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As Rachel Wept of Old

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Abstract: This article describes one man's experience at a Jewish funeral.

As Rachel Wept of Old

By Isaac Russell

On a cloudy afternoon in New York, just before the 1st of October, hundreds of Jewish women started on a pilgrimage uptown to the Temple Emanu-El. These women wore shawls on their heads instead of hats. And they wept as they walked, even as Rachel wept of old.

It was the second day of an ancient Jewish feast, it seemed, and the women should have been glad, for the feast was a harvest festival. They were forbidden by the orthodox creed to ride on that day.

Therefore the pilgrimage on foot. I met these women and passed among them to a line of policemen, and then on through the line into the Jewish Temple Emanu-El.

For the day was one of sorrow to all New York Jews, whether orthodox or not. It was the day of the funeral of a Jew who came to America as a poor immigrant, and lived to be one of the world's greatest international financiers.

Every man and woman who ever bought an article in Utah after 1900 has had his life touched by the power of this Jew, for he was head of the great international banking firm of Kuhn, Loeb & Co., when this firm financed the reorganization of the Union Pacific.

He was the banking genius behind Harriman, and in the world of railroad credits he became as famous over the Union Pacific enterprise as Harriman did in the world of railroad operation.

And now the great banker was dead. Jacob Schiff, even as happened to Jacob of old, was "gathered to his fathers."

In the progress of a day's work, that had already included the writing of an article on the latest elues in a bomb outrage in Wall Street, and the latest news from a special legislative session on the housing crisis, I went to this funeral of Jacob Schiff.

There is something different with the Jews. They seldom know how to honor anybody in a way to wipe out the fundamental lines of democracy. They did not speak of "The Honorable Jacob Schiff." They spoke merely of plain Jacob.

We may almost say that the Jews are the keepers of the world's democracy of the soul. They have few snobs among them, and few traits of snobbery. Here in the synagogue I was

welcomed and ushered speedily to a seat. There were no reserved pews, no ropes holding the anointed from the unanointed. There was a feeling of equality before God as his children within the Temple Emanu-El.

Floral decorations were very simple. It was announced that Jacob had asked that it be so. There was to be no mention of his name at the service. It was whispered about that Jacob had so ordered it.

There was only going to be the singing of songs that were older than the song of Solomon, the breathing of prayers of a race's aspiration, that had been uttered on the Mount of Olives and the high place that was Sinai.

There were to be lamentations that were older than the lamentations of Jeremiah.

An organ broke forth with the gently sobbing strains of the Kol Nidre. A cantor followed with the lament of the Chivice. A choir chanted in with words that perhaps were sung when Father Abraham, most ancient of patriarchs, was gathered unto the fathers that were his, in the cave beside Hebron.

Perhaps even that older Jacob who had made the name beloved by all Jews through many centuries had sung this lament as he helped his brother Esau lay away their father Isaac in the midst of his people who had died before him.

An aged Jew who sat beside me thought it nothing beneath his dignity to explain to a stranger the meaning of the Jewish liturgy. And the meaning of the symbolism of various decorations in the Temple.

There were the closed doors behind the pulpit. They were of bronze and were the gift of Jacob Schiff. They led to the sacred scrolls kept in the ark of the covenant. Just as the sacred word was, when Moses led his people up out of Egypt.

We conversed about these ancient religious rites and symbols until we mentioned a white tapestry that hung from the pulpit to the foot of the bier. On the white field was embroidered the double triangle, known to all Jews as "The Star of David."

"The Star of David," said my Jewish companion, "is the oldest religious symbol in the world. It is even older than David was.

"It signifies the most ancient thought in the world—the thought of immortality and the Godhead of three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. The three equal sides of the triangle stand for these three elements of the Godhead."

Here was something new and quite interesting to me, in the way of conceptions.

I recalled the bitter dispute brought on by the late Bishop

F. S. Spalding of the Episcopal Church in Utah. It had to do with the "Book of Abraham," which Joseph the Prophet had translated from a papyrus, found in the chest of an Egyptian mummy.

