

Attitudes toward Jewish-Gentile Relations in the Jewish Tradition and Contemporary Israel*

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My research concerns over the past few years touch upon the inter-relationship between beliefs, values and norms on the one hand and tradition on the other. Beliefs, values and norms, as I use the terms, are concerned with how we think the world functions, which in turn is closely related to our aspirations, to what we want or don't want, what we think is right or wrong, standards of conduct we deem appropriate and inappropriate and rules of behaviour. The tradition is our perception of the beliefs, values and norms of the past; what we think were the beliefs, values and norms of the culture with which we identify. My special interest lies in trying to establish with as much precision as I can, the interrelationship between contemporary values and the tradition. What I am going to share with you this evening are some of my problems and some of my reflections, rather than answers which alas, I do not have. The only way to approach the problem intelligently is to compare a specific aspect of the tradition with a specific set of contemporary values.

My lecture is about Jewish-Gentile relations, with special reference to relations between Israel and 'the nations of the world'; what these relations are and what they should be, as reflected in the beliefs, values and norms of contemporary Israelis and in the Jewish tradition.

In order not to oversimplify, let me now introduce two caveats. First, the Jewish tradition with regard to Jewish-Gentile relations, as is true with regard to other abstract issues, is not cut of one cloth. It reflects different and sometimes contradictory beliefs, values and norms, some of which were dominant at one point in time, others in another. Secondly, a concern with the interrelationship between values and tradition does not mean that one is formulated with *exclusive* regard to the other. Additional factors may be important; they may even be of paramount importance.

Until very recently, it was through the rabbis, especially the leading rabbis, the great authorities in the interpretation of sacred Jewish texts, that the tradition has been understood. This remains true for most of

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those to whom the tradition is relevant in the conscious formulation of their own values. It is therefore appropriate that the terms Jewish tradition and rabbinic tradition are synonymous.

I think it fair to say that for most rabbinic authorities the actual state of Jewish-Gentile relations has played a formative role in shaping their values (in other words, what they believe relations ought to be) as well as their interpretation of how the tradition views Jewish-Gentile relations. This should not surprise us. I do not mean to vulgarize or oversimplify a complex process. On the one hand all of us experience reality through our beliefs about the nature of reality. What I think happens to me is in good part a function of my beliefs about the world and society which, in turn, are intimately related to my basic values.

For example, let me assume that on my home this evening I am grabbed by one black man while a second black man steals my watch and wallet. I may find support in this event for my beliefs or values: that some people are thieves, that blacks are violent criminals, that blacks are expressing their rage at South African society, that although they might have injured me the blacks chose only to rob me, that blacks are anti-semitic, that South Africa is no place for whites, or for Jews, that big cities all over the world are dangerous, etc. etc. I hope I have convinced you that our beliefs and values shape our perceptions of reality. But I still maintain that most of us, at least over the long run, are able to reorient our perceptions of reality to our experiences. To put it another way: although what we believe about the world certainly influences what we perceive is happening to us, what happens to us does influence what we believe about the world. Regardless of how strongly I believe that my wife loves me, she can hit me over the head only so many times before I begin to suspect that she doesn't really love me. My therapist, or her therapist, or our therapist may even insist that she does love me — that banging me on the head is simply her way of signalling for attention. The therapist may be right but I don't think this is going to prevent a change in my perception about the nature of our relationship. It follows that the way in which Jews are treated by non-Jews influences, at least over the long run and for most rabbinic authorities, the expectations they have about the nature of such relations, the way in which they interpret the tradition's view of such relations and what they view as the desired set of relations. Jacob Katz demonstrates as much for the medieval period in his important volume on Jewish-Gentile relations in the medieval and modern period.¹ This certainly conforms to what one might reasonably expect, and as I will illustrate, to my own experiences as well.

