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We need Jewish Youth, 1924?.



# We Need the Jewish Youth

By RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER

I SHOULD like, first of all, through the medium of Young Judaea, the only organized youth movement among our Jewish people in America, to teach the lesson of loyalty to every Jewish boy and girl in our country. I want them to learn to love their people. My love of my people is not and was not a thing of pity for my unfortunate brethren. My pride in my race is not and never was due to a recognition of the heroic sufferings of my people. I think that it is a sign of a neurosis when an individual or group seeks refuge in the thought or the memory of suffering. I sometimes resent the tyranny which the martyred or the sick or the suffering exercise over us simply because they are suffering or martyred or sick, without any relation to the cause of the martyrdom the ailment or the suffering.

I love my people not because it suffered, but because of the peculiar and unique character of its suffering. It was voluntary, vicarious, self-inflicted suffering and that type of suffering becomes majestic; that type of suffering becomes a sacrament and an inspiration. When a people chooses to die in order that others may live more abundantly, when a people chooses to receive the stripes so that through its suffering mankind may be healed, then that people exercises no tyranny upon our loyalty or imagination, but commands a devotion and an admiration which transcends all else.

It is that kind of pride and love of our people based upon a knowledge of the circumstances of our experience that I should like to see deeply implanted in the soul of every Jewish boy and girl in our country. I should like them to love their people not in a sentimental manner but through an intimate acquaintance with the achievements of the race whose standbearers they should become. I should like them to know just what my people contributed to the well-being, to the intellectual and the moral and the spiritual advancement of the human race. I should like them to think of my people as the idol-breakers. I should like them to know how my people smashed idols in order to enthrone God. I should like them to know how my people taught men and women to lift up their eyes to Heaven and how to make those people pray to God to look down from on high to the people below. I should like them to know how my people fashioned a bond of unity between the Divinity and humanity and how my people taught men to call to an *Ovinu Sh'bashumayim*" (Our Father Who Art in Heaven).

## Let Them Know Jewish Ideals

I should like them to know just what a tremendous, revolutionary thought our people projected in the world when they fashioned in us the passion of their creative genius, this God idea. I should like them to know just how my people, viewing a world in confusion, steeped in hate and suspicion, projected another revolutionary idea. Are we not all brothers, hath not one God created us all, why then should we deal treacherously one with another? I should like these boys and girls before they go out into the world to face the crude realities of life and meet the

slings and arrows of adversity, to be dwell beneath that humble roof. All armored with the thought of what their people contributed to the ideal of social righteousness—*Zedek, Zedek, Tirdov*. No master and no slave in the sight of God, no tyrant and no groveling slaves, but men, each one made in the image of God, each life sacred and sufficient unto itself. These are some of the achievements which are today the pinnacles, the heights toward which mankind with bleeding hands and torn feet is struggling to reach. I should like them to know what their people contributed in the creation and fashioning and evolution of these ideals.

I should like them to be Jews enlightened, alert, proud, well-informed, but not chauvinistic, not braggarts, not Jewish isolationists. The Jew was never an isolationist. The Jew always welcomed the charm and the beauty of other cultures into the tents of Shem. (*Yeffifuso shel Shem b'Ohalo Yafeth*.) The Jews always widened the girths and strengthened the flaps and let them come in, but it was always his tent and his home. We survived not because we Ghettoized ourselves and built a wall of seclusion around us. We survived because we are the most marvelously adaptive and adapted people in the world; by always preserving the integrity of our own life and our own soul.

