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# MENORAH REVIEW



NUMBER 37 • CENTER FOR JUDAIC STUDIES OF VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY • SPRING/SUMMER 1996

## For the Enrichment of Jewish Thought

### Who Do You Say That I Am?

*A Rabbi Talks With Jesus*  
by Jacob Neusner  
New York: Doubleday Dell

A Review Essay  
by Peter J. Haas

The purpose of this book simply cannot be explained in clearer language than that used by the author himself. The book is meant, Neusner tells us, to explain why "if I had been in the Land of Israel in the first century, I would not have joined the circle of Jesus' disciples" (p. xi). This way of framing matters is crucial. This is not just yet another apology for the Jewish rejection of Paul and the Gentile church. This is meant rather as a reasoned explanation of why a first-century believing Jew would reject Jesus' teaching on the principled ground that Jesus' teachings "at important points contradict the Torah. And where Jesus diverges from the revelation by God to Moses at Mount Sinai, he is wrong and Moses is right" (p. xii).

The book that follows is constructed as a kind of dialogue. Neusner imagines himself to be in the crowd during the Sermon on the Mount. He tells us his thoughts as he hears the words of this teacher: what he finds familiar, what he finds new and intriguing, and what he finds troubling. Pushing his way to the speaker after the crowd has begun to disperse, our author in the following chapters enters into a dialogue with Jesus about what the words he has heard could possibly mean. In the end, Neusner and Jesus part ways. Neusner goes his way with new admiration for Jesus and his message but more convinced than ever that to follow this new teacher is to turn his back on Torah, and this he is not prepared to do. There can be here no Jewish Christianity.

Before proceeding, it may be helpful to introduce the partners in dialogue. The Jesus of this dialogue is the Jesus according to Matthew, the gospel that claims most

directly to speak to Jews. The other partner in the dialogue, our author, is Jacob Neusner, an ordained Conservative rabbi, a foremost scholar of Judaism in Late Antiquity and author of more than 400 books on Judaism, Jewish thought and Jewish history, and the holder of some 13 honorary degrees and academic medals.

With this background in mind, it becomes clear why Neusner has not conceived of this book as a classical apology or a scholarly commentary but rather as an inter-rabbinic debate: one rabbi (Neusner) talking to and arguing with another "rabbi" (Jesus) about issues central to Torah. Neusner's assumption, possibly strange to believing Christians but largely self-evident to practicing Jews, is that the highest form of respect one rabbi can show another is to enter into serious debate. This then is what this book claims to be all about, not to convince Christians of the rightness of Judaism nor to convince Jews of the wrongness of Jesus but, instead, to show both groups that a reasoned and principled dissent to Jesus from within Judaism is possible (if not in fact unavoidable).

This proceeds as a series of chapters built around tensions Neusner sees in Jesus' own message as presented to us by Matthew. The first has to do with the opening of the Sermon on the Mount. If Jesus had in fact come to fulfill the Torah then how can he be saying "But I say to you..."? That is, how exactly are Jesus' words to be taken as a fulfillment of Torah when each new teaching of his is set forth not in the name of Torah or of God but on his personal authority? And

beyond that, Jesus' remarks are addressed not to the community, as are the words of Torah, but to the individual. Thus Neusner, standing in the first century audience at the foot of the mount, hears a call to react as an individual to a prophet's personal teaching. To be sure, he finds this amazing but not in the sense meant by the disciples. What Neusner finds amazing is that Jesus is in effect saying that if one were to take these words seriously, one would have to leave the community that follows God's word as revealed in the Torah to follow an individual path preached by this one prophet. Can this possibly be? The next chapter, entitled "Honor Thy Father and Mother vs. Do Not Think That I Have Come to Bring Peace on Earth," addresses this issue and concludes that is exactly the point. The old bonds of family and people are to be broken to create a new family and people united by faith not blood. But to do so, Neusner concludes, is to destroy the Israel that God created.

This theme is then explored and developed in the next several chapters, suggestively titled, "Remember the Sabbath Day to Keep It Holy vs. Look, Your Disciples Are Doing What is Not Lawful to Do on the Sabbath;" "You Shall Be Holy...vs. If You Would Be Perfect...;" "You Shall Be Holy vs. Holier Than Thou;" "You Shall Tithe...vs. You Tithe the Mint and Dill and Cummin and Have Neglected the Weightier Matters..." In all these chapters Neusner finds again and again that to take the words and teachings of Jesus at face value means to abandon the Torah given at Sinai. In effect, he understands Jesus to be saying that his listeners must give up Torah so as to be holy as God is holy and, instead, follow Jesus so as to be perfect. This is a new and unprecedented idea, Neusner argues, and one that he, like the Pharisees of the Gospels, finds strange and, finally, at odds with Judaism. At the close of the book, the two rabbis have breakfast together and then go their separate ways—the one into Judaism, the other to Jerusalem and the new religion that lies beyond.

Despite the claims of the book that it is about a first century dialogue, the contents are about much more. The voice of the contemporary rabbinic scholar constantly

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intrudes with commentary and allusions. Thus, we find our first-century listener countering in his mind a saying of Jesus he has just heard with a passage found in the Mishnah (third century C.E.) or the Talmud (seventh century C.E.), or have Jesus indicate that what he is saying is not really so odd for it would later be said by the sage quoted in *Leviticus Rabbah* (fifth century C.E.)! These later intrusions are somewhat disconcerting if one tries to imagine the book taking place entirely within the first century, especially since it was Neusner himself who has taught us that it is illegitimate to homogenize all of Rabbinic Judaism so that any one document can be cited as proof for all Judaism at all times. In this view, citing these later documents to establish some point in the time of Jesus is to commit an egregious methodological error. But Neusner is much too self-conscious a scholar to fall into that trap. His point, I believe, is a larger one. He wants to emphasize that, after all, many of the things Jesus says are not so revolutionary in and of themselves but reflect established positions that have been part of Judaism from Late Antiquity onwards. That is, Jesus is often taking his stand on views that continue to be legitimate alternatives in Judaism. This serves to highlight what is unique about Jesus as Neusner hears him, namely his claim to authority over against the Torah of Sinai. It is this claim, not some detail of law, that occasions Neusner's principled dissent. In short, these passages serve to make the point that a rabbinic dialogue with Jesus is not so strange after all; Jesus himself seems to have been engaged in just such an enterprise. Judaism's opposition is centered not primarily on the content of what Jesus is saying but on its form, on its claim to stand outside and above the Torah of Sinai. About points of law, there can be legitimate debate, on the authority of Torah for the community of Israel there cannot, and it is on these latter grounds that Jesus and Neusner part ways.