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For most of the last 2,000 years the Jewish experience of non-Jews has been primarily one of fear, isolation, hostility and persecution. This is reflected in the rabbinic tradition which anticipates Gentile hostility in such metaphors as “Essau hates Jacob”, where Essau stands for all Gentiles and Jacob for all Jews. It is reflected in the verse Jews recite at the *seder* each Passover eve: “in every generation forces rise up to destroy us” (the phrase is very indefinite about who is trying to destroy us). Not surprisingly, the same tradition legitimates exclusive Jewish concern with self. The Biblical verse, “thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” is interpreted to mean a *Jewish* neighbour; or the Biblical command to return an object lost by one’s neighbour, even if that neighbour is an enemy, applies only to fellow Jews.

The emancipation, enlightenment and development of nation-states in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, mark a water-shed in modern Jewish history with special implications for Jewish perceptions of Jewish-Gentile relations. The importance of the emancipation for our purposes, is not the granting of civil liberties to Jews in western and central Europe but rather its association with the enlightenment, which led to the anticipation of a new era in Jewish-Gentile relations, even among those who had yet to taste its fruits.

The enlightenment, that is, the belief in the power of the rational human mind to overcome prejudice, ‘religious superstition’, and racial and religious barriers, was especially attractive to Jews. The enlightenment suggested the inevitability of human progress. It thereby encouraged Jews to believe that although they did not enjoy full civil rights or social equality, they would, in the near future, do so. In accord with the enlightenment, Jews believed that Gentiles would accept them as equals — not because they were Jews, not despite the fact that they were Jews but because their Jewishness was irrelevant to such rights.

The new conceptions of the nation-state in the late 18th and early 19th centuries further reinforced these expectations because governments now insisted that they must relate to all citizens directly rather than through the mediation of ethnic, religious or any other group to which the citizen happened to belong. In other words, citizens were to be treated as individuals and the new nation-states thereby undermined what remained of the medieval corporate structures, be they estates, guilds or Jewish *Kehillot*, which had heretofore located individuals in communities of social, economic and political relevance.

The processes associated with the emancipation, enlightenment and development of the nation state shook the foundations of the Jewish tradition which rested upon assumptions about the special role and function of Jews in the world; assumptions which had heretofore been reinforced by Gentile persecution of Jews. Obviously Jews did not enjoy being the subjects of Gentile animus, restrictive legislation or punitive

regulation. But the attitudes and behaviour of the non-Jew confirmed the Jews' own belief that they were a special people — for did not the world around them behave to them in a special way? Furthermore, Jews may have recognized the fact that their special status did not always operate to their disadvantage. Indeed, whatever the depredations to which Jews were exposed, their status as Jews generally protected them, at least in the eyes of the Christian Church, from the fate accorded to Christian heretics. Because Jews were special, the Church sought to convert them rather than kill them. The emancipation and enlightenment posed a challenge to Judaism because they undermined one of the cardinal premises of the Jewish tradition — that Jews were different from all other people and therefore it was natural for the Gentile to treat them differently.

The Jewish reaction and response to this challenge is the real story of 19th century European Jewish history. For our purposes I am concerned only with the response of those so committed to the tradition that they could never accept that its premises were faulty or that the consequences of the emancipation and enlightenment required a revision of the rabbinic tradition. Instead we find among this group, these first Orthodox Jews, a reinterpretation of the tradition. Not all Orthodox Jews sought to reinterpret the tradition. Some responded by rejecting the emancipation and enlightenment. If the emancipation and enlightenment, i.e. modernity, challenged the premises of the tradition — then Jews were called upon to reject modernity. This school of thought, which dominated Hungarian Orthodoxy under the leadership of the Ḥatam Sofer and was reinforced by 19th century Hassidism, is enjoying a renaissance today in the streets of Jerusalem and B'nai Brak, and I am told, Johannesburg as well.

