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Newspaper clippings, regarding publications of Daniel Jeremy
Silver, 1973-1990.

Religion

New Challenge to Jewish Seminaries

Protestants and Roman Catholics are accustomed to the fact that their seminaries are often at the forefront of radical change—witness the recent student sit-in at Union Theological Seminary in support of demands by black militant leader James Forman.

In Judaism, however, seminaries have traditionally performed the opposite function. Whether Orthodox, Conservative or Reform, they have seen their role as the chief guardians of their particular tradition and tended to view criticism, much less reform, with suspicion.

Last week this stance came under fire at a symposium sponsored by Judaism, a quarterly magazine published by the American Jewish Congress. In the principal address Rabbi Daniel Jeremy Silver, president of the National Foundation for Jewish Culture, called for major changes in Jewish seminaries on the ground that they were "placid, past-oriented and pedantic."

In doing so, he reflected a growing anxiety among younger rabbis and students that is already leading to some radical experimentation in Jewish religious training.

There are three major Jewish seminaries in the country with a combined total of about 400 students. These are the seminary in Yeshiva University (Orthodox) and Jewish Theological Seminary (Conservative) in New York, and the Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion (Reform), which has facilities in both New York and Cincinnati.

Without mentioning names, Rabbi Silver, a Reform rabbi, made two basic charges. First, he said, Jewish seminaries have degenerated into little more than technical or "trade" schools aimed at churning out congregational rabbis. "Scholarship is sacrificed to courses in technique," he said, "and the resulting mix is neither the meat of learning nor the milk of counseling."

Second, despite their urban setting, today's seminaries have cut themselves off from modern life and culture. "Almost all rabbinic training is carried out in splendid isolation," he said, "even in the middle of New York."

Rabbi Silver is not the first to make such observations. The main article in the current American Jewish Yearbook is a detailed critique of American seminaries by Charles S. Liebman, chairman of the Department of Political Science at Yeshiva.

Dr. Liebman noted that to-

day's seminaries are still modeled on 19th century European institutions. They reflect either the "yeshivot," where the Talmud was studied in isolation from contemporary culture, or the "Wissenschaft des Judentums," where Jewish culture was studied in a broad sense with the emphasis on dispassionate examination.

There is a growing conviction, however, that both models are now inadequate for a younger generation that seeks to combine a strong sense of ethnic identity with radical social involvement and a new sense of communal identity.

Rabbi Silver had at least three suggestions for reforming seminary education. He called for an end to "sectarianism" and urged that seminaries become part of modern university systems where students could study Jewish law in conjunction with Eastern philosophy, psychology, Semitic languages and other disciplines.

He urged the development of experimental curricula, including an end to the present system where each particular academic discipline is more or less a world unto itself. Finally, he suggested what may be the most radical change of all: the ordaining of women.

Rabbi Silver drew some harsh criticisms from seminary officials present. Rabbi Emanuel Rackman of Yeshiva University, for instance, said that an attack is being waged on the Talmud "at all levels" and called the situation "pathetic."

In actuality, experiments are already under way to implement the sort of changes envisioned by Rabbi Silver.

A new reconstructionist Rabbinical College was started last year in Philadelphia where students are required to explore other religions and where courses are integrated into the program of Temple University.

Even more radical is the Havurat Shalom, an experimental seminary in Cambridge, Mass., where students and faculty have established a community and make decisions on courses and other matters on a group basis. The first graduates will receive the title of "haver," meaning fellow or associate, rather than rabbi.

