

SHALOM

Jewish Peace Letter

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“Seek peace and pursue it” (Psalm 34:15)

RABBI ABRAHAM CRONBACH, RABBI Isidor B. Hoffman and Jewish communal executive Jane Evans epitomized their opposition to war and the need to support those men who could not in good conscience participate in war by founding the Jewish Peace Fellowship in 1941. Their initial purpose, former JPF President Naomi Goodman once wrote, was to help imprisoned and largely forsaken Jewish Conscientious Objectors before and during World War II, men whose rejection of war was little understood by their fellow Jews. Years later, during the Vietnam War, the JPF grew concerned about the lack of a recognizable Jewish antiwar presence though many American Jews actively opposed that war and others to follow.

Over the years the JPF has sought to unite those who believe Jewish ideals and experience provide inspiration for a nonviolent way of life. Toward that end, our aims and activities have expanded, and we have become a Jewish voice in the peace community and a peace voice in the Jewish community. In the absence of a draft we continue to work for a negotiated and nonviolent two-state solution between Israel and Palestine. We also support Israeli young men and women who wish to be Conscientious Objectors. We participate in the Prison Visitation Service, a group that visits and stays in touch with forgotten prisoners, Jewish and non-Jewish. We

have always adamantly opposed the death penalty and have in the past written appeals to various courts in this regard. We resolutely opposed compulsory national service and especially the draft, and will so again should their reinstatement be considered. We have written, picketed and marched against the warmakers during Vietnam, the Gulf War, and the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. And we have honored people and organizations working to preserve peace with our Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel Award.

In three years we will proudly mark our seventy-fifth anniversary. Until then, and beyond, we honor all the men and women who shared in creating and building the JPF. We are inspired by Hillel, who sought to avoid bitterness and contention in dealing with controversy and to maintain the spirit of self-giving love while engaged in the effort to achieve these purposes: “Be of the disciples of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace, and loving mankind and drawing them to the Torah.”

This issue of *Shalom* reprints seven articles among the very many which have appeared in its print version. Each speaks to the writers’ concerns about Jewish life here and abroad: war and peace, a daughter’s recollection of her rabbi father, Jewish life in Germany, Israel, and more. We hope you enjoy reading them.

— *The Jewish Peace Fellowship*



Stefan Merken

The Jewish Peace Fellowship's Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel Award

THE JEWISH PEACE FELLOWSHIP'S RABBI ABRAHAM Joshua Heschel Award is presented to an individual or organization that has made exceptional contributions to peace and justice in the Jewish tradition.

We are pleased to announce that Albert Vorspan is the recipient this year of our Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel Award.

The quest for peace among nations and social justice at home and abroad has been a lifelong pursuit for Albert Vorspan.

Al — as everybody calls him — Vorspan has been one of the most consistent and influential voices within and outside organized American Jewish life. Born in St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1924, he served as director of the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism, as well as senior vice president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (now the Union for Reform Judaism).

Above all, he was and remains a vital and prophetic voice of faith and reason within American Jewry's Reform Movement, and also played a huge role in emphasizing ethical concerns and moral behavior to generations of Jews, both

STEFAN MERKEN *is chair of the Jewish Peace Fellowship.*



Albert Vorspan

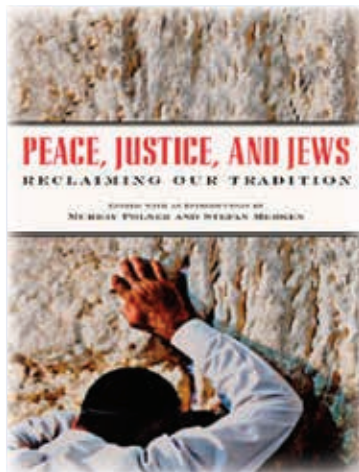
religious and secular.

Al Vorspan has never been shy about publicly expressing his concerns about crucial public issues even in the face of criticism by some in the organized Jewish community. In 1966, for example, he condemned American involvement

in Vietnam, drawing the wrath of the war's supporters. In *The New York Times Magazine*, in 1988, he criticized Israeli government policies following the first Palestinian Intifada, writing, "Whether we accept it or not, every night's television news confirms it: Israelis now seem the oppressors, Palestinians the victims," a sentiment which did not endear him to some in the Jewish community.

His book, *Jewish Dimensions of Social Justice: Tough Moral Choices of Our Time* (co-authored with David Saperstein), has been a voice of prophetic Judaism. Another of his books, *Giants of Justice*, deals with contributions to social justice by such Jewish luminaries as Louis Brandeis, Albert Einstein, Stephen Wise, Louis Marshall, Henrietta Szold, David Dubinsky, Abraham Cronbach and Herbert Lehman.

