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“Shall We Remain Jews?,” 1902 November 2.

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* = Jamnagrat

Shall We remain Jews?

Miss J. Davis

Nov. 2nd 1902

Shall we remain Jews? It is a strange and perhaps a foolish question.

Thus may it seem; foolish, because here, there can be but one answer. Why

^{ask}
~~ask~~ a question that is already answered? foolish, also, because the world

will not permit any one of us to be other than Jew, and strange, because

there appears to be no cause for the question. Why ask a question that

need not be asked? strange also because Jews we are and we have express-

ed no wish to be other. Friends: The question is neither strange nor

foolish. It is not foolish: There might possibly be an answer other than

the one. There may come a time and it may be near at hand when the world

will permit the Jew to be what he chooses. It is not strange: There is

cause for the question. It needs be asked and answered. Jews we are but

there are many who ~~wish~~ themselves other than Jews. I ask the question

in order that I may ^{an}swer it. Shall we remain Jews? Yes; Jews we will

remain. My answer is but ^{one} ~~air~~ with yours perhaps, but my reasons are more

than ^{one} ~~air~~ and not yours perhaps. I resent that judgment of the world

which compels a Jew to remain a Jew. I desire our sons and daughters ^{to}

remain, not because the world compels but because their Jewish heart com-

pels. I know the common opinion of Jew and non-Jew, "Once a Jew always a

Jew." The Jews believe it because they think ~~there~~ is a certain feeling

born in us which holds us forever to the race. The non-Jews believe it

because they think the Jews are peculiar not in the sense of ~~ethnopen~~ but

peculiar ⁱⁿ ~~to~~ racial ^{characteristics} which cannot be destroyed. We or per-

haps it were safer to speak for myself, I do not believe it because I

think we are not a race, we are not and do not seek to be a nation.

We are a religious denomination. I born a Jew must not remain a Jew.

I can change my faith as surely and as completely as other men change their religions. I do not assert there is not an inborn feeling, a natural sympathy between Jew and Jew. There is such a feeling. It is the sympathy of fellow suffering. It is the ~~strong bond~~ ^{strong bond} of a common misery. It is allegiance for resistance against a common foe. It is a child not naturally born, but made, created by centuries of persecution. The Jew has felt for the Jew because none other has felt for him. The Jew feels for the Jew because none other feels for him. But this feeling does not make a man a Jew religiously. The judgment of the world is wrong. The Jew need not remain a Jew. Not only need not but does not. I plead for liberty. It may sound strangely falling from my lips and in this house for Jewish worship. I plead for liberty that the Jew need not remain a Jew. I plead that the world compel us not forever to be shut in to ourselves. If there be ~~born~~ Jews who would not so remain I hope they be granted fullest freedom to be what they would. If they wish not to remain Jews let them out from our midst and no longer be counted of us. Jews must be Jews religiously. If they are not they are not Jews. Let them surrender the name. I bid them go in peace. Surely they who cannot have faith in our Jewish religion do not seek to ~~cherish~~ a racial tie or to preserve a national bond. The Hebrew and the Israelite perish before the Jew. The Nation and the race die before the religion. For us there are no Hebrews. There are no Israelites. There are Jews. and if not, then simply men and women. There have been and there are those in every community who have wished and wish that ~~the~~ and the world would let them be other than they are. They sorrow because Israel has set his seal upon their faces.

They grieve because they cannot emancipate themselves. They would rejoice to look unJewish, and sink the Jewish nature deep within their breasts and obliterate every feature, manner, peculiarity, sign that might in any wise betray the Jew. For such as these I plead. I would that they be given liberty to be what they will., I plead that the world know them not as Jews but as men and women, and judge them not by how they were born but by how they live. As for us, having freedom to step forth we choose to stand within. We are Jews and wish to remain Jews. I believe I can understand the temptation which has come to many, especially in years past and in other countries to throw off the Jewish yoke and to plunge headlong into the arms of the ruling faith. It has been a burden to be a Jew. It has been a hindrance. Genius was born of Israel and lived and died unknown, unhonored. Power strong enough to rule a people perished, unused. Ambition eager to lead a multitude was ill content to guide a paltry few. The sons of Israel had genius, and power and ambition. They longed to be in the world to rule, to lead, to fire, to inspire mankind. They could not. They were Jews. Do you understand the temptation? A work was needed to be done, and they had the power and the genius to do. It was not permitted them. They were Jews, Sons of a despised race. To many the Jewish faith was not dear and vital. I can appreciate their longing to break the bond, to overleap the barriers, to cease to be Jews, to be anything of any faith, it mattered not to them. Many were tempted and being tempted fell. Of the many, few were sincere in their conversion. Their new religion was but a cloak and they wore it lightly. They sought not a truer faith but freedom, power, advancement, privilege, social opportunity,

