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JEWISH REVIEW

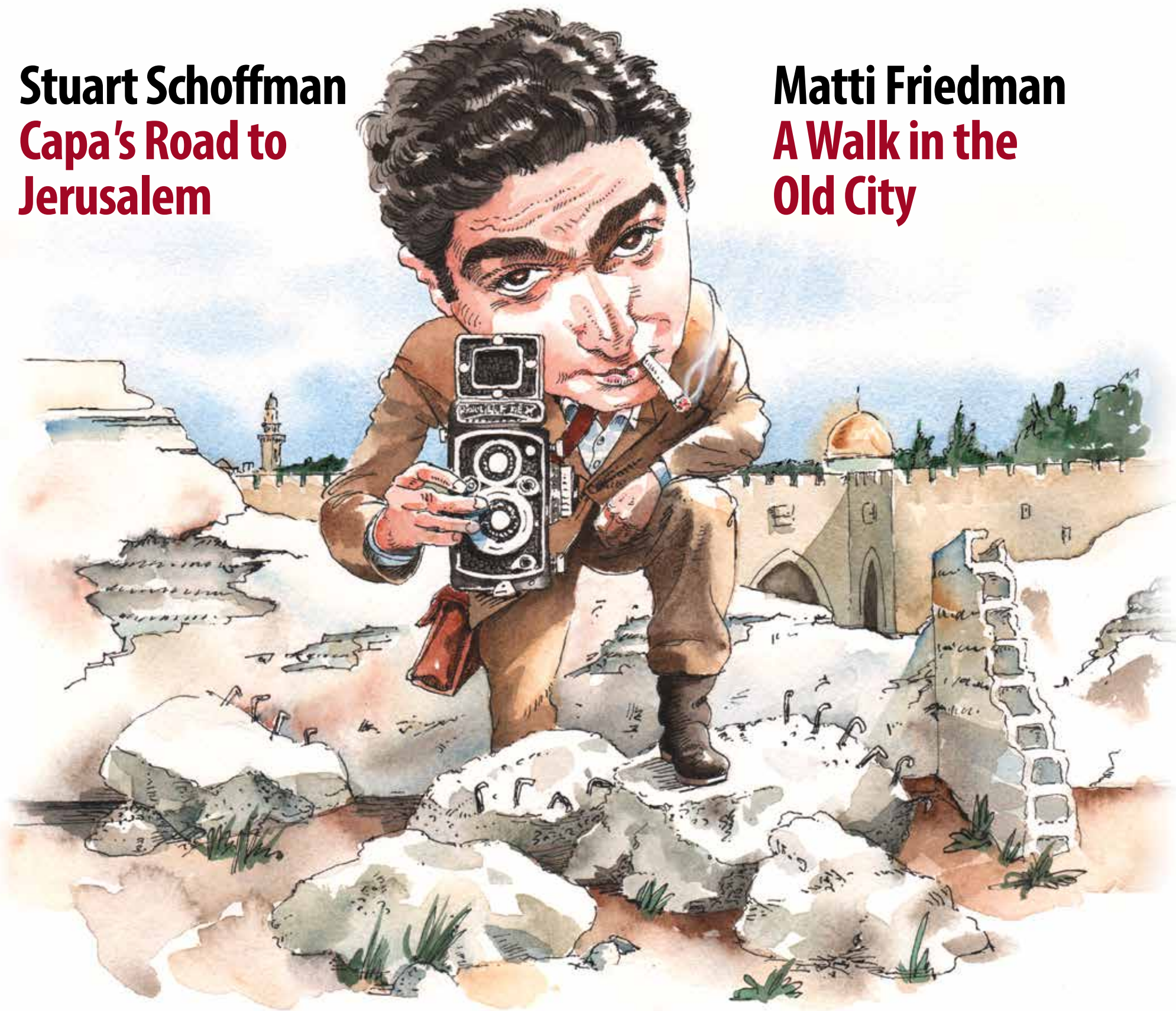
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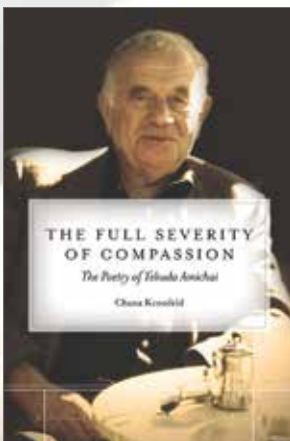
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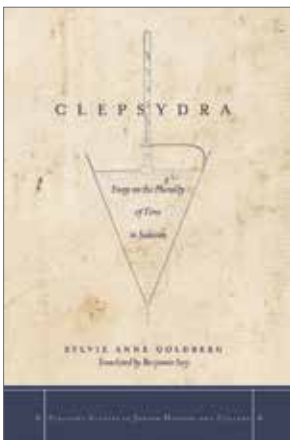
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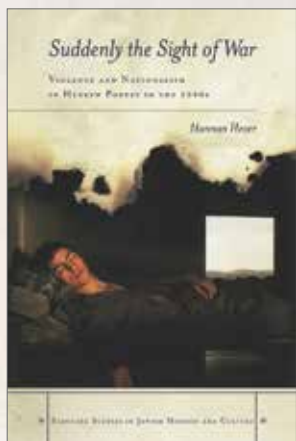
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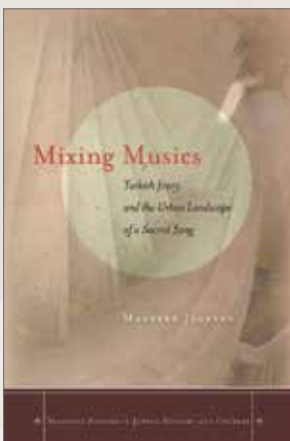
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JEWISH REVIEW
OF BOOKS

LETTERS

- 4 **JTS, American Judaism, and Conditional Synagogues**

FEATURES

- 5 **ELLI FISCHER** **Why I Defy the Israeli Chief Rabbinate** *Everyone knows that the Israeli Chief Rabbinate is often capricious, needlessly adversarial, and hopelessly bureaucratic. Actually, it's worse than that. It can't be abolished any time soon, but its power should be radically diminished.*
- 9 **MATTI FRIEDMAN** **A Walk in Jerusalem** *Jews and Arabs live separately and are rarely friends, but they deal with each other constantly. The city can't function otherwise. A walk in the Old City under a cloud of unease.*

REVIEWS

- 11 **ALLAN ARKUSH** **Oh, the Humanity!** *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* by Yuval Noah Harari • *Human Nature & Jewish Thought: Judaism's Case for Why Persons Matter* by Alan L. Mittleman
- 14 **ALAN MINTZ** **Reader, I Adopted Him** *Ha-almah mi-Kazan* (Lady of Kazan) by Maya Arad
- 18 **MICHAH GOTTLIEB** **Re-Intoxicated by God** *Spinoza's Metaphysics: Substance and Thought* by Yitzhak Y. Melamed
- 22 **AMY NEWMAN SMITH** **Water Shall Flow from Jerusalem** *Let There Be Water: Israel's Solution for a Water-Starved World* by Seth M. Siegel
- 24 **JAY LEFKOWITZ** **Shifting Daylight** *Doomed to Succeed: The U.S.-Israel Relationship from Truman to Obama* by Dennis Ross

READINGS & REFLECTIONS

- 27 **JULIAN SINCLAIR** **Not by the Rivers of Babylon** *It turns out that Israel sits on a "saddle point" between four weather systems. The rabbis of the Talmud didn't know that, but they did have some interesting things to say about rain.*
- 29 **MENAHEM MILSON** **Sadat in Jerusalem: Behind the Scenes** *The outcome of Anwar Sadat's 1977 visit to Israel was historic, but the backstage wrangling over protocol and Palestinian participation was also significant.*
- 31 **WALTER LAQUEUR** **Remembering the Scholems** *New books about Gershom Scholem and his brother Werner evoke memories of 28 Abarbanel Street in Jerusalem.*

LOST & FOUND

- 35 **VLADIMIR JABOTINSKY** **Your Time Is Up: Jabotinsky at the Sixth Zionist Congress** *The young Jabotinsky didn't exactly take the Sixth Zionist Congress by storm. When he approached Chaim Weizmann, saying, "I hope I am not intruding," Weizmann replied, "You are." A newly discovered text, edited by Brian Horowitz and Leonid Katsis.*

THE ARTS

- 37 **STUART SCHOFFMAN** **Robert Capa's Road to Jerusalem** *Robert Capa: Photographer of Life* curated by Raz Samira • *Capa in Color* edited by Cynthia Young
- 43 **SHOSHANA OLIDORT** **A Harem of Translators** *The Muses of Bashevis Singer* directed by Shaul Betser and Asaf Galay
- 45 **MICHAEL WEINGRAD** **A Cipher and His Songs** *Chayav melei shir: sipuro shel Avraham Halfi* (Life of Poetry: The Story of Avraham Halfi) directed by Uri Misgav
- 45 **AVRAHAM HALFI** **Two Poems** translated by Leon Wieseltier

LAST WORD

- 47 **ABRAHAM SOCHER** **A Party in Boisk**

JTS and American Judaism

Shame on Rabbi Gordis, and shame on the editors for accepting another lament about Conservative Judaism (“Tradition, Creativity, and Cognitive Dissonance,” Fall 2015) devoid of any positive suggestions or recognition that there are some glowing embers of hope that might be fanned into flame.

Rabbi Gordis tells us that Conservative Judaism “did not achieve [its] fundamental goal . . . the creation of a modern yet halakhically committed laity.” He tells us that Conservative Judaism lacks the “cognitive dissonance” and is “devoid of the raucousness” that is needed to be a creative movement. Perhaps there was some validity to this viewpoint in past decades, but Gordis seems oblivious to the ideological ferment that has gripped the movement over the past two decades. We’ve hotly debated and eventually embraced a more equal role for women. Now, similar debates and a similar evolution of views are occurring regarding gays. Jewish educational practices and curricula have evolved drastically in our religious and day schools.

There is also great progress in Israel. Rediscovery of the value of teaching Jewish “tradition” in the public schools, the tremendous growth of the TALM school movement, the growth of enrollment in non-orthodox adult education courses such as those sponsored by the Schechter Institute, and the development of an indigenous Masorti leadership and membership are all positive signs for the movement.

If Rabbi Gordis really wishes to help the Jewish enterprise, he must move beyond criticism, recognize and encourage positive efforts already in place, and devote more space in his essays to suggesting paths for improvement.

Carl Sunshine
Los Angeles, California

As a student who attended The Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) in the 1950s, I enjoyed reading Daniel Gordis’s excellent essay, but I do have some reservations. First, the author suggests that Professor Lieberman “communicated a disdain for the vast majority of the students JTS obliged him to teach.” That was not my experience. When a student excelled, it was not uncommon for Professor Lieberman to place his arm on the student’s shoulders and offer words of encouragement after class. Indeed, at the conclusion of an address to the Rabbinical Assembly, Professor Lieberman warmly related an extraordinary encounter that reinforced his faith in the Seminary. He heard a voice in the dormitory studying Talmud one Saturday night reciting passages aloud, which he described as “sweet,” and the “voice of Torah which had the genuine longing of our ancestors,” reminding him of “the voice of the Yeshivah of the old country.” Second, Professor Lieberman and Abraham Joshua Heschel certainly had their differences, but undoubtedly respected one another and enjoyed a warm personal relationship.

Finally, it is easy to speculate on what might have been had the luminaries of the JTS in the 1950s cultivated an “argumentative community” around theology. But Chancellor Finkelstein built a diverse faculty across a range of fields so that students could study, assess, and consider Judaism through radically different lenses as they progressed through their studies. To expect this faculty to have engaged in the same kind of argumentative dialogue that the early Zionists had with one another is unrealistic. The universe of Jewish

theology is infinitely more vast and diverse than the competing visions of a Jewish state in the 20th century.

Rabbi Solomon Spiro
via jewishreviewofbooks.com

I was a rabbinical student at The Jewish Theological Seminary in the 1950s, the golden age of Jewish scholarship that Daniel Gordis describes so accurately in his article “Tradition, Creativity, and Cognitive Dissonance.” I too was puzzled by the readiness of so many American Jews to claim the label of Conservative Judaism despite their reluctance to accept the halakhic lifestyle that the Seminary faculty attached to that name.



Today, after several decades of serving a typical suburban Conservative congregation, I think I understand the disconnect. Dr. Finkelstein, z”l, Professor Lieberman, z”l, and their colleagues, great scholars and caring Jews all, did envision a Conservative movement of observant Jews in America, but I suspect they could have lived out their years happily on the Upper West Side of New York without ever going to a movie or watching a baseball game. However, the tens of thousands of American Jews who joined Conservative synagogues envisioned living fully as Jews and as Americans. We eagerly accepted the invitation to participate fully in American life. Unlike our Reform brethren, who regularly gave preference to the secular alternative, Conservative Jews strove to be maximally Jewish and at the same time maximally American.

Were we conflicted? Daily. Were we inconsistent? Undoubtedly. Did we fall short of what the standards of Conservative Judaism asked of us on matters like Shabbat observance, kashrut, and *mikvah*, and did we miss out on some aspects of American life? Yes, but we made the decision that participation in American life and living as serious Jews were worth it. Would my teachers have been disappointed by the movement they helped to create? I suspect they would (and probably were). Was the Holy One Blessed Be He disappointed in us? I am in no position to judge, but I would hope not.

Rabbi Harold Kushner
Natick, MA

Daniel Gordis Responds:

Carl Sunshine misunderstood my article. No lament, it was a portrayal of the intellectual discourse that JTS cultivated—and more often did not—in its greatest years. The tenor of intellectual discourse at JTS is not unrelated to the eventual fate of Conser-

vative Judaism, of course, but the issues are distinct. Sunshine conflates them.

Solomon Spiro offers memories of Professor Lieberman’s kindness as a teacher as proof that I judged Lieberman too harshly. I readily stipulate that Professor Lieberman had good days. However, in the very same 1948 Rabbinical Assembly address that Rabbi Spiro quotes, Lieberman responded to his students’ *Siyyum Ha-Shas* by saying, “It was indeed gratifying to . . . hear the Hadran of Rabbi Abrams. I’m convinced that he has studied at least one tractate of the Talmud.”

That gratuitous humiliation of a student in public was classic Lieberman. Most stunning is that he did not get the comment stricken from the published record. He simply felt no remorse. That attitude contributed in no small way to the venomous atmosphere at JTS, which so many of its students were understandably desperate to flee. Interested readers can find the entire address in Judah Goldin’s classic anthology, *The Jewish Expression*. Lieberman’s relationship with Abraham Joshua Heschel is also, unfortunately, a matter of historical record.

Quantifying the intellectual breadth of any field is obviously difficult, but Spiro sells Zionism’s intellectual richness short. Zionism was home to statist and non-statist; communists, socialists, and capitalists; those who saw in Zionism an opportunity to write a new chapter of Jewish history and those who sought to leave Jewish history and Judaism utterly behind; those who believed coexistence with the Arabs possible and those who predicted that Jewish sovereignty would provoke a conflict with no end; those who saw Zionism as a fundamentally intellectual undertaking and others who felt that only dirty hands in the soil of Eretz Yisrael would give Zionism meaning. There was much more. That Jewish theological discourse was so obviously richer than Zionist thought strikes me as a very dubious claim.

Rabbi Kushner’s utter decency and wisdom have long afforded all of us a model of teaching and discourse. I am as sure as one can be that the Holy One is not disappointed by his work.

Conditional Synagogues

Eugene R. Sheppard begins his essay “On Old Stones, a Black Cat, and a New Zion” (Fall 2015) with a legend that may be the source for the curious name of the Prague Altneuschul. There is another possible source, with similar messianic or even proto-Zionist implications, that also plays on the phrase *al tenai*. The Babylonian Talmud (Megilla 28b) claims that the synagogues in Babylon are built *al tenai* (with the condition that) they may be used for non-ritual purposes as well, unlike synagogues in the Holy Land. As the Tosafot understand it, diaspora synagogues have a lower level of sanctity than those in Israel. Ultimately, when the Messiah arrives, the former will lose their sanctity entirely. Those who named the Altneuschul may have been the only synagogue leaders to give explicit recognition to the conditional nature of any diaspora *shul’s* sanctity.

Hillel M. Jaffe
Bronx, NY

Correction

A cartoon on page 46 of our Fall 2015 issue incorrectly identified the subject as Max von Oppenheim. The drawing is of Kaiser Wilhelm II.

Why I Defy the Israeli Chief Rabbinate

BY ELLI FISCHER

I am still not really sure how Israel's Channel 2 got to me last summer. A reporter told me that they had received my name from a civil rights organization called Israel Hofsheet (Be Free Israel). I have nothing to do with the group, so they were probably thinking of the other rabbi interviewed in the segment, Charles Davidson, who is now listed on Israel Hofsheet's website. However, like Rabbi Davidson, and perhaps a handful of other Israeli rabbis, I have married couples who have not registered with the Israeli Chief Rabbinate (Rabbanut). I am willing to do so despite the fact that, according to a law passed in 2013, anyone who marries in a halakhic ceremony must make efforts to register the marriage. Although there are some apparent ambiguities in its formulation and, so far, no one has been arrested let alone tried under the law, it carries penalties of up to two years in prison for any couple or rabbi convicted of violating it.

The first non-Rabbanut wedding at which I officiated was for a couple who wanted to marry under a chuppah and with *kiddushin* (halakhic betrothal), "in accordance with the law of Moses and Israel." However, their feelings about the Rabbanut were so profoundly negative that they did not want it to have any role in their wedding. One way for American readers to begin to appreciate this sentiment is to imagine asking an official from the Bureau of Motor Vehicles to officiate at their wedding, though, as the journalists at Channel 2 and others have shown, it's really much worse than that.

The second wedding was for an Ethiopian couple. The groom, frustrated that the Rabbanut conversion court seemed to be in no hurry to convert him, converted with a private rabbinic court and then came to me. Of course, I haven't married every couple that has come to me for a non-Rabbanut wedding. In the first place, I perform only halakhic weddings. I also insist upon a prenuptial agreement requiring a *get* (halakhic divorce) in the event that the marriage is dissolved. Finally, I insist that the couple have a civil marriage somewhere (usually they go to Cyprus, along with all of the other Israelis avoiding the Rabbanut).

After the Channel 2 story aired, even Tzohar, the religious Zionist rabbinic group whose aim is to reform the Rabbanut, condemned the "maverick rabbis" who perform unauthorized weddings. A week later, a coalition of religious Zionist rabbis, led by Tzohar's chairman, Rabbi David Stav, and the distinguished octogenarian Rabbi Nahum Rabinovitch, announced that they had begun converting people to Judaism outside the auspices of the Rabbanut. This wasn't illegal—there is no Israeli law that grants the Rabbanut the sole power to create conversion panels—but it was still a challenge to the Rabbanut's authority. Unless the Rabbanut recognizes the validity of these new conversion panels, the converts cannot have a Jewish wedding in Israel—or, at least, not a legal one.

Although the Rabbanut conversion process is

often capricious, needlessly adversarial, and hopelessly bureaucratic, the main motivation for the new courts was the historical failure of the Rabbanut

to remember that Yigal Amir justified his assassination of Yitzhak Rabin in precisely these terms. Of course, as he subsequently explained, Rabbi

The Rabbanut condemns Rabbi Stav for subverting its power over conversion, and Stav's organization condemns me for subverting the Rabbanut's power over marriage.

to come up with a viable, welcoming policy with regard to immigrants of Jewish ancestry from the former Soviet Union. In a statement, Rabbis Stav and Rabinovitch spoke of the "moral responsibility . . . to attend to the absorption of immigrants and their full integration." Setting aside the question of

Aviner did not really mean to be taken literally, but his overheated rhetoric suggests that the Rabbanut and the ideology that ascribes theological and even messianic significance to a government bureaucracy are in trouble.

In short, the Rabbanut and its supporters con-



Yulia Tagil and Stas Granin celebrate their alternative wedding ceremony in a Tel Aviv square, July 2010, to protest the guidelines set by the Chief Rabbinate. (Photo by Uriel Sinai/Getty Images.)

whether religious conversion ought to be a part of a modern democracy's immigration policy, this move was something of a last resort, coming only after attempts to loosen the Rabbanut's grip on conversion through legislation, regulation, litigation, and a multimillion-dollar campaign to get Stav elected chief rabbi had all failed.

Reactions to these challenges to the Rabbanut's authority have not been mild. In a weekly column, Rabbi Shlomo Aviner, an influential religious Zionist, wrote that anyone who works against the Rabbanut has the status of a "rodef," literally a "pursuer," or attacker, whose life can be taken to save the pursued. Even those Israelis not well-versed in rabbinic liter-

demn Rabbi Stav for subverting its power over conversion, and Rabbi Stav's organization condemns me for subverting the Rabbanut's power over marriage, even though their converts can wed in Israel only outside the Rabbanut. The paradox of rabbis who simultaneously undermine and reinforce the Rabbanut derives from their belief that the Israeli Chief Rabbinate is necessary to protect the integrity of the Jewish people, but that it is presently failing at the task. Even the new conversion initiative is meant to promote, or provoke, change from *within* the Rabbanut.

One way to illustrate this paradox is by looking a little more closely at the law that provides for up to two years in prison for anyone who dares to avoid

the Rabbanut, no matter how faithfully they follow the rabbinic laws of marriage. This law actually began as an attempt at moderate reform from within, along the general lines of American “school choice” initiatives. It allows couples to register and marry through any local office of the Rabbanut instead of limiting them to the jurisdiction of the office in the bride or groom’s place of residence. Thus, the law gives couples greater flexibility to choose a rabbi, but, at the same time, it cements the Rabbanut’s total control of Jewish marriage in Israel and criminalizes dissent. This law is generally known as the “Tzohar law,” after the name of its principal sponsor.

The problem with the Rabbanut and the related Ministry of Religious Services is not that they have deviated from their historical mission and are now malfunctioning. By design, the Rabbanut reduces rabbis to bureaucrats. As a government agency like any other, it is subject to partisan wrangling and the temptations of patronage and corruption. Worse, the Rabbanut is particularly ill-suited to functioning as a government bureaucracy. A historical institution—the rabbinate—that traditionally functioned on the basis of collegial trust, the flexibility to address unique circumstances, and tolerance of local differences is ill-suited to becoming a rigid, regulated, centralized, and bureaucratic regime. Forcing it to do so has made it monstrous. Moreover, the price of authority over a very limited social sphere has been irrelevant in all other spheres of Israeli religious and cultural life. This trade-off was noted by the late Jewish philosopher Yeshayahu Leibowitz as early as 1959:

[N]othing weakens the strength and influence and persuasiveness of religion and prevents the winning of hearts more than religious institutions which are kept by a secular state, more than investing secular functions with an official religious aura, than religious laws included like aberrations in a code of secular legislation.

A second problem with the centralization of Jewish religious authority is that it weakened local communities as a basic unit of religious life. This was no accident. During the state’s early years, David Ben-Gurion, Israel’s first prime minister, chose to retain the Ottoman-era ecclesiastical courts that governed personal status within religious communities, both as a concession to religious factions and as a key element of his state-building effort.

As political scientist Yüksel Sezgin has argued convincingly, Ben-Gurion deemed it important to create a new Jewish-Israeli identity that would supersede the manifold ethnic and religious identities forged over the centuries in the Jewish diaspora. Israel could have recognized multiple Jewish communities, as Israel recognized and empowered the clergy of 11 faith communities (Jewish, Sunni Muslim, and nine Christian churches) and even added three more (Baha’i, Druze, and an additional Christian church). However, Ben-Gurion understood that a central religious body monitoring the boundaries of the Jewish people would reinforce state consciousness, whereas decentralized Jewish communities would compete with the state and with each other for citizens’ allegiances and resources.

The upshot is that, with the important excep-

tion of Ashkenazi *haredim*, generations of Israelis have come to expect the state to provide them with rabbis, synagogues, ritual baths, and a host of other services and institutions that were traditionally provided by local communities. By the same token, the state-appointed staffs of these establishments are not regarded as communal leaders but as mere functionaries.

The Rabbanut uses state power to impose uniformity, which in turn forces religious groups to compete for control of the state religious apparatus. This was less apparent in the first 25 years of Israel’s statehood when the Rabbanut was headed by consensus-building figures, such as Rabbis Yitzhak Herzog and Ben-Zion Meir Hai Uziel, and the *haredi* world was politically weak. However, the potential to transform the Rabbanut into a winner-take-all contest was



Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren conducts the wedding ceremony of Yuval Rabin and his wife, Elat, Kfar Shmaryahu, May 18, 1976. (Photo by Yaacov Saar, courtesy of the Government Press Office, Israel.)



An Israeli soldier going through the conversion process visits a kindergarten in Efrat to learn about Hanukkah, November 2013. (Photo by Gershon Elinson/FLASH90.)

The most common refrain among critics of the Rabbanut is that it is overly stringent, increasingly extremist, and dominated by *haredim*, who have no religious stake in the integrity of the institution or, indeed, of the Zionist project. This is a radical misunderstanding of the problem, which is structural: a matter of political philosophy not personnel.

always present. It first became a reality not under a *haredi* chief rabbi who was beholden to overly strict, anti-Zionist *roshei yeshiva*, but under religious Zionist hero Rabbi Shlomo Goren. Goren had been on the scene during the capture of the Old City of Jerusalem in the Six-Day War and famously led the first minyan at the newly liberated Western Wall. Rabbi Goren understood, like many others, that Jewish law was presently unfit to serve as the law of a modern state, but he also believed that it could be refashioned in order to do so. Having concluded that halakha could, in principle, function as state law, he was also willing to enforce it by means of state power.

In 1972, politicians enamored with his willingness to make halakha conform to the logic of the state deposed the incumbent chief rabbi and elected Rabbi Goren. This was in the midst of the famous controversy over Hanokh and Miriam Langer, two young

soldiers whose mother had not obtained a halakhic divorce from her previous husband before marrying their father. This seemed to render the Langers *mamzerim* (literally, bastards), who had been born of an adulterous union, and were thus forbidden to marry Jews. Despite the rabbinic tradition of finding every leniency to prevent such situations, a rabbinical court

consisting of Rabbis Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, Ovadia Yosef, and Shaul Yisraeli—leading rabbinic figures in the *haredi*, Sephardi, and religious Zionist camps respectively—held that this was indeed the case. Following a public outcry, Defense Minister Moshe Dayan threatened to institute civil marriage if a halakhic solution was not found, and one Knesset faction even proposed such a law, precipitating a coalition crisis. Enter new Chief Rabbi Goren, who overruled the rabbinic court, arguing that the mother's first husband, a convert, had never really been Jewish because there were ample grounds to doubt that he had been properly converted in Poland. For this and other reasons (the facts of the case were quite messy), Goren cast doubt on the validity of the first marriage.

The Langer case ought to have been a great success for Rabbi Goren. He had successfully freed a brother and sister from their unmarriageable status, while staving off political threats to limit the powers of the rabbinate. But it was also the moment when the benignly condescending *haredi* attitude toward the Rabbanut became one of utter contempt. When Israel effectively became a two-bloc parliamentary system in 1977, *haredi* parties used their newfound bargaining power to take the Rabbanut out of the hands of Rabbi Goren and the religious Zionists and make it a source of patronage jobs for their own people. More than a generation later, this remains the state of affairs. In retrospect, it looks like Moshe Dayan might have had the better solution, even—or especially—in religious terms.

Would returning the Rabbanut to the control of religious Zionists, even thoughtful, moderate ones such as the rabbis allied with Tzohar, solve the problem? Only if you think that the only problem with the Rabbanut is who is in charge of it. But even if one ignores the systemic problems resulting from the entanglement of religion and state, this approach virtually guarantees that the tug of war over control of the Rabbanut will never end. Every time a new chief rabbi is elected or a new government coalition is formed, there will be a fierce struggle for control, and every time the Rabbanut or Ministry of Religious Services changes hands, there is a risk that the new regime will attempt to unravel whatever the outgoing regime accomplished. Since no party can decisively win this contest, the only way to end it is to find a way to take away the prize.

The problems with the Rabbanut are not merely theoretical. In recent polls, 71 percent of Israeli Jews expressed dissatisfaction with the Rabbanut and about 65 percent favored its dissolution. But what does “dissolution” mean in this context? What does the growing chorus of Israelis who demand “separation” of religion and state want?

It turns out that “separation” is not exactly the right word for what Israelis want. Even if it were, it would be politically unattainable. Such a sweeping change would be opposed not only by Israel's Orthodox parliamentarians—who constitute at least a quarter of every Knesset and who would see the view as motivated by anti-religious sentiment—but also by its Arab politicians, who don't want their communities' religious institutions to be disestablished. Muslim and Orthodox Jewish parliamentarians have in fact joined forces in the past to oppose legislation that would reduce the power of religious courts. Moreover, any coalition that includes neither Jewish religious parties nor Arab parties would

be very unstable, making it unlikely that it would last long enough to make irreversible changes.

From a practical perspective, abolishing the Rabbanut would create an unworkable vacuum. For example, a child born to a mother who married her first husband halakhically and divorced him in a newly instituted civil procedure would be just as unmarriageable as the Langer children had been before Goren's intervention. In contrast to dis-

possibility of separating Judaism from the State of Israel. Even if distinguishing Israeli identity from Jewish identity would make life easier in some respects for Arabs and *haredim*, there is no doubt that Israel must remain the nation-state of the Jewish people, and thus there will continue to be a great deal of overlap between Israeli identity and Jewishness. It is also clear that Judaism cannot be reduced to either nationality or religion. The Jewish nation-

The goal, therefore, must not be to separate the Jewish religion from the Jewish state but to minimize the degree to which religious institutions exercise the coercive power of the state.

putes over “who is a Jew?”—which can often be resolved through a pro forma conversion—*mamzerut* is a stigma that is inherited from either parent and forbids those who bear it from marrying into the Jewish community. Although one can imagine solutions to this problem, it is also possible that fully separating Judaism and state would result, within a few generations, in two or more distinct and endogenous Jewish populations.

Other effects of abolition would be less dire. The kosher-certification industry, for instance, could, perhaps, be privatized overnight, but a religious free market would beckon all sorts of charlatans and predators before the population learned how to be informed consumers. It would take some time for Israeli Jews to relearn how to build functioning communities. Thus, if the Rabbanut is going to die, it must be a slow death.


Finally, of course, there is the fundamental im-

state might attempt—and arguably has attempted, and failed—to repurpose Jewish symbols to forge a desacralized, national civic religion, but not without doing violence to the Jewish religion. The goal, therefore, must not be to separate the Jewish religion from the Jewish state but to minimize the degree to which religious institutions exercise the coercive power of the state.


