

Israel as I see it: A Dedicated Hero - Hillel Kook

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Our Sages taught us: “Whoever saves one Jewish soul it is as if he saves an entire world”.

There are many who made great efforts to save our People from the wrath of the Nazi Germans and their ready

European and other helpers as the Nazis proceeded to destroy Jews wherever they possibly could throughout Europe and wherever the Third Reich’s armies went. To this day Europe remains a continent dripping with Jewish blood and continuing Jew-hatred.

Regretfully, the Allies, with the United States and the British in the lead, made virtually no effort to destroy the Nazi German mass murder extermination camps nor to destroy railroads carrying hopeless Jewish victims to death camps from all parts of Europe, particularly from Poland and from Russia. Here and there help came from other sources.

Dr. Zorach Warhaftig, working together with a Japanese Consul, saved thousands of Jews as they crossed from Russia into China. In 1944, as news of the slaughter began to spread and became more difficult to ignore, American Jewish “leadership” met in Pittsburgh and cried out to President Roosevelt and to Congress to help save our People.

The “close contact” then was Dr. Stephen Wise. Wise bore the brunt of the criticism. We met Wise in the Pittsburgh conference hall.

Stephen Wise inquired: “What are they screaming about?”

We replied: “They are worried about our People and expect you to help now!”

Stephen Wise remarked sadly: “I am doing the best that I can. I will try harder”.

Stephen Wise failed.

Hillel Kook, nephew of Israel’s first Chief Rabbi, Avraham Isaac HaKohen Kook, sent by the Yishuv (Jewish community in British Mandate Palestine) as an emissary to help recruit an army for the future State, already upon seeing what was happening in 1942 in the growing horror of the Holocaust, concentrated his entire efforts to saving lives. Known as “Peter Bergson“, Kook organized a group of ardent and dedicated co-workers in the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe.

The Emergency Committee raised U.S. public awareness of the Nazi German Holocaust, organized protests and recruited Hollywood personalities including Bob Hope and Ben Hecht. The Committee ran over 200 full page U.S. newspaper ads and sponsored a protest march to Washington, D.C. of 400 Rabbis. Committee activities led to U.S. Congressional pressure on the White House. With the help of Secretary of the Treasury, Henry Morgenthau Jr., a United States War Refugee Board was established to save Jewish refugees. According to the Simon Wiesenthal Center, the War Refugee Board saved 200,000 Jews (Source: “Remembering the mission of a ‘nuisance diplomat’“, by Shoshana Kordova, Ha’aretz, Friday, August 29, 2003, written about the Root & Branch Association’s August 27th Hillel Kook Memorial Evening).

Nazi Germany invaded Hungary in March, 1944. S.S. Colonel Adolph Eichmann in Budapest began mass deportations of Jews to death camps immediately. Raoul Wallenberg, Secretary to the Swedish Embassy in Budapest, together with resident Swedish diplomat Per Anger, Swiss Consul Carl Lutz and El Salvador diplomat George Mantello, came to the rescue of Hungarian Jews, providing them with protective passports and saving over 100,000 Hungarian Jews.

Tragically, after the Russians occupied Hungary, Wallenberg disappeared. The Emergency Committee worked to the end of the Holocaust and provided assistance to the survivors.

We chaired the August 27th Root & Branch Association Hillel Kook Memorial Evening -- held to honor Hillel Kook's second Yahrzeit (anniversary of death -- Kook died on August 18, 2001, at age 86) -- a tribute to a truly dedicated hero whose efforts literally saved the worlds of each individual saved. Mr. Larry Pfeffer organized this very impressive event, held at the Seymour J. Abrams Orthodox Union Jerusalem World Center.

Mr. Pfeffer, a Hungarian child Holocaust survivor, recalled the periods of terror and praised particularly the Bergson group Emergency Committee. Brief but meaningful remarks were delivered by Mr. Israel Medad of the Menachem Begin Heritage Center, by Dr. Robert Rozett, Yad Vashem Library Director; by Mr. Jonathan Rosenblum, Jerusalem Post columnist and Mr. David Bedein, Israel Resource News Agency.

Greetings from the Diplomatic Corps came from Her Excellency Mrs. Suzana Gun de Hasenson, Ambassador of El Salvador; from His Excellency Dr. Janos Hovari, Ambassador of Hungary; and from His Excellency Mr. Robert Rydberg, Ambassador of Sweden.

Accompanied by flutist Netanel Zelavsky, Hungarian Ambassador Hovari joined Shai Csillag of Merkaz haIrgunim (the umbrella organization for Holocaust survivors), Joseph Marton and Larry Pfeffer in singing Hungarian Jewish songs. A message by Mr. Isi Leibler, Senior Vice President of the World Jewish Congress, posed a challenge to leadership today to unite and to deal with current problems. Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik enlarged upon the "Obligation to Care, to Know and to Do: Jewish Sources Requiring Activism" in the past, present and future.

The Keynote Address was delivered brilliantly by Ambassador Professor Moshe Arens, former Israeli Minister of Defense, former Minister for Foreign Affairs and former Ambassador to the United States. Professor Arens emphasized preparedness for any and all events: "This war against terror is not new to us. We have fought it for many

years. It has now spread worldwide with Jews everywhere as targets. Our heroes of the past like Hillel Kook are on call for the dangers ahead".

A brief movie of Hillel's messages was shown as daughter Dr. Becky Kook of Ben Gurion University of the Negev related some reflections about her beloved father. The gathering rose in tribute to Hillel Kook, the 23rd Psalm was recited and Kaddish (prayer for the dead) chanted, to close an impressive and meaningful event.

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