
CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM

Volume XXXIII, Number 4

Summer 1980, ס'שנ

THE JEWISH RESPONSE TO CRISIS

Mortimer Ostow

TRIBUTE TO ADELE GINZBERG

Eli Ginzberg

THE NEW ASSIMILATIONISTS

Arnold Jacob Wolf

A VIEW OF SWEDISH JEWRY

Morton H. Narrowe

**INDEX TO VOLUMES XXXI-XXXIII OF
CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM**

*review essays / mekorot
book reviews*

BOOK REVIEWS

Perspectives on Jews and Judaism: Essays in Honor of Wolfe Kelman, ed. by Arthur Chiel, New York: Rabbinical Assembly, 1978, 483 pp., \$25.00.

PERSPECTIVES ON JEWS AND JUDAISM is marvelously fascinating to read for precisely the same reason that it is maddeningly difficult to review: it covers more subjects than any one person could possibly write about with authority. Gone are the days when a scholar can lay claim to the whole field of Jewish Studies. Ours is the era of specialization: the "expert at everything" meets universal scorn.

The value of in-depth study cannot be denied; still, one can only lament the disappearance of what once was known as the community of Jewish scholarship. Increasingly, specialists in different fields of Jewish Studies ignore everything but what goes on in their own narrow disciplines. Those that do venture out move to the secular world, usually that closest to their own speciality. Too often, they allow advances in other Jewish fields to pass unnoticed. Cross-fertilization in Judaic Studies becomes ever more difficult.

A cheer, therefore, is in order for the *festschriften* and journals that resist currents of change and stubbornly insist on bringing all aspects of Jewish Studies within their purview. The volume at hand is particularly cheering: its almost two score of studies span the entire Jewish experience (though, surprisingly, the field of Holocaust Studies goes unrepresented). As Gerson Cohen points out in his masterful introduction, such diversity of subject is suitable tribute to the honoree, Executive Vice-President of the Rabbinical Assembly and a man "enormously well-read and sensitive to issues both classical and modern." The diversity is also a tribute to the editor, who liberally granted contributors free rein to honor Wolfe Kelman in any manner they found most appropriate.

From amidst all this delightful diversity, a certain overarching unity nevertheless

emerges. The unity is the unity of the humanities: seemingly narrow studies yield teachings of broad significance and profound importance.

Though articles are arranged alphabetically, any historically-minded person will begin this volume with David Lieber's analysis of biblical leadership. Prophets, priests, and wisdom teachers, Lieber demonstrates, were men who "emerged as *the* leaders because they permitted themselves to be led." Like all great leaders, they were rooted in their society, while simultaneously transcending it. A second Bible article comes from the pen of Shlomo Balter. He finds, hidden away in Psalm 1, the "fundamental meaning of Torah." God's moral teachings and man's praise enter into dialogue. Ultimately, both agree: Torah and happiness are interrelated.

A different kind of relationship finds expression in Jacob Agus's study of the Book of Acts. Viewed anew from a Jewish perspective, Acts emerges as an important document in the early divergence of Christianity from Judaism.

Continuing into the Rabbinic period, one finds Louis Finkelstein's important study on "The Origin and Development of the Qedushah," David Novak's inquiry into the "Origin of the Noahide Laws," and Isaac Klein's exploration of "Euthanasia: A Jewish View." David Weiss Halivni's "Can A Religious Law Be Immoral?" is as timely as Klein's piece and has already been widely quoted for polemical ends. Its innocent title notwithstanding, the article has direct bearing on what Halivni pleases to call "our present religious predicament." We await his more detailed work which is in progress.

Today's renewed interest in Hasidism may or may not relate to "our present religious predicament," but it is symptomatic of a widespread dissatisfaction with past social and religious certainties. Here, four articles explore aspects of hasidic thought, each in a different way. The late Abraham Joshua Hesch-

el (translated by Samuel H. Dresner) recounts the legendary story of how Rabbi Pinhas of Koretz prevented a Russian invasion of Poland. Pinchas Hakohen Peli discusses the Sabbath as found in the writings of Rabbi Zvi Elimelech of Dinor ("we can infuse the temporal world with eternity, and raise ourselves to the heights of Sabbath each day of the week"). S. Michael Gelber compares psychoanalytic insights to hasidic ones, "to substantiate the strong suspicion of wisdom in both their sets of insights." Using a different approach, Jacob Yuroh Teshima contrasts hasidic insights to Zen Buddhist ones, particularly in relation to "Strange Thoughts" ("while Zen Buddhism denies their significance from the outset, Hasidism came to discover [their] cosmic significance").

Thoughts, strange and otherwise, form the subject matter of other scholarly articles in this collection. David Wolf Silverman examines Gersonides' remarks on prophecy ("the Active Intellect is the operative cause of miraculous events"). In an examination of Hebrew personal pronouns, José Faur deals with the paradoxical nature of human speech ("speech is both the grounds of isolation and the means by which isolation is resolved"). Leon J. Goldstein investigates Martin Buber's conception of the Interpersonal Encounter, "the disinterested knowledge of our fellow man." A different kind of encounter, that between body and soul, is re-examined by Harlan J. Wechsler in light of modern medical technology's advances in radical, perhaps dehumanizing brain surgery. After this, it comes as something of a relief to find three papers (Harold M. Schulweis, Simon Greenberg, Ben Zion Bokser) dealing with God: His personality, forbearance, and the religious dimensions of His supposed nonexistence.

