

# Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project

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Series IV: Sermons, 1914-1963, undated.

Reel Box Folder 165 60 955

A nation's greatness, 1955.

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#### A NATION'S GREATNESS

May 15, 1955

The subject of my address this morning was suggested to me by a poem, written quite a number of years ago by Ralph Waldo Emerson, called "A Nation's Strength."

This is the poem:

What makes a nation's pillars high And its foundations strong?
What makes it mighty to defy
The foes that round it throng?

It is not gold. Its kingdoms grand Go down in battle shock; Its shafts are laid on sinking sand, Not on abiding rock.

Is it the sword? Ask the red dust Of empires passed away; The blood has turned their stones to rust, Their glory to decay.

And is it pride? Ah, that bright crown Has seemed to nations sweet;
But God has struck its luster down
In ashes at His feet.

Not gold but only men can make A people great and strong; Men who for truth and honor's sake Stand fast and suffer long.

Brave men who work while others sleep, Who dare while others fly -They build a nation's pillars deep And lift them to the sky.

What is a nation's greatness? What does a nation consist of? Abraham Lincoln said, "A nation may be said to consist of its territory, its people, and its laws. The territory is the only part which is of certain durability." A nation, then, according to Abraham Lincoln, consists of its territory, its people, and its laws. When you come to think of it, all of these three elements which make up a mation change. The territory of a nation through the years, through the generations or fenturies, may expand or may contract. The United States of America of 1955,

territorially and geographically speaking, is not at all the United States of America of 1789, or what our country was after the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, or after the accession of Florida, or Texas, or the Mexican cessions, or Alaska or Hawaii. Teritorially our nation grew. Other nations lose from time to time some of their territory - they become contracted, especially nations which grew empires or possessed colonies. In the course of time their empires break up and their colonies may be lost to them. So that territorially, a nation changes. And certainly as regards the people which make up a nation - the people frequently charges, especially those peoples which have experienced large-scale immigration from time to time. This is especially true of our country, which is, as you know, a veritable melting-pot of the peoples of the whole earth, so that the human composition of the nation, as far as antecedents and racial backgrounds are concerned, changes radically from time to time. The vast migrations of peoples over the face of the globe over the last few hundred years pretty well mixed up the racial strains of almost all the nations of the earth. In a real sense amalgamation of racial stock has been going on since the beginning of time.

Laws, which are the third element in this composition of a nation, change. The types of government of a nation change - monarchy, constitutional monarchy, democracy, dictatorship.

When all is said and done, therefore, what is really distinctive about a nation is not its territory nor its people nor its form of government. Thereis no durability these to any one of three factors. What is distinctive about a nation is a sense of historic continuity which the people experience, a sense of common loyalties and common sympathies which exist among them and which do not exist between them and other peoples, and a desire to be governed by themselves rather than by others.

And what is really durable and distinctive and great about any nation and what really outlives the changes and mutations imperitory and composition and laws -

forms of government - is the significant contribution in terms of arts, science, literature, and social institutions to the welfare of humanity which that particular nation makes.

In this sense the phrase which we find in one of our great Psalms in the Bible is profoundly true: "Let nations know that they are like individuals, like human beings." Nations are like individuals, and what makes an individual great and significant is not his size or his wealth or his power, but his contribution towards the building of the good society and the nature of his dealings with his fellow men. And that too is the criterion for the greatness of a nation.

What is ancient Greece remembered by? Think back to your study of history.

What is ancient Greece remembered by? Certainly not for its size. It is a very small country, a country that could hide itself in one of our states in the U.S. - a little country, largely barren, mountainous, with very limited resources. What won for Greece so large a place in the annals of mankind? Why, it's men, and institutions, and ideas to which it gave birth - its Homer, Plato, Aristotle, Euripides, Sophecles, Aeschylus. Its philosophers, artists, sculptors, scientists. That remarkable little people inhabiting a speck of the globe carved new highways for civilization, opened new doors, perfected new tools which enabled man to begin his mastery of the world.

Take the little people of Judea. It has been said that only two peoples molded Western civilization - the Greeks and the Jews - Hellenic and Hebraic influences determined modern civilization. Well, Judea, like Greece, was literally an infinitesimal spot on the face of the earth. Rugged mountains in Judea and plains in Samaria - the whole country was never, at the height of its greatest expansion, expanded beyond Damascus in the north and Idumaea in the south. A little strip of

country

land, much of it barren. What made that little osignificant in the records of human history? Why are the names of that little country mentioned over and over again as names of cities of other countries all over the world? Why, it's the men and the ideas which it produced. It's Abraham and Moses and Isaiah and Micah and Amos and Hillel and a new God concept and a new code of ethics which it gave to the world. It revolutionized the spiritual and religious life and outlook of mankind. That's what made Judea significant. That's what made the pation important.

