

# Shiksa

## Biblical Roots of Racism

n [Yiddish, fem. of sheygets fr. Hebrew, blemish, abomination] 1. A non-Jewish girl.<sup>i</sup>

### The Silent Holocaust

Most of us would agree that a distinction should be maintained between Gentiles who fall in love with Jews and Gentiles who haul them off to concentration camps. But Rabbi Epharim Z. Buchwald has a special insight in this regard -- the net effect is indistinguishable, and it's the bottom line that counts.

In a letter, tape and book campaign decrying "The Silent Holocaust," Rabbi Buchwald's National Jewish Outreach Program has been reaching out to individuals who might be sympathetic. You can get on NJOP's mailing list by buying a copy of The Talmud, The Midrash Rabbah, the Codes of Maimonides, or Jewish Publication Society translations of The Bible. Then you will learn about "a study commissioned by Harvard University" which found that "by the American Tricentennial year of 2076, there could be as few as 10,000 Jews in America!"

That's down about 10 million because of "a life-and-death battle" with shiksas:

Concentration camps and gas chambers aren't the only ways to exterminate the Jewish people . . . intermarriage . . . can accomplish the same evil end. What you and I do in the next few years will make the difference between a thriving American Jewry and a tragedy truly beyond comprehension . . . Never before has the future of our people been so threatened. . . . Can we do anything to stop this 'Silent Holocaust?' The answer is yes . . . Please join us in this life-and-death battle today.<sup>ii</sup>

### Rebekah's Lament

Rabbi Edwin Friedman is a therapist who specializes in Jewish-Gentile marriages. His chapter in the classic psychotherapy manual *Ethnicity and Family Therapy* is entitled "The Myth of The Shiksa." According to Rabbi Friedman:<sup>iii</sup>

For 1000 years, Eastern European Jews and their descendants have used the term shiksa to refer to a non-Jewish woman who lures Jewish men away from religion and family. This attractive will-o'-

the-wisp, as folk imagination would have it, is seductive, immoral, ignorant, and insensitive to Jewish values. It is not just that she is unsuitable to the warmth of traditional Jewish family life - she will destroy it!

In fact, the myth of the shiksa goes back much further than Rabbi Friedman's reckoning. The first lament over shiksas was directed at Isaac (Abraham's Jewish son, as distinct from his non-Jewish son, Ishmael, who married many shiksas) by Rebekah, Isaacs' wife. She was worried about their son Jacob (as distinct from their disinherited son, Esau, who also married several shiksas):

Then Rebekah said to Isaac, "I am weary of my life because of the Hittite women. If Jacob marries one of the Hittite women such as these, one of the women of the land, what good will my life be to me?" (Genesis 26:46)

### **31,968 Shiksas**

Rebekah's concern was prescient. While en route to The Promised Land, shiksa trouble became both the cause and the consequence of the largest single influx of non-Jewish women on record (from Numbers 31:1-35):

They warred against Midian, as the LORD commanded Moses, and slew every male . . . And the people of Israel took captive the women of Midian and their little ones . . . Then they brought the captives and the booty and the spoil to Moses [3 to 4 day march] . . . And Moses was angry with the officers of the army, the commanders of thousands and the commanders of hundreds, who had come from service in the war. Moses said to them, "Have you let all the women live? . . . now kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known man by lying with him. But all the young girls who have not known man by lying with him, keep alive for yourselves . . . Now the booty remaining of the spoil that the men of war took was . . . thirty-two thousand persons in all, women who had not known man by lying with him.

