CLAL

28/544
December 26, 1997
27 Kislev 5758

Sh'ma

A JOURNAL OF JEWISH RESPONSIBILITY

Inside...

NAZI GOLD
RECOVERED ART
INSURANCE CLAIMS
DORMANT ACCOUNTS

The legacy of the Holocaust is changing.

In this issue, we explore the emerging questions of policy and memory, and how we should begin answering them.

From All of Us to All of You:
May your Hanukkah be bright!

Michael Berenbaum 3
Gilbert N. Kahn 5
Richard Hirsh 7
Ta sh'ma 7

Justice, justice

■ Marilyn Henry

Struggling alone for more than a half-century after World War II, untold thousands of Jews—survivors and their heirs—tried to recover the assets that had been spirited to Switzerland for safekeeping during the Nazi rampage of Europe. They were rebuffed by Swiss bankers, who were merciless in their precise demands for often-impossible proofs and documents.

Two years ago, unlocking the vaults and recovering these accounts suddenly became a sacred mission for Jewish organizations. The once-futile individual claims for dormant Holocaust-era assets in Swiss banks were transformed into something of a collective Jewish cause.

Unleashing The Demons

There is much speculation about why this is so—and much of the conjecture is unkind. The initial reasons have become irrelevant. What remains crucial, though, are the effects.

Since the Swiss imbroglio resurrected the concern with Jewish material losses in Europe, the Jewish community has been forced to grapple simultaneously with intertwined issues: its notion of "justice," its idea of heroes and villains, and its image of survivors.

These are questions that will continue to confront the Jewish community. It was easy to open the Pandora's box. Closing it is another matter.

The sudden focus on Jewish losses did not remain confined to unrecovered assets in Swiss banks. In the effort to document these losses, Jewish organizations turned to American archives, many of which had been available—but generally ignored—for some 20 years. The archives revealed multiple layers of war-era history. As each layer was peeled away, a new demon was exposed, until the matter burgeoned into a broader review of what has come to be generally known as "Nazi gold."

Accounting For The Nazi Gold

This sterile shorthand refers to Germany's looting of Europe, usually referring to the gold reserves of the European central banks; the Reich's use of the loot to trade with the neutrals and sustain the war; and the Allies' efforts to recover and restore the plunder.

In the end, said Stuart Eizenstat, the US State Department official overseeing the American historical review of the Holocaust era, the "Nazi gold" issue shows that Holocaust victims also were victimized by "the sad combination of indifference on the part of neutrals and inaction on the part of the Allies."

The curious thing, though, is that despite the avalanche of evidence identify-

ing numerous rogues, the Jewish community has been myopic, selectively pursuing "justice" from the only easy target, Switzerland.

The Jewish community's reaction to the earliest historical report on "Nazi gold," which came from the British Foreign Office in September 1996, highlighted the shortcomings of the communal response. The community pounced on the report's statement that Switzerland turned over to the Allies only a small part of the Nazi gold it had bought during World War II—even though the British figures were highly suspect because of an egregious error in currency calculations. The community disregarded the fact that the report minimized how Britain obstructed the Allied negotiations to recover gold from the Swiss.

More important, there was scarcely a word of complaint from the Jewish community when the British report ignored entirely how Whitehall undermined post-war reparations and refugee relief because London did not want to make available funds that would be used for Jewish immigration to Palestine.

Also overlooked was that neither the United States nor Britain made any appreciable effort to restore heirless Jewish assets that were in their own banks after the war. There has been nary an organizational peep about their obligations to compensate for Jewish material losses.

What Do We Seek?

The question of obligations is a difficult one; they spring from different sources. As the creator and perpetrator of the Shoah, Germany has obvious obligations, and thus has been paying reparations for more than 45 years. What, though, are the obligations of other European states, both the occupied and the neutral? One could argue that, in some way, each profited at the expense of Nazi victims; all fell somewhere along what Deborah Dwork, director of the Center for Holocaust Study at Clark University, calls "the C continuum": a progression of compromise, collusion, complicity, collaboration.

