Reconciliation and Healing: A South African Jewish Perspective

BY DANA EVAN KAPLAN

South African politics has seen many unusual incidents over the years, but none could match the visit of President Nelson Mandela to Orania in August 1995. Orania, a small town in the midst of the vast upper Karoo, is the place to which the white *bittereinders* ("bitter enders"—those not willing to reconcile with the new order) of the apartheid era fled to avoid integration. The group included Betsie Verwoerd, the 94-year-old widow of Hendrik Verwoerd, former president of the National Party of South Africa and the principal architect of apartheid. The group hoisted the flag of the 19th-century Transvaal Boer Republic, erected a statue of Hendrik Verwoerd on a nearby hill, and placed a "strictly private" sign at the entrance to the settlement.

However, even Orania has now been brought into the new South Africa. The situation arose when President Nelson Mandela invited Mrs. Verwoerd to join a lunch with the spouses of other previous heads of state of South Africa. She declined because of her advanced age and the distance to Johannesburg. Then, as a newspaper account put it, "faithful to the Boer tradition of hospitality, she threw in a *pro forma* invitation of the 'drop-in-for-tea-if-you're-ever-in-the-area' variety. She apparently failed to appreciate she was dealing with a man who engineered a people's freedom from a cup of tea."[1]

President Mandela promptly accepted Mrs. Verwoerd's invitation and came to Orania. Orania's civil leaders gathered in their Sunday best as the new president of South Africa

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arrived via a South African Airforce Puma helicopter. Mrs. Verwoerd greeted him on the steps of the nearby community center and, after a cup of tea and a number of speeches—Mrs. Verwoerd requested that Mandela consider the concept of an Afrikaner Volkstaat with sympathy—they took a tour of the town. When they reached the statue of Hendrik Verwoerd and Mandela saw the smallish stone features of the man who, during his life, had cast such a huge shadow over the lives of tens of millions of South Africans, he blurted out, "You've made him very small."

Let the Reconciliation Begin

Whether intentional or not, the sentiment expressed in this lighthearted comment gives some indication as to what is needed before South Africa can move forward with confidence, tackle the sensitive issues of the past, and embark on the process of healing. Apart from the ability to be able to look back with forgiveness and compassion, healing takes many forms. In South Africa an entire nation is now trying to heal the wounds of more than 40 years of oppression and discrimination.

In a fervent appeal for a focus on healing, Mamphela Ramphele, Vice Chancellor of the University of Cape Town, spoke of the tremendous difficulty of managing the process of transition from authoritarian rule to democracy, saying, "South Africa needs healing as a matter of urgency."[2] However, in order to heal, she said, one must learn about what has happened. This was what was learned in the former East Germany—that one must open all the files and bring all the dirt out into the open before the nation can move on. "Only psychiatrically ill persons disassociate themselves from the past," she said, and they "end up with severe mental problems. We cannot afford a national psychotic state as a basis for a future South Africa. We have to come to terms with our past, warts and all—and forgive but not forget."[3]

The process of healing emotional wounds was recognized in the Torah. In *parashat Vayigash* (Gen. 44:18-47:27) Joseph orders that his goblet be placed in the knapsack of his youngest brother, Benjamin. After the brothers begin their trek back to their father in the land of Israel, Joseph sends Egyptian officials after them, searches them, and has them arrested. The brothers plead with Joseph to spare Benjamin, and Judah begs Joseph to enslave him rather than Benjamin. They stress to Joseph, whom they have not identified as their brother, that if they return without Benjamin, their father will die of grief. Joseph is touched by this outpouring of emotion, and he tells his attendants to leave him alone with his brothers. As soon as the attendants leave, he reveals his identity to them: "I am Joseph" (Gen. 45:3).

It is crucial to recall that these are the same brothers who had stripped Joseph of his "amazing technicolor dreamcoat" and had thrown him into a pit to be eaten by a wild animal or die of thirst. Then they sold him into slavery, fully cognizant of the fact that the fate of a slave in Egyptian society

was usually a tragic one (Gen. 37:1-40:23).