The Jewish Peace Fellowship is proud to present this year's Heschel Award to Albert Vorspan. ✧



Peace, Justice and Jews: Reclaiming Our Tradition

Edited by Murray Polner and Stefan Merken.

A landmark collection of contemporary progressive Jewish thought written by activists from Israel, the U.S. and the U.K.

Publishers Weekly called it "literate, thought-provoking" and "by no means homogeneous" and which looked at "from all angles, the idea that editors Polner and Merken believe reflect the most basic attitude in our Jewish heritage."

Publishers Weekly concluded: "There is much to learn here for anyone, Jew or Gentile, interested in global issues of peace and justice."

\$25.00 per copy, plus \$5.00 for shipping

Susannah Heschel

‘God Is Affected by What Human Beings Do’

IT IS VERY SPECIAL FOR ME TO BE HERE ON THIS OCCASION [of the Abraham, Joshua Heschel Award ceremony] which is honoring my father and my mother for the work that they accomplished, for the home they created, for the values they always stood for. I want to say a few words about my father.

The first thing, of course, that we might ask is: What does it mean to create peace? Obviously, it means a commitment to certain principles — you have to stand for something. But it also means creating a certain kind of people, people with certain kinds of human qualities. And that, I think, was the central message of my father’s work. My father asked, “What kinds of qualities does it take inside of us and our souls to create a world of peace?”; and he asked, “How can we shape ourselves to bring about a world of peace? What kinds of people do we have to be?” And for my father, the central qualities were compassion and empathy. Those are the qualities that emerged again and again in his theological writings and his political work, and also in the kind of person that he was, the kind of person he was at home.

In my father’s theological writings, he talks about God as a God who cares about us, a God who cares about human beings, who’s involved in our lives, a God who’s involved in human history. For my father, and the kind of Jewish tradition he represented in the Midrash and Kaballah, God isn’t remote and abstract, but rather God is responsive to human deeds. There is a state-

ment in the Talmud which says that, “when the Temple in Jerusalem went up in flames, God cried.” And there’s a statement in the Midrash in which God says, “I am God, and you are my witnesses, and if you are not my witnesses, then I am not God.” And so just as God is involved in our lives, just as God suffers with us, so a genuinely religious person is also involved in the lives of other people. Who is a religious person? A religious person, my father would say, is someone who suffers the harm done to other people.

My father put it very starkly. He said “Whatever we do to another person, we do to God. When we hurt a human being, we injure God. When we do a holy act, we give strength to God. God is affected by what human beings do.” My father often used to say in his lectures, “To be a Jew is not simply to be, but to stand for.” He said that “every Jew is a representative of the Jewish spirit, every human being is a disclosure of the divine. if you really want to understand the meaning of God,” he said, “sharpen your sense of the human.”

In his own life, my father became involved in political issues, not just because he concluded intellectually that this was the right stand to take, but

more than that. Whatever the situation was, he responded with his heart, empathetically, with warmth, with affection. He was the kind of person who was always attentive to other people’s moods, very sensitive, and always with his feelings in the forefront. He wasn’t moody and distracted; he was always warm and loving and enthusiastic. And whatever the issue was, he cared, and his soul came out.

He wrote about the war in Vietnam, explaining why he was involved in the opposition to the war. He wrote that Vietnam was a personal problem. To be human means not



Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, Susannah Heschel’s father, participated in the Selma Civil Rights March on March 21, 1965. The march led to the passage of the Voting Rights Act in July 1965. From far left: U.S. Representative John Lewis (D-GA), who had been severely beaten on March 7, 1965, while leading the “Bloody Sunday” march; an unidentified nun; the Rev. Ralph Abernathy; the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.; Ralph Bunche, former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations; Rabbi Heschel; the Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth.

SUSANNAH HESCHEL is Dartmouth College’s Eli Black professor of Jewish studies. She was recently awarded a Guggenheim fellowship.

to be immune to other people's suffering. The question addressed to everyone of us personally and collectively was: "What shall I do to stop the killing and dying in Vietnam?"

I want to conclude by reminiscing about the weekend my father went to Selma, Alabama, for Martin Luther King Jr.'s historic march from Selma to Montgomery. I remember when the telegram came on Friday afternoon from Dr. King asking my father to join the marchers. There was a burst of activity, packing and arranging, getting ready. Of course, there was the normal Friday afternoon chaos, getting ready for the Sabbath. When, finally, Sabbath ended, my mother and I went to see him off. I remember kissing him goodbye, and watching him get into a yellow Checker taxi, and driving off to the airport, wondering if I would ever see him again, because in those days, a march in the South was a very dangerous thing. I remember watching television: Sheriff Bull Connor from Birmingham attacking Dr. King and the other demonstrators with German Shepherd dogs and water hoses. My mother and I were very tense and very worried.

