



Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project

Featuring collections from the Western Reserve Historical Society and
The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives

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

Series IV: Sermons, 1914-1963, undated.

Reel
160

Box
57

Folder
682

The undefeated optimism of our faith, 1943.

617

THE UNDEFEATED OPTIMISM OF OUR FAITH



By
Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver

At
The Temple

On
Sunday morning, March 7, 1943

There is a Midrash which says that there were ten Psalms recorded in the Bible which were sung by Israel in the course of its history -- in the midst of crisis, or after the crisis -- ten songs of faith. The first was sung when the Children of Israel were freed from Egypt. The second was the song of triumph by the Red Sea. The third, when in the wilderness, when the well suddenly appeared and provided water. The fourth was the song which Moses sang before his death. The fifth was sung by Joshua after his victory over the five Amorite kings. The sixth was the song of Deborah and Barak which they sang when the Children of Israel conquered Sisera. The seventh was the Psalm of David when he was delivered out of the hands of his enemies. The eighth was the song of Solomon sung at the dedication of the Temple. The ninth was the song of Jehoshaphat, king, as he went to battle against the Moabites and Ammonites. The tenth is the grand and mighty Psalm which the Children of Israel sang and will sing to the end of days at their future final and everlasting deliverance.

It is a very beautiful and significant Midrash. You will see that the Midrash calls attention not to one crisis in Jewish history, but to many. For the history of Israel was a history of crises. From all of them, Israel emerged triumphant and singing, and at the very end there will be a song of everlasting deliverance. This Midrash is but one of many of innumerable testimonials which we find in our sacred literature and in our history of the undefeated optimism of our faith and of our people. And in every trial, and in every severe national tribulation there was manifest indelibly the remarkable unshakable confidence, the final outcome, in the triumph of the right of national survival.

I read this morning the famous chapter from the Book of Jeremiah, written just before the first exile -- before the destruction of the First Temple. Disaster was in the offing. The City of Jerusalem was besieged. The plight of the city was hopeless -- about to fall. The leaders of the people were about to be led away in chains to Babylon. The sanctuary of the Lord was about to be put in the fire

At that moment, a moment of dread anticipation, of impending tragedy, the prophet, Jeremiah, says to his people: "Yet again there shall be heard in this place whereof ye say: It is waste, without man or beast, even in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, that are desolate -- the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride." The prophet, Jeremiah, was commanded by the Lord to buy a piece of land in a country which was soon to be conquered by the Babylonians and have the deed signed and sealed and put away in an earthen vessel that it may last many days as a confident symbol that "Houses and fields and vineyards shall yet again be bought in this land." Optimism in the face of doom.

Whence does this optimism spring? It sprang from the people's unshaken faith in a just cause -- the people had sinned. The people had provoked God. God had punished them severely, broken their national pride, cast them out in exile. But if a sin can bring on punishment, repentance can bring on forgiveness and restitution, because there is a just God and He looks through a just law of providence and retribution.

So Jeremiah passed through the people speaking in the name of God: "Like as I have brought all this great evil upon this people, so will I bring upon them all the good that I have promised them."

Many centuries later, when the Second Temple was destroyed, and again Jerusalem was laid waste, the masses of the people were led away as captive slaves to work in the salt mines, it seemed that Israel was forever lost, completely destroyed. At that time, at that dire moment of national calamity, the great Rabbi who lived at that time, Jochanan ben Zakkai founded a little school, an academy, at the very time of the destruction of the country. At the defeat of his people, Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakkai established a new school. What was really destroyed? A building, a group of buildings, many cities, an army -- but Israel was more than that. Israel

was a people. It had become an idea. Israel through its long history had already expressed itself in spiritual power, in Torah, in a code of life, in a complexity of ideas. Israel had already projected the vision of a spiritual Jeremiah. Zion and the Holy of Holies were now really in the hearts and minds of the faithful. Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Joshua and Rabbi Akkiba, disciples of Jochanan ben Zakkai saw the ruins and Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Joshua broke out into weeping and rent their garments. But Rabbi Akiba laughed. And they turned to him and said: Why do you laugh? Why do you weep, they were asked by Akkiba? They said, behold the sanctuary of the Lord, the Holy of Holies! Behold wild beasts now prowl about it. The Temple is destroyed. Our people are in exile. The enemies have triumphed. Rabbi Akiba turned to them and said: Why all this is fulfillment of the prophecy of Micah who had said: "Therefore shall Zion because of you be plowed as a field and Jerusalem shall become heaps and the mount of the Temple as a ruined forest." And so will the other prophecy be fulfilled: "I shall return unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. There shall yet old men and old women sit in the broad places of Jerusalem and the broad places of Jerusalem shall be full of boys and girls playing there." If the earlier prophecy had not been fulfilled surely this latter prophecy of redemption must be fulfilled. They said to Akiba: Thou hast comforted us, O, Akiba, Thou hast comforted us!

As you notice, this optimism of our people was not the result of any easy-going lives, of a pleasant, untroubled existence, but out of disaster, suffering and exile, it rose triumphantly to proclaim its unbroken faith in tomorrow.