There are two historical pacts that point the way to disentangling religion and state in Israel. The first may seem like a poor choice: the “Status Quo Agreement” reached by David Ben-Gurion, then chairman of The Jewish Agency Executive, and the leaders of the *haredi* Agudat Yisrael faction in June 1947. It was in this agreement that Ben-Gurion agreed that marriage and divorce in the future Jewish state would remain under the auspices of rabbinical courts

II Pizmonim פזמונים

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Rinat n'ra

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Weddingsong נזרחב Hochzeitlied

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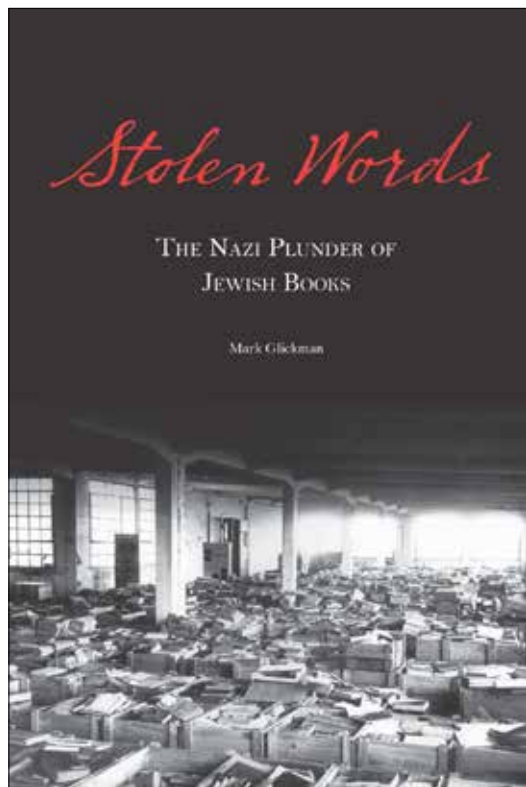
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inherited from Ottoman times—ground zero for the entanglement of religion and state in Israel.

However, there were three other important features of that agreement: Jewish religious communities would have educational autonomy as long as certain basic curricular requirements were met, Shabbat would be the national day of rest, and public institutions would serve kosher food. Educational autonomy protects the freedom of individuals and communities to practice their religion and raise their children in accord with their values. Recognizing Shabbat and providing only kosher food nurture non-coercive expressions of Judaism in the public sphere. Taken together, these arrangements strengthen the state’s commitment to civil liberties while simultaneously strengthening its Jewish character. In the context of any new grand bargain, they suggest that the operative guideline should be the minimization of religious coercion while allowing and even fostering non-coercive expressions of the Jewish religion and vigilantly protecting religion’s free exercise.

The second pact was never put into practice. In 2004 Rabbi Yaacov Medan, a leading religious Zionist rabbi (and a prime mover behind the new conversion initiative), and Professor Ruth Gavison, a distinguished and avowedly nonreligious member of The Hebrew University’s Faculty of Law, published an extraordinary document known as the “Gavison-Medan Covenant.” It offered concrete proposals for privatizing and regulating kosher certification, implementing a civil marriage regime that attempts to take religious strictures and differences into account, and recognizing conversions performed in Israel and abroad by panels of any Jewish denomination. Throughout the document, Gavison and Medan posit national unity as the primary goal without attempting to police the borders of the Jewish people in the way that the Rabbanut now does.

The Gavison-Medan Covenant has some shortcomings. For one thing, it outlines what the law ought to be but provides no road map for getting there or even somewhere reasonably close. Another problem is that it appeals to values that are not shared by *haredim* (or Arabs, though that is a separate discussion). It seeks a set of mutually agreeable ground rules by which religious and secular Zionists can coexist, but does not recognize the need for any lasting social compromise to reach further. Finally, some of the key compromises of the Gavison-Medan Covenant might be unworkable today. For instance, the covenant explicitly restricts marriage to one man and one woman and retains Rabbanut control over divorce. It is hard to envision broad Israeli political support for either of those measures today, though other compromises are possible. Nonetheless, in its understanding that the Rabbanut must be disempowered and its commitment to national unity, the Gavison-Medan Covenant remains the foundation for any good proposal about the future of religion and state in Israel.

Rather than outline what I think a Gavison-Medan 2.0 might look like—after all it must be the result of prolonged political and religious discussion and compromise—let me instead briefly suggest why such a grand compromise which at least partially disempowers the Rabbanut is theologically defensible, even desirable.

Isaiah’s prophecy “I will restore your judges as of old, and your counselors as of yore . . . Zion shall

be redeemed through law” (Isaiah 1:26-27) is paraphrased in the Amidah and repeated by observant Jews three times a day. It was traditionally believed that the return to Zion would include the restoration of halakha. For the first secular Zionists and their modern-day descendants this was part of the unrealistic exilic mindset for which Jewish sovereignty was the cure. *Haredim*, of course, believe in the eternal validity of halakha, but they are not, to say the least, committed to viewing the State of Israel as beginning the restoration of our “judges as of old.” Neither party has an ideological stake in the future of the Rabbanut. The problem, however, is acute for religious Zionists, who strive to maintain fealty to halakha while viewing the non-halakhic State of Israel as the vehicle of God’s redemption. To disempower the Rabbanut would seem to be an admission not only that the most religious of the state’s institutions has failed, but that halakha itself is incapable of serving as the law of the Jewish state. Is there a way out of this dilemma? I think that there is.

In a very suggestive passage the Talmud (Avoda Zara 8b) describes the self-imposed exile of the Sanhedrin, the halakhic supreme court:

Forty years before the destruction of the Temple, the Sanhedrin went into exile and sat in a shop . . . When they saw that murderers were proliferating and they could not judge them, they said: “It is best that we exile ourselves from place to place so that none are condemned [to death].”

The court is described here as going into self-imposed exile in order to recuse itself from judging capital cases. Presiding over an increasingly violent society, the rabbis recognized that biblical justice wasn’t working. They voluntarily relinquished power, even as the Temple still stood, to avoid implementing a halakhic regime that was ineffective.

What this passage—and it is by no means uncharacteristic of rabbinic thought—suggests is that there are traditional models for combining Jewish sovereignty with (relative) rabbinic powerlessness. My own willingness to conduct marriages outside the authority of the Rabbanut is, in part, a gesture in this direction, a recognition that halakha cannot govern the reconstituted Jewish state and, far worse, that the state is actually undermining the integrity of halakha. Israeli society may change in unforeseen ways, and halakha will surely continue to evolve. Perhaps one day it will be ready to emerge from its “exile.” But until then, halakha is better off giving up even the little state power that it has.

I am not so naïve as to think that anyone in Israel today will voluntarily give up power, but the present arrangements are not only dysfunctional, they are ultimately untenable. One way or another, the Rabbanut must be made to gradually divest itself of its power. The effect of this disempowerment will be that the eternal struggle for the soul of Judaism is not played out in the corridors of state power, but where it belongs: in homes, communities, classrooms, rabbinical schools, universities, synagogues, and the public square.

Elli Fischer is a rabbi, translator, and writer living in Modi’in, Israel.

A Walk in Jerusalem

BY MATTI FRIEDMAN

Much that is important in Jerusalem right now was visible during a short walk I took around the Old City on a rainy Tuesday in November: Four Border Police officers in riot gear, two men and two women, eyeing their smartphones and Arab passers-by with the same casual interest. Muslim women coming from the al-Aqsa Mosque, eyeing the officers. A blue-and-white flag on a wall declaring one apartment to be a Jewish island inside the Muslim Quarter. A gleaming Arabic sign announcing a new Israeli health clinic serving Palestinian clientele. Palestinian men at a traffic light outside the walls, crossing the invisible line between east and west Jerusalem on their way to work.

I waited at the light-rail stop outside Damascus Gate and boarded a train of Jewish and Arab passengers, fewer of both than usual. I got off downtown, and within an hour there had been a Palestinian stabbing attack on another train and a second attack at Damascus Gate.

The city of Jerusalem is subject to great and contradictory forces, some pulling its 830,000 residents apart and some pushing them together. The forces of disintegration have been evident in the spate of stabbing attacks against Israeli civilians and policemen this fall. In the six weeks beginning October 1 there were two dozen attacks or attempted attacks by Palestinians in Jerusalem alone, most involving knives. They persist, in Jerusalem and elsewhere, as I write. Jerusalem in crisis mode doesn't resemble an American city during or after a race riot, for example, or a natural disaster. There aren't burned-out neighborhoods or looted streets. There is no large-scale breakdown of public order. Instead there are small incidents of murderous violence, some localized rioting, and a cloud of unease.

At such times, which are familiar to those of us who have lived here for many years, pedestrian traffic thins out as people choose to stay home if they can. Kiosks and cafés notice this in their cash registers, and tourist cancellations hit the hotels. Car traffic worsens as parents drive their kids to school instead of sending them on public buses. Panicked reports make the rounds, summoned from the genuinely terrifying Middle Eastern ether and broadcast into our lives via Facebook and WhatsApp. Here's one that pinged into my wife's cellphone on October 13, passed on by another parent from our daughter's kindergarten:

There is a warning that today Arab women will begin appearing in playgrounds in long, regular dress including a purse and sunglasses, ordinary camouflaged dress in order not to arouse suspicion.

Be careful of any male or female stranger that approaches you the female terrorists want to slaughter children with the knives in their purse!!!

That hardly seems plausible, but then neither does the idea that two schoolgirls would try to kill a grandfather with scissors, which is something that happened here not too long afterward.

Jews look nervously at any person who could be an Arab, meaning many if not most people in the city. Transactions among Jews and Arabs in stores and cabs are cautious and sometimes more polite than usual, as if to communicate: I am not a threat.

Unhappy, frightened, and aggrieved, the hotel continued to function, like the city itself.

Arabs are more aware of their vulnerability to harassment from Jewish hooligans—a regular feature of life for many Arab taxi drivers, for example—and are subject to the humiliation of police stops and searches. A feature of our urban landscape: Young Palestinians in jeans and T-shirts, their lunches in plastic bags, waiting unhappily beside an armed woman their age as she looks at IDs and speaks into her radio, her back to them.

by Arab doctors and the surviving assailant was treated by Jews. This is common.

Jews and Arabs live separately and are rarely friends, but they deal with each other constantly, and the city can't work any other way. More than any other single factor this mutual dependence "is what prevents the city from breaking down into a gang war, Belfast-style," according to Marik Shtern, a geographer who tracks economic trends in the city at The Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies. A friend of his, a Jewish hotel manager, told Shtern that after the stabbing attacks began half of her Palestinian workers didn't show up—they were too scared to come to west Jerusalem. She was scared of the half who did show up and conducted the hotel's daily business with pepper spray hidden in her pocket. Unhappy, frightened, and aggrieved, the hotel continued to function, like the city itself.

On a day when two Israelis were stabbed at Ammunition Hill in northern Jerusalem, their assailant shot and wounded, I waited outside my kids' elementary school in southern Jerusalem. I watched two boys in *kippot* holding the hands of an Arab minivan driver who was taking them home, as he does every day. When I arrived home a dozen city

workers, most of them Palestinian, were replacing sewage lines on my street. Had I not heard the news, I wouldn't have known anything was amiss.

The closeness of life here makes the perception gap between the sides even more striking. Among Palestinians the response to the stabbings seems to have been a curious mix of applause for the assailants and denial that they did anything wrong—they were, it was widely claimed, shot for no reason by police and then framed with planted knives. The dissonance reminded me of a 2002 rally in support of al-Qaeda that I attended as a reporter in London's Trafalgar Square, where a friendly

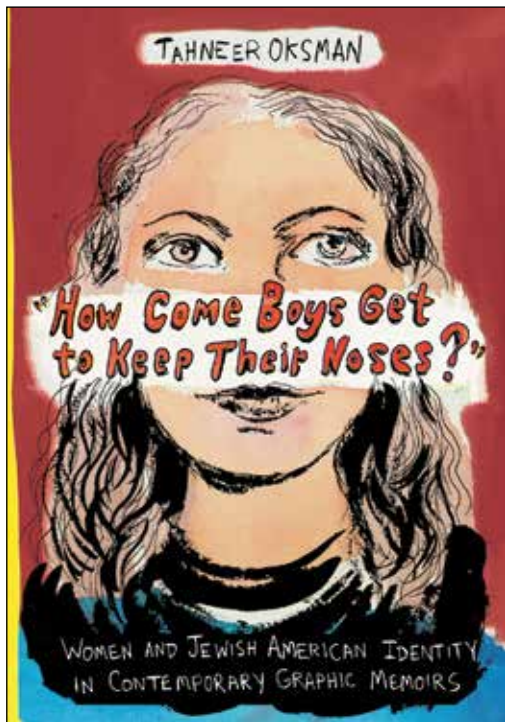
British-Pakistani guy my age told me he admired Osama Bin Laden for the 9/11 attacks and also that he suspected the Mossad was behind them.

Palestinian media, particularly (but not only) outlets controlled by Hamas in Gaza, have energetically called for further attacks, and if there was equally energetic condemnation from any Palestinian leader I missed it. Factions of Fatah, a movement generally referred to as "moderate" in Western news copy, tweeted enthusiastic encour-



Israeli Border Police keep watch outside an Arab restaurant in Jerusalem's Old City. (Photo by Hadas Parush/Flash90.)

If Arabs can't get into west Jerusalem, the city's economy grinds to a halt. Nearly half of the workers in east Jerusalem make their living in the west. Palestinians also depend on the Israeli health system, which has been improving services in east Jerusalem, and the system in Jerusalem as a whole depends on Palestinian nurses, doctors, and hospital support staff. In the October 12 stabbing of a 13-year-old Jewish boy by two Palestinian cousins of about the same age, the Jewish victim was treated



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agement. The Palestinians are part of the same Islamic world buffeted by some of the most disturbing ideological trends the world has seen since the 1940s—trends recently demonstrated on the streets of Paris—and in this context such violence makes sense. Our new neighbors from the Islamic State contributed a few videos expressing support and threatening worse. Helpful “how-to” stabbing guides were posted online. There seemed to be no awareness on the Palestinian side, at least publicly, of the way terrorism and their sympathy for it cripple those Israelis who seek coexistence, or the way it is certain to affect Palestinian livelihoods. The attackers haven’t been only young men but also women and children as young as 12, meaning that in Israeli eyes any Palestinian, no matter their age or gender, could be a killer. Given a choice, Jewish employers will thus reasonably prefer to hire Jews or foreign workers.

Some of the forces acting to destabilize the city, like the growing Middle Eastern weakness for nihilistic bloodshed and aversion to constructive poli-

Contrary to the most extreme of such suspicions, Israel has no plan to rid Jerusalem of its Arab population, whose growth rate is currently twice that of the Jewish population. But Palestin-

Among Palestinians the response to the stabbings seems to have been a curious mix of applause for the assailants and denial that they did anything wrong.

ians see Jewish enclaves in neighborhoods like Silwan expanding, bringing with them more Israeli flags, friction, and armed guards with government salaries, invading the urban spaces where Palestinians feel at home and permanently changing them.



Police of the K9 unit patrol on Ben Yehuda Street, central Jerusalem, October 2015, as security increased following a wave of terror attacks. (Photo by Nati Shohat/Flash90.)

tics, are not in Israel’s control. But others are. Our side is blind to the effect on Palestinians of Israeli actions, particularly on the Temple Mount and inside Palestinian neighborhoods. Not all Palestinian fears are baseless or the result of cynical incitement.

There has been no shift in government policy regarding Jewish prayer on the Temple Mount, but Palestinian Muslims have seen more religious Jews ascending and trying to pray there in recent years. The government ministers who support a more assertive Jewish presence on the mount do not represent the official line, but they aren’t figments of the Palestinian imagination. Neither is the small cadre of pyromaniacs who toy with the fantasy of replacing the Islamic holy sites with the third Temple. Most Israelis see these activists as marginal and their plans as harmless lunacy. But Palestinians don’t, and the fact that a group like The Temple Institute (“Build We Must”) has received hundreds of thousands of shekels in government funding makes Palestinian suspicions harder to dismiss.

More property changes hands every few months. This jeopardizes Israel’s claim to be a fair custodian and threatens to destabilize a place which is, after all, not a cosmic battleground but a real city whose well-being is a matter of life and death for the people who live in it.

Where is Jerusalem headed? The answer lies somewhere in that walk on a rainy day in November: In Israeli security officers trying to keep the peace; in the actions of some Jewish groups playing a dangerous game with Arab sensitivities; in a Palestinian public sympathetic to violence against Israelis but also drawn by what Israel has to offer; and in Israel’s ability and desire to give every resident of this abnormal city a chance at normal life.

Matti Friedman lives and writes in Jerusalem. His book The Aleppo Codex won the 2014 Sami Rohr Prize, and his next, Pumpkinflowers: A Soldier’s Story, will be published in May (both from Algonquin Books).

Oh, the Humanity!

BY ALLAN ARKUSH

Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind

by Yuval Noah Harari

HarperCollins, 464 pp., \$29.99

Human Nature & Jewish Thought: Judaism's Case for Why Persons Matter

by Alan L. Mittleman

Princeton University Press, 232 pp., \$27.95

If another Hebrew University professor has created more of a stir than Yuval Noah Harari any time recently, I don't know who it is. Translated into more than two dozen languages, a best-seller in many countries, including both Israel and the United States, Harari's *Sapiens* has catapulted him to fame. By the time I watched his June 2015 TED talk in September, 1.5 million people had preceded me. In a very short time, Yuval Noah Harari has become the best-known Israeli intellectual in the world.

There is, however, nothing particularly Israeli, or even Jewish, about this "brief history of humankind." Harari does refer casually to the length of the route from his home near Jerusalem to The Hebrew University, but he accords ancient Israel, modern Israel, and the Jewish religion only glancing, and usually condescending, attention. He describes the biblical deity as a being whose "chief interest is in the tiny Jewish nation and in the obscure land of Israel." The Jewish religion, he reports, "had little to offer other nations." The citizens of the State of Israel, he says, along with those of most other countries, "may harbour illusions of independence," but they really can't do very much at all on their own. However, these remarks betray no special animus toward Judaism or the Jewish state; they are simply reflections of his overall attitude toward human affairs. From Harari's point of view, ethnic and territorial divisions are just accidents of history that are, inevitably and unregrettably, in the process of being erased. And there is no God.

Harari's erudite, absorbing, and often witty narrative begins with Homo sapiens' apparently easy victory over (and partial absorption of) their Neanderthal rivals, pieces together what can be inferred about their dispersion throughout the planet, and describes the ways in which the prehistoric cognitive and agricultural revolutions set the stage for the complex societies and cultures of the ancient and medieval worlds. His book concludes with an analysis of modernity that concentrates on the way in which the breathtaking

progress of the last 500 years or so has resulted from the "mutual reinforcement of science, politics and economics."

Of this progress Harari is not an unequivocal fan. While he often applauds man's advance and

"If a man suffers from feelings of guilt on account of the fact that he has enslaved animals, it is just this that proves his great difference from them." This claim might give Harari pause if he sought to elevate animals to the rank of humans. But as Good-

It is astonishing to see how blithely Harari disregards the entire history of philosophical efforts to define the purpose of human existence.

reason's many victories over ignorance and prejudice, he also observes that "new aptitudes, behaviours and skills do not necessarily make for a better life." Indeed, it is an open question to him whether "the seventy or so turbulent millennia since the Cognitive Revolution made the world a better place to live." And even if we are happier than our remote or recent ancestors, what we have achieved may not have been worth the trouble. For we are now "disturbing the ecological equilibrium of our planet" in ways that are "destroying the foundations of human prosperity in an orgy of reckless consumption."



Yuval Noah Harari. (Photo courtesy of Rami Zarneger.)

Yet how much of a catastrophe our possible self-destruction might depend on the vantage point from which one asks that question. Much of what we Homo sapiens have obtained "was accumulated at the expense of laboratory monkeys, dairy cows and conveyor-belt chickens." If we accept only a part "of what animal-rights activists are claiming, then modern industrial agriculture might well be the greatest crime in history." So perhaps the demise or even disappearance of human beings would be, on the whole, a good thing.

Writing in *Ha'aretz* in May, Micah Goodman, who teaches Jewish thought at The Hebrew University, took Harari to task for his failure to recognize the superiority of human beings to animals.

man himself observes, Harari's thought moves in the opposite direction. Here, for instance, is his provocative translation of the most famous lines of the American Declaration of Independence into language that he can affirm:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men evolved differently, that they are born with certain mutable characteristics, and that among these are life and the pursuit of pleasure.

This is part and parcel of his rejection of what he identifies as the "religion" of liberal humanism, a creed that both sanctifies humans and, in spite of its professed secularity, unwittingly relies on monotheism. Indeed, "[w]ithout recourse to eternal souls and a Creator God, it becomes embarrassingly difficult for liberals to explain what is so special about individual Sapiens."

An unbeliever himself, and perhaps not even a liberal, Harari makes no such effort. Nor does he ever make it clear what is so special about Homo sapiens as a species, other than their unparalleled capacity to reshape nature:

As far as we can tell, from a purely scientific viewpoint, human life has absolutely no meaning. Humans are the outcome of blind evolutionary processes that operate without goal or purpose. Our actions are not part of some divine cosmic plan, and if planet Earth were to blow up tomorrow morning, the universe would probably keep going about its business as usual. As far as we can tell at this point, human subjectivity would not be missed. Hence *any* meaning that people ascribe to their lives is just a delusion.

It is astonishing to see how blithely Harari disregards the entire history of philosophical efforts to define the purpose of human existence even in the absence of a "divine cosmic plan." One has to wonder, too, why such a nihilist would take the trouble to write a 450-page book to enlighten his partners in pointless existence about their condition. However, if he can't offer us meaning, it seems, he can at least help us (for whatever unexplained reason of his own) find a path to happiness that has nothing to do with meaning.



Evolution and Theory by Zadok Ben-David, from the exhibition A Brief History of Humankind at The Israel Museum. (© Zadok Ben-David. Photo by Elie Posner, © The Israel Museum, Jerusalem.)

In *Sapiens*' penultimate chapter, Harari questions whether happiness should be sought through the use of chemicals or through meditation and clearly prefers the latter. Showing, for once, a measure of genuine respect for a religion, he sympathetically describes the serenity that can be achieved through Buddhist meditation:

It is like a man standing for decades on the seashore, embracing certain "good" waves and trying to prevent them from disintegrating, while simultaneously pushing back "bad" waves to prevent them from getting near him. Day in, day out, the man stands on the beach, driving himself crazy with this fruitless exercise. Eventually, he sits down on the sand and just allows the waves to come and go as they please. How peaceful!

But Harari is not prepared to see Buddhism as anything more than a possible path to happiness, one that must be measured for its efficacy against all of the others. Scholars, he tells us, have only very recently begun to study the history of happiness, and "[i]t's much too early to adopt rigid conclusions and end a debate that's hardly yet begun."

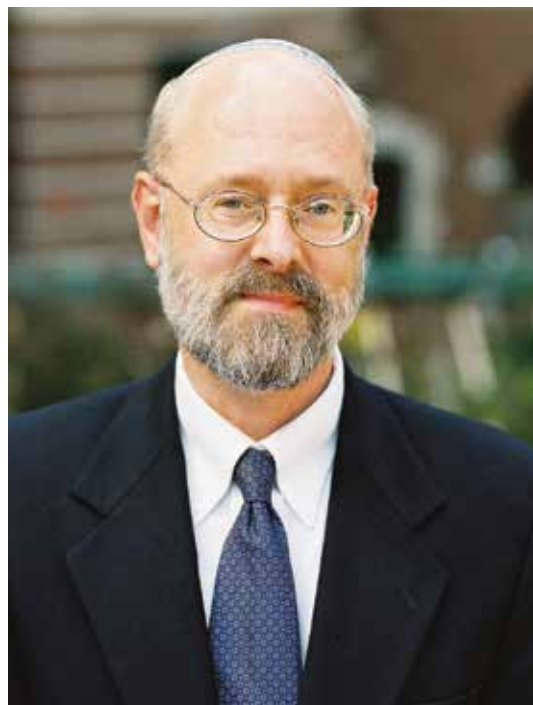
What apparently interests Harari more than the next stage of this debate is that the human pursuit of happiness may lead us out of humanity altogether now that we have the capacity to redesign ourselves through biological and cyborg engineering. Tinkering with our genes, we "might fiddle with *Homo sapiens* to such an extent that we would no longer be *Homo sapiens*." People could then become "a-mortal," although not necessarily deathless, since even an a-mortal could be hit by a bus.

A perhaps even more revolutionary project to marry man and machine "will allow computers to read the electrical signals of a human brain, simultaneously transmitting signals that the brain can read in turn." This could create "a sort of Inter-brain-net," a post-human cyborg, which "would be so fundamentally another kind of being that we cannot even grasp the philosophical, psychological or political implications" of its existence.

Harari is clearly excited by such possibilities, but

he has little confidence that science will be able to take care of itself. It needs to be supplemented by a different kind of inquiry. "What do we want to become?" he asks, and, more fundamentally, "What do we want to want?" For Harari, these fundamentally amoral questions take the place of the classical moral inquiry into what we "ought" to want.

Alan Mittleman, a professor of Jewish philosophy at The Jewish Theological Seminary and the author of many valuable books, sees the same challenges on the horizon as Harari and poses some very similar questions. Borrowing a phrase from the



Alan L. Mittleman. (Courtesy of the Jewish Theological Seminary.)

philosopher Jürgen Habermas, he speaks of humankind's newfound capacity to genetically engineer an "auto-transformation of the species" and worries that our "semisecular society" lacks "the moral resources" to deal with this alarming situation.

Mittleman is troubled not only by the rise of the new technology but by enemies of humanism like

Harari. He worries that "[s]cientism's thoroughgoing objectification of human life comes at the cost of the worth of persons." Fortunately, however, even the people who try to pay this inhuman price cannot succeed for long. They must, in the end, if they are to retain their sanity, reintegrate their scientific conception of their identity into a "more capacious" account of who they are. Indeed, Mittleman argues, it is impossible to "step outside morality and remain human."

In *Human Nature & Jewish Thought*, he tries to show how Judaism can help provide the moral resources for those "Jews, Christians, secularists, and seekers" who are fighting the humanist good fight. He is well aware that "material saturated with theistic assumptions" may be rejected out of hand by people who take "their cues from contemporary scientific naturalism," but Mittleman does not preach to them. "I do not presume that Jewish ideas come with any intrinsic authority," he says in his introduction. "The only authority they have is that of reason; they have the potential to persuade."

So he begins "bottom up with the experience of personhood," as it is expressed in Judaism. Drawing on biblical, rabbinic, and medieval (and to a much lesser extent modern) Jewish philosophical writings, he sketches a tradition that focuses on the human as a part of nature, but never loses sight of man's ability to rise above it. It is not long, however, before he acknowledges that what underlies such an account is the basic biblical idea that "[h]uman beings are made in the image of God, and therefore possess intrinsic and undeniable worth."

Mittleman eloquently spells out the ethical ramifications of this fundamental belief. For the rabbis, "*Imago dei* has to do with how we take responsibility for ourselves and the world." "No rabbi," Mittleman insists, "talks as Socrates does (*Apology* 40c–42) in welcoming the soul's imminent flight from its corporeal prison. Instead, both soul and body work together to fulfill the human vocation of emulating God in action." Some of the medieval Jewish philosophers, it is true, were deeply influenced by dualistic metaphysics, but "the bent of their work is to remain true to the biblical vision of a moral universe anchored in persons, responsibility, and character."

In the last chapter of the book, entitled "Persons Together," Mittleman outlines the political ramifications of the most valuable biblical and rabbinic moral teachings. The Bible may demonstrate little interest in politics for its own sake, but its authors did hold to the idea of a kind of social contract. And "[t]he old covenantal theme of legitimacy through consent," Mittleman writes, "becomes the norm for Jewish communities throughout history."

Mittleman also identifies a healthy respect for both labor and capital in Jewish tradition. It considers even the meanest occupations honorable and recognizes a nearly absolute right to private property. At the same time, it stresses the extent to which "sharing one's wealth with those in need is a religious duty." Tellingly, Mittleman devotes much more attention to the details involved in the fulfillment of this duty than anything else. He writes of the members of the Jewish polity "actively engaged in work for the common good (*tovat ha-klal*), jointly sustaining the conditions under which persons, in the Judaic version of flourishing, may lead godly lives."

If Yuval Harari were to read *Human Nature & Jewish Thought*, he might readily concede that

our humanity is ineluctably bound up with morality, as Mittleman says, without acknowledging that any particular moral teaching is really valid. And he might very well applaud Mittleman's analysis of the shortcomings of some modern philosophers. "I like what you wrote about Kant," I can imagine the world historian saying to the theologian. "You're absolutely right to say that his entire 'secular, post-theological grounding for human worth . . . assumes a long Jewish and Christian prologue to the story of human worth, without, of course, invoking that backstory.' You are also right to say that Kant and others like him failed to achieve their philosophical goals, since they appealed 'in an unacknowledged way, to the biblical instincts that motivate them.' You, at least, unlike them, know the theological source of your own fundamental convictions. But I'm afraid that I can't see that source as anything other than an imaginary entity, and therefore don't believe that your recourse to Jewish sources can in any way contribute to a purely rational discussion of the worth of persons and the future of humanity."

It is not only religion that separates Mittleman from Harari but the humility that follows from it. While Mittleman believes that the main human task is to imitate God, primarily through engagement in moral action, Harari sees Homo sapiens standing "on the verge of becoming a god, poised to acquire not only eternal youth, but also the divine abilities of creation and destruction." This is a challenge that Harari wants humankind to accept, even if he is unsure whether we are up to it. "Is there anything more dangerous," he asks at the very end of his book, "than dissatisfied and irresponsible gods who don't know what they want?"

For Mittleman, human beings, who are not and will never be divine, must know more than just what they want. They must attempt to discern the will of God, which on matters pertaining to the new technology is far from transparent. But Judaism's basic message is nonetheless clear to him:

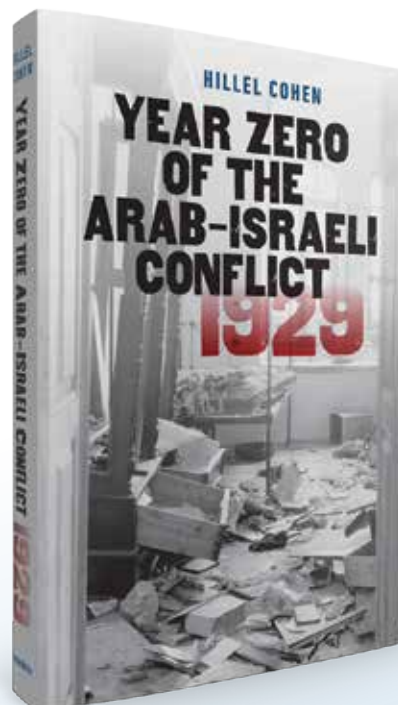
Our own survival might well depend on cultivating anew a sense of limits. Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden for transgressing a limit. Limits there will always be, many imposed by human nature. Our dignity inheres in knowing when and how to master them, and when and how to accept them with respect.

