MS-763: Rabbi Herbert A. Friedman Collection, 1930-2004.
Series I: Wexner Heritage Foundation, 1947-2004.
Subseries 1: General Files, 1949-2004.

Box	Folder
68	8

"Wexner Heritage Review." 2000.

3101 Clifton Ave, Cincinnati, Ohio 45220
513.487.3000
AmericanJewishArchives.org

WEXNER HERITAGE
REVIEW
WEB ISSUE NO.

Election Day is upon us; the opening three articles therefore focus on political issues.

WHAT THIS HISTORIC MOMENT *Means for Us*

Jumping off from the nomination of Senator Joseph Lieberman, philanthropist Michael Steinhardt wonders why American Jews by a ratio of 2:1 fear anti-Semitism more than they fear intermarriage. Part of the fault, he says, is that the infrastructure of the American Jewish is fixated on ancient fears: It is time to relinquish the perspective of the ghetto and to invest our energies as never before on the inner life of Judaism.

RESIST TEMPTATION: *Don t Fight the Power of Faith*

This pair of articles explore the pros and cons of charitable choice: whether the federal government should fund sectarian-run social welfare programs with religious content. Charitable choice has recently enjoyed the spotlight because the presidential candidates from the two major U.S. political parties favor it. (*JTS Magazine*, Spring 2000)

THE PROBLEM *With Pedestal Rabbis*

The role of the rabbi has often been subject to criticism, such as in a recent study that concludes that rabbis are 85 percent irrelevant. Rabbi Joshua Hammerman writes movingly about how a rabbi must be both a leader and willing to admit to flaws, an important lesson for all leaders. (*New York Jewish Week*, September 22, 2000, www.thejewishweek.com)

SYNAGOGUE TRANSFORMATION: *Forsaking the Status Quo in Scarsdale*

Synagogue transformation is much talked about, but rarely done. This article describes how one synagogue carefully, but steadily set the dynamic in motion. (*Reform Judaism*, Summer 2000, http://uahc.org/rjmag/)

WHAT THIS HISTORIC MOMENT *Means for Us*

By Michael Steinhardt

The historic selection of Senator Joseph Lieberman to run on the Democratic ticket has been justly hailed as a turning point in American politics.

In the Jewish community, however, initial reactions of euphoria and disbelief have given way to a more cautious approach. Although Jewish leaders have unanimously celebrated the nomination, many were caught off guard, shocked that a Jew should be placed on a presidential ticket.

Fears that the Lieberman nomination could turn into a lighting rod for anti-Semitism are not uncommon. Even if Lieberman maintains his image as a mentsch, an anxious view holds that such enormous public exposure can only lead to a backlash.

These fears have led to a paradoxical situation: Gentile Americans seem more comfortable with a Jew in the West Wing than do Jews themselves.

How can we explain such dissonance in the American body politic? Put another way, why does the American Jewish community subsist off an image of itself frozen in another era?

A recent survey showed that 62 percent of American Jews consider anti-Semitism to be a major threat, whereas only 32 percent consider the same of intermarriage. Many of the most assimilated and successful American Jews people who feel no connection to Jewish religious tradition and who have integrated completely into mainstream American society doubt whether anti-Semitism is truly a thing of the past.

Ancient Fears

The fault for this attitude lies largely with the infrastructure of the American Jewish community itself. Instead of adjusting their outreach and philanthropic priorities to reflect the new reality of American Jewish integration, leaders of the community are fixated on ancient fears. Thus, the Jewish community is much better equipped to mobilize in the face of anti-Semitism fighting Holocaust deniers, supporting Israel, combating the show trial in Iran than to reorient its communal structures to meet the needs of a successful and integrated Jewish community.

The reasons for this are complex. The most obvious is simply stagnation. It is difficult for any community to adjust itself to a drastically altered landscape. Jews have made unequaled progress in America in the last 50 years, but 50 years is only a tiny wave in the vast ocean of Jewish history.

The past has always weighed heavily on our backs, and who can really say what the future will bring?

But there are less justifiable reasons why the Jewish community is stuck in the past. Let s be honest: It s much easier to raise money for Jewish causes if you promote an image of Jews under siege, threatened by antisemitism and never certain of our place in society. It is also easier to justify the existence of many Jewish organizations by promoting the perspective of Us vs. Them, an outlook that necessitates the strengthening of organizations born when anti-Semitism truly was a major force in America.

A remarkable gap exists between American Jewish reality and the image projected by Jewish philanthropies.

On the one hand, Jews have become integrated into American life so successfully and embraced by their Christian neighbors so fully that the Jewish religion is not considered a handicap in a presidential race. On the other hand, the view from the trenches of the American Jewish leadership is that our status is precarious and that the Jewish foothold in American society could slip and stumble away.

Time For A Change

For those who would argue that there is no harm done in the overprotective, anachronistic orientation of Jewish community organizations, look around you. Status-quo institutions of yesteryear continue to receive philanthropic support while

new initiatives designed to appeal to fully acculturated American Jews languish.

Indeed, a major reason why the Jewish community has been unable to combat the torrents of assimilation and intermarriage is that it is fixed on outmoded programs and perspectives with which few identify.

Jewish pundits wonder why their outreach efforts are failing without stopping to think that the majority of American Jews cannot relate to the pitch.

If ever a time has come to change, that time is now. We must reorient and revitalize our philanthropy and communal infrastructure to reflect the fact that American Jews are secular, integrated, accepted in American society and determined to remain that way.

The infrastructure of the American Jewish community must serve the majority of American Jews. It is time to relinquish the perspective of the ghetto and to invest our energies as never before on the inner life of Judaism.

We must embrace initiatives that meet American Jews on their own terms. Instead of placing our priorities predominately with the minority of religious Jews who are insulated and isolated, we should be inaugurating large-scale initiatives in Jewish education and Jewish experience that will stem the tide of assimilation among the rank and file, especially non-Orthodox Jews.

Renewal is necessary not just among the major organizations but even in the smallest synagogues. Many Jews continue to attend religious services even though they are secular themselves and find the services meaningless. Out of a residual discomfort with gentiles and out of an atavistic need to be insular, they tolerate the boredom because this is the inherited and only game in town. The climate this creates is one reason young Jews generally don t attend religious services.

But imagine a synagogue that reflects the new American reality: A place that is not a haven from an outside threat but a center of Jewish joy. Some synagogues have already reoriented themselves to the changing needs of American Jews; the results have been fantastic.

Wouldn t it be remarkable if these synagogues were the norm?

The same holds true for our educational priorities. In the 20th century, Jewish American education, which consisted mainly of Sunday schools and after-school programs, was nothing short of a disaster. Few Orthodox American Jews were happy with their experiences at those institutions, or satisfied with the knowledge they gained there.

Some improvement has occurred recently, but educational initiatives are still not well-funded compared to the overall need. Fewer non-Orthodox youngsters receive any form of Jewish education today than did those of 20 years ago, though the number in day schools is growing. It is time to invest in day-school education that appeals to today s American Jewish families, to families that are non-Orthodox and integrated into the secular world.

An End To Fear

It is notable that Vice President Al Gore did not simply choose a Jewish candidate, but an observant Jew. The message is that America accepts not only Jews who conform to the mainstream, but also those who maintain their distinct practices.

Contrast this with the Jewish community s implicit perspective that it would be unwise to wear our identity on our sleeves and that those who are observant should insulate themselves from mainstream society. This, too, is rooted in assumptions of the past that have little relevance today.

The time has come to stop assuming we must either distance ourselves from America or distance ourselves from our identity. Secular American Jews are as proud of their country as they are of their religion. We must gear our initiatives to them, so that they may live full Jewish lives free of unsubstantiated fears.

Michael Steinhardt is chairman of the Jewish Life Network. He also is chairman of Jewish Renaissance Media, the owner of the Detroit Jewish News and Atlanta Jewish Times. He can be reached at The DJN@aol.com.

RESIST *Temptation*

By Marc D. Stern

A growing disenchantment with government has led to a massive revamping of welfare programs; the privatizing of government programs; from prisons to public education, and proposals to transfer responsibility for social welfare programs to private groups, especially churches and synagogues. The latter effort, which was written into law for the first time during the 1996 federal welfare reform, is known as charitable choice. Several states, including Texas, New Jersey, Florida and Wisconsin, have their own versions. Charitable choice threatens the most fundamental understandings of church and state separation.

Government has long reimbursed religiously affiliated charities for providing secular social services. The constitutionality of this practice is not in doubt. In 1898, the Supreme Court held that the government did not violate the Establishment Clause by funding a Catholic hospital for the indigent. Groups like United Jewish Communities (many of whose social service programs have little or no discernible Jewish content), Catholic Charities and the Protestant Welfare Federations, have long received government funding without quarrel. Charitable choice programs will make little difference to these groups.

It is a fair question whether it is wise for Jewish federations to be as financially beholden to government as they are, and whether this indebtedness has drained their programs of Jewish content and distracted the federation community from more parochial, but less well reimbursed, tasks. That is a subject for a different article, but these concerns each of them in large part a consequence of government funding should serve as a warning to those in the religious community who would embrace charitable choice as an opportunity to tap the financial resources of government. In the long term, funding and regulation are inescapably intertwined.

What is new about charitable choice is that it requires the government to fund agencies whose programs are essentially religious, whose social service is inextricably bound up with the spreading of the faith and whose employment decisions are religiously based. While in theory charitable choice does not authorize government to directly fund religious instruction (agencies are supposed to raise these funds themselves), the ban on direct funding of religious instruction is readily circumvented by the government s sleight of hand.

Texas, for example, has contracted with a consortium of evangelical churches to provide job training for welfare recipients. The text is the Bible. The course covers topics such as God Loves Man — His Creation, Authority — All Authority Comes from God and To Work Is to Serve God and Man. The program s premise is distinctly evangelical: We want to change from the inside out ... and that can be accomplished through a relationship with Jesus Christ. All of this is at the expense of Texas taxpayers.

Whatever the efficacy of this program, it is not one that government can or should pay for. The United States Supreme Court has repeatedly declared that direct support of a church ... would seem contrary to Establishment Clause concerns dating to the earliest days of the Republic.

To be sure, no one under charitable choice laws can be forced to attend sectarian social service programs. In theory, the government is required to provide alternatives. Whether it will really do so when the law allows it to contract with religious providers to offer all of a particular service in a state or locality, remains to be seen.

But even if it does, the choice confronting someone in need is likely to be a sectarian program amenable to a community s religious majority or a secular program, not a religious

program of the citizen s own faith. Does anyone expect Alabama to offer parallel programs under Catholic, Jewish or Muslim auspices? There will be Baptist programs aplenty, and maybe even some secular ones, but no others. This is blatant discrimination against minority faiths.

There is precious little objective evidence that sectarian agencies do a consistently better job than secular ones, despite the repeated claim that religious programs are superior. Of course, some sectarian providers are better than some public providers, but there are also public providers better than sectarian ones, and secular non-profits better than either public or sectarian ones.

If the only provider of a service is religious it will do better than non-existent competition, but what does that tell us? If, as appears to be the case in Texas prison system, the only intensive pre-release training and post-release mentoring program is operated under religious auspices, one would expect its graduates to have a lower recidivism rate than inmates simply released upon completion of their sentences. But what does that prove about the superiority of faith-based programs? And given the use of charitable choice as an excuse to reduce direct government involvement in the provision of social services, it is fair to ask whether there are enough sectarian providers to pick up the slack.

There may be a limited number of cases in which it is both constitutional and appropriate to fund sectarian social services. In a report prepared 15 years ago, the American Jewish Congress argued that it was acceptable to fund sectarian providers offering a total environment for recipients such as a nursing home or a live-in child care institution. In those cases, the state is providing a substitute home, and those who live in these homes should not be forced to accept only the most minimal level of religious observance. But in most other circumstances, the Establishment Clause bars government subsidies for pervasively religious institutions.

When Medicare and Medicaid were first enacted, Congress promised that government funding would not lead to government control of medicine. It was inevitable that this promise would be broken. The same fate awaits religious institutions that accept government funding, if not immediately, then eventually. Recipients will rue the day they yielded to temptation.

Marc D. Stern is an assistant executive director of the American Jewish Congress and an attorney specializing in church-state relations.

Reprinted with permission of JTS Magazine.

DON'T FIGHT *the Power of Faith*

By Marshall J. Berger

When Prime Minister Ehud Barak urged Israelis last year to provide voluntary assistance for the hungry, some social work professors complained. If volunteers feed the hungry, they charged, that takes the state off the hook. Alleviating poverty, they argued, is the job of the state, not civil society.

The professors got it backwards. The duty to clothe the naked and feed the hungry is a religious duty that God placed on us as individuals, not the citizens of the state. Thus, the post-welfare state notion that social services should be contracted out to voluntary organizations is in keeping with Jewish tradition not alien to it. Such contracting out reflects the role of private, voluntary associations in providing social services to the needy.

Moreover, contracting out to private social services has other virtues. Taking the bureaucracy out of welfare programs works. Why? Because it allows us to add *hesed* (kindness) into the helping process. And no bureaucracy can sustain the *gemilut hasidim* (acts of loving-kindness) that God requires if we are to engage in the mitzvah of *tikkunolam* (repairing the world).

Private social service programs are thus part of the social welfare mix. But church-state separationists have drawn a red line between secular and faith-based social services. In their view, in order to ensure that the constitutional requirements of church-state separation are fully adhered to, the federal government ought not fund faith-based social service entities. To meet this concern, Catholics and Jews have spun off separate non-profit entities such as Jewish federations and Catholic Charities to receive and disburse government money.

However, these religious groups have often had to deny their sectarian character to retain government funds. As Stephen Carter, Yale Law School professor and author of The Culture of Disbelief, has pointed out, In our sensible zeal to keep religion from dominating our politics, we have created a political and legal culture that presses the religiously faithful to be other than themselves, to act as though their faith does not matter to them. As but one example, a Jewish-run senior housing center funded in part through a government-subsidized mortgage would not allow the Jewish residents to have a synagogue on premises. Only after extensive legal wrangling did the center agree to allow the residents to put up a mezuzah.

But let us be clear. Faith-based social services work. The anecdotal evidence is incontrovertible. It is pastors, not bureaucrats, who can reach out to convicted felons. We can point to Alcoholics Anonymous and other 12-step programs as evidence that recourse to a higher power can transform lives. Teen Challenge, a faith-based street ministry, has had extraordinary success in weaning delinquent youth away from gangs, using religion to transform lives. Even Louis Farrakhan—though we are repelled by his anti-Semitic rhetoric has, through the language of faith, brought about radical lifestyle changes in many of his flock.

Government contracting of social services to faith-based charities, or charitable choice, is already with us and available for various welfare services under the 1996 Welfare Reform Act. That law forbids government from discriminating against faith-based providers in social service contracts. And these faith-based organizations have the right to maintain a religious environment by displaying religious art, scripture, religious apparel and other symbols. They retain their right to use religious criteria in hiring, firing and disciplining employees, while remaining subject to other anti-discrimination laws. They can limit the scope of fiscal audits by segregating federal funds into a separate account.

Senator John Ashcroft, a Republican from Missouri, has recently introduced legislation that would extend charitable choice options to pro-

grams that fight juvenile crime, prevent substance abuse and assist the elderly.

But many in the Jewish community fear charitable choice because of church-state concerns. They believe that providing funds to a religious social service provider violates the strictures against giving money that creates pervasive sectarianism.

The constitutional arguments here are complex. Certainly some formulations of charitable choice (those that require clients to engage in sectarian ritual to secure services) raise constitutional red flags. But other formulations may not. In at least one case, Bowen v. Kendrick, the Supreme Court upheld federal grants for teenage sexuality counseling, including counseling offered by faith-based charities. In her concurring opinion, Justice Sandra Day O Connor drove her likely support for charitable choice options home when she opined that the object of congressional funding under consideration, teenage sexuality, was inevitably more difficult than in other projects, such as ministering to the poor and sick.

The fact is that, in the words of Douglas Laycock, University of Texas law professor and a leading scholar in the law of religious liberty, When government contracts with religious providers to deliver social services, it gets full secular value for its money. There is a tangible secular benefit and it is that benefit which the government is paying for. The fact that the providers are religious groups should not be relevant. To do otherwise is to allow concerns about the separation of church and state to actually discriminate against religion and thus violate the free exercise clause of the Constitution.

Now an idea can be a good one and still fail constitutional muster. But the Jewish community s efforts should go toward creating and supporting structures that can provide the benefits of charitable choice within a licit constitutional framework. Surprisingly, the official Jewish defense organizations seem to have reluctantly agreed. Event the Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA), in its 1999-2000 public affairs agenda, agrees that religiously affiliated institutions may provide valuable and efficient social services, and may qualify for government funding for such services. But the JCPA and other Jewish defense groups are quick to cavil, rapidly backsliding from their endorsement in principle.

Jewish social service agencies should be in the forefront of efforts to bring the world of faith into the social services dynamic. They should be working to structure government partnerships with faith-based social services in constitutionally appropriate ways rather than fighting a rearguard action against the power of faith.

Marshall J. Berger is a professor of law at the Catholic University of America's Columbus School of Law and senior adviser to the Israel Policy Forum. He was chief lawyer of the U.S. Department of Labor during the Bush administration.

Reprinted with permission of JTS Magazine

THE PROBLEM *With Pedestal Rabbis*

By Joshua Hammerman

We ve been hearing a lot about rabbis lately, and most of it is not good.

Allegations of abuse of rabbinic power and betrayal of trust are hardly new, here or in Israel.

In fact, many Israelis, weaned on the galling defiance of Aryeh Deri and the unmitigated chutzpah of Ovadia Yosef, are having a hard time comprehending how an overtly religious person like Joseph Lieberman can be both observant and uncorrupted. But it s not just over there.

Now, *Publishers Weekly* reports that HarperCollins has paid author and former PBS religion reporter Arthur Magida a significant six figures for a book based on a trial that won t even be happening until next spring. Why? Because the defendant, Fred Neulander, is believed to be the first rabbi ever to be charged with murder in this case, his wife in suburban Philadelphia. Magida says the book will pose the question, What happens when we deify men and women in the pulpit and are betrayed?

What happens, evidently, is a boffo book advance, with film rights to follow. Adding insult to injury, a new study of American Jewry authored by Bethamie Horowitz shows that only 5 percent of American Jews see their rabbis as a positive influence in their lives, while 10 percent say rabbis have negatively influenced them. The remainder of those surveyed didn t mention rabbis as an influence at all, positive or negative.

For rabbis, that it is a striking indictment; it means we are 85 percent irrelevant. That statistic screams out for some major rethinking of the rabbi s place in modern Jewish life. Personally, if my work is to be irrelevant to 85 percent of American Jewry, there is no reason for me to be missing my kids school plays and Little League games. If I am to be an invisible rabbi, I might as well be a good father.

The very week that the Horowitz survey was released, I received three calls from people new to my area wishing to find out about my congregation. Each caller complained about how bad experiences with a rabbi turned him or her off to synagogue life umpteen years ago. I m used to hearing that. But what stunned me most was the depth of their gratitude for my merely returning their call. Have people come to expect so little of their rabbis that they are actually shocked when one displays simple human decency and warmth?

Or is it that we still expect too much? Have we set up our leaders for a fall by placing them on pedestals, allowing them to tower so high above being simply human that when the fall occurs, as is inevitable, it is often devastating?

Speaking as a rabbi, there is a clear danger in our being so eager to place rabbis on pedestals: We rabbis begin to believe all our press clippings and forget the reasons we got into the rabbinate in the first place. And when we fail, our followers often blindly defend us because they still need to revere us, and we begin to believe that an admission of fallibility will compromise our ability to lead.

It s time to smash the pedestal rabbinate like so many of Terach s idols. Whereas human rabbis make mistakes, take responsibility for them and move on, pedestal rabbis make mistakes, deny them, hope that others will not notice and inevitably succumb to them. Pedestal rabbis are the ones most likely to become 85 percent irrelevant in the end because relevance requires relationship, and human beings relate best to other human beings. Only to the degree that I can be human can I lead others on the human quest.

We rabbis are seeking ways to humanize the role without compromising the respect due the position. A few weeks ago I ran an informal survey of colleagues on my on-line rabbinic chat group and found that most prefer to be called rabbi by congregants rather than by their first names. I tend to agree. If our important work is to be taken seriously, then let s not infantilize it. Even Mister Rogers gets to be called by his last name.

Imagine if the Baal Shem Tov had been called Rabbi Izzy. Would his disciples have taken

him seriously? Actually, yes, because it was the power of his message that made the Baal Shem Tov great, not his name (which means, ironically, Master of the good name). And for all those rabbis of the Talmud, like Akiba, who were revered by their first names, and all those medieval rabbis with cool nicknames, like the Rambam and the Ran, these pet names were indicators of the great respect and affection earned through close relationships rather than pedestal-sitting.

It s clear that if we are to navigate out way through this crisis in confidence and re-establish the rightful place of the rabbi in Jewish life, we have to both safeguard the integrity of the role and reaffirm the frailty of the human being who fills it. And that begins when the rabbi steps down from the pulpit of the soul and laughs, cries, errs and does shuvah together with the rest of us.

In the end, it doesn t really matter how the rabbi is addressed. What matters is only that the rabbi is addressed, one soul to another, two flawed human beings in dialogue.

Joshua Hammerman is spiritual leader of Temple Beth El in Stamford, Conn. His new book, thelordismyshepherd.com: Seeking God in Cyberspace, can be previewed online at http://www.thelordismyshepherd.com.

Reprinted with permission of New York Jewish Week.

FORSAKING THE STATUS QUO IN SCARSDALE: *How we transformed Westchester Reform Temple*

By Richard Jacobs

To tell you the truth, the Judaism I had experienced as a youth growing up in a large suburban Reform synagogue seemed shallow and uninspiring. The dreary services lacked passion and relevance. Our religious education was woefully inadequate. So when I was ordained eighteen years ago at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, I didn t want to be a congregational rabbi. How, in good conscience, could I take a leadership role in an institution in which I had so little faith?

But as fate would have it, I am today the rabbi of a large suburban Reform congregation. No, I have not sold out. I have come to believe that it is possible and necessary to transform our synagogues.

When I first became the spiritual leader of Westchester Reform Temple in Scarsdale, New York, I thought naively that if I could just articulate a compelling vision of what our congregation could become, the members would dutifully roll up their sleeves and off we d go. We did make some modest changes in our religious school and in our worship, but the status quo still reigned supreme.

One day, while I pondered why my approach wasn t working, Sara Lee, the director of HUC-JIR s Rhea Hirsch School of Education in Los Angeles, phoned to invite our temple to be part of the Experiment in Congregational Education (ECE), a projected devoted to transforming synagogues into communities of lifelong learners. Aft first, our leadership was hesitant to enter the project, fearing that the hidden agenda was to remake us in someone else s image. But after months of serious discussion and assurances from the Rhea Hirsch School that it would simply give us tools and guidance, our board agreed to sign on. We took this step not because our educational programs were failing, but because we were convinced that the dominant model of supplementary Jewish education—in which the synagogue is viewed by parents as a place to drop off kids to somehow become Jewish—was not working and in dire need of change.

As one of six original ECE congregations (the others were Congregation Beth Am, Los Altos Hills, California; Congregation Emanu-El, San Diego, California; Congregation Shaare Emeth, St. Louis, Missouri; Leo Baeck Temple, Los Angeles, California; and The Temple, Atlanta, Georgia), we were assigned an adviser who helped us through the process. We participated in several retreats with leadership teams from the other ECE synagogues led by the Rhea Hirsch faculty and five advisers. If any of us thought that the retreats would be a shopping trip for new programmatic ideas, we were wrong. The ECE staff encouraged us to spend the first year developing a bold educational vision that would be the basis of deep, systemic change. The visioning work frustrated some members of our task force, who wanted to solve problems and implement changes, not discuss the many limiting assumptions that inhibit real transformation.

A few months into the process, we invited 40 congregants to join an ECE task force that would work for a year to study and reflect on what our temple might be at its very best. Each meeting consisted of innovative text study and experimental learning, including experiments with new rituals. Through the ECE retreats, we were introduced to the best practices of other synagogues, including innovative models of family and classroom education. In addition, our task force visited dynamic congregations, Jewish museums, Hillel foundations and summer camps.

At the same time, a group of trustees set out to create a congregational mission statement. They determined five pillars of our temple s sacred work:

Talmud Torah: Lifelong and life-enhancing Jewish learning; Æ Avodah: Personal and communal religious practices, including worship, that

fill our lives with spiritual depth; Æ Chavurah: A welcoming, inclusive, and sacred community that embraces each of us with support, care, and wisdom; Æ Tikkun Olam: Ongoing involvement in bringing healing and justice to the brokenness in our world; Æ Klal Yisrael: Strengthening our bonds to Israel and the Jewish people in all lands and building commonality among the various streams of Judaism.

After a year, the ECE task force shared its initial educational vision with the congregation in a series of community conversations. Almost half of our 1,000 families joined in serious dialogue about the future educational direction of our synagogue. The pro cess led to some major changes, including a new initiative called Sharing Shabbat, an alternative path for families with children in kindergarten through fifth grade. Almost one-third of our eligible religious school families now choose to come every Shabbat morning, joining in a spirited, participatory congregational service that engages worshipers of all ages. Each week in the hour-long service, a different family takes responsibility for leading the Torah service. After the oneg, the children go to classrooms with teachers while the adults study the portion of the week with our cantor, Angela Wamick Buchdal, or with Rabbi Aaron Panken, a member of the congregation.

Since our weekly gatherings of study and prayer began four years ago, this community has shared the joy of welcoming newborn children and the pain of mourning the passing of loved ones. Every week the children see that serious Jewish learning and heartfelt worship are the province of all Jews, children and adults alike.

To date, no b nai mitzvah have been celebrated during Sharing Shabbat s worship service, but we are considering that option. We offer two other Shabbat morning worship options: the Torah Study Library Minyan and the main sanctuary service during which b nai mitzvah are celebrated. As we began to expand and deepen our learning options, we discovered that not only did we need more space, we needed a different kind of space—not just a new wing to our school, sanctuary or social hall, but smaller, more intimate spaces for study groups, alternative services and spiritual support groups. Fortunately, we were able to purchase, renovate and enlarge an old house that stood adjacent to the temple. To ensure that the interior of our new Center for Jewish Life (CJL) evoked a sense of Jewish spirituality, we worked with the architect and two Jewish artists, Laurie Gross and Penny Sobel. Using light as a theme, CJL feels like a retreat center on the grounds of our temple. People who attend baby namings, healing services, Shabbat dinners and other events in our new space attest to feeling a special sense of warmth and intimacy.

In another ECE-inspired initiative, we created a new youth program that integrates formal and informal Jewish education. Recent studies of identity formation convinced us that informal Jewish experiences such as camping, youth groups and trips to Israel power fully connect young Jews to Judaism by creating communities in which Jewish values and teachings are not only taught but lived. All of our formal and informal educational programs are now under the direction of our new youth rabbi, Laurie Katz Braun, who nurtures the educational, spiritual, socialand emotional needs of our teens.

Like many congregations, we used to have only two separate tracks: youth group and confirmation. Now there are four additional gateways through which teens can continue Jewish learning, and living: Teen Theater, Teen Healing Services, regular Shabbat dinners for teens, and informal Torah study in the Teen Chavurah. In facilitating all these programs, our youth rabbi gets to know each of our young people, while providing Jewish spiritual direction in a multitude of settings.

In addition to educational changes, we are also re-envisioning governance. Out of our ECE task force we created a more permanent Education Council, which brings together everyone involved in learning for regular planning, coordination. and rethinking the temple s educational

programs. At one of our Ed Council meetings. we reflected on the temple s monthly calendar of events and noticed how weeknights were dominated by committee meetings; in other words, business meetings were conflicting with scheduled programs and thereby excluding committee members. To remedy this situation, we moved most of our committee meetings to Tuesday nights, freeing up Mondays for the arts, Wednesdays for adult learning and Thursdays for healing services and spiritual support groups. With this change, we realigned our activity calendar to reflect the temple s core values and mission.

After four years of ECE-guided change, we felt ready to begin transforming perhaps the most delicate area of synagogue life: worship. Committed to the principle that learning informs every aspect of our practice, we created a working group of 30 people to study the prayer curriculum of Synagogue 2000. By design, our working group evolved into a spiritual community, sharing our spiritual journeys through guided reflections; engaging in serious study of Jewish prayer; and experimenting with different modalities of prayer, from meditation to davening to classical Reform worship.

This process has led to many changes in the temple s approach to worship, including the creation of two distinct weekly Erev Shabbat services to meet the needs of our diverse membership. For Kabbalat Shabbat (6:15 p.m.-7:15 p.m.) we offer a mostly musical service usually voice and guitar with opportunities for silent reflection, providing worshipers with an intimate, highly participatory, and shorter prayer experience. Rather than concluding with an oneg, we encourage congregants to follow the service with a Shabbat dinner at the temple or at home. Our late Shabbat service, which begins in our main sanctuary at 8:15 p.m., offers melodies and customs that are cherished by many of our longtime congregants: majestic musical pieces sung by the cantor and the quartet, usually with organ or some times piano accompaniment; a Torah service and sermon; and a concluding oneg.

The early and late services both begin with everyone gathering around a Shabbat table for the opening nigunim (traditional melodies), candle lighting, Kiddush and greeting. After having drawn together as a community, we then move to the sanctuary. Our temple is blessed to have three full-time and two part-time clergy. We all take turns leading the early and late services, though none of us leads more than one service each Friday evening.

The double Friday night services might turn out to have been a bad idea, or they may continue to grow in popularity. We won t know unless we are willing to experiment and then honestly assess our successes and failures. I am convinced that we are on the right path because we are not afraid to make mis takes as we slowly transform our synagogue. Our members have learned to trust the process that leads to changes, and they know that their input will be welcomed as we continue to evolve.

Transforming a synagogue is some what like having new owners renovate a home while the previous inhabitants are still inside. At Westchester Reform Temple, we were careful not to make longtime members feel like strangers in their own spiritual home. Each task force and working group has included veteran members who were often skep tical, if not resistant, to the change process. The involvement of nay-sayers is more than a matter of expedience; it is an essential part of the ethical decision making we learned from our beloved rabbi emeritus, Jack Stern, Jr.

We discovered early on that synagogues cannot be transformed unless there is a dynamic partnership between professional and lay leadership. If we let our rabbis, cantors and educators take charge of all matters concerning ritual and learning, we do our congregants a disservice; ultimately, no one can do the spiritual work for another. For synagogue transformation to suc-

ceed, temple professionals need to empower congregants to value their own spiritual resources.

Are we finished transforming Westchester Reform Temple? Certainly not, but we have learned much from the work we ve done so far. The ECE and Synagogue 2000 projects have taught us how to re-envision what we do and given us tools to get there step by step. Grants from the Continuity Commission of New York s UJA-Federation and the Covenant Foundation have given us critical financial support to pilot our new youth and Sharing Shabbat programs.

Like lifelong Jewish learning and spiritual growth, transformation is a process that never ends. It has taken years to earn enough confidence and trust from our congregation to tackle the hardest challenges of synagogue life— the proverbial high-hanging fruit.

Our congregational journey feels like Joshua and Caleb s brief scouting trip to the promised land. When they returned to the Israelites camped in the wilder ness, they showed the whole community some of the fruits they had acquired on the trip: We came to the land you sent us to: It does indeed flow with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. However, the people who inhabit the country are powerful. and cities are fortified and very large (Numbers 13: 27-28). Even with the serious obstacles, Caleb and Joshua were ready to journey toward the land flowing with milk and honey. The mod est fruits of our efforts propel us to echo Caleb s rallying cry in Numbers 13:30: Aloh na aleh Let s get going to that better place.

Rabbi Richard Jacobs, HUC-JIR class of 1982, is spiritual leader of Westchester Reform Temple in Scarsdale, New York.

Reprinted with permission of Reform Judaism

PUBLISHED BY THE WEXNER HERITAGE FOUNDATION
551 Madison Avenue • New York, NY 10022 • (212) 355-6115

Comments regarding the Wexner Heritage Review may be directed to editor@wexner.org

WEXNER HERITAGE
REVIEW
WEB ISSUE NO. 18 ELUL 5760

Blessing *for College Parents*

Former Wexner Heritage Vice President Rabbi Ramie Arian suggests that on Rosh Hashanah, a blessing, be said, for college parents who are sending the kids off to college for the first time. Please share this with your rabbi. (*CCAR Journal*, Fall 1998, **www.ccarnet.org)**

UJA & CJF *Reorganize*

Statement with Regard to the *Partnership Between the United Jewish Communities and the Religious Movements*

The Lieberman *Factor*

In a strong and bold statement, the Executive Vice President of the rabbinic arm of the Reform movement was strongly critical of the exclusion of rabbinic voices in any meaningful manner from the newly organized United Jewish Communities, the national umbrella of the Federations. Rabbi Menitoff called for freezing the level of contributions by Reform Jews to Federations. His main critique concerns the governance issue and the failure of the Federations to deal with issues of pluralism in the Jewish community. Stephen Solender, President and CEO of United Jewish Communities, provided the Wexner Heritage Review with a response to this statement, pointing out that the United Jewish Communities are still only in their first year of operation and asked that "the leadership of the [religious] movements give us more time to reorganize our governance." Finally, a column by Joseph R. Rackman gives the historical context of this debate. He suggests that the concerns of American Jewry have shifted from concerns about Israel and the survival of the Jewish people to spiritual and religious concerns. What he calls the "Lieberman Factor" is illustrative of this shift. This issue raised by these pieces deserve broad debate and the Wexner Heritage Review invites comments, responses and criticisms of these pieces.

Letter from Israel: *Income Inequality Rears Its Ugly Head*

Even as the peace process dominates our thoughts, Jewish leaders must stay abreast of other critical developments in Israeli society. Unfortunately, Israel lays claims to one of the worst problems in the developed world with respect to income distribution. The top ten percent of Israel's salaried wage-earners are taking home almost a third of all the money earned in Israel, while thirty percent are taking home less than ten percent. One out of every four children in Israel is living below or just at the poverty line. Also troubling are high Israeli unemployment figures. (*Midstream*, May/June 2000, www.midstream.org, special subscription rates for Wexnerite, one year $12.97 and two years $20.97)

Blessing *for College Parents*

by Ramie Arian

Rosh Hashanah coincides not only with the new Jewish year, but with the new academic year as well. For many, it is a time of transition. For parents who are sending children off to college, a nearly universal life passage in the American Jewish community, it is frequently a particularly difficult, even traumatic, season.

