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Meet your ancestors, 1945.

664
"MEET YOUR ANCESTORS"

How does the Bible portray the Jewish people collectively as distinct from its leaders? What are the qualities of heart and mind which have been responsible for Jewish survival?

By
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At
The Temple - E. 105th St. at Ansel Rd.

On
Sunday morning, October 28, 1945

At times we read in the Bible that the children of Israel went aside of the way of their forefathers had have done evil in the sight of God. The implication is that our forefathers were better than those of the generations that followed.

On the other hand we read from time to time in the Bible: (See manuscript for Hebrew) The implication there is that the forefathers were very bad, sinful that their emulation is undesirable. There is evidently a difference of opinion about the virtues of our ancestors according to our Sacred Literature that men are prone to idealize their ancestors. The Bible, as a rule, does not. The Bible is always quite realistic and rather matter of fact in describing all men and all people, in describing Jewish heroes and the Jewish ~~man~~ people as a whole. No one is portrayed in the Bible without his promises, without his faults and without his human frailties. The Bible seeks to make men better. It does not therefore start with perfection.

The great heroes^{of} the Bible, the patriarchs, matriarchs, Joseph, Moses, David, Solomon lovingly as their stories are told, are nevertheless also revealed in their moments of weakness, sin and humiliation.

And the people of Israel, too, of whom the Bible speaks so often with such affection and tenderness and championing, comes in for its full measure of condemnation and most bitter attack.

The prophet, Jeremiah, one of whose great prophecies I read to you this morning, speaks of God saying unto Israel: "I have loved Thee ~~xx~~ with an everlasting love." This same prophet is most violent and bitter and relentless in his castigations. Because these prophets were so eager for their people, so eager for them to be perfect, to be leaders of mankind, they projected for them such a gross destiny, and when they saw them back-sliding and worshiping pagan gods they felt they were committing the blackest kind of treachery and treason. They denounced their people so much. Prophets were told, according to the Rabbis, that they were too impatient in redressing of their people, they berated them

too much and because of that some of the great prophets were punished by God. The prophet Elijah who waged that great struggle against Baal worship of his day and said: "I am greatly jealous for you, O Lord, because the people have foresaken Thy Covenant," God said unto him: "Elijah, appoint Elisha as your successor. You can no longer lead this people."

When the great prophet, Isaiah said: "I dwell among a people of unclean lips," the angel took a burning coal and scorched the lips of that prophet.

Even the greatest of the prophets, Moses, berated, "They will not believe me." And God said, "A man who loses faith in his people cannot lead them." He died in the wilderness and did not lead his people to the Promised Land.

While there is the implication of weakness, there is, nevertheless, also great strength, nobility, greatness. The leader, the prophet, the teacher must understand both the weakness and the strength.

As I said a moment ago, the Bible does not hesitate to point out these faults, especially in the early life of our people. After our people left Egypt where they had been slaves for four hundred years, for a long time after their liberation they carried with them the scars of servitude. They manifested all the shortcomings of slaves, of men who were liberated, but still not free. Fear made them cowards. Hunger and thirst in the wilderness made them hanker after the fleshpots of Egypt. The road was too long, their desires too many. The soul of the people became impatient, impatient of their leadership. Moses complained time and again: "The people want to stone me." His leadership was challenged, denied. And they had no courage to face dangerous enterprises. The spies who had been sent ahead to spy out the land of Canaan said the land not was flowing with milk and honey, the people immediately lost courage and cried out to their leader to take them back to Egypt. The Bible points out all these flaws, these serious weaknesses of the people.

Nevertheless, when the great heathen prophet Balaam was summoned by the

the King of Moab to come and curse the people of Israel, hoping that by such a curse the people of Israel might be destroyed, this wise cunning believer of the heathen Baal saw something strangely different in this people: "Lo it is a people that dwells apart and is not like unto any other people." He discerned something fierce, some untamed strength of the people. He speaks of them as "a people who rise up as a lioness and that lifts himself up as a lion." He sees in that people something of the undefeasible strength, and he discerns that everyone that will bless that people will be blessed and that everyone who will curse this people will himself be cursed..

I read this morning the amazing confession of Dr. Ley, who while awaiting trial committed suicide. He was one of the most criminal of the criminals and before he committed suicide wrote this confession. Germany was defeated because of anti-Semitism, says the document. The only hope of Germany ever in the future is to come to amicable understanding with Germany. He has come to understand that those who press our people are themselves pressed, and those who curse are themselves cursed. So Balaam, the prophet of centuries and centuries ago look over this people whose weaknesses and strength the Bible records, this prophet is moved to say:

Now what is this lion's strength of this people? What is it that resides in this people concerning whom so many shortcomings are also recorded? I should think that first of all this may account for its undefeasibility. This people have a way of responding to a great vision. It has a capacity to respond to an ideal. When they were brought to the foot of Mt. Sinai, and when they were told that their destiny would be linked up with a great faith, one God, that they could be servants of one code of moral law, laws of justice, kindness, brotherhood, this self-same people, catching this vision, aware that it might become a Kingdom of Priests, a Holy people, they cried out with one accord. "We will do it." And so quickly is their response that

they put the doing even before the hearing." The Rabbis called them "the hasty people." He said to this people -- of their back-sliding -- once they caught sight of that vision, they remained true to it. Of course there was back-sliding. Of course they relaxed from time to time, to idolatry, to the ways of the heathen, and lapses were frequent. Especially was this true among the rich, the well-heeled who fretted and balked at the restraints and disciplines of the Moral Code of the Jews. The wealthy and the well-heeled were very often tantalized by Aryan glitter and Aryan civilization. They wanted to be assimilated with the foreign peoples. They wanted to be like other peoples. Their slogan was "When they shall have eaten their fill, and waxen fat, and turned unto other Gods." That is true of modern America as of ancient Palestine. Many of our people are attracted by every new fad. They are fascinated by every modernistic foible. Judaism then becomes too antiquated for them. The Jewish people becomes too restricted, remaining in the Jewish fold becomes too restricted, too narrow for them. Also the pastures in the other field are more attractive. That always has been a common experience among our people. Nevertheless that vision which we call Judaism, that vision was kept alive by our people for thirty-five centuries and whether they were free men or slaves living in Palestine or in exile, whether they have passed through vast tribulations, terror, persecution, they remained true to that vision always and clung to it. They preferred exile to apostasy... So that in all truth and full justification they did say in their prayers:

"Look from Heaven and see how we have become a scorn and a derision among the nations; we are accounted as sheep brought to the slaughter, to be slain and destroyed, or to be smitten and reprached. Yet, despite all this, we have not forgotten thy name. We beseech thee, do not forget us."

Yes, Israel can be weak. But it can also be strong. I suppose that is what the Rabbis meant when Israel referred in the Bible to the "dumst in the

earth and the stars in the heavens. (Quote Hebrew quotation from manuscript)

This same loyalty, and if I had the time, I would dwell on it at great length, Israel was able to manifest towards its land and towards its community. And driven towards this land "By the rivers of Babylon they sat down and wept... And they said: "How can we sing of Zion in a strange land?" They they vowed their eternal vow: "If I forget Thee, O Jerusalem, May my right hand forget its cunning." And for 2500 years that vow has remained a part of them. They have not forgotten. A magnificent fierce loyalty upon the responsibility for the survival of our people. It is one of the dominant characteristics of our people.

And also this other. The Bible calls attention to the fact that they are a generous people. During those years of wilderness through which they traveled and to which I have referred, when they resolved to build the Tabernacle in the wilderness, Moses said unto them: "Take ye from among ye an offering unto the Lord, whoever is willing, let him bring it, gold, silver and brass." And they brought so much, says the Bible that the skilled artisans who were to use all of that for the Tabernacles, cried unto Moses: "The people bring much more than enough." And Moses had to restrain the people from bringing more, for the stuff they had was sufficient for all. They had too much.

That isn't an accident of Jewish history. That is of the very warp and woof of Jewish character. What people has ever matched Israel for generosity from ancient days to modern days? Among what people are the laws of charity so amply defined and made so much of a mandate as among the people of Israel? Look into the laws of the Bible, the laws protecting the poor, the orphans, the widows? In the fields, corners were left for the poor, for those without possessions.

The Jews responded to the appeal of all human need, not only the needs of their own people but the needs of every human being. In the ancient world, in a world full of fear of the stranger, the Bible proclaimed: "Love the stranger

for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt." This expressed itself not only in charity, but in what our people called "deeds of love." Charity is done only with money. Deeds of love with manifold things. Charity is for the poor only. Kindness, goodness, love toward everything -- Milut Chasidim -- all this derives from one of the dominant characteristics of our people -- Rachmanit -- kindness, mercy.

Once removed from barbarism, we quickly developed a respect for human life, a hatred for cruelty, inhumanity, torture. The lot of the whole people, the plight of the poor, of the stranger was tragic beyond words. Israel introduced a new concept in the relationship of the strong to the weak, the master to the slave. There were no arenas in ancient Israel for men to clash with beasts for the enjoyment of people. There never were inquisitions. The Rabbis made amazingly incisive observations: "Any Jew who is found to be cruel -- one has every right to suspect his ancestry. He is probably not a Jew at all."

Not only kindness toward human beings, but kindness towards animals, dumb creatures. That, my good friends, is an outstanding quality of our people.

Another one of those qualities responsibility for the survival of the Jewish people is "Bishanim." The Rabbis said: "There three marks of distinction which characterize the Jewish people - charity, mercy. Of two of these I have already spoken.... I haven't yet spoke of "Biyeshanim". What does that mean? It means modesty, it means purity. It means chastity. It means the very opposite of that which common in the ancient world -- immorality, immodesty, licentiousness, impurity. Throughout the ages peoples marveled at the "purity of the Jewish family." The home of the Jewish people was regarded as a sanctity. Marriage was a bond of sanctity. To the Jews the home was a sanctuary. The home was a castle not to be broken into when he was away.

