1st Issue!

Hillel Halkin: Siddur & Sensibility

JEWISH REVIEW OF BOOKS

NUMBER 1, SPRING 2010

$6.95

Shlomo Avineri
Ross & Makovsky on US Power in the Middle East

Dara Horn
Rosenfeld's Style

Michael Weingrad
No Jewish Narnias?

The Book of Genesis Illustrated

Pekar Reads Crumb

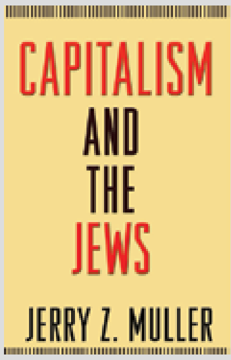
Jon D. Levenson **On Abraham**

Adam Kirsch **Rebecca Goldstein's New Novel**

J.H.H. Weiler **The British Supreme Court Blunders**

Shmuel Rosner **Walking the Green Line** Ron Rosenbaum **The Jewish Bob Dylan**

Azzan Yadin: **Rashi Redux** J.J. Schacter **Father Escapes a Cannonball! Rabbi Jacob Emden's Memoir**

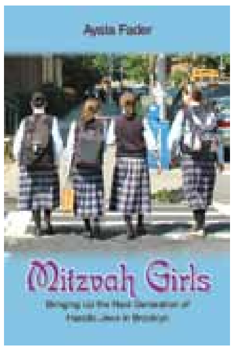


Capitalism and the Jews

Jerry Z. Muller

"This learned and suggestive little volume distills two centuries of wisdom concerning Jews and capitalism into four provocative essays. Drawing freely upon economic history, Jewish history, and the history of ideas, Jerry Muller moves deftly from European thinkers to Jewish traders and from communists to nationalists. Along the way, he dispenses fresh insights, little known information, and much common sense concerning issues too often shrouded in myth, bigotry, ideology, and apologetics."
—Jonathan D. Sarna, Brandeis University

Cloth $24.95 978-0-691-14478-8



Winner of the 2009 National Jewish Book Award in the category of Women's Studies

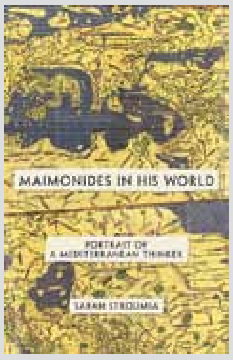
Mitzvah Girls

Bringing Up the Next Generation of Hasidic Jews in Brooklyn

Ayala Fader

"*Mitzvah Girls* is a rigorous ethnographic study of the education of Hasidic girls in Brooklyn. It is entertaining and engaging, combining personal accounts and subjective prose with critical analysis."
—Giulia Miller, *Times Higher Education*

Paper $22.95 978-0-691-13917-3
Cloth $55.00 978-0-691-13916-6



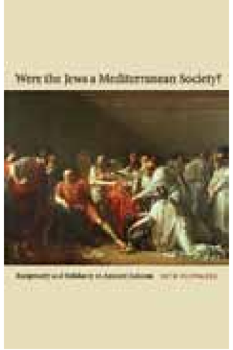
Maimonides in His World

Portrait of a Mediterranean Thinker

Sarah Stroumsa

"Stroumsa paints a richly documented, nuanced portrait of Maimonides as a bold, open thinker whose sometimes revolutionary conception of Judaism draws freely from the multiple philosophical, theological, scientific, and ideological currents of his contemporary Mediterranean world. Stroumsa points scholars in new directions for future study of the greatest Jewish figure of the Middle Ages."
—Josef Stern, University of Chicago

Cloth $39.50 978-0-691-13763-6



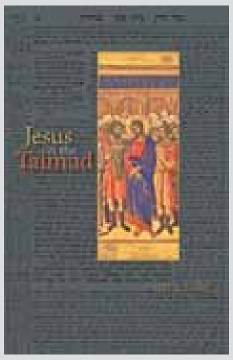
Were the Jews a Mediterranean Society?

Reciprocity and Solidarity in Ancient Judaism

Seth Schwartz

"An important consideration of some vital questions in the study of Judaism in the Hellenistic period and late antiquity by one of its most original, well-informed, and intellectually rigorous historians. This book offers a new perspective on this formative period in Jewish history and will be much discussed."
—Michael D. Swartz, Ohio State University

Cloth $29.95 978-0-691-14054-4

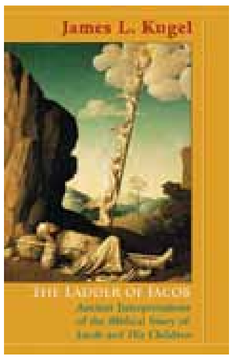


Jesus in the Talmud

Peter Schäfer

"[Schäfer's] great scholarship now provides Jews and Christians interested in developing a new and better relationship with a way to work through many of the hateful things that we have said about each other in the past. . . . The sources that Schafer adduces are virulent and dangerous, but his analysis of them leaves one unexpectedly full of hope."
—David Novak, *New Republic*

Paper $19.95 978-0-691-14318-7



The Ladder of Jacob

Ancient Interpretations of the Biblical Story of Jacob and His Children

James L. Kugel

"*The Ladder of Jacob* is one of the most readable and attractive introductions to the general style of traditional Jewish reasoning from Scripture. It captures the strange combination of playfulness with deadly seriousness that characterizes this exegetical tradition."
—John Baron, *Times Literary Supplement*

Paper $15.95 978-0-691-14123-7

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS

800.777.4726
press.princeton.edu

EDITOR
Abraham Socher

PUBLISHER
Eric Cohen

SR. CONTRIBUTING EDITOR
Allan Arkush

EDITORIAL BOARD
Robert Alter
Shlomo Avineri
Leora Batnitzky
Ruth Gavison
Moshe Halbertal
Hillel Halkin
Jon D. Levenson
Anita Shapira
Michael Walzer
J. H.H. Weiler
Leon Wieseltier
Ruth Wisse
Steven Zipperstein

ASSISTANT EDITOR
Philip Getz

DESIGN AND PRODUCTION
Betsy Klarfeld

BUSINESS MANAGER
Lori Dorr

EDITORIAL FELLOW
Michael Moss

INTERNS
Moshe Dlott
Kendell Pinkney
David Stark

The ***Jewish Review of Books*** (Print ISSN 2153-1978, Online ISSN 2153-1994) is a quarterly publication of ideas and criticism published in Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter, by Bee.Ideas, LLC., 745 Fifth Avenue, Suite 1400, New York, NY 10151.

For annual **subscriptions**, please visit www.jewishreviewofbooks.com or send $19.95 ($29.95 outside of the US) to Jewish Review of Books, PO Box 3000, Denville, NJ 07834. Please send notifications of address changes to the same address or to subscriptions@jewishreviewofbooks.com.

Letters to the Editor should be emailed to letters@jewishreviewofbooks.com or to our editorial office, 3091 Mayfield Road, Suite 412, Cleveland Heights, OH 44118. Please send all unsolicited **reviews and manuscripts** to the attention of the editors at submissions@jewishreviewofbooks.com, or to our editorial office. **Advertising** inquiries should be sent to ads@jewishreviewofbooks.com. **Review copies** should be sent to the attention of the Assistant Editor at our editorial office.

JEWISH REVIEW
OF BOOKS

JEWISH REVIEW OF BOOKS
Spring 2010

EDITORIAL

4 Abraham Socher **Welcome to the Jewish Review of Books**

FEATURES

5 Shlomo Avineri **What the US Can and Can't Do in the Middle East** *Are the realists being realistic about American power in the Middle East?*
7 Hillel Halkin **Endless Devotion** *A personal reflection on the best English siddur and what it still misses.*
12 Dara Horn **Requiem for a Luftmentsh** *On Jewish intellectuals, then and now.*
16 Michael Weingrad **Why There is No Jewish Narnia** *New novels in English and Hebrew raise the question of Jewish fantasy.*

REVIEWS

21 Adam Kirsch **A Novel of Unbelief** *36 Arguments for the Existence of God* by Rebecca Newberger Goldstein
22 Menachem Kellner **God & Idolatry** *Saving God: Religion after Idolatry* by Mark Johnston
23 Shmuel Rosner **Walking the Green Line** *Tris (The Settler)* by Emily Amrousi • *Hebron Jews* by Jerold S. Auerbach • *Ha-Mitnachalim (The Settlers)* by Gadi Taub • *Lords of the Land* by Idith Zertal and Akiva Eldar, Translated by Vivian Eden • *The Accidental Empire* by Gershom Gorenberg • *Hitpakhut* (*Disillusionment)* by Dan Margalit
27 Lance J. Sussman **Prospects for American Judaism** *Contemporary American Judaism: Transformation and Renewal* by Dana Evan Kaplan
28 Noah Efron **Faith in Doubt** *In Praise of Doubt* by Peter Berger and Anton Zijderveld
30 Allan Arkush **Old -New Debate** *Herzl Az ve-Hayom* (*Herzl Then and Now)* Edited by Avi Sagi and Yedidya Stern • *Medinat Ha-Yehudim ve-Altneuland (The Jewish State and Old-New Land)* by Theodor Herzl, Edited by Dov Eichenwald with an Introduction by Gadi Taub • *Herzl* by Shlomo Avineri
33 Azzan Yadin **Lost in Translation** *The Commentators' Bible: Exodus and Leviticus* Edited, translated, and annotated by Michael Carasik
35 Shalom Carmy **In Whose Image?** *Neither Beast Nor God: The Dignity of the Human Person* by Gilbert Meilaender
36 Samuel Moyn **Ordinary Memory** *Remembering Survival: Inside a Nazi Slave-Labor Camp* by Christopher Browning
37 Shoshana Olidort **Appelfeld in Bloom** *Blooms of Darkness* by Aharon Appelfeld
38 Margot Lurie **Poems Like Mountains** *These Mountains: Selected Poems of Rivka Miriam* Translated by Linda Stern Zisquit

READINGS

40 Jon D. Levenson **The Idea of Abrahamic Religions: A Qualified Dissent**
45 J. H. H. Weiler **Discrimination and Identity in London: The Jewish Free School Case**

THE ARTS

47 Yair Rosenberg **No Sex in the City: On *Srugim***
48 Ron Rosenbaum **Bob Dylan: Messiah or Escape Artist?**

LOST AND FOUND

50 Jacob J. Schacter **Cannon Fire Over Sarajevo and Sin in Ansbach: A Passage from Rabbi Jacob Emden's 18th Century Memoir**

LAST WORD

51 Harvey Pekar and Tara Seibel **Crumb's Genesis: A Graphic Review**

On the cover: (*from top*): 'Camel' by Christopher Brand, from the cover of *Myths, Illusions and Peace,* courtesy of Viking Penguin; Photo of Isaac Rosenfeld on his gravestone (photo by John Martine); 'Kingdom of Bavel,' by Maya Shleifer, from *Ha-mayim she-bein ha-olamot*; Harvey Pekar reading Crumb's *The Book of Genesis* (illustration by Tara Seibel).

Welcome to the Jewish Review of Books

BY ABRAHAM SOCHER

This is an especially good time to launch a Jewish magazine of ideas and criticism. Perhaps it has always been a good time: the history of Jewish thought over the last two hundred years could be charted through a dozen periodicals in a half-dozen languages. But we live at a moment in which more Jewish books, and books of particular Jewish interest, are being published than ever before. Of the making of such books, it seems, there is no end. But of real criticism, considered judgment rendered in graceful, accessible prose, there is something of a scarcity.

The problem is not a lack of interesting Jewish writers, thinkers, or scholars. There are, to begin with, dozens of journals of Jewish Studies, for the most part geared to specialized academic work. Such scholarship is necessary and often important. But it does not suffice for understanding what it means to be a Jew in the modern world, or what Jewish texts and ideas might have to contribute to the larger discussion of important issues—religious, philosophical, political, ethical, literary—of the day. Then there are the newspapers, magazines, and websites that make it their full- or part-time business to report on Jewish culture. Here, with noble exceptions, the pressure of timeliness and the constraints of space combine to restrict the full, measured consideration that Jewish books and issues, in the widest sense, deserve.

We aspire to offer something different: a lively magazine of ideas and argument, criticism and commentary, written especially for intelligent men and women who believe, as I do, that Jewish subjects are worthy of attention that is serious, accessible, and occasionally even playful.

In the pages of the *Jewish Review of Books*, leading scholars, critics, writers, and journalists will discuss Jewish thought, literature, culture, and politics as well as fiction, poetry, and the arts, with wit and erudition. Here you will find review essays on everything from Maimonides' theology to the latest court decision in Europe; from translations of Hebrew and Yiddish poetry to bestselling novels; from controversy over the Dead Sea Scrolls to controversy over the Israeli Rabbinate; and from the history of the *shtetl* to the present challenges facing American Jewry. Not only will we cover books published in English, we will bring news of some of the most interesting and important books published in Israel and Europe. We will also reconsider literary, scholarly, and religious classics and offer new translations of documents that open a window onto fascinating historical figures and moments.

Of course, we have heard the good news of the Internet, and the supposed death knell of the book, not to speak of the book review. This fall, for instance, on the occasion of his latest novel, Philip Roth predicted the imminent demise of fiction. Perhaps, he said, a remnant of readers will survive, half-hobbyists and half-monks, but they won't save literary culture. The book has not been able to compete with the movie or TV screen, and it certainly cannot compete with the computer screen and its portable offspring.

Well, Roth has been in an autumnal mood for a while now, and one is permitted—maybe even obligated—to doubt apocalyptic scenarios. As I write this, Apple is unveiling the latest cool, glowing screen; no doubt like you, I am tempted by it, and will probably also be tempted by whatever comes next. But, like you, I am tempted because I suspect that it may help me to read more, not less. As temptations sometimes do, this one expresses a faith that there will remain important things to read, some old and some new, some waiting to be rediscovered and some waiting to be written.

It may be that, now or in the near future, we will read Amichai, Bellow, and Grade, the latest history of the Middle East, or even the Babylonian Talmud—that great compendium of hyperlinks reaching back to Sinai—primarily on a screen. The important, vital thing is that we continue truly and critically to read, rather than passively absorbing information, registering buzz, assimilating "memes." And it is certainly conceivable, even likely, that this can be done on a screen. Indeed, you may be reading these very words on a screen. If not, this seems the right moment to invite you to visit us at our website, www.jewishreviewofbooks.com

Our magazine is a forum, not a platform; a conversation, not a polemic. It is founded in the conviction that the ideas and achievements of Jewish religion, literature, and scholarship are interesting and valuable in and of themselves.

Whether you read our articles in print or on the web, you will find authors who are not cheerleaders or narrow theoreticians of one religious, political, or literary party or another. As is the case with our distinguished Editorial Board, our contributors understand that all things excellent are as difficult as they are rare, and that excellence carries across denominations, languages, and political divisions.

The *Jewish Review of Books* is a forum, not a platform; a conversation, not a polemic. In particular, it is founded in the conviction that the ideas and achievements of Jewish religion, literature, and scholarship are interesting and valuable in and of themselves. They are not reducible to any position or program, no matter how worthy.

This is not to say that our authors will refrain from addressing political issues, particularly with regard to Israel. Critics in and outside of Israel are too often tempted to judge its behavior and its politics from the standpoint of redemption, whether of the messianic or secular variety. But there can be no such standpoint until utopia dawns or the messiah comes. In the meantime, cool reason and factual sobriety will be our standard.

Franz Rosenzweig, an early 20th-century Jewish thinker of no particular party who has since been claimed by several, once adopted a famous line from the ancient Roman playwright Terence: "as I am human, nothing human is alien to me." Rosenzweig gave the line a witty tweak by challenging his Jewish reader to assert that, as a Jew, "nothing Jewish is alien to me."

What Rosenzweig understood is that no one leads a life that is simply "human." Just as we speak a particular language, not language as such, we live and flourish within particular communities, cultures, and traditions. Rosenzweig's claim was not that everything Jewish was worthy of celebration, only that it was worthy of understanding, and he suggested that a "Jewish Renaissance" could begin with just these words. For our part, we will aim to produce an excellent magazine, in the full knowledge that this, too, is as difficult as it is rare. Welcome to the *Jewish Review of Books*.

What the US Can and Can't Do in the Middle East

BY SHLOMO AVINERI

MYTHS, ILLUSIONS AND PEACE: FINDING A NEW DIRECTION FOR AMERICA IN THE MIDDLE EAST
by Dennis Ross and David Makovsky
Viking, 368 pp., $27.95

The Obama administration's lack of success in reviving negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians highlights a paradox. The US has a great deal of power in the Middle East, but it is often practically impotent.

How can this be?

The scope of American power, in the Middle East or anywhere else, depends on circumstances and local conditions. Yet Washington policy wonks all too often tend to overlook this uncomfortable fact, viewing situations exclusively from inside the Beltway.

Throughout the many decades of US involvement in the Middle East, there is a pattern of success as well as failure, and it is this pattern that constitutes the backdrop to the knowledgeable and timely new book by Dennis Ross and David Makovsky—the one a veteran of Mideast peace negotiations under several American presidents, the other a seasoned journalist and analyst.

The United States has been and can be extremely powerful and helpful when either of the following scenarios unfolds: 1) a shooting war erupts and threatens to unleash dire regional or even global consequences or 2) the contending parties have already made, on their own, significant steps towards reaching an agreement but still need a helpful push from the outside. In the first case, the US can function as an effective firefighter and bring about a cessation of hostilities. In the second, it can act as a midwife and help clinch the deal.

Examples abound. Let us start with the first scenario—stamping out conflagrations. Towards the end of October 1973, Israel had overcome the first shocks of the Egyptian and Syrian attack; its forces had crossed the Suez Canal, were about to encircle the Egyptian Third Army, and were positioning themselves on the highway to Cairo, at Kilometer 101. The Egyptian forces were in imminent danger of total collapse, threatening unforeseeable consequences for Egypt and the Arab world. The threat of direct Soviet intervention was on the horizon. Washington, for its part, did not want to see the Egyptians subjected to a crushing defeat, rightly thinking that future chances of Egyptian–Israeli rapprochement rested on the establishment of some sort of equilibrium between the two countries. Another humiliating Arab defeat like the one in 1967, it was presumed, would only make the Arabs more obdurate and the Israelis even more arrogant. The US resolved to put an end to the fighting and start a slow process of consolidation. It delivered the tough messages that stopped a victorious Israeli army in its tracks and started the uphill process of two disengagement agreements which eventually led, in their own circuitous way, to Israeli-Egyptian peace in 1979.

In the last stages of Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982 ("The First Lebanon War"), after Syrian agents assassinated the Israeli-backed Lebanese President-elect Bashir Gemayel, Israel was about to burst into Muslim West Beirut. In all probability, this would have brought about a Syrian intervention in what until then had been a limited Israeli-PLO conflict. A few angry phone calls from President Reagan to Prime Minister Begin stopped Israel from occupying West Beirut and led to complex negotiations, which culminated in the PLO evacuating Beirut and relocating its headquarters to Tunis.

A structurally similar but somewhat different case unfolded during the first Gulf War in 1991. After the US military had failed to eliminate Iraqi missile launchers that had been used to dispatch thirty-nine missiles against Israeli civilian targets, Israel considered a major operation against Iraq. Washington feared that this might break up its coalition with moderate Arab states (mainly Saudi Arabia) against Saddam Hussein, and warned Israel that should it launch such an operation, its planes might find themselves confronting US aircraft, or at least denied the codes necessary to fly over American-controlled airspace. The Israeli government under Yitzhak Shamir—a hard-liner if ever there was one—gritted its teeth but gave up on attacking Iraq.

What all these scenarios have in common is simple: the situation was combustible, and what was required of Israel was only a cessation—or avoidance—of a set of military operations. America exerted intense pressure to make Israel stop on a dime. No lengthy processes were involved; a clear "Yes" or "No" was required from Israel immediately (with a "No" obviously ruled out).

There have been other occasions, however, when Israel and its adversaries have started negotiations on their own, made significant concessions to each other, and borne the domestic political costs of their decisions. But then, at the last minute, their failure to resolve some final disagreements bilaterally threatened to destroy the whole edifice of negotiations. In such situations, an assertive American intervention in the negotiations has been proven to be immensely powerful and successful.

When President Anwar Sadat, for instance, decided to travel to Jerusalem and address the Knesset, his initiative caught Washington by surprise and was seen by the Carter White House as potentially undermining its own hitherto unsuccessful attempts at peacemaking. Hawkish Prime Minister Menachem Begin's surprisingly generous response led to a year of largely successful bilateral negotiations between Israel and Egypt that brought the two countries to the brink of peace. Yet a few thorny issues still remained unresolved. Both sides found it difficult to make the necessary final concessions. It was at this time that President Carter called the leaders of both countries to Camp David, knocked heads together and used the carrot as well as the stick to make both sides go the extra inch to reach an agreement, which was then celebrated on the White House lawn. Nevertheless, there was historical justice in awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to Sadat and Begin, but not to Carter. The American president had been merely the helpful midwife while parenthood belonged exclusively to the leaders of Egypt and Israel.

A similar scenario unfolded in the 1993 negotiations between Israel and the PLO. Again, the Oslo negotiations were initiated by the two sides, with the US left completely out of the loop and even angry at Israel for starting such a momentous process without divulging it to its major ally. While the secret bilateral negotiations in Norway brought both sides towards the historic achievement of mutual recognition, they were unable to resolve a number of tricky issues. It was at this point that President Clinton got into the act, invited Rabin, Peres, and Arafat to Washington and was able to tighten the loose knots. Again, the US was a midwife, not the initiator or the mediator: what Israel and the PLO did achieve, they achieved—except for the extra few inches at the final moment—bilaterally and on their own.

In the absence of political will on the part of the local players, an American president cannot bring recalcitrant horses to water.

The Israel-Jordan peace treaty of 1994 was likewise negotiated bilaterally (again, with some American misgivings), but the final photo opportunity at the signing at the Arava Crossing in the desert featured President Clinton, who gave his blessing to an agreement reached directly between King Hussein and Prime Minister Rabin.

The US can, then, be of assistance. But when a shooting war or bilateral negotiations are not already underway, it falls flat on its face. Every American attempt to reach an agreement in the absence of these conditions has ended in spectacular failure: the Madrid Conference fizzled out into jejune and futile committee meetings; President Clinton's attempt at Camp David 2000 to bring Prime Minister Barak and Chairman Arafat to sign a peace agreement failed dismally; President Bush's Road Map remained a wish list and his last minute Annapolis Process turned out to be a nice photo opportunity. President Obama's attempt to dispatch his special representative former Senator George Mitchell already appears to be an exercise in futility.

The reason for this is simple: in the absence of a political will on the part of the local players, an American president cannot bring recalcitrant horses to water. Even if both sides sign a framework agreement, like the Road Map, the test is in implementation, and the devil, as always, is in the details. There are hundreds of details involved in any Israeli-Arab agreement (see the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty or the Oslo Accords). Carrying out any such agreement, which entails territorial issues, possible population evacuation, and complex security arrangements with a plethora of technical arrangements, takes years. An American president cannot constantly babysit such a protracted process, nor can he oversee all its details on a daily basis (he has, after all, other issues on his plate). Without the necessary preconditions, the process invariably gets bogged down in the eternal and treacherous dunes of Middle East politics.

Ross and Makovsky have very different backgrounds and perspectives, but they are both veteran Middle East experts who are well aware of the checkered record of the world's greatest superpower in the region. The failure of the Bush Administration to bring about democratization in the Arab world as a consequence of the defeat of Saddam Hussein adds to the bitter aftertaste of good intentions gone sour. Yet the authors are equally troubled by the way some of Bush's critics—as exemplified in the Baker-Hamilton report—view the Middle East and America's options in crafting an alternative policy. This brings them to the conclusion that grand theories about the region—be they of the right or the left—fail to resolve its problems. At the root of such theories, regardless of their ideological bent, lie a number of basic myths and illusions. It is this set of myths and illusions that the authors set out to discuss, analyze, deconstruct—and sometimes pillory—as responsible for many of America's missteps and failures over the years. By their account, realists and neoconservative idealists alike are guilty of imposing theoretical constructs upon a recalcitrant reality. Worst of all, Ross and Makovsky remark, realists can sometimes appear to be ignorant of reality.

The authors focus mainly on three myths: 1) "linkage," 2) "engagement," and 3) promotion of regional democracy. The connection of the first two with the supposedly innovative approaches put forth by the Obama administration (in which Ross himself now plays a part) is what gives this book its special significance.

Ross and Makovsky view the myth of linkage as the most pernicious of the three, and call it "the mother of all myths." They show that it is not really new, and that the "realists" who currently espouse it have a venerable lineage, going back to the 1940s. According to this "realist" view, the problems that the United States faces in the Arab world—and by implication also among Muslims in general—stem from the Arab-Israeli conflict. Once this conflict is solved—and solved, so the proponents of this approach usually, though not universally, suggest—by satisfying Arab demands, the tension between the Arabs and the US will disappear. In political terms, what this has meant for decades is that Washington must compel Israel to dismantle all settlements and return to its pre-1967 borders. The subsequent establishment of a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital would at once put an end to the estrangement of the Arabs from the US, enhance the standing of America in the region, and (realists being realists) insure an unimpeded flow of oil from the Arab Gulf states to the West. Waxing sanctimonious, some of these realists occasionally add that this would also be in Israel's "best interests."

This myth was initially identified with basically conservative groups, business-oriented, sometimes connected with oil interests, and ensconced among the State Department "Arabists." Occasionally, it was also tinged with strains of genteel anti-Semitism, viewing Jews generally (in American society, as well as in the Middle East), as slightly pushy and disruptive of the established order. It was these "realists" who sought unsuccessfully to thwart President Truman's recognition of Israel in 1948. At that time, some even viewed the social democratic dominance of the Jewish community in Palestine as being a dangerous prelude to Soviet influence on the politics of the Jewish state.

The right-wing tincture of the "realists" has faded in recent years, and this position is now much more identified with a left-wing approach (how "realists" can really be left-wing if left-wing politics is identified with universalist humanist ideas is a separate issue). Not to put too fine a point on it, this attitude was also, at least in part, responsible for President Obama's masterful—yet fawning—speech in Cairo.

Ross and Makovsky go to great lengths to show how this linkage theory is faulty, both factually and historically. The authors identify some of the bloody conflicts in the region that have nothing to do with Israel, from the Iraqi coup of 1958 to the Yemeni civil war of 1962-68 to the 2003 Iraq War. Moreover, the major challenge to American regional and world hegemony—the tragedy of 9/11—was initially depicted by al-Qaeda itself as a response to the subversive influence of America on Arab and Muslim lifestyles, mainly in Saudi Arabia. Only much later did the Palestinian issue appear in Osama bin Laden's fatwas.

The claim that failure to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict may embroil the whole area in ever-widening violence and instability has been—at least until now—belied by the facts. The second intifada, for all the support it gained on the "Arab street," mainly due to Al-Jazeera TV, had little effect in neighboring countries or influence on their relations with the US. No doubt the Palestinian problem and Israel's occupation of the West Bank (and until 2006 also of Gaza) have added a further element of tension to the area. But it is the "root cause" of neither the region's instability nor its frayed relations with the US.

From left: Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, American President Jimmy Carter, and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat at Camp David, 13 September 1978. (Photo by Keystone/Getty Images.)

The linkage theory has served over the years as a convenient vehicle for the Arab countries' public diplomacy. Rather than address internal issues of repression, discrimination, authoritarianism, and economic stagnation, it is much easier for Arab rulers—be they monarchist or republican, but in every case non-democratic—to pin all their problems on "the conflict." This is the best alibi for deflecting local criticism as well as avoiding the kind of inner reforms they so desperately need. The authors mention the courageous UNDP 2002 Arab Human Development Report, written by Arab intellectuals and experts, which states expressly that "[Israeli] occupation has damaging side effects"—but avoids portraying the occupation as the cause of Arab underdevelopment in the areas of education, women's rights, general human rights, democratization, and liberalization. The attempt to blame Israel, and the conflict, for all the ills of the Arab world is another example of a culture of victimization which is endemic to the Arab world though not unique to it (the Israelis have their own version), and makes the chances of reform in the region even more remote.

Ross and Makovsky also point out that the "realists" choose to overlook the reality and depth of the fundamental Arab unwillingness to accept the Jewish state. This is a deeply felt ideological tenet of Palestinian and Arab historical narratives, and though Egypt and Jordan have found it possible to make peace with Israel by skirting the issue, their populations still adhere to this worldview. The problem is not just the post-1967 occupation of Palestinian territories, but goes much deeper. For "realists" to ignore this is simply unconscionable and certainly renders it impossible for them to provide a realistic map of the situation.

Sticking to the linkage myth will, according to the authors, impede any progress towards peace in the region. The tepid response—to say the least—of Arab countries to Obama's soaring rhetoric in Cairo suggests that while most Arabs welcomed the President's non-confrontational approach, they did not feel that it is incumbent upon them to reciprocate.

The authors are equally scathing in their assessment of the neoconservative myth of democratization, but the collapse of this myth in the wake of the second Gulf War has obviated the need for extensive refutation. What is not always explicitly stated, even by an Obama Administration eager to get out of Iraq, is that what the US will not leave behind is a democratic regime. If Iraq does not descend into civil war when the American forces depart, it will be because a neo-authoritarian regime will have consolidated its power in Baghdad. What will happen then to the *de facto* semi-independent Kurdistan Regional Government does not seem to bother either "realists" or liberals. That the Kurds were the most oppressed group under Saddam and also the US's best (and only real) ally, does not seem to bother all those who—justifiably—call for the Palestinians' right to self-determination. Some peoples are obviously more equal than others.

Towards the end of the book Ross and Makovsky tackle the myth of "engagement," and here their account is most nuanced. While they are not altogether opposed to engagement, especially with Iran, they have serious doubts about Hezbollah and Hamas. On an intellectual level, nobody should be against engagement. This is especially the case when one takes into account, as the authors repeatedly do, that the confrontational approach of the Bush Administration did not stop Iran from proceeding along the road to nuclear development. Yet Ross and Makovsky are skeptical as to whether the adoption of engagement as such will solve the dilemmas posed by Iran's nuclear ambitions. Developments in recent months seem to prove them right.

The authors propose a number of possible options, but favor a novel approach. Rather than negotiate with Iran in open forums, they suggest opening a secret back channel (the real "realist" Kissinger option). This should be accompanied by a robust policy of supporting, politically and militarily, Iran's antagonists in the region. What they recommend is in essence a sophisticated carrots-and-sticks policy, but without the public fuss that accompanies open negotiations. It is better for the participants to talk to each other than to CNN. Such back-channel talks should suggest to the Iranians not only the benefits of an agreement, but could also spell out—in grim detail, made possible by secrecy—the dire consequences if an agreement were not to be reached.

This looks and sounds reasonable. But is it perhaps too late for such an approach? Is the current internal turmoil in Iran (which has escalated since this book was published) making such a scenario virtually impossible? These are difficult questions, and in any case there is no doubt that the US needs a sophisticated policy of engagement also with its European allies if it envisages an effective "coalition of the willing" in case the current engagement leads nowhere.

The authors try to reintroduce realism into US policy in the region, but realism based on reality, not on abstract constructs. They also argue that the administration should carefully nurture reform in the Arab world—and they identify some of the more prominent reformers who should be encouraged. But this should be done without undermining existing regimes, realizing this is a long-term process, not a *deus ex machina*. After all, Bush's insistence on Palestinian elections granted Hamas not only a plurality but also quasi-democratic legitimacy. Pushing for peace should also be accompanied by a measured assessment of what is feasible, as opposed to a pipe dream, even if it looks nice on paper. Hence, conflict management rather than conflict resolution should be seriously considered—after all, this has been the approach in Cyprus, Bosnia, and Kosovo after more ambitious peace plans have failed.

There is an obvious subtext to all of this: aside from telling a political story, the authors also maintain that the claim that the US should "distance" itself from Israel, and thus regain its standing in the Arab world, is wrong-headed. It is a timely reminder, bolstered by sound historical knowledge and understanding of the region.

The book's value is enhanced by the fact that both authors are "doves": they believe in a two-state solution and find the Israeli settlement policies unconscionable on both moral and political grounds. In the past, Ross has sometimes been accused by Israeli negotiators of being "pro-Palestinian." But being dovish does not mean being starry-eyed or ignorant. Therein lie wisdom and moderation.

Shlomo Avineri *is Professor of Political Science at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and served as Director-General of Israel's Foreign Ministry in the first government of Yitzhak Rabin. His most recent book is* Herzl, *an intellectual biography (in Hebrew) of the founder of modern Zionism.*

Endless Devotion

BY HILLEL HALKIN

KOREN SACKS SIDDUR, HEBREW/ENGLISH PRAYERBOOK
Koren, 1244 pp., $24.95

A first reaction to the deluxe new siddur or prayer book recently issued in a Hebrew-English edition by Koren Publishers is that, at 1,244 handsomely printed, imitation stamped-leather-bound pages, it is a bit hefty to be carried to synagogue on the Sabbath by the Orthodox users for whom it is primarily intended. To be sure, the *ArtScroll Siddur*, with which it is meant to compete, has only 200 fewer pages and, printed on thicker paper, is as bulky. But the *ArtScroll*, the standard siddur of most American Orthodox synagogues since its publication in 1989, is already on their shelves. The *Koren Siddur* must be brought by the congregant—at least until it gains a place on those shelves too, as its publishers clearly hope that it will.

The *Koren* is large because, like the *ArtScroll*, it has facing English text and English commentary at the bottom of its pages, both the work of its editor, Great Britain's distinguished Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks; a spatially generous layout less cluttered than the *ArtScroll's*, and a comprehensiveness at least as great. Besides the regular weekday morning, afternoon, and evening services, and their Sabbath and holiday variations, which (with the exception of the long Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur liturgies) are found in any traditional siddur, the *Koren* includes numerous items that usually are not. Some of these are for holiday-related occasions like *bi'ur chametz,* the declaring of a house free of unleavened food before Passover, or *ushpizin,* the welcoming of the biblical patriarchs said by Jewish legend to visit on Sukkot; others belong to life-cycle rituals such as *pidyon ha-ben,* the redemption of a first-born son, or the confession before death. In addition, the *Koren* has a lengthy introduction by Sacks, the text of all Torah readings for weekday and holiday mornings, a prayer calendar of the Jewish year, a digest of rules and regulations pertaining to Jewish prayer, and a "Halakhic Guide To Prayer For Visitors To Israel," where some customs differ from the Diaspora's. It adds up.

Of course, Jewish liturgy itself has kept adding up over the centuries, continually growing from its earliest origins. These go back, if not as far as is claimed by rabbinic tradition, which ascribes them to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, considerably farther than they are held to by the common misconception that Jewish communal worship is largely a post-Second Temple institution, a response to the abrogation of the priestly sacrifices after the Temple's destruction by the Romans in 70 C.E. There are passages in the siddur that would seem to support this view, such as this one from the morning service:

> Now, because of our sins, the Temple is destroyed and the daily sacrifice discontinued, and we have no priest at his service, no Levite on his platform, no Israelite at his post … Therefore, may it be Your will, Lord our God and God of our ancestors, that the prayer of our lips be considered, accepted and favored before You as if we had offered the daily sacrifice at its appointed time and place, according to its laws.
> (All translations are taken from the *Koren Siddur*)

Yet in actuality, the synagogue was central to Jewish life long before the Temple's destruction and for centuries coexisted with the sacrifices from which it sprang. Its revolutionary significance was pointed out by the German-Jewish historian Ismar Elbogen in his magisterial 1923 study, *The Jewish Liturgy and Its Historical Development*:

> …it was the first time in human history that regular assemblies for worship were held at sites that had no other sanctity than what was bestowed upon them by the community of the faithful. It was a liturgy that freed itself from the practices theretofore customary among all peoples, relinquishing all such accessories as sacrifices and other offerings and intermediation by priests, and placing man and his spiritual life at the center of the liturgy. It is the same kind of liturgy as came to prevail in the European religions, and thus became familiar to all of civilized humanity.

As Elbogen observes, Christianity and Islam took not just the "forms" of regular prayer from Judaism but the very idea of it. Paradoxically, however, it was the supreme importance to biblical Judaism of animal sacrifice in the Temple that led to this idea's development. This was because, by the time the First Temple was razed by the Babylonians in the sixth century B.C.E., all sacrifice to the God of Israel on altars other than the Temple's had been stamped out in the name of the Temple's exclusivity. Worshipers living far from Jerusalem, whether in Palestine or in exile in Babylonia, were compelled to find alternate modes of religious behavior. The two they settled on were public readings from the Torah on Sabbaths, holidays, and the Jewish market days of Monday and Thursday, when rural residents flocked to towns, and prayer gatherings held at the hours at which Temple sacrifice took place, originally conceived of as vicarious participations in sacrifice rather than as substitutes for it.

These gatherings began in Second Temple times with members of the priestly caste in Palestine, which sent semi-annual delegations from outlying districts to Jerusalem to assist for a week in the sacrificial ministrations. Since not all priests could join these missions, those staying behind expressed their identification with those making the journey by sessions of daily worship synchronized with the morning and afternoon sacrifices and the evening locking of the Temple's gates. When, eventually, these sessions were opened to the general public, made year-round and combined with readings from the Torah, Jewish prayer as we now know it emerged. By the time of the redaction of the Mishnah over a hundred years after the Second Temple's destruction, the core of the three daily services of *shacharit, mincha,* and *ma'ariv* was nearly the same as it is today.

This core included basic prayers well-known even to many non-observant Jews, such as the *shema yisrael,* the "Hear O Israel," and the *amida* or *shemoneh esrei,* the silent "standing prayer" or "Eighteen Benedictions" (so called because its weekday version had eighteen—later enlarged to nineteen—repetitions of the formula "Blessed are You, Lord"). Numerous other familiar prayers, however, only came later. Until the eighth or ninth century, when the siddur (the Hebrew word means "ordering," that is, the ordering of the liturgy) was first committed to writing, the daily, weekly, and holiday services had to be brief enough to be memorized, if not by the congregation, at least by its leader, to whose recitations it answered "Amen." Only once a written siddur existed was it possible to add new prayers freely, the sole limit on them being the congregation's time and patience.

Anyone familiar with the service knows the feeling of snapping to attention that the *barkhu* produces.

It was then that the siddur's long period of expansion commenced. The hymn *adon olam,* "Lord of the Universe," for example, which opens the daily *shacharit* and—heartily sung to a variety of melodies, the oldest originally a 17th-century German drinking song—concludes the Sabbath and holiday additional service or *musaf,* is attributed to the 11th-century Hispano-Hebrew poet Shlomo ibn Gabirol. The solemn *aleinu le-shabe'ach,* "It is Our Duty to Praise," the coda of all three daily services, was restricted to the High Holidays until roughly 1300. This is also approximately when the mourner's kaddish entered the liturgy (other forms of the kaddish are older), while the favorite Sabbath hymn *lekha dodi* was composed by the 16th-century Palestinian kabbalist Shlomo Alkabetz. Part of the prayer for the state of Israel recited by many congregations today derives from 19th-century prayers by European Jews for their governments. A siddur inherited by me from my father, printed in Vilna in 1909, asks God to "protect, assist, elevate, exalt, and raise high our lord Tsar Nikolai Alexandrovitsh, his wife the esteemed Tsarina Alexandra Fyedorovna, his mother the esteemed Tsarina Maria Fyederovna, and the crown prince Alexei Nikolayevitsh, along with all the royal family, long may it live in glory."

The siddur is thus not a single text but a compilation of texts, differing (although generally only slightly) from one part of the Jewish world to the next. Until the first attempts to streamline it were made by the German Reform movement in the early nineteenth century, it never stopped absorbing new hymns, poems, biblical and rabbinic passages, doxologies, confessional formulas, and pleas for divine aid and intercession. Its original order became a disorder that still seemed orderly to Jewish worshipers because anything repeated day after day, year after year, and century after century, will be perceived by those who repeat it as the natural—indeed, the only conceivable—way of doing things.

Nevertheless, the original core of Jewish prayer is still intact and tightly structured. Located some two-thirds of the way through *shacharit*, it begins with the *barkhu* or "Bless ye," a call to worship that once marked the morning service's commencement, just as it still does that of the evening service:

> Prayer leader: Bless the Lord, the blessed One!
> Congregation: Bless the Lord the blessed One,
> for ever and all time!
> Prayer leader: Bless the Lord the blessed One,
> for ever and all time!

Anyone familiar with the traditional synagogue service knows the feeling of snapping to attention that the *barkhu* produces. Until now the congregation has behaved like an undisciplined aggregate, some of its members barely moving their lips as they pray, others whispering, murmuring, or declaiming the words out loud; some keeping up with the prayer leader and some not; the latecomers striving to catch up with the earlier arrivals; no one paying much heed to anyone else. With the *barkhu,* the atmosphere changes. The prayer leader takes command; his chant grows louder and more emphatic; the congregation becomes a single body and responds in unison. The *barkhu* still functions as a call to prayer, even if those called by it have been praying for quite a while.

From the *barkhu,* the *shacharit* proceeds to the *yotzer,* a paean to God, the creator of light, who "great in knowledge, prepared and made the rays of the sun." This section builds up to a description of the different orders of God's angels chanting His praises in words taken from the epiphanies of the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel:

> All accept on themselves,
> one from another,
> the yoke of the kingdom of heaven,
> granting permission to one another
> to sanctify the One who formed them,
> in serene spirit,
> pure speech and sweet melody.
> All, as one,
> proclaim His holiness
> saying in awe:
>
> Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts:
> the whole world is filled with His glory!
> Then the Ophanim and the Holy Hayot,
> with a roar of noise,
> raise themselves toward the Seraphim and,
> facing them, give praise, saying:
>
> Blessed be the Lord's glory from His place!

From here the service proceeds to the *bocher be-amo yisrael be-ahava,* a prayer thanking God for

"Hear, Israel! The Lord is our God; the Lord is one" (Deut. 6:4). (Painting by David Gelernter. Courtesy of Susan and Roger Hertog.)

His love in choosing Israel; next, to the tripartite "Hear, O Israel," Judaism's great declaration of faith that *adonai eloheinu, adonai echad,* "the Lord is our God, the Lord is One"; then to the *ga'al yisrael,* the theme of God's salvation as evinced by the parting of the Red Sea; and on to the silently recited Eighteen Benedictions—which, as explained by Sacks in emphasizing the numerical "fractals" of the liturgy, repeat the triads that have preceded them with "three blessings of praise at the beginning … three of acknowledgment at the end," and in between, "six individual requests, followed by six collective ones, each divided into two groups of three."

The climax of this progression comes in the prayer leader's repetition of the Eighteen Benedictions, now recited aloud with the addition of the *kedusha* or "Holiness." In it, the congregation rises and the prayer leader intones:

> We will sanctify Your name on earth,
> as they [the angels] sanctify it in the highest heavens, as is written by Your prophet,
> "And they call to one another saying:
> Congregation: Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole world is filled with His glory!"
> Those facing him say "Blessed –"
> Prayer Leader: Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole world is filled with His glory!"
> Those facing them say "Blessed –"
> Congregation: "Blessed is the Lord's glory from His place."

