

MEMORIAL ADDRESS

(5,555 ml)

MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR JEWS FROM CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Another year has passed, another year added to the distance that separates us from the infamous holocaust with which our century has been cursed.

Again we remember, and again we experience the sharp, poignant agony of re-living the misery of millions of death^s, of recalling the glories of European Jewry, ^{its institutions + marvels, the familiar names + faces} that have now been reduced to only a memory in the hearts of those who still dare to remember.

But painful as the memories may be, we cherish them. We assemble this day to strengthen ourselves and to strengthen each other in the determination that, in the words of the Book of Esther, ve'zikhram lo yasuf mi-zar^aim, that their memories shall not ^{disappear} ~~disappear~~ from amongst their children. We shall not forget the preciousness of the victims. We shall not forget the brutality of their executioners. We shall not forget, too, the criminal callousness of the onlookers.

We gather once a year so that all of us together may brush off the heavy dust ^{oblivion and} of forgetfulness, so that the footprints of beloved lives shall not be lost in the shifting sands of time.

This service for the memory of the Czechoslovakian Jewish martyrs, is held on the eve of a special Sabbath in Jewish life, Shabbat Zakhor. It is a Sabbath of ^{Rememberance} ~~remembrance~~. "Remember what Amalek did unto thee." Amalek is the eternal symbol of the unreconstructed anti-Semite, the personification of all that is evil, degenerate, unredeemable, and inhuman in humanity. And we are commanded to remember him.

But more than ~~for~~ zakhor, remembering, we are also commanded machoh - to blot out the name of Amalek; in other words, we are to do something about Amalekism. We are told: do not be paralyzed into pious pasivism. Machoh as well as Zakhor. But exactly how are we to effect this active tribute to the victims of Amalek? How are we to put into practice the injunction of Machoh?

The Bible offers two answers. In Exodus we are told:

וְאֶמְחֶה אֶת־זֵכְרָם מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם
 וְאֶמְחֶה אֶת־אֶמְלֵק מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם

"For I will blot out the memory of Amalek from under the heavens." In other words, G-d will do the blotting, not man.

But in Deuteronomy we are told:

וְאַתָּה תִּמְחֶה אֶת־זֵכְרָם מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם
 וְאַתָּה תִּמְחֶה אֶת־אֶמְלֵק מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם

"Thou shalt blot out the memory of the Amalek from under the heavens."

Is this not inconsistent? The Jewish tradition was aware of the apparent contradiction and answered: No. The Zohar tells us that there are two levels on which the war against Amalek must be waged from generation to generation: Elyonim (the higher level) and Tachtonim (the lower level). On a human, social-political level - the battle against Amalekism must be conducted by man alone: timcheh, Thou shalt blot out. On the higher, spiritual, G-dly level, G-d Himself says: Emcheh, I will blot out. Here man joins G-d in the struggle against the spirit of Amalek. The Jew is in concert with his G-d.

The struggle against Amalek in tachtonim must continue without interruption. It means that we must uproot evil wherever we find it. We must extirpate cruelty and meanness wherever they exist. We must beware of the recurrence of inhumanity, for evil is a deadly, tenacious weed which can grow in the finest garden of culture and civilization. We must never relax our vigilance. We must ourselves conduct the battle against anti-Semitism: Timcheh. We must seek it out and oppose it whether it be in Moscow or in Arlington, Virginia. Any hatred, any noxious jingoism which can ever develop into genocide, must be blotted out by ourselves. It is our job, our task, our duty, Timcheh.

This past year we experienced the most intense war against Amalek in Tachtonim. The capture of Eichmann represented a triumph in the human-Jewish battle against Amalek. ¹¹ Now we must pursue other Nazis, ex-Nazis, neo-Nazis. As citizens of the United States we must remind our government that even West Germany still contains Germans, and that therefore we must never allow the Atom Bomb to be given to that country.

The method of Tachtonim, the lower level of the battle against Amalek, must be: to remember Amalek's treachery. Before our eyes we must always hold a picture of the death camp. The word "Theresienstadt" or "Bergen Belsen," or any of the others, must become an eternal symbol not only of unrelieved misery but of our unfinished task in our imperfect world. Do not repress the horror. Let it act as a deterrent, to prevent the recurrence of such ghastliness as we have experienced. Timcheh, thou shall blot out.

