



# VCU

Virginia Commonwealth University  
**VCU Scholars Compass**

---

Menorah Review

VCU University Archives

---

1988

## Menorah Review (No. 12, Winter, 1988)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/menorah>

 Part of the [History of Religion Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

© The Author(s)

---

### Recommended Citation

<https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/menorah/12>

This Full Issue is brought to you for free and open access by the VCU University Archives at VCU Scholars Compass. It has been accepted for inclusion in Menorah Review by an authorized administrator of VCU Scholars Compass. For more information, please contact [libcompass@vcu.edu](mailto:libcompass@vcu.edu).



# MENORAH



REVIEW • THE JUDAIC STUDIES PROGRAM OF VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY • NUMBER 12 • WINTER 1988

## RECOVERING SCRIPTURE

### *Five Biblical Portraits*

By Elie Wiesel  
University of Notre Dame Press

A Review essay by  
Martin S. Jaffee

The Torah—the Five Books of Moses and its amplification in the Prophets and the Writings—is acknowledged by all to be the foundation of Judaism. Less frequently is it also recognized as the single greatest challenge to Judaism. As foundation, the Torah makes Judaism possible, for Judaism is nothing more than the ongoing effort of Jews to embody the words of Torah in their collective and personal existence. In this, however, lies the challenge of the Torah. For, over any existing structure of Jewish society or pattern of personal piety stands the judgment of the Torah, God's own word. This is the dilemma of the Jews' ascription of holiness to the library of Hebrew Scripture. Without the Torah we would not and could not create Judaism. With it our creation is always found wanting.

This dilemma, created by our belief in the holiness of the Torah, opens outward to others, each bearing its own particular nuance of paradox. Consider just one: from the day the Torah came to Israel, complete and perfect on Sinai, as Jewish tradition affirms, or in the evolving reflections of prophets, priests, and editors, as critical historians assert, from that day, our only access to the meaning of its immutable words has been from the shifting standpoint of our own temporal existence.

Whether we imagine Israel receiving the Torah from the hands of Moses or from the hands of a coterie of exiled priests, we must acknowledge

that the day after its reception it began to be out of date, its original meaning began to be replaced by another. Each day the Torah recedes yet further into the past as we are propelled onward into the future. Yet its holiness in our eyes prevents us from letting it recede in peace. We pursue it in the midst of the flux of our lives and seek to transform it into an anchor in time, hoping that the very immutability of its language will still the perception of our unbridgeable temporal distance from it.

This attempt to transform the ancient words of the Torah into the source of a contemporary address is what we mean by interpretation or, to use rabbinic terminology, midrash. Jews, in their attempts to gain access in time to the eternal text, begin to revise that text even as they seek to address it. They begin to reshape its meaning, if not the words in which that meaning is embodied, then into the form of a living communication. This communication, however, is not to *any* Israel, frozen forever in an eternal archetype, but to *this particular* Israel—the concrete Israel of flesh and blood that turns its mind and heart to the text in the expectation of hearing it speak.

The paradoxical situation created for Judaism by its conviction of the Torah's holiness must be borne by the reader of Elie Wiesel's recent collection of essays, *Five Biblical Portraits*. The reason does not lie simply in Wiesel's self-conscious attempt to "contemporize" the rather elusive

Scriptural portraits of Saul, Jonah, Jeremiah, Elijah, and Joshua.

To be sure, on one level we must read Wiesel's essays as a kind of modern midrash, a transformative retelling of Scripture, which preserves its text while reading into it the historically-anchored concerns of the contemporary reader. But there are more pressing reasons for recalling, as we read Wiesel, the paradoxical relation of Israel to its Torah. The reason is that it is Wiesel who, perhaps more than any other living writer, has made the present generation of Israel aware that our religion to the Torah, paradoxical in any age, is for our generation almost paralyzing. This paralysis, of course, originates in the fact that when *this* generation of Israel reads the Torah as an address to itself, it must imagine what that address can possibly mean, or have meant, to others of Israel who, within living memory, were annihilated in the death camps of the Third Reich.

It has been suggested, obliquely in Wiesel's earlier work and more plainly in the writing of recent theological interpreters, that the Jewish catastrophe of our time is so unprecedented in scope and unique in its dimensions that it has become a point of demarcation, separating all later generations of Israel from their pre-Holocaust forbears. We are, it is said, cut off from past formulations of Jewish faith just as surely as the lives of Hitler's victims were cut off by their executioner. (See, for example, R. Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz*, and the recent volumes by A. Cohen, *The Tremendum* and E. Fackenheim, *To Mend the World*.) Perhaps the most penetrating exploration of the extent of our amputation from sustaining sources of Judaic faith is the recently-translated meditation of A. Neher, *The Exile of the Word*, which raises the radical question of whether we must

*This issue of the Review has been gratefully supported by the Jewish Community Federation of Richmond.*

regard the Torah itself as irretrievably out of reach, a collection of words incapable of addressing us as living speech. At issue, then, is the very capacity of Israel to sustain its struggle with Scripture, to live within the paradox of Judaism long enough to recover from the Torah a genuine address, a word that rings true to ears, which, vicariously or by personal experience, have also heard the screams of burning babies.

