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VCU Menorah Review

*For the Enrichment of Jewish Thought*

Winter/Spring 2013 no. 78

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## After the Shoah: Blackmail, Vengeance, and the Death of the Future

A review essay by Cliff Edwards

***Disenchantment: George Steiner and the Meaning of Western Civilization after Auschwitz* by Catherine Chatterley. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press**

Catherine Chatterley is founding director of the Canadian Institute for the Study of Antisemitism, and teaches courses in modern European and Jewish history at the University of Manitoba. Her compact volume on George Steiner, the literary critic, philosopher of language, and novelist whose family escaped from Europe to France and then America as Nazi power threatened, is an engaging model of philosophic-humanistic biography. She balances carefully selected, and often provocative, quotations from the works of her subject, George Steiner, with her own illuminating commentary on the unfolding significance of his original thought on critical issues of the Shoah, the destruction of Middle-European Jewry, the nexus of humanism and barbarism in our time, and the relationship of Judaism and Christianity, language and criticism, transcendence and messianism.

Chatterley's task is a huge and complicated one, and could easily become a confusing and frustrating journey for the reader. In my view, Chatterley has so mastered the primary sources, including Steiner's essays, lectures, studies, critical reviews, and novels from the 1950's to the present, that illumination and excitement will mark the reader's experience, and appreciation of Steiner's original thought will lead many to search the web and library for Steiner's novel on Adolph Hitler (*The Portage to San Cristobal of A.H.*, 1981), *Real Presences* (1989), *Grammars of Creation* (2001), *My Unwritten Books* (2008), or his critical essays on Paul Celan, Kafka, Levinas, Heidegger, Hannah Arendt, Leo Strauss, and dozens of other writers and philosophers who have fashioned our world.

It is Steiner's early faith inculcated by his father that the humanities have the power to humanize, that was destroyed by the Holocaust and has become the personal crisis fueling his search for answers to the human dilemma. As Chatterley explains:

"One image in particular, which reflects this collusion of humanism and barbarism, obsesses Steiner: the polished Nazi officer who operates a death camp during the day and in the evening reads Rilke and listens to Beethoven. There is no question that this image of the cultured Nazi death camp commandant forces the allegedly opposed worlds of culture and barbarism together in a shockingly unexpected manner. Clearly the Holocaust violates cherished European assumptions about the humanistic nature of Western culture, the importance of "good breeding," and the progressive and humanizing tendencies of education." (page 3)

That the advanced culture of Europe, embraced by most Jews of the region, could reveal itself to be riddled with hatred for Jews in the twentieth century, and against all rational thought seek to annihilate those of its own members whose only crime was "existence," is the horrifying conundrum at the center of Steiner's puzzlement and life-work.

Steiner has not claimed to have solved that crucial riddle. He admits his own sense of guilt at having escaped the Shoah due to his father's foresight and connections that made possible a youth of study and relative ease in New York. He has come to the view that scholars and critics concerned with the humanities cannot avoid the questions raised by the destruction of middle-European Jewry without their work being reduced to "academic trivia," and he has dedicated his own most engaged thought to clarifying the issues involved. His attempts at answers have led him to note the special vulnerability of academics (as in the case of Heidegger and others) in failing to witness through humane acts of hospitality to those threatened in times of political crisis, and he is well aware of contemporary situations that share the horrors of pogroms of the past. Further, he has plumbed the depths

of Judaism's own inner nature to find some answer to the "hatred of Jews." His suggestion is that Judaism's creation of an authoritative God who insists upon the human struggle for a "moral" life might have struck Western humanity as a "blackmail of transcendence" that stirs up deep animosities. Later, according to Chatterley, Steiner added to this "explanation" for the Shoah "a symbolic symmetry with the Jewish rejection of Jesus" that led to the death of "messianism" and Christianity's turn toward an "enactment of Christian vengeance." She writes:

"So, then, for Steiner, the origins of the Shoah lie deep within the religious imagination of Western culture, in which the Jews are responsible for both the creation and destruction of God." (128)

But Steiner is not without hope, in spite of the horror of the Shoah and the retreat of Western culture from religion over the past three centuries. Further, as a scholar of the world's rich heritage of languages, Steiner sees "the future tense" itself as a promise that there is a healing way forward for humans, the language-animal. "Hope" and its incarnation in language, in fact, is in itself a force to be reckoned with. Chatterley writes that Steiner believes "it is still possible to look toward the human future with hope for its redemption without a formal belief in God," and that, as Steiner writes, "the two validating wonders of human existence are love and the invention of the future tense. Their conjunction, if it will ever come to pass, is the Messianic." (128)

As an afterword, allow me to note that Chatterley's judicious use of quotations from the huge store of Steiner's writings led me to gather several of Steiner's works and seek to further discover the amazing scholar of languages and cultures at the heart of her book. Her ability to organize and explicate Steiner's complex and developing thought over a half-century and more became all the more daunting. My reading in Steiner himself, encouraged by her study, uncovered further fascinating layers to Steiner's life and work, and I would encourage others to try their hand at Steiner's *Real Presences* (1989) or *Grammars of Creation* (2001). If one wishes to experience the "singularity" that is Steiner himself, I would suggest the autobiographical collection of

chapters he titled *Errata: An Examined Life* (1997). There I discovered more clearly than elsewhere the individuality of the scholar and human being, the mix of sometimes self-indulgent novelist and story-teller, whose chief resource is his own appetite for living, sometimes lover of culture who flies trial kites before the scholarly world hoping they will become targets for others, will provoke a good argument, and just possibly might provide some illumination for confused and despairing human beings.

*Cliff Edwards is a professor of religious studies at Virginia Commonwealth University and editorial consultant of Menorah Review.*

## Assessing Jewish Worship In the United States

A review essay by Steven Windmueller

### ***The Synagogue in America: A Short History* by Marc Lee Raphael. New York University Press**

Marc Lee Raphael is one of America's premier Jewish historians. *The Synagogue in America: a Short History* represents his latest contribution to a body of work that includes his *Columbia History of the Jews* and *American Judaism*. As another reviewer of this volume has concluded, "...Raphael has provided his readers with intriguing vistas and insights into the contours of Jewish religious life"

Professor Raphael manages, in this two hundred page volume, to incorporate core information on the development and growth of the American synagogue, a rich presentation on the emergence of the denominational movements, an introduction to key rituals and practices that would symbolize the blending of the Jewish story with the American experience. Dr. Raphael employs the use of synagogue records of some 125 congregations as a critical source in describing Jewish religious life in this nation from the colonial period until the contemporary era.

Of special value in this text is the amount of attention the author pays to certain specific themes. Among the more impressive topics involve the relationship of the synagogue world to Israel, the changing dimensions of prayer and liturgy over time, key tensions among synagogue leaders at various settings and times over *minhag* and matters of decorum, and the impact of the Great Depression on Jewish communities and their congregations.

Another engaging feature of this historical survey was the specific attention given to synagogue architectural styles that would reflect distinctive periods of the American Jewish story. Associated with Dr. Raphael's attention to the physical character of congregations would be his focus over the debates associated with synagogue seating patterns



at different stages of the community's development.

In such an overview, clearly key elements would need to be sacrificed and certain emerging trends left to others to introduce. For example, Raphael provides limited coverage to the impact of the ideological platforms associated with the movements of American Judaism, the core ideas that would shape and define Jewish religious thought and practice. The more recent developments taking place related to experimental *minyanim* and alternative seminaries are surprisingly absent. Within the world of American Orthodoxy, the impact of Rabbi Avi Weiss and his Yeshivat Chovevei Torah represents one of those missing elements, as does any reference to the significant growth and influence of Chabad Lubavitch.

Dr. Raphael is able, in the course of his writing, to offer instructive insights into the roles played by rabbinic leaders in different settings and the impact of major changes to the world of the American synagogue, including the impact of immigration patterns, post-Second World War suburbanization and the emergence in the 1960s and beyond of experimentation with ritual and religious practice.

While I am thrilled with the presence of such a volume for the richness of its information and its distinctive value as a resource, the voice of Marc Raphael would have been beneficial in helping to articulate what he may observe as the core trends and challenges that have defined the religious experience of Jews in America. As one who teaches the American Jewish experience and has previously drawn on Professor Raphael's writings, this will be a welcomed addition to my students' reading list.

*Steven Windmueller is the Rabbi Alfred Gottschalk Emeritus Professor of Jewish Communal Service at the Los Angeles campus of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.*

## Books in Brief: New and Notable

### ***The Aleppo Codex: A True Story of Obsession, Faith, and the Pursuit of an Ancient Bible* by Matti Friedman**

Chapel Hill, N.C.: Algonquin Books

In an age when physical books matter less and less, here is a thrilling story about a book that meant everything. This true-life detective story unveils the journey of a sacred text the tenth-century annotated bible known as the Aleppo Codex from its hiding place in a Syrian synagogue to the newly founded state of Israel. Based on Matti Friedman's independent research, documents kept secret for fifty years and personal interviews with key players, the book proposes a new theory of what happened when the codex left Aleppo, Syria, in the late 1940s and eventually surfaced in Jerusalem, mysteriously incomplete.

The codex provides vital keys to reading biblical texts. By recounting its history, Friedman explores the once vibrant Jewish communities in Islamic lands and follows the thread into the present, uncovering difficult truths about how the manuscript was taken to Israel and how its most important pages went missing. Along the way, he raises critical questions about who owns historical treasures and the role of myth and legend in the creation of a nation.

### ***In God's Shadow: Politics in the Hebrew Bible* by Michael Walzer**

New Haven: Yale University Press

Political theorist Michael Walzer reports his findings after decades of thinking about the politics of the Hebrew Bible. Attentive to nuance while engagingly straightforward, Walzer examines the laws, the histories, the prophecies and the wisdom of the ancient biblical writers and discusses their views on such central political questions as justice, hierarchy, war, the authority of kings and priests and the experience of exile. Because there are many biblical writers with differing views,

pluralism is a central feature of biblical politics. Yet pluralism, Walzer observes, is never explicitly defended in the Bible; indeed, it couldn't be defended since God's word had to be as singular as God himself. Yet different political regimes are described in the biblical texts, and there are conflicting political arguments and also a recurrent anti-political argument: if you have faith in God, you have no need for strong institutions, prudent leaders or reformist policies. At the same time, however, in the books of law and prophecy, the people of Israel are called upon to overcome oppression and "let justice well up like water, righteousness like an unfailing stream."

***Sephardism: Spanish Jewish History and the Modern Literary Imagination* edited by Yael Halevi-Wise**

Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press

In this book, Sephardism is defined not as an expression of Sephardic identity but as a politicized literary metaphor. Since the nineteenth century, this metaphor has occurred with extraordinary frequency in works by authors from a variety of ethnicities, religions, and nationalities in Europe, the Americas, North Africa, Israel and even India.

Why have Gentile and Jewish writers and cultural figures chosen to draw upon the medieval Sephardic experience to express their concerns about dissidents and minorities in modern nations? To what extent does their use of Sephardism overlap with other politicized discourses such as orientalism, hispanism, and medievalism, which also emerged from a clash between authoritarian, progressive and romantic ideologies? This book brings a new approach to Sephardic studies by situating it at a crossroads between Jewish studies and Hispanic studies in ways that enhance our appreciation of how historical fiction and political history have shaped, and were shaped by, historical attitudes toward Jews and their representation.

***Sanctuary in the Wilderness: A Critical Introduction to American Hebrew Poetry* by Alan Mintz**

Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press

The effort to create a serious Hebrew literature in the United States in the years around World War I is one of the best kept secrets of American Jewish history. Hebrew had been revived as a modern literary language in nineteenth-century Russia and then taken to Palestine as part of the Zionist revolution. But the overwhelming majority of Jewish emigrants from Eastern Europe settled in America, and a passionate kernel among them believed that Hebrew provided the vehicle for modernizing the Jewish people while maintaining their connection to Zion. These American Hebraists created schools, journals, newspapers, and, most of all, a high literary culture focused on producing poetry. *Sanctuary in the Wilderness* is a critical introduction to American Hebrew poetry, focusing on a dozen key poets. This secular poetry began with a preoccupation with the situation of the individual in a disenchanting world and then moved outward to engage American vistas and Jewish fate and hope in midcentury. American Hebrew poets hoped to be read in both Palestine and America, but were disappointed on both scores. Several moved to Israel and connected with the vital literary scene there, but most stayed and persisted in the cause of American Hebraism.

***A Jewish Voice from Ottoman Salonica: The Ladino Memoir of Sa'adi besalel a-Levi*, edited by Aron Rodrigue and Sarah Abrevaya Stein**

Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.

