



Daniel Jeremy Silver Collection Digitization Project

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Moses, 1974.

Moses
Daniel Jeremy Silver
January 13, 1974

I want to talk to ~~you this morning~~ about Moses and I want to do so
from a particular point of view. This is not so much a biographical history as it is
an attempt to understand Jewish ^{thought, particularly} ~~theology~~, the difficulty that Judaism faces when it
^{Takes To Task} must ~~confront~~ a hero figure ^{I will use as my departure point} and I'd like to discuss Moses on the basis of contemporary
~~event suggested by a column~~ ^a ~~Tom Wicker, Senior Editor of the New York Times~~ ^{IN EARLY}
~~published this past week~~ ^{JANUARY IN EARLY JANUARY} in which he speculated on a surprising phenomenon in
American life and that is ^{though} ~~that~~ a significant number of Americans believe the President
to be guilty of ~~a series of serious crimes~~ ^{or crimes} or misdemeanors arising out of Watergate
or influence peddling or ~~his income tax problems~~ ^{the} ~~but who do not believe that the~~ ^{ISSUE, LESS THAN HALF OF THAT NUMBER}
President ought to be tried and impeached because of these ~~crimes~~ ^{acts}. Now the usual
~~reason which is expressed by some 35 percent of the American people who hold~~
this seemingly illogical position, ~~guilty but not to be punished, is that the country~~ ^{AND THE MAIN REASON THEY OFFER IS A PRAGMATIC ONE.}
is troubled, divided, ~~embittered~~ ^{AND}, confused, and ~~that it ought not to be subjected to~~
the long bitter ~~political~~ ^{SENATE} anguish of a trial before the ~~Senate for impeachment~~ ^{OF ITS PRESIDENT.}.
~~According to a recent Roper poll on which Mr. Wicker depends,~~ ^{MR. WICKER DEPENDS IN} ^{WHICH REVEALED THAT}
~~some~~ ^{while} 79 percent of the American people believe the President to be guilty of one or
another of these crimes; only 44 percent of ~~the American people~~ believe he ought to
be tried for impeachment, ^{WICKER SPECULATES ABOUT THE MOTIVES OF THE} ~~on the basis of these very acts and it is the 35 percent,~~
~~the gap in those who believe the President to be guilty of various acts and those~~ ^{BUT WHO WANT TO AVOID}
~~who believe that because of his guilt he ought to be punished that Wicker speculates.~~ ^{ACTION AGAINST HIM.}
~~His argument is that the usual objective explanation, the country is troubled, the~~ ^{WICKER BELIEVES THAT THESE PROFERRED} ^{AND}
country ought not to be made to endure that kind of political quarrel ~~now~~ ^{burdened with another} ^{DEBATE} is not so
~~much an explanation as a rationalization, a rationalization, according to Mr. Wicker,~~ ^{THAT AN EXPLANATION, IT IS A CONVENIENT VERBAL MANOEUVRE}

the believe, for the true reason: the recognition of an uncomfortable truth, the truth that in condemning Mr. ~~Nixon~~ ^{the President} many millions of Americans would be condemning themselves, ^{How so!} because, again, according to the editor, ^{WICKER ARGUES} many Americans, perhaps a majority of them, ^{us} have accepted as a norm of conduct the standards ^{of} which the President ^{as their own, to wit} has accepted for himself, that is, if there are loop holes in ^{the} various tax laws ^{its proper to} why not exploit these loopholes to the full? That if one has privilege and ~~one has~~ ^{use that office for personal} office there is nothing wrong in taking advantage of that office and that privilege for personal financial gain; that if one has influence one ought to use, ^{under this common} one is right to use that influence. Guilt according to this assumed ^{directly threaten} American code of conduct results only when we take immediate advantage of another person, when ^{another's home} we threaten someone directly, when we steal from someone, when we strongarm another, or when we openly and contemptuously flaunt the law. ^{it's no} Short of that if our crime is simply to do a favor for someone that he ought not to have and is unseen; if our crime is simply that we have avoided taxes and thus ^{even though our} shifted the burden, for the burden exists always, on those who perhaps can less ^{privilege is} afford than we might to pay our share that's not a crime, that's simply being shrewd, ^{ON ANOTHER'S SHOULDER} being smart. In brief, Mr. Wicker feels that these Americans are saying that if we ^{35%} vote to impeach the President ^{is a vote to change} we are essentially impeaching a very comfortable way ^{code} of life whose advantages we ^{they have enjoyed} have gained for his, obviously, is not the only fortune ^{BE PRESIDENT'S} which has been made from one or another bit of tax manipulation; and obviously ^{IT IS NOT THE ONLY ONE} he is not the only man of power who has used his power to advance friends and to ^{denied financial privilege from his office} take advantage personally of the office that he holds. Perhaps. ^{IT IS TRUE THAT} Certainly all of us tend to be most ^{definitely about the objectivity of} objective in our judgements when we are least aware of the sub- ^{behind} jective elements which ~~are entering~~ into them. Certainly all of us are guilty of

