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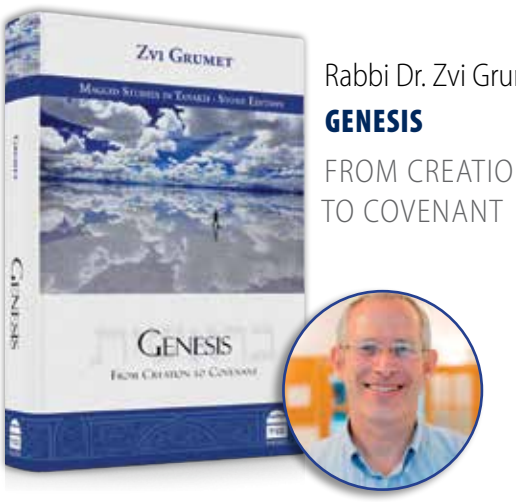

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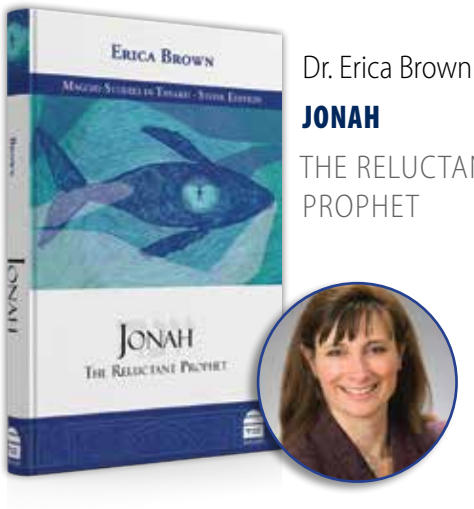

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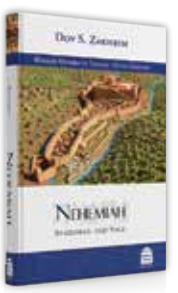

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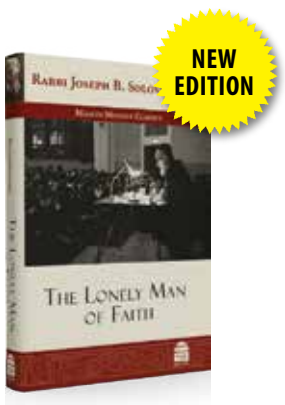

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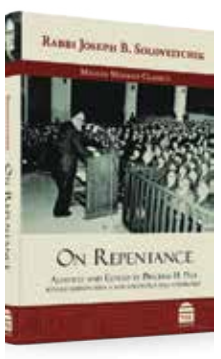

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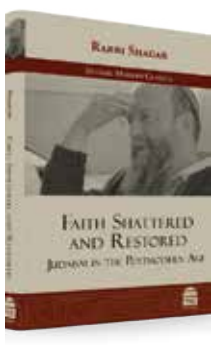

Rav Shagar

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READINGS

LAST WORD

On the cover: *The Melting Pot* by Mark Anderson.

Poland and the Devil's Point of View

I read Ruth Wisse's brilliant portrait of Mendele Mokher Seforim directly after I read Jan Gross's blistering criticism of Poland's new Holocaust law ("The Jewish Critic and the Devil's Point of View" and "Law, Justice, and Memory in Poland," Spring 2018). The "wide aerial" perspective on Jewish suffering that Mendele gets when the Devil takes him on a flight above tsarist Russia immediately reminded me of the historical perspective Gross gives in contextualizing the Law and Justice Party's contemptible rhetoric and actions. On the other hand, what is one to make of the fact that Poland is, unlike its liberal European neighbors, reliably supportive of Israel? Apparently, things are complicated even when you can see the whole picture.

Peter Kahn
Los Angeles, CA

Abraham's Genome

In Richard Hidary's review of Christine Hayes's *What's Divine about Divine Law?* ("God's Law in Human Hands," Spring 2018), he summarizes her position as being that the Torah is "the expression of a divine will that can change, and, in any case, must be interpreted." In other words, divine fiat and human (rabbinic) reason are the elements that continually interact to reshape Torah law. So far, so good, but another factor is missing. The Jewish moral code is not only based on revelation and reason; its origins stem from an evolved human moral sense or instinct which favors cooperative social behavior. Cooperation within social groups in the earliest humans was an adaptive trait that led to greater survival and reproduction and hence was incorporated into the human genome. Just as language unfolds in all human beings as a built-in module shaped by our early environment, so all of us possess an instinct for moral (as well as immoral) behavior that is shaped by our experience and culture.

Abraham can ask "Shall not the judge of all the earth deal justly?" because he has this innate sense of wrong and right. It is a sense that is not based on divine fiat—this is precisely what Abraham argues against! Neither is this moral sense based on human reason. Rather, it seems to me, Abraham knows in his *kishkes* what is right and wrong. What's missing from this erudite review is the concept of a natural moral sense which precedes divine revelation at Sinai and underlies our reason.

Joel Rutman, MD
Zikhron Yaakov, Israel

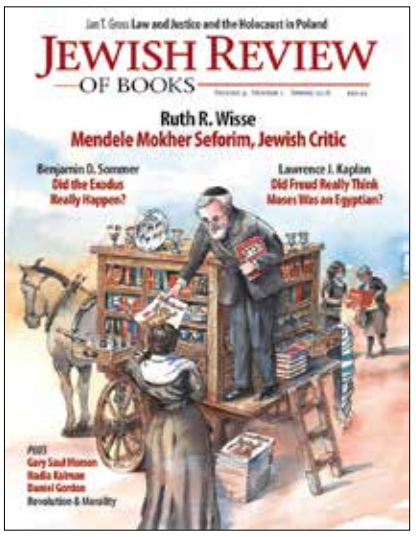
Reading List

I especially appreciated that, in his review of Albert Memmi's newly published diary from 1955–1956 ("Telling the Whole Truth: Albert Memmi," Spring 2018), Daniel Gordon took the occasion to provide a broad overview of Memmi's work on postcolonialism, Jewish identity, and Zionism. I knew little of Memmi other than his name, and Gordon convinced me that I need to read him now. In fact, I promptly went and ordered a couple of his books from Amazon and another one from my college library.

Andrew Pessin
Professor of Philosophy, Connecticut College
Campus Bureau Editor, *The Algemeiner*

Freud and the Talmudic Columbo

I like the way Lawrence J. Kaplan put Freud and his Moses book on the couch ("Moses, Murder, and the Jewish Psyche," Spring 2018), but I am not sure that I am convinced by his, uh, analysis. The (short) standard version of Freud's theory is, as Kaplan explains, that Moses was an Egyptian priest in the monotheistic cult of the sun-god Aton, who led the Hebrew slaves out of Egypt, taught them monotheism, and was murdered for his efforts. The Israelites repressed the memory but then got a second Midianite Moses who they conflated with the first one in their guilty memories. But Kaplan, like some



talmudic Columbo, walks carefully through Freud's text asking questions that no one seems to have asked. Why does Freud suddenly stop talking about the second Moses? And why does he eventually say only "*if* they happened to strike their great man dead" (emphasis added) about the first one?

These are good questions, but it doesn't seem to me that they prove the case. Aren't they arguments from silence? And couldn't Freud have just assumed that the historical existence of the second Moses had been established, that he was being rhetorical in saying "if," and so on?

Carol Shaw
Chicago, IL

Lawrence Kaplan Responds:

I very much appreciate Carol Shaw's kind praise of my essay, particularly her witty description of me—perhaps inspired by my suggestion that the first two essays of *Moses and Monotheism* take the form of a detective story—as a "talmudic Columbo." Despite her praise, Shaw maintains that my essay is built on the weak foundation of arguments from silence. Even were that the case, arguments from silence are valuable when the silence is significant. After all, it was the fact that the dog did *not* bark in the night that led Sherlock Holmes to the identity of the villain.

Back to our case: Freud comments, "if they happened to strike their great man dead," and Shaw suggests that the "if" may have just been for rhetorical effect. Indeed, it was, but to what effect? Given Freud's early emphasis on the central importance of the Israelites' murder of Moses, inasmuch as it was the repressed memory of that murder that triggered Jewish guilt, the deflationary rhetoric of this passage is odd. It should alert us to the fact that the murder no longer plays the central role it played earlier. In fact, in the second part of the third essay Freud *never* mentions Moses's murder, though he refers several times to the Jewish people's rejection in the desert of the Mosaic religion.

But, I did not only argue from silence. My main point was that *Moses and Monotheism* contains two contradictory stories. In the first story it was the repressed memory of the murder of Moses that gave rise to Jewish guilt. In the second story it was the initial appearance of Father Moses to his beloved children, the "poor Jewish bondsmen," that elicited that guilt. This leads Freud to change his story about the nature of Jewish chosenness. Oh—"just one more thing." Unlike my teacher Yosef Yerushalmi and others, I never tried to put Freud "on the couch." I am not a psychiatrist nor the son of a psychiatrist, but one thing I have learned from studying Talmud and Maimonides, reading Freud, and watching *Columbo*: Pay close attention to detail.

Lawrence Kaplan
McGill University

Who's the Sabbatean?

Stuart Schoffman celebrates Shabbtai Zevi's messianic movement of the mid-1660s as a harbinger of future national consciousness and activism ("Shabbtai at Seventy," Spring 2018). But it strikes me that the failed messiah is as much a potent symbol and harbinger of modern diaspora Judaism and in particular its less orthodox and more syncretic expressions. After converting to Islam to save his neck, Shabbtai spent the last decade of his life waffling between the Muslim and Jewish worlds. While this could be seen as hypocrisy, it was also, I think, a sign of a new Jewish identity that welcomed the influence of other traditions and tried to meld them. The mixing of Islam and Judaism into something that was not quite either one continued with Shabbtai's followers in Salonica who converted to Islam but maintained Sabbatean rites and called themselves the Ma'aminim. In the Christian West, Shabbtai's spiritual descendants under Jacob Frank flirted with and often converted to Catholicism. And the greatest descendant of Shabbtai's followers in 19th-century Prague was one of the greatest liberal assimilated Jews who has ever lived, Justice Louis Brandeis.

Barak A. Bassman
Ardmore, PA

Horse, Buggy, and History

I enjoyed Mark Anderson's whimsical portrait of Mendele Mokher Seforim on your Spring 2018 cover and found myself compulsively scanning his stock for what to buy, until two details of his horse and wagon caught my attention. The smaller wheels appeared to be in the back of the wagon rather than in the front, where they could turn under the wagon and permit steering, and the horse was harnessed around his middle rather than by his breast and shoulder, by which he could exert his pulling power. The breast-and-shoulder harness dates from the 9th century and small-front-wheel steering from the Middle Ages. (See my recent book *Where Have All the Horses Gone?*) Still, a charming picture.

Jonathan V. Levin
Teaneck, NJ

Correction

In Daniel Gordon's review of Albert Memmi's *Tunisie, An I* ("Telling the Whole Truth: Albert Memmi," Spring 2018), the Jewish population of Tunis in 1961 was given as 250. While the majority of the 65,000 Jews in Tunis emigrated to France or Israel between 1956 and 1967, the Jewish population in 1961 was higher than stated. According to Hebrew University demographer Sergio Della Pergola, as of 2015 there were between 1,100 and 1,300 Jews in all of Tunisia.

In the Melting Pot

BY ALLAN ARKUSH

"That's a great play, Mr. Zangwill, that's a great play." President Theodore Roosevelt famously shouted out these words to Israel Zangwill as the curtain went down on the Washington, D.C., premiere of the British Jewish author's *The Melting Pot* in October 1908. The president, who on later occasions explicitly deplored the very notion of "hyphenated Americans," could only have been pleased by a drama whose Jewish hero celebrated America as "God's Crucible, the great Melting-Pot where all the races of Europe are melting and reforming," and where, out of "Germans and Frenchmen, Irishmen and Englishmen, Jews and Russians . . . God is making the American."

Even before the performance of the play and the universal adoption of its title as a metaphor for the process of complete assimilation, American Jews had been busy devising means of withstanding the pressures that Zangwill welcomed. Among other things, they founded (or rather, refounded) in 1888 the Jewish Publication Society. One of the first works the society published was what Jonathan Sarna has called "the first best-selling Jewish novel in America," Israel Zangwill's *Children of the Ghetto*—a book that sensitively depicted the lives of Eastern European Jewish immigrants in London (without pointing hopefully to their disappearance through assimilation).

Zangwill was also for a time one of the most important figures in the Zionist movement, a key ally of Theodor Herzl in its earliest days and one of his ardent supporters until Herzl died in 1904. Zangwill left Zionism the following year, in protest against the movement's principled rejection of any territory other than Palestine as a destination for Jewish settlement, but he remained a nationalist activist. For 20 years he led the Jewish Territorial Organization, which scoured the world, from Australia to North Africa to southern Africa, in search of an alternative site for a homeland for his people.

Zangwill's politics might seem inconsistent, but he was not really of two minds. He mostly felt that the anomalous, vulnerable existence of the Jews as a scorned minority had to be brought to an end, one way or another. Dissolve them among others or collect them together and grant them some measure of autonomy in one of the world's underpopulated places—whatever worked, whatever could put an end to anti-Semitism, was worth doing. For Zangwill, the preservation of the Jewish people as such was not a priority.

One Zionist of the same era who saw things very differently was Horace Kallen, a professor of philosophy at the University of Wisconsin, who in 1915 published in *The Nation* a famous retort to Zangwill (and others) entitled "Democracy Versus the Melting Pot." The wayward son of an immigrant Austro-Hungarian Orthodox rabbi, Kallen for a time welcomed the dissolution of the Jews, but he eventually concluded that people "may change their clothes, their politics, their wives, their religions, their philosophies," but "[t]hey cannot change their grandfathers." Since the "selfhood which is inalienable" in different nationalities is ancestrally determined, their respective efforts at "self-realization" would necessarily have to take very different forms.

For baby boomers exploring what Horace Kallen called the "aesthetic and intellectual forms" of Jewish culture, the United States has truly been "a land of unlimited possibilities."

Program from a performance of Israel Zangwill's* The Melting Pot*, 1916. (Courtesy of the University of Iowa Libraries Special Collections Department.)

Therefore, instead of looking forward to the consolidation of a single identity within what he called the American "commonwealth," Kallen advocated the creation of conditions that would facilitate "the realization of the distinctive individuality of each *natio* that composes it." Each people should be able to express "its emotional and voluntary life in its own language, in its own inevitable aesthetic and intellectual forms." Even as they underwent Americanization, the Poles would do this in Polish, the Italians in Italian, and the Jews, ideally, in Hebrew or Yiddish, in innovative ways. The New World would succeed where the old one had failed.

> The "American civilization" may come to mean the perfection of the cooperative harmonies of "European civilization," the waste, the squalor, and the distress of Europe being eliminated—a multiplicity in a unity, an orchestration of mankind.

Or, in an influential phrase Kallen patched together a decade later, America would become a land of "cultural pluralism."

Who came closer to prophesying what America would really be like in the middle years of the 20th century, Zangwill or Kallen? In 1963, Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan famously—if not wholly accurately—declared in their book *Beyond the Melting Pot* that "the point about the melting pot . . . is that it did not happen," not in New York, at any rate, or other big cities that resembled it. Americans, by and large, kept their ethnic identities, if not, for the most part, their languages of origin. And certainly, it has been relatively easy in the half-century since Glazer and Moynihan published their book to be a "hyphenated American," and a Jewish American in particular. For baby boomers like me who have spent much of our lives exploring what Kallen called the "aesthetic and intellectual forms" of Jewish culture in these years, the United States has truly been, to borrow the famous phrase coined more than 100 years ago by the forgotten German Jewish banker and writer Ludwig Max Goldberger, "a land of unlimited possibilities."

I myself have explored a considerable number of them. I have, in fact, done little else in my life, whose way stations have included Camp Ramah, the Jewish Theological Seminary, the Department of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies at Brandeis, positions in Judaic studies at several American universities, teaching in Meah and other adult education programs, and working with various Jewish educational foundations. I've also translated a couple of Jewish classics and produced a fair amount of scholarly work on Jewish thought and history, edited the magazine of the Association for Jewish Studies, and helped to edit the publication you're now reading. My role in the Jewish section of Kallen's American orchestra has not by any means been a major one, but I have found it fulfilling. Far from having any regrets, I'd do it all over again (and I'm not yet ready to stop).

Yet I have to say, too, that I've never been able to escape, from the very beginning, a sense that I was fighting a losing battle. I can remember, for instance, a serious talk about the future that another camper and I had with a counselor named Rafi in a rowboat on the lake belonging to Camp Ramah in Connecticut in 1964. Rafi told us something that we had both heard before, but earnestly and compellingly enough for me to remember the tone of it, if not the exact words, more than a half-century later. We had to go back home, he told us, and remake our communities in the image of the camp. We had to make our camp Hebrew the communities' Hebrew,

our Shabbat their Shabbat, our *ruach* (spirit) their *ruach*. Our job was to build a future in which it was not just the rabbi and a small coterie of his supporters who lived genuinely Conservative Jewish lives but the whole congregation.

I didn't argue with Rafi, but as he spoke I thought of all of my classmates who had dropped out of Hebrew school right after their bar and bat mitzvahs. What could we, the remnant still enrolled and more or less inspired, possibly do to turn them around? How could we ever induce them to prefer Friday night services to movies and Saturday morning services to playing golf or skiing? It seemed far more likely that we would slip away, one by one, to join them.

Since that day on the boat, I've heard a lot of other pep talks. I've even given some. And I've been part of a number of Jewish programs and projects that have fared quite well. But I've never felt like I was on the winning team. Even when I have taken pride in the real accomplishments of the various associations and institutions in which I have been involved, I have never lost sight of the large and ever-increasing distance between people more or less like me and the great majority of Jews in America.

According to the Pew Research Center, there are now in the United States 4.2 million people who profess the Jewish religion and another 1.2 million who do not but still identify as Jews (not to mention the 2.4 million who acknowledge some Jewish background but affirm no Jewish identity at all). Every reader of this essay has no doubt already seen the discouraging statistics that chart the disaffiliation of very large numbers of those who still identify as Jews from organized Jewish life, the steep rise in intermarriage over the past half-century, and the low percentage of children of intermarried Jews who are being raised as Jews, so I won't dwell on them.

Rather, I will note that according to the Pew survey only half of the Jews in this country can read the Hebrew alphabet, and of them only a small fraction (one-quarter, supposedly, but I find it hard to believe it's that high) say that they can read Hebrew texts with comprehension. Unfortunately, the survey doesn't tally how many people know, for instance, what the Mishnah is, who the Gaon of Vilna was, or when the Kishinev pogrom took place, but I'm sure that if it did we would see evidence of massive ignorance. This, at least, is what my own experience leads me to believe. Outside of my usual Jewish haunts, I less and less often meet Jews who know or care very much about Jewish culture or religion. While there are exceptions to the rule, the typical Jews I meet are evidence not of a thriving cultural pluralism but of the widespread disappearance of the selfhood Kallen thought to be intrinsic and inalienable. It turns out that it doesn't really matter that much whom your grandparents were. Glazer and Moynihan notwithstanding, we never really got beyond the melting pot.

It is possible to remain undaunted by the sight of massive defections from the Jewish people and the widespread dissolution of Jewish consciousness. There are, after all, still millions of Jews in America, and as Rabbi Tarfon reminded us a long time ago, our inability to complete a task doesn't leave us free to desist from it. The American Jewish world is full of leaders, scholars, and activists who know that the odds are against them but nevertheless continue to fight to hold onto what has not been lost and even to make gains. Who knows, after all, what's going to happen? The Jewish future has often looked bleaker than it does in this country today.

It doesn't look especially bleak to some people who see no binary opposition between the ideals of the melting pot and cultural pluralism. The distinguished historian David Biale, for one, in an essay that he published 20 years ago entitled "American Symphony or Melting Pot?," argued that there was no reason why one couldn't uphold both at the same time. "After nearly a century of counterarguments," he trenchantly wrote, "Zangwill's melting pot continues to simmer." But "postethnic theory" offered grounds for hoping that it would not dissolve everything that is Jewish into something new and unrecognizable.

> [I]nstead of simply asserting a new amalgam identity, it is possible for a multiracial or multiethnic person to identify at one and the same time as both Irish and Italian, or both black and white, or even Jew and Christian. That is, in place of a new, monolithic identity to take the place of the ethnic or racial identities that make it up, one could imagine multiple identities held simultaneously and chosen as much as inherited. To put it in Horace Kallen's terms, we may not be able to choose our grandparents, but we can choose the extent to which we affirm our connection to this or that grandparent. Freed of its early essentialism, Kallen's cultural pluralism can be resurrected by communities of choice.

Israel Zangwill in an undated photo. (Hulton Archive/ Culture Club/Getty Images.)

Seen in this light, the extremely high intermarriage rate (the figure Biale cited in 1998 was 30 percent; it's now double that) need not be a cause for alarm. "Far from siphoning off the Jewish gene pool, perhaps intermarriage needs to be seen instead as creating new forms of identity, including multiple identities, that will reshape what it means to be Jewish in ways we can only begin to imagine. For the first time in Jewish history, there are children of mixed marriages who violate the 'law of excluded middle' by asserting that they are simultaneously Jewish and Christian or Jewish and Italian."

Biale went perhaps a bit too far here. That one could be Jewish and Italian at the same time, even if one wasn't the product of a mixed marriage, was, as Biale knows, always a possibility. And even after the disappearance of the ancient Jewish Christian sects individual Jews have occasionally insisted that in becoming Christians, they have not abandoned but only completed their Jewish identities (Father Daniel, for instance, the Jewish-born hero of the Holocaust era who made aliyah from Poland in the 1950s as a Catholic priest). A century ago, viewing things from a different perspective, the secular Jewish intellectual Chaim Zhitlovsky came to a similar conclusion, insisting that there was no reason why a Jew couldn't profess the Christian faith (preferably, in Yiddish!), since one's Jewish identity was not a religious matter. But these quibbles aside, it is clear that Biale's examples were designed to shock—and to suggest that just about any identity at all could be fruitfully combined with a Jewish one and still fall under some Jewish rubric.

Biale was not unrestrained, however, in his enthusiasm for this brave new world. "Whether these new forms of identity spell the end of the Jewish people or its continuation in some new guise," he concluded, "cannot be easily predicted since there is no true historical precedent for this development." Another prominent professor of Jewish studies, Shaul Magid, writing 15 years after Biale, welcomed the emergence of a postethnic America without fretting much about whether it would undermine the existence of the Jewish people, an entity whose survival is evidently of less concern to him than the evolution of the religion he dubiously describes as Judaism. I won't repeat here my reservations about Magid's case for what I called "cosmotheism with a post-Jewish face" (see "All-American, Post-Everything," Fall 2013, *Jewish Review of Books*), but I do want to take a cue from him. He usefully pointed out a few locations on the Internet where one can find these inventive new forms of Jewish identity that are coming into being. "One of the largest," he wrote, "www.half-jewish.net, is more than a support group. It is an advocacy organization that seeks to be a voice for the inclusion of multiethnic Jews in the Jewish community. On this website we read, 'Some of us are contented Christians, Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists, but we'd like to learn more about our Jewish "half" in ways that don't involve leaving our current faith or culture.'"

I recently went back to this website in search of revealing statements by new kinds of Jews, but what I found, for the most part, was evidence of divided souls groping for greater clarity about their personal situations and some helpful information about the attitudes of different sectors of the Jewish community toward people of partly Jewish origin who were not halakhically Jewish. But there were also "Christian resources" that directed "half-Jews" to Lauren Winner's *Girl Meets God*, a patrilineal half-Jewish woman's description of "her long journey from Reform Judaism to Orthodox Judaism to the Episcopal Church and evangelical Christian views" and to "a long-distance Messianic Jewish teaching institute."

Despite the lack of positive evidence at www.half-jewish.net, it may very well be the case that here and there new idiosyncratic forms of mixed Jewish identity are coming into being. But I doubt there are any that will have anything more than a short half-life. What I do perceive—everywhere—are last gasps. I hear them, for instance, when acquaintances tell me, radiating a little bit of *nachas*, that their grandchildren, who are hard to classify as

either Jews or non-Jews, have something of a liking for latkes. At the same time, they tell me that the kids also celebrate Christmas (only at home and with no trace of Jesus!).

Melting pot blends of this sort, and not innovative syntheses, are what's really happening on the ground, all over America. While I do not mean to be dismissive of the integrity and goodwill of those who are piecing together such composite identities, I fully expect that in the long run their experiments will lead, with a few individual exceptions, to non-Jewish grandchildren for whom the fact that they had some Jewish (or half-Jewish) grandparents is not much more than a genealogical curiosity.

There are, however, much less radical experiments taking place within the American Jewish community that are at least somewhat more promising. Jack Wertheimer provides a panoramic overview of them in his soon-to-be-published and thought-provoking book *The New American Judaism*. A professor of American Jewish history at the Jewish Theological Seminary, and formerly the provost of that institution, Wertheimer has over the years written many penetrating studies of the American Jewish condition, all of which reflect a keen, deeply informed understanding of the disintegration that has taken place as well as a persistent refusal to acknowledge its inevitability. There is plenty in his new book, too, to reinforce the fears of pessimists like me. But he also sees many signs of vitality. Within the admittedly ailing Conservative movement, for instance, a considerable number of rabbis are now ambitiously "playing to the themes of the day: inclusiveness, spirituality, musical creativity, shorter services, nonjudgmentalism, personalized attention, caring communities, relational Judaism, and Judaism beyond the walls of the synagogue." In the "more cohesive, participatory and spirited communities" they are forging, "the elite meet the folk where they are" (instead of the other way around, as my old counselor Rafi, and the old Conservative movement, had wished).

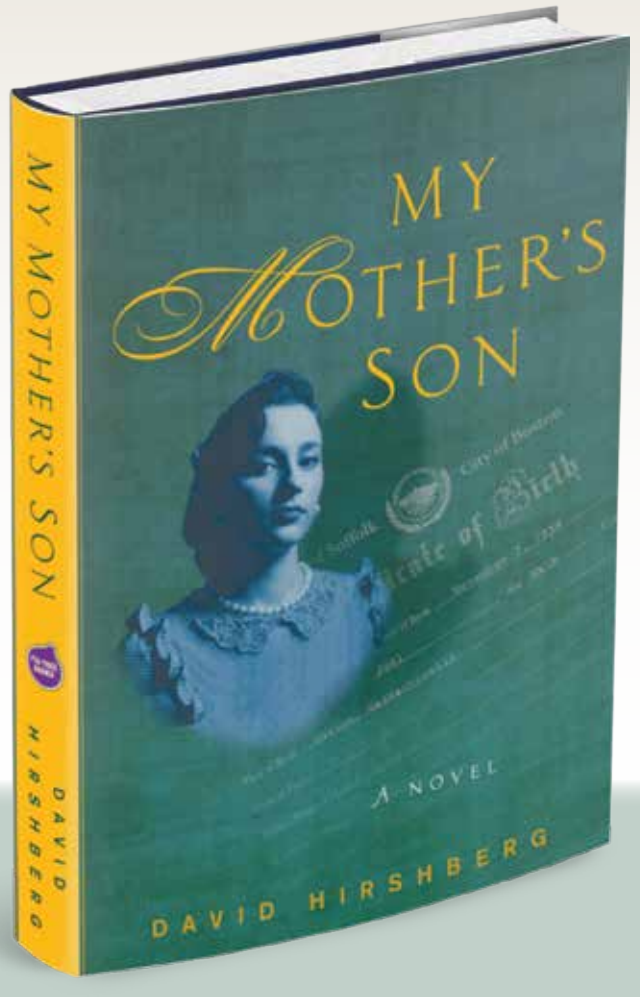
Wertheimer also provides a long list of transdenominational educational enterprises of various sorts that have undoubtedly enjoyed great success, from Birthright Israel to Mechon Hadar to Limmud and others. His book's conclusion sketches the outlines of "a large nationwide movement" consisting of "many hundreds of local synagogues, outreach centers, and start-ups engaged in the effort to remix Judaism for the current age."

Wertheimer is ambivalent about much of what he has seen, but his very serious misgivings do not prevent him from being hopeful about the "next iteration of a new/old Judaism" in the United States. Having circulated very much less than he has (he lists the 160 rabbis to whom he spoke in preparation for this book and mentions the hundreds of synagogues he has visited over the years), I can't really gainsay him. I can even hope that he is right. But when I weigh everything that I myself have witnessed together with all of the statistics signaling decline—Conservative Judaism has gone from representing more than 40 percent of American Jewry to less than 20 percent in a generation, 28 percent of those raised Reform have left the Jewish religion altogether, and so on—I can't muster any comparable hope for the future of Judaism in America, except among the Orthodox.

Several years ago, I gave a talk to a group of students at Yeshiva University on cultural Zionism, in the course of which I expressed my doubts about the internal coherence of the project launched by Ahad Ha-Am (one of Horace Kallen's sources of inspiration) at the turn of the 20th century. After our meeting was over, around 9 p.m. on a week night, my hosts walked me across the street from the building in which we had met to show me a little bit more of their institution. I don't recall what I had been expecting, but I do remember my sense of astonishment when we entered a large, very crowded *beit midrash* (study hall). Unlike Moses, who was bewildered when God propelled him into the future to see the *beit midrash* of Rabbi Akiva, I knew what was going on. But I was nonetheless surprised to see hundreds of young men robustly and loudly engaged, in pairs, in the study of rabbinic texts when I myself was just about ready to go to bed. While I had been in *batei midrash* before, in the United States and in Israel, I had never witnessed a scene like this. Here, I thought (though I didn't say it, perhaps because I felt that my hosts wanted to hear it), if anywhere, is a force capable of resisting the pressures of assimilation. I can think of nothing like it outside of the precincts of Orthodoxy.

Wertheimer both confirms my impressions and warns against drawing overhasty conclusions. "Thus far," he writes, "the Modern Orthodox world has managed to flourish and persist by creating a community of practice and by focusing most of its intellectual energy on intensified Talmud study. This is not to be minimized. The movement's vibrant

"WHEN YOU'RE A KID, THEY DON'T ALWAYS TELL YOU THE TRUTH. . . "



"Hirshberg's debut novel packs both emotional punch and a vivid portrait of Jewish American life in post-WWII Boston. A retiring radio comedian reminisces on his childhood, fitting himself into the larger picture of a Jewish immigrant family and focusing on one year, 1952, as a turning point in his coming-of-age. . . . Who you become, the author suggests, is an amalgam of who you know and the stories you assimilate. Readers will find connections here to Michael Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* (2000) and to Saul Bellow's classic *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953)."

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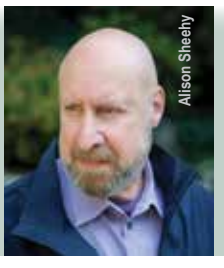

communal life, high levels of observance, and serious engagement with traditional texts are monumental achievements." But these achievements may not be as stable as they look. Roiled by challenges ranging from the heresies of modern biblical criticism to the appeal of ultra-Orthodoxy, Modern Orthodoxy is losing adherents to the left and to the right. Despite having a very low rate of intermarriage and a higher than average fertility rate, Modern Orthodoxy's demographic growth just barely makes up for its losses. Haredi Jews now outnumber them two to one. Among school-aged children, the ratio in favor of the ultra-Orthodox has climbed to something more like four to one.

The ultra-Orthodox have their problems, too, but they've got the momentum, and they know it. There are now some six thousand to seven thousand haredi outreach workers in the field (mostly affiliated with Chabad but more than two thousand who aren't). This is, Wertheimer informs us, "more than double the number of active Conservative, Reform, and all other permutations of liberal rabbis *combined*." We, and especially the leaders of the liberal denominations, ought to let this extraordinary fact sink in, when thinking about the future of American Jewry. These outreach workers are not garnering many full-fledged recruits (the *ba'al teshuvah* phenomenon remains a countercultural trickle in comparison to the wave of assimilation). However, Wertheimer contends on the basis of extensive interviews, this is not their main goal. They would just like the rest of us to be, somehow, better Jews, and they're largely succeeding at that. "*Kiruv* [outreach] has become a powerful vehicle for re-engaging Jews with the non-Orthodox sectors of the community." Here too the elite meet the folk more or less where they are, but they also unabashedly represent a form of Judaism that demands much more than the Judaism of their liberal colleagues.

This is no doubt good for the Jews, but it doesn't answer the question of how much of a future there is, in the long run, for nonharedi Judaism in the United States. On this matter, I can't pretend to be among the optimists. I don't want to admit that the game is over, though, even if the guys in the black uniforms do look like the team that will eventually win.

They certainly look a lot stronger than the team with which I have come to feel the greatest affinity: Jewish scholars who study their ancestors' culture and history intensively but lack the faith that held them together. That's in part because we're not really a team at all but a relatively small and scattered bunch of people who tend to be more concerned with research agendas than our collective destiny as a minority. We might be closer than anybody else on the scene to what Horace Kallen hoped to see, but even if you add us together with all the ethnically conscious Jewish creative artists in this country, I don't think we're making much progress in, to put things in Kallen's terms again, "the realization of the distinctive individuality" of our people. For the most part, we haven't even tried.

