




2007

## Menorah Review (No. 67, Summer/Fall, 2007)

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VCU Menorah Review

*For the Enrichment of Jewish Thought*

Summer/Fall 2007 no. 67

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## A Poem by Richard E. Sherwin

our kids were sitting ducks for all the rockets  
anti tank and anti jew the Russians  
and Iranians supplied the bunkered  
Hizbullah and their civilian moslems

each the other's camouflage and host  
each committing war crimes and proclaiming  
innocence of any thought of paying  
for the Protocols of Death they boasted

the UN keepers watchers of such peace  
recorded nothing seeing hearing nothing  
till our shells and missiles touched them some  
and then all Israel was judged diseased

and now our wounded kids or dead ignored  
and those who grew this carnage still adored

## Camp Sisters: Women and the Holocaust

By Joyce Parkey

When Nazi concentration camp survivors address why or how they survived their imprisonment, they state luck or chance as the primary or only possible reason. However, in the next sentence, the same individual tells of a friend or relative without whose companionship, aid, and support they would have died. The Nazis aimed at isolating Jews, segregating them from loved ones, as part of the process for their 'Final Solution,' but they failed to take into account that human beings are at heart social creatures and will create substitute relationships or strengthen and redefine existing ones to fill the void left by separation and death. The newly formed surrogate families were not only coping mechanisms for dealing with the brutality encountered in the camps, but actually increased an inmate's chances for survival. While current research shows evidence of bonding occurring between men as well as between women, this paper will examine only those relationships experienced by women, often referred to as 'camp sisters' or 'camp mothers,' specifically how and why they were formed, what needs they met, and how they contributed to survival in the camps.

When prisoners first arrived at the camps, they were immediately segregated by sex, followed by an initial selection. Those to live went to the left, and the others marked for death, to the right. In a matter of moments, most, if not all, of their closest relatives were beyond their reach. From there they were stripped of any remaining belongings, their hair, and their names. The inmates were suddenly reduced to a number, naked alongside other women and among male guards and prisoners, being searched in every crevice of their bodies. When they were finally given clothes to wear, the dresses were ill fitting and didn't belong to them. They ended up in an overcrowded barracks without any personal space, a bucket for a toilet shared among hundreds of women, if they were lucky enough to have access to any facilities at all, and given what was called food but lacked any real nourishment. They were even denied a source of potable water for drinking purposes

much less to use to clean themselves up. Standing at roll calls, hard labor, and minimal sleep followed. All this was meant to humiliate and dehumanize, shock the prisoners into submission, and lead them willing to death. Yet, many still maintained their will to live, and were determined to "survive at any price, and (they) clung to life with all (their) might." (Birenbaum, 100) When confronted with the number of dead upon awakening her first morning in Ravensbruck, Sara Tuvel Bernstein writes she "decided then. I would not die. Somehow, in whatever way I could, I would remain alive; Esther (her sister), Ellen, and Lily, as well. As long as I had the strength, we would live. I would see to it." (Bernstein, 206) She extended her desire to live to the other three members of her camp family, linking their survival with hers.

The will to live is an animal instinct for self preservation, but "cooperation for survival among members of the same species is a basic law of life" as well (Davidson, 122). One can lead to the other because there is "strength in cooperation and mutual aid," and the harsher the environment, when extreme levels of degradation, cruelty, and deprivation are the norm, the greater the need for reciprocal, helping relationships (Tec, 344). Forming these cooperative associations is therefore adaptive behavior under traumatic circumstances which improves quality of life for the individuals involved, and these relationships were as important to survival as following base instincts. Survivor accounts agree that it was almost impossible to remain alive on your own, certainly not and maintain any semblance of humanity at the same time. (Gelissen, 149 & Goldenberg, 337 & Tec, 183)

Human beings have a strong need for affiliation, what Goldenberg refers to as a "need for connectedness. (Goldenberg, 329) Even though people seek out other groups later in life, the primary way they satisfy this need for others is through the family they are born into. Deprived of these connections, people quite naturally form new ones. It is no wonder that prisoners in concentration camps sought out relationships with other inmates because they satisfied this basic requirement for belonging. Additionally, camp families came together through shared misfortune and suffering, "motivated not by trivialities, but rather by

a genuine sense of solidarity among people who shared each other's grisly fate." (Adelsberger, 99) Identifying with a group in this manner generates "feelings of connection that are often intense," (Staub, 14) to the point that Liana Millu notes "most of the sisters in camp loved each other with an almost morbid attachment." (Millu, 151)

Often the women were bound by familial relationship or friendship prior to deportation, and from the start, the elder of the group took it upon herself to look after and protect the younger one(s). Sara Tuvel Bernstein reminds us that the old European school of thought came into play in that you listened to the oldest even if she was a fool. (Bernstein, 210) She was deported alongside her younger sister, Esther, and two young friends, coming to think of them as sisters, too, and it was Sara who determined the best course of action to keep them all alive. Rena Gelissen arrived at Auschwitz before her sister, Danka, but took care of both her and Dina, a friend from their hometown of Tycliz, after their subsequent arrivals. Judy Weiszenberg Cohen ended up at Auschwitz not only with her oldest sister Erzsebet, but with two other sisters as well. She remembers Erzsebet making the rules for them to follow, too. Halina Birenbaum was separated from her mother during the initial selection at Majdanek, but Hela, her 20 year old sister-in-law, immediately stepped in and told her "from now on, I'm your mother." (Birenbaum, 78) Judith Pinczovsky Jaegermann and her mother were interned together, and she attributes her survival to her mother. She also mentions that her mother sheltered all the young girls who were alone. In a less traditional family group, Dr. Lucie Adelsberger was adopted by two teenage girls who became her "camp mother" and "camp grandmother" even though she herself was in her forties at the time.

