SHALOM

Jewish Peace Letter

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Stefan Merken

From Where I Sit

Stefan Merken is chair of Jewish Peace Fellowship.

They came first for the Communists,
and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist.

Then they came for the Socialist trade unionists,
and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist.

Then they came for the Jews,
and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew.

Then they came for me
and by that time no one was left to speak up.

— Rev. Martin Niemoeller, *German pastor*

Murray Polner and I have just finished rediting and printing a new version of *Roots of Jewish Nonviolence* for the JPF. Most of the essays are new; only Rabbi Everett Gendler's "Therefore Choose Life" reappears in this new edition. We have also included a portion of the original introduction by Stephen Schwarzschild.

The original essays meant so much to me when I was 18 and received *Roots* from Rabbi Michael Robinson and the JPF. And yet, times have changed and so have the youth to whom this book is meant to appeal. So we looked for essays that spoke more to the youth of today. I think this collection of essays is an exciting addition to JPF's literature list. Rabbis Phil Bentley, Michael Robinson and Sheila Peltz Weinberg, as well as the scholar activist Richard Schwartz have much to add to the ongoing conversation on the issue of Jewish nonviolence.

The need for a longer conversation is the reason we have reissued a new version of the book. There is no military draft that young people need fear or avoid, at least not yet. But there are driving questions that push young adults to seek out essays on Jewish nonviolence. Since Allan Solomonow first edited *Roots* in 1971, our book has been requested again and again. Young people have always turned to the JPF for answers to their questions on war and violence. But where else can they turn? What other Jewish organization is dedicated to keeping these issues on the front burner? This is the reason that we are so dedicated to keeping these important ideas alive.

The quote at the beginning of my article was first introduced to me by a German peace worker friend when I arrived in Berlin in the mid-70's. He told me it was painted on the walls of the basement of the church where Pastor Niemoeller had preached. Since that time I have often heard others utter these words. To me they are like a Shema of the peace and justice worker. If we don't make our voices heard who will? Who will care enough when young people need to hear them again?

What the JPF needs from you:

If you read this newsletter, let us hear from you. Please send financial help to keep the organization alive and to make sure that we are still here when young people order a copy of Roots — and when they reach out to the JPF for guidance. If you have ideas or thoughts you would like to share, please suggest an article for Shalom. But most of all, please get involved. ✡

Best wishes for a Happy New Year to our members and readers!

The next issue of Shalom will appear in March 2011.

J. E. McNeil

The DREAM Act: Worse than Nothing

J. E. McNeil is executive director of the Center on Conscience & War.

Many progressives support the DREAM Act, but the Center on Conscience & War opposes it in its current form. The DREAM Act — the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act — sponsored by Sen. Dick Durbin (D-Ill.) and Sen. Dick Lugar (R-Ind.), theoretically is designed to give undocumented young people a chance at citizenship provided they attend college — not usually an option for poor, often poorly educated and undocumented Latino youths who are prohibited from receiving Pell grants — for at least two years, or enlist and serve in the military for two years.

There are several issues that raise a concern, but from the peace community the worst part of the bill and its supporters is the unabashed effort to recruit for the United States Military. Twelve percent of Army enlistees are Hispanic, and this percentage is expected to double by 2020 if the current rate of recruitment continues. The military supports the DREAM Act as part of its comprehensive plan to recruit Latinos.

In contrast, fewer than 30 percent of Latinos have ever even attended college according to the most recent census report. The single greatest problem facing first-generation college students and the institutions that they attend is the sheer number of first-generation students who are forced to leave college. This problem is so severe that Dr. Valerie McKay, a professor at the University of Oklahoma, found in a 2009 study that about 43 of first-generation students leave without finishing a degree, whereas only about 20 percent of non-first generation students left without a degree. *U.S. News and World Report* cited in August 2009 studies that show remedial students are more likely to drop out. If they take two or more catch-up classes, their chances of graduating plummet. *USA Today* reported on March 29, 2010, even more alarming statistics: Roughly 30 percent of entering freshmen in the U.S. are first-generation college students, and 24 percent — 4.5 million — are both first-gens and low income. Nationally, 89 percent of low-income first-gens leave college within six years without a degree. More than a quarter leave after their first year — four times the dropout rate of higher-income second-generation students. This statistic includes native citizens of the U.S. who are the first in their families to go to college, so the odds are that statistics for non-native students fare even worse.

