

Senator Robert Morgan
Remarks on the Occasion of the Groundbreaking
for a New Sanctuary for Beth David Synagogue
Greensboro, North Carolina
September 7, 1980

JEWISH LIFE IN AMERICA

There has been on group of people which has made a lasting mark on life in the United States far in excess of its numbers. I am referring to the people who cling to the Jewish faith.

Truthfully, the Jewish community in America has a diversity of origins and national backgrounds that only a strong and living faith could bridge.

While the Jewish community constitutes less than 3 percent of the population, most people would probably guess that the proportion is much higher based on its achievements.

It is clear to me that there has been a reciprocal relationship-- the United States has been good for Jewish immigrants, and the Jewish community has been good for the country.

ROLE IN GOVERNMENT

As a politician, I believe that I can speak with the greatest familiarity in the area of government. I will talk about my experience as a Senator, although my close relationship with the Jewish community in North Carolina goes back to my days in the State legislature.

At the national level of government, by every measure of participatory democracy, Jews have actively sought and achieved a high degree of involvement in the political process.

While the Jewish community represents 3 percent of the population, it represents 4 percent of the votes cast in most elections. As any politician can tell you, all you need is 1 percent to win a victory.

In my own party, 15 percent of the membership is Jewish, and you have seen their impact on the candidates sent forth by the Democratic party-- men like Roosevelt, Truman, Johnson, Kennedy, and now President Carter. These men have surrounded themselves with advisers attuned to the Jewish community and who have worked for a strong and unwavering U.S. commitment to Israel.

I can tell you also that many of the best known political analysts, who scrutinize each of us in elected office and provide the public with invaluable insights

are Jewish. David Broder, Theodore White, and Art Buchwald are a few of the more prominent. Louis Harris, the famous political pollster, also is Jewish.

This interest in American government has been ongoing and has enhanced the progress of our Nation.

JUDAISM AS FOUNDATION

Rather than simply listing the various personalities and achievements which bring the contributions of the Jewish community to mind, let me tell you of a subject of greater interest.

While individuals may come and go and while a community may grow strong or weak, one thing remains-- Judaism. It is fitting that as we come here at the consecration of a new

sanctuary, where the age-old traditions will be repeated, where the young may be educated, and where the community will draw its strength, that I speak to you of what I see as Judaism's strong foundation for Jewish contributions in American government and thereby to American life.

BELIEF IN GOOD GOVERNMENT

Throughout history, Jewish teachers have emphasized the necessity of good government as the basis for achieving justice for all men.

In the first century after the birth of Christ, Rabbi Hanina (Ha-nee-nah) warned, "Pray for the welfare of the government, since but for the awe thereof, men would surely swallow each other alive."

Ever since, the Jewish search for good government and for its preservation has continued. The noted philosopher Alfred North Whitehead noted that "Our modern civilization owes its origins mainly to the Greeks and the Jews. The Greeks have vanished; the Jews remain."

There are several teachings of Judaism which make it fundamentally supportive of our democratic form of government.

JUSTICE

Above all, Judaism is a religion which seeks justice for all men. Not only does it teach the merits of justice for all, but it also emphasizes the active pursuit of that goal.

Jacob Javits, my distinguished colleague from New York--
a respected and trusted friend-- once said, "I'm struggling for
a just society. That's the highest Jewish ethic that I know
of..." His career in the Senate certainly reflects his
dedication to that goal.

TOLERANCE

Tolerance is another teaching of Judaism which
blends with and reinforces democracy. Two circumstances
have brought about this tolerant attitude.

First, as a religion, Judaism does not preach the
conversion of other peoples. Judaism respects the rights
and beliefs of all. Second, Jews have lived as the objects
of great intolerance.

We all know, but it is well to repeat, the long history of persecution visited on the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. No group of people has ever been the subject of such covert, overt and systematic persecution on so many continents as the Jewish people.

In reaction to this and in line with religious teachings, the Jewish community has demonstrated the quality of tolerance which is so vital to living in a democratic society made up of so many racial and ethnic groups.

RESPECT FOR U.S. GOVERNMENT

Since the Jewish community came to this country as immigrants, starting with Brazilian Jews fleeing the Inquisition, they brought the unique perspectives of an immigrant. I believe that the Jewish community is more

appreciative of the government and therefore more involved in preserving it.

I can assure you that no Russian Jew ever sat down with a prospective Czar, nor did any average working man sit down with a member of the German Parliament. Only in America. Every member of the Jewish community I have ever met has spoken with reverence of this unique democratic system, so often taken for granted by others.

THE WRITTEN LAW

Judaism has an overriding faith in the written law as a method of achieving justice. Again, this coincides with our democratic system.

The Ten Commandments represent that contract between God and man by which man agreed to abide by rules in exchange

for the blessings of the Lord. Our Constitution represents a contractual arrangement between the people and their government, and it is based in part on the concept of a written law set forth by the Jewish people over 5,000 years ago.

I might add that a written law moves a people toward judicial decisionmaking rather than political decisionmaking. We act within the law in this country even in our political activities. One need only mention the names of Brandeis, Cardozo, and Frankfurter to conjure up the faith in law as a vehicle for achieving justice instilled by Judaism.

I believe that the religious foundation of these men led them to the great achievements they made as members of the United States Supreme Court.

POSITIVE FAITH

Finally, I would note that Judaism is an optimistic faith which emphasizes personal responsibility. There are no dismal predictions from Jewish teachers; only the caution that one must work hard to achieve the justice we seek.

As one writer pointed out, Judaism emphasizes that the world is man's to shape, "that he is much more the creator of history than its creature."

For all these reasons, Judaism has enabled the Jewish people to help fashion this nation into the great country that it is and to carve for themselves a position in society unequalled in any age.

CONCLUSION

The Jewish contribution to the continuity of our way of life has been great. Without scientists such as Einstein, Western civilization would have been quite different. Without the strong religious ties generated by the synagogues of this nation, our social fabric would have been greatly weakened.

How often I hear that the Jewish community emphasizes education, and how often I wish that other groups did so too. To participate in our democracy, to build a better world for all, requires education.

You know that I am a bit of a historian, and I found a quotation for Josephus Daniels, editor of the Raleigh News and Observer and Secretary of the Navy under President Woodrow

Wilson which demonstrates the ongoing concerns and dedication to our American government which is so strong in the synagogues of our country. Daniels wrote,

Critics of the Jews have no comprehension of the depths of Jewish devotion to their religion or their appreciation of the opportunities in the New World, whose doors were opened to them by Thomas Jefferson, and to whose highest stations they had been called by Woodrow Wilson, the intellectual successor of the sage of Monticello.

The critics probably do not know that it was a Hebrew banker who came to the financial aid of Washington in the Revolution, a Jewish naval officer who saved the home of Jefferson, and another Jew who preserved it in its original stately setting until Jews and Gentiles together could dedicate it as a sacred shrine of liberty in America.

We are here at a time of renewal. We all know that buildings can only symbolize the dedication and commitment of a people to their faith. It is the faith, the heritage, and the people who continue.

I am proud to be able to share this happy moment of beginning with you, for it reassures me that the people of Israel will continue their strong contribution here in N.C. and in the United States. I share your pride and I say to you MAZEL TOV! (Mah-zell Tahv)