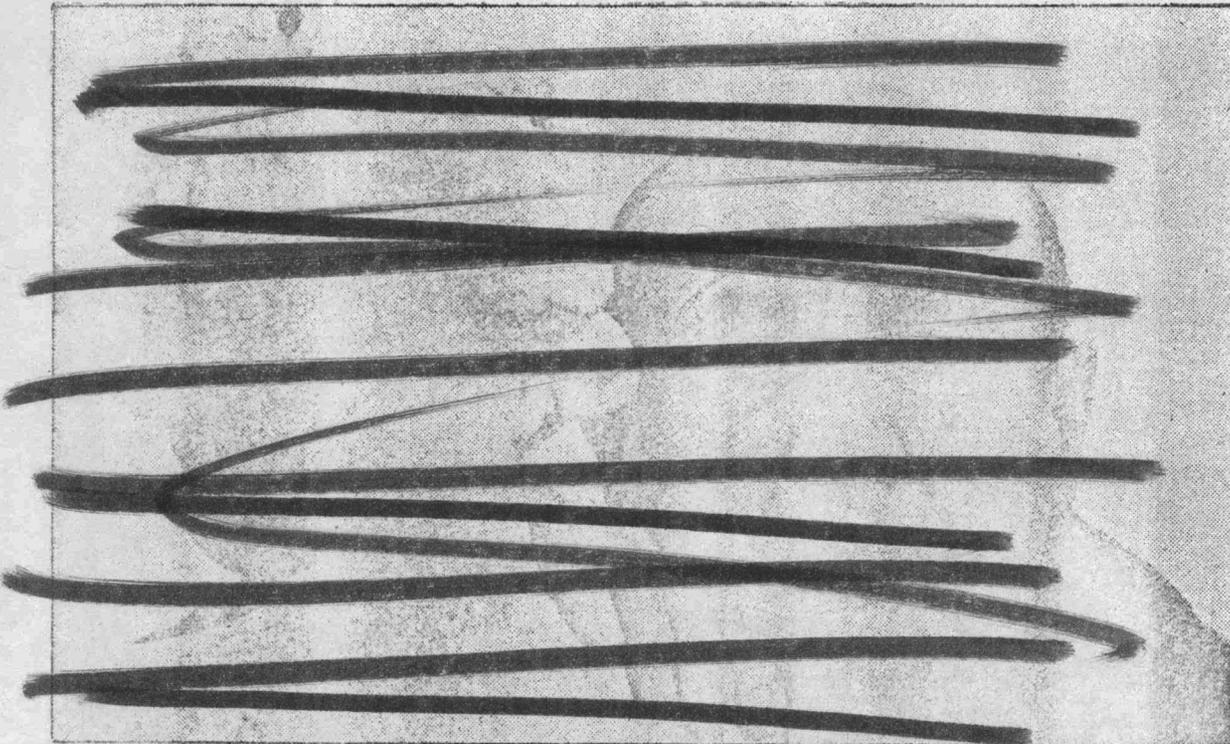
In New York another group of about 15 graduate students and others have incorporated themselves as the Havurah, an experimental community and academic institution that seeks to "clarify and deepen, beyond current formulations, the meaning of being a Jew in twentieth-century America."

—EDWARD B. FISKE

CALENDAR

LOS ANGELES TIMES

KIRSCH was LA
BOOK EDITOR
1952 til his death
FEBRUARY 9, 1975 1980



The Children of Israel and How They Grew

BY ROBERT KIRSCH

• There are many histories of the Jews, but histories of Judaism are relatively rare. It may be argued that the two cannot be separated, and Daniel Jeremy Silver and Bernard Martin, authors of "A History of Judaism" (Basic Books: \$30; two vols., boxed, illustrated), concede that "the story of Judaism cannot be told without reference to the story of the Jewish people—its living bearers."

Inevitably, it is a question of emphasis, and these impressive volumes (the first: "From Abraham to Maimonides" by Silver; the second: "Europe and the New World" by Martin) those aspects of social and political history are given which are essential ground to the development of an evolving religion, philosophy, intellectual and spiritual culture.

"What we have attempted here," the authors say, "is an account of the spiritual odyssey of the Jewish people from its beginnings to the present day. We have refused to restrict our understanding of Judaism to a creed, code of conduct or cultic system. Judaism is all of these and more. It also includes the entire intellectual culture of the Jewish people and the phenomena that have significantly molded its inner life."

This is an ambitious undertaking and perhaps even an arrogant one. The astonishing thing is that the authors not only have delivered on their promise, they have done so with elegance of style, breadth of erudition and fidelity to great complexity and variety of

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...the subtle disturbing roles he calls the *grand guignol* of his personality.

Photo by Jack Shannon

Mad Dogs and an Englishman

BY FIONA LEWIS

"As long as you don't want to know why I always play psychopathic villains and sadistic monsters all the time..."