With this chilling set of facts, let us turn to the DREAM Act itself. What is provided by this bill? A student who has

J. E. McNeil

illegally entered or remained in the U.S. with his or her parents prior to graduating high school and either graduates or receives a G.E.D (General Equivalency Diploma) and who has lived in the U.S. for five and a half years may be deemed as having been a resident alien (i.e., having a green card) for six years and therefore may *apply* for citizenship — provided he or she honorably served in the U.S. military for two years or attended college for two years.

It sounds pretty good, but notice that this does *not* provide citizenship; it only provides the initial requirement to *apply* for citizenship, six years of residency being deemed to have been met. All other requirements (such as literacy) must still be met. In fact, under the DREAM Act a person would have to wait three years after completing college or military service to apply for citizenship. In the mean time, that person would remain subject to deportation.

Second, notice that "college" rather than "postsecondary education or trade school" is required. The word "college" is very clearly defined in federal legislation as a four-year college or a two-year institution at which students are in a program to transfer to a four-year college. The same studies referred to above — and President Obama — support community college as the entry point for students who are either first generation or have other issues that might hold them back from immediate success. While some community colleges would meet this definition, many programs, such as those for practical nursing or training for a skilled trade such as electrician, would not.

Next, consider what happens to the young man or woman who drops or flunks out of college under this program. They are now known to Homeland Security and are prime candidates for deportation. There are already thousands of noncitizen military veterans who are being threatened with deportation because, even though they were legal residents when they

enlisted, they never got actual citizenship and later violated some rule for remaining in the country (see the Web site, http://www.banishedveterans.info/). And while we are at it, what happens to their parents with whom they are living at a place now known to Homeland Security?

What if you are not college material? Then your only choice is to join the military "for two years." Unfortunately, the minimum term of service in the U.S. military is eight years. It may require only two years of active duty, but you remain eligible to recall for a minimum of eight years.

Don't forget that women who join the military more than double their chance of sexual assault. Men who join quadruple the chance that they will commit suicide. There is also the potential for death or injury. Homelessness is more likely for veterans as well. All of this is a high price for a *chance* at citizenship.

And there appears to be no ability to shift from one track to another. Once you commit to the military, that is the only choice. What happens if you are discharged legally as a Conscientious Objector or for a medical reason prior to finishing your two years of service? The same issues about leaving school early apply here as well.

When the bill was first introduced many years ago, it included a community service option. That was removed more than four years ago. That was when the Center on Conscience & War first began to lobby against the DREAM Act. Not having a viable nonviolent alternative for immigrants is a deal breaker for us.

Now many counter-recruitment organizations oppose the DREAM Act. Although some have tried to claim that those who oppose the Dream Act are elitists, a lot of opposition has grown in grass-root immigration reform communities. In addition, the Mexican American Political Association (MAPA) and the Hermandad Mexicana Latinoamericana only conditionally support the DREAM Act, and advocate for the cleansing of the bill of its military service clause, or minimally return the community service option as an integral part of the legislation. Among the more mainstream, the Illinois Federation of Teachers recently passed a resolution in October which supported adding more options to the DREAM Act.

On November 19, 2010, Joshua DuBois and Mara Vanderslice, director and deputy director of the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships, came to the regular meeting of the heads of the Washington Interreligious Staff Community. At that meeting, I spoke about some of the fundamental flaws with this bill and turned to the leaders of the faith communities sitting around the table and said, "I know that many of you have heard me say this all before and you sort of agree with me about the problems I raise but still support the bill. You believe that this bill is better than nothing. But I am saying right here and right now that this bill is worse than nothing."

Military recruitment is not the right tool for immigration policy reform. ✡

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Rory MacLean

Stumbling on History

Rory MacLean has written about the fall of the Berlin Wall, met with Burmese Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi, worked on movies with David Bowie and Marlene Dietrich, and written and presented more than 50 programs on the BBC. Born in Canada, he currently lives in Berlin. This essay initially appeared on his blog, Meet the Germans, sponsored by the Goethe-Institut London (http://blog.goethe.de/meet-the-germans).

