

And even with greater force comes this appeal to us to-day
pleading that, in the celebration of the feast of freedom, we
should think of the innumerable plight of our brethren in the
war zone.

The blood-stained pages of the history of our people during the
middle ages pale into insignificance when compared with what
they have to go through in these terrible days. Ten years ago
we were stirred to our depths by the atrocities perpetrated upon
our Russian brethren. What then shall be our attitude in this
unparalleled calamity? The situation is indescribable; no words
can depict it. In Russian Poland alone 200 boroughs and townships
were laid in ruins, and about 7,000 small villages have been
utterly destroyed. And all these places were inhabited by Jews, in
many instances entirely by Jews. Add to these over half a million
of Jews ruined in Galicia, about 35,000 in Serbia, and a hundred
thousand in Palestine, and one stands aghast at the terrible
picture conjured up before the mind's eye. How can we then
celebrate the feast of redemption unconcernedly knowing all this
misery and wretchedness? Shall we not be moved to pity?
Shall we not do all in our power, eye, share our last piece of bread,
to alleviate in some measure their terrible sufferings? Shall we enjoy
immunity from the world-devastating war, all the time knowing of
the bitter plight of our kith and kin? Pleading in behalf of the
sufferers in consequence of the war, I do not appeal to you for
charity. I remind you of your simple duty. Many of those who
are daily perishing from want and hunger may be your own
relatives, your own flesh and blood, and you cannot—*you dare*
not—refuse your help. This appeal goes out to every one—the
poor as well as the rich,—for the poorest here is rich in comparison
with those in Russia and Poland. *עוֹרַרְתִּי מִכָּל עַמּוֹת הָאָרֶץ*
“And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the
land of Egypt.”

Remember that it is by accident that you are enjoying the
freedom of England. You yourself might easily have been the
victim. Do not make excuses, nor seek for justification to abstain
from doing your duty. Make up your mind, at once, how much
your heart prompts you to give, and send it immediately to our
Treasurer. We shall join with those who have already con-
tributed the good work, so that the Liverpool Community shall make
a united effort to respond fittingly to the urgent appeal made to
us.

“Thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the
land of Egypt!” This too is a message brought to us by our
festival. However terrible the situation of our people may be,
and in no time has it been worse, however dark and gloomy the
outlook may appear to us, we need not despair. Better days are
sure to come. Were we not bondmen even here in this country?
Have not our predecessors had to struggle hard, fight inch by
inch, for our emancipation? And the God of our fathers who
redeemed them from Egyptian bondage, and who never suffered
Israel to perish, He will again show His mercy to all Israel, and,
as of old, there will be light in all their habitations.—Amen.

blood and the shedding of tears forcing its control over the civilized world to bring man into closer sympathy and into closer touch with man! This could never have been foreseen at the outset of the present world sorrow. The world is bleeding; the world is weeping. Yet we see the blood transformed into glory and the world's tears being turned into joy, reinforcing Israel's protest against despair, reaffirming Israel's optimistic faith that, whatever the cost and however severe the gnashing of teeth, truth and righteousness will kiss each other. To that effect may the words of the poet be metaphorically interpreted:

"It's rather dark in the earth to-day,
Said one little bulb to his brother,
"But I thought that I felt a sun-beam ray;
We must strive and grow till we find the way!"
And they nestled close to each other.
And they struggled and toiled by day and by night
Till two little snowdrops in green and white
Rose out of the darkness into the light
And softly kissed each other."

Because of its long history and particularly through the Passover, Israel is the protestant against the world's despair. Since darkest night precedes the dawn and since light with time will pierce the encircling gloom even as the gentle snowdrop, symbol of hope, breaks through the encrusting earth at the feel of sunshine, Israel witnesses unto the family of nations that God was King, is King and evermore will be King. Wherefore, right, justice and liberty in ever widening presentment must and will prevail after each recurring blast of the world's wintry nights.

Israel furthermore witnesses by experience to the ministry of sorrow in God's plan of education and uplift.

