Hillel Halkin Law in the Desert: A Commentary • **Vanessa L. Ochs** Passover in DC

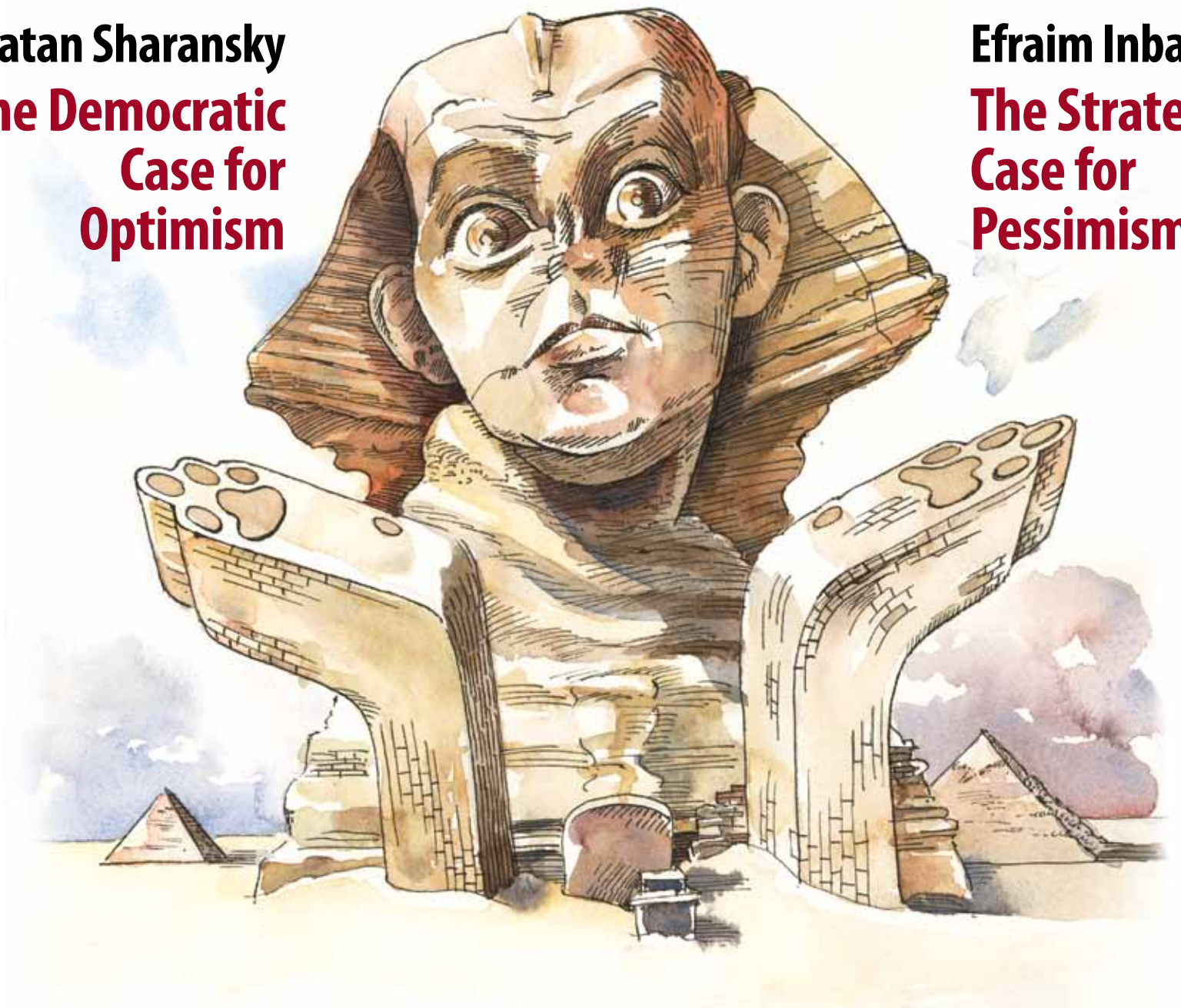
Jewish Review of Books

Volume 2, Number 1 Spring 2011 $6.95

What Comes Next?

Natan Sharansky
The Democratic Case for Optimism

Efraim Inbar
The Strategic Case for Pessimism



How to Think About Revolutions in the Middle East

Shlomo Avineri • Amr Bargisi • Eva Bellin • Daniel Kurtzer
Menahem Milson • Itamar Rabinovich • Michael Walzer

David J. Wolpe: The Chief Rabbi's Achievement **PLUS Jewish Parenting, Joan Nathan's French Cholent,** and the **Life & Fate of Lucky Grossman**

0 74470 25782 0

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 all **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.
For **customer service and subscription-related issues**, please call (877) 753-0337 or write to service@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 2011

LETTERS

4 **Independence in Prayer, With Respect to Argument, The Heirs of Secularism**

FEATURES

5 NATAN SHARANSKY **The Stakes in the Middle East** *Reformers and democrats represent the real hope for a future of peace, liberty, and—not least—stability in the Middle East.*

7 EFRAIM INBAR **Israel and the Old-New Middle East** *The social and political realities of the Middle East make democracy unlikely. A rough neighborhood may be getting rougher.*

10 VANESSA L. OCHS **Passover on the Potomac** *Two new haggadahs from our nation's capital—one new and one old— and the "audacious hope" of redemption.*

REVIEWS

13 NORMAN A. STILLMAN **Buried Treasure** *Sacred Trash: The Lost and Found World of the Cairo Geniza* by Adina Hoffman and Peter Cole

15 MARC B. SHAPIRO **That in Aleppo Once** *Crown of Aleppo: The Mystery of the Oldest Hebrew Bible Codex* by Hayim Tawil and Bernard Schneider

17 MAXIM D. SHRAYER **Lucky Grossman** *The Road: Stories, Journalism, and Essays* by Vasily Grossman Edited by Robert Chandler, translated from the Russian by Robert and Elizabeth Chandler with Olga Mukovnikova

20 STEPHEN J. WHITFIELD **Our Exodus** *Leon Uris and the Americanization of Israel's Founding Story* by M. M. Silver • *Leon Uris: Life of a Best Seller* by Ira B. Nadel

22 GERALD STEINBERG **Begin's Shakespeare** *The Prime Ministers: An Intimate Narrative of Israeli Leadership* by Yehuda Avner

25 DEREK J. PENSLAR **The Hands of Others** *The Arabs and the Holocaust: The Arab-Israeli War of Narratives* by Gilbert Achcar

28 SAMUEL HELFONT **Qutb's Milestones** *Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Radical Islam* by John Calvert

29 BETH KISSILEFF **Biblical Start-Ups** *Beginnings: Reflections on the Bible's Intriguing Firsts* by Meir Shalev, translated by Stuart Schoffman

30 MICHEL GURFINKIEL **Melting Pot** *Quiches, Kugels, and Couscous: My Search for Jewish Cooking in France* by Joan Nathan

32 ABBY WISSE SCHACHTER **Grading Parents** *The Blessings of a B Minus* by Wendy Mogel

34 DAVID J. WOLPE **The Chief Rabbi's Achievement** *Future Tense: Jews, Judaism, and Israel in the Twenty-First Century* by Jonathan Sacks, and seven other books by Sacks

READINGS

38 HILLEL HALKIN **Law in the Desert** *Studying the weekly portion with Jerome, Nachmanides, and others, the seemingly tedious parts of Exodus become compelling.*

SYMPOSIUM

44 **Thinking About Revolution and Democracy in the Middle East** by Shlomo Avineri, Amr Bargisi, Eva Bellin, Daniel Kurtzer, Menahem Milson, Itamar Rabinovich, and Michael Walzer

IN MEMORIAM

50 RUSSELL JACOBY **Daniel Bell (1919-2011)**

LAST WORD

51 JOSHUA MURAVCHIK **Trashing Dictatorship in Cairo**

On the cover: "Sphinx of the Perplexed" by Mark Anderson.

Independence in Prayer

In her article "Minyan 2.0" (Winter 2011), Margot Lurie writes: "There is an open secret about Hadar: like many other minyanim, it is funded by lots of organized community money, offered by institutions eager to keep young Jews connected to their heritage." As is clear from the budget summary accessible to the public on our website, this is untrue. The current annual budget for Kehilat Hadar is $165,000, nearly all of which was raised from Kehilat Hadar participants. The exception is a $3000 micro-grant that we received from UJA-Federation of New York to help fund scholarships for those in financial need to attend our annual Shavuot retreat this year. Our sister organization, Mechon Hadar, makes no secret of raising money from foundations, but it is not an independent minyan and is a separate not-for-profit organization with different leadership, boards, and constituencies.

Lurie may disagree with us about the merits of the the independent minyan movement, but she should check her facts before going to print. This misstatement maligns the generosity and responsibility of our community.

Yael Buechler, Tamar Fox, Ashira Konigsburg,
Dana Kresel, and Marc Melzer
Gabbaim, Kehilat Hadar
New York, NY

As the rabbi of a synagogue, I hope that this brief letter will show that one need not be a 20-something participant in an independent minyan in a church basement to be upset by Margot Lurie's review of Elie Kaunfer's *Empowered Judaism*.

Lurie claims that Kaunfer fails to solve the problem of meaning, instead descending into corporate, mundane logistics about how to run a minyan (such as: start on time). The only response to this is *ein hakhi nami*—yes! The book is not meant to be a theology. The point is to help the Jewish community set up the necessary infrastructure for Jews to access the tradition to try to find meaning. In other words, Kaunfer is not trying to rewrite Heschel, as Lurie claims, but rather, to rewrite the *Steinsaltz Reference Guide to the Talmud.*

Further, her claim that independent minyanim are populated by slacker 20- and 30-somethings living off of the largesse of their parents and the institutional Jewish world is simply not supported by facts.

Rabbi Michaʾel Rosenberg
Fort Tryon Jewish Center
New York, NY

A *yashar koach* to Margot Lurie for her review essay, which balances the accolades heaped upon the latest movement of independent minyanim as "new" and ground-breaking, and captures much about the general minyan dynamic.

Empowered Judaism is this generation's version of the then-challenging *The [New] Jewish Catalog.* Even in the minyanim of the 1980's (oh, yes, those dinosaurs of prayer), one could observe the drive that Judaism inherently has toward "more" and "higher." Now, as then, the independent minyan is seen by its founders as the triumph of prayer over ideology.

Shirah Hecht
Penn State University

Margot Lurie Responds

The Hadar gabbaim focus on the issue of funding—a minor and subsidiary point in my review. I am glad to stipulate that Hadar differs from others in its fund-raising practices. But their letter does enable me to clarify the misperception of Rabbi Michaʾel Rosenberg. I do not claim, as he states, that independent minyanim are "populated by slacker 20- and 30-somethings." On the contrary, I criticize their corporatization. As I wrote, "The hands may be the hands of *chaverim*, but the voice is the voice of the e-bankers, lawyers, and bright-eyed young professionals." It is precisely because the cohort of minyan-goers is so high-achieving—and yet neglects to acknowledge communal needs beyond its own narrow self-involvement—that I think the movement's claims are so dubious. Nor am I under any illusion that Kaunfer is Heschel or thinks that he's Heschel. Nevertheless, his book repeatedly suggests that it is not merely a how-to-make-a-minyan guide, but an answer to the Jewish crisis of meaning—an answer that it conspicuously fails to provide.

I thank Shirah Hecht and the many readers, including members of independent minyanim who contacted me directly, for their kind remarks about my essay.

With Respect to Argument

Peter Berkowitz's "One State," a review of "*What is a Palestinian State Worth*" by Sari Nusseibeh (Winter 2011) encourages an implication of distrust in a man who has proven over the decades that he is exactly one who should be trusted to conclude a genuine and just peace between Israel and the Palestinians. Nor is the implication new, but a repeat of the accusation that Nusseibeh is a wolf in sheep's clothing advocating equal political rights for Palestinians for the purpose of voting a Jewish state out of existence. Nusseibeh has also been accused of betraying Palestinians and suffered broken arms as his punishment.

I have known Sari Nusseibeh since 1979 when I became Director of the Israel Program of Temple University's Beasley School of Law School. For many summers, Nusseibeh has appeared in our classrooms at Tel Aviv University and at Al Quds University in Jerusalem, where he is president, to discuss peace between Israelis and Palestinians. I have also lectured at Al Quds University on American Constitutional law, my area of scholarship. Sari Nusseibeh has impressed many skeptics both American and Israeli as a sincere advocate of equal respect for both sides.

In my view, not to trust Sari Nusseibeh is not to trust the peace process.

Burton Caine
Temple University - Beasley School of Law

Peter Berkowitz Responds:

Since he neither takes issue with my summary of Sari Nusseibeh's argument nor addresses my criticisms, Burton Caine implies that the very act of scrutinizing Nusseibeh's views dishonors the man and injures prospects for peace. One could wonder, however, who treats Nusseibeh and the prospects for peace with greater respect. Is it colleagues like Professor Caine—and reviewers elsewhere, most instructively David Shulman in *The New York Review of Books*—who ignore Nusseibeh's emphatic contention in his new book that Israel's Jewish and democratic dimensions are simply and utterly incompatible, and dismiss or discount his proposal for a one-state solution in which Palestinians become second-class Israeli citizens lacking political rights? Or those who take his analysis and proposals seriously, and bring into focus the misunderstandings of Israel they promote, and the violence on both sides, which, if enacted, these proposals would likely provoke?

The Heirs of Secularism

I read Allan Arkush's review of David Biale's *Not in the Heavens: The Tradition of Secular Jewish Thought* (Winter 2011) with great interest, and I was pleased to find a balanced treatment of the book. What both Biale and Arkush have missed, however, is the reality of contemporary Secular Humanistic Judaism—a real live movement with real live communities, literature, leadership, and ideology.

All too often, those who do dare to discuss secular Judaism do so either as an historical phenomenon like Yiddish socialism or kibbutz Zionism or a sociological fact of individual secularized Jews rather than as living communities and an actual philosophy of being Jewish. Why not explore how self-identified Secular and Humanistic Jews and their organizations celebrate Passover, or articulate their sense of Jewish peoplehood, or educate their children?

Of course, the word "secular" is always the chameleon, meaning both a sociological phenomenon ("secularization") and the philosophical perspective ("secular humanism"). And the phenomenon of "secular Jews" is much larger than the movement of Secular Humanistic Judaism; sociologically secular Jews may not fully identify with our ideology or *minhag*. But the phenomenon is enriched by looking not just at secularization or famous intellectuals, but also at those individuals and communities who face its reality and embrace its results. And today, not only in the 1930s.

We are the "heir and upholder of the tradition of secular Jewish thought" that Arkush was seeking in his review.

Rabbi Adam Chalom
Kol Hadash Humanistic Congregation
Berkeley, CA

The Stakes in the Middle East

BY NATAN SHARANSKY

Has the Muslim and Arab Spring been dangerously deflected, its brief moment of democratic hopefulness hijacked by the hard men of power? Observing the bloody events in Libya, Bahrain, and Yemen, not to mention the crackdowns in Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Iran, many have drawn just that conclusion. Even in Egypt, where a dictator was successfully toppled and elated citizens flocked to vote in a national referendum, the future seems, at best, up for grabs.

All this has reinforced the worries of those in Israel and the West who warned from the start that little good was likely to come from the popular rebellions rocking the Arab and Muslim world, that they might be followed by long-term chaos and anarchy or by regimes even more repressive and dangerous than those now on or over the edge of collapse.

But not so fast. No movement toward freedom has succeeded in the blink of an eye, absent a struggle, or without periods when all has seemed lost. In the case of this latest movement, not only has its work barely begun, but it is up against a formidable combination of odds. That is why the next phases are so crucial—and why in my view the nations of the free world must, without delay, seize the moment to lend a hand.

What sort of hand, and how? Here a little history is in order.

For decades, the policy of the free world toward the Arab and Muslim Middle East was based on a simple principle: The overriding aim was stability, purchased by deals struck with leaders. That the leaders in question were autocrats of one stripe or another mattered little; neither did the cruelty and rank corruption endemic to their rule. To the contrary, tyranny was seen as the guarantor of stability, just as corruption guaranteed that the regimes' friendship could be bought.

And so a pact was struck. Sometimes the terms were transparent, a prime example being the 1993 "peace" deal between Israel and Yasser Arafat. The arch-terrorist's dictatorial powers were openly embraced as ensuring his control of terrorism, while his corruption was underwritten by an international agreement that poured many tens of millions of dollars intended for the Palestinian people into his private slush fund. More often the terms were masked, as in relations between France and Tunisia, or the US and Egypt. But the quid pro quo—support for stability—remained the same, rationalized by considerations of realpolitik and the comforting assertion that we had no right to judge the behavior of societies with moral standards different from our own.

Repeatedly, however, and now definitively, that pact has been exposed as a sham, yielding not stability but its opposite. And, the recent setbacks notwithstanding, the old pact has been no less definitively broken—broken not by us, and not by our partners in Cairo, Tunis, and elsewhere, but by the awakening peoples of the region themselves. This great awakening cannot be wished away. It may be stalled; it may be temporarily forced underground; but it cannot be extinguished forever. Already it has accomplished something historic: shattering the longstanding truism that, unlike "us," the Arab and Muslim peoples of the Middle East have no real desire for freedom, that they are content with living in societies dominated by fear. With tremendous courage, they have done nothing less than to put their lives on the line to inform us otherwise.

A historical page has at last begun to turn. But, practically speaking, the current window of hope is only so wide, and, as we have seen, many are the forces aiming to slam it shut. The question is, what comes next?

Surveying the fall or near-fall of the Arab dictators, some in the West have reverted to habit, turning wistfully to well-organized structures within the society shaped by those same dictators: notably, the military on the one hand, the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups on the other. The unspoken idea is to replicate the old pact but with a different set of players with whom the West can continue to do business on the same terms. Once again the goal is stability and security, rationalized now by pointing to the alleged absence of any other centers of potential leadership within Arab society, and by the "discovery" of moderate elements within some of the region's worst actors.

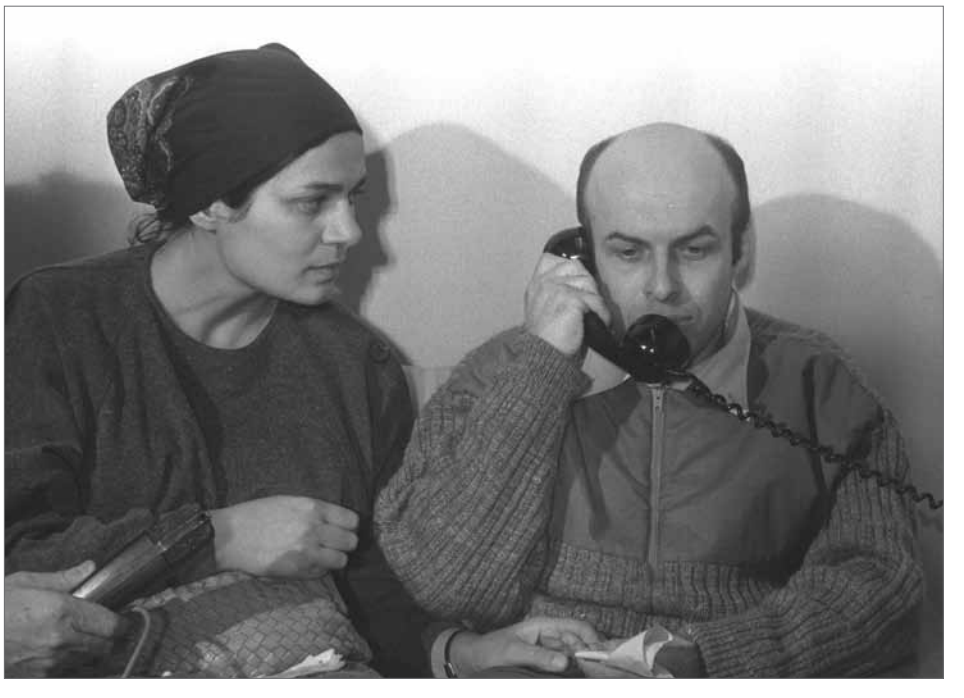
This is delusion squared. What is really being justified is an abdication of the free world's own ability to influence the momentous developments now gripping the Muslim world. Take the evident willingness expressed by Washington to "engage" the Muslim Brotherhood. As the Egyptian democratic dissident Saad Eddin Ibrahim has put it, this is akin to announcing that the free world *has no choice* but to accept these people, complete with their determination to install an Islamic government, as the legitimate inheritors of power. It is to turn a blind eye to the unprecedented opportunities of the present and to commit oneself to repeating, obsessively, all the mistakes of the past. "They [the Muslim Brotherhood] are stubborn and nobody knows their real intentions," said an Egyptian factory owner after voting in the March 19 referendum. "That is not what the revolution is about."

There is an alternative: to throw one's support unequivocally behind the reformers and democrats who represent the real hope for a future of peace, liberty—and stability.

I can hear the response already. How many times did my fellow dissidents and I in the Soviet Union hear the same response during our own hard, long march to freedom? "Yes," went the refrain, "you democrats are all wonderful people—but you are few and you command no legions. What can we in the West do but try to work through your masters, the ones with the army, the ones holding the instruments of power?" And how deep was the subsequent shock when the impossible suddenly happened and, army or no army, gulag or no gulag, the mighty empire collapsed. Who could have predicted it?

Actually, many did. Even in the most freedom-starved Communist societies, just as in the Arab world today, dissident men and women were thinking free thoughts and daring to express them. They also knew that their thoughts were the real thoughts, their feelings the real feelings, of tens of millions of others straining against the bonds of a fear society and yearning to break free. The presence of those silent armies behind them was what enabled so many dissidents to predict with assurance the fall of Soviet tyranny.

A lesson should have been learned from this experience, but wasn't. How many times, in later years, did I hear the same phrases and arguments voiced



Natan Sharansky wth his wife, Avital, thanking President Ronald Reagan after his release from Soviet prison in 1986. (Photo by Nati Harnik, courtesy of the Israel Government Press Office.)

against efforts to support democratic dissidents in the Arab nations and genuine reformers within Palestinian society? "Your ideas about freedom," Ariel Sharon assured me when I served in his government, "have no relevance to the Middle East." Yet those dissidents and reformers existed, and in Syria, Egypt, and even Saudi Arabia they were mounting pro-democracy protests. Fully aware that their own thirst for freedom was widely shared and ultimately irrepressible, they also knew, and said, that their regimes, too, were destined to fall. In 2007, at an international conference of dissidents in Prague chaired by José María Aznar, Vaclav Havel, and myself, they conveyed their assurances personally to President Bush. They also warned that the longer the West continued to prop up the dictators, the greater the chance that, when they did fall, they would be succeeded by worse.

"Your ideas about freedom," Ariel Sharon assured me, "have no relevance to the Middle East." Yet those dissidents and reformers existed, and in Syria, Egypt, and even Saudi Arabia they were mounting pro-democracy protests. "

Can that fate be averted? Can the democratic reformers of the Middle East be empowered to shape a better future than the one being readied for them by the princes and generals and Islamists, enabled by the skeptics and false realists in today's free world? It will not be easy. But—and here is another lesson from history—the fact is that circumstances today are in many ways more auspicious than they were for us in the 1980s.

Back then, we dissidents had no Internet to help us organize and build our constituencies, no satellite TV to publicize our plight, and, with Western broadcasts heavily jammed and correspondence regularly opened, no normal way to establish contact with individual foreigners or human-rights groups abroad. For its part, the free world had little leverage over the dictators in the Kremlin. Today, communications are easy and instantaneous. Moreover, at least for the moment, the governing structures are on the defensive and scrambling to hold on, while the Muslim Brotherhood is not yet strong enough to seize control and foreclose the possibility of genuine reform. Finally, and precisely because of their longstanding ties with Middle Eastern governments, the US and the European Union are uniquely well placed to guide that process of reform.

The first duty, then, is to speak out, clearly and repeatedly, in unqualified support of the protesters' right to expression, and in no less unqualified sympathy for the cause of democratic dissidents in their struggle against still-existing regimes and their potential non-democratic successors. Strong words in themselves are not sufficient, but they are crucially necessary.

The second duty is to match words with deeds. The aim must be to create the conditions that will enable masses of ordinary people to cross the fear barrier and participate actively and openly in the building of free societies. Only thus will the West avoid falling into the fatal choice of relegitimating dictatorship.

Here the critical point is linkage, whose instrument is the massive amounts of foreign aid the free world has committed to some of the lands in question. By continuing to remain generous, by recruiting other donors from, especially, the oil-rich nations of the Arab world—*and* by placing clear, verifiable, and enforceable conditions on our largesse—we can decisively help form the essential institutions of an open society: a free press, freedom of religion, rule of law, civil-society reform, the freedom to organize, and the rest. In Egypt and elsewhere, local entrepreneurs can be mobilized to address the dire housing conditions. International human-rights organizations can prove their bona fides by finding and working with local partners dedicated to democratic reform, including students and women's groups. Individuals and groups like those nurtured by the online project Cyberdissidents can be openly strengthened and empowered.

In speaking of the duties of the free world, I of course mean to include the State of Israel. Although for obvious reasons Israel cannot take the lead in the international efforts outlined above, it can contribute significantly to them, especially in its immediate neighborhood. Simply by existing and flourishing, Israel has already provided its Palestinian neighbors with a powerfully alluring demonstration of the blessings of freedom and democracy. Nor, at root, is the Palestinians' problem with the State of Israel; it is with their own autocratic leadership. The so-called peace process was built in partnership with such leaders, and it proved as disastrous in improving the lives of Palestinians as it did in delivering peace for Israel. Now, on the West Bank, there are hopeful signs of a liberalizing economy and of cooperation with Israel on security and other matters. By encouraging the spread of similar bottom-up processes in law, education, media, and civil-society reform, Israel can help promote a Palestinian society founded on democratic principles, ruled by accountable leaders, and prepared for peace.

The principle of linkage is the same everywhere: the sooner the free world moves, the quicker the building blocks of civil society can be formed. The quicker those building blocks are established, the more thoroughly will the democratic spirit influence the growth of representative parties and institutions—and the brighter will be the chances of a positive outcome overall.

Will we, all of us, see our responsibility and our opportunity, and act? My worry is that we won't. My hope is that we will. In doing so, we will not only keep faith with the masses of individuals now giving their lives to the dream of change, but purchase true stability for the peoples of the region and for ourselves.

—March 29, 2011

Natan Sharansky, chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel, is the author (with Ron Dermer) of The Case for Democracy *(PublicAffairs) and of* Fear No Evil *(PublicAffairs), a memoir of his struggle against the KGB and his years as a political prisoner in the Soviet gulag. The present essay is an expansion of his March 13, 2011 op-ed piece in* The Washington Post.

Israel and the Old-New Middle East

BY EFRAIM INBAR

Dramatic events are unfolding before our eyes in the Middle East. From the shores of the Atlantic, in Morocco, to the coast of the Persian Gulf in countries such as Bahrain and Iran, countless demonstrators gather in the central squares of cities large and small to vent their rage against their rulers and demand change in their countries. Remarkably, they have succeeded in Tunisia and Egypt. Throughout the region, long-standing authoritarian regimes are under great duress, and, as I write, the violence in Libya continues.

The trajectory of these events is not yet clear. One thing, however, is unmistakable: The many observers in the West naïvely expressing hope for a rapid transition to democracy display ignorance of the social and political realities of North Africa and the Middle East. It is far too soon to herald the "Jasmine Revolution" in Tunisia or the toppling of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak as victories of people power over the forces of reaction.

While longing for freedom is basic to humanity, so is the need for political stability. Dictators have long been able to rule much of the world because they understand the human fear of chaos. The social contract upon which most states are founded is predicated on providing security and stability—not freedom. In fact, democracies are a relatively new socio-political phenomenon—the result of a long and complex historical process. Despite exposure for more than a century to Western cultural influence, the Arab world has failed in many respects to modernize. The crowds in the street, whose courage is commendable, are not enough to build new democracies. Middle Eastern societies, deeply attached to Islamic traditions, will not suddenly adhere to a liberal-democratic ethos. Unfortunately, the cultivation of a democratic political culture simply takes more time than some Western pundits would like to believe, and the absence of an organized democratic alternative to dictatorship in the Arab states and Iran is a recipe for political instability.

In Lebanon, the democratic hopes generated by the "Cedar Revolution" did not prevent the Hezbollization of the country. Similarly, the praiseworthy hopes of the Egyptian masses for a more open and just political system might be hijacked in free elections by the politically organized Muslim Brotherhood, whose commitment to democracy is non-existent.

Resistance to democratization will persist in many quarters. For example, we have seen the Saudi intervention in Bahrain to preserve the rule of a Sunni dynasty. The Middle Eastern regimes' inclination and capacity to suppress their people should not be underestimated. The tenacity of the ruling groups in clinging uninhibitedly to power—when their only alternative is torture and death in the streets—has been clearly seen in the grim performances of the Revolutionary Guard in Iran and Muammar Gaddafi's mercenaries in Libya. The ruling Alawite minority in Syria may well follow suit.

Another clear result of the recent events is the further erosion of the US position in the Middle East. The rulers of the pro-American states have learned again that when push comes to shove, America cannot be trusted. As the ground shifted in the Middle East, the Obama administration delivered confused, contradictory, and inconsistent responses. First, there was a quick demand for Mubarak's departure, and then there was support for the military regime, followed by a hesitant and muted condemnation of Gaddafi's violent repression before taking action. American encouragement of the Egyptian demonstrations against Mubarak was viewed by leaders in Amman, Kuwait City, Rabat, and Riyadh as the betrayal of a friend and ally. President Obama seems susceptible to the "Carter Syndrome" that helped to undermine the Iranian Shah. Unfortunately, Obama's behavior is dangerous for America's friends. It strengthens the general perception of a weak and confused American foreign policy. What leaders in the Middle East see is an American retreat from Iraq and Afghanistan, feeble attempts to "engage" America's enemies (Iran and Syria), and desertion of old friends. As rulers in the pro-American states conclude that they cannot rely on US support, they will distance themselves from Washington.

The absence of an organized democratic alternative to dictatorship in the Arab states and Iran is a recipe for political instability.

The flags of Egypt, Tunisia, and the old Republic of Libya being waved by Egyptians in Tahrir Square, February, 2011. (Photo © STR/epa/Corbis.)

Whatever happens in Egypt will have repercussions throughout the region. At the moment, the pro-Western Egyptian regime seems to have weathered the crisis by sacrificing Hosni Mubarak and promising elections and reform. It remains to be seen how well the Egyptian generals deliver and whether they are capable of forming useful coalitions with liberal forces in the middle class in order to neutralize the only well-organized political force outside the ruling government: the Muslim Brotherhood. In any case, in the near future we will see a weakened regime and much uncertainty.

How the diminutive nation of Bahrain emerges from this crisis will also be important, and not only due to its strategic location in the Persian Gulf and its role as host of the US Fifth Fleet headquarters. The majority of Bahrain's population consists of Arab Shiites. Until now, they seem to have identified primarily as Arabs and thus been amenable to living under a Sunni Arab monarchy. But if the religious Shiite component of their identity comes to overshadow the ethnic Arab dimension, they might push for the establishment of a pro-Iranian government or even annexation to Iran. Such a shift in identity could be disastrous for Saudi Arabia. Its eastern province, where much of its oil riches are situated, is mostly inhabited by Arab Shiites. Greater Iranian influence among the Saudi Shiites could bring about the loss of Saudi sovereignty over the eastern province and the loss of oil revenues to the Saudi government, which might also affect the stability of the Kingdom. Neighboring oil-rich Kuwait also has a sizable Shiite minority that is susceptible to Iranian subversion.

Similarly, the future of Iraq will be largely determined by identity politics. If current efforts at nation-building fail to sustain a strong Iraqi identity and religious divisions are not diminished, the proximity of Shiite Iran could pull the Iraqi Shiite South toward sectarianism and separatism. Iraq's future is of course linked to the way in which American performance is viewed in the region. Interestingly, the fragile democratically elected Iraqi government has been only slightly affected by the regional wave of unrest, probably because many Iraqis are hoping that the current Shiite-dominated regime can provide a modicum of stability. In any case, Iraq is proof that transition from a dictatorial regime is a lengthy and bloody process.

There is also a real chance that additional Arab states torn by civil war might become "failed states." Alternatively, the ruling governments will be busy parrying increased domestic challenges. This will reduce their ability to project power and combat the growing Iranian or Turkish regional influence.

Indeed, the first to gain from regional unrest is Egypt's regional rival, the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Incredibly, the Muslim Brotherhood has received a great deal of positive publicity, and is often portrayed in the Western media as a moderate Muslim political actor.