In the end, *A Rabbi Talks With Jesus* is not about the historical Jesus, the early Church or even about the Judaism (or Judaisms) of the first century. It is a book about how an observant rabbinic Jew might respond to the closest thing we have to Jesus himself, the gospel accounts, not to the teachings of the Gentile church. Its aim is to show that Judaism's rejection of Jesus and Christianity is not the result of blindness or perversity but of a certain faith. It is only when we recognize the faith and sincerity of the other, Neusner says, that a true Jewish-Christian dialogue can emerge. This book is a modest but important contribution to making that sort of utterly open and honest dialogue possible.

*Peter J. Haas is a professor of religious studies at Vanderbilt University and a contributing editor.*

## Taking the Plunge

*Entering Jewish Prayer:  
A Guide to Personal Devotion  
and the Worship Service*  
by Reuven Hammer  
New York: Schocken Books

A Review Essay  
by Earle J. Coleman

Rabbi Reuven Hammer's title reminds one that praying is more like jumping into a stream than viewing it from afar. Striking an admirable balance between devotional and scholarly material, Hammer begins by stating that contemporary Jews want to know the meaning of their prayers. This is no mean task for, as he later observes, prayers—like poems—can have levels of meaning. Ideally, like poetry, prayer is an end in itself (i.e., intrinsically valuable apart from its fruits). Emphasis is on the here and now as when one prays to the God "who has kept us alive, sustained us and brought us to this moment." In fine, prayer shares the immediacy of the present moment that one feels in profound aesthetic experiences.

Faithful to Judaism, Hammer emphasizes the communal nature of Jewish prayer: "We stand before God not as individuals but as part of a historical entity." While the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead urged that religion is what one does with his solitude, Jews yearn to pray as a community, if possible in a synagogue (during the Diaspora, one name for synagogues was "house of prayer"). If that is not possible, it is best to pray at the same time. By so uniting, Jews affirm their collective past and establish their togetherness for the future. Therefore, Hammer observes that every Jew addresses God not simply as an individual but as a member of a people. This social nature of prayer has an interesting eastern parallel; even silent Zen Buddhist monks, who are meditating, often prefer to do so in the company of their fellows.

Hammer recognizes that the concept of prayer raises manifold philosophical questions (e.g., How much should one pray?) Some sages agreed with St. Paul that one should pray without ceasing. After all, if God is omnipresent, acknowledgement in the form of continuous prayer may seem to be the appropriate human response. Of course, only a mystical interpretation of prayer renders this possible, with prayer becoming an orientation, perspective or attitude that one brings to every situation, as an artist may carry an aesthetic outlook to any circumstance. Again, some have wondered: How can one pray when his zeal has "dried up"? With any other problem one can pray

for help. This culminates in the paradox of prayer: How can one pray for the ability to pray when one has lost the ability to pray? Hammer notes that in traditional Ashkenazic *siddurim* one can find prayer concerning the ability to pray. At first, this seems logically absurd, for the incapacitated individual is incompetent to recite the prayer. Nevertheless, some sages have found comfort in reciting passages from the Book of Psalms. Evidently, such recitation is intended to open the individual to the inspiration that initiates and guides one as prayer.

One may also ask if praying for some purposes can diminish the dignity and solemnity of prayer. As a chaplain in the U.S. Air Force, Hammer once declined to give an invocation at a Judo match because he thought it would "trivialize" prayer. However, in *Letters to Malcolm*, C.S. Lewis wonders if the person who refrains from so-called trivial prayer is more concerned with offending his own dignity than the dignity of the divine. If God is all pervasive, then what aspect of life is beneath divine intervention? As no theme is too trivial for the true artist—Van Gogh painted peasant's boots—perhaps no prayer is too minor for the devout believer. Naturally, if one prayed excessively or exclusively for lesser matters, he would be open to criticism. Some consider prayers that one directs toward the past to be vain or useless, but others ask if an omnipotent God can change what has already happened. Orthodox thinkers tend to believe that since God created nature, He can interfere with it as He wishes. Others say that God does not change the laws of nature since these laws are God's own laws. One can also puzzle over whether prayers about the present logically entail that the past become otherwise. Given such complexities, Hammer may be prudent to suggest that one best understands prayers as expressions of hope and desire, not as directives to alter nature. Obviously, the majority of Jews and other theists will ignore this suggestion; to them, prayer is frequently a request for a miracle. In any case, the sages agree that prayers are eternal because, even in the world to come where humans have no needs, they will still wish to express their gratitude to God.

Some think that petitionary prayers imply that either God doesn't know or doesn't care. Since an omniscient, omnibenevolent, omnipotent God would inevitably do what is best, some construe prayers of request as pointless annoyances. There is also a tension between requesting something of God and accepting His will, whatever it may be. Moreover, some reason that what is perfect does not change; therefore, human prayers cannot move an immutable God. Of course, there is no shortage of responses. Some defend petitionary prayer as an expression of faith since it affirms one's utter dependency on God. This fosters humility, which

is an important trait, for the Talmud teaches that humans were created after the tiny ant. Some emphasize that prayers of request are frequently for others, thereby allowing one to cultivate the virtue of altruism. According to Hammer, prayers of petition are less frequent in the liturgy than prayers of praise; and, among petitionary prayers, those of peace prevail. Philosophers make the point that perhaps petitionary prayers are not outside God's casual order but elements within it. In fine, prayers are themselves casual links in God's chain of causes and effects that determine the course of the universe. Thus, prayer enables humans to participate in God's ongoing creation. Viewed this way, prayer contributes to the way things are, but it also can be transformative. Just as the aesthetic—a note of song, a spontaneous dance or the rays of sunlight—can dramatize an incident and endow the ordinary with the extraordinary, a blessing after a meal, Hammer says, elevates an ordinary experience and endows it with deeper significance.

***Creativity is an obvious virtue in art, but innovation, spontaneity, vitality, freedom and flexibility also play a crucial role in prayer.***

When it comes to prayer, the concepts or words that are so central to theology and philosophy sometimes play a diminished role. A Hasidic tale relates that when a man had left home without his prayer book, he "prayed" the following prayer: "Lord, I will recite the alphabet five times and you, who know all prayers, can put the letters together to make the prayers that I cannot remember." It is reported that the Lord told His angels that this was the best prayer of the day because it proceeded from a simple and sincere heart. Hammer agrees that the text of prayers may not be as important as one's attitude toward them. Discussing the rites of mourning, Hammer comments, "Even without consideration of the meaning of the words, the very act of repeated recitation of a prayer in public helps restore equanimity and leads a mourner back to a place within the community of believers." Martin Buber speaks similarly of "believers who do not need to know the content of a litany since the arrangement of sounds alone gives them all that they need and more than any content could." Further, if prayer is communication with God, some of the most important prayers may take the form of gestures, attitudes, mundane acts, artistic expressions or listening. Indeed, an anecdote underlines the importance of prayer as listening. Someone asked a deeply prayerful man: "What does God say to you?" "Nothing, He just listens," was the reply. "But what do you say to God?" "Nothing, I just listen," was the

reply. Such an ostensible silence does not mean that no communication has occurred; rather it affirms an ineffable transmission when words fail humans and are unnecessary for God.