The life of our people was never a calm and placid one at any time. It was always a life of swords, conflict, strain. The very word, Israel, was given to our Father, Jacob, because he wrestled with angels and with men, and ...

Our national existence began in slavery and revolution. We reached the promised land after forty years of wandering in the desert, and our ancestors had

to fight for every foot of soil in Palestine before they could settle there. The period of the Judges were the battle-days of our early history in Palestine. Spiritually we fought ~~against~~ against the entire world in ancient days for nearly fifteen centuries -- against the paganism of the Canaanites, the Egyptians, Babylonians, the Greeks and the Romans. The whole world was idolatrous. But one little people alone, that little spot of Judea resisted the empires which waged war on Israel from the days of Assyria to the days of the Third Reich which were the most powerful empires in the world.

Israel ^{was} ~~were~~ never relaxed! We were always braced against alien foes and alien influences. Frequently our people were defeated and were exiled. They frequently tasted all the fury and hatred of rulers and mobs from Pharaoh to Hitler.

Now to have remained full of hope and faith in the future, after so many centuries of strife and frustration and suffering is a great tribute to the soul of the Race, and points unmistakable to deep springs whence that soul draws its sustaining strength.

What were those strengths? Strengths of ideas, certain beliefs. In the first place it had to do with the belief of their God, and in their defeats, in their successive defeats of the ages our people always beheld ~~in~~ the triumph of their just God. And in the rescue, His mercy and everlasting goodness. It was God who explained for them the tangled web of their strange career and checkered experiences. They came to believe that they were singled out for great rewards and great punishment because God had singled them out for a great destiny..

Their suffering had one of two origins. Either they had sinned against the moral law and must atone for it, or they, being God's chosen servants, must atone by their suffering for the sins of the world. There was hope, ~~one~~ the one hand hope in repentance, or hope in the redemption of the world. Neither yields to despair.

Both ennobled. A sinner who~~x~~ is aware of his sin, is also aware of God against Whom

he has sinned. A man who knows that he is off tune can recapture the harmony, the broken harmony of his life. So that our people's faith in God, even when they knew themselves not to be righteous, was nevertheless sustained by their faith in a just God. "Art Thou not God from everlasting, my Holy God? There we will never die."

This concept of suffering for the sins of the world -- that is, for an ideal -- that is what gave a note of grandeur to Jewish life in its darkest hour. There was world significance, a great cosmic drama was being enacted on the stage of the world, and they were the central figures in that drama. They were helping to fashion a new world, as God willed those new worlds to come about. They were helping to perfect a new world. They were the summoned ones, to help in that cosmic cause. They were the leaders, the pioneers in that spiritual work. Theirs was a crown of thorns. As the hour of destiny was ~~being~~ fashioning these new worlds, Israel was the Anvil which bore the strokes of the hammers. Suffering for a cause, was a Badge of Honor. Therefore the prophet was able to say to his people: "The people that walk in darkness see great light."

But even the other kind of suffering -- personal suffering for personal deficiencies and moral inadequacies -- even that kind of suffering purifies a man, may lift him to new levels of insight and sympathy. There is a very challenging phrase in the Bible: "Moses was close to darkness when he sought God." Very often it is in the darkness of our lives, in our misery and in our defeat that we discover God. So it is this confidence in God, in his noble ministry of suffering wherein lies the undefeated optimism of our people.

There is one other thought I would like to leave. They believed, because their religion taught them to believe, in the perfectibility of the world. Not that the world is perfect. There is evil in the world, great evil. Judaism was never a Pollyana religion. Judaism faced all the brutality in the world and saw them for what they were -- war and poverty, exploitation, lust and hate. It didn't

close its eyes to it. They were realities, but they were capable of being over-come and man has it within himself to over-come them.

The end of all creation is good. All that the Lord has created, he created for the ultimate good. This world was not created that it should be run down ultimately to chaos and anarchy. He created it out of chaos. He formed it that man may dwell upon it. There is a Golden Age coming.

Our Religion is a Messianic Religion, a religion that believed in ^an nobler, finer, juster, more peaceful world when wars will cease and poverty will be abolished, where every man will someday sit under his vine and fig tree and know war no more. But it is within the power ~~x~~ of man to hasten that day or to retard it.

Therefore our people believe the evil of the world should not discourage them. It should challenge them to work for the golden day which is yet to come. The world can be made perfect and men can help to make it so.

The great pessimistic philosopher, Schopenhauer, was quite correct when he declared that "Optimism is as irreconcilable with Christianity as it is with Buddhism and Brahmanism. The fundamental characteristics of Judaism are optimism and realism.