On Rosh Hashanah in most Reform congregations, the Torah reading is from Genesis 22, the binding of Isaac. The image of the Akedah *may heighten, for some congregants, the trauma of sending a child away. At the same time, the telling of the story brings to mind the whole of the Abraham saga, and the language of* Genesis 22, *with its repeated use of the verbs, take ((8-) and go (+-%), particularly evokes* Genesis 12, Lekh Lekhah, *the story of Abraham s call to leave his parents house.*

I have used the image of Lekh Lekhah *to fashion a blessing for the parents who are sending children off to their first year of college. This takes place on Rosh Hashanah morning, just after the Torah reading. I call on the appropriate parents by name, and ask them to come forward. I say the following:*

The story of the Jewish people begins with Abraham, who left his parents house, following an inner voice to a place that was to be shown him only once he was already on the journey. He and Sarah departed, armed with a promise from God that they were to play a pivotal role in human history, that they would beget a great nation. They were promised that God would make their name great, that all peoples would be blessed though them. But the promise could only be fulfilled once they obeyed the first command God gave them: go forth leave your parents house I will show you the way.

We have among us several parents whose children in this season are going forth, like Abraham and Sarah, in search of the promise that is to be theirs. For the first time, they are leaving the home of their parents, often not knowing toward what end they are journeying until somewhere along the way.

I would ask the parents of _____ to rise.

Our children are our link with eternity. In a very real, biological sense, they connect us with the future.

Our children are our link with our dreams. When we dream of what could be in this world, we dream for their sake.

Our children are our link with our selves. That they will inherit the world that we build reminds us carefully to consider what we are building.

Our tradition says much about Abraham and Sarah, but we know little about their parents. How must they have felt as they bid their farewells? It must have been a bittersweet moment. How full of pride they must have been, that their children were ready to accept the promise of adulthood. And how anxious, too, that their son and daughter might not be ready to measure up to the challenges they would face; that they had not done enough to prepare them. And how lonely to have them missing from their home.

You, like the parents of Sarah and Abraham, have reared your children to adulthood. You have showered upon them all your love and devotion, your energy and caring, your wishes and your hopes and your dreams. You have prepared them, as well as anyone can, to face the challenges they will meet on an uncertain path to a place they do not know. And they, now, are prepared to answer the call, to face the challenge, to set forth on the journey.

As God blessed Sarah and Abraham when they went forth, so may your children know blessing. And as with Abraham and Sarah, may all who meet them on their path find blessing through them. May they be a continuing source of pride to you, to us, and all the world. May you know the fulfillment of having given them a solid foundation upon which to build their lives. We are proud of them, and we are proud for you.

We say together, Amen.

Rabbi Ramie Arian, former Vice President of the Wexner Heritage Foundation, is the executive director of the Foundation for Jewish Camping in Manhattan.

Reprinted by permission of the *CCAR Journal.*

UJA & CJF *Reorganize*

by Paul Menitoff
Executive Vice President
Central Conference of American (Reform) Rabbis

The reorganization of the national federation world (the UJA and CJF) into the United Jewish Communities has, perhaps appropriately, placed the real power into the hands of the leaderships of local federations, but has inappropriately all but excluded the religious movements from the leadership mix. Only one seat, representing all the religious movements, has been set-aside at the twenty-five person Executive Committee s table. The rabbinate (Reform, Orthodox, Conservative and Reconstructionist) have been totally excluded from that table. Each year, the Executive Committee will meet about ten times. The second tier, 120 member Board of Directors, will meet four times a year and has a few movement seats. The third level policy making group, the 550 member Board of Delegates is composed exclusively of federation representatives (*i.e.* no religious movement or rabbinic representation). At best, the religious movements have been thrown a crumb from the policy making pie and the rabbinate has been ignored.

It is true that the following four program pillars have been established: (1) Renaissance and Renewal, (2) Financial Resource Development, (3) Israel and Overseas and (4) Human Services and Public Policies. The rabbinate s and the religious movements impact on the organization s structure and its policies will be channeled through the Renaissance and Renewal pillar where the movements have been allotted 10 of the 30 seats on the planning group. The requests from the UJC for movement representatives have been directed to the respective synagogue organizations. The rabbinic arms were not contacted. In any case, for the movements to be included in a planning group for one pillar out of four and to be kept away from any role to speak of at the governance tables is not an indication of our being taken seriously.

A SUGGESTED RESPONSE

The federation world restructured in order to strengthen its weakened position in American Jewish life. It is ironic that the restructuring has virtually excluded the one segment of the organized Jewish community that is flourishing and that has an energized constituency: the synagogue movements and their respective rabbinic organizations. It is reasonable for us, therefore, to ask what future role do we as rabbis want to play in the federation mix and what should we say to our people? The answer must be rendered with the recognition that funds raised by the federation system support important local services and overseas ventures. The answer, however, still seems clear.

First, Reform rabbis should work together with our colleagues in other movements, and the local lay leadership in our respective communities, to ensure that an equal partnership is developed between the local synagogues and federations. Synagogue Jews constitute the majority of donors to federations. It is, therefore, not unrealistic to expect local federations to enter into a partnership with the local rabbinic, lay and movement leadership to address concerns of the synagogue community. The partnership that exists in Boston between the CJP (under Barry Schrage s leadership), the UAHC, United Synagogues, Boston Area Reform Rabbis and the Synagogue Council of Massachusetts is not perfect, but is a model for other communities to emulate.

Second, Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist Jews comprise over eighty percent of the affiliated Jewish community. In spite of that fact, the federation world has shown little interest in issues of pluralism. Some of its leaders have even indicated that the P word does not exist in the federation s vocabulary. Given the numerical strength of non-orthodox Jews in the North American Jewish community, it is, therefore, reasonable to expect pluralism issues to be significant agenda items for local federations. Also, given that the local federations are now essentially in control

of the new UJC structure, we need to make certain that they put the word pluralism in the UJC vocabulary.

Third, while our people and we should continue to support financially federation campaigns, we must reconsider our giving patterns. Instead of automatically increasing annual federation gifts, we and our people should channel those dollar increases, and additional funds, to our own institutions (*e.g.*, UAHC, HUC-JIR, ARZA/World Union) and congregations here and in Israel and to philanthropies such as the New Israel Fund that not only takes us and pluralism seriously, but also disseminate funds to causes in Israel that most of us support.

A FINAL WORD

Let me be clear, I am not calling for the abandonment of the federation enterprise. I am, however, convinced that while we should continue our support, we much indicate that nothing less than a partnership with local federations that addresses our synagogue concerns will be acceptable. Pluralism, both locally and nationally, must be a substantial agenda item. Finally, charitable dollars for Israel can no longer be channeled solely through the federation pipeline. A greater portion of those dollars must be given directly to our institutions in Israel and to charities that champion our interests.

Rabbi Paul Menitoff is the Executive Vice President of the Central Conference of American Rabbis.

Reprinted by permission of the *CCAR Newsletter*.

Statement with Regard to the *Partnership Between the United Jewish Communities and the Religious Movements*

by Stephen D. Solender
President & CEO, United Jewish Communities

The United Jewish Communities continues to be most desirous of developing a close working relationship with all the religious movements. We are so pleased that the movements are well represented on our Jewish Renaissance and Renewal Pillar and will be very soon represented on each of our other Pillars: Campaign/Financial Resource Development, Israel and Overseas, and Human Services and Social Policy. In addition, we have already made available one position on our 25 person Executive Committee for a representative of the movements. We have currently referred the matter of representation from the movements on our Board of Trustees to our By-law Committee.

The United Jewish Communities has only been incorporated since November 1999. Consequently, we are still in our first year of operation. Therefore, we are asking the leadership of the movements to give us more time to reorganize our governance.

We also want to stress that the federation system is providing millions of dollars of support, through the Campaign, to finance programs and services of the Reform, Conservative and Orthodox movements in each of our federated communities and in Israel. The federation campaign is a major source of income, not only for agencies within the federation system, but also for movement related activities.

Consequently, it is in the interests of the movements, as well as the federations, to give full support to the UJA-Federation Campaign since they are vital to the economic stability of movement programs in North America and Israel, as well as to the lifesaving work of the federation system.

We urge all persons affiliated with the movements to be as supportive as possible of the Annual Campaign.

The Lieberman *Factor*

by JOSEPH R. RACKMAN
c/o Squadron, Ellenoff, Plesent & Sheinfeld, LLC
551 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10176
(212) 661-6500

The initial reactions in America to the candidacy of Senator Lieberman have been very positive, even to the point of giving the Democrats a real boost in the polls. Nonetheless, the older any given Jew is, the more incredulous he or she is that a Jewish candidacy can give buoyancy to a presidential ticket!

A number of pundits have commented upon the fact that Senator Lieberman has, on behalf of the Democratic Party, co-opted the Republican Party on the God is on our side issue. What interests me more, however, is what the Lieberman candidacy means for the Jewish community and its perception of itself.

A generation ago, the animating issue of American Jewry was the safety and security of the State of Israel. This was reflected in the growth of the Federation with its ever-increasing fund-raising achievements. One of the high points was having had the privilege, as a community, to help fund the exodus of Russian Jewry to both America and Israel. One author coined the term Sacred Survival to describe these concerns. For many Jews, this was Judaism an understandable reaction in the shadow of the Holocaust.

The self-perception of the American Jewish community altered with the release of the 1990 Jewish population survey that showed an enormous increase in intermarriage and began a focus by many on the needs of individual American Jews for spirituality (a term I use for want of a better one). Lines began to be drawn between secular and religious Jews, between those who identified with issues concerning physical needs of Jews as opposed to their religious ones. The great loser in this shift has been the Federations. Indeed, they felt the need to reorganize and have renamed the national governing body as the United Jewish Communities, but like the name change of ESSO to EXXON many years ago, it seems to be the same old gas. Besides the name change, little seems to have changed, as the Federations remain more concerned with physical rather than spiritual issues.

Senator Lieberman has raised the stakes of the game. This is a Jew who does not hesitate to use the 3-letter word for the Supreme Being. And there are many Jews who are uncomfortable with this (although they are reluctant to state this publicly). In part, one can understand why. When most Americans refer to God, they are referring to a Christian God. And the more Christian America is, the more uncomfortable (theoretically) Jews should be within it. Senator Lieberman, however, seems quite comfortable being a Jew in America with God s name on his lips.

Will the Lieberman Factor produce a change in Jewish communal perceptions? Will an increased identity of Jews with God cause the United Jewish Communities to follow the Lieberman example?

One issue that deserves close attention in this regard is the governing system that has been put in place for the United Jewish Communities. Only one seat, representing <u>all</u> the religious movements, has been set aside on the 25-person Executive Committee of the United Jewish Communities. Only a few seats have been reserved for the three main rabbinic organizations on the 120-member of the Board of Directors.

Admittedly, the United Jewish Communities has granted more representation to the religious movements on the Jewish Renaissance and Renewal subcommittee of the United Jewish Communities, where the movements have ten of the thirty seats. Yet it is at the Executive Committee and Board of Directors levels that the decisions will be made as to how many resources will be poured into Renaissance and Renewal activities. (Indeed, the United Jewish Communities cannot bring itself to speak of religious activities, only Renaissance and Renewal a telling sign of its discomfort with Judaism as a religion.) At this most important

level, of Executive Committee, the religious representatives of the Jewish community have been, for all intents and purposes, excluded.

The Lieberman Factor suggests that the United Jewish Communities will have to alter its position or continue its slow death. Just as the general American community faces a cultural war between secular and religious factions, so does the Jewish community. This is to be expected, as what historically occurs in Jewish communities often reflects what is going on in the host communities. The question is whether the Lieberman Factor will give strength to the religious side of the divide in both the American and Jewish contexts.

It is worth noting that this high achievement, the candidacy for vice president of the United States, has been achieved not by an assimilated Jew or a secular Jew, but a religious Jew who is comfortable in all realms, secular and religious. The United Jewish Communities and local Federations must transform themselves so that they too are comfortable in all sectors, including the religious communities. The day must come when a majority percentage of Federation funds go directly towards religious and spiritual needs. The Lieberman Factor suggests that this must occur sooner rather than later.

Reprinted by permission of the author.

Letter from Israel: *Income Inequality Rears Its Ugly Head*

by Ruth Seligman

Israel has many claims to fame, not all of them worthy of emulation. One of these claims is the income gap between its rich and poor. Some economists claim that of all the Western industrialized countries, the bloc called the First World, Israel ranks second in income inequality. Only the United States, they say, where private research studies have indicated that the gap in income has widened dramatically during the Clinton administrations, surpasses Israel. The World Bank, however, claims that the income gap in Israel is merely the fourth largest in the Western world, following France, Britain, and the United States.

Whatever figure you choose, the gap is nothing to be proud of. It represents potential dangers for Israeli society, ranging from the brain drain of professionals in such fields as medicine, where low salaries for hospital doctors are causing many to consider leaving the field, even after years of expensive, backbreaking training, to the more horrifying scenario where the possibility of civil war cannot be ruled out, improbable as I regard this.

In Israel today, the top 10 percent of salaried wage-earners is making more than 10 times as much as the bottom 10 percent. Or, to say it in another equally dramatic fashion, the top 10 percent of Israel s salaried wage-earners are taking home almost a third of all the money earned in Israel, while 30 percent are taking home less than 10 percent.

These figures are, however, misleading. The gap may conceivably be wider. The reason: the statistics as released by Israel s Central Bureau of Statistics only relate to money earned by salaried employees. They do not include income derived from capital, such as savings and stocks and bonds, nor that from rentals or inheritance. In addition, they omit income earned by the self-employed, a sector that includes, *inter alia*, lawyers, accountants, and consultants of one sort

or another. Although the public at large is not privy to these figures, if one looks at the standard of living of many of these self-employed or independents, as they are called in Israel, and, for example, the homes and cars they own, one cannot doubt that many are well within the upper 10 percent upper income bracket.

Even without these adjustments or corrections, the economic picture in Israel is far from sanguine. Among Israeli wage-earners, those in the top 10 percent average $4,500 a month, while those on the bottom rung average $220 a month. Remember, however, we are talking only about averages.

For months now, the media have bombarded the Israeli public with revelations of how rich the rich are and how much more they earn than anyone had realized. A general manager for one of Israel s leading banks, for example, took home in 1998 almost $500,000, a sum that included salary plus bonuses. This is over $40,000 a month. Contrast that, however, with a teacher who has advanced degrees and 20 years seniority and who earns less than $1,500 a month, or with a practical nurse with 15 years of experience who is making a little over $1,000 a month.

The real shocker regarding income inequality, however, came when the salaries for civil servants were revealed. Traditionally, government employment has never been the place where big bucks are made. And the thousands of civil servants in Israel who are paid less than the minimum wage of about $750 a month will agree. But even here there is an extraordinary degree of income inequality. Some examples: the spokesperson for a small municipality outside of Tel Aviv (Petach Tikva) is taking home almost $14,000 a month, while the head of Jerusalem s Department of Welfare has to make do with a mere $9,000 a month, a figure similar to that earned by the manager of the beaches in Chadera, a medium-sized city halfway between Tel Aviv an Haifa. Note that these salaries for people who are not even holding extremely senior positions come at a time when the municipalities are constantly crying wolf, complaining of their inability to meet their payrolls, and demanding additional assistance from the central government.

The high wages paid in the public sector, as well as those in the private sector, where, as a rule, they are generally higher, have taken many Israelis by surprise. Most distressed, perhaps, is Israel s middle class, where many are finding it harder and harder to get through the month, let alone buy a home. Today, where the price of a small three-bedroom apartment can equal eight to ten years of a salaried employee s total yearly income, such purchases are often out of reach, idle dreams. Without parental assistance, many continue to rent, with rents often taking half of a monthly salary and, as more than one renter has said, with the money going down the drain.

How does the average Israeli manage? Many live on what here is called the overdraft, credit extended by the bank at a very high rate of interest. In effect, they live by borrowing and by scrimping on such luxuries as afternoon programs for their children. These programs, however, are often a necessity in a country where children only attend grammar school until noon or one o clock and where mothers who work, and most do, have the choice of letting their offspring become latch-key children, those on their own all afternoon, or paying high sums for extracurricular activities. This middle class is not poor in the traditional sense of the word. They have money for food and clothing and for an occasional vacation, but there is a great deal of resentment, fanned today by the realization that they are moving farther and farther away from the good life they see others experiencing. Will this resentment someday translate itself into civil unrest? This is a question for which there is, as yet, no answer.

The problems experienced by many of the middle class in Israel cannot, of course, compare to the plight of those in the lower socio-economic strata of the society. Today, in Israel, approximately 1.2 million people are living below or just at the poverty line, about $800 a month for a family of four. Within this figure of 1.2 million there are approximately 400,000 children or, to put it another way, one out of every four children in

Israel is living below or just at the poverty line.

Israel s unemployment figures are also no cause for celebration. In January of this year, the figure stood at 9.3 percent, with a record 221,000 jobless. More disturbing than this figure is the feeling that it appears that unemployment is on the rise. The figure recorded for the last quarter of 1999, for example, was 8.9 percent.

Neither of these figures, however, reflects the depth of the problem, since unemployment figures for those living on the periphery, for example, in the outlying development towns of the south, such as Sderot, Dimona, or Ofakim, are much higher ranging from 12 to 15 percent and even higher.

Predictions are always risky, but it appears that Israeli unemployment figures can only continue to rise, at least in the foreseeable future. Many of those who are out of work were employed in intensive-labor industries, such as textile factories. Today, more and more owners of these plants are closing their operations and moving to countries such as Turkey, Jordan, Egypt, and even the Far East where labor costs are lower than in Israel.

If and when peace treaties are signed with other Mideast countries, will Israel see more companies relocating to counties where lower wages mean increased profits? Again, this, too, is another unanswered troubling question. If, however, the answer is yes, the repercussions can only increase Israel s income gap.

Another factor that bodes ill for Israel s poor stems, paradoxically enough, from the success and extraordinary growth of Israel s hi-tech industry. It is not for nothing that Israel is now being called Silicon Wadi, with *wadi* being the word in Arabic, also used in Hebrew, for valley. So successful is this sector that dozens of hi-tech companies and start-ups have been able to go public on Wall Street. This search for funds has been so successful that it is now claimed that two-thirds of the money raised by Israeli firms last year came from abroad.

No one denies the connection between economic growth and prosperity for Israel and the success of its hi-tech sector. Hi-tech, however, tends to offer few opportunities for Israel s unemployed. Even the lower-level jobs available in this sector require as a rule a good command of English and a high school diploma. And the diploma itself is not enough. Hi-tech companies also look for those who have successfully passed some of the Israeli matriculation examinations, somewhat akin to College Boards in the States. Although essentially taken for admittance to Israel s institutions of higher learning, these examinations also reflect an individual s academic ability and potential. Many now out of work, especially older workers, do not meet these criteria. The result: undoubtedly, they will benefit little, if at all, from the growth and expansion of Israel s hi-tech industry, one that, from all indications, will be playing an even more dominant and prominent role in the future. Although it is quite possible that some of Israel s unskilled or poorly trained workers may find work in the service-and-maintenance operations required by the hi-tech sector, not enough will be so employed as to affect the overall picture.

When discussing income inequality in Israel, it is important to recall that in the last decade countries all over the Western world have been experiencing an ever-widening gap between their rich and poor. Israel is no exception. But, as the adage says and in many such sayings there is often more than a kernel of truth anything you can do, we (*i.e.*, Israel) can do better. Thus, although on the one hand, Israel is merely reflecting a universal trend, at the same time it appears to be moving faster than many other countries, so much so that some pessimists predict that, within a generation or two, 15 percent of the Israeli population will be living on a very high standard indeed, comparable to that of any Western industrialized country, while the rest of the population will be far beneath them in earning power and standard of living.

No one can predict when or even if this will happen. It is, however, a scenario that could occur and, if it does, could lead to serious unrest and even a cry for a strong man to correct the situation.

Even without this pessimistic assessment, the situation in Israel is still problematic, still fraught

with unresolved issues. Over and above all, we are living in a period where there are more questions than answers.

The late Richard Crossman, a distinguished British statesman, once remarked that he was deeply impressed by the way Israel was able to hold onto its democratic structure its allegiance, adherence, and commitment to the principles of free speech, a free press, and the right of assembly in spite of constant threats to its survival and stability by its Arab neighbors.

Until today, Israel has always been before or after a war. Even in the so-called periods of peace, the ever-present danger of attack and possible annihilation by those around them has been the glue holding Israeli society together. Could peace loosen that bond? Again, this is another one of those troubling questions still to be addressed.

I, however, feel that there is little cause for this particular concern. Disturbing as is the income gap, Israelis appear to be adjusting to it. As a nation, Israelis are extremely resilient. True, they frequently express their dissatisfaction by strikes called to protest discriminatory and unequal salary agreements and wage packets. At any one time, these strikes may have teachers, doctors, social workers, municipal employees, or others causing havoc and even suffering to the society.

Nevertheless, these strikes, painful as they are both for the strikers and for those affected by them, whether they be patients in a hospital, children kept home from school, or householders stewing in uncollected garbage are more a reflection of Israel s basic democratic stance than a demand for a change in the regime.

Israelis with a bent for history look back on the early years of the state with nostalgia, recalling a time when they shared with the founding fathers the vision of an egalitarian society, based as was the kibbutz on the principles of equity, mutual assistance, and social justice.

In many ways, the kibbutz, that unique form of communal settlement in which the principles of socialism were put into actual practice, set the standards on which most people felt the Israeli society should be based. Today, however, just as Israel has moved from a society that appeared to stress collectivism and the good of the community over the desires of the individual to one that places a high premium on individualism and personal accomplishment, so, too, has the kibbutz made a similar shift. In many kibbutzim today, for example, members are now paid a salary for the work they do, with those holding more responsible jobs, *i.e.*, factory managers, or those in other high- paying branches such as guest house managers receiving more than those working in the kitchens or the laundries. And, from these wages, members now pay for their meals and other services, a situation once deemed unbelievable.

If the kibbutz has been able to accommodate itself to the changing reality of a world where some people earn more, while others earn less, cannot one say that Israelis outside the kibbutz can make the same adjustment, notwithstanding the fact that the gap in incomes is wider than ever before. This, too, is a question that will be answered only with time.

The repercussions resounding from Israel s ever broadening income gap have yet to be realized, analyzed, or tackled. We know that Israel has survived over 50 years of tension and uncertainty. These same elements are still part and parcel of the Israeli scene today, though dressed in different clothes. We can only hope that the tensions and uncertainties created by the gap between the rich and the poor will in the long run be just another obstacle the society has to overcome, another challenge to meet and conquer.

RUTH SELIGMAN, an American-born journalist who has lived in Israel since 1951, writes for both Jewish and non Jewish periodicals.

Reprinted by permission of *Midstream*.

Published by The Wexner Heritage Foundation
551 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10022
(212) 355-6115
Comments regarding the Wexner Heritage Review may be directed to editor@wexner.org

WEXNER HERITAGE
REVIEW
WEB ISSUE NO. 16 TAMMUZ 5760

The month of Tishrei is filled with holidays and this special issue tries to focus on many of the upcoming observances.

The Mystery *of Gods Presence*

The Mystery of Gods Presence, a *Rosh Hashanah* s meditation, is adapted from a presentation at the Wexner Graduate Fellowship Programs 1999 Summer Institute. The author prays that the longings of my heart should be fulfilled for the good, not fulfilled simply because I asked. I try not to do all the asking, to remember increasingly what is asked of me. (*The New York Jewish Week*, September 17, 1999, www.thejewishweek.com)

Why *Am I Here?*

The former New York Times editor, Max Frankel, delivered this provocative sermon this past *Rosh Hashanah*, explaining his particular version of secular Judaism. Rabbi Firestone, a Jewish renewal rabbi, responds to his presentation. (*Tikkun*, January/February 2000, www.tikkun.org)

On *Succot*

Succot, a holiday in which we are surrounded by agricultural products, caused Rabbi Joshua Schmidman (Orthodox) to think about the Jewish concept of beauty. It is not youth but longevity, not the new, but the eternal that he values.

Meditations of an Orphan *for My Father*

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin provides a beautiful description of his father. It is a timely piece for this month of *Tishrei*, in which *Yizkor* is observed on both *Yom Kippur* and *Shmini Atzeret*. One is never too old to feel the disorientation that comes with the loss of a parent, to experience the wrenching despair that is the orphan s inheritance. (*Jewish Spectator*, Spring 1998, published quarterly, P.O. Box 8160, Calabasas, California 91372-8160, $26.00 annually)

Excerpt from

God Was in This Place *and I, I Did Not Know*

On *Simchat Torah*, the last day of the *Tishrei* holidays, we complete the cycle of reading the *Torah* and begin again with *Genesis*. *Apropos* the story of creation, Rabbi Lawrence Kushner examines the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden. (Woodstock, VT: *Jewish Lights Publishing*, 1994)

The Mystery *of God s Presence*

By NESSA RAPPORT

A New Year Mediation

In one way, my journey has been undramatic. I have always believed in God; I cannot remember a time, even as a small child, when I could imagine a universe without God. This does not mean that I understand God s ways, either in our story as a people or in my own continuing journey.

But understanding everything my goal as a teenager no longer seems as necessary. What has changed is that my ardent, yearning self has been seasoned by unexpected humor. Even in times of terrible pain and uncertainty, God s hand in my life amuses me. I pray, I pray fervently for something that seems to matter above all, without which my journey will be incomplete. And God hears my prayers, answers them sometimes directly, leaving me with the burden of gratitude, and sometimes so obliquely that I understand finally why my mother used to say to me: *Kol mish alot libech Itovah* that the longings of my heart should be fulfilled for the good, not fulfilled simply because I asked.

I try not to do all the asking, to remember increasingly what is asked of me, to recall even in difficult hours the continuous blessings God has bestowed upon me, more than I deserve. I see Judaism as an aristocracy, and chosenness as a cloak of royalty that any human being on any path toward truth can warrant, accept and enact. Sometimes, walking down the street on an average day in an average frame of mind, I remind myself that I am the daughter of a king. Neither the daughter metaphor nor the king one perturbs me. I no longer mistake my God for my father, and do not feel that being the creation of an all-mighty God diminishes me.

As my reverence for any human being declines rather precipitously, as I recognize that even great men and women are fallible, as I no longer need to idolize flesh and blood, in precisely the same proportion has my awe of God s sovereignty been magnified. I do not want a mortal king or queen, but I find God s majesty paradoxically sustaining.

I, along with my generation, love the small, still voice. I love the tenderness of a merciful God; the intimate aspect of *shechinah*; the God within who is all being. I am in debt to the theologians who have restored those facets of God to us. But when I feel my own frailty, when I see how meager is my capacity to avert the harsh decree, I find a harbor in contemplating God s immensity, in knowing my power is finite next to God s infinity.

This awareness is comforting not because I expect that the decree will be reversed in any simplistic way, but because I know that even at the moments of greatest loneliness, of crying out to God in anguish, that God is strong enough to take in all the pain, to return to me a measure of that infinite strength, to take me from the constraints of narrow places to the eternal, ever-present love in which we can dwell and which we can manifest.

As the millennium turns and the paper reports that Christians are newly interested in learning Hebrew in order to deepen their understanding of

the Bible, it is time for Jews to reclaim the centrality of love in our tradition, to proclaim by the lives we lead that law is love, not its opposite.

We know that love partakes of the divine. We know that at wordless moments of love our soul expands beyond our mortal frame to reflect the One in whose image we are formed. We know it from the lives of our bodies and from the associations we have been taught the extra soul of the Sabbath, the Song of Songs.

When I was young, my repertoire was limited. I knew the exaltation of romantic love. I knew the irreplaceable love of a great friend. But I did not understand God s unmediated love. Now, farther along my journey, I have been granted the ability to reflect God s image by my own creating of life. Motherhood has allowed me to be loved past my faults and has provided an immeasurable augmenting of my own ability to love. Motherhood has allowed me to return to my parents, return as *teshuvah* and return to them an inadequate portion of the love I now know they had for me all along.

When I was young I did not understand how at desperate times in our history, Jewish parents would choose to die with their children rather than live on without them. At some point on the path to adulthood I saw with wonderment that so my parents felt for me and my sisters. Now, I am a mother, and I know. And know, because of it, that every living thing is a created being, brought into the world in the image of God and worthy of love, no matter how broken, how bereft. Covenantal justice, which the Jews invented in partnership with God, is the medium of that love.

What have I learned? That god is with us not only in celebration, which I always knew, but in sorrow, in the dark, solitary places where we continue to wrestle with our angel, where, alongside the harsh decree, we all live in God s generous bounty, gift after gift after gift.

Before Yaakov met his angel, he was terrified of what his brother, Esav, might do. But when his body had been marked and morning had broken, his blessing won, his name changed, then Yaakov-Yisrael could come near his brother without fear. And his brother could run to him, and embrace him, and fall upon him, and kiss him. And together they could weep.

Terror is the prelude to love. Solitude and struggle, darkness and injury. But day breaks. The sun dispels the night. The adversary does not prevail. The wound becomes the sign of aristocracy. And I, in the middle of my years, read as if for the first time past the story of the lonely night, past the confrontation in the dark, to the story of *chesed,* of grace and loving kindness, in which Yaakov, the accumulator, the hoarder, can meet his brother face to face and say: Take my gifts. Take my blessing *Ki yesh li kol.* I have enough. I have all.

For the giving and receiving of love is everything.

Nessa Rapoport is the author of a novel, Preparing for Sabbath, and of A Woman's Book of Grieving. With Ted Solotaroff, she edited The Schocken Book of Contemporary Jewish Fiction. This essay appeared in her monthly column, "Inner Life," published by New York's The Jewish Week (9/17/99) and is reprinted by permission of the author. Other columns are available at the archive of www.thejewishweek.com.

Why *Am I Here?*

by Max Frankel

On Rosh Hashanah 1999, at a small congregation in Long Island, former New York Times *editor Max Frankel delivered this provocative sermon explaining his particular versions of secular Judaism. It is printed here with a response from Rabbi Tirzah Firestone.*

I am honored to be speaking to you on a day of such reverence for Jews everywhere. I honestly don t know why I am expected to have anything meaningful to say to you. Please understand that I speak only for myself, and, as you will see, to myself, dwelling on the highly personal thoughts that come to me at this season.

Those thoughts all revolve around a single question: Why am I here?

Why, first of all, am I here in Saltaire? Why on these holidays do I prefer to be dressed down when even the most reformed and agnostic Jews elsewhere are dressing up? Why do I prefer a minimal dose of ritual to the splendiferous liturgies accumulated by many of our tribe s sages over many centuries?

Well, I like spending the holidays in Saltaire precisely because the services are short and sweet and unpretentious. Instead of straining my patience with overblown repetitions and dreary lectures that put me in mind only of the clock, the services here give me all the time I need to check up on my faith or lack of it and to pay a heartfelt tribute to forebears and other memories.

My parents exploited these holidays to satisfy a child s need for ceremony and to inflate that child s sense of self-importance. They kept afloat the myth that I was being watched, nourished, and guided by the mysterious force of the universe their synonym for God. Then, in immature middle age, I kept coming to synagogue to honor their sense of custom and continuity and to give my children a chance to carry on with that custom. But now that time for me is fleeting, a miniservice is preferable because it doesn t take much longer to think my holiday thoughts than it takes to describe them to you.

I especially like spending the holidays here in Saltaire because we come together as sandaled and sneakered friends and neighbors, not the merely nodding acquaintances of urban and suburban temples. We come together just long enough to mark the specialness of the day, then walk on the beach or sail on the bay and define our own unique measure of observance, without superfluous ceremony or hierarchy. With all the building and rebuilding we are witnessing in our village, it is no longer apt to describe Saltaire life as entirely simple. Still, compared to holiday exertions on the mainland, or even the longer island across the bay, our village remains an innocent Eden.

But why am I in any house of worship?

I am old enough now to acknowledge the truth: that despite my competence in the liturgy, I am incompetent at, indeed incapable of, genuine prayer.

Don t misunderstand; I am not ungrateful for a rich and blessed life but I attribute that to the intense love and accidental genes that I have shared with the kin of many generations, past, present, and future, I am not so vain as to believe that a deity capable of inventing this incredible

universe is watching directly over me, just itching to respond to my solemn beggings, tributes, or confessions. I have known the temptation of praying for good things or for overcoming the bad. But I have grown ashamed of the urge to exploit holidays and synagogues to send toward heaven my agenda of self-interest.

Along the way, I have grown certain that humanity invented God, not the other way around.

I understand the urge. People throughout history have embraced one or more gods and also devils to cope with the exquisite mysteries and terrible trials of existence. I respect that need and the creativity it has inspired. But I consider it my good fortune that I was born into a free-thinking tribe a tribe that banished not only all idols but all images of its own God. Unformed and unpictured, the Jewish God has encouraged us to treat Him or Her as an abstraction. We have been liberated or, if you prefer, condemned to strive to find our own definition of the meaning of life.

So I come occasionally to a house of worship because the occasion stimulates me to wonder why I am here, to think about the nature of life, and to advertise my right to do so freely to advertise my membership in a hard-thinking tribe. I m here because I was born a Jew and raised a Jew and persecuted as a Jew and because I sometimes yearn for the special comfort of affiliating with Jews. We Americans pride ourselves on achieving the goal of the many religions that hold all of us on this Earth to be God s children. But our enduring tribal habits are proof that one parent in common does not make for genuine brother-and-sisterhood.

At best, humanity is a collection of stepbrothers and stepsisters. We are defined not just by different genes and different experiences but even by different calendars. So we feel a need to retreat to the circle of blood relations. In spite of myself, I feel a special delight in possessing my own holidays and rituals, to exchange a perverse New Year greeting in autumn instead of winter. Millennium shmilennium, we Jews are only 239 years from 6000!

But the ultimate reason for my comfort in being Jewish is not at all ceremonial. I am comforted by that discomforting Jewish summons to all of us to define our own deity, our own system of beliefs. Jews must live with a delicious religious paradox: we are instructed by our dogma to reject dogma, and to imagine our own place in the universal scheme of things. Our most exalted rabbis are teachers, not priests. We are all obliged to study, but not to accept or believe. We have been freed to think, to enjoy the communal songs but to make up our own words.

Thinking about how I have dealt with that paradox, I discovered that while I have strayed from the idea of God, I could not escape from Torah that rich collection of laws and fables that was my earliest childhood literature. I consider Torah to be our tribe s Declaration and Constitution combined proclaiming our freedom and our commitment to law as the only reliable restraint on human behavior the only firm guarantee of human liberty and human rights. We are a disputatious tribe because the constant improvement of law and defense of liberty require unending dissent and debate.

Instead of idols and passions, our tribe worships words and argument and that religion lies at the heart of our highly verbal contributions to world culture. Inspired by our heritage as keepers of the book, creators of law, and storytellers supreme, we do, as others often complain, achieve disproportionate influence in education and communication.