As the more or less secular Jew I now am, I nevertheless agree with Jack Wertheimer that "aside from anti-Semitic persecution, nothing is likely to play a larger role in determining the future of Jewish life in this country than the lived religion of ordinary Jews." But can one take one's place alongside religious Jews just for this reason? People as different as Jay Lefkowitz, who was a senior policy adviser in the administration of George W. Bush, and Michael Walzer, the eminent left-wing political theorist, answer this question affirmatively. In his recent and much discussed *Commentary* article "The Rise of Social Orthodoxy," Lefkowitz reconciles his theological uncertainty with his daily donning of tefillin, his kashrut, and his weekly synagogue attendance on the grounds that "the key to Jewish living is not our religious beliefs but our commitment to a set of practices and values that foster community and continuity." Walzer, for his part, is no mere doubter but "a fully secular person," one who is "theologically tone deaf" yet goes to his non-Orthodox "shul every Shabbos."

Here, I thought (though I didn't say it, perhaps because I felt that my hosts wanted to hear it), if anywhere, is a force capable of resisting the pressures of assimilation.

A beit midrash ***at Yeshiva University, New York City. (Courtesy of Yeshiva University.)***

> You don't have a Jewish life in Princeton, New Jersey, if you aren't part of a synagogue. You don't meet people that you want to talk to, the people that you can talk easily to about whatever awful thing has happened in the Middle East in the past week. I feel that's a necessary part of my life, but it doesn't make me a religious Jew. I cannot imagine a future for American Jews outside of the synagogue, and that means that secular Jews have got to find a way of connecting to the tradition.

It would be easy to admonish readers who want to help secure a Jewish future in the United States to follow in the footsteps of Lefkowitz, or at least of Walzer. I'm afraid, however, that I can't preach what I can't promise to practice (consistently, anyhow). But that doesn't mean that I can't try to clarify things. In my attempt to do so, I have drawn on the usual statistics that reflect the extent of defection from Judaism and Jewish life but also on the analyses of scholars like Biale and Magid who highlight the fact that the American melting pot is on the boil. What I do not share with my colleagues is the expectation that Zangwill's "crucible" will somehow produce new human alloys who will be genuine and lasting heirs of the Jewish past, even if they might seem shockingly un-Jewish to us. What it produces, the rhetoric of contemporary identity politics notwithstanding, is good, more or less culturally homogeneous Americans.

Wertheimer's account of current experiments with a "new/old Judaism" in liberal synagogues and elsewhere throughout the country is harder to dismiss, especially since he retains a keen awareness of their shortcomings even as he takes heart in their existence. Whether these are signs of a true revival of religious but non-Orthodox Judaism remains to be seen. If I'm skeptical about that, it's not only on the basis of my own experience but because I can't believe in the long-term survivability of any form of Judaism in our modern liberal democracy that isn't rooted in solid convictions and consolidated by a disciplined and more or less segregated communal life.

The Modern Orthodox possess both of these things in good measure, and the ultra-Orthodox do so to an even larger degree, and will go on, for the most part, doing what they do. Some Jews who are much less rigorously religious may yet manage to sustain a strong presence on the scene, but it is undeniable that their overall numbers are shrinking. Those Jews who cannot quite say yes to God but cannot say no to Jewish peoplehood will fit, a little uncomfortably, into some of these communities, perhaps coming to shul infrequently and late, but, like Walzer, participating enthusiastically in the Jewish conversations at the kiddush. And the large majority of the rest of America's Jews will in all likelihood (although not inevitably, as I must remind myself), like millions of their predecessors, disappear in the great American melting pot that continues to bubble away.

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

Sacrificial Speech

BY SHAI SECUNDA

Blood for Thought: The Reinvention of Sacrifice in Early Rabbinic Literature
by Mira Balberg
University of California Press, 304 pp., $95

Professor Andrew P. Cohen, the protagonist of Ruby Namdar's recently translated novel *The Ruined House*, is a dapper chap with the perfect daily ritual: He exercises consistently, eats healthfully, and leads a seamless life of intellectual and material pleasure. Socially Jewish and crowned with a priestly last name, Cohen is unlettered in Hebrew and so unreligious he barely makes it to synagogue on Yom Kippur. The only temple the good professor frequents is his own gleaming Manhattan apartment, where he showily prepares slabs of filet mignon for fancy dinner parties—a shadowy ancestral memory of sacrificial ritual. In time, however, strange, primitive visions shock Andrew, like a bolt out of the blue. Vexed from 20 centuries of stony sleep, the ancient Jerusalem Temple and its messy sacrificial rite threaten the clean, modern edifice that Andrew—and modern Judaism—worked so hard to build. Then again, maybe the past is not as primitive as we think.

Just a few years after the publication of her *Purity, Body, and Self in Early Rabbinic Literature*, Mira Balberg has somehow managed to write another path-breaking work on another formidable and arcane section of rabbinic literature—sacrificial law. Like her first monograph, which redescribed and reclaimed the complex and seemingly irrelevant rabbinic rules of purity, *Blood for Thought: The Reinvention of Sacrifice in Early Rabbinic Literature* shows how an ancient Jewish Temple rite persevered—nay, flourished—for centuries after the Second Temple lay in ruins, its cultic theater shuttered. This was again thanks to the Rabbis of late antiquity, who cut away the melodrama and distilled the sacrificial act into a sparse, almost modernist ritual. In her reconstruction of the rabbinic conception of sacrifice, Balberg challenges the equation of sacrifice with heady romantic cultism and the idea that Judaism as we know it—rabbinic Judaism—is an inherently post-sacrificial religion. Along the way, *Blood for Thought* provokes much thought about the distinction between religious and secular rituals and ancient and contemporary "high priests," be they Second Temple Jerusalemites or 21st-century New Yorkers.

The book opens with a discussion of another modern Hebrew novel troubled by the tenacity of the Jewish sacrificial rite: "I don't need a temple," opines a soldier in Haim Be'er's *The Time of Trimming*: "If the minister of education had appointed me as a judge of the Israel Prize, I would give the prize . . . to Titus Vespasian who with the aid of Heaven liberated us once and for all from this nightmare of a slaughterhouse." This is a polemical version of a common view, uttered often and with conviction among polite company, and it is, to some extent, historically accurate. The destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 C.E. was a watershed moment in Jewish history that shifted the balance of power from the priests toward the Rabbis, so that a public, priestly religion gave way to the more interior forms of worship and study that now characterize Judaism. Guy Stroumsa has gone so far as to describe the Temple's destruction as the singular moment "that activated the slow—overly slow—transformation of religion to which we owe, among other things, European culture."

The Rabbis of late antiquity distilled the sacrificial act into a sparse, almost modernist ritual.

A sacrifice of two heifers. Detail from a fresco in the Crypt of St. Magnus, St. Mary Cathedral, Anagni, Italy, 13th century. (Courtesy of De Agostini Picture Library/A. Dagli Orti/Bridgeman Images.)

The problem with this theory is that the Rabbis cannot be classified as anti- or postsacrifice. Aside from stray talmudic maxims elevating Torah study over Temple service, the ancient Rabbis devoted an enormous amount of their literary output to the careful study of sacrificial law. Modern scholars have tried to argue away or reinterpret the importance of the evidence, insisting, for example, that the Rabbis were merely trying to appropriate priestly power by teaching the priestly rite or that their goal was to transform physical offerings into prayer-like recitations through study. Alternatively, some have argued that the Rabbis were antiquarians preserving a lost rite before it faded away in the mists of time, or—and this is really an argument of last resort—maybe they were stubbornly, heroically, denying reality by studying sacrificial law as if the Temple continued to exist. Each of these arguments denies the immensity and intensity of the Rabbis' commitment to animal sacrifice and also the unvexed mood of their writings on the topic.

Balberg's solution to this problem is so elegant and subtle that, like Poe's purloined letter, it was missed by generations of scholars. In her account, the Rabbis continued to focus on animal sacrifice long after the Temple's destruction since, culturally speaking, there never was a complete rupture requiring a reconstruction. Practically, of course, a believer could no longer pick herself up, ascend the Temple Mount, and offer a turtle dove on the altar. But even when the Temple stood in all its glory, sacrifice within its precincts was at best experienced sporadically, as many Jews lived at considerable distance from Jerusalem. Both before—and after—its destruction, the Temple and animal sacrifice held a commanding presence in Jewish life and imagination, and were ceaselessly invoked in prayer, art, and religious study. If decades after the ruin of Jerusalem the ancient Jewish historian Flavius Josephus could still write in the present tense "our slaughter of tame animals for sacrifices . . . is common to us and to all other men," then rabbis living a few decades later could legitimately lay down the "order of the sacrifice" in real time. Moreover, the distinction between ritual sacrifice to the Deity and kosher slaughter for regular meals was not always clear. Professor Cohen's dinner guests were onto something when they perceived "his single-minded intensity" as he carved a roast, like "an avatar of an ancient hunter or tribal shaman charged with sacrificing to the gods."

Sacrifice held the interest of not only the late ancient Rabbis. It has also beguiled well-known modern anthropologists, historians of religion, and Jewish studies scholars from Marcel Mauss and René Girard to Moshe Halbertal. In trying to get to the core of the sacrificial act, these theorists of sacrifice understand it as communication, premeditated violence, or pious devotion. In so doing, they have tended to focus on specific ritual actions to support their theses, such as entering and exiting sacred space (communication), the slaughter of the

animal (violence), or its dedication (devotion), while ignoring other parts of the sacrificial process.

Blood for Thought's main contribution is to show how despite the Rabbis' preservation of animal sacrifice as an ongoing cultural paradigm, there was also a shift away from the past. The Rabbis may not have revived sacrifice, but they did thoroughly *reinvent* it by excising anything "sacrificial"—that is, giving something up for a higher entity—from Jewish sacrifice. They consistently downplayed the roles of human giver and divine recipient by rendering emotionally charged moments like the laying of hands on the animal and the sacred consumption of the flesh on the altar as ritually inconsequential. Even the violent spectacle of the sacred butchery was de-emphasized. What remained was a stark, entirely procedural act, termed "the work of blood," consisting of precise movements and the perfect concentration of nameless priests, wherein the chief "drama"—if we can call it such—was the flawless fulfillment of ritual obligations which almost miraculously transformed parts of the slayed animal from forbidden to permitted.

Balberg shows how the Rabbis addressed issues that had been raised earlier but took on a new importance during late antiquity, the period stretching roughly from Rome's crisis of empire until the Muslim conquests, which saw many religious transformations, including the "end of sacrifice" throughout the Mediterranean world. In response to the age-old challenge of why an omnipotent god would require sacrifices to begin with, some pagan writers enthusiastically embraced the abandonment of sacrifices. Others, like the Church Father Clement, developed an old allegorical understanding that rendered the physical offerings moot. For their part, the Rabbis responded that sacrifices remained consequential, not in order to fulfill a divine appetite for flesh, but rather to communicate a central halakhic value—that fulfilling *mitzvot* fastidiously is, as Ecclesiastes put it, "the sum of Man."

A believer could no longer pick herself up, ascend the Temple Mount, and offer a turtle dove on the altar.

Balberg is astoundingly erudite and unfailingly interesting, but, like most contemporary works of academic Jewish studies, *Blood for Thought* does not address contemporary Jews as much as it could, nor does it engage with traditional rabbinic scholarship. Had Balberg written a longer, different book, she might have traced more recent reinventions of rabbinic sacrifice. One prominent example is the role this highly abstract discourse played in the development of the Lithuanian analytical school—a trend studied by the Lithuanian-born Israeli Supreme Court judge Moshe Zilberg, who argued that it provided a valuable proving ground for a form of Jewish legal reasoning that could be adapted to modern legal discourse. Opposing Eastern European schools of Talmud study rejected this focus and considered the Lithuanian *lamdanim* lazy in their preference for the abstract, impractical discourse of sacrifice. The late, leading haredi *rosh yeshiva* Eliezer Menachem Shach liked to quote Pharaoh's criticism of the Israelites in this connection: "You are weak, weak! That is why you say, 'Let us go and sacrifice to the LORD'" (Ex. 5:17).

Although it goes against the standards of academic dispassion, it would have been interesting if *Blood for Thought* had included some reflection on the potential meaning of sacrifice for contemporary Judaism, including its non-Orthodox varieties. One of the most interesting characters in Namdar's *The Ruined House* is Rabbi Abby Rosenthal, who devotes the Yom Kippur sermon in her Reform congregation to the day's sacrifices—the "theatrical performance staged every year" in ancient Jerusalem. Rather than reacting with drooping eyelids and stolen snores, the congregation is enthralled as Rabbi Rosenthal relates her excitement upon rediscovering the details of the sacrificial rite, which her rationalist predecessors had rejected:

> "Our text for today was deleted from the prayer books that you and I grew up with by the nineteenth century. This year I rediscovered it. Its aesthetics, structure, texture are as fascinating as are its contents. It's old, strange, fascinating, inspiring. It moves me greatly to share it with you. It's called"— she pronounced the words in Hebrew, in a deep, musical, guttural voice—"*Seder ha-Avodah*, Order of the Ritual."

Shai Secunda is the Jacob Neusner Associate Professor of Judaism at Bard College, where he teaches in the religion department.

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Maimonides, Stonehenge, and Newton's Obsessions

BY MATT GOLDISH

Priest of Nature: The Religious Worlds of Isaac Newton
by Rob Iliffe
Oxford University Press, 536 pp., $34.95

Philosophers and theologians during the age of the scientific revolution commonly believed that God reveals himself through both the Book of Scripture and the Book of Nature. Both books are coy with their secrets, but they can be coaxed out by the truly wise. These secrets can never really conflict because they were written by the same author. What many take as the conflict between religion and science during that age is a later invention of the Enlightenment. In the 16th and 17th centuries the issue was more about who had the authority to reconcile scripture with nature.

Although Sir Isaac Newton, the greatest scientist of the age, spent as much time and intellectual energy on scripture as he did on nature, he kept this work a closely guarded secret. Indeed, Rob Iliffe begins his comprehensive new book on Newton's religious thought, *Priest of Nature: The Religious Worlds of Isaac Newton*, with an exchange of letters between Newton and Robert Hooke, the secretary of the Royal Society. Hooke asked Newton about his views on recent scientific work, and Newton replied that he had become disillusioned with such work and was concentrating on his "other studies."

> What . . . was the content of these "other studies"? Most of his colleagues at Trinity College, Cambridge, were aware that he was devoted to his "chymical" (i.e., chemical and alchemical) investigations, but they also knew that he was an exceptionally serious student of religion. His outward behavior indicated that he was an "intire"—that is, a devout—Christian, a fine and upstanding member of the Church of England . . . However, by the time Hooke's letter arrived, Newton was harboring a terrible secret. He believed that the central Christian doctrine of the Trinity was a diabolical fraud.

As Iliffe emphasizes, these views were not lightly held, nor were they idiosyncratic opinions that Newton only developed late in life (he was 36 when Hooke wrote to him). Rather, "they lay at the heart of a massive research programme on prophecy and church history" that was "in his eyes, at least as 'rational' as his work on physics and mathematics."

Although something was always known of Newton's theology (he discussed it, albeit obscurely, in the essay called the "General Scholium" attached to the second and third editions of the *Principia*), and more of it became clear after his death, it was ignored or minimized for more than two centuries. Indeed, in the early 19th century it was explained away as being the result of some kind of mental breakdown. This attitude didn't really change until historians began to systematically read Newton's papers in the 20th century.

Newton had left these papers to his niece, Catherine Conduitt, but they sat in the family home all but unread until the end of the 19th century, when the mathematical papers were donated to Cambridge, and the papers from his tenure at the Royal Mint went to the Public Record Office. No one, however, was interested in the voluminous collection of theological, historical, and alchemical manuscripts—not Cambridge, Harvard, Yale, or the British Library. In 1936 Viscount Lymington, who had inherited the remaining papers, sold them at public auction. A number of these papers were scattered among private individuals or institutions, but the great economist Lord John Maynard Keynes and a quirky, contentious Bible scholar named Abraham Shalom Yahuda bought major lots, thus preserving much of the material in two collections.

It takes a bit of a genius to successfully study a genius; in this case one must first master the millions of words Newton wrote about natural theology, doctrine, prophecy, and church history.

Portrait of Isaac Newton by Sir Godfrey Kneller, 1689. (Courtesy of Uckfield House, Uckfield, GB. Lebrecht Music and Arts Photo Library/ Alamy Photo.)

Keynes was a perceptive reader, and he quickly saw that Newton was more complicated than the Enlightenment hero of Alexander Pope's famous couplet ("Nature and Nature's laws lay hid in night: / God said, 'Let Newton be!' and all was light"). In a famous essay published a decade after the purchase, Keynes wrote:

> In the eighteenth century and since, Newton came to be thought of as the first and greatest of the modern age of scientists, a rationalist, one who taught us to think on the lines of cold and untinctured reason.
>
> I do not see him in this light. I do not think that any one who has pored over the contents of that box which he packed up . . . in 1696 . . . can see him like that. Newton was not the first of the age of reason. He was the last of the magicians.

Keynes was also the first to propose an influence of Judaism on Newton's theology, suggesting that Newton was really "a Judaic monotheist of the school of Maimonides" rather than a Socinian or any other kind of radical antitrinitarian Protestant.

When the Yahuda papers were first made available at the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem in the late 1960s, David Castillejo, a Cambridge scholar who had carefully studied the Keynes collection at Cambridge, came to Israel and wrote up a rough typescript catalog of the Yahuda material. This document, kept in a back room of the library, was for decades the best guide to Newton's theological and historical manuscripts. When my teacher Richard H. Popkin came to Jerusalem to investigate the collection, Castillejo's catalog led him to Newton's notes on Maimonides. Ultimately, I think Popkin somewhat misstated Maimonides's influence on Newton (a matter to which I will return), but their work, together with Frank Manuel's little 1974 classic on Newton's religion (*The Religion of Isaac Newton*) and Richard Westfall's massive 1980 biography (*Never at Rest*), inspired a generation of scholars.

In 1991, the Chadwyck-Healey publishing company put out a microfilm collection of all the known Newton manuscripts, a staggering 43 reels of microfilm. Less than a decade later the Newton Project began the enormous enterprise of scanning and transcribing all of Newton's known works. Iliffe, a professor of history at Oxford University, headed the project, which means that for at least two decades he spent hours every day reading Newton. It takes a bit of a genius to successfully study a genius, and in this case one must first master the millions of words the great man wrote about natural theology, doctrine, prophecy, and church history.

Iliffe does a great deal more than that. He places these writings in illuminating historical context, creating order out of a dizzying mass of primary and

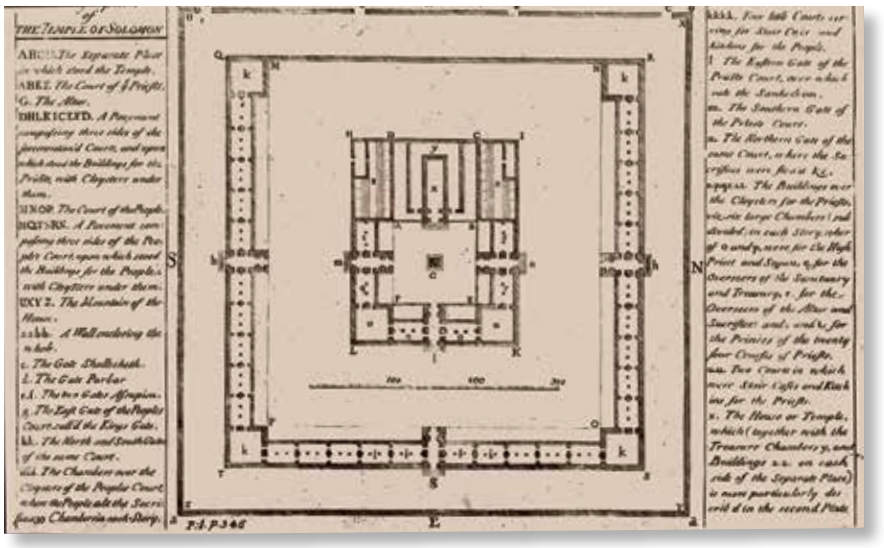
secondary literature. The result is an entirely new perspective on several areas of Newton's thought, including his scientific work, as well as a beautifully ordered trek through Newton's religious ideas. His study is eye-opening for Newton scholars, but it also introduces nonspecialists to the intellectual and religious world of perhaps the greatest scientist in history.

In the early 1990s I wrote a doctoral dissertation about Newton and Judaism at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The great American Jewish physicist Herbert Goldstein was living in Jerusalem at the time and somehow heard about my work. After reading it he said, "I was expecting more about how Newton learned his principles from Maimonides or about his researches on the mathematics of the sacred cubit. I wasn't expecting so much Christian theology!" Newton *had* studied Jewish texts with great care in the construction of his massive religious works. He consulted Josephus Flavius, Maimonides, the Mishnah and Talmud, and even works of the Kabbalah, but he really was a radical Christian who acknowledged Jesus as the Son of God. He just insisted that the son could not be conflated with the father. In fact, he thought Jesus had been sent into the world to cleanse it of precisely such idolatrous suggestions, and he turned to the Hebrew Bible and Jewish sources, in part, to reconstruct the original monotheism of Noah and the Israelite religion which succeeded it—and to understand the conceptual errors that led to idolatry.

Newton's obsession with the corruption of the early church by pagan metaphysics led him inexorably to the historical question of the origin of idolatry. Here it was Maimonides's *Hilkhot avodah zara* (Laws of Idolatry), in the 1641 translation of Dionysius Vossius, that provided Newton and many others with a useful historical schema. Maimonides famously described how early people slipped from worship of the one true God to worship of his retinue—the sun, moon, and stars—which led to the occlusion of the divine and the corruption of worship. Newton also found this view in contemporary authors, such as John Spencer, John Selden, and Robert Boyle, who themselves drew upon Maimonides (Iliffe only glancingly mentions their Maimonidean source).

Newton held that before the corruption of the original pristine religion, a scientific priesthood maintained both theological and natural truths, though these were largely hidden from the masses. In particular, the priests knew that the sun and not the earth was the center of their universe; hence, ancient temples from Stonehenge to the Temple in Jerusalem were organized around perpetual fires that represented the sun. These temples themselves stood for the solar system, a kind of "symbol of the world." Here, too, Newton drew upon many sources which regarded so-called vestal worship as central to ancient religion. (Vesta, the Roman goddess of the hearth, was personified by fire.) However, as Iliffe writes, "Newton fully Copernicanised the notion and claimed that it was through the vestal religion that the Ancients worshipped the Temple of the true God."

The tabernacle and the two Jerusalem Temples were of deep interest to Newton for another reason. He read the mysterious Revelation of St. John as being physically set in the Temple precinct. Newton traced the symbols of Revelation—trumpets, seas, seals, books, priests, and so on—to motifs inspired by what the prophet saw as he walked around the Temple. This Temple was also a model for the true Church and would be rebuilt at the End of Days. He left several drawings of the Temple (with his own idiosyncratic Newtonian layout) as well as numerous written passages concerning its importance.



Isaac Newton's diagram of part of the Temple of Solomon, from* The Chronology of Ancient Kingdoms*, published in London, 1728.

Abraham Shalom Yahuda. (Courtesy of the Abraham Shalom Yahuda Archive, The National Library of Israel, Jerusalem.)

Indeed, despite Keynes's clever hunch and Popkin's interesting hypotheses, Newton's notes on Maimonides mainly concern the laws of the Temple (*hilkhot beit ha-behirah*) rather than theology (he didn't even own the Latin translation of *The Guide of the Perplexed*). As Iliffe remarks a number of times, Newton went shopping for facts or information he needed to fill out his own historical theories. Thus, Mishnah Middot, Josephus, and Maimonides, which he read in recent Latin translations, were all grist for the mill of his unique Temple researches.

There were, to be sure, other areas in which Newton consulted Jewish sources. When he was asked to carry out investigations on the history of the calendar during early considerations of its reform around the turn of the 18th century, Newton consulted Maimonides's *Hilkhot kiddush ha-chodesh* (Laws of the Sanctification of the New Moon). The Maimonides references remained in the drafts up to, but not including, the final version.

Newton also studied Kabbalah in translation and has occasionally—and erroneously—been described as a kind of Christian kabbalist, but his interest in Kabbalah is an odder and more characteristically Newtonian story than that. Certain Christians had found Kabbalah to be congenial to their own theologies since the days of the Renaissance humanist Count Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. Newton's teacher and friend, the Cambridge Platonist Henry More, wrote a fair amount about "Cabala" in this general vein, but it turned out that he knew next to nothing about the thing itself. His version of the esoteric Jewish tradition derived mainly from his own imagination. Then, between 1677 and 1685, an enormous compendium of genuine kabbalistic writings in Latin translation, the *Kabbala Denudata*, was published by Christian Knorr von Rosenroth. Suddenly European scholars from John Locke to Lady Anne Conway were interested in Jewish mysticism.

The critical moment for Newton occurred when his arch-rival Leibniz began incorporating Kabbalah into his thought. It was, in fact, Leibniz's understanding of God's influence on the world through the medium of the *sephirot* that set Newton off. This was part of Leibniz's belief in a plenum (no vacuum in physical space) and his attack on Newton's gravitational theory. Newton got a copy of the *Kabbala Denudata*, read it voraciously, dog-earing the pages as he went, and launched his counterattack. Kabbalah, he argued, was precisely one of those pagan theories that had first infected Judaism with idolatrous ideas, and then, through converted Jews, introduced these corruptions into Christianity.

Some of Newton's Jewish reading makes its way into Iliffe's book, but not much. Perhaps it was a smaller corner of Newton's vast theological and historical enterprise than many of us, from Keynes to Popkin and his students, have been tempted to think. Then again, during my years working on these manuscripts, Jewish sources and ideas seemed to be constantly turning up. Another reason may be that Iliffe tends to focus on Newton's religious writings from the 1670s through the 1690s, while more material about Jews and Judaism appears in later manuscripts, particularly those from around 1710.

Whatever the level of Newton's interest in Judaica, he was never interested in actual Jews, who had been tacitly readmitted to England after almost four hundred years of exile during his youth. A learned Jew named Isaac Abendana taught Hebrew at Cambridge and knew many of Newton's contemporaries, including John Locke, Henry More, and Robert Boyle. Although Newton read his books, he never strolled across the campus to meet him.

Matt Goldish holds the Samuel M. and Esther Melton Chair in Jewish History at the Ohio State University. He is the author of Judaism in the Theology of Sir Isaac Newton *(Kluwer) and several other works.*

No Empty Place

BY YITZHAK Y. MELAMED

Nefesh HaTzimtzum: Rabbi Chaim Volozhin's* Nefesh HaChaim *with Translation and Commentary (Volume 1)
translation and commentary by Avinoam Fraenkel
Urim Publications, 811 pp., $34.95

Nefesh HaTzimtzum: Understanding* Nefesh HaChaim *through the Key Concept of Tzimtzum and Related Writings (Volume 2)
translation and commentary by Avinoam Fraenkel
Urim Publications, 757 pp., $31

On May 11, 1772, when the rabbinic and lay leaders of Vilna announced the first major ban (*herem*) against the so-called new Hasidim, they were charged with disrespect toward *talmidei hakhamim* (rabbinic scholars), laxity about the proper times of prayer, and bizarre ecstatic prayer practices, including somersaults. The *herem* described the Hasidim as wicked, and their odd ritual behavior as typical of "abominable heretics [*ke-to'evot ha-apikorsim*]." Indeed, the movement was, according to its accusers, virtually an attempt to found a new religion, but, strikingly, no strictly theological accusations were made. In particular, the *mitnagdim*, or rabbinic opposition, did not object to the Hasidic view of God's relation to the universe. Though the Hasidim were pantheists (or panentheists) through and through, raising this accusation was of little potency, since variants of pantheism had been openly and enthusiastically endorsed, not only by numerous kabbalists, but also by other major medieval Jewish authorities, such as Solomon ibn Gabirol and Abraham ibn Ezra.

While in Western Christendom the Church establishment repeatedly and harshly condemned pantheism as either heresy or idolatry, things were very different in the Jewish sphere. Relying on the equality of the numeric values (*gematria*) of the Hebrew words for God (*Elokim*) and nature (*teva*), medieval and early modern kabbalists often asserted their shared identity. Remarks such as "He is everything, and in Him is Everything [*Hu ha-kol, u'vo ha-kol*]" or "God fills all the worlds and encompasses all the worlds [*memale kol almin ve-sovev kol almin*]" are commonplace in medieval and early modern rabbinic literature.

While pantheism was certainly not a Hasidic innovation, some early Hasidic writers were extremely daring in stating their views. Thus, Rabbi Ya'akov Yosef of Polnoye, one of the closest disciples of Hasidism's founder, the Ba'al Shem Tov, rather shockingly asserted that since God completely fills all the worlds, every idol must too be divine. Nonetheless, the accusation that Hasidic pantheism amounted to nothing short of gross idolatry did not appear until 1796, in a public letter written by Rabbi Eliyahu of Vilna, the famous Vilna Gaon, shortly before his death. In the letter, the Gaon compared the Hasidic leaders to the worshipers of the golden calf and described the movement as a cult of

Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin famously argued for the supreme value of "Torah *lishmah*," or Torah study for its own sake.

"every tree and every stone," through their misreading of Ezekiel 3:12: "Blessed be the Glory of God from His Place," and their radical understanding of the notion that God is the place of the world.

The rift between the Hasidim and their opponents was further exacerbated in the spring of 1800 when Rabbi Avigdor of Pinsk, a disciple of the Gaon, filed a complaint against the Hasidim to the Russian tsar, Paul I, which alleged theological as well as political impropriety among Hasidic leaders. In the complaint, Rabbi Avigdor cited a passage from the writings of Rabbi Ya'akov Yosef, according to which man should aspire to merge himself completely with God during prayer. If this were possible, Rabbi Avigdor quipped, the Hasidim "should have become immortal." Unlike in the 1772 condemnation of Hasidism, the issue of pantheism took on a significant role in Rabbi Avigdor's complaint. Interestingly the theological absurdities he found in this position were strikingly reminiscent of early 18th-century condemnations of Spinoza's equation of God and nature by Pierre Bayle and others. Indeed, when the philosopher Salomon Maimon wrote his famous autobiography some 20 years after having visited the early Hasidic court of the Maggid of Mezheritch, he coined the term "acosmism" to describe the Maggid's teaching that only God truly exists, while the world we experience is mere appearance—and ascribed it to Spinoza as well.

Following Rabbi Avidgor's complaint, several Hasidic leaders in the Russian Empire, including Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, the founder of Chabad Hasidism, were arrested and interrogated. The Russian authorities concluded that the complaint was part of an intra-Jewish dispute of little interest to them and of no legal merit.

The most substantial theoretical response to Hasidism from a leader of the mitnagdic—literally, opposition—movement did not appear until 1824, three years after the passing of its author, Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin. *Nefesh HaChaim*, which plays on the author's name in characteristic rabbinic fashion and means "The Life's Soul," is a masterpiece of the Lithuanian-mitnagdic outlook. Rabbi Chaim, who was widely considered the Gaon's closest disciple, established the illustrious Volozhin Yeshiva, which would become the model for most other modern Lithuanian *yeshivot*, in 1802. His book famously argued for the supreme value of "Torah *lishmah*," or Torah study for its own sake, and remains a key text in modern *yeshivot* even if, as Avinoam Fraenkel notes in the introduction to his massive new annotated bilingual edition, it is often read rather selectively, with little emphasis on its kabbalistic theology.

The Volozhin Yeshiva by Anatoly Nalivaev, 1964.

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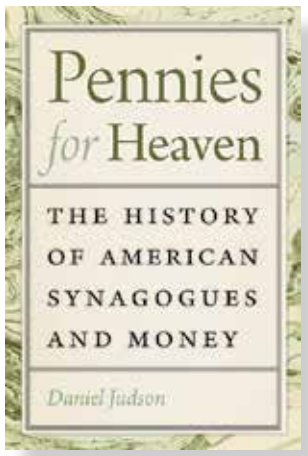

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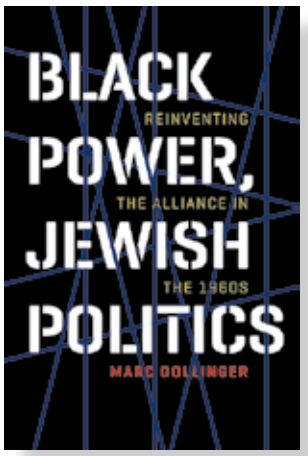

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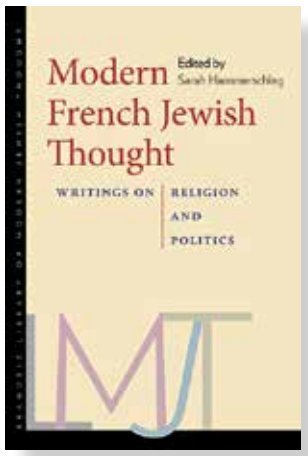

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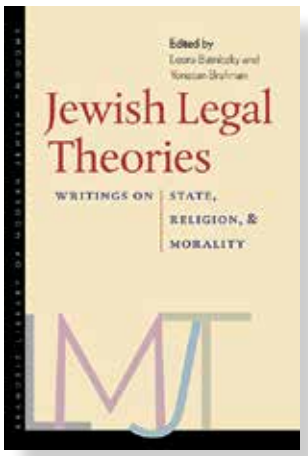

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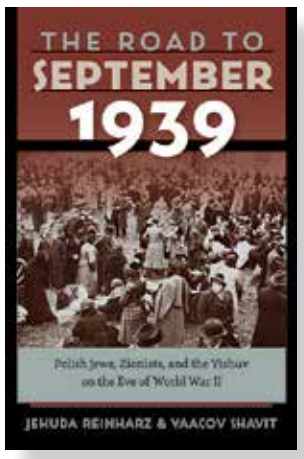

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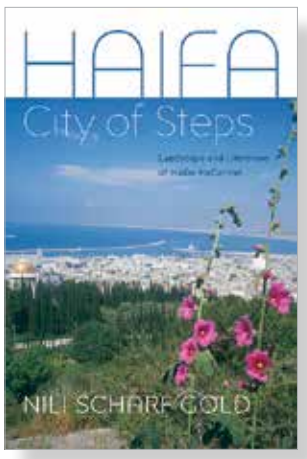

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Rabbi Chaim had a mild disposition, and the attitude of *Nefesh HaChaim* toward the Hasidim was very different from the harsh late 18th-century attacks of his great teacher and colleagues. In fact, there is no explicit mention of Hasidism or Hasidic texts in *Nefesh HaChaim*. Nonetheless, it is clear that he is working through the same set of theological issues, nor can one mistake the object of Rabbi Chaim's critique when, for instance, he criticizes those whose spiritual preparations for prayer lead them to pray long after the halakhically set time. One may even discern a not inconsiderable sense of irony in his comparison of this practice to the behavior of a person "who blows Shofar with tremendous fervor on Seder Night . . . or one who eats the olive quantity of matzah on Rosh Hashana." Still, the tone of Rabbi Chaim's critique is far from personal, and although his main polemical target has been taken by many to be Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi and his book *Likutei Amarim*, popularly known as the *Tanya*, neither he nor any other Hasidic leader or text are ever mentioned directly.

