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MENORAH REVIEW



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For the Enrichment of Jewish Thought

Acts of Faith and Compassion: Some Who Saved Jews During the Holocaust

By Eva Fleischner

The following article is excerpted from the lecture presented by Dr. Fleischner for the Selma and Jacob Brown Annual Lecture held last April. The annual lecture is sponsored by the Center for Judaic Studies of Virginia Commonwealth University. Dr. Fleischner is professor of religion at Montclair State College in New Jersey.

In his important book, *The Abandonment of the Jews*, David Wyman writes: "It was not lack of workable plans that stood in the way of saving many more thousands of European Jews. Nor was it insufficient shipping . . . or the possibility that rescue projects would hamper the war effort. The real obstacle was the absence of a strong desire to save Jews." In other words, the world did not care. Jews were expendable.

Why did the world not care? In searching for an answer I must speak briefly of what has come to be known as the "teaching of contempt," because this teaching contributed heavily to the world's indifference to the fate of the Jews during the Holocaust. The term, "teaching of contempt," is relatively recent (the late 1950s), but the phenomenon to which it refers is almost as old as Christianity.

This teaching, found in Christian liturgy, preaching and theology, has, for nearly 1900 years, seen the Jewish people as spiritually dead, cursed, punished by God because they had rejected the Messiah. By the early second century, the infamous deicide accusation had been formulated (the Jews as Christ-killers). Jews now became increasingly depicted as the enemies of God, allies and agents of the devil. As the Church became identified with the temporal power of the Roman Empire in the fourth century,

these attitudes were concretized in anti-Jewish legislation and, frequently, led to discrimination, accusations of blasphemy and ritual murder, which, in turn, prompted persecution, expulsion and mass slaughter. This teaching has been so pervasive that it can be argued that, though not sufficient in itself to explain the Holocaust, or *Shoah*, it helped prepare for Hitler's genocide of the Jewish people. In other words, Christianity helped make the *Shoah* possible.

And yet, there is light in the almost impenetrable darkness that was the *Shoah*, light that radiates from those who didn't stand by in apathy but who risked their lives to save Jews. They are the women and men whom Jewish tradition honors with the title, "Righteous among the Nations of the World." The great avenue leading to Yad Vashem is named in their honor the "Avenue of the Just." A forest, growing vaster each year, covers the hilltop on which stands Yad Vashem, with each tree bearing the name of a rescuer.

Let me now speak of some Catholic rescuers I met and interviewed in France, on a research project begun in the summer of 1985. Who were they? What made them different from so many others? What made them willing to risk their lives for the persecuted Jews?

IN THIS ISSUE

- *Acts of Faith and Compassion: Some Who Saved Jews During the Holocaust*
- *Jewish Mysticism, Mystical Cosmology and Mystical Experience*
- *Schwere un zein a Yid*
- *Arguing With God in the Age of Dilemma*
- *New Insights Into an Ancient People*
- *Book Briefings*

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They come from every walk of life. Some are famous and have been honored by Yad Vashem; other have never before told their story. They are very different from each other in personality and background. But they all have one thing in common: None of them think of themselves as heroic, as having done anything extraordinary. I was told time and again: "I don't really have anything to tell you, I didn't do anything." Or, "We did so little, given all there was to do." We may think of them as heroes, but they see themselves as quite ordinary.

And perhaps we, too, shouldn't think of them too quickly as heroes or saints; not only because they themselves refuse this label, but because it would also let us off the hook too easily. If we put them on a pedestal, we deprive ourselves of the possibility of identifying with them. These men and women can become models for us, not to be admired and venerated, but flesh-and-blood creatures who embody the potential for goodness existing in all of us.

One of the women I met is a nun who, today in her 90s, lives in a house for retired sisters near Paris. During the war she was

director of a large and fashionable boarding school for girls in Paris. Her position made it relatively easy for her to take in and hide Jewish children until she could arrange sending them across the border into the unoccupied zone. Often she took them to the train herself. On one occasion she needed 15,000 francs to pay a woman who had agreed to take a Jewish baby across the border. "Where did you get that kind of money?" I asked. She shrugged and said: "I don't remember, but it always came when I needed it."

She spoke of a confrontation she had with a French policeman sent to the school to take the Jewish children away. When she refused to hand over the children, the man, embarrassed, said to her, "What am I to do? I have my orders." "If you are afraid for you skin, give me a week in which I will hide the children; then come back and arrest me! What you are doing is a disgrace. Can you really imagine that I would give you the children?" He went away, and in the week that followed she spirited the children away in all directions. "Luckily I had the addresses of many convents." He never came back.

This nun's background doesn't explain her actions. Like many aristocratic French families, her family had tended to be antisemitic — although the war changed that and they began to help her. Nor did she speak in religious terms. Rather, I felt in her an instinctive gut response to a crisis, to a situation of terrible injustice. Her position enabled her to help and help she did.

People acted for many different reasons: patriotism, personal contact with Jews, a sense of justice, resistance to the hated Germans, the influence of a teacher, the demands of Christian faith and so on. But one motive was common to all — compassionate, humanitarian concern. Again and again, I was told: "They were victims, they needed help, they had nowhere to go." Everyone knew the Jews were the most exposed of all the Nazis' victims. As such, they had to be helped.