When at last, my father came home, we were very relieved but very proud. I remember he brought home a lei of flowers someone had given many of the marchers, and he told us that during the long march, "I felt my legs were praying."



Susannah Heschel

— Fall-Winter 1986-87



The Challenge of Shalom: The Jewish Tradition of Peace and Justice

Edited by Murray Polner and Naomi Goodman

Highlights the deep and powerful tradition of Jewish nonviolence. With reverence for life, passion for justice, and empathy for the suffering, Jews historically have practiced a "uniquely powerful system of ethical peacefulness." *The Challenge of Shalom* includes sections on the Tradition, the Holocaust, Israel, Reverence for all life and Personal Testimonies. **\$18.95 per copy, plus \$5 shipping.**

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Steven S. Schwarzschild

Jewish Moral Values and War

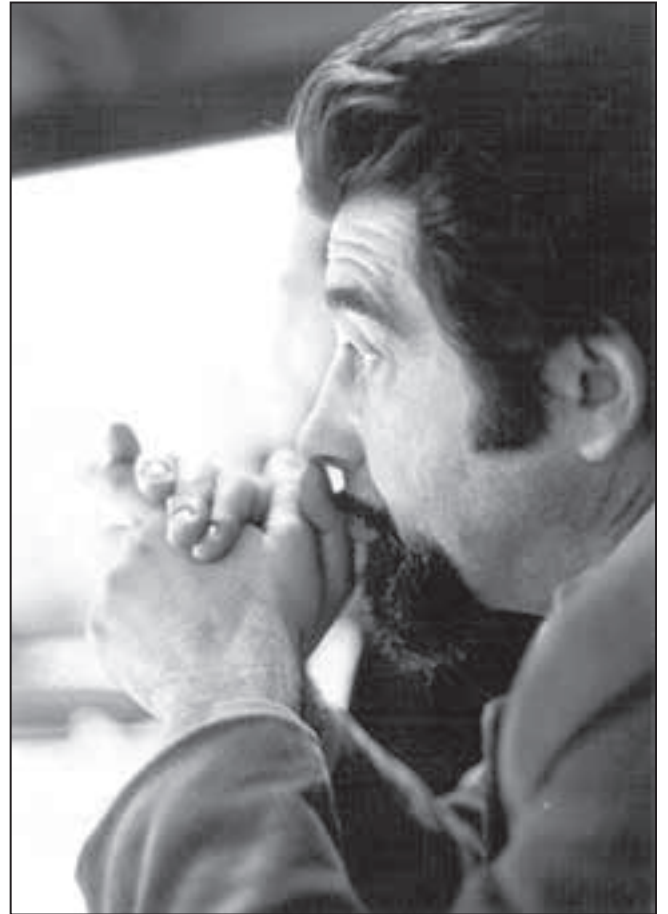
UNDoubtedly the many wars since the end of World War II have put the question of Jewish pacifism and conscientious objection into the center of the concern of a very large and rapidly increasing number of American Jews. The militarily explosive state of the world ensures the continuing centrality of the moral problem of war for the foreseeable future. The state of Israel, too, has encountered similar ethical and religious objections.

The small number of essentially exploratory but serious articles in this pamphlet, *Roots of Jewish Nonviolence*, tries to come to grips with the question of Jewish moral values in their application to this condition.

For myself I must say that, it can, I think, unambiguously be shown that the ethos, the letter and the spirit of Judaism *de facto* rule out all war and killing. The outline of the argument is quite simple:

It is true that the vast classical sources of Judaism, extending over four thousand years and the whole world, can be cited to any and all effects. The chief problem, therefore, is that of a criterion of selection and interpretation. That criterion will have to turn out to be the Messianic fulfillment, as in any rational system the end determines the means. The Messianic fulfillment, now, is, as all are bound to agree, the state of peace, justice and truth. Equipped with this criterion, it becomes relatively easy to demonstrate — indeed, one is overwhelmed by the majesty of the evidence — that Jewish law (*halachah*) has effectively reduced the legitimacy of war to the zero-point and that Jewish doctrine (*aggadah*) is a uniquely powerful system of ethical peacefulness. Add to this the actual history of the Jewish people, from before the time of Jeremiah, the prophet, through Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai, down to the millions and again millions who, nonviolently, went to their deaths throughout European history “for the sanctification of God’s name” — and the claim seems indisputable that Judaism is a singular enterprise of moral peacefulness in the whole panorama of human history.