It is of great significance, then, that Elie Wiesel, who has engaged all other sources of post-Biblical Jewish tradition—Talmudic, philosophical, and mystical—in his attempts to understand the consequences for the Jewish spirit of the Holocaust experience, turns now and at last to Scripture. In overhearing his engagement, in the specificity of his own time, with the Torah's eternal language, we hope to learn something of the possibilities of our own engagement with the Torah in our own specific situation.

Perhaps the most striking and suggestive indication of the nature of Wiesel's engagement with the Scriptural text is his choice of subjects for his portrait. Absent are all the great founders and covenantal heroes who, in the history of Jewish religious literature, serve as the models of Israel's life in relation to God. We have here no portrait of any Patriarch's struggle with belief in the mysterious God of Testing and Promise. The life of Moses, so critical in all accounts of the nature of Israel's covenant, receives only passing mention. David, the paradigm of past and future Jewish political leadership, is the subject of only indirect attention. Even Job, the classic puzzle in the tradition of theodicy, is entirely ignored.

No, Wiesel's book is not a study of people we are used to reflecting upon as models of our own efforts to live out the meaning of the Torah. Rather, Wiesel focuses our attention upon those figures in the Scriptural tradition, such as Joshua and Saul, who are only diminished versions of spiritual ideals brought to perfection by Moses and David. He forces us to scrutinize the characters of prophets, such as Jonah and Elijah, whose careers are essentially mysterious rather than inspiring. Finally, when

he does turn to one of the great classical prophets, he reflects upon Jeremiah, that most tortured member of a guild never known for joy in its mission.

Are there any shared traits that, taken together, begin to illumine Wiesel's interest in the lives of the imperfect, mysterious, and disturbed? I think there are. First, Wiesel's subjects, in midrashic tradition as well as in the author's own reconstruction of their consciousness, suffer either from grave doubts regarding the morality of what God compels them to do (Joshua, Elijah, and Jeremiah), or from their own sense of having been commissioned and then abandoned by God (Jonah, Saul). All are individuals, then, for whom the nearness of God and knowledge of his ways constitutes a personal crisis rather than a comforting presence. In this sense, Wiesel teaches us that the Joban situation structures much more of Scripture than we might have originally surmised.

Second, and perhaps more important, all of Wiesel's subjects live out their lives in a period of heightened, almost unbearable tension with regard to the destiny of Israel. The setting for each life is the Land of Israel, God's holy soil; the issue of each life is the question of Israel's title to or conduct upon that soil. The period from Joshua to Jeremiah, which includes the careers of Saul, Elijah, and Jonah, is, from the perspective of the Prophetic canon of Scripture, the time in which Israel's royal leaders and unlettered masses alike proved unworthy of the gift of the Land. Conquered by Joshua at the cost of Canaanite blood, the Land is purified in Jeremiah's lifetime by the even greater outpouring of Israelite blood. It is in this period between the elating sense of coming into possession of God's final promise and the catastrophic sense of having that promise revoked and reformulated, that Wiesel's characters struggle to interpret their own place in God's impossible plan.

As we recognize the themes that bind these various lives into a single pattern of life, we are placed in a position to interpret as well the significance of Wiesel's renewed engagement with the Torah as a source of literary inspiration. In the time of

Judaism's greatest catastrophe and triumph—the Holocaust and the rebuilding of the Land of Israel—Wiesel discovers in Israel's sacred book heroes remarkably appropriate to our own situation of "heightened, almost unbearable tension with regard to the destiny of Israel." Wiesel's portraits chart a narrow path that avoids both the despair engendered by unprecedented genocide and the naive triumphalism made plausible by military and political success. In which either posture is a tempting solution to ambiguity, Wiesel forces us time and again to probe the flaws of each. By reconstructing for us a Scriptural time eerily like our own, and by forging images of Scriptural figures who share all our smallness, we are forced to mistrust our entitlement to hopelessness as well as our claim to completion. By bringing us up short against the unexpected in the Torah, Wiesel affirms that, if we indeed still share the paradox of Judaism, that paradox need not, even in our time, be a paralysis. He reminds us that, when the Torah is made to speak to our time, it continues to speak ambiguously and in maddening nuance, just as it has in other times. The Torah remains, as it always has been in Judaism, the foundation of our capacity to be Israel and the judge of what we create as Israel.

*Martin S. Jaffee is associate professor of Jewish studies and comparative religion at the University of Washington.*

## JEWISH AND SECULAR BIOETHICS

*Health and Medicine in the Jewish Tradition: L'Hayyim—To Life*  
By David M. Feldman  
Crossroad Publishing Co.