Scholars then had provoked much ridicule among disbelievers in the Prophet Joseph, by asserting it was preposterous for anyone to imagine the Egyptians could have known the religious ideas of Abraham.

The religious symbol of the goddess of Isis came to my mind along with the three-folded crown of the god Osiris.

I asked the aged Hebrew if the "knot" of Isis and the peculiar crown of Osiris were not older symbols than the Star of David—if these Egyptian symbols were not older than any Hebraic.

His answer was very much of a shock to me, for anyone can apply the test he proposed. I had gone over the ground in company with Dr. Widtsoe of the University of Utah.

"Go up to the Metropolitan Museum of Art," he proposed, "and in the first Egyptian room you will find samples of Egypt according to the native culture. There will be a skeleton and the hole in a solid piece of stone where it was buried.

"You will find no religious symbols connected with this burial and no mummification. It is just a skeleton of a body thrown into a cleft in a rock, in a crouching position.

This I knew well, for I had seen samples of these burials in earliest Egypt.

"And that crown of Osiris with its three folds, what do you think that means?" the old Hebrew asked. "It means precisely what the Star of David meant, with its three-sided triangle. It means the trinity of the Godhead."

This, I knew, too, for Budge had so stated in one of his greater books on Egyptian religion.

"And all this means," said my companion, as the organ sobbed out the strains of the Kol Nidre, "that the Israelites took down to Egypt and taught them all they knew of religion. Abraham and his people carried down the idea of immortality, that gave rise to the temples and the tombs and the pyramids. "All these, with the sculpture and the hieroglyphics that went with them, were reared to the principle of the life everlasting."

This was not strange talk to me, out of conformity with known facts. For I recalled that on searching for the origin of Egyptian art I had found a reproduction of the oldest picture in all Egyptian lore. It was a picture of two donkeys, packed with articles for trade, and some Israelites leading them.

The caption explained that these were Israelitish traders arriving at a certain Egyptian nomarchy (as a province was des-

ignated) and the date was 1000 years before Abraham's visit to Egypt.

Then again, there was the first poem coming down out of Egyptian lore. I got this from Breasted, who was more bitter in his ridicule of the Prophet than any other of Bishop Spalding's scholars. He had claimed that Egyptian religion and the Hebraic religion were as different as Chinese and American, so to speak. That is, that it was ridiculous to put Abraham's monotheistic gospel in a polytheistic environment.

Yet in Breasted's own work I had found the "tale of Senhu," the earliest poem known in any language. And as Breasted himself translated it, it was the tale of an Egyptian who fled into Palestine and dwelt there to save his neck. He knew court secrets that he felt the Egyptian rulers would kill him to hush up.

So that the earliest Egyptian literature and the earliest Egyptian sculpture had Abraham's people and the Egyptians commingling, thousands of years before Joseph went down into Egypt, and Moses led the exodus out of Egypt.

It did not startle me at all, therefore, to have this aged Jew telling me that the Egyptian religion was based essentially not on a lot of polytheistic ideas, but upon a Godhead. For Breasted himself made fun of all the early Egyptian translations that wrote of beast worship, and bird worship. And he made it clear that almost to the day of his own work no decent survey of Egyptian documents had ever been made.

And I knew from the latest works that the so-called bird worship was not bird worship at all, but that the Egyptian symbolism represented the ibis-headed goddess, Toth, as the recording angel. The figure in sculpture of a heavenly group merely meant "secretary." So Isis meant "divine protection" or "mercy."

While the big idea of the religion was temple service for the dead, a godhead, and various heavenly figures who served the godhead. We have them still in our heavens, as St. Peter, keeper of the gates, the recording angel, etc.

But I teased my Jewish informant a bit. I told him I was sure the Egyptian ideas were older than the gospel of Abraham. But he caught me up quick. He knew his grounds. He referred me to Abbott's *History of Masonry*, a new book all our people should read. It traces masonic symbols to their sources, and it credits the Egyptian symbols and teachings to the Hebrews who carried them into Egypt with them. What a shock it must be to Breasted to find things working out this way!