STEVEN S. SCHWARZSCHILD was professor of Judaic studies at Washington University, in St. Louis. This essay, with minor changes, is an excerpt from his introduction to the 1981 edition of Jewish Peace Fellowship’s *Roots of Jewish Nonviolence*.



Steven S. Schwarzschild

I close with a personal confession: The men of my generation have gone through a World War, the Holocaust, Stalinism and Vietnam — not to speak of other mass bloodlettings. I have seen enough unnatural deaths to outlast a lifetime. I know that I, like all other men and women, have no choice but to die — and whether I will die with human blood on my hands. I am deeply tired of and sickened by killing. I pray with Balaam, inspired by God and seeing Israel (Numb. 23:9f): “Behold, this is a people that is to dwell solitary . . . May my soul die the death of the righteous and my end be like theirs.” ✨

— 1981

Rabbi Philip Bentley

Toward A Jewish Theology of Pacifism

I OFTEN FIND MYSELF EXPLAINING JEWISH PACIFISM to nonpacifist Jews and to non-Jewish pacifists. Most of them wonder how the religion of the Jewish people could possibly embrace pacifism. Of course I have to explain to nonpacifists that pacifism is not “passive-ism” and that pacifism takes many forms.

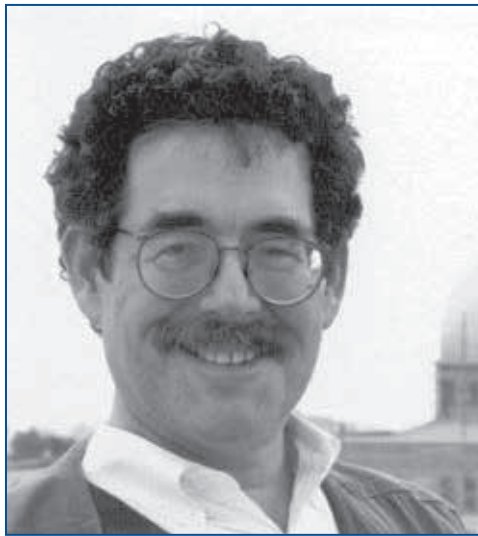
I discovered last year that outside of our JPF membership it is not easy to find someone willing to come out as both a Jew and a pacifist. We were looking for a celebrity to head up a major fund-raising effort for our fiftieth anniversary. Despite having some contacts in Hollywood, the music industry, the worlds of literature, journalism and theater, we were not able to find such a person. Some were pacifists but were not willing to publicly support a specifically Jewish organization. Some were Jewish but, even if antiwar, were unwilling to wear a label “Pacifist.” We even discussed the idea of no longer using that term because it is so misunderstood.

Perhaps we need a new label for ourselves but I am surer than ever that the Jewish tradition is at heart one with pacifism — an ethic which regards the use of physical force as the very last resort used only under the most extenuating circumstances. I believe this position arises from some very basic Jewish theology.

There is a discussion recorded in the Talmud, one of many examples of a kind of scholarly one-upmanship among the rabbis. A group of them were trying to see who could come up with the biblical passage which most succinctly summarized Judaism. Starting with longer passages such as the Ten Commandments, shorter and shorter passages were quoted (“What does the Eternal require of you? Only to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”) Rabbi Akiva, who often won these contests, cited “Love your neighbor as your self.” But another scholar topped him with “This is the book of the line of Adam.” (Genesis 5:11)

The Talmud asks why only one couple was created by

God. The answer is so that no one can say, “My Adam was better than your Adam.” Every human being carries the potential of the entire world, as Adam did. When Cain murdered Abel, the Torah says that Abel’s “bloods” cried out. Why “bloods” (instead of “blood”)? Because all the potential descendants of Abel were murdered along with Abel. For this reason we are taught that “To destroy a single human life is to destroy an entire world and to save a single human life is to save an entire world.” Even though every human being is a unique individual each one of us is stamped with a Divine Image. When the first couple was created they were said to be “in the divine image.” (Genesis 1:26) Whatever that phrase means, it indicates that in some sense every human being carries something of the Divine. Jewish law takes this seriously, saying that not to



Rabbi Philip Bentley

reproduce is to reduce the Divine Image and that certain actions are an affront to the Divine Image.

