



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
167

Box
61

Folder
1058

Four Great Choices which Moses Made, 1962.

FOUR GREAT CHOICES WHICH MOSES MADE

DR. ABBA HILLEL SILVER

Sunday Morning -- April 22, 1962

My dear friends -- A man is known by the choices which he makes at the critical junctures of his life. It is then that a man's true character reveals itself, for it is then that the total man makes a decision -- the man as he finally emerges from a long, inner struggle. The debate is now over, the pros and cons have all been weighed, and the irrevocable choice is made. It is a once-for-all choice, for it was not quickly or lightly made. And as the decision is, so will be the man's destiny.

There are people who are incapable of making decisions. There are people who are unable to meet the challenge of choice. They go limping through life with two or more opinions about the same subject. They cannot trust themselves to make up their minds. They persist in weighing and considering so long that performance comes to nothing. Action falls between the two stools of unresolved choices. Of such men the Bible says: "He who observes the wind all the time will not sow, and he who regards the clouds constantly will not reap".

Now the failure to make a decision is in itself a decision -- though an involuntary one. And that failure to make a decision also reveals character -- the vacillating character of irresolution and timidity. Man must pay the price both for decision and indecision, but the one is noble and the other quite ignoble.

Every great human soul experiences what you might call the agony of prolonged inner struggle preliminary to making a final choice and a final commitment, but, once the choice is made, once the commitment is made, after a prolonged inner, heart-searching struggle, it remains for all time and under all circumstances, firm, constant and undeviating.

Now, my dear friends, a great human soul informs our beautiful festival of Passover -- Moses, the Man of God. There is so much that is appealing in the life of this hero not in armor, this conqueror who never built a city which time would ultimately destroy, nor an empire which would some day be traced in ruins. This great man whose tomb would never know a monument, but whose name would forever remain sweet upon the lips of men, of all men in all ages, who love freedom, who love justice, who love goodness!

Now, kings and rulers, the mighty of the earth have often built for themselves magnificent tombs, which Job quite properly called --
"ruins" -- for they all end up in ruins. No matter how magnificent these tombs may be, one thinks of the ancient pyramids, the vast desert tombs of the Pharaohs which tens of thousands of slaves helped to build; one thinks of the tomb of King Mausolus of Caria, the king whose name is imbedded in our term "mausoleum", the tomb which was erected by his widow Artimisia and which was considered by the ancients one of the seven wonders of the world. One thinks of the resplendent tomb of Cyrus at Pasargadae in ancient Persia, which was painstakingly and at enormous cost, carved out of a steep mountain slope, but which was finally plundered and abandoned; one thinks of the majestic tombs of the Medici in Florence which Michaelangelo sculptured and adorned and of the Escorial, one of the most remarkable buildings in the world, which contains the richly decorated pantheon where the Kings and Queens of Spain lie buried, and of the tomb of Napoleon in the Invalides, on the banks of the Seine.

Tombs everywhere in all parts of the earth, monuments to man's vanity, even in death, and to his vain conceit that massive blocks of stone and marble heaped high will insure his immortality or the affectionate and reverent regard of posterity! Of Moses -- whose name outshines them all in the annals of

mankind -- and who will outlive them all -- of Moses the Bible says:

-- "No man knows the place of his burial to this day..." No tomb, no monument.

Now, one of the most appealing qualities of this man Moses, whom the Bible calls the greatest of prophets and the humblest of men, was the manner in which he arrived at the important and critical decisions of his life, the manner in which he made the choices, the decisive choices of his life. Because of them, we celebrate today the Festival of Passover.

The first choice which Moses made in his rather early life was between palace and hovel. Moses, as you will recall, was born in an hovel among slaves. His kith and kin were the slaves of the Egyptian Pharaoh. They and their ancestors had been slaves for nigh unto four hundred years. Their burdens were very heavy. They groaned under their bondage. Their lives were made bitter with hard labor in mortar and brick. Moses, who was born among these slaves, and who was doomed to die -- as were all male children born to the Hebrew slaves -- was by his mother secreted in a basket of bulrushes and hidden among the tall reeds of the Nile from where he was rescued by the princess of the Pharaoh. Moses was raised as a prince in the palace of the king. His youth and early manhood were spent amidst the splendor and luxury of the royal palace. He was given a princely Egyptian education. His future was full of the promise of all good things -- power, glory, wealth and all the delights of man.

