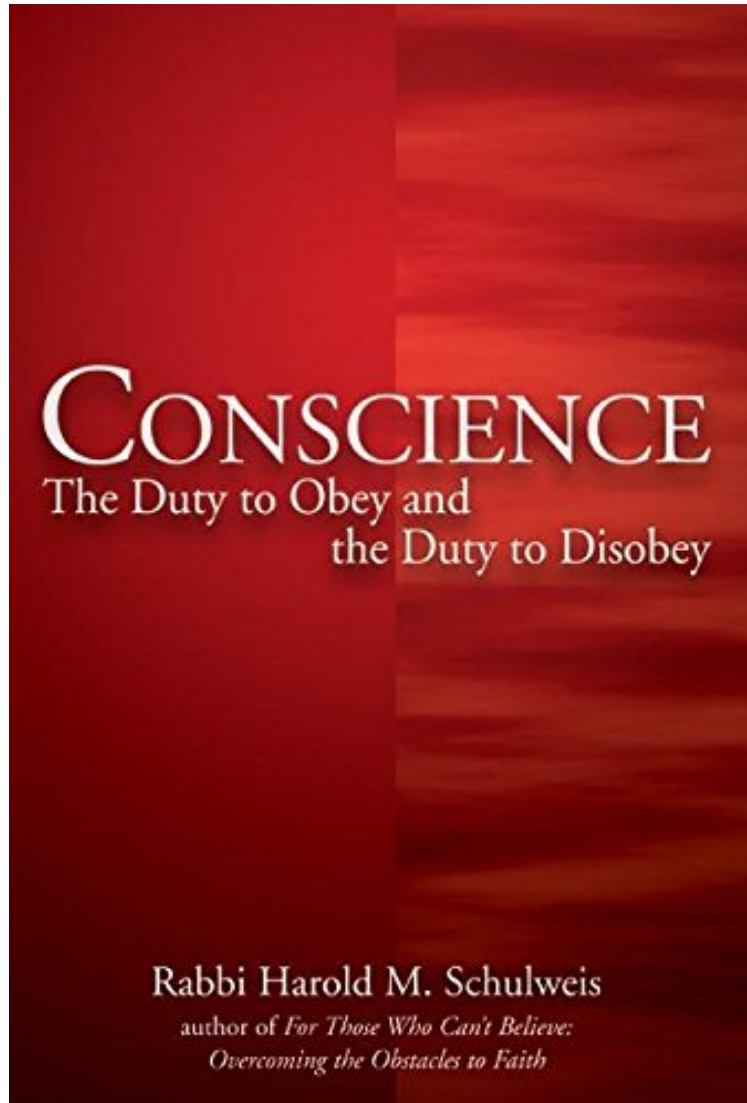


(Mobile ebook) Conscience: The Duty to Obey and the Duty to Disobey

Conscience: The Duty to Obey and the Duty to Disobey

Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis

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Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis : Conscience: The Duty to Obey and the Duty to Disobey before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Conscience: The Duty to Obey and the Duty to Disobey:

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. A case for conscience as the source of common ground By Maxwell Grant Drawing on Scripture, Talmud, history and literature, Rabbi Harold Schulweis has written a short book that celebrates the role of conscience as the essence of religion -- both in Judaism, specifically and religion, generally. Highly readable with short chapters and "pull quotes" (those boxes with a quotation from the text set in the

margin of a page), the book seems designed for faith-based study groups in synagogues. Schulweis writes very clearly and uses quotations thoughtfully -- even a group with people of different ages and from very different walks of life would be able to read it together easily. Schulweis argues emphatically against a literal reading of Scripture. Specifically, he shows how Judaism has a rich tradition of reading the Bible that is willing to challenge even the words on the page in the name of the values that God stands for. Even explicit laws can be retired in the name of deeper principles. The challenge for faithful people, he argues, is to seek to live under the direction of those deeper principles, and to build a world that is based upon them. It is a good book, but not a great one. Simply, it is too short, and it leaves the reader wanting more...actually, a little too much more. Nevertheless, fans of Schulweis' work, especially the magnificent "For Those Who Can't Believe," will be glad to have another useful, thought provoking volume to add to their libraries. 3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. It Depends What You Want By MARK LIEBERMAN This is a serious discussion on Jewish attitudes toward obeying and disobeying Torah commandments. It covers the bases very thoroughly and without any particular bias. It's eclectic and well documented. Best of all, it's clear and concise. However, it doesn't offer any fresh point of view or much in the way of modern viewpoints. If you're looking for a survey of attitudes, this does the job. If you are looking for guidelines for spiritual actions, this is the wrong book. 3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Conscience: How Jewish Law, traditional Jewish sources and conscience interact By Michael Brochstein If you just wish to know simple straightforward halakha (Jewish law) then don't bother with this book. If you wish to see ways that conscience can play a role then read this book. It draws from traditional Jewish sources as well as others. It is a bit too short and I wished the early sections were more fleshed out. Still, definitely worth reading if this subject interests you.