When Joseph reveals his identity to his brothers, the brothers are stunned and terror-stricken. This was the brother they had left to die and then sold into slavery. Surely he will want revenge. Joseph, however, is completely conciliatory. He tells them, "I am your brother Joseph, he whom you sold into Egypt. Now, do not be distressed or reproach yourselves because you sold me hither; it was to save life that God sent me ahead of you" (Gen. 45:5).

This amazingly reconciliatory attitude has puzzled readers over the centuries. How could Joseph behave so civilly—in fact, warmly—to the same brothers who had acted callously and cruelly toward him?

This is a remarkable parallel to the response of Nelson Mandela to Betsie Verwoerd. Mrs. Verwoerd, of course, did not play any active role in Mandela's imprisonment, but she certainly symbolizes the white opposition of blacks that was institutionalized for so long in South Africa. Just as their meeting was a gesture of understanding between these two individuals, many South Africans believe that everyone in the nation must make similar gestures.

Mandela has consistently provided a model for this; he stresses the need for healing and reconciliation throughout his written works and speeches. In a memorable passage in his autobiography, Mandela writes that he was not born with a hunger to be free. He was born free—free in every way that he could know. Free to run in the fields near his mother's hut, free to swim in the clear steam that ran through his village, free to roast mealies under the stars and ride on the broad backs of slow-moving bulls.[4]

Mandela writes that it was only when he began to learn that his boyhood freedom was an illusion that he began to hunger for that freedom. At first he wanted freedom only for himself, and then for his family. But then he began to hunger for the freedom of his tribe, the Xhosa people. Then, in prison:

> It was during those long and lonely years that my hunger for the freedom of my own people became a hunger for the freedom of all people, white and black. I knew as well as I knew anything that the oppressor must be liberated just as surely as the oppressed. A man who takes away another man's freedom is a prisoner of hatred, he is locked behind the bars of prejudice and narrow-mindedness. I am not truly free if I am taking away someone else's freedom. Just as surely as I am not free when my freedom is taken from me. The oppressed and the oppressor alike are robbed of their community.[5]

In a remarkable statement of acceptance and tolerance, Mandela writes that when he left prison, he wanted to free both the persecutor and the persecuted:

> When I walked out of prison, that was my mission, to liber-

ate the oppressed and the oppressor both. Some say that has now been achieved. But I know that that is not the case. The truth is that we are not yet free; we have merely achieved the freedom to be free, the right not to be oppressed. We have not taken the final step of our journey, but the first step on a longer and even more difficult road. For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others. The true test of our devotion to freedom is just beginning.[6]

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission

To initiate the formal healing and reconciliation process, President Mandela established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which was created in 1995 and is expected to continue its work through 1999. The goal of the TRC is to:

> . . . provide for the investigation of the nature, causes and extent of gross violations of human rights which occurred during the conflicts of the past. It will also attempt to restore the civil and human dignity of victims and will grant amnesty to those who have committed certain political crimes. In this way the Commission will seek to promote national unity and reconciliation.[7]

Much of the South African public accepts the need for catharsis and trusts the leadership of the TRC's chairman, Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu. For many years, during and after apartheid, Tutu has been the focus of hope for racial justice in South Africa. Since his ordination in 1961, he has been a leading voice of reason, compassion, and faith during the dark years of apartheid oppression. As a president of All Africa Conference of Churches and in many other roles, Tutu has been a defender of human rights not only in South Africa but throughout the continent.

In 1995 the Archbishop addressed my congregation, Temple Israel in Green Point, Cape Town. Speaking eloquently and with great humor, it was clear that he had prepared his remarks specifically for a Jewish congregation. In particular, he quoted from the prophets, citing the obligation of all to seek out justice and fight against injustice. Tutu remarked that if he and his fellow Christians took this message seriously and applied it to the struggle against apartheid, then the real "fault" lies with Jews—for having given such morally inspiring sentiments to the world. The moral assault on the evils of apartheid had been fought and won. The almost miraculous transformation had been attempted and had been successful beyond anyone's greatest hopes.

In general the new South Africa is a country full of people of good will and with a sincere desire to achieve reconciliation. However, it is clear to most observers that the reconciliation process must be paired with an equally

important goal, the redistribution of resources to equalize the gross economic inequities that were created and/or reinforced under apartheid. Since the transition from apartheid to democracy has been made, a great deal has been accomplished, accomplishments that skeptics had said were impossible. Indeed, the very fact that forces that had been locked in apparent irreconcilable conflict had found a way to negotiate a path to a democratic constitution has been a tremendous success in itself.

