

Should We Forgive The Germans?

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I once heard the comment that there has never been a really great novel or even a great poetic literary memorial to the Jews who perished during the Nazi catastrophe. Personally, I doubt there ever will be. Even the sum total of all efforts to portray what happened will be doomed to fall short of depicting the enormity of the crime, the flood of innocent blood, and the immeasurable pain and heartache and sorrow. No cup can hold the measure of tears that flowed from the broken bodies of our people who by sheer coincidence happened to live in the Germany of the Nazi era.

We have also been dealing of late with two problems: One that the world will too quickly forget what happened. The other: that our own people will too quickly forget what happened. This despite the fact that the wheels of justice still grind out their work. Nazis are still being ~~brought to~~ hunted down and brought to trial.

And in the main Jews still have much of residual hatred for Germans. Understandably. There are many Jews who will not use German products. They will not visit Germany, They will urge every recourse to ~~punish~~ punishment of the Nazi criminals.

Now a new and different voice has been raised. Writing in LOOK magazine, a colleague of mine, Rabbi Joseph Asher of Temple Emanuel in Greensboro, N.C. declares "that the time ~~has~~

has come for those who hate Germany and the Germans to take a new look at their feelings."

Rabbi Asher was born in Germany. Recently he returned to visit the places of his youth, the school which he attended and to talk with those of his boyhood friends, now grown to manhood, who had in the Nazi era been the source of so much of his suffering and subsequent exile. Rabbi Asher is convinced that hatred perpetuated is futile. Instead he finds ~~xxxixix~~ that after his visit and after talking with erstwhile enemies his feelings of hatred have dissipated. He writes this way: "The spiritual victory I feel that I have won lies in the reducing of bitterness and converting it into the stuff of which civilized human relations are made. Beyond retribution for evil lies compassion for the wrongdoer. 'God desires not the death of the wicked but that he turn from his evil ways and live.' That is the Jewish concept of God. Since man is created in His image, it behoves him to desire likewise. As wickedness springs from small and individual acts, thus does compassion begin in a single man's heart."

And then acting in positive manner, Rabbi Asher pleads that German speaking rabbis go to Germany and devote one month to teaching about Jews and Judaism in German secondary schools.

I'm perfectly willing to accept Asher's mission for himself. Others with similar background
Too put Now it seems to me that there is more in *offer*
an idea to forgive love of Ch. wife parents
Rabbi Asher's attitude and proposal than merely the agreement or disagreement with his personal attitude. After all, it would come in ill grace

from any American Jew who has never come within 1000 miles of the Nazis to judge whether Rabbi

Asher's feelings are justified or not.

It seems to me that if he and many others like him whose lives were tortured and twisted by the Nazis, whose loved ones and friends ~~were~~ were killed can forgive, then so can we.

The truth is that the enormity of the crime knows no human punishment commensurate with it and therefore no forgiveness or understanding either makes sense. The only thing which does make sense is a direct effort to learn from history and a concentrated desire to rid the world of every kind of hate and to build instead a world society based upon understanding and kindness the decent acceptance of the differences among people. *According to Jewish teaching: not sinners should be removed from society of men but the sin.*

After all, the ^{view} of a crime makes quite a difference in judgement. The criminal can excuse his actions. The victim or his survivors cry out for punishment. And the detached bystander can so easily---too easily--- tell the others how they ought behave and how they ought to feel. The real point at issue ^{are} ~~is~~ our own ^{not} feelings. Not Rabbi Asher's and not the German's but our own. Do we have either the right to hate the Germans or the right to forgive them. *Vid matter. No one can enter hate or forgive for another*

Viewed from the victims point of view we are not without considerable blame ourselves. In discussing Rabbi Asher's article with our Cantor I was reminded by him of our own guilt. What did America or American Jewry do for our oppressed

breathern when Hitler was at the height of his vicious poer? The plain truth is that had America (and other countries) opened the door of our land, hundreds of thousands of Hitler's v ictim^ses would never have died. With all our power and preteneded ethical revulsion at what was happening, with all our vast reaches of land and resoucrces , the gates, to all intents remained closed. Some who had fled from Germany reached to our very doorstep in New York harbor and were turned back to the buthcer's slaughter house whre they perished. Isn't there a sharing of blame -- if blame there is to be-- demanded here. Are we oursleves so lilly pure?

I think of the counsel of two men. One is the sainted Rabbi Leo Baeck. A man in his 70's at the time, Rabbi Baeck was imprisoned in Thrensenstadt. All presumed him to be dead. More than perhaps any other he ministered to the dead and dying community of German Jewry. He refused to leve for A_merica time and again when it was possible to save him. A_t the end of the war he ermerged from theconcentration camp alive and after many months of rehabilitation and recovery he entered a second new life in England and in America. At Cincinnati at the HUC I came to know him, to study with him and to be blessed by his friendship. And on one ocaasion when Baeck was about to return to Germany to dedicate a reconstitututed synagogue, I ventured to speak about the Nazi era even tho I knew he

never liked to discuss it. But I asked him: Rabbi, how is it that you can renew your friendships with the Germans. How can you possibly forgive what they did to you and to your people? His answer was so simply so direct and so absolutely clear it required no more than one sentence. He said: "Sidney don't you know that Judaism does not believe in collective guilt?"

And indeed we do not. Each man is responsible for his own individual actions and for his forgiveness he must approach, not other men, but his God. Ours is the task neither to blame nor to forgive, but to understand, to defend truth and honor and to teach goodness and right.

The other of whom I think in the context of this subject is a teacher of mine, ^{Abraham Cronbach} who passed away only a few weeks ago at the age of 83. He was a life-long pacifist, a man who rode a roller coaster of popularity and disdain. At one period he was the most reviled of men; at another the most beloved of our teachers. It all depended upon the mood of our times and the maturity of the perception of his students. ~~xxxx~~ At the end of his life, in his ~~xxxx~~ very advanced old age, curiously, he became the hero not of rabbinic students alone but of the teen ages in our Youth Program who flocked from far and wide to listen to him and to be with him. And I can never forget his two word counsel that he maintained was sound in ALL human relationships: NEVER BLAME, That's all Never blame. Balme his maintained did not good. It only ate out

the heart of the aggrieved. But to turn from ~~blame~~ blame was to turn to aid and help, teaching and guidance and to the real salvation of the sinner.

Well, there are plenty of areas in our own lives where we may improve our human relationships. We shall always have our blood run cold to remember what happened to the ~~sanctified~~ ^{Forgiveness & forgetting are different matters. It's my opinion but not fact} 6 million. We shall ~~never~~ recover from the slaughter of our people. Nor ought we ever ~~forget~~ forget what happened---not to blame forever a generation of ~~any~~ people or a nation as a whole, but in order to make very sure that we understand what can happen to US and to our fellow men if we allow ourselves to be captured by prejudice and fear of others.

Let's try to build a world where ~~not even~~
~~a little child~~

we shall find the spiritual victory of which Rabbi Asher speaks. Let us remember those who perished in our prayers forever. And Let us remember those among whom we live in our actions. ~~forever~~.