

Marc Chagall's speech at the thirtieth anniversary of Isaac Leib Peretz's death

Given at the Yidisher Kultur Farband (YKUF),
May 5th 1945

Text in Yiddish

Marc and Ida Chagall Archive, Paris

Chagall praises the art of the playwright Isaac Leib Peretz, one of the most important creators in Yiddish literature, and regrets that it is not the best time to study his work.

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These are, in truth, not the best of times to study Peretz in all his facets, evaluate his art, and the purity of his style. I can no longer dream while reading him like in past times. We have his dilapidated tomb before our eyes, without grass or inscription. We cannot remain silent; we cannot speak of his world when the entire world has witnessed how the artist himself was cast into the void. This country, this people—Germany—has set out to destroy our art. It has sent our artists to the grave and has desecrated their tombs. Damning the country of Nietzsche and Wagner would be an understatement... What Jews are now interested in Peretz's ways of thinking? Sometimes I am under the impression that it is not us, the living, who follow his path; but instead, the dead, the deceased martyrs, and the thousands of heroes who fight in any which place [who have followed his ideas]. However, I am convinced that our ragged people will once again come out of their ghetto-cave with an alert stride; their hands covered in mud, and they will inscribe a new Bible of heritage in the hearts of our grandchildren. And perhaps I myself will have the strength to paint our exile beside the mortuary truck in the color of blood. Our brotherly creation, united and vengeful, will be the only thing that will allow us to resurrect the tomb of Peretz, like the old and new creators. We will take it to Peretz for his new jubilee. Those of us who remain on Earth alive will parade him to his cemetery and lay him down once again in his rebuilt mausoleum. But, as I spoke, I have become very sad. I cannot help it. I am blushing with embarrassment. Sometimes I want to lay down where he rests. I want to ask whoever: do not burden me with a feeling of banishment from my brothers, who are already divided and confronted enough. I feel sometimes that I am shrouded in light and am sinking in a well of dreams. What do I see? A broken clock and an elderly Jew collecting firewood who sits down to recite psalms. The sky gathers its sparse clouds. It extends through the darkness, black like the phylacteries. I do not know what to do with my body. Suddenly, a white shawl flies through the air, like fine smoke, and rests upon me like a bridal canopy. I yell out and cling: it is my image, giving me strength. I listen carefully: it is speaking. It emanates a suffocating scent of gas. I embrace her and she levitates. Tears pour down her girlish wet cheeks. She announces that she is alive.

Message from Marc Chagall to the Zionist Emergency Council

September 30th 1945

Letter in English

Marc and Ida Chagall Archive, Paris

Message defending the Jewish people's right to have their
own State.

***La Terre Retrouvée*, no. 6**

December 15th 1947

Newspaper in French

Marc and Ida Chagall Archive, Paris

Announcement of the creation of the State of Israel

Message from Marc Chagall to David Ben-Gurion

May 14th 1948

Letter in Russian

Marc and Ida Chagall Archive, Paris

Marc Chagall's correspondence with David Ben-Gurion in relation to the declaration of independence of the State of Israel on May 14th 1948 is proof of his support for the Jewish people defending their right to a nation of their own.

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To Ben-Gurion. In Palestine. May 14th 1948. Telegram. On this historic day for the Jewish people, I, son and artist of the ghetto, extend a warm greeting, glorious combatants, founders of the new Jewish republic. I hope that all the honest people, intellectuals, and artists of all nations, including the Arab countries, are willing to recognize, in the sake of their own life and their own art, the right of the biblical people to live in their country, following the precepts of the prophets recognized throughout the world.

Blessed be these Jews who give their lives for this higher ideal.

[Although I am no longer young, I have no reservations in placing myself at your disposal, or also offering the life of David, my two year-old son, as a future gift for the country. I hope that all the honest people, intellectuals, and artists of all nations, help to construct and defend the new Biblical nation, so as to repair the offense committed by humanity against Judaism during the millennia of their exile.

Marc Chagall]

Marc Chagall, draft of an article for *Eynikeyt*

April 1948

Marc and Ida Chagall Archive, Paris

After the millions of deaths of the Shoah, the artist celebrates the recognition of the Jewish world brought about by the creation of a nation that will allow for a reconstruction and a new connection with their homeland.

Marc Chagall at the World Peace Congress

April 23rd 1949

Exhibition print

Letter from Marc Chagall to the Mouvement contre le Racisme, l'Antisémitisme et pour la Paix (MRAP)

1949

Letter in Yiddish

Marc and Ida Chagall Archive, Paris

In this letter, Chagall manifests his rejection of the elements of propaganda utilized to disseminate national socialist and anti-Semitic ideologies, such as the weekly tabloid *Der Stürmer*.

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You ask me for my opinion on the possible revival of Nazi magazines, including the damned Stürmer. I am aware of this, yes. I am a humble artist, nothing more. I have reflected on how to make our world, our culture, and our art known, but, regrettably, the more time goes by, the harder it is to share this life.

Despite it all, from the depths of my soul, I wish to state my protest against the opportunities that have been presented to the most vile elements of humanity to "freely" express their alleged opinions, ones that have led to the use of crematory ovens in recent times and whose objective is that we all drown in hate and blood in the future.