

[FREE] Why Should Jews Survive?: Looking Past the Holocaust toward a Jewish Future

## Why Should Jews Survive?: Looking Past the Holocaust toward a Jewish Future

*Michael Goldberg*

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**Michael Goldberg : Why Should Jews Survive?: Looking Past the Holocaust toward a Jewish Future** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Why Should Jews Survive?: Looking Past the Holocaust toward a Jewish Future:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A Leading Rabbi Condemns the Cult of the Holocaust. Unusual Frankness on Onetime Bribery of High-Level Gentiles, Tax EvasionBy Jan PeczkisThis work contains much interesting informationmdash;and not only related to theology and the Shoah. Author Goldberg believes that American Jews must stop thinking of surviving for survivalrsquo;s sake, and to return to God.This book includes personal

insights. For instance, the author spoke on the phone, in November 1994, with Kiki, the widow of Jerzy Kosinski. She said that her late husband thought of THE PAINTED BIRD as "autofiction". (p. 39).

#### THE LITERAL CULT OF THE HOLOCAUST

Rabbi Michael Goldberg contends that the Holocaust has become a CULT—a substitute religion for Jews—and not only in a figurative sense. He cites Paul Tillich on "ultimate concern", and thus the Holocaust has become the "ultimate concern" of too many Jews. Robert Bellah wrote of an American civil religion, in which politics become a matter of transcendence. (p. 43). In like manner, the Holocaust has assumed the status of Jewish civil religion. What's more, its tenets are often held dogmatically. (p. 48). Goldberg adds that, "Although Jews' observance may have lapsed in such areas as SHABBAT, KASHRUT, and TALMUD TORAH, their scrupulosity in maintaining the Holocaust cult remains steadfast and enduring." (p. 53). The replacement of God by the Holocaust constitutes idolatry. (p. 62, 173).

#### IMPLICATIONS OF THE HOLOCAUST AS A VIRTUAL RELIGION

One shortcoming of Goldberg's "Jews should quit replacing God with the Holocaust" reasoning is the fact that Jews had largely undergone self-atheization long before the Holocaust, so there is really nothing to replace. For details, please click on the link that is under the first comment in this review. Another possible shortcoming of Goldberg's view is that it is solely Judeocentric. That is, over-attention to the Holocaust is objectionable insofar as it causes a distortion of what it means to be Jewish, or fails to benefit Jews in the long run. However, other peoples should also be considered. For a Jewish view of the over-attention to the Holocaust as something that effectively diminishes the genocidal sufferings of non-Jews, please click on Stranger at Home: "The Holocaust," Zionism, and American Judaism, and read my review.

#### GOD AND JEWISH SUFFERING

The author repudiates the lachrymose Jewish view of history, as he quips, (quote) Nevertheless, the depiction of all Jewish history as one long episode of victimization is profoundly false. Although Jews certainly have suffered many savage episodes of persecution—for a people over three and one-half millennia old, it would truly be astounding NOT to find such episodes—a chronicle focusing on such experiences alone fails to yield the whole story. (unquote) (Emphasis is in original) (p. 123). As an antidote, he cites [see also my review of] Powerlessness in Jewish History. Rabbi Goldberg categorically rejects the notion that the Holocaust has discredited belief in God. He notes that God promised to save the Jewish people as a whole, and not individual Jews per se. For instance, God delivered the Jews, from slavery, according to the Book of Exodus. Even so, many earlier generations of Jews had lived out their lives in slavery in Egypt. (pp. 69-70). Likewise, God delivered 2/3rds of the world's Jews from the Holocaust, even with the loss of 1/3rd, and Nazi Germany went down in ignominious defeat.

#### JEWISH COMMUNAL RESPONSIBILITY (INADVERTENT IMPLICATIONS FOR POLISH-JEWISH RELATIONS)

Rabbi Goldberg makes this thought-provoking comment, (quote) Crucially, however, civil Judaism's idea of Jews' moral responsibility for one another extends no further than an arm's length reach into a wallet—certainly not to the trigger finger of a West Bank Jewish settler who has murdered an Arab child. As part of the traditional Yom Kippur liturgy, seeking God's forgiveness, Jews are required to confess in unison: "WE have committed violence." But civil Judaism is absolutely silent as to what, if any, communal responsibility Jews bear for such savage outbreaks. (unquote) (Emphasis is in original) (p. 45). The foregoing consideration can be extended. Jews commonly call on Poles to "come to terms with the past"—to assume some form of collective responsibility for Polish misdeeds during the Holocaust (no matter how trivial), but are unwilling to take any communal responsibility for Jewish crimes against Poles—such as those conducted by Soviet-collaborating Jews [sometimes called the ZYDOKOMUNA], who murdered tens of thousands of Poles.