This book presents, for the first time, the complete text of the earliest known Ladino-language memoir, transliterated from the original script, translated into English, and introduced and explicated by the editors. The memoirist, Sa'adi Besalel a-Levi (1820-1903), wrote about Ottoman Jews' daily life at a time when the long-ascendant fabric of Ottoman society was just beginning to unravel. His vivid portrayal of life in Salonica, a major port in the Ottoman Levant with a majority-Jewish population, thus provides a unique window into a way of life before it

disappeared as a result of profound political and social changes and the World Wars. Sa'adi was himself a prominent journalist and publisher, one of the most significant creators of modern Sephardic print culture. He was also a rebel, accusing the Jewish leadership of Salonica of being corrupt, abusive, and fanatical; that leadership, in turn, excommunicated him from the Jewish community. The experience of excommunication pervades Sa'adi's memoir, which documents a world that its author was himself actively involved in changing.

***Pledges of Jewish Allegiance* by David Ellenson and Daniel Gordis**

Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press

Since the late 1700s, when the Jewish community ceased to be a semiautonomous political unit in Western Europe and the United States and individual Jews became integrated culturally, socially, and politically into broader society, questions surrounding Jewish status and identity have occupied a prominent and contentious place in Jewish legal discourse. This book examines a wide array of legal opinions written by nineteenth- and twentieth-century orthodox rabbis in Europe, the United States and Israel. It argues that these rabbis' divergent positions based on the same legal precedents demonstrate that they were doing more than delivering legal opinions. Instead, they were crafting public policy for Jewish society in response to Jews' social and political interactions as equals with the non-Jewish persons in whose midst they dwelled.

*Pledges of Jewish Allegiance* prefaces its analysis of modern opinions with a discussion of the classical Jewish sources upon which they draw.

***The Oslo Idea: The Euphoria of Failure* by Raphael Israeli**

New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers

The idea of peace is always enchanting, for it encompasses the tranquility and serenity for which every human yearns. The nation of Israel has never known peace, but it dreams of peace. In practice, Israel

navigates between the poles of war and peace, with endless middle-of-the-road situations like cease-fire, truce, armistice and other temporary cessations of hostilities.

*The Oslo Idea* traces the roots of the current campaign to delegitimize Israel. The campaign is not linked to Israeli resistance, to the absence of an acceptable settlement between Israel and the Palestinians or to Israel's reluctance to abandon territory. It results from a change of tactics by the Palestinian leadership. Israeli argues that these tactics have been used to exhaust, reduce and replace Israel rather than produce a compromise. Half the Palestinian people and other uncompromising Arabs and Muslims have stated that goal openly and act to achieve it.

Israeli deconstructs the immense illusion of the Oslo peace accords, which initiated the so-called "peace process." He shows how Oslo lured a naive Israeli leadership into a trap. He shows how outside factors, bent on finding and supporting an evasive peace, have helped perpetuate the fiasco Oslo represents. He shows how Oslo's supporters have advanced the "peace process" by coaxing and threatening Israel behind the scenes, and binding Israel alone with the Oslo commitments and their derivatives. More importantly, the author outlines and analyzes the basic and seemingly unbridgeable points of contention that remain: security, refugees, settlements, water, borders and the status of Jerusalem itself.

***The Night of Broken Glass: Eyewitness Accounts of Kristallnacht*, edited by Uta Gerhardt and Thomas Karlauf**

Polity Press: Bristol, United Kingdom

November 9, 1938 is widely seen as a violent turning point in Nazi Germany's assault on the Jews. An estimated 400 Jews lost their lives in the anti-Semitic pogrom and more than 30,000 were imprisoned or sent to concentration camps, where many were brutally mistreated. Thousands more fled their homelands in Germany and Austria, shocked by what they had seen, heard and experienced. What they

took with them was not only the pain of saying farewell but also the memory of terrible scenes: attacks by mobs of drunken Nazis, public humiliations, burning synagogues, inhuman conditions in overcrowded prison cells and concentration camp barracks. The reactions of neighbours and passersby to these barbarities ranged from sympathy and aid to scorn, mockery, and abuse.

In 1939 the Harvard sociologist Edward Hartshorne gathered eyewitness accounts of the Kristallnacht from hundreds of Jews who had fled, but Hartshorne joined the Secret Service shortly afterwards and the accounts he gathered were forgotten until now. These eyewitness testimonies published here for the first time, with a foreword by Saul Friedlander, the Pulitzer Prize historian and Holocaust survivor paint a harrowing picture of everyday violence in one of Europe's darkest moments. This unique and disturbing document will be of great interest to anyone interested in modern history, Nazi Germany and the historical experience of the Jews.

***Henry Ford's War on Jews and the Legal Battle against Hate Speech***  
**by Victoria Saker Woeste**

Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press

Henry Ford is remembered in American lore as the ultimate entrepreneur the man who invented assembly-line manufacturing and made automobiles affordable. Largely forgotten is his side career as a publisher of anti-Semitic propaganda. This is the story of Ford's ownership of the *Dearborn Independent*, his involvement in the defamatory articles it ran, and the two Jewish lawyers, Aaron Sapiro and Louis Marshall, who each tried to stop Ford's war. In 1927, the case of Sapiro v. Ford transfixed the nation. In order to end the embarrassing litigation, Ford apologized for the one thing he would never have lost on in court: the offense of hate speech. Using never-before-discovered evidence from archives and private family collections, this study reveals the depth of Ford's involvement in every aspect of this case and explains why Jewish civil rights lawyers and religious leaders were deeply divid-

ed over how to handle Ford.

***The State of the Jews: A Critical Appraisal* by Edward Alexander**

New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers

The author examines the current predicament of the Jewish people and the land of Israel, both of which still stand at the storm center of history, because Jews can never take the right to live as a natural right.

The volume comprises celebrations and attacks. Edward Alexander celebrates writers like Abba Kovner, Cynthia Ozick, Ruth Wisse and Hillel Halkin, who recognized in the foundation of Israel shortly after the destruction of European Jewry one of the few redeeming events in a century of blood and shame. He attacks Israel's external enemies busy planners of boycotts, brazen advocates of politicide, professorial apologists for suicide bombing and also its internal enemies. These are "anti-Zionist" Jews, devotees of lost causes willfully blind to the fact that Israel's creation was an event of biblical magnitude. Indifference to Jewish survival during World War II was the admitted moral failure of earlier American-Jewish intellectuals, but today's "progressives" and "New Diasporists" call indifference virtue, and mistake cowardice for courage. Because the new anti-Semitism, tightening the noose around Israel's throat, emanates mainly from liberals, Alexander analyzes both anti-Semitic and philo-Semitic strains in three prominent Victorian liberals: Thomas Arnold, his son, Matthew, and John Stuart Mill. The main body of Alexander's book is divided generically into history, politics and literature. At a deeper level, its chapters are integrated by the book's pervasive concern: the interconnectedness between the state of Israel and the spiritual state of contemporary Jewry.

***Mossad: The Greatest Missions of the Israeli Secret Service* by Michael bar-Zohar and Missim Mishal**

New York: HarperCollins

The Mossad is universally recognized today as the greatest intelligence service in the world. It is also the most enigmatic one, shrouded in a



thick veil of secrecy. Many of its fascinating feats are still unknown; most of its heroes remain unnamed. Here, for the first time the veil is lifted by two Israeli authors. From the famous cases the kidnapping of Eichmann from Argentina, the systematic tracking down of those responsible for the Munich Massacre to lesser-known episodes shrouded in darkness, this extraordinary book describes the dramatic, largely secret history of the Mossad, and the Israeli intelligence community. It examines the covert operations, the targeted assassinations and the paramilitary operations within and outside Israel. It also reveals the identities of the best Mossad agents and leaders, whose personal stories are interwoven with the great Mossad operations.

***The Jewish Movement in the Soviet Union* , edited by Yaacov Ro'i**

Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press

Yaacov Ro'i and his collaborators provide the first scholarly survey of one of the most successful Soviet dissident movements, one which ultimately affected and reflected the demise of a superpower's stature.

The Jewish Movement saw hundreds of thousands of Soviet Jews leave their native country for Israel. This book grapples with the movement's origins, its Soviet and international contexts, and its considerable achievements prior to the mass Jewish emigration of Gorbachev's last years, about one quarter of a million Jews left the Soviet Union. The contributors, a mix of senior and junior scholars as well as movement participants, examine the influences of a wide range of contemporary events, including the victory of Israel in the 1967 war, the Soviet dissident and human rights movements, and the general malaise of Soviet society, its self-contradictory attitude toward nationalism and its underlying anti-Semitism.

The book is based on a combination of secondary research, archival work, and interviews. The epilogue by former secretary of state George P. Shultz discusses support for the Jewish movement under the Ronald Reagan administration, reactions and views by the United

States as Gorbachev came to power and U.S. satisfaction of his de-nouement.

***Demonizing the Jews: Luther and the Protestant Church in Nazi Germany* by Christopher J. Probst**

Bloomington: Indiana University Press

The acquiescence of the German Protestant churches in Nazi oppression and murder of Jews is well documented. In this book, Christopher J. Probst demonstrates that a significant number of German theologians and clergy made use of the 16th-century writings by Martin Luther on Jews and Judaism to reinforce the racial anti-Semitism and religious anti-Judaism already present among Protestants. Focusing on key figures, Probst's study makes clear that a significant number of pastors, bishops and theologians of varying theological and political persuasions employed Luther's texts with considerable effectiveness in campaigning for the creation of a "de-Judaized" form of Christianity. Probst shows that even the church most critical of Luther's anti-Jewish writings reaffirmed the anti-Semitic stereotyping that helped justify early Nazi measures against the Jews.

***Barricades and Banners: The Revolution of 1905 and the Transformation of Warsaw Jewry* by Scott Ury**

Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press

This book examines the intersection of urban society and modern politics among Jews in turn of the century Warsaw, Europe's largest Jewish center at the time. By focusing on the tumultuous events surrounding the Revolution of 1905, *Barricades and Banners* argues that the metropolitanization of Jewish life led to a need for new forms of community and belonging, and that the ensuing search for collective and individual order gave birth to the new institutions, organizations and practices that would define modern Jewish society and politics for the remainder of the twentieth century.

***The Birth of Conservative Judaism* by Michael R. Cohen**

New York: Columbia University Press

Solomon Schechter (1847--1915), the charismatic leader of New York's Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS), came to America in 1902 intent on revitalizing traditional Judaism. While he advocated a return to traditional practices, Schechter articulated no clear position on divisive issues, instead preferring to focus on similarities that could unite American Jewry under a broad message. Michael R. Cohen demonstrates how Schechter, unable to implement his vision on his own, turned to his disciples, rabbinical students and alumni of JTS, to shape his movement. By mid-century, Conservative Judaism had become the largest American Jewish grouping in the United States, guided by Schechter's disciples and their continuing efforts to embrace diversity while eschewing divisive debates.

Yet Conservative Judaism's fluid boundaries also proved problematic for the movement, frustrating many rabbis who wanted a single platform to define their beliefs. Cohen demonstrates how a legacy of tension between diversity and boundaries now lies at the heart of Conservative Judaism's modern struggle for relevance. His analysis explicates four key claims: that Conservative Judaism's clergy, not its laity or Seminary, created and shaped the movement; that diversity was and still is a crucial component of the success and failure of new American religions; that the Conservative movement's contemporary struggle for self-definition is tied to its origins and that the porous boundaries between Orthodox, Conservative and Reform Judaism reflect the complexity of the American Jewish landscape a fact that Schechter and his disciples keenly understood. Rectifying misconceptions in previous accounts of Conservative Judaism's emergence, Cohen's study enables a fresh encounter with a unique religious phenomenon.

***Jewish Jocks: An Unorthodox Hall of Fame*, edited by Franklin Foer and Marc Tracy**

New York: Hachette Book Group

The essays in this book cover the most influential Jews in sports ath-

letes, coaches, broadcasters, team owners, trainers and even statisticians (in the finite universe of Jewish jocks, they count!). Contributors include some of today's most celebrated writers, such as New Yorker editor David Remnick; novelists Jonathan Safran Foer, Shalom Auslander and Booker Prize winner Howard Jacobson; sportswriter Buzz Bissinger; economist Larry Summers; columnist David Brooks; journalists Jane Leavy, Daniel Okrent, George Packer, David Plotz and Dahlia Lithwick; bestselling authors Stephen Dubner, David Margolick, Rich Cohen, Steven Pinker, Judith Shulevitz and Ron Rosenbaum, writing on figures like Howard Cosell, Art Shamsky, Kerri Strug, Harold Solomon, Sandy Koufax, Shirley Povitch and many more.

While the book doesn't claim to be a comprehensive encyclopedia, it nevertheless stands on its own as a timeless collection of biographical musings, sociological riffs about assimilation, first-person reflections, and, above all, great writing on some of the most influential and unexpected pioneers in the world of sports.