My dear friends, our people today face another crisis -- perhaps their greatest in history, the crisis of mass exploitation, the crisis of extermination. This is the time to draw consciously and deliberately upon the undefeated optimism of our people, based upon confidence and a just God, based upon the conception of the noble ministry of suffering, and based upon faith in the perfectibility of human society. The world is suffering for its sins. It is atoning for its sins. God will accept the atonement. Even as He has smitten, so will He forgive. That is the law of the history of our people. Men and nations are suffering today. Israel is suffering today more than any one. That has been our tragic noble privilege through the ages. We are again the anvils upon which history is being fashioned. Out of this evil, out of the evils of our day, out of the bitter conflict of our world, a new and better day will come. Men will reach higher levels of perfection.

(something said about the nine songs sung in the history of our people and of the final and ultimate song of triumph which will be sung).



1. 10 Songs recorded in B. that were sung by Israel in course of history - in midst of Crisis - during or after. 10 Songs of Faith!

- ① On night they were freed from Egypt.
- ② Song of Triumph by the Red Sea.
- ③ When well sprung up in the wilderness
- ④ Moses - before his death.
- ⑤ Joshua - after his victory over the 5 Amorite Kings
- ⑥ Deborah & Barak - when they conquered Sisera.
- ⑦ David - when delivered out of the hands of his enemies
- ⑧ Solomon - at the Dedication, the Temple.
- ⑨ Jehoshaphat - as he went to battle ag. the Moabites & Ammonites
- ⑩ The grand and mighty song - at future deliverance - which will be everlasting

2. Significant Midrash. Not one Crisis but many. A history full of Crises. But from all B. emerged triumphant - singing. And at the very end - too - there will be Song of Everlasting deliverance. This Midrash is but one of innumerable testimonials to the Undefeated Optimism of our Faith - People.

By every trial & severe tribulation.

3. There appeared a remarkable unshakable confidence in the final outcome, in the triumph of the right, in national survival.

@ The First Exile - Disaster - The Temple - Chains - Jerusalem - Siege

"Yet again there shall be heard in this place whereof ye say: It is waste, without man or beast, even in the ~~other~~ ~~streets~~ cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, that are desolate - the voice of joy & the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride."

During Siege - 130 yrs a field, and signs had a deed signed and sealed and put away in an earthen vessel that it may last many days as a sign and

symbol that "Houses and fields and vineyards shall yet again be brought in this land."

Whence this faith? Just God! Sinned! Provoked! But if Sin brings punishment, Repentance brings forgiveness! There is a just law of providence and retribution!

"Like as I have brought all this great evil upon this people, so will I bring upon them all the good that I have promised them"

(b) Second Destruction - Johanan b. Zakkai - Jamnia.

In what was destroyed? A Building! A City! An army!

But Israel ^{was} more than that. It had expressed itself also in sp. powers - in a Torah - a code of life - a complex of ideals - vision of a sp. Jerusalem - Zion and the Holy of Holies were really in the hearts and minds of the faithful.

Cathage was destroyed. The Carthaginians disappeared.

Rome was "The Romans"

Judea was destroyed. The Jews survived.

- Some, the famous disciples of J. ben Zakkai - Rabbi Eliezer, R. Johanan and R. Akiba - ruins of Temple. ^{150 years of Jews} ~~for 150 years~~ ~~the ruins of the Sanctuary~~ ~~wept & rent their garments~~ ~~Attila laughed!~~ - Why do you laugh? Why do you weep?

"The earlier prophecy - (Micah) was fulfilled: "Therefore shall Zion because of you be plowed as a field and Jerusalem shall become heaps and the mount of the Temple as a ruined forest"

So will the other prophecy be fulfilled (Zechariah): "I shall return unto you, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. There shall yet old men and old women sit in the broad places of Jerusalem, and the broad places of Jer. shall be full of boys and girls playing there"

If the earlier prophecy had not been fulfilled... אז לא יושבו שם
בני ישראל

This undefeated optimism prompted them to proclaim 2016 p 12

3). As you notice, this optimism was not the result of long-going lives, of pleasant, untroubled existence. Out of disaster, suffering and exile, it rose triumphantly to proclaim its unbroken faith in to-morrow!

The life of our people never a calm & placid one. A life of swords, of conflict, of strain. - Thob.

Our nat. existence began in slavery and revolution. We reached the promised land after 40 yrs. of wandering in desert where a whole generation perished. Our ancestors had to fight for every foot of Pal. before they could settle there. The period of the Jews when the latter days of our early history in Pal. Spiritually we fought ag. the entire heathen world for 15 centuries - the paganism of Caracalla, Eg. - Bab. - Persia's Greeks & Romans. The Empires which waged war upon us from the days of Assyria to the days of Third Reich were the most powerful empires in the world.

We were never relaxed! We were always braced against alien foes and alien influences. And frequently we tasted defeat - degradation - slavery - exile - persecution - the fury & hatred of rulers & mobs from Pharaoh to Hitler.

To have remained full of hope, & confidence, & faith in future after so many centuries of strife and frustration and suffering is a tribute to the soul of the Race, and points to deep springs where that soul draws its sustaining strength, the

4/ God. In its defects our people beheld the triumph of their just ⁽⁴⁾
God! In their rescue His mercy & everlasting goodness.

- God explained ~~these~~ ^{for them} tangled web of their strange career
and checked experiences.

