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Masons, Centennial Lodge No. 763 F. & A. M., New York, 1926.



REVEREND ABBA HILLEL SILVER, D.D., RABBI OF

"THE TEMPLE," CLEVELAND, OHIO,

as guest of the Lodge, will be the Orator at the
GOLDEN JUBILEE FESTIVAL LODGE,
GRAND LODGE ROOM, MASONIC HALL,
23rd Street and Sixth Avenue, New York City,
APRIL 27, 1926, 8 P. M.

Centennial Lodge, No. 763

F. & A. M.

1876 - 1926

OUR FESTIVAL DAYS APPROACH



THIS TRANSLATION OF A LATIN VERSIFICATION OF PSALM CXXII WAS MADE IN 1698:

IN 1926, LET IT BE THE SUMMONS TO THE BRETHREN OF CENTENNIAL LODGE TO KEEP "YOUR FESTAL DAY."

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| 1. O 'twas a joyful sound to hear
Our tribes devoutly say,
Up, Israel! to the temple haste,
And keep your festal day. | 4. May peace within thy sacred walls
A constant guest be found;
With plenty and prosperity
Thy palaces be crown'd. |
| 2. At Salem's courts we must appear,
With our assembled powers,
In strong and beauteous order
ranged,
Like her united towers. | 5. For my dear brethren's sake, and
friends
No less than brethren dear,
I'll pray, May peace in Salem's
towers
A constant guest appear. |
| 3. O ever pray for Salem's peace;
For they shall prosp'rous be,
Thou holy city of our God,
Who bear true love to thee. | 6. But most of all I'll seek thy good,
And ever wish thee well,
For Sion and the temple's sake,
Where God vouchsafes to dwell. |

Rabbi Silver: Ever since receiving the kind invitation of your committee to share in the honor of participating in the program to night, I have been at a loss to define exactly the scope of my address. I am not acquainted with the fraternal intimacies of your great Lodge, and I cannot take my text either from the principles of from the practices and achievements of your great Order. But, as I sat here this evening, and watched what was transpiring, and listened to what was said, one fact stood out most prominently, and that was the sentiment of "comradeship" which dominates your life, and the sentiment of "brotherhood" which informs your organization. Twice this evening I heard reference to the "Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man", and it pleased me exceedingly, for it is these very things to which men in my calling are dedicating their lives.

Nothing is needed, to my mind, in this troubled and tortured world of ours today, in which so much of hate is rampant, and in which suspicion makes co-operation so difficult between peoples and races and creeds - I say, nothing is so needed in this troubled world of ours as a renewed emphasis and a magnificent stressing of this doctrine of "good will between men".

You know, good will is not easy of attainment. It is not a legacy of the human race. It is an achievement, and it is yet to be achieved. Primitive man knew very little of good will. His good will was limited to his family or to the larger family working-unit, the tribe. For his kith and kin primitive man had a steadfast loyalty, an almost sacrificial loyalty, but for all others he had little or none. Neighboring peoples were his menacing enemies, and, certainly, distant peoples were his potential enemies. Knowing other people little he had little friendship for them. His contacts being few, his friendly relationships were few. It was only as his contacts increased that his horizons widened. As the sphere of his interest and concerns in life stretched out beyond the

boundaries and confines of his limited tribe did his good will expand, There was now a necessity for understanding and for co-operating with these other peoples. The first contacts which groups of people had with one another were the contacts of conflict. War brought people together first of all. That might sound rather strange, but it is historically true. War brought peoples together first. Europe came to know Asia; Asia came to know Europe, through successive invasions of people, through belligerent migrations of people. The competitive instinct, the passion for political and economic aggrandizement, made possible the discovery of the Western Hemisphere, made possible the discovery and the exploitation of the "dark continent", made possible all the colonial efforts of the human race, and brought about as a result numerous conflicts, many of them bloody conflicts, culminating in the last and the greatest war, the war in which so many of you ~~this evening~~ participated, the war which all of you witnessed.

The last war was the most widespread contact through conflict that the world has ever known, and as a direct result of it there ensued a tentative "League of Nations" which is the most widespread contact through co-operation ~~that~~ the world has ever known. This is significant. Conflict leads to co-operation. Necessity sublimates struggle into co-operation, and rivalry into good will.

