

Sh'ma

a journal of Jewish responsibility

13/252, APRIL 15, 1983

The end of Zionist ideology?

Mitchell Cohen

"Tell me your honor, how am I to understand this, that you write about 'light, light, light' while I feel the dark in every part of my soul?"
Yosef Hayim Brenner to Rav Kook.

For Zionists dismayed by the direction of Israel in the Begin era, it is time for some hard thinking and tough questions. Even apart from its manifestations in Israeli-Arab relations, there is a profound malaise within Zionism—a malaise with roots deeper than the fortunes and policies of the current government in Jerusalem. To borrow a phrase from Hannah Arendt, Zionism no longer thinks what it is doing. It congratulates itself incessantly for its many (and very real) accomplishments. It does not try to understand its own limits and possibilities in today's world and prefers to rely on old lifeless formula and an elaborate institutional network to safeguard its future, pretending that this institutional network is a popular movement of the Jewish people. For Zionism to survive as something with value, it must begin an internal dialogue unafraid of the conclusions that might be reached. It must think **itself**.

Historical movements neither appear nor sustain themselves *ex nihilo*. Conditions, generally of conflict, provide the soil for their growth. In the golden age of Zionist thought (roughly the half century after 1881), real conditions gave the impetus to political ideas. Self-scrutiny of the Jewish people was the essence of Zionism. Zionism attempted to think the condition of the Diaspora and propose an alternative. Thus as long as there is a Diaspora, the *raison d'être* of Zionism exists.

Current Zionism is Contentless

The existence of a *raison d'être*, however, does not guarantee the continued existence of a movement. By and large, post-state Zionism is an uncritical Zionism, a non-thinking Zionism with nothing to say to Diaspora Jews about their *own* lives; we have instead an Israeli nationalism on one hand, and a support movement in the *Golah* (exile) for the Jewish state on the other. This is an easy Zionism, especially for American Jews, because it has no need to pose difficult *Zionist* questions about the nature of life in the *Golah*. This contentless Zionism permits fixation on the *formal* (though, of course, unquestionably necessary) aspect of Zionism, the State *qua* State. Questions about means and ends, indeed the very effort to define ends, are disparaged as "ideological bickering," leftovers from another age and another continent. After all, it is better to be "pragmatic" like good Americans.

One aspect of American political culture is a self-congratulatory enthusiasm for being "non-ideological." This was crystallized in the "End of Ideology" thesis propounded by various social and political scientists in the 1950's. Briefly (and broadly) the assertion was that the end of ideology was upon us because the advanced West could resolve all major problems within the existing systems, thus allowing everybody to be happily integrated. Hence if we can properly manipulate the means (e.g., the American political and social systems), we need ask no real questions about political and social ends. In this technocratic outlook, the means became the end; as Alasdair MacIntyre has pointed out, the "End of Ideology" argument was an ideology itself. We add: an ideology of the status quo masquerading as pragmatism.

For the American *Golah*, where Zionism as a critique of Jewish reality was never taken too seriously, a similar end of Zionist ideology poses no problem. Indeed, it was Zionist ideology that was the problem. What better exemplifies this than Brandeis' famous rationalization that to be better Americans we have to be better Jews and to be better Jews we have to be Zionists. If Zionism is a critique of *galut* (exile) reality, it is self-evident that it makes American identity problematic.

The Relationship Between Means And Ends

Mainstream American Zionism has always been that of Brandeis; it speaks of the State which American Zionists support but not of the relations

between means and ends. Means and ends may be conceptually distinguished but are in reality always mutually determining. Their interrelation was at the heart of the division between left and right within Zionism. Jabotinsky's attack on the rising power of the Zionist Socialists in the 1920's and 1930's was based on a statist vision of nationalism, the goal of Zionism was a state, pure and simple. The national endeavor ought not to be "polluted" by foreign, divisive elements such as socialism and the question of social classes. "In Zionism and in Palestine," he wrote in 1931, "you are but a puppet dangling from a wire and playing a prescribed part, and the hand that pulls that wire is called— the State in building."

