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Post-Shoah Dialogues: Re-Thinking Our Texts Together
(review)

Samuel M. Edelman

Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies, Volume 24,
Number 3, Spring 2006, pp. 171-174 (Review)

Published by Purdue University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/sho.2006.0051>



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Jews, but because of social disaffection. The interesting part of this article is Pippidi's citing the most primitive and shameless rewriting of history that one can see anywhere. We learn that Romanians had never mistreated Jews, but on the contrary, it was the Romanians who have always been victimized.

Randolph Braham, of course, is the dean of historians of the Hungarian Holocaust. My guess is that no one will ever write a more detailed and reliable description of that sad story than what is contained in his *Politics of Genocide*. In his piece in the current volume he is concerned with the treatment of the Holocaust in Hungary today. There are politicians and other public figures in Hungary who are antisemites by any definition and who have a pathological pre-occupation with Jews. However, their party, the Magyar Igazság és Élet Pártja, is expected to receive no more than one or two percent of the vote in the elections of 2006. Braham is more disturbed by a far larger segment of the political spectrum, the supporters of the moderate right wing Fidesz Party. He rightly dubs them as "history-cleansers." Fidesz derives its legitimacy from association with the unattractive, conservative, and antisemitic pre-war Horthy regime. Partisans of Fidesz intend to remove the dark spots of that regime, and in general they deny or underplay the enthusiastic collaboration of Hungarians in the destruction process in 1944.

Michael Shafir's article is the most ambitious and valuable in this volume. He writes not only about Hungary and Romania, but also about the other countries of Eastern Europe and discusses not only the present situation, but also the entire post-war period. He demonstrates that Holocaust denial, belittling of suffering, and distortions of various kind exist in all ex-communist countries. He is particularly good in describing the various forms of denial and distortions such as deflecting guilt from the perpetrators to the Germans, and even to the victims. He rightly argues that misremembering is not only an insult to the victims, but also a danger to the fragile democratic regimes of the region. History must be faced.

Peter Kenez
Department of History
University of California—
Santa Cruz



Post-Shoah Dialogues: Re-Thinking Our Texts Together, edited by James F. Moore. Studies in the Shoah, Vol. XXV. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2004. 270 pp. \$35.00.

It is not often that one is confronted with a text so complicated, so densely packed with challenging ideas, and so critical for truly moving Christian-Jew-

ish dialogue to a new level of action than this book. So many words have been spoken, so many words have been written—yet the scourge of 2000 years of hatred of Jews by Christians continued unabated through to the Holocaust. Christianity after the Shoah is confronted with the idea that it may have been the catalyst that ultimately led to the Shoah through its own original core sacred texts. Jews and Judaism, after the Shoah, are confronted with the problem of what Judaism should be in light of the Shoah. We all have to do what Rabbi Irving Greenberg has suggested Jews have to do after the Shoah, which is restoring our connection to the covenant with G-d by restoring our connection to Torah.

While Jews and Christians share common texts, there is nothing common about what they each do with those texts. Christians use Torah to prove the divinity of Jesus, while Jews use the texts to explore their relation to G-d and their historical and cultural memory. The common texts shared by Jews and Christians when looked at from a Jewish perspective have a very different meaning than when they are looked at from a Christian perspective.

What the four authors (James Moore, Zev Garber, Henry Knight, and Steven Jacobs) argue for and demonstrate in an impressive way is a shift in interpretive response to both Jewish and Christian texts based on the Jewish rhetorical tool known as midrash. Midrash is defined by the Jewish Encyclopedia as

A term occurring as early as II Chron. xiii. 22, xxiv. 27, though perhaps not in the sense in which it came to be used later, and denoting "exposition," "exegesis," especially that of the Scriptures. In contradistinction to literal interpretation, subsequently called "peshat" (comp. Geiger's "Wiss. Zeit. Jüd. Theol." v. 244), the term "midrash" designates an exegesis which, going more deeply than the mere literal sense, attempts to penetrate into the spirit of the Scriptures, to examine the text from all sides, and thereby to derive interpretations which are not immediately obvious.

