

Introduction to
Address before the Hebraic Society
1910

The manuscript is a combination of two separate documents, both of which are found in Harvard Archives Royce Papers (HARP) Box 97, along with nineteen other miscellaneous documents. The first document, which is the third in HARP Box 97, is a two-page handwritten manuscript that outlines the address before the Hebraic Society. The outline specifies that the topic of the address is the self-chosen people of Israel and their mission today, and that Royce will attempt to explain the Israelites and their mission in terms of loyalty. The second document, which is the fourth in HARP Box 97, is the address before the Hebraic Society, an incomplete sixteen-page handwritten manuscript. Royce begins the address with a reminiscence of a conversation with William James. An observation of the Moabite stone prompts Royce to wonder how differently the world would have been had the Israelites not won in their struggle against the people of Moab. The lesson to learn from the war between Israel and Moab, James replies, is that only the faith whose adherents are most steadfast in their devotion, and consequently has an unconquerable belief in their faith, will have the conviction necessary for the right to mold the world's religion after their own. The people of Israel won this right in their war against the Moabites, and subsequently, in their physical and spiritual struggles with the people of the world.

Royce agrees with James, and the remainder of the manuscript attempts to develop his insight. The historical resilience of the people of Israel — the worldly defeat of their nation and worldwide victory of their religion — is, according to Royce, explainable by the decision of the Israelites to choose themselves. By a practical stubbornness, the Israelites chose themselves as the chosen people of God, and to remain loyal to themselves as the self-chosen people of God throughout every adversity. For the Israelites, such a decision involves a power of self-idealization that combines shrewdness, prophetic vision, piety and devotion, a mysterious unity of traits peculiar to the Jewish spirit. Such a spirit is responsible for the decision of the Israelites to choose the righteous cause of their God, and to thereby choose themselves as the chosen people of God. Despite changes in historical circumstance, the Jewish spirit remains; but the question is how the Jewish spirit chooses itself anew in a modern context and for the future. Now, in modernity, Yahweh is no longer the God of Israel but the world's God. Despite its beauty and universality, the vision of the prophets was therefore not sufficiently universal. Hence, the decision to choose the righteous cause of God, and thereby become a part of God's chosen people, is and ought to be available to all with the will to do so. The world-historical mission of the Israelites is, therefore, that its people have the will to choose the righteous cause of God, remain God's chosen people throughout every adversity, and thus, preserve their special place among the people of the world.

Written by Joseph Dillabough
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