Such a formulation, of course, begs the question of what a state is. A technical means of protection and organization? A tool of oppression? An arena for the the expression of various forms of life? Are the institutions and tools of a state, e.g., government, army, police, embodiments of human realization?

Jabotinsky *reified* the State; he made it a thing unto itself, the be-all and end-all. Hence the Labor Zionist reply to Jabotinsky, articulated in particular by Ben Gurion at the time, was that means and ends could not be separated; any national movement, including Zionism, could be good or bad depending on the social reality it creates.

If social vision is subordinated, the means, however, become the be-all and end-all... And Zionism becomes an ideology of statism whose focus is the Jewish State rather than the liberation of the Jewish people. In short, it becomes an ideology of means masquerading as a pragmatic nationalism. Ironically, Ben Gurion himself came to embrace something like this— it might be argued that in this regard he became his opposite, Jabotinsky. In pursuing his policy of "*mamlakhtiyut*" ("statism" or "*etatism*") as Prime Minister, Ben Gurion sought to subordinate all institutions, including those of the Labor movement (the *kibbutzim*, the Histadrut) to the State and its exigencies. Statism, colored with a foggy messianism, replaced socialism in his political vocabulary, and while much of the Labor leadership still spoke of socialism, it increasingly became statist as well. Israel may be the only historical example of a socialist movement nationalizing its own institutions and, by this, undermining itself.

Compromise For The Sake of Coalition

Take, for instance, the question of education. During the Mandate, labor, religious and general Zionists each maintained their own school systems. *Mamlakhtiyut* dictated one, state-run system; but for the sake of his coalition with the religious parties, Ben Gurion satisfied himself with merging only the general and labor systems and continuing a separate religious one. In 1953, the year before the merger, 43.4% of Israeli students attended the labor schools as opposed to 19.1% in the religious and 27.1% in the general "trends" (as they were called). In other words, Labor yielded a critical means by which to socialize young Israelis into its value system. No doubt many in Mapai thought that their

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dominance in the government would guarantee the infusion of Labor ideals in national education. In retrospect, we can see how wrong they were.

Indeed, three decades later the Zionist right wing, long the apostles of fetishizing the state, came to power and gave their coalition partner, the National Religious Party, the portfolio for Education and Culture. Zvulun Hammer, a religious and not a "pure" nationalist, has sought, albeit with caution, to enhance the religious content of the curriculum of the secular state schools which he oversees along with the religious ones. Labor, in the meanwhile, is dominated by statist technocrats and finds itself not only in opposition but bewildered and unsure of its own vision and goals.

The State Has Become An End In Itself

Israeli and American Zionisms have met where the means become all and ends— ideology— are negated. What this ultimately signifies is the triumph of right wing Zionism— a triumph, if the above analysis is correct, prepared by the Labor Zionists. With this triumph the State *qua* State becomes an object of worship, nationalism runs rampant, and there is no place for a critical Zionism. The promotion of *aliyah* today exemplifies what this implies: how often are American Jews told to move to Israel "because it is good for the State" (i.e. American Jews are a means to the end of the State), rather than because *aliyah* responds to dilemmas to their *own* lives (in which case, the State is a means, and only a means, for the well-being of the Jewish people)? The two approaches represent difference between a statist Zionism and a humanist Zionism.

Ahad Ha'am once wrote an essay entitled "Anticipations and Survivals" in which he tells us that in each age there exist beliefs that are out of step with their times, hidden in "watertight compartments" in the minds of a few, with no practical effect. These are "survivals" lacking the conditions which originally nurtured them, and their contemporary appearance of life "is illusory: it is no real life of motion and activity, but the passive life of an old man whose 'moisture is gone and his natural force abated'."

Alongside "survivals" there are "anticipations"— ideas yet in their youth, alive (like "survivals") in a world that doesn't understand them. Writing in 1892, Ahad Ha'am saw the Return to Zion as a "survival" which, given the right developments, could flourish as new life, and become as a soul to

a body. For there is hope for both "anticipations" and "survivals," he insisted, as long as they have a breath in them.