But Moses knew that he was a Hebrew! Not far from the palace where he was reared were the miserable slave-pens where his family and his brethren lived and groaned under the lash of the task-masters -- .

Moses grew up. His mind and soul developed as he matured and now he was confronted more and more with a problem, a problem which would not let him go:

What should he do? Should he go back and cast in his lot with his suffering brothers, become a slave like them, live with them amidst the filth and poverty of their slave-quarters, or should he continue to dwell as a happy, pampered prince amidst the pleasures and delights of the Egyptian court? His mind and soul were in constant turmoil. He could not evade the problem. He must make a choice. Palace or hovel! Prince or slave! The young Moses finally made his fateful choice --

-- when Moses grew up, when he matured, when his mind was finally made up, he went back to his brethren. So, as between status and loyalty, Moses chose loyalty. As between pride and obligation, Moses chose obligation.

That choice determined his entire career and all the momentous events which were to follow.

This was the first heroic choice of Moses. It involved a sharp break with his past, and a desperate plunge into an unknown future. Ask yourselves: How many men would make such a choice?

Years later, Moses was to make another decisive choice. You will recall that he fled from Egypt. In his anger, at seeing an Egyptian task-master mercilessly beating a helpless Hebrew slave, he struck the task-master and killed him. When his act became known, he had to escape and he fled to the land of Midian. There he remained a fugitive for many years. He dwelt with Jethro, a priest of Midian, tending his flocks, and in the course of time he married Jethro's daughter, and children were born to them. Moses dwelt peacefully in a peaceful land. In the quiet and freedom of the oases, far away from the noise, the corruption and the horrors of Egypt, Moses was at peace and he was happy. But something in his soul continued to trouble him and would not give him rest. Memories of his kinsmen, enslaved in far-away Egypt, kept

recurring. How was it with them? Once before some obscure and unaccountable force had pulled him back to his suffering people. Should he return to his brethren again, share their fate, perhaps help them, but in so doing, face the danger of a fugitive whose life the Egyptians were seeking? The prolonged turmoil within his soul finally culminated in a revelation -- in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush -- which burned without being consumed. With it came the call to return to Egypt and bring forth his enslaved brothers. And here Moses found himself again in the dread valley of decision. He must make a choice. There was no escape. Should he return or should he remain? Moses did not arrive at his decision quickly, without great soul-searching, without great hesitation. "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?" Again you read: "Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, I am slow of speech and of tongue, send someone else..." and again, "Oh, my Lord, send, I pray thee, some other person". But the call finally overpowers him. He makes his irrecocable decision. He returns to Egypt. What follows is world history. Moses was to set in motion the first great revolution in behalf of human freedom.

And so between ease and mission, Moses chose mission! Between personal comfort and the service of his fellow-men, Moses chose the service of his fellow-men. Would we make such a choice? How many people would make such a choice?

There is yet a third choice which Moses was to make which revealed his true character. He had at last brought the people out of Egypt across the Red Sea, and across the wilderness to the foot of Mount Sinai. Painfully he had led them; patiently he had instructed them; for their sake he had suffered much. But, as soon as he was gone from them, gone to the top of the mountain to receive the Torah, the same people for whom he had labored so much and suffered so much, flaunted all his instructions. They quickly made for themselves a golden image,

a golden calf , and they danced around it in licentious abandon crying out: "This is your god, oh Israel." Moses, on descending from the mountain was crushed by the evidence of the futility of all his work, the terrible failure of all that he had done, and at that moment he hears the voice of God: "I will destroy this people; they are worthless; they are irredeemable serfs; their souls are still in Egypt even though their bodies are not. They are a stiff-necked people. I will destroy them, but of you, Moses, I will make a great nation."