Only 31,968 of these virgins were made available as shiksas because 32 of them were given "to Eleazar the priest" as an "offering for the Lord" -- that is, for human sacrifice (see Numbers 31, RSV). The King James translation of the Bible specifies that these women were to be a "heave offering" (see Numbers 31:29 & 41) -- which means that after dismemberment, various body parts were "heaved up," or thrown in the air, in celebration.<sup>iv</sup>

The ostensible reason for killing all non-virgin Midianite women was "the LORD's vengeance" for involvement with a shiksa. Her name was Cozbi, and her affair with the Israelite soldier Zimri would not have been so threatening if he had not had the chutzpah to bring her home (Numbers 25:6-8 . . . 14,15):

One of the people of Israel came and brought a Midianite woman to his family, in the sight of Moses and in the sight of the whole congregation of the people of Israel, while they were weeping at the door of the tent of meeting. When Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose and left the congregation, and took a spear in his hand and went after the man of Israel into the inner room, and pierced both of them, the man of Israel and the woman, through her body . . . The name of the slain man of Israel, who was slain with the Midianite woman, was Zimri . . . And the name of the Midianite woman who was slain was Cozbi the daughter of Zur, who was the head of the people of a fathers' house in Midian.

## Perks & Power

It would have been acceptable for Zimri to have sex with Cozbi if she had been a prostitute. Indeed, according to The Midrash Rabbah<sup>v</sup> (MR -- The Great Exposition, \_ 400 BCE to 1200 CE), Phinehas gained entry to Zimri's tent by telling surrounding family members that he merely wanted to take a turn after Zimri finished (MR: Numbers 25):

He [Phinehas] was afraid of his [Zimri's] tribe who surrounded him. When he came near them they asked him: "Why have you come?" He said to them: "I have also come to indulge my desires." They gave him leave and he entered. If he had not said this they would not have allowed him to go in.

But Phinehas and Moses knew that Cozbi was the daughter of a major political figure, that involvement with her could lead to a substantive relationship with a woman who was not chaste by virtue of not being an in-group member, and that, in turn, could threaten the foundation of the Israelites' cohesiveness. This concern was explicitly confabulated in The Midrash Rabbah, where we learn that Cozbi was sent to cement an alliance with the Israelites by becoming Moses' fourth Midianite wife:<sup>vi</sup>

The woman [Cozbi] said to him [Zimri]: "I shall give myself to none but Moses, for so my father Balak bade me, not to yield to any one but to Moses your master, because my father was a king."<sup>vii</sup> Said he to her: "Behold, I am as great as he is! [as great as Moses] I shall bring you out before their eyes!" He seized her by her plait [her hair] and brought her to Moses. He said to him [to Moses]: "O son of Amram! Is this woman permitted or forbidden?" He answered him: "She is forbidden to you." Said Zimri to him: "Yet the woman whom you married was a Midianitess!" Thereupon Moses felt powerless and the law slipped from his mind. All Israel wailed aloud; for it says, They were weeping (Numbers 25:6). What were they weeping for? Because they became powerless at that moment. (MR: Numbers 23)

## Coitus Interruptus

In order to bring back the power, Phinehas put on quite a show. He managed to give Cozbi the shaft, after a fashion . . . and the Lord God Almighty worked twelve miracles through an emissary (MR: Numbers20:25):

He pierced them both, as one lay on top of the other, through the unclean place of both of them . . . as he had been jealous in the cause of the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, He [God] wrought twelve miracles for him [Zimri].

The first miracle was that, though in the ordinary course they would have separated from each other [Zimri and Cozbi], an angel made them cleave to each other. The second miracle was that the angel shut their mouths so that they should not cry out. The third was that he directed the spear straight towards her belly so that his genitals might be seen inside the belly. This was done so that cavillers might not say that he [Phinehas] also had gone in to satisfy his desire [as he told Zimri's family].

The fourth was that the angel lengthened the iron so that it might pierce them both. The fifth was that He put strength in to his arm in order that he might lift them both up. The sixth was that He put strength into the helve [spear shaft] to sustain them both. The seventh was that the victims did not slide down from the weapon, but remained stationary. The eighth was that the angel turned them over at the top of the spear into proper position [man on top] in order to display their disgraceful conduct to all.

