



CLAL

26/503
December 8, 1995
15 Kislev 5756

Sh'ma

A JOURNAL OF JEWISH RESPONSIBILITY

In this issue

Once again, the complicated relationship between Blacks and Jews is on the public agenda.

In this issue, we explore possible paths to progress and stubborn areas of tension.

Diversity and the politics of hate Edward Joseph Katz

During the past two years, I have kept active in both the Jewish and Black communities in Asheville, North Carolina. I have co-directed a seminar series entitled *Crossing Bridges: Linking African-American and Jewish Lives*, sponsored by the University of North Carolina at Asheville and its Center for Jewish Studies; I have talked with African-American youth groups about Jewish history and culture; I have incorporated Jewish and African-American works into many of the literature and humanities courses I teach there.

Often during these events, attention turns to the news-making demagogues—to David Duke, to Leonard Jeffries, to Pat Buchanan—and discussion shifts from the focused issues informed by daily experience to the hazy problems engendered by larger-than-life racists. Now more than ever, when faced with monumental events like the Million Man March led by Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan, we turn our attention to the way in which antisemites have placed themselves at the heart of the public debate.

How To Face Hatred

At times such as these, when confronted with the specter of ethnic hatred, Jews tend to ask: Why always is it us? Why always the Jews? But then, we might go on to ask ourselves (and often do not), with equal honesty and despair: Why always is it the African-Americans? The insistent, monotonous rhythm of hateful stereotypes and accusations terrifies because it comes from beyond our sphere of

control, from the lips of those whose lives we cannot touch, whose ideas we cannot fathom, whose monolithic defenses we cannot crack. And so we are left anxious, frightened, impotent—asking, Why always is it us?

Dark Security

But as a colleague of mine observed, the real question is, Who listens? Of course, the racists and antisemites do—for they hear in the words of others a confirmation that the world they see is the same world that others see. But we also tend, I think, to listen when the noise of hatred and bigotry pierces the din of the everyday lives we lead.

We listen when the words that come to us confirm our sense of the images and symbols others have created out of us. And because we listen so intently, the politics of hatred inform our sense of the world and we allow these bigots to become for us a sort of distracting fascination. That is, in our faithful attention to each word they speak, we risk being swept further from the world of daily needs, further from the world of the people to whom we ought to be talking, with

Inside...	
Dwight B. Mullen	3
William L. Taylor	4
Edward S. Shapiro	6
Shma mina	7
But others say about... ..	8

whom we ought to be planning and working for the future. It is often easier to rail about the racists and antisemites in the news, than it is to search our own souls and to ask ourselves what needs to be done.

It is a terrible truth, I think, that when we hear an antisemitic slur, we find a validation of *our* grim belief that the world does not contain space for change. In those moments, we measure ourselves, our identities, against the yardstick of another's hatred; and, in a sense, the hatred becomes an anchor for us, too—it tells us that our place in the world is not shifting out from under us, that tomorrow the world will look just as it does today. And in this, one can find an ironic stability, a dark security: if life is painful, at least we know what to expect.

The Damaging Lens Of Expectations

In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud wrote about a kind of inertia that civilization exerts upon those who live within its structures. As individuals, Freud argues, we are reluctant to give up the objects of our desires, which arise out of our idealized expectations and the way they contribute to our sense of self. Similarly, a culture very reluctantly gives up the products of its expectations, which also contribute to its sense of identity: and when those expectations are founded on expressions of discontent, violence and hatred, the effect on a society can only be divisive.

The expectations that shape a civilization's values acquire an independent life and power of their own, until finally they become the perspective from which we view the world. In fact, rather than see events as they are or consider cultural possibilities as they might exist for us, we often "reshape" what we encounter in the world so that it conforms to our sense of reality. Instead of serving as a focal point around which people of diverse views might rally, the fearful domain of our present cultural expectations serves to open up a cultural divide, to enlarge the societal fissures across which we can only stare at one another dumbly.

And so, what we do is to find ways not to hear the voices of real significance, ways to ignore the voices of people whose concerns, desires and aspirations are the same as our own. And in this sense, the true question—Who will listen?—reveals that our obsession with the hatemongers may lead us away from the world of engagement, away from the things we might control.

Diversity—the differences with which we come to the world—must be seen as a challenge, as a call to action.