While there was usually one 'sister' who took charge of the group, the relationships formed were by necessity fluid and reciprocal, changing when one or another became ill or perhaps died. This reciprocity was an important characteristic of these families because the brutal conditions in the camps made it next to impossible for any one person to be strong all the time, either in mind or body. When one family

member was depressed, ill, or injured, it was up to the other to take charge. While initially Hela stepped in as Halina Birenbaum's mother, eventually she became ill, and Halina had to nurse her. Because Hela and subsequent camp sisters died, Halina ended up creating multiple camp families in succession who provided her with needed protection, warmth, and affection. Frequently, camp families were separated because of transfers between camps, leaving the members to realign themselves with other groups. Judy Weiszenberg Cohen was sent to Bergen-Belsen while her three sisters remained in Auschwitz. There she asked two friends, Sari and Edith Feig, if she could become their camp sister so she wouldn't have to be alone.

One very important function of camp families was to physically care for one another, especially in the sharing of any extra food organized and in nursing any member who fell ill. Survivors speak of the care that went into dividing food absolutely equally among their groups because "these are hungry people; everyone must receive exactly the same portions." (Gelissen, 216) Not that there was much to divide, but an occasional piece of meat or vegetable discovered in the soup, extra bread acquired in a bartered transaction, or a gift from a prisoner in a better work detail could provide much needed nourishment. By banding together, the odds increased that one of these extra sources of food materialized. There was also a special need for protection when a woman became ill or injured. To begin with, any evidence of illness or injury, such as fecal matter or blood, needed to be cleaned up because if the kapo, a prisoner in charge, suspected someone was sick she would send the woman to the infirmary, and the infirmary meant almost certain death. Also, any weakness or disease shown before the SS meant selection and subsequent death. Something as trivial as scabies was now a life threatening illness and must be covered up or salve bartered for to heal it. Someone too ill to keep up with the work demands placed upon the prisoners must be compensated for and protected, including being propped up at roll call if unable to stand. Irene Csillag speaks of even engaging in a form of physical therapy with her sister who had fallen so ill she was unable to walk. Irene would take



her out of their bunk twice a day and put one foot in front of the other until she could manage on her own again. Sara Bernstein's camp sister Lily lost her glasses during a beating by a kapo. She was unable to see without them; so from then on one or more of her camp family stayed by her side. More than one prisoner recounts feeling unable to keep going, especially on the death marches away from the camps and the advancing Allies, and only the other members of her lager family urging her on, physically pulling her each step of the way, or making her promise to keep trying kept her from dying. Rena Gelissen, became gravely ill on the march out of Auschwitz, extremely weak and ready to die, but her sister Danka and their friend Janka wouldn't let her give up so they each took one of her elbows until she was able to walk again on her own. Had these women not had camp sisters by their sides to physically provide for them, they could not have survived.

More importantly, though, than physical care was the psychological, spiritual, and emotional support these surrogate families gave to one another and which took on many forms. Each woman experienced high levels of stress and anxiety brought on by the uncertainty of the camps. Unable to determine their own fates, they were subject to the whims of the SS guards and the prisoners they placed in charge. Groups provided relief from the stress by conveying a sense of security, real or imagined, to the women. Just knowing she was not alone but part of a group eased an individual's mind and gave her strength to continue. Also, by being able to take part in group decisions, an individual regained a sense of control over her life. (Davidson, 135) When Gelissen's camp family was deciding whether to find a way to remain at Auschwitz during the evacuation or leave as ordered, Janka spoke up and said "All I know is that I don't want to die here. Let me die anywhere but Auschwitz." (Gelissen, 244) She understood the Nazis were bent on murdering her, but in her mind she was determining the where. They left with the others.

Spiritual comfort between and among women only rarely took on a religious expression. Birenbaum mentions a "makeshift service with candles" (Birenbaum, 133) held by the women in her block, and Millu

recalls a similar Hanukkah ceremony that became a time to mourn the dead. Rena Gelisen and her sister Danka fasted together their first year in Auschwitz but refused to give up a day's ration of food the following year. More often than not, if women tried to assert their belief in a just and helping God as a source of consolation, it was met with scorn. Liana Millu comments after one such occasion that she "felt like asking them why God would help us in particular and allow last year's unfortunate souls to freeze to death." (Millu, 150) Differing views of God actually came between two sisters. While Gustine continued to believe that "God can't allow injustice to triumph," her sister Lotti could only see that "meanwhile the crematorium just keeps puffing away and ashes are dropping on (her) head." (Millu, 172) Although Gelissen believed luck or perhaps a mistaken fate kept her and her sister alive, she was unable to completely disavow God. She also acknowledged burying the dead at Neustadt Glewe as very important to her personally, but even more significant, she and her camp family found saying a prayer over their grave "makes (them) feel good, and there is not much that does that." (Gelissen, 260) Prayer provided a connection to their past lives and community as well as spiritual comfort for their group.