Another righteous person I met was Fr. Albert Gau, who planted his tree at Yad Vashem the year after we met. During the war he opened a restaurant (ostensibly run by a woman he knew), which served as a front for Jews and other refugees from the Germans. I asked him whether he had had the support of his bishop. With some hesitation he answered, "Yes, up to a point," and told me the following story.

One day his bishop called him and said, "My dear Father, this business is really getting too dangerous. I must ask you to stop." That same day his doorbell rang and there stood a pregnant Jewish woman. He welcomed her and invited her inside, then telephoned his bishop: "Bishop, I have a pregnant Jewish woman here. You told me to me to stop, so I'll send her to your place; you have plenty of room." The worried bishop told Fr. Gau to

keep the woman: "Do whatever you have to, but keep her!" The priest obtained entry for her in a maternity ward, both she and her child were saved and he continued his rescue work.

He spoke of his network of helpers, which included a Carmelite convent outside his town. On one occasion this convent's Superior helped save a Jew hiding from the Gestapo by dressing him in a Carmelite habit when the Germans came to search the convent.

People acted for many different reasons: patriotism, personal contact with Jews, a sense of justice, resistance to the hated Germans, the influence of a teacher, the demands of Christian faith . . . But one motive was common to all -- compassionate, humanitarian concern.

What made Fr. Gau act as he did? Two things seem clear to me. He is a profoundly compassionate man (he kept referring to all that the Jews had suffered), and he is a man of great independence of character. As a young man, he chose not to go to the local seminary, upon deciding to enter the priesthood, because it was too provincial and narrow. Instead, he went to the seminary of St Sulpice in Paris where he was exposed to a great breadth of ideas and to great teachers.

Some rescuers had a real love of Jews and Judaism before the war. Rolande Birgy is one of these. She has been honored by Yad Vashem for saving many Jewish children, getting them across the Alps into Switzerland. She always made sure, in finding families willing to hide the children, that their faith would be respected. On the day of the week when French children are away from school to attend catechism classes, Rolande saw to it that the Jewish children were taught their own Scriptures by a priest.

Eventually, she was arrested by the French police. An official came to her cell to interrogate her and the following conversation ensued between them: "Why on earth do you help those Jews?" "Because I am French, and Catholic!" "But surely you know that it was the Jews who killed Christ!" "My dear sir, let me tell you something. Anyone who has had any catechism at all knows that it was not the Jews who killed Christ, but our sins." "I guess you are right . . ." Here is an example of both the teaching of contempt, and the overcoming of it.

Let me now speak of a bishop and another lay woman. On August 23, 1942, when deportations of French Jews were under way, the archbishop (later Cardinal) of Toulouse, Msgr. Saliege, ordered a pastoral letter in which he vehemently condemned the inhuman treatment of Jews read in all his churches. The letter caused a sensation throughout France, for it was the first time a bishop of the Catholic Church had spoken out publicly on behalf of the Jews. Inspired by Saliege's example, the bishop of the neighboring diocese, Msgr. Theas of Montauban, in turn wrote a pastoral letter to be read the following Sunday. He telephoned a young social worker he knew, Marie-Rose Gineste, asking her to type and copy the letter for him. When he said he intended to distribute it by mail, she told him the letter would be intercepted immediately. "Leave it to me," she said. And taking her bicycle (which she still rides occasionally at the age of 80) she covered 100 kilometers a day and took the letter to every parish in the diocese, except one where she knew the priest was a collaborator. Marie-Rose planted her tree at Yad Vashem in April 1986.

The Catholics of Toulouse and Montauban had the support and blessing of their bishops. Others, alas, weren't so fortunate. Indeed, out of 80 French bishops, only five spoke out. I knew before I started my work that I wouldn't find very many "Just Ones." And knowing this, I found, and still find, comfort in Jewish tradition. Long ago the rabbis taught that whoever saves one life, it is as if they had saved the entire world. As Harold Schulweis wrote, "a tradition that teaches (this) . . . does not measure goodness in numbers." Also, there is the story in Genesis of Abraham bargaining with God, trying to save Sodom and Gomorrah from destruction: "Master of the universe, will you destroy the just along with the wicked? What if 50 just people are found in the two cities?" And God agreed that he would spare them if only 50 could be found. You know the rest: how Abraham finally got down to 10. God would spare the cities if only 10 just people could be found.

We shall never know how many Just Ones there were during the *Shoah*. Yad Vashem has, to date, honored some 5,000. Raul Wallenberg saved at least 30,000 Jews himself, some say as many as 100,000. Whatever their number, it is still small in the overall picture and these men and women are very precious to us. They help restore, or keep alive, our faith in humanity, in the power of the human spirit to overcome evil, to choose life rather than death. Because they are our sisters and brothers, not really so different from us, they give us hope that we, too, might likewise recognize our neighbor in every victim of oppression.

The research discussed here is part of a study begun in 1985, at the suggestion of Professor Yehuda Bauer of Hebrew University. A grant from the Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism enabled the author to spend six months at Yad Vashem and in France.

Jewish Mysticism, Mystical Cosmology and Mystical Experience

The Mystic Quest: An Introduction to Jewish Mysticism

by David S. Ariel

Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, Inc.

