

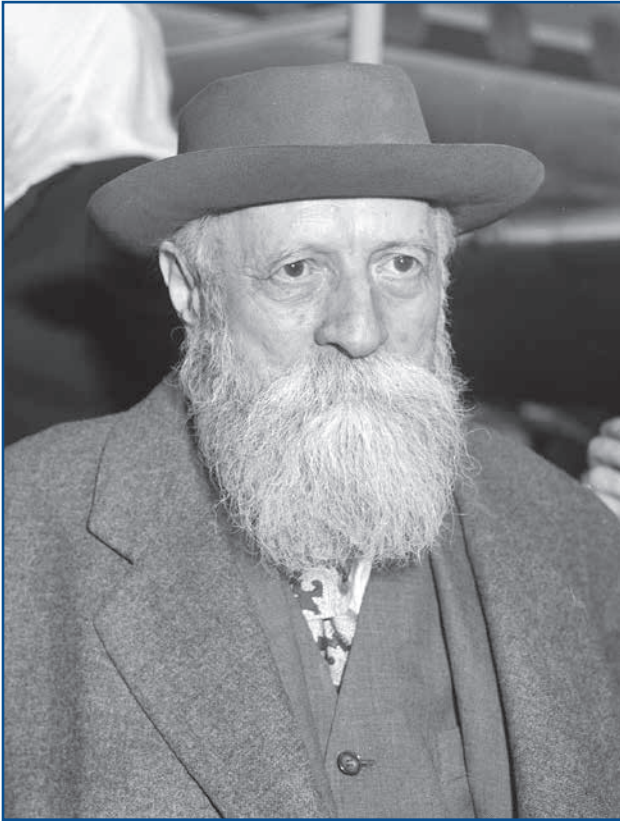
# SHALOM

*Jewish Peace Letter*

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Carol Ascher

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Stefan Merken

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**Remembering Rabbi Leonard Beerman**

Stefan Merken

## We Must Be Blind

**WE MUST BE BLIND** not to see the starvation and death of children in America. We must be blind not to see the selfish rich closed up in their gated enclaves hoping the poor will just disappear. We must be blind not to see the inequality of human suffering of so many when only a few have so much. We must be blind not to see the blocks upon blocks in every city in America of rat infested homes unfit to live in with no chance of ever getting out.

We must be deaf not to hear the wail of the homeless searching for a meal or a decent bed to keep warm from the winter winds. We must be deaf not to hear the tears of mothers whose children were killed or maimed on the streets of America. We must be deaf not to hear the sobs of children who go to bed each night hungry, sleeping in vacant cars dreaming of a home.

We must be callous to believe those who suffer will find solace and a helping hand at some point in life. We must be callous to think that after years and years of fighting senseless wars we would finally learn that war does nothing but waste young lives and valuable resources to protect the rich. We must be callous



to drive by the lines and lines  
of the hungry, waiting for a soup kitchen  
to open or for space, out of the cold. ☆

