

# The Dangers Of Jewish Paranoia

*If all roads lead to Auschwitz, we have foreclosed all options for a happier future.*

BY HAROLD M. SCHULWEIS  
Special To The BALTIMORE Jewish Times

*Editor's Note: We are proud to introduce Dr. Harold Schulweis as a regular contributor, exclusive to the Jewish Times. Dr. Schulweis, one of the most thoughtful and innovative rabbis in America, is spiritual leader of Valley Beth Shalom congregation in Encino, California. A pioneer of the chavurot movement and in training para-rabbis, he has taught contemporary Jewish thought at the Hebrew Union College and the University of Judaism in Los Angeles, authored several books, including "Evil And The Morality Of God," and lectures throughout the country on contemporary Jewish life.*

We — myself included — are prompt to criticize the State Department, government officials, Congress, and the Administration when these speak or act in a manner prejudicial to Jewish interests. We are quite properly not shy to protest. But, as in every true relationship, more than negation is required.

Consider the opportunity, more, the obligation, to praise our government, the C.I.A., the U.S. Air Force, Vice President Bush and President Reagan who directed the extraordinary airlift of Ethiopian Jews from the Sudan to Israel.

Have Jewish organizations and synagogue pulpits urged the community to send letters and telegrams to the White House and to Congress for the courage of our officials to risk the ire of the Arab nations and for the compassionate and competent manner that this rescue

took place?

Why not?

What blocks our confirmation of such a magnificent governmental effort? Why have affirmation, joy and gratitude become alien to us?

For decades now we have had it pounded into us that we are alone, an isolated, parish people. We have been told repeatedly that we have no allies out there, no concerned people, no friends. Strident voices have insisted that the whole world wants us dead. So successfully have we internalized the myth of Jacob as the eternal victim and of Esau as the perennial persecutor that decent behavior from the non-Jewish world is denied, held suspect or ignored.

Some Jewish leaders seem to believe that downing the diaspora will lead to ascent to Israel; that evidence of good interpersonal relations between Jews and non-Jews in the diaspora mitigates the rationale for making aliyah. It is wiser then to deny goodness and to exaggerate anti-Semitism. You are not so safe and secure in America. Others conspire with this fear convinced that Jewish philanthropy is best served by giving us bad news, pointing to anti-Semitism, shaking us by the shoulders and crying, "Pay attention — we are in danger!"

They are right to keep us alert, to sniff out the danger. But they are profoundly wrong in measuring events on an unbalanced scale weighted towards disaster. We and our children must know the hardened heart of Pharaoh, but they must know of Shiphrah and Push, the Egyptian midwives who risked their lives by violating Pharaoh's decree to murder the Hebrew male children. We and our children must know the sordid aspects of governmental political behavior but also the decency which exists by its side.

How many of our children are taught of the vote by the U.S. House of Representatives in 1911 abrogating our commercial treaty with Czarist Russia because of its inhumane treatment of Jews; or of our government's active concern for the lot of Soviet Jewish refugees; or of the liberality of the United States whose trade agreements with Israel eliminate all tariffs between the two countries, the first such pact the U.S. has negotiated with

any country; or the most favorable foreign aid package the U.S. extends to Israel? The negotiators who depend on "downers" are in danger of substance abuse. They become dependent on the fear of anti-Semitism to raise Jewish consciousness. But the incorporation of fear and guilt of others, at best, short term stimulus. Abused, it causes internal depression, paralysis of will and a somnolent acquiescence to catastrophic thinking.

The morale of a people is ravaged by such alleged "realism." If anti-Semitism is endowed with immortality, if the paranoia mounts, if the common wisdom prevails, "scratch a gentile, find an anti-Semite," if pogrom, persecution, inquisition, crematoria are the sole lenses through which we will view our destiny, if all roads lead to Auschwitz, we have foreclosed all options for a happier future.

However well intentioned, catastrophic thinking destroys Jewish moral status-ship. Hypertrophied basic distrust blinds us to opportunities. Unless we break out of the fatalism which views the human species as hopelessly divided between "they" who hate and "we" who suffer, we will live out a false curse, one we must repudiate. Bilaam blessed us, conferring upon us the status of "a people who dwells alone and who is not reckoned among the nations." Bilaam's blessings cannot be trusted anymore than his curses are to be accepted. Our sages (Makkoth 24a) questioned Bilaam's benediction and its apparent adoption by Moses who decreed (Deuteronomy 33:28) "And Israel dwelleth in safety, the fountain of Jacob alone." Amos, the prophet, came, protested and revoked Moses' sentence on Israel. He said, "O Lord God, cease, I beseech Thee; how shall Jacob stand alone? for he is small." And it goes on saying, "The Lord repented concerning this: 'This also shall not be,' saith the Lord." (Amos 7:5-6)

We owe our children more than a past of litanies and a future of isolation. We owe them a way of looking at the world not as an immutable conspiracy against us and at themselves not as caught in a leprous circle. There are allies out there and affirmations within which must be recognized and nurtured.

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