Disraeli said that "all the great things have been done by little nations."

I don't know how true that is as an absolute statement, but certainly we would be justified in saying that most of the great things have been done by little nations.

When England produced its Magna Charta and developed Constitutional Covernment, England was a small country. It wasn't the great British Empire which it came to be in the 19th century. The greatest movement in the Middle Ages - the Renaissance,

Humanism, the birth of the modern world, came out of little city-states in Italy - out of Florence, out of Venice, and you might remember too that the great revolutionary ideas which our country gave to the world was given at the time when the whole population of the United States was less than 3 million and the territory was a thin strip of land on the borders of the Atlantic; when the Revolutionary fathers gave the Declaration of Independence and the Eill of Rights and thepew concept of democracy and self-government to the world, the American people was a small people.

Many years later when our country extended far beyond its original borders and its population was ten times what it was in 1789, the famous scientist, Huxley, who attended the opening of Johns Hopkins University, on the occasion of that celebration he delivered a memortable address in which, among other things, he said, "I cannot say that I am in the slightest degree impressed by your bigness (that is, the bigness of America) or your material resources as such. Size is not grandeur,

and territory does not make a nation. The great issue about which hangs a true sublimity and a terror of overhanging fate is what are you going to dowith all these things? What is it to be the end to which these are to be the means?"

What is the greatness of a nation? Some have tried to suggest that a nation's greatness consists and depends upon its original racial stock, the purity of its racial stock. That was the myth which the Nazis tried so desperately to popularize in the world in our own lifetime. Some nations are great automatically, according to this doctrine, by virtue of having been born great, being possessed of the right biologic strain. This, of course, is all wishful thinking. All races of man, except those which have been least favored by geographic location, have at one time or another produced real greatness, and there have been nations great and small belonging to all racial stocks who have produced little of significance in the arts and the sciences and very few great men of world renown.

No race, my dear friends, has a monopoly on genius or on all fields of human progress. Excellence in one field may be counterpoised by deficiencies in others. Again the span of creative achievement of any one people is neither unlimited nor uninterrupted. Nor are the contributions of any one people sufficient for the encompassing life of mankind. Whatever is finally achieved by any one people of enduring truth, or beauty, or utility, becomes in the end the grateful possession of all.

No, it is not race that makes a nation great - it is men, and ideas. I very frequently visit the city of Washington, the capital of our country, as many of you do, and I am always impressed by the great monuments of that city, what it is that the American people wish to memorialize, wish to hold up as an example and an inspiration for all future generations, what it is the American people is most grateful for. Three of the foremost monuments of that great city - becoming one of the most beautiful cities of the world - are dedicated to three men: the

Washington Monument, dedicated to the man who gave the American people political freedom and set in motion a wave of struggles for political emancipation throughout the Western world; Thomas Jefferson, champion of human rights, author of the Declaration of Independence, the greatest apostle of democracy in the world and undoubtedly the foremost liberal of modern times - it is a beautiful monument dedicated to his memory in the city of Washington - stately, simple, impressive; and, of course, Abraham Lincoln, the great emancipator, who set slaves free. It isn't merely three men that these monuments immortalize, but three ideas - vital, indispensable to the progress of civilization. Political freedom, political independence, human rights, inalienable human rights, and human equality, equality of all races and of all people. These men represent America's greatness. America produced them and gave their faith and their vision to the world.

There are other impressive edifices and buildings in Washington which in a real way symbolize the greatness of a great country. There is the majestic structure of the Supreme Court of the U.S., symbolizing and epitomizing government by law and not by men, respect for the authority of law, reliance is the last analysis upon law. That is a nation's greatness:

There is the capital of the United States, where Congress has for the last century and a half legislated for a free people. Now, not all of its laws were good laws, nor all of its legislators learned or great or wise, but longer than most governments on the face of the earth, in that place, in the capital, a freely elected body of men made laws which in the long run served the best interests of a free, self-governing, and progressive people. That is a nation's greatness.

In that same city you will find other impressive structures dedicated to learning, to the arts, to the sciences; the great Library of Congress, one of the foremost collection of books in the world; the great Smithsonian Institution for the diffusion of knowledge among man; National Academies of Arts, Museums - these are the greatness of a nation, and they are duplicated in a hundred ways in other cities and capitals

of our country. Our school system, our social agencies, our institutions for the care of the sick and the aged and the orphaned, our art centers, our recreation centers, whatever in our art and literature, journalism and theater, radio and television is wholesome and truthful and clean and noble - they represent our nation's strength. A high standard of living for our people. Sound relationships between employee and management. Steady employment. A sense of general well-being. A confidence in the future. A pride in the nation to which one belongs. These represent the greatness of our country.