Instead, the Jewish community pursues "justice" almost exclusively from Switzerland. Of course, the bank accounts must be restored to the survivors and heirs. Those accounts, however, have become virtually a negligible aspect of the Nazi gold issue, leaving the question: What next? What exactly does justice demand of Switzerland, or any European state?

None in the Jewish communal leadership has ever said explicitly what that is. The implication is that it is measured by money. If so, then, how much? Who decides? To whom is it owed and how is it paid? Who pays? Where is the line between reparations and retribution?

The presumption that this is about money is the only conclusion to be reached when Jewish organizations habitually marshal their arguments that "more must be done" by noting that survivors are poor, sick, old and dying. This is a subtle shift in the emphasis from the original claimants of dormant Swiss bank accounts to the world of survivors. And what is that world?

Tarnishing The Memories

After the war, people focused on how the Jews of Europe died. In trauma and pity, many observers failed to remember the fullness of centuries of the Jewish life in Europe that was annihilated by the Nazis, or to appreciate the heroic efforts of survivors to rebuild their families

MARILYN HENRY is the staff correspondent in New York of the *Jerusalem Post* and the author of "*The Restitution of Jewish Property in Central and Eastern Europe*," published under the auspices of the American Jewish Committee.

Sh'ma A JOURNAL OF JEWISH RESPONSIBILITY

Senior Editors Irving Greenberg, Harold M. Schulweis
Editor Nina Beth Cardin
Administration/Production Bambi Marcus
Contributing Editors Michael Berenbaum, Elliot N. Dorff, Arnold Eisen, Leonard Fein, Barry Freundel, Rela M. Geffen, Neil Gillman, Joanne Greenberg, Brad Hirschfield, Lawrence Hoffman, Paula Hyman, Lori Lefkovitz, Deborah Dash Moore, David Nelson, Vanessa Ochs, Riv-Ellen Prell, Elie Wiesel, Arnold Jacob Wolf, David Wolpe, Walter Wurzburger, Michael Wyschogrod
Founding Editor Eugene B. Borowitz

Sh'ma a journal of jewish responsibility welcomes articles from diverse points of view. Hence, the opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the editors. Donations to *Sh'ma a journal of jewish responsibility* are tax-deductible. *Sh'ma a journal of jewish responsibility* is available in microform from University Microfilms Internat'l., Ann Arbor, MI and in audio format from the Jewish Braille Institute, New York NY.

Address all correspondence, subscriptions and change of address notices to: *Sh'ma a journal of jewish responsibility, c/o* CLAL, 440 Park Avenue South, Fourth Floor, New York NY 10016-8012. Telephone: 212-779-3300; Fax: 212-779-1009.

Sh'ma a journal of jewish responsibility (ISSN 0049-0385) is published bi-weekly except June, July and August, by CLAL, 440 Park Avenue South, Fourth Floor, New York, NY 10016-8012. Periodical postage paid at New York NY. Subscriptions: $29 for two years in U.S.; $18 for one year; $21 for one year overseas; $35 for two years overseas; bulk subscriptions of 10 or more to one address, $9 per subscription; retired or handicapped persons of restricted means may subscribe for one year at half price. **POSTMASTER**: Send address changes to *Sh'ma a journal of jewish responsibility, c/o* CLAL, 440 Park Avenue South, Fourth Floor, New York NY 10016-8012.

Sh'ma Online, an interactive discussion group, is available through any online service which can exchange with the Internet. To join, send a one-line message to: **listserv@jtsa.edu** saying: **subscribe shma** [your name]. Messages to *Sh'ma Online* can then be sent to: **shma@jtsa.edu**. "The Best of *Sh'ma*" can be found on the Jewish Community OnLine at America Online. Type in keyword "Jewishnews" and look for *Sh'ma*.

Copyright © 1997 by CLAL — The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership
December 26, 1997

and communities after the Shoah. It took decades to shake the one-dimensional image of survivors, frozen in emaciated bodies at liberation.

Yet, in the two years of "Nazi gold," what a regression there has been in how we collectively view survivors, as we admonish the world that they are poor, sick and dying. That is tragically true for many, especially those in Central and Eastern Europe—the "double victims," who suffered under the Nazis, then under the communist regimes. But we do no honor to the majority of survivors in the West by portraying them collectively as *miscaynim*, hapless unfortunates, and ignoring their noble accomplishments in the last half-century.

