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Series IV: Sermons, 1914-1963, undated.

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Moses, 1953.

M O S E S

The Second in a Series of "Judaism Seen Through Its Great Personalities"

November 22, 1953

Two weeks ago, you may recall, I spoke of the patriarch Abraham and we saw reflected in him some of the virtues and ideals which are precious in the sight of Judaism. The pilgrimage spirit, the love of peace, hospitality, the sacrificial faith and the great passion for justice for all men. Abraham was the founder of our faith. Moses was its law-giver. " ", Moses commanded the Torah for us. " ", which became the heritage of the whole congregation of Jacob.

We speak of Moses as "Mosha Rabbāno," Moses our teacher. What sort of a man was he? What virtues, ideals of our faith are reflected in him? This man Moses who towers above all - the giant among mankind's heroic figures? This man Moses has intrigued writers and dramatists, artists, painters, sculptures throughout the ages, and he is still an inspiration to many an author, to many an artist. I think essentially Moses is a great human being. There's nothing mysterious about him or baffling or unfathomable. He's not like one of those distant personalities in the dim ages of the past which somehow loom large but which we cannot define. And as we read his story we can also sense in this very human-being the strength of the man, the courage, the iron will which enabled him to set a people of slaves free and to mold them into a nation. The great artist of the Renaissance, perhaps the greatest of all, Michael-Angelo, was able to catch some of this masterful, this majestic strength of the man, the great dignity of him, and the powerful and purposeful personality. What Michael-Angelo did not catch was the utter humanity of the man and the utter humility of the man. Qualities which the Bible very pointedly and deliberately, and time and again, points out.

" ", this man Moses was the most humble of all men who ever lived upon the face of the earth, was the supreme tribute

which the Bible pays to this titanic figure of all religious history, and that is very characteristic, not only of Moses but of the people who Moses fashioned and who revered and honored Moses as representing the supreme virtues which the people revered and honored. " " , above all honors and all glories comes humility.

Jews hated the proud - those who exalted themselves by virtue of the special equipments of powers and talents and even genius, but those who exalted themselves above men. Those who sought to domineer the imprint of the Torah, said the Rabbis, is humility. Scholars of the Torah are recognized in the streets by the humility of their walk, and their speech, and their dress. He who for the sake of the Torah makes himself small in this world will be great in the world to come. But this is not an accidental virtue among a host of other virtues praised by our people. It is remarkable how much emphasis is placed in the Bible and in rabbinic literature on this quality of modesty, of humility, of lowliness of spirit in a human being. It was sensed by our people that the proud and the arrogant can never approach God because you cannot approach God in any spirit but the spirit of lowliness and humility. Walking humbly with God was of the three virtues which constitute religion that Micus spoke of - the doing of justice, and the loving of mercy, and the walking humbly with God.

And so this is the first great quality exemplified in this personality with which one would not expect this quality to be associated - humility. And also the quality which is also precious in the sight of our people - the quality of ~~which~~ what I might call "shepherding love." Shepherding love. The love that looks out for others; that tends and watches over others as a shepherd does his flock.

" " , Moses was a shepherd and that's a key to his character. And he was a shepherd all his life, whether it was with the flock of Jethro out in the wilderness or when he led his rebellious host of slaves for forty years through the wilderness to the promised land - always he remained in spirit and in attitude, a shepherd.

Our people loved the quality of "shepherding love " which spoke of God as a shepherd - " " , the Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. The Rabbis tell of how God came to select Moses to be the leader of the people. Moses was a shepherd tending the flock when a young lamb strayed away from the flock and was lost and Moses went out to look for that lost lamb and he found this little lamb that had fallen among rocks and stones and broken its leg, bleating and crying, and Moses picked up the little lamb, tended it, looked after it, set its broken leg, carried it in his arms back to the flock. And God said a man who can so look after a lost lamb from the flock, who can be that kind of a shepherd, is qualified to be the shepherd of my people.