unconsciously judging others by assumptions, ~~by~~ ^{NATIONALISM AND EGO} needs, ~~by hidden ego drives, ego~~
~~defenses of our own.~~ It is certainly true that in America we long since called shrewdness
 Yankee ingenuity and praised it, and we have long since created a system of law which
 is such a thicket of language, of special privilege, of special opportunity, that we
 think nothing of the fact that those who are able can hire brilliant tax men who can
 show them how to take advantage of every legal quibble which is available to them.

But I'd like to suggest to you this morning that even if Mr. Wicker
 is to a certain degree correct, that Americans have lost that rather clear sense of
 right and wrong and in a sense reflect them in their judgements about the President,
 there is another unconscious element in the issue, one I think to be more basic, more
 universal and one which certainly does not require us to take such a completely
 jaundiced view of American values and of the American character. I would suggest
 to you that one of the reasons that millions of Americans are unwilling to proceed
 in their own minds with the idea of impeachment is because unconsciously we need
 a leader; that somehow it seems to us better to have a discredited leader than to have
 no leader at all. When we were young and when we were in civics class we were
 told that America was a society of laws and not of men. And certainly the history
 of American political development is one which shows from the very beginning a
 great suspicion of administrative power. America did not inherit the mystique of
 majesty, of loyalty, of the saviour, the leader. Quite the contrary. The American
 Constitution was born among those who had rebellion against majesty and loyalty
 and the leader. When they conceived in those early days of a balance of power
 they thought of power resting essentially with the people, with the courts and with
 the Congress and the administration, the Presidency, was seen almost as a
 ceremonial office. The President was the personification of the nation and not the

power of the nation. He was to be open to people who were to bring him their private troubles. He was to be an omnibudsman. He was to be symbolic rather than to enjoy the almost imperial powers which Americans in the last 50 or 75 years have invested more and more in the presidency. If we have moved, and we have moved, from the concept of a very limited authority to the concept of a presidency which has perhaps the greatest authority of any office in the world we have done so against the mainstream of our own initial development. We have done so, I would submit to you, without really being aware of it, we have done so because unconsciously and to a degree consciously Americans, as most human beings, as all human beings feel desperately the need for a leader.

I give you the Eisenhower phenomenon. We came out of a great world war. We came out the unrivaled and uncontested major power in the world. No people before in history have ever had the exalted role which was ours and we looked around desperately for a father figure, for someone who would comfort us, and assure us that we would use this power well, who in a sense personified all of our commonplace, ordinary human dreams, that we would not abuse and misuse the power that we held.

I give you the Kennedy phenomenon. For those who are most intellectual, most cynical, most aware of what we had done during the Eisenhower years, invested the very same charisma in the youthful crusader which their more middle-aged parents had invested in the more middle-aged father figure.

I give you the Nixon phenomenon. What was the election in 1972? but a deliberate decision by the overwhelming majority of Americans that we prefer a decisive, powerful man whom we suspected to an impudent bungling man whom we

respected. You remember the kind of quiet desperation so many of us felt right after Mr. Agnew resigned? We were sick and tired of almost all we were hearing from Washington, that we were desperately afraid a situation might arise where America was leaderless and many of us convinced ourselves during that period of time, better a discredited leader than no leader at all. We moved heaven and earth to move as quickly as we could to find a Ford in our future, to see to it that there was someone in authority, legitimate, for whatever would happen might happen, would step in automatically into power.

