

Conscience – The Duty to Obey and the Duty to Disobey by Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis.  
Jewish Lights Publishing 2008.

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