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SHALOM

Jewish Peace Letter

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C O N T E N T S

Polner on the page

As we look forward with one eye to continuing the Shalom Jewish Peace Letter, we cast one eye backward to revisit examples of Murray's wisdom found in his many publications. Pg.3



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From Where I Sit

Stefan Merken

The editorial board of Shalom needs your help now.

STEFAN MERKEN
is co-editor of *Shalom* and
the Chair of the JPF.

Reaching Out to You

With the recent passing of Murray Polner this year on May 30th, the *Shalom Newsletter* editorial board

greatly misses our long-time friend and dedicated Jewish Peace Fellowship contributor and editor. We greatly miss his insights, his warmth, and his compassion. There will never be another Murray Polner.

In speaking to an old friend who has worked with JPF over the years, he tells me that he is part of Veterans for Peace. They are doing counter-recruitment in the schools and young people seem to be getting the message. Their message is creating enough of a stir that the military recruitment folks are complaining to the school system. This seems like a good sign.

The editorial board of *Shalom* needs your help. This would be a great time to send us interesting articles you find in

reading the news, or that you write and would like to share. Please remember that the JPF has a vision statement that we on the editorial board try to honor and stay on track. So do send us what you have or what you find and we will try to fit them into a newsletter.

Peace groups across the country are suffering from the same single issue with which the JPF is suffering: the lack of new, young members. It appears that young people have lost interest in getting involved in peace groups. We would love to hear from you with any suggestions you may have regarding ways in which to reach out to the younger generation

and get them involved. Perhaps through social media which seems to be where they receive much of their information. So please let us know your thoughts on this. ☆



SHALOM

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HONORARY PRESIDENT Rabbi Philip J. Bentley •

CHAIR Stefan Merken • **VICE PRESIDENT** Rabbi Leonard Beerman z"

EDITORS Murray Polner & Richard Middleton-Kaplan

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS Patrick Henry, Susannah Heschel,
E. James Lieberman, Adam Simms, Lawrence S. Wittner

Established in 1941

E-mail: jpf@forusa.org • World Wide Web: <http://www.jewishpeacefellowship.org>

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*In Memoriam***Polner on the Page**

For those of us who write, edit, and design the Shalom Jewish Peace Letter, this October issue is a difficult one: our first without Murray Polner (1928–2019) at the helm. He was so prolific that he provided the sole article (“A Strange Romance”) for the June 2019 issue that we published shortly after his May 30 passing; his extensive reading, searing insights, and unshakeable commitment to peace remained fully intact through that last article.

We continue to mourn Murray’s passing, and we appreciate that as readers you do as well. We also celebrate his life and his immense contributions to peacebuilding. Therefore, as we look forward with one eye to continuing the Shalom Jewish Peace Letter, we cast one eye backward to revisit examples of Murray’s wisdom found in his many publications.

Murray Polner



From *No Victory Parades: The Return of the Vietnam Veteran* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971):

They have been ignored, as soldiers and as veterans. Unlike the returning servicemen of earlier wars, they have not been celebrated in film or song; there are no more victory parades. Born at a time of rapid political, social, and technological change, reflecting both the hopes and anxieties of the post-World War II years in which they came to adulthood, these young men left military service filled with doubts about the kind of war they were forced to fight, about their country’s leaders, and about the sanctity of their America. Regardless of their convictions about the war, practically every veteran I spoke with indicated in a variety of ways his suspicion that he had been manipulated; the government was nothing but a faceless “them.”



From *When Can I Come Home? A Debate on Amnesty for Exiles, Antiwar Prisoners, and Others* (Doubleday, 1972):

Since little will be done until the war ends, the case for peace now is even greater, and the appeal for eventual amnesty much more valid, especially when one remembers what these new “criminals” did *not* do. They did not rebel against their country, they did not commit treason or openly take up arms. Their sole offense, if it is an offense, was in cherishing freedom so highly that they refused to submit to a draft or military service in a war their morality and their ethics would not let them accept.



From *Rabbi: The American Experience* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977):

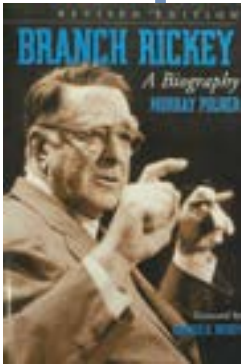
The anguish of constant change has also affected every Western religious institution, Jews along with Christians, and the result is a society with little religious faith, despite what people tell touring pollsters. Stripped of that degree of belief—and in Judaism today that term must also embrace identification with the lot of fellow Jews throughout the world—what remains are diverse communities with shifting values and inexplicable standards by which society and its citizens may be judged. “How does a society without religion set standards of any kind?” asked one

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In Memoriam

rabbi. “What is the source of ultimate meaning beyond time and place?” ...

But whatever the years ahead hold for rabbis and their congregational responsibilities, they will more than anything else have to seek a dominant place for the Jewish religion and Jewish scholarship in an unbelieving synagogue and nonsynagogue population. Hardly an easy task. But the extent of their success will determine the kind of American Jewish community that will exist at the close of this century.



