



## Holocaust Educator

BY MIRIAM L. ZIMMERMAN

### Inspiration for reconciliation from our tradition

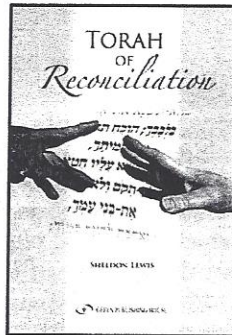
The *Torah* is a book of healing, of reconciliation, and of peace. To prove it, Rabbi Sheldon Lewis spent over ten years culling passages of *Torah* that promote “mutual respect even when people disagree, as a pathway to reconciliation (p.xix).” Published in 2012 by Gefen Publishing House, Rabbi Lewis’ *Torah of Reconciliation* is an accessible text, perfect for someone searching for examples of peacemaking in the *Torah*, for a sacred self-help book dealing with intractable conflict, or for sources justifying Jewish-Palestinian relationship building. As a divorce mediator, I wish all my clients could read this book.

The book emerged out of Rabbi Lewis’ personal response to the tragedy of 9/11 that brought down the World Trade Center. That “incomprehensible act” motivated him to “search for a way of acting in the world beyond anger and vengefulness.” Parashah by parashah, the rabbi painstakingly analyzes and explicates passages in *Torah* that help guide the reader to a deeper understanding of conflict and peace.

I had the good fortune to hear Rabbi Lewis speak at my own *shul*, Congregation Beth Jacob in Redwood City, Calif., on May 24, 2013, when he discussed his reasons for writing the book and answered congregant’s questions. At my husband’s urging, we put a sticker by our name so that we could pay for the book after Shabbat and thus were able to take a signed copy with us.

Rabbi Lewis is a familiar leader in our area, rabbi *emeritus* of Congregation Kol Emeth in Palo Alto, where he served for 33 years. His bio describes his years as a peace and interfaith activist. He was a student of Abraham Joshua Heschel in the 1960s and served in Vietnam as a US Army chaplain after his ordination at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City.

As of this writing, I have completed the



## GERTEL

(continued from page 8)

for generations, and of the efforts of Palestinian Arabs to be surrogates of the Nazis during World War II.

The panel discussion ended with a presentation by University of Chicago political science professor John Mearsheimer, known for his crusade against what he perceives as a destructive “Israel Lobby” in American society. Mearsheimer stressed from the outset that resistance to neo-liberalism around the world does not necessarily mean that the reluctant nation is opposed to liberal values. Such resistance, rather, is due to the failure of the United States to export those values effectively because America has been all too “interventionist” since World War II, and especially since the dismantling of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

pages devoted to *Bereshit* (Genesis). The stories in Genesis are full of strife and, surprisingly, reconciliation. The case of Ishmael and Isaac in Chaye Sarah (Genesis 23:1-25:18) illustrates that G-d ordains “multiple parallel destinies.” Ishmael and Jacob of the next generation each have 12 sons, hinting “at their special place in G-d’s plan.” By the end of the story, Isaac and Ishmael have reconciled and, together, bury their father Abraham in the cave of *Machpelah* (Genesis 25:8-9).

The learned rabbi points out that in Genesis, conflict is healing. “Genesis stories seem determined not to leave any conflict without healing.” Examples abound from family relationships: Stories about “Abraham and Lot, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Laban, then Jacob and Esau, and Joseph and his brothers, all move from discord to reconciliation.... Thus the message of Genesis is one of hope for unity within a family and, by extension, beyond (p. 107).”

Regrettably, I do not possess the scholarship to analyze critically the methodology or accuracy of Rabbi Lewis’ undertaking. But as a lay reader interested in *Torah*’s guidance in all things to do with peace, reconciliation, and healing, this book is a treasure trove for understanding.

The rabbi integrates citations from Talmud and wisdom from our sages, of blessed memory. For example, he explains the *eruv*, the device that extends personal space and thus permits carrying objects into a public area, as a “joining together.” He cites Rabbi Joshua Halevi who explains that the *eruv* promotes “peace among neighbors who might have become estranged.”

The work of Rabbi Lewis is a necessary (see Zimmerman, page 14)

As regards the Palestinian Arabs, Mearsheimer’s advice for them was mostly in the realm of public relations. He said that it was all too easy for the Israelis to portray them as terrorists because the Palestinian Arabs had made bad decisions, particularly the Second Intifada.