A Review Essay by
Jonathan Shear

Mysticism, as David Ariel points out in *The Mystic Quest*, has always been an intimate component of the world's major religions. Based on highly unusual sorts of experiences, it is often difficult to understand. Nevertheless, Ariel holds, it reflects the universal human impulse for knowledge that goes beyond the surface to the depths of reality. *The Mystic Quest: An Introduction to Jewish Mysticism* presents the reader with a readily understandable body of information about the long and often arcane tradition of Jewish mysticism, from its ancient roots through the development of the Kabbalah and Hasidism in recent centuries, and ends with speculations about its significance in the contemporary world.

Ariel describes a number of interrelated, fascinating, and provocative doctrines central to Jewish mysticism for many centuries. These include the theses (1) that God is absolutely unmanifest and impersonal, (2) that there is an absolute abyss between Him and ourselves and our empirical world, (3) that this abyss is bridged by ten divine cosmic "beings" or "personal aspects" of God, the *Sefirot*, emanated by God and expressing his dynamic and personal potentials, (4) that the *Sefirot*, and the divine realm as a whole, exist in various states of concord and opposition, (5) that the nature of the divine realm is mirrored by impulses deep within our individuals/souls, (6) that we can bring these impulses within ourselves into harmony by proper performance of ritual actions, (7) that this performance also has the effect of helping integrate and harmonize the tendencies within the divine realm itself, and finally (8) that

this divine harmony in turn helps bring harmony to the mundane empirical world. As a result, according to Ariel, the central task of the Jewish mystic is to master the appropriate rituals in order to bring harmony to ourselves, our world, and Heaven itself. For Heaven itself will not be completely harmonious and fulfilled without the proper performance of ritual actions by humankind, God's creation.

This cosmology is surely extraordinary. And even more extraordinary is the notion that human action is required for the divine realm, Heaven itself, to be in harmony. Thus these major ideas from the *Kabbalah* are surely worthy of study. Ariel's book, however, purports to be about mysticism, not cosmology or merely occult practices. And by themselves there is nothing particularly "mystical" about the above ideas. Consider, for example, the doctrine of the *Sefirot*. The notion of divine beings (angels, etc.) created by God and acting as His intermediaries, is believed by people of diverse religions throughout the world, without their being at all concerned with mysticism. Perhaps these particular divine beings are not standard. But what about the notion that such beings are "mystical"? To qualify as mystical, some connection between the idea of the existence of such beings and mystical experience — experience for example of (what is taken to be) these beings themselves — is needed. Similarly, the notion that human beings can by performance of ritual actions influence the divine realm to the benefit of ourselves and our mundane world (and even the divine realm itself) is found in religions throughout the world, independently of all questions of mysticism. Again, some connection between such rituals and beliefs on the one hand and unusual (that is, "mystical") modes of experience on the other must be made before the beliefs and rituals in question could properly be understood as mystical themselves.

Unfortunately, aside from noting that these rituals and beliefs are emphasized by the *Kabbalah*, the central tradition of Jewish mysticism, Ariel's *The Mystic Quest* generally fails to make the appropriate connections with actual mystical experience, and therefore with mysticism itself. Such connections, of course, can be made. But the book seldom either supports or clarifies its extended doctrinal accounts with descriptions of the relevant experiences. Discussions of the *Sefirot*, for example, are central to most of the chapters of the book. Yet it is not until the next to last chapter that Ariel first even suggests any experiential content (other than simply feelings of some kind of presence) to the notion of the *Sefirot* central to his account of Jewish mysticism, and only in the final pages of the book does he first give an explicit example of a (pur-

ported) experience of these extraordinary beings.

In short, the book overwhelmingly emphasizes cosmology, doctrine, and ritual, generally with little appropriate reference to experience. This is unfortunate, for without reference to the relevant mystical experiences, Ariel's often informative discussions of doctrine, ritual and historical context are likely to appear unmotivated and even tedious to the uninitiated reader who, drawn by the title of the book (and its implied claim that it is an appropriate introduction for the beginner) is interested in mysticism, rather than arcane cosmology and ritual and their historical contexts as topics in themselves.

Ariel's reference to Jewish mystical experiences is more than simply inadequate; at crucial points it is sometimes confused and even contradictory. His final chapter, for example, begins with the assertion that Jewish mysticism may be unique among other forms of religious mysticism in that its highest goal is not union with God... Even in the highest stage of *devekut* ["adhesion" to God], the Jewish mystic never become united with *Eyn Sof* [God]. (p. 191)

Yet a few pages earlier he claimed that through prayer the *Hasid* can achieve a state of adhesion (*devekut*) in which he transcends consciousness of his own existence and ultimately achieves consciousness of oneness with God. (p. 178)

He then supported this claim with one of the few explicitly experiential passages cited in the book:

If we achieve this union, we will think about ourselves... that we are nothing other than God... He alone exists and there is nothing other than Him. (p. 178, quoted from *Derekh Emet*, 14)

And then, similarly, described basic Hasidic meditation practice in the following terms:

He empties his consciousness of awareness of the world and thinks himself to be nothingness... Finally his consciousness is filled with awareness of God and nothing else. At that moment his consciousness and God's being are identical. (p. 180)

Thus, strangely, one of Ariel's more important observations about Jewish mystical doctrine, namely that it denies that the mystic ever becomes united with God, is directly contradicted by the experiential material he cites.