In Washington newspapers last winter there was printed a photograph of a splendid statue of the goddess Isis. It was by a living sculptor. I wondered why any modern sculptor should

do the goddess of mercy this way. I found the sculptured beauty was to adorn a masonic temple!

The masons credit their ritual to the Temple of Solomon. Yet they have both Isis and Osiris in the ritual, and anybody who has ever uttered a Christian prayer will respond to this tribute to the Deity:

“He who hath made all, the sole one; he commandeth and the gods came into being; he is the father of gods, he who made mankind and created the beasts; he it is who makes pastures for the herds, and fruit trees for men; who creates that whereby fish live in the river and the birds under the heavens; who gives breath to those that are in the egg and feeds the son of the serpent; he creates that whereby the gnat lives and also the worms and fleas. He creates what is needed by the mice in their holes, and that which feeds the birds upon all trees. The Nile comes on his account, he, the sweet, the well-beloved, and when he comes, mankind lives. And this Lord of all gods is verily of a kindly heart, when men call him he delivers the fearful from the insolent.”

The words I have set down here in quotation marks came to my mind as the cantor at Jacob Schiff's funeral read forth the words of David's psalm, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He leadeth me by green pastures.”

Those words I had learned to recite when a child, from dear old Aunt Mary Morris in one of the first adobe school houses built in Utah—in the old Fifteenth Ward, in Salt Lake.

The almost similar words of the Egyptian hymn to Amon-re, the king of the gods, I take from page 58 of Adolf Erman's *Hand Book of Egyptian Religion*.

Surely there was not much to distinguish Egyptian religion from the Hebraic in this period of the New Kingdom in Egypt. We almost have the psalms of David in this as in several other Egyptian hymns.

And today all Christians expect the dead to be judged. They expect a hearing in heaven for the departed soul at the judgment seat. The masons, I understand, judge the candidate before a ritualistic character named Osiris, as in Egypt. Anyone who knows a modern standard of uprightness in living will appreciate this call of the Egyptian soul for a fair judgment before Osiris:

“I have come to thee, O my Lord, that I may behold thy beauty. * * * I come to thee to bring thee truth and to chase away wrong doing. I have committed no sins against mankind. * * * I have made no man evil in the eyes of his superior. I have not caused to hunger. I have not caused to weep. I have done no murder. I have not commanded to

murder. I have not caused grief to any. I have not committed impurity in the pure abodes of the gods of my city. I have not diminished the corn measure. I have not diminished the cube measure. I have not falsified the field measure. I have not falsified the tongue of the balance. I have not stolen the milk from the mouth of the child. I have not stolen the cattle from his pasture.”

Here again, in reading this appeal of an Egyptian soul for judgment, we get a code of morals that, by a mere paraphrasing, becomes the Ten Commandments. I take this prayer from page 104 of Erman's *Hand Book*. It was the earliest religious conception fully developed in Egypt. And yet the code is a code of life, even for today.

It is strange indeed, after reading the assaults of Breasted, who despised religious documents of Egypt so much that he excluded them one and all from his four volumes of Egyptian translations, to find a historian of masonry, an aged Jew in the Temple Emanu-El, and the Egyptian texts themselves, so strangely bearing out the story of a communism of spirit and text between Hebraic religion and Egyptian religion. It is strange, or rather it would be strange, to anyone not expecting these things to work out just this way, in spite of all that Breasted said in jeering at Joseph Smith.
New York, N. Y.

Grand Teton

Salaam! Stark peak, with heaven-piercing shaft!
 Upon thy summit storm-winds find a home,
 And through the cold, pure air-lanes eagles pass
 To perch their eyries on thy granite dome.
 Up-flinging thy hoar head among the clouds,
 The cheap and noisy company of men
 Thou hast disdained. Thy austere solitude
 Proclaims a cosmic truth beyond the ken
 Of human mind: the great infinitude
 Of God's creative might. Thy baffling walls,
 By age-old tools of wind and storm planed smooth,
 Forbid man's trespass when adventure calls.
 So standest thou, a prophet, gray, aloof.
 When thou wert carved the gods of grandeur laughed.
 Salaam! Stark peak, with heaven-piercing shaft!

Floyd R. Barber.

Paris, Idaho