Now, the thought that I want to make clear this evening is this: Mankind can accelerate this inevitable process towards good will -- mankind may hasten it. It need not wait upon the bloody means of conflict to bring about understanding and co-operation among peoples. Mankind can hasten that day of universal reconciliation and good will by surrendering some of the ancient memories of the race, by suppressing or sublimating some of the ancient codes of conduct, some of the ancient habits of thought, which keep people from meeting.

What is it which keeps peoples, races and religions from meeting? I choose to call all the facts which go into this estrangement and alienation among peoples - I choose to assemble them all under the one name of "imperialism". There is such a thing as "political imperialism", which is so well known to you that I need not speak of it this evening. That has been responsible for a great deal of rivalry and competition and war and horror in the world; but there are two other types of "imperialism" just as obnoxious, just as hateful and just as devastating in society as "political imperialism". One is "religious imperialism" and the other is "racial imperialism".

What do I mean by "religious imperialism"? What is imperialism? Imperialism is that system of thought which assumes that a group is in possession of the highest truth and of the greatest power, and that therefore it is justified in imposing that truth by means of that power upon every other group. That underlies all political imperialism.

That thing we find also in religion. Instead of looking upon religion as a groping of the human soul for the dwelling place of God, as a quest, as an endless search of the human mind and soul for reality, never knowing whether we attain that reality, never sure that we have that absolute and final truth, but always confident that if there is a God in heaven that God will reward us, not on the basis of what we have achieved but on the basis of the sincerity and the earnestness of our groping and our searching, - I say, instead of regarding religion in this experimental way, there are religions and there are groups of people who regard religion as something ready-made, as an accomplished thing, as something given in an absolute and perfect form, into the possession of some one group, and that, therefore, that group ought to impose that truth upon all others, by persuasion, preferably, if necessary, by force, for the salvation of the souls of those who are still in darkness.

Now, in medieval days that persuasion made necessary by religious imperialism took on tragic forms, - the rack and the inquisition, the auto-da-fé, anathema, excommunication, war. Today it has taken on the forms of "civilized" persecution, political discrimination, social discrimination, vicious propoganda, and pamphleteering. The impulse is the same. It is the direct consequence of that frame of mind which looks upon his particular religion as perfect in expression; his creed as final and eternal, and his ritual ~~as~~ being merely a guide to noble thinking and living as possessing almost sacramental or magical powers.

Now, as long as people will think of religion in this way, so long will men not meet and so long will there be hatred and hostility and unhappiness in the world.

You must not blame "religion" for these things. I know full well that many crimes have been committed in the name of religion, just as many crimes have been committed in the name of liberty, and many sins have been perpetrated in the name of art. Every noble cause has its ignoble defenders, and every noble effort of the human race has been well nigh frustrated by the fanatic or the zealous or the spurious champion of that cause.

There is in man a primitive, archaic, competitive instinct which is constantly seeking outlet and expression, and when it finds that channel of expression in religion then it becomes the most devastating instinct of all, for religion seems to give that competitive instinct not only scope but sanction. Once religion places upon a cause the seal of Godliness it seems to remove all restrictions and decent restraints.

I am thinking at the moment of the Crusades. The Crusades gave the untamed, barbarian peoples of Europe an opportunity to express their martial instincts under the sanction and with the authority of religion,

so that a man could kill the livelong day the infidel and the Turk and the Jew, and at the close of the day feel almost sanctified. We are told that when the Crusaders entered the Holy City they butchered all day until they walked ankle deep in blood, and at nightfall they knelt, almost sobbing for joy, before the Holy Sepulchre and sang hymns of praise to the Prince of Peace. There was no confusion in their minds, and there was no contrast there, because their instincts were given free scope, and religion, as they understood it, sanctified their instincts. But it was not religion; it was a perverted emotionalism cloaked in a religious garb.

What we need in the world today, friends, is the truly religious man who does not deviate one iota from his adherence to his own faith, but who at the same time grants ^{to other people} the same privilege of adherence and loyalty ~~to other people~~ to their own.