Rabbi Chaim's stance toward the relationship between God and the world in *Nefesh HaChaim* is intriguing, and it is of central concern to Fraenkel. In one passage, Rabbi Chaim comes close to the Hasidic assertion that only God exists and that the finite things of the universe are nullified within it, but at the very last moment, he seems to pull back: "God is the Soul and the Ultimate Source of the power and life force which [all the worlds] receive from Him . . . just like a soul is distributed within a person's body—for even though it is distributed within each specific part of him, it nevertheless cannot be said that the body is nullified to it in a way that it appears not to exist at all."

Yet, just a few pages later, Rabbi Chaim writes in a manner that is almost indistinguishable from a Hasidic approach while discussing God as the place (*makom*) of the universe. (Here, incidentally, I will reproduce Fraenkel's unusual bullet-point approach to making the *Nefesh HaChaim*'s often run-on, sometimes digressive sentences accessible to English readers.)

- but it is also appropriate and fitting that with his will [a person] should completely nullify all the powers of the supernal and lower worlds, and also his own powers/abilities, to the extent that it appears [to him] that they do not exist . . .

- and that he should concentrate his heart in prayer only on the Makom [place] of the Universe alone, that He is the Unified One, the Infinite One, Who fills All of this world, and all of the worlds, and that there is no place devoid of Him.

This sounds very much like the Hasidic approach to prayer, but in a parenthetical passage I have elided, Rabbi Chaim characteristically adds that one should aspire to this state of consciousness during *study* as well as prayer. In doing so he quotes a talmudic passage that says, "Words of Torah are only sustained with one who considers himself to not exist." The talmudic sage Rabbi Yochanan was playing on a verse of Job to make a psychological point about humility rather than a metaphysical one about the illusion of worldly existence, but Fraenkel is right to translate it this way in the context of *Nefesh HaChaim*. Indeed, for Rabbi Chaim, it is this loss

of self in the act of Torah study, rather than prayerful rapture, which is the highest and most sublime human activity.

For both Rabbi Chaim and his Hasidic opponents, the mystery of how an infinite divine being created a finite physical world is answered by the 16th-century kabbalist Rabbi Isaac Luria's doctrine of *tzimtzum*, or divine self-limitation. As Fraenkel writes near the beginning of his 757-page second volume, which is almost entirely given over to explicating the place of this idea in *Nefesh HaChaim* and documenting its sources, the concept of *tzimtzum* "explains how it can be that the existence of an All Permeating and Infinite God is totally concealed from us in this physical world."

In the celebrated formulation of Luria's student Rabbi Chaim Vital, before the creation of the world "the sublime and simple light filled all of reality."

> There was no empty place or vacant space, but everything was filled by that simple light . . . then, the Ein-Sof [the Infinite] contracted itself at the very central point, and contracted that light to surround the central point, and left an empty place and a vacant space . . . in which all the worlds were emanated, created, and formed.

The precise meaning of this striking description was the subject of learned and subtle controversy among early modern kabbalists. Some conceived it as a more or less literal description, affirming that the creation of space truly vacant from God, a kind of spiritual vacuum, was a necessary condition for the creation of the world. Among this school of literal interpretation of the doctrine ("*tzimtzum ke-pshuto*") one finds Rabbi Immanuel Hai Ricchi, Rabbi Jonathan Eybeschutz, Rabbi Jacob Emden, and, according to some, even Rabbi Chaim's master, the Vilna Gaon. In contrast to this school, Rabbi Joseph Irgas, Rabbi Abraham Cohen Herrera, and virtually every Hasidic master adopted a nonliteral reading of the doctrine ("*tzimtzum she-lo ke-pshuto*"), arguing that the divine contraction before creation was only apparent and that truly God never withdrew from any part of reality.

In situating *Nefesh HaChaim* within this kabbalistic discussion, Fraenkel has already done his primary audience—who are likely to be, like him, members of the modern-day, English-speaking yeshiva world—a great service. For, as noted, these readers and others have tended to read Rabbi Chaim's treatise so selectively and with so little understanding of its kabbalistic terms of art that they have generally taken it to be a work of pious exhortations to study more Talmud, rather than a subtle work of mystical theology. (It is almost as if an entire modern intellectual culture were to grow up around, say, Pico della Mirandola's *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, without ever bothering to learn anything about Plato or Renaissance Neoplatonists.)

Fraenkel's main thesis in the second volume is quite bold. He argues that "the main protagonists in the *Tzimtzum* debate all actually agreed on the underlying concept." What have come to be seen as rival and opposed interpretations of *tzimtzum* are merely a result of the misunderstanding of certain crucial terms and a lack of appreciation of the merely perspectival diversity of descriptions of one and the same process. In particular, according to Fraenkel, the Hasidic masters, including Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, on the one hand, and the Gaon and Rabbi Chaim, on the other, all agreed that the correct understanding of divine self-limitation was *tzimtzum she-lo ke-pshuto*. That is, God entirely filled the universe both before and after creation. Fraenkel's argument for harmony among authorities on these matters is too intricate to examine in detail here, but he also quotes the great 20th-century rabbinic ethicist Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler that "in this generation in which there is a need to unite . . . it is fitting to publicize the fact that there are no differences of opinion in the essence" of the concept of *tzimtzum*.

As it happens, I do not share this desire for theological consensus, nor do I think that such unity is required by the rabbinic world view. If on simple and trivial matters of fact, unanimity is a reason for *disqualifying* a ruling in rabbinic court, I see no reason to require it on issues that may well transcend our cognitive capacities. (Both the Tower of Babel and the cult of the golden calf were the outcomes of unity.)

Nonetheless Fraenkel's attempt to harmonize the apparently conflicting views on the *tzimtzum* is highly valuable. In the first place, Fraenkel's claim is well argued and meticulously grounded in the sources, and thus deserves serious consideration. Second, Fraenkel's reading goes against the main trend of interpretation in both the academic world of Kabbalah studies and that of Chabad historiography, which follows the last Lubavitcher Rebbe in stressing the opposition between Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi and Rabbi Chaim on *tzimtzum*.

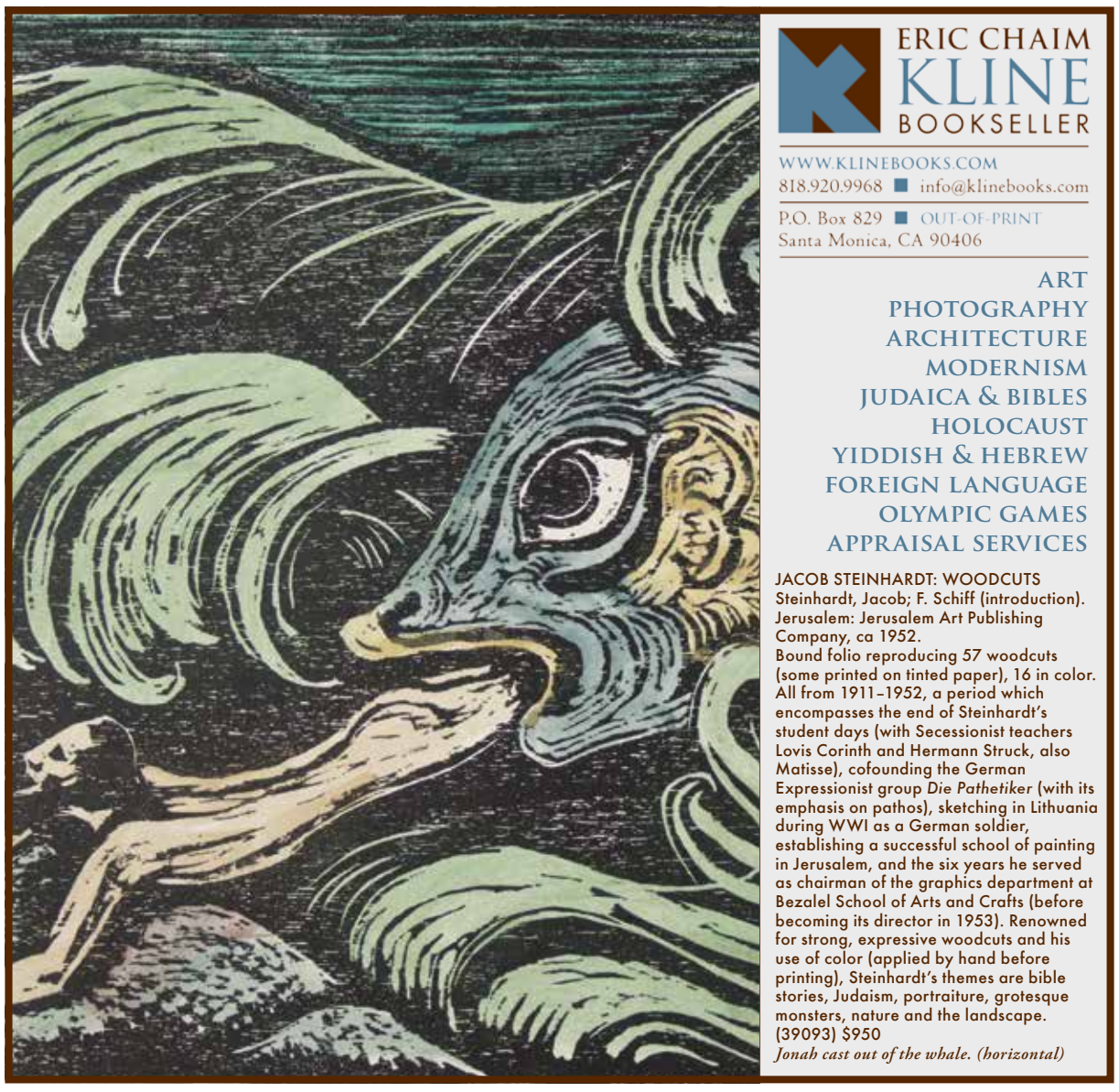
In an interesting author's note, Fraenkel writes that he began the book in general agreement with this approach, until he met a prominent Jerusalem kabbalist named Rabbi Moshe Schatz:

> The highlight of my interactions with R. Schatz was a marathon private study session about one year after starting to write this section, in which I sat in amazement, witnessing him being inspired by a new understanding that finally fully and very clearly explained that no real underlying difference on this topic ever existed.

The first of the eight traditional rabbinic approbations which preface Fraenkel's edition of *Nefesh HaChaim* is from Rabbi Schatz, the next six are from well-known Orthodox rabbis, and the last is from Professor Jonathan Garb, a distinguished scholar of Kabbalah at the Hebrew University. It is a work of both real piety and ingenious scholarship.

Fraenkel is a computer scientist by training and profession as well as an independent scholar, and it would be hard to overestimate the amount of intellectual effort, courage, precision, and diligence invested in these two volumes. Books such as this are rare, but if I may quote the words of another God-seeking Jew: "All things excellent are as difficult as they are rare."

Yitzhak Y. Melamed holds the Charlotte Bloomberg Chair in Philosophy at Johns Hopkins University. He is the author of Spinoza's Metaphysics: Substance and Thought *(Oxford University Press).*



The Founder of Jewish Studies

BY MICHAH GOTTLIEB

Leopold Zunz: Creativity in Adversity
by Ismar Schorsch
University of Pennsylvania Press, 344 pp., $65

In December 2018 more than a thousand Jewish studies scholars will gather in Boston to attend the 50th annual conference of the Association for Jewish Studies (AJS). At the gathering it will surely be noted that 2018 marks not just the 50th anniversary of AJS but also the 200th anniversary of the field. In 1818, a 23-year-old university student named Leopold Zunz published a 30-page essay with the modest title "On Rabbinic Literature."

Zunz could never have dreamed of his impact. A year after publishing "On Rabbinic Literature" he cofounded the Society for the Culture and Scientific Study of the Jews (Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden), establishing the first Jewish studies research institute and the first Jewish studies journal. Although only three issues of the journal were published, and within four and a half years the society had disbanded, Zunz always regarded it as a great, almost messianic project. In 1839, he wrote a friend that "the Verein survived 39X40 days, and those days in which Gans, Moser, Heine, Zunz and Rubo, ignoring their own welfare, devoted themselves wholly to the interests of their people—were they not more comely than our own day with its heartless self-centeredness?" Part of the "self-centeredness" to which he referred was the opportunistic conversion to Christianity of his erstwhile comrades-in-arms the poet Heinrich Heine and Eduard Gans. Gans, who had been president of the society and a leading student of Hegel, was appointed associate professor of law at the University of Berlin promptly after his conversion.

Zunz himself repeatedly lobbied for a professorship in Jewish studies at a German university but had no success. The first such professorship was only created after the Holocaust, yet today virtually every major American, German, and Israeli university has a Jewish studies program. Jewish studies faculty can be found at universities around the world, from Tokyo to Tuscaloosa. So, it is fortunate that at this historic moment Ismar Schorsch, the chancellor emeritus of the Jewish Theological Seminary, has given us the first English-language biography of Zunz. The product of painstaking archival research, meticulous analysis, and illuminating synthesis, Schorsch's book is a staggering scholarly achievement.

Schorsch identifies four main assumptions that guided Zunz's revolutionary approach to Jewish knowledge. First, while traditional texts often ascribe events in Jewish history to God's miraculous will, Zunz bracketed divine influence regarding "the human as the agent of history." Second, while rabbinic literature regularly interprets the Bible anachronistically, the approach Zunz founded puts "chronology at its crux," stressing the need to place historical events in a careful temporal sequence.

While traditional scholarship focused on a small number of authoritative texts, Zunz insisted upon regarding philosophical texts, Hebrew grammars, fables, wills, and memoirs as primary sources of Jewish knowledge.

Third, while most Jewish writers of the past relied nearly exclusively on Jewish texts for knowledge about Jewish law, ideas, and history, Zunz's Jewish studies "emphasizes the validity of non-Jewish sources." Finally, while traditional scholarship focused on a relatively small number of authoritative texts, primarily the Bible, rabbinic literature, and legal codes, Zunz insisted upon regarding philosophical texts, Hebrew grammars, fables, wills, and memoirs—whether published or in manuscript—as primary sources of Jewish knowledge.

Portrait of Leopold Zunz, age 49, by Gustav Heidenreich. (Courtesy of the National Library of Israel and Professor Haggai Ben Shammai, Academic Director of the National Library of Israel.)

Traditional Jewish study was never a purely theoretical pursuit. It was always meant to shape and suffuse Jewish life. What of the new Jewish studies? This question has been raised since the inception of the field. Is Jewish studies supposed to have practical consequences or to be a disinterested "academic" pursuit studied purely for its own sake? The historian Isaak Markus Jost, Zunz's childhood friend, claimed that Zunz's scholarship was free from practical concerns, and this claim has been repeated by many writers, most famously the philosopher Hermann Cohen, who quipped that Zunz "could have been a great historian, but was alas only an antiquarian." Ismar Schorsch, himself a great historian, aims to overturn that judgment. In fact, of the three volumes of Zunz's *Gesammelte Schriften* (Collected Writings), published 1875–1876, only one volume is devoted to "hard-core scholarship." The other two contain writings directed to the German public advocating Jewish emancipation and speeches and sermons to the Jewish community. As Schorsch persuasively argues, "for Zunz the life of the mind and his frequent forays into the public arena were inseparable."

Leopold Zunz was born on August 10, 1794, in the "tiny German earldom" of Lippe. His father died in 1802, and the young boy was sent to board at a traditional Ashkenazi Jewish yeshiva in Wolfenbüttel, whose curriculum, like that of virtually all such schools, focused almost entirely on intensive Talmud study. Zunz later described the school as chaotic and filthy and the teachers as cruel and ignorant. But in 1807 Samuel Meyer Ehrenberg was appointed as the school inspector and modernized the school in line with the educational principles of the Jewish Enlightenment (Haskalah). Schorsch quotes Zunz's exuberant reaction to this change: "We literally went in a single day from the Middle Ages to a new day, and likewise from a state of Jewish slavery to civil freedom."

In 1815 Zunz enrolled at the recently established University of Berlin, where he studied history and philology. His teachers included the leading Greco-Roman historian of the day, Friedrich August Wolf, preeminent Bible critic W. M. L. De Wette, and "medievalist and student of Nordic myths" Friedrich Rühs. But Zunz stopped studying with Rühs when the latter published *On the Demands by Jews for German Citizenship.* Rühs argued that Jews could not be citizens due to their moral corruption and self-segregation. He blamed Judaism for these moral failings, concluding that Jews could be eligible for citizenship only after converting.

Schorsch has unearthed a first draft of "On Rabbinic Literature" in which Zunz sarcastically

attacked Rühs's veneration of the Middle Ages and his sense of Christian moral superiority:

> Where may one find more splendid laws than in Würzburg which in the fifteenth century allowed Jews to take with them 50 per cent [of their money]? . . . Where more fairness than in Augsburg in 1440 where the expelled Jews could take along their belongings and sell their houses within two years?

Schorsch observes that in the published version Zunz dropped the sarcasm. Instead, he provided a subtler defense of Jewish civil rights, arguing that historical scholarship would prove that Jews never lived fully segregated lives, but rather created vibrant cultures that drew upon and contributed to the Gentile societies in which they lived.

As a young man, Zunz also sought a role in Jewish communal religious leadership. In 1821, shortly before he married, Zunz was appointed preacher at the Reform Beer Temple in Berlin, but he was fired less than a year later. Schorsch tells us that the breaking point came when the congregation charged that Zunz had "improperly departed from the synagogue" on Tisha b'Av. But he also cites a letter from Zunz to his friend Isaak Noa Mannheimer in which Zunz maintains that he was dismissed because of a sermon he gave on "the downfall of the Temple" (which the Ninth of Av, of course, commemorates) in which he "did not spare the board and set forth irreligion, vanity, arrogance and love of money as the reasons for the downfall." Clearly, he was not cut out for the rabbinate.

With the collapse of the Verein and his dismissal from the Beer Temple, Zunz found work as a political editor at Berlin's prestigious daily *Haude- und Spenersche Zeitung.* Previous scholars have written virtually nothing about this period, and Schorsch provides the reader with valuable details about Zunz's work at the newspaper, linking it to his later involvement in politics. He also served as the director of the Berlin Jewish community public school from 1825 until 1829, while continuing his historical research.

In 1832 Zunz published *The Sermons of the Jews* which the 1906 *Jewish Encyclopedia* called "the most important Jewish work published in the nineteenth century." The book centers on a masterful historical analysis of classical midrash, which Zunz applied to current religious debates. One of the major reforms enacted by early Reform temples had been the introduction of an inspiring sermon in the vernacular language. The previous practice in German Jewish congregations had been for the rabbi only to speak on the Sabbaths before Passover and Yom Kippur, when he would deliver a learned talmudic discourse in Yiddish. In *The Sermons of the Jews,* Zunz argues that the original *midrashim* were, in fact, the vernacular sermons of the ancient rabbis. And he demonstrates that this tradition continued throughout the medieval and early modern periods, especially among Sephardim and Italian Jews. Thus, Zunz argues, the Reformers' introduction of an inspiring sermon delivered in German was not an innovation, but a revival of an ancient tradition. Indeed, it was the *lack* of a vernacular sermon within German and Polish communities that was a deviation from rabbinic tradition.

In 1840 Zunz was appointed director of a Jewish teachers' seminary in Berlin, where he served for a decade. In this period, he turned from advocating Jewish reforms to a conservative defense of key Jewish rituals. In an 1844 pamphlet Zunz used history to defend circumcision against charges by some radical reformers that it was barbaric and immoral. He argued that the distinction between moral and ceremonial laws was a relatively late invention only emerging in "exile where Jews became aware of their otherness." Zunz also surveyed the history of how Jews interpreted circumcision, from Maimonides, who saw it as a symbol of "God's love for Israel and of the love Jews have for one another," to medieval poets, who saw the blood of circumcision as foreshadowing Jewish martyrdom. Zunz concluded that circumcision served an important national purpose of creating a bond uniting Jews.

Zunz argued that the Reformers' introduction of an inspiring sermon delivered in German was not an innovation but a revival of an ancient tradition.

Portrait of Eduard Gans, 1828, by L. Sebbers. (Courtesy of the Leo Baeck Institute.)

In 1845 Zunz published his second masterpiece, *On History and Literature.* This work has been little studied, and Schorsch offers a fascinating, original analysis of it. He shows that a central aim of the book is to defend medieval Ashkenaz from German Reformers who regularly contrasted backward, superstitious Ashkenazi culture with enlightened, rational Sephardi culture, casting themselves as modern heirs of classical Sepharad and their opponents as epigones of medieval Ashkenaz. Resisting this stereotype, Zunz illustrates the richness of medieval Ashkenazi literature, which included "theology, history, poetry, astronomy, medicine and science," and stresses the moral elevation of its mussar literature, whose "ethical standards and pronouncements exceeded those of their Christian neighbors." Zunz's book provoked a furious response from the leading Reform scholar and thinker of the day, Abraham Geiger.

A vocal democrat, Zunz was an active participant in the March Revolution of 1848, delivering fiery speeches and even serving as an elector to the Prussian National Assembly. Schorsch writes that "Zunz was … not only the most politically engaged of all German Jewish Wissenschaft scholars but also the most radical in his political views." Following the failure of the 1848 revolutions, he retreated from public life and from 1855 to 1865 published a trilogy on the synagogue liturgy. Schorsch shows that a primary aim of these books was to illustrate Jewish creativity and literary virtuosity in the face of Christian persecution.

The Zunzes were married for 52 years, and Schorsch movingly evokes Leopold's companionship with his Adelheid (they never had children), and the extremity of his grief following her death in 1874. "With my Adelheid," he wrote, "I have lost everything, even myself. . . . I have no heart that supports me and no one needs mine." Nonetheless, he lived for another 12 years and developed a close friendship with David Kaufmann, a historian of Jewish thought who was nearly 60 years his junior. Schorsch's biography ends with the touching image of an elder statesman of Jewish scholarship passing the baton to a younger scholar before his death on March 17, 1886, at age 91.

Zunz's conviction that Jewish studies scholarship was meant to impact life was borne out by the fact that within his lifetime Reform, Conservative, and Modern Orthodox seminaries in Germany and America made Jewish studies an important component in the training of modern rabbis. This remains true, but the place of Jewish studies in modern Jewish life is by no means secure. Ultra-Orthodoxy, which largely rejects academic Jewish studies, is the fastest-growing Jewish group worldwide, while Reform, Conservative, and, arguably, Modern Orthodox Judaism remain demographically stagnant or in decline, and the prospects for Jewish secularism in America are, to say no more, unclear. Does the work of those one thousand scholars, Zunz's heirs, at the Association for Jewish Studies matter to contemporary Judaism and Jewish life?

Concerns about Jewish studies are not new. In Zunz's own lifetime the neo-Orthodox ideologue Samson Raphael Hirsch argued that historicizing Jewish texts, ideas, or rituals alienated contemporary Jews from them by making them seem foreign, outdated, and all too human. When modern Jewish denominations sought to establish themselves in the shadow of tradition-bound Judaism, scholarship's capacity to legitimate religious reform clearly served an important function. But what of today, when few Jews outside Orthodoxy feel a robust sense of obligation to Torah law? It is far from clear that historical scholarship addresses the key issues confronting the liberal denominations of Judaism. In Zunz's time Jewish studies was also an important tool for refuting anti-Judaism and legitimating Jewish civil rights. But this no longer seems relevant in America or Europe where, whatever prejudice may still exist, Jewish civil equality is largely taken for granted. (The place of Jewish studies in Israel is very different, though no less problematic.)

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Leopold Zunz insisted that scholarship should serve not just an intellectual function, but also a moral and political one. Is that true today and ought it to be? The leading Jewish political issue on today's college campuses is, of course, Israel. But professors of what is now called "Israel studies" are far from unanimous in their approach to the subject. Should they strive to strengthen Zionism as a bulwark against anti-Jewish hatred by demonstrating the historical connection of Jews to the Land

It is far from clear that historical scholarship addresses the key issues confronting the liberal denominations of Judaism.

of Israel? Or should they unmask the colonialist elements of the Zionist project? Or are such politicized approaches the way scholarship should be pursued at all? Israel studies may become an increasingly contentious flashpoint among Jews. Meanwhile, the heirs to Zunz's historical project among scholars of Jewish studies may seem increasingly irrelevant.

To be sure, Jewish studies will continue to be of interest to those seeking to understand their roots and culture. But for the past half-century, the strongest driving interest has been understanding the Holocaust and the Jewish worlds destroyed by it. As memory of the Holocaust recedes, this interest appears to be diminishing. What resources will Jews be willing to devote to funding research into less dramatic aspects of their history and culture?

In his original 1818 essay Zunz criticized those who overemphasized scholarship's practical utility:

> Let not philosophical inferiors hinder the flight to the Kingdom of Hope by their questions of utility. We have nothing to say to whomever fails to grasp the highest relations of science, its most estimable greatness, and every detail as an integral part of spiritual creation.

Zunz was arguing that Jewish studies was legitimated not by considerations of contemporary utility but by the fact that reality forms a whole and studying every manifestation of human civilization contributes to illuminating the complex mosaic of human culture. It was part of what we would call the humanities.

As the Jewish community changes and its priorities shift, academic Jewish studies and the Jewish community may eventually go their separate ways. If this happens, the centenary meeting of the Association of Jewish Studies may be significantly smaller than the 50th anniversary meeting. But though diminished, Jewish studies would not disappear. Instead, it would find its modest place as the study of a small expression of human culture that has exercised an outsized impact on world civilization.

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To Spy Out the Land

BY AMY NEWMAN SMITH

Spies in Palestine: Love, Betrayal, and the Heroic Life of Sarah Aaronsohn
by James Srodes
Counterpoint, 224 pp., $16.95

The Woman Who Fought an Empire: Sarah Aaronsohn and Her Nili Spy Ring
by Gregory J. Wallance
Potomac Books, 328 pp., $32.95

"We won't need to die . . . and when the day comes, the boys will turn into green crowned date palms and next to them their girls will petrify into statues of white marble," wrote the young spy Avshalom Feinberg. While the letter's recipient, Rivka Aaronsohn, would live until 1981, Feinberg, along with Rivka's sister Sarah, would die violently within a few years. Some 100 years after the destruction of the Nili spy ring, to which they belonged, two new books tell their story. (Nili was a password taken from Samuel I 15:29, "*Netzach Yisrael lo y'shaker*," roughly translatable as "The Eternal One of Israel does not lie.")

Published shortly before his death, James Srodes's *Spies in Palestine: Love, Betrayal, and the Heroic Life of Sarah Aaronsohn* grew out of a misfiled document the author happened across in the British National Archives while researching a biography of CIA director Allen W. Dulles. Alongside the initials of dozens of civil servants who read the document appropriating 10,000 British pounds (about $600,000 today) for an experimental agricultural site at Atlit, outside the town of Zikhron Yaakov, was a scrawled note, "Considering our moral responsibility for the unhappy fate of the 'A Organization,' this is the least we could do." Like that mislaid government form, the history of the Aaronsohns and the Nili spy ring, which aided the British in their fight against the Ottoman Empire during World War I, has gone through many hands. As Srodes himself observes, "It is an important caution for the reader that not all histories, and certainly not all biographies, on this topic are in agreement. Contradictions of fact, disagreements over interpretation, and individual motives of the historians themselves can confuse."

The more recent publication of *The Woman Who Fought an Empire: Sarah Aaronsohn and Her Nili Spy Ring* by Gregory J. Wallance shows how right Srodes was. The two writers disagree on matters both large and small, from the foundational question of whose influence was strongest in the spy ring to intimate matters of the heart. Almost from the beginning, Srodes and Wallance diverge: One names malaria as the cause of the high mortality rate among the early pioneers that almost doomed the settlement; the other points to dysentery. (A third book, published in 2005, to which I will return, clarifies the matter: Those early First Aliyah pioneers fell victim to both diseases.) They are most at odds about Sarah Aaronsohn's character and love life. Srodes describes her marriage to Chaim Abraham, a Constantinople merchant who never followed her to Palestine, as one of convenience and links her romantically to fellow spies Avshalom Feinberg and Yosef Lishansky. Wallance calls her marriage loving and acknowledges an affair only with Lifshansky. He depicts her as a singularly cool-headed operative, who, unlike her excitable male colleagues, remained focused on the mission. (Both authors, however, discount the persistent speculation of a dalliance between Sarah and T. E. Lawrence, "Lawrence of Arabia," based on his enigmatic dedication of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* to "S.A.")

Sarah kept her secrets, even as she drifted in and out of consciousness, and even when her innocent relatives were tortured in front of her.

Avshalom Feinberg and Sarah Aaronsohn, 1916.

Sarah Aaronsohn tending to carrier pigeons, 1917. (Courtesy of Beit Aaronsohn Nili Museum Archive.)

After a brief prologue set in early 1917, when the shadow of the Great War fell fully on Zikhron Yaakov, Srodes backtracks to tell the story of the founding of the town by members of the First Aliyah, including Sarah's father, Ephraim, and the genesis of the nearby Atlit agricultural station in the pioneering work of her world-famous agronomist brother, Aaron. In addition to Sarah and Aaron, their brother Alexander was also central to Nili. The little network of spies used their access to local Ottoman troop positions and intimate knowledge of the region to help the British war effort. In doing so, they were correctly betting on the British, but not everyone in Zikhron Yaakov or the Old Yishuv, more generally, agreed. Srodes usefully situates their actions within the context of competing national identities in the region and the global race for petroleum that focused the entire world on the Middle East.

Because Srodes starts his tale near the end of the Nili affair, readers know its terrible outcome in advance. On the eve of Sukkot, 1917, the residents of Zikhron Yaakov suffered along with 27-year-old Sarah Aaronsohn, unable to escape her screams as she was tortured by Turkish operatives. On Srodes's telling, it was vital that she hold out because, unlike the other spies, not to speak of those friends and family members who were not part of the clandestine circle, "she alone . . . held a great secret": British forces under General Edmund Allenby were poised to strike from Egypt with the goal of capturing Jerusalem.

Srodes, a prolific biographer whose prose tends to the florid, can hardly be blamed for his description of Sarah as a "hardened warrior," in these circumstances. In this matter, Wallance affirms him: "The Turks were students of torture who applauded the discovery of a new method as though it was a scientific breakthrough; some had studied the records of the Spanish Inquisition to refine their skills." The practice of beating the soles of a victim's feet with rods or tubes, known as *faluka,* was one of the mildest forms of torment that was inflicted upon her. But she kept her secrets, even as she drifted in and out of consciousness, and even when her innocent relatives were tortured in front of her.

Spies in Palestine is an excellent resource, but it is hampered by Srodes's unwillingness to trim details and dramatis personae. While it is important to know how Aaron's American and British contacts opened doors to American benefactors and British military intelligence that would have remained closed even to a "self-taught prodigy in botany, geology, and hydrology" credited with the rediscovery of the "mother of all wheat," Srodes's exhaustive list of his important contacts burdens an already far-ranging narrative. Nor is he willing to truncate or elide any of Nili's breakthroughs and accomplishments or its challenges and setbacks.

What largely rescues Srodes's account is the drama of Sarah's life and death itself. As Srodes weaves the tale of her last days of freedom, the lost possibilities for her escape are painful to contemplate. And there are the words she left behind. After one has read what she was subjected to, it is almost unbelievable that she was able to threaten her captors, saying, "Your end is nigh, you will fall into the pit I have dug for you."

If Srodes is a popularizer, Wallance is more of a scholar. His carefully footnoted *The Woman Who Fought an Empire* draws more closely on the archival material, primarily from that of the Beit Aaronsohn Nili Museum in Zikhron Yaakov. Where Srodes declares the importance of Nili intelligence, Wallance demonstrates with specifics**.** Nili operatives, going about their work as doctors, farmers, and merchants, mapped the location of Turkish forces, as well as the state of their training and equipment. They also mapped the bridges, roads, and fortifications built by the Turks' German engineers. Wallance tells us that a Turkish army engineer Sarah recruited as a spy produced a map of Jerusalem "on which he had marked the location of Turkish fortifications." Another Nili intelligence coup described by Wallance provided both the number and capability—including flying speeds and machine gun capacities—of the airplanes that were being brought in to reinforce the Gaza–Beersheva front. That information gave the British time to move in additional planes and ensure British air superiority. Information from the Nili was so reliable, he explains, it was used to verify other sources. Ottoman ruler Djemal Pasha certainly believed Nili tipped the balance against him, railing, "All my friends warned me, don't trust the Jews, and I treated them well. . . . See how Aaronsohn showed me his honesty and his trustworthiness. I allowed him to travel to Berlin for his alleged scientific purpose—and he escaped to the British and organized spying against me."