Donnerstag, 11. November 2010

The brass cobblestones glinted in the autumn sunlight. On the pavement beside them lay six white roses. I stopped, as had a dozen others residents in the hour since the new stones had been laid on our street. "Here lived Regina Edel," I read."Deported 17.12.1942. Murdered Auschwitz 23.2.1943."

Next to it were six more plates, recording the names of other Jewish residents who had been pulled from their home on this leafy and peaceful residential street, and murdered in the camps.

I stood in silence for a moment. Then I spoke the names aloud. Selma Schnee. Hugo and Flora Philips. Dr. Kurt Jacobsohn, his wife Liesbeth and little Hans Adolf. Their boy was six years old when he was executed — along with his parents — at Auschwitz.

I have written before about how modern Germany — in a courageous, humane and moving manner — is subjecting itself to national psychoanalysis. This difficult and painful process is evident in Berlin's Holocaust Memorial, the undulating labyrinth of concrete plinths which commemorates the European Jews murdered during the Second World War. It can also be seen in Daniel Libeskind's tortured Jewish Museum, as well as the black husk of the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church, destroyed by Allied bombs in 1943, and the former Hohenschönhausen Stasi prison which chronicles the zeal of the iniquitous Ministry for State Security in controlling and repressing East Germans. It's a Freudian idea that the repressed (or at least unspoken) will fester like a canker unless it is brought to the light. The insistence on memory is anciently Jewish, and now Western: the conviction that for the psychic health of a society its past atrocities must be unearthed and confessed, as a condition of healing.

But this insistence on facing the past is not only evident in grand official projects. Take the *stolpersteine*. An astonishing 20,000 of these brass "stumble stones" have been planted among the cobbles of 280 German cities, engraved with the name of a victim: a Jew, a Gypsy, a homosexual, a euthanasia victim — anyone the Nazis felt did not deserve to live. Each plaque begins with the same words: "*Hier Wohnt*" — here lived — followed by the name, date of birth, year of deportation, the camp, and the fate of the victim, if known.

In almost every case the *stolpersteine* have been commissioned and paid for by residents of the deceased's former home. All have been made in the studio of Gunter Demnig, an artist who began the project in 1993 with an exhibition of 200 plaques for Sinti and Roma victims. His bold idea to lay stones for the victims of the Holocaust all over Europe almost overwhelmed him until the minister of Cologne's Atoniter Church told him to "start small." He did, and today there are 1,400 stones in Cologne, and more than 3,000 in Berlin. Demnig — who still does much of the work himself — has also laid the *stolpersteine* in Austria, Italy, Hungary, the Czech Republic and the Netherlands.

"Oh our terrible history," sighed Hilde Keilinghaus, a Berlin school teacher who lives on my street. Keilinghaus commissioned the seven stones with her neighbors Bettina and Clemens Brandl-Risi. "I think it's important to give the victims a face," she told me when we met in her apartment. "I think it's important that people see the stones in front of

the house, and stop, and read the names."

With the help of a volunteer from the town hall, Keilinghaus was able to find those names. The Gedenkbuch, the Memorial Book for the German Victims of the Holocaust published by the Bundesarchiv, proved to be an invaluable resource. The cost of the *stolpersteine* — €95 per stone — was split equally by the building's residents. But the search for the victim's living relatives proved hauntingly difficult.

"I checked all the German records," she told me. "I even went to Yad Vashem, Israel's memorial to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust in Jerusalem. And I was shocked to find that no one had asked about these people. There was no brother. No daughter. All their relatives must have been murdered also."

She sighed and went on, "The one exception was Hanns Daniel Philips, Hugo and Flora's son. He wasn't in Berlin when his parents were taken away. He survived the war, lived in London for a time and in 1979 went to Yad Vashem to see if there was any traces of them. But now we can't find him. He too has disappeared."

Next month Keilinghaus, the Brandl-Risis and their neighbors will hold a small ceremony for the seven murdered residents of their house. Their names will be read out loud, echoing down the street where they once walked, talked and played. No rabbi will be present for it will not be a funeral but rather an act of remembrance, touched by both shame and a desire to learn from terrible, past mistakes.