A Review essay by  
Robert Redmon

There are two ways one might approach a book such as Feldman's *Health and Medicine in the Jewish Tradition*. One is descriptively, that is with a description and critique of the factual and analytical claims made. The other is normatively, that is with a critique of the claims made of what one ought to do in certain situations. The first activity would center on

Feldman's claims as to the Jewish tradition in the area of health and medicine. The second would center on the universal applicability (which I take morality to imply) of claims he makes about medical ethics.

Obviously, someone who approaches the text as a non-Jewish scholar (being neither a Jew nor an authority on the Jewish tradition), I will direct most of my remarks to the normative claims. The text is, however, extremely rich (considering its size—only 114 pages) both in content and in method, and it is an excellent introduction to Jewish bioethics and to the Jewish method of approaching problems in morality and theology.

An excellent example of this method is found in the first chapter, where the question arises as to whether or not the Jew has a duty (or is even allowed) to attempt to heal someone whom God has made ill, either directly or through the general condition of the universe, which he has created. The arguments begin with an examination of the Bible and its interpretations, then the Talmud, followed by centuries of arguments by the rabbis, before being resolved in favor of a special duty to heal even on the Sabbath and other holy days. The penultimate duty to preserve life, *this life in this world*, is in marked contrast to Christian doctrine, where this life is taken as a preparation for the next.

One cannot help getting the feeling at times, however, that some of the complex and subtle arguments in the Talmud (I could not help wondering why these are not found as examples in logic texts), when they are applied to contemporary problems in bioethics by Feldman, turn into rationalizations for what most of us see as moral truths, independently of the Bible, the Talmud, or any other religious text. An example of this is found in the chapter, "The Right to Life—Neonatal and Terminal," where "removing a hindrance to natural death is permitted" although "passive euthanasia is forbidden." The distinction here was hard to draw from the modern examples and even harder to see how it was derived from a story in the Talmud (about someone being executed—obviously not a "natural" death). Most of us would agree that there are some times when it is mor-

ally permissible to allow death to occur. Feldman (and others, I gather) wanted very hard to draw this conclusion from the Talmud and biblical sources. In any case, this example, as well as the preceding one and many others in the volume, are enlightening as to method and history. The historical references and the careful definition of Hebrew terms (there is a short glossary at the end of the text) are very clear and useful to anyone interested in Jewish bioethics.

*Normative Issues.* The book contains 12 chapters. The first four center around Judaism's concern for life, health, and healing. The fifth is a necessarily sketchy account of Jews who have been influential in medicine. Chapter six concerns mental health, seven is on marriage, and the last five center on some of the issues normally dealt with in more secular medical ethics: reproduction, abortion, the obligations to life, euthanasia, and the nature of death. Interestingly enough, the important issues of informed consent and the right to health care are not dealt with directly, although the discussions on the individual Jew's responsibility to maintain his or her own life has obvious implications on the issue of informed consent, and the claims in the early chapters of a "mandate to heal" have implications for the second issue. It would seem inconsistent to hold that a physician has a moral responsibility to heal even "the stranger," even on the Sabbath, and yet maintain that he or she could deny services because of an inability to pay. In fact Feldman tells us that a nineteenth-century rabbinical ruling held that a communal court could coerce a physician to treat the poor without pay (p. 37).

On the question of informed consent, American law and secular bioethics have recently put a great deal of importance on the patient's right to refuse treatment and to have adequate information prior to being asked to consent to treatment. In several states, this has even reached the point where a patient's surrogate may request discontinuance of nutrition and water for a permanently comatose or dying patient. Although Feldman sees no such general "right to die" in Jewish law, the concept of patient autonomy arises in an inter-

esting way. If the patient *believes* he or she is ill (and, say, needs food on Yom Kippur), and the physician does not, then "we listen to the patient rather than the doctor" (p. 25). Thus, although Jewish law is basically paternalistic on medical matters and puts the obligation of both patient and physician of preserving life and health above the patient's right to self-determination, the patient's view as to his or her own condition overrides that of others. The patient's view as to the *facts* are overriding but not to the ordering of *values*. This view is the exact opposite of what many hold today, that is, that all factual questions about health should be left to the "experts," and then we as "consumers" or "clients" may decide to do with the information and ourselves as we see fit. Although one may not agree with Jewish law on this matter, or with the way Feldman has interpreted it, it is worthwhile from time to time to question our absolute right to autonomy and our absolute ignorance of factual matters, especially as it concerns our own health and well-being.

Feldman's historical account of Christian and Jewish views on the subject of abortion is fascinating. Although many Jews do hold that abortion, "fetacide," is tantamount to murder in Jewish law, Feldman gives an argument that it is not. He argues that the fetus is not a person until it emerges from its mother, and that her health and especially her life must take precedence over that of the fetus. On the conservative view, abortion is "akin to murder," and except under very serious circumstance (a threat to the life of the mother, or *perhaps* her mental and physical health), it is not permitted. On the liberal view, there is no prohibition against abortion *per se*, but we need "to safeguard against indiscriminate or unjustified thwarting of potential life," which does have a value.