But a second branch of Orthodoxy, best known as 'modern orthodoxy', responded quite differently. If, it argued, the emancipation and enlightenment suggested that the premises of the traditional conception of Jewish-Gentile relations was wrong, then perhaps we have not properly understood the tradition. Since the tradition cannot be wrong, and since we know what we have experienced, the only solution is to reinterpret the tradition. Perhaps 'selected reinterpretation' would be a better term, or perhaps we might say that certain themes within the tradition, hitherto of a minor nature, now resound in major tones.

This reinterpretation extended into the twentieth century in Western Europe, the United States, and I suspect South Africa as well. I can illustrate it through my own experience of the Jewish tradition. I attended a very fine, very serious Jewish Day School. We studied our Hebrew or Jewish subjects six days a week from eight in the morning till

12.30 in the afternoon. I learned the maxim to love my neighbour as myself and I learned about my obligation to return articles which my neighbour had lost. I learned about these things in the context of ethical study, in the framework of Bible study and in Talmud study but I never learned that 'neighbour' meant only Jew. In fact, and here I think my teachers were at fault, I was never told that *anyone* interpreted the term 'neighbour' to mean only Jew. I lectured at Yeshiva University in New York between 1963 and 1969. Yeshiva University contains the largest seminary in the world for training Orthodox rabbis. My closest friends were on the rabbinical school faculty but I discovered that 'neighbour' means Jew only after I had made *aliya* to Israel.

Let me give you another example. The rabbinic tradition rules that one may desecrate the Sabbath to save a life. Better, the rabbis say, to violate one Sabbath in order that other Sabbaths may be kept. It seems to follow, therefore, that one ought not to violate the Sabbath to save the life of a *Goy* since the *Goy* will not observe future Sabbaths. This issue provoked some debate among rabbis and assumed contemporary relevance in the mid-1960's. This was a result of a hoax played by an anti-religious Jew in Israel who wished to illustrate the hostile attitude of Judaism to the Gentile. The details of the hoax need not concern us. It is sufficient to observe that at least for a brief period, the rabbinic world and many Jewish secularists as well, concerned themselves with whether or not a Jew acting in accordance with the tradition was permitted to violate the Sabbath in order to save a Gentile's life.

The Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Israel visited the U.S. during this period. He lectured on the topic to the rabbinical students at Yeshiva University. Classes were cancelled so that students could attend the lecture. The Chief Rabbi concluded that a Jew was permitted to violate the Sabbath to save a Gentile's life "for the sake of peace". In other words, ideally the Jew ought not to save the Gentile's life but since not doing so might lead to misunderstanding, to inter-religious friction, to persecution of Jews, better to save the *Goy's* life.

At the conclusion of the lecture one of the eminent Talmudic scholars on the Yeshiva University faculty announced that his students were to return to their classroom. He proceeded, I am told, to explain that the Chief Rabbi had erred. A Jew is commanded to violate the Sabbath in order to save the life of a *Goy*, he is reported to have said, not for instrumental or extrinsic reasons but because of the inherent sanctity of all human life, Jewish or non-Jewish. At the risk of over-simplification I am suggesting that these two radically different interpretations of the tradition characterize differences between rabbinic interpretations in western Europe as opposed to rabbinic interpretations in eastern Europe and stem from the different historical experiences which Jews underwent in western and eastern Europe. I am not a student, much less

a scholar of the rabbinic literature, so although my suggestion conforms to common sense, to my own experiences, and to my limited knowledge of the sources, it is not the product of systematic research. I hope that my essay inspires such research.