An Egypt beleaguered by domestic problems, however, will have little energy to focus on countering Iran's nuclear aspirations. Knowing this, Iran tried to destabilize the Mubarak regime two years ago by sending Hezbollah terrorists via Hamas-ruled Gaza into Egypt. More recently, it openly encouraged the anti-Mubarak demonstrators to topple the military-based regime. It should be no surprise to find out that Iranian agents were fomenting trouble in the streets of Cairo during the protests.

Instability in Bahrain definitely enhances the position of Iran in the Gulf and in the energy sector. Unrest in Kuwait would bring this country into the Iranian orbit, and Iran would further benefit if Baghdad distances itself from a retreating US.

The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt will also be a beneficiary in the unfolding events, if the army-based regime becomes weaker. Incredibly, the Muslim Brotherhood has recently received a great deal of positive publicity, and is often portrayed in the Western media as a moderate Muslim political actor. Such superficial coverage willfully overlooks its extreme anti-Western, anti-modernist positions, not to mention its rabid anti-Semitism. The organization's famous credo doesn't hide its political philosophy or ambitions, "Allah is our objective. The Prophet is our leader. Qur'an is our constitution. Jihad is our way. Dying in the service of Allah is our greatest hope." No one should forget that its ultimate goal is to establish an Islamic republic in Egypt.

The troubles in Egypt were also welcomed by Turkey's Islamist ruling party, the AKP. Under the AKP, Turkey has distanced itself from the West and joined the radical axis in the Middle East, supporting Hezbollah, Hamas, and Iran. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan is leading the country in an increasingly authoritarian direction, infringing on freedom of the press, limiting the power of the judiciary, and increasingly intimidating political opponents. The notion that the current Turkish regime could become a model for transition toward democracy in the Arab world reflects ignorance of what is taking place in Turkey.

Hamas, an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, is another beneficiary of the current crisis. The Mubarak regime, a bitter opponent of the group, cooperated with Israel in the attempt to isolate and weaken its rule in Gaza. If Egypt falls to Islamic rule, Hamas will be able to break out of the Egyptian-Israeli quarantine and enhance its access to Iran.

The turmoil in Egypt is unquestionably another boon for the Iran-led radical forces in the Middle East. It follows the takeover of Lebanon by Hezbollah, Iran's Lebanese proxy, which undid several years of American and European attempts to strengthen the pro-Western, pro-democratic forces. Unfortunately, these elements are not ready to put up a fight, but prefer stability to armed struggle. The greater prominence of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and its recently gained (and entirely spurious) respectability will also bolster the cause of the radical Islamists everywhere in the region.

American weakness could induce an avalanche effect that could lead the existing Arab governments to succumb to Iranian pressure. The ripple effects of the widespread socio-political malaise within the Arab world could paralyze the foreign policy of Arab states and make strategic cooperation with the US more precarious. This could create a regional environment in which Iran's freedom of action would be enhanced and its ability to take over the oil and gas fields in its vicinity in the Persian Gulf and Caspian Basin increased. It could also increase the likelihood of Iran's crossing of the nuclear threshold, thus dramatically changing the regional balance of power.

Israel is watching the recent developments with great concern. Israelis ask whether the current American administration is capable of exercising sound strategic judgment and standing by its allies. Jerusalem is astute enough to realize that the demonstrating crowds represent a much greater potential for radicalization than democratization. It concurs with many Arab leaders that courting favor with the demonstrators undermines pro-American regimes and regional stability. Moreover, it realizes that the popular sentiment in the Arab world is largely anti-Western and, needless to say, anti-Israel. While Israel would welcome peaceful democratic neighbors, its thinking is guided by a worst–case analysis.

Israel's fears focus on Egypt and the implications of a policy change concerning the 1979 Egypt-Israel peace treaty, which has been one of the pillars of Israel's national security. Sadat's defection from the Arab military coalition removed the strongest military force from Israel's list of enemies, enormously improving the country's strategic situation. Moreover, the peace with Egypt deprived the other Arab states of the ability to launch a two-front war against Israel. The demilitarization of the Sinai Peninsula further stabilized the strategic Egyptian-Israeli relationship by denying either side the option of a surprise attack. Jerusalem fears, above all, an Islamist takeover of Egypt, which would indeed be a strategic nightmare.

This has not yet happened, since the Egyptian military continues to control the country and has announced its support for keeping Egypt's international commitments. In all probability, the direction of Egyptian politics will not change radically in the near future, which is good news for Israel. But, the new regime will be weaker than the previous one and would probably prefer not to be burdened with the Israeli relationship. This means that the always "cold peace" might very soon become even chillier.

Another troublesome aspect of the situation in Egypt is the erosion of the country's sovereignty in the Sinai, which borders the Gaza Strip. During the recent turmoil, several Egyptian police stations were attacked by Sinai Bedouins, whose smuggling activities had previously been constrained by the Egyptian police. This police presence was only somewhat effective in preventing Iranian arms from flowing via Sinai to Gaza, and will probably become even less so, allowing Hamas to further enhance its arsenal of missiles. The Sinai could, in fact, become a haven for terrorists, as parts of Lebanon are now.

Jerusalem is also monitoring developments in Jordan, the neighbor with which it shares its longest border, and which is located closest to Israel's

Protesters from the Muslim Brotherhood burn an Israeli flag outside Cairo University, December, 2008. (Photo © Nasser Nuri/Reuters/Corbis.)

heartland—the Tel Aviv-Jerusalem-Haifa triangle that holds most of the country's population and economic infrastructure. While Israel regards Jordan as providing a strategic buffer zone on its eastern border, the Jordanian elite see Israel as an insurance policy against invasions from its neighbors. So far, King Abdullah has been successful in riding the current Middle East storm with minimal damage to his rule and to relations with Israel. However, if Iraq falls to the radicals, the pressure on the Hashemites will grow again.

Iranian forces stand guard at a rally marking the 31st anniversary of the 1979 Revolution. (Photo © ATTA Kenare/AFP/Getty Images.)

The unprecedented events in the region have deflected attention from the Palestinian issue, and the demonstrations are obviously not fueled by concern for the Palestinians. Still, experience suggests that eventually Israel will be blamed, if only partially, for the radicalization of the Muslim street. Consequently, misguided attempts "to solve" the insoluble Israeli-Palestinian conflict will likely ensue. Slogans about the "urgency" of peace between Israelis and Palestinians and about the need to capitalize upon "the last window of opportunity" will be revived. Yet, the slim chances for a stable agreement are becoming more remote as the fragile Palestinian Authority faces increasing pressure from a more powerful and popular Hamas. Indeed, the virulently anti-Israel Hamas, encouraged by the developments in Egypt, might adopt a more aggressive posture toward the Jewish state.

As the region seems less receptive to peace overtures, Israel must prepare for a deteriorating strategic environment. Domestic changes, beyond Israel's control, have brought about a reorientation in the foreign policy of important regional powers that were once Israel's allies. The 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran heralded the rise of a potent ideologically driven rival. The entrenchment in Turkish politics of the Islamist AKP, after the 2007 electoral victory, moved this pivotal state into the anti-Israel camp. And the situation in Egypt and Jordan may not be hopeless, but it is certainly precarious.

Jerusalem must therefore continue to pay close attention to the capability of its nearby and distant neighbors to harm it. The Middle East turmoil is generally weakening the Arab states and giving Iran greater opportunities to extend its reach. The strategic fatigue of the US also opens up opportunities in the Middle East for its rivals, China and Russia—not a prospect welcomed by Israel. Thus, the current unrest in the region is a warning bell for Israel to improve its defenses in case the situation worsens. Israel is a strong state with a remarkable military machine. Yet, it has neglected its capacity to wage large-scale wars. The last such war was in 1973. Since then, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) has been preoccupied with small wars and non-state actors.

Israel must invest in building a stronger force that is able to deal with a variety of contingencies, including large-scale war. This means expanding the IDF and updating its strategic scenarios. Since force-building is a lengthy process, appropriate decisions on force structure and budget allocations are required as soon as possible. Dealing with missiles of a variety of ranges has been on the national security agenda for at least two decades. Budgetary constraints have slowed development and adequate deployment of a multi-layered missile defense system. This situation needs to be remedied as the radical forces' motivation to attack Israel grows. Fortunately, Israel's flourishing economy can afford larger defense outlays to meet its national security challenges.

The Middle East is a rough neighborhood and may be getting rougher.

—March 29, 2011

Efraim Inbar is a professor of Political Studies at Bar-Ilan University and director of the Begin-Sadat (BESA) Center for Strategic Studies.

Passover on the Potomac

BY VANESSA L. OCHS

OUR HAGGADAH: UNITING TRADITIONS FOR INTERFAITH FAMILIES
by Cokie and Steve Roberts
Harper, 192 pp., $19.99

THE WASHINGTON HAGGADAH
by Joel ben Simeon, translated by David Stern
Harvard University Press, 248 pp., $39.95

If the Obamas conduct a seder again this Passover, the haggadah in the hands of family members and guests—Jewish and non-Jewish—will probably be the one they have used for the past two years, that most American of haggadot, the "traditional Maxwell House." Maxwell House was not the first company to use a complimentary haggadah to sell groceries, but it has been the most prolific, publishing more than 50 million copies since 1934. It is no surprise, then, to see it become a fixture of "our nation's seder."

Just across the Potomac in Bethesda, Washington insiders Cokie and Steve Roberts, bestselling authors, celebrities of TV, radio and print journalism, have been holding a Maxwell House-free seder for nearly four decades. The Robertses—he's a cultural Jew and she's a religious Catholic—will use their homemade text, just published as *Our Haggadah: Uniting Traditions for Interfaith Families* and so will their kin and guests. Their roster of seder regulars recalls Adam Sandler's "Chanukah Song": there's "Lesley Stahl, a Jew from Massachusetts, and her husband, Aaron Latham, a Protestant from Texas"; there's "Linda Wertheimer (Protestant, New Mexico) and her husband, Fred (Jewish, Brooklyn), and Nina Totenberg (Jewish, Massachusetts) and her husband, Floyd Haskell (Protestant, Colorado)."

The Robertses' initiative is a lineal descendant of the once famous and singularly high-powered seder presided over by former Secretary of Labor, Supreme Court Justice, and Ambassador to the UN Arthur J. Goldberg and his wife, Dorothy. In 1961, the Goldbergs' guest list included President and Mrs. John F. Kennedy, the Speaker of the House, two Supreme Court justices, two senators, and the president of the AFL-CIO. In 1967, it included the newlywed Robertses, at whose wedding Goldberg had given a speech. The Goldbergs' homemade haggadah presented Passover's theme of freedom in American language: "The Festival of Pesach calls upon us to put an end to all slavery . . . Pesach calls us to the eternal pursuit of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Mrs. Goldberg, in her marginal notes, reminded herself to mention that "one of the best descriptions of the exodus is the great Negro spiritual 'Go Down Moses.'" Cokie Roberts remembers participating "with gusto" when "the crowd started singing freedom songs from the civil rights and labor movements, held over from the days when Goldberg had been a leading labor lawyer."

In 1968, the Robertses were on their own and tried the Maxwell House haggadah, but they ditched it the following year for their own stitched-together, pick-and-choose haggadah, modeled after the Goldbergs' but tailored to their interfaith marriage. It is but one exemplar of the many "homemade haggadahs" that have been created ever since it was discovered that you didn't have to be a rabbi to cut and paste (first literally, later digitally) to arrive at a ceremony that felt theologically or politically relevant, and temporally realistic, given the length of your group's attention span.

Unlike the White House seder, which culminates with the traditional call of "Next year in Jerusalem," the Robertses and their guests express their hope for "Next year in Bethesda."

The Robertses began with "The New Haggadah" published by the Reconstructionist movement. Its first edition in 1941 got Mordecai Kaplan into trouble with his Jewish Theological Seminary colleagues, to whom he referred in his diary as "the great do-nothings who command positions of spiritual influence in Jewish life." They assailed him for such sins ranging from his "unscientific" translation of *karpas* as "parsley" to the much more weighty offense of eliminating any reference in the text to the chosenness of the Jews. Responding liturgically to the many American Jews for whom the seder ritual had become "meaningless and uninspiring," Kaplan intended to provide a haggadah that "could make of that service a living religious experience." To their selections from Kaplan, the Robertses added prayers that he had omitted but to which their guests remained attached. They also added more narrative parts from Exodus and deleted anything that had a xenophobic ring to it (in the early 1990s, they made the requisite gender tweaks). The book they have published is a haggadah for interfaith families such as their own who have decided, as they did, to create a home in which the rituals of more than one religion are practiced.

Steve and Cokie Roberts. (Photo courtesy of Felicia Evans.)

Unlike the White House seder, which culminates, interestingly enough, with the traditional call of "Next year in Jerusalem," the Robertses and their guests express their hope for "Next year in Bethesda," and they do not mean the biblical healing pool in Jerusalem. Rather, the Robertses explain what they consider to be a truism: "For many American Jews, especially Jews in interfaith relationships, celebrating Passover in Israel is not a deeply held desire." Wishing to hold more seders in Bethesda is the "more honest hope." But there seems to be some confusion here. Whatever one's politics, the haggadah's aspiration to be in Jerusalem is not about booking tickets on El Al for a Passover at the King David Hotel nor even about settling in Israel. It's about the "audacious hope" of a particular people, once saved, only to find itself in exile again and again. It's about having the fortitude to overcome despair; it's about homeland, nationhood. For some, it's a heavenly Jerusalem that will descend to earth in messianic times; for others, it's a dream of perfection towards which one can work. However it is understood, the idea of Jerusalem is a lot to give up in favor of, well, remaining where one is.

The Roberts seder is most hospitable to the Jew who likes the idea of a few traditional practices, but isn't much interested in Jewish law or theology. If God is not absent from the Robertses' haggadah text, it is because Cokie is a Christian who believes in a loving God who experiences Passover and Easter as completely compatible with one another. If in Jewish practice a blessing is said *over* bread, at the Roberts seder the matzah itself is blessed, made holy through the uttered name of God, as in communion. And Jesus is there too: He is beckoned at the singing of all verses of "We Shall Overcome," originally a Chris-

tian spiritual before it became the anthem of the civil rights movement. One verse, which the Robertses include, begins, "We shall be like Him, we shall be like Him . . ." The source for it is, of course, John 3:2: "But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

I myself have witnessed the often intense and sometimes heartbreaking negotiations on the part of interfaith couples who seek to discern how and if sacred celebrations can be conjoined. Jewish culture layered with Easter Sunday works for the Robertses, but is not the right recipe for the many religiously educated, committed, Passover-experienced, and God-directed Jews who have no need to rely upon the non-Jews with whom they have linked lives to be what Mrs. Roberts' husband jokingly calls "the better Jew."

Serenely removed from such questions, back on the DC side of the Potomac, in the Library of Congress, sits the 15th-century haggadah known, on account of its nine-decade sojourn in our nation's capital, as "the Washington Haggadah." Harvard University Press has just issued a sumptuous facsimile edition, along with a translation of the Hebrew text and commentary by David Stern, a distinguished scholar of rabbinic texts at the University of Pennsylvania, and art historian Katrin Kogman-Appel, who teaches at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev.

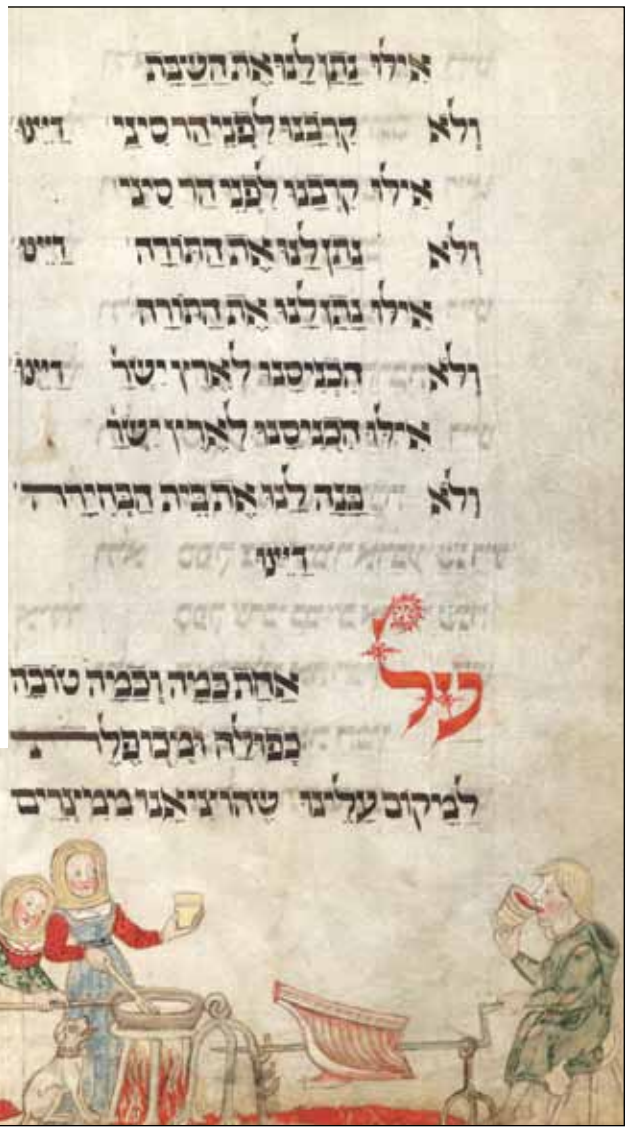
Stern frames his introduction as a biography of the haggadah. "The life of any haggadah," he writes, "begins much earlier than the moment of its production." It commences "with the formulation of its text, a process that took at least ten centuries; and that text itself derives from a ceremony, a ritual, that goes back to the earliest beginnings of the Israelite nation." The roots of that ritual, the seder, have both pre-biblical and biblical origins and reflect a melding, over time, of practices marking the spring harvest of wheat and sacred national memories that would be "turned into watershed moments in the sacred history of Israel, the one commemorating the divine salvation of the first-born sons from death, the other the miraculous Exodus of the Israelites from Egyptian servitude." But how did we get from the pilgrim's family meal of matzah, bitter herbs, and lamb sacrificed at the Temple in Jerusalem to the symbolic "surrogate" meal and haggadah text that came in its stead when the Temple was destroyed? Although the Tosefta, Mishna, and Talmud give us glimpses of seder practices, we possess no written text older than the 9th or 10th century. The fragments we do have indicate that the earliest liturgy was not freestanding, but part of a prayer book. Stern apprises us of the different kinds of haggadah manuscripts that would emerge from the 13th century onward, when it became a book of its own, and takes us just to the cusp of the first printed haggadot.

The roots of the seder, have both pre-biblical and biblical origins and reflect a melding of practices marking the spring harvest of wheat and sacred national memories.

The Washington Haggadah in particular "exemplifies the lives of Jewish books more generally." Produced in Germany, it traveled to Italy, and then, before its arrival in America, "wandered across continents and through the lands of the Diaspora." Its creator, scribe and illustrator Joel Feibush ben Simeon, was responsible for eighteen or so manuscripts that are still extant, half of which are haggadot. When the Jews were expelled from his native Cologne, he moved to Bonn, where he received his training. Exiled once again, he went to northern Italy. In this period, when he returned periodically to Germany, he created haggadot, siddurim, and machzorim. In Katrin Kogman-Appel's assessment, Joel was a cultural agent, melding the "flatness and two-dimensionality of the spared-ground technique typical of German illustration" and the "Italian feeling for depth and detail . . ." The Washington Haggadah was not commissioned. Joel, confident in his artistic powers, knew a customer would come along, and left the end pages empty for personalization.

Joel is a very funny artist—imagine a 15th-century Roz Chast making haggadot. He loves visual puns, doodles with hide-and-seek gargoyles, and throws in a matzah-holding monkey (why? who knows?), all the while gently satirizing the denizens of his social world. My favorite three images are ones I see as a triptych on the battle of the sexes. The first is an image of a food preparation scene. On the right, there is a miserable fellow in a scruffy tunic turning the spit of a roasting rack of lamb. He is swilling a cup of wine, and there is an ample flask nearby for refills. On the left, there are two upstanding





Pages from "the Washington Haggadah," clockwise from left: A man stuffs bitter herbs into his wife's mouth. The "Dayenu" page. The matzah-holding monkey. (Images courtesy of the Hebraic Section, Library of Congress.)

women (with their dog, why not?) stirring a pot of soup, one of whom offers a sobering cup to the man, as if to say in frustration, "Enough!"—it is, after all, on the "Dayenu" page— "Why must women do all the hard work?" The second image illustrates the passage on *maror*, the bitter herb, with a haggadah convention of textbook misogyny: An enormous husband attempts to stuff a bouquet of bitter herbs into his wife's mouth, for she, as the joke goes, is his bitterness. His tiny wife holds her own, looking away and holding on to her double-edged sword for steadiness, even though that sword in Proverbs depicts the nasty sharpness that is woman. In the third image Joel whimsically resolves these images

The Messiah rides in on a donkey during the seder. (Image courtesy of the Hebraic Section, Library of Congress.)

of marital strife with a goofy-happy, even eschatological ending: Giddyapping into a door of a medieval home comes a donkey, and on it the Messiah himself, and the whole happy and now harmonious family: dad, mom (this time, she's the tippler), all the kids, and even granny (or a servant), hanging on to the tail for dear life.

Stern traces the "afterlife" of this haggadah as well. I wish I could say it was as colorful a story as that of the Sarajevo Haggadah, which Geraldine Brooks fictionalized in *The People of the Book* a few years ago, but it's not. Joel's haggadah was purchased by a Jew in Germany and probably stayed there for quite a while, before moving to Italy. By the 19th century, it had come into the hands of a distinguished Provençali family in Mantua, who left wine drops and marginalia that suggest it was still being used at their family seders. In 1902, the haggadah was bought by Ephraim Deinard, the flamboyant book dealer, bibliographer, parodist, and polemicist (he despised both Hasidism and Reform Judaism and questioned the existence of Jesus).

This brings us back to Washington. Deinard's dream was to establish "a major Judaica collection in America's national library," the Library of Congress. The philanthropist Jacob H. Schiff financed the purchase of several batches of Deinard's collection of almost 20,000 Hebrew manuscripts. Joel's haggadah, called "Hebrew Manuscript #1," arrived around 1916. Now enshrined as "a treasure," it ceased its life as a functioning haggadah. However, a few years ago, Sharmila Sen, a Harvard University Press editor, was shown the Washington Haggadah while visiting the Library of Congress. Sen, a Bengali Hindi born in India who had never seen a haggadah or attended a seder, fell in love with the book:

> At first with the material object itself—the parchment is exquisite, the illuminations so quirky and charming, the calligraphy is beautiful. As the curator told me the story of the book, I wanted to bring it back to the table . . . I found out that the last (and only) facsimile of this book was made almost 20 years ago and cost over $1000. I wanted this to be a book which would be . . . something real people bring to the Passover table and not be afraid of a little wine spill or food stain . . ."

That's not likely to happen. The book Sen has produced is simply too gorgeous. The reproductions reflect the feel of parchment and the shine of the golden initial illuminations; the design by Annamarie McMahon is pristine, with the variations in color of the English type mirroring Joel's varied palette, and even the binding, embossed in gold and copper hues, reflect Joel's marginal decorative elements. Besides, after flipping back and forth between the facsimile pages and the English translation that follows it, struggling to keep the assembled guests on track, and longing for "Chad Gadya," (a song not included until after Joel's day), one might end up missing the Maxwell House. Where will we be seeing the *The Washington Haggadah* this Passover? Where else, but on our nation's coffee table?

Vanessa L. Ochs is an associate professor of religious studies at the University of Virginia and is writing a "biography" of the Passover haggadah for Princeton University Press.

Buried Treasure

BY NORMAN A. STILLMAN

SACRED TRASH: THE LOST AND FOUND WORLD OF THE CAIRO GENIZA
by Adina Hoffman and Peter Cole
Schocken/Nextbook, 304 pp., $26.95

In 1896, two Scottish sisters came to Solomon Schechter, then a Reader in Talmudic and Rabbinic Literature at Cambridge University, and showed him some moldy scraps of manuscript they had purchased in Egypt. Schechter immediately recognized them as fragments of the long-lost Hebrew original of the Apocryphal book of Ben Sira (known in the Christian tradition as Ecclesiasticus). Soon thereafter he rushed off to Cairo, where he found the enormous cache of discarded manuscripts that had been deposited in the *geniza* (a traditional storage place for worn or discarded Hebrew texts containing the Divine Name) of the Ben Ezra Synagogue of Fustat (Old Cairo).

The approximately 200,000 pieces he brought back to Cambridge constituted the largest collection of medieval Jewish documents ever assembled. What made the Cairo Geniza different from every other geniza was that it contained not only Hebrew and Aramaic religious writings, such as Torah scrolls, prayerbooks, and *tefillin* and *mezuza* parchments, but also secular materials in a several languages and scripts (mainly in Judeo-Arabic). Works of Jewish scholarship and literature that had been lost were rediscovered, and a formative period in Jewish history was illuminated. This was the age of the Exilarchs (Babylon-based "heads of the diaspora" who traced their lineage back to the royal House of David); of Jewish philosophers and theologians such as Saadya Gaon and Maimonides; of sublime poets from the Golden Age of Sephardic Hebrew letters such as Shmuel Hanagid and Yehuda Halevi, and of Jewish merchants who sailed back and forth across the Mediterranean and from Egypt to places as far as India and Ceylon.

The authors compare the work of Geniza scholars to the gameshow *Jeopardy!*, where the answer is provided, and the trick is to come up with the question that prompted it.

The broad outlines of this tale of discovery and rescue are quite familiar, having been repeated in academic and semi-academic books and articles many times over. Scholars like Stefan Reif, the author of *A Jewish Archive from Old Cairo,* have done an excellent job of describing the collection in Cambridge and its significance for Jewish scholarship. But the real behind-the-scenes story of the Geniza and the Western scholars who retrieved and studied it is—not surprisingly—far more complicated and far more fascinating. It is also a very human story, as the husband-and-wife team of Peter Cole and Adina Hoffman show in their charming and unobtrusively erudite new book *Sacred Trash*.

Using published memoirs, unpublished diaries, personal correspondence, archival sources, and interviews with friends, families, students, and colleagues, Hoffman and Cole have produced colorful portraits of the Geniza scholars, their intellectual passions, their scholarly agendas and controversies, and in some cases, their personal egos and jealousies. Although they have adorned the cover of their book with the iconic and carefully self-staged photograph of Solomon Schechter, "a rabbinic version of Rodin's *The Thinker*," sitting and contemplating the Geniza treasure trove at Cambridge, they don't indulge in hagiography. They present him as a flesh-and-blood human being, a visionary scholar, a loving husband, a committed Jew, but also "a man of no small appetites" who could "orchestrate, on the sly, his Indiana Jones-like expedition to Egypt."

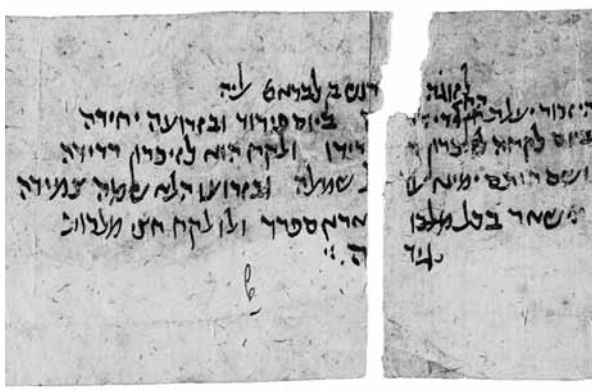
Hoffman and Cole are equally skillful in portraying other pioneer historians of the Geniza. Wisely, they devote an entire chapter to the great Shelomo Dov Goitein. As the authors rightly observe, if Schechter was the discoverer of the Cairo Geniza, Goitein was its "*rediscoverer*." While most of the work of scholars before Goitein had been devoted to the literary and spiritual texts of the Geniza, Goitein was the first to see the historical value of what many regarded as "worthless" material for the reconstruction of the lives of ordinary people. Basing himself on more than 25,000 seemingly humdrum documents that included merchants' correspondence, bills of lading, trousseau lists, communal and court records, deathbed wills and declarations (mainly in Judeo-Arabic), Goitein produced a panoramic five-volume study of Mediterranean life in the High Middle Ages entitled *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*. It is one of the great achievements of historical and humanistic scholarship of the 20th century, a work that has shed a bright new light upon a little-known but formative period in Jewish history. Hoffman and Cole fully appreciate Goitein's significance, and also understand his special role as a teacher who trained or inspired an entire generation of scholars to continue studying the historical Geniza.

Solomon Schechter studies fragments of Hebrew and Arabic documents, most of them dating from the 9th-12th centuries, rescued from the Cairo Geniza. (Photo courtesy of the Syndics of the Cambridge University Library.)

Hoffman and Cole devote as much attention to the spiritual and literary side of the Geniza as they do to the mundane. Cole himself is a noted poet and translator as well as the editor of the prize-winning anthology *The Dream of the Poem: Hebrew Poetry from Muslim and Christian Spain, 950-1492*, and many of *Sacred Trash*'s quotations from medieval Hebrew poetry represent his own translations. Cole and Hoffman's explanations of the nature of *piyyut* (Hebrew liturgical poetry)—both the earlier Byzantine and later Sephardic—nicely elucidate an extremely complicated subject for the non-specialist. The portraits

of scholars such as Israel Davidson, Menahem Zulay, Hayyim Schirmann, and Ezra Fleischer, who devoted themselves to recovering, indentifying, and interpreting the enormous poetic corpus from the Geniza, are sensitively drawn and the nature of their individual contributions are given their due. Not only did they add to the repertoire of renowned poets such as Dunash ben Labrat, Solomon ibn Gabirol, and Moses ibn Ezra, but also retrieved the lost works of poets who were known by name only, such as Joseph ibn Abitur and Menahem ben Saruk. They also revealed the hitherto-unknown work of the only female poet so far found in the Geniza, the wife of Dunash ben Labrat. Her moving lament for her absent husband still moves the reader eleven centuries later:

Will her love remember his graceful doe,
her only son in her arms as he parted?
On her left hand he placed a ring from his right,
on his wrist she placed his bracelet.
As a keepsake she took his mantle from him,
and he in turn took hers from her.



Poem by the wife of Dunash ben Labrat, the 10th-century Spanish poet. (Image courtesy of Cambridge University Library Mosseri VIII.202.2; Mosseri IV.387.)

If the authors' rendition of Hebrew verse is exquisite, their expository prose is charmingly breezy. They describe a palimpsest "as a kind of medieval Etch A Sketch pad," and quite rightly compare some of the work of Geniza scholars to the popular television gameshow *Jeopardy!*, where the answer is provided, and the trick is to come up with the question that prompted it. Though aimed at the wider public, *Sacred Trash* has much to satisfy the academic reader as well. The authors' grasp of the scholarly issues in Geniza research and the rich, discursive endnotes show that they have read a great deal of the academic literature in Hebrew and English. Most readers will skip the endnotes, but they are well worth reading for anyone who wants to pursue the topic.

Hoffman and Cole have fittingly chosen to end their account of the founding fathers of Geniza research with Goitein. However, in a brief Afterword, they survey some of the recent scholarly trends, including the study of magic texts, and ongoing efforts to preserve and digitize the documents. The Cairo Geniza's "sacred trash" will continue to yield historical treasure for quite some time.

Norman A. Stillman is the Schusterman/Josey Professor of Judaic History at the University of Oklahoma. He is the Executive Editor of Encyclopedia of the Jews in the Islamic World *(Brill).*

That in Aleppo Once

BY MARC B. SHAPIRO

CROWN OF ALEPPO: THE MYSTERY OF THE OLDEST HEBREW BIBLE CODEX
by Hayim Tawil and Bernard Schneider
Jewish Publication Society, 199 pp., $40

Sometime in the 10th century, in Tiberias, Aharon ben Asher and Shlomo ben Buya'a sat down to produce an annotated copy of the Hebrew Bible. Ben Buya'a was responsible for the lettering, while Ben Asher, whose father, Moshe, was also a great master of the textual tradition, or Masorete (from the Hebrew *mesorah*, meaning tradition), added the notes. These notes are what made the so-called "Aleppo Codex" (a codex is an ancient book rather than a scroll), or, in Hebrew, *Keter Aram Tsova* (Crown of Aleppo) the most authoritative Hebrew Bible of the Middle Ages. In fact, ben Asher and ben Buya'a's text didn't reach Aleppo until the 15th century, and the question of how it got there is one of the several historical mysteries discussed in Hayim Tawil and Bernard Schneider's new book.

