



The Legacy: Teaching for Life from the Great Lithuanian Rabbis

Berel Wein, Warren Goldstein

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Two Orthodox rabbis, Wein the founder and director of Destiny Foundation, and Goldstein the Chief Rabbi of South Africa, joined together to offer nine essays about rabbis who lived in Lithuania and taught a people-oriented version of Judaism. Rabbi Wine wrote three of the essays and focused on the history of the country, the Jews in it, and their problems. He also wrote the appendix "Historical Context." Rabbi Goldstein's six essays focused on the Lithuanian rabbis' worldview and their teachings. Wine sometimes touched upon the teachings and Goldstein upon history. Jews arrived in Lithuania in the fourteenth century escaping from pogroms in Germany and Central Europe. By the nineteenth century, Jews were the largest national minority in this strongly Roman Catholic county. By 1920, they had a representative in the Lithuanian parliament, but remained a distinct and unassimilated minority, and by 1939, they numbered about 300,000. Wein writes that pleasantness is one of the central teachings of these rabbis. "The key to pleasantness, and hence to justice and fairness in life, is judging one's own behavior in the light of how it affects others." He points out that "the Lithuanian rabbinic leadership was almost totally wiped out in the Holocaust. Because of this, those who embodied this idea of pleasantness and its value system - and had been in the forefront of its dissemination in the wider Jewish world - virtually disappeared from the Jewish scene." Goldstein gives details of this teaching. The rabbis taught Jews are required to develop this type of behavior "the most important Torah objective," this behavior comes before Torah, and many of its teachings are in the Torah itself. Proper behavior, for example, includes treating all people, Jews and non-Jews, properly, in all ways, including financial dealings.

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