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“The Problem of Judaism in America,” 1917 April 29.

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April 29, 1917.

THE PROBLEM OF JUDAISM IN AMERICA.

Will the Jews of America who are freed from persecution remain loyal to their Judaism? Will the Jews of America, who are a free people--free as they have never been before in the whole history of humankind--free to live without restraint and restriction or disability--free as to their ^{meetings} communities, their synagogues and their temples, and free to worship according to their conscience,--will they remain loyal to their Judaism? That is the problem of Judaism here in free America. Under a holocaust of oppression, amidst the fires of persecution, the tribes of Jacob in centuries past were welded into a people of Israel. Under the aggressive assaults of the enemy, under the menace and threat of our persecutors and our oppressors, Israel has always maintained its solidarity. Israel would not surrender, neither would it compromise. When the storm raged in its fury, when the wind blew with fullest might, Israel wrapped around itself the cloak of oppression, and as in the old fable, when sunshine and freedom came Israel was ready to cast aside the cloak altogether.

We of modern Israel are content with our materialism. We of modern Israel, like most in America and like most in the world, live with a very smug and pleasant materialism. And as a recent writer has

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said, if the Jew be lifted out of his contented materialism, and by means of religion be reborn unto a spiritualism of power, he might make Judaism a vital force. Here, if anywhere, lies the hope of American Judaism. It is in the recognition of the spiritual. It is in the pushing of all the material into the back-ground. It is in the Jew understanding himself as a man spiritually,--as a messenger of the spiritual appointed by history through long ages and centuries of suffering and martyrdom. It is by the Jew becoming this champion of the spiritual in this modern day reason of his spiritual appointment he bears a spiritual message, that he is the champion of the spiritual ideal to a materialistic world.

Shall we interpret our civilization as the thousands to us interpret it? Shall we count the accumulated treasures of civilization or the achievements and advancements of the race and to be the great architectural monuments which man has reared? Shall we account it to be our works of art, our sculptures and paintings? Shall we believe the human monuments erected upon these reflect our cathedrals dedicated to God or palaces dedicated to kings? Surely these are not the achievements of the history of the race. These are not the great treasures of civilization and surely not our own treasures of civilization. These vast acres of factory buildings, these vast acres of apartment stores, these are

not the treasures of civilization. These do not work the highest achievements of the race to future and advancing ages. The test of our spiritual civilization will be in the ideal through which men and women live truthfully, and they will reveal themselves in the sanctity of life, the purity of womanhood and the protection of children.

You ask me the question what do we in this materialistic world surrounded on all sides by the influences of conquering materialism? How shall we now conquer the world's materialism? How shall we put an end to spiritual apathy? How shall we waken out of their sleep those who are in the palls of cathartic indifference?

There are those who believe they find _____; those who would recreate an Israel, a religious romanticism, or those who would put into our life the world element. _____ We of Israel will be respiritualized. Symbols and ceremonials have their glory and power. Custom and tradition and institutions have their true value. But symbols, ceremonials and customs should not be received or instituted by us unless they appeal to our reason, unless they accord with our life.

Shall we then have a new Jewish revival? Shall we bring into modern Judaism the spirit of materialism? Shall we play upon the superstitions of men and women? I thank God every day that through

the centuries Judaism has freed itself more and more from superstition.

I thank God every day that modern Jews laugh at the fears of hell and tremble not at the fears of damnation. They may remember God.

But we Jews know that the Jews are not, that a Jew is not, afraid of God. We believe that our Judaism must be a rational religion. We believe that no religion can endure or will finally endure if it does not consist of human reason. We know that through ages past our

Judaism has always been under the need and necessity of harmonization with the intellectual judgments of the age. If it could not be har-

monized it would ^{have been} ~~be~~ rejected. And Judaism must be harmonized. If it cannot be thus harmonized it will be rejected. This does not mean we

believe in shifting promises. This does not mean the repeal of

Judaism or that it shall be surrendered as world opinion changes. But it does mean that ever through the centuries there has been a process

of harmonization, -from the day of Philo and Mamonides to the present

hour. And Judaism cannot live if it be in contradiction to the true

essence and true discoveries of the human mind. We believe a religion must be a law for living. A religion for living must be our Judaism.

There must be law in the land to which we look forward, and our Judaism shall be the religion and ideal by which we shall truly live. So

that the religion which we believe and house of God which we believe

in shall send us back into the spiritualism of the worlds that inspire our ideals, that shall inspire our life and ennoble our conduct.