The Jews of western Europe and the United States experienced the emancipation. To the Jews of eastern Europe it was only a dream. True, the Jewish middle class and intellectuals were sure at one time that the dream would be realized. But the 1881 pogroms in Russia shattered their remaining illusions about the inevitability of progress; illusions we might add, that most rabbis never shared. The disappointment arising from the pogroms and the frustrated hope, resulted in a feeling among vast numbers of eastern European Jews that Gentile hostility would remain a permanent feature in their lives unless some basic change took place in the condition of the Jew. Jews, in turn, were divided over what the nature of the change would be or whether they themselves should seek to effect the change. The vast majority looked to emigration to the West. I am not concerned with them here. The rabbinic authorities with whom I am concerned felt that emigration was futile. In his fascinating autobiography, *Alei Haldi*, the early religious Zionist leader Yitzhak Nissenbaum tells of a meeting between three east European rabbinic leaders in this period². The rabbis issued a statement noting that Jews were fleeing to the United States to escape the fist of the anti-semitic. But what would the emigrants find there? The same anti-semitic fist would be present. What the Jews would not find were *shuls*, *mikvas* and Jewish schools. Better, urged the Rabbis, to stay in Russia, repent of sin and perform pious acts. If Jews must flee, the Holy Land was preferable to the U.S. as a place of refuge.

The rabbis of eastern Europe, and they rather than the rabbis of the west were the leading authorities, saw no need to reinterpret the Jewish tradition. The image of the hostile *Goy* and the defenseless Jew conformed to their own experiences. No doubt they found some comfort in the tradition's conception of the ultimate punishment of the *Goy* by the hand of God. The hostility they felt toward the Gentile was legitimated by the life they experienced as well as the rabbinic tradition.

A second group with whom I am concerned, the Zionists, also reacted to the pogroms of 1881. Indeed, the pogroms and resulting frustration were critical events in the formation of modern Zionism. Zionism accepted the fact that the emancipation was a chimera, an unrealizable dream, unless the Jewish condition was radically changed. But unlike the rabbis, the Zionists saw no need to wait for the unfolding of divine redemption which would change men's hearts and punish evil. Jewish suffering, in their opinion, was not the result of an evil *Goy* or a biologically or religiously inherited animosity to the Jew, but rather an

understandable almost natural response of the Gentiles to the presence of unassimilable, indigestible strangers in their midst.

Rather than quote to you from Zionist fathers such as Pinsker or Herzl in this regard, I would prefer that you listen carefully to the following astonishing statement of a figure with whom you are probably better acquainted.

“The Jewish people erred when it blamed anti-Semitism for all the suffering and hardship it underwent in the Diaspora ... Must the whole world act like angels toward us? Does a people build its existence on the rule of righteousness — in the midst of other nations? Do Jews observe the rule of righteousness among themselves? Is there no jealousy and hatred among us? ... Do we relate to members of other groups and parties with sufficient understanding? ... And we who are different from every people expect others to understand us ... to accept us with love and fraternity, and if they don't we are angry and protest against their wickedness ... Is it too difficult for us to understand that every nation fashions its own way of life in accordance with its needs and its desires ... The cause of our troubles and the anti-Semitism of which we complain result from our peculiar status that does not accord with the established framework of the nations of the world. It is not the result of the wickedness or folly of the Gentiles which we call anti-Semitism”³.

This is Ben-Gurion speaking. The year is 1944. Polish Jewry has been exterminated. Hungarian Jewry has been or is being transported to the death camps. Was Ben Gurion, were the Zionists, that insensitive to the Holocaust, to the Nazis and to the behaviour of the masses of east Europeans who willingly co-operated with the Nazis in the extermination of the Jews? In fact it is not Ben Gurion or Zionist insensitivity that explains this incredible statement but the power of the Zionist dream or illusion that Jewish normalcy was not only desirable but could be achieved through the establishment of a Jewish state. Zionists had to believe that; otherwise, if hatred of the Jews was endemic to the *Goy*, then the Jewish state would never be a normal state and the Zionist enterprise, at least for the secular Zionist, became meaningless.