What I find refreshing about Feldman's discussion on the matter is the suggestion that one can find something wrong about abortion without claiming that it is murder. Most people in the United States (according to polls) do not wish to take the absurd step of holding that a month-old embryo is a "person" under the Constitution, with everything that this

claim entails about rights, taxation, representation in Congress, and so on. On the other hand, late abortion to avoid inconveniences or as a means of birth control does display a callous disregard for human (even if not "personal") life. Not all wrongs, even serious wrongs, are violations of rights. To go back to an earlier topic, it may be a serious wrong to deprive a very ill person of medical care because he or she can't afford to pay for it, although that person may not have a right to such care. Likewise, although the fetus may have no rights (including a right to life), it does not follow that anything can be done to it regardless of circumstances.

The ethical issues revolving around our concepts of mental illness have comprised a major part of the texts and discussions in medical ethics. The reason for this is obvious—only when people are considered mentally ill may we deprive them of liberty without a jury trial and treat them against their will. Since our normal requirements of informed consent, to say nothing of the "right to liberty," may be abridged when we are classified as mentally ill, it is no wonder that so much attention has been paid to this area. What further generates discussion is that the concept of *mental* illness itself may be considered suspect. Some physicians, philosophers, and scientists have argued that the only type of disease that is real is physical disease, and unless a physical cause can be found for abnormal behavior, the problem is not medical, but social, educational, criminal, and so on.

One of the reasons why the mind could be considered as capable of having its own non-physical diseases is that it is claimed to be an entity separate from the body and, thus, has its own laws of operation and its own diseases. Historically, the justification for this claim of separateness is found in the works of Descartes and other seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophers. (Though, interestingly enough, the Jewish philosopher Spinoza claimed that such a dichotomy was false.) The concept of a separate mind gave a philosophical justification for the Christian doctrine of the soul,

which could leave the body after death.

In the chapter, "Mental as well as Physical Health," Feldman confirms the "holism" and this-worldliness in the Jewish tradition. Although the categories of "mental health" and "physical health" are maintained, they are equally important and are seen as interrelated. Just as the duty to preserve physical health can override the duty to observe holy days, so also can the duty to maintain mental health. The close relation between the two is seen in the recognition that confidence in the physician can be important in recovering from an illness and that one should not accept death as inevitable, lest one hasten it by being in a certain frame of mind.

Judaism's denial that feelings of guilt are always a symptom of a mental disorder is an important insight. There is a distinction between appropriate and inappropriate responses to an immoral act, and it is worthwhile to remind ourselves that the psychiatrist cannot absolve us of our sins. My major complaint of Feldman is that he did not address many of the issues that arise in this area. As he mentions, a large number of important figures in psychiatry have been Jews, which is explained by Judaism's concern with mental health, yet the connection of Jewish religious beliefs with psychiatric theory is not discussed.

One of the purposes of the series *Health/Medicine and the Faith Traditions*, of which the present volume belongs, is to enable those who work in health care to better understand the religious framework of their patients. The present volume should be very useful in this regard, not just because it describes the beliefs of a people but because it enables the careful reader to discern the *method* involved in reaching those beliefs. One can better understand the role of the rabbi, for example, in helping a dying patient and his or her family decide whether or not to continue life support. I recommend it for anyone interested in how the religious Jew approaches the vital issues of bioethics.

*Robert Redmon is professor of philosophy and chairman of the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at VCU.*

## THE REPUBLIC OF MOSES

*The Jewish Polity: Jewish Political Organization from Biblical Times to the Present*

By Daniel J. Elazar and  
Stuart A. Cohen  
Indiana University Press

A Review essay by  
Joseph P. Schultz

In his introduction to the tractate *Sanhedrin*, part of the monumental project of translating the Talmud into Hebrew, Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz suggests that this tractate represents the Jewish concept of the ideal state, a Hebraic counterpart to Plato's *Republic*. It has long been recognized that there is a Jewish political tradition extending from the Bible to the State of Israel, and though there have been many individual studies and monographs dealing with aspects of this tradition, there has been no comprehensive overview of the subject. *The Jewish Polity*, by Daniel H. Elazar and Stuart A. Cohen, fills this lacuna.

Not only have the authors provided an imaginative synthesis of the scholarship in this area (such synthesizing is critically needed in Jewish studies), but they have also provided a new perspective on the periodization of Jewish history and fresh insights into the nature of Jewish tradition. When the authors state that the Jewish tradition is prismatic, each prism reflecting a different dimension but all revealing a common core, and that it is the task of scholarship to look at all the planes of the prism to uncover its richness, they echo the rabbinic adage that the Torah has 70 faces.