Harari's eye is on the new god, who has no fixed limits; Mittleman's is on the old God who fixed limits for Adam and Eve. The Hebrew University professor and the Jewish Theological Seminary professor share no common philosophical ground. But they do share a certain foreboding about humankind's use of its newfound powers.

As far apart as they are in principle, therefore, it is not impossible to imagine that Harari and Mittleman will one day find themselves on the same side of the barricades against the scientists who are all too eager to plunge into the unknown and their reckless supporters. But that will depend, of course, on how much like its old self Harari decides that he wants humankind to be.

Allan Arkush is the senior contributing editor of the Jewish Review of Books and professor of Judaic studies and history at Binghamton University.

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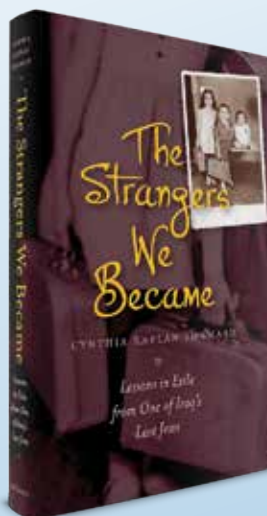


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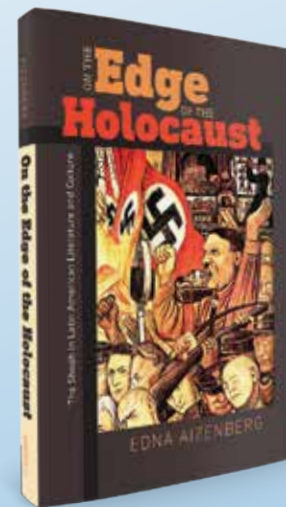
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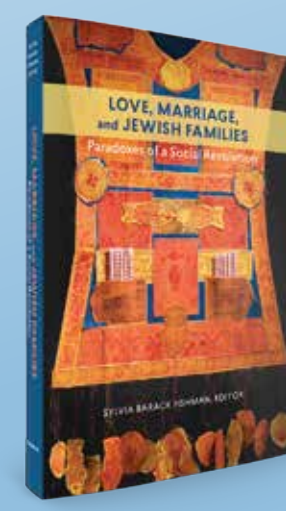
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BY ALAN MINTZ

Ha-almah mi-Kazan (Lady of Kazan)

by Maya Arad

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It is one of the ironies of the Zionist revolution that the revival of Hebrew as a modern literary language in 18th-century Germany preceded the active resettlement of the Land of Israel by a century. Even once Tel Aviv had become the center of Hebrew literary life in the 1920s, there were still David Fogel in Vienna and Paris, Berl Pomerantz in Warsaw, Hayyim Lensky in Leningrad, and so on. In America between the two world wars, there were Hebrew newspapers and dozens of Hebrew writers. After 1948, some of the prominent Americans—including Simon Halkin, Israel Efros, and Abraham Regelson—immigrated to the new state, but many others, like the great poet Gabriel Preil, remained behind.

Of course, with the establishment of the State of Israel, it was inevitable that Hebrew literature would make its home there. But now that there is an Israeli diaspora, the return of serious Hebrew literature to Europe and especially America is also inevitable, largely an effect of the global economy rather than ideology. However, when Reuven Namdar, an Israeli who lives on the Upper West Side of New York City and isn't planning on leaving, won the Sapir Prize for his novel *Ha-bayit asher necherav* (The Ruined House) last year, many in the literary establishment looked askance, and from now on residence in Israel will be a prerequisite for the prize. That's too bad, since the presence of Hebrew writers abroad would seem to present opportunities for both Israeli culture and American Jewish culture that ought to be encouraged.

Counting the many hundreds of thousands of Israelis living outside Israel may be a demographer's nightmare, but there is no doubt that the number is huge. Yet you can read far and wide in Israeli Hebrew literature and find next to no stories or novels that deal seriously with the Israeli dispersion. Here is an important subject in want of coverage, and who better than diaspora Hebrew writers to take it on? And while they're at it, why not ask them to train their fictional lens on us American Jews and the way we live?

Which brings me to Maya Arad. Arad is the foremost Hebrew writer working outside Israel and one of the best novelists of her generation. She was born in 1971 and raised on Kibbutz Nahal Oz and in Rishon Lezion. After completing her army service, she studied at Tel Aviv University and went on to complete a doctorate in linguistics at the University of London. She lived and taught in Cambridge, Massachusetts and Geneva, Switzerland before moving to Palo Alto, where she

is writer-in-residence in the Jewish studies program at Stanford University, at which her husband teaches the history of Greek science.

Arad made a splash in 2003 with her first book *Makom acher ve'ir zarah* (Another Place and a Foreign City), which tells the story of a young female

ha-sipur ha-katzar (Short Story Master) depicts the midlife crisis of a Hebrew writer who has been pegged as Israel's master of the short story in an age when only novels deliver fame. *Chashad leshitayon* (Suspected Dementia) describes a crisis in the lives of a childless Israeli couple who had lived in Silicon

You can read far and wide in Israeli Hebrew literature and find next to no stories or novels that deal seriously with the Israeli dispersion.

soldier and her Canadian boyfriend, in rhymed verse on the model of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* and Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate*. The novel was a best-seller and listed for none other than the Sapir Prize. Since then, Arad has written seven novels, and each is ambitious and experimental in its own way.

None of these novels has appeared in English yet. A drift away from Israel on the part of American Jews may help explain why so few titles of Israeli lit-

erature are appearing these days, as well as a general American indifference to reading fiction in translation. But I suspect that the real reason in Arad's case is that her novels do not engage the big issues—war and peace, the founding and future of the state, and the enduring shadow of the Holocaust—with which we tend to identify great Israeli literature. Instead, Arad writes comedies of manners that examine the lives of the professional classes. *Sheva midot ra'ot* (Seven Moral Failings), for instance, is a wickedly observed campus novel about the competition for a tenure-track position at a university resembling Stanford. Each of its chapters is written under the sign of one of the medieval vices, such as sloth, pride, envy, and so on. Her 2009 novel *Oman*

Valley for 40 years. A young couple arrives from Tel Aviv speaking a very different kind of Hebrew and shakes up their carefully constructed American life.

This is minor literature in the sense that Jane Austen—a model for Arad—is minor because she focuses on human character rather than on the Napoleonic wars and the religious crisis of the Enlightenment. It is also no accident that the “big” Israeli writers (Oz, Yehoshua, Grossman) are men and Arad is a woman. Arad is actually not a “women's writer”; she writes more about men than women, and matters of dress, food, and shelter are not preoccupations. But in a larger sense, she is focused on the domestic sphere. In her latest and most ambitious novel, *Ha-almah mi-Kazan* (Lady of Kazan), which appeared in the spring, Arad goes further and deeper than in any of her previous works by taking on the most major of the minor issues in Israeli life: family.

The centrality of having children is taken for granted in Israel. Young people still marry in their twenties and often rely on their parents to help with the burdens of child rearing. Parents and grandparents are never more than an hour or two away. From maternity leaves to maternity services to inexpensive preschools, the society encourages family life. And fertility medicine in Israel is among the most advanced, and accessible, in the world. Yet what's taken for granted in Israel is demonstrably not so in France, Italy, Germany, and many other developed countries with similar policies. In Israel the fertility rate is 3.0, which means that there is on average an additional child beyond the two who will replace the parents. To be sure, the large size of *haredi* families skews the picture, yet even among secular Jews (including single women and gay couples) there is a pronounced tendency toward having more children.

That is surely a cause for celebration and a sign of the society's fundamental confidence in itself. But it obscures the difficult situation of men and women who do not marry or who do not have children. When a norm is so pervasive, standing outside it can be painful, especially during the many holidays that punctuate the Israeli calendar.

It, the 39-year-old heroine of Maya Arad's new novel, is a woman who might have been better



Maya Arad. (Courtesy of Mira Mamon.)

off without children. When she visits Anat, her friend and fellow high-school teacher, she pretends to admire her boys but really finds them uncouth little monsters who soak up all of their mother's attention. When she goes to the bathroom, she is secretly insulted to find the sink full of toys. She is similarly impatient with her elderly mother, and her only sibling is a brother in Toronto, with whom she shares nothing. She has dated very lit-

This is minor literature in the sense that Jane Austen—a model for Arad—is minor because she focuses on human character rather than on the Napoleonic wars.

tle except for an affair with a married professor in graduate school. The right man has not come along, and she has never bestirred herself to seek a relationship. Instead, she has constructed a life of refined gratifications: reading English novels, eating healthily—no flour, sugar, or caffeine—and teaching English literature to Tel Aviv girls who have been similarly smitten by *Jane Eyre* and *Pride and Prejudice*.

Idit's complacency begins to unravel when Anat introduces her to Michael, a friend of her husband's. Michael has acceded to the wishes of his Russian parents to become a doctor, and the long years of training and his native shyness have left him single too. Michael is not attracted to Idit, and he resents being an unwitting party in the ruse of the blind date. But Idit is convinced that Michael is the man of her dreams, and she mobilizes all her wiles to bind him to her, including getting him to sleep with her and believing herself pregnant. Although she fails—Michael goes off to a two-year medical fellowship in Boston—the desire to have a child is triggered, and, despite unremitting waves of insult and humiliation, Idit does not rest until she has one.

The real motives that initiate this maternal ordeal are a potent mixture of the social and the literary. She realizes, once she finally wakes up to the fact, that there is simply no way to make a tolerable life within Israeli society without having children. There is no reasonable construction of womanhood that is not defined by caring for children and following them through the stages of life. Idit might well have taken steps to meet a man and have a child, as other women do, if it weren't for a fantasy life abetted by her immersion in literature. Her adolescence has been shaped by reading Jane Austen and the Brontës and identifying with spirited and intelligent, if not beautiful, women who have had the courage not to settle and instead to wait patiently for a man who is equal to them. She staunchly rejects being fixed up by friends or co-workers because she has a script in her mind:

She will meet him entirely by chance. In a museum. Walking on the shore. In the health food store, by the granola and whole grains with the fabric bags they have both brought from

home. Or at a bookstore. This was her preferred scenario.

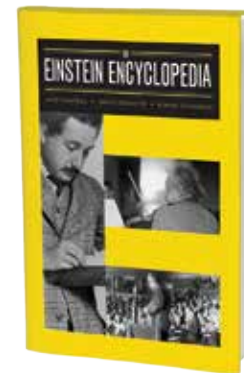
She extends this mode of thinking to her visions of herself as a mother. Her children will not be glued to the TV and computer games, and they will not be impolite and unruly, like most Israeli children. Their vacation time will be spent doing puzzles, taking nature walks, and cooking together. And there will be no toys in the bathroom sink.

Alas, no sensitive stranger emerges from among the organic produce aisles, and, of course, no engaging, well-behaved, but mysteriously parentless children do either. Idit assesses her situation and, after a brief and disheartening experiment with online dating, she comes to terms with the fact that if she wants a child she will have to take matters into her own hands. Thus begins a series of extraordinary measures, each less desirable than the one that came before it. She proposes to a gay friend that they co-parent a child only to be told that *his* partner wouldn't hear of it. She finds an eager and likeable gay man only to discover that he has HIV. She answers ads from unappealing older men who want to father a child without the responsibilities of marriage. She is interviewed by the parents of a brilliant young man who had his sperm frozen before he died of leukemia. (They reject her when they find out her age.) When she finally reconciles herself to the anonymity of a sperm bank, she discovers that, despite all her healthy living, she has entered early menopause and only prolonged hormone treatments will yield a chance of fertility. For a woman who has lived on the luxury of her expectations, each of these failures is experienced as an unjust insult.

Unbroken, Idit pushes on to the ultimate frontier: adoption. A savvy user of online forums, she discovers that Russia is one of the few countries that permits adoption by single women, and soon she is registered with an Israeli agency specializing in placements from Russian orphanages. Suddenly the call comes, and before she knows it she finds herself in wintry Kazan, the capital of Tatarstan, east of Moscow on the Volga. What she sees in the state orphanages requires the tone of the novel to pivot from comic irony to moral seriousness. The endless wards of abandoned children, starved for touch and gazing through affectless eyes, establish an ethical ground zero that ridicules the desires of women to obtain a plaything to palliate their own aloneness.

Suddenly, a one-year-old baby girl, listless and underweight, is placed in Idit's arms—she has never even held a baby before—and she is told to embrace her daughter. Idit panics. Even though she knows that the medical problems of children offered for adoption are routinely exaggerated in order to justify their being taken out of the country, and even though she knows that the symptoms she has observed in the child are likely the result of the institutional conditions rather than genetic or organic issues, she cannot handle it. She leaves Russia weighed down by the knowledge that her decision has condemned the little girl, like so many others, to lifelong neglect in state institutions.

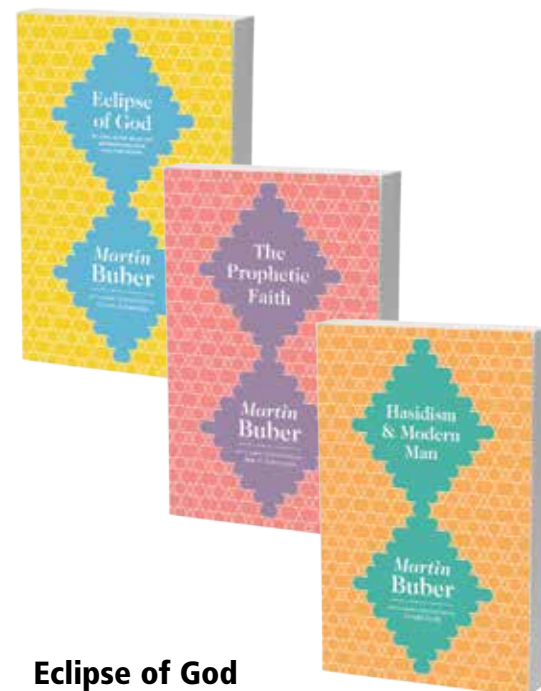
A few months after returning to Tel Aviv, Idit gets another chance. She is summoned to another provincial Russian city and offered a boy for



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adoption. And this time, even though there is not much more certainty about the boy's health, she does not flinch, and she finds herself returning to Israel as a mother.

Lev, as she calls the boy, is a bundle of restless impulses with manifold behavior problems. She wrestles him in and out of strollers during the first long, torpid Tel Aviv summer, as she is reduced to tears by attempting to take care of the most basic necessities of life. She has no family and no support system; she doesn't drive a car and doesn't even own a car seat. When Lev gets a little older and is invited to birthday parties of other children, his problems with impulse control create scenes of searing humiliation. Blessed with the "gift" of a child, Idit feels herself more deeply abandoned and sinned against by the world than ever.

In the hands of a lesser novelist, Idit's comic-tragic ups and downs might come off as just another schematic morality tale about the way we live now. Arad's steepest challenge is to take the edge off our temptation to judge Idit for her self-delusion. She succeeds in this by making her own voice invisible and locating the narrative very close to her heroine's own consciousness. Take, for example, the description of Idit's rage at Jane Austen and *Pride and Prejudice* in the midst of her search for a sperm donor.

From the corner of her eye she caught sight of the neglected volume. How much had she adored that book when she was a girl! . . . Idit had read it slowly, with effort and the use of a dictionary. She was fourteen

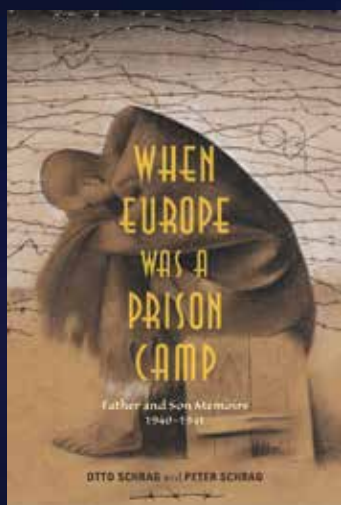


Israeli children play in a garden on a hot summer day. (Photo by Nati Shohat/FLASH90.)

then, younger than Lydia, the youngest of the Bennet children. Now she read it with the eyes of a grown-up woman who was almost the age of Mrs. Bennet, Jane's mother. How pathetic the book seemed to her now. Country girls giggling at balls and scheming to catch a young squire. "Jane!", she exclaimed with disgust, addressing the writer by her

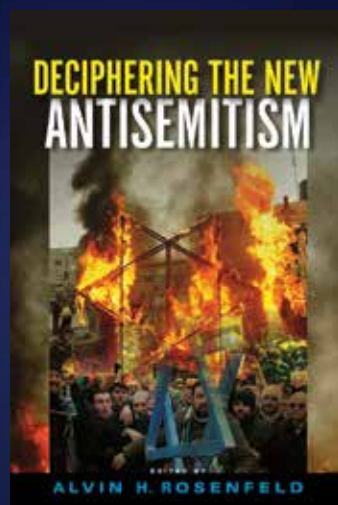
first name as if she knew her. Idit felt anger toward her for all the inflated expectations she had encouraged in women over the last two centuries, and in herself as well: One can live in an out-of-the-way village, grow up in a poor and eccentric family, and decline any option that is not the very best. For in the end, a handsome and rich eligible bachelor will ride

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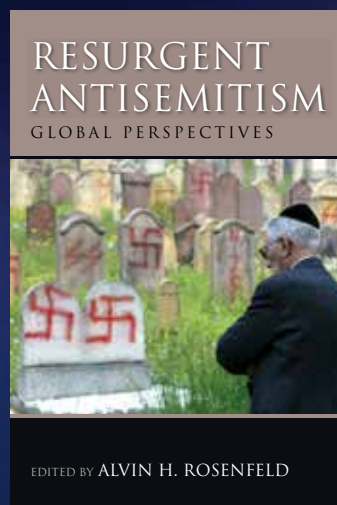


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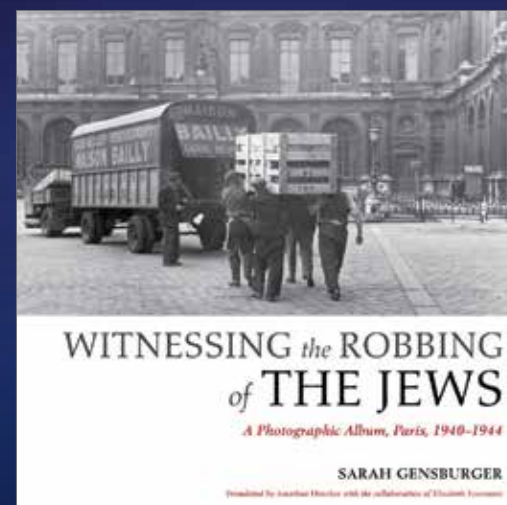
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into the neighborhood and fall in love with you at first sight:

In the shadow of this faith, Idit spent her teens, and then her twenties and her thirties. It will happen. One need only wait patiently and not compromise. Even now it was hard for her to detach herself from her trust in novels, despite knowing it false. But here is the truth: At the age of 40 she is reduced to surfing the internet to find a man willing to impregnate her with his sperm in order to produce a child they can share.

The nice irony of the passage lies in Idit's believing that her disavowal of the novel is a sign of newfound maturity, when she is really shifting responsibility for her situation away from herself. A great work of literature that had nurtured her earlier life is now demonized as the font of seductive untruth. The mocking epiphany comes at the end: Idit still cannot truly wean herself from the mystique of those novels, and she is condemned to experience daily the chasm between literature and her life.

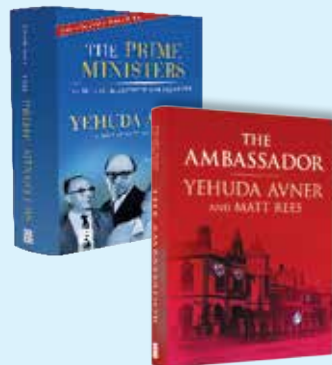
A writer cannot be this intimate with the inner landscape of her heroine's illusions and humiliations without creating a sense of understanding that is deeper than the folly being described. We are fascinated rather than put off by Idit's dogged and self-punishing quest for getting something from the world because Arad has enabled us to connect with her character's deepest motives. Arad's Hebrew prose is extraordinarily precise both in the descriptions of Idit's experiences and in the pitch-perfect, up-to-the-minute dialogue. This discipline extends to the construction of the plot. Although this is a long book, there is little that is extraneous, and I felt almost hypnotically compelled to consume the story as if the moral drama unfolding in it made the rest of my life far less urgent.

That compulsion is rewarded by a qualified happy ending. Idit soon comes to terms with the fact that she cannot raise a growing boy in her tiny Tel Aviv apartment. She settles in a village in the south, where Lev can run around and visit the animals in the nearby moshav. She learns to drive, buys a car, and teaches basic English courses in a community college. Most importantly, she begins to accept the vast differences between Lev's temperament and her own and to discover a genuine affection for her child.

In her misreading of the novels she loved, Idit believed that good things would come to the heroine who sat and waited and refused to compromise. She forgot the part about experience and suffering leading to knowledge and acceptance of the possible. Her ordeal restores the missing piece, and the mix of wisdom and renunciation with which the novel concludes seems entirely convincing. Now that Arad has written an illuminating novel about family in Israel, one hopes that she will train the marvelous instrument of her craft upon the lives of the Jews among whom she lives today. Arad has depicted American Jews in earlier novels but only glancingly (and somewhat satirically). There remains a vast and inviting canvas for her abundant gifts.

Alan Mintz teaches Hebrew literature at The Jewish Theological Seminary. He is currently working on a study of the late S.Y. Agnon.

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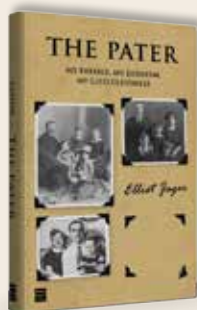
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Spinoza's Metaphysics: Substance and Thought

by Yitzhak Y. Melamed

Oxford University Press, 256 pp., \$35

Near the beginning of *The Family Moskat*, Isaac Bashevis Singer introduces us to a young man from a distinguished rabbinic family named Asa Heschel Bannet:

At five he was studying Talmud, at six he began the Talmudic commentators, at eight the teacher had no more to give him. At the age of nine he delivered a discourse in the synagogue, and at twelve he was writing learned letters to rabbis in other towns . . . [who] would send him back long epistles, addressing him as “The Keen and Eagle-eyed” and “Uprooter of Mountains.”

We meet Bannet as he arrives in Warsaw and are given a glimpse of how far he has travelled from the piety of his youth: “In his pocket rested a worn volume, the *Ethics* of Spinoza in a Hebrew translation.”

The figure of talmudic prodigy gone bad is an old one going back to the 18th-century Polish Jewish thinker Salomon Maimon. The way out is clearly marked: Intense Talmud study leads to intense study of science and philosophy. Questioning *within* the framework of rabbinic Judaism is replaced by questioning the framework of rabbinic Judaism *itself*. Spinoza was (in fact, sometimes still is) a crucial step along the path out.

There are many reasons that talmudic geniuses were attracted to the Dutch-Jewish heretic. In his *Theological-Political Treatise*, Spinoza critiques the Bible and challenges central tenets of traditional Judaism. But more often than not it was Spinoza's *Ethics*, not the *Treatise*, that was the lure. According to the *Ethics*, the good life consists in cultivating intellectual and moral perfection, goals that seem consistent with the aims of a Talmud student. But for Spinoza intellectual perfection consists not in mastering the Talmud but rather in scientific knowledge of nature. And while Spinoza shares the rabbinic aim of cultivating moral virtues such as generosity and gratitude, he finds no value in ritual practice.

Harry Austryn Wolfson was one of the most notable talmudic prodigies turned unbeliever. Trained in the legendary Slobodka yeshiva, Wolfson held the first chair in Jewish studies at an American university. For almost 50 years, he was the Nathan Littauer Professor of Hebrew Literature and Philosophy at Harvard, until his death in 1974. In 1934, Wolfson published *The Philosophy of Spinoza: Unfolding the Latent Processes of His Reasoning*, a monumental two-volume study of the *Ethics*. At the beginning of the book, Wolfson considered Spinoza's philosophical method. Spinoza modeled his *Ethics* on Euclid's *Elements*, beginning with definitions and self-evident axioms, then

presenting propositions that he proved using the definitions, axioms, and prior propositions. But beneath Spinoza's ostensibly geometrical method, Wolfson discerned a deeper talmudic approach:

In its concentrated form of exposition and in the baffling allusiveness and ellipticalness of its style, the *Ethics* may be compared to the Talmudic and rabbinic writings upon which Spinoza was brought up, and it is in that spirit in which the old rabbinic scholars approach the study of their standard texts that we must approach the study of the *Ethics*.

One lapsed yeshiva *bocher* recognized another, or at least thought he did (Spinoza had considerably less rabbinic learning than did Wolfson).

On the surface, comparing Spinoza's method in the *Ethics* to the Talmud is outlandish. The Talmud is a hodgepodge of rabbinic opinions associatively linked to other rabbinic opinions, which argues over the meaning of prior rabbinic statements and cites scriptural prooftexts. By contrast, Spinoza constructs a methodical, self-contained philosophical

Demonstrata. Wolfson, who had a dry sense of humor, wrote that the only reason he abandoned this title was because “it did not seem advisable to have the title begin with the word ‘Spinoza.’”

Thirty-five years after Wolfson published his magnum opus, a second monumental interpretation of Spinoza appeared. In *Spinoza's Metaphysics: An Essay in Interpretation*, Edwin Curley, an analytically trained philosopher (and lapsed Christian), revolutionized Spinoza studies. Curley attempted to provide a “coherent and precise explanation” of Spinoza's metaphysics by showing that the philosopher espoused a “consistent, reasoned view of the world” not merely by 17th-century standards, but by the standards of 20th-century Anglo-American philosophy. Consequently, Curley was entirely unapologetic about presenting Spinoza's system in “a philosophical vocabulary which was entirely unfamiliar to Spinoza.”

Yitzhak Melamed's important new study, *Spinoza's Metaphysics: Substance and Thought*, is far too dense and intricately argued to sum up, but it would be fair to say that he enters into this argument, and improves upon both Wolfson and Curley, which is an extraordinary accomplishment.



Dutch 1000-guilder note honoring Baruch Spinoza.

system, which rarely interprets other philosophers or cites prooftexts. Nonetheless, Wolfson brashly asserted that “if we could cut up all the philosophic literature available to [Spinoza] into slips of paper, toss them up into the air, and let them fall back to the ground, then out of these scattered slips of paper we could reconstruct his *Ethics*.”

Just as the Talmud reads every word of the Mishnah with great care, seeking to understand how the mishnaic rabbis based themselves on biblical authority and why one rabbi's opinion differs from another, so Wolfson saw Spinoza as carefully choosing each word of his *Ethics*, in implicit dialogue with earlier philosophical authorities, accepting, modifying, or rejecting them.

For Wolfson, Spinoza was the culmination of rabbinic scholasticism as evidenced by the title he originally chose for his book: *Spinoza the Last of the Mediaevals: a Study of the Ethica Ordine Geometrico Demonstrata in the light of a hypothetically constructed Ethica More Scholastico Rabbinicoque*

The 18th-century German Romantic Novelist famously described Spinoza as a “God-intoxicated man” who identified God with the cosmos, and Spinoza has been widely considered a pantheist since then. For all the differences between Wolfson and Curley, they agreed on one striking conclusion—the notion that Spinoza was a pantheist was wrong. Wolfson argued that Spi-

noza saw God as merely the highest conceptual category through which all else was conceived, while Curley contended that Spinoza identified God with the fundamental principles of natural science. One of Melamed's most important contributions is that he rehabilitates the traditional view of Spinoza as a pantheist.

To illustrate the differences between Wolfson's, Curley's, and Melamed's approaches, we must understand their interpretations of one of the key elements of Spinoza's metaphysics, his distinction between substance and modes. At the beginning of the *Ethics*, Spinoza divided Being into two: Substance was that which “is in itself and is conceived through itself” while modes were “the affections of substance or that which is in another through which it is also conceived.” For Spinoza, God was the only substance while finite things like a jousting lance (not to speak of you and me) were modes of substance. Infinite extension and infinite thought were God's attributes.

Wolfson observed that medieval philosophers

frequently began by dividing Being into two, though they spoke of substance and accidents. Their substance existed in itself while accidents existed in something else. Thus, for the medievals, God was a substance but so were finite things like the jousting lance. Contingent features of finite things such as the blackness of a particular jousting lance were accidents. Wolfson assumed that Spinoza's starting point was this medieval division of Being, and on this basis he raised several questions. Why did Spinoza use the term "mode" instead of "accident"? Why did he deny that there were finite substances, asserting that God was the only substance? Why did he add the condition of "being conceived through itself" to the definition of substance and "being conceived through another" to the definition of modes?

The medievals assumed that blackness was an accident of the jousting lance because the lance's



Harry Austryn Wolfson. (Courtesy of Mark Anderson.)

blackness could not exist outside of it. The jousting lance, however, was a substance since it could be moved from one place to another while retaining its form. Wolfson hypothesized that Spinoza worried that while it was true that a jousting lance could be moved, it could never exist outside of space. So finite things must be modes of the only true substance, God, one of whose attributes is infinite extension. According to Wolfson, Spinoza replaced the term "accident" with "mode" because he thought that an accident can be conceived without a substance while a mode cannot. For example, while I can conceive of blackness without extension, I can't conceive of a jousting lance without extension.

On this basis, Wolfson argued that Spinoza's distinction between substance and mode was similar to that between a genus and a species. Just as the genus "animal" includes the species "human being," so the genus "substance" includes all finite modes, including our lance. Wolfson interpreted Spinoza's definition of mode, namely "that which is in another through which it is also conceived," as meaning that a mode is "in another" in the sense that it is conceived through another. For Wolfson's Spinoza, modes do not inhere bodily in substance, so all things do not inhere in God. Hence, he was not a pantheist, at least not in the conventional sense of the term.

Curley rejected Wolfson's interpretation, though

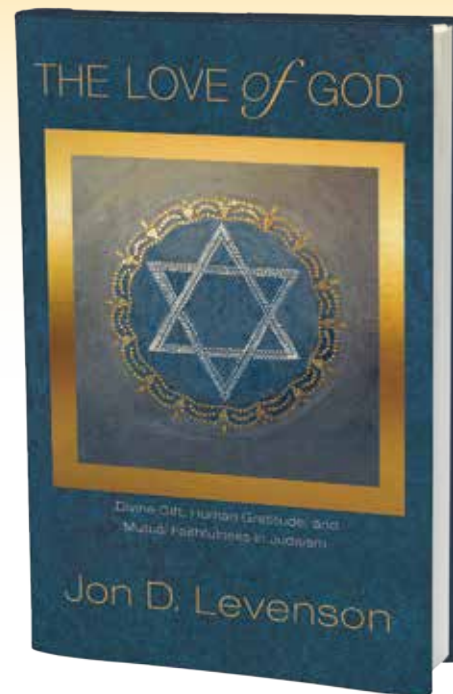
not his conclusion. "Many logicians nowadays, with Russell's paradoxes in mind, would," he wrote, "reject the notion of a class being a member of itself as unintelligible." And yet that was precisely what Wolfson's Spinoza held with regard to substance. Curley also noted that Spinoza denied that a genus could cause anything, since it was just a philosophical abstraction. So if God was the highest genus, it could not cause anything. Yet Spinoza explicitly asserted that God was the cause of all things.