Pain has always been more or less man's perplexing problem. In the history of the world the sufferer has been the stumbling block of mankind. The Greek placed the suffering child on the doorstep to die. The Indian permitted his suffering aged to perish. Philosophy itself has not solved the riddle of pain and sorrow. Yet "sorrow and suffering are the birthmark of humanity." And Israel proclaims that the ministry of sorrow and pain to which all flesh is heir is not always punishment but is a mysterious means by which the divine Will expresses itself to prepare men and women, races and peoples for still better things, to behold greater depths of sympathy and to ascend greater heights of wisdom without which the world would be decidedly the loser.

And the Passover experience throughout time impressed this conviction upon the Jewish consciousness. In name Anti-Semitism is a recent phenomenon; in fact, it is coincident with the history of Israel, the Servant of the Lord. The world has always been pleased to lacerate its prophets body and soul and to crucify its prophet people. Of all nights, the Passover eve was the occasion for the fury in the hearts of men to be unleashed against Israel. At Passover time was heard the *hep-hep* call of the Crusades. Then, too, unbridled ignorance and superstition wrought havoc in Israel with the charge that Jews required Christian blood for the Passover. Israel has indeed been the man of sorrows; yet through Israel's stripes has much of the world's ills been removed.

Can the Passover lesson have greater value and drive home a finer moral? Is not the most vitalizing preachment that a people can offer a sorrow-laden world this, that sorrow and pain are the world's travail in its delivery of the new born hopes for humanity? And are we not beholding the evidence, the startling evidence thereof with our own eyes? Think of it! A liberalized Russia! A free Russia! One hundred thousand or more exiles returned to freedom from Siberian slavery! All religious disabilities removed in a land once dark with suppression! And the spirit of democracy not yet stayed; but, painfully, through the spilling of

American Jews, on the other hand, will fall into grave error if, in response to such unworthy suspicion and because of any hysterical spread of patriotism, they desire as Jews to give vent to their emotions, to keep separate and distinct their service to the country by the formation of relief work, or by the organization of companies and regiments consisting entirely or largely of Jews. Emphasizing Jewishness in this fashion will avail naught and may prove harmful. These are not Jewish hours but American hours. Good taste suggests the submerging of our Jewishness in all service we render the nation and the joining of hands and of purpose with comrade citizens of all shades of opinion and of all philosophies of life. Moreover, sound judgment warns against the isolation of resources upon religious lines. It presents a danger. In the past Jews have strenuously contested any and every possible union of Church and State, every possible association which might serve as a binder to this union. In political issues, complete separation of Church and State have almost invariably been our slogan. In the present national need, Jews can, therefore, hardly deem it advisable to conduct themselves in any way that may leave a doubt as to what the Jews' attitude on such matters is and will be. The Jew can be patriotic. The Jew will be patriotic. Many avenues for the expression of his patriotism will be offered. Let him engage in relief and in Red Cross work, let him volunteer, let him enlist, let him meet conscription, let him face universal service as the case may be. Let him do all this, however, with fellow citizens on the strength of his Americanism and in the thought of his Americanism let him merge all claims.

Though in this regard the Jew will best serve his country by submerging his Jewishness, from another angle he can emphasize his Jewishness and, by such emphasis, he can strengthen, if not add to the spiritual resources of the American people. This service will be entirely in the realm of ideas.

At the beginning of this ^{Century} ~~country~~ Americans had been thinking and hoping that war was a thing of the past, that the American people, if not the world, had become weary of war. We were led to this belief by the announcement of Peace Conferences, by the formation of Peace Societies, by the propaganda of Peace Movements and by the promised or suggested getting together of nations to settle their disputes and differences without bloodshed. Europe it was soon seen was a hotbed of intrigue. Old rivalries were smouldering, not dead. Antagonistic races were fomenting animosities which sooner or later had to explode. For three years past, distrust, colossal hatred and the most destructive strife the world has known have ranged people against people until finally we Americans are being launched into the raging sea of blood. In the break of international goodwill, in the stupendous loss of life, in the tragic indifference to human life and to human values, in the

bestly passions let loose, men and women see the bankruptcy of all religion. Where is God? is the cry that has gone forth from many lips. What is the evidence that God is not fiction or, if not a figment of the imagination, that he is not a monster sardonically enjoying the helpless efforts of a struggling humanity engulfed in the darkness of its irate emotions? Whither shall we turn for witness that God exists and that all is not blind, irritational fate or hapless accident? Who can offer experience that will reassure doubting, swelting mankind and that will lead it again to sustaining faith?