I should like to teach our young boys and girls to love the Synagogue, the noblest creation of the spirit of Israel. Nothing can take the place of the Synagogue in Jewish life, not even Palestine, not even nationalism. The Synagogue was the dearest and choicest creation of our race. It was born in exile, in the Babylonian exile. It was retained when the Temple was rebuilt. It assumed complete domination in Jewish life when the Second Temple was destroyed. The Synagogue was the particular creation of the Jews. It had no hierarchy. It had no Priesthood. It had no sacerdotalism. It was a spontaneous creation of Jewish men and women. It became a place of assembly, a place of study where youth was instructed, a place where the stranger was welcomed. It went with Israel into exile. It witnessed Israel's joys and Israel's sorrow. It was the refuge of the persecuted and the haunted soul of our people right through the ages of Stygian gloom. One great painter not so very long ago represented the synagogue as an old, haggard woman seated amongst the ruins of a shattered life. Ah, only those who see things and cannot see through things can thus picture the synagogue of Israel. Our life of ceaseless wanderings did not permit us to build, up to comparatively recent times, edifices of beautiful architectural design, with marvelous columns, with glorious colored windows that held within themselves all the passion of a creative people. Our Synagogues were never built on the highways of a city but in out-of-the-way places, in dark alleys, humble buildings, simple and crude. Externally so unattractive as this picture which the painter drew, but oh, what a world of marvelous, ardent glory dwelt within those simple walls! Only he who drew life's inspiration from the sanctity dwelling within these walls can know what the synagogue meant, what glories are

there, what solemnities, what grandeurs the passion of our ancestors may be found there.

## The Synagogue—Glory of an Undying Race

"You wish to know," cries the great Hebrew poet, Bialik, "whence your brothers drew that strength to combat the armed phalanxes of their enemies; you wish to know how their strength kept up, you wish to know whence they drew that courage? Go to a little synagogue in some forsaken village way out on the distant steppes, and there in the twilight of the vanishing day, you will find three or four men chanting over an ancient tome, chanting in the old, old chant from their sacred Law. There you will stand before the miracle of my people's eternal life, and you will see the glory of an undying race—the synagogue!" And I wish I could bring that love of that Jewish institution into the hearts of our boys and girls.

Do you know the story of Sokolovka? Did you read of it perchance? It happened three years ago. It was *Yom Kippur* day in the little town of

Sokolovka just three years ago, in 1921, when the hordes of the counter-revolutionary armies were sweeping over the Ukraine. In this little village the Jewish men and women, and children, were assembled in the little, almost broken-down synagogue. It was *Yom Kippur* day and that morning the Cossack leader Kosakoff entered the city and he and his infuriated mob broke into the synagogue and commanded the Rabbi and the elders of the congregation to open the Ark, take out the Scrolls of the Law, and march around the center of the synagogue and sing and dance as they are accustomed to do on *Simchas Torah*. It delighted the soul of this Cossack to see these frightened and intimidated Jews dance before him in forced merriment and when that ghastly scene was done, he commanded the Jews to march to the square of the city. The Rabbi anticipated what was to happen, and so he turned to his congregation and said, "Brothers, repeat with me ere we leave this synagogue seven times *Adonoy Hu Elohim*," that battle-cry of a people that has been compelled to wage unarmed the

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**General Forrest's recipe for winning battles was to "get thar fust'est with the most'est men".**

In business as in war, to win you must be first.

## We Need the Jewish Youth

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battles of the Lord of Hosts. In sobs, with broken voices, they repeated *Adonoy Hu Elohim*. They were marched two by two into the square of the city and lined up in a semi-circle, the elders in the center, dressed in white—for it was *Yom Kippur*—and an order rang out and one hundred and eighty were shot down.

The synagogue heard that cry and treasured it and it is of such cries and it is of such moans and such scenes that our synagogue is built. An institution, built more of the dead than of the living, this sacred institution, drenched in the tears, sanctified by the sacrificial loyalty of our people, our joy, our pride, our glory, that I would wish to transmit to the boys and girls of my people.

And lastly, I am interested in Young Judaea, because it has to do with youth, with young people, with plastic, yielding, susceptible material. Youth, youth, what the world needs today is youth! Our civilization collapsed because in 1914 and in 1919 again its spiritual reservoirs were found dry and empty. Scientific and economic imperialism had drained the vital reservoirs of mankind. All the creative enthusiasm of the masses was directed into the channels of competitive industrialism and its allied technical arts. But the spiritual things which alone unify life and direct life were impoverished and enfeebled, and we reached a point where we were no longer able to direct and unify our lives, and our civilization collapsed. The heart stopped functioning and so the mind was darkened. And if mankind is ever to rise from the dust of defeat and degradation, it must be from the heart. Therefore, we need youth.