Creativity is an obvious virtue in art, but innovation, spontaneity, vitality, freedom and flexibility also play a crucial role in prayer. Thus, some insist that one must supplement traditional prayers with fresh prayers that one formulates in her own words or at least with the reading of prayers that are new to the reader. While there is always a need for fresh prayers, in the recitation of ancient prayers one's present mental set and emotions can constitute what is new. As Hammer remarks, "Of course, the main thing that is 'new' is oneself. Depending on my thoughts, my mood, my feelings, my existential situation of the moment, what I say, no matter how many times I have said it before, takes on new meaning." Traditional and newly created prayers interpenetrate and become inseparable; for example, one's spontaneous prayers borrow from the vocabulary of Jewish tradition. When Hammer states that concluding a prayer may be no easier than beginning to pray, he brings to mind the creative process. How does the artist start and how does she know when to stop? Inspiration—sometimes called "afflation"—to recognize its divine origin—is the traditional reply; one is inspired to start as well as to stop.

Since Jews recognize a God who is at once immanent and transcendent (i.e., near and far), they face the paradox of how the same being can be both a part of the world and apart from it. For those who are more interested in prayer than in intellectual puzzles, it becomes obvious that two sorts of prayers are necessary: second- and third-person prayers. In the former mode of address, one meets a God that is immanent (i.e., close, "Blessed are You"), but in the latter mode of address, one prays to a God who is beyond ("Blessed is the Glory of the Lord"). It follows that a complete prayer life will include intimate conversations and affirmations of the numinous Absolute. While there may be no rational solution to the paradox of immanence and transcendence, there is an existential resolution through the life of prayer in which God is present as the interior stirring that first calls one to pray and as the transcendental object of prayer. Because a person can hardly crave what she has never tasted, God must already be within the individual before she turns outward in search of the divine. In other words, one's desire to pray means that God has already begun the dialogue. In effect, God's immanence and transcendence coalesce in humanity. Actually, God is the beginning, middle and end since God initiates one's search for the divine, guides the individual along the path and serves as the

ultimate destination.

It is disconcerting to learn that prayer, along with other basic activities such as breathing, sitting and eating, is difficult. Thus, the yogi instructs one in how to breathe correctly, the expert on posture explains how to sit properly and the nutritionist gives advice on how to eat wisely. It may be prudent to pray without the benefit of guidance, but one may still wonder why praying is so hard to do. One reason is that it is an all-consuming activity (i.e., one that calls for a total response). When a modern painter was asked how he painted, he replied that he painted with his testicles. That is to say, he painted with his all—body, mind, emotions and spirit—holding nothing back. A 13th-century philosopher, mystic and poet speaks similarly of prayer as an act that commands participation of all our faculties: "We ought to pray so powerfully that we should like to put our every member and strength, our two eyes and ears, mouth, heart, and all our senses to work; and we should not give up until we find that we wish to be one with Him who is present to us and whom we entreat, namely God." In the spiritual classic *The Cloud of Unknowing* we find: "Why do you suppose that this little prayer of one syllable is powerful enough to pierce the heavens? Well, it is because it is the prayer of a man's whole being." (Martin Buber held the optimistic view that while we can love with our entire being, we cannot hate with our whole being.) Not surprisingly, some Zen Buddhist paintings consist of a single, energetic stroke.

If prayer is difficult for individuals, it may even be more so for couples. Some people think they know their partners intimately—after all, the two have lived, slept, raised children and traveled together for years—but they may never participate in the final human intimacy of praying together as a pair. That prayer can be intimidating helps explain why we approach it with reluctance. After a man had spent time praying in the desert, he was asked: "Aren't you afraid to be alone out there?" He answered: "Two things frighten me; when I am praying, I might meet God and I might meet myself."

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**IT is praiseworthy to achieve peace between two men who quarrel. It is even more important to make peace between your body and spirit, so that materialism does not conquer the spirit.**

—Jacob Joseph Ha-Kohen

## Freudian Identity

*Dual Allegiance: Freud As a Modern Jew*  
by Moshe Gresser  
Albany: State University of New York Press

A Review Essay  
by Sarah Barbara Watstein

Book-length "new" appraisals of Freud appear from time to time, challenging us to ask ourselves, to ask history, "Who was Freud?" Our fascination with Freud, his personality, his teaching and his school would appear to know no bounds. Interest in both Freud's self-analysis and the evolution of his Jewish identity are also strong. Was Freud really a "godless" Jew? To what extent was he a student of religion? And, what does all this have to do with psychoanalysis anyway?

This book examines Freud's correspondence between the years 1872 and 1939 (the year of his death) and, on this basis, describes the development of his Jewish identity. Two claims are supported: first, that Freud's Jewish identity, far from being a single homogeneous reality, in fact develops in three stages; secondly, Freud's Jewish identity is built on a dual allegiance to Jewish ethnicity and a Freudian version of Judaism and to German Enlightenment humanism and its liberal values.

Readers owe the author considerable gratitude for including in the introduction an exposition of the argument. These pages should be "required reading." The text is arranged in chronological order: personal correspondence is divided into chapters that cover the early period, to 1906; the middle period, 1907-22; and the late period, 1923-39. The book culminates in an extended discussion of Freud's last and most deliberately Jewish work, *Moses and Monotheism*.

Gresser helps us to understand that Freud's attitude toward his Jewishness during the course of his life was a critical, and not incidental or peripheral, element of his identity. In the final chapter, the author writes, "Freud's Jewishness mattered to him, and he credited it with some basic elements of his character. . . . By the end of his life, he comes to understand why it matters so much: it is an inalienable, almost physical, phylogenetic link to the dawn of human and Jewish history." The book ends with discussion of the question—what can we learn from Freud's version of Jewish history and Jewish identity, including his dual allegiance, for the question of modern identity and modern Jewish identity in particular?

If you are curious about Freud and anti-Semitism, Freud and assimilation, Freud

and atheism, Freud as a "fighting Jew," Freud as a Biblical historian, Freud and Jewish solidarity, Freud's fixation with Moses, Freud's view of psychoanalysis as "Jewish national concern" or "Jewish science," or Freud's sympathy for Zionism. . . then immerse yourself in this analysis in the light of Freud's correspondence. The immense amount of specific information will not disappoint you. In fact, you might find yourself being drawn to the "Notes and Selected Bibliography" for further reading.

## Poetic Faith

*Tekiah*  
by Richard Chess  
Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1994.

A Review Essay  
by Sarah Barbara Watstein

A review of this book must begin with a confession—I was attracted to *Tekiah* not because I am familiar with the author or the publisher or because I had encountered the author's poems in other publications (*North Carolina Humanities, Orim: A Jewish Journal* at Yale, *Tampa Review*, etc.), but because of its title, *Tekiah*, and, I presume, its overarching subject. The sound of the *shofar* has always been one of the most haunting and magnificent sounds I have ever heard. It is a sound that brings forth deep feelings—of joy and regret, shame and hope. It is a sound that instills both awe and gratitude. Richard Chess' poems did not disappoint me: *Tekiah* is a remarkable gift to readers everywhere.