***The Nazi, the Painter and the Forgotten Story of the SS Road* by G.H. Bennett**

London: Reaktion Books

In 2006 a long-forgotten canister of film was discovered in a church in Devon, a county located in the southwestern corner of the United Kingdom. No one knew how it had gotten there, but its contents were tantalizing: the grainy black and white footage showed members of the German SS and police building a road in Ukraine and Crimea in 1943. The BBC caused a sensation when it aired the footage, but the film gave few clues to the protagonists or their task.

World War II historian G. H. Bennett pieces together the story of the film and its principal characters in *The Nazi, the Painter and the Forgotten Story of the SS Road*. In his search for answers, Bennett unearthed an overlooked chapter of the Holocaust: a wartime German road-building project led by Walter Gieseke, the Nazi policeman who ended up running the SS task force that served the dual purpose of

exterminating Jewish and other lives while laying the infrastructure for a utopian Nazi haven in the Ukraine. Bennett tells the story of the road and its builders through the experiences of Arnold Daghani, a Romanian artist who was one of the few Jewish laborers to survive the project. Daghani describes the brutal treatment he endured, as well as the beating, torture and murder of his fellow laborers by the Nazis, and his postwar efforts to bring the perpetrators to justice.

Recovering an important but lost episode in the history of World War II and the Holocaust, *The Nazi, the Painter and the Forgotten Story of the SS Road* is a moving, and at times, horrifying chronicle of suffering, deprivation and survival.

### ***The Modern Guide to Judaism by Shmuley Boteach***

New York: Overlook Press

What does it mean that we are spiritual beings? Can humans bring harmony to their dual spiritual and material nature and achieve success? Shmuley Boteach tackles this important issue, arguing that Judaism possesses a core of wisdom that appeals to Jews and non-Jews alike. Boteach rejects Judaism seeking piety in abstractions, or rationalizing injustice and suffering, and says that it is primarily about seeking optimism and spirituality. Comparing Judaism with other faith traditions, he also contends that Judaism is a religion with a profound earthward orientation and is uniquely suited to modern-day men and women who desire professional success without starving their souls.

### ***New Babylonians: A History of Jews in Modern Iraq by Orit Bashkin***

Stanford University Press

Although Iraqi Jews saw themselves as Iraqi patriots, their community which had existed in Iraq for more than 2,500 years was displaced following the establishment of the state of Israel. *New Babylonians* chronicles the lives of these Jews, their urban Arab culture and their hopes for a democratic nation-state. It studies their ideas about Ju-

daim, Islam, secularism, modernity, and reform, focusing on Iraqi Jews who internalized narratives of Arab and Iraqi nationalisms and on those who turned to communism in the 1940s.

As the book reveals, the ultimate displacement of this community was not the result of a perpetual persecution on the part of their Iraqi compatriots, but rather the outcome of misguided state policies during the late 1940s and early 1950s. Sadly, from a dominant mood of co-existence, friendship, and partnership, the impossibility of Arab-Jewish coexistence became the prevailing narrative in the region and the dominant narrative we have come to know today.

***In History's Grip: Philip Roth's Newark Trilogy* by Michael Kimmage**

Stanford University Press

Kimmage concentrates on the literature of Philip Roth, one of America's greatest writers, and in particular on *American Pastoral*, *I Married a Communist* and *The Human Stain*. Each of these novels from the 1990s uses Newark, New Jersey, to explore American history and character. Each features a protagonist who grows up in and then leaves Newark, after which he is undone by a historically generated crisis. The city's twentieth-century decline from immigrant metropolis to postindustrial disaster completes the motif of history and its terrifying power over individual destiny.

*In History's Grip* is the first critical study to foreground the city of Newark as the source of Roth's inspiration, and to scrutinize a subject Roth was accused of avoiding as a younger writer history. In so doing, the book brings together the two halves of Roth's decades-long career: the first featuring characters who live outside of history's grip; the second, characters entrapped in historical patterns beyond their ken and control.

***The Jewish Jesus: How Judaism and Christianity Shaped Each Other* by Peter Schafer**

Princeton University Press

In late antiquity, as Christianity emerged from Judaism, it was not only the new religion that was being influenced by the old. The rise and revolutionary challenge of Christianity also had a profound influence on rabbinic Judaism, which was itself just emerging and, like Christianity, trying to shape its own identity. In *The Jewish Jesus*, Peter Schfer reveals the crucial ways in which various Jewish heresies, including Christianity, affected the development of rabbinic Judaism. He even shows that some of the ideas that the rabbis appropriated from Christianity were actually reappropriated Jewish ideas. The result is a demonstration of the deep mutual influence between the sister religions, one that calls into question hard and fast distinctions between orthodoxy and heresy, and even Judaism and Christianity, during the first centuries CE.

***The First Modern Jew: Spinoza and the History of An Image* by Daniel B. Schwartz**

Princeton University Press

Pioneering biblical critic, theorist of democracy and legendary conflater of God and nature, Jewish philosopher Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) was excommunicated by the Sephardic Jews of Amsterdam in 1656 for his "horrible heresies" and "monstrous deeds." Yet, over the past three centuries, Spinoza's rupture with traditional Jewish beliefs and practices has elevated him to a prominent place in genealogies of Jewish modernity. *The First Modern Jew* provides a riveting look at how Spinoza went from being one of Judaism's most notorious outcasts to one of its most celebrated (if still highly controversial) cultural icons, and a powerful and protean symbol of the first modern secular Jew.

Ranging from Amsterdam to Palestine and back again to Europe, the book chronicles Spinoza's posthumous odyssey from marginalized heretic to hero, the exemplar of a whole host of Jewish identities, including cosmopolitan, nationalist, reformist and rejectionist. Daniel Schwartz shows that in fashioning Spinoza into "the first modern Jew,"

generations of Jewish intellectuals German liberals, East European maskilim, secular Zionists and Yiddishists have projected their own dilemmas of identity onto him, reshaping the Amsterdam thinker in their own image. The many afterlives of Spinoza are a kind of looking glass into the struggles of Jewish writers over where to draw the boundaries of Jewishness and whether a secular Jewish identity is indeed possible. Cumulatively, these afterlives offer a kaleidoscopic view of modern Jewish culture and a vivid history of an obsession with Spinoza that continues to this day.

### ***On Sacrifice* by Moshe Halbertal**

Princeton University Press

The idea and practice of sacrifice play a profound role in religion, ethics, and politics. In this brief book, philosopher Moshe Halbertal explores the meaning and implications of sacrifice, developing a theory of sacrifice as an offering and examining the relationship between sacrifice, ritual, violence and love. *On Sacrifice* also looks at the place of self-sacrifice within ethical life and at the complex role of sacrifice as both a noble and destructive political ideal.

In the religious domain, Halbertal argues, sacrifice is an offering, a gift given in the context of a hierarchical relationship. As such it is vulnerable to rejection, a trauma at the root of both ritual and violence. An offering is also an ambiguous gesture torn between a genuine expression of gratitude and love and an instrument of exchange, a tension that haunts the practice of sacrifice.

In the moral and political domains, sacrifice is tied to the idea of self-transcendence, in which an individual sacrifices his or her self-interest for the sake of higher values and commitments. While self-sacrifice has great potential moral value, it can also be used to justify the most brutal acts. Halbertal attempts to unravel the relationship between self-sacrifice and violence, arguing that misguided self-sacrifice is far more problematic than exaggerated self-love. In his exploration of the positive and negative dimensions of self-sacrifice, Halbertal also



addresses the role of past sacrifice in obligating future generations and in creating a bond for political associations, and considers the function of the modern state as a sacrificial community.

## Claude Lanzmann's Shoah Revisited

A review essay by Kenneth Waltzer

Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah* was re-released in the United States in 2010, more than a quarter century after it first appeared in 1985. Lanzmann's lengthy memoir, *The Patagonian Hare*, appeared in translation here in 2012. This then is a propitious time for revisiting *Shoah* and for reconsidering its construction, value, impact, strengths and weaknesses. What claims can be made for and against this powerful work of memory and art? How does the film stand up over time?

When it first appeared, *Shoah* transformed the way people regarded the Holocaust, basically filling an absence with a presence. Reviewing the film in France, Simone de Beauvoir praised it as "a sheer masterpiece." Timothy Garton Ash acknowledged it as an "enormous" film. Today, historian Timothy Smith says it is "one of the great works of art [note: not of history] of the twentieth century." Adam Thirlwell calls it "one of the sternest, strangest and most important films made in the short history of cinema." (1) Lanzmann himself, his own most important booster, talks about his obsessive practice in researching and making the film: "After I started, I could not stop." "I was like a horse with blinders. I could not look right or left, only straight ahead into the black circle of the Shoah." (2) Watching the finished *Shoah*, Lanzmann insists, "one bears witness to the incarnation of the truth, the contrary of the sanitization of historical science." (3)

Although *Shoah* is about history, it is not a historical documentary nor is it a history. It contains no historical footage; there are no images of Hitler or of Nazi soldiers, or of the millions of the Jewish dead. It is instead, as Lanzmann has labeled it, "a fiction of the real." It is a visual representation of the Holocaust that is built around reenacting survivor oral testimonies, filming in the mostly deserted places where the Nazis had manufactured mass death and collecting interviews with perpetrators in Germany, victims mostly in Israel and bystanders in Poland. It is a work of creative imagination and also a performative work of art

with its own logic and structure. Survivors are placed in settings like on a rowboat on a river, or in a former death camp, or inside an Israeli barbershop and asked to redo their testimonies for the camera. Or their interviews become the soundtracks to endless silent visual explorations of the killing landscapes as they appeared in the present.

*Shoah* is very much a product of the time it was made. The political and moral landscape of the world was one thing in the 1970s and 1980s and it has changed considerably since then and the possibilities of tapping survivors' oral testimonies live on film have also altered significantly. In the 1980s, just enough had been written that Lanzmann, the French Jewish existentialist and journalist, could train himself up, read the works and enter the search for truth. Survivors were also reaching a point where they could and would speak on camera. A few had testified but mostly in trials far from the public eye. Also most people in the West had just not been inside Communist Poland, visited Auschwitz or seen the memorial stones of Treblinka. Audiences had not yet heard any such testimony, nor had they visited and seen these ruins deep behind the Iron Curtain.

Today, in a globalizing world, there has been a remarkable explosion of attention to the catastrophe of European Jewry, especially in American and European culture. Survivors have now left to us tens of thousands of oral testimonies stored in archives and have helped to build impressive institutions of memory visited by millions. Many such institutions host exhibitions characterized by the intensive use of video testimonies. Today, the survivors are passing; most are already gone, including all those who earlier appeared in *Shoah*. The Communist bloc has also imploded and Jews all over the world have been taking heritage tours of the cemeteries and the camp sites and the partially revamped memory landscape and memorials of Eastern Europe. It is remarkable today to consider how much in the 1970s and 1980s the Holocaust in this sense of it was still relatively unknown — how much even in films used then to depict the catastrophe it was known without true regard to its specificity and how much in the 1990s and 2000s the Holocaust is today a substantial, powerful presence, part of the spreading

globalizing culture. Never again! The European Union contributes to the upkeep of Auschwitz and sends youths from many places on the continent for on-site education; the United Nations commemorates the Holocaust annually at Auschwitz each January. Jewish youths go on Marches of the Living to Auschwitz from the U.S., Canada, Australia and Israel, accompanied by younger survivors. *Shoah* is a product of that change and also contributed importantly to making that change.

Lanzmann describes the creating of *Shoah* in his memoir *The Patagonian Hare* as a kind of twelve-year obsessive craziness, a running after people and money, participants and backers and he describes himself as a pioneer and path-breaker searching for veracity in the ruins. "I was the first person to return to the scene of the crime, to those who had never spoken," he brags. (4) Actually, some of the witnesses had spoken in trials or written memoirs. Lanzmann found trace elements of many of these and persuaded these witnesses in particular to dramatize their experiences by speaking on location or got their testimonies in interviews and set these against the backdrop of desolate ruins words against places. Or, if perpetrators, he persuaded some and he deceived still others, filming them with hidden Paluche cameras.

From these cumulative interviews and from the many set performances he assembled and directed, a devastating portrait of life amidst death in the death camps emerged that had not before been contemplated. Lanzmann provided a sense of a unique modern hell on earth, replete with terrible deceptions, horrible cruelty and brutality and high prisoner fear and powerlessness. Nothing is as devastating as the claims spoken by witnesses Abraham Bomba or Filip Miller, who were forced to assist in the Nazi death process at two different camps, that they could do nothing they were completely helpless to warn those who were de-trained and being led into the gas chambers. Lanzmann was also the first to highlight some of the extreme moral dilemmas of prisoner existence in what a few years later would come to be known through Primo Levi's later writings as the gray zone of the camps.