Here again Moses is faced with a fateful choice. Should he consent to the destruction of his people -- this ungrateful, sinful and inconstant people which had betrayed him and his life's work, -- and allow himself to be spared, to become the progenitor of a new nation? Moses made his choice. Moses said to the Lord: "Alas, the people have sinned a great sin, but now, O Lord, if Thou wilt forgive their sin (it is good) -- but if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book which Thou has written"...

Between hurt pride on the one hand and love on the other, Moses chose love and pity. Between love of self and love of his people, the immortal leader chose the love of his people. How many men, when they feel themselves abused and greatly wronged, would choose pity and compassion and understanding as Moses did? How many would rather sulk in their tents and say: "Well, I have done my best by these people and now I am through"?

There was a fourth and final choice which Moses made. Moses is on the just top of Mount Nebo ~~and~~ outside of the Promised Land. He is now an old man, a very old man. He is within sight of the Promised Land. For forty years he had trekked through a great and terrible wilderness with his people. For forty years he endured the heat and thirst of the desert, the rebellions, grumblings

and complaints of his people; for forty years he had had to fight enemies without, because here before him was the Promised Land into which he will enter. This will repay him for all the hardships and heart-aches of the weary years; this will crown his life's work.

But at that very moment the voice of God comes to him: "Moses, look well over this Promised Land from a distance. Look over it to the north and the south and the east and the west; look long, for only with thine eyes thou shalt see it, but into it thou shalt not come." Why, this cannot be! To be robbed of victory on the very threshold of attainment? To be frustrated at the very point of victory? To die of thirst in the very sight of springs of fresh water? Is this just? What will Moses now do or say? Will he turn bitter? Will rebellion and bitterness well up in his soul, all the accumulated complaints of his life, will they rush to his lips? A, ho! The very first words after hearing this that come to the lips of Moses upon hearing of his fate announced, are not words of rebellion, of complaint or of challenge. Slowly he begins to intone a blessing, his last sweet blessing of his people: "Let Reuben live and not die. Let Israel live and not die. What am I? I am mortal; I must die. What matters it if I cannot enter the Promised Land? I do not count. I do not count. Let Reuben live and not die; let Israel live and not die."

And so between rebellion and faith, between defiance and submission to God's inscrutable will, Moses chose faith. This is the last of the four great choices which Moses made. As between position and loyalty, he chose loyalty. As between ease and duty, he chose duty. As between selfish interest and the love of his people, he chose the love of his people. As between rebellion and faith, he chose faith. Would you? How many people would make those choices?

"Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide", wrote the American poet Lowell shortly before the Civil War in his poem, "The Present Crisis". "Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide. In the strife of Truth with Falsehood, for the good or evil side." Perhaps more than once! Great is the man who has the courage to make his decisions, and, having made them, abide by them and act upon them. "The King of Babylon stood at the parting of the ways", declared the prophet Ezekiel. How often do we find ourselves standing at the parting of the ways...what shall I choose? Shall I choose ease, shall I seek only selfish interests, my own good; should I shut out the clamor of the unhappy world about me, and turn a deaf ear to the call of duty, or shall I choose duty, loyalty, and commitment? Shall I listen to the sad music of humanity, and seek ways to give other men an ampler life with my labors and sacrifices? Shall I choose Me, or shall I choose the God in me? Shall I constrict my soul within the narrow confines of my bodily cravings and appetites and ambition or shall I take the wings of the morning and soar to the uttermost regions where truth and goodness and beauty eternally abide? "The King of Babylon stood at the parting of the ways." In a sense, every normal human soul is sovereign, is king, possessed of the right of sovereign choices. "Behold I have set before you life and the good, death and the evil --

--

choose life! Moses chose exile, suffering, ingratitude, misunderstanding, vilification, betrayal -- the hard choices, but he also chose life! For himself, for his people. And out of this beautiful holiday of Passover, Moses speaks to us and summons us through all the symbols and ceremonies to make the right choices in the significant moments of our lives.