But we should never forget that despite our millennia of study and storytelling, we still have no better answer than any other tribe to the ultimate Why am I here? It remains for each of us to conquer that vain yearning for immortality, to accept the limits on our talents and capacities and on life itself and still salvage a sense of purpose and meaning from our brief existence.

Those who say they are here on Earth to do God s will are obviously evading the issue, for that will has been defined by mere mortals. The idea of a divine will causes many people to do good, but it has also caused many to commit evil. Just think of how much pillage, murder, and war have been justified as some kind of service to assorted gods or the will of history. History is the product of causes and consequences, but it has no will, no purpose, of its own. As people who sometimes consider themselves Chosen ought to appreciate, history belongs to those who write it.

But if my actions and fate are not dictated by a divine plan or subject to a historical will, how do I find purpose in my individual life? Why am I here? What is my function? What mark will I leave? What constitutes a life well lived?

Most of us have no chance of ever contributing some life-saving vaccine or other invention or making some heroic sacrifice for the common good of all humanity. In any case, we rarely really understand in our short time on Earth what individual action constitutes a truly historic contribution to the evolution of life. One generation s medicine just turns out to be another s poison.

Contrary to logic, the longer I live, the smaller is the speck that represents me in the universe. The briefer my remaining time on Earth, the more modest, indeed microscopic, appear the consequences of my best efforts. When I come to a religious function and think about why I am here, I became transfixed by the incredible long chain of circumstances that brought me to my place on Earth how many random journeys and unplanned couplings produced my genes and gave me life and how many trillions of toiling, striving, plants, animals, and people produced the environment in which I have landed. Whatever it is that I can add to the gene pool and whatever I have managed to do to improve the space around me, my net contribution is a tiny, almost immeasurable drop in the universal bucket.

It is to escape the notion that we are mere ants in the universe that people throughout history have invoked a Divine will or utopian scheme of history. As the years race by, we all aspire to discover a larger meaning not only a longer life but an afterlife that will memorialize our existence. It s why we enlist in causes that we call larger than ourselves and erect monuments to our passage. They are, of course, mere castles on the beach.

For me, the wisdom of Jewish culture is that it has a single, overriding prescription for living a good life. If I understand our heritage correctly,

it holds that my obligation and my reward are both defined by the concept of study: I am expected to rise about my selfish biological needs and to strive to understand the time and place into which I happen to have come. I am importuned to absorb as much as possible the lesson learned by all who came before me and to figure out how, given my capacities and predicaments, I might enhance and enrich the lives of others, now and in the future.

So I think of myself as running just one short lap in the endless race the striving of all living things. I carry the baton that was handed to me, I run as well as my talent will allow, and I make sure that no matter what I may achieve along the way that I not drop the baton, that I avoid doing harm, false moves, and unworthy deeds.

Why am I here? I come to look up at the stars and to contemplate my smallness in the chain of life. The Heavens inspire me to keep asking why I am here. And I come to worship not to pray for good fortune but to honor a tribe and a heritage that encourage me to face that awesome question.

So I ask you, why are you here?

Tirzah Firestone, a Jewish renewal rabbi, responds

Dear Mr. Frankel,

Your ecclesiastical discourse is bound to resonate with the many who see themselves as lone products of life s random journey, and who look upon their own individual efforts as insignificant drops in a universal bucket. Doubtless, too, there are numerous Jews who would join you in spirit to celebrate a simple, sunny Rosh Hashanah away from it all, dressing down both the ostentatious attire and the superfluous repetitions that are common to the day.

But while you were away, you seem to have missed some rather important developments; there are now many, many of us who stand together, not only at the High Holidays but year-round, as a global community of Jews, dedicated to an alive, hands-on approach to Judaism in the world, and to building a society in which our lives are connected to one another and to values which transcend us. Together we shed the stereotypical outer trappings of the Judaism you describe. We work to eschew the narcissistic individualism that is rampant in the society around us just as we do the nihilistic deconstructionism which would have us believe that our natural human hunger for meaning is nothing more than the vain yearnings of immortality.

What we have learned is that without a community of like-minded allies, this narcissism and nihilism creep insidiously into even the most thoughtful among us, leading one to confuse his or her own existential angst with the purposelessness of a whole people or, God forbid, with life itself.

Rather than subscribing to the broken-down myths of our ancestors, and settling for a cynical reductionism which tells us that in the end nothing we do matters, we prefer to challenge ourselves as a community to develop a new vision for this venerable lineage which we call Judaism. Around the world, this transdenominational community of Jews, linked by the TIKKUN reader-

ship and in other expressions of the Jewish renewal movement, works together to forge a life which is commensurate with our durative spirit and our ancient mandate for bringing holiness into the world. Together we proclaim our connection and responsibility to the earth which we inhabit, to the other members of the human race, and to the task of fostering a sane, meaningful and, yes, joyous existence which sanctifies and celebrates.

Max Frankel retired as executive editor of the New York Times in 1994 and has since written a biweekly column, "Word & Image" for the Times' magazine. He received a Pulitzer Prize for his coverage of Nixon's trip to China.

Rabbi Tirzah Firestone is a Jungian therapist, founding rabbi of the Jewish Renewal Congregation of Boulder, Colorado, and author of With Roots in Heaven (Plume).

Reprinted from Tikkun: A Bimonthly Jewish Critique of Politics, Culture & Society.

On *Succot*

By Rabbi Joshua Shmidman

Every civilization and every philosophical system searches for the meaning of beauty. In classical Western thought, the pursuit of the Beautiful is deemed to be as basic as the quest for the Good and the True. Contemporary culture has been profoundly influenced by this perspective. To this day, the striving for beauty is a dominant and desirable component of an accomplished individual an ideal to be devoutly pursued.

At first glance, it would seem that the enshrinement of beauty as a value n and of itself is not a major Jewish priority. The oft quoted phrase, taken in isolation, hevel ha-yofi, beauty is vanity, seems, on a cursory level, to cast beauty in a negative light.

It seems to me, however, that a compelling argument ought to be made for the vital and central role that beauty occupies in the Jewish worldview. In order to do so, we must show that for Judaism, beauty is something unique and means something entirely different than in all other thought systems.

What, then, is distinct and singular about the Jewish concept of beauty? To answer this, one looks to the Torah to find the sources of the Jewish idea of beauty. Like all abstract theories in Judaism which ultimately find their expression in concrete mitzvot, the idea of beauty, as well, finds a tangible realization in the central mitzvot of the holiday of Sukkot. The Torah requires: And you shall take unto yourselves on the first day (of Sukkot) a fruit of a beautiful tree pri

etz hadar. The Talmud (Sukkot 35a) wishes to define what constitutes a beautiful tree by analyzing the Hebrew word for beautiful, hadar. The sages conclude that it is the etrog tree, because the word hadar is interpreted to be a fruit which dwells continuously all year on the tree (hadar, literally, that which dwells). Thus, they understand the word dar to mean the opposite of temporary or intermittent residence; rather, it implies permanence, a continuous process through time (similar to the French duree or the English endure). The etrog tree fulfils this requirement of constant dwelling, for most other fruits are seasonal, but the etrog grows, blossoms and produces fruit throughout all the seasons; in the heat and the cold, in the wind and in the storm it stubbornly persists! It endures! And in the Jewish view, that is why it is beautiful.

Beauty then, in classical Jewish sources, means the indomitable power of life, the determination to live on despite all difficulties, the affirmation of the victory of life over death, the drive for eternity.

In this light, we can understand another striking mitzvah in the Torah. Concerning the obligation to honor the elderly, the Torah states: Ve hadarta p nei zakein, which is usually translated and honor the face of the old person. The word hadar, however, literally means beauty , so what the verse is actually telling us is to ascribe beauty to the old face. What is beautiful about an old face? This very idea contradicts the basic attitude of Western civilization which, since the time of the ancient Greeks, has always associated beauty with youth. In the contemporary Western world, the entire cosmetic industry is predicated on making people appear young, if they wish to look beautiful. The attempt is precisely to make the old face seem younger. yet the Torah ascribes hadar, beauty, to the old face precisely because it expresses the ongoing triumph of a life which endured and persisted throughout the arduous passage of time.

How much determination, courage and will to live do we see in an old face! In this regard, the Talmud (Kiddushin 33a) tells us, Rabbi Yochanan used to stand up even before aged Aramean heathens saying, How many troubles have passed over these. The Torah, thus, requires us to see in aging persons, not that they are fading away into oblivion, but to recognize in them the unremitting surge to live, and of the yearning of the immortal soul deep within each individual for eternity.

Therefore, Beauty in the Jewish worldview is not a value to be understood in isolation. It is not an attempt, as in other aesthetic systems, to merely capture the moment, with its concomitant glorification of youth and the attempt to preserve it for all time. In Judaism, beauty inheres in the basic Jewish historical sensibility: the palpable experience of apprehending the eternal in the flow of passing time.

In a similar vein, the Menorah, which is central in the service of the Holy Temple, and which has become a symbol of the Jewish people itself, is described in the Torah as ner tamid, an eternal light. The source in the Torah (Exodus 27:20) reads: And thou (Moses) shall command the children of Israel that they bring unto you pure olive oil beaten for lighting to make a light shine out continuously. The Sages of the midrash point

out that the olive the beaten olive whose oil burns continuously, is the true symbol of Israel. The midrash quotes the verse in Jeremiah (11:16): The Lord called thy name (Israel) a leafy olive tree, beautiful with goodly fruit, and the midrash asks, why is it the olive tree with which Israel is identified? The answer given is that Israel is uniquely similar in many of its essential characteristics to the fruit of the olive tree. The olive is beaten, pressed, ground down, and then it produces its oil which gives rise to glowing light. So, too, the people of Israel: despite all the oppression, cruelty and exile visited upon them, they are not destroyed; rather, they continue to shine on magnificently, ever brighter. It is significant that in the passage quoted, Jeremiah declares not only the dauntless character of Israel s persistence in the face of every hardship, but defines this quality as being the very source of Israel s beauty leafy olive tree, beautiful with goodly fruit.

In a comparable way, in the revelation to the prophet Zechariah declaring the triumph of the Divine spirit over physical might, he is shown a menorah surrounded by two olive trees. This prophecy, coming after the destruction of the First Temple and on the threshold of the building of the Second Temple, is intended to absolutely affirm that despite defeat and destruction, Israel will continue to flourish and give out, ever-greater light. It is quite reasonable, also, to maintain that the requirement of mehadrin min hamehadrin, to perform the mitzvah of lighting Chanukah lights, commemorating the Menorah of the Temple, in a particularly beautiful way, is an expression not only of the triumph of the life especially the spiritual life of the Jewish people over their oppressors but the continuous expansion of this light and life force. Hence, the ruling of Beit Hillel (mosif v holeich), that each night an additional light is kindled.

When we complete the study of a tractate of the Talmud, we recite hadran aloch, we shall return to you. We proclaim that our studies and the knowledge gained will not simply slip into the past, but that we shall continuously go back, revive, rejuvenate and find new meaning in out past learning. The very word hadran, from the root hadar, thus has basically the same meaning as the word hadar, as we now understand it: to continually persist and to be beautiful are identical!

The holiday of Sukkot dramatizes the paradoxical idea that while on the one hand, we are to recognize the temporary and transient nature of human existence on earth by residing in temporary sukkah booths, at the same time, we are to affirm the immortality of life and the eternity of Israel by taking hold of the ever-enduring etrog. The dialectic tension in these contradictory elements establishes the framework of our comprehension and experience of the beautiful. Discovering, affirming and struggling in the face of implacable difficulties, in the face of mutability and death itself, for the realization of the eternal creates the Jewish sense of beauty. The statement beauty is vain is to be understood as the charm of the moment; the woman of valor in Solomon s Proverbs, on the other hand, is truly beautiful, precisely because of her heroic dedication to the future and the triumph of her immortal ideals. We may paraphrase

Keats famous line, A thing of beauty is a joy forever : we declare that the joy in struggling and ensuring that there is a forever is a thing of beauty. The ultimate beauty of Israel itself lies in the triumph of its eternity.

Meditations of an Orphan *for My Father*

By Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

I am an orphan and it makes me inexpressibly sad. I am an orphan and even my beautiful and brilliant grandchildren cannot fill the gnawing pit in my stomach or strengthen the shaky ground beneath my feet. I remember smiling disdainfully when, as a young rabbi, I saw an octogenarian congregant weep while reciting El Maleh on the day of his father s yartzheit. What a shame, old Mr. Schwartz is nebbach an orphan. Now my tears have merged with his. One is never too old to feel the disorientation that comes with the loss of a parent, to experience the wrenching despair that is the orphan s inheritance.

Jewish law maintains that mourning for a spouse, child, or sibling lasts thirty days, while mourning for a parent takes a full year. Is this because of our obligation to honor and respect them? Is this because other relationships can be replaced, whereas the father and the mother can never be replaced? Is this because our parents gave us life, genes, a defining environment, and that with their passing *ipso facto* a piece of us passes away as well? Our parents are our first and most genuine teachers. Whenever one mourns a parent one mourns for oneself at the same time for the early years remembered only by the parents, for one s own mortality, now so terribly evident. Without the illusory buffer of the previous generation in the world, the next-in-line is left exposed and completely vulnerable.

With sadness also comes appreciation, for what they provided, and for what one has become as a result. The Hebrew word *even*, building stone, is comprised of two words, *av* (father) and *ben* (son). Parents and children comprise an eternal building (binyan), parents representing the infrastructure and foundation, children representing the continuation and development. We are our parents and our parents are us. Those who have left this world live once again. In giving our parents life through our memories, we reveal and restore to life much of ourselves as well.

My father was my first and in some respects my most important teacher. We were so different externally that I only realized this truth in recent years.

He was raised in the home of my grandparents. My grandfather Shmuel, an intellectual Communist, wrote for the Yiddish *Freiheit* and believed idealistically that religion was the opiate of the masses. My grandmother Lena, a strikingly beautiful devotee of the Yiddish theater, knew Shakespeare in Yiddish virtually by heart. My father s home was Yiddish without being Jewish. He was never given any Jewish education. He never celebrated a bar mitvah.

Unlike his parents, my father was American, with interests more athletic than intellectual. He played semi-professional baseball (for the Brooklyn Orioles, I think), enjoyed a good card game, and was an excellent tap and ballroom dancer. I was the antithesis. Not being much of a sportsman, I could hardly throw a baseball. By accident of living in a low-income neighborhood with an educationally inferior public school, I was sent to a yeshiva. Dancing and card-playing were beyond the purview of acceptable behavior. Yet my father and I enjoyed an uncommonly close relationship. From the time I was five years old, I spent Motzei Shabbat [Saturday night] with my father (and grandfather for as long as he lived) at the Turkish Baths, the Shvitz. I may have been overlooked by the stickball team, but I could take a lot of heat an accomplishment that made my father proud.

The Turkish Bath, first on Myrtle Ave. in Brooklyn and later on Tenth Street and First in Manhattan, had a subculture all its own. Conversation ranged from the most profound philosophical and political debates to the banter of intimate male bonding. My father and grandfather treated me with gentle sensitivity and, despite my young years, made me feel my ideas were significant. Even if I disagreed with them politically and theologically, they allowed me that right. My father and I continued our intimate conversations in the Shvitz after I married, after we both made aliyah (at the Ramada Continental in Tel Aviv), and until a few months before his passing.

I learned from my father to love people. He initially trusted everyone unless they misplaced that trust, and treated every human being with warmth and dignity. He was a people-person, with a smile and a good word for everyone, old and young, his employers as well as those who swept floors. He was the king of the Shvitz, he knew every waiter in a restaurant by name, he made pals whenever he stopped the car to ask directions, even if he didn t get the directions he wanted.

We were poor growing up. My mother said my father was so trusting and honest that he lacked the guile to outsmart others in business. He was the consummate good guy, and probably a little bit of a *freier* [sucker]. When he began working for others, his bosses loved and trusted him. His customers loved and trusted him. Customers would invite him to enter their stockrooms and would order blind according to what he thought they needed. I learned from him that its better to allow others to take advantage of you than for you to take advantage of others.

I learned from my father to love life, to savor all of the simple pleasures of this world. I once called him from one of my trips abroad, only to hear an unfamiliar voice answer the phone with Harry s Place. I beg your pardon, I responded. Gin Rummy, Poker, refreshments, and jokes a harmless evening with the wild boys for whoever is interested. I asked in an upset tone of voice to speak to my father and heard the respondent say in a muffled voice, Uh oh Harry, it s your son, the rabbi. I better hang up so he ll think he got the wrong number.

After my mother had passed away, my sister informed me in a panic that my father with his severe cataracts that made it impossible for him to read or distinguish images clearly, the cataracts that rendered his heart condition inoperable was taking driving lessons in order to apply for an Israeli license. I immediately went to his apartment to convince him to change his mind. Do you think I m stupid? he said in indignation. I have no intention of actually driving! But the young woman who gives the lessons is a pleasure to be with. . .

My father was able to enjoy life because he was never resentful or jealous. He was truly content with his portion. He assessed his situation not on the basis of what he lacked, but on what he had. From his perspective, he had the best: the best wife, the best children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren, the best city, the best mayor. His optimism was the product of a natural, simple faith, an unshakable confidence in the future. Almost ten years before his death, my father had a serious lung cancer operation. If God takes me now, he told me, I ll have had no complaints. I was treated to a good life. But, anyway, I m sure I ll come out of this very well. We ll go to the Shvitz together next month. We did.

My father taught me about commitment, especially to family, parents, and children. Every Wednesday, starting the week after his honeymoon, my father would return to his mother s house and clean the floors, literally getting on his hands and knees, because he knew how important cleanliness was to her. He visited his parents with the family. We trekked by foot and by two buses every Sunday afternoon, and every Thursday evening. When my maternal grandmother became mortally ill with cancer, my father was at her bedside every evening after work. Although he had no religious training, after her death he never missed a Kaddish, either during the first eleven months following her death or on the yartzheit.

He was a model husband who literally loved his wife as himself and respected her beyond himself. He used to joke, I always wanted my women weak and my coffee strong. God provid-

ed me with a strong woman who made my coffee weak but He knew me much better than I know myself. He never lost patience with her when she became ill with Alzheimer s, answering her repeated questions as if it was the first time he heard them. My mother would not allow him to leave her sight, and he almost always good-naturedly complied. When my mother was comatose for months, my father would caress her and speak words of love to her as his body shook with sobs.

My maternal grandmother would always pray: Don t throw me (tashlikheni) into old age; allow me to get used to it slowly, in stages and by degrees, and then take me home. I am grateful that my father was like a ripened fruit, ready to be plucked from the tree of life in this world. I am grateful for the person he enabled me to become, for the self-confidence provided by a father who lets it be known that his son is the center of his universe. He may not have taught me how to learn a page of gemara, but he did teach me how to live, to savor each moment of joy, how to love, how to communicate with people, how to establish enduring commitments and relationships.

Although a grandfather, I feel like an orphan, and I am indescribably sad. To my happy and wholehearted and simple and loving and strong father and teacher, I thank you, and bid you farewell.

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin,is Chief Rav of the City of Efrat, and Dean of Ohr Torah Colleges and Graduate Programs.

Reprinted by permission of the Jewish Spectator.

Excerpt from

God Was in This Place

and I, I Did Not Know

By Lawrence Kushner

If God didn t want Adam and Eve to eat fruit from the tree in the center of the garden, then why put it right there, out in the middle of the garden where Adam and Eve could reach it? Why didn t God just hide the fruit somewhere deep in the forest? And then, equally puzzling, after putting the tree in the middle of the garden, why did God specifically tell Adam and Eve to be sure not to eat the fruit?

(Can you imagine telling an adolescent, as you leave the house, You can do whatever you like, just don t ever go in the top drawer of my dresser. Sure, Mom. Right, Dad. Thanks for the tip.) What a different world it would be if the forbidden fruit were on one unknown random tree hidden deep in some primordial garden. The chances are high that we might never have discovered it. We would all live in childhood eternal.

There is one rabbinic tradition that tells of God s creating other worlds and destroying them before our present universe. Each one was presumably deficient in some vital way. For all we know, God did try creating a world without the tree temptingly planted right in the middle of the garden. Or maybe there was a prior universe in which God neglected to forbid human beings to eat the fruit. Maybe God realized that Adam and Eve weren t clever enough on their own to figure out how to sin. After universes of infantile obedience, they remained tediously, predictably, and incorrigibly infantile.

Yes, Daddy, yes, Mommy, whatever you want.

This will never work, reasons God. Better they should know some sin, estrangement, and guilt but at least become autonomous human beings rather than remain these insipid, goody-two-shoes infants. But I can t just make them autonomous. If I did, their autonomy, their individuation, their independence would be a sham. They must earn it themselves. They must want it badly enough to pay a price. I ll let them make their own children, but first they must earn their autonomy.

I suspect it was for this reason, out of desperation, that God resorted to a setup that has come to be known as the expulsion from the garden of Eden. Eating the first fruit was not a sin but a necessary, prearranged passage toward human maturity. We have read it all wrong: God was not angry; God rejoiced at our disobedience and then wept with joy that we could feel our estrangement and want to return home. . . .

What Adam and Eve did in the garden of Eden was not a sin; it is what was supposed to happen. Indeed, it has happened in every generation since. Children disobey their parents and, in so doing, complete their own creation. Adam and Eve are duped, not by the snake, but by God. They were lovingly tricked into committing the primal act of disobedience that alone could ensure their separation from God, their individuation, and their expulsion from (childhood s) garden. Yet just because such is the way of the world does not mean there is no psychic damage.

The price of autonomy, individuation, is the trauma of separation from parents. At the core of every psyche lies a deep pain. We are not guilty *because* of Adam and Eve s sin, as in orthodox Christianity s doctrine of original sin. Nor are we sinful *as* Adam and Eve were sinful, as in Judaism s teaching. For our own good we have been tricked into leaving our parent s home, into separating from God. The issue is not sin, guilt, or even disobedience. The necessary price for becoming an autonomous adult is the unending pain of separation.

Excerpt from God Was In This Place and I, I Did Not Know ' Lawrence Kushner (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1994). $16.95 + $3.50 s/h. Order by mail or call 800-962-4544. Permission granted by Jewish Lights Publishing, P.O. Box 237, Woodstock, VT 05091.

Published by The Wexner Heritage Foundation
551 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10022
(212) 355-6115

Comments regarding the Wexner Heritage Review may be directed to editor@wexner.org

#17

EROS *and the Ninth of AV*

The fast commemorating the destruction of the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem occurs on the 9th day of Av (commencing on the evening of August 9 this year). This unusual article suggests that the loss of the Temples was connected with the loss of Eros, which the author describes as "the primal energy of the universe." This is a most unorthodox (in every sense of the word) perspective. (*Tikkun*, July/August 1999, www.tikkun.org)

WHY U.S. JEWS *have stopped coming*

After nearly 2000 years of mourning the loss of Jerusalem and praying for redemption, it is rather odd that only 1,323 American Jews emigrated to Israel in 1999. This almost non-existent level of emigration is even more difficult to understand when one considers that Israel's standard of living has never been higher. The author suggests that there are problems on both sides of the ocean. *(The Jerusalem Post, February 25, 2000, www.jpost.com)*

AN AMERICAN *in Jerusalem*

Exile is not only physical, but a state of mind - as can be seen in this short piece that shows the lesson that can be learned in an Israeli laundromat. *(The Jerusalem Report, November 22, 1999, www.jreport.com)*

SELECTIONS FROM *the Responsa Anthology*

Tradition teaches that God decreed our exile from the land because the spies that Moses had sent out to Canaan slandered the Holy Land. The rabbis did not treat slander lightly as is shown in a responsa as to whether a cantor can be dismissed from his job because of a rumor. (Responsa are the

questions posed by members of the Jewish community to rabbis along with the answers that are given.) Other issues discussed range from whether prayer in the vernacular is permitted, to a question from a person who to know if he is allowed to accept a position as an auditor with the Internal Revenue Service. (Excerpted from *The Responsa Anthology*, Jason Aronson, Inc., Northvale, N.J. 1996)

EROS *and the Ninth of AV*

by Mordechai Gafni

The Ninth of Av—the anniversary of the destruction of the Mikdash, the holy temple— is an intense day of mourning for Jews worldwide. An omnipresent motif in Jewish consciousness, the loss of the temple leads us not only to mourn its destruction but also to yearn for its rebuilding. And yet what is it that we yearn for? Surely another building on the bitterly contested temple mount holds no inherent redemptive promise. Further, it seems likely that mystic philosopher Abraham Kook was right when he said that the animal sacrifices which demarcated the ancient temple would hold little attraction for spiritually evolved moderns.

Three talmudic texts and an ancient esoteric mystical tradition can guide us in our search for understanding what we might yearn for on Tisha B'Av this year.

The first text, by its very strangeness, jolts us into the realization that our intuitive impressions of the holy may need fundamental re-orienting. Said R. Isaac, "From the day the temple was destroyed, the taste of sex was taken away, and given to the sinners, *i.e.*, those engaged in illicit sex . . . as the verse says in Proverbs, 'stolen waters are sweet.'" In the context of this passage, illicit sex refers specifically to adultery; the "taste of sex" is an idiom meant to refer to the ultimate sexual experience. According to this eyebrow-raising passage, the difference between temple and post-temple spirituality is that after the destruction, the fullest erotic joy of sex was very difficult to access with our partners. The yearning for the temple is in effect understood as a yearning for Eros of the most intense kind.

Lest you think that this passage is anomalous, let us proceed in our investigation. The second rather shocking text is a description of the innermost sanctum of the temple. In the holy of holies, relates the Talmud, were two angelic cherubs locked in embrace. A careful reading of the Hebrew phrase indicates that they were in fact erotically intertwined. Furthermore, according to the first book of Kings, the walls of

the first temple were covered with erotic pictures of these sexually intertwined cherubs. The primary image in the holy of holies—the innermost precinct of holiness in the temple—is a symbol of Eros. To realize how far we have strayed from this conception, one has only to imagine the reaction of today's congregants upon walking into their synagogue and finding the walls covered with pictures of figures in explicit sexual embrace.

To understand, however, what Eros meant in the religio-cultural context of the temple, we need to unpack a final source. The Talmud describes a mythic dialogue between the Rabbis and God. The internal reference of the text locates the dialogue historically as taking place in the Second Temple era at the close of the era of prophecy. The Rabbis entreat God to nullify the power of the drive towards idolatry. Immediately, a lion of fire emerges from the holy of holies and is identified by the prophet as the primal urge toward idolatry. The Rabbis realize that it cannot be slain, so they weaken it instead. Feeling that they are privy to a moment of grace, the Rabbis entreat God again. Allow us, they say, to slay the drive for sexuality. God grants their wish and again a lion of fire emerges from the holy of holies. When they attempt to slay this lion, however, the world simply stops. Chickens don't lay eggs, people don't go to work, all productivity and, according to the hasidic reading of the text, all spiritual work grinds to a standstill. The Rabbis understand that they have gone too far and retract their request. This drive as well is weakened, but not slain.

What is this strange and holy mythic tale trying to teach us? The underlying teaching would seem to be that the seat of Eros and the seat of holiness are one.

The first lion to emerge from the holy of holies personifies the drive for idolatry, the second the sexual drive. Both, however, are but expressions of a common underlying reality—that of Eros. Idolatry at its core is not primitive fetishism. It is, rather, a burning lust for the holy. Under every tree, in every brook, courses primal divinity. The idolater, like the prophet, experiences the world as an erotic manifestation of the God force. The symbolism of the lions emerging from the holy of holies is the text's way of teaching that Eros is holiness.

Eros in this understanding includes but is not limited to sex. Rather, it refers to the primal energy of the universe. Eros is where essence and existence meet. To experience the world erotically is to be plugged into the divine erotic essence of reality. As the tale of the lions indicates, the drive to uncover the divine sensuality of the world is not without its dangers. The erotic may overwhelm us to the point that our ethical sensitivities are swept away and our sacred boundaries overrun. And yet the need to experience the world in all of its divine Eros remains a primal human need—and according to this text, the temple of Jerusalem was organized in response to that need.

The destruction of the temple thus heralded the fall of Eros in two distinct ways. First Eros came to be limited to genital sexuality. When we seek the realization of our full need for Eros in sex, we are bound to be disillusioned. Sex cannot, by itself, sate us in our lust for essence. Sex itself cannot re-enchant our world with the magic of Eros. When we mourn the temple's destruction, we yearn to live erotically in all the facets of our lives once again.

The Talmud relates that at the time of the destruction, fruits lost their taste. Laughter vanished from the life of the polis, and the vitality of sexuality was reserved for those seeking an illicit adulterous thrill. When fruits lose their full erotic taste, when laughter becomes mechanical and only in response to sexual humor, then true Eros, the temple, has been destroyed.

The passionate yearning for rebuilding the temple is the longing to redeem Eros from its distortions. We need to move from the Eros of longing which symbolized the exile to an Eros of fulfillment. We need to experience the full intensity of erotic relationship with our partners. Put succinctly, rebuilding the temple is to touch the passion of illicit sex within the holy and ethical context of my relationship with my partner. This is the deep intent of Akiva, the mystic sage who witnessed the destruction of the temple. All the books are holy, taught Akiva, and the Song of Songs is the holy of holies. In making this statement, Akiva is doing more than extolling the virtue of the God-Israel relationship, which the Song of Songs allegorizes in terms of passion and sensuality. Akiva is teaching us that the essence of the

temple, the holy of holies, is the Song of Songs; that is, the experience of passion and sensuality as the guiding force in all of our relationships with the world. It is for this that we yearn on the Ninth of Av.

Modechai Gafni is a rabbi and scholar in Jerusalem. He serves as a director of Minad and as the Melitz scholar-in-residence.

Reprinted by permission of *Tikkun* magazine, a bi-monthly Jewish Critique of Politics, Culture & Society.

WHY U.S. JEWS *have stopped coming*

by Herb Keinon

The number is simply astounding. Of some five and a half million Jews in the US, a grand total of 1,323 immigrated to Israel in 1999, some 15% less then 1998. And 1998 itself? With only 1,556 American immigrants, it was not exactly a banner year for US aliya. But 1,323? That's nothing. A similar number of US Jews probably re-located last year—for business and academic reasons to Canada, Europe or the Far Est.

What is most interesting about this figure is that it comes at a time when life in Israel for western immigrants has never been so comfortable. First of all, the standard of living facing immigrants now is much higher than it was, say, 20 years ago. The apartments are bigger, the appliances readily and more cheaply available, the cars more numerous and of a greater variety. Gone are the days when aliya meant an automatic and drastic decrease in one's standard of living. Granted, it's still not America, but it's not far behind most countries in Europe.

Secondly, if it was the job market that kept immigrants away in the past, now immigrants—if they come with computer knowledge or experience—have a plethora of hi-tech jobs to choose from. And these are jobs with good conditions—high pay, stock options, even in-house gyms. In short, the works.

If it was familiarity that used to keep people away, the urge for the same culture and food that they grew up with in Brooklyn or Los Angeles, then this too has changed. The much-discussed Americanization of Israel—for all its cons—has created an environment in which Americans can feel right at home. One need not yearn anymore for Ruffles potato chips, or Ben & Jerry's ice cream, or even Ace Hardware. It's all available here in abundance.

And if it is Americana and sports that the immigrants long for, then this too has also become readily available, thanks to cable television. One can sit in one's living room in Beersheva or Karmiel and watch the NFL playoffs, followed by Jay Leno and Ally McBeal.

As to the problem of distance from family and friends, this has become less acute thanks to e-mail and competitive phone prices. Gone are the days where an immigrant could only afford to call family in the US once a month, because it cost some $3 per minute using Israel's monopoly phone company. Now rates are an amazing 12 cents a minute, and less, making it possible to call home every night. Via -email, one can even be in contact with relatives three, four, five times a day. True, it is not the same as being there, but it does ease the pain of separation and narrow the distance. It is now possible to know in detail what is going on in the life of one's parent or sibling, and not to feel so completely cut off as in the past.

Then why the decline in immigration from the west in general, and from the US in particular? Because it is not simply material things that have kept American Jews from Israel in the past, nor is it material well being that will attract them in the future. Israel has changed. It is no longer the pioneering, egalitarian society where the simple life is held in high esteem and the farmer is as well respected as the bank manager. The country's values have undergone a radical transformation. Wealth is celebrated, success is measured by the number of trips abroad taken each year. Urban scourges—crime, domestic violence, drugs—have made significant inroads. Idealistic Jewish youth will not have as easy a time as they once did looking for simple, non-materialistic, Jewish spiritual values in Israel.

Furthermore, few harbor illusions any more that

a utopian society is being created here. Indeed, the utopian experiments—the kibbutzim, the settlements—are, for different reasons, laboring under dark clouds.

There was a time when committed American Jewish kids would come to Israel and be bitten by the country—by its values, by what it's like to live in a Jewish state, by the excitement and challenge of living here.

The country now bites less hard.

But it is not only that the product, Israel, has changed. The consumer, American Jewry, is also different. First of all there is less of a feeling of guilt about not coming to Israel. This is partly because Israel is now a country of six million, not three million, and its physical security seems more and more a given. There are also very few leaders, either Israeli or American, who say that coming to Israel is a top priority. Guilt is a great motivating force, and it has been removed from the equation.

Also, as American Jewry becomes less and less committed to Judaism, its attachment to Israel wanes. Differences of opinion over the country's foreign policy, as well as domestic issues like the on-going "Who is a Jew" debate, give those who don't want to identify with Israel, a good excuse not to. Religious Jews who believe in Greater Israel can justify not coming here by saying that the country has sold this ideology down the river, so why live there anyhow; while committed Reform and Conservative Jews can rationalize not coming by saying they refuse to live in a place that does not respect their brand of Judaism.

It is easy to look at immigration figures from the US and just shrug them off with a curt "the Jews in America are just too comfortable to leave." But that is too simple. Jews were equally comfortable 15 years ago, but they came in greater numbers. Something on both sides of the ocean has changed, and it is important to find out what, and why. These low immigration figures reflect both on Israel and on American Jewry, and what they imply is not something either side can be proud of.

Reprinted by permission of the *Jerusalem Post*.

AN AMERICAN *in Jerusalem*

by Kari Field

Today there is a new American standing in the laundromat, looking lost and slightly irritated. He knows enough Hebrew to recognize my accent but not enough to understand what I am saying; he switches to English. He needs to know how much, what coins, how to open the machine. Our system strikes him as terribly inefficient; he wonders why there are only two working dryers for four washing machines.

And I think to myself: he still crosses the street with the light and has not learned to look for wayward bus drivers who cut the corners. He is irritated at the bank lady who gave her son's phone call precedence over him. He has not learned: the son will need his mother long after this new American has forgotten the name of the bank. And he has not learned: the son could grow up to be just 19 and then die in Lebanon, and then no American's deposit could ever replace the loss. But he is a paying customer, and nothing (except more time in this most irritating and gracious culture) will soothe him yet.