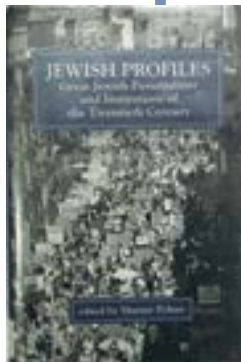
From *Branch Rickey: A Biography* (McFarland & Company, 1982; revised edition 2007):

In the years following [the integration of major league baseball], Rickey’s sympathies for and understanding of the suffering of minorities deepened. He recognized that bigotry, however cloaked in respectability, was a plague. ...

He helped establish the National Scholarship Service and Fund for Negro Students. And during the 1960s he motored through the Deep South to study at first hand the impact of the momentous *Brown v. Topeka* desegregation ruling on its schools and black people. Looking, ever looking, he was overflowing with ardor and passion for this cause and this principle. For Branch Rickey, the simplest of truths was that God had indeed created all men and women equal.

He provocatively challenged six hundred white ministers in Lakeside, Ohio: “I am contemptuous of the church’s role to date in integration. Ministers, on the whole, are like other people. They want to go slowly on integration. They’re moderates. In fact, I can think of no major white figure in America today who *isn’t* a moderate.

“They call you an extremist if you want integration *now*—which is the only morally defensible position. To advise moderation is like going to a stickup man and saying to him, ‘Don’t use a gun. That’s violent. Why not be a pickpocket instead?’ *A moderate is a moral pickpocket.*”



From the preface to *Jewish Profiles: Great Jewish Personalities and Institutions of the Twentieth Century*, edited by Murray Polner, with a foreword by Irving Howe (Jason Aronson, Inc., 1991).

This volume collects profiles that appeared in the periodical *Present Tense* for which Murray was founding and sole editor during its run from 1973 to 1990:

Armed, then, with a pledge from [The American Jewish Committee] of *absolute* editorial control, I became the editor of what soon became a liberal magazine dedicated to debate, discussion, and reportage. But we also took sides. The articles dealt with everything we thought mattered—from Israel to the Diaspora, from pre-Gorbachev Soviet violations of human rights and liberties to illegal secret American warfare against Nicaragua, from the status of the family to the plight of the homeless and impoverished. We were one of the first Jewish publications to call attention to the desperate situation of Ethiopian and Soviet Jews. We were among the earliest to challenge the war in Vietnam and the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. And we argued that Palestinians had rights, too, including the right of self-determination.

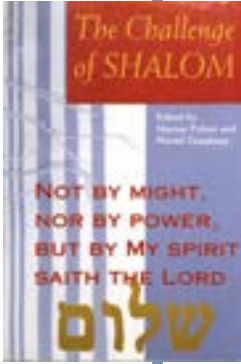
Present Tense, since its inception, sought to reflect the openness and tolerance that are the hallmark of liberalism and much of Jewish life. We tried to reflect the ethical and moral teachings of our faith, without which it becomes ritualized and vacuous. ...

Independence of mind and thought, the celebration of differences as well as

Continued on next page

In Memoriam

common threads, our tradition’s insistence upon moral behavior, and the pursuit of peace were, therefore, the components that made *Present Tense* what it was.



From the introduction to *The Challenge of Shalom: The Jewish Tradition of Peace and Justice* (New Society Publishers, 1994), edited by Murray Polner and Naomi Goodman:

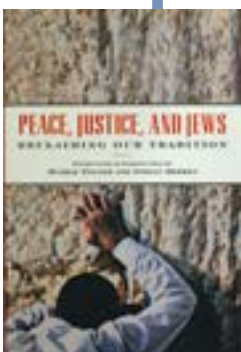
The view held by skeptics and critics of nonviolent action draws only one lesson from the Holocaust, and then emotionally or ideologically applies it to contemporary threats—real or imagined. Possibly it is derived also from the fact that absolute, principled nonviolence was rarely demanded by the founders and interpreters of Judaism. True enough, yet as the contents of this book attest, quite another set of lessons can also be drawn from Jewish tradition. Above all, these lessons celebrate the belief that peace is the highest priority in Jewish life, what the late Rabbi Steven Schwarzchild once described as “[a] uniquely powerful system of ethical peacefulness.”



From *Disarmed and Dangerous: The Radical Lives and Times of Daniel and Philip Berrigan* (Basic Books, 1997), with Jim O’Grady:

At Cornell, Daniel Berrigan] also influenced Jewish students not by proselytizing but by challenging them to learn and fulfill the mandates of their faith. David Saperstein recalled that “the power of his message opened up for me the concept of being called into a partnership with God in creating a better world,” and later wrote of Dan that “with his gentle voice and potent poetry, he sliced through political complexities and reduced the test of the ethical person to a kind of biblical simplicity: What we *do* for the least of us; what we *do* to bring peace into the world; what we *do* to rouse ourselves and others from our moral slumber. He introduced me to the work and thinking of Martin Buber, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton and others who fleshed out my understanding of the broad range of options one has in responding to G-d’s call to partnership.” Some of Dan’s Jewish students even journeyed on their own down to Manhattan and volunteered with the [C]atholic Worker.

.....
Yet above all else, conscience and protest did count, and millions of others opposed to the pointless and bloody war were right. Had there been no demonstrations, no draft board raids, no campus upheavals, no alternative weeklies, no centrist opposition, and, yes, no Dan or Phil Berrigan and the Catholic Left, there is no telling when it might have ended, how many more Asians and Americans would have died, and even whether nuclear weapons might have been used.



