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# vcu MENORAH REVIEW

NUMBER 61 • CENTER FOR JUDAIC STUDIES OF VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY • SUMMER/FALL 2004

## For the Enrichment of Jewish Thought

### Reflections by the Author: Rochelle L. Millen

*Women, Birth and Death in  
Jewish Law and Practice*

by Rochelle L. Millen  
Waltham, MA: University of New  
England, Brandeis Series on  
Jewish Women

Growing up in a traditional Conservative synagogue during the 1950s (there was no other kind back then), a child of Polish immigrants who had left Brooklyn for suburbia, certain aspects of Jewish life flowed forward with nary a force forming a counter-pressure. In junior congregation—and later in youth services—boys and girls sat separately, although without a *mehitzah*, as did men and women in the adult service. All public ritual was enacted by males, and gender roles were well-defined. In the excellent public school system my three siblings and I attended, boys took shop while girls had home economics. In our home, however, my mother worked full-time with my father, and it was my father who did much of the food shopping, made our lunches early every morning and often washed the dishes when he was home at night.

I never felt restricted in what I could do; it was understood that all of us would go to college, although neither my sister, a "h" (may she rest in peace), nor I were ever asked what we wanted to be when we grew up. Women, even bright women, became teachers and then, after marriage, mothers. It was only in the late 1960s and early 1970s that women like myself became aware of some of the social, cultural and religious assumptions that had been—and still were—so greatly influencing the trajectory of our lives.

For me, as related in Part II of my book, *Women, Birth and Death in Jewish Law and Practice*, the intertwined threads woven into the tapestry of my life became tangled and knotted as my desire to recite *kaddish* for my mother, a "h, met with negative—indeed, often nasty. The resulting inner conflict became the impetus for exploring in what

ways the sources of my deeply rooted Judaism paralleled, and were integrated with, the other central aspects of my identity. The book is the outcome of years of study and struggle, which is evident in a paper given in 1982, articles and book chapters published in 1990 and 1996, both informal and academic presentations in between.

The plan of the book, as first envisioned by Dr. Phyllis Deutsch, senior editor of University Press of New England, involved a study of all lifecycle events—birth, puberty, marriage and death—with an analysis of rabbinic sources followed by discussion of Orthodox, Conservative and Reform laws and practices specifically related to women. A well-done investigation of such a broad nature, I felt, could take two, or even three, volumes; examination of the halakic sources alone requires extensive discussion and much had already been done in other studies. Therefore, I decided to focus on issues relating to the beginning and end of life, birth and death.

The inquiry into classical rabbinic sources is framed by theoretical questions that bring to the fore the central issue of how Judaism, feminism and the broader historical/cultural context are interrelated. As a scholar of religion, I have always been interested in the vital interplay between religious traditions and cultural circumstances. Beginning in the late 19th century—although with much earlier foreshadowing—what today is called feminism increasingly develops into a powerful social and cultural force. One can gauge its early influence on modern Judaism

in the famous responsum of R. Meir Hacohen written in the early 1920s and in the later comment of Yeshayahu Leibowitz that “barring women from the study of Torah is... a denial of a basic Jewish right.” These illustrate well the intertwining of sociology, cultural history and religious legal discourse and limit the ways in which religious law can be understood as metahistorical.

For some, feminism is seen as the culprit of many ills besetting the Jewish community, especially assimilation and the weakening of the traditional family structure. But to avow such culpability is to look at the world through a narrow lens since women in Eastern Europe frequently supported their scholarly husbands and the pious Glueckel of Hameln was a businesswoman *par excellence*. Indeed, it is to fail to discern the constant interplay between Jewish sources and ever-changing history. The various denominations of Judaism—and the spectrum of opinions within each, perhaps especially within Orthodoxy—manifest the various ongoing stages of this complementarity. In the Middle Ages, economic relations with Christians and Muslims led to important rabbinic responses later incorporated into mainstream *halakha*, while the 19th century development of the Reform Movement resulted in considerations of how modernity and Judaism might be conjoined. Feminism is the challenge of our time: how the values, rituals and teachings of Judaism can remain a richly lived reality while affirming the dignity and autonomy of girls and women as understood in our historical context. To do this is not to affirm cultural forces as prior to Judaism but rather to acknowledge their necessary interrelation. Jews live within the constant tension, the push and pull, of tradition and history and no group, whatever its protestations, has succeeded in withdrawing from the arena. Despite attempts by some to remain isolated from mainstream culture, no one can be hermetically sealed off from the historical context in which s/he lives.

I believe that *Women, Birth and Death in Jewish Law and Practice* contributes to the growing literature on feminism and Judaism by demonstrating how the concepts of gender, sexuality, public/private and com-

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munity/autonomy are essential concepts of modernity and of the rabbinic discourse that is the foundation of all manifestations of Judaism. Both permutations must be carefully considered as contemporary Jews struggle with how to live lives that are simultaneously deeply feminist and deeply Jewish. My work is part of this ongoing conversation.

