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Anti-semitism, 1924.

January 24, 1924.

A N T I S E M I T I S M *

By

RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER

It used to be my custom to begin after dinner speeches with a story, which seemed to be the practice from time immemorial until a Yehuddah told me this story, and then I stopped. He said, if you tell a story to a Pollak, he laughs three times; the first time when you tell it to him, the second time when you explain it to him and the third time when he understands it. You tell the same story to a Puritz - that's a man of still higher degree of lack of intelligence; he laughs twice; once when you tell it to him and the second time when you explain it to him, because he doesn't understand it. When you tell a story to a Coasack, who is still a higher degree of lack of intelligence, he laughs only once, when you tell him the story, because he never gives you a chance to explain it. But when you tell a story to a Yehudda, he says, that's an old one and I can tell it better than you can.

I have been rather discouraged in story telling, but by this marvelous eulogy that I have received this evening, you would think I were dead. It reminds me of the time I addressed a St. Patrick's day gathering of my Irish friends in Cleveland on St. Patrick's day and the speaker winding up a marvelous eulogistic speech, introduced me as "Father Silver". And I told them the story of the two Irishman who went to church one

* Stenographically reported by Caroline Loewenthal

Sunday morning for a change and heard the priest deliver a sermon on "The Bliss of Matrimony". I'm glad my wife isn't present, so I can tell this story. Pat turned to Mike, after the sermon, and said, "Mike, how did you like the Father's sermon on 'The Bliss of Matrimony'?" Mike said, "It was great, but I wish I knew as little about married life as the Father does".

It is very gratifying, men and women, very gratifying indeed to see this splendid gathering of men and women. It is a commentary on the marvelous appeal which the fraternal spirit of B'nai Brithdom has to men and women. As I go from city to city, visiting my people, I am indeed very happy to observe in recent years the marvelous revival of interest in Jewish life. I find a real intensive revival of interest in Jewish culture, in Jewish problems, in Jewish institutions. I find many cities actually engaged in building new synagogues, new philanthropic, new educational institutions. I firmly believe we are on the threshold of the Golden Age in American Jewish life. And as I look over this vast audience this evening and see the youth that is here, as I think of these two young friends on either side of me, filled with that loyalty and that fine ability, I am convinced more so than I ever was that Israel is not orphaned (Hebrew).

We have much to anticipate in the way of a real Jewish Renaissance in this land in years to come. The war

bruised our bodies, but it didn't crush our souls. The war uprooted many a Jewish community in Eastern Europe. The war destroyed close on to six hundred thousand of our brethren and sisters. The war shut down many of the academies of learning abroad and scattered the books of learning all over the world, but the war didn't starve the soul.

The old saying of that wise philosopher who wrote the first chapters of the Book of Exodus always comes back to me because they are so truly descriptive of Jewish experience. (Hebrew) "The more they oppressed him, the more he increased and the more he multiplied". Persecution, discrimination, active hostility stalls the Jew. It brings the drifter and the indifferent one back as an active soul in the ranks. We have adjusted ourselves to prosperity. Freedom and affluence oft times undermine our spiritual personality. We become flabby and walk under the warm waves of opulence and well-being, but adversity strengthens us, disciplines us, turns us back to fundamental principles. In that sense there is no greater friend to the Jew than the antisemite, if the antisemite only knew it.

The wave of antisemitism which swept over the world since the war has not demoralized the Jew at all. Some have grown timid. Others have become mortally sensitive. Still others have become cowardly. But as far as the overwhelming mass of Israel is concerned, this last wave of antisemitism which has inundated the whole of the civilized world, has not weakened or corroded the position of the Jew and that is very significant.

The Jew digs in everywhere when the hosts of darkness begin to march upon him. And since the war, as I have observed Jewish life here and abroad, with this organized planet of darkness urged on the march against us, with all their poison weapons of vicious, lying propaganda, and all their instruments of destruction, the Jew dug himself in behind his trenches and his trenches are today as they were a thousand and two thousand years ago, his synagogue, his school, his home, and there we stand today as secure, in spite of all the raging storms of hostility, as we have ever been. Antisemitism has not demoralized us because we understand today as we have always understood the source and the purpose of these antisemitic attacks.

