

(admittedly mythological) imperative to remember. Count me in the historians' camp.

I am committed to the recollection of historical reality and the contextualization of sacred text and ritual. Yet as a progressive religious Jew, I don't consider Yerushalmi's dichotomy between Jewish historiography and "collective memory" as inevitable. I believe that the mythic imperative to remember the past must be married to historiography, so that history might yield its multidimensional truths.

Jewish life today demands a creative synthesis of the secular and the sacred: an adherence to historiography along with greater appreciation for history's significance — the sacred aspect — to be extracted from historical patterns and from each moment along history's timeline.

We might conceive this integration of Jewish history and group memory (as expressed in text and ritual) as the "unpacking" of the collective lived experience of the Jewish people over time. (By collective experience I refer to all retrievable aspects of Jewish history, including constituencies — such as women, gays, and lesbians — whose stories have been neglected or rendered invisible both by rabbis and historians.)

Viewing our past through the lens of the classic rabbinic exegetical model known as

PaRDeS: *peshat* (the literal or contextual dimension), *derash* (homiletical), *remez* (allusive or allegorical), and *sod* (hidden or mystical), we can understand the historical dimension of human experience as the *peshat*, the critical starting point of exploration. The text we investigate is the ever-growing record of our recoverable past; through it, we discover, acknowledge — and yes, even feel — our personal connection to those who have preceded us.

As a Jew committed to searching out the sacred dimension of every moment, place, and person, I see the excavation of the past as a spiritual practice. Through it, we can deepen our consciousness by investigating the truth of our experience, noticing that which has escaped awareness. We can make obvious connections that until now were latent. We can discover significance in that which may have been considered superfluous.

If as Jews we are to maintain our crucial sense that sanctity abides in all of creation, then nothing — no person, no place, no moment, no history — is meaningless. We need to remember it all. The so-called "secular" and the "devout" can find common ground in Rabbi Nachman's dictum: "In remembering is the secret of redemption." 

Judaism over Time

DEENA ARANOFF

The notion that historical inquiry is disruptive of a more traditional engagement with Judaism was given its most eloquent and influential expression by Yosef Yerushalmi in *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*. In this now canonical volume, Yerushalmi outlined the ways in which the historian confronts the unsorted and fragmented materials of the past and produces an account that is at odds with the narratives embedded in Jewish liturgy and ritual. In contrast to the unity and coherence of collective memory, with its implied therapeutic function for Jewish society through the ages, critical research remains outside the matrix of popular Jewish ritual and practice; it is even at odds with some of its most resilient refrains, such as the centrality of divine providence in the experience of the Jewish people.

I would like to suggest that this long-held dichotomy between critical history and an abiding engagement with Judaism has lost its grip on the contemporary Jewish imagination. Recent trends in cultural and intellectual sen-

sibilities reflect an increasing readiness to attribute positive meaning to the contingencies of history. The contemporary *zeitgeist* is one that acknowledges the fragmented and shifting nature of reality and embraces the notion that people and phenomena can best be understood through their temporality, kind, and condition, through an inquiry into their past and the role of the past in shaping the present. This growing capacity to make meaning out of history is coupled with an increasing suspicion of its opposite, namely, the pursuit of the essence of Judaism. The attempt to peel away layers of Jewish history in the search for its timeless core is regarded as a thinly veiled reproduction of the values of its author.

Despite its mournful tone, Yerushalmi's work signals the emergence of this new and increasingly viable mode of relating to Judaism. Though often read as sounding the death knell of the fruitful interaction between the historian's craft and the search for meaning, *Zakhor* represents an early and tentative instance of what

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has since become a widespread possibility, namely, the inquiry into changing the nature of Judaism as a way of forging a relationship with it. Once known for its opposition to traditional Judaism, historical inquiry has become a constructive mode of religious inquiry, a means by which individuals find meaning in Jewish practice, literature, and ideas. The study of Jewish history may have signaled alienation from the tradition a mere generation ago; it has now become a rich and viable point of entry for those seeking to deepen their relationship with it.

In addition to the ever-widening provenance of postmodern sensibilities, I would suggest that this emerging capacity to integrate historicity into the search for meaning has been nourished by modern notions of relationality as articulated

by philosophers such as Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas. The historical enterprise rests upon the assumption of difference, installing a cultural and temporal gap between the historian and the object of study. Indeed, this gap is the cause of Yerushalmi's lament; the historian's perspective is at odds with a traditional sense of continuity with a sacred past. However, with the advent of modern notions of relationality, in which difference no longer signals alienation but is instead a necessary ingredient for the authentic encounter with the "other," the critical-historical enterprise takes on a more positive function. Rather than privileging resonance and familiarity, history privileges the unfamiliar as a necessary condition for an encounter with the "other," in this case, Judaism. 

The Faith of Fallen Jews

MICHAEL L. MILLER

Is French history the faith of fallen Frenchmen? Is women's history the faith of lapsed ladies? Such questions may sound ludicrous, especially if we consider that French historians assumed "a vital and honored place in the process of national awakening," (quoting Yosef Yerushalmi) and women's historians played a comparable, albeit less prominent, role in the process of feminist awakening. Maybe this is why Yerushalmi's pithy dictum that history is the "faith of fallen Jews" sounds so counterintuitive, so provocative. Yet it is also highly perceptive, perhaps because it strikes such a personal chord.

Every year, I assign a single chapter of *Zakhor* in my graduate seminar on Jewish emancipation, with the hope that my students will understand that, just by sitting in my classroom, they are engaged in a "radically new venture" in Jewish history that stems from the very subject matter they are studying. The seminar examines debates over the place of Jews in European society, placing special emphasis on the Haskalah, Reform Judaism, Modern Orthodoxy, and other ideological trends that emerged as part of the broader struggle for Jewish emancipation in the 19th century. When I tweak my syllabus each year, I am often tempted to remove the unit on *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (Science of Judaism), the German-Jewish movement that promoted the critical study of Jewish literature, culture, and history, and aspired to establish departments of Jewish studies at universities in Germany and elsewhere. As an heir to this movement, and a professional Jewish historian myself, I begin to

wonder whether this topic is too self-referential; relevant perhaps to members of the historian's guild but of little interest or pertinence to anyone else. In the end, however, I always include this unit, in part so my students can revel in Yerushalmi's felicitous wordsmithery, but primarily so they can read two sentences in *Zakhor*.

"The modern effort to reconstruct the past," wrote Yerushalmi, "begins at a time that witnesses a sharp break in the continuity of Jewish living and hence also an ever-growing decay of Jewish group memory. In this sense, if for no other, history becomes what it had never been before — the faith of fallen Jews." Here, in a nutshell, is the dilemma of modern Jews. If Judaism is no longer an all-encompassing way of life, if the Jewish community is no longer the primary point of reference, if Mount Sinai and "our sages of blessed memory" are no longer the arbiters of Judaism, then what does it mean to be Jewish? What is the essence of Jewishness? What is the bedrock of Jewish identity? For "fallen Jews" of the 19th century, history provided a guide (if not an answer) to many of these questions, and this is equally true for the "risen Jews" of the 21st century. These are the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of "fallen Jews," who are now rediscovering their ancestry and trying to make sense of it. These are my students in Budapest, who come from across the former communist bloc. They have faith in neither God nor Marx, but they still have faith in history. Who knows? Maybe history is even part of a Jewish awakening. 

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