Sh'ma שמע

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THIS PAST YEAR, *Sh'ma*, along with the Taube Foundation for Jewish Life and Culture, sponsored an essay contest to spark a communal discussion on the future of North American Jewish life. The contest was designed to foreground the creative, inspiring, thoughtful, and imaginative ideas of a Jewish generation — young people roughly in their twenties and thirties — that has not yet been fully heard. This double issue of *Sh'ma* includes the nine winning essays, which reflect new opportunities to engage next-gen Jews in Jewish life. Introducing the issue is Steven Jacobson's essay suggesting that we listen carefully to these new and insightful voices. Details about the contest and the winners are found on page 22.

Sh'ma deeply appreciates the generous support of the Taube Foundation for Jewish Life and Culture, which sponsored the essay contest and this issue of the journal.

OMG! How Generation Y Can Help Redefine American Judaism

Steven M. Jacobson

"IT IS THE PURSUIT of happiness that thwarts happiness."

So wrote Victor Frankel in *Man's Search for Meaning.* To paraphrase Frankel, I regretfully predict the following: efforts to ensure Jewish continuity will thwart Jewish continuity.

"OMG! How Generation Y is Redefining Faith in the iPod Era," Anna Greenberg's illuminating report on issues of faith among Generation Y, reveals increasingly evident insights about the disillusionment of young American Jews with the dominant institutions of American Jewry. In recent years, an increasingly vocal cadre of communal critics has identified the multiple variables that continue to enlarge the chasm between our postmodern children and the thoroughly modern institutions that seek to serve them. Greenberg's report adds to this chorus.

Among the contributions of Greenberg's report is its confirmation that young Jews possess fully integrated identities as Americans and as Jews. Not surprisingly, Greenberg's report illustrates that young Jews largely reflect the values and influences of mainstream American culture. Like their peers, they are intensely pluralistic. Reared in a radically different milieu than their parents, most young Americans Jews eschew many of the very tenets of modern American Jewry — particularly the centrality and, dare I say, the superiority of Jewishness. They are products of a society in which the combination of consumer culture, unbridled individualism, and technology have enabled multiple identities to coexist fluidly in a single individual. This multiplicity is celebrated and has resulted in an unparalleled embrace of diversity, though most conventional American Jewish institutions do not share in that embrace.

Rather than focus on how Jews and Judaism might define our purposes and our contributions in the 21st century, too many of our institutions remain locked in a battle that has long been decided and thus squander vast resources on lavish efforts to turn inevitable tides. The communal obsession with intermarriage and continuity has prevented the community from engaging in a process of discourse and discovery that could define postmodern Judaism, that could draw upon our resources and our vast collective memory to inform how we might manage our fully integrated identities, and that could empower young people to take their place in the future of American Jewry.

The increasingly common innovations of young Jews in the U.S. have highlighted the degree to which the integration of their Americanness and Jewishness is at the core of their Jewish expression. This integration can be readily identified in the creation of trans-denominational *minyanim*, the steady progress of Jewish environmentalism, and in recent developments in Jewish culture (particularly American Jewish literature). It is also evident in the involvement of young Jews in non-Jewish endeavors such as Meetup, MoveOn, and *The Daily Show*. The success of these examples attests to the value that may be manifest in a candid exploration of what it means for Jews to be so fully American and what it can mean for America for Jews to be so fully Jewish.

The communal obsession with intermarriage and continuity has prevented it from engaging in a process of discourse and discovery that could define postmodern Judaism… that could inform how we might manage our fully integrated identities….

Greenberg's report further reveals that in two important respects, young Jews reflect the influences of their forbearers more than those of their peers: in addition to being less overtly religious, they have a significantly higher political consciousness. Of eleven variables used to identify themselves in this report, Jews claimed that their "political beliefs" were second only to "family" in order of significance. Furthermore, Greenberg reports that young Jews were more likely than their non-Jewish peers to participate in a protest, to work on behalf of a political candidate, to buy "environmentally friendly" products, and even to be engaged in volunteer activities related to health or social services. Finally, a full 91 percent of those polled were registered to vote, significantly more than their non-Jewish peers.

With the combination of their embrace of American pluralism, their heightened political consciousness, and their fully integrated identities, young Jews are sowing the seeds of a new agenda for American Jewry, largely independent of our mainstream institutions. Imagine, instead of having spent too many years and too many millions on an agenda dominated by our own future, if the community had committed itself — with the same fervor — to addressing the AIDS crisis, hunger, genocide, or any of a plethora of concerns that need our attention and could be inexorably altered by the searing focus of a committed Jewish community. In addition to restraining our communal narcissism, such efforts, according to Greenberg's report, would likely have resonated with the broad swath of young Jewish adults that have been the target of our communal fixation. [ed. note: The nine essays that follow reflect such an effort.]

Victor Frankel declared that one does not find happiness by seeking happiness; it is only in finding meaning that one becomes content. Perhaps continuity is not its own end, either. Perhaps only with meaningful expressions of Jewishness that relate not to ourselves, but to others, can our institutions reestablish the increasingly elusive value of American Judaism.

Steven M. Jacobson, a Sh'ma *Advisory Board member, is Director of the Dorot Fellowship in Israel at the Dorot Foundation.*

Discussion Guide

Bringing together myriad voices and experiences in a sacred conversation provides Sh'ma *readers with an opportunity in a few very full pages to explore a topic of Jewish interest from a variety of perspectives. To facilitate a fuller discussion of the ideas, we offer the following questions:*

1. How might our communities continue to acknowledge destruction and danger but refocus primary resources on celebrating Jewish endurance and vitality?
2. What is the impact of a changing Jewish demography? Can we reimagine Jewish identity as a culturally dispersed and vibrant interconnection with multiple homes?
3. Should Jewish communal groups focus on Jewish continuity projects or put forward programs that stress service, the arts, and other avenues that empower next-gen Jews to lead fully integrated lives?