Zionism is Nearly Lifeless

The Zionist world today is composed of bodies without souls, institutions with red tape in their veins; their appearance of life is illusory as demonstrated by the surreal world of the Zionist Congress held this past December. (How many delegates returned to the *Golah* complaining that there was too much "politics" at the Congress? Better to be "pragmatic.")

A vibrant, critical Zionism is but a survival today, somewhere in watertight compartments in the minds of a few. Shall it suffocate or break out and breathe? Here then is one task for thinking Zionists: an intellectual guerrilla war against the Zionism of today. Before Zionism's future lies the question of finding a form of itself relevant to the conditions of the times. In the era of Beginesque triumphalism this is to ask: can the survival become an anticipation too— an old-new soul giving rebirth to a decaying body? ●

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Promoting racism in israel

Eric H. Yoffie

On February 26, 1980, an article entitled "The Mitzvah of Genocide in the Torah" appeared in *Bat Kol*, the student publication of Bar-Ilan University, which is Israel's major Orthodox institution of higher learning. Written by Rabbi Israel Hess, the article is an explanation of the

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commandment in Deuteronomy 25:17 to obliterate the memory of Amalek. Rabbi Hess notes that the commandment requires the killing of babes and sucklings, and forbids the showing of mercy. Amalek, he tells us, is any nation that declares war against Israel. In response to such a war, "God proclaims a counter-jihad" in which He Himself participates. Lest the reader thinks that Rabbi Hess is referring only to an abstract halachic matter, he concludes by stressing that we shall all soon be called upon to wage a *milchemet mitzvah* (a war of religious obligation), the purpose of which will be to exterminate Amalek. Today's Amalek is not identified, but it is not difficult to guess whom he has in mind. Following the article's publication, there were no expressions of protest from the *Bat Kol* editorial board, Bar-Ilan students, or the university administration, and it was later reprinted in other newspapers.

The opinions of Rabbi Hess are significant because they indicate a distressing trend which has become increasingly apparent in the State of Israel in the last decade. In certain Orthodox circles, Rabbis and others, quoting Torah and speaking in the name of Jewish law, have expressed views about the relations between Jews and non-Jews that are such a departure from normally accepted thinking on such matters that one can only react to them with incredulity. Their underlying assumption seems to be that the hostility of the Gentile world to the Jewish people has created an unbridgeable gap between Jew and non-Jew. This hatred is seen as being so intense that it demands, with the supposed approval of the Jewish tradition, a radical response on the part of Jews to the non-Jews who live in their midst and on their borders.

Gentiles Suspected of Intent To Murder

A second striking example of this phenomenon is an exchange of letters between Rabbi Shimon Wizer and a Yeshivah student serving in the Israeli army (*Niv Hamidrashiyah*, vol. 11, pp. 29-31, and vol. 13, pp. 211-212). The student had asked his teacher about the application of the concept of *tohar haneshek* (the purity of arms) to the Arab non-combatant population during wartime. The Rabbi struggles with the question of how to judge a Jew who murders a Gentile during peacetime, but proceeds to assert that "in any case, in time of war, one is obligated to kill." He explains his conclusion by pointing to the talmudic principle that if one comes to kill you, you should arise and kill him first. When applying the principle to Jews, Rabbi Wizer points out,

it is valid only when there is firm reason to believe that your attacker has murderous intentions. However, the non-Jew in wartime "must always be judged as one who comes to kill you, except if it is otherwise clear that he has no malicious intent." Rabbi Wizer insists that his view of *tohar haneshek* is the correct one according to halacha, and he laments the fact that the Israel Defense Forces have accepted the Gentile meaning of the term, thus forcing them to suffer unnecessary casualties.