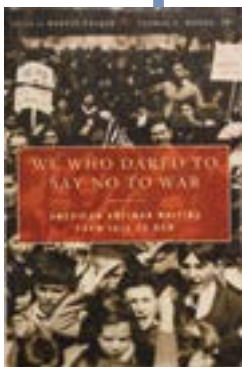
From *Peace, Justice, and Jews: Reclaiming Our Tradition* (Bunim & Bannigan, 2007), edited with an introduction by Murray and Stefan Merken:

We Jews have a peace tradition. ... Peace has been the idea, the messianic dream, which we have hoped and prayed for, and the goal for our future generations. Religious and secular Jews have historically always been among the skeptics, reformers,

Continued on next page

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and rebels fighting despotism and tyranny. This derives from the purest and highest in our morality: the belief in Shalom, which encompasses much more than the absence of war. Shalom is best defined as wholeness, grace, and truth: ethical values which when married to the concept of justice define what being a Jew—or anyone—can and should be, not merely in opposition to war makers, but equally to the way we treat the most vulnerable among us: animals, prisoners, conquered people, military conscripts, and all victims of cruelty, indifference, and violence.



From the introduction to *We Who Dared to Say No to War: American Antiwar Writing from 1812 to Now* (Basic Books/Perseus, 2008), edited by Murray with Thomas E. Woods, Jr.):

And while World War II may have been a necessary war, we remind readers that (1) that war was but a continuation of the unnecessary World War I, and (2) there were always critics of the war—“noninterventionists” to its partisans and “isolationists” to its opponents—before and after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Some of the most articulate opponents of the foreign-policy consensus, then and now, among Washington’s elite are those who recognize that American military power needs to be narrowly restricted to *defense*—specifically, an end to the stationing of U.S. troops throughout the world, a sharp reduction in military budgets, a restoration of constitutional parity between the three branches of government, and a refusal to inject the nation into conflicts without end, all over the world. ...

Finally, and inevitably, we turn to Iraq, where impassioned supporters invoke a future consumed by “World War IV.” As usual, our present and future wars are aided and abetted by the intimate relationship between weapons manufacturers (which in the good old days were called “merchants of death”) and contractors and far too many policy makers and legislators. We offer here the testimonies of serious opponents of our government’s foreign policy as a rebuke to the limited and narrow debate that takes place among Washington’s elites, think tanks, and (with few exceptions) our servile and incurious mass media.

The conventional wisdom about the Iraq War is that it was begun under false pretenses, that a supine media drilled those falsehoods into Americans’ heads, and that this was all very unusual. Well, as they say, two out of three ain’t bad.

☆

Facts and Ignorance

Patrick Henry

Worrisome Statistics from 2018

SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN ANTISEMITISM

Europe: **Germany:** 20% increase in antisemitic incidents in 2018 (swastikas, insults, arson, assault, murder). 89% from the far right. Hostility towards Jews also from Muslims. **France:** 74% increase in antisemitic incidents in 2018 (541 incidents). In both countries, some antisemitism comes from the left (situation in Israel).

European Jews are moving to Israel in great numbers (especially French Jews).

United States: An FBI report noted a 37% increase in antisemitic hate crimes in 2017. After the survey was taken, we witnessed the worst antisemitic attack in U.S. history in October 2018 at Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh where 11 Jews were murdered during Shabbat services.

Washington State: Hate crimes rose 78% between 2013 and 2017 (ninth largest increase among the states). Seattle showed an increase of nearly 400% since 2012. There were 521 reported hate crimes in Seattle in 2018. 60% of these hate crimes came from racial animosity, 21% from religious animosity, and 16% from sexual orientation animosity.

An FBI report noted a 37% increase in antisemitic hate crimes in 2017.

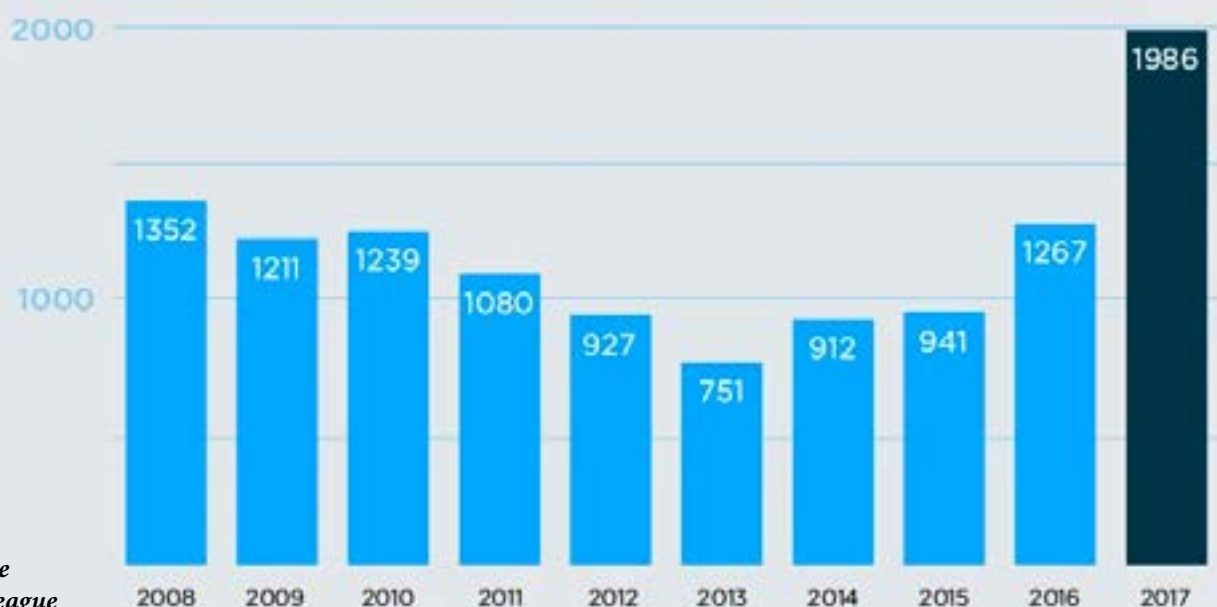
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Anti-Semitic Incidents: U.S.