What, then, was the proper understanding of the relationship between Spinoza's substance and its modes? Was Spinoza, in fact, a pantheist? Curley observed that the first person to interpret Spinoza as a pantheist was Pierre Bayle in his 1697 *Historical and Critical Dictionary*. But he also argued that such pantheism was incoherent. First, Bayle argued that if modes were properties of the one substance, that is God, then God would have contradictory properties. For example, Hillary Clinton supported the war in Iraq and Barack Obama opposed it. Since Clinton and Obama are both properties of God, God both supported and opposed the war in Iraq, which violates the principle of non-contradiction. Second, Bayle noted that finite modes were constantly changing. Barack Obama is born, rises to power, and dies. But Spinoza held that God is immutable. Finally, Bayle wrote that finite beings regularly commit evil acts. But if finite beings inhere in God then God was responsible for evil, which was theologically unacceptable. To Bayle's objections, Curley added one of his own. When we say that a quality inheres in something we generally mean that the quality is predicable of it. For example, being 2,722 feet high is predicated of the Burj Khalifa tower in Dubai. But since finite modes are things, if Spinoza saw finite modes as predicable of God, then he committed a category error, since one thing cannot be predicated of another.

If Spinoza were susceptible to such criticism, then it would turn out that he did not really have a "consistent, reasoned view of the world," either in his terms or our own. So Curley constructed what he called a "model metaphysic" based on early-20th-century British philosophy to reinterpret Spinoza's account of substance and modes. According to this "model metaphysic," there are three levels of reality. First, are the fundamental laws of nature, which are true and could never have been otherwise. Then there are singular facts such as that the Burj Khalifa is 2,722 feet high, which are only accidentally true, since it could have been 2,721 feet high. Between the fundamental laws and the singular facts are what Curley calls "derivative nomological facts," that is, less general scientific generalizations that follow from the laws of nature, such as the law of inertia. This, according to Curley, was what Spinoza was getting at in his distinction between substance and modes. For Curley, Spinoza's God, or substance, which was known through God's attributes, was equivalent to the fundamental laws of nature. Singular facts were finite modes. Between substance and finite modes were the infinite modes, which were equivalent to Curley's "derivative nomological facts."

Curley agreed with Wolfson that Spinoza was no pantheist. But for Curley, the relationship between God (substance) and finite modes was causal, not conceptual. Since all finite modes existed by virtue of the fundamental laws of nature, God could be said to cause them. But as the finite modes neither existed within God nor were predicated of God, God was not equivalent to them.

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Yitzhak Melamed agrees that Curley effectively dismantled Wolfson's interpretation and hence does not feel the need to address it. Rather, he takes as his task doing to Curley's interpretation what Curley did to Wolfson's. Melamed begins by carefully summarizing Curley's interpretation of the substance-mode distinction and his arguments for it. He then presents 13 arguments against Curley's reading. Needless to say, the pages of the *Jewish Review of Books* do not have the attribute of infinite extension, so I will focus on three of his arguments.

Curley and Melamed agree that Spinoza affirmed the medieval philosophical view that God is omniscient. But, Melamed asks, if finite modes do not inhere in God, and ideas are finite modes, what does it mean for God to be omniscient? In Curley's view, Spinoza's God was the cause of ideas, but they did not inhere in Him. Consequently, God was ignorant, something that Spinoza explicitly rejected. Second, Melamed cites a letter in which Spinoza said that he maintained "together with Paul and perhaps together with all ancient philosophers" that "all things are in God and move in God." Melamed notes that the idea that all things "move in God" is unintelligible on Curley's reading. He also notes that if Spinoza's phrase that "all things are in God" simply meant that God was the cause of all things, it is unclear why he would have invoked the "ancient philosophers." For Spinoza's own contemporaries universally maintained that God was the cause of all things.

Finally, Melamed observes that in Spinoza's unpublished *Compendium of the Hebrew Grammar* he drew an analogy between parts of speech and meta-

physical divisions of reality. Spinoza asserted that nouns correspond with substance, adjectives with attributes, and participles with modes. For example, the noun "man" (*ish*) is a substance, the adjective "big" (*gadol*) is an attribute, and the participle "walk" (*holekh*) is a mode. Spinoza explained that the difference between adjectives and participles is that adjectives refer to aspects of the noun that are

As Melamed puts it, "The price we pay for making Spinoza like us is that it is no longer clear why we should have an interest in Spinoza."

static and not related to time, while participles refer to aspects of the noun that change and are related to time. So a man being big is a static property, while his walking is contingent and changes. Since participles are properties of nouns, it is clear that Spinoza saw modes as properties of substance.

In response to Bayle's contention that in the pantheistic view God has contradictory properties, Melamed argues that contradiction is only apparent. The fact that finite modes contradict each other creates no contradiction in God. For it may be that insofar as God is Hillary Clinton God supported the war in Iraq, but insofar as God is Barack Obama God did not. Melamed has little problem dispensing with Bay-

le's second objection, namely that pantheism makes God responsible for evil. For, as Spinoza told us time and again, good and evil are human constructs. Regarding Bayle's final objection, the problem of divine immutability, Melamed bites the bullet and argues that Spinoza did not actually deny the possibility of change in God. Reading closely, Melamed notes that what Spinoza claimed was that "God, or all of God's attributes, are immutable." According to Melamed, Spinoza was claiming only that God insofar as He is expressed through His attributes is immutable, not God insofar as He is expressed through His modes.

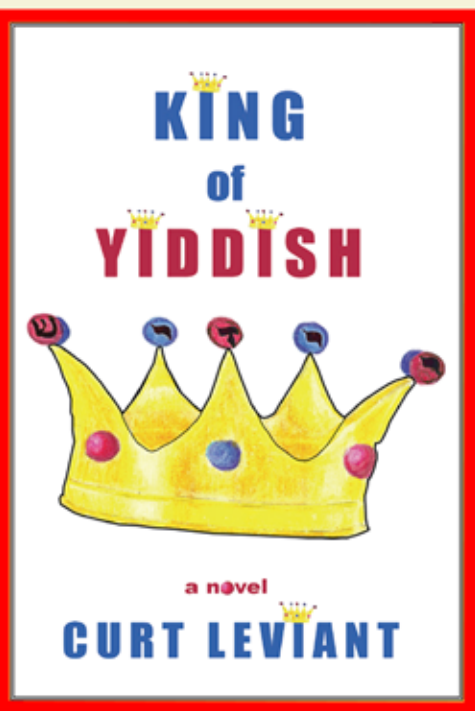
Melamed further rejects Curley's claim that if Spinoza held that modes could be predicated of God he would have been committing a category error. Melamed notes that Spinoza's contemporaries such as Leibniz and Arnauld thought that finite modes could be predicated of substances or even of other modes. Melamed also argues that for Spinoza there was no problem with finite things being in God without being part of God. Aristotle himself claimed that knowledge of grammar is *in* the soul, without being *part* of it. Melamed contends that Spinoza saw modes as properties that followed from God's essence without being identical to it.

Finally, Melamed writes that Curley's claim that things cannot be predicated of other things was not necessarily a category error since, as Russell argued, things can be understood as merely "bundles of co-existing qualities" and qualities can be predicated of substances. In this way, Melamed clears the way to re-establishing the pantheistic interpretation of Spinoza.

Melamed's polemic with Curley is not just about Spinoza. He sees Curley's approach to Spinoza as symptomatic of a broader problem in the way many philosophers study the history of philosophy. For a long time, analytic philosophers have ruled Anglo-American philosophy departments and embattled historians of philosophy have tried to justify their existence by showing how old philosophers can contribute to contemporary analytic debates. Melamed agrees that contemporary philosophy can, in fact, learn from historical figures, but he has misgivings about the way this aim is often pursued. Curley's interpretation of Spinoza, he argues, exemplifies the problem.

Historians of philosophy, such as Curley, often speak of the "principle of charity": One assumes that great philosophers have not committed elementary philosophical blunders. When applied modestly, Melamed agrees that this is good historical practice. But too often the principle is invoked to legitimize wildly anachronistic interpretations. For Melamed, Curley's "model metaphysic" is just such an interpretation. The value of studying old philosophers is, he argues, that they help us question contemporary assumptions and open new avenues for philosophical thinking. As he puts it, "The price we pay for making Spinoza like us is that it is no longer clear why we should have an interest in Spinoza." Instead, Melamed proposes that we be open to reading philosophers according to their original intentions as a way of "*challeng[ing]*" (rather than confirm[ing]) our most basic beliefs and intuitions . . . [to] help us diagnose our own blind spots."

Seen from the perspective of contemporary analytic philosophy, Spinoza's pantheism may seem to commit a category error, but for Melamed true charity bids us to read the *Ethics* within its historical context—



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and be open to the possibility that Spinoza might have been right. For example, by taking seriously Spinoza's claim that finite modes are things but inhere in substance, Melamed sees Spinoza as questioning the common philosophical assumption that there is a clear-cut distinction between properties and things.

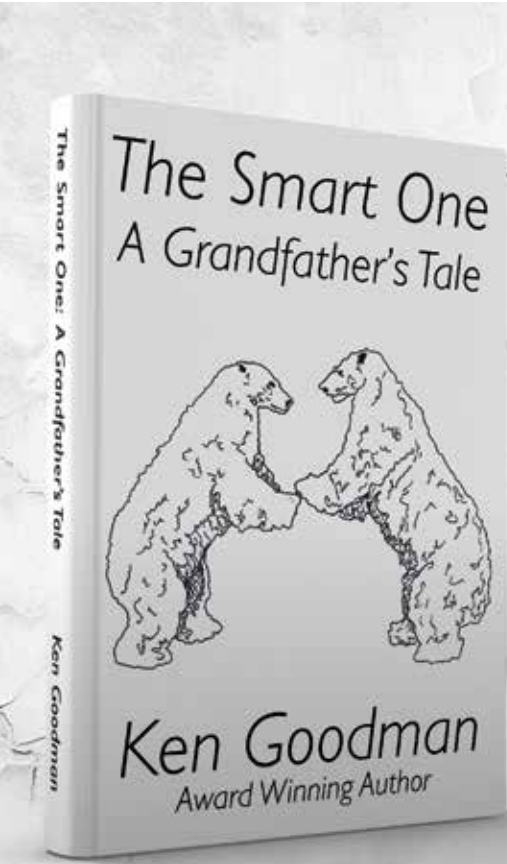
Melamed's general point about the misuse of the principle of charity is well-taken (and he is not alone in making it), but the dividing line between appropriate and inappropriate uses of the principle is not always so clear. Why, for example, is Curley's use of the "model metaphysic" to explain Spinoza out of bounds, while Melamed's use of Russell's notion of things as "bundles of qualities" is fair game? Every scholar, it seems, must strike a balance between textual evidence, conceptual clarity, and logical consistency. These will always, and necessarily, be matters of judgment.

While Melamed rejects Wolfson's interpretation of Spinoza as much as Curley's, he does intimate that he shares a kinship with Wolfson in a different respect. In his acknowledgements, Melamed refers to his numerous discussions of "Reb Boruch Ha-Sefaradi" since emigrating from the ultra-Orthodox "holy city of Bney Brak." In thanking his dissertation advisor, the Yale philosopher Michael Della Rocca, he lauds him as "an ideal Talmudic sage." On close inspection, one can also discern a talmudic sensibility that informs Melamed's approach to Spinoza, albeit one that differs from Wolfson's. Like Wolfson, Melamed explores how Spinoza uses key philosophical sources through careful textual analysis and dialectical argument. But while Wolfson's dialectic was mostly internal to Spinoza and his purported sources—asking why and how Spinoza departed from his medieval philosophical predecessors—Melamed's dialectic is usually directed at a prominent modern interpretation of Spinoza.

Melamed presents a given interpretation and his alternative, and then offers a series of textual and conceptual objections to the influential interpretation. He then considers possible responses to his objections and refutes them. If Wolfson's approach was akin to that of the talmudic sages in relation to their mishnaic predecessors, Melamed's is more like tertiary medieval commentators such as Tosafot who defended their interpretations by refuting prior commentators like Rashi. Admittedly this approach is not unique to Melamed—all historians of philosophy, Curley included, must proceed like this to some degree. But the level of Melamed's attention to textual detail combined with his logical acuity is unusual even among Spinoza scholars and may owe something to his talmudic training.

I wonder if I detect a debt to Talmud study in one other aspect of Melamed's scholarship. Every student of the Talmud knows that the Talmud tends to give priority to older rabbinic opinions over newer ones, presupposing a "decline of the generations." Perhaps Melamed's talmudic sensibility inclines him to take seriously the possibility that a 17th-century rationalist may have understood certain problems better than analytic philosophers of the 20th and 21st centuries.

Michah Gottlieb is associate professor of Hebrew and Judaic studies at NYU. He is the author, most recently, of Faith, Reason, Politics: Essays on the History of Jewish Thought (Academic Studies Press) and is currently completing a study of German-Jewish Bible translation.




The Smart One: A Grandfather's Tale
By Ken Goodman

The future is often foretold in stories of the past. As families flee Debaltseve in Eastern Ukraine in 2015, Ken Goodman's **The Smart One: A Grandfather's Tale** takes us back to families fleeing persecution in Eastern Europe at the turn of the Twentieth Century. It is a compelling story of Jewish migration to America, which begins in Smorgon, now in Belarus, a former Soviet Republic, but at the time Smorgon was in Vilnius, a district of Lithuania, and a part of the Russian Empire. The book is beautifully illustrated throughout with fine line drawings by **Ray Martens**.

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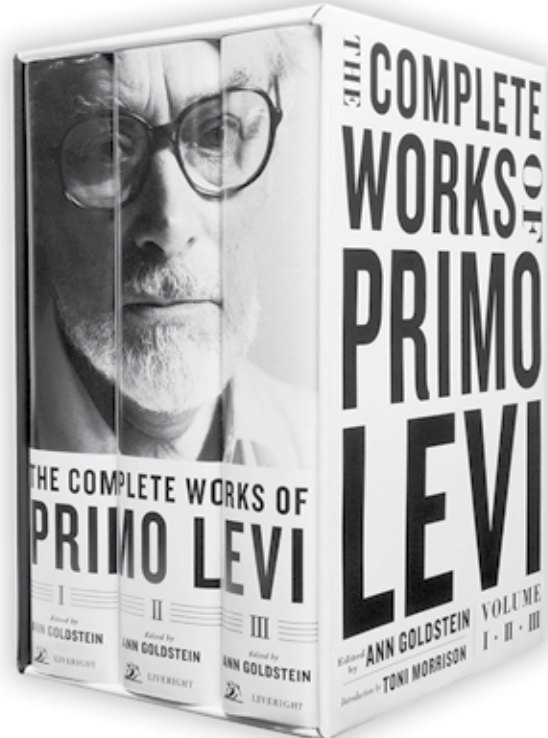
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Water Shall Flow from Jerusalem

BY AMY NEWMAN SMITH

Let There Be Water: Israel's Solution for a Water-Starved World

by Seth M. Siegel

Thomas Dunne Books/St. Martin's Press, 352 pp., \$27.99

Consequences are curious things. When the British military in the Middle East during World War II started sourcing supplies from local manufacturers, it didn't know it was giving a leg up to the firm that would become the Israeli pharmaceutical giant Teva. And when the British government, in the 1930 Hope Simpson Report and many others, pointed to water scarcity in Palestine to justify capping Jewish immigration, it couldn't have foreseen that its diagnosis would be a driving force for making a land of deserts into a water-secure nation. Farther still from the imaginations of Sir John Hope Simpson and other British "experts" would be a future in which the Jewish nation they tried to stifle would be the world leader in literally life-saving water resource solutions.

In fact, Seth Siegel argues in *Let There Be Water*, the same May 1939 White Paper that virtually closed the doors of Palestine to the Jews had the unanticipated effect of compelling "new thinking by the Zionists about how to manage the nation's water for the broadest benefit" which resulted almost exactly 25 years later in the completion of the National Water Carrier, an 81-mile system of giant pipes, open canals, tunnels, reservoirs, and pumping stations, that carries water from the Sea of Galilee to the arid south of the country. The White Paper rested on the back of the 1930 Hope Simpson Report, which is replete with findings on the existing and potential water resources of Mandate Palestine:

As a general rule irrigation water is wasted. This is very obvious in the irrigated areas of the Jordan Valley, the Beisan area, the Wadi Fara'a and the Jericho area. In each of these areas it is probable that scientific management of the irrigation would save enough water to double the irrigable area from the existing supply.

It is not hard to draw a line between that report's observation and the oft-repeated imperative, found on posters in classrooms and signs across Israel, to "not waste a drop." Nor is it a leap to see how focused thinking on agriculture's huge consumption of water has led Israel to become the global leader in both drip irrigation and plant breeding, among a host of water resource management strategies. With or without British interference, the Jews of Palestine were going to have to discover a way to find more water and make the most of it if the Yishuv was going to support a growing population.

Jumping along the timeline with which Siegel prefaces his book, key milestones in this story emerge: the Zionist plan for "integrated water resource planning and management" of July 1939, the Yarkon-Negev Pipeline opening in July 1955, the National Water Carrier opening in 1964, the advent of drip

Israel's water authorities can detect leaks, often before the user is aware of them.

irrigation in 1966, the Shafdan wastewater treatment plant coming online in 1969, massive desalinization plants built beginning in 2005. Omitted by necessity are thousands of less dramatic technological and policy achievements that enabled Israel to declare "water independence from weather" in October 2013.

Let There Be Water appears as the ongoing drought across California and the western United

Council predicting that within 10 years "countries important to the US and to global security will be at risk of 'state failure' . . . 'The ability of key countries to produce food and generate energy,'" or more precisely their *inability*, it goes on to say, will soon be "posing a risk to global food markets and hobbling economic growth."

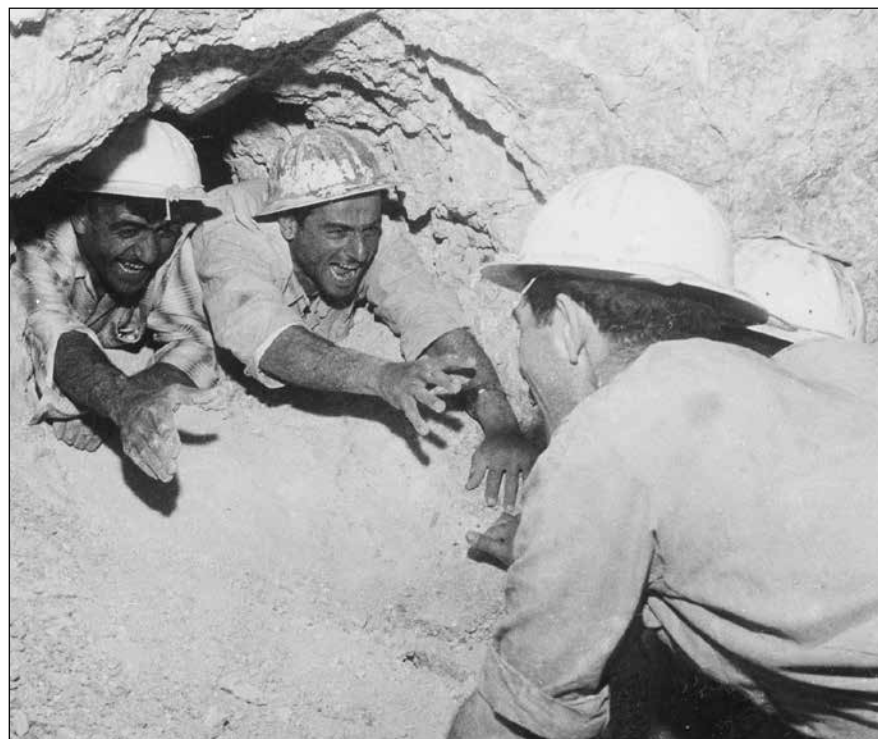
Siegel paints a devastating picture of conditions in the United States: The High Plains Aquifer that provides water to eight Great Plains states that grow essential crops such as corn and wheat has been so over-utilized that "parts of it have already gone dry," while low water levels in Lake Mead, at the border of Nevada and Arizona, could soon interrupt the production of hydroelectric power currently flowing to the Southwest.

In the years since the U.N. Mandate ended, Israel's population has grown more than tenfold. That growing population went from relative poverty to a mostly middle-class lifestyle—a change that

means greater water use per person. Since 1948, its yearly rainfall has declined by more than 50 percent. Despite all that, Israel currently exports water to Gaza, the Palestinian Authority, and Jordan, along with billions of dollars' worth of water-thirsty fruits and vegetables to America, the European Union, and elsewhere.

The foundation of this achievement is in having developed what Siegel calls a "water-respecting" culture. He describes how even well-to-do families can be seen scooping bath water out of the tub to water backyard plants and how hygiene classes teach students to use the least amount of water when showering and brushing

their teeth. All water has been metered since 1955. With the advent of electronic metering and monitoring technology, Israel's water authorities can detect leaks, often before the user is aware of them. Where London loses 30 percent of the water that goes into its municipal system to leaks and Chicago loses 25 percent, the Israelis have driven municipal water losses down to less than 11 percent—even taking into account cities like Jerusalem, where parts of the infrastructure date back to the Ottomans—and have set a new goal of seven percent. Perhaps even more important is the way in which water rights are



Excavation crews reach out to each other after tunneling through the rock as part of the National Water Carrier, 1960s, which carried billions of gallons of water to the Negev. (Courtesy of Daniel Rosenblum/Mekorot.)

States slows crop production and fuels forest fires. People and governments are thinking creatively about water and taking steps toward using it conservatively, just as Israelis have been doing for decades. It's no accident that the last item on Siegel's timeline is a March 2014 agreement on "water cooperation" between Israel and California, an event that merited a signing ceremony involving Governor Jerry Brown and Prime Minister Netanyahu.

To illustrate the scope of what he means by a "water-starved world," Siegel quotes a partially declassified report from the U.S. National Intelligence

construed: All “water ownership and usage is controlled by the government acting in the interest of the people as a whole.”

It is to Siegel’s credit that the section of the book devoted to Israel’s treatment and reuse of 85 percent of its sewage for everything but drinking and bathing is as engaging as any other part of the book, if not more so. (The country’s closest competitor in this area is Spain, with a 25 percent reuse rate. The United States lags behind at a paltry 10 percent.) In telling the story of how Israel turned waste into an asset, he captures the country’s astonishing economic and technological drive. Sometimes this almost has the flavor of one of those late-night Ginsu knife commercials (“But wait! There’s more!”). On occasion, this crosses—or at least flirts with—the line between policy and public relations, and, as it turns out, the Jewish National Fund (which has paid for large parts of Israel’s water reclamation infrastructure) has embraced the book as a marketing tool. But none of this undermines the story Siegel



Drip irrigation, developed in 1959, results in the need for far less water. (Courtesy of Netafim.)

has to tell, which is genuinely extraordinary.

Siegel sets out, and largely succeeds, at placing Israel’s water resource efforts in the same narrative arc that has long framed the country’s military and political successes, making them part of the challenges that, in the course of being overcome, both defined the national character and unified the country. Although this may seem a stretch to the American reader, his argument is not forced. The five-shekel bill depicts the National Water Carrier as a pipeline carrying water from the hilly north to the desert of the south, and postage stamps are issued to mark water-related milestones.

Nor are dramatic feats limited to elite military units. Siegel recounts how in 1946 the Zionists “pulled off one of the most daring episodes of its cat-and-mouse struggle with the British over their continuing restrictions on immigration and settlement building.” While the British by then barred Jews from building new settlements, the Zionists found a “loophole,” an outdated but still-in-effect Ottoman regulation that blocked the demolition of any roofed structure as long as it wasn’t a “safety hazard.” As Yom Kippur came to a close, 11 convoys spread out across the northern Negev carrying building supplies. When the sun came up the next morning, the British found 11 new Jewish farms, each with at least one structure topped by a roof. To make them into real working farms, they needed water. Siegel clearly delights in the irony of how Simcha Blass,

the hydroengineer tasked with making sure each of the farms had water, overcame post-war scarcity to achieve this goal. Blass bought up all of the pipes used in wartime London to fight fires caused by German bombs: “The discarded British pipes first used to frustrate Hitler’s efforts to terrorize the people of London now served to undermine British efforts to stymie Jewish settlement construction.”

Israeli water technology is used in 150 food and beverage companies, from Chobani yogurt to Coca-Cola and Corona (just to name those beginning with “C”).

In 1939, a U.S. Department of Agriculture soil scientist named Walter Clay Lowdermilk visited Palestine and found the Yishuv’s agricultural restoration “remarkable.” His best-selling 1944 book *Palestine, Land of Promise* went through 11 printings and was found open on President Roosevelt’s desk after his death. Lowdermilk predicted that the Jews’ work could “serve as the example, the demonstration, the lever.” While Lowdermilk’s vision was confined to the Middle East, current events show that work is impacting countries as far apart as the United States, Uganda, and China.

Israel is a world leader in breeding and engineering plants that save on water and are adapted to local conditions. Siegel gives the example of short-stalked wheat originally developed for growing in Israel. “The stalk adds nothing to the wheat, so why waste water growing it?” observes Dr. Shoshan Haran. The NGO she heads, Fair Planet, puts that kind of thinking to work developing seeds that meet the unique needs of African farmers. Other Israeli researchers have focused on developing fruits and vegetables that grow using brackish, or mildly salty, water, expanding the amount of water available to farmers.

One of the early heroes of this part of Israel’s water story is none other than Simcha Blass, of the London pipe coup. Semi-retired, Blass began to muse about something he had observed on a visit to a farm two decades earlier. What he had noticed had been “an anomaly in a row of trees planted along a fence; one was much taller than the others.” How was this to be explained?

Walking around the tree, Blass found a tiny leak in a metal irrigation pipe near the base. He suspected that these small, but steady, drops of water were going to the tree’s roots and were the likely cause of its superior growth.

Blass didn’t act on this insight until 1959, when he began to perform experiments that eventually confirmed the feasibility and enormous utility of drip irrigation. Delivering precise amounts of water right where a plant needs it (along with fertilizer) can save between 50 and 60 percent of the water utilized in flood or sprinkler irrigation. And fields watered with drip irrigation deliver more crops despite using less water. Partnering with *kibbutzim* that were diversifying into manufacturing (including one of the settlements which he helped to place on a sound footing in 1946), Blass helped create the drip irrigation equipment company Netafim, which currently has about \$800 million in sales per year. India alone now drip-irrigates more than five million acres of farmland.

The final section of *Let There Be Water* focuses on the way Israel’s water know-how could benefit the rest of the world while reshaping its relationship with it. While Siegel has shown that Israel has solved its own problems through a combination of hard-headed policy, entrepreneurship, and technological innovation, it is less clear that the same package will work elsewhere, or even if it does, whether it will

change Israel’s diplomatic standing in the world.

Americans, for instance, are unlikely to accept centralized government control over water, even if it means water revenues are actually used to fund infrastructure upgrades and expansion. Nor is there likely to be the political will to make the change Israel did in 2008, when everyone—individuals, farmers, and companies—began to be charged the actual cost of the water they used. Household water prices went up by 40 percent, and consumers responded by cutting usage by about 16 percent. Perhaps revealingly, an Israeli company’s efforts to build a desalinization plant in Carlsbad, California, along the lines of those that create nearly 500 million gallons of freshwater from saltwater each day in Israel, have been slowed by bureaucratic red tape for almost a decade, though the plant is expected to go online shortly.

On the other hand, Israel’s worldwide reach does make it harder for supporters of boycotts, divestments, and sanctions to cut ties between Israel and the rest of the world. Major agricultural firms like Monsanto and Syngenta have R&D centers and joint ventures in Israel, and Israeli water technology is used in 150 food and beverage companies, from Chobani yogurt to Coca-Cola and Corona (just to name those beginning with “C”).

Meanwhile, Siegel reports that since 2008 “the PA has chosen to use water as one key area of non-cooperation with Israel.” Training for Palestinians in water technology that had gone on for years came to an end in Israel in 2010, although it continues in a limited way in Oman, Jordan. And while China uses Israeli water technology, creating an opening that led to full diplomatic ties in 1992, it does not seem to have changed its posture at the United Nations. In fact, when I took a look at 20 recent anti-Israel votes at the United Nations, I found that none of the major beneficiaries of Israel’s water expertise, including India and Uganda (whose prime minister penned an enthusiastic blurb for the book’s back cover), voted in favor of Israel.

During Prime Minister Netanyahu’s ceremonial visit to California, he told Governor Brown and those assembled, “We don’t have a water problem . . . and California doesn’t need to have a water problem.” Readers of Seth Siegel’s fine book will likely be convinced that, at least in principle, this is true. Whether Israel’s water solutions can also act as “the example, the demonstration, the lever” that change Israel’s position in world politics is a larger question.

Amy Newman Smith is the associate editor of the Jewish Review of Books.

Shifting Daylight

BY JAY LEFKOWITZ

Doomed to Succeed: The U.S.-Israel Relationship from Truman to Obama

by Dennis Ross

Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 496 pp., \$30

Over the past 35 years, no American has been more deeply engaged in the Sisyphean task of trying to foster peace between Israel and the Palestinians than Dennis Ross. From the time he joined the Carter administration as an assistant to then Assistant Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz until midway through the Obama administration, Ross held a series of high-level Middle East policy positions in the White House or State Department under every president except George W. Bush. And during the tenures of Presidents George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and Barack Obama, Ross was the point man for the United States on what has dubiously enough become known as the “peace process.” Now, from his on-again, off-again perch at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Ross has undertaken the task of summing up the history of U.S.-Israel relations from Truman to Obama.

Although Ross’s book is titled *Doomed to Succeed: The U.S.-Israel Relationship from Truman to Obama*, he could also have called it *Groundhog Day*. Ross quotes fellow historian-diplomat Stephen Sestanovich as saying that every president since World War II entered office believing that “the world had changed in some fundamental way that his predecessor either totally misunderstood or failed to manage effectively.” They also came into office with a new playbook for the Middle East. Devoting one chapter to each administration since Truman, Ross shows how the U.S.-Israel relationship has survived, and even thrived since 1948, despite this. In doing so, he also describes how “a number of interrelated assumptions about Israel and the region have embedded themselves in at least part of the national security apparatus—and frequently informed presidents.” These ideas, which largely emanate from Foggy Bottom, include “the need to distance from Israel to gain Arab responsiveness, concern about the high costs of cooperating with the Israelis, and the belief that resolving the Palestinian problem is the key to improving the U.S. position in the region.”