In this perplexity the words of the Prophet Isaiah taken from this Passover morning's Haftarah come as a fitting reply: "But now, thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob and He that formed thee, O Israel; Fear not . . . Ye are my witnesses saith the Lord and my servant whom I have chosen." Israel is the witness of a truth and a sustaining faith which at this portentous pass the world needs and seeks. Israel can offer testimony and the Passover itself is testimonial of an age long experience.

The Passover is Israel's watchnight, Israel's redoubt from which the presence of God in the world and in history is discernible, ready to bring succor even though overwhelming forces of facts beat upon it to destroy. For at Passover, Israel with God saw the Egyptians dead at the sea shore, an experience which repeated itself in the course of the centuries. Babylon, the great, was passed, leaving only records of former grandeur and conquest. Ancient Persia is no more. Greece and Rome whose pride and dominion humbled Israel and broke its national power are like Egyptian wreckage on the seashore of eternity. Since the mighty deliverance wrought in Egypt till to-day, Israel with God has ploughed through the fields of time, sowing in its furrows the seed of religious experience and of religious health. Year after year the sons of Jacob, gathered in their homes for the Seder on Passover eve, were fortified in the belief of their fathers and in the assurance of God's promise to their children. Their existence is living testimony; they are eye witnesses. For, that a people, weak, scattered, without land should survive inhuman persecution, that this people should outlive its vanquishers, that the conquered should triumph over the conqueror yet retain its individuality and primal strength is unexplainable from mere natural causation. God alone is the solution of the enigma. History may obscure His plan. Man's hatred for man may bring God's justice into question. That the wicked seemingly flourish though the righteous apparently languish clouds God's mercy. Nonetheless, Israel is the ocular witness that events are not haphazard or accident, that "man is not driftwood on the stream of time," that a righteous purpose pervades the universe making for progress and perfection, that liberty, service aspiration and sacrifice are purposeful—yea, in short, that no word goeth forth out of the mouth of the Lord and returneth unless it have found sway.

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"AMERICAN ISRAEL'S OPPORTUNITY."

The thought which above all others forces itself into speech here this morning is one that casts sorrow over our Passover celebration, Since last we met for divine worship, our beloved country has been committed to war. Uncertainties lie ahead, horror will follow in the wake of battle and heated, often blind passion will spring forth as it always does when men array themselves against men in the fiery struggle for life and for country.

To the American Jew, conscious of his American citizenship and loyal thereto, the line of conduct will appear clear. As American Jews, we have a twofold loyalty: our loyalty as Americans which we share with all citizens of this fair land; and our loyalty as Jews which, notwithstanding our citizenship or, better even, because of it, we intend to guard and to preserve. In the testing days to come it may be well if we keep these loyalties clearly defined and separate. In the measure that we are successful in doing so shall we, I believe, the better meet our responsibilities, discharge ourselves creditably of our duty and contribute strongly to the economic and spiritual resources of the nation during and after the conflict.

To the present needs of the country, all considerations are and should be secondary. Her safety and her wellbeing are primary. Loyal citizens of whatever origin and of whatsoever religious profession will desire to be faithful to her in the hours of trial that await. And no less faithful than others will American Jews be. Past experience and past service serve as a basis for justifiable supposition. In this connection. In the Revolutionary War, in the War of the Rebellion, in the Mexican and in the Spanish-American Wars the Jew fought side by side with Christians, forgetting even as they did all religious distinctions, manfully rising to obligations and serving the nation which from its inception granted, not rights and liberties but right and liberty to all who sought asylum within its borders. The Jew in war and in peace has been mindful of his indebtedness to America and has sought to bestow blessing in return for blessing conferred.

Oblivious of this service, suspicion which has gained currency to the effect that in the present decisive moment American Jews will not respond to the call to arms is unwarranted, unfair and un-American. American law gives to every individual and to every group the benefit of doubt until remissness of conduct shall have been proved. In the light of past service, American Jews can with dignity afford to ignore for the time being aspersions upon their good faith as citizens and to rest assured that this manhood will properly disport itself when the hour and the call for its display will have been sounded.

* G. A. KOHUT S'34

American Israel's Opportunity

Passover Sermon

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The West End Synagogue
150 West 82nd Street
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By

Rev. Dr. Nathan Stern

NYPL