What I'm suggesting to you this morning is simply this, that one of the most powerful, unconscious drives among men and women, among all of us, a universal emotion, is the need to feel that someone is taking our problems and helping us to handle them, someone more powerful than we, someone with greater authority than we, someone who can make things happen which we within the limited ambit circumference of our lives cannot make happen. We live in a confused world. Within the confines of our business and our profession we can do what needs to be done. We are competent, but inflation impinges upon our lives and none of us are individually competent to handle, to obviate, to dissipate the inflation. Nuclear confrontation is involved in our lives, racial crisis is involved in our lives, all kinds of political, social and economic phenomena impinge on us in every way possible. We are dependent upon powers beyond ourselves and dependency is a characteristic of childhood and the child needs the father. The child needs the sense of security. The more confused, the more dependent a nation, the more it wants to invest some kind of charisma, some kind of assumption of a leader as the saviour in a man,

It is God who delivers. It is God who saves. It is God who gives us the redemptive power

any man, who can give it a sense that he has taken the strings of power in hand and is handling them, hopefully wisely and hopefully well. Now I say this morning ^{to you this} not to obviously applaud this emotional need, but to make us conscious of it. History is filled with the failure of the leader. History can be written as a sad tragedy illustrating that there are no saviours. Obviously, we must be on our guard against this basic drive, this basic tendency in all of us, to find someone, some hope in someone, who will make everything right. Now I've come a long way to come to Moses but I'd like to suggest to you that just as the American social drama can be written in terms of a basic vision of limited power, a basic assumption that power corrupts, a basic need to disabuse people of the hero, so Judaism can be explained as a unique religion in that it alone among the major historic religions of man has moved against the hero, has moved against veneration of any saint, any saviour, that it alone insists that we must be conscious of this deep seated need to worship, to invest authority, to invest charisma, in another and avoid it and beware of it.

Greece took its great early heros and made them into gods. Rome took its emperors and made them into gods. Christianity took its saints and made them into near gods and it took a man and made him into the son of God. And Judaism? Judaism took Moses and read Moses entirely out of the haggadah, out of the story of the exodus of the Jews from Egypt. An amazing phenomenon. Passover time - we sit down to the table. We pick up the haggadah. What is it? It's a history book. It tells of the deliverance of the Jews from Egypt, of slavery, of the exodus, of Sinai, of the 40 years of the wilderness trek. Amazingly, the name of Moses is never once mentioned in the haggadah. It is God who redeems. It is God who delivers, it is God who saves, not Moses, God's redemptive power.

Moses is fascinating to me not only as a man but because he ^{has} ~~is~~ always presented to Jewish theologians and Jewish historians the need to come to grips with what do you do with a hero? Obviously, he's of an heroic stature. Obviously, he plays a central role in the chronology and the chronicle of the Bible. But it's interesting. It's interesting to look to see what the biblical editors did with the life of Moses. How is he introduced? A child, a child is saved, his first worries a cry and a tear. He's a man of stature, he's a man of ability, but the biblical editor, after 40 years of Moses' leadership, makes it clear that the reason Moses did not lead the children of Israel into the Promised Land is that Moses had sinned against God. He is not perfect. He is not blameless. He is not a saint. There is no man so righteous that he sins not and when come to write the finale, the obituary of Moses the biblical editor makes it very clear that there is to be no reverence of Moses as a saint. Throughout the Middle East men, women, went to venerate saints at their graves and the biblical editor makes it clear that no man knows Moses' death place, his burial cave, to this very day. There is no focus to which to make pilgrimage in order to venerate Moses. A surprising fact. When the Bible tells of the history of the exodus, the wilderness wandering, it tells obviously of Moses and the Torah. When it speaks of the law ⁱⁿ which God mediated the revelation, which God mediated to us, it is through Moses, the prophet. But in the later books of the Bible, in the prophets, in the wisdom literature, Moses is hardly mentioned. There is no hagiography. There are no embellished legends about Moses. Moses is not returned to. He has done his work and that's the beginning and the end of it as it is with any man. Moses is not a saint. He's not the hero figure. He's not the son of God who is to be

worshipped. He's not the intermediary sitting in Heaven to whom we address our prayers so that he will transmit those prayers to God. And when later still the apocalyptic literature developed, when Jews believed that there were individual heroes of the past who visited them in visions and dreams and took them into Heaven and made them aware of the secrets of the end of the world and the coming of the messianic times, subconsciously they used many of the great heroes, Elijah, Elisha, Jeremiah, Daniel, but not Moses. Moses is walled in by the theology from becoming what obviously many of the people needed him to become, something greater than life, someone who is in a sense superhuman.