But let us give the ‘old man’ his due. In affirming Jewish normalcy he reclaimed a prophetic vision of the future which to the best of my knowledge is really only a minor theme in the rabbinic tradition: the vision of Israel as a “light unto the nations”. Ben Gurion affirmed this as one of the two central purposes of the Jewish state. But he also believed that his conception of Judaism and the Jewish state, of relations between Jews and Gentiles in particular, required the rejection of the

Jewish tradition as he understood that tradition. We must never forget, as Arthur Hertzberg teaches us in the marvellous introductory essay to his collection of readings titled *The Zionist Idea*, that Zionism is a product of the east European not the west European Jewish experience. Zionism, as I noted before, is a product of the conviction that the emancipation had failed. Zionism came to resolve the problem of the east European, the problem of material and physical persecution, rather than the problem of the west European or American Jew — the problem of finding meaning and significance in living as a Jew. It was only after the creation of Israel - although the process began much earlier — that most western Jews reinterpreted Zionism and transformed it into a new form of Jewish identity which they were then able to embrace. But this point is beyond the scope of my lecture.⁴

To return to our story — the founders of Israel in the classic east European Zionist mould believed that the creation of the State would normalize Jewish-Gentile relations and resolve the problem of anti-semitism because anti-semitism was the result of Jewish strangeness or “ghost-like existence”, to use Pinsker’s phrase. Anti-Semitism was the rational response of normal nations to these strangers in their midst and this ideology required that the founders of Israel deny not only the Jewish tradition but the relevance of the Holocaust. I could quote to you from Ben Gurion or Sharett in this regard but let me cite another Israeli leader.

In the debate over German reparations in 1952, Pinhas Lavon, a member of the government and later minister of defence, responded to those who argued that accepting German reparations would blur the historically unprecedented monstrosity of the Holocaust. The Holocaust was not unique, he explained. Jews were killed in the past. The only difference was that more Jews were killed in the Holocaust and that was because there were more Jews alive to begin with and the Nazis were more efficient murderers. Moreover, Lavon argued, the Nazi effort at genocide was not unique. The Turks had attempted it against the Armenians “and the blood of the Armenian people is no less precious to them than ours is to us”⁵.

Lavon, like Ben Gurion, was forced to deny that the Holocaust carried any special meaning for the Jews. The Holocaust could only have special meaning if it was a special event and if it was a special event then the Jews were a special people and this is precisely what Zionism denied.

What we find within Israel therefore, in the early years of Statehood, are two images of the Gentile and of Gentile-Jewish relations. One was the traditional rabbinic image that was not confined exclusively to religious Jews. This image, transferred from eastern Europe to Israel, was reinforced by conceptions of Sephardic Jews from North Africa

and Yemen — an image unaffected by the reinterpretation and adaptation taking place in western rabbinic circles for 150 years. This eastern European-Sephardic image portrayed a hostile *Goy*, be he individual or nation, anxious to pollute and destroy the Jew. Jewish hostility to the *Goy* and indifference to his moral conceptions was therefore entirely legitimate.

Secondly, we find the Zionist conception of a benign, friendly world — a conception reinforced by American and Soviet support for the creation of Israel, by Israel's admission into the United Nations, and by the reception accorded Israel from most nations and most civilized people of the world in the early years of statehood. The western rabbinic image never found roots in Israel.

It is not part of my story to account for the decline of this second conception, that is the decline of classic Zionist ideology, in Israel. My colleague, Eliezer Don-Yehiya and I seek to do that in our book, *The Civil Religion of Israel* just published by the University of California Press⁶. No doubt the Holocaust itself helps to account for the decline. In the Kibbutzim during the 1930's for example, the *haggadot* written specially for Passover customarily excised the verses from the traditional *haggada* calling upon God to "pour out his wrath upon the nations who know thee not". After 1945 this verse reappears. But other factors, some purely subjective and others rooted in Israel's experience of increased isolation and foreign hostility, help account for the penetration of traditional-rabbinic images of Jewish-Gentile relations into wider circles of the secular population. Contrary to what is often said, the growing influence of rabbis and religious Jewry in Israel is not solely or even primarily the result of coalition bargaining and domestic politics. It is attributable to the fact that the rabbinic tradition articulates an ideology and conceptions that appear to be both authentically Jewish and consistent with the way many secular Jews experience reality. There is no more powerful political metaphor in Israel today than that contained in the Biblical description of Israel as "a people that dwelleth alone", a verse whose rabbinic interpretation is self evident. Hence Israel's isolation is now interpreted as the destiny of the Jews and Israel's treatment by the world, a paradigm of the inescapable Jewish condition. The fact that this belief legitimates Israel's foreign policy, excuses the government from the consequences of its activity, insulates the Israeli population from criticism that its behaviour may evoke even from its true friends, is not the *cause* of Israeli conceptions of Jewish-Gentile relations but is one of its most unfortunate by-products.