Kadosh, kadosh, kadosh: the prophet Isaiah's three "holies" are customarily exclaimed while rising with each on the balls of one's feet, as if the congregation were a throng of angels seeking to catch a glimpse of God's throne over the heads of those in front of it. It is, as Jonathan Sacks writes in his thoughtful introduction, a moment of "astonishing drama." Angels and men in rabbinic midrash are often portrayed as rivals, men striving for the angels' closeness to God, angels jealous of God's fascination with men, and there is an undercurrent of this competition in the morning prayer, which describes [His] ministering angels,

> all of whom stand in the universe's heights,
> proclaiming together,
> in awe, aloud,
> the words of the living God, the eternal King.
> They are all beloved, all pure, all mighty,
> and all perform in awe and reverence the will of their Maker.
> All open their mouths in holiness and purity,
> With song and psalm,
> And bless, praise, glorify,
> revere, sanctify and declare the sovereignty of [God]

What mortal can vie with such creatures of perfection? Yet in the *kedusha,* men and angels join together, serenading God with the same words. As it is above, so it is below. For a brief moment every morning, the universe is unified as it was at the time of its creation, of which *shacharit* is a recurring commemoration.

It is wonderfully poetic—even more so in Hebrew, to which Sacks' English does not always do full justice.

Often, it does. "Bless the Lord, the blessed One" for *barkhu et adonai ha-mevorakh,* with its response of "Bless the Lord, the blessed One, for ever and all time" for *barukh adonai ha-mevorakh le-olam va-ed,* strikes just the right note. How easy it is to strike a wrong one can be seen from the *Artscroll*'s "Bless Hashem, the blessed One" / "Blessed is Hashem, the blessed One, for all eternity"; the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism's *Siddur Sim Shalom*'s "Praise the Lord, Source of Blessing" / "Praised be the Lord, Source of blessing, throughout all time"; and the Reform movement's *Mishkan T'filah*'s "Praise Adonai to whom praise is due!" / "Praised be Adonai to whom praise is due, now and forever!"

All three of these are ill-conceived, each in a way that is characteristic of its denomination of Judaism. "Hashem"—literally, "the Name"—is a Hebrew circumlocution commonly used by Orthodox Jews in obedience to the biblical prohibition on taking God's name in vain; as a rendition of *adonai,* "Lord," in the *barkhu,* it suggests that a translated Hebrew prayer is a vain thing itself. *Sim Shalom*'s "Praise" instead of "Bless," coupled with "Source of Blessing" (an epithet for God borrowed from the 13th-century kabbalist Bahya ben Asher) in place of "the blessed One," are meant to sidestep the question of how God can be blessed by man; yet a good translation transmits questions (this one already embedded in the language of the Bible), it does not conceal them. *Mishkan T'filah*, which also bowdlerizes blessing to praising, seeks a bold immediacy by going to the opposite extreme from the *Artscroll* and incorrectly treating *adonai* as if it *were* the name of God rather than a translatable Hebrew word *for* God. The *Koren* alone is faithful to the *barkhu*'s gravity and simplicity.

In other places, however, the *Koren* seems wrong, too. "With a roar of noise" for Ezekiel's *be-kol ra'ash gadol*—literally, "with a great sound of noise"—is clunky. It evokes a revved car engine more than the clamor of angels. Although the King James Bible's "with a noise of a great rushing" may also leave something to be desired, it at least calls to mind waterfalls, not exhaust pipes.

On the whole, Sacks makes little attempt to reproduce the siddur's poetry. Take the lines in the *yotzer* beginning with "[His] ministering angels." In Hebrew they are:

> *Va-asher meshartav kulam omdim be-rum olam*
> *u-mashmi'im be-yir'ah yachad be-kol*
> *divrei elohim chayim u-melekh olam.*
> *Kulam ahuvim, kulam b'rurim, kulam giborim,*
> *Ve-khulam osim be-eimah u-veyir'ah retzon konam.*
> *Ve-khulam potchim et pihem bi-kedusha u-vetahara*
> *be-shirah u-vezimrah, u-mevarkhim*
> *u-meshabchim u-mefa'arim*
> *u-ma'aritzim u-makdishim u-mamlikhim*

Like all good poetry, this passage depends on its fusion of sense and sound—that is, of its chorus of singing angels and its humming Hebrew *mem.* This consonant already dominates the first line, whose last four words end with it. Lines 1, 3, and 5 rhyme in *am*—twice in *olam,* "world" or "universe," and once in *konam,* "their Maker"—while the same syllable occurs three more times in *kulam,* "all." Even more insistent is *–im,* the masculine plural ending of Hebrew nouns and present-tense verbs, which is repeated 15 times, reaching a crescendo in the concluding "bless, praise, glorify, revere, sanctify, and declare the sovereignty of [God]," all double-*mem*med verbs that, culminating in the triple *mem* of *mamlikhim,* swell like a grand musical chord.

The translation in the *Koren Siddur* conveys none of this. Yet Sacks was wise, I think, not to attempt it—and not only because the task might well have been beyond him, or anyone. Even Orthodox Jews who do not completely understand the siddur's Hebrew are not, after all, going to recite the *shacharit* in English. Their God expects them to worship Him in Hebrew alone. It is, as it were, His native tongue in which He converses with His angels, and He appreciates the effort to speak to Him in it, however lamely. Sacks' translation is not meant to be prayed in, nor is it aimed at creating a literary equivalent that would vie with the Hebrew and draw attention away from it. It is there solely as an aid to understanding the Hebrew, a kind of interlinear (though not printed that way) gloss. This is also the logic behind its counter-intuitive printing of the right-to-left-written Hebrew on each left-hand page and the left-to-right-written English on each right-hand page, thus arranging the two languages back-to-back rather than face-to-face. As explained on the *Koren Siddur* website, this placement is meant to allow the Hebrew and English texts "to align at the center of the Siddur," so that, as both "flow to the margins," they are symmetrical and more easily compared.

But are even Orthodox worshipers who fully understand the *shacharit*'s Hebrew moved by its poetry or drama? An outside observer might be permitted to doubt it. Although these worshipers may show a bit of emotion in the *shema* (drawing out the last syllable of *echad* as did the martyred Rabbi Akiva who, exclaiming it as he was tortured to death by the Romans, "lingered on 'One' and surrendered his soul with it"), and may raise their voices for the "holy, holy, holy" of the *kedusha,* they then take their seats again and help the prayer leader hasten through the rest of the service with a half-swallowed "Blessed is He, blessed is His name" after each "Blessed are you, O Lord" and a quick "Amen" at its end.

They have reason to hurry. Most are men with jobs to get to and have already been praying for close to half an hour, having managed to recite before the *barkhu*—to give a partial list—the blessings for donning their *tallitot* and *tefillin*; a lengthy passage from the Book of Exodus; the *adon olam*; the *yigdal,* a versification of the thirteen dogmatic beliefs declared by Maimonides to be incumbent on every Jew; the fourteen "Blessings of the Dawn"; a passage from the Book of Genesis; long descriptions of the daily sacrifices from the Pentateuch; a section of the Mishnah detailing the ingredients and preparation of the *k'toret,* the incense burned in the Temple; more long descriptions of sacrifices; the thirteen logical principles by which the Mishnaic sage Rabbi Yishma'el taught that the Torah should be expounded; a non-mourner's kaddish; for those in mourning, a mourner's kaddish; a dozen different Psalms and compilations of verses from the Book of Psalms; excerpts from the Books of Chronicles and Nehemiah; the prophetess Miriam's song about crossing the Red Sea in the Book of Exodus, and another non-mourner's kaddish.

Nor are the Eighteen Benedictions the end. Still to come are the *tachanun* or plea for God's forgiveness, of which an even longer version is said on days the Torah is read; another non-mourner's kaddish; the ceremony of removing the Torah scroll from the Ark if it is a Monday or a Thursday; the reading from it; the ceremony of returning it to the Ark; more Psalms and biblical passages; another non-mourner's kaddish; *aleinu*; a mourner's kaddish; a special Psalm for the day of the week; and a final non-mourner's kaddish, after which the worshiper strips off his *tefillin*, quickly removes and folds his *tallit*, and departs with few words—unless, that is, he has chosen, like many Orthodox Jews (the non-Orthodox rarely bother with daily prayer), to say *shacharit* at home and keep his synagogue-going for Sabbaths and holidays. This saves not only travel time but also the prayer leader's repetition of the Eighteen Benedictions with the *kedusha,* the reading of the Torah and the many kaddishes, all of which are performable only in a *minyan* or prayer quorum of ten.

And indeed, Sabbath and holiday prayer in a typical Orthodox congregation is less rushed. There is more singing on the congregation's part and a slower, more melodic delivery on the prayer leader's. Yet the overall impression remains one of casualness. Worshipers pray silently or out loud as they wish, sometimes joining the prayer leader for a phrase or two, sometimes calling out words on their own. Some hold themselves upright; others "shockle," to use the Yiddish word for rocking back and forth or swaying from side to side with a motion that can be contemplatively slow or almost sexually frenetic. Men may converse in the middle of the prayer; at the end of the silent *shemoneh esrei*, which is recited at different speeds, those who are done stand chatting while waiting for the others to finish. Small children run unhindered in the aisles. As the Torah is read, the sexton strolls around the synagogue assigning ritual tasks: being called to the Torah; lifting it when the reading is over; rolling it tight, restoring its drapery and silver crown, and putting it back in the Ark. On returning to their seats, the recipients of these honors stop to shake the hands held out to them. If a congregant is reading rather than praying, no one minds. He may be immersed in a page of Talmud or *The Ethics of The Fathers,* a Mishnaic tractate of rabbinic epigrams that is included in the siddur because it is studied in some congregations on the Sabbath but that also serves as an intellectual refuge for those bored with the prayer itself.

In any congregation, there are also likely to be worshipers praying with genuine fervor. On the whole, however, if prayer is, as Sacks says, "the most intimate gesture of the religious life and the most transformative," there is more intimacy than transformation in most Orthodox services. Although the synagogue may be the house of God, one doesn't expect to have a fresh or deep experience each time when one drops in on God so often. Nor, perhaps, can one expect God to. There is a joke about the Jew who complains, "O Lord, my next-door neighbor is a Conservative Jew; he prays once a week and he's a millionaire. Down the street lives a Reform Jew; he prays once a year and he's a billionaire. And I pray three times a day, every day, and have nothing but debts."

"That's just it," God replies. "I hate nudniks."

The Ba'al Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism, might have said that the Jew's prayers never reached God at all. Once, it is told, the Ba'al Shem came to a synagogue and balked at entering it. To his entourage he explained that it was crammed with perfunctory prayers whose failure to rise to the heavens left no room for him to set foot inside.

The struggle to keep prayer—"the language of the soul in conversation with God," to quote Sacks again—from becoming a routine activity is intrinsic to every religion that makes praying a regular duty. In *The Ethics of the Fathers* is the saying, attributed to the 1st-century sage Shimon ben Netanel, "Be punctilious in reciting the 'Hear O Israel' and the other prayers, and when you pray, make your prayers not rote but mercy cries to God"; yet a punctilious cry for mercy is not easily achieved. The 4th-century church abbot Agatho, when asked what the hardest part of the religious life was, replied that it was prayer, since the demons who hated God put more effort into thwarting it than into anything else.

Whoever has ever prayed regularly and not just at rare moments of personal crisis knows what these demons are: they range from difficulty in concentrating and the disturbance of distracting thoughts to religious doubts and the inability to identify with the words one is saying. The observant Jew is tempting prey for them. A devout Catholic attends a once-a-week mass that has a great deal of pageantry to hold his attention and in which his role is limited to brief responses to the longer utterances of the priest. In most Protestant services, congregational participation consists largely of hymn singing, an expansively enjoyable activity. Though Muslims pray five times a day, each prayer is brief, a few pithy formulas declaring God's greatness accompanied by frequent changes of physical position. Only Jews must recite every morning, "The incense contained eleven kinds of spices: balsam, onycha, galbanum and frankincense … myrhh, cassia, spikenard and saffron … twelve manehs of costus, three of aromatic bark; nine of cinnamon," or, every evening:

> Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the
> Universe,
> who by His word brings on evenings,
> by His wisdom opens the gates of heaven,
> with understanding makes time change and the
> seasons rotate,
> and by His will
> orders the stars in their constellations in the sky.
> He creates day and night,
> rolling away the light before the darkness,
> and darkness before the light.

This is a beautiful prayer—there are many like it in the siddur—but the demons are not awed by beauty. Jews have developed ways of dealing with them. They learn the daily services by heart so that they can shut their eyes while saying them and keep the outside world at bay; a few may even wrap their prayer shawls around their heads to be alone with God. They shockle, letting the steady rhythm of their bodies concentrate them as breathing does in meditation. They enter the prayers imaginatively: a list of the ingredients in the Temple incense is different if you picture yourself as the incense maker. (The early 19th-century Hasidic master Avraham Yehoshua Heschel of Apt is said to have recited the Yom Kippur service's description of the High Priest in the Holy of Holies entirely in the first person because he believed he had performed the task in a former life.) They seek out the prayers that speak most to them. Someone who is ill or has illness in his family will, in the Eighteen Benedictions, put all his feeling into "Heal us, Lord, and we shall be healed … Blessed are You, Lord, Healer of the sick of His people Israel." A person conscious of having done wrong will dwell on "Forgive us, our Father, for we have sinned … Blessed are You, Lord, the gracious One who repeatedly forgives."

Concentrating on the liturgy by endowing its words with maximal meaning, personal significance, or special intensity is known in Jewish tradition as *kavanah,* a Hebrew word meaning "intention." But the word also has a more technical significance, designating in kabbalistic practice a specific mystical meditation designed to heighten prayer's effect on the Upper Spheres. Although in some Orthodox circles they may be making a comeback, such *kavanot,* of which the *Koren Siddur* has several, have on the whole fallen into disuse, perhaps because they make a long service even longer. While as capable of degenerating into mere words as anything else, the cosmic significance with which they endow the act of prayer can be a powerfully focusing force.

Nothing, however, can keep one focused on one's prayers when one loses faith in the God to whom one has been praying. This happened to me midway through adolescence. Although since then I have attended many synagogues services, I have never really been able to pray. A part of me still yearns for the days when I could. It misses the thrill of the leather straps biting into my arm each morning as I said, "I will betroth you to me for ever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and justice, loving-kindness and compassion; I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord." It misses the soul-throb of God's bringing on the evening while the last light goes out in the west, the spheres rolling out darkness over the face of the earth. It misses the devotion of bowing low like a servant leaving the room of his master, "the King of all kings, the Holy One blessed be He," in the concluding *aleinu.*

Nothing, however, can keep one focused on one's prayers when one loses faith in the God to whom one has been praying.

There were times when I prayed mechanically then, too. There were times when I didn't pray at all. But there were times when I felt like a priest in the Temple, binding my soul to the altar and offering the daily sacrifice at its appointed time and place. It was the intensity of that experience that makes me feel like an imposter when I take part in a synagogue service today. Like anyone skilled at playing a role, I alone know I am playing it. I go through the motions of prayer as proficiently as do the men around me. You don't forget such things any more than you forget how to swim or ride a bicycle.

And yet I sometimes wonder how many of these men are having an experience more intense than my own. Not a large number, to judge by outward appearances. Most seem to be engaged in what they are doing without overly troubling themselves about it. They take pleasure in being together, as people take pleasure in any group activity—folk dancing, say, or a sing-along. I do not say they have no feeling of uplift. Clearly they do. But it is an uplift that could also be mine if I allowed it to be, which may be why I place no great value on it.

I acknowledge my snobbery. There is, as Emile Durkheim was perhaps the first to observe in his *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, a social dimension to worship that may be mistaken for something else. Praying in a *minyan* is different from praying alone, less because of the additional prayers said by the worshipers than because of the human solidarity established among them. Precisely this, though, is its spiritual danger. Judaism, to be sure, is about community. The God of Israel made His covenant not with individuals but with a people, of which a congregation of worshipers is a microcosm. But a congregation can lift its voices more to itself than to God. Communal worship then becomes reflexive, a form of self-celebration. Of all prayer's demons, this may be the subtlest.

A sociologist like Durkheim might remark that it is altogether too subtle to be concerned with, since group prayer is by nature an act in which the social and spiritual are indistinguishable. A woman I know would agree. She has a religious history similar to my own except for the fact that she has continued to attend regular Orthodox services all her life. "It's my way of connecting with what is beyond myself," she has said to me. "Whether that's human or divine, I can't say. I only know that nothing else brings me into the same contact with it."

My father, who prayed with great *kavanah* yet was adamant about having no religious beliefs whatsoever, had a different answer. "It's what a Jew does," he would say. He once told me a story about a man standing in the street outside a *shtibl,* a little synagogue, looking for a *tseynter,* a tenth Jew to add to the nine waiting inside to say the afternoon prayer. Spotting a likely-looking candidate, he asks: "Excuse me, mister. Are you Jewish?" "Yes, I am," says the Jew. "What can I do for you?" "You can join a minyan for mincha," the man says. "I'm afraid that's impossible," answers the Jew. "Why?" asks the man. "Because I'm an atheist," says the Jew. The man gives the Jew a withering look. "And where," he inquires, "is it written that an atheist doesn't have to say mincha?"

In fact, it's written nowhere. As far as Jewish law is concerned, an atheist has to pray like anyone else.

Maybe my snobbery, then, has less to recommend it than I think. I have always considered it a form of respect for the God I once believed in to refuse to dishonor either of us by mouthing empty words to Him. But the God of Judaism would rather have empty words than none. *Mitokh she-lo lishma ba lishma,* the rabbis said: the deed not initially performed for its own sake will come to be for its own sake if persisted at.

Is it only a foolish pride, then, that makes me insist on my impostership? The Hasidic rabbi Yisroel of Koznitz is said to have let out a cry of illumination upon hearing the verse "And thy carcasses shall be meat unto all the birds of the air" read in the *tokhecha,* the chapter in Deuteronomy describing the curses God will bring on the people of Israel if disobeyed by them. Afterwards, he related his insight to his disciples:

> Prayers said without fear or love, are like carcasses. But He who hears every prayer has mercy on His creatures. From above He awakens men's hearts, so that at long last they can pray with their souls as they should, and then their prayers grow great and devour the carcasses and fly like birds to the gates of Heaven.

On Sabbaths, holidays, and days of the new moon, an extra sacrifice was offered in the Temple, which led to the institution of the *musaf,* a fourth, additional synagogue service after the Torah reading. It centers on the silent prayer, whose weekday benedictions are now replaced by a passage about this sacrifice. On Sabbaths, for instance, one says:

> May it be Your will
> Lord our God and God of our ancestors, to lead us back in joy
> to our land and to plant us within our borders…
>
> And the additional offering of this Sabbath day
> we will prepare and offer before You in love,
> in accord with Your will's commandment,
> as You wrote for us in your Torah…
>
> "On the Sabbath day,
> make an offering of two lambs a year old, without blemish,
> together with two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil as a meal-offering, and its appropriate libation."

Among the earliest changes in the traditional liturgy made by the Reform movement in Germany, one found in its first prayer book, printed by the *Neuen israelitischen Tempelverein* of Hamburg in 1818, was the elimination of this passage. The motives for deleting it were obvious. Apart from wishing to disassociate themselves from the dream of returning to Zion, the new synagogue's founders regarded even lip service to the reinstitution of animal sacrifice as an embarrassment, the expression of an atavistic desire to revert to a more primitive stage of Judaism that had been happily outgrown.

Contemporary Reform synagogues in America have gone further by eliminating the *musaf* service entirely. In the *Mishkan T'filah,* as in its predecessor, the Central Conference of American Rabbis' *Union Prayer Book,* the Sabbath morning service ends with the Torah reading. There is not so much as an editorial note to indicate the *musaf*'s absence.

The Conservative movement, though it too renounces the hope for sacrifice's renewal, has been less radical. Its 1947 *Sabbath and Festival Prayer Book* contains the traditional *amida* of the *musaf*, with the passage on sacrifice emended to:

> May it be Thy will, O Lord our God and God of our fathers, to lead us joyfully back to our land, and to establish us within its borders where our forefathers prepared the daily offerings and the additional Sabbath offerings, as is written in Thy Torah, through Moses, Thine inspired servant.

The 1989 *Siddur Sim Shalom* has two *musaf* services, the emended traditional one and an "alternative" one. The traditional one modernizes the language of "May it be Thy will" and adds, "And there [in our land] may we worship You with love and reverence as in days of old and ancient times." The alternative one gives the worshiper a choice of four different *amida*s, all ignoring the subject of sacrifice entirely.

One could easily make sport of these two *musafs*, the first for the tougher-minded who don't shrink from the fact that their forefathers slit the throats of bullocks, rams, lambs, goats, and doves in the Temple, the second for the squeamish who would rather not think about it. Yet when it comes to animal sacrifice, we are all squeamish today. It is a practice so foreign to us that we scarcely have any notion of what its sacredness was about or of why, for most of human history, religious ceremonies all over the world revolved around it.

Historically, if communal prayer took the place of animal sacrifice, animal sacrifice, as the Bible reminds us in the story of the binding of Isaac, took the place of human sacrifice. Early humanity worshiped its gods with the taking of human life because human life was the most precious thing it could give them. Animal life came next. And because, as the Book of Deuteronomy tells us, *ha-dam hu ha-nefesh,* the blood is an animal's life, it commands us: "Only be sure that you eat not the blood … thou shalt pour it upon the earth as water." The meat of the sacrifice is to be eaten and enjoyed. The blood is for God alone.

The flow of blood always shocks. It mesmerizes. Even cutting a finger sends a shiver of horror and excitement through us that no pain or ache can duplicate. The few drops that are quickly staunched by a band-aid are the life beginning to leave us. The blood gushing from an animal's throat at an altar needs no words. It is wordless prayer, just as prayer is bloodless sacrifice.

There is a logic in the absence of the *musaf* in *Mishkan T'filah*. We are beyond all that now, so why mention it?

There is a logic in the emended *musaf* of *Siddur Sim Shalom*, too. Our forefathers did what they did and we are not ashamed of it, but it would be absurd to want to do it ourselves. Let us therefore mention it—in the past tense.

There is only tradition in the *musaf* of the *Koren Siddur*. All but the more hallucinatory Orthodox Jews know that the Temple will not be rebuilt in historical time and that animals will not again be slaughtered in it. And the great majority of them, if honest, would admit to being thankful that this is so.

But the traditional *musaf* expresses a passionate wish. *And the additional offering of this Sabbath day we will prepare and offer before You in love*: it is the wish to be able to offer to God what is most precious—and what is most precious is not the words that we say day in and day out. Words are what the siddur has accumulated, more and more of them, as though in the fear that there can never be enough. Some move us more and some move us less, but none grabs us and shakes us until we feel faint. We yearn for the prayer that cuts to the quick like a knife.

Hillel Halkin*, who lives in Israel, is a translator, essayist, and author of four books, the latest of which, published this month by Nextbook/Shocken, is his biography* Yehuda Halevi.

Requiem for a Luftmentsh

BY DARA HORN

ROSENFELD'S LIVES: FAME, OBLIVION, AND THE FURIES OF WRITING
by Steven Zipperstein
Yale University Press, 274 pages., $27.50

Isaac Rosenfeld, the mid-century American Jewish intellectual—essayist, novelist, literary critic, thinker, wastrel, provocateur, son, husband, father, lover, prodigy, genius, failure, dead at his desk of a heart attack at the age of 38—was many things to many people, but no one would say he wasn't bright. If anything bound the many threads of his dissolute life, incisively recounted in Steven Zipperstein's biography *Rosenfeld's Lives*, it was his intellect, his supreme conviction from childhood onward that what made life worth living was the thought that went into it. Rosenfeld is best known today for his friendship and rivalry with Saul Bellow, for his unrealized grand ambitions as a novelist, and for the nonfiction pieces he wrote for *The Partisan Review*, *Commentary*, and *The New Republic*—essays that pushed the boundaries of cultural criticism with their astute observations on morality and beauty. When Zipperstein's book appeared last year, reviewers focused almost exclusively on Rosenfeld as a symbol of literary failure, on Bellow as Rosenfeld's foil, and Rosenfeld as the might-have-been.

But these reviewers missed the most remarkable aspect of Rosenfeld's brief life: not the career he might have had, but the one that he actually did have, and most significantly, what that career represented. Rosenfeld was a public intellectual of a very specific sort that is nearly extinct today, and it is very much worth exploring why that is so. What we are talking about is not the decline of the intellectual, or even of the Jewish intellectual, but rather the decline of an explicitly Jewish subset of the intellectual: the *luftmentsh*. The implications of the *luftmentsh*'s demise for both Jewish and American culture are vast—and almost entirely positive. For the death of the *luftmentsh* may mark the beginning of an entirely new understanding of what intelligence should be.

The Yiddish word *luftmentsh* literally means "airman," but it is tempting to translate it as "airhead," since the term is considerably closer to insult than compliment. In Eastern European Jewish culture, it describes a man—and as we shall see, a *luftmentsh* is always a man—who has enormous ambition, but whose achievements are confined to castles in the air. The *luftmentsh* loves to think and dream, but resists at all costs the pull of gravity that might return him to earth to confront his limitations. Instead he looks to the clouds with pure, beautiful, delusional optimism: not merely hopeful, but entirely convinced that he indeed knows how to fly. The most famous *luftmentsh* in the Yiddish literary canon is Sholem Aleichem's Menachem-Mendl, a character who spends his life pursuing various financial schemes with the unwavering conviction that he is always on the verge of success—and whose failures only encourage him to try again. But as hospitable as the world of finance is (or was) to dreams unrelated to reality, the *luftmentsh*'s most natural habitat is the world of letters. In literary and intellectual circles, the *luftmentsh* can truly thrive, pursuing his lofty ideas to their most impractical extremes and all the while being praised for his genius, without ever needing to demonstrate any kind of accomplishment at all. Indeed, to the true *luftmentsh*, actual accomplishments—whether businesses built, coherent works composed, students instructed, disciples cultivated, children raised, bills paid, lovers satisfied, problems solved—are almost considered shortcomings, interfering as they do with his far more majestic potential. If this type doesn't sound familiar to you, then perhaps you aren't acquainted with previous centuries' incarnations of the Jewish nerd.

BELOVED FATHER
ISAAC
ROSENFELD
Writer

Gravestone of Isaac Rosenfeld (1918-1956) at Waldheim Jewish Cemetery. (Photo by John Martine.)

Isaac Rosenfeld grew up as the living embodiment of the twentieth century's American Jewish nerd. The son of immigrant parents, he was short, stout, sickly, a "barber pole with glasses," and encouraged by his family to spend the bulk of his boyhood doing what he clearly enjoyed most: sitting in a dimly-lit room and reading his way through the canon of Western philosophy and literature. He made it out of the house to go to school, of course, and also to attend a Sholem Aleichem Folkshul (Hebrew-school-like supplementary program designed to preserve Yiddish literacy) and he wrote well enough to publish some short works in Yiddish as a young adult. At home, he replaced an earlier generation's obsessive study of Talmud with an obsessive study of Aristotle, Dostoyevsky, and the various strains of Marxist philosophy that were in vogue among American intellectuals of his time. He might well have remained locked in his bedroom forever if he hadn't had the great fortune in public high school of meeting some like-minded peers, most notably Saul Bellow. Their friendship, which deteriorated with Bellow's adult successes, centered around an intense exchange of ideas, and was fueled by their earnest conviction that they were both destined for greatness as American authors. Comfortable enough in the vast seas of both Jewish and Gentile civilization to mock the latter with the former, their best-remembered joint project was "Di shir ha-shirim fun Mendl Pumshtok," a Yiddish parody of T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." At the University of Chicago, Rosenfeld and Bellow were enrolled in a curriculum based on the so-called Great Books, but this was somewhat irrelevant. After all, they had already read them.

One gets the sense, in examining these young men's lives, of an excitement in ideas unequaled by any similar excitement in reality. Part of the reason for this was the Great Depression. The lack of job prospects for these bright young people was both debilitating and liberating, as it meant that one could spend all day in the library without missing out on any opportunities in the real world. Bellow described this period as the beginning of his "mental life," and it is quite possible that he would have preferred not to have any other. Rosenfeld certainly would have preferred it that way. Upon graduating, he took up a fellowship in philosophy at Columbia University, but found even open-ended graduate study to be too stifling for his burgeoning mind. He abandoned his fellowship to devote himself entirely to writing fiction and criticism—with his wife's secretarial earnings paying his bills. In his short lifetime, Rosenfeld failed to achieve his dream of writing enduring fiction, but his essays—on books, on terror and joy, on good and evil, on the moral and aesthetic dimensions of literature, on the Jewish past and future, on the cultural implications of money and power and youth and sex and beauty and love and decline and death—are stunning, sometimes funny, sometimes devastating, searing coals of thought.

Rosenfeld soon found himself at the center of a swirling salon of writers, thinkers, bohemians, and intellectuals, nearly all of them Jewish, and, one surmises from descriptions of the interactions and correspondence between these friends and enemies, nearly all of them as well-read as he. These brilliant people were not immune to the less brilliant fads of the day, such as the theories of the psychologist Wilhelm Reich, who advised his followers to gather their sexual energy by masturbating while lying in specially-built "orgone boxes." (Both Rosenfeld and Bellow owned their own.) But its most thoughtful members placed their highest hope in the life of the mind, in the possibility, however distant, that the intellectual could bring to society a kind of redemption. And it is this bright, odd hope in the power of the intellectual that today seems so bizarre. Rosenfeld's life story is usually considered a tragedy because of his unmet promise. But what makes one pause now in reading his biography is the bare existence of that promise—the faith that intelligent people around him placed in people like him, and their expectation that a great American novel or essay would redefine and change the nation or the world.

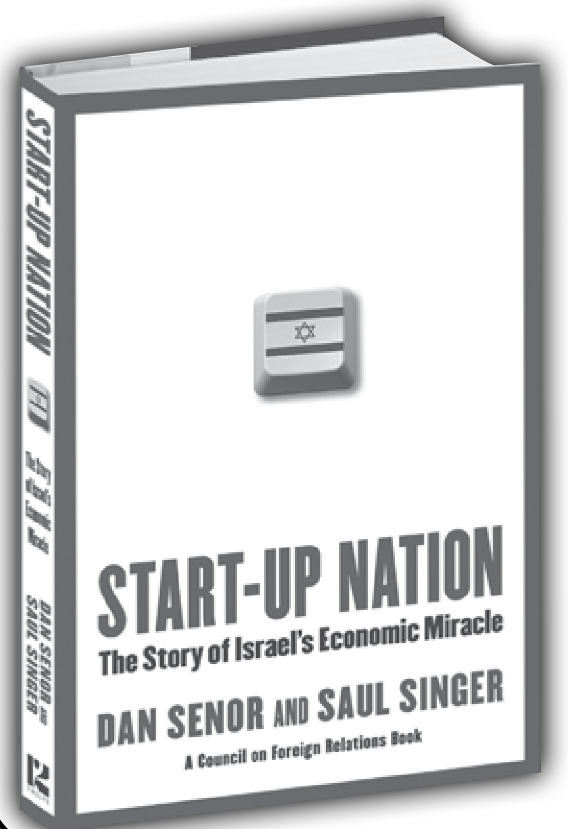
The idea of a "public intellectual" in America today is practically quaint, embodied primarily by the twelve people in American letters who happen to have steady gigs at one of four magazines. One could moan and groan about this, but it would be more interesting to consider whether a society needs such people at all. If we assume for the moment that it does, then it is worth investigating where the younger versions of such people might be hiding—people like the young Rosenfeld, tucked away in their dimly lit rooms with their books, preparing for the life of the mind. And so I present the question: Where are the young people today who read Aristotle for fun?

It's a leading question, of course, and also an unfair one, since even Rosenfeld and his friends had the added motivation that being well-read might have impressed people (perhaps even—gasp—girls) in a way that it would not today. But I am not asking this question to make some false and tedious point about each generation being dumber than the last. Much like the proverbial sucker, there's a nerd born every minute. Rather, I ask the question in order to determine what it means to be young, smart, and talented now as opposed to then. This is not really a question about who attends prestigious universities or who becomes famous (or even infamous), but about how we define intelligence, ambition, and success, which qualities we respect in others, what sorts of lives we want young people to aspire to lead, and what ideas we believe make life worth living.

The acute demise of the public intellectual in America has been demonstrated many times over, most thoroughly in Richard Posner's *Public Intellectuals: A Study of Decline* (2001). It would be easy to explain this supposed degeneration in public discourse by citing the usual tedious list of low-brow media influences with which today's young people must contend. But if anything, the rise of a bottom-up media culture has made intellectual life potentially richer, with the tiniest niches of thought instantly filled by proliferating publications and with brilliant minds in the hinterlands no longer isolated from their brilliant peers elsewhere. The actual change in intellectual life in recent years is not one of degree, but of direction. Intellect today is no longer measured by how well one observes the world, but rather by how well one solves the problems one finds within it.

Today the primary goal of education at institutions like Harvard or Yale or the University of Chicago is not to teach students to revere ideas, or to

Discover why Israel has more companies on the NASDAQ than Europe, China, and India combined.


START-UP NATION
The Story of Israel's Economic Miracle
DAN SENOR AND SAUL SINGER
A Council on Foreign Relations Book

"Compelling and satisfying...filled with eye-opening revelations...rich examples, explanations and analysis."

—Barron's

Available in hardcover and as an eBook

www.startupnationbook.com

Twelve is an imprint of Grand Central Publishing
Hachette Book Group

master a specific body of works, or to become better observers of the world, but rather to teach them to solve problems. This approach to education has reigned in the sciences since the Enlightenment, but its extension into the humanities dates only to the past forty years. By the time I arrived in college fifteen years ago, the idea of "required reading" for all students was long passé, and even the idea of course requirements was dying a slow death. In fact, one of the only remaining universal hurdles for the freshman class at Harvard, where I had just enrolled, was the Quantitative Reasoning Requirement. The "QRR" was not a math course, but rather a twenty-five-question quiz intended to test one's ability to pinpoint and correct flaws in statistics. A typical question might ask what distortions a telephone survey directed toward every twelfth name in the phone book would produce. (It would overcount single-occupant and small households, if you must know.) If this kind of question sounds more like a case interview at McKinsey Consulting than a requirement for a degree in literature, then it is perhaps not surprising that many of my classmates with humanities degrees became consultants.

Nor was this problem-solving ethos limited to students who simply weren't sure what to do with themselves after graduation and needed to repay their student loans. One would expect a doctoral program—such as the one in which I occasionally spent six years of my life—to be a milieu rather isolated from practical concerns. But even there, I found, the interests of students and faculty were astonishingly technical. An entire field called narratology had emerged whose goal was to uncover consistent patterns in literary works, applying to fiction the concerns of the telephone survey. One internationally renowned scholar, Franco Moretti, had even introduced a new approach to literary study that called for the actual quantification of world literature by characteristics to reveal patterns in literary development, so that students could statistically survey, say, the rise of the first-person in twentieth-century novels across world cultures. This approach would require a team effort of many scholars reading literature across dozens of languages and periods in order to create the necessary graphs. Presumably such an approach would make good use of the skills such scholars needed to pass the QRR.

A far more telling demonstration of how intellectual life has taken a turn for the statistical can be found in Posner's *Public Intellectuals*—not in the book's content, but in its form. To demonstrate the decline of public intellectuals, Posner does not rely on opinions or even reportage from those in the know, but actually provides tables upon tables of statistics tracking media mentions of public figures, sorted by field, age, occupation, and other indicators, and then uses multiple-regression analysis on these data to prove his point.

It would probably not be too much to say that the sort of intellectual literary writing, especially on Jewish subjects, at which Rosenfeld excelled, has moved in this direction too, and is by now quite entrenched in it. This doesn't mean that today's essays on these subjects are collections of statistics. But they are almost always collections of anecdotes and quotations—prooftexts, to invoke the Jewish concept—intended not to meander or observe or to provoke, but rather to effectively prove a point, with as much concrete evidence as can be mustered. In the pages of a new literary magazine like *n+1*, for example, founded several years ago by the sort of young American Jewish intellectuals who approximate the ambitions of the young Rosenfeld and Bellow, the best essays, even on purely literary subjects, are works of reportage that inevitably present a cultural problem and either implicitly or explicitly suggest a solution by the end. The same can be said of magazines like *The New Yorker* or *The New Republic* or other surviving publications to which Rosenfeld contributed. This model of intellectual nonfiction writing has become so standard as to appear obvious, as though this were the only way for an intelligent person to express himself. But this is not the way Rosenfeld wrote.

When Rosenfeld published his infamous essay "Adam and Eve on Delancey Street," claiming that the laws of *kashrut* encourage sexual repression, he did not do so to try to solve a problem of sexual repression; his goal was to make an observation and, of course, to provoke his readers. In 1949, the piece stirred a controversy by dismissing religious concerns with a dirty joke. But what is most remarkable about that essay today is the high-wire act of its reasoning. It jumps from an anecdote about Jews observing the production of "kosher bacon" at a delicatessen to his conclusion on why such an event would draw a crowd: "Now I am prepared to say that this scene had its origin in Paradise." It continues with a vague account of Jewish dietary laws, builds to an equally vague assessment of meat and dairy as correlating to male and female, culminates with the idea that food taboos are placeholders for sexual taboos, and concludes that *kashrut* be abolished for all but Hasidim.

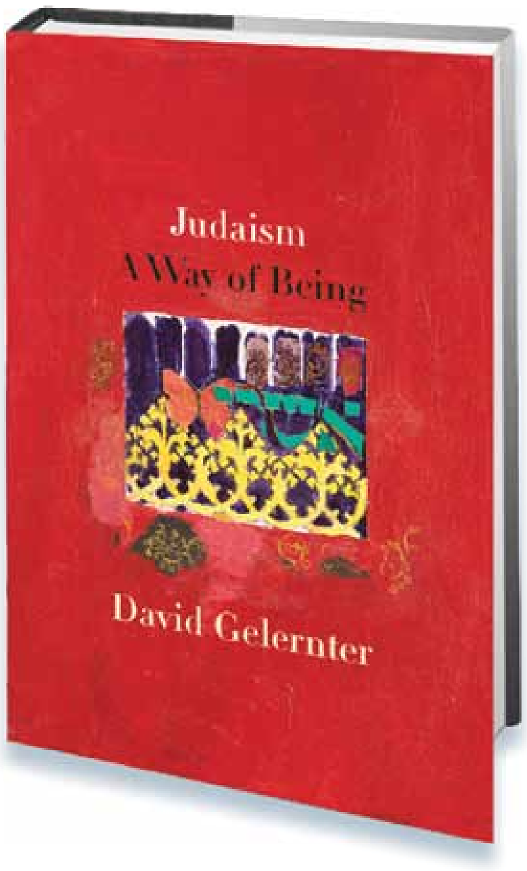
It is a crazy essay, not because of the ideas it presents, which today barely register as provocative, but because its highly intellectual author felt no need to provide even the slightest bit of evidence to support his admittedly provocative claims. He quotes no texts, cites no studies, includes no interviews, provides not even a single comment from a single person—whether a scholar, a man on the street, or his mother-in-law—to buttress his point. The piece does not even include the sort of barely half-baked non-evidence that a non-journalistically-inclined Jewish nerd might reasonably be expected to produce on the topic of *kashrut*—such as, say, a verse from the Torah, or better yet, a conveniently misinterpreted verse from the Torah. Rosenfeld simply doesn't bother. He relies on his writing alone to make his point. Today, I cannot read that essay without mentally demanding proof, without recalling the statistical law that correlation (if there even is one in this case) does not imply causation, or without reaching the end and thinking, "Well, and if it were true, what do you suggest we do about it?", knowing that even Rosenfeld's suggestion that the Jewish dietary laws be abolished is intended as provocation rather than solution. I ask these questions as I read this essay not because I am naturally hostile to its conclusions, but simply because I am accustomed to seeing smart writers at least try to prove their points. It is no longer the case that an intriguing idea is enough.

Yet an intriguing idea is all that sustains Rosenfeld's best and most memorable essays. Essays on the state of American Jewish literature (usually about its demise) crop up every decade or so. One can easily find the most recent ones in the pages of *The New Yorker* or similar magazines. These essays lately fea-

New from David Gelernter

"A Song of Songs for the contemporary temperament"

– Cynthia Ozick



"Shocks with the lyricism of his prose"

– *Boston Globe*

"Rhapsodic"

– Stanley Fish

"Possessing the force and grace of a mighty poem"

– Wilfred McClay

Yale UNIVERSITY PRESS
YaleBooks.com

ture lists of names of writers and examples of works that fit particular paradigms, declare a trend, and then either praise or lament it. But Rosenfeld's 1944 essay "The Situation of the Jewish Writer" contains not even a single writer's name, except to credit Bellow with the phrase "colonies of the spirit." Instead it is a musing about alienation and exile as a source of creativity. Its claims could not survive our age, now that a very literary Israel and a confident American Jewish community have changed the rules of the game for Jewish writers. But this is beside the point. Even in its own time and on its own terms, the essay could not stand up to any real demand for proof. It makes its observations without citing a single work of literature and without offering a shred of evidence for its grand idea. The essay is moving, elegiac, troubling, provocative, and above all a thing of beauty. One could not publish it today.

Our current expectations of our intellectuals (and of the institutions that cultivate them) are the results of a larger change in what we consider intelligence, but they are not its cause. In the spirit of the evidence-free musings at which Rosenfeld excelled, we might as well take the liberty of moving from blithely observing what has happened to blithely speculating why.

The awkward truth is that intellect today is very closely tied to practical purposes, and specifically to money—or, more accurately (and more true to what money has always represented to Diaspora Jews), to the avoidance of risk. There are several reasons for this. One is almost too obvious to mention: the cost of the kind of education on which intellectual life unfortunately yet undeniably depends. If Isaac Rosenfeld had graduated from the University of Chicago in 1999, he might still have settled upon graduation in a bug-infested New York apartment. But it is likely that he would have been staring down fifty thousand dollars' worth of student debt while doing so, and would still be attempting to pay it off at his death at 38.

Yet there is also a less obvious reason why intellectual life has taken a turn for the practical, and which perhaps more profoundly condemns the Jewish *luftmentsh* to extinction. In non-Jewish Western culture, the life of the mind was for centuries restricted to those whose social status allowed them to afford it, making nerdhood—with its combination of intellectual talent and social isolation—a contradiction in terms, except perhaps for monks. But in Ashkenazi Jewish culture, the idea of *Torah li-shma*, or study of Torah for its own sake, was something to which every man, rich or poor, was expected to aspire, and even in poverty, many achieved the dream of leading an intellectual life. The esteem for scholarship in Jewish culture is a true if tired cliché. But what is less often discussed is the machinery behind the scenes which made it possible: the particular arrangement of Ashkenazi society, in which women were expected both to work outside the home and to raise the children so as to allow their husbands the ability to pursue a life of studying Torah. This societal arrangement affected not only the management of a married couple's life, but their extended family as well: Often an arranged marriage between teenagers would involve the young couple boarding at the bride's parents' home for a number of years, so that the groom could continue his studies free of earthly obligations. This arrangement was so typical that there is even a Yiddish word, *kestler*, denoting a married man who boards with his in-laws.