So he is irritated, trying to make sense of this system. When I ask him if I could use one of his towels, one of those he is shoveling into the machine, to mop up my spilled drink, he recoils. I am a stranger; there is no knowing what I might do.

But it is just lime soda, and it won't stain.

So I run to the restaurant next door in search of paper towels. He has not learned yet that this is a community, that it is all right to talk to strangers on the bus, and that when tragedy strikes, Israelis run to the street to hold each other.

He looks sheepish later when he needs change and decides that he better not ask me. Luckily the other American woman (there are so many of us) in the laundromat is still here and has the shekels he needs. Again, he has not learned: I would have given him the change. There is

community here, in these small forms, and its rules are inviolate.

But he will learn; and then when he returns to America he will forget politeness and keeping his distance, and he will stand in other people's space, and not understand why they need to keep themselves separate. He will have forgotten that Americans will go to great lengths not to touch each other and even greater lengths to be polite. In a country with space and without crisis, Americans have enough room to stay out of each other's business; but here we are all so dependent upon each other, so close; connected somehow and no longer strangers.

He will learn: Each world has its own logic. He will stand between them for a moment them for a moment, this moment and later, feeling the value of both, until he finds his home again.

Reprinted by permission of the *Jerusalem Report*

SELECTIONS FROM *the Responsa Anthology*

Dismissing a Cantor on the Basis of a Rumor

Teshuvot HaRambam, no. 85

Question: *A man is a well-known chazzan [cantor] and a scholar. There is a rumor circulating that he commited a sin, which shall remain unmentioned. There are no witnesses, and the man is known to have enemies. Should he or shouldn't he be dismissed from his position? If witnesses bear out the rumor and he accepts the penalty that is imposed, must he be dismissed even though he accepted his punishment?*

Responsum: No appointee should be fired on the basis of a rumor, even if he has no enemies. But if he does have enemies in his town, then, even if witnesses confirm the rumor, he should

not be dismissed if he accepts the penalty. For we do not demote a person from the rank of sanctity he holds, whether he is a member of the Great Sanhedrin or a chazzan in a synagogue, unless he publicly violated the law. The man who spread the rumor should be banned and flogged because of defamation of character.

Be respectful of the Torah, "for the mitzvah is a lamp and the Torah is light."

Remove Shoes before Entering Synagogue?

Teshuvot Rashbash, no. 285

(This responsum was written by Rabbi Shelomoh Duran [Rashbash], the son of Rashbatz, and was printed in his own volume [Livorno 1740].)

Question: *A congregation wants to introduce a new ordinance forbidding anyone to enter the synagogue wearing shoes, since in Moslem eyes wearing shoes in a house of worship is a disgrace. Some members oppose this on the grounds that the* **Rambam** *permits the wearing of footgear in a synagogue. What is your opinion on this matter?*

Responsum: Everyone knows that a synagogue must be treated with the utmost honor and respect, and any form of contempt or must be avoided at all cost. Honor and respect depend on what it is that people regard as a mark of distinction. For example, a synagogue building should be taller than the surrounding houses, if that is possible; a synagogue should be brightly illuminated with beautiful chandeliers; no casual snacks should be eaten there; it should not be used as a shelter from rain or sunshine; it should not be used as a passageway or a shortcut, or shown similar of disrespect. However, the question of what constitutes respect or disrespect depends on local custom.

Intrinsically, honor and dishonor are qualities of the soul. But there is also imagined honor and dishonor. If a person wears dignified clothes he is regarded as a respectable man; if he wears disheveled clothes people have contempt for him, although in truth the clothes do not reflect the soul of a man. It is all in the mind. In one

place a certain garment confers great honor on you, while in another locality you will be a laughingstock for wearing it. . . . In Christian lands where wearing shoes is not a sign of disrespect, where you wear shoes even when you stand before the king, it is no disgrace to wear shoes in the synagogue. In our [Moslem] lands, however, where it is an insult to wear shoes in the presence of dignitaries, and certainly in the presence of the king, there you should not wear shoes in the synagogue. The fact that until now the rabbis have not forbidden it does not mean that it is permitted. The Mishnah and the Gemara and the writings of later authorities are full of examples of new enactments that were instituted to remedy situations that earlier *poskim* had not dealt with. And when the **Rambam** states in Chapter 5 of the Laws of Prayer that you should not pray barefoot, he means in localities where it is customary to wear shoes when standing in front of government officials. Therefore, in Christian countries it is forbidden to pray barefoot, whereas in Moslem countries you should remove your shoes. It is really self-evident, for how would it look if in a Moslem country no one may enter the home of even the lowliest Arab wearing shoes, while in the House of God shoes should be permitted?

May the Son Marry the Girl of His Choice?

Teshuvot Maharashdam, Orach Chaim, no. 95

Question: *It happened in Salonica, Greece, that before his death, Reuven told his son that under no circumstances was he to marry a certain young lady. The questioner asks, since this young lady appeals to Reuven's son, whether he should be concerned about violating the command of honoring his father.*

Responsum: The *Chacham* Rabbi Chaim Ovadiah wrote about this at great length. I received his decision and I concur. Reuven's son is permitted to marry the woman he favors and his father's command constitutes no impediment whatsoever. If she is a decent Jewish girl and he loves her, then he should marry her, for with her, God will give him upright children; this would not be the case if he married another woman whom he did not desire, for the children

of an unloved wife are unloved by God.

There are two instances where a son need not obey his father: if a father wants to deter his son from leaving the country in order to study Torah, and most assuredly if the son wants to marry the girl who appeals to him, then the very great mitzvah of marrying her overrides the mitzvah of honoring one's father and mother.

Sing Secular Melodies in the Synagogue

Teshuvot HaBach Hayeshanot, no. 127

Question: *Are we permitted to sing in the synagogue melodies that are sung in church?*

Responsum: I think that only liturgical melodies are forbidden that have been specifically composed for church worship. Since they are strictly religious compositions, they may be likened to a religious statue that is prohibited to be used because it was designed for the purpose of religious worship. . . . But if the melodies were not specifically created for church music, I see no reason to forbid them to be sung in the synagogue.

Is Prayer in the Vernacular Permitted?

Teshuvot Dvar Shmuel, no. 321

Question: *Ten Jews, none of whom knows Hebrew, live in a community where there is no one who can recite the prayers for them in Hebrew. Are they permitted to pray together and recite Kaddish and Kedushah in their own language?*

Responsum: Although it may sound strange, most *poskim* permit praying in any language. Proof of this is the Kaddish prayer, which is recited in Aramaic, and most *poskim* hold that Aramaic is inferior to any other language. An additional proof can be inferred from the verse, "Speak to Aharon and to his sons, saying: 'This is how you must bless the Israelites.'" The implication is that the priestly blessing must be recited in Hebrew. It follows that were it not for

this special injunction, even the priestly blessing could have been said in any language, just as can the Shema, the Shemoneh Esreih (Silent Meditation), and Birkat Hamazon (Grace after Meals). I have heard from reliable sources that in the great city of Salonica there is a full-time chazzan for women who do not understand Hebrew, who prays for himself and for them in their language.

Auditor for the Internal Revenue Service

Igrot Moshe, Yoreh De'ah, no. 159

Question: Is it permissible to accept a position as auditor for the Internal Revenue Service, because one may discover an offense by someone? Wouldn't informing the government be an act of betrayal, since the government metes out a harsher sentence than that imposed by Torah law?

Responsum [*to Mr. David E. Bass*]: It is clear that whoever audits these books will find the offense. Furthermore, if this person does not take the position, the IRS will find another auditor, so that the lawbreaker's loss is no greater if the man accepts the position than if he did not, and someone else would take his place. Thus, by taking the job, he does not inflict any damage, and there is no prohibition involved.

Moreover, the auditor should consider that most of the returns he examines are correct. It is only a possibility that he finds a fraudulent tax return. We cannot forbid him to accept a job on the outside chance that he finds wrongdoing. . . . And if he does find an offense, he is obligated to report the truth and testify to facts of the case. It would bring dishonor on God's name if he did not testify.

May He Marry Two Wives?

Teshuvot Rabbeinu Nissim Girondi, no. 48

Question: *Reuven married his wife in France, a country where the enactment of Rabbeinu Gershon Meor HaGolah against polygamy is*

accepted as law. [Rabbeinu Gershon Meor HaGolah, "The Light of the Diaspora," was born in Metz, France, c. 960, and died in Mainz, Germany, 1040. His enactments, which have had a far-reaching effect on Jewish family life, are accepted throughout Ashkenazi Jewry but are not accepted by Sephardi Jews.] Reuven now resides in Castile, Spain, where Rabbeinu Gershon's ban is not accepted, and where it is customary to marry two wives. Is Reuven permitted to take an additional wife?

Responsum: We have a rule that when someone travels from one place to another he must observe the stringencies of both the locality he came from and the place where he now resides (*Pesachim* 50a). . . . Furthermore, Rabbeinu Gershon's ban was accepted by all the people of the Ashkenazi region as mandatory law for them and their offspring. It is binding on their *person*, regardless of the locale where they may be situated.

However, I am inclined to permit polygamy if the [first] wife gives her consent. For the ban was instituted for the woman's benefit, and if she declares that she does not want the protection offered her by the rabbinical enactment, we should abide by her wishes. But, on second thought, I am pondering the question of whether the ban against polygamy was instituted for the benefit of the women, or perhaps it was also for the benefit of the men, to prevent the plague of constant bickering and recriminations in the home. If that is the case, the ban is not lifted even if the wife gives her consent. And even if we say that it was enacted solely for the benefit of the women, I don't think it is enough that the wife give her consent, for there is the danger that the husband will pester her until she agrees to let him marry a second wife. Therefore, I defer to the rabbis of France and Germany, where the enactment originated. We should follow their directives in this matter.

Should the Blind Light the Menorah?

Teshuvot Maharshal, no. 77

Question: *Does a sightless person have to light the menorah on Chanukah? Since we do not recite the berachah for* viewing *the Chanukah lights but rather "to* kindle *the Chanukah lights,"*

should he therefore be required to light the menorah? Or, since we light the menorah in order to proclaim the miracle of Chanukah and he cannot proclaim something he cannot see, should he be not required to light the menorah?

Responsum: If a blind person is in a house where other people are lighting the menorah, he should give a coin and acquire a share in the oil and the wick. If he is married, his wife should light the menorah for him. If he has no wife and lives by himself, although he cannot see the lights, he should kindle the menorah with someone's assistance. The mitzvah of chanukah certainly is not inferior to the mitzvah of *tzitzit* about which it says, "that you may see them"; and yet a blind person who cannot see them is required to wear *tzitzit*.

The Marriage Broker's Fee

Teshuvot HaBach Hayeshanot, no. 28

Question: *A man promised to pay a* shadchen *so-and-so-much if he should succeed in arranging a certain match. The* shadchen *put his heart into it and made the match. Now the man recants and says that he was only joking and that he owes him only the standard fee. Is the* shadchen *entitled to the amount he was promised?*

Responsum: . . . He must pay the *shadchen* the amount he stipulated. The standard fee was instituted only for cases where no fee was agreed upon in advance. This was done in order to avoid quarreling and haggling about the *shadchen*'s fee. But when the man explicitly agreed to pay a certain amount, it is clear that he must pay all he promised and he cannot say that he meant it only in jest. Besides, it is quite logical. The man knows full well that the *shadchen* could arrange the same match with someone else and still receive the standard fee. With that in mind he promised to pay him more, in order that the *shadchen* should do his best on his behalf. Therefore, he cannot now say that he was only joking.

It is accepted practice in all matters, if you are eager to obtain something, to offer an incentive to a broker to obtain the desired item before someone else gets it. Or if you want a job done quickly, you offer the workers a bonus, and you cannot say afterwards that you did not really

mean it. This is surely true of a *shadchen*, where it is the accepted custom to offer him a larger than the standard fee. Therefore, he must pay the *shadchen* all that he promised to pay, even if it is in excess of the standard fee.

Joseph Rackman, Esq., Editor

Published by The Wexner Heritage Foundation
551 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10022
(212) 355-6115

Comments regarding the Wexner Heritage Review may be directed to editor@wexner.org

ON CHELM *and the Middle East*

Yiddishist Ruth Wisse believes Israel's peace camp is behaving as if Jews are still in exile and are trying to appease the *goyim*. Towards the end of this article, her analysis is disputed by Israeli novelist, A. B. Yehoshua, who believes that while her position might have been true twenty years ago, the peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan demonstrate a new reality in the Middle East. This is very useful background reading in view of the ongoing "land for peace" negotiations.

MY *Philanthropic Hero*

Well known community leader Michael Steinhardt describes the person that he looks up to, a businessman who has chosen anonymity, even as he is building the first non-Orthodox Jewish boarding high school in American history. The goal of the enterprise is create an institution that will rival Exeter and Andover. It is reminiscent of Rabbi Herbert Friedman's idea to build an identical project, only that Rabbi Friedman's dream was to build this institution in Israel with the student population coming half from Israel and half from the Diaspora.

MORE INFORMATION, *Please*

The issue of governmental school vouchers that could be used to pay for parochial schools has created a split in the American Jewish community. Those Jews who feel the burden of religious school tuition would like to see government subsidies in the form of school vouchers, while many other Jews are more interested in preserving the impregnability of the church-state constitutional barrier. Since many more American children would go to Christian schools should government vouchers be made available, the author suggests that a study be undertaken of the current attitudes towards Jews on the part of graduates of Christian parochial schools. This is a much needed piece of information for an informed communal debate. (*Manhattan Jewish Sentinel*, January 14, 2000)

ON CHELM
and the Middle East

By Michael Arnold

When Ruth Wisse stepped up to the podium at the Jerusalem Hilton last Thursday to deliver a lecture on Jewish political strategies in the Diaspora, she brought no fancy multimedia aids. If she had wanted any extras, a copy of that morning's *New York Times* would have sufficed. On the same day that Wisse was telling an audience sponsored by the Shalem Center think tank that Mideast peace would come only when the Arabs learned to yield land and the Jews to hold it, a group of 300 American rabbis was calling on Israel to share its capital with the Palestinians in the interest of peace.

Wisse, a professor of Yiddish and comparative literature at Harvard and a frequent commentator on Middle Eastern politics, could hardly have asked for a better illustration of her thesis. Faced with seemingly unending hostility from the Arab world, she contends, Jews in Israel and the Diaspora are falling back on political strategies they honed as resident aliens in the Christian and Moslem worlds: Try to accommodate your adversaries, and if they still don't like you, seek the fault in yourself.

In many ways, Wisse says, this "politics of accommodation" was a brilliant strategy, a political experiment almost as startling in its originality as the concept of monotheism.

There's only one problem with it, she says: It doesn't work.

It is not unusual for an academic to dabble in political affairs. Professors of political science, law, economics, history or regional studies often contribute their ideas to newspapers. Among their ranks, however, it's a safe bet there aren't many professors of Yiddish literature.

Ruth Wisse was born in 1936 in Czernowitz, Romania, where her father, Leibl Roskies, had been sent by his Polish boss two years earlier to build a rubber factory. For his efforts he was awarded a medal by King Carol, which may have eased the family's flight in June 1940 as the horrors of war loomed. The family made its way

to Portugal by train and boat, and ultimately settled in Montreal.

Unlike most other Jews who fled Europe, the Roskieses were fleeing not the Nazis but the Soviet Communists, who were unlikely to take kindly to the Jewish manager and part-owner of Romania's largest rubber factory.

Yet Leibl had not entirely discarded his early affection for the idealism of Communism— one he formed as a barmitzva-aged boy listening to Leon Trotsky orate in Red Square. Wisse writes that even later, when he had been disabused of his admiration for Trotsky and the repressive regimes of Lenin and Stalin, her father never was able to dismiss communism with quite the same vehemence as fascism. He maintained a distinction between a will to power that had used totalitarianism to achieve its aims and an ideology of idealism that had degenerated into totalitarianism.

By the time Wisse was a college student, however, Montreal's left-wing movements had become rather "toothless," and she and her friends expressed their idealism through ironic renditions of songs praising international brotherhood sponsored by the Folk Music Club that succeeded the Labor Progressive Party Club at McGill University. Inside, Wisse writes in *Commentary* magazine, she couldn't help envying the more trying circumstances faced by political idealists of her father's generation.

If her political education began at home, so too did Wisse's taste for literature. As the family prospered from a textile plant her father and uncles ran outside Montreal, Wisse's mother used the family salon to host literary evenings in support of Yiddish culture, which included the obligatory purchase of a book by a local Yiddish author. Both Wisse and a brother, David Roskies, a professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, made their careers in the field.

Wisse made her academic reputation with such works as *The Schlemiel as Modern Hero* and *I.L. Peretz and the Making of Modern Jewish Culture,* as well as a host of Yiddish anthologies that she edited. Some Yiddishists have criticized her for dismissing as sentimental nonsense the idea that Yiddish is being revived as a vital, living language—the conclusion, she says, is too obvious to debate—yet her scholarly output has

been impressive enough to win her positions first at McGill and later at Harvard, where she directed the university's Center for Jewish Studies.

It was through Yiddish literature that Wisse also received her apprenticeship in Jewish politics.

Hillel Halkin, a translator and writer who has been friendly with Wisse for the past 30 years, said the two used to argue frequently over Israeli politics. No naif in the ways of the Middle East, Halkin contended that Israel needed to be more conciliatory in its dealings with the Arabs in order to break the ring of hostility surrounding the Jewish state. Wisse, safely ensconced in North America, argued that Israel had to hold firm, for generations if need be.

In recent years, Halkin says, he has come to share many of Wisse's views. How is it, he asked her, that I live in Israel and confront this reality daily, and you live far away in North America — yet you understood Middle Eastern politics better than I?

Because I know my Yiddish literature, Wisse answered—"by which she meant that she knows the Jews," Halkin says.

Indeed, Wisse says, there is little in the work of Israel's "New Historians"—re-evaluations of Israeli and Zionist history that place much of the blame for the Arab-Israeli conflict on the Jewish side—that, was not prefigured in Jewish Enlightenment thinking 150 years ago, or in the early decades of this century, among Jewish Communists.

How were the "enlightened" Jews, the *maskilim*, to make sense of the gentiles' hatred? By blaming the Jews for bringing it on themselves. And when Jews found themselves hated as well under communism, which preached the brotherhood of man and sought to transcend national boundaries, Jewish believers again placed the blame on their own kind, on Jews who had been class oppressors and thus called down the gentiles' righteous indignation.

In both cases, Wisse says, the Jews' solution to the hatred of others was not to press their own demands for acceptance and tolerance, but to seek to change themselves.

The *maskilim* "wanted to be hopeful about the Jewish condition, and their way of doing it was to hold the Jews responsible for the aggression leveled against them," Wisse says. "You seem to have a political solution because then all you have to do is make the Jews change. That's been the strategy of the Jewish left for 150 years, basically."

With that perspective, then, the Jewish peace lobby's call for Jewish accommodation on Jerusalem—rather than Arab accommodation to Jewish demands—seems all too familiar.

"Because it's been 50 years and the Arabs don't want to make peace, everything begins to collapse and everyone naturally falls back into those old positions," Wisse says. "The advantage of knowing Yiddish literature is that if you read the sources of 100 years ago, you see exactly the same arguments the New Historians are making today."

Wisse admits that she might go back further than the 19th century; the Jews' excessive self-blame may have its roots in the Torah, in the breast-beating and the interpretation of any hardship, be it military defeat at the hands of Amalek or plague among the Israelites, as retribution for some internal moral failing that has only to be identified and addressed for the misfortune to lift.

Many have marveled at the Jews' improbable survival as a nation despite 2,000 years of exile. Some interpreters have concluded that after the destruction of the Temple and their defeat by the Romans, the Jews passed beyond the realm of politics, becoming a nation of spirit that re-entered the political fray only with the appearance of the Zionist movement 100 years ago.

Wisse, however, notes that the vigor of Zionism and the efficiency of its execution bespeak a nation practiced in politics, though one whose politics took such an unusual form that it has no parallel in world history.

Of the Jews' ancient adversaries, indeed, who remains? Each of the great empires which vanquished the ancient Jews vanished following a later military defeat. Only the Jews managed to construct a political strategy so creative that

they could linger on as a nation after losing the three building blocks of nationhood: land, central authority and the means of self-defense.

Wisse has termed this strategy the "politics of complementarity," and by it she means that in every place they settled, the Jews sought out niches where they could fill the needs of their host societies. With this strategy, the Jews sustained themselves materially and maintained the communal institutions that kept the nation's spirit alive, but in terms of political power they were completely dependent on the protection of the local ruler.

Those Jews who survived successive waves of persecution saw in their endurance the proof that God ultimately guaranteed their safety. The ruling Christians and Moslems, however, read a different moral into the story, seeing the Jews' perpetual sufferings as proof of their cursedness and a sign of the gentiles' superiority. Each wave of persecution only made the next one inevitable.

Indeed, Wisse notes, the Jews political strategy had transformed them into a "no-fail target" for their gentile rulers: their lives and property, in effect acting as a safety valve for all the political pressure building up in the host society.

"The Jews thought they were fulfilling all kinds of functions—economic functions of real usefulness to society—but their real function for the politicians was as a target," she says. "Violence against the Jews was always politically profitable, and always without consequence."

Some might argue that during the centuries of exile the Jews may have had no alternative other than extermination. At least such politics allowed them the barest measure of survival. Yet it was an aberrant and contingent existence from which the Zionist movement sought to deliver the Jews by returning to them the essentials of sovereignty. In the end, the Zionists would find themselves pitted in a race against cycles of destruction that were ever more thorough.

"To try to live as a nation without these three staples of nationhood was an absolutely astonishing experiment," Wisse says. "What I'm saying doesn't retroactively discredit those who launched the experiment. However, when an

experiment fails, you can't keep pretending that it's viable. The Holocaust can be defined as the failure of that Jewish political strategy."

Many universities have departments of Semitic languages, much as they have faculties teaching Romance or Slavic languages. One joke tells of a university that, unusually, pairs German and Russian instruction—in the department of anti-Semitic languages.

The Holocaust was the culmination of these ever-widening cycles of persecution. Whatever sufferings Nazi conquest imposed on its subject peoples, Wisse notes, Hitler offered them a political sweetener—the elimination of their Jews. Many European peoples, not only the Germans, responded eagerly to the invitation. Soviet Communism under Stalin proved only marginally less lethal to Jewish life.

Now, to the hypothetical department of anti-Semitic languages, one could add another—Semitic—tongue: Arabic. It is here that Wisse's interpretation of Jewish political thought merges with her concern for Israel's current safety.

Anti-Jewish fervor has served numerous functions in the Arab and Islamic world, Wisse notes: as a tool of pan-Arabism, as a tool of pan-Islam (including for recruitment today among American Blacks), as a point of alliance with the Soviet Union, and for the crystallization of many Arab countries' nationalism. Having allied themselves first with the Nazis during World War II and then with the Soviets during the Cold War, the Arabs, she says, have laid claim to the legacy of the two greatest purveyors of 20th-century anti-semitism.

"The Palestinians are the first people whose nationalism consists primarily of opposition to the Jewish people," she said in an interview two days before her Shalem Center talk. "It's not just a component feature as it was of German, French, Polish or Russian nationalism, which all used antipathy to the Jews. Palestinian nationalism really came to effloresence as a nationalism that defines itself primarily against the Jewish people. This is truly a frightening phenomenon."

One of the goals of the Zionist movement, Wisse notes, was to rid the Jews of the tics accumulated during their extended exile.

It seemed initially to have succeeded, and, for the first quarter-century of Israel's existence, it appeared that the Jews had succeeded in winning the international legitimacy and acceptance they so desperately craved.

Most trace the erosion of international support for Israel to the Six Day War in 1967, when Israel's image as the weakling in danger of extermination by the bullying Arab world shifted to the conquering brute that humiliated three Arab states and stole their lands.

Wisse, however, places the crucial moment six years later, in the wake of the Yom Kippur War. It was then, as the Arab-Soviet alliance solidified, that the Arabs in what Wisse considers one brilliant stroke redrew the ideological contours of the conflict and put the Jews on the moral defensive. They did this by exchanging the rhetoric of the right—bellicose statements about ganging up to sweep the Jewish state into the sea—for the rhetoric of the left, a Soviet-style propaganda onslaught in which the Arab states painted Israel as the aggressor, the racist, colonial implant that had denied a forlorn nation its political rights.

Suddenly the huge and aggressive Arab world which had fought three wars against Israel receded, leaving only imperialist Israel threatening shivering Palestinian refugees.

The irony was startling, Wisse notes.

"It's funny, isn't it, that the Arabs, who place such value on military prowess, should have lost on the battlefield, while the Jews, who take pride in the power of their intellect, should have lost the war of ideas?" she writes in her 1992 polemic, *If I Am Not for Myself: The Liberal Betrayal of the Jews*. "We know why Arab governments mounted a campaign of defamation against Israel: because they wanted to justify in the language of morality the crime they intend to commit, sooner or later, through force of arms."

The ruse worked, she says. Even liberal Jews felt their support for Israel shaken, felt themselves under moral suspicion. As those who by definition believe in the goodness of man and the solubility of human conflicts, liberals were confounded by the Arabs' persistent hatred;

offered an ideological fig-leaf, they found it easier to blame Israel for that hostility than consider the possibility that mankind was in fact not as honorable and peace-loving as they wished to believe. The right, which found reasons of self-interest to support the Arab cause—a billion consumers and a major supplier of oil—found itself in an anti-Israel alliance with the liberal left. Wisse felt the noose tightening.

"Every year there are more and more people falling for this propaganda," Wisse says. "People want to find a solution, and it's easier to force the Jews to do something than it is to force the Arab world. So if I want to be an optimist I have to blame the Jews."

The final straw was the appearance among Israeli leftists of Peace Now, whose very title suggests that it is Israel who can decide to grant or deny peace. Faced with what she considered evidence that the old Jewish patterns of Diaspora accommodation were resurfacing, Wisse launched a second career as a prolific defender of Israel in print, seeking to unmask not only what she considered the continuing lethal intentions of the Arab world, but the hypocrisy of Western liberals in not arising to Israel's defense.

Anyone even marginally familiar with yiddish culture knows the tales of Chelm, a place whose inhabitants are so incorrigibly foolish that they have become the butt of untold Jewish jokes. Wisse boils down the repertoire of Chelm stories to one simple principle: the choice of a course of action that is theoretically possible, but practically absurd.

Israel's behavior since the onset of the peace process fits this pattern, she believes, a course of concessions by the stronger party to weaker adversaries whom Wisse believes remain committed to the destruction of the Jewish state. The theory behind it is that accommodation by Israel will assuage Arab intransigence and buy the Jews acceptance in the region.

Yet Jewish experience has proven, Wisse says, that the truth is precisely the opposite: A policy of surrender does not bring you honor in your enemies' eyes, but only whets their appetite.

"There isn't anyone in the world who is

politically astute who looks at the map and the demographics and says it's within the power of the Jewish people to bring peace—except through self-annihilation," Wisse says. That, indeed, is a solution to the problem that might seem eminently reasonable to the inhabitants of Chelm.

Her analysis is disputed by Israeli novelist A.B. Yehoshua, who says Wisse's argument is sadly outdated, having been overtaken by peace agreements already signed with Egypt and Jordan and under negotiation with the Palestinian Authority and Syria.

"It was OK when she was speaking about this 20 years ago, but after what we experienced over the past 20 years, she was to be a little bit more reasonable. Even in the Diaspora today she's in the minority," Yehoshua says. "What should we fight for today, land? [Egypt's] willingness to fight is much less than when we were sitting on the Suez Canal 100 meters from Suez and Ismailia. We hope as in the beginning of Zionism that the Arabs will understand that they can't fight anymore and they will come to peace, which is now happening. They'll never be our lovers, but I want to see them as good neighbors."

Yet Wisse is convinced that old habits die hard; behavior learned over two millennia can hardly be unlearned virtually overnight. She believes that despite the Zionist movement's best efforts, the Israeli national will has been eroded by the unrelenting and protean Arab war against Israel, which in addition to the standard route of armed force also has been fought in the spheres of economics, diplomacy and public relations.

A nation worn and grief-stricken from the devastation of the Holocaust believed that its victory in war, the final arbiter of international politics, would ensure its ultimate acceptance in the region. Yet the Arabs, Wisse says, refused to play by the rules. Losing each successive war, they have insisted on maintaining their siege of the Jewish state until they ultimately breach the walls. The Jews, she says, generally a liberal and pacific people—not to mention an exhausted one—can no longer take the strain.

"No other people in the 20th century has been so subject to the politics of delegitimation and aggression, and it's bound to take a toll," Wisse says. So we begin to yield, and you think: 'It's

wonderful, it will bring peace, it will bring the solution.' It's a very self-congratulatory kind of move, and your intellect tends to support it, because the alternative seems too bleak to contemplate: to hold firm not for one generation, but for 10. That is a very viable option as far as I'm concerned. If anyone thinks it's going to take less than that, they are obviously willing to sacrifice the State of Israel, because it will take many, many generations for the Arab world to transform itself into a modern, democratic society."

Taking questions after the Shalem Center talk, the emotion surges in Wisse's voice as she discusses the Jew's timidity in asserting his needs, and the Arab's brazenness. Yet she doesn't touch explicitly on the dynamics of Israel's current peace negotiations; her talk is mainly a summary of the cycles of antisemitism and Jewish reactions to it.

It is left to Halkin, who follows her at the microphone, to draw out the implied connection between the historical Assyrian threat and the actual Syrian one.

Afterward, one audience member complains that the evening has left him with the offensive impression that leftists are not true Zionists. Told later of this perception, Wisse denies that that was her intention, but marshals in reply a Yiddish proverb: "The thief feels that the stolen hat burns his head."

If Wisse refrains from spelling out the conclusions of her philosophy it is probably from a desire to be polite, Halkin says, not wishing to come off as too bellicose before an Israeli audience when her criticism, after all, is leveled from the safe perch of the Ivy League.

There may also be a measure of regret involved, perhaps mild guilt. The Wisses indeed made aliya in 1970, but returned to Canada after one year for reasons of "family dynamics"—a decision that Wisse declines to detail but that obviously remains painful. While Wisse's conservative views put her at odds with Harvard's prevailing liberal ideology— an animus expressed in invitations withheld to academic conferences, books that go unreviewed, ideas that are not engaged in the field of debate—that is an altogether different level of sacrifice than putting her own three children on the frontline in support of her ideas.

"Let her come here and fight first before she sends other people to shed their blood. The Israelis should be the ones to decide what to concede and how it should be done," says Benny Morris, a New Historian whose work has led to claims that Jewish troops ethnically cleansed areas of Arabs in the War of Independence. "The Arabs have made the basic concession of accepting Israel's existence in the Middle East. For them it's a terrible concession. Maybe it's convenient from Boston to say we shouldn't make any concessions, but we also have to. Israel's concessions are in terms of land because that's the coin of diplomacy in the region. It may look much more real, but in fact psychological concessions are just as difficult to make."

The residency test is the embattled Israeli's ultimate rejoinder to his American Jewish critic. It is a powerful argument, but not irrefutable. Sometimes the proper understanding can only be attained with the perspective of distance.

Thrown back on Diaspora tactics of accommodation, Israel "is not taking seriously what it means to be a competitive power," Wisse says. "In the old strategy, the Jews were not against individual competition and economic competition, but the one thing you never were was a political competitor."

Israel's current political situation presents the Jews with a clash of two contending impulses: a tendency toward liberalism and empathy whose roots lie deep in the Jewish tradition, and the imperative of sovereign survival that sometimes means asserting and defending your own interests at the expense of others—even, if need be, in apparently illiberal ways. Indeed, she implies, standing up for the Jews should be the real liberal imperative.

"Jews tend to present themselves as being so moral if they stand up for persecuted peoples, but it would only be true if these Jews were willing to stand up first and foremost for the most persecuted people of all, which is the Jews," Wisse says. "If you look at the moral history of the 20th century, to stand up for the Jews has meant standing up to the most aggressive political forces. It's almost a rule of thumb. When the Jews stand up for themselves here in Israel they're not just protecting the Jews, they are at one and the same time standing up to the most debilitating, aggressive

forces of our century.

"And if they lose this struggle, in a sense they involve the world in a tremendous loss."

Reprinted by permission of the Jerusalem Post.

MY *Philanthropic Hero*

By Michael Steinhardt

Call him "Mr. C." An independent-minded businessman, Mr. C. has embarked upon a project that is so extraordinary in scope and so filled with vision and courage that he has become my philanthropic hero. But because he is overwhelmingly committed to the ideal of anonymous philanthropy, Mr. C. insists that his real name be kept out of the spotlight.

The project speaks for itself: the first non-Orthodox Jewish boarding high school in American history. The American Hebrew Academy will be situated on a lush 100-acre campus in the verdant countryside of Greensboro, N.C. There will be state-of-the-art classrooms hooked up to the Internet, a 60,000-volume library, as well as a synagogue, sports fields and a 22-acre lake. The entire project will cost hundreds of millions of dollars, with most of the funding coming from this same Mr. C. The first classes of ninth and tenth graders are set to begin in the fall of 2001.

The uniqueness of Mr. C.'s philanthropy lies in its innovation. Boarding school *yeshivot* have been a staple of Orthodox Jewish communities for generations. But non-Orthodox Jews who sought boarding high schools for their teens simply had no Jewish outlets to choose from. Mr. C. saw this need, and he became determined to fill it. Not only that: He saw in the boarding school an institution that could transform generations of Jews by providing an integrated and holistic approach to Jewish learning and life. One might consider North Carolina too far from urban centers for a Jewish school to thrive. But therein lies the genius of its founder: With its location outside population centers, the American Hebrew Academy has the potential to become a phenomenally concentrated Jewish learning environment.

In the 1970's, the dream of an inclusive Jewish

boarding high school came close to fruition on two separate occasions. In both instances, lack of sufficient funding kept the projects from being actualized. What was needed was not only an enormous infusion of capital to purchase land and build the campus, but a visionary entrepreneur who would devote his life to making the dreams a reality

That is why today's project is different. Mr. C. has left no aspect of the project to chance. Even the design of the campus has been given meticulous attention to ensure optimum spiritual, ecological and academic harmony. Aaron G. Green, best known as a protege of the late Frank Lloyd Wright, was awarded the design commission after an extensive competition involving 15 architectural firms. Green's goal was to create an integrated learning environment that respected the sanctity of the natural surroundings. As if to emphasize the humility of the Academy's founder, it was decided that no campus building would extend higher than the surrounding trees.