**STEFAN MERKEN** is chair of the Jewish Peace Fellowship.



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Carol Ascher

## Martin Buber's Spiritual Resistance

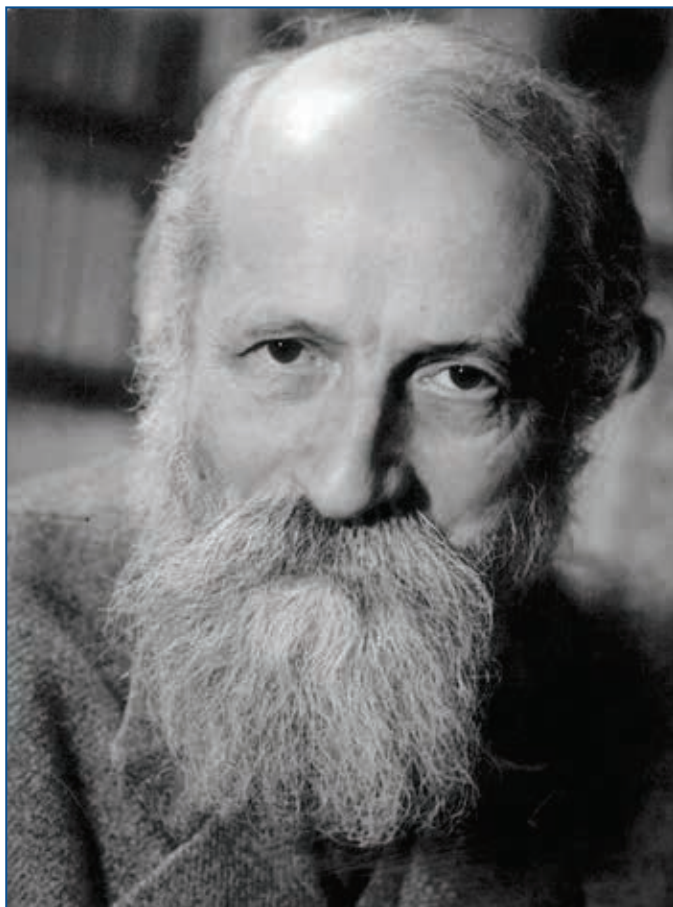
**A**T NINETY-FOUR, Lilli Zimet, my mother's cousin, lives alone in a two-story home near Temple Beth El in Poughkeepsie, New York, where in 1946 her husband, Rabbi Erwin Zimet, another refugee from the Nazis, assumed leadership. With her memory still keen, she talks easily of her experiences in the Jewish schools created by Martin Buber to give German Jews inner "spiritual resistance" during the early years of Nazism.

Until Hitler became Chancellor of Germany in the spring of 1933, Lilli was a patriotic German teen. Although her family attended synagogue on the High Holidays, "Much of the time, we weren't really very conscious of being Jews," Lilli recalls.

Convinced that assimilated German Jews like Lilli, who had given up so much to be good Germans, were particularly vulnerable to the psychological effects of anti-Semitism, Buber initiated a system of education he hoped would offer Jews the "moral and spiritual strength" to cope with the growing restrictions of Nazi Germany "through a deeper affirmation of their Jewishness."

By the end of Hitler's first year, thirty-seven thousand Jews had left Germany, or almost a tenth of the four hundred thousand Jewish citizens, and school life had become fraught for Jewish students. Yet Lilli graduated from her girl's lyceum in 1935, just as the Nuremberg Laws stripped Jews of citizenship and forbade Jewish students to attend public schools and universities. Determined nonetheless to be a teacher, Lilli sought educational training in the only place she could: in one of the Jewish schools developing under Buber's leadership.

Fifteen young Jewish women gathered in a Berlin apartment for a teacher-training course led by Nelli Wolfheim, a disciple of Maria Montessori. Their training combined pedagogy, child



*Martin Buber: "A command is not a sentence," he taught, "but an address."*

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**CAROL ASCHER's** novel, memoir, *Afterimages*, and her novels, *The Flood* and *Spooner Street* (forthcoming), reflect her Jewish refugee heritage. In addition to *Lilli Zimet*, who gave generously of her time, this article draws on Maurice Friedman's *Martin Buber's Life and Work: The Middle Years*, as well as several articles by witnesses to this period — Hans Gaertner, Nahum Gilstzer, Ernst Simon and Louis Harap — which are collected in the 1956 Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook. This article first appeared in expanded form in *Tikkun*, December 15, 2014. For more pieces like this, visit [tikkun.org](http://tikkun.org). Carol Ascher can be reached at [carolascher.com](http://carolascher.com)

psychology, and Jewish studies, and included internships in Jewish kindergartens. "Initially, we were in a Jewish school by default, because other schools wouldn't take us," Lilli remembers. "Jewish education was incidental to what we were there to study. But eventually we started to realize: *This Jewish art and music is ours*. We felt a new appreciation for our background."