Bellow once wrote that "art has something to do with an arrest of attention in the midst of distraction," and one could say the same of any intense exploration of ideas. But as anyone who has spent more than twenty minutes alone with multiple children knows, someone has to be on hand to address the distractions. The life of the mind for these men was only possible because women made it so. In fact, one of the many ironies of Jewish culture is how a system of law and lore that is concrete in the extreme, much of it centered on the mundane details of domestic life, came to be obsessively studied by men as a theoretical mental exercise, while their wives were the ones expected to apply these rules to households on earth. If one substitutes Torah study for an intellectual life of a different sort, one finds that Rosenfeld and Bellow during their early careers, despite their deliberate distance from traditional Jewish culture, were in an important sense actually leading the traditional Ashkenazi lifestyle—with their intellectual gifts entirely subsidized, both financially and personally, by their wives. Bellow's case was at one point traditional in the extreme. During his first marriage he actually lived as a kind of literary *kestler* in his wife's parents' home, writing the great American novel while his mother-in-law prepared his meals.

In a story, he wrote "When I was a child, I spent my days playing on the ceiling, and it was all my family could do to get me down..."

This subsidy was high, financially and otherwise, as is perhaps obvious in these men's short-lived marriages (Rosenfeld left his, a tempestuous one, for numerous affairs; Bellow, with more years as well as more optimism at his disposal, married five times), or in the strivings of some of their children (Rosenfeld's daughter, for one, became a Buddhist nun). For reasons well beyond the scope of this essay, few women today are willing to provide the scaffolding of reality on which a *luftmentsh*'s ambitions depend. The expansion of American adolescence into one's late twenties also means that a person requiring this kind of subsidy today is more likely to receive it from his parents than from his spouse, and one does meet many young writers and thinkers who would be on waiting lists for low-income housing without the help of Mom and Dad. But parental generosity has natural limits as well, and eventually everyone must grow up. When you, rather than your wife, are the one coming home at the end of the day to a home full of screaming toddlers or surly teenagers—or even when you are simply the one coming home to piles of bills that no one else is paying—you very quickly become acquainted with the limitations of the life of the mind, not merely in its material shortcomings, but more profoundly in its shortcomings in addressing those essential questions whose answers ought to have the greatest impact on the world.

Rosenfeld himself knew this, and it pained him. His journals are filled with his yearning to capture in his writing the gritty reality in which he lived: "I'm dying to write about myself, Vasiliki [his wife], the kids, the Village, my family ... enough psychological abstractions—people, flesh and blood, reality!" The problem was that he didn't really mean it. His fictional works became increasingly abstract, and elsewhere he spoke of reality and its attendant obligations as something not ennobling, but degrading. In one essay he spoke accurately—and disdainfully—of how "In my time the young regarded life as an adventure. Now they regard it as an investment." This quip on its surface is a dismissal of materialism, but one can sense within it the *luftmentsh*'s visceral distaste for the kinds of demanding moral and emotional investments that make real life bear fruit.

In his short story "The World of the Ceiling," Rosenfeld put it more explicitly: "When I was a child, I spent my days playing on the ceiling, and it was all my family could do to get me down for dinner. As I grew older and it became time, as they would tell me at home, to take life seriously, I established permanent residence on high ... I can call down from the sky an influence to enlighten the people, lead them to conduct their intercourse in love and in the reverence which is owing to everyone who has been formed in the image of man." But then, of course, "I grew up, married, raised children, ran after them wiping their noses, and thus sank deeper and deeper into reality ... I haven't had much time to spend on the ceiling." Rosenfeld's tongue may have been planted in his cheek, but his *luftmentsh* wistfulness, his dread of "sinking" into reality, is very much in earnest. The idea of reality as an abyss one sinks into, rather than as a mountain one climbs—an elevated place at once terrifying and marvelous, which one admires and scales and finally inhabits—is itself the most damning aspect of the old version of intellectual life.

Not at all coincidentally, it is also what separates Rosenfeld's fiction from Bellow's. Fiction requires at least a passing familiarity with reality, and despite Bellow's own preference for the mental life, he knew what he was missing. Bellow's protagonists may live with their heads in the clouds, but what makes their portrayals powerful are their interactions with—and their ultimate admiration for—his more minor characters who are fully invested in their lives on earth. At the end of Bellow's novel *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, the title character reflects on the death of his friend and benefactor, Dr. Elya Gruner, who has financially provided for Sammler and his daughter for twenty years, along with providing for his own children. Mr. Sammler, himself a *luftmentsh* who spends the novel's first page worrying that the books in his apartment are "the wrong books," spends the novel's last page reciting the following private eulogy for Dr. Gruner: "He was aware that he must meet, and he did meet—through all the confusion and degraded clowning of this life through which we are speeding—he did meet the terms of his contract. The terms which, in his inmost heart, each man knows. As I know mine. As all know. For that is the truth of it—that we all know, God, that we know, that we know, we know, we know."

A long time ago, there was a certain type of man, otherwise brilliant, who failed to know this.

***Dara Horn** received her doctorate in literature from Harvard in 2006. Her third novel,* All Other Nights *(Norton 2009), about Jewish spies in the Civil War, will be published in paperback this March.*

Why There is No Jewish Narnia

BY MICHAEL WEINGRAD

Lo! We have heard how near and far over middle-earth Moses declared his ordinances to men . . .

(The Old English "Exodus" poem, translated by J. R. R. Tolkien)

THE MAGICIANS
by Lev Grossman, Viking, 416 pp., $26.95

HA-MAYIM SHE-BEIN HA-OLAMOT (THE WATER BETWEEN THE WORLDS)
by Hagar Yanai, Keter, 313 pp., 88 NIS

Although it might seem unlikely that anyone would wonder whether the author of *The Lord of the Rings* was Jewish, the Nazis took no chances. When the publishing firm of Ruetten & Loening was negotiating with J. R. R. Tolkien over a German translation of *The Hobbit* in 1938, they demanded that Tolkien provide written assurance that he was an Aryan. Tolkien chastised the publishers for "impertinent and irrelevant inquiries," and—ever the professor of philology— lectured them on the proper meaning of the term: "As far as I am aware none of my ancestors spoke Hindustani, Persian, Gypsy, or any related dialects." As to being Jewish, Tolkien regretted that "I appear to have *no* ancestors of that gifted people."

Needless to say, C. S. Lewis wasn't Jewish either, though he did marry a Jewish convert to Anglican Christianity (played by Deborah Winger in the film *Shadowlands*). In fact, when one of her two sons from a previous marriage became increasingly observant, Lewis turned to the great Jewish historian Cecil Roth for advice on finding kosher food and shabbat hospitality for his stepson. But of course no one would suppose the author of *Mere Christianity* and the *Chronicles of Narnia* to have been Jewish himself. Tolkien had famously converted his friend and fellow Oxford don from skepticism to Christianity through a series of conversations that led Lewis to the realization that "the story of Christ is simply a true myth."

Tolkien and Lewis's gentility would hardly bear comment were it not for the fact that they are not isolated examples in this regard, but only the most well-known figures within an entire literary genre—perhaps the only such genre—in which Jewish practitioners are strikingly rare. I cannot think of a single major fantasy writer who is Jewish, and there are only a handful of minor ones of any note. To no other field of modern literature have Jews contributed so little.

So why don't Jews write more fantasy literature? And a different, deeper but related question: why are there no works of modern fantasy that are profoundly Jewish in the way that, say, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* is Christian? Why no Jewish Lewises, and why no Jewish Narnias?

My interest in these questions is partly personal. Tolkien and Lewis loomed large in my childhood and, as I read them to my own children, I wonder what they ought to mean to us as Jews. But my thoughts are also stimulated by the recent publication of some apparent exceptions to the rule: from the United States, *The Magicians*, a fantasy novel for adults by novelist and critic Lev Grossman, and from Israel, Hagar Yanai's *Ha-mayim she-bein ha-olamot* (The Water Between the Worlds), the acclaimed second installation of a projected fantasy trilogy, which, when it is finished, will be the first such trilogy in Hebrew.

Asking these questions is hardly frivolous when fantasy, especially children's fantasy, has today become a multi-billion dollar industry. In addition to the perennial popularity of Lewis and Tolkien, there is of course the publishing *tsunami* that is J. K. Rowling, as well as the lesser but still remarkable successes of recent fantasy authors such as Philip Pullman and Jonathan Stroud, all magnified immensely by the films based on their books. Fantasy is big business.

Indeed, one wonders why, amidst all the initiatives to solve the crisis in Jewish continuity, no one has yet proposed commissioning a Jewish fantasy series that might plumb the theological depths like Lewis or at least thrill Jewish preteens with tales of Potterish derring-do. Granted, popularity is rarely cooked to order and religious allegory sometimes backfires (a mother once wrote Lewis that her nine year old son had guiltily confessed to loving Aslan the lion more than Jesus). But still, what non-electronic phenomenon has held the attention of more children (and not a few adults) during the last ten years, than Rowling's tales of Hogwarts? And, as Tom Shippey has shown in *Tolkien: Author of the Century*, the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy consistently tops readers' polls of their most beloved books. Why the apparent aversion to producing such well-received books by the People of the Book?

Some readers may have already expressed surprise at my assertion that Jews do not write fantasy literature. Haven't modern Jewish writers, from Kafka and Bruno Schulz to Isaac Bashevis Singer and Cynthia Ozick, written about ghosts, demons, magic, and metamorphoses? But the supernatural does not itself define fantasy literature, which is a more specific genre. It emerged in Victorian England, and its origins are best understood as one of a number of cultural salvage projects that occurred in an era when modern materialism and Darwinism seemed to drive religious faith from the field. Religion's capacity for wonder found a haven in fantasy literature.

The experience of wonder, of joy and delight on the part of the reader, has long been recognized as one of the defining characteristics of the genre. This wonder is connected with a world, with a place of magic, strangeness, danger, and charm; and whether it is called Perelandra, Earthsea, Amber, or Oz, this world must be a truly alien place. As Ursula K. Leguin says: "The point about Elfland is that you are not at home there. It's not Poughkeepsie."

To answer the question of why Jews do not write fantasy, we should begin by acknowledging that the conventional trappings of fantasy, with their feudal atmosphere and rootedness in rural Europe, are not especially welcoming to Jews, who were too often at the wrong end of the medieval sword. Ever since the Crusades, Jews have had good reasons to cast doubt upon the romance of knighthood, and this is an obstacle in a genre that takes medieval chivalry as its imaginative ideal.

One wonders why, amidst all the initiatives to solve the crisis in Jewish continuity, no one has yet proposed commissioning a Jewish fantasy series.

It is not only that Jews are ambivalent about a return to an imaginary feudal past. It is even more accurate to say that most Jews have been deeply and passionately invested in modernity, and that history, rather than otherworldliness, has been the very ground of the radical and transformative projects of the modern Jewish experience. This goes some way towards explaining the Jewish enthusiasm for science fiction over fantasy (from Asimov to Silverberg to Weinbaum there is no dearth of Jewish science fiction writers). George MacDonald's *Phantastes*, thought by some to be the first fantasy novel ever written, begins with a long epigraph from Novalis in which he celebrates the redemptive counter-logic of the fairytale: "A fairytale [*Märchen*] is like a vision without rational connections, a harmonious whole . . . opposed throughout to the world of rational truth." Contrast Herzl's dictum that "If you will it, it is no *Märchen*." The impulse in the latter is that of science fiction—the proposal of what might be—and indeed Herzl's one novel *Old-New Land* was a utopian fiction about the future State of Israel.

Lev Grossman's clever new novel *The Magicians* would seem to bring the Jewish disenchantment with medieval fantasy into the heart of the genre. His characters (who are urban sophisticates but not identifiably Jewish) are underwhelmed by their encounter with the fantasy world, in this case a Narnia clone called "Fillory." When presented with the predictable quest to become king of this magical land, Grossman's protagonist, a recent college grad named Quentin, finds it unpalatable and, well, a little *unrealistic*:

> There was hardly any central government, so what would a king actually do? The entire political economy appeared to be frozen in the feudal Middle Ages, but there were elements of Victorian-level technology as well. Who had made that beautiful Victorian carriage? What craftsmen wove the innards of the clockwork mechanisms that were so ubiquitous in Fillory? Or were these things done by magic? Either way, they must keep Fillory in its pre-industrial, agrarian state on purpose, by choice. Like the Amish.

The novel is serious, too, and its goal is to ask the question of whether fantasy and adulthood are mutually exclusive, as the process of becoming an adult means accepting the reality principle rather than "looking for the next secret door that is going to lead you to your real life," as one character puts it. Of course, such an either/or does not do justice to fantasy literature, which, at its best, confronts loss, pain, and frustration. Grossman does not, for instance, turn his satirical sights on Tolkien's Middle Earth, which after all is a world saturated with failure and loss, and his send-up of Narnia's divinely incarnated lion Aslan falls short of grappling seriously with Lewis's actual theology.

Moreover, his overeducated, young, single protagonists—like Whit Stillman characters thrown into a Harry Potter novel—can offer only a thin slice of what it means to be an adult. Nevertheless, Grossman's experiment of placing real, urban, early twenty-somethings in a Hogwarts-and-Narnia-like environment is often dazzling. What he shows is the extent to which medieval magic cannot make our human unhappiness disappear.

Aside from an aversion to medieval nostalgia, there is a further historical reason why 20th-century Jews have not written much fantasy literature, and that is, inevitably, the Holocaust. Its still agonizing historical weight must press prohibitively upon Jewish engagement with the magical and fantastical. It is not that fantasy writers must be innocent naifs. Tolkien and Lewis were deeply influenced in their portrayals of evil by what they knew of 20th-century political barbarity. As Shippey notes, Tolkien especially grapples in his novels more seriously than many supposedly more sophisticated modern literary works with the evils of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, for Jewish writers working after the Holocaust, classical fantasy must have made redemption seem too easy. Certainly, the notion of magic and wizards existing in our own world—as in, for example, the Harry Potter books—becomes all but impossible. (Or at least must raise the question of why Hogwarts, like the FDR administration, never tried to bomb the railroad tracks.)

C. S. Lewis was always clear that he did not set out to write *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe* as a didactic project. It began, he said, with an image in his head of an umbrella-toting faun standing in the snow. Nonetheless, when he wrote the Narnia books, Lewis drew deeply from his Christian beliefs. In this, he and the many Christian fantasy writers have an advantage over not only the few, largely assimilated Jewish fantasy writers, but even over a deeply knowledgeable and religiously committed Jewish writer who might seek to create a work of fantasy dramatizing Judaism in the way that the various Narnia books dramatize Christianity. The Jewish difficulty with fantasy is not only historical and sociological. It is theological as well, and this has to do with the degree to which Judaism has banished the magical and mythological elements necessary for fantasy.

To put it crudely, if Christianity is a fantasy religion, then Judaism is a science fiction religion. If the former is individualistic, magical, and salvationist, the latter is collective, technical, and this-worldly. Judaism's divine drama is connected with a specific people in a specific place within a specific history. Its halakhic core is not, I think, convincingly represented in fantasy allegory. In its rabbinic elaboration, even the messianic idea is shorn of its mythic and apocalyptic potential. Whereas fantasy grows naturally out of Christian soil, Judaism's more adamant separation from myth and magic render classic elements of the fantasy genre undeveloped

JUDAH M. COHEN
The Making of a Reform Jewish Cantor
Musical Authority, Cultural Investment
CD Included

The Making of a Reform Jewish Cantor
Musical Authority, Cultural Investment
JUDAH M. COHEN
An unprecedented look into the meaning of attaining musical authority among American Reform Jews at the turn of the 21st century, this book follows students over the course of their training, as they prepare to become modern Jewish musical leaders, providing unusual insights into issues of musical tradition, identity, gender, community, and high and low musical culture.
hardcover $39.95 • *CD Included*

ORTHODOX JEWS IN AMERICA
Jeffrey S. Gurock

Orthodox Jews in America
JEFFREY S. GUROCK
"Although there are many good books on the history of Jews in America and a smaller subset that focuses on aspects of Orthodox Judaism in contemporary times, no one, until now, has written an overview of how Orthodoxy in America has evolved over the centuries from the first arrivals in the 17th century to the present. . . . [R]ecommended not only for serious readers on the topic but for general readers as well."
—*Library Journal*
paperback $24.95

Rediscovering Traces of Memory
The Jewish Heritage of Polish Galicia
Jonathan Webber
Photographs by Chris Schwarz
From the permanent exhibition of the Galicia Jewish Museum, Kraków

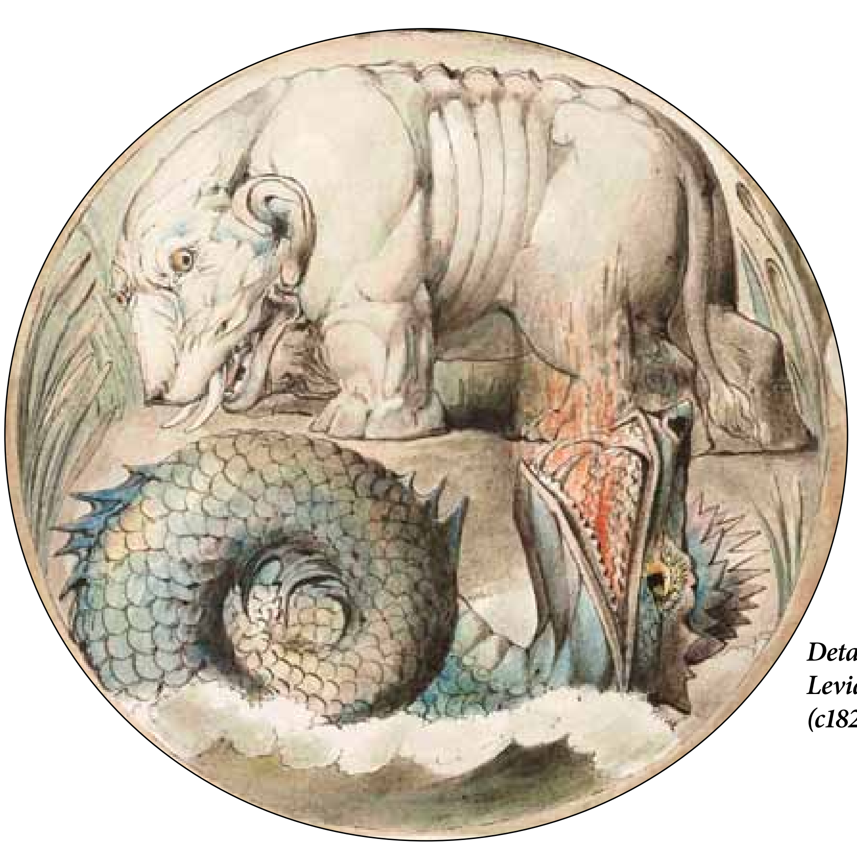
Rediscovering Traces of Memory
The Jewish Heritage of Polish Galicia
JONATHAN WEBBER
PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHRIS SCHWARZ
In this remarkable album, stunning color photos bear witness to the great Jewish civilization that once flourished in Poland. With detailed captions and notes, these images record the sites of Jewish life and death, and the ways in which Jewish culture is being remembered today. "A moving account of what is being done to preserve the memory of what was lost and of the people, both Poles and Jews, involved in this important undertaking."
—Antony Polonsky
Published in association with the Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, Oxford
paperback $27.95

BRIDGES
A Jewish Feminist Journal

Bridges
A Jewish Feminist Journal
EDITED BY CLARE KINBERG
Bridges is a showcase for the creative work of Jewish feminists. The journal features articles, commentary, discussions of politics and culture, scholarly essays, fiction and poetry, visual art, graphics, photography, and archival materials, including oral histories, interviews, diaries, and letters.
Published semiannually
eISSN 1558-9552 | pISSN 1046-8358
Subscriptions
Individuals: electronic $30.60; electronic & print $37.40; print $34.00
Institutions: electronic $50.40; electronic & print $78.40; print $56.00
Foreign first class postage: $10.50
Foreign airmail postage: $18.00
single issue price $20.00

INDIANA UNIVERSITY PRESS
INDIANA UNIVERSITY

To Order Call: *1-800-842-6796* **Or Visit:** *iupress.indiana.edu*



Detail from "Behemoth and Leviathan" by William Blake (c1826).

or suspect in the Jewish imaginative tradition. Let us take two central examples: the magical world and the idea of evil.

Christianity has a much more vivid memory and even appreciation of the pagan worlds which preceded it than does Judaism. Neither Canaanite nor Egyptian civilizations exercise much fascination for the Jewish imagination, and certainly not as a place of enchantment or escape. In contrast, the Christian imagination found in Lewis and Tolkien often moves, like Beowulf or Sir Gawain, through an older pagan world in which spirits of place and mythical beings are still potent. Nor is this limited to fauns and elves. This anterior world can be dark and frighteningly alien, as Tolkien has Gandalf indicate in *The Two Towers*. "Far, far below the deepest delvings of the Dwarves," the wizard says, "the world is gnawed by nameless things. Even Sauron knows them not." Lewis sounds the same note in *Perelandra* when, far below the surface of the planet Venus, his protagonist catches an unsettling glimpse of alien creatures, and wonders if there might be "some way to renew the old Pagan practice of propitiating the local gods of unknown places in such fashion that it was no offence to God Himself but only a prudent and courteous apology for trespass."

Contrast this with the treatment of the great and symbolic monster of ancient Judaism—the sea-creature Leviathan, whose terrifying pagan majesty as the personification of the watery depths the rabbis were determined to strip away:

> Raba said in the name of R. Yochanan: The Holy One will make a feast for the righteous out of the flesh of Leviathan, and what is left will be portioned out and made available as merchandise in the marketplaces of Jerusalem. (Bava Batra 75a)

To subject the primal abyss to the forces of commerce is to demythologize with a vengeance—and to do it wholesale at that.

In general, Judaism is much warier about the temptation of dualism than is Christianity, and undercuts the power and significance of any rivals to God, whether Leviathan, angel, or, especially for our purposes, devil. Fantasy literature is often based around conflict with a powerful evil force—Tolkien's Morgoth and Sauron and Lewis's Jadis and the White Witch are clear examples—and Christianity offers a far more developed tradition of evil as a supernatural, external, autonomous force than does Judaism, whose Satan (or Samael or Lilith or Ashmedai) are limited in their power and usually rather obedient to God's wishes. In *Mere Christianity*, Lewis writes:

> One of the things that surprised me when I first read the New Testament seriously was that it talked so much about a Dark Power in the universe—a mighty evil spirit who was held to be the Power behind death and disease, and sin. The difference [between Christianity and Dualism] is that Christianity thinks this Dark Power was created by God, and was good when he was created, and went wrong. Christianity agrees with Dualism that this universe is at war. But it does not think this is a war between independent powers. It thinks it is a civil war, a rebellion, and that we are living in a part of the universe occupied by the rebel.
>
> Enemy-occupied territory—that is what this world is. Christianity is the story of how the rightful king has landed, you might say landed in disguise, and is calling us all to take part in a great campaign of sabotage.

This is of course the plot, in a nutshell, of *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*, and much of Lewis's Space Trilogy too—which, for that matter, concludes with the forces of good being led not by a Christian but by the pre-Christian Merlin. Judaism is far more skittish about acknowledging the existence of powers acting apart from God, even in rebellion—which leaves a lot less room for magic.

To be sure, all the elements necessary for classic fantasy—magic, myth, dualism, demonic forces, strange worlds, and so forth—can be found sprinkled here and there in biblical and rabbinic literature. Much of it is developed in Jewish folklore, and theoretically developed and dramatized in the kabbalistic literature, especially the *Zohar*, which may even draw on the medieval literature Lewis lovingly described in his scholarly work *The Allegory of Love*.

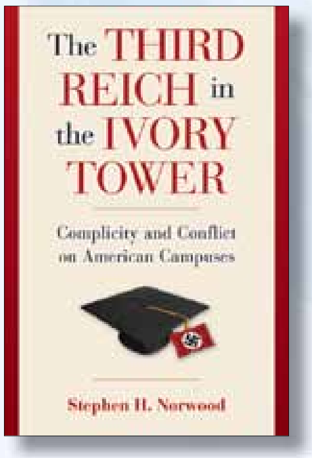
For the last hundred years, various anthologists have attempted, with greater or lesser ideological urgency, to collect these elements and weave them together into a usable Jewish "mythology." Hagai Dagan's *Ha-mitologiyah ha-yehudit* (The Jewish Mythology, 2003) and Howard Schwartz's *Tree of Souls: The Mythology of Judaism* (2004) are only the most recent compilations that posit and seek to restore a supposedly repressed or marginalized Jewish mythic vitality, a project that runs back through Buber's Hasidic collections and Berdichevsky's emphasis on Judaism's earthy, pagan side. Yet the very necessity of all these attempts to retrieve and weave together these elements suggests their marginality. While Lewis could remain within orthodox, or at least "mere" Christianity in writing his books, the Jewish writer leaves the realm of the normative in order to develop the mythologies that are the fantasy writer's natural materials. Put another way, Tolkien and Lewis both referred to Christianity as the sole true fairytale. Jewish thinkers are far less likely to consider this praise.

The absence of fantasy writing in Israel is, if anything, even starker than in the Diaspora. The fantasy genre has always been disparaged in modern Hebrew literary culture as being a frivolous distraction from the serious political and artistic missions facing the Jewish people and its writers. Of course, Israelis are just as avid consumers of fantasy literature, film, and games as any other nation. Israelis have flocked to Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* films, their bookstores are filled with Hebrew translations of writers from Tolkien and Rowling to Robert Jordan and Orson Scott Card, and their children play Hebrew editions of Dungeons & Dragons games. And yet none of this production is local. As one writer lamented, in an article in *Ha'aretz* in 2002 on the absence of Israeli fantasy literature:

> Faeries do not dance underneath our swaying palm trees, there are no fire-breathing dragons in the cave of Machpelah, and Harry Potter doesn't live in Kfar Saba. But why? Why couldn't Harry Potter have been written in Israel? Why is local fantasy literature so weak, so that it almost seems that a book like that couldn't be published in the state of the Jews?

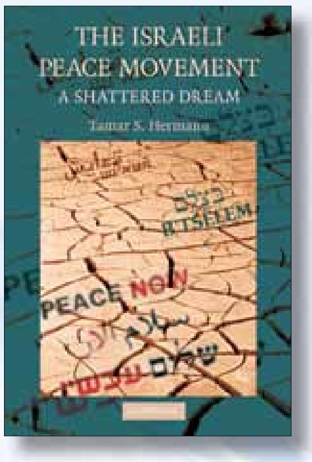
As it happens, though, the author of these lines, Hagar Yanai, has recently attempted to fill this gap, along with a few other Israeli writers who have in the last few years begun to produce fantasy books—not magical realism or surrealism or postmodernism, but serious fantasy. Yanai's *Ha-livyatan mi-Bavel* (The Leviathan of Babylon) was published in 2006, followed by *Ha-mayim she-bein ha-olamot* (The Water Between the Worlds) in 2008, with a third scheduled to follow. Both of these books won Israel's local Geffen awards for best original Hebrew fan-

CAMBRIDGE


The THIRD REICH in the IVORY TOWER
Complicity and Conflict on American Campuses
Stephen H. Norwood

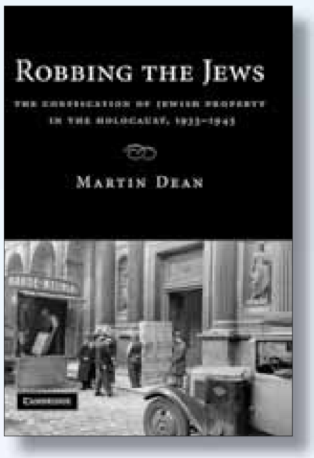
"...brilliantly researched, utterly thorough and morally upsetting..."

-CARLIN ROMANO,
THE CHRONICLE REVIEW


THE ISRAELI PEACE MOVEMENT
A SHATTERED DREAM
Tamar S. Hermann
PEACE NOW
B'TSELEM

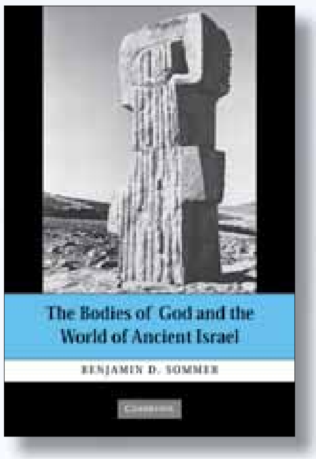
"Hermann's hard-nosed assessment of the Israeli peace movement is a must-read."

-ASHER ARIAN,
ISRAEL DEMOCRACY INSTITUTE

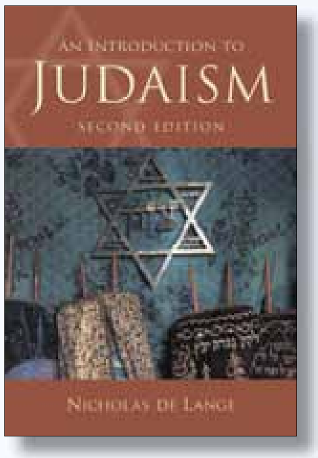

ROBBING THE JEWS
THE CONFISCATION OF JEWISH PROPERTY IN THE HOLOCAUST, 1933–1945
MARTIN DEAN

"...an incredible base for future research. Highly recommended."

-CHOICE

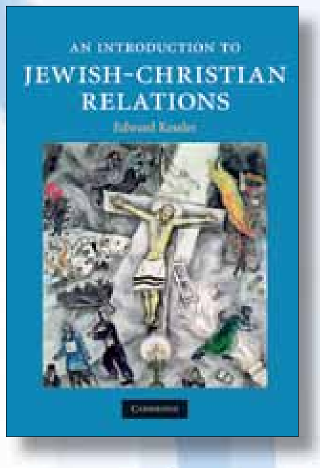

The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel
BENJAMIN D. SOMMER

2009 JORDAN SCHNITZER BOOK AWARD
for BIBLICAL STUDIES,
RABBINICS *and* ARCHAEOLOGY

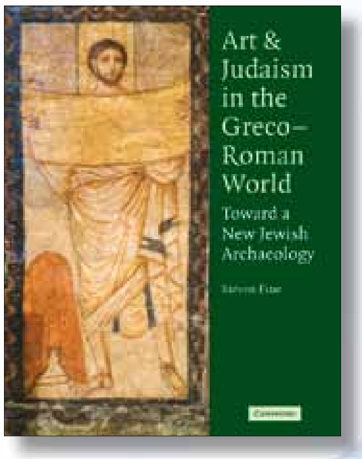

AN INTRODUCTION TO
JUDAISM
SECOND EDITION
NICHOLAS DE LANGE

"...a remarkably comprehensive analysis of Jews and Judaism."

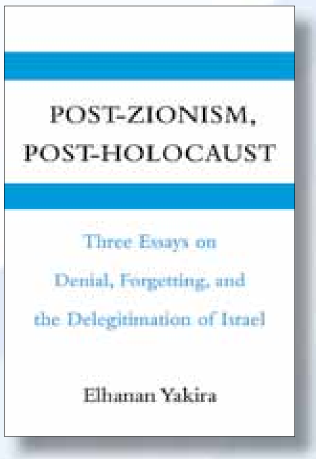
-PUBLISHERS WEEKLY


AN INTRODUCTION TO
JEWISH-CHRISTIAN RELATIONS
Edward Kessler

A fresh take on 2,000 years of interfaith relations.

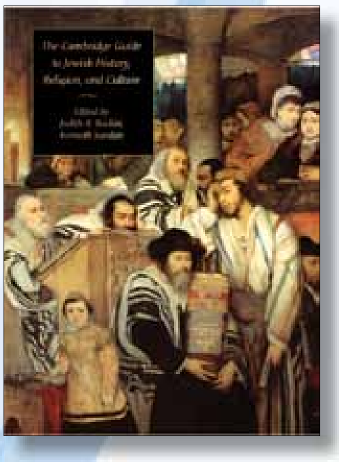

Art & Judaism in the Greco-Roman World
Toward a New Jewish Archaeology
Steven Fine

2009 JORDAN SCHNITZER BOOK AWARD
for JEWS *and* THE ARTS


POST-ZIONISM, POST-HOLOCAUST
Three Essays on Denial, Forgetting, and the Delegitimation of Israel
Elhanan Yakira

"...an original and profound contribution to the debates between pro- and post-Zionists and between mainstreamers and Holocaust deniers."

-ITAMAR RABINOVICH, NEW YORK UNIVERSITY



A comprehensive and engaging overview of Jewish life, from its origins in the ancient Near East to its impact on contemporary popular culture.

www.cambridge.org/us

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

הים הצפוני
נורינגסגור
הרי אורל
"המילה יוצרת
המילה מנצחת
המילה מרפאת"
קלמוקורסק
נורדאבאלה
קשגאר
מדבר המלח
גאליה
סביליה
אילירייה
תראקיה
הרי קווקאז
קאלאזגירט
פרתיה
הרי הזאגרוס
אוקספרינה
בבל
ירושלים
שבא
בלמונע
מדבר מט
חצרמוות
האוקיינוס ההודי
ארץ כוש
ממלכת בבל

"The Kingdom of Bavel" by Maya Shleifer, from Yanai's **Ha-mayim she-bein ha-olamot.**

tasy or science fiction novel of the year (a prize that, significantly, has existed for only a few years). But the enthusiasm has been mainstream as well. Yanai was awarded the Prime Minister's Prize, along with more established writers such as Ariel Hirschfeld and Haim Sabato, "for the way in which [she] introduces mythological and fantastical elements from various eras and strata of Jewish tradition into a contemporary Hebrew work … Yanai has 'resurrected' a neglected stream in Hebrew literature."

This is a questionable resurrection, for Yanai draws only superficially on the sort of materials that Schwartz and Dagan have lovingly anthologized—despite pulling an epigraph from the latter. Nor does her work really show the influence of authors like Tolkien, Lewis and LeGuin. If anything, the overriding ambience is that of Hollywood action films, from James Bond to *The Matrix* and *Pirates of the Carribbean*. Yanai loves spectacle, chase scenes, prison breaks, explosions and slapstick, all of which she does well. Her literary influences are drawn mainly from contemporary fantasy (Philip Pullman, Rowling, Stroud) and like these authors, Yanai's fantasy world is essentially modern, mundane, and technocratic, with magical forces and creatures substituting our fossil fuels and silicon chips. There is little true enchantment here, just crystal balls instead of iPhones (electrically charged demons power the generators in Yanai's Babylon).

The plot of Yanai's trilogy-in-the-making centers on two Israeli teenagers, Ella and Yonatan, who travel via an inter-dimensional portal from Tel Aviv to a world ruled by the oppressive (and entirely unbiblical) Babylonian Empire. In this dystopian world, depression is a crime. Ella and Yonatan become separated, Ella joining a group of anti-imperial rebels led by the dashing young warrior, Hillel Ben-Shachar, while Yonatan befriends a demon with a penchant for scatological humor and falls into the clutches of the imperial priesthood. In the second book, they discover that their own parents have long been deeply embroiled in the trans-dimension machinations of Babylon, and that the fate of multiple worlds, including our own, is at stake.

Yanai's decision to set her fantasy world in an alternative Near East is intriguing. Indeed, probably the most fantastic element in these novels is the portrayal of a Middle East throughout which two young Israelis can travel more or less freely. No matter what fearsome monsters, demonic armies, and diabolical villains they have to contend with, Yonatan and Ella clearly come out better than if they were trekking through the Syria, Iran, or Saudi Arabia of our own world on Israeli passports.

Yet these books are not really very interested in the various Near Eastern mythologies they draw from. Yanai does not (at least in the first two-thirds of the series) explore, say, the implications of a Middle East without monotheism, or what it might be like to live in a world in which the transmigration of souls is a known reality. Instead, Yanai's central borrowing—the mythic battle between the great god Marduk and Leviathan's Sumerian cousin Tiamat, embodiment of the primal abyss—is used to conduct what seems to be a rather odd polemic against our contemporary psychotherapeutic culture. Babylon is a civilization that seeks obsessively to police, banish, or destroy the powerful, dark, and unpredictable currents in the human soul, represented by Tiamat and the watery abyss. The evil priests of Babylon are described as "soul-doctors," who use "soul-scopes" to inspect the inner recesses of their patients' psyches, a process that leaves their patients feeling horribly violated and exposed. The population is kept docile with injections of psychotropic drugs, and those who lapse into depression are sent to therapeutic concentration camps. Finally, it emerges that the Babylonian priesthood is in cahoots with an international drug conglomerate. (Yanai seems to feel about Prozac the way that Philip Pullman feels about Christianity.)

Writing for teenagers, it is perhaps not surprising that Yanai's heroes are heroic nonconformists. Yet their deepest struggles are expressed in the language of contemporary self-actualization. "Before I can return with you to any human realm and be who you expect me to be," Yonatan tells the empress with whom he has fallen in love, "I have to deal with who I am." The empress meanwhile learns that, to fulfill her own magical quest, she must discover that "the abyss is within you … you must jump into the depths within yourself." Yanai's former involvement in Israel's New Age culture—she wrote for a prominent New Age magazine, spent time in a Buddhist monastery in Japan, and edited a volume of literary erotica by women before turning to fantasy—makes itself felt here. In fact, Yanai writes particularly well when she touches the raw nerve of her teenaged characters' erotic and sexual insecurities. But, as is often the case with such adolescent quests for personal authenticity, the overall process is less than interesting to follow. Her characters display the conventional anti-conventionality of most Disney movies, with girls looking for their princes and boys for their princesses, and everyone singing about how they need to be who they are. I would hesitate to give this book to a teenager, not because there are things in it they shouldn't know, but because there is little in it that they don't already.

Yanai's Babylon trilogy, when it is complete, will sit on a very short shelf of recent Israeli fantasy books, the most interesting of which is poet and critic Shimon Adaf's *Ha-lev ha-kavur* (A Mere Mortal*)*. The novel is particularly intriguing because Adaf makes an attempt to base his lyrical and chillingly creepy tale on biblical and midrashic sources. His villain is Amraphel, the King of Shinar, whom Abraham defeated in the Book of Genesis, and who has returned to stalk a southern development town in Israel based on Adaf's native Sderot. This attempt is disappointingly truncated, though, less an exploration of Jewish sources than, like Yanai's Babylon, a springboard for concerns purely his own.

We will probably see more Jewish writers producing fantasy, as younger Israeli writers seek to follow global trends, and as younger American Jewish writers shed older instinctive hesitations about the genre. But we will have to wait some time, if not forever, for a genuinely Jewish fantasy work to appear. It may not be impossible, but it will take some audacity and may require more literary stimulation than any anthology of forgotten Jewish mythic materials, such as Schwartz and Dagan have given us, is likely to provide. It would require at least a Jewish education equivalent to the philological and medievalist backgrounds of the Oxford and Cambridge dons Tolkien and Lewis. Perhaps there is some Jewish Studies professor or yeshiva student even now scribbling in a notebook.

Michael Weingrad *directs the Jewish Studies program at Portland State University. His book,* American Hebrew Literature: Writing Jewish National Identity in the United States *will be published this fall by Syracuse University Press.*

A Novel of Unbelief

BY ADAM KIRSCH

36 ARGUMENTS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD: A WORK OF FICTION
by Rebecca Newberger Goldstein
Pantheon, 416 pp., $27.95

To a believer in God, no matter what her religion, the title of Rebecca Newberger Goldstein's new novel, *36 Arguments for the Existence of God*, may sound discouraging in its very abundance. A proposition that can be proven need only be proven once. To try to prove it 36 times smacks of protesting too much. And in fact, it doesn't take long to discover that Goldstein's book actually delivers the precise opposite of what its title promises. The novel's hero, psychology professor Cass Seltzer, has written a book—*The Varieties of Religious Illusion*, the title an echo of both William James and Freud—whose appendix lists the 36 reasons to believe, and offers a devastating logical rebuttal of each one. This appendix, which has captured the popular imagination and turned mild-mannered Cass into a celebrity pundit—acclaimed by NPR and *Time* as "the atheist with a soul"—is reproduced in full at the end of the novel. From "The Cosmological Argument" to "The Argument from Survival After Death" to "The Argument from the Survival of the Jews," Goldstein-as-Seltzer shows how impossible it is to argue an unwilling mind into faith.

But of course, that is not how most people find faith in the first place. Goldstein acknowledges as much in her last counter-proof, "The Argument from the Abundance of Arguments": "Religions … do not justify themselves with a single logical argument, but minister to all of these spiritual needs and provide a space in our lives where the largest questions with which we grapple all come together..." The challenge Goldstein sets for herself in her latest novel is whether a writer capable of so fully inhabiting the mind of the atheist is also capable of mapping that faithful "space" in a sympathetic and convincing way. Goldstein is also known as a philosopher—her last book was a biography of Spinoza—but this is fundamentally a novelistic challenge, a matter not of analyzing a consciousness but of creating one.

In *36 Arguments*, however, Goldstein seldom strives for that kind of deep characterization—the kind that allowed, say, George Eliot, a famous agnostic, to paint her loving scenes of clerical life. Despite its title, this is not so much a novel of ideas as a novel about intellectuals—which is to say, a comic novel. It opens with Seltzer, a professor at second-tier Frankfurter University, having a late-night epiphany on a footbridge across the Charles River. Yet the trigger for this oceanic experience—"the night is so cold that everything seems to have been stripped of superfluous existence, reduced to the purity of abstraction"—is that he has just been offered a job at Harvard, which for the academic careerists who populate the novel is the equivalent of canonization.

Meanwhile, for Seltzer's girlfriend Lucinda Mandelbaum—a brilliant game theorist, whose mathematical modeling of the human mind leaves the psychology of religion looking a little squishy—life on the faculty at Frankfurter is a constant humiliation. Even as Cass's star is rising, Lucinda's is falling. Her abrasive, arrogant manner got her fired from her job at Princeton, and she takes out her disappointment by ostentatiously attacking people at conferences and lectures—a tactic she calls "fanging." The match between gentle Cass and sharp Lucinda is an unlikely one, but that only makes him more pathetically grateful. Like his sudden fame and his Harvard job, the love of Lucinda strikes Cass as an inexplicable reward.

Rebecca Newberger Goldstein. (Photo by Steven Pinker.)

Cass's romantic and professional dilemmas give Goldstein the opportunity to satirize the celebrity-academic world she knows well. Anyone interested in that world, especially its Jewish precincts, will have fun reading *36 Arguments* and tracing Goldstein's jokes and barbs to their real-life originals. I'm pretty sure, for instance, that Sy Auerbach, Cass's brusque, high-powered literary agent ("a large and showily handsome man … looking like a milkweed that has burst its pod"), is based on John Brockman, the agent-cum-intellectual entrepreneur.