In the Middle Ages, pretty much all Jews believed that the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, had been dictated by God to Moses. But just as important as its reception was the issue of the Torah's transmission. The troubling reality in ancient and medieval times was that Torah scrolls were not uniform, neither in letters, nor in divisions of sections or vocalization of words. This was a religious predicament, but it was also a scholarly challenge, for the only solution was to investigate scribal traditions, compare the best biblical manuscripts and Torah scrolls, and make informed critical judgments about which readings made the most sense.

This is where the Masoretes came in. By creating a system of marginal signs and notes they enabled the text—and the proper way to read it—to be passed on in as perfect a fashion as possible. To be sure, there had been a concern with biblical accuracy before this—the Talmud says that the *soferim* (scribes) were known as such because they "count" (in Hebrew, *soferim*) the letters of the Torah—but it is not until the 8th century that we find systematic treatments of the text, vocalization, and cantillation of the Torah. The codex, basically a book, was simply the best form in which to record masoretic notes, since the scribe can write on both sides of the page and his reader needn't roll and unroll to find his place. Indeed, Jewish law, which allows only the unvocalized, unpunctuated, and unglossed letters of the Bible to appear in a Torah scroll, almost makes it necessary.

One hundred years after ben Asher and ben Buya'a wrote it, the Aleppo Codex, was in the hands of the Karaite community of Jerusalem. In fact, it is possible that ben Asher and ben Buya'a themselves had been Karaites. Tawil and Schneider take no side in this disputed issue, but it is not implausible, since Karaites, biblicists who rejected rabbinic interpretation and tradition, had a perhaps even stronger theological interest in finding and preserving the purest biblical text than their rabbinic rivals. Moreover, the field of masoretic studies has seen its share of "outsiders," as most traditional Jewish scholars preferred to focus on the traditional fields of Talmud and halakhah. (One of the greatest masoretic authorities in modern times, C. D. Ginsburg, was a convert to Christianity, and when traditionalist scholars cite his writings they rarely realize that the "C" stands for "Christian.")

A halo of folklore surrounded the Codex: It was written by the biblical Ezra and stored in "the Cave of Elijah"; pregnant women prayed near it, and there was a curse against anyone who sold it.

In his 12th-century code of Jewish law, the *Mishneh Torah*, Moses Maimonides wrote that he "relied on the well-known codex in Egypt, which contains the twenty-four books [of the Bible] that had been in Jerusalem for several years, upon which all relied because it was proofread by ben Asher." In the 19th and 20th centuries there was a great deal of scholarly discussion as to whether, as tradition had it, this was the same text that later became known as the Aleppo Codex. But as Tawil and Schneider recount, in a nice bit of detective work, Moshe Goshen-Gottstein, of the Hebrew University, conclusively proved that it was indeed the identical text, though by that time much of the Aleppo Codex itself had been lost.

Yitzhak Ben-Zvi studying the Aleppo Codex upon its arrival in Israel in 1958. (Photo courtesy of David Rubonger and the Hebrew University.)

In 1935 Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, who later became the second president of the State of Israel, visited Aleppo to see the Codex, which had by then become surrounded by a halo of local history and folklore. It was widely described as the work not of ben Asher and ben Buya'a but of Ezra himself, the biblical scribe who, by tradition, was buried nearby. It was guarded in a safe behind an iron door in the basement of the Great Synagogue of Aleppo, in what was called the "Cave of Elijah," and believed to be not only holy but magical. Pregnant women prayed near it, and there was supposed to be a curse against anyone who sold it. Both the security measures and the curse may have been inspired by the colorful 19th-century Karaite scholar and forger Abraham Firkovich's attempt to acquire, perhaps even steal, the Codex. In any event, they did not help Ben-Zvi in his persistent attempts over the following years to convince the Syrian Jewish elders to transfer the Codex to Jerusalem. Although Ben-Zvi was genuinely worried about the safety and preservation of the Codex, nationalism also provided a motive: The Aleppan community had done its job well for centuries, but now that the Jewish home in Palestine had been reestablished, the Crown should return to Jerusalem.

Needless to say, the elders of Aleppo did not see matters this way. In fact, they believed that it was precisely the presence of the Codex that helped protect the community. Even if they could be convinced that the Codex was in danger in Aleppo, they were also terrified by the curse attached to it. Allowing it to leave the community, even if only to be photographed and returned, was regarded by them as no different from selling it.

Intermittent discussions along these lines continued through the 1940s. In 1947, after the UN vote supporting the partition of Palestine, an anti-Jewish riot broke out in Aleppo. The Great Synagogue, which dated back to the 5th or 6th century, was ransacked and burned. Exactly what happened to the Aleppo Codex that day and how part of it was saved is still unclear. The authors discuss seven accounts of how the Crown was saved. Here is the recollection of Moshe Tawil, the chief rabbi of Aleppo at the time (and no relation to the book's author):

> The Crown was accidentally saved . . . Four days after [the pogrom], we entered the Great Synagogue and we saw the ashes of all the holy

> books. The sexton [Asher Baghdadi] entered and told Rabbi Yitzhak Shchebar that six books were burned and everybody looked at the Crown that was dirty and wallowing in ashes. Immediately, they took the Crown and gave it to a Christian merchant for safekeeping. After four or five months they handed the book to a Jew.

But by this time almost two hundred pages, including most of the first five books of the Bible were missing. Only the last six and a half chapters of Deuteronomy remained. Individual pages were also missing from various books of the Prophets and Writings and the entire books of Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah are also absent. About forty percent of the original codex was missing.

In 1957 what was left of the Codex was smuggled out of Syria by a man named Murad Faham. According to Faham, Tawil told him that if he succeeded he could give it to whomever he chose. When he arrived in Israel, Faham offered it to now-President Yitzhak Ben-Zvi so that it could be entrusted to the State of Israel. The local Syrian Jewish community regarded the Codex as its property and sued. Although Faham's story had—like every story about the Codex—some holes in it, the Crown stayed with the State and is today held at the Israel Museum. (It has also now been digitized and made available online.)

For a long time it was thought that the missing sections of the Aleppo Codex had all been destroyed, but Tawil and Schneider are not convinced of this. They collate tantalizing evidence that suggest the missing pages may still survive. A missing page from the Book of Chronicles surfaced in the 1970s, and was later donated by the family that held it to the Ben-Zvi Institute in Jerusalem. According to the family, the page was found on the floor of the Great Synagogue on the day of the pogrom. In the late 1980s, two men in Hasidic garb visited a prominent collector of Judaica at the Jerusalem Hilton, offering to sell him about one hundred pages of what appeared to be the Aleppo Codex for $750,000, before disappearing. And then there is Sam Sabbagh, a Syrian Jew who emigrated from Aleppo as a young man and was living in Brooklyn. For six decades Sabbagh kept a scrap of the Codex from the Book of Exodus in a plastic pouch in his wallet as a kind of good luck charm, or *kimeyah*. Sabbagh passed away in 2005 and his family donated the fragment, which included the words of Moses on behalf of God to Pharaoh, "Let my people go, that they may serve me," to the Ben-Zvi Institute two years later. Such stories have convinced the authors that the missing pages need not be lost forever. In 1992 Tawil asked a Mossad agent named Shlomo Gal about the missing parts of the Codex. He was told "Leave the subject alone. You don't want to know. It's a very dirty story." Nonetheless, Tawil and Schneider plainly think that recovering the remainder of the Crown of Aleppo ought to be higher on the agenda of Israel's cultural and religious authorities.

Above, Aleppan scholars inside the Great Synagogue, c. early 17th century. (Photo courtesy of the Ben-Zvi Institute, Jerusalem.) Right, Modern-day Aleppo, Syria.

The story of the Aleppo Codex is dramatic, and, if the authors are right, unfinished. Yet what makes it important is its religious and scholarly significance. At least as of now, virtually all of the five books of Moses are missing from the Codex, making it impossible to check Torah scrolls against it for textual accuracy. But, in a scholarly discovery inadequately discussed in *Crown of Aleppo,* the Israeli scholar Jordan Penkower was able to find a textual witness to the missing section of masoretic notes recorded in the margins of a Bible printed in Spain in 1490. This new evidence confirmed Goshen-Gottstein's argument that the Aleppo Codex was indeed the ben Asher text used by Maimonides.

Maimonides had affirmed that the Aleppo Codex was the most accurate text, and if the medieval scholars of Europe had access to it, they would have used it as their guide for writing a Torah scroll. Instead they were confronted with conflicting scrolls and masoretic works, and had to adopt a more eclectic approach. One might therefore assume that since we now know what was in the Codex (which incidentally was very close to the Yemenite tradition), contemporary Torahs should be corrected in its strong canonical light.

The most famous example of how this could be done relates to how the scribe is supposed to write the Song of Moses (Deuteronomy 32). With the exception of the Yemenite community, Torah scrolls today have this song in seventy lines. Yet the Crown has it in sixty-seven lines, as Maimonides in fact ruled. Should Torah scrolls therefore be corrected? One might think so, and some printed Bibles are now produced in accordance with the Crown. Yet when it comes to correcting actual Torah scrolls, scholarly conclusions do not trump religious tradition.

The religious community, the one that cherishes the Torah, studying it daily and reading it publicly a number of times each week, has now been reunited with the most perfect Bible text in existence, the text upon which Maimonides depended and with which religious scholars throughout history would have given anything to spend a few hours. Yet, today, with few exceptions, interest in the Crown is of a historical, not a religious, nature. Our biblical text—mistakes and all—continues to be used, uncorrected.

When, many years ago, I expressed my annoyance about this, I was told "It is true that the Torah scrolls from which we read likely have mistakes, but they are *our* mistakes." This still strikes me as profound. It is true that the text of my synagogue's Torah scroll is not as perfect as that of the Aleppo Codex. Where its letters. line breaks, and spacing differ with what appeared in the Crown of Aleppo, it is almost certainly the case that the Crown is right. Were he alive today, Maimonides would disqualify all non-Yemenite Torah scrolls. But this "less perfect" version of the Torah is what my father and grandfather listened to in synagogue, and it is the version that has been sanctified by the study of countless Torah scholars. It is this that makes it authentic, even more authentic than the Crown that for centuries had almost no contact with the people who would have benefited most from it. Perhaps it is fitting, then, that the final resting place of the Aleppo Codex is not a synagogue but a museum, which is where we place the valued parts of our heritage that we no longer use in our everyday life.

Marc B. Shapiro holds the Weinberg Chair in Judaic Studies at the University of Scranton, and is the author of The Limits of Orthodox Theology *(Littman Library).*

Lucky Grossman

BY MAXIM D. SHRAYER

THE ROAD: STORIES, JOURNALISM, AND ESSAYS BY VASILY GROSSMAN
Edited by Robert Chandler, translated by Robert and Elizabeth Chandler with Olga Mukovnikova. Commentary and notes by Robert Chandler with Yuri Bit-Yunan. Afterword by Fyodor Guber.
New York Review of Books Classics, 373 pp., $15.95

"They say there are people who are born under a lucky star . . . But the star under which Grossman was born was a star of misfortune," wrote Vasily Grossman's colleague Ilya Ehrenburg. When Grossman died of stomach cancer in 1964, a month before the removal of Krushchev by Brezhnev, he had already been devastated by the efforts of the Soviet regime to delete him from history. He had pinned hopes on the Thaw, but in 1961 the KGB confiscated the manuscript of *Life and Fate*, his major novel indicting Stalinism and Hitlerism. "They strangled me in the back alley," Grossman said to Boris Yampolsky. "They" included not only the regime and its active accomplices, but the silent majority of Grossman's literary brethren.

Grossman had been one of the principal voices of anti-Nazi resistance, and a legendary journalist who spent 1000 days at the front during World War II. But his final years were difficult. Close friends still adored Grossman; Semyon Lipkin, who helped to smuggle the manuscript of *Life and Fate* to the West a decade after Grossman's death, called him a "saint." Grossman also enjoyed the dedication of his last love Yekaterina Zabolotskaya, widow of the great poet Nikolay Zabolotsky, though it is not clear that she ever fully understood him. (In *Life and Fate*, the Russian wife of Grossman's fictional alter ego, Viktor Shtrum, loves him but fails to comprehend his Jewish anxieties.)

The Road, a new collection of Grossman's shorter prose published by a team of translators and scholars under the loving curatorship of veteran translator Robert Chandler presents a retrospective of the writer's career. The opening section offers a window into Grossman's prewar years. Born Iosif Grossman in Berdichev, once known as the "Jerusalem of Volhynia," he entered literature in 1929, the 2nd year of the first Five-Year Plan, with the Russian first name "Vasily." In these early writings, including the story "In the Town of Berdichev," one hears Grossman searching for a voice of his own. Isaac Babel and Andrey Platonov were among the early Soviet models, but as the story "A Young Woman and an Old Woman" demonstrates, Chekhov was Grossman's beacon. But Grossman was also something of a revolutionary romantic. Although he never joined the Communist Party, it took him a long time to rid himself of the belief that Jews were beholden to the revolution.

The war against Nazism was a time of great personal trauma; his mother was murdered in Berdichev in September of 1941, along with 200,000 other Jews. But it was also Grossman's time of glory—literary, civic, and military. Reporting from the trenches, Grossman survived the war physically unscathed, earning the moniker "lucky Grossman." His novel *The People Are Immortal* grew out of the first months at war, and still reads breathlessly. Grossman's articles in the main army newspaper, *Red Star*, were devoured by millions. Only a fraction of the material he gathered in interviews was published at the time. (If Grossman were alive today, he would have a blog.)

Grossman was one of the principal voices of anti-Nazi resistance and a legendary journalist who spent 1000 days at the front during World War II.

Vasily Grossman as a young boy with his mother, c. 1913. (Photo courtesy of NYRB Classics.)

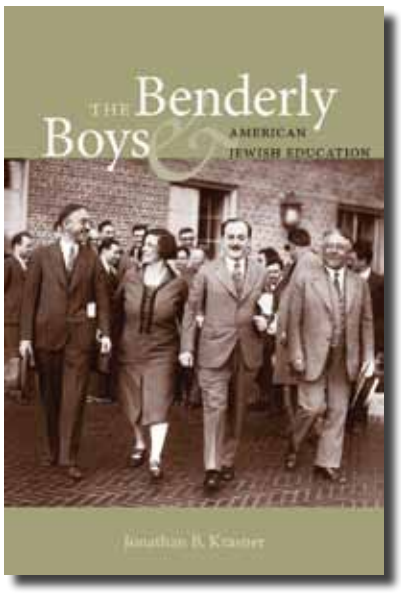
A section entitled "The War, the Shoah," constitutes the core of the new collection. In reading Grossman's wartime fiction and reportage, one senses his imperative to resist what by 1943 had become an unspoken Soviet directive: not to discuss specific Jewish victimhood and to downgrade Jewish military valor. A case in point is Grossman's 1943 story "The Old Teacher," which appears here in a new translation. Grossman was the first writer of fiction to present to the general Soviet reader an account of the Shoah by bullet. At the heart of the story lie the destinies of two professionals, the old teacher Rosenthal and the doctor Weintraub, as both face the impending execution of the town's Jewish community. Grossman's price for publishing about the Shoah was to obscure the collaboration of the local population with the Nazis. He did his best to hint at it by giving the traitors Ukrainian names. But the story's prevalent sentiment is that cases of collaboration were singular, and that the Soviet people enjoyed unity and the local populations displayed empathy for the Jewish victims. The truth about the Shoah in the occupied territories was more complicated.

In the summer of 1944, Grossman saw the *Aktion Reinhard* camps in Poland. His searing essay on "The Hell of Treblinka" ran in the December issue of the Moscow magazine *Banner*. It read, and still reads, as though a Jewish Muse was speaking into his ear. The essay was reprinted as a pamphlet in 1945 and distributed at the Nuremberg Trials. From late 1943 to 1945, Grossman worked with Ilya Ehrenburg on *The Black Book*, a project of the Jewish Antifascist Committee. He wrote the preface, sections on "The Murder of Jews in Berdichev" and "Treblinka," and prepared "The History of the Minsk Ghetto" along with other sections. His luck, such as it was, changed with the anticosmopolitan campaign and the derailing of *The Black Book* by Soviet authorities. He continued to publish and was spared the fate of the leaders of the Jewish Antifascist Committee, but he was vilified in the Soviet press. Stalin's death in March 1953 eased his lot, but only temporarily.

Shimon Markish once said that no one wrote about the Shoah and Stalinist anti-Semitism "with as much poignancy and emotion" as Grossman. In his 1955 essay "The Sistine Madonna," Grossman imagines Raphael's Madonna as living through the crimes of both Nazism and Stalinism. He depicts the Madonna and child as Jews annihilated at Treblinka, as Ukrainians murdered in the Great Famine, and as Russians killed in the gulag. But, even here, Grossman can not shake Marxism-Leninism. The essay presents a class analysis, and includes sentences such as: "I believe that this Madonna is a purely atheistic expression of life and humanity, without divine participation," and "The Madonna's beauty is closely tied to earthly life. It is a democratic, human, and humane beauty." Having grown up in the Brezhnevite years, I have a

STARRED BOOKS from Our Series Editors

Brandeis Series in American Jewish History, Culture and Life



The Benderly Boys and American Jewish Education

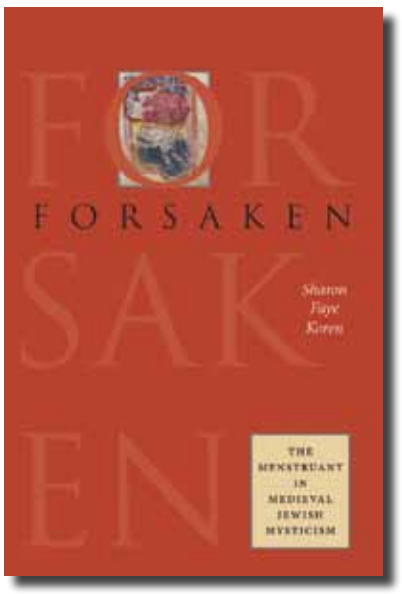
Jonathan B. Krasner

The first full-scale history of the creation, growth, and ultimate decline of the dominant twentieth-century model for American Jewish education

Drawing on the theories of Johann Pestalozzi, Herbert Spencer, and John Dewey, and deriving inspiration from cultural Zionism, Benderly sought to modernize Jewish education by professionalizing the field, creating an immigrant-based, progressive supplementary school model, and spreading the mantra of community responsibility for Jewish education. The "Benderly Boys," from the 1920s to the 1970s, were the dominant force in Jewish education—both formal and informal—in the United States.

Paper, 496 pp., 48 illus., 6⅛ x 9¼"
978-1-58465-983-9 • $39.95

HBI Series on Jewish Women



Forsaken

The Menstruant in Medieval Jewish Mysticism

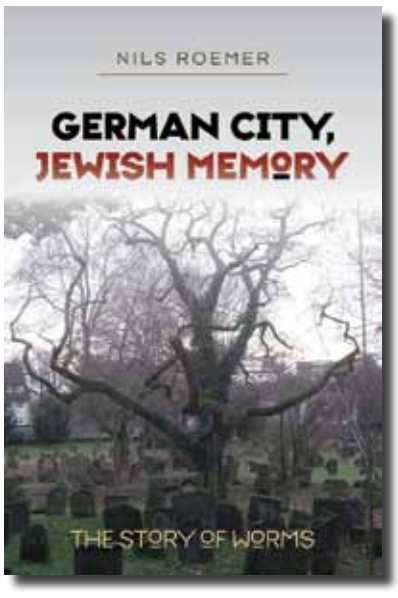
Sharon Faye Koren

A fascinating analysis of why there are no female mystics in medieval Judaism

Offering a provocative look at premodern rabbinical views of the female body and their ramifications for women's spiritual development, Koren compares Jewish views with medieval Christian and Muslim views of both female menstruation and the possibility of female mystical experience.

Paper, 288 pp., 6 x 9"
978-1-58465-982-2 • $35.00

Tauber Institute Series for the Study of European Jewry



German City, Jewish Memory

The Story of Worms

Nils Roemer

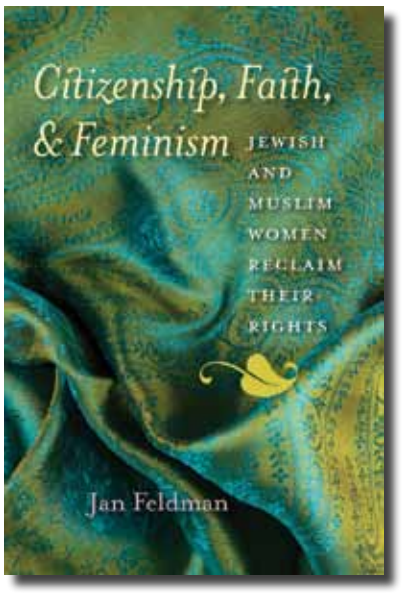
A remarkable, in-depth study of Jewish history, culture, and memory in a historic and contemporary German city

"[*German City, Jewish Memory*] opens up an exciting new way of telling the story of one city, providing thoughtful insights on how conceptions of time, place and community changed over a period of a thousand years. [It] will be enjoyed by those who are interested in medieval and modern history alike."

— Elisheva Baumgarten, Bar-Ilan University

Paper, 328 pp., 46 illus., 6 x 9"
978-1-58465-922-8 • $35.00

HBI Series on Gender, Culture, Religion and Law



Citizenship, Faith, and Feminism

Jewish and Muslim Women Reclaim Their Rights

Jan Feldman

The first book to examine religious feminist activists in Israel, the U.S., and Kuwait

This book shows how "dual citizens"—Orthodox Jewish women in Israel, Muslim women in Kuwait, and women of both those faiths in the U.S.—have increasingly deployed their civic citizenship rights to reform not destroy their religions and in the process to improve their status.

Paper, 256 pp., 6 x 9"
978-1-58465-973-0 • $29.95

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 |

bit of a hard time reading such Soviet-speak, even from Grossman and even in translation.

Against the backdrop of *Life and Fate* (which Grossman still hoped to publish at home) and of *Forever Flowing* (which he did not), Part Three of Chandler's new volume represents the intriguing final phase of Grossman's career. It features six fictions completed between 1960 and 1962. Two animal stories, "The Dog" and "The Road," form a pair not only for their subjects, but also because of the symmetry in the endings: The male protagonists behold the loving eyes of a dog and an elk, respectively. A shadow of Tolstoy's art of the familiar made strange hangs over these late stories. "The Road," the tale of a mule in the Italian army who finds himself in Russia, is compelling:

> Through their warm breath and their weary eyes, Giu the mule and the mare from Vologda spoke clearly to each other of their life and fate, and there was something charming and wonderful about these trustful, affectionate beings standing beside each other on the wartime plain, under the gray winter sky.

The embedded reference to *Life and Fate* here signals that the strange mule furrowing the steppe with tired hooves is an allegory for Grossman himself, an overweight, bespectacled lieutenant-colonel walking with a cane through the carnage of history.

"In Kislovodsk" stands out among Grossman's late fiction. Chandler is absolutely correct that among Grossman's sources for this story were the materials prepared by Viktor Shklovsky for *The Black Book*. Set in 1942 in a resort in the foothills of the North Caucasus, this story reads as a commentary on "The Old Teacher," and could have been titled "The Old Doctor." Dr. Weintraub administers poison to himself and his family not long before the murder of all the Jews in his small town. The Russian doctor initially collaborates with the occupants and is placed in charge of a hospital for wounded Red Army soldiers. Complicity with the murder of his patients pushes the doctor and his wife over the edge:

> They behaved very vulgarly . . . They ate pressed caviar and drank wine; he clinked with her and kissed her fingers as if they were young lovers in a restaurant . . . Then, in a harsh voice, she said, 'And now poison me, like a mad dog—and yourself too!'

Cognates of the Russian word *poshlost'*, which Nabokov taught us is a special sort of banal and crass vapidness, punctuate the end of this story, and one wonders if Grossman is not warning us about vulgarizing the memory of the war and Shoah through fiction.

In his introduction and notes, Chandler identifies several overarching themes of Grossman's late stories—and his whole career. One of them is the theme of failure, of being a *neudachnik* (loser), as Grossman called himself in *Goodness Be to You!*, a late non-fictional work that still awaits translation. Even more prominent is the theme of motherhood in his life and art. Grossman elevated the act of addressing a mother to the level of sacred music. The letters he wrote on the 9th and 20th anniversary of his mother's death share an intimate connection with the fictional experience of Viktor Shtrum in *Life and Fate*, who loses his mother in the Shoah.

Although he never joined the Communist Party, it took him a long time to rid himself of the belief that Jews were beholden to the revolution.

Grossman with the Red Army in Schwerin, Germany, 1945. (Photo courtesy of Random House Australia.)

Grossman's reception by Western readers is a story of great admiration tinged with occasional absurdities. The back cover of *The Road* quotes, in modified form, the last clause of a comment Martin Amis made in *House of Meetings*: "And by other ghosts—by Fyodor Dostoevsky, by Joseph Conrad, by Eugenia Ginzburg, and by the Tolstoy of the USSR, Vasily Grossman." To call Grossman "the Tolstoy of the USSR" is misleading. There was, of course, literally a Tolstoy of the USSR, Count Aleksey N. Tolstoy, a writer whose stylistic gifts may have been more ample than Grossman's, though he was also a venal Stalinist.

Reluctant to say anything irreverent about Grossman, Chandler has offered this disclaimer: "Only in one respect, perhaps, is Grossman overshadowed by [Leo] Tolstoy: he lacks Tolstoy's ability to evoke the richness, the fullness of life . . . Grossman, however, is writing about one of the darkest periods of European history." A dearth of desire and pleasure did help Grossman to capture the gruesomeness of history, but it was also an artistic problem in much of his fiction.

Grossman's greatest works and pages are those where a gut-wrenching power of witnessing buttresses the force of moral indictment. "The Hell of Treblinka" remains his finest work. Many sections of *Life and Fate* are beyond critical praise, and the chapters describing the death of Sofia Levinton and young David in a gas chamber belong with the best pages of Holocaust literature. John and Carol Garrard, Grossman's devoted biographers, called this "art from agony."

But Grossman's life was also agony from art—or an agony of art. This, oddly, brings one to the issue of translation. Another translator might take a more literalist strategy, and feel less inclined to downplay some of Grossman's contortions of rhetoric. On the whole, Grossman gains and endures in translation, whereas a bicultural verbal genius like Isaac Babel inevitably loses in English translation, just as Bernard Malamud would lose in Russian translation. With the publication of *The Road*, Robert Chandler and his colleagues have given us new textual evidence to reflect on Iosif Grossman's Jewish-Russian luck and on the literary immortality of Vasily Grossman.

Maxim D. Shrayer teaches at Boston College, is the editor of An Anthology of Jewish-Russian Literature *and is the author, most recently, of* Yom Kippur in Amsterdam: Stories *(Syracuse University Press).*

The Exodus

BY STEPHEN J. WHITFIELD

OUR EXODUS: LEON URIS AND THE AMERICANIZATION OF ISRAEL'S FOUNDING STORY
by M. M. Silver
Wayne State University Press, 266 pp., $29.95

LEON URIS: LIFE OF A BEST SELLER
by Ira B. Nadel
University of Texas Press, 352 pp., $27.95

Can any modern Jewish literary career have been less likely than that of Leon Uris?

Before dropping out of high school to join the Marines, he flunked English three times. After serving bravely and honorably against the Japanese at Gaudalcanal and at Tarawa, he did not take advantage of the G.I. bill and, unlike nearly four out of every five young Jews in postwar America, never went to college. Nor did he have a bar mitzvah ceremony and, as an adult never observed any Jewish holidays. Yet, in 1956, after having written two bestsellers set in World War II, Uris decided to write a novel about the origins of the State of Israel. Although he went on to write several more bestsellers, it is this novel, *Exodus*, that justifies two new scholarly books, M. M. Silver's monograph on how Uris "Americanized" the story of the founding of the State of Israel, and Ira B. Nadel's biography of the novelist.

The books highlight Uris' peculiar status in 20th-century Jewish history. Neither Silver nor Nadel makes a case for the author's literary importance and the news they bring of their subject's simplistic attitudes and hard living will not enhance his reputation. Nonetheless, they provide the materials for a surprising reassessment of Uris' historical importance.

Inscribed on Uris' tombstone at the military base in Quantico are the twin markers of his identity: "American Marine/Jewish Writer." The Marine Corps was the branch of the service that contained those Lenny Bruce had dubbed "heavy goyim." Thanks to the Corps, Uris erased some of the shame that he attached to the misery of his struggling and fractious family. He especially needed to break free of a cantankerous father, an unsuccessful paper-hanger who had come to America from Poland via Palestine, and adhered to the Communist illusions promoted in the Yiddish daily, the *Freiheit,* all his life.

The Jewish inhabitants of Israel are "magnificent people," Uris wrote his father in 1956, during his first visit. Here, the novelist added in an unsubtle rebuke, lives "a kind of Jew you and I have never seen before." Out of that dichotomy came a determination to make American Jews proud of the achievements of a nation that would be celebrating the tenth anniversary of its birth in 1958. But the primary readership of *Exodus* was intended to be non-Jewish Americans—not merely because there were so many more of them, but also because Uris interpreted Zionism as a variant of the historic yearning for national liberation, a replay of 1776 (and from the same imperial foe, no less). Academics these days are quick to see everything as mediated, and both Silver and Nadel read *Exodus* as an Americanization of Middle Eastern history by the screenwriter of *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral* (which also played somewhat fast and loose with history). But his was also among the first American novels to expose the horror of the Holocaust, and he made explicit the essential moral connection between the vulnerability of European Jewry and the formation of a state that would end the history of pogroms, massacres, and, of course, genocide.

Original poster advertising the 1960 movie,* Exodus, *based on Uris' book. (Image © The Farkash Gallery, Jaffa, Israel.)

Deliberately divided, like the Pentateuch, into five parts, *Exodus* ends fittingly with a *seder*. After all, as Uris informed his father in 1956, "the Bible sold six million copies" a year earlier. *Exodus* could not quite match that kind of popularity, but its success was staggering. By February1959, Doubleday's hardcover edition was selling 2,500 copies a *day*, flying off the shelves. By the end of that year, Bantam correctly guessed that the paperback edition might come close to selling five million copies, and therefore initiated what was then the largest advance print order in the history of publishing. The director of Israel's tourist office observed "more tourists fly in to Tel Aviv with *Exodus* than with the Bible." In 1960-1961, El Al offered a two-week tour for visitors to the Holy Land to see where (the fictional) Ari Ben Canaan and his comrades staged the exploits that promoted Jewish pride. Four decades later, Edward Said would complain to *Al-Ahram* saying, "the main narrative model that dominates American thinking still seems to be Leon Uris' 1958 novel *Exodus*."

Uris went on to write other books about Jews, whether set during the Holocaust (*Mila 18*, *QB VII*) or in the Middle East (*Jerusalem: Song of Songs*, *The Haj*, *Mitla Pass*). Even *Trinity*, his 1976 novel about Ireland, stemmed from his identification of the Irish Catholics with the Jews (with Great Britain, once again, as the enemy). Despite its intimidating 751 pages, *Trinity* stayed on the *New York Times* Best Seller List for one hundred weeks and sold more than five million copies. But *Exodus* was singular. Perhaps only *The Good Earth* is comparable, as an example of an enormously popular novel that decisively shaped American perceptions of a foreign country. But Pearl Buck knew China better than Uris knew Israel, and there was little about Uris' background or interests that would have suggested a capacity for writing about the Zionist enterprise.

On this odd Jewish writer, Silver's *Our Exodus* is more reliable than is Nadel's *Leon Uris*, and exhibits a surer grasp of context. Silver is also more informative on the ways that *Exodus* diverges from the historical record. But Nadel's biography, though more informal, is also the juicier of the pair, because its subject was so prickly a character and because his literary career was so improbable. Uris' personality was as volatile as an ammo dump. His truculence, often fueled by vodka martinis, seems to have matched his father's, but it was compounded by a litigiousness that Wolf Yerushalmi (who shortened his name to Uris only when he came to America) could not have afforded. Cocaine also took its toll. Uris eventually alienated nearly all his friends and close relatives, did not attend his father's funeral, and was far too jealous to seek companionship or support among other writers, to whose work he generally remained indifferent or hostile. The bookshelves in the New York apartment where Uris' last years were spent displayed no works other than those he himself had written. In fact, nothing made him more intemperate than discussing the work of his fellow Jewish American novelists. Even *Marjorie Morningstar* he denounced as "harmful to the best interests of the Jewish people." This was hardly a literary judgment, but Uris did not—or could not—differentiate between the aims of Herman Wouk and Norman Mailer. These novelists, Uris complained,

portrayed Jews either as unappealing alrightniks or as candidates for psychotherapy, or both. And when his own unabashed Jewish nationalism annoyed "the so-called liberal Jewish press," Uris had a ready explanation: "Jews have always turned on their heroes."