Wallance's narrative allows Sarah to step out of the shadow of her famous brother and her headstrong colleagues, showcasing her intense focus and sense of duty to her fellow Jews. On Wallance's telling, Nili was not only the scientist-diplomat Aaron's project. He describes Sarah's horrified eyewitness reports on the Armenian genocide as just as central to Nili's founding as Aaron, Alexander, and Avshalom's hatching plans to aid the British for Zionist ends. Where Aaron paid bribes to and joked with Djemal Pasha, Sarah was convinced that Djemal "would match, if not exceed, the brutality of the dozens of sultans who had ruled the Ottoman Empire over six centuries."

Although she did not, like many spies, "thirst for danger as a means of self-fulfillment," Sarah seems to have been born for the world of clandestine operations. When she sent warnings from Constantinople to her family in the Yishuv of the massacre of the Armenians, a fate she feared would befall the Jews, she wrote in tiny handwriting covered with large postage stamps. To get the recipients to look under those stamps, "she wrote a letter to Rivka urging her to admire 'the boule'; using the French word for treelined boulevard, but really a pun on the Hebrew word *bul*, or stamp." It was Aaron who established contact with the British and convinced them that he was neither a double agent nor a crank, but it was Sarah who did the hands-on work of recruiting sources and reactivating those who had fallen silent. She even took risky trips to Damascus to eavesdrop on the German officers aiding the Ottoman war effort.

Nili operatives, going about their work as doctors, farmers, and merchants, mapped the location of Turkish forces, as well as the state of their training and equipment.

Unlike mercurial colleagues Avshalom Feinberg, whose rashness led to his death at the hands of Bedouins in the Sinai, or Na'aman Belkind, whose drinking habits led him to reveal the existence of Nili and the names of its members, she spent the day before her arrest burning incriminating documents. In contrast to her silence under torture, Aaron's misgivings about using the agricultural station for espionage led him to confess the ring's activity to his American benefactors, an admission that put everyone's life in danger. Wallance does not mince words: Aaron's departure from the Yishuv was for the best, "not only because his stature might finally gain the cooperation of British intelligence, but also, simply put, he was not a good spy."

Where Aaron could be excitable and rush into decisions, Sarah was stoic. She continued to collect intelligence even when communications with—and much-needed funds from—the British failed to arrive. Frustrated with British bureaucracy in Cairo, Aaron wrote in his diary:

> More than twenty times I felt like throwing up to their face what I thought of their complete and irremediable inability to understand the situation. A hundred times daily I curse the moment when we decided to work with them . . . better [to] commit suicide than to continue under such conditions with people whom we thought were our friends.

Ottoman Turkish leader Djemal Pasha, left, with a German officer of the Asia Korps during World War I. (Courtesy of the Bain Collection, Library of Congress.)

Suicide is one thing to threaten and another to do. Facing transport to Damascus where further torture and certain death awaited her, Sarah managed to convince her Turkish guards to give her a few minutes alone in Aaron's house to change before the journey. In that time, she wrote out her final instructions to the Nili network, located a hidden gun, and shot herself.

In the early 1900s, Zikhron Yaakov was still very much a small town where rivalries and grudges grew abundantly. The Aaronsohns—people said—thought they were better than their neighbors. Aaron, in particular, drew resentment for the imperious way he directed the Atlit station and, perhaps, simply for his spectacular successes. This commonly held opinion was not helped when he convinced his younger brother Alexander to go to the United States, where Alex filed papers to become a citizen and went to work at the Department of Agriculture. Alex's articles in *The Atlantic Monthly* extolling the virtues of Palestine were not relished in Zikhron Yaakov. As Srodes puts it, "Sentiment held that one Aaronsohn celebrity swanking about abroad was enough, two was too much." Had they been more steeped in the traditions of their Romanian Jewish ancestors, the two might have given a thought to the *ayin hara*. As it was, they were visitors at the mansions of Secretary of State Robert Lansing, his nephews John Foster Dulles and Allen Dulles, and Assistant Navy Secretary Franklin D. Roosevelt and hobnobbed with luminaries such as Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., Herbert Croly (the editor of the then-influential *The New Republic*), and multimillionaire Herbert Hoover.

Nor was that the only source of conflict. First Aliyah

families like the Aaronsohns were scorned by Second Aliyah newcomers who wanted to work the land in place of Arab laborers and institute communal property ownership and decision-making. Second Aliyah self-defense groups like Ha-Shomer simply refused to protect First Aliyah towns such as Zikhron Yaakov and Hadera. In 1913, Alexander Aaronsohn and Avshalom Feinberg, the fiancé of Rivka Aaronsohn, formed a rival group called the Gideonites. Young men with horses and guns "joined as a brotherhood, with a sworn oath of secrecy and a pledge to match violence done to them with greater retaliation." Their frequent and violent skirmishes with Arabs in nearby villages over destroyed crops and stolen livestock gave them confidence. Many Nili spies—including the hotheads who would play a role in the network's discovery by the Turks—came from the ranks of the Gideonites.

The grave of Avshalom Feinberg after it was relocated to Mount Herzl. (Courtesy of Lisanna Wallance.)

Wallance points us to another book about the Nili spy ring, *A Strange Death* by Hillel Halkin (the death of the title is not, incidentally, Sarah Aaronsohn's). Halkin's 2005 book is, despite the dark subject matter, a pleasure to read, showing how small-town feuds and rivalries, past hurts, and insults intersect with historical events. Halkin underscores how, by defining a life as "historic," historians elide much that makes a life. His Sarah is not an untouchable heroine, but rather a woman whose "heroism and passion" are "perfectly human."

Begun after Halkin moved to Zikhron Yaakov, the writing turned him into a kind of spy, cultivating sources, digging out secrets, and surreptitiously entering deserted buildings. Halkin's tale is full of historical rhymes, echoes between past and modern events, which afford the reader literary pleasure and historical insight that ordinary biography cannot provide.

Halkin tells us of an older book, a "thin, paperbound volume . . . barely a hundred pages long." It was *Sarah, Flame of The Nili*, found in the deserted home of Tzvi Aaronsohn and signed by both Alexander and Rivka. It is a book for young readers, and Halkin dismisses it until he reaches an absolutely stunning passage:

> The people of Zichron felt they would go mad if they had to hear the screams of the tortured prisoners any longer. But there were also four women who ran through the streets of the town, laughing and jeering at each scream. And though we may leave their eternal damnation to others, let it be known that each was requited in her way.

Halkin's book was written out of an attempt to understand not Sarah's bravery, but the laughing and jeering of such "Gorgons and Furies."

Where Wallance and Srodes both place their trust in the established archives, Halkin shows us memorial books from small settlements, township council notes, pictures found in abandoned buildings, and the memories of those who lived through Nili and the aftermath, as malleable and unreliable as those memories might be. The established narrative is that fear of the Turks motivated those Jews who opposed Nili, even to the point of betraying it. As Wallance puts it, "The perspective of Jews in this region was that espionage was dangerous and that relations with the Turks could be managed. Why revolt against an empire when it can be bribed?" Halkin bids us to look deeper:

> If you wanted to know who did what—joined the spy ring, was for it, against it, took no stand—you had to put the big things aside. The course of the war—the hopes of the Jews—the plans of the British—the right to risk lives that hadn't asked to be risked: These were not the keys that fit the doors on [Zikhron Yaakov's] Founders Street. To open those, you had to know other things. Who was related to whom. Who was the neighbor of whom. Who was friendly or had quarreled with whom. Who was more brave, prudent, adventurous, selfish, caring, or timid than whom.

The grave of one of the four women who was alleged to have jeered as Sarah Aaronsohn was tortured sits alone, away from her family members. Her "*mitah meshunah*," her strange death, ended her life at age 50, five years after Aaronsohn's death. Sarah's grave is there too, not outside the cemetery proper, as is customary in the case of suicide, but next to her mother and surrounded by a fence that instead of setting her apart as shamed appears to give her a place of honor.

There had long been rumors that Yosef Lishansky and Avshalom Feinberg had not been attacked by Bedouins while attempting to cross into Egypt to reestablish communications with the British. Instead, the town gossip went, Yosef killed Avshalom in a rivalrous argument over Sarah. The falsity of this rumor "was proven after the 1967 war," Halkin tells us, "when Feinberg's remains were dug up by Israeli soldiers in Sinai with the help of an old Bedouin who corroborated Lishansky's story." Over the site grew a lone date tree.

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

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Free Radicals

BY ALLIS RADOSH AND RONALD RADOSH

The J. Abrams Book: The Life and Work of an Exceptional Personality
by Jacob Abrams, edited by the Jewish Cultural Center in Mexico, translated by Ruth Murphy
privately published by Rebecca Nestle, 301 pp., $20

Left of the Left: My Memories of Sam Dolgoff
by Anatole Dolgoff
AK Press, 400 pp., $22

The history of American anarchists, and of Jewish anarchists in particular, has been forgotten, largely overshadowed by the history of the more well known (and far less defensible) American communist movement. Two recent books—neither of them is a conventional biography—reintroduce us to two fascinating 20th-century Jewish anarchists. The volumes are almost as quirky and unconventional as their subjects. *The J. Abrams Book: The Life and Work of an Exceptional Personality* is a kind of scrapbook-memoir published by friends and coworkers of the subject after his death in 1953; *Left of the Left: My Memories of Sam Dolgoff* is by the subject's son Anatole, who keeps up a running dialogue with his long-dead father.

The J. Abrams Book contains fragments of the subject's autobiography. The most compelling is his account of the five years he spent in the Soviet Union, which takes up half of the book. Surprisingly, nothing that Jacob ("Jack") Abrams put in writing deals directly with the famous Supreme Court case that bears his name: *Abrams v. United States*. It's the free speech case with which every law school graduate must be at least vaguely familiar, without necessarily remembering anything about the man it immortalized.

In July 1918, when the United States sent 15,000 troops to intervene in revolutionary Russia, Jack Abrams and some of his fellow anarchists organized a protest. They rented a six-room apartment in East Harlem as their headquarters and installed a printing press in the basement, where they produced two leaflets, one written in English and the other in Yiddish, to be distributed on New York City's Lower East Side. "Workers," it proclaimed, "our reply to barbaric intervention has to be a general strike! An open challenge only will let the government know that not only the Russian Worker fights for freedom, but also here in America lives the spirit of Revolution. . . . We must not and will not betray the splendid fighters of Russia."

On August 22, 1918, they dropped five thousand of these leaflets from a tenement rooftop on the Lower East Side. They were quickly arrested and charged with conspiracy "to unlawfully utter, print, write and publish . . . disloyal, scurrilous, and abusive language about the form of government of the United States . . . language intended to incite, provoke, and encourage resistance to the United States in the war with Germany." The trial was held in October, in an atmosphere permeated by patriotic bond drives and Liberty Loan rallies. Judge Henry DeLamar Clayton Jr., a former senator, betrayed his feelings during a cross-examination of Abrams. Speaking in a soft voice with a Yiddish accent, Abrams tried his best to defend what he meant by his anarchist beliefs: "This government was built on a revolution. When our forefathers of the American Revolution . . ."—which was as far as he managed to get. "Your what?" Judge Clayton asked. The jurors got his point. Two weeks later the defendants were found guilty. Three of them, Abrams, Samuel Lipman, and Hyman Lachowsky, were given the maximum sentence of 20 years in prison. The fourth, Mollie Steimer, received 15 years, probably because she was a young woman.

Like the proverbial canaries in a coal mine, the American anarchists became the first critics on the Left to expose the horrors of Bolshevism.

Defendants in* Abrams v. United States *departing for Russia, November 24, 1921. From left, Samuel Lipman, Hyman Lachowsky, Mollie Steimer, and Jacob Abrams.

The defendants appealed the case, which went to the Supreme Court and was filed as *Abrams v. United States*. The majority of the court affirmed the sentence, but it led to one of Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.'s most famous dissents (in which Justice Louis Brandeis joined him). Holmes's argument that only the "clear and present danger" of immediate evil could justify restricting speech was a milestone in the defense of freedom of speech.

Abrams and his fellow defendants spent two years in jail while their attorney Harry Weinberger worked out a deal: The defendants would be released with the stipulation that they leave for Russia—their birthplace—at their own expense and never return to the United States. On November 24, 1921, Abrams, his wife Mary, and his fellow defendants set sail for the USSR.

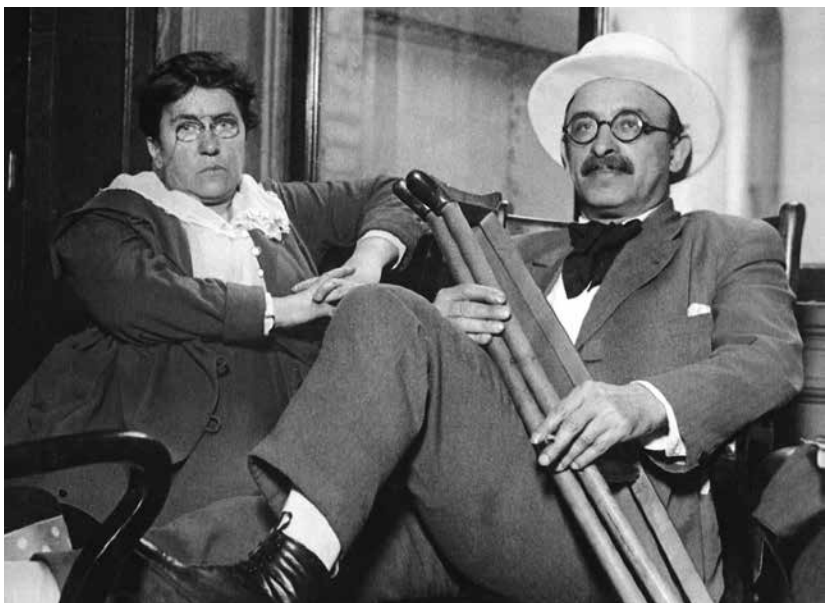
While there are scores of books on the history of American communism, students of American politics tend to forget that, as the historian Kenyon Zimmer pointed out in his book *Immigrants Against the State*, anarchists once outnumbered Marxists, and by 1910 there were a few hundred thousand of them in this country. Indeed, up to World War II, Zimmer wrote, they "remained a significant—though largely forgotten—element of the American Left." Unlike today's masked rock-throwers, they stood for the creation of a peaceful, stateless, antiauthoritarian society where people would freely join together to govern themselves. In America, anarchist groups were largely organized by their members' countries of origin: German, Italian, Spanish, and so on. However, it was Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe who settled in New York City that became the movement's most influential and enthusiastic adherents.

Many immigrants from poor working-class families, sent out to work at an early age and afforded only a limited education, were drawn to anarcho-syndicalism, which held out the promise that revolutionary industrial unionism would ultimately result in the workers' control of the economy and transform society into an anarchist utopia. Jewish anarchists pursued their arguments in New York's lively radical Yiddish-language subculture. Although they were not ashamed of their Jewish heritage, as atheists they rejected Judaism and famously held an annual Yom Kippur Ball, mocking the holiest day on the Jewish calendar.

The J. Abrams Book contains Abrams's account of his childhood in Russia, where he was born in 1886, and continues with his arrival in the United States in 1908; his deportation back to what had become the Soviet Union in 1921; his flight from the Soviet

Union five years later; and his arrival in Mexico, where he spent the last 30 years of his life.

To call his childhood painful is an understatement. After his mother died when he was four and his stepmother rejected him, he had to sleep on the floor between doorways, was often hungry, and dressed in ragged hand-me-downs. His older sister Manya took care of him, and eventually apprenticed him to a bookbinder and printer whose workers introduced him to the revolutionary antitsarist underground. Manya left for America in 1906 and sent for Jack two years later. He settled on the Lower East Side, got a job as a bookbinder, joined the International Brotherhood of Bookbinders, and was elected president of the local. His future wife, Mary Domsky, was active in the Amalgamated Clothing Workers union (she narrowly escaped dying in the tragic and famous Triangle Shirtwaist Company fire). Abrams had met her before the fire on picket lines and at forums where they heard talks by Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman, and other anarchists. Abrams, who was already a revolutionary but not yet an anarchist, was persuaded.



Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, ca. 1917. (War Department of the United States Government.)

Leon Trotsky and his wife, Natalia, arrive in exile in the city of Tampico, Mexico, January 9, 1937. The Mexican artist Frida Kahlo, left of Natalia, came to greet them. (Photo by Keystone-France/Gamma-Keystone via Getty Images.)

A decade later, he was back in Russia and even more miserable than he had been as a child. After his first experiences with the Cheka, the early Soviet secret police, "it became clearer" to Abrams "that the people in America who had criticized the leadership of Soviet Russia were not completely wrong." Indeed, everything was the opposite of what he had expected. He and Mary were assigned to one small room with three other people, hunger was endemic, people were dressed in rags, and the Bolshevik claim to have eliminated prostitution was patently false. At the time, the Bolsheviks were trying to destroy those with other radical tendencies, including socialists and anarchists who had fought alongside them to overthrow the tsar, but Abrams had defended the revolution and had paid for it. He was informed that his status was that of a "non-party member with a Soviet lining," but, as he soon found out, it did not protect him from Soviet repression. When he spoke up at meetings he was admonished and told "the collective is the boss and the individual is his servant."

When asked what kind of work he would like to do, he suggested that he set up and run an automatic laundry, which he had learned how to do in prison. He was immediately given permission to set up the first modern laundry in Russia, which operated out of the basement of the Foreign Ministry. However, when he protested inefficiencies and graft he was ignored, and eventually charges of anti-Soviet activity were brought against him. Disenchanted, he concluded that it was time to "abandon this land of one's hopes."

Realizing that if he and Mary wanted to leave he would have to find employment in an enterprise that was not run directly by the Soviet state, he quit his job. Since their housing was tied to government employment, they were immediately evicted. They had to live in the corridor for six weeks, until a friend took them into his apartment, which was meant for one person but now housed six. As it happened, two of the spaces were taken by political tourists, Ronald Radosh's parents. Abrams asked if when they returned to New York, they would tell the truth about how people really lived in the workers' paradise. Reuben Radosh told him that he would not, since he had to defend the idea of the Soviet revolution, not depict its reality, to which Abrams responded, "happy is the believer, for whom even bad things become transformed into good ones." In 1926, Abrams told the commissars that he and Mary would be of more value to the revolution in other countries, a fable he told them in the hope he would get official permission to leave. Much to his surprise, after an interrogation at the infamous Lubyanka prison, he and Mary received two passports. They gladly left Russia for good (albeit with the GPU on their trail). Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman had earlier learned a similar lesson during their Russian exile. Like the proverbial canaries in a coal mine, the American anarchists became the first critics on the Left to expose the horrors of Bolshevism.

The next year, Abrams and Mary arrived in Mexico, where the National Revolutionary Party had come to power. There weren't many anarchists in Mexico, but they were welcomed by the small but growing Jewish community. "In Jewish Mexico," one of his friends wrote in tribute, "it was the community activists of the younger [Jewish] generation who were his audiences and his adherents." Eventually Abrams became a director of the Jewish Cultural Center. He found work as a photographer and then set up a printing shop where he printed Yiddish books and newspapers. He also chaired Mexico's International Committee Against Fascism, which supported the Republican forces in the Spanish Civil War. When refugees began arriving after Franco's victory, Abrams organized to help them and other antifascist exiles.

In 1937, Leon Trotsky arrived in Mexico. Knowing that he was short of funds, his host, the then-Trotskyist painter Diego Rivera, introduced him to Abrams, who was able to arrange a loan. The two became unlikely friends, and Abrams often visited him at his home in Coyoacán just outside of Mexico City. On one occasion, when they were having lunch, Trotsky began denouncing Stalin and his other foes. Abrams, who always spoke his mind, responded:

> I'm only fifty-percent in agreement with you. I agree with what you say about your former comrades when you condemn them. However, here's where we part ways. I don't agree that if you were in Stalin's place, you would be better. Dictatorship has its own logic; perhaps you would be even worse.
>
> When Trotsky told him that he took pride in his order to have the Red Army put down the attempted rebellion of the Kronstadt sailors during the civil war Abrams condemned him to which Trotsky responded, "I would have done the same if it took place now," thereby verifying Abrams' critique.

A friend in the Jewish community later commented, after witnessing this exchange, that "not everyone could do this," and yet Abrams did and remained "good friends with Trotsky."

In 1945 Abrams was diagnosed with throat cancer. Through the intercession of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, he was allowed to seek medical care in the United States, where he was guarded by a federal marshal day and night. After several treatments at Temple University's hospital Jacob Abrams died in Mexico in 1953. Mary, who did not want a religious service, wrote the inscription for his tombstone: "J. Abrams who fought passionately for freedom, justice and tolerance."

In *Left of the Left: My Memories of Sam Dolgoff*, Anatole Dolgoff sets out to tell not only his family's story but also "the history of a culture, and of a chapter of American radicalism that few people know about." Dolgoff strives to give an emotionally honest and impartial look at his parents and himself, warts and all, although he seems to be harder on himself. Looking back, he writes that except for his parents, "I doubt there is much to my life you would find interesting." His academic career at the New York City College of Technology teaching physics paled in comparison. At the end of his career, he found that his father was more and more on his mind, and students complained that "I talk about my parents too much, proof to them that I am over the hill and growing senile." He was neither and wrote the book after he retired.

Sam Dolgoff belonged to a slightly later generation of Jewish anarchists than Jack Abrams. His father, Max, had been a rebel back in Russia, where he enraged his own rabbi father "by renouncing religion altogether." When Max was about to be conscripted into the army, he left for America and in 1905 sent for his wife Anna and their three-year-old son Sam. Sam was a socialist by the age of 14, but he soon concluded that the socialists were mere reformers who were not really interested in uprooting the capitalist system or transforming society. When he started expressing these views at meetings and publishing his ideas in a mimeographed paper he called *Friends of Freedom*, he was put on trial and expelled from the Socialist Party for insubordination. Afterwards, one of the party judges came up to him and said, "I am going to give you a tip. You are not a socialist. You are an anarchist." Dolgoff promptly asked him for an address. When he made his way to a dingy loft near Union Square, the anarchists welcomed him with open arms, but he was soon dissatisfied with what felt more like a debating society for misfits than a political movement. One member told him that he "was not a Road to Freedom type. 'You are an anarcho-syndicalist. You are an IWW, a Wobbly!'"

He joined the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in 1922 and became a migratory worker riding the rails, propagating anarcho-syndicalist ideas, and participating in strikes. On a trip to Cleveland he met Esther Miller, a delegate from the Anarchist Forum who had agreed to meet a speaker from the IWW on the steps of the library. After an hour of waiting, she started to leave when she looked more closely at a hobo who had been pacing back and forth there for the whole time. Of course, it was Sam. Anatole Dolgoff describes his father during this period as having "a strong face, a rugged Russian Jewish face, wild black hair swept back, acute black eyes behind the glasses, a prominent nose," and he quotes an acquaintance as saying that Sam looked like he combed his hair with an egg-beater. Esther, by contrast, was a "proper young lady from a striving, high-achieving, first-generation immigrant family—well mannered, well spoken, and immaculately dressed" who had earned an MA in English literature. Her family thought it was perverse of her to "run off with a Wobbly, a filthy hobo house painter," but they were married for 58 years.

In 1933, Sam and Esther moved to Stelton, New Jersey, a "largely anarchistic colony," but concluded that such places were "essentially self-isolationist forms of escapism." They settled in New York City where Sam, together with Carlo Tresca and his circle of Italian anarchists, helped found the Vanguard Group, an anarcho-communist group that largely propagated "the ideas of Bakunin and Kropotkin." Sam edited and wrote a column for its publication, *Vanguard: A Libertarian Communist Journal*, focusing on the American labor movement.

But a cause that consumed his time and energy, as it did in Mexico for Abrams, was the Spanish Revolution, during which anarchists had temporarily established a functioning anarchist society in northeast Spain, including Barcelona, until the cause was defeated by the Communists. Dolgoff was ready to join the fight but was told that what the anarchists needed more than anything was not fighters but arms, money, and international support. Looking back on it Dolgoff wrote that "about eight million people directly or indirectly participated" in the Spanish Revolution, which "came closer to realizing the ideal of the free stateless society on a vast scale than any other revolution in history."

Sam Dolgoff's 1983 self-published critique of Marx's theory of economic determinism and the state, as well as Marxist views on the early socialist labor movement, peasantry, and the Paris Commune.

In 1954, he and others formed the Libertarian League, which held forums every Friday night featuring nonanarchist speakers such as Michael Harrington, Bayard Rustin, and Dorothy Day. Dolgoff also developed relationships with Paul Goodman and Dave Van Ronk, the sometimes Trotskyist/anarchist blues and folk singer who regarded him as a mentor and surrogate father figure. When the 1960s arrived, Sam and Esther found the behavior of what might be called "lifestyle" anarchists infuriating. "I am sick and tired," Sam told Paul Avrich, the foremost historian of the anarchist movement, "of these half-assed artists and poets who reject organization and want only to play with their belly buttons." But he was not ready to give up on them and mentored such figures as Tuli Kupferberg of the Fugs, a counterculture folk-rock band. What upset Dolgoff the most was the young radicals' embrace of Fidel Castro, whom he quickly recognized as a Stalinist dictator. He campaigned on behalf of the Cuban anarchists whom Castro had attacked and exiled, and waged a 15-year battle against the pro-Castro Left. In 1976, he published *The Cuban Revolution: A Critical Perspective*. The critic Paul Berman has best summed up what Dolgoff meant to so many:

> Sam Dolgoff had many great traits, but the greatest of all was a nobility of character—a human sympathy that made him side with the downtrodden . . . He taught me how to look at the world through eyes that are not the same as the official eyes of the state and the big establishment and the ideologues.

As the child of anarchists, Anatole Dolgoff has developed an untraditional and rather disorganized format to present the story of his father. He tells us that during his childhood there were two Anatoles: the one who lived in his parents' world of radical ideologues and lost causes, which he kept secret and was often embarrassed by, and the one who lived on the streets and at school with his friends. Then there was his father's alcoholism, which almost destroyed the family. While Anatole's love for his parents is apparent, the process of writing his book clearly helped him to accept and admire them. He does not, however, let his father off the hook on several issues. For example, Sam criticized Emma Goldman for not being "very enthusiastic about the IWW" and for "not really asking for much more than what today would be considered a liberal program." His son disagrees, writing, "Emma and her group supported the Wobblies and the class struggle 'a-plenty,' in my opinion." While Sam was infuriated by the pro-Castro Left, his son takes a more charitable view of them, writing: "Clearly they were mistaken. But their mistakes were motivated by enthusiasm for what they thought was a genuine revolution of the poor and downtrodden. They fell in love and love can be blind."

Jack Abrams and Sam Dolgoff shared more than their identities as anarcho-syndicalists. They were both idealistic, courageous, single-minded, and passionate in fighting for their cause and for freedom not only in America but internationally. Like many of their fellow Jewish immigrants they were self-taught and eager to learn; they were working-class intellectuals and charismatic orators—a lost Jewish type. They were also fortunate to marry women (who in anarchist fashion were referred to as "life companions") who were devoted to their shared cause.

What then did these Jewish anarchists accomplish? After all, they not only failed to achieve their lifelong dream of a free cooperative society without a state to rule over them; they failed to attract enough believers in that dream to keep the movement alive. Perhaps their biggest mistake was the belief that humankind was basically good despite all they had experienced to the contrary. On the other hand, they were clear-eyed, even prophetic, in their early disillusionment with communism. They were dreamers, but their dream was a noble one and worthy of being remembered.

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A Book and a Sword in the Vilna Ghetto

BY CECILE E. KUZNITZ

The Book Smugglers: Partisans, Poets, and the Race to Save Jewish Treasures from the Nazis
by David E. Fishman
ForeEdge/University Press of New England, 312 pp., $29.95

When Jewish inmates of the Vilna Ghetto returned home after a day of slave labor in the city, they had to pass inspection at the ghetto gate, a frightening prospect for those smuggling food for their starving families and even more dangerous for members of the Fareynikte partizaner organizatsye (United Partisan Organization, known as the FPO), the armed resistance movement, who often smuggled weapons and ammunition. One day in July 1943, the poet Shmerke Kaczerginski, hid another type of contraband: rare rabbinic books strapped to his body inside a Torah cover. Manning the watch was not a member of the Jewish police, which often looked the other way, but an SS officer known for his sadism. As David E. Fishman recounts the incident in *The Book Smugglers*:

> From a block away you could hear the shrieks of inmates being beaten for hiding food. The workers around Shmerke reached into their clothing. Potatoes, bread, vegetables, and pieces of firewood rolled into the street. They hissed at Shmerke, his puffed-up body obvious. . . . "Dump it. Dump it!" But Shmerke wouldn't unload.

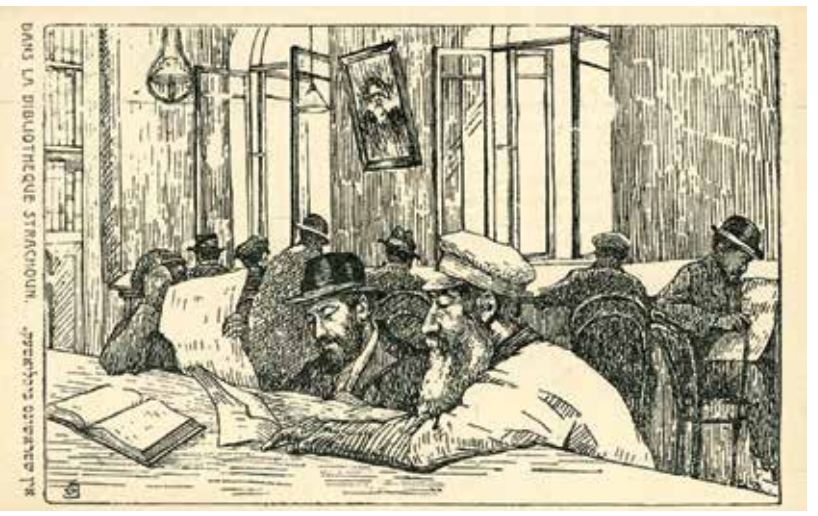
Just as he reached the head of the line, the SS officer left the gate and Kaczerginski accomplished his mission:

> In a secret bunker deep beneath the ghetto, a stone-floored cavern excavated from the damp soil, metal canisters were stuffed with books, manuscripts, documents, theater memorabilia, and religious artifacts. Later that night, Shmerke added his treasures to the desperate depository. Before resealing the hidden doorway into the treasure room, he bade farewell to the Torah covers and old rarities with a loving caress, as if they were his children.

Kaczerginski was one of a group of ghetto residents who risked their lives to save the legacy of Jewish culture from Nazi plunder. It also included the linguist Zelig Kalmanovitch, who underwent a religious awakening during the war and became known as "the prophet of the Vilna ghetto"; Herman Kruk, who arrived as a refugee fleeing Warsaw and headed the ghetto library; the high school teacher Rachela Krinsky, who became Kaczerginki's lover; and the great Yiddish poet Abraham Sutzkever. Close friends and members of the literary group Young Vilna in the 1930s, Kaczerginski and Sutzkever organized what came to be known as the paper brigade.

An aesthete with a belief that literature possessed an almost supernatural power, Sutzkever composed powerful poems in the midst of the Holocaust in the faith that he could cheat death as long as he continued to create. Yet it is not the refined Sutzkever who is Fishman's hero but the colorful, earthy Kaczerginski. A true *folksmentsh* (man of the people), Kaczerginski was a communist who had led a hardscrabble existence, but his lively, outgoing personality won him friends from all walks of life.

The rescue of books, manuscripts, and Torahs was almost as much a form of resistance as the preservation of life itself.



"In the Strashun Library," a postcard from the "Vilner yidishe geto" (Vilna Jewish Ghetto) series by Ber Zalkind, ca. 1923.

His poems, less innovative and more tuneful than Sutzkever's, were often set to music. Many became popular in the Vilna Ghetto and are still sung today.

At the outbreak of World War II Vilna had enjoyed a period of relative calm under Lithuanian and then Soviet rule, so many residents hoped that Vilna could ride out the war unscathed. But within six months of the arrival of the German army on June 22, 1941, over half of the city's Jews had been shot and buried in mass graves at Ponar on Vilna's outskirts. Living Jews were not the Nazis' only target. A mere week after the initial Nazi foray into Vilna a member of the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg (ERR), the Nazi agency in charge of looting cultural property in occupied territory, arrived to survey local libraries, museums, and art collections.

Vilna, which was known as "the Jerusalem of Lithuania," was a special prize. Its legendary status as a center of Jewish learning was symbolized by two great institutions. The Strashun Library stood in the heart of the traditional Jewish quarter and was famous for its collection of rabbinic works. In a newer part of the city stood the Yidisher visnshaftlekher institut (Yiddish Scientific Institute, known by its acronym YIVO), the first center for Yiddish scholarship, which was rooted in a secular vision of the Jewish people as a modern nation. Since that nation lacked a state of its own, the YIVO headquarters became an international symbol for Yiddish-speaking Jews, the equivalent of a national language academy, university, and library rolled into one.