The poems in this collection are concerned with both contemporary Judaism and with the sacred, with growing up in Brooklyn in 1963, as well as with the eve of Rosh Hashanah, 500 years after the Inquisition. These collections are concerned with the plight of Yiddish poets in America and with ritual purification. And, they are concerned with baby boomers and the making of Cain by Adam and Eve.

Also within this collection of poems are themes about rabbis, including "The Drunk Rabbi," "The Rabbi Masturbates," "The Rabbi's Tongue," "The Rabbi Disturbed," "Rabbi qua Mystic," "The Rabbi's Hand," "At the Rabbi's Study Group," "The Rabbi's Wife," "Rabbi in the Garden," "The Rabbi Who Does Not Observe" and "The Rabbi's Sabbatical." These poems are about practice and belief; about tradition and disorder; about the sensual, the secular, the sacred and the spiritual.

Yes, there are poems about the Days of Awe; the Jewish High Holidays, beginning

with Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, and concluding with Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. "With the Blast of the Ram's Horn," "The Rest of the Year," "The Eve of Rosh Hashanah, 500 years After the Inquisition" and "Tekiah Gedolah" are poems I will remember long after my encounter with this slender volume.

An invitation can be the only appropriate conclusion to this review. I invite you to immerse yourself in *Tekiah*. Lose yourself in Richard Chess' poems; you will not make a mistake. I put this book down feeling the power of the "Rock and Redeemer," in Chess' words,

God was with me once  
His big eyes staring  
Out from the wound I licked.  
My lover's and His  
Labored breathing  
a mistake

Inviting Him  
To save me  
I tried to

Sleep I ducked  
Under a barricade  
Marched in a parade

Your big eye  
Your heavy  
Breathing Your fat lips

Parted, about to speak  
I had made a mistake  
Losing myself

In prayer I liked  
The rise  
And dip the power

Of a hundred  
Voices singing  
Spiritedly

Nothing could be purer  
Unbuttoning a blouse  
Bowing to

The scroll God was  
With me His big  
Eyes heavy

Breathing fat lips  
His absolute  
Refusal to budge

Yes, this is powerful writing that at the moment of the testing, not in one poem but in each poem, presents us with a description of faith.

Sarah Barbara Watstein is interim manager, University Computing Services, Academic Campus, of Virginia Commonwealth University and a contributing editor.

## The First Arab-Israeli Talks: An Anti-Zionist's Perspective

*Peace for Palestine: First Lost Opportunity*  
by Elmer Berger  
Gainesville: University of Florida Press

A Review Essay  
by Rafael Medoff

Were the Arab-Israeli armistice talks following the 1948 war a "missed opportunity" to establish a long-standing Middle East peace? In *Peace for Palestine*, a self-described "revisionist" account of the 1948-1949 armistice negotiations, Elmer Berger contends that the major obstacle to attaining a full-fledged peace was the failure of the Truman administration to force Israel to make sweeping territorial concessions and permit the mass return of Arab refugees. Berger charges that a combination of Israeli "arrogance" and American "timidity" scuttled hopes for a real peace and laid the groundwork for future Arab-Israeli wars.

Considering that Berger's theory is such a radical departure from conventional histories of the Arab-Israeli conflict, one might have expected the author to have undertaken original archival research on the topic. Instead, *Peace for Palestine* is based on a highly selective reading of the two major published collections pertaining to the armistice negotiations, *Documents on Foreign Policy of Israel* and *Foreign Relations of the United States*. The author also makes frequent use of secondary sources that are strongly sympathetic to the Arab perspective, such as Simha Flapan's *The Birth of Israel* and Alan Hirst's *The Gun and the Olive Branch*. Perhaps this is not surprising in view of Berger's own political position (he is president of an organization called American Jewish Alternatives to Zionism), but it raises fundamental questions about the veracity of his historical claims.

*Peace for Palestine* presents the Arab-Israeli armistice negotiations with almost no reference to the events that preceded them. The 1947 U.N. vote recommending the partition of Palestine is portrayed as the result of "Zionist propaganda exploitation of the Holocaust." (He also chides the Zionists for making "little or no reference to Hitler's own victims.") Berger's chapter on the 1948 war—it totals just three pages—contains no explicit reference to the fact that six Arab armies launched a war of aggression against the newborn Jewish state. Nor is there any mention of the Arab leaders' vows to drive the Jews into the sea. Instead, Berger reports

only the the U.N. vote "triggered immediate conflict in Palestine between Arabs and Zionists," followed by the "intervention" of an unspecified number of Arab armies seeking "to assist the Palestinian Arabs to defend themselves against Zionism."

When the dust had settled, "the putative Zionist state," as Berger calls it, entered armistice talks with the Arabs only to further its secret goal of expanding Israel's territory in accordance with the map that the World

Zionist Organization had prepared for the 1919 Paris Peace Conference. "Israeli strategy, in both the fighting and the armistice negotiations in 1948-49, adhered closely to the 1919 Zionist aspirations," Berger claims. Berger returns to the 1919 map again and again throughout *Peace for Palestine*, citing it as proof of Israel's secret agenda of expansionism. Yet he does not produce the slightest evidence of any connection between the 1919 map and subsequent events. The truth

This song is sung at the end of the Passover (Pesach) Ritual Meal called the "Seder" (meaning—Order, Arrangement, etc.).

*The Yiddish version goes faster and more syncopated than the Hebrew one. I understand the English version is even slower and more choral than the Hebrew one. All versions speed up as they proceed, progressing backwards to the first stanza and its "Refrain" from whichever stanza is being called. At the end, it becomes a race to see who can sing faster, really by the end it's a chant, from the 13 legal principles back through the ritual universe to their origin in God, Our God, no other.*

- a. Translation of the Hebrew version: ACHAD ME YODEYAH  
*One, who knows? One, who knows? I know one.*  
REFRAIN: *One is our God, Our God, our God, Our God, our God, our God, on Earth.*  
*Two, who knows? Two, who knows? I know two. Two are the Tablets (of Covenant). REFRAIN*

The rest of the stanzas:

*Three are the Fathers (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob),  
Four are the Mothers (Sarah, Rachel, Rebecca and Leah),  
Five are the Pentateuch,  
Six are the (books of the) Mishnah (commentary on the Pentateuch),  
Seven are the Seven days of the Week,  
Eight are the days of Circumcision,  
Nine are the months of Birth,  
Ten are the Words/Acts (the Ten Commandments),  
Eleven are the stars (Planets),  
Twelve are the Tribes,  
Thirteen are the rules of Talmudic interpretation (of the Pentateuch from/by which laws are derived).*