Carlyle wrote a book once which he called "Heroes and Hero Worship" and he spoke in that little volume of the natural tendency of men to worship heroes and how that worship becomes veneration and reverence and they become more than human. Jews obviously tended to want to do that with the greatest of their heroes and the official religion, the official theology, moved deliberately, almost systematically against this natural human tendency. Judaism, like the American system, is based on a constitution, on the covenant. It's a society based upon law, not a society based upon men. In China there was a great religion. It's called Confucianism, the man. In India there was a great religion. It's called Buddhism, the man. In Western Europe and Eastern Europe there was a great religion. It's called Christianity, the name, the label, of a man. But we call our religion not Mosaism, but Judaism, simply the religion of the Jewish people. And the greatest compliment that the Bible can pay to Moses is not that he is a hero, but that he is simply the servant, the slave, of God. He is a man who does God's will and he remains always the man, the mortal, fallible, limited, great but limited just as, hopefully, we are.

Now I would not say to you that Jewish life was immune to the tendency

to venerate Moses or to create saint figures and venerate these. I would submit to you that the very need to limit the veneration in which Moses was held as tribute to the tendency of our people, conscious or unconscious, to want something more than the assurance of the law, something more than an invisible God, to want a man who is the visible presence of power in the midst of the people. Obviously this is there. Moses has power and tradition makes much of the fact that there is a transference of the power to Joshua and from Joshua to the prophets and from the prophets to the sages and in each generation from one group of sages to another, that the sense of authority vested in them, has never completely left Israel. And when our people describe the messianic days those miracles which God would make for them, for us, at the end of time, it's interesting they could not conceive even of this miraculous time except as revolving around an individual, a man, a messiah, a second Moses who would make all to be right. And in the of the despair of Europe when the hasidim created their great faith of joy and of dance and of song they also created faith which was woven around the veneration of the sadik. They turned their revies, they turned their great leaders, into gods among them. And they worshipped their every act and their every words and their every thought. We have not been immune to this basic need to see someone as the leader, but we fought against it. We've tried to limit it. We've tried to keep Moses simply a man, a great man, a fine man, a noble man, but through it all a man. And I would submit to you that following our theology and following our system of government, that one of the great challenges which face American life is to keep the presidency human, limited, circumscribed.

When the President comes into a room everyone stands. There are special marches, special music, which is played on his arrival. He is in a sense walled in as were the ancient Roman emperors from his own people, not only for his

own protection, but somehow because by distance the great emperors of mankind have always discovered that they increased the awe in which average people hold them. The presidency is an awesome office, but it's also an office which is that which is occupied by simply a man and no man is the saviour. No man can solve all of our problems for us. Insofar as these problems can be solved they must be solved by us, every one of us, working in concert, within our own capacities, within our own prerogatives, to achieve decency, to achieve justice, to achieve learning and the like. There's no salvation except through the actions and the energies of every man, every man, you and me. So, let's beware of the childish in us, in the place where there are no men strive thou to be a man. It is the nature of a man, of an adult, to recognize that he lives in confused times, that there are dangers today and there will be dangers tomorrow and the next; that he has a responsibility to lead and to help as do others; to venerate real achievement; to respect great leadership, intellectual, social political and to recognize that the best of leaders is mortal, limited, unable to do more than any other of us might do. When Moses died the Bible wished to pay tribute to this, our greatest hero, said simply: And Moses died, the man of God, the servant of God and that he died with his work incomplete. He had not crossed into the Promised Land. He had done much but he could not do it all. He had gone far but he could not guarantee the future to the children of Israel. I pray for great leaders and I pray that we will always have the understanding of their limitations, of their responsibilities and even more, of ours.

Two days after the attack. The W. J. C. N. T. was speculated
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WRHS



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 London WRHS the appeal to
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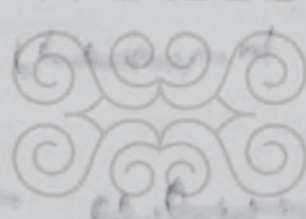
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