No points, however, will be awarded for figuring out that Frankfurter is really Brandeis, whose buildings Goldstein describes this way: "The campus went heavy on the concrete. This, Cass had been told, was the International Style of architecture, which had been considered boldly cutting-edge after the Second World War, when Frankfurter had been established … To Cass it looked like the style of architecture favored by the wealthy Reform temples and Jewish community centers of northern New Jersey, where he had grown up." A running joke involves the university's president, Shimmy Baumzer: An Israeli with a war-hero biography resembling Ariel Sharon's, who is afraid only of his wife, Deedee, a Texas socialite whose pet project is bringing fraternities and sororities to Frankfurter. This provokes a campus rebellion by anti-Greek students, who half-seriously model themselves on the Maccabees.

But the most comic figure in the book—the biggest character in several senses—is Jonas Elijah Klapper, Frankfurter's Extreme Distinguished Professor of Faith, Literature, and Values (the "extreme" is an excellent touch). As the novel progresses, it becomes clear that Klapper is Goldstein's gleeful parody of Harold Bloom—his bulk, erudition, flamboyance, and grandiosity. Here is Klapper holding forth to a retinue of awed graduate students, in a seminar titled "The Sublime, the Subliminal and the Self": "Poetry is in the business of psychopoesis at least as much as is philosophy. And if I might be permitted, humbly, to stand between Plato and Aristotle and offer my emendation, you will hear me fervently whispering 'oh more, far more!'"

Klapper's gravitational pull means that the novel is increasingly deflected from its original course. The Cass and Lucinda plot takes place in the present, but Klapper is a figure from Cass's grad-school days, and it is in the flashbacks to this remembered past that the novel's characters and ideas are most vital. There is a familiar kind of campus comedy in the hapless figure of Gideon Raven, Klapper's acolyte, now entering his twelfth year of work on his doctorate: "Medical school! God, what I wouldn't give for the chance to go to medical school!" he sighs to the still-enthusiastic young Cass. Not by coincidence is Gideon's favorite hangout a bar called "The View from Nowhere." (It is a characteristically Goldsteinian joke that this is also the name of a celebrated book by the philosopher Thomas Nagel.)

The novel's most serious reflections on faith, however, also pivot around the figure of Klapper. The professor is delighted to learn that Cass is related, on his mother's side, to the Valdener Rebbe, the leader of a Hasidic sect in upstate New York. Together, these secular Jews—along with Roz Margolis, Cass's new, still more aggressively skeptical girlfriend—make a pilgrimage to New Walden, the sect's self-contained village (here, too, the parallel with New Square or Kiryas Joel is hard to miss). To Roz, an anthropologist who does fieldwork in the Amazon jungle, the Valdeners are a hardly less exotic tribe, and Goldstein gingerly documents their folkways: men and women walk on opposite sides of the street, there is a taboo on counting the members of a family, and the whole community competes to share the scraps from the Rebbe's table.

In this way, Goldstein stages an emblematic confrontation between two Jewish communities—modern, rationalistic Frankfurter versus anti-modern, pietistic New Walden. Of course, the discomfort of Americanized Jews with their traditional brethren is not a new theme in Jewish-American fiction—Philip Roth gave it classic treatment in his story "Eli, the Fanatic." Goldstein's distinctive contribution lies in her philosophical knowledge and vocabulary, her ability to restate the dilemmas of faith using technical concepts like "rigid designators" ("a term that designates the same object in all possible worlds").

Yet this very expertise is also what restricts Goldstein's sympathies, despite her best efforts, to the secular, skeptical side of the question. It is not just that almost all of her characters are outspoken rationalists—this is probably an accurate reflection of the academic milieu she is writing about. The deeper problem is that, even at New Walden, the experience of religious faith is not allowed to speak for itself.

This emerges in dramatic fashion in the figure of Azarya, the Rebbe's firstborn son, whom Cass and Roz discover to be a mathematical prodigy. At the age of six, without any real education, he has figured out advanced concepts like prime numbers and factorials, which he discusses in terms borrowed from Hasidic mysticism. The major suspense in the narrative, and the reason for its dual time-scheme, is the question of whether Azarya will escape the Valdeners and fulfill his genius, or remain at home to become the next Rebbe. Without spoiling Goldstein's carefully constructed ending, it is fair to say that the way in which the choice is framed makes clear that only the first option is respectable on the novel's own terms. Perhaps that is because literary fiction is itself an essentially secular genre. Goldstein seems to tell us as much in the figure of Klapper, who disappears from Frankfurter and the novel when he decides to move to Safed, in order to stop writing about Jewish mysticism and start living it.

__Adam Kirsch__ is a Senior Editor at The New Republic *and a columnist for* Tablet Magazine. *His most recent book is* Benjamin Disraeli, *published by Nextbook/Schocken.*

God and Idolatry

BY MENACHEM KELLNER

SAVING GOD: RELIGION AFTER IDOLATRY
by Mark Johnston
Princeton University Press, 248 pp., $24.95

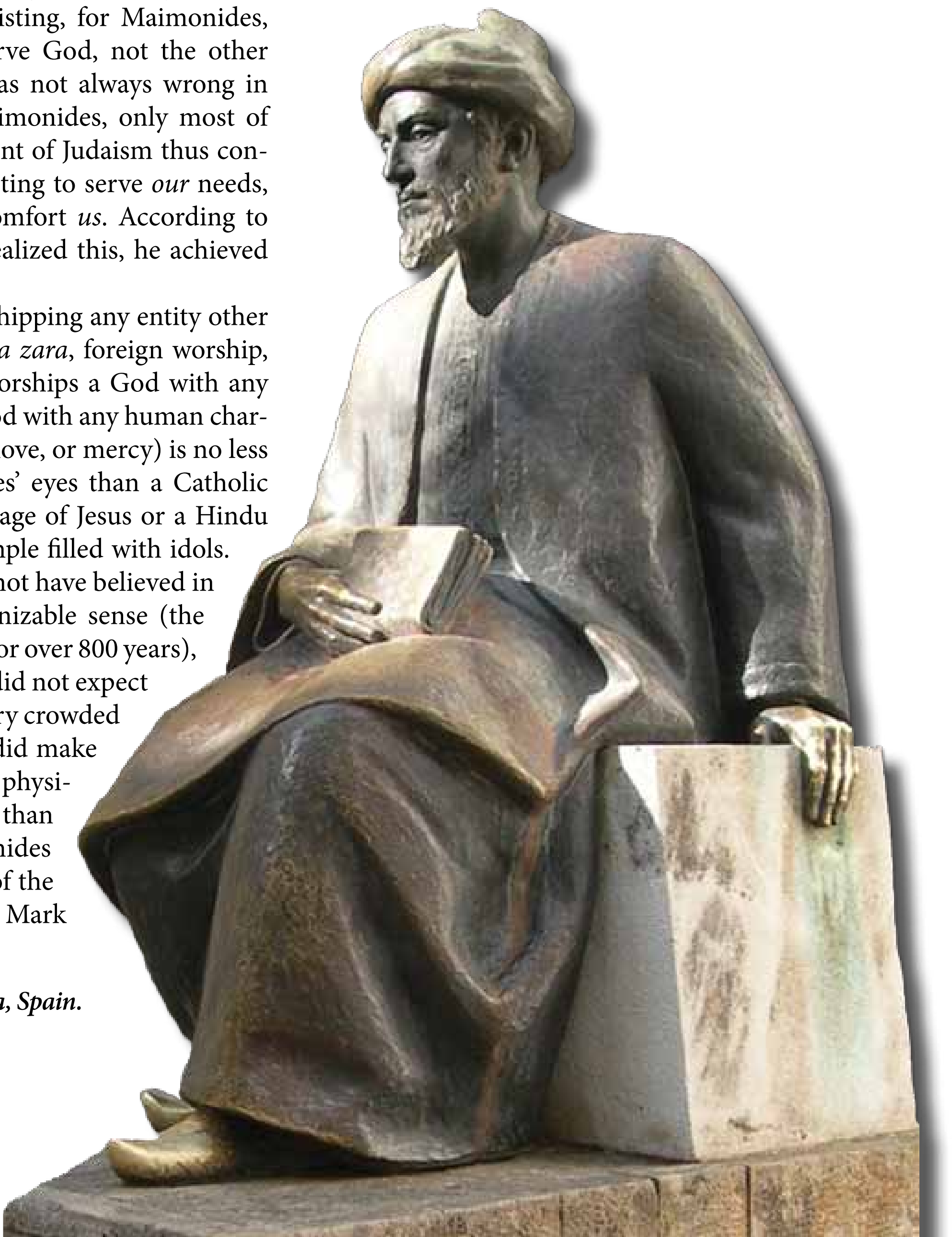
Reading *Saving God* in shul, I was asked by the person sitting next to me what it was about. He may have been struck by the cover illustration, which reproduces a painting from the cathedral in Toledo, Spain, called *The Despoilation of Christ*. I answered: "In Jewish terms, it is about saving *Yiddishkeit* from the rabbis—as Maimonides tried and pretty much failed to do." I had to say "in Jewish terms" because this witty and philosophically subtle book is profoundly Christian, more so than the author seems to realize. But, at the same time, it is also very Maimonidean in its thoroughgoing rejection of superstition and idolatry as an offense to true religion.

Notwithstanding Johnston's pose of equal disdain for all three Western monotheisms, it turns out that he assumes the truth of the Christian idea that human beings are "fallen." Original sin for Johnston is nothing as simple-minded as flouting God's command and eating a piece of fruit (with or without a blessing). It is, rather, the "condition that comes with being human [which] is … not just the self-will that resists the other-regarding demands built into one's internalized conception of the good. It is self-will combined with a covetous and violent protection of the compromised fruit we have plucked from the tree of knowledge of good and evil." The all-encompassing nature of this condition necessitates a dramatic cure and (a philosophically reconfigured) Christ eventually enters the picture. Thus, despite Johnston's apparent intentions, the book turns out to propound and defend a sort of post-Christian Christianity.

In what way is *Saving God* Maimonidean? Maimonides' God is of very little use or comfort for most Jews. As the late Israeli gadfly Yeshayahu Leibowitz never tired of insisting, for Maimonides, humans are meant to serve God, not the other way round. (Leibowitz was not always wrong in his interpretations of Maimonides, only most of the time.) It is not the point of Judaism thus configured to see God as existing to serve *our* needs, answer *our* prayers, or comfort *us*. According to Maimonides, when Job realized this, he achieved enlightenment.

For Maimonides, worshipping any entity other than God is literally *avoda zara*, foreign worship, or idolatry. A Jew who worships a God with any corporeal qualities or a God with any human characteristics (such as anger, love, or mercy) is no less an idolater in Maimonides' eyes than a Catholic genuflecting before an image of Jesus or a Hindu making offerings in a Temple filled with idols. Maimonides may or may not have believed in an after-life in any recognizable sense (the debate has been going on for over 800 years), but if he did, he certainly did not expect to find the next world a very crowded place. And of those who did make it in, far more would be physicists and philosophers than rabbis. In short, Maimonides was an intellectual elitist of the strictest sort—and so is Mark Johnston, though he is unequivocal in his rejection of an afterlife, even for metaphysicians.

Maimonides and Johnston both eschew supernaturalism. For the former, all that exists is God and the created universe; no angels, no demons, no objectively holy objects, places, times, or people. For Johnston, all that exists is the physical universe and the



Maimonides Memorial in Córdoba, Spain.

"Highest One" (Johnston's capitalization amused me throughout the book), which "is not just the source of existence, but is continuously disclosing himself in the universe and in history, and that is what the universe and human history are for the sake of." Johnston describes his position as "panentheism," which is to be distinguished from classical theism on the one hand (the position of Maimonides), and from pantheism on the other, which identifies God with the natural realm. In contrast, "the panentheist asserts that God is partly *constituted* by the natural realm in the sense that his activity is manifest in and through natural processes *alone*. But his reality goes beyond what is captured by the purely scientific description of all the events that make up the natural realm."

But what truly separates Maimonides from Johnston is a palpable care for humanity. For a man who claims to find the next world "in this world properly received" he has very little patience for the needs of real people. Because of his concern for real people, Maimonides, despite his pronounced intellectual elitism, devoted much of his time to the service of his community, and invested ten years in writing his great legal digest, the *Mishneh Torah*. Even more important, Maimonides saw this not only as an act of *noblesse oblige*, but ultimately as an imitation of God. But, to give him credit, Johnston, a professional philosopher, has written a work largely accessible to the serious common reader, and is also kind enough to warn us when he is about to engage in the sort of intellectual pyrotechnics which are characteristic of his profession.

Johnston's belief in the fallen nature of human beings also separates him from Maimonides or Maimonideanism. Maimonides had no illusions about the low moral state of most human beings, but like all legitimate exponents of the Jewish tradition, he did not think that human beings were so fallen that they could not rise. That is the point behind his naturalistic messianism (a messianism which really has no pressing need for a Messiah, even though he accepts the traditional view that there will be one). "Belief in God," Johnston avers, "is not a matter of believing in the proposition that he exists; it is an orientation in which the Highest One comes into view, with salvific effect." But the Jewish tradition recognizes a category of *chasidei ummot ha-olam* (the righteous among the nations of the world, among whom it would be hard not to include Mark Johnston) who are, in Christian terminology, "saved" without any specific "orientation" to the "Highest One." This is, in part, a consequence of the idea that human beings are born pure, uncontaminated by original sin, unfallen. That is also what makes possible Maimonides' naturalist messianism. Only a truly fallen world needs a truly miraculous savior.

One more point. The rabbis of the Talmud disapproved of the figure of King David as described in the Books of Samuel (a randy Mafia thug) and turned him into a pale and studious *yeshiva bochur* who rarely left the confines of the study hall. Maimonides gave the rabbis a dose of their own medicine and presented them (and the prophets of Israel) as something close to toga-clad philosophers. Neither interpreted the biblical God in literalist fashion. Johnston is well aware of this, but occasionally seems to pick on the God of Israel rather more than on Allah or Jesus. This is perhaps one more indication of the profoundly Christian nature of this profound book.

Menachem Kellner *is Professor of Jewish Thought at the University of Haifa and Senior Fellow at The Shalem Center, Jerusalem. His most recent book is* Science in the Bet Midrash: Studies in Maimonides.

Walking the Green Line

BY SHMUEL ROSNER

TRIS (THE SETTLER)
by Emily Amrousi, Kinneret-Zmora-Bitan-Dvir, 333 pp., 89 NIS

HEBRON JEWS
by Jerold S. Auerbach, Rowman & Littlefield, 240 pp., $34.95

HA-MITNACHALIM (THE SETTLERS)
by Gadi Taub, Yediot, 190 pp., 88 NIS

LORDS OF THE LAND
by Idith Zertal and Akiva Eldar, Translated by Vivian Eden, Nation Books, 576 pp., $19.95

THE ACCIDENTAL EMPIRE
by Gershom Gorenberg, Times Press, 480 pp., $18

HITPAKHUT (DISILLUSIONMENT)
by Dan Margalit, Kinneret-Zmora-Bitan-Dvir, 318 pp., 89 NIS

In the mid-1990s, my wife signed a deal with an Israeli publishing house to write a book about the settlers. The idea was for us to reside for a year in the distant settlement of Elon Moreh, a hard-core *hitnachalut*, in which some of Gush Emunim's founding fathers live. Elon Moreh is located on top of the impressive Har Kabir (Great Mountain), overlooking the site of the biblical city of Shechem, not far from today's Nablus. Our plan was to drive back and forth to our workplaces in Tel Aviv along the treacherous but beautiful roads of Samaria.

We never tried to deceive the people of Elon Moreh. They knew we were coming because of the book, and also knew that we weren't exactly sympathizers. But we were trying not to be biased either. We told the committee processing our application for residency that we weren't coming because we wanted proof that settlers were evil or deranged—and it was true. We had long talks with the man who was then secretary general of the settlement and his elegant, French-born wife, a woman who later became my wife's friend. We ate at their dinner table, and learned their children's names and habits. It was a long process, and at the end, after much deliberation, the reception committee decided to let us live in the settlement.

It was not an easy decision for them, I am sure, and not just because of our political differences. I come from an Orthodox family and am quite familiar with traditional Jewish practices, but my wife has a secular background and has never been a strictly observant Jew. Elon Moreh is a very religious place, so allowing her to observe and write about their lives required a level of trust and acceptance that settlers of this kind don't always seem to possess. Nevertheless, they were convinced, and we were allocated a small townhouse. We got a local phone number and reserved the truck that would carry our belongings from our apartment in Tel Aviv to the mountainous tranquility of Elon Moreh.

Just three days before the planned move, an early morning phone call notified us that there was trouble. Apparently, not all the residents of Elon Moreh were at peace with the committee's decision. A couple of them demanded a general assembly of all the settlement's residents to review it. We were invited to come and make our case. When we got to the settlement it was clear to us that the battle had been lost even before it started. The assembly was not gathering to hear our case. It was putting us on trial for all the sins, real or imagined, of "the press," "hedonistic Tel Avivians," "peaceniks," and the "hostile elites." They would not trust us, "media people," nor would they allow a "fifth column" into their safe, isolated hermitage.

Their suspicions were not utterly unwarranted. Over the years, the settlers have received a lot of bad press. But there are also writers who are their friends and admirers, who describe them not as obscurantist enemies of the peace process but as potential saviors of Israel. Indeed, conflicting narratives mar all discussion of the settler movement, impeding dispassionate understanding of its origin and destination. All writers are either "with us" or "against us." All take sides, including those whose books are under review here.

In *The Accidental Empire*, Gershom Gorenberg subtly mocks the way in which previous writers on the subject of the settlements have tendentiously oversimplified matters. "On one side are the secular pragmatists of the left; on the other, the religious fanatics of the right. Or—in another telling that changes the labels without drastically changing the script—on one side are uninspired defeatists; on the other, the truest patriots." But Gorenberg, though a gifted writer, suffers from the very malady that he has diagnosed. The reader of his book can have no doubt as to which narrative he accepts. And more troubling: one gets the sense that he embarked on his investigations with his mind already made up. Whatever he actually discovered—many new details but few new insights—Gorenberg wasn't going to write positively about the settler movement. He embarked on his journey in order to understand how the rogues got the upper hand. An American-born Israeli, writing in English for a primarily American readership, his main contribution is to impose a prefabricated Americanized vocabulary on this highly specific Middle Eastern story, relying on concepts such as "colonialism" and "empire," which are of dubious use.

Gorenberg's treatment of the subject is relatively calm and even-handed compared to that of Idith Zertal and Akiva Eldar—a scholar and a journalist, respectively, of the Israeli Left. Gorenberg, to his credit, concentrates on history, retelling in detail how the settlers started their conquest of the West Bank (his story ends more than thirty years ago). You can find little sympathy or admiration in his narrative, but the tone is generally composed. This is not the case with Eldar and Zertal, who pretend to write history while engaging in raw politics in their *Lords of the Land.*

Where Gorenberg seems not to like the idea of the settlement movement, Zertal and Eldar seem to dislike (dare I say hate?) the settlers themselves. What they are really most angry about is Israel's complicity with the settlers' advances. They accuse the settlers of "stealing" the land. They make sure to use the word "radical" when referring to activists of the right (there's no "radical" left in their political vocabulary). They say of the settlers that "their camp" was "guilty" and is "responsible" for the assassination of the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. A mere glance at the titles of the book's chapters gives one a sufficient sense of what's inside: "blindness," "bad faith," "a moveable death," "complicity," "the pace of apocalypse." This is an angry book.

Gadi Taub's *The Settlers* is hardly any less impassioned, but it is couched in much more temperate terms and makes an honest attempt to dive deeper into Israel's ideological battles. One of the more intriguing aspects of Taub's book is his elucidation of the way settlers have used language to rationalize their actions, employing different strategies and combinations of arguments to convince the public that the journey on which they have embarked must continue. Settlers, as Taub meticulously demonstrates, have used religious arguments (this land is a God-given land), historical arguments (this is our fathers' land), strategic arguments (if we abandon the mountainous Judea and Samaria we will be at a strategic disadvantage), and even lawyerly arguments (what about our human rights? why can't we live here?). All of these arguments Taub describes as evolving justifications aimed at answering skeptics at different points in time. He regards them as tactical moves more than anything else, tricks the settlers repeatedly use to masquerade the religious-messianic motives of the movement's hard-core leadership. And his conclusion (to cite language he has used elsewhere) is based on words he cites from someone within "the camp":

> In all public transactions outside the circle of believers the rhetoric of redemption proved ineffective … "I don't think that it's possible to take a public and raise it all at once to higher stages. *Nekuda*, which is our broadcasting channel, has to do it in a continuous process. We [the religious core of the settlers] need to project that we are a sober, realistic, rational public, in order to tie wider publics to us. Only after we tie the public to us, could we raise it to higher stages. I don't know if the time has yet come for that…

Taub makes a convincing case. He is right to point out that the settlers continually revise what they have to say for public consumption, and that with every twist and turn in their rationales they end up bumping into another wall. If settlements are there because of religion, then they will not be acceptable to secular people. If they're there for security's sake, that's not convincing either, since "in security matters, the state is far more responsible, better informed, and better equipped to plan and consider matters than settlers are." What settlers really believe in and hope for, according to Taub, is a miracle: "that redemption would come if only they

moment

CELEBRATING **35** YEARS

Moment is "a must–read"— Slate

"Moment is mandatory reading for people who crave fascinating stories written in a bright and lively way. It's rapidly becoming the Jewish New Yorker!"

— Robert S. Greenberger, former Wall Street Journal foreign affairs reporter

"In the chaotic magazine world of the Post–Internet Age, there's not much there that manages to be thoughtful, informative and provocative. Moment is one of those rare exceptions."— Glenn Frankel, Pulitzer Prize-winning former Washington Post reporter

SUBSCRIBE AND RECEIVE SIX ILLUMINATING ISSUES PER YEAR.

North America's largest independent Jewish magazine transcends the divides of the Jewish world. Fresh, engaging and always intelligent, Moment offers readers of all ages beautifully written articles, fiction and reviews. The magazine's stellar book section, edited by Mike Levitas, former editor of the New York Times Sunday Book Review and op-ed page, includes reviewers such as Sherwin B. Nuland, Clyde Haberman, David Margolick, Steven Heller and Lore Segal. Each issue is packed with diverse opinions, providing depth and perspective. As Elie Wiesel says: "Moment is where every Jew should turn." Visit momentmag.com today to subscribe to the print or digital edition.

Independent journalism from a Jewish perspective momentmag.com | momentmagblog.com | 800.777.1005

held fast to the land," but "did not cut themselves loose from the hawkish right, on whom they relied for a political solution." Of course, Taub finds this unacceptable. A state can't pursue policies based on the hope for divine intervention. Zionism itself is based on the assumption that the only miracles are the ones that are man-made and that Jews should take matters into their own hands.

West Bank settlement of Amona, north of Ramallah. (Photo by Orel Cohen/AFP/Getty Images.)

While Taub does a fine job of exposing messianic thinking among settlers, he fails to see what we might call the "settlerism of practice," the settlerism that is far from being "radical" or "messianic" and is very close in nature and performance to early Zionism. It is the achievement of a settler movement that sets impractical goals, and then settles for those it can get; a settler movement that dreams unrealistically, but is very realistic and pragmatic in its policies. And the proof is on the hills of Judea and the mountains of Samaria. A lively, dynamic, vibrant Jewish community now inhabits those areas, one that builds houses, establishes schools, manipulates governments to get more funds, playing the game dangerously but also carefully, handling its affairs in a shrewd, pragmatic way.

Surely there is reason to be disappointed with the settlers' less than complete readiness to condemn the violent shenanigans of the "Jewish Underground" of the 1980s; surely there is reason to be angry with settlers' behavior prior to the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin; and surely there is a lot to be said against settlers' cursing of soldiers and policemen during the Disengagement from Gaza. All that said, the settler "movement" never went as far as to lose touch with Israeli society. Even in the aftermath of the Israeli government's recent decision to freeze settlement construction for a period of ten months, they have still been careful not to go too far in their protests and active opposition. Thus, what Taub describes as the worrying signs of settlers' lying to Israelis about the "real" motives for settling the land could also be viewed as grounds for reassurance: they feel the need to revise their self-justifications because they want Israelis to be convinced. They want Israelis to be convinced, because they themselves are "Israelis" and would like to be part of Israel's society. They have to change their story in order to be "acceptable."

In the eyes of Jerold S. Auerbach, they are already much more than acceptable. His *Hebron Jews* is a sympathetic book—sympathetic to settlers and settlements—but no less angry than Zertal and Eldar's *Lords of the Land*. While they are angry with the settlers, Auerbach is angry with all those who oppose the settlers' grandiose project. "By now," he writes accusingly, "the rhetoric of settler illegitimacy is deeply embedded in Israeli secular culture." In Auerbach's world, as in the parallel world of Zertal-Eldar, there is no such thing as gray. Everything is black or white.

Rabbi Moshe Levinger, for instance, the incendiary, fanatical leader of Hebron's settlers and a figure of some notoriety, shows up in Auerbach's narrative as a man who has "proven to be a formidable, indeed, irrepressible, leader—and provocateur." Although he might occasionally be "histrionic, even hysterical, his charismatic power was indisputable. Combining asceticism, stubbornness, and courage, he led by bold example…" Levinger, Auerbach notes, "was unafraid to roam, at night and unarmed, through the forbidding Arab casbah. There, oblivious to danger, he might sit on the ground, lead prayers, and conduct a Torah lesson…" To such heroes as Levinger, Auerbach contrasts "secular Israelis," who "scornfully dismissive of biblical land promises, emancipated from Jewish memory, and avidly embracing modern Western values—have all but forgotten what Hebron Jews remain fiercely determined to remember."

However, Auerbach is wrong both factually and ideologically. Secular Israelis aren't "scornfully dismissive" of biblical promises. The head of Israel's opposition, former Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, in a speech marking the November 29, 1947 UN resolution calling for the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine, talked about "the connection of thousands of years between the Jewish people and the land of Israel." And this comes from Livni, who favors a two state solution and evacuation of settlements. She supported the Gaza pullout and the "convergence" plan that never materialized. (Ehud Olmert promised Israelis that he would evacuate most of the West Bank within four years if reelected Prime Minister.) Other such comments by secular leaders, authors, military men, politicians, and citizens of Israel can be easily found. Secular Israelis didn't "forget" what Hebron Jews "remember." They just choose not to make remembrance the one and only consideration in public life. It is arguably the case that it is they who better "remember" the lessons of pragmatic Zionism, and it is Auerbach's settlers who sometimes "scornfully forget" to prioritize their values and desires in a reasonable manner.

Far from regarding secular Israel with boundless scorn, like Auerbach, Emily Amrousi is one of those nice, presentable settlers, who want a dialogue promoting the message of friendly otherness to the many readers, radio listeners, and media personalities still charmed by the fact that a settler—a settler!—can speak their language. A professional in the world of public relations, she has written a novel that is more of an anthropological achievement than a noteworthy piece of literature. Her protagonist, Na'ama, is a "settler" no doubt, but also a human being interested in topics familiar to all readers of young mothers' chick-lit:

> a familiar tingle in my breasts. Sure sign that they are filled with milk right on time for breast-feeding and this draws me back to the mother station. A breast-feeding mother: the line connecting me to the baby is the time between feedings. My life circles in three-hour intervals, between breast-feeding and self-feeding…

This is a political book, but its messages are wrapped in the human story of settlers' daily apolitical struggles. These include coping with gossip (mostly concerning pregnancy, or, more accurately, the whisper-drawing non-pregnancy), relationships among neighbors, domestic struggles, even—delicately—the settlers' sex lives. The book contains more self-conscious mockery than people might expect from stern-looking zealots, and thus enables Amrousi to achieve two goals: disarming the settlers' foes, and criticizing settler mores without alienating herself from her own community. What we hear is the criticism of a lover and the self-mockery of a member. Unlike my wife, she might even acquire the trust of some (though probably not all) of the ultra-zealots of Elon Moreh.

To such a reader the message is hard to miss: "look, we are just like everyone else. We talk about men, more about relationships, less about sex … we love this land but we also want to walk along its roads with decent shoes on our feet." Amrousi makes her case convincingly, if sometimes breathlessly. In her novel, real human beings, with their many shortcomings, both political and emotional, and their few virtues, replace the villain-caricatures of Zertal and Eldar and the super-heroes of Auerbach. There are settlers here with whom even the more suspicious reader can identify. To such a reader, there are moments in which the settlers will seem kind and moving, and also moments in which they seem extreme and detached from the realities of modern life.

At the root of Amrousi's novel lies a call for acceptance. She wants to be seen as a human being, craving, worrying, loving, struggling, not as one of the one-dimensional figures peopling both Taub's and Auerbach's books. Ironically, she is "the settler" who is trying to be pleasant and communicative, while these two are constantly pushing her to the margins. Taub portrays her compatriots as the settler-freaks breaking away from Israel's secular-rational-pragmatic society; Auerbach portrays them as the settler-icons breaking away from Israel's secular, hedonistic, and valueless society.

One of the things that Amrousi's book captures nicely is the way that other Israelis, who have no ideological axes to grind, maintain their relations with the settlers and their movement. Unlike the world of cultural and political polemics, in which arguments are made and defended, and in which definitive—and for commercial reasons, preferably controversial—conclusions are drawn, in the world of real people there can be gray areas and unlikely alliances, even friendship. Thus, it is not hard to have days on which one loves the settlers and admires their sacrifices and hardships, and days on which one loathes their dismissive treatment of law and order and their condescending manners toward fellow citizens; days on which their patriotism seems fresh and exciting and days on which they seem weird and out of touch.

Taub's book catches such moments of distaste, even hate, when he describes how the entire settler community was widely if unjustly accused of incitement leading to murder during the months following Rabin's assassination. But Taub is not as good at catching the other moments, those of admiration for the settlers and of identification with their struggle and many sacrifices. In September 2009, Dan Margalit, one of Israel's most well-known columnists and TV personalities—a hawkish centrist and never a "supporter" of settlements—published *Hitpakhut* (Disillusionment) in which he describes the sorrow he felt upon witnessing the evacuation of Neve Dekalim, one of the many Gaza Strip settlements wiped off the map by Ariel Sharon's "disengagement" plan of 2005:

> I was sitting at home, watching the scenes of clashes in another settlement and tears were pouring down my cheeks. My wife asked me what's happening—after all, I've witnessed worse scenes in the past, for example in the Yom Kippur War, or in the evacuation of Pitchat Rafiach. Nevertheless, this time was different. I promised myself that I will never again support the eviction of a Jew by a fellow Jew from his legal home.

Both Taub and Margalit succeed in conveying the way in which anger or compassion toward the settlers can, on occasion, capture the public mood, but there are also many other moments that defy any such descriptions.

Sadly enough, apocalyptic prophecies accord better with sober analysis of the Middle East than other, more hopeful, predictions. Those laying out scenarios of doom tend to be right more often than those who optimistically claim that better, more peaceful times lie ahead. Strangely, this overwhelming pessimism clouds not just discussions of relations between Israel and its Arab (or Persian) enemies, but also discussions about the future of Israel's society. Every major event in the life of the country stirs memories of the Second Temple and fears of another Jewish civil war, like in the old days. Every dispute tends to ignite apprehensive discussions of possible fissures and battles.

A pessimistic spirit also hovers over most books dealing with the settlers. Taub, while confident that "most religious Zionist settlers will in the crunch put the state above the settlements," goes on to say that most Israelis are inclined to conclude that "one will have to force a solution on the settlers, not to persuade them or hope that they will propose a solution to the problem that they themselves have created. And, indeed it looks as if it will be necessary to force a solution on them." Auerbach, for his part, predicts that "Hebron Jews are likely to remain under siege, the pariahs of the Jewish people." Such analyses of current events, solemn and annoyingly humorless, prevent both men from looking into the future with a sufficient degree of humility.

In Amrousi's novel, real human beings replace the villain-caricatures of Zertal and Eldar and the superheroes of Auerbach.

"Once Jews relinquish their right to live in Hebron", writes Auerbach:

> They implicitly undermine their claim to live anywhere in their biblical homeland. To abandon Hebron is to surrender the claims of memory that bind Jews to each other, to their ancient homeland, and to their shared past and future.

Taub's conclusions are more cautious and conciliatory in tone. He urges "secular Zionists" to try to win the hearts and minds of the settlers, and he seems to believe that the settlers are either closet realists who will eventually come around to accepting his worldview or extremist zealots doomed to fail. Their most ardent ideologues and activists, he predicts, will turn themselves into a marginal sect, one that will have difficulty convincing the majority, even the majority of believers, that it is in fact the true representative of the spirit and tradition of Judaism. He who clings to settlement at any price—at the expense of the unity of the people or the Jewishness of the state—will condemn himself to marginality. He will turn, in the eyes of many, in the eyes of the majority, into a kind of territorial Sabbatean who abandoned the ethical, spiritual, and religious world of Judaism to hold fast to a single theological tenet: settling the land.

Curiously, all of the books on this subject treat the debate over settlerism as if it were exclusively a debate among Jewish Israelis, secular vs. religious, Zionists vs. post-Zionists, idealistic vs. hedonistic. The outside world is mentioned mostly in passing, as if Israelis themselves will determine the course of events by force of argument, or ferocity, or even violence. Everyone acts as if settlements were just an internal problem. Palestinians, those living in and desirous of inheriting "the land of the settlers," are merely bystanders in these books. The watchful world, the critical "international community" that is united and vehement on the "settlement issue," is no more than a tool in the hands of debating, warring Jews.

This might be the world in which some people would prefer to live, but it can hardly be regarded as a realistic portrayal of the current circumstances. Whether the settlers are right or wrong, whether Israelis will be convinced by their idealistic brethren or outraged and betrayed by their arrogant condescension has less significance than one might wish. As can be easily demonstrated by past events, it is the outside world who will ultimately determine the fate of the settlements. It will be the Palestinians, and their ability to overcome their shortcomings, who will decide whether or not the West Bank remains under Israeli control. And it will be the level of international pressure that will determine the degree to which Israelis will be willing to make sacrifices to hold onto all, part, or none of the settlements.

While no one should be so deluded as to think that ending the settlements will be the key to lasting peace in the region, there is also no reason to believe that keeping the settlements is such a necessity that Israel cannot thrive without them. Most Israelis understand this, whether they support the settlements or not, whether they are settlers themselves, or were, or will be, or once considered it, or have cousins living there (as I have), or will never cross the "green line" for ideological reasons, or for fear of Palestinian terrorism, or for lack of interest. Real Israelis, like the fictional settlers of Amrousi's book, are all-too human: they have views that can change and loyalties to things other than ideology. Unlike the writers of polemical tracts, they don't see things in black and white.

Many of them can easily slip into the familiar role of passionately arguing for and against the settlements. But most are weary of this by now. All has been said, and it's all much too tiresome to repeat. Yes—it is our ancestors' land. Yes—there's no reason to prevent Jews from living there. Yes—it is also a political matter, and politics sometime means compromise. Yes—compromise is hard, and will be fervently debated. Yes—if a decision to evacuate will be made, settlers will be evacuated.

Until then, more books about settlers will be written, and the more human they are, the more they deal with the lives that people are really living, the more interesting they will be. "We talk about our lives on the mountain," says Amrousi's settler-protagonist, when she is asked to describe her conversations with a secular, liberal, city-dwelling friend. "We talk about the little that he knows. The effort to break down the stigmas in which he is stuck wears me out."

Shmuel Rosner *is an editor and columnist based in Tel Aviv. He writes for the* Jerusalem Post, Maariv, Slate, The New Republic, The Jewish Chronicle *and other publications, and is the non-fiction editor for Israel's largest publishing house, Kinneret-Zmora-Bitan-Dvir.*

Prospects for American Judaism

BY LANCE J. SUSSMAN

CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN JUDAISM: TRANSFORMATION AND RENEWAL
by Dana Evan Kaplan
Columbia University Press, 446 pp., $34.50

Walk down the hallway of any long-established suburban Reform or Conservative synagogue where the photographs of each year's confirmation class are mounted and you will be reminded of the dramatic changes that have taken place in these institutions over the past half-century. Fifty years ago, in many of the larger congregations, ninth and tenth grade classes regularly exceeded one hundred students and sometimes even reached two hundred. By the late 1960s, the students' hair was getting longer, and by the mid-1970s the classes started getting smaller. Today, if a Reform congregation of a thousand families can muster a confirmation class of thirty students, rabbis and educators are not only relieved but feel a small sense of victory.

This is but one reflection of an undeniable reality. With the exception of a number of Orthodox communities and a few other bright spots in or just off the mainstream of Jewish religious life, American Judaism is in precipitous decline. Not only is enrollment in non-Orthodox Jewish religious educational programs down, so is synagogue affiliation. Philanthropic giving in the religious sector of the Jewish community is also declining. For rabbis, Jewish educators, and communal leaders, it is a difficult moment. Jews are flourishing in America, but organized, institutional Judaism is in deep trouble, particularly after the recent economic crisis.

Why is this happening? Can anything be done to remedy the situation or are today's non-Orthodox synagogues on the same path to obsolescence as the Jewish labor unions of a century ago or the old Borsht Belt resorts? Are Day Schools the answer or should the broader Jewish community concentrate on welcoming and retaining the ever growing mixed married population? Can Jewish communal and institutional efforts really do anything to control long-term American, Jewish, and global historical processes? Before one attempts to address these questions, as Dana Kaplan does in his new book, *Contemporary American Judaism: Transformation and Renewal*, one needs to know how we arrived at this historical moment.

Jacob Rader Marcus, the greatest American Jewish historian of the twentieth century, described the religion of colonial American Jews as "the Orthodoxy of salutary neglect." The German Jews who began arriving in ever increasing numbers after the War of 1812 were generally no more enthusiastic about practicing Judaism than were their Sephardic predecessors. The Eastern European immigrants who came next were people whose ties to a God-fearing, learning-based, mitzvah-driven Judaism were already frayed by the time they set sail for America and, for the most part, only continued to weaken after their arrival. The return of hundreds of thousands of their essentially secular children and grandchildren to the synagogue in suburbia after World War II was an anomaly. As Kaplan observes, in the post-war period "the emphasis was … on affiliation rather than participation or theological commitment."

American Judaism may have experienced a "Great Awakening" at the end of the nineteenth century, but the expansion of synagogue-based denominational Judaism after World War II was not a "Second Great Awakening." Other trends and issues, including interfaith activism, support for Israel, Holocaust awareness, and rescue of Soviet Jewry, moved American Jews of the period more deeply than religious faith. The Jewish federations and their political and social services became the "heavy industries" of American Jewry while religion became one of its "light industries." Above all, it was secular American ideologies, especially liberalism, that shaped Jewish life.

The Reform movement has probably contracted by a full third in the last ten years.

Dana Kaplan, for his part, appears to be of the opinion that the new Jewish spirituality of the late twentieth century was the primary cause of the "fall of American Jewish Denominationalism" (the title of his third chapter). It seems to me, however, that the roots of the problem are much older and deeper. The new interest in spirituality has been and remains marginal in the lives of most American Jews. Kaplan's pervasive and disproportionate emphasis on the development of Jewish Renewal, pop mysticism and non-denominational synagogue renewal takes the place, in his book, of a serious analysis of his ostensible subject, contemporary American Judaism. It appears that his real interest is not in drawing a comprehensive portrait of current realities but rather in describing those "Jews in contemporary America [who] are exploring virgin territory and have no idea where it may lead." Everyone and everything else gets short shrift.

Most perplexing is Kaplan's cursory and inadequate treatment of contemporary Orthodox Judaism in America. He does have a sub-chapter entitled "The Surprising Survival and Revival of Orthodox Judaism." But is it really so very surprising, in view of the world-wide revival of old-fashioned religion, including the tremendous growth of American Protestant fundamentalism? What is truly surprising is the scant attention that he gives to Orthodoxy, especially in view of his observation at the end of the book that "relations between Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jews have been steadily deteriorating," and that the two groups are rapidly moving toward a complete schism. While Kaplan briefly reviews the course of centrist or modern Orthodoxy, he fails to report on the recent history of the fervently Orthodox, particularly the communities they have built in Brooklyn, Monsey and upstate New York, Lakewood, Baltimore, and elsewhere. It is only in the contexts of outreach and mysticism that Kaplan goes into any depth at all about Judaism's most dynamic religious sector today in America. And nowhere does he take up the challenge thrown down by Jonathan Sarna in his *American Judaism: A History* to examine this sector's deep weaknesses, including a lack of first-rate leadership and shaky institutional finances.

Closer to his (and my own) spiritual home, Kaplan also fails to critically examine Reform Judaism. Instead, he generally echoes the movement's own triumphalism. His brief discussion of "contemporary Reform Judaism" concentrates on the pre-World War II era before focusing on the movement's new religious flexibility as its most salient characteristic. In his discussion of the 1999 Pittsburgh Platform, Kaplan concludes that despite tremendous conflict throughout the movement over its original "traditional content, the final result was relatively innocuous." In fact, the adoption of this platform represented a significant compromise balancing the expressions of Renewal Judaism with the historical beliefs, practices, and personalities of the Reform movement. By contrast, the widely accepted new Reform prayer book, *Mishkan T'filah* (2007), clearly institutionalizes mysticism, feminism, and neo-traditional liturgical practices to a greater extent than any previous Reform siddur and represents a religious victory for the Renewal wing of Reform Judaism.

The demographic situation of American Reform Judaism today is hard to assess, in part because the movement stopped publishing statistical information about itself a decade ago. Professor Steven M. Cohen, a leading sociologist of American Judaism and a professor at the Reform movement's flagship Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, talks about 850,000 Reform Jews. Similarly, *Reform Judaism* magazine reports a circulation of approximately 300,000, which would yield a total affiliated Reform population at well under one million adherents. In other words, the Reform movement has probably contracted by a full third in the last ten years! The impact of this reality on its finances has been felt by Reform synagogue boards across the country and can be seen in the dismantling of almost the entire regional office system of the American Reform movement and the extraordinary efforts during the past year on the part of of the Board of Governors of the Hebrew Union College to keep all four branches of HUC-JIR open. Of this increasingly desperate situation the reader will learn very little from Kaplan (or, for that matter, from the book's preface, written by David Ellenson, the president of HUC-JIR).

Kaplan does pick up on some of the themes of Sarna's now decade-old *American Judaism*. He greatly expands his discussion of mixed marriage, for instance, and, perhaps more controversially, formulates a new framework, "inclusivity," to discuss the changing role of both gender and sexuality in the post-war Jewish community. But his most significant contribution to the story of Judaism in America appears in his book's last three chapters. These chapters focus on "Radical Responses to the Suburban Experience," "The Popularization of Jewish Mystical Outreach," and finally, "Herculean Efforts at Synagogue Renewal." Here, Kaplan is clearly breaking new ground and writing a new narrative for twenty-first century American Judaism. For the most part, however, his account is descriptive. He neither makes an historiographically defined argument nor places his report in the broader context of American religious history.