In 1936, having completed her training, Lilli secured a teaching job at the Kaliski School in the Berlin suburb of Dahlem, where the villa of a Jewish family who had fled Germany was providing classrooms for about one hundred Jewish students. Lotte Kalliski, a Polish Jew, had opened a progressive grammar school shortly before Hitler's ascent to power, but by 1934, the



Kaliski School was serving only Jewish students; using progressive teaching methods, Judaism was woven into all academic subjects. One of Lilli's jobs was to run the Oneg Shabbat, the informal gathering to express the joy of the Sabbath, which she had learned from Wolfheim and by then was "eager to put into practice."

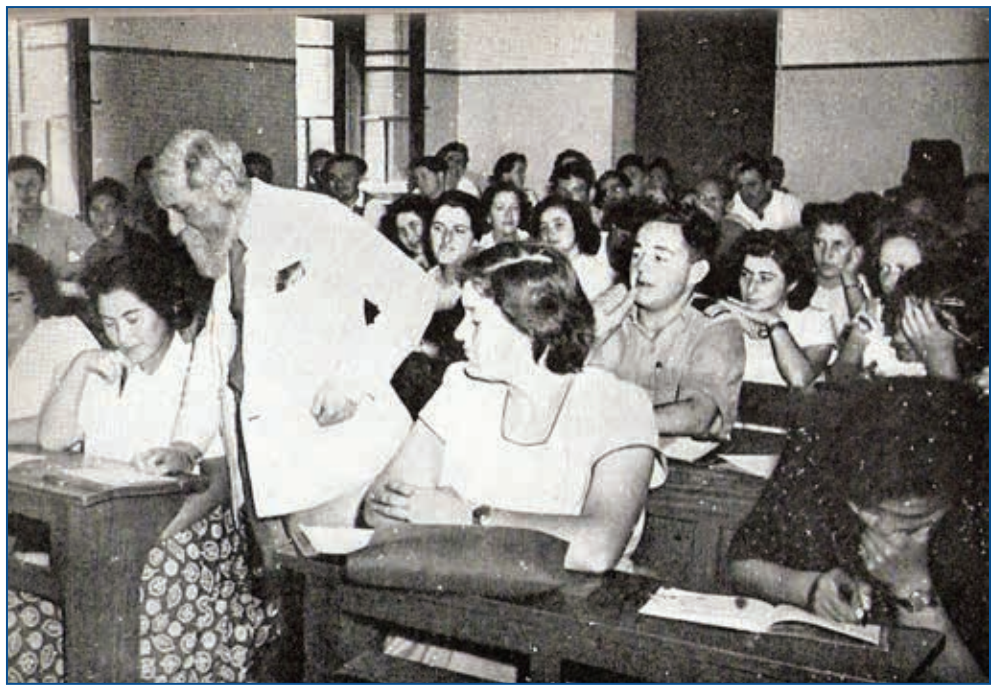
**ALTHOUGH MARTIN BUBER** did not attend a synagogue and was married to a gentile, he was a deeply spiritual man who taught philosophy and Jewish studies at the University of Frankfort until he was relieved of his post by Hitler. His groundbreaking book, *I and Thou* (1923) which declared that deep, personal, I-Thou encounters with others could bring an individual to an I-Thou relationship with God, had given him a following among both Jews and Christians. "The true meaning of love of one's neighbor," Buber wrote, "is not that it is a command from God which we are to fulfill, but that through it and in it we meet God."

In 1925, Buber began working with the theologian/philosopher Franz Rosenzweig (founder of the House of Jewish Learning in Frankfurt, where Buber often lectured) on another ambitious initiative: creating a German translation of the Hebrew Bible that would preserve the wonderful rhythm and poetry of the Torah for German Jews who did not know Hebrew.

During much of their collaboration, Rosenzweig, who had ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease), could barely move or speak. Buber would read each Hebrew phrase aloud as Rosenzweig tapped out his suggestions. Rosenzweig died in 1929, leaving Buber with much of the work to complete. He would finish the German translation in 1961, in Israel, four years before his own death.

