

**POST HOLOCAUST RECOVERY:**  
**An Appeal For Moral Education**

by Harold M. Schulweis

The Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Hassidism, was haunted by a strange dream. In the dream the very incarnation of Evil appeared in the image of a dark heart seething malevolence. All the cruelties of the world were concentrated in that sinister form. Frightened and repelled, the Baal Shem Tov clenched his fist and pounded furiously against the evil heart, meaning to kill it. Suddenly, he heard the sobbing of an infant from within it. He stopped, amazed that within such evil innocence could live.

The dream is rooted in the cabalistic masterpiece the Zohar, which states that when God came to create the world and reveal what was hidden in the depths, light and darkness were entwined with each other; holy and profane, good and bad impulses cleaved to one another.

And what are we who know this commingling to do? Our task is the act of differentiation, the disentanglement of good and evil, the search for the sparks of decency buried within the coarse husks, sparks which when gathered together form a torch that can light up the dark corridors. The Baal Shem Tov heard the infant's cry, and in that cry hope was restored.

The Holocaust is our nightmare from which we struggle to awake. It intrudes on our sleep and spills over into our waking moments. The Holocaust is the dominant psychic reality in our lives. It lies hidden in the hoarse conversations with our children about mixed marriage, in our arguments over the low fertility rates of Jews, in our debates over support of the State of Israel, in our appeals for Jewish unity, in our fund-raising -- whatever the Jewish cause. The Holocaust shapes our stance toward the world and our self-understanding. It clings to our skin and

penetrates beneath our skin, motivating our agenda and our policies. How could it be otherwise? Who could expect that a people that lost two out of every five of its members -- 40% of its community -- should emerge unscathed, unscarred, fully normal?

We are a battered people still working out our shock, our sense of abandonment, resentment and disillusionment. Beneath surface tranquillity, seething angers and anxieties persist. We are an abused people still working out our grief, still in mourning.

It is not an easy mourning for us, and not easy to transmit its meaning to our children. I know this as a father and a rabbi. Part of me understands that my children must know everything -- the charred skeletons, the mass graves, the green and yellow smoke from the chimneys, the diabolic experiments of Mengele. I want them to know it all not only because a feigned ignorance would betray the martyrdom of our family, but because I want my children to understand me: my anxieties, my restlessness, my sensitivities, my paranoia.

But another part of me cautions against unwittingly laying a stone upon their hearts, crushing them with melancholy, filling them with a paralyzing cynicism. How we are to master the trauma, how we are to confront the world, how we are to exact meaning and morale from our nightmare so that we and our children can live with wisdom, courage, and hope -- that is the depth agenda for the post-Holocaust generation. For this internal mastery we need to apply Jewish therapeutic wisdom to our collective loss. How does the tradition guide us through our personal losses, our private mourning? When there's a death in the family, the tradition counsels us to "hold on and to let go." On the surface of things contradictory counsel, but upon reflection this bonding and loosening

provide a profound key to our healing.

To hold on means to cherish every gesture, kindness, embrace of those we loved. Every recollection has its own after-life, its own immortality of influence in our lives. Kaddish, yahrzeit, yizkor are the ritual bonds to our significant past.

At the same time, we are urged to let go: to rent the garment of the mourners, cut the fringes of the tallit (prayer shawl) of the deceased, lower the casket, return the dust to the earth from which life was drawn. These are the loosening rituals that signify closure. Mourners are like aerialists on a swinging trapeze, letting go one ring to catch hold of another. Letting go in order to hold on, a dialectic of mourning.

Holding on and letting go means that the "shivah" days of mourning are seven and no more; the Kaddish recited eleven months and no more. As our sages observed, "He who mourns more than is necessary does not mourn for the deceased" but for someone else or something else, perhaps oneself. At the end of the shivah, the mourners are bidden to rise from the low bench, to leave their home and to walk around the neighborhood, to re-enter the world.

Memory is an ambiguous energy. For the sake of health, it must be used to sustain us, to help us walk "through," not remain "in," the valley of the shadow of death. Life-sustaining memories are selected with the healing knowledge that those we love loved us, and, loving us, wish for the restoration of our will to live.

We can do no better in working out our collective mourning. Holding on, we sift through the cremated ashes of our tragic past to salvage some sparks of decency: the courage to resist, the will to live, the talent to choose. But of what are we to let go?