The picture Kaplan paints of efforts to renew and spiritualize Judaism in America is colorful. Kaplan yokes together discussions of Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, the grand rebbe of the Jewish Renewal movement, and Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach, "the father of the new Jewish music," with reports on the outreach work of Aish HaTorah, the "Ba'al Teshuva Phenomenon" and ArtScroll books among others. In his discussion of what he calls "mystical outreach," Kaplan mostly examines the meteoric rise of Chabad-Lubavitch in America, its international impact and its internal messianic conflict. Finally, Kaplan looks at various attempts at synagogue renewal with special focus on well-known and well-funded projects like the STAR (Synagogue: Transformation and Renewal) "synaplex" initiative led by three large Jewish Foundations: Bronfman, Schusterman, and Steinhardt (the rise in importance of the independent Jewish foundation is another recent phenomenon that merits more attention).

Kaplan's account of these endeavors is sympathetic but not exactly upbeat. Where "American Jewish religious belief and practice" are headed is something he does not profess to know. *Contemporary American Judaism* is an ambitious book that seeks to tell a big story. But it tells only part of that story in an incomplete manner, without a clear thesis or historiographical framework. It is, in essence, a traveler's report from a community that might be on the verge of a vast implosion. Perhaps current efforts at transformation and renewal are the birth pains of a new "Yavneh moment" in American Judaism, an historical comparison provided by Kaplan himself in his closing statement. But before that happens, if we borrow his analogy, many Temples may yet have to fall while isolated communities of modern-day zealots hold out in their own spiritual fortresses.

At the end of his narrative, Kaplan approvingly quotes the distinguished cultural historian David Biale, who calls on American Jews to face the future not with trepidation but with enthusiasm. Biale recommends that we regard intermarriage and other seemingly disintegrative trends "as creating new forms of identity, including multiple identities, that will reshape what it means to be Jewish in ways that we can only begin to imagine." Kaplan neglects to mention that Biale is also a leading exponent of secular Judaism who presumably can observe the decline of the Jewish religion with at least some equanimity. It is strange, then, to encounter him as an encouraging voice at the very end of a book animated by a concern with the fate of institutional Judaism in America. But what is even stranger is what follows the conclusion of Kaplan's narrative: an Afterword by Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi.

While Kaplan is guarded in his assessment of the strength of the transformation and renewal he has described in his book, Schachter-Shalomi, who happily takes credit for a great deal of it, is enthusiastic about the future of Judaism in America. "I'm optimistic," he writes, "that something will emerge, you know. I'm as optimistic as I am when I see a newborn baby." He is less than completely candid, however, in his less than completely literate explanation of why he feels this way. Referring to insights that he gained while working on his recent book, *The Paradigm Shift*, he proclaims that "we have to abandon the Deuteronomic point of view of Jewish triumphalism that mashiach is coming and then all the goyim finding out they were wrong to knowing that we are looking at something that is a lot more organismic." What is less than clear here, aside from the syntax, is that his new paradigm calls for relinquishing the very idea of God as Father, King, and Judge, as well as the notion of Torah as legislation. Perhaps Schachter-Shalomi felt that he ought to soft-pedal his radicalism, for consistency's sake, in a chapter where he lauds Chabad (a movement to which, as Kaplan has reminded us, he once belonged but was eventually forced to leave).

Why Kaplan has attached an opinion so much more positive than his own to the end of his book not as an appendix illustrating the strengths and weaknesses of the Renewal Movement but as a full-fledged "Afterward" is a bit of a mystery. Perhaps the editors at Columbia University Press have a post-modern taste for first-person narratives and hybrid texts. Perhaps they perceived the need for a "happy ending." Or perhaps Kaplan himself could not help but give voice in the end, in some fashion, to the optimism about the future with which the Jewish religious tradition has for so long been imbued.

__Lance J. Sussman__, Ph.D., Senior Rabbi of Reform Congregation Keneseth Israel (Elkins Park, PA) has taught American Jewish History at Princeton and Binghamton University. He is author of Isaac Leeser and the Making of American Judaism.

Faith in Doubt

BY NOAH EFRON

IN PRAISE OF DOUBT
by Peter Berger and Anton Zijderveld
HarperOne, 192 pp., $23.99

Every Saturday last fall, dozens of men and boys, followers of Rabbi Yitzchak Tuvia Weiss, the aged Chief Rabbi of the ultra-Orthodox organization *Edah ha-Hareidis*, converged in anger on the Intel factory in Jerusalem to protest that company's decision to keep production lines open on the Sabbath. The factory lies on a small campus that borders a Haredi, or ultra-orthodox neighborhood, and though etching computer chips is not particularly noisy, its operation was an affront to the devout observance of the day. Intel security ringed the grounds with razor wire, and police set up a perimeter, holding in the protesters who spat and cried, "Nazis! Nazis!" and "You Zionists caused the Holocaust!" Maxine Fassberg, general manager of Intel Israel, announced that if the protests at the factory continued, "the company will be forced to close it and may also decide to leave Israel," taking with it 6,500 good jobs. That's what happens, one blogger observed, when you put "Yentl Inside."

The Jerusalem silicon kerfuffle was just one episode in last autumn's harvest of religious conflict in Israel. Religious demonstrators showered rocks on cars making use of a city-owned parking lot, recently opened on the Sabbath. In November, a young woman was arrested for wearing a *tallit*, or prayer shawl, traditionally worn only by men, and carrying a Torah beyond the restricted zone that Israel's Supreme Court has delegated for non-orthodox prayer at the Western Wall. That weekend, four thousand Israelis rallied in downtown Jerusalem, demanding to "take back the city for secular Jews" and put an end to the coercion of fundamentalist "Ayatollahs." (My fourteen year old daughter, who herself can sometimes be found wrapped in a prayer shawl cradling a Torah scroll, traveled an hour to be among them.)

Everyday events in Jerusalem constantly force those of us who live in Israel to consider just what is the rightful place of religious convictions, and other strongly held beliefs, in the public square. This is the sort of question that Peter Berger and Anton Zijderveld set out to answer in their brief but ambitious new book, *In Praise of Doubt: How to Have Convictions without Becoming a Fanatic*. Berger has been an intellectual celebrity among sociologists and others since at least 1967, when he and Thomas Luckmann published an extraordinary book called *The Social Construction of Reality*. He is also a distinguished Lutheran lay leader. Zijderveld is a Dutch sociologist, philosopher, journalist, and political consultant. As an adviser to his country's center-right Christian Democratic Appeal party, he insisted that Holland seek to better integrate Muslims, who in turn must seek to become better integrated. He is also an atheist.

Together, Berger and Zijderveld are a potent pair: two supple intellectuals, believer and non-, scarred by the tumultuous half-century over which their scholarly careers have stretched, who have witnessed the death and rebirth of fundamentalist Christianity, Islam, and Judaism in the very different contexts of the United States and Europe. They make a dream team for tackling perhaps *the* issue in the West today: how can people (and peoples) of diverging beliefs live together peaceably?

Nearly two decades ago, in a famously controversial essay "The Clash of Civilizations," Samuel Huntington highlighted one of the most important ways in which this issue was taking shape: the rapid growth of a Muslim population in many European nations. In subsequent years, innumerable books have focused on the same situation, often drawing more apocalyptic implications than Huntington did.

In Zijderveld's Holland, such prophecies gained plausibility when filmmaker Theo van Gogh was murdered by a twenty-six-year-old Moroccan-Dutchman named Mohammed Bouyeri. Bouyeri, who in thoroughly Dutch fashion, rode a bicycle, sidled up to van Gogh on a busy street, shot him several times, and then drew a machete and slit his throat. Afterwards, he placed a note on his victim's chest, plunging a smaller knife between his ribs to hold it in place. Van Gogh's offense had been to produce a film about the subjection of Muslim women. Writer Ian Buruma, who grew up in Holland and wrote a book about the murder, found in it "the end of a sweet dream of tolerance and light in the most progressive little enclave of Europe."

That a grotesque act of intolerance might bring an end to tolerance itself is a conclusion that does not necessarily follow, but it does have a certain logic. Many Dutch citizens—like many citizens of other Western countries—concluded from the murder that Muslims were an unabsorbed and indeed unabsorbable minority. As they saw it, even after years in the most live-and-let-live of Europe's great cities, Muslims in Amsterdam had soundly rejected this ethos, though it was the very ethos that accounted for the relative peace they themselves enjoyed in Europe.

But what then were Holland, Europe, and the West to do? How could they accept a large minority that rejects the very openness that makes room for such a minority? On the other hand, given their own vaunted commitment to *tolerance-uber-alles*, how could they not? This paradox of tolerance left many Europeans convinced that they faced a problem that had no solution.

Not so, write Berger and Zijderveld. The paradox of tolerance is a product of misunderstanding the nature of belief itself, and what it can and should be. We tend to recognize only two sorts of belief, one relativist and one absolutist. In the relativist mode "not only is the religious 'other' accorded respect, and conceded freedom to believe and practice in ways different from one's own, but the 'other' world view is … embraced as a harbinger of valid truth." In the absolutist mode, only one truth is recognized; the believer must either "attempt to impose a creed on everyone" or leave them "to go to hell."

The meeting of these two sorts of believers is bound to be an unhappy one, Berger and Zijderveld observe, but this is because both modes of belief are dysfunctional in ways that mirror one another: "The danger of relativism to a stable society is an excess of doubt, the danger of fundamentalism is a deficit of doubt." Planting a shiv in a filmmaker's chest is a sign of too much certainty, and wringing ones hands about whether or not clerics ought be allowed to fill their congregants with such confidence is a sign of too little.

Both sides would benefit, Berger and Zijderveld write, by finding a "middle ground", which incorporates a proper measure of "doubt—a basic uncertainty that isn't prepared to let itself be crushed by belief or unbelief, knowledge or ignorance." For true believers, a little extra doubt might dilute the righteous certainty that makes it possible to stab directors and fly jets into skyscrapers. For relativists, a doubt of doubt itself—and of the *I-say-tomayto-you-say-tomahto* approach that an excess of doubt breeds—might make it possible to pull the weeds of fundamentalist hatred before they come to dominate the soil. "Doubt," Berger and Zijderveld conclude, "is the hallmark of democracy, just as absolute truth (alleged and truly believed) is the hallmark of every type of tyranny."

Berger and Zijderveld are right, of course. Belief without doubt *is* cruel and doubt without belief *is* feeble. They back their assertions with arguments drawn from political, social, and epistemological theory, but one suspects that the source of their perspective is above all their own surpassing *Menschlichkeit*. For the sort of doubt they call for, and the sort of humility it produces, are above all the crucial active ingredients in basic human decency.

"The meaning of the dignity of humankind comes to be perceived at certain moments of history," Berger and Zijderveld observe. Once perceived, they continue, the notion that people deserve to be treated with respect and granted autonomy is almost universally "assumed to be intrinsic to human beings always and everywhere." On this foundation, it is possible to build political, legal, economic, and social institutions that allow people to believe very different things with passion and sincerity, but without the dangerous "quality of certainty." Taken together, what these institutions look like is liberal, free-market democracy. Michel Foucault once noted that often, while thinking something through, though "sure of having traveled far, one finds that one is looking down on oneself from above." This is the case for *In Praise of Doubt*, and in itself this is not an unsatisfactory result. Berger and Zijderveld validate liberal democracy at a time when it seems to need it.

But still, doubt and moderation are virtues with which one cannot take issue, yet they alone cannot achieve what Berger and Zijderveld expect of them. *In Praise of Doubt* is a book about politics that focuses almost entirely on what people *believe* and almost not at all on what they *do* and how they *live.*

Some years ago, one of the two large dairies in Israel launched a line of yogurt for kids with a dinosaur motif. Everything had dinosaurs. Each flavor had a dinosaur; the print ads showed dinosaurs and the radio spots aired reptilian growls in the background. The Haredi community was quick to complain that this was causing their children to ask troublesome questions about the age of the world. I asked then-Knesset Member Avraham Ravitz, himself a Haredi, how he could be so sure that dinosaurs hadn't once walked the earth. He laughed and said that he wasn't sure at all. In fact, he had no problem believing in dinosaurs.

The real problem with the yogurt was threefold. First of all, not all God-fearing parents were religiously sophisticated enough to explain away the apparent contradiction between the prehistoric origins of dinosaurs according to carbon dating and the relative freshness of all creation according to the Torah. This might undermine not only the children's still-naïve faith, but, even more crucially, their respect for their parents. Finally, even for those who could explain the matter to their children, who wants to have complicated exegetical discussions over breakfast? Who needs the headache? So the Haredim demanded that the dinosaurs disappear, and by the next week there was not a trace of them to be found on supermarket shelves or billboards. But the issue was not belief, and neither was it a dogmatic deficit of doubt. The issue was what gets discussed around the breakfast table.

Something like this is true of the Intel factory. What bothers the zealous Jews screaming epithets is not so much the failure of secular high-tech workers to understand just how much God wants them to keep the Sabbath. It is rather that a factory operating in their own backyard—with cars and trucks coming in and out—prevents them from observing the Sabbath the way they want to observe it. Things more mundane than "belief" are at the heart of the conflict: the noises of lumbering trucks, the freedom to amble down roads with baby carriages, the possibility of escaping all signs of commerce for one day a week. And while Berger and Zijderveld are no doubt right that the righteous anger of the protesters would be nicely tamped if they were more given to humane self-doubt, there is no reason to think that this would resolve the fundamental conflict.

And what's true in Jerusalem is true elsewhere. Conflict rarely coalesces around belief, emerging instead over behaviors, practices, and policies. Dampening the fires of belief rarely diminishes the sort of conflict Berger and Zijderveld, like the rest of us, find troublesome. Such conflict wanes not so much when people learn to doubt their own cherished beliefs, but when they learn to see beauty and value in the efforts of others to build lives of meaning and purpose and community, even when these lives are far from the ones they might wish to lead. But such appreciation tends not to grow across razor wire, amidst cries of "Nazis!" and "Ayatollahs!" Even in Jerusalem, perhaps especially in Jerusalem, such miracles might be too much to expect.

***Noah Efron** serves on the Tel Aviv City Council and is the author of* Real Jews: Secular, Ultra-Orthodox and the Struggle for Jewish Identity in Israel *and, most recently, of* Judaism & Science: A Historical Introduction.

Old-New Debate

BY ALLAN ARKUSH

HERZL
by Shlomo Avineri
Zalman Shazar Center, 221 pp., 63.50 NIS

HERZL THEN AND NOW
by Avi Sagi and Yedidya Stern, Shalom Hartman Institute,
Keter Books and Bar-Ilan University Press, 693 pp., 198 NIS

THE STATE OF THE JEWS AND ALTNEULAND
Edited by Dov Eichenwald, Introduction by Gadi Taub,
Yediot Books, 298 pp., 128 NIS

Theodor Herzl is indisputably Israel's principal Founding Father. He was not the first person in modern times to call for the creation of a Jewish state, but he summoned into existence the movement that made it possible and marked out the path that it was to pursue. When he first published *The Jewish State* in 1896, the proto-Zionist groups in the Jewish world were weak, scattered, and mostly ineffectual. Herzl's unification of these forces and others in Basel in 1897 constituted, as he noted in his diary and as subsequent events confirmed, the foundation of the Jewish state. His energetic diplomacy led nowhere in his own day, but it established the paradigm that guided Zionist leaders to a crucial success in the course of World War I. As a consequence of his achievements, Herzl has dominated the iconography of Zionism for a century and remains absolutely central to its historiography.

Of the other Founding Fathers of Zionism, none have loomed comparably large in the imagination of their heirs. Herzl's main internal critic, Asher Ginsberg, best known by his pen name Ahad Ha'am, has enjoyed nothing like Herzl's fame and is a household name only in certain academic circles. An intellectual who had sought the leadership of the proto-Zionist movement, he was dismayed to see Herzl emerge from nowhere and usurp the commanding role in Jewry to which he himself aspired. From the start, Ahad Ha'am peppered Herzl with criticism. He regarded Herzl as an upstart, a man lacking any Jewish knowledge, and an adventurer whose grandiose schemes for resettling the Jewish masses in a state like any other state would uselessly divert the Jewish people from the one thing it might actually be able to accomplish in Palestine. Rescuing all of the denizens of the Diaspora from anti-Semitism was impossible, but it was feasible, in his view, to create "a good-sized settlement of Jews" that would become "in the course of time the center of the nation, wherein its spirit will find pure expression and develop in all its aspects up to the highest degree of perfection of which it is capable." His hope was that the new secular culture produced by the Palestinian Jewish community would "go forth from this center to the great circumference, to all the communities of the Diaspora, and breathe new life into them and preserve their unity." Herzl, for his part, regarded Ahad Ha'am as a pedant and a pest.

Whenever I reexamine the relationship between these two men, I consistently find myself sympathizing more with Ahad Ha'am. I am afraid that I do this partly for personal reasons. My maternal grandfather was born in the early 1890s in Skvira, the town in Ukraine that had been Ahad Ha'am's birthplace several decades earlier. When I was a teenager, Zayde Shmiel told me of a day long ago when his father had gripped his little shoulder, pointed to a rather unprepossessing dignitary seated in a passing wagon, and said to him, "Du zehst? Dos iz Ahad Ha'am." Somehow, this event has taken up residence in my mind as my own earliest memory.

But my instinctive reaction isn't entirely for family reasons. Zayde Shmiel (né Skvirsky, but renamed Squire, a word he could never learn to pronounce) only told me his story after I told him how much I had enjoyed reading Ahad Ha'am at camp. In the summer of 1964, the last one I spent at Camp Ramah, I attended a Hebrew class in which we made our way painstakingly through Ahad Ha'am's essay "Moses." This piece made a strong impression on me. It didn't matter, the author said, whether Moses ever existed or not. The moral lessons of Moses, the most valuable truths of Judaism, came from deep within the Jewish soul and need not rest upon any divine revelation. For an adolescent edging toward agnosticism but lacking any desire to break loose from his Jewishness, this was a very welcome and convenient message. I remain grateful for it, even though I no longer find it fully convincing.

Many of today's leading writers on Zionism seem to share my ambivalence about Herzl.

Perhaps I should feel a little closer to Herzl, after having worn an outfit designed to look like his signature turn-of-the century black frock coat and an equally black full-length false beard as I helped to lead the victory march down one of the main streets of my upstate New York hometown a couple of weeks after the Six Day War. But I'm afraid that even this thrilling experience could not keep me from seeing Herzl through the wary eyes of an *Ostjude*. He wouldn't have been a Jew at all, I couldn't help but suspect, if he had felt that he had any respectable alternative. In his Jewish state, the flag had seven stars, symbolizing the seven-hour workday that he hoped to see instituted, and the inhabitants spoke every language in the world except Hebrew. Rereading Ahad Ha'am's mockery of Herzl's essentially un-Jewish cultural politics, I have always felt that justice was mostly on the side of the former.

But it is only when I see him pitted against my lantsman and similarly-minded people that Herzl seems questionable to me. Ranged against his political enemies or, especially, his contemporary academic critics, Herzl always looks a lot better. I have often bristled at, and sometimes reacted in print against, crude anti-Zionist or post-Zionist caricatures of the assimilated Viennese intellectual who wholly bought into the worst of *fin de siècle* Eurocentrism and imperialism and redesigned Jewishness to match it. Yet even as I have defended Herzl against biased and unfair criticism, I have always had a lingering sense that there was something amiss about him.

Many of today's leading writers on Zionism seem to share my ambivalence about Herzl. Quite a few have picked up the criticism where Ahad Ha'am left off. This is especially true in Israel, where the recent centenary anniversary of his death has generated a small crop of new Hebrew publications about the man and his works. These writings, I am sorry to say, do not include a new full-scale scholarly biography of the man. Unlike George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and several other American Founding Fathers, who constantly have new biographies written about them, Herzl has never been the subject of such a book. But Shlomo Avineri has added a small, popular biography that reconsiders his ideas and career. Gadi Taub has written a noteworthy introduction to Herzl's principal political writings, the political tract *The Jewish State* and the utopian novel *Old-New Land*. Avi Sagi and Yedidya Stern have edited a two-volume collection entitled *Herzl Az ve-Hayom* (Herzl Then and Now) replete with thought-provoking essays. In quite a few of them, Ahad Ha'am either hovers menacingly in the background or shows up as a foil.

In his essay in the Sagi-Stern collection, for instance, Shmuel Feiner, the leading contemporary historian of the Jewish Enlightenment, takes issue with Ahad Ha'am's assertion that Herzl's futuristic vision of a Jewish utopia in Palestine in his novel *Old-New Land* differed scarcely at all from what some restorer of African independence might someday dream up as an ideal society for his people, that there was nothing specifically Jewish about it. Feiner argues to the contrary that what Herzl in fact did was to lay the foundations for "the humanistic, secular-Jewish state." He admits that the book transplants a European cultural model to the Land of Israel, but he considers it crucially important to note that Herzl did not thereby erase or abolish the Jews' particular heritage. "Contrary to his critics' claims, Herzl's secular-Zionist vision rests on a rich deposit of historical memories, patriotic landscapes, nostalgia, religious ceremonies and biblical texts."

And indeed, as Feiner notes, the Jews of *Old-New Land* have seders on Passover, worship in temples on the Sabbath, and attend operas based on stories such as that of Sabbatai Zvi, the

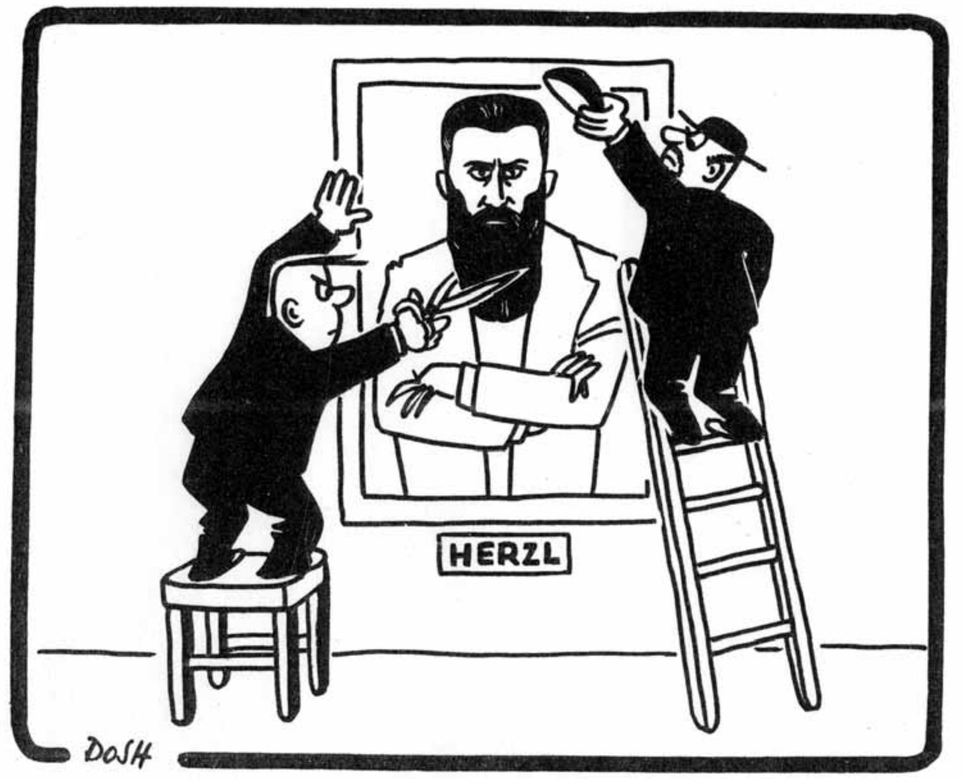
17th-century false messiah. The New Society, its leader explains, has reconnected the Jewish people with its past and its ancient land. Participating in a seder in Haifa, Dr. Friedrich Loewenberg, the hitherto deracinated Jew whose accidental visit to Palestine in 1923 sets the stage for Herzl's whole story, has to fight back tears when he hears for the first time since his childhood the Hebrew words of the Haggadah.

Feiner gives a great deal of weight to such scenes but is not deceived by them into maintaining that Herzl's inner *ba'al teshuvah* was struggling to come out. This was a mistake made quite eagerly, it seems, by no small number of early religious Zionists (as Dov Schwartz shows in his essay in this collection). Herzl's God, Feiner notes, has undergone a process of secularization. "He no longer plays the part of God the Creator, who supervises and commands, nor the part of 'the God of our forefathers' alone, but he is circumscribed by the terms of human morality: 'he is present everywhere in the universe as in the form of the aspiration toward the good.'" As far from tradition as Herzl may have been, however, Ahad Ha'am had him pegged for something he wasn't. According to Feiner, Herzl was "the ideologue of humanistic Zionism," who "painted in *Old-New Land* a portrait of a secular Jewish society and culture" that his imaginary Jewish state strove to bring into being.

Without challenging Feiner directly, the editors of *Herzl Then and Now,* who are also his colleagues at Bar-Ilan, present a diametrically opposed assessment of Herzl's Jewish consciousness, mostly on the basis of a close reading of the same novel. It is true, Sagi and Stern observe, that the characters in Herzl's utopia connect their grand achievements to their Jewish origin, but only insofar as the Jews' long suffering, economic experience, and cosmopolitanism had prepared them for the state-building task at hand. "The New Society's spokesmen," they write, "do not recognize any human need at all for a distinctive identity and culture." They live in a world drained of specifically Jewish content and open to the equal participation of all, regardless of religion or national identity.

Like Feiner, Sagi and Stern highlight the vast difference between the living God of Israel and Herzl's abstract God-idea, but unlike Feiner they are not prepared to grant that Herzl's humanistic theology deserves to be recognized as a particularly Jewish brand of secularism. They are of course aware of the Jewish aspects of life in *Old-New Land* noted by Feiner, but they see them as little more than vestigial trappings of the Jewish past that have almost nothing to do with the real life of the New Society. What is decisive in their eyes is the fact that this society turns for validation of its achievements not to the heritage of the Jews but to the judgment of the Gentiles. This is represented in the novel by the ship *Futuro*, which periodically carries to Palestine five hundred members of "the intellectual aristocracy of the whole civilized world" before whose judgment the country's Jews are prepared to bow. For Herzl, Sagi and Stern conclude, the revival of the Jewish people in its own land "is not tied up with the revival of its distinctive culture" but with obedience to "the voice of universal culture" for which the Jewish people is merely an "echo chamber."

Ahad Ha'am really did have Herzl's number, these two authors maintain. But while Ahad Ha'am restricted himself to wondering whether Herzl's blueprints couldn't hypothetically serve the Africans just as well as the Jews, Sagi and Stern, writing a century later, can place part of the blame for the existing State of Israel's identity crisis on Herzl's flawed vision. They see his final literary work as an anticipation of the currently fashionable notion that Israel has to strip itself of its Jewish identity, assume universalistic, liberal garb, and become a "state of all its citizens." In the end, however, they take heart from the fact that a decisive majority of the Jews in Israel has chosen, "in opposition to *Old-New Land*, to opt for a vision of the State of Israel as a home for Jewish identity, one in which it can grow and flourish."



KULTURKAMPF

Reprinted from **To Israel, With Love***, by Dosh [pseud.]. New York, T. Yoseloff, c1960.*

In identifying Herzl, of all people, with tendencies subversive of the Jewish state, the sociologist Oz Almog, best known in the United States as the author of *The Sabra: The Creation of the New Jew*, goes a step further than Sagi and Stern. Like many of the other contributors to *Herzl Then and Now*, including its editors, he stresses the centrality of science and technology to Herzl's vision of the future. He describes the growth of the Israeli high-tech industry as the fulfillment of Herzl's dream: "it brings together Jewish independence and sovereignty, technological progress, the spirit of scientific invention and integration into global processes." But it also contains within it the seeds of the very same dream's self-destruction. It has helped to bring about the kind of globalization that encourages and fosters the migration of Israeli high-tech people to other parts of the world. In the past two decades, California's Silicon Valley has absorbed large numbers of Israelis who have concentrated in such spots as Sunnyvale, locally and jokingly known as "the kibbutz." It is possible, Almog muses, that these colonies of "pioneers" of the new Israeliness constitute the bridgehead of a mass migration of Israel's best and brightest, one that will ease their departure from the State of Israel and soften their absorption abroad.

Concerns of this kind are utterly absent from Gadi Taub's introduction to a new edition of Herzl's *The Jewish State and Old-New Land*. A professor of communications at the Hebrew University and a unique figure on the Israeli scene who has done everything from hosting children's TV programs to publishing a salacious, best-selling novel, Taub devotes a considerable portion of his time to combating threats to liberal Zionism from both the right and the left. Herzl for him is a venerable forbear, one whose guidance Israelis ought to continue to heed.

Taub's introductory essay is not overtly polemical, but his emphasis on Herzl's strong advocacy of tolerance and his growing affinity with democracy seem to be targeted at readers who might sympathize with the people depicted in his book *The Settlers* (reviewed elsewhere in this issue). Although he does not seem to be at all worried that Herzl has left the door open to post-Zionism, he appears to be responding to post-Zionist and anti-Zionist (and, for that matter, cultural Zionist and sometimes religious Zionist) charges that Herzl's Jewish nationalism was a mere contrivance, a distorted and unworthy thing. Taub unapologetically admits that it was indeed a makeshift and ill-defined identity, based on religion but also detached from it and fuzzy around the edges. But that, he says, is true of nationalism in general. If, for Herzl, the Jews' national identity "is due to their inheritance of a shared tradition, they resemble in this respect other nations whose identity also crystallized around religion, tradition, language, and a common historical experience." Taub, who sees nations as crucial platforms for the maintenance of liberal societies, does not really seem to care about the solidity of their origins. One thing that is of vital importance, in his view, is that they produce states that are respectful of the national minorities living within their boundaries, as Herzl's was in theory and as Israel's Proclamation of statehood promises.

Taub's essay ends with an old-fashioned encomium to Herzl as a man who cast the giant shadow "of someone who not only understood but also paved the way to the Jews' independence." The vision of Zionism "took shape with truly astonishing precision and reached the goal that Herzl had foreseen by the means that Herzl had foreseen." A similar appreciation of his achievements pervades the recently published biography by the eminent political scientist Shlomo Avineri. This volume joins what Avineri notes is a plethora of existing studies of Herzl's life and career. What he himself has chosen to produce (for a series of popular biographies published by the Zalman Shazar Center) is not a full-fledged scholarly biography but a fairly brief exploration, as he puts it, of the self-creation and path through life of the man whose "Bildungsroman" very largely overlaps with the formation of the Zionist movement.

Avineri retells an oft-repeated story briskly and well, frequently drawing on his deep knowledge of *fin de siècle* European political thought and history to illuminate aspects of Herzl's outlook and conduct that earlier biographers have left unexplained. He spends a surprising amount of time discrediting the demonstrably mistaken and, in my opinion, ineradicable notion that it was the Dreyfus trial in 1894 that made Herzl into a Zionist. What is not surprising is the fact that he has devoted the second longest chapter of his book to a detailed exposition of *Old-New Land*, a work that he truly admires. Most of all, he appreciates Herzl's efforts to steer a path between capitalism and collectivism and his strong commitment to democracy and religious and ethnic tolerance in the Palestine of the future. At no point does he find fault with Herzl for marginalizing the Jewish religion in his utopia or, for that matter, for giving it too much emphasis.

In his own day, Herzl's tireless efforts did not succeed, Avineri observes, in turning the Zionist idea into anything more than a literary dream. But Herzl did manage to put Zionism on the map. Consequently, "when the right political circumstances came into being in 1917, with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and in 1947, after World War II and the Holocaust, the Zionist movement succeeded in building the national home and the state on the basis of the ideational, organizational and diplomatic foundations that Herzl had laid during his nine years of activity." Avineri acknowledges at the very end of his book that a gap exists between Herzl's idealistic vision and contemporary realities, but he concludes on a positive note: those who want to diminish this gap, "to bring the earthly Israel closer to the heavenly 'Old-New Land,'" can do no better than to remember Herzl's famous motto: "If you will it, it is no legend."

Avineri's book is a cogent reminder of the greatness of Theodor Herzl and the continuing relevance of his ideals. But it did not undo my virtually inborn preference for Ahad Ha'am (whom Avineri barely mentions). Especially after having read the updated versions of the old critique of him in parts of *Herzl Then and Now,* I am still inclined to see Herzl as something of a foreigner. Ahad Ha'am no doubt went too far when he accused him of bleaching Judaism completely out of his picture of the future. But what he held onto was at bottom nothing more than what the intellectual historian Fania Oz-Salzberger labels in her essay in *Herzl Then and Now* as "Judaism lite." Still, I think that it would be wrong, in the final analysis, to fault him too much for this. Lack of depth as a modern Jewish thinker is a small shortcoming for a man of action whose deeds made all the difference for the Jewish people. Even those who find certain aspects of *Old-New Land* distasteful and still take their bearings from Ahad Ha'am know that their intellectual hero would be a completely forgotten man and their own hopes for Israel as a Jewish cultural center would be utterly groundless were it not for the state-building work of Theodor Herzl. Although I cannot imagine that I will ever do so again, I do not at all regret having once attempted to impersonate him.

Ahad Ha'am, unlike Herzl, has been the subject of several full-scale academic biographies in recent decades, including, most notably, Steven Zipperstein's *Elusive Prophet: Ahad Ha'am and the Origins of Zionism*. But none of his writings has lately served as the linchpin for the discussion of contemporary issues in the way that Herzl's

New Books from Stanford University Press

Inventing the Israelite
Jewish Fiction in Nineteenth-Century France
Maurice Samuels
Cloth, $60.00

Middlebrow Literature and the Making of German-Jewish Identity
Jonathan Hess
Cloth, $55.00

The Idea of Galicia
History and Fantasy in Habsburg Political Culture
Larry Wolff
Cloth, $65.00

Multidirectional Memory
Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization
Michael Rothberg
Cloth, $70.00; Paper, $24.95

The Enigma of Isaac Babel
Biography, History, Context
Gregory Freidin
Cloth, $60.00

The Agony of Greek Jews, 1940-1945
Steven Bowman
Cloth, $55.00

The Fall of a Sparrow
The Life and Times of Abba Kovner
Dina Porat
Cloth $65.00

Germans into Jews
Remaking the Jewish Social Body in the Weimar Republic
Sharon Gillerman
Cloth, $50.00

Historians of the Jews and the Holocaust
David Engel
Cloth, $65.00

800.621.2736 www.sup.org Stanford University Press

Old-New Land has. Perhaps his most frequently remembered words today are the unusually prescient warning he issued in an 1891 article entitled “Truth from the Land of Israel” that the Arabs of Palestine would not forever tolerate the growth of the new Jewish community. But as Alan Dowty has shown, Ahad Ha’am has been given far too much credit for his fleeting comments about this issue, which was anything but a recurring concern of his in the ensuing decades.

My Zayde Shmiel told me that his father had pointed to a dignitary in a passing wagon in Skvira, and said, “Du zehst? Dos iz Ahad Ha’am.”

Ahad Ha’am’s primary concern was to foster within the new community in Palestine a Jewish identity that was both secular and deeply rooted in the moral teachings emanating from the sacred literature of Israel. But this was from the outset a problematic notion, one that was constantly exposed to criticism from all sides, from the religious Zionists, who decried the abandonment of God, to the more extreme secularists, who saw no reason to perpetuate the desiccated values of one’s ancestors when one had every right to create one’s own. Much as I admire Ahad Ha’am, I can’t deny that his ideological opponents made arguments that were more coherent and consistent than his. It doesn’t surprise me, either, that they are winning the day.

Is this how Ahad Ha’am himself would feel, if he could come back today and see what Herzl’s movement has wrought? In an essay that appeared a couple of years ago in the Israeli magazine *Kivunim Chadashim*, Fania Oz-Salzberger dealt with this question, by imagining a reunion of several Zionist Founding Fathers for a lightning tour of contemporary Israel. Traveling with this group, Oz-Salzberger’s fictitious Ahad Ha’am is able to see that his writings are still being studied by groups of young people in Jerusalem and even in Tel Aviv, in classes and informal gatherings, “with *kipot* and without them.” The cultural enterprise he wished to launch is evidently alive and kicking. “He might be pleased to know this,” Oz-Salzberger muses, “but more than he would be pleased, he would be disconcerted by the rainbow of Jewish types parading through the streets of the capital, the one having nothing to do with the other, and no love lost between them. And he would worry.”

Striking what might at first seem to be a cheerier note, Chaim Waxman, professor emeritus of sociology at Rutgers and now a resident of Jerusalem, has just published an essay entitled “Ahad Ha’am Could Smile: Israel as the Spiritual Center of the American Jewish Community.” He could smile, writes Waxman, because of the centrality that Israel has assumed in the organizational life of American Jewry and even more because of the vital role that it has played in awakening and preserving Jewish identity in the United States. But, he concludes at the end of his essay, “it would be a small smile, and perhaps even less than that,” one of the kind that Ahad Ha’am himself might have described, in Yiddish, as a “*bittere gelechter.*” For “Israel, as important as it is to those who have a Jewish identity … is not a central factor in the identity of most American Jews, whose … ties to Israel are growing ever weaker.”

These assessments of the likely state of mind of a contemporary Ahad Ha’am are certainly debatable, and they are probably not the last that we will hear. There is every reason to expect that other Israeli thinkers and scholars will in the years ahead arrive at new ones, as they persist in measuring their country’s achievements against the lofty cultural ambitions of a very demanding Founding Father. Ahad Ha’am will not soon catch up with Herzl, whose *Jewish State* and *Old-New Land* have come to play a part in Israeli public discourse somewhat comparable to that of the *Federalist Papers* in ours. But neither will he be forgotten. And as long as his ideas and Herzl’s still reverberate in the ongoing conversation about the direction in which Israel is headed, Zionism will continue to retain a good measure of its old vitality.

***Allan Arkush** is Professor of Judaic Studies and History at Binghamton University. He is the Senior Contributing Editor of the* Jewish Review of Books.

Lost in Translation

BY AZZAN YADIN

THE COMMENTATORS’ BIBLE: EXODUS
Edited, translated and annotated by Michael Carasik
JPS, 368 pp, $75

THE COMMENTATORS’ BIBLE: LEVITICUS
Edited, translated and annotated by Michael Carasik
JPS, 270 pp., $75

The novelist Jonathan Rosen has written evocatively of the parallels between rabbinic literature and the World Wide Web: “When I look at a page of Talmud and see all those texts tucked intimately and intrusively onto the same page, like immigrant children sharing a single bed, I do think of the interrupting, jumbled culture of the Internet.” Rosen’s insight is compelling, but the Talmud is not the only rabbinic work to create this experience and arguably not even the first. In 1517, four years before he would produce the first printed edition of the entire Talmud, Daniel Bomberg, the great Christian publisher of Hebrew books, published *Mikraot Gedolot*, containing the text of the Pentateuch together with several influential translations and commentaries.

The innovation of Bomberg’s *Mikraot Gedolot* was typographical, elegantly displaying the different commentators and the biblical verses they interpret on the same page. But, of course, it was not *merely* typographical. Like the printed Talmud, *Mikraot Gedolot* offers a synopsis in the most literal sense of the word—a seeing together—of commentators who lived generations and worlds apart.

First, placed immediately alongside the biblical text is an Aramaic translation by Onkelos (2nd century). Beneath it, we see the French contingent, Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki (known by his famous acronym, Rashi) and his grandson, Rabbi Shlomo ben Meir (Rashbam). Rashi’s commentary combines linguistic brilliance with an unflagging commitment to classical rabbinic midrash. He is the indispensable commentator to the Torah (and, amazingly, to the Talmud as well). Rashbam is deeply committed to the plain sense, or *peshat*, of the Torah. Further down the page, we find the great Spanish writers: Abraham Ibn Ezra, a contemporary of Rashbam, who was born in Muslim Spain but wandered throughout Europe and the Middle East, and Nahmanides (Ramban), whose expansive commentary investigates the biblical text in relation to its plain sense, to rabbinic midrash, and to kabbalistic interpretations. In addition, we have Rabbi David Kimchi (Radak), the outstanding representative of the Provençal philosophical tradition of exegesis, and Obadiah ben Ya’akov Sforno, the late Renaissance Italian doctor and commentator. The innumerable editions of *Mikraot Gedolot* that followed Bomberg’s collected these commentaries (and others besides, depending on the interests and whims of the publisher) and put them on the same page as the biblical text on which they commented. In doing so, they created a new experience for the reader: the il-

One can imagine what Carasik and JPS were thinking but it doesn’t work.

lusion of entering a timeless realm of conversation, a set of nested hyperlinks as it were, reaching all the way back to revelation.

Michael Carasik has attempted to reproduce this experience for the modern reader of English in *The Commentators' Bible*, of which the Jewish Publication Society (JPS) has now published Exodus and Leviticus. Genesis, with its voluminous commentaries, will be such a daunting task that Carasik is apparently saving it for last. This is an ambitious project and JPS has spared no effort in producing a visually breathtaking Bible (the late Adrianne Onderdonk Dudden is credited with the design). Unfortunately, the contents do not live up to their setting.

Indeed, JPS's decision to translate *Mikraot Gedolot* into English requires some explanation, since all of the major commentaries are already available in English. Carasik addresses this question in his introduction to the volume, noting that past translations "were either made for scholars, assume a high level of Hebrew knowledge, or are literal and difficult to follow." So Carasik and JPS do have a justification for all the bowdlerizing to come, albeit a misguided one. They want to provide a "user-friendly text" which recreates the intellectual experience of reading *Mikraot Gedolot* without any of the attendant challenges.

In Carasik's English version of *Mikraot Gedolot,* the Aramaic translation of Onkelos has been replaced by the old and new JPS translations (OJPS and NJPS, respectively), along with his translations of Rashi, Ramban, Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, and "additional comments," a selection from other classical commentators. But how does one make scholarly, largely philological, always erudite, sometimes deep medieval Bible commentaries "user-friendly"?

In his "Principles of Translation," Carasik tacitly admits this is not ultimately possible: rather than striving for a faithful rendition of the Hebrew, he produces a hypothetical text based on the assumption that "the commentators are rewriting their original comments today, in contemporary English, for readers who do not know Hebrew." So, "when an added word, phrase, or clause will make the commentator's meaning clear, I add it *as if it had been written by the commentator.*" The emphasis is Carasik's and the results are dizzying. We are presented with medieval commentators who refer time and again to 20th-century English translations. Thus, Carasik's Ramban, in his comments to Exodus 6:3, is made to say "the English translations follow Ibn Ezra ... [but] the text really means..." The new Rashi similarly notes that "the OJPS translation is preferable here" (Exodus 20:4). The Leviticus volume has Ibn Ezra noting "the English translations—which are correct—ignore the masoretic punctuation" (Leviticus 6:15).

This is bizarre. Would the reader really be deterred if he learned that the 1917 JPS translation followed Rashi, not the other way around, in a bracketed note? And this is only the beginning. Carasik's principles of translation consist of eight kinds of comments that are "regularly *omitted*," four kinds that are "regularly *changed*," and "three kinds of comments that are nonetheless *retained*."