And for those who are needy, what have we done? Despite two years of political maneuvering, virtually no survivor has seen any tangible benefit. The communal leadership had repeatedly reproached the Swiss, and by extension, the other European states, because the survivors need help. That has the effect of turning survivors into pawns, in which urgent aid is predicated on the Europeans doing the "right" thing.

Have We Done Enough?

Obligations spring from different sources. We play on European guilt and its genocide to remind it of its debts. But what of our own?

For the Jewish community, the survivors have been the substance and the shadow. One of the most depressing aspects of the last two years has been to see the agitated revival of Jewish awareness of impoverished survivors, to watch the community haul them to Congress to blink for the cameras and tell their sad stories—always pointing the finger at Europe, never at the United States—and then do virtually nothing else to help them. We've witnessed an outpouring of publicity, and self-aggrandizing organizational fund-raising campaigns, but not a ripple of material communal support for survivors.

"You shall not stand idly by your neighbor's blood," our tradition tells us (Leviticus 19:16). Where our neighbor's welfare is endangered, we must not remain indifferent. Yet our communal record in the last two years shows that we have been deaf to ample warnings and blind to our phenomenal publicity.

Even before the frenzy over dormant Swiss accounts, Eizenstat challenged the Jewish community to aid survivors while efforts to recover Jewish property in Central and Eastern Europe—the other major restitution matter—proceeded at its sluggish pace.

Restitution "may take time, time that the survivors do not have," Eizenstat said in January 1996 at a World Jewish Congress assembly in Jerusalem. "In the interim, I would encourage international Jewish organizations to take a moral decision to use their own financial resources...to ensure that survivors can live out the balance of their lives in dignity."

We can speak eloquently of survivors' dignity, even as we ignore our tradition's commandment that it is our task to ensure it. Our tradition insists that our responsibility to help the needy prevails independently of others. We are not absolved while we wait for European and Allied offers of "justice." "Do not stand idly by." ✦

Questions of values, questions of truth

Michael Berenbaum

If one were to judge from the headlines of recent months, the story of the Holocaust is about apologies and money. It seems that before the last of the survivors leaves the earth, some amends will be made. And the subject of the Holocaust, the absoluteness of its evil, is forcing a confrontation with the national myths that comforted previous generations and obscured their true complicity. The "neutrality" of the Swiss is being re-examined, so too, the complicity of the French, the antisemitism of the Church, and the pervasiveness of German participation.

One cannot overestimate the importance of the apologies that have been forthcoming. The third generation is asking questions that their parents were too polite to ask of the perpetrators. And the Pope seems intent on taking definitive and irreversible steps to combat Christian theological antisemitism before his papacy comes to an end.

German Memories

In Germany, the debate triggered by Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners* has pitted the third generation of Germans—Goldhagen's peers—against their parents and grandparents. That generation has not bought the line advanced by Chancellor Kohl, namely that the SS was dishonorable, but that the stain need not taint the German army nor the German people, who seemingly were Hitler's victims as well. One looks at the interpretation of the Holocaust offered in Bonn's Museum to History of the *Bundesrepublik* and sees the timidity of

MICHAEL BERENBAUM is President and CEO of the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation in Los Angeles and a Visiting Professor of Theology at the University of Judaism.

the children of the perpetrators. One observes the same phenomena in the debate over the size, content and shape of the proposed German memorial to the Holocaust in Berlin, and in the genuine reluctance of Germany, especially under the leadership of Chancellor Kohl and his generation, to build a museum to the Holocaust in Berlin. Indeed, the German memorials are, if anything, underfunded, and it is their state of disrepair that mirrors second-generation Germans' concern with the Holocaust.

Thus, no matter what one's view on Goldhagen's work, the debate generated by his book has been important in Germany—important and welcome. It should not be treated in isolation from the controversial and excellent exhibition on the *Wehrmacht* and its role in the genocide, nor from the less vocal debate triggered by *Nasty Girl*, occasioned by Anna Rosmus' discovery of the hidden history of her town.