Elazar and Cohen see the Torah of Moses as the constitution of the Jewish people reflecting the covenant, the partnership between God and humans in perfecting the world. The constitution is implemented through the governmental structure of the *edah*, the biblical term for the nation as a whole, an assembly of all citizens that meets at regular times. The *edah* is under divine sovereignty, and its appointed leaders exercise power only with the consent of God and his representatives on earth. The constituent units of the *edah* are the *medinot* or *aratzot*, the provinces of the re-

gional or intermediate structures of government, and the *kehillot*, the local communities. Though the modern Hebrew term *medinah* is used today for politically sovereign states, the authors point out that in the Jewish political tradition "there is no state . . . in the sense of a reified political entity complete in and of itself," since the state is subordinate to God. They prefer the translation of *medinah* as polity, since "entities with their own political-legal jurisdiction are polities . . ." and "no polity exists apart from its component elements nor does it possess absolute sovereignty." This framework embraces Jewish political structures as varied as the primitive democracy of early Israel, the monarchies, the theocracy of the Second Temple period under the leadership of high priests, the nomocracy of the Sanhedrin and the Patriarchate under rabbinic leadership, the kehillah-oriented structure of the diaspora with its autonomous authority, the voluntary associations of the emancipation and post-emancipation years and the State of Israel, and the Jewish diaspora communities of our own time.

Within the Jewish polity, power was and is diffused. Again, this reflects the covenantal system and its insistence that political omnipotence be permanently denied to human beings. The authors use a well-known Mishnaic statement to depict the division of authority: "Rabbi Simeon said there are three crowns, the crown of the *torah*, the crown of *kehunah* (priesthood), the crown of *malikut* (kingship); but the crown of a good name (*shem tov*) excels them all" (M. Avot 4:13). The crown of *torah* is the channel through which Israel's divine constitutional teaching is expressed. Its bearers are the prophets and sages, beginning with Moses and continuing through to the rabbinate and teachers of Judaism in our time. The crown of the priesthood is the means by which God and the nation (*edah*) are brought into dialogue through formal worship, shared rituals, and symbolic expressions. Its bearers are the sons of Aaron and their descendants as well as those who performed priestly functions throughout the course of Jewish history after the priesthood declined and eventually became marginal with the destruction of the Sec-

ond Temple. The crown of kingship represents the vehicle of civil authority, which began with the elders (*zekenim*) and magistrates (*nesi'im*) of the Mosaic period, was given to David and his descendants (who had to share it with non-Davidic kings as a result of the sinfulness of the House of David), and was passed on to Jewish leaders in the land of Israel and in the diaspora down to our own day.

This division of authority differs from conventional separation of power systems in that the crowns (*ketarim*) are primarily concerned with the source, character, and purpose of authority, that is, orientation, and only secondarily with functions (executive, legislative, judicial). In the ideal Jewish republic, no *keter* has the constitutional right to encroach upon the domain of others or to deprive them of their authority. Moreover, the ideal Jewish polity cannot be complete unless all three *ketarim* are represented in one form or another. The interdependence and the interaction of the three sources of power are what gives vitality to the system. In reality, however, Cohen and Elazar point out that inter-*keter* conflict was far more characteristic of Jewish public life, and in certain periods of time, such as after the destruction of the Second Temple, the authority of the *keter kehunah* (the crown of priesthood) and the *keter malikut* (crown of kingship) were merged with the *keter torah* (crown of *torah*) in the Sanhedrian and the figure of the Patriarch. Nevertheless, the basic elements of the ideal Jewish polity continue to reassert themselves, if not in one era then in a succeeding one.

There is one crucial element missing from this analysis. The Mishnah cited by the authors mentions a fourth *keter*, the *keter shem tov*, the crown of a good name, which according to Rabbi Simeon, "excels them all." This *keter* represents charismatic leadership, in which the divine spirit is channeled through a living personality rather than through a constitutional *Torah* or an institutional priesthood or civil authority. Such charismatic personalities make their impact on the masses through their moral perfection and their mystical intensity, or through the miracles associated with them. Their authority and power derive from the "good name" they have attained among the

populace. Prophets like Elijah and Elisha belong somewhat more to the *keter shem tov* than to the *keter torah*. The Rechabites of the First Temple period and the Essenes in the time of the Second Temple can be seen as offshoots of the *keter shem tov*. Honi ha-Ma'agel (the circle maker) belongs more to the *keter shem tov* than to the *Pharisaic keter torah*. Jesus and the disciples belong to the *keter shem tov*. The *Yorde Merkava'h*, the riders of the chariot, and the later kabbalists are basically products of this *keter*. Shabbetai Zevi's initial success derived from the crown of the good name. But the example *par excellence* of this *keter* is the man who derived his name from it and left its indelible imprint on the movement he began—Israel Baal Shem Tov. It is far more accurate to see the kabbalists and the hasidic movement as belonging to the *keter shem tov* than to portray them as latter day representatives of the *keter kehunah*, as the authors have done.