One can imagine what Carasik and JPS were thinking but it doesn't work. What is the non-Hebrew-reader to do with Jacob ben Hayyim's comment on the second of the Ten Commandments, "You shall have no other gods besides Me," where he writes: "Besides Me: The Hebrew word should correctly be spelled with a *patah* under the *yud*, for one who is learned in the mysteries"? (What, for that matter, is the Hebrew reader to do?) Or consider Rashi to Exodus 1:12 ("... the [Egyptians] came to dread the Israelites"). Rashi glosses the verse "Rather, the Egyptians were weary of their lives" and then cites a rabbinic interpretation: "[O]ur Sages derive from the word *va-yakutzu* that the Israelites were like *kotzim*—like thorns in the Egyptians' eyes." In translating the second gloss, Carasik reproduces the phonetic play of *va-yakutzu* ("came to dread") and *kotzim* ("thorns"). But an analogous phonetic similarity animates the first gloss as well ("*va-yakutzu*: the Egyptians *katzu* ["were weary"] of their lives"), which is passed over in silence.

The *Mikraot Gedolot* created a new experience for the reader: the illusion of entering a timeless realm of conversation.

A similar case occurs in Exodus 1:11, "and they built garrison [*miskenot*] cities for Pharaoh," which Rashi glosses: "Rather 'store cities' as Onkelos and OJPS have it. That this is the correct meaning is shown by [Isaiah] 22:15, where the same root is used for the 'steward' of the palace." Once again, Carasik's translation presents a number of difficulties. First, Isaiah 22:15 uses "the same root" as what? Second, how does the existence of a steward argue in favor of "store cities" over "garrison cities" as the better translation for "*miskenot* cities"? Stewards, after all, manage large estates and would presumably be employed in royal cities of either sort. In fact, Rashi argues quite elegantly that Isaiah 22:15 uses the word *sokhen* (a cognate of *miskenot*) to mean "an official charged with the storehouses" (*gizbar ha-memuneh `al ha-'otzarot*), thus providing biblical proof that the Hebrew root *s-k-n* refers to storage rather than fortification. But this point cannot be communicated without recourse to at least a modicum of Hebrew and thus would not have been written by a Rashi writing "in contemporary English." (Rashi, one recalls, was a winemaker as well as a commentator, and there is a saying about the dangers of new wine in old bottles.)

The emphasis on accessibility transcends the translation choices and cuts to the core of Carasik's project. Medieval commentary often serves as a framework within which broader issues—philosophical, mystical, linguistic—were addressed and these discussions have largely been excluded from *The Commentators' Bible*. Ramban was the most wide-ranging of the commentators and he suffers the most. When, for instance, in his introductory comments, he states that *Genesis* provides an account of *hiddush ha-`olam* he is using a philosophical term of art for the doctrine that the world was created from nothing (*ex nihilo*), thus distancing himself from Maimonides' suggestion that the biblical account could be interpreted to support the Aristotelian view of an eternal universe. None of this, however, can be recognized in Carasik's translation that *Genesis* provides an account of the "origin of the world." "For this," Carasik's bewildered reader asks, "I need Ramban?"

The same is often the case for Ramban's kabbalistic interpretations, which, Carasik states, "have not [been] included in full," no doubt because they are obscure, complex, and not in the least user-friendly. But they were also the reason Ramban wrote the commentary, as he makes clear in his famous introduction. Just as problematic are places where the translation includes mystical readings but does not identify them as such. In the same introductory passage to Exodus, Ramban writes that Israel's exile in Egypt diminished its holiness, but when the people encamped by Sinai and constructed the Tabernacle, the divine presence dwelt among them once again, "*she-haya sod* 'when God's company graced their tents' (Job 29:4)." The Hebrew words *she-haya sod*, mean "this is the esoteric doctrine concerning..." and indicate that the verse or the matter then introduced are to be understood according to mystical principles. Carasik omits these words altogether, which is troubling, because it clearly violates both the letter and the spirit of Ramban's commentary. On what grounds has Carasik concluded that Ramban, in "rewriting" his Bible commentary for contemporary American readers, would have withheld from them the fact that it is Job 29:4 in its *mystical* interpretation that is relevant to his discussion?

Finally, *The Commentators' Bible* obscures the fact that medieval commentary was often a means of preserving and transmitting earlier rabbinic traditions. Perhaps the most striking example of this is Rashi's discussion of the Sinai epiphany that mostly consists of verbatim citations from earlier rabbinic midrashim to Exodus, chief among them the *Mekhilta of Rabbi Ishmael*. All of this will be lost on the reader of *The Commentators' Bible: Exodus*. Similar problems arise in the volume on Leviticus.

The Mishnaic sage Rabbi Yochanan ben Bag Bag enjoined his hearers to continually delve into the Torah since "all things are in it." The medieval commentators took this to heart and integrated science, philosophy, linguistics, Kabbalah, earlier rabbinic sources, and more into their commentaries. But Scripture is no longer the touchstone for the sciences, whose march toward modernity was inextricably tied to their independence from biblical authority, while Kabbalah, biblical grammar and earlier rabbinic sources are unfamiliar to most modern readers. *The Commentators' Bible* acknowledges these changes and reimagines the medieval commentaries as though they had been composed just yesterday. The result is a collection of commentaries whose ties to broader cultural and intellectual traditions are often omitted or obscured, and whose complex discussions are too often simplified beyond recognition. Carasik and JPS are apparently driven by the conviction that not enough had been lost in previous translations.

***Azzan Yadin** is Associate Professor of Rabbinic Literature at Rutgers University. His primary scholarly focus is on early rabbinic legal interpretation. He is working on a book-length study of Rabbi Akiva.*

In Whose Image?

BY SHALOM CARMY

NEITHER BEAST NOR GOD: THE DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON
by Gilbert Meilaender, Encounter Books, 120 pp., $21.95

This small book, by a prominent Lutheran ethicist, contains two big ideas. The first is encapsulated in the title—the human being occupies a middle state between animal and divinity. Much traditional religious thought, Christian and Jewish, grows out of the humility and majesty of this finite creature, of whom Psalm 8 wondered that God should pay him such attention. The second theme is expressed by the subtitle—the author's conviction that the concept of human dignity is essential to ethical reflection. This question arose in part from the author's work with President Bush's Council on Bioethics.

Late in the book, Meilaender confronts the accusation made by critics of the Council, that "dignity" is a "squishy" term that doesn't mean very much in practice. He therefore builds the book on two primary meanings of "dignity," while conceding that some ambiguity is unavoidable. "Human dignity is simply a placeholder for what is thought to be characteristically human—and to be honored and upheld because it is human." *Human dignity*, in this sense, names the features of humanity that we honor. Some human beings possess this kind of dignity more than others. *Personal dignity*, by contrast, transcends these differences: it signifies a fundamental equality among persons. It defines the scope of humanity rather than its content.

We need this distinction because some may be ready to allow for many or all features of human dignity, while denying their pertinence to those who do not display these characteristics of humanity—such as a permanently demented person or a criminal. Yet Meilaender, like most traditionalists, ascribes personal dignity to them and therefore their persons must be honored. Even when my life is burdensome and no longer a value *for* me or a benefit to others, it still has value *in* me: "it demands respect, not comparative assessment."

This radical idea of human equality ultimately derives from the Biblical conception of man. Meilaender's formulation of it is also indebted to Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*. Whether it can survive without such underpinnings is debatable. One primary alternative Meilaender considers is Hobbesian, an alternative in which equality is grounded in the vulnerability that all human beings share. This leads to a morality almost exclusively concerned with the relief of suffering and the satisfaction of desires. Such a morality fails to recognize that which is genuinely honorable in humanity. The other alternative is Kantian, defined in terms of the human capacity for free choice. The great weakness of this type of theory is that it ignores the bodily dimensions of human existence: "No longer simply made in the image of God, they are now free spirits, almost godlike themselves."

This brings us back to Meilaender's positive concept of human nature, "neither beast nor God," which takes up most of his pages. The "in-between" character of human existence includes the biological realities of life (here Meilaender draws on the seminal 20th-century philosopher of biology Hans Jonas): the impulse to self-preservation, procreation, and commitment to our species and family that distinguishes human beings from angels. Thus the central chapters are entitled: Birth and Breeding; Childhood; Loyalties; Death. Much of Meilaender's argument is an affirmation of the human condition, with its biological and cultural horizons and limitations.

Take particular loyalties. Utilitarians like Peter Singer maintain that particular or local relations have little or no inherent moral value. In practice, they would agree that it is best for each individual to undertake special responsibility for his or her immediate surroundings but only as a matter of efficiency or necessity. However, in theory, even the individual attention required for child rearing could be accomplished by random assignment. For Meilaender, this kind of arbitrariness violates our sense of what it means to be a human being rather than a god.

Judaism and Christianity, of course, command universal solicitude and love. Meilaender's chapter on loyalty explores the possible ways that particular loves are compatible with and even help to build bridges to the kind of indiscriminate love that recognizes all human beings as one's neighbor, without compromising or diminishing the particularity of human existence.

One of Meilaender's comments on abortion offers a good illustration of his approach:

> [E]ven bracketing entirely more general arguments about abortion—the ready acceptance of abortion of "defective" fetuses (or, now, assisted reproduction procedures in which "defective" embryos are selected against) violates the human dignity we share. It sets aside the fundamental bond of parents and children, inserting choice in the place of love and acceptance, and teaching us thereby that we must justify our continued existence, especially when we constitute a burden to others. That is inhumane in the most precise sense, for it drains moral significance from a relationship which deeply marks our human identity and which makes space in life for a love that need not be earned.

The fact that many traditional rabbinic authorities would permit abortion of severely deformed fetuses does not diminish the profundity of this insight. There is a world of difference between the tragic recognition that parents may be unable to bear a burden, on the one hand, and the belief that such a fetus may be deemed unwanted and thus disposable, on the other. Here the case-by-case legalism of the Halakha yields a more nuanced result than Meilaender's, even if the theological orientations converge.

It is thus possible to endorse Meilaender's overall mode of thought, while recognizing that the normative conclusions he draws from human realities are debatable. Because few of us agree completely about the values inherent in our "in between" state or about how to weigh these values against other pressures, those who insist on clear-cut conclusions will continue to dismiss dignity as a "squishy," subjective concept. Meilaender recognizes that "discernment is needed" in assessing the implications of dignity in his first sense: one might self-interestedly want an additional daughter to provide care in one's old age but not clone an existing daughter for the same purpose.

On a less divisive subject—what the fact of mortality contributes to the value of life, Meilaender cites the view that our ability to remain interested and engaged in life depends upon our knowledge that it will end: "Could we," he asks, "sustain indefinitely our interest in sports, in children, in vocational achievements?" This seems open to question. Interest in sports often fades precisely because life is finite, we come to invest our interest in more important matters, and this seems exactly as it should be. If the passage of time gives our activities both urgency and poignancy, that is not necessarily because our life span is short, but more because the direction of time makes actions irreversible. If my children and I live forever, they would still be born only once. If an activity is valuable in itself, it remains valuable even if, like prayer, it is repeated untold times.

Our discussion so far has set the concept of dignity in the context of everyday ethical life. People can honor their humanity or violate it without, so to speak, changing the rules of the game. The familiar reality of the human condition, between the animal and the superhuman, sooner or later reasserts itself. However, the most disturbing sections of this book consider the threat of a "transhuman" society, where the very limits of the human condition are suspended. As Eric Cohen has written, influenced by Jonas and by Meilaender: "Science is power without wisdom about the uses of power."

Towards the end of the book, Meilaender argues that the equality of personal dignity implies that dementia afflicting a great violinist is no more dehumanizing than dementia afflicting a woman who regularly empties the office trash. For if that were the case, "it would seem that the virtuoso and the janitor were never of equal dignity." But for Meilaender, the violinist possesses no more dignity than the janitor, even if she has invested extraordinary effort in her training and made a greater contribution to human welfare. I don't question Meilaender's conclusion, but those not already in agreement are unlikely to get there without further argument. They must be brought to understand why, before their illness, the janitor and the violinist were indeed equal in the eyes of God. Yet this little book is nevertheless an honorable effort at theological ethics, helping us to recover the wisdom that science alone cannot provide.

***Shalom Carmy** is Chair of Bible and Jewish Philosophy at Yeshiva College and editor of* Tradition. *He is currently working on a collection of essays on R. Joseph Soloveitchik entitled* Of Eagle's Flight and Snail's Pace.

Ordinary Memory

BY SAMUEL MOYN

REMEMBERING SURVIVAL: INSIDE A NAZI SLAVE-LABOR CAMP
by Christopher R. Browning, W. W. Norton & Company
375 pp., $27.95

"I wanted to write an integrated history," Saul Friedländer told a magazine in 2007, in an interview marking the long-awaited concluding installment of his Holocaust study *Nazi Germany and the Jews*. By "integrated history," Friedländer meant one in which the designs of genocidal perpetrators were fused with the personal testimony of the victims. "Business-as-usual history flattens the interpretation of mass extermination," Friedländer explained. "But the voices of the victims—their lack of understanding, their despair, their powerful eloquence or their helpless clumsiness—these can shake our well-protected representation of events. They can stop us in our tracks. They can restore our initial sense of disbelief, before knowledge rushes in to smother it."

It is striking to note how recently the imperative to listen to survivors as a source for history took hold. Raul Hilberg left out personal testimony on principle in his epoch-making *The Destruction of European Jewry* of 1961. As recently as 1996, Daniel Goldhagen inveighed against "historians of the Holocaust and of Nazism [who] rarely, if ever, listen to the voices of the dead Jews speaking to us through their surviving diaries or to the voices of Jewish survivors recounting the manner of their treatment." He was on firm ground here if not elsewhere—and the field, epitomized by Friedländer himself, followed Goldhagen. But the uses of survivor testimony as historical resources are many and varied. And the risks of invoking it do not disappear simply because doing so comes to seem ethically necessary.

Christopher R. Browning's new history of a single town during the Holocaust and the slave labor camps that were erected there, while important for a number of reasons, is most interesting for facing up to these problems. Browning has done more than anyone, over the course of a career marked by path-breaking enterprises and unextravagant empiricism, to teach new things. He first became known for brilliant interventions into the debate around the timing of the decision for genocide, in investigations that culminated in *The Origins of the Final Solution*, a massive recent study that provides the best current account of the evolution of Nazi decision-making. His most visible contribution, however, remains his now classic *Ordinary Men*, which followed a single unit of the German order police and its killing activities, based on perpetrator testimony.

Browning writes that he first turned to his case study of the Polish town of Wierzbnik and its slave labor sites at Starachowice out of exasperation on reading the transcript of the trial of the murderer who perpetrated some of the worst crimes there. The Nuremberg trials had not only slighted the Holocaust, but also preferred contemporary documentary records rather than live witnesses as sources of proof. When Germany itself began to try war criminals in the early 1960s, its courts did hear survivor testimony. The testimony was beset, however, by some of the same flaws that once led Hilberg to ignore it. Even when recorded shortly after the events in question, witness memories were spotty, changed from one occasion to another, and did not always jibe with the recollections of others who saw the same things. But Browning shows that in the case of the trial of Walther Becker, who helped clear the Wierzbnik ghetto, other factors were at work too. The undoubted difficulty of reconstructing the past reliably on the basis of testimony—and an ulterior motive to exempt perpetrators—led Becker's judge to let him off scot free. "Never have I studied a case in detail," Browning writes, "and encountered a verdict that represented such a miscarriage of justice and disgrace to the German legal system."

And so he threw himself into a reconstruction based on survivor testimony—for there was little else to use—by gathering all the memories he could of Wierzbnik/Starachowice. They came from the German judicial proceedings, but also earlier sources like the immediate postwar Polish Historical Commission, and then a glut of recent testimonies recorded as Holocaust commemoration took off, in endeavors like Yale University's Fortunoff collection and the Visual History Archive (funded by Steven Spielberg). In the end, Browning had amassed statements from 292 different survivors. Then he conducted interviews of his own.

If this book can rely on these painstakingly assembled testimonies to extraordinary and revealing effect, it is most of all because of Browning's distinctive and persuasive view about why survivor testimony matters. In Friedländer's opinion—a rather strange one on reflection—it is important because it disrupts the reader's easy assimilation of what happened. For him, the purpose of testimony is to interfere with any easy reckoning with the past, with what he called the "business-as-usual" of history. Meanwhile, Goldhagen had stumbled onto testimony out of the conviction that it would prove how gleefully Germans killed Jews: it would provide information, not so much about what actually happened, but regarding the emotional state of the killers.

Browning has another view. There are many events in the Holocaust where the systematic exclusion of survivor testimony as evidence would erase their only traces. True: the difficulties of using such testimony are forbidding. But is there any alternative? In Wierzbnik/Starachowice, moreover, Browning found a perfect case. For reasons he explores, a disproportionate number of Jews survived the clearing of the town ghetto, and later the slave labor experience. The large number of testimonies on which he could draw meant he could plausibly reconstruct what occurred throughout, basing his strongest inferences on the agreement of different accounts. Without relying on testimony, the sole alternative for many aspects of the Holocaust would, as Browning observes, be "foregoing any attempt to write their history at all." But Browning goes much further, powerfully and convincingly vindicating the use of survivor testimony as a precious source for the reconstruction of the past. Testimony, far from disrupting epistemology, makes it possible.

In his quiet manner, Browning converts the mass of testimony he has collected into historical narrative. He begins with background on the Jewish community of the town and its relations with Polish neighbors before the war that will bring his protagonists so much ruin. Step by step, the Holocaust in one town unfolds through Browning's movingly understated story of the German army's arrival, the ghettoization of the Jews of the area, and the arrival through force or flight of Jews from other places. What would turn out to be minor infractions were experienced with a shock, even from the first days. Rosalie Laks recalled that when she saw her father—one of the town's most eminent Jews—pushed into the street and kicked over and over, she understood from his shattered glasses "what the war was all about."

These sections are so powerful, because in spite of the indignities they document, they only set the stage for the ghetto's horrific destruction on October 27, 1942. With Becker's assistance as local security expert, the district's "Jewish destruction" battalion—an SS unit with Eastern European *Hilfswillige* as indispensable helpers—marauded through the streets murdering as they went. As thousands were shipped to Treblinka for immediate extermination on that fateful day, others survived through a terrible "selection" to work in various labor installations; having bought and bribed their way into slavery before, Jews survived at a much higher rate here than elsewhere in the Radom district where Wierzbnik was situated. After the ghetto-clearing, the slave labor camps were the only places Jews could have a real chance to stay alive.

It was nevertheless a slim chance and grim alternative. In detailed, vivid descriptions, Browning tracks his witnesses through the ordeal of terroristic massacres and the typhus epidemic brought on by obscene conditions. Before the crisis of the eastern front leads to the closure of the installations, and the shipping of the survivors to Auschwitz, Browning is able to dedicate attention to topics with ramifications far beyond the specific history of this place: the underground economy, persisting relations with former neighbors often asked to guard property, encounters with the Ukrainian guards who patrolled the gates (and sometimes looked the other way) as the Jewish hierarchy took charge of the camps themselves, and more difficult subjects like sex and rape. Throughout, Browning pays careful attention to details, like the relevance of gender and age in determining experiences and outcomes.

Finally, in a particularly damning chapter, Browning narrates the return of surviving Jews to the Wierzbnik area. His account of Polish violence complements Jan Gross's recent study of the postwar moment. Though during the war some Poles had kept property on behalf of their persecuted neighbors, with the closure of the town's camps and the disappearance of their inmates, "it was as if a switch had been flicked." When survivors returned to seek their belongings, nationalist agitation and local selfishness combined to lead as far as murder.

The primary purpose of Browning's book, however, is to understand the still obscure and contested subject of Jewish slave labor as an alternative to extermination. And Browning is certainly right that, aside from some memoirs and a recent study of the Gross Rosen camps by Bella Gutterman, slave labor installations have not gotten their due in either historical study or general perceptions of the era. Alongside the eventually vast concentration camp system (which originated in 1933 for the earliest Nazi enemies), and the killing centers like Chelmno and Treblinka, there were also a great number of installations outside "the SS state." In these little-known sites, Jews were "rented out" by the SS as slaves to private industry. Browning proves decisively, in a work that illuminates the entire phenomenon as much as it does a particular camp, that Goldhagen was wrong to view slave labor as merely another form of death-dealing, accomplished by different means. Instead, the slave labor system was where the contending imperatives of killing the Jews and winning the war met. "Jewish work here," Browning concludes, "was clearly not contrived as a gratuitous means of torment but rather was an essential contribution to the German war effort." Correspondingly, and in spite of much death through work and indeed episodes of deliberate mass killings, "the Jewish strategy of survival through labor was not entirely illusory."

If this terrible slavery ultimately allowed some Jews to remember survival, the book that results remains most thought-provoking and interesting for illustrating the uses of their testimony and its limits. Browning's response to the German judges is not to reverse their skepticism about testimony into credulity. For the historian, Browning insists, what matters is "accuracy, and not just sincerity." And he is alert throughout to problems of contradiction within and among testimonies and the role of time in distorting (but also, he shows, sometimes improving) recall. Lawrence Langer entitled his study of Holocaust testimony "the ruins of memory"—as if recollection were not merely difficult psychologically but impossible epistemologically. But Browning interestingly notes that most Holocaust witnesses have tried to "provide a conventional chronological narrative." And contrary to the dominant view that testimonies tell more about the present in which they are given than the past they narrate, Browning finds that witnesses over time have given very similar accounts in new contexts.

Browning is right to conclude that, especially when testimonies are amassed in large numbers, "the crucial issue … is that the problems of evidence are recognized and taken into account, not that problematic evidence remains unused." All the same, there is little explicit reflection on this point, save in the standout section in which Browning enumerates rival ways of remembering how selection was escaped or survived as the Nazis closed the ghetto. Browning disarmingly concedes that much of his decision-making about when to follow witnesses and when to ignore them depended simply on his trained intuition.

Yet there is a downside, too, to the valuable rediscovery that witnesses are useful for recording facts that would otherwise escape historians. Browning honestly acknowledges that "among the survivors of the Starachowice camps, there is no Primo Levi or Elie Wiesel." And Browning's reliance on testimony typically reduces it to the shortest of snippets, when he quotes it at all. Most revealingly, the longest single piece of testimony in the entire book is from a literary memoir, recounting events the memoirist had not herself witnessed. In this book, Browning has ground his testimonies into the atomic facts they provide, and cemented the parts together into the history that memory by itself could not generate. If anything is missing, it is a sense of what one would otherwise expect in a study based on memories of horror, even in the absence of literary eloquence or philosophical depth: a story of personal experience.

The host of Jewish names that populate Browning's pages provide a sense of authenticity. Yet they serve as not much more than interchangeable victims. If any strong personalities emerge, it is in the series of demonic perpetrators on whom witness memories unsurprisingly converge. Most chilling is the occasional glimpse one has of the remembered psychological state of the Jewish victims, especially the constant fear of being buried alive that more than one recalls. Browning has successfully turned subjective testimony into objective history, and it is a fine achievement. But subjectivity, in all its depths, is also a part of history.

***Samuel Moyn** is a professor of history at Columbia University. His new book,* The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History, *is being published by Harvard University Press in September.*

Appelfeld in Bloom

BY SHOSHANA OLIDORT

BLOOMS OF DARKNESS
by Aharon Appelfeld, Translated by Jeffrey M. Green
Schocken, 288 pp., $25.95

Great writers often repeat themselves, and Israeli author Aharon Appelfeld is no exception. A child survivor of the Holocaust, he has published more than thirty books—among them novels, short story collections, and a memoir—through which he explores the traumas of his past, sometimes directly, often less so.

Appelfeld was eight years old when the Germans invaded Romania, killing his mother and deporting him and his father to a Ukrainian labor camp. When the two were separated, the young boy escaped the camp. For two years, he wandered the forests, subsisting on wild fruit and berries. During winter, he passed himself off as a Ukrainian orphan in order to find work in exchange for meager shelter and food. For a time he worked as a servant for a temperamental prostitute; later, he joined the Soviet army, assisting in the military kitchen. After the war, he traveled to Italy with other survivors, and from there to Palestine, where he arrived, alone and uneducated, at the age of 14.

Appelfeld's work draws heavily on his childhood experiences. Although he writes in Hebrew, his works are all set in Europe, before or during the war. Always, the language is bare, even plain; observations and ideas are communicated in a simple, childlike voice. In *Blooms of Darkness*, the protagonist Hugo lives in an unidentified ghetto with his mother (his father has been taken away). From his apartment window, he watches the deportations, and observes desperate Jews grope in the dark as they try to make sense of what is happening around them and search for some means of escape. In these harsh surroundings, the boy has "learned not to ask" but "to listen instead to the silence between the words."

Many of Hugo's friends have been sent to the mountains with peasants who agree to hide them in exchange for hefty bribes. But when the peasant that Hugo's mother had reserved fails to show up, she entrusts her only child to Marianna, a prostitute and old friend who has agreed to hide the boy. Mother and son escape the ghetto in the thick of night, and make their way through the suffocating sewer pipes. At the brothel, Hugo's mother instructs her son to do as he is told, and not to ask questions. When she leaves, the boy watches as his mother is "swallowed up in the darkness."

Hidden away in a closet in Marianna's room, Hugo invents an imaginary world filled with people from his past—teachers, friends, and relatives. But his only actual friend is Marianna, and the relationship, while not exactly equal, is mutual. He sees her as a beautiful, generous savior; she sees him as the only male not trying to take advantage of her. In the end, Hugo loses his virginity to a drunken Marianna at the tender age of 12. Appelfeld's descriptions of the boy's first sexual encounter are restrained, almost to a fault, and Jeffrey M. Green's excellent translation evokes the reticence that is typical of Appelfeld:

> More than once in his life, Hugo will try to reimagine that drunken night. He will call up the thick darkness that was infused with perfume and brandy, and the pleasure that was mixed with a fear of the abyss. But not a word passed between them, as if words had become extinct.

Appelfeld's tentative relationship with words derives from his personal history. As a young émigré to Palestine, he quickly shed the languages of his childhood (German, Romanian, Ukrainian) and of his time during and after the war (Yiddish and Italian), and began writing in Hebrew before he was really "rooted in the language," making his earliest attempts "more a kind of stuttering than writing," the author once said. While Hebrew remains his only written language, Appelfeld, who resides in Jerusalem and is one of Israel's most celebrated authors, still sometimes feels as if "what I'm writing is somehow not my own."

In place of a native language, the writer holds onto his memories—which, for him, are physically palpable sensations. "The cells of my body apparently remember more than my mind," Appelfeld wrote in his memoir, *The Story of a Life*.

Hugo, too, learns to rely on memory, and "records in his heart everything his eyes see." In the ghetto, he takes in "the people who enter the house in a panic and spit out a horrifying bit of news" and those who "sit by the table and don't utter a word." Later, in Marianna's closet, Hugo listens closely to the goings on beyond the door.

Often, Hugo imagines reuniting with his parents. But the Russian victory—after the boy's nearly two years in hiding—brings with it new worries. Marianna, having slept with German soldiers, is accused of collaboration, and it is this cruel irony that ultimately separates her from the boy.

This isn't the author's first attempt at capturing the experiences of the Holocaust through the eyes of a child. *The Story of a Life*, his critically acclaimed memoir, recreates the past by recalling the author's own idyllic childhood in Czernowitz and the ways in which it was so suddenly and irreversibly shattered. Similarly, the novel *Tzili* depicts a young girl "devoid of charm and almost mute," who is left behind when her family escapes to safety. Like the young Appelfeld, Tzili spends the war years wandering through the forests, at one point seeking refuge with a prostitute.

With *Blooms of Darkness* the author has once again set out to evoke a Jewish child's experiences of loss and loneliness in war-ravaged Europe. The novel has all the characteristic trademarks of an Appelfeld work, yet it is less effective than many of his earlier books. Perhaps this is because reticence can only go so far, especially when the author is revisiting themes he has already explored at length.

Still, this is a powerful novel and the mood of isolation that pervades the book's final chapters is particularly haunting. Returning to his hometown, Hugo discovers that much is familiar and little has changed, except that "here and there a tree has been uprooted, and a sapling has been planted in its place."

In the town square, refugees have gathered to seek out loved ones and try to get their bearings. Communication is difficult, if not impossible. A woman harasses a man, demanding to be told what happened at the camps. But the man refuses to speak. Observing the emaciated survivors, Hugo notes, "it is obvious that something within them has died. And the part that is left can't explain what has happened to them."

__Shoshana Olidort__ is a freelance writer and researcher whose reviews have appeared in The Forward *and* Ha'aretz.

Poems Like Mountains

BY MARGOT LURIE

THESE MOUNTAINS: SELECTED POEMS OF RIVKA MIRIAM
Translated by Linda Stern Zisquit
Toby Press, 244 pp., $14.95

"I was a year old," Rivka Miriam says, "and my father would hold me in his arms and throw me up and down and I laughed and laughed and laughed. Each time he threw me up he'd yell in Yiddish 'Rivkela Rivkela where's Savta?' 'Killed.' 'Rivkela Rivkela where's Miriam?' 'Killed.' 'Rivkela Rivkela where's Chaim?' 'Killed.' He'd say all the names and I'd laugh and laugh. I was a year old, I feel I absorbed it from the start."

Rivka Miriam's disciplined, imagistic poems speak in the voice of this child. Born in Jerusalem in 1952 to the Yiddish writer Leib Rochman, Rivka Miriam is named for her grandmother and aunt, both of whom perished in Treblinka. Considered a *yeled peleh* or prodigy, she flourished in the salon-like atmosphere of her childhood home, and began to write poems about her ancestors, often sounding like a resurrected Holocaust victim. "I was not born. / I was restored to life," reads an early poem.

My Yellow Dress, the poet's first book, was published when she was 14 and earned her the never-quite-escapable label of "Holocaust poet." *These Mountains,* translated with aesthetic alertness by Linda Stern Zisquit, shows us how insufficient and misleading that label is. There are no boxcars or bars of soap in these poems; almost nothing on the referential level points to the experiences of her parents and grandparents. It is reverence for life, not reference to death, that Rivka Miriam achieves. The simple structure and even tone of these poems stands in sharp contrast to the histrionics of most "Holocaust poetry." (Charles Reznikoff's *Holocaust* is an important exception, which, significantly, was drawn from testimony offered during the trials of Nazi criminals.) In her two most recent books, Miriam does write about her murdered relatives: her pregnant aunt, her uncle, her great-uncle ("who ran wrapped in a *tallit* and yelled 'Redemption!'"). Reading these harrowing poems makes one realize how oblique the rest of the poems are.

One would not expect it, but the tone of these poems is playful rather than ponderous. Perhaps like her father converting the names of the dead into a game, Rivka Miriam turns the darkness into poetry. This is not to say that she becomes acclimated to horror, as is the traditional argument in English poetry. "We grow accustomed to the Dark," wrote Emily Dickinson. In *Paradise Lost,* Milton put the same argument in the demon Belial's mouth: "This horror will grow milde, this darkness light." Miriam strongly argues against any such acclimation. "We didn't get used to dying," she writes:

> though our death, like an old husband
> lies close to us and his arm, as if asleep
> carelessly hugs the thickness of our hip

Death and terror are domesticated but not integrated.

The Biblical allusions for which she is known are not so much allusions as they are a familiar and meaningful context. There's no appeal to God in the poems, and she situates herself in the Bible's stories—not the awe and terror of the Prophets, or the keening of the Kinot. Like a child, she attends to the familiar parts of Scripture: Miriam's well, the Jonah narrative, Moses, Lot's wife. This is not to say that her knowledge is limited—quite the opposite. Zisquit helpfully observes that Rivka Miriam "presents a self tapping into the unconscious, a sort of faux naïf attempting to stay a little girl, and she sustains that persona—neither clever nor sophisticated—as part of a technique to maintain a natural fresh innocence, a sense of wonder in her work."

The poems are short: rarely longer than half a page, with few stanza breaks, as if the poet is reluctant to enter and exit the silence. Poetic devices are almost completely absent from the work. Not only is there no rhyme (Israeli poets dropped rhyme sooner and more decisively than their English counterparts), but there is very little assonance or consonance, and lines are rarely broken "artistically" mid-phrase. The one poetic device of which she makes heavy use is repetition, and like her father's "Rivkela Rivkela" game, it's more often used to evoke absence than to underscore presence: "My fathers are all dead, / my fathers are dead. / All of them." Of course, the absence of poetic devices doesn't indicate the absence of poetry. Rivka Miriam eschews these devices, strips language almost bare, and it still sings.

It is not just language that gets stripped down. The poems are peopled with the infertile and disabled. Playing with Exodus 13:8 on teaching one's child about the departure from Egypt, she instructs: "And you shall teach your son muteness / that very day." Circumcision, too, becomes a disability:

A handsome circumcised man grabs my
 shoulders,
he's feeling what's left of my wings.
—Both of us are remnants—I tell him—
I and my wings, you and your organ.

The Hebrew word "remnant" *(sarid)* also means "survivor." It is typical of Rivka Miriam to use words like these, that can be contextualized and recontextualized, sometimes seeming to be embedded in a post-Holocaust narrative, sometimes not.

Another theme of the poems is that of birth and procreation. Interestingly, these images are often tied to men. "God closed his womb," she writes. In a poem on the binding of Isaac, "Abraham was binding his son / as with umbilical cords / to return him to his old, brittle loins." One of her best-known poems, "That Very Night," says:

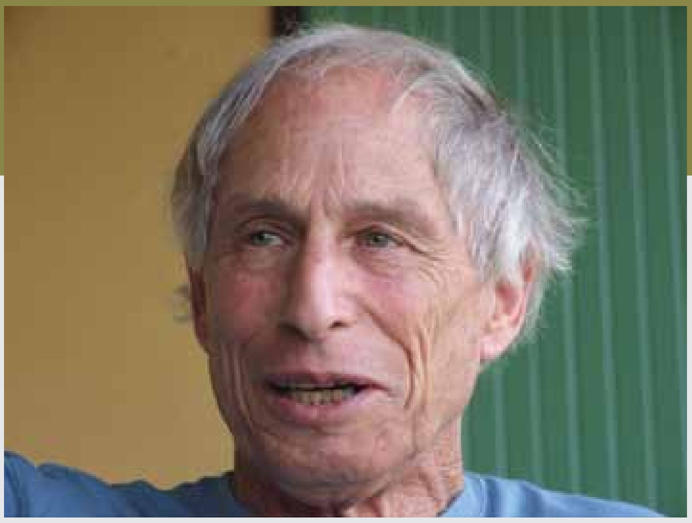
Now that it is clear that I'm a man
it turns out that I'm the father of my children
and their growth was in a father's womb
warm and hairy and tearless.

In contrast, women in Rivka Miriam's work are often barren, like the biblical matriarchs, "stone mothers" who cannot give birth or nurse.

Rivka Miriam is well-known and celebrated in Israel, where she has written twelve books of poetry as well as short stories and children's books, but this is her English language debut. The translations are presented opposite the Hebrew, though it should be said that because of the poet's simple syntax and vocabulary, a beginning student of the language could tackle many in the original. The English text is slightly pocked with some rather unfortunate typographical errors ("I will prostate myself"). Paradoxically, the potency of the poems is somehow lessened when they are read as a collection, like music sustained at too high a pitch for too long. But read individually, the poems are searing.

Margot Lurie *is a Maytag Fellow at the Iowa Writers' Workshop. Her work has appeared in* Parnassus: Poetry in Review *and* The New Criterion.

"Readers will be rewarded by learning about Halevi's poetry and philosophy"
—Publishers Weekly



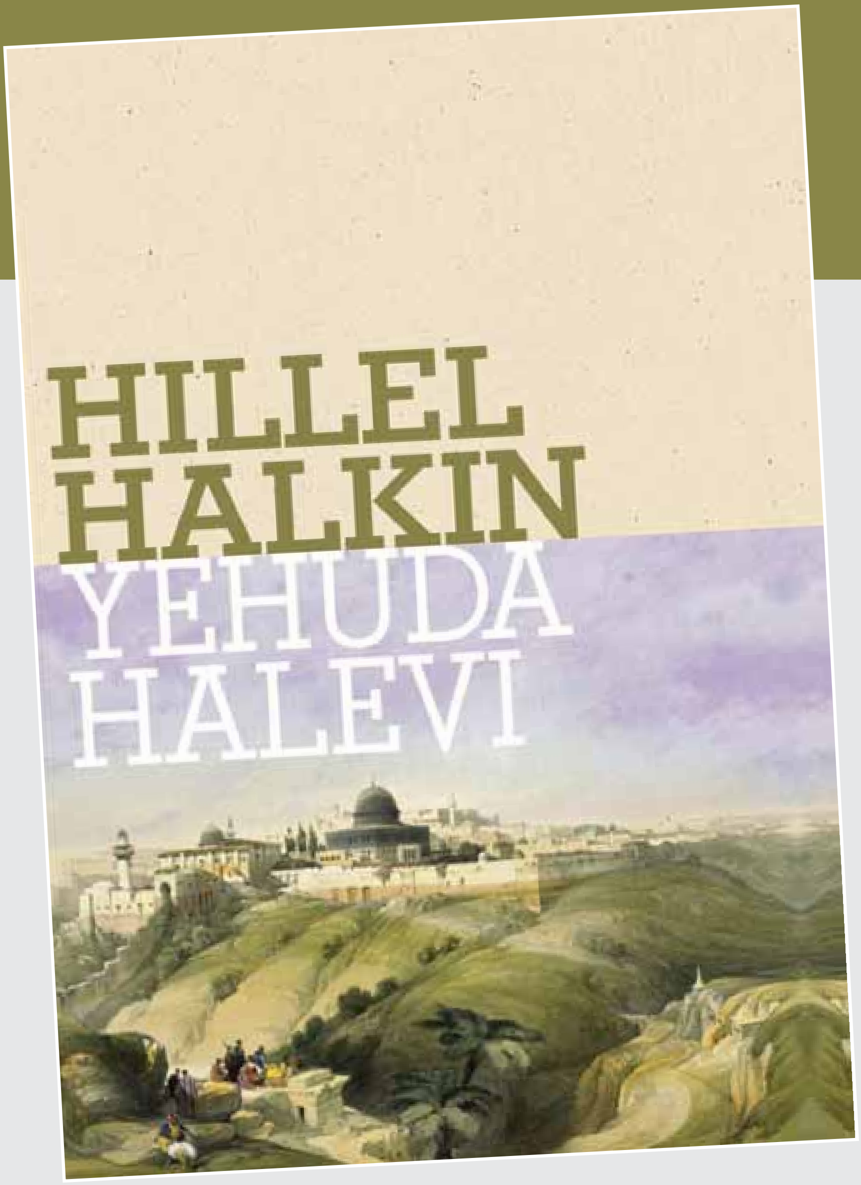
Yoav Etiel

COMING SOON FROM NEXTBOOK PRESS'S JEWISH ENCOUNTERS BOOK SERIES

Acclaimed writer and translator Hillel Halkin tells the story of the legendary poet and philosopher Yehuda Halevi, whose words live on as part of modern Jewish liturgy. In the process, Halkin takes readers back to medieval Spain, and the tangle of religious and cultural influences that made Halevi such an enduring figure. And he pieces together the mysterious fragments of Halevi's last days and his final, fateful voyage to Palestine.

>nextbook PRESS
www.nextbookpress.com

SCHOCKEN
www.schocken.com



ALSO AVAILABLE FOR DOWNLOAD AS AN E-BOOK.

The Idea of Abrahamic Religions: A Qualified Dissent

BY JON D. LEVENSON

One of the most remarkable things about the Jewish and Christian traditions is that they both revere figures who predated the central events of their redemptive histories. Both hold in high esteem the patriarchs of Genesis—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—even though these figures precede Moses or Jesus. The cases of Isaac and Jacob are complicated by the fact that they were in conflict with Ishmael and Esau, respectively. But in the case of Abraham, there is no such conflict, and so it should come as no surprise that nowadays many find in him a focus of Jewish-Christian commonality. That Abraham, or Ibrahim in Arabic, is a person of high importance in the Qur'an and the continuing Muslim tradition adds to his luster as a figure on whom those who seek peace and inter-communal reconciliation can focus.

A particularly apt example of the hopes currently attached to the patriarch comes from the *Abraham Path Initiative*, an organization dedicated to getting people to "follow the footsteps of Abraham/Ibrahim through the Middle East." As their literature notes, "three and a half billion people—over half the human family—trace their history or faith back to Abraham, considered the father of monotheism." Their aim is to develop a thoroughly modern interfaith and intercultural pilgrimage, which will inspire "respect and understanding among people, young and old, around the world."

Needless to say, groups like this have their work cut out for them. For it certainly seems that most Jews, Christians, and Muslims regard Abraham as the father of their own community alone, a view that is easily explained if we consider the foundational literatures of the three putatively Abrahamic communities. In Judaism, Abraham serves as the first Jew, the biological father of most Jews and the adoptive yet no less real father of those who have converted to the religion of his descendants. For Christians, Abraham has long been "the father of all that believe," in the words of the apostle Paul (Rom 4:5), who clearly thinks that what those believers believe—and what the patriarch's life prefigures—is the core message of the gospel. In the Islamic case, as early as the Qur'an, Abraham is emphatically said to be neither a Jew nor a Christian but rather a *muslim*, one who has submitted to God. In the words of the Muslim scripture itself, "the people who are worthiest of Abraham are those who followed him, together with this Prophet and the believers." As an imam in Jerusalem put it not long ago, "Abraham is the father of one religion, and that religion is Islam." That there are now, and have long been, Jews and Christians who make the same statement in behalf of their own religions merits serious thought.

The Muslim case is unique among the three, though, since however sharply Jews and Christians differ in their interpretation of the scriptures they hold in common, they are after all working from the same text. To paraphrase George Bernard Shaw's quip, if "England and America are two countries separated by a common language," then Judaism and Christianity are two religions separated by a common Abraham. Genesis is not part of Muslim scripture, however, and the Qur'anic Ibrahim is different from that of Genesis in ways great and small. Another way of stating this is to say that whereas Judaism and Christianity have long diverged in their interpretations of Abraham, it is not at all clear that Islam is interpreting what the other two mean by "Abraham."

Then again, Islam may be less of an outlier than first seems the case. For if we compare Abraham as he is presented in Genesis with the figure of the same name as he is reinterpreted in post-biblical Jewish sources, it is not at all clear that Jews and Christians are talking about the same figure, either. There is something historically unrealistic, and I daresay rather Protestant as well, about the assumption that the commonality of scripture in Judaism and Christianity implies that they are talking about the selfsame figure.