In January 1934, Buber reopened Rosenzweig's House of Jewish Learning in Frankfurt. But he soon realized the need for a national office to coordinate both the training of Jewish teachers and the general lectures that would be needed to give Jews meaningful Jewish lives under Hitler. Ernst Simon, an educator and Jewish philosopher who had fled to Palestine, was persuaded to return to run the Central Office for Jewish Adult Education. Meanwhile, Buber traveled to Berlin, Breslau, Frankfurt, Mannheim, Munich, Stuttgart and dozens of other towns and cities to lecture on the need for Jewish education, give classes on the Bible and other specific subjects, and generally encourage the Jewish education movement.

At the Central Office, Simon contacted rabbis as well as Jewish schools and other institutions of Jewish learning throughout Germany to pull together a cadre of speakers and teacher trainers. By 1935, except for the ultra-Orthodox, representatives from nearly the entire Jewish spectrum were participating in Buber's



*Martin Buber teaching.*

educational network. National and local teacher training conferences were organized to strengthen teachers' pedagogical skills and deepen their Jewish knowledge, particularly in the five subjects he considered essential: Hebrew, Bible, community, history and faith. In addition, country retreats were initiated to build trust and create a sense of community among teachers.

After delivering a lecture at the Berlin Philharmonic on "The Power of the Spirit" to an overflow crowd, including a number of note-taking Nazis, in late 1935, Martin Buber was forbidden to speak publicly in Germany. Still, he traveled throughout the country, speaking in private homes and Quaker meetings, talking to small groups of Jewish teachers, and supporting the Jewish schools however he could.

As he explained, "In our history hardship has always had a reviving power. It is not the worst thing that our starting point is hardship and compulsion. What we must do is make of it freedom and a blessing." The overriding goal was to enable both teachers and students to feel an "alert and strong love" for the world around them, including its deprivations and horrors.

For Buber, the psalms and other biblical readings could illuminate contemporary challenges, reminding German Jews that their spiritual doubts were not new. In a collection of twenty-three Hebrew psalms he published in 1936 alongside his own German translation, his forward was entitled, "Out of the Depths I Call unto Thee." Arguing that expressions of personal need and hopes for rescue of the community easily overlap, he reassured his readers that "The words of personal complaint are themselves an offering to God." As the Psalmist waits for a response from God, who seems to have forsaken him, again and again he cries out, "How long, O Lord, how long?" For Buber, God is always near; it is we who turn away from His presence. As Buber would tell a friend in Palestine, "The time of Hitler was the most terrible

that I have lived through, but even in that time there was a holy meaning in history, there was God. . . only I cannot say how and where.”

Buber showed teachers how to read the Bible — slowly and out loud, as he had done with Rosenzweig. “A command is not a sentence,” he taught, “but an address.” He wanted each listener to hear the Bible as a personal call. Indeed, he wanted instruction in all subjects to follow this slow and thoughtful intensity, allowing for active student participation, including questions, comments, and challenges. For Buber, education could not be fully effective if it reached a student only intellectually; it had to engage the learner’s entire being.

To maximize the opportunities for Jews with different experiences in adherence to Jewish law and observance to talk through their beliefs honestly, Buber arranged for the schools to be filled with teachers and students of different Jewish backgrounds. His ultimate goal was for Jewish teachers to create “I-Thou” relationships amongst themselves and with their students — placing themselves fully in each relationship as they worked towards deep acceptance and understanding.

**IT WAS AT A 1935** summer conference for teachers in the wooded grounds of the Jewish Convalescent Home on Lehnitz Lake, a two-hour ride from Berlin, that Lilli heard Buber speak and met her future husband. An admirer of Buber, Erwin Zimet was a guitar-playing rabbinical student who was directing services at the Convalescent Home and supplementing Buber’s lectures to teachers with classes in Judaism and Hebrew.

As Nazi restrictions and violence were followed by surges in Jewish emigration, Jewish schools serving older students focused on preparing their students for new lives abroad. At the Jewish Convalescent Home on Lake Lehnitz, young

women were trained in housekeeping skills that would make them employable as maids in their new countries, even if they didn’t know the language. A number of schools trained students in farming and other vocational skills they could use in Palestine, South America or elsewhere. And some schools prepared students both for British matriculation and the American College Boards.