A Jewish Artists Service Corps:
Creating and Sustaining Community

Stephen Hazan Arnoff

WHAT WOULD HAPPEN if the Jewish communities of the world placed dynamic, talented, highly-trained, full-time artists at their cultural center? From Stravinsky to Picasso and Dylan to Graham, contemporary artists are the pioneers of modern cultural vocabulary, social change, political hope, and spiritual growth. The Jewish people lack nothing in terms of the resources and communal structures to initiate a golden age, and young Jewishly-attuned artists are the messengers of the mission. In North America in particular, Jews are more culturally diverse and more deeply established in influential social and vocational frameworks than ever before. Yet artists, a vital and giving cohort wedded by definition to imaginative thinking and community building, find themselves at the margins of Jewish life, if they find themselves in a Jewish mode at all. By investing in structures that facilitate artists expanding their Jewish consciousness and connection — allowing them to assert their skills and interests to meet the living goals of the Jewish community — the Jewish world will unleash a lasting source of inspiration and strength, extending itself to new areas of accomplishment.

Philip Roth, a writer whose work challenges American society while skirting the edges of the Jewish world, models a vision of the artist's role within a community:

> [T]he last 40 years…have been so powerfully determining that men and women of intelligence and literary sensibility feel that the strongest thing in their lives is what has happened to us collectively: the new freedoms, the testing of the old conventions, the prosperity...[P]eople prepare for life in a certain way and have certain expectations of the difficulties that come with those lives, then they get blindsided by the present moment; history comes in at them in ways for which there is no preparation. 'History is a very sudden thing,' is how I put it. I'm talking about the historical fire at the centre and how the smoke from that fire reaches into your house.*

As translators, guides, comforters, and town criers for the experiences of the world, artists are nonlinear thinkers and creative problem solvers reflecting essential modes of understanding and feeling for the societies in which they live. Artists are the natural cohort to understand and communicate the rapid changes of our time, yet the Jewish community provides no incubator, let alone defined roles, for this creative core. To fuse Jewish communities seeking vision, passion, and meaningful content with a powerful cohort of new cultural leaders, I propose the establishment of a Jewish Artists Service Corps.

Following other successful leadership models, the Jewish Artists Service Corps will engage uniquely talented individuals with a wide variety of Jewish experience and interest. Having completed MFAs or other advanced work in fine arts, film and video, writing, music, theater, dance, and performance art, artists selected for the Corps will have demonstrated abilities to engage their craft at the highest levels as well as profound curiosity and potential for taking leadership roles in the Jewish world. The Jewish Artists Service Corps will seek outstanding individuals who have already succeeded in merging Jewish content and inspiration into their contemporary artistic vision both as creators and, in some cases, teachers and mentors. The program will specialize in recruiting participants seeking their "first big break" in the arts. Many marvelous young artists, despite their talent and best efforts, fail to find a creative home to maintain artistic output, entering a wave of doubt and debt after leaving school. The Corps will invest in young adults at a critical stage in their artistic and personal development, ensuring that these individuals and the many resources they carry will be bound to the Jewish community for years to come.

Each fall, a class of artists will begin a yearlong immersion program in Israel, preparing them to return to their home communities to occupy positions of cultural leadership. The curriculum of the Jewish Artists Service Corps will include pluralistic Jewish

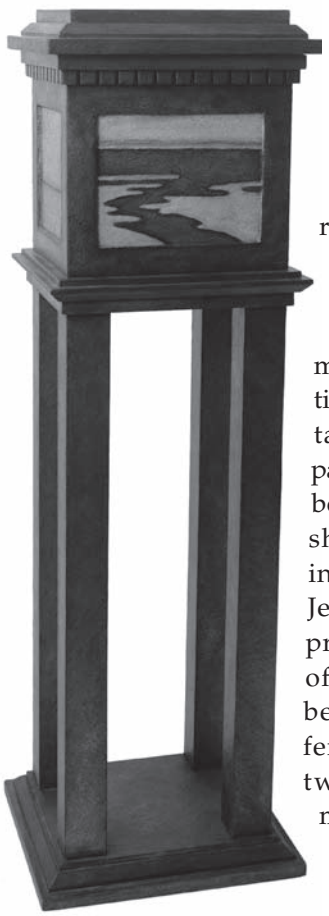
Stephen Hazan Arnoff, born in 1969, was Founding Director of Artists Networks and Programming at the Makor/Steinhardt Center of the 92nd Street Y. He currently develops new programs for Jewish art and artists as a Mandel Jerusalem Fellow. He has taught at Limmud in New York and England, the Brandeis-Bardin Institute, the New School University, the Skirball Center for Adult Jewish Learning, and the Jewish Theological Seminary. He first found his artistic voice within the work of Bob Dylan and has worked toward merging this inspiration with traditional Jewish content ever since.

* *The Guardian,* Sept 11, 2004

study and dialogue facilitated by a faculty of cutting edge educators and artists, Hebrew ulpan, master classes in artistic disciplines, extensive time and dedicated space for developing new collaborative and individual artistic work, community service projects, training in informal education, and extended seminars on career development and the realities of making art in the Jewish marketplace. As they engage Jewish content deeply, gather long-term professional skills, create and present new work, and experience the power and inspiration of living in a vibrant Jewish community, artists will be guided toward leadership positions.