Christian reading of Torah, which has often been a one-sided search for the rhetorical evidence of Jesus' divinity when coupled with the bag and baggage of anti-Jewish polemic, has set the grounding for the 2000 years of Christian anti-Jewish action. Jewish Midrash rarely if ever includes Christian or even secular interpretations. So this book's use of midrash to explore both Jewish and Christian texts by a team of Jewish and Christian scholars is not only unique but powerful. For example, these four authors looked at Genesis 32, on Jacob wrestling with the angel, and Matthew 26 about Jesus in the garden at Gethsemane. Moore sets out in his essay the overarching approach taken by the four authors. His five chapters tackle the issues of looking at Christian tradition in a new way; antisemitism; creating an ethic of dialogue; and the

genocidal mind in religion. Steven Jacobs wrote three chapters focusing on the question of how to deal with Biblical texts after the Shoah; wrestling with the images of God and the Devil; and finally, defining what the genocidal mind is in light of religious expression. Henry Knight's focus is also in three chapters which explore in great detail both Genesis 32 and Matthew 26 and how to operationalize these kinds of dialogical explorations based on texts; he also explores in a passionate essay how to deal with the idea of the Holy in light of the Shoah; his final chapter is entitled Coming to Terms with Amalek. Zev Garber's essays are equally passionate explorations of topics including how theology comes to impact interpretation of biblical texts; Shoah testimony and Torah and their interaction; and a fascinating essay responding to James Moore on intolerance and prejudice, "What's Love Got to Do With it." Garber also has the last word in a personal apologia.

What is remarkable about these essays is that looking at Genesis and Matthew from a Jewish perspective gives us a remarkably clear context for both texts that has been absent from Christian hermeneutics. In many ways the reading of these texts out of their respective Jewish contexts has been one of the root causes of antisemitism and set the ground work for the Shoah itself. In many different ways this book shows that this statement is true.

The contribution of this book is in its effort at rectifying these root causes by giving us a self-help manual for Christian-Jewish dialogue based on text reading. By bringing this from the hallowed halls of academe to the church and the synagogue the authors are moving what has been a decades-long interaction out to the rest of the world.

While Judaism will never accept the theological perspective of Christianity concerning the divinity of Jesus, Christianity will never relinquish its theological root. The statements of Pope John Paul II during his trip to Israel when he spoke of Judaism as the Churches' elder brother marked a significant change in Catholic attitudes after Vatican II. As the Church moves through transition from the Papacy of John Paul II to Pope Benedict XVI, *Post-Shoah Dialogues* takes on even greater import as an educational manual for future Christian-Jewish dialogue.

This is an important book. If used well it could be the basis of a future dialogue that could spread from community to community. The implications are massive. David Weiss Halivni, in his book *The Book and the Sword*, gives us an idea of the theological importance of this dialogue in the story he tells in the first page of the book. Halivni tells the story of the angel Michael reproaching G-d as the first child is shoved into the crematorium. G-d shouts back at Michael saying:

"I am the Lord of the Universe. If you are displeased with the way I conduct the world, I will return it to void and null." Hearing these words, Michael knew that there was to be no reversal. He had heard these words once before in connection with the Ten Martyrs. He knew their effect. He went back to his place ashen and dejected, but could not resist looking back sheepishly at God and saw a huge tear rolling down His face, destined for the legendary cup which collects tears and which when full, will bring the redemption of the world. Alas, to Michael's horror, instead of entering the cup the tear hit its rim, most of it spilling on the ground—and the fire of the crematorium continued to burn. (Forward to David Weiss Halivini, *The Book and the Sword, A Life of Learning in the Shadow of Destruction* [New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996])

After the Shoah it is imperative that both Jews and Christians find ways to at least widen the cup so that the redemption of the world may finally come. Here is an approach which may show promise and hope for widening the cup.

Samuel M. Edelman
Modern Jewish Studies and Rhetoric
Director, Modern Jewish Studies
BA
California State University, Chico



In the Aftermath of Genocide: Armenians and Jews in Twentieth-Century France, by Maud S. Mandel. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003. 317 pp. \$23.95.

Armenians and Jews differ in most things, including religion, origins, language, and socio-economic profile. Armenians are an ancient Christian community, one of the oldest in the world, whose origins lie in the Anatolian plateau of Asia Minor. Although Jewish roots may be traced to ancient Israel and Judah, for nearly two millennia Jews have been a diaspora community with shifting centers of concentration, from Rome, to Spain, to western Europe, to eastern Europe and Russia, to the United States, and most recently to modern Israel. Armenian is an Indo-European language; Hebrew is Semitic. Yiddish is a Germanic blend written in Hebrew, and Ladino is a blend of medieval Castilian, combined with Hebrew, Turkish, and Arabic. Until the latter half of the 19th century, Armenians were peasant farmers living in the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire, while most European Jews were an urban population, prohibited from farming, earning its living as merchants, petty-traders, money-lenders, and skilled craftsmen.

Despite these many differences, Armenians and Jews share tragic modern histories in the Ottoman Empire and Europe, respectively, where they expe-