What haunted Uris was history: in the Pacific Theater, in the Middle East, in the Warsaw Ghetto, in the Nazi camps, and in Ireland.

Nadel's account of Uris' final years does not make for edifying reading. He was overweight and suffered from high blood pressure, arthritis, knee pain, lower back pain, dental problems, and gout, among other ailments. As he aged, Uris often made loutish passes at married women and patronized prostitutes. One prostitute once beat him up so badly he was hospitalized; later, while with a Latvian masseuse whom he assumed to be a prostitute, Uris defied a "Do Not Touch" sign and got beaten up again. His lavish spending habits forced the former millionaire to beg for credit from his publishers. Such was the vulgarity of his mind that his mounting medical and personal problems led him to describe his *tsures* as an "emotional Auschwitz."

How to assess his legacy is a challenge that neither Silver nor Nadel fully meets. It is pointless to hold an openly commercial writer to formal or aesthetic standards to which he did not subscribe. For a quarter of a century beginning with *Battle Cry* in 1953 and ending with *Trinity* in 1976, Uris showed an uncanny knack for gratifying popular taste. A 1966 photo reproduced in Nadel's volume portrays Uris with the author of *Valley of the Dolls*. But Leon Uris and Jacqueline Susann merit comparison only in terms of their sales figures. Uris did not appeal to prurient interest, or—it should be added—to that other staple of the mass market, the vicarious pleasures of violence. What haunted him instead was history: in the Pacific Theater, in the Middle East, in the Warsaw Ghetto, in the Nazi camps, and in Ireland. To be sure, Uris was a philistine, and would have agreed with Mickey Spillane, who once said "I don't give a hoot about . . . [reading] reviews. What I want to read are royalty checks." But unlike such bestselling contemporaries, Uris actually made a difference.

Thousands of readers wrote to thank him for making Jewish identity something to be cultivated rather than suppressed. *Exodus* was integral to the process of ethnic discovery (or rediscovery), and fortified the desire among countless American Jews to invoke not only the right to be equal but also the option to be different. In aiming primarily at non-Jewish American readers, Uris actually undershot his target. *Exodus* may even have helped invalidate the expectation of Herzl that the Diaspora was fated, whether by the pressure of persecution or the allure of assimilation, to vanish. Uris' impact on American Jewry was truly extraordinary. Nor could the effect of the Russian translation of *Exodus,* which circulated in a *samizdat* edition, have been anticipated. Soviet Jews read this illicit edition as a guide to the buried treasures of their Jewish past. The executive director of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, Jerry Goodman, claimed that *Exodus* affected the *refuseniks* even more than did the Bible. In a 1985 letter to this reviewer, Uris placed *Exodus* "among the most influential novels in history." That opinion is astoundingly self-serving, but it is also incontestably true.

By changing the lives of American, Soviet, and former Soviet Jews, Uris expanded the boundaries of what a novel might be expected to accomplish. More than any other writer, he also helped Israel to win the crucial friendship of the United States. It worked both ways. Ari Folman, the Israeli filmmaker who made *Waltz With Bashir*, recently remarked that Uris' novel "is a must-read in Israel." Such are the elements of an utterly unpredictable legacy. By the same extra-literary standard by which he once dismissed *Marjorie Morningstar*, Leon Uris deserves to be ranked as the most important Jewish novelist who ever lived.

Leon Uris and Jacqueline Susann promoting each other's best-selling books, c. 1966. (Photo © Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, the University of Texas at Austin.)

Stephen J. Whitfield is Max Richter Chair in American Civilization at Brandeis University, and the author of In Search of American Jewish Culture *(Brandeis University Press).*

Begin's Shakespeare

BY GERALD STEINBERG

THE PRIME MINISTERS: AN INTIMATE NARRATIVE OF ISRAELI LEADERSHIP
by Yehuda Avner
Toby Press, 715 pp., $29.95

The restoration of Jewish national sovereignty and the survival of the State of Israel in its first decades required extraordinary leaders. Even after the final departure from office of Israel's first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, the country remained in great need of statesmen with a clear understanding of the opportunities available to them—as well as the limitations on their actions—in a highly complex political environment. Yehuda Avner's memoir examines the striking personalities and accomplishments of some of Israel's first leaders, and illustrates them in vivid detail. Avner's presence on the scene as a speech writer, senior advisor, and confidant for four of Israel's prime ministers—Eshkol, Meir, Rabin, and Begin—provided him with a ringside view of the action. Like Dean Acheson's *Present at the Creation,* a classic memoir of the origins of the Cold War as seen from the top floor of the US State Department, Avner's *The Prime Ministers* is an indispensable book. It is required reading for understanding the formative years of Israeli foreign policy and diplomacy.

In 1947, while still in his teens, the idealistic young Avner left his family in Manchester to settle in Palestine**.** As one of the founders of the religious Kibbutz Lavi, he "harvested rocks" to clear the land, dug latrines, and took up arms in Israel's War of Independence. In 1959, Avner was hired as a "greenhorn" translator in the foreign ministry over which Golda Meir presided, and at the height of Ben-Gurion's dominance of Israeli politics. Although he was not a member of the Labor party, his intellect and skills compensated for the lack of political allegiance usually necessary for promotion. In 1963, he became an English-language speechwriter for Eshkol, who became prime minister after Ben-Gurion's abrupt resignation. When Eshkol and his successors traveled abroad, Avner was also their note-taker and confidant. He eventually became a senior advisor and, at the peak of his career, ambassador to Britain and Australia.

In contrast to revisionist and polemical biographies, Avner's memoir includes little speculative psychological or political analysis, and reflects respect and affection for the prime ministers who led the country during this period. As he emphasizes, all four of the leaders for whom he worked were fully dedicated to the objectives of Zionism and to their public responsibilities. None could even be suspected of abusing the power and public trust for personal gain. Although each leader featured in this volume had his or her distinctive view of the international and regional environment and the policy options available to Israel, they all shared a hard-core realism. They understood that in international politics, power and interests, rather than ideals or moral commitments, usually determined policy,

Begin clung to an idealized image of the United States and its leaders as committed supporters of liberty and freedom.

and expected little in the way of benevolence from the "international community." Outflanked by Arab oil power, Israel needed to tread carefully, find allies where possible, and minimize the dangers when out-gunned diplomatically.

The fragility of Israel's position is reflected in the story Avner tells about a speech he drafted for Eshkol at the time of his 1965 state visit to London. When the young advisor sought to "rebrand Israel" (using today's foreign ministry jargon) as a normal country, including references to cultural pluralism and "Tel Aviv high jinks," Eshkol rejected the draft, and scolded him: "Don't you understand we are still at war? We are still beleaguered. We still face terrorism . . . We are still absorbing hundreds of thousands of refugee immigrants. So how on earth can you expect us to be normal?"

This admonition notwithstanding, Eshkol himself had little difficulty reverting to normality, even while engaging in diplomacy on the highest level. Three years after his state visit to the capital of the United Kingdom, the prime minister and some of his advisers traveled to meet with President Lyndon Johnson at his ranch in south Texas. Johnson packed the group into his station wagon soon after their arrival and sped them around the vast property. "That's Daisy," the president announced, pointing to one of his favorite cows, in the midst of a wild ride. Eshkol "looked inquiringly at Dr. Herzog, and above the growl of the engine, asked '*Vas rett der goy?*'—Yiddish for 'What's the goy talking about?'" But when they stopped at a barn to take a closer look at a cow named Nellie, Eshkol, the ex-kibbutznik, was perfectly prepared to enter a stall and crouch down "to examine the cow and her wet and wobbly calf."

In 1969, shortly after Eshkol's death, Avner received a call from Israel's new ambassador to the United States, Yitzhak Rabin, who was looking for someone whose knowledge of English could make up for the deficiencies of his own. Avner spent the next three and a half years at the side of this future prime minister, with whom he was to work directly, once again, after he succeeded Golda Meir in 1974. Rabin, Avner tells us, was "a conceptualizer with a highly structured and analytical mind." He put these talents on display in 1975 while playing a complex diplomatic and psychological game with Henry Kissinger. At one point in the course of their negotiations, Avner reports, Rabin rebuked the American secretary of state for blaming Israel and not "Sadat's intransigence" for placing the success of his mission in grave danger. When Rabin characterized Kissinger's analysis as a "total distortion of the facts," Kissinger "turned, and without another word walked out of the room," and brought heavy pres-

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger at a joint press conference, July 12, 1975. (Photo by Moshe Milner, courtesy of the Israel Government Press Office).

sure to bear on Israel. As Avner shows, Rabin then continued to resist Kissinger's demands for premature concessions and skillfully turned a weak hand into long-term American commitments.

Avner devotes a considerable amount of attention to foreign leaders and their interactions with their Israeli counterparts. He describes numerous occasions when Europeans, in particular, adopted a patronizing approach, disguising petty political interests with lofty moral rhetoric. In 1973, for instance, Europe's socialist leaders cowered in the face of the Arab oil embargo and closed their airspace to American planes delivering much-needed weapons during the Yom Kippur War. In response, Golda Meir did not sugarcoat her response to German Chancellor Willie Brandt, who was, in theory, one of Israel's best friends. As a fellow socialist, she asked, "what possible meaning socialism can have when not a single socialist country in all of Europe was prepared to come to the aid of the only democratic nation in the Middle East?"

More than half of Avner's book focuses on Menachem Begin, whom he appropriately identifies as "The Last Patriarch" and "the quintessential Jew." Avner hadn't initially expected to work for him, but had assumed that Begin's accession to high office would mean his own exile from "that marvelously cosseted and privileged environment known as the prime minister's bureau." To his astonishment, Begin kept him on, telling him, "with a warm smile, and in English," that he would "polish my Polish English. You will be my Shakespeare. You will shakespearize it." This reflects well on Begin, but also on Avner, whose ability to work with such a wide range of leaders, from both Labor and Likud, is a sign of his pragmatic approach to Israeli diplomacy, and constitutes a much needed reminder of the limitations resulting from ideological blinders, both left and right.

Begin, who became prime minister after the 1977 electoral "earthquake," was even more of a realist than his predecessors, and had no illusions about Europe. In 1981, Begin reprimanded Chancellor Helmut Schmidt for making a statement in Saudi Arabia regarding Germany's commitment to the Palestinians, which left unmentioned his nation's obligation to the Jewish people. In response, Begin told Schmidt that his statement "showed callous disregard for the Jews exterminated by his people in World War II." As Avner recalls, "The pall of the Holocaust clung to Menachem Begin like a shroud, unremittingly." Later, while serving as the Israeli ambassador in London, Avner was invited to a state banquet in honor of the German president. When the German anthem was played, he imagined Begin's response, and, diplomatic protocol notwithstanding, stayed in his seat.

In sharp contrast, Begin clung to an idealized image of the United States and its leaders as committed supporters of liberty and freedom. Before meeting President Carter for the first time, Begin told his advisers, "I believe Jimmy Carter to be a decent man, and his impulse is entirely sincere . . . Since I believe him to be an honest man I have to believe he can detect the truth when he sees it, and is, therefore, open to persuasion."

While maintaining his core beliefs and policies, Begin worked hard to influence Carter, who nevertheless persisted in his efforts to revive the Geneva

conference in partnership with the Soviet Union. In November 1977, when Sadat sought to circumvent Carter's plans by coming to Jerusalem to begin peace negotiations, Begin continued to keep Carter fully informed of developments. Despite many bitter arguments, Begin clung tenaciously to his effort at persuasion, until he recognized that Carter was unalterably committed to an outlook contrary to his own.

The recent events in Egypt have highlighted the importance and unique nature of the 1979 peace treaty with Israel. While much has been written about this remarkable process, Prime Minister Begin's perspective has been largely unrepresented, in part because he gave few interviews and wrote no memoirs. Avner helps to fill this gap in the literature. In contrast to the image of a rigid leader blindly committed to ideology, his detailed reportage demonstrates the realism that guided Begin's conduct during his years as prime minister. He understood the importance of peace with Egypt for the future of Israel, reluctantly accepting withdrawal from the Sinai and the accompanying security risks as the price. Avner portrays the prime minister as maintaining a clear view of the objective, and not allowing his emotions to interfere with his judgment. During crises in the difficult negotiations, the Egyptian media used anti-Semitic images for personal attacks against Begin, and referred to him as "Shylock." But Begin was unruffled, even sending notes to Avner "from Shylock to Shakespeare."

Begin remained steadfast in the face of pressures from other quarters as well. When the US called for Israel to return to the pre-1967 armistice lines, he declared:

> We are a nation of returnees, back to our homeland, Eretz Yisrael. Ours is a generation of destruction and redemption . . . Ours is a generation that rose up from the bottomless pit of hell. We were a helpless people . . . No one came to our rescue. We could do nothing about it. But now we can. Now we can defend ourselves.

But Begin was not immovable. As Avner observes, "Even while the mule in him reared up against any West Bank concessions, the statesman within him strained to rein in his own impulses." Begin found a formula that "was not an outright avowal of Israeli sovereignty, but nor was it a concession to anybody else's . . ." After many more rancorous sessions, including two weeks at Camp David in 1978, this remained Begin's bottom line in the negotiations. He proposed autonomy for the "Arabs of Eretz Yisrael," as he insisted on calling them, but rejected any move towards an independent state under Arafat's control. Sadat, as well as Carter, eventually accepted Begin's bottom line.

Avner's chapters on Begin and Reagan reflect a different but equally complex relationship, in this case involving a president whose ideological and intuitive sympathy for Israel was often qualified by other American interests. Israel's attack on Iraq's nuclear reactor in June 1981, Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights in December of that year, the massive American sale of advanced weapons to Saudi Arabia, and then the Lebanon war in 1982 created a great deal of stress in US-Israel relations. By focusing on the communication (and often miscommunication) between the leaders of the two countries, Avner adds an important dimension to the analysis of their interaction.

Prime Minister Golda Meir and German Chancellor Willy Brandt at the Knesset, June, 1973. (Photo © AFP/Getty Images)

Prime Minister Menachem Begin and President Jimmy Carter at the White House, with Yehuda Avner at the far right, July, 1977. (Photo by Ya'acov Sa'ar, courtesy of the Israel Government Press Office.)

Reagan's use of "cue cards" during meetings, with no substantive or spontaneous departures from the text, is seen as reflecting the fear of his advisors (including the consistently hostile Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberg), who "did not want their man plunging extemporaneously into exchanges on complex issues…" For Begin, the master orator, this device and Reagan's inaccessibility were as frustrating as Carter's refusal to respond to his passionate lectures on Jewish history and rights.

The final chapters of Avner's book respectfully portray Begin's decline in the wake of accumulated political and physical stress, accelerated by the death of his wife, Aliza. As in the case of the other prime ministers featured in this diplomatic history, the personal is secondary to the political realm, but never entirely removed from it. The image of a very weak and largely dysfunctional Begin attempting to deal with the Lebanon war, which went terribly wrong, highlights the centrality of leadership, in both its positive and negative aspects.

Begin's official resignation in August 1983 marked the end of the era that began with Ben-Gurion, in which Israel was led by the charismatic heads of the pre-state Zionist movements. In their own different ways, they all worked indefatigably to translate their absolute belief in the centrality of Jewish sovereign equality into the form of a state capable of surviving and prospering in "a difficult environment." And in realizing this objective, they gave their successors the opportunity to maintain and build on their achievements. Yehuda Avner, who saw so much of this up close, who was "present at the creation," deserves our thanks for supplying us with such a vivid and instructive reminder of the very special men in whose service he utilized his own unique talents.

Gerald Steinberg teaches political science at Bar-Ilan University, and is the executive director of NGO Monitor.

The Hands of Others

BY DEREK J. PENSLAR

THE ARABS AND THE HOLOCAUST: THE ARAB-ISRAELI WAR OF NARRATIVES
by Gilbert Achcar
Metropolitan, 386 pp., $30

How much of the blame for the Holocaust can be placed upon the Arabs? And why is there so much Holocaust denial in the Arab world today? According to Gilbert Achcar, only a small minority of Arabs were committed Nazi sympathizers, while hardly any actively abetted the Holocaust. 'The Arabs' as a people, he argues, were not co-conspirators of the Nazis and therefore should not have had to pay the price in Palestine for the genocide perpetrated against the Jews in Europe. That "price," the loss of their homeland in 1948, is in turn the source of Arab Holocaust denial: "The further that Israel goes in its political and practical denial of the *nakba*, and the longer Israel continues to exacerbate its consequences, the more Palestinians and Arabs will be tempted to riposte by denying the Holocaust."

Readers made uneasy by these ideas may be even more ill disposed to give them a hearing when they learn the identity of the author of *The Arabs and the Holocaust*. Gilbert Achcar is a Lebanese-born socialist, a harsh critic of American foreign policy and of Israel, and the co-author (with Noam Chomsky) of a 2007 volume entitled *Perilous Power: The Middle East and U.S. Foreign Policy. Dialogues on Terror, Democracy, War, and Justice.* Nevertheless, his newest book is an important work, even—perhaps especially—for those who will not agree with it. Its exploration of Arab sensibilities is thoughtful and illuminating, its condemnation of Holocaust denial humane and principled. Yet no less principled is the author's steadfast anti-Zionism. The book, although meant to overcome what the subtitle calls "the Arab-Israeli war of narratives," in fact demonstrates the chasm that divides the leftist Arab intelligentsia from its Israeli counterpart.

Arabs responded to Nazism in many different ways, with few apart from radical religious figures like the notorious Palestinian leader Muhammad Amin al-Husseini demonstrating deep anti-Semitism.

Achcar begins his book with a comprehensive overview of the different ideological camps in the Arab world during the era of the Holocaust. He endeavors to show that Arabs responded to Nazism in many different ways, with few apart from radical religious figures like the notorious Palestinian leader Muhammad Amin al-Husseini demonstrating deep anti-Semitism. There was a solidly anti-Nazi liberal intelligentsia, which during the 1930s filled the Arabic press in Egypt and Palestine with criticism of Hitler's regime on ethical and religious grounds, but also expressed fears that Nazi persecution of the Jews would serve to strengthen the Zionist enterprise. Marxist Arab intellectuals became sworn enemies of Hitler, at least after his June 1941 invasion of the Soviet Union. Some secular Arab nationalists sympathized with Germany because it was the enemy of the British Empire, which stood between them and their countries' full independence. But only a few thousand Muslims from the entire Middle East and Africa served in Axis forces, while nine thousand Palestinian Arabs served in the British Army, and hundreds of thousands of Maghrebis fought for the Free French. Iraqi Prime Minister Rashid Ali al-Gaylani was, Achcar argues, acting as a nationalist and anti-imperialist, not a Nazi collaborator, when, after being forced from office in January 1941, he called on Axis military support for a short-lived coup d'état.

Bosnian soldiers of the 13th Waffen Mountain Division of the SS, reading a booklet on Islam and Judaism, July, 1943. (Photo © Mielke, Bundesarchiv.)

On the other hand, there were several pro-Nazi Arab nationalist organizations, and some of them flirted with fascism. The Futuwwa high school student movement in Iraq wrought havoc during the *farhud*, the murderous pogrom of June 1-2, 1941, in Baghdad. Another nationalist organization, Young Egypt, adopted a truly anti-Semitic platform in 1939 and organized a boycott of Jewish businesses. This group in fact attracted several young men who would become leaders of the Free Officers who seized power in 1952, including Gamal Abdel Nasser and Anwar Sadat. Achcar tries very hard to minimize the degree to which Young Egypt had a pernicious influence on these two men. Nasser, he notes, left Young Egypt because it was "inane," and Sadat, although solidly pro-German, never displayed "the slightest sympathy for Nazi doctrine in general or anti-Semitism in particular."

Islamist movements, Achcar stresses, were far more consistently and vociferously anti-Semitic than secular Arab nationalist forces. Reading anti-Jewish rhetoric in classic Muslim texts in the light of pernicious new ideas emanating from contemporary Europe, the Wahabi fundamentalists of Saudi Arabia, backward-looking Islamic reformers like the Syrian Rashid Rida, and the founders of the Muslim Brotherhood all spoke in terms of an inevitable clash of religious civilizations between Judaism and Islam. They were true anti-Semites who believed Jews to possess awesome economic and political power, and to exercise a corrosive effect on the morals of Arab youth. (Similarly fanatical was a Palestinian village sheikh and armed rebel of the early 1930s named Izz ul-Din al-Qassam, after whom Hamas' armed wing—and rockets—would be named.)

As Achcar makes clear, the most influential of the reactionary pan-Islamists was Muhammad Amin al-Husseini, the mufti of Jerusalem and leader of the Palestinian national movement during the years of the British Mandate. Exiled from Palestine in the course of the Arab uprising against the British in the

late 1930s, Husseini ultimately found his way to Berlin, where he met with the highest officials in the Nazi regime, including Hitler, and pleaded with them to support the Palestinian cause and prevent Jewish immigration to Palestine. In Berlin, the Mufti went to work for the Foreign Ministry's office of propaganda, broadcasting pro-Nazi propaganda to the Middle East on short wave radio. The Mufti knew, and approved of, the Holocaust, and in 1943 raised a Bosnian Muslim division to serve in the Waffen SS.

The true extent of Husseni's influence in the 1940s is debatable, but he was, without a doubt, a war criminal.

Husseini plays a central part in Jeffrey Herf's recent *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, which draws heavily on transcripts of Arabic Nazi broadcasts, all of them drenched in anti-Semitism, and many explicitly inciting violence. Citing the Qur'an, one typical broadcast called upon Arabs to "kill the Jews wherever you find them." Achcar acknowledges the Mufti's anti-Semitism, but he claims that his influence on the Arab and Muslim world was minimal. Bosnian Muslims signed up to fight with the SS not out of any enthusiasm for Nazism but in order to take revenge against the Serbian nationalists who had, earlier in the war, massacred thousands of their compatriots. The SS division that the Mufti raised quickly fell apart, as most of its members deserted to join Tito's partisan units. Achcar also claims that the Mufti was neither a respected nor an influential leader after 1939, but was hated and feared by his political enemies throughout Palestine, ranging from other patrician families to the radical nationalists of the Istiqlal (Independence) party.

How, then, do we account for the Mufti's ability to dominate the Arab Higher Committee (AHC), the unified leadership of Palestine's political parties, even after his departure? Why was he able to stymie Palestinian acceptance of the 1939 White Paper, of which the majority of AHC members approved? And why, despite being unable to return to Palestine after the war, did he remain, even in Egyptian exile, the most prominent Palestinian leader during the 1948 war? On these points Achcar is silent.

The true extent of Husseni's influence in the 1940s is debatable, but he was, without a doubt, a war criminal. He was guilty at least of collaboration and, as a subject of the British crown, subject to prosecution for treason. The overwhelming majority of Arabs were, however, uninvolved in the Holocaust and innocent bystanders to it. Achcar's account of this period undermines any argument that what in the Arab world is called the *nakba* constituted the Arabs' just desserts for their iniquitous conduct toward the world's Jews during World War II. Many Palestinians may have hoped for a German victory that would rid them of both the British and the Zionists, but attacks by Palestinian guerillas, and then Arab armies, against Israel in the 1948 War have to be seen in their own terms, not as an attempted extension of the Nazi genocide.

Arab Holocaust denial was neither immediate nor instinctive. Shortly after the war, the Mufti correctly estimated Jewish losses in the Holocaust

as "more than thirty percent of the total number of these people." During the early 1950s, Arabs frequently acknowledged the genocide though they had little sympathy for Israel. This hint of openness faded as Israel increasingly defined itself in terms of the Holocaust. The Eichmann trial, Israel's representation of the 1967 War as a would-be second Shoah (though Achcar doubts that Israel was, in fact, in existential danger), and Menachem Begin's persistent use of Holocaust imagery from the late 1970s onward (the only alternative to invading Lebanon, he said in 1982, is "Treblinka") dumbfounded Arabs, especially after a mighty Israel conquered the West Bank and Gaza and began to settle it with Jews. Invoking powerlessness while wielding power fueled Arab fantasies of Jewish duplicity, thus encouraging the claim that the Holocaust did not happen, or had been exaggerated.

Achcar's main arguments are not very different from those of Israeli scholars Meir Litvak and Esther Webman in *From Empathy to Denial*, an exhaustive survey of Arab responses to the Holocaust. Achcar heaps criticism upon this book, at times unfairly and over minor differences of interpretation. There are, however, at least two important differences in their analysis. While Litvak and Webman interpret the Palestinian cult of the *nakba* as a mere copy of Israeli Holocaust-centrism, Achcar insists that the Palestinians' memory of their national tragedy has its own character, wellsprings, and underlying legitimacy. Litvak and Webman also see Arabs, even the secular intellectuals among them, proclaiming the Holocaust and *nakba* to be equivalent. Achcar, however, insists that he is merely demanding conversation and acknowledgment. He readily grants that the Holocaust, as well as other acts of mass murder and ethnic cleansing, far outweigh anything Israel did to the Palestinians in 1948. But that by no means eliminates his grievance against Israel.

Achcar's account of the gradual emergence of Holocaust denial in the Arab world calls to mind a parallel process that has taken place in Israel and the Jewish world in general. The Palestinian tragedy was widely known at the time it occurred, and some Israelis assumed a share of responsibility for it. Many Israeli soldiers were witness to, or a cause of, Arab flight. The expulsion of Arabs from Lydda and Ramle was even reported shortly after the fact in *Israel Speaks*, the New York-based newspaper of the American Friends of the Haganah. During the state's early years, the plight of Arabs driven from their land and forbidden to return was exposed in the Israeli journal *Ha-Olam Ha-Zeh* and in a popular book of 1950, *Ha-tsad ha-sheni shel ha-matbe'a* (The Other Side of the Coin), by the journal's editor, Uri Avnery. The expulsion of Palestinians from their village was also the subject of a celebrated and widely-read work of fiction, *Khirbet Khizeh* (1949), by S. Yizhar. Yet, as Anita Shapira has shown, the fact that some measure of the Palestinian tragedy was due to forced flight was forgotten over time. The flood of immigration into Israel diluted the country's previously intimate knowledge of the war, and ongoing Arab hostility spurred the creation of a retroactive image of Arab flight as planned by a conniving Palestinian leadership. What might be called "*nakba* denial," like Holocaust denial, has been an acquired behavior.

This parallel process of forgetfulness is something that ought to be the subject of discussion among Jews and Arabs, Zionists and Palestinian sympathizers. If Achcar's book helps to stimulate such conversation, and even lead to honest discussion in the Middle East about the mass exodus of its Jews after 1948, it could do much good. Unfortunately, Achcar's soothing call for "Cartesian shared reason" is thwarted by his own political agenda. Israel, he claims, is the last "European colonial settler state" that has not recognized and restored the rights of the native population. Even if one accepts the premise on which it rests, this statement is a bit of a stretch—the United States and Canada, for example, have yet to restore North America to Native Americans. Achcar further describes Israel as "a bellicose state that has continued to occupy the territory of its neighbors for sixty years"—not forty (since 1967), but sixty, since its founding. Is the state then, in any territorial form, illegitimate? Must it retreat to the borders of the 1947 United Nations partition proposal? No Arab peace offer of the past fifty years has suggested such a thing.

Cover of* Vienna Illustrated *showing Muhammad Amin al-Husseini inspecting Bosnian troops of the 13th Waffen Mountain Division of the SS, January, 1944.

Underlying these sentiments is the venerable anti-Zionist cliché that Jews comprise a religious community, not a nation, and so do not have a collective right of sovereign self-determination. Achcar sees Arab leaders from Nasser to Michel Aflaq to Yasser Arafat as having undertaken a fundamentally peaceful mission to transform Israelis "from a colonial Zionist population into a non-Zionist religious community enjoying equal rights in a secular Palestine." Not only does he ignore decades of Arab bellicosity towards Israel and the grim legacy of Palestinian terrorism, but he also conjures away millenia of Jewish corporate existence that transcended confessional boundaries, not to mention the self-definition of the vast majority of world Jewry today.

Achcar is critical of Islamic Jihad and Hamas but sees them as the direct result of Israel's destruction or delegitimization of secular, democratic, and liberal alternatives. During the 1980s, Israel did, in fact, promote Islamic movements in the West Bank and Gaza as an alternative to the PLO. But Achcar demeans Palestinians, and Arabs as a whole, by denying them agency or moral freedom, and presenting them as mere playthings in the hands of awesome, unstoppable Israeli power. After all, radical Islam has flourished throughout the Middle East without the help of Israel (nor, Achcar's secularist prejudices notwithstanding, are practicing Muslims necessarily more hostile to Israel than are their secular brethren). Occupation alone does not explain the self-destructive choices that Palestinian leaders have made over the past forty years. The occupied and the occupier each have moral responsibilities, and victimhood does not automatically bestow virtue.

Achcar claims that anti-Zionism is not anti-Semitism because not all Jews are Zionists. Apparently, Jews who *are* Zionists—the great majority of world Jewry today—are to be condemned. Achcar believes that fundamental critiques of Israel have moved from "the Far Left to the heart of post-Zionism," and from there to previously committed but now recovering Zionists like Avraham Burg. Leaving aside Achcar's vast overestimation of post-Zionism's influence on Israeli or diaspora Jewish society, it is deeply troubling that never once in the book does he offer a definition of Zionism itself. It seems that the word, no matter how conceived, means dispossession and racism. Achcar cannot accept even a Zionism that recognizes Palestinian national rights, that strives to equalize the social position of Israel's Arab citizens and to foster a stable Palestinian state, while asserting the rights and needs of the Jewish people.

Despite the polemical tone of Achcar's later chapters, his basic historical argument is sound. The Holocaust was a European crime, for which the Arab world was not culpable. Pro-German sentiment during World War II and even rabid anti-Semitism do not make Arabs co-conspirators in the genocide that took place thousands of miles from the Middle East. Arab Holocaust denial has developed out of the dynamics of the Arab-Israeli conflict in general and the dispossession of the Palestinians in particular. The Holocaust, however central in Israeli collective memory, occurred in another place and was the work of other hands. Its stain upon humanity is dark and deep enough; it must not be allowed to poison the soil upon which peace between Israel and a Palestinian state may finally be attained. Gilbert Achcar has not succeeded at overcoming the "Arab-Israeli war of narratives," but he has taken an important step towards reframing it.

Derek J. Penslar is the Samuel Zacks Professor of Jewish History at the University of Toronto, and the author of Israel in History: The Jewish State in Comparative Perspective *(Routledge).*

Qutb's Milestones

BY SAMUEL HELFONT

SAYYID QUTB AND THE ORIGINS OF RADICAL ISLAM
by John Calvert
Columbia University Press., 256 pp., $29.50

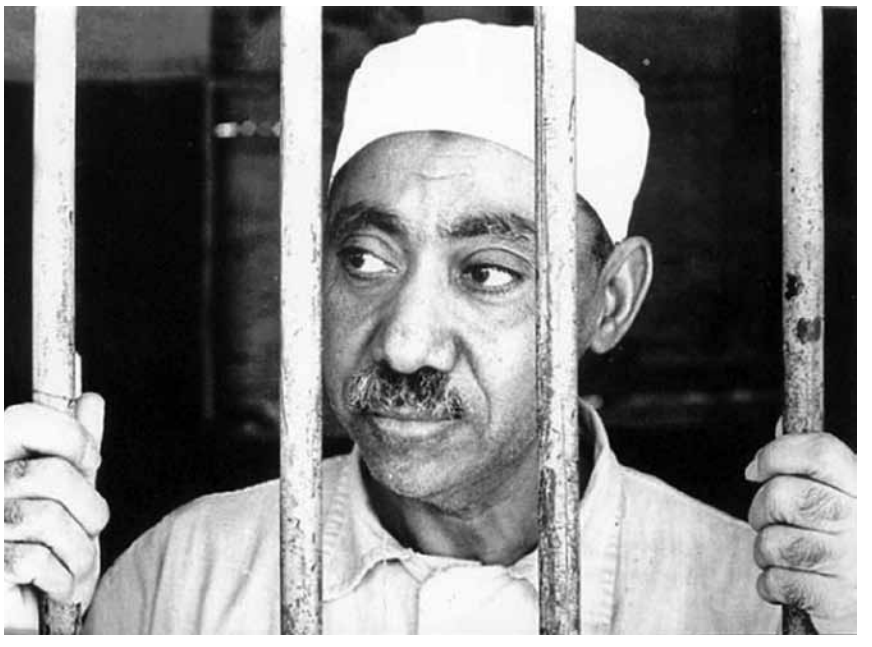
In recent years, Sayyid Qutb has become infamous as the intellectual godfather of al-Qaeda. Indeed, as John Calvert writes in *Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Radical Islam*, a "consensus has emerged that the 'road to 9/11' traces back to him." In their attempts to explain the movement he helped to spawn, Gilles Kepel, William Shepard, Lawrence Wright, and others have already limned the contours of Qutb's life and thought. Calvert, however, offers the first truly comprehensive biography. Building on the work of his predecessors, he offers new insight into Qutb's early writings as well as details of the dark days he spent in Nasser's prisons. What emerges is a more nuanced portrait, not only of the historic Qutb, but also of the process of transformations that eventually produced Qutbism.