Mr. C. did not rest on the laurels of the architecture. A great philanthropist must ensure that all aspects of his project evolve according to its guiding vision. This is why he convinced Alvin Mars, one of our great Jewish educators to become headmaster. Mr. Mars has served in all facets of Jewish academic and residential educational life, holding posts ranging from director of Camp Ramah in California to vice president for academic affairs and chief academic officer of the University of Judaism. His most recent position has been as executive vice president of the Brandeis-Bardin Institute in California, where he continued his innovative work in the field of Jewish education.

Mr. Mars intends to make the American Hebrew Academy the breeding ground of a new kind of integrated Jewish learning. "My notion is that the locus of integration is in the individual himself or herself," he told me recently. "This isn't just a high school with a dormitory. It is a total Jewish environmental experience along with a core curriculum. We will provide vehicles for kids to express all the things they are learning, so that they can no longer draw lines between when they're expressing a Jewish thought and a different one. It becomes so much a part of them that it defines them completely."

The goal is that non-Orthodox Jews will finally

have the opportunity to experience a fully integrated Jewish education. Mr. Mars refers to the inclusiveness of the Academy as "liberal pluralistic," meaning that students will receive a Jewish education but they will also be able to explore their own paths and engage Jewish texts in their own fashion through theater, art, literature and the sciences. Faculty will live on campus too; Mr. Mars has vowed to hire only dynamic teachers who are determined to engage the students instead of merely lecture them. As Mr. Mars says, "If education is a sheet of music, then we must focus not only on the notes, but on the spaces between the notes, to create the melody. So we will be teaching as much in the spaces in between the classes as in the classes themselves."

It is a new way to look at Jewish education. If it succeeds, the American Hebrew Academy will be not just another place to learn the Jewish holidays, but a preeminent academic institution to rival Exeter, Choate and Andover. Jewish parents who wish to send their children to elite boarding schools will finally have a Jewish option. The academy will complement summer camps and college programs as a foundation stone of Jewish identity building for young American Jews.

In explaining why he didn't want his name used in this article, Mr. C. told me, "I don't look for people's approval in how I run my life, and I don't do philanthropy to show off my wealth. I get my fulfillment simply knowing that I've done it. I'm fighting to reverse the tide of Jewish kids leaving the fold. If we can instill a sense of the worth of their heritage, then we will have the battle won." Mr. C. is truly a remarkable Jewish leader. He has stuck to his vision that holistic Jewish education will transform American Jewry. Moreover, in his repudiation of public accolade, he has added an aura of nobility to his enterprise that is a challenge and inspiration to us all.

Michael Steinhardt is a leading Jewish philanthropist.

Reprinted by permission of the author.

MORE INFORMATION, *Please*

By Joseph R. Rackman

The idea of school vouchers sponsored by governmental entities is gaining momentum in the U.S. to provide families an alternative to public schools, the government would give families a voucher valid for a few thousand dollars of private school tuition.

It has only been tried on a small-scale so far, in only a few locales. In no instance has a court ruled that vouchers be permitted for religious schools. Indeed, in Cleveland a court recently ruled that such a use violates the church-state constitutional barrier. Yet there are many religious leaders, Christian and Jewish, who would like to see governmental vouchers available for use at parochial schools. Such funding would greatly enhance the ability of parents to send children to Jewish day schools, as well as to Southern Baptist schools and those that would be sponsored by the followers of Louis Farrakhan.

In the secular realm, support for vouchers comes from the Republican right. According to their political philosophy, if private schools proliferate, the competition (not such a bad idea) engendered between them and public schools would (theoretically) produce a less bureaucratic school system.

In the Orthodox Jewish world, there is much support for vouchers to relieve the burden on families that dedicate inordinate percentages of their disposable income to day school tuition. Indeed, with the (wonderful) proliferation of Solomon Schechter schools, which are sponsored by the Conservative movement, support from Conservative Jews for vouchers will likely grow.

On the other side of the divide in the Jewish world are all those who believe that a strong America is good for Jews and that a strong America requires a superior public school system. There are also many Jews who are strong supporters of the rule of separation between church and state, believing that it is part of what has allowed Jews to thrive in this

particular country. Should school vouchers be made available for parochial education, it would be a significant violation of that principle.

So far, I have said nothing new, only reviewed the current state of affairs. However, there is one thing that is not well known, that is troubling me. I have had the occasion to request that one of the premier Jewish defense agencies undertake a study as to whether an increase in religious education would prove a boon or a detriment to Jews overall. I want to study the prejudices and attitudes of children who are currently graduating from parochial schools and from public schools. The comparison should be done between schools in the same zip code so that the schools being compared are composed of similarly situated students. Does religious education enhance tolerance for others or diminish it?

I am one of those who believe that the Catholic schools of today are teachers of tolerance. As far as its attitude towards Jews, the Catholic church in North America is not merely tolerant of Jews, but treats Judaism as a valid religion with an eternal covenant with God. How will graduates of Southern Baptist schools view us? I am not so sure.

I expect that there will be good news and bad news—that certain types of religious education enhance tolerance, while others, unfortunately, do not. This is important information that I want to have and that all responsible Jewish leaders should have before they advocate for or against school vouchers being used in conjunction with parochial schools.

I understand the hesitation from those on the left hand of the spectrum to entertain the idea of supporting vouchers, even if these studies were to show that tolerance in the U.S. is more likely to rise than to fall, given their interest in preserving the impregnability of the church/state barrier.

Less understandable, though, is the reaction within the Orthodox world.

I have discussed these musings with a trustee [who is also a Wexner Heritage alumna] of a well-known and extremely well-funded foundation that is devoting most of its resources towards day schools. This particular trustee

informed me that not only was she, but so were many of the other trustees of the foundation, urging that school vouchers be made available for parochial schools. And yet, she admitted, she had yet to see any data concerning the possible outcome in terms of the attitudes toward Jews on the part of the graduates of those parochial schools.

I hope she takes me up on my urging that these studies should be done. It would be especially nice if they could be done in conjunction with one of the Jewish defense agencies that so oppose school vouchers. A study sponsored by one group which is so inclined against, and another group that is so inclined to favor school vouchers would be more likely to be accurate and would have greater credibility in the Jewish community. If and when such information is disseminated it will enlighten debate on this issue.

Joseph R. Rackman is a partner in the law firm of of Squadron, Ellenoff, Plesent & Sheinfeld, LLP and the editor of the Wexner Heritage Review.

Reprinted by permission of the author.

Joseph Rackman, Esq., Editor

Published by The Wexner Heritage Foundation
551 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10022
(212) 355-6115

Comments regarding the Wexner Heritage Review may be directed to editor@wexner.org

WEXNER HERITAGE
REVIEW
WEB ISSUE NO. 15 Sivan 5760

*The holiday of **Shavuot** occurs in this month of **Sivan**, commemorating the revelation at Mt. Sinai and the creation of the covenantal relationship between God and the Jewish people. Back then, the boundary lines between Jews and non-Jews were clear. Nowadays, we must wrestle not only with the boundary lines between Jews and non-Jews, but between Jews and Jews. This month's issue explores this topic.*

I'm God *You're Not*

The first boundary line is the one separating God and humanity, a concept succinctly expressed by Rabbi Lawrence Kushner.
(Excerpted from *God was in this Place and I, I did not know.*)

Jewishness in a New Era: *Continuity, Discontinuity or Transformation?*

Wexner Summer Institute Faculty Member Irwin Kula suggests that there is no current crisis in Jewish life, at least in terms of individual Jewish identity, as he argues that the boundaries of Jewish life and identity are larger than generally thought. He admits that the ways Jewish identity are expressed have changed. "Expressions of . . Jewish identity finds new forms that are appropriate . . . in a broader human community. Kashrut, for instance, ceases to be a means of social separation of this era, and becomes for many an expression of our endeavor to create a world of social justice and environmental stability."
Rabbi Kula is President of CLAL – The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership. www.clal.org

The Battle *For Jewish Souls*

The porous nature of Jewish identity boundaries are explored in this pair of articles describing one organization that takes secular Jews and brings them to Orthodoxy and another that does the reverse. Aish HaTorah, arguably Orthodox Jewry's most successful outreach movement among disaffected Diaspora youth, is adjusting its focus—to try and draw secular Israelis closer to their religion. Hillel (no relation to the American Hillel organization serving college campuses), the small but growing organization that shepherds unhappy ultra-Orthodox Israelis toward a secular lifestyle, has been promised government funding for the first time. Both groups are convinced of the moral value of their work, yet their aims are diametrically opposed.
(*The Jerusalem Report*, February 14, 2000, www.irep.com, email: subs@jreport.co.il for subscription information)

Making Judaism *Sexy*

Shmuley Boteach, Orthodox rabbi and author of *Kosher Sex*, has gotten much press lately with his unorthodox style. His much publicized relationships with non-Jewish celebrities (such as Michael Jackson) has caused people to wonder why he spends so much time teaching Judaism to non-Jews. He answers, "To get the Jews interested in the Jewish world, you have to get the non-Jews interested. The Jews will follow what the non-Jews are doing." Exactly where his boundary lines are between Jews and non-Jews seems unclear.
(*Moment Magazine*, June 2000, www.momentmag.com)

A New Approach to *Jews-for-Jesus*

To round out this forum on Jewish/Jewish and Jewish/non-Jewish relationships, Dennis Prager gives a new slant on dealing with Jews-for-Jesus. He suggests that Jews-for-Jesus be broken into two categories– those who regard Jesus as having been the Messiah (who are not necessarily anathema) and those who regard Jesus as a divinity.
(*Moment Magazine*, June 2000, www.momentmag.com)

I'm God *You're Not*

by **Rabbi Lawrence Kushner**

from the book
"God was in this PLACE & I, I did not know"

Metaphors for Torah abound. Perhaps the most formatively potent is Torah as a total of 613 commandments, first postulated by Rabbi Simlai in the third century. Simlai, in all likelihood, never counted them. Instead he arrived at this number by adding together the number of days in the solar year (365) with the number of parts believed to be in the human body (248). There were, Simlai suggested, 365 prohibitions and 248 positive commandments. In this way the sum of the two numbers symbolically would encompass both the physical and the temporal universes. Several scholars have each taken turns at identifying precisely what was commanded. The most famous was certainly Moses Maimonides in the twelfth century. His enumeration of the "613," in *Sefer HaMitzvot* (The Book of the Commandments), became the primary source for subsequent Jewish legal tradition.

Rabbi Hamnuna, a contemporary of Simlai, questioned why the numerical equivalent for the Hebrew word Torah is not 613 but only 611? According to the numerological system of *gematria*, each Hebrew letter is assigned a number value corresponding to its place in the sequence of the alphabet. Thus, the four letters of the word *Torah*, *tav* (400), *vav* (6), *resh* (200), and *hay* (5), produce a number totaling 611. But this is two short of the total of Torah commandments according to Rabbi Simlai. If the discrepancy was fifty or even ten, there would be little concern, but to fall just two short demands an explanation. The solution permits Rabbi Hamnuna an insight that generates a modest category of research: which two?

According to the Book of Deuteronomy, "Moses commanded us a Torah." Since "Torah" equals 611, we received 611 commandments from Moses. But the other two, we heard straight from God (*mi-pi ha-gevurah*, from the Mighty Mouth itself). And those two (according to the Jewish numbering of the commandments) are the first two utterances of the decalogue: "I am the Lord, your God. . . ." and "You shall have no other gods before me. . . ." These are the primary, unmediated religious content of Sinai; all the rest is human commentary.

These first two utterances are actually mirror images of one another. "I am the Lord your God. . . ." and "You shall have no other gods before me. . . ." We realize, after further scrutiny, that they also reduce themselves to: "I'm God; you're not." That is all you need to know to construct a religion. The Holy One of Being has an intention beyond your ken; it is other than you. God's ego is not yours. In the words of the prophet Isaiah, "My plans are not your plans." Not because you don't want to do what God wants, but because you can only comprehend a tiny part of God's plan. I'm God; you're not. This is the beginning of the reconciliation between God's ego and our own.

Jewishness in a New Era:
Continuity, Discontinuity or Transformation?

by **Irwin Kula**

There are two assumptions held almost universally by Jewish continuity specialists, be they day school devotees, synagogue transformers, Israel experience enthusiasts, spiritual renewal champions, or denominational loyalists.

The first assumption is that there is a terrible crisis in American Jewish life, an erosion of Jewish identity. This is characterized by some, in the most extreme and offensive way, as another Holocaust, as if the free choices made by some Jews to live in ways that other Jews regard as insufficiently Jewish could be equated with the deaths of those who were murdered because they were Jewish. Most others describe this erosion of identity in a less inflammatory way as assimilation.

The second assumption held almost universally by the players in the new Jewish continuity industry is that there is a solution to the problem. While they disagree among themselves as to how this "terrible erosion in Jewish life" is to be corrected, each presumes to know what needs to be preserved from the inherited tradition, and how it ought to be transmitted programmatically or institutionally.

For these continuity "experts," preservation generally entails transmitting some predetermined "essence" of Judaism or ostensibly "core" Jewish experience to the "assimilated"--an essence or core that has been decided upon by rabbis, educators and major philanthropists. The continuity crisis is thus understood as a failure to transmit this core or essence of Judaism, a failure that can be corrected if more money is channeled into the right kinds of programs and institutions. To this end, in recent years we have witnessed a major increase in the funds made available to the kinds of programs (e.g., adult education, Israel experience) and institutions (e.g., synagogues, day schools, etc.) that are supposed to be capable of instilling strong Jewish identities.

With some justification, this redirection of communal resources has been touted as a revolution in Jewish life. But all the fanfare must not obscure the fact that this redirection of resources is hardly radical in a qualitative sense. Most of the new money is being invested in programs and institutions that rely on methods and approaches that have long been familiar.

Interestingly, the one thing that almost never takes place in the Jewish community"s efforts to get a handle on the continuity "problem" is an open-ended conversation between those on the "inside" of the Jewish community and those the insiders have defined as "assimilated" and in "need" of outreach. Conversations between these two groups would not only help the "insiders" to better understand the real needs of the "assimilated" but would also help them to understand the various ways in which the latter experience and think about their Jewish identities.

Over the past few years, I have been engaged in just these kinds of conversations. In the process, I have discovered that it may well be that these two assumptions so central to the Jewish continuity industry are not only false but actually undermine our collective efforts to build rich Jewish identities and compelling communities in an era of great change and transition.

These conversations suggest the following:

What if there actually is no crisis in Jewish life, at least in terms of individual Jewish identity? After all, according to a recent study by the American Jewish Committee, more than 90 percent of Jews told researchers that they are proud to be Jewish. And yet, at the same time, the AJC survey (1998) found that less than a third of all Jews felt it was important to belong to a Jewish organization, to participate in synagogue services or to travel to Israel. This seems to indicate that the continuity problem may be bound up not so much with the dissolution of individual Jewish identity, as with the inability of so many existing Jewish practices and institutions--institutions and practices created in another era--to connect with and mobilize that pride which most Jews continue to feel today no matter how assimilated they happen to be. Perhaps, what the continuity industry depicts as a weakening of Jewish identity manifests not its attenuation as much as a change in its modes of expression. And this change corresponds to the changes in the outward and inward circumstances of Jewish life.

One might describe these changes as the normalization of the Jewish condition. If this is correct, the behavioral changes that are usually cited as evidence of the "erosion" of Jewish life must be reinterpreted as evidence of the fact that Jews are living in a context far different from the one in which the behavioral norms that have eroded were socially viable. In a different place and time, when Jews were still separated from the wider society by law, social prejudice and oppression, a range of boundary-maintaining Jewish behaviors made sense, sociologically and pragmatically. But as Jews have increasingly come to experience themselves as fully at home and integrated in America, it is not surprising that behaviors experienced by most Jews as socially marginalizing have lost their power and declined.

When statisticians measure for these behaviors--as if these behaviors alone were to be equated with the essence of Jewishness--they find them in decline and declare that we are in the midst of a full-blown continuity crisis. To measure the vitality of Jewish life in the present age by the persistence of these traditional behaviors is as myopic today as it would have been to measure the strength of Jewish identity 200 years after the destruction of the Second Temple by the persistence of animal sacrifice (or belief in its being irreplaceable). Had the statisticians of that era, and the institutions employing them, focused their attention upon the identity markers of Temple Judaism, there is little doubt what their conclusion would have been: "Sacrifice, and the belief in its continued importance, are way down," they would have announced, "thus Jewish identity and continuity are fast eroding." Of course, by framing their research agenda in this way, the statisticians would have missed the most important phenomenon of the age: the rise of Rabbinic Judaism, a Judaism built upon a very different set of behaviors and practices.

In a more pernicious and less accepting social context than the present, the rejection by individual Jews of practices that marked them as different and made them objects of prejudice and discrimination could be legitimately understood as born of the individual"s desire to shed the burden of being outwardly identified as a Jew. But the "assimilation" of the present era ought to be understood as something else entirely, not as a flight from Jewishness but as its healthy normalization in an era of genuine acceptance of Jews as Jews. This normalization is in fact the necessary condition for the full realization of Jewish consciousness.

Normalization invites greater responsibility and initiative and a much wider framework in which to live out and express the full meaning of our individual Jewish identities. Normalization prevents Judaism from being defined exclusively as a culture of learning and prayer and expands the range of Jewish behavior beyond the circumscribed borders of home and synagogue. The culture of learning and prayer and symbolic holy time (though still an important way to express Jewishness) is simply no longer the exclusive defining framework of Jewish identity.

In this new era of normalization, Jews do not simply become like everyone else. Rather, the expression of their Jewish identities finds new forms that are appropriate to their full and equal participation in a broader human community. Kashrut, for instance, ceases to be a means of social separation in this era, and becomes for many an expression of our endeavor to create a world of social justice and environmental sustainability. Tzedakah is similarly transformed in this era of normalization, as Jewish philanthropic concern expands to encompass the needs not of Jews alone but of all whose basic human needs are unmet. This increase in tzedakah to charities outside of the Jewish world may appear as a net decrease (or as "erosion") if one narrowly equates tzedakah with gifts to Jewish organizations. But in an era of Jewish social acceptance and affluence, this decrease ought to be understood not as indicative of a weakening of Jewish identity but as a sign of its ongoing and healthy transformation.

If in fact what has been dubbed the continuity crisis is rather a sign that Jewishness is now finding new forms of expression in a new social context, then the assumption that any one of us knows exactly what it is that needs to be preserved from the past becomes problematic. A new context inevitably will demand far-reaching changes in the very nature of Jewishness and its institutional expressions. In this respect,

our time is like the continuity crisis in Jewish life that followed the destruction of the Temple in the first century c.e. That crisis compelled the thorough re-imagining of Jewishness in both its individual and institutional expressions, the re-imagining that we know today as "Rabbinic Judaism."

The tacit assumption of continuity specialists, especially within the various denominations, is that the Jews whom they are trying to engage are not expressing their Jewishness according to the continuity specialists" own definition of normative Jewish behavior. Statutory prayer, extensive Talmud study, and zealous ritual observance--all of these behaviors are indeed important and historically (at least during some periods of Jewish history) they were normative expressions of Jewishness. But it may well be that these long established forms of Jewishness, even if upgraded, are too circumscribed for this new era in Jewish history. Perhaps we need to create a pluralist and democratic environment of experimentation that will foster the emergence of new expressions of Jewishness and new kinds of Jewish community that are more attuned to the era in which we live.

The Battle *For Jewish Souls*

Aish HaTorah, arguably Orthodox Jewry's most successful outreach movement among disaffected Diaspora youth, is adjusting its focus-to try and draw secular Israelis closer to their religion. Hillel, the small but growing organization that shepherds unhappy ultra-Orthodox Israelis toward a secular lifestyle, has been promised government funding for the first time. Both groups are convinced of the moral value of their work, yet their aims are diametrically opposed.

Aish HaTorah

***by* Erik Schechter**

In a spartan third-floor classroom at the Aish HaTorah yeshivah overlooking the Western Wall, Rabbi Eliyahu Ellis, 40, lanky and bearded, is teasing a definition of a "spiritual experience" out of his four, initially puzzled, students: a New York jock in his late teens; a twenty-something Belgian with hair down to his shoulders; an earnest Londoner in his late fifties; and a stout thirtyish New York divorcé.

"Where might such an experience be sparked?" Ellis asks.

There's a pause. Then the Belgian ventures, "Nature? I feel spiritual when I'm walking in the woods."

The rabbi, pleased, reaches for his marker and scribbles "nature" on a pale-gray board.

Now Ellis's gaze falls upon the jock, who seems preoccupied with a cup of pretzel bits. The delay is longer this time. Eventually, appropriately, he suggests, "Physical exertion-getting somewhere."

"Right," says Ellis brightly, "reaching a goal!" He picks up the marker again.

Within 10 minutes, Ellis has a dozen ideas on the board, ranging from "dreams," to "an inspirational idea," to "coincidence," to "the death of a loved one." "Sorry for making you work so hard," he apologizes. The students grin, pleased with themselves.

Now Ellis asks them to word-associate with their list: When they think of these settings, and their potential for a spiritual experience, what feelings are generated? The answers come more quickly now: A sense of unity with the universe; power; insight; calmness; awe . . . .

Terrific, the rabbi enthuses, telling them to listen carefully to what they're saying. "You're giving the traditional Jewish definitions of God. He's omniscient, omnipotent, infinite." Spiritual experiences, he drives on, "represent our limited perception of God's interaction with this world."

The students look impressed, a little wowed. The jock has stopped chomping the pretzels.

The next step, says Ellis, is to find the way to plug into that interaction to maximize it. And how do we do that. "Well one way is by following the Torah, which offers access to truths that our own minds couldn't lead us to."

Ellis's is a gentle, effective approach, an easily digestible route toward Orthodoxy that contrasts sharply with traditional yeshivah Talmud study-and with outreach efforts, like Chabad's, that want recruits to observe rituals right away and ask questions later.

And that approach, adopted throughout Aish Hatorah's English-speaking outreach program-and bolstered by a polished, celebrity-driven fundraising operation-has helped the yeshivah grow from a rinky-dink institution into a world-renowned magnet for young Jews seeking answers about their heritage. A quarter of a century after it was established, Aish HaTorah (The Torah's Fire) is the moderate face of *the ba'al tshuvah* (newly Orthodox) movement, wielding an annual budget of $20 million, averaging 100,000 hits a month on its website, with 22 branches worldwide, and educational programs in 100 cities.

Founded by American-born Rabbi Noah Weinberg, Aish HaTorah is now expanding its Jerusalem headquarters from the impressive four-storey building constructed in 1996, into a six-floor facility, complete with a theater for screening a 20-

minute film on Judaism that its fundraising brochure promises will become "a powerful and moving tourist attraction."

Most significantly, it is also now setting its sights beyond Diaspora Jewry-targeting Israelis. Previously, its Jerusalem efforts were directed primarily at Jewish visitors from overseas, and have proved particularly attractive to those from Conservative and Reform backgrounds. Now it has opened Hebrew-speaking centers in Ramat Gan and Petah Tikvah, and is completing plans for more, in Tel Aviv and Herzliyah, staffed by Orthodox Israelis schooled in Aish HaTorah methodology.

But success, inevitably, attracts criticism. And Aish HaTorah is under fire from several directions: for employing pseudo-scientific arguments-including a reliance on the devalued Bible Codes-to "prove" the divine origin of the Torah; for being less open-minded and pluralistic than it would have people believe; and for what other institutions label as a slapdash approach to teaching Judaism, delivered by teachers who may not have the deepest knowledge.

Weinberg and his colleagues shrug off must of the criticism as misplaced, even vindictive. On the question of superficiality, however, Aish HaTorah's Israel fundraising director Rabbi Ephraim Shore pleads guilty. "Ideally, we would like to send out (to administer courses worldwide) the guys who have 10 years of Talmud under their belt," he allows disarmingly. "But there aren't enough of them, and we do have doctors and lawyers who can give valuable classes. We feel that the continuity of the Jewish people cannot wait."

For all the hoopla that surrounds it, Aish HaTorah is tiny at its core-the Jerusalem yeshivah has just 60 full-time students (all male, although women do attend some programs), 20 of whom are on the path to ordination, and 30 full-time educators. As such, it receives only five percent of the Aish budget.

Around this dedicated nucleus run broader, looser bands of backpackers, college graduates and professionals in their thousands who attend programs ranging, in length, from a few days to a year and, in location, from San Antonio to Moscow.

Wealthier individuals study Torah in more exclusive sessions, sometimes one-on-one at an Aish HaTorah branch, or even in their own offices. Many of them, in turn, become donors. Late last year, Len Leader, president of America Online Investments, began studying with an Aish rabbi, focusing, he says, on Torah's applications to real life. The lessons "have given me a deeper appreciation of my religion," he says, adding that he now intends to contribute financially to Aish HaTorah.

Finally, the outer ring of the system comprises celebrities and business leaders-many of them secular, some not Jewish-whose contact with Aish HaTorah is limited to awards ceremonies, fund-raising dinners or chartered travel "missions" to Israel. Such saliently secular Israeli prime ministers as Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres and Benjamin Netanyahu, for instance, have participated in Aish's Jerusalem Fellowships program-which sees Diaspora youngsters brought to meet with political leaders across the spectrum. Noami Chazan, from the left-wing Meretz party, has also participated in this program. "They're too right-wing and narrow-minded," she says, "and I go there to tell them that."

Aish HaTorah branches host a total of 22 fund-raising dinners each year, where attendees pay from $75 to $500 a plate. Networking with studio executives and others through its prominent Los Angeles branch, the yeshivah has been able to attract the likes of Kirk Douglas, Larry King, Jason Alexander, Noah Wyle, Suzanne Sommers, Fran Drescher and Jeffrey Katzenberg. Rather than make an outright donation, these stars "lend their names" to an event, drawing in the donors.

And celebrities are not the only magnets. A 50th Anniversary of Israel "Tribute Mission," culminating in an awards evening at the Knesset on August 27, 1998, was attended by Margaret Thatcher (her expenses covered by Aish) and Jeane Kirkpatrck, and garnered testimonials from Bill Clinton, Al Gore, Mikhail Gorbachev and Crown Prince Hassan of Jordan.

Eighty percent of Aish's funding, says Shore, comes from 20 percent of the donors-one or two really big fish in each city, each donating around $25,000 in a small city, six figures in a big one. "The rest, donations of $100 to $200, comes from students and young professionals."

Weinberg's success was not achieved overnight. In fact, Aish HaTorah was the fifth yeshivah he founded after immigrating from New York in 1953. The first three collapsed in debt. The fourth, Ohr Somayach-perhaps the only *ba 'al tshuvah* yeshivah that rivals Aish HaTorah in popularity-was established in 1972 and is thriving. But Weinberg, square-bearded and jolly, left it within two years because he felt it wasn't aggressive enough in fighting for the survival of the Jewish people. "I wanted to recruit young people," says the rabbi, 70, "to stem the hemorrhage of assimilation."

To accomplish that, to give non-Orthodox Jews a compelling reason to embrace the religion, Aish HaTorah says it sets out to steer its students along a course of reasoning, rather than urge them to take a leap of blind faith. In lectures, for example, teachers seek to demonstrate that the Jews' survival, through two millennia of dispersion, defies conventional historical flux but is supported by scriptural prophecies. Teachers cite boldly specific predictions from the Torah-for example, the claim in Exodus 34:24 that the Land of Israel will never be harmed while its inhabitants are celebrating one of the three annual pilgrimage festivals. No mortal author, the argument runs, could have risked such an assertion. "We're teaching wisdom," says Weinberg.

Given that desire to stress supporting evidence of the Torah's divinity, it is not surprising that Aish HaTorah seized on the Bible Codes-the purported "discovery" of prophetic allusions hidden in code from in the text of Genesis-and made it a key element in its two-day Discovery Program, a popular outreach effort that draws in people off the street. What is surprising, however, is that this focus on the Bible Codes is

still being maintained, even though the statistical research that produced the codes is being increasingly discredited. "We're not idiots," says Nisan Medrez, 31, the tall affable rabbi who runs Discovery. "If there's undeniable proof that the codes are wrong, we'll stop teaching them. But all our opponents do is say that we're a bunch of liars."

Hardly, counters Australian statistician Brendan McKay, stating flatly that the codes are a hoax. In a paper published last summer in Statistical Science, the same journal that had publicized the Bible Codes in 1994, McKay and colleagues used a similar methodology to "find" codes, too, in Tolstoy's War and Peace.

Another central player in Discovery, MIT physics doctorate Gerald Schroeder, invokes the Theory of Relativity to reconcile the Bible's reference to mere days of creation with the scientists' multi-billion-year timetable. The apparent contradiction, he claims, stems from a distorted perception of time as the universe expands. According to Schroeder, therefore, the first five and a half days of Creation can be measured as having lasted both 132 hours *and* 15 billion years-depending on whether one counts "forward," from the Big Bang, or "backward" from the present.

"Pure baloney," scoffs Mark Parekh, emeritus professor of physics at California State University, Fullerton. By positing an objective "cosmic clock" that began ticking when matter first formed, Parekh says, Schroeder's argument actually undermines the notion of time's relativity.

Such criticisms notwithstanding, Discovery is a palpable hit. The Jerusalem seminar every other Sunday and Monday draws in about 15 people in the winter, 30 in the summer. And of every 10 who come, says an Aish HaTorah rabbinical student, three or four go on to other classes.

Students at one recent such seminar, at which Schroeder taught and the Bible Codes featured, came away impressed. "I was skeptical," said a young actuary from Australia. "But it was overwhelming. It has opened whole new dimensions to me." "I don't know about all the code stuff," added Belynda Cohen, 24, from Zimbabwe, who said her non-Orthodox parents were supporting her new pursuit of Jewish education. "But I will definitely take more classes."

Josh Kulp, director of Jerusalem's Conservative Yeshiva, is scathing. "We don't take in people off the street, and we don't have a Discovery program that will convince you, in a few days, to be an observant Jew," he says dismissively. "Sure, they'll accept you at Aish HaTorah if you don't observe any of the commandments. But just try saying 'I want to pray in an egalitarian *minyan*." See where that gets you!"

But Adam Jacobs, 28, a Brandeis graduate who now learns full-time at Aish, counters with the tale of a Jewish-born Moslem who studied at Aish, and was given permission to pray five times a day toward Mecca.

Weinberg confirms this story, and he's adamant about the open-mindedness. "We're not trying to brainwash people," he asserts. "We don't say you have to be religious to be happy. If you're an atheist, we'll teach you to be a happy atheist."

Still, he did not set up the world's hippest Orthodox yeshivah to make atheists happy. As he boasted in the Summer 1998 issue of Tradition, an American Orthodox journal, "Give us any secular professional for three months of study, and we'll turn him around to our side. If he's a university professor, so much the better. The more intellectual he is, the easier the job!"

HILLEL

***by* Adina Kay**

On the outside, with his unruly yellow-brown beard, thick glasses, black hat, long black coat and trousers tucked into socks, Menahem looks like a typical ultra-Orthodox yeshivah student. But on the inside, he says, smiling his lopsided smile, "I'm secular. This coat, this hat-that's my costume." He taps his chest: "In here I've made the switch."

Menahem (not his real name) is a yotze-a leaver, heading out of ultra-Orthodoxy into secular society. It's a radical lifestyle shift, and Menahem, 24, has not informed his family and is still a few months away from adjusting his external appearance to match his internal orientation. His eyes dart fearfully across the Jerusalem hotel lobby, searching for people who might recognize him; in the past, would-be *yotzim* have been beaten up by ultra-Orthodox zealots.

Menahem is here to see Avi, his guide into the non-Orthodox world. Six months ago, he sent a message on the Internet to an organization called Hillel, which maintains a site on the Web for ultra-Orthodox Jews desperate to break out of their cloistered framework. (The site's motto: "The right to ask.") Avi was assigned to steer him through the transformation.

There are no figures for how many ultra-Orthodox Jews leave their community each year, just as there are no figures for how many secular Israelis travel in the other direction. But most experts believe the trend toward Orthodoxy is far stronger than the trend away from it, in part because there are a plethora of ultra-Orthodox institutions determinedly wooing non-Orthodox Israelis. Set up eight years ago by members of Kibbutz Ein Shemer, Hillel is a quiet, tiny counterbalance; through its activities in 1999, 250 young people crossed the line.

Staffed by 100 volunteers, half of them professionals, with only one paid worker, Hillel is now expanding its educational and other operations. And it has won a commitment from Education Minister Yossi Sarid, whose anti-clerical Meretz party draws most of its support from secular Israelis, to fund live-in colleges for *yotzim*. "Sarid has promised to give us half of our current budget of about $100,000," says Hillel's chief administrator, who declines to be named.

Of all the calls for help received from people like Menahem-via hot lines in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv as well as via e-mail-about one in four makes the shift out of ultra-Orthodoxy. "Compared to the numbers turning to religion via the ultra-Orthodox, we are very small," says Avi, 31, a Jerusalem lawyer and criminologist. "But this is not a competition. This is a non-profit group trying to better society by helping troubled young people."

Avi, who has volunteered at Hillel for 18 months, says that 19 out of 20 calls are from men, mostly in their late teens. Stuttering and insecure, and insisting on anonymity, their first words, he says, are almost always: "How can you help me?" In most cases, the caller is going through a personal crisis and has no one else to talk to, but is ultimately not so torn as to bolt the ultra-Orthodox world altogether.

Says Avi: "First, we try to establish exactly why a person is calling. Have they had a genuine loss of faith? Do they seriously want to leave their community? Or is something else troubling them: Conflict with parents, stress related to the yeshivah, even sexual urges? We refer some calls to professionals, social workers, whoever is appropriate. We don't slam the phone down on anyone, but neither do we want to sink our hooks into people who are deeply distressed. Unlike those ultra-Orthodox recruiters who roam the streets looking for depressed youngsters, and try to comfort them with the ways of the Torah, we are not missionaries, and we understand that our way is not for everyone."

Breaking out of the closed world of ultra-Orthodoxy is a profoundly traumatic experience. Apart from the spiritual break, there are also family and social crises to cope with, not to mention material considerations. One Rehovot man in his early 20s who made the shift through Hillel says that his brothers, furious at the imminent betrayal, beat him up daily for months, that his parents no longer talk to him, that former friends accuse him of shaming them, his family and his yeshivah. Without Hillel, he says, he would have had nothing to fall back on-nowhere to live, no way to move forward.

In such a climate, the Hillel volunteers work slowly and painstakingly with their charges. Phone calls lead to meetings, which lead in turn to efforts to locate a kind of foster home-a non-ultra-Orthodox family willing to take in the youngster for anything from a few months to a year or more, providing support and affection.

When that host family is lined up, the *yotze*-still outwardly ultra-Orthodox-is invited to visit. If the match is a good one, the *yotze* moves in, shedding the former lifestyle, adopting a new one.