Moses never thought of himself, only of his people. I read you the story this morning from the 32nd chapter of the Book of Exodus, the story of the Building of the Golden Calf. This act of black apostasy and treason on the part of the people, treason to their God, who had just brought them out of slavery and led them across the Red Sea and leading them on to freedom. Moses had left them and gone up to Mt. Sinai and the people felt themselves without a leader and without the leader's God, and so they called upon Aaron and said, make us a God like the Egyptians worship and Aaron told them, give me your gold and I will make you a God - and he did, a golden calf, a cow, such as the Egyptians worshipped and the people began to sacrifice to that God and the Lord became angry with his people and resolved to destroy them and said to Moses, let me alone "

" , and I will consume them. They're unworthy.

" " , and out of you I will rebuild a nation and make of thee a great nation. But Moses wasn't thinking of himself, Moses was thinking of his people and he pleaded with God, do not destroy the people - they have been slaves, they and their ancestors for hundreds of years, they don't know any better, give them a chance, they will learn better - either they or the generation after them. "

thou O Lord canst not forgive them, "

" , and if not, if

" , erase me from

thy book which thou hast written - I don't want to live without them. Rather me than they. I am only a tool, break me, not them. Moses loved his people. He knew them to be very rebellious. " " , you were rebellious, said Moses, just before he died, to his people. You have been rebellious from the very day that I knew you. But he loved them and when they were in fear he heartened them, and when they were in grief he comforted them, and significantly enough the people knew it and understood it fully. Oh, they often in fear and in doubt and in despair, in their hunger and their thirst in the wilderness, and in their fierce impatience they would turn against Moses - why did you bring us out of Egypt to perish here in the wilderness? They would denounce him. They would rebel against him as Korach and his host did. Very often Moses had to say, O good Lord before long they will stone me to death, this people. But down deep in their hearts the people knew that Moses loved them and therefore they loved and admired him. And when he left them to go up to Mt. Sinai they felt as though their protector and their guide had vanished; the man on whom they could lean; their shepherd, whose rod and whose staff guided them. And when Moses died, " " , and the children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab for thirty days.

Moses was humble with a "shepherding love" for his people but he was also strong, with the strength of granite. He wasn't a weak man. Somehow we associate humility and love with weakness - not at all. To be humble and to be loving requires the greatest strength of human character. It is weakness in a man to be proud and arrogant and selfish - not strength - strength is found in humility and strength is found in selfless love.

Moses dared to face up to the king of Egypt, to the Pharoah, and demand that his people go forth. Moses dared to face up to his own people and endure their distrust and their accusations, their infamous attack upon him. Moses was strong to lead with a firm hand this motley mob, to give them a Law, to lead them for

four decades, through war and danger, and hunger, and thirst to the gates of the promised land. And when it was necessary he was strong enough to punish his people. After the building of the Golden Calf he sifted out the malefactors, the leaders, those who had misled the people and 3,000 of them were slain. That's strength in a man and qualified him to be a liberator, a leader of a revolution, the first great revolution in human history.

That kind of spiritual strength is what our people always admired. Our people never worshipped brute power; was never impressed by sheer force, was contemptuous of it. But the fearless spirit that we have come to call the prophetic spirit, that our people admire and revere.

When Jeremiah received his consecration vision to become a prophet to his people, God said unto him, "Behold, I make you this day a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls against the whole land, against the Kings of Judah, its princes, its priests, and the people of the land." A fortified city, an iron pillar, bronze walls of the spirit - that's what our people admire. And Moses was the " ", the father of all the prophets. He came to know God, " ", as the Bible put it, figuratively, of course, not literally face to face, he came to understand God more profoundly than any of the other prophets. And he set the tradition for all the prophets. And his spirit broods over all of them, Isaiah and Amos, and Hosaiah and Jeremiah. They speak in the spirit of the immortal Moses, the prophet.