This means that every human being is in the Divine Image — not just saintly people, not just Jews, not just ordinary people, but *all* people. Stalin, Hitler, Saddam Hussein, Slobodan Milosovic and every other villain you may care to name is made in the Divine Image. The evil done by human beings desecrates that image — not just the evil done by human monsters but the evil you and I and the most righteous do. One God means one humanity and nothing less. This crushing responsibility is the reason for our belief in the human power to change and why *tshuvah* is so important.

There are always reasons one can find to use physical force or go to war. To do so, however, represents personal, moral, political and diplomatic failure. Peacemaking, whether between individuals or nations, is hard work and often unpleasant, but again and again Jewish ethics requires us to pursue not conflict but peace. “Seek peace and pursue it” is based on the most basic Jewish ideas about who and what we are — as human beings and as Jews. Surely that is the basis for Jewish pacifism. ☆

Rabbi PHILIP BENTLEY is a past president of the JPF.

— Spring 1993

Gila Sversky

Forbidden Questions

“HAD WE HAD AN ARMY THEN, MY FAMILY would not have burned in Aushchwitz.”

It was a day of powerful statements, and this was the one that greeted us as we arrived in Kibbutz Ha-Ogen for the first Israeli conference about conscientious objection or nonparticipation in military service. In a country where the army is regarded as not only an existential necessity but also a revered holy cow, it is no wonder that a group of ten kibbutz members refused to allow us to meet on their premises.

The group of kibbutzniks, some — but not all — aging Holocaust survivors, shouted out their pain as we trickled in: “How dare you hold this discussion in our hall”; “Your sons are not more precious than ours”; “You are trying to turn cowardice into ideology”; and “My whole family burned in Auschwitz.” In Israel, probably like elsewhere, one doesn’t argue with Holocaust survivors. Although the powers that be at the kibbutz had agreed to rent us the hall months earlier, we had no wish to defy this angry minority.

This was the apt beginning to a day of strong feelings and efforts to rethink — to get past the veils of convention and myth shrouding the issues of militarism in Israeli society and service in the army. The conference was organized by a group of courageous independent women, some of whom were veterans of the peace movement and others for whom the road to this conference was paved by a year’s participation in a women’s consciousness-raising group. For some the inspiration for asking these forbidden questions was their sons’ impending conscription into the army . . . and the next war.

The conference left the kibbutz and reorganized itself in the backyard of one of the organizers, where a hundred and fifty of us sat on plastic chairs and strained to hear the unamplified voices of speakers competing with nearby whizzing of cars and helicopters.

It opened with testimonies of young men discharged from the army on grounds of “unfitness.” These monologues, read by women, presented the reality of nonparticipation in military service as an act of conscientious choice, often grounded in ideological objections to the current role of the

GILA SVIRSKY is a veteran Israeli peace and human rights activist.



Gila Sversky

Israeli army. As there are no legal provisions for conscientious objection in Israel, this is often the only way open for those who object on ideological grounds — to allow themselves to be declared “unfit,” with all the negative repercussions this may later have on jobs and lives.

Four young men and women then presented the stories of the roads they had traveled through the ordeal of refusing to serve. Fahed Mu’adi, a Druze university student, described how he offered the army two reasons for not serving: pacifism and refusal as a Palestinian to fight his brother Arabs. “Inappropriate for army duty” read his exemption when it finally arrived, after he had served time for his beliefs, “Which is what I had been telling them all along,” said Fahed. The Druze have the reputation of being loyal and fierce fighters in Israel’s army, but Fahed reported that over fifty percent now refuse to serve, and the number is growing. Fahed brought

greetings from the Druze women of the Galilee, especially from his mother who, he told us, had instantly responded “Well done!” when he first called to say he was in jail. Said Fahed, “I got my mother’s spirit and I hope to pass it on to my children.”

Elly Gozansky, son of the much respected Tomar Gozansky, female Knesset member from the Hadash party, opened by complimenting the women’s peace movement for being able to do what men in that country never manage to. Elly noted that he is not a pacifist, but a “selective refuser” — refusing to engage in any act that preserves the occupation. This is the position of the Yesh Gvul movement to which he and several present are active. Elly believes that such selective refusal is more difficult to engage in but ultimately more effective than absolute refusal to serve in the army. Selective refusal, he explained, is a powerful combination of conscience and political message. The message according to Elly: There is a limit to obedience, and every soldier must set this limit for him/herself.

“I refuse to harm any living creature,” said animal rights activist Ori Stav, explaining his decision not to serve: “When confronted with war, the very least we can do is refuse to participate.” Ori is one of the only two men we are aware of who have actually been discharged on the grounds of conscientious objection.