Public honors. Today there is a like temptation in Europe and here. The way to power and advancement and public honor is still difficult for the Jew. The door of social recognition is still shut in his face. There are those who feel weighted, burdened, dragged down and held down by this name of Jew. Gladly and with light heart they would surrender a religion they love none too well, to win for themselves new honor, new glory, new power, full opportunity, full equality and full freedom. The temptation is not new. The same temptation came to David in the Court of Babylon. The same temptation came to the flower of Israel's youth under Grecian influence. The same temptation came to the Jewish Kings and princes under the dominion of Rome. The same temptation ^{has} ~~that~~ come to all the Jews in all ~~in~~ their lands of exile and oppression. Cease to be Jews! Be heathen, Star and sun worshipper! Bow before Baal and dance in the groves of Astaroth! Bend the knee to Olympus and to the Roman man-Gods! Be Christian, Mohammedan, Be Catholic, Be Protestant! Adopt the religion of the country you chance to dwell in! Yield to the whim of the nation that rules you. Be heathen here and Mohammedan there, Christian, Catholic, Protestant, anything but do not be Jews! It is the old, old problem which each country, each nation, each religion and each generation have made ever new. Generations and generations ago the same command was spoken and its answer given, as spoken ^{to} Moses in the Court of the Great Pharaoh "Be of the sons of Egypt" and he chose to be of the sons of enslaved Israel. If the Jew at any time during these last 3000 years had surrendered his Judaism who can tell what religion today would be masters of the earth.

Truly there would have been for all Israel less pain, less suffering, less oppression, more peace, more happiness, more freedom, but in religion there would have been a confusion of truth and error. Superstition would have been exalted and Paganism made King. The religion of God, our Judaism ~~was~~ would have been buried so completely, that only the after ages would have brought it to light again. There would have been a perversion of Jewish truths and a corruption of Jewish ideals. I believe our peace, our happiness, our freedom would have been bought at too dear a price. Today we and the world may have cause to give thanks for what has been called Jewish stiff-neckedness and Jewish Stubbornness of heart. Mankind may well rejoice that the old Jewish spirit was unyielding. Let them who love us not, speak of Jewish narrowness, exclusiveness, tribalism and nationalism. Nationalism and tribalism have blessed their very haters.

have saved the world's purest ideals and kept them pure! The narrowness
Exclusiveness and narrowness of Judaism was not in thought, in conception, in teaching, in ideal. Judaism 1900 years ago believed itself true and therefore was it narrow and stubborn, if you like the phrase. It refused to change itself, to be modified, to accept heathen doctrines and pagan practices. Judaism might have conquered the world but it shrank from impurity and untruth. Christianity and later Mohammedanism as missionary Judaism went forth to convert the nations. Read their history from the beginning to this hour. They have won wonderful victories. They have passed through remarkable developments. They rule in the civilized world. Yet what do we hear? Is it the song of glorification? Are the Christianity and the Mohammedanism of this age the fairest flower and the noblest fruit of religion?

On all sides is heard the cry, "return to the simple faith of the masters" Return to the religion of Jesus, of Mohomet" and though they say it not, we say it for them, return to the pure Judaism taught in the Bible. Christianity and Mohammedanism have been necessary to convert the world. They have been the schools of preparation through which the heathen nations needed to pass but they are not the final highest result. Now when they are in their highest they have not risen higher than their Jewish source. From the hills of Palestine they flowed forth as fertilizing streams to water all the earth and nowhere nor at any time have they risen any higher than the fountain head whence they sprang. Christianity and Mohammedanism are returning to the source of waters. They are cleansing themselves from the impurities that have defiled the stream, pure in the beginning. They still use their favored name but in their highest and best they are not Christianity and Mohammedanism but Judaism pure and simple. Mankind may well be glad that the old Jewish fathers were tribal and national. Mankind may with us rejoice that the Jews of so many generations yielded not to temptation but were faithful to their trust. We are Jews and we would remain Jews because the pure religion of God was born in and of Israel and was preserved in and through Israel because there is not now nor at any time has there been, any religious taught higher than that of ancient Israel. because we are the keepers of the covenant made with the fathers, because in Israel have been handed down from father to son, the law and the prophets with their true interpretation, because we are the children of a people persecuted, whom Justice now is freeing, because we are the followers of a faith once despised