In the case of the Abraham of Genesis, there is something in the text that resists the notion that he is equally the father of more than one community, but also something that renders a larger perspective if not inevitable, then at least hard to avoid for very long. Let us begin with God's first address to the man who was known at first as "Abram":

> The LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your native land, from your kin-group, and from your father's house to the land that I will show you.
> I will make of you a great nation. And I will bless you;
> I will make your name great,
> And you shall be a blessing.
> I will bless those who bless you
> And curse him that curses you;
> And all the families of the earth
> Shall bless themselves by you." (Gen 12:1–3)

In the context of Genesis itself, the land the LORD will show Abraham—and promise to give to his descendants a few verses later—is Canaan, and the "great nation" that will derive from this still childless man with a barren wife turns out to be the people of Israel, named for his grandson. Yet, the very passage that puts the Israelite patriarch-to-be into motion toward the promised land looks beyond the promised people and perhaps the promised land as well, in its enigmatic last verse: "And all the families of the earth / Shall bless themselves by you" (Gen 12:3). What, precisely, does this mean? Here is the comment of the best-known medieval Jewish commentator, Rashi:

> There are many freer interpretive traditions, but this is its contextual sense: A man says to his son, "May you be like Abraham!" And this is so in every case of those words "shall bless themselves by you" in the Bible, and here is the proof: "By you shall Israel invoke blessings, saying, 'May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh.'" (Gen 48:20)

Rashi, in short, thinks the Hebrew preposition in question here does not mean "in" or "through," as many translations render it; it means "by." This traditional Jewish reading obviously influenced the translation from the Jewish Publication Society that I have quoted ("And all the families of the earth/ Shall bless themselves by you").

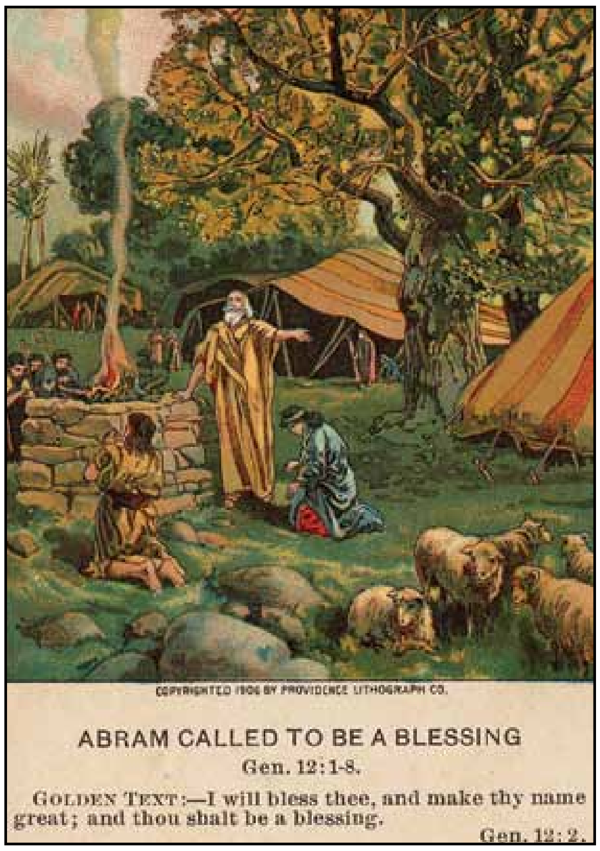
The immediate context in Genesis and Rashi's astute reference to Jacob's blessing of his grandsons Ephraim and Manasseh speak strongly for this interpretation. If Rashi and those who follow him have understood the verse correctly, what God promises Abraham in Gen 12:3 is that he shall become a byword of blessing. In other words, it is by reference to him that members of the families of the earth shall give blessings. It is as if someone were to say, to use American analogies, "May you make money like Rockefeller!" or "May you dunk like LeBron!"

The traditional Christian interpretation moves in the opposite direction. For Christianity has long seen in the election of Abraham the beginning of a movement that reaches fruition only with the incorporation of all the nations of the world into the Abrahamic promise. In this reading, the Jewish people are—or, to be more precise, were—a prototype for the Church, a multi-ethnic body that early on made a claim to be the true Israel. For many Christians, the new relationship initiated with God's call and commission of Abraham involves a dramatic movement away from particularism towards universalism, away from a particular land and a particular people and towards the salvation of the entire world. As for the call of Abraham in Genesis 12:1–3, this interpretation places the greatest emphasis, not surprisingly, on that final clause, rendered as, "*in* thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." For Paul, the Jew who after the death of Jesus became his "apostle to the Gentiles," these words became the prooftext for a theology that insisted that the blessing in question falls on the Gentiles and not only on the Jews (and perhaps not on the Jews at all):

> Just as Abraham "believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," [Gen 15:6], so, you see, those who believe are the descendants of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles

> by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you" [Gen 12:3]. For this reason, those who believe are blessed with Abraham who believed." (Galatians 3:6–9)

To the modern mind, Paul's words can give the impression that he wished to counter the particularism of Judaism, and its retrograde doctrine of the "chosen people," with a more universalistic affirmation, one that included all of humanity within God's promise—universalistic Christianity replacing particularistic Judaism.


COPYRIGHTED 1906 BY PROVIDENCE LITHOGRAPH CO.
ABRAM CALLED TO BE A BLESSING
Gen. 12:1-8.
GOLDEN TEXT:—I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing.
Gen. 12:2.

Bible card published in 1906 by the Providence Lithograph Company.

Paul's goal was actually quite different from this characteristic post-Enlightenment reading. What he sought was the universal diffusion of the particularistic—and rather tiny—community that was the nascent Church. And here is the point with which the familiar depiction of Judaism as particularistic and Christianity as universalistic fails to reckon, with drastic consequences over the centuries: for Paul, the Church was not just a particular community. It was a particular community made up exclusively of descendants of Abraham. "And if you belong to Christ," the apostle to the Gentiles wrote in the same letter, "then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise." Conversion to Christianity (to use terminology that did not exist in Paul's time) thus gives Gentiles the status that Jews claimed for themselves: it makes them descendants of Abraham and thus heirs to the promises given to him. It does so, to be sure, while bypassing the laws of Moses and even the commandment of circumcision, given to Abraham himself six generations before Moses. But the Gentile's Christian identity has markers of its own, the best known being the conversion or initiation rite of baptism. Baptism makes a Gentile, as it were, into a Jew, and is thus properly compared with the conversion-rites of Judaism, which in the case of male converts require circumcision. In both the Christian and the Jewish cases, the rites in question underscore the separation of the community—the Church of Jesus Christ and the people Israel, respectively—from humanity at large. Were the goal to affirm the dignity of all humans—a theme that is, to be sure, prominent in both traditions—then the focus would be on the universal fathers of the human race, Adam and Noah, and surely not on Abraham.

Where does Paul's Christological reading of Abraham leave those who have been Jews all along and who are not persuaded by the new phenomenon that comes to be called Christianity? On the one hand, Paul expresses great concern for his "kindred according to the flesh." He declares that the covenant and the patriarchs are still theirs, and explicitly denies that God has rejected his people. On the other hand, in the same passage he iterates his view that "not all of Abraham's children are his true descendants," since the promise trumps the flesh (that is, birth), and declares that the Jews are branches that have been lopped off the tree due to unbelief and replaced by Gentiles who have been grafted in "in their place." To complicate the picture still further, however, Paul closes with what seems to be a prediction that "these natural branches [will] be grafted back into their own olive tree." This last turn probably relates to Paul's expectations for the end-time, when he thought Jesus would return. What he seems to have believed is that in the end of days, the Jews, like the rest of the world, would turn to Jesus, and as a consequence God would lift his punishment on them and restore his chosen people to their prior and ultimately irrevocable glory.

Unfortunately, even Paul's ambivalence about Jews who do not become Christians was largely lost in the subsequent centuries of Christian history, and the blessing for the nations turned into a curse for the Jews. The author of the early Christian work known as the Epistle of Barnabas, writing about 100 C.E., expands upon God's declaration in Genesis that Abraham—then still uncircumcised—is righteous on the basis of his faith thus: "Behold, I have made thee, Abraham, the father of the Gentiles . . . who believe in God in uncircumcision." The same author declares, as Jeffrey Siker puts it, that "God has abandoned the Jews for the Gentiles." The apologist Justin, who wrote after the Roman Empire had brutally defeated the Jews in the Bar Kokhba War (132-135 C.E.), took the next step. He transformed circumcision from a sign of God's enduring and unbreakable covenant into its opposite, a sign of divine rejection and Jewish suffering, painfully evident in their loss of the Land of Israel, the enormous destruction that the Romans wrought there, and especially the Roman exclusion of the Jews from Jerusalem.

This notion that the singling-out of Abraham never referred to the Jews, or no longer refers to the Jews, but applies only to the Church, interprets the event as purely instrumental: God did not fall in love with Abraham and the nation that would descend from him for their own sake. Rather, he singled them out strictly for the purpose first declared in Genesis 12:3: "And all the families of the earth / Shall bless themselves by you/be blessed in you." The traditional effort of Christians to convert all nations and the lack of just such an effort among the Jews for the last two millennia could then be interpreted as further proof that only the Church, not the people Israel, carried on the Abrahamic legacy.

From what I have said so far, one could easily devise a simple contrast between the Jewish and the Christian interpretations of their common father that would go like this: The Jewish understanding of Abraham focuses on the Jewish people, and others are brought in only to highlight the blessedness of Abraham and the family that descends from him. The Christian understanding of Abraham is no less focused on a specific group, in this case the Church, but it conceives of Abraham in an expansive context, as a man who bears a message of universal import, foreshadowing the universal aspirations of the Church for its gospel. Whereas, to revert to Gen 12:3, the Jews think all the families of the earth shall bless themselves by reference to Abraham, the Christians think that in Abraham all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Though each tradition is particularistic in its own way, Judaism is inward-looking and Christianity outward-looking. But this grand contrast, like so many others involving these two traditions, is much too simple.

To understand why, let us first turn to those alternative, "freer interpretive traditions" of Gen 12:3b that Rashi mentions. An ancient midrash, in fact, paraphrases the divine prediction this way: "Rain comes through your merit; dew comes through your merit." The midrash thus shows that the blessing on Abraham has positive consequences for "all the families of the earth," whose prosperity is owing to him through the benefits his descendants, the Jewish people, confer. He is thus not simply a byword of blessing, as Rashi was to think; he is a universal *source* of blessing. The midrash that offers this reading supports it with intriguing examples of Gentiles who prosper because of the interventions of Jews, for example, the pharaoh to whom Joseph revealed the coming famine and how to survive it and whom Jacob later explicitly blesses, and the Persian king Ahasuerus, whose life Mordecai and Esther save from an assassination plot.

This ancient midrashic notion that God will bless "all the families of the earth" because of Abraham is a notion that developed much further in the Middle Ages. An example of the most expansive understanding of the clause appears in the works of the great medieval philosopher, commentator, and statesman Isaac Abarbanel, who himself was exiled from Portugal and Spain.

> The goal of his journeying is hinted at in the expression, "you shall be a blessing" (Gen 12:2), for He commanded him that when he would journey, there would be a blessing among the peoples because he would teach them and make them know the true faith in such a way that the world would be perfected by means of him. And He (may He be blessed!) informed him that His providence would adhere to those people who accept his teaching and learn his faith.

Abarbanel thus draws a tight connection between Abraham's journeys conveyed at the beginning of God's initial charge to him ("Go forth from your native land," Gen 12:1) and the enigmatic blessing at its end ("And all the families of the earth / Shall bless themselves by you").

In Abarbanel's view, it is Abraham and, by implication, the Jewish people, who instruct the world.

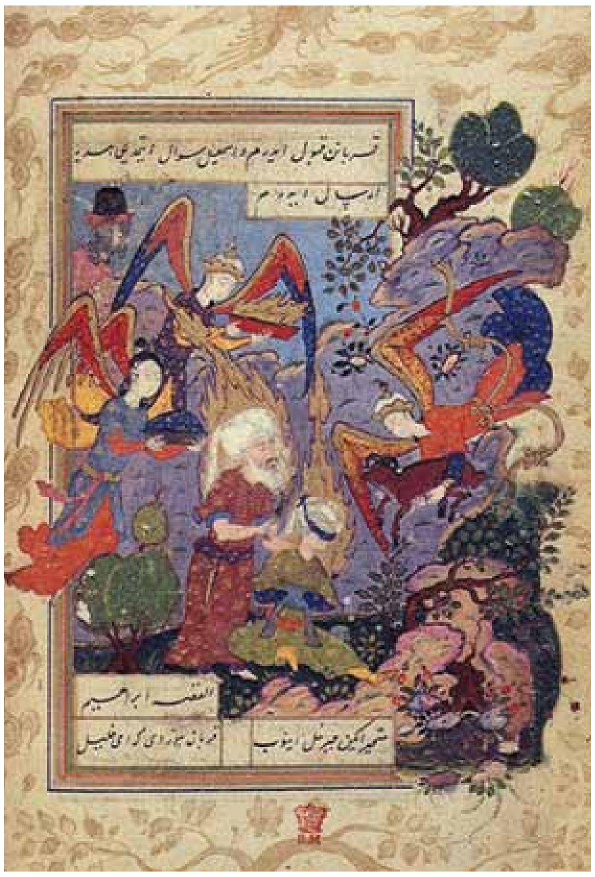
God's singling out of the Jews does not, to be sure, depend on their fulfilling any mission. But in Abarbanel's theology and that of the sources upon which he depends, the Jews do have a mission to fulfill nonetheless, to share the universal and transcendent truth to which they have graciously been made privy. The blessing of Abraham and the blessing of all the peoples of the earth are not at odds with each other. They are related parts of the same divine initiative.

The notion that Abraham held a distinctive theological idea that he felt charged to disseminate is so widespread in the Jewish tradition that to some it comes as a surprise that it has no basis in the text of Genesis itself. There, what Abraham founds is not a religion or a theology but a *family*. He is the first father of the people Israel, named for his grandson, Jacob/Israel. There is no reason to think of Abraham as holding a purer view of God than any of the people with whom he comes into contact or objecting to their mode of worship in the slightest.

In Genesis, that is. For elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, in the book of Joshua, we find a hint of a dynamic within Abraham's family of origin that does not appear in Genesis. In his farewell address, Joshua, Moses' successor, begins thus: "In olden times, your forefathers—Terah, the father of Abraham and father of Nahor—lived beyond the Euphrates and worshiped other gods. But I took your father Abraham from beyond the Euphrates and led him through the whole land of Canaan and multiplied his offspring." Why God chose Abraham—and not, for example, his brother Nahor—remains a question here, to be sure, but it is one that later traditions would answer in rich and imaginative detail.

The earliest example seems to be the book of Jubilees, a Jewish work from the mid-second century B.C.E. that never became part of the biblical canon of rabbinic Judaism. After telling us the circumstances of Abraham's birth, the eleventh chapter of Jubilees reports this: "And the lad began understanding the straying of the land, that everyone went astray after graven images and after pollution . . . And he separated from his father so that he might not worship the idols with him. And he began to pray to the Creator of all so that He might save him from the straying of the sons of men, and so that his portion might not fall into straying after the pollution and scorn." Soon thereafter, we read of Abraham's confronting his father with the message that the idols are useless. "Do not worship them," he tells Terah. "Worship the God of heaven." "And his father said to him, 'I also know (that), my son, but what shall I do to the people who have made me minister before them? . . . Be silent, my son, lest they kill you.'" But Abraham refuses to go along and burns down the idolatrous temple.

Jubilees also reports that once when Abraham was observing the stars in hopes of predicting the weather, "a word came into his heart, saying, 'All the signs of the stars and the signs of the sun and the moon are all in the hand of the LORD. Why am I seeking?" (Jub 12:17). Here, the polemic against idolatry clothes a key philosophical claim. Nature is not God; God is above nature. This insight then provokes Abraham to pray that God protect him from straying from God's service and that he reveal to Abraham whether he should return to Ur or stay in Haran. Only then, as Jubilees would have it, does God give him the command with which Genesis 12 begins, to leave his native land and his father's household and to set out for the unnamed land that turns out, of course, to be Canaan.



"The Offer of Ibrahim's Son" Miniature from Hadiqat al-Su'ada (The Garden of the Holy Ones) by al-Fuduli, Turkey; c. 1650.

The command to leave the land of the idolaters and the promise of a new land to be deeded to Abraham's descendants are, on this account, a divine response to Abraham's discovery of a profound theological truth, the nature of the God who is above nature.

The tale of Abraham's confrontation with his idolater father underlies a number of stories still familiar to traditional Jews. According to the one that is perhaps the best known, Abraham's father hands him over to the idolatrous king Nimrod, who, eager to show that fire is divine, casts him into a furnace, from which, of course, God rescues Abraham. The story is so familiar that, in my experience, many Jews are surprised to discover that it is not in the Bible.

If the idea of Abraham's conflict with his idolatrous father is not scriptural in Judaism (or Christianity), however, it is, however, scriptural in Islam. In this, we see a commonality of Judaism and Islam not paralleled in ancient Christianity. In the Qur'an, the story of Abraham's confrontation with his father appears, in fact, in association with another Jewish theme that we have already examined, his attack on astrology:

> And when Abraham said to his father Azar, "Do you take idols for gods? I see you and your people are in manifest error."
> Thus We show Abraham the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, that he might be one of those possessed of certainty.
> And when night fell, he saw a star; so he said: "This is my Lord", but when it set, he said: "I do not like those that set."
> Then, when he saw the moon rising, he said: "This is my Lord", but when it set, he said: "If my Lord does not guide me rightly, I will be one of the erring people."
> Then, when he saw the sun rising, he said: "This is my Lord; this is larger", but when it set, he said: "O, my people, I am innocent of what you associate [with God].
> "I turn my face towards Him Who fashioned the heavens and the earth, as an upright man, and I am not one of the polytheists." (Qur'an 6:74–79)

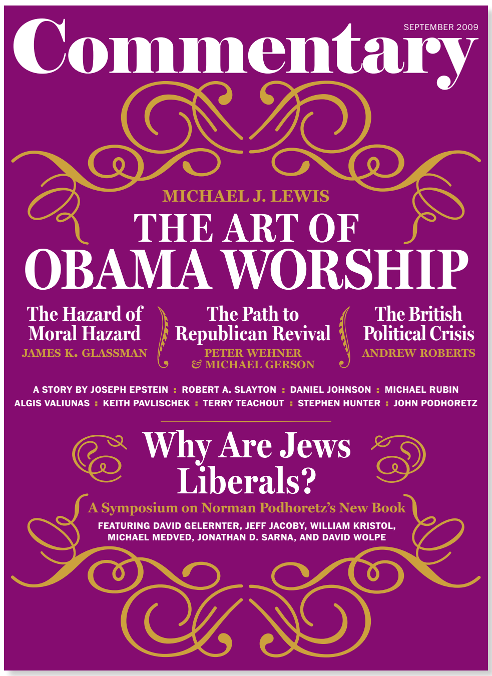
However weak the stories of Abraham and his father's idols may be as an interpretation of the function of religious iconography (as practitioners of Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christianity and several other living traditions can attest), the stories do have one great strength nonetheless: they readily communicate the difference between the Creator and His creation to the mind of a child, implanting this key theological point deeply in the culture of the faithful.

We have seen that the attempt to treat the Abraham of Genesis as the founder of a religion is in fundamental error. In that book, what he founds is not a religion—he has no theological teaching—but a family. When we came to the Abraham of Second Temple and rabbinic Judaism, however, we found that he has now acquired a teaching. This Abraham stands foursquare against the widespread folly of idolatry and the mistake of thinking that the world is governed by physical phenomena. Instead, he teaches about the one God who is the creator and owner of the world and whose purposes the very singling out of Abraham and his descendants manifests and advances. The father has become a founder.

To the extent that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are focused on a belief in that God and a proclamation of him to the world, we can indeed speak of them as Abrahamic religions, a confraternity of three communities devoted to the one God whose character was discovered and taught by their common revered antecedent. And to that extent, too, the appeal to Abraham as a source of commonality and kinship among these three groups makes eminent sense and can help defeat the widespread notion that strong religious commitments can be a source only of division and discord.

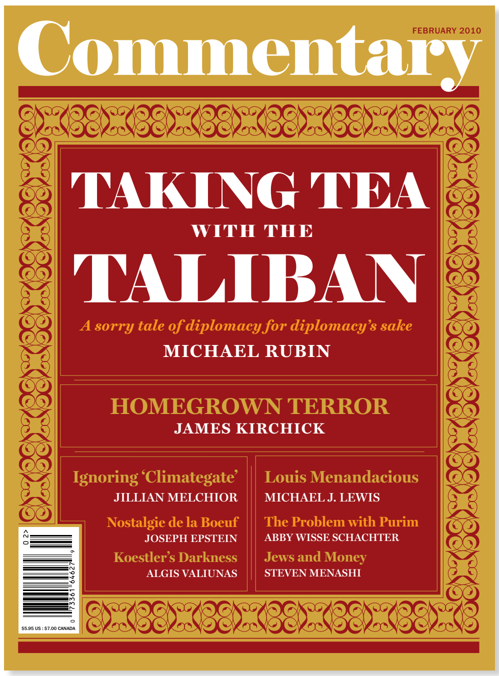
There are, however, some serious qualifications about this use of Abraham in interreligious contexts that the texts we have seen underscore. If an appeal to Abraham simply invokes his name in pursuit of inter-communal peace and harmony but disregards the teachings with which these three communities associate him, it can only be shallow and self-defeating. And if that is the case, then the appeal to Abraham the monotheist must of necessity be founded upon that belief in the invisible, transcendent, superintending, and providential God that he is thought to have rediscovered or reencountered.

The appeal to Abraham, in other words, is necessarily also a critique of polytheism, atheism, and pantheism in their various forms, and those who belong to an Abrahamic confraternity of commu-



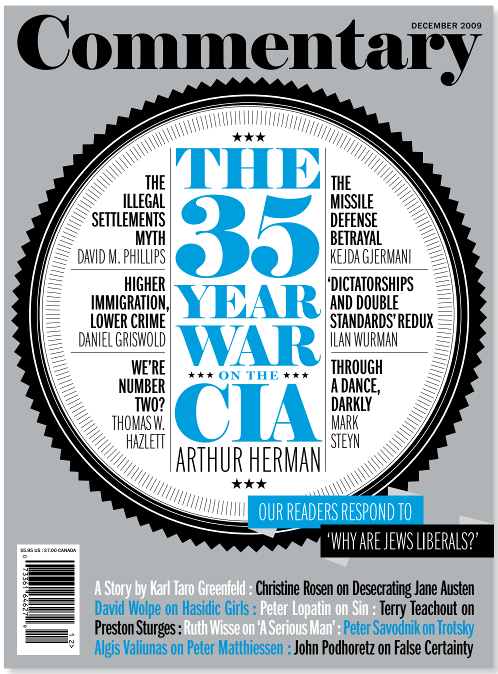
Commentary
SEPTEMBER 2009
MICHAEL J. LEWIS
THE ART OF OBAMA WORSHIP
The Hazard of Moral Hazard
JAMES K. GLASSMAN
The Path to Republican Revival
PETER WEHNER & MICHAEL GERSON
The British Political Crisis
ANDREW ROBERTS
A STORY BY JOSEPH EPSTEIN : ROBERT A. SLAYTON : DANIEL JOHNSON : MICHAEL RUBIN
ALGIS VALIUNAS : KEITH PAVLISCHEK : TERRY TEACHOUT : STEPHEN HUNTER : JOHN PODHORETZ
Why Are Jews Liberals?
A Symposium on Norman Podhoretz's New Book
FEATURING DAVID GELERNTER, JEFF JACOBY, WILLIAM KRISTOL, MICHAEL MEDVED, JONATHAN D. SARNA, AND DAVID WOLPE

Commentary
MAY 2009
ISRAEL AT RISK
A Commentary Special Report
John R. Bolton
Michael B. Oren
Norman Podhoretz
Mark Steyn
Jonathan S. Tobin
I.F. Stone, Soviet Agent—Case Closed
John Earl Haynes, Harvey Klehr, Alexander Vassiliev
The Inflation Temptation
John Steele Gordon
Liberal Hawks, RIP
Abe Greenwald
New York on the Precipice
Fred Siegel
Golnick's Fortune
A story by Adam Langer
Elliott Abrams on Iran : Christopher Caldwell on Jonathan Littell : David Frum on the iPod
Terry Teachout on Alec Guinness : Algis Valiunas on 'Edgar Sawtelle'
James Kirchick : Jeff Jacoby : D.G. Myers : George B. Goodman : John Podhoretz

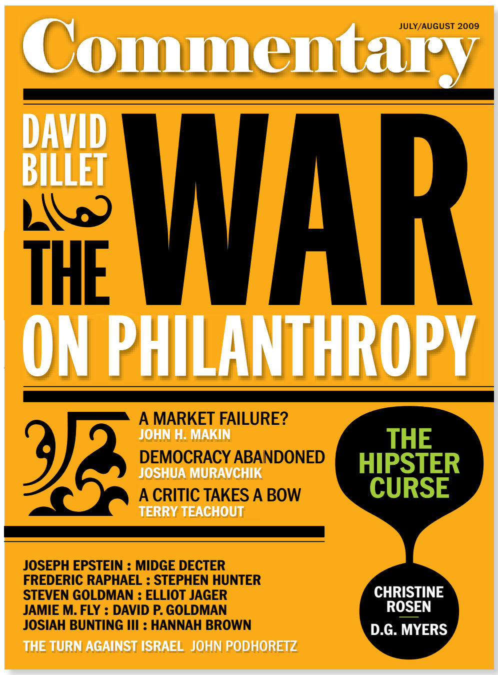


Commentary
FEBRUARY 2010
TAKING TEA WITH THE TALIBAN
A sorry tale of diplomacy for diplomacy's sake
MICHAEL RUBIN
HOMEGROWN TERROR
JAMES KIRCHICK
Ignoring 'Climategate'
JILLIAN MELCHIOR
Nostalgie de la Boeuf
JOSEPH EPSTEIN
Koestler's Darkness
ALGIS VALIUNAS
Louis Menandacious
MICHAEL J. LEWIS
The Problem with Purim
ABBY WISSE SCHACHTER
Jews and Money
STEVEN MENASHI
$5.95 US : $7.00 CANADA

Commentary
NOVEMBER 2009
NORMAN PODHORETZ
The Real Irving Kristol
What Price Popularity?
JAMES KIRCHICK
HOW WE CAN WIN IN AFGHANISTAN
MAX BOOT
AND THE LIBERAL COLLAPSE
ABE GREENWALD
DAN SENOR & SAUL SINGER
Intel and the ISRAELIS
JOSEPH EPSTEIN : DAVID FRUM
MICHAEL MEDVED : PAUL A. RAHE
LIAM JULIAN : TERRY TEACHOUT
SAM MUNSON : ALGIS VALIUNAS
A STORY BY JOHN J. CLAYTON
JOHN PODHORETZ
$5.95 US : $7.00 CANADA



Commentary
DECEMBER 2009
THE 35 YEAR WAR ON THE CIA
ARTHUR HERMAN
THE ILLEGAL SETTLEMENTS MYTH
DAVID M. PHILLIPS
HIGHER IMMIGRATION, LOWER CRIME
DANIEL GRISWOLD
WE'RE NUMBER TWO?
THOMAS W. HAZLETT
THE MISSILE DEFENSE BETRAYAL
KEJDA GJERMANI
'DICTATORSHIPS AND DOUBLE STANDARDS' REDUX
ILAN WURMAN
THROUGH A DANCE, DARKLY
MARK STEYN
OUR READERS RESPOND TO 'WHY ARE JEWS LIBERALS?'
A Story by Karl Taro Greenfeld : Christine Rosen on Desecrating Jane Austen
David Wolpe on Hasidic Girls : Peter Lopatin on Sin : Terry Teachout on Preston Sturges : Ruth Wisse on 'A Serious Man' : Peter Savodnik on Trotsky
Algis Valiunas on Peter Matthiessen : John Podhoretz on False Certainty
$5.95 US : $7.00 CANADA



Commentary
JULY/AUGUST 2009
DAVID BILLET
THE WAR ON PHILANTHROPY
A MARKET FAILURE?
JOHN H. MAKIN
DEMOCRACY ABANDONED
JOSHUA MURAVCHIK
A CRITIC TAKES A BOW
TERRY TEACHOUT
THE HIPSTER CURSE
CHRISTINE ROSEN
D.G. MYERS
JOSEPH EPSTEIN : MIDGE DECTER
FREDERIC RAPHAEL : STEPHEN HUNTER
STEVEN GOLDMAN : ELLIOT JAGER
JAMIE M. FLY : DAVID P. GOLDMAN
JOSIAH BUNTING III : HANNAH BROWN
THE TURN AGAINST ISRAEL JOHN PODHORETZ

Do you *love* Commentary?

Become an online subscriber for as little as $19.95 a year.

Purchase an online subscription to *Commentary* and you will receive 24 free articles from *Commentary*'s digital archive dating back to 1945—that's six decades of great writing from great thinkers absolutely free for as little as $19.95

www.commentarymagazine.com

Commentary
America's Greatest Monthly

nities would have to oppose rigorously any attempt to reduce nature or human nature to their physical manifestations. Needless to say, this position would be highly offensive in some influential circles, since it opposes not only naturalism, or scientism, but also the position, widespread nowadays, that ultimately no theological or philosophical worldview is any better or truer than any other. Those who invoke Abraham out of a commendable desire for inter-communal peace must be careful not to allow their pluralism to slide into relativism, as if the figure they invoke made no truth claims and opposed no idolatries. Abraham is, after all, the man who in many texts remonstrates with his idolatrous father and townsmen and, in at least one that we have seen, burns down the idolaters' temple. It is one thing to deplore the burning; it is quite another to deny that idolatry, and the transcendent truth that exposes its limitations, exist.

The belief in the sovereignty and providence of God evident in these Jewish texts from the Greco-Roman period was hardly unique to the Jews. It finds resonance among the pagans of the time, especially figures influenced by Stoicism. Indeed, there is a pagan monotheism, but if we are to use the term "monotheism" in connection with the so-called Abrahamic religions, we must also be careful not to allow that misleading term to imply a simple equation of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with the God of the philosophers. Martin S. Jaffee points to one key difference when he describes as the "essential marker" of the sort of monotheism represented by Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. That marker, in his words, "is not the uniqueness of God alone. *Rather, it lies in the desire of the unique God to summon from out of the human mass a unique community established in his name and the desire of that community to serve God in love and obedience by responding to his call.*" In Judaism, that "unique community" is called the people Israel. In Christianity, it is known as the Church. In Islam, it is called the Umma, the body of the faithful who have submitted to God as he has commanded them to do.

This is not to claim that the three traditions hold the same theology of election, or chosenness. They do not. Indeed, in the Muslim case, it is doubtful that Allah has elected Abraham at all; he is, rather, a prophet in the chain whose culmination is Muhammad, "the seal of the prophets." To speak of the God of Abraham, however, without regard to the identity and nature of the "unique community" that he is thought to have founded and prefigured or, in the case of Islam, exemplified, is drastically to misunderstand how Abraham functions in these three traditions.

Some, to be sure, see this communal dimension as unnecessary. Bruce Feiler, author of a bestselling book on Abraham, laments that "suddenly the carefully balanced message of the Abraham story—that God cares for all his children—a tradition that existed for hundreds of years before the religions *themselves* existed, was put in jeopardy by the inheritors of that tradition [the Jews]." But the question of which community is the true heir of Abraham is hardly the creation of medieval polemic among Jews, Christians, and Muslims. It is, in fact, internal to the book of Genesis itself, whose central drama turns on the key question of which son will inherit the covenantal promise made by God to his father.

As for Abraham's first two sons, Genesis 17:18–21 records God's promise that although Ishmael will become the father of a great and numerous nation, it is with Isaac alone that God will make the covenant. In this theology, the subtlety of which is often missed, Ishmael is not disowned: rather, he inherits the promise but not the covenant, while Isaac inherits both. A similar dynamic can be seen in the next generation, when it is Isaac's younger son Jacob who acquires the status of the firstborn and his father's blessing, not the older brother Esau. The point of such narratives is clear: Not all biological descendants of Abraham are members of the Abrahamic community. It was never the case that "the balanced message of the Abraham story [was] that God cares for all his children," as Feiler mistakenly thinks. For in the biblical telling, the fathers of the whole human race are Adam and Noah; Abraham is the father of the Jewish people. All people are created "in the image of God," as Genesis 1 famously puts it, but not all peoples, not even all monotheists, are descendants of Abraham. If the three Abrahamic religions agree on the specialness and preciousness of the human race in the eyes of God, it is not because of Abraham.

We have seen that the nature of the monotheism of the Abrahamic religious traditions is one that is inextricably involved with the formation of a distinct community, distinguised in one way or another from the rest of humanity to give testimony to God in distinctive ways. Here, Jaffee's term, "elective monotheism," is useful. It reminds us that in Genesis (though not in the Qur'an) the patriarch's discovery of God or God's revelation to him is only half the story; the other half involves the question of inheritance: Which son most fully carries on the father's promise? In sum, the theme of election or chosenness is an inextricable part of the Abrahamic tradition in both Judaism and Christianity, though Islam takes a somewhat different path. We can go further: if the communal dimension is an intrinsic aspect of Abrahamic monotheism in its Jewish and Christian manifestations, then it makes sense that each of the three self-styled Abrahamic traditions would sometimes portray their founder as practicing that tradition. And indeed, in Jewish tradition we meet an Abraham who kept the *mitzvot*, the commandments of the Torah, before the Torah was given; in Christian tradition, we hear of an Abraham who was pronounced righteous by God as an uncircumcised Gentile without the Torah and its commandments; and in Islam, as we shall soon see, there is the Abraham/Ibrahim who was neither a Jew nor a Christian precisely because he lived before there was a Torah or a gospel but who was instead a Muslim prophet whose true followers today are those who follow Muhammad.

The connection of Abraham with ongoing communities and their distinctive practices and beliefs is what makes it possible for Abraham to have become a point of controversy among them and not simply, as many would desire today, a node of commonality. The Jewish Abraham who observes the commandments of the Torah even before it has been given through Moses (which is, importantly, not the only Jewish view of the matter) originates before the Pauline Abraham who is, to use Paul's language, reckoned as righteous by faith alone, but it is not hard to see how the two images became opposing sides of a continuing and community-defining disputation.

In the Qur'an, the Jews and Christians are chided for just that: for arguing anachronistically about Abraham.

> O People of the Book, why do you dispute
> concerning Abraham, when the Torah and
> the Gospel were only revealed after him? Do
> you have no sense?
> There, you have disputed concerning
> what you know; so why do you dispute
> concerning what you do not know? Allah
> knows and you do not know.
> Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian,
> but a hanif [i.e., a true monotheist] and a
> Muslim. And he was not one of the polytheists.
> Surely, the people who are worthiest of
> Abraham are those who followed him,
> together with this Prophet and the believers.
> Allah is the guardian of the believers! (Qur'an
> 3:65–68)

At first, this passage may seem to prefigure the modern belief in a three-fold confraternity of Abrahamic religions, all of them focused on their mutual founder. A closer look reveals, however, that the passage removes Abraham from Jews and Christians alike, directing these communities, who have so long denied each other's continuity with him, to see him as something different from themselves and more ancient—as one who was *muslim*, submitted to God and untainted by idolatry of any sort. What he prefigures, in short, is not the confraternity of Abrahamic religions but rather the one true Abrahamic religion, Islam, which the Jews and Christians, for all their disputatious prattle about the patriarch, have distorted.

There is something truly outward-looking and expansive in the story of the man who is promised that he shall be "the father of a multitude of nations," and the efforts of the three "Abrahamic religions" to associate him exclusively with their own communities cannot altogether obliterate this. But in the case of Jews and Christians, the commonality of the three communities will always be limited by the focus of the book of Genesis on chosenness or election. The very claim that God has graciously singled out a particular people—the people of Israel or the Church—constitutes both a bond and a barrier between these two continuing communities, one that they do not share with Islam. But even in the case of Jews and Christians, to speak of the Abrahamic legacy as only a bond, or as only a barrier, is to simplify matters to the point of falsification. In this instance, as in so many others, the challenge before Jews and Christians alike is to uphold with integrity both the connections and the divisions. Since today the pressure to uphold the connections is vastly greater than the pressure to uphold the divisions, this is, alas, no easy task.

Jon D. Levenson *is the Albert A. List Professor of Jewish Studies at Harvard Divinity School and the author, most recently, of* Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel *and* Resurrection: The Power of God for Christians and Jews *(the latter co-authored with Kevin J. Madigan).*

Discrimination and Identity in London: The Jewish Free School Case

BY J. H. H. WEILER

It is not every day that the Chief Rabbi of Britain, Sir Jonathan Sacks, is found by the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom to be guilty of racial discrimination, but that is what happened in the recent Jewish Free School (JFS) Case.

The facts of the case are as simple as the underlying legal, religious, and cultural issues are complex. The Jewish Free School, founded in 1732, is Europe's largest Jewish secondary school and one of the best schools in London. Moreover, as a state-funded school, it is literally free. As a matter of policy, JFS gives preference to Jews in its admissions decisions. Since the number of Jewish applications consistently exceeds the places available, non-Jews are, in effect, excluded. No one contests the right of JFS to do this. By law, Catholic schools can give preference to Catholics; Muslim schools to Muslims, and so on. The law also allows such schools to determine eligibility by reference to religious "membership or practice." But there is no exemption for discrimination on grounds of race.

The legal limits of JFS's policy were recently tested when a twelve-year-old boy, identified in court documents as "M," applied for admission to the school. M's mother, who is Italian Catholic by birth, converted to Judaism through a non-Orthodox rabbinic court. At the time of his application, M was living with his father and although the two of them were members of a Masorti synagogue, M was denied admission because Chief Rabbi Sacks, whose authority is recognized by JFS, did not recognize the conversion of his mother as valid, rendering M not Jewish, by extension.

In determining whether M was Jewish, the Chief Rabbi, as head of the United Synagogue, applied the criterion of "membership in the Jewish people" rather than that of "the practice of Judaism." Membership was determined by traditional norms: someone born to a Jewish mother or converted according to halakha. Since Rabbi Sacks and the United Synagogue do not recognize the halakhic authority of Masorti Rabbinic courts, M was treated as if he were a non-Jewish applicant, his family's practice of Judaism notwithstanding. A lower court upheld the school's right to do deny M a place, but this decision was reversed on appeal and came before the Supreme Court.

In the eyes of the Majority, this exclusion amounted to prohibited racial discrimination.

Five Law Lords found direct discrimination, which, under British Law, can never be justified or excused. Two Law Lords found indirect racial discrimination which can be justified or excused but which was not so justified in this case. Only two found for the School and the United Synagogue. So how did the Majority reach its conclusion?

English law includes "ethnic origins" as a proxy for race, which is understood to be "appreciably wider than the strictly racial or biological." Several criteria determine ethnicity: shared history, cultural tradition, common geographical origins, descent from a small number of common ancestors, a common language, a common literature, a common religion, being a minority within a larger community, and so on.

> A group defined by reference to enough of these characteristics would be capable of including converts, for example, persons who marry into the group … Provided a person who joins the group feels himself or herself to be a member of it, as is accepted by other members, then he is [for the purposes of the law prohibiting racial discrimination,] such a member.

The Majority found that on these anthropological criteria, the Jewish people are an ethnic group.

Now, one should not condemn the British courts for construing race anthropologically and giving a non-religious definition to Jewishness. In the first place, it is consistent with the purpose of Britain's Race Relations Act. Anti-Semites are distinctly uninterested in halakhic definitions of Jewishness, and we would not want someone who was discriminated against as a Jew to face a legal defense that—according to Orthodox standards—she was not actually Jewish, ergo it wasn't really discrimination. Second, we do not want the legislature or the courts to be in the business of setting religious criteria for Jewishness. But we should note that a gap exists between this anthropological definition of Jewishness and a religious definition. It is possible that someone would be anthropologically Jewish but religiously not. (Many such Jews were gassed at Auschwitz.)

Lady Hale, in a lucid and succinct opinion, captures the core of the Majority's reasoning:

> There is no doubt that the Jewish people are an ethnic group ... [I]t is just as unlawful to treat one person more favourably on the ground of his ethnic origin as it is to treat another person less favourably. There can be no doubt that, if an employer were to take exactly the same criterion as that used by the … Chief Rabbi and refuse to employ a person because the Chief Rabbi would regard him as halachically Jewish, the employer would be treating that person less favourably on grounds of his ethnic origin...

M was treated less favorably because he did not come under the Chief Rabbi's definition of Jewishness, as the son of a Jewish mother. In the eyes of the Majority that definition was an ethnic and hence racial determination. The Jewish Free School was guilty of racial discrimination. Or was it?

In order to highlight the problems with the Supreme Court's decision, let us imagine that both of M's parents were Italian by birth, or for that matter Chinese. M would then be ethnically Italian or Chinese. But had his mother undergone a halakhically incontestable conversion, M would be fully Jewish, according to Rabbi Sacks and JFS—race, genes, and ethnicity notwithstanding. This is the traditional Jewish position, and there is nothing racist about it. Thus, an M with exactly the same "racial" or "ethnic" makeup would be considered Jewish had his mother satisfied the *religious* requirements of conversion. This is the traditional Jewish position, and there is nothing racist about it.

As an internal Jewish matter, the wisdom of the Chief Rabbi and JFS's decision to exclude students such as M calls for serious reflection. But even from the perspective of the non-Orthodox denominations, whose conversions the Chief Rabbi does not recognize, the result of the case should be alarming. All Jewish denominations accept the proposition that Jewish identity is determined by either descent or conversion, though they differ on the precise rules. Indeed, the Masorti movement accepts the same Jewish legal tradition, but interprets it more liberally. A Reform school could also face an M who felt Jewish but was not so by Reform criteria, say because neither of his parents had converted, as noted by Rabbi Bayfield, head of England's Reform Movement in a statement cited in the Court's decision.

The Majority has conflated the secular anthropological criterion of ethnicity, which is the province of the civil authorities, with the religious criterion, which is the province of religious authorities.

Was the Chief Rabbi concerned with ethnicity as the Majority Held? To the Minority, it was clear that his concerns were not even remotely ethnic or racial. Thus, Lord Rodger in dissent:

> Faced with a boy whose mother had converted under Orthodox auspices, the governors would have considered him for admission without pausing for a single second to enquire whether he or his mother came from Rome, Brooklyn, Siberia, or Buenos Aires, whether she had once been a Roman Catholic or a Muslim, or whether he or she came from a close-knit Jewish community or had chosen to assimilate and disappear into secular society. In other words, the "ethnic origins" of the child or his mother … would not have played any part in the governors' decision to admit him … the only ground for treating M less favourably than the comparator [i.e. a son of an Halakhikly converted woman] is the difference in their respective mothers' conversions—a religious, not a racial ground.

This is cogent but it should be noted that it is this very example given by Lord Rodger which seems to animate the Majority too. Although never explicitly articulated, the following argument seems to underlie the Court's decision: How is it possible that the Jewish Free School and the Chief Rabbi can consider someone eligible who is an atheist, uninterested in Judaism, believes in none of its propositions, and whose main reason for going to JFS is that it is excellent and free, while rejecting a candidate such as M, who is a deeply religious, committed, and knowledgeable Jew, albeit non-Orthodox? Since the first applicant is, by definition, not religious, preferential treatment of him over M must be due to racial discrimination.