When the Nazi archivist-looters of the ERR returned to Vilna in early 1942 they set up several sorting centers, including one in the YIVO building itself. There they assembled a team of slave laborers who were forced to comb through the YIVO collections as well as books, documents, and art and ritual objects looted from local libraries, museums, and synagogues. The most valuable were shipped to Germany to be used for "Jewish research without Jews," once the work of extermination had been completed. As it became clear that what was not shipped away would be destroyed, the workers faced a heartrending predicament. Fishman describes the enslaved Jews' anguished realization that they themselves became "responsible for life-and-death decisions about the fate of cultural treasures." He quotes Kruk, whose diary is the single most complete account of the Vilna Ghetto:

> Kruk, the librarian, shuddered as he recorded the moment when the book dumping began, in early June 1942: "The Jewish laborers who are engaged in this work are literally in tears. Your heart breaks just looking at the scene." As someone who had built libraries, first in Warsaw and then in the Vilna ghetto, he recognized the full magnitude of the crime that was unfolding.

Zelig Kalmanovitch was similarly tormented:

> His emotions once burst forth at a literary program in the ghetto where he was the featured speaker. When the chairman introduced him as "the guardian of YIVO in the Vilna ghetto," Kalmanovitch jumped out of his seat and cut him off: "No, I'm not a guardian; I'm a gravedigger!"

As they came to this agonized conclusion, a group led by Kaczerginski and Sutzkever decided to

organize the paper brigade. In addition to smuggling material under their clothes when they returned from YIVO to the ghetto, they created hiding places in the YIVO building itself. Sympathetic Lithuanian contacts also played a crucial role by taking items to conceal in other locations in the city. Among the many treasures they saved was the 18th-century *pinkas* (register) of the Vilna Gaon's elite study group, or *kloyz*; the diary of Theodor Herzl, which YIVO had purchased from his son; and letters and manuscripts from leading Jewish writers such as Sholem Aleichem and I. L. Peretz. They even found a way to transport large artworks by Mark Antokolsky, Ilya Repin, and others. Some questioned the decision to risk so much for mere artifacts. As Fishman quotes Kaczerginski:

> "Ghetto inmates looked at us as if we were lunatics. They were smuggling foodstuffs into the ghetto, in their clothes and boots. We were smuggling books, pieces of paper, occasionally a Sefer Torah or mezuzahs." Some members of the paper brigade faced a real moral dilemma whether to smuggle in books or foodstuffs for their family. There were inmates who criticized the work brigade for occupying itself with the fate of papers in a time of a life-and-death crisis. But Kalmanovitch replied emphatically that books were irreplaceable; "they don't grow on trees."

More than just a dramatic tale, Fishman's story of "the Auschwitz of Jewish culture" seeks to reframe our understanding of the Holocaust itself:

> Most of us are aware of the Holocaust as the greatest genocide in history. . . . But few of us think of the Holocaust as an act of cultural plunder and destruction. The Nazis sought not only to murder the Jews but also to obliterate their culture. They sent millions of Jewish books, manuscripts, and works of art to incinerators and garbage dumps. And they transported hundreds of thousands of cultural treasures to specialized libraries and institutes in Germany, in order to study the race they hoped to exterminate.

If the eradication of Jewish books was as important to the Nazis as the extermination of Jewish bodies, then the fate of libraries, archives, and art collections is central to understanding the Holocaust. In insisting upon this, Fishman draws upon the insight of his subjects:

> He [Kruk] also noticed the parallel between the fate of Vilna's Jews and their books. "The death throes of the Yiddish Scientific Institute are not only long and slow, but like everything here, it dies in a mass-grave."

Over 40 years later Abraham Sutzkever recalled how "the evil ones undertook to transform [the YIVO headquarters at] Wiwulskiego 18 into a Ponar for Jewish culture, and they ordered a few dozen Jews from the Vilna ghetto to dig graves for our soul."

If the destruction of Jewish culture and Jewish life were intertwined, then the reverse was also true: The rescue of books, manuscripts, Torahs, and so on was almost as much a form of resistance as the preservation of life itself. In the ghetto, the newly religious YIVO leader Zelig Kalmanovitch viewed Nazi persecution as a punishment from God for the sin of assimilation, yet even he came to see the work of the paper brigade as necessary:

> [H]e blessed the book smugglers as a pious rabbi: "The workers are rescuing whatever they can from oblivion. May they be blessed for risking their lives, and may they be protected under the wings of the Divine Presence. May the Lord . . . have mercy on the saving remnant and grant us to see the buried letters in peace."

Sutzkever made a similar point powerfully in his famous poem "The Lead Plates of the Romm Press," in which he imagined melting the plates of the famous Jewish printing house for bullets:

> Liquid lead brightly shining in bullets so fine,
> Ancient thoughts—in the letters that melted hot.
> A line from Babylonia, from Poland a line,
> Boiled, flooded together, in the foundry pot.
> Jewish valor, hidden in word and in sign,
> Must now explode the whole world with a shot!

First Sutzkever and more slowly the communist-leaning Kaczerginski came to realize that they had to rescue the treasures of Jewish Vilna once again, this time from the Soviet regime.

Facing the jeers of fellow Jews desperate for food and firewood, the members of the paper brigade rejected the dichotomy between physical and cultural survival. Thus, it is not surprising that Kaczerginski, Sutzkever, and fellow ghetto inmate Abba Kovner were at the same time poets and partisans. Fishman writes that Kaczerginski was as proud to smuggle books for the paper brigade as he was to smuggle arms for the FPO:

> In his memoirs, he recounted a folktale: When the Lord created the first Jew, the biblical patriarch Abraham, the Almighty gave him two presents for his life journey—a book, which Abraham held in one hand, and a sword, which he held in the other. But the patriarch became so fascinated reading the book that he didn't notice how the sword slipped out of his hand. Ever since that moment, the Jews have been the people of the book. It was left to the ghetto fighters and partisans to discover the lost sword and pick it up.

Fishman writes in a lively, accessible style, eschewing academic jargon and emphasizing the suspense and colorful personalities of his story. In an author's note, he writes that he has "taken the liberty of imagining the feeling and thoughts of my protagonists at various moments," and his account sometimes reads like a spy novel, but it is based on meticulous historical detective work in six countries and as many languages. Occasionally, one wonders whether this or that literary embellishment was necessary. The doomed romance between Kaczerginski and Rachela Krinsky, for instance, would be affecting even without allusions to their "erotic energies" and passionate trysts. Less salaciously, the emotional recovery of salvaged materials in the 1980s might have been a stronger scene without the remark that "Never before was the cataloging work of librarians and archivists accompanied by so many smiles and tears." But these are minor criticisms of a gripping work with broader implications. Generally, these are left for the reader to infer, but, at one point, Fishman addresses the question of why these men and women risked their

Workers sort through piles of confiscated books and papers at the Yiddish Scientific Institute (YIVO). Vilna, Poland, April 1943. (Courtesy of Yad Vashem Photo Archive, Jerusalem, 1495/9.)

lives for books and papers, writing that it was both an existential statement and an act of faith:

> The existential statement was that literature and culture were ultimate values . . . Since they were sure they would soon die, they chose to connect their remaining lives, and if necessary their deaths, with the things that truly mattered. . . . The book smugglers were also expressing their faith that there would be a Jewish people after the war, which would need to repossess its cultural treasures. . . . Finally, as proud citizens of Jewish Vilna, the members of the paper brigade believed that the very essence of their community lay in its books and documents. If volumes from the Strashun Library, documents from YIVO, and manuscripts from the Anski Museum were saved, the spirit of the Jerusalem of Lithuania would live on, even if its Jews would perish.

Caught in the Nazi death trap, these individuals dedicated themselves to a source of transcendent meaning as human beings, as Jews, and as natives of Vilna: the written word.

There was hope that however many Jewish souls were exterminated, the Jewish people would endure and that this *sheyres-hapleyte* (surviving remnant) would take up the preserved fragments of its culture. It was this hope that accompanied the surviving members of the paper brigade as they returned to Vilna after liberation, Sutzkever from Moscow (his literary talents were so renowned that Soviet authorities sent a military aircraft to transport him and his wife from the forests of Lithuania to safety in Moscow in 1944) and Kaczerginski from a Soviet partisan unit in the nearby forests.

On July 26, 1944, a mere 13 days after Vilna's liberation, Kaczerginski, Sutzkever, and Kovner established a Jewish museum to house the recovered remnants of the city's Jewish heritage (the YIVO building and all the material hidden within it had been destroyed). They also set out to collect documents generated in the ghetto by its Jewish inmates and German rulers, as well as some of the very first survivor testimonies. This work arose from yet another goal: to now hold the Nazi tormentors accountable for their actions.

> Shmerke, Sutzkever, and Kovner conceived of the museum as a continuation of both the paper brigade and the FPO. . . . [They] intended to use different types of material (the ghetto archive, Gestapo archive, and survivor testimony) to ensure that murderers would be brought to justice and punished. They saw the Jewish Museum as a framework for continuing the battle against the German murderers and their local collaborators, with trials and evidence instead of guns and landmines.

When Sutzkever was invited to testify at the Nuremburg trials as a witness of Jewish persecution, he read a German document found in the Vilna Ghetto into the court record. It was the first time such evidence had been submitted by a victim of Nazi crimes.

As Vilna's small Jewish community struggled to reestablish itself, the limits of Soviet support for Jewish culture soon became all too clear. Here Fishman sheds new light on Soviet Jewish policy, in particular the dynamic between Moscow and local bureaucrats. The museum's associates worked in rooms of the former ghetto prison while fighting to secure permits, space, and staff. They found Lithuanian officials uncooperative at best. On one occasion the Trash Administration sent 30 tons of recovered Jewish papers to be recycled as Sutzkever and Kaczerginski frantically ran from office to office, seeking to have the order rescinded. As Kovner wrote,

Shmerke Kaczerginski and Abraham Sutzkever on the porch of their apartment in the Vilna Ghetto, July 20, 1943. The poets led the smuggling operation from the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg work site. (Courtesy of ForeEdge Press.)

> Across the city, precious Venice imprints, manuscripts, and unique items are being ripped apart, trampled upon, and used to heat ovens, and we are not given the opportunity to save these treasures. For two years, we risked our lives to hide them from the Germans, and now, in the Soviet Union, they are being destroyed. . . . Sutzkever and I have had dozens of meetings with ministers, the Central Committee of the Communist Party, and other important persons. They all promise, but no one helps.

First Sutzkever and more slowly the communist-leaning Kaczerginski came to realize that they had to rescue these materials once again, this time from the Soviet regime. They began clandestinely handing over packages to various emissaries headed to New York, where YIVO had relocated in 1940. When they themselves finally emigrated they smuggled along what they could via Poland, Prague, and Paris. Now guilty of the theft of Soviet property, they did their best to cover their tracks. Here Fishman's research particularly shines, though the tangled tale of how these packages made it out from behind the Iron Curtain will never be fully unraveled.

The smuggled documents joined another remnant of the Vilna YIVO; what the ERR selected for

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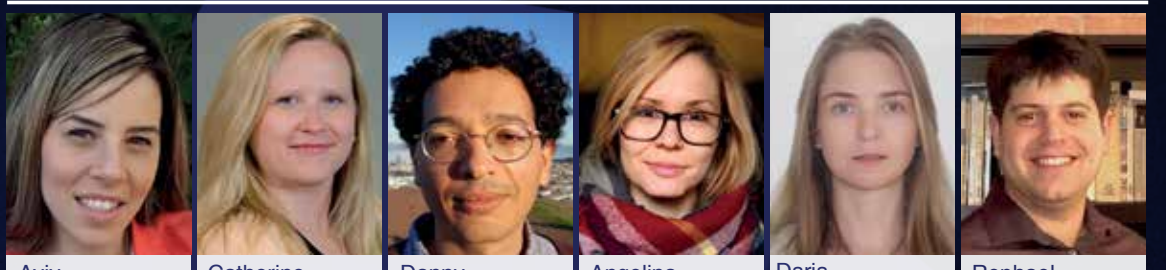

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shipment to Germany had remained intact and was discovered by the Allies near Frankfurt after liberation. Thanks to the energetic efforts of Max Weinreich, YIVO's only surviving leader, 420 crates of material arrived in New York in July 1947. The museum in Vilna that Kaczerginski, Sutzkever, and Kovner had established was closed, along with other Jewish institutions, in 1949. Its holdings were transferred to other repositories and disappeared from sight for the next 40 years.

With the advent of perestroika in 1988 startling news reached New York: Jewish materials had survived in Vilna. Kaczerginski's best-case scenario had come true, for while these items had been hidden in the Lithuanian Book Chamber its director, Antanas Ulpis, had resisted pressure to destroy them. Now YIVO staff—including Fishman himself—traveled to Lithuania to view the discoveries. As YIVO Executive Director Samuel Norich and Chief Archivist Marek Web greeted Ulpis,

> a staff member brought in a handcart with five brown paper bags wrapped with string. The staff member unwrapped them and took out documents written in Hebrew letters. Norich and his archivist were speechless. . . . Many of them bore YIVO's stamp.

This, they realized, was a portion of YIVO's prewar Vilna archive. Negotiations commenced with Lithuanian authorities to regain possession of the materials, but they were ultimately unsuccessful. Instead, beginning in 1995, the archival documents were brought to New York, where they were duplicated and then returned.

Some of the six hundred Torah scrolls that were confiscated by the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg. In 1946, the U.S. Army established the Offenbach Archival Depot (OAD) to collect and classify the books and written material taken by the Germans. (Courtesy of Yad Vashem Photo Archive, Jerusalem, 1495/9.)

As a young archivist at YIVO, I too was present as some of these events unfolded. I remember Fira Bramson, who cataloged the Jewish finds in the Book Chamber in the 1990s, addressing a YIVO staff meeting in her genuine Lithuanian Yiddish, bringing the first eyewitness account of collections believed destroyed decades ago. I remember examining these documents myself, crumpled, dirty, and in total disarray. But perhaps my most memorable experience was the day I was assigned to make photocopies for a visitor to the archives. His aristocratic bearing and the deference he was shown left me too intimidated to speak to him. It was Abraham Sutzkever, examining items in the Sutzkever Kaczerginski Collection that he and his comrade had hidden, rescued, and smuggled to safety.

The final chapter of this story is still being written. In 2015 YIVO reached an agreement with the Lithuanian Central State Archives and the National Library of Lithuania to catalog and digitize the surviving Jewish materials in Vilna. As work proceeded new caches were discovered, revealing that more prewar documents remained intact than anyone had previously imagined. New resources are now available online, ensuring that the Vilna treasures will be preserved, made accessible, and reunited virtually with YIVO's New York collections. The heroes of *The Book Smugglers* deserve no less.

Cecile E. Kuznitz is the director of Jewish studies at Bard College, where she is a professor of history. She is the author of YIVO and the Making of Modern Jewish Culture: Scholarship for the Yiddish Nation *(Cambridge University Press).*

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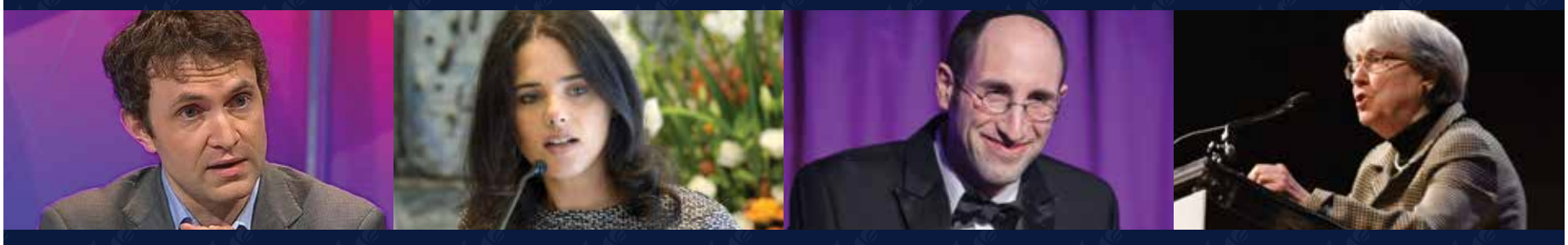

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33 Days and Four Years

BY CATHERINE C. BOCK-WEISS

33 Days
by Léon Werth, translated by Austin D. Johnston
Melville House Publishing, 224 pp., $16

Deposition 1940–1944: A Secret Diary of Life in Vichy France
by Léon Werth, edited and translated by David Ball
Oxford University Press, 368 pp., $34.95

On the dedication page of *The Little Prince,* Antoine de Saint-Exupéry apologized to his young readers:

> I ask children to forgive me for dedicating this book to a grown-up. I have a serious excuse: this grown-up is the best friend I have in the world. I have another excuse: this grown-up can understand everything, even books for children. I have a third excuse: he lives in France where he is hungry and cold. He needs to be comforted.

His friend was the Jewish writer Léon Werth, who was indeed hungry and cold in France in 1943. After the Nazi invasion, Werth had gone into hiding in the Jura countryside. Saint-Exupéry wrote the dedication in New York, where he was preparing to leave for North Africa as a pilot for the Free French Air Force. *The Little Prince* was published later that year, but Werth was not to see a copy until after the war, by which time Saint-Exupéry was dead, having disappeared while flying a reconnaissance mission from Corsica in 1944.

The friendship between Saint-Exupéry, the scion of a conservative aristocratic French family, and Werth, a leftist novelist-critic and the son of a Jewish clothing merchant, who spoke out forcefully against French colonialism, fascism, and Stalinism, was an unlikely one. They met in 1931 and, despite a 22-year age difference, forged a friendship remarkable in its intimacy and sympathetic exchange of views. Saint-Exupéry had arrived in New York in 1940 armed with a precious manuscript, Werth's *33 Days*, planning to use it to win American sympathy for France in its hour of defeat.

The text was Werth's first-hand chronicle of the chaotic exodus of French civilians who, on order from the government, fled from the north of the country, joining refugees from across the Belgian border in advance of the German army. It had taken him 33 days to travel to Saint-Amour, a village near the Swiss border, ordinarily an eight-hour trip from Paris. German planes strafed and bombed the roads, which were clogged with everything from tanks to pushcarts, from horse-drawn wagons to automobiles without gas. An estimated eight million people were on the road, and Werth's day-by-day account puts a human face on these numbers.

Saint-Exupéry wrote an introduction to the smuggled text and negotiated a contract with the Brentano's publishing company to publish it in English. But the book never appeared and the manuscript disappeared. It was rediscovered in 1992 and published in France to great acclaim, but a copy of Saint-Exupéry's introduction did not come to light until 2014. This elegant English-language edition, ably translated by Austin Johnston, is the first to include the introduction of Werth's best friend.

Wryly, perceptively, despairingly, Werth deciphered the truth behind the German and Vichy propaganda that was on offer in the village and the neighboring market towns.

Léon Werth in an undated photo. (Editions Viviane Hamy.)

Although the publication of *33 Days* was long delayed, Werth's *Deposition 1940–1944* appeared in France immediately after the war, in 1946. In this diary, Werth recorded the fixed or fluctuating sentiments of peasants, farmers, shopkeepers, and landowners in his isolated free-zone French village. Wryly, perceptively, despairingly, he deciphered the truth behind the German and Vichy propaganda that was on offer in the village and the neighboring market towns, and he sifted through rumors, anecdotes, and village stories about local incidents.

In the last year of the war, Werth made his way to Paris, hiding in the apartment that his wife Suzanne had established as a safe house for English and Canadian parachutists, Resistance leaders, and Jews in hiding. Not Jewish herself, Suzanne Werth worked with the Resistance network, passing 13 times between Saint-Amour in the free zone and occupied Paris at great risk to herself, her son, and her husband. Together the family witnessed the Paris street battles that accompanied the arrival of Allied tanks in August 1944.

David Ball's new translation is a generous selection from Werth's original journal, but Ball's chosen extracts are concerned primarily with the data of history: events, documents, actions, dialogues. He has pared away many, if not most, of the reflective entries that reveal *"l'homme interieur"* that Werth's isolation brought to the fore. The most recent French editions of the journal give us more of Werth's loneliness, doubts, and self-questioning, and his conflicted feelings about France and the future of Europe.

"There is no trace of Judeocentrism in this diary," observed Jean-Pierre Azéma in his 1992 introduction, which has been translated (and condensed) for this volume. But, of course, it is more complicated than that. Werth had been largely indifferent to his Jewish heritage for most of his life, but his existential situation was permeated with the fact of his Jewishness: He was in virtual solitary confinement in a remote village, forbidden to publish and earn his livelihood, cut off from his friends and his intellectual milieu, a hostage to anti-Semitism. Though southeastern France did not have a heavy German troop presence, Werth's safety depended on whether or not his local neighbors denounced him. In his first weeks of hiding, he described himself as a "captive in our summer house . . . I take refuge in my room, like zoo animals in their little den." It was as a Jew, penned in by Vichy's anti-Semitic decrees, that Léon Werth discovered his identity as a Jew.

Like many assimilated French Jews, Werth had defined himself as a Frenchman. He embraced the liberal, secular culture of the French Republic that provided and protected his civil rights. His Jewish education was minimal at best. After Werth's father died when Léon was seven, his intellectual development was taken in hand by his mother's brother, the young Sorbonne philosopher Frédéric Rauh, who was known as "Rauh the moralist" by his university students. Rauh was a positivist and pragmatist whose books dealt with the question of morality without religious sanctions.

Werth's first journal entry about Jews is a response to the issuing of the *Statut des Juifs*, on October 3, 1940, the day of its promulgation:

> Vichy is preparing a statute regulating Jews. A Polish Jew at least felt Jewish. People in the Nalewki neighborhood of Warsaw did not conceive of themselves as Polish. But French Jews no longer felt Jewish. Those who felt most Jewish in their hearts were only Jewish through the memory of a few family traditions.

Here, we see Werth holding Jews at arm's length. Five days later, he describes two kinds of Jews he seems to know, the contemptible materialistic assimilated Jew and the pious observant Jew. He has only contempt for the former: "They've lost—and they're proud of it—all contact with Judaism, not to say with anything resembling religion. They didn't feel Jewish, they felt rich." But in the same entry he describes the pious Jews of a past generation, possibly a remembrance of his grandparents:

> In Alsace in the middle of the nineteenth century, there was a certain Jewish purity, as there was a Protestant purity. These austere religions offered only demanding things to lean on. Those who practiced them were a suspect group, in the opposition. That led to pride more than to facility.

These distanced observations seem to have been a kind of preparation for acknowledging himself as a Jew. But even as France disowned him, he clung desperately to his French identity. He wrote on October 21, "I care about a civilization, about France. I have no other way of dressing. I can't go out completely naked." He is not quite ready to don his Jewish identity.

It is not until the entry of December 9, 1940, that we find Werth clearly identifying himself as a Jew, though he worried about a narrowing of his world view: "I'm a Jew, but am I going to reduce the world to the comforts Jews will have in the Europe of tomorrow?" Seven months later, on July 9, 1941, he wrote, "I am going to Lons to declare that according to the terms of the law of June 2, 1941, I am Jewish."

> I feel humiliated. It's the first time that society has humiliated me. I feel humiliated, not because I'm Jewish, but because I am presumed to be of inferior quality because I'm Jewish. It's absurd; it may be the fault of my pride, but that's the way it is.
>
> [I'm being forced] to claim that I'm from a Jewish nation to which I felt no connection. . . . But if a foreigner means to humiliate me through this nation, I am hurt, and I don't know if it's this nation or myself I must defend. But simple dignity obliges me to identify myself with it. . . . It would be just too cowardly to deliberate whether or not I feel Jewish! If you insult the name of Jew in me, then I am Jewish, totally Jewish, Jewish to the tips of my toes, Jewish to my very guts. After that, we'll see.

Werth went to the market town to register as a Jew, as farmers milled about with their animals to register their weights:

> As others go to declare their cattle and the weight of their pigs, I went to the prefecture to declare I was Jewish. . . . I made my declaration at the prefecture. I threw out the word "Jew," as if I was about to sing the Marseillaise.

From this point on he begins to record meticulously everything he learns about the deportations and massacres of the Jews.

On March 27, 1944, he wrote, "Now and then I wish—oh, I'm well aware it's a very faint wish—that I were deported to the depths of Poland, to be with the people who are suffering, with those suffering the most." But he self-consciously adds (though Ball does not translate this): "Heritage of Christianity. Christianity by osmosis." Werth knew that the idea of suffering as redemptive was not a Jewish one, even though he knew little else about the religion for which he suffered.

In his late journal entries of 1944, Werth wondered skeptically about what kind of Europe would be possible after the war. "Is there a Europe?" he asks. "Founded on what? on Christianity? on reason? on experimental science? Europe seems very far away to me." Hearing General De Gaulle's radio broadcasts from London, Werth wanted to believe that there was another France, a "spiritual nation," that could be restored after the war. But he also feared that under fascist brutality it had lost the ability to conceive of itself as an idea, an ideal of liberty and justice.

When the Allies marched into Paris, Werth experienced the giddy excitement of victory, of deliverance. But at this moment of triumph, he also saw Frenchwomen accused of having German lovers being marched with shaved heads through the Paris streets. Even the public abasement of captured German soldiers unsettled him:

> But the humiliation of those men makes me suffer. It is necessary, it is even justice itself. I approve of it, it satisfies me, it soothes me, and I cannot rejoice at it. . . . I'm forgetting nothing [i.e., the massacres, deportations, and tortures]. But when a human being is humiliated, his humiliation is in me.

The full humiliation of the Jews was in Werth during the war years. But it was as a proud Frenchman that he joined the crowd that welcomed De Gaulle.

Exodus of French Jews upon the arrival of the German army, June 1940. (Photo by Keystone-France/Gamma-Keystone via Getty Images.)

Catherine C. Bock-Weiss is professor emerita at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and the author of Henri Matisse: Modernist Against the Grain *(Penn State University Press).*

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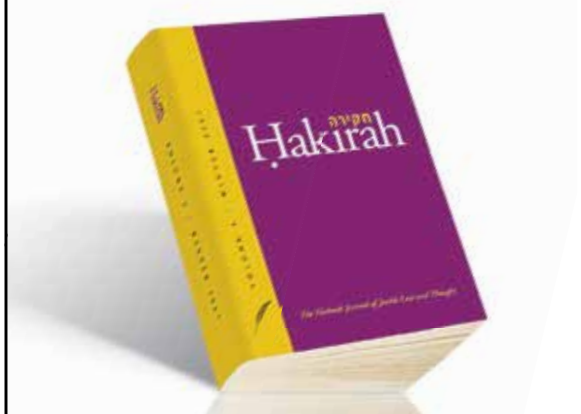

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You Shall Appoint for Yourself Judges

BY TOM GINSBURG

The Purse and the Sword: The Trials of Israel's Legal Revolution
by Daniel Friedmann, translated by Haim Watzman
Oxford University Press, 416 pp., $100

Towering over Israeli law of the past several decades is the singular figure of Aharon Barak. A former dean of the law faculty of the Hebrew University, he was appointed attorney general in 1975, became a justice on the Supreme Court three years later, and headed the court from 1995 to 2006. Combining the raw intellectual firepower of Oliver Wendell Holmes with the activism of Earl Warren, Barak remade the court, and to some extent the country, with his bold assertions of judicial power. His sheer range and depth led Richard Posner, the prolific former judge on the United States Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit (and a trenchant critic of Barak's approach), to suggest that Barak would deserve a Nobel Prize for law, if such a thing existed. It is not much of an exaggeration to say that legal and judicial politics in Israel since his retirement have pivoted on competing views of Barak and his court: Was he a robust defender of human rights or a runaway judge who imposed his political preferences on a nation? In *The Purse and the Sword,* one of Barak's chief intellectual antagonists, former minister of justice Daniel Friedmann, lays out the case against him.

As is well known, Israel's founding fathers could not agree on a constitutional text, in large part because of disputes between religious leaders and parties and the secular political establishment. Instead, the country has gradually adopted a series of "Basic Laws" (*chukei ha-yesod*) to define the fundamental institutions of the state. As a result of this piecemeal approach, the country has no formal constitution to interpret, and in this Israel is much like its former overseer, the United Kingdom. As in the UK, Israeli legislators could do pretty much what they liked, free of the fundamental constraints that might be found in a formal bill of rights or a written constitution. To be sure, there were common law traditions and principles of "natural justice" that might constrain policymakers, particularly in the administrative realm. But these were minimal, and judges interpreted them narrowly.

In the early decades after the founding, Israel's judges made modest contributions to develop a rights jurisprudence. A critical juncture was the *Kol Ha'Am* case in 1953, in which the minister of interior shut down a newspaper owned by the Communist Party. In interpreting whether this constituted a violation of fundamental rights, Justice Shimon Agranat (who had been born in Louisville, Kentucky, and attended the University of Chicago Law School) cited classic American cases and imported a modified version of Holmes's "clear and present danger" standard for justifying restrictions on rights. More generally, in laying down a general approach to rights adjudication in Israel, Agranat also established a pattern whereby foreign law citations would play a prominent role in Israeli jurisprudence.

Was he a robust defender of human rights or a runaway judge who imposed his political preferences on a nation?

Judges tended to defer to the government and legislature in the following decades. Following the British tradition, judges were on occasion called upon to lead commissions of inquiry into government malfeasance; for example, Agranat headed a commission that investigated the military's failures in the run-up to the Yom Kippur War. Still, the country's politics largely took place at the ballot box and in the Knesset. Friedmann dubs this the "classical era" of a restrained court.

Justice Aharon Barak in an undated photo. (Courtesy of Yossi Zamir/Flash90.)

Enter Aharon Barak. Appointed as attorney general after a stellar academic career, he quickly established a reputation as a vigorous anticorruption crusader. One of his most prominent cases targeted then-prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, along with his wife Leah, for having maintained two foreign bank accounts in violation of Israeli law. (The accounts were opened legally while Rabin was serving as ambassador to the United States.) The so-called Dollar Account affair led to the resignation of Rabin, who prematurely called it "a sad ending to my public career." When Rabin was assassinated in 1995, lingering bitterness over the scandal led Leah Rabin to pointedly ignore Barak at the funeral.

A few months after Rabin's resignation and the subsequent electoral victory of Menachem Begin in 1977, Barak joined the Supreme Court as its youngest judge. He became its president in 1995. Although Friedmann dates the activist phase of the court as beginning in 1993 under Barak's predecessor Meir Shamgar, it was led by Barak, and it ended when he stepped down in 2006.

From the outset, Barak had an expansive view of the judicial role. In both his jurisprudence and in his academic work, he argued that there was in principle no limit to the role of law and courts in adjudicating social and political disputes. Doctrinally, this meant that the court should expand standing in public interest cases beyond those who had suffered immediate injuries. It also meant that the court should reject arguments that certain disputes were incapable of being decided in the courts, or, to use the technical term, nonjusticiable. Furthermore, the judge could not, in Barak's view, avoid some kind of quasi-legislative role, as it was inherent in the very process of legal interpretation. No statute is complete, and so, in the exercise of filling gaps and giving meaning to the terms, judges would have to play a creative role. In his phrase, judges were "junior partners" in the creation of statutory law; when it came to common law, judges were "senior partners."

Perhaps the most radical step was taken when Barak and his colleagues formally imbued the Basic Laws with a constitutional character. In particular, the 1992 Basic Laws on Freedom of Occupation and on Human Dignity and Liberty contained some fundamental rights, with the possibility of judicial oversight. Barak and his colleagues read these laws as empowering the court to strike down contrary legislation of the Knesset. Barak called this achievement a "constitutional revolution," but Friedmann prefers "legal revolution," since he does not regard it as in any sense constitutional. Regardless of the label, the doctrine was used expansively. The notion of human dignity, in particular, was described by Barak as a kind of umbrella right, into which could be read many subsidiary rights, including a principle of equality that is nowhere mentioned in the text of the Basic Law and was explicitly rejected by the legislature in its compromise to enact the 1992 laws. It was then used to forbid the establishment of privately run prisons; to force adjustment of a legislative compensation scheme for settlers evacuated from Gaza; and, in a minority opinion, to argue for a principle of family reunification to allow Palestinians in the West Bank to move to Israel. More broadly, the court found itself ruling on topics from the use of torture to taxes to immigration policy. In Federalist No. 78, Alexander

Hamilton famously described the court as lacking the legislative power of the purse and the executive branch's power of the sword. Friedmann's title pointedly summarizes his argument that, under Barak, the Israeli Supreme Court grabbed both.

Israeli constitutional decisions became an unexpected export. The country's decisions have been cited in courts from Canada to Colombia to Poland, and they play an outsized role in the field of comparative constitutional law. This is largely because of the force of Barak's opinions. He is a strong advocate of the doctrine of proportionality, a technique that guides courts to weigh whether infringements on rights are justified. Proportionality review, which involves a series of inquiries taken in a particular order, promises rigor in what is, by definition, a value-laden exercise, allowing courts to argue that their decisions are methodologically grounded.

Barak was not only an exporter of opinions but also an active participant in what is sometimes called the "global conversation among courts," in which judges compare approaches and cite each other's opinions across national borders. This kind of legal globalization, like the actual thing, generated inevitable backlash and criticism. Friedmann pithily captures the sentiment when he asks just who Barak's primary audience was: the Israeli public or a bunch of professors at Yale Law School, where Barak teaches each year.

Friedmann's book is most delicious in its inside-baseball account of judicial appointments. Judges in Israel are appointed by the Judicial Selection Committee, on which three Supreme Court justices serve, along with representatives of the Bar Association, the Knesset, and the government. While formally this should serve to prevent any single institution from dominating, Friedmann has long argued that it tends to reproduce the composition of the Supreme Court over time. During Barak's era, the court played the dominant role in appointing its own members, overwhelmingly favoring candidates from the state's attorney and prosecution offices, at the expense of other legal constituencies. Friedmann had pushed for more political accountability in appointments and greater involvement of district court judges and defense lawyers, as well as input from academics holding different views concerning judicial interpretation and activism. He pulls no punches with his criticisms, giving a blow-by-blow account of the appointment of justices he considers to be mediocrities.