I would like to call your attention to some choices which the people of Moses made, inspired by his example. The Jewish people, in the course of its long history, was confronted time and again with critical decisions upon which their survival and the survival of Judaism depended. The first one was at the foot of Mt. Sinai. They were asked to choose. They were asked to accept or reject a covenant with God which would make of them a different kind of a people -- and they were told what this covenant would entail -- relentless warfare with all the surrounding peoples whose way of life was different from theirs and who persisted in holding on to their own cherished way of life, their creeds, their cults, their practices. If they accepted this covenant they would become a hated and resented minority in the world. Would it not be better, on the other hand, to be like all other peoples -- to adopt their beliefs, conform with their customs, float along, as it were with the current, instead of buffeting the waves of controversy.

What would their choice be at Mt. Sinai? Moses put the entire matter before them -- The people decided. They answered as of one voice: -- "All that the

Lord spoke, we will do". And so an everlasting covenant was introduced between YHVA and the people of Israel which made of them a different kind of a people. And to give you a sample of another choice which our people of Moses made -- Centuries later, the Jewish people found themselves exiled in Babylon and there they were confronted with another choice. Their state in Judea had been destroyed, their Temple was in ruins, they found themselves amidst a proud and conquering people. What would they do? Would they break their ties with their past, forget Judah and Jerusalem and YHVH who seemed to have forgotten

them and assimilate and cease to be Jews? It would be much easier for them and their children. And there were among them many Jews whose morale broke and a wave of apostasy swept over them. They returned to all forms of heathen worship in Babylon. But the majority clung loyally to their covenant. They would not assimilate; they would not become submerged. So, amid the ruins of their national disaster, they proclaimed with increasing further their faith in YHVA who forgives the iniquities of his people, who does not visit the sins of the fathers upon the children, who does not require a temple for His dwelling place nor altars and sacrifices for His worship. And so they vowed in Babylon, by the rivers of Babylon they lifted up their voices and said: --

"If I forget the old Jerusalem, may my right hand wither". And because they made their choice we are here today -- because they made their choice Western civilization inherited from them the spiritual and the ethical values which are molding the lives of people.

And finally I should like to call your attention to another great moment in Jewish history when our people found themselves at a cross-roads and they had to make a decision -- a fateful, a dreadful decision. In Spain our forefathers have lived for centuries. They increased in numbers and in prosperity. They came to occupy very high positions in government; they became the advisors to kings and to treasures, many of them. Many of them dwelt in mansions and palaces such as Moses dwelt in as a young man in Egypt. There was little to distinguish these Jews of Spain from the proud grandees of that country but the Church was unwilling to have infidels, who refused to accept Christ, share in the prosperity of the country. They would desecrate a very sacred soil by their presense.

And the Church had no difficulty in persuading Ferdinand and Isabella and so on March 31, 1492, a royal edict was issued which gave the Jews of Spain -- the hundreds of thousands of them -- the great choice, either of abandoning their religion, their ancient faith, or of abandoning their country, their home, their property, their position, their security, everything, and go out into exile and face the unknown dangers of homelessness and wandering. Five months were given to them to make that choice -- apostasy or exile. And history reports very few Jews accepted Christianity. The overwhelming majority of them went into exile and faced the dread experiences which overtook them. And because these men, these Jews made their fierce and desperate decision, our people have survived.

And because in our own day, in spite of the savage persecution, terror and death visited on our people by the Nazi beasts -- in spite of the destruction of tens of thousands of Jewish centers and communities, the Jewish people chose not to succumb, not to give way to despair -- --
"I will not die, I will continue to live" because they surmounted their appalling tragedies by a powerful act of will and they proceeded to build a new hope and a new life and a new homeland in Israel because they made this decision -- Jews of this generation. They will grow in strength and our people will awake better and freer in happier days. We co-opted for life. We could have co-opted for disappearance. We co-opted for life and therefore more abundant life will be given unto us. Moses, our great teacher, taught us to make the right kind of decisions, to choose wisely. We may be called God's chosen people -- equally, as someone said, we are a right-choosing, truth-choosing, life-choosing, thought-choosing people. This is the secret of our survival. Amen.