I just finished reading a book by St. Clair Lewis called "Cass Timberlain." Many couples married. Hardly one of them has a happy marriage. If this is

America 1945, there is something very written in its core, I would say. The number of divorces recorded in our courts seem to substantiate St. Clair Lewis' book.

Our people had a different conception of human life. One of its great secrets of survival was that within there was strength, loyalty, mutual aid, mutual respect, a refuge in the storm, an isle of peace and security in an immense world.

Finally ^{when} we meet our ancestors, we study them throughout the ages, we will find another outstanding characteristic -- the love of freedom, the impatience of tyranny. The King of Israel was not like the King of Babylon, or of Assyria. In five instances at least the Bible calls attention to the fact that the people elected their people. They rebelled against the King if he was unjust. Kings were subject to the higher law. The prophet could come to the King as he did to King David and say to him: "Thou art the man who is guilty."....

When Hitler said that Democracy was Jewish, he was stating a cold, historic fact. Liberty always important in life of Jews.

These, then, I regard as the outstanding characteristics of this people which is far from being perfect, people who can never be represented by spokesmen of our people as perfect people, a people nevertheless which possesses rare qualities which has enabled it to survive all through the long centuries in spite of circumstances and persecutions, which means to move forward into the future, undefeated. It is loyal to a vision, to a conviction. It has a great spirit of humanness, of generosity, of love of life and love of human beings. It hates tyranny and oppression. It loves freedom and it reveres the sanctity of home life. Because of these qualities our people was able to say: "Much as they afflict me -- but never were they able to prevail upon me."

1) "Meet your Ancestors" -

עו מ/25:3 ל.א.א 1/12. 2sch. 11
12
1/18 1/18, 1/18 x/18 ילד פ/18 נ/18 גליל 2/30 פ/18 3/18 1/18 7/18 - Judges

- (a) Diff. of opinion about the virtues of ancestors whom men are prone to idealize.
- (b) Bible is quite realistic + matter-of-fact in describing all men and all people - all of heroes and the of people as a whole.
c/ no one is portrayed without his faults - human frailties
B. seeks to make men better. It does not start with perfection.
- (d) The great heroes of the Bible - the Patriarchs - the Matriarchs - Joseph - Moses - David - Solomon, lovingly as their stories are told, are nevertheless also revealed in their moments of weakness, sin and humiliation.
- (e) And the people of Israel, too, for whom the Bible speaks so often with such affection and tenderness and championing, comes in for its full measure of condemnation and most bitter attack.
- (f) The Prophet Jeremiah - most violent and relentless in his castigations
- (g) They were so eager for their people to be perfect - leaders - so high a destiny - brothers blackest treachery - unobedient
- (h) Too impatient + inexorable - berated too much + doubted too much
① Elijah - "Great jealous - foraker the covenant" - affront Eli as his successor
② Isaiah - "unclean lips"
③ Moses - 1/1, 1/18 1/18 1/18 -
- (i) There is weakness, of course, but also strength! and endurance

2/ When our people emerged from 400 - manifested all the shortcomings of slaves who had just found freedom (2)

- ① Fear made cowards of them - Red Sea. פחד מפני ה' ופחד מן המצרים
- ② Hunger & Thirst in Wilderness - חסרון מים וחסרון אוכל
- ③ 'Impatient' חסרון סבלנות
- ④ Backsliding - Golden Calf - חסרון אמונה - קוראח -
- ⑤ No courage to face dangerous enterprises - Spies -

3/ And yet when Moses - something strangely different -
"So it is a people that dwells apart and is not like any other people":

① He discerns some thing, untamed strength in them

He speaks of them as a people that rises up as a lioness and that lifts himself up as a lion:

② He discerns that everyone that will bless that people will be blessed - curse - will be curse - Dr. Levy

③ And he beats forth unswervingly in a prayer / praise -
- שיר ליהודה -

4/ What is the lion-strength of this unique people -
concerning whom so many features are reported?

① They respond to the appeal of a just vision. Sinai - not a selfish vision
- Code - Covenant - United Humanity
- 15:50 And -

② And with all their repeated backsliding - remained true to that vision.

9/ Rabbis are on sound historical ground

personality and character - person - is difficult to personify

10/ personality - character - facets and dimensions of ancient world - high standards of family

personality - marriage a holy institution - marriage bond a Sacred

(a) Respect for marriage - Reverence + fidelity - Simcha Levi - Caro Turef

(b) Home life - family devotion - his "castle" - Savich

11/ Love of Freedom - Impatient of tyranny - Pol. - social - econ. - educ.
Absolutism - hard road in Israel -

(a) Solomon - 3 instances - people elected = Samuel - "Rebellion of Saul"
Kings were subject to higher law - Chai David - Ahab

(b) Power & dignity of the king - power is power is power

(c) Power of Priesthood in Rel. life - curbed - whole people
power is power - laymen - Pharisees

(d) Econ. absolutism - exploitation -

(e) Humane is justice - curbed Hutter
Biblical account

12/ It is then qualitative is power is power is power
qualitative is power is power is power
qualitative is power is power is power