Jewish Ideas Weekly

www.jewishideasdaily.com

August 10-17, 2012

Friday, August 10

The Last Berber Jews

By Diana Muir Appelbaum

As a child, the French filmmaker Kamal Hachkar learned the Berber language from his grandparents in Tinghir, a Berber oasis city east of the Atlas Mountains in Morocco. As an adult he discovered that the now exclusively Muslim town once had a substantial Jewish community. In Hachkar's film *Tinghir-Jerusalem, Echoes from the Mellah: The Rediscovery of a Judeo-Berber Culture*, which appeared at the New York Sephardic Film Festival this spring, Hachkar walks through Tinghir with his grandfather. They stop at a certain spot, and Hachkar asks the old man if this is where the synagogue was. It is there no longer: All that remain in the old Jewish quarters of this and other Berber towns are crumbled adobe walls, vacant lots, and once-Jewish stores now owned by Muslims.

Hachkar was told what other young Moroccan children are told if they ask about the vanished Jews, that the Zionists forced the Jews to leave their beloved villages and that the Jews left in tears. Intrigued, he follows the story to Israel, where he tracks down the elderly Jews who were uprooted from Tinghir. Tears flowing, the immigrants reminisce about their childhood homes and friends. They sing old Berber songs and sigh. Berber Jews from Morocco have not had easy lives in Israel.

But do they regret leaving? No—and not merely, as one Israeli-born daughter reminds her mother, because in Morocco the woman had to wash clothes by hand in the river. The Jews left because they had to leave.

The Berber regions of Morocco were tribal and were not fully controlled by central authorities until well into the 20th century. Although Berber tribes understand themselves as extended families, descendants of a single, named ancestor, reality is more complicated. Families of slaves, former slaves, and survivors of defeated tribes can join a tribe as subordinate members. Berber Jews belonged to their tribes in this subordinate way. In the film, Hachkar walks the ruins of the abandoned Jewish quarter of a small Berber town as an elderly man describes the close friendships between the Jews and Muslims: The Jews of his tribe were like brothers, he says, and fought with the tribe to defend its territory. But when asked whether Jewish and Muslim young people could fall in love and marry, he recoils in shock.

You can still see traces of the Berber Jews in the geometric, humanoid carvings on the gravestones in the old Jewish cemetery of Mogador, modern Essaouira. Berber Jews fascinated 20th-century French ethnologists, who came to study them and photograph Jewish Berber women, with their distinctive tribal jewelry, embroidered robes, and tattooed faces. But only a small percentage of Morocco's Jews were Berber-speakers. Larger numbers of Arabic-speaking Jews lived in Fez, Marrakech, and other cities and spoke Jewish versions of their regions' Arabic dialects. After 1492, they were joined by Sephardim expelled from Spain. For the next five centuries, the communities maintained their distinctive customs, languages, and synagogues.

It is easy to get nostalgic about Jewish life in Morocco—picturesque towns, wonderful food. Today, the few thousand Jews who remain, mostly in the business hub of Casablanca, have full citizenship. Jews are welcome to visit and run businesses. The government has a moderate attitude toward Israel.

But Jewish life in Berber or Arab Morocco was never secure. This year is the centennial of the Fez Pogrom of 1912, a useful reminder that the history of the Jews in Arab North Africa was very like their history in other Christian and Muslim lands. Muslims saw Jews as inferior. Jews understood that they lived at Muslim sufferance. Jews could and did rise to great wealth and power in Moroccan society; but they had no rights, only such privileges as Muslim society and sultans chose to grant them. For centuries, they put up with what their neighbors dished out: petty humiliations, heavy taxation, occasional violence. The Jews of Fez responded to news of the first Zionist Congress in 1897 by establishing a chapter of Hibbat Zion (Lovers of Zion).

In 1948, Moroccans responded to the creation of Israel with deadly pogroms in Oujda and Jerada. In a wave of Jew hatred over the next several years, Jews were kidnapped and

Jewish Ideas Weekly, *published by* Jewish Ideas Daily, *is a project of Bee.Ideas. To contact us, please email* editors@jewishideasdaily.com.

murdered. They were not expelled, as in Algeria; but Morocco had become dangerous, and they began to leave. They went to France, Montreal—and Israel, because, for the first time in history, they had the opportunity to go home. Indeed, so many families immigrated to Israel that in 1956, King Hassan, fearing that other Arab states would blame him for allowing immigrants from Morocco to strengthen Israel, forbade the Jews to leave.

After emigration was banned, Jews escaped clandestinely. On January 11, 1961, the *Egoz*, a small boat leased by the Mossad to smuggle Jews from Morocco to Gibraltar, capsized. All forty-four of the olim drowned, half were children. After the *Egoz* disaster, the Jewish Agency and the Mossad worked with threatened Moroccan communities to rescue the children first. In Operation Mural, 530 Moroccan Jewish children were sent by their families on an ostensible holiday in Switzerland—and, from there, flown to Israel.

Four months later, a deal was struck for a larger emigration. King Hassan, embarrassed by the international attention paid to the *Egoz* drownings, agreed that Moroccan Jews could emigrate secretly, so as not to draw the attention of anti-Israel governments—and the king would receive an indemnity for each Jew who left. The figures were never released, but it is estimated that between $5 million and $20 million flowed to the royal treasury in exchange for the 80,000 Moroccan Jews who were allowed to make aliyah between 1962 and 1964.

The last Berber Jews left Tinghir and other Berber towns silently, in the dead of night. Word was passed among them; they left with only what they could carry and without telling their Muslim neighbors. They walked, some of them single file down mountain trails, to roads outside their villages. There, they boarded buses to begin their journey to the Jewish state.

Monday, August 13

Holocaust Reparations: The Back Story

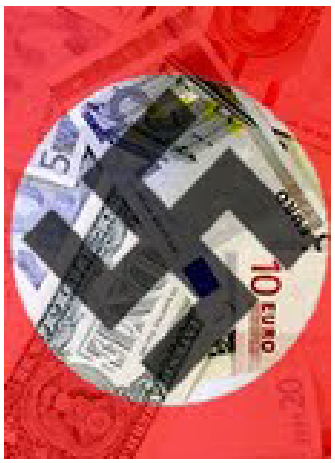
By Michael Pinto-Duschinsky

On July 10th, dignitaries from the U.S., German, and Israeli governments attended a curious ceremony at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington. The gathering marked the 60th anniversary of the first agreement by the West German government with the Israeli government and the Jewish "Claims Conference" to grant modest financial compensation for the Holocaust. Some of the Jews in the room had spent the years since the agreement in seemingly interminable haggling.

The event had the character of a celebration and an exercise in self-congratulation. Ambassador Stuart Eizenstat, a prominent Jewish corporate lawyer who currently holds the offices of Special Advisor to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on Holocaust Issues and Special Negotiator for the Jewish Claims Conference, was in top form. In the 1990s, as a sub-cabinet official in Bill Clinton's administration, Eizenstat headed the talks between class action lawyers for Holocaust survivors and German corporations that were accused of using slave labor during the Second World War. Bodies such as the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, the "Claims Conference," and the German government also participated. Eizenstat subsequently wrote a self-praising volume about his role and went on to receive the "Great Negotiator" award from his alma mater, Harvard Law School.

At the ceremony, Eizenstat declared that "the Claims Conference vision, we hope, of meaningful compensation and reparations during the last 60 years has truly brought a reconciliation between Germany, the Jewish people, and the state of Israel."

But was Eizenstat justified in claiming this? As a Holocaust survivor and British academic, who acted as honorary advisor to a group of former slave laborers in London during talks in the 1990s, I have my doubts. The oft-cited statistic that Germany has given payments amounting to over $60 billion since the War to Nazi victims is disingenuous. Much of this consists of pensions and related social security payments to former German citizens living in Western countries whom Hitler forced to leave but who would have received the payments in any case had they remained in Germany.



While I appreciate the dilemmas faced by Eizenstat and the Jewish bodies that participated in the negotiations of the 1990s, my firsthand experiences have led me to be critical of them. In particular, the emphasis on haggling for money—admittedly a valid aim in view of the poverty of some Holocaust survivors in Israel and the former Soviet Union—led to unseemly sacrifices of historical truth for cash.

Eizenstat's view was that he could win some money for elderly survivors while they were still alive. This would be better than pursuing lawsuits which could be lost and which, in any case, were likely to drag on until what the German side menacingly called a "biological solution" to the claims issue: by the time the lawsuits were over, the claimants would all be dead. On this basis, the several billions of dollars pledged by the German side made it worthwhile to persuade the lawyers for the survivors to settle out of court.