What mankind needs today is to discover the common human elements in all religions, to reach down beneath the surface creeds and dogmas, deep down into the rich sub-soil of human needs, of the spiritual cravings of men, and on the basis of these common needs ^{to} unite. I am not now speaking for toleration, I am not now appealing for tolerance. Tolerance is only a negative thing, Tolerance is not enough. I am now speaking for that prophetic vision, for that sound intelligence, which will urge people to discover the common human denominator in all religions, and then to pool their resources, for the sake of meeting these great needs. Why, there is sin in the world and there is crime in the world and there is injustice in the world rampant, which are a menace to one faith as to another. There is materialism in the world, and there is the worship of things and position and wealth and the lust after things, and these are the common enemy of all spiritual religions. Why cannot faiths unite their intelligence, their will to serve, in

order to solve these common problems.

After all, friends, this is perhaps the real kind of meeting and this is perhaps the only real way for Jew and non-Jew to meet in the world. Jew and non-Jew can meet, not on the basis of physical merger, not on the basis of one losing its identity in the other, not on the basis of a common uniformity, but on the basis of co-operation in specific, social tasks.

That is how peoples co-operate. When the man from India discovers that his greatest menace is disease, and the man eight thousand miles away in Norway or Sweden discovers that his greatest menace is also disease, and the two get together to wrestle with that specific problem, these two have met, really met; a bond of union has been established between them. One may continue to speak his language and so may the other. One may continue to wear his national garb, and so may the other. One may continue to worship his God in his way, and so may the other. But upon one great social task they have met. A link of brotherhood has been forged between them.

When the man from Moscow realizes that his greatest need is education and enlightenment and the breaking of the shackles of ignorance and the man from South America recognizes that his greatest need is education and enlightenment and the widening of human horizons, and the two get together to think over their problem and wrestle with it, why, they will have met. One may continue to wear his garb and speak his language and read his literature and love his land, and so will the other, but between the two of them a highway of intercommunication has been established down which human good will is daily moving. And when Jew and Christian will realize that their source is one—God, and their goal is one, the service of man, they will join their enthusiasms and their consecrations in the one common task of making God's truth regnant in the world and in bringing a little more of sweetness and a little more of light into the habitations of man.

They will have met. One may continue to worship in church or cathedral, and the other in synagogue or temple. Their worship will be one. One may continue to read his prayer book and the other his, but their prayer will be one. The walls of the churches will separate them, but the spirit of religion will unite them. That is my ideal of good will between Christian and Jew, between all faiths, and it can only come about as the proponent of one and of all religions realizes that he is not in possession of the sole, monopolistic absolute truth denied to all others, but that he has simply envisaged a common truth from another angle, that there are many roads leading to God, and that his road is the one which he prefers to traverse best of all.

Man will hasten the day of good will by destroying religious imperialism, and, by destroying racial imperialism. What do I mean by "racial imperialism"? Just as there are some people who claim to have religious preference so there are some peoples who claim to have racial preference. They come from better stock, they are racially superior. "I have blond hair and blue eyes, and I am therefore of the chosen children of God; I am the salt of the earth. You have black hair and brown eyes; you belong to a mongrel race. Yours is not a creative race; yours is an imitative race. Being endowed with these superior qualities I am by Divine right the Master race, and, therefore, you must be subjected to me; you must serve me". That is racial imperialism.

Much of this pseudo-philosophy was popularized by some of the German philosophers in the days before the war, and much of it was responsible for the war. A good bit of it is beginning to invade our own country. "The chosen races", "the Nordic races", "the undesirable races", "the Mediterranean races", or "Asiatic races", etc., etc.

Now, as long as this racial imperialism is rampant in the world there will be no good will among peoples; there cannot be any good will. In the sight of God and in the sight of history there are no superior races, and there are no inferior races. There are only advanced races and backward races, races helped or retarded by physical conditions by historical fortunes or misfortunes. There are no superior races who remain superior for more than a few hundred years. You cannot point to any race in the world today which has maintained its position of dominance and mastery for more than a few hundred years. The races which are called superior today were the backward races of a few hundred years ago, and the backward races like the Chinese and the Indians and the Arab races were the masterful, the great races a few centuries or many centuries ago. And there are no pure races in the world. Any one who has a smattering of history knows that during the fifth, sixth, seventh and the eighth centuries, Europe - the whole of Europe, not to speak of other continents, was the veritable stamping ground of all sorts and kinds of races, Goths and Teutons and Huns and Mongolians and Vandals who moved to and fro across the face of Europe, mingling and co-mingling their blood, until today there isn't a race, in Europe that can claim racial homogeneity. England is six races and France is twelve races and Germany is twenty races, and America is a hundred races.