Anti-Semitic Incidents in the U.S. Over the Last Decade

ADL

Total Incidents



Facts and Ignorance

PATRICK HENRY compiled these statistics for a course he teaches about the rescue of Jews during the Holocaust. Patrick is Cushing Eells Emeritus Professor of Philosophy and Literature at Whitman College. He is the author of *We Only Know Men: The Rescue of Jews in France during the Holocaust* (The Catholic University of America Press, 2007) and the editor of *Jewish Resistance Against the Nazis* (The Catholic University of America Press, 2014).

IGNORANCE OF THE HOLOCAUST

Europe: One-third of Europeans surveyed by CNN in November 2018 said that they knew “little or nothing about the Holocaust.” Roughly 25% claimed that Jews had too much influence “in conflicts and wars,” as well as “in business and finance.”

United States: 41% of all Americans surveyed in April 2018 (and 66% of millennials—aged 18-34) didn’t know what Auschwitz was. In the same survey, 31% of all Americans and 41% of millennials claimed that 2,000,000 or fewer Jews were murdered during the Holocaust. Finally, 22% of millennials said that they “hadn’t heard” or “were not sure” that they had heard of the Holocaust.

WE ARE LIVING AT A TIME OF INTENSE RACISM

There has been a steady increase in hate crimes in the United States in recent years, including a 17% increase in 2017. These hate crimes are aimed at blacks, Jews, Muslims, Latinx, and LGBTQ persons. Blacks are the most targeted racial group (about 50%), Jews the most targeted religious group (about 58%). Muslims are the victims of 19% of all religious hate crimes in the United States. ☆

66% of millennials surveyed do not know what Auschwitz was.



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\$25 / \$50 / \$100 / \$250 / \$500 / \$1000 / Other \$ _____

Enclosed is my check, payable to “Jewish Peace Fellowship”

(Please provide your name and address below so that we may properly credit your contribution.)

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY / STATE / ZIP _____

Phone: _____

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Below, please clearly print the names and addresses, including e-mail, of friends you think might be interested in supporting the aims of the Jewish Peace Fellowship.

*“An eye for
an eye”*

Richard
Middleton-Kaplan

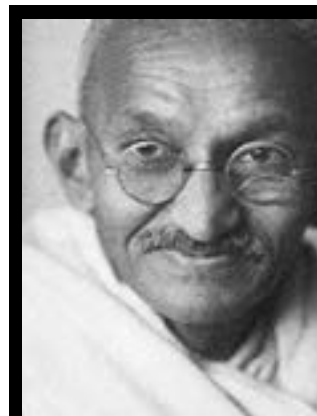
Justice at the Crossroads

A Jewish philosopher responds to Gandhi

An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind,” attributed to Gandhi and often accompanied with his picture, has attained the cultural currency of an indisputably wise pronouncement. Appearing on sweatshirts, bumper stickers, and countless posters, the pronouncement seems to be Gandhi’s retort to what is by implication the harsh, futile, destructive Old Testament injunction to render justice by taking “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth,” and “life for life.”

What is a suitable Jewish response to Gandhi’s apparent repudiation of this cornerstone principle in our foundational text? Do we reject the “eye for an eye” principle of the Hebrew Bible as barbaric and outdated? Or can we find a way of rationalizing it? A probing, profound, powerfully moving answer came from the Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995) in a 1963 essay titled “An Eye for an Eye.” Although Levinas does not name Gandhi directly, his carefully chosen phrases suggest that he is not merely addressing vague ideas about non-violence that were politically relevant at that time, but rather responding specifically to Gandhi’s philosophy of non-violent action as a means of halting injustice. Characterized by stunning twists and turns of thought, sometimes agreeing with Gandhi and sometimes challenging him, Levinas offers a multi-layered reflection that still demands our attention as we try to balance Jewish law with our thoughts and feelings about the death penalty.

Born in Lithuania, Levinas moved to France in the late 1930s and joined the French army at the start of World War II. He was soon captured and spent the rest of the war in a POW camp while most of his family perished in the Holocaust. His views on justice and retribution, and on the possibility of achieving justice through Gandhian nonviolence, therefore come from agonizing personal loss as well as philosophic contemplation.