But there were several problems with the settlement won by the "Great Negotiator." Former slave laborers of the Nazis would each receive the insultingly small sum of $7,500 or less. This was hardly the "modest but significant" amount suggested by Eizenstat's deputy, Ambassador J. D. Bindenagel. For this, not only would they be required to sign away all future legal rights but there would be no admission on the German side of legal liability for the atrocities of the Nazi "*Vernichtung durch Arbeit*" (Death through Work) program. The German President would offer an apology but on condition that the Clinton administration signed an agreement that German corporations and the German government would be assured of "legal peace."

The refusal by German industry and by the German government to acknowledge that Holocaust slave labor was illegal continues to have a huge symbolic importance. For how can there be true reconciliation, let alone a humanitarian order in Europe and in the world as a whole if modern Germany continues to deny legal liability for the un-

speakable actions of Nazi Germany? I remember a moment in the slave labor talks when I accompanied two of the survivors to a meeting with the German ambassador to the United Kingdom. When one of them described his experiences as a slave laborer in Buna-Monowitz, a sub-camp of Auschwitz, the Ambassador turned to me to explain that "strictly speaking" Germany had done nothing illegal there. Subsequently, the late Otto Graf Lambsdorff, a corrupt ex-minister who was the chief German negotiator in the talks organized by the U.S. Department of State, stressed that the settlement carried no legal admission.

To make matters worse, German denials of legal responsibility for the Holocaust have been accompanied by historical spin-doctoring. The German authorities even went to the length of organizing a conference at a former concentration camp to establish that the term "slave labor" be abandoned in favor of the less harsh-sounding "forced labor." German banks and corporations financed a mini-industry of historians to write accounts of their records under the Nazis. Such sponsored histories have tended to be exercises in "gray-washing": works that make small admissions alongside denials of guilt on large matters. Sometimes Jewish historians have been employed in order to add credence to the corporations' defenses. The late Professor Gerald Feldman of Berkeley became a particularly notorious defender of the interests of the German bodies that sponsored his work.

Apart from payments by individual German companies to chosen historians, the German negotiators in the legal negotiations of the 1990s insisted on reserving a proportion of the settlement offer for so-called "remembrance" projects. In practice, this meant that a German-dominated committee would act as a major source of research funds for Holocaust studies. Such German research funding tends to have corrosive effects on the Jewish institutions and the Holocaust museums that accept it. Far from assuring "remembrance," it distorts it. One particularly worrying German policy has been to restrict archive access to its chosen historians. I myself have been denied access to key archives held by Deutsche Bank and Volkswagen.

There are other reasons why the many rounds of talks over Holocaust compensation and restitution are no cause for satisfaction. Inevitably, the long years of dealings with the German authorities have tended to affect the small circle of employees and board members of the Claims Conference and isolate them and their interests from those of the wider Jewish community. In 2006, the London *Jewish Chronicle* revealed that, while Auschwitz slave laborers had been offered a maximum of $7,500, the chief official of the Claims Conference had received an annual salary and pension contribution of $437,811.

Some of the class action lawyers representing Holocaust survivors were prepared to settle on terms which were arguably highly disadvantageous to their clients in return for multi-million dollar payouts for themselves. Some of these lawyers had led me and members of the London-based survivor body Claims for Jewish Slave Labor Compensation to believe that they were acting pro bono for various family reasons. One of the lawyers told me over a meal in the State Department cafeteria during a break in the negotiations that he had spoken to a psychiatrist who had assured him that it was better that the survivors should die happy rather than be told that they were receiving a raw deal. The firm of the lawyer in question received several million dollars.

There have been repeated financial scandals involving the Claims Conference. The United Kingdom Jewish Board of Deputies has been in serious conflict with the New York-based Claims Conference over its handling of claims for Jewish property in the former East Germany. Then there is the matter of some $57 million in payments reportedly granted by Claims Conference officials in exchange for kickbacks.

In my opinion, world Jewry has three responsibilities to Holocaust survivors. The first is to ensure that all compensation available goes to them and is not diverted to "remembrance" projects for museums and for academic research financed by German authorities. Certainly, Holocaust museums and Holocaust research both are vital; but they need to be funded from Jewish contributions in order to avoid the distortions and propaganda that come from German money. Second, so far as remembrance is concerned, the core Jewish objective must be to ensure that archives in German hands relating to the Holocaust are freely available and are not restricted to select groups of historians sponsored by the very corporations which are accused of using slave labor under the Nazis. Third, though symbolic, it also is vital to secure German admission of legal liability. Only then can there be a genuine reconciliation between Germany and the Jewish people.

Tuesday, August 14

The Month of Return

The Jewish month of Av will soon become Ellul, and mourning for the destruction of the Temples will give way to repentance for our sins. It is time for introspection; and, as we contemplate our relationships with others and with the Divine, questions about penitence, forgiveness, change, and mortality itself inevitably arise.

In anticipation of Ellul, which begins this weekend, we re-publish two features that confront these questions. The first piece has two parts. One is based on a reflection by U.S. Senator Joseph Lieberman, who will retire at the end of this year, on Shabbat and the ways in which it creates a path to understanding the purpose of life on earth. The second part describes a surprising meditation by polemicist David Horowitz on his mortality and his growing comprehension of the redemptive significance of the Jewish people.

The second feature reprinted here is a commentary on the teachings of the great theologian and mystic, Rav Kook, about the meaning of repentance. Dissimilar as he is to Lieberman and Horowitz, Rav Kook, like them, bases his work on a personal idea of teshuvah, "return."

With the return to Ellul, we return to these explorations of the great questions of this season. —The Editors

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The Book of Life

By Tevi Troy

The High Holy Days are traditionally a time for introspection. Even the sturdiest soul must pause with trepidation over the more harrowing passages in the somber liturgy of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Who shall live, and who shall die? Who in his time, and

who not in his time? Who by fire, and who by drowning? Wrestling with such questions is nothing new in Judaism, but this year, by coincidence, two newly published books, though vastly different in character, jointly aid in the search for meaning that is the watchword of the season.

In another set of coincidences, both books are by laymen rather than scholars or rabbis, and both laymen are active in American politics. The first is Joseph Lieberman's *The Gift of Rest: Rediscovering the Beauty of the Sabbath (*Simon and Schuster*)*; the second is David Horowitz's *A Point in Time: The Search for Redemption in This Life and the Next (*Regnery*)*.

Lieberman is coming to the end of a tumultuous and reverberant political career that saw him arrive in the U.S. Senate in 1988; run and lose as the Democratic Vice Presidential candidate in the 2000 national election, the closest in our lifetimes; be expelled by his own party for his maverick views on foreign policy, in particular his steadfast support for George W. Bush's determination to stay the course in Iraq; return victoriously to the Senate as an Independent in 2006; and receive serious consideration as a potential GOP Vice Presidential candidate in 2008.

One is tempted to speculate on the connection between Lieberman's soul-trying peregrinations in the political wilderness and the impulse to compose a book on that sheltered island of respite, contemplation, and prayer that is the Jewish Sabbath. But he himself draws no such connection, being content instead with a few tales of how he has coped with the inevitable conflicts between the requirements of Sabbath observance and his sometimes urgent legislative responsibilities. Mostly, though, he focuses on the ultimate meaning of the Sabbath in his own life as an Orthodox Jew and as an American. Though produced with the assistance of David Klinghoffer, a professional writer, *The Gift of Rest* is quintessentially Lieberman. Conversational, humorous, and at the same time morally serious, it is redolent of the spirit of a witty and well-educated man who has been blessed with a strikingly equable temperament.

The book follows in sequence the stages of the Sabbath itself, from prior preparations on Friday afternoon all the way through to the concluding *Havdalah* service after sunset on Saturday. In each section Lieberman intersperses information about the laws, rituals, and customs pertinent to that aspect of the day with anecdotes about his own habits of celebrating it. Each Friday, for example, he buys flowers for his wife, Hadassah; during the Sabbath itself, he will not so much as wear a watch, lest he be distracted by reminders of the scheduled rigidity of his work week. In a chapter titled "Sunrise, Sunset: Intimacy, Human and Divine," he muses suggestively on the traditional injunction that husbands and wives make a point of cohabiting on the Day of Rest.