In response to his Rabbi's answer, the soldier concludes in his letter that "during wartime I am permitted, and even obligated, to kill every Arab man and woman who happen across my way. I am obligated to kill them even if this leads to complications with the military code." Concerned that so many children are misled by the "rationality" that is so prevalent in Israeli society, the soldier urges that this concept of *tohar haneshek* be taught in Israeli schools, especially the religious ones.

In a later defense of his position, Rabbi Wizer reaffirms his stand, and adduces as support an opinion by Rabbi Abraham Zemel which "arrived at a similar conclusion." Rabbi Zemel's views are also worthy of consideration. They appeared in an article which was written while he served as Chief Military Rabbi of the Central Command, and which contains a halachic justification for the killing of non-Jewish civilians, including women and children, in time of war: "Thus they say: 'And the best among the Gentiles thou shalt kill,' and one must never trust that a non-Jew will refrain from causing harm to our forces." The Chief of Staff suppressed the article, but it later found its way into the secular press (*Haolam Haze*, no. 1915).

Proponents of Racism Well-known

The proponents of these views are in some cases well-known and highly respected figures. For example, Rabbi Eliezer Waldenberg, the winner of the 1976 Israel Prize, has contended that it is forbidden for non-Jews to live in Jerusalem: "I, for example, am for maintaining the law that forbids non-Jews from living in Jerusalem, and if we are to maintain this law in a proper fashion we would need to expel all non-Jews from Jerusalem... In like manner, it is forbidden to us to permit non-Jews to be in a majority in any city among the cities of Israel" (*Haarets*, May 9, 1976).

It would be terribly wrong to suggest that all or

most members of Israel's Orthodox community support such ideas. Surely they do not. A relatively small number of *Gush Emunim* members and sympathizers are responsible. However, it must be stressed that these quotations are no longer simply isolated examples, and many more could be added to those offered above. Even more distressing is the fact that with a few exceptions, the Orthodox establishment in Israel has remained silent in the face of these clumsy distortions of Jewish law.

Amnon Rubinstein Takes Exception

The one public figure who has carefully catalogued these outrages and has attempted to bring them to the public's attention is Amnon Rubinstein, a law professor at Tel Aviv University and a member of the Knesset's moderate *Shinui* party. Unfortunately, Rubinstein's efforts have gained little notice. He is usually ignored or seen as an alarmist, while *Gush Emunim* supporters have vilified him as a Jew-hater and an Arab-lover. He has remained undeterred, however, and has pointed out that not only do such voices bring Judaism into disrepute, but they also could create a dangerous mood which might have serious practical consequences for the Arabs of Israel.

Rubinstein is right, and the time has come for a concerted and forceful protest from the religious community, Orthodox and non-Orthodox, both in Israel and the Diaspora. All those who cherish Torah must be anguished by its use as an instrument of racism. Such sentiments are anti-Jewish, anti-Zionist, and an affront to the entire Jewish people. We must condemn them now, clearly and unequivocally, before they begin to claim innocent victims. ●

Israeli ban on Strauss' music is unjust

David Goldstein

Israel recently reaffirmed its public blackout of the music of Wagner and Richard Strauss as a gesture of sensitivity to the victims of the Holocaust. The linkage of Strauss with Wagner is quite unjust and a clear case of guilt by association.

Strauss actually lived at the time of Hitler and for a short time served as head of the Music Division of the Third Reich. His great works, *A Symphony of Psalms*, *Der Rosenkavalier* and *Salome*, among many others, served to establish him as a leading

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musician of his time. It is known that he met with Hitler face to face and posed in photographs with him. It is also clear that he did not lift a finger in protest. Alas, he acceded to Hitler just like everyone else.

Yet Strauss was really no more a Nazi than were scores of millions of other Germans who also never lifted a finger to stop Hitler. This is not to extenuate his behavior, only to place it in perspective. Politically, Strauss blends into the masses.

Wagner however stands out like a sore thumb. He was an inspiration for Hitler and for hate.

Though he antedated the Nazis by more than half a century, no man of his time was more Nazi than he. He represented the cultural link between Nietzsche and Hitler, using music to express the leitmotifs of Aryan superiority. This hardly describes the gentler themes of Strauss.