To be sure, at certain times and in certain personalities there was a merging of two and sometimes three sources of authority. Moses, Isaiah, Akiba, Nahmanides, the Ari (Rabbi Isaac Luria), Joseph Caro, and, to a certain extent, the Gaon of Vilna represent the merging of the *keter torah* and the *keter shem tov*. The judges of biblical times combined the authority of the *keter shem tov* and the *keter malikut*. Samuel, who possessed the authority of *keter shem tov* and *keter torah*, was compelled by the people and the divine command to concede the *keter malikut* to Saul, the first king in Israel. In the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel, three sources of authority were combined, *keter shem tov*, *keter torah*, and *keter kehunah*.

On the other hand, as Ephraim Urbach and the late Gershom Scholem have shown, there has also been constant conflict between the *keter shem tov* and the other *ketarim*, but most often with the *keter torah*. Is it coincidental that the author of the Mishnaic statement is Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai, one of R. Akiba's foremost disciples and the man to whom kabbalistic tradition putatively assigns the authorship of the Zohar? In sharing his master's mystical approach, is Rabbi Simeon telling us that, as important as the other *ketarim* are, the *keter shem tov*, the mystical spiritual

orientation toward the Jewish polity, takes precedence?

Cohen and Elazar's work opens up new dimensions for the political-constitutional study of Jewish law. The politicization of *halakah* as a result of the struggle between the *ketarim* is a subject worthy of extensive research. In this connection a comparison with Islam is instructive. Among the various forms of political rule in the world, the Islamic state is the closest to the Jewish polity. In both Islam and in Judaism, the state is subordinate to God and his law, and the Muslims, like the Jews, consider the temporal rulers as stewards caring for the divine patrimony. In Islam, as in Judaism, religion is highly relevant to the political and social organization of the community, and thus, unlike Christianity, there is no contrast between "the Church" and "the world."

But in the Jewish experience, periods of political weakness and diaspora existence have been far more extensive than periods of sovereignty and political strength. The result has been that the power centers of religion (the crowns of torah priesthood and the good name) have been more dominant than that of political authority (the crown of kingship). Nevertheless, even in exile the ideal of political sovereignty was kept vitally alive in the Jewish consciousness so that, for all intents and purposes, the *ketaric* balance of power was kept in tact. The Jewish legal authorities responding to the ever-changing nature of the Jewish polity in the land of Israel and in the diaspora created a flood of new enactments that had far reaching consequences in every phase of Jewish life.

The Islamic experience has been just the opposite. For Islam, the periods of political strength and sovereignty have been greater than those of political impotence. Unlike the Jews, the Muslims never experienced a long exile. Consequently, the power center of the Islamic state has been as dominant as that of the religious authority. Muslim religious leaders, at various times and place, held governmental office with the result that the Caliphs would often bring pressure on the Islamic scholars and judges to decide cases in their favor. To protect themselves, the jurists restricted the right of *ijtihad* or independent judgment, the working

out of a decision from general principles, and relied more and more on precedents. These precedents enabled the judge to resist the ruler's pressure on the ground that the point in question had already been decided earlier and it was not within his competence to review the decision. Thus, in Islam the price paid for the merging of the political and religious power centers was a loss of flexibility in the law, with little or no impetus for new legislation.

Elazar and Cohen depict the relationship between the *keter torah* and the *keter malkhut* in the State of Israel today as a continuation of the dynamic interdependence characteristic of these power centers of Jewish life in the past. But should the State of Israel gain political and economic strength for a considerable period of time and the present trend of religious parties and personalities aspiring to political office and power accelerate, the Islamic example of a frozen legal system, now all too evident in certain areas of Jewish law, might become the norm for the *halakah* of the future.

Joseph P. Schultz is professor of history at the University of Missouri-Kansas City.

#### BOOK BRIEFINGS

*Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective.* Edited by Geoffrey Hartman. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. President Reagan's plan to make a more or less routine diplomatic visit to the cemetery in Bitburg in May 1985 turned out to be the most volatile political event of the year. That visit brought forth powerful memories and deep-seated animosities including the most painful issues of the twentieth century. The editor has brought together an internationally renowned group of commentators to ponder the issues. This book by some of the world's leading thinkers helps us to understand our moral and political condition today.

*A History of Ancient Israel and Judah.* By J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press. Approaching biblical history as history, the authors seek to go behind the theological evaluation of the monarch to discover the political and economic factors that, for ex-

ample, led the biblical writers to praise some kings and condemn others. The book is enhanced by the inclusion of significant ancient documents, maps, charts, and photographs taken recently in the Holy Land.

*The Anthropology of Evil.* Edited by David Parkin. New York: Basil Blackwell, Inc. This book provides anthropological perspectives on one of the most intriguing and disturbing problems of the natural and human worlds: the nature of evil. Thirteen authors discuss the problem in the context of different societies and religions: Christian, Confucian, Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, and others. The book also provides unusual perspectives on questions such as the nature of innocence, the root of evil, the notion of individual malevolence, and whether God is evil. Much has been written on evil by historians, theologians, and philosophers. This book supplies the distinctive and revealing contributions of anthropologists.