Fear was constant in the camps, and is referred to by Adelsberger as "the antechamber to hell." (Adelsberger, 10) The greatest perceived danger was in being alone, whether because as Delbo states, "no one believes she'll return when she's alone," (Delbo, 99) and thoughts of giving up pervaded her consciousness in those situations, or because of the uncertainty surrounding the loved one's fate drove her to distraction. Gelissen describes poignantly the mental torture that separation from a camp sister brings: "All morning I work, wondering if my sister is dead yet. I can barely finish my soup at lunch. And my stomach is so tied up in knots of worry that I don't appreciate the extra broth. I simply miss my sister and wish she were here to share it with me; I know she won't each lunch today. Through the afternoon I try not to think about whether I will ever see Danka's smile or beautiful eyes again. I cannot stand the time it takes for the sun to cross

the sky. Finally, Emma orders, "Halt!" ...Weak from hunger, mad with worry, I believe my sister has died a hundred times over. Then I really see her." (Gelissen, 118) Rena vows after that experience, to never let "[Danka] out of my sight for another day of outside work; my nerves couldn't stand it." (Gelissen, 120)

Because this fear of being alone was so prevalent, camp families would do almost anything to stay together, taking extraordinary risks. Gerda Klein tells us that when she was on the verge of suicide, Ilse gave up her spot on a transport out of Marzdorf to Gerda. Ilse then cried out "My sister, my sister!" appealing to the director of the camp to prevent their separation. This could have placed them both in peril because he could just have easily decided they would remain at Marzdorf unloading flax by day and coal by night until they died from exhaustion. Birenbaum relates a similar story. Hela, her sister-in-law, was selected for death. Halina, "knew (she) had to be with Hela no matter what happened," so she ran after Hossler and cried "she is my mother, my sister, my family, I cannot live without her." (Birenbaum, 109) Amazingly, he let both of them live rather than sending Halina along with Hela to the gas chambers. The fear of being left alone was greater than the fear of dying together proven in stories related by both Gelissen and Irene Csillag who tell us of two separate occasions where one sister followed the other to the trucks that would take them both to the gas chambers. Gelissen and her sister even took an oath that if one sister was selected, they would go together.

Fear of being alone could also produce feelings of anger such as when Liana Millu became "enraged at being separated from Stella and Jeanette" (Millu, 51) because she was deprived of the buffer her two camp sisters provided against the daily brutalities she as a prisoner had to endure. Millu compensated for this loss of camp family by partnering with a pregnant woman in her new barracks. Another reaction to being alone, stemming from repeated loss or even disgust with what an individual had been reduced, was to resist what in the end would alleviate their fears, namely bonding with another. When Halina Birenbaum worked in Canada sorting thru victim's belongings, she felt that "while

working in the pit of hell, I could not be friends with anyone. I could not endure myself, so how could I get along with others?" (Birenbaum, 143) However, in the end, knowledge that "'lone wolf' behavior could almost guarantee death," (Goldenberg, 337) would draw an individual into forming new relationships. In Halina's case, she sought out Celina, a friend of her brother's, and Mrs. Prajsowa and her daughter, two camp friends, in order to ultimately survive by making life more bearable thru the company of others.

How did camp families function to alleviate fear, other than thru the knowledge of shared misery? Klein put it very succinctly, "when we bring comfort to others, we reassure ourselves, and when we dispel fear [in others], we assuage our own fear as well." (Klein, 260) Women would nurture and comfort one another through the suffering camps like Auschwitz brought to their lives, give one another emotional support, and encourage each other to keep going. "Having a sister, a cousin, or a friend in the camp with you was sometimes the only thing that gave you the courage to go on." (Bernstein, 243) Women who were alone with no one to care for or receive comfort from in return, gave up, and this led to death from emotional exhaustion. Research supports this claim that death can result from "social isolation and the absence of meaningful contact." (Bordens, 292)

Camp families were also a source of hope for prisoners because "when hope is verbalized in the group interaction it becomes more powerful through suggestion and mutual validation." (Davidson, 133) Birenbaum's memoir testifies to this potency as well when she states hope is "the real value of life and human feeling – their (prisoners) power even in the worst circumstances, in hell." (Birenbaum, vi) They were surrounded by illness and death, treated as slaves. If they couldn't muster enough hope to believe that their situation was only temporary, many would give up and die, and solitary prisoners were more likely to do just that. Gelissen stated: "We are surviving because we have a hope for living, but admitting this hope is insane. In my heart I want to believe I will be free again someday because I don't have the strength to stand up and live without that hope. But death is too immi-

ment; the crematoriums are too oppressive. Hope is only there because we cannot survive without it." (Gelissen, 220)

Camp sisters boosted each others morale and functioned to maintain that hope, motivating the women to continue living when all around them seemed hopeless. In addition, camp families served as "a link that joined the prisoners' lost past to the hope for a future." (Tec, 351)

Human beings have not only a need for affiliation, but a need for intimacy as well. Intimacy is a close relationship characterized by sharing innermost feelings and concerns and exhibiting affectionate behaviors towards one another. Klein speaks of the act of talking about personal worries with friends contributing to a better sense of well-being. The night before Ruth Elias and her newborn daughter were to be sent to the gas chamber, she confided in Maca Steinberg about her plight and started feeling better just by having someone to talk to. Maca devised a plan that saved Elias' life, at the expense of her child, and in the process became Ruth's camp mother. Later, as Elias grieved for her daughter, her camp sister Berta supported her by silently keeping her company. Birenbaum talks of a relationship she developed with a kapo, Alvira, who had a child the same age as Halina at home. Alvira's unexpected but genuine gift of friendship and her spontaneous gestures of affection deeply impacted her. Millu speaks of her tendency to become attached to people who extended her the hand of friendship, and that even in the lager, she continued this trend. These relationships were a source of strength, spiritual and emotional nourishment, as well as affection and love. Klein speaks of love as a weapon and as a "deep well of truth and strength" (Klein, 86) since it could change one's outlook on life from despair to hope in a future. Rena Gelissen tells the story of a group of older women that made it into camp rather than immediately being sent to the gas chambers. She relates "as hard as we (the prisoners) have all become, these women have touched our hearts and made us feel again." (Gelissen, 171) Prisoners would also pass the time telling stories of their past lives, exchanging recipes, and singing songs. These were life-affirming behaviors that provided a link between the past and the future. On rare occasions the women

even made each other laugh which in turn eased their psychic pain and provided a momentary sense of relief.