- They were ruined out for great reverses and great humili-
ment too. God had ruined them out for a great Destiny!

- Their suffering had one two aspects. Either they had
ruined against the moral law and must atone for it.
Or they, being God's chosen servants must atone by
their suffering for the sins of the world.

- In either concept there was hope - hope ⁱⁿ repentance
or hope in the redemption of the world. Both are glorious
in the concept. Neither yields to despair. Exalting
concepts.

- A sinner who is aware of his sins, is also aware
of God against whom he ruined. To that extent he
is already half-way to repentance and return to God.
Off turn - re capture the fine harmony!

- Our people's faith in God - even when not wholly righteous -
sustained them - in their darkest hours. God is to
him his own right and power

5/ Suffering for sins of world - for an ideal - gave a note
of grandeur & sublimity to it

There was world beginning to their tribulations.

A great cosmic drama was being enacted
and they were the central figure in it

They were helping to fashion new worlds - as God willed them. - plb psl - Prison-house -

- Being leaders - there's was the crown of thorns.

- As the Hammer of Destiny was fashioning new worlds, Israel was the Anvil which bore the strokes of the Hammer.

Suffering for a Cause was a Badge of Honor. 5B Suffering purifies a man. Lifts him to new heights in spirit & sympathy.

6) Confidence in God! Uplifted ministry / Suffering! Suffering -

The Perfection of the World. There is Evil in the world; but it can be overcome! Did not deny Reality of Evil - Pollyanna - and man is capable of overcoming it.

The End of all creation is Good. 3:21 26:1, 27:3 31:26 32:6

The Human world was created not that to run down into anarchy and chaos - 3:21 26:1, 27:3 31:26 32:6

There is a Golden Age coming. 3:21 26:1, 27:3 31:26 32:6

Our Religion is a Messianic Religion. 3:21 26:1, 27:3 31:26 32:6
- wars shall cease - Poverty - Each man will sit - Earth shall be full -

It is within power of man to hasten that day, Retard or advance it.

7) The Evil of the world: should not discourage man. Challenge! ^{Optimism}

Schopenhauer: "Optimism is as irreconcilable with Christianity as it is with Buddhism and Brahmanism. The fundamental characteristics of Judaism are optimism and realism"

8) To-day - another great Crisis - perhaps the greatest - ^{mass slaughter}

① Conf. in God ② Uplifted ministry / Suffering. ③ Perfection of world - Uplifted ministry / Suffering. 3:21 26:1, 27:3 31:26 32:6

4
THE UNDEFEATED OPTIMISM OF OUR FAITH

841
Sermon
The Temple, March 7, 1943

92
14
There is a Midrash which says that there ~~were~~^{are} ten Psalms recorded in the Bible which were sung by Israel in the course of its history, in the midst of a crisis, or after the ^ccrisis - ten songs of faith. The first was sung when the Children of Israel were freed from Egypt. The second was the song of triumph by the Red Sea. The third ^{was} in the wilderness, when the well suddenly appeared and provided water. The fourth was the song which Moses sang ^g before his death. The fifth was sung by Joshua after his victory over the five Amorite kings. The sixth was the song ^{that} of Deborah and Barak which ~~they~~ sang when the Children of Israel ^{had} conquered Sisera. The seventh was the Psalm of David when he was delivered out of the hands of his enemies. The eighth was the song of Solomon sung at the dedication of the Temple. The ninth was the song of Jehoshaphat as he went to battle against the Moabites and Ammonites. The tenth is the grand and mighty Psalm which the Children of Israel sang and will sing to the end of days at their future, final, and everlasting deliverance.

C
It is a beautiful and significant Midrash, ^{which} The Midrash calls attention not to one crisis in Jewish history, but to many. The history of Israel ^{is} ~~was~~ a history of crises. But from all of them, Israel ~~emerged~~ emerged triumphant and singing, and at the very end there will be a song of everlasting deliverance. This Midrash is but one of many of nigh numberless testimonials which we find in our sacred literature and in our history of the undefeated optimism of our faith and ^{of} our people. In every trial, and in every severe national tribulation, there was manifest a remarkably unshakable confidence in the final outcome, in the triumph of the right and in national survival.

2
There is
~~I read this morning~~ a famous chapter from the Book of Jeremiah, written just before the first exile - before the destruction of the First Temple. Disaster was in the offing. Jerusalem was besieged. The plight of the city was hopeless, ~~it~~ was about to fall. The leaders of the people were about to be led away in chains.

2

NO 4

to Babylon. The sanctuary of the Lord was about to be put ~~to~~ⁱⁿ the fire. At that moment, a moment of dread anticipation, of impending tragedy, the prophet says to his people: "Yet again there shall be heard in this place whereof ye say: It is waste, without man or beast, even in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, that are desolate - the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride." The prophet Jeremiah was commanded by the Lord to buy a piece of land in this country which was soon to be conquered and to have the deed signed and sealed and put away in an earthen vessel, that it ^{would} last ~~many~~ ^{of confidence} days as a confident symbol that "Houses and fields and vineyards shall yet again be bought in this land." Optimism in the face of doom.