We must let go of those false and dangerous interpretations that

extract the wrong lessons for ourselves and our children from the tragedy of the Holocaust. Let go the perception that sees in the Holocaust confirmation of a primitive fissure in the human species, a primordial split between "them" and "us"; between "them," the perennial persecutors and, and "we" the eternal victims; between the children of darkness who carry the genes of Ishmael, Esau and Amalek, and us, the eternal scapegoats, the hated descendants of Isaac, Jacob and Israel. Dichotomous thinking exploits the catastrophe of the Holocaust to vindicate a schismatic interpretation of Jewish history.

The polarization of humanity is not the wise and reverent exercise of Jewish memory. It is rather the imposition of a deeply divisive metaphysics that visits the mind-set of a Manichaeian dualism upon the whole of Jewish history, past, present and future. It is bound to a belief in the eternal repetition of the hatred of the Jew wherein every anti-Semitic event as a confirmation of an original curse. It is our version of original sin, an anti-Jewish malediction that is seen to lie in the very blood of our existence. It's maxim is "ever again." Jews were, are, and will be hated by the world. Every and any sign of philo-Semitism is either dismissed as masking baser motivations or simply not registered in Jewish memory. Only the gullible are taken in by the report of good news. The truly wise know the split nature of human history.

As the lyrics of a popular Israeli song in the 60's had it, "The whole world is against us. This is an ancient tale. Well, if the whole world is against us, to hell with the whole world."

This sentiment does not properly memorialize Jewish history. On the contrary, it endows anti-semitism with immortality. The Jewish historian Professor Salo Baron, waged a long intellectual war against what he termed

the "lachrymose conception of Jewish history," the one-sided reading of Jewish history as exclusively one of "leidensgeschichte," a history of suffering. Its focus on the negative eclipses the positive, creative, cultural and spiritual activities in Jewish history. I add to that caveat my fear that Jewish history, past and future is being bent to fit that pessimistic polarization.

It is not difficult to understand the Jewish quarrel with the world, particularly after the Holocaust. Who of us can not appreciate the rage and disillusionment of a battered people? But for the sake of our collective health, we must be concerned about the disequilibrium of the spirit it leaves in its wake, the imbalance that cripples our morale. That metaphysical view must be let go because its fatalism runs counter to Judaism and is dangerous. It encourages the self-fulfilling prophecy that predicts, "scratch a gentile and find the mortal enemy;" scratch a Jew and find the perennial victim. The book of Numbers records the irony of such self-fulfilling prophecy. "We were in our own sight as grasshoppers and so were we in their sight."

The metaphysics of fatalism leads to a justification of the growing Jewish isolationism. For if the whole world is contaminated, then there is nothing to be done, no one to cultivate, no alliances to be formed. What is left is to withdraw into ourselves. That isolationism means the abandonment of Jewish statesmanship and a cynical disregard for public opinion.

Some use the split thinking of "them" and "us" to scare Jews into insulating themselves. But who would choose to live long in the leprous circle of the damned? The dichotomy of "them" and "us" inevitably leads to the scandalous divisiveness within "us." Split thinking may begin with "them" and "us," but it ends with internal polarization, incivility and

the solipsism of Jewish cults.

We owe our children more than a legacy of isolation and basic distrust. We owe them the confidence that marks the great Jewish institutions: that the human being is created in the divine image; that human beings are potentially good; that the prophetic faith in the possibility of a brighter future enables us to break out of the morose cycle of eternal recurrence.

All well and good. But where in the face of the Holocaust is there any empirical evidence of goodness? Where in the heart of evil is there the small sound of the infant's cry, the remotest trace of benevolence, the slightest record of altruism? There is sacred evidence, hard, authenticated witness to a powerful phenomenon that remains largely unattended, unrecorded, untaught, unused. There are in our midst witnesses to goodness who must be encouraged to come forth and to testify. But to discover goodness, to learn to use it for our recovery, we have to look, we have to want to look. There is no immaculate perception in vision. We have to pay attention to events and persons buried in anonymity or hidden in obscure footnotes?

I have met gentiles, Christian men and women, flesh and blood human beings, from all walks of life and from every country that the Nazis occupied, who risked their lives, and the lives of their families, and lost their possessions to hide, protect, feed members of our Jewish family. I have examined the testimony of survivors who are alive today because of ordinary people who acted in extraordinary fashion to hide Jews sought out by Nazi predators and collaborators, to hide them in closets, attics, barnyards, pig-sties, sewers; who lied to authorities, falsified passports, and lost their fortunes. Not saints, these rescuers, but human beings who

transcended the environs of prejudice and contempt and shielded Jews out of care, concern, responsibility, love. The experience of these rescuers and the testimony of the survivors -- the empirical reality of goodness -- have affected my theology, my morale, and my understanding of what must be done to create a healthier society.