For the first time in the history of the world our Judaism can be actually a religion of freedom, and not a religion of persecution and not a religion of martyrdom and not a religion whose chief cry is furnishing our unfortunate brothers so well under the yoke of the oppressor. Our Judaism of America in this 20th Century should be a religion of free-men--freemen side by side with their fellowmen in the sight of God, and free to worship. The triumph of Judaism and the Jew will not be when we get honored with social recognition from our fellowman. Social ostracism is not to divide Judaism. By right of history the Jew is witness not only to the martyrdom of the centuries past (ages of ill will) but the Jew is an eternal witness to the truth which he inherited from his father, from lawgiver, seer and sage. That is the truth on which we fall or stand; that is the ideal to which we have consecrated our lives.

Here in America is the Sabbath institution. Yet it must be confessed with truth that there is no Sabbath in American Israel, and the Sabbath problem is ^{vital} ~~fatal~~ to our Judaism. And if Judaism

shall not re-create for itself a Sabbath which it shall keep, whether it be on the old seventh day historical Sabbath or whether it be on Sunday, the day of rest, then there will never be _____

Sabbath in America. We cannot continue in America with this Sabbath sham and pretence. We cannot continue with that kind of Sabbath which so vitally affects our life in America. — —

Here in America they will disregard the Sabbath law, and we see them on the Sabbath on the streets and in public places with open violation and disrespect. If the Sabbath sham and pretence shall continue through the next generation as it has continued through the generation past, it will be ruinous and destructive to the continuation of the religious life of American Israel. I believe firmly that the Jews want a Sabbath and the Jews should observe a Sabbath day. If they can and will observe it on the old historic Sabbath, let them keep it sacred and holy. If they cannot, they need a Sabbath on some day of the week, a day that shall bring to them a message of spiritual uplift and exaltation of spirit. We shall be awakened to religious enthusiasm, and out of the Sabbath shall come an intensifying zeal for the ethical and moral life. Think you there is anticipation therefor? Think you that some will insist upon the law — — — — — principles of law particulars of the law, concern themselves with externalities and thereby save our Judaism?

I ask you, men and women in the world today, men and women face to face all over the world, all nations face to face with the supreme crisis of history, nation after nation plunged into a great conflict, millions face to face with death? Those millions are not concerning themselves with externalities or with ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ principles of law; they are not busy with genuflections and do not concern themselves with things that are fatal. They are thinking of the vital principles of life, of the essence of religion which should inspire them in any hour of crisis. These men, if they follow the God of religion, feel when they stand face to face with death that they stand in the presence of God, that they hear the calls of duty

They stand, as the Poet has written:

"Upon the great world's altar stairs
 "We slip through darkness up to God."

Men in darkness forget the things of life. Men face to face with death forget externalities. They know they live conscious of a God present in the world.

How shall we inspire an American Israel with this spiritual truth and this spiritual ideal? American Jews are ignorant of their own Judaism. American Jews know not what contribution Jews have made to the thought and civilization connected with the world of

of humankind. It must be confessed that the American Jews do not have an appreciation of their noble Jewish heritage. We are all

giving ourselves to the work of the ^{Master} under the externalities

Men and women refuse deliberately to enter the temple,

save at rare intervals to hee-haw at us. They refuse our spoken message. Not alone that, they are unready to read the printed word.

They care not how many a minister has given his life to this cause and how many a minister has fallen bravely in the fight, -as bravely as men who fight on the field of battle.

This very day one of our leaders of American Israel, who has been in the good fight more than a quarter of a century, this day ~~he~~ lies dead and buried with honor and glory. He is a victim fallen in the fight. He gave his life instantly to awaken American Israel to a consciousness of that truth which has been burning in every breast -- which should not need a Jewish teacher or preacher, - which should not need a prophet to teach Israel the glory and truth of its ancient heritage.

Judaism is false to its history ----- the age that ----- is the regular spirit which gave the Jew life and distinction.

Oh, that we might become conscious of the glory of our being!
Oh, that we would know ourselves spiritually as a people whose lives are ennobled by our spirituality and who have been teaching the

spirit of our religion, find ourselves uplifted by the principles of our faith! We Jews, by right of history, are the champions of the moral law--the moral law superior to ordinances and statutes and judgments. Yes, the moral law, superior to the ordinances of cities, superior to the statutes of the state, superior to the judgment of the court. As a recent writer has said: "And then we saw that the ideal of righteousness was not an automatic, inevitable end, but that it had been thought as a punishment to keep life in the world."