Further, the specter of a potential civil war has disappeared from South Africa's vision of its future. For whites, none of the worst-case scenarios have come to pass. In particular, no large-scale nationalization of property has occurred. This in itself is a major accomplishment, because most South African blacks have absolutely nothing. Further, there were no mass attacks on whites. This fear of violent retribution underlay the tremendous sense of doom that many whites felt. There was not even a general increase in the rate of taxation.[8] The Mandela government has been working to equalize the health care system for the vast majority of people in the country by getting running water into homes, introducing nutrition programs for some five million chronically malnourished children, using health care resources for primary care rather than expensive operations, and promoting affordable health care for the mass market.[9]

The Reconstruction and Development Programme, which the government states will create a better life for all South Africans, is on track and shows signs of delivering—albeit slowly—on its many promises.[10] As early as 1995, for example, just one year after the elections, more than 28,000 people had been employed through affirmative-action programs; four million residents had been given access to potable water; 614 municipal service upgrading projects were making life much more comfortable for more than three million people; children, pregnant women, and lactating mothers had received free health care; three-and-a-half million children were being fed daily; and housing projects and other infrastructure developments were being built.[11]

These efforts are consistent with the underlying values of Judaism, as expressed by authors such as Michael Lerner. Lerner has written that Judaism presents the world with a challenge. According to Lerner, Judaism preaches that the world can and should be fundamentally changed. He believes that our central goal is *tikun olam*, the healing and transformation of the world.[12] Indeed, various Jewish communal organizations have become involved in the reshaping of South Africa. In his testimony before the TRC in November 1997, Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris cited a number of programs under the broad umbrella of *tikun*, a Hebrew word meaning "repairing" or "trying to put things right." These include the Mitzvah Bin, where Jewish housewives buy extra food and deliver it to a synagogue distribution center, to be given to the hungry. Welfare projects include helping support a home for the mentally and physically handicapped in

Alexandra Township and a similar home in Johannesburg. An agricultural project at Rietfontein is based on the principle of empowerment.[13]

Other *tikun* projects include solar heating development, water preservation, and crop planting. There are educational programs in schools in black neighborhoods, pre-school enrichment programs, adult literacy programs, and teacher training programs. Jewish business people are also sharing their entrepreneurial and banking skills with young people. Harris concluded with, "It is our job as religious people to try to apply the antidotes . . . to display the best that human beings can do to fellow human beings . . . . If Apartheid was divisive, the antidote is building bridges, and coming together—a togetherness which will spell the great future of our country."[14]

The Induction of the TRC

It is my belief that the miracle that has occurred in South Africa over the past few years can give us all a renewed hope that we may yet live to see healing throughout the world. This belief was reinforced during my years in South Africa, where I served as rabbi at Temple Israel in Green Point, Cape Town, from 1994 to 1997. One of the greatest honors I received there was the invitation to be one of the religious leaders inducting the commissioners of the TRC in a service in St. George's Cathedral in Cape Town on 13 February 1996. The venue was especially appropriate, for St. George's Cathedral had become the epicenter of protest against apartheid in the 1970s, and many of these protests had ended with beatings and, inevitably, arrests.

At this induction religious leaders from at least seven faiths—including African traditional clerics and Christian, Moslem, Hindu, Jewish, and Buddhist clergy—presided over the service and gave their blessings to the commissioners in a dedication and blessing ceremony. The service began with Minister of Justice Dullah Omar lighting a candle of peace while the congregation, composed of members of a great number of faiths and philosophical perspectives, sang the historic American civil rights movement protest song "We Shall Overcome." Included was the third verse, which is so relevant in the South African context: "The truth will set us free someday / Oh deep in my heart I do believe we shall overcome someday."