FOUR GREAT CHOICES WHICH MOSES MADE

Sermon, The Temple, April
22, 1962

~~My dear friends~~ A man is known by the choices which he makes at the critical junctures of his life. It is then that a man's true character reveals itself, for it is then that the total man makes a decision -- the man as he finally emerges from a long, inner struggle. The debate is now over, the pros and cons have all been weighed, and the irrevocable choice is made. It is a once-for-all choice, for it ^{is} not quickly or lightly made. And as the decision is, so will be the man's destiny.

There are people who are incapable of making decisions. There are people who are unable to meet the challenge of choice. They go limping through life with two or more opinions about the same subject. They cannot trust themselves to make up their minds. They persist in weighing and considering so long that performance comes to nothing. Action falls between the two stools of unresolved choices. Of such men the Bible says: "He who observes the wind all the time will not sow, and he who regards the clouds constantly will not reap".

Now, the failure to make a decision is in itself a decision -- though an involuntary one. And that failure to make a decision, also reveals character -- the vacillating character of irresolution and timidity. Man must pay the price both for decision and indecision, but the one is noble and the other quite ignoble.

Every great human soul experiences what you might call the agony of prolonged inner struggle preliminary to making a final choice and a final commitment, but, once the choice is made, once the commitment is made, after a prolonged ~~inner~~ heart-searching struggle, it remains for all time and under all circumstances, firm, constant, and undeviating.

U
M

Now, a great human soul informs our festival of Passover - Moses, the man of God. There is so much that is appealing in the life of this hero not in armor, this conqueror who never built a city which time would ultimately destroy, nor an empire which would someday be traced in ruins; this great man whose tomb would never know a monument, but whose name would forever remain sweet upon the lips of all men in all ages who love freedom, who love justice, who love goodness!

Kings and rulers, the mighty of the earth, have often built for themselves magnificent tombs, tombs which Job quite properly called "ruins"; for they all end up in ruins, no matter how magnificent ^{they} ~~these~~ tombs may be. One thinks of the ancient ^{pyramids}, the vast desert tombs of the Pharaohs which tens of thousands of slaves helped to build; one thinks of the tomb of King Mausolus of Caria, the king whose name is embedded in our ^{word} ~~term~~ "mausoleum", the tomb which was erected by his widow, Artimisia, and which was considered by the ancients one of the seven wonders of the world. One thinks of the resplendent tomb of Cyrus ^{at} Pasargadae in ancient Persia, which was carved out of a steep mountain slope painstakingly and at enormous cost, but which was finally plundered and abandoned; one thinks of the majestic tombs of the Medici in Florence, which Michelangelo sculptured and adorned; and of the Escorial, one of the most remarkable ~~best~~ buildings in the world, which contains the richly ~~maximized~~ decorated pantheon where the kings and queens of Spain lie buried; and of the tomb of Napoleon in Les Invalides, on the banks of the Seine.

Start:

Tombs in all parts of the earth, monuments to man's vanity, even in death, and to his vain conceit that massive blocks of stone and marble heaped high will ^Ensure his immortality or the affectionate and reverent regard of posterity! Of Moses, whose name outshines ^{all others} ~~them all~~ in the annals of

What should he do? Should he go back and cast in his lot with his suffering brothers, become a slave like them, live with them amidst the filth and the poverty of their slave-quarters, or should he continue to dwell as a happy, pampered prince amidst the pleasures and delights of the ~~XXXXXX~~ Egyptian court? His mind and his soul were in constant turmoil. He could not evade the problem. He must make a choice. Palace or hovel! Prince or slave! The young Moses finally made his fateful choice: ~~when Moses grew up, when he matured, when his mind was finally made up,~~ he went back to his brethren. So, as between status and loyalty, Moses chose loyalty. As between pride and obligation, Moses chose obligation.

That choice determined his entire career and all the momentous events which were to follow. This was the first heroic choice of Moses. It involved a sharp break with his past, and a desperate plunge into an unknown future. Ask yourselves: How many men would make such a choice?

