

**CALIFORNIA; BELIEFS; Of the Conflict in Sudan, Rabbi Vows 'Never Again'; In observing High Holy Days, leader sees parallel between the Holocaust and reports of genocide in Darfur. He urges Jews to 'act globally.'; [HOME EDITION]**

Larry B. Stammer. **Los Angeles Times**. Los Angeles, Calif.: Sep 18, 2004. pg. B.2

**Abstract (Summary)**

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"In the calendar you'll notice that Islam begins with Muhammad's flight from Mecca to Medina, and Christianity with the birth of Jesus. Judaism begins with the birth of the universe," he said. The major figure in the creation story is Adam, who was not a Jew. Schulweis said the word is derived from adamah, which means "earth." No Jews are mentioned in the first 11 chapters of Genesis, he continued. Cain and Abel were not Jews. Neither was Noah.

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As Jews entered the High Holy Days this week in the midst of reports of genocide in Sudan, one of the nation's leading rabbis is exhorting Jews to make good a vow born out of the ashes of the Holocaust: "Never again!"

The appeal by Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis of Valley Beth Shalom in Encino may sound more like a theme for Yam Hashoah -- Holocaust Remembrance Day -- than for Rosh Hashana, the Jewish New Year, which began at sundown Wednesday. But Schulweis said the connection between them is clear and compelling.

He is calling for creation of a new commission of Jews, to be known as Jewish World Watch, to actively monitor reports of atrocities worldwide and speak out against injustice. He hopes the idea will spread from his Conservative congregation to others.

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How did Schulweis get from the Jewish New Year to concern about genocide? Despite Judaism's past characterization as a "tribal religion," the story of Rosh Hashana marks the faith as a world religion -- with world concerns, he said. Unlike Passover which commemorates the Israelites' escape from slavery in Egypt, Rosh Hashana is unrelated to any Jewish event.

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Schulweis said that when he went to college Judaism was seen simply as a monotheistic religion, but one that was decidedly provincial and concerned with its own people.

"Rosh Hashana overcomes that," he said. It celebrates the birth of the universe and the birth of humanity.

"To be a Jew is to think big. To be a Jew is to think globally. To be a Jew is to act globally. To be a Jew is to love God, who is global," he told his congregants. There are moral and ethical consequences that flow from that assertion, he said.

Schulweis is not alone in his thinking.

Rabbi David Ellenson, president of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, said: "Rosh Hashana is a holiday in which we begin to reflect very seriously on our conduct. It beckons to us to consider our place as Jews in the larger world."

Rabbi Elliot Dorff, rector and distinguished professor of philosophy at the University of Judaism in Los Angeles, said Jewish activism and concern for others beyond the Jewish community has long been established.

For example, a Los Angeles Times Poll in 1988 reported that 50% of Jews polled cited "a commitment to social equality" as being the characteristic most important to their Jewish identity, while 17% cited religious observance and 17% support for Israel.

Earlier this week, the American Jewish World Service reported raising \$250,000 for humanitarian efforts in the Darfur province of western Sudan.

Separately, Rabbi Lee Bycel, former dean of Hebrew Union College- Jewish Institute of Religion, will travel to Chad, where an estimated 200,000 Sudanese have fled, and will join the refugees in observing Yom Kippur, a day of fasting that will begin at sundown Friday.

"On this fast day of ours, I will fast with people who do not fast by choice, who may never 'break the fast,' "Bycel said. He also hopes to raise \$75,000 for food and medical supplies through a Los Angeles group known as MAZON, a national non-profit on Bundy Drive that allocates donations from the Jewish community to prevent or alleviate hunger among people of all faiths and backgrounds.

It was perhaps inevitable in a time of terror and genocide that reflections of the Shoah, the Hebrew word for Holocaust, would weigh on the minds of rabbis and Jews in view of events in Sudan.

Judaism's 10 High Holy Days are called the Days of Awe. It is a time when Jews are asked to reflect on their lives over the last year and to ask forgiveness of others and of God before God seals his judgments in the Book of Life on Yom Kippur.

"I think there is a worry that at least some Jews may be too worried about our own people and not worried about others," Dorff said. "Judaism does have a very strong universalist strain to it. But it also has a very strong particularist strain to.... The entire tradition is a balancing act between those two strains."

The immediate concern, Schulweis said, are estimates by the U.N. World Health Organization that 10,000 displaced people are dying from violence and disease each month in Darfur, largely at the hands of government-backed militias. The U.N. agency has said 50,000 have died so far in the 19 month conflict, although the Sudanese government has called the estimate exaggerated. About 1.2 million people have fled their villages to escape the violence in Darfur.

"I say, 'Never again?' Was this vow only to protect Jews from genocide?" Schulweis asked his congregants. "Don't I remember what you and I said and preached and taught and heard: 'Where are the nations of the world? Where are the churches of the world? Where are the priests, pastors, the bishops and the pope?' And will my children and grandchildren ask of me, 'And where was the synagogue, where were the rabbis, and where were you during Rwanda, when genocide took place in 1994? Or the slaughter of the Tutsis by the Hutu?' "

**[illustration]**

Caption: PHOTO: SPEAKING OUT: "We wish to raise our voice because we global Jews know that silence is lethal," said Rabbi Harold Schulweis, preaching to Valley Beth Shalom against global injustices.; PHOTOGRAPHER: Lawrence K. Ho Los Angeles Times

Credit: Times Staff Writer