EDWARD JOSEPH KATZ teaches in the Department of Literature and Language at the University of North Carolina at Asheville and is a Board Member of the Center for Jewish Studies.

It is not enough, then, to say that we will refuse to look away from those who hate, that we will be witnesses and accusers; nor is it really enough to assert that we will celebrate our cultural, racial and religious difference. We can no longer accept the idea that the cultural divide between Jews and Blacks is inevitable. We must come to see that the divide exists, it widens, in part because we Jews have absented ourselves, by choice, from the real lives of those who bring a different perspective to the world.

Can We Build A New Partnership

As the African-American scholar Cornel West argues in *Race Matters*, we must acknowledge that, though Jews may share with Blacks a history of darkness, suffering and persecution, our most recent past has been brighter for us, has offered to us a larger share of the future. As Jews, we must understand that when we reach out, as we

Sh'ma A JOURNAL OF JEWISH RESPONSIBILITY

Senior Editors Eugene B. Borowitz, Irving Greenberg, Harold M. Schulweis

Editor Nina Beth Cardin

Administrator/Production Bambi Marcus

Contributing Editors Michael Berenbaum, David Biale, Elliot N. Dorff, Arnold Eisen, David Ellenson, Leonard Fein, Barry Freundel, Rela M. Geffen, Neil Gillman, Joanne Greenberg, Lawrence Hoffman, Paula Hyman, Deborah Dash Moore, David Novak, Riv-Ellen Prell, Ellen Umansky, Elie Wiesel, Arnold Jacob Wolf, Walter Wurzbarger, Michael Wyschogrod

Founding Editor Eugene B. Borowitz

Sh'ma a journal of jewish responsibility welcomes articles from diverse points of view. Hence, the opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the editors. Donations to *Sh'ma a journal of jewish responsibility* are tax-deductible. *Sh'ma a journal of jewish responsibility* is available in microform from University Microfilms Internat'l., Ann Arbor, MI.

Book reviews are by Eugene B. Borowitz.

Address all correspondence, subscriptions and change of address notices to *Sh'ma a journal of jewish responsibility*, c/o CLAL, 99 Park Avenue, Suite S-300, New York, NY 10016. Telephone: 212-867-8888; FAX: 212-867-8853.

Sh'ma a journal of jewish responsibility (ISSN 0049-0385) is published bi-weekly except June, July and August, by CLAL, 99 Park Avenue, Suite C-300, New York, NY 10016. Second-class postage paid at New York, NY. Subscriptions: \$29 for two years in U.S.; \$18 for one year; \$21 a year overseas; \$35 for two years overseas; bulk subscriptions of 10 or more to one address, \$9 per subscription; retired or handicapped persons of restricted means may subscribe for one year at half price. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to *Sh'ma a journal of jewish responsibility*, c/o CLAL, 99 Park Avenue, S-300, New York, NY 10016-1599.

Sh'ma Online, an interactive discussion group, is available through any online service which can exchange with the Internet, such as CompuServe, GEnie, Prodigy, America Online, MCI Mail, ATTMail or Delphi. To join, send a one-line message to: listproc@shamash.nysenet.org saying: **subscribe shma** your full name. Messages to *Sh'ma Online* can then be sent to: shma@shamash.nysenet.org

Copyright © 1995 by CLAL
December 8, 1995

should, we may not always encounter an outstretched hand. Jews and Blacks need to establish true dialogue and trust, to discover each others' common values and real concerns. For our part, we must come to the Black community not with our plans for what they should do, for this is condescending and paternalistic; rather, we must come to them with the desire to find out what we can embark upon together.

To bridge the divide will require much more than the discussion of difference: it demands that we do real work with real people, that we engage together the problems—local, regional, state—that confront our larger community. To return to Freud, we must learn to shift our cultural expectations from those of division to those of community. We need to reorient ourselves to a reworked set of desires: we must see that civilization is, in large part, the process of harnessing diversity in order to accomplish concrete goals. And these goals must truly be what matters in real life: they must involve the education and nurturing of our children, the care for our elderly, the enrichment of whatever is best in our common culture. The challenge of diversity, then, is for us to look within ourselves and ask some painful questions, and to look at others around us and find ways to participate—truly to engage ourselves—in our real lives together. □