Ross convincingly argues that this approach is “fundamentally flawed” and highlights the presidents who rejected it most forcefully: Bill Clinton and George W. Bush. He is also surprisingly unsparring in his criticism of his most recent boss, President Obama, who, Ross makes clear, unequivocally accepts the State Department’s traditional view of Israel.

Ross begins his tour of U.S.-Israel relations with Truman, who has long been regarded as a hero in the pro-Israel community because of

his support, over the strong objection of his State Department, for the 1947 United Nations Partition Plan, as well as for his courageous recognition of the State of Israel only hours after it declared its independence. When Truman’s secretary of state, the illustrious George Marshall, warned him that,

best debunking the positions of the State Department’s Arabists, showing that none of their dire predictions ever came true. First, the Saudis’ economic interests in selling oil to the U.S. trumped whatever animus they may have felt toward the U.S. In fact, King Saud actually increased cooperation with the

The Truman State Department’s stance was predicated on the idea that support for Israel would be disastrous for U.S. interests in the region.

“If the President were to follow Mr. Clifford’s advice [in favor of recognition] and if in the election I were to vote, I would vote against the President,” Truman ignored him. However, despite Truman’s genuine support for the Zionist cause (which largely stemmed from his desire to help the victims of the Holocaust find a refuge), once Israel came into existence, he followed his State Department’s ad-

U.S. after Truman recognized Israel. Second, there is absolutely no evidence that greater U.S. support for Israel would have driven the Arabs into the Soviets’ arms. After all, despite the Soviet Union’s extensive provision of munitions to Israel during Israel’s War of Independence (through their proxy Czechoslovakia), the Arabs weren’t alienated from the Soviets. And third, Israel proved itself capable of defeating

simultaneous attacks from Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Jordan, and Egypt without any American military support.

As Ross shows, U.S.-Israel relations have followed a predictable pattern, with each newly elected president feeling the need to change the country’s Israel policy because of a view that his predecessor got it wrong. Thus, believing that Truman’s support for Israel was motivated by electoral considerations, Eisenhower decided to distance the U.S. from Israel. Conversely, when Kennedy was elected, he strove for warmer relations with Israel, both



President Harry Truman meets with Israeli Ambassador Abba Eban and Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion at the White House, May 1, 1951. (Photo by Fritz Cohen, courtesy of the Government Press Office, Israel.)

vice and kept assistance to Israel to a bare minimum. Indeed, during Israel’s nearly year-long War of Independence, the United States enforced an arms embargo on Israel and its adversaries.

The Truman State Department’s stance was predicated on the idea that support for Israel would be disastrous for U.S. interests in the region, an idea that, as Ross shows, periodically finds its way back into the mainstream of U.S. foreign policy, despite the lack of evidence to support it. Two of Truman’s senior advisors, George Kennan and Loy Henderson, predicted that the U.S. would lose access to Arab oil; would drive the Arabs into the embrace of the Soviets; and would end up spilling its own soldiers’ blood on behalf of the Jews, because otherwise they would surely be defeated. Ross is at his

because he saw it as a country with which the U.S. shared basic values and because, as he told David Ben-Gurion, “I was elected by the Jews of New York,” whose favor he wished to repay. This pattern has continued, with Johnson, Clinton, and George W. Bush fostering warmer relations with Israel and Nixon, Carter, George H.W. Bush, and Barack Obama all coming into office intent on putting more distance between America and its ally.

Ross’s overarching historical argument is that, in fact, American interests in the region have suffered whenever the U.S. pulls away from Israel. “Not only was there never a benefit” from such policies, he concludes, but “in many cases our relations with Arab States worsened.” He cites the Eisenhower, Nixon, and Obama administrations as

key examples of periods during which our standing in the Arab world fell, notwithstanding the effort each of these presidents made to be more “neutral” in their approach to Israel than their predecessors. For instance, when Nixon’s first secretary of state, William Rogers, tried to peddle a plan that would have returned virtually all of the Arab territory captured in 1967 without addressing Israeli security needs, the Arabs “rejected our outreach and actually drew closer to Moscow.” Moreover, Ross points out that such American coolness toward Israel actually discouraged the Arabs from making peace with it: “Every administration that distanced from Israel succeeded only in building expectations of what more we might do to accommodate Arab interests, not what Arab leaders might do in response to our distancing.”

The corollary to Ross’s argument, as he also makes clear, is that those administrations that avoid allowing too much daylight to come between the U.S. and Israel are much better equipped to promote the peace process. Rejecting the traditional State Department advice, both Clinton and George W. Bush, in particular, understood that only when Israel truly feels secure in its relationship with the U.S. is it willing to take risks. This was certainly borne out during the waning days of the Clinton presidency when Prime Minister Ehud Barak made an unprecedented offer to withdraw from nearly all of the territory captured by Israel in 1967 and during the George W. Bush

presidency when Prime Minister Ariel Sharon handed over the Gaza Strip to the Palestinians—the first Israeli withdrawal from territory since the 1970s. In what was clearly a premeditated effort to

in Ramallah. As National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley observed, Bush “had a ‘gut feeling’ for leaders and how you invest in them so they will respond to you.”



PLO leader Yasser Arafat, U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross, and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak meet in the West Bank town of Ramallah, March 8, 2000, in a second attempt to regenerate the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. (AWAD AWAD/AFP/Getty Images.)

reassure Sharon that the U.S. had his back, Bush told the press that he “believe[d] that Ariel Sharon is a man of peace,” even as Sharon’s military was holding Yasser Arafat under de facto house arrest

In sharp contrast to Clinton and Bush, President Obama came into office, Ross writes, “believing that we needed to distance ourselves from Israel.” In a telling anecdote from the early days of the administration,

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Ross describes how his suggestion that Obama combine his initial trip to Cairo, where he planned to give his first major foreign policy address, with a visit to Israel, was rejected. As Ross notes, Obama wanted to advertise that “[he] was different, and the Muslims needed to see he was different.”

And different he has been. Ross explains that even though President Obama “had an instinctive commitment to Israel’s security” and “always responded to Israel’s security needs,” “[h]is instinct

You can take the man out of the peace process, but, after all those years of negotiating for peace, you cannot take the peace process out of the man.

to see the Palestinians as the victims in the conflict remained too strong” for him to contemplate an “uncritical embrace” of Israel. Thus, in 2014, when Obama urged the Israelis to see Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, also known by his nom de guerre Abu Mazen, as a viable peace partner, Obama “said nothing about what Abu Mazen had to do; the responsibility for acting was exclusively Netanyahu’s.” Moreover, when Abbas simply refused to respond to Obama’s proposal for an agreement that had not even been cleared with Israel (including a provision that Jerusalem would have two capitals for two states), Obama “gave him a pass by blaming his ‘shutdown’ on Israeli settlement policy.”

As Ross shows again and again, the State Department’s focus on trying to distance the U.S. from Israel actually disincentivized the Palestinians from making compromises for the sake of peace. But he implicitly hints at another, potentially far more troubling by-product of that policy. In the preface to the book, Ross describes a conversation among President Obama and the leaders of three of our most important allies: England, Germany, and France. Even though the agenda for the meeting didn’t include Israel, all three leaders—David Cameron, Angela Merkel, and Nicolas Sarkozy—launched into spontaneous tirades against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, calling him a liar and the obstacle to peace. One wonders if this should be taken merely as an indication of how tenuous Europe’s relations with Israel really are, or whether the comments about Netanyahu were encouraged by the leaders’ perception of the Obama administration’s own animosity toward Israel.

If there is one other message Ross wants to impart to future occupants of the White House, it is that the United States should pay more attention to the genuine interests of the Arab countries. As Ross writes, “The point is not that the Palestinians don’t matter. They do. But the hard truth is that they are not a priority for Arab leaders . . . The priorities of Arab leaders revolve around survival and security.” Ross illustrates the danger to regional stability that can result from a vacillating America with a story from the Suez Crisis. President Eisenhower strongly opposed the military action taken by Israel, Great Britain, and France after Nasser blocked the Suez Canal in 1956, arguing that the

United States “had a duty to oppose aggression.” As Ross puts it, “What damaged the United States was the perception that it would not stand by its friends.” In fact, when Lebanon’s prime minister visited the White House in 1959, he told Eisenhower that “U.S. behavior during the Suez conflict had led him to believe that America would never ‘resort to force to support friends.’”

In view of all the years Ross has toiled in the large-

Bush was “breaking the mold” in trying to empower the Palestinians while also holding them accountable for their conduct. Thus, he “offered full-throated U.S. support for the creation of a state” and told the Palestinians from the Rose Garden in a speech on June 24, 2002: “You deserve democracy and the rule of law. You deserve an open society and a thriving economy. You deserve a life of hope for your children. An end to occupation and a peaceful democratic Palestinian



Dennis Ross and U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright toast in the sukkah of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his wife, Sarah, October 1998. (Photo by Amos Ben Gershon, courtesy of the Government Press Office, Israel.)

ly barren fields of the peace process, it is notable that his book is short on policy prescriptions for the key protagonists in the conflict. In fact, notwithstanding his criticism of Obama for giving Abu Mazen a blank check, Ross says very little about what the Palestinians need to do to achieve their goal of statehood. His one real policy suggestion is directed toward Israel. Specifically, Ross writes that the Israelis

should declare that they will negotiate on borders with the Palestinians, but until it is agreed upon, they will build only in those areas that they think will be part of Israel: to the west of the security barrier and the existing Jewish neighborhoods in Jerusalem.

No doubt most Israelis would happily walk away from most of the territory captured in 1967. Many would even be willing to make some accommodations in parts of east Jerusalem (defensive barriers are now being built to isolate the Arab neighborhoods in east Jerusalem in the wake of the knife attacks). But at a time when the Palestinians seem to have abandoned any desire for a two-state solution, it is simply unrealistic for any Israeli government to halt all settlement activity in the West Bank, especially given the organic growth taking place within those communities.

But the larger problem with Ross’s suggestion is that it falls into one of the traps that he himself has just spent hundreds of pages criticizing—the notion that U.S. policy is a matter of pressuring Israel. Notably, the one president who bucked that trend was George W. Bush, for whom Ross didn’t work. As Ross notes,

state may seem distant, but America and our partners throughout the world stand ready to help . . .” But Bush also made clear such a state could only emerge if “Palestinians embrace democracy, confront corruption and firmly reject terror.” It would not come about solely as the result of territorial concessions by Israel. In other words, U.S. policy should not simply be to promote land for peace.

Despite his sober analysis of 65 years of negotiations between Arabs and Israelis and, in particular, the utter failure to achieve peace between Israel and the Palestinians since the 1967 war, Ross is not prepared to give up entirely on the peace process—though he readily acknowledges that “it would not be a game changer in the region.” Maybe you can take the man out of the peace process, but, after all those years of negotiating for peace, you cannot take the peace process out of the man. Nevertheless, Ross has written an illuminating history, and his detailed accounts of the behind-the-scenes policymaking in the halls of the White House, the Situation Room, and the prime minister’s residence make for fascinating reading for anyone with an interest in America’s policy in the Middle East. One hopes that his book will become required reading for those in the State Department and the National Security Council who are charged with making that policy.

Jay Lefkowitz is a partner at Kirkland & Ellis. He served as a domestic policy advisor to President George W. Bush and as the United States’ Special Envoy for Human Rights in North Korea.

Not by the Rivers of Babylon

BY JULIAN SINCLAIR

The talmudic tractate Ta'anit is, arguably, the most sustained body of classic Jewish thinking about the natural world and its resources. As is often the case with the rabbis, one must read between the lines. A pungent passage in Ta'anit contrasts the climate and geography of the Land of Israel with that of its neighbors and leads to reflections on the role of natural resources in Israel that still resonate.

It begins by comparing two kinds of rain: "Mist followed by heavy rain: What is its sign? A sieve. Heavy rain by light rain: What is its sign? Goat's dung." Finely ground flour falls from a sieve before the coarser flour, just as mist sometimes precedes heavy rain, and something like the reverse happens in the digestive process of goats. I'll return to the thematic significance of this bit of barnyard lore. The passage continues with the story of a 4th-century sage from the Land of Israel visiting Babylonia.

Ulla came to Bavel. He saw flying clouds [*porchot*]. He said to the people "clear away my things, because the rain is about to come." In the end, the rain did not come. Ulla said, "Just as the Babylonians are liars, so too their rains are liars." Ulla arrived in Bavel. He saw that a basket of dates sold there for a *zuz*. He said to himself, "A basket of honey sells here for only a *zuz* and the Babylonians don't spend their time studying Torah?" That night the dates pained him. He said to himself, "A basketful of knives sells for a *zuz* and the Babylonians still manage to spend some time studying Torah?" (Babylonian Talmud, Ta'anit, 9b)

In the Land of Israel, clouds of this sort invariably portend rain. But here in Babylonia, *porchot* drift across the sky and no rain follows. Disturbed by this irregularity, Ulla lashes out at the Babylonians: Neither their natural signs nor their utterances are trustworthy. Babylon is surprising in other ways: Since food is so cheap, he wonders why they don't spend all their time studying Torah. When, later that night, the dates begin to feel like knives in his stomach, Ulla reconsiders his criticism. (Rashi explains here that during the night Ulla suffered from diarrhea.) Abundance does not translate automatically into leisure. A whole chain of contingencies stands between natural resources and their metabolization into happiness, health, or spiritual progress.

We can now see the literary point of prefacing Ulla's story with talk of sifted flour and goat defecation. The passage is actually about the way in which different societies digest raw blessings and turn those inputs into real value. Ulla passes harsh judgment on the Babylonian Jews for their inability to convert material prosperity into Torah learning, before realizing that the societal digestion of material blessings in Babylon is quite different from what he was used to in Israel. Given their affluence, it's a wonder that the Babylonian Jews have a spiritual life at all.

The passage continues with an argument between two sages that looks like an exercise in bad climate science:

Rabbi Eliezer says, "The whole world drinks (*i.e.*, receives rain) from the oceans, as it says, 'and a mist rose from the land and watered the face of the whole earth'" (Gen. 2:6). Rabbi Yehoshua said to him, "But the water from the oceans is salty!" Rabbi Eliezer answered, "The waters are sweetened in the clouds." Rabbi Yehoshua said: "The world drinks from the upper waters, as it says, 'the land . . . drinks up its water from the rains of heaven.'" (Deut. 11:11) So what do I learn from "and a mist rose from the land"? It teaches that the clouds grow, rise up to the sky, open their mouths like a flask, and receive rainwater (from the heavens).



A stormy winter day in Israel. (Photo by Hadas Parush/Flash90.)

Although his explanation for the sweetness of rainfall is faulty (the salt is left in the sea, not in the clouds), Rabbi Eliezer's view approximates our understanding of the hydrological cycle. Rabbi Yehoshua's opinion appears, from a modern perspective, to be simply mistaken. However, I am not sure that their argument is primarily (or even secondarily) about weather science.

Let us examine the biblical passages from which Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua pluck their prooftexts. Rabbi Eliezer's passage from Genesis reads as follows:

And there were not yet any plants on the earth, and the grasses of the fields had not yet sprouted, for the Lord God had not yet made it rain upon the earth and there was no human to work the land. *And a cloud [eid] rose from the earth and watered the face of the whole land.* And the Lord God formed the human and

breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the human became a living soul. (Gen. 2: 5–7)

We should note first that the import of this passage is universal; it is about the creation of the world. This is the textual basis for his quasi-scientific opinion that the world is watered by sources that originate on earth rather than in the heavens. But it is also significant that Rabbi Eliezer takes as the source for his view, a verse that depicts a pre-human reality; in the absence of either rain or the human need for it, a vapor irrigated the earth.

Where Rabbi Eliezer chose a text from Genesis about the creation of the world, his colleague Rabbi Yehoshua responded with one from Deuteronomy about the promised Land of Israel in contrast to Egypt:

For the land that you are going towards to inherit is not like the Land of Egypt, which you have come from, where you planted seeds and watered them with your feet, like a vegetable garden. The land that you are going into is a land of hills and valleys; *from the rain of the heavens you shall drink water.* It is a land that the Lord your God looks out for, always; the eyes of the Lord your God are upon it from the beginning of the year until the year's end. (Deut. 11: 10–12)

For the great 13th-century medieval commentator Moses ben Nachman, known by his acronym Ramban, the Bible's comparison turns on the precariousness of material life in Israel:

Know that it is not like the land of Egypt that you can water it continuously with your feet from rivers and lakes like a vegetable garden; rather it is a land of hills and valleys. From the rain of the heavens you will drink water, *and not from any place else.* And so it is necessary that God be concerned with it always, for rain, for the Land is very thirsty and needs rain all year; and if you go against the will of God, and He does not concern himself with the land for rain, then it will be very bad.

Egypt's affluence is watered by its great rivers; in contrast, the providential gaze of God *must* be upon the Land of Israel; if it were not, then the land would quickly fall into the desolation that Ramban himself witnessed and wrote about at the end of his life.

What should a modern reader make of these ancient and medieval sources' insistence on

the special climatic conditions of the Land of Israel that supposedly make the weather uniquely sensitive to our prayers and good deeds? In a fascinating Hebrew book published in 2011, Pinchas Alpert, a professor of atmospheric physics and former head of the Porter School of Environmental Studies at Tel Aviv University, mapped the weather systems in the Northern Hemisphere for January, the middle of Israel's rainy season. Alpert discovered, to his surprise, that there is indeed something highly unusual about Israel's climate. The country is situated on a "saddle point," a point of disequilibrium between four weather systems. To the northwest there is a low-pressure system associated with rainy weather, around Europe. To the southeast, there is another low-pressure, rainy area associated with India. In between these are two high-pressure systems associated with dry weather, one to the northeast of Israel over Turkey and central Asia and one southwest around the Sahara Desert.

This is a forecaster's nightmare. Alpert discovered only one comparable weather system on earth, and it is located at a longitude 180 degrees west, over an uninhabited area of the Pacific Ocean, leading Alpert to muse, much like Ramban before him:

Maybe this is one reason why God chose this place to be the land of the Jewish people . . . here people are conscious of the vital need for rain. They do not feel security in having "enough" rain. We do not have water channels like the Nile Delta in Egypt. We are entirely dependent upon rain and it is "easy" for God to alter the delicate synoptic balance this way or that, in

accordance with the behavior of the Jewish people. In Israel, God keeps us in a permanent state of wakefulness.

Whether or not we agree with his suggestion that God manipulates the weather of Israel behind a veil of chaotic climate systems, Alpert's research is striking corroboration of the talmudic rabbis' observation that there is something uniquely precarious about our relationship to water in Israel.

An interesting parallel text from the Jerusalem Talmud elaborates on the moral and spiritual implications of a nation's sources of water:

Rabbi Hanan from Tzipori said in the name of Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachman: "Because of four things the Holy One Blessed be He 'changed His mind' and decided that the Land (of Israel) would only drink from above (and not from rivers): because of the strong; in order to disperse bad vapors; so that the high up people and the lowly should drink alike; and so that all would turn their eyes to the heavens." (Talmud Yerushalmi, Ta'anit, c.f. Midrash Bereishit Rabba, 13:9)

Here we find the rabbinic claim that social inequality and even pollution are lessened when the major natural resources come from the sky—and hence are distributed equally—rather than the earth.

It is tempting for a modern to substitute the word "oil" for "water" here. The blessing (or curse) of abundant oil can warp a whole society's path of development. Those "high up" who control the society's natural resources do not drink, as it were,

together with the poor and lowly. The deleterious consequences for education, economic innovation, women's rights, and the development of democracy are well known.

The passage in tractate Ta'anit that begins with Ulla's travels concludes with some further rabbinic reflections suggesting that life in Babylon is actually not so bad:

Rabbi Oshaya says, "You that dwell on many waters, great are your store houses." (Jeremiah: 51:13) Why are Bavel's storehouses filled with corn? Because she rests on many waters. Rav said, "Bavel is wealthy, because you can harvest there, even if there is no rain." Abbaye said, "It's better to live in a wet place than a dry one."

Where does all this praise of Babylon leave the unique quality of Israel as a land of virtuous vulnerability? There is one broad textual hint here that the message of these Babylonian sages is not so simple. For Rabbi Oshaya has dramatically decapitated the verse from Jeremiah, which is in fact part of a furious tirade excoriating the opulence of Babylon and condemning the overweening pride of her leaders, powered by their great rivers. The commentator Rashi notes this and supplies the whole verse: "O, you that dwells on many waters, abundant in treasures, *your end is come, and the measure of your greed.*"

It is unimaginable that either Rabbi Oshaya or the Talmud's editors could have quoted five complimentary words about Babylon without being fully aware that the surrounding two chapters passed damning judgment on that nation. Why then would they have chosen to ignore its context so blatantly? It seems to me to be an acknowledgment of the material conditions that made their creative work possible, while also subtly hinting at their knowledge of the darker side of the arrogance that undergirded the economic order in which they flourished.

Consciousness of water scarcity remains widespread in Israel. Children in kindergarten learn not to run the tap while brushing their teeth; we still scan the winter skies for signs of rain and scrutinize the weekly ups and downs of the Sea of Galilee's level as avidly and anxiously as some watch the stock market. The traditional religious responses to water scarcity also persist. In recent years, mass prayer rallies and public fast days have been held in response to prolonged droughts.

However, the predominant Israeli effort to overcome dependence on rainfall has relied, not on providence but on technology. (See Amy Newman Smith's article, "Water Shall Flow from Jerusalem," on page 22.) Today many countries, particularly in the Third World, suffer from acute water scarcity and benefit from solutions that Israel has developed. If technology and humility can be harnessed, then the paradoxical blessing of Israel's ancient and modern water vulnerability may be a blessing to the whole world.

Julian Sinclair is vice president for research at Energiya Global, an Israeli solar energy company. He has translated and annotated Rav Kook's Introduction to Shabbat Ha'aretz (Hazon). His new book on Jewish environmental thought is forthcoming from Maggid Press.

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Sadat in Jerusalem: Behind the Scenes

BY MENAHEM MILSON

On November 9, 1977 Egyptian President Anwar Sadat surprised the Egyptian People's Assembly and all those in attendance (including, as it happened, PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat) by setting aside his prepared text and declaring that he was "ready to travel to the ends of the earth" to protect Egyptian lives and that "Israel will be surprised to hear me say that I am willing to go to their parliament, the Knesset itself." Ten days later, on November 19, Sadat landed in Israel for his historic two-day visit.

Sixteen months before Sadat's visit, I had returned to active duty with the IDF after many years immersed in the study and teaching of Arabic literature at The Hebrew University. At the request of then-Minister of Defense Shimon Peres I became the head of the Department of Arab Affairs for the military government of Judea and Samaria.

At that time, Palestinian public life was dominated by the October 1974 resolution of the Arab Summit in Rabat, according to which the PLO was the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people everywhere. We at the Department of Arab Affairs in Judea and Samaria were keenly aware of the momentous implications of this decision, but the significance was less clear to Israel's decision makers at the time. Perhaps their failure was the innate tendency of self-proclaimed pragmatists to underestimate the importance of programmatic, ideological declarations. Or maybe it stemmed from the simple fact that so many Arab summit resolutions were never implemented.

In any case, these officials failed to reckon with the way in which the Rabat resolution confirmed and consolidated the PLO's standing in the Territories. Unsurprisingly, the PLO fiercely enforced compliance with this resolution from its headquarters in Beirut, threatening to kill any Palestinian who dared to defy it. After Sadat's speech, the Arab press in the Territories broadcast the PLO's fierce opposition to his impending visit. Yet we at the Department of Arab Affairs noticed that, despite the general impression that the entire Palestinian public in the Territories was unanimously opposed to the Sadat initiative, in reality there were many who hoped for political change and were willing to welcome his visit.

On Wednesday, November 16, 1977, I was given instructions from then-Minister of Foreign Affairs Moshe Dayan to invite several Palestinian figures from Jerusalem and the West Bank to welcome Sadat at Ben-Gurion Airport. The list I was given included a number of pro-PLO mayors who had been elected about 18 months previously. I immediately told the coordinator of government activities in the Territories who had relayed Dayan's order to me that every single person on Dayan's list would refuse the invitation. He replied that Dayan believed, to the contrary, that they would accept it. I should add here that Dayan was held by his many admirers to possess uncanny insight into the so-called "Arab mind." I did as I was told, and invited the figures on Dayan's list, including Nablus Mayor

Bassam Shak'a, Ramallah Mayor Karim Khalaf, and Hebron Mayor Fahd Qawasmeh. They all refused.

I notified the coordinator, who soon got back to me and said, "The Foreign Minister now asks that you prepare a list of people you believe will accept the invitation." In fact, I already had the list ready, because I had gone through a similar experience a few months earlier, when Dayan had held a reception for U.S. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance. Then, too, Dayan had asked me to invite a number of people from Judea and Samaria, including pro-PLO mayors, dismissing my assessment that they would not come. When they had, in fact, turned down the invitation, I was urgently asked to find alternative candidates who would accept it. I had done so, and several distinguished Palestinians attended the reception at Dayan's residence.



Menahem Milson with President Sadat as he reviews the Honor Guard at Ben-Gurion Airport before his return to Egypt, November 21, 1977. (Photo courtesy of the author.)

In both cases, when Dayan acquiesced to a list of invitees who might actually come, he added one telling restriction: I was not to include Aziz Shehadeh, a prominent lawyer from Ramallah who was known for his opposition to the PLO and his willingness to negotiate with Israel. (He was later assassinated, on December 2, 1985.) Dayan's caveat was symptomatic of his distaste for moderate Palestinians. He made it publicly known that he regarded Palestinian terrorism as a "natural" response to their condition and consequently did not really take Palestinians who openly rejected terrorism seriously—even though it required a great deal of personal courage (and strong backing from one's clan) to publicly deviate from the official PLO line.

The question of which Palestinian figures should be invited to welcome Secretary Vance, or who should meet President Sadat at the airport, may appear to involve trivial matters of protocol—and, in a sense, they

did. Yet this affair highlighted the substantial difference between two approaches to relations with the Palestinians: that of Dayan—the man who had determined Israel's policy in the Territories since the 1967 war—and the very different approach in which I believed. The principle that guided me in all my work as advisor on Arab affairs, and later as head of the Civil Administration in the West Bank, was that Israel had to encourage and protect those Palestinians who favored coexistence, whether they were pro-Jordan or proponents of Palestinian independence.

It so happened that I had yet another involvement in Sadat's visit. On the same Wednesday, November 16, 1977, a few hours after I received the instruction to prepare a list of Palestinians for Sadat's reception, I received a call from Prime Minister

Begin's military secretary, Brigadier General Ephraim Poran, who informed me that the government had chosen me to be the military aide-de-camp for the visiting president. Accordingly, I was asked to join the committee coordinating the visit, which was chaired by Poran himself and included high-ranking representatives of the relevant government ministries, among them the deputy chief of the Shin Bet (the General Security Service).

One of the most sensitive issues facing the committee was the problem of Sadat's safety, in particular during his prayer at the Al-Aqsa Mosque on Sunday, before his speech in the Knesset. When the committee met, Poran told us that, following the recommendation of the security services and the police, it had been decided to bar all wor-

shippers from the Al-Aqsa compound during Sadat's visit, except for his entourage and the heads of the Muslim Waqf, which administers the mosque, together with a small number of correspondents and TV teams. Our principal concern was, of course, that the PLO, or conceivably someone else, might make an attempt on President Sadat's life. If they were to do so, his visit to the mosque was their best opportunity. There was even a terrible precedent: In July 1951, King Abdullah I of Jordan (the great-grandfather of the present king of Jordan) had been assassinated in the Al-Aqsa Mosque by a Palestinian gunman. To compound matters, Sunday was Eid Al-Adha, the most important holiday of the Muslim year. Although I understood the security considerations, barring worshippers from the Al-Aqsa compound struck me as deeply misguided. The other committee members did not at first grasp what it would mean to let Sadat be seen on TV screens across the Arab world praying

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/mō zā' ik/

1. of or pertaining to Moses or the laws, faith, institutions, and writings attributed to him.

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at the mosque in isolation. Such a scene would in itself be a victory for those who opposed the visit.

I pointed out to my fellow committee members that one measure of the success of this event would

Although I understood the security considerations, barring worshippers from the Al-Aqsa compound struck me as deeply misguided.

be how it was covered in the media. It was extremely important, I said, that the images of Sadat's prayer at Al-Aqsa, just before his visit to the Knesset, showed him surrounded and applauded by many Palestinian



President Anwar Sadat praying at the Al-Aqsa Mosque, Jerusalem, November 20, 1977. (Photo by Miki Tzarfati, courtesy of the Government Press Office, Israel.)

Muslim worshippers. "So what do you propose, Menahem?" Poran asked jokingly, "Do you think you can train an Israeli infantry unit to pray the Muslim prayer, and we will dress them up in kaffiyehs?" "No," I answered, "I am talking about real Arab Muslim worshippers. According to our inquiries in the last few days, there are thousands of Palestinians who would be willing to come and pray with Sadat." My fellow committee members were persuaded by my argument, but the big question was what the heads of the security apparatuses would say. Both the representative of the police and the deputy chief of the Shin Bet said that, in a matter of such sensitivity, the final word would have to come from the heads of their respective organizations, Police Chief Haim Tavori and Security Agency Director Avraham Ahituv.

The decision was postponed until Friday morning. In the meantime, my staff in the Department of Arab Affairs and I continued to appraise Palestinian public opinion. Despite the threats and the incitement of the PLO, we believed that there were indeed thousands who would come to pray with Sadat if given the chance. On Friday morning, I spoke with Tavori and Ahituv, and they agreed to let Arab worshippers attend prayers at the Al-Aqsa Mosque that Sunday, as long as everyone entering the mosque was searched and the number of worshippers was limited to 1,500 people. Elated, I immediately told

my deputy at the Department of Arab Affairs Yigal Carmon to notify a number of leading figures in the Hebron and Bethlehem districts that they would be able to come with their men and pray with Sadat.

On Saturday night, when Sadat landed at the airport and approached the reception line, a number of Palestinian figures from the West Bank were waiting to shake his hand, among them the mayor of Bethlehem, Elias Freij; the mayor of Beit Jala, Farah Al-Araj; Mustafa Dudeen from the Hebron area; two leaders from Nablus; and Sheikh Muhammad Ali Al-Ja'bari, the former mayor of Hebron, who was known for his good relations with the Jordanian king. The next day, when President Sadat and his entourage arrived at the Al-Aqsa Mosque, it was full of Muslim worshippers who had arrived early in the morning in busses and trucks. When he entered the compound, a cheer went up: "Long

live the hero of peace, we shall sacrifice our blood and life for you, O Sadat." Sadat's face lit up and his companions smiled in satisfaction as press and TV cameramen captured the moment.