The seventeen commissioners of the TRC represented a wide cross-section of the South African population, with most of the country's racial groups represented. At the induction, each of the seventeen commissioners was called by name, came forward, and received a candle and an olive branch. Each candle was then lit from the peace candle, and the seventeen commissioners stood in a semi-circle facing the congregation. The religious leaders, accompanied by ten-year-old Carmen Esau of the Sea Point Primary School, then read the words of dedication:

> We call upon you who have been appointed as commissioners of the Truth and Rec-

onciliation Commission to acknowledge and recognize as a sacred trust the awesome responsibility that has been given to you. We pledge you our support and give you our blessing in the task that lies before you. And we ask that, in your work for truth and reconciliation, you will be guided by a wisdom greater than your own, a wisdom that knows and encompasses all truth. Will you dedicate yourselves to carry out the task that has been entrusted to you with the highest integrity, with impartiality and compassion for all, for the purpose of healing our nation?

The commissioners responded with "I will," and the congregation proclaimed, "Go forward in the light of truth, with our blessing." The religious leaders then blessed the commissioners simultaneously in a stream of blessings.

The chairman of the TRC, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, then spoke of the tremendous task facing the TRC. He became so emotional that he added, "I don't tend to be speechless, as you know, but I am tongue-tied because I think all of us have been quite overwhelmed by what has happened here."

Then President Nelson Mandela addressed the gathering, stating that the whole of the South African nation had suffered and that the only way for all the people of the country to come together as a united nation of peace would be for everyone to come to terms with the past. To do this, Mandela said, the task of the TRC would be to deal with cases of gross human-rights violations and to ensure that the truth was laid bare.

Mandela said he was confident that the commissioners, together with the entire nation, would succeed in building national unity and reconciliation through confronting rather than avoiding this sensitive but important history of apartheid repression:

> We are building a nation of unity and reconciliation, and while some hold the view that the past is best forgotten, uncovering the truth is an essential step for us to move together into the future as a nation; we all suffered, so as a nation we want to redeem and reconstruct ourselves.

Reactions to the Establishment of the TRC

The establishment of the TRC was based on the final clause of South Africa's interim constitution, thus providing a historic bridge between the past of a deeply divided society characterized by strife, injustice, terrible conflict, and untold suffering, and a future founded on democracy and the recognition of the human rights of all. The South African society of the future would promote the peaceful coexistence of all South Africans—black, white, colored, Indian, and all others. Further, in contrast to the policy pursued by the apartheid government of creating divisions among racial groups in order to control them, the new

South African society would pursue peaceful coexistence.

However, in order to have peaceful coexistence, the TRC has recognized that it is terribly important to achieve a reconciliation among the various groups that were deliberately played against the other during the apartheid years. This reconciliation must go hand in hand with the economic reconstruction of society, which resulted in the planning of the reconstruction and development program mentioned earlier. The establishment of the TRC has led to ongoing discussion and debate among South Africans about how exactly to achieve the reconciliation and healing that most South Africans hunger for.

The objectives of the TRC are to promote national unity and reconciliation in a spirit of understanding. The TRC has been mandated to try to establish as complete a picture as possible of the causes, nature, and extent of human rights violations committed since 1 March 1960, shortly before the Sharpeville Massacre. Its attempt was to include the antecedents, circumstances, factors, and contexts of all human rights violations. Further, the TRC has the power to grant amnesty to people who are willing to make full disclosure of any knowledge they may have had about acts associated with political objectives. Interestingly, this amnesty was not based on a prerequisite of expressing remorse.

Another task of the TRC is to establish and make known the fate or whereabouts of victims of the apartheid repression. The TRC would also provide a forum to give such victims an opportunity to relate their own account of the human rights violations they suffered. Finally, at the conclusion of the process, the TRC compile a comprehensive report not only detailing the crimes and atrocities of the past but also recommending measures to prevent the violation of human rights in the future.

Many South Africans, white as well as black, understood the vital role that uncovering the crimes of the apartheid government could have in achieving national reconciliation. Others, however, feared that the investigation would only inflame hatred. A number of Orthodox rabbis held this latter view. Rabbi Ivan Lerner, Senior Minister of the Claremont (Orthodox) Hebrew Congregation in Cape Town, wrote to one of Cape Town's major newspapers, the *Cape Times*, that "the Truth Commission will only serve to divide and distract South Africans from the critical and vital business of securing a future for ourselves and our children."[15]

This letter initiated considerable controversy in the South African press, prompting Lerner to write several rejoinders.[16] In another letter, he stated that if Archbishop Tutu could urge Jews to forgive Nazis for the murder of six million Jews—because the Bible advocates and encourages reconciliation and forgiveness—then Tutu should apply the same standards to those guilty of racial crimes in South Africa's past.[17] However, it is my view that this ignores the crucial fact that the TRC is charged precisely with establishing the evidence in order to understand the past. The TRC has

the authority to grant amnesty to most types of political criminals. Thus, it is not a vehicle for persecution and revenge, but rather one for historical research and forgiveness.