It's About Justice And Truth

Different events have given birth to renewed national self-examination. Switzerland and France come to mind, but so too Austria, and also Poland where the bishops have set aside a Sunday in January for a nation-wide discussion of Judaism within the Roman Catholic Church. The public debate in Europe has been generational and is of considerable significance—grandchildren often remember what their parents chose to forget.

I admire the daring and the diligence of the World Jewish Congress, which made charges against Switzerland that seemed at the time overblown and exaggerated but have been vindicated by recent events. Fine research and an intuitive sense of what the Swiss had done were combined with the honor of Edgar Bronfman and the courage of him and his colleagues. The D'Amato hearings, the Eizenstat report, and the findings of the Swiss government itself have substantiated the World Jewish Congress' initial charges. Credit must also be given to the Swiss for their ineptitude at crisis management, which compounded their trouble and made their accusers seem like a model of responsibility, propriety and understatement.

Still, the considerable achievements of the World Jewish Congress and its allies are not without their problems unless the Jewish community engages in a serious discussion as to the distribution of these funds and creates a mechanism for resolving the disputes against competing claimants.

Some survivors are worried that the focus on the financial crimes will obscure, and overwhelm, the much larger crime of genocide. Would that all that was lost during the Holocaust was money. Of course, something much more significant was lost. Human lives are of infinite value, and all the emphasis on the looting of Jewish property cannot be allowed to dilute the focus on the crime of genocide.

Thus, it is imperative that the looting be seen as a companion to the genocide. The Germans and their Allies and collaborators sought to murder the Jews, to eradicate all memory of the crime, and to profit from the proceeds. The true magnitude of their crime becomes ever more apparent as detail after detail of the financial looting becomes public. The circle of complicity grows wider and wider. We now know it encompassed national banks. We will soon learn the degree to which it enveloped the art world, including some of the world's preeminent museums, the most prominent of the art galleries, and the most distinguished of the art historians.

Antisemites may claim that Jews are interested only in money and that all the emphasis on Holocaust education is merely for the sake of fiscal gain. Therefore, we must emphasize the issues of justice and truth. We must speak of the magnitude of the crime and of those whose achievements are tainted because of their participation. The killers did not act alone. Neutrality was not neutral and the bystanders were not always bystanders, especially when it came to money.

The distribution of the funds that will be returned to the Jewish community and to the heirs of survivors pits valid Jewish interests against valid Jewish interests, justice against justice, right against right, truth against truth, values against values.

What Are The Choices?

Permit me to explain the questions that must be asked and the reasoning behind them. Should all survivors share equally—the rich and the poor, American, Israeli and European? Survivors claim that the Nazi made a *selektion* among survivors; we should not. Having suffered alike, they should all be treated equally.

Should a means test be imposed upon recipients of these funds so that the truly needy will be helped? After all, no matter how great limited funds are available, their distribution can make a real difference in the life of some survivors and no tangible difference in the life of other survivors. Let those who are needy come and partake. Why share and share alike?

Should Israeli and American survivors share in these funds, or should they be dedicated to Eastern European Jews who currently live in conditions of poverty and penury and for whom even small sums can make a real difference in the quality of their lives, and in their very ability to survive? American and Israeli survivors have had the opportunity to participate in previous programs;

such a chance was denied many European survivors who lived under communism.

Should American and Israeli institutions benefit from these funds or should they be devoted to European Jewish institutions which are less able to sustain themselves? For American and Israeli institutions, these funds are a blessing. For some European institutions, they are a necessity.

If there are to be institutional beneficiaries, should they go to the cause of Holocaust remembrance and memorialization, or toward the purpose of Jewish education? Should they aid the survivors directly or be put at the disposal of the larger Jewish community to be decided by a process of establishing communal priorities? These funds are from the Holocaust. Should they not be spent to memorialize the victims or, alternatively, to preserve the values that were an integral part of the victims' lives?

This Must Not Divide Us

Each claimant can offer persuasive arguments as to why his position should prevail. Each has *bona fide*, value-laden arguments. Each has truths to bring to her side. Each can marshal political pressures within Jewish institutional life. A mechanism must be established that can allow for the appropriate resolution of conflicting legitimate demands lest the war of the Jews—the battle for tangible resources—overshadow the larger achievements of the cause.