A bit of a how-to manual, the book also has consciously universal implications. At the end of each chapter, Lieberman offers practical hints for how all persons, Jew and Gentile alike, can bring a little more of the Sabbath into their lives. As he writes at the outset, the Sabbath "is a gift from God that I want to share with everyone who reads this book, in the hopes that they will grow to love it as much as I do." Lieberman loves it, clearly, for itself alone and because it is a proven pathway to discovering the purpose of life on earth. As a deliberately modest reflection on that pathway, *The Gift of Rest* is worthy of its subject: a wise, measured, and joyful exercise.

A bracing if far less upbeat exercise awaits readers of David Horowitz's *A Point in Time.* This is the last in a trilogy of brief books on the theme of mortality, his own included, that Horowitz has published in recent years, the earlier two being *The End of Time* (2005) and *A Cracking of the Heart* (2009). The author on display here may seem unrecognizable to followers of the gifted and voluble polemicist who has battled mightily against the pernicious influence of the American Left on American politics and culture. But the same David Horowitz has composed *A Point in Time*, a deeply thoughtful, at times lyrical meditation that is serious without a hint of solemnity, and quietly but powerfully moving.

In recounting his struggle to accept his own mortality while rescuing some faith in the redeeming significance of human life, Horowitz is guided by several carefully chosen thinkers. Prominent among them are the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius (121-180 C.E.) and the towering Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881). The former appeals to Horowitz as a philosophical Stoic who, given the final erasure of death, questions not only the permanence but the utility of earthly striving. "Make the best use of what is in your power and take the rest as it happens," Horowitz quotes the emperor quoting the slave Epictetus; although he does not note the resemblance, all three might have been quoting the strikingly similar musings on the ephemerality and futility of life by the biblical author of Ecclesiastes.

Even more strikingly, and to Horowitz's frustration, Marcus Aurelius, as if overwhelmed by the bleakness of his own vision, concludes his Stoic quest in a complete philosophical reversal, urging himself and his readers to place their faith in the all-seeing wisdom of the immortal gods. (Appropriately enough, Ecclesiastes ends on an analogous note.) Moving, then, to the opposite side of the spectrum, Horowitz turns to Dostoevsky, with his famous repudiation of the quest for earthly salvation—a quest, the novelist mordantly observes, that "has led to the greatest crimes"—and his surrender to the love that surpasses understanding that is epitomized for Dostoevsky in the Christian faith.

Yet this, too, will not do. As Horowitz details, the great novelist's embrace of all existence under the aspect of divine love is fatally undercut by the vicious and unremitting hatred Dostoevsky reserves in his heart for one human species in particular—namely, the Jews. And it is here that Horowitz's book takes its final turn as, in a brief concluding chapter, his "Search for Redemption in This Life and the Next" comes to rest in contemplation of the stubborn and mysterious will of his own people to survive and to hold fast to their ancient calling, with its pledge of final redemption, against all odds and in contention with so many more powerful but finally evanescent human regimes.

It would not be too much to say that Horowitz's tortuous but clear-eyed quest for redemptive meaning is itself an expression of a quintessentially Jewish approach to life, its possibilities, and its rewards, whether realized or promised. It is a spirit that he shares with Joseph Lieberman. Bypassing the often inaccessible researches of the academics and the platitudes of the self-help specialists,

both of these men of affairs and passionate amateur theologians have something acute to say about Judaism's answers to the toughest questions life presents us with—at no time more poignantly than in the annual season of repentance and renewal.

Repentance = Freedom?

By Yehudah Mirsky

In the thick of the month of Ellul, nearing Rosh Hashanah, penitence is or should be in the air. Also recently marked was the 75th *yahrzeit* of the great mystic, jurist, and theologian Abraham Isaac Kook (1865-1935). As it turns out, Kook's teachings on the meaning of repentance are among his most striking, stamped with his distinctive mix of piety and audacity. In his eyes, teshuvah, generally translated as "repentance" but literally and more powerfully "return," signifies not only a deepened and renewed commitment to religion and commandments but, paradoxically, nothing less than a new birth of freedom.

Kook's ideas on the subject are chiefly laid out in the volume *Orot Hateshuvah* ("The Lights of Return"), first published in 1925. Like nearly all his works, this is less a systematic treatise than a collection of reflections, aphorisms, and poetic and mystical flights culled from his spiritual diaries. Again, like all his works, it is deep, transporting—and problematic.

This, in sum, is Kook's vision: all of existence, individual and collective, high and low, is rooted in God and will return to Him. God is the source of the *élan vital* coursing through the universe, a force expressing itself in all aspects of human creativity and freedom, even those that at first blush seem to run counter to conventional religion. To engage in teshuvah is, so to speak, to catch the wave.

While touching on powerful currents of modern sensibility, Kook's thought is rooted above all in Kabbalah, the Jewish mystical tradition. Central to that tradition is the doctrine of the Sefirot, the nodal points of divine energy that, taken together, constitute the deep structure from which all known worlds have emanated and to which they and we will return. Crucial to this process of cosmic unfolding is the sefirah known as Binah ("Insight"), also designated "the maternal sefirah": the metaphysical womb out of which emerge the cosmos and all its souls. It, too, is designated "teshuvah."

Repentance, in other words, is return to the very womb of creation—a "place without boundaries" in the words of the author of the 13th-century kabbalistic treatise *Shaarei Orah.* Its connection with freedom was spelled out in the 16th century by Judah Loewe, the Maharal of Prague, who wrote that "when people undertake teshuvah and return to their beginnings, the world too returns to its beginning, to restore and repair every ruined thing in the world."

Writing in the early 20th century, Kook was striving to make sense of a deep paradox: on the one hand, the collapse of much of traditional society in secularism and revolution; on the other hand, the stirrings of Jewish national, cultural, and perhaps spiritual renewal in the land of Israel, itself the work of secular Jews and rebels against rabbinic authority. He was also drawn to the modern beliefs in progress and in the power and primacy of self-expression. In the kabbalistic understanding of teshuvah, he found a way of weaving these themes into the fabric of tradition:

> Teshuvah derives from the aspiration of all existence to be more refined, stronger, and better than it is. Hidden in this desire is a life force that would overcome the limited dimension of being and its weaknesses. And the particular teshuvah of an individual, and all the more so of the community, draws its strength from this fount of life, which continually exercises its strength in never-ending action.

But if existence, with all its promise and imperfections, originates in God and is driven to return to Him, what then is sin? To Kook, it is that which obstructs the divine light, "the illumination of the higher Wisdom whose revelatory path proceeds through the simple harmony of a soul given to understanding the wholeness of all being and its heavenly source." Release from sin thus requires not only a practical commitment to Torah and commandments but also a relaxation of the sorrows, and the guilt, that create blockages in the soul. As he writes in an amazing passage: "One who grieves constantly for his sins and the sins of the world must constantly forgive and *absolve himself and the whole world* [emphasis added], and in so doing will draw forgiveness and a light of lovingkindness onto all being and bring joy to God and to His creatures."

This passage resonates with Kook's dissent from the religious view that identifies repentance with submission and the breaking of one's own will. Yes, the will must be disciplined in action—Kook was no less a jurist than a mystic—but "the will deriving from the power of teshuvah . . . is not the superficial will, which grasps only the weak and external sides of life, but rather the will that is the innermost nucleus of the foundation of life, the very selfhood of the soul."

What he is describing, Kook recognizes, is an ideal, not the reality: "There is still no true freedom in the world, which is not yet liberated from its slavish fetters." Still, he insists, "there are levels, levels," and these are realizable in "the extent to which each personality can grasp, through good inclinations, acts, and longings, its choice and its heavenly freedom." *And* there is something that can lead the way—namely, the "national renaissance" of the Jewish people. This powerful phenomenon is, for Kook, "the foundation of the great edifice of teshuvah, the higher teshuvah of Israel and of the entire world that will follow in its train."

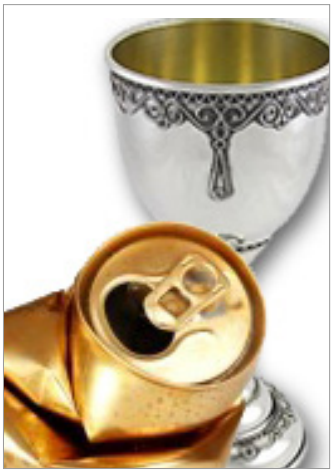
An extraordinary conception indeed. As for its problems, one may usefully invoke Isaiah Berlin's classic essay distinguishing two senses of freedom: negative freedom, freedom from the restraints of government and social coercion, and positive freedom, the freedom to be one's own best imagined self. The former is the humbler ideal, the latter the more thrilling—but also, when too tightly identified with the collective, or too loosely connected with ethics, a source of great human suffering.