Orna Cohen, the woman in the group, described her decision. Although the law does allow women not to serve for reasons of conscience, Orna was discharged as “unfit.” Orna today serves as a lawyer with Adala, the Association for Palestinian Civil Rights in Israel.

Finally, Yuval Lotem described his selective refusal when he found the unit — in which he was an officer — deep in Lebanon on the outskirts of Beirut. For Yuval, it was his understanding of the Holocaust that led to his desire to set himself apart from collective behavior that is patently unacceptable.

The audience was a portrait in attentiveness while these quiet, soft-spoken young people described the thought process, the jail terms, the rejection — or support — of families. No one said it but I recalled the words of critics of such behavior: Sensitive young people are needed inside the army to restrain the others, not removing themselves from the arena of action. And then the words of Mahatma Gandhi in reply: Noncooperation with evil is a sacred duty.

After lunch, the audience broke up into small discussion groups. My group was heavy with stories of broken lives after the death of a loved one in army service. It opened with the bitter monologue by a woman in her fifties whose brother, her only sibling, was killed in the army when she was fourteen. “He died in the attack on Green Island [part of Egypt],”

she said. “Six boys killed for what? For nothing. Today Green Island is a tourist center where Israelis go diving . . . ‘Grief and failure,’ as Brenner wrote, that’s what my family’s life has been ever since. Grief and failure.” She described the special status and indulgence granted families of dead soldiers to say what they feel. “Don’t wait to earn that special status,” she warned. Haya told the story of her two brothers killed in the Independence War and Edna spoke of her son who had committed suicide in the army. This, they said, is what motivated them to attend the conference.

Some of us who know Hava Keller, the veteran activist, asked her to tell the story of her son Adam, who had a personal history of civil disobedience from the moment he realized that he had a problem with army service. In one of his early acts of protest as a soldier on a tank base, Adam painted “IDF Soldiers: Refuse to be occupiers and oppressors!” on a hundred and fifty tanks and the officers’ latrine. He also pasted “Down with the occupation” stickers on the tanks and posted a leaflet about the future Palestinian state on the base bulletin board. Needless to say, Adam spent a long time in prison for this and other good deeds. (“The army has no sense of humor,” quipped Hava).

Two years later, Adam sent a letter informing the prime minister that he resigned from the army. His resignation, as you may have guessed, was not accepted. But the army psychologist wanted to be helpful and sought some evidence of irrationality to justify an early release. “Do you hear voices?” he prompted. To which Adam brightly replied, “Yes, I hear the voice of history.”

Later that day we discussed, among many topics, the thin line between sedition and advocating conscientious objection; how Israeli society educated for militarism and a power ethos — in schools, religious holidays, youth groups; Israel’s history of war resisters; and the successful experience of South African whites to protesting apartheid by means of challenging compulsory draft laws.

Finally, I offer three general observations arising from the conference: We are surrounded by articulate, bold and courageous women and men who inspire us by words and deed. We are beginning to understand how militarism permeates every aspect of our lives. So hard to see when it is so close! And finally, the conference marks a new stage of development for the women’s peace movement in Israel.

We no longer need to educate ourselves about the evils of oppressing another people. We are now talking about another strategy: refusal to cooperate with evil. Some will embark upon this scary new path, and others will not. But none of us will ever regard conscientious objection as an act of betrayal. ☆

— Winter 1999

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Naomi Goodman

Pacifism, Not Passivism; Feminism, Not Pseudo-Machismo

PACIFISM AND FEMINISM HAVE BEEN CONSIDERED antithetical ideas. An historian, Bernice Carroll, of the University of Illinois, at the meetings of the American Historical Association last winter, discussed the subject by saying that today's activists were confronted with the old question of "whether to sacrifice pacifism for feminism or feminism for pacifism." Yet nonviolence and feminism are defined as sister aspirations by the Gathering of Women in the Nonviolent Movement, sponsored jointly by the International Fellowship of Reconciliation and the War Resisters' International, the proceedings of which were recently published. The initial statement of the Gathering pointed out that there are "links between feminism and nonviolence — we are feminists because we are nonviolent and vice versa — but there is a generally hostile attitude in the women's movement towards 'declared nonviolence' . . . Acting nonviolently does not mean losing our newfound strength or returning to a position of weakness. On the contrary, it means discovering our *own new* and liberating ways of working which do not imitate traditional male structures: small groups, coordinated autonomy, respect for and caring about each individual (not just their politics.)"