More to the point, Lanzmann focused nearly everything in *Shoah* on

and around the process of mass death, even taking people by means of Filip Müller's haunting testimony Müller was a *sonderkommando* in Birkenau for three years inside the Nazi gas chambers. Unlike so many American films that have appeared since, which have been about saving lives or other redemptive themes, *Shoah* was unyielding about the centrality of mass death and the absence of redemption. If one doesn't recognize this, Lanzmann himself constantly harps on the point, that the core "subject of *Shoah* was death in the gas chambers, extermination, not survival."(5)

But Lanzmann's claim that *Shoah* is "the incarnation of truth" is not fully embraced by everyone. (6) Some critical reviewers question the film's commitment to truth values, noting its several concrete historical shortcomings. They emphasize particularly the film's marked subjectivity, especially concerning Polish Catholic bystanders: Lanzmann used Polish peasants demagogically to dramatize the timelessness of classic Christian anti-Semitism. Others sense too that the film's orientation is shaped by a view of the Holocaust that is less analytical than quasi-religious, genocide as a *tremendum*. Lanzmann also employed many filmmaking tricks to shape what he refers to as truth in the film, as for instance when the Polish railway man, Henrik Gawkowski, drives an engine and a long train behind as he enters Treblinka again, or when the Jewish barber, Abraham Bomba, poses cutting hair in a rented Tel Aviv salon as if this were the ante-room to the gas at Treblinka. Lanzmann staged and filmed contemporary scenes like the scene before the church near Chelmno with area Polish peasants provoking anticipated responses for the camera which he then presented as part of the truth of the Shoah.

Not only Polish sources responded that this was provocative and faulty (the Polish government barred the film from being distributed in Poland for many years and asked Lanzmann to make changes). Lanzmann also writes in his memoir about numerous French Jewish intellectuals who simply failed to see the relevance of folk Polish Catholic peasant anti-Semitism as myth in the present to the story of the Nazi Holocaust that swept Europe in the past. Incredibly, this is the

only scene where Lanzmann asks why in the film why the Shoah, why the Final Solution and it focuses on Polish peasants, not on Nazi killers. The great Polish underground messenger Jan Karski, who appeared in the film and gave it high praise afterward, also criticized Lanzmann's failure to show Polish rescuers who worked to save many Polish Jews in other words, to portray the full picture about Poland. This is also a film by a French Jew which simply fails totally and inexplicably to explore the role of French society or Vichy in the Nazi Holocaust, a mystery that is surprisingly not addressed in his memoir.

Lanzmann's drive for "truth," while informed by much reading, was a drive mainly aimed at creating the sense of authenticity; it was also shaped by the artist's ingenuity and penchant for theater. *Shoah* offers what we may call the filmmaker's truth, shaped by "research" but also by personal obsession and mystification. At times, Lanzmann introduces us to factual things we didn't know the road to heaven at Treblinka, the final death struggle inside the closed chambers. This is the inquisitive Lanzmann, digging and asking survivors and perpetrators about how things were done, what happened here and what happened there. What was it like? What did you feel? At other times, though, Lanzmann appears to highlight the impossibility of approaching or representing the Holocaust, because there is so little to show and the whole set of events seems to have receded into history and to be almost beyond history.

*Shoah* is a demanding cascade of voices and words, faces and gestures and landscapes; it runs to an interminable nine and a half hours. The events and doings described by the witnesses come to life when set against the backdrops of these desolate sites. Some of the testimonies are riveting. Yet at the same time the film's duration challenges all but the most committed and resolute viewers. Additionally, while the film goes on and on and on, there are many potential witnesses who are not searched for or found and thus there are numerous absences concerning aspects of the Holocaust about which we frankly know a great deal more today. There are no witnesses or survivors, for instance, of the many mass killings that took place far away from the camps,

mainly in the forests and pits of Belarus and Ukraine in the Soviet Union; these are parts of what recently have been called the Holocaust by guns. Historians like Timothy Snyder today suggest that there were nearly as many killings by shooting as by gassing during the Holocaust and the center of the Holocaust is as much in forests and pits further east as in the killing camps in Poland. There are also no witnesses or survivors of the further brutalities and terrors that were inflicted on those who were sent from Auschwitz into the additional hell of the Nazi concentration camp system in Germany and Austria. There are also few reflections on the seething ethnic antagonisms throughout Eastern Europe which created their own dynamic of terrible killing. Nor are there survivors who speak about the brutal death marches during the final days. Lanzmann keeps his attention in *Shoah* on the six death camps that were created by the Nazis in Poland and on the core processes deportation, selection, gassing that fed industrial killing during the genocide. His Holocaust is singularly one of trains and camps and also curiously one without Nazi ideologues and zealous killers.

## I.

Lanzmann's fascinating and picaresque memoir tells much about the man and how he proceeded in creating the film. The "adventure of *Shoah*," as he terms it, began with a request from Alouph Hareven, the director-general of the Israeli foreign ministry, after Lanzmann did a first film about Israel, *Why Israel*, if he would make a film about the Holocaust from a Jewish point of view. Lanzmann had not thought about such a film at all until then. An editor at *Les Temps Moderne*, the journal created by French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, Lanzmann had spent his early professional life as a leftist journalist personally close to and heavily influenced by Sartre. He was committed primarily to universalistic causes of the left and he was highly active on their behalf. He visited and wrote about people's democracies in the Soviet bloc; he actively supported the liberation of Algeria and of other North African colonies. He traveled to China and to North Korea; he stood firmly as existentialist man and French citizen against the French colonial empire in southeastern Asia. He writes that for a long time,

despite what he came to know about Communism, "the Soviet Union remained like a sky above my head, as it did above those of many men in my generation." (7) It is also fascinating that he became close to Frantz Fanon during this period, traveling to see him and resonating personally with Fanon's writings about the transformation of ethno-identity by the oppressed through struggle and violence. He was frankly carried away by Fanon, who he believed for a time "to be the keeper of the truth." (8)

But an alternative line of identity development ultimately grew more influential for Lanzmann by the late 1960s and early 1970s, which helps us understand the path he took to come to *Shoah*. Lanzmann traveled to the newly created Israel in the early 1950s where he saw first-hand its immigrant *ma'aborot*, *kibbutzim* and teeming cities where he witnessed the energies of a re-born Jewish people, who were mostly still the offspring of Europe, newly constructing a novel post-colonial state. The trip had significant impact on the French Jew who, as a teenager, had fought the Nazis in the French resistance and could easily have been sent away as a Holocaust victim himself. Then later, Lanzmann responded with high personal emotion to the rising Arab threat against the State of Israel in 1967, which he judged to be a possibly mortal one, leading him to speak out volubly with other French Jewish intellectuals in Paris during the run-up to the war. After those awful days, there then followed the surprising Israeli victory in the Six-Day War, "no walkover," he argues, which transformed his outlook even more radically. The deepening connection he was creating with Israel, the Six-Day War, his longstanding preoccupation with anti-Semitism from the early postwar days, when he taught a seminar on anti-Semitism in East Berlin and his burgeoning response to leftist anti-Zionism, all strongly highlighted his deep Jewishness; his siding with Israel led also to a fateful break with his friend Sartre.

At the same time, there were cumulating other factors that were simultaneously diminishing his faith in revolution and in violence as the approved roads to human liberation and solidarity. These included the open enmity expressed by the revolutionary new Arab states -- Ben



Bella in Algeria, Nasser in Egypt toward the Jewish state in the Middle East. He had hoped it would and could be otherwise. Such factors included, too, the dalliance of some on the French left, including Sartre, after May 1968, with Maoism and radical left-wing violence. Instead, in the early 1970s, Lanzmann worked intensely on *Why Israel*, a journalist now learning the new craft (for him) of filmmaking and then, when asked, he recognized the singular opportunity and began what later he would call *Shoah*. He felt he knew about the Holocaust, it was in his blood; yet he also felt distant from it and not at all educated about it.

So Lanzmann now began a program of reading and self-education about the Holocaust, reading especially Raul Hilberg's *The Destruction of the European Jews*, which at the time was an indispensable contribution which greatly influenced the film for good and for ill. He absorbed a hundred other books and monographs too, he says and he spoke with many survivors, learning that he needed to master a vast body of knowledge in order simply to question them seriously and that he needed to do even more to make such testimony appear alive and spontaneous on film. He concluded early that he would not use any archival footage and also that he would focus on mass death and the death camps. He says he grew committed to the idea that, in the film, which remained unnamed until the end, that "the living would be self-effacing so that the dead might speak through them." (9) He also grew increasingly committed to a view of the singularity and enormity of the Nazi destruction of the Jews as a major event of the century. It is the central moral orientation of *Shoah* and is conveyed clearly to the audience.

The Frankfurt Treblinka trials transcripts also influenced Lanzmann, offering testimonies by both survivors and perpetrators; the late Gita Sereny's book on Franz Stangl, the commandant of Treblinka, had an impact. Yehuda Bauer, Holocaust historian at Hebrew University, offered special help, gently guiding Lanzmann and introducing survivors to him, some of whom became characters in the film. Lanzmann also met many *sonderkommando* who had surfaced earlier during the Eichmann trial but none rivaled in his mind the impressive Filip Miller. He

searched for and found Abraham Bomba in New York, who was cutting hair beneath Grand Central Station and living near Pelham Parkway in the north Bronx. He found Bomba again a second time, after the barber retired and moved to Israel. In Israel, too, he found Simon Srebnik and Michael Podchlebnik, the only known survivors of Chełmno. These were no small feats of legerdemain in a time before the internet.

Lanzmann had not planned to go to or film in Poland and he went first only in 1978 hoping to confirm that he didn't really need to be there. Gradually, however, while he was in Poland, the idea of filming in the places where the killing occurred took shape in his mind. He would bring Simon Srebnik back to Chełmno; he would sweepingly film at Treblinka and Auschwitz and put voices against the backgrounds. Visiting Treblinka, in particular, more than four years after beginning, Lanzmann was utterly taken by the sign denoting the village of Treblinka, as if it were a shaman object, enchanted and magical. Discovery of the sign, the village and the train station, devastated him. "Treblinka existed! A village named Treblinka existed!" These kinds of discoveries somehow made the Shoah less distant and mythical, more concrete and approachable, he says; it was as if an explosion went off inside him. Here the past was remote and yet it was really close. Traces existed in the topography. Here too he found Henrik Gawkowski, the trainman of Treblinka, still nearby. Poland, he realized, was a treasure he should not squander. He filmed there during 1978 to 1981.

Gradually, too, the strategies of "deceiving the deceivers," and secretly filming former Nazis who were living freely in West Germany also took shape, utilizing secret cameras and recording devices feeding signals to tape reels in a nearby van and generating dramatic, if grey and grainy, footage. Lanzmann found mainly camp officers and desk bureaucrats, facilitators and technicians of the death process rather than its masterminds and overlords. Lanzmann also piled up a host of stories of near mishaps and close-calls in doing so: one time an attempted interview with a former *Einsatzgruppen* officer led to a violent beating by the Nazi's sons, which put Lanzmann in the hospital with serious injuries.

Though originally recruited by a representative of Israel to do the film, Lanzmann quickly broke from Israeli state support and direction. This is important. The artist simply had more serious ambitions and would not be handled by handlers any handlers at all. So the Israeli Foreign Ministry cut him off after a few years and a scientific committee established to receive progress reports ceased its meetings. The finished film is not at all an instrumentalization of the Holocaust by the Israeli state. Lanzmann labored mostly independently on the film for seven or eight years and then edited it another four to five years. At some point after the money ended, Lanzmann turned to Menachem Begin, the new prime minister, for help, who put him in touch with a former Mossad member, who in turn promised support if the film ran less than two hours and was completed in 18 months. Lanzmann quickly agreed, although he hadn't yet started shooting and he had no intention to meet any conditions whatsoever. Lanzmann ended up shooting 350 hours of film in a half dozen countries. The film became his life and his obsession, and he was ready to do almost anything to make it his own way and to decide its duration himself.

## **II.**

It is a common misunderstanding among many who saw *Shoah* when it was distributed in the United States that Lanzmann's purpose even if he was not doing a traditional historical documentary was nonetheless to make a history. *Shoah*, however, eschews chronology, which is usually a constant feature of history and it also steers clear of any normalizing linear narrative that might serve to "explain" or "harmonize" what Lanzmann came to view as something that simply cannot be harmonized. Lanzmann is insistent that there is no, and cannot be, any explanation about the Holocaust. It is a radical break in human history, unique and incomparable. Looking at it is blinding, for it "created a circle of flames around itself." "The Nazi crime was both unprecedented and unsurpassable," he observes. "It was factually, literally, a crime against the human essence, a metaphysical crime committed on the person of each murdered Jew against the being of Man."(10) By this, Lanzmann means that the Nazis violated species unity, taking it as

their duty to decide what peoples should be permitted to live on this earth. Moreover, it is still not ended, he says: there is not any closure. The Shoah exists in the present as well as the past in the burdened memories of witnesses, in the visual traces and artifacts in the landscape testifying to the unsurpassable limits of inhumanity of which mankind is capable. The Nazi destruction of the Jews reveals itself, he argues, in "a hallucinating timelessness."