Kook was clearly thinking mainly of positive freedom, and his ideas are prey to its characteristic deformations: a romantic apotheosis of the self and of the individual or collective will in pursuit of its own untrammeled fulfillment. Kook's belief in progress and the inevitable moral improvement of the world, a belief very much a product of his age, would also come in for severe pummeling in the ensuing decades.

Kook was a deeply dialectical thinker, and his ideas should be approached with care. But it does not require the erasure of his vision to appreciate how its cosmic exuberance should be balanced by a contrary motion rooted in structures able to counter, contain, and, ultimately, sustain it. After all, central to the kabbalah that was so central to him is the idea that, in order to shine into this finite world, the divine light must be contained in vessels. The ceaseless interplay between radiant energy and the structures that bear it is the very essence of the life of the spirit.

Charles Murray and the Rabbis

Earlier this year, sociologist Charles Murray published *Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960-2010* (Crown Forum). For more than three decades Murray has written about the attributes of individual mind and character that determine the fates of nations. His 1984 book, *Losing Ground: American Social Policy 1950-1980 (*Basic Books*)*, argued that U.S. welfare programs of the 1960s and 1970s worsened the situation of the clients they were meant to help. The book is widely credited with having played a significant role in the passage of the 1996 welfare reform act, which added time limits and work requirements to welfare programs. Murray's 1994 *The Bell Curve* (Free Press), written with Richard Herrnstein, concluded that individual intelligence was a better predictor of economic and social success in America than factors like education and parents' wealth. The book warned that the differences between the "cognitive elite" and the rest of the country were growing dangerously.



Some critics said *Losing Ground* and *The Bell Curve* were racially motivated. In this view, Murray was "really" saying, underneath the social science data, that African-Americans were less successful than white Americans because they were less intelligent and that government rules and programs could not and should not be expected to change this fact. The subsequent debate came to include public statements on both sides of the issue by intelligence researchers, a special task force established by the American Psychological Association, entire books written with the aim of refuting Herrnstein and Murray, and a book-length counter-refutation by Murray himself.

The same criticism cannot be made of *Coming Apart*, in which African-Americans do not figure at all. *Coming Apart* argues that in white America, the upper and lower classes increasingly live in different worlds. In the top socio-economic layer, the disruptions of the counter-culture have faded: Divorce rates are down, satisfaction with marriage is up, and out-of-wedlock births are rare. By contrast, poor and working-class whites—around 30 percent of the country's white population—are increasingly indifferent to traditional American values like industriousness, law-abiding honesty, marriage, and religion.

The white lower class, Murray notes, is four times less church-going than the white upper class. Before the recent recession, unemployed white men aged 30-49 with high school diplomas were four times more likely than white men with college diplomas to have stopped looking for work. The out-of-wedlock birth rate for college-educated white women is five percent; for high-school-educated white women, the rate is 40 percent.

As with Murray's previous books, *Coming Apart* has engendered criticism—in particular, the criticism that it neglects the economic factors making it more difficult for today's working-class Americans to find and keep jobs (though in fact Murray's data cover 50 years of good economic times and bad). But few have denied that the phenomena Murray lays out are real and consequential.

In one sense, Jews, with their high scores on intelligence tests and for large parts of the community economic success, would seem immune from the divisions that Murray analyzes. Indeed, Murray once wrote at length about this type of Jewish "immunity," in an April, 2007 *Commentary* article titled "Jewish Genius." But the immunity conferred by high IQs may be insignificant or illusory. There is, in fact, a larger question: Is the American social landscape described in *Coming Apart* good for the Jews?

Jewish Ideas Daily's Suzanne Garment recently sat with Charles Murray at the American Enterprise Institute, where he is W.H. Brady Scholar, and asked him the question in person.

What is missing in *Coming Apart*, he freely acknowledged, is something that preoccupied a whole generation of sociologists: ethnicity. The residents of the white working-class and lower-class community that was studied in *Coming Apart* were mainly German in origin, "and they weren't the immigrant generation any more. I didn't have the data to break them into ethnic groups—and there didn't seem much point."

Ethnicity, he said, "isn't such a primal source of division any longer." In the small town in Virginia in which he lives, "race and ethnicity aren't things that people notice any more"; in the casino where he goes to play the occasional game of poker, "the tables are incredibly variegated, and you just don't hear derogatory remarks."

On the other hand, "Robert Putnam has found that living in ethnically diverse communities reduces trust, not just between ethnic groups but within a single ethnic group. That doesn't bode well for the building of social capital among the immigrant components of those diverse communities."

The absence of this kind of social capital is going to be an increasing problem, one that is not unrelated to the history of Jews in America:

> Jews have been Americans squared—including the ambition and, therefore, the speed of their rise. But at the time when they were establishing themselves in America, there was a particular American ethos to imbibe. You didn't look down on other Americans: It was un-American. It was an ethos of equal dignity, a kind of absence of ostentation.

For newer immigrants, he said, American society no longer presents the same kind of model. These newer immigrants may come from societies in which there are clear divisions between rich and poor, with no ethos of equal dignity. They arrive in an America in which that ethos is increasingly weak and the differences between rich and poor are increasingly apparent. Of the new immigrants, Murray said, "I'm not sure they're going to integrate in the same way."

So, if a kind of coming apart is taking place in American society as a whole, what are the implications for American Jews, who became integrated into an older, less divided model of America? What should the Jewish reaction be?

On these questions, Murray himself is not the last word. Earlier this summer, the Tikvah Fund, together with Yeshiva University's Center for the Jewish Future, convened a dozen Modern Orthodox pulpit rabbis for three days of study and conversation. One of the purposes of the conference was to encourage talented rabbis to consider the great cultural issues of our time and bring Jewish perspectives to bear on those issues.

The rabbis were asked to arrive at the conference having read *Coming Apart* and written responses that addressed the moral questions raised by Murray's argument, considered through a Jewish lens. Here, edited for length, are some of their responses.

—*The Editors*

Trouble in Eden

By Yaakov Y. Kermaier

The Bible, say the sages, has seventy faces. Her beauty is complex and subtle, appreciated differently in each era and place. But, while every believer finds self-affirmation in the Bible, it is more difficult to discern and accept the Bible's rebuke. We want to see her smile; we also need to see her frown.

With this premise in mind, let us begin searching for the Bible's 21st-century American face "in the beginning." The opening chapters of Genesis describe the creation of the world, followed by man's placement in and expulsion from the Garden of Eden. These passages speak fundamental truths about not only the world created then but the world we seek to fashion now. What were the salient characteristics of the Garden of Eden, and what went wrong? Why does it matter to 2012 America?

Charles Murray's scholarly and arresting new book, *Coming Apart*, informs—with no such intention—our modern study of Genesis. America, argues Murray, "is coming apart at the seams—not seams of race or ethnicity, but of class." Over the past 50 years, America has developed a "new lower class," which no longer lives by the principles that made America exceptional, and an isolated "new upper class" that still lives by these values but lacks the confidence to promote them.

What are the elements that, according to Murray, have long defined America's civic culture? Not by chance, they are the same four principles as those of the biblical Eden: industriousness, honesty, marriage, and faith. The four consecutive verses of Genesis 2:15-18 speak for themselves; no homiletical embellishment is necessary.

On industriousness, Genesis 2:15: "The Lord God took Adam and placed him in the Garden of Eden to work it and preserve it" (*l'ovdah ul'shomrah*), not to rest and relax in the lush environs. Despite—or perhaps because of—Eden's abundant resources, God charges Adam to labor and safeguard it.

On honesty, which, says Murray, is chiefly expressed through what Francis Grund called "unbounded respect for the law," Genesis 2:16,17: "And the Lord God commanded Adam, saying, 'from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Bad do not eat, for on the day you eat from it, you will surely die.'" God trusts Adam to obey this law; if he betrays that trust, life as he knows it will end.

On marriage, Genesis 2:18: "The Lord said, 'It is not good for man to be alone; let us make for him a partner.'" The Bible has described everything in God's new world as "good" until this verse. But here we are told that in the midst of all the good, something is awry. The phrase "it is not good" jars. The Founder, like America's founders, "took for granted," as Murray says, "that marriage was a bedrock institution of society."

And of faith these verses have no need to speak explicitly. God Himself communicates with Adam, empathizes with Adam's loneliness, brings Adam a soul mate. To Adam, God was as palpably present as the flora and fauna surrounding him.

Murray's four essential American virtues should resonate strongly with Jews and Christians because these are also the four essential virtues of the Bible's archetypical society. With the insight of *Coming Apart*, a foundational passage of all biblical faiths takes on greater contemporary relevance and urgency. What disturbed the peace in Eden? What is eroding America's distinct way of life?