While we can unambivalently welcome the re-examination of national myths that is currently taking place, the battle for the return of Jewish assets, communal and individual, may be a mixed blessing unless we address serious issues and establish an appropriate mechanism to adjudicate legitimate claims. ✦

A proposal for the distribution of re-claimed european jewish assets

Gilbert N. Kahn

Fifty years after the greatest human atrocity ever committed, Jews throughout the world stand to become the beneficiaries of funds and resources which were stolen, confiscated, or removed from them by their murderers or their accomplices. The Nazi gold, the Swiss Bank accounts, the French art disclosures, the British Treasury trusts, the Italian insurance indemnities, and even the Palestine bank accounts, among others, represent only part of what are assumed to be hundreds of millions of dollars worth of Jewish assets and accounts that disappeared, beginning in 1933. In addition, Jewish property claims—private and communal—now sit ready to be reclaimed. Finally, compensation and/or restitution for suffering, etc., may be forthcoming as well.

Claims Conference

Despite a history of working with restitution claims against Germany, the Jewish community is unprepared to handle the monumental task about to be thrust upon it. Given the times and the unprecedented, Herculean task they faced, the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany (Claims Conference) created a reasonably effective operation for processing the enormous number of German-Jewish claims. Yet, whatever good experiences the Claims Conference had in dealing with issues of restitution, today's challenge is significantly greater in size, scope, and urgency.

Setting Policy

Probably the most painful question that must be asked is whether indeed all survivors are and ought to be treated equally in terms of their rights to assets. The case could be made, in 1997, that one can seriously question whether all survivors should automatically be the recipients of funds and assets—especially of communal assets—even when they can make a legitimate, legal, claim. This question is even more appropriate when it is posed concerning the rights of heirs. Specifically, how should heirs be treated, up to what degree, and what are their ethical rights of inheritance?

With declining philanthropic resources and a dramatic decline in governmental funds throughout the world for the indigent, hungry, elderly, infirm and needy, it could be argued that Jews ought to be giving priority in the dispersal of whatever windfall they obtain, to the care of needy Jews; first and foremost to needy survivors.

It could also be argued that Jewish education represents the only true possible hope of preventing young Jews from totally assimilating and giving Hitler a post-Holocaust victory. Therefore, any resources that the Jewish community obtains should be designated—immediately—to create and establish an entire array of Jewish educational institutions.

DR. GILBERT N. KAHN is Associate Professor of Political Science at Kean University. This article is based on a paper prepared for and funded by the University of Judaism, Center for Policy Options. An expanded version will appear in their forthcoming public policy series.

The case can also be made that any funds that world Jewry obtains should go to the maintenance and development of the State of Israel which represents the true homeland for all Jews and the absolute refuge for all Jews.

Despite the fact that it contradicts logic, there is little likelihood there will be any serious effort to deny survivors their right to full and complete compensation to any and all of their personal assets that become available. Similarly, first-degree heirs will insist on their claim to retrieved assets; but it seems appropriate to cap their restitution at a designated level.

With respect to the State of Israel, it seems that the legitimacy of their right to claim priority consideration, as was the case in the immediate aftermath of World War II, is no longer present. Survivors, heirs, and other petitioners—including the State of Israel should be treated equally. Israel is no longer in dire straits. Its survival and its place as a refuge are no longer in doubt. While it can use all the financial support that it can garner, it is no longer a needy case.

Rather, it is recommended that a Kehilla Fund be established to serve as the official recipient of all funds and resources that are obtained by the Jewish community from various governments—or from private or other public institutions—for which there are no known survivors or first-degree heirs. This fund would be the temporary steward of these resources and would invest those funds until such time that its Governing and Allocations Boards would determine their disposition. It would be the goal of this fund to move funds out as soon as possible and not to engage in program of annualized allocations.