Lerner further wrote that an amnesty needed to be granted for all events that occurred in the apartheid years and that investigation of such crimes would not make any contribution whatsoever toward reconciliation and unity. He feared that the TRC would stir up the anger and animosity of the many groups who are "still uncomfortable with ANC [African National Congress]majority rule." Rabbi Lerner recommended that Archbishop Tutu and President Mandela jointly urge that the TRC be disbanded before any significant "damage" is done.

Lerner's letters stirred up heated debate among both leaders in the broader community and ordinary citizens concerned for the future of the country. Three leading Jewish intellectuals, Professors Milton Shan and Sally Frankental of the University of Cape Town, and Professor Jeremy Sarkin of the University of the Western Cape responded immediately, saying that the proposition that the TRC will have harmful consequences demonstrates ignorance of the TRC's objectives and capabilities. Such a view, they believe, is based on the notion that burying the past will have no negative consequence, as if distancing oneself from the past allows it to disappear harmlessly. "Without the processes envisioned in the workings of the Commission," they wrote, "revenge, anger and resentment will be the order of the day. Only by bringing to the fore the horrors of past human rights violations and abuses and coming to terms with them, will it be possible to establish the rule of law and culture of human rights."[18]

Further responses to Lerner's comments were quick in coming. The Reverend Peter Storey, bishop of the Central District of the Methodist Church in Johannesburg, wrote that Lerner's criticism of the TRC "demonstrates how dangerously this enterprise is being misunderstood."[19] Storey wrote that Lerner's thesis—that South Africa's fragile, political miracle was in danger of being shattered by a political circus that would divide South Africans from each other—was exactly what propagandists from the apartheid regime wanted everyone to believe: that the TRC was an obstacle to reconciliation rather than a vehicle for it.

Storey admitted that the TRC was a risky venture, and it could go badly wrong, but for the very opposite reasons that Lerner gave. Storey argued, "it is an immensely courageous attempt to deal honestly, rather than expediently, with the process of cleansing and forgiveness."[20] The Bible and later theological expositions agree that reconciliation with God as well as with other people can only happen when we have remembered our sin, and repented fully.

Storey also argued that Rabbi Lerner made the fundamental mistake of confusing forgiving with forgetting. Using Lerner's own example of the Holocaust, Storey wrote that it is very important that the world not forget

the horror of the murder of millions of Jews, noting that it is frightening how numerous right-wing ideologues have attempted to deny that the Holocaust ever happened. Storey argued that if the greatest crime in human history can be denied, how much more the crimes of apartheid? I support Storey's argument. It seems to me that moving on without a full disclosure of the past will only leave the terrible anxiety of the past unresolved, and this can only produce dissonance and conflict in the future.

Finally, Storey argued that the TRC offers the possibility of a double healing for the past. Unlike the Nüremberg trials after World War II or the Eichman trial in Israel in the early 1960s, the TRC offers the offenders the opportunity to confess and be granted amnesty. This is why Storey titled his article "Truth Commission's Forgiveness is Amazing Grace."

Possibly the most controversial of Storey's comments was the following:

> When many white South Africans speak enthusiastically about our "miracle," they refer not so much to the liberation of our land from bondage as to the fact that it happened with so little inconvenience to themselves.
>
> They didn't feel the bondage. They lived comfortably with apartheid and feel little discomfort now. The degree to which any white South African can truly celebrate our liberation (and become part of our new nation) is in direct ratio to our awareness of the suffering we caused in the past. Unless the whole, ghastly litany of past wrongs is brought to the surface in a way that cannot be deigned, these wrongs will continue to seep out like buried toxic waste into our newspapers for decades to come.[21]

Among the other responses to Lerner's challenge was the *Cape Times* editorial:

> Rabbi Lerner's letter reflects the concerns of a significant section of conservative white opinion, but a section which, regrettably, is almost wholly out of touch with feelings in the black community. The commission's main concern is to establish the historical truth and place it on record . . . . Acknowledgment of the truth is needed if reconciliation is to be genuine and lasting.[22]

The *Cape Times* argued that one of the most crucial purposes of the TRC was to help the families of black victims, who may not know what happened to their loved ones, to learn the circumstances of their deaths. This may help to ease the pain of loss and restore the dignity of the memories of those who died. Further, the acknowledgment of the truth of what happened to these victims may help future generations of South Africans to be alert to such abuses and avoid them in time.

Another intellectual in the Jewish

community, Gerald Gordon, a legal scholar and writer of literary fiction, also responded to Lerner's article.[23] Gordon seconded Storey's view that Lerner's error was that he has confused forgiveness and forgetfulness. Gordon wrote that if Lerner had relied on what Archbishop Tutu told his Israeli hosts when he visited Jerusalem in 1989—that the time was well overdue for the Jews to forgive the Nazis and the same standard should be applied to those guilty of South Africa's racial crimes—then he had misunderstood Tutu's message. According to Gordon, Archbishop Tutu meant that Jews should not forget what the Nazis did in the Holocaust, but only that they should forgive.

Gordon also suggested that if Lerner's advice were to be followed, there might be very little documentary evidence of the apartheid crimes, and this might enable apartheid revisionists to present warped and distorted views of South African history. According to Gordon, the only real way of preventing the actual story of what happened from becoming a vague and imprecise memory very quickly was to commit it to a proper recording through the gathering of historical data. The two main methods to gather these data are either through prosecutions in a court of law or establishing a commission to hear evidence on the crimes of apartheid from both those who committed apartheid crimes as well as those who suffered from those atrocities. Clearly, he wrote, the best course of action was the establishment of the TRC.

Another response came from the distinguished Professor Charles Villa-Vicencio, professor of religion and society at the University of Cape Town, who wrote that true reconciliation is a deeply spiritual exercise that cannot bypass the passion of the past. He wrote that in both Christianity and Judaism this process involves the acknowledgment or confession of guilt, genuine remorse, commitment to change, and restitution. This repentance is the formula for real forgiveness. Villa-Vicencio also wrote that while Lerner's eagerness to forget the haunting memories of the apartheid years will only offer temporary relief, such amnesia will, in the long term, bury the burden of the past, and this is likely to erupt each time the nation experiences a racial, social, or political crisis.[24]

In his later letters, Lerner wrote that a small, nonpolitical commission made up of internationally respected jurists who have served on various human rights commissions would have been preferable to the TRC. He doubted whether anyone who had lived in South Africa in the apartheid era could be objective about the political events that had occurred. Therefore, a truth commission composed of South Africans—who would inevitably use the data gathered for political purposes—was inappropriate regardless of their particular positions on political issues during the apartheid era. Rather, he believed that a commission sponsored by the United Nations, with the specific task of only gathering information, would be far more effective than the TRC.

Certainly there were a number of

writers who supported Lerner's views. One such writer attacked the writer of the editorial in the *Cape Times* for his description of Lerner's position:

> To dismiss his views as typifying "conservative white opinion" is impertinent. To state that he is out of touch with the feelings of the black community is presumptuous. To lecture a rabbi on the Holocaust is so arrogant it leaves one speechless.[25]

The Process Begins

Despite this controversy, as the TRC became operational, most South Africans hoped that it would produce positive results. Almost immediately, the TRC began dealing with a number of sensitive issues. One was forgiveness. On Sunday, 31 March 1996, Archbishop Desmond Tutu stated on prime-time television that the victims of apartheid atrocities should use Good Friday to forgive those who had murdered their loved ones. At least that was how some of the victims interpreted his remarks—in particular, well-known Afrikaner anti-apartheid activist and victim Marius Schoon.[26]