Consider also a second major example. Mystical traditions throughout the world, Judaism included, often refer to an experience variously called "pure consciousness," "pure being," and "pure nothingness" which has as its defining characteristic the fact that it is completely devoid of all empirical content whatsoever. Indeed, this experience

is so central to diverse mystical traditions that it is often referred to as "the central mystical experience." Jewish mysticism, too, naturally, refers to this experience. As Ariel notes, this "nothingness" is here called "Ayin" and is identified with the *Keter*, the first and highest of the *Sefirot* emanated by God.

Keter, also called *Ayin* (nothing), is not a nonbeing...It is the indeterminate *nothing* from which all *being* unfolds. (p. 112)

Ariel's discussion of the possibility of having the relevant experience is, unfortunately, again at least confusing, if not contradictory. At first he states that *Keter* can be known "through the unique intuition that comes about through mystical revelation," citing as his authority Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai, the voice of the *Zohar* (one of Jewish mysticism's most important texts). (p. 75) But Ariel then repeatedly asserts that the possibility of this experience is categorically rejected by Jewish mysticism. (pp. 92-3, 195, etc.) Nevertheless, it is well known that experience of *Keter/Ayin* is recorded and discussed in Jewish mysticism, much as in other traditions throughout the world. (See, for example, Daniel Matt's "Ayin: The Concept of Nothingness in Jewish Mysticism," in *The Problem of Pure Consciousness*, edited by Robert Foreman, Oxford University Press, 1990). Clearly, more careful attention to the mystical experiences in general, and this central experience in particular is needed.

In fairness to Ariel, it should be noted that he often states that mystical experience lies at the heart of mysticism in general, and Jewish mysticism in particular. And his introductory chapter is full of paradigmatic examples of mystical experiences. Unfortunately, almost none of these are Jewish mystical experiences. Thus a more fruitful approach to Jewish mysticism would have been to go on to emphasize, either here or in later chapters, mystical experiences as reported by Jewish mystics, and examine the relationships of these experiences to the doctrinal, historical, and ritual contexts in which they occur. This, of course, would be an application of the major traditional approach to the intellectual study of mysticism. Had Ariel taken this approach, carefully examining all of his major topics in terms of the relevant experiences, his book, full of useful and informative material as it is, would have been much more interesting, accessible to beginners, lively and useful for scholars, and perhaps, one would expect, more consistent.

Focusing on the relevant experiences, moreover, can have a value above and beyond such stylistic questions of intellectual interest, accessibility and liveliness. It is the experiences themselves which underlie and give

life to the topic of mysticism in general, and mystical doctrines in particular. Indeed, focusing on the experiences themselves in as complete abstraction as possible from all the metaphysical and religious doctrines they have usually been associated with would seem to me to be particularly useful both for understanding the objective significance of the experiences and for understanding these doctrines themselves. For mystical experiences are objective facts about human consciousness, and they can be studied as such and evaluated for their objective significance (see, for example, my *The Inner Dimension*, Peter Lang Publishing, 1990). And once we can identify and "sort out" the components of mystical experience which can be grasped independently of doctrine and belief, the unique contribution and significance of these doctrines and rituals should naturally emerge most clearly.

Such an approach, in particular, would have value for the study of Jewish mysticism. Many details of the Jewish mystical doctrines outlined, for example, by Ariel are unique to Judaism. In fact, they are unique within Judaism. And these unique details are mirrored, and presumably often grounded, in the experiences of Jewish mystics. Indeed, it is only by reference to these experiences that we can fully come to understand why such highly unconventional doctrines would ever have come to be believed, how we should understand them, and how their truth might come to be evaluated. Examination of the experiences themselves, augmented by objective evaluation of their content, would thus not only provide enhanced access for the contemporary, nonmystical reader to the wealth of information contained in Ariel's book, but a platform for evaluating their significance.

Most mystics, of course, would maintain that direct experience is the essential ingredient. And Ariel, too, in the final pages of his book, brings the discussion back not only to experience, but one's own experience, observing that

human beings yearn for explanations that transcend the state of human knowledge. Each of us strives in some way for a transcendent experience, an oceanic feeling, the sense of undifferentiatedness. The vehicle for these forms of human expression is religion and, often, mysticism. (pp. 200-1)

Nevertheless, he feels,

it is unlikely that there will be a revival of Jewish mysticism in its traditional form. The teachings of Jewish mysticism are too rooted in the medieval way of thinking for them to appeal to the modern mind. (p. 200)

However, Ariel also refers here to "modern, secular meditational techniques [which]

foster relaxational, attentional, and deautomatized states of consciousness," notes their parallels with *kabbalistic* practices throughout history (p. 199), and suggests that even contemporary performance of religious rituals (such as those of *Yom Kippur*) can perhaps produce the requisite deautomatization and transcendence in contemporary worshippers. (p. 201) Here, then, Ariel would seem — from the perspective of the mystic — to be on the right track. For it is only by developing the requisite depths of inner experience that the rich Jewish tradition of mystical doctrines could be elevated to something more than the realm of mere "powerful mythology" Ariel feels it has to be relegated to in today's modern world. Whether or not such experience can be developed using the means available to us today is an open, empirical question. But seeing whether it can, and by what means, is a good part of what "the Mystic Quest" is all about.

Jonathan Shear is affiliate professor of religious studies at Virginia Commonwealth University and author of The Inner Dimension: Philosophy and the Experience of Consciousness.