And once that transition has been made, says Dr. Ami Dolev, who chairs Hillel's board, various educational programs kick in: There are weekend seminars, focusing on subjects like biology, basic math, literature, the arts-and other areas left out of the ultra-Orthodox curriculum. "They have no knowledge of geography, social studies or basic economic terms," says Dolev, a Hebrew University biochemist and a self-professed "UCLA at Berkeley liberal." "Israeli history? Forget it." *Yotzim* are invited to concerts and plays. Where necessary, Hillel arranges for them to be drafted, and organizes workshops to prepare them for service. It even offers classes on shopping and cooking, balancing a checkbook and job-hunting.

All of this costs money. Hillel's inception in 1991 was entirely paid for by the New Israel Fund, which backs liberal programs in Israel, and continues to allocate $25,000 a year to Hillel. Lately, though, with its educational agenda expanding, it has begun raising money from private donors, mainly in the U.S. but also in Israel.

Now Dolev is determined to ensure that Sarid honors his commitment to provide Education Ministry funding. After all, he argues, the government effectively funds the newly-religious movement, "by enabling full-time state-supported study in the yeshivot. For years the Ministry of Education has been wearing a yarmulke."

Avraham Ravitz, of the ultra-Orthodox United Torah Judaism party, however, is strongly opposing any allocation of funds. "Hillel's work is anti-educational," he fumes. "They're taking emotionally distressed young adults and instead of encouraging them to find solace in their homes, they draw them away."

Hillel also plans to begin reaching out to disaffected ultra-Orthodox youth in the U.S. "I was walking in Washington Square Park in Manhattan recently," Dolev says, "and I spotted two young men wearing jeans, no kippot, but with their *peyot* tucked behind their ears. I stopped to speak with them and, sure enough, they had gotten into the habit of leaving their yeshivot at night, wandering the streets, looking for some breathing space. Many wind up in terrible situations-involved with drugs, or taken advantage of physically. And yet, there is no organization like Hillel willing to help them."

Hillel is anxious that it be perceived not as anti-Orthodox but rather as a humanitarian organization aiming to prevent the *yotzim* from ending up on the street. It urges its "clients" to maintain a relationship with their family whenever possible, and holds group Passover seders and meals on other festivals. Some of its volunteers, and some of the host families are Orthodox. The difference, says Dolev, is that they leave it to the *yotzim* to decide how Orthodox they want to be, rather than imposing a lifestyle.

Nevertheless, Hillel has had to move its Jerusalem HQ three times in two years because of break-ins that it blames on ultra-Orthodox extremists, and threats both on the telephone and daubed on the walls. Dolev says there is even a faux-Hillel, a body that tracks down *yotzim*, purports to be sympathetic, but acts to bring them back into the ultra-Orthodox fold.

Hillel barely advertises, generally relying on word-of-mouth. Menahem came across its Website when surfing on the computer his father used for business. "My name is Menahem," read his initial message. "Please get back to me."

"We are creating new lives for youngsters," says Dolev, "who are coming out of the darkness of the ultra-Orthodox

community. When we hear about places like Iran or Afghanistan, where there is absolutely no freedom of choice, we are alarmed. But the truth is, it happens right here, in Me'ah She'arim and B'nei Brak."

Reprinted by permission of the *Jerusalem Report*.

Making Judaism *Sexy*

by **Alexandra J. Wall**

For once, Rabbi Shmuley Boteach is at a loss for words.

A Time magazine reporter has called on the Jewish guru of sex and relationships to ask what advice he would offer Monica Lewinsky, who is having trouble meeting men.

"What would you tell her?" Shmuley asks me.

Eventually, he comes up with: "She should not be afraid to be vulnerable." And she should look to date in communities where people have never heard of her, like Hasidic Borough Park and Papua, New Guinea.

Put yourself out there, and seek a new constituency. For those familiar with Shmuley and his doctrine, those twin pillars of advice might sound familiar: It's the same path Shmuley himself has followed on his meteoric rise to celebrity. Shmuley has sought publicity wherever he can find it-*Larry King Live, Good Morning America*, and the *Howard Stern Show*, for starters. And the Orthodox rabbi has looked to spread his message, most shockingly, among non-Jews-simply in the hope that if gentiles find Judaism more appealing, more Jews will too. So much has been written about Shmuley, the author of *Kosher Sex* and the self-proclaimed love prophet, that it's worth stepping back and asking why, exactly, Shmuley seems to have struck such a nerve. "More is at work here than the influence of *Seinfeld* and the ascendancy of bagels over doughnuts," New York magazine wrote in a February cover story. What is at work, Shmuley hopes, is a shift in the way Judaism is presented to the world. At times Shmuley sounds less like a rabbi and more like a marketing director trying to rejuvenate a 5,000-year-old product. "From the age of 14, I wanted to be a global exponent of Judaism," Shmuley says. It's easy to imagine the CEO of Nike saying the same thing about tennis shoes.

After 11 years in Great Britain, Shmuley Boteach (bo-TAY-ach), now 33, has arrived in New York City. And he's brought with him the L'Chaim Society, a Jewish organization he founded at Oxford University.

Since arriving less than a year ago, he has redefined the meaning of high-profile rabbi. He made headlines by taking pop star Michael Jackson to synagogue; he appeared on Stern's shock jock radio show, and he debated self-help guru Deepak Chopra. *Kosher Sex*, his tenth book, has sold 200,000 copies worldwide, was a best-seller in England, and has been translated into several languages, including German and Dutch. His newest book, *Dating Secrets of the Ten Commandments*, offers sex and relationship advice based on the highest precepts of Judaism: "According to Talmudic legend," Shmuley writes, even "the Almighty did quite a bit of 'dating' before He settled down into a loving relationship with the Jews." And he's already working on a new project, *Kosher Emotions*.

Shmuley (once you get to know him, it's impossible to refer to him as anything else) grew up in Los Angeles. His parents divorced when he was eight, and his mother took him and his siblings to Miami. A melancholy child who continually hoped his parents would reunite, he is on a mission to help everyone find his or her *bashert* (fated one, soul mate), and have a happy marriage.

But Shmuley is more than just a relationship guru. He wants to do no less than "mainstream Judaism." He says Jews have marginalized their religion and accepted "peripheral spiritual status" in world culture. If Buddhists can believe in the universality of their message, he says, so can Jews. "The fact is that the Jewish people made phenomenal contributions to the ancient world. They gave the world the Sabbath, the idea of charity, the Messiah, and the belief in one God." These concepts are relevant today, he says, and should be accessible to Jews and non-Jews alike. But Shmuley says emphatically: "I'm not converting anyone to Judaism." Rather, by showing non-Jews the virtue of Jewish values and tradition, Shmuley hopes to generate excitement among Jews. If he can get Judaism out there in the popular culture, even if he has to appear with raunchy shock jocks to do it, then non-Jews will get interested in what Judaism has to offer. "To get the Jews interested in the Jewish world, you have to get the non-Jews interested," he says. "The Jews will follow what the non-Jews are doing." Mainstreaming is thus not an abstract concept, and it's not proselytizing. "If we could show that Judaism has mainstream appeal, we could bring back thousands of young Jews," he says. "Why isn't there one Jewish figure as big as the Dalai Lama? Why, when the Lubavitcher Rebbe was alive, wasn't he as big as the Dalai Lama? Because he had a black hat and a beard? The Dalai Lama walks around in sheets!"

"Mainstreaming Judaism" was what Shmuley tried to do at Oxford. "I wanted non-Jews to come along and drink from the fountain of Judaism," he says. "And it worked" He engaged high-profile speakers, including Brazilian soccer star Diego Maradona, pop singer Boy George, and former Russian prime minister Mikhail Gorbachev. The L'Chaim Society eventually became the second largest student group on campus, with lectures drawing as many as 2,000 students.

"I love the Jewish people with all my heart and soul," he says. "I love my Judaism with all my heart and soul." Unfortunately, he says, there are not too many Jews out there

who feel the same way, and it's largely because today's rabbis are falling down on the job. Many Jews think being Jewish is boring, and Shmuley wants to change that. "With the limited intellectual faculties available to me," he says, "I'm trying to reinvigorate this nation."

Shmuley often makes reference to the Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the spiritual leader of the Lubavitch movement (some believed he was the Messiah), who died in 1994. "I owe all my Jewish inspiration to the Lubavitcher Rebbe," Shmuley says. "I am nothing without his memory, and . . . his teachings." It goes without saying that Shmuley is strictly Orthodox (he keeps kosher and keeps the Sabbath). But he wasn't born a Chabadnick. He was raised modern Orthodox-his father is Persian, his mother Ashkenazi-and when he told his parents (after attending a Lubavitch summer camp) that he wanted to be a rabbi, they were not thrilled. He eventually decided to enter a Lubavtch yeshiva. His siblings are in the jewelry business.

Lubavitch sent him to Oxford to be its *shaliach* (emissary) there in 1988, days after his 22nd birthday, and he quickly carved out a niche for himself as an expert on relationships. He talked about relationships, he says, because that's what drew big crowds. "If I gave a seminar on the *parsha* (Torah portion) of the week, I got 20 students," he says. "If I gave one about relationships, I got 200 students."

But the large number of non-Jews at his events disturbed Lubavitch leaders, who aim to provide outreach for Jews-period. One Lubavitcher told me that if a Jewish student goes to the Chabad House with a non-Jewish boyfriend or girlfriend, the emissary should try to convince her or him to end the relationship. Shmuley's critics say that by attracting so many non-Jews he encouraged intermarriage. Shmuley disagrees. He does not condone intermarriage. He says that if anything, teaching non-Jews about Judaism caused them to break off relationships with their Jewish partners-simply because of their newfound respect for Judaism. To Shmuley's mind, as convoluted as this may sound, inviting inter-dating couples to Jewish events was a surefire way to get the non-Jew to come to his or her senses.

The tension between Shmuley and the Lubavitch leaders worsened when Cory Booker, an African American Rhodes scholar and practicing Baptist (now a councilman in Newark, NJ), became L'Chaim president. The breaking point, according to the British press, was when Shmuley invited Yitzhak Rabin to speak at Oxford in 1994 (Rabin's stance on giving up land for peace was anathema to the Lubavitcher Rebbe). But according to one Lubavitcher, the Rabin story was planted by Shmuley to deflect attention from the real issues: his outreach to non-Jews and his outlandish tactics, which put him beyond the Lubavitch pale. Lubavitch severed its ties and withdrew all funding (Lubavitchers generally provide seed money to their emissaries around the world; in Shmuley's case, Chabad was still funding him at the time of the rift). But by then, Shmuley no longer needed them. His events were so popular that he was easily able to raise money on his own. He continued running the L'Chaim Society in Oxford and opened branches in London and Cambridge. He moved to London in 1998, and held a pulpit until *Kosher Sex* came out the following year, when he was banned from British Orthodox synagogues (causing the *Daily Telegraph* to dub him the "missionary who lost his position").

To what can we attribute Shmuley's success at Oxford? Arash Farin, who is of Iranian-Jewish descent, began attending L'Chaim Society events at Oxford in 1996. He says non-Jews came to the events not despite the deep Jewish overtones, but because of them. Shmuley "makes learning Judaism fun," says Farin, 23, an investment banker and the current L'Chaim Society president. "He aims to take the most distant and anachronistic Jewish concepts and relate them to the modern-day problems people face." According to Farin, Shmuley is able to "bridge the gap" between the Jewish texts and people's lives.

The L'Chaim Society, now located in midtown Manhattan, serves as Shmuley's de facto pulpit and also pays his salary (Shmuley won't say how much). The money comes from private donations. The organization arranges lectures and gives Shmuley an office to work out of. Basically, the L'Chaim Society gives Shmuley a platform to do everything a rabbi does except lead services. He writes essays that he distributes via e-mail to his former students at Oxford, schedules appearances and lectures by invited guests (the first was Chopra), and provides dating advice to complete strangers via e-mail. He recently settled in Englewood, NJ, and he regularly opens his home for *Shabbos* meals. Get to know him, and if he likes you, it will only be a matter of time before he invites you over.

Shmuley wants desperately to be liked. He wants you to like him, too. But one gets the sense that the L'Chaim Society is still trying to figure out its mission. In Oxford, its Shabbat dinners were the place to be on Friday night. In New York, there are almost as many Jewish outreach organizations as Chinese takeouts, and the society will need its own shtick if it is to make a unique contribution.

The Jews Shmuley caters to are mostly involved but not Orthodox. And in New York he has continued attracting non-Jews. Yusef Kassim, 23, an African American and practicing Baptist, finds meaning in the universal aspects of Shmuley's message. "So much of it is so basic, like be good to people," Kassim says. "I think he just wants to help people. He's experienced a lot of pain"-by that he means Shmuley's parents' divorce-"And I would like to help him help his people." Kassim, Shmuley might say, is "Exhibit A" in his quest to go global, Jewishly. Presumably, as Jews see more people like Booker and Kassim-not to mention the King of Pop- getting involved, more of them will start exploring Judaism, too.

Shmuley provides nearly unrestricted access to journalists. I begin one Friday by accompanying him to a televised debate about pornography, and end by sitting around the Shabbos table with his wife and six children. Shmuley distrusts the media, but he has a publicist at the PR firm of Howard Rubenstein, and he assiduously courts it. Critics question whether Shmuley is promoting Judaism or simply himself. "What else is there to life besides the sincere search for celebrity and recognition," he writes in *Kosher Sex*, "and how else will I attain these noble and lofty goals if I don't

write about sex?" He says he most admires humility; he also says, "I'm the materialist and egotist in the family." He brings up his need for adulation constantly, as if acknowledging his own insecurities justifies the choices that so many have called into question. Take, for example, his allowing *Playboy* to publish an excerpt of *Kosher Sex*. "Where was I supposed to publish it to reach those who could use it most?" he quips. "In the shul bulletin?"

He is Hasidic in manner (always answering "How are you?" with the standard "Thank God") but not in dress (he wears a yarmulke and regular suits, not necessarily black, and no hat). And his behavior and ideas can be decidedly unorthodox. He shakes hands with women. He is accepting of gays despite Orthodox doctrine that views homosexuality as a sin. "Being gay is a sin like driving on Shabbat is a sin," he says, implying that he would condemn someone for neither. He calls himself the love prophet. He claims to hate the Internet, yet he has launched a dating service Web site, www.loveprophet.com, that he hopes will be a moneymaking venture (there will be a membership fee), and he was recently named matchmaker in chief of matchnet.com-one of the largest on-line dating sites. He won the *Times of London*-sponsored "Preacher of the Year" contest last year with the highest score ever, and yet he remains banned from preaching in British synagogues.

He is as comfortable quoting Jesus ("It's more difficult for the rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle") as he is Maimonides ("Seek the truth, regardless of its source"). Listen to him for awhile, and you'll hear him make references to Freud, Aristotle, Hegel, Soloveitchik, and Kurt Cobain. He'll invoke a quote from the great Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai to discuss why you shouldn't engage in a one-night stand. He is a short man (5 foot 5)-he says "vertically challenged"-with manic energy. He only sleeps about four hours a night. He is constantly on his cell phone, once checking to see who was calling as he mounted a dais for a lecture. He is always late. He can be rude and abrupt, but he is also disarmingly funny, always quick with a comeback. Hang around long enough after one of his speaking engagements, and he'll ask you if you want to grab a bite to eat.

He is a master of self-deprecation, and he deliberately emphasizes his flaws-both in his books and in person-in the belief that this will make people more willing to overlook them. And he has no patience for those who criticize his brash style. "A rabbi's supposed to be pious and meek and humble, and I'm ambitious," he says. "That's not allowed. [They say]: 'You're destroying that model.' But that model doesn't work." And it's that model that he's trying to fix.

"He speaks on a topic [sex] that is not openly explored within the Orthodox community," says Michael Gross, a 37-year-old Orthodox New Yorker. "Everyone thinks about these things, like . . . [having] premarital relations, because they're human. But here you have [someone] talking about it."

And talk about it he does. While Judaism encourages a healthy sex life between husband and wife, and rabbis have offered sexual advice throughout the ages, Shmuley has a one-track mind; everything comes back to sex. And what exactly does Shmuley preach? He is opposed to sex outside of marriage. Once the knot is tied, however, Shmuley would have couples open the floodgates. Just about anything is kosher (sex toys experimentation with positions, and oral sex, which he says was sanctioned by the Rambam), and as long as it's between husband and wife, it's consensual, and it will keep passion in the marriage (no-nos include porn, which Shmuley says detracts from sensuality, and masturbation, which he says leads to decreased dependence on the spouse-a bad thing). "Shared pleasure in sex is the cornerstone of marriage," he writes. "When practiced with sanctity, love, and commitment, far from being an animalistic act, sex is humankind's loftiest pursuit, where a man and woman, freed from all inhibition, can capture [each] other's essence."

In today's world you can have great sex with anyone, Shmuley says, but only within marriage can you experience it to its full potential. "Great sex makes you feel amazing and has you howling and swinging from the rafters together with your lover," he writes in *Kosher Sex*. "But kosher sex is not measured during the lovemaking itself, but the morning after, when you can't get your partner off your mind."

Reprinted by permission of the author and *Moment Magazine*.

A New Approach to *Jews-for-Jesus*

***by* Dennis Prager**

Jews can love and embrace Jews with a variety of messianic beliefs, but not Jews with a variety of deities. What should we do about the Jews-for-Jesus? The general Jewish response- one of the only things the Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform communities agree on-is to ostracize them. We have labeled them a cult and fought their methods of luring Jews to Christianity. We have denied that even Jews-for-Jesus born-Jewish are Jews. We have, for all intents and purposes, put them in *cherem* (excommunication).

I have long subscribed to this approach. Many years ago, I was asked to "deprogram" some Jews-for-Jesus at the request of their distraught parents (one couple, Holocaust survivors, were so distraught they told me they regretted surviving the Holocaust). And I have written a long essay on the theological fraud of being a Christian and a Jew at the same time: Most Jews-for-Jesus are former Jews who converted to Christianity. To deny that they are Christians is actually an insult to Christianity-to believe in Christ yet deny being a Christian suggests that one is embarrassed by one's new religion.

Over the years I have met Jews-for-Jesus and have also observed them from afar. Some love the Jewish people, Israel, and being Jewish. Sometimes they also lessen Judeaophobia among Christians who have never interacted with Jews. At

the same time, some of these people, especially their leaders, are theological charlatans out to trick Jews searching for God into becoming Christians. They often provide a Jewish front for some Christian conversion efforts.

I believe it is time to try a new approach to Jews-for-Jesus. Though they are hardly the numerical threat to Jews that they are often made out to be, they are also not disappearing, and our unrelenting war against them has not been particularly successful. I therefore suggest that the Jewish community try this: Divide and conquer the Jews-for-Jesus by separating them into two distinct groups. One group is Jews-for-Jesus who have renounced Judaism and embraced Christianity by believing Jesus is God. The other group consists of those who believe Jesus was the messiah, but not God. These people have not abandoned monotheism, and can be embraced as Jews who have an erroneous messianic belief. In Judaism there is an enormous difference between erroneously believing that a certain man is the messiah and believing that this man is God. There is, after all, a belief in Judaism that someone will be a messiah, and, at different times, many Jews have believed that someone was the messiah without being read out of the Jewish people. At this very moment, there are some wonderful Chabad Jews who believe the last Lubavitcher rebbe was the messiah and no one is calling, nor should anyone call, for their removal from the Jewish people.

On the other hand, there is no Jewish belief in a man as God or in a Trinity. That belief is a tenet of Christianity. In order to divide Jews-for-Jesus into these two categories-one being Christians and the other being Jews who have an erroneous messianic belief-and then begin the process of readmitting members of the latter group into the Jewish people, they would have to appear before a bet din (religious court) and swear before it, God, and the Torah that they will:

- Cease calling themselves Jews-for-Jesus. The term is incompatible with Judaism. No Lubavitchers who believe that the Rebbe is the messiah describe themselves as Jews-for-the-Rebbe.

- Cease associating in any religious forum with Jews-for-Jesus. All their religious activities must take place with fellow Jews who practice Judaism, not with people who practice Christianity with a Torah scroll and a yarmulke.

- Cease proselytizing on behalf of their belief in Jesus as the messiah. Again, to use the Lubavitcher analogy, Lubavitchers who believe in the Rebbe as messiah do not proselytize other Jews to accept their messianic belief.

Will this plan work? Perhaps not. Perhaps only a handful of Jews-for-Jesus will accept these terms and rejoin Judaism and the Jewish people. But it is worth trying for three reasons. First, redeeming one Jewish soul fulfills a great mitzvah. Second, this pronouncement would clarify for all Jews and Christians that we Jews accept among us a variety of messianic beliefs- but what we do not accept is a variety of divinities. And it makes clear that Jews-for-Jesus have separated themselves from Judaism and the Jewish people. Third, it forces those who remain Jews-for-Jesus to come clean. Their Jewish messianic cover has been blown-they are now revealed to be Christians, not Jews-for-Jesus, because only Christians believe in Jesus as God.

We Jews can love and embrace Jews with erroneous messianic beliefs. We can love and embrace Christians. We cannot love or embrace charlatans.

Dennis Prager's latest book is *Happiness Is a Serious Problem* (HarperCollins), and he *writes The Prager Perspective* biweekly. His daily radio show is nationally syndicated. His Web site is www.dennisprager.com.

Joseph Rackman, Esq., Editor

Published by The Wexner Heritage Foundation
551 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10022
(212) 355-6115

Comments regarding the Wexner Heritage Review may be directed to editor@wexner.org

Israeli Independence Day is on the fifth day of Iyar (beginning on the evening of May 1) and the three articles this month try to take a look not at political issues in Israel, but everyday life.

TEL AVIV *Diarist*

The well known editor of The New Republic, Martin Peretz, writes beautifully about Tel Aviv. "It is a city interested in fashionable clothes, fashion of all sorts, and in striking bodies. . . . Tel Aviv is a city that dances, dances to trance music and wave music, rave music and stomp music. . . . No one will mistake this for Jerusalem. No one is brooding, not about the Jewish question and not about the Arab question either. These people are not a light unto the nations, and they do not want to be. . . . They are really the first normal Jews in 2000 years, Jews without complexes, Jews without prophecies."
(*The New Republic*, November 22, 1999, www.tnr.com)

SILO *Swing*

This brief glimpse of disco life on the kibbutz gives a realistic picture of a facet of Israeli life that is not often seen. The kibbutz, one of the great achievements of modern Zionism, is fading away. This is an interesting report on what one Kibbutz community has done to face the future.
(*The Jerusalem Report*, August 30, 1999, www.jrep.com)

FREE TO BE *Personal...*

In Israel, politics taints most every activity, including the arts. Nonetheless, it appears that things may be calming down a little bit. One Israeli director notes that "Sometimes 'Macbeth' is just 'Macbeth' and not a fable." Still, tensions flare up and the widely publicized Israeli film "Kadosh", a haunting depiction of life inside an ultra-Orthodox community was criticized not only for its depiction of the ultra-Orthodox community, but for the casting of an Israeli Arab in the role of an ultra-Orthodox rabbi. This article surveys numerous instances in a journey towards tolerance on the Israeli cultural scene.
(*The New York Times*, October 31, 1999)

TEL AVIV *Diarist*

by **Martin Peretz**

Of all the cities in the world, my heart belongs to Jerusalem. It has always been so. But I loved it, like millions of other Jews over the long 2,000--year exile, even when I had not yet seen it. Now, however, my heart is informed by my eyes. I walk Jerusalem's streets and alleys, including many in the Arab sector, without fear of losing my way. And, when I do, I often happen upon some weighty spot-which is itself a joy. Every spot in Jerusalem is weighty for someone, but Christians and Muslims have other places that are already their Zions. How many Zions does a person or a group need? For Jews, for me, Jerusalem is the only place in the world that could be Zion-the heart of a once-again-sovereign Jewish nation, a providential trope crafted by modern politics.

This conviction colored the exuberant tour I imposed on my exhausted friend David Kansas, the editor of *TheStreet.com*, when we came to Israel on a business trip a few days ago. But Jerusalem itself is exhausting in a more concrete sense. It is the last battlefield of the century-old conflict between the Arabs and Jews of Palestine, and I for one am not sure that Jerusalem has seen the last bloodshed of that conflict, because bloodshed is what gives Yasir Arafat's struggle authenticity. Authenticity also lies at the heart of the city's searing Jewish wars, wars fought over two questions: (1) Who is a Jew? and (2) What is the meaning of a Jewish state? There is no escaping these questions in Jerusalem. They are not just in the air; they are on the street. So Jerusalem is a city where Jews still brood, where life is fraught with anxiety about identity, community, and hostile neighbors. Where life is not yet normal.

This is not the case in Tel Aviv, the city around which one-third of the Israeli population lives. The founding of Tel Aviv coincided roughly with the birth of modern Zionism; that is to say, it occurred about 100 years ago. The city was built quite literally on the sands; and, aside from the few thousand Arabs who come from the beautiful,

small town of Jaffa that was long ago surrounded by and incorporated into Tel Aviv, all its inhabitants are Jewish. And, since very few of those two million Jews are ultraorthodox Jews (or *haredim*, meaning "those who tremble"), piety does not preclude what is novel or unfamiliar. Tel Aviv is what one of my children, using a term of high compliment, calls "a happening place."

It was not always so. For decades, economic austerity imposed on the city a spartan ethos that was, if anything, exacerbated by the normative puritanism of Zionist socialism. Then, too, there were the dangers of life in Israel's nasty neighborhood, which affected every Israeli city. Arab armies were well-armed (by the Soviets), if not exactly well-trained, and periodic war against the Jews was all that secured Arab governments in power. Those days are now largely over. Not that Israel can let down its guard, given its vulnerability to what are so crisply termed unconventional weapons. But the government of Ehud Barak, while intent on peace, will not make an agreement that tempts the Palestinians (and the Iraqis and the Syrians) to war. So Israel is more self-confident than it has ever been. It is strong, and it is prosperous. You can feel it everywhere, and nowhere more than in Tel Aviv.

This is not, then, just any happening place. It is Barcelona and Notting Hill in London, the Marais in Paris and Sydney combined. And, yes, it is New York's TriBeCa and SoHo, Greenwich Village and Williamsburg, as well. A middleaged person like myself feels like an interloper on the cult of the young. But there's one thing about the young: they are not trapped in the divisions of yesterday. The old divisions increasingly don't apply, and they don't apply because they are eroding demographically. Marriages between Ashkenazim and Sephardim, light Jews and dark, secular and traditional, those on the cutting edge of modernity and those reared in ancient verities, people of the Internet and People of the Book-such marriages are on the rise. The evidence is all around. Jews from Ethiopia marry half-Jews from Russia. There is no Jewish look, at least not here, and the result is a fuller, stronger Israeli identity than was once thought possible. Even Herzl only dimly imagined it. Now it lives, and it has the vibrancy of all great

mixes.

Tel Aviv is a cafe city, an outdoor-cafe city, and the cigarette police are not on patrol. It is a city interested in fashionable clothes, fashion of all sorts, and in striking bodies. (The body was an icon in early Zionism, a manifestation of the new Jew. Even nerdy Franz Kafka, when he joined a Zionist organization in Prague, began to lift weights.) It is a beach city, with aggressive high--rises and pockets of graceful neo-Bauhaus constructions adapted to "Orientalist" style.

Tel Aviv is a city that dances, dances to trance music and wave music, rave music and stomp music. There is also Middle Eastern music and music that is a fusion of East and West. Still, the Israel Philharmonic (which was founded as the Palestine Philharmonic-Palestine used to be a Zionist word--by a relative of mine, the violinist Bronislaw Huberman) and the many other classical ensembles arising from the Russian migration do very well. In fact, the migration brought musicians and their audiences at once. Tel Aviv is a city that goes to the theater, grounded drama and edgy drama, so thoughtlessly that its bad-boy playwrights, we were told in a recent *New York Times* article by Deborah Sontag [the last article in this issue of WHR- editor], long for the old censorious times. A former student of mine at Harvard, Barak Marshall, and I were walking in Jaffa, and someone came up and asked, "Aren't you Barak?" I asked the questioner how he knew my friend. "Everybody who cares about dance knows Barak," he responded. Barak is maybe 29. He didn't dance until he was 24. The winner of many international prizes, he is now the choreographer at the very established Batsheva Dance Company, and his own group, Bazouz, has quite literally taken the country by storm. But I shouldn't have been surprised. This is also a country in which a book of poetry sells 20,000 copies.

David, Barak, and I strolled on the Mediterranean promenade just south of the Hilton, past Tel Aviv's former downtown center, through the no-man's-land that separated the new Jewish city from old Arab Jaffa, into the ancient seaport, almost to Bat Yam. A five-mile walk, maybe more, past a stretch

of eateries, music venues, coffee houses and dance bars, families, friends, lovers, old people, children. No one will mistake this for Jerusalem. No one is brooding, not about the Jewish question and not about the Arab question, either. These people are not a light unto the nations, and they do not want to be. Neither do they want to be history's victims, and they won't be. They are really the first normal Jews in 2,000 years, Jews without complexes, Jews without prophecies. Tel Aviv is their city, the first truly Zionist city, and it is open to the world.

Reprinted by permission of *The New Republic*.

SILO*Swing*

***by* Jo-Ann Mort**

Long after the remnants of chicken dinner are cleared from the communal dining room at Kibbutz Hatzor, beefy bouncers in the MetRock parking lot (in a former agricultural field) rehearse their safety drill. Between midnight and 5 a.m. on weekends, over 1,500 young people will frequent the state-of-the-art disco built in a defunct grain silo, driving to the kibbutz, located near Ashdod, from as far as Eilat, four hours south. MetRock, open for business on Thursday and Friday nights, features sophisticated lighting, three bars, and the hottest music from Europe and the States. It has movable ceiling fans and a floor sprinkler to cool down the dancers.

"There isn't a single soldier who doesn't know Kibbutz Hatzor," says Freddie Tohar, the 28-year-old brains behind the venture. All Hatzor kids (and their dates) get in for free; other kibbutz youths get a discount. Even young people from the neighboring religious kibbutzim have hidden their yarmulkes to take advantage of the discount - on Shabbat.

Tohar, who grew up in Hatzor, convinced the kibbutz to make an initial investment of 150,000 shekels to create MetRock. Five years later, after paying his fair-market wage and the salaries to his professional tem, the kibbutz nets about 1 million shekels annually.

It took a while to convince kibbutz members that this was a worthwhile venture. Putting double windowpanes in several homes helped reduce noise complaints. But a disco seemed to go against everything the kibbutz stood for.

Still, a major incentive was the chance to create an atmosphere that would keep the kibbutz's young people at home, offer good, clean fun, and perhaps draw new youth to the settlement. Hatzor's demography leans heavily toward the over-80 set.

Watching the dance floor fill up, I recalled my days in Hashomer Hatzair, the Kibbutz Artzi-affiliated youth movement, back in the U.S. in the 70s, when we shunned drugs, alcohol and other bourgeois ills. Friday night meant meetings, debating about Borochov or Marx, and singing revolutionary songs like "Banks of Marble." But behind the ideology, what we really wanted was to successfully settle the land of Israel.

So despite it all, this sizzling disco is not the antithesis of the kibbutz dream. It's just the children and grandchildren born of the dream happily dancing the night away.

Reprinted by permission of *The Jerusalem Report*.

FREE TO BE *Personal...*

***by* Deborah Sontag**

When "A Palestinian Girl" opened at the Haifa Theater in 1985, protests arose over the very title. On that basis alone, some season ticket holders canceled their subscriptions. Others packed the premier and, as the curtain fell, exploded into spontaneous debate over whether the subject matter itself was subversive.

Several years later, another play by the same writer, Yehoshua Sobol, engendered an even stronger reaction. "The Jerusalem Syndrome" was not meant as allegory. But it dealt with the revolt of the Jews against the Romans at the time of the Second Temple, and it opened at the start of the intifada, the Palestinian uprising against Israel. Extreme right-wing groups stormed the theater,

threw stun grenades and provoked fistfights with audience members.

The play was forced to close early and Mr. Sobol to step down as the artistic director of the Haifa Theater. Feeling bitter and suffocated, Mr. Sobol flew to London for a few years of self-imposed exile and turned his pen away from his homeland, to historic figures like Baruch Spinoza, the 17th-century Dutch philosopher.

Mr. Sobol, now 60, looks back on that era from the vantage point of a very different one. Now he is concerned that a depressing commercialism has overtaken the Israeli theatrical scene, and he finds himself almost nostalgic for the days of intolerance.
"There was intense violence in the cultural arena, and it was perhaps the darkest period for trying to choke the expression of artists," he said. "But for me the most exciting years were those of very brutal reactions to some of my plays. Because then I knew that the plays meant something, that they were of some importance."

Many outsiders assume that Israeli artists still create and perform in a hyperconflicted, even censorious, environment. They assume that free expression is delimited by both religious fundamentalists and the political right wing. They also imagine that such conflict is a negative. But their assumptions have more to do with the Israel of a decade ago than today.

Last year, these misconceptions were reinforced by the internationally publicized controversy surrounding the religious right's objections to a piece by the Batsheva Dance Company of Tel Aviv. In one passage, the performers, dressed in black garb resembling that of Hasidic Jews, stripped to their briefs and danced to a central song about Judaism from the Passover Haggadah.

"Let them wear gatkes," or long underwear (in Yiddish), President Ezer Weizman of Israel had suggested, in mediation. The company withdrew from a scheduled performance at Israel's 50th-anniversary extravaganza rather than edit its work by political dictate.

The political climate suddenly looked hostile to the arts, as the world's eyes focused on Israel's half-century birthday party. But in reality, the moment was anomalous. Such tensions have actually dissipated over the last 10 years. As Israeli society has grown more normalized, taboos have been broken and barriers flattened. Tolerance has grown so much that like Mr. Sobol, some artists long for the old days of rabid response to their work. Mere passionate debate, when it arises, feels tepid. Everything else seems like indifference.

Batsheva included, most Israeli artists have long relished and exploited the charged context in which they make their art. The conflicts-over religion, ethnicity and peace-that dominate Israeli life fueled their creativity, giving them a critical role in the ever-evolving national debate over Israeli identity. The swirling conversations about their plays, their films, their protest songs and their art installations meant that what they did mattered.

"Culture here has held a powerful role," said Amos Gital, 48, a film director. "In the Western world, both the visual arts and the cinema suffer from a lack of context. But in the Middle East, we are anachronistic: things still count. Until very recently, every work of art that tried to be something was treated as something defining, something that strove to express what it is to be Israeli."

Today, though, while the nation's identity remains in flux, most artists say that their role has become more limited, provoking a raging debate within the arts about how to adjust. Most agree that political art has become less explosive as Israelis lose the nervous feeling that they are living in a chronic state of emergency. Confrontational points of view have become less threatening, less heretical and ultimately less important.