*The Road from Babylon: The Story of Sephardi and Oriental Jews.* By Chaim Raphael. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers. The author condenses the inexhaustibly rich history of the Sephardi and Oriental Jews into a colorful portrait of a people who have exercised considerable influence from the time of the Bible to today and in every country from Babylon to Spain to America. In many places and times, the author shows these people—ordinary and extraordinary—living their unique adventure.

*Christians and Jews: The Eternal Bond.* By Stuart E. Rosenberg. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co. Beyond acknowledging that Jesus was a Jew, most Christians have little idea that Christianity inherited its basic tradition from the "mother religion." Indeed, without a better understanding of its Jewish sources, Christians can hardly know very much about Christianity. Jews, for their part, need a closer knowledge of their own traditions in order to survive as Jews in a world dominated by other religions. From both standpoints—the Christian and the Jewish—proper understanding and appreciation of differences are essential in a pluralistic, democratic society. This book recognizes and celebrates the eternal bond that links the two religions as the

author sets forth the background of Jewish rituals and describes their counterparts in Christianity.

*If Not Now, When?* By Primo Levi. New York: Viking Penguin, Inc. In the final days of World War II, a courageous band of Jewish partisans makes its way from Russia to Italy, moving toward the ultimate goal—Palestine. Based on a true story, this novel chronicles their adventures as they wage a personal war of revenge against the Nazis—blowing up trains, rescuing the last victims of concentration camps, scoring victories in the face of unspeakable devastation.

*A Simple Story.* By S. Y. Agnon. New York: Schocken Books. Szybusz, a small town in southern Poland, is the scene of a bittersweet romance at the turn of the century. The novel's author is the first Hebrew writer to win the Nobel Prize for literature (1966).

*Semites and Anti-Semites: An Inquiry into Conflict and Prejudice.* by Bernard Lewis. New York: W. W. Norton & Company. The Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East has unsettled the world for over half a century. What are the roots of this violence? Does it spring from old-style conflict between nations and peoples over territory? Is it simply the "normal" prejudice found through time between neighboring people of different cultural traditions or ethnic origins? Or is hostility toward Israel a unique case of anti-Semitism that goes beyond normal prejudice in ascribing to Jews a quality of cosmic evil? The thesis of this book is that, while all three kinds of prejudice are involved, the third and newest prejudice—virulent anti-Semitism—so long a poison in the bloodstream of Christendom, seems to have entered the body of Islam. To understand how this has happened, the author leads us step-by-step through the history of the Semitic peoples and languages to the emergence of the Jews and their enemies, linking the Nazis, the Holocaust, and the Palestinian question and arriving finally at the war against Zionism which, for some, has turned into a war against the Jews.

*Chaim Weizmann.* By Norman Rose. Viking Penguin, Inc. In this biography, the author offers the first au-

thoritative, fully documented, one-volume account of Weizmann's remarkable career. Using richly detailed material from personal letters, memoirs, and other archival documents, Rose paints a fascinating picture of Weizmann's life. He focuses on him as an indefatigable statesman, master diplomat, and chemist of international renown. Rose recounts both the highlights and the setbacks of Weizmann's career. This well-balanced book offers a provocative look at one of Israel's founding fathers, a man whose life in many ways objectifies the history of the Jewish people in the modern period. Rose's biography brilliantly captures the wide range of Weizmann's interests and the unique character of his work and achievement, and should constitute a major contribution to modern diplomatic political history.

*Death and Birth of Judaism.* By Jacob Neusner. Basic Books. In this book, subtitled *The Impact of Christianity, Secularism, and the Holocaust on Jewish Faith*, the author argues that contemporary Judaism is really made up of several separate religious systems. In this fascinating history of Judaism in the West, Neusner looks at how Judaism has continually responded to political and social change. All the various "Judaisms" sought redemptive meaning in the Jewish experience. Neusner looks at each of the Judaisms in turn, examining what was new about each, as well as what was continuous with traditional Judaism. He concludes by pondering whether it is still possible to recapture the purpose and emotional depth of an ancestral religion.

*The Land of Israel: Jewish Perspectives.* Edited by Lawrence A. Hoffman. University of Notre Dame Press. This work is a compendium of essays that discusses the spiritual and legal significance of the Land for the Jewish people. Containing contributions by Israeli and American scholars, the volume is international in flavor and interdisciplinary in scope—and the first comprehensive treatment of the subject to appear in English. The essays form a chronological narrative that covers the entire range of Jewish thought, from its foundation in the Bible and the Mishnah to its contemporary expression in, for example, the debate over the State of Israel

conducted by such groups as the Gush Emunim and Oz Veshalom movements.