I have said that present Israeli conceptions of the *Goy* or of Jewish-Gentile relations are a return to a major motif in the tradition. But there is one important difference. Jews in Israel now possess political and

military power to act out certain conceptions which, within the rabbinic tradition were pure hyperbole or hypothetical constructions. These constructions served as ideological weapons to comfort and console an otherwise defenceless people. Today, however, they may serve to encourage and legitimate violence and terror. There is a phrase in the Talmud, “even the best of the *Goyim* should be killed”. Read in context, there is no question that the phrase is not to be taken literally. But taken out of context, used as it was, by an army Rabbi in a message to Israeli soldiers, it has a very different significance. Dare we lightly dismiss an essay by the former campus rabbi of Bar Ilan University titled “Genocide is a Commandment from the Torah” — an essay looking forward to the day that all Amelikites will be exterminated; or an editor’s column in a student newspaper which invokes a rabbinic homily that the only way to treat the non-Jewish residents of the Holy Land is to murder them? Do these statements make you squirm? Then think how I who live among these people feel when I hear them. But I am even more upset when I hear justification of the outrages committed by some Israeli troops, or by some of the Jewish settlers on the West Bank, in the name of the rabbinic tradition. To the everlasting shame of Judaism, these statements, in turn, aroused little negative reaction from other rabbinic figures.

There has been a change this past year, primarily though not entirely, as a consequence of Israel’s disastrous war in Lebanon. Let it be said to the credit of religious Zionist leaders that they were among the few within the government, and they were encouraged by a number of rabbis, who protested Israel’s bombing of west Beirut. We have a Minister of Education representing a religious party who now acknowledges that something very serious has gone wrong in the religious educational system. Listen to Rav Amital, esteemed leader of the most prestigious of the academies for advanced Talmudic learning among the Zionist-orientated *Yeshivot*:

“I read the essays of rabbis on the enormous value of our being a nation possessed of military might; virtually a super-power; on the ideal of destroying the nests of evil not as part of a necessary war of defence but as the first stage in the destruction of all evil in the world ... Whoever seeks an ideological explanation for the political plan of bringing order into fragmented Lebanon and wishes to interpret this as an act of merit will find his wish fulfilled in these publications”.

Amital then quotes from one such publication as follows:

“If we hear from the weak among us that perhaps we have gone to war to establish such an order [the answer is] a decided yes, we will establish a world order”.⁸

What I am suggesting is that neither the early Zionist formula nor the current Israeli interpretation of the rabbinic tradition are acceptable options for me. What is my option? Speaking as a social scientist I could deny the very premise of a conception of Jewish-Gentile relations. There is no such thing as Gentile behaviour, or Gentile morality or Gentile conceptions of the Jew. Gentile or *Goy* are mental constructs which Jews invented. It is no more realistic than was the division of the world into Greek and Barbarian or the Mormon division of the world into Mormon-Gentile — a division which defines Jews as Gentiles. Need I remind you that Gentiles do not conceive of themselves as Gentiles i.e. they do not define themselves as non-Jews. Gentile is a Jewish category to define the rest of the world and it strains the credulity of a social scientist to believe that all non-Jews and all states behave uniformly towards Jews.

