The Eternal Dissident

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INTRODUCTION


7. The grandparents wrote a touching note, in their immigrants’ English, expressing the hope that their grandson remain true to his faith on the occasion of his brit milah. Leonard Beerman kept the note in a frame in his study.
My Dear Grandson,

Enclose you will find a smole [sic] gift presented to you by your Grandparents on the day that you became a member, according to the law of Moses, to the most glorious religion on the face of this earth. We therefore Bestow our Blessing upon you. May you be the Sunshine of your Parents and a healing Balm to the People of Israel and to all mankind, a good American and a good Jew, and a servant to the God of Israel, the soul of this Great universe.

And when you will mature to that age that you will be able to understand these few words then we will ask of you to tell your darling Mother to read this letter to you often.

Save this letter for many years so that you will be able to read it to your own children.

We remain,

Your Grand Parents

Jacob I. And Rose Grossman

8. Beerman often punned that like his father, he too was a purveyor of “notions,” intending not the wares that his father sold, but the ideas that he sought to disseminate.

9. Leonard I. Beerman, interview by author, July 11, 2013. Although outliers in Owosso, the Beermans belonged to a large majority of American Jews who held to liberal views and were strong Roosevelt supporters. On this pronounced Jewish political disposition, see Marc Dollinger, *Quest for Inclusion: Jews and Liberalism in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).


12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.


15. Beerman’s transcript from the Pennsylvania State College is found in the Central Archives of the Hebrew University (CAHU). Thanks to Michael Vinegrad of the CAHU for his assistance in retrieving the Penn State, and HUC transcripts.


17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid. As a reflection of his growing sense of Jewishness, Leonard performed a decidedly Jewish act in the AC spark plug factory. While putting the finishing touches on the .50 caliber rifles on the assembly line, he would chisel a six-pointed Star of David on the barrel.


21. Ibid. Spinoza was the favored philosopher of many modern Jewish iconoclasts, for whom he represented a rare example of intellectual courage and integrity. Daniel B. Schwartz has chronicled the wide range of modern Jewish admirers of Spinoza in *The First Modern Jew: Spinoza and the History of an Image* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

22. Beerman, interview, July 11, 2013. He recalled that his decision to enlist was motivated by his desire “to show that I wasn’t afraid. I wasn’t afraid of what I’ve been. I’d always been afraid of fighting, physical conflict.”

24. Ibid.
25. His transcript from HUC covering the period 1943–1947 reveals that Leonard was a fine student, but also that grade inflation was not present at the college in that period. For example, he was not only awarded a number of “Goods” during his time there (the letter equivalent of 80–85), but he also received one in his favored subject of philosophy in 1945–1946. One course in which he always received the highest grade of E (95–100) was public speaking. His transcript is found in the CAHU.
27. The Hebrew word kavanah denotes intense spiritual intention and refers here to those rabbinical students who were most intent on enhancing their Jewish spiritual experience, as opposed to the academic study of theology or engaging in social justice activity.
29. The CAHU contains Beerman's transcripts from Penn State and HUC, but no trace of classes taken at the Hebrew University. This suggests that he applied for admission, but never formally registered for classes in Jerusalem.
32. On the various iterations of the binational idea in Palestine, see Susan Lee Hattis, The Bi-national Idea in Mandatory Palestine (Haifa: Shikmona, 1970), as well as Benny Morris, One State, Two States: Resolving the Israel/Palestine Conflict (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).
34. “Beerman Holds British to Blame for Violence” (undated bulletin of the Penn State Hillel chapter).
35. Ibid.
36. For a helpful analysis of the ingredients that make up a successful sermon, including a discussion of a 1910 address by Judah Magnes, see Michael Marmur, “Contemporary Jewish Homiletics: Some Key Components,” International Journal of Homiletics 1 (2016): 52–70.
38. Ibid.


48. In addition, the two clergymen frequently preached in each other’s institution. On one occasion in 1988, Leonard preached a sermon on Easter at All Saints Church’s service at the Hollywood Bowl. See John Dart, “Rabbi to Participate in Hollywood Bowl Easter Sunrise Service; Organizer Seeks Involvement of All Communities, Religions,” Los Angeles Times, March 19, 1988.


51. Another indication of his popularity in the face of controversy was the fact that he was solicited for a number of rabbinic positions over the course of his career, including by Rodef Shalom in Pittsburgh (1966) and Central Synagogue in New York City (1971). Letters attesting to this interest are in the Beerman Archive. In addition, he was invited by the faculty of HUC in Cincinnati to be a candidate for the position of dean. See his letter to his good friend Prof. Eugene Mihaly, declining the offer, January 1, 1979, Beerman Archive.


56. In fact, in his last years, Beerman served as a member of the rabbinical council of Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP), the left-wing group known for its support of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement. Although he did not support a global boycott of Israel (as opposed to a boycott of products produced in Jewish settlements in the
West Bank), Beerman embraced his JVP affiliation. See the extended conversation between between him and Brant Rosen, cofounder of the JVP rabbinical council on April 28, 2014, in Westwood, at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C7opriHG20&t=2734s, accessed on June 7, 2017.