Schoon wrote that: (1) as a religious leader, Archbishop Tutu was entitled to make an appeal of this nature to those in his church; (2) as the chairperson of the TRC, however, he should not impose Christian ethical values as the law of the land; and (3) that Tutu's remarks moved toward the imposition of Christian views on all South Africans. Schoon also wrote that he understood the political reasons that led to the establishment of the TRC, but that there was nothing in the constitution or in South African law that requires the victims to forgive the perpetrators of apartheid crimes. Schoon wrote, "I am a victim of heinous abuse. My wife and daughter were murdered by a self-confessed killer of the apartheid regime."[27]

Schoon's comments highlighted the difficulty of attempting to achieve a quasi-religious function through a civil institution. In a country that had been torn by strife and conflict along racial lines and in which untold suffering occurred as a result of terrible injustices perpetuated by the government, the process of healing must, inevitably, transcend a strictly legal basis. Nevertheless, when Marius Schoon wrote, "There is no feeling of forgiveness in my heart,"[28] many sympathized with his feelings. His wife and daughter were murdered, and the person responsible had confessed to the crime. The natural inclination was to want to see such a person punished, and it was understandable that Schoon did not want to place forgiveness before justice.

A second area of some concern was the feeling, in certain quarters, that real reconciliation could only happen if it went hand in hand with the process of social and economic transformation. This meant that reconciliation between whites and "non-whites" must be linked to far greater job opportunities for those groups that had been discriminated against under the apartheid regime. Minister of Justice Dullah Omar warned at a "Report

from the Truth Commission" workshop in Johannesburg: "The danger that arises is that the values of the old order will continue to live on in the new democratic order and dominate this new order."[29]

Omar pointed out that whites still dominated all aspects of society and that true reconciliation would not be possible until there was substantial movement toward a more equitable economic order. This was a very serious point, because since the African National Congress (ANC) was voted into power, many whites have felt economically vulnerable, and an aggressive link between a moral reconciliation and a dramatic change in the economic order would certainly put a great strain on inter-race relations in the new South Africa.

Jews and the TRC

Jews, like most white South Africans, do not see the connection between media accounts of the TRC's work and their own lives. They want to be left alone to live their quiet suburban lives, and they find jarring and upsetting the constant intrusion of debate and discussion about the legacy of apartheid. This is true not so much because of what it says about the suffering of blacks but because of what it threatens to do to their comfortable and complacent lifestyles.

During my recent visit to South Africa I frequently heard remarks like, "We've been through four years of this cathartic process of listening to how awful apartheid was, but how much more are we going to have to tolerate? It's enough!" One person said, "The blacks are intent on blaming everything on apartheid. Why can't they start looking forward and accept that they are making a mess of the country. You can't blame everything on something that happened so long ago."

Officially, however, the South African Jewish community went on record as supporting the work of the TRC. In November 1997, Marlene Bethlehem, Chairperson of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, and Chief Rabbi Cyril E. Harris addressed the TRC. Speaking about the attempt to pinpoint the failings of the various groups concerning their collective behavior during the apartheid years, Harris pointed out that the Jewish community did not initiate apartheid, that many Jews did not agree with apartheid, and that almost everyone in the Jewish community had a certain degree of awkward tension about apartheid. However, he added, most members of the Jewish community benefited from apartheid.[30]

Harris also noted that many Jewish individuals were not silent; they fought hard against apartheid and were and are prominent in most of the anti-apartheid movements. He cited significant Jewish participation in various protest groups, such as the Five Freedoms Forum, the Jews for Justice (Cape Town), Jews for Social Justice (Johannesburg), and the Black Sash (national). However, Harris noted that the apartheid regime was an oppressive government, and the Jewish community saw itself as a very small community surrounded by much larger forces. Following the Ho-

locaust, if Jews felt afraid of governments, there was certainly justification for that fear. Because of the Holocaust, and other such persecutions, Jews all over the world have a hypersensitivity to survival.