"My father was 18 years old when the war began," Keilinghaus told me. "He fought on the Eastern Front and was imprisoned in a Soviet gulag until 1948. When he came home to Germany, he forbade me and my brother to wear any kind of uniform. I couldn't even join the Scouts."

"How could it have happened that my parents didn't see what was happening?" wondered Hilde Keilinghaus, her brow knotted. "Today we must look into ourselves and ask, if we had been alive at that time, how would we have reacted?" She concluded, "This is our history, and it's still around us. It needs to be kept in mind."

Beneath her window the shining, brass *stolpersteine* catch the eye, make passers-by stop, and reflect, and take their breath away. ✡

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Patrick Henry

Interfaith Dialogue at Ground Zero

Patrick Henry is a retired teacher living in Walla Walla. A slightly different version of this opinion piece appeared originally online at Mercywords.

On September 11, 2001, my cousin, Michael Francis Lynch, a firefighter temporarily assigned to Engine 40, Ladder 35 in Manhattan, entered the south tower of the World Trade Center not very long before it collapsed. He was 30 years old and engaged to be married to Stephanie Luccioni.

His father, Jack Lynch, spent each day thereafter at Ground Zero, searching through the rubble, looking for survivors and the remains of the dead. More than 2,500 mourners crowded the Mass of Celebration for Michael's life on December 7, 2001, in Saint Frances de Chantal Church in the Bronx. Then, finally, on March 21, 2002, Michael's body was found. The medical examiner determined that Michael was either carrying a woman or shielding her with his coat. Their remains were mingled. The family had to wait until May 3, 2002, to bury Michael, as the medical examiner required the additional time to separate the remains properly. The Lynch family hopes, somehow, to be able to identify that woman.

Michael Francis Lynch was only one of the 343 firefighters who died that day at Ground Zero and that number of firemen is only a little more than a tenth of those who died in the 9/11 disaster. The reality on the ground at Ground Zero and throughout New York City nine years later is a vast, heavy and interminable grief that lies just below the surface.

We should not be surprised that there is so much opposition to building a community center/mosque close to Ground Zero. Two-thirds of New Yorkers are opposed to it. Yet, as George Bush told the country shortly after 9/11, we are not at war with Islam but with Al Qaeda. We know too that the freedom of religion that we proudly practice gives every religion the right to build its churches, synagogues and mosques where it sees fit.

How can we now treat each other with respect as we seek a solution that acknowledges both the freedom to build a mosque and the feelings of the majority of those who lost their loved ones on 9/11?

Since 9/11, not only in New York City but throughout the country, many Americans have reached out to Muslim Americans, to protect them from misplaced rage, to take their children to school, to protect their mosques from vandals. 9/11 demonstrated the urgency of creating interfaith groups for the purposes of dialogue and better understanding. These groups have sprung up sporadically in major cities as well as in rural areas, like eastern Washington, where I happen to belong to one. Only rarely were synagogues, churches and mosques united in these ways before 9/11.

During the last three years, the worldwide Muslim community has reached out to non-Muslims, calling for dialogue and solidarity. This took the initial form of an October 11, 2007, 29-page letter addressed to Christian leaders. Entitled "A Common Word Between Us and You," it was signed by 138 Muslim scholars and clerics from across the globe. This letter is an invitation to work together for peace; it cites the Qur'an, the Christian Scriptures and the Torah. It represents a definite effort to demonstrate that Islam is a religion of peace and that moderate Muslims are willing to speak out against violence. "Without peace and justice between our two communities," the authors argue, communities that constitute 55 percent of the world's population, "there can be no meaningful peace in the world."

On February 25, 2008, the same Muslim clerics and scholars addressed the Jewish community in "A Call to Peace,

Dialogue and Understanding Between Muslims and Jews." Clearly an attempt to establish mutual respect and improve Jewish-Muslim relations, this call to peace, dialogue and understanding emphasizes the commonalities between the two religions with their same father, Abraham, and calls for an end to stereotypes and prejudices that dehumanize both Muslims and Jews. The responses by Christians and Jews to these Muslim initiatives were wholeheartedly favorable and highly enthusiastic.

This is the framework in which we must see the mosque/Ground Zero controversy. It is a serious bump in the road but we cannot allow it to throw us off course. The absolute essential foundation for interfaith peace is interfaith dialogue. There can be no understanding, no trust, no forgiveness, no reconciliation, no communion without communication.

