st, of last year. That was Hitler's first military defeat. Then in the last two weeks, the two disastrous Italian defeats. These represented the first two important Allied victories. So that the picture of the close of 1940 is not nearly as black as it was a few months ago.

England started the last half of 1940 almost beaten to her knees. Its army was in rout. Her entire military equipment was abandoned in Flanders in her headlong flight back home, and except for her Navy and for her far outnumbered but gloriously spirited air force, England seemed to be defenseless. And during these last six months, England has been subjected to the the most savage kind of bombardment from the air. The Nazis boasted that they dropped ninety million

pounds of explosives over Great Britain. Many of her fair cities have been shattered, reduced to rubble. During those last six months, a frightful toll has been taken of her ships on the high seas - shipload after ship-load of precious cargo sent to the bottom of the sea by Nazi warships, submarines and airplanes. And yet, at the close of 1940, England emerges and enters the new year with a Navy still undefeated and still in control of the high seas, growing in strength, and steadily catching up to the amazing air power of Germany, inflicting terrific damage on her foe daily. Her army has been re-organized, strengthened and is standing on the alert in England and is on a victorious offensive in the Near East. The morale of her people, in spite of this terrific punishment, is superbly unshaken.

What has contributed to the miracle of the recuperation of England is not only her own indomitable will, her amazing spiritual resourcefulness, but also the very important material and spiritual support which England has received from the United States. And this has been, in my judgment, perhaps the most significant event in 1940 - the awakening of America to a full realization of what was going on in the world, the awakening of America to the full implications of the struggle, the struggle either for freedom or for the enslavement of the world, the awakening of our country to a realization of first, the necessity to send maximum aid to Great Britain, the last outpost of human freedom in the world; and then a resolution to intensify, to increase that aid day by day, month by month.

What few people in this country realized a year ago, two years ago, five years ago, when they expressed that realization, and consequently were denounced as war-mongers - what few people realized then, many people realize and know today. The smug isolationism of our country has disappeared. They know that we can't ostrich-like hide our heads in the sand until the war blows over, and stuff our ears with cotton so as not to hear the roar of guns. That is gone. All the

Nazi-inspired talk about power-politics is now at an end. This talk no longer receives the respectful hearing of the masses of our people. All the appeasement preachings fall on deaf ears.

The President of the United States, last Sunday, in a great address, voiced not only what was in his heart and mind, but what was in the heart and mind of the majority of the American people. "Never before since Jamestown and Plymouth Rock has an American civilization been in such danger as now". "If Great Britain goes down...all of us in the Americas would be living at the point of a gun". The realization came to our people rather slowly during the last year. But it has come, and as the realization has grown with greater conviction upon our people, our help to Great Britain has increased.

During the year, we have been sending material aid to Great Britain. We have sent fifty destroyers, eight hundred thousand rifles, and fighting planes. Every day we are increasing this aid in our determination, as the President of the United States states, that the Axis shall not win this war. America is awakened and it has determined not only to aid Great Britain, but to arm itself. America is awakened to the need to build more ships, to conscript its manpower if necessary. America will not be terrorized. American will not consent to submit to live in an enslaved world, its independence dependent upon the will of two or three countries of the European world.

America is also awakened to the danger here at home of spies and saboteurs and fifth columnists. It has begun to make life quite dangerous and difficult for these agents of foreign aggressor nations. America has awakened to a rediscovery of its heritage, of its mission in the world, of its destiny. Americans have begun to speak again as they have not in generations of the American way of life, its uniqueness, its grandeur. That is something new that has come into our lives and into the life of the world - and that, in my the judgment, is the most significant event of the last year.

And the Nazis understand that fact. They fully understand the implication of America's resolve to help Great Britain, to proclaim freedom throughout the world, to be again the spokesmen of human life. Understanding it all, they have been trying to terrorize America. They announced a three-fold alliance with Berlin, Tokio and Rome, just to serve notice to America that if America becomes involved with any one of the three countries, the other two will gang up against the United States. But as long as the British Navy controls the Atlantic, and the American Navy controls the Pacific, and the Armies of Italy keep on running, so long is this merely part of a war of nerves, and propaganda stuff, and nothing more.

The future, my good friends, is dark and uncertain. The war is far from being over. The powerful military machine is far from being destroyed. There will still be much blood, toil, tears and sweat. On the other hand, the winter of 1940-41 is not a good one either for Hitler, for Germany or for Italy. The peoples of Germany and Italy are not happy. Their food is scarce. Their wants are widespread. Their dangers have increased. The peace which was so confidently promised them for 1940 has not materialized. They have been given victories, of course. But a victorious people really should be in a position to celebrate its victories and not to have to hide itself from air-raids and in dark, dank shelters every night. They know that the war is still on. ~~American~~ England still stands. They know, of course, that America which helped to defeat Germany in the last war, is determined that Germany shall not win this war.

There is a growing unrest among the many conquered and subjugated peoples as their want and suffering increased. And in the Orient, China is still undefeated. And the British and French possessions in the Pacific have not been as easy plums to pick as one was led to think.

