

Destiny of the Chosen People

Throughout history, Jews have fulfilled their destiny as the 'chosen people', chosen for attack whenever masses of humanity were made to feel aggrieved. As the playwright Ben Hecht put it in 1943, quoted in this book by Eliyho Matz, *'The Jewish situation never has had much to do with Jews. The Jews have been a lightning rod down which a thousand different psychic storms have struck and vented themselves.'* Thousands of Jews were being murdered every day in the Third Reich, while Western leaders averted their eyes. Hecht's profound observation resonates throughout the ages as the essence of the 'final solution', for there is no 'final solution'. As a lesser sage, the Dean of the Harvard Divinity School, when asked *'What is it about the Jews that you object to?'*, responded truthfully though unwisely, *'Their continued existence'*. The Nazi Holocaust, like all previous and subsequent attacks on the Jews, is in essence a demonic act of self-destruction, emanating from a violent core of self-hatred. Tragically, Jews themselves are not exempt from this perversity, as their response to the Holocaust reveals.

This book of memoirs, research, and conversations with Hillel Kook, who adopted the name of Peter Bergson, provides a new account of the attempt to put the plight of European Jewry before the eyes of those in power in Washington DC, and jolt them out of their inaction. There is not the slightest doubt, as evidenced from the documents reprinted in this book, that President Roosevelt, his entire Administration, key members of Congress, and diplomats in Europe, knew exactly in real time the fact and the dimensions of the Holocaust. Ben Hecht's statements, a series of full-page advertisements in the New York Times, and several prominent dramatic Broadway gatherings were all part of Bergson's struggle to engage U.S. efforts toward rescuing the ever-dwindling number of Jews in Europe.

Bergson repeatedly confronted the public and the politicians with the consequences of their inaction. In 1943 he staged a Kaddish, the Jewish memorial service, in Madison Square Garden, later replicated in other cities, when the death total numbered 'only' two million. As late as 1944, after millions more Jews had been brutally murdered, he staged a Broadway play, *'A Flag Is Born'*, with Marlon Brando speaking these words written by Ben Hecht: *'Where were you – Jews? Where were you when the killing was going on? When the six million were being burned and buried alive in the lime pits, where were you?... Where was your cry of rage that could have filled the world and stopped the fires? Nowhere! Because you were ashamed to cry out as Jews.... You with your Jewish hearts hidden in your American boots! You – with your Jewish hearts hidden behind English accents – you let the six million die – rather than make the faux-pas of seeming a Jew. We heard – your silence – in the gas chambers.'* Bergson also organized a march of rabbis on Washington, raised money for more full-page advertisements, sponsored Congressional resolutions urging top-level attention and action, all directed toward the only thing that mattered in his view – saving lives.

The Nazi regime expertly organized an elaborate program of identifying, kidnapping, and transporting Jews from their homes throughout Europe to the death camps. Non-Jews were motivated by government propaganda in all media appealing to their patriotism and to what

was portrayed as a social obligation to rid society of a menace. Neighbors, encouraged to cooperate, faced threats to their livelihoods and their lives for any perceived lack of enthusiasm for the grisly task their governments assigned them. This early form of mind control / cognitive warfare, under Goebbels, occupied a major part of the Nazi regime's activities. To nullify the natural human revulsion against such horrible crimes, both in Germany and overseas, the Nazi regime's propaganda promoted a sense of hopelessness about the prospect of stopping them. Another division of the regime acquired the chemical constituents of poison gas, operated the rail system, built industrial-scale gas chambers and death camps to hold those awaiting slaughter, performed medical experiments on prisoners in the guise of helping them, and disposed of the bodies, all while denying the existence of this vast industrial colossus of death.

It might seem obvious that industrial-scale slaughter of millions of human beings would be hard to hide, and indeed it was. It required the active cooperation of thousands of Germans, and the silence of millions throughout Europe who must have witnessed the deportations. Among these collaborators and witnesses, we learn from Matz's book, a few brought word of the Holocaust to neutral observers in Switzerland as early as 1942. Poring through document archives, Matz found a declassified memo from U.S. Consul Paul Squire dated October 29, 1942 conveying an affidavit by Paul Guggenheim, a Professor of International Law in Geneva, confirming intelligence from reliable German informants to the effect that Hitler had officially ordered, in writing, the complete extermination of all Jews within the Third Reich. While this order merely ratified a policy already in effect, it constituted public evidence of atrocities that could not be denied. The Consul's memo was sent to Secretary of State Cordell Hull, who informed President Roosevelt. Therefore, FDR knew in late 1942 that millions of Jews were being murdered in Nazi Germany.

The self-destructive impulse, as noted above, is a nondenominational demiurge. In the death camps, Bruno Bettelheim's interviews of survivors reveal how the breakdown of personality led some to take on the personalities of the most sadistic guards, even seeking out assignments requiring torture of fellow Jews. This effectively divided the prisoners against themselves, foreclosing resistance, leaving most to perish passively. The death camps were a kind of laboratory for messaging designed for similar effects overseas. American Jews were likewise divided among themselves, and this, together with passive hopelessness, may have tilted the balance of U.S. political leadership in favor of inaction against Hitler's genocidal program.

Meeting with President Roosevelt at the White House on December 8, 1942, a delegation led by the American Jewish Congress further informed him of the mass murder of two million Jews in accordance with Hitler's order. Matz's book quotes the post-meeting memorandum citing depositions to U.S. Government representatives abroad, official and confidential German communications, eyewitness accounts, and underground press reports. FDR assured them of his sympathy and did nothing.

Like FDR, the American Jewish Congress and associated Jewish groups averted their eyes from the present and reposed all their hopes in a future Jewish state. Bergson focused entirely on the

here-and-now plight of European Jewry, urging a practical rescue plan. Bergson asked pointedly *'How do you expect to have a Jewish state with no Jews?'*

With his trademark flair for the dramatic, Bergson established a Jewish government-in-exile with an Embassy in Washington. This was too much for the Zionists, who claimed to own the exclusive franchise for representing Jews everywhere. Its spokesman, Rabbii Wise, indignantly asked Bergson *'In whose name are you speaking?'* to which he retorted *'Did you expect me to hold elections in the death camps?'* Bergson viewed political institutions as subservient to urgent humanitarian needs. Like Japanese Ambassador Sugihara who issued thousands of visas to Jews seeking to escape certain death, Bergson was less interested in diplomatic niceties than in rescuing Jews.

Bergson, though diplomatically inept, contributed important thought-innovations that Jews and Israelis have yet to reckon with. He challenged the consensus view that nothing could be done about the annihilation of European Jewry until after the war was over. Much could have been done that was never even tried. The notion of integrating Jewish armed resistance fighters with the regular Allied armies might have seemed a bit ofchutzpah, but was the only practical rescue plan that any Jewish organization offered. Bergson's observation that American Jews were different from European Jews offended those who craved Jewish unity, but it was the key to his own notion of statehood, which required negotiating as an external national entity rather than as a subject of Britain or America. Bergson favored a State with a written Constitution (like the United States), a concept that offended those Zionists who sought a religious basis for Jewish statehood. Bergson, wary of the theocratic model of Iran or Saudi Arabia, sought instead a supra-religious entity with equal rights of citizenship for adherents of all religions. Had his visionary urgings been heeded, Israel today might be better able to defend itself against the next Holocaust. Or not: Because these recurring paroxysms of self-destruction are not about the Jews, but come from mass frenzy whipped up by government officials seeking total domination. This book by Eliyho Matz shows with krystalnacht-like clarity the perils of inaction.

– Peter Miller, 2022.9.11