Human beings thrive on physical contact. Because of this, touch held special meaning for camp sisters, and it is a symbol of all that these relationships represented. Rena Gelissen speaks of how at roll call she would reach out to her sister "and touch her hand, reassuringly. Her fingers touch mine. This is our check-in. Every morning, if it's possible, we send this silent message to each other - I'm okay." (Gelissen, 134) She speaks frequently of squeezing hands whenever possible to comfort the other with their presence, and Birenbaum speaks of leaving Majdanek with Hela hand in hand. In other words, holding hands serves to remind them they are not alone, their greatest fear. To Bernstein, clasped hands were the link between her and her camp sisters. It represented the strength they had collectively, but lacked individually.

Leitner asks if "staying alive not only for yourself, but also because someone else expects you to, double the life force?" (Goldenberg, "Testimony, Narrative, and Nightmare") Often women valued the lives of their camp sisters more than their own, and they felt it necessary to stay alive to guarantee their sisters continued to live. This became their reason for living. Birenbaum's sister-in-law, Hela, told Helina "I am no longer alive. I only live through you, Halina, with your breath." (Birenbaum, 117) When she would have otherwise given up, she continued to struggle on because of Halina. Myrna Goldberg tells of a similar situation that existed between Cecilie Klein and her sister Mina. After Mina learned of the death of their mother and her own newborn child in the gas chambers, she wanted to give up and die, but Cecilie was able to convince her to continue on, one day at a time. "[Mina] held herself out, out of love for [Cecilie's] life, not hers." (Goldenberg, 331) By caring for another, you could bring meaning to your own life and find a purpose to continue on because as Terrence Des Pres notes "the need to help is as basic as the need for help" (Davidson, 125) because when you help others, you end up feeling better about your own situation as well.

Central to the relationships was the responsibility these women felt for the survival of their camp families and how intertwined their own survival was with their sisters. Millu mentions a time when she was ill and depressed. Lying beside Zina in the infirmary, she remembers: I could never quite make up my mind on the eternal question of whether to get passionately involved in life or simply give up and watch from the "sidelines. Still, Zina was younger, and I felt it was my duty to talk sense to her again." (Millu, 120) Millu was on the verge of quitting, but instead, out of a sense of obligation to Zina, she pulled herself together and carried on. Ruth Elias also felt this same accountability for Berta after they had given birth in Auschwitz. Despondent over the death of her own child and about to be transferred to a labor camp, she describes "a need to concentrate on something outside myself," in this case Berta, as instrumental in restoring her will to live. (Elias, 153) Klein considered the life of Ilse, her camp sister, to be "as dear as her own," and therefore would take no risks that involved both of their lives without considering Ilse's wishes. This would seem like a given in any relationship, but under the circumstances, many people acted in their own best interests, and the fact that some could think of another's welfare in addition to their own is no small feat. Even on her death bed, Ilse made Gerda promise to keep trying for another week afraid that without her, Gerda would just give up. Bernstein states she "felt completely responsible for these three young girls [Esther, Ellen, Lily]; to me we were all sisters. I had to do everything in my power to enable us to remain alive." (Bernstein, 210) She felt accountable for all their lives, not just her own. Rena Gelissen also writes of how her survival is contingent on the survival of her sister, and how she "must be with my sister. I know that I must make sure she lives; without her I cannot survive. I do not admit that to myself, but I know she is a part of my truth, my being. We cannot be separated; there is danger in separation." (Gelissen, 99) Her sister, Danka, also realized how interconnected their lives were, and did all she could to help ensure Rena's survival as well.

Many survivors speak of the struggle to remain human in a place that

was specifically designed to strip you of your humanity, but how was that possible? In many cases, it wasn't. Gelissen looked around her at the apathy and selfishness of some of the prisoners and wondered what the Nazis done to them that they should sink so low. She emphasized not lowering yourself to others vile behavior, sharing with your friends, and doing whatever was necessary to keep your mind and spirit intact, even at risk to your body. At one point, she and her sister were assigned to the Canada work detail sorting clothes, relatively easy work physically, but the close proximity to the gas chambers was too much for her to bear. Gellisen's camp family was an integral part of how she managed to maintain her dignity amid impossible surroundings, and Birenbaum agrees keeping your dignity in the midst of chaos was an absolute must. Millu, though, recognized the necessity to look on a fellow prisoner not as "a selfish monster, but a warm, good trusting human being" instead (Millu, 59), and treat her with the empathy and sympathy she deserves as such. In other words, in order to keep your own humanity, you must acknowledge it in others. Ettinger confirms groups "promoted the psychosocial survival of the victims by preserving human awareness and a sense of self despite the dehumanization and amorality," (Davidson, 121) and also helped an individual to "retain part of his personality and self-respect." (Davidson, 124)

The Nazis set out to annihilate European Jewry, intent on destroying their humanity piece by piece before taking their lives. Anything prisoners were able to do to prevent this was an act of resistance, from washing their faces so they looked human to bonding with other prisoners for their emotional, spiritual, and physical well-being because forming relationships is a human thing to do that fulfills human needs. Joining together for mutual support and nurturance was not enough in itself to prevent death by starvation and disease, but it could help provide some of the essential elements necessary for survival including, but not limited to, keeping the will to live alive, alleviating stress, anxiety, and fear, providing spiritual comfort, satisfying human needs for affiliation, intimacy, and affection, providing physical care, engendering a sense of responsibility for each other's well being, fostering



hope, and keeping them in touch with their intrinsic humaneness.