- b. Translation of first stanza from the Yiddish version, MU ASAPRU MU ADABRU, the rest of whose stanzas refer to the same items as the Hebrew version.  
In Aramaic: *Who can tell, who can say?*  
A nonsense line: *Yum ta da dee yah*  
In Yiddish: *Who can tell, who can say, what the One means/refers to? One is God, and no other/more, and no other/more.*
- c. The Ladino version translates: QUEN SUPIENSE Y ENTENDIENSE  
*Who can guess and who can know  
praise of God creating,  
How much is One?  
One is the Creator, Blessed (be) He, Blessed (be) his Name.  
How much is two? Two is Moshe and Aaron.  
How much is three? Three are the Fathers.  
Four are the Mothers of Israel  
Five are the books of the Law  
Six are the days of the weeks  
Seven days with the Sabbath  
Eight days of the Chupa (Wedding Canopy)  
Nine months of the pregnancy  
Ten Commandments of the Law  
Eleven brothers without Joseph.*

—Richard Sherwin



is that there is nothing sinister about the map. The participants in the Paris Peace Conference were debating Palestine's future and, in view of the country's ill-defined borders, the Zionist leadership presented its view. The map's inclusion of portions of northern Sinai, the eastern bank of the Jordan River, the Golan Heights and what today comprises southern Lebanon, was consistent with Biblical and historical definitions of the boundaries of the Holy Land. Berger regards the 1919 map as the permanently enshrined centerpiece of the nefarious strategy to which all Zionists secretly pledge allegiance.

**Peace for Palestine frequently digresses into broadsides against U.S. policy in the Middle East.**

In Berger's version of the 1948-49 negotiations, the Arab representatives at the armistice table were the naive victims of crafty and rapacious Israeli negotiators. Whenever Berger cannot easily fit some development into this formula, he returns to 1919. Israel's reluctance to make territorial concessions is explained as a desire to retain "strategic points that would, in some future time, serve their plans to expand to the territory claimed in the 1919 Zionist proposals." Syria's demand for Israeli surrender of the Galilee was due to the fact that "the Syrians may have been aware of the 1919 Zionist blueprint that anticipated the Litani River as a part of the water system of the Jewish state. They could well have reasoned that the Galilee was a good strategic base from which Israel could later advance on the coveted water source." Even adelay in scheduling a particular round of the negotiations is explained in this manner: "The Israelis skirted a meeting to talk peace probably because they were far from realizing the territorial aspirations of the 1919 Zionist memorandum," Berger writes. (Terms like "may have been," "could well have" and "probably" abound in *Peace for Palestine*; lacking evidence, Berger indulges in speculation.)

Berger is eventually reduced to reading history backwards, citing the results of subsequent Arab-Israeli wars as "proof" of the connection between the 1919 map and the 1948-49 Israeli negotiating stance. The Israelis' reluctance to cede additional territory to Syria in the armistice talks "may be explained by their military campaigns in the 1967 war when they not only crossed the international boundary but occupied and—in 1981—annexed the Golan Heights." (The fact that Israel was acting in self-defense in 1967, not engaging in premeditated imperialism, goes unmentioned.) At another point, Berger quotes Simha Flapan's assessment that Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion se-

cretely coveted Arab lands—proof, according to Berger, that newborn Israel was scheming to acquire the lands included in "the 1919 Zionist memorandum again—and much of the territory Israel occupied in the 1967 war." Since there are no documents linking Ben-Gurion's 1948 position to the 1919 map, Berger's assertion amounts to the incredible claim that Ben-Gurion, in 1948-49, was unconsciously acting in accordance with both a map of 30 years before and an unplanned war that was to take place 19 years in the future.

*Peace for Palestine* frequently digresses into broadsides against U.S. policy in the Middle East. Berger bemoans what he calls Washington's "legendary" and "knee-jerk" willingness to bow to "the intimidating visage of the Zionist lobby." If there is no peace in the Middle East today, according to Berger, it is because the Truman administration did not force Israel to surrender to Arab demands, and subsequent administrations made the same mistake. American policy, he asserts, has been determined by what he calls "the Zionist lobbying machine" in the United States.

Berger appears to be only briefly puzzled by the fact that his major source on U.S. policy, the *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS) series, does not contain evidence to support this claim. Here is how he explains it: "A reluctance to record in official documents that the persistent lobbying of the American Zionist organizations enjoyed considerable success is understandable. The in-house editors of the FRUS volumes are, after all, humans as well as bureaucrats."

A more plausible explanation is that the Zionists' "considerable success" is not evident in FRUS because it was not, in fact, all that considerable. Jewish lobbying efforts made headway in some symbolic areas, such as U.S. support for the U.N. partition plan and U.S. recognition of Israel. But they were unable to reverse the arms embargo that the Truman administration clamped on Israel during the 1948 war, nor did they prevent the administration from pressing Israel for concessions on territorial and refugee issues during the armistice talks.

By criticizing FRUS, Berger comes full circle. *Peace for Palestine* begins by trumpeting FRUS as one of the major new sources that will reveal Israel and American Jewry as the guilty parties in the Arab-Israeli conflict. It ends with Berger attacking FRUS for not endorsing his preconceptions about the conflict. This is the kind of inconsistency that would prove fatal in a high school debate; how much more so in a book that pretends to constitute scholarship.

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**Love and Death  
in the Jewish  
Exegetical Tradition**

*The Kiss of God: Spiritual and Mystical Death in Judaism*  
by Michael Fishbane  
Seattle: The University of Washington Press

A Review Essay  
by Cliff Edwards

Michael Fishbane is Nathan Cummings professor of Jewish Studies at the University of Chicago, and this small, though rich, volume contains his Samuel and Althea Stroum Lectures in Jewish Studies that was delivered at the University of Washington in 1990. At the heart of this book is Fishbane's well-known fascination with the Jewish exegetical imagination in all its diversity over the ages. Rabbinic sources and sages of all eras, Jewish exegetes, philosophers, and mystics rub shoulders with each other on every page.

The unifying theme of the work is provided by "two wings" Fishbane finds vital to many rabbinic descriptions of the flight of the soul: the Shema's call to love God with all one's heart, soul and might and the Song of Songs's description of the lover's desire for the kisses of her Beloved. The two passages are brought together and woven by the sages into varieties of spiritual exercises providing both communal and private rituals of spiritual perfection. Central to this rabbinic quest is the dark mystery of death, the death of the martyr, the need for preparation for possible martyrdom and the extension of this need to a life in which the soul so cleaves to God that it is "as if" one has given up one's life in sanctifying God's name whether in prayer or study. God's "kiss" is the drawing of the human soul to the Divine, whether to overcome the sufferings of the martyr, prepare the faithful for natural death or provide a life of disciplined ascent of the soul.

In revealing the mysterious intertwining of love and death in Jewish spirituality over the ages, Fishbane demonstrates the "exegetical construction of reality" constantly transforming Biblical texts and their layers of interpretation. Fishbane's *Kiss of God* both reveals the old sources and provides new directions for appreciating and participating in Judaism's deep intertextuality and creative religious imagination.