The real difference the two musicians is that for Strauss, art and politics were separated; for Wagner they were one and the same. Further, Wagner genuinely hated Jews and used his not inconsequential influence to prevent the emergence of Jewish composers such as Meyerbeer and Mendelssohn and the poet Heine. His poisonously hateful work, *Das Judentum in der Musik* was calculated to denigrate and sabotage Jewish cultural life in Europe. Indeed, Wagner believed that Jewish life and creativity should be eradicated altogether.

Strauss Ban A Form Hypocrisy

We live in a strange world, don't we? We regularly turn our backs on gross evil and from time to time even traffic with it, but reserve the fury of our moral indignation for the pitifully insignificant. It is a form of hypocrisy that permits us to trivialize monstrous aberrant behavior and thereby extenuate our own enfeeblement in its face.

I certainly do not suggest that Israel alone is guilty of this. In fact, Israel, of all nations, may be least condemnable. Yet, every other car in Israel is either a VW or a Mercedes. Israel's merchant fleet was outfitted in West Germany as part of the post-war reparations agreement. Trade relations between Israel and Germany are brisk on many levels. Diplomatic relations have been established. But, the music of Richard Strauss may not be heard in Jerusalem's concert halls or over the radio.

The words of Schiller seem apt: "Die

Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht (The world's history is the world's judgment)." How sad that history has so adjudged an innocent, childlike Rose-bearer that he appears to some as a Nazi in jackboots.

Thus, I would make a plea for the separation of Strauss and Wagner in the public view. Let Strauss be played without shame. The beauty of his compositions may well be good defense. The best defense, however, is that though he was a German, he was no Nazi.

Wagner, however, was a Nazi, and his music reminds us of that to this very day. It will always present but a single *leitmotif*: the *Übermensch*—the rightness of Aryan dominance and the inherent inferiority of all others. ●

Ignoring the plight of syrian jewry

Rafael Medoff

The Jews of Syria live under the thumb of a barbaric, medieval tyranny which punishes dissidents with death and prohibits virtually all emigration. They live in cramped, primitive ghettos in Damascus, Aleppo and Qamishli. The handful of Jews who are able to escape Syria each year, by sneaking across its borders with Turkey or Lebanon, describe a community living in terror, subject to periodic degradations at the hands of both government soldiers and local Moslems. Outright pogroms are not uncommon.

What is uncommon is any public outcry on their behalf in the Jewish world. There is no Brussels Conference on Syrian Jewry. The Jewish leadership does not sponsor a Greater New York Conference on Syrian Jewry or a National Conference on Syrian Jewry. Hundreds of thousands of Jews do not rally on Solidarity Sunday for Syrian Jews. There is no Solidarity Sunday for Syrian Jews.

The silence of the American Jewish leadership on the Syrian Jewry question is almost inexplicable. It is clearly *not* out of a fear that publicity will provoke intensified Syrian persecution, for each Jewish organization does in fact have an "Oppressed Jewry" desk which distributes infrequent press releases about the oppression of Syrian Jewry. It appears, rather, that the Jewish Establishment is simply preoccupied with other matters, and Syrian Jews have been lost in the shuffle. The fact that a group like the American Jewish Congress finds defending the legal rights of

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Reverend Sun Myung Moon to be more urgent than the situation of Syrian Jewry is a graphic and disturbing example of this indifference.

Israel Could Help

The bitter irony is that *it may well be within Israel's power to rescue them*. In the wake of the fighting in Lebanon, Israel is holding over 300 Syrian prisoners of war and some 6,000 P.L.O. prisoners, many of them Syrians. That Syria wants them back and is prepared to bargain for them is proven by the lengthy and successful Israeli-Syrian prisoner exchange negotiations after the Yom Kippur War.