And Hitler is worried, seemingly worried - for he has begun to talk so much about God in his speeches. This man who said a few years ago that

"The religions are all alike, no matter what they call themselves. They have no future -- certainly none for the Germans. Fascism, if it likes, may come to terms with the Church. So shall I. Why not? That will not prevent me from tearing up Christianity root and branch, and annihilating it in Germany."

In the last few speeches which he has made, hardly a paragraph appeared in which he did not hobnob with God Almighty. Perhaps he suspects that the war is not yet won. Perhaps he suspects that he may never ~~xxx~~ win the war.

The year 1940, of course, has been a year of great human tragedy quite apart from politics. It has been a year of millions of refugees, not merely Jewish ones. Millions of refugees found themselves drifting over the face of Europe, their homes gone, ^{with} no food, no shelter, no medical care, many dying on the way, millions of war-driven, hate-driven, invasion-driven flotsam and jetsam of human wreckage. It has been a year in which civilians have been subjected to almost greater punishment than the soldiers. Men, women and children, young and old have had to bear this nerve shattering attack from the sky day after day, night after night, week after week and month after month. It has been a year of human tragedy incalculable.

For our people the year 1940 was the climax of seven years of horror. The last few places of refuge of our people in Western Europe, the last few Jewish communities - Holland, Belgium, France - were shattered. Nazi persecution, Nazi discrimination, Nazi annihilation, policies cold, calculated, ruthless come in the wake of Nazi invasion. France which was the first country in the world to emancipate the Jew -- nearly one hundred and fifty years ago - great, beautiful France, the very torch and light of human freedom in Europe - has during this last year, under pressure of their conqueror, been compelled to announce to the world anti-Jewish legislation, discriminatory measures against the Jews of France who so valiantly served France throughout her history, who loved France with every fibre of their beings.

What happened to the Jews of Poland this year we don't know. A dark curtain has been dropped over their heads. A horrible experience. But we do know that the million and a quarter Jews who are in Nazi-occupied Poland are being subjected to starvation, to epidemics, to slave labor gangs. All the Jews of Warsaw are pushed into a ghetto and an eight-foot wall built around them. Every one wears a badge to designate him as a Jew.

And as the Nazis have been moving into the Southeastern part of Europe in the last few months - into Roumania, Hungary -- the lot of the Jews in these countries has become increasingly more difficult, almost unbearable.

There has been only one brightspot in the Old World - as far as we Jews are concerned - there has been but one bright spot - and that has been the Jewish community of Palestine which is almost in the war zone and which is also menaced. It has also experienced bombing during the year. It is still strong, still free, still building. It is mobilized to defend every inch of the soil in Palestine with its blood if necessary. It seemed at first as if Palestine would become an early battlefield if the Italians moved across Northern Africa to the Suez Canal and if the Germans marched down through Palestine. What happened in Northern Africa and Lybia postponed at least for the time being this pincer movement which might have brought them to the heart of Palestine. Palestine therefore experienced a great shock of nerves ⁱⁿ the last few weeks. As long as the British Navy remains strong, the position of the Jews in Palestine is secure. The Jews are pouring into that country not only by land, but by sea, legally and illegally. There is a mad stampede of horror-driven sons and daughters of Israel pouring in trying to find some place of refuge. And there are no places for refugees except Palestine except for the few of them who can escape to the Western Hemisphere.

That is how the year 1941 dawns upon the world and upon Israel. There is fear in our hearts. But there is in all the hearts of freedom-loving men.

What They Say

“The religions are all alike, no matter what they call themselves. They have no future—certainly none for the Germans. Fascism, if it likes, may come to terms with the Church. So shall I. Why not? That will not prevent me from tearing up Christianity root and branch, and annihilating it in Germany.”

—ADOLF HITLER.

1/ Amazed at how much has passed - Hard to realize - how little time has (1) elapsed! Talked about them so much - felt about them so deeply - must have happened a long time ago. Actually 10 m. ago Finland was still fighting Soviet R. - 8 m. Belgium & Holland still free & indep. countries, deemed as secure in their neutrality. 7 m. ago France still stood in pragmatic behind its Magnot line. Italy's invasion of Egypt occurred only 4 m. ago - and her invasion of Greece only 2 m. ago -

Great human emotions aroused by past events have a way of making these events seem in time, and seem more remote & they really are.

When you come to think of it - our whole world has been so dizzily spinning in its mad whirl, less > 3 ys. ago - Austria - and all the shattering events which have shaken our world to its foundations, have occurred within a relat. few months.

2/ It is impossible to draw a balance sheet of year 1940. Only day by day Commencements are possible. In the world is at war and the separate episodes in a war, rather than a less secretly sequenced a uninterrupted have signs, only in relation to final outcome, has. If, for example, Allies win this war, the defeat of the last June, as the big invasion, the two countries of the Can. countries will be very little consequence. If they lose, these events will loom up as a great historical significance. It is the final battle which gives meaning & proportion to all that precedes it -

3/ Year began in an ominous pause - "all just as the West Front" Allies behind Magnot line - Nazis behind Dieffend line - knew that it was a work-a-like has - a "Phony" war - There was no fighting. Allies had not come to check of Plan - Sept. '39 - Leopold -

2
Their fighting will still be paralyzed -
looking for easy victory -

War was with methods short, war -

Eng relied on Blockade & leaflets. France, as warning it
went behind her frontiers. Still did not or could not under-
stand character of the fighting then, and his first purpose!
For 8 months this went on. Then first month of 1940

→ And then - Invasion of Denmark, ~~Sweden~~ Norway in April
- Belgium & Holland in May -

- And blood began to flow in earnest.