The ninth was that they did not drop any blood; this was in order that Phinehas might not be defiled. The tenth was that the Holy One, blessed be He, preserved their spirit, so that they might not die and Phinehas be defiled [as the pending highest priest, Phinehas could not be defiled by handling the dead, so God kept the victims alive while on the spear]. The eleventh was that the angel raised the lintel [the entrance of the tent] so that both of them might pass out, carried aloft between his shoulders, before the eyes of all.

The twelfth was that when Phinehas came out the members of the man's tribe [Zimri's tribe, the Simeonites] stood ready to attack him, but an angel descended and commenced to strike them. When Phinehas saw that he sought to destroy them, he dashed the victims on the ground and, offering up a prayer, caused the angel to depart.<sup>viii</sup>

## Heart & Soul

Clearly, shiksa-power was greatly feared. Moses' instruction regarding captured Midianite women, "Keep alive for yourselves" had to be curbed. So laws were established to curtail the threat posed by Israelite soldiers' propensity to bring women home (Deuteronomy 21:10-14):

When you go forth to war against your enemies, and the LORD your God gives them into your hands, and you take them captive, and see among the captives a beautiful woman, and you have desire for her and would take her for yourself as wife, then you shall bring her home to your house, and she shall shave her head and pare her nails. And she shall put off her captive's garb, and shall remain in your house and bewail her father and her mother a full month; after that you may go in to her, and be her husband, and she shall be your wife. Then, if you have no delight in her, you shall let her go where she will.

Writing in the late 11th Century, Maimonides summarized the elaborations and amendments to the law regarding captive women that are scattered throughout The Talmud:

If after the first coition, while she is still a heathen, she expresses her willingness to accept Judaism, arrangements are forthwith made for her ablution for the purpose of conversion. If she is unwilling to accept the Jewish religion, she remains in his house thirty days, as it is said: She shall bewail her father and her mother a full month (Deuteronomy 21:13). She weeps also for her religion and he may not stop her . . . He puts up with her, in the hope that she might accept Judaism. If she does, and he desires to marry her, she is converted and takes a ritual bath . . . If after the marriage [after resuming sexual intercourse] he no longer cares for her, he lets her go where she pleases.

If she refuses to be converted, she is put up with for twelve months . . . A captive woman who refuses, after the lapse of twelve months, to renounce idolatry, is put to death.<sup>ix</sup>

## Filthy Lust

Anthropologists categorize societies according to their rules for marrying in (endogamy) or marrying out (exogamy). Endogamy is a strong force in many traditional cultures, and even within subdivisions of larger cultures. Accordingly, Rabbi Friedman reports that identical neuroses attach to marriages between Orthodox, Conservative and Reform Jews, none of which are more pathological than those which can ensue between Catholic, Protestant, Greek Orthodox and Russian Orthodox Christians, or between Sunni and Shiite Muslims. Indeed, the closer groups are in geography, economy, and the time of their initial separation, the fiercer the rules and the nastier the innuendos.

Having grown up among Protestant Christians, I remember hearing lascivious rumors about Catholic and Jewish girls -- primarily that they were 'easy'. Years of dogged adolescent research proved the rumors to be false, much to my chagrin, but they are still propagated. The message behind such tales is that other groups' women are not chaste, not clean, and certainly not fit for marriage. The Rabbis of The Talmud protected their flocks by spreading such rumors about non-Jewish women, though one wonders why they felt a need to go so far:<sup>x</sup>

One should not entrust cattle to a heathen shepherd . . . neither should we buy male cattle from [heathen] women, for fear of their having used them for immoral practice! . . . Why then should we not leave female animals alone with female heathens? Because heathens frequent their neighbours' wives, and should one by chance not find her in, and find the cattle there, he might use it immorally. You may also say that even if he should find her in he might use the animal, as a Master has said: Heathens prefer the cattle of Israelites to their own wives. When the serpent came unto Eve he infused filthy lust into her . . . when Israel stood at Sinai that lust was eliminated, but the lust of idolaters, who did not stand at Sinai, did not cease.