Conquering nations like Egypt, Assyria and Rome had trampled it under foot. The Alexanders and Caesars of Rome had invested might — at least had faded from sight. The Alexanders and Caesars and Napoleons had invested might with a glory so that the moral idea for a time had faded from sight. Are there no ~~Emperors~~ Alexanders, no Caesars, and no Napoleons in this Twentieth Century of freedom? Are there no Alexanders, no Caesars, no Napoleons who are again investing the doctrine of might with glory, so that the moral idea sinks down into nothingness? ~~xxxTherexxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ Dare we stand for the moral law, for the ideal, in face of this doctrine of might which has absorbed the minds of men? It is the heighth of our

Judaism, which we dare to proclaim to America, and which America dares to proclaim to nations.

But our Judaism stands supreme and steadfast, ever pronouncing its doctrine of appeal to righteousness, ever speaking its protest against wrong and injustice, ever in the midst of darkness daring to foster the Judaism bearing within it the passion for justice, which is the hope of mankind, and endeavoring to ~~instill instill~~ instill that passion for justice into the form and life and spirit of America. America should be to mankind the understanding of justice and righteousness.

Our Judaism in America makes and proclaims the fight for human brotherhood. Oh, what a mockery! Human brotherhood, when we know so well that the spirit of narrowness still rules in the hearts of men! Human brotherhood, when we are conscious, in spite of the teachings of all the religions and creeds,

Human brotherhood, when we know so well that brotherhood is not understood and that brotherhood is not a reality here in America and among the great nations! Strange our appreciation of human brotherhood! Absurd our very human brotherhood -- to proclaim

brotherhood to men gone mad! *But if* ~~an~~ it is in accord with our Judaism, -

our Judaism which never dispairs,--if God be ^{father} ~~fair~~ of the world, then all men and all nations are entitled to proof. Therefore Judaism would teach the lesson of spiritualism, Judaism cannot be dominated by the spirit of spiritualism. We cannot exalt ourselves with racial glory.

We know that the future of the Jew and Judaism must be in the great world and not in any land, whether it be the Holy Land that bears the name of Palestine,--a thousand times more life and power will there be in our Jerusalem if we and with all the might and earnestness at my command I would protest and drive home the truth--protest against their insistence, but drive home the conception of our Judaism here in America, and that we do not live in exile ~~anywhere~~ ^{one} in the land that gives us freedom and that we surely are not in exile here in America, - - - and that we firmly believe that here in America it is possible to live our Jewish life as Judaism ought to be lived.

It was no chance, no accident, that out of the old prayer book there was stricken the prayers for the Messiah. It was no accident that former generations rejected the prayers for the Messiah and rebuilding of the Temple. It was because they had learned to understand

that surer doctrine of faith in the coming of the Messianic age. Not alone Jewry, but the whole world is looking forward to the future coming of a Messiah which shall be the fulfillment of the Messianic ideals, which will be taken to be the coming Messianic age. Our Judaism must be not for Israel alone, and surely not for Palestine alone. Its preaching and ideals must be for all nations of the world.

The English Matthew Arnold (insert quotation)

And the American Judge _____ exalts and culminates his thought with this magnificent phrase: "Israel's ideal of justice has taken possession of the human mind."

and
The Jews of America and the modern nations all of
them are under the spell of a dominant materialism. Jews are material-
istic, America is materialistic, and the whole world as we know it
today is materialistic. Thousands are believers in the doctrine of
might rather than in the doctrine of right, and the Jews in America
need a spiritual rebirth under a spiritual life and leadership which
will give some true and real life and power to this cry that is ringing
through all the land that there shall be liberty for all people and
racess
all nations; that there shall be justice for men and nations, and at
last a world-wide human world-wide human spirit, a ~~world-wide human~~ brotherhood.

There will not be liberty for races and peoples, there will not be justice for men and nations, there cannot be a world-wide human spirit and world-wide human brotherhood binding together nation and nation, until we learn the doctrine of right--until might is thrown into the dark background of this philosophy of materialism--until we know ourselves appointed by our history to be spiritual teachers, spiritual messengers with this spiritual fire that shall kindle Judaism in America--kindle America also, and through America kindle the nations of the world.