Years later, Moses was to make another decisive choice. You will recall that he fled from Egypt. In his anger at seeing an Egyptian taskmaster mercilessly beating a helpless Hebrew slave, he struck the taskmaster and killed him. When his act became known, he had to escape, and he fled to the land of Midian. There he remained a fugitive for many years. He dwelt with Jethro, a priest of Midian, tending his flocks, and in the course of time he married Jethro's daughter, and children were born to them. Moses dwelt peacefully in a peaceful land. In the quiet and the freedom of the oases, far away from the noise, the corruption, and the horrors of Egypt, Moses was at peace and he was happy. But something in his soul continued to trouble him and would not give him rest. Memories of his kinsmen, enslaved in far away Egypt, kept

recurring. How was it with them? Once before some obscure and unaccountable force had pulled him back to his suffering people. Should he return to his brethren again, share their fate, perhaps help them, but in so doing, face the danger of a fugitive whose life the Egyptians were seeking? The prolonged turmoil within his soul finally culminated in a revelation -- in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush ^{Le} which burned without being consumed. With it came the call to return to Egypt and bring forth his enslaved brothers. And here Moses found himself again in the dread valley of decision. He must make a choice. There was no escape. Should he return? ~~or~~ Should he remain? Moses did not arrive at his decision quickly, without great soul-searching, without great hesitation. "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?" Again ^{we} you read: "Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, I am slow of speech and of tongue, send someone ^{else}..." and again, "Oh, my Lord, send, I pray thee, some other person". But the call finally overpowers him. He makes his irrevocable decision. He returns to Egypt. What follows is world history. Moses was to set in motion the first great revolution in behalf of human freedom.

And so between ease and mission, Moses chose mission! Between personal comfort and the service of his fellow-men, Moses chose the service of his fellow-men. Would we make such a choice? How many people would make such a choice?

There is yet a third choice which Moses was to make which revealed his true character. He had at last brought the people out of Egypt across the Red Sea, and across the wilderness to the foot of Mount Sinai. Painfully he had led them. Patiently he had instructed them. ^F For their sake he had suffered much. But, as soon as he was gone from them, gone to the top of the mountain to receive the Torah, the same people for whom he had labored so much and suffered so much, ^{flouted} flaunted all his instructions. They quickly made for themselves a golden image.

a golden calf, and they danced around it in licentious abandon ^{and cried out:} ~~and cried out:~~

"This is your god, ^{is} oh Israel." Moses, on descending from the mountain, was crushed by the ^{tried to do,} evidence of the futility of all his work, the terrible failure of all that he had ~~done~~ ^{tried to do,} and at that moment he hears the voice of God: "I will destroy this people. They are worthless, They are irredeemable serfs. Their souls ^s are still in Egypt even though their bodies are not. They are a stiff-necked people. I will destroy them, but of you, Moses, I will make a great nation."

Here again Moses is faced with a fateful choice. Should he consent to the destruction of his people, ~~to~~ this ungrateful, sinful, and inconstant people which had betrayed him and his life's work, ~~to~~ and allow himself to be spared, to become the progenitor of a new nation? Moses made his choice. Moses said to the Lord: "Alas, the people have sinned a great sin, but now, O Lord, if Thou wilt forgive their sin ^{it is good} -- but if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book which Thou has written".

Between hurt pride on the one hand and love on the other, Moses chose love and pity. Between love of self and love of his people, the immortal leader chose the love of his people. How many men, when they feel themselves abused and ~~greatly~~ wronged, would choose pity and compassion and understanding as Moses did? How many would rather sulk in their tents and say: "Well, I have done my best by these people and now I am through"?

There was a fourth and final choice which Moses made. Moses is on the ^{just} top of Mount Nebo ~~and~~ outside of the Promised Land. He is now an old man, a very old man. He is within sight of the Promised Land. For forty years he had trekked through ^{an awesome} ~~and~~ terrible wilderness with his people. For forty years he ^{had} endured the heat and thirst of the desert, the rebellions, grumblings,

and complaints of his people; for forty years he had had to fight enemies without and rebellion within. But now here is the Promised Land into which he will enter. This will repay him for all the hardships and heartaches of the weary years; this will crown his life's work.