I want my children to know the entire story -- the killers of the dream, the sadists and torturers of innocence. But equally I want them to know these significant others. I want them to be exposed as I have been to precious persons such as Alex and Mila Roslan, two Polish Christians who hid three Jewish children in their small home throughout the Holocaust years. I want them to hear as I myself heard from the lips of Yaakov and David Gilat, the surviving brothers hidden by the Roslans, how the Roslans made themselves "as hiding places from the wind and shelters from the tempests; as rivets of water in dry places; as shadows of a great rock in a weary land" (Isaiah 32). I want them to hear how, when scarlet fever broke out and hit the children, Yurek Roslan, age 10, was taken to the Warsaw hospital where no Jewish person could enter; how Yurek carefully divided the powdered medicine given to him by the physicians so that the Jewish youngsters at home could be treated; how when Yaakov Gilat required surgery, the Roslans hollowed out their sofa and smuggled him into the hospital for an operation; how the family sold their home and repeatedly changed their residence to avoid detection of their magnificent crime. I would remind my children that while these activities were going on the Polish population was warned by the German army that offering a Jew lodging, transportation was punishable by death.

What do the Roslans mean to me as a Jew? What claims do they have upon my memory?

The Roslans were not alone. Should our children not know of the

Polish sewer workers who hid seventeen Jews for fourteen months in the rat infested sewers of Lvov?

-- of the courage of village in Holland in which every non-Jewish family concealed at least one Jew?

-- of the citizens of Le Chambon Sur Lignon who stood up to the Vichy police, the German army, and the Gestapo and saved 5,000 Jews from destruction? Philip Hallie, in his Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed, describes the arrest of a lone Jew in Le Chambon who is placed in a bus to be deported to the Nazi camps. The villagers lines up and each of them reached out through the open window to give him gifts: an apple, a candy bar, a newspaper.

-- of Demiter Peshev and the Bulgarian Orthodox church and Sobranie, the Bulgarian parliament, which steadfastly defied the Nazis and refused to deport 50,000 Bulgarian Jews? Of Bishop Kiril, who wired King Boris warning that he would mount campaign of civil disobedience and would himself lie down on the railroad tracks before the trains would deport Jews to death camps.

-- of General Roatta and the Italian Army and the Italian diplomats who, in defiance of Nazi orders, rescued tens of thousands of Jews in Croatia and southern France?

-- of Paul Gruninger, the Swiss police official; and Aristedes de Sousa Mendes, the Portuguese consul; and Sempo Sugihara, the Japanese Consul stationed in Kracow -- all three of whom defied the Nazis and their respective governments, lost their positions, and their fortunes, and were publicly humiliated for their acts of altruism? These three alone account for the rescue of 16,500 hunted and persecuted Jews.

Why should our children hear only curses of the Jew-haters and not the



blessings of those who rescued our people? Why are accounts of betrayal and persecution the rightful legacy to leave our children, but not the memories of loyalty and love? Why only the tears of fear and hate and not the tears of love and hope?

There is something tragically wrong that our children know the names of Eichmann, Himmler and Klaus Barbie but not the names or exploits of the Christian families who hid Anne Frank and her family in the attic for two and a half years. Consult the Encyclopedia Judaica in the entry dealing with Anne Frank and no mention is found of the names of the rescuers, nor what they did, nor what became of them after they were caught. You will find them and their acts dismissed with seven words: "They were kept alive by friendly gentiles."

The anonymity of the numberless rescuers, given the moral heroism of their deeds, is a sad state of affairs. With all of the Holocaust centers now in existence, there has been no systematic study of Christian-Jewish relations during World War II, and no active search for these precious spirits of our time. This judgment has been independently expressed by Professor Yehudah Bauer of the Hebrew University, Professor Sybil Milton, formerly of the Leo Baeck Institute, and Dr. Ivo Herzer of the Riverside Research Institute. Why should the name of villainy be immortalized and that of the righteous lie buried in anonymity?