I have quoted at length because the statement expresses my personal view so well. Perhaps the contradiction referred to above comes from differing definitions of feminism which thus lead to different goals. If the goal of the woman's movement is equal acceptance in the present male dominated society, then feminists celebrate such victories as women being commissioned in the regular army, participating in maneuvers and being considered for combat duty, while regarding the dull and unsatisfactory jobs held by most men as desirable achievements for women. If the goal of feminism is a life-oriented world in which women's sensitivity and nurturing interests become acceptable attributes of both sexes, the attitudes of nonviolence and pacifism (not passivism), are basic values for a non-exploitative society in which neither sex dominates and aggression is no longer a survival skill.

Perhaps some of the feminists who are not pacifists need to realize that pacifism is not passive acceptance of fate or personal

NAOMI GOODMAN, a former JPF president, was a feminist historian, writer and poet.

Pacifism is not spineless acceptance of whatever will be, but practice of the nonviolent method of combating evil and misplaced force. In its essence, pacifism is a nonviolent way of life which recognizes the religious truth that means and ends are the same. Thus it is as appropriate for the woman's movement as for any human beings.

— N.G.

avoidance of conflict; rather it is active acceptance of the strength and responsibilities of nonviolence. Pacifism is not spineless acceptance of whatever will be, but practice of the nonviolent method of combating evil and misplaced force. In its essence, pacifism is a nonviolent way of life which recognizes the religious truth that means and ends are the same. Thus it is as appropriate for the women's movement as for any human being.

To those who regard such aims as impractical ideals, we can reply that the goals are indeed long-term and that the approach will condition the results and affect the participants. Also, the extraordinary changes in attitudes and actions, by women and towards women, which are the result of the women's movement, have come surprisingly fast even recognizing that progress is built on the struggles of the early suffragettes and earlier feminist pioneers. These changes are qualitative — a large-scale consciousness raising. Is it too much to link a realization of every individual, regardless of his or her gender, with an appreciation of the sanctity of every life, regardless of nationality? That we women can no longer accept the popular male attitudes of machismo and violence?

Feminism to me is a logical and meaningful extension of my concerns as a pacifist and a believer in nonviolence. Pacifism for me has been clarified and enriched by feminist understanding. If the potential of women is to be realized, then true equality will be needed. If the potential of individuals is to be realized, then violence — as organized into war, institutionalized in society and practiced in private — will also have to end. ☆

— Autumn 1977

Richard Chaim Schneider

Civil Courage

ON A LOVELY, MILD SUMMER EVENING A BARE YEAR before the fall of the The Wall, I found myself sitting in a Munich coffee house with a young journalist. We talked about art and literature, God and the universe, and — of course — about Germans and Jews. It was that moment in German political developments when the “Republicans” (the neo-Nazi party) were winning victory after victory in local elections and when some people began to worry that they might actually achieve national power. My friend hinted at that concern but added passionately that this time the Nazis wouldn’t just walk in because this time we would fight them in the streets. I responded to his idealistic readiness to do battle with the slight amendment. “Not we,” I said. “You!” My friend was startled and began to argue after the realization that what I meant was that I ought not make the mistake of setting myself aside as a Jew; after all, he said, I was a German citizen and we both had a duty of fighting the Nazis in the streets, shoulder to shoulder. I was not persuaded by his argument and responded that it was the German people who were called upon — not I — to demonstrate that it was prepared to defend the democratic institutions that had been imposed upon it.

In the most casual way, the German people have become accustomed to the images of rioting neo-Nazis, or ransacked refugee centers, or of the burned children of foreign workers. Their discomfort is rationalized with the most banal arguments: these outbreaks were phenomena of ongoing social change; they were transitory and marginal symptoms of the dislocations of German reunification. Solemn appeals of Federal President von Weizsaecker and Chancellor Kohl consisted of misleading images of a secure present: The Republic is solidly established on democratic principles; the Government fights with determination against racism and prejudice; do not worry, everything is under control. The fact that people who had found political asylum in the Federal Republic were attacked last Christmas Eve was seen as an annoying exception and did not diminish the general festivities.

German-born RICHARD CHAIM SCHNEIDER lived in Munich in 1992. A version of the article appeared in Die Zeit. This article was translated by the late Henry Schwarzschild.



Richard Chaim Schneider

I do not presume to judge the civil courage of others. But ever since that conversation, and especially given the radically new circumstances that now exist in Germany, I have been wondering who that “we” is. Does he mean the German people? God know there is a dearth of civil courage in this society.

And now about “we,” the Jews? How about me, born in Germany and still living there? Where am I? How about my civil courage?