A Profound and Stirring Call to Action in Our Troubled World from One of America's Great Religious Leaders "Conscience may be understood as the hidden inner compass that guides our lives and must be searched for and recovered repeatedly. At no time more than our own is this need to retrieve the shards of broken conscience more urgent." from the Introduction This clarion call to rethink our moral and political behavior examines the idea of conscience and the role conscience plays in our relationships to government, law, ethics, religion, human nature and God and to each other. From Abraham to Abu Ghraib, from the dissenting prophets to Darfur, Rabbi Harold Schulweis probes history, the Bible and the works of contemporary thinkers for ideas about both critical disobedience and uncritical obedience. He illuminates the potential for evil and the potential for good that rests within us as individuals and as a society. By questioning religion's capacity and will to break from mindless conformity, Rabbi Schulweis challenges us to counter our current suppressive culture of obedience with the culture of moral compassion, and to fulfill religion's obligation to make room for and carry out courageous moral dissent.

From Publishers Weekly In this articulate and cogent treatise, Schulweis, longtime congregational rabbi and founding chairman of the Jewish Foundation for the Righteous, argues that acts of disobedience can be appropriate and moral when law violates conscience. Referencing the Midrash, Bible and Talmud, he argues that both the popular understanding of God as a being who cannot be contradicted and of Judaism as a religion that requires uncompromising obedience to authority is mistaken. Throughout Jewish history, he explains, rabbis have created ingenious legal maneuvers to eliminate laws they found unconscionable, such as making capital punishment so difficult to implement that it became obsolete. Furthermore, God's engagement with humanity, most famously his interaction with Abraham before he destroys Sodom, indicates a willingness for confrontations promoting morality and righteousness. Schulweis's broad knowledge is evident as he intersperses biblical anecdotes with philosophical theories, as is his ability to make his thesis relevant by including material on the Holocaust and references to Abu Ghraib. Whether religious or not, readers concerned with the culture of mindless complicity will find this volume revealing and enlightening. (Nov.) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From Booklist The book analyzes the idea of conscience and the role it plays in our relationships to law, ethics, religion, human nature, and God as well as to each other. Schulweis delves into history, the Bible, and the works of many contemporary scholars, looking for great ideas about critical disobedience and what he labels uncritical obedience. His goal is to interpret and understand the potential for evil and the potential for good in us and in our society. Schulweis has given us a readable treatment of some difficult issues. --George Cohen "Remarkable. Eloquently makes the case that faith can never be passive; it must assault our conscience and push us to do right." Rabbi Eric H. Yoffie, president, Union for Reform Judaism "Clearly reveals a new depth of understanding of the gift of partnership in creation afforded by God to His beloved children through the exercise of moral consciousness and 'fear of God.'" Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, Armenian Church Western Diocese Learned and thoughtful demonstrates that conscience constitutes the vital core of Judaism, challenging us in our complacency and inspiring us to transform morality into deeds. Professor Susannah Heschel, author, Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus Calls on us to recognize that sometimes the promptings of our conscience are more authentically the voice of God than the words of our tradition. Rabbi Harold Kushner, author, When Bad Things Happen to Good People It doesn't take a genius to figure out when one receives a letter from a charity informing one that whether they had two million or