Whence ^{did} does this optimism spring? It sprang from the people's unshaken faith. The people had sinned. The people had provoked God. God had punished them severely, broken their national pride, cast them out in exile. But if a sin can bring on punishment, ^erepentance can bring on forgiveness and restitution. There is a just God. There is a just law of providence and retribution. So Jeremiah passed through the people speaking in the name of God: "Like as I have brought all this great evil upon this people, so I will bring upon them all the good that I have promised them."

Many centuries later, when the Second Temple was destroyed, and Jerusalem was again laid waste and the masses were led away as slaves to work in the salt mines, it again seemed that Israel was forever lost, ~~completely destroyed~~. At that dire moment of national calamity, the great ^{Teacher} ~~Rabbi who lived at that time~~ Jochanan ben Zakkai established a new school. For what ^{had been} ~~was~~ destroyed? A building! A city! Many cities! An army! ~~But~~ Israel was more than that. Israel was a people. Israel was an idea. Israel ~~had already~~ expressed itself in spiritual powers, in Torah, in a code of life, in a ^pcomplex of ideals. Israel had projected the vision of a spiritual Jerusalem. Zion and the Holy of Holies were now ~~really~~ in the hearts and minds of the faithful. Carthage was destroyed. The Carthaginians ⁱ~~disappeared~~. Rome was destroyed. The Romans disappeared. Judea was destroyed. The Jews survived.

3
~~Rabbi~~ Eliezer, ~~Rabbi~~ Joshua and ~~Rabbi~~ Akiba, disciples of Jochanan ben Zakkai, saw the ruins. ~~Rabbi~~ Eliezer and ~~Rabbi~~ Joshua broke out into weeping and rent their garments. ~~Rabbi~~ Akiba laughed. They turned to him: "Why do you laugh?" "Why do you weep?" they were in turn asked by Akiba. "Behold," they said, "the sanctuary of the Lord, the Holy of Holies! ~~Behold~~ Wild beasts now prowl about it. The Temple is destroyed. Our people are in exile. The enemies ~~xxx~~ have triumphed." ~~Rabbi~~ Akiba turned to them and said: "The earlier prophecy (of ~~Micah~~) has been fulfilled which said, 'Therefore shall Zion because of you be plowed as a field and Jerusalem shall become heaps and the mount of the Temple as a ruined forest.' ~~And so will~~ ^{Now} the other prophecy ^{will} be fulfilled: 'I shall return unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. There shall yet old men and old women sit in the broad places of Jerusalem and the broad places of Jerusalem shall be full of boys and girls playing there.' If the earlier prophecy had not been fulfilled, this latter prophecy of redemption could not be fulfilled." This undefeated optimism prompted ~~them~~ ^{Eliezer and Joshua} to proclaim: "Thou hast comforted us, O, Akiba, Thou hast comforted us!"

As you notice, this optimism of our people was not the result of easy-going lives or of a pleasant, untroubled existence. Out of disaster, suffering and exile, it rose triumphantly to proclaim its unbroken faith in tomorrow.

The life of our people was never a ~~calm~~ ^{calm} and placid one. It was always a life of swords, of conflict, of strain. The very name Israel was given to our Father, Jacob, because he wrestled with angels and men, and was not ~~defeated~~ ^{defeated}.

cl Our national existence began in slavery and revolution. We reached the Promised Land after forty years of wandering in the desert, ~~where~~ ^{along the way} a whole generation perished. Our ancestors had to fight for every foot of soil in Palestine before they could settle there. The period of the Judges ^{was} the battle ^{age} days of our early history, ~~in Palestine~~. Spiritually we fought against the entire heathen world for nearly fifteen centuries ^{against} the paganism of the Canaanites, the Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Greeks, and the Romans. The whole world was idolatrous. One little people alone resisted. From the days of Assyria to the

4
days of the Third Reich, the empires which waged war on Israel were the most powerful empires in the world.

9/15
We were never relaxed! We were always braced against alien foes and alien influences. Frequently our people tasted defeat, degradation, slavery, exile, the fury and hatred of rulers and mobs. To have remained full of hope and faith in the future, after so many centuries of strife and frustration and suffering, is a tribute to the soul of the ^{people} ~~people~~ and points to deep springs whence the soul draws its sustaining strength.

What were those strengths? Ideas [#] Certain beliefs. In the first place, strength came from the belief in God. In their successive defeats our people beheld the triumph of their just God; ^{they beheld} and in their rescue, ^{mercy and} His everlasting goodness. It was God who explained for them the tangled web of their strange career and checkered experiences. They came to believe that they were singled out for ^{high} ~~great~~ rewards and ^{hard} ~~great~~ punishment because God had singled them out for a ^{holy} ~~great~~ destiny!