Actor extraordinary Donald Pleasence seems the most... of the midday sun, his hands making big bulges in the pockets of his red and blue corduroy...

You see, they always ask me that and I can't stand it

The plaster cherubim are on the patio

...of the Malibu beach house which was transformed for the set of an... "Hearts of the West," have been temporarily... the beach. Howard Zeiff... and the film stars Jeff Bridges, Andy Griffith, Alan Arkin and Donald Pleasence, playing the wealthy... to grips with movie making during the early era of Hollywood.

Pleasence takes his robe around the surprisingly bird-

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Books

The Children of Israel and How They Grew

Continued from First Page

source and expression. It is a richly informing, always stimulating reading experience.

Each generation must test its understanding in the light of its own values and standards, its scholarship. The authors quickly define theirs: They are "products of the Western intellectual tradition, now in their middle years, liberal and critical in their orientation toward the Jewish tradition, but nonetheless committed Jews. We were trained to respect intellectual honesty, to strive for truth and to avoid twisting facts to fit preconceived ideologies. These pages were written in the spirit of love, but not as apologetics."

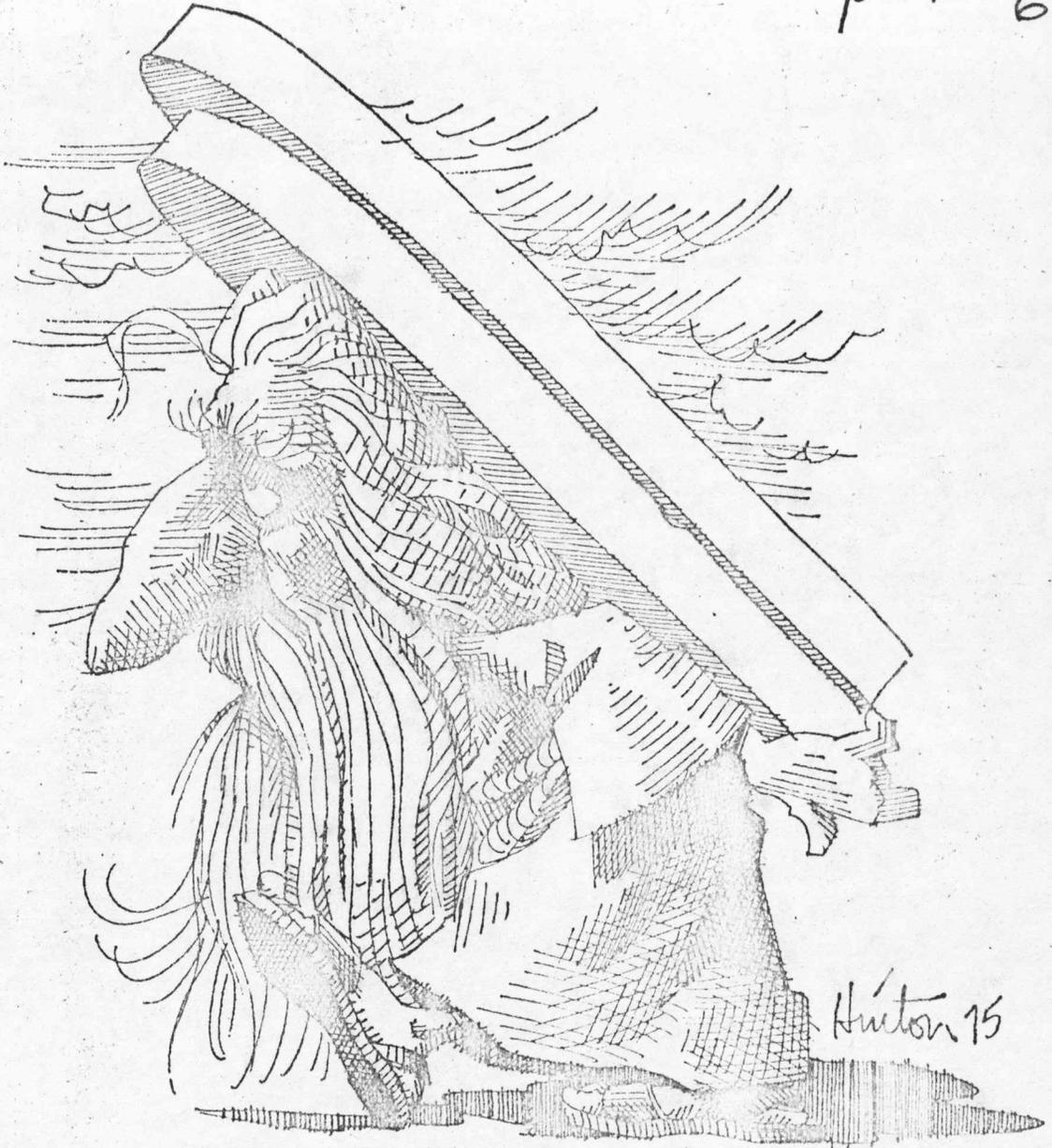
It is not a stance that will satisfy all readers—though the governing approach is a judicious one, to do justice to the contending beliefs and philosophies which are touched upon in these pages. For Judaism, though it has an irreducible common core of covenant and law, a unity, is a way of life, thought and faith which has produced the widest range of philosophical and imaginative response. And within its own community, certainly, from the period of the Prophets, interpreters of God's will and meaning have injected an existential note, or an emphasis on life-style, or a means of responding to a particular challenge. Pharisee, Sadducee, Essene, Karaite, Hellenist, Hasid, Kabbalist, Reform Jew, conservative Jew, Orthodox or neo-Orthodox Jew, Haskalahnik or Zionist—Jews have argued doctrine, ideals, moral values and imperatives, and have found in law, literature and history provenance for their acts and beliefs.