*Rochelle Millen is professor of religion at Wittenberg University and a contributing editor.*

## Further Reflections on Rochelle L. Millen's Book

by Sarah Barbara Watstein

Rochelle Millen and I share several experiences. We are both Jews who came of age during the same period, both women and academics and we are both women who have struggled with the multifaceted challenges of identity. I share her experience of growing up in a traditional conservative synagogue in the 1950s; however, unlike Millen, I did not benefit from an excellent public school system but, instead, as a consequence of a mediocre (at best) public school system, I was sent to boarding school at age 13—an Episcopalian school at that. In my family, unlike in Millen's, at least during my childhood and early adolescence, gender roles were more clearly and more traditionally defined. Like Millen, I too was deeply influenced and changed by the late 1960s and early 1970s. Millen's study and struggle suggest that many of her inner conflicts about religion and gender have been resolved. Despite my having turned 50 earlier this year, my struggle with being Jewish and a female in America continues, as does my struggle with being a Jew, a woman and a professional. This struggle is rich, and it is always challenging. Indeed, it was with an appreciation for our shared experience that I approached Millen's book—a book that promised to be relevant for both scholars and the educated public. I was not disappointed. Millen's explorations succeed in challenging a diverse audience. *Women, Birth and Death in Jewish Law and Practice* has much to offer Jews, women, scholars and the educated public.

As Jews, ritual is the way we live; it is our metronome. Indeed, we come of age celebrating, through the seasons and through our holidays, critical aspects of the Jewish life cycle, birth and death. As women, these cycles take on special meaning as we develop and, through aging, pace and experience these various life cycles and personal milestones. Millen is drawn to text, tradi-

tional and contemporary, as a way of exploring meaning and creating identity. As an academic with advanced degrees in several fields, I share this compulsion and continuously grapple with examination and analysis, drawn to text, traditional and contemporary, print and electronic, as a way of exploring meaning and creating as well as redefining identity. For scholars—anthropologists, sociologists and theologians alike, as well as feminist theorists—Millen's work is confirmation that there haven't been enough compelling and soundly researched texts that seek to explore the identity of Jewish women—Orthodox, Conservative and Reform—in relation to the life cycle events of birth and death. And, finally, for the educated public, with years of learning and living, there is room for yet another book on Judaism and feminism.

It is the methodology of this volume that distinguishes it from other studies of women in Judaism and other topically oriented histories and criticisms of rabbinic literatures. A thorough and sensitive analysis of gender is interwoven throughout the text. Millen pays attention to Orthodox, Conservative and Reform Judaism. Her in-depth knowledge of the denominations of the Jewish community results in a balanced text that provides a rich learning experience. She also equally emphasizes gender, the public/private nexus and the community/autonomy dialectic. Millen identifies birth, contraception, fertility, the welcoming of a new daughter, Kaddish and the funeral as fundamental factors in human life—a “safe” assumption that positions her to cast a wide net.\* The Jewish rites of birth and death form the organizing construct of the book. Part I, “Issues Surrounding Birth,” includes four chapters dealing with birth, conception, birth control, fertility and celebration on the birth of a daughter. “Death and Mourning” is the focus of Part II; here the readers will find in-depth reflections on Kaddish and the funeral. This structure not only lightens the reader's load but also reinforces the themes of the book. In her Epilogue, Millen notes: “The conceptual apparatus of the analysis—gender, sexuality, public/private spheres and community/autonomy—has provided a frame of reference that demonstrates not only the patriarchal assumptions undergirding the classical texts but also some of the possibilities for moving behind them.”

For me, Part II was the stronger, more compelling “read” in this work. The subject of women and Kaddish has long intrigued me, as have contemporary discussions of grief, mourning and Kaddish. Additionally, as a feminist and a writer, I am fascinated by the relationship of language, religion and feminism. What better place to reflect on all three than here, thinking about death and mourning, about the powerful Kaddish? In this part of the book, Millen deftly explores

women and Jewish law as well as the transformation of tradition. Her knowledge of historical context, biblical context and rabbinic origins results in text that flows—scholarship at its best. Notes and works cited following the Epilogue reflect the quality of Millen's scholarship and provide valued suggestions for further reading or research.

For Jews and feminists alike, you won't be disappointed. Being open to Jewish and feminist inquiry is required, as is a willingness to reconsider your values both as a Jew and as a feminist. Millen will satisfy scholars and the educated public as long as they are genuinely open to critical reflection on contemporary culture and to thinking differently about ritual. For these and other readers, I say this—let Millen be your guide—there are patterns emerging in American Judaism, patterns that defy, and yet celebrate, and in their own way, incorporate tradition. *Women, Birth and Death in Jewish Law and Practice* is, at bottom, about continuity and change, gender and assimilation, construction of Jewish culture and identity, traditions and counter-traditions. I suspect you'll agree with my sentiments when you finish this book. Millen deserves our respect and recognition for moving us toward a more mature Jewish feminist theology. Hers is a progressive approach to Jewish culture and identity.

\*It is not within the scope of this brief critique to explore the reality, let alone the

Dig up the graveyards  
in your heart. The memories  
are dust, or should be.  
The bones' resentments, loves, too  
heavy and too poisonous.

Kaddish everything  
and one. If it's not time at  
seventy when is?  
No matter how you psalm the  
dead they're dead and you're their praise

their day their only  
day this side messiah worlds  
so let them free. There  
are so many living dead  
who need heart's resurrection.

Live the better life  
you know and not the corpse you  
bury you alive in.  
Wash your hands and leave.  
Fast, if you have to, and love.