It occurred to me that Mearsheimer’s arguments failed to take into account that Israel, like America, can only work with available policies and the leaders that their constituencies tolerate. It is not as if Israel were digging in its heels for ideological reasons against an eager and accommodating, or at least interested, interlocutor. Nor was there a movement of liberal reformers waiting to topple Mubarak that could be foiled by American policies. Even the Muslim Brotherhood, as Al-Arian pointed out, was all too happy to work within Mubarak’s guidelines.

Interestingly, Mearsheimer concluded as did the other panelists, whether in their formal remarks or in the later discussion, with words of admiration for the “original” or “early” Zionists. The “original” Zionists, Mearsheimer observed, were secularists who challenged the Jewish religious establishment. Israel’s “suicide,” he warned, is being hastened by the increased Zionist sentiment among the ultra-Orthodox, boding a “more religious” Zionism. Abukhalil waxed nostalgic, as well, about “early” Zionists “who didn’t necessarily want to displace the Palestinian nation,” but were willing to settle for parts of Argentina.

During his prepared presentation, Abukhalil had also waxed nostalgic about the writings of Ahad Ha’am, the father of cultural Zionism, who in an early 20th century essay had wondered aloud whether the Jews could have treated the Palestinians a bit better. Abukhalil cited the essay as an indictment of most Zionists, but it is certainly to their credit. Have Palestinian Arabs ever considered in print that they could have been nicer to the Jews, or that they forfeited opportunities for statehood through bad decisions?

The expressed nostalgia for the “original” Zionists reminded me of the first speaker, Bernard Harcourt. He did posit disillusionment long ago with leftist and neo-liberal resistance alike, questioning the conventional ideological polarity of left versus right. Why, then, are the “good” Zionists those who mouthed yesterday’s ideologies? Were the other speakers saying that the only good Zionist is an anachronism who mouths platitudes that today’s academics no longer believe, anyway?

Rabbi Gertel is the author of two books, *What Jews Know About Salvation and Over the Top Judaism: Precedents and Trends in the Depiction of Jewish Beliefs and Observances in Film and Television.* ★



## AGES

(continued from page 10)

however, Lilienthal, despite major gains in the educational sector, and as a preacher (his English improved rapidly), became the target of some bitter opposition, the reasons for which need not troubled the reader.

Ten years after his Manhattan experience, Lilienthal moved to Cincinnati in order to occupy a prestige pulpit in that city. It was in that Midwestern locale that the full flowering of his intellectual, social and organizational skills reached maturation. As one of the few rabbis in the New World with both authentic rabbinic credentials and a doctorate from a German university, Lilienthal began to think through the liberal religious agenda that was percolating in his mind and transmitting his ideas both in his sermon materials and in the various Jewish periodicals which were circulating in the United States. In fact, many of Ruben's analyses of Lilienthal's theological positions are based on a close reading and synthesis of the articles he published.

Ruben's book offers an important and nuanced corrective to the impression that Isaac Meyer Wise was the "father" of Reform Judaism in America. There is considerable truth to this notion but it must be augmented by homage that must be paid to Lilienthal whose rabbinic scholarship, intellectual acuity and friendship with Wise, provided much of the rationale behind the founding and development of Hebrew Union College and Reform Judaism's Central Conference of American Rabbis.

One cannot leave the saga of Max Lilienthal without reference to Abraham Lincoln and Ulysses Grant. When the American Civil War broke out Lilienthal was appalled by the conflict and even more so by the misguided decision of Grant as head of the Union army to expel Jews from areas in Tennessee where it was alleged they were engaging in smuggling activities. Lilienthal joined a delegation of Jewish businessmen and other leaders who asked for a meeting with Abraham Lincoln. By the time Lilienthal arrived for the meeting, the president had already rescinded "the foolish order" and welcomed his guests warmly.

Bruce L. Ruben's work is now *de rigueur* reading for anyone who wants to know the history of 19th century American Jewry as well as the travail experienced by a traditional Jew who sought a more mellow interpretation of Jewish history and religion.

Arnold Ages is "Distinguished Emeritus Professor," University of Waterloo, Ontario Canada. ★

## ZIMMERMAN

(continued from page 9)

counterweight to other depictions of Torah and G-d as "cruel, unforgiving, chauvinistic, suspicious of others, warlike, and violent." Over and over, the rabbi cites examples of G-d and Torah as "kind, eager to forgive, embracing of others and their destinies, seeking peace, and abhorring every vestige of violence."