WRHS AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES
Their suffering had one of two origins. Either they had sinned against the moral law and must atone for it, or they, being God's chosen servants, must atone by their suffering for the sins of the world. In either concept there was hope. ⁱⁿ On the one hand hope ~~xxx~~ repentance, on the other hope in the redemption of the world. Neither concept yields to despair. Both ennobles. A sinner who is aware of his sin, is also aware of God against Whom he has sinned; to that extent he is already halfway to repentance and return to God. A man who knows that he is ^{true} off tune can recapture the harmony of his life. ~~So that~~ our people's faith in God, even when they knew themselves not to be righteous, sustained them in their darkest hour. ^{"Art not Thou from everlasting, O Lord my God, my holy one?"} ~~"Art Thou not God from everlasting, my Holy God? There we will never die."~~ ^{we shall not die!"} ~~Hataktak 1812~~

(check)
This concept of suffering for the sins of the world - that is, for an ideal - gave a note of grandeur and sublimity to Jewish life in its darkest hours. There was world significance to their tribulation. A great cosmic drama was being enacted and they were the central figures in that drama. They were helping to fashion a new world, as God willed those new worlds to come about. They were

5
helping to perfect a new world. ~~לחן עולם~~ They were ^{the} summoned ones to help in that cosmic cause. Being the leaders, the pioneers in that spiritual work, theirs was a crown of thorns. As the hammer of destiny was fashioning new worlds, Israel was the anvil which bore the strokes of the hammering. Suffering for a cause was a badge of honor. Therefore the prophet was able to say to his people: "The people who walk in darkness see great light".

~~העם החללים בחשך יאיר גויה~~

41 Even the other kind of suffering ^M personal suffering for personal deficiencies and moral inadequacies ^M even that kind of suffering may purify a man and lift him to new levels of insight and sympathy. There is a challenging phrase in the Bible: "Moses was close to darkness when he sought God" ~~ומושה נגיש אל הערפל~~. Often it is in the darkness of our lives, in our misery and in our defeat that we discover God. It is in this confidence in God and in Israel's noble ministry of suffering that the undefeated optimism of our people is to be found.

There is one other thought that I would like to leave. Israel believed, because their religion taught them to believe, in the perfectability of the world. There is evil in the world, but it can be overcome. Judaism was never a Pollyanna religion. Judaism faced reality; Judaism saw and acknowledged war and poverty, exploitation, lust and hate. These were realities, but they were capable of being overcome and man has it within himself to overcome them.

The end of all creation is good. ~~כל דעבדו רחמנה למב עבוד~~ All that the Lord has created He created for the ultimate good. The human world was not created that it should run down ultimately into chaos and anarchy. ~~לא מיהו ברהה לשבת וצרה~~ (see note) God created it out of chaos. He formed it that man may dwell upon it. ~~There is a golden age coming:~~

Our religion is a messianic religion,

~~והיה באחרית הימים~~

a religion that believed in a nobler, a finer, a juster, more peaceful world when wars will cease and poverty will be abolished, where every man will ~~someday~~ sit under ^{and his} his vine ~~fig~~ tree and know war no more. It is within the power of man to hasten that day ^M to retard or advance it.

46

The evil of the world should not discourage man. It should challenge him to work for the golden day which is yet to come. The world can be made ^{livable} ~~perfect~~ and men can help to make it so. The pessimistic philosopher Schopenhauer was quite correct when he declared that "optimism is as irreconcilable with Christianity as it is with Buddhism and Brahmanism. The fundamental characteristics of Judaism are optimism and realism."

My dear friends, Our people today face another crisis, perhaps their greatest in history, ^{the} the crisis of mass slaughter, the crisis of extermination. This is the time to draw consciously and deliberately upon the undefeated optimism of our people, based upon confidence in a just God, based upon the conception of the noble ministry of suffering, and based upon faith in the perfectability of human society. The world is suffering for its sins. It is atoning for its sins. God will accept the atonement. Even as He has smitten, so will he forgive. That is the law implicit in the history of our people. Men and nations are suffering today. Israel is suffering more than anyone. That has been our tragic noble privilege through the ages. We are again the anvils upon which history is being fashioned. Out of this evil, out of the evils of our day, out of the bitter conflict of our world, a new and better day will come. ~~שירה חדשה שבתו גאולים~~

"The redeemed will yet sing a new song."

ged
16

THE UNDEFEATED OPTIMISM OF OUR FAITH

at The Temple, March 7, 1943

There is a Midrash which says that there ^{are} ~~were~~ ten Psalms recorded in the Bible which were sung by Israel in the course of its history - in the midst of crisis, or after the crisis - ten songs of faith. The first was sung when the Children of Israel were freed from Egypt. The second was the song of triumph by the Red Sea. The third, in the wilderness, when the well suddenly appeared and provided water. The fourth was the song which Moses sang before his death. The fifth was sung by Joshua after his victory over the five Amorite kings. The sixth was the song of Deborah and Barak which they sang when the Children of Israel conquered Sisera. The seventh was the Psalm of David when he was delivered out of the hands of his enemies. The eighth was the song of Solomon sung at the dedication of the Temple. The ninth was the song of Jehoshaphat as he went to battle against the Moabites and Ammonites. The tenth is the ~~grand~~ and mighty Psalm which the Children of Israel sang and will sing to the end of days at their future, final and everlasting deliverance.

