

HIDING AND SEEKING: Faith and Tolerance after the Holocaust

Hiding and Seeking tells the story of a father who tries to alert his adult Orthodox Jewish sons to the dangers posed by defenders of the faith who preach intolerance of the "other", by those who feel compelled to create impenetrable barriers between "us" and "them."

To broaden their narrow and insular views he takes them on a highly charged emotional journey to Poland. To his sons, like many offspring of Polish Holocaust survivors, this is a country whose people are incurably anti-Semitic and beyond redemption. It is precisely here that he introduces his sons to Poles who personify the highest levels of exemplary behavior.

The highlight of their journey comes when they manage to track down the Polish farm family who risked their lives to hide the sons' grandfather for more than two years during the Holocaust. This encounter and its tumultuous aftermath lead the sons to at least consider their father's viewpoint more seriously.

Hiding and Seeking explores the Holocaust's effect on faith in God as well as its impact on faith in our fellow human beings. It embeds these issues in a deeply personal inter-generational saga of survivors, their children, and their children's children. Filmed in Jerusalem, Brooklyn and Poland, the film focuses on the filmmaker's attempt to heal the wounds of the past by stopping the transmission of hatred from generation to generation.

History and Background of the Project

For over twenty-five years Menachem Daum has been interviewing holocaust survivors like his parents, in an attempt to understand their crisis of faith. The first result of this enduring obsession was *A Life Apart: Hasidism in America*. Our second effort, *Hiding and Seeking: Faith and Tolerance After the Holocaust*, is a deeply felt personal film, which focuses on Menachem Daum and his sons, and explores the ways in which faith in God has perhaps unintentionally led to intolerance for others. It is the second of an intended trilogy which explores Jewish responses to the Holocaust. The third film will focus on the State of Israel.

In one sense *Hiding and Seeking* has been in production for 35 years. That is when Menachem Daum borrowed a super 8 camera from a friend to film his first born son along with his wife, mother and father. Other footage was shot after he got his first video camera in the seventies. But the bulk of the film was shot in New York and in Poland and Israel over the past 24 months.

When Oren Rudavsky and Menachem Daum first embarked on *Hiding and Seeking*, it was an attempt to tell the story of Holocaust survivors and their search for faith in God after the terrible calamity that befell them. That resulted in a segment for PBS' *Religion and Ethics Newsweekly*.

But in conversations between Menachem and Oren, it became clear that Menachem's personal struggle to change the direction his community was taking, was the real subject of the film. In recent years, Menachem has struggled to come to terms with the increasing insularity of the Orthodox Jewish world he was born into. It has not been an entirely happy or successful struggle. Countless attempts to reach out to community leaders and to discuss these issues with them have failed. Letters to the editor of Orthodox newspapers have been unanswered and unprinted. Even Menachem's own sons seem to have moved to a fringe of the right in Israel that Menachem finds frightening.

His feelings were crystallized when his wife Rifke returned from a Rabbi's lecture one night, where the Rabbi in unvarnished language called for distance and "hatred" of the non-jewish world. Menachem was no longer able to sit still. But after his attempts to make changes in his community fell on deaf ears, and after September 11th made clear to him the real dangers of religious intolerance, Menachem decided that he must at least try to influence his sons.

So as the film recounts, Menachem traveled to Israel to tell his two sons Tzvi Dovid and Akiva, just exactly what his fears were. He played them the tape of the Rabbi's speech and then he decided to take them to Poland, where years before he had had a revelation.

The trip they took would change their lives in big and small ways and will deeply affect anyone who watches the film.

A background note from Menachem Daum – Film Subject and Producer/Director

I was born in a Displaced Persons Camp in Germany and our family came to America in May of 1951. Upon arrival we were “adopted” by a very kind American-Jewish family, the Dubbs. The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society had recruited them as volunteers to help us “refugees” get settled in America. They took us to Schenectady, New York where they got us a nice apartment and arranged a good job for my father. He was making \$50 a week of which he was able to save \$10. Mrs. Dubb took me to the Riverside Public School and registered me in the first grade as “Martin”. She told me it would be much easier for people to pronounce than Menachem. The Dubbs helped us get a TV set so we could learn English. Our TV was such a novelty at the time that many of our neighbors would come over to watch Milton Berle and Sid Caesar. All was going well.

One day some of my classmates asked me to join them that evening “trick or treating”. I looked forward with excitement to joining my friends in this new and exciting ritual. My father came home and said I couldn’t join them, that I was Jewish and that Jewish children didn’t trick or treat. Until then our Jewishness had meant little to me. I was bewildered by my father’s refusal and stormed out onto our stoop. I sat there with tears in my eyes watching my friends delighting in their costumes and bags of goodies.