But what I have just said is not necessarily what I believe. I practice social science but I don't always believe it. As a Jew I must have a conception of the non-Jew and of Jewish-non-Jewish relations if I am to define who I am. Groups and individuals are defined by their boundaries; by their images of themselves in relation to others. So I accept that as a Jew if I have a self image I will necessarily have an image or conception of the non-Jew and of my relations with him. Social Science alerts me to the need for caution in the application of this conception, subjecting it as frequently as possible to tests and keeping it sufficiently vague and sufficiently open-ended to prevent my policies from becoming prisoners of my preconceptions.

What I want to urge is a conception of Jewish-Gentile relations which unravels both the Zionist and the traditional rabbinic package. As I said, I deny that we must choose between one package with its conceptions of Jewish normalcy and rejection of the tradition and denial of any meaning to the Holocaust, and the other package which affirms the tradition, preaches Jewish-Gentile hostility and interprets the Holocaust as the inevitable outcome of Jewish defencelessness and the absence of a Jewish state.

I reject classical Zionism and its conception of a Jewish nation like all other nations. I reject the classical Zionist goal of normalizing Jewish existence. Therefore, I encourage those who would subject Israel to special moral standards. I insist only that they be honest about the application of those standards. And, I maintain, this is fully consistent with the rabbinic tradition.

The Holocaust also has special meaning and significance for me. There is more to the Holocaust than lessons and morals. But let us confine ourselves now to their elucidation. I deny that the Holocaust teaches us that if Jews are not strong enough or do not have a state the

Goyim will destroy us. This is a foolish lesson. Of course the Jews and Israel must be strong. If my Arab neighbours were capable of destroying me then unfortunately there is no question they would do so. I do not need the Holocaust or the rabbinic tradition to teach me that. But to generalize from the Holocaust that *Goyim* will kill Jews if Jews are not strong enough is foolish because all Jews would long since have been dead. The Jewish people, even with a Jewish state, will never be strong enough to resist the combined might of the Gentiles.

The primary lesson of the Holocaust, for me, is that the price I may have to pay for being Jewish, even in the 20th century, even in a society with a highly developed culture, even if I am strong, is a horrendous one. So if I choose to be Jewish I am making a momentous choice, fraught with consequence. I had better be absolutely sure I know what I'm choosing. Surely "Jewish survival" is not enough. This I also learn from the rabbinic tradition. At no point, at no place in the tradition are Jews instructed to survive. This is not our mandate. This is God's problem. We must only obey Him. And if all I want is personal survival I can do a lot better than join my lot to the Jewish people in general and the State of Israel in particular. Those Jews who preach that the primary mandate to Jews is survival, know very little about Judaism and have even less understanding of the requisites of survival.

The second lesson I learn from the Holocaust is the special responsibility that my experience as a Jew imposes upon me. This also reinforces my understanding of the Jewish tradition but you must remember that I am primarily a product of the west, not of eastern European Jewry from which I am two generations removed. So the tradition is filtered to me through the more liberal and universalist perspectives of the rabbis of the west. If the events of the Holocaust affect me in some special way; if I, as a Jew, experience the Holocaust however vicariously, in a way non-Jews did not and cannot experience it, then I understand in a way they do not understand the consequence of indifference to evil and suffering. Therefore I cannot remain indifferent to evil and suffering even when they seem not to affect me as a Jew — as in South Africa.

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I had intended to discuss the interrelationship of the tradition and contemporary values — not to preach a sermon. My vocation, however inadequately I fulfill it, is that of scholar not homilist. I am honestly uncomfortable and embarrassed in making moral representations when I myself fall so far below the standard I set for others. But it is my scholarly interest no less than my existential concerns that involve me in the issue of the interpretation of the tradition. And it is in the role of a scholar that I offer this final paradoxical observation.