## **Herbie's Mother's Lament**

Myths can defy reality for as long as they serve the interests of their believers, to wit the following complaint, unnervingly similar to Rebekah's, made some 4,000 years later, in a letter submitted by one of Rabbi Friedman's clients:<sup>3</sup>

Dear Herbie,

Well, if you want to commit suicide, I guess there is nothing I can do. But I can't tell you how much this shiksa business is hurting your father and me. I don't know if you realize that this will hurt us financially. We will probably have to leave town and I will certainly have to give up my job teaching Hebrew .

..

Your father is sick over this - you know he hasn't been well. All I can say is that if he dies, I will hold you responsible.

Mary may say that she loves you, but have you told her that we Jews think of Jesus as an illegitimate son?

Love,  
Mother

Is Herbie's mother right? Wrong? Somewhere in between? Compared to Rebekah, she is only somewhat more loquacious. But compared to Rabbi Buchwald of the National Jewish Outreach Program, she has the patience of Job and the wisdom of Solomon (who, according to First Kings 11:1-3, married several hundred shiksas).

How so? Herbie's mother did not equate Mary the shiksa with Adolf the fuhrer.

## Rachel's Shaygetz

For NJOP, the only thing worse than rejection is the ultimate acceptance. To be loved is as bad as being hated, or worse. Indeed, compared to hatred that strengthens in-group solidarity, love that leads to exogamous marriage is a disaster. That is why NJOP has received financial support or letters of endorsement from Rabbi Dovid Cohen, Rabbi Elya Svei, Rabbi Yaakov Weinberg, the Novominsker Rebbe, the Squarer Rebbe, and Rabbi Zelig Epstein, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the UJA/Federation, AVICHAH, the Steinhardt Foundation, the Scheuer Foundation, the Gruss Fund, the Joseph Alexander Foundation, the Wolfson Family Foundation, the New Kalman Sunshine Fund, Inc., the Nelkin Family Foundation, the B.L. Manger Foundation, Inc. and the Fredman Family Fund.

Of course, those who wish to help the NJOP on a more modest scale can become an Associate, Supporting, Contributing or Sustaining Member for only \$25, \$50, \$75 or \$100. Even before checking off one's membership level and corresponding bonus entitlements, Rabbi Buchwald will share a letter that he received. It rounds out the exogamy problem by introducing the male counterpart of a shiksa, a shaygetz.<sup>xi</sup>

Across the letter's top, in hand-written script, Rabbi Buchwald explains that the letter tells "the story of the National Jewish Outreach Program better than I can myself."

Dear Rabbi,

I have just received some of the worst news of my life.

I have two grown daughters, Miriam and Rachel. My husband and I sent them to Hebrew school and synagogue, and encouraged them to live Jewish lives.

But with Rachel, we have failed. Four years ago, she met a young man at work. They fell in love. He is not Jewish and he did not convert. They married anyway. Now Rachel has called to say she is expecting . . .

My heart is breaking . . . as a concentration camp survivor, I find this especially hard to accept . . .

Sincerely,  
[Name Withheld]

## Oblivion

In what must rank among the most demagogic analogies in the history of similitude, Rabbi Buchwald, Name Withheld and Herbie's mother demean all of us. They liken love to hate, romantic passion to cruel passion, marriage to murder, and giving birth to causing inconsolable despair. If you purchase NJO's introductory tape (\$39), you will hear, more clearly, where these people are coming from:<sup>2</sup>

-- You see, we're engaged in a battle, what we are fighting today is a battle, it's a battle, it's a nuclear battle . . . One million American Jewish children are being raised as non-Jews . . . it's a silent holocaust ladies and gentlemen.

Just because we don't see the goose-stepping Nazi soldiers doesn't mean the end is not exactly the same. They are lost into oblivion . . . little Jewish children who never had a chance to live in the wealthiest, most sophisticated Jewish community in all of Jewish history . . . It's a silent holocaust!