We need the throb of warm, passionate ideals. We need faith, we need adventure, we need the full-throated song and the marvelously impassioned idealism of youth. We have enough mental vigor and enough intellectual vigor for a half-dozen more causes. What we need is that spiritual intensity, that transcending faith which are youth. Old age we have all about us. Old age will tell you at once that human nature is incorrigible, that

things will always be as they are. Old age will sound the note of warning that things will always remain as they are and will prove most logically and conclusively that things cannot be bettered. Youth lives not by syllogisms, but by faith, and therefore today the world is turning to its youth. We don't need leaders. We crucify leaders. We need consecrated young men who have faith to serve and to suffer—to suffer and to serve a cause. That is what the world needs today. That is what Judaism needs today. We are turning to our youth.

Heretofore American Israel has depended for its culture, for its learning, for its enthusiasm, upon leaders from Europe. We must now turn to our own youth. It can be done. We must help these boys and girls grow up into fine Jewish men and women normally. Don't compel them when they are twenty or over to readjust themselves intellectually, because that is a very painful and trying and often times a very tragic process. Let them grow into Jewish life gracefully, charmingly, normally as a plant grows. Let them have an environment which is Jewish, so that when they face life, they will face it not afraid, nor apologetic, but as normal human beings who have been taught to accept these things and are prepared to meet them. That was the youth that I had. That was the youth which forty of my colleagues of the Dr. Herzl Club had. That was their youth. We were Jews before we knew of the existence of a Jewish problem; and when we met the Jewish problem, we did not take it so seriously and were not so terribly disturbed by it. We knew that anti-Semitism existed and that we would encounter it in life. We knew that sporadic outbursts of distemper were common. We have survived them. We have developed strategies to meet them. We were not disturbed, nor grown fanatic or extreme in our reaction to that sort of thing. We lived our lives harmoniously, integrated lives. I thank God that it was my good fortune to have had just that type of Jewish upbringing, and I want all of our boys and girls if possible to have that advantage. That is our appeal to you.

### Felix Fuld President of New Jersey Federation

"American Jews have demonstrated to the world at large that they are hardworking, honest and enterprising people, capable of taking care of themselves and ready to participate in every movement for the general welfare of the community and country," declared Mr. Felix Fuld, President of the New Jersey Federation of Young Men's and Young Women's Hebrew Associations at a testimonial banquet given in his honor Sunday night in the auditorium of the Y. M. H. A. building. The occasion for the banquet was the reelection of Mr. Fuld for the third time as president of the Federation.

400 representatives of the various "Y" building of Newark.

Jewish communities in the state of New Jersey were present. The function, which was the first of its kind ever held, was an unusual social success. Greetings to the guest of the evening were received from Felix M. Warburg, Louis Marshall, Julius Rosenwald and others. Oscar Weingarten acted as toastmaster. William Newcorn, Harry Bacharach, ex-mayor of Atlantic City; Dr. B. S. Pollak, Rabbi Solomon Foster, Rabbi Charles I. Hoffman and Rabbi Charles Silberfeld spoke. Mr. A. J. Dimond, president of the Newark Y. M. H. A. presented a portrait of the guest of honor. It will be hung in the

### Shomrim Society Formed by Jewish Members N.Y.P.D.

The Shomrim Society will be the name under which 700 Jewish members of the New York Police Department will be organized for the purpose of strengthening religious spirit among them, according to an announcement of Dr. Isidore Frank, Jewish chaplain of the Police Department.

The organization is being formed with the consent of Commissioner Enright and will function similarly to the

Anchor Club, the Knights of Columbus Organization of Policemen, the Masonic Society and the Square Club. At the first meeting held in Liberty Hall, Houston and Norfolk Streets, New York, 240 Jewish policemen joined the society. Lieutenant Jacob Kaminsky was elected president, Sergeant Morris Greenberg, first vice-president. Patrolman Harry Schreiber, second vice-president and Detective Morris Borkim, recording secretary.