The next day, Sadat met with several of the Palestinian figures who had welcomed him at the airport, as well as Anwar Al-Khatib from Jerusalem and Hikmat Al-Masri from Nablus. Upon his return to Egypt, he declared: "In Jerusalem I met the real Palestinians." It was, ironically, precisely the reverse of Moshe Dayan's position.

Of course, this is all something like ancient history in Israeli-Palestinian relations by now. Over the last three-plus decades, we have seen the Oslo Accords and recurrent rounds of negotiations that have led nowhere. All the more reason, then, to recall those brave Palestinians who 38 years ago defied the PLO and welcomed Sadat at Ben-Gurion Airport.

Menahem Milson is professor of Arabic literature at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the author of Najib Mahfuz: The Novelist-Philosopher of Cairo (St. Martin's Press), and the cofounder and academic adviser of The Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI). His current project is a major online Arabic-Hebrew dictionary, available at arabdictionary.huji.ac.il.

Remembering the Scholems

BY WALTER LAQUEUR

“Der liebe Gott wohnt im Detail”: Theodor W. Adorno-Gershom Scholem Briefwechsel, 1939–1969 (God Is in the Details: The Correspondence of Theodor Adorno and Gershom Scholem, 1939–1969)

edited by Asaf Angermann

Suhrkamp Verlag, 548 pp., €39.95

Von Berlin nach Jerusalem und zurück: Gershom Scholem zwischen Israel und Deutschland (From Berlin to Jerusalem and Back: Gershom Scholem Between Israel and Germany)

by Noam Zadoff

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 448 pp., €59.99

Der rote Hiob: Das Leben des Werner Scholem (The Red Job: The Life of Werner Scholem)

by Mirjam Zadoff

Carl Hanser Verlag, 384 pp., €24.90

Werner Scholem: Eine politische Biographie (1895–1940) (Werner Scholem: A Political Biography, 1895–1940)

by Ralf Hoffrogge

UVK Universitätsverlag Konstanz, 496 pp., €24.99

Among Israeli intellectuals of his generation, Gershom Scholem had by far the greatest impact both at home and abroad. At home, Geulah Cohen, the Joan of Arc of Lehi (the so-called Stern Gang), sat at his feet, but so, in the early years, had Berl Katznelson, the guru of the Labor Party, as had seemingly every other Israeli politician, writer, and scholar. By the time I was a regular guest at his home in the 1960s and 1970s, a visit to Scholem had become part of the program for visiting European and American intellectuals who came to Jerusalem for a week or two; there should have been signposts in Rehavia similar to those in other parts of the capital, guiding visitors to his book-lined home on 28 Abarbanel Street. (He would be pleased to know that streets are now named after *him* in Israel.)

It is not easy to explain the spread of Scholem's fame. His field, the history of Kabbalah, was literally esoteric, and even if many intellectuals understood that the irrational had become inescapable in the 20th century, few had ever heard of the texts and figures Scholem worked on outside of the pages of his own books and essays, preeminently *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, let alone read them. Nonetheless, he had a deserved reputation not only as a genius who had almost single-handedly created an academic field, but also as someone who had profound things to say not just about Jewish his-

tory and Zionism, but also about philosophy, history, and politics. Moreover, given the nature of his expertise, along with his enormous self-confidence, he came to be thought of as a kind of magician. And though sometimes prickly, he liked company (and

fire until it was too late. He committed suicide on the French-Spanish border while trying to escape from Nazi-occupied France in 1940.

In 1941, Scholem dedicated *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* to his memory. For several decades

There should have been signposts in Rehavia similar to those in other parts of the capital, guiding visitors to Gershom Scholem's book-lined home.

he liked to gossip), so the stream of distinguished visitors, invited visits abroad, and academic honors continued until his death in 1982.

In the decades since then, the study of Scholem himself has become almost its own academic sub-

now, Benjamin has been at least as celebrated a figure as Scholem himself, but that we know of him at all is one of Scholem's achievements. He shares that credit with two of Benjamin's other friends, Hannah Arendt and one of the leaders of the Frankfurt

school of critical theory, Theodor Adorno, both of whom collaborated with Scholem in championing Benjamin's works to skeptical publishers. This becomes clear in the recently published correspondence between Scholem and Adorno, which nicely complements the more famous correspondence between Scholem and Arendt, published in full in Germany five years ago (reviewed in these pages by Steven E. Aschheim, "Between New York and Jerusalem," Winter 2011).

In both cases, the bulk of the correspondence is devoted to Benjamin, though, of course, the climax of the Arendt-Scholem letters was their famous public exchange over *Eichmann*

in Jerusalem. History has, I believe, largely vindicated Scholem in his criticism of Arendt's description of the Jewish councils in the camps and her application of the concept of "the banality of evil" to Eichmann (see most recently Bettina Stangneth's *Eichmann Before Jerusalem*, and Richard Wolin's review "The Banality of Evil: The Demise of a Legend," Fall 2014). Nonetheless, in re-reading the exchange, it seems to me that Scholem was wrong or unfair in two matters. Contrary to Scholem's allegations, Arendt did not turn to anti-Zionism under the influence of left-wing German-Jewish circles. She did write some foolish things at the time—for instance that the Zionists could learn from Soviet policy on



Gershom Scholem in Offenbach, Germany, 1946, identifying Hebrew manuscripts stolen by the Nazis. (Courtesy of the Gershom Scholem Archive, The National Library of Israel.)

field—just this year there were international conferences devoted to him in Jerusalem and at Indiana University. Part of this is due to his relationships with other extraordinary German-Jewish intellectuals of his generation, especially the philosopher-critic Walter Benjamin. Throughout their friendship (which Scholem chronicled in a moving memoir, *Walter Benjamin: The Story of a Friendship*), he fought an uphill battle to get Benjamin interested in Jewish culture and even to come to Israel. Preoccupied with messy love affairs, Baudelaire, his relationship with Bertolt Brecht, and Marxist theory, Benjamin didn't get much further than learning the Hebrew alphabet, nor did he realize that the world around him was on

national minorities—but, on this point, Scholem misread her. Arendt thought, rather, that Zionism had gone wrong in its nationalism just when the nationalist era had passed. She turns out to have been wrong about this, certainly outside of Europe, but it was not a Marxist (or *marxisant*) error. As for Scholem's well-known complaint that Arendt lacked *ahavat yisrael* (love of Israel), it should be noted that though her descriptions of Galician and North African Jews were unkind, even racist, such language and attitudes had been common for a long time among Jews from Western Europe and Germany with regard to their Eastern coreligionists. And the attitude was often reciprocated.

Hannah Arendt was a strange mixture of contradictory qualities: warm-hearted and ready to be of help in an emergency, but also arrogant, given to exaggerated and premature judgments and remarks. Ironically, she shared some of these qualities with Scholem. But Scholem was always far more cautious in print, and this aspect of his personality was, consequently, less public. I remember a conversation in which he impressed on me that one could say almost anything in conversation but one had to be very careful with what one wrote. (This lesson arose not from any great issue that had been discussed but comments he had made about a fellow Jewish thinker, perhaps even more famous at the time than Scholem, who, he said, had a roving eye.)

It is well-known that Scholem was hostile to the Frankfurt School, whose members he regarded as deluded, both about the explanatory power of their eclectic brand of neo-Marxism and about their iden-

tities (virtually all the members of the school were Jewish; Adorno himself had a Jewish father and an Italian mother). He once mordantly described the group as a Jewish sect and deeply resented its power over Walter Benjamin. So one is surprised by the cordiality of his exchanges with Adorno. He didn't think much of Herbert Marcuse, whose interpretations of Benjamin he once described as "insolent

institutions, as well as why he spent so much of his time travelling abroad.

Zadoff has put his finger on a real biographical issue. After all, in 1964, Scholem had famously denied that there had ever been a "German-Jewish dialogue." The idea of a true dialogue, or cultural symbiosis, had always been a chimera or, at best, a one-sided affair. The Jews had wanted to be Ger-

Walter Benjamin is at least as celebrated a figure as Scholem himself, but that we know of him at all is one of Scholem's achievements.

blabber," but in this he and Adorno were in agreement. Accounts of their relationship may need to be slightly revised.

Three other new books have recently appeared (all of them in German, though Noam Zadoff's biography first appeared in Hebrew) that shed further light on Scholem's life, personality, and family. Zadoff's book is the first (almost) full-scale biography. Its title, *Von Berlin nach Jerusalem und zurück* (From Berlin to Jerusalem and Back), is of course a play on the title of Scholem's own memoir of his youth, *From Berlin to Jerusalem*. But it also points to the thesis of the author, which is that late in life Scholem became disillusioned with Zionism and pessimistic about the future of Israel. It is this disillusionment, according to Zadoff, that explains Scholem's late-life involvement with so many German thinkers and

mans, but the Germans had never welcomed this aspiration. But if this remained Scholem's position, why did he spend so much time back in Berlin, and other European capitals, not to speak of Jung's Eranos Conferences in Switzerland? (Zadoff's account of Scholem at Eranos is one of the highlights of the book.) Did he have a late-life change of heart and give up on his (admittedly idiosyncratic) brand of political Zionism for something more like a version of Ahad Ha-Am's cultural Zionism?

In the late 1960s, when I was working on my history of Zionism, I asked George Lichtheim, a close mutual friend (and the translator of *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*), to arrange an interview with Scholem. I was curious about how he had come to make aliyah in September 1923 when very few others came to Palestine from Central Europe. The historian S.D. Goitein, his future colleague at The Hebrew University, came from Germany at that

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time, but I doubt whether there were more than a dozen others—despite the ruinous hyperinflation of the time. His answer after a few seconds of deliberation was “I wanted to put an end to the wretched traditional Jewish passion for constant travel!” But, he said, “Look how I failed—they travel now more than ever.”

Scholem’s more serious answer was that he went to Jerusalem as a young man because he was convinced that Eretz Yisrael offered a chance—the only chance—for a revival of Judaism and a rebirth of the Jewish people. A conversation ensued that lasted off and on for more than a decade. I was a permanent visiting professor at Tel Aviv at the time, but we usually spent our weekends with our daughter in Jerusalem and would regularly visit Gershom and Fanya—even she addressed him as “Scholem”—on Shabbat afternoons.

Of course, Zadoff is right that Scholem was less enthusiastic and optimistic in the 1970s than he had been as an idealistic 26-year-old immigrant; there are many reasons for this, but one of them is simply that elderly people seldom are as enthusiastic as the young. Scholem moved to Jerusalem in pursuit of a utopian dream. Dreams sometimes come true, but hardly ever in the way one anticipated. There was indeed an ingathering of exiles, and a state came into being. But it was not built by those envisaged by Herzl and the early Zionists,

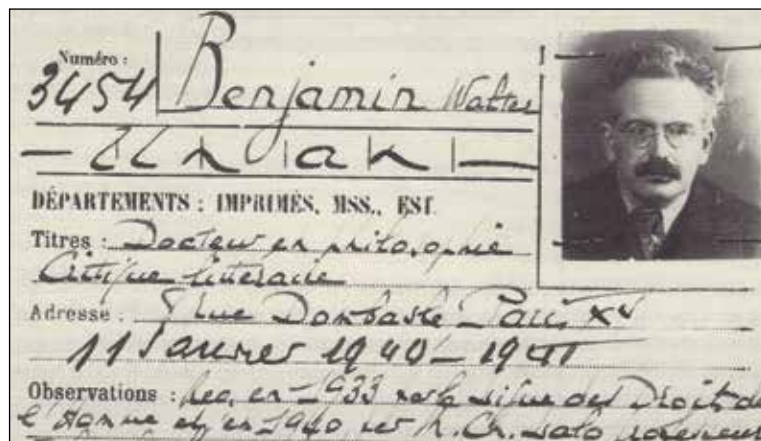
since most of European Jewry had disappeared in the Holocaust. Seen in this light, a measure of disappointment, perhaps even great disappointment, was inevitable. But I don’t think that it drove Scholem back to a Berlin that no longer existed. What Scholem had told me about the Jewish proclivity for travel also turned out to apply to him.

A great many things attracted Scholem to Europe, not least the fact that he was admired there

intellectual *Wiedergutmachung* (restitution). Nor, I think, was Scholem escaping Jerusalem or trying to recapture a Berlin he had lost. Rather, he and other postwar intellectuals found themselves trying to recreate the old European “republic of letters,” in which scholars and thinkers moved freely from one country to another. There were many reasons for this too, but one of them was technology; improved communications and travel, not to speak of peace, opened up the world. The renewal of this intellectual tradition, together with the common desire of distinguished academics to travel on their laurels, rather than a love affair with Germany, seems to me sufficient explanation for Scholem’s perambulations.

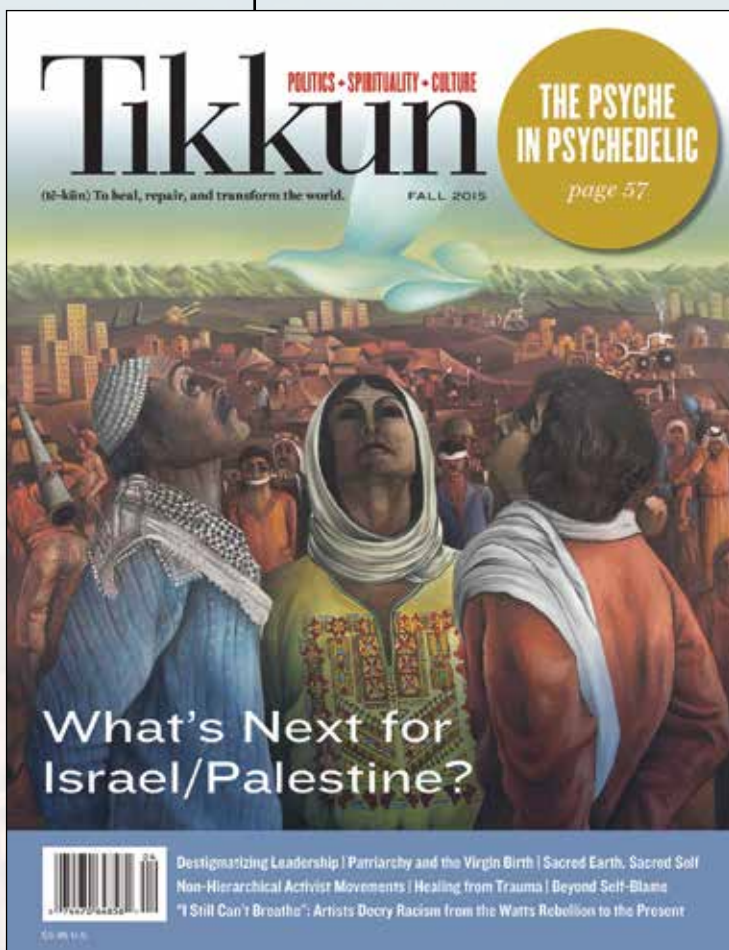
Gershom, or rather Gerhard, was the youngest of the four Scholem boys; his brother Werner was nearest to him in age. Gershom was apparently their mother Betty’s favorite (even after he emigrated, she sent his favorite German chocolate to Jerusalem). No one caused her more heartache than Werner, who is, remarkably, now the subject of two enormously detailed biographies, one by Mirjam Zadoff (Noam Zadoff’s wife) and the other by Ralf Hoffrogge.

Politics was Werner’s great passion, but his political sense and, above all, his timing were terrible. Like Gershom, he began his political life in Jung Juda, a left-wing Zionist youth movement, just before World War I. After serving in the army (Gershom had feigned madness to avoid service), Werner became one of the leaders of the German communists in the early 1920s, but he quarreled with the Stalinists and



Walter Benjamin’s library card, Paris, 1940. (From the *Bibliothèque Nationale*.)

as one of the giants of the prewar intellectual generation. Jürgen Habermas, in whose house near Munich leading intellectuals often met when they came to Germany, describes how Adorno, Marcuse, and other leading thinkers not known for excessive modesty fell silent in Scholem’s presence. Scholem was, of course, flattered. Who would not have been? But this was genuine respect, not just



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Perseverance and Hope by Sliman Mansour

became a Party outcast. In the 1930s he was, nonetheless, imprisoned by the Nazi regime as a communist, and, despite his family's best efforts (after all, they argued, he had been expelled from the Party), he remained in prison and thus was not able to leave Germany with the rest of the family. He was murdered in Buchenwald, perhaps as the result of a denunciation by Communist fellow inmates, though of course his chances of survival were slim in any case.

Years ago, a strange, unpublished manuscript was given to me to assess. A poorly written and unlikely narrative entitled *The Daughters of the General*, it was the story of a young Jewish communist who had an affair with the daughter of a German general. The communist was working for the Soviet secret service, or the Cheka as it was then called, and induced the girl to obtain secret information from her father. The book had been written by the leader of one of the communist splinter groups of the time. Although none of it seemed very plausible, the young Jewish communist seducer sounded very much like Werner Scholem. Of course, I thought of asking Gershom, but refrained, since I doubted that he knew and, in any case, probably would not have told me if he did.

Some years ago the truth came out—the strange novel was not pure invention. The general was Kurt von Hammerstein-Equord, head of the Reichswehr, the German army in pre-Hitlerian days. His daughters were communists, and Werner Scholem had indeed had an affair with one of them, Marie-Louise, when they were studying law at the University of Berlin together. However, the real Soviet spy had been another young Jewish

communist named Leon Roth, originally a member of the Poalei Zion Marxist-Zionist movement. Marie-Louise was his spy, and he did obtain valuable information from her.

Scholem and other postwar intellectuals found themselves trying to recreate the old European “republic of letters,” in which scholars and thinkers moved freely from one country to another.

In February 1933, Hitler made a speech in the general's apartment in which he told the assembled top brass about his war plans. Marie-Louise got a detailed account of the speech to Roth. Soon after, Roth was called to Moscow, but his intelligence won him no honors. Instead, like many other agents, he was shot. Stalin, needless to say, ignored the information.

After Scholem's letters with his mother were published, I found out that he had, in fact, known about his brother's affair. In a long letter from Italy in 1930s (in which she called Werner a “giant ass”), Betty told him the whole story. Had he told me, I could perhaps by strange coincidence have filled him in on a point or two. Some time after the war, at a London bus station, I ran into an old classmate

named Gebhard. To cut a long story very short, he was the first husband of Werner Scholem's daughter Renee. They too had been communists, members of a front organization called Free German Youth in London, and the party demands wrecked their marriage. (Renee eventually became an important executive at the BBC.)

As for Marie-Louise, it turned out that she was given the benefit of the doubt by the Gestapo, who decided that she had been the innocent victim of an intrigue. She survived the Nazi regime and became a lawyer in communist East Germany. One of her sons defected to West Germany. The awful novel I had read was finally published a few years ago in Berlin, but its story has inspired other, perhaps better, ones.

Gershom Scholem was an utterly unique individual if any one ever was, but his family exemplified much of the 20th-century German-Jewish experience (symbiosis or no symbiosis). I do not claim to understand him better than present or future historians because I sat in his house and drank Fanya's coffee, but I do hear his voice again in these new and recent volumes, especially in his voluminous, sparkling correspondence.

Walter Laqueur was for many years head of the Institute of Contemporary History and Wiener Library in London, chairman of the International Research Council of the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C., and university professor at Georgetown University. He is the author, most recently, of Optimism in Politics: Reflections on Contemporary History (Transaction Publishers).

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Your Time Is Up: Jabotinsky at the Sixth Zionist Congress

BY VLADIMIR JABOTINSKY, EDITED BY BRIAN HOROWITZ AND LEONID KATSI

Vladimir Jabotinsky wrote his *Story of My Life* in Hebrew and published it in Tel Aviv in 1936. A Russian version has long been available, but it has never before appeared in English. Our rendition of the following excerpt is based on the rough draft of an English translation of the original Hebrew or Yiddish or Russian (we just don't know). Professor Leonid Katsis discovered the rough draft almost by accident in 2010 in the archives of the Jabotinsky Institute in Tel Aviv. At the time, he was looking for proof that Jabotinsky had in fact participated in the publication of *Osvobozhdenie* (*Liberation*), the journal of the Russian Social Democrats in the early years of the 20th century. The newly rediscovered draft, annotated and corrected by Jabotinsky himself, confirms that he did.

Unfortunately, there is no indication of when the translation was undertaken, who was responsible for it, or whether there were ever any plans to publish it. Given Jabotinsky's own direct involvement in its preparation, however, it is obviously the best available foundation for an English version of *Story of My Life*. We wish to express our gratitude to Zé'ev Jabotinsky for giving us the opportunity to make his grandfather's autobiography available in this way, and for the first time, to English-speaking readers.

To what degree Jabotinsky told a true life story is hard to determine. In his *Zionism and the Fin de Siècle: Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism* from Nordau to Jabotinsky, Professor Michael Stanislawski has characterized it as "a brilliant, but highly fictionalized, self-fashioning." But Hillel Halkin, in his recent biography of Jabotinsky, described his memoirs more sympathetically as "a sincere if artful attempt to describe times and episodes in his life as he recalled them."

Jabotinsky's narrative begins with a colorful account of his upbringing in Odessa and his education in Italy. While he portrays himself as having been a Zionist practically from birth, his evolution into a Jewish nationalist was probably more gradual than his autobiography indicates. He was certainly a Zionist by the time he attended the Sixth Zionist Congress as the representative of a group of Odessa businessmen.

The congress took place in August 1903, when memories of the murderous pogrom in Kishinev were still fresh. The need to provide a refuge for the Russian Jews threatened by more such pogroms was very much on Theodor Herzl's mind when he famously called on the delegates to authorize an investigation of the territory that the British government was prepared to offer the Zionists in East Africa. Jabotinsky, who had seen the devastation in Kishinev himself and participated in relief efforts, did not share Herzl's

sense of urgency. Jabotinsky seems to have defended Herzl against some of his more moralistic critics, but he joined other Russian Zionists in opposing the Uganda proposal. Historians disagree about the accuracy of Jabotinsky's account of his experience at the congress, but no one doubts that it grants insight into the mind of the leader who published it in 1936, at a time when he had abandoned the organization that Herzl had founded but still sought to lead the Zionist movement.

A very amusing comedy could be written about my adventures at the congress. First of all, I was not entitled to participate in it, as I was almost a year and a half too young with respect to the legal age for a delegate, and I do not remember who



I came toward them and asked, "I hope I am not intruding?" Weizmann answered: "You are"—and I went away.

I tried to ascend the podium of the congress and to speak precisely on a burning question: Some months before that, Herzl had gone to Russia and talked with the minister of the interior, Plehve; the same Plehve whom we considered the instigator of the Kishinev pogrom. A passionate discussion broke out among the Zionist circles in Russia—whether it is admissible or forbidden to conduct negotiations with a monster such as him. True, both sides had agreed not to touch on this dangerous subject from the tribune of the congress, and I also knew it. Nevertheless, I decided that the interdiction did not apply to me because my experience—the experience of a journalist in Russia, skilled in the art of writing on a risky question without irritating the censor—would help me on this occasion, too, to steer clear of the reefs.

members of the Executive Committee and were so busy
(a) meetings* inside. I was introduced to a thin and
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izman*, and I was told that he was the leader of the
immediately* that my place was also in the opposition,
now yet why (the reason). So*, when I saw that young
group of friends* his friends* around a table in a cafe,
ation full of impetuosity*, I came* (me suis approché)
/don't disturb you/ /Do I disturb you? / (174 2)
: "(I-hope-I-am-not)* intruding*?" - Weizman
do", - and I went away.
the (pulpit, rostrum, platform, floor, planks)* of
speak* precisely on a 'burning' question: Some months

Vladimir Jabotinsky, 1910. Above: part of an edited page from *Story of My Life*. (Courtesy of the Jabotinsky Institute in Israel.)

the friendly false witnesses were who attested to my being twenty-four years old; my face was that of a boy, and the official in charge of the delegates' cards did not want to accept me until I brought the witnesses. After that I loitered by myself in the corridors of the casino; I did not know anybody except those bigwigs I had seen in Kishinev, but they were members of the executive committee and were busy with secret meetings inside. I was introduced to a thin and tall young man—with a black triangular beard and a shining bald head—called Dr. Weizmann, and I was told that he was the leader of the opposition: I felt immediately that my place was also in the opposition, although I did not know yet why. So when I saw that young man sitting with a group of his friends around a table in a café, engaged in a conversation full of intensity,

My turn came when the time allotted to the speakers had already been limited to fifteen minutes, but I was not allowed even that quarter of an hour for my eloquence. I began to demonstrate that the two issues of ethics and tactics ought not to be confused. The delegates in the corner of the opposition sensed immediately what was in the mind of that young man, unknown to everybody, with a black head of hair, speaking a polished Russian as if he were reciting a poem at a *gymnasium* examination, and began to stir and to shout: "Enough! No more!" Panic broke out in the hall. Herzl himself, who was busy in the adjoining room, heard the noise, came out hurriedly to the tribune, and asked of one of the delegates, "What is it, what does he say?" It so happened that delegate was the same Dr. Weizmann, and he replied briefly and

emphatically: “Quatsch” (“Nonsense”). At that, Herzl came toward me from behind the podium and said: “Ihre Zeit ist um” (“Your time is up”), and these were the first words and the last I ever had the privilege to hear from him. Dr. Friedman, one

could I have known whether there was a danger of a split in the movement. I did not know my people, I saw my delegates for the first time, and I did not yet have time to approach any of them; and the great majority of them, among these many who, like

which it began simply could not be compared to it. In spite of the split, the tears, and the indignation, some deeper inner cohesion between the “Neinsager” and the “Jasager” [“the yes sayers”] came about. Perhaps they learned to have more respect for one another or for the movement than they had before; and it seems to me the movement as a whole also attained greater elevation on that day, when the delegates of the people mourned their first political victory. I am sure that Chamberlain, the author of the Uganda proposal, and Balfour and many more statesmen in England and in other countries, only on that day realized what Zionism meant, and that the same is true also of many veterans of the movement.

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of the close associates of the leader, emphasized these words with the outrageous bluntness of his native Prussian: “Gehen Sie herunter, sonst werden Sie heruntergeschleppt” (“Come down or else you will be hauled down”). I came down without finishing the defense unwanted by the man in whose defense I had taken the floor.

I realized that my task in that congress was to keep silent and to observe, and that is what I did. I found a lot of things to observe there. The Sixth Congress, the last in Herzl’s life, was perhaps the first congress of adult Zionism. The name of that examination of maturity is known as Uganda. I was one of the minority that voted against Uganda and, together with the rest of the “Neinsagers” [“the no sayers”], walked out of the hall. I wondered myself at the motive hidden deep within my soul that prompted me to vote against, in spite of what I had told my electors. I had no romantic love for Eretz Yisrael then—I am not sure that I have it now—nor

myself, came from Russia, raised their hand to vote “for.” Nobody tried to persuade me to vote as I did. Herzl made a colossal impression on me—this word is no exaggeration, no other description would fit: colossal—I am not one of those who will easily bow to a personality. In general I do not remember, out of all the experiences I have had in my life, one man who made any impression on me whatsoever either before Herzl or after him. I felt that truly there stands before me a man of destiny, a prophet and leader by the grace of God, deserving to be followed even through error and confusion. And even today it seems to me that I hear his voice ringing in my ears, as he swore to all of us, “Im eshkachekh Yerushalayim. . . .” [“If I forget thee, o Jerusalem”]. I believe his oath; everyone believed. Yet still I voted against him, but I do not know why: “just so”—that same “because” that is stronger than a thousand reasons.

It is a strange thing: I felt that, after that vote, the congress reached such a height that the level at

Vladimir Jabotinsky’s *Story of My Life*, edited by Brian Horowitz and Leonid Katsis will be published in December 2015 by Wayne State University Press.

Brian Horowitz is the Sizeler Family Chair Professor of Jewish Studies at Tulane University. He is the author of *Empire Jews: Jewish Nationalism and Acculturation in 19th- and Early 20th-Century Russia* (Slavica Publishers) and *Jewish Philanthropy and Enlightenment in Late-Tsarist Russia* (University of Washington Press).

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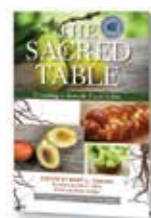


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Robert Capa's Road to Jerusalem

BY STUART SCHOFFMAN

Robert Capa: Photographer of Life

curated by Raz Samira

Tel Aviv Museum of Art, February 19 to October 10, 2015

Capa in Color

edited by Cynthia Young

DelMonico Books/International Center of Photography,

208 pp., \$60

When David Ben-Gurion proclaimed the establishment of Israel on May 14, 1948, at the old Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Robert Capa was there. The world's most famous photojournalist had covered the Spanish Civil War, the Allied conquest of North Africa and Italy, the invasion of Normandy, and the liberation of Paris. He had hobnobbed with Hemingway, romanced Ingrid Bergman, and toured Stalin's Russia with John Steinbeck. Now he was in the Jewish homeland for the first time. His striking image of the state's founding moment was recently shown in the postmodern wing of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, one of the 40-plus prints in *Robert Capa: Photographer of Life* (*Tzalam shel ha-chayim* in Hebrew).

The show's English title is a fine pun, since Capa's main venue was *Life* magazine, which in 1937 made his "Falling Soldier" picture an anti-fascist emblem of the Spanish Civil War. He was only 23. A decade later, Capa recalled in a radio interview how he had just reached out of a trench and clicked the shutter without looking and two months later discovered he was famous. In his thorough, unauthorized biography *Blood and Champagne: The Life and Times of Robert Capa* (2002), the British popular historian Alex Kershaw challenged that version, suggesting that Capa had staged soldiers in action during a lull in the fighting, attracting an actual enemy sniper. Wall text alongside the disputed photo at the Tel Aviv show remarked that, "It might be that the secret of the photograph's magic—depicting that moment between life and death—and of the myth surrounding it, lies in the inability to reach a decisive answer." The secret of the photograph might also be said of the photographer, who lived to the fullest, courted death, and created a heroic image of himself.

Here, then, is Robert Capa's Ben-Gurion, standing before the microphones under a big photo of big-bearded Theodor Herzl and framed in the foreground by the profile of a similarly bearded Orthodox Jew, slightly out of focus, larger than either Herzl or the speaker. Israeli museum-goers were surely prone (as perhaps intended by the show's skillful curator, Raz Samira) to read the image of the State's inception as ironic, a prescient caution about religion and politics. I'm more inclined to read the picture as romantic, a hint of Capa's bond with another Budapest-born

Jewish artist, the secular playwright who embraced all Jews, bearded and otherwise, in a dream of return. What Capa had in mind is another question.