Allocations Guidelines

The overall goal of the Kehilla Fund would be to help people, first and foremost. The following guidelines should govern allocations:

- The first priority should be to repair, improve, and/or create Jewish institutions to support and sustain survivors and survivor groups. Food, housing, and medical attention are the first concern; institutions second. Additional resources would be extended for community centers, shelters, seniors' facilities, synagogues, soup kitchens, home care services, medical assistance, and subsistence allowances.
- Claims from European communities and/or from the State of Israel for the care and support of Holocaust survivors should be considered based on the needs, the size, the nature of the community, and the services demanded.
- All groups of survivors will be considered as an overall category. There will be no preferences given to one country versus another.
- First-degree heirs should be permitted to receive sufficient resources to guarantee them a set fixed-income for life. The survivor community and the second-generation community, in particular, will undoubtedly object to any cap for any heirs. Nonetheless, "caps" seem to be an extremely reasonable approach, albeit an emotionally charged one. In 1997, the heirs of survivors are either indigent themselves, in which case they would naturally be entitled to adequate restitution up to the designated fixed-income, or they are sufficiently successful in their own right.
- Education should be made available to the existing world-wide Jewish community. This would include, but need not be limited to, the maintenance, support and/or creation of Jewish schools, curricula, programming, informal education, camps, etc. for Jewish children. An important appendage to this work would be the creation of Holocaust education material for local, state, or national educational departments to be integrated into school curricula for the general population.
- In those European countries where viable Jewish communities exist and where communal funds and assets become available, the first priority should be to provide adequately for the needs of the indigenous Jewish community. If it is determined that major, significant resources remain, in excess of the amount that can be reasonably used by that country's Jewish community, such excess funds should be put into the Kehilla Fund for dispersement.
- For unidentified claims, unclaimed assets, or those Jewish assets for which there is no identified survivor or heir, or where there is no surviving community or community claimant, the operating board of the Kehilla Fund will have to consider various possibilities. Where there are no longer Jewish communities, arrangements should be made with the local communities to sell existing Jewish communal property. The proceeds from the sales of such property, in turn, should be given over to the Kehilla Fund for distribution according to the program outlined. Where funds cannot be removed or segregated or allocated to the Kehilla Fund—those funds should be dedicated for education, or Holocaust related, community-wide, programming. Where communities insist that funds remain in the community or the state or the country, efforts should be made to follow the established priority system.
- Memorials for the victims while important for educational purposes do not present a critical demand for a major expenditure of funds. Such memorials could be

developed, especially in areas and communities within which there are still significant Jewish populations. They must not involve major expenditures of resources from the Kehilla Fund. They should require matching funds from local, state, or national governmental authorities (preferably from all three); and they should be public, visible, and modest.

▸ Museum and archives in Great Britain and the United States should receive only token support.

Conclusion

At all costs, the goal must be to maximize the use of the funds that now have been released. It must be the legacy of today's Jewish community to create a system that treats these funds in a way which will affirm once again that the 6 million victims will have their memory sanctified and their tradition and their values remembered and perpetuated.✦

❦ Endthoughts ❦

Intermarriage: the language we speak

Richard Hirsh

Two essential positions dominate the intermarriage discussion. One holds that increasing efforts at outreach can convert [pun intended] a liability into an asset; the other holds that our limited communal resources should be devoted to strengthening the core, not the periphery.

Whatever position one takes, how we as a Jewish community react to intermarried families, and especially the language we use in relating to them, takes on a special, perhaps even determinitive, significance.

What Not To Say

In a recent letter to a prominent Jewish newspaper, a no doubt sincere and committed Jew referred to intermarriage as a "cancer." This type of language is both counterproductive, and, more importantly, hurtful. Such language is unlikely to persuade intermarried couples of the willingness of the Jewish community to welcome them as they seek closer identification with the Jewish community.

Similarly, invoking comparisons between intermarriage and the Holocaust, as one prominent Jewish spokesman for a traditional organization has done repeatedly, is particularly unhelpful. It demonstrates, first of all, a remarkable insensitivity to Holocaust victims and survivors. Secondly, comparing Jewish men and women who for whatever reason may have married someone who was not born Jewish to Nazis is a violation of the *mitzvah* of *ahavat Yisrael*, the respect and affection expected of one Jew for another.