Nonetheless, Harris continued, the silence of so many can connote acquiescence and accommodation. He argued that one of the most terrible things about apartheid was that it so desensitized generally decent people to the fact that millions of other people were suffering so much. Harris stated, "They were used to apartheid, they accommodated themselves to it, they acquiesced in it."[31]

Harris stressed that this did not mean that he was condoning the silence of the Jewish community during apartheid but that he was simply attempting to explain it in order to ask for others to understand the motivations and the background. He said:

> The Jewish community in South Africa confesses a collective failure to protest against apartheid. The situation here was not one where the human rights of the minority were affected—that in itself would have been wrong. It was one in which the human rights of the vast majority were systematically and forcibly denied and was a monstrous aberration. The entire thrust of Jewish moral teachings, together with the essential lesson of Jewish historical experience, as the most consistent victim in the world, should have moved the community to do everything possible to oppose apartheid. Distancing oneself from the anguished cry of the majority and myopically pursuing one's own interest can never be morally justified.[32]

Harris concluded by explaining that for him the pivotal issue of the TRC is how to turn what they are taking testimony on, the inequities of the past, and turn it toward concrete advantage for the future. The reason that he believes that South African Jews and all people in South Africa must endeavor to understand the failings of past is so that people can become aware of their responsibilities in the present in order to help repair the damage and to build a better future. It is not *in spite of* the past that we must do better today, but rather *because of* the past that we must do better today."[33]

Toward the Future

Despite the controversies about the work of the TRC, I believe that most South Africans are still hopeful about the process of reconciliation and healing. One of the key ingredients of this process is forgiveness. I believe most would agree with the sentiments of Archbishop Tutu on the topic of forgiveness, written in a foreword to a collection of articles called *Exploring Forgiveness*:

> Forgiveness is one of the key ideas in this world. Forgiveness is not just some nebulous, vague idea that one can easily dismiss. It has to do with unit-

> ing people through practical politics. Without forgiveness there is no future . . . . Forgiveness is taking seriously the awfulness of what has happened when you are treated unfairly. It is opening the door for the other person to have a chance to begin again. Without forgiveness, resentment builds in us, a resentment which turns into hostility and anger. Hatred eats away at our well-being. In Africa we have a word, *Ubuntu*, which is difficult to render in Western languages.[34]

One thing is for certain however: despite the trepidation with which many South Africans approach the possibility of true reconciliation and healing, the need for forgiveness is a core element of any hope for the future. Forgiving is incredibly difficult in the best of circumstances, and the current South African situation is far from the best of circumstances. Nevertheless, it is remarkable to see the tenacity with which almost all of the parties in the South African ethnic, religious, and racial mix have persevered with the forgiveness process. The idea is that forgiveness, in politics as well as in interpersonal relationships, must be an ongoing process rather than something that is to be applied at one place and at one time. The notion of forgiveness as a process rather than an event appears to be a lesson that all of the groups instinctually sense and have worked on over the last four or five years.

For example, the TRC has tried to develop a process that involves remembering, recounting, and recording, but also that involves repenting, resolving, and reconciling. The idea that justice must be meted out has been relegated to the back row. In order to achieve the healing that is felt to be the highest priority for the society, the needs of the victims and their families for absolute justice have been given a lower priority. As Archbishop Tutu has repeatedly stressed, the Christian theme of forgiveness has been given prominence.

However, forgiveness is not just a Christian theme, it is a core concept in Judaism as well. As Jews remember every Yom Kippur, there is a process of absolution and atonement that leads to forgiveness and some degree of closure. Those who have done wrong are encouraged to recount the full details of their passive or active crimes to the TRC and are therefore involved implicitly, although not explicitly, in a process of *teshuvah*, repentance. Their names and their acts and their confessions are made public, and for many of the victims this public confession of crimes by the perpetuators may have to serve as a very partial form of justice. Because the need for forgiveness as a healing process leading to true reconciliation is felt to be the most important emotional need for South African society as a whole, many of these victims, as British journalist Brian Frost states, " . . . may have to live with their scars and their stains for the rest of their lives."[35]

It can be hoped, however, that the

emotional sacrifices that so many individual South Africans may have to make will be more than compensated for by the successful healing process that may bring about a unified effort toward *tikun olam*, the repairing of the world. In the South African case, the last four or five years have seen a very literal process of the repairing of South African society, such as bringing potable water to millions who never had it before. Such concrete steps to improve the quality of life for all are the direct result of putting forgiveness above justice.

The South African experience should fill every Jewish heart with the hope that people of all backgrounds can work together to overcome bigotry and political repression and to make a better tomorrow for all of the people of South Africa. If reconciliation and healing can be accomplished in one country, perhaps it can be accomplished all over the world.

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