And conversely, periodic depressions, economic insecurity, and large scale unemployment, and slums, and the neglect of those who are entitled to our care, and corruption in politics and in government and in the arts and literature, and increasing crime, and juvenile delinquency and broken homes, and increased divorces, and segregation and discrimination and intolerance and bigotry and hate-mongering and war-mongering - these represent our nation's weaknesses and are our dangerous national maladies.

There have been many people visitors to the United States, friendly critics of our country who visited our shores from time to time from France, England, or other lands, and then wrote about America. Two of the foremost visitors and writers, intelligent, far-seeing, came from France and from England - one more than 100 years ago. In 1831 and 1832 Alexis de Tocqueville visited our country; upon his return to France he wrote a monumental work called "Democracy in America." Fifty years later the eminent author, James Bryce, visited our shores, made a study of our institutions and our form of government, and he wrote a monumental work which is a classic, "The American Commonwealth." There have been many others. Now these writers found many things in American life and society to criticize and to be criticized. They spoke of the rather low level of political life in our country, the intellectual standard of our political leadership which they did not regard as very high, the failure of real talent to enter the field of politics. They called attent on

to the "Ideal of Public Life" that in this country is rather low; corruption in politics. They dwelt also on the formidable power of wealth and big business in controlling the life of America. They spoke of this passion on the part of many Americans to get rich.

But they also found things to praise, things which represent the real greatness and which they appreciated as elements of real greatness, which they held up as an example for the rest of the world. First and foremost of those things was our love for human equality, basic sympathy for the equality of man; our faith in liberty; our belief in the worth of every human being, and in man's perfectibility through education and through improved environment; our belief in progress and improvement, this remarkable optimism of the American people, not merely in terms of material progress but in terms of improvement of the individual, of rising to ever high levels. They found that an admirable quality in the American people. They were amazed and they dwelt on their admiration of our fundamental unity as a people, in spite of the diversity of strains and elements which have entered into the composition of the American people. In times of crisis this people, so variegated, coming from so many parts of the world and from so many different backgrounds, so many different religious strains - in times of crisis this people seemingly has an unfailing genius for coalition, for uniting, for meeting the challenge of a dangerous moment. And they also dwelled with great appreciation upon the quality in the American character which they called one way or another "fraternity," "kindliness," "a sense of human fellowship," a feeling of the duty towards mutual help. They called it the "big heart" of the American people. There is no people on earth in all history that have been so generous, not only citizen toward citizen, but collectively, as a country, to other countries, to backward peoples. We are to this day pouring out thousands of millions of dollars in help - peoples to whom we have little relationship, really, lift themselves into a higher standard of living and health, a better way of life.

These are elements of real greatness in a nation. As long as we will cherish these elements, we shall remain a great people. In spite of our great wealth and in spite of our great power, which are frequently a threat to the greatness of a people. For the essence of civilization, my dear friends, is the free, secure, peaceful, and creative social life. That is the real criterion. The criteria of greatness are neither wealth, nor size, nor speed, nor invention, nor armament, but the values which a people places upon human personality, the rewards which it grants to labor and to merit, the quality of its intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic interests, and the encouragement which it gives to these factors and to all factors which make human life sweeter, more confident, and more joyous. If then, you ask me, what is patriotism, I would say that patriotism is loyalty to these spiritual and ethical principles within a nation which give rise to great men, to great ideas, and to great institutions. I go back, then, to the great words of Emerson: a nation's greatness is not gold, not size, not arms, not the capacity to throw one's weight around in the international scene. The greatness of a nation is men, inspired by great convictions, strong and firm in their resolution to stand by these convictions. That, I take it, has been the greatness of the Jewish people. Way back in the Bible you are already admonished, God called upon the people of Israel to undertake a great mission in the world not because of your numbers because you are small, really, you are few in numbers. They were chosen because God believed that in this people He would find a quality of loyalty, a steadfastness of great principles which would enable them to be the carriers of great ideas to mankind. I think history has attested to the fact. For thousands of years this little people, frequently harrassed, beaten, exiled, persecuted, suffering many defections, losing many in the course of time, yet always possessed of a caul which remained immovably

loyal and firm and carried on. This is our greatness. This is our pride. And I trust that this will be the greatness and the pride of the American people in the days to come; remaining true to the ideals of human equality, human freedom, of spiritual unity, and of kindliness and helpfulness in the world. May God grant that it be so in all future days. Amen.



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# orted in Syrian Frontier Agreement; nk to Nasser Bloc Is Seen in the Move

ab Le-States proposed resolution.

No official stand of that kind

Syria's has been taken but some inform- secret reports had been received United ed circles believe they are stall-that estimated that a total of secre- ing in order to avoid annoying 200 Egyptian officers and nonn For- Eqypt and at the same time commissioned officers were "beted to avoid the appearance of oppesing ing trained in land, sea and air President Eisenhower has as-Egyp- the Security Council effort to operations and the use of arma-sured Israel that the United Abdel safeguard peace.