Which is the authentic Judaism? In the light of the narrative here, each reader will give his own interpretation. The authors do not shrink from giving theirs: "Our studies confirm our preconception that, despite all the changes, there has been no age which has not listened reverently to the divine voice of Sinai, no generation without a gripping tension between the word of God and palpable realities of the present day. The Jew has always looked back, and his historical past has always informed his present."

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History says yes. That record is documented here in the literature itself. One cannot read about Judaism and its long development—its confrontation of spiritual and worldly matters, its linkage with Western culture—without sensing that its experience somehow dramatizes the meaning and...

a result of the antagonism of outside communities. Would Judaism have survived without anti-Semitism and persecution? The question is not easily answered, but the evidence adduced here is insistent if not a total answer. There is a positive current at the center of Judaism, a commitment beyond defense and response. While it is true that no period, however hospitable toward the Jews, was free of the menace of destruction...



SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 1975 Los Angeles Times CALENDAR PAGE 64

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In the mists of history, Silver seeks to trace from history, archaeology, comparative ancient cultures, etymology, myth and folklore the nature of the seminomadic tribes called the Hebrews, emerging on the stage of history under the leadership of Abraham of Ur in Mesopotamia. Mesopotamian myths, culture and laws profoundly influenced the earliest Hebrews. Their Gilgamesh epic, suitably modified, parallels scriptural stories: the Garden of Eden, the Flood, the Tower of Babel.

There is some speculation in Silver's reconstruction of this earliest period, but it is informed speculation. It in no way demeans the Hebrew genius or tradition to examine the way in which ideas in the air became part of their faith. Hammurabi's laws are announced to be "his words." Biblical law has no source but God himself: "God spoke all these words saying . . ." In Babylon and Assyria, the kings and nobles had special rights; the Hebrews accepted in their covenant the commonality of men before God. Even Moses the lawgiver was a messenger. No saint, no unflawed man, a stammerer, he was capable of disobedience to God's command.

The Hebrew covenant was not negotiated with God. It was handed down, binding, eternal and without a release clause, Israel, of all the people of the area, invested an intense psychic energy in the covenant, sealed it by circumcision. Why? "Possibly for no better reason than that there had been a covenant with Abraham, and this covenant had been renewed at Sinai and periodically thereafter. Covenant may be a primary datum. Great spiritual moments are original happenings."

And once they happen, they are foundation. Men may discuss and exhort, may falter and doubt, may rationalize and embroider, but they must inevitably return to that source. That is the paradoxical essence of the Judaic experience, the drive of its survival, the basic answer to a question posed by Silver at the begin-

ning: "Can a community that bases its life on a revealed law undergo endless change?"

