

Rabbi's Message
"Sucker Sermon"
March 19, 1970
Purim

Purim is that festival on our religious calendar when we ponder the almost ineradicable phenomenon of anti-semitism. There seems to be no end to Hamans, and their followers never cease to multiply.

I am not one of those who believe that Jews themselves are responsible for the anti-semitism that exists. With many historians and scholars I maintain that we are hated for reasons that are not of our making, and because we are hated, the anti-semite justifies his hate by finding faults in us that we sometimes have and sometimes do not have. Nonetheless, I do maintain that we Jews frequently behave in such a way that we add fuel to the flames and cause many people who would otherwise be neutral to sympathize and even identify with our destroyers.

It should be of interest that the Talmud did not hesitate to question why it was that Mordecai was so obstinate that he refused to bow to Haman and accord to Haman that homage which the king wanted him to enjoy. To justify Mordecai's behavior the Talmud states that what was involved was more than tribute to Haman. What was involved was nothing less than idolatry and for Mordecai to have yielded would have been to compromise every principle he cherished, and especially the principle of religious freedom. Thus it would appear that nothing short of the violation of one's most basic principles justifies a refusal to accommodate to the mores and traditions of a host country when such refusal may endanger the safety of Jews.

Now in America Jews are not strictly speaking guests. As George Washington said, we are not here by sufferance but as of right. Yet even in a democracy there must be accommodation and respect for what is the general consensus. And in our American democracy, an important element of the general consensus is respect for the integrity of the judicial system. Indeed it would be suicide for Jews to undermine the judicial system when it has been, and continues to be, the principal means of our security and salvation. Let the judicial system collapse and minority groups are easy

prey to the majority. All minority groups in this country must learn to appreciate this fact. There may be isolated instances when the system does not work and resort to revolutionary tactics is unavoidable. If Blacks in Mississippi cannot get a fair trial nothing short of violence may avail. However, in the last ten or twenty years it has become clear that the courts were both available and fair to communists, draft-dodgers, minority groups, and many others who found the relief they sought in judicial decision.

To the defendants in Chicago and to the Black Panthers in New York the courts are also available and all have had the free choice of counsel and access to appellate courts. Apparently this is not what they want. What they want is to overthrow the system. The overwhelming majority of American citizens will not permit this to happen and as liberal as Jews may be, we cannot identify in this situation with any group other than the majority.

The revolutionary character of both trials became obvious during the demonstration in New York City on February 23rd. The signs carried by those participating indicated that it was not one judge alone against whom the protest was being uttered. It was rather against all judges. It was against the entire judicial establishment. This was a tragedy of major proportions. As I sometimes tell my students, I cannot fathom how irresponsible young people can be vis-a-vis government as they seek to overthrow it, when even for the purity of the water that they drink they must depend upon the "establishment." Otherwise they would be drinking water that is not potable. For their safety in their parade and demonstration they also had to rely upon the police whom they hate. Thus it is sheer madness that is driving them to do what they are doing when they seek total destruction of the "establishment" instead of its betterment.

The only thing that pleased me about the demonstration was that I saw so few Jews among the participants. This was a most encouraging sign. In all demonstrations we have a right to expect that since one third of New York's population is Jewish, one third in every demonstration would be Jewish. I believe that the percentage was less at Bryant Park. Who knows but that more of our young are coming to their senses!

In any event while Purim is dedicated to the defeat of the anti-semite, we must also ponder the measure of our contribution to his success. And

American Jewish youth must ponder this now as never before.