The debate over how the tradition views Jewish-Gentile relations is a debate to which scholars or intellectuals *qua* scholars or intellectuals can offer only a minimal contribution. They can point to the inaccuracy of facile generalizations and remind the major participants that there are different themes within the tradition. But the terms of the debate are too broad and conceptions too ambiguously defined to admit a truly scholarly answer. Secondly, the outcome is too important for those within the tradition to allow those who stand outside it to decide who or what is right or wrong. The interpretation of the tradition will be determined through its interplay with the values and perceptions of those who attempt to live their lives in accordance with it. That is the difference between a live tradition and a dead one.

It is false to believe that we read into the tradition whatever we choose but it is no less false to believe that the tradition simply dictates a set of values to which its followers blindly adhere. I know of no formula or equation which spells out the subtle nature of the interrelationship. But I do suggest that the two variables, contemporary values on the one hand and the tradition on the other, are interdependent but by no means necessarily identical even for those most committed to the tradition. But commitment is the precondition for meaningful participation in interpretation. It is not open to all people, or even alas to all Jews, though all Jews have a stake in its outcome. The effective ground rules limit the participants to those whose behaviour reflects the fact that they seriously care about what the tradition means because they are committed to follow the application of its precepts whether they like them or not, whether it suits them or not, whether they agree with them or not.

Let me spell this out in very blunt terms. The Jewish tradition has always been defined and interpreted in terms of specific *halakhic*, that is, legal norms. The only legitimate participants in the debate over the tradition are those who accept its norms as binding. Those who accept its binding nature, however they may reinterpret it, cannot honour the opinions about the tradition of those who do not. If someone does not observe the dietary laws or the Sabbath (whose nature in the tradition is beyond dispute) his opinion cannot be admitted in the debate over what

the tradition enjoins with respect to Jewish-Gentile relations. The danger is too great that such persons might simply read into the tradition what they want to hear.

For better or worse, therefore, it is Orthodox Jews alone who will ultimately decide an issue that is so important to many who are not Orthodox. For this reason, if for none other, all of us ought to observe developments within Orthodox Judaism with utmost attention. Paradoxically, it is they who will in large measure determine the future of all Jews, by their continuing construction of the Jewish past.

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NOTES

1. Jacob Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance: Studies in Jewish Gentile Relations in Medieval and Modern Times* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961)
2. Yitzhak Nissenbaum, *The Leaves of my Lifetime* (Jerusalem: Reuven Maas, 1969) (Hebrew)
3. David Ben Gurion, *In the Conflict* Vol. IV p.12 (Tel Aviv: Hotza'at Mapai, 1949) (Hebrew)
4. I discuss this in my book *The Ambivalent American Jew* (Philadelphia Jewish Publication Society, 1973)
5. *Divrei Haknesset* 1952 p.910 (Hebrew)
6. Charles S Liebman and Eliezer Don Yehiya, *Civil Religion in Israel: Traditional Judaism and Political Culture in the Jewish State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983)
7. For a list of other statements and their source see Amnon Rubinstein, *From Herzl to Gush Emunim and Back Again* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1980) (Hebrew)

Niv Hamidrashia is an annual published by Midrashiat Noam, one of Israel's most distinguished religious high schools. In the 1974 issue (pp.29-31) there is an exchange of letters between a former student then serving in the Israeli army and his teacher, a figure of some importance in Israeli rabbinical circles. The rabbi provides a textual analysis of the problem of killing unarmed women and children during a war and refers to the Israeli army conception of "purity of arms" which cautions soldiers against unnecessary killing. His conclusion is as follows:

"Even though the rule "If someone comes to kill you, you may kill him first" applies also to a Jew (who comes to kill you) ... this is true only if there is a suspicion that he has come to kill you. But the *Goy* in time of war ... is always to be judged as coming to kill you unless it is clear that he has no evil intention. It is this rule that determines "purity of arms" according to *Halakah* and not the Gentile sense that is now accepted by the Israeli Defense forces, an interpretation that to our regret has resulted in more than a few losses".

8. *Nekuda*, No.52 pp-8-11 (Dec 24, 1982) (Hebrew)