We need Beatte Klarsfelds and Simon Wiesenthals to search out the rescuers of our people with the same zeal and energy with which the murders of our people are properly hunted down and brought to justice. Jewish institutions, Jewish historians, Jewish scholars must not allow the history of this phenomenon to be overlooked or to sink to the bottom of some footnotes. And have these rescuers no claim upon us? Should we not know where they are today, how they fare, who protects them, who befriends them?

Why the reluctance to focus on rescuers is based on a number of concerns. Some suggest that speaking of heroic altruists lessens the tragedy of the Holocaust. I think not. There are no heroes without villains. There are no Jeanne Damanns, no Herman Graebes without the Mengeles and Himmlers. The ordeals of the rescuers can illuminate the darkness of the cave which many fear to enter. We may more readily help many face the evil by using the activity of the rescuers to sustain their morale. Some non-Jews turn away from the holocaust because they cannot bear the accusation against the Christian world. But I am less interested in forcing on them a collective mea culpa for their forebears, less interested in producing feelings of brooding guilt that frequently prove to be counterproductive, than in presenting them with Christian heroes, models of behavior, to be respected, honored and emulated. Let them know the moral heroism of the priest Bernard Lichtenberg of St. Heldwig's Cathedral who insisted on joining the Jews deported to the Jewish ghetto of Lodz and, punished by the Nazis, died on way to Dachau; and of Father Marie Benoit, who turned his monastery into a rescue agency issuing baptismal certificates and passports to Jews, who in Rome was known as Padre Benedetti and by those he protected "Father of the Jews." Let them know of the moral courage of Cardinal Saliege, the archbishop of Toulouse, and pastors Herman Maas and Herman Greuber. Memory is for the sake of the future. I agree with the historian Yosef Yerushalmi who, in addressing Christians, concluded "Not by your ancestors but by your actions will you be judged."

There are some who resist this concern for the rescuers because the numbers are too few. How many rescuers were there? Estimates range from 50,000 to 500,000. Whatever the number, there were too few. There are

always too few moral heroes in history. But let me hasten to add (a) that we do not know because we have not searched and (b) that quantity is no measure of moral quality. We are not dealing with sacks of potatoes. We are dealing with life-and-death choices that must not be trivialized by the numbers game. In our Judaic tradition we are taught that for the sake of thirty-six righteous persons the world is sustained; for the sake of ten righteous persons Sodom and Gomorrah would not have been destroyed; and that the saving of one person is tantamount to saving the entire world. Many worlds were saved by rescuers. Speaking of numbers, a Dutch Christian rescuer used the expression "the conspiracy of goodness." "Do you think," he said, "that I could have hidden that Jewish family without the knowledge and cooperation of the grocer, the milkman, the policeman?" If evil has many faces, goodness has many forms. Goodness must not be whittled down by numbers.

Goodness must not be trivialized. At a recent Holocaust conference, someone seriously asked "Was it so hard to help a Jew?" To hide a Jew was a matter of life and death for the protector and his or her family. On January 29, 1943, the S.S. executed fifteen Poles in the village of Wierbicz, members of those families who saved Jews. One of those fifteen souls was a two-year-old child.

-- Ninety-six Polish men were murdered by the Germans in the village of Biala for hiding and feeding Jews.

-- In Stary Ciepielow, the S.S. pushed twenty-three Poles, men, women, children, and infants into a barn and burned down the barn with all of them inside for their violation of the edict proscribing protection of the Jews.

Goodness is a powerful mirror. Goodness challenges us in the way that evil does not. Compared to Eichmann, I am a saint; but compared to the Roslans, how do I measure up? Would I unlock the door? Would I take into

my home this sick man, this pregnant woman, this frightened family -- would I keep them for days, weeks, months, years, knowing that discovery of my act by the Nazi predators would mean the imprisonment, torture and death of my family? How do I buy food in my impoverished community? How do I call a doctor for someone who doesn't exist, or remove refuse or bury a body without detection while outside the informer bribed by vodka and cigarettes looks on?

Our people possesses sacred testimony, a double memory of the worst and the best: the memory of indescribable evil, and the memory of the precious human capacity to do good.

Our people possess valuable information for the character education of a post-Holocaust generation. The behavior and circumstance of these rescuers offer the deepest refutation of the Eichmann alibi that there was no alternative to passive complicity with the murderous regimes, and refutation of the Waldheim argument that knowing of atrocities is not committing atrocities. Through their lives we know that there are alternatives to the cog-in-the-wheel rationalizations. Through their lives, the rescuers have demonstrated that to know is no cognitive sport, that to know and to do nothing is to be guilty of standing idly before the shedding of innocent blood. Even in hell there were men and women who would not bend to the threats and seductions of the demonic.

