



## Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project

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### **MS-4787: Abba Hillel Silver Papers, 1902-1989.**

Series V: Writings, 1909-1963, undated.

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George Washington, 1935.



Radio Broadcast by Rabbi Silver on February 22, 1935

All authentic biographies of George Washington have laid the greatest emphasis upon his character. It was the character of George Washington which proved to be the cement which held the Revolution, as well as the young nation together. Men believed in him even when they did not altogether believe in the Revolution.

Washington was not the perfect infallible man which popular legend and grateful tradition have painted him. No mortal man is. But there was a force of character about him that made men believe in him. They believed in his sound, practical judgment. They believed in his moral and spiritual integrity. They believed in his courage. They believed in his loyalty. They believed in him and confidently followed him.

Courage particularly, seems to have been the quality of this man. You must not think of the Revolutionary War as a swift consummation of a great ideal, won over night, or of the American people in the days of the Revolution as a united people ~~xxx~~ rising in their power against British tyranny. Nothing can be further from the truth. The War lasted some seven long years. Seven dark, heart-breaking years of war. It was a war which only one third of the American people really wanted, and mostly the poor people. The bulk of the property owners were Loyalists and Torys. One hundred thousand of them fled their native colonies because they were not in sympathy with the Revolution. It was not a united people that entered the Revolution. Washington's army never numbered more than some 725,000 people and at the close of the war he did not have more than 6000 soldiers in his army. During these seven long years his men were frequently without clothing and food and nearly always without money.

Valley Forge was not the only dark hour of the Revolution. There were many dark hours when the Revolution seemed to be doomed. It was the tremendous



courage of this man Washington that carried the Revolution through to victory.

Washington manifested the same courage after the Revolution. Here, again, you must not think that with the victory of the Revolutionary forces in 1783 the American nation sprung, as it were, full-grown, from the brow of history. Not at all. Another six or seven heart-breaking years had to pass before the Constitution was finally adopted and the nation finally established. They were years of jealousy, dissension and struggle among the states, years of fearfully depreciated currency, and of economic collapse, the kind of years which Europe experienced after the World War.

Through these critical years and through the years that he was President of the United States, Washington piloted the ship of state frequently threatened with shipwreck safely and steadily. When his work was done and as a result of his firm and courageous leadership the American nation was safely launched upon its great destiny.

I should like to comment upon one or two of the ideals which motivated this man and which constitute his precious legacy to our own generation.

Washington was a religious man who gave voice to his religious sentiments more than once. He maintained that the moral life of a people must be grounded in religion. In his farewell speech to the American people he stated: "Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports; and let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education in minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle."

But he was broad and tolerant in his religious outlook. He was a champion



of religious freedom. When the struggle for religious freedom was at its height in the State of Virginia, which struggle culminated in the Virginia Act for the Establishment of Religious freedom in 1785, Washington wrote to George Mason during the Virginia struggle in 1785: "No man's sentiments are more opposed to any kind of restraint upon religious principles than mine are."

It was due to the efforts of George Washington that the first Amendment to the Constitution of the United States was passed in 1789 which reads: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

Washington, when he became President, was felicitated by many of the religious groups in the United States for his courageous championing of religious freedom. They wrote addressed to him thanking him for his labor in their behalf and he replied to them. In 1789 he wrote to the United Baptist Churches of Virginia:

"If I could have entertained the slightest apprehension that the Constitution framed in the Convention, where I had the honor to preside, might possibly endanger the religious rights of any ecclesiastical society, certainly I should never have placed my signature to it; and if I could now conceive that the General Government might ever be so administered as to render the liberty of conscience insecure, I beg you will be persuaded that no one would be more zealous than myself to establish effectual barriers against the horrors of ~~the~~ spiritual tyranny and every species of religious persecution. For you doubtless remember that I have often expressed my sentiments that every man conducting himself as a good citizen and being accountable to God alone for his religious opinion, ought to be protected in worshipping the Deity according to the dictates of his own conscience."

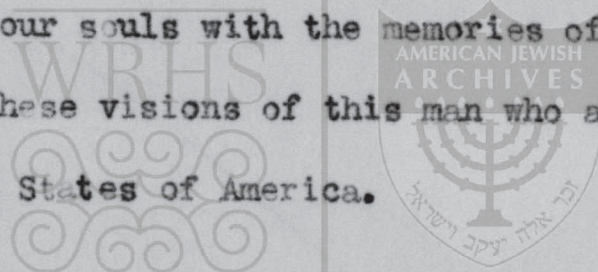


And he wrote a similar letter to the Quakers of Pennsylvania and to the Jewish Community of Newport.

Washington thought of America not only as a land of complete religious freedom but as a place of refuge for all the persecuted of the earth. And though he led his people into war -- few cherished the ideal of peace more than he.

"I conceive under an energetic general government such regulations might be made, and such measures taken, as would render the country the asylum of pacific and industrious characters from all parts of Europe - a land of asylum for mankind."

It is good for all Americans to pause on this Anniversary day of George Washington so as to refresh our souls with the memories of this magnificent personality and bring back these visions of this man who achieved the Revolution and who founded these United States of America.





Broadcast Feb. 22-1935

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Through these critical years and through the years <sup>when</sup> ~~that~~ he was President of the United States, Washington piloted the ship of state <sup>which was</sup> frequently threatened with shipwreck, safely and steadily. <sup>It was as a result of his work and of his</sup> ~~When his work was done and as a result of his~~ firm and courageous <sup>that</sup> leadership the American nation was safely launched upon its great destiny.

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It is good for <sup>us</sup> ~~all~~ Americans, to pause on this Anniversary day of George Washington ~~as~~ to refresh our souls with the memories of this magnificent personality and <sup>to</sup> bring back <sup>to mind the great democratic ideals</sup> ~~these visions~~ of this man who achieved the Revolution and who founded these United States of America.

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