



BOOKS

Chutzpah, by Alan Dershowitz. Published by Little, Brown & Co., \$22.95

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Civil liberties lawyer Alan Dershowitz has embarked on a new crusade—changing the attitude of American Jews toward themselves.

Best known as the attorney for Jonathan Pollard, Leona Helmsley, and Claus von Bulow, Dershowitz covers an enormous stretch of new ground in *Chutzpah*, a book he terms a "major reassessment of the situation of Jews in America and in the world."

The author previously wrote *Reversal of Fortune* about his involvement in the von Bulow case.

"The byword of past generations of Jewish Americans has been *shanda*—fear of embarrassment in front of our hosts," Dershowitz writes in his new book. "The byword of the next generation should be *chutzpah*—assertive insistence on first-class status among our peers."

Comprehensive and vibrant, *Chutzpah* is incredibly readable, peppered with bombshell insights and anecdotes that demand to be read aloud. The book is best read with highlighting pen in hand.

It's also probably as substantial and urgent a treatise on the state of American Jewry as any in some time.

"Notwithstanding the stereotype, we are not pushy or assertive enough for our own good and for the good of our more vulnerable brothers and sisters in other parts of the world," Dershowitz writes. "Despite our apparent success, deep down we see ourselves as second-class citizens—as guests in another people's land. We worry about charges of dual loyalty, of being too rich, too smart, and too powerful....We don't appreciate how much we have contributed to the greatness of this country.

"We must strike from our vocabulary the offensive concept of *shanda fur de goyim*—an embarrassment in front of the gen-

tiles."

Born in 1938 and raised an Orthodox Jew, Dershowitz "made the journey from my Brooklyn *shtetl* to Yale Law School" only to discover "the world of bigotry, discrimination, racism and anti-Semitism called the American bar." *Chutzpah* chronicles the offenses of America's top law schools and legal firms in virulent



Alan Dershowitz

terms, referring to the colleges' anti-Semitic administrators as "a pack of dishonest bigots unworthy of respect or emulation."

Anti-Semitism, Dershowitz asserts, is far from dead. "Over the years, we have grown accustomed to anti-Jewish propaganda from the extreme right,

and, more recently, from the extreme left," *Chutzpah* reads. "What is relatively new is the growing acceptability of anti-Jewish bigotry among some intellectuals, university students, and moderate black and Third World leaders....The *old* anti-Semitism is waning; but the *new* Judeopathy is alive and well."

To bolster his point Dershowitz transcribes six pages of anti-Semitic letters he has received, gives a capsule history of anti-Semitism, and describes a 1987 trip to Auschwitz in which he was able to find virtually no evidence that Jews were victims of the camps. "Instead of my eyes tearing, my fists clenched," he writes, "It was a shocking and infuriating experience."

There is genuine passion (and a tendency to overuse italics for emphasis) in Dershowitz's writing. He clearly relished re-engaging longtime ideological foes on all sides: Rabbi Meir Kahane, "anti-Zionist zealot" Noam Chomsky, and neoconservative Norman Podhoretz all come out on the losing end of past debates that Dershowitz narrates in detail, quoting substantial stretches of dialogue transcribed from notes or tapes.

Dershowitz also devotes a

chapter to the case of convicted spy Jonathan Pollard.

"It was the ultimate *shanda fur de goyim*," he writes. "The official Jewish response was an overreactive attempt to disassociate 'loyal' American Jews from this one 'disloyal traitor' who had betrayed not only America in general, but the Jews of America in particular."

Quoting liberally from his own essays and letters-to-the-editor, Dershowitz goes on to describe his efforts to free refusenik Natan Sharansky, criticize the United States' "single-standard" actions in the United Nations, and defend strict separation of church and state.

Of primary importance, he writes, is Jews' willingness to stand up for themselves.

"*Sh'a shtill* [keeping quiet] has never served us well. It did not save us from the Nazis. It did not help Soviet Refuseniks. And it will not protect our interests as Jewish Americans....Unless we regard ourselves as first-class Americans and as first-class Jews, no one else will so regard us."

Matthew Budman is a member of the Northern California Jewish Bulletin staff. This review is published by special arrangement with that publication.