*“An eye for an eye
makes the whole
world blind.”*

Mahatma Gandhi

Levinas was well-aware of Gandhi. He likely would have heard news coverage of his widely reported arrival in Marseilles in September of 1931. Three times he mentions the Mahatma in his 1953 book *Liberté et commandement* (Liberty and Command). In

In “An Eye for an Eye”—and in other essays written around the same time—Levinas contemplates whether Gandhian non-violence can stop violence and produce justice. Gandhi and Levinas converge and diverge

*“Violence calls up
violence, but we must
put a stop to this chain
reaction.”*

Emmanuel Levinas



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“An eye for an eye”

on this issue but, ultimately, Levinas found Gandhian non-violence inadequate as a means of achieving or restoring justice...but he thought violence equally inadequate. “An Eye for an Eye” reveals a thinker deeply conflicted and it leaves the reader in a state of irresolution, with neither violence nor non-violence capable of soothing the cry of injustice and “staunch[ing] this eternal haemorrhage” of the unhealed wound.

(Note: Levinas’s essay “An Eye for an Eye” can be found in the essay collection *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, translated by Seán Hand, published by Johns Hopkins University Press in 1990.)

Levinas begins his discussion in “An Eye for an Eye” by quoting Leviticus 24: 17-22:

“And if a man strikes down any human being he shall be put to death. And one who slays an animal shall pay for it a life for the life. And a man who inflicts an

injury upon his fellow man just as he did, so shall be done to him, fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. Just as he inflicted an injury upon a person, so shall it be inflicted upon him. And one who injures an animal shall pay for it. And one who strikes a person shall be put to death. One law shall be exacted for you, sojourner and resident alike, for I am the Lord, your God.”

He comments on the quotation from Leviticus with what appears to be a direct challenge to the statement often attributed to Gandhi (“An eye for an eye leaves the whole world blind”): “Harsh words, far removed from those which magnify non-resistance to evil.”

Here we might expect from Levinas a defense of Leviticus and a refutation of the softer Gandhian creed. Instead, though, Levinas makes clear that the rabbis did not intend a literal, physical, violent enforcement of the law of retaliation; according to them, he informs us, “eye for eye meant a fine.” Levinas reportedly wrote “An Eye for an

Eye” as a protest against the death penalty, and at this point in his essay he rejects the violent taking of an eye—or a life—as punishment. Such punishments only set the cycle of violence spinning again: “Violence calls up violence, but we must put a stop to this chain reaction.” He insists that man must have “justice without killing,” and that a non-violent application of justice “is necessary and henceforth is the only possible form of justice...” At this juncture, Levinas’s position mirrors Gandhi’s.

Levinas and Gandhi thus seem to concur with respect to the impossibility of violence to serve as protector or promoter of justice. However, Levinas adds two deeply troubling, troubled paragraphs which seem to mark a reversal. Gandhi wrote that “Mankind is at the crossroads. It has to make its choice between the law of the jungle and the law of humanity”—and it is exactly at this crossroads that Levinas stands in the final two paragraphs of “An Eye for an Eye.” From the perspectives of ethics and Talmudic interpretation, non-violence may indeed be “the only possible form of justice,” but that does not make it satisfactory—or even just. Levinas observes that punishment by fines lets the rich off easily, not touching them at the essence of their moral being but rather letting them pay off “[o]utrage and fracture” and “gouged-out eyes” with “a

Non-violence may indeed be “the only possible form of justice,” but that does not make it satisfactory—or even just.

Emmanuel Levinas



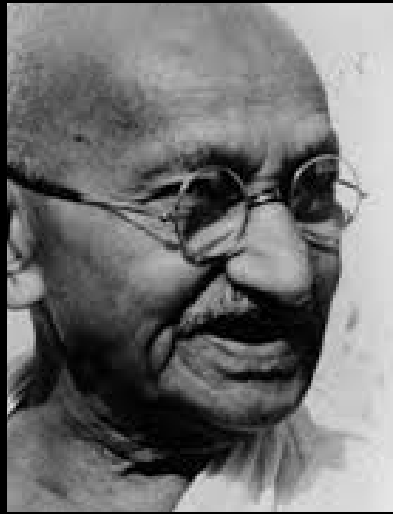
Levinas wrote “An Eye for an Eye” as a protest against the death penalty.

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*“An eye for
an eye”*

*“Mankind is at the
crossroads. It has
to make its choice
between the law of the
jungle and the law of
humanity.”*

Mahatma Gandhi



light heart and a healthy body...” An exchange of financial fracture for bodily fracture, or for the fracture opened up in one’s existence by irreparable wrong, compounds the injustice endured by the wronged party. While the “Bible reminds us of the spirit of kindness,” the wounded heart cries out that a financial settlement does not stop the cycle of violence, but actually continues the violence against the victim by inflicting the additional wound of inadequate reparation. “Yes, an eye for an eye,” Levinas bluntly declares, now seeming to insist on a literal application of the law of retaliation.

He closes his essay with these words: “Neither all eternity, nor all the money in the world, can heal the outrage done to man. It is a disfigurement or wound that bleeds for all time, as though it required a parallel suffering to staunch this eternal haemorrhage.” With this emphatic conclusion, Levinas seems to take a divergent path from Gandhi’s, choosing at the crossroads to pursue the law of the jungle.