We must practice the dialogue we preach and sit down together with Thomas Merton's wisdom in our hearts: "The first real step toward peace is the recognition that the true solution to our problems is not accessible to any one isolated party … all must arrive at it by working together."

In this dialogical context, I cannot offer an answer but, perhaps, I can suggest the beginnings of one.

1. Let the Muslim group that wants to build the mosque near Ground Zero relinquish its right to do so and construct the mosque elsewhere in Manhattan. Recall that Pope John Paul II realized that building a convent at Auschwitz (which the Carmelite nuns had a perfect right to do) was simply too offensive to so many that it would ultimately cause more harm than good. Just as Pope John Paul II could not afford to lose all the Catholic/Jewish solidarity built up since the Holocaust, we cannot afford to lose what we have gained in Christian/Jewish/Muslim ecumenism since 9/11. Such a magnanimous gesture on the part of the Muslim community would ease tensions, create trust and promote discussion. It would also demonstrate the wisdom of Martin Luther King Jr.'s statement that: "Peace is not merely a distant goal we seek but a means by which we arrive at that goal."

2. The imam of the proposed Cordoba House, Feisal Abdul Rauf, clearly a man of peace, has said that had he known his choice of this site would cause such heated opposition, he never would have chosen it. We must help him find an honorable way out of this dilemma. Let those who object to the building of the mosque near Ground Zero lead a campaign to raise $100 million, the cost of the mosque, to send as flood relief to those tens of thousands of Muslims suffering today in Pakistan. This would let the Muslim world know that opposition to building the mosque near Ground Zero is not synonymous with anti-Islamic sentiments.

3. Recognizing that throughout human history organized religions have been such an impediment to peace that it is difficult today to imagine a peaceful future without a major worldwide multireligious contribution, let us construct, not near but on Ground Zero, an interfaith place of worship where people of all faiths would hold religious services. This would be a monument of hope in memory of all those Christians, Jews and Muslims who died there, an interfaith center that would incarnate Isaiah's words: "My house will be called a house of prayer for all peoples." ✡

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Leonard I. Beerman

A Vision for a Bewildering Time

Rabbi Leonard I. Beerman is the founding rabbi of Los Angeles' Leo Baeck Temple, where he served for 37 years until his retirement in 1986. He is a fellow of the Los Angeles Institute of the Humanities, vice-president of the Jewish Peace Fellowship, the rabbi-in-residence at All Saints Episcopal Church in Pasadena, and a member of the Pacific Council on International Policy and the Abrahamic Faith Peace Initiative.

The late Rabbi Michael Robinson was a longtime congregational rabbi in the Reform movement and served as head of the Jewish Peace Fellowship for many years.

Rabbi Leonard I. Beerman

I FEEL VERY GRATEFUL AND HONORED TO BE ABLE TO SPEAK here tonight at an event that memorializes Rabbi Michael Robinson. Thinking of Mike reminds me of the words of E. B. White, which can serve as an epigraph for what I have to say this evening: " If the world were merely seductive, that would be easy. If it were merely challenging, that would be no problem. But if I arise in the morning torn between a desire to improve the world and a desire to enjoy the world, this makes it hard to plan the day."

Mike and I first met at the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati where we were students together. Mike, as you surely know, was a very visible presence, someone you couldn't possibly miss. Tall, his voice deeply enriched with a Southern accent. And I recall how in the late 40's he engaged me in a civil rights action. Cincinnati, across the river from Kentucky, once a slave state, was a deeply segregated community. And like so many Northern cities of the time, openly discriminated against Negroes, in housing, in employment, in places of public accommodation, like refusing to serve them in restaurants. The Busy Bee, the restaurant we students frequented not far from the school, was like that. "They are not going to get away with that," Mike insisted. So, accompanied by a black student he had recruited from the University of Cincinnati, four of us entered the restaurant, sat down in a booth. The waitress came and refused to serve us. She called the owner who asked us to leave, which we refused to do. We sat there, unmoving, for more than two hours. We must have known that we were coming too soon. And yet we felt called to do it. It would be years later that such discrimination would come to an end.