Schwere un zein a Yid

A Review Essay
by Melvin I Urofsky

Neil M. Cowan and Ruth Schwartz Cowan. *Our Parents' Lives: The Americanization of Eastern European Jews*. New York: Basic Books.

M. Herbert Danzger. *Returning to Tradition: The Contemporary Revival of Orthodox Judaism*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Ben Kamin. *Stones in the Soul: One Day in the Life of an American Rabbi*. New York: Macmillan.

Charles S. Liebman and Steven M. Cohen. *Two Worlds of Judaism: The Israeli and American Experiences*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

My grandparents' generation, the generation that constituted the great Jewish migration from eastern Europe to America, discovered when they arrived in "Columbus's land" they could no longer take their Jewishness for granted. Where in Europe economic, political and religious persecution had hemmed Jews within tightly knit communities, in the New World freedom pre-

vailed and, while that made their lives more tolerable as human beings, freedom also eroded the traditional ties that had bound individual Jews to faith and community. As many of them complained, "Schvere un zein a Yid," it's hard to be a Jew in America.

It wasn't that they couldn't be Jewish; many of them remained faithful to the end of their days and handed on the heritage to their children. But they couldn't be the type of Jew they had been in Russia or Poland, where they lived inside a closed community in which everyone took for granted the norms of traditional Jewish practice. There everyone stopped work on the Sabbath; here they often had to work or to keep their shops open on Saturday. There everyone kept kosher; here keeping the dietary laws wasn't impossible but very difficult, especially outside the home. There everyone married a fellow Jew since it was the only way that didn't involve conversion to Christianity; here one could marry as one pleased.

Judaism survived, of course, because it did what it had to so often in the past — adapt. The German Jews, who had come here in the mid-nineteenth century, had already developed Reform Judaism as their answer to the challenge of modernity; in the early part of this century Conservative Judaism tried to balance tradition and modern life, but with a greater emphasis on tradition than in Reform. And, as happened in every emancipated Jewish community, there was a falling off, an abandonment of the old rituals, a greater emphasis on the social rather than the religious aspects of Jewish life, and, ever since World War II, a rising rate of intermarriage.

Traditional, or Orthodox Judaism, didn't disappear, but it never held the normative position in the United States that it had in Europe. The community maintained a certain vitality despite the departure of its children for Conservative and Reform temples primarily because of continued immigration from Europe. Then come the Holocaust and the destruction of the Old World, and by the 1950s commentators were predicting the demise of Orthodoxy in this country.

These four books explore various aspects of this transformation as well as one development totally unexpected by American Jews a generation ago, the revival of Orthodoxy. Each one looks at a different aspect and each one raises troubling questions.

Israeli-born Ben Kamin, rabbi of The Temple in Cleveland, one of the great cathedral congregations of Reform Judaism, wrote one of the most disturbing books I have read in a long time. The rabbis I know best are people who gain great pleasure from their work. While they have to deal with divorce, sickness, death and other problems,

that seems more than balanced by the joy they take in helping their congregants through the life cycle events of birth, bar and bat mitzvah, marriage and the like. They don't deny there are problems and difficulties they must deal with, but the satisfaction they derive from their work is obvious.

Kamin describes one day in his life and uses the events of that day to talk about a whole range of issues. Much of what he says is interesting and insightful, and there is no question that here is a caring human being. But it is a day of woe, of funerals, of violence, of loss, without any hint of the counter-balancing events. If I had a child who wanted to be a rabbi, I would give him or her this book to read; whatever Kamin's intention, it isn't a recruiting tract for the rabbinate.

In the United States, Judaism is a religion and a culture and, with the exception of the Orthodox, isn't the determining factor in Jewish lives. We are Americans who are Jewish . . . In Israel . . . one is a Jew, a complete Jew, because one is in Israel.

Our Parents' Lives is primarily a collection of oral history transcriptions the Cowans did within a fairly small circle of people, their parents and friends, and it is principally useful as an antidote to the overly sentimental portrait of eastern Europe and the lower East Side we get from *Fiddler on the Roof* or *The World of Our Fathers*. Jews in eastern Europe never lived far from danger, and nearly every one of the people interviewed could recall a story of antisemitism, physical threats, attacks and even murder.

What is most interesting is how they became "Amerikaners," or to put it another way, how they ceased being the type of Jews they had been in the Old World. This sample, at least, acted just like other immigrant groups and as they became assimilated, did just what their contemporaries did, including, for some of the women, a rather wild sex life in the 1920s. Those who like thinking of that generation of immigrants and their children as a golden generation should read this book. It was hard being a Jew in America.

The book would have been far better if the Cowans hadn't tried imposing their analyses on top of the transcripts, and some of their comments are not only unsubstantiated by the evidence, but downright silly. *Yiddishkeit*, at least as far as everyone I know has ever used this term, has meant a commitment to and a love of Jewish

religion and culture, even if one isn't personally observant. The Cowans come up with a nonsensical economic interpretation coming very close to some of the charges leveled by antisemites — that there is something in Jewish culture, "a willingness to take financial risks, a nose for a good deal, a special alertness to messages of the market, a willingness to maneuver on the very fringes of what is legal, a familiarity with the world of banking — (that) sped them along the road to success in America." Anyone interested in this book should use the transcripts for the valuable but limited source they are, and just skip the editors' useless commentaries.