ninety million invested with Madoff that something is wrong with our world. One of the wisest men I have met, Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis has written *Conscience: The Duty to Obey and the Duty to Disobey* (Jewish Lights \$19.99). It is pertinent today as it is in discussing the Old Testament. Oddly enough, Hebrew had no word for "conscience", modern Hebrew has the word *matzpun* which is derived from the Hebrew *tzafun* which connotes hiddenness. The major question Schulweis addresses is What is the appropriate response to divine laws that run against the grain of conscience? He points out Abraham's dialogue with God over Gods intention to kill all of Sodom. God is not the implacable authoritarian commander whose plans cannot be questioned. Rabbi Schulweis points to Moses convinces God that the second commandment to visit the sins of the father on the next generation was wrong. As we talked, I did ask Rabbi Schulweis, Does God have a conscience? In the light of torture at Abu Ghraib in our days, one can use the question, Must an immoral law, divinely given, be observed? Gods Law or Halacha must have conscience, and yet changing times can have their affect. By what sort of logic are divine laws overturned? In the case of a wife suspected of adultery, she was to drink the waters of bitterness and hear the priest give a horrible curse. If she was guilty, her body would swell and her thighs would fall away. To change a bad law requires compassionate conscience and moral courage. Conscience allows us to tell truth to power, which is the irony that Eli Weisels Foundation should have lost so much money in the Madoff debacle. Where were those who questioned the mans investing policies who did not speak up? Does greed overcome conscience? He quotes Thomas Malthus and Herbert Spencer that attend the voice of conscience and our economy will be drained and our energy exhausted. Rabbi Schulweis told me about his foundation, the Jewish Foundation for the Righteous, dedicated to the study and recognition of the phenomenon of Christian rescuers and to raise funds so that in their waning years they have some security, recognition and material help. So far they have given help to over 2,000. He includes in the book the remarkable help given to the Jews in the Holocaust by diplomats who gave over and above documents to rescue them from the Naziis. Among those mentioned are Aristides de Sousa Mendes of Portugal and Sempo Sugihara of Japan. Rabbi Schulweis ends the book with the thought that we are frozen in the overwhelming bias toward the duty to obey without question. A fact that has led us to war in Iraq and blind belief in an economic fantasy led by a duplicitous Pied Piper. (CONNIE MARTINSON Beverly Hills Courier 2009-01-02) This remarkable study constitutes a profound and stirring call to action in our troubled world from one of America's great religious leaders. Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis, one of the most respected spiritual leaders and teachers of his generation, has been a rabbi at Valley Beth Shalom in Encino, California, for close to forty years. He is the founding chairman of the Jewish Foundation for the Righteous, an organization that identifies and offers grants to those non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jews threatened by the agents of Nazi savagery. He is also the founder of Jewish World Watch, which aims to raise moral consciousness within the Jewish community. Synagogues and other religious institutions are now supporting this effort across the country. He thus has sterling credentials to present a study on "Conscience" in the Jewish and general traditions. In his Introduction, Rabbi Schulweis writes that conscience may be understood as the hidden inner compass that guides our lives and must be searched for and recovered repeatedly. At no time more than our own is this need to retrieve the shards of broken conscience more urgent. His clarion call to rethink our moral and political behavior examines the idea of conscience and the role conscience plays in our relationships to government, law, ethics, religion, human nature and God and to each other. From Abraham to Abu Ghraib, from the dissenting prophets to Darfur, Rabbi Harold Schulweis probes history, the Bible and the works of contemporary thinkers for ideas about both critical disobedience and uncritical obedience. He illuminates the potential for evil and the potential for good that rests within us as individuals and as a society. By questioning religions capacity and will to break from mindless conformity, Rabbi Schulweis challenges us to counter our current suppressive culture of obedience with the culture of moral compassion, and to fulfill religions obligation to make room for and carry out courageous moral dissent. The author draws from a wide range of biblical, Talmudic, midrashic, as well as secular sources to make his point. While revering tradition, he holds that there are times when the wisdom of our conscience is more authentically the voice of God than the words of our tradition. A bold affirmation of Gods gift to humans to think through issues and follow our own heart, at the same time as we honor our past. Rabbi Eric H. Yoffie, president, Union for Reform Judaism, expresses his reaction to the book by calling it, correctly in my view, remarkable, and writing the Schulweis eloquently makes the case that faith can never be passive; it must assault our conscience and push us to do right. Rabbi Schulweis leadership in the Jewish world, in word and action, has made him one of American Jewrys great luminaries. We are all indebted to him for producing this ground-breaking statement on a major ethical and theological issue. (Dov Peretz Elkins Jewish Media 2008-11-02) A new take on the oldest Jewish book a woman's perspective is the Jewish Book Council's pick of the year. "The Torah: A Women's Commentary" (URJ Press), edited by Tamara Eskenazi and Rabbi Andrea Weiss, was announced this week as winner of the Everett Family Foundation's Jewish Book of the Year Award. "The Torah," which emphasizes Jewish women in the Bible and offers a women's perspective, is the first such collection of scholarship and commentary on Jewish scriptures written by women in several countries and in Jewish denominations. "No one questions why women should read a Torah commentary written by men," Rabbi Weiss wrote in The Jerusalem Post last year. For the longest time, that is all we had. The new commentary does not seek to supplant existing Torah commentaries, but to supplement them, adding an array of new voices to our collective conversation about the Torah. Benny Morris's 1948: A History

