

## Should Jews end their absorption with the Holocaust?

Reviewed by  
David Lee Preston

Near the end of her sensitive, well-meaning and often brave essay *A Season for Healing*, Anne Roiphe recounts a story told by Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, a story that serves as an allegory for the contemporary Jewish dilemma in confronting the Holocaust:

On the train from Warsaw to Brest (known in Yiddish as Brisk), some young businessmen invited a small, bearded man with a cap and a sacred book to join their card game and share their liquor. He declined, so they threw his cap out the window and pushed him from their compartment. When the train reached its destination, a large crowd surged forward to greet the man — he was the Brisker Rebbe, one of the great Talmudic scholars of Lithuania. The young businessmen chased after him, pleading ignorance and seeking forgiveness.

"I cannot forgive you," the rabbi said. "I am

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the Reb Chaim from Brisk — you did nothing to offend me. You must ask forgiveness of the little man in the car with you, the one who had no name."

Similarly, Jews today cannot forgive on behalf of the nameless Six Million; they also cannot help being angry for them. It is this anger that permeates Jewish discussion of the Holocaust, and that Roiphe believes must be vented and acknowledged before healing can begin.

As her title suggests, she believes that the season for healing the wounds of the Holocaust is at hand. Her concern is with enabling the anger — both Jewish and non-

Jewish — to be put behind, and for everyone to come to terms with the particularly Jewish nature of the catastrophe so that it can be regarded in universal terms and the whole world may learn its lessons. In so doing, she believes, the ultimate holocaust can yet be prevented.

She calls for caution and respect in dealing with educated blacks who are stirred to anti-Semitism by Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan, and she voices hope that somehow they will change. She suggests that Jews must take the first step in permitting the healing to proceed.

The problem with her argument, coming as it does barely four decades after the ovens stopped burning at Auschwitz-Birkenau, is that the healing depends on a measure of empathy between Jew and non-Jew. And in 1989, most of the Christian world doesn't seek forgiveness or even acknowledge responsibility for a climate that built the ovens and kept them stoked.

Two decades ago, the Protestant scholar A. Roy Eckardt wrote that "a major reason why the Nazis could go as far as they did was that Western culture had been steeped so thoroughly in Christian dogmatic and theological hostilities toward the Jewish people and in the contempt and hatred of Jews that had been long regnant in the Christian world: Roman, Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Protestant."

In a landmark 1975 book, *The Crucifixion of the Jews*, Methodist minister Franklin H. Littell of Philadelphia wrote of the Holocaust that Christians "must begin our agonizing self-assessment and reappraisal with the fact that in a season of betrayal and faithlessness the vast majority of the martyrs for the Lord

(See "HEALING" on 4-K)

*Inquirer staff writer David Lee Preston's articles led to the removal of several ethnic leaders from the Bush campaign because of Nazi, fascist or anti-Semitic backgrounds.*

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