Lanzmann's commitment in *Shoah* then is to "resurrecting" the Holocaust through what he terms "history in the present"; he is committed to showing it as a "specific historical event" against efforts to make of it a legend or a secondary event but he does not seek to tell the story or explain the causes of the event. He also is committed to highlighting its trace elements all about. In particular, he is devoted to showing the details of the final stages of the mass killing, believing that this is the Holocaust's most distinctive horror and that this horror must be made and felt by viewers as immediate. His strategy is to get living witnesses to relive past experiences of personal trauma. Through interviews and staged reenactments with survivor-victims, especially those who were situated very close to the death process, Lanzmann dramatizes the radical juncture that the Holocaust represents in human history and, in the process, wins the audience's identification with the victims and its empathy.

After all, the Nazis' purpose was to eliminate the Jews, to make them as a people completely disappear. They were to be killed and burned, to go up the crematory chimneys in smoke. They were to be made unseen and disembodied. They or anyone else would be unable to tell of their disappearance. The Nazi project itself would never be trumpeted or fully known. Lanzmann turns the tables on the Nazis, shifting the telling from documents or images made by the Nazi killers to words that are offered by Hitler's victims. He places survivors at the film's center, in the process informing and transforming our view of the Holocaust as it existed before the 1980s. He also re-embodies a people in all its diversity speaking many tongues Polish Jews, Czech Jews, Hungarian Jews, Greek Jews -- permitting us to see and hear them,

learn from them and identify with their suffering.

Lanzmann employs the survivors above all to make suffering, violence and powerlessness immediate. He uses them in their detailed specificity as persons to break down our defenses. At the same time, he shows the topographical expanses of the death camps to dramatize the magnitude of the Nazis' undertaking. The spaces too the scarred earth, the old red and brown buildings and barracks, the once electrified barbed wire and the watchtowers, the crematoria and the numerous memorial stones representing the losses these testify, too, to the absolute hugeness of the extermination.

The historian Dominick LaCapra wonders if there is not an obsessive compulsion in the making of the film, the need by Lanzmann repetitively to put himself in the position as a witness of the traumatized victim-witness who relives the unmastered past on camera. (11)

Lanzmann pushes these survivors by his interactions with them into their deepest recesses of memory and films their breakdowns. The camera doesn't shut off and wait for restored composure. It is the loss of composure that Lanzmann seeks. This is one of the great powers of the film, for most audiences had not encountered survivors or the fragility of survivors like this before. Lanzmann instinctively knew that these encounters would work their magic on audiences. Lanzmann is insistent and difficult in these encounters, but he is not without feeling or empathy; he pushes his witnesses so we can all hear and know and witness as well.

These testimonies serve not as inputs into a larger history but as stand-ins and substitutes for it, fragmented memories of human experience in place of a considered historical story. Lanzmann is after the experience of what Auschwitz survivor Charlotte Delbo labeled "deep memory." He is after that moment when the walls survivors built during the postwar years to separate present life and past life, today and yesterday, get breached and the past comes flooding in, accompanied by powerful feelings of shame, guilt, powerlessness and self-accusation. The moment is palpable. We know it when it happens

when Bomba talks of the arrival of women from his hometown of Częstochowa at Treblinka, when Miller recounts the liquidation of the Czech family camp in Auschwitz and his compulsion to join his countrywomen in the gas chambers. Apparently Jan Karski, who carried information from the Warsaw ghetto to the West, broke down several times during his lengthy interview with Lanzmann, but these portions were not included in the film.

Despite his rejection of history and what he calls “the sanitization of the historical sciences,” Lanzmann nonetheless managed to privilege one historian and one line of interpretation about the Holocaust. (12) The late Raul Hilberg appears prominently in the film and his view of the Holocaust greatly shapes Lanzmann’s understanding. Hilberg’s view is an institutional one, rooted in research in Nazi regime documents, which emphasizes the bureaucratic and technical aspects of how the Nazis carried out the Final Solution. As a consequence, the film shows a Nazi regime that was mostly all cogs and wheels without a motor, mostly people who followed orders and then felt sorry for themselves because they had to do such terrible work and serve in such terrible places. I was greatly disturbed by this when I saw the film for the first time in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in 1985, greatly bothered by the absence of a clear indictment of the Nazi leadership or a clear exploration of the racial project of ideological Nazism. My upset led me to speak with several survivors in the Detroit metropolitan Jewish community who had been in Auschwitz. To my surprise, they argued firmly on behalf of *Shoah* as successfully capturing what to them was the essence of their experiences. “We never saw Hitler”, they said. “We saw German officers and guards. We saw trains and camps.” Those I spoke with who also saw the film recognized their experiences in it, identified with it and were uncritical in embracing Lanzmann’s movie as a masterpiece.

Speaking at Yale University the next year in 1986, Lanzmann affirmed that “Hilberg's book, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, was really my Bible for many years....” But he then went on to emphasize that, “in spite of this , *Shoah* is not a historical film, it is something else....

To condense in one word what the film is for me, I would say that the film is an incarnation, a resurrection." (13)

### III.

In his recently published *The End of the Holocaust*, literary scholar Alvin H. Rosenfeld writes that in the making of films and other forms of popular culture, rather than in the writing of history, that we mostly get our knowledge of the Holocaust. But Rosenfeld claims, paradoxically, that the more attention that is paid in the culture these days to the Nazi destruction of Jews, the less appears truly to be known or comprehended about it. Rosenfeld worries in fact that a process of transformation is and has been underway in recent decades which, as Holocaust representation in film and media takes place increasingly farther in time from the actual events, it becomes transfigured, losing its specificity and depriving us of some of the sense of the Holocaust as a massive crime and trauma and a special moral event in human history.

Instead, Holocaust phrases and categories are appropriated today as outsized metaphors that are sloppily applied to a multitude of victimizations, Holocaust films frequently turn upward at the end, emphasizing redemptive themes about human goodness and the Shoah is trivialized, vulgarized, expropriated and stretched, such that "a catastrophic history is lightened of its historical burden and gives up the sense of [special] scandal" that should attend it. Far from being fixed and solid, Rosenfeld worries, memory and consciousness of the Holocaust today is beset by an array of cultural pressures that challenge its place as a pivotal event in modern European and Jewish and world human history. (14)

Lanzmann's *Shoah* is immune from most of Rosenfeld's critique, for Lanzmann never treats the Holocaust in *Shoah* without highlighting its distinctive specificity as a unique war against the Jews nor does he view it at all as a setting for affirming humankind. *Shoah* does not stress that in the Nazi camps life can be beautiful nor does it highlight

the behaviors of righteous humans who acted at the margins of the destruction. These cultural deformations of the Holocaust, which began mostly during the 1990s, during the decade after *Shoah* appeared, required a film like *Shoah* to have preceded them. Lanzmann, moreover, has actively railed and declaimed against such developments especially against Spielberg's *Schindler's List* and Benigni's *Life is Beautiful*. Even describing what Jan Karski did in *Shoah*, traveling from the Warsaw ghetto to the West, Lanzmann emphasizes his failure to be believed, to be effective, because Western leaders did not hear him and know and act well in response. The emphasis is not on righteousness or human goodness.

Lanzmann's mode of representation in *Shoah* is remarkably serious and focused, stressing that the Shoah set a blinding fire around itself and that it stands as nothing less than a radical juncture in human history. The re-release of this film plus the appearance of the memoir are events actually serving to combat contemporary misappropriations and deformations of the Holocaust. But Rosenfeld also records in *The End of the Holocaust* something that Lanzmann once said to him personally: that "to portray the Holocaust, one has to create a work of art." It is the only way, Lanzmann thinks; it cannot be through history, which for Lanzmann is neither a productive or helpful path. This is pure Lanzmann-speak overstated, self-important, dichotomizing and self-aggrandizing. It is also misleading as is his declaration about art and sanitized historical science.

Reading Rosenfeld, one learns it is possible for artful representations of the Holocaust to go astray, to depict the Holocaust without approaching anything like serious comprehension of what it contained and what it means. Art certainly represents one approach but it is frankly not a privileged one. And it is not the only one. Lanzmann's art reaches the status of being special because it is deeply informed and shaped by recognition of the Shoah as a critical juncture in human history. But it should also be said, contra Lanzmann, that it is also possible via history and historical inquiry, not just filmic representation, to move toward fuller understanding. In *The Patagonian Hare*, Lanzmann still insists we



should not even ask why. Representing the Shoah is best done by cutting off and sequestering treatment of the events from historical inquiry and historical narrative. This is a form of know-nothingness which serves as a bar to further inquiry. It is also a form of exceptionalism about human events, which is problematic. It is also outdated, fitting uneasily in a new age with its own Rwandas, Darfurs, Cambodias and Bosnias additional genocides that also light blinding flames around themselves and demand our worried attention and explanation as well.

Indeed, this writer thinks that it is mainly through continued aggressive historical inquiry and wrestling with these events, alone and in comparison, that we may learn more about their dynamics and the terrible capacities human beings exhibit. To put it concretely, it has been through such outstanding work on the Holocaust in recent decades by first-rate historians like Christopher Browning on Nazi leaders and their path to deciding the Final Solution, Saul Friedlander on Nazi eliminationist anti-Semitism and the unfolding of killing during the years of extermination, Timothy Snyder on the terrible killing grounds between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union and Omer Bartov on the local and regional aspects of ethno-killing that we have developed new and important perspectives. Lanzmann's portrait in *Shoah*, invaluable as it is, is about part, but not about all, the story of how and it is simply insufficient concerning why. (15)

*Shoah* is and was a critically important contribution by an artistic genius; our students must see it or view parts of it. Those who use it in our teaching and we are many know its value and its importance: above all, we know its impact on our students. Nothing like *Shoah* can or will ever be produced again, although similar films following *Shoah's* lead may now be in the making, not merely about the Holocaust but about the Rwandan genocide. But *Shoah* is also, let us acknowledge, not the complete and full story, about which "historical science" has made tremendous strides since the 1980s exploring and explaining what happened and why. *Shoah* is a product of its time and of the filmmaker's choices; and it offers what can be called idiosyncratic truth, his truth, in an original artistic engagement with the events it

represents.

**Notes:**

1. Simone de Beauvoir, "Shoah," reprinted in *Claude Lanzmann's Shoah: Key Essays*, edited by Stuart Liebman (Oxford U. Press, 2007), p. 65; Timothy Garton Ash, "The Life of Death," *New York Review of Books*, 32:20, December 19, 1985; Timothy Snyder, "The Holocaust We Don't See: Lanzmann's Shoah Revisited," *New York Review of Books* Blog, Dec. 15, 2011; Adam Thirlwell, "Genocide and the Fine Arts," *New Republic*, April 20, 2012.
2. Quoted in Larry Rohter, "The Maker of Shoah Stresses Its Lasting Value," *New York Times*, December 6, 2010.
3. Quoted in Stuart Jeffries, "Claude Lanzmann on Why Shoah Still Matters," *Guardian*, June 9, 2011.
4. Quoted in Adam Schatz, "Nothing He Hasn't Done, Nowhere He Hasn't Been," *London Review of Books* 34:7, April 5, 2012, pp 11-15.
5. *The Patagonian Hare* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012), p. 419.
6. Adam Thirlwell offers: "it is not, in the end, a film in which the truth values are meticulous. It is more disheveled than that and its greatness lies in its dishevelment."
7. *The Patagonian Hare*, p. 378.
8. "We now know that the real Africa is not the Africa of Fanon's dreams," Lanzmann writes. "The real Africa is Rwanda, the genocide of the Tutsis, it is the Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Darfur and others. Horror seems to slowly pervade the whole continent, not sparing Algeria." See *The Patagonian Hare*, pp. 336-348.
9. *The Patagonian Hare*, pp. 423-424.
10. Claude Lanzmann, "From the Holocaust to 'Holocaust,'" *Dissent*

(Spring, 1981), reprinted in *Claude Lanzmann's Shoah: Key Essays*, p.28.

11. "Lanzmann's Shoah: "Here There is No Why," *Critical Inquiry* 23:2 (Winter, 1997), pp. 231-269, republished in *Claude Lanzmann's Shoah: Key Essays*, pp. 191-230.

12. Lanzmann channels Hilberg. "The planned methodical bureaucratic massacre of six million Jews was a long-term enterprise, carried out patiently and without passion.," he writes. See "From the Holocaust to "Holocaust," in *Claude Lanzmann's Shoah: Key Essays*, p.28.

13. "An Evening with Claude Lanzmann," May 4, 1986.

14. Alvin H. Rosenfeld, *The End of the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana U. Press, 2011).

15. Christopher Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Policy, September 1939-March 1942* (University of Nebraska Press, 2004); Saul Friedlander, *Nazi Germany and the Jews: The Years of Persecution and Nazi Germany and the Jews: The Years of Extermination* (Harper and Row, 1998, 2007); Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (Basic Books, 2011); and Omer Bartov, *The Micro-history of Genocide: 200 Years of Inter-ethnic Relations and the Holocaust in Buczacz, Ukraine* (forthcoming, 2014).