We are not novices in the game of struggle and suffering. In our checkered career from the says of Haman to the days of Ludendorf and from Shushan to Dearborn, we have seen them all, all the varieties and all the species of Jew-baiting and we know from whence they spring and to what end they labor and so we are not demoralized. We know that the Jew-baiter baits the Jew not because of the Jew's wealth or the Jews' poverty; not because of the Jews' intellect or the Jews' lack of intellect; not because of his virtues or because of his vices. Merit and demerit have nothing to do with the problem. Were we all angels strumming on the harp, the antisemite would still find fault with the tune we were playing. The antisemite dislikes us not because of the economic competition which we bring to his door and not because of individual superiority or inferiority. He dislikes us because he fears us, as he should by right fear us,

not for our wealth or our power or our influence or our insights and hidden supporters, but for our patent open aggressive spirit. He is afraid, as he has every right to be afraid of that two-edged sword of prophecy in the hands of our people.

I would like to emphasize this thought for a moment, because to me it is the central thing in the entire discussion of antisemitism. When Haman - and I speak of Haman because we have just got over celebrating Purim - when Haman came before the king, he gave the king many plausible reasons why the king should permit the destruction and extermination of all the Jews in the one hundred and twenty provinces. He told the king their religion is different, their customs are different, they are a menace. But the real reason he did not give the king. That reason he alone knew and the keen author of the Magilla told us. "He hated Mordecai and Mordecai's kith and kin because Mordecai would not kneel and bow down to him. That is very significant. He never told that to the king, but all his machinations were motivated by that one fact. He was a Jew and the only man in the empire that refused to bow down and kneel. And that I make bold to say is the cause and the source of the antisemitism, and if you will read Jewish history you will find how grievously true this fact is. The Jew has suffered the torments of hell for two thousand years because he refused to bow down and kneel to despotism, to reaction, to superstition, to everything that strangles and stultifies and incarnates human life. The Jew has been a liberal in the finest sense of the word. The Jew has been the spiritual rebel, the spiritual revolutionist of all times. That marvellous

prophet of the exile knew it twenty-five hundred years ago when he said God summoned Israel (Hebrew) to bring the imprisoned out of the dungeon, to bring light to those who are blind. That has been our mission and that has been our curse and that has been our immortality. That has been our memorable task through the ages from the days that Father Abraham destroyed the idols in his father's house, from the days when Moses broke the tablets because of the faithless of the people; from the days when Isaiah thundered against the opposition of the sacrificial cult; from the days when Jeremiah pointed his finger against the temple and said, this is not God and this is not religion; from the days of Amos who thundered against exploitation and grinding the face of the poor, right through and up to our own days when the sons and daughters of Israel are found fighting on the battlefields of human endeavor, on every corner of the world our people have been the champions of freedom and idol breakers, a rebel, a spiritual adventurer seeking new fields, new horizons, new continents for the soul of man.

So the intrenched and privileged classes in olden days and in modern days who fear progress, who are afraid of the rising seas of human freedom, who see their power and their prestige banishing from their control, all these powers of darkness in all times bring venomous hate against the Jew because he would not kneel and bow down. He would say yea when everybody was clamoring nay. He was an individualist. It was impossible for him to be untrue to the God who dwelt in him. I would like to have you know that thought. I would like to have you understand

how the whole history of Israel and the soul of our people embraced these ideals.