"Now the serpent was cunning . . . ." Do not fear eating the forbidden fruit, he tells Eve, for "on the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and bad" (Genesis 3:1-5). Imagine: You simply eat the fruit, then live effortlessly, always sure of which road to take. Murray might argue that the serpent was luring Eve into the primeval prototype of the European welfare state: a world stripped of tough choices, with only a single path to travel.

Eve succumbed; Adam joined in the folly. They expected contentment and elevated self-esteem. Instead, "The eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked" (Genesis 3:7). The outcome, Murray would say, was no surprise: "People need self-respect, but self-respect must be earned," and "the only way to earn anything is to achieve it in the face of the possibility of failing." In retrospect, it may have been better not to station Adam in Eden in the first place: If he and Eve had tilled their own garden, they likely would not have exchanged their life of responsibility, risk, and satisfying achievement for a safe, but shallow life free from serious deliberation and consequential decision-making.

Coming Apart's central argument is that real happiness is achieved in just four domains—family, vocation, community and faith. These four are based upon the parallel founding American virtues: Marriage (which anchors family); industriousness (which brings vocational success); honesty (the raw material of social trust and community); and faith. America's burgeoning welfare state intervenes in these domains, stripping citizens of responsibility and diminishing their satisfaction in life.

Murray hopes Americans will learn the lessons of the financial and intellectual bankruptcies of the European welfare state. He further hopes for a civic "Great Awakening" that will save the "American project." But hope is not a plan. In the meantime, we need to ask: How can we, in our own arena—religious communities—alter America's dangerous trajectory? Do we, through our programs and services, promote stronger marriages and families? Do we nurture a real sense of community, rooted in trust and honesty? Do we clearly communicate to our youth the moral imperatives of hard work and ambition? Do we foster genuine faith and religious purpose?

Happiness is not the primary objective of religious life; living according to God's will is. Still, happiness is an important goal in both biblical and rabbinic literature, and religious communities are ideally equipped to promote not just the element of "faith," but all four foundational virtues, which together lead to happiness. In particular, Murray's frustration with the insecure "new upper class," which doesn't preach what it practices, can best be addressed by religious communities: Is there a better place to combat the moral relativism that prevents those who live by the four virtues from speaking their minds? Strong communities nurture clarity and courage in individual members.

Faith communities that promote their efforts as both religious and American will inspire the patriotic to greater religious participation and the faith-focused to greater civic participation. Establishing the essential sameness of our country's and our Bible's foundational virtues could unite different faith groups in a powerful alliance for God and country. Religious communities will not, on their own, cure America's woes. We are, however, uniquely positioned to influence the "new upper class" and, I believe,

have the best shot at infiltrating the "new lower class" as well.

Exceptional America, argues Murray, is disintegrating. Students of Genesis can help restore the virtues that make our Land of Liberty unique among nations.

Religion, Happiness, and the American Dream

By N. Daniel Korobkin

America as we know it is dead. At least that is what Charles Murray would have us believe in his latest book, *Coming Apart*.

The "American project" is Murray's term to describe what America has stood for since its founding, and how it has succeeded in emerging as the greatest country in the world with the greatest global influence. America has preserved traditional values and emphasis on the four necessary ingredients for this project: family, vocation, community, and faith. The values and nature of each one of these parts of American society has seriously eroded over the past four decades, and that is why our society is crumbling.

The traditional *family* of two parents married to each other and raising children has become more rarified, and this has contributed to a degradation of social ethics and morality. *Vocation* refers not only to one's profession and job but also to one's work ethic, industriousness, and honesty. This too, has taken a turn for the worse, in that people's ambitions for financial success have overshadowed all other considerations, and American businessmen are no longer embarrassed to live large and take huge bonuses at others' expense. *Communities* no longer offer the same opportunities for volunteer organizations and gatherings, such as pot luck dinners at the local church or rotary club, and thus there is greater xenophobia and estrangement from each other. Finally, people's commitment to their respective faiths has diminished; fewer people attend worship services regularly, and religion is no longer a central part of most Americans' lives.

Not only do these ingredients comprise the American project, they contribute to the individual's sense of happiness and fulfillment. Take away these elements, and people tend to be less happy. Since the 70's these features of American society have continually eroded; some have disappeared entirely, while others have changed so significantly as to no longer be recognizable.

Of the four aforementioned, Murray spends the largest part of his book discussing the unraveling of the American community. He presents a bleak picture of an increasingly divided class system in America today, where the privileged live more and more isolated lives in isolated communities, to the point where they are completely oblivious to the lives and challenges of the less privileged. This has led to an America that is more divided today than ever before.

An early proponent of the American project, frequently quoted by Murray, is Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859), who, observing the United States as a visiting French foreigner, marveled at the unique achievements and character of American society: its industriousness, its work ethic, and its commitment to religion, family and community; all these were unique elements of Tocqueville's America that evoked his effusive praise. Murray sadly observes that it would appear as if all of the elements of this American exceptionalism have all but disappeared in modern America. Furthermore, Americans have resigned themselves to a more European model of the state taking care of its citizens, instead of the citizens uniting on a grassroots communal level to take care of themselves.

Murray does not assign weight to the four ingredients that go into making the American project successful. For instance, he doesn't tell us whether the lack of religious commitment is more or less of a contributing factor to the unraveling of society than the slow disappearance of the traditional nuclear family. Nor does he convey a connectivity between these four ingredients; he represents them as distinct and disparate elements of America, without suggesting that one or more of these elements may be strengthened or weakened as a result of the rise or fall of the others.

This issue of connectivity is important to me personally, because we all view the world through our unique lenses. As a religious cleric, I thus suppose that I cannot but observe that many of our cultural values are the product of our religious values; as goes our commitment to religion, so go our families, vocations, and communities.

While this may sound overly reductionist, it's not my own idea. Shortly after the turn of the 20th century, German social scientist Max Weber, one of the most important voices of modern sociology, wrote *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. The book was predicated on Weber's observation that in Germany at the time, there was a disproportionately higher percentage of Protestants than Catholics among community leaders, capital investors, and skilled corporate managers. Weber concluded that embedded within the religious ethos of the Protestant is a particular work ethic that drives the Protestant to industriousness and financial success. He thus examined the teachings of the two founders of modern Protestantism, Martin Luther and John Calvin.

Weber discovered that Luther had emphasized a theology that allows the non-cleric to be as close to God as the priest in the church. How is this accomplished? Through an honest day's work. All work, not just religious work, was considered sacred in God's eyes. A Protestant could therefore take special pride and have an extra spring in his step every time he made a sale; every additional coin in his coffers was one step closer to God.

Calvin went even further, and suggested that in order to be one of God's elect who would reach Heaven, it was necessary to live a moral and ethical life that included industriousness, hard work, and frugal living. This theology resulted in a more productive work force. Moreover, it produced a working class that wouldn't blow its paycheck on the latest big screen television, but would instead thriftily invest that money in the bank, thus continually building capital for the future. Early American aphorisms like, "A penny saved is a penny earned" find their origins in Calvinist founding fathers like Benjamin Franklin.

Murray doesn't offer any solutions to the current state of affairs, only observations. He does, however, suggest that the current trends are reversible if only America takes note of the need to go back to our roots. While I share Murray's overarching diagnosis of modern American society, I'm afraid I don't share his one glimmer of optimistic hope that things can turn around. The simple fact is that Western civilization has been moving further away from religion and further toward secularism since the 18th century, and the trend has only accelerated in the last 40 years. Yes, there have been small periods of greater religious devotion within certain pockets of the Western world (think of Mormonism as one example in American society), but overall, it seems like the dice have been cast. As science and technology ascend in their importance in

everyday life, so diminishes the importance of religion. And as religion deteriorates, so deteriorate our work ethic as well as community and family structures.

But is all lost, then, as Murray would have us believe? Are there not modern societies today where people lead happy and productive lives that are nonetheless devoid of religion? Indeed, recent studies of the "happiness index" show that within the largely secular countries of Scandinavia, people are happier overall than in countries where religion is more embraced and emphasized. But of course, Norway is not America, nor has it enjoyed the level of success and world influence that America has. There is no "Norwegian project" to speak of, no declaration of principles that espouses an exceptional way for people to live, contribute and grow together within a society.

Murray may be correct that the American project–that which makes America and Americans exceptional–is coming apart. That doesn't necessarily mean that Americans' pursuit of happiness is now unattainable, but it does mean that our ability to accomplish the great and exceptional American project of being a light unto the nations, to quote Isaiah, has now come to an end.