Wherein does prophecy consist really? What is prophecy? Prophecy consists in proclaiming unafraid to all the people the Law, the moral Law of God, the Law of justice and love and equality, of freedom and peace. Prophecy was the mandate to call sinners and oppressors and exploiters and tyrants of men to account and to repentance. Prophecy was to defend the cause of the widow and the orphan, the defenseless and the weak. Prophecy was a great moral sense of the human race. That's the Torah of Mosha - that's the Law of Moses. One law for all, for all

men regardless, for all nations regardless. "

", you

shall not recognize people in judgment - all people are alike. "

", you shall not be afraid of any man. "

",

for Law belongs to God.

And this spirit of prophecy has always been in the heart of Judaism. That is the essence of our faith. There is ritual in our religion and ceremony, important. There is custom and observance, important. There is public worship, important. There is theology and speculation, all important. But in forming them all and underlying them all is " " , to judge the case of the poor and of the needy, that is the good. " " , this is knowing me, sayeth God. The moral Law, the prophetic Law, that is the essence of Judaism.

And speaking of Law, Moses was the Law-Giver. Judaism is based on Law. " " , laws, statutes, ordinances. Judaism believed in the rule of Law, not in the rule of men. Certain other religions, Christianity among them, came to look upon Law as a sort of a burden, a sort of a hinderance to the spiritual life of man. Only faith was important. In the case of Christianity, faith in the crucifixion, incarnation, the crucifixion, the resurrection of Jesus - he who believes in Him is saved. Works are not as important. A man is saved by believing. In Judaism a man is saved, if at all, because the whole concept of salvation is alien to Judaism, a man is saved by leading a good life, by obeying the moral Law. Laws are required to guide men, protect society, even ceremonial Laws, ritual Laws have their pedagogic value to train men into the habits of the good life, of the religious life.

Judaism is distinguished from nearly every religion of mankind by the fact that it is a religion of Law, a Torah. Of course, in the course of time, teachers and rabbis found it necessary to pyramid Law upon Law, many of them necessary for the time, which later on became unnecessary and by being retained did prove a burden upon the people, so that a reform and liberal movement arose which began

to select the Laws which are essential, which are timeless, which are eternal, which are true and valid for all generations and the Laws which have a temporary purpose, which are no longer important. Whether it is reform Judaism or liberal Judaism or conservative Judaism or traditional Judaism, - there is no Judaism without a system of Law, moral and ceremonial.

And finally, good friends, Moses was the liberator, the emancipator of liberty - liberty has always been dear to the heart of our people. Because of their initial experience in Egypt where they were slaves for four hundred years, our people never forgot the taste of servitude, the bitterness of slavery, the hurt to the body and the soul of the lash of the task-master, and always yearned for freedom, emancipation, every department of human life. "

and thou shalt proclaim freedom, liberty, throughout the land and to all the inhabitants thereof. By the way, that sentence from the Book of Leviticus is inscribed upon the Liberty Bell in the City of Philadelphia. To bring thee in prison out of the prison-house, to be a breaker of chains; the sons and daughters of Israel throughout the ages, and it is in their blood to be in the forefront of those who found mankind's wars of liberation.

This great and beloved country of ours drew its inspiration and its authority for the American Revolution, for its Declaration of Independence, for its Proclamation of Democracy and Human Equality from Moses, from the Exodus, from the Bible, just as the Pilgrim Fathers whose holiday the American people will celebrate this coming Thursday, just as they took their inspiration for religious freedom, freedom of the spirit of man from the Old Testament, from the book which is the inspiration of Moses.