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## From the Feminist's Corner

**Taking Root: Narratives of Jewish Women in Latin America edited by Marjorie Agosin. Ohio University Press, Ohio University: Research in International Studies, Latin America Series No. 38, 2002.**

by Sarah Barbara Watstein

The immense diversity of Latin American Jewish experience is captured in stories and essays, visions and narratives from Jewish women from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Columbia, Cuba, El Salvador, Mexico, Peru and other countries. Themes of exile, loss, death, and travel crisscross through the various stories and essays. Emigration and immigration are front and center, and throughout there is a profusion of cultures, languages and colors. Agosin has brought together a line-up of distinguished and multitalented contributors; their "meditations" form a rich tapestry. In her Introduction, Agosin writes - - "I believed that each of these women had an important story to tell, ancient and new wisdoms that would shed light on a diasporic existence that is not exclusive to Jewish experience." Readers who seek to explore the many faces and facets of Jewish women and immigration, those who are drawn to probe the connection between the Jewish people's emigration and the topic of the diasporic condition, as well as those who seek to better understand Latin American history and culture, will not be disappointed by this collection. In fact, I suspect these readers will eagerly recommend purchase to their friends.

*Inge: A Girl's Journey through Nazi Europe by Inge Joseph Bleier and David E. Gumpert. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.*

In early 1939, after Kristallnacht, young Inge Joseph's family in Germany is broken apart, and her desperate mother sends her alone to Brussels to live with wealthy relatives. She soon finds herself one of a hundred Jewish children fleeing for their lives following Hitler's invasions of Belgium and France. This is a dramatic story of Christian

rescue of Jewish children during the Holocaust. It is also a totally frank account of the life and feelings of a teenage girl struggling to survive through her life and on into the lives of her descendents. Many readers may be familiar with the Kindertransport - - the 10,000 Jewish children who were sent to England to live with foster families. However, readers may be less familiar with the several hundred Jewish children from Germany and Austria who were sent to Belgium and other continental European countries instead of to England. These children did not have foster families, because they had to flee for their lives when Hitler invaded their countries. Inge was among a group of 100 such children who escaped from Belgium to southern France, where they lived in a goat barn, then a beautiful chateau. Eventually they were arrested and sent to a French concentration camp, at which point Inge embarked on a series of escapes that would haunt her for the rest of her life. Entering Inge's world is painful - - there is no easy way out. And yet, here is a reaffirmation in the strength of the human spirit under the most trying conditions. Gumpert, a nephew of Inge, deserves high praise for telling and preserving his aunt's story. We are all the richer for the telling.

*The Committed Marriage: A Guide to Finding a Soulmate and Building a Relationship Through Timeless Biblical Wisdom by Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis. San Francisco: HarperCollins*

Jungreis shows how relationships can be built and sustained on a foundation of faith. With a solutions focus, she examines common marital problems, and offers practical, optimistic advice on a variety of topics - - becoming a desirable mate, how to find a mate, grow together and grow apart, communicate without hurting, grow old together in dignity. Torah study has penetrated Jungreis' mind and heart, and it is to Torah that she returns, time and again, in this work. She believes that Torah wisdom can protect those who are married from failure in marriage, and that it can inspire individuals to relate with chesed, compassion and sensitivity to their mates. And, "most significant, Torah study teaches you how your marriage can become the most awesome experience through which you can realize your potential as a

man or woman and impart a legacy to future generations.” For readers who share these views, or those who are curious about them - - and open to her convictions and values, *The Committed Marriage* will prove to be a worthwhile “read.” While I share Jungreis’ belief that marriage is an opportunity to grow in kindness, wisdom and love, I found this guide to be intrinsically frustrating - - all Jungreis’ stories convey success, which is hardly representative in contemporary America. Positive outcomes are not always possible for each and every marital problem. Additionally, Jungreis’ focus is on the heterosexual lifestyle. Her way of thinking is inherently heterosexual. I suggest that this lifestyle is less homogenous than she would suggest, and, moreover, that the life-transforming experience that is Torah study has much to say, also, to gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender Jews who may also be looking to find a soul mate and build a relationship. *The Committed Life* would have been stronger if Jungreis had challenged herself to venture beyond the traditional, to explore the diversity that increasingly characterizes our culture.

*Jewish Girls Coming of Age in America, 1860-1920* by Melissa R. Klapper. New York University Press

Klapper skillfully recreates the American Jewish lives many girls led during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The analysis of previously untapped archival material makes the book notable. Popular periodicals, personal papers - - published and unpublished autobiographies and memoirs, and diaries, allow for a detailed collective portrait of adolescent Jewish girls in America between 1860 and 1920. Klapper focuses on Jewish girls and the problem of education in turn-of-the-century America. She turns her attention also to the religious education of Jewish girls, and to adolescent Jewish girls and American youth culture. Throughout, modernization and tradition continuously encounter one another. For readers interested in the encounter between Jewishness and Americanness, this is rich reading. Klapper’s bibliography is testament to the quality of her scholarship, and serves as a jumping off point for readers seeking to pursue published primary or secondary sources which influenced the author. For this reader,

Klapper's treatment of the phenomenon of acculturation was particularly fascinating. What does it mean to be both Jewish and American - - then, as well as now? What social prejudices, cultural influences, and economic opportunities impacted these dual identities? Klapper is clearly drawn to these questions.