At that very moment the voice of God ^{comes} came to him: "Moses, look well over this Promised Land from a distance. Look it over to the north and the south and the east and the west; look long, for only with thine eyes ~~thou~~ thou shalt see it, but into it thou shalt not come." Why, this cannot be! To be robbed of victory on the ~~very~~ threshold of attainment? To be frustrated at the ~~very~~ point of victory? To die of thirst in the ~~very~~ sight of springs of fresh water? Is this just? What will Moses now do or say? Will he turn bitter? Will rebellion and bitterness well up in his soul, all the accumulated complaints of his life ^{will} _{in} will they rush to his lips? After hearing his doom announced, the ~~very~~ first words that come to the lips of Moses are not words of rebellion, of complaint, or of challenge. Slowly he begins to intone a ~~lament~~ ^{blessings} his last sweet ~~lament~~ ^{blessing} of his people: "Let Reuben live and not die, let Israel live and not die. What am I? I am mortal; I must die. What matters it if I cannot enter the Promised Land? I do not count.

~~Let Reuben live and not die, let Israel live and not die.~~ ^{Let Reuben live and not die, let Israel live and not die.}

And so between rebellion and faith, between defiance and submission to God's inscrutable will, Moses chose ^{faith} ~~faith~~. This is the last of the four great choices which Moses made. As between position and loyalty, he chose loyalty. As between ease and duty, he chose duty. As between selfish interests and the love of his people, he chose the love of his people. As ~~between~~ between rebellion and faith, he chose faith. Would you? How many people would make those choices?

gal
107

"Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide," wrote the American poet Lowell shortly before the Civil War in his poem, ^WThe present crisis^W. "Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide", In the strife of truth with falsehood, for the good or evil, ²side." Perhaps more than once! Great is the man who has the courage to make his decisions, and having made them, ^{to}abide by them and act upon them. "The king of Babylon stood at the parting of the ways", declared the prophet Ezekiel. How often do we find ourselves standing at the parting of the ways^W. What shall I choose? Shall I choose ease^S? Shall I seek my own good? Should I shut out the clamor of the unhappy world around me, and turn a deaf ear to the call of duty, or shall I choose duty, loyalty, and commitment? Shall I listen to the ^{sad}music of humanity, and ~~seek~~ seek ways to give other men an ampler life with my labors and sacrifices? Shall I choose me, or shall I choose the God in me? ^SShall I constrict my ~~soul~~ soul within the narrow confines of my bodily cravings and appetites and ambitions, or shall I take the wings of the morning and soar to the uttermost regions where truth and goodness and beauty eternally abide? "The king of Babylon stood at the parting of the ways." In a sense, every normal human soul is king, is sovereign, possessed of the right of sover^Ssign choices. "Behold, I have set before you life and the good, death and the evil...choose life!" Moses chose exile, suffering, in^Sgratitude, misunderstanding, vilification, betrayal - the hard choices, but he also chose life! For himself, and for his people. And out of this beautiful holiday of Passover, Moses speaks to us and summons us through all the symbols and ceremonies to make the right choices in the significant moments of our lives.

I would like to call your attention to some choices which the people of Moses made, inspired by his example. The Jewish people in the course of ^{their} ~~its~~ long history ^{were} ~~was~~ confronted time and time again with critical decisions upon which their survival and the survival of ^{Judaism} ~~XXXXXX~~ depended. The first one was at the foot of ^{Mount} ~~mt.~~ Sinai. They were asked to choose, asked to accept or reject a covenant with God which would make of them a different kind of people. ~~והיה לכם לעם נבדל~~ And they were told what this covenant would entail: relentless warfare with all the surrounding peoples whose way of life was different from theirs and who persisted in holding on to their own cherished way of life, their creeds, their cults, their practices. If they accepted this covenant they would become a hated and resented minority in the world. Would it not be better, on the other hand, to be like all other peoples, to adopt their beliefs, conform to their customs, to float along, as it were, with the currents, instead of buffeting the waves of controversy?