—by Richard E. Sherwin

cultural identity, of those from whom birth, conception, fertility or the welcoming of a new daughter are not fundamental factors in their lives. Nonetheless, as a single lesbian without children, I found myself curious as to how Millen would approach and examine this reality. Millen does offer readers a note, if you will, as to her scope, mentioning that neither Reconstructionism nor lesbianism/homosexuality would be discussed.

*Sarah Barbara Watstein is a professor and an associate university librarian for public services, VCU Libraries, Virginia Commonwealth University, as well as a contributing editor.*

## Reflections by the Author: Herbert Hirsch

*Anti-Genocide: Building an American Movement to Prevent Genocide*  
by Herbert Hirsch  
Westport, CT:  
Praeger Publishers

The subject of genocide came flooding back to human consciousness at the conclusion of the last century as repeated examples of mass slaughter assaulted humanity. There is, in fact, little doubt that the 20th century was perhaps the most consistently violent century in human existence, at least in terms of the number of victims. Estimates of the toll in human life are astounding. Brzezinski speculates that war alone claimed 87 million lives and that all told 167 to 175 million lives were lost to what he calls politically motivated carnage. According to his calculations, this is the approximate equivalent of the total population of France, Italy and Great Britain; or more than two-thirds the total current population of the United States. This is more than the total killed in all previous wars, civil conflicts and religious persecutions throughout human history. Clearly, as we observed the close of the last century, we could not avoid the pessimistic conclusion that genocide, war and racial as well as ethnic conflict appeared to be increasingly common occurrences.

Pondering this tangibility of mass death, I used to think that appropriate action could stop the slaughter. I wrote, in fact, at the conclusion of my previous book, *Genocide and the Politics of Memory* (University of North Carolina Press, 1995), that genocide could be prevented if specific long- and short-term steps were taken. I argued that in the short term it was most important to end the violence to create the conditions under which steps might be taken to bring about reconciliation and peaceful coexistence. To

accomplish this I said that three interrelated steps are necessary: (1) develop a policy to bring together the international laws of war and the U.N. Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide; (2) develop an "Early Warning System" and instruments of humanitarian intervention to recognize and curtail future genocides and political massacres; and (3) formulate mechanisms to capture and punish instigators of genocide and political massacres demonstrating to the world that violence is not an acceptable means to achieve political ends.

In the long term, I continued, if human life is to be preserved, world views must change from chauvinistic nationalism to cooperative internationalism. Throughout history, with increasing ferocity and deadliness in the 20th century, genocide has been perpetuated by the modern nation state that has made few, if any, moves to prevent or punish that crime. Since nationalism is the psychological foundation on which international perceptions are currently constructed, it must be modified by instituting a process of political re-socialization from one which emphasizes nationalism to one which emphasizes internationalism. The mechanism to inculcate this new perspective will be changing the orientation of political education so that it emphasizes international human rights and what I called "covenanted internationalism."

My new book, *Anti-Genocide: Building an American Movement to Prevent Genocide*, re-examines those arguments and adds an additional dimension. Here I argue that if we are ever to successfully confront and prevent, or at least control, the most egregious aspects of genocidal violence, it will be necessary to create some mechanisms, some political institutions, to contain violence in the short run and to change, or try to change, human behavior in the long run. This book examines these complex realities and proposes how a politics of prevention could be built. The particular focus is on the United States, where a political movement needs to be built to support the politics of prevention in the international realm. These are the short-term politics of prevention. The second part of the equation is to try to control genocidal behavior in the long run. To accomplish this it will be necessary to begin to change the way humans view each other by creating a new ethic of life-enhancing behavior based on the ideology of universal human rights and pass this on from generation to generation via the process of re-educating human beings to move away from hatred and violence as solutions to their problems.

The book begins with an examination of how political movements are structured by examining the civil rights movement and the anti-Vietnam war movement of the 1960s. From there it proceeds to look at what the

American public thinks about genocide and then looks at American political institutions and their responses to genocide. The focus here is to see if pressure could be put on American political leaders to get them to participate in international political processes to prevent genocide.

The next section, in fact, looks at the failure of American foreign policy in Bosnia, Rwanda, Kosovo and East Timor, then critiques the politics followed by both the Clinton and Bush administrations. Following that examination, the last section formulates a policy that could be created to try to prevent the repetition of genocide in the modern world.

In this sense, this is a unique book since there have been books written that explain why different genocides have occurred but few that propose how to structure a political movement to prevent genocide from continuing to plague humanity in the future.

*Herbert Hirsch is professor of political science at Virginia Commonwealth University and a contributing editor.*

## Problems of Biblical Patriarchy

*Reading the Women of the Bible: A New Interpretation of Their Stories*  
by Tikva Frymer-Kensky  
New York: Schocken Books

A Review Essay  
by Kristin Swenson-Mendez

I wish that this book had been available when I led a course on women in the Hebrew Bible for a small group of adults in our community. My class, then, was composed of women, most of them active members of Jewish, Roman Catholic or Protestant congregations. They proved to be keen-minded, creative thinkers, eager to learn more about the ancient world of biblical texts and especially about women of that world and then to discuss the implication of such texts for us today. Frymer-Kensky's book is written to appeal to just such readers—intelligent and inquisitive, ready to approach old texts and traditions with fresh eyes. Readers of *Reading the Women of the Bible* need not have years of academic biblical study behind them but will find the book even more thought-provoking and satisfying if they already have some familiarity with the stories.