RICHARD HIRSH is Rabbi of the Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation and the editor of the journal, *The Reconstructionist*.

❖ ❖ ❖ Ta sh'ma ❖ ❖ ❖

We invite you to send us your favorite text and comment. Submissions should not exceed 200 words. Be sure to include proper citation of sources. Hebrew will appear in transliteration.

■ **Dan Mosenkis**

As the flesh of R. Akiva was being flayed by the Romans, the angels called out in anguish: "Is this the Torah, and this its reward?" Whereupon a voice replied from heaven: "If I hear another sound uttered I will turn the world to water, I will devastate both heaven and earth. This is my decree; accept it."

FROM THE MIDRASHIC COMPILATION ON THE TEN MARTYRS, RECITED ON YOM KIPPUR

On first reading, one might see God's response as petulant and frustrated, because God too cannot possibly justify this fate. But, on closer reading, I see more of a hint of helplessness, inevitability, resignation: "Given the way the world was set up, this fate is inevitable."

A more immediate example: In a world in which linear momentum is conserved, in a head-on crash the greater damage will usually be sustained by the smaller car, regardless of which driver was more at fault. To arrange otherwise, we would need a world with a different operating system. Similarly, God is saying that in this world, the only way to insure a different outcome would be to destroy this world and create one that used a different system.

DAN MOSENKIS lives in Fair Lawn NJ and teaches math at City College of NY.

We as a community would also do well to avoid invidious comparisons between Jews and non-Jews, often accompanied by the offensive and insulting terms *shiksa* and *shaygetz*, which literally mean "abomination." It is worth noting that in any given Jewish setting there are increasing odds of finding several Jews-by-choice, who certainly do not see themselves as "former *shiksas*" or "former *shaygetzes*", and for whom "anti-*goyim*" remarks are cruel and hurtful.

See The Faces

The issue is not "intermarriage" as an abstract or statistical issue: The issue is people who are intermarried. Minimally, the obligation of *kavod ha-briot*, respect for the dignity of other human beings, should caution us to be sensitive to the type of language we use when talking about the lives of other people.

We speak in generalities of people whom we generally do not know, of people whose commitments to the Jewish community may in fact be present, and who, with no malice, do not necessarily make their major life-decisions in terms of what is good or not good for the Jewish people.

But to speak of intermarried families as if they are a single phenomenon is to miss the uniqueness of each person and each couple. Clearly, many intermarried families are on a trajectory away from the Jewish life, no matter what programs we provide. In an era of diminishing Jewish dollars, we should evaluate how much we invest in outreach as opposed to programs designed to strengthen Jewish identity and discourage intermarriage from the outset.

There are other intermarried families who are no doubt wrestling seriously with issues of identity and identification. We should be aware that the language we use—and that they see and hear—can either draw them closer or alienate them.

Regardless of our best efforts, intermarriage will continue to be a reality of the Jewish community. We need to affirm our belief that Jewish-Jewish marriages are the most desirable for purposes of Jewish continuity, identity of children, and, not inconsequentially, for the stability and security of the marital relationship.

Choose Language Carefully

Yet, even as we make that affirmation, we need to remain open to those who, for whatever reason, but presumably without the intention of harming the Jewish people, have chosen spouses who happen not to be Jewish.

Let us indeed engage in debate, and let us assess how best to use our communal resources. Let us respect the passion that drives committed Jews to work towards reducing the rate of intermarriage, as we also need to respect the determination that drives those committed to outreach. But in our efforts to confront this issue, let us not forget that we are dealing with people, people with parents and grandparents, people with children and grandchildren. An appropriate place to start would be with an agreement that the language we use in this debate should be respectful and sensitive. Let us finally have a moratorium on inappropriate analogies and insulting imprecations. ✦

We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of Vanessa Ochs and Rabbi David Nelson to our October 31, 1997 issue (28/540).

PURIM IS COMING!
PURIM IS COMING!
Send us your yuks by
FEBRUARY 6th.

Sh'ma a journal of jewish responsibility
440 Park Avenue South, Fourth Floor
New York, NY 10016-8012

Periodical Postage Paid at New York, NY