Within Levinas’s invocation of a “wound that bleeds for all time,” the echo of the Holocaust resounds; within his insistence on the inadequacy of fines, we hear the voice of outrage against

the possibility of financial reparations for survivors. It is with respect to the Holocaust that we find the widest divergence between Gandhi and Levinas. In an essay called “The Jews,” the Mahatma wrote of Nazi Germany, “if the Jewish mind could be prepared for voluntary suffering, even the massacre I have imagined could be turned into a day of thanksgiving and joy that Jehovah had wrought deliverance of the race even at the hands of the tyrant. For to the God-fearing, death has no terror. It is a joyful sleep to be followed by a waking that would be all the more refreshing for the long sleep.” Gandhi wrote this in 1938, and in fairness to him “the massacre [he] imagined” could not have included the gas chambers. Yet his words later won the approval of Holocaust survivors such as Bruno Bettelheim and Viktor Frankl. Levinas differs from all three. He finds no joyful or refreshing sleep but rather the anguish of a wound still freshly open. That wound demands “a parallel suffering to staunch” it—a parallel violence, perhaps.

Nonetheless, even Gandhi allowed for some use of violence. “He who cannot protect himself or his nearest and dearest or their honor by non-violently facing death may and ought to do so by violently dealing with the oppressor,” he wrote. Gandhi’s words here resemble those of *Nine Talmudic Readings* in which Levinas writes, “if I am violent it is because violence is needed to put an end to violence.” Their words also echo Lamentations, which Levinas cites in “An Eye for an Eye.” There one finds eyes not being gouged out but weeping ceaselessly for the destroyed daughters of Israel. Having witnessed the destruction of his people, Levinas seeks to staunch not just the wound that bleeds for all time, but also the flow of tears that cry for all time—his own included, presumably, though he does not say so.

Are we left, then, with the conclusion that justice can only be achieved through violent

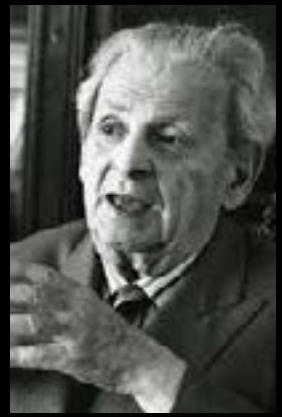
*It is with regard to
the Holocaust that
Gandhi’s and Levinas’s
views differ the most*

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“An eye for
an eye”

*It is a disfigurement or wound
that bleeds for all time, as though
it required a parallel suffering to
staunch this eternal haemorrhage*

Emmanuel Levinas



and literal retaliation? Not quite. If that were the case, Levinas’s final sentence in “An Eye for an Eye” would read thus: “It is a disfigurement or wound that bleeds for all time, which requires a parallel suffering to staunch this eternal haemorrhage.” Instead, Levinas writes, “It is a disfigurement or wound that bleeds for all time, *as though* it required a parallel suffering to staunch this eternal haemorrhage” (my emphasis). With “as though,” he simultaneously acknowledges the wounded heart’s desire to inflict a parallel suffering and, forbidding that, the rabbis’ arguments for “justice based on peace and kindness...”

With this, we stand again at the crossroads, scanning the optical field of human behavior. An unresolved ending to “An Eye for an Eye” leaves us with no preferred path; each is limited and inadequate. Impotent outrage remains uncalmed. Neither non-violent financial penalties nor violent vengeance provide satisfactory justice. Neither will staunch the eternal hemorrhage. An eye for an eye may or may not make the whole world blind, but it neither preserves nor restores the sight of the blinded victim. From those eyes, tears of lamentation will continue to pour down unceasingly. No wonder then that both Gandhi and Levinas found themselves trying to gain more insight into an issue that changes within the blink of an eye. Whatever healing may take place will occur not due to any mode of restitution—no mode is adequate—but due to the invisible processes inside wounded human hearts. ☆

A Survivor's Perspective

Rene Lichtman PhD

“The images of children on the cement floor of a cage do indeed bring up images of... what?”

Letter to The Detroit Jewish News

Yes, I Call Them Concentration Camps

I have read all the statements on the “concentration camps” issue in Detroit’s *Jewish News* (JN).

At the risk of being called someone who “compares,” “dilutes,” “trivializes,” etc. ... the Holocaust, which would not be the first time for me, let me say that I find the term concentration camp appropriate for what is occurring to children and families on our southern borders.

And probably even right next door, in Youngstown, Ohio, where two years later a number of Iraqi Christians are still being held by ICE, separated from families.

So when I see children being torn from their mothers, or lying under Mylar blankets on a cement floor, in a cage, yes, the images become “triggers,” for us survivors, and others, and the term “concentration camp” automatically comes up. Along with the frustration, anger, fury, and anxiety attacks.

I read with interest my old friend’s article, a camp survivor, not a child survivor like myself. (The article by Michael Weiss can be found at <https://thejewishnews.com/2019/08/09/concentration-camps-and-detention-centers-theres-a-big-difference/>).

My friend mentions getting his information from television, but then I noted that not once in his article did my friend even mention the word “children.” How could anyone watch the news on TV and not see the children, on the floors, the cages? Even the *Jewish News* had photos of children, in cages, on the floors. Our local political leaders even went to the border, Florida, and brought back photos.

But when one thinks about it, reviews the letters in your paper, outraged about the words “concentration” or “camps,” or “anti-Semitism” everywhere hardly anyone mentions the children, only their own individual and personal righteous outrage.