Qutb was born in a small Egyptian village in 1906 to a middle-income, land-owning family. He was fascinated at an early age by his country's newly emerging group of liberal, middle-class *effendis*, several of whom taught at his school. "Everything about them—their outlook, appearance, and life experiences—seemed connected to an exciting new world of change, movement, and intellectual liberation," Calvert writes. Aspiring to join them, the teenaged Qutb left home for Cairo to study at a secular teachers college. Upon graduation he found employment in the Ministry of Education and embarked on a literary career. His early writings included novels, essays, poems, and various autobiographical pieces. He would later dismiss these as unimportant, apart from having helped him to develop an elegant prose style, and it is doubtful that they had much influence on his later works. Nevertheless, they were well received in Egyptian liberal-modernist circles, and brought him into contact with leading intellectuals such as Taha Hussein and eventual Nobel laureate Najib Mahfuz.

Although he remained deeply religious, Qutb was still a liberal nationalist at this point in his life. However, in the late 1930s and 1940s, as Egyptian political movements became more ardently opposed to Western imperialism, Qutb's views began to evolve. His writings from these years reveal frustration, even disgust, with Western civilization, which he denounced for seeking "to destroy all that humanity has produced in the way of spiritual values, human creeds, and noble traditions." Like other Egyptian intellectuals of his generation, he began to look for more "authentic" sources of inspiration. The transformation was gradual, but by the late 1940s this meant Islam and Islamism, albeit of a reformist rather than revolutionary nature. Nonetheless, Qutb continued to express nationalist sentiments and remained committed to working within the existing nation-state system. In fact, as Calvert suggests, Qutb probably would have "accepted an Islamized version of the existing monarchical-parliamentary system . . ."

Qutb's Islamist views seem to have taken a more radical turn durng his year as a student in the United States in 1949, which left him railing against the entire country as a sea of primitive depravity. Calvert, however, puts less emphasis on this visit than have previous authors, who often cite his horrified descriptions of the hedonism and superficiality of postwar America, especially his shock at the institution of church dances. He is inclined to suggest that the trip did more to solidify Qutb's preconceived notions about America than it did to shape them.

Qutb's writings made him a favorite of the Muslim Brotherhood, and a trusted intermediary between them and Gamal Abdel Nasser and the officers who overthrew the monarchy in 1952. A few nights before the coup, these officers visited Qutb's home, where they met with a contingent of high-ranking Muslim Brothers. The alliance did not last. Shortly after the coup, it broke up over disagreements concerning the role of Islam in the state. In 1954, Nasser had all the leading Brothers, including Qutb, arrested and put on trial. Qutb was sentenced to fifteen years of hard labor. Along with other Muslim Brothers, he was also brutally tortured.



Sayyid Qutb.

Languishing in the Egyptian prison where he had been deposited by the regime he helped bring to power, Qutb considered what had gone wrong. Until this point, Qutb's Islamism had been colored by Egyptian nationalism and firmly rooted in third world anti-imperialism. But now, incarcerated and abused by a nationalist and militantly anti-imperialist regime, he began to develop the uncompromising ideology that would eventually be called Qutbism. As Calvert skillfully shows, it was based on the premise that the only legitimate form of Islamic government is one in which sovereignty (*hakimiyya*) belongs solely to God. He decried all nationalisms as un-Islamic and unnatural divisions of the one true community of Muslims. Consequently, there was not a single Islamic state in the entire world. Every existing society was, therefore, in a state of barbaric ignorance (*jahiliyya*). Qutb's solution, outlined in books he wrote and published while still in prison such as the revolutionary manifesto, *Milestones*, and his Qur'anic commentary, *In the Shade of the Qur'an*, was the formation of a revolutionary vanguard who would work to overthrow the existing barbarism and reestablish true Islam.

A few nights before the coup, officers visited Qutb's home, where they met with a contingent of high-ranking Muslim Brothers.

In 1964, Qutb was released from prison at the behest of the Iraqi President, Abdul Salam Arif. He soon became the center of a small group of Islamists that began stockpiling weapons and considered using them against Nasser's regime. They were, however, soon arrested, and Qutb was hanged at a military prison in 1966.

Hassan al-Hudaybi, the General Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1950s and 1960s, wrote an influential book entitled *Preachers, Not Judges*, which criticizes Qutb's radical diagnosis of Egyptian society without ever mentioning his name. Nonetheless, Qutb's radical ideas made inroads throughout the Islamic world. Within the Brotherhood, some accepted Qutb's theories and developed small militant groups. One of these groups, the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, was responsible for the assassination of President Anwar Sadat in 1981. Other Qutbists went on to form terrorist groups, such as Takfir wal Hijra and eventually al-Qaeda. But the rank and file of the Brotherhood,

while holding Qutb in high regard, have rejected his most radical ideas. In particular, they have continued to accept the framework of the nation-state system, and their ideology has remained firmly tied to the broader nationalist, anti-imperialist cause.

Calvert lives up to his promise of presenting Qutb with "empathy, not necessarily sympathy." He gives the reader a real sense of how the world looked to Qutb, but this approach has its dangers. Sometimes, Calvert appears not just to have recapitulated Qutb's narrative but to have succumbed to it. For instance, he appears to accept Qutb's declarations of innocence in the plot against Nasser in 1954, writing "it is difficult to judge the validity of the regime's case against Qutb." Yet, one does not have to sympathize with Nasser's brutal government to see that Qutb had declared it illegitimate, called for its destruction, and was in the process of stockpiling weapons. Moreover, Qutb was, by this point, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, which had already assassinated one Egyptian prime minister and had attempted to assassinate Nasser himself. Later, Calvert even seems to glorify what he describes as Qutb's "martyrdom."

If Calvert seems to have misjudged Qutb's propensity for violence against Nasser, he doesn't fail to recognize the intensity of his loathing for Jews, although he may explain it away too easily. He argues that Qutb's anti-Semitism should be understood in the context of the colonial oppression that left Egyptians "aware that their nation's destiny was in the grip of others—the British, the Americans and the economic elite, many of the latter with roots outside the country, who, directly or indirectly, were connected with the monarchical-parliamentary regime." He further notes that Qutb believed that "the Jews stand behind an entire range of modern-day calumnies, including Freudian psychology and Marxist socialism," but he fails to note where Qutb got such ideas. As Jeffrey Herf has shown, Qutb's book *Our Battle with the Jews* and other similar works were strongly influenced by wartime Nazi propaganda. That Calvert has chosen to gloss over Qutb's absorption of some of the worst strains of European anti-Semitism is unfortunate.

With the renewed prominence of the Muslim Brotherhood in post-uprising Egypt, Sayyid Qutb may be more relevant than ever before. Over the past three decades, the Egyptian Brothers have done a good deal to separate themselves from Qutb's legacy, most recently in their willingness to cooperate with secular groups in the protests at Tahrir Square and afterwards. In fact, the Muslim Brotherhood now finds itself in a position very similar to the one it occupied over half a century ago during the Free Officers Revolution, in which Qutb played a key role. It enjoys widespread support and is aligned with a broad array of political movements. But how long will this last? Now that Mubarak is gone, the Brothers, and Egyptians in general, will have to decide not what they are against, but what they are for. If they refrain from turning to Qutb, Egypt will be much closer to the democracy and freedom that it deserves.

Samuel Helfont is a doctoral student at Princeton University, and the author of Yusuf al-Qaradawi: Islam and Modernity *(Moshe Dayan Center).*

Biblical Start-Ups

BY BETH KISSILEFF

BEGINNINGS: REFLECTIONS ON THE BIBLE'S INTRIGUING FIRSTS
by Meir Shalev, translated by Stuart Schoffman
Harmony, 304 pp., $25

When Virginia Woolf collected her literary essays in a volume entitled *The Common Reader* in 1925, she defined her audience as "private people" reading for their "own pleasure rather than to impart knowledge or correct the opinions of others." In *Beginnings,* his second book of essays on the Hebrew Bible, Meir Shalev, a noted Israeli writer, performs the same service for the Bible that Woolf did for English literature. As Shalev writes in his introduction, his purpose in writing is to "urge readers to go back to the original and make new discoveries—about themselves as well."

Shalev's impetus for writing these linked essays is to explore the first time particular words are used in the Bible. Why, for instance, do we assume the first dreamer mentioned in Genesis is Jacob, who dreams of angels ascending and descending a heavenly ladder, when in fact it is Abimelech, King of Gerar, who dreams the truth that Sarah is not Abraham's sister? Here, Shalev also gives a helpful definition of the biblical dream: "not a complicated psychological vehicle, but rather a simple, practical tool by whose means God has His say."

These essays bring a novelist's insight to the analysis of biblical characters. Thus, Shalev's notion that an "essential feature" of Abraham's personality is his "aversion to confrontation" has the virtue of explaining a number of psychological and textual puzzles, including the events that led up to the almost-sacrifice of Isaac. Of Jacob he writes, "it seems that despite the divine decision to give him a new name, Jacob, was not finished with his old one." Later, when an elderly Jacob describes his life to Pharaoh in the past tense, Shalev explains that since he thought his son Joseph was dead, it was "as if his days had already ended."

Meir Shalev. (Photo © Bastian Schweitzer/ Diogenes Verlag AG Zuerich.)

Shalev's discussion of the fraught family narrative that is the Joseph story in his essay "The First Hate" (which also draws on Thomas Mann's novels) is particularly insightful:

> Despite his gifts of imagination, he could not conceive of the fiction his brothers had concocted, the wild animal and the tunic soaked in blood.

Joseph's behavior towards his brothers in Egypt is not, according to Shalev, a form of revenge, but rather, "a form of investigation. Joseph wanted to test his brothers before revealing himself to them."

This attentiveness to the motivations behind biblical dialogue is also present in Shalev's discussion of the book of Jonah. The sailors on the storm-tossed ship ask Jonah about his people and his "occupation" but he only answers the former. In fact, Shalev reminds a reader, the standard Hebrew words for prophet (*navi*, *chozeh, ro'eh*) never appear in the four chapters of Jonah. Shalev writes that if Jonah were to declare his occupation he would look ridiculous, because a "prophet who cannot foretell a storm that will engulf a ship in which he himself is sailing is not much of a prophet." Shalev's description of Jonah's use of a mere five words to encourage the people of Nineveh to repent, *od arbaim yom ve-nineveh nehepokhet* ("Forty days more and Nineveh shall be overthrown"), shows his knowledge of the storyteller's craft: Jonah's "minimalism is deliberate" and allows the reader to focus on "his professional relations with his employer, the Lord."

Sometimes, Shalev persuasively interprets what is not spoken at all. He notes, for instance, that the word "forgiveness" does not appear in the Joseph story. More provocatively, he reads the dramatic story in which the prophet Elisha blesses his childless Shunemite hostess with a son, whom he must later resuscitate, as implying that Elisha was, in fact, the child's father.

Shalev's literary skepticism is directed at rabbinic texts as well. He is certainly right that the midrash tends to "blame the victim" in its treatment of the rape of Dinah, but too often he gives the ancient rabbis less than their due as sensitive readers. This neglect is, no doubt, inspired by Shalev's very contemporary Israeli desire to wrest the Bible from rabbinic control. Of God's arbitrariness in opening and closing wombs he writes that it is

> a sign that he does not reveal all of his reasons to human beings. Certainly not to the self-appointed spokesmen for the Almighty who speak only for themselves and for the religious institutions from which they earn their keep.

For all the subtle and occasionally startling insights in these essays, there is also a great deal of paraphrase, which can sometimes feel tedious. Must a reader be told that Ecclesiastes did not "subscribe to the simpleminded formula that organized religion would have us believe: that the righteous are rewarded and evildoers are punished"?

However, one appreciates that in these essays Shalev is working to revive the classic Zionist project of making the Bible the property of the common Israeli reader, and he may have to remind some of those readers about some of the details. To Shalev, the Bible is not just a text, but a product of the land where he lives. He describes going on hikes and doing "on-site readings where the stories took place," and of seeing a friend of his father demonstrate with a slingshot how David might have used his weapons. The English-speaking reader will never develop this same closeness with the text, but Shalev's essays can hint at the experience of knowing both language and land, and how that contributes to a fuller understanding of the text. *Beginnings* belongs on the same bookshelf as David Grossman's *Lion's Honey*, a masterful discussion of the Samson cycle by a noted Israeli fiction writer.

In these essays, Shalev brings a novelist's insight to the analysis of biblical characters.

One drawback to essays written for the common reader can be a lack of scholarly context. For instance, Shalev points out that Elijah is described as a "Tishbite" though there is no known place "Tishbeh," and suggests that the appellation might be connected instead to the root *toshav*, meaning that Elijah was a non-native. At points like this, it would be useful to know what Bible scholars have said about such speculations.

But in the end, one forgives Shalev such sins of omission in a collection of essays so full of literary insight and good humor. In his discussion of the Ten Commandments, Shalev jokes that the last of them is "Thou shalt not covet" because no Jew is capable of a perfect ten—"nine is the highest score on the Jewish report card." One closes this book of essays in a similar spirit, grateful for near perfection.

Beth Kissileff is the editor of a forthcoming anthology of essays on Genesis, and has recently completed a novel.

Melting Pot

BY MICHEL GURFINKIEL

QUICHES, KUGELS, AND COUSCOUS: MY SEARCH FOR JEWISH COOKING IN FRANCE
by Joan Nathan
Knopf, 400 pp., $39.95

Joan Nathan's *Quiches, Kugels, and Couscous: My Search for Jewish Cooking in France* doesn't have a very French title. Quiche is more American fantasy than true French staple; no one eats kugels in France nowadays; and the French do not speak of "cooking" but rather of "cuisine" or "the table." But such quibbles should not prevent one from digging into Nathan's story of Jewish-French culinary culture and its development. Probably America's leading writer on Jewish food, Nathan (who, I should mention, consulted with me briefly while writing the book) is especially well known for her historical cookbook, *Jewish Cooking in America,* but she also has experience with French cuisine going back to her student days in the 1950s. In her frequent travels through France, where her family has roots, she has collected recipes, stories, reflections, pictures, and historical data on the local Jewish cuisine.

France is one of the great centers of Jewish cuisine for two reasons. The first, and most obvious, is that France is one of the very few countries in which eating is less a corporeal necessity than a culture unto itself. Indeed, the Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, the 18th-century codifier of French gastronomy, even banned the word "feed" ("Animals," he wrote, "are fed, man eats"). French Jews had to adapt to such mores. The second reason is the melting pot that is French Jewry, which is now the third largest Jewish population center, second only to Israel in its diversity. In the past two centuries, France has seen large-scale immigration from both Central and Eastern Europe, North Africa, and the Near East. Each group of newcomers has worked to preserve its traditions in two key realms: liturgy and food.

In recent years, French Jewry has also made a massive and unexpected return to religious observance, creating a new demand for kosher cuisine. According to the Shamash worldwide database, France now boasts 379 kosher restaurants, for a Jewish population of about 500,000. (By contrast, the United States has 5.5 million Jews but only 1510 kosher restaurants). Unfortunately, Nathan's vision of France and French-Jewish cooking has not caught up with these developments. She scants the vast array of kosher restaurants that have transformed Jewish life in France, bringing French-Jewish food to prominence and raising its standards of quality to unprecedented levels. Her list of eighteen notable restaurants includes only three certified kosher restaurants. A fourth restaurant, which she describes as

Kosher falafel in the Marais, Paris. (Photo courtesy of Alfred A. Knopf, New York.)

kosher, claims indeed to be so, but was never certified by any rabbinical authority.

Nathan's geographical sense of the Jewish Paris scene is similarly outdated. The Marais and Belleville, of which she writes fondly, have largely vanished as Jewish areas. But visitors who stroll around by Rue Manin (near the Buttes Chaumont park), Porte de la Villette (claiming Europe's largest kosher meat market), or such West End locations as Rue Jouffroy d'Abbans, Boulevard des Ternes, and Place Victor Hugo, will see Jewish eateries of all sorts, as well as bakeries, supermarkets, butchers, and wine merchants.

And what about the chefs? Nathan also includes several characters and recipes that have only a tenuous relation—or no relation at all—to Judaism. Thus, Daniel Rose, a promising young American chef in Paris, is quoted on several occasions. While Jewish by birth, Rose neither observes the Jewish dietary laws nor shows any interest in traditional Jewish dishes. It would have been more to the point to pay a visit to Chef Ghislaine Arabian, an established star in French cuisine. Arabian is not Jewish, but she has advised Sushi West, a kosher Asian fusion food restaurant chain.

These are disappointing lapses but they should not deter the reader. Nathan is sometimes arbitrary or misleading; but she also has a real and even unique talent for spotting culinary masterpieces in unlikely places, uncovering the Jewish genealogies of classic French dishes, and finding the human story behind a piece of cake or a glass of wine.

A few year ago, Israel's Supreme Court banned the force feeding of geese necessary to produce *foie gras*. This was, to digress for a moment, a fourfold blunder. *Foie gras* is extraordinarily nutritious, a profitable export, the result of the goose's natural propensity to stock fat, and a genuine Jewish culinary tradition adopted from ancient Egypt. Noting the last two of these points, Nathan introduces us to Anne-Juliette Belicha and her husband, Maurice, who enlisted the help of a local butcher and started producing *foie gras* under rabbinical supervision in Périgord, one of the top gastronomic enclaves of southwestern France, where she was pleasantly surprised by the gentleness of the actual force-feeding (*gavage*). "I watched this process for more than an hour," writes Nathan, "and did not hear a quack."

According to the Shamash worldwide database, France now boasts 379 kosher restaurants, for a Jewish population of about 500,000.

Another character in Nathan's story is Shimon Bellhassen, a Talmudist and veterinarian-turned-shepherd with eleven children who produces kosher cheese—twenty different kinds, including Tomme de Savoie and Reblochon—in a little town in the Alps home to one of France's top *yeshivot*.

And how can one not be moved by the story of Lionel Barrieu, the grandson of a Catholic police officer who went underground rather than take part in the round-up of Jews during World War II? A convert to Judaism, Lionel—now Ariel—is particularly proud of a kosher version of his favorite dish, meat lasagna, with a milky non-dairy Béchamel sauce.

Equally fascinating are Nathan's investigations into the ancient Jewish dishes that are found in the diets of both Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jews. *Cholent*, the classic Ashkenazic bean-and-barley Sabbath stew, is a descendant of *chamin*, a dish described in Talmudic literature, and a not-so-distant relative of a Sephardic stew called *adafina* ("buried stew") in Arabic, or *dfina* in Judeo-Arabic. But it also turns out that southern France's trademark *cassoulet*, a thick stew with white or fava beans, duck, and lamb, is probably a local *chamin* adopted by Christians in the 14th century when the Jews were banished.

Another interesting case is the wheat soup (*Grün Kern* in German, or *soupe au blé vert* in French) that was customarily served on Friday nights by Ashkenazic Jewish families from eastern France. Nathan "asked all over for a recipe" without success, until by chance, she saw a Tunisian from Paris photographing his mother making soup and realized that it was almost exactly the same dish.

Its shortcomings notwithstanding, Nathan has written a book that one might liken to an old kosher Sauternes wine: sweet, immensely rich, and asking to be savored.

Michel Gurfinkiel is a French journalist and author, most recently, of Israël peut-il survivre? La Nouvelle Règle du jeu *(Hugo & Compagnie).*

Grading Parents

BY ABBY WISSE SCHACHTER

THE BLESSING OF A B MINUS
by Wendy Mogel
Scribner, 192 pp., $24

In what is easily the most shocking suggestion in *The Blessings of a B Minus*, Wendy Mogel urges parents to refrain from talking to their teens about college until 11th grade. "Clench your teeth if you have to," Mogel recommends. Her point is that college admission has become a tension-filled derby that doesn't do kids trying to get in to Harvard, or their parents, any good.

Instead, Mogel introduces readers to the concept of *bitachon*—trust in God. She explains, "parents need to place more emphasis on a loving acceptance of the dizzying spiral of adolescent development than on a narrow, focused effort to make their teenagers college-worthy." Parents should have a little more faith in their kids not only because it will probably improve family life but because it will help their children develop the skills they need to grow into adulthood. Building self-reliance is a central theme of Mogel's work. "According to the Talmud, 'teaching your child to swim' is a primary parental responsibility . . . because the goal of parenting is to raise our children to leave us."

Mogel is a clinical psychologist and mother of two whose first book, *The Blessing of a Skinned Knee: Using Jewish Teachings to Raise Self-Reliant Children*, made her a superstar. That success was well deserved since the book did a terrific job of exposing why so many parents she counseled were miserable, and so many kids she tested were frustrated. Having illustrated the emptiness of modern-day child rearing, Mogel boned up on Judaism—with its levelheaded approach to real human fallibility and potential—and wrote a handbook for happier, more satisfied, more successful parents and kids.

Neither Tiger Mom Chua nor any of the parents Mogel describes can handle failure.

She admits that for the most part she has her sights set on upper-middle-class and wealthy parents on the East and West coasts, but many of the issues she raises about homework, sleep, college, and chores, will be familiar to a wide swath of American parents.

Mogel is certainly right when she argues that many parents have become so fearful and overprotective that they tend to "help" their children too often instead of letting them experience the world with all (or at least some of) its sharp edges. Parents, according to Mogel, try so hard to "care" for their kids' every emotional or physical want and need that the home ends up a place where there is no authority and no structure. This leaves children exquisitely aware of their own feelings but not their obligations, either to their families or to the larger community. And as Mogel discovered through her clinical practice and counseling, this overabundance of "care" together with a total lack of authority and moral structure left the kids basically nowhere.

One of the most useful lessons from *Skinned Knee* is Mogel's discussion of parental authority. She expertly categorizes the types of parents who have abdicated their authority. There are the parents who are ideologically committed to democracy in the home, the "as long as your grades are good you can treat me like dirt" parents, and the hyperattuned-to-my-rude-kid's-every-desire parents—all of whom hate the re-

sults without knowing quite what to do.

In contrast, Mogel urges something like a "Divine Command theory" of parenting. The first of the Ten Commandments, "I am the Lord, your God . . ." is, she teaches, traditionally taken to establish God's authority. Mogel then goes on to employ the classic distinction between two categories of commandments, *chukim* and *mishpatim*. The latter have an explicable rationale. But

Wendy Mogel. (Photo courtesy of Brad Buckman.)

chukim are to be followed just because God commands them. Respecting Mom and Dad, Mogel explains, is one of the *chukim*. There ought to be no confusion about who is in charge. "Parents get fooled," Mogel writes, "because their kids are such skilled debaters, but children are not psychologically equipped to handle winning those debates . . . They can't regulate their own TV watching, or monitor their language, or teach themselves good manners." Establishing who is in charge is actually a way to make kids more secure and ultimately more successful.

From this perspective, it might seem as if Mogel and the recently infamous "Tiger Mother" have a lot in common. After all, Amy Chua's embrace of parental authority as the means of guaranteeing a child's success is the reason everyone and their mother has an opinion about Chua's memoir. Does she take discipline and drive to an abusive extreme or is her way of pushing her kids to excellence better than the soft, self-regarding approach of most Americans?

In fact, Mogel has just as much to teach Chua as she does any other over-achieving, upper-class parent. Chua has really just taken the parenting Mogel is critiquing to the *nth* degree. Neither Chua nor any of the parents Mogel describes can handle failure. Chua makes absolutely no room for her daughters to try and fail. Not only can't they fail; only first place is considered success. Chua has nothing to say about her role as a moral force in her children's upbringing. This omission—her insistence on a discipline that is not grounded in ethics—is her book's ultimate failing. As Mogel writes in *Skinned Knee*:

> Determined to give their children everything they needed to become "winners" in this highly competitive culture, [parents] missed out on God's most sacred gift to us: the power and holiness of the present moment and of each child's individuality . . . By sanctifying the most mundane aspects of the here and now, [Judaism] teaches us that there is greatness not just in grand and glorious achievements but in our small, everyday efforts and deeds.

Parents who drink wine at Shabbat dinner to sanctify the experience, are showing their kids that there is a time and place for drinking.

Mogel writes about the notion of a "good enough" child and urges parents to recognize that they can't control outcomes. Chua, and lots of other parents, would do well to bookmark the page.

Mogel's new book is meant to extend this approach from childhood into adolescence. "Using the Jewish teachings I'd written about, I was able to resist the extremes of overprotection, overscheduling, overindulgence," Mogel triumphantly explains early in *The Blessings of a B Minus*. She had confidence in her abilities to parent her girls through their teen years because, she writes, "when it comes to teenagers, I am a professional."

Mogel is, of course, right that as kids begin to leave childhood, parents have to begin to let go so that they can blossom into individuals. This process can be difficult to watch, but by providing example after example of families she's counseled, Mogel gives readers a pretty good sense of what doesn't work. One weakness of *B Minus*, however, is that the practical solutions Mogel now imparts have little to do with Judaism and much more to do with a conventional and entirely unsurprising liberalism. At any rate, Mogel is certainly selective with her Jewish precepts in this new book.

In *Skinned Knee* Mogel extolled the virtues of Shabbat. She took great pains to explain the reasons, morality, and importance of separating out this bit of time every week to shut off, slow down, and recover. Carving out such "sacred" space for the family to come together at a meal to talk and reconnect, she argued, is especially important in our current over-scheduled, over-networked, and endlessly stimulated lives. Not that she insisted on Orthodox observance to derive these benefits. "Now that the children are bigger we are looser about Shabbat," she wrote, "but the one thing that remains unchanged and inviolable is our leisurely Friday night dinner."

But what was inviolable in *Skinned Knee* becomes very much so in *B Minus*. Now that the kids are teenagers, with different circadian rhythms and developing brains, getting them to sit down to dinner with the rest of their family every Friday night is not even physiologically realistic according to Mogel. She recommends that you remain flexible, "respect your child," and allow that your teen may not make it to the table every week or if he does he might not stay at the table very long. What happened to commandments, *chukim*, and absolute respect for one's parents? And what kind of parental message is it to make these things inviolable until the age of, say, 14?

Consistency is a problem in *B Minus*. For instance, Mogel loves the notion of sanctification as a means of modeling good behavior when it comes to alcohol. Parents who drink wine at Shabbat dinner to sanctify the experience are showing their kids that there is a time and place for drinking. And she is adamant that parents not take this as an endorsement for letting underage kids drink at home with their friends. But then she urges parents to develop what she defines as a sense of proportion and realism when it comes to drinking, drugs, and sex.

To Mogel's way of thinking, vices like drugs, and experiences like premarital (and unprotected) sex are part of the teen landscape nowadays and parents are therefore better off giving their kids space to talk about these subjects if they so choose, and to lay down realistic rules in any case. "Give them rules about safety and decency . . . Do not endorse risky behavior, but recognize and accept that it's probably going to happen." What happened to traditional Jewish teaching in this case? Perhaps it was hard to find the right rabbinic saying when Mogel's advice actually ran up against traditional values: Sex is meant to be enjoyed within the confines of a loving, sanctified relationship, not by unattached teenagers with raging hormones.

Indeed, Mogel's decision to ignore Jewish wisdom in this case makes *The Blessings of a B Minus* less brave and less useful (less of a blessing, one is tempted to say) than her first book. Whether her selective use of Jewish teachings derives from her personal convictions or from a sober assessment of what her audience would accept, the result is a book that falls short of its stated purpose.

Mogel does offer some terrific ideas for parents of teens that have nothing to do with Jewish teachings, however, and these should be religiously observed by every Tiger Mom and over-parent out there: Kids should get paying jobs and do chores. The menial labor, low-skilled job will teach your teen that "service is not servility and that any job can be done with dignity. It motivates you to work hard in school when you see how easily low-wage/low-skilled jobs become boring or repetitive."

As for the chores, well, again, Mogel wants kids to learn the value of "menial" work rather than exclusively "exalted" work like studying and homework. A working mother of four once explained a perfectly compatible but more practical reason to me. When each child got to be tall enough to reach the knobs on the washing machine, she taught them how to do laundry. "I was working," she said, "so if they needed clean clothes they had to learn how to get them that way."

Abby Wisse Schachter edits the New York Post*'s politics blog "Capitol Punishment" (nypost.com/blogs/capitol).*

The Chief Rabbi's Achievement

BY DAVID J. WOLPE

FUTURE TENSE: JEWS, JUDAISM, AND ISRAEL IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY
by Jonathan Sacks
Schocken, 304 pp., $26.95

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

TO HEAL A FRACTURED WORLD: THE ETHICS OF RESPONSIBILITY
by Jonathan Sacks
Schocken, 288 pp., $14

RABBI JONATHAN SACKS' HAGGADAH: HEBREW AND ENGLISH TEXT WITH NEW ESSAYS AND COMMENTARY
by Jonathan Sacks
Continuum, 256 pp., $24.95

THE DIGNITY OF DIFFERENCE: HOW TO AVOID THE CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS
by Jonathan Sacks
Continuum, 224 pp., $19.95

ONE PEOPLE? TRADITION, MODERNITY AND JEWISH UNITY
by Jonathan Sacks
Littman, 276 pp., $27.95

TRADITION IN AN UNTRADITIONAL AGE: ESSAYS ON MODERN JEWISH THOUGHT
by Jonathan Sacks
Vallentine Mitchell & Co., 311 pp., $40

ARGUMENTS FOR THE SAKE OF HEAVEN: EMERGING TRENDS IN TRADITIONAL JUDAISM
by Jonathan Sacks
Rowman & Littlefield, 274 pp., Out of Print

Robert Frost may be right when he says "Something there is that doesn't love a wall," but it isn't the Jewish people. We love walls. The rabbis insisted on a *siyyag la-Torah*, a fence around the Torah to protect its laws, and we welcome requirements and boundaries. Walls insulate; they shelter; they keep in and keep out. Of course we don't love walls when they no longer serve our purposes. Then we do what we can to render them more flexible, or move them. Despite rabbinic legends to the contrary, walls just don't give. When we try to bend or move them, they tend to break.

This dilemma is at the heart of much of the work of Lord Jonathan Sacks, an Orthodox rabbi who has sought to work both within and beyond the walls that protect his faith. The most gifted expositor of Judaism in our day, Sacks has written more than twenty books that are both deeply learned and very accessible. From his perch as Britain's Chief Rabbi—which he plans to leave in 2013 after 22 years—he has constantly endeavored to breach the walls separating Jews from one another, and Judaism from the larger world. Again and again, Sacks addresses the questions: how elastic can the tradition be? And at what point does ecumenism snap from the counter-pressure of authenticity? His latest work, *Future Tense*, reminds us of the scope and ambition of Sacks' teaching, but also of its problematic character.

The most gifted expositor of Judaism in our day, Sacks has written more than twenty books that are both deeply learned and very accessible.

In *Tradition in an Untraditional Age*, one of his earliest books, Sacks rejects the "adjectival Jew"—the

Jonathan Sacks. (Photo courtesy of Natalie Weinberg.)

labels so many in our tradition seem to need. "Adjectives of ideology have no place in the ongoing life of Torah," he writes. But the adjectives (and the walls they betoken) have long served many purposes and it's hard to escape the implications of doing away with them. What Orthodoxy requires is precisely what Conservative and Reform Judaism reject. Unity for the Orthodox can mean nothing more than inclusion: The non-Orthodox are wrong, but still Jewish. Unity for liberal Jews, however, means pluralism, even allowing for significant differences between the Conservative and Reform movements. The Orthodox must affirm the legitimacy of non-Orthodox ideologies as authentically Jewish. But this is precisely what the Orthodox cannot do.