Lilli was teaching at the Kaliski School a few days before *Kristallnacht* when she was called to the telephone. Erwin and his father, who were in Germany on Polish passports, had been interred at a camp on the Polish border. Shortly thereafter, German Foreign Minister Joachim Von Ribbentrop appropriated the Dahlem villa, forcing the Kaliski School to close its doors.

Erwin and his father were released in March of 1939. The promise by Rabbi Milton Steinberg of a post as an associate rabbi at New York’s Park Avenue Synagogue helped Erwin leave Germany for the US. Lilli, who managed to flee to London in 1939, arrived in New York in 1940, and the couple was soon married. In 1946, the two moved to Poughkeepsie, New York, where Erwin Zimet would build Temple Beth El’s small congregation into a lively progressive synagogue of nine hundred families that for a decade also included a Hebrew day school.

**ONE MEASURE** OF THE SUCCESS of Buber’s alternate school system is that, in 1937, an astonishing sixty-five percent of all Jewish children still in Germany were in school. Yet Buber never quite achieved his vision of a rich array of high-quality Jewish educational enrichment. Many teachers — often, Jews laid off from the German school system — were inadequately prepared to weave Jewish concerns and concepts into the regular curriculum, and those Jews who knew Hebrew were rarely trained as teachers. ☆

## A Giant of a Rabbi

**R**ABBI LEONARD BEERMAN, longtime pacifist, founding rabbi of Los Angeles’ Leo Baeck Temple and vice-president of the Jewish Peace Fellowship, died in December 2014, at age ninety-three. He had been a marine in World War II and later a member of the Haganah; and while he had never been in combat, he said he became a pacifist because of “what I had seen: People transformed just to hating, hating, hating. It is no way for humankind to live.”

Rabbi Ken Chasen, his successor at Leo Baeck, said, “Beerman’s faith was bound to his activism, fearlessly speaking out on contentious issues such as the exaggeration of the Communist scare, advocating for better wages for the working poor in the United States, racial equality, and concern for the lives and welfare of Palestinians.”

He was not a silent rabbi. ☆



Ruth L. Hiller

## Conscientious Objection in Israel

**R**EFUSAL TO DO MILITARY SERVICE in Israel is a complex issue. It is assumed that all Israelis are required to serve in the army, and many do. In actual fact, however, a growing number of Israeli citizens choose not to enlist. It is important to note that military service is required only of Jews and secular Palestinian-Arab Druze men. It is not required of Christians or Muslims, who make up twenty percent of the population.

While the government attempts to maintain the myth that the IDF is an army of all the people, there are huge efforts to conscript the ultra-Orthodox Jews, or haredim, a sector which has been exempt from military service since Israel's establishment. The haredim maintain that their contribution to society is through their study of Torah, which they consider to be of greater value than military service, and consider compulsory military service as a form of religious persecution.

There are also attempts to conscript Israel's Palestinian citizens.

Participation in the Israeli army is regarded by many Palestinians as equivalent to treason, since Israel still occupies Palestine. Nevertheless, some Muslim and Christian Palestinians do volunteer for army service. Among the former are Bedouins.

It has yet to be proven that participation in the military

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**RUTH L. HILLER** is a cofounder of *New Profile* ([www.newprofile.org/english](http://www.newprofile.org/english)), a movement to demilitarize Israeli society. *New Profile* was established in October 1998 and continues to support and counsel anyone who is considering not doing army service.

provides connections that will further careers or other opportunities, such as integration into mainstream society. Druze villages, where residents do heed conscription, are subject to overcrowding, poor infrastructure and house demolitions. Presently many Bedouin villages in the Negev are also subject to repeated destruction, including the homes of former Bedouin soldiers.



*Udi Segal, 18 years old, began serving his fourth prison term for refusal to serve in the military on September 29, 2014.*

Another group that pays a price for choosing not to serve in the army are the Shministim, or high school seniors — young Jewish conscientious objectors, aged sixteen to twenty, who have declared their refusal to serve in an occupying army. In 2014, one hundred and forty Shministim signed a public letter and sent it to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, clearly stating their intentions to refuse military service. Such a declaration means these teenagers, upon their induction dates, are possible candidates for immediate incarceration that could last for many months.