The animus between the two men is also personal and extends to the justice who in 2006 became Barak's successor, Dorit Beinisch. In 2002 she blocked the appointment to the court of Friedmann's friend and protégé Nili Cohen, a well-regarded academic who had served as rector of Tel Aviv University. Barak initially supported her as the main alternative to his leading intellectual opponent, Professor Ruth Gavison, who had long been a prominent critic of the constitutional revolution. However, Cohen's candidacy was jeopardized by an unfounded allegation of financial improprieties that was soon discredited. Friedmann blames Barak for subsequently failing to push her through, arguing that a leader with his force of personality could have done so.

Soon after Barak's retirement, Friedmann became minister of justice in the Olmert government, with a mandate to shake up the clubby judicial appointments pattern. Of Friedmann's three predecessors, two had been prosecuted and one had resigned under serious police investigation. In this he saw the conspiracy of a deep-state legal system reluctant to limit its own power and to allow necessary reforms. Nevertheless, he succeeded in getting the Knesset to limit the term of the Supreme Court president to seven years. (Barak had served in that position for more than a decade, until reaching the mandatory retirement age of 70.) Friedmann also attacked the system of judicial appointments, encouraging more political involvement in the appointment process. In addition, he sought to limit the expansive standing doctrine, which had allowed a plethora of nongovernmental organizations access to the court. Soon, however, Olmert went down in a corruption scandal, and Friedmann was out.

Judicial power expands, producing calls for restraint and accountability, then judicial power contracts until new demands on the system draw the courts back into politics.

Former minister of justice Daniel Friedman at the Knesset, Jerusalem, 2012. (Coutesy of Yoav Ari Dudkevitch/FLASH90.)

So, who is right? Did Barak engage in a power grab, willfully insinuating the court into every aspect of Israeli life and exposing the law as a political enterprise? Or was he simply stepping into the void left by a corrupt and gridlocked political system unable to provide sufficient protection for human rights?

Friedmann's critique is a powerful one, and his book is also a valuable resource that critically summarizes much of the history of the Supreme Court. Yet one wonders if the prosecution has really proven its case. This is, after all, just an Israeli version of a story that has taken place in many countries in recent decades. From South Korea to Brazil to Italy, courts have assumed a more prominent place in their country's politics. Many of these courts have relaxed constraints on standing and justiciability, while greatly expanding the range of issues on which they rule. The causes of this phenomenon are complicated: a growing demand for rights, the inability of the traditional political machinery to fully deliver the protection that citizens demand, and the growing legitimacy of claims to technocratic authority.

This broader global context of judicialization leads one to wonder if the great-man theory of judicial power is entirely accurate. Surely a man with as formidable an intellect as Barak would have an outsized influence on the law, but, if we see the same basic forces at work in many other legal systems, one has to wonder about the counterfactual. Would the Israeli Supreme Court have remained a "classic court" if Aharon Barak had just stayed at the Hebrew University (or moved to New Haven)?

The fact is that, in many countries, judicial power expands, producing calls for restraint and accountability, then judicial power contracts until new demands on the system draw the courts back into politics. At the end of the book, Friedmann celebrates the Supreme Court's return to partial restraint under Justice Asher Grunis and his successor Miriam Naor, both of whom have moderated judicial activism and fended off attempts to restructure the system of judicial appointments. But it is hard to believe the last chapter has been written on judicial activism in Israel. Indeed, at the time of this writing, the Knesset is debating a bill to allow it to override, with a simple majority of 61 votes, Supreme Court decisions of unconstitutionality.

One sees in Friedmann's account a sense of particular frustration with the judiciary's role in various scandals that have ruined political careers (including those of some of his friends and allies). Some of the scandals seem to have involved violations of the law that were merely technical, while others turn on disputed facts. But even if one disagrees with particular judgements rendered by particular prosecutors and judges, it is not clear that this is a systemic problem for which there is an easy remedy. As yet another Israeli prime minister is faced with a corruption scandal, one must ask, if not the legal system, then who can hold politicians accountable? In country after country, public frustration with legislatures is at dangerously high levels. Even if it renounces the powers of both the purse and the sword, the judiciary cannot avoid making decisions with political consequences.

This is a wholly extraordinary book by one leading figure in the Israeli legal establishment about the revolution wrought by another. Friedmann's narrative is one of a fall from grace from the period of the classic court, to which he longs to return. But viewed from a broader perspective, it seems unlikely that there is any going back. Judicial power may be curtailed temporarily, but it is now one of the established modalities of democratic government. Barak pushed judicial power past the conventional limits; he is thus one of a kind, but he is also one of a type. Barak was, in the end, like all other judges, only more so.

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Containing God's Presence

BY ILANA KURSHAN

The Heart of Torah, Essays on the Weekly Torah Portion: Genesis and Exodus
by Rabbi Shai Held, foreword by Rabbi Yitz Greenberg
The Jewish Publication Society, 400 pp., $24.95

The Heart of Torah, Essays on the Weekly Torah Portion: Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy
by Rabbi Shai Held, foreword by Rabbi Yitz Greenberg
The Jewish Publication Society, 496 pp., $24.95

Over the course of a year, the Jewish calendar bends to the arc of the Torah reading cycle and assumes its shades. With the end of summer and the start of the Jewish new year, the world is created anew in Genesis and nearly destroyed by flood in the story of Noah, a parsha (portion) which coincides with the start of the rainy season in Israel. As the autumn chill sets in and the nights grow longer, we follow the story of the patriarchs and matriarchs, who look up at the stars and journey through the desert guided by divine promise and by visions of God in the darkness of night. On the coldest and darkest days of the year, we read of Joseph's descent into the pit, cast down by his jealous brothers, only to rise to prominence in Egypt as the winter days begin to grow longer and more hopeful. Wells and wombs give way to politics and persuasion, and sometime around the start of the secular new year we begin Exodus, the narrative of our deliverance from Egyptian bondage, as part of our spiritual preparation in the months before Passover. Then we immerse ourselves in the details of sacrificial worship as spring sets in, reading of sin and purification as the first flowers break through the softening soil. Just when it starts to get warmer after Passover we trek with the Israelites through the desert, and then, when it's too hot to move forward anymore, we stop to hear Moses recount it all over again in Deuteronomy during the dog days of summer.

The Torah reading cycle provides the structure not just for the Jewish year but also for countless volumes of commentary on the biblical text, including Rabbi Shai Held's brilliant new two-volume collection *The Heart of Torah, Essays on the Weekly Torah Portion*. Held offers two discussions of each parsha, perhaps a reminder that there is never just one way to interpret Torah. He describes these discussions as essays rather than sermons, which is the more common rendering of the Hebrew term "*drashot*." This is apt, since both "essays" and "*drashot*" have the sense of a search or attempt rather than the statement of a settled position; Held is deeply serious but never sermonic. Interestingly, Held notes that the meaning of the term "*drash*" evolves over the course of the Bible: In Genesis and Exodus, it is used to refer to seeking out God's will, whereas in later books, such as Ezra, the object of this inquiry is not God but the Torah: "Instead of inquiring of God directly, people now seek guidance through studying God's Torah." This is essentially Held's project, seeking guidance—especially moral instruction—by inquiring of the text in order to get at its heart.

The "heart of Torah," for Held, is *chesed*, which he translates as "love and kindness." As he writes, "[w]hen all is said and done, religion is, in large part, about softening our hearts and learning to care." Most of his essays begin with a close reading of the biblical text, which in turn leads him to a claim about God and then to an ethical message for his contemporary readers. In "People Have Names: The Torah's Take-down of Totalitarianism," he rejects the conventional interpretations of the Tower of Babel story:

> Genesis 11 is not a simple morality tale about a human attempt to storm the heavens and displace God. Nor, conversely, is it a primitive allegory about an insecure deity who is so threatened by human achievement that God needs to wreak havoc on the best-laid human plans. The narrative is also not placed where it is in the Torah in order to explain the vast multiplicity of human languages. Nor is it a lament about some lost primeval unity.

Having toppled these readings, Held then proceeds to construct his own.

Through a close reading of the nine biblical verses that comprise the Tower of Babel story, Held demonstrates that it is really the city and not the tower as such that is the focus of biblical condemnation. This is why it is the city which is described as being punished at the end of the story. (Held might have added that whenever both city and tower are mentioned, the city is always mentioned first.) In short, something is rotten in Babel, and the tower is merely an expression of this deeper ethical taint.

Wells and wombs give way to politics and persuasion, and sometime around the start of the secular new year we begin Exodus.

The Tower of Babel ***by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, 1563. (Courtesy of the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.)***

Held considers the punishment that God metes out to the builders—scattering them "over the face of the whole earth" (Gen. 11:8)—in light of the blessing He gives to Adam and Eve and then to Noah to "Be fertile and increase, and fill the earth" (Gen. 1:28, 9:1). How, Held asks, can the Bible describe human dispersion as both a blessing and a

curse? His elegant solution is that the builders are being punished because what they most fervently desire—to build a city and tower lest they be scattered—is the opposite of what God most desires for humanity. "God's 'punishment,' then, may not ultimately be a punishment at all, but a reaffirmation of the initial divine blessing in the face of human refusal and obstruction."

But why is God so intent that people disperse? Here, Held turns to a classic 19th-century commentator known by the acronym Netziv (Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin) for a suggestive reading. The Netziv reads the Bible's description of the people as having had "the same language and the same words" (Gen. 11:1) as meaning that "their words . . . were all the same." Held takes this one step further, explaining that "total uniformity is necessarily a sign of totalitarian control." The problem with the Babel builders, then, was their intolerance of independent thought. "If everyone says the same words and thinks the same thoughts, then a society emerges in which there is no room for individual tastes, thoughts, and aspirations, or for individual projects and creativity."

Held grounds this reading in both the text and its context: No names are mentioned in the verses about Babel, and the story follows on the heels of a long genealogy of Noah's children. He buttresses this claim by invoking the contemporary Israeli American commentator Judy Klitsner, who points out that the Babel story is followed by a story about a man literally named Name—Noah's son Shem—as if to emphasize the namelessness that precedes his mention. Held goes on to cite a midrash from *Pirke d'Rabbi Eliezer* which describes the builders as caring more about bricks than people; the collective project was more important than the individuals making up the collective. And so uniformity entails anonymity, and anonymity implies insignificance.

What of Babel's assault on heaven as an attack on God? Though he had previously rejected this reading as too simplistic, he now returns to it through the back door. Yes, Babel is an attack on God, but it is an attack on God because it is an attack on human uniqueness.

> An attempt to root out human individuality is an assault on God. Jewish theology affirms that each and every human being is created in the image of God, and that our uniqueness and individuality are a large part of what God treasures about us.

The story of Babel is mythic in its universalism, describing a time before the world was divided into languages, religions, or nationalities, so it is not surprising that the message Held draws from this story is also universal. But this is true of the majority of the essays in this collection. Held explores how the Bible calls upon us to conduct ourselves in the world, beyond, or perhaps even prior to, Jewish law. Even his essays that are ostensibly about what it means to be Jewish are also about what it means to excel at being human. In his essay on Vayetze, for instance, Held explores the meaning of the term "*Yehudi*" (Jew), which comes from Leah and Jacob's son Yehudah. Held traces the evolution of Leah's emotional state over the course of their marriage, paying close attention to the names she chooses for each of her first four children. He notes that in naming her fourth child Yehudah, from "I will praise," Leah manages to turn her unfulfilled longing into gratitude.

> Leah has somehow found the courage to accept that her life is not going to turn out as she had hoped. She has spent years aching for the love of her husband . . . But now, suddenly, she sees that this constant yearning will only generate more fantasy and illusion.

Held draws on a talmudic passage in which Leah is identified as the first person in the world to express gratitude to God. He is quick to note that this is clearly not the case. Rather, what sets Leah apart is her ability to be grateful in the midst of sorrow. Given that Yehudah's name becomes the name for the entire Jewish people, Held writes that "a Jew is, ideally, a human being who, like Leah, can find her way to gratitude without having everything she wants or even needs."

In his essay on the first parsha in Deuteronomy, Held argues that God's love for Israel is not on account of Israel's merits but is "pure grace," as he proves from the story of God's choice of Abraham. Drawing on the prophet Amos's criticism of Israelite complacency, he shows how biblical chosenness requires a higher degree of accountability and moral responsibility. Held reads the verses in Deuteronomy that describe the provision of land to Israel and God's instructions concerning how the Israelites should pass through the land of other nations as showing that God cares about the welfare of other nations and charges Israel to do so as well. He insists that "[a] careful reading of Tanakh thus demonstrates that election, or chosenness, is not a function of merit; it does not give the people a moral blank check; nor does it suggest that Israel is God's only concern."

Three Strangers *by Richard McBee, 1995. (Courtesy of Richard McBee.)*

Held's ecumenicism is also evident in the range of sources he cites. He quotes liberally from the Talmud and midrash, as well as from medieval commentators, Hasidic masters, and contemporary interpreters (including Israelis, such as Shmuel Faust and Rav Shagar, who are largely unknown to American readers). He is receptive both to traditional exegesis and to modern scholarship, often showing how the Torah's theological and ethical claims are all the more radical given the contrast with the ancient Near Eastern context from which they emerged. Moreover, he incorporates non-Jewish insights and contributions from early Christian sources to works by contemporary Protestant scholars.

Central to Held's theology is the notion that God's actions are a model for ours.

Of course, the majority of commentators Held draws upon are from within the rabbinic tradition. Occasionally we hear women's voices, particularly Nechama Leibowitz or contributors to the anthology *The Torah: A Women's Commentary*, but Held's egalitarianism is most pronounced when he discusses the lives of biblical women as human actors on the scriptural stage, each with her own feelings and dreams. For instance, he considers Sarah's barrenness from her perspective—how she must have felt when Abraham prayed for Avimelech to have children but not for his own wife, and what it would have been like when Abraham laughed at God's promise of a child for her and responded with a prayer for Ishmael, Hagar's son.

For Held, biblical women and men are judged by the same ethical standards. He regards Jacob's lack of compassion and hospitality in Parshat Vayishlach as standing in stark contrast not just to that of his grandfather Abraham but also to that of his mother, Rebekah. In his essay on Miketz, he traces the moral evolution of what it means to be one's brother's keeper, a lesson that Cain spurns, Yehudah struggles to learn, and Miriam seems intuitively to grasp. For Held, gender is not a barrier to comparison; these characters are far more united by their common humanity than they are divided along gender lines. In this sense, Held's commentary is more radically egalitarian than any book expressly about biblical women could ever be.

In his most sanguine essays, on the second half of Exodus and on Leviticus, Held argues that the Mishkan, the portable sanctuary which the Israelites carried with them in the desert, was, like Shabbat, modeled after Eden. The Torah's description of its construction offers a picture of what the ideal communal project would be like—motivated by genuine

generosity and a respect for the sanctity of the cause.

As Held contends in his essay on Parshat Teruma, the Mishkan offers a glimpse of a reality in which the world is a temple for God's presence and in which God's presence serves as a model for how we can best be present for one another. This conception of the Mishkan emerges from his analysis of *tzimtzum*, a notion that is understood in opposite ways by the talmudic sages and by the kabbalists. As the essay unfolds, Held provides an ingenious synthesis of these two understandings which he characteristically transposes from the theological to the ethical plane.

The great 16th-century kabbalist Rabbi Isaac Luria taught that God made space for the world to exist by contracting or withdrawing the divine presence into itself, a process he referred to as *tzimtzum*. And yet, as Held notes, *tzimtzum* was originally a rabbinic term, and "for the Talmudic sages it means something very different . . . than it meant for Luria." To explain this meaning of the term, Held cites a midrash from *Pesikta d'Rav Kahana*, a collection of homilies that predates Luria by about a millennium. The midrash relates that Moses was incredulous when God instructed him to build a tabernacle for God. How could any structure possibly contain the omnipresent? God responded to Moses that He would "descend and contract" His presence on earth. Thus, the kabbalistic *tzimtzum* is about a divine withdrawal to make space, whereas the rabbinic *tzimtzum* is about "intensified presence." Held quotes Gershom Scholem's remark that Luria inherited the rabbinic term and "stood it on its head," but Held is really interested in how these two meanings of the term can coexist: "Taken together these Rabbinic and Lurianic notions of *tzimtzum* convey the importance of being present while making space."

Central to Held's theology is the notion that God's actions are a model for ours. To follow the ethical charges of the Torah—to visit the sick; to be kind to the widow, the orphan, and the stranger; to judge poor and rich alike; to cherish human uniqueness—is to walk in God's ways. Held's synthesis of both meanings of *tzimtzum*—Lurianic withdrawal and rabbinic intensified presence—is not just about how God is present in the world but also about how we should be present for one another in our human relationships. Held finds intimations of this idea in an essay by Martin Buber called "Distance and Relation." Buber argued that what he called a "primal setting at a distance," a recognition that the other is independent of oneself, must precede any "entering into relation." As Held writes, translating this insight into everyday human terms:

Rabbi Shai Held.

> One of the core challenges of loving a friend or a spouse is to learn to be completely present . . . while also making space for our partner to be who he or she is, independent of us. . . . Too much presence suffocates our partner . . . Too little presence constitutes abandonment.

Held's commentary ends where the Torah ends, leaving us all still in the wilderness—but also sending us back to creation to begin the Torah reading cycle anew each fall, trying once again to draw out the Torah's enduring meaning. Perhaps not surprisingly, then, what lingers and resonates most upon reading through these volumes is the message Held was offered as a teenager, at the beginning of his own spiritual journey. In one of the rare personal moments in these essays, he writes that he spent his teens preoccupied with questions of faith and once wrote a 15-page handwritten letter—"[a]s only an angst-ridden adolescent could"—confessing his struggles to the late Rabbi Louis Jacobs, whose open-minded traditionalism had inspired him. Jacobs wrote back to Held: "Remember always . . . that the search for Torah is itself Torah and that in the very search you have already found."

Ilana Kurshan is the author of If All the Seas Were Ink: A Memoir *(St. Martin's Press).*

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Dress British, Think Yiddish

BY EITAN KENSKY

Stanley Kubrick: New York Jewish Intellectual
by Nathan Abrams
Rutgers University Press, 340 pp., $34.95

Stanley Kubrick was a Jew from Jewland. Raised in the Bronx, he was surrounded by Jewish friends and neighbors, some of whom became early artistic collaborators. Born in 1928, he lived his adult life in the shadow of the Holocaust, and, although he never realized his plan to adapt Louis Begley's novel *Wartime Lies*, Holocaust imagery was surprisingly central to his films. Allegorical enemies wear Nazi-inspired uniforms; partially formed mannequins stand in for disfigured bodies; and the state as a source of violence is a master theme that recurs throughout his pictures. He self-consciously cast Jewish stars in key roles: Peter Sellers, Tony Curtis, Sydney Pollack, Shelley Winters, and, iconically, Kirk Douglas. Indeed, the movies he made with Douglas, *Paths of Glory* and *Spartacus*, were critical in cementing Douglas's image as the muscular, moral Jew.

Kubrick even cast himself in the same biographical role long played by Otto Preminger, Billy Wilder, and Max Ophüls: Jewish émigré director. He left America for England in the 1960s, and his most English movie, *Barry Lyndon*, is also his most obviously Jewish: Barry, the Irish outsider, tries to ingratiate himself into high society, only to be tripped up by his incomprehension of a moral code that gives sanction to some forms of violence (and greed) but not others. In *Eyes Wide Shut*, his final film, the protagonist sleepwalks through highly stylized, fantasy versions of the landscape of Kubrick's early years as a photographer and filmmaker: Greenwich Village and Central Park West. So how is it that we've come to see Kubrick only as a controlling, austere, manipulative, reclusive genius from England?

In *Stanley Kubrick: New York Jewish Intellectual*, Nathan Abrams answers this question with a single word: misdirection. Abrams's essential argument is that Kubrick buried his Jewish preoccupations and thematic concerns, distracting viewers with superficially Gentile alternatives. Dr. Strangelove is obviously an ex-Nazi, a Wernher von Braun figure. Yet an early character sketch, preserved in Kubrick's archive, describes him as "a Herman Kahn type." The grotesque absurdity of Strangelove's autonomous Nazi arm misdirects us from the Jewish nuclear strategist, who, along with others, served as Kubrick's proximate target.

Abrams understands Kubrick not as a rootless cosmopolitan, but as a rooted one. This was a New York Jew, fascinated with photography, jazz, and chess. He took evening classes at City College and studied at Columbia with Lionel Trilling. Later, he moved to the Village and got to know Beat poets. He assiduously read intellectual journals and little magazines: *Neurotica* (the first Beat journal), *Partisan Review, Commentary, Encounter* (which published Trilling's review of *Lolita*, a strong influence on Kubrick's adaptation), *Dissent*. (In *The Shining*, Jack Torrance reads the *New York Review of Books*.) Kubrick read the most important works of Holocaust history and studies of totalitarianism as they were published. In a scathing review of *Eyes Wide Shut*, Midge Decter recounted Kubrick's biography and called him "a familiar figure." She knew what she was talking about. He truly was one of them, Abrams argues, a New York Jewish intellectual. "And while he was never a writer or a literary critic, he read their magazines. He had a fondness for ideological speculation, he was Jewish by birth, and he strived self-consciously to be brilliant."

Kubrick's Jewish humor unquestionably reached its apogee during his collaborations with Peter Sellers.

Director Stanley Kubrick and actor Peter Sellers on the set of* Dr. Strangelove*, 1963. (Courtesy of Hawk Films Production/Columbia Pictures/Kobal Collection.)

More importantly, the substance of Kubrick's work reflects many of the same preoccupations as his fellow midcentury Jewish intellectuals. He was endlessly fascinated by man's capacity for evil and "ultraviolence." The disturbance of *A Clockwork Orange*'s second act derives from the state-sanctioned torture that poses as rehabilitation, a technique that explicitly recalls Nazi experimentation. *Paths of Glory* and *Full Metal Jacket* both explored the dehumanization of war and the transformation of the moral individual into a killer. For decades Kubrick thought about filming a Holocaust movie, and he even asked Isaac Bashevis Singer about writing the screenplay. He came closest to making a version of that movie in the early 1990s, when he was working on adapting Begley's *Wartime Lies*, but he abandoned the project, either because of the success of *Schindler's List* or because of the enormity of the subject, the impossibility of capturing everything he had learned about the Holocaust in a single film. These were not merely professional or purely artistic concerns. In a remarkable interview from the documentary *Stanley Kubrick: A Life in Pictures*, Christiane Kubrick, his third wife and the love of his life, expressed relief that Kubrick gave up the project: "He became very depressed during the preparations, and I was glad when he gave up on it because it was really taking its toll." The documentary omits the fact that Christiane had been inducted into the Hitler Youth during her childhood, and that her uncle, Veit Harlan, was the director of *Jud Süss*. It's not hard to suppose that the preparations were also taking their toll on *her*. Kubrick even managed to extend his fascination with the Holocaust beyond the grave: The posthumously released *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence*, produced by Kubrick and directed by Steven Spielberg, contains horrific shots of violence against humanoid robots—those with the capacity to pass, which are therefore intolerable.

Abrams suggests that we understand Kubrick's moral world through the contrast between "*menschlikayt*," the distinctive Jewish ideal of human decency, and "*goyim naches*," the things Jews supposedly don't value. This framework would seem, as we say in Yiddish, farfetched, if *Barry Lyndon* didn't hinge on a textbook definition of "*goyim naches*": the rules of dueling. Barry is made and unmade in a duel, his one ethical act leading not to reconciliation but to ruin.

Abrams combines close readings of the films with intensive, archival research into the source material—scripts, production documents, and Kubrick's personal papers and artifacts—which collectively tell a Jewish story. Kubrick nearly always adapted pre-existing material, and he nearly always removed explicitly Jewish characters and subplots from the original sources. Curiously, Kubrick would add Jewish elements (*Dr. Strangelove* originally featured the "rightwinger—half-Jewish" senator, John Applekuegel) only to cut them close to production. What Kubrick kept were, according to Abrams, coded "Jewish moments." Abrams writes approvingly that "nonexplicitness" provides "the key to understanding Kubrick's ambivalent, ambiguous, and seemingly paradoxical attitude toward Judaism." We could somewhat less charitably think of this as a formula: Think Jewish, omit the name, ostensibly achieve the universal.

Another recurring theme of Abrams's work is

Kubrick's Jewish humor. Again, there are tells: A placard advertising a Lenny Bruce performance at a burlesque show prominently appears in the background of Kubrick's early film *The Killing* (1956). *Barry Lyndon* is characterized by an extremely dry wit in which high is always undercut by low. (The

An Italian poster advertising* Spartacus*, 1960. (Courtesy of SilverScreen/Alamy Stock Photo.)

film opens with one of its beautiful, painterly shots of men on a bluff in the Irish countryside: "Gentlemen, *cock* your pistols!")

But Kubrick's Jewish humor unquestionably reached its apogee during his collaborations with Peter Sellers. "How did they ever make a movie of . . . *Lolita*?" the original trailer asks. Well, by *not* making a movie of *Lolita*. Kubrick's version is a brilliant-if-frustrating amalgamation of Nabokov's story and a slapsticky, shticky cat-and-mouse game. Kubrick and Sellers transformed Humbert Humbert's alter ego Quilty from a spectral presence to true antagonist. The nervy atmosphere of its opening scene comes from treating the showdown between Humbert and Quilty like a Marx Brothers routine: The straight man meets the wacko. "Hey, you're a sort of bad loser," Quilty tells Humbert as they "play" ping pong; "I'm just dying for a drink," he says drolly as a gun is pointed at him. The film, through Quilty, masks its exploration of evil through the semitransparent shade of the comic. "It's hard not to read the characterizations as intentional, an inside joke, or a series of jokes, about Jews as Jews and stereotypes of Jews," Abrams writes. Sometimes the joke is hardly inside. Quilty attempts to ward off Humbert's advance by saying, "This is a Gentile's house. You'd better run along." And then there is the suggestion that Sellers modeled his own performance on Lionel Trilling, after watching Trilling's discussion of *Lolita* with Nabokov on a talk show.

The chapter on *Lolita* is the most surprising and the most revisionary, but Abrams's book is nearly always compelling. Nonetheless, some of Abrams's readings of Kubrick's protagonists as Jewish are too attenuated—or perhaps the protagonists were themselves too attenuated as Jews—for the reading to be fully persuasive. *2001: A Space Odyssey*, for instance, is too other-worldly to sustain the New York Jewish frame.

At other times, the gravity of reading Kubrick as a Jew from New York is liberating. Abrams's opening chapter on Kubrick's early films—*Fear and Desire*, *Killer's Kiss,* and *The Killing*—is an exciting reintroduction to the young director. While the taut crime story *The Killing* has developed a cult following over the years (the opening heist in *The Dark Knight* borrows from it liberally), *Killer's Kiss* remains a lost gem. Shot in a rush on location, the movie radiates with the energy of getting to make something in and about the place that you love. New York shapes the characters and sparks the action. The male and female leads are connected and separated by an air shaft; they watch each other (though they pretend not to watch) through their close windows. Their actions are mirrors, the apartment building pushing them into a dance of observing and being observed. Later scenes trade this claustrophobia for the particular dread of a city at its most empty: the industrial waterfront after hours, loft factories, the cavern of Penn Station.

Eyes Wide Shut, Kubrick's last film, is the unlikely reprisal and opposite of *Killer's Kiss*. *Killer's Kiss* reveals the city in its natural state. *Eyes Wide Shut*'s city was constructed on a backlot, a New York imagined in exile. Abrams calls it the "summation of Kubrick's career as a New York Jewish intellectual," and he's right to do so. An unfaithful adaptation of Arthur Schnitzler's *Traumnovelle* (*Dream Story*), the movie serves as exhibit A of Kubrick's method: Start with an explicitly Jewish source text, replace the Jewish protagonist with an empty vessel (Tom Cruise), but add new Jewish figures, a Jewish mise en scène ("Josef Kreibich's Knish Bakery" prominently appears during Bill's walks through Greenwich Village), and tackle Jewish preoccupations. Sydney Pollack's Victor Ziegler, the film's hairy antagonist, is an anti-Semite's dream: a lecher and a manipulator whose wealth enables him to abandon the rules of conventional morality. The film's orgy sequence is disturbing precisely because it is an unerotic abstraction of sex performed for the powerful. Cruise's Harford, like Barry Lyndon, may know the password, but he does not belong, and everyone knows it. There are always gates, restrictions, a level the Jew who obeys the rules cannot attain.

Kubrick's body of work is haunted by the movies he never made. He worked meticulously and deliberately, developing projects for decades but not completing them. Had he made his Holocaust movie with Isaac Bashevis Singer; had he adapted *Traumnovelle* with Woody Allen as the lead in the 1970s instead of Tom Cruise in the 1990s; had he filmed *Aryan Papers*—there would be no debate about Kubrick's identity as a Jewish director. But the movies he did make nonetheless bear the traces of the Jewish preoccupations, which Abrams brilliantly uncovers.

Eitan Kensky founded In Geveb: A Journal of Yiddish Studies *and was the director of collections initiatives at the Yiddish Book Center. He is the incoming Reinhard Family Curator of Judaica and Hebraica at Stanford University Library.*

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Maimonides in Ma'ale Adumim

BY ALLAN NADLER

In 1977, I received a slender volume of commentary on Moses Maimonides's codification of *Hilkhot Teshuvah* (Laws of Repentance) in his *Mishneh Torah*. It was by a former teacher of mine, Rabbi Nachum Rabinovitch, who was then the principal of Jews' College in London, and it was called *Yad Peshutah*. The title, which means "Outstretched Hand," is a clever play on the alternative name sometimes used for Maimonides's 14-volume code of Jewish law, *Yad ha-Hazakah*, or "Strong Hand" (the two Hebrew letters composing the word "*yad*," or hand, also stand for the number 14). Thus, the title implied, Rabinovitch's commentary was an attempt to reach back across the generations to Maimonides in the 12th century and out to contemporary students of the code—and that it aimed to do so by elucidating the *peshat*, or most straightforward meaning, of the text.

In its preface, Rabinovitch announced his audacious plan to extend this approach to the entire *Mishneh Torah*. What struck me most then—and strikes me all the more powerfully these 40 years later, as that initial 148-page volume has blossomed into the most systematic, comprehensive commentary on Maimonides's code ever produced—was not the work's ambition. Rather, it was its systematic clarity and methodological precision, combined with the author's extraordinary mastery of all of Maimonides's works, from the book on logic he wrote as a young man to his final masterpiece, *The Guide of the Perplexed*. Rabinovitch's guiding principle, which he repeats several times, is that "Maimonides must be interpreted through Maimonides." The 23 massive volumes of the now almost complete *Yad Peshutah* bear out the fruitfulness of this approach. As Rabinovitch shows, Maimonides was a remarkably consistent thinker whose halakhic positions in the *Mishneh Torah* were meticulously coordinated with his philosophical reasoning.

Although Rabinovitch is, in many respects, a traditional *rosh yeshiva*—his prose integrates elements of "yeshivish" Hebrew with a mélange of classical and modern styles—he is surely the most thoroughly Maimonidean thinker of our age, not only in this massive commentary, but also in his consummately rationalist works on Jewish law, theology, and Zionism. He is, to put the point piously, perhaps the most impressive and the least well known of our sages.

Born in Sainte-Sophie, Quebec, a farming town at the foothills of the Laurentian Mountains north of Montreal, in 1928, Rabinovitch was sent as a teenager to study at that city's only yeshiva, Merkaz Hatorah, where he was discovered by Montreal's then chief rabbi, the late Pinchas Hirschprung, who ordained him at the age of 20. From Montreal, Rabinovitch went on to study with Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchok Ruderman at Baltimore's Ner Yisrael yeshiva, from which he received a second ordination, while at the same time completing an advanced degree in mathematics at Johns Hopkins University. In his first rabbinical post, Rabinovitch was the leader of the small Orthodox community in Charleston, South Carolina, where he established its first Hebrew day school. In 1963, he returned to Canada to lead the Clanton Park Synagogue in Toronto. While there, he completed a doctorate in the history of science at the University of Toronto. In 1971, he accepted the stunning offer to become principal of Jews' College in London. Ten years later, in a move that shocked his colleagues and students, he accepted another unlikely offer, to become the *rosh yeshiva* of Birkat Moshe, a small yeshiva in Ma'ale Adumim, a settlement a few miles outside of Jerusalem, on the other side of the Green Line. At the time, Birkat Moshe was little more than a trailer

Rabbi Nachum Rabinovitch, 2011.

with a few students, but it had been founded by two brilliant young scholars: Chaim Sabato, who would go on to become a prize-winning novelist, and Yitzhak Sheilat, who would later edit and translate the most meticulous and widely consulted edition of Maimonides's letters. Over the last four decades, Birkat Moshe has become one of the leading Zionist *yeshivot* in Israel, with an important press.

His extraordinary career and accomplishments notwithstanding, Rabbi Rabinovitch is hardly known to diaspora Jews, even those steeped in the rabbinic tradition. His approach is simply too modern, halakhically lenient, and philosophically sophisticated for most of the Orthodox world, let alone the haredi one. Moreover, his regular references to the all-but-banned *Guide of the Perplexed* certainly place him beyond most pales of Orthodox settlement—I know of no other *rosh yeshiva* who regularly lectures on the *Guide*. Nor, despite perennial academic interest in Maimonides, is Rabinovitch particularly well known among university-based scholars of Jewish studies.