But the battle against Amalek, which is the ~~greatest~~ tribute to the memory of our martyrs, must also take place on the higher level, the elyonim. And the best weapon for the spiritual battle with Amalekism is: a stronger Israel. On the highest level, the greatest revenge against the Nazis is the enduring greatness of the Jewish people.

If the lower form is an unrelenting hunt of every last criminal, then the higher level is: to remember ^{in reverence & love} the victims and perpetuate what was lovely in their life, not what was ineffably horrible in their death; not the Buchenwalds and Dachaus - but the Pragues, the Warsaws, and the Frankforts; not the Concentration Camp - but the Kehillot Kadoshot; not the Gauleiters and assorted butchers - but gedolim, the Maharals and Ezekiel Landau's, the scientists, and artists, physicians and writers, thinkers and ordinary folk.

If the lower level of our battle against Amalek is to mark the enemies of our people and of mankind for eternal villification, then the higher level is to remember that we had friends from those not of our people - and, although they were not many, still a handful of Masaryks is enough to redeem the Jewish optimism and confidence in man, and to make us feel that man as such is worth surviving.

If the lower battle means to capture and probably execute an Eichmann, then the higher one is symbolized by the fact that he was tried by Jewish justice in a Jewish State. And the battle in Elyonim reveals itself, as well, in our support, love, and loyalty for the State of Israel.

If the lower level means that the death of Jews just ~~must~~ be avenged, then the higher means that the life of Judaism must be enhanced.

Many years ago the great Jewish poet, the Sweet Singer of Israel, Yehudah Halevi, wrote as follows:

בְּכַל יְמֵינוּ נִתְּנָה לָנוּ
וְנִתְּנָה לָנוּ וְנִתְּנָה לָנוּ
לֵב אֶת מִקּוּם שֶׁחַת וְרָמָה
וְנִתְּנָה לָנוּ מִקּוּם חַי וְנִתְּנָה לָנוּ

Is it well that the dead should be remembered

And the Ark and Tablets forgotten?

That we should seek out the place of the pit and the worm

And forsake the fount of eternal life?

The poet is asking us to remember the higher level. What is it, after all, that united the Czech and the Pole, the big city sophisticate and the provincial shtetel-dweller who died hand in hand? They were Jews! They were bound by a tradition and a destiny, by Torah and by God, by a covenant that arches over the ages.

When we remember this: their Jewishness, their Judaism, their Jewish charm and sweetness, their Jewish decency and sense of righteousness and pity - then we are battling Amalek in Elyonim, then we are furthering the words of the Lord: "for I will blot out the memory of Amalek from under the Heavens." For if we are on His side, then He is on our side.

Tonight we entertain again the bitter-sweet memories of the martyrs of our people. Tonight we resolve in iron determination not to abandon the lower level of "Thou shalt blot out the memory of Amalek."

And tonight, too, we must leave with a historic resolve in each heart that we will wage war in the realm of the spirit as well. Despite of all of its detractors, Judaism will prevail; Jews will prevail, Israel will prevail.

The memorial to our martyrs of all our people, and Czechoslovak Jews in particular, is: a stronger State of Israel; a more vibrant Jewish community; a more meaningful Jewish life; a new sense of decency amongst all men - and ultimately a better and safer world, the brotherhood of all men under the fatherhood of G-d.

תהיה נשמתם קשורים בנשמות
May their souls be bound up in the bond of eternal light.

MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR JEWS FROM CZECHOSLOVAKIA -- NAZI VICTIMS

Thursday, March 15, 1962 - 8 P. M. Sharp

Auditorium of Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion
40 West 68th Street, New York
near Central Park

P R O G R A M

Organ Prelude J. S. Bach

Largo - From the Fifth Trio Sonata

Opening Remarks Dr. William Reiner
President, Joseph Popper Lodge
B'nai Brith

Why Art Thou Cast Down, My Soul?..... Isadore Freed

Psalm 42

Choir

Yoshev B'seser Elyon..... Salomon Sulzer
O Thou That Dwellst in the Covert of the Most High

Psalm 91

Cantor Norman Summers, Congregation B'nai Jeshurun, Newark, N.J.

and Choir

Memorial Address Rabbi Norman Lamm
The Jewish Center, New York City

El Mole Rachamin Morris Barash
Cantor Norman Summers

Kaddish..... Rabbi Norman Lamm

Postlude Antonin Dvorak

Largo - From New World Symphony

Choir - Students of School of Sacred Music
Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion

Morris Barash - Conductor Miss Ilse Wunsch - at the organ

Memorial Service Committee of Jews from Czechoslovakia