For most of our rabbinic careers Mike and I were geographically on opposite sides of the country, and saw each other infrequently. Yet we stood together in so many ways and in so many issues of justice and peace. You might say we were relics of another age, the one that followed World War II. Back then we were filled with the optimism of the time. We had a conviction that a humane society was just around the corner; that the wrongs and injustices of history would be corrected, or could be corrected, and that we as rabbis, drawing inspiration from the great ethical ideals of the Jewish tradition, could be instruments in the creation of such a world. Moreover, we were convinced that the central facet of being a Jew was to have compassion for all people in their vulnerability, and to be among those who would try to extend the domain of love and justice.

But the defeat of the Nazis and Japanese did not usher in the messianic era. We now had to reckon with the persistent betrayals of the human possibility: ideals corrupted by expediency; the best and the brightest seduced by the lure of power. Moreover, we were compelled to see what could not be hidden, the terror and the madness and the violence, more cruel than ever. How could the Holocaust of European Jewry be un-

leashed by the armed children of Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, and Goethe? How could the marvelous dream of socialist liberation end in the gulag of Stalin and the murder of millions of Russians? How could the democracy of Thomas Jefferson and the Franklin Delano Roosevelt my parents taught me to revere, exterminate whole Vietnamese villages and its own fighting men with Agent Orange and napalm? How could the Israelis stand idly by as Palestinians were denied their rights and their liberties? How could Jews, of all people, permit their souls to be annexed by the territories they occupied?

We rabbis had to live our lives and do our work with a fundamental contradiction. We surely wanted to stand at a certain distance from things in order to see the world and to see the hope and the good that are in it. We wanted to soar above reality so that we could embrace it in all of its tangle of good and evil, of worry and hope. But to the caring, knowing Jew, the world always calls with a cry; it does not allow itself to be viewed only from above. Not to hear that cry, to soar above it, to view it from afar, is a moral treason. So, to be apart from the world, and yet to be in the world, that is the contradiction that agitates the mind and spirit of a thoughtful, caring Jew.

But to be in the world means inevitably to enter the realm of controversy. It might mean, as an example, to enter a place where religion and politics meet one another. Now I believe, and have always believed, that a religion must be political. A religion divorced from politics is a religion divorced from life and from people. I am not talking about partisan politics in the synagogue, which does not belong in the synagogue. No, religion must be political because this world is political, for this world has to do with the decisions we make, the decisions that determine who shall live and who shall die, and how we live and how we die. A religion that does not help us, cajole us, noodge us to confront the moral issues present in all of this is another anti-depressant, another anti-anxiety medication, at best a subordinate amusement. It does not denounce, it adapts, as C. Wright Mills once wrote. It does not move the heart, it hardens the heart. It does not stir the conscience, it blunts the conscience. Those who want a religion which blunts the conscience would rob Judaism of what I believe is its moral grandeur.

Who shall live, who shall die? How we live and how we die. The years of the 20th century, and the first decade of the 21st, have been the most barbaric in human history. The total number of deaths associated with the wars fought since 1914 has been estimated at 190 million. And these years brought with them a qualitatively different kind of war, more inhumane. In my father's war, World War I, 5 percent of those who died were civilians. But as Eric Hobsbawm has written, in World War II the burden shifted, when civilians became 66 percent of those who died; and not only died, but were the actual object of military operations. We saw this in the Nazi bombing of London, the American bombing of Tokyo, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Allied bombing of Dresden, and as the German and Soviet armies and the Allies raged, killing one another across the continent; not to forget our own six million. And as for today, it is estimated that 80-90 percent of those who die in war today are noncombatants, a grotesque moral transformation.

Meanwhile, the human dimension, the sorrow and the pity and the horror and the maiming and the killing of soldiers and little children that occur daily, and will go on in the willingness to continue and extend the battle in Afghanistan — these go largely unremarked. We don't have reliable figures on how many have been killed in Afghanistan. We do know that as of March 31 of this year more than 240,000 remain internally displaced. As of January 2009, 2.8 million remain outside the country residing mainly in Pakistan and Iran.

A few years ago, at the annual dinner of Human Rights Watch in Los Angeles, I heard a poem read, a poem that in its unnerving simplicity brought the human reality of war into my consciousness, into my kishkes, so that I vowed to myself that I would learn it, and carry it with me wherever I spoke. And I have. It was written by the Colombian poet Jotomario Abarlaez.