## Israel's Leaders: An Inside View

A review essay by Matthew Schwartz

***The Prime Ministers: An Intimate Narrative of Israeli Leadership.* By Yehuda Avner. The Toby Press; New Milford, Conn., 2010**

Yehuda Avner's delightful articles in the *Jerusalem Post* over the years have left many readers hoping that he would someday write a book based on his experience as diplomat, adviser and speechwriter for several Israeli prime ministers: Levi Eshkol, Golda Meir, Yitzchak Rabin and Menahem Begin. *The Prime Ministers* is now with us and well fulfills our expectations. It is in the form of a memoir of episodes which illustrate the responses of the prime ministers and many others to the challenges of the early decades of Israel's history. It makes for a fascinating intimate narrative, warm and insightful, shedding light on other world leaders as well — Richard Nixon, Jimmy Carter, Anwar Sadat, Margaret Thatcher and much more. Avner's own favorite was Menahem Begin, who appears early in the story and whose passing, more or less, marks the end of the story.

Avner's account is unusual among such memoirs in its lack of ego-centric bitterness. His tone is respectful. Yet he does not hesitate to describe quietly the flaws and errors of certain major figures. He is a marvelous raconteur, especially of humorous incidents which involve a line or two of Yiddish. Many of these word pictures are unforgettable. The book begins with Avner's boyhood in Manchester, England, and his first awareness of the Irgun. The main narrative begins in 1928 with a striking story. The Arabs of Jerusalem went wild when some Jews set up a small screen as a *mechitza* at the Western Wall. The Arabs murdered a Hasid in Jerusalem, and a number of violent riots broke out including the massacre of Yeshiva students in Hebron. The British forbade the Jews to pray at the Wall and to blow the shofar at the end of Yom Kippur. People who tried were roughly handled. When Menahem Begin came to Palestine in 1942 and learned of the problem,

he posted warnings that anyone who harassed the Jews' prayers would be punished by the Irgun. That year, a young man blew the shofar, and the British police marched quietly back to their barracks. The Jews danced triumphantly home to their dwellings in the old Jewish Quarter.

Avner's anecdotes form an essential component of the narrative. On one occasion, Begin's Irgun threatened to capture and hang Englishmen if the British hung Irgun prisoners. When the British refused to desist, Irgun fighters captured a British businessman named Collins. Collins claimed that he was Jewish, but his captors did not believe him until as they readied the noose for his neck, he began to recite somewhat incoherently *Adon Olam*.

Another wonderful anecdote tells how, with a Yiddish quip, Avner managed to get the better of a harshly anti-Semitic high school teacher shortly before his graduation in Manchester in 1947. The story foreshadows in a quiet way his respect for people, like Begin, who were openly proud to be Jewish.

Avner liked all four prime ministers whom he served, especially Begin, who felt a strong sense of Jewish history and identity. Begin would never raise his hand in anger against another Jew. His restraint in the Altalena incident in 1948 averted a possible civil war between Ben Gurion's forces and his own. Avner was deeply impressed by a speech Begin delivered shortly after the 1948 war.

Among the many beautiful vignettes is one describing a Shabbat afternoon open house hosted by the Begins, the week that they moved into the prime minister's residence in Jerusalem. All sorts of people came to partake of orange juice and cookies and to talk to the new prime minister. Begin's personal empathy with each one was remarkable the man who lost his wife and children in the Holocaust but had carried their picture all through the concentration camp, a poor Sephardi storekeeper, an artist from Romania just arrived in Israel after years in a Communist prison. The gathering ended as the people saw three stars in the evening sky, the men recited the evening prayer,

the prime minister recited *havdala* and people went home happy. For the secret service, however, the gathering was a logistics nightmare, and they would not allow the Begins to do it again. Another striking passage describes Saturday nights when a remarkably brilliant group would gather together at the PM's residence to study the Pentateuchal reading of the week. On this occasion, the guests included Professors Ephraim Urbach, Nehama Leibowitz, Yaacov Katz and several other distinguished Bible scholars, archaeologists and historians. The discussion centered around the passage in the Book of Numbers describing the Jews as "a people that dwells alone." One could wish to be a fly on their wall.

Begin brought his strong sense of Jewish feeling to the negotiating table in dealing with American leaders. He and Sadat grew to have great respect and even liking for each other, while recognizing their differences. Begin wrote to Jehan Sadat after her husband's assassination, and she wrote to Begin when his Aliza passed away a year later. Both letters are precious human documents.

Levi Eshkol was a competent, dedicated prime minister, who guided Israel through some scary moments before and during the 1967 War. Shortly before the war, he offered to resign in favor of Ben Gurion. Imagine this quiet man several months later holding on to his bowler hat, while being driven around Lyndon B. Johnson's Texas ranch in an open jeep with LBJ himself speeding up and down the hills. There are wonderful stories about Golda Meir her visit to the Great Synagogue in Moscow, her interview by Oriana Fallaci. Yitzchak Rabin was a quiet, competent man.

There are unforgettable portraits of others. Sir Isaiah Berlin, brilliant English philosopher and diplomat, descendant of famous rabbis was withal, rather a self-hating Jew. Bruno Kreisky, Jewish prime minister of Austria, adamantly rejected Golda Meir's personal plea to ease the way of Jewish refuseniks, who needed to stop in Austria en route from the USSR to Israel. Some years later, Avner met a Jerusalem street beggar who came to Prime Minister Begin's office for a handout. He

was surprised to learn that the beggar was Kreisky's brother.

Avner was deeply impressed by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Menahem Mendel Schneerson, with whom he met several times in connection to diplomatic visits to the U.S. They spoke in Hebrew; the Rebbe's classic, Avner's modern. "What lured me most as we talked were the Rebbe's eyes. They exuded wisdom, awareness, kindness, and good fellowship. They were the eyes of one who could see mystery in the obvious, poetry in the mundane and large issues in small things." They met for three hours as Avner reported on Menahem Begin's meeting with President Carter. The Rebbe then dictated a letter praising Begin for his strong stand on behalf of Eretz Yisrael and the Jewish people. "As he dissected my account, his air of authority seemed to deepen. It came of something beyond knowledge. It was in his state of being, something he possessed in his soul which I can not possibly begin to explain."

Avner is less enamored with Jimmy Carter, whom he describes talking to Begin "with disdain in his voice and fury in his eyes." On another occasion, Carter's face was "a mask of politeness, but it was easy to see by his clenched teeth that anger lurked beneath." Zbigniew Brzezinski was "a cold wind blowing in from the Arctic." Begin somewhat mollified Brzezinski by presenting him with a dossier of his father's activities in helping Polish Jews during World War II.

Henry Kissinger was uncomfortable with his Jewishness. A psychiatrist who had grown up with Kissinger both in Germany and New York explained to Avner that Kissinger's identity issue held him back from wholly supporting Israel even during the existential threat of the Yom Kippur War.

Meals in the diplomatic setting were often a challenge for Avner and other Israeli officials, including Menahem Begin and Yaacov Herzog, who kept kosher. This resulted in kosher dinners being served in the White House and in Buckingham Palace. Levi Eshkol's visit to LBJ's ranch produced a difficult moment. The main course was freshly shot

pheasant so that Avner and Yaacov Herzog had to quietly request plain salads. Lady Bird Johnson, a warm and charming hostess, apologized profusely for the misunderstanding. She had been informed that pheasant was acceptable. Ladybird then noted that "your prime minister has no trouble eating the bird." Herzog responded, "May I share a confidence, Mrs. Johnson? The prime minister has one secret vice. He cannot resist fine gourmet. So you may take his lapse as a compliment to your chef." "Oh, I shall, I shall," said a charmed Mrs. Johnson.

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## Mission in the Diaspora: Simon Dubnov's Jewish Autonomism

An essay by Brian Horowitz

A fresh commitment to diaspora as a fully authentic Jewish path and not as a substitute for life in Israeli state has led to a search for the roots of diaspora nationalism and from there, to Simon Dubnov, the father of Jewish Autonomism. In fact, Dubnov has a great deal to give the Jewish people even now since his main goal was to explain, and then realize, the conditions in which the Jewish people could thrive economically, politically and culturally in the diaspora. Since more than one half of Jews live outside Israel, we might take a look at this play-book of how to thrive in diaspora.

For Dubnov the operative concept was the Jewish people which he maintained composed the Jewish nation. In fact, he attributed little importance to religion in the evaluation of who a Jew was and far more to culture. Religion had played a role in earlier times, but other factors, such as economic relations, food and home, sport and leisure, had also helped give form to individual lives. Moreover, for Dubnov, in modern times, religion had lost its theological significance and become merely a system of symbols and rituals that had nostalgic value.

In its most basic form, Jewish Autonomism refers to the idea that Jews in the diaspora have the right to separate cultural, educational and political institutions that promote Jewish interests. In a multi-national state, Jews would acquire, in addition to individual rights, collective rights and would receive government money for Jewish activities. As Dubnov envisioned it, Jewish autonomy would work best in a liberal democracy in which Jews would have all the protections of the individual citizen, including the right to a trial by jury, religious tolerance and freedom of speech and assembly, and have their own Jewish institutions, such as schools, cultural centers and political administration. Just as society as a whole, the Jewish institutions would be run democratically as well. Although the combination seems implausible,

Dubnov imagined joining the privileges of an inclusive democracy with the rights of national separatism.

Autonomism emerges from the view that Jews throughout the world feel a belonging to a unified people. Dubnov explains, "No one can prevent me from publicly expressing my religion, educating my children in the Jewish national spirit and supporting such an atmosphere in my elementary school. They cannot prevent me from sharing a solidarity of interests with my coreligionists in this country and in other countries, organizing community institutions by legal methods and participating in public institutions and organizations devoted to the projection and defense of the interests of the Jewish people worldwide." (1)

Simon Dubnov was born in Mstislav, Belarus in 1860. Since his father was busy in the timber trade and constantly away from home, he was educated by his grandfather, a Talmudic scholar. A promising *Talmud hochem*, in his teens, Dubnov was infected by the Haskalah, the Jewish enlightenment first through secular books in Hebrew and then in Russian, French, and English. Of particular importance to his intellectual evolution was the English philosopher, John Stuart Mill, who articulated ideas of liberty, self-control and the progressive values of equality, law, and justice. These ideas, mixed in with Russian radicalism, inspired the youth to break from the past.

His all-consuming goal became acquiring a university education. But Dubnov was unable to find a Russian high school that would accept him since he was already too old for matriculation. Making a virtue of necessity, he organized his "own private university," reading intensely and widely in the humanities. A vivid depiction of Dubnov's biography can be found in his memoirs, *The Book of Life* (three vols. 1933-1940), which is truly one of the masterpieces of Russian-Jewish intellectual life of the tsarist period (2).

By 1880, he lived illegally in St. Petersburg, writing articles for the Russian-Jewish newspaper, *Voskhod*, under the pseudonym Kritikus. Incidentally, Kritikus became one of the most well-respected thinkers

in Russia. He single-handedly lent professional respect to Yiddish literature, “discovering” Sholem Aleichem and Mendele Mocher Sforim. In time, Dubnov stopped writing reviews and devoted his energies to the study of East European Jewish history, a field that was in its infancy at the time. Within a decade, Dubnov wrote the main monographs for which he became famous, including *The Jews of Russia and Poland* (three vols., 1916-20) and later his ten-volume *History of the Jews* (1925-30).

Moving to Odessa, Dubnov befriended some of the most important Jewish intellectuals of the twentieth century, such as Ahad-Ha’am, Mendele Mocher Sforim and Nachman Hayim Bialik. At the time of the Revolution of 1905 in Russia, however, Dubnov lost confidence in radicalism, becoming convinced that ultimately only Jews care about Jews. Following the revolution, he organized and led a new political party, the Folkspartay, that embodied his ideas of Jewish autonomy.

The Bolshevik Revolution and life in starving Petersburg hit the historian and his family hard. Finally winning permission to leave the Soviet Union in 1922, he traveled to Berlin and then accepted a position in Latvia at the University of Daupils. Watching the growing Nazi threat with apprehension, Dubnov did not accept offers to come to New York or Palestine, claiming that he could not abandon the Jewish people of Eastern Europe in their time of need. He lost his life to the Nazis in 1940 in Riga when he was shot after having been forced to leave his home and march with the other Jews of the city.

As a historian, Dubnov concluded that Autonomism coincided perfectly with the people’s existence as a wandering nation. In his *Essays on Old and New Judaism* (1898-1905), Dubnov described various kinds of nations, judging them according to their complexity. For example, he claimed that “uncivilized” tribes were on a lower level than modern nations since the members of the former were bound only by language and geography, whereas the latter were united by religion and culture. However, the Jews composed the highest kind of nation because, although bereft of land and even at times of a common language,

they were united by spiritual elements. Each member felt an enduring connection to one another through culture and an indelible sense of peoplehood.