Following a brief introduction and concluded by a short section concerning reading then and now, the body of the book comprises chapters about individual women and/or stories. These chapters are divided into

four parts, identified as "Victors," "Victims," "Virgins" and "Voice." The divisions may seem a bit artificial but, as Frymer-Kensky explains in her introduction, the four "categories of stories" reflect "four 'discourses' to which these stories address themselves" (p. xvii), discourses that broaden the appeal and range of application further than does a simple recital of female persons in biblical stories. Indeed, the book is less concerned with developing biblical sketches of particular women and more about what the position, role and function of these women's stories play in the greater matter of Israel's development and self-identity.

The author explains that the "woman as victor" stories are tales about heroic women who become saviors" (p. xvii); yet, they are more broadly encouraging stories for a people challenged by disadvantageous circumstances. Similarly, while the "women as victim" stories are "tales of women who suffer at the hands of the men in power" (p. xvii), Frymer-Kensky maintains that they also illustrate Israel's experiences as "marginalized" and "vulnerable," "battered by her enemies" (p. xxi). The group of stories that Frymer-Kensky calls "Voices (of God)" include narratives of women who "appear as oracles," serving as "the voice of God's decisions" concerning the history of Israel (pp. xviii-xix). These, too, have broader application, Frymer-Kensky argues. For "[j]ust as these women, not politically powerful themselves, are privileged to know the will of God, so too Israel, small and marginal between the great empires of the world, is nevertheless the bearer of God's word" (p. xxi). Finally, in the category of "Virgins," Frymer-Kensky discusses stories concerned variously with "marriage, intermarriage, ethnicity and boundaries with non-Israelites" (p. xix). Consequently, they address "the complex issues of identity and survival" (p. xix) and "define the borders of Israel" (p. xxi). Because her aim is to discuss "the meaning of the women-stories as a group and...the concept of 'woman' in the Bible" (p. xxvii), Frymer-Kensky does not discuss every woman who appears in biblical texts. She even avoids such "greats" as Eve and Miriam, whose shadows the author explains may inhibit our appreciation of how other women's stories shed light on Israel's self-understanding.

Nevertheless, the book addresses the stories of matriarchs, queens and prophetesses as well as of many lesser-known biblical women. Among those stories that Frymer-Kensky examines in the context of "Victors" are the Rivka stories; the women of the exodus (including the women involved in Moses' birth and infancy, and Zipporah); Rahab; Deborah and Yael; the "wise woman of 2 Samuel; the Shunammite woman of 2 Kings; and the "Villians"—Potiphar's wife, Delilah, and Athaliah. Among the "Vic-

tics," Frymer-Kensky discusses stories of Abraham passing Sarah off as his sister, effectively consigning her as concubine first to Pharaoh and second to Abimelech. Also included are stories concerning Lot's daughters, Jephthah's daughter, the Levite's "concubine" at the end of Judges, Bathsheba, Tamar of 2 Samuel and the "cannibal mothers of 2 Kings 6. Within the section, in a chapter titled "Kings to the Rescue?" the author briefly discusses the place of kingship in Israel's development. In the context of the biblical discourse on issues related to marriage, in Frymer-Kensky's "Virgins" chapter, she examines the Dinah story, texts concerning women identified simply as "Canaanite," also Jezebel, Cozbi, Hagar, Ruth, Moabitesses in general, Tamar of Genesis 38 and the foreign women that so irked Ezra and Nehemiah. Also in this section, Frymer-Kensky offers an excursus of the association of such women with royalty, "The Royal Way." The "Voice" section includes discussion of the role of Rahab and Deborah in the conquest of Canaan; the relationship of Hannah and the Witch of Endor to Israel's first king, Saul; Abigail; and Huldah. In a chapter titled "Woman as Voice," Frymer-Kensky reflects on the role women have played as oracles, "presenting by their existence and by their messages the direction in which Israel will move" (p. 327). Finally, a brief "Part Five" concerns techniques of "reading the women of the Bible," reflections on the "later adventures of biblical women" and "reading these stories today."

Given that there are so many, varied and complicated stories about women in the Bible, Frymer-Kensky writes that the question that first drove her inquiry was "could

the biblical stories about women have been written because of the desire of Israelite men to explore the nature of women and their role and to understand the question of gender?" (p. xv). She admits that after exploring the role and function of women's stories, her conclusion was negative. That is, rather than developing and defending the idea of woman as "Other," the stories of women in the Hebrew Bible portrayed and illuminated Israel's understanding of herself. This is an intriguing hypothesis and one largely borne out by and successfully described in Frymer-Kensky's present study.

This does not, however, preclude an inevitably patriarchal perspective. In a kind of apology for the patriarchal nature of biblical texts, Frymer-Kensky reminds readers that the Hebrew Bible is a product of its time(s). For example, she writes, "The male Lord did not create patriarchy. The truth is just the opposite: patriarchal thought required that the one Lord of all be conceived as male and portrayed in a masculine grammar" (p. xiv); and "though patriarchy pre-existed the Bible, the Bible was not written to construct it...the Bible did not eradicate slavery; it did not eliminate patriarchy; it did not eradicate economic oppression" (pp. xiv-xv). Despite this context, however, Frymer-Kensky shows some of the ways the Bible challenged the status quo. Indeed, some stories depict women in positions of leadership and exercising sanctioned power; other stories depict creative and resourceful women whose accomplishments undermined the powers-that-be.