A day after the war
if there is a war,
if there is a day after the war,
I will hold you in my arms

A day after the war
if there is a war,
if there is a day after the war,
if after the war I have arms,
I will make to you with love.

A day after the war
if there is a war,
if there is a day after the war
if after the war there is love,
and if there is what it takes to make love.

Who shall live and who shall die. How we live and how we die. How shall we live in this unbalanced world whose unbridled economy is cracked in a hundred shivers, a world fraught with the danger posed by our enemies, the brutality of terror, and the cruelty of our own exaggerated force and bravado?

"A spirit is characterized not only by what it does, but no less by what it permits, what it forgives, what it beholds in silence." Those are the words of Rabbi Leo Baeck, the leading rabbi of Germany when Hitler came to power, after whom the congregation which I once served took its name.

What it permits, what it forgives, what it beholds in silence. One must be very careful about one's silences, for silences rise to heaven as well.

A few years ago, a much beloved Israeli poet, considered by some to be the greatest Hebrew woman poet of all time, Dahlia Ravikovich, died in Tel Aviv. In a memorial tribute to her Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld said that Ravikovich in her work had written of the self in a state of crisis, which in some way was an expression of the moral disintegration of Israel itself. Her poetry, they said, explored the parallels between

the plight of the Palestinians and the suffering of the Jews in the years of the Diaspora. In one of her best known poems, "Hovering at a Low Altitude," there is a female narrator who presents herself in a very satirical way as witness to the rape and murder of an Arab shepherd girl. The narrator watches from the safe distance of a low altitude and does nothing. As she watches she says, "I'm not here." She sees the little girl, yet she says over and over, "I'm not here." The image of hovering in this poem, *rechifa* in Hebrew, contains a double meaning, connecting the language of army bulletins (low-flying helicopters in hovering formations over the Gaza strip) with Tel Aviv slang (where *l-rachef* means "to be cool by staying detached from the political situation"). The image of low altitude hovering over an atrocity, Robert Alter, distinguished professor at Berkeley, has written, "is an emblem of the situation of the ordinary Israeli, knowing but choosing not to see certain terrible acts perpetrated by other Israelis or even in the name of IDF or the government." It is primarily "a parable of the moral untenability of detached observation."

I think that the real struggle in Israel for Israel's survival is not the one against Israel's many enemies, such as those heard spewing forth in the ranting of Hamas or Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran. The real struggle is one taking place within Israel and within us as American Jews. It is a struggle for the heart and soul, one that has been taking place in Israel from its very beginning, and certainly since 1967 when Israel conquered all of the territory between the Jordan and the sea.

But it is also a struggle about our purpose as American Jews, whether we are just to be Jews, to be supporters of Israel and our fellow Jews, since indeed all Jews are responsible for one another; to be Jews and to continue to be what we have been—a monument to endurance—or whether we are in any way, more importantly, to be Jews, and to become bearers of a great moral aspiration. Yes, to be responsible for our fellow Jews and Israel, reveling in its remarkable accomplishments, to be responsible, but not always in the way these members of our Jewish family choose to define themselves, not in ways that bring destruction or humiliation to others or to themselves.

I shall never forget the words I heard spoken by Nahum Goldman, when he said at a meeting I attended in Tel Aviv in November 1977, a day before Anwar Sadat made his historic visit: "This is a critical hour in the history of Israel and the Jewish people. The great problem for Israel is the problem of being powerful. For two thousand years we were powerless as a people, and without power we learned how to be the best visionaries, the best idealists. Now the powerless have become powerful. We have an army and flags and a state and victories. [Were he speaking today he could have gone on to say, and an air force and nuclear weapons and sophisticated technology, the envy of many nations in the world.] And in America, Jews are well organized and wealthy, and highly placed in political, cultural and economic life.

"But we have not yet learned how to use our power in the service of our visions. To place our reliance on power is our greatest weakness. The survival of the Jewish people is more in danger today than ever before."

The threat to us is not the threat of anti-Semitism or the fanatics among the radical fundamentalist Muslims. No, what is threatened today is the ethical core of our being as Jews. For whatever can explain the mystery of Jewish survival, the roots of that mystery are ethical, or they are nothing.