We Jews have testimony to offer an embittered, cynical world. The behavior of tens of thousands of rescuers balances the lopsided bias of religious and secular sources that judge human nature to be nothing but nasty, brutish, and short. The naturalist George Santayana wrote: "In human nature generous impulses are occasional or reversible; they are spent in childhood, in dreams, in extremities, they are often weak or soured in

old age. They form amiable interludes like tearful sentiments in a ruffian, or they are pleasant self-deceptive hypocrisies acted out, like civility to strangers because such is in society the path of least resistance. Strain the situation, however, dig a little beneath the surface and you will find a ferocious, persistent, profound selfishness" (Dominations and Powers).

Peel away the thin-layered persona of civil amenities and there appear the uncosmeticized faces of people who, in Sigmund Freud's judgment, "view their neighbor in order to gratify their aggressiveness, to exploit his capacity for work without recompense, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and to kill him."

Against that distorted reading of human nature and the melancholy that inundates us, the mounting evidence of altruism has much to contribute to our spiritual equilibrium. Not only our own morale, but the morale of our world must be served. We need, and the future of civilization requires, basic trust; not a naive, uncritical trust but, in the words of Erik Erikson, "a favorable ratio of basic trust over basic distrust."

The vital imperative for our generation is "hakarath ha-tov" -- recognition of goodness. That recognition requires more than passive acknowledgment. It means to identify the self-effacing righteous people, to befriend these noble and largely anonymous spirits; it means to help them live out their waning lives in dignity. Too many of them find themselves today in dire circumstances, pariahs among their own for acting against popular anti-Semitism. Alex and Mila Roslan had to move to Clearwater, Florida, because they were harrassed by former Polish citizens who scoffed at their rescue, saying, "So what if there would be six million and two among their dead." Those who protected our people with their bodies must

themselves be protected from the shame of abandonment and the ignominy of being forgotten. "Hakarath ha-tov" means to study the evidence of their lives so that they enter the teaching curriculum of Jewish and non-Jewish schools, providing a new generation with moral models beyond Rambo and Dirty Harry. This submerged evidence must become part of our memory and our morale. It can help us work out our grief; free us and our children from the paralysis of cynicism; remind us that we are not alone in facing a genocidal world; remind us that there are friends out there, real friends and potential allies who must be cultivated to restore our human solidarity.

Parenthetically, even in the recent tragedy of Beita on the West Bank, there were Arab villagers who would stone the Jewish teen-agers, who protected them from the raging mob. That single piece of moral decency must not be ignored. In an atmosphere of dangerous distrust, single events of that sort light up the future, suggesting the possibility of reconciliation. Focusing on the relationship between non-Jewish rescuers and Jewish survivors of the Holocaust may serve as a new perspective for reconciliation of Catholic-Protestant strife in Ireland, Moslem-Christian, Buddhist-Islamic, and black-white conflicts. Recognition and study of altruism among those commonly assumed to be enemies opens an untapped vein for harmony. "Who is strong?" the Rabbis ask, and answer, "They who can make friends of adversaries."

The world needs moral heroes of flesh and blood. Members of threatened, submerged societies need heroes of moral altruism -- those who come from the other side, from the enemy side, and who stand for them. Those who have managed to transcend the enmity and contempt within their own circles and stand for the maligned victims of prejudice. The rescuers

I have come to know helped me overcome the generalizations that put the others into the role of enemy. I came with my healthy share of suspicion and prejudice against Germans and Poles and goyim. But having come to know Graebe, Roslan, Irene Opdyke, Jeanne Damann, hearing them and hearing the testimony of the survivors, I can let go of that morbid view that contaminates my Jewish faith and hope.

The reiterated myth that the whole world wants us dead -- always wanted us dead and will always want us dead -- is pernicious and false. We are never so alone as when we act on that belief. There are friends out there and potential friends, friends to be cultivated.

Remember the evil, but do not forget the good.

We must not allow goodness to be orphaned. For the sake of these we remember, for the sake of working out our grief, for the sake of our children's vitality, we must apply the therapeutic wisdom of our tradition: let go and hold on; let go in order to hold on.