According to Dubnov, this spiritual bond was visible in their history, in the creation of mobile centers. In one era Jews made a home in Palestine, but in another, the center of Jewish life moved to Babylonia. Later it moved again to Spain, then Poland, the United States and Israel. According to Dubnov, the center was strongest and most productive when more of the elements of autonomy were satisfied.

If a community makes demands for collective rights, the question of who is a Jew has to be faced directly. In his answer, Dubnov sought for an inclusiveness that surpassed religious identification. Essentially, he accepted any person who was born Jewish or made a declaration of belonging to the Jewish people. He excluded only those who publicly renounced their identification. Nonetheless, if one were a member of the community one was obligated to pay special taxes, voluntary contributions would not suffice. His thinking on membership was certainly influenced by the fact that allocation of money depended on numbers, but also, and more importantly, by his general attitude toward Jewish identity. Dubnov viewed Jews as a nation with its own languages, culture, and religion. To him it mattered little if one was religious, since a lack of religious practice did not annul one's membership in the community. In fact, Dubnov stood in favor of a separation of church and state. Thus, although he favored government funding of cultural and educational matters, religion was something private. In a liberal state, the laws had to be applied to every citizen regardless of ethnicity or religion.

As one can see right away, the model for Jewish Autonomism was hardly the United States with its emphasis on a triumphant cosmopolitanism and the reduction of separations between nationalities. The Austrian-Hungarian Empire with its parliament consisting of national political parties and (at least in principle) tolerance of religious and ethnic difference was one model. Of course, that empire has its flaws

since in addition to various Jewish political parties, anti-Semitic parties also appeared, and the principle of equality before the law was recognized in the breach rather than in practice.

Another model was The Council of the Four Lands in 16th and 17th century Poland in which Jews were given self-rule. Agreeing to create a parliament of sorts to centralize decisions throughout the country, Jews formed legislative and judicial councils that met at the annual fair in Lublin. More to the point, Dubnov liked the way that in late-medieval Poland, Jews were considered a corporate body separate from the other members of society who were organized by class nobility, merchants, peasantry and clergy. However, Dubnov was quick to note that a modern state could not permit anti-Jewish persecution or discrimination, and he also condemned the class warfare that afflicted Jewish communities at the time. Modern Jewish communities would eliminate the possibility of corruption by unelected leaders through the implementation of democratic methods. Incidentally, Dubnov was an early supporter of women's rights and he envisioned women's suffrage in all his plans.

I think one can agree that Autonomism is something very different from Zionism or even Territorialism. The scope is smaller and the aims more narrow. In contrast to those two projects, Dubnov did not seek to make Jews a majority people, but rather hoped to fine-tune Jewish minority life in the diaspora. Aware that the tide of history moves inexorably toward total assimilation, he believed that only an interminable struggle could ensure Jewish survival. In addition, he understood that even in advanced democracies, minority groups are often held hostage to the majority will. Thus, Dubnov's concepts put him in the forefront of thinking about minority rights in Eastern Europe with such thinkers as Otto Bauer, Toms Masaryk and Noah Prylucki.

There are clearly a number of arresting paradoxes about Dubnov's Autonomism. Remarkably, anti-Semites have long vocalized fears toward the Jews with the accusation that the latter constituted a "state within a state." In truth, it cannot be seen how national separatism

would lead to a reduction in anti-Jewish feeling; on the contrary, such demands would likely increase it. Similarly, it is hard to imagine a state turning to cultural separatism in order to ensure the inclusion of all minorities. Separatism, as far as one can conclude from historical evidence, benefits majorities, leaving minorities excluded.

Although it gives a utopian impression, Autonomism clearly facilitates a struggle with assimilation. I do not think that anyone would disagree that it is hard to preserve Jewish culture and education in a society like the United States that valorizes above all inclusion and individuality. By setting as a principle that minority nationalities need institutionalized protections and funding, Autonomism places a priority on national culture and creativity and demands respect for difference. It promotes democracy and rights for the flourishing of multiplicity and diversity.

But is it realistic? In a world in which cultural homogenization is killing languages, species, and cultures at increasing speed, Autonomism does not look bad at all. Whether it could help save diaspora Jewish culture and whether Jews could implement it in our time are questions that we will probably confront more and more in the face of an undefeatable and uncontrollable assimilation.

**Notes:**

1. S. Dubnov, *Nationalism and History: Essays on Old and New Judaism*, ed. K. Pinson (New York: Athenum, 1970), (1st edition 1958), 134.
2. There is still no English-translation of *Kniga zhizni*, although the University of Wisconsin Press is slated to publish one in the coming year.

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## Saul And David

A poem by Richard E. Sherwin

pity david and saul who fought as if  
eternal enemies and not as pit  
bulls chosen bred and bet on and then tossed  
away a royal win and human loss

pity david and saul inflated by  
the spirit of Gd sucked out and left to die  
a hero on a hill savior in bed  
betrayed by Gd and husked and just as dead

pity david and saul who touched by Gd  
exalted and degraded israel  
and judahs Temples risen twice twice felled  
their suffering abandonments the cost

pity saul and david praise the Lord  
what david wrote saul lived without the word

## The Rambam Project: Code, Mashal, Hegemony, Sanctity Of Life And Gender in the Mishneh Torah

An essay by Janet Madden

*"A code is a perspective of quotations, a mirage of 'structures;' we know only its departures and returns." Roland Barthes*

According to Abraham Joshua Heschel, the point and purpose of Jewish Law is inextricably and inherently bound up with Jewish identity and with living a Jewish life. Heschel asserts that "we have forgotten the mystery of being human and the deep responsibility involved in just being alive... the meaning of God is precisely the challenge of 'how to be.' And this is the meaning of Jewish Law how to be" (252).

In light of Heschel's words, it is possible to understand that Maimonides' purpose in writing the Mishneh Torah was to create a text that would serve as a guide to "how to be" a Jew; more than eight centuries after its compilation, it endures as a central Jewish text and can be understood as an investigation into Jewish identity as well as Jewish law. As Joseph Soloveitchik explains, in the Mishneh Torah, the Rambam "apprehends the religious act in an entirely different light he employed a descriptive method of expounding the content and symbolic meaning of the religious norm" (94). And while the Rambam's primary objective for the Mishneh Torah was to produce a codification of Jewish law, to construe a narrow legal definition of "code" is to misunderstand the nature of the Rambam's project; to approach this work so narrowly is to miss much of the nuance that a careful examination of virtually any part of the Mishneh Torah can provide. For beyond its function as a legal work, the Mishneh Torah is, indeed, a reflection of its author's philosophy, theology, ethical value system, psychological acumen and just plain *seichel* of the Rambam's understanding of how to be, of how to be a Jew, and, particularly, of how to be a Jew in a world in which all of the certainties that he might have expected had been stripped away.



Considering the Mishneh Torah as a codification is both an obvious and intriguingly provocative endeavor. The word "code" has a number of applications, connoting not only a systematically arranged and comprehensive collection of laws, and a systematic collection of regulations and rules of procedure or conduct, but also a system of signals transmitting messages, including messages that require secrecy or brevity. And applying these several definitions to the Mishneh Torah raises a number of interesting possibilities. Because it is a compilation of Halachah, the depiction of the Mishneh Torah as a legal code is an obvious if inadequate taxonomic descriptor. In fact, the Mishneh Torah cites neither sources nor arguments, and confines itself to stating the final decision on the law to be followed in each of the situations it presents; unique in the canon of Halachic works, its author provides no discussion of Talmudic interpretation or methodology, and its sequence of chapters follows the factual subject matter of the laws rather than the intellectual principle involved. And Halachah clearly constitutes a value system a set of consistent ethical values that encompasses both personal and cultural values used for the purpose of ethical or ideological integrity. Since a well-defined value system translates into a moral code, notwithstanding its conceptual and stylistic uniqueness, the Mishneh Torah effortlessly fulfills both the legal and procedural definitions of "code." But this comprehensive yet succinct work was not written in Arabic, as the Ramban's previous works had been; instead, it was written in Hebrew. Thus, these clues the choice of linguistic medium, the audience, and the cultural and historical *milieux* in which it was composed suggest that the Rambam's outward project in fact contains within it the creation of a subversive and subterranean work. Read in the context of these clues, it becomes clear that the true purpose of this work is the addressing of urgent issues of Jewish cultural and religious identity and continuity in the post-Expulsion experience, an experience in which Jews found their communities fractured and their senses of identity and place seismically dislocated. The Rambam's own geographic, cultural and personal migrant experience is likely to have been a condition that Sander Gilman identifies as "frontier" a psychic location in which all peoples interact to define themselves and

others in reality or in fantasy. Gilman emphasizes that a frontier is “not the periphery” (15). Rather, frontier is “the place of the ‘migrant culture of the in-between’ as both a transitional and translational phenomenon, one that ‘dramatizes the activity of a culture’s untranslatableability’” (Homi Bhabha quoted in Gilman *Frontier* 15). And there is much in Jewish life and law that was untranslatable within the context of the non-Jewish world that the Rambam mediated, negotiated and traversed in his roles as physician and community leader and that must certainly have influenced him as philosopher and codifier.

If, as Gilman observes, “Writing plays a central role in defining Jews against the preconceptions of the world in which they find themselves [and] the importance of writing [provides a] general model for the articulation of Jewish identity,” (*Jewish Self-Hatred* 15), then applying Gilman’s theory of the nexus of writing and identity to the Mishneh Torah facilitates a shift in the perception of Rambam’s purpose from a simplistic understanding of a manual of what and how to do and what not do to a terse and sophisticated investigation both of Heschel’s “how to be” and of traditional Judaism’s understanding of life’s foundational purpose: the location and experience of a relationship with the meaning of God.

Within and without Judaism, the exploration of “how to be” is often expressed in narrative, particularly in the form of parable, or *mashal*, which JewishEncyclopedia.com defines as “any fictive illustration in the form of a brief narrative.” Thus, parable came to mean a fictitious narrative, generally referring to something that might naturally occur, by which spiritual and moral matters might be conveyed. As one of the simplest of narrative forms, a parable is a short tale that illustrates universal truth. It sketches a setting, describes an action and shows the results; it often involves a character facing a moral dilemma, or making a questionable decision and then suffering the consequences. Further, as the JewishEncyclopedia.com points out, the *mashal* is integral to explicating Jewish law: “In the Talmud and Midrash almost every religious idea, moral maxim, or ethical requirement is accompanied by a parable which illustrates it.” And while a parable is a literary genre

that presents its message concisely, it does not do so simplistically. In midrashic literature, particularly, according to Gilat Hasan-Rokem, the parable is a theoretical device that, precisely because of its obliqueness, is qualified to bear contents of skepticism and self-contradiction" (112).

In considering possible interpretations of and coded-ness within the Mishneh Torah, it is essential to keep in mind that the Rambam lived, worked and wrote the Mishneh Torah as a *dhimmi* a non-Muslim subject of an empire that imposed on non-Muslims a restricted freedom of religion and worship and that required loyalty to the empire. These conditions conform precisely to Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony. Gramsci theorizes that a culturally-diverse society can nevertheless be ruled or dominated by one of its social classes, in which the ideas of the ruling class come to be seen as the norm, viewed as universal ideologies and perceived to benefit everyone while in fact benefiting the ruling class. As a Jew in the service of the Sultan, the Rambam could not but have had a constant and keen awareness of the hegemonic status of Jews within the Islamic world. And this awareness emerges in his editorial choices in the Mishneh Torah: the inclusion of *meshalim* in a work that strives for intellectual and verbal economy is an example of self-contradiction so subtle that it might go unnoticed and that might be intended to go unnoticed. In Stern's opinion:

*the mashal is an implicitly esoteric mode of communication, an interpretative event that separates 'insiders' from 'outsiders' those who understand from those who don't and that restricts its understanding to a select, or elect, few. It is sometimes claimed that the parable was employed to express controversial or dangerous beliefs that were better not articulated openly, or that could not be for political or doctrinal reasons. The Rabbis themselves would probably have found this subversive or "secretive" conception of the mashal congenial the Rabbis understood how the parable could be used to express controversial opinions in less than fully explicit fashion. (50)*

And an essential component of a literary form as compressed as the *mashal* is the use of symbols concrete representations of abstract ideas that are expressed in symbolic language, the language that Erich Fromm describes as:

*a language in which inner experiences, feelings and thoughts are expressed as if they were sensory experiences, events in the outer world. It is a language which has a different logic from the conventional one we speak in the daytime, a logic in which not time and space are the ruling categories but intensity and association. (7)*

One of the most arresting *meshalim* in the Mishneh Torah in terms of its intensity and association appears in *Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah* 5:9. In *Political Theories of the Middle Ages*, O. Gierke asserts that “The body, like the body politic, is a theatre; everything is symbolic, everything including the sexual act.” (quoted in Brown 131). Thus, the content of Halachah 5:9 and its placement in Rambam’s taxonomy point both to its symbolic elements and to its function as *mashal*.