As a rabbi, he cedes his judgment and authority to no religious organization, political party, or venerated Orthodox rabbinical tribunal, regardless of how many "Torah giants" fill its mass meetings' massive daises. He also has shown a brave indifference to the single most powerful religious institution in the Jewish State, Israel's Chief Rabbinate. Three years ago, together with Rabbis Shlomo Riskin and David Stav, Rabinovitch established an independent *beit din* to handle the cases of the thousands of Israeli candidates for conversion to Judaism with greater compassion, efficiency, and leniency than had been shown by state-sanctioned rabbinic courts.

As it happens, when I received that first volume of Rabinovitch's *Yad Peshutah*, I was in graduate school, studying under the foremost academic scholar of Maimonides's legal code, Harvard's Isadore Twersky. Ten years earlier, Twersky had published an article called "Some Non-Halachic Aspects of the *Mishneh-Torah*," in which he argued, against a scholarly consensus stretching back to the 19th century, that Mamonides's philosophical and legal writings were not only compatible but complementary. The *Mishneh Torah* was not simply the public, communal work of a radical philosopher, whose *Guide of the Perplexed* secretly undermined many of its religious certainties, as many scholars (most famously Leo Strauss and Shlomo Pines) had argued. Rather, Maimonides was a philosopher-theologian who (more or less) consistently taught the same rational religion, though he wrote differently for different audiences. In 1977, Twersky was in the midst of finishing his masterpiece, *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides*, which argued for this reading in extensive detail. Thus, two great scholars, working independently of one another, crafted a formidable set of arguments for the unity of Maimonides's work, one in a 600-page *hibbur*, the other in a 12,000-page (!) *perush* (to borrow the master's own terminology in distinguishing his works of codification from those of commentary).

In choosing to write a commentary rather than a book, Rabinovitch boldly inscribed himself in an almost 800-year tradition, from the cryptic animadversions of Maimonides's contemporary Rabbi Abraham ben David of Posquières (known as Rabad) through the early 20th-century classic *Ohr Sameach* by Rabbi Meir Simcha ha-Kohen of Dvinsk. And yet, while *Yad Peshutah* is largely exegetical, working line by line through the text of the *Mishneh Torah*, it also contains many brilliant self-contained essays. The first is Rabinovitch's essay on Maimonides's own introduction to his code, an immensely important history of halakhic jurisprudence. In this introduction, Maimonides lists the Torah's 613 commandments, as he had done more expansively in his earlier *Sefer ha-Mitzvot* (Book of the Commandments). These lists correspond, but not perfectly, as has long been obvious to historians

of halakha. Rabinovitch reconciles them and then goes on to coordinate them with the classification of the commandments in the third part of the *Guide*, where Maimonides introduces his famous *Ta'amei ha-Mitzvot* (Reasons for the Commandments). Here, Rabinovitch does what others had only gestured at; he carefully works through all 613 *mitzvot* demonstrating that there are no contradictions between Maimonides's three accounts.

Nonetheless, given the long and rich literary history of Maimonidean scholarship one may wonder what could possibly be added to such an embarrassment of exegetical riches on a line-by-line basis. Based on a more than two-year-long reading of *Yad Peshutah,* my answer is to pose another question (bordering on a kvetch), "Oy, where even to begin?" Well, probably with Rabinovitch's establishment of the most accurate possible version of the text of the *Mishneh Torah*, based on decades of assiduous research on manuscripts from Cambridge and Oxford to Jerusalem and Cairo. Having established to his satisfaction the ideal text, Rabinovitch explains the logic or rationale behind Maimonides's ordering of each halakha (or roughly speaking, in this context, paragraph) in the code's 14 books; second, he compares each ruling to every analogous discussion in Maimonides's earlier halakhic works; third, he turns to explicate the text itself, while cross-referencing and harmonizing it with all related sections elsewhere within the *Mishneh Torah*; finally, he does much the same with regard to all of Maimonides's other writings, including his responsa, epistles, philosophical and even medical works.

Over the years, Rabinovitch has tended to add more and more of his conversations with the traditional rabbinical commentators who surround the text in the classical editions of the *Mishneh Torah,* including the *Mishnah la-Melekh*, the *Kesef Mishnah*, the *Hagahot Maimoniyot*, and many others. Revealingly, Rabinovitch never once mentions the Lithuanian yeshiva world's most cherished glosses to the *Mishneh Torah*, namely the celebrated *Hiddushei Rabenu Haim Halevi*, by the legendary "Brisker Gaon," Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik. The conceptually innovative, but famously forced, Brisker methodology could hardly be farther from *Yad Peshutah*'s goal of clarifying the plain meaning—the *peshat*—of Maimonides's text.

Indeed, Rabinovitch is scarcely less bold than Maimonides himself in challenging his great rabbinic predecessors. Thus, when he disagrees with Maimonides's formidable 13th-century mystical critic Nachmanides, known by his Hebrew acronym Ramban (just as Maimonides is known as Rambam), he will typically write, "Although I am but dust under the feet of the great Ramban . . ."—and then proceed to demolish his argument. In such places, one feels the calm intellectual confidence exuded by Rabinovitch, which may be the natural result of being modestly aware—but aware nonetheless—that he has mastered an entire tradition. (It also must be said that this partisanship clearly differentiates his approach from that of his academic contemporaries.)

Rabinovitch extends Maimonides's concessions to later courts and opinions to their logical end (and, arguably, even beyond it).

Of the many hundreds of passages that might be analyzed to illustrate precisely how *Yad Peshutah* "works" let us turn to the first two chapters of Rabinovitch's commentary to Maimonides's *Hilkhot Mamrim* (Laws Concerning Rebels). This new legal category is a particularly strong example of Maimonides's daringly original reclassification of halakha. There was simply no precedent for the existence of a distinct category of laws about "rebels." The term "*mamrim*" is of biblical origin: "You [the generation of the desert] were rebels against the Lord your God" (Deut. 9:24), but its use as a rubric to bring together nine biblical commandments whose talmudic elaborations are scattered across some 11 tractates is Maimonides's invention. Arguably its most original feature is placing laws pertaining to the judicial authority of the ancient Sanhedrin in Jerusalem together with the laws of filial responsibility, from the obligation to honor one's parents to the draconian punishment of "the deviant and rebellious son."

Mishneh Torah ***by Maimonides, ca. 1457–1465. (Courtesy of the Israel Museum.)***

Maimonides never stated his reasons for reclassifying the entire corpus of Jewish law as it had been ordered since mishnaic times, and neither did his commentators, at least not in any systematic, comprehensive way. In his preface to *Hilkhot Mamrim*, Rabinovitch cites several selections from *The Guide of the Perplexed* where Maimonides explicates the laws of the judiciary and appends the capital offense of the "rebellious son" to the prohibition of rebelling against rulings of the High Court. Then, Rabinovitch succinctly explicates the political reasoning of the *Guide*:

> Clearly, however, before introducing the case of the rebellious son, which is the most extreme example of the destruction of family structure, one must first also explicate the obligations and imperatives to honor and fear parents, for only thus will the home [and the nation] be built upon the most durable foundations.

In this preface, Rabinovitch also handily and characteristically defends Maimonides against his great critic Nachmanides. Nachmanides wonders how Maimonides can classify the violation of the Rabbis' interpretations and decrees as a violation of a *biblical* commandment. Rabinovitch retorts by noting that Maimonides has already implicitly answered this question in his precise framing of these laws:

> The High Court in Jerusalem is the foundation of the Oral Torah, and they are the pillars of instruction from whom laws and statutes go out to all of Israel. Concerning them, the Torah promises "You shall do according to the laws which they shall instruct you. . . ." (Deuteronomy 17:11) This is a positive commandment.

Consequently, we are biblically commanded to obey rabbinic rulings.

Having established the biblical basis for the authority of rabbinic courts, in the second chapter of *Mamrim* Maimonides provides an expository list of what we might call chinks in the Sanhedrin's armor. Here, Rabinovitch plunges into a deeply learned discussion of the general issue of legal precedent. Indeed, these 25 dense pages could be published as a separate monograph, perhaps called *On Stare Decisis in Rabbinical Law*. Although Rabinovitch rarely cites the work of modern scholars, in these pages he shows his mastery not only of traditional 19th- and 20th-century commentary on Maimonides but also of academic work on Maimonides, including that of Shlomo Zalman Havlin and Gerald (Yaakov) Blidstein. Such a mixed array of citations is simply not to be found in any earlier commentary to Maimonides's code.

As I read Rabinovitch, he systematically highlights the cases in which later courts may legitimately overturn the decisions of their predecessors, even by "resurrecting" long-ago rejected minority court—or even individual—opinions. On every occasion that presents itself, Rabinovitch extends Maimonides's concessions to later courts and opinions to their logical end (and, arguably, even beyond it). This tendency to limit the authority of precedent is at one with his overall, scientifically oriented philosophy of Judaism, which is deeply rooted in the idea of historical progress.

A detailed analysis of Rabinovitch's doctrine of precedent would be impossible in the present context. Instead, I will conclude with a more familiar subject: the prohibition of cooking, or eating, meat and milk together. The source of the prohibition as we know it lies in the rabbinic interpretations of each of the three appearances in the Torah of the verse "You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk." (Ex. 23:19, Ex. 34:26, Deut. 14:21) All of these expansions of that literal prohibition are considered to carry the weight of biblical law—with one very notable exception, namely the inclusion of chicken (and other fowl) in the category of "meat." This goes back to a ruling of the 2nd-century sage Rabbi Akiva, but, as Rabbi Yossi the Galilean remarked, birds don't produce milk. Consequently, Rabbi Akiva

should be understood as "building a fence around the Torah"—to prevent a slide down the slippery slope from chicken parmesan to a cheeseburger, and so on.

What does this have to do with the laws dealt with in Chapter Two of *Mamrim*? After dealing with the scope of rabbinic authority, Maimonides applies the prohibition of neither adding nor subtracting from the Torah to the Sanhedrin and all subsequent rabbis. In particular, they may not present a purely rabbinic law as having biblical authority. After Rabinovitch establishes the precise text of these passages (he relies on the variant manuscript of Maimonides's descendent Rabbi Yehoshua ha-Naggid), he notes a strange consequence of Maimonides's ruling: A court or rabbi who claims that the prohibition against eating chicken and dairy together is biblical violates the biblical prohibition of adding to the laws of the Torah. (One imagines a wayward student enjoying a chicken parmesan sub when his rabbi appears and rebukes him for violating the famous commandment not to "boil a kid in its mother's milk," thus committing a biblical felony, whereas his student would be guilty of only a rabbinic misdemeanor—the irony would be more delicious than the sandwich.)

To the extent that Rabinovitch has a public reputation, it is as a liberal on the one hand and a hardline ultrarightist on the other. The first reputation is due to his principled break with Israel's Chief Rabbinate on their intolerant approach to conversion. By contrast, based on a few rather shocking political statements, Rabinovitch has become erroneously labeled as a messianic Zionist extremist. Although Rabinovitch is on the political right in Israel, this is a terrible distortion.

In fact, one of the most striking aspects of Rabinovitch's philosophy of Judaism is its universalist humanism. He has, it must be acknowledged, said some incendiary things. In a private, secretly taped conversation, he reacted to the Israeli government's 2005 decision to forcibly evict the Jews living in Gaza by suggesting that they should booby-trap their homes with explosives and warn the evicting soldiers that they were doing so. This, to put it mildly, was not such a good idea. More recently, he inexcusably compared members of the Knesset to members of the notorious Judenrat councils in the Nazi ghettos. Such extreme remarks are the result of his passionate but thoroughly unmessianic conviction that territorial compromise is a mortal danger to Israel and its citizens. Rabinovitch, who is by nature a lenient halakhist, tolerates no compromise, seeing it in the context of the obligation to save human lives (*pikuach nefesh*). In short, on this one issue, his passionate humanism buttresses his extremism.

At the same time, Rabinovitch's profound concern for the sanctity of human life has led him to take what might be termed "liberal" views that are not shared by the large majority of Religious Zionist rabbis. For example, in a highly unusual, if gentle, rebuke of the famed Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Rabinovitch firmly rejected the notion that all mortal enemies of the Jewish nation throughout its history are to be classified as Amalekites, condemning this as a dangerous idea with no basis whatsoever in halakha. Throughout his work, including a 2006 volume of responsa to queries from IDF soldiers, Rabinovitch insists on treating Gentiles, all Gentiles, regardless of their religion (barring ancient idolatry) or the degree of their hatred of Jews and Israel, as fellow human beings with all the rights that implies. In this regard, he is fond of quoting a verse from Psalms 145:9: "God's mercy extends to all His creations." This view also leads Rabinovitch to rule that it is incumbent on medics in the IDF and Israeli doctors, as well as any bystanders who can assist, to treat and save the lives of Arab combatants, even those of terrorists wounded in the course of attacking Israelis (and even on the Sabbath).

Rabinovitch discourages the trend among religious Jews to add customs and stringencies that their parents and ancestors did not observe, which he regards as pious showboating.

This same universalist liberalism is evident in Rabinovitch's general assessment of both Christianity and Islam as movements that spread the originally Judaic principles of monotheism, morality, and even messianic hope to the entire world. He has praised the Catholic Church's Second Vatican Council, even citing the text of *Nostra Aetate* as correcting what he regards as the historical perversions of Paul's true attitude toward the Jews, which was in the end one of love.

Rabinovitch actually rejects the messianic ideology of many of his fellow Religious Zionists, which he decries as halakhically unfounded and dangerously close to racism. This is consistent with his general—and classically Maimonidean—derision of all mystical and actively messianic theologies of Judaism. Relatedly, he has condemned the arrogance of those who attempt to explain the Holocaust, in particular those of his fellow Zionists who see the Shoah as the necessary precursor to the *gevurah* embodied in the heroic rise of the modern Jewish State. Indeed, Rabinovitch advises deleting the phrase "*reishit tzmichat ge'ulateinu*" (the first flowering of our redemption) from the standard Prayer for the Welfare of Israel, chanted every Shabbat morning in most synagogues. Rather, he cautiously compares the still relatively young Jewish State to the early years of the Second Jewish Commonwealth, asking, "would the [initial] victory of the Maccabees have justified dubbing the Hasmonean Empire as the 'beginning of the final redemption'?"

I have left the most damning allegation against Rabbi Rabinovitch for last, because it is unfounded. Shortly after the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin in 1995, it was widely reported that Rabinovitch was among those who had applied the "laws of the *rodef*" (a lethal pursuer whom one is permitted to kill in self-defense) to Rabin, thus helping to create the poisonous ideological climate that made his murder possible. But the crazed assassin Yigal Amir never set foot in Rabinovitch's yeshiva, and when Rabinovitch was publicly asked whether he regarded Rabin as a *rodef*, his consistent and curt response was a passionate "*chas ve-shalom*" (roughly, heaven forbid). Neither the governmental Shamgar report on Rabin's assassination nor journalist Dan Ephron's excellent book *Killing a King* so much as mention Rabinovitch, and yet the calumny—"fake news" if anything is—persists.

While *Yad Peshutah* will almost certainly end up being studied mainly by scholars, Rabinovitch's works as a practicing halakhist have always aimed to make traditional life as livable as possible for his fellow Jews. Although the range of the topics he has covered is encyclopedic, a consideration of a handful of his *teshuvot* (responsa) will round out his portrait. In these decisions, he has consistently discouraged the trend among religious Jews to add customs and stringencies that their parents and ancestors did not observe, which he generally regards as pious showboating (a phenomenon, he notes, that the Talmud called "*yuhara*"). And he is brutally dismissive of rabbinic peers who inevitably lean toward stringency, citing an epigram that a rabbi who is always blindly stringent will in the end merit followers who blindly violate the Torah. In another responsum (this one about family law) he expresses similar exasperation, condemning those rabbis who, relying solely and without any historical perspective on precedents, rule stringently, when a recognition of recent scientific progress would require far more leniency. And then there is one responsum where Rabinovitch flies into a true rage. When some of Toronto's Orthodox rabbis restricted access to the formerly ecumenical community mikvah that he had been central in establishing, he sarcastically described them as "little foxes desecrating the vineyard of the Lord" (a play on Song of Songs 2:15).

Throughout his impressive body of halakhic decisions, Rabinovitch consistently applies Maimonidean philosophical and historicist principles. His responsa on matters of women's modesty, for instance, all conclude with an almost identical formulation: No single standard applies to each and every woman in all times and places, so each must base her decision in these deeply personal matters on the standards and norms of the particular community in which she lives. Similarly, in allowing men in shorts and T-shirts to don tefillin and lead public prayers, Rabinovitch recognizes the modern Zionist reality of Orthodox Jews toiling in the Israeli heat on *kibbutzim* and *moshavim* and in cities, again always insisting that the norms of each community determine such matters.

Throughout his long, distinguished career Rabinovitch has stood firmly against the legal application of the romantic doctrine of the "decline of the generations" (*yeridat ha-dorot*), which insists that with each new generation, knowledge is diminished as we grow ever distant from the revelation at Sinai. He is a guardian of tradition who believes in progress—in short, a Maimonidean. In the year of his 90th birthday, and a little more than 40 years since he began his monumental *Yad Peshutah*, Rabbi Rabinovitch is perhaps unique in meriting a slight spin on the famous old saying applied to Maimonides: "from Moses to Moses, may there arise more like Nachum."

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On Literary Brilliance and Moral Rot

BY ROBERT ZARETSKY

Last December, the prestigious French publishing house Gallimard revealed plans to republish three so-called pamphlets first penned more than 70 years ago. The announcement provoked an earthquake in French literary and political circles, exposing ideological and artistic fault lines more than a century old. Its aftershocks are still reverberating. This is not surprising, given the identity of the author—Louis-Ferdinand Céline—and nature of the works: *Bagatelles pour un massacre* (Bagatelles for a Massacre), *Les beaux draps* (A Fine Mess), and *L'École des cadavres* (The School of Cadavers).

As almost anyone who has studied French literature knows, Céline is the author of *Voyage au bout de la nuit* (*Journey to the End of the Night*), one of the 20th century's darkest and most dazzling works of fiction. The novel traces the life of Ferdinand Bardamu, a semiautobiographical character whose bleak itinerary includes stops at the no-man's-land of wartime France, a Ford factory in America, a colonial outpost in French-ruled Africa, and the suburban slums of Paris. Céline's prose strips the reader of the illusions bequeathed by the Enlightenment of the invincibility of reason and ineluctability of progress. "Truth," concludes the narrator, "is an endless death agony. The truth is death. You have to choose: death or lies. I've never been able to kill myself."

We have never been able, in turn, to ignore Céline's writing. In part, it is a question of his extraordinary life. Céline was an interloper in France's literary world; like Bardamu, he did not graduate from an elite lycée in Paris but instead from the trenches of World War I; he did not write his works in a Left Bank café but instead in a miserable apartment in the squalid suburb of Clichy; his audience was not, at least at first, bourgeois readers but instead the working poor that, as a doctor, he treated. As a result, Céline may have earned a right to a kind of humane cynicism:

> When the grave lies open before us, let's not try to be witty, but on the other hand, let's not forget, but make it our business to record the worst of the human viciousness we've seen without changing one word. When we've done that, we can curl up our toes and sink into the pit. That's work enough for a lifetime.

Céline's style is yet another reason he cannot be ignored. In *Voyage*, Céline's language remains as dizzying as when the book first appeared in 1932. (The book nearly won the country's most prestigious literary award, the Prix Goncourt, but those committee members horrified by the writing slightly outnumbered those hypnotized by it.) Pocked by hundreds of ellipses, Céline's sentences pulsate with a jazz-like rhythm, riffing in a slang as foreign as Basque to many of his readers. He tosses off dozens of aphorisms, as bleak as they are brilliant: "One way or another, kissing is as indispensable as scratching." "When you stop to think about it, at least a hundred people must want you dead in the course of an average day." "Nothing can be explained. The world only knows how to do one thing, to roll over and kill you, as a sleeper kills his fleas." "Philosophizing is simply one way of being afraid, a cowardly pretense that doesn't get you anywhere." "This body of ours, this disguise put on by common jumping molecules, is in constant revolt against the abominable farce of having to endure." Veering from the philosophical to the scatological, Céline reads like a modern mash-up of Rabelais and La Rochefoucauld.

Céline tosses off dozens of aphorisms, as bleak as they are brilliant.

There is yet one more reason Céline cannot be ignored—a reason that brings us to the recent controversy in Paris. He was, quite simply, a virulent anti-Semite whose three pamphlets—something of a misnomer, since *Bagatelles pour un massacre* alone falls just shy of 400 pages—are shocking even by the standards of other anti-Semites. With *Bagatelles*, Céline promises an "anti-Semitic pedagogy," presented by the book's narrator Ferdinand that will reveal how the "Jewish race" controls French finance and politics and has corrupted French culture. In one of Céline's favorite phrases, France's proud literary and artistic traditions were becoming fatally "*enjuivé*," or "Judaized"—made Jewish. So much so, he exclaims, that "to the French palate . . . Jewish shit is a taste without equal! An ineffable nectar! Verily, an ascension into Heaven!" Consider, Ferdinand prattles, the case of Communist Russia: "As soon as they were in command, the Hymies didn't waste time in setting about to the decimation of the Aryans . . . Over the past seventeen years, they have had the impure destroyed by the millions . . . The Jews don't like to see the color of blood? Not their own of course! . . . But that of others, they give themselves a generous view . . . as soon as the occasion presents itself."

Unless France acted, declares Ferdinand, her fate would be the same. "You must remember that for a Jew . . . every non-Jew is nothing but an animal! . . . Never anything more . . . The chosen people haven't yet proceeded to carry out mass executions in our precincts, only the occasional murder. But these matters will not be left to wait much longer." Time was of the essence: "Once they get a sure grip on our bones, once they've softened our good hearts, once they are quite sure they possess us down to our very last leucoplasts, they will transform themselves into despots, the most arrogant and brazen that have ever been seen in all of history." For this reason, those peoples who "have hung a few of those Jews had good reason . . . Those kikes had best be on their guards. Patience wears out, then disappears . . . pogroms do not come about for nothing!"

Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Meudon, France, ca. 1955. (Photo by Lipnitzki/Roger Viollet/Getty Images.)

Céline's ravings were so relentless that many of his contemporaries dismissed them as a joke. Shortly after the *Bagatelles*' publication in 1937, the Nobel Prize laureate (and polite anti-Semite) André Gide insisted that Céline "does his best not to be taken seriously." Of course, when one notes that Céline includes Racine, Stendhal, the Pope,

and Picasso in his list of Jews, Gide's claim may seem credible. Except, that is, when one recalls the historical context. As the great Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain warned soon after the book's publication, "Today in Europe, there are people who seek the extermination of the Jews. It is this, is it not, that we are discussing?" While this "massacre remains a dream, the germs of hatred filling the air are real." Maritain's prediction needed just a half-dozen years—a period spanning Céline's completion of two more anti-Semitic pamphlets and Hitler's attempted completion of the Final Solution—to come true.

Just days after the Allies landed at Normandy, Céline joined the exodus of French collaborators streaming to Germany. After the war, he fled to Denmark, where he remained for six years. In 1951, he returned to France upon learning that he had been amnestied for his acts of collaboration. He died 10 years later, leaving behind a widow, Lucette, and a literary legacy that remains the third rail of French intellectual and political discourse. Increasingly preoccupied during his last years by what the future would say of his past, Céline and his new publisher, Gallimard—his previous publisher, the collaborationist Robert Denoël, was assassinated, perhaps by the Resistance, in 1945—were opposed to republishing the "pamphlets." It was a decision that Lucette, now 105 years old, and the management of Gallimard—determined to sanitize, if not sanctify Céline—long maintained.

That is, until last year. In December, the radical right-wing magazine *L'Incorrect* leaked the news that Antoine Gallimard—grandson of Gaston Gallimard, the company's legendary founder, and current CEO—planned to reissue the pamphlets in 2018. The new edition, it appeared, would also include a preface by Pierre Assouline. It was a canny move by Gallimard: Assouline is a well-known and respected literary journalist who has written several biographies (including one of, yes, Gaston Gallimard). With his name appearing on the cover, Assouline would in turn lend Gallimard cover from the predictable storm of criticism. No doubt Gallimard would be as shocked—shocked!—were he asked if Assouline's Jewish background played a role in his choice, as he would be if asked whether he was motivated by the strong likelihood that Céline's anti-Semitic pamphlets would do a brisk business in contemporary France with both ultranationalist and radical Islamist readers. The ostensible reason, instead, is that Lucette, who is under continuous care and rarely conscious, had a change of heart.

The leak led to a flood of criticism that even Assouline's good name could not staunch. Most notably, Serge Klarsfeld, the famous Nazi-hunter and founder of the association Sons and Daughters of Jewish Deportees from France, appealed to Gallimard to reconsider the project. While this book belonged in libraries, Klarsfeld found it "insupportable" to think that one could find it stocked in bookstores. To those who insisted that enough time has passed, Klarsfeld agreed that "times have changed, but in a very unfavorable way." Noting the alarming rise of anti-Semitic activity in France, he insisted that the pamphlets, precisely because Céline penned them, are "deadly" and constitute "an act of aggression against us and against French Jews."

Klarsfeld's condemnation of Gallimard's plans was echoed by other prominent voices. In the newspaper *Libération*, the essayist Gisèle Berkman declared that "each phrase, each word [in the pamphlets] is a call for murder." In a context where "anti-Semitism and racism are considered an opinion like any other, where the 'Jew' and 'money' are again joined, and Jews are accused of manipulating the world, it is nothing less than sheer dishonesty to declare that these works can be read without consequences." Upping the ante, the literary scholar Tiphaine Samoyault argued that Céline's anti-Semitism is not an unfortunate literary quirk but sincere and systemic. In a *Le Monde* editorial, she declared that she and other scholars have chosen not to teach Céline's works because "his hateful words are found not just in his pamphlets, and because his anti-Semitism, far from an exception, represents a serious engagement on his part."

With his name appearing on the cover, Assouline would lend Gallimard cover from the predictable storm of criticism.

Demonstration by the far-right Front National (FN) party against migrants due to arrive in the city of Grambois, La Tour d'Aigues, France, October 23, 2016. The banner reads "No migrants in our villages." (Reuters/Jean-Paul Pelissier, stock.adobe.com.)

In a nation where, ever since Louis XIV created the Académie française, politics and literature have been so tightly entwined, politicians inevitably piled into the fray. Alexis Corbière, the spokesperson for the extreme-left party La France Insoumise (Defiant France), denounced Gallimard's plans and noted that hate speech, which includes anti-Semitic utterances, is outlawed. As a result, should these "deliriously anti-Semitic texts" be published, how could the courts forbid the publication of other anti-Semitic declarations? On the far right, Bruno Gollnisch, a pillar of the National Front, was apoplectic. It is hard to imagine, he sneered, that the "scum who fill the Islamic-mafia battalions of 'our' suburbs would bother to read French authors to justify anti-Jewish actions." The irony of Gollnisch's defense of French Jewry was thicker than a slab of pâté. Ten years ago, Gollnisch was slapped with a three-month suspended sentence and fine of 55,000 euros for questioning the number of Jews killed in the concentration camps, all the while casting doubt upon the existence of the gas chambers.

Weighing in as well was former president Nicolas Sarkozy. In 2011, he had gone on record that "one could like Céline without being an anti-Semite just as one could like Proust without being a homosexual." Since realizing that Proust never called for the extermination of heterosexuals, Sarkozy now showed greater prudence. After hemming and hawing, he concluded that given the current rash of anti-Semitic sentiment, he "didn't see the purpose" in reissuing the pamphlets.

The government, it turned out, was equally skeptical. Shortly after the news leak, Frédéric Potier, director of the cabinet-level office charged with tracking racist and anti-Semitic activities, invited Antoine Gallimard to his office. In the meeting Potier sought guarantees that the book would include a critical apparatus "casting light on the ideological context of these pamphlets" and that historians would be part of this effort. Assouline's preface, no matter how perceptive, would be inadequate. As for the critical apparatus written for a 2012 Canadian edition of the pamphlets that Gallimard planned to use, it was worse than inadequate. Not only was this edition pallidly titled *Ecrits polémiques,* but the Canadian publisher, Rémi Ferland, had described the Front National's Marine Le Pen during last year's presidential election as "France's last chance." Gallimard thanked Potier for his time and told him the pamphlets would be published as planned.

But Gallimard's plans proved as airtight as those of the French army in 1940. In an open letter published in the magazine *Le Nouvel Obs*, more than a dozen internationally recognized specialists in 20th-century history—including Annette Becker, Pierre-

André Taguieff, Laurent Joly, Michel Winock, and Jay Winter—declared that this project "cannot be done in haste." They compared the gravity of the task to the recent publication in Germany of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, noting that more than two-thirds of the latter text was filled with critical annotations and notes. In effect, a scholarly cordon sanitaire had been built around Hitler's ravings in the implicit hope of attracting only other scholars. In any case, to do anything less with Céline's pamphlets, the French historians warned, would be unprofessional. Trenchantly, they added it would be unethical for a publisher to earn a profit from the book's publication.

In early March, President Emmanuel Macron finally addressed the controversy. At the annual dinner sponsored by the Representative Council of Jewish Institutions in France (CRIF), Macron reminded his audience, which included nearly all of his cabinet ministers, that it was not his role to "judge" the controversy over the pamphlets. But, he continued, he nevertheless had a personal opinion. While he was encouraged by the "adult debate" over the question of publication, Macron declared: "I do not believe we need these pamphlets."

By then, though, Gallimard had already retreated. A few weeks before Macron's speech, the publisher, with majestic understatement, acknowledged that "the methodological and memorial conditions are presently not reunited to calmly envisage publication" of the pamphlets. As a result, he was suspending plans to reissue the texts. At the same time, he insisted that "condemning them to censorship hinders efforts to reveal their roots and ideological reach and cultivates an unhealthy curiosity instead of critical reasoning."

It is easy to see that Gallimard's statement lacks the critical reasoning he pretends to defend. First, it has never been a question of censorship. The pamphlets can be found not just in libraries and used bookstores—including the *bouquiniste* stalls along the Seine—but also on the Internet, where one can download a PDF in seconds. Besides, the work of examining the literary roots and measuring the ideological reach of these pamphlets has been underway for decades. From Alice Kaplan's path-breaking work on Céline's sources for *Bagatelles pour un massacre*, in which she traced his borrowings from the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and a variety of other anti-Semitic works, to Pierre-André Taguieff and Annick Durafour's recent study *Céline, le race, le juif*, there has been no shortage of scholarly works. (Or for that matter, damning ones: Taguieff and Durafour reveal that Céline denounced a number of French Jews to the Vichy authorities.) Finally, Gallimard's refusal to issue the pamphlets à la *Mein Kampf*—namely, with the texts buffered by a solid critical apparatus—would more likely encourage rather than discourage "an unhealthy curiosity."

But this last point nevertheless raises a number of questions. How reasonable is the assumption that a full-blown scholarly edition of Céline's pamphlets would protect innocent readers against its radioactive qualities? After all, 100,000 copies of the new German edition of *Mein Kampf*, which submerges Hitler's words in an ocean of commentary, recently rolled off the printing press. It is likely that more than a few of the buyers offered a rationale similar to literary young men in the 1970s justifying their subscriptions to *Playboy*: They bought it for the footnotes. Why, in fact, do we need a critical edition of Céline's murderously anti-Semitic ravings at all? As the historian Tal Bruttmann remarked, Céline's pamphlets, unlike Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, which is historically unavoidable, hardly deserves such attention. His writings were not a blueprint for a totalitarian state's war aims, but instead a collage of rancid claims thrown together by a vile man who happened to be a great novelist. What do they tell us—apart, that is, that Céline was an anti-Semite? This is hardly, Bruttmann drily concludes, "a great discovery."

In the end, it may well be that the claims made by historians no less than Gallimard are beside the point, if the only point is that Céline was, as Bruttmann notes, an anti-Semite. It is a dreary point, a miserable point, but also an uncontroversial point. In fact—and herein lies the rub—Céline's anti-Semitism can no more be denied than the brilliance and originality of his fiction. In one of the passages from *Bagatelles*, where Céline states that the Jews can be found gathered at each of France's catastrophes, roosting like a thousand ravens from Hell, he exclaims: "*Cela ne s'invente pas*." You cannot make this stuff up. Of course, Céline and his sources made it all up. Does this mean we, in turn, should continue to make up reasons, no matter how disinterested or austere, for republishing such writings?

Robert Zaretsky is a professor in the Honors College at the University of Houston. His book Catherine and Diderot: An Empress, A Philosophe and the Fate of the Enlightenment *will be published next year by Harvard University Press.*

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Du Bois, the Warsaw Ghetto, and a Priestly Blessing

BY JENNA WEISSMAN JOSELIT

Like many of their readers, American Jewish magazines changed their names: The periodical known as *Jewish Currents*, for example, first came into the world in the 1940s as *Jewish Life*. Styling itself a "progressive" magazine, often a byword in postwar America for an avowedly communist enterprise, it shared its innocuous-seeming title for a spell with the house publication of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, confounding subsequent generations of historians.

Throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s, *Jewish Life* published detailed and impassioned articles about the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, whose fighting spirit inspired its own, and the "Negro question" in the United States, often linking the two. In an ongoing effort to deepen its readers' understanding of the dire conditions of African American life and to inspire them to make common cause with the African American community, the magazine's editors repeatedly invited Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois to contribute to its pages.