Reflecting ben Zakkai's plan, the Corps will empower an impassioned cadre of visionaries to ensure the Jewish future.

The Jewish Artists Service Corps will work with Jewish camps, JCCs, intentional communities, synagogues, centers of health and healing, private and communal foundations, primary and secondary schools, and other centers of Jewish learning to develop long-term positions for returning artists to make use of their talents. Positions for artists will include artists-in-residencies, teaching, therapeutic, mentorship, and ritual roles, commissions from communal and private patrons, entertainment, public relations and marketing tasks, and participation in communal boards and leadership councils. As in other successful Jewish leadership programs, alumni of the Corps will be required to offer a minimum of two years of commitment to work in the Jewish community for every year spent in programmatic training. They will enjoy the support of the staff and faculty of the Corps throughout their careers in the form of enrichment programs and gatherings, mentorship, and peer networking.



Tobi Kahn
ZEDEK VI
Charity Box 2000
acrylic on wood
48½ x 15⅛ x 13⅛ inches

A core model for infusing communities seeking direction with new leadership unfolded at Yavneh after the destruction of the Second Temple. Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai requested from the Romans that he and a handful of surviving students might establish a new Jewish culture from the scattered Jewish traditions they possessed. The Jewish communities of the 20th and 21st centuries have known their share of destruction too, yet they may also speak of an embarrassment of riches — a legacy of learning and tradition still untapped by many, an as yet unformed community of creative, inspiring, and dynamic leaders eager for the opportunity to be listened to and to lead, and thriving centers of Jewish life with the resources to support stunning new forms of Jewish knowledge, growth, and expression. A Jewish Artists Service Corps engaged in Jewish dialogue and experience through innovative practice, study, dialogue, and work will reflect Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai's original plan — to empower an impassioned cadre of visionaries to ensure the Jewish future through preservation and reimagination of inherited traditions and communal structures.

What would happen if the Jewish communities of the world placed dynamic, talented, highly trained, full-time artists at their cultural center? While Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai's generation of students were initially only a small pocket of resistance in troubled times, they evolved into the key guides, comforters, and promoters for the Jewish experience, laying the foundations of Jewish life for nearly two millennia through development of the Talmud and *midrash*, rabbinic liturgy, and many of the primary sources for Jewish language, practice, and law. None of these innovations could have been predicted, and all became essential. Today's Jewish communities — brave enough to seek out and support the fertile minds and eager hearts of committed, skilled young artists — can enter a legacy that is in its way as meaningful, as radical, and as alive as that of the rabbis, generating Jewish communities of depth, surprise, hope, beauty, vision, and joy with creative arts and culture at their core.

Moving Beyond Movements

Sarra Alpert

"Uh-huh. That's a great idea."

I am doing what I always do when I talk with this supervisor — nodding and agreeing. She has just observed my Hebrew School class, which she does every few months, and is now giving me her feedback. I take notes; I uh-huh; I validate as if she were a parking stub.

"Is there anything else?"

She shifts uncomfortably. "Actually, there is one more thing." I sit up a little straighter. "When you were teaching your unit on Abraham and Sarah, one of the children asked you if the Torah is true. Your answer was," she looks down at her notes, "'Some Jews think it is, some Jews think it's not, some Jews think parts of it are true. The point isn't whether it's true or not, the point is that we think it's really important for everything it teaches us.'"

I'm puzzled. This is the answer I've been giving consistently. It's the most direct and accurate answer that I can think to give, and it also gives children a sense of the possibilities within Jewish belief and practice, an idea I believe to be very valuable. "Uh-huh."

Apparently not everyone feels that way. "I was uncomfortable with that answer," she continues. "The answer should have been 'Yes. The Torah is true.'"

Over the past seven years, I have worked at nine different Hebrew Schools. As opposed to the conversation described above in a Conservative school, in one of the other schools, a Humanist congregation, I was given instructions that there was to be no mention of God or commandedness; I was to describe the Torah as a collection of myths that people used to believe "a long, long time ago."

I find it hard to fathom that either one of these doctrines leads to a vibrant, engaging, sustainable Jewish community. In one, if I stick to the dogma and give a straight-faced account of talking snakes, I am distancing my students even further from a meaningful understanding of a Judaism that feels applicable to their lives and real in their times. In the other, if I stick to the dogma and present a Judaism where belief in God and the idea of being commanded are only a part of our ancient history, without room for new, contemporary ideas, I am presenting a narrow understanding of a wide-ranging religion that offers Jews today myriad ways to experience their Jewishness. The key word is sustainable — if we, particularly young Jews struggling to define ourselves, are offered the choices of "my way or the highway," many will turn toward the highway without looking back.

I have also taught in two Hebrew schools that were not affiliated with any movement. In those schools, I have not only been allowed but also encouraged to present a range of Jewish understanding and practice. The lack of movement doctrine governing these particular Jewish communities means that what they teach and practice and value is a representation not of a statement coming from outside their community, but a reflection of who they actually are. Because there aren't pre-set answers to the questions of what defines their religious and educational environment, they have had to struggle with those answers personally and communally. Many drafts of mission statements have been written, many discussions have been had, many bagels have been eaten. And in the end, while they have established parameters around basic value statements — defining who they are, why they have come together, and what they are trying to create — there is also a deep-rooted appreciation for the range of ideas contained within their community. The result is a place where diversity encourages more complex understandings, where struggle breeds engagement and innovation. A place where children hear about all that Judaism can be and where I, as their teacher, get to pick through all of that with them, praising their questions and helping guide them through the rich array of possible answers.