Or you can read the perpetual plea of Morris Cohen from Brooklyn, as transcribed by Rabbi Buchwald from telephone calls to his NJO office:<sup>xii</sup>

Rabbi! How can we sit here when there is a Holocaust taking place all about us?! One million Jewish children are going up in flames!! We're not doing enough!! How much money do we need? One billion, two billion, three billion dollars, let's go out and raise it and save them!!

## **Evil**

Perhaps assimilation is even worse than "going up in flames." After all, those who assimilate draw the non-assimilated like a magnet. In a new twist on the old rallying cry "better dead than red," a final solution was clear to Mr. Kostner:

Hackensack, N.J., March 24, 1997 (Reuter) - A New Jersey jury Monday rejected the death penalty for a man who pleaded guilty to killing his two children because he feared his ex-wife would not raise them as Jews.<sup>xiii</sup>

If this were simply wrong, it would not have gone as far as it has. Evil is a pernicious kind of wrong, a sort of wrong that can be turned like a hologram until a very different, fleeting, almost subliminal picture appears. Evil is a kind of wrong that insinuates itself between layers of right.

In-groups sandwich an outline for animosity, an organizing principle for prejudice, between layers of social support. Whether Christian or Muslim or Jewish, every extremist is supported by a small number of less extreme admirers and each of those supporters is buoyed, in turn, by a larger group of sympathizers. These connections are continuous right down to the bottom of the pyramid, where vaguely sympathetic in-group members are offended by the very extremists who would have no base, and no basis, without them. It is that vague sympathy which needs to be examined.

Recognizing that "goose-stepping Nazi soldiers" and exomy do not bring "exactly the same end" is too easy. The challenging continuum is the one that differentiates lovers whose marriage marks a small separation from lovers whose marriage marks a larger departure. In one third of the 486 societies classified by anthropologists for marriage preference, the first degree of separation is the family, with marriage between mates who are not first cousins bringing some level of disappointment. Then we have hand wringing over lovers who join from different local communities, then different sects within tribes, then different tribes, different nations, different religions . . . all the way up to different races. Ultimately, the challenge of where to draw the line resolves into the question of whether to draw a line, and why.



Line drawers promote two forms of evil -- hypocrisy and racism. Hypocrisy because although they renounce coercion, if members of a group are not free to leave, then members who stay can not be doing so of their own free will. And racism because despite explicit protestations to the contrary, one cannot disapprove of a marriage without disapproving of a person because he or she was born in a different group.

A wolf, no matter how big and bad, is not evil until it is dressed in sheep's clothing.

Ask any shiksa.

## Notes & References

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<sup>i</sup>Webster's Collegiate Dictionary. See also: Bermant, C. 1991. Some Carefully and Carelessly Chosen Words. Jewish Chronicle, May 17.

<sup>ii</sup>NJOP flyer, copy available on request. For a complimentary issue of *Outreach*, NJOP's Newsletter, call 212-986-7450, visit [www.njop.org](http://www.njop.org), or write to NJOP, 485 Fifth Avenue, Suite 70, NY, NY 10017.

<sup>iii</sup>E. Friedman, pp 499 & 501 in McGoldrick, et al., *Ethnicity and Family Therapy*

<sup>iv</sup>Human sacrifice of Canaanites and other non-Jews was common (for a poignant example see 1st Samuel 15:31-32), but sacrifice of Israelites by Israelites in order to appease or cajole their god was rare subsequent to recision of the commandment to sacrifice all first born children (cf. Exodus 13:2; 22:29-30 and Leviticus 27:28-29 with Exodus 13:13 and 34:20) -- a commandment for which the god of the Israelites eventually apologized (Ezekiel 20:26). Nevertheless, ritual sacrifice of a virgin Israelite woman was still well received and well rewarded (e.g., Judges 11:12 through 12:8).

<sup>v</sup>The Midrash Rabbah. Freedman, H and Simon, M. (eds). 1983. New York: Soncino Press.