It is not only between but also within denominations that the question of legitimacy arises. Sacks repeatedly contrasts the positions of the influential 19th-century rabbis Samson Raphael Hirsch and Moses Sofer, the first, offering a more expansive view of the modern world, and the second a rejectionist one. The Cambridge and Oxford-educated Sacks cannot endorse Sofer's stringencies. Still, the secular, materialist, and relativist assumptions of modernity undermine and threaten to sink Modern Orthodox efforts, of which Hirsch's was one of the first. Sacks acknowledges the problem:

> Can a synthesis be created between tradition and a culture so fundamentally at odds with it? The presumption must be that it cannot. If it cannot, then the choice lies between a religious modernism that breaks with tradition, or a religious tradition that disengages from modernity.

The limits to how far Sacks himself could go in bridging incompatible positions became painfully clear about fifteen years ago, following the death of the distinguished Reform rabbi Hugo Gryn. Sacks angered the left wing of British Jewry by refusing to attend his funeral and then proceeded to anger the right wing by speaking at a memorial gathering for him. The text of a letter from Sacks to another Orthodox rabbi, which was subsequently leaked, included Sacks' denigration of the Reform movement and did nothing to calm the troubled waters.

Again and again, when he is caught in the middle, Sacks does what he can to make the best of the situation. "Judaism," he says in *Arguments for the Sake of Heaven*, "is best understood not as a set of correct positions but as a set of axes of tension." But such formulations only go so far. As the rabbis famously say about *tefillin*, the *shel rosh* (the head compartment) has four divisions, because each person's thoughts differ, but the *shel yad* (the compartment placed on the arm) has only one, because Israel must act in unity. Tension and discord may persist in theology but if the community does not adhere to one standard of behavior, the traditional system collapses. "Judaism is not about the truths we know, but about the truths we live," Sacks writes in *To Heal a Fractured World*. In a Jewish world

divided between those who uphold *halakha* as a binding life system and those who do not, however, there is no unity in thought or action. Elevating tension to an ideal has a certain intellectual appeal but it is not a coherent program.

Is there a remedy for reconciling a fractured Judaism? Sacks' answer seems, in part, to employ the strategy of many controversial Jewish thinkers before him: When there is restlessness at home, embrace the world. In times of dissension within one's tradition, look beyond it—expand your worldview—and perhaps fret a bit less about internal frictions.

The world provides no escape from troubles, but at least it enlarges them so that one's own strains are put in context, and so that Jews can export some of our best ideas and beliefs instead of just battling amongst ourselves. Jews do not relish being instructed by the world, but instructing the world has often been an unmitigated joy. Increasingly, it is Sacks' role as Jewish pedagogue to British and Western society, and only less so his rabbinic writings, that seems to win him more admiration and esteem from his fellow Jews.

Sacks' message to the world begins with the question of how Judaism has endured. In his new book *Future Tense*, he writes:

> We can now understand a phenomenon that would otherwise be wholly unintelligible: how Jews survived in exile for two-thousand years. They did so because *they were a society before they were a state*. They had laws before they had a land. They had a social covenant before they had a social contract. So, even if the contract failed, the covenant remained. [emphasis in the original]

This distinction between a covenant and a contract is central to Sacks' understanding of Judaism and how it has survived. He writes, "the logic of the covenant, unlike the social contract of the state, has nothing to do with rights, power and self-interest. Instead it is defined by three key words—*mishpat, tzedek* and *chesed*." A covenant, unlike a contract, is not about dividing goods, but growing them. The covenantal goods to which Sacks refers— love, devotion, sacrifice—increase with partnership:

> A contract is a *transaction*. A covenant is a *relationship*. A contract is about interests. A covenant is about identity. It is about two or more 'I's' coming together to form a 'We.' . . . That is why contracts *benefit*, but covenants *transform*.

In other words, the covenant is the particular promise that instantiates universal goods. The covenant model is a small people's gift to the larger world.

The covenant provides Sacks with his model of particularity and universality: Jews are members of a particular tribe with a universal message. Christianity, on the other hand, learned from Plato that truth resides only in universals. What is it that makes a table a table when one has four legs, another three; one holds food, another trophies? Plato's answer is that all are reflections of the ideal table. In the ideal (the universal) resides the greatest reality. Thus, in Christian terms, the entire world should subscribe to the one true belief. By

contrast, Judaism has remained stubbornly particularistic; salvation (or in Judaism, redemption), is not the preserve of Jews alone. There is one God but no one answer.

Judaism has always insisted on what Sacks, in his best book, calls "the dignity of difference":

> Biblical monotheism is not the idea that there is one God and therefore one truth, one faith, one way of life. On the contrary, it is the idea that *unity creates diversity*. That is the non-Platonic miracle of creation.

Even in his recent commentary to the siddur, Sacks pauses to note: "Judaism is the great counter-Platonic narrative in Western civilization." We are Jews, in all our messy particularity, not proclaimers of great abstract truths, but devotees of the actual, champions of the quotidian. *Halakha*, the way, the law, not philosophy, is our characteristic expression.

In the Torah, diversity begins with Babel. Sacks writes that the tower's collapse was our liberation; different languages, different traditions, a mosaic, not a melting pot—this is God's intended design. Jews remind the world that truth resides not in universals to which all must subscribe, but in the clamorous human chorus. Sacks returns repeatedly to the historical irony that the more utopian the scheme, the more likely it is to crush actual human beings: "Universalism cannot tolerate the otherness of the other. It is the imperialism of the rationalistic mind."

This lesson derives from the work of Sacks' favorite philosophers, Isaiah Berlin and Alasdair MacIntyre. It echoes Berlin's emphasis on the plurality of legitimate—and sometimes competing—goods that human beings desire, as well as MacIntyre's lessons about the incommensurability of different systems of ethical reasoning.

Preaching pluralism to the world and denying it at home is the perhaps inescapable, but still painful, paradox with which Modern Orthodox Jewish spokesmen must live.

Passover fits beautifully into Sacks' counter-Platonic ideal of embracing difference. Like Michael Walzer, Sacks highlights the way in which the exodus has inspired numerous revolutions across the globe, and throughout history. In his *Haggadah* he writes:

> There have been four revolutions in the West in modern times: the British and American, and the French and Russian . . . The contrast between them is vivid. Britain and America succeeded in creating a free society, not without civil war, but at least without tyranny and terror. The French and Russian revolutions began with a dream of utopia and ended with a nightmare of bloodshed and the suppression of human rights.

The *Haggadah* provides Sacks with some of his richest material. A universal God fashions a stubbornly particular nation. Only a monotheistic people, he points out, could have invented the synagogue, because one had to believe God was everywhere to build houses of worship in Babylonia and Britain. The pagan gods were without passports. Judaism is a particular people's fidelity to a universal God, allowed for service to the One by innumerable paths.

In *Future Tense*, Sacks homiletically suggests that God chose the land of Israel as the setting for his people's life precisely because it "is a place from which it is [geographically] impossible to build an empire." Judaism is a critique of the imperial impulse, he writes. That is why Israel's history has been different under the Jews: "Only under Jewish rule has Israel been an independent nation, not part of an empire." And "it continues to be a major obstacle to the restoration of the Caliphate, the imperial dream shared by al-Qaeda, Hamas, and Hezbollah." The Jewish insistence on the particular is always opposed to the imperial aspiration, whether military or philosophical.

This attractive portrait cannot erase a painful contradiction. What Sacks approves in the world at large is something that he cannot endorse within Judaism. In *One People? Tradition,*

Modernity, and Jewish Unity, Sacks states his problematic credo: "Judaism is the religion of a particular people. From this, two consequences follow. It is inclusive towards Jews, and *pluralist* towards other faiths." With this dubious stroke, Sacks decides that one people cannot sustain internal variety. But this is a conclusion that both Jewish history and much of Jewish philosophy, with its plurality of incompatible views, flatly contradicts. Moreover, it is a conclusion that I suspect he would be unwilling to apply to others. Can there be no pluralism among the French, Indians, or Serbs? Can there be no multiple forms of Chinese Confucianism? Only on Orthodox premises—God told us we must be this way—are Jews bound to reject pluralism. But then our obligation to act in a certain manner does not stem from the fact that Judaism is "the religion of a particular people." Rather, the sticking point is God's will. Presuming to outlaw other interpretations on the basis of one reading of God's will—God does not *wish* us to be non-Orthodox Jews—is an ancient, venerable practice, but not much of a concession to the dignity of difference.

Preaching pluralism to the world and denying it at home is the perhaps inescapable, but still painful, paradox with which Modern Orthodox Jewish spokesmen must live. Those Orthodox thinkers who preach a genuine pluralism such as David Hartman and Yitz Greenberg, receive a very mixed reception in the Orthodox community, and Sacks, in several references to them, makes it clear that he wonders whether they have crossed a boundary that places them outside of Orthodoxy itself.

At times, Sacks permits himself simplicities: "Judaism," he writes in his latest book, "is the voice of hope in the conversations of mankind," and "surely, of all religions, Judaism emphasizes the work of God, not humans." And, again: "No civilization, no faith has been as child-centered as Judaism." These are the sorts of declarations that one might be able to get away with from the pulpit, but in cold print they read as boosterism. Surely there is a Tibetan, Russian Orthodox, or Jain voice of hope. Is there really no other culture, eastern or western, as focused on children as Jews? Does Judaism indeed emphasize God's work more than does Christianity, more than Islam? These rhetorical excesses are born of a noble attempt to counteract the tremendous tide of abandonment of the Jewish tradition. At best, they can be regarded as overstatements on the part of a writer provoked to excess by the predicament he faces.

More important than his occasional susceptibility to platitudes is the fact that Sacks fails to do justice to the challenges presented by the modern study of religion. He appears never to risk a straightforward reckoning with biblical criticism. Sacks has been quoted as harshly attacking those who deny the Mosaic authorship of the Torah. But since modern criticism is the standard approach in virtually every non-Evangelical or non-Orthodox university in the Western world, it cannot be simply dismissed out of hand. For a thinker preoccupied with the widespread Jewish abandonment of tradition, ignoring the intellectual impact of comparative religion, history, archeology, textual criticism, and science leaves a gaping hole in the middle of his discourse. Sacks writes, "modernity forced faith into exile." Yet, he does not allow his reading of Torah and the tradition to meet modernity on its most difficult terrain.

When Sacks does engage the Torah, on his own more congenial turf, he proves himself a masterful interpreter, whose comments illuminate both the text and human nature. Noting, for example, the Torah's description of Moses' radiance after he brought down the second set of tablets that he, not God, had carved, Sacks writes: "We are changed not by what we receive, but by what we do." On God's choosing to tell Abraham of His plan to destroy Sodom, Sacks suggests that this is a deliberate invitation to argue with the Divine.

He also has a gift for providing plausible, if not entirely sufficient, interpretations of the most problematic questions of theology.

He also has a gift for providing plausible, if not entirely sufficient, interpretations of the most problematic questions of theology. He interprets the *akedah*, the binding of Isaac, as God instructing Abraham that one can only treasure that which one is in danger of losing, a lesson taught throughout the Torah. And in a lovely and entirely characteristic comment on the messianic idea, Sacks writes: "that it stands in relation to Jewish history as the stars did to ancient navigation. As Kenneth Minogue notes, 'when you steer by a star you don't aim to arrive there.'" In one stroke, much of the implausibility and fantasy has been drained from messianism, and we are left with an image drawn from an Australian political theorist to illustrate a central Jewish concept. Sacks' work is full of such gems.

Judaism today is without an influential, original Jewish philosopher who belongs in the company of Buber, Rosenzweig, Soloveitchik, Levinas, or Kaplan. But we are in desperate need of a fresh philosophy, an authentic redefinition of the boundaries of Jewish life and peoplehood. Despite his philosophical background and theological ideas, Jonathan Sacks has not forged a new philosophy. Yet, given his training and his gifts, perhaps when he is soon relieved of the burdens of the chief rabbinate, Rabbi Sacks will offer the comprehensive and compelling philosophy for which the Jewish world yearns. Certainly no one else is better qualified. In the meantime, he has presented a broad social and historical understanding of Judaism, studded with penetrating observations, and expressed with homiletic eloquence. In the spirit of the present season, one can only say *dayyenu*.

David J. Wolpe is the rabbi of Sinai Temple in Los Angeles, and the author of, most recently, Why Faith Matters *(Harper Collins).*

Law in the Desert

BY HILLEL HALKIN

Talk of failed New Year's resolutions! Three or four times over the years, come Rosh Hashanah, I've promised myself that this year, *this* year, I'll study at home each week, with its standard commentaries, the *parshat ha-shavu'a,* the weekly Torah reading recited in synagogue on the Sabbath. Three or four times, I've started out a few weeks later with high hopes. Three or four times, I've worked my way through the ten weekly readings of Genesis and the first five of Exodus. Three or four times, I've stopped there.

Studying the weekly Torah reading with its commentaries is an old Jewish custom, and many Jews—most, unlike myself, regular synagogue-goers—repeat the entire 52-week cycle of the Chumash, the Five Books of Moses, year after year. Although different annotated editions of the Chumash have different commentaries, the more complete sets include, at a minimum, the 2nd-century Aramaic translation of the Bible known as Targum Onkelos; the 11th-century commentary of Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki or Rashi; the 12th-century commentary of Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra, and the 13th-century commentary of Rabbi Moses ben Nachman, also known as Nachmanides or "the Ramban." Together with the voluminous corpus of the Midrash upon which they frequently draw, these are the main pillars of Jewish biblical exegesis, on which all subsequent commentators have built.

Each has its distinctive traits. The Targum, though on the whole highly literal, occasionally introduces free rabbinic interpretations into the text. Rashi, a meticulous Hebraist, is pietistic in outlook and a faithful transmitter of rabbinic tradition. Ibn Ezra, no less scrupulous a grammarian, is a rationalist with a preference for naturalistic and sometimes philosophical explanations. The Ramban likes to rely on his predecessors for the plain meanings of verses while focusing on broader contextual issues.

They complement one another. Their interplay isn't always explicit. "Your brother has come in deceit and taken your blessing," says Isaac to Esau in the sixth weekly reading of Genesis upon realizing that he has been tricked by Jacob. Onkelos, like the ancient rabbis, is disturbed by this—how can one revered Patriarch call another a deceiver?—and translates the Hebrew *be-mirma,* "in deceit," as the Aramaic *be-chukhma,* "with wisdom." Rashi echoes Onkelos without citing him. Ibn Ezra demurs without mentioning either man. "He told a lie," he says tersely of Jacob, tacitly rebuking Rashi and Onkelos for whitewashing the text. The Ramban seeks to adjudicate. Yes, he says, Isaac does call Jacob a deceiver—but Isaac realizes the deceit is justifiable, having had the insight that Jacob, though not his own choice, is God's, thus making Jacob a *wise* deceiver.

The Patriarchs! Often I have thought of them as great, lawless spirits taken captive by moralistic minds. Of course Jacob lies. He has to, precisely because his father does not have the insight the Ramban attributes to him. If anyone has it, it's Jacob's mother Rebecca, who masterminds the deceit. Jacob goes along with her willingly. He knows that the stakes—the legacy of the blessing first given by God to Abraham—are too high to allow for the rules of fairness. He grasps the magnitude of this legacy better than does Esau and so is worthier of it. In Genesis, the worthiest strive to fulfill a destiny of whose grandeur they are conscious even if they, too, do not fully comprehend it.

But Esau is himself a wonderful character—

The Patriarchs! Often I have thought of them as great, lawless spirits taken captive by moralistic minds.

wonderful in grief when he cries out, "Bless me, Father, too," and wonderful in forbearance when he and Jacob meet again years later. The rabbis, painting him in dark colors to highlight Jacob's virtue, begrudge him any acknowledgment of this. Does the Bible tell us he was a capable fellow, "a man skilled in hunting"? "Hunting," writes Rashi, conveys Esau's shameless stalking of his father's favors. Did he sell his birthright because he came home one day "weary" and desperate for refreshment? He was weary of all the murders he had committed. Drawn with great sympathy by the biblical text, he gets none from the classical commentators.

They flatten the text, these commentators, so as to re-elevate it on their own terms. I preferred my Patriarchs to theirs: lawless, unbridled, freely camping and decamping, putting up and taking down their tents; always on the move with their wives, their children, their concubines, their flocks and camels, their bitter family quarrels passed down from generation to generation; always restlessly seeking, carrying with them the destiny not fully understood. Abraham, the reckless gambler; timid yet tenacious Isaac; wily Jacob, tricking and being tricked; suave, diplomatic Joseph, lowering the curtain on Genesis with a happy ending just when it has come to seem the most tragic of books; Joseph, the divine impresario!

The curtain stays down for hundreds of years. When it rises again, the Patriarchs' descendants are slaves in Egypt, ignorant of the legacy over which their ancestors fought. Moses appears—impetuous, self-doubting, unyielding, long-suffering Moses! He encounters the God of his forefathers. He and his brother Aaron confront Pharaoh. They inflict ten plagues on the Egyptians. They lead the Israelites to a mountain in the desert. Moses ascends it to receive the Law. "And Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the Lord came down on it in fire, and its smoke went up like the smoke from a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly." Onkelos, anxious as always to avoid physicalizing God, translates "came down on it" as "was revealed on it." Rashi, having no such compunctions, tells us that God spread the sky over the mountain "as though covering a bed with a sheet" and lowered His throne onto it. Ibn Ezra remarks that Mount Sinai only trembled metaphorically. The Ramban explains that the Israelites did not *see* God descend in the fire but heard His voice saying, "I am the Lord your God . . . You shall have no other God beside me . . . You shall make no graven image of what is in the heavens above or on the earth below . . ."

"Isaac and Jacob" by Jusepe de Ribera (Lo Spagnoletto), 1637. (Image © Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY.)

It's a page-turner, the *parshat ha-shavu'a.* I can't wait for the next installment.

It comes. It's called Mishpatim, "Laws." It begins:

> These are the laws you shall set before them.
> Should you buy a Hebrew slave, six years he
> shall serve and in the seventh he shall go

> free . . . And should an ox gore a man or a woman and they die, the ox shall surely be stoned and its flesh shall not be eaten, and the ox's owner is clear . . . And should a man open a pit, or should a man dig a pit and not cover it and an ox or donkey fall in, the owner of the pit shall pay silver, and the carcass shall be his . . .

Next comes Terumah, "Donation." It concerns the construction of the Tabernacle. It begins:

> And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 'Speak to the Israelites, that they take me a donation from every man . . . And this is the donation you shall take from them: gold and silver and bronze and indigo and purple and crimson and linen and goat hair and reddened ram skins and ocher-dyed skins and acacia wood . . .

After Terumah comes Tetzaveh, "You Shall Command." It's about the garments and sacrifices of the priests serving in the Tabernacle. It begins:

> And you shall command the Israelites . . . and these are the garments they shall make: breastplate and ephod and robe and checkwork tunic, turban, and sash.

So this is the legacy! The grand narrative flow of Genesis and the first half of Exodus is over, though it still will burst forth in trickles here and there. It couldn't have happened soon enough for Rashi. In his first comment on the first verse of Genesis he approvingly quotes the 4th-century Rabbi Yitzhak as saying that little would have been lost had the Bible started in the middle of Exodus, since "the crux of the Torah is only its commandments."

Three or four times over the years, I reached the commandments. Three or four times, I got no further.

Last Rosh Hashanah, I resolved, after a long hiatus, to try again. I'm now at the end of Exodus and going strong. What made this year different? In part, my deciding to read the biblical text not in Hebrew but in the Latin Vulgate of the Christian church father Jerome. This added the stimulation of novelty.

Jerome translated the Bible while living in Palestine in the late 4th and early 5th centuries. An accomplished author in his own right, he studied Hebrew and Aramaic and regularly consulted Onkelos' Targum; the Greek Septuagint (a Jewish translation of the Bible, the world's first, done in Alexandria in the 3rd and 2nd centuries B.C.E.), and diverse rabbinic sources. Even more faithful than the Targum to the literal meaning of the biblical text, he was far freer with its form and took frequent liberties with its Hebrew syntax, whose extreme simplicity, with its repetitive reliance on short, independent clauses linked by paratactic "and's," fell short of his standards of Latin elegance. Often he subordinated clause to clause, as we do in English with all our "when's," "while's," "before's," and "during's" that biblical Hebrew commonly eschews.

Jerome translated the legal and ritual sections of the Chumash out of a sense of duty; he could not but have been, I suspect, rather bored by them. While they, too, were a part of God's word, they were the part that God had abrogated. Both Jerome's Christian faith and his taste in prose would have inclined him more to the structured rhetoric of a Pauline epistle like Romans that declares:

> Now we know that whatsoever things the Law says, it says to those who are under the Law, that every mouth may be stopped and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the Law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight, for by the Law is the knowledge of sin.

Chromolithograph of Moses with the Tablets overlooking the corrupted Jews, c. 1885. (Image © Bettmann/Corbis.)

Dutiful Jerome, laboring faithfully through the laws of goring oxen, the measurements of the Tabernacle, and the vestments of its priests when they only led to the knowledge of sin!

Not that Paul was against laws. His epistles counsel adherence to those of Rome. But those were the laws of secular authority. Breaking them made one a criminal in the eyes of the state, not a sinner in the eyes of God. God had not promulgated them. He *had* promulgated the Law given at Sinai—and He had done so, paradoxically, knowing that its statutes were too numerous and complicated to be obeyed, so that anyone seeking to do so would be ultimately reduced to a helpless sense of his inability to perform God's will. This, as Paul saw it, was the Law's whole purpose: to produce in its adherents an overwhelming consciousness of sin, alien to the pagan world, that would compel them, followed by the rest of humanity, to throw themselves on the mercy of God's grace as manifested through the son sent to atone for them.

I've always sympathized with Paul. He was raised, as I was, in the world of Jewish observance, and while he felt too cramped by it to remain in it, he was too attached to it to let go of it. He longed to link up with the rest of humanity while remaining the Jew that he was, and by repudiating the Law in the name of the Law he found a brilliant if tortured way of doing so. Long before Spinoza, he was the prototype of a certain kind of modern Jewish intellectual.

As a child, I, too, knew the difference between the laws of Rome and the laws of God. When I was 6 or 7 years old, sent by my mother to buy a newspaper, I took two papers from a pile at the stand by mistake, while paying only for one; but although I lived for a while in great fear of being arrested, I got over it as soon as I realized that my crime had gone unnoticed. It was different when I unwittingly placed a meat fork in the dairy silverware drawer in our kitchen. Then I had a consciousness of sin, which lasted longer. God was no kiosk owner.

All around me were sins waiting to be committed. If I forgot to say my bedtime prayers, I had sinned. If I unthinkingly switched on a light on the Sabbath, I had sinned. I envied the Patriarchs who lived before the Law. Hadn't Abraham served his guests milk and butter with their meat? That was why Rashi was in such a hurry to get past him to the commandments. Yet three or four times over the years, I groaned when I reached them. So must have Jerome. *Haec sunt iudicia quae propones eis*, these are the laws you shall set before them. I did not want them set before me.

The second half of Exodus can be read as a study in the institutionalization of religion. No longer a small roaming band to whom God can appear anywhere and at any time, the Israelites leave Egypt as twelve tribes. They need what any large group needs if it is not to degenerate into a mob: clear rules of conduct, recognized penalties for breaking them, established forms and places of worship, trained specialists to mediate between them and the divine. Mishpatim, Terumah, Tetzaveh: these lay the foundations for a code of civil behavior, a centralized cultus, a priestly class. They mark, in the biblical narrative, a transition from an era of spontaneity between man and man, and between man and God, to one of regulated order. This is necessary. It is part of God's plan. But as with all institutionalizations of originally spontaneous relationships, one feels nostalgic for what has been lost.

It is part of God's *second* plan. His first is to create in six days a world that is all good and let human beings made in His image run it independently. This works out badly. The first humans disobey Him and are driven from Eden. By the tenth generation, the generation of Noah, "God saw the earth and it

was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted its ways on the earth."

God wipes out everything with a great flood and starts anew. This time He will do it differently. He will ignore most of the human race; it is too large, too unruly, for Him to work with. He will proceed slowly, methodically. And so He begins with a single individual, Abraham. Again and again He tests him to make sure He has chosen correctly, satisfied only by the last, pitiless trial of the sacrifice of Isaac. From there He moves on to a family, carefully winnowing it as it grows until it consists of twelve brothers. Taking time out to let their offspring multiply and be enslaved in Egypt, He is now ready for the next stage: He will take the descendants of these brothers out of bondage and make them a model people—"a kingdom of priests and a holy nation," as He tells them when they are assembled before Him at Sinai. They will be His pilot project on earth. Once it succeeds, He can extend it to the rest of humanity.

I've always sympathized with Paul. He was raised, as I was, in the world of Jewish observance, and while he felt too cramped to remain in it, he was too attached to let go.

A model people needs model laws. God goes about it pedagogically, starting with the laws that He knows will be of greatest interest. As the Ramban puts it: "God began with the laws of the Hebrew slave because freeing him in the seventh year was a reminder of the exodus from Egypt." More than a reminder: a promise to an anxious people that it will not be reenslaved by the more powerful of its own brothers. One imagines the stir in the desert. Six years of servitude and no more! So this is law! Real slaves have no laws but the whims of their masters.

There follow laws of property, laws of damages and restitution, laws of theft and murder, laws of sexual relationships: the basic norms that a functional society must have. All else is in abeyance. Moses is on the mountain receiving the Law, and we, the Bible's readers, are given a preview of it while the worried Israelites camped below await Moses' return. We know the Law's contents before they do.

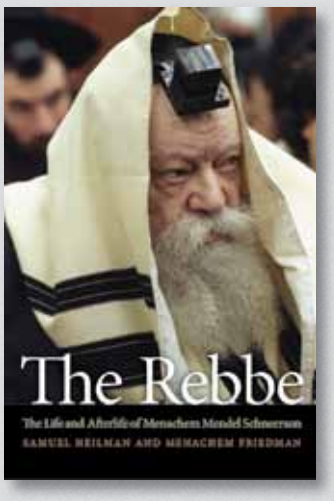
The narrative only resumes with the weekly reading of Ki Tisa. Afraid that Moses has abandoned them and left them leaderless in the desert, the Israelites say to Aaron, "Rise up, make us gods that will go before us, for this man Moses who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has happened to him." And so Aaron collects their gold jewelry and fashions from it a calf—a graven image—and the people worship it and revel around it. High on the mountain, Moses is told by God, "Go, go down, for your people, which you have brought out of Egypt, has been corrupted." Moses descends after first persuading God not to exterminate the Israelites as He threatens to; sees them dancing around the calf; angrily smashes the tablets of the Law that he is carrying, and commands the Levites to commit a punitive massacre in which thirty thousand people are killed.

"For your people has been corrupted," *ki shichet amkha*: Rashi's comment on the cutting "your"—that of a father who comes home to find his son misbehaving and tells his wife it's her child, not his—is to assure us that God is not disassociating Himself from the Israelites, but scolding Moses for having permitted idolatrous heathen to join them and lead them astray. Well, that's Rashi for you: always sticking up for the Jews. But why does neither he nor any of the other commentators in my Chumash point out that the verb *shachet*, to act corruptly, is the very same verb used in Genesis to describe the human race on the eve of the flood? Why does no one dwell on the obvious parallel between the two stories? In both, God sets out to create or recreate the world. In both, all goes well for a while. In both, the illusion of success soon collapses. In both, God resolves to destroy what He has done and begin again, the second time with Moses as a second Noah or Abraham. ("And now leave me be," God tells Moses, "that my wrath may flare against them, and I will put an end to them, and I will make you a great nation.") In both, God repents of His fury and offers its survivors an eternal pact—a promise not to repeat the flood, a reaffirmation of His covenant with Israel.

There must be commentators who have noticed this. The Zohar, itself a mystical commentary on the Chumash written shortly after the time of the Ramban, does notice it. When the Israelites sinned with the golden calf, it says, they fell from the heights of Sinai to the lower depths, for the same serpent that poisoned Adam poisoned them, so that *gerimu mota le-khol alma*, they brought, like Adam and Eve, death upon the whole world. The debacle at Sinai is a cosmic catastrophe, comparable only to the sin in Eden and its aftermath in reflecting as much on the incorrigibility of God's optimism as on that of man's waywardness.

I was wrong to think that the narrative flow of Exodus had ever stopped. Mishpatim, Terumah, and Tetzaveh were a continuation of it. They were needed, not only as a contretemps to create a sense of lapsed time, the forty days spent by Moses on the mountain, between two contiguous events, but because the drama lost much of its intensity without them. Their detail was necessary to illustrate the effort God had put into designing a Law flouted by His chosen people as soon as Moses turned his back on them—to illustrate the extent of His failure. His second attempt at forging order out of chaos, it is even more galling than the first, since the lesson learned from the first has not kept it from being repeated.

This realization—*parshat ha-shavu'a* students would call it a *chidush,* a new way of looking at things—carried me excitedly through the last six Torah readings of Exodus that had always stymied me before. Suddenly, God's effort needed to be understood. It was an integral part of the story. "And should a man open a pit, or should a man dig a pit and not cover it, and an ox or donkey fall in, the owner of the pit shall pay silver, and the carcass shall be his . . ." Did that mean that if an ox wandered onto my property and fell into a pit and was killed, I, the pit's owner, was responsible?



Winner of the 2010 National Jewish Book Award in the category of American Jewish Studies

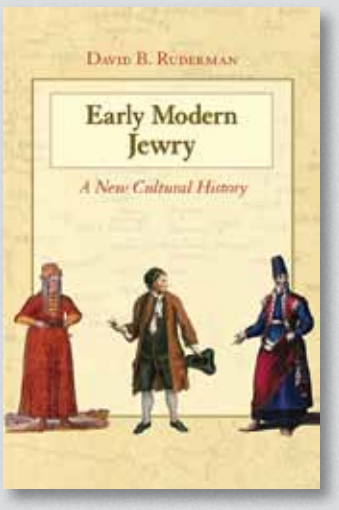
The Rebbe

The Life and Afterlife of
Menachem Mendel Schneerson

Samuel Heilman & Menachem Friedman

"*The Rebbe* . . . fills a considerable void in the biography of one of the towering religious figures of the 20th century. . . . I am grateful to the authors for a profoundly human biography that will hopefully spur a whole new literature on the rebbe as man rather than angel and as person rather than saint."
—Rabbi Shmuley Boteach, *New York Jewish Week*

Cloth $29.95 978-0-691-13888-6



Winner of the 2010 National Jewish Book Award in the category of History

Early Modern Jewry

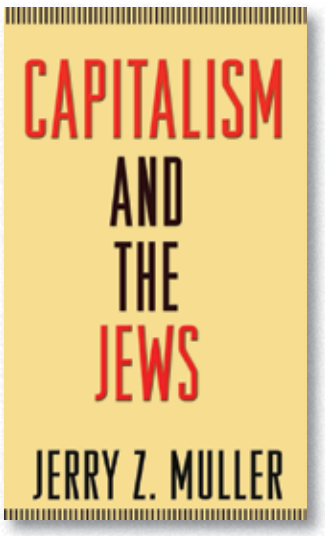
A New Cultural History

David B. Ruderman

"Ruderman's provocative thesis marks a scholarly watershed. It reopens and complicates the question of when modern Jewish history began, and suggests that far-reaching but underappreciated trends analogous to those traced in this book have already inaugurated a postmodern era of Jewish history."
—Lawrence Grossman, *Forward*

"Brave, stimulating, highly erudite, and informative."
—Moshe Rosman, *Jewish Review of Books*

Cloth $35.00 978-0-691-14464-1

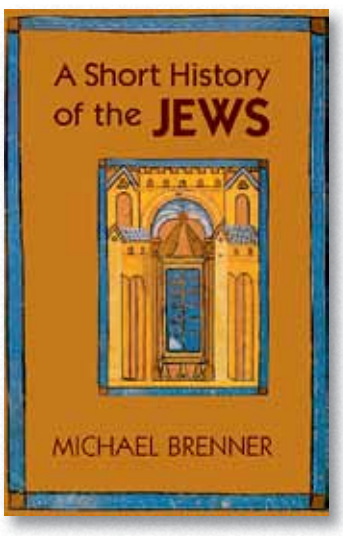


Capitalism and the Jews

Jerry Z. Muller

"Muller presents a provocative and accessible survey of how Jewish culture and historical accident ripened Jews for commercial success and why that success has earned them so much misfortune. . . . While this book is ostensibly about 'the Jews,' Muller's most chilling insights are about their enemies, and the creative, almost supernatural, malleability of anti-Semitism itself. For centuries, poverty, paranoia and financial illiteracy have combined into a dangerous brew—one that has made economic virtuosity look suspiciously like social vice."
—Catherine Rampell, *New York Times Book Review*

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



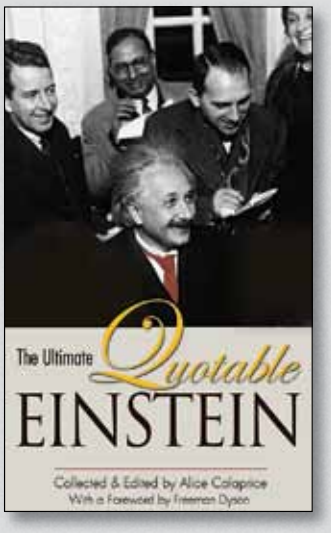
A Short History of the Jews

Michael Brenner

Translated by Jeremiah Riemer

"Drawing on the best recent scholarship and wearing his formidable learning lightly, Michael Brenner has produced a remarkable synoptic survey of Jewish history. His book must be considered a standard against which all such efforts to master and make sense of the Jewish past should be measured."
—Stephen J. Whitfield, Brandeis University

Cloth $29.95 978-0-691-14351-4



The Ultimate Quotable Einstein

Collected and edited by Alice Calaprice

With a foreword by Freeman Dyson

Here is the definitive new edition of the hugely popular collection of Einstein quotations that has sold tens of thousands of copies worldwide and been translated into twenty-five languages. *The Ultimate Quotable Einstein* features 400 additional quotes, bringing the total to roughly 1,600 in all.