of the First Arab-Israeli War (Yale University Press) won the Gerrard and Ella Berman Memorial Award in the history category, and the two other books about Jewish women and the Torah *A Jewish Woman's Prayer Book* (Spiegel Grau), edited by Aliza Lavie, and *Esther Takacs Genesis The Book with Seventy Faces: A Guide for the Family* also won JBC awards. Other winners included *The Holocaust by Bullets: A Priest's Journey to Uncover the Truth Behind the Murder of 1.5 Million Jews* (Palgrave Macmillan) by Father Patrick Desbois and *Conscience: The Duty to Obey and the Duty to Disobey* (Jewish Lights Publishing) by Rabbi Harold Schulweis. The authors of those books and 14 others will be honored March 5 at the Center for Jewish History. (Steve Lipman *The Jewish Week* 2009-01-16) In this articulate and cogent treatise, Schulweis, longtime congregational rabbi and founding chairman of the Jewish Foundation for the Righteous, argues that acts of disobedience can be appropriate and moral when law violates conscience. Referencing the Midrash, Bible and Talmud, he argues that both the popular understanding of God as a being who cannot be contradicted and of Judaism as a religion that requires uncompromising obedience to authority is mistaken. Throughout Jewish history, he explains, rabbis have created ingenious legal maneuvers to eliminate laws they found unconscionable, such as making capital punishment so difficult to implement that it became obsolete. Furthermore, God's engagement with humanity, most famously his interaction with Abraham before he destroys Sodom, indicates a willingness for confrontations promoting morality and righteousness. Schulweis's broad knowledge is evident as he intersperses biblical anecdotes with philosophical theories, as is his ability to make his thesis relevant by including material on the Holocaust and references to Abu Ghraib. Whether religious or not, readers concerned with the culture of mindless complicity will find this volume revealing and enlightening. (Nov.) (PW Religion BookLine 2008-08-27) We told you so and early, too! We just got word that on March 9, the beloved writer and sage Rabbi Harold Schulweis will be honored at the Jewish National Book Awards as the prize winner in the category "Contemporary Jewish Life and Practice." Bravo to the rabbi, who is in his 80s and gave the world this very important little volume at precisely the moment when we all need to hear this tough piece of spiritual wisdom. If you missed it, go back and read our *Conversation With Rabbi Schulweis on Conscience*. Or, visit the Jewish National Book Awards site to look over the other winners for the publishing year of 2008. There's a free PDF file you can download to read about all the winning Jewish books and finalists as well. Or, visit the Web site of Jewish Lights publishing, where Jewish Lights founder Stuart Matlins was an important creative force in getting this particular volume on *Conscience* to readers just when we all need it most. (Read the Spirit 2009-01-16) There are few Progressive rabbis writing today anywhere in the world who can equal Harold Schulweis for integrity, honesty, clear-sightedness and common sense. In *Conscience*, Schulweis has carefully crafted a wonderful book on conscience and conformity. *Conscience* is divided into eight sections: *Conscience Confronts God*, *Human Conscience and Divine Legislation*, *Conscience and Covenant: Vertical and Horizontal*, *Against Conscience*, *Witness to Goodness*, *The Conscience of an Anti-Semite*, *Cultivating Conscience* and *The Bridge Across the Rivers of "Either- Or"*. Each section is subdivided and through the sub-sections Schulweis develops his theme with specific examples. Starting from exploring the key biblical relationships with God of Abraham and Moses, and the rabbinic approach to halakhah, Schulweis considers the nature of the covenant between God and Israel, whether it is a horizontal one, requiring give and take on both sides, or whether it is a vertical one where God dictates and Israel does what it is told! Chapters 5 and 6 are in many ways the most fascinating, notably the latter with its case studies of convinced anti-Semites who nevertheless risked everything in Nazi-occupied Europe to save Jews. In chapter 7, Schulweis considers some of the recent stains on America's reputation, such as the torture and inhuman treatment by American troops of prisoners at Abu Ghraib, but disappointingly ignores the even viler excesses of the Bush regime such as the suspension of the Geneva Conventions for detainees at Guantanamo Bay, and the outsourcing of torture. What is also missing from this otherwise superb book is any mention of the tension between the dictates of one's Jewish conscience and a desire to support the State of Israel and the actions of Israeli governments and the Israeli military. I read *Conscience* against the background of the assault on Gaza and this seemed a huge lacuna. (Rabbi Dr Charles Middleburgh Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues 2009-01-01)