Confronting ourselves across the cultural divide

Dwight B. Mullen

Jews and African-Americans have consistently sought to resolve the "twoness" of our existences in the United States. This duality can be seen within as well as between our two communities. Within our separate communities we have wrestled with the double identity we bear as members of often embattled ethnic groups holding citizenship in a hostile country. Between our two communities, we have fluctuated from being unknowable urban neighbors in segregated, sometimes contiguous sections of town to allies in legal and local fights to improve our collective lot. At times, we have succeeded together

DR. DWIGHT B. MULLEN is an Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of North Carolina at Asheville. He is currently a Fulbright Scholar to Malawi in South Africa.

wildly while at others we have been our own worst enemies.

There are many forerunners to acknowledge if we are attempting to resolve the dilemma of preserving our separate group identities while simultaneously removing the barriers that have marked our status as the "Other." In many ways, discussions focusing on diversity and multiculturalism seem to be continuations of historic discussions of the past. From an African-American perspective, what complicates today's discussions, though, is the terrible price that is being paid for being the "Other" in the United States. Rather than cataloging the horrific statistics covering the health, mortality, incarceration and education of Blacks as examples of the price for twoness, let us instead reconstruct the ways in which we strategize to solve these problems.

Understanding The New Realities

Seminars, community meetings, dialogues between leaders, assistance in community development are tangible means by which individuals from our communities have come together to mutually resolve perplexing issues. Despite the pain or frustration, we must continue to meet together. To not do so is to avoid our communities' traditional role in this country. Throughout the history of the United States, we have consistently found ourselves central to debates striking at the very heart of the experiments that founded America. To leave unresolved our issues is to leave unresolved dilemmas that threaten the republic. Slavery and racism, labor and industry, social equality and state segregation have all seen Jews and African-Americans as lead discussants. Why back out now when we are faced with the rocky, explosive issues of our day?

If we choose to face the problems together then there are certain questions that must be addressed. These questions involve the issues themselves along with the ways through which we discuss them. First, let us be clear, no longer are we confronted solely with issues based on overt discrimination. We are also needing to address issues symptomatic of the growing and deep class divisions within and between our communities. For many African-Americans, discussions delving into multiculturalism and diversity seem pathetically off-track when so many neighbors, friends and relatives are dying in the quagmire of the underclass. Frankly, there are more pressing issues than the development of cross-cultural linkages. Many are even calling for the revitalization of historically Black institutions and the creation of new Afrocentric approaches to community development. Turning inward and separating ourselves for the survival

of the community is a consideration that cannot be ignored. This is not seen as a return to the days of Jim Crow segregation. It is, rather, a conscious choice to depend primarily on the judgment of Black people. This tactic must be understood as a means to an end, not an end in itself. The ends, however, are where our communities must continue to orient our collective efforts.

Simultaneously, African-Americans are politically isolated by the nation's movement to the right. Historically, this has meant a return to a status quo that accepts, if not promotes, the victimization of Blacks. The end of this century is highly reminiscent of the later part of the 1800s when the economic, social and political gains of Reconstruction were lost as the political winds changed and the Court, Congress and President reversed course and combined with the states to impose second-class citizenship of African-Americans.

We did not suffer this status by ourselves, though. The segregation and discrimination we experienced was also felt by Jews. With this as background, it is difficult today to accept the neo-conservative positions being assumed by so many former allies. Participating in the politics of the 1980s and 90s that justify predatory capitalism seems the equivalent of taking a hand in mob actions at the turn of the century that purportedly provided vigilante justice. At some point we must take responsibility for changing systems that promote disparity and distort ideals.

Are We Becoming Racists?

With this as a lesson what, then, are we to do? Redefining what it means to be allies is a first step. Are we better off supporting each other as we confront the political, economic and social realities of today? Or do our needs in these areas present a chasm that is too wide to bridge?

Admitting that the class divisions, for example, are too great to be crossed might spell disaster for a country long accustomed to denying the existence of persistent and destructive economic divisions. We must decide whether we even have the will to constructively discuss solutions together. If we do possess the will, it seems as though the next step is identifying our mutually held values.