If the American dream is the pursuit and acquisition of happiness, then not all is lost. There is no reason to assume that Americans can no longer lead happy and meaningful lives, even if religion, which is the barometer for family, vocation and community, has been compromised. But if the American dream is something greater than happiness for the individual, if it's about the creation of a society that acts as a moral compass for the rest of the world, then we are awakening from that dream, and that component of our greatness has been lost. In the end, Americans may simply have lost interest in their role passed down to them by their forefathers, and just don't care anymore. A world without America, however, will be much worse off, and that's truly a reason for concern.

Preaching in the Post-Sermon Age

By Yosie Levine

For anyone interested in understanding the trajectory of American values and culture, Charles Murray's newest book, *Coming Apart*, is an important text. Murray argues that over the past 50 years, two utterly disparate classes have emerged from the once-uniform American landscape. Members of the upper class overwhelmingly attend certain colleges, marry one another, and live in enclaves far removed from people who are different from them. Meanwhile, the core values that form the backbone of this upper class—marriage, industriousness, honesty, and religion—are eroding precipitously among the lower class.

The consequences are alarming. While only seven percent of children are born out of wedlock among the upper class, the number is a staggering 45 percent among the lower class. The employment gap is huge. Moreover, people in the lower class pursue education less vigorously and are far less active in their local communities. The members of the respective classes are increasingly ignorant about the lives of people unlike themselves.

Supported by a mass of data, Murray makes a compelling case and a sobering diagnosis. His agenda is descriptive rather than prescriptive. But, in considering ways to rectify what has gone wrong, he points to two phenomena that are worth examining through the lens of Jewish values.

First, there is the phenomenon of isolation: Members of the upper class are woefully out of touch with their lower class counterparts, partly because contact between the two groups is simply too infrequent. Any prescription for mitigating this problem must surely include a formula for bringing different kinds of people together.

The Jewish tradition encourages this to happen organically by casting as wide a net as possible. For devout practitioners, daily obligations require regular contact with people outside the immediate social circle. While Jewish history is replete with charitable societies and institutions for the promulgation of Jewish values, individual duties in Jewish law cannot be outsourced. Simply put, there is no substitute for personal involvement. Mitzvot like visiting the sick, comforting the bereaved, lifting up the widow, orphan, and stranger, and inviting guests into one's home demand continuous interaction with people who are, by definition, in a different life situation.

For those who are affiliated but less rigorously committed, the act of worship brings exposure to people in different life stages and of different backgrounds. Synagogue demographics may be influenced by geography, but esteem and honor within a congregation are based on virtue. Study, charity, and personal piety are honored, obscuring distinctions of class.

Even for those who attach to the Jewish story only a few times a year, the holidays help individuals clear the hurdles of class difference. In Temple times, all Jews living in the Jewish state, irrespective of class, were enjoined to make three annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem; the idea was that all Jews would celebrate their holidays as a single community. It was the ancient equivalent of an economy-class community retreat: Find ways for people to leave their natural habitats and comfort zones, and they will find the human ties that bind them. While the practice itself is obsolete, its ethic remains very much alive.

One can envision many ways to encourage Murray's divided American classes to come together. David Brooks has suggested a post-high school year of mandatory national service. Think of the benefits of Teach for America, for both students and teachers. Another thought is to develop intelligent ways to improve and integrate public school systems. In the "SuperZips"—upper-class zipcodes—that Murray describes, many public schools are highly regarded and considered perfectly viable alternatives to expensive private schools. The trick would be to maintain these public schools' high academic standards while absorbing a meaningful minority of children from lower-class backgrounds.

There is, however, a second, much tougher nut to crack: the challenge of mobilizing the upper class to "preach what they practice," as Murray puts it. Today, the ethic of non-judgmentalism predominates. The elite are generally unwilling to tell others what they really think. Members of the upper class know what works for them but say to themselves, "Who are we to tell others what is virtuous?"

Rabbis, too, are leery of moralizing. The Torah commands, "Rebuke your neighbor"; but the Talmud points to the words that immediately follow: "But do not bear a sin because of him." As the rabbis interpret it, one must be absolutely certain that a well-intentioned rebuke does not encroach on the wrongdoer's dignity. Reproach may be a virtuous act, but discretion is more virtuous still.

Murray has it right: We live in a post-sermon culture. As Leon Wieseltier puts it, "We wish to be right without anybody else being wrong." Except for the ultra-Ortho-

dox, this sentiment prevails even—perhaps especially—among teachers and rabbis. Their task would have once been described as conveying truths; today, however, they use a vocabulary of encouraging, persuading, inspiring, and perhaps influencing congregants or students. Preaching is out of vogue.

Perhaps the pendulum will swing again, and those with good values and ideas will regain the self-confidence to share them with others. In the meantime, consider this verse, among the last words Moses spoke to his people: "Remember the days of old, consider the years of ages past. Ask your father, he will inform you; your elders, they will tell you."

There will always be voices of wisdom. But the verse presupposes that we will have relationships with those wise individuals, so that they will be available to us when we need them. If we want to start bridging the values gap in America, the answer is to re-learn not the art of effective preaching but the art of effective relationship-building. The upper class does not need to preach more; it needs to reach out more. Our day-to-day lives are filled with dozens of transactional relationships—with clerks, doormen, receptionists. Imagine what could happen if we transformed even one of these into a meaningful human relationship.

The capacity to preserve American exceptionalism is in our hands. Opportunities abound. We need to seize them.

Can the Doctrine of Shared Responsibility Put Us Back Together Again?

By Ari Perl

Examining sociologist Charles Murray's newest book, *Coming Apart*, against the backdrop of our American Orthodox Jewish community, produces deeply conflicting feelings. On the one hand, there's a dismal realization that certain aspects of Murray's characterization of broader American society are reflected in our own demographics; on the other hand, a hope that time-honored values of that same community have the potential to save itself, and maybe even the broader American project.

Using masses of data, Murray attempts to demonstrate that the gap between America's "new upper class" and "new lower class" has increased steadily since the 1960s and is still growing. Power and influence tend to lie with upper-class individuals who are not just socially isolated but geographically self-contained, living almost exclusively in neighborhoods of people like themselves. Because the "new upper class" is generally ignorant about lower-class lives, public policy often fails to reflect the concerns of—or concern for—this steadily growing lower class.

Statistics aside, one can plainly see that the American Jewish community has not been immune to these trends. In recent years the true middle class among us has evaporated, leaving behind two distinct, increasingly isolated communities.

An informal study within my own community recently concluded that parents of three children need to earn an income in the 95th percentile of American families just to meet the basic financial obligations of a traditional Jewish lifestyle. At the same time, there are entire Jewish communities living below the poverty line. Instead of Belmont and Fishtown, the communities representing Murray's "new upper" and "new lower" classes, we have Englewood and Kiryas Joel (identified by the *New York Times* as the poorest U.S. town with a population over 10,000).

The growing socio-economic gap and geographic isolation help explain some otherwise perplexing Jewish communal realities. For instance, when time comes to give *Matanot La'evyonim* ("gifts to the poor") on Purim, members of the "new upper class" increasingly find themselves in a position unfamiliar to previous generations: Because they no longer live side-by-side with those in need, they turn to national or global agencies to dispense gifts on their behalf.

Murray chastises both classes for what he sees as an impending collapse of our unique "American project." The lower class, he asserts, has precipitously abandoned the four moral pillars of this project: marriage, industriousness, honesty, and religiosity. The upper class, while not exhibiting as steep a decline, contributes to the deterioration of the lower class by being unwilling to preach the core American values that it practices.

Of Murray's "founding virtues," industriousness is most intriguing to explore through the lens of Jewish tradition. Undoubtedly, our community has been affected by general societal trends. What, we might wonder, would result if the ingenuity and doggedness of the chronic *schnorrers* (individuals asking for charitable handouts) who frequent our communities were transferred to the workplace? Does the attitude of needy charity-collectors, who often behave as though they are entitled, by right, to the funds they seek from donors, more closely resemble American industriousness or the "European welfare state" mentality that Murray decries? And while I hesitate to make unfair and sweeping generalizations, might the steep rise in the number of young men studying in kollel instead of pursuing higher education, enrolling in vocational training, or seeking workforce employment, be less about rightward ideological drift than a manifestation of Murray's well-documented decline in male industriousness over the past few decades?