Happily, participants in this *festshrift* have not slighted the editor's area of specialization: modern Jewish history. Arthur Chiel himself investigates Hebraic allusions in Marc Les-carbot's *History of New France* (1609).

Menahem Schmelzer traces the modern history of the unique manuscript of Isaac Ibn Ezra's *Diwan*, now safely ensconced in the Jewish Theological Seminary Library. More broadly, Sefton D. Temkin, Louis Jacobs, Abraham J. Karp and Seymour Siegel analyze various aspects of the great nineteenth-century Jewish tension between tradition and change, a tension which spawned and continues to strain the entire Conservative movement. Temkin discusses Max Lillienthal's effort to set up a *bet din* in New York in 1847. Jacobs and Karp portray two rabbis, Joseph Hayyim of Baghdad and Jacob David Wilowsky (Ridwas), originally from Grodno, who held fast to the reins of halakhic tradition even as wild forces of change erupted around them. Focusing his lens somewhat differently, Siegel concentrates on the Lithuanian "War of Kitniyot" (1868), a battle over whether drought conditions permitted rabbis to sanction as an emergency measure the consumption of legumes on Passover. Here as elsewhere the struggle turned more on *haskalah* than *halakhah*.

Zionism, the explosive issue that is to twentieth century Jewish history what Hasidism and Reform were in earlier years, receives equal billing with them in the table of contents: four papers. Simcha Kling tries to prove that "from its earliest days . . . Conservative Judaism wholeheartedly embraced the Zionist idea." Benjamin C. I. Ravid publishes fascinating snatches from correspondence between David Ben Gurion and Simon Rawidowicz dealing with the State of Israel and the Diaspora. "I do not accept this [Ben Gurion] decision, which excludes the ten million souls in the diasporas, and myself among them, from the totality of Israel. I have been a man of Israel all my life," Rawidowicz insisted in 1957. He would no doubt have been pleased to see the articles in this volume by Nahum Goldmann ("Israel's Cultural Mission") and Arnold Jacob Wolf ("On the Dialectics of Zionism"), which convincingly demonstrate that the issues he

raised over two decades ago are current still.

Equally current, alas, are those problems which the Diaspora must face all by itself. "The core identity offered to Jewish children is attenuated in several respects," Mortimor Ostow warns in his "The Psychologic Determinants of Jewish Identity." Rela Geffen Monson demonstrates that the Jewish family in America has its identity problems, too. Happily, both Monson and Ostow assure us that the situation is far from critical. Milton Himmelfarb ("A Haunting Question") offers no such comfort. He sees us committing "demographic suicide," and in a sprightly written mock interview wonders how a survivor from our time will justify his actions forty-five years hence.

Himmelfarb is only one of several contributors who decided to honor Wolfe Kelman in some unconventional way. Others — Chaim Grade (in his original Yiddish), Walter Kaufmann ("Israel: A Cycle of Poems"), and Elie Wiesel ("The Tale of a Niggun") — proffer poetry. Eli Ginzberg presents a fascinating memoir of the Seminary Family's intrigues, feuds, homelife, and offspring. And Jacob Neusner contributes "notes toward an intellectual autobiography," a frank self-analysis of his own scholarly evolution during the past twenty-five years.

Neusner's piece makes explicit what the others studies clearly imply, that (to quote Neusner citing Kelman) "scholarship expresses culture and its human, social context." This, perhaps, is what unifies Jewish scholars. Certainly, it is what keeps Jewish scholarship — and for that matter non-Jewish scholarship — vibrant and creative. Ultimately, it may also be that which links the fate of Jewish scholarship with the fate of Elie Wiesel's niggun:

*it continues
and will continue
until the end of time
and beyond.*

CINCINNATI, OHIO

JONATHAN D. SARNA

Masot beguf rishon (Essays in the First Person), by Aharon Appelfeld, Jerusalem: Hasif-riah hatsionit al yad hahistradrut hatsionit ha'olamit, 1979, 14 pp., \$3.00.

AHARON APPELFELD is the Israeli author whose literary works, almost in their entirety, revolve around the Holocaust. Recently a collection of his essays has appeared in which the author speaks directly rather than through his fictional characters, their situations and crises. While in much that is written on the subject of the Holocaust the words tend to shout out to the reader, this very sensitive book is more like various hues and shades of whisper. Appelfeld belongs to a generation of Hebrew writers who have rejected the style and ways of thinking of pathos. The quiet reflective tone of these essays is related to Appelfeld's conviction as to where the crucial truth of the Holocaust experience lies: not in the realm of things that can be recorded in historical studies but rather within the hidden depths of the soul of the individual who lived through that experience.

Appelfeld's essays touch gently upon various kinds of inner experiences, including moments both of torment and triumph. They suggest the devastating effect of the shattering of faith brought about by the Holocaust, not a religious faith but rather a belief in the promise of European civilization and human progress. We are told that the demolition of these illusions was no less excruciating than the physical torment of those same years. The essays deal with the painful yet healing confrontation with the very fact of one's being a Jew, a fact initially quite insignificant in the consciousness of many Jews caught up with the events of the Holocaust and one to which they related with both love and enmity at the very same time. The essays allude to the moral traumas associated with survival and to the sense of the loss of the human image which are often more painful to the survivor even than the memories of the camps. We are told of a subtle determination to forget one's