What would the Jewish world look like if synagogue missions were based not on movement doctrine, but on the philosophical, religious, and cultural ideals of that specific community? If the questions to ask in assessing and understanding a synagogue were not "Is it Orthodox, Conservative, Reform or Reconstructionist?" but "What is the position on egalitarianism? How does the community relate to issues of social justice? How do they approach education? What choices have they made about the content and structure of their service — the *siddur* used, the *tefillot* included or not, the language in which the prayers are recited?" When movements structure doc-

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trine, when they define answers for a community, it vastly limits the personal engagement of the community to decide whether or not an answer fits the community and the members' images of themselves as Jews.

Movements are such a relatively new part of Jewish history, yet our institutions and religious identifications have often come to be defined by them. But now, in growing numbers, individuals, groups, and institutions are acknowledging that Judaism may thrive more fully without the binds of movement identification. These new "post-denominational" or "trans-denominational" *minyanim* and institutions are defining their choices within their specific community, rather than taking those definitions from a movement's dictionary. Working in these communities, I have seen adults and children struggling with their questions and in doing so embracing a Judaism that is open to the varied ideas, approaches, and understandings that make our tradition so rich and multilayered.

When traveling in Germany last winter, my group visited the small town of Worms to see Rashi's yeshiva. Our tour guide showed us a diorama of the former walled-in Jewish ghetto in Worms and told us a story about another ghetto. One day, a government edict arrived saying that the ghetto walls could come down. An eager young man climbed up and started dismantling the stones joyfully. The elders stopped him. "We like our walls," they said. "It keeps in what we choose and out what we don't." So the walls stayed up and, in many Jewish communities, those metaphorical walls are still up today. But children — and all people, really — find ways to scale walls, to tunnel under, or simply to break them down as they barrel through. My hope is that we can share in that process of breaking down the barriers, keeping some of the pieces of who we have been and creating a Judaism that reflects who we are and who we may yet become.

Lacking Seed

Joshua Gross

I AM CONCERNED about Jewish seed.

Last year, while wandering through the labyrinthine passageways of Cairo's Egyptian Museum, I came to a dead end crowded with abandoned antiquities. I was about to turn back when something caught my eye, a certain stone column. The dust-smudged index card identified it as the *Merneptah Stela* of 1207 B.C.E. The glyphs were translated: "Israel is stripped bare, wholly lacking seed."

So many of our monuments address that *we have survived but not* why *we have survived. Since the Holocaust, we have focused single-mindedly on Jewish survival and have failed to collectively define exactly what surviving requires of us.*

Later I would be shocked to discover that this inscription is the first archeological evidence of the existence of Israel — nation or people. In one of history's most inspired ironies, the first declaration on the Jewish people is a death knell.

Standing before that hewn stone, I experienced a strange feeling of familiarity. After all, throughout my travels in Europe I have bowed my head to observe a moment of silence at dozens of monuments to Jewish death. Younger Jews like me seem to be at ease amidst the sepulchral atmosphere of these memorials; after the silence breaks, we take photographs and continue our previous conversations. After all, we have survived and are comforted by that knowledge. But the more time I spend in the presence of these monuments, the more I begin to question their purpose. Do we gather around them to mourn Jewish death or to celebrate Jewish endurance? And when confronted with such a broken world, are we responsible for anything beyond our own self-preservation?

In 1995, Germany began accepting submissions for a national "Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe." Artist Horst Hoheisel provocatively proposed blowing up the Brandenburg Gate as a fitting testament. Hoheisel is representative of the German "memory artists" that have emerged in the last 25 years. These artists are defined by a shared fear that memorials may actually relieve a population of the burden of remembering. In the spirit of William Faulkner's immortal statement, "The past isn't dead; it isn't even past," German art-

ists have proposed living memory projects and created "negative form" monuments to mark the ruins of Jewish communities in sites throughout Germany.

Ostensibly, Holocaust memorials have been built so that the global community will not forget past lessons. But a problem arises when, in the presence of such monuments, viewers simply stand still and silently "remember." The Jewish community has not yet decided whether "Never Again" is a universal obligation or a self-referential declaration, and the memorials we build reflect this uncertainty. They inspire us to remember, but not to take action against contemporary injustice.

When the author of the *Merneptah Stela* wrote that Israel was "wholly lacking seed," he was referring to physical eradication. But I wonder if the Jewish community is experiencing a spiritual decay, one that calls into question the very merit of our survival. So many of our monuments address *that* we have survived but not *why* we have survived. Since the Holocaust, we have focused single-mindedly on Jewish survival and have failed to collectively define exactly what surviving requires of us. Rabbi David Hartman has argued, "Sinai prohibits the Jewish people from ever abandoning the effort of creating a shared moral language with the nations of the world." Has our monumentalization of the Holocaust truly created a shared moral language? Or does the Shoah relieve us of the burden of healing a world that has so cruelly rejected us?

The memory of our tragedy must transform the Jewish community into a phalanx against injustice. While many young Jews have already made this choice and thrown themselves into activism or service, tragically, many of these Jews feel that they need to suppress their Jewish identity in favor of a more humanistic posture. But now more Jews are beginning to perceive their conscientious voting, social justice advocacy, or fair trade shopping habits as a logical extension of their Jewish consciousness. Hopefully these leaders will employ the leverage of Jewish institutions, museums, and memorials to give voice to the other oppressed "Jews" of the world. Perhaps one day a Holocaust museum will be re-coronated as a Museum of Jewish Responsibility to better serve the memory of our murdered six million.