The Syrians hold eleven Israeli P.O.W.s. That Israel is prepared to offer the Syrians a generous deal in order to get them back is proven by the many lopsided prisoner exchanges to which Israel has agreed in the past. Israel has justified these one-sided exchanges on the humanitarian need to secure freedom for its prisoners, no matter what the cost. But 6,500 for eleven? And at the cost of 5,000 Syrian Jewish lives? The Syrians are not necessarily unwilling to make a deal for Syrian Jews. In 1977, hard bargaining and public pressure succeeded in convincing the Syrians to allow the emigration of fourteen Syrian Jewish women.

The Syrian and P.L.O. captives in Israel's hands thus represent crucial leverage which can be used to bargain for Syrian Jewish freedom. If this unusual opportunity is squandered, how long will it be before another arises? And will Syrian Jews live to see that day?

Israel's record of intervention on behalf of endangered Jewish communities is, however, not a proud one. Too often, Israel's relations or hoped-for relations with countries such as the Soviet Union and Ethiopia were given priority at the expense of Jews in those lands. It was left to American Jewish activists to publicize the plight of Soviet and Ethiopian Jewry.

Syrian Jewry may be similarly endangered by excessive Israeli concern over diplomatic niceties. U.S. Government officials have made plain their desire to wrap up as soon as possible the negotiations over an Israeli-Syrian-P.L.O. withdrawal from Lebanon. For Israel to raise the Syrian Jewry issue could complicate the negotiating process slightly; and at least one former U.S. Secretary of State has openly declared that the U.S. considers the plight of Syrian Jewry to be "an internal affair of the Syrian Government"

(*Jerusalem Post*, May 3, 1974). Are Israeli officials afraid to irritate the State Department by raising an "extraneous" matter such as the lives of 5,000 Jews?

Will American Jews Exert Pressure?

But Israel's failure to speak out for Syrian Jewry should not be meekly accepted by the American Jewish community. Rather, American Jews must work to prod Israel on behalf of the Syrian Jews. An ad hoc group calling itself the Student Struggle for Syrian Jewry (P.O. Box 425—Midwood Station, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11230) has become the first—and so far the only—group to endorse and publicize the idea of a prisoner exchange for Syrian Jewry. Its central argument: the Jewish State must act to save endangered Jews, and if that sometimes entails dispensing with diplomatic niceties—so be it.

In Israel, recent escapees from Syria—who are usually far too terrified to speak out—have led public demonstrations to demand such a prisoner exchange. There has been no response from the Begin Government.

The ball is in American Jewry's court. Will American Jewish leaders, writers and intellectuals criticize Israel's indifference towards Syrian Jews? Will they demand that the Syrian Jewish question be brought to the negotiating table and resolved through a prisoner exchange? Or will they publicly chastise Israel only when the chorus of non-Jewish attacks makes such criticism popular?

Syrian Jews await the answer. ●

...but others say about sefardim...

As a Jew born in an Arab land, I want to state at the outset that I am proud of being an Eastern Jew and I am proud of being Israeli.

My experience growing up among Eastern Jews is that we share a strong sense of justice, decency and kindness. One weakness, as I see it, is an awe of authority, and a hesitancy to challenge it. Another is a strong emotionalism that sometimes overlooks all aspects of an issue but one.

These latter characteristics, along with deep scars of inferiority and humiliation acquired through centuries of residence in Arab lands and colonization, can be used and abused at the expense of the former qualities. I am saddened to see that our positive qualities are neglected or forgotten by the people in power, the media and some segments of the nation in Israel and abroad, whereas our

weaknesses are exploited or amplified.

Those people who have come forward as vocal and violent supporters of hard-line policies in Israel are not representative of the Eastern community but are those who are most angry and most able to express their anger at an establishment that has had no interest in understanding their world.

The energies of the Eastern community in Israel can be oriented toward positive actions. It requires understanding and tolerance from the rest of Israel, sensitivity to usage of offensive or exclusionary language and avoidance of extreme, polarizing generalizations.

It requires self-examination, among the Ashkenazim, of the hidden prejudices and attitudes they developed while an oppressed people: fears of being seen as not sharing all the values and life-style of the Western world, total rejection of those 'barbaric', backward, uncivilized Eastern customs.