History says yes. That record is documented here in the literature itself. One cannot read about Judaism and its long development—its confrontation of spiritual and worldly matters, its linkage with Western culture—without sensing that its experience somehow dramatizes the meaning and significance of history itself. This is true, of course, of other histories and ways of life; but none offers so continuous and pervading a theme of men grappling with events and destinies as a riddle of God's purpose, power and law.

Primitive Judaism, unlike other Asian faiths, did not emphasize the miraculous power within nature which animates life; it stressed the miraculous power within the covenant which bound God and man. ". . . The Hebrews saw God primarily in history, while others saw God primarily in nature."

To establish the narrative, Silver must work with the care of someone trying to restore the original and succeeding words of a manuscript written on by generations of scribes, seeking the several truths of what happened and what succeeding generations of men believed had happened. His reconstruction is nothing less than brilliant.

Martin's task is different but no less arduous. He takes up the story after Maimonides and tracks the responses within Judaism to the challenges of the later Middle Ages in Spain, France, Germany and Italy, through the ordeal of the Spanish expulsion, the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation, the rise of Hasidism, and the Haskalah, the movement of enlightenment, which sought to meet the most profound challenge of all—the civil emancipation of the Jews in the 19th century.

Each historical experience, as in the past, brought its own response or collection of responses. Each exposure to other cultures stimulated attempts to absorb or understand but always to survive. Jewish communities were never hermetically sealed even in the worst of ghetto times. There were always reaction and interaction.

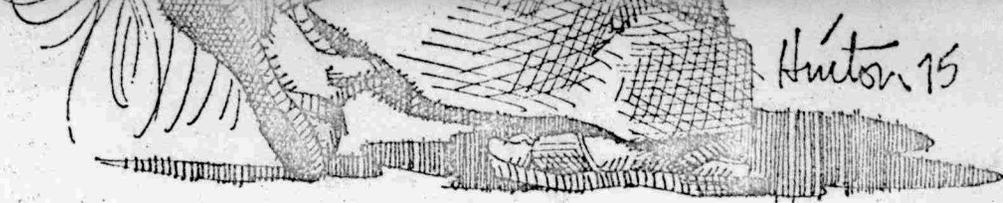
One of the enduring questions is whether the survival of Judaism in its various forms and approaches was

a result of the antagonism of outside communities. Would Judaism have survived without anti-Semitism and persecution? The question is not easily answered, but the evidence adduced here is insistent if not a total answer. There is a positive current at the center of Judaism, a commitment beyond defense and response. While it is true that no period, however hospitable toward the Jews, was free of the memory of disaster and defeat, it is equally true that many of its most creative and convincing thinkers write out of a love and fealty to their people and its covenant.

However, seductive that question may be, what the authors deal with here is the reality of that history. "Am Yisrael hai, the Jewish people live—and will continue to live," Martin says. Beneath and beyond the text, there is the sense of those martyred, of those who may have opted out, of those who assimilate and those who disappear. In short, the Jews, despite their uniqueness as a people, reflect the broad spectrum of humanity. And another truth emerges: the covenant is renewed by choice.

But it is never a simple choice. The range of response covers a diversity of view and temperament from Maimonides to Joseph Karo, from Hillel to Herzl, from Philo to A.D. Gordon, from mysticism to rationalism, from Hasidism to Zionism, from Josephus (in these pages somewhat unfairly designated a "stooge") to Akiva. But in the tension between the inherited history and the challenging reality, we see the powerful creative forces of Judaism, the unity and diversity. Jewish life was as complex and compelling as the world in which it was lived.

The two volumes not only are fascinating reading but are, in addition, a virtual anthology of Judaic literature. Notes, appendices, an excellent and comprehensive glossary and a critical bibliography are provided. One may question some of the assessments as being too harsh (Salo Baron's massive "A Social and Religious History of the Jews" is described as "verbose and murky" and M.I. Dimont's "Jews, God and History" is somewhat facetiously dismissed as "popular because it invents what every Jew would like to believe his history had been"), but these are minor lapses in what is, on the whole, a brilliant, informed and thoughtful accomplishment.