While Frymer-Kensky discusses both these models and others in exploring the remarkable nature of women's stories in the Hebrew Bible, occasionally her explanations did not seem plausible. I find it difficult to believe, for instance, that the namelessness of certain "wise" women was due less to their dismissal by the biblical writers than to some sense, as Frymer-Kensky maintains, that their kind was so common. Similarly, it seems a bit of a stretch to claim that David's blindness to Amnon's determination that Tamar alone should serve her lust-sick brother because the food she would serve may be semantically related to the term for a Babylonian medicine and maybe "princesses of the realm were instructed in the creation of healing foods" (p. 158). However, in defense of her conclusion, Frymer-Kensky points out that the food Tamar prepares is both special ("heart cakes") and three times described as something that may heal.

Among the most intriguing and valuable aspects of *Reading the Women of the Bible* for me were Frymer-Kensky's discussion of the women who served as "oracles," announcing the direction that Israel's development was to take at crucial junctures; and her more general ideal that in the stories of

## A DEAD CHILD SPEAKS

My mother held me by my hand.  
Then someone raised the knife of parting:  
So that it should not strike me,  
My mother loosed her hand from mine.  
But she lightly touched my thighs once more  
And her hand was bleeding—

After the knife of parting  
Cut in two each bite I swallowed—  
It rose before me with the sun at dawn  
And began to sharpen itself in my eyes—  
Wind and water ground in my ear  
And every voice of comfort pierced my heart—

And I was led to death  
I still in the last moment  
The unsheathing of the great knife of parting.

—by Nellie Sachs

women, biblical writers explored their identity as "Israel" and sought to understand and describe Israel's relationship and the greater world. I also appreciated Frymer-Kensky's frank acknowledgement that troubling biblical stories of women have meaning for us today, in part because our society is not free of victimization and destitution. We have the experience necessary to make the biblical metaphors of women ring true. However, the presence of such stories and our critical reflections on them may hasten the dismantling of oppressive social structures. She explains, "[w]hen there is nothing in reality that corresponds to the biblical victim stories, then these stories (in their revealed state) will have done their job and the old metaphors will cease to have their power" (p. 354).

That Frymer-Kensky closely reads the stories about women with recognition of their patriarchal setting (socio-historical and literary) does not mean that finally she challenges the value, even authority, of biblical texts. Many readers will find this settling; others may find it disappointing. But the author explains that her interpretations, informed by her scholarship as an Assyriologist, reflect her disinclination to reject either the biblical texts or her feminist principles. She writes, "[m]y feminism combined with my love of the Bible determined my interpretative choices. They cause me to combine a hermeneutic of suspicion with a hermeneutic of grace, not assuming evil intent on the part of the biblical authors but not ignoring the patriarchal difficulties" (p. xxvi). The difficulty of balancing these sympathies is great, and Frymer-Kensky's attempt is admirable.

*Kristin Swenson-Mendez is a professor of religious studies at Virginia Commonwealth University and a contributing editor.*

## SHEPHERD

This expanse that spreads its nostrils wide.  
This height that yearns to you overhead.  
Light spilling the milk's white.  
Fragrance of wool. Fragrance of bread.

At the feet of the sheep and man that listens,  
in the water trough is the lapping tune—  
Barefoot.

With all his five senses bared.  
Morning steps toward noon.

This morn of Creation! Wafts in the fields  
Incense from dung, dew drops from grass.  
From horizon to horizon. Adam and fields.  
From horizon to horizon. Abel and flocks.

—by Avraham Shlonsky

## Our Brother Jesus

*Brother Jesus: The Nazarene  
Through Jewish Eyes*  
by Sohalom Ben-Chorin,  
translated by Jared S. Klein and  
Max Reinhart  
Athens: University of Georgia  
Press

*Jesus Through Jewish Eyes*  
edited by Beatrice Bruteau  
New York:  
Maryknoll/Orbis Books

A Review Essay  
by Frank E. Eakin Jr.

Both *Brother Jesus* and *Jesus Through Jewish Eyes* are excellent examples of recent attempts to recover the Jewish roots of Jesus. This is not simply a continuation of the movement variously designated but covered in the "historical Jesus" movement pursued by Christian scholars. To the contrary, this is an attempt to recover Jesus, the Jew of the first century from Nazareth. There is nothing pejorative about the presentation of Jesus in either volume. To the contrary, Christians whose traditions have so covered over the Jesus of history with the Christ of faith can enrich their understanding of Jesus immensely by sitting at the feet of these Jewish scholars.