It is a beautiful and significant Midrash. The Midrash calls attention not to one crisis in Jewish history, but to many. The history of Israel ^{is} ~~was~~ a history of crises. But from all of them, Israel ~~emerged~~ emerged triumphant and singing, and at the very end there will be a song of everlasting deliverance. This Midrash is but one of many of nigh numberless testimonials which we find in our sacred literature and in our history of the undefeated optimism of our faith and ^{of} our people. In every trial, and in every severe national tribulation, there was manifest a remarkable ^{unshakable} confidence in the final outcome, in the triumph of the right and in national survival.

I read this morning a famous chapter from the Book of Jeremiah, written just before the first exile - before the destruction of the First Temple. Disaster was in the offing. Jerusalem was besieged. The plight of the city was hopeless - it was about to fall. The leaders of the people were about to be led away in chains

to Babylon. The sanctuary of the Lord was about to be put in the fire. At that moment, a moment of dread anticipation, of impending tragedy, the prophet says to his people: "Yet again there shall be heard in this place whereof ye say: It is waste, without man or beast, even in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, that are desolate - the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride." The prophet Jeremiah, ^{was} commanded by the Lord to buy a piece of land in his country which was soon to be conquered and to have the deed signed and sealed and put away in an earthen vessel that it ^{would} ~~may~~ last many days as a confident symbol that "Houses and fields and vineyards shall yet again be bought in this land." Optimism in the face of doom.

Whence does this optimism spring? It sprang from the people's unshaken faith. The people had sinned. The people had provoked God. God had punished them severely, broken their national pride, cast them out in exile. But if a sin can bring on punishment, repentance can bring on forgiveness and restitution. There is a just God, ^{there} is a just law of providence and retribution. So Jeremiah passed through the people speaking in the name of God: "Like as I have brought all this great evil upon this people, so I will bring upon them all the good that I have promised them."

Many centuries later, when the Second Temple was destroyed, and Jerusalem was again laid waste and the masses were led away as slaves to work in the salt mines, it again seemed that Israel was forever lost, completely destroyed. At that dire moment of national calamity, the great Rabbi who lived at that time, Jochanan ben Zakkai established a new school. For what was destroyed? A building! A city! Many cities! An army! But Israel was more than that. Israel was a people. ~~It~~ ^{Israel} was an idea. Israel had already expressed itself in spiritual powers, in Torah, in a code of life, in a ^p complex of ideals, Israel had projected the vision of a spiritual Jerusalem. Zion and the Holy of Holies were now really in the hearts and minds of the faithful. Carthage was destroyed. The Carthaginians disappeared. Rome was destroyed. The Romans disappeared. Judea was destroyed. The Jews survived.

Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Joshua and Rabbi Akiba, disciples of Jochanan ben Zakkai saw the ruins. Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Joshua broke out into weeping and rent their garments. Rabbi Akiba laughed. They turned to him: "Why do you laugh?" "Why do you weep?" they were in turn asked by Akiba. "Behold," they said, "the sanctuary of the Lord, the Holy of Holies! Behold wild beasts now prowl about it. The Temple is destroyed. Our people are in exile. The enemies ~~XXX~~ have triumphed:" Rabbi Akiba turned to them and said: "The earlier prophecy (of Micah) has been fulfilled which said, 'Therefore shall Zion because of you be plowed as a field and Jerusalem shall become heaps and the mount of the Temple as a ruined forest.' ^{(Micah) Now} ~~And so will~~ the other prophecy be fulfilled: 'I shall return unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. There shall yet old men and old women sit in the broad places of Jerusalem and the broad places of Jerusalem shall be full of boys and girls playing there.' If the earlier prophecy had not been fulfilled this latter prophecy of redemption could not be fulfilled." This undefeated optimism prompted ^{Eliezer & Joshua} them to proclaim: "Thou hast comforted us, O, Akiba, Thou hast comforted us!"

As you notice, this optimism of our people was not the result of easy-going lives or of a pleasant, untroubled existence. Out of disaster, suffering and exile, it rose triumphantly to proclaim its unbroken faith in tomorrow.

The life of our people was never a ^{calm} ~~calm~~ and placid one. It was always a life of swords, of conflict, of strain. The very name Israel was given to our Father, Jacob, because he wrestled with angels and men, and was not alone.

Our national existence began in slavery and revolution. We reached the promised land after forty years of wandering in the desert, where a whole generation perished, ^{along the way.} Our ancestors had to fight for every foot of soil in Palestine before they could settle there. The period of the Judges ^{was} ~~were~~ the battle-days of our early history in Palestine. Spiritually we fought against the entire heathen world for nearly fifteen centuries - against the paganism of the Canaanites, the Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Greeks and the Romans. The whole world was idolatrous. One little people alone resisted. From the days of Assyria to the

days of the Third Reich, the empires which waged war on Israel were the most powerful empires in the world.