He preferred to keep things ambiguous, to make

be ruined by a *Life* darkroom technician in London who accidentally melted the film emulsions under deadline pressure. *Life* published the few salvageable negatives, including the iconic image of a lone

He was a womanizer, a heavy drinker, and a compulsive gambler who consistently lost his shirt everywhere from poker games at the front lines to European casinos.

his life a legend. By all accounts, his own not least, he was a womanizer, a heavy drinker, and a compulsive gambler who consistently lost his shirt everywhere from poker games at the front lines to European casinos. Capa relished the persona of a Hungarian gypsy, and his exploits, including the wily acquisition of passports and whiskey, occupy much of his witty World War II memoir *Slightly Out of Focus*, published in 1947 and still in print. A *New York Times* reviewer extolled the pictures but carped that "nothing is duller

soldier edging through the water toward Omaha Beach. "Immense excitement of moment made Photographer Capa move his camera and blur picture," read the caption, shifting the blame. Capa resented the implication that he was less than steady under fire. "If your pictures aren't good enough, you're not close enough," he used to say.

"Despite all his inventions and postures, Capa has, somewhere at his center, a reality," wrote John Hersey in 1947, in his article "The Man Who Invented Himself," a subtle review of the memoir for a short-lived literary magazine. Capa, wrote Hersey, "has the intuition of a gambler . . . His courage is partly his apprehension of the odds, and partly innate." Eventually the odds caught up with him. He stepped on a mine in Vietnam on May 25, 1954 and became the first American journalist to die in Indochina. He was 40 years old.

Also at Capa's center was his Jewish identity, be it ever so blurry. The son of middle-class dressmakers, he was born Endre Friedmann and fled fascist Hungary in 1931 for Berlin. A year later he published photographs of a fiery Leon Trotsky orating in Copenhagen. The most dramatic of these was in the Tel Aviv show, hanging alongside the Ben-Gurion picture and an image of Menachem Begin, his back to the camera, captivating a Tel Aviv crowd in 1950.

In 1933 he moved to Paris, called himself André, and met a young Polish-German Jewish emigrée named Gerta Pohorylle (she worked under the name Gerda Taro), who became the

great love of his life. Together they took pictures and invented a mysterious, dashing photographer named Robert Capa who charged high prices for his brilliant work. "Money poured in," wrote Hersey. "The association was happy, for Capa loved Gerda, Gerda loved Andrei, Andrei loved Capa, and Capa loved Capa." Together, they covered the Civil War in Spain, where Gerda was killed in 1937.

Ten years later, Capa was plugging his book on



David Ben-Gurion at the ceremony of the declaration of the State of Israel, May 14, 1948. (Photo by Robert Capa, collection of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art. Photo: Elad Sarig.)

to read about than another man's hangover." Capa had begun writing autobiographical sketches in Sun Valley, Idaho, in 1941, under the tutelage of Hemingway. "Writing the truth being obviously so difficult," read Capa's disclaimer on the flap of the first edition, "I have in the interest of it allowed myself to go sometimes slightly beyond and slightly this side of it."

The title *Slightly Out of Focus* alludes to the fate of his D-Day pictures, shot under heavy fire, only to

the *Hi! Jinx* radio show in New York. Apart from being the only known recording of Capa's Hungarian lilt—"a musical deformation of speech in all languages," in the words of the writer Irwin Shaw, "dubbed 'Capanese' by his friends"—the interview sheds rare light on Capa's Jewish identity. (Shaw himself was born Shamforoff in the Bronx in 1913, the same year as Capa.) Asked about the Hersey article and the origin of "Robert Capa," he bristled:

A little bit it is John Hersey who invented the man who invented himself, or something like that. There are so many inventions going around about me . . . It's kind of a corny kind of story, because sure enough, I had a name which was a little bit different from Bob Capa, that was long time ago in Paris, around 1934, 1935, and that real name of mine was not too good, you know . . . I couldn't get assignment any more . . . I needed a new name very badly.

"What was your old name?" asked his interviewer, Jinx Falkenburg. "Oh," replied Capa, "it's very embarrassing to say something there, it began with Endre, and then it was Friedmann, the two of them hang together, and let's discard it for the minute."

Embarrassed or not, in his memoir's opening chapter Capa describes himself as "born deeply covered by Jewish grandfathers on every side" and refers to his mother's "big and loving Jewish heart." Later on, he begins his chapter on D-Day with an odd Jewish anecdote:

Once a year, usually sometime in April, every self-respecting Jewish family celebrates Passover, the Jewish Thanksgiving . . . When dinner is irrevocably over, father loosens his belt and lights a five-cent cigar. At this crucial moment the youngest of the sons—I have been doing it for years—steps up and addresses his father in solemn Hebrew. He asks, "What makes this day different from all other days?" Then father, with great relish and gusto, tells the story of how, many thousands of years ago in Egypt, the angel of destruction passed over the firstborn sons of the Chosen People, and how, afterwards, General Moses led them across the Red Sea without getting their feet wet. The Gentiles and Jews who crossed the English Channel on the sixth of June in the year 1944, landing with very wet feet on the beach in Normandy called "Easy Red," ought to have—once a year, on that date, a Crossover day. Their children, after finishing a couple of cans of C-rations, would ask their father, "What makes this day different from all other days?"

Among other inaccuracies, Capa was not the youngest in his family—that was Cornell Capa, who adopted his brother's invented surname and cultivated his legacy for more than half a century. All the same, it is interesting that Capa chose to frame the end of World War II in terms of Jewish memory and redemption.

In June 1945, a month after the Allies had accepted Germany's surrender, Capa and Irwin Shaw were in the lobby of the Ritz Hotel in Paris when Ingrid Bergman walked into their lives. They wrote a note to the glamorous star of *Casablanca* and *Gaslight*,

jointly inviting her to dinner. She was smitten with Capa, and they spent weeks together in Europe that summer before she returned to her husband in California. Capa went to Berlin to photograph the first postwar Rosh Hashanah for *Life*, and then she persuaded him to come to Hollywood. When he landed in town in December 1945, she was starring



John Steinbeck and Robert Capa at Stockholm airport before a flight to Moscow, 1947. (Photo courtesy of LIFE Picture Service. © Collection Capa/Magnum Photos.)



Children's Dance Fountain, Stalingrad, USSR, 1947. (© Robert Capa, © International Center of Photography/Magnum Photos.)

in Alfred Hitchcock's anti-Nazi thriller *Notorious*, and Capa shot some stills on the set.

He got a job with a production company but quickly felt confined. "After more than a decade of war," writes biographer Alex Kershaw, "Capa had started to exhibit many of the symptoms of post-

traumatic stress disorder: restlessness, heavy drinking, irritability, depression, survivor's guilt, lack of direction and barely concealed nihilism." He also unwisely played poker with John Huston, Howard Hawks, and Humphrey Bogart. He and Bergman continued their affair, and he even took her to meet his mother Julia. Bergman talked of divorcing her husband, a Swedish neurosurgeon, to marry Capa, but he could not commit, or settle down, and they finally parted in the spring of 1947.

"Nineteen forty-seven was a turning point in Capa's life," writes curator Cynthia Young in her handsome new volume, *Capa in Color*. "He founded Magnum, the photographers cooperative agency he had dreamed of since 1938, and traveled to the Soviet Union." Capa and his partners in Magnum—notably Henri Cartier-Bresson and the Polish-Jewish David Seymour, known as "Chim"—now owned their own negatives, retaining copyright of their pictures. It was an act of radical defiance against *Time-Life* and its corporate culture.

Politically, Capa was a dedicated enemy of fascism, not a communist, though his work had appeared in a communist paper. He was keen to visit Russia, but had been turned down twice for a visa. Now he teamed up with John Steinbeck, respected by the Soviets for *The Grapes of Wrath*. Among the more intriguing photos in *Capa in Color* is a black-and-white snapshot of Capa and Steinbeck about to board a plane for the USSR. Steinbeck at age 45 is tall and dignified in a handsome hat, whereas Capa could pass for his kid brother, young and smug. Scores of pictures with helmet and dangling cigarette have typecast Capa as a Hollywood heart-throb, but in this shot, tripod jauntily perched on his shoulder, he seems more like Sammy Glick or Woody Allen's protean Zelig.

Steinbeck wrote a book called *A Russian Journal*, with photographs by Capa. In a story for the British weekly *Illustrated*, Steinbeck dwelt on the omnipresent statues of Stalin, and Capa's best pictures were a color shot of a young one-legged man among visitors to Red Square and a staggering black-and-white of the Children's Dance Fountain amid the devastation of Stalingrad, a photo displayed in the Tel Aviv exhibit. The *Illustrated* story ran on May 1, 1948. One week later, on assignment for that same magazine, Capa landed in Tel Aviv.

On June 21, 1948, the Hebrew daily *Al Ha-mishmar*,

the newspaper of the left-wing Hashomer Hatzair movement, published an interview with Capa by Eugen Kolb, a fellow Hungarian Jew who later became the director of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art. (In his authorized 1985 biography Richard Whelan wrote that Capa seemed to know every Hungarian

in Tel Aviv, and “through them he kept himself and his fellow journalists well supplied with black-market food and liquor.”) “War interests me,” Capa told Kolb, “but I can’t stand the sight of blood . . . I never photographed a single corpse.” This was, of course, untrue: He had shot his famous pictures of the “last man to die” in World War II, in Leipzig only three years earlier. “I am a photographer of life,” he went on to declare, and after the war “my only wish was to finally be an unemployed war correspondent.”

It was one of his patented lines. He was quoted the same way in *Illustrated* in the text accompanying his gripping pictures of the Arab-Israeli war. But “once again,” the magazine continued, “the violence of war has caught up with Robert Capa.” In late May, Capa had gone to the Negev to cover the defense of Kibbutz Negba as hundreds of Egyptian shells flew overhead. On July 3, *Illustrated* ran a photo-essay called “The Road to Jerusalem Was a Road of Death,” for which Capa had photographed soldiers in action. He also covered the laborious carving of the so-called Burma Road, a project commanded by the legendary American Colonel David “Mickey” Marcus to circumvent the siege of Jerusalem. His photo of a muscular Marcus working out on an exercise bar appeared in that issue, alongside another—taken shockingly soon thereafter—of Marcus’s funeral in Jerusalem. On June 11, Marcus was mistakenly killed near Abu Ghosh by an Israeli sentry.

Alex Kershaw calls Capa’s pictures of the War of Independence “the most lyrical and dynamic coverage of his career,” but they were virtually absent from the recent Tel Aviv show, apart from one shot of

soldiers, possibly near Latrun. Many were displayed in an important earlier retrospective at the same museum in 1988, *Robert Capa: Photographs from Israel, 1948–1950*, curated by the Israeli Magnum photographer Micha Bar-Am. As the Hebrew poet Haim Gouri commented in the catalogue to that show:

The photographs of the Israeli war recall the pictures of the Spanish Civil War: sandbags against a wall, rifle slits, someone scampering across an area under fire, volunteer units, a soldier at rest reading a newspaper in the shade of a tree, the ubiquitous stocking cap, a meal eaten against a wall pitted with bullet holes.

When Capa spoke with Eugen Kolb of *Al Ha-mishmar*, a U.N. truce was in effect. “I appreciate Tel Aviv as a great achievement, and also the *kibbutzim*—but only a few days ago did I feel what Israel is,” said Capa. “It was when I traveled on the new road to Jerusalem, and the city appeared before my eyes.” That road was the high point of his stay, he said; he was with the road builders day and night, and photographed every stage of the labor. “The picture dearest to me is an old stone cutter from Jerusalem, with beard and sidelocks, working to clear the road.”

No image fitting that description hung in the Tel Aviv show, but it appears in *Report on Israel*, the book that Capa and Irwin Shaw published in 1950. The caption reads “Stonecutters from besieged Jerusalem working on that Middle Eastern necessity—a detour,” but under its sun-baked banality is the story of refugees carving a homeland. It’s not a great photograph, but its triangulated composition rhymes

with the picture of Ben-Gurion and Herzl. The cover choice for that book shows how Capa’s cynicism melted away in Israel. Here again we find a religious Jew with a beard. The man eyes the photographer warmly, with only the faintest trace of suspicion, or amusement. He is a strong man, a builder, an “old-new” Jew wearing both *kippa* and *tzitzit*, yet he looks, at first glance, like he’s carrying a cross.

On June 21, the same day the Capa interview ran in *Al Ha-mishmar*, the ship *Altalena*, carrying weapons for the Irgun, grounded itself at midnight off a Tel Aviv beach. The following afternoon, the confrontation between the Haganah—now known as the Israeli army—and the Irgun or Etzel, the right-wing militia commanded by Menachem Begin, reached its bloody climax. Ben-Gurion had demanded that the Irgun surrender its weapons and disband in order to create a single fighting force for the new state. Although Begin wanted to avoid violence, he could not accept Ben-Gurion’s terms. Ben-Gurion ordered that the ship be shelled. The *Altalena* caught fire but luckily did not explode. Shooting broke out on the beach. And there to capture the fratricidal tragedy was the ubiquitous Robert Capa.

Capa sold his *Altalena* pictures to *Life*, which on July 12 ran two pages with the headline “JEW FIGHTS JEW IN THE HOLY LAND/Photographer records ill-fated Irgun landing.” The Irgun, opined *Life*, “chose a singular time and place” for its action, in the midst of a truce and “under the noses of U.N. observers sweating it out” at a beachfront hotel. “Meanwhile Photographer Robert Capa

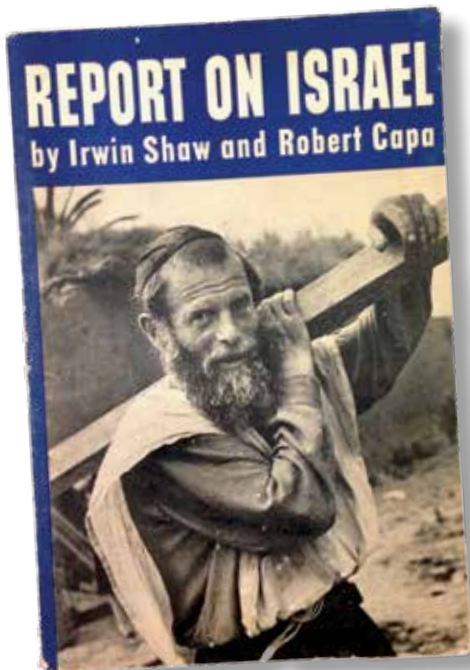


Haganah soldiers carry the coffin of Colonel David “Mickey” Marcus, Jerusalem, June 1948. (© Robert Capa, © International Center of Photography/Magnum Photos.)



Workers build the “Burma Road” between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, June 1948. (© Robert Capa, © International Center of Photography/Magnum Photos.)

took up his own position on the balcony of the hotel and photographed this remarkable blow-by-blow account.” There are five small photos as the battle is joined, and one big, climactic shot: “CREWMEN AND VOLUNTEERS TAKE TO THE WATER WHILE THEIR ILLEGAL ARMS AND AMMUNITION—REPORTEDLY ENOUGH TO SUPPLY 4,000 TROOPS—GO UP IN SMOKE.” That photograph is very similar to the one that was displayed at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art.



Report on Israel by Irwin Shaw and Robert Capa, published by Simon & Schuster, New York, 1950.

A color picture of the burning *Altalena* appears in *Capa in Color*. It is taken from the same angle, with a giant trumpet of smoke, but there are no Irgun men in the water or rescuers on paddleboards. The shrubbery casts long shadows, but there was enough light for a sharp color exposure, perhaps with the use of a tripod. The beachfront seems to have been cleared of spectators. A few boys ride away from the beach on bikes, apparently turned away by guards. It is evidently the quiet afternoon after the battle.

Capa being Capa, there's more to the story. The biographer Richard Whelan wrote that Capa “moved forward on the beach, to photograph people jumping off the blazing ship,” with bullets “whizzing around him from all directions.”

When Capa was close enough to get his pictures, he assumed a half-crouching stance with his legs well apart. All of a sudden, a bullet grazed the inside of his thigh. For one sickening moment of blind panic, before he could locate the area of pain precisely, he feared that the bullet had unsexed him. When he told the story later, he claimed that, despite the danger around him and the encumbrance of the cameras around his neck, he undid his belt on the spot and pulled down his pants, all the while spinning like a dervish from fear and pain. Everything was intact; the bullet had only grazed his thigh, leaving a bad bruise but not even breaking the skin. He told his friends that, taking this terrifyingly close call as a warning, he ran back to his hotel and left Israel on the next plane for Paris.

If he was thus traumatized, when and how did Capa take the sharply focused color picture of the ship

burning, with no men left in the water? And if he'd really been on the beach during the confrontation, why didn't he take any pictures before being grazed by the bullet? Why are all his published shots of the *Altalena* story taken from a high angle, the balcony? His other war pictures from Israel are closer, better. Capa may not have been “close enough” this time, but he was well placed to spin an entertaining yarn.

What to make of it? On one level, it's Heming-

the remains of the Warsaw Ghetto, but that at Auschwitz he “had neither tears nor words.” Capa's shot of the ghetto—a lone church looming over a vast field of rubble—was one of the strongest pictures from the Tel Aviv show. White doesn't discuss Capa in his memoir, so all we can do is imagine these two conflicted Jewish journalists on their long drive away from the camp, arguing about Zionism, which White had abandoned as a student at Harvard. “I



The Altalena burning, Tel Aviv, June 22, 1948. (© Robert Capa, © International Center of Photography/Magnum Photos.)

way with a happy ending: Jake Barnes dodges the wound. Or, perhaps it was a symptom of survivor guilt for a career built on death: the “falling soldier” and Gerda in Spain, the carnage of World War II, the slain Jews of Budapest, and now, only 11 days ago, Capa's new friend Mickey Marcus. Or dare we suggest a baptism by fire into a fellowship of Zionism, a kind of farcical, figurative *brit milah*? In an affectionate tribute to Capa, published in *Vogue* in 1982, Irwin Shaw remembers him saying, “That would be the final insult—being killed by the Jews!”

After the *Altalena*, Capa traveled to Poland with Theodore H. White, then serving as a European correspondent for the Overseas News Agency. White had grown up Orthodox in Boston and done his best to submerge his Jewish roots. In his 1978 memoir *In Search of History: A Personal Adventure*, he confided that he cried amidst



The ruins of the Warsaw Ghetto, October 1948. (© Robert Capa, © International Center of Photography/Magnum Photos.)

was never a Zionist,” Capa had told *Al Ha-mishmar*, “and I’m not one now either, but in any event I have changed my view about Israel: I am now convinced that for most of the world’s Jews there is no other solution except Israel. And those who deny this rely on reasons that are immoral. Yes, I am a friend of this land and its people.”

Following Poland, Capa returned to his native Budapest for six weeks. “Looking down on the burned-out row of hotels and the ruined bridges,” Capa wrote

Capa’s shot of the ghetto—a lone church looming over a vast field of rubble—was one of the strongest pictures from the Tel Aviv show.

in the travel magazine *Holiday*, “Budapest appeared like a beautiful woman with her teeth knocked out.” His article, reprinted in *Capa in Color*, included a long conversation with a boyhood friend named Sandor, a furrier. “As only one of twenty of Hungary’s Jews survived the war,” wrote Capa, “I was surprised to see that his name was still above the shop, and even more surprised to find him alive.” Sandor described his wartime travails in Russia and his difficult existence in communist Budapest. “I left his shop feeling sorry for both of us,” wrote Capa. “He was my age and he made me feel suddenly very old.”

He also may have made Capa feel homesick for Israel. At any rate, when Capa learned that Irwin Shaw was headed for Tel Aviv in the spring of 1949 on assignment for *The New Yorker*, he suggested they team up and get a book out of it. Gifted and prolific, Shaw had a play on Broadway, *Bury the Dead*, when he was 23. In 1946 and 1947 he published short stories in *Collier’s* and *The New Yorker* about a Jewish survivor in Tel Aviv and a British policeman in Haifa. His best-selling World War II novel *The Young Lions* (1948) focused on anti-Semitism in the American army. Shaw, too, was intrigued by the ingathering of the exiles in the new Jewish state, but, perhaps because he was born in the Bronx not Budapest, he doesn’t seem to have taken the story as personally as Capa.

They arrived in time to cover Israel’s first birthday. In Shaw’s “Letter from Tel Aviv,” published in *The New Yorker* on May 28, 1949 and retitled “Independence Day” as the first chapter of *Report on Israel*, Shaw described denizens of Tel Aviv sitting on beach chairs on the fifth of Iyar, watching “their children swim out through the pretty green water to the rusting hulk of the LST *Altalena* . . . making a plaything out of a tragic monument.” The 1949 photo of the ship and holiday crowd, shot this time from beach level, takes up a double spread at the center of the book, its largest picture, the heavy heart of Capa’s *Report on Israel*.

Shaw found Tel Aviv “unbeautiful” and noted that in Israel, “as in Italy, the men, both young and old, are more attractive than the women.” His text is larded with facile generalizations, some amusingly outmoded today, others less so:

Little hard liquor is drunk, and a drunkard is almost certain to be a visiting American. The food suffers from the residents’ general impatience with the gentler aspects of civilized life.

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The driving is ferocious . . . As one visitor said, after a drive from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, “No wonder they won the war. They will risk their lives over as little a thing as reaching a café thirty seconds ahead of the next man.”

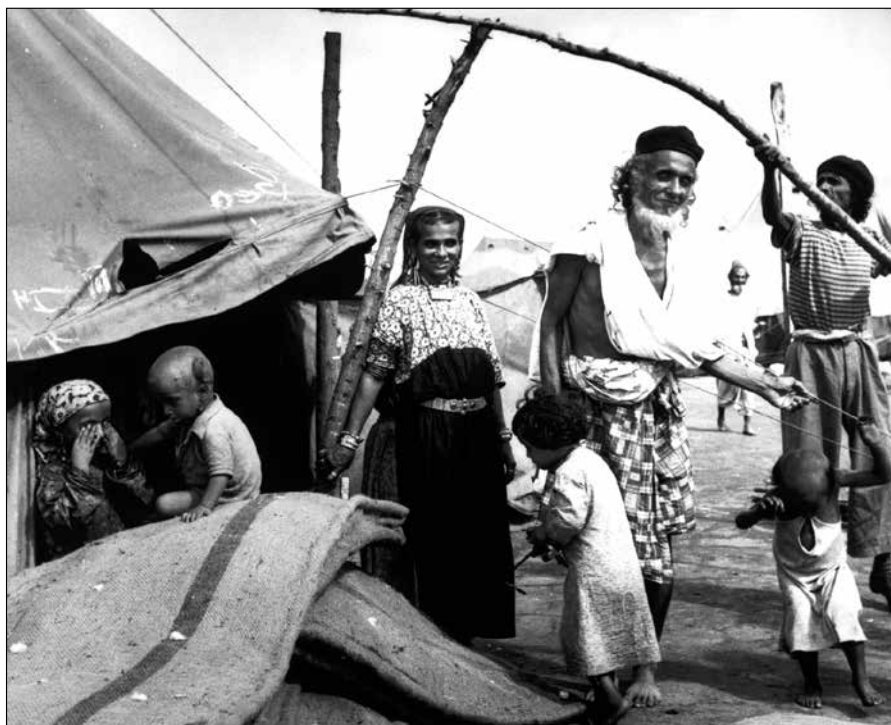
According to one’s sympathies, the people are either magnificently self-confident or unpleasantly arrogant about their abilities.

Capa, meanwhile, was busily taking evocative pictures of Israelis, sabras and immigrants, young and old, religious and secular. “Everywhere, the land is alive,” wrote Capa in an inspiring photo-essay called “Israel Reborn” that ran in *Look*. “The people are building again on the ruins left by the recent years of fighting. Behind them they have many new legends to add to the Biblical legends of old.” Capa’s account was free of irreverence, his voice a far cry from the ironic tone of *Slightly Out of Focus*. “Five of the six settlements started each week are in the Negev,” he wrote, where “the real future of Israel” lies. New immigrants are pictured boarding a truck for re-settlement in “an abandoned Arab village, where they must first rebuild the houses.” Whereas Shaw in *The New Yorker* had described an Israeli who “regards American Jewry rather disdainfully as an inexhaustibly rich mine of dollars,” Capa respectfully reported that, “the United Jewish Appeal finances the basic program of receiving, feeding, and sheltering new immigrants into Israel.”

Indeed, Capa’s third trip to Israel, in 1950, was for the UJA, which asked him to direct a short fund-raising film about immigrant absorption. He was, reportedly, a less than professional filmmaker, unnerving UJA chairman and former Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau during a shoot at a moshav named in his honor. On that same trip, however, Capa took some of his most expressive pictures of Israel. A dramatic shot of housing construction near Beersheva, reproduced in *Capa in Color*, is one of the many Capa pictures celebrating the rapid development of the country. An elegantly composed black-and-white of Yemenite *olim*, captioned by *Life* as “Tribesmen

from Arabia,” was among the half-dozen images from the *ma’abarot*, immigrant transit camps, that, for me, were the most memorable pictures in the Tel Aviv show.

The chapter on Jerusalem in *Report on Israel* originated not in *The New Yorker*, but in *Illustrated* magazine. “Jerusalem is a city of endless contention,” wrote Shaw, “and within its walls there have been few arguments that have not been settled finally by



Immigrant transit camp, ca. 1949–1950. (© Robert Capa, © International Center of Photography/Magnum Photos.)



Immigrants arrive at the Haifa Port, ca. 1949–1950. (© Robert Capa, © International Center of Photography/Magnum Photos.)

bloodshed.” The Old City, in 1949, was off limits to Capa and Shaw, of course, but Shaw recalled his 1943 visit to the “Wailing Wall” and how the old men and women touched it “inch by inch, first with their fingertips, then with their lips, giving a strange appearance of idolatry to their whispered prayers.” Shaw’s essay, republished in *Capa in Color*, still rings true, even if its conclusion is clichéd: “Peace, the carved stone letters say on the monuments; peace, chant the worshippers. But if men can have peace in Jerusalem, men can have peace anywhere on the planet.”

Capa ended his *Look* essay on a similar note. After describing a visit to President Chaim Weizmann at his home in Rehovot, Capa tells of an aged rabbi from Yemen, living nearby in an abandoned Arab house:

He scarcely lifted his face from his dog-eared Talmud as I talked to him. When I left, saying good-by with the traditional “*Shalom*,” the old rabbi looked up. He murmured: “*Shalom, shalom, ve-eyn Shalom!* Peace, peace, but there is no peace!”

An old man fitting that description turns up not in *Look* but in the Shaw-Capa book, with laughing eyes barely open and a philosophical grin.

Look ran a full-page picture of the dapper Weizmann and his young grandson seated on a patio. Weizmann’s eyes are closed and the barefoot boy wears an innocent smile. Weizmann “lives quietly,” reads Capa’s caption, “remembering a 60-year fight for a free Israel”—which, in fact, is just what it looks like. John Steinbeck remembered his friend as having been able to “photograph thought.” Do we ascribe a unique magic to Capa’s work because of his bravery, fabled charm, and tragic early death, our conveniently constructed narrative of Jewish return? His Israel pictures are, arguably, the strongest and most heartfelt of his career, but are they better than that of others? In reply, I would single out a picture from the 1988 Tel Aviv Museum catalogue of an immigrant family arriving by ship, viewing Israel for the first time. It’s a close shot, not merely because of Capa’s physical proximity to these Jews but because he might have been one of them. One is tempted to call it “Friedmann Comes Home.”

“Settling in Israel himself was increasingly on Capa’s mind,” wrote Richard Whelan, providing, as usual, no source for this intriguing claim. Be that as it may, Capa spent most of the early 1950s based in Paris. He hung out at the Longchamps racetrack with famous friends and shot colorful stories for *Holiday* about the good life in Rome, Paris, and the French resorts. (A black-and-white print of revelers at Biarritz was the only post-Israel picture at the Tel Aviv Museum show.) He skied with Shaw at Klosters, a Swiss village popular with Hollywood celebrities. “The last time I saw him,” Shaw wrote in 1982, “was at the railroad station of Klosters, where he was serenaded by the town band as he climbed aboard the train with a bottle of champagne and someone else’s wife.” Capa was on his way to a job in Japan, where he received a cable from *Life*, asking if he could replace a photographer in Vietnam whose mother had fallen ill. His pictures of French soldiers crossing a field are the last images in *Capa in Color*.

The magazine eulogized him as “the first LIFE war photographer ever killed in line of duty.” Hemingway cabled from Madrid: “He was so much alive that it is a hard long day to think of him as dead.” Lacking any formal Jewish affiliations, Capa was buried in a Quaker cemetery in northern Westchester County, New York. His gravestone gives the date of his birth in Budapest and of his death in Vietnam, and one more word, in Hebrew, “*Shalom*.”

Stuart Schoffman, a journalist and screenwriter, emigrated from Hollywood to Jerusalem in 1988. His latest translation of Hebrew fiction, *The Extra* by A.B. Yehoshua, will be published this year by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

A Harem of Translators

BY SHOSHANA OLIDORT

The Muses of Bashevis Singer

directed by Shaul Betser and Asaf Galay

Antenna Productions/Cinephil, 72 minutes, English and Hebrew, with English subtitles

Reviewing *The Collected Stories of Isaac Bashevis Singer* for *The New York Times Book Review* in 1982, Cynthia Ozick concluded by pointing out that Singer's list of translators was so long (and it would only get longer) she could not possibly name them all. As if by way of explanation Ozick remarked that "Singer has not yet found his Scott Moncrieff," referring to the preeminent translator of Marcel Proust. But, of course, Ozick knew that Singer didn't want a Scott Moncrieff. In fact, he had first come to the attention of the American literary world when Irving Howe got Saul Bellow to translate "Gimpel the Fool" for *Partisan Review* in 1953. It was an extraordinary moment in the history of American Jewish letters, but Singer, who didn't like to share the limelight, was looking for another kind of translator.

The Muses of Bashevis Singer, a new documentary directed by Israeli filmmakers Asaf Galay and Shaul Betser, is about Singer's insatiable appetite for fame and for women, and about how he brought these together to solve his translation problem. The film includes interviews with several of Singer's translators, two of his biographers (the French writer Florence Noiville and the late Yiddish scholar Janet Hadda), his proofreader and long-time mistress Doba Gerber, his Swedish publisher, a granddaughter, and a great-niece, among others. It also features footage from earlier interviews conducted with translators including Dorothea Straus, wife of Roger Straus, the chairman of Singer's publishing house, Farrar, Straus and Giroux. After their sessions, Singer would pay Straus \$71.03, saying "it's a pleasure for me to make a check out to a rich woman." Their relationship appears to have been chaste, but the film is full of accounts of Singer's notorious philandering with translators and others, the abandonment of his young son and common-law wife, as well as his marriage to a woman who left her own husband and young children in order to be with him. If this were another author one might question such a heavy emphasis on the lurid details of the artist's personal life, but Singer himself has testified that he had mixed "fiction with reality to such a degree that after a while I was bewildered myself. I didn't know what is really autobiography and what is fiction."