Charles Liebman and Steven Cohen have long been involved in social science research about the nature of the American Jewish community, and, in *Two Worlds of Judaism*, have taken survey data from Israel to try to compare the views of Jews in the two countries. They are, not surprisingly, different and confirm what many commentators have said in a less scientific manner.

In the United States, Judaism is a religion and a culture and, with the exception of the Orthodox, isn't the determining factor in Jewish lives. We are Americans who are Jewish, some of us with a greater commitment to the institutions of communal life and some with a lesser commitment. In Israel there is the additional factor of the land; one is a Jew, a complete Jew, because one is in Israel. Here nationalism and religion are separate; there they are closely intertwined and, thus, affect every aspect of life. Moreover, in Israel, Orthodoxy is taken as normative Judaism, even by those who are non-observant; here we, just as the majority of other Americans, believe in a tolerant pluralism. The authors clearly are unhappy with aspects of Jewish life in both countries, but they don't see "two Judaisms" emerging; they do, however, see a great deal of tension between the two communities over religious issues.

As Liebman and Cohen point out, Orthodoxy is strong in Israel; what surprises many observers is its comeback in the United States, and that is the subject of Herbert Danzger's *Returning to Tradition*. Danzger studies the *ba'al shuva yeshivot*, the schools for "returning" Jews, that is, Jews, who whether they were once Orthodox or not, now are returning to the tradition, which focuses around the rituals of kashrut and Sabbath observance.

Why people return is a complicated subject and Danzger explores the phenomenon from a sympathetic stance. Orthodox himself, he is still a trained observer; these two traits allowed him access where a non-observant Jew could never have gone. If there is a quibble with this book, it is that Danzger doesn't address some of the troubling issues he notes, such as the fact that

many women who would like to return cannot accept the position that Orthodoxy ascribes to females or that some of the rabbis who have recruited evidently have been ostracized by the right wing Orthodox because they dared to confront some of the problems of modernity.

The four books together provide a fascinating sketch of Jewish life in America; the grandchildren of those who came here a century ago also can say, even if not in Yiddish, that indeed it is often difficult to be a Jew in America.

Melvin I. Urofsky is professor of history at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Arguing With God in the Age of Dilemma

*Arguing With God:
A Jewish Tradition*
By Anson Laytner
Northvale, N. J.:
Jason Aronson Inc.

A Review Essay
by Matthew Schwartz

In *Arguing With God: A Jewish Tradition*, Rabbi Anson Laytner presents a well-researched, historical survey of the motif of arguing with God in Jewish literature from the biblical patriarchs to post-Holocaust writers like Eli Wiesel and Jacob Glatstein. "I hope that contemporary Jews not only will learn of the continuous heritage of doubt and protest . . . but will also gain a sense of reassurance that the present spiritual crisis, far from being unique in history, has analogies and precedents in other times and places of Jewish history."

The devoted synagogue goer familiar with their regular prayers, who has been moved by the daily *selihot* of the High Holiday season and who has lamented with *kinot* on Tisha B'Av will find little new here. This book is directed, instead, at the larger numbers who are less aware of the unique expression of intimacy and *hutzpah* in the long tradition of Jews demanding answers and favors from God in their prayers.

Man's challenge to God and his dissatisfaction with the world often arise from his inability to resolve the ancient question of why do the righteous suffer and why do the wicked prosper! Rabbi Laytner is very troubled by this question and his deep emotional concern is a central force in this

book. Despite man's fascination with theodicy, it should be noted that Jewish liturgy, including many samples in this book, presents man in argument with God about other issues too.

Laytner offers and, perhaps, somewhat overdoes the thesis that there was some tension beginning in the Second Commonwealth period between saints like Honi Hamaagel and R. Hanina ben Dosa, who could be petulant with God, and the school of R. Akiba, which emphasized acceptance of the divine will. This distinction does exist to some degree, but the two groups weren't in rigid conflict. Nor did R. Akiba's group win or seek to win a complete victory. The section on Hasidic prayer is lengthy and interesting, but there is only a brief reference to Mitnagdic views (p. 187). Also missing is discussion of Nachmanides' *Gate of Repentance*, a classic medieval rabbinic treatment of theodicy and related topics.

In a final "Personal Afterward," 18 pages, Laytner offers an interesting personal account of his own relationship with God and theodicy and with the meaning of modern Judaism. It is the dilemma of an intellectual, honest, modern, liberal Jew. We have grown accustomed to being treated to autobiographical views of people's insides, but this is a more philosophic, serious document. Certain characteristics of modern man become apparent in Rabbi Laytner's essay—his dilemmas, his struggles, his desire for freedom and his quest for answers in a world where he feels alien. Using Rabbi Laytner's essay as a source, we shall offer a description of this modern man and, also, some responses that might come from an non-modern, perhaps a "Judaic" man.

Modern man. Is there a solution to the problem of theodicy? Rabbi Laytner isn't sure. His "thoughts only constitute a working toward a solution, not a solution per se. If solutions do exist—and I'm not sure they do . . ." (p. 232). Here is a starting point of dilemma—modern man is unsure and he finds his uncertainties unacceptable and perturbing. But his uncertainties also are chronic. It seems necessary to him to remain uncertain even while demanding solutions. He chooses to respond to his dilemma by remaining in it. Uncertainty is his nature. He knows he cannot solve theodicy, but he pushes himself to solve it. He wants closeness to God and demands that God answer him. Yet, he is uncomfortable with intimacy and with the resolution of the distance between himself and Deity. His view is, in a sense, self-taunting and dangerously naive.