Yes, it's the same old brutal world, isn't it? Brimming with violence and mendacity, where human beings, even the best of them, act in what could kindly be called, morally ambiguous ways, and often in the name of the highest ideals and noblest purposes—freedom, democracy, God's word. It's so obvious, as our own Jewish tradition has taught us, and long before the insights of Freud and his disciples: we have been created with a cluster of contradictory drives and hungers, the impulses of mutual hatred and greed and envy, the ability to tear the world apart, the power to invent tyranny and torture and war.

But we have also been endowed with another set of impulses, the ones that draw us toward one another, in connection, in community, in love. The ones that helped us discover liberty, equality, fraternity, and though they remain unrealized, we have labored our way toward them.

The one beautiful, fragile, humble truth that can bring us to a better way of being is in guarding and cultivating the awareness that whatever value we have has come to us because of the accomplishment of others, the living and the dead. The other is always present in our lives. We can hear it in our voices, in the language we speak; we can see it in the color of our eyes. Even when we are alone, a book on the shelf, a table, a bed, a chair, a picture on the wall, remind us that the other is always there.

Oh, to experience that exquisite sense of what one human being owes to another, what one human being can mean to another. Do we not wish to see and feel the interconnectedness

between all things, and to be an instrument of that interconnectedness?

The poet Ann Lauterbach once wrote that when choices are displayed in the service of the possibility of meaning, in the making of objects of art, for example, we call the results *beautiful*. That is, we stand before a painting of Van Gogh or Claude Monet, or we read a poem of Emily Dickinson or Stanley Kunitz or Yehuda Amichai, or we listen to the music of Mozart or Mahler or folk or jazz or rock, and we say, "this is beautiful," but what we are really announcing, Ann Lauterbach insists, is our pleasure and our gratitude for the choices the artist has made. We recognize something in how one stroke of the brush brushes up against another stroke of the brush, how one note moves toward and away from the next in an astounding sequence, how one word attaches itself to another and to another, until something that has to do with the words separately, gather themselves into a connection which allows us, which invites us, which incites us to experience the meaning of meaning.

Is that not what we are seeking, to see and feel the union, the connectedness, the beauty of it all — in the marvel of the human conscience, in the structure of our bodies and our imaginations, and our passions, in all the disparate parts of our lives, in the ties of humanity itself that link us to one another?

This is the vision that can bring ardor and courage to our own fragile belief, that this world, for all of its barbarism and stupidity and anguish, is also a place where change is possible, where love and human will can be transforming. In this endeavor there is no guarantee of victory, but there is a choice: one either collaborates with the enemy — with whatever is, whatever is miserable, or inhumane, with whatever is unjust, whatever demeans the life of any human being — or one joins the resistance, and insists upon being among those who dare to diminish the store of insult and agony, insists on being among those who dare to believe that every person, even those we call our enemies, that every human being, wild and unpredictable as we may be, is a disclosure of the divine.

My teacher Abraham Heschel once said, "To be a Jew is not only to be, but to stand for." What is it that we stand for? That is the question put before us, waiting, waiting for our answer.

Michael Robinson: born in Asheville, North Carolina in 1924. Seeing those words reminded me inevitably of another native of Asheville, Thomas Wolfe, who was 24 years old when Mike was born, struggling to complete his first novel, a work that would catapult him into literary greatness in his time. In the last pages of Wolfe's final book, *You Can't Go Home Again*, can be found these words:

"I believe that we are lost here in America, but I believe we shall be found. And this belief … is for me — and I think for all of us — not only our own hope, but America's everlasting, living dream. I think the life which we have fashioned in America, and which has fashioned us — the forms we made, the cells that grew — was self-destructive in its nature … I think these forms are dying and must die, just as I know that America and the people in it, are deathless, undiscovered, and must live.

"I think the true discovery of America is before us … the true fulfillment of our spirit, our people, of our mighty and immortal land, is yet to come. I think the true discovery of our own democracy is still before us. And I think that all these things are certain as the morning, as inevitable as noon." ✡

This article originated as a talk delivered August 13, 2010, at the Annual Rabbi Michael Robinson Memorial Service at Temple Shomrei Torah, Santa Rosa, California.

Best wishes for a Happy New Year to our members and readers!
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