<sup>vi</sup> According to The Bible, before marrying a Cushite, Moses spent his early adulthood among the monotheistic Midianites, where he gained his religious convictions and married three women -- Zipporah, a daughter of the priest Jethro, an unnamed daughter of Ruel, and an unnamed daughter of Hobab, Ruel's son (see Exodus 2:18-22, 3:1, 4:18-20, 18:2-5, Numbers 10:29, 12:1, Judges 1:16 and 4:11).

<sup>vii</sup>In the Bible, Balak is a Moabite and Cozbi is a Midianite, but as always, keeping the story straight was less important than making the story's point.

<sup>viii</sup>An even more eye-opening treatment of the Cozbi & Zimri story is supplied by Richard Friedman in his book *Who Wrote the Bible?* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987). Using his own translation of Numbers 25:6-8, Friedman infers that Zimri brought Cozbi into the inner sanctum of the Tent of Meeting, into the Israelites' Tabernacle (the movable holy of holies), to have sex:

And here was a man from the children of Israel, and he brought a Midianitess close to his brothers in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel. And they were weeping at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. And Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw, and he rose from the midst of the congregation, and he took a spear in his hand. And he came after the Israelite man to the Tent-chamber, and he thrust through the two of them, the Israelite man and the woman, to her stomach.

which provides a basis for the following apologia:

An Israelite man and a Midianite woman have gone into the Tent of Meeting "in the sight of Moses," but it is not Moses who acts,

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but Phinehas. He follows the man and woman inside the Tent. They are engaged in an activity whose arrangement makes it possible to thrust a spear through both the man and the woman, ending in the woman's abdomen. The execution without a trial is possible because death is the unquestionable fate of anyone entering the Tabernacle who is not a priest. Phinehas' reward is an eternal covenant of priesthood.

But non-ad hoc translations of the Bible (including all Jewish Publication Society translations, The King James Version, The Revised Berkeley Version, and the Revised Standard Version) have Zimri taking Cozbi to "his family," "his brethren," "his relatives" or "his companions," as distinct from into the Tent of Meeting, and in these translations Phinehas leaves the Tent of Meeting to go after them. The most recent JPS translation, Tanakh, reads as follows (Numbers 25:6-8):

Just then one of the Israelites came and brought a Midianite woman over to his companions, in the sight of Moses and of the whole Israelite community who were weeping at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. When Phinehas, son of Eleazar son of Aaron the priest, saw this, he left the assembly and, taking a spear in his hand, he followed the Israelite into the chamber and stabbed both of them, the Israelite and the woman, through the belly.

It was also clear to both the Sages of the Talmud and the Midrash Rabbah, who could presumably read ancient Hebrew at least as well as Friedman, that these verses meant that Moses was at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting looking out while Zimri took Cozbi to the chamber of his own tent among the tents of his family.

<sup>ix</sup>Maimonides, M. 1195 (circa). *The Book of Judges: The Code of Maimonides* (Hershman, A.M. trans) New Haven: Yale University Press (1949). Treatise 5, chapter 8:2-9, pp 229-230.

<sup>x</sup>Babylonian Talmud, The. Epstein, I. (ed.). 1978 Quincentenary Edition. London: Soncino Press. Abodah Zarah, 22b.

<sup>xi</sup>The shaygetz problem did not exist before Jewish women gained a secular legal right to marry without their father's permission and began to do so in appreciable numbers, so this is a more recent phenomenon. When the Hebrew word 'shaygetz' was feminized into the Yiddish word 'shiksa', it still meant "an abomination" in Hebrew without a secondary meaning designating a non-Jewish male in particular. Accordingly, even though 'shaygetz' is a much older word, it did not take on its now familiar meaning of a male shiksa until after the word 'shiksa' had gained common parlance as a non-Jewish female abomination.

<sup>xii</sup> Outreach, the Newsletter of the National Jewish Outreach Program. 10:2, May 1997 (Iyar 5757), p 1.

<sup>xiii</sup> See also, *The New York Times*, May 17, 1997, p 24.