• which reason now is honoring, because we are the teachers of a truth always declared false, which mankind now acknowledges to be true. Why shall we not remain Jews? In the hour of freedom shall we beg for freedom? In the hour of triumph shall we bend the knee? Why has the Jew lived and suffered when it was easier to die? Why has the Jew been faithful and scorned when it was more pleasing to be unfaithful and honored? Has he not lived to hasten this hour? This very hour of which the first stroke now is sounding? ~~This~~ This is the hour of promise the beginning of the fulfillment of hope, the hour of Israel's triumph. Through 30 long centuries the Jew has cherished his faith. Into his hands was given the sacred trust. In his heart he bore it and with his life he guarded it. He has lived for God's truth. No other tie bound him to the world. All that men value as human happiness he surrendered. Yet in misery he was in bliss. His suffering was for God, for a divine truth. He despaired and in despair he hoped. He was exile and wanderer and yet he faltered not. Bravely he went on, believing that God was leading him. Is it not our Jewish faith, belief in God? God in the heart. Aye, ~~God~~ God has been in the hearts of Israel. The Jew has lived for his God. He has done more than know God with the mind, more than love God with the heart, more than work for God with might; He has lived for God a dark and miserable life yet ~~by~~ ^{to} faith always filled with light and happiness. And now at the end if there have been purpose in it and the purpose is being revealed, shall we cease to be Jews? If the Jew have lived his remarkable life ~~and~~ ^{to} accomplish ~~his~~ a divine purpose, now when the purpose is near accomplishment shall we proclaim, 'twas all in vain? Have we failed so completely in learning the lesson of 30 centuries, of 100 generations of mankind?

We must remain Jews, to prove that the nations in their persecutions of the Jews have been cruel and unjust, to prove that Israel, 19 centuries ~~X~~ past, was justified ⁱⁿ denying that the Messiah had come, to prove that our fathers were right in refusing salvation by means of cross and holy water, to prove that we Jews, guardians of the ancient faith of Israel are ~~i~~ the possessors of a true religion. We must do more. It is not enough to live negatively, a protest against the denial of other faiths. Judaism has positive doctrine to teach. In the hour of opportunity and freedom when we are privileged to speak, let us ring forth our truths, our ideals, our hopes. Of old was the truth with the Jew and now it is with the Jew. Let us proclaim Judaism, not by any other name, the religion of the prophets, the religion in which God is over man and man is for God. Let the world hear that it must stand upon justice and that this is Jewish. ~~Let~~ men hear that righteousness is ^{true} ~~the~~ life and that this is Jewish. Let all the nations know that a right world and a right mankind and a right life rest upon God and righteousness and that this is Jewish. We are Jews and we would remain Jews. Let others do as they will. Not because the world compels but because our hearts desire and our minds approve, ~~4~~ are we Jews. Now when freedom is, now when the doors are open, we remain doubly steadfast and doubly strong. In ourselves must and will we prove false, the age-long lie that the Jew is low, base, dishonest, dishonorable, all that hating hearts might conceive. We are Jews. We must and will ~~x~~ prove that we will remain Jews and yet be of the noblest of earth-: ^{not yet be noble,} ~~1~~
Nay, not in spite of, ^{noble} ~~yoke~~ because of being Jews. Our Judaism with its ~~1~~ laws and its ideals makes us noble. We are the representatives of the

We are the representatives of the Jew, we are the living proof that ~~if~~ despite our centuries of oppression there be worth in us, such worth is possible in every Jew. Why shall we become un-Jewish when the world is becoming Jewish? I do not say it in boast-ful spirit. The world is becoming Jewish in its religion, in its God-conception, in its man conception, in its thought concerning life and duty. We wish to be Jews. Whatever faults be in some, they need not be in us. No nation, no race, no religion has not its erring children. We do not claim to be the perfect of the earth, but we do claim, we have proved it by 30 centuries of living and we would prove it still further until the end of days that Jewish life means the purest and highest life. Therefore am I and therefore I ask you to be Jews indeed. Jew you are: ~~and~~ Jew remain!