Our people began as nomads, wandered about in the wilderness with his tent. For thousands of years our ancestors were nomads in the desert of Arabia. A nomad is a democrat. His hand knew no tyrant and no despot over him. The tribe is one and every member of the tribe is the equal of every other member. The sheik is only the man selected for his wisdom, for his age, for his experience, but he has no authority given to him by the independent members of that tribe. Our fathers had that democratic experience for thousands of years before they came into the land of Canaan. They continued that same tradition. They didn't settle down to make kings over them. They didn't surrender their freedom. When a crisis came, they would select a man who would lead them to battle and then come back to his task; he had no hereditary rights, no power in Israel. And when the Phillistines, their mortal enemies in Palestine, were pressing upon them, they feared them and they began to clamor for a king and they came to the prophet Samuel, saying, give us a king. Samuel cursed them for asking for a king. He didn't want a king. He pleaded with them, why do you want a king to enslave you, who will take your men to be soldiers, who will deprive you of your rights and when they were insistent and Samuel consented to anoint a king, what authority did he have? Revolution during the reign of Saul and David and Solomon and at Solomon's death the splitting up of the kingdom and up to the destruction of the temple in 586 the masses of the people always remained in control of their government and from the destruction of the temple - and this is very significant, I am giving you a

bit of history - from the destruction of the temple in 586 to the time of the Maccabees in 165, a period of four hundred years, there were no kings or rulers in Israel. The wise men, the sages took care of the political life of the people. The men ruled themselves and ruled themselves well. For perhaps a period of one hundred years we have a state of kingship in Israel and then Palestine comes under the rule of the pagans and from the time of the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. to 1924, the people of Israel now numbering fifteen millions, scattered over the face of the world, knew no rulers, no despots, had no central authority like the Catholic Church had its pope and yet remained a unified people. They recognized leadership in Babylon, but that was voluntary, given out of respect and so up to this day orthodox Judaism has no central human authority. Of course it is ^{highly} centralized but the centralization is one of spirit, one of law, one of book rather than of man, one of spiritual power and not temporary power. That has been the education of our people from the dim distant day to this day, free men, men proud and jealous of their rights and privileges, and that is the reason the Jew refused to bow down when people demanded it of him.

Up to this day we Jews are individualists. Whenever you meet two Jews, you have three opinions. In a sense that is highly undesirable, but in another sense it is tremendously desirable. I would rather have two men alert to their own needs and their own prerogatives, struggling, clashing, because that means progress and that means civilization, than to have a herd of cattle

that go by the name of human beings. Because of this, our individualism, the Jew was the first to evolve a spiritual religion.

Up to the time when the Prophets arose in Israel, religion was institutional religion, religion was the possession of the priestcraft, of the powerful hierarchy and it was centralized in a place, in a ritual, a sacrificial cult. But the genius of our people, seeking to express itself through democratic liberty, very early in the history of our people gave birth to prophets who denounced institutional religion and who reduced temple and sacrificial cults to secondary positions, who soon supplanted the temple with the synagogue and the priest with the Rabbi, who is a democratic institution. Israel would not tolerate this religious despotism and for that reason the Jew began to demand equal recognition. And in the religion of no people will you find such vituperation, such bitter denunciation of exploitation, of oppression as you will find in the literature of your people. And in the literature of no other people of antiquity will you find such regulation against the exploitation of the poor, the gleaning of the corners of the field, the tithes to the poor and the jubilee - all measures deliberately aimed against poverty and the attempt to recognize the poor man in his house.

And the same expresses itself in its political freedom. There are no masters and no slaves in the sight of God. (Hebrew) Men are My slaves - God's and not slaves unto slaves. The Jew respected the inherent divinity in the life of every human being. (Hebrew) This is the generation of man - a man, not men. Any why,

asks a Rabbi, was that singular and not plural? And with keen intuitive wisdom they say it is singular purposely so that the generations to come from man will have the right to say, (Hebrew) the world was created for my sake. That is a marvellous conception of human life.

That same individuality of the Jew expresses itself in his craving for international justice. No nation because it is powerful has a right to oppress^{and repress} and desert a weaker neighbor. War was denounced long before the Christian nations in 1924 summoned a conference to see what can be done to mitigate the horrors of war. Twenty-five hundred years ago a little people enslaved on the banks of the Mediterranean embodied in a burning spirit of love a commentary on war, when swords shall be beaten into low-shares and nations shall not learn war against nation. (Hebrew) Peace, peace, be unto those who are afar off and those who are near. That is your legacy, that is in you. It is not in a book, it is in your veins and blood. It isn't a pleasant heritage. It doesn't make for free and quietness of body and ^{mind}. That is a liquid fire in the veins of our bodies, a driving, a propelling force. To be an individualist is to be constantly seeking, advancing, progressing, challenging, demanding. It is never to rest content and to be satisfied with the judgments and lies of the majority. It is never to kneel down and bow down. It is to be a nomad, who does not kneel and who does not bow down. I firmly that that is the reason why we are hated by the people who hate us today.