In addition to the possible threat of going to jail, these young people are also subject to continued harassment by their teachers, peers, communities and the military. Their families may tell them how disappointed they are in the choices made, and some leave home due to the tensions created.

Through acts of civil disobedience and their desire to apply democratic values and change society, the Shministim are a growing group of highly sensitive human beings who bravely oppose Israel's occupation of Palestine at all costs and believe in a better and more peaceful future for Israelis and Palestinians. ☆

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Ken Giles

## What I Learned as a Senate Page in 1965 *And What I Teach in 2015*



*August 6, 1965: President Lyndon B. Johnson signs the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Standing in the first row of onlookers are Senator Everett Dirksen (third from the left), and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (fifth from the right).*

**I**N 1965, I WAS A US SENATE PAGE. I was appointed by Senator Everett Dirksen, of Illinois. It was a historic year:

**KEN GILES** teaches violin at several schools and at the DC Youth Orchestra in Washington, DC. He also sings with the DC Labor Chorus. Ken is a longtime member of the Jewish Peace Fellowship and was a Conscientious Objector during the Vietnam War.

Medicare and Medicaid were passed. The Voting Rights Act was passed. The “war on poverty” was started. Unfortunately, the bombing of North Vietnam also began in 1965, and the Vietnam War eventually derailed President Lyndon Johnson’s plans to deal with poverty and other domestic issues.

On March 15, 1965, I witnessed President Johnson’s historic speech to Congress on voting rights. As a Senate page, I sat in the House chamber to listen to LBJ say, “Really it’s all of

us who must overcome the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice... and we *shall* overcome." Senator Dirksen rounded up enough Republican votes to help pass the Voting Rights Act, and I remember the Senate voting seventy-nine to nineteen on May 26, 1965, to pass the new law. I still have a Senate vote sheet on which I recorded the historic vote.

That same year, President Johnson, Senator Dirksen and many others escalated the Vietnam War, diverting our nation's resources from the task of ending poverty and creating a more equal and just society. I thought the choice was clear: stop war so we can rebuild a more equal and just society. We changed the laws to get rid of racial segregation and to assure voting rights, but we didn't make a more equal economy.

In 1969, I sent my draft board an application requesting that I be classified as a Conscientious Objector. The Jewish Peace Fellowship gave me inspiring information about peace activities. Rabbi Mike Robinson encouraged me to support "Trees and Life for Vietnam," an effort to plant trees and rebuild hospitals which American bombs had defoliated and destroyed. Allan Solomonow invited me to join a tour through the Middle East to promote Israeli-Palestinian peace. The Continental Walk for Disarmament and Social Justice linked the issues of peace and a just society. As I played my violin with the marchers in D.C., I met Charlie

King with his guitar, and we started a long musical collaboration to sing songs of peace and justice.

Now, as a music teacher, I tell my students about what I witnessed fifty years ago when Congress took big steps to make our society more equal. But I also admit that we have a long way to go. Yes, the Voting Rights Act brought millions of people to the polls and helped elect many African American politicians, including President Obama. But what is happening to voting rights now? Are photo i.d. requirements disenfranchising many older, poorer voters? Are oddly-drawn voting districts concentrating African American voters in one district, assuring safe districts for white politicians? Are poverty, unemployment and poor schools making it very hard for people to live a decent life? Are we spending our national resources on being the world's police, while we neglect social needs at home?

Now, in 2015, the fiftieth anniversary of the Selma march for voting rights, on March 7, will call attention to what we have achieved and what remains to be done. I plan to be in Selma, remembering the things I saw as a Senate page. Yes, we changed the laws, but the harder task is to change our society. We have to preserve what we gained and work for real economic opportunity for all. The choice remains: militarism or economic justice. ☆

# SHALOM *Jewish Peace Letter*

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