#### Britons to Quit Jordan

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AMMAN, Jordan, March 24 atives (A)—All British offices in the mas- Arab Legion except a number in picked men to the Soviet bloc countries for their training.

and posts are to return home, a joint Egypt's military secrets are

The communiqué was issued after long talks between a British team headed by British Am-bassador Charles Duke and a Jordan delegation led by Premier Samir el-Rifai.

## Egyptians Train in Soviet By OSGOOD CARUTHERS

CAIRO, March 24-A highly laced Egyptian source said to-

to the Soviet bloc coun-armistice. ther than permit large

the Lebanonese and Syrian were being trained in Poland in Premiers some of the Beirut the use of the new weapons newspapers declared they had agreed to protest the United from the Soviet bloc for cotton and rice.

> The report from London said ments at a Soviet base near Poland's Gdynia." Baltic seaport

was less dangerous to send hand- Israel dispute.

world knows much more about goodwill." them than do those living in

and and Czechoslovakia for ensive training in the use of clay purchased Communist as.

The actual numbers and types weapons these Egyptian weapons these Egyptian weapons these Egyptian weapons these Egyptian to use were clared that El Arish is not in the actual training to use were clared that El Arish is not in the actual training to use were clared that El Arish is not in the actual training to use were clared to Egyptian by Communist Czechoslovakia.

General Eisenhower's message was delivered to Egyptian by Communist Czechoslovakia.

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General Eisenhower's message was delivered to President Ben
Zvi yesterday by Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver of Cleveland, an American Zionist leader. The ary secret, the source said.

vas no secret, however,

Premier Gamal Abdel

had decided to send

therefore any build-up of arms
there is not a violation of the

story the Soviet bloc count

armistice.

Egypt has been said to have of Communist experts purchased six submarines from to Egypt, the source the Soviet bloc but there have been no accounts except from by the British Foreign their having been seen in Mediterday that Egyptians terranean waters.

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> worded retion

# Ission on the "ed-pployed." But Govare written in BYPASSING JAPANESE

Special to The New York Times.

TOKYO, March 24-Moscow's tration on friendship drive in Asia has obthe edu-viously bypassed Japan. Many Japanese have been upset this week by developments affecting job relations between their country the and the Soviet Union.

One was Moscow's refusal to ing consider Japanese claims for the ng return of the Southern Kurile er and South Sakhalin Islands, ocresentatives on a peace treaty.

The Soviet Union and Japan 67 to 33 to re technically at war

# PRESIDENT ASKS ISRAELI PATIENCE

Eisenhower, in Letter to Nation's President, Says We Back Peace in Area

Special to The New York Times TEL AVIV, Israel, March 24-States Government is "exploring every avenue" to achieve a The Premier obviously felt it peaceful solution of the Arab-

In a letter to President Izhak excertain technical and training
posts are to return home, a joint
British - Jordanian communique
said today.

certain technical and training
Egypt's military secrets are
so tightly guarded here that it
would seem everyone else in the
"patience, mutual confidence and"

The letter was made public Egypt.

There also have been reports today at a time of growing frusthat Czechoslovak built T-43 tration over the United States' tration over the United States' tanks in regimental strength failure to sell arms to Israel. are stationed at El Arish in the Premier David Ben-Gurion told Negev desert near the Mediter-ranean coast, 25 miles from the Egyptian-held Gaza strip. A few British Centurion tanks also are he would assume the United States Ambassador Feb. 29 that, failing a categori-cal reply within a few weeks, he would assume the United States was rejecting Israel's reacced Egyptian source said toay that his Government had int men to the Soviet Union, land and Czechoslovakia for lensive training in the use of lensive lensive training in the use of lensive l

Through my friend, Dr. Abba Hillel Silver, who is about to visit Israel, I should like to take the opportunity to convey to you my warm personal greetings on the occasion of the cele-bration of Passover, your his-toric festival of freedom, and on the eve of the eighth anniversary of the establishment of the State of Israel.

I have followed with admiration the progress and development of your country.

The American people wish your young state peace and prosperity. Permit me to asprosperity. Permit me to assure you that the American Government is earnestly and in the friendliest spirit exploring every avenue to bring about a satisfactory and peaceful solution of the problems which con-front Israel and its neighbors. We shall all need patience, mutual confidence and goodwill to help us along the way.

#### Ban on Costa Rican Lifted Special to The New York Time

SAN JOSE, Costa Rica, March cupied by the Russians since the 24-Former President Rafael end of World War II. This led Angel Calderon Guardia was re to an indefinite suspension of the turned to membership in the protracted London negotiations Costa Rican College of Physibetween Soviet and Japanese rep- cians and Surgeons today. The college's General Assembly voted



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