Still, artists point out, normal is relative. Jerusalem and Tel Aviv are not New York or Paris, not with the ubiquitous armed soldiers, police cars that travel everywhere with blue lights flashing and security guards who examine every handbag entering the local supermarkets.

Here, normal means that a fragile social

equilibrium has been re-established four years after Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated by a right-wing Jewish extremist. It means that the days when "A Palestinian Girl" was such a provocative title are probably gone, and probably irreversibly, but it is impossible to tell.

Normal also means that the Sabbath wars have calmed down from the days when ultra-Orthodox Jewish youths threw bottles to protest Friday night screenings at the Cinematheque in Jerusalem. A potentially destabilizing debate persists about whether Israel should be a democracy or a theocracy, but, in the meantime, the Israel Museum in Jerusalem calmly opens not only every Saturday but on the Jewish New Year.

Many artists are more than happy to adjust by relinquishing the role that a fraught political context forced upon them. They long to feel liberated from the yoke of being self-consciously Israeli in all their work and of being "meaningful" in a political context.

"Sometimes 'Macbeth' is just 'Macbeth' and not a fable," said Micah Lewensohn, 47, a theater director and also director of the annual Israel Festival. He described a workshop of Israeli and Palestinian directors with Peter Brook in 1996, in which everyone expressed a similar yearning to put on plays for the sole reason that they were beautiful or well-crafted.

"The feeling was that we had paid our political dues," Mr. Lewensohn said. "Enough of this region. We all of us wanted to do something out of love for the theater and not as compensation for the fact that we didn't go into politics."

But there is no consensus within the arts world that it is acceptable to relinquish a sense of engagement. Some artists insist that their political work is not finished, contending that they themselves, by pushing at the edges of the acceptable, helped lead Israeli society down a road to greater tolerance.

This feeling is particularly striking in the visual arts, where conceptual mixed-media art rules. Years ago, Israeli artists began exploring this

approach to engage burning questions, say, about the morality of the Israeli occupation in the West Bank. Many of those artists see pure painting or drawing, with no text or message attached, not only as a luxury but also as part of an alien (European, Christian, old-fashioned) tradition.

One classical painter, Eli Shamir, who concentrates on straightforward portraits and Israeli landscapes, said that he was effectively shunned by the art establishment.

"Israeli culture is monolithic culture, very much a part of the modern era, a kind of mandatory avant-garde," said Mr. Shamir, who teaches drawing and painting at some of the finest art schools in the United States but cannot get equivalent work in Israel. "Many people find what I do irritating."

James Snyder, an American who is director of the Israel Museum said, "At this moment, if, like Eli Shamir, you decide to be a representational painter, it's a political act."

Given the tensions in Israeli society, it took a conscious kind of chutzpah when Mr. Gitai, a secular filmmaker, cast an Israeli-Arab actor in the role of an ultra-Orthodox rabbi in his latest film, "Kadosh." Later he wondered whether that was the key provocation, the reason the Israeli film board, which was then controlled by the National Religious Party, denied him financing in 1998.

"Kadosh," a haunting depiction of life inside an ultra-Orthodox community in Jerusalem, tenderly renders rituals and intimate portraits of religious characters. But it ultimately paints a stultifying picture, particularly for women, of life in a ghetto.

The film board, which subsidizes nearly every Israeli film, told Mr. Gitai, one of Israel's best-known directors, that it was turning him down "on artistic grounds." Then, earlier this year, after the Cannes Film Festival selected "Kadosh" as the first Israeli film ever to be shown there, the film board reconsidered the film's artistry. And it retroactively awarded Mr. Gitai nearly half the film's $1.3 million budget.

Were they originally motivated by political

concerns? It is entirely possible that the board really didn't like the movie in the first place, since political intrusions into the creative process are uncommon here. The censorship board for theatrical works was abolished a decade ago, after contributing to the success of several banned works that refused to close.

But what happened with "Kadosh" and with the Batsheva Dance Company did come at a time when internal social divisions were exacerbated. The country was moving toward a celebration of its 50th birthday, three years after the Rabin assassination ripped it apart. Benjamin Netanyahu led a right-wing government in which the ultra-Orthodox wielded particular power.

Tensions generally escalate here anyway when an artist is selected to represent Israel. Also in 1998, for instance, a small scandal erupted-and fizzled-when Dana International, a transsexual diva, won the Eurovision pop music contest on behalf of the Jewish homeland. The rabbis weren't thrilled, although many Israelis considered it a weird kind of post-Zionist accomplishment.

"Anaphase," the full-length Batsheva piece, was scrutinized after it was chosen as a featured work of art for Israel's official, nationally televised birthday party. In that context, some found it unnecessarily offensive to religious Israelis. Others-especially after the Chief Rabbi of Israel warned that those who did not condemn Batsheva's "forbidden act" would bring upon themselves "suffering, and even death"-wondered if what had transpired portended a wave of repression.

But Batsheva's state subsidy of over $1 million a year was never touched, and in Tel Aviv, performances of "Anaphase" eventually went on unedited. So the moment had faded into a cautionary tale by the time Ehud Barak, a dovish hawk who preaches unity, was elected Prime Minister in May, putting secular liberals back in charge of the ministries that finance culture.

Partly crediting themselves, Israeli artists say tolerance has grown nearly continuously over the last 10 years, with a steady movement toward greater freedom of expression on the sensitive

subjects for their society: the Israeli-Arab relationship, militarism, religion and the Holocaust.

In the journey toward tolerance, there have been dozens of battles. Hanoch Levin, a leading Israeli playwright who died this year, fought some of the crucial ones. Starting in the late 1960's, he began defying the censors with works that skewered Israeli mores, subversively mocking its militarist pride, its political leaders and its very self-image.

By the mid-1990's, confrontational art was almost de rigueur but still powerful. Three years before the brouhaha over "Anaphase," for instance, at the opening of the Israel Festival in 1995, the Batsheva Company dancers sat with their backs to a capacity audience that included Mr. Rabin. They appeared to be simulating masturbation until they turned to reveal that they were cleaning their army-issued guns.

It was a startling enough image to make the audience gasp. Mr. Rabin, a peacemaker but former general, seemed palpably uncomfortable. But the only action he took was to shift in his seat.

Similarly, a few years later, two provocative exhibits at the Israel Museum played with the Holocaust era in a way that many Israelis found disturbing. "To Live and Die as Eva Braun," an installation by Roi Rosen, dealt with Hitler's mistress; a piece by Ran Katzir transformed Nazi propaganda into children's coloring books. On the radio, Holocaust survivors protested that a line had been crossed. But both shows completed their full runs.

The days when theaters were stormed for presenting Palestinians sympathetically or Israelis critically are long gone. Now it is fashionable to collaborate with Palestinian artists and, as the Cameri Theater in Tel Aviv does, to invite Palestinian teenagers to Israel for special productions in Arabic. Early this month, for the first time ever, a Palestinian director's movie-"A Chronicle of Disappearance," by Illiya Suleiman-was selected as the best Israeli film of the year by Israeli critics. If anything, the resistance comes from abroad: Mr. Lewensohn, the director, cannot

persuade Muslim musical stars to perform at the Israel Festival; they are certain they will lose their audience.

The Parisians expressed initial concern when Dani Karavan, a world-renowned environmental sculptor, chose to construct "Peace Sukkah" for his contribution to a current exhibit on the Champs-Élysées. It seemed destined to offend several parties at once: religious Jews, right-wing Israelis and anti-peace Palestinians. Mr. Karavan went ahead anyway and constructed a traditional religious tabernacle, like those built all over Israel during the fall harvest festival, but subverted it to a political message. He centered in it an olive tree and topped it with handmade Israeli and Palestinian flags.

Asked if the work would be too politically controversial for Israel, Mr. Karavan laughed and recalled his last exhibit in his homeland, two years ago at the Museum of Israeli Art in Ramat Gan.

Unlike most of his large-scale work, which espouses peace and tolerance in general terms, this was an angry exhibit of political art directed at the Netanyahu Government. Mr. Karavan took an olive tree, hung it upside down by the roots and called it Har Homa, for the housing project outside Jerusalem that had stopped the peace process. He shot a bullet hole through a sabra, the prickly cactus that is emblematic of Israel, and called it "Nature Morte." He printed the Declaration of Independence of Israel with the sections about peace and relations with the Arabs written upside down.

"It was very strange," he said. "I was afraid it would have demonstrations. My wife wanted us to change our phone number. The director of the museum said he would be fired. But he's still there and we still have the same telephone.

"It went very calm," Mr. Karavan continued, "If it had been in the street, maybe they would have tried to destroy it, but it was in a museum. It was art, and at this moment, art is not so influential.

Nonetheless, he continues to work from the heart, even it means erecting giant projects in the desert

that few will travel to see. One of his latest, "Path to Peace," is what he calls a "border sculpture." It consists of 108 columns, forged from ancient stone and inscribed with the word "peace" in many languages, that form a path through the Negev to the border with Egypt at Nitzana. Mr. Karavan's ambition is to find an Egyptian sculptor who will continue the path on the other side, but so far he has not found anyone "brave enough," he said.

From the early, pioneering days, even before the state was born, there was an effort to forge a positive national identity through culture, starting with the very revival of the Hebrew language and then with imagery in painting and lyrics in songs that celebrated Zionism.

"Historically, our traditions are a bit Soviet," Mr. Lewensohn, the director, said.

The ideas was to use state subsidies to help create a unified cultural identity, not in a melting pot but, as it was said, in a pressure cooker. That had both political and ethnic ramifications.

It took a long time before the state, with its interest in nation-building, was willing to finance protest art or experimental art. But the ethnic was considered political, too. For despite the huge influx of Sephardic Jews from the Middle East and Northern Africa, the unified culture identity was to be European, or Ashkenazic. Western and symphonic traditions prevailed in music, for instance; even today there are at least 11 state-financed symphony and chamber orchestras in a country of six million people.

Until about 10 years ago, Middle Eastern music was sold mainly at the central bus station in Tel Aviv, on cassette racks. Mainstream pop music was very nationalist and saccharine and never featured any instrument as naturally regional as an oud (a sort of Middle Eastern lute). Now, Eastern and hybrid East-West music dominate the pop charts, and protest rock is as commonplace as house music, rap and even salsa in Hebrew.

By now the so-called Kulturkampf has many battlefields. Israeli society is intensely fragmented. Not only are there tensions between doves and

hawks and secular and religious Jews, but also between Ashkenazim and Sephardim, between Moroccan immigrants and Russian immigrants, and, of course, between Jews and Arabs.

Many older Israelis fret that in the post-Zionist era an identifiable Israeli art, even if it is the confrontational conceptual work of the multimedia artists, will disappear.

"There is concern that the segmentation of society is overpowering the shared culture and that genuinely shared achievement is being discredited as hegemonic," wrote Elihu Katz, a communications professor in a new comprehensive study of Israeli culture policy for the Beracha Foundation.

Certainly, individual populations-the ultra-Orthodox, the Russians and the Israeli Arabs, for instance-are starting to generate a self-enclosed cultural repertory that has no desire to go mainstream. But many artists make a point of extending themselves, if only for commercial reasons. The need for wider commercial success is particularly pressing in a small country where an appeal to a fragment of the population can rarely be self-sustaining.

Sometimes the cross-fertilization can be dizzying. Zehava Ben, a popular Eastern-style singer, not only plays to ethnically mixed crowds but to Palestinians in Nablus. Fishy HaGadol, or Fishy the Big, a Tel Aviv rapper whose real name is Adam Levinzon, is a descendant of a leading Sephardic rabbi; he considers himself a Black Panther and honed his craft at a club called Soweto in Tel Aviv. Tofaa, an Orthodox, all-woman rock-pop-blues-and-klezmer band, attracts both religious and secular audiences-but only women, since they are proscribed from singing to men by religious law.

Against this backdrop, it is no wonder then, that in the nexus between culture and politics, mainstream artists feel that many of the battles have been fought and won and are now passé. Some think that the commercial battles loom ahead, especially if state financing shrinks as feared. Playwrights and filmmakers, in particular, are concerned that

Israeli producers, their eyes on the box-office receipts, are growing increasingly reluctant to take chances.

In the last couple of years, two works by serious playwrights that dealt with Rabin's killing were rejected by producers here and had to go abroad to find audiences. What chilled the playwrights is that this time, reflecting the new era, the rejections were not ideological but commercial. The plays were too heavy, and the subject matter too wearisome for audiences who want some diversion, they were told.

Much of the current theater fare is light or melodramatic or a kind of particularly Israeli docudrama. A mean-spirited joke in drama circles concerns a terrible car crash on the Haifa-Tel Aviv highway. Immediately, screaming ambulances appear on the scene-joined in short order by the resident director of a leading theater, hungry for new material to be converted into an insta-play.

"I don't see anything really radical or biting done nowadays in Israel," Mr. Sobol said glumly. But then he perked up. "Great difficulties will arise when Israeli writers and playwrights start a deep exploration of what we did during those decades of occupation, how it affected them and how it affected us.

"Then," he said hopefully, "it will probably become controversial again."

Joseph Rackman, Esq., Editor

Published by The Wexner Heritage Foundation
551 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10022
(212) 355-6115

Comments regarding the Wexner Heritage Review

may be directed to editor@wexner.org

WEXNER HERITAGE
REVIEW
WEB ISSUE NO. 13 Nisan 5760

Passover and Yom HaShoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day, fall in the Hebrew month of Nisan. Both sacred days are reflected in the following selections.

Three Thoughts
For The Seder

This brief article provides three points that can be made at the Seder. Questions are provided to be asked of the participants (and answers to the questions are provided, as well). (*New York Jewish Week*, April 10, 1998, www.thejewishweek.com)

The Lost
Transport

The author was three years old when he was liberated and saved from the Holocaust. He tells the story of the trip back to the concentration camps with fellow survivors. Some of the details are harrowing. Other stories convey enormous dignity. This piece is so moving that we should consider having family members read it on the evening of May 1 or during the day of May 2 (when *Yom HaShoah* falls this year). (*Commentary*, September 1995, www.commentarymagazine.com)

At Century's End
A Holocaust Backlash

"What many [Holocaust] scholars have in common is an open and unapologetic disdain for those who are direct witnesses to the atrocity." The author also criticizes feature films such as "Schindler's List," "Jakob the Liar," and "Life is Beautiful" because they "openly misdirect the emotions and detract from the tragedy rather than enlighten . . . Hollywood exists on smoke and mirrors, but Auschwitz did without the mirrors and dedicated itself entirely to real smoke." He continues, "The Holocaust was a particular Jewish tragedy, one that not even all Jews endured, or owned. That privilege was shared only by those who were there, and paid the price for such geographical misfortune." (*The New York Jewish Week*, December 31, 1999, www.thejewishweek.com)

Why?
A Poem

This very brief poem teaches us what the antidote to the Holocaust could have been and what the antidote must be to other tragedies. (Retrieved from the Internet)

Three Thoughts
For The Seder

by **Joseph R. Rackman**

For those too busy to study in anticipation of the seder, here are three observations to make while reciting the Haggadah.

• Why is the paragraph that begins, "This is the bread of affliction" written in Aramaic, the language of Babylon and the only non-Hebrew paragraph in the Haggadah. Why is this one paragraph written in a different language?

Reading through the paragraph should provide the answer. It contains an invitation to the poor to join in the meal. Composed in Babylon, it would have been silly, even mocking of the poor, to invite them in a language (Hebrew) they did not understand. Aramaic was the language of the day when the Haggadah was compiled, and Hebrew was reserved for scholars. So if you are going to invite people to a dinner, make sure they receive and understand the invitation.

• Everybody knows the four questions about why this night we eat matzah and bitter herbs, why we dip our foods in sauces and recline while we eat. The problem is with the next paragraph, which provides the answer. It describes the fact that we had been slaves in Egypt and were taken out, to freedom. How does this answer the question about the matzah, bitter herbs, dipping and reclining?

Some may say this is the beginning of a long-winded answer that eventually will respond to each of the questions. But there is another, more satisfying answer.

The four questions are really one. The child is asking whether tonight we are poor (eating the matzah, known as poor man's bread, and bitter herbs) or rich (eating with sauces while reclining). Are we celebrating a wondrous day or are we bemoaning some terrible past event in Jewish history?

We were slaves in Egypt (and so, the matzah and bitter herbs) but we went out to freedom, and so the rejoicing (with the fancy dipping and the reclining).

• Here is one with a twist. The heart of the retelling of the story of the exodus from Egypt begins with the verse: "My father was a wondering Aramen ... The Egyptians did evil to us and afflicted us ... We cried out to God ... and God heard our cries ..."

Ask from which book of the Bible are these key verses retelling the story.

The odds are that people will answer that the verses are from the second book of the Bible, Exodus, which contains the story of the exodus from Egypt. It seems like a who-is-buried-in-Grant's-tomb question.

But everyone answering "Exodus" will be wrong. The verses are taken from the fifth book of the Bible, Deuteronomy: chapter 26.

These verses were recited during one of the major harvest festivals, accompanying the offering that was brought by an Israelite to the Temple in Jerusalem. On which holiday was it recited—Passover, Shavuot, or Sukkot?

Again, it is likely that most people will guess Passover, but the right answer is Shavuot. For these were the verses that were recited when the first fruits were brought to the Temple on that festival. So why were these verses chosen instead of ones from Exodus?

My father [Rabbi Emanuel Rackman] taught me a wonderful answer, which he learned from Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik.

He noted that these verses are the only place in the Bible where the story of the exodus from Egypt is told in the first person.

After all, as the Haggadah instructs, we are commanded on this night to feel as if each one of us was taken out of Egypt. Everywhere else in the Bible the historical narrative is in the third person.

But these verses, recited on Shavuot, are the only ones in the first person that tell of our liberation from Egypt. In this way we are fulfilling the directive that the Passover story be related not as some prior historical event but as an ongoing action in the present. I was brought out of Egypt, and God saved me, not just my ancestors.

Enjoy the seder.

The Lost

Transport

by **Joseph A. Polak**

APRIL 1945: about a week before liberation, the command of Bergen-Belsen decided to transfer the entire section of the camp known as the *Sternlager* to Theresienstadt. The *Sternlager* prisoners were ostensibly of some political consequence and, the Nazis reasoned, might prove useful as exchange-barter for German nationals abroad. Three trains were used for this procedure, each headed toward Theresienstadt.

The story of the *Sternlager* transports is as follows. The first train left the Bergen-Belsen rail platform on April 6, 1945, with 400 inmates of the *Sternlager* and some 2,100 other prisoners. On April 13, at the town of Farsleben (near Magdeburg), it was liberated by the Americans. The second train, made up largely of Hungarian Jews, left for Theresienstadt on April 7, and actually reached its destination. On April 9, approximately 2,500 remaining members of the *Sternlager* boarded yet a third train, and this train, as far as anyone in the outside world knew, dropped off the face of the earth and became known to historians as the "Lost Transport."

Only later was it learned that the third train had traveled farther and farther east, searching furtively for rail corridors south to Prague and Theresienstadt that had not been bombed out or occupied by Allied forces. Even after Bergen-Belsen was liberated on April 15, the train remained firmly in Nazi hands—a microcosm of the Holocaust which had already ended, at least by some definitions, in most of Europe. While the British were setting up camp in Bergen-Belsen and attempting to feed and heal its wretched survivors, the train, with its conscientious SS command, hurtled doggedly eastward. With raging typhus, hunger, thirst, and the mounting death toll, the conditions on board were beyond description. The Allies added injury to insult by strafing the train, especially during its frequent stops.

On April 23, the train reached its final destination in a delicate forest deep in eastern Germany, outside the village of Troebitz, where it was liberated, in another ironic twist of history, by a Cossack division of Marshal Zhukov's army. By the time all the dead had been buried, fewer than 2,000 survivors remained to attempt to put their lives back together in this picturesque village-on-a-lake of 700 people where no Jew had ever lived, and many of whose inhabitants had either fled the Russians or were now evacuated by them to provide housing for the *Sternlager* survivors.

Until July 1945 (by which time almost all had left), the three principal activities that filled the survivors' lives were finding food, recuperating, and burying the endless victims of typhus. These included some nineteen of the town's own burghers and its mayor, who had contracted the dreaded disease from their visitors. Yet among those alive today, testimonies about those months in Troebitz are surrounded by a peculiar haze. While survivors recall people and events in the *Sternlager* with great precision, memories about the summer of healing in Troebitz remain almost entirely without texture.

My mother, father, and I (not yet three years old) were on this Lost Transport, and 50 years later, at the very end of April 1995, I was invited by a recently formed group, the "Lost Transport Victims Memorial Society," to join a journey of remembrance starting in Amsterdam, pausing in Bergen-Belsen, and winding its way to Troebitz where a memorial wall bearing the names of the victims would be unveiled. I was also asked to address the group when it arrived in Bergen-Belsen. In what follows, the material in italics consists of somewhat amended excerpts from that talk.

WITH the Jewish memorial in Bergen-Belsen at my back, the sun in my eyes, and a sharp wind blowing my manuscript around, I recite my words. Four busloads of Troebitz survivors and their families gaze unsmilingly at me. Nearby lie the mass graves of Bergen-Belsen in unbearably neat mounds, with legends reading, typically, "Here rest 5,000 dead." I feel an enormous fatigue. It seems to me that evil wants to rest, and I am somehow disturbing it.

We survivors are getting old, and as the end of our days draws near, we find that instead of receding into time, the Holocaust, notwithstanding that it occurred over 50 years ago, seems to draw nearer.

As we move closer to the destiny we ourselves were then spared, as we prepare to join our relatives and friends in the darkness of that Night and in the light of that darkness, the Holocaust, instead of fading, seems to beckon us. It haunts the fullness of our hearts when we sit in our dwellings, when we walk along our way, when we lie down, and when we rise up.

It sits not in the center of our perception, but at the periphery. Like the angel of death, it lurks. Whether our eyes are open or whether they are closed, the Holocaust waits for a momentary distraction, and then it appears. Not far from the daily work of our hands, not far from the play-noise of our children and grandchildren, sits the delirium, sits the typhus; not far, the hunger; not far, the trains.

No danger, then, of the Holocaust being forgotten. Memory, these days, at least for us, is not at risk. It is omnipresent. Sometimes it even feels as though it would take over experience. Sometimes we have to fight to continue living in Amsterdam and Boston and Jerusalem instead of in Westerbork, Bergen-Belsen, and Troebitz.

And so, even as the Holocaust has begun to revisit us, we have decided to come here and revisit it.

On the last day of our journey, an American survivor in her seventies approaches me. "Your speech bore right into my heart," she says. "Do you want to know how I spend my Sundays in America? Not with my family, which is big, appreciative, and loving. No—I go to the Holocaust memorial in our town, which is indoors, and sit near the names and the memorabilia. There, somehow, I am in my element; there, believe it or not, is where I feel most at home."

We are here, then, not just to remember the dead, whom we remember every day. We are here to remember the living. We are here to remember ourselves: to remember who we were in those days, and what it was we went through.

Where the memorials and mass graves are is not where the *Sternlager* was, I was told. The place that today is Bergen-Belsen throws memory into disarray. Bergen-Belsen the concentration camp was burned to a crisp by the British to prevent further spread of the typhus from which my father later died, and to show that an era of evil was over. But how wrong they were! Their flamethrowers destroyed any visual clues to jog our memories.

To VISITORS the mass graves bring wells of tears, but survivors, who know what happened, who were part of the horror yet have trouble distinguishing between history and nightmare—such survivors are not helped by these harrowing mounds, or by the photographs in the Bergen-Belsen documentation center, or by the empty green fields that now form the heart of where the deepest mud and the greatest squalor on earth once reigned. Nor did the British flames end the evil of the Holocaust. For the survivors on this journey, while the Holocaust of history was over, the Holocaust of memory has grown stronger each day.

We are here to testify not merely to the mass murder, but to our own experiences. We are here to see if it all happened the way we remember it, or—for some of us with the amnesias of childhood or the amnesia that comes from too much horror—we are here to see whether it happened the way we were told it happened. And we are more than aware that in reviewing this episode of our lives, we could be changing the way we remember it, and the way we will tell it to our children.

We are here to see whether the biographies we have been telling (and not telling) are true, for we are haunted by the question of—how could they be true?

How is it possible that I, less than three years old in Bergen-Belsen, survived it? Surely I am a fraud, the victim of a liar's tale—a tale about which I *remember* nothing, yet which I somehow feel doomed to repeat?

Dr. Thomas Rahe is the young, astute, unsentimental German historian whose efforts have gone far to make the documentation center at the present site of Bergen-Belsen a place where, at least with lists of names and numbers, reality and history *can* in fact be checked. He and I find each other walking along the railway platform. "Close to 600 children survived Bergen-Belsen," he points out to me, "due to its better conditions before 1945. Six hundred is more than any other concentration camp. The Bergen-Belsen children will be the last survivors, the last to be able to testify to what the Nazis wrought." He is seeking, he tells me, to make his list of child survivors as complete as possible, and urges me to get others to register with him.

We child survivors change the iconography of the Holocaust. We are not small and gaunt, with dark heads and shadows under our eyes, or blond and overweight like many of the older survivors of Auschwitz I have come to know. Most of my fellow child survivors seem to know no Yiddish. They speak English and Dutch and Hebrew without accents. They are breezy, they have a light touch; the shadows from which they emerge, and to which they often retreat, are for the most part imperceptible.

How could the tales be true? How is it possible to survive the filth, the hunger, and the cold? How is it possible to survive the humiliation? We are here not merely to testify to the reality of one another's experience; we are here to examine our reluctance to testify.

We don't want to testify, because our bodies and souls were not created to witness such scenes, our minds not fashioned to contain them, much less to recall them.

We don't want to testify, because every testimony is in itself a betrayal: if we were all fashioned as equals, why should they have died and we survived? We can make no sense of how we were selected and not selected; we cannot fathom the explanation, and our inability to explain has led us down a road of guilt; for some, even of shame.

In the end, then, we are here to reflect on why we were given 50 years more than the others, and to consider what we have done with those years.

As the bus moves steadily through the lush German countryside, which is beautiful yet whose beauty evades me, I move to the front, sit down in the tour guide's jumpseat, and tell my Holocaust tale. Soon others follow, and amid weeping and, surprisingly, much laughter, I discover there are survivors younger than I who remember even less, but who provide me with badly needed doses of reality.

Naturally the older ones remember more. One, about five years older than I, recalls the depths of the hunger, of fighting over potato peels, of stealing and foraging without shame. Another, perhaps ten years older, tells of winter problems: "My shoes collapsed, and they were open at the toes and I got frostbite and was afraid of gangrene. Until I learned that an effective way of treating the frostbite was with the warmth of my own urine."

And stories of enormous dignity: on your birthday, everyone in your family would give you his ration of bread. An SS officer took pity on a child whipped for stealing potatoes, and smuggled him fresh bread. Matzot were baked in Bergen-Belsen for Passover 1944. On the train to Troebitz, which kept stopping, and thereby affording new opportunities to bury the dead, an uncle reminded his nephew of the requirement that the traveler's prayer be recited anew each day, and not merely at the beginning of a journey.

But we are not here, in Bergen-Belsen, merely to speak to ourselves and to one another. We are also here in what has surely become the most contaminated, most wretched spot on earth to speak to God.

For the survivor, speaking to God is perhaps more difficult than it is for others. I have seen survivors pray three times a day in their synagogues and not speak to God; I have seen them teach the deepest secrets of the Torah and not speak to God; I have heard them sing songs of the Sabbath and not speak to God. Only when they recite memorial prayers have I seen them speak to God; in the midst of this inventory of names which no sane mind can apprehend, I have seen them address their Maker. One man I knew would recite the prayer "Lord, full of mercy" for the six children he lost at Auschwitz—one prayer at a time, one child at a time, pronouncing each name carefully and slowly until I was certain the Court of Heaven and the Court of Earth could bear it no longer, and I myself wanted to flee his presence and escape from an accusation from which there was no hiding.

Today, in this place, I will try to speak to God. I will speak only on my own behalf, not merely because I represent no one but myself, but also because there are friends among us who are nonbelievers, and after the Holocaust I have come to feel their ache and to respect their silence.

IN THE charming town of Bergen we are wined and dined by the Minister of Culture for Lower Saxony. He is calm, remarkably sane and clear, and makes a brief speech. Eighty-five percent of all Germans today, he tells us, were five years old or less during the war. The inheritance our parents left us is the moral squalor that was the Holocaust. Each day Germans need to deal with this inheritance. One way they can do it, he continues, is by putting up money for institutions like the documentation center at Bergen-Belsen, where an effort is being made to list every single one of the 120,000 inmates of the camp, so that, in his words, "the names do not ever lapse into anonymity."

To which I reply:

There is nothing you can do that will ever redeem either your parents or yourselves from the moral squalor you describe. No amount of money, no amount of virtue can ever bring light to the darkness your country has created. The deeds of your parents cannot be forgotten, and as long as memory stirs, as long as the word Auschwitz continues to bring a shudder to the human frame, you are doomed to be their representatives, and your hands will be stained with blood that you yourselves may not have spilled. For as long as people remember history, or hear a Jewish story, or see a Jewish child, you are destined both to take responsibility for this darkness and never, ever to be forgiven for it.

(But of course I say no such thing.)

IN BERLIN, we are taken on a bus tour of the city. We begin at the zoo, and our guide, who has clearly not been clued-in to her new charges, opens along the following lines:

"Welcome to Berlin. Two-and-a-half hours is a short time to see all the history of this city, but we will do our best. Most bus tours of Berlin begin right here at the zoo, so perhaps I will tell you something about it, to give you a sense of what the city has gone through. In 1939, before the war, Berlin had not one but two zoos, which boasted more than 10,000 animals. In 1945, only one zoo was left, with barely 90 animals . . . ."

A slow titter runs through our bus. Someone needs to fill her in. This is what I tell her:

In 1933, Berlin boasted 172,000 Jews and at least sixteen synagogues. These Jews, unlike the animals, were asked to leave, and so in 1939 Berlin was down to 83,000 Jews. But most of those were murdered, so that by 1945 there were only 5,000 Jews left, and while you still had a zoo, you didn't have a single synagogue. With all due respect, madam, your remarks make me wonder: whom do Berliners miss more, the elephants or the Jews?

(But of course I say no such thing.)

FINALLY our small armada heads toward Troebitz. Security is tight—there are two police helicopters overhead and our bus, the first in a caravan of four, is preceded by a cruiser with its blue lights flashing and its klaxon blaring. For many, the terrifying, come-and-go sound triggers a memory of the Gestapo, and brings us close to tears.

What will Troebitz be like? Will the villagers be there, or will they hide in their attics and peer out from behind drawn shades? Will Troebitz remember us? Will we remember Troebitz?

The survivors spill out of the buses as if they had not been allowed outdoors for months, and gather, for the first time, for a group photograph. The atmosphere is electric, the mood high. This is an event—indeed, a scene—that is not likely to be repeated; a return of incalculable moral vengeance, of great triumph. See, we the begrimed, the humiliated of the earth, have returned! We lived! We have made something of these all-but-stamped-out lives!

The villagers of Troebitz are present in large numbers: the mayor, a nephew of the one who died of typhus; the storekeepers; the housewives; and most of all, the high-school students. I work with students at home, and I am at once drawn to these. Their faces are exceedingly straight and innocent, though not naive. They look calmly and directly at me; it is clear that they know everything.

Come, they say, come and see our exhibit. In the Town Hall we explore a project composed jointly by the region's high schools: a photographic display, with commentary, of the journey of the Lost Transport, complete with a chilling table-sized model of Bergen-Belsen, photographs of the liberation of a kind which children should not have to see, maps of the railroad routes, and a list of victims buried in Troebitz, including my father.

No Jew had returned to Troebitz for 40 years. In 1985, conscience got hold of one survivor who came to see under what farmland his father's grave might lie. What he found instead was an impeccably kept Jewish cemetery; his father's gravestone was intact, maintained as it had been left in 1945, with the flowers tended as if by a member of the family.

"Two thousand people showed up in our village of 700," the mayor tells us. "We didn't invite them, and they didn't want to be here. But we did what we could." Troebitz had remembered us with dignity, and we, as we weep deep tears at the memorial service in the small Jewish cemetery overlooking the lake, we remember Troebitz.

I begin my prayer with a story.

Master of the Universe, You Who remember all things forgotten, remember the little four-year-old boy as he stood in that white hospital room in Eindhoven in 1946. In that big white bed lay an unfamiliar woman, claiming to be his mother. But this could not be his mother! When he had last seen his mother seven months ago on a train in Troebitz, she was a bag of bones weighing 50 pounds, crazy with delirium.

Creator of Heaven and Earth, You before Whom there lies only eternity, before Whose glorious throne there is no forgetting, remember, I beg You, that moment in the hospital room, where in the presence of the priests and the nuns, the woman in the bed finally succeeds in persuading this child that she really is his mother. Remember how the mother, resisting tears, asks the child to open the drawer in the white night table next to her bed. The child obeys, and there, among a sea of chocolates and candies, he finds his gifts: the small red prayerbook, the ritual undergarment—with its fringes.

Do You hear, O Listener to the prayers of Your People Israel—that it ***never occurred to her*** *to think that You had abandoned her on that dark Night? Father of Compassion, You Whose eye observes, Whose ear hears, You Who each day enters the inventory of our virtues in a book, know that this was not an isolated case. Those Jews who were religiously observant before the Holocaust for the most part maintained their observance after the Holocaust.*

Master of the Universe, in the Night we weep, but in the dawn, do we not sing Your praises?

Lord of Wonders, look upon us—orphaned and widowed, haunted and half-crazed by a Night which refuses to end, ***are we not back****? Are there not more students studying Your Torah now than before the Night? Do not more Jews speak Your Holy Tongue now than before the Night? Are not our young men and women, especially when they don that green uniform of the army of Israel, every bit as prepared to die for their people as was the generation of the Night—who had no choice?*

And so, Master of the Universe—You Who reigned before aught was created—we the survivors approach You with the great question of the sages about liberation: why is this Night different from all other Nights? Have we not suffered enough? How long shall we be haunted by the trains and by the typhus? How long will the barking of dogs and the sounds of German bring sweat to our palms? Is not this the darkest Night of all? Have we not suffered enough?

Master of the Universe, forgive me if I call upon all who are buried here, and in Troebitz, and in Auschwitz and Treblinka, and in the other mountains of human ash, to join with those of us gathered here today, to form a rally of protest. You in Whose hand lies the spirit of every living thing: when will the Night finally become the Dawn, the memories be given meaning, the nightmares become dreams? When will the Great Sabbath finally arrive, whereon, as You have promised, the lion shall finally lie down with the lamb, and a little child shall lead them?

Joseph A. Polak is rabbi and director of the B'nai B'rith Hillel House at Boston University.