Who hates the Jew? The liberal, the cultured man, the democrat, the lover of mankind? Oh, no. Who are our enemies?

Know a man by his friends, but know him more by his enemies. Who are our enemies? The Junkers in Germany and Austria, the decadent despots of Russia, the Chestertons and their lackeys and henchmen, the powers of darkness expanded by the uprising of human freedom, afraid of their prerogatives, afraid of their privileges, afraid their rights will be snatched from them. They are the people of Ludendorfs, of mediaevalism, those are the people who are our sworn enemies. They fear us. They know the Jew is found in the van of every liberal movement. They know the Jew has the spirit of freedom in his blood, the shackles of a marvelous heritage of three thousand years that makes him willing to be a spiritual rebel, a progressive, and so they hate the Jew and seek his destruction. He will not kneel and he will not bow down. If I had the time I would illustrate just what I believe, but I must go on to my last point.

What shall we do about it today with this increase of antisemitism? Shall we be intimidated? Shall we try to give up our ancient burden and our ancient glory? No. The world needs us today as at no time since the beginning of time. The world needs us most when it hates us most and the world hates us most today. If we were to give up out of fear, out of lassitude of spirit or weariness of spirit, this mission of our people to be the eternal protestant, the world would be the poorer for a great guide and leader. The world needs today idol breakers even as it needed them in the days of Abraham.

We have other lies today that are rampant, that must be scotched. We have other lies that are posioning the lives and souls of other human beings. We have, for example, the lie of race. I have blond hair and blue eyes. I am a Teuton, I am a Nordic and there I belong to the chosen people of the Lord. I am the salt of the world. I say so myself. You happen to have brown eyes and black hair. You happen to come from the lands along the Mediterrean, therefore you belong to the mongrel people. My race is a blessing, whereas your race is a curse. If you happen to be a Semite, you are impossible and if you happen to be an Asiatic, you are impossible. You think that is an exaggeration? Right in your halls of Congress this lie is now formulating your immigration laws. We have introduced a new note and a new motive in our immigration laws. Immigrants are not to be selected on mental or physical tests. Immigrants are to be selected on the basis of that vague intangible pseudo-science of one hundred present lying racial lie. If you happen to come from one corner of Europe, you are one hundred per cent. If you happen to come from another part of Europe, you are not wanted, you are disqualified, because your hair is black and your eyes are brown. That lie of race, of its superiority was expressed during the war in Germany and as is the case in all wars, the victor assumes all the liabilities of the vanquished. The lies that were expanded in Germany have now been transplanted to America, and are now promulgated by the pseudo scientists in America

What's the truth about race and why do we Jews set about to smash that idol? We were the people who first gave the world the conception of race selection and we have the right to speak of it. We have called ourselves the chosen people. But chosen people to the Jew meant something utterly different from what Kultur meant to the Teuton. To the Teuton his "Kultur" was supreme and therefore it ought to be imposed upon others by force of arms. First reduce every other people to political impotency and then feed them with the nectar of your Kultur. That is one conception of Kultur as expressed by the Kaiser for Germany.

What was the prophetic idea of the selection of Israel? I, the Lord, thy God have summoned thee. Why? Because of my plan of selection, to be a servant unto Me, to lead out the imprisoned from the dungeon, to give light unto them that dwell in darkness, to serve, to conquer the world through love and service and sacrificial loyalty to God and give and give, not to aggress, not to gain and hold influence and power, but to go into the highways and the byways of life, like Joseph, seeking your brothers, bringing the refreshing word of a God of love to all those who need the word of love. That is why and what we were selected for. Not because we are stronger and better, but because in us, in our racial soul, there was this craving for human rights and human freedom, because somehow the genius of our people evolved earlier than any other people the one God idea and the one man idea and that became our selection and mission.