Rabbi Lewis maintains an amazing website, [www.TorahofReconciliation.com](http://www.TorahofReconciliation.com), which includes all sources he cites in his book for each of the Five Books of Moses. Each chapter ends with a section entitled, "Applied Peacemaking from the Responsa Literature". Those sources are also on the website.

The website has a blog that Rabbi Lewis hopes "will stimulate learning and conversation about the pathways to reconciliation, whether interpersonally, in a small circle, or on the world stage." In addition, the blog affords him the opportunity to present his findings of new, post-publication "sources in Jewish tradition that speak to the theme of reconciliation." He invites interaction with his readers: "The blog is a perfect place for me to share these sources with you. I would also welcome learning from you similar sources that inspire you."

Rabbi Lewis includes his personal reflections that help clarify the complexity of commentary and text. "The intended result is to reveal the rich, wise resources available in Judaism for the crucial task of peacemaking in the modern world. The sources speak of reconciliation in the home between individuals and apply to the search for peace between peoples and nations," his website affirms.

In the book's conclusion, Rabbi Lewis points out, "Against great odds, the Torah of reconciliation has a very strong and sustained voice. At times the message of peace within Torah has been eclipsed, but its message has been unrelenting (p. 338)."

*Torah of Reconciliation* is endorsed by Rabbi Amy Eilberg of the Jay Phillips Center for Interfaith Learning in St. Paul, Minn.; Rev. Douglas K. Huneke, Senior Minister *Emeritus*, Westminster Presbyterian Church in Tiburon, Calif.; and Dr. Adriane Leveen, Senior Lecturer of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. I join their voices in acclaiming this book.

Visionary peacemakers can look to the past and find inspiration for reconciliation from our tradition and for healing in the future. When it comes to Torah, "all its paths are peace." Rabbi Lewis helps the reader not only to find these paths, but, also, to embark on them.

Dr. Miriam L. Zimmerman is professor

*emerita at Notre Dame de Namur University in Belmont, Calif. She can be reached at [mzimmerman@ndnu.edu](mailto:mzimmerman@ndnu.edu). ★*

## D. SASSO

(continued from page 3)

consign people to poverty, hunger, homelessness and despair – Ira's faith may yet prevail. It was a faith grounded in the optimistic yet never Pollyannaish conviction that human reason and love can overcome darkness and hate; that the creative power of human kindness and goodness is greater than the destructive forces of evil; and that human effort and cooperation are the godly tools at our disposal to bring about freedom, justice and peace.

Rabbi Dennis Sasso is beginning his 37th year as senior rabbi of Congregation Beth-El Zedeck in Indianapolis. This will be his first year serving without his wife Rabbi Sandy Sasso who retired this month. Reprinted from The Indianapolis Star May 6, 2013. ★

## ROBERTS

(continued from page 5)

And in my thesis to prove this scientific observation that I expect to verify, I must answer the "why" question. My answer is the soul of simplicity expressed in that old rubric: "A man works from sun to sun. A woman's work is never done." You're shuffling papers at work – she's doing the same or similar stuff and on top of that, in most marriages she's also provisioning the house, washing your clothes, and preparing meals.

Funny thing, as predictable as her snooze on the couch, it never happens at the theater. Another gender difference; it's as though the frugal, thoughtful planner who is your wife or friend, mentally resolved to get her money's worth. "This cost me ten bucks. I'm gonna enjoy every minute of it."

Wait till the Journal sees this insight into the female psyche. Next investigation: Why does it take them so long to get out of the car. I really know, but I guess I oughta do the experiment before I reveal the results.

Ted Roberts, a Rockower Award winner, is a syndicated Jewish columnist who looks at Jewish life with rare wit and insight. Ted lives in Huntsville, Ala., where for 25 years he has served as bar mitzvah teacher. His inspiration is his patient wife, Shirley. Check out his website: [www.wonderwordworks.com](http://www.wonderwordworks.com). Blogsite: [www.scribblerontheroof.typepad.com](http://www.scribblerontheroof.typepad.com). His collected works *The Scribbler on The Roof* can be bought at [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com) or [lulu.com/content/127641](http://lulu.com/content/127641). ★