*The Jew as Ally of the Muslim: Medieval Roots of Anti-Semitism.* By Allan Harris Cutler and Helen Elmquist Cutler. University of Notre Dame Press. The authors contend that the great outburst of anti-Semitism in Western Europe during the Middle Ages, rather than proceeding from the deicide charge and the socioeconomic rivalry between Christians and Jews, derived primarily from anti-Muslimism and the association of Jew with Muslim made by medieval Christians. Detailed examination of medieval Hebrew texts and Christian documents suggests that the twelfth-century renaissance grew out of an attempt to solve the problem of Christianity's relations with Islam and Judaism. The authors further document evidence of anti-Semitism through their analysis of Pope Innocent III's decree of the Fourth Lateran Council and in their study of the influence of Islam on the Spanish Inquisition. They conclude with comments on the contemporary ramifications of the anti-Islamic origins of anti-Semitism.

*Modern Midrash.* By David C. Jacobson. Albany: State University of New York Press. This book explores a central phenomenon in the development of modern Jewish literature: the retelling of traditional Jewish narratives by twentieth-century writers. It shows how and toward what end biblical stories, legends, and Hasidic tales have been used in shaping modern Hebrew literature. The author provides many fresh insights on the various issues of modern Jewish existence addressed in these works, such as the need to revive the Jewish tradition by reinterpreting it in light of new values, the attempt to preserve Jewish identity while entering into Western culture, the changing roles of men and women in Jewish culture, challenges to traditional Jewish views of secularity, attempts to destroy the Jewish people, moral and political issues raised by the State of Israel, and the conflict between Jews and Arabs.

*Israeli Mythogynies.* By Esther Fuchs. Albany: State University of New York Press. This book systematically examines the representations of women by mainstream contemporary He-

brew authors, like A. B. Yehoshua, Amos Oz, and Amalia Kahana-Carmon. Fuchs' method brings to light not only the consistent differences in the fictional characterizations of men and women but also the unexpected ways in which these differences are related to the author's gender. This pioneering study will be invaluable to scholars and critics of feminist theory and modern Hebrew literature alike.

*Yemenite Jewry: Origins, Culture, and Literature.* By Reuben Ahroni. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. The uniqueness of Yemenite Jewry is captured by the author's comprehensive study of Yemenite Jewry from antiquity to the present. The Yemenites, one of the oldest Jewish communities in the Diaspora, were a people quarantined by religion, surviving in a country long controlled by a sectarian and fanatic Muslim regime. Despite persecution and suffering, the community never lost hope in redemption. Its rich literature and cul-

ture illustrate the hopes of its people. Ironically, the loss of Yemenite Jewry's distinctiveness and the end of their cultural and social life came with their rapid integration into Israel after their mass exodus in 1948. This fact underscores the imperative of this study.

*The Life and Times of Menachem Begin.* By Amos Perlmutter. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., Inc. The author offers the first comprehensive biography of Begin to boldly explore the inner man behind the complex leader. He places him in the times and locations where he lived and rose in Zionist politics. The book reveals the private man so that in the end we finally come to understand the public figure.

*The Enchantments of Judaism: Rites of Transformation from Birth through Death.* By Jacob Neusner. New York: Basic Books, Inc. The author argues that to be a believing Jew entails a great deal more than subscribing to a set of doctrinal beliefs. The rites of Judaism work to enchant, not merely

to convince, making the ordinary experiences of life into something sacred. The author shows how celebration and story work to transform both the individual and the group in the basic rites of Judaism.

#### FORTHCOMING

The next issue of *Menorah Review* will feature a condensed version of the 1987 Selma and Jacob Brown Annual Lecture presented by Dr. Egon Mayer, professor of sociology at Brooklyn College. Mayer's topic is "Love and Tradition: Marriage between Jews and Christians."



REVIEW • THE JUDAIC STUDIES PROGRAM OF VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY • NUMBER 12 • WINTER 1988

*Menorah Review* is published by the Judaic Studies Program and the Judaic Culture Advisory Committee of Virginia Commonwealth University. Unsolicited manuscripts are welcome. Address all correspondence to Judaic Studies Program, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA 23284-2025

Editor: Jack D. Spiro  
Managing Editor: Elaine M. Jones

#### JUDAIC CULTURE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Thomas O. Hall, Jr., chairman  
Harry Lyons, founding member  
David G. Bromley  
Jacob Brown  
Hans Faick  
Herbert Hirsch\*  
Helen Horwitz  
Robert Hyman  
William J. Judd  
Barry Katz  
Frances Lewis  
Neil November  
Cathy Plotkin  
Arthur Seidenberg  
Robert Talbert  
Melvin Urofsky  
Saul Viener  
Jay Weinberg

#### Ex Officio:

Charles P. Ruch  
Elske v.P. Smith  
\*editorial board chairman

Nonprofit Organization  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Richmond, Virginia  
Permit No. 869