The intrinsic worth of individual and group identities, the sacredness of family including the education of our children and the veneration of our elderly are some of the points around which to center our efforts as we aggressively strategize to preserve who we are in America. The challenge we face today is not just learning to identify where we are going but to also avoid losing what we

have gained together. Fear, distrust and rage are symptoms of neglected relations. Without intense reexamination and reconstruction of relations between our communities we threaten to become the very racists we have for so very long fought. We must not be assimilated in this way into the American social fabric. □

Affirmative action: we are all beneficiaries

William L. Taylor

All over this land you will find beneficiaries of affirmative action. They are black and Hispanic-American police officers, firefighters, construction workers, pharmacists, bank officers, health care managers. They are the sons and daughters of black and Hispanic farm workers, janitors and housekeepers.

Their parents were kept down by the yoke of government-imposed segregation and discrimination based on race, national origin and sex. Opportunities to escape the yoke did not happen even after passage of the civil rights laws in the 60s. For several years, government officials continued to believe that repealing the old laws and adopting a stance of "race neutrality" would be sufficient to undo entrenched institutional patterns of exclusion. When that turned out not to be the case, when very little changed on the job or in the university, affirmative action was born.

The beneficiaries of affirmative action are forgotten people in the assault on the policy launched by presidential aspirants Senators Phil Gramm and Bob Dole, sometime aspirant Governor Pete Wilson and other politicians. They paint a picture of privileged but somehow unqualified minorities elbowing their way into positions at the expense of deserving white males.

Mend It, Don't End It

The picture could not be more distorted. Affirmative action policies are designed mostly to provide access to the first rung of the educational and occupational ladder. After that, minorities and women are on their own; if they do not prove their merit, they will not progress. In

WILLIAM L. TAYLOR practices law in Washington, DC specializing in advocacy for poor and minority children. He served as Staff Director of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights during the 1960s.

fact, the term "beneficiary" may be somewhat misleading. The policies have really only helped people help themselves.

Certainly there are some costs to affirmative action. Sometimes legitimate aspirations of white applicants or workers may be disappointed, although the courts have been very careful to ensure that white males will not be displaced from the positions they hold, even at companies that were ridden with discrimination. Sometimes, abuses occur and qualifications are ignored in hiring and admission decisions. But, redress is available in these situations and it is not necessary or sensible to scrap a policy in order to cure its abuses. In President Clinton's phrase, the task in affirmative action is to "mend it, not end it."

The fact is that the real frustrations of many American workers cannot properly be laid at the doorstep of affirmative action, but rather are attributable to the impact of technological change and a global economy. The politicians attacking affirmative action are seeking to excuse their own failures to develop policies that adapt to a changed economy by scapegoating minorities and women. They are practicing the politics of division and exacerbating racial tensions.

The Problem Lies Elsewhere

Most important, the benefits of affirmative action far outweigh the costs. Many of the grandchildren of the farm workers, janitors and housekeepers are coming through the public schools now. Last year, the RAND Corporation study showed that 13- and 17-year-old black youngsters had made enough academic progress to cut the gap that existed between black and white students in 1970 almost in half. Hispanic-American students had also made substantial progress, as measured by the respected National Assessment of Educational Progress. RAND found that one important reason for this progress had to do with the education of parents. In 1970, only 6% of the black teenagers taking the test had parents with college experience; by 1990, 25% had parents who had attended or graduated college.

When affirmative action policies opened the doors of colleges in the early 70s, minority applicants entered, worked hard and acquired the skills to get better paying jobs, formed stable families and created the conditions for the success of their children. This is good news for all Americans—the creation of a positive dynamic to counter the negative cycle of deprivation, discrimination, dependency, and the pathology of drugs, crime and teenage pregnancy. In contributing to a more just and productive society, affirmative action has made beneficiaries of all of us.

If affirmative action has worked well, some have asked whether it is time to end it. Unfortunately, discrimination is still rampant, as the Urban Institute found when it sent pairs of white and minority youngsters—matched in education credentials and appearance—on a job search, only to have the minority testers rejected at a much greater rate than whites. Quitting now on affirmative action or on investments in human resources like pre-school education and job training assistance, would be leaving the job half done and relegating many children of the inner city to lives without hope or opportunity.

This is what the current struggle over affirmative action policy is all about. It occurs at a time of deepening divisions in the nation and new explosions of racial and religious hatred.