The aforementioned German counter-monuments were designed to afflict the German psyche while catalyzing a fresh, continuous relationship with their history. Can the global Jewish community acknowledge that we too have our empty spaces, our ruins, our negated ghosts, but that we have not yet chosen to confront them as the Germans have theirs? With the founding of the Jewish state now decades behind us, it might be safe to consider what monuments our own people might build, guided by our unique moral vision, compelled by our own obsession with history.

On the website www.nakbainhebrew.org, activist Eytan Bronstein has begun this process, lamenting, "Many monuments and road signs point out the loss of Jewish soldiers in wars, yet no indication of the destruction of Palestinian life may be found on our cultural and geographical landscape." His proposed solution — posting signs at the sites of destroyed Palestinian villages — has, as one might expect, met with widespread Jewish hostility.

This heated issue won't be addressed today, but one day a public, communal, cathartic reconciliation must occur. Bronstein's proposal might be a good start. Acknowledging some Palestinian presence within Israel's borders will allow us to transcend our subjectivity as Jews and address Israel's turbulent history. Every decade that passes without such an acknowledgement risks demoralizing another generation of Jews who are shocked to discover the history of a Deir Yassin. The Jewish community is in desperate need of a new generation of memory artists.

If we turn away from our obligations as a so-called chosen people, then our covenant will wither and our purpose will be lost. Jewish thought and action, by both design and history, elevates consciousness and raises moral standards. Should the coming decades be defined by a continued failure to grasp the universal meaning of *b'tzelem Elokim* and further indulgence in morally narcissistic victimhood, the loss would be measured in human lives — from ethnic cleansing campaigns in Central Africa to state-sponsored killing in East Asia. Our monuments have adequately marked our survival. It will be much harder to formulate — and then, hopefully, to represent — what that survival means. Memory is not only a wound to be cauterized. The *Merneptah Stela* gathers dust in Egypt. Only our actions can determine if Israel's seed is truly lost.

Joshua Gross, born in 1981, was raised in Trumbull, CT and was bar mitzvahed at Congregation Rodeph Sholom. He graduated with honors from the University of Michigan with a degree in English and Creative Writing. Following college, he spent a year volunteering in Israel on Project Otzma. Until recently, he worked at the Joseph Slifka Center for Jewish Life at Yale under the tutelage of Rabbi James Ponet. While at Slifka, he staffed an American Jewish World Service project to El Salvador, which awakened him to his potential as both a Jew and as a human being actively involved in the world. He currently resides in Washington, DC, where he is searching for a job that will complement his idealism and cynicism equally.

Sh'ma שמע

ReCreating Jewish Communities:
Wholeness and Healing

Sarah Tauber

NEARLY TWO MILLENNIA AGO, after the destruction of the Second Temple, our ancestors in Judea, the Galilee, and Babylonia creatively transformed the conception of Jewish tradition and Jewish community, birthing a new kind of Judaism that we call rabbinic Judaism. Like those daring survivors of catastrophe, the Jews who were born after the Shoah live in the shadow of cataclysm. And like our ancestors, we live in an era when the urgent need for innovative ways to confront our past, nourish our present, and sustain our future stares us in the face every day. As we enter the 21st century, how will the Jewish community respond to the worldwide pain and suffering that characterizes our era — no matter how materially secure we may be? The slow but steady deterioration of the natural environment, the collapse of a social safety net, fears about job security, the demands of an aging Jewish population, the anxiety about the precariousness of our children's futures, the ongoing worries about the difficult hurdles Israel continues to face — all these concerns weigh us down as human beings and as Jews.

The search for wholeness is what Jewish tradition describes as *shleimut*. I believe that the main focus of Jewish identity in the 21st century, in the Diaspora and in Israel, will be the re-creation of Jewish communities that help us find solutions to the very real pain and fear we experience because of our contemporary situation. The ability to shape a community life that helps people overcome their loneliness and isolation as they deal with these struggles will be the unifying factor around which a 21st- century Jewish identity will emerge. A revitalized communal experience that emphasizes deepened personal relationships will have a powerful healing impact on worldwide Jewry and, by drawing on traditional and contemporary models, will redefine the centrality of Jewish identity for Jews worldwide. The links between spiritual seeking and mitzvot, and in particular Torah, *avodah,* and *gemilut chasidim*, will be addressed in ways that will empower Jews to see Judaism as a renewed source of profound personal meaning. In the midst of our concerns about the present and the future, we will explore together the various ways that the mitzvot of study and prayer open us to the security that comes from an ongoing connection with *Mekor Chayim*, the Source of Life. And in an era when so many of us feel the extraordinary stresses on our financial resources and on our personal time, the mitzvah of *gemilut chasidim* will guide us in our search to cultivate what it means to give and receive as loving human beings.

Refuah shleima is the Hebrew expression that we use daily in the *Amidah* when we pray to God to be restored to a sense of wholeness. *Refuat hanefesh, refuat haguf* — healing of the soul, healing of the body — these very words are found in the *mishebeirach*, or healing, blessing that we recite every Shabbat. Our rabbinic ancestors who gave these prayers their

Sarah Tauber, born in 1966, is currently a doctoral student in Jewish Education at the Jewish Theological Seminary. Sarah has studied modern Jewish history in the United States and Europe; she also ran a congregational school in Geneva, Switzerland for several years before returning to the USA in 2003. Sarah's Jewish passion was charged by close relationships with family members who survived the Shoah, by the inspiration of several rabbis and Jewish teachers, and by the writings of Aharon Appelfeld and Martin Buber.