And so, humble, loving, strong; in Moses we find the prophetic spirit of Judaism is fashioned for justice, for law, for freedom. More than any other Jew, Moses molded the Jewish people and for all times we find the pattern of Jewish life and of Jewish thought, and not only for Judaism - Moses - that is true of all

great spiritual genius - Moses' message could not be limited to any one people, to any one country. Its dynamic truth was destined to break through any temporal or territorial limitations, surge, flow out and enrich the lives of all men. And so the spirit of Moses is reflected in Christianity. The spirit of Moses is reflected in Islam. The spirit of Moses is found today in every effort that is made by human beings of whatever race and whatever clime which seeks greater freedom for man and the breaking of chains, which seek greater justice for man and the rights of all men, which preaches a way of life which is a way of humility and kindness. In any part of the world today there is the soul of Moses, the work as it will be unto eternity. There never arose a prophet in Israel like unto Moses whom God knew face to face, and there never arose a prophet in the whole of mankind who so magnificently brought forth the hopes and the dreams and the aspirations of humanity as did Moses, the Man of God.



1/ In Abraham we saw reflected some essential virtues and ideals precious in the sight of Judaism.

the pilgrim's spirit - love of peace - heroic faith - sacrifice - faith - passion for justice for all men.

He was the Founder of the Faith.

אלוהים ברא את האדם בצלמו
בדמות אלהים בראוהו

Moses was its Law-giver! אלוהים נאמר.

2. What sort of a man was he? What virtues. as reflected in him? - who towers above all - a

Giant among mankind's heroic figures of history - distinguished writers, dramatists, artists, painters, sculptors throughout the ages.

→ a great human being - not a mysterious, unapproachable personality - beyond the reach of man's humble state.

He is close to us - we can understand his hopes and dreams, his struggles, frustrations and disappointments, - How he was misunderstood, criticized, opposed - by those whom he loved - his epic achievements, his lonely death.

We can measure the strength, the man, the courage,

the iron will, he who set free a people from slavery and molded them into a nation - Unshakable - caught that marvelous strength - the new dignity - the powerful will of purpose.

What he did not catch — the utter humility and humility of the man — which the Bible stresses
also, לִבְיָנוּתוֹ לִבְיָנוּתוֹ לִבְיָנוּתוֹ —
לִבְיָנוּתוֹ לִבְיָנוּתוֹ לִבְיָנוּתוֹ —

① Virtue לִבְיָנוּתוֹ לִבְיָנוּתוֹ לִבְיָנוּתוֹ — Jed. hated the
pride — those who exalted — dominion —

— "The imprint, the לִבְיָנוּתוֹ is humility.
— "Students, the לִבְיָנוּתוֹ are recognized in the street by their
humility, their walk, their speech, their dress.
"He who for the sake, the לִבְיָנוּתוֹ makes himself small
on this world, will be great on the world to come"

② First quality exemplified — Humility

3/ ~~But strength too~~ And also — the Shepherd who — the
love that looks out for others — that serves and watches
over others — as a shepherd does his flock

לִבְיָנוּתוֹ לִבְיָנוּתוֹ לִבְיָנוּתוֹ —

~~God~~ God, Himself — represented as —

Moses and lost lamb — =

① Moses never that humor — only of his people.

Golden Calf — Back of the לִבְיָנוּתוֹ לִבְיָנוּתוֹ לִבְיָנוּתוֹ — לִבְיָנוּתוֹ

— pleads with God — as if for his own
children

Laws are required to guide - protect - and society
Even ceremonial laws have their pedagogic value - to train
men into the habits of the righteous life.

7/ Exodus - liberty as always dear to the heart of our people

3/23 x/12/1 -

- Because of our critical experience - as slaves in Egypt

- 2/10/10 2/10/10 1/10/10 - Breaker, chains

Exodus - Leviticus - Numbers - Deuteronomy

Exodus - Leviticus - Numbers - Deuteronomy - other people - Americans
people find them in Scripture sanctuary - Prophets

8/ Humble, Lowly, Strong - In him is the prophetic spirit
of Judaism - His passion for Justice, and Law, and Freedom.

more & any one else he molded the J. people - and defined
for all time the pattern, its faith and life.