At Century's End,

A Holocaust Backlash

by **Thane Rosenbaum**

It sure is confusing out there for people with a conscience about the Holocaust.

As the century comes to a close and a new millennium is set to begin, the Shoah has never occupied a more prominent position in the American, if the not the world's, public consciousness. Yet at the same time, what recently passes for Holocaust art, literature and scholarship more often than not undermines, trivializes and constitutes an insidious backlash against the Holocaust itself.

Those for whom "Never Again" has been ritualized as a daily prayer, there is much to be grateful about. Just consider all the books, feature films, documentaries, videotaped survivor testimonies, and Holocaust resource and documentation centers spread out across the land like mass-murder peep shows.

In some states, Holocaust education is now mandatory for high school students. And, of course, the centerpiece of all efforts at Holocaust martyrology involves public memorials and museums—the one in Washington the envy of Disney—and designated days for mourning, from Kristallnacht to Yom HaShoah.

Indeed, the Holocaust has become a totemic, Mount Rushmore symbol of inhumanity, a signature embarrassment of a century that is now finally on its way out. Yet the hope seems to be that as we embark on a new era, our blank slates will achieve an added boost of purity—all because of the universal appeal and universal lessons that the study of the Holocaust has provided.

This wasn't always the case. For the first 20 years after European Jewish life vanished from the shtetls and cities alike, the Shoah wasn't a symbol of anything other than silence. The Holocaust (which at the time didn't even exist as a word to describe this particular tragedy) was more taboo than totem. There was simply too much horror, shock, and shame; the magnitude of it all would take years to set in. Eventually, however, books came to be written. Survivors began to speak. Artists decided on aesthetic boundaries. But all of this was undertaken with extreme tentativeness and reverence, and most important of all, humility.

What distinguishes the recent outpouring of Holocaust literary and artistic material from that which preceded it is the very absence of humility. Frankly, the awe is now gone; the gloves have come off even though the body is still cold. The Holocaust, no longer sacred, has become a vulnerable target for criticism and invention, no more private and particular than an episode of the "Jerry Springer Show." And we're not talking about deniers here, whom nobody ever took seriously, but rather otherwise well-meaning, albeit indecorous people, who should know better.

As it turns out, Binjamin Wilkomirski, the author of "Fragments," wasn't a Holocaust survivor after all, but rather a pretender, a false survivor who aspired to a sainthood that in these dawning millennial days could only be conferred through the stature of the Shoah. Wilkomirski's German publisher had reservations from the very beginning about the veracity of his story, but chose to pass the book off as a memoir rather than as a novel anyway. True Holocaust stories are simply more tantalizing than invented ones.

Yet, in "Imagining the Holocaust," Daniel R. Schwarz recently argued that Elie Wiesel's "Night" is as much a novel as a memoir, which surely must be news to Wiesel, a novelist who up until now had correctly assumed that he had the right—if not the moral authority—to be able to distinguish his real-life from his fictional dramas. Twenty years ago such an effrontery against Wiesel and his iconic memoir would have been unthinkable, but nowadays bad manners are charming and fewer people know the difference between deconstruction and desecration.

Similarly, Peter Novick's "The Holocaust in American Life" can only be described as an act of violence against the Holocaust. Yet surprisingly few reacted with outrage against his book. In it, Novick seemingly dismisses the suffering of survivors and instead chooses to focus on what he sees as a far more interesting Jewish question: the cynical exploitation of the Holocaust in an age that celebrates identity politics and relative victimhood.

Menachem Rosensaft, the founding chairman of the International Network of Children of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, and also a member of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council, says, "People want to create novel ideas in order to advance their own careers. The problem with Novick is that he resents the survivors for knowing more about the Holocaust than he does. We are still living in an extremely sensitive twilight in the sense that we do not have the right to engage in either speculative or intellectual exercises that will offend or hurt the survivors. This is not an elitist position, but simply humane."

But Novick is not alone. What many scholars have in common is an open and unapologetic disdain for those who were direct witnesses to the atrocity. The value of their testimony has not only been challenged, but in some cases deprecated and ignored.

Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, author of the international bestseller, "Hitler's Willing Executioners," recognizes both the danger, and the insult, in this phenomenon.

"Many scholars, most notably Raul Hilberg and those who follow him, take the indefensible position that the victims of the Holocaust have little or nothing to tell us about those who tortured and brutalized them," Goldhagen said. "This is not only outrageous, but completely at odds with those scholars who are collecting testimonies from the victims of Kosovo, Bosnia, Rwanda and Cambodia in order to learn what happened in those genocides."

The fact that many historians often regard the Jewish eyewitness accounts of Holocaust survivors as bring too subjective and unreliable is all the more tragic, and ironic, given the exponential numbers of survivors who have had their oral testimonies videotaped during the latter part of this decade. What's the point of recording their stories if writers and historians have no use for them?

Moreover, this archival visual material may have had damaging side effects on the survivors themselves. Eva Fogelman, a New York-based psychologist who is an expert in Holocaust-related trauma, and also a daughter of two Holocaust survivors, points out what are for many the unacknowledged pitfalls inherent in these oral history projects.

"Oral history projects are glitzy, they have received financial support, but they are limited." Fogelman said, "Unfortunately, the lingering psychological pain that survivors continue to experience more than 50 years after liberation is ongoing in their lives, and for some, particularly the older ones, it has even gotten worse after taping their testimonies. Oral histories, in themselves, could never have been expected to be the magic bullet that would heal the psychological wounds of the Holocaust, and we shouldn't delude ourselves into thinking that once the testimony is completed, there is closure for the survivor."

As Holocaust libraries continue to expand—with or without survivor testimonies—another question is the quality of what is bring written. Publishers do seem enthusiastically committed to books—both nonfiction and fiction—that have Holocaust themes. But it's not so clear whether the ideas contained in these books, and the art being produced, contributes to a meaningful conversation about the Holocaust, one that authentically and respectfully addresses the moral complexity that the Shoah demands.

"Look, people can't get enough of the Holocaust," said Melvin Jules Bukiet, a novelist and also the son of a Holocaust survivor. "It's all so irresistible—the darkest, most unpleasant event of our time. Unfortunately, however, most of the people who can't resist it are also inadequate to render it. A lot of what is being published are not great books, and in this case the bar should be even higher because the subject is more serious."

But the absence of great books may not make a difference anyway, given the general decline in reading and the alarming increase in all forms of screen-worship. Indeed, during the past few years more and more people have been introduced to the Holocaust by way of Hollywood and its collaborators than anything else. And this reality has given rise to the most egregious distortions in what most people have come to learn about the Shoah.

Feature films such as "Schindler's List," "Jakob the Liar," "Train of Life," and the most offensive and mindless of all, "Life is Beautiful," ultimately misdirect the emotions and detract from the tragedy, rather than enlighten. But why should this be surprising given a film industry that depends on neatly packaged, life-affirming endings, and the celebration of the human spirit, for its commercial success, none of which has very much to do with the annihilation of European Jewry at all. Hollywood exists on smoke and mirrors, but Auschwitz did without the mirrors and dedicated itself entirely to real smoke.

Annette Insdorf, professor and director of undergraduate film studies at Columbia University, and the daughter of two Holocaust survivors, says that she is "leery of anyone including myself, assuming a position of moral superiority when it comes to the realm of art. Each of us has different criteria—indeed a different agenda—and I for one chafe at self-appointed arbiters of artistic permissibility."

But doesn't the Holocaust deserve better? Shouldn't the "realm of art" be the least bit humbled by the sheer dimensions of this tragedy? While art often takes liberties with history—indeed, it prides itself on such reinventions—shouldn't historical accuracy, and yes, even artistic restraint, count for something when it comes to mass murder?

An excellent example of this hubris comes courtesy of Roberto Benigni, the director of "Life is Beautiful." He stated that as far as he was concerned, the Holocaust belonged to everyone, as if the Shoah was some deranged intellectual property from hell—without boundaries, without discretion. But the fact is: Benigni doesn't own the event, neither do the sirens nor muses that whisper into his arrogant ear. The Holocaust was a particular Jewish tragedy, one that not even all Jews endured, or owned. That privilege was shared only by those who were there, and paid the price for such geographical misfortune.

Even Yom HaShoah can't catch a break. There are those, like Ismar Schorsch, chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary, who have called for subsuming the international day of Holocaust remembrance into the Jewish holiday of Tisha B'Av.

"The mere suggestion of the elimination of Yom HaShoah tells survivors that their personal suffering does not rate a special unique recognition," said Rosensaft. "Maybe during the year 2050, when there will no longer be any living survivors, this theological question could be subject to a legitimate debate. After all, we don't have a set date for the victims of the Inquisition or the pogroms. But a special, unique recognition for the Holocaust should not be tampered with during the lifetime of the survivors."

It does seem that as the century winds down, and the crime of the Holocaust recedes from our immediate memories, there is a general unwillingness to give the survivors their due. Maybe that's what eventually happens with all historical events. As time passes, sympathies wane. Unique sufferings are suddenly deemed commonplace. The morally unimpeachable is put on the defensive. And detractors shamelessly show their faces.

But the Holocaust is not just another historical event. And it didn't happen that long ago. Surely the moratorium on cheap shots against the Shoah should not have ended so soon. Yet then again, this was a century dominated by narcissism and disrespect. Maybe we shouldn't be so surprised after all.

For years Elie Wiesel wondered whether it would have been better if the survivors had actually said nothing after their liberation. Silence may have ultimately produced the loudest noise, left the most lasting impression, created a chilling, agonizing mystery for all of us to ponder. What is ultimately unknowable should remain so.

But we all know how this post-Holocaust story actually turned out. Nobody could keep quiet—not Wiesel, not other survivors, not even children of survivors, nor the historians, novelists, psychologists and filmmakers.

The essential tale of the Shoah was too hot, and the moral imperatives to speak—and at times shout—was too great. To do otherwise would have been the ultimate betrayal. But as we now coast into a new calendar, perhaps we can bring some of the awe and humility that once surrounded the Holocaust along with us.

Thane Rosenbaum *is a novelist and the author of* "Second Hand Smoke" *and* "Elijah Visible."

Why?

by **Ken Rhodes**

On the street I saw a small girl
cold and shivering in a thin dress,
with little hope of a decent meal.
I became angry and said to God:
"Why did you permit this?
Why don't you do something about it?"

For a while God said nothing.
That night he replied, quite suddenly:
"I certainly did something about it. I made you."

Joseph Rackman, Esq., Editor

Published by The Wexner Heritage Foundation
551 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10022
(212) 355-6115

Comments regarding the Wexner Heritage Review may be directed to editor@wexner.org

WEXNER HERITAGE
REVIEW
WEB ISSUE NO. 12 Adar II 5760

Orthodoxy
And Synagogue Renewal

Orthodox synagogues seem to be success stories, based upon their high level of attendance. However, one Orthodox rabbi believes that there are many shortcomings and that the synagogue must be used to create a true community. We can also "serve a transformative role . . . to strengthen and make holy the Jewish family unit . . . Adult education offerings must include parenting classes, co-taught by the rabbi and a developmental psychologist." He also suggests linking the holidays to the needs of the broader community, such as building homes for the homeless at Sukkot time and collecting food for the hungry before Passover.
(*Contact*, Autumn 1999, the journal of the Jewish Life Network)

Ignoring
Our Would-Be Friends

Gary Rosenblatt, the editor of *The New York Jewish Week*, questions Jewish reticence to seek alliances with the 70 million American Christian Evangelicals. "We tend to nurture and defend rather than questions our [own] negative stereotypes about religious Christians. The time for reassessing Jewish attitudes is needed." (This reticence is also evidenced by the next article concerning relations between Jews and Catholics.)
(*The New York Jewish Week*, December 3, 1999, www.thejewishweek.com)

Infallible,
But Wrong

Pope John Paul II will be visiting Israel this month and Rabbi David Rosen, a key negotiator in the establishment of relations between Israel and the Vatican, provides a superb summary of the improvement in relations between Jews and Catholics over the past two generations. "Today, the Catholic church is not only part of the problem (of anti-Semitism), it is part of the solution." Recent news reports (coming after the writing of this article) concerning the Vatican-PLO accord and the desire to internationalize Jerusalem makes us realize that for all the improvements, however, Catholic-Jewish relations have a way to go.
(*The Jerusalem Post*, January 14, 2000, www.jpost.com)

Orthodoxy
And Synagogue Renewal

by **Rabbi Yosef Kanefsky**

If I had to hazard a guess, I would bet that most of my Orthodox brethren would regard the challenge of synagogue renewal as being one that did not really pertain to us. And if we were to define synagogue renewal in the narrowest possible sense, they would be right. The percentage of Orthodox Jews who attend synagogue every Shabbat is very high, and it is common for an Orthodox synagogue to offer multiple Shabbat morning services, all of which are well attended. If by renewal we mean the filling of the seats, then this is generally not an Orthodox issue.

The reality, though, is that the challenge of renewal touches upon many more areas than simply that of numbers. It involves looking at these well-attended services of ours, and asking what they are truly accomplishing. There is, I believe a widespread recognition within the Orthodox community that the synagogue functions as a social club as much as it does a place of meaningful religious experience. Orthodox synagogues are notoriously noisy during services, even during Torah reading. Worshipers do not generally look to the Shabbat morning services for spiritual inspiration or emotional uplift. The message of the rabbi's sermon sometimes gets lost in the discussion over whether the rabbi spoke too long. Even the Orthodox synagogue's traditional role of inspiring and transforming the religious lives of its members through weekly classes and lectures may no longer be viable. The proliferation of opportunities to study via the internet, and the growth of adult Jewish education programs in non-synagogue forums have cut deeply into this role of the synagogue. The challenge of renewal-renewal of the spiritual potency of the Orthodox synagogue-beckons.

The key to success is the synagogue's being able to identify and recognize those areas in which it truly has the power to make a difference in people's lives. The goal, then, is to design or redesign the synagogue's activities so that the synagogue actually is making a profound difference in its members' lives-in the ways that they think and behave. As people come to view their synagogue as a center for personal and spiritual growth, their expectations of synagogue membership and of the role that the synagogue should play in their lives will change and expand. A self-driving dynamic of renewal will be put into motion.

One of the ways that a synagogue can have a profound impact on the life of its members is through creating a meaningful community, one in which every member feels the support and love of every other. The work toward the creation of this type of community takes place in *shul* on Shabbat morning and is the result of the efforts of a few critical committees.

The Shabbat morning service is filled with opportunities for generating a deep sense of intra-communal caring. When, for example, the *mi shebayrach* for the sick is recited, the rabbi needs to give a very specific update as to who is sick (or who has a loved one who is sick), how one may contact or visit people who are hospitalized, who could use a friendly visitor in the week to come, and to whom one can speak if one would like to prepare a meal for a person who is ill. The *bikur cholim* (visiting the sick) committee must specifically ask both the close friends of the sick person as well as people who aren't as close to help. When an individual recites the *gomel* (blessing for one's well-being) in *shul*, people have to know why it's being recited (with the individual's permission of course). When a family celebrates a *simcha* (happy occasion) in *shul*, everyone present must be encouraged to sing and to dance with the celebrants. (Yes, we really dance in *shul*!) When a baby is named, the parents must be given the opportunity to share with everyone the significance of the name they chose. There must be a committee whose specific function is to welcome and arrange Shabbat meal invitations for every new soul who walks through the door. The cumulative impact of these efforts is enormous. Everyone feels connected to and responsible for everyone else. The synagogue becomes a true community and Shabbat morning becomes a very significant locus for personal religious growth.

A second vital area in which the synagogue can serve a transformative role is in its ability to strengthen and make holy the Jewish family unit. Programs in which parents and children celebrate and learn together (creative informal learning is often best) need to be a regular part of the program year. On Shabbat mornings, rabbis need to make the Torah's teachings concerning family relationships a frequently recurring sermon topic. The adult education offerings must include parenting classes co-taught by the rabbi and a developmental psychologist. The synagogue needs to be seen as the prime resource for how to create and to raise the Jewish family.

The synagogue can and must make the prayer experience one that consistently lifts and inspires. In this regard, there is nothing that comes close to the power of the communal song. The energy that fills the room when all of the voices have joined as one is incomparable. Achieving this does require a rigid insistence that all of those who want to lead services comply with the communal singing standard, and the synagogue must provide opportunities for training. But the benefit in terms of the renewal of interest and active participation in prayer is enormous. The most prevalent trend in this regard has been the introduction and broad utilization of the melodies of the late Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach. A leader in this movement has been the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale which, under the direction of Rabbi Avi Weiss, has adopted Rabbi Carlebach's entire Friday night service, to the delight of the standing-room-only crowds. This enhancement of the service must be complemented by classes on the text of the *siddur*. This rightfully remains the educational niche of the synagogue even at a time when there are so many other educational resources in the larger (real and virtual) community.

Finally, for an Orthodox synagogue to renew its spiritual vitality, its members have to see their Judaism actually making a difference. Every *chag* (holiday) needs to have a *tikkun* (thematically linked) project attached to it. This could be building homes for the homeless at Sukkot time, collecting food for the hungry at Pesach time, participating in a community-building cross-denominational Torah study at Shavuot time, or whatever it is that suits the desires of a particular community. The program for Bar and Bat Mitzvah preparation needs to include group hospital visits, helping younger children at synagogue youth events, and other acts of community service. When a synagogue community works together to bring its principles into practice, the synagogue becomes so much more than a social club for its congregants. It becomes their Sinai.

Rabbi Yosef Kanefsky is the spiritual leader of B'nai David-Judea Congregation in Los Angeles. He is a contributor to *Spiritual Manifestos*, a new book by young clergy on religion in America.

Ignoring
Our Would-Be Friends

***by* Gary Rosenblatt**

Let's be honest here: If I say "Evangelical Christian," do you think "anti-Semite," or merely "millennium-crazed, Bible-toting missionary?"

You'd probably be surprised if I said the correct answer, in most cases, is not only one who believes a spiritual rebirth is necessary for salvation and who often has a zeal for proselytizing, but one who supports Israel and the Jewish people, prayerfully and financially. Even so, you might suggest that an evangelical's motives are suspect, that the only reason for this support is to fulfill a prophecy that the Jews in the land of Israel will see the light and accept Jesus at the end of days.

Truth is, while we are quick to accuse others of anti-Jewish sentiments, we tend to nurture and defend rather than question our own negative stereotypes about others, especially religious Christians. And we are prejudiced against them, despite the fact that they pray for, defend and tour Israel - an estimated 60 percent of tourists to the Jewish state are Evangelicals (and they don't cancel their trips after terror incidents like we do). Moreover, they contribute to Israel and Jewish causes in large numbers.

Yechiel Eckstein is somewhat of an expert on the issue. He heads an organization called the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, based in Chicago, which raises funds from Christians around the country to help rescue Jews from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia and resettle them in Israel, and to support impoverished Jews in the former Soviet Union and Israel. The money goes to the Jewish Agency for Israel and the Joint Distribution Committee, no strings attached.

Last year, the fellowship contributed $6.5 million from about 100,000 donors, mostly working-class Christians who responded to one of two televised "infomercials" sponsored by the group. This year the amount may reach $10 million, and Eckstein described the giving as "sacrificial," noting that many people make donations from their Social Security savings or in lieu of giving Christmas presents to relatives.

Why? Because they have been taught through the Bible that those who bless Israel will themselves be blessed (Genesis, 12:3). Eckstein, an Orthodox rabbi, is as proud of the Christian community for its efforts as he is frustrated with the Jewish community for failing to acknowledge these good works. He says that despite representing the single largest annual campaign gift to UJA in Chicago - $20 million over the last four years - his group receives little recognition or formal gratitude. It's not that he's seeking kavod, or honor, he says, but an acknowledgment that Christians support Israel and Jewish causes, an important message for the Jewish community.

Some Israeli leaders, like Natan Sharansky, the minister of interior, and Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert, have been effusive in their praise of the fellowship's work - but not organized Jewry here. Perhaps because as a group, American Jews seem more fearful than respectful of devout Christians. We engage in interfaith dialogue with Catholics and with liberal Protestant denominations, but tend to discuss Evangelicals, who number some 70 million in America, in the context of cults and missionaries, and how to counteract them.

Elliot Abrams, president of the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, D.C., says he is convinced that a major reason why Jews don't deal with Evangelicals is the result of "a tremendous amount of pure prejudice." He said polls consistently show that Jews think of Evangelicals as anti-Semitic, though the same polls show they are not, and that little effort is made to educate Jews or meet with Evangelicals. His group does sponsor some workshops with rabbis and Evangelical ministers, and he says that while ideological discussions may lead nowhere - Evangelicals say it is their mission to proselytize and Jews explain how offensive that it is to them - there could be areas of cooperation, from helping the poor to de-emphasizing the sexual content of television programs.

Some Jewish officials criticize Eckstein for working more closely with Christians than with Jews, but Abrams said he has seen Eckstein in dialogue with Evangelical leaders, and "he is tough as nails" in telling them why Jews are deeply upset by attempts to missionize to them, Abrams said. "Yechiel's message is that Christian needs to love and support Israel."

And they do.

Eckstein, in a program sponsored by the Everett Institutes, said his group will be opening an office in Jerusalem, and has commissioned a Gallup poll to determine Israeli attitudes toward Christians, to be released next month. A future study will examine American Jewish attitudes toward Christians.

Such studies may find that even if Jews were made aware of the support Evangelicals have for them and Israel, they would harbor suspicions about theological motives. Certainly there are Christians who see helping Jews and Israel as a precursor to hastening messianic days, but most, says Eckstein, simply have been taught through Bible study that it is a blessing to support Israel and the Jewish people.

He points out that lumping mainline, fundamentalist and Pentecostal Christians together is as naive and ignorant as failing to see the distinctions among Modern Orthodox, haredi and chasidic Jews. And he says that for all our discomfort about Christian missionizing to the Jews, we should bear in mind that only a very small percentage of funds go for that purpose. Indeed, do you know anyone who gave up Judaism to become a Southern Baptist as a result of missionary efforts?

The danger is more to interfaith relations than to losing Jews, but we should continue to emphasize our resentment against efforts specifically targeting Jews for conversion.

We should also reassess our own attitudes, though. Steven Bayme of the American Jewish Committee notes that "our views towards Christians reflect a lack of maturity among American Jews. We still fear Christianity as if it represented the Church of past centuries."

It's time to confront that fear. If not, our actions could contribute to a self-fulfilling prophecy whereby Jews continue to be cynical and suspicious about Christian support for Israel until finally, Christians come to resent Jews for spurning their affection. And then the Jews would say, "I told you they hated us."

We may still have issues with Evangelicals about their motives, but we, a people all too convinced that it has no allies in the world, do ourselves and tens of millions of our fellow Americans a disservice by ignoring their abiding friendship, love and support.

Reprinted by permission of *The New York Jewish Week*.

Infallible,

But Wrong

by **Rabbi David Rosen**

Pope John Paul II is due to arrive in Israel in the latter part of March. While he has been talking about such a trip since the early years of his Pontificate, the timing of this visit, at the beginning of the new millennium, has given it even greater meaning.

It is not that he considers the date to be accurate. He knows full well that the calendar date of 2000 is far from precise, and certainly does not consider it to be a divinely appointed apocalyptic date.

However, the Pope is a master in the use of symbols and milestones.

Designating the year as the Great Jubilee four years ago (based on the biblical concept regarding the 50th year: Leviticus 25:10), the Vatican released a document outlining the Pope's expectations and instructions for the years leading up to and culminating in the millennial year.

In this document *(In Tertio Millenio Adveniente),* John Paul II not only calls on the Catholic faith-ful to make pilgrimage both to Rome and the Holy Land, he refers to his own plan to come to Israel as a pilgrim. In addition, he indicates his hope that the millennium and his visit will serve as opportunity for reconciliation between Christians, Jews and Moslems. To this end he has initiated a series of conferences and issued statements expressing Catholic remorse for violence done in the name of the Church, especial-ly toward the Jewish people.

Indeed, Pope John Paul has played a remarkable role in the advancement of Catholic-Jewish relations, continuing the work of Pope John XXIII. His visit to Israel will be, in addition to all else, a visible expression of the historic transformation of Catholic attitudes toward Jews, Judaism and Israel.

IN ORDER to appreciate the extent of this transformation, it is appropri-ate to recall the reply of Pope Pius X to Theodor Herzl in January 1904, when the latter asked the pontiff for his support for the Zionist enter-prise. In his diaries, Herzl records Pius X as saying: "We are unable to favor this movement. We cannot prevent the Jews from going to Jerusalem, but we could never sanc-tion it. As head of the Church, I can-not answer you otherwise. The Jews have not recognized our Lord. Therefore, we cannot recognize the Jewish people; and so, if you come to Palestine and settle your people there, we will be ready with church-es and priests to baptize all of you."

In fact, Cardinal Merry del Val, instructed by the Pope to pursue the correspondence with Herzl, wrote him that "as long as the Jews deny Christ's divinity, we cannot take a stand favorable to them."

The subsequent Vatican secretary of state, Cardinal Pietro Gasparri, was bitterly opposed to the Balfour Declaration, and wrote in 1919 that "the danger that frightens us the most is that of the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine."

These attitudes were, of course, not new.

The "teaching of contempt" toward the Jews, portrayed as accursed and condemned on high for failing to recognize the "true Messiah," had its origins in the first centuries of Christianity. The tragic historic condition of the Jewish people was accordingly portrayed as proof of the Christian claim.

For Justin Martyr (second century), the destruction of the Temple and consequent exile were ultimate confirmation of the thesis that the Mosaic Law had been abrogated and replaced by the Christian faith. In fact, the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile and dispersion of the Jews were presented by John Chrysostom (fourth century) not just as divine punishment on the Jews for their rejection and killing of Jesus, but as "proof" of the fact that Jesus was himself divine.

The fact that the Jews endured so much suffering, the logic went, proved that they were an accursed people. Since they had broken the divine covenant by not recognizing Jesus as the "fulfillment" of that covenant, a new people-the believers in Jesus-had been covenanted to replace them. Accordingly, the Church was the new chosen people, "*verus Israel*,-the true Israel-in the Divine plan of salvation.

If this "teaching of contempt" was not necessarily always the motiva-tion for the persecution of Jews in so-called Christian lands, it certain-ly created the climate for it.

While the spirit of scholarly research in the earlier part of the century had much to do with a review of Catholic teaching concerning the Jews, it was the impact of the Holocaust and the personal commitment of Pope John XXIII that led to the radical break with this past theology.

As papal envoy in Turkey during World War II, John XXIII helped save thousands of Jews from the clutches of the Nazis and their collaborators.

He was also substantially affected by his personal encounters, espe-cially with the Jewish historian Jules Isaac. The French-Jewish scholar published in 1948 a book *entitled Jesus et. Israel*, which brought out as no study had done before how closely the contempt for the Jewish people and the vilification of the Jewish religion were linked to Christian preaching.

In convening the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, John XXIII sought, *inter alia*, the reappraisal of Catholic theological attitudes toward the Jewish people. As a result, the document promulgated in 1965, known as *Nostra Aetate*, categorically repudiated the teaching of contempt toward the Jewish people and ushered in the revolution in Church teaching that has continued over the past 35 years.

In *Nostra Aetate*, the Church rejected the idea of Jewish collective, let alone continuous, responsibility for the death of Jesus; affirmed the divine covenant with the Jewish people as eternal and unbroken, condemned antisemitism and emphasized the Jewish roots of Christianity.

Since *Nostra Aetate*, the Vatican and, in particular, Pope John Paul II, have made many additional condemnations of antisemitism, declaring it to be a sin against God and man, and thus incompatible with Christian faith.

In 1986, the pope made his historic visit to the Great Synagogue in Rome and emphasized Christianity's unique link and debt to Judaism. In 1990, he reiterated an earlier declaration made in Prague by Cardinal Cassidy and the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jewish People by saying that the fact that antisemitism had found a place in Christian thought and teaching demanded an act of *teshuva* (repentance) on its part.

And, in closing the European Bishops Synod in 1991, Pope John Paul II uttered an eloquent prayer expressing contrition for the sins committed toward the Jews by Christians in Europe through the centuries, particularly during the Holocaust.

Formal recognition of the significance of the State of Israel for the Jewish people was expressed by the Pope in his apostolic letter *Redemptionis Anno* in April 1984 and was reflected a year later in an official Vatican document relating to Jews and Judaism.

The normalization of relations between the Holy See and Israel was the natural outcome of these changes in theology and attitude. Indeed, for many years before the establishment of diplomatic ties, the Holy See had categorically stated that there were no theological barriers to full relations with Israel.

Why, then, did it take the Vatican another 30 years to establish them? Theology was not the problem. While it seems fair to say that there were undoubtedly those within the Church hierarchy who still adhered (and some may continue to adhere) to the old theology, they were not the major obstacle.

The Vatican's reluctance to establish full diplomatic relations was rather the consequence of secular political considerations. The Church has communities, institutions and assets in Arab and Moslem societies and it feared that any rapprochement with Israel could trigger a backlash.

Above all, most Catholics in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza are Arabs who identify to varying degrees with the Palestinian cause. Christians living in the Palestinian nationalist society had no interest in any change in the status quo as long as Palestinian and Israel interests were seen as being in conflict. This was made clear to the Vatican.

The Vatican's position, however, changed as did the global and regional realities of realpolitik in the Nineties. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the Gulf war facilitated the ensuing Middle East peace process, and, as Vatican spokesman Joachin Navarro-Valls put it at the time, if the Palestinians were talking with the Israelis, why shouldn't the Vatican?

In the three years prior to the Madrid peace conference, Israel had more than doubled its diplomatic missions through the reestablish-ment of relations with African countries (which had terminated them after the Yom Kippur War) and the establishment of new rela-tions with the emerging states of the former communist bloc.

The Vatican was one of the last entities outside the circle of Israel's diplomatic relations. Were the Holy See to have further delayed rapprochement, protestations regarding the theological acceptance of Israel would have rung hollow.

Not least of all, as the peace talks moved ahead, the Church did nor want to be left out in the cold, especially regarding the future of Jerusalem, where the Holy See has substantial interests.

Significantly, on this matter the Vatican was no longer talking of the internationalization of Jerusalem, but rather of international guarantees for the status of the religious communities and the holy sites.

The formal turning point came in July 1992 with the establishment of the Permanent Bilateral Commission of the State of Israel and the Holy See.

This culminated in the Jerusalem signing of the Fundamental Agreement that established full bilateral relations between the two on December 30, 1993.

While Vatican spokespersons emphasized that this was an agreement between states, it was evident from the text that it was much more. The preamble of the agreement made clear that normalization took place within the context of the historic reconciliation of the Catholic Church with the Jewish people.

Furthermore, as Archbishop Luigi Barbarito, the Apostolic Nuncio to the Court of St. James pointed out at Westminster on February 28. 1994, the document was also historic in its recognition of the unique character and universal significance of the Holy Land for the Jewish People.

Indeed, the very act of the Holy See signing an agreement and normalizing relations with the restored sovereign Jewish people in the land of its ancestors was the culmination of the revolution in Church teaching. Dr. Yossi Beilin, who chaired the Israeli negotiating team on behalf of the government of Israel, described it at the time as a triumph for the Jewish people.

Moreover, in the second article of the Fundamental Agreement, the Church went beyond its past condemnation of antisemitism and pledged to work with Israel to combat such bigotry, giving even greater impetus to the increasing shift of focus in Jewish-Christian relations from the past to the future.

All this is not to ignore a number of recent controversies, if not conflicts, between Jewry and the Catholic Church, most

of which have been related to the Church's past teachings and persecution of the Jews-particularly concerning the Holocaust.

It was against this background that Jewish organizations protested the Carmelite Convent at Auschwitz as an offensive appropriation of Jewish victimhood. Similarly opposed was the canonization of Edith Stein, a nun who converted from Judaism to Catholicism and perished in the Holocaust. Another example was the Pope's reception and honoring of Kurt Waldheim.

Such incidents led many Jews to question the genuineness of the Church's declared goodwill toward the Jewish people, and the integrity of its historical reckoning.

In response to the strong negative Jewish reaction to his reception of Waldheim, Pope John Paul II informed Jewish leaders in 1987 that the Holy See would produce a document dealing with past Church teachings and persecution of the Jews, culminating with the Holocaust.

Various national Bishops Conferences took up this initiative with impressive candor and self-criticism. Particular mention should be made of the remarkable statements released by the German and French Bishops Conferences, in 1995 and 1997 respectively. In asking forgiveness of the Jewish people, these documents declared that "Christians were guilty of both an indirect and a direct role in the process which led to the Shoah" for which "the Church bears guilt and co-responsibility."

However, when the Vatican document was issued in 1998, it was a disappointment for many. as it did not go as far. The Vatican explained that the character of the text was determined by the need to address parts of the world which had little or no knowledge of the Holocaust, let alone a direct relationship to it.

In fact, the Vatican insisted that the document not only acknowledged Christian responsibility and need for repentance, but, in addressing the billion Catholic faithful throughout the world, served as a significant bulwark in the battle against Holocaust denial.

Nevertheless, the statement also sought to justify and applaud the role of Pope Pius XII during the Holocaust, portraying his position as one of heroic support for Jews.

The fact that most Jews have a very different if not diametrically opposite view of Pius XII meant that the document elicited a very negative response. The controversy over the role of Pius XII has been compounded by references to his candidature for beatification by the Holy See (a process actually begun during Pope Paul VI's pontificate).

These issues have highlighted the fact that the differences between Christians and Jews concern not only identities and faith affirmations, but also the way in which we relate to history and memory.

Yet, notwithstanding these difficulties, the past 35 years have witnessed a truly historic revolution that is above all evidenced in the educational materials relating to Jews, Judaism and Israel used by the Catholic Church in the US.

As my late senior colleague Dr. Geoffrey Wigoder put it, today the Catholic Church is not only not part of the problem (of antisemitism), it is part of the solution.

Indeed, as far as the State of Israel is concerned, the visit of the Pope-who will pay his respects to the highest elected officials of the Jewish nation now restored to sovereignty in its historic homeland with Jerusalem as its capital-is more than a great opportunity for Israeli tourism; it is the ultimate symbol of the transforma-tion in Catholic-Jewish relations.

Rabbi David Rosen, former chief rabbi of Ireland, is currently the director of the Israel office of the Anti-Defamation League, and the ADL's co-liaison to the Vatican. Rosen, a key negotiator in the establishment of relations between Israel and the Vatican, is today president of the International Council of Christians and Jews and the World Conference in Religion and Peace.

Reprinted by permission of the *Jerusalem Post*.

Joseph Rackman, Esq., Editor

Published by The Wexner Heritage Foundation
551 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10022
(212) 355-6115

Comments regarding the Wexner Heritage Review may be directed to editor@wexner.org