What would be their choice at ^{Mount} ~~mt.~~ Sinai? Moses put the entire ^{matter} ~~matter~~ before them. ~~האם~~ "וישם לפניכם את כל הדברים" The people decided. They answered as with one voice: ~~נאמנו~~ "כל אשר דבר יי נעלה" All that the Lord spoke we will do. And so an everlasting covenant was entered into, between Yahveh and the people of Israel, which made of them a different kind of people to this day.

Let me give you the example of another choice which our people, the people of Moses, made. Centuries later, the Jewish people found themselves in exile in Babylon, and there they were confronted with another choice. Their state in Judea had been destroyed, their Temple was in ruin; ^{sh} they found themselves amidst a proud and conquering people. What ^{sh} would they do? Should they break their ties with the past, forget Judah ^{and} ~~and~~ Jerusalem and Yahveh, who seemed to have forsaken

them, and assimilate and cease to be Jews? It would be much easier for them and their children. There were ~~many~~ among them many ~~Jews~~ whose morale broke, and a wave of apostasy swept over them. They returned to all ^{the} forms of heathen worship in Babylon. ^{But} ~~But~~ the majority clung loyally to their covenant. They would not assimilate. They would not become submerged. So, amid the ruins of their national disaster, they proclaimed with increasing fervor their faith in Yahweh, who forgives the iniquities of His people, who does not visit the sins of the fathers upon the children, who does not require a Temple for His dwelling place nor altars and sacrifices for His worship. By the rivers of Babylon they lifted up their voices and said: ~~עם אשכנז יושלם חסכה יסיון~~ "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, may my right hand wither." Because they made their choice we are here today; because they made their choice, Western civilization inherited from them the spiritual and ethical values which are molding the lives of people.

Finally I should like to call your attention to another great moment in Jewish history when our people found themselves at a crossroads and ~~they~~ had to make a decision - a fateful, dreadful decision. In Spain our forefathers had lived for centuries. They increased in numbers and in prosperity. They came to occupy high positions in government; many became ~~many~~ advisors and treasurers to kings. Many of them dwelt in mansions and palaces such as Moses ^{had} dwelt in as a young man in Egypt. There was little to distinguish these Jews of Spain from the proud grandees of the country, but the Church was unwilling to have infidels, ^{those} who refused to accept Christ, share in the prosperity of the country. They would desecrate the sacred soil by their presence.

no 47

And the Church had no difficulty in persuading Ferdinand and Isabella, so on March 31, 1492, a royal edict was issued which gave the Jews of Spain - the hundreds of thousands of them - the dread choice, either of abandoning their religion, their ancient faith, or of abandoning their country, their homes, their property, their positions, their security, everything, and go out into exile and face the unknown dangers of homelessness and wandering. Three months were given them to make that choice - apostasy or exile. History records that very few Jews accepted Christianity. The overwhelming majority of them went into exile and faced the tragic experiences which overtook them. And because these men, these Jews, made their fierce and desperate decision, our people have survived.

And because in our own day, in spite of savage persecutions, terror, and death visited upon millions of our people by the Nazi beasts, in spite of the destruction of tens of thousands of Jewish centers and communities, the Jewish people chose not to succumb, not to give way to despair.

אנחנו לא נשכנע

"I will not die, I will continue to live" because they surmounted their appalling tragedies by a powerful act of will, and they proceeded to build a new hope and a new life and a new homeland in Israel. Because they made this decision, Jews of this generation will grow in strength and our people will awake better and freer in happier days. We co-opted for life. We could have co-opted for disappearance. We co-opted for life, and therefore more abundant life will be given unto us.

Moses, our great teacher, taught us to make the right kind of decisions, to choose wisely. We may be called God's chosen people, but equally, as someone said, we are a right-choosing, truth-choosing, life-choosing, God-choosing people, and this is the secret of our survival.

an: word
OK? [check
Dictionary]