#### THE TERM GOY IS DEROGATORY

In his glossary of terms, Goldberg writes, (quote) Originally, a biblical term for "nation"; of which the descendants of Abraham constitute one example (see, e. g., Gen. 12:2); in rabbinic literature, however, the term comes to refer to nations or peoples OTHER THAN the Jews, and in time, it takes on an extremely pejorative connotation. (unquote) (Emphasis is in original) (p. 180).

#### THE NOAHIDE LAWS—NOT AN EARLY FORM OF JEWISH UNIVERSALISM

Nowadays, we often hear that ancient Jews were very progressive for their time, and tolerant of gentiles, insofar as Jews had to obey 613 commandments, while those gentiles willing to be righteous had the incomparably lighter burden of obeying only the 7 Noahide Laws in order to be acceptable before God—moreover without the need for ever converting to Judaism. Rabbi Michael Goldberg deconstructs this comforting narrative. He writes, (quote) Some have taken the so-called Noachide Laws incumbent on non-Jews as establishing a "two-track" system for living righteously, with Jews being bound by the full complement of commandments in the Torah. But both the Talmud (AVODAH ZARAH 64b) and Maimonides (MISHNEH TORAH, HILCHOT MRSQU;LACHIM) reflect perspectives that view the Noachide commandments as the minimal requirements needed for a non-Jew to be treated as a GER-TOSHAV, i. e., as a resident-alien whose presence is to be tolerated by the larger, normative culture around them. Moreover, in the Jerusalem Talmud (AVODAH ZARAH 2:1), the Noachide Laws are viewed as a preparatory step on the way of non-Jews' universally coming to accept the whole of Torah as binding on them. (unquote) (pp. 118-119).

#### JEWIS, BRIBERY OF HIGH-LEVEL GENTILE OFFICIALS, AND TAX EVASION

At various places and times, Jews had been accused of gaining special favors from gentile leaders, often through underhanded means, as well as cheating on taxes. Rabbi Michael Goldberg sheds light on this. In fact, he comes down hard on Jews for their long habit of bribing leading GOYS, and doing so for

personal gain, and he rejects the canned exculpatory statements for this kind of conduct. Thus, Goldberg comments, (quote) But as committed the rabbis were to maintaining the integrity of Jewish courts, they were to just that degree oblivious to Jews' corrupting the judicial character of non-Jewish legal systems... We might be tempted to try to justify such behavior by invoking the famous rabbinic maxim that "saving a life takes precedence over everything"; Trym—but not succeed. Many of the reported incidents of bribery have nothing at all to do with preserving life but with preserving cash, for example, by offering a "gift" to a Gentile official in return for a lower tax rate. (unquote). (p. 104). Author Goldberg points out that bribery and tax evasion both run afoul of basic halachic (halakhic) principles, which include the avoidance of taking advantage of someone's "blind spot"; and the obligation to establish just courts—among gentiles (as per the Noachide laws) as well as Jews. Most of all, they flout the obligations of DINA DR'—MALCHUTA DINA, wherein, with few exceptions, "the law of the land is the law"; especially in tax matters, where tax evasion is tantamount to theft. Even so, Goldberg continues, "So intellectually agile at creating legal fictions and at otherwise reinterpreting other practices they found theologically or ethically problematic, the rabbis in this area remained silent." (p. 104). Taking this further, Goldberg rejects the counter-argument that the rabbinical inaction was excused by the fact that Jews were a minority group living in a hostile gentile world. (p. 104). Instead, he essentially faults the rabbis for hypocrisy, even though he does not use that word. He quips, (quote) Sadly, the rabbis, for whom the Exodus vision shaped practice in Jewish courts, became blind to that vision as it applied to Jews' practices toward non-Jewish officials. The contradiction between the world-embracing story the rabbis espoused and the practices they countenanced vis-à-vis the wider, non-Jewish world weakened the credibility of their claim to serve the God of the world as members of that people who are to make manifest his character to the world. To hold on to both that formative story and those deformed practices is to hold on to a contradiction. (unquote). (p. 105). [However, rather than rabbinical hypocrisy per se, one could think of Talmudic-style dual morality. There is one moral standard governing Jewish conduct towards fellow Jews, and another one for Jewish conduct towards the GOYIM.] On page 118, Rabbi Michael Goldberg cites the following Talmudic sources on Jews bribing non-Jews: SHABBAT 116a-b, YEVAMOT 63b, and AVODAH ZARAH 71 a. For "saving a life"; see YOMA 85a-b; for bribing a gentile official in order to obtain a lower tax rate, see AVODAH ZARAH 71a; and for cheating on taxes being tantamount to theft (at least insofar as Jews cheat other Jews), see NEDARIM 28a, GITTIN 10b. BABA KAMA 113a, and BABA BATRA 54b, 55a. [I encourage the reader to look up many of these verses, in the online Babylonian Talmud (Soncino version), as I did.] For further reading on Jews and onetime tax evasion, please click on, and read my detailed review, of Goyim: Gentiles and Israelites in Mishnah-Tosefta (Brown Judaic Studies). 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. An Important Perspective By Alan David Londy The Holocaust is a singular event in modern Jewish history. Michael Goldberg's insightful book attempts to place the Holocaust in its proper perspective within the modern Jewish consciousness. An essential work for all people who seek to understand the reality of Jewish existence in a post-Holocaust world. Stimulating, controversial, and thought-provoking.