Modern man is deeply concerned with freedom, an idea that entered its modern phase with the political revolutions of the late eighteenth century and thrives today among the cultured. However, with freedom to make choices comes a seeming freedom

not to choose, a freedom to withhold commitment. One is free to choose until he has made the choice. A choice that seems to require so great a commitment is awesome, so it must be a perfect choice. Like most modern dilemmas, this one is nothing new, but each age of history gives it a new form. Among the ancient Stoics, freedom meant, in its truest and most ultimate form, the choice between life and suicide. The Roman philosopher Seneca writes over and over that the only real choice anyone has is the freedom to depart from life when he wishes, just as one may leave a banquet when he wishes. A man's only real freedom is the ability to choose when to end his own life—the freedom of suicide.

Modern man feels a certain alienation from tradition, the past and, indeed, from the present. He searches for his roots but is unconfident and uncomfortable when he comes close to them, for roots too proclaim restrictions. Modern man, as a religious thinker would like to meet with God, as did Moses and Job, and discuss serious issues of religious thought with Him. This is something that no Greek could ever do with Zeus. Cannot God favor us with some miracles like those described in the Bible to convince us as the ancient Israelites were convinced? Yet, modern man seems uneasy about approaching God in this way, as though he needs someone to reassure him that talking to God won't betray his freedom or weaken his identity, that it need not necessitate the stifling of all his accustomed sources of ideas and of security.

In this context, Laytner argues there is a deep psychospiritual wound in the Jewish soul because the "issue of God's inactivity and Jewish suffering is not being adequately addressed . . . in the synagogue." The Holocaust has worsened the problem but isn't its only cause. The modern rabbi is timid and unwilling to address the serious needs of his parishioners. He is no longer the "spiritual emissary of the congregation," (p. 239) and he upholds a belief system and a concept of God that seems irrelevant. It's no wonder that, "worship services are sparsely and infrequently attended, ritual observance is declining, education is ineffective, a sense of identity is difficult . . . all because the fundamental questions are being ignored."

"If I had to identify my current relationship with God, I would label it agnostic mysticism." (p. 232). Modern man covers his eyes while reciting the Sh'ma but peeks between his fingers at the Divine Presence. He yearns to "taste" and "see" God's presence and won't be placated by an I-Thou experience or a small still voice. The agnostic mystic's quest can end only in a face-to-face encounter with God. Thus, it seems that modern man wants to identify himself as both agnostic and mystic, not realizing the

two positions are inherently conflictual, and perhaps he is telling us again that with all his need for freedom, he cannot make choices. Frightened and unsure, he cannot remove his hands from his eyes altogether during the Sh'ma for fear of some primal danger nor can he make the decision to cover them. He has been led to believe he is being asked to make a grand leap of faith and this frightens him. He would like to experience real miracles as in the biblical stories, to help him make his commitment, all the while suspecting it wouldn't help him anyway, and shortsightedly forgetting that the biblical miracles weren't always very convincing to those who experienced them.

Modern man is self-doubting and self-castigating (p. 125). Rabbi Laytner devotes 10 years to the writing of this book and his last line tells us that this is "what the arguing with God tradition means for me as of today . . . May 19, 1989."

The words "angry" and "torn" are used to describe the modern man's state of mind in his quest for an encounter with God and these words are of the stock of western thought. The answer to despair might well be Redemption and, like Job, modern man would like to push all interference aside and demand redemption from God, as it were, face to face.

Judaic man is moved by a different view. He accepts, for practical purposes, his inability to resolve issues like theodicy and he sets his doubts on the back burner while believing that God, with whom he feels intimate, knows the reasons and has an intelligent plan for the world. The story of Job contains a serious answer as well as a question.

To Judaic man, having freedom of choice doesn't mean making no choices. He, in fact, makes choices of all kinds constantly, most importantly, choices between right and wrong and every decision leads to new questions. But he doesn't trouble himself with leaps of faith. The challenges and choices in Jewish thought are designed to lead to harmony, not to emotional chaos and intellectual stultification.

All thinking persons must question and challenge the world around them and must come to terms with Deity. Jewish tradition, as this book makes clear, encourages, even demands, that man be open with God. Not the halachic concept of the rebellious elder — that a scholar not agreeing with the decision of a rabbinic court must challenge it all the way to the Sanhedrin in the Jerusalem temple. He must never surrender or compromise his freedom to think, although if the final legal decision goes against him he must conform to the law in practice.

When Judaic man doesn't approach God with his problem, then God approaches

him and he can almost expect it. God seeks out Adam and Cain when they back away from seeking conciliation with Him. In perhaps the classic example, God opens up to the prophet Jonah several times even while Jonah backs away. God may, in moments of exasperation, call the Israelites a "stiff-necked people," but it is their very stubbornness that makes them able to receive a Torah and unwilling to accept a second-rate relationship with God or with reality.

In the Greek heritage of western civilization, figures like Antigone and Iphigenia think they can find self-fulfillment only in heroic self-destruction. Jewish tradition is strikingly different. While man should acknowledge and repent his misdeeds, he must never forget that he himself is the center and object of Creation and that self-castigation is totally opposite to the life-producing role the Creator has set for him.

