

OCTOBER 2, 1969

ADDRESS AT SIMCHAT TORAH
CELEBRATION FOR SOVIET JEWRY
Dag Hammarskjold Plaza

Last year it rained in Moscow on Simchat Torah. Nevertheless, thousands of young Jews and Jewesses were not deterred; they came and they sang and they danced for hours.

We who have come this evening are determined to do no less. We shall not let the rain dampen our spirit, even if it drenches the flesh. I think you will agree with a bargain I am willing to strike with the Almighty: keep open the floodgates of Heaven and let it pour tonight -- provided you also open wide the doors of Russia and let our fellow Jews stream out in their hundreds of thousands.

Indeed that is precisely why aroused representatives of New York Jewry are here assembled under the auspices of the New York Conference on Soviet Jewry and its 34 constituent organizations. The adult organizations, together with the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry and other concerned youth groups, express their solidarity with Russian Jewry, and especially its reawakened youth.

We are here to express three central themes: sorrow, solidarity, and protest.

Unfortunately, there is much to be sorrowful about. Fifty years of Russian repression have taken their toll of this once magnificent, creative Jewish community of three million souls.

Now, we do not want to indulge in exaggerations. Unlike the Soviet representatives who, in this complex of buildings of the United Nations, cheapen the coin of international rhetoric, debase civilized discourse, and desecrate the martyrdom of Hitler's victims by comparing Israel's so-called "atrocities" to the barbarous crimes of the Nazis, we shall not turn the tables and be guilty of the same vulgar extravagance.

We acknowledge openly: Soviet repression of Judaism is not identical with or in any manner as severe as the Nazi oppression of Jews.

What is the difference between them, between Nazi persecution and Russian repression? It is the difference between fire and ice, between burning and freezing. The Nazis burned Jews. Six million Jews were consumed in the flames of

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hatred, in crematoria, in concentration camps. They and their families, their homes and their synagogues and communal institutions, went up in the greatest conflagration of hate in history, in paroxysms of anguish, searing the Jewish body and soul for generations to come.

But the Soviets do not burn Jews. There is no genocide. But they have determined to freeze us to death! They have decided to put Jewish identity and Judaism itself on ice, not to preserve them but to snuff out the last spark of Jewish love and warmth and loyalty. They do not allow Jews their own language, their own literature, their own religious education, their own training of rabbis, their own prayerbooks, their own religious contacts with other Jews throughout the world. That is why the rest of the world is not as concerned with the plight of Russian Jewry as, however belatedly, they came to realize the enormity of the Nazi crimes. They may have been afraid of catching fire; they are not afraid of catching cold.

So we express our sorrow and our sadness at the destiny of three million souls who have been silenced, culturally frozen, spiritually iced.

However, sorrow is the first, but by no means the totality of our mission. On the contrary, with all our regret and sympathy, we are here to testify to the world about marvels and wonders that are taking place.

What the Soviet authorities failed to anticipate is the unquenchable spark of Jewishness, that "divine spark," that seed of Jewish warmth and zeal and enthusiasm that miraculously came to life after half a century of Communist indoctrination in the dogma of the non-existence of the Jewish people. In Jewish youth that has for three generations been alienated from all sources of Jewish learning and tradition and history, this miracle has come to pass; and the reawakening has begun to melt a fifty year old layer of ice, as young Jews and Jewesses in Soviet Russia rediscover their Jewish identity and defiantly express it on this festival, as it culminates in Simchat Torah, in song and in dance, in fraternity and in comradeship, in and around synagogues in Russia's major cities.

And we are here on this eve of Hoshanah Rabbah, the transition between Sukkot and Simchat Torah, and we offer them our solidarity, our friendship, our fellowship. We pray in the words characteristic of this festival: Hoshiah et amekha -- "O God of Israel, help your people, and bless your

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inheritance ... so that all the nations of the world -- bar none -- shall know that the Lord is God and there is none other." Let all the world know that despite the cold, the ice, the glacial indifference, the far-flung program of freezing out Jewish existence -- that God lives and His people lives, that ode avinu chai and that am Yisrael chai.

From across the ocean, we here and Jews and Jewesses of sixty other cities throughout this continent, express solidarity and friendship. We are with you, our brothers and sisters in Russia -- in fraternity, in affection, in mutual bonds of undying and unquenchable Jewishness. And we shall never forget you -- not till you are free.

Our third theme is Protest. We are not protesting because it is fashionable. We protest because our hearts and consciences will not permit us to do otherwise. We protest because we are Jews; because we are moral; because we believe in the dignity of man; because we are human.

We will not rest until Russian Jewry is redeemed.

We will not hold our peace until they are at peace.

We shall not keep quiet while Jews remain the chief victims of residual Stalinism.

We will not, cannot, permit the world to remain passive while Russian Jewry becomes a kind of ongoing, internal Czechoslovakia.