When a race is conscious of possessing superior advantages - and there are such races, for races are not all equal any more than individuals - that does not warrant it to arrogate unto itself conceit or domination or mastery. Rather that should compel it to a greater sense of obligation and service and helpfulness. I speak of that here and now because men and women such as you who are dedicating yourselves to the heroic task of bringing about a greater brotherhood in the world ought to know the difficulties involved in that task. It is not an easy task. It does not come about

simply by wishing it or by uttering fine attractive phrases. It will come about after many many generations of human self-discipline, of human self-purgation, if you will, of suppressing or of sublimating those ancient inherited memories of racial prides and racial arrogances which have come down to us from ages long since dead.

Certainly, in these United States this racial idolatry, this racial imperialism, has no place, should have no place, for here a hundred races have poured into their substance, physical and spiritual; here the nations from the four corners of the earth have sent their brain and brawn and America is what it is because of the peoples and the races which are here. Whether they are blond or no, whether they are amalgamated or no, whether this has been a melting pot or not, that is not important. The important thing is that America is what it is today in prosperity, in prestige, in promise, because of these numerous, diverse peoples which have gone into its composition.

Surely, here all emphasis should be laid not on birth but on principle, not on blood but on ideals, not on the past but on the promise of the future. I have often conceived of America - perhaps fondly conceived - as of a mosaic, made up not of one block of one size or of one color, but of many stones, made up of many sizes and many colors, all arranging themselves, into that perfect pattern which we call "America". I have often thought of America as a magnificent rainbow, made up not of one color nor yet of many colors, but of many colors blending and fusing into one superb magnificence which we call American Democracy! Here is God's workshop. Here peoples come, various in their religions, various in their nationalities, various in their races, and here they join their common hopes and their common aspirations, to form what? Not merely a new government, not merely another country, but to form a new civilization, a new type of social existence, where men shall truly be free, free in the comradeship of free men, free in a fraternity of free men, free where indentities and similarities

will be stressed rather than the superficial differences which always have existed and which always will exist. The more civilized we become, the more diversified we become.

Once upon a time we had one system of government. Once upon a time we had one theory of art. Once upon a time we had one Roman Empire, or one Holy Church. Today we have numerous theories of government, and numerous conceptions of art, and we have two hundred religious denominations in this land; and the more advanced man becomes the more individualized he becomes; the more he takes on a crystallisation which we call "personality". There will always be and increasingly so, differentiations among men, and those who would like to force all people into one common mold so that they will all emerge, acting alike, speaking alike and thinking alike, are fond and foolish children who are trying to bring back the times which existed before the mythical Tower of Babel, when all people did look alike and act alike and speak alike. That can never be. Freedom does not demand uniformity, sameness, monotony; not at all. On the contrary, real freedom commands a man: "Develop that which is you, your potentialities, your gifts, your uniqueness; express and realize yourself; fulfill yourself, and then bring your gifts and your achievements and lay them upon a common altar of a common life"

We in America are trying to build up a civilization that will express this yearning of man for complete and perfect freedom in the confraternity of free men; and to that you men and women individually and your magnificent organization collectively can contribute a great deal.

I recall that during the heat and the conflict of the war I was asked by an organization to give my definition of "America", and this is the definition which I gave them, and this is the definition which

I would like to leave with you as my parting word tonight: I said that America is much more than an aggregate of one hundred and ten millions of people or a stretch of territory three thousand miles wide; I said that America is all that the suppressed and the denied peoples of the earth longed for. I said, "God built Him a continent of glory and filled it with treasures untold. He carpetted it with soft rolling prairies and pillared it with thundering mountains. He graced it with deep shadowed forests, and filled them with song. Then He called unto a thousand peoples, and summoned the bravest among them; they came from the ends of the earth, each bearing a gift and a hope; the glow of adventure was in their eyes, and the glory of hope within their souls. And out of the labor of men and the bounty of earth, out of the memories of ages and the hopes of the world God fashioned a nation in love, blessed it with a purpose sublime, and called it "America."