Sh'ma שמע

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prominent place in our liturgy grasped the dire need for a total healing to such an extent that they instituted them as a regular part of our spiritual practice. This acute sense of the importance of healing is similar to much of the current search for spiritual healing that is gradually making its way into the forefront of Jewish life.

Where do I see evidence of this growing desire for spiritual wholeness as a response to our present reality? It is found in the very large numbers of so-called secular American Jews who seek out the healing practices present in the spiritual traditions of the Orient and who attempt to adapt them to Judaism's religious traditions; it is found in the vitality of groups like *Chabad* Hasidism and Jewish Renewal, movements that are both centered on the idea of *teshuvah*, or spiritual turning to God; each, from its own vantage point, shares an awareness of the core spiritual depth that Judaism wants us to embrace at every moment as a means of giving our lives purpose, orientation, and coherence. It is also found in the waves of young secular Israelis who, after having served their perilous time in the army, go to India and other points east in search of spiritual guidance that they tragically do not yet seem to be able to discover in their own country.

Alongside the existential challenges that we face daily, as Jews we live in an era that has experienced the "eclipse of God," to borrow Martin Buber's biblically inspired metaphor. In this new century, the voices that speak truthfully and honestly about a pervasive loss of spiritual orientation, and about the possibilities for recovering it *as Jews*, will be listened to carefully; 60 years after the Shoah, and in view of the ongoing struggles of the State of Israel, our visionary leaders will begin to light paths for us that must rekindle anew our faith in the transcendent meaning of our Jewish existence — for us and for the world. Such an audacious charge of hallowing our mundane lives is the task that Judaism thrusts upon every generation of Jews, pushing us to confront and to work through the challenges that we face in being human. In the 21st century, this spiritual endeavor will once again occupy a central place in our collective identity.

In the coming decades, the primary task of our religious leaders and educators will be to hone their listening skills, to hear with keen attentiveness the voices that cry out for spiritual healing. Our leadership must be willing to respond with caring guidance, with the wisdom that emerges from our awareness of the necessity to act with *cheyn*, *chesed*, and *rachamim*. These are the spiritual virtues that Judaism commands us to cultivate because we are made in the image of a compassionate, responsive God. Each individual who chooses to walk through the doors of our communal spaces will know that she or he is unconditionally welcomed and supported; our leaders will counter the impersonal communication promoted by sophisticated technologies and will develop instead the face-to-face relationships that provide sustenance for the spirit as we journey through our lives. Our manifold hopes for Jewish continuity will depend upon the capacity of our religious and lay leaders to work toward the creation of Jewish settings that will be safe havens, places where our time together will be sanctified, where — as a collectivity — ongoing and enduring *refuah shleima* will give birth, as it did 2,000 years ago, to an energized Jewish identity.

In this new century, the voices that speak truthfully and honestly about a pervasive loss of spiritual orientation, and about the possibilities for recovering it as Jews, *will be listened to carefully.*

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Service: Redrawing the Face of American Jewry

Koby Oppenheim

MAYBE IT WAS a slow week. Staggered blue bars stretched across the front page of the *Forward*, and a worried title announced growing disinterest in Israel. American Jews are turning their energies elsewhere; a gray forecast strewn with a few glimmers of hope — but is it new?

"I entered a Russian prison, I got out, I moved to Israel, I became a Cabinet minister," Natan Sharansky remarked, "and the people I work with are mostly the same people." When these "same people" began campaigning for Sharansky's release, they were probably the vanguard of American Jewish activism. Merging human rights with Jewish pride, they were on the cusp of a changing world. That they are still leading this community is not the problem; it's that they're doing it alone. We have a dearth of young leaders as we also witness a continuing detachment from issues central to American Jewish identity.

As America prepares for a demographic reshuffling, the greatest wealth transfer in its history, and changing threats and values, the future role of our community is increasingly in question. American Jewish leaders' ability to leverage their vast reserves of experience in guiding our shrinking ranks through these dramatic changes hinges on someone succeeding them. With so many talented young Jews publishing, deal making, and doctoring, why aren't they plotting our future course?

Waning Jewish identity, surveys and studies tell us, results from declining exposure to Jewish education, Israel, and communal life. As the Holocaust grows distant and our relationship with the State of Israel matures, the pillars of American Jewish identity need reinforcement. Nothing will replace the pain and exhilaration of the last century, but blessed with only knowing persecution and discrimination secondhand, younger Jews need something else to attract their talents and passion. To remedy this, we've floated new ideas and tapped our donors. We aren't lacking initiative or creativity, it seems; we are missing a communal vision.

Who can resist a free trip? This generation grew up on year-round markdowns and file swapping. Trying to reacquaint young American Jews with Israel and themselves, birthright israel attempts to reverse, or at least halt, the trend of disaffiliation and instill a new sense of purpose. While its long-term impact remains to be seen, the biggest, splashiest, and most ambitious initiative in recent years, birthright has reset the bar for communal programming. Birthright capitalizes on several important points: a visit to the Western Wall and Masada is worth several semesters of Jewish Studies courses; spending ten days eating, sleeping, and schmoozing with other Jews builds Jewish community faster than any JCC; and meeting Israelis face-to-face will override the lack of positive news coverage.