I think at that moment my father realized that if he stayed in Schenectady any longer America would swallow up his children. Almost immediately he moved us to Brooklyn, registered my brother and I in a Hasidic yeshiva and started praying in a small Hasidic synagogue. Gradually, he resumed Hasidic practices he had largely discarded since the Holocaust. He took a job as a textile machine operator and from his meager salary scraped together our yeshiva tuition. He was never able to save \$10 a week again.

I was sent to yeshivas where the Holocaust permeated everything around us. The schools were named after Jewish communities destroyed during the Holocaust. My classmates were all children of survivors. Most of my teachers had been in the camps just a few years earlier. And yet the Holocaust was never mentioned. The threat it posed to our faith was just too great.

My mother went along with my father despite her own unresolved crisis of faith. She told me how she had prayed the entire first night she came to Aushwitz. She was certain God would immediately destroy this evil place. Morning came and the chimneys were still smoking. She decided then and there she would really give God a piece of her mind when she met Him in heavenly judgment. Despite her anger, she never completely gave up on Him. Before her death, as her mind was being eroded by Alzheimer’s Disease, she thought every day was the Sabbath. Her greatest fear was that is she might, God forbid, forget to light the Sabbath candles or recite the Sabbath prayers.

I am grateful to my parents for inheriting some of my father’s faith and some of my mother’s skepticism. For years I tried to reconcile the two by interviewing numerous observant survivors in an attempt to understand their continued faith. I gradually realized that survivors themselves are at a loss to explain God’s silence. Almost unanimously, they reject all theological explanations for the Holocaust. Though disappointed in not finding answers to the big questions I discovered that survivors who kept the faith have a surprising degree of religious tolerance. As a close Hasidic friend of my father told me, “It is much easier for me to understand my friends who abandoned faith after the Holocaust than it is to explain to you why I remained.”

I am sympathetic to survivors' attempt to protect post-Holocaust faith and pass it on to future generations. It is an overwhelming challenge and, amazingly, one at which they have largely succeeded. At the same time I am leery of all those who attempt to bolster faith by demeaning the "other". Faith after the Holocaust requires us to live with unanswerable questions. That humbling recognition must lead to a faith that builds bridges, rather than barriers between all people.

Dr. Daum has produced, written, and co-directed *A Life Apart: Hasidism in America* and *In Care Of*, a documentary nominated for an Emmy which depicts the moral and ethical dilemmas faced by families caring for their impaired elders. He also produced, wrote and directed *Stay Tuned*, a documentary on coping with hearing loss. He is now working on *Give Us Harmony: The Music and Message of Shlomo Carlebach*. Dr. Daum and his wife, Rifka, have lived in the Hasidic neighborhood of Boro Park, Brooklyn for the past 35 years. After his Talmudic studies at Beth Medrash Gevoah and Mesiftha Tifereth Jerusalem he studied educational psychology and received an MA from Fairfield University and a Ph.D. from Fordham University.

Oren Rudavsky – Producer/Director Statement

I met Menachem Daum over ten years ago and soon afterward we began collaborating on *A Life Apart*, a film about the Hasidic Jews of America, a community Menachem knew intimately and to which I had many romantic notions. At the time he told me the story of how his father had forbade him to celebrate Halloween, a few years after he moved from a displaced persons camp in Germany to Schenectady, NY. The event clearly had a defining impact on his life. I immediately knew that there was a fascinating film embedded within this father rejecting his son's earliest desires and attractions. What I didn't know turned out to be much more amazing and is the rest of the story of *Hiding and Seeking*. Documentary filmmaking can be full of surprises when it is a true collaboration between the filmmaker and his or her subjects. In this case, an emotional depth and truth came along with a great adventure.

I have been producing and photographing fiction and non-fiction work since 1980. Aside from the current film, I am producing *The Treatment*, a feature film based on Daniel Menaker's comic contemporary New York shrink/love story novel. Another recent fiction production includes *Margaux Thrive's Diary* for Oxygen Television.

Feature documentaries include *And Baby Makes Two* and *A Life Apart: Hasidism in America*. *And Baby Makes Two* was funded by ITVS, premiered at the Newport International Film Festival and opened theatrically in New York at the Quad Cinema. It was selected to be part of the PBS series Independent Lens. It has since played on Metrochannel and Oxygen Television. *A Life Apart: Hasidism in America* was funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. The film enjoyed a highly successful theatrical release beginning at the Walter Reade Theater at Lincoln Center and continuing for three months at the Quad Cinema in New York and in five other theaters in the metropolitan area before opening nationally. It received an Emmy nomination for its national PBS release in 1998.

A film about the Mexican immigrant community, *Chato is Dead* has been partially funded by the Soros Foundation. I also recently produced a segment for PBS Media Matters, *Reckoning in York* that was reported by Alex Kotlowitz and followed the story of the mayor of York, Charlie Robertson as he was indicted along with six others for a murder during race riots thirty years before.