Beginning with a chapter on "The Figure of Jesus," Ben-Chorin selects various aspects of the mission and message of Jesus, culminating with a chapter titled "INRI," or "The Curse of the Crucified." He seeks, in each case, to focus the words of Jesus and the events in the ministry of Jesus within a Jewish context, and the reader is struck by the breadth of his knowledge as he incorporates diverse historical data, linguistic and philological skills, legal connotation, sociological and psychological nuances, and so on. His awareness of the New Testament and Christian traditions is remarkable, and he is able to utilize these Christian materials along with additional diverse data and thereby set Jesus in his first-century context. For example, "The Wedding in Cana" does not seek to clarify a "miracle," which is a Hellenistic rather than a Hebraic phenomenon regardless. He interprets this even aetiologically; i.e., the event points ahead to the Last Supper and is built on a post-Jesus kerygmatic development. He interpreted the various aspects of Jesus' ministry in this fashion, never straying far from his emphasis on my brother Jesus, a Jewish man of first-century Palestine. He quotes (p. 5) from Martin Buber's *Two Types of Faith* wherein Buber stated: "From my youth

onwards I have found in Jesus my great brother... My own fraternally open relationship to him has grown ever stronger and clearer..." Ben-Chorin responds: "Buber's confession defines my own position. Jesus is for me an eternal brother—not only my human brother but my Jewish brother" (p. 5).

Buber's famous quotation and Ben-Chorin's embracing of the same both defines approach and characterizes position in *Brother Jesus*. This is a well-written, intelligently presented work that enables the Jesus of history to come alive in a fashion precluded by the Gospels because they built more on the Christ of faith understanding.

Beatrice Bruteau drew together diverse Jewish commentators drawn from academics, the congregational rabbinic and individuals particularly attuned to Jewish-Christian issues by virtue of their existential situations. They are asked to share their reflections about Jesus. *Jesus Through Jewish Eyes* is divided into four self-explanatory sections: Historical and Theological Views, Appraisals and Interpretations, Personal Views and The Conversation Continues. These presentations are radically different, beginning with Michael J. Cook's "Evolving Jewish Views of Jesus" to the final chapter by Rami M. Shapiro, "Listening to Jesus With an Ear for God." Roughly two-thirds into the book is a moving and compelling essay by Lawrence Kushner, "My Lunch With Jesus," which focuses on his relationship with an Episcopal priest.

While Christians deal with Jesus, they carry historical baggage that precludes absolute objectivity. It is recognized that Jewish writers also carry interpretative baggage based on historical experiences. Whereas this baggage might be totally dissimilar to that borne by Christians, contributors were nonetheless enjoined to minimize the way that baggage impacted their chapters. What results are numerous contributions that portray the intensely spiritual side of modern Jewish faith.

Because it is impossible to deal with the contributions of the individual writers, and these are well-written and thoughtful materials, it is perhaps more helpful in a review essay of this type to note what motivated the editor to bring these essays together. She notes three primary motivations (pp. vii-ix): (1) to portray the faith practiced by Jesus rather than focusing on the Christian representations of the religion/faith of Jesus; (2) to help Jewish people better understand Jesus and to recognize that the historical problems Jews encountered are the responsibility of the Church and not of Jesus; and (3) to share with Christians what Jews think of Jesus and thereby to enrich the Christian understanding of Jesus. Each of these chapters in helpful fashion develops one or more of these motivations for book development as

expressed by the editor.

These two books, one written by a Jewish scholar and the other made up of chapters contributed by Jewish writers, demonstrate a sincere desire on the part of Jews to know better the person of Jesus as a Jew. Last this be understood only as a Jewish concern, the trilogy of books by John P. Meier, a Roman Catholic priest, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, is an excellent contribution toward understanding Jesus in his Jewish context.

Thus, gradually with the assistance of both Jewish and Christian scholars, we begin to develop a sense of who Jesus was in the first century, not what the Jesus of history became in the cloak of the Christ of faith. We begin in a very elementary way to understand Jesus of Nazareth. As we gather insight regarding the person of the human Jesus, we take the first and most important step toward repairing the breaches in Jewish and Christian relations. Perhaps as Jews and Christians, we will come to understand better what Schalom Ben-Chorin's great teacher, Martin Buber, meant when he referred to Jesus as "my great brother." To make that affirmation with meaning and understanding is a meeting ground for Jews and Christians; moreover, it is perhaps one of the most significant affirmations one can make, be the individual Christian or Jewish.

*Frank E. Eakin Jr. is the Weinstein-Rosenthal Professor of Jewish and Christian Studies, Department of Religion, University of Richmond, and a contributing editor.*

## Poetry After Auschwitz?

*The Terror of Our Days: Four American Poets Respond to the Holocaust*

by Harriet Parmet  
Bethlehem, PA:  
Lehigh University Press

A Review Essay  
by Cliff Edwards

Harriet Parmet has taught courses in modern Israeli literature, ancient Hebrew literature in translation, American-Jewish literature and the literature of the Holocaust, and is co-founder of Lehigh University's Jewish Studies Program. In this volume, based on her doctoral dissertation, she places in context and interprets the intent, strategies and effectiveness of four American poets who address the Holocaust in their work. None of the four directly experienced the atrocities of Auschwitz and related sites in Nazi-controlled Europe. The four po-

ets—Sylvia Plath, William Heyen, Gerald Stern and Jerome Rothenberg—challenge T. W. Adorno's dictum that "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric." Each of the poets becomes "a witness by imagination," following in the shadow of "the seminal poetry of the Holocaust matriarch Nelly Sachs and patriarch Paul Celan," preferring words regarding the horror of silence.