*Storm of Terror: A Hebron Mother's Diary by June Leavitt. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee*

The 1993 Arab-Israeli conflict is at the heart of this personal narrative which is dedicated in memory of all the victims of terrorism and their families. Often in life, we are unaware of the deep forces, within and without, that would soon change the surface of all things. Leavitt, an ex-American, raising five children in Hebron, miles from the West Bank of Israel, explores these forces and what it is like to live side-by-side with terrorism. This is at once a book about life in the home, and also about faults and calamities, about trying to make a living, to raise a family, while under enemy fire. It is a book about the search for meaning and form in chaos. It is also a book about healing, about doing the spiritual work of transformation which cannot be done under prolonged stress. Reading this book, I was inspired. Israel and Jerusalem are indeed burrowed into my consciousness, and it is possible to revive our connection to earth. Leavitt shows us that while Israel is indeed a difficult country to live in, there are lulls in the terror - - there is calm, energy and love do make all things possible in this world, and our journeys do ultimately have meaning.

*Peace in the House: Tales from a Yiddish Kitchen by Faye Moskowitz. Boston: Godine*

Thirteen delightful tales make up this slight collection, which is anything but slight. This series of stories of Moskowitz' parents, their extended families, their neighbors and landsleit, and finally of her own coming of age in America, is a "keeper." Sit back and listen - - absorb what it means to grow up female, Jewish and smart in America. Taking place in 1940s all the way through the 1990s, each of these stories is

pitch perfect. Take this slim volume in hand and rediscover the beauty of writing, the beauty of storytelling. This is pleasurable writing, and memorable writing, at its best.

*A Letter to Harvey Milk by Leslea Newman. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press*

Between these covers are nine stories about what it means to be a Jew in the twentieth century. A Jewish lesbian, Newman is a gifted writer who is not afraid to confront both Jewish and lesbian concerns. Nor is she afraid to confront both timely and eternal issues. Indulge yourself with a mug of coffee or tea, settle in to your favorite armchair, and ease into these stories. You'll soon understand why the University of Wisconsin Press decided to reprint this collection. The new Preface provides insight into our times, and nicely frames the collection. The time you spend with these stories will pass quickly, and leave you wanting more.

*Going South: Jewish Women in the Civil Rights Movement by Debra Schultz. New York University Press*

This book is an oral history, reflecting on the experiences of fifteen Jewish women who went south for civil rights, working primarily with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, a southern civil rights group led by young Black organizers. Who are these women? What do they have in common? What does it mean to be a boundary-crossing, northern Jewish woman in the 1960s? To be a boundary-crossing northern Jewish woman with the opportunity, means and will to put their bodies on the line to challenge the entrenched system of southern racism in the 1960s? Schultz succeeds in getting a sense of these women in their movement context. The grandchild of Russian Jewish immigrants who fled persecution and found security in America, she succeeds in contributing to ongoing efforts of memory and action by making visible an antiracist Jewish women's tradition. Much has been written about Blacks and Jews in the Civil Rights movement, less so about Jewish women in the movement. What about the interweaving

of religion, gender and politics? Religion, gender, sexual politics and reactionary populism? What about it indeed! Oral and public history has rarely been better.

*Princess or Prisoner: Jewish Women in Jerusalem, 1840 – 1914* by Margalit Shilo. Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press

Shilo's research focuses on the lives of women in the Jewish community of Jerusalem, and specifically on the female experience of immigration; marriage as a female experience; women at home; women in the public sphere; scholarship, illiteracy and educational revolution; and finally on poverty, widowhood, husband desertion, prostitution, and missionary efforts. Exposed here is the world of women in the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community of Jerusalem toward the end of Ottoman rule in the Holy Land. How does society impose gender roles? How does a traditional culture contend with modernization? How do women serve as both catalyst and barometer of social, cultural and economic change? These are fascinating questions, and Shilo does them justice in this comprehensive work. Nearly 100 pages of notes and references complete this text; here is historical writing at its best. Bravo.

*Sarah Barbara Watstein is Associate University Librarian for Research and Instrumental Services at the University of California, Los Angeles.*



## Modern History and Modern Letters

### **The New Tradition: Essays on Modern Hebrew Literature by Gershon Shaked, Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press**

A Review essay by Daniel Grossberg

The 17 essays in this work by Gershon Shaked, Professor Emeritus of Hebrew Literature at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, open with major contributions to the definition of the “new tradition” in Hebrew literature that evolved in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. That tradition, Shaked explains, is a “modern Hebraic secular cultural tradition,” characterized by “both the secularization of religious values and the sacralization of a revived Jewish nationalism.” Shaked notes that “however secular that new canon may seem, the culture it describes is engaged in a constant intertextual dialogue with the Jewish heritage.”

The author’s studies are penetrating and his analyses of the creation of the new canon are lucid and compelling. He identifies, for example, the preferences of different ideological groups in nineteenth and twentieth-century Jewish history to identify with specific biblical books and personalities. “The choice of a particular subsection of the canon for poetry and reinterpretation transform the subsection into a dominant one, in this way the subsection derives its legitimacy from the very canon of which it is a minor part.” Thus, a new canon, an anti-canon comes about and a new tradition evolves. Our literary analyst points to Shaul Tchernichovsky’s “Canaanite Poems,” as an example of the poet’s choice of a pre-monotheistic Canaanite world and a tragic, anti-prophetic, combative historical figure such as Saul as “a clear expression of his search for an appropriate (sub-canonical) selection that would support his outlook within the canon itself... Here, conquest and slaughter are viewed as positive values, while Isaiah’s vision ‘Nation shall not lift up sword against nation. Neither shall they learn war any more’ is moved to the margins....”