While its correlation to *schnorrers* and kollel fellows can be debated, industriousness as a fundamental Jewish value cannot. Adam was tasked by God with "working" the Garden of Eden and its "upkeep" (Genesis 2:15). When the Israelites felt trapped between Pharaoh's advancing army and the sea, Moses says, "God will fight for you; you need only stand by silently" (Exodus 14:13-14). Somewhat surprisingly, God rebukes Moses: "Why are you crying out to me? Speak to the People of Israel and tell them to journey forth!" (Exodus 14:15). The Midrash suggests that the Red Sea did not part until the tribal leader of Judah leapt into the water up to his neck. Both the biblical narrative and rabbinic literature unequivocally reject the notion that God protects or provides for the Jewish people without their assuming responsibility for their own salvation.

This doctrine of shared responsibility has historically fueled Jewish industriousness, and offers hope for reversing the alarming trends Murray describes. Because the doctrine predicates assistance to an individual on that person's assuming personal responsibility for improving his or her lot, it motivates the individual to take steps toward achieving that goal. By taking the initiative demanded by the doctrine, the individual reclaims the sense of personal dignity and worth that accompany productive activity.

While society is not divinely omnipotent, its role in caring for the needy is, in many ways, analogous to God's role as biblical provider. In both cases, the moral precursor to the delivery of aid is the question of how much personal responsibility should be demanded from the recipient. Building on our Judeo-Christian moral foundation, both our public and private sectors ought to refocus

public assistance programs on stimulating industriousness by demanding appropriate levels of shared responsibility. While I recognize the challenges of such reorientation, examples of such new thinking might include:

- Using private philanthropic and public funds to supplement minimum wages with bonuses to workers who demonstrate sustained industriousness. Nothing is more demoralizing to industriousness than the hard-working laborer who, nevertheless, must still rely on public assistance simply because the minimum wage has not kept pace with increased living costs.

- Granting public service organizations earmarked funds to hire unemployed individuals for fixed-term jobs that further the organization's mission. At the conclusion of the term, the income, experience, and sense of worth gained by the participants would prove invaluable in motivating them to seek longer-term employment and helping them land permanent jobs.

Even if we cannot fully overcome the logistical challenges of these proposals, our society would benefit from thinking seriously about stimulating industriousness instead of granting financial assistance modeled on the failing mechanisms of European welfare states. Of the four "founding virtues," it is difficult to imagine strategic, systematic means of changing attitudes toward marriage, increasing honesty, or strengthening religious belief. With respect to industriousness, however, the Jewish doctrine of shared responsibility offers an opportunity to counter Murray's despair with our own hope.

Universal Service?

By Benjamin J. Samuels

Each year on Memorial Day, the superzip—upper-income ZIP code—city of Newton, Massachusetts, a city comprised of 13 villages, holds its annual Memorial Day parade. Despite the fact that Newton City Hall resides in tony Newton Centre, the parade routes through Newton's middle class Nonantum neighborhood, literally and somewhat figuratively located on the other side of the Pike. Having just read Charles Murray's new study of so-called "White America" since 1963, I quizzically thought about the geographical placement of the parade in light of Murray's critique of contemporary values held by two increasingly distant classes of Americans: elites and workers.

To me, Memorial Day represents not a day off from work but an affirmation of the values and vision that have made our nation great, by honoring those in the U.S. Armed Forces who have made the ultimate sacrifice on behalf of what Murray calls the "American Project." I attend Newton's Memorial Day parade almost yearly and have been consistently disappointed by the turnout. Old-fashioned fire trucks, convertibles filled with aging, proud veterans, floats aflutter with American flags, and marching bands playing traditional American classics travel down traffic-cleared roads with few sidewalk observers in sight. For some reason, working-class, principally Italian and Catholic Nonantum turns out more parade observers than Newton's more upper-crust villages. Does Nonantum send more of its sons and daughters to the military?

For me, Nonantum challenges Murray's generalizations. Working-class Newtonians hold fast to patriotic values such as loyalty, sacrifice, and honor. Murray presumably would counter that Nonantum is squarely middle class—the American majority that his book, surprisingly, ignores.

Recent studies indicate, Murray contends, that that core American values are on the wane in working-class America and holding steady in elite enclaves. He says a higher incidence of commitment to family and partnered child-rearing through stable marriage, personal integrity and honest business practices, industriousness, and religiosity can be found among well-paid, college-educated elites than among working-class whites. Loyalty, sacrifice, and honor in the most meaningful ways are no longer the hallmarks of a significant percentage of the broad American population. While differences in economic station, education, and job opportunities are certainly to blame, for Murray, the changes and their remedies are not about economics or race (the focus of the study is whites) but about class, values, and culture. If core American values continue to weaken, the center will not hold and our society will come apart.

In *Coming Apart,* Murray styles himself a biblical prophet, foreseeing doom as a consequence of broken covenants while holding out a modicum of hope if the elites assume their responsibility to lead the nation back to core values through education and continued reform of welfare and entitlement programs; and if they avoid adopting the failing European model of government-subsidized lives of leisure or allowing the hollowing-out of elite America through imitation of the disintegrated value system of the working class. Murray disavows economic solutions such as income redistribution, higher taxation of the elites, and entitlement programs, which, he says, disincentivize the elites and make the working class increasingly dependent. Instead, he turns to an inchoate vision of re-educating the American public as to what is essential for success in life, both personally and nationally. On the one hand, Murray decries the lack of judgmentalism by elites toward the working class: Elites, he thinks, are particularly suited to serve as the moral conscience of the nation, since they have achieved the winning formula for success in life; the problem is that they have abdicated their duty of advocacy, preferring the more politically correct noncommittal positions of ecumenism and intellectual pluralism. At the same time, however, Murray is an avowed libertarian, believing in the art of moral suasion but not in government-regulated social fixes.

I share Murray's concern about the integrity of the core values of marriage, honesty, industriousness, and religiosity, while affirming our belief in a country that separates Church and State and upholds individual liberty. However, I would recommend a different solution from Murray's to the question of how best to confront the challenges facing America and our growing class divisions. I believe there should be a return of the draft, not just for military service but for national service.

A draft, first of all, would allow the intermingling of classes during the most formative years of emerging adulthood. Being part of a national work force would forge a new national allegiance and foster proud camaraderie. Second, induction into a military or national service program would not only create opportunity to repair our nation's aging physical infrastructure but allow us to teach a new generation discipline, cooperation, industriousness, work skills, and social awareness. Third, conscripted young adults would be able to earn money to pay for furthering their education through an updated version of the GI Bill. Students who have spent two years after high school working

for the common weal of the nation would enter college more mature, self-reliant, and hardworking, eager to succeed at their studies and begin their lives.

Finally, such a program would create an opportunity for discovery and self-discovery for the most talented Americans, especially those who would emerge from the lower classes to which they were born. While the elites would understandably resist being forced into such a program, since in their minds they already possess the benefits described above, it would be essential for compulsory conscription to be universal if the program's goals are to be attained.

There are still other arguments that can and should be made in favor of universal, mandatory conscription of America's youth to meet the increasing challenges that face not only white America but African-American, Latino, and other ethnic minorities. If such an approach is ever adopted, Memorial Day, like the Fourth of July, will regain its national significance as a day that celebrates and memorializes loyalty, sacrifice, and honor, as displayed by every citizen who will be a builder of a better America.

Thursday, August 17

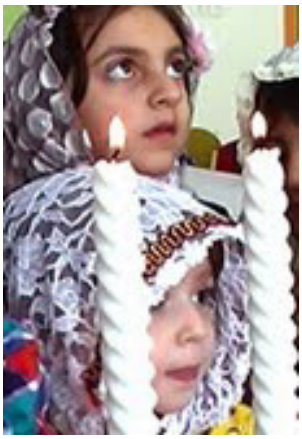
Iranian Jewry Today

By Shai Secunda

In late June 2012, Mohammad-Reza Rahimi, the Vice President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, addressed an international conference on the proliferation of illicit drugs. In describing Iran's narcotics problem, Rahimi acknowledged his country's extensive border with Afghanistan, the largest producer of illegal opium in the world. But he also blamed the crisis on the Babylonian Talmud.

The *New York Times* and several major Western media outlets published Rahimi's anti-Semitic remarks and suggested that the affair further increased Iran's growing isolation and intensified the nuclear crisis unfolding between Israel, Iran, and the United States. But the media largely neglected to consider how such remarks affected, and were received by, Iran's own Jewish community. Indeed, the broader discourse concerning the current Iranian nuclear crisis has focused solely on Jews living in Israel. Iranian Jews are simply not mentioned.