The old dilemma seems to be reviving, the old wound that will not scab over, much less heal. That paradoxical identity of a Jew in Germany says (with what justification?) that it should be my task (or the task of Jews as such) to devote body and soul to the defense of others persecuted in post-Holocaust Germany. Surely in some way I am a part of that diffuse “we” of German citizens — my passport gives me

the privilege. But when even the Social Democratic Chairman Bjoem Engholm talks about “Jewish fellow citizens,” I wonder whether Jews are really a part of the whole. In this society, racism is public. And as such it relates to me. And therefore I ought to be concerned about preserving democracy in the reunited Germany. But this thought precisely defines the paradoxes of the German-Jewish existence: I would demonstrate my civil courage, I would offer resistance and solidarity — not as a citizen of this country but out of the most self-regarding motives imaginable: as a Jew. In other words, preventive survival instinct masquerading as civil courage. A cynical motive, and a vain one in the bargain, as history plainly teaches.

Have we postwar German Jews not learned that Jewish resistance was useless? That Germany, typically enough, eradicated the best, the most courageous, the most assimilated Jews from the national entity? And were we not given an alternative that supersedes any impulse to such senseless undertakings as resistance? Isn't it the state of Israel that provides a guarantee for survival? But doesn't the existence of Israel provide the excuse for avoiding one's duty as a German citizen, one's democratic commitment to one's country, even the demand of one's conscience? In the past few weeks, a woman friend of mine has been verbally assaulted several times by street rowdies. She is from Israel, of Sephardic descent, and looks Levantine, but this tenured academician has lived in the Federal Republic for twenty years and is technically also among the “we” of German citizens.

“You foreign pig, go home,” they shouted into her alien-looking face. People observing the scene kept on walking, looking the other way, did not intervene. “And that was the worst part of it,” she said later. “Suddenly you stand there and you're no longer a part of the whole. You're a pariah!” The fright is still in her bones; for the first time in Germany, she is afraid. As a foreigner, mind you; not as a Jew. And I am supposed to take comfort from that? The accident of my looking “European,” of my being able to “pass” as a German is an ambiguous fortune, one that hardly suggests that I should trust being an untroubled member of the “we” of citizens of Germany.

Is it arrogance, therefore, if I expect Germans to raise a loud protest against the recent senseless and brutal attacks on the people who look different? The Gulf War demonstrated that large masses of protestors can be organized in Germany for the right cause. The hysteria, which was then widespread, awakened dormant energies, but they were born largely out of the fear that one's own wellbeing might be at stake. Not concern for Kuwaitis, certainly not concern for Israel, elicited the public uproar that extended from Hamburg

to Munich and all across this land. The dishonesty of the peace demonstrations lay precisely in the fact that they had nothing to do with civil courage, less even with readiness to defend democratic values. People were in the streets not for others but themselves. And you want me to imitate that?

I easily confess that it is an illusory vision that hundreds of thousands of Germans might rally around the encampments of asylums for refugees, that it is crazy to expect a Günter Grass or a Gerhard Zwerenz and any one of the many others who claimed for decades that they were unlike the older generation, to stand guard at the gates of the refugee encampments. But my absurd hope was nurtured year after year by the whining assurances that in postwar Germany there had been no occasion to prove that people had changed, that they indeed had learned something from history.

Just recently, a well-known author severely criticized me for not having read with sufficient emotion an article in a German magazine about the appalling conditions under which dissenting intellectuals were living in Croatia and Serbia. I surmise that her sympathy with a suffering humanity stands in precise ratio to her geographic distance from the suffering. I asked her whether she was aware that a Munich refugee housing project was subjected to an arson attack several times within a few days — and what was she going to do about that? I am still waiting for an answer.

Rhetorical battles such as this one seem to me symptomatic of the moral climate in Germany and impel me to differentiate between “us” and “them.” And they suggest something of the tragedy that is implied in the fate of being a postwar German Jew. But all this may also contain a key to the present situation for Jews — and for me. Can we dissociate ourselves from responsibility for other human beings, just because we live in Germany? Isn't it civil courage and solidarity that moves to overcome the differences between “us” and “them”? Of course it is. Yet it seems to me that my efforts on behalf of the endangered minorities is in a significant way a protest against the passivity of the silent German majority and against the paralyzed inaction of German politicians. And it is an act of Jewish, of human, emancipation. Chaim Weizmann used to remind us that it is easier to take a Jew out of the ghetto than it is to take the ghetto out of the Jew. Such Jews as are left in Germany illustrate the point. With few exceptions, Jews lie low so as not to waken sleeping dogs. I consider that foolish and inhuman. It is for that reason that “we” must do something. That gives Germans no leave to remain passive. And only then, maybe, can we take the battle to the streets arm in arm. ☆

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