The volume is a fine record of modern cultural history and as such treats all major aspects of Jewish history of the last two centuries that have left an imprint on Hebrew letters. The effects and affects of persecution, destruction and the Holocaust are patent on the literary imagination of the Hebrew writers and these too are ably traced among the essays.

Shaked is no less adept at incisive analyses of individual works and their styles than dealing with general literary trends. Shaked writes of the poetry of Yehuda Amichai, what is true of Natan Zach also. “[He] challenged the poetic conventions and thematics of his times: he lowered the stylistic register of literary Hebrew and transformed the pathetic, exalted poetic idiom of the pre-state years into a sober, sensitive, accessible language. Style and content unite in his poetry to reflect the change in the national atmosphere from the euphoria of the founding years to the down-to-earth realities of the 1950s and 1960s...He mourned the decline and fall of the founding fathers’ idealism.”

The literary scholarship displayed in this work of criticism is dazzling. Shaked brings to bear on his investigations of Hebrew works the content, themes, and styles of scores of writers of world literature. In his study of Mendele Mokher Seforim alone, he makes masterful juxtapositions to Gogol and Saltykov-Schedrin’s Russian social satire; Richardson’s sentimental novel *Pamela*; Fielding’s picaresque novel *Tom Jones* and Dickens’ examples of the Bildungsroman *David Copperfield* and *Oliver Twist*. This is his practice throughout the book and no citation is gratuitous; each adds a significant nuance or dimension. In discussing Shmuel Yosef Agnon, Shaked begins with a comparative study of the Hebrew Nobel laureate and his contemporary and “spiritual sibling” Franz Kafka. Shaked’s brilliant mind does not stop there. He then examines the influence of the Scandinavian literary impressionists on the Hebrew prose artist.

The final three chapters of *The New Tradition* deal with individual writers who arose in vastly different venues and represented markedly

different outlooks: Joseph Hayyim Brenner, born in Russia, drafted into the Russian army, deserted after a year, traveled to Germany and then to London before immigrating to Palestine; Yitzhak Shami, born in Turkish Palestine, taught in Damascus and Hebron among Arabs; and David Vogel, born in Germany, lived most his life in Vienna and Paris. Brenner conveys the “uprooted” experience of the European Jew in Palestine. Shami treats the Arab-Jewish experience in the Palestinian and Syrian communities and Vogel writes in Hebrew outside the mainstream of Israeli literature - more in the German-Jewish literary tradition. Shaked subjects the work of each to an incisive literary analysis.

Shaked’s breadth of knowledge and reading not only elucidates the writing he discusses. It spreads a broad backdrop for the understanding of modern Jewish history and Hebrew culture and literature, as well.

*Dr. Daniel Grossberg recently retired from the University at Albany where he held a joint appointment to the Judaic Studies Department and the Religious Studies Program, and served as the Director of the Hebrew Program. His numerous publications are in Biblical studies with a specialty in biblical poetry and in modern Hebrew literature. Grossberg was also visiting Scholar at the Oxford Center for Post-graduate Hebrew Studies in England.*

## The Roots of Anti-Semitism

### **A Concise History of American Antisemitism, by Robert Michael, Baltimore: Rowman and Littlefield**

A Review essay by Steven F. Windmueller, Ph.D.

The thesis of Robert Michael's *A Concise History of American Antisemitism* is that Christianity serves as the basis for modern anti-Semitism and that this concept has not been fully explored or understood by those examining patterns of anti-Semitic behavior within this nation. Further, it is the author's contention that anti-Semitism is at the core of the American historical experience, a perspective that this reviewer would strongly challenge. Because it is "a concise" review of the field of anti-Semitism, there is little opportunity to fully examine some of Michael's findings and conclusions, reflecting another weakness to this volume.

Throughout this volume Michael introduces sweeping judgments, as with his reference to the colonial period, where he offers his readers the following assessment: "...most (italics inserted) Americans seemed to hold the belief that Jews were cast out of the economy of salvation because Jews rejected and crucified Christ and continued to do so in every generation." Later he offers this analysis: "Even when, in a minority of instances, (italics inserted) Jews were well treated, they were often not seen as real people, but instead as a stereotyped bundle of positive traits." Michaels builds his entire argument around this core theme, namely that "anti-Jewish ideology embodied within Christian religious perspective provided the fundamental basis of American anti-Semitism". The singular emphasis on Christian anti-Semitism as the basis of the politics of hate in this society would seem problematic at best. No doubt, Christianity is an important contributor to the development of anti-Semitism, but in the view of this historian it is the central theme, defining the individual and collective behavior of Americans toward Jews and Judaism.

For this reviewer, Chapter Four, "A People Whose Feet Run to Evil': American Antisemitism from the Civil War through World War 1" reflects the overriding problem of this text. In this sixty-year overview, Michael attempts to introduce such themes as "America as a Christian nation", a crisp review of the literary scene during this era, and an introduction on the impact of Jewish immigration on the American consciousness. Michael does a disservice to his readership as he seeks to encapsulate a significant period of American history within some thirty pages of text and commentary, never offering an adequate defense for his primary argument related to the impact of Christianity or acknowledging the other core factors central to the presence of anti-Semitism in American culture.