Cloth $24.95 978-0-691-13817-6

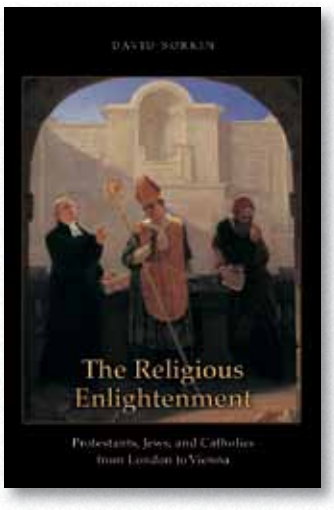
History Lessons

The Creation of American Jewish Heritage

Beth S. Wenger

"Arguing that American Jews have created a distinctive American Jewish heritage that interweaves Judaism with democracy, Wenger's compelling and elegant book shows that this heritage rewrites both Jewish and American history into a relatively seamless whole."
—Deborah Dash Moore, director of the Jean and Samuel Frankel Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Michigan

Cloth $35.00 978-0-691-14752-9



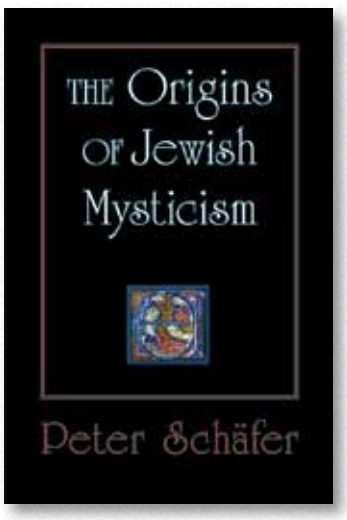
The Religious Enlightenment

Protestants, Jews, and Catholics from London to Vienna

David Sorkin

"Sorkin has written a powerful, imaginative, and path-breaking study that fundamentally challenges reigning academic conceptions of the Enlightenment, the birth of modern Europe, and the path of modern European history. . . . The author's argument for a more moderate view of the birth and path of modernity across the European continent—one that grew out of dialogue and toleration and not out of religious or ethnic conflict—is compelling and persuasive."
—Scott Ury, *Religious Studies Review*

Paper $27.95 978-0-691-14937-0



The Origins of Jewish Mysticism

Peter Schäfer

"*The Origins of Jewish Mysticism* is the culmination of a lifetime of scholarship by one of the most important figures in the field. Full of fresh and convincing interpretations, it is among the most significant works on Jewish mysticism to appear in decades. Peter Schäfer is an original thinker."
—Philip Alexander, University of Manchester

Paper $35.00 978-0-691-14215-9

No, said Rashi. My property was my property. The Torah was referring to a pit dug in the public domain.

But if I dig a pit in the public domain, how am I its owner?

By "owner," Ibn Ezra explains, the Torah designates the pit's user, since it must have been dug for some use.

Then I have no liability at all for a pit dug on my own property?

My *parshat ha-shavu'a* commentators weren't clear about this. I looked at the 3rd-century-C.E. Mishnah, the earliest systematic explication of biblical law. Yes, said the first chapter of Bava Kama, the opening part of the treatise of Nezikin or "Damages": if in digging a pit on my own property I cross the line separating it from the public domain, or from someone else's property, anyone falling into it from the other side is my responsibility, too.

But it was more complicated than that. The 6th-century Gemara, the systematic explication of the Mishnah, stated that according to Rabbi Akiva, even if the pit was entirely on my property, I was still liable if I hadn't made clear that trespassing was forbidden. Rabbi Ishmael disagreed. The Gemara's discussion of their disagreement was long and intricate, and I had trouble following it.

Nor would following it in the Gemara have been enough to know the outcome. For that, I would have had to consult the Ge'onim, the 7th–to-11th-century Talmudic scholars of Babylonia; and after them, the Rishonim, the 11th-to-16th century scholars of North Africa and Europe; and after them the Acharonim, the scholars who came later—in short, the whole vast edifice of Jewish law. It suddenly towered above me, this edifice, in all its architectural immensity, dizzyingly tall—explication upon explication, disagreement upon disagreement, complication upon complication—and for the first time, though I had never gotten beyond its bottom floors, I felt that I grasped its full grandeur, the indomitable scope of its determination to make up for the golden calf. Century after century, the Jews had labored to convince God that He was right not to have given up on them at Sinai—that His pilot project could still work—that they would devote themselves to it endlessly, tirelessly, even if it took thousands of years—even if the rest of humanity went its own way in the meantime—even if the rest of humanity agreed that the Law only led to the knowledge of sin.

I've been thinking about the knowledge of sin.

Over the years I've been involved, sometimes alone and sometimes with others, in more court cases than I'd have liked to be. Nothing major. A case involving my father, then ill with Alzheimer's, who was defrauded by his neighborhood grocer. A case involving a mobile phone antenna erected illegally opposite our home. A running battle with the town in which we live about building rights on our land. A consequent suit for damages filed by us. A fight with the local planning commission over a road it wanted to run through our and our neighbors' property. Another fight to stop a nearby restaurant from blasting loud music into the night. All trivial stuff.

On the whole, the courts have performed creditably. I can't complain too much about the judges. The depressing thing has been the deceit with which they've had to deal. Corrupt authorities. Secret, illicit deals. Law enforcers looking the other way. Manipulation of evidence. Lies on the witness stand. Suborning of witnesses.

I suppose it's that way everywhere. Why wouldn't it be? It's only the laws of Rome. If you think you can get away with it, you break them. I've broken my share of them myself.

Wouldn't we be better off with the Law of God? If every bribe taker and perjurer knew he was sinning?

Not that you can't know you're a sinner and still sin. And the laws of Mishpatim say not only "You shall take no bribe" and "You shall not bear false witness," but also "Should a man sell his daughter as a slave girl, she shall not go free as the male slaves go free," and "Whoever speaks profanely of his father and mother shall be put to death." For all practical purposes, the rabbis abolished the death penalty even for murder, let alone for swearing at one's parents, but that isn't the point. The point is that knowing you're a sinner in the eyes of the Law means believing the Law—all of it—is God's. There may be nothing to keep you from obeying just those parts of it that you like, but if that's your attitude, you won't feel sinful when you disobey them. The laws of God and the laws of Rome are then two versions of the same thing.

Knowing you're a sinner in the eyes of the Law means believing the Law—all of it—is God's.

I don't say *I* believe the Law is God's. I only say I've come to believe that if God had a plan for humanity, He would give it a Law, and he would not abrogate it as Paul thought He did.

I haven't always been of that opinion. But neither was God. The first time around, He thought men could manage on their own and waited ten generations before deciding He was wrong.

A generation for Methusaleh was longer than it is for us, and even by our own paltry standards I haven't lived through three. Still—so I found myself thinking this year while studying the *parshat ha-shavu'a*—I already am where God was after ten.

I'm not happy with that. I have an anarchistic streak. I've never liked being told what to do. I've always wanted to do the right thing because I wanted to, not because I had to. I've wanted to do it Paul's way, without the Law, "for when the Gentiles, which have not the Law, do by nature the things contained in the Law, these, having not the Law, are a law unto themselves."

Like the Patriarchs.

It's a nice idea. It was clever of Paul to have thought of it. It just doesn't work. It didn't work in the days of Noah and it won't work now. There isn't enough of mankind that, having no Law, will do by nature the things contained in the Law. We need a sense of sin to bridle us. If it's taken me most of a lifetime to realize that, then that's what lifetimes must be for.

This week was Pekudei, the last Torah reading of Exodus. Before it came Vayakhel. Together they are two of the most tedious *parshot ha-shavu'a* in the Chumash. Vayakhel relates how the Israelites built the Tabernacle according to the instructions in Terumah; Pekudei, how they made the priests' vestments according to the instructions in Tetzaveh. Both repeat the language of Terumah and Tetzaveh almost to a word. "And they shall make an Ark of acacia wood, two and a half cubits its length, and a cubit and a half its width, and a cubit and a half its height," says Terumah. "And Bezalel made an Ark of acacia wood, two and a half cubits its length, and a cubit and a half its width, and a cubit and a half its height," says Vayakhel. The commentators fall silent. What's there to add?

But a *chidush* is a *chidush*—and now I read even Vayakhel and Pekudei with fresh eyes, starting with the former's opening verses, which describe how the Israelites, called upon to donate "gold and silver and bronze and indigo and purple and crimson and linen and goat hair and reddened ram skins and ocher-dyed skins and acacia wood," respond with such enthusiasm that Moses has to tell them to stop, there being already more than enough. If it occurred to any of the commentators in my Chumash that behind this outpouring of public-spiritedness was a consciousness of sin, they kept it to themselves. I can't say it didn't occur to me.

There is a cheerfulness in Vayakhel and Pekudei that would hardly have seemed possible a short time before when Moses dashed the Law to the ground. Everyone is bringing gifts to the Tabernacle; everyone is measuring, making, fitting. Bezalel runs around giving orders. We hear the sounds of saws and hammers; there is a smell of freshly cut lumber, the crisp colors of newly died fabrics.

> And they made the boards for the Tabernacle, twenty boards for the southern end . . . And they made the curtain of indigo and purple and crimson, designer's work they made it . . . And they made tunics of twisted linen, weaver's work, for Aaron and his sons . . .

It's like a huge stage set on which a multitude of workers is racing to get things done in time for the premiere.

The date arrives. It's the anniversary of the exodus, the first day of the first month of its second year. Miraculously, everything is ready. The Tabernacle is standing. The Ark of the Covenant is in place. The showbread is on the table. The lamp in the Tent of Meeting is lit. The golden altar is ready for its offerings. Moses enters and offers up the burnt offering and the meal offering as commanded. The audience holds its breath.

And then it happens:

"And cloud covered the Tent of Meeting and the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle."

It's a mini-Sinai, God's glory in a cloud like fire in smoke. All that light and dark mixed together, the brightest sunshine and the blackest gloom!

"And the cloud went up from over the Tabernacle, the Israelites would journey onward in all their journeyings. And if the cloud did not go up, they would not journey onward until the day it went up. For the Lord's cloud was over the Tabernacle by day, and fire by night was in it, before the eyes of all the house of Israel in all their journeyings."

Explicit, says Jerome, *liber Ellesmoth id est Exodus.*

Bring on Leviticus.

Hillel Halkin is a translator, essayist, and author of four books, the most recent of which is Yehuda Halevi *(Schocken/Nextbook).*

Thinking about Revolution and Democracy in the Middle East

Beginning with the protests in Tunisia that toppled the regime of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in January of this year, revolution has spread across North Africa and the Middle East with such velocity that predicting exactly what will happen next is probably a fool's errand. Elsewhere in this issue, our authors and reviewers discuss what these events may mean for Israel, particularly but not only in its relations with a post-Mubarak Egypt. Here, we have asked seven writers to return to their bookshelves and tell us what books, authors, and arguments they find helpful in thinking through the causes and implications of these surprising events.

Our symposiasts are an extraordinarily distinguished and eclectic group of scholars, diplomats, theorists, and activists. Having reached across the board for help, we weren't surprised when their answers were all over the map. Edmund Burke's name came up, but so did that of Karl Marx and the much more recent theorist Michael Doyle. We were directed to the works of venerable students of Middle Eastern affairs like Bernard Lewis and Fouad Ajami, but also to less famous scholars like Houchang Chehabi and Juan J. Linz, the editors of the wonderfully titled Sultanistic Regimes. *There are novels on our reading list too, including those of Egyptian writers Najib Mahfuz, Alaa al-Aswany, and Gamal al-Ghithani. Finally, for the extraordinary reader who has already read everything mentioned, there is one to which you can still look forward: Steven Cook's soon-to-be-published history of Egypt.*

—The Editors, March 29, 2011

The Middle Eastern Dialectic

BY SHLOMO AVINERI

Writing in the *New York Daily Tribune* in 1853, Karl Marx described contemporary India as a society "contaminated by distinctions of caste and by slavery," immersed in "a brutalizing worship of nature" and based on "an undignified, stagnatory, and vegetative life . . . which rendered murder itself a religious rite in Hindostan." Such stagnant "Oriental despotism" (to use Marx's term) did not possess internal mechanisms of change. It was British rule, on the other hand, that introduced modernity—and change—into this society: a railway system unifying the subcontinent, a rational bureaucracy, a local market economy becoming part of a global economy. He concluded:

> [Because] mankind cannot fulfill its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia . . . whatever may have been the crimes of England, she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about this revolution.

This historical dialectic—what Hegel called the "Cunning of Reason"—may not be exactly a socialist version of "the white man's burden," but it comes close. Such ideas have accompanied modernizers in the Arab world, too, since Napoleon's campaign in Egypt. Muhammad Ali's attempts at modernization in Egypt, as well as a long list of Ottoman *Tanzimat* reforms were all inspired by variations on the Enlightenment model in which future redemption and prosperity reside in the Orient adopting the Occidental developmental route. Edward Said may have branded this as racist European "Orientalism," but it was an idea adopted, willingly and enthusiastically, by many Middle Eastern (and Asian and African) intellectuals and political leaders who contrasted their own impoverished countries and authoritarian forms of government (all preceding Western colonial expansion) with the prosperity and freedom of the West. In his *The Arab Predicament*, Fouad Ajami follows, among other themes, the infatuation of the Arab intelligentsia with 19th- and 20th-century European ideas. There has not been a Western ideology, movement, or institution that has not found its followers in the Arab world. In the 1920s, it was the European model of the nation-state, anchored in liberal constitutionalism; in the 1930s, varieties of fascism; in the 1950s, different strands of socialism, some inspired by the Soviet Union. Pan-Arabism, Arab socialism—all were fashioned on European models.

The Arab tragedy was that all these attempts failed dismally. Their failure was compounded by the fact that the adoption of each of these models was out of touch with local social conditions and religious belief systems, and the attempt to foist European models on Arab society created distorted realities—sometimes caricatures, in some cases frightening monstrosities. In the 1920s-30s, liberal constitutionalism became in Egypt (as well as in Syria and Iraq) a cloak for the rule of the traditional landowning classes, the *effendis*. Nasser's "Arab socialism" became the disguise for an attempt at Egyptian hegemony under a military junta; and Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath Party rule in Iraq (and to a lesser degree its Syrian variant under the two Assads) combined, as Bernard Lewis suggested, the worst amalgam of fascism and Soviet-style communism.

One consequence of this failure of all European-derived models was to open the door to Islamism. Far from being an aggressive attempt at world dominion, as Islamic fundamentalism is sometimes presented, it is much more a sign of defeat. After having failed in all attempts to implant foreign models, what could be more enticing and captivating than an inward-looking "return" to an idealized, and sometimes totally invented tradition of pristine Islam, before the region became contaminated by western ideas?

By contrast, what is happening now in the Arab countries is a genuine novelty. Spontaneous mass demonstrations have brought about the fall of authoritarian regimes in Tunisia and Egypt and contin-

Recommended Reading

Reflections on the Revolution in France by Edmund Burke (1790)

Egypt in Search of Political Community by Nadav Safran (1961)

Karl Marx on Colonialism and Modernization: His Dispatches and Other Writings by Karl Marx (1968)

The Military in Politics: Changing Patterns in Brazil by Alfred C. Stepan (1974)

Zayni Barakat by Gamal al-Ghitani (1974)

"The End of Pan-Arabism," by Fouad Ajami, *Foreign Affairs* (Winter 1978/79)

"Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs, Parts I and II," by Michael Doyle, *Philosophy and Public Affairs* (Summer and Fall 1983)

Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939 by Albert Habib Hourani (1983)

The History of Modern Egypt by P. J. Vatikiotis (1986)

The Vanished Imam by Fouad Ajami (1986)

Children of Gebelawi by Najib Mahfuz (1988)

The Political Language of Islam by Bernard Lewis (1991)

The Arab Predicament by Fouad Ajami (1992)

The Society of the Muslim Brothers by Richard Mitchell (1993)

Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation by Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan (1996)

Sultanistic Regimes Edited by Houchang Chehabi and Juan J. Linz (1998)

The Dream Palace of the Arabs by Fouad Ajami (1999)

From Dictatorship to Democracy by Gene Sharp (2003)

The Yacoubian Building by Alaa al-Aswany (2002)

Politics and Society in the Contemporary Middle East by Michele Penner Angrist (2010)

ue to pressure the rulers in other countries. Nothing like this has ever happened before in the Arab world, which had known numerous military coups d'état and putsches, but never a popular revolution. While successful in bringing down the relatively mild autocracies of Ben Ali and Mubarak, this popular wave has yet to prove that it can bring down the harsh systems of Gaddafi or Assad, let alone the traditional monarchies, which seem to possess a sort of traditional legitimacy the republican regimes (in reality, military juntas wearing tailored suites) had never enjoyed.

The battle cry on Tahrir was—and is—a Western one: "democracy." And it is aided by modern—Western—means of mass communication and social networking. Its success cannot be denied. However, the question remains whether it will be equally successful in establishing stable democratic regimes. This depends on concrete conditions, not imported ideas, and these will vary from country to country. Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan have shown in their *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation* how much successful transitions depend on local conditions: the existence of elements of a civil society, traditions of pluralism and individualism, a relative autonomy of a variety of mediating institutions, as well as the historical role of religion.

Linz and Stepan's book takes in a variety of countries and societies—from Eastern Europe to Spain and Portugal and Latin America. Even the more limited post-Communist experience shows a great diversity—from successful transitions in Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary, to neo-authoritarianism in Russia and the "sultanistic" regimes of the former Central Asian Soviet republics.

Which will it be, for example, in Egypt? Will the army, which has ruled the country for almost 60 years, give up its enormous political power and economic clout? Will democratic parties emerge in a landscape in which the best-organized social movement is the Muslim Brotherhood? And what will eventually happen in Libya?

"How beautiful was the Republic—under the Monarchy?" went a saying popular during the turmoil of the French Revolution. In the Arab world, the jury is still out.

Shlomo Avineri, of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, was member of international observer missions to the first post-communist elections in several Eastern European countries.

cism. Although as an Egyptian, I hold no brief for Mubarak or any of the other Arab tyrants, Burke's attack on "the spirit of innovation," the desire to break with all things past and establish an entirely new social and political order, still resonates.

Edmund Burke.

What the Western media has been calling the "secular opposition" consists mostly of naïve pseudo-activists alongside many opportunists, mediocre thinkers, and madmen. This "youth revolution" with its incoherent mix of hopes, demands, and grievances, and its insistence on the stark opposition between the young and the old scares me, my own youth notwithstanding. When I visited Tahrir Square I thought of Burke: "but what is liberty without wisdom, and without virtue? It is the greatest of all possible evils; for it is folly, vice, and madness, without tuition or restraint."

Not that a people should endure the injustice of a despot for the sake of preserving stability and tradition. Burke acknowledges the right of people to dismiss their ruler by force, but only if all other means have been exhausted. This wasn't really the case in Tunisia, and even less so in Egypt. Dozens of former officials and business men are now facing house arrest, confiscation of property, or imprisonment without due process, and calls for an even deeper purge are filling newspaper pages and TV airtime.

"Days of rage" may topple a dictator—in Tunisia and here in Egypt, at least, they have—but they are unlikely to produce democracy, and neither is Egypt's more likely path. The constitutional reform that just passed is almost certainly a win for the military dictatorship that Mubarak led for so long, with perhaps a few seats at the table for the Muslim Brotherhood and others. In short, we are probably closer to Nasser's 1952 Free Officers Coup than we are to 1776. I wish that I thought otherwise.

What can we Egyptians do? We do not have sufficient foundations for a truly liberal democratic regime, and these can only be laid down through a slow, patient work of building civil institutions in a stable atmosphere. As Burke argues, democracy is not to be found or created in an undifferentiated mob but in the small associations of society:

> To be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle (the germ as it were) of public affections. It is the first link in the series by which we proceed towards a love to our country, and to mankind. The interest of that portion of social arrangement is a trust in the hands of all those who compose it; and as none but bad men would justify it in abuse, none but traitors would barter it away for their own personal advantage.

Reflections on the Revolution in France is an antidote to the peculiar complacency that comes with utopian aspirations. In it, Burke echoed long forgotten classical voices to remind his fellowmen that the "Tyranny of Many" is even worse than the "Tyranny of One." Perhaps it is not yet too late for the revolutionaries in my country and elsewhere in the region to learn this lesson.

Amr Bargisi is the Director of Programs at the Egyptian Union of Liberal Youth.

Reflections on the Revolution in Egypt

BY AMR BARGISI

I picked up Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* after the Tunisian uprising and have been re-reading it ever since. Like the Arab uprisings of today, the French Revolution initially sparked much enthusiasm and little skepti-

Egyptian soldiers atop a tank with "Mubarak the tyrant has fallen" written on the side, in Tahrir Square, January 30, 2011.

Why Now?

BY EVA BELLIN

Trotsky famously said, "Revolution is impossible until it is inevitable." No one expects revolution to occur, even when the motives are obvious and pressing. Numerous factors—structural, ideological, sociological—stand in the way of successful uprising. Until they don't.

Readers looking for a way into the politics of the region might begin with Michele Penner Angrist's excellent edited volume, *Politics and Society in the Contemporary Middle East*, published just a few months ago. But while such discussions identify the repression, corruption, and economic hardship that motivated the uprisings, they don't quite explain why they are happening *now*. After all, there have been legitimate grievances on these scores for decades. Furthermore, the wave of protest got its start in, of all places, Tunisia—a country whose experience of these afflictions has been modest when compared to, say, the pervasive poverty of Egypt or the kleptocracy of Saudi Arabia.

Egyptian protesters carry a fitting sign in Tahrir Square, January, 2011.

So how to account for the *when* and the *where*? It is no surprise that the unrest got started in the republics, not the monarchies, and in the personalistic, "patrimonial" republics first. In such regimes, including the recently deposed governments of Tunisia and Egypt, rule is concentrated in one person whose hold on power is secured through a mix of patronage and coercion. Should the regime fail to deliver sustenance or security, the leader is the natural focus of popular anger. Since leaders such as Ben Ali and Mubarak have neither the traditional legitimacy of a monarch nor the base of support that comes with effective party organization, they are particularly vulnerable. Even more important, these leaders are vulnerable to abandonment by the coercive apparatus (especially the military), which may decide it is easier to toss over a single leader than to try to defend an inept system. So Ben Ali and Mubarak were always more at risk than Jordan's Abdullah or Morocco's Muhammed VI. The experiences of Trujilo, Batista, Somoza, Duvalier, and Pahlavi bear this out, as was shown in a now-classic collection of case studies edited by Houchang Chehabi and Juan J. Linz called *Sultanistic Regimes*.

The character of the military is just as important. Protests snowball when the protesters are persuaded that the military will not shoot. And regime elites will flee when the military abandons their defense. But what determines whether the military will defect? At heart is the issue of whether the military is personally invested in the survival of the ruler. A professional military such as that found in Tunisia is less likely to shoot; a patrimonial military such as that of Libya (or Syria) is more likely to massacre. Alfred C.Stepan explored the dynamics of such decision-making in another great case study, *The Military in Politics: Changing Patterns in Brazil*.

But while this analysis sheds light on *where* successful uprisings are likely to occur, it says little about the *when*. Why were Arab countries seized by a wave of protest this winter, not ten years ago? Specialists have long attributed the quiescence of Arab societies to successful authoritarian repression, which have made organized opposition all but impossible. So why has popular protest proven possible now? The answer can be summed up in two words: social media. Think of the Facebook pages devoted to Muhammad Bouazizi's self-immolation and the brutalization of Khaled Said by the Egyptian security services. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and smartphones provided the means for coordination and synchronization of thousands of people, in the absence of formal organizational infrastructure. Most important, the anonymity and spontaneity of the media meant they could escape the control of an authoritarian state. More than any other factor, new social media explain why the protesters were able to mobilize now.

But powerful as Facebook no doubt is, it doesn't explain why the protesters were so peaceful and disciplined in Tahrir Square and elsewhere. This was essential to avoiding the bloodbath that even a professional military would have initiated under provocation. Part of the answer can be found in Gene Sharp's renowned work on non-violent resistance, most accessibly spelled out in the manifesto he wrote for Burmese dissidents in 1993, *From Dictatorship to Democracy: A Conceptual Framework for Liberation*. Sharp's work clearly informed the tactics embraced by the protests' organizers. Several key organizers, including veterans of the failed April 6 protest last spring, studied his work and modeled their tactics on those of Sharp's Eastern European disciples, especially in Serbia.

But in the end there is always a measure of mystery about revolution. To paraphrase Tocqueville in his classic study of the French Revolution "without the reasons I have stated, the French Revolution never would have happened . . . but all these reasons together do not manage to explain it."

Eva Bellin is Myra and Robert Kraft Professor of Arab Politics at Brandeis University.

On Mubarak

BY DANIEL KURTZER

When I was appointed US ambassador to Egypt in 1997, the State Department sent me a transcript of interviews with former US officials who had served in Egypt. Of all the material I had read in graduate school and in the run-up to my appointment—academic books, think tank analyses, newspaper stories—this oral history proved to be the most important. Although all the personnel on both sides had changed by the time I took up my position, the insights—in particular, the cultural and social habits of Egyptians—were still invaluable. I learned, for example, how important funerals and condolence calls are, and by showing up on these occasions, I entered parts of Egyptian society normally closed to Americans. This paid dividends on the job.

I think of this oral history project often because of the place it occupied between the academic and the practical. This is particularly relevant today, with Egypt in upheaval. For most Egypt experts, the events of the past weeks have been something like a crash of our collective hard-drives. Events are moving at such speeds and in such uncertain directions that media commentators have proven almost useless.

This does not mean that academic studies of Egypt are without merit. Richard Mitchell's pioneering work *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* was and remains quite important. More recently, the excellent publications of the Carnegie Endowment have helped tune us in to the world of Egypt's nascent democracy movement.

Unfortunately, no book existed that prepared me for the dealings I had with President Hosni

Mubarak. Much had been written about Mubarak's predecessors, Gamal Abdel Nasser and Anwar Sadat. In fact, they had both written their own autobiographies. But Mubarak was not given to memoirs, nor was he the subject of many books. Thus, in relation to the single biggest challenge an ambassador faces—dealing with the leader of the country—I was left to my own devices.

Of all the epithets being directed at Mubarak these days, the one that is most wrongheaded is "iron-fisted dictator." Mubarak was no Saddam Hussein, or Hafez al Assad, or Muammar Gaddafi. He would not and did not direct his armed forces to fire on the demonstrators. He knew when the time had come to exit, albeit reluctantly. To be sure, he oversaw a system based on repression of political dissent, and which was authoritarian to the core. But he was not a monster.

To understand Mubarak, in my view, one needs to look at the circumstances of his accession to power, and the challenges he faced during the formative first decade of his rule. Mubarak was sitting next to Sadat on October 6, 1981 when Islamic militants gunned down the president. I wasn't at the parade but I was stationed in Egypt at the time, and I recall vividly our collective sense that something larger had happened, perhaps an armed Islamist uprising. Sadat had jailed thousands of oppositionists, and in the immediate aftermath of the assassination, Islamists were attacking police stations and other government buildings.

Assuming the presidency at this moment, Mubarak's first tasks were to restore stability and assure his ability to govern. He must have recalled that both Nasser and Sadat faced early challenges to their leadership. He certainly understood that the two challenges of stability and leadership were inextricably linked. Over the longer term, Mubarak also faced the challenge of keeping Egypt afloat economically. There is much talk today about the $70 billion in US assistance provided over the past thirty years, but it should be remembered that for the first decade of that aid, it only replaced the Arab state subsidies that had been cut off when Egypt signed a peace treaty with Israel. Mubarak made sure to implement the treaty, but it cost Egypt dearly.

Mubarak worked hard over the years to expand the peace. We met often to discuss strategy and tactics. He was not entirely happy with American policy, which he thought was too soft and too beholden to Israeli interests, but he tried to help. At my urging, for example, he was instrumental in persuading a reluctant Yasser Arafat to go to Camp David in 2000, and equally determined not to allow the Clinton administration to walk away from the peace process after the summit failed.

The fact is that thirty years later Egypt is a changed country, and Mubarak deserves some of the credit. It now has a relatively modern infrastructure and an economy that has some free market characteristics, though it is also wracked by cronyism and corruption. Moreover, it has enjoyed a prolonged period without war, not a bad achievement in a tough neighborhood that includes Sudan to the south and Libya to the west. The cost, however, was too high: sustained human rights abuses, severe restrictions on basic freedoms, and a pervasive system of internal spying and fear instilled in those considered dangerous by the regime. Still, Mubarak's achievements cannot be overlooked.

Steven Cook of the Council on Foreign relations will soon publish a sweeping history of modern Egypt, which will become a must-read for anyone interested in the subject. A similarly sweeping and objective treatment of the Mubarak presidency is also needed.

Daniel Kurtzer has served as US ambassador to Egypt (1997-2001) and to Israel (2001-2005).

Egypt's Youth Revolution: Some Literary Thoughts

BY MENAHEM MILSON

The images of Cairene masses in Tahrir Square (Liberation Square), with the overwhelming presence of young people, marked the end of an era. Looking at the faces of the demonstrators, I couldn't help but think of the young protagonists in Alaa al-Aswany's 2002 Arabic novel *The Yacoubian Building*. The novel features a diverse gallery of characters, differing in age, social class, and education, who all live in the downtown Cairo building that gives the novel its name. The more affluent of them reside in the building's spacious apartments, whereas the poor live in cramped shacks on the roof, which in the building's heyday, during the 1930s and 1940s, were used as storage sheds and laundry rooms. Despite their diverse backgrounds, the characters all share a deep sense of frustration, injustice and misery born of the social and political order prevailing in Egypt.

Taha, a high school student who lives with his parents in one of the roof shacks, aspires to become a police officer and thus rise above the social status of his father, the building's doorman. His grades clearly make him eligible for the police academy, but when he admits during the interview that his father is a doorman, the admissions committee rejects him as unfit. His letter of complaint to President Mubarak yields nothing but a curt reply affirming that the screening process had been fair, and wishing him luck in another profession. At the university, he gravitates towards a group of religious young men, one of whom influences him to join a clandestine Islamist organization. He is arrested and undergoes brutal interrogations. Eventually he is killed in a terrorist operation in which he and his friends assassinate a police officer.

Taha's sweetheart, Busayna, also lives in the roof shacks. After her father dies, she must find work in order to help support her younger sisters and brother. She learns that, in order to keep a job—any job—a poor girl like her must provide sexual favors to the boss. She says to Taha: "This country is not ours, Taha. It belongs to those who have money. If you had 20,000 pounds to pay as a bribe, would anyone ask you what your father did for a living?" Embittered and filled with guilt, she leaves Taha and, in the end, marries a debauched bachelor 40 years her senior.

Al-Aswany's characters rarely mention Mubarak by name. He is referred to as "the Big Man," who must receive a share of every large business deal requiring official approval. In fact, bribery is the rule in any contact between the citizen and the authorities, at every level.