The Jewish Place In Social Justice

I do not know if there is a "special" Jewish responsibility to participate in this struggle. What I do know is that over the forty plus years I have worked in civil rights (beginning in 1954 as a member of Thurgood Marshall's legal staff at the NAACP Legal Defense Fund) Jewish-Americans have played an important and valued role as allies in the civil rights movement. Certainly, there have been strains in the alliance, including those occurring over affirmative action policy, which has evoked for some Jews an echo of quotas as ceilings on Jewish participation, and which resulted in conflict in particular areas such as public school teaching in the 70s.

But far more dominant are the bonds forged by empathy—knowing the impact of persecution and being treated as a stranger in one's own land—and by Jewish secular and religious values and traditions. These bonds have led major Jewish organizations to renew their commitment to the principles of affirmative action in the current policy battle. For me, this continuing commitment to goals of equality and social justice is a critical source of my pride in my Jewish identity.

For some Jews, the increased prominence of Louis Farrakhan, a black bigot whose message of hate echoes that of many white bigots, may have provided a rationale for disengagement from cooperative efforts in civil rights. They, and all of us, might do well to heed the admonition of Ralph Ellison:

"What is needed in our country is not an exchange of pathologies, but a change of the basis of society. This is a job which both Negroes and whites must perform together."

These words, written fifty years ago, have a special poignancy and urgency today. Surely, despite the progress that has been made, we are witnessing an "exchange of

pathologies." Whether we allow that exchange to engulf us or seek to surmount it will determine what kind of society we and our children live in in the next century. □

The price of affirmative action

Edward S. Shapiro

Affirmative action is detrimental to all Americans, including Jews and its purported minority beneficiaries. Affirmative action is partially responsible for diversity rather than excellence becoming the governing principle of academia, business and politics. And this when our high school students lag behind the rest of the world in standardized examinations and when our major corporations are competing in a world market with corporations which are unhindered by the costs of administering expensive affirmative action programs. The costs of affirmative action policies are difficult to quantify, but most informed estimates put them into the tens of billions of dollars annually. And this does not include the intangible price of poisoning race relations and embittering millions of Americans.

According to a 1990 study of the National Opinion Research Center, one out of ten white men have been injured by affirmative action. In 1993, 75 supervisors in New York's Human Resources Administration were passed over for promotion because, according to one city official, they were "too white and too male." And recently the *Weekly Standard*, William Kristol's new political magazine, had an article on the admissions policies of the Government Department at Harvard University. The department evidently uses a procedure known as "race-norming" which ranks white applicants against other white applicants, and black applicants against other black applicants.

Pursuing Collective Guilt

What Nathan Glazer has called "affirmative discrimination" ultimately rests upon the claim for justice. Blacks, it is argued, are due compensation for slavery, which ended over 130 years ago, and for the post-slavery experience of segregation and discrimination. There is some logic to this claim until one asks, "justice from whom?" The slave owners are long dead, and the persons

EDWARD S. SHAPIRO teaches American History at Seton Hall University.

being asked to sacrifice their interests to those of blacks often are members of ethnic groups, such as Jews, which were not responsible for slavery and racial segregation.

We are told by affirmative action partisans that all whites must pay the price of affirmative action since, living in a racist society, they are privileged by having white skins. In other guises, this doctrine of collective guilt has been vigorously condemned.

Affirmative action is a doctrine of personal irresponsibility. Not only are white males judged responsible for the actions of others, but blacks are judged not responsible for their own actions.

Affirmative action rests on the premises that the economic and social disparity between whites and blacks is due to racism. In fact, there is a wealth of evidence that economic disparities between whites and blacks are not due to racism but to other factors such as the lack of job skills and the structure of the black family. "Rather than admit this reality," George Gilder recently wrote, "the intelligentsia, black and white, would rather pursue fantasies of racial hatred." Furthermore, the group which would most benefit from affirmative action—the black middle class—does not need it, while the group which most needs it—the black underclass—is unable to benefit from it.

The Victimhood Racket

The major premise of those favoring affirmative action is that it is necessary for the social and economic advancement of blacks. Actually there had been an impressive growth in the black middle class prior to the 1960s when affirmative discrimination became widespread, and this growth continued in the 1970s and then in the 1980s when the economy took off. Economic growth and not racial favoritism has been the major source of black upward mobility, except for those employed in the growing affirmative action industry of university affirmative action officers, government enforcement officials, and corporate vice presidents in charge of diversity. Claiming to do good, they have ended up doing quite well.