Throughout his review, Michael seeks only to concentrate his work on the specific linkages of different modalities of anti-Semitism to its Christian origins. For example, in his weakest chapter, his focus on the post Second World War period, Chapter Seven, the author introduces primarily only one key element, black-Jewish relations in defense of his position. Here again, the emphasis for Michael is to exclusively align this area of social conflict to the Christian roots of black anti-Semitism. There is no attention given to the rise of the political left, to the impact of radical Islam, or to any of the other possible social and political factors that have contributed to and continue to contemporary anti-Jewish thought. Nowhere does Michael offer any commentary on anti-Zionism or other off-shoots of modern anti-Semitism.

Fundamentally, this volume represents at best a narrow view of this complex topic. This book unfortunately misses the mark in effectively capturing this important subject by seeking a single explanation to justify this significant subject. It may well not be possible to construct "a concise" review of the causes of anti-Semitism. For sure, this effort falls far short of that mission.

*Steven F. Windmueller is Dean and Adjunct Professor of Jewish Communal Service at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Los Angeles.*

## Noteworthy books

*The Other War: Israelis, Palestinians and the Struggle for Media Supremacy* by Stephanie Guttman. San Francisco: Encounter Books.

*Living through Pain: Psalms and the Search for Wholeness* by Kristin M. Swenson. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press.

*Israeli Women's Studies: A Reader*, edited by Esther Fuchs. Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

*The Myth of Hitler's Pope: How Pope Pius XII Rescued Jews from the Nazis* by Rabbi David G. Dalin. Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, Inc.

*Criminal Case 40/61, The Trial of Adolf Eichmann: An Eyewitness Account* by Harry Mulisch. Philadelphia: University Pennsylvania Press.

*Exile & Return: Predicaments of Palestinians & Jews*, edited by Ann M. Lesch & Ian S. Lustick. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

*Biblical Interpretation and Middle East Policy: The Promised Land, America, and Israel, 1917-2002* by Irvine H. Anderson. Tallahassee: University Press of Florida.

*The Judaic Other In Dante, the Gawain Poet, and Chaucer* by Catherine S. Cox. Tallahassee: University Press of Florida.

*Talking with Christians: Musings of a Jewish Theologian* by David Novak. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

*The Tree of Life: A Trilogy of Life in the Lodz Ghetto (Book Two: From the Depths I Call You, 1940-1942)* by Chava Rosenfarb. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.

*Bodies and Souls: The Tragic Plight of Three Jewish Women Forced into Prostitution in the Americas* by Isabel Vincent. New York: William Morrow.

*Voices of the Diaspora: Jewish Women Writing in Contemporary Europe*, edited by Thomas Nolden and Frances Malino. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

*Tattoo for a Slave* by Hortense Calisher. New York: Harcourt Inc.

*God's Mountain: The Temple Mount in Time, Place, and Memory* by Yaron Z. Eliav. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

*Unchosen: The Hidden Lives of Hasidic Rebels* by Hella Winston. Boston: Beacon Press.

*The Culture of the Babylonian Talmud* by Jeffrey L. Rubenstein. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

*The Warriors: My Life as a Jewish Soviet Partisan* by Harold Zissman. Syracuse University Press.

*The "Bergson Boys" and the Origins of Contemporary Zionist Militancy* by Judith Tydor Baumel. Syracuse University Press.

*The Rise of Modern Yiddish Culture* by David E. Fishman. University of Pittsburgh Press.

*A Concise History of American Anti-Semitism* by Robert Michael. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group.

*Israeli Folk Narratives: Settlement, Immigration, Ethnicity* by Haya Bar-Itzhak. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press.

*Judaism's Encounter with Sports* by Jeffrey S. Gurock. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

*The Jews of Bohemia & Moravia: Facing the Holocaust* by Livia Rothkirchen. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

*Jewish Writing and the Deep Places of the Imagination* by Mark Krupnick. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

*The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age* by Daniel Levy and Natan

Sznaider. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

*The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures* by Michael D. Coogan. New York: Oxford University Press.

*Pilgrimage and the Jews* by David M. Gitlitz and Linda Kay Davidson. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.

*Moriz Rosenthal in Word and Music: A Legacy of the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Mark Mitchell and Allan Evans. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

*Terrible Fate: Ethnic Cleansing in the Making of Modern Europe* by Benjamin Lieberman. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, Publisher.

*Being Jewish in the New Germany* by Jeffrey M. Peck. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

*How to Cure a Fanatic* by Amos Oz. Princeton University Press.

*The Rabbi's Wife: The Rebbetzin in American Jewish Life* by Shuly Rubin Schwartz. New York University Press.

*Orientalism and the Hebrew Imagination* by Yaron Peleg. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

*Egyptian Jewry: A Guide to Egyptian Jewry in the Mid-Twentieth Century* by Victor D. Sanua. Brooklyn, NY: International Association of Jews from Egypt.

*In Every Tongue: The Racial & Ethnic Diversity of the Jewish People* by Diane Tobin, Gary A. Tobin, & Scott Rubin. San Francisco: Institute for Jewish & Community Research.

*Fire in the Ashes: God, Evil, and the Holocaust*, edited by David Patterson and John K. Roth. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

*Modigliani* by Jeffrey Meyers. New York: Harcourt, Inc.



*Telling the Little Secrets: American Jewish Writing since the 1980s.*  
Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.

*The Talmud's Theological Language Game: A Philosophical Discourse Analysis* by Eugene B. Borowitz. Albany: State University of New York Press.

*Being for Myself Alone: Origins of Jewish Autobiography* by Marcus Moseley. Stanford University Press.

*Diamond Stories: Enduring Change on 47th Street* by Renee Rose Sheield. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

*Abraham: The First Historical Biography* by David Rosenberg. New York: Basic Books.

*Barney Ross* by Douglas Century. New York: Schocken Books