We were never relaxed! We were always braced against alien foes and alien influences. Frequently our people tasted defeat, degradation, slavery, exile, the fury and hatred of rulers and mobs. To have remained full of hope and faith in the future, after so many centuries of strife and frustration and suffering is a tribute to the soul of the ^{people} ~~race~~, and points to deep springs whence the soul draws its sustaining strength.

What were those strengths? Ideas, ^{certain} beliefs. In the first place strength came from the belief in God. In their successive defeats our people beheld the triumph of their just God, and in their rescue, His ^{mercy and} everlasting goodness. It was God who explained for them the tangled web of their strange career and checkered experiences. They came to believe that they were singled out for ^{high} ~~great~~ rewards and ^{hard} ~~great~~ punishment because God had singled them out for a ^{holy} ~~great~~ destiny!

Their suffering had one of two origins. Either they had sinned against the moral law and must atone for it, or they, being God's chosen servants, must atone by their suffering for the sins of the world. In either concept there was hope. ⁱⁿ On the one hand hope ~~RMX~~ repentance, on the other hope in the redemption of the world. Neither concept yields to despair. Both ennobles. A sinner who is aware of his sin, is also aware of God against Whom he has sinned; to that extent he is already halfway to repentance and return to God. A man who knows that he is ^{true} off tune can recapture the harmony of his life. So that our people's faith in God, even when they knew themselves not to be righteous, sustained them in their darkest hour. ^{art Thou not God from everlasting, O Lord My God, my holy one?} "Art Thou not God from everlasting, my Holy God? There we will ^{we shall} never die." ^{not die?} ^{Habakkuk, 1:12}

This concept of suffering for the sins of the world - that is, for an ideal - gave a note of grandeur and sublimity to Jewish life in its darkest hour. There was world significance to their tribulation. A great cosmic drama was being enacted and they were the central figures in that drama. They were helping to fashion a new world, as God willed those new worlds to come about. They were

helping to perfect a new world - *הם היו*. They were the summoned ones to help in that ~~comic~~ cause. Being the leaders, the pioneers in that spiritual work, theirs was a crown of thorns. As the hammer of destiny was fashioning new worlds, Israel was the anvil which bore the strokes of the hammering. Suffering for a cause was a badge of honor. Therefore the prophet was able to say to his people: "The people that walk in darkness see great light."

היה זה גילוי נאם
Even the other kind of suffering - personal suffering for personal deficiencies and moral inadequacies - even that kind of suffering may purify a man and lift him to new levels of insight and sympathy. There is a very challenging phrase in the Bible: "Moses was close to darkness when he sought God". *הוא היה קרוב לטמא*
Often it is in the darkness of our lives, in our misery and in our defeat that we discover God. It is in this confidence in God and in Israel's noble ministry of suffering that there is to be found the undefeated optimism of our people.

There is one other thought that I would like to leave. Israel believed, because their religion taught them to believe, in the perfectability of the world. There is evil in the world, but it can be overcome. Judaism was never ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ a Pollyanna religion. Judaism faced reality, Judaism saw and acknowledged war and poverty, exploitation, lust and hate. These were realities, but they were capable of being overcome and man has it within himself to overcome them.

הכל נברא לטוב
The end of all creation is good. ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ All that the Lord has created He created for the ultimate good. The human world was not created that it should ~~run~~ run down ultimately into chaos and anarchy.

אין תיכף תהיה
God created it out of chaos. He formed it that man may dwell upon it. There is a golden age coming.

אין תיכף תהיה
Our religion is a Messianic religion,
(a) a a a *אין תיכף תהיה*
a religion that believed in nobler, finer, juster, more peaceful world when wars will cease and poverty will be abolished, where every man will someday sit under his vine and fig tree and know war no more. It is within the power of man to hasten that day - to retard or advance it.

The evil of the world should not discourage man. It should challenge him to work for the golden day which is yet to come. The world can be made perfect and men can ~~XXXX~~ help make it so. The ~~XXXX~~ pessimistic philosopher Schopenhauer was quite correct when he declared that "optimism is as irreconcilable with Christianity as it is with Buddhism and Brahmanism. The fundamental characteristics of Judaism are optimism and realism."

My dear friends, our people today face another crisis - perhaps their greatest in history, the crisis of mass slaughter, the crisis of ~~ex~~termination. This is the time to draw ~~XXXXXXXX~~ consciously and deliberately upon the undefeated optimism of our people, based upon confidence in a just God, based upon the conception of the noble ministry of suffering, and based upon faith ~~X~~ in the perfectability of human society. The world is suffering for its sins. It is atoning for its sins. God will accept the atonement. Even as He has smitten, so will He forgive. That is ~~KNW~~ the law implicit in the history of our people. Men and nations are suffering today. Israel is suffering more than anyone. That has been our tragic noble privilege through the ages. We are again the anvils upon which history is being fashioned. Out of this evil, out of the evils of our day, out of the bitter conflict of our world, a new and better day will come. *פ'ח' 1726 27'6*
 "The redeemed will yet sing a new song."
P'f' 1102