May 19, 1973

Von Hoffman and Israel

Rabbi Silver Disputes Columnist

NICHOLAS VON HOFFMAN'S most recent attack on Israel (PD May 9) rests on a broken reed. Israel Shahak long identified himself with Matzpen, the radical internationalist cell from which the Syrians were able to recruit a spy ring. Shahak broke with this group, but continues to insist that the nation state must be abolished and to make political judgments as if this was already the case.

Unfortunately, the murder and imprisonment of Jews in Iraq and Egypt, most recently that of the Kashkush family of five in broad daylight on a Baghdad street, and the racist laws of Jordan which deny Jews the right to own land or be citizens hardly support Shahak's optimistic hopes for a stateless Near East.

Israel is a social democracy. It has its problems, but has provided decency, security and freedom for all its citizens. Moslems, Christians, Arabs and Druses not only have vote but have been or are members of the Knesset, have been or are deputy ministers as well as members of the foreign service. Of all the states which surround Israel only Lebanon has a similarly open society.

It's strange to hear peacenik Von Hoffman complain about Israel's decision not to draft Arab citizens into military service, but surely the scattering of families in that world suggests the pressures such men would be subjected to. Press censorship except on strictly military matters is unknown in Israel and such critics as Dr. Shahak teach freely at the Hebrew University and freely travel abroad to express their views.

I look forward to the day when Von Hoffman will apply the same "democratic" standards to political life in Egypt, Libya or Syria as he has to Israel.

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**Readers'
Forum**



Matzpen-type ideology. In November the rank and file membership of the came to its meeting and voted Shahak and Matzpen out. Mezvinsky is incorrect when he defines Shahak as the league's president. In effect he has been impeached. (Reference: Jerusalem Post, Nov. 19, 1972).

The rest of Mezvinsky's criticisms are the familiar complaints of those who have never accepted the legitimacy of Israel and can be summarily disposed of. Israel has no constitution, true, but neither has England. The test of a social democracy is not a constitution but whether it is a community under law. Jews can claim Israel citizenship under the Law of Return and non-Jews must make procedural application, true, but once citizenship is granted all are equal, the vote, welfare, due process, representation in the Knesset, property rights, etc., are assured to all.

Mezvinsky's tendentious use of language is exposed in his plaint that "two noted West Bank Arab journalists-editors were jailed for publishing in their Arabic-language newspaper an editorial eulogizing Kamel Nasser, the Palestinian Arab poet killed by Israelis in the most recent incursion into Lebanon."

WHAT HE NEGLECTS to say is that the poet was a guerrilla chief whose recent writings had been limited to the threats of the El Fatah for which he was official spokesman and chief propagandist. The editors were not jailed for their black-bordered eulogy of Nasser but for a front-page editorial urging processions of mourning. The police feared such demonstrations would lead to riot. No better evidence of Israel's open society could be sighted than the fact that despite the tense situation in the West Bank, both leading Israeli papers, Haaretz and Maariv, wrote scathing editorials criticizing what they called the government's overreaction.

I make no claim that Israel is a faultless state. I do claim, that given the aggressive opposition of neighbors, and her herculean responsibility in human rehabilitation, Israel has performed remarkably. An oiless desert blooms. A complex modern state exists which is busy establishing an advanced society. In our imperfect world, one wonders why a man like Mezvinsky spends his every energy inventing a defamatory case against this small struggling people and trotting the likes of Israel Shahak around the country.

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Rabbi Silver Replies ^{6/4/73}

NORTON MEZVINSKY'S letter (PD May 26) challenges my facts and requires a response. I said Israel Shahak had been identified with Matzpen. Mezvinsky, former executive director of the tiringly anti-Israel American Council for Judaism, denies his tie with that small group of extreme socialists from whose ranks the Syrians recruited a recently exposed spy ring. The facts are these:

The Israel League for Human Civil Rights is organized much like the ACLU to protect the rights of all Israeli citizens. In 1969, a rump group composed largely of Matzpen and Rakah (the Moscow-oriented Communist party), took over the league and acclaimed Shahak president. His tenure was characterized by a steady drum-