59. In the tribute booklet honoring Leonard Beerman in 1986, the Interfaith Center described its goal as “bring[ing] an end to the nuclear arms race and the threat of mass nuclear destruction.”
62. Ibid.
63. Proverbs 30:22. Perhaps the most compelling use of the phrase from Proverbs in this context was made by Simon Rawidowicz in a hard-hitting, though unpublished meditation on Arab refugees from Israel written in the early 1950s. See D. N. Myers, Between Jew and Arab: The Lost Voice of Simon Rawidowicz (Hanover, NH and London: Brandeis University Press, 2008), 99, 103.
64. See his reflections in “Time in Israel, Part II,” November 1967.
65. The call for “an American Jewish Intifada” can be found in the manifesto of the Jewish Committee on the Middle East from 1988, accessed at http://jcome.org/jcometestimony.pdf.
67. Ibid.
69. The year of the meeting that was reported in various accounts of Leonard’s life was 1983, although a photograph of a visiting delegation of Americans meeting with Arafat in Amman is from 1985. The photograph appears in the Jordanian daily newspaper Al Ra’i, June 24, 1985, which is found in the Beerman Archive.
70. For example, Beerman’s mix of openness and tireless defense of the rights of others won him an award from the ACLU of Southern California in 1981. The letter of invitation made reference to “the enormous contributions you have made in preserving constitutional rights and freedoms.” See the letter of invitation from Ramona Ripston, executive director of the ACLU of Southern California, February 19, 1981, Beerman Archive. Over the course of his career, Leonard received awards from the American Friends Service Committee, Death Penalty Focus, the Muslim Public Affairs Council, Physicians for Social Responsibility, the Human Relations Commission of Los Angeles, the Jewish War Veterans, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the Levantine Cultural Center, and the Liberty Hill Foundation, among others.
The original members of the group were Beerman, Gunther, Nicholas, Willens, and Sheinbaum, along with Paul Schrade, Ralph Carson, Jack Roberts, Stanley Gortikov, Albert Wells, and Bob Powsner. Subsequent additions included George Regas, Mike Farrell, Arthur Greenberg, and David Rintels. This roster comes from a brief history of the group written by Fred Nicholas, November 18, 2014.


This statement of principles, crafted by a group of about fifteen scholars, rabbis, and activists in a private home, was published as “Love They Neighbor as Thyself,” Jewish Journal, September 5, 2014, http://jewishjournal.com/opinion/133057/.

Drawn from saying 12 of Leonard Beerman’s favorite sayings; see “Sayings of Leonard I. Beerman” in this volume.


Rabbi Beerman’s sermons and other writings were often works in progress; as such, they contained occasional mistakes of punctuation, which, for the sake of clarity, have been corrected in the selections presented in this volume.

1. CHAPEL SERMON, OCTOBER 30, 1948


2. SIGMUND FREUD, MAY 11, 1956

3. The typescript text contains these words on a line between paragraphs.
4. Typescript text is incomplete.

5. THE LEGACY OF MLK, JANUARY 15, 1982

1. The boycott lasted from December 1, 1955, until January 17, 1956—381 days.

6. FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH GEORGE (REGAS), APRIL 13, 2005

11. FROM THE DIARY OF A LEO BAECK TEMPLE
RABBI, FEBRUARY 5, 1971

1. Adapted from T.S. Eliot, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.”

15. MY TROUBLES WITH GOD; GOD’S TROUBLES
WITH ME, FEBRUARY 9, 1979

1. The two paragraphs above appear typed on a piece of paper just before the sermon below, which begins with Rabbi Beerman’s handwritten words “Rough copy, Unedited, Not for Distribution.”
2. Rabbi Baeck was deported to Theresienstadt in 1943, but survived his time there and lived until 1956; he also taught at Hebrew Union College, as Beerman knew.

20. UCLA TEACH-IN ON VIETNAM WAR, MARCH 24, 1966

1. Ed.: Rabbi Beerman concluded here, it appears, with a prose poem by Mark Twain called “The War Prayer” (1904) that he often invoked. “The War Prayer” reflected Twain’s deep skepticism that one could summon God to support one’s own war effort: “The burden of its supplication was, that an ever-merciful and benignant Father of us all would watch over our noble young soldiers, and aid, comfort, and encourage them in their patriotic work; bless them, shield them in the day of battle and the hour of peril, bear them in His mighty hand, make them strong and confident, invincible in the bloody onset; help them crush the foe, grant to them and to their flag and country imperishable honor and glory.”

26. SURVIVAL IN A NUCLEAR AGE, FEBRUARY 17, 1984

1. Ed.: Beerman originally wrote “guns” in the typed version of the text, but crossed it out and wrote in pen “m.r. nw,” the last two letters of which might signify “nuclear weapons.”

29. A VISION FOR A BEWILDERING TIME, MAY 18, 2007


33. TIME IN ISRAEL, PARTS I AND II, NOVEMBER 1967

1. Ed.: The preceding sentence was inserted by pen in the text, with the last portion unreadable.
2. The word here is illegible.
35. YOM KIPPU R MORNING, OCTOBER 11, 1978

1. This is a reference to the famous “Three No’s” of the Khartoum Resolution issued by the Arab League at its summit on September 1, 1967. The actual formulation from that resolution was “no peace, no recognition of Israel, no negotiations.”


36. YOM KIPPU R EVE, SEPTEMBER 26, 1982


2. Estimates are that the demonstration in central Tel Aviv on September 25, 1982, drew some 400,000 participants.

3. The reference is to Beerman’s friend and fellow Reform rabbi Jerome Grollman (1922–2008), who served for sixty years at United Hebrew Congregation in St. Louis.

38. A SERMON FOR YOM KIPPU R MORNING, OCTOBER 4, 2014