Redemption is, indeed, a high article of Jewish faith. The Talmud speaks of the one "who can acquire his world (*olam*) in an hour;" however, the way to Redemption for Judaic man isn't usually a frightening leap of faith. There are smaller needs of wisdom, sustenance, healing and the like, those paragraphs of the *amidah* that modern man would like to leap over to get at God himself (p. 236). Modern man is duly terrified by the extreme choices, daredevil leaps and joyless Atlas-like burdens that he draws on to himself. The stranger asked Hillel to teach him the whole Torah while he stood on one foot. Modern man, perhaps unfairly, demands to be taught while standing on no feet. In this he seeks a great deal, perhaps more than is feasible, both of others and of himself.

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**New Insights
Into an Ancient People**

Jewish Self-Hatred
By Sander L. Gilman
Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press

A Review Essay
by Steven F. Windmueller

Infrequently, one comes across a book as exceptionally well-crafted and researched as is Sander L. Gilman's text. The focus of Professor Gilman's research encompasses both a historical and psychological inquiry into the nature of the idea of *Jewish Self-Hatred*. As he notes, there is a "preoccupation of Jews in the West with their Otherness." Gilman's thesis rests on the principle that the written word "provides the historian of stereotypes with raw material with which to recreate the evolving sense of Jewish identity in response to the rhetoric of the Western World." The direction Gilman has taken with this analysis encompasses four themes. Each of these reflects different phases of both the Jewish experience with other cultures and with the ability of Jews to accommodate to their own environment. His work is built around the impact of Christian efforts at conversion of Jews during the Middle Ages, the focus of Jewish assimilation in the changing industrial society and, finally, the impact of the theories of race on the language and literature of the Jewish people as they entered the twentieth century.

Throughout the course of these four historical scenarios, Professor Gilman seeks

Book Briefings

Echoes from the Holocaust: Philosophical Reflections on a Dark Time. Edited by Alan Rosenberg and Gerald E. Myers. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. This collection of 23 essays is the first book to focus comprehensively on the profound issues and philosophical significance of the Holocaust. They convey an extraordinary range of factual information and philosophical reflection in seeking to identify the haunting meanings of the Holocaust. Some of the questions: How should philosophy approach the Holocaust? What part did the intellectual climate play in allowing Hitlerism? What is the philosophical climate today and what are its probable cultural effects? Multiple dimensions of the Holocaust are brought together here for philosophical interpretation.

A Guide to Life: Jewish Laws and Customs of Mourning. By Tzvi Rabinowicz. Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, Inc. This book covers all aspects of Jewish mourning rituals, including visiting the sick, respect for the dead, and words of comfort. It also contains memorial prayers in English and Hebrew. The author provides a practical and useful explanation of the laws and customs of mourning.

to illuminate how marginal groups, in this instance, the Jewish community, through the use of language, have adopted the negative and myth-making labels that were applied by the majority society toward this particular subculture.

A central idea in Gilman's provocative research is the question of assimilation and identity. He poses a series of questions and then seeks to argue for his premise. What do monolithic societies demand of an outsider before they will admit this individual into their membership? And what happens to this individual if he is never truly granted membership? The writer maintains that, following the German Enlightenment, the exclusion of groups, such as Jews, from an otherwise homogeneous society lead to the phenomenon of antisemitism. The fears that the Jewish community had concerning its own status and identity were projected to the more alien and isolated members of its own community as, for example, German Jewish attitudes toward Eastern European Jewry. Thus, this transference of hate directed by the outside community is, in turn, redirected within the smaller culture to elements that were perceived to truly reflect the charges that were devised by the larger society.

Professor Guy Stern pays special

tribute to this text and to its author when he commented:

"Only someone versed equally in literature, social history and group psychology could have undertaken this research. Gilman's fascinating and moving book identifies a demon of the Jewish past; beyond that, it may help to exorcise it."

Clearly, Sander Gilman brings to this study the unique combination of skills of being proficient in both the humanities and in the field of psychiatry. He has mastered the ability to effectively integrate the concepts of culture and literature with those of science and medicine.

In its conclusion, *Jewish Self-Hatred* concentrates on an examination of post-Holocaust literature both in Europe and North America. Gilman concludes that "the establishment of the State of Israel, the rebirth of Hebrew . . . and the new, militant image of the Jew as a warrior, confront American Jews with an image of the Jew rooted in a newly united sense of national identity . . ."

Thus, he surmises that the historical patterns of *Jewish Self-Hatred* may have finally ceased, and in its place the emergence of a more positive framework by which Jewish writers and thinkers are now framing

the character and identity of the Jewish people. Joining other ethnic groups in the shaping of the American experiences has relieved Jews of the fear of being an isolated, marginal entity, perceived as different from their neighbors. This new character and status have given a sense of assuredness and, as a result, have begun to generate a more positive and different language and discourse by which contemporary writers can project the anxieties and issues facing the modern Jewish world.

Steven F. Windmueller is executive director of the Jewish Community Relations Committee in Los Angeles.

"He who learns quickly and forgets quickly his advantage is cancelled by his disadvantage. He who is slow to learn and slow to forget, his disadvantage is cancelled by his advantage."
--Talmud



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