Sylvia Plath (1932-1963) and William Heyen (1940-present), neither of whom is Jewish, are treated as "confessional poets." Plath is no doubt included in the volume to attract readers, as most will have heard of her brief, brilliant career and her tragic suicide by gas in her London flat. Plath "attempts to work her way out of her private turmoil through the utilization of the Holocaust metaphor," and the legitimacy of her project is questioned by Parmet and earlier critics. Is reduction of the Holocaust to "metaphor" acceptable in view of the enormity of the event? Nevertheless, Parmet finds powerful reflections on suffering in such desperate poems as "Mary's Song," "Lady Lazarus," "Daddy," "The Thin People" and "Getting There."

William Heyen is treated somewhat differently as he struggles with memories of an uncle who fought for Hitler and a Nazi father-in-law. He is given credit for his research and travel to death camp sites and his attempt to fathom the evil of the Third Reich as "shared heritage of humanity." Heyen's *The Swastika Poems, My Holocaust Songs, The Trains and Erika: Poems of the Holocaust* force the reader to join him in remembering. His poems work at the task of "creating memory for his reader."

The third poet selected by Parmet, Gerald Stern, has been described as a "late, ironic Jewish disciple of Whitman." Trained in the Hebrew prayer book and liturgy, Stern is attracted to Hasidic thought and kabbalistic secrecy. Living with a sense of guilt regarding his own comfort and security, he seeks catharsis through his creation of a "mythological literature," probing the suffering of the Holocaust victims, entering into nature and reciting the details of his environment in New York City. Parmet competently examines for the reader the many facets of his art in such books of his as *Lucky Life* and *Leaving Another Kingdom*.

Jerome Rothenberg is the final poet examined by Parmet. She finds in his attempt to rediscover his Polish-Jewish ancestral roots the struggle to locate a "language of the dead," to express archaic Judaism's "oral worlds of myth, vision, revelation." Works titled *White Sun, Black Sun, Poland/1931* and *Khubn and Other Poems* are viewed as including elements of kabbalah and apocalyptic, strategies for approaching the terror of the Holocaust.

In her conclusion to the volume, Parmet returns to the issue of the possibility of a

poetry of the Holocaust. She finally stands with Lawrence Langer's critical position and Paul Celan's poetic practice, preferring words to silence, remembering to forgetfulness. She writes: "Even as the systems that once sustained the spirit have defaulted, art is still called upon to salvage the voices of the dead and dying."

*Cliff Edwards is professor of religious studies at Virginia Commonwealth University and an editorial consultant. His latest book is Shoes of Van Gogh: A Spiritual and Artistic Journey to the Ordinary.*

## PROPHET, GO, FLEE (Amos 7.12)

"Go, Flee?"—A man like me does not flee!  
Walk calmly, my cattle taught me,  
My tongue did not learn to say "yes"  
And my word shall fall like a heavy ax.

Not my fault—if my strength was spent in vain,  
It is your sin and you carry the blame!  
No anvil underneath it did my hammer find  
Into the tree's rot my ax came.

No matter! I accept my fate:  
My tools to my belt I tie,  
Day laborer without my wage  
I shall return calmly the same way.

Back to my cote I return, to its values  
And with sycamores my covenant I make.  
And you—you rot and decay  
Tomorrow a storm shall carry you away.

—by Chaim Nahman Bialik

## PUT ME INTO THE BREACH

Put me into the breach with every rolling stone,  
With hammers fasten me in.  
Perhaps I will placate my motherland and stone  
The sin of the people who did not mend its ruins.

How good to know I am a stone  
Like all the stones of Jerusalem:  
With my bones up in the wall, happy am I.  
Why should my body be less than my soul,  
in flood and flame it accompanied this people  
in silence or keening cry?

Take me with the Jerusalem stone,  
place me in the walls, upon me daub cement,  
And my pining bones will sing from the walls  
Toward the Messiah's advent.

—by Yehuda Kami

# NOTEWORTHY BOOKS

*Editor's Note: The following is a list of books received from publishers but, as of this printing, have not been reviewed for Menorah Review.*