But birthright also has its shortcomings. It is, by definition, a birthright: all take and no give. We run the risk of repeating the original birthright story: "*vayochal vayesht vayakom vayelach*." (*Genesis* 25:34) Esau ate, drank, got up and left — just leave off the next few words. No one will accuse participants of scorning the program if they don't return engaged American Jews. Ultimately, this incredible trip occurs abroad in another time and climate zone.

What is wholly American and Jewish? What holds potential for quality experiences that rival those of a Jewish state? Volunteering. Perhaps trite sounding, but the same surveys that paint gloomy landscapes also tell us that young students have the highest propensity to volunteer among any age group in the Jewish community. In nationwide surveys, Jewish values of community service routinely rank as high, or higher, than Israel as the most compelling aspect of Jewish identity.*

Opportunities for volunteering are multitudinous. For example, we could focus on immigrant communities that now populate neighborhoods Jews vacated decades ago and face challenges similar to those of our grandparents: adequate housing, accessible healthcare, and quality education. They don't,

Koby Oppenheim, a Dorot fellowship alum, is 27 years old. He worked at a Jewish Community Center in Minsk, Belarus as a Jewish Service Corps volunteer (2003–2004) with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. Though he lived in New York during the immigration of the early 1990s, he had had few interactions with Soviet Jewry apart from a yearly rally. Seeing Jews from the former Soviet Union transforming communities in Europe and Israel, he realized how important they had become in a changing Jewish world and wanted to experience a part of it himself.

* Cohen, Steven M. and Fein, Leonard, "American Jews and their Social Justice Involvement," AMOS, 2001, 17.

however, have a network of Jewish hospitals or the advantages of emigrating from Europe. These challenges aren't unique to immigrant communities, either. Large swaths of American society confront them daily, and as America begins to navigate a new demographic and security reality — and the accompanying cultural and social challenges — these issues will become only more pressing. Moral leadership and a vision for a society of equal opportunity are begging for takers. Judaism and the American Jewish experience uniquely equip us both to serve our country and community.

At the crossroads of our foreign, economic, and security agendas, environmentalism has metamorphosed into the linchpin of American policy. From reams of statistics and climate maps to farming and recycling, environmentalism offers an array of issues to work on. It recognizes that political borders and linguistic differences are only barriers if we allow them to be — a principle inherent in our identity as Jews as well. "Jewish interests" are by definition as international and diverse as the Jewish community. We advocate for others because we recognize that our identity and future are bound with the identities and futures of other people. Environmentalism shares the same values and offers opportunities to employ our hands, minds, and tradition.

Our relationship with other Diaspora communities typically occurs in short spurts: in times of crisis or vacation. We come when we're needed or need to get away. These communities, however, face similar challenges to our own; from expanding day school education to grappling with intermarriage, they offer experiences of mutual benefit. Providing a framework for American Jewish volunteers to work in fragile Diaspora communities would provide those communities with our expertise and talent while offering service opportunities for young Jews. More than merely learning about them, seeing different models and experiments in Jewish life has the potential to breathe new vitality into our own community.

Volunteering teaches by doing, helping, and changing, creating community by building on common experiences and shared achievements. The new focus on service-learning programs, both Jewish and nonsectarian, also provides an opportunity for sustained Jewish engagement and education.

Our dual challenges — attracting young leadership and redefining ourselves in light of the Holocaust's retreating memory and a maturing Israel — may guide us to some resolution. If our current communal leadership came of age with the founding of the Peace Corp, this generation's reference point is AmeriCorps — where a commitment to volunteer communal responsibility can be enormously powerful. Complementing the emotional charge of Israel with physical involvement of volunteering, we can redraw the face of American Jewry.

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Dispersion:
"Wherever you go, there's always someone Jewish…"

Amy 'afo'Fornari

DECEMBER 2003. I went to the Brooklyn Museum of Art to see Frederick Brenner's exhibit *Diaspora: Homelands in Exile*, an installation of photographs that capture the diverse embodiments of Judaism all over the world. Most specifically, Brenner attempts to disrupt the stereotypical image of Jews as white Eastern European men. I stood before one of Brenner's images of a photographer taking pictures of Long Island Jews dressed as Eastern European Jews standing in front of a facade of the Western Wall. More than a year later, the vivid image is strong in my mind. That photograph speaks to the layered dimensions of exile that North American Jews internalize and their desperate attempts to feel at home.

North American Jews living in the 21st century must build meaningful Jewish communal identities based on their own multiple experiences in Diaspora. What if Brenner had photographed Long Island Jews dressed in secular American attire doing *tashlich* off the Brooklyn Bridge or eating Chinese food on Christmas? Would that be a realistic representation of American Jewish life? Moving away from a discourse of exile and homeland allows us to engage a notion of dispersion as home.

November 2002. It was Friday night in Taipei, Taiwan. The streets were overcrowded, the cars moved quickly with little regard for traffic lights, and the motorcycles wove through the mix of people and vehicles. Having been in Taiwan for over a month, I craved Jewish life and community. With a quick Internet search I located a Shabbat *minyan*. Following the directions, a Jewish friend and I arrived at a hotel in downtown Taipei. A bit surprised to be in a hotel, we approached the concierge. In a mixed-up version of English, Mandarin, and charades, he managed to understand we were looking for the other Jews. He escorted us to the seventh floor where we opened the door to a room not much bigger than a walk-in closet. Eight other Jews were gossiping in a range of languages, including Chinese, Hebrew, English, and French. As we entered, the rabbi (an American expatriate who had been living in Taiwan for over 25 years) threw his hands up: "We have a *minyan*!" I later learned that a gathering of ten Jews for Shabbat in Taipei is rare. There was challah, Manischewitz, candle lighting, and of course, homemade *rugulach*. After the service, which consisted of traditional prayers, rabbinic rambling, and a few songs, we all went out for a "kosher" dinner at the Buddhist vegetarian restaurant next door. At the end of the night, we wished each other a "Good Shabbes" and parted ways. It was clear Judaism had found a home in Taipei.