In the fifty years since the Holocaust, the Jewish People have felt one overriding concern: survival. The ghosts of the murdered six million, along with the living generation of survivors, have called out the unifying chant, "never again." In 1948, this concern found a second focus in the state of Israel, the ultimate refuge of Jews worldwide. But Rabbi Michael Goldberg finds that these twin pillars of Jewish identity are brittle, and have already begun to crumble; they will not be enough to support or sustain the next generation. The time has come to answer the question: Why should Jews survive? In this provocative book, Goldberg launches a bold attack on what he calls the "Holocaust cult," challenging Jews to return to a deeper, richer sense of purpose. He argues that this cult—with shrines like the U.S. Holocaust Museum, high priests such as Elie Wiesel, and rites like UJA death camp pilgrimages—is deeply destructive of Jewish identity. As the current "master story" of Judaism, Goldberg writes, the Holocaust has been used to depict Jews as uniquely victimized in human history—transforming them from God's chosen to those who manage to survive despite God's silent complicity in their persecution. This Holocaust-centered, survival-for-survival's-sake Judaism is already showing its emptiness, Goldberg contends; the generation that survived Hitler and founded Israel is dying, and the new generation seems adrift (for instance, one recent survey predicts that 70% of American Jewish marriages will be intermarriages by the turn of the century). Jews need positive reasons for remaining Jewish, he argues; they need to return to the Exodus as their master story—the story of God leading the Jews out of slavery and making with them an eternal covenant that gave the Jews a unique place in God's plan. The Jews should survive, Goldberg concludes, because they are the linchpin in God's redemption of the world. Rabbi Michael Goldberg has long wrestled with the crisis of identity facing today's Jewish community. In Why Should Jews Survive?, he provides a provocative and powerfully argued challenge to the dominant theme of modern Jewish thought.

From Booklist The title Goldberg chooses for his denunciation of a mentality of victimization among Jews should cause a stir, but not as much as will his arguments. He asserts that it is important to study the Holocaust, yet he laments that the study has taken on almost religious dimensions. For Goldberg, to portray Jewish history as a long

series of suffering, culminating in World War II, is not only inaccurate; it is a "deeply anti-Semitic" assessment of the Jewish people as "spineless." He chastises the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, saying that if its goal "is to spur America's conscience so that it never happens again, so far, it seems, it's been a \$167 million bust." He criticizes a militant belief in martyrdom as he compares the Jews' mass suicide in resistance to the Romans at Masada to that of the Jonestown cult. Deeply religious himself, he concludes that the Jews' mission is to carry out God's redemption of the world. These are all provocative ideas. It's about time Judaic studies received such an alarming wake-up call.

Aaron Cohen "Stirring, lucid, and beautifully written."--The Jerusalem Report "An eloquent, brave call to Jewish covenantal fidelity....Goldberg's erudite passion deserves the ear of the masses."--Kirkus s "[A] thoughtful and challenging essay."--Publishers Weekly

About the Author Michael Goldberg, one of the leading theologians and ethicists in America, is Rabbi of Congregation B'nai Tikvah in Los Angeles. He was Founding Rabbi of Congregation Lev Chadash, a first-of-its-kind "covenantal" synagogue in Indianapolis, and has held chairs of Jewish Studies at St. John's University (Minnesota) and at the College of William and Mary. His books include *Theology and Narrative: Jews and Christians*, *Getting Our Stories Straight*; and *Against the Grain: New Approaches to Professional Ethics*.