- Being Israeli: The Dynamics of Multiple Citizenship.*** By Gershon Shafir and Yoav Peled. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Sticking Together: The Israeli Experiment in Pluralism.*** By Yaakov Kop and Robert E. Litan. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.
- Leo Strauss: The Early Writings (1921-1932).*** Translated and edited by Michael Zank. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- The Nazi Germany Sourcebook: An Anthology of Texts.*** By Roderick Stackelberg and Sally A. Winkle. New York: Routledge.
- "Our Place in Al-Andalus"—Kabbalah, Philosophy, Literature in Arab-Jewish Letters.*** By Gil Anidjar. California: Stanford University Press.
- Rescuing the Children: A Holocaust Memoir.*** By Vivette Samuel. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- The Chosen People in an Almost Chosen Nation: Jews and Judaism in America.*** Edited by Richard John Neuhaus. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
- Female, Jewish, Educated: The Lives of Central European University Women.*** By Harriet Pass Freidenreich. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- The Chosen People: Wales and the Jews.*** Edited by Grahame Davies. Chester Spring, PA: Seren Books/Dufour Editions Inc.
- Shabbat: The Family Guide to Preparing For and Celebrating the Sabbath (2nd Edition).*** By Ron Wolfson. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing.
- Fortress of My Youth: Memoir of a Terezin Survivor.*** By Jana Friesova. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Essential Essays on Judaism.*** By Eliezer Berkovits, edited by David Hazony. Jerusalem: Shalem Press Books.
- New Beginnings: Holocaust Survivors in Bergen-Belsen and the British Zone in Germany, 1945-1950.*** By Hagit Lavsky. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press.
- Storm in the Community: Yiddish Polemical Pamphlets of Amsterdam Jewry, 1797-1798.*** Edited by Jozeph Michman and Marion Aptroot. Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press.
- The Regal Way: The Life and Times of Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin.*** By David Assaf. California: Stanford University Press.
- Who Will Say Yiddish? A Search for Jewish Identity in Contemporary Poland.*** By Larry N. Mayer, photographs by Gary Gelb. New York: Syracuse University Press.
- One People, Two Worlds: A Reform Rabbi and an Orthodox Rabbi Explore the Issues That Divide Them.*** By Amiel Hirsch and Yosef Reinman. New York: Schocken Books.
- Holocaust and Rescue: Impotent or Indifferent? Anglo-Jewry 1938-1945.*** By Pamela Shatzkes. London: Palgrave Publishers Ltd.
- American Klezmer: Its Roots and Offshoots.*** Edited by Mark Slobin. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Jewish Life in the American West.*** Edited by Ava F. Kahn. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Beautiful Death: Jewish Poetry and Martyrdom in Medieval France.*** By Susan L. Einbinder. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- A Book of Life: Embracing Judaism as a Spiritual Practice.*** By Michael Strassfeld. New York: Shoken Books.
- The Sultan's Jew: Morocco and the Sephardi World.*** By Daniel J. Schroeter. California: Stanford University Press.
- A Double Thread: Growing Up English and Jewish in London.*** By John Gross. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, Publisher.
- Sacrificing Truth: Archaeology and the Myth of Masada.*** By Nachman Ben-Yehuda. Amherst, NY: Humanity Books.
- The Journey Home: Discovering the Deep Spiritual Wisdom of the Jewish Tradition.*** By Lawrence A. Hoffman. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Storm of Terror: A Hebron Mother's Diary.*** By June Leavitt. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, Publisher.
- Abraham: A Journey to the Heart of Three Faiths.*** By Bruce Feiler. New York: William Morrow.
- Going South: Jewish Women in the Civil Rights Movement.*** By Debra L. Schultz. New York University Press.
- Mazel.*** By Rebecca Goldstein. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Stories of an Imaginary Childhood.*** By Melvin Jules Bukiet. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Safe Among the Germans: Liberated Jews After World War II.*** By Ruth Gay. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- The 23rd Psalm: A Holocaust Memoir.*** By George Lucius Salton. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- A Race Against Death: Peter Bergson, America and the Holocaust.*** By David S. Wyman and Rafael Medoff. New York: The New Press.
- Taking Root: Narratives of Jewish Women in Latin America.*** Edited by Marjorie Agosin. Athens: Ohio University.
- Rebuilding the House of Israel: Architectures of Gender in Jewish Antiquity.*** By Cynthia M. Baker. California: Stanford University Press.

## NOTEWORTHY BOOKS, *continued from page 7*

***A Moral Reckoning: The Role of the Catholic Church in the Holocaust and Its Unfulfilled Duty of Repair.*** By Daniel Jonah Goldhagen. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

***Judaism, Mathematics and the Hebrew Calendar.*** By Hyman Gabai. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc.

***The Fourth Commandment: Remember the Sabbath Day.*** By Francine Klagsbrun. New York: Harmony Books.

***Hidden: A Sister and Brother in Nazi Poland.*** By Fay Walker and Leo Rosen. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

***The Martin Buber Reader: Essential Writings.*** Edited by Asher D. Biemann. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

***The Chosen Body: The Politics of the Body in Israel Society.*** By Meira Weiss. California: Stanford University Press.

***Jews and the American Public Square: Debating Religion and Republic.*** Edited by Alan Mittleman, Jonathan D. Sarna and Robert Licht. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

***Jewish Polity and American Civil Society: Communal Agencies and Religious Movements in the American Public Square.*** Edited by Alan Mittleman, Jonathan D. Sarna and Robert Licht. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

***Hidden Heritage: The Legacy of the Crypto-Jews.*** By Janet Liebman Jacobs. Berkeley: University of California Press.

***A Jew in America: My Life and a People's Struggle for Identity.*** By Arthur Hertzberg. HarperSanFrancisco.

***A Prophet for Our Time: An Anthology of the Writings of Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum.*** Edited by Judith H. Banki and Eugene J. Fisher. New York: Fordham University Press.

***The Israeli Diaspora.*** By Steven J. Gold. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

***Peace in the Home: Tales from a Yiddish Kitchen.*** By Faye Moskowitz. Boston: David R. Godine Publishers.

***The Haunted Smile: The Story of Jewish Comedians in America.*** By Lawrence J. Epstein. New York: Public Affairs.

***Ety: The Letters and Diaries of Ety Hillesum 1941-1943.*** Edited by Klass A.D. Smelik. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

***From Ideology to Liturgy: Reconstructionist Worship and American Liberal Judaism.*** By Eric Caplan. Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press.

***The Committed Marriage: A Guide to Finding a Soulmate and Building a Relationship Through Timeless Biblical Wisdom.*** By Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis. HarperSanFrancisco.

***The New Rabbi: A Congregation for Its Leader.*** By Stephen Fried. New York: The Bantam Dell Publishing Group.



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