Mr. Andrei E. Gromyko, the Soviet Minister for Foreign Affairs, in his opening address in this very area some two weeks ago, on September 19th, said: "In international affairs the only realistic approach is one that takes into account the profound and vital interest in peace of all the peoples."

Quite so, Mr. Gromyko -- "all the peoples." Why then does your Government discriminate against the "profound and vital interests in peace" of our people, the Jewish people? Why are we singled out for restrictions that violate your own constitution? Are we not included in "all the peoples?" And if we are, why are we not permitted to maintain Jewish culture, Jewish language, Jewish literature, Jewish religion?

In the same speech, Mr. Gromyko said, in this very locale: "The policy of peace stems from the profoundly human nature of the socialist system which has finally established itself in our country." But why, Mr. Gromyko, does your Government not permit Jews to benefit from the "profoundly

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human nature" of your socialist system? Russian Orthodox religionists establish schools for their ministers; that is as it should be. But why cannot Jews have yeshivot? Baptists and Catholics may meet with colleagues overseas and form international organizations -- and that is right; but why not Jewish rabbis? They may print prayer-books and Bibles -- why not Jews? Why are you not humane to Jews as well as you pretend to be to other minority groups in your country?

Mr. Gromyko said but two weeks ago, here, at the U.N.: "The Soviet Union advocates strict compliance with the Charter in its totality, and the implementation of the principles of the United Nations without any exception." Yes, Mr. Gromyko, "without any exception." Surely that includes the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the U.N. in 1948. Mr. Gromyko, Article XIII of that Declaration states: "Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own." Why does not the Soviet Union implement that principle of the United Nations -- without any exception? Why do you not let Russian Jews out? Why do you imprison Kochubiyevsky and many like him because of the crime of wanting to leave? Where is your consistency, let alone humaneness? Or does the phrase "without exception" mean: except for the Jews?

The Russian Government speaks of peace, of understanding, of rights. Well, Kochubiyevsky and a thousand like him peacefully ask for the understanding of a fundamental human right - expressed in just three short words: LET ME OUT.

Do you hear, Mr. Brezhnev? LET HIM OUT!

Do you hear, Mr. Kosygin? LET HIM OUT!

Do you hear, Mr. Gromyko? LET HIM OUT!

Let me remind you of what Lenin once said: "a refugee is a man who votes with his feet." Well, then, give Russian Jews the vote! Let them live - or let them leave!

But of course, Mr. Gromyko and his colleagues do not answer. The Kremlin does not speak. And the Russian Jews too do not -- can not -- talk out openly.

But, thank God, we can. And God willing, we will. You are gathered here tonight and must declare yourselves one way or the other.

Shall we allow a veil of indifference and anonymity to cover the plight of Soviet Jewry, as Russian officialdom shamefully covered with anonymity the graves of thousands of Jews at Babi Yar?

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Shall we, who have the opportunity to speak out, shall we turn into silent Jews and fail to cry out in behalf of the Jews of Silence?

Shall we American Jews, who painfully remember how bashful and silent and over-polite we were a generation ago, repeat that iniquity and be struck dumb once again in the face of impending catastrophe?

Shall we do these things? I say NO. NO, six million times NO!

But listen, my friends, Jews speak many languages, including non-verbal languages. For long centuries one of the languages we spoke was that of tears. Through tears we expressed sorrow, mourning, and also frustration and protest and rage, and even joy and delight and happiness.

But our people has also expressed its deepest sentiments and aspirations through another language: that of song and cheer and laughter and humor. And the Lord God of Israel prefers that language. We bless Him for the attribute of Ha-bocher be'shirei zimrah, He chooses song and celebration as the ideal way of devotion.

So in our generation young Russian Jews who know neither Jewish faith nor Jewish history have intuitively rediscovered the Jewish language of - shirei zimrah, of song. While the Jews of Silence, as Elie Wiesel so aptly called them, cannot speak out, they do sing out. On this festival they gather in their thousands about synagogues in all the major cities, and their song and their dance tell not only of pain, but of wistful hope; not of despair but of a new and exciting sense of identity; not of past agonies, but of buoyant promise; not of dread but of redemption; not of fear but of confidence.

So shall we do tonight. Our old and our young together shall express our sorrow, our solidarity, our protest, in song -- as do they.

So let our voices join theirs, and let our song ring out -- across the oceans and through the tears and despite the anger.

Let the sound of our mighty faith pierce that Iron Curtain.

Let us sing, and let the silence be banished.

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Let our warmth and enthusiasm melt the glacial indifference, the frozen apathy, the cold hatred.

Let our resolve ring out from land to land and from continent to continent, as we affirm together with our fellow Jews -- in Moscow, in Kiev, in Leningrad, wherever they be -- that our people survives, that Israel lives, that am Yisrael chai.