Contrary to my friend’s and many others’ observations, that “no immigrant children died, while in the concentration camps all Jewish children died,” some immigrant children did die, reported on TV, due to lack of medical attention, or due to lack of concern. I know, “they should have stayed home,” some former Jewish friends have told me. A friend, a second-generation survivor, even said that she felt no need to help “these people” because no one helped her parents when they went to Auschwitz!

As to the “camps” terminology, people who want to talk on the subject should really do a search and find out what the various Holocaust academics and museums tell us. You

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LEFT: During the roundup of August 20, 1941, which catches 4,232 Jewish men, the French police are supervised by German soldiers. RIGHT: ICE roundups in present-day Detroit.



A Survivor's Perspective

will find two categories, "concentration camps" and "extermination camps," or what many of us call simply death camps. There were thousands of concentration camps, but only about five of them were "extermination camps," with gas chambers. Three of these death camps Majdanek, Belzek, Sobibor were right around Lublin, where my large Polish-Jewish family was from, just north of Lublin, a town called Lubartow. All gassed at those three camps, uncles, aunts, nieces, grandparents... I have records, numbers rounded up, dates of the roundups, and where, which camp they went to. I have gone back to Lubartow, to "our" cemetery, and to Majdanek, the other cemetery. I have a Yiskor Book, Remembrance Book, with their photographs.

So when we say "Close the Camps," yes there is nothing "shocking" for me about calling them concentration camps.

One could call them the more polite, sterile, "internment camps," or my friend's "detention centers." But for most "normal" people today, meaning American non-Jews, the images of children on the cement floor of a cage do indeed bring up images of... what? What has become THE standard, THE measure, of evil...? Not Rwanda or Kosovo or Syria or Yemen. The noted Holocaust scholar Michael Berenbaum wrote an essay now long ago, when Steven Spielberg and other filmmakers first came out with Holocaust films, and as today many Jews came out to attack the films for all kinds of personal "not correct" this and that... never just right. He titled his article "Who Owns the Holocaust?," and Berenbaum said, "it is not YOUR Holocaust anymore... you complained for decades that no one paid attention to your history, your sufferings, and now the world

does, artists and filmmakers and writers and poets ... and they will do with it as they wish... the Holocaust is now universal, belongs to everyone. Let go" (*Moment*, Vol. 25, No. 6, 2000).

I was born in 1937, in Paris, hidden outside Paris, just South of Drancy, our major concentration camp in France. (See map on p.15.) Note the small black square symbol for concentration camps. Note there were many, but not one was a death camp, no gas chambers in the French camps. Not even cages. Just horrible conditions like the ones described about the camps at the U.S. border, malnutrition, no medical

care, no decent toilet facilities, no clean water, and no decent shelter in the rain or cold. So the term concentration camp is appropriate for our U.S. camps.

Note also the many camps on the French Southern border, facing Spain. Just like in the U.S.A., the French were very worried about all those foreigners and immigrants from Spain fleeing the Spanish Civil War. So the French caught the immigrants, including many German Jews sent from Nazi Germany, and put them in these camps. And when the Germans invaded France in 1940, the Jews were in those camps, easy picking for the Germans, and French Fascists, collaborators. As the map shows, most of the railroads went to Drancy, also called a Transfer Camp, and from Drancy, one railroad track straight to a death camp, Majdanek, Sobibor, Treblinka, Auschwitz. That is where the Jewish

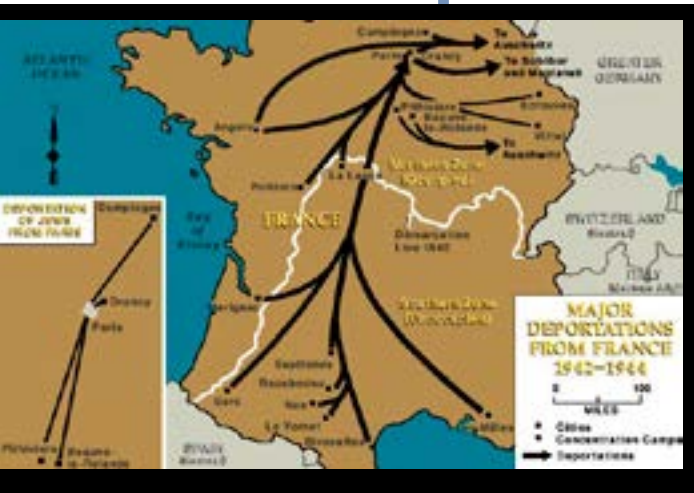


Recent photo of the Drancy Transit Camp.

In Drancy, there was no death camp, just horrible conditions like the ones described in the camps at the U.S. border.

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children went. What is Steve Miller's plan for the children without family members?

I should add that this periodic outrage, or letters of complaint, self-righteousness, about anything to do with the Shoah, language, just a bit controversial, only comes out when there is something on the subject, a movie or an article. That is when the usual folks come out of their hiding places, with self-righteousness telling us only THEY, as Jews, or second generation, only they are at the top of what are called the "hierarchy of suffering." We Jews suffer the most and nobody should compare, dilute, trivialize...OUR Holocaust.

So the Holocaust sits there on the sterile shelf of history, in our museums, and no one can even think about it... even when facing a group of young black or Latino students. Mentioning the Shoah in relation to today's racist policies, murders of young people of color, mass shootings by right wing lunatics, mentioning the Holocaust would be attacked as a form of "comparison..."