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## BOOK BRIEFINGS

*Editor's Note: Inclusion of a book in "Briefings" does not preclude its being reviewed in a future issue of Menorah Review.*

***A New Jewry? America Since the Second World War.*** Edited by Peter Y. Medding. New York: Oxford University Press. The end of World War II was a major turning point for American Jews. How they perceived themselves in American society, where they resided, the ways in which they earned their livelihoods, and what they derived from American culture and how they shaped it are studied in this volume. The contributions also look at the manner in which American Jews recreated community and affiliated with it, how they related to and brought closer a far-off Jewish homeland, the way in which these themes entered their literary imagination, and what they conceived to be the very meaning of Judaism. Presenting a historical snapshot of an era that may be passing due to current ongoing social pressures, this volume captures a unique response to a particular set of conditions in the American Jewish community.

***The Sephardim: Their Glorious Tradition From the Babylonian Exile to the Present.*** By Lucien Gubbay and Abraham Levy. London: Carnell Limited. Sephardim, at one time, formed the majority of the Jewish people and contributed largely to Jewish civilization, both religious and secular. This book relates the story of their own very special culture from 585 B.C.E. to the present. Much of the book is devoted to separate accounts of all the major communities of the Sephardi exile, each scrupulously researched. Packed with human interest, these histories are generously illustrated with specially drawn maps and a host of photographs, including many not previously published. Never before have the stories of so many Sephardi communities been presented together in a single volume.

***Terror In the Night: The Klan's Campaign Against the Jews.*** By Jack Nelson. New York: Simon & Schuster. In the tour de force of a long career, Nelson shows us the civil rights movement's last unreported front—the Ku Klux Klan's war against Southern Jews. He recreates this bitter campaign and assembles the secrets surrounding what is perhaps its most disturbing episode: a top secret plan to trap the Klan's most elusive bomber. The book is exciting reading and extraordinary journalism.

***Life Is Like a Glass of Tea: Studies in Classic Jewish Jokes.*** By Richard Raskin. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society. The boundaries between Jewish joke and human nature can be difficult to locate. When Jewish humor is at its best, it is impossible to tell where the joke ends and reality begins. This is a thoughtful, interpretive book that brings clarity to the unique flavor and often outrageous irreverence of Jewish humor. Six classic jokes have been chosen for close study, with an entire chapter devoted to each. The history of the successive stages and variants of the jokes are discussed. Raskin cites researchers from the rich and varied literature of Jewish jokes, closing with supplementary jokes and a useful bibliography.

***The Joys of Hebrew.*** By Lewis Glinert. New York: Oxford University Press. This informative and often humorous book features more than 600 Hebrew words and expressions arranged in alphabetical order. More than a guide to Hebrew, it is a celebration of Hebrew itself, a treasure trove of Jewish wit, wisdom, culture and tradition. Glinert provides a concise definition of each entry and then illustrates the word's usage with generous passages from the Bible and the Talmud, the prayers and sayings of noted Rabbis, and excerpts from Weisel, Steinsaltz, Agnon, Buber and others.

***On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts In the Kabbalah.*** By Gershom Scholem. New York: Schocken Books. In six seminal essays, the path-breaking scholar of Jewish mysticism delves into several of the Kabbalah's most intriguing conceptions: the mystical shape of the imageless God; good and evil in the Kabbalah; the Tsaddik or righteous soul; the Shekinah, the feminine aspect of God; Gilgul, the transmigration of souls; and Tselem, astral bodies or the spiritual composition of a human being. Scholem systematically and brilliantly analyzes the history and background of these critical ideas.

***The United States and the State of Israel.*** By David Schoenbaum. New York: Oxford University Press. A survey of the special relationship between the last global superpower and a tiny regional client, this book is also a study of how that relationship grew and what makes it work. Schoenbaum reviews the Israeli-American relations from their roots in both the American and Jewish experience to the risks and opportunities of the peace process. He also examines them in the perspective of the World Wars, the Cold War and the Gulf War, European imperialism and Middle Eastern nationalism, as well as global policy and domestic politics in both countries. The result is an insightful account of one of history's oddest international couples, hard-pressed to live together but unable to live apart.

***The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia: A Historical Reader.*** Edited by Wilma Abeles Iggers. Detroit: Wayne State University Press. While much has been written about East European and German Jewry, relatively little attention has been given to the Jews of Bohemia and Moravia although they played an important role in the industrial, economic and cultural life of central Europe. This book examines the social and cultural history of the Jewish community in Czechoslovakia from the Age of Enlightenment to the middle of the 20th century. Despite fluctuations and radical breaks, the time span from 1744 to 1952 constitutes a single unit that encompasses striking cultural and economic developments as well as anti-Semitism and cynicism unmatched even in the Middle Ages.

***Apple of Gold: Constitutionalism in Israel and the United States.*** By Gary Jeffrey Jacobsohn. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. By comparing the constitutional systems of Israel and the United States, Jacobsohn provides a new view of the essentials of constitutionalism itself. The book begins by examining the founding documents of the two nations and discussing their implications. The author's use of the comparative perspective addresses many contemporary issues in constitutional theory. For those involved in debates concerning the role of the courts in a democratic polity or the strengths and weaknesses of a radically individualistic liberal constitutionalism, this book is essential reading.

***The New Reich: Violent Extremism in Unified Germany and Beyond.*** By Michael Schmidt. New York: Pantheon Books. This is a unique and important document—an investigation of neo-Nazism, which is rapidly growing in Germany and causing a chill of foreboding throughout Europe. It offers a comprehensive analysis of present-day Germany, from the legacy of the Nazis to "historical revisionism" about the Holocaust, and to the widely prevailing attitudes that condone this hatred and violence. Schmidt filmed and personally interviewed both rank-and-file suburban skinhead shocktroops and their secretive leaders, as well as ex-Nazis with a



history of warcrimes. Their own words will alert the reader as much as their actions do to the very real menace they present.

**Turkey and the Holocaust.** By *Stanford J. Shaw*. New York: *New York University Press*. The neutrality maintained by Turkey during most of World War II allowed it to rescue thousands of Jews from the Holocaust in the Nazi-occupied and collaborating countries of Europe. In France, the Turkish consuls in Paris and Marseilles intervened to protect Turkish Jews from the application of anti-Jewish laws introduced both by the German occupying authorities and the Vichy government. Moreover, the Turkish government instructed its diplomats in Eastern Europe to provide all possible assistance to Jews being persecuted during the Holocaust. It also permitted almost 100,000 East European Jews to transit through Turkey on their way to Palestine. This book is based on extensive research in hitherto unused Turkish diplomatic archives in Ankara and the oral testimonies and published memories of many who were involved. It is an important addition to Holocaust literature.