The war finally came to the West! It was which
had been coming by way of China, Ethiopia,
Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland - It was which they had
been preparing for for years but where they
had hoped would always strike elsewhere, but not
in the West ^{crushing} centers of Western European Civilization.

→ It was a night ^{crushing} Blitzkrieg! Amazingly short. Amazingly
crushing! Holland was conquered in 4 days. Belgium
capitulated in 2 weeks. "Battle of France" lasted 17
days - and it was all over! English driven into the
Sea! Nazis controlled the whole Coast of West. Europe
from Arctic Ocean to Bay of Biscay! England was
about to be invaded!

→ By the middle of 1940 - Nazi power reached its peak,
and fortunes of Allies - touched bottom!

→ The end of 1940 - found the prospect, the Axis not nearly
as brilliant as they had been - and the future, the Allies

- the still very raw - and nearly so desperate.
- Evacuation { Dunkirk - first sign of strength!
 - Failure to invade Eng - first H. set back!
 - 2 disastrous Italian campaigns - first Allied Victories.

4) England started last 1/2 of 1940 - almost beaten - her army in rout - her military equipment abandoned in Flanders - except for her Navy and her air - mounted but gloriously spirited RAF - ~~practically~~ ^{practically} do! perished - ~~And during these~~ ^{During these} ~~six~~ ^{six} months, she has been subjected to savage bombing from the air - 90 M. bombs, explosives dropped on her cities & towns - civilian pop. mostly under attack ^{Mary & her ships sunk} but she emerges ~~but~~ ^{but} the new year - with a Navy still undefeated & still commanding the seas, her air - power growing in strength, and inflicting terrific damage on the foe daily, her armies strong at home to resist invasion - & victorious in the East - and her morale, superbly unshaken -

5) What has contributed to this miracle of recuperation - not only her own indomitable & indefatigable spirit - her resourcefulness - But material & spiritual support - from U.S.

✓ This has been perhaps most sign. event of 1940!
✓ The Awakening of America - to a full realization of what was going on in world - of implications the struggle - The Freedom of Enslavement, the world.

of warning to read maximum ad -
of warning himself to utmost -
What the few understood 2-4-6 yrs. ago - the
Many have understood -
Strong isolationism is gone.

Nazi-inspired talk about - Power-politics - at an end.

Apparent headwinds - fall on deaf ears.

Pres. R. last Sunday - voiced what is in hearts -
"Never before since Jamestown and Plymouth Rock has an American Civilization been in such danger as now"
"If B. Pr. goes down" all goes in the Americas would be living at the point of a gun"

50 drops - 800,000 rifles - flying planes - only
just evidence of our determination to help

Security on nation - to make available
Army ourselves - Double our Navy - Air force -
corruption - not to be forgiven.

Havana Conference - unite West. Hemisphere

Awakened to Spies Agents - 5th Col. Race prep.

We are proud to talk 'America' now - democracy -
a crusade - Re-discovered to Soul!

6/ Nazis understood implications of all this. It means
that they cannot win!

Announced 3 fold Alliance as us = But with
Eng. controlling Atlantic - U.S. Pacific + Italy
unable to stop running - the threat is part of
war & nerves - and nothing more -

Future is dark and uncertain - War is far from over. Paperful. (5)
But the way, the newspaper is becoming ^{depleted} ^{war} ^{harder} ^{"Blood, toil, tears and sweat"}
The winter of 1940-41 is not a good one for ^{the} ^{for} ^{Germany}
or for Italy.

- Their people are not happy. Food is scarce. Want is wide-spread. Dangers have increased. Peace, promised them has not come! A victorious people should not have to spend their night in cold! ^{old days} ^{air-raid shelters}!
- England still stands. America, which defeated her in the last war, is determined that they shall not win in this war -
- There is growing unrest among conquered and subjugated peoples - their wants & sufferings increase.
- China is ^{still} undefeated in the Orient!
- British, French, Dutch possessions in the Pacific are not as easy places to pick as one was led to think.
- ~~Soviet empire~~ ^{He has been hobnobbing with food}
Hitler is worried! ^{calling on his army with the spirit of}
(note) in his recent speeches - and that is a sign of weakness.
- The war is not won - Perhaps he suspects that it may never be won.

8. A sea of human tragedy - refugees - airbais bombed -
(Bel + Holland - drowned - France - Vichy)
9. In our people - climax - refugees - 300,000 - Bulgaria - slave labor camps
S. East Europ - Rumania - ghettos - Poland - 1 1/2 M. - starvation - terror - spidemics - refugees - relief
10. Palestine - war zone - bombing - refugees - relief
still hungry - deserve -
11. "Steel" Patria - manliness.

1/2 Letter from Prof. Einstein.

4