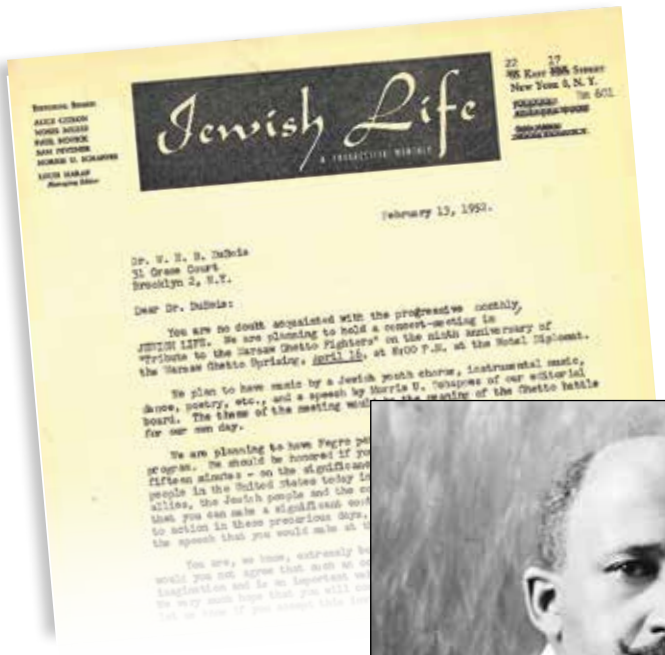
"We are anxious to include an article on the relationship between the struggle against anti-Semitism and all forms of anti-Negroism," Samuel Barron, the magazine's managing editor, wrote to the prominent African American leader and elder statesman in November 1947, hoping he would accept the assignment. Du Bois declined, citing too many demands on his time.

Two years later, Louis Harap, Barron's successor as managing editor, tried again to persuade Du Bois to write for the magazine. "You are no doubt acquainted with *Jewish Life* and the work it is doing on the oppression of Negroes and national groups in the United States in addition to the Jewish question. However, we feel that we have not yet done enough, either on the Negro problem or on Negro-Jewish relations. I know you are probably deluged with requests of this kind," Harap continued, "but I hope very much that you will respond favorably to this one in view of the need for closer liaison between the Negro and Jewish movements." Once again, Du Bois declined.

Jewish Life persisted. Having learned of a trip Du Bois had taken to Warsaw in the aftermath of World War II, the magazine's editorial board thought he might offer a deeply informed and personal perspective on the contemporary relevance of the Warsaw Ghetto. In February 1952, it invited the African American civil rights crusader to participate in a "Tribute to the Warsaw Ghetto fighters," which was scheduled for April 16, on the ninth anniversary of the uprising, at Manhattan's Hotel Diplomat on West 43rd Street. "We should be honored if you would consent to speak – perhaps for fifteen minutes – on the significance of the ghetto fight for the Negro people in the United States today in relation to cooperation with their allies, the Jewish people and the common people of America," read the invitation, somewhat lumberingly.

Jewish Life was right to think that Du Bois would have what to say. In a letter to his friend and patron, Anita McCormick Blaine, penned shortly after returning to the States, he gave voice to both despair and hope at what he had encountered in postwar Poland. "I never thought it possible that human beings could do to each other in modern days what the Germans did to Warsaw," Du Bois wrote in September 1949, adding, "In some cases, there was nothing but dust left." He was equally taken with its residents' commitment to renewal, observing that the "city is rising again and anew and the spirit of the people is extraordinary."

Jewish Life was right to think that W. E. B. Du Bois would have what to say.


Jewish Life

A PROGRESSIVE MONTHLY

February 13, 1952.

Dr. W. E. B. DuBois
21 Grove Court
Brooklyn 2, N.Y.

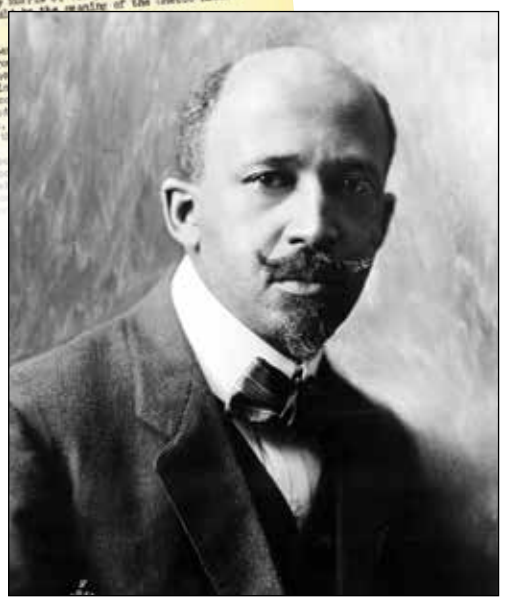
Dear Dr. DuBois:

You are no doubt acquainted with the progressive monthly, JEWISH LIFE. We are planning to hold a concert-meeting in "Tribute to the Warsaw Ghetto Fighters" on the ninth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, April 16, at 8:00 P.M. at the Hotel Diplomat.

We plan to have music by a Jewish youth chorus, instrumental music, dance, poetry, etc., and a speech by Morris U. Schappes of our editorial board. The theme of the meeting will be the meaning of the Ghetto battle for our own day.

We are planning to have Negro participation in the program. We should be honored if you would consent to speak – on the significance of the ghetto fight for the Negro people in the United States today in relation to cooperation with their allies, the Jewish people and the common people of America – for fifteen minutes. Perhaps you would be willing to send us a message that you can make a significant contribution to action in these precarious days, which we could read at the meeting if you cannot be present. We hope that you will make the speech that you would make at the meeting.

You are, we know, extremely busy, but we hope that you will find it possible to accept our invitation and be an important part of the meeting. We very much hope that you will be able to come if you can.



Letter from Jewish Life *to W. E. B. Du Bois, February 13, 1952. (W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.) Right: W. E. B. Du Bois, 1918. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.)*

This time around, in 1952, the right occasion and the right subject neatly came together, prompting Du Bois to accept the magazine's invitation. "He asks me to say that if he can speak plainly with his new teeth, he will talk 15 minutes for your organization on April 16," responded Lillian Hyman, his secretary, on behalf of her boss.

And so he did, taking his place on the stage of the Hotel Diplomat's ballroom alongside the Edith Segal Mitlschul Dance Group and the Jewish Young Folk Singers, a brand new, interracial chorus whose "youthful verve" and "delightful joyousness of spirit" enlivened the proceedings. Du Bois's remarks, which were subsequently published in the May 1952 issue of *Jewish Life* under the title "The Negro and the Warsaw Ghetto," deepened them.

At once a personal account and a history lesson, his presentation built on the impressions he had committed to paper several years earlier, enlarging their circumference.

> I have seen something of human upheaval in this world: the scream and shots of a race riot in Atlanta; the marching of the Ku Klux Klan; the threat of courts and police; the neglect and destruction of human habitation; but nothing in my wildest imagination was equal to what I saw in Warsaw in 1949. I would have said before seeing it that it was impossible for a civilized nation with deep religious convictions and outstanding religious institutions; with literature and art; to treat fellow human beings as Warsaw had been treated. There had been complete, planned and utter destruction.

"[O]ne afternoon," Du Bois told his audience, "I was taken out to the former ghetto. I knew all too little of its story although I had visited ghettos in parts of Europe, particularly in Frankfurt, Germany. Here there was not much to see. There was complete and total waste and a monument. And the monument brought back again the problem of race and religion, which so long had been my own particular and separate problem." (Du Bois had in mind Nathan Rapoport's then recently dedicated sculptural salute to the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, which, in James Young's words, stood amidst and drew its power from the adjacent "landscape of debris," its "moonscape of rubble, piled sixteen feet high.")

"Gradually, from looking and reading," Du Bois continued, "I rebuilt the story of this extraordinary resistance to oppression and wrong . . . a resistance which involved death and destruction for hundreds and hundreds of human beings; a deliberate sacrifice in life for a great ideal in the face of the fact that the sacrifice might be completely in vain."

The result of his visits, he ringingly concluded, "was not so much clearer understanding of the Jewish problem in the world as it was a real and more complete understanding of the Negro problem . . . the ghetto of Warsaw helped me to emerge from a certain social provincialism into a broader conception of

what the fight against race segregation, religious discrimination and the oppression by wealth had to become if civilization was going to triumph and broaden in the world."

In the years that followed, the editors of *Jewish Life* continued to keep in touch with Dr. Du Bois, inviting him to participate in a 1953 "mass rally" and 10th anniversary commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising in New York, proposing he write for the magazine on "Negro-Jewish relations" and on school segregation, and sending him a telegram on his 85th birthday: "We do you most honor by continued common struggle with Negro people and all progressives and equality."

In every instance, *Jewish Life* initiated these exchanges. But in 1954, Du Bois himself began a conversation by turning to Harap for guidance. He tells him about a character in a novel that he is writing—a German rabbi who survived the "Hitler massacre"—who, by chance, encounters an African American college president whom he had met years before. The survivor would like to pronounce a Hebrew blessing on his long-lost friend. "What would he say?" asks Du Bois of his dyed-in-the-wool-left-wing-secularist colleague at the helm of *Jewish Life*. "Please give me a quotation."

Memorial to the heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, by Nathan Rapoport, Warsaw, Poland.

Harap was eager to oblige but didn't know how, so he turned to Joshua Bloch, the distinguished bibliographer, longtime head of the New York Public Library's Jewish Division, and an ordained rabbi, for a liturgical assist. On Christmas Eve 1954, in a letter preserved in the W. E. B. Du Bois collection at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, Harap furnished Du Bois with the text of the traditional priestly benediction—in both English and in Hebrew transliteration.

Du Bois would go on to make use of the blessing in the concluding pages of *Worlds of Color,* the last volume of his Black Flame trilogy. At once a sweeping work of historical fiction and a rueful self-portrait, it follows the life and times of Manual Mansart, the president of a historically black college in Georgia.

In the 1961 novel's last dramatic set piece, an aging Mansart is unceremoniously expelled from a conference of "Negro leadership in Africa and America" for his radicalism. "Black Brothers, let us never sell our high heritage for a mess of such White Folks' pottage!," he tells the assembly, among them a Jewish clergyman named Rabbi Blumenschweig, who turns out to be the character Du Bois had first mentioned to Harap. In the novel, the rabbi met Mansart in Nazi Berlin in 1936 and, years later, encouraged him to attend this international gathering. The two men exit together. Just as the ailing Mansart is about to get into a cab, the clergyman, "his head uncovered and his white hair blowing in the frosty night," places his hands on his old friend's shoulders and blesses him:

Yevorechecho Adonoi veyishmerecho;
Yoer Adonoi ponov eilecho vichuneko;
Yiso Adonoi ponov eilecho veyosem lecho sholom.

Mansart dies several pages later, his legacy—and that of his creator—hallowed by an age-old Jewish prayer.

Permission to publish correspondence was granted by Jewish Currents, The David Graham Du Bois Trust, and the W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst.

Jenna Weissman Joselit is the Charles E. Smith Professor of Judaic Studies and Professor of History at the George Washington University. Her latest book is Set in Stone: America's Embrace of the Ten Commandments *(Oxford University Press).*

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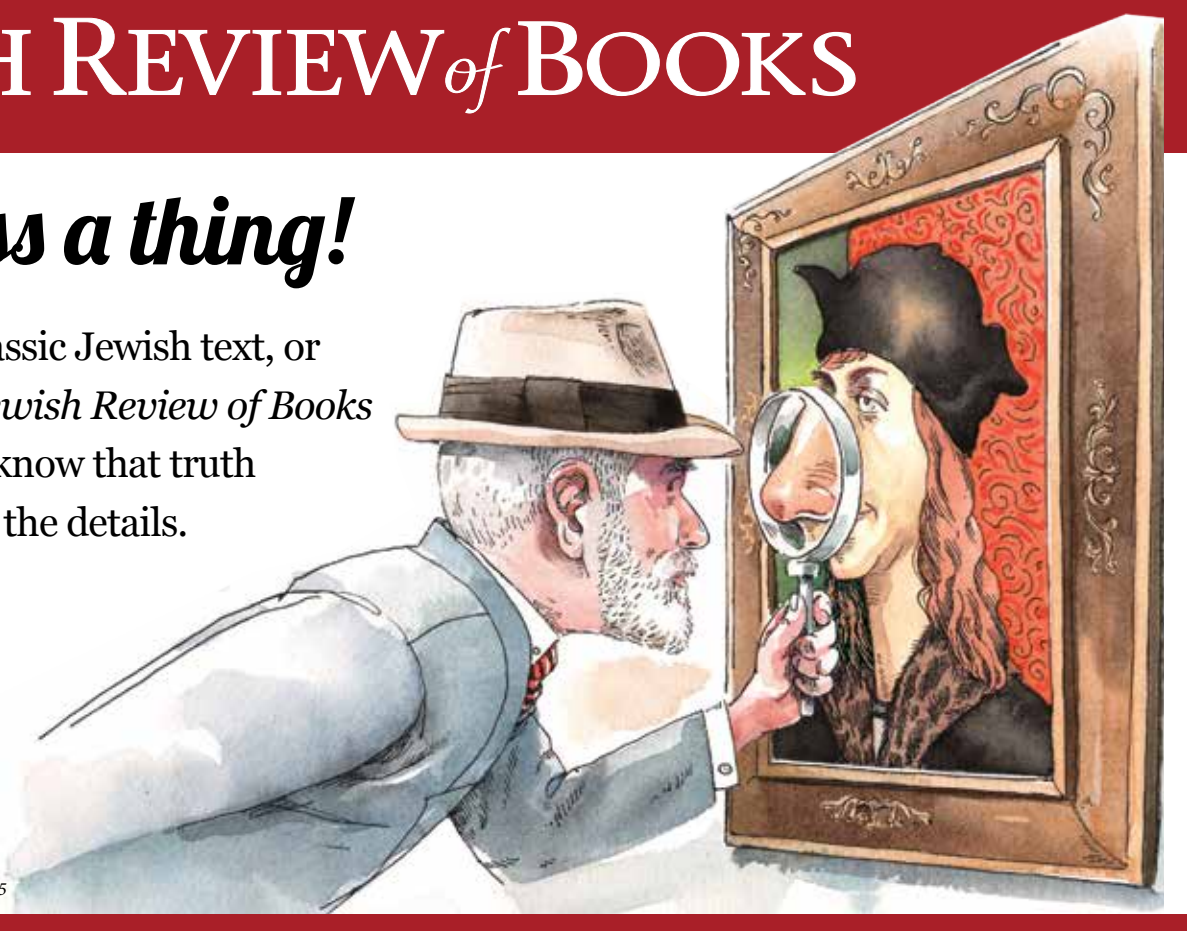

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Says Who?

BY ABRAHAM SOCHER

In 1990, just back from studying in Jerusalem for a year, I talked my way into a miserable job in the Los Angeles office of a major Jewish organization. I was called an assistant director of something or other, but my actual duties, such as they were, seemed to consist in helping my boss raise funds to cover his salary and the overhead, and writing a superfluous newsletter, in which I struggled to find the nonexistent sweet spot between synagogue announcements and corporate press releases. We worked in a dingy office on Fairfax that might have been previously occupied by Philip Marlowe (I could have used his drawer flask). There was a modeling agency, or so it claimed, on the first floor, a kosher pizza parlor down the street, and a sweet old barber named Nathan Newman around the corner who had grown up in the famous town of Mezheritch and survived more than one camp.

One of the things about having a truly bad job is that you find yourself not just bored but needing to remind yourself of whom you are. I had picked up a little green paperback copy of Peter Berger's *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* somewhere, and I read dense, nourishing bits of it on my lunch hour, puzzling over Germanic formulations such as "Man, as we know him empirically, cannot be conceived of apart from the continuous outpouring of himself into the world in which he finds himself. . . . Human being is externalizing in its essence and from the beginning." (In the margins, I scribbled, "Read Hegel!"—probably still a good idea.) But Berger could also hit you with an epigrammatic little dart: "[R]eligion," he wrote, "is the audacious attempt to conceive of the entire universe as being humanly significant."

In *The Sacred Canopy* Berger argues that the modern state and economy require social spaces and institutions that are free, or mostly free, from the domination of religion and its symbols. In this connection, he liked to quote the 17th-century Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius, who said that if international law was to be effective between states with different established religions, it must be framed "as if God did not exist." And as between states, eventually, so too within them; thus, modern workers had to leave their religion at the factory gates. Or, to quote the famous advice from the poet Yehudah Leib Gordon to his fellow 19th-century Jews: "Be a man in the streets and a Jew at home." But—and this returns us to Berger's Hegelian point—if you get used to leaving your religion at home, you end up thinking secular thoughts, which leads to the further decline of religion.

This process of secularization inevitably forces religions to enter the marketplace to compete for adherents, but the experience of different options on the consumer side necessarily relativizes the absolute claims of religion. Meanwhile, on the producer side, religious institutions must rationalize themselves along modern, corporate lines in order to effectively compete in the modern world.

These points were not all original to Berger. But he brought them together in a persuasive intellectual package that, unlike the accounts of some of his fellow postwar "secularization theorists," fully recognized the depth of religion. In fact, in a move he owed to Max Weber, he argued that the seeds of this secularization lay not only in the modern reorganization of society but in religion itself—or at least the Bible's original uncompromising rejection of Near Eastern polytheism and, closer to home, the Protestant disenchantment of medieval Christianity. Moreover, as he periodically made clear, while this was his value-free sociological analysis, Berger was himself a serious Protestant who still found what he called "signals of transcendence" in our doubly disenchanted world.

I thought I saw Berger on the Green Line, looking more or less as he had on the back of *Facing Up to Modernity*: bald with a brown cigarillo, like a bookie lost in thought.

When I got to Harvard for graduate school, I called up Berger at his Boston University office. Eagerly, I told him that I had read his work closely and that I was planning to write a dissertation on the Jewish Enlightenment, which I wanted to discuss with him. "Well," he said, "you do know that I am not Jewish . . ." I was a bit nonplussed. Here was this giant of social theory, who sometimes used Jewish examples to illustrate his points, and yet he seemed to be suggesting that the fact that he wasn't Jewish disqualified him from discussing a topic in Jewish studies. I scrambled for an answer by delivering a presumptuous little lecture on how his theory of secularization applied to the Jewish case, but of course he knew this. After all, hadn't he written at the very conclusion of *The Sacred Canopy* that "the fundamental option between resistance and accommodation must be faced by Judaism, particularly in America, in terms that are not too drastically different from those in which it is faced by the Christian churches"?

Berger listened patiently, and then he said, "You can come to see me, but"—and here he spoke with heavy emphasis—"it sounds like you have read my books . . . and *I haven't thought of anything new*." That remark did its work. I never forgot it, and I didn't call Berger for another 20 years, though I did think that I saw him once on the Green Line at the Copley station, looking more or less as he had on the back cover of *Facing Up to Modernity*: bald with a brown cigarillo, like a bookie lost in thought.

As it happens, just a few years later Berger actually did think of something new. As he charmingly tells the story in his introduction to *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, his reconsideration of his old theory crystallized when a massive volume called *Fundamentalisms Observed* landed on his desk:

> The Fundamentalism Project was very generously funded by the MacArthur Foundation . . . The book was very big . . . the kind that could do serious injury. So I asked myself, why would the MacArthur Foundation shell out several million dollars to support an international study of religious fundamentalists?
> Two answers came to mind. The first was obvious and not very interesting. The MacArthur Foundation is a very progressive outfit; it understands fundamentalists to be anti-progressive; the Project, then, was a matter of knowing one's enemies. But there was also a more interesting answer. "Fundamentalism" is considered a strange, hard-to-understand phenomenon; the purpose of the Project was to . . . make it more understandable. But to whom? *Who* finds this world strange? Well, the answer to *that* question was easy: people to whom the officials of the MacArthur Foundation normally talk, such as professors at elite American universities. And with this came the aha! experience. The . . . Project was based on an upside-down perception of the world, according to which "fundamentalism" (which, when all is said and done, usually refers to any sort of passionate religious movement) is a rare, hard-to-explain thing. But . . . [t]he difficult-to-understand phenomenon is not Iranian mullahs but American university professors—it might be worth a multi-million-dollar project to try to explain that!

Berger had often remarked that sociology asks the nervy little question "*Says who?*" and now he asked it of his colleagues and himself. Not only hadn't the world secularized in the way that he had thought it would, but the religions that were resurgent weren't the kind that had made peace with modernity. Instead, "movements with beliefs and practices dripping with reactionary supernaturalism (the kind utterly beyond the pale at self-respecting faculty parties) have widely succeeded." Modernity, Berger went on to argue, does lead to pluralism, and pluralism does tend to relativize religious belief, but it hasn't led to a thoroughly secular world, nor will it. As soon as one stepped

out of the faculty lounge, Berger said, one saw that people moved much more easily from the enchanted groves of tradition to the iron cage of modern rationality and back again than Max Weber, or indeed he, had ever thought possible.

In 2012, I finally got back in touch with Berger. By then, I was editing this magazine, and I wanted him to write for me. His email back was not quite as discouraging as our phone call 20 years earlier, but it was not dissimilar: "I'm not looking for new places to publish (having, as you know, already contributed greatly to the deforestation of the planet)—also, I'm over-burdened with work—also (though this may not be relevant, since you describe the publication as 'catholic, as it were, in its interests and approaches'), I'm not Jewish."

"The difficult-to-understand phenomenon," Berger wrote, "is not Iranian mullahs but American university professors—it might be worth a multi-million-dollar project to try to explain that!"

Eventually, I prevailed upon him to review Michael Walzer's latest book *The Paradox of Liberation: Secular Revolutions and Religious Counterrevolutions* ("Paradox or Pluralism?," Summer 2015). It was obviously right up his alley, since Walzer's paradox was that religion had returned with a vengeance to countries, like Israel, that had been founded by radical secularists. By this time, I also understood his sensitivity about not being Jewish, because I now knew that he was—or rather that he had been born to Jewish parents in Vienna, in 1929. A recent book called *The New Sociology of Knowledge: The Life and Work of Peter L. Berger* by Michaela Pfadenhauer had crossed my desk, and, in her introduction, she briefly sketched Berger's early years, based upon a German memoir he had published in 2008. From Pfadenhauer, I learned that Berger and his parents had converted just before fleeing the Nazis in 1938, eventually ending up in British Mandate Palestine. She also wrote that Berger had been hesitant to publish the memoir, even in German, because some of his "Jewish friends might feel snubbed by . . . a decision against a Jewish identity on his part."

Peter and I bantered on the phone and through email while we worked on the Walzer review. I didn't ask him how his life experience related to his sociological theory of religion, though I couldn't help but wonder. Twice, I came close. The first time was when he included a joke about speaking Yiddish in Israel in his piece. The second was when he excitedly told me that he had been invited to address the German Protestant Assembly, and I almost told him the one about the Jewish convert who is invited to give the Sunday sermon and begins, "My fellow goyim . . ." It would have been presumptuous (again), but he probably would have laughed. He enjoyed telling Jewish jokes more than most Lutherans I have known.

Several months later, I visited him at his apartment in Brookline. It had been a hard year. His beloved wife and intellectual collaborator Brigitte Berger had passed away, and he himself was wheelchair ridden and not well. But he did want to talk. We continued our conversations about religion, doubt, and moderation and about books on which we agreed and disagreed (including his), and he told me the story of his early life.

His parents were both assimilated Viennese Jews. In 1938, they had gone with a nine-year-old Peter and some other family members to an Anglican cleric who was converting Jews in order to help them flee Austria for a small fee. The conversion was perfunctory. In his memoir *Im Morgenlicht der Erinnerung: Eine Kindheit in turbulenter Zeit* (In the Dawn of Memory: A Childhood in a Turbulent Time), he wrote that his uncle leaned over "and said with a cynical grin, 'So now you are baptized!' I remember how terribly embarrassed I was and I felt somehow humiliated." From there, they went to family in Monfacone, near Trieste, but they soon realized that they wouldn't be able to stay in Mussolini's Italy. A sympathetic official at the English consulate finally relented when his mother burst into tears, and offered to give them papers to either Kenya or Palestine.

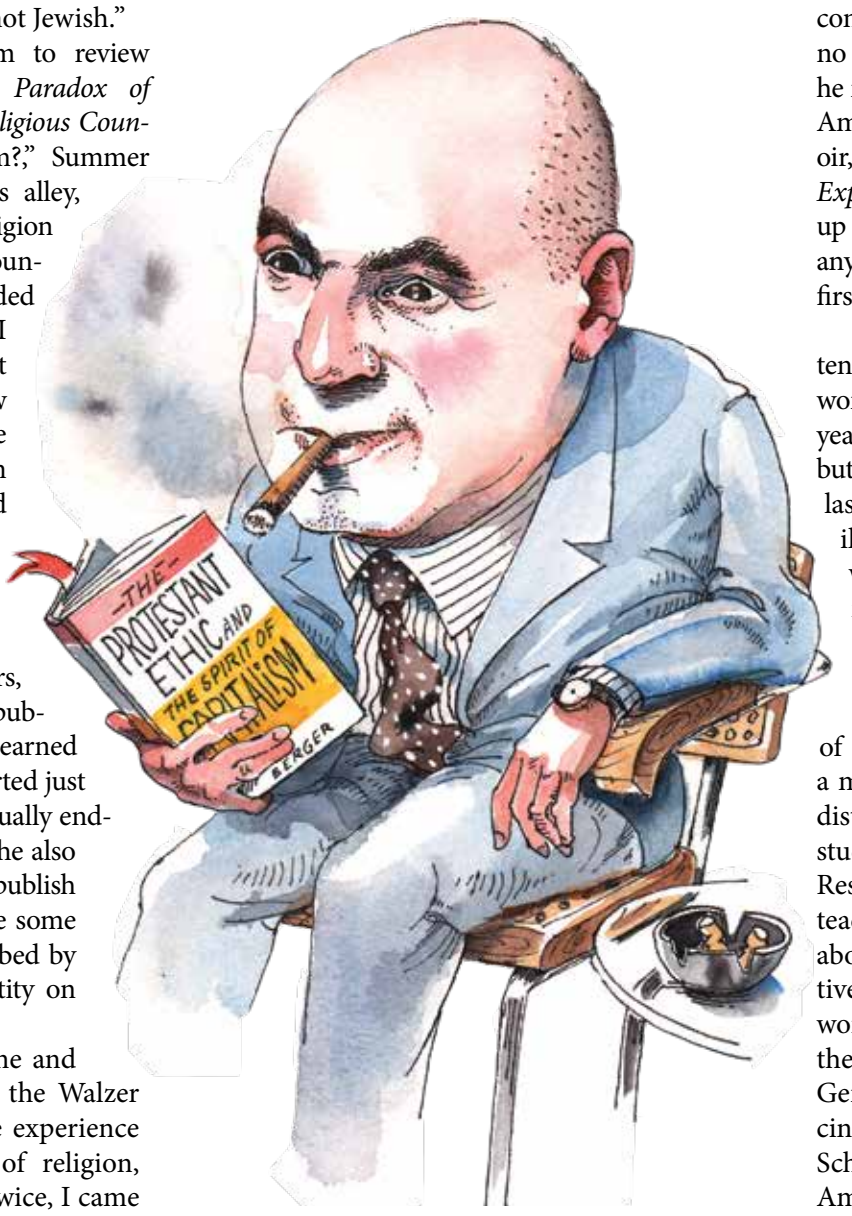

Illustration by Mark Anderson.

They chose Palestine, because, his mother said, it seemed "less alien," but when they arrived in Haifa they remained Christians, sending Peter—Ya'akov on the Hebrew-speaking street—to a Swiss missionary school. When he was old enough for high school, his schoolteacher took him and two other "Hebrew Christians" to the famous Beit Sefer ha-Reali, but they were rejected by the headmaster as being potentially subversive ("*ein zersetzendes Element*"), which, Peter said, was the *second* time he had heard himself being rejected on such grounds by a representative of the majority. Instead, he went to St. Luke's Anglican School, where most of his teachers were former Jews. At St. Luke's, he was given free rein of the theological library left by a certain Pastor Berg who had returned to Germany. In these years he became a fervent, if, as he later recognized, very idiosyncratic, Lutheran "without ever having met one." After the war, the Bergers left for America as soon as they could. At one point in our conversation, he remarked with some wonder, but no regret, that had things gone slightly differently he might have become an Israeli Jew rather than an American Protestant. His English-language memoir, *Adventures of an Accidental Sociologist: How to Explain the World Without Becoming a Bore*, picks up with his arrival in America and never mentions any of this, though it does have a Jewish joke on the first page.

I thought about my conversation with Peter often in the months that followed, and I sometimes wondered whether I could get him to write about his years in Haifa and their bearing on his later thought, but I never quite got up the nerve. He passed away last June at the age of 88, having done as much to illuminate the place of religion in the modern world as anyone in the last century. Although none of the obituaries I read seemed aware of Berger's Jewish background, I wasn't the only one who had noticed.

This spring, the Committee for the Study of Religion at the CUNY Graduate Center held a memorial conference for him. Its organizer, the distinguished sociologist Samuel Heilman, had studied with Berger at the New School for Social Research in the late 1960s, but he hadn't known his teacher's history until Professor Alan Brill told him about it after Berger's death. In Heilman's perceptive talk, he described the central theme of Berger's work as the way in which fate becomes choice in the modern world and persuasively interpreted his German memoir in that light. In Brill's equally fascinating lecture, he told us that Rabbi Alexander Schindler, the long-time president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, had once consulted Berger about whether the Reform movement should seek converts. The great sociologist replied that it might as well, since all denominations must compete in a pluralist world. Needless to say, Schindler did not ask the nervy follow-up question: *Says who?*

Abraham Socher is the editor of the Jewish Review of Books.

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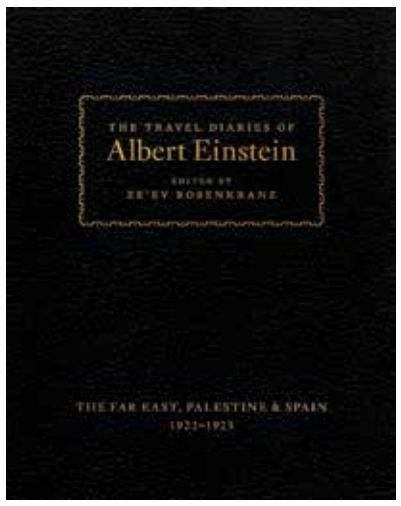

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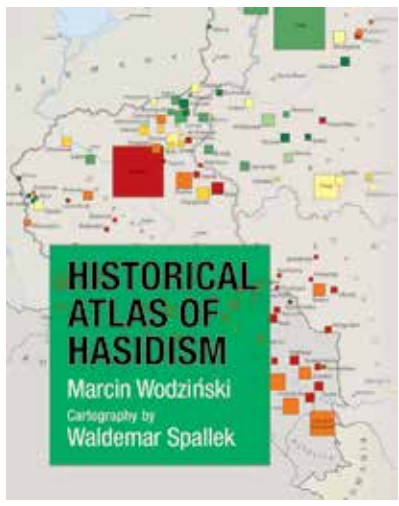

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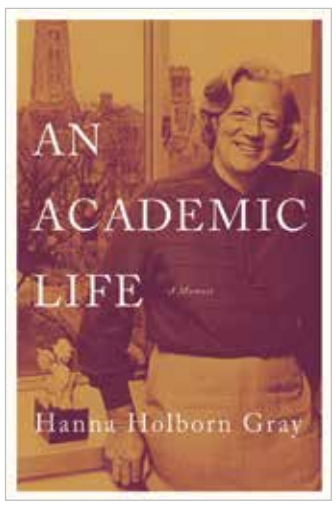

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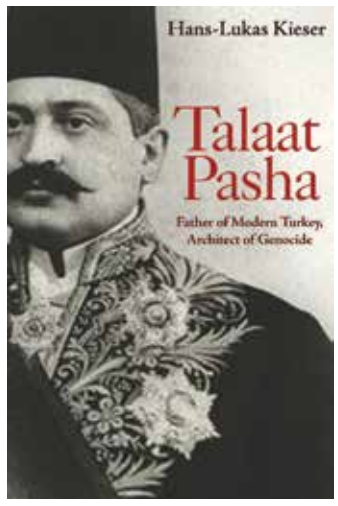

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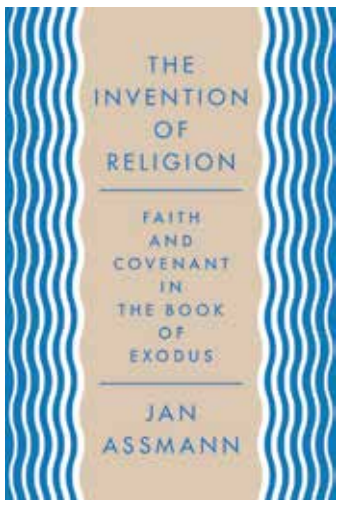

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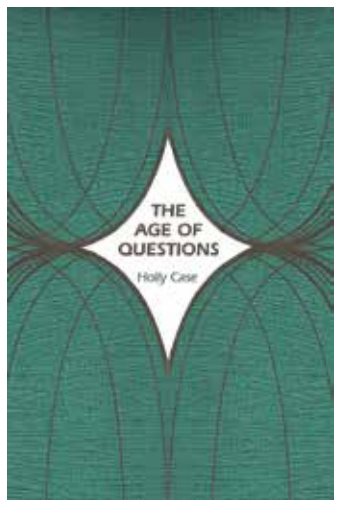

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