What is wrong with the above implicit reasoning? Well, nothing except that it is underwritten by a profoundly Christian understanding of religion and religious membership. It is shaped by the fundamental Christian idea of the New Covenant in which the "old" covenantal boundaries of Israelite peoplehood were dissolved, and a universal salvific message was extended to all *individuals* regardless of the people to whom they belonged. To quote Paul, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." On this view, you are Christian if and only if you believe in Christ. This idea of religion as a matter of doctrinal conviction has shaped the Western sensibility as to what religious membership means. It is to be respected. But it is not the Jewish understanding of religious belonging. In fact it originated in a rejection of Judaism. (Paul also spoke of being circumcised in the heart rather than the flesh.) One can, as a Jewish religious proposition, belong to the Jewish people even if you have lost your faith.

What is troubling about the Majority is its sheer incomprehension and consequent intolerance of a religion whose self-understanding is different than that of Christianity. Their anthropological reading of ethnicity is suitable in the circumstances for which the Race Relations Act was intended. But when the law makes an exception for religion and the religion in question is Judaism, it should be understood on its own terms, not on Christian (or, more precisely, Protestant) terms.

But, one might protest, even if one accepted the self-understanding of the religion in question, that acceptance cannot be absolute. We would not allow child sacrifice, even if religiously mandated. What, then, if I continue to hold that the Jewish self-understanding and definition of membership—descent and conversion—just are discriminatory? In fact, this is the unstated conclusion of the Majority's decision, and it is deeply troubling. For the most troubling discrimination I see here is the one against Jewish institutions applying religious criteria of membership. Lady Hale speaks of the Jewish "people." The Jewish religious definition of peoplehood—descent and conversion—is no different from all of the secular definitions with which I am familiar. You are French, or Italian, or German, or Irish, or Australian or, yes, British, if you are born to a parent or parents belonging legally to that people (descent) or if you legally naturalize (conversion). Some countries add place of birth, but practically none exclude the two first criteria.

Among the rights of being British is eligibility for election to Parliament. Imagine a different M, born and bred in Britain, speaking English and feeling entirely patriotic, but, alas, the son of non-British parents whose naturalizations were invalid by extant British rules. "I am afraid, Sir," the British election officer will say, "that until such time as you legally naturalize, you may not stand for election, which is a right reserved to Britons." "Even to Britons," M might protest, "who never set foot in this country, who hate it, who disparage it, who want to abolish the Monarchy?" "I am afraid so" would be the inevitable answer of the election officer in Britain and in virtually every other country.

If the majority of the Law Lords of the Supreme Court in the JFS case accept the peoplehood of the Jews, why would they hold the Jewish *religious* definition of membership to be discriminatory when it is similar to the secular universal practice among all other peoples?

__J. H. H. Weiler__ is University Professor as well as holder of the European Union Jean Monnet Chair at New York University School of Law, and Co-Director of the Tikvah Center for Law & Jewish Civilization.

Presenting the 2009 - 10 Fellows at The Tikvah Center for Law & Jewish Civilization

Saul Berman
Berkowitz Fellow
Rabbi Saul J. Berman is Associate Professor of Jewish Studies at Stern College for Women of Yeshiva University, and an Adjunct Professor at Columbia University School of Law.

Moshe Idel
Joint Fellow, The Straus Institute
Moshe Idel is Max Cooper Professor in Jewish Thought, Department of Jewish Thought, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, and Senior Researcher at the Shalom Hartman Institute.

Aharon Shemesh
Aharon Shemesh is Associate Professor at the department of Talmud, Bar-Ilan University.

Avital Margalit
Avital Margalit teaches courses on property law and the sociology of law at the Law Faculty of Bar Ilan University.

Beth Berkowitz
Beth Berkowitz is Assistant Professor of Talmud and Rabbinics at the Jewish Theological Seminary.

Adiel Schremer
Adiel Schremer is an Associate Professor in Bar-Ilan University's Department of Jewish History and heads the Halpern Center for the Study of Jewish Self-Perception.

Yishai Beer
Yishai Beer is a Professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem Faculty of Law, specializing in taxation.

James Kugel
James L. Kugel is Director of the Institute for the History of the Jewish Bible at Bar Ilan University in Israel and chairman of the Bible department there.

The Tikvah Center for Law & Jewish Civilization

The Tikvah Center is directed by Moshe Halbertal and J. H. H. Weiler. Please visit us at www.nyutikvah.org for more information about The Tikvah Center, and its Fellowship and Affiliate programs.

NYU LAW
New York University School of Law

No Sex in the City

BY YAIR ROSENBERG

Srugim is the kind of show that doesn't usually make it to television, even in Israel. Your conventional network docket does not have a slot for a "faith-based soap opera," and for good reason—between disinterested non-religious viewers and easily offended religious ones, there would seem to be a very small demographic for such programming. *Srugim*—the title refers to the knitted *kippot* worn by modern Orthodox men—never did get the memo, and its first season garnered praise, as well as a sizable audience, from all corners of Israeli society and even some American viewers, who watched it online. After its successful maiden run in the summer of 2008, the show was picked up for a second season, which is airing now, while the first season is available on DVD with English subtitles.

The *Srugim* storyline follows a group of 30-something modern religious singles in the Katamon neighborhood of Jerusalem as they attempt to navigate the frequently contradictory worlds of contemporary Israel and traditional observance. In the first scene, we meet Yifat, the graphic designer who photoshops *kippot* onto models in religious product advertisements, and her roommate, Hodayah, a Hebrew University Bible student who struggles daily with her faith. We soon encounter Nati, the surgeon with commitment issues; Amir, the recently divorced *ulpana* (women's seminary) Hebrew instructor who moves in with him; and Reut, the high-powered financier who motorcycles to work and is learning to read the *haftarah* for her women's prayer group. These characters play a romantic (if generally chaste) game of musical chairs, dating each other and assorted colorful supporting cast members.

So what transforms this ostensibly niche show into an Israeli pop culture phenomenon? Viewers of faith likely appreciate the sympathetic portrayal of the *dati* (religious) lifestyle and seeing moments of their daily experience brought to life on the screen for the first time—whether it be a typical Shabbat meal, the difficulties of conducting modest relationships, how one keeps a kosher kitchen, or the pressures and loneliness of being single in the marriage-oriented Orthodox world. At the same time, what makes *Srugim* work for more general audiences is that its protagonists are undeniably human. *Srugim* is about *people* who happen not to turn on lights on Saturdays—not about the Sabbath restrictions themselves.

Perhaps most importantly, the show is not out to make a polemical point, nor does it attempt to insert itself into internal religious debates or discussions of the role of religion in Israeli society. Recognizing that religious thought does not reduce to sound bites, the show chooses to portray religious life while avoiding discussions of theology. Rather than question the *dati* lifestyle, it takes it for granted. Religion is in this manner the backdrop and catalyst for personal interaction, but not the focus.

This non-judgmental stance does not mean that the show whitewashes the fault-lines between different communities in Israel, religious or otherwise. We experience the awkward silence when a pop culture reference is made at the Shabbat table (*Seinfeld*'s "soup nazi," naturally), to the confusion of the lone yeshiva student who, it quickly becomes apparent, has never watched TV. We feel the discomfort when an Orthodox man discovers the only pair of *tefillin* available in the apartment complex belongs to an American girl. And in one of the most powerful storylines of the show, we see how one character's relationship with a *chiloni* (secular) man ultimately fails when she is unable to bridge the gap between her world and his.

Thus, rather than having each character unrealistically and unfaithfully alter his or her personal identity, the show instead gives us people who make space for others, without compromising the courage of their convictions. Indeed, the novelty of *Srugim* is that it manages to seat the modern Orthodox feminist, the yeshiva student, and the *chiloni* around the same Shabbat table and present it as a possibility, rather than a punch-line.

A shabbat meal from Srugim. (Image by Go2Films)

This optimism is also the heart of the show's appeal—its characters evince a mutual respect that is all too often lacking in the modern Jewish and Israeli communities (conveniently, the show eschews contemporary Israeli politics). This is evident in the poignant scene where one character, after struggling with her faith and observance, decides to leave religion altogether and adopt the *chiloni* lifestyle, and her longtime *dati* roommate convinces her not to move out of their apartment ("I leave hair in the shower, you're a *chiloniyah*—we'll manage!"). *Srugim* points towards an Israel of much the same spirit.

Not everyone, though, has been ready to jump on the *Srugim* bandwagon. One prominent Religious Zionist rabbi went so far as to place the show under a religious ban, citing the questionable conduct of various *dati* characters on the show. "There is bad language and licentiousness. It is not enough to be '*shomer negiah*' [chaste], and this is also not always followed [on the show]—one needs purity and modesty," he wrote. There is more to such a rejection than reactionism to immorality on television—at stake here are conflicting visions for the Israeli *dati* community.

Srugim's co-creator and director, Eliezer "Laizy" Shapira, and many of its writers and production staff are graduates of *Ma'ale,* a film school founded in 1989 to encourage the production of entertainment sensitive to the nuances of Orthodox religious life. These students and their teachers believe that for there to be a vibrant Orthodoxy, there must be a vibrant Orthodox artistic culture. But the small yet vocal rabbinic backlash to *Srugim* throws some of the tensions inherent in this enterprise into sharp relief.

How does a religious community express its experience in art without also depicting and arguably humanizing transgression? There will always be traditionalists who will object to seeing examples of "what not to do" being exhibited by people who otherwise look and act like members of their community. But can one say anything truly relevant about being Orthodox on television if one cannot portray sin, from Sabbath violation to sexual indiscretion?

As Shapira told the *Jerusalem Post*, to make his characters convincing, "We had to make room for them to repent." Real religious people stumble and make mistakes. To say anything valuable about their lives is to talk about coping with religious failure. *Srugim* understands this: its characters have principles, and though they often bend or even break them, they always return to judge themselves by them. A character can return to his ex-wife in a moment of loneliness, while another can prepare to sleep with her boyfriend, in violation of Orthodox Jewish law, before pulling back at the last instant. Together with them, we experience the tug-of-war of faith. Try to find any other soap opera where characters routinely feel guilty over how they have treated other people or how they relate to God.

The remarkable success of *Srugim* across religious and ideological lines shows that this approach resonates with viewers of all stripes. In a world where shows like *Sex and the City* tend to glamorize the shallowest elements of human experience, *Srugim* and its characters manage to strive for meaning and not merely entertainment.

***Yair Rosenberg** is a junior at Harvard College and an Arts and Culture editor at The Harvard Crimson.*

Bob Dylan: Messiah or Escape Artist?

BY RON ROSENBAUM

BOB DYLAN: PROPHET, MYSTIC, POET
by Seth Rogovoy, Scribner Books, 336 pp., $26

In 1978, a young graduate student traveling in India named Daniel Matt wrote to Gershom Scholem, the 80-year-old Professor of Jewish Mysticism at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The letter discussed his experiences, his ambitious plans to translate the central text of Jewish mysticism, the *Zohar*, and, most of all, about Bob Dylan, who he hoped Scholem might appreciate.

> I'm also sending you *Bob Dylan Approximately*, whose author believes that Dylan draws on Kabbalistic sources consciously or unconsciously (whatever that means). The thesis does not hold water ... Be that as it may, the book is still interesting as a collage, and will give you a hippie's perspective on Robert Zimmerman (Dylan's real name).

Scholem replied:

> Your detailed account of your travels in the East and your experiences there with several friends and gurus I read with great interest ... Who was or is Robert Zimmerman, called Bob Dylan? ... Please let me know if he is a Jew. The Zimmermans divide 50% into Jews and goyim ... My receptivity to music is, alas, nothing, therefore I forego the pleasure of listening to "Blonde on Blonde" or even the more seducing "Desire." The title "Highway 61" arouses no desire in me. Maybe I am too old for it.

"Who was or is Robert Zimmerman, called Bob Dylan?" Is he a Jew? Good questions! Almost from the beginning of his career Bob Dylan né Zimmerman has had an odd, intense, divisive, often mysterious, relationship with Jews and Judaism. For some Jews (and Christians too) he has become a virtually messianic figure. In his new book, *Bob Dylan: Prophet, Mystic, Poet,* Seth Rogovoy portrays him as a kind of biblical prophet on the order of Isaiah or Jeremiah.

I'm not exaggerating the cult-like devotion of those whom I've come to call "the Bobolators" (after Shakespeare's "Bardolators"). Although there are many brilliant commentators who are able to separate the wheat from the chaff, there are others for whom there *is* no chaff, those for whom his every word and line in every lyric, no matter how casual or trivial, seems to be a burning bush of signification that speaks with numinous authority in a blaze of encrypted poetry.

He was the chosen one for the secular Jewish folkies who saw him as able to bring the messianic, if not Marxist, social gospel to the gentiles in his protest songs. While some kvetched about his name change, realistically "Zimmerman" wouldn't have served the Woody Guthrie persona he crafted. And the Woody Guthrie act *worked*. It worked so well that this middle-class Jewish boy from Hibbing, Minnesota, passed as a kind of Okie hobo. Of course, talent played a part: Dylan's "Song to Woody," really the first sign he was capable of conjuring up transcendent beauty, decisively signaled his difference from all of the other Greenwich Village *faux* Okies.

That is, until he got tired of that act and caught fire with electric rock and roll, leading to cries of betrayal and "Judas!" That famous cry of "Judas!" was heard as Dylan launched into an electric guitar set in his 1966 Royal Albert Hall concert (now available as *Live 1966* and arguably the best of the live Dylan albums). And when you think about it, it was an accusation that he was being Judas to his own Jesus.

New from JPS

CROWN OF ALEPPO
The Mystery of the Oldest Hebrew Bible Codex
Hayim Tawil and Bernard Schneider

The history and dramatic rescue of the oldest Hebrew Bible in book form

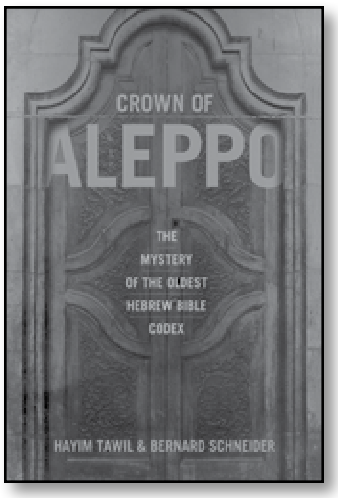
The authors tell the incredible story of the survival, against all odds, of the Aleppo Codex—one of the most authoritative and accurate traditional Masoretic texts of the Bible.

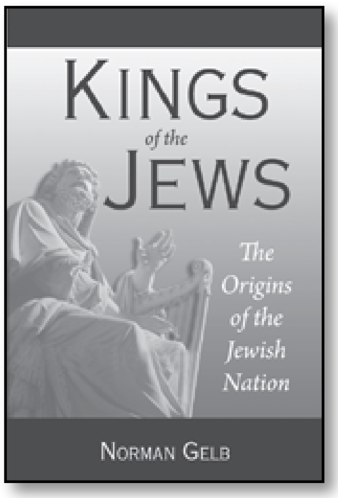
The Crown passed through history until the 15th century when it was housed in the Great Synagogue of Aleppo, Syria. When the synagogue was burned in a 1947 pogrom, the codex was thought to be destroyed, lost forever.

Miraculously, a significant portion of the Crown of Aleppo survived the fire and was smuggled from the synagogue ruins to an unknown location—presumably within the Aleppan Jewish community.

Ten years later, the surviving pages of the codex were secretly brought to Israel and finally moved to their current location in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

Available: April 2010
Over 50 B/W + color photographs & maps
$40 Cloth 200 pages 7" x 10"
ISBN: 978-0-8276-0895-5


CROWN OF
ALEPPO
THE MYSTERY OF THE OLDEST HEBREW BIBLE CODEX
HAYIM TAWIL & BERNARD SCHNEIDER



KINGS OF THE JEWS
The Origins of the Jewish Nation
Norman Gelb

The incredible saga of Jewish history as seen through the eyes of its monarchs

We know about King David and King Solomon, but what about kings Omri and Uzziah?

Of the more than fifty monarchs who sat on the throne of the Jews for over 1000 years, most of us can recall only a few. In *Kings of the Jews*, Norman Gelb tells us the real stories of them all, revealing how a remarkably resilient people survived divisions, discord, and conquest to forge a vibrant identity that has lasted to the present day.

Kings of the Jews explores some of the most dramatic periods in Jewish history: the united Israelite kingdom under David and Solomon, the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah, the Babylonian exile, and the destruction of the Second Temple and the Roman conquest of Jerusalem.

Available: March 2010
With illustrations, maps, chronologies, and index
$22 paper 190 pages 6" x 9"
ISBN: 978-0-8276-0913-6

THE JEWISH PUBLICATION SOCIETY
2100 Arch Street, Philadelphia, PA 19103
800-234-3151 or 800-355-1165 fax 215-568-2017
www.jewishpub.org

But he was wickedly good at electric rock and roll and there was a period when he was writing unconsciously great songs, with an alchemy of cynicism, nihilism, psychedelicism, and absurdist black humor: The flash and filigree of "Highway 61 Revisited"; the "thin wild mercury" sound (as Dylan once described it) of *Blonde on Blonde*. I still believe this was his moment of greatest transcendence culminating in the pure masterpiece, *Blood on the Tracks*. In those first two albums, especially, one could place Dylan in a secular Jewish cultural/historical context: the largely Jewish "black humor" movement whose genesis lay in the absurd horror of the Holocaust, from Lenny Bruce to Joseph Heller and Norman Mailer to Philip Roth.

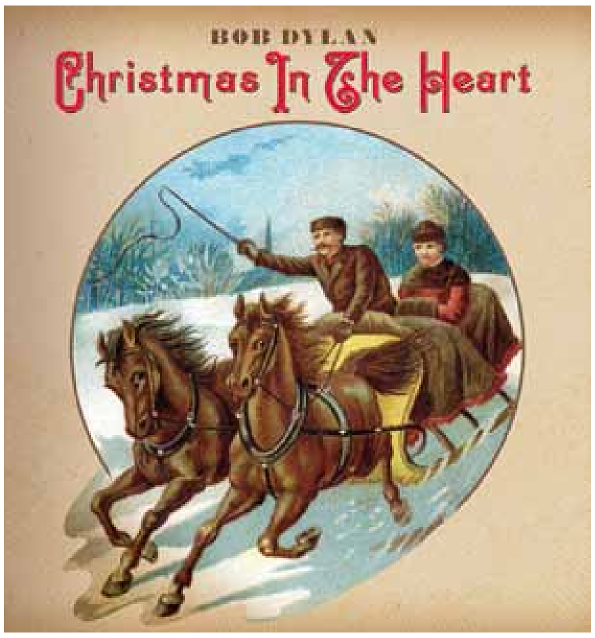
But, as Matt wrote to Scholem, some Jews have always wanted to claim him for more traditional Jewish piety, and Rogovoy is the latest. It should be said that those who labor in the vineyards of Dylanology (and I'm now working on my own take on him) owe Rogovoy a great debt for persuasively tracking so many Dylan words, lines, and allusions to Biblical sources we might not have noticed. But should we therefore expect Dylan to behave himself as a specifically Jewish artist?

Rogovoy tries to make the case that the most important thing about Dylan is his Jewishness. Even when Dylan converted to Christianity, Rogovoy assures us, he—and his songs—were still really Jewish. And for a time—after the explicitly Christian period of the late seventies and early eighties passed—when Dylan was seen on Chabad Lubavitcher telethons and then, more privately at Chabad services all over the map, it seemed like Dylan had finally found his home in the messianic Hasidic sect.

But then, somewhat to Rogovoy's misfortune, just as this book proclaiming Dylan's essential Jewishness was about to be published, Dylan's label made an announcement that even those like myself, no longer easily shocked by Dylan's choices, found shocking. Rogovoy's Jewish "prophet, mystic, poet" was going to release a "traditional" Christmas album, entitled "Christmas in the Heart." Yes, we all know (as Garrison Keillor churlishly reminded us recently) that Jews have written many Christmas songs, but mostly of the secular "White Christmas" sort. In this album Dylan sings real devotional songs, including "O Come All Ye Faithful."

But could there be a connection between Rogovoy's book and the Christmas album? Rogovoy is so relentless in nailing every Dylan utterance to some Biblical or Talmudic or kabbalistic source that on some level Dylan might have known he was about to be tied to this procrustean bed of piety for good. This is more metaphorical conjecture than biographical theory. But if you watch the video of "Must be Santa" from the *Christmas in the Heart* album (by far the best thing on it), you see a Dylanesque guy desperately trying to flee from a Christmas party and hurling himself through the glass of the venue to escape it.

That's Dylan: more escape artist than preacher. It was Dylan who told us he became his own "enemy / in the instant that I preach." Nonetheless, Rogovoy's source-hunting is so relentless, one can only bow to his ingenuity as he pins just about every Dylan line you can think of, like a dead butterfly, to its biblical source box. I was particularly impressed by the wealth of allusions to the Davidic stories he finds. On the other hand, Dylan has been aptly described as a "magpie" who snatches images and allusions from any context, as he happens upon them. And what Rogovoy sees as piety may be mag-piety. A less contestable aspect of Rogovoy's exemplary research is his deepening of the detailed picture now emerging of Dylan's Jewish upbringing. Rogovoy shows that the Zimmermans were at "the center of Jewish life in Hibbing," and that young Robert's bar mitzvah broke attendance records at the local hotel.



The cover of Bob Dylan's "Christmas in the Heart," released by Sony in October, 2009.

Certainly, we know Dylan has remained preoccupied with God. There's an excerpt in Rogovoy's book from an interview with Dylan (this was in the late '70s and the interviewer, as it happens, was me). Dylan was discussing the ills of the modern world and, in his inscrutable deadpan, suddenly mentioned that he had seen a *Time* magazine cover that asked "Is God dead"?

"Would you think that was a responsible thing to do?" Dylan asked me, with an emphasis on *responsible* that made it either genuinely indignant or joking—or both. Then he added "What does God think of that? I mean if you were God, how would you like to see that written about yourself?" It was funny, Dylan trying to feel God's pain, asking the primal Dylan question of God: how does it feel?

Perhaps the biggest stretch of the book is Rogovoy's rationalization of Dylan's Jesus period. Talk about taking the Christ out of Christmas. Consider when he comes to what he calls "Dylan's most direct statement of Christian belief," on the album *Slow Train Coming*. "The official published lyric of 'When You Gonna Wake Up' has him singing, 'There's a Man upon a cross and He's been crucified / Do You have any idea why or for who He died?'"

"But," Rogovoy tells us, as if he has discovered a loophole, "on the recording Dylan actually sings, 'There's a man on the cross and he's been crucified for you / Believe in his power that's all you gotta do.'" Either way it's a pretty straightforward declaration that the crucifixion is the path to salvation. But wait! Rogovoy seeks to obfuscate Dylan's rare if unappealing didacticism: "The line seems tacked on to the end of the song; nothing that comes before prepares a listener for this statement of faith; there is no case being made that leads up to this as the logical (or illogical) conclusion; it's practically a *non sequitur* as it appears in the song."

You can almost see him sweat. But it's simply not true that nothing prepares the listener or that it's a *non sequitur*. It's more like a culmination that Rogovoy can't abide. He denies Dylan the right, misguided or not, to be the person he was then, because it challenges the ironclad rigidity of Rogovoy's thesis. This transparent sophistry ("tacked on" could be another person's "triumphant conclusion") allows Rogovoy to avoid confonting Dylan's soul-searching.

Still, there's something there. As Daniel Matt, now the distinguished translator of the *Zohar*, put it to me in an e-mail:

> For many years I worshiped Dylan. I occasionally referred to him as *Baba Dilan*, Aramaic for "our gateway," to truth and wisdom. For some reason, I always wanted him to be very deeply Jewish, whether or not he was. I felt that he saw things in their stark reality, that his prophetic vision penetrated to the core of everything and his poetic genius enabled him to share that with others.

***Ron Rosenbaum**, a columnist for* Slate, *is the author of* Explaining Hitler *and* The Shakespeare Wars, *and is working on a book on Bob Dylan for Yale University Press.*

Coming in the Summer issue of the JEWISH REVIEW OF BOOKS

Steven Zipperstein: ***How a Stalinist Spy Invented Ghetto Nostalgia***
Richard I. Cohen: ***Artistic Splendor in the Sephardic Diaspora***
Paul Reitter: ***Kafka's New Life***
Hava Tirosh Samuelson: ***The Zohar in Translation***
Abraham Socher: ***The Chabad Paradox***

Meanwhile, visit us at www.jewishreviewofbooks.com

Cannon Fire Over Sarajevo and Sin in Ansbach: A Passage from Rabbi Jacob Emden's 18th Century Memoir

RABBI JACOB EMDEN, TRANSLATED BY JACOB J. SCHACTER

The autobiography of the matriarch and businesswoman Gluckel of Hameln (1646-1724) has long been available in English. So has the autobiography of Solomon Maimon (1753-1800), the philosopher and notorious heretic. But the other major Jewish autobiography of the eighteenth century, that of the sage and heresy-hunter Jacob Emden (1698?-1776), has up to now been published only in the Hebrew in two faulty editions (Warsaw, 1896 and Jerusalem, 1979), and, interestingly enough, in French (1992). Emden wrote in the flowery Hebrew, replete with biblical and rabbinic allusions, that was characteristic of his time. He was also strikingly candid, almost modern, in his descriptions of himself and others.

This excerpt from Emden's fascinating tale comes from a section of the book dealing with the life of his father, Chakham Zevi Ashkenazi (1660?-1718), a man after whom Emden patterned himself in many ways. It has been translated for us by Rabbi Jacob J. Schacter, University Professor of Jewish History and Jewish Thought at Yeshiva University, who has written extensively on Emden's life and work. Professor Schacter is currently preparing a critical edition of the Hebrew text from a manuscript in the Bodleian Library of Oxford University, from which this excerpt is taken.

My revered father was also *of beautiful form and fair to look upon* (Gen. 39:6) and, with this, practiced extreme piety from his youth. As a result, enormously wealthy people desired him [for their daughters]. He was engaged to and married the daughter of a very rich man, from among the wealthy of the community of old Buda, who spent a great deal of money on his behalf. In Buda, my revered father was a considerably rich man. Subsequently, he was the rabbi and Chakham of the community of Sarajevo in the land of Bosnia among whose residents there also were extremely affluent men. When the city of Buda was captured by the [Prussian] king, may his majesty be exalted, the entire [Jewish] community went into captivity. The feet of my grandfather and grandmother were put into fetters and the commander of the Prussian army, who captured them and into whose lot they fell, brought them to Berlin where they were ransomed.

My revered father escaped from there through a miraculous and wondrous event when the city first came under siege. A fiery ball from a large fire barrel called a cannon came and fell upon the house in which my revered father of blessed memory dwelt. It smashed the house into chips and splinters, and the [cannon] ball killed his first wife together with the young girl he had by her. He was in another adjoining room in the house and it did not harm him at all. He was saved *by the mercy of God upon him* (Gen. 19:16); it was a miracle. From there he *fled and escaped* (1 Sam. 19:18) ... He was [then] accepted as rabbi in the holy community of Sarajevo and served that congregation, which treated him with great respect, until the siege of Ofen ended. When the city of Sarajevo's time approached and it too came under siege by the armed forces of the [Prussian] king, may his majesty be exalted, and when he heard that his father and mother were captured, my revered father left and departed from that country and came to the land of Germany. Throughout the long way and difficult wandering he did not want to accept gift[s] from any person even though he enjoyed a great reputation [and] wherever he came they [i.e., the local inhabitants] trembled [with respect] before him. He managed with the little bit of money found in his possession. When he arrived in Venice, he was a guest at the home of the distinguished, pious, and eminent scholar, the honorable master, Rabbi Samuel Aboab, may the memory of the righteous be for a blessing, who demonstrated an extra measure of affection for my revered father. There the money was exhausted from his pouch, practically every penny was gone from [his] pocket. [However], in a wondrous way, God arranged for him [to meet] one of the Hungarian noblemen who owed him a certain amount [of money]. He came there, "having been caused to come to the same inn," and paid my revered father his entire debt in full. Thus, he was not compelled to abandon the virtue of piety to which he clung from his youth, to hate gifts, in keeping with what our Sages said, "A man is led [by God] along the path he [himself] wants to follow" (Makkot 10b), *for the Lord was with him* (Gen. 39:23). From there he went to the state of Ansbach.

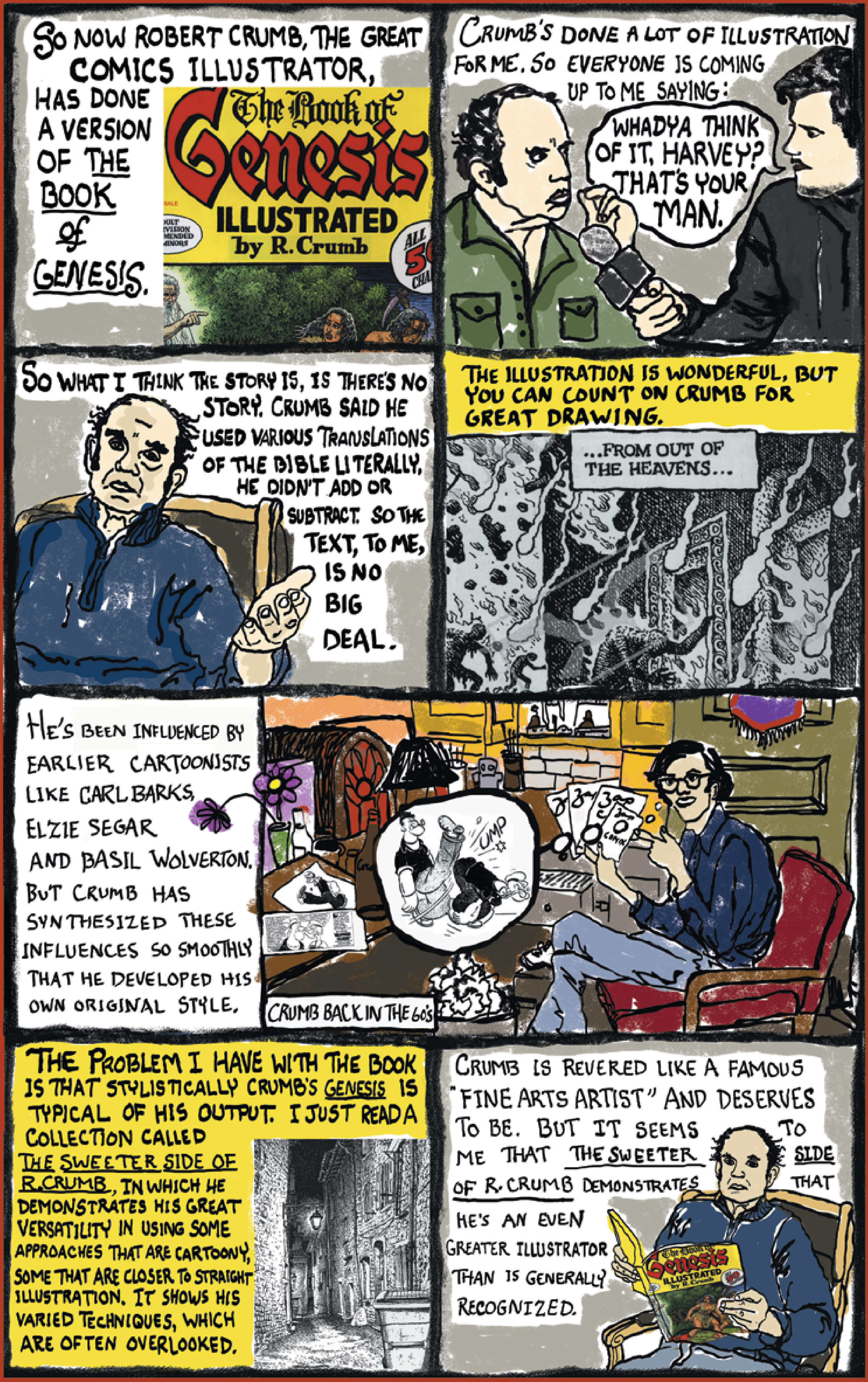
A fiery ball from a large fire barrel called a cannon came and fell upon the house in which my father dwelt.

It was at this time that an unsavory event occurred with the very prominent wealthy man, Modl Ansbach. He had succumbed to an overpowering compulsion [to yield to] the temptation of his passions which enticed him into marrying a woman who, by rabbinic law, was forbidden to him. He requested of one hundred rabbis that they permit her to him. He [indeed] found several of them in the land of Poland whence he sent "a messenger to commit a sin" with a bag of [bribe] money in his hand. For pieces of silver several of them consented to him, to release the bond of the prohibition. Some he bribed with a great deal of money and obtained their signatures; with regard to others, he falsely claimed [their support]. When my revered father of blessed memory passed through there, this communal leader tried to persuade him as well and begged of him that he too should sign for him the writ of permission. He tried to open the palm of his hand [i.e., to bribe him] in order to achieve his desired goal. [However,] my revered father scolded him, threw him out with a rebuke, and spat before him for having asked him [to do] such an improper thing.

What punishment was forthcoming for Modl? This matter is widely known and has been publicized. For after having in fact married her, [he became very ill] and [his] limbs dropped off. Thus, from Heaven they were separated so that they not be joined with one another in sin. This was a great sanctification of the Divine Name for it became abundantly apparent how much greater and more stringent are the words of the Sages than the words of the Torah [i.e., biblical law]. For every day we see deliberate sinners like usurers, thieves and robbers, perjurers, those who shave their beards and [generally] transgress against the Torah. Yet, the Holy One, blessed be He, defers His anger, witnesses His shame and is silent. He does not collect from them His due in this world; on the contrary, He repays them their reward to their faces, to destroy them. [However,] regarding the decrees and ordinances of the Sages, he is not indulgent and does not wait. Punishment is not long in coming, God forbid, in order to demonstrate His love for them [i.e., the Sages], for all their words are like coals of fire. Thus do we find [here] explicitly that He was more stringent in enforcing the honor of the righteous than His own honor. This has [in fact] occurred frequently as can be determined by any intelligent Jew who will examine historical events and not consider them matters of chance. As I will further inform you later on, we have seen and know for a certainty that the end of a person who transgresses against the words of the Sages will be [either] premature death or poverty and ugly afflictions worse than death.

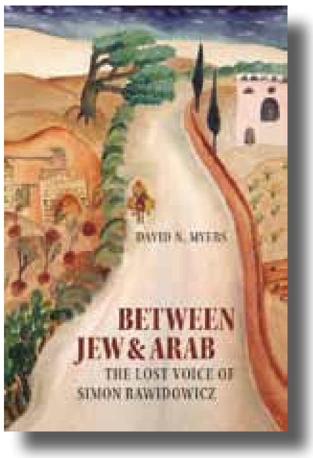
After various vicissitudes, my grandfather, together with his wife, my grandmother, came to Altona and [there] beheld their beloved son, my revered father of blessed memory, held in high esteem. He had already married my revered mother, the Rabbanit, may she rest in peace, as I will write later, with God's help. From there they traveled to the Holy Land via Poland and merited to settle in Jerusalem, may she be built and established speedily in our days.

"The Genesis Review" Written by Harvey Pekar illustrated by Tara Seibel


SO NOW ROBERT CRUMB, THE GREAT COMICS ILLUSTRATOR, HAS DONE A VERSION OF THE BOOK OF GENESIS.
The Book of Genesis ILLUSTRATED by R. Crumb
CRUMB'S DONE A LOT OF ILLUSTRATION FOR ME. SO EVERYONE IS COMING UP TO ME SAYING:
WHADYA THINK OF IT, HARVEY? THAT'S YOUR MAN.
SO WHAT I THINK THE STORY IS, IS THERE'S NO STORY. CRUMB SAID HE USED VARIOUS TRANSLATIONS OF THE BIBLE LITERALLY, HE DIDN'T ADD OR SUBTRACT. SO THE TEXT, TO ME, IS NO BIG DEAL.
THE ILLUSTRATION IS WONDERFUL, BUT YOU CAN COUNT ON CRUMB FOR GREAT DRAWING.
...FROM OUT OF THE HEAVENS...
HE'S BEEN INFLUENCED BY EARLIER CARTOONISTS LIKE CARL BARKS, ELZIE SEGAR AND BASIL WOLVERTON. BUT CRUMB HAS SYNTHESIZED THESE INFLUENCES SO SMOOTHLY THAT HE DEVELOPED HIS OWN ORIGINAL STYLE.
UMP
CRUMB BACK IN THE 60's
THE PROBLEM I HAVE WITH THE BOOK IS THAT STYLISTICALLY CRUMB'S GENESIS IS TYPICAL OF HIS OUTPUT. I JUST READ A COLLECTION CALLED THE SWEETER SIDE OF R. CRUMB, IN WHICH HE DEMONSTRATES HIS GREAT VERSATILITY IN USING SOME APPROACHES THAT ARE CARTOONY, SOME THAT ARE CLOSER TO STRAIGHT ILLUSTRATION. IT SHOWS HIS VARIED TECHNIQUES, WHICH ARE OFTEN OVERLOOKED.
CRUMB IS REVERED LIKE A FAMOUS "FINE ARTS ARTIST" AND DESERVES TO BE. BUT IT SEEMS TO ME THAT THE SWEETER SIDE OF R. CRUMB DEMONSTRATES THAT HE'S AN EVEN GREATER ILLUSTRATOR THAN IS GENERALLY RECOGNIZED.
Genesis ILLUSTRATED by R. Crumb

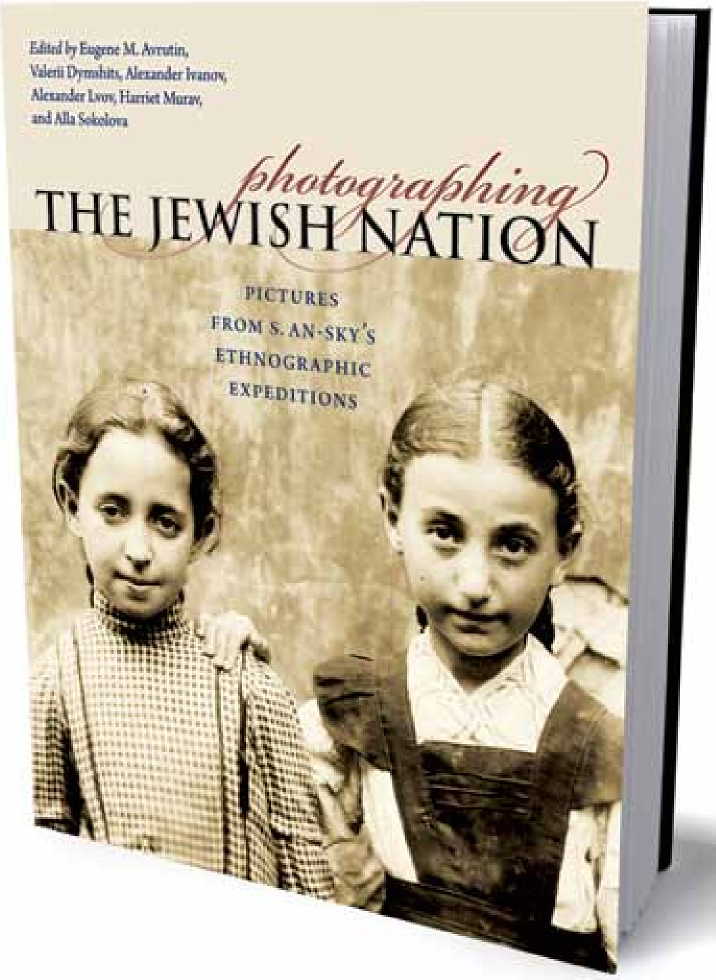
PANELS 1, 4 AND 6 ART BY R. CRUMB

BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY PRESS CONGRATULATES THE *JEWISH REVIEW OF BOOKS* ON ITS INAUGURAL ISSUE


DAVID N. MYERS
BETWEEN JEW & ARAB
THE LOST VOICE OF SIMON RAWIDOWICZ

"Myers demonstrates his virtuosity at intellectual history as he creates a marvelous context for us to understand this major thinker."

—*Jewish Journal*

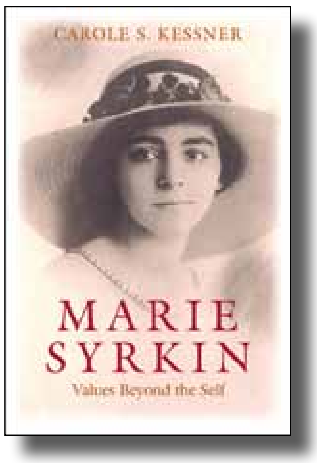

Edited by Eugene M. Avrutin, Valerii Dymshits, Alexander Ivanov, Alexander Lvov, Harriet Murav, and Alla Sokolova
photographing THE JEWISH NATION
PICTURES FROM S. AN-SKY'S ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPEDITIONS

Over 170 amazing photographs of Jewish life in the Pale of Settlement, from S. An-sky's ethnographic expeditions

"Eye-opening . . . [these]photographs contain novelistic richness."

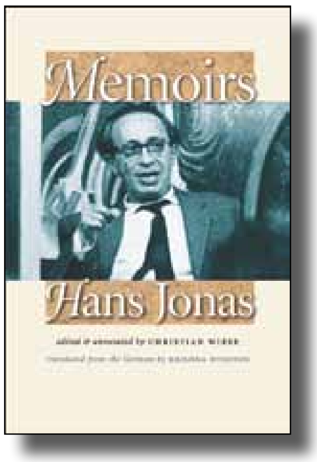
—*The Forward*

WINNER OF THE NATIONAL JEWISH BOOK AWARD 2008


CAROLE S. KESSNER
MARIE SYRKIN
Values Beyond the Self

"It is not sentimental over praise to say that Marie Syrkin deserves a place at the roundtable of great intellects who helped shape contemporary Jewish-American liberalism."

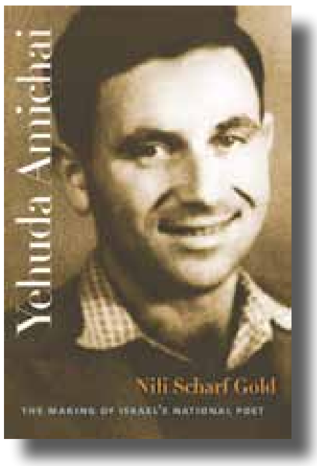
—*Haaretz*


Memoirs
Hans Jonas

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN BY KRISHNA WINSTON

"This memoir, [is]a collection of heterogeneous unpublished material—diaries, memoirs, letters, interviews, and public statement—shaped and organized by Christian Wiese."

—*Shofar*


Yehuda Amichai
Nili Scharf Gold
THE MAKING OF ISRAEL'S NATIONAL POET

"The integrity of Nili Gold's research shines out of every page of this book. "

—Robert A. Caro, Pulitzer Prize-winning biographer and author of *The Power Broker* and *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*

For More Information About These and Other Brandeis Titles, Visit www.upne.com/brandeis.html

Brandeis University Press | Publisher of compelling and innovative studies of the Jewish experience |