**Between God and Beast: An Examination of Amos Oz's Prose.** By *Avraham Balaban*. University Park, PA: *The Pennsylvania State University Press*. Balaban argues in this book that Oz's fiction has, from the outset, followed Jung's psychological theory. The major psychic processes depicted throughout Oz's prose are typically Jungian. Oz uses many of the symbols of the self as they are presented by Jung. Many of the symbols examined in this study have never before been discussed in articles about Oz's writings. Balaban also devotes considerable study to the religious dimension of Oz's work as well as the impact of his personal life on his writings.

**The Field of Yiddish: Studies in Language, Folklore and Litera-**

**ture (5th Collection).** Edited by *David Goldberg*. Evanston, IL: *Northwestern University Press* and the *YIVO Institute for Jewish Research*. Considerable scholarship in Yiddish language, literature and culture has appeared in English and other languages. But the multidisciplinary scope of this collection remains relatively unique. It is a continuation of the broadest possible definition of the field of Yiddish studies. This volume and those preceding it define a vibrant and diversified field of Yiddish scholarship.

**The Visual Dimension: Aspects of Jewish Art.** Edited by *Clare Moore*. Boulder, CO: *Westview Press*. Despite the well-known Biblical injunction, a long-standing tradition of Jewish artistic creation exists. However that art is defined, and by whomever it is produced, a body of art that is specifically Jewish in content has existed for centuries. But, the problem of definition is a tangled one. In addition to historical explorations, matters of archival legitimacy, the survival of fakes and forgeries and other issues are discussed here by experts with reputations as authorities in their fields.

**The Holocaust, the French and the Jews.** By *Susan Zuccotti*. New York: *Basic Books*. An award-winning historian offers a balanced look at the Holocaust in France and asks not only what factors led to the death of more than 24 percent of Jews in France but, also, how nearly 76 percent of them managed to survive. She explains how the limited scope for most roundups of Jews and the gradual expansion of categories of those eligible for arrest lulled many into thinking they were safe when they might otherwise have escaped. Few in France at the time perceived the dangers of following the law under Vichy or realized what awaited deportees in Germany. The French popular response to Nazi policies ran the gamut from active rescue and resistance to vague benevolence to zealous collaboration.



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# BOOK BRIEFINGS

A Supplement to *Menorah Review*  
Spring/Summer 1996

*Editor's Note:* Inclusion of a book in "Briefings" does not preclude its being reviewed in a future issue of *Menorah Review*.

***Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory.*** By Deborah Lipstadt. New York: The Free Press. The denial of the Holocaust has no more credibility than the assertion that the earth is flat. Yet there are those who insist that the death of six million Jews in Nazi concentration camps is nothing but a hoax perpetuated by a powerful Zionist conspiracy. Lipstadt shows how Holocaust denial thrives in the current atmosphere of value-relativism and argues that this chilling attack on the factual record not only threatens Jews but undermines the very tenets of objective scholarship that support our faith in historical knowledge. Thus, the movement has an unsuspected power to dramatically alter the way truth and meaning are transmitted from one generation to another.

***Conservative Judaism: The New Century.*** By Neil Gillman. New York: Behrman House. This book exposes, for the first time, the key issue, conflicts and dilemmas that have forced the Movement to come to terms with its identity—the demand to ordain women, the pressure to accept gay and lesbian rabbis, the Movement's ambivalence toward Israel and the recognition that its members are largely unobservant and uncommitted. A meditation on the past and an inspiration for the future, here is the book that answers the question: "What does the Conservative Movement stand for?" More than 90 historical and contemporary photographs document the growth of the Movement from its early beginnings in Europe to contemporary American life in the 1990s.

***Christianity and the Holocaust of Hungarian Jewry.*** By Moshe Y. Hertzl. New York: University Press. The tragedy of Hungarian Jewry reached its climax between May 15 and July 7, 1944, when nearly half a million Jews were expelled from Hungary and sent to death camps. This event did not take place in a vacuum but rather developed from the relationship that had evolved over generations between the expelled people and the larger populace. The Christian church in Hungary played a central, active role in this relationship and in its final, devastating outcome. Hertzl exposes this repressed and painful episode in the history of the Holocaust. Using previously unknown materials and extensive analytical research, he recreates the church's actions and disposition toward Hungarian Jewry. He provides a scathing indictment of the church's lack of compassion toward Hungarian Jews during this period.

***To See a Promised Land: Americans and the Holy Land in the Nineteenth Century.*** By Lester I. Vogel. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press. The author explores the fascination that Americans historically have had with the land of the Bible. By focusing on period before World War I, Vogel uncovers the various ways in which Americans, primarily Protestants, typically thought about and knew the Holy Land prior to the land's politicization and embroilment in the conflict between Arab and Jewish national interests. He suggests that the unique relationship between Americans and a foreign land might be seen as an expression of "geopiety," a term coined by the geographer, John Wright, to describe a certain mixture of place, past and faith.

***Gabriel's Palace: Jewish Mystical Tales.*** By Howard Schwartz. New York: Oxford University Press. Schwartz has collected the greatest of stories, sacred and secular, from Jewish tradition in a marvelously readable anthology. He provides a treasury of 150 remarkable tales from the rich tradition of Jewish mysticism. These tales cover a range of mystical experiences, virtually all presented as true accounts, not only of mystical union but of visions, dreams, soul travel, encounters with angels and demons, possession by both good and evil spirits, miracles, and experiences out of body and out of time. Above all, these tales serve as examples of how a mystical life could be lived. They form a rich genre of their own. Schwartz has brought the powerful tradition of Jewish mysticism to life in clear, contemporary English.

***Rabbi Israel Salanter and the Mussar Movement: Seeking the Torah of Truth.*** By Immanuel Etkes. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society. This is a biography of one of the most influential thinkers of Eastern European Jewry in the modern period. Bold and original in his philosophy, Salanter was an educator who fought to preserve traditional Judaism in the face of the Enlightenment. He used modern science in his struggle to preserve traditional Judaism. In this book, the Mussar doctrine is explored along with its influences. Etkes traces Salanter's predecessors and places the Mussar movement within its historic and cultural context—a reaction to the increased strength of the Haskalah movement and the secularization that came with it.

***Freud, Race and Gender.*** By Sander L. Gilman. Princeton University Press. Gilman's aim is to analyze the role Freud's Jewish identity played in the construction of psychoanalysis at a time when Jews were defined in terms of a new "science" of race and to illuminate the connections Freud made between conventions of racial difference and his own theories about gender relations. This book presents a new understanding of Freud's image of himself as a Jew. A major component of this identity is to be found in the debates about the meaning of Jewish racial identity that haunted the medical writing of Freud's time. The book explores Freud's complex reaction to the medicalization of concepts about race. It is a provocative work of interest to a broad range of readers concerned with Jewish studies, gender studies, literature, and the intellectual and cultural history of the *fin de siècle*.