The problem of the urban underclass is certainly not ameliorated by modifying college admission standards and hiring standards. Members of the urban underclass don't go to college and are unsuited for white-collar employment. They would be helped more by fostering economic growth and eliminating racial barriers in employment. Unfortunately, affirmative action attenuates that quality of personal initiative which has propelled other groups, such as Jews and Asian-Americans, as well as many blacks,

(continued, p. 8)

BRAD HIRSCHFELD: To be sure, loss and dislocation can fire our spiritual capacities. However, in condemning comfort and security as impediments to our encounter with God, we assure the incongruity of these stories with the lives which more of us are blessed to live at this time than in any other period in human history. Rather than denigrate these gifts of life, we must shape them as opportunities to encounter God, much as the rabbis uncovered ways in which a dinner table could become the Temple altar after the Temple's destruction. If familiarity is antithetical to the spiritual, then spiritual encounters will always be few and far between.

Moreover, David's reading of these stories ignores the divine response to each event of insecurity and dislocation. In each case, the wanderer is promised physical security and even wealth as blessings and tokens of the ongoing relationship with God. Rather than glorify insecurity and dislocation, we ought to glorify the journey toward greater security and safer places for all of humanity. **RABBI BRAD HIRSCHFELD** is Associate Director for Professional Education at CLAL.

DIANNE ESSES: Certainly, as Brad points out, God's encounters with our ancestors were often concluded with promises of great blessing and wealth. But when that blessing comes, its power to evoke in them a sense of the divine is wholly dependent on the memory of the context of raw, direct encounter in which the promise was first made.

Brad urges us to encounter God in security and wealth; David observes that Abraham, Hagar, Jacob, Moses and the Israelites often encounter God at moments when they are unfettered by the trappings of security. In fact, both views are necessary, though neither by itself is sufficient. We need to leave the security of our home and our wealth in order to experience them as blessings.

If we never left, never experienced loss and vulnerability, we would never experience all that we have as blessing. It is because I was lonely that I delight in my relationships, because my life has been in danger that I experience life as a gift. And, finally, it is because we do not take our blessings for granted, we do not become overattached to the things of our lives, that we can go and meet God in all our fragile insecurity.

DIANNE ESSES is a Steinhardt Fellow at CLAL.

Sh'ma mina*

Jacob left Beer Sheva and set out for Haran.

GENESIS 28:10

What does the first half of this verse mean? According to Rashi, the text need only have said, "Jacob set out for Haran," but the mention of his leaving Beer Sheva teaches that the departure of a *tzaddik* from a place leaves an impression. This explanation, seems insufficient since the rest of the story deals not with the effect Jacob's departure had on Beer Sheva, but rather with its effect on *him*.

Rather, the first part of the verse tells us that Jacob's encounter with God (the ladder dream) can *only* happen when Jacob has left the comfort and security of home. We see this idea throughout the Torah. God speaks to Abram not at home, in Ur, but in Haran. Similarly, though her mistress Sarai mistreats her, Hagar is not comforted by God at home, but only when she has fled to the wilderness. Even the enslaved Hebrews do not perceive God directly until they are adrift in the desert. Apparently, the familiarity and comfort of "home" numbs us to the possibility of God's presence.

But the truth of this observation conflicts with subsequent history, when the encounter with God was institutionalized in the Temple, or, later, in the home or the synagogue. Perhaps this development can explain the frequent complaints of meaninglessness and lack of spirituality in our contemporary Jewish institutions. Perhaps the intensity of the biblical encounter with God can only be found if, following Jacob's lead, we leave the security of "home" and venture into the wilderness.

RABBI DAVID NELSON

*Learn from this—a page of text study composed by CLAL

of *tzaddik*, or even to approach it, we must leave home and encounter tribulation.

ED ELLMAN is a long-time supporter of CLAL. He lives in Columbus, OH, where he is in the insurance and investment business.

ED ELLMAN: Rashi claims that Jacob's departure from Beer Sheva is significant, since the departure of a *tzaddik* from a place makes an impression. But to my mind, Jacob was not yet a *tzaddik*! His actions, until then, included exploitation, deceit and thievery.