Numbering approximately 30,000, Iranian Jewry constitutes the largest Jewish community in the Middle East outside of Israel. Very soon after Rahimi's speech, the website of the Tehran Jewish Association posted a letter that its director, Dr. Homayun Sameyah, had dispatched to the Iranian Vice President. In it, Sameyah takes issue with Rahimi's allegations against the Talmud, and argues that "besides discussing matters of religious law, [the Talmud] also describes the lives of the sages and prophets, aspects of proper morals and behavior, and matters of health and medicine, within the limits of that time's science." The letter respectfully but firmly requests that the Vice President clarify his remarks and correct any potential misunderstandings, which they may have brought about. Finally, it asks that Rahimi reiterate the difference between Zionists and Jews—a distinction that originated with Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979, when the Jewish community sought assurances that it would be safe in the new Republic.



Sameyah's letter of protest, along with other official statements, articles, and announcements uploaded to the Tehran Jewish Association's website, provide a fascinating viewing-point into the Jewish community in Iran today. But like most sources of information on the Jews in the Islamic Republic—including Western journalism and even scholarly publications—the view is more peephole than window, and it allows for only a limited and frequently obstructed glimpse at the complexities of this fascinating community.

Jews constitute the oldest minority in the Islamic Republic today; by a long shot. The community has an ancient and illustrious history in Iran, dating back to the Babylonian exile in the middle of the first millennium B.C.E. when Jews found themselves under the mostly benevolent rule of the nascent yet soon vast Iranian Achaemenid Empire, founded by Cyrus. Aside from sporadic episodes of persecution, Jews prospered under the various dynasties that ruled Iran. But that changed when the Safavids came to power at the turn of the 16th century and inaugurated Shiite Islam as the state religion. Iranian minorities of all stripes did not fare well under Shiite Islam, particularly in its medieval articulation. The longstanding Shiite persecution complex coupled with newfound hegemony over vast territories often proved a dangerous cocktail, while severe purity laws precluded most forms of contact between Shiite Iranians and everyone else.

By the close of the Qajar period (1786-1925), the Jewish population was seriously depleted. Yet the modernization of Iran and particularly the Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1911, which gave parliamentary representation to Jews and other recognized minorities, finally brought a measure of relief. The ascension of the Pahlavi monarchy (1925-1979) improved the situation for the Jews quite dramatically. As a result of this brief upturn in Jewish fortunes, the Islamic Revolution of 1979 is often seen as a radical deterioration for Iranian Jews. Indeed, many Iranian Jews now living outside of Iran's borders still pine for the autocratic reign of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (1941-79), over thirty years on.

Unquestionably, the numbers confirm a major decline: Within a decade of the Islamic Revolution, the community had dwindled by some 75 percent. The popular persecution that followed the revolution, and the difficult years of the Iran-Iraq war made life in the new Republic unbearable for much of the Jewish community. Numerous Jews, other minority groups, as well as many liberal-thinking Muslims, packed up their things and escaped. The mass exodus and the stories that Iranian Jews brought with them have to a great extent defined the public perception of what it means to live as a Jew in Iran. Yet, in the years since many of those Jews departed, various political changes have significantly affected Iran's remaining Jews: The Iran-Iraq war, the years of reform at the turn of the millennium, and now the complexities of Ahmadinejad's presidency and the ever-mutating Iranian political scene have successively altered the map dramatically.

In February and March of 2009, *New York Times* columnist Roger Cohen penned

a pair of now infamous articlesabout a trip he took to the Islamic Republic. The image that Cohen painted of Jewish life in Iran was particularly rosy. He observed that furious protests against Israel's war with Gaza did not spill over into anti-Semitic diatribes and, more personally, that he had "seldom been treated with such consistent warmth as in Iran." The response from many journalists around the country was swift and severe. Their resounding message was that Cohen did not know how to read Iran and its Jews. He had been duped.

In certain respects, the fault lines highlighted by the Cohen fiasco parallel the dispute between Israeli scholars of Iran. On one side, a number of academics, mainly affiliated with major Israeli centers for Middle Eastern studies, are closely aligned with the government's approach regarding the Iranian nuclear threat. Many also see the situation of Iranian Jewry as particularly dire. On the other, scholars associated primarily with the Left, such as Ben-Gurion University's Haggai Ram, criticize the government's view, and offer radical and even subversive re-readings of the current crisis which suggest that Israel's fear of Iran is largely self-manufactured. Recent work by Orly Rahimiyan—an extensively published doctoral candidate also at Ben-Gurion—makes the case for a more nuanced assessment of the ethno-national identity and political situation of the Jews in Iran today. Rahimiyan argues that Iranian Jews have constructed a complex hybrid identity for themselves that cannot easily be untangled. In this regard, Iranian Jews are very much Iranian, although they are also strongly Jewish.

Following years of secularization during the reign of the Shah, Jews in the Islamic Republic became visibly more religious. (This might be attributed to the general religious fervor that the country has experienced since the late 1970s. Alternatively, it might be related to the fact that the synagogue is one of the few public communal spaces still available for Jews.) In practice, Iranian Jews can visit Israel via a third country. Receiving an exit visa is no longer the bureaucratic nightmare it once was, and technically speaking, many Iranian Jews could leave the country if they so desired. In the summer of 2007, what began as a genuinely felt offer of financial incentives to Jewish Iranians who wanted to immigrate to Israel turned into a debacle that deeply insulted Iran's Jewish community.

Many outside observers attribute Iranian Jewry's frequent criticisms of Israel's treatment of the Palestinians solely to efforts to appease the Islamic regime. But as disconcerting as the thought may be, it is possible that the critique springs from the widely held Iranian view of the Jewish state, which sees Israel's rule over the Palestinians through the lens of Iran's traumatic encounters with colonialism and related Western attempts to intervene in its political affairs.

Nonetheless, there are reasons to be concerned about Iranian Jewry. Contrary to Cohen's observations, not every official parses the difference between Zionist and Jew as neatly as the Jewish community would want him to. In a famous case, just before Passover in 1999, thirteen Iranian Jews were incarcerated in the city of Shiraz on suspicion of spying for Israel (three were later released but the rest were deemed guilty). And beyond his remarks about the annihilation of Israel, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's Holocaust denial has made the community extremely uncomfortable. So uncomfortable, in fact, that in early 2006 the Jewish community sent a letter of protest to the President (the letter, which unlike the dispatch to Rahimi did not merit an official response, is also uploaded to the Tehran Jewish Association website). While this episode reflects the highly negative influence that official Iranian rhetoric has had on the Jewish community there, it also reveals a community confident enough to register its complaint in full view.

Roger Cohen wrote his *Times* articles just months before the massive, unprecedented unrest of the summer and fall of 2009 that came to be known as the Green Movement. The protests, which erupted in the wake of a stolen presidential reelection and which the regime and its civilian minions violently suppressed, alerted the world to a republic that was far less stable than previously thought and to a new generation of Iranians no longer willing to be trampled. Where the Jews stood during this tumultuous period is unclear: The status of most religious minorities was simply not part of the reformist discourse. Still, one cannot help but notice the letter of congratulation to Ahmadinejad on his 2005 election which appears on the Tehran Jewish Association's website, and the virtual silence that followed his 2009 reelection.

Early analysis of the Green Movement saw the protests not as revolutionary, but as a civil rights movement that wanted a fair vote. But three years later, following a dramatic Arab Spring, some of the young Iranians who were involved in the movement have come to the realization that their efforts to effect change within the system led only to beatings and humiliations. Despondency reigns. The Islamic Revolution wrought by their parents does not speak to them, nor does it define their identity—even for some of those who are deeply Muslim. A burgeoning underground music and radical arts scene reflects a generation in the throes of the painful process of crafting a new Iranian identity. Thus, despite the appearance of order, the situation remains ripe for change.

A number of Western analysts and Iranian expats continue to hope for the return of the Pahlavi monarchy, yet all indications suggest that there is virtually no chance of this happening. A true revolution, if it is to come at all, will take place organically, and may very well emerge from a newly formed Iranian identity. The precise nature of this identity is anyone's guess. Some evidence suggests that Zoroastrianism—the ancient religion of Iran—may play a role, though now in a de-ritualized, nationalistic form. To an extent, the Shah went down this path already, and used it to push a unified secular Iranian national identity that partially effaced minority identities. This time around, however, maybe we will see a pan-Iranian Islamic-Zoroastrianism—hybrid that allows space for the country's many minority groups, including Jews and Christians. Perhaps even something similar to the vibrantly diverse ethno-religious realities reflected in the pages of the Babylonian Talmud. If only Vice President Rahimi had bothered to open it.