A quote from Singer that frames Galay and Betser's film lays out the author's approach to translation: "In my younger days I used to dream about a harem full of women; lately, I'm dreaming of a harem full of translators. If those translators could be women in addition, this would be paradise on

earth." Singer's muses were women, most of them young, who were flattered to be taken under his wing and receive his attentions. He worked closely with them, often dictating his own translations so that they were closer to typist-editors than translators. Slavishly devoted, these women—and there were many—worked tirelessly under his tutelage.

Slavishly devoted, these women—and there were many—worked tirelessly under his tutelage.

While it's impossible to verify how many were also his lovers, Janet Hadda reports having heard from more than one of Singer's translators that the author had slept "with all his translators except for me."

Two women interviewed for this film recall being approached by Singer to translate his work. As Evelyn Torton Beck recounts it, "He asked me if I wanted to be his translator—it was like a marriage proposal." Marie-Pierre Bay, who was responsible for bringing Singer to a French readership, remembers meeting the author over dinner with a group of people, at the

translations of his work be based on the English versions. While Noiville chalks this up to an innocent desire for accessibility, the Hebrew translator Bilha Rubinstein insisted on working from the Yiddish after discovering that the English translations tended to sanitize the texts. Thus, *shiksa* became "village woman." Similarly, the recurrence of the term *nekeivos* in Singer's work, generally translated as "women," loses the distinctly archaic (and misogynistic) flavor of the original.

In an interview that appeared in *The Paris Review* in 1968, Singer claimed, rather disingenuously, that since taking on the translation of his work he is able to "take care that I don't lose too much." What Singer actually did was craft translations that were deliberately unlike the originals, often in crucial ways. Though he insisted that, as someone who draws so heavily on folklore, he is a "heavy loser" in translation, the fact remains that many of the losses were engineered by Singer himself and designed to work to his advantage.

Indeed, as Hadda points out in this film, it was not for nothing that Singer was sometimes accused of betraying the Yiddish language, a theme explored by Cynthia Ozick in her satirical novella *Envy; or, Yiddish in America*. Centered around two characters who are thinly disguised versions of Singer and



Isaac Bashevis Singer with his translators. (Courtesy of the Harry Ransom Center.)

end of which he "came up to me and said: you will be my translator." In that moment, says Bay, "my whole life changed." When Bay decided to study Yiddish (many of Singer's "translators" did not know any Yiddish at all), Singer told her not to bother.

In fact, Singer insisted that all foreign-language

the Yiddish poet Jacob Glatstein, the story explores the envy inspired by the Singer character's rise to fame among his cohorts who insist that his success in English amounts to a betrayal of Yiddish.

In the case of Singer, the famous Italian saying *Traduttore, traditore* (translator, traitor) takes on

Commentary

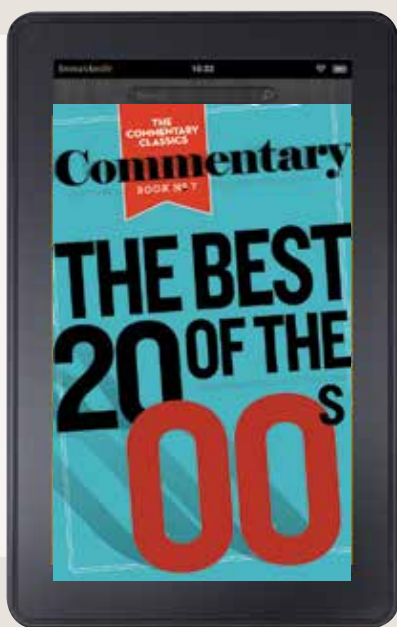
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special urgency. Here was an artist who facilitated the translation of his work and then apparently preferred the translation to his Yiddish originals. But as

The best translator, Singer once said, is “both a sage and a fool.”

Hadda points out, Singer had an eye toward English translation because he was “desperate for fame and he understood . . . nobody would become famous in Yiddish.”

Desperate for fame, hungry for women, Singer, who went on to win the Nobel Prize in 1978 and who is one of only two non-English writers (the other being Vladimir Nabokov) enshrined in the



Isaac Bashevis Singer with his wife, Alma, ca. 1960s. (Courtesy of the Harry Ransom Center.)

Library of America, refused to share his success with those who helped him achieve it. The best translator, he once said, is “both a sage and a fool.” Asked what he would want if he could have one wish, the author said he would ask God to be his translator. Maybe, though one doubts he would really want to give up his paradisiacal harem.

In her review of *The Collected Stories*, Ozick mentioned the “scandalous rumors” about Singer and his translators: “how they are half collaborators, half serfs, how they start out sunk in homage, accept paltry fees, and end disgruntled or bemused, yet transformed, having looked on Singer plain.” She imagines a Singer tale, set in Zamosc and called “Rabbi Bashevis’s Helpers,” that would tell the story of his many translators. In Galay and Betser’s film, Ozick’s wish has been realized.

Shoshana Olidort is a student in the doctoral program in comparative literature at Stanford University.

A Cipher and His Songs

BY MICHAEL WEINGRAD

Chayav meleï shir: sipuro shel Avraham Halfi (Life of Poetry: The Story of Avraham Halfi)

directed by Uri Misgav

Kastina Productions, 53 minutes, Hebrew with English subtitles

If you are a lover of Israeli music then you certainly know Avraham Halfi (1906–1980), though perhaps not by name. The late Arik Einstein's silky renderings of Halfi poems such as “*Atur mitzchekh zahav shachor*” (Your Brow Is Crowned with Black Gold), set to music by composer Yoni Rechter, are among the most popular Israeli recordings ever.

As Uri Misgav's recent documentary about the poet shows, Halfi himself was something of a puzzle. A writer of bewitching intimacy, he nevertheless refused to describe himself as a poet or read his verse in public. He called himself an actor and had a long and successful theatrical career, with a late cinematic turn in the dark, absurdist 1972 film *Floch*, written by the distinguished playwright Hanoch Levin. An inveterate ladies' man—the documentary reveals the identity of the muse of “*Atur mitzchekh*,” the wife of one of Halfi's friends—he was striking to look at though hardly conventionally handsome, with the stylized eyes and mouth of an African mask and a nose described by one of his friends as “an ad for an Idaho potato.”

A clown, a dandy, a bachelor until his seventies when he married an actress four decades his junior, Halfi remained even to those who knew him a kind of cipher. He was, says one of his fellow actors, “the man across the street, disappearing around a corner.” In his memoirs, the poet Natan Zach recalls Halfi in the 1950s spouting apocalyptic, mystical prophecies in the cafés of Tel Aviv, while in the film Zach rumbles about the surprise he and so many of Halfi's friends experienced when, after Halfi's death in 1980, they first learned that he had an adopted daughter. Halfi faced outward, a gifted comic performer, and inward, a lyric poet of resonant privacy, and it is still not entirely clear who stood, Janus-faced, between the two.

Misgav's film joins a small flood of recent documentaries that explore Israel's literary past, including Yair Qedar's *Ha-ivrim* (The Hebrews), an ambitious series about modern Hebrew writers from Chaim Nahman Bialik to Yonah Wallach, and Hagai Levi's more uneven *Ha-mekulalim* (The Accursed), which treats Wallach and other avant-garde culture heroes such as Pinchas Sadeh.

A note of nostalgia runs through these projects, whose directors tend to decry the loss of a bygone humanistic literary culture. Misgav, a journalist

and critic (the film is his first), says that in recovering Halfi's story he felt he was entering “a forgotten world, a world of poetry and art and high culture.” Speaking with me this summer, Qedar used nearly identical language in describing the impulse behind his film series: “I felt I was dealing with a world that was disappearing, a world in which literature and art were central to it, a world of high culture.” Levi ends the first episode of his film with the rueful judgment: “There are no more people like that today.”

Halfi faced outward, a gifted comic performer, and inward, a lyric poet of resonant privacy.

Yet this desire to rediscover and celebrate the culture heroes of past generations, reinterpreting them for a contemporary audience, is, I would argue, itself a clear sign of Israeli culture's continu-



Avraham Halfi. (Photograph by Yaacov Agor, courtesy of Alexander Agor.)

ing vitality. I attended the Jerusalem premieres of Qedar's new films on the novelist and literary conscience of the second aliyah, Yosef Hayyim Brenner, and the religious poet Zelda, both times along with standing room-only crowds.

The question in the case of each of these documentaries is how and to what extent film can illuminate the life and work of a writer. In the case of a novel, film-makers can always retell the story, but a successful film is often as much an excuse not to read the book as an invitation to do so. Relations between film and poetry are by nature less inherently competitive. Qedar's films especially delight in using cinematic resources—imagery and voice, music and animation—to enact the adventure of reading a poem.

Yet the documentary impulse eventually halts before the enigma of the poet's personality and the sufficiency of his or her poems. This is certainly the

Two Poems

BY AVRAHAM HALFI

At my death
I will weep for your anguish that I died.

Before my death I say,
with all tenderness I say,
that if you could weep only a little,
like the doe
I once saw shed a tear or two
and then quit the place of its weeping
and climb to a distant crag
to see the world beyond tears –

If you could—
then I too would find a great stillness
like a river becalmed between its banks
flowing going to my fate.

If I meet you
my allusions will not be
like fine birds with delicate wings.
They will be like murky words
whose darkly secret depths
will hurt you with pain.

Happy is he who hurts this night
in your honor.

How many have fallen
in their fields
in battles raging for serenity.

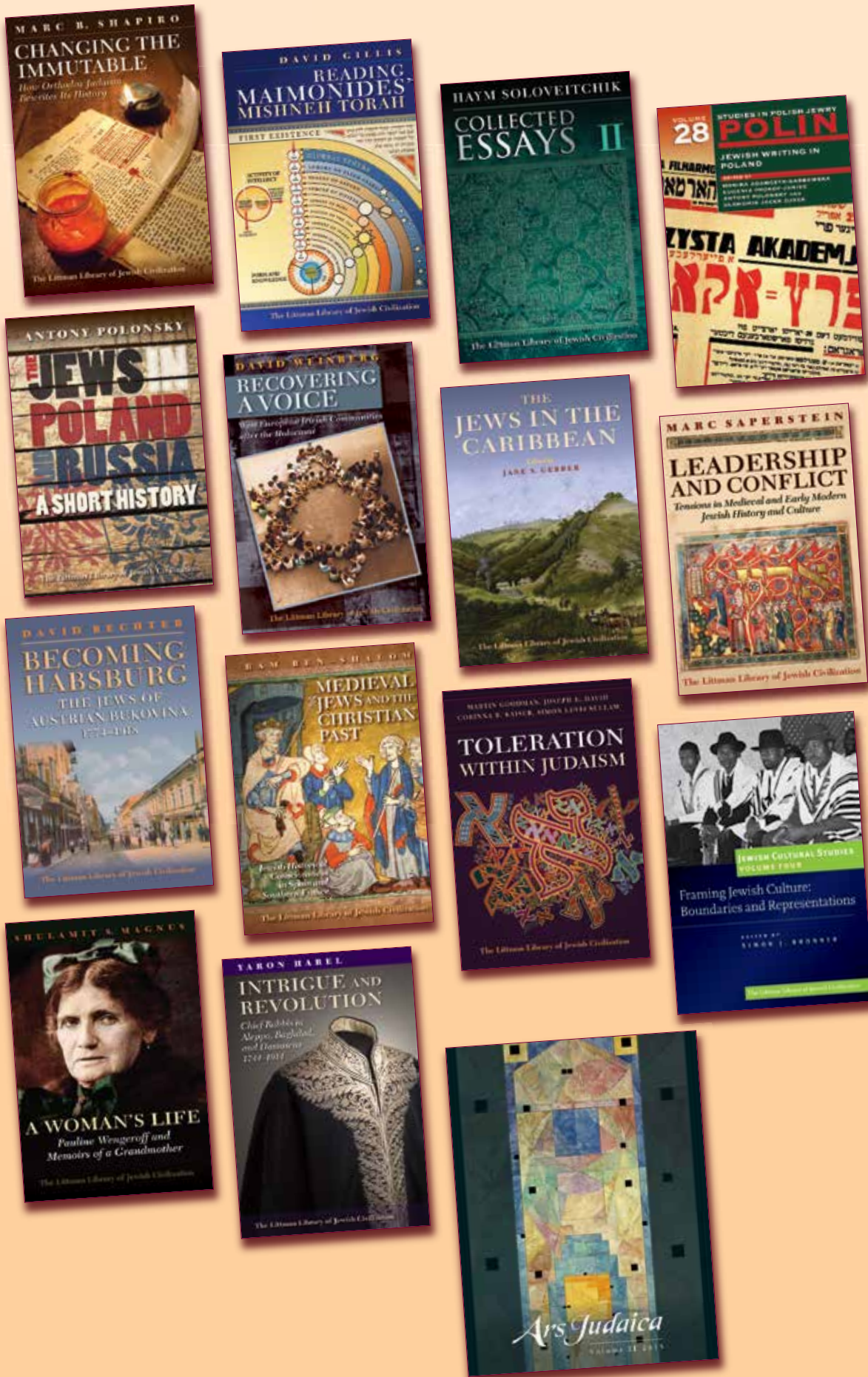
Poems also
fall in battles—
they break apart from their rhymes
like women from their jewels.
They are silent
until there comes one like you.
Until you come.

—translated by Leon Wieseltier



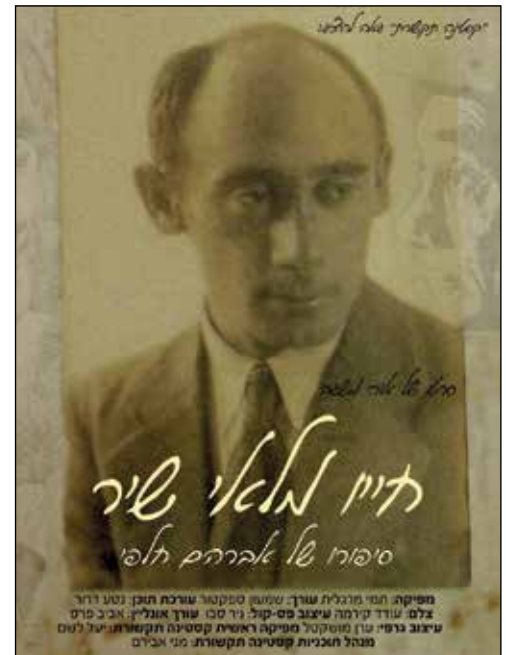
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case with Misgav's film, which amuses and entices but cannot explain Halfi or the smoldering confidences of his verse. His poems are movingly revelatory, but what they reveal are further secrets, pregnant silences, reservoirs of unspoken loss. As he writes in a poem that turns the Eden of the Bible, in which Adam and Eve "heard the voice of the Lord



Movie poster for *Chayav Melei Shir*: sipuro shel Avraham Halfi. (Courtesy of Kastina Productions.)

God going about in the garden" (Gen. 3:8), into his own anti-paradise (in my translation):

I saw how dreams darken.
 They hung like birds
 on the ends of the branches of the tree.
 Darkening.

My voice then went about in the garden—
 but was unheard amidst the rustling
 of the thirsty grass.
 And it didn't know how to say the things
 their life had breathed deep into my body.
 And so it died among its silences
 and didn't tell.

One senses that this unspoken sorrow and the atmosphere of solitude it engendered are rooted in the traumas of Halfi's early years. His mother died when he was three. As a child, he fled with his father from the Polish city of Lodz to Ukraine during World War I, barely surviving a pogrom. Yet, as the film notes, we know very little of Halfi's life before he arrived in Palestine in 1924 at the age of 18, not even his exact birthdate. Like many immigrant writers of his generation he kept the story of his life in the shadows, and it seeps up like dark water in his poems.

At one point in the film, Zach, who was himself born in Berlin, identifies Halfi as one of these "children of two motherlands," in Lea Goldberg's phrase. "It was a one-of-a-kind generation," Zach growls. "I hope it will never return."

Michael Weingrad is a professor at Portland State University and the editor and translator of Letters to America: Selected Poems of Reuven Ben-Yosef (Syracuse University Press).

A Party in Boisk

BY ABRAHAM SOCHER

On Tuesday, the fifth of Nisan, 1843, in the town of Boisk, a little way outside of Riga, the *Hevrat Aggadeta*, a society for the study of talmudic legends, had a party:

We rejoiced in the joy of the commandment [*simcha shel mitzvah*] that God had helped us to study and to teach and to finish the Aggadeta . . . We celebrated for two whole days. On Tuesday we finished . . . and we made a party, a joyous occasion and a festival day. We invited 123 guests, not counting the musicians and the 15 waiters. There were four fancy courses, and [there was so much food that] every plate had at least a little left over, so that if a man hadn't eaten in three days he would have been satisfied and full . . . Our joy was an exceedingly great one in the joyousness of the mitzvah. We poured the wine like it was water—some pouring it down their throats and others on the floor.

Then, like Chuck Berry, they decided to do it again:

On Wednesday, we began anew the study of the Aggadeta, and we took upon ourselves the obligation to learn and to teach the books of the *Ein Ya'akov*. So we made another great feast to rejoice yet again in the joy of the mitzvah. And all the people made merry with trumpets and fiddles, and the earth split with the noise. And the people who stood outside and saw our joyousness envied us the joy of the mitzvah.

This passage crossed my mind as we were wrapping up our 5th Anniversary conference and celebration at the Yeshiva University Museum a couple of months ago. A great, edifying time was had by all—and we will certainly do something like it again soon—but we did not party like it was 1843 in Boisk. Then again, who does?

I teach at a liberal arts college, and I've never seen a Bloomsday at which undergrads gloried like this in the completion of *Ulysses*. The difference, of course, is in that recurring phrase *simcha shel mitzvah*, the joy of the commandment, but the boisterous, bodily joy these Boiskers took in fulfilling the commandment to study Torah is still surprising, and that may have something to do with the Torah they chose to study. To be brief, it was the lore, not the law. In fact, it is easy to imagine that the envious people “who stood outside and saw our joyousness,” were actually talmudic elitists, who looked down upon their elation at having finished a bunch of stories. “Well, we showed them what real *simcha shel mitzvah* was,” one imagines the members of the society saying.

The work that the members of the *Hevrat Aggadeta* rejoiced in concluding and committed themselves to re-reading is a curious set of books. In the early 1500s a scholar named Ya'akov ibn Habib, who had been expelled from Spain in 1492 and then from Portugal five years later, found him-

self in the Ottoman city of Salonica with access to the great library of the famous Benveniste family and had a radical literary idea. The Babylonian Talmud had often been stripped, in one way or another, of its anecdotes, legends, myths, folk wisdom, jokes, and sermons, leaving only the halakha, the law unadorned. This is what Rabbi Yitzhak Alfasi had done in his classic *Sefer ha-Halakhot*, which was the basis for all of the halakhic codes of the Middle Ages. What if one did precisely the opposite and kept only the aggada?

In her excellent, recent study of Ibn Habib, Marjorie Lehman argues that he intended his *Ein Ya'akov* (Well of Jacob) to be a source of religious faith for a community that needed it after years of forced conversions (including that of his son) and exile. Leh-

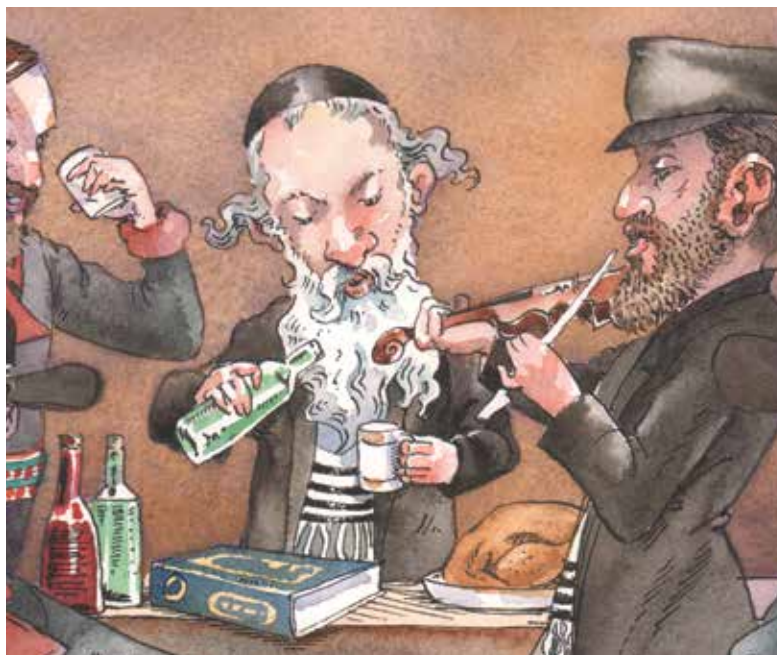


Illustration by Mark Anderson.

an makes a strong case for the project as an attempt to bolster the faith of a traumatized Sephardic community. But I wouldn't underestimate aesthetic joy as a motive for the collection.

The bitterness of exile and the bright glitter of literary beauty come together in the brilliant first lines of Ibn Habib's introduction. All of the *midrashim*, he says, are lost, “scattered” about the Talmud, where they shine like stars in a luminous firmament. The *Ein Ya'akov*, then, is a kind of literary ingathering, beginning with Rabban Gamliel waiting impatiently for sons to get back from a late-night party through everything from the famous stories of Rabbi Akiva's marriage and Elisha ben Abuya's apostasy to Pinchas ben Yair's remarkable donkey, God's comportment in the heavenly academy, and on and on, until it closes with a mishnah, in which Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi promises the righteous “310 worlds” in the afterlife, based on a fanciful reading of a verse in Proverbs.

Some 50 years after the *Hevrat Aggadeta's* big party, a young Abraham Isaac Kook took the job

as the rabbi of Boisk. He had studied at the yeshiva of Volozhin, where there was a controversy between those who thought that the curriculum should be largely devoted to the study of the Talmud in its legal, halakhic aspect and those who wanted to supplement such study with an intense regimen of spiritual self-reflection (or even castigation), known as mussar. I don't know if the *Hevrat Aggadeta* was still active in the 1890s, but in Boisk Rav Kook began writing a commentary to the *Ein Ya'akov*. Yehudah Mirsky, his leading biographer, describes it as an attempt to show that the religious life was neither entirely a matter of halakha, nor a perpetual battle with one's evil inclination, but rather “a life-long effort at self-cultivation that would bring one's morals . . . into alignment with the divine ethos” that structures the universe.

Of course, the reason that the *Ein Ya'akov* was so popular is because, whatever Ibn Habib's intentions or Rav Kook's interpretations, the carnival of its actual contents could never be contained under one tent, theological, ethical, or otherwise. Curiously, two of Rav Kook's fellow alumni from Volozhin, Chaim Nachman Bialik and Micha Yosef Berdichevsky, self-consciously compiled modern rivals to the *Ein Ya'akov*, both of which also attempted to make the aggada tell, as it were, a single story. Bialik's *Sefer Ha-Aggada* is elegant, classicizing, and compiled in the service of a secular-nationalist vision of Jewish tradition. Berdichevsky's various translations and anthologies are a raucous, Ni-

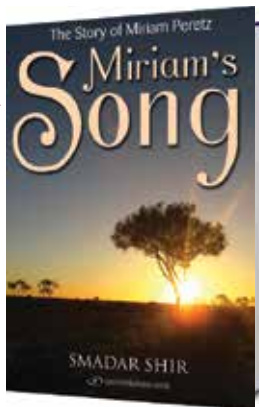
etzschean attempt to rewrite the tradition from its own suppressed sources. (In one text he recovered, creation begins with the flatulence of Leviathan.)

I ran across the description of the party in Boisk in Simha Assaf's classic collection of primary sources on the history of Jewish education years ago. Assaf, who was a generation younger than Kook, was another Lithuanian prodigy who made aliyah. He eventually sat on the first Israeli Supreme Court as its halakhic expert. I once heard a story about his arrival in Palestine, though like most of the stories of talmudic sages, it's probably apocryphal. Before Assaf went to present himself at one of the great *yeshivot*, a friend warned him not to boast that he knew “all of Shas,” that is the entire Talmud, so he told the *rosh yeshiva* that he knew “half of Shas.” “Which half?” the *rosh yeshiva* asked. “Which half do you want?” Assaf replied.

Abraham Socher is the editor of the Jewish Review of Books and professor of religion and Jewish studies at Oberlin College.



GEFEN PUBLISHING HOUSE



Miriam's Song
The Story of Miriam Peretz
By Smadar Shir

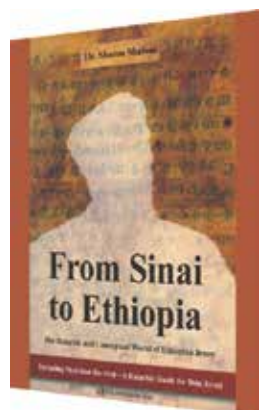
Uriel Peretz, dreamed of becoming the first Moroccan IDF Chief of Staff, but his mother sensed that he would not leave Lebanon safely. In Nov. 1998, Uriel was fatally wounded by Hezbollah terrorists. Tragically, in March 2010 her 2nd son, Eliraz Peretz, was killed in an exchange of fire in the Gaza Strip.

This is the story of here transforming her pain into education and volunteer service which began with visits to schools and military bases, talking about her sons' leadership visions.

Publication – February 2016

"Miriam's ability to continue to express her deep pain and channel it into a contribution to the education and formation of future generations, serves as an example and model of inspiration for us all."

IDF Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi at the December 2010 presentation of the Medal of Appreciation



From Sinai to Ethiopia
The Halachic & Conceptual World of Ethiopian Jewry
By Rabbi Dr. Sharon Shalom

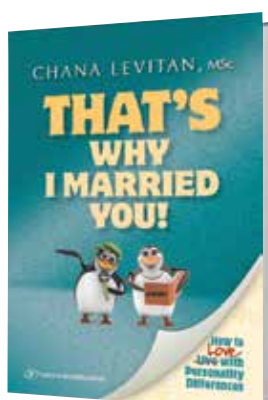
Some two thousand years ago, a group of Jews settled in Ethiopia and was for millennia cut off from the rest of world Jewry, preserving its heritage with great self sacrifice.

When Rabbi Shalom's community, the Beta Israel, ultimately made its way to Israel to rejoin its brethren in the late 20th century, a host of complex dilemmas emerged.

Rabbi Shalom's original work delves into the history, customs, and law of the Beta Israel and contrasting it with Orthodox rabbinic law.

Due out – December 2015

Rabbi Dr. Sharon Shalom received his PhD in Jewish philosophy from Bar-Ilan University and rabbinic ordination from Yeshivat Har Etzion. Today he serves as rabbi of Congregation Kadoshei Yisrael in Kiryat Gat.

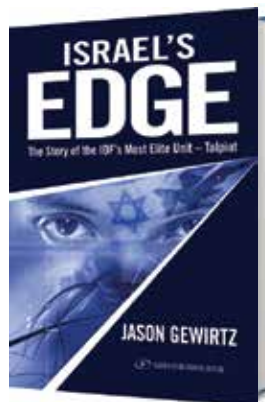


That's Why I Married You
How to Live Love With Personality Differences

That's Why I Married You! is a practical handbook for couples to not only learn to live with their personality differences but to actually love with their differences. **The fact is that we're naturally attracted to someone who possesses significant differences. These differences hold a tremendous power of connection and vibrancy – if we can use them correctly.** Without the proper emotional tools and the right mindset, however, these very differences can possibly wreak havoc in a marriage.

Chana Levitan, MSc, is an educator, speaker, therapist and author with twenty-five years of experience. Chana has lectured extensively across the globe on four different continents and has counseled thousands of men and women on dating and marriage. She is a frequent guest on television and radio talk shows.

Publication – March 2016



Israel's Edge
The Story of the IDF's Most Elite Unit - TALPIOT
By Jason Gewirtz

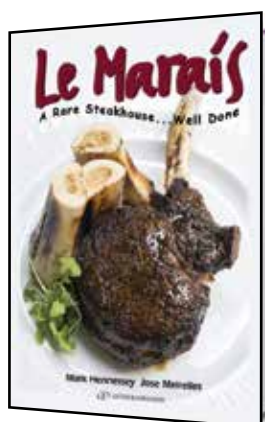
Instead of being trained only to fight, the soldiers selected for Talpiot are taught how to think. They commit to 9 years of service, rather than the 3 years a normal soldier serves. Talpiots are educated in the military applications for computer science, physics and math and they have an enormous influence on the weapons Israel develops and on the Israeli economy, through the businesses they establish after leaving the army. No other military unit has had more of an impact on the State of Israel.

The soldiers of TALPIOT are truly unsung heroes.

Publication – February 2016

"...(Talpiots are) the flagship of the research & development systems of (Israel's) security."
Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu

Jason Gewirtz is an executive producer at CNBC and has covered Israel and Israeli business for many years. He currently produces Power Lunch, which is broadcast live every day jointly from CNBC's headquarters and the New York Stock Exchange.



Le Marais
A Rare Steakhouse...Well Done
By Mark Hennessey and Jose Meirelles

Get to know the personalities behind the Le Marais experience while learning how to create its incredible delicacies at home. **This beautifully illustrated cookbook gives you the techniques and recipes you'll need to bring French gourmet into the kosher kitchen.**

MARK HENNESSEY is executive chef at Le Marais NY. He is a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America in New York.

JOSÉ de MEIRELLES is executive chef and co-owner of Le Marais NY and Clubhouse Café. In 1987 he graduated the French Culinary Institute in New York.

Publication – January 2016

"Where else would a non-Jewish Portuguese immigrant open a French bistro, hire an Irish-Italian Catholic as its executive chef, and create one of the finest and most successful Kosher restaurants in the United States?"

Hadassah and Joe Lieberman



Sister of Zion
By Ruth Danon

A chance encounter in a convent in the Old City of Jerusalem at the height of the Six-Day War reveals the thrilling biography of a young Jewish girl brought into the arms of the Catholic faith.

Forced to flee Bulgaria during the World War II, Regine Canetti and her family boarded an illegal immigrant ship headed for Eretz Israel. But when the boat sank in a storm, Regine lost half her family. The life story of Sister Regine highlights the tragedy of the restrictions on Jewish immigration during the British mandate, the **relations between the Church and the Jews**, and the experience of life in Israel during some of its critical moments in history.

Publication – February 2015

Ruth Danon has an MSc from Hebrew University of Jerusalem. This is her second book. Her book about Atarot, the first settlement in the Judean mountains and her birthplace – which was conquered by the Arab Legion in 1948 – was published in Hebrew by Ariel Publishing House in 2007.



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