***A People Divided: Judaism in Contemporary America.*** By Jack Wertheimer. New York: Basic Books. Opening with a look back at American Judaism at mid-century, Wertheimer reveals the impact of new social trends and ideologies ranging from suburbanization to population growth, from feminism to fundamentalism. He then covers, in detail, the history, philosophy and vital statistics of each of the major Jewish branches, revealing how each denomination has responded differently to the challenges facing Judaism. By examining both official ideology and the religious practice of ordinary Jews, the author explains why tensions have flared so spectacularly and sheds new light on such volatile issues as acrimony among rival

religious movements, rampant intermarriage and declining rates of affiliation among younger Jews.

**Defiance: The Bielski Partisans—The Story of the Largest Armed Rescue of Jews By Jews During World War II.** By *Nechama Tec*. New York: Oxford University Press. Tec offers a riveting history of a group of Jews who struggled against the terrors of the Third Reich, risking their lives against overwhelming odds for a glimmer of freedom. It was a forest community, established in 1942 in western Belorussia, numbering more than 1,200 by 1944—the largest armed rescue operation of Jews by Jews. The group owed its success and survival to its leader, Tuvia Bielski, the archetype of Weber's formulation of a charismatic authority figure. Filled with intriguing anecdotes and chilling stories, the book reconstructs the lives of those in the community and tells how they survived in a hostile environment. It is a poignant story of the incredible hurdles Bielski and his followers faced as well as the remarkable triumphs they attained.

**Hebrew in Ashkenaz: A Language in Exile.** Edited by *Lewis Glinert*. Princeton University Press. This is a pioneering attempt to reverse an age-old academic prejudice against the legitimacy of Ashkenazi Hebrew. Glinert has gathered the ideas of philosophers, historians, sociologists and linguists to address such contentious issues as the role of Hebrew in Jewish life and the evolving shape of the language, over the period of 1,000 years from the dawn of Ashkenazi life in Germany through contemporary Jewish society in Britain and Russia. The author abolishes the myth that Ashkenazi Hebrew was solely a language of religious study and fixed prayer. Instead, it is a language with vibrancy and creativity all its own, from which today's Hebrew emerged with remarkably little effort. This study is the first global look at the role of Hebrew in Jewish society.

**The Face of Survival: Jewish Life in Eastern Europe, Past and Present.** By *Michael Riff*. London: Vallentine Mitchell & Co. Ltd. This attractive and substantive volume combines narrative and autobiographical text with many hitherto unpublished photographs to view Jewish life in East Central Europe from the vantage point of the present. In words and pictures, it traces the history of the Jews in Poland, Hungary, Romania and Czechoslovakia from the late 19th century through the First World War, the interwar years and the Holocaust until the present day. Throughout the book every care is taken to depict the full richness of Jewish life in each of the countries concerned and, while each society is treated singularly, running through the book is a visible comparative thread.

**Wisdom Literature and the Structure of Proverbs.** By *T.A. Perry*. University Park: Penn State Press. This study focuses less on "popular" proverbs than on the critical stance through which the sages approached such popular perceptions of truth. Perry argues that wisdom was a reaction to dangerous tendencies in the normal use of proverbs: their authoritarian presumption, the assumption that they somehow represent absolute truths. By way of reactive defense, sages responded through the creation of wisdom sayings, here viewed as specific tools of critical thinking and value analysis. Perry approaches the Bible from a literary point of view and draws interesting parallels with the work of such scholars as Greimas. He then offers a formula derived from the sages' own exegetical practices for unlocking the secrets of wisdom sayings.

**Women and Spirituality: Voices of Protest and Promise (2nd Edition).** By *Ursula King*. University Park, PA: Penn State Press. Taking a critical look at feminism and exploring its explicit and implicit spiritual dimensions, the author engages in a reflective dialogue with contemporary women's experience. She asks to what extent patriarchal oppression and androcentric thinking are inherent

in all religious beliefs, practices and institutions. The discussion encompasses women mystics; goddess worship; patriarchy; androgyny; feminist theology; and reflections of peace, non-violence and ecology. For the new edition, all material has been revised and updated. This is the only book that provides a comprehensive survey of current discussions in feminist theology and spirituality.

**The Oxford Companion to the Bible.** Edited by *Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan*. New York: Oxford University Press. This magnificent volume provides an authoritative reference to the people, places, events, books, institutions, religious beliefs and secular influence of the Bible. Written by more than 250 scholars from some 20 countries in five continents and embracing a wide variety of perspectives, it offers more than 700 entries. The volume features an abundance of interpretive essays. Contributors also explore Biblical views on modern issues such as homosexuality, anti-Semitism and the influence of the Bible on Western civilization. It also serves as a handy reference, the first place to turn for finding factual information on the Bible.

**Songs of the Heart: An Introduction to the Book of Psalms.** By *Nahum M. Sarna*. New York: Schocken Books. Sarna examines the forms of expression, literary style and range of religious ideas in the psalms. A representative selection of psalms is explored, each of which typifies one of the varied genres that make up the Psalter. He makes extensive use of archaeological finds as well as data derived from artifacts, inscriptions, literature and linguistic studies of the Biblical era. This stimulating multidisciplinary study sheds light on the cultural background of the psalms, which remain at the heart of Jewish and Christian worship to this day.

**A People Apart: Chosenness and Ritual in Jewish Philosophical Thought.** Edited by *Daniel H. Frank*. Albany: State University Press of New York. This book deals with two problems central to Jewish theology: the chosenness of the Jewish people and the rationale of the ritual commandments in Judaism. The two topics are naturally connected since the ritual commandments of Judaism most clearly demarcate Judaism from other religions and, therefore, contribute to the sense of chosenness so widespread among Jews. The book represents an important methodological breakthrough for the academic discipline of Jewish philosophy. By incorporating models from anthropology and philosophy of language, the essays on Jewish ritual integrate Jewish philosophy into the larger academic discipline of religious studies.

**Egypt, Canaan and Israel in Ancient Times.** By *Donald B. Redford*. Princeton University Press. Covering the time span from the Paleolithic period to the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., the eminent Egyptologist, Donald Redford, explores 3,000 years of uninterrupted contact between Egypt and Western Asia across the Sinai land-bridge. In the vivid and lucid style expected from the author of the popular *Akhenaten*, Redford presents a sweeping narrative of the love-hate relationship between the peoples of ancient Israel/Palestine and Egypt. A wealth of research on the peoples and localities of ancient Palestine is presented for the reader.

**Rabin of Israel.** By *Robert Slater*. New York: St. Martin's Press. Slater presents a fully realized portrait of Rabin based on interviews with Rabin's colleagues, friends, family and Rabin, himself, in this first biography. Rabin emerges as a shy, diffident, even mysterious man whose changing fortunes seem to echo the contradictions within himself. His first tenure as prime minister was marked by both his resolute actions during the Entebbe hostage crisis and his ignominious resignation as the result of a petty financial scandal. Yet Rabin was returned to office at one of the most crucial moments in Israel's history.