Only after he leaves Beer Sheva and confronts his own duplicity, do we begin our identification with Jacob. When Jacob later encounters and wrestles with the angel/man, we are given the paradigm of struggling to overcome our *yetzer bara*, the exploitative, selfish part of ourselves.

Nahum Sarna points out that the etymology of the name "Israel," although usually understood as "God-wrestler," could mean "straight with God." Through struggle, transformation has been achieved.

Leaving Haran was an essential developmental move for Abraham and for Rebekah (Isaac's wife-to-be), and it was the beginning of the process for Jacob. Haran is the symbol for the place which each of us must abandon in order to grow.

We revere Jacob because he achieved a complete metamorphosis of inner being; he *became* a *tzaddik*. We learn from him that, to achieve the ideal state

up the economic and social ladder. The message that a person's fate is his to determine is often difficult to accept since it eliminates a convenient excuse for failure. But without this belief in personal responsibility, it is difficult to conceive of any social or economic reform program working if its beneficiaries think of themselves as helpless victims in need of special treatment.

The Fallacy Of Race-Based Justice

The argument that the only way to eliminate racism is by becoming race-conscious is fanciful. Do advocates of affirmative action want to emphasize racism in a society in which blacks comprise only 12% of the population? Do they think that the vast majority of whites will tolerate that? A society free of racial, gender, religious and ethnic discrimination should be the goal of public policy. Such a society also has the advantage of being one in which minorities best flourish.

With economic and social rewards being determined by group membership, there has been an inevitable increase in the number of groups claiming victimhood status. Women, Asians, Hispanics, Eskimos, homosexuals and the physically disabled have joined blacks in demanding a place at the table. What began as a laudable objective has become a racket, pure and simple.

Little wonder then that affirmative action has poisoned American race relations. Blacks, convinced of the rightness of affirmative action, are seemingly endless in their demands. They even reject the sensible suggestion that a date be named, say 2010, when all affirmative action programs will be abolished. Affirmative action has had the same effect as advertising—it stimulates unlimited demands and inculcates perpetual discontent. Whites, by contrast, are equally persuaded that affirmative action is fundamentally alien to traditional American principles of individualism and fair play.

American Jews have a particular stake in the elimination of affirmative action. Jews have flourished in the United States as a result of the replacement of ascription by merit. This has been particularly true since the end of World War II. Who could have imagined in the 1930s that there would come a time, such as today, when America's three most prestigious universities—Harvard,

Princeton and Yale—would have Jewish (or part-Jewish) presidents? The racial, gender and ethnic entitlements of affirmative action strike at the very heart of the principle of merit, and inevitably undermine the prospects of social and economic success of a minority which is no more than 2.5% of the population.

One of the least attractive results of the contemporary backlash against affirmative action has been the pitting of various groups against one another. Thus, in California, Asian-Americans favor the ending of racial entitlements while blacks support it. Affirmative action has also increased antagonism between whites and blacks on the college campus. All of this could have been avoided had the country never deviated from the goal of the civil rights movement of the 1960s of creating a society in which people would be judged by the content of their character and not by the group to which they belong by the accident of birth. □

But others say about...

Orthodoxy

I was very dismayed to learn that according to Jon Zimmerman (*Sh'ma*, 11/10/95) only Orthodoxy leads to the highest spiritual levels and the kinds of people who embody holiness. Wow. Mr. Zimmerman has not defined "holiness" as he applies it, so it's hard to either disagree or concur. Yet, I would hope that there are some scholars out there in *Sh'ma*-land who can respond to this indictment. Is there room in Mr. Zimmerman's philosophy for non-Jews to be holy? Can a woman be holy? To what degree may a person fall short of perfection, yet still be holy? Who, exactly, determines who is holy and who isn't? Are the *Lamed Vavniks* holy? Are they only Orthodox Jews? Is ritual a means to an end, or an end in itself? I await additional input on this subject...

Betty J. Singer
Wayne, NJ

Sh'ma a Journal of Jewish responsibility
99 Park Avenue, Suite S-300
New York, NY 10016-1599

Second-Class Postage Paid at New York, NY

*19970905 504286 210 1
Cantor Deborah R. Staiman
Temple Israel Of Gtr Miami
137 Ne 19th Street
North Miami Beach FL 33132-1095