The subjects of my films have ranged from mental illness to race relations, the Amish, Jews in Eastern Europe, Nuns and Hasidim. Selected credits include: *Spark Among the Ashes*, *At the Crossroads*, *Gloria: A Case of Alleged Police Brutality*, and *Dreams So Real*. My films have appeared on WNET, PBS, Discovery, and ABC television and been shown at Sundance, Berlin, AFI, San Francisco, Jerusalem, Sydney, London and other film festivals.

I have worked independently as well as for such entities as ABC PrimeTime Live, Saturday Night Live and The Real World. As director of photography my credits include: *Twitch and Shout*, *The Last Klezmer*, *The Amish: Not to be Modern*, *Voices From the Attic*, *Un Beso A Esta Tierra* and *Untying the Straitjacket*. I have tried to work over the years on films about immigrant communities, communities that are marginal, or individuals whose voices have not been heard in the mainstream.

Zelda Greenstein – Editor

Zelda Greenstein has edited: *Divan* a personal documentary by Pearl Gluck about a woman who travels to Hungary to find a connection with her Hasidic roots, *90 MILES* by Juan Carlos Zaldivar about a Cuban-American family's difficult relationship with their native and adopted countries (POV, best documentary prize at the Havana Film Festival 2001), co-directed and edited *Women of the Wall* with Faye Lederman, *Enemy of the People* by Zareh Tueknavorian about Armenia under the reign of Stalin, and *Before You Go* by Nicole Betancourt about a daughter's relationship with her father who is dying of AIDS (HBO).

Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach – singer/songwriter

Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach was the foremost songwriter in contemporary Judaism, who used his music to inspire and unite Jews around the world. Rabbi Carlebach put the words of Jewish prayer and ceremony to music that is heard at virtually every Jewish wedding and bar mitzvah, from Hasidic to Reform.

In a recording career that stretched over 30 years, the rabbi sang his songs on more than 25 albums. His most famous song was "Am Yisroel Chai" ("The People of Israel Live"), which was an anthem of Jews behind the Iron Curtain before the fall of Communism. It continues to be sung at Jewish rallies and celebrations today.

One of Rabbi Carlebach's few English songs, about the beauty of the Jewish Sabbath, begins, "The whole world is waiting to sing the song of Shabbos." Rabbi Carlebach was constantly on tour, rushing from one capital to another. He appeared in large concert halls, like Carnegie Hall in New York and the Opera Palace in St. Petersburg, as well as synagogue basements and college coffeeshouses.

Rabbi Carlebach, who was Orthodox, had a full head of white curls and a white beard that he pinned back rather than cut, and wore a trademark white shirt and vest. He operated outside traditional Jewish structures in style and substance, and spoke about God and His love in a way that could make other rabbis uncomfortable. "Holy brothers and sisters, I have something really deep to tell you," was his way of addressing a crowd.

At the end of Yom Kippur, what most rabbis call the most solemn day of the year, Rabbi Carlebach would joyously sing and dance late into the night. Most of his songs seemed to have no ending, but would keep

going and going until the crowd was exhausted. The rabbi would rise and tell an elaborate Hasidic tale or bit of Torah wisdom until he began another song.

Shlomo Carlebach was born in 1925 in Berlin, where his father, Naftali, was an Orthodox leader. The family, which fled the Nazis in 1933, lived in Switzerland before coming to New York in 1939. His father became the rabbi of a small synagogue on West 79th Street, Congregation Kehlilath Jacob; Shlomo Carlebach and his twin brother, Eli Chaim, took over the synagogue after their father's death in 1967.

He studied at the Yeshiva Torah Vodaath in Brooklyn and at the Bais Medrash Gavoah in Lakewood, N.J. From 1951 to 1954, he worked as a traveling emissary of the Grand Rabbi of Lubavitch, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson.

During that period, he also picked up a guitar and began writing songs and visiting coffeehouses and clubs in Greenwich Village, where he met Bob Dylan, Pete Seeger and other folk singers. They encouraged his singing career and helped the rabbi get a spot at the Berkeley Folk Festival in 1966. After his appearance, he decided to remain in the Bay Area to reach out to what he called "lost Jewish souls," runaways and drug addicted youths. He founded a communelike synagogue called The House of Love and Prayer.

"If I would have called it Temple Israel, nobody would have come," he said. "I had the privilege of reaching thousands of kids. Hopefully I put a little seed in their hearts."

Eleven years later, he closed the House of Love and Prayer and took the remnants of the congregation to Israel, where he established the small settlement of Moshav Or Modiin, in Lod, near Ben Gurion Airport. The settlement now has about 35 families.

*Ari L. Goldman, The New York Times
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Shlomo Carlebach music

courtesy of
The Carlebach Family

From this day on

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Performed by C. Lanzbom

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