When I finished reading the novel a few years ago, I wondered: How long can a people so oppressed continue to tolerate the existing order? In al-Aswany's book, a corrupt politician says:

> We have studied the mentality of the Egyptian people well. The Egyptians—God created them submissive to authority. There are peoples who are by nature rebellious. But the Egyptian, he will always bow his head so he can make a living . . . Of all the people in the world, the Egyptians are easiest to rule. Once you assume power, they will surrender to you, grovel before you, and you can do what you like with them.

The events at Tahrir Square have finally belied this theory, which was held not only by Egyptian politicians but also by many experts on Egyptian history.

Another literary work that comes to mind in this context is Najib Mahfuz's famous novel *Children of Gebelawi*, originally serialized in 1959 in Egypt's leading paper *Al-Ahram*. In a thinly disguised allegory, Mahfuz describes a world abandoned by God, in which injustice and oppression reign supreme. (Egyptian Islamists never forgave Mahfuz his irreverence.) On another level, the novel is a comment on the nature of political power in Egypt, which, according to Mahfuz, is ruled by "those who wield the clubs," Mahfuz's description of the officers who have been in power since the 1952 revolution.

Gamal al-Ghithani's depiction of Egypt's military regime is equally damning. (Al-Ghitani belongs to the literary generation between Mahfuz and al-Aswany.) His 1974 novel *Zayni Barakat* tells the story of a cruel and power-hungry police chief in Cairo at the beginning of the 16th century. Zayni Barakat serves the Mamluk sultan, and when the latter is defeated by the Ottoman conquerors, he transfers his loyalty to the new rulers and continues his reign of terror. Al-Ghitani made it no secret that, in describing the oppression and brutality of 16th-century Egypt, he was referring to the regime of the Free Officers under Nasser.

One cannot overlook the fact that, throughout the years since the 1952 coup, the majority of Egyptian writers and intellectuals were acquiescent, and many even willingly served the regime. In his *Children of Gebelawi*, Mahfuz called them "the poets of the coffee-houses," who sing the rulers' praises and avoid any talk "that might embarrass the masters."

It was remarkable to see how the chief editors of Cairo's leading papers did an about-face as soon as Mubarak was forced to step down. In a recent television interview, Egyptian poet Ahmed Abd al-Mu'ti al-Higazi said with indignation:

> It is inconceivable to support tyranny until January 25, 2011, and then become a liberal as soon as the revolution is successful. I feel sorry for these people, and there are many of them. It's not just a few journalists . . . they groveled before the regime prior to January 25, and their voices are equally loud today.

The novels of Mahfuz, al-Ghitani, and al-Aswany afford us a deeper understanding of the roots of the Youth Revolution. They cannot, however, answer the two big questions concerning Egypt's future: whether "those who wield the clubs" will agree to give up the power they have enjoyed for so long and whether Egyptian Islamism will rise or wane.

Menahem Milson is professor of Arabic literature at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and the author of Najib Mahfuz: The Novelist Philosopher of Cairo *(St. Martin's Press). Milson is the co-founder and chairman of the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI).*

The Return of Pan-Arabism?

BY ITAMAR RABINOVICH

Hosni Mubarak's overthrow by an unstructured popular movement sends one back to the classic histories of modern Egypt, P. J. Vatikiotis' *The History of Modern Egypt: From Muhammad Ali to Mubarak* and Nadav Safran's *Egypt in Search of Political Community: An Analysis of the Intellectual and Political Evolution of Egypt, 1804-1952*. Both, in their different ways, tell the tale of Egypt's efforts to build a stable, modern polity.

From left: Ali Abdullah Saleh of Yemen, Mahmud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority, Muammar Gaddafi of Libya, Amr Mussa of the Arab League, and Hosni Mubarak of Egypt at the Arab League summit in Sirte, Libya, October 9, 2010. (Photo © Khaled Desouki/AFP/Getty Images.)

Like Albert Habib Hourani in his *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1789-1939* from 1983, they recount the collapse of Egypt's brief experiment in liberal politics in the inter-war period of the past century. Egypt's British masters and mentors bear some responsibility for the failure to create a liberal Egypt, but it was swept away by the more powerful forces of Arabism and Islam.

I could go on, but I would rather focus my quest for perspective on the current wave of change on the work of two scholars. Orientalism has been maligned in recent decades but it is difficult to find in the current generation of Middle East scholars those possessed of as profound a knowledge of both medieval Islam and the modern Middle East, as Bernard Lewis. In the current context, I find his *The Political Language of Islam* particularly helpful. In this book, Lewis drew on his command of Islamic sources and a large number of Middle Eastern and European languages in order to offer us intriguing insights into the way Muslims have thought and communicated about politics. Take a basic concept like "state." In English and several European languages it implies constancy and stability. In Arabic the term for state is *dawla,* whose root, *dwl,* means to turn, rotate, or change. In other words it literally means a revolution. Understanding what Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi and even Wael Ghonim ("the Google man") mean, and how they are understood by their listeners in Arabic, turns out to be more complicated than just reading the translation of their remarks in the *Times* or even *Ha'aretz*.

The second is Fouad Ajami, who was born to a Shiite family in Lebanon and is now the Majid Khadduri Professor of Middle East Studies at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies, and Chair of the Working Group on Islamism and the International Order at the Hoover Institution. Ajami became famous in 1978 when he published a *Foreign Affairs* essay with the title "The End of Pan-Arabism." Pronouncing the ideology that had dominated Arab politics for half a century dead was considered heresy, but it turned out to be prophetic. Ajami has been required reading ever since. Among his most personal books is *The Vanished Imam*, which tells the story of the Shiite community in Lebanon and its leader Imam Musa al-Sadr, who disappeared in, of all places, Libya. As the world watches Muammar Gaddafi fighting ruthlessly for his political life, it is instructive to recall how he

invited Al Sadr to Libya and probably had him killed at Yasser Arafat's behest. Curiously, now that Gaddafi is tottering, there are rumors in Lebanon that Al Sadr is actually alive in Libya and may come back to haunt the leadership of Hezbollah. (Not very likely, but an intriguing thought.)

Ajami's masterwork, *The Dream Palace of the Arabs*, is a grim portrait of Arab society and politics at the turn of this century. If you read this book now you will not wonder why the region has just been swept by a revolutionary wave but why it didn't happen much earlier. Ajami's depiction of the Arab regimes' management of the peace process with Israel is telling. Under the title "The Orphaned Peace" he describes the way in which Hosni Mubarak kept "the cold peace" with Israel going, while allowing the Arab nationalist and Islamic opposition to rail against Jews and Israelis. But all is relative and as Mubarak was losing his power Israelis latched on to him as the leader who, despite everything, kept the peace, or at least non-belligerency, going.

A final perhaps now-heretical thought: Is pan-Arabism really dead? Or did it recently return to life on the waves of Al-Jazeera? And what might that portend?

Itamar Rabinovich served as Israel's ambassador to the United States, and as president of Tel Aviv University. He is a Distinguished Global Professor at NYU.

was achieved through the initiative of one dictator (Sadat) and then sustained over three decades by another dictator (Mubarek). I remember being told by Fouad Ajami that this peace, and the later peace with Jordan's king, "had no legs." He meant that peace was supported by the heads of these countries but not by the people.

And now in Egypt the head has fallen, and it is at least possible that some form of democracy will follow. Actually, we don't know what will follow, but let's assume that after whatever difficulties an imperfect democracy, like all the other democracies, and a relatively liberal democracy, emerges to Israel's west. Then, Doyle's thesis will be tested. Will Egypt's democrats keep the peace with Israel? Or will there be a drift, or a march, toward war?

Curiously, a number of politicians on the Israeli right have been good Doylians, opposing rightists like Moshe Arens, and arguing that a stable peace won't come to the Middle East so long as Israel's neighbors are ruled by autocrats, whose policies have little popular support. For some, this has simply been an excuse for avoiding serious negotiations on, say, the Saudi peace proposal, which obviously doesn't have a liberal or democratic provenance. Now, their bluff has been called, and they are not looking forward to negotiating with a democratic Egypt. But Natan Sharansky has proven that his commitment to the Doyle thesis is serious: In a long interview in *The Jerusalem Post*, he urged Israelis to welcome the uprisings in the Arab world as (possible) harbingers of peace.

Of course, all this is political science and politics, not physics or math. There are no certainties here. Nor does Doyle's thesis predict that the citizens of different and often competing democratic states will actually like one another. It is just that they won't and, in fact, don't think of war as a way of settling their differences. Consider the example of Germany and Poland today—there is no mutual affection, but no danger of armed conflict either. Why not? It's not the case that democratic political leaders have great difficulty convincing their citizens to go to war. Rather, in order to do that they have to convince those citizens that the enemy is truly terrible; they have to point to totalitarian communists (as in Vietnam) or to brutal tyrants (like Saddam Hussein). And countries ruled democratically, by politicians who don't look all that different from you and me, can't plausibly be described as truly terrible.

Will Israel look less terrible to a democratic Egypt? It is, again, not a sure thing, not even close to a sure thing. But there is at least a possibility that the old Zionist dream of normality will find its realization here, in the peaceful co-existence of (imperfect) democratic states. No doubt, it won't be a peace of the heart, but if Doyle is right, it will definitely have legs.

Michael Walzer is Professor Emeritus at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton.

The Democratic Peace Theory

BY MICHAEL WALZER

Almost thirty years ago, Michael Doyle wrote two articles in *Philosophy and Public Affairs* ("Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs," parts I and II, 1983) arguing that liberal states, republics, and democracies don't go to war with one another. The argument was theoretical (taking off from Kant's essay on "Perpetual Peace") and empirical: There really weren't any such wars. By contrast, there have been many wars, and many kinds of war, just and unjust, between liberal and illiberal states. The zone of peace extends only across the liberal, democratic world, where values are shared and interests mutually accommodated. I think of Doyle's thesis as one of the relatively few well-founded "findings" of modern political science. It is also a thesis that one would like to be true—and especially now when young rebels across the Arab world are calling for a democratic transformation.

All of Israel's wars have been fought, as you would expect if Doyle is right, with illiberal and undemocratic states (or illiberal "entities" like Hamas' Gaza). Lebanon might be an exception, but the writ of Lebanese democracy did not extend to the South, where Hezbollah ruled. At the same time, however, it is also true, as Moshe Arens recently reminded his fellow citizens, that both of Israel's peace treaties, and all of its cease fires, have been negotiated with illiberal and undemocratic states. Most notably, the peace treaty with Egypt

Daniel Bell (1919-2011)

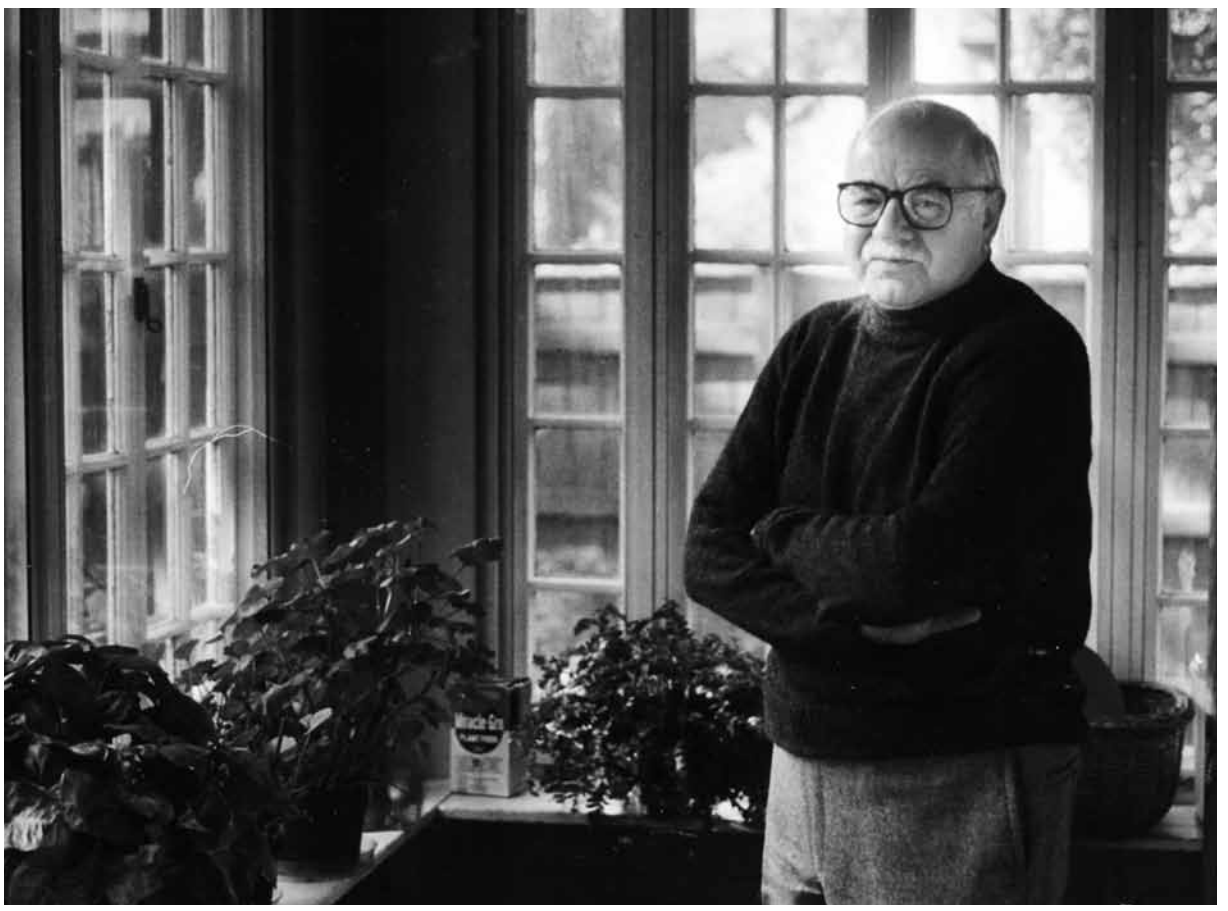
BY RUSSELL JACOBY

Daniel Bell belonged to a generation of New York intellectuals that lit up the American cultural firmament for decades and that has now virtually passed from the scene. Like others such as Irving Howe and Alfred Kazin, Bell emerged from a poor, immigrant Jewish neighborhood infused by learning and leftism. "The *shul* and the Socialist party—that framed my life," Bell once remarked. His essays and especially his 1960 book *The End of Ideology* made Bell a permanent reference point for political thinkers on the right and left. The book's subtitle, "On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties" suggested its theme—the demise of socialist verities. *The End of Ideology* captured the *Zeitgeist* at the end of the 1950s—or perhaps, more precisely, it captured the exhaustion of Bell's own leftist generation in the wake of Stalinism and postwar American prosperity.

Unlike certain luminaries from his cohort such as his friend Irving Kristol, who in the 1970s embraced conservatism, Bell did not dramatically change his political colors during the course of his life. He began as a moderate anti-communist socialist and ended as a liberal committed to social equality. As a young man, he worked as a journalist for the socialist weekly, *The New Leader*, and planned a book on the Monopoly State. Dissatisfied with Marxist theory, Bell gave up the manuscript and in 1949 joined *Fortune* magazine as a labor reporter. He presented his ideas about the failures of Marxism in his first and, in many ways, best and most careful book, *Marxian Socialism in the United States*, which remains one of his least noticed. "The old simplistic theories no longer hold," Bell stated in 1952, anticipating his argument in *The End of Ideology*. American society, which lacks a real bourgeoisie, petty-bourgeoisie, and proletariat, has evolved "in a far different direction" from that predicted by Marxism. Socialism in the United States, Bell concluded, has no future; it had become "a notation in the archives of history."

At the same time Bell was writing off socialism, he was organizing a response to McCarthyism and the right wing of American politics. In *The New American Right*, published in 1955, Bell, with Richard Hofstadter and others, sought to understand how a right-wing movement emerged "not of depression, but of prosperity." This proved to be an enduring conundrum, and Bell re-edited the collection in 1962 to account for the appearance of a new American right wing centered on the John Birch Society and Barry Goldwater. (He probably could republish the volume today with few changes.) The right-wing, he wrote fifty years ago, seems driven by rancor and a resentment of a cosmopolitan modernity; it wants to return to mythic values of individual initiative and self-reliance. In political terms, this means "the dismantling of the welfare state" and the "taming of labor unions."

The 1960s proved a difficult time for Bell and many of his generation. The Black Power movement, student protests, feminism, and the counterculture upset their theories—and lives. Announcements of the "end of ideology" proved premature. Indeed, what is now called neoconservatism derives from the response of Kristol and others to the 1960s. Bell himself had already broken with his friend C. Wright Mills, the radical sociologist who embraced the New Left. In 1968, when student strikes and an occupation took place at Columbia University, Bell was a tenured sociologist there. And he was not pleased. Bell's account of the Columbia events sought an explanation in psychology—a mass delusion had infected students—and dripped with contempt. In 1969, he fled Columbia for Harvard and for what he hoped would be the quieter streets of Cambridge.



Daniel Bell at his home in Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1992. (Photo © Janet Knott/Boston Globe /Landov.)

Yet Bell never followed Kristol all the way into neoconservativism. He went on to write insightful books such as the *Coming of the Post-Industrial Society*; and in his lucidity, his learning, his combativeness, but also in his openness, Bell exemplified the best of the New York Intellectuals. He welcomed visitors, and was known for his non-stop and heady talk. He occasionally pondered his Jewish identity as a secular intellectual. "I have no final answers," he admitted. "I was born in *galut*," and live "the outward life" of an American with "the inward secret" of the Jew. "I walk with this sign as a frontlet between my eyes, and it is as visible to some secret others as their sign is to me."

Bell moved from journalism to the professoriate, but he skipped a doctorate. This might explain, in part, why he did not specialize; or, as he rather famously remarked, "I specialize in generalizations." Nor did he write narrow and jargon-laced monographs, but rather limpid essays, which constituted his books from *The End of Ideology* to *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*. In this too Bell typified his generation. The sweeping essay was a trademark of the New York Intellectuals.

Irving Howe commented on this mania of "the Jewish boys" to tackle all matters great and small as they left their neighborhood for the wider world. "We thought we should know everything." For this reason they did not want to be pigeonholed as literary critics or sociologists. "We used to make fun of the guy who spent ninety-six pages analyzing a twelve-line poem," Howe remembered. Rather, they wrote spirited essays that addressed society as a whole. "Behind this is the very profoundly Jewish impulse: Namely, you've got to beat the goyim at their own game. So you have to dazzle them a little." Howe added, "Danny Bell lives by the same notion." So he did, and we are the richer for it.

Russell Jacoby is the author of The Last Intellectuals *and other books. His new book,* Bloodlust*:* On the Roots of Violence from Cain and Abel to the Present *(Free Press) is being published this spring. He teaches history at UCLA.*

Trashing Dictatorship in Cairo

BY JOSHUA MURAVCHIK

Hussein Ibish of the American Task Force on Palestine and Daniel Pipes of the Middle East Forum—two observers each inhabiting distant points on the political spectrum—reported being struck by the same item that hit me from the uprising in Egypt. Following the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak and the subsequent decision of the protest movement to vacate Tahrir Square, leaders called on participants to return the next day to clean up after themselves. And they did.

I've visited Egypt a handful of times and was surprised to discover how much I liked it, above all for the unparalleled warmth of the people. But one thing that has shocked me is the seemingly universal disdain for public places.

On a train from Alexandria to Cairo, I watched a large man, clothed in a threadbare dishdasha and sandals, consume a bag of sunflower seeds. As he chewed the seeds, he tossed the husks on the floor, creating a mound in the aisle. I've seen comparable behavior among the well-off. In 2005, I interviewed reform-minded presidential candidate Ayman Nour at his home, a large luxurious flat, filled with high-end technology and elegant Egyptian antiques. A broad, landscaped patio led to a swimming pool. But to get to his apartment, I had to make my way through unlighted corridors and an elevator that reeked of neglect. Puzzled, I was told that Egyptians lavish care only on their private spaces.

What the Tahrir cleanup signified to me was that the protesters want to open a new chapter in their history. The larger evidence of this was, of course, the general peacefulness of the protests.

When I blogged about the burning of the National Democratic Party headquarters as an exception to the non-violence, a young Egyptian activist I know wrote me plaintively that he and his colleagues believed that government agents had done this as a provocation. I'm not so sure, but I noted how pained he was by the allegation, which he took as a stain on the honor of his movement.

Although Egypt was in the forefront in this respect, the idea of non-violence was evident elsewhere in the region. *The New York Times* reported from Oman that "Protestors at [a] vigil in Sohar . . . said they regretted the burning of a supermarket . . . and other acts of violence, which they said were carried out by a small band of excited young people." No doubt, non-violence wherever possible has been a wise tactic, but perhaps this choice and the Tahrir cleanup also signal the birth of a new sense of civic honor in the region.

One source of this change might be that Arabs remember being burned by revolution before. Starting with Egypt in 1952, revolutions swept across the Arab world. The outcomes could scarcely have been worse: Each of the new Arab "republics" proved more tyrannical than the regime it supplanted. In fact, in recent times the most liberal of the Arab states—Morocco, Kuwait, Jordan—have been the surviving monarchies. To add insult to injury, every one of the revolutionary rulers tried to engineer a dynastic succession, although only Hafez al-Assad succeeded. Indeed, Mubarak's wish to pass the presidency to his widely reviled son, Gamal, may have been the straw that broke the back of public acquiescence in Egypt.

A Syrian activist tells me that the conspicuous absence of revolutionary leaders is no accident, but "reflect[s] an innate suspicion . . . born out of our past experiences where our revolutionary leaders turned into corrupt and corrupting dictators. I think adopting the right revolutionary means will pave the way [to] the right revolutionary results."

Egyptian women scrub off graffiti in Tahrir Square, Feburary 12, 2011. (Photo © Chris Hondros/Getty Images.)

To say that these are all encouraging signs is not to say that all signs are encouraging. One cannot praise the revolt without recalling the vicious assault on CBS reporter Lara Logan by an estimated 200 men who beat and molested her while screaming, "Jew! Jew!" Apart from the raw ugliness of this crime, it points to issues that stand between Egypt and democracy, or at least liberal democracy.

The virulent anti-Semitism is well known. Less so is the pathology of relations between the sexes in the Arab world. An Egyptian feminist group recently issued statistics saying that 83 percent of Egyptian women and 98 percent of female visitors to the country had experienced some kind of molestation. The survey was not rigorous, but whatever the true numbers, the practice is shockingly common. In Najib Mahfuz's great novel *Palace Walk*, the protagonist, Al-Sayyid Ahmad Abd al-Jawad, spends every evening carousing while his wife waits for his late-night return so that she may bathe his feet. Listening to his (sanitized) accounts of his day's activities is the high point of her day. Mahfuz's novel was set in the 1920s, but the intervening century has brought little progress. In her 1992 novel, the celebrated Egyptian novelist, Ahdaf Soueif, portrays a young woman who defies her parents to marry the love of her life. He whisks her off to London, installs her in a fine apartment, and, after she behaves shyly on their first night together, never pays attention to her again. A leading Egyptian female blogger and activist told me that she did not know of a single Egyptian man who was faithful to his wife. And a male of the same generation told me he knew of only one happy marriage.

Does this have anything to do with democracy? After all, democracy began in the West when women had few rights. True enough, but there were traditions of courtliness missing in the Arab world where, rather than "ladies first," women have been expected to walk behind their men to display subordination. Democracy presupposes a recognition of our common humanity. A failure to see this in Jews might not be fatal—if there are no Jews around. But failure to see it in women is incompatible with the virtues on which democracy depends.

A more immediate worry is the Muslim Brotherhood. A week after the conclusion of the Cairo protests, the spiritual leader of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, returned to Cairo and held forth at a Friday celebration in Tahrir Square. Despite efforts of various apologists to whitewash him, Qaradawi is a bloodthirsty racist who has urged the killing of Americans in Iraq and Jews everywhere. He writes that a climactic battle "between . . . all Muslims and all Jews" is a "precondition [to] the day of judgment." On this particular Friday, in response to Qaradawi's sermon, listeners chanted: "to Jerusalem we go; martyrs in the millions" and "Today Egypt; tomorrow Palestine." When Wael Ghonim, the Egyptian Google chief who was the hero of the revolution, sought to address the crowd, Qaradawi's entourage blocked him from the podium.

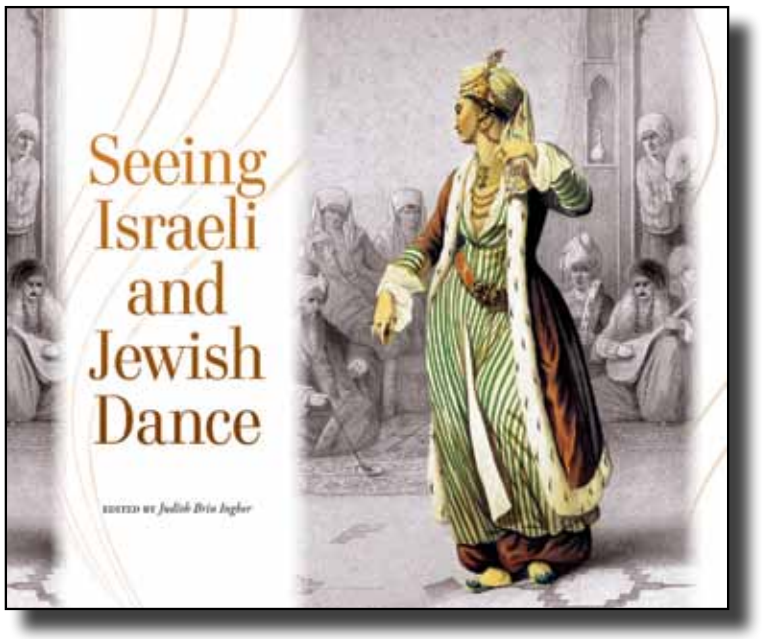
If there is scant reason for equanimity about how the Brotherhood would behave if it gained control of Egypt, there is however considerable hope that this will not happen. As has already been widely noted, one of the most remarkable things about the upheavals in Egypt and elsewhere has been how marginal the Islamists have been. Opportunistic politicians like Mohammed ElBaradei or Ayman Nour may pander to the Brotherhood, but the secular youth in the forefront of the protest movement dislike and fear it as much as we do.

Will democracy issue from the current miraculous moment? In many of these lands the odds are steeply against it. But in Egypt it might take hold, and that would be momentous. Egypt has been the political, cultural, and intellectual heart of the Arab world, though its influence has waned in these decades of stagnation. An Egypt with a lively democratic process and a free press would quickly regain that preeminence and serve as a model others would likely follow sooner or later.

Joshua Muravchik is a fellow at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies. His most recent book is The Next Founders: Voices of Democracy in the Middle East *(Encounter).*

JEWISH REVIEW
OF BOOKS
A Publication of Bee.Ideas, LLC.
745 Fifth Avenue, Suite 1400
New York, NY 10151

New Titles From Wayne State University Press



Seeing Israeli and Jewish Dance

Edited by Judith Brin Ingber

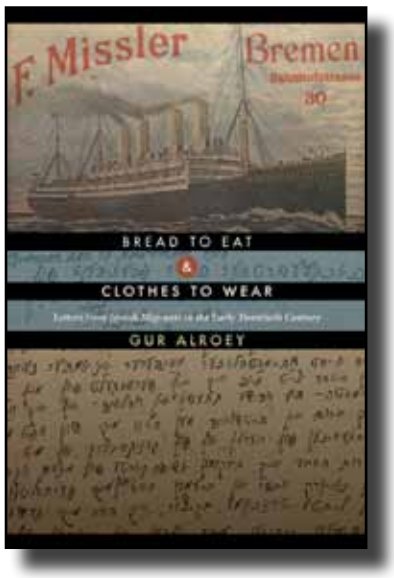
A comprehensive survey of historical and contemporary Jewish dance containing 182 beautiful images.

"Judith Brin Ingber has assembled in one volume a wealth of information and ideas. Dancing springs to life on the page—illuminating how cultural roots yield new blooms when transplanted into different soil."
—Deborah Jowitt, dance critic and historian

June 2011 • 504 pages • 182 illustrations • $34.95 cloth

Special discount for *Jewish Review of Books* readers!

Save 20%
on Jewish Studies titles!
Enter code JRB1
at checkout.



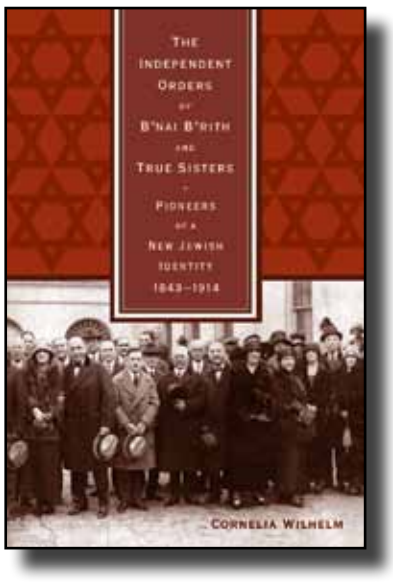
Bread to Eat and Clothes to Wear

Letters from Jewish Migrants in the Early Twentieth Century

Gur Alroey

"This is a wonderful and important addition to the literature in the fields of American and modern—that is European—Jewish history. What Gur Alroey has done is unpack the great Eastern European Jewish migration to America through what scholars are always complaining is missing: the voices of the 'ordinary' women and men who went through the process."
—Hasia R. Diner, Paul S. and Sylvia Steinberg Professor of American Jewish History and professor of Hebrew and Judaic studies at New York University

June 2011 • 256 pages • 9 illustrations • $29.95 paper



The Independent Orders of B'nai B'rith and True Sisters

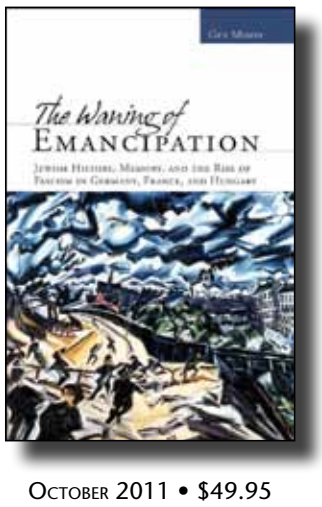
Pioneers of a New Jewish Identity, 1843-1914

Cornelia Wilhelm

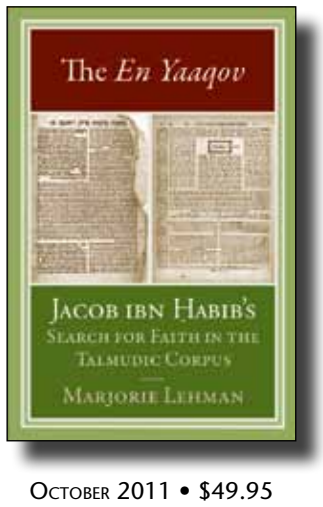
"This is an extraordinarily well researched volume on the most important Jewish fraternal organization in American Jewish history. Nobody before Wilhelm has made use of B'nai B'rith's archives, and nobody has been able to handle the German-language materials that are vital to researching B'nai B'rith."
—Jonathan D. Sarna, Joseph H. and Belle R. Braun Professor of American Jewish History at Brandeis University

July 2011 • 384 pages • 17 illustrations • $44.95 cloth

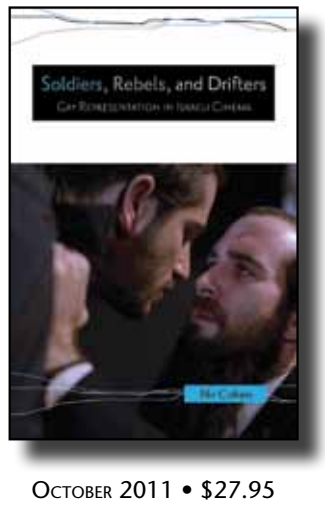
October 2011 • $44.95



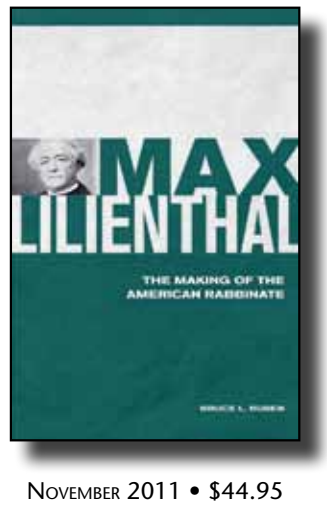
October 2011 • $49.95



October 2011 • $49.95



October 2011 • $27.95



November 2011 • $44.95

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THESE AND OTHER GREAT TITLES, VISIT WSUPRESS.WAYNE.EDU