The case recounted in Halachah 5:9 is taken from *Sanhedrin* 75a; it relates the predicament of a lovesick man whose life can be saved, according to his physicians, only if he is able to have sexual relations with the woman who is the object of his desire. Initially, Halachah 5:9 might seem incongruously placed in *Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah*, laws that are the foundation of the Torah, since it might seem that this halachah should appear in *Hilchot Ishut*, which addresses the prohibition against sexual relations outside marriage, or *Hilchot Issure Bi’ah*, the laws of forbidden sexual relations. But, in the sequencing of *Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah*, Halachah 5:9 is preceded by a discussion of feeding “a sick person insects or creeping animals, or chametz on Pesach, or when one is fed on Yom Kippur” (Maimonides 222) and succeeded by a discussion of one who is not forced to transgress a mitzvah but does so “in a spirit of derision, to arouse G-d’s anger” (Maimonides 226). The Rambam thus bookends the teaching presented in Halachah 5:9 with laws of exceptions to prohibited foods and with the prohibition against provoking God as a result of disrespectful behavior. Therefore, the case of the lovesick man is poised between a life-affirming example of Kiddush HaShem, the sanctification of the name of God, and an example of a behavior that can be subsumed into the general category of Chillul HaShem, the desecration of the name of God. Its placement, therefore, signals the dramatic intersection and the centrality of the

theological and social issues that Halachah 5:9 raises, since its narrative connects the idea of using the forbidden to save a life and the right of the man who desires set against that of the woman who is the desired object.

In *The Women of the Talmud*, Judith Z. Abrams asserts that in the Talmudic era, "it was not uncommon for men to attempt to betroth women when the women were not all that interested in becoming betrothed" (42), but that, male desire notwithstanding, "the transaction had to be effected with a maximum of seriousness and dignity" (42-43). It is not possible to discern whether Halachah 5:9 describes an attempt at coerced betrothal through the medium of life-saving necessity or whether the physicians who treat the man are proponents of preserving his life regardless of the consequences that the fulfillment of his desires will cause to the woman he desires. But what can quickly be discerned is that Halachah 5:9 dramatizes the collision between an halachic infraction considered so serious that one must "die rather than transgress," (*Sanhedrin* 74a) and a concern for the sanctity of life so overarching that the entire Torah is otherwise set aside to preserve life or health (*Yoma* 82b). If, as the commentary on Halachah 5:9 asserts, the case of the lovesick man "actually occurred and [was] not merely an abstract, theoretical question" (Touger in Maimonides 225), purported fact does not obviate either the problematic content of this narrative or its function as a *mashal* that operates simultaneously as an exploration of Jewish law and identity, the Toraitic value of the sanctity of life, the status of Jewish women and hegemonic Islamic-Jewish relations that is, the psychic territory of Gilman's frontier.

In order to explore the theoretical implications of Halachah 5:9 in the Rambam's world, it is instructive to consider his perspective on *brit milah*, the embodied halachic evidence of Jewish male identity and relationship to God. Shaye J.D. Cohen points out that according to both Philo and Maimonides, a defect "inheres in Jewish men"; Philo explains that the purpose of circumcision is to teach men to moderate their lust, while Maimonides "explains that the purpose of circumcision is to weaken the male organ, thereby in fact reducing lust and diminishing

performance" (quoted in Cohen 143-4). In the *Guide for the Perplexed*, during his discussion of the sexual effect of circumcision, the Rambam opines that circumcision "weakens the power of sexual excitement" (575). And while asserting that performance anxiety underpins Halachah 5:9 is an overly facile reading, on a symbolic level, the remedy of curative sexual relations as, literally, a life-saving measure, may in fact be an expression of the reality of a sense of personal and communally-felt impotence of an exilic Jewish population both in the Talmudic period and in the Rambam's day. And if this halachah is read as a *mashal*, it is possible to view the lovesick man as the symbol of the Jew who albeit his presumed circumcision has become thoroughly assimilated into a non-Jewish morality and who, through his failure to moderate his impulses, has become enslaved to his unbridled desire.

In "Ethical Ideas," the Rambam repeatedly argues that the "right way" (9) to live is achieved by adhering to the virtue of moderation. He takes the position that "every person should always evaluate his dispositions and adjust them in the middle course, so that he may enjoy physical health" (9). But, as Byron Sherwin and Seymour Cohen state, in the Rambam's opinion, the elimination of bad habits does not merely improve physical health: since "a prerequisite for moral action is moral volition, bad habits are to be avoided since they restrain choice" (112). The moral illness of the man in Halachah 5:9 is both concrete and so acute that it is, literally, life-threatening: a condition that the Rambam likely would have diagnosed as the result of possessing the characteristic of indulging "in appetites without being sufficiently gratified" (9). Thus, the message is that the man's bad habit has influenced him to such an extent that his unrestrained and fatal fixation on the woman he desires will, literally, kill him. The lovesick man serves as the embodied proof-text for the Rambam's pronouncement that "by yielding to lust a man loses his intellectual energy, injures his health, and perishes before his time" (17).

The physician-characters of the *mashal*, who say that the man's only remedy is the satisfaction of his desire, simply diagnose and prescribe. The *mashal* does not permit them to express philosophical, ethical,

theological or psychological perspectives. But the Rambam and other medieval Jews who worked as practicing physicians incorporated both halacha and moral principles in their *hanhagot*, a genre of ethical writing that focuses on “specific practical details of moral behavior” with the objective of “lead[ing] and guide[ing] one through particular prescriptions toward proper behavioral patterns” (Sherwin and Cohen 115). In this case, the man’s moral illness provides a cautionary example, and in incorporating this *mashal* into *Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah*, the Rambam illustrates his belief that physical life without a moral foundation cannot be sustained and confirms the rabbis’ teaching that it should not be, if the value of one life can be established only as the result of the immoral co-opting of another.

In Jewish textual tradition, Melanie Malka Landau points out, “Women and Torah are used interchangeably as objects of male desire” (94). In this *mashal*, the symbolic value of the woman, signaled by the complete absence of detail about her, is indeed aligned with the value of halachah and Jewish ethical values that derive from and are the foundations of the Torah. Throughout the Mishneh Torah, Maimondes clearly communicates that ideally, Jews know that they must go beyond the strict mandates of halachah, which teaches only the basics: they must act *lifnim meishurat hadin* and go beyond basic legal requirements designed to safeguard Jewish life and values.

In *Toward a New Tzniut*, Danya Ruttenberg observes that the “ethic of modesty seeks to enable empowered individuals to live in connection with the Divine; it is also a communal value” (208). But Halachah 5:9 depicts a man who has allowed his lust to become so utterly ascendant that he has violated his connection with the Divine on both personal and communal level; as the *mashal* makes clear through the device of repetition, he cannot be saved at the expense of the woman, and must be permitted to die.

The Rambam writes in *Hilchot Ishut* 15 that “The sages have ordained that a man should honor his wife more than himself,” (quoted in Finkel 225), and the lovesickness of the man in Halachah 5:9 is an indication

of his incapacity to enter into a legitimate relationship. Martin Samuel Cohen points out that although “Semen is *av tumah*, a primary agent there is no moral opprobrium at all directed towards healthy men and women who enter into a state of *tumah* for rational reasons” (181-2). But in Halachah 5:9, there exists neither health nor rationality. Indeed, as the halachah makes clear, if the lovesick man is permitted to have prescriptive sex with the woman, his moral contagion will cause her to become physically and spiritually *tumah*; even speaking with him privately will cause her to become socially as well as spiritually *tumah*. In fact, his own condition of *tumah*, caused by his unrestrained desire, is so dangerous that any contact with him will inevitably dishonor and endanger not only the woman he desires but Jewish women in general.

Just as Judith Romney Wegner begins her study of the status of women in the Mishnah by stressing the importance of considering male-female relationships within the “crucial” context of the Mishnah’s concern with the “sanctity of human relationships” (4), so understanding Halachah 5:9 as a *mashal* illuminates the crucial importance of this principle to Jewish identity and Jewish life. This halachah confirms that in Jewish life, of the sanctity of relationships and the value of every human life are primary values. In its extraordinary concern that Jewish women “would not be regarded capriciously” (Mishneh Torah 226) even in a situation where a life is threatened, Halachah 5:9 asserts that Jewish women are not mere objects of desire and that both morally and legally, Judaism takes the position that Jewish women, no less than Jewish men, are divinely endowed with human dignity. Diasporic hegemony does not elide an individual’s responsibility for his own behavior; one life is not privileged over another. As the Mishneh Torah makes clear, to be a Jew is to be in relationship with God and with humanity in the context of a legal and ethical system that provides guidance for “how to be” with the aim of imbuing every aspect of life with possibilities for holiness and meaning.

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## Valuing Cultural Differences

A review essay by Steven Windmueller

***The Jewish Origins of Cultural Pluralism* by Daniel Greene.  
Bloomington: Indiana University Press**

Daniel Greene treats his readers to a fascinating story associated with the emergence of the idea of cultural pluralism. Employing the *Menorah Journal*, philosopher Horace Kallen, along with a group of fellow academics and Harvard students, share their critique of the American Jewish scene. For Kallen this journal and its student-affiliated organization, the Menorah Association, would serve as a vehicle during the period beginning in 1915 and ending in the mid-1930s for his ideas and those of his colleagues for creating a vibrant Jewish cultural movement. At the height of its impact, Intercollegiate Menorah Association would be active on more than 80 campuses across the United States.

Emerging as a counter-point to the melting pot thesis of Israel Zangwell, Kallen and his cohort sought to use to the pages of the *Journal* and the activities of the Menorah Association to articulate their vision for American Jewry. The founders of this movement were seeking “to develop a vibrant Jewish cultural renaissance in an American setting. Kallen’s pluralist vision relied on imaging the nation as conglomerate of co-existing groups.” For Kallen and his fellow travelers, assimilation was identified as “national suicide.” Joining the ranks of the cultural Zionists, he envisioned Palestine as “a center from which the Jewish spirit may radiate and give to Jews that inspiration which springs from the memories of the great past and the hope of a great future.”

In the process of framing their case that American Judaism was without substance, these young scholars would challenge the Jewish establishment. They engaged the key leadership of the primary liberal seminaries, HUC, JIR and JTS and, more directly, a number of central figures within the Reform rabbinate, in a debate over the vitality of American Judaism. Kallen contended that “Judaism tends to be more

than a survival worn down to dietary intolerances, an occasional Kad-dish for the dead, and perhaps a ticket for admitting to synagogue or hall on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.”

A specific portion of this book is devoted to the contentious inter-change between the intellectual voices of the Menorah Association and Reform Judaism’s rabbinic leadership. Led by Elliott Cohen, who later would serve as the editor of the American Jewish Committee’s *Commentary Magazine*, the assault was focused on Jewish assimilation and the failure in particular of the American rabbinate for being “a too meek acquiescence in the degradation of the rabbinic function to that of a spokesman i.e., a mouthpiece of the ignorance, ambitions, and fears of the influential Jewish laity.” In turn, Kallen blamed rabbis for the “failures of educational institutions and the internal divisiveness of organizational life.” These charges did not go unattended, as the leaders of the Reform movement during this period, including Dr. Julian Morgenstern, Abba Hillel Silver and Solomon Freehof, offered their criticism of Kallen and the *Journal*, ultimately leading to a formal break between these prominent rabbinic figures and the editorial board of the *Menorah Journal*.

In introducing the Menorah Movement, Greene also documents the emergence and growth of academic anti-Semitism in the 1920’s, led by Harvard University’s president, A. Lawrence Lowell, as the Ivy institutions imposed quotas on both the admission of Jewish students and in limiting the hiring of Jewish faculty members. Greene also does a particular service for his readers by providing a historic survey of the development of the field of Jewish studies in the United States, which parallels the emergence of the Menorah Association. Similarly, the writer offers a historical background on the emergence and growth of Hillel as the primary expression of Jewish religious and cultural life on American campuses, ultimately surpassing and replacing the Menorah Association.

As a part of his closing reflections, Greene identified the more recent challenges to the ideas surrounding cultural pluralism as an accepted

social model. Multiculturalism and pluralism are seen by some as the natural successors to the concepts introduced by Horace Kallen.

This well-written text not only lays out the ideas associated with cultural pluralism as defined by Kallen and others but also offers readers an insight into the world of American higher education and its engagement and connection to the rise of Jewish intellectualism. In the end, Greene contends that in a society that valued cultural differences, “promoting Jewish culture would not marginalize Jews but would create opportunities for them to coexist within a diverse ethnic landscape.” As such this book opens new doors to a richer understanding of an essential piece of 20th century American Jewish ideology and social behavior.

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