It also requires the adaptation of Zionist ideology to the realities and values of the Eastern community (e.g. by paying attention to urban neighborhoods as well as new settlements).

Above all, it demands a clear acknowledgement that we were and still are ONE people.

Yael Touitou Assous
Chicago, IL.

...but others say about women rabbis...

As a longtime subscriber, reader, and admirer of *Sh'ma*, I was deeply distressed, disappointed, and offended by the onesidedness of the views presented (13/250) concerning the issue of women in the rabbinate in general, and in the Conservative rabbinate in particular. Of the seven statements printed, none dissented from the view that the rabbinate should be open equally to women as well as to men. Even the Orthodox presenter stated, albeit a bit too glibly to my mind, her contention that all non-Orthodox rabbis were equal, regardless of sex.

The uninformed reader might thereby gain the impression that, with the exception of a handful of fearful neo-Orthodox Jewish Theological Seminary faculty members and their supporters within the Conservative rabbinate, the admission of women to the Rabbinical Assembly is an accepted and virtually foregone conclusion.

As a member of that Rabbinical Assembly, I beg to disagree.

There is a large body of Conservative rabbis,

many even products of the Conservative Movement, USY and Camps Ramah, as myself, who are strongly opposed to that position.

The major part of our objection to the inclusion of women in the Conservative rabbinate is based on halachic principles.

The officiating by women as witnesses in matters of personal status, specifically for conversion, marriage and divorce, is by no means as simple a matter as the proponents would have us believe. I daresay that in this matter, the overwhelming number of members of the Rabbinical Assembly will permit only males to sign such crucial documents, in keeping with halachic norms.

Many of my colleagues join me in fearing the creation of a schism within the ranks of the Conservative rabbinate, wherein male members of the Rabbinical Assembly would be constrained by Jewish law and tradition from accepting the testimony of female members of the same Assembly in such crucial matters.

Indeed, what would be the true status of such women rabbis if their signatures were unacceptable to the vast majority of male rabbis with whom they would be serving? It is that fear of schism and of creating a "rabbinic underclass" of female rabbis in name only, which makes many of us wary of adopting with open arms the proposals put forward with such fervor by our "justice-seeking" colleagues.

We, too, seek to do what is right, but perhaps we are bound by a different set of considerations and historical priorities.

I trust that in the future, *Sh'ma* will continue to prove worthy of its masthead's assertion of "responsibility" by presenting differing viewpoints, particularly on such a serious and sensitive issue.

Jonathan D. Porath
Clark, NJ.

...but others say...

The Varieties of Baalei Teshuvah

I was born in Poland in 1946 and raised there. My parents were survivors. I left Poland in 1968, settled in Sweden and married a Swedish Protestant. My son Marcus' birth was also a birth of a problem: how am I going to raise a child, being myself Jewish but knowing nothing about Judaism, finding my Jewishness no more than an exotic disturbance.?

The question was not answered when we left for the United States in 1979— Marcus was by then nine years old. Luckily I met some people knowledgeable enough and enjoying being Jewish enough not to let me go back to Sweden without some hint of knowledge about Judaism, Jews..., myself. Your book, *The Mask Jews Wear*, was a gift from a dear friend. And what a book!

I admit it willingly. It has not been easy to go through your book. Think yourself: a Jewish woman like me, without any knowledge about Judaism, and what is more: perceiving Judaism through glasses of Catholicism, the only religion I knew about, being born and raised in a Catholic country. But, but... I always wondered over my strong desire to be loyal to something I knew so little about (and so many members of my family killed during the Holocaust). The question was how to be loyal to something. And why?

So, you explained to me. And I understood! Back in Sweden in 1982, we began to celebrate Sabbath every Friday evening. My mother lights candles again— she hasn't done it since 1941. And my second child, a daughter, attends Sunday School at the Synagogue.

I hope I'm not sounding as if I was a new-born Christian; I'm just trying to describe a feeling of growing self-respect as days go by.

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