

## The Future Will Be Bright

by Rabbi David Hartley Mark

In front, the sun climbs slow, how slowly,  
But westward, look: the land is bright.

--Arthur Hugh Clough (1819-1861)

These are difficult days for the American Republic. I do not propose to get into politics here; that is being done by all the news outlets, from TV to online. As a rabbi, as a political, philosophical, and historical thinker, I suggest to you that we Americans, whether of faith or no faith, will survive this. In my lifetime, I have witnessed the assassinations of John and Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr. There have been incidents of genocide, riots, 9/11, and, of course, the current plague, whose end no one can predict—though the proverbial “light at the end of the tunnel” is there: a faint but steady glimmer.

After this litany of tragedies and horrors, how would it be possible for anyone to claim a sense of optimism? When I attended Yeshiva University many years ago, I had a beloved Jewish History teacher, Rabbi Louis Bernstein z'l. He was fond of calling Jewish History “Oy Vey History”—whether discussing papal decrees against the Jews, the Chmielnicki Massacres, the Spanish Inquisition, the Black Hundreds and Cossacks in Imperial Russia, and so on.

In every instance, Rabbi Bernstein would intone, “But we survived. Boys! It’s your job, your mitzvah, to make certain that we survive now, and forever. Yes: God had promised that we will be an Eternal People. But you have to make it happen.”\

I have never forgotten his words. And so, I put the challenge to you: it is up to us to make America work. We are not politicians or statesmen; we are ordinary human beings. Still, everyone can contribute, even in the smallest way, to help get our country back on track. Civility, respect, and a fearless approach to righting wrongs—all of these can help.

Most of all, do not become discouraged. In 1935, with the Country still in the throes of the Great Depression, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt looked squarely at its downward spiral, and realized full well that many Americans had reached the end of their ropes of survival. And so, FDR, always skillful with a turn of phrase, stated the following new aphorism while giving a Fireside Chat: “When you get to the end of your rope, tie a knot and hold on.”

FDR was a true leader: he was able to find options when there appeared to be none. His spiritual message (and he was truly and deeply a man of the spirit) was, Never lose hope. Do something to survive. Do it precisely when it seems as if there is nothing you can do. And do it with whatever you happen to have.

Things may look bad, but we’ve still got that scrap of rope! The challenge now is to make it work for us. I know we can do it!