What is race? There is no pure race in the world. The German scientist speaks academically. Five, six, seven right centuries the whole of Europe mingled and fused their blood until today there isn't one pure race in any country in all Europe.

What is the truth of race? There are no superior races and no inferior races. The peoples of Northwestern Europe haven't been a race for more than three hundred years, because of the discovery of America and because of the abundance of coal. When the people of Northwestern Europe were in the dungeons of European life, Rome was conquering the world and building empires; Greece, this mongrel people, was being led by Euripedes and Socrates and Aristotle and Phidas; the science, art and philosophy which up to this day is the art and literature and philosophy of mankind. When these Germanic and these Nordics, the salt of the world, God's favorite, were barbarians, a little people, this most Asiatic people evolved a God idea which is a great ideal and gave them a God. Why whenever a Nordic builds a church and dedicates it to St. Peter or St. Paul, whenever he announces the name of Jesus, whenever he recites a psalm, whenever he reads a passage from the Old or the New Testament, he is reading and paying tribute to some one who came out of this despised Asiatic people, the Jews.

What is the truth of race? No race remains supreme. It comes into being, has its youth, a period of creation and dies. The race is a period of youth and creation and then goes to seed. There is no race that you can mention that remains supreme for more than four or five thousand years. That is why civilization

is a record of Rome, Spain, Greece who are decadent and dying. They have had their say. Perhaps the future belongs to the Asiatic - who knows? Europe is mentally and physically exhausted and only a tremendous effort of will can give the European race a lease of life for another hundred years or two. Nationality has nothing to do with race. Men live together, react together and die together in course of time. And here in America, we surely cannot claim to be racial when we have drawn our source and claim from the four corners of the world. We Jews know what racial traditions are and knowing this, we ought to set about in the world smashing this lie of race and teaching mankind, as we taught them to worship one God, as we taught them the ideal of human brotherhood, as we taught them the social idea of peace -- all Jewish ideas -- the idea of nationality. Race may become a stepping stone, for it is a stepping block.

If the Englishman is made conscious of the great tradition of his race and constitutional government and he utilizes that not for conquest but to help himself and mankind to self government, then the Englishman becomes a blessing. If the Teuton reflects the spirit of Goethe, Heine, Schiller and he uses their marvellous humaneness and humanity, then his race becomes a blessing to all. And if the Frenchman is conscious of the marvellous classic traditions of the French people and uses them not to hold the Rhineland for French imperialism, but uses that great gift for the glorification and beauty of man,

his race becomes a blessing to mankind. Just as if we Jews would use our rare tradition of the saints and prophets and martyrs, the traditions of steadfastness and loyalty, if we use them for ourselves to cleanse ourselves and ennoble ourselves and consecrate ourselves to the ideals of our self, our race becomes a blessing and we become the blessing to the world. That is race.

The other type of race, the distinctive, we Jews must crush, with the lie of materialism, with the lie of capitalism. We Jews who gave race to the world, we are losing the sense of prayer and of sanctity in the home. We are no longer the leaders of mankind. We follow notions; we succumb to the lie of materialism which is eating into the very vitals of the whole world. Once upon a time the Jew was different. Hemmed in the ghetto, he broke the ghetto walls and instead of keeping his standards high, he is sinking to the levels of the people around him. We must destroy the lie of nationalism; we must destroy the lie of capitalization and competitive economic life. That is something for you and I to devote our energies to and for these things we ought to live fearlessly as of old.

We are today, men and women, standing on the threshold of a new life - providing we want to - where the seers and prophets of our people stood three thousand years ago, priests of the most high God summoning men to freedom. We are still today dreamers from Galileo, lost in the sorry traffic of Roman hostages, like men and prophets crucified, a risen people. In

our veins the rythm of the might seets, the flaming torch(Hebrew)
"The Lord is my light and mysalvation, of whom need I be
afraid?"(Hebrew) "The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom
need I be afraid?"