In between coming out to write letters about their outrage over some comparison, these righteous fellow Jews do or say nothing. Nothing about police murders of POC, nothing about Trump's racism, nothing about his misogyny, his contempt for women, nothing about the numbers of rightwing Jews who surround and support Trump, like the Kushners, the Steve Millers, the Adelsons...whom we should find embarrassing...because does it not give our G-d a bad name, a bad reputation on the universal stage? Are we not embarrassed, as Jews?

I was raised with the one term "*camp de concentration*," and that had various definitions, but we knew that Auschwitz meant one clear thing: gas chambers.

As to the slogan "Never Again," with all the variety of the subject, "... means NOW," again I fully agree with those slogans. I have always felt this was a universal slogan "never again to anyone," not only Jews.

And as for the complaint "this is not Nazi Germany," ...really? What dates are you talking about?

I would say yes, it is like Germany of the early 1930's, when Hitler and his goons were slowly taking over, with violence, slowly. Like today, Hitler had his scapegoats; like today; he had great control over the social media of the period, radio, print, and the then-new mass media form, propaganda films. And he did get the support of the military, so he had all the guns. Today, what do we have?

A recent rally in front of the Holocaust Memorial Center in Farmington Hills, Michigan, has continued the "camps" discussion, but added another complication, or another taboo. We are now saying "Close the Camps – Never

Again Is Now," in front of our very large local Holocaust Memorial Center, on one of the busiest locations in this Detroit suburb. We are now accused of "exploiting the Holocaust" by using it as a "backdrop" for our demands to "Close the Camps – Never Again Means Now." We were and are now accused of "desecrating the memory of the Six Million" by choosing such a "sacred" location.

At the rally, our large demonstration was opposed by "counter demonstrators," a very odd mix, hard to understand at first. We were opposed by the local rightwing

At the Holocaust Memorial Center in Farmington Hills, MI, we demanded, "Close the Camps – Never Again Means Now."

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RENE LICHTMAN, Ph.D., is a Holocaust survivor, speaker, and activist whose experience is included in the Voice/Vision Holocaust Survivor Oral History Archive. He is a founding member of the Hidden Children and Child Survivors of Michigan, as well as founding member of the World Federation of Jewish Child Survivors of the Holocaust and Descendants. He is a frequent speaker at the Holocaust Memorial Center in Farmington Hills, speaking as a Holocaust Child Survivor to visiting groups and students about every two weeks during school times. Rene has been an artist all of his life. As a young painter he was the recipient of a Fulbright Grant to paint abroad, and last year had a retrospective of his art, 1960-2018.

Jews, mostly religious, the rightwing Zionist Organization of America, the Chabad, some Republicans, but also by the Fascist White Supremacist “PROUD BOYS,” flying their flag in the middle of the U.S. and Israeli flags. The Proud Boys were there, they said, to “protect” the “good Jews” from our side “the communists”!

“Our side” was in fact the normal community residents, families, synagogue folks, Arabs, Muslims, Catholics, Protestants, African-Americans, gays, speakers from each of these communities. The *Detroit Free Press* wrote:

“Two opposing groups in the immigration debate faced off Tuesday evening in front of the Holocaust Memorial Center in Farmington Hills” (“Immigration Debate Divides Jewish Community in Metro Detroit,” Aug. 20, 2019. See the story at <https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2019/08/20/immigration-divides-jewish-community-metro-detroit/2060648001/>. For additional coverage of the controversy in Detroit’s Jewish News, see publisher Arthur Horwitz’s editorial, “Deep Political Divide Ignores Nuances of Holocaust Center,” from Aug. 27, 2019, at <https://thejewishnews.com/2019/08/27/deep-political-divide-ignores-nuances-of-holocaust-center/>).

I was hidden just South of Drancy, separated from my biological “Jewish” mother, who was also hidden somewhere else. My French Catholic family did not know where either of us were hidden, which

was safer for all in case of interrogations. My mother, just arrived from Poland, had no phony papers. My father dead. My mother was a “real foreigner” who could not speak French at all; even with a fake ID card she would still be seen as an immigrant from Poland, since she could not “pass” like those with blue eyes and blonde hair.

My mother was hidden and I was hidden, just like the many Middle Eastern and Hispanic families today in our Detroit communities afraid to go out and “get picked up” by ICE. As I was separated from my mother, many children are today separated from mothers.

Fortunately, my mother knew where I was hidden and four years later, when the war ended, she came to get me. I did not know her or the language she spoke, not Polish or French but Yiddish. It was very confusing for me. I was physically in pain most of the time after that, with severe stomach cramps. Many years later, after my U.S. Army service I was finally diagnosed with a duodenal ulcer. My Jewish doctor, also a survivor, simply talked to me for a few minutes and explained my severe “stomach cramps.” The various tests and x-rays confirmed his opinion.

When I see the photos of these children in the camps, I empathize. Many of these children are and will also suffer severe socio-psychological trauma, as I and many other Holocaust children have and do today.

In my view, people like Steven Miller should be in front of the International Court of Justice for what the Nuremberg Trials created, Crimes against Humanity, specifically crimes against children:

“Crimes against humanity are certain acts that are deliberately committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian or an identifiable part of a civilian population.” The first prosecution for crimes against humanity took place at the Nuremberg trials, 1947. ☆

“As I was separated from my mother, many children are today separated from mothers.”