Diaspora — and its dynamic processes and mechanisms — have produced and disseminated diverse understandings of Jewish life. Rather than understanding Diaspora Judaism as *galut*, exile, which constructs a need for Israel as *moledet*, homeland, the place of reunion and return, Diasporism calls for a reimagination of how Jews living outside of Israel understand their Jewishness; it challenges the discursive roots of Diaspora Judaism to make the move away from *galut*, or exile, to *t'futsot*, or dispersion. This discursive change validates the experience of those living outside of Israel.

Having spent eight months traveling and studying comparative religion, I have experienced Shabbat with dozens of different Jewish communities in at least five different countries. No two were the same in practice, prayer, or appearance, although there were parallels between the experiences. From Orthodox to Sephardi, the categories resist translation. To be a Modern Orthodox Ashkenazi Jew means something very different in a place like Athens, Greece, where there is one Sephardic synagogue. To be a Persian Jew growing up in Great Neck, NY, where there are over 20 synagogues, is very different than living in a subculture in the Muslim city of Tehran, Iran. And it is altogether different to be an expatriate Jew living in Taiwan, struggling to make a *minyan*. These differences affect how communities talk about themselves and the opportunities they have to express themselves. Just as there is no equivalent of a Reform synagogue in the Great Neck Persian community, there is no Sepharidic synagogue within the Reform movement. The manifold names and ways of being Jewish in Great Neck alone, let alone Greece or Taiwan, bring to the foreground the

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power of Jewish dispersion as an empowering source of cultural identity.

For Jews, the term Diaspora carries religious significance as it connotes a detachment from the holy land, from the Temple, and thus from God. However, the biblical roots of Judaism remind us of our nomadic ways. Across the world and in a multitude of languages, there exist contested representations of Jewish history, Jewish culture, Jewish community, and Jewish subjective identity. Brenner's photograph is but one take at the subjective experience of being Jewish. His exhibit includes images of Jews living on just about every continent. Perhaps what is amazing about his collection of snapshots from India to Ethiopia, China, Argentina, and Alaska, is the ease in which one can locate both Judaism and the places in which Judaism thrives. Throughout Brenner's photographs, food, music, and clothing make visible and visceral the many lands that Judaism calls home.

The Diaspora has opened a space for cultural crossings, for calling Buddhist vegetarian food on a Friday night in Taipei a kosher Shabbat dinner, for finding Judaism in Thailand while eating falafel on a commercial street in Bangkok or attending a Shabbat dinner in Chiang Mai with 100 secular Israelis who do not otherwise observe the Sabbath. If we continue to understand Diaspora as a naming of displaced communities, people who have been dislocated from their native homeland, then we are bound to the notion of *galut* and the need for *moledet*. But if we focus our attention and our discourse on both the thriving international Jewish communities and the ability to be Jewish while traveling, the conversation creates a sense of holiness, a sense of being connected both to other Jews and to God throughout the world.

We are a tradition based on movement, creating community and continuity in changing places. For a people in motion, bound together by *Torat chayyim*, a living text, dispersion breaks down the dichotomy of homeland and exile, creating space for vibrant and sustained Jewish life around the world. It challenges the Israel-centered narrative through which the collective identities of Jews living outside of Israel have been articulated. Diaspora Jews, as hybrid subjects, traverse categories and territories and therefore cannot be at home in a single unified theoretical and/or geographical location. Through *t'futsot*, dispersion, Judaism redefines its religious and cultural values away from land and away from victimhood. While the term Diaspora is inherently locked into victimhood through its connection to exile, dispersion can be its own source of pride.

We cannot create authentic identity based on the mythic representations of identity captured in Brenner's photographs. But we can create a real sense of communal identification based on our accomplishments in the many places Jews work, play, and pray. In refocusing our power on the portability of our tradition, we return to the creation of holy time as opposed to holy space. As Abraham Joshua Heschel's *The Sabbath* articulates, "The Bible is more concerned with time than with space…It pays more attention to generations, to events, than to countries, to things; it is more concerned with history than with geography." (1951) In *t'futsot* we refocus ourselves on the dynamic expression of holy time in all the places where Jews live; through this we can harness our capacity to be creative catalysts for *tikkun olam* in communities around the world.

For a people in motion, bound together by a living Torah, dispersion breaks down the dichotomy of homeland and exile, creating space for vibrant and sustained Jewish life around the world.

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The Deeper Value of Talmud Torah

Michael Rosenberg

THE EMPHASIS ON the Holocaust and Israel as the two loci for Jewish engagement in the last 50 years reveals a deeply rooted attitude toward the importance of history. Jewish youth trips that take North American teenagers from Auschwitz to Tel Aviv are based on an idea that the Jewish experience is linear, from destruction to reconstruction, from *galut*[1] to *ge'ula*.[2]

While history is an important axis on which to consider Judaism, viewing it as our primary way of interacting with the Jewish narrative entails many problems. Most obviously, as we move further away in time from the experiences of the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel, the vividness of those experiences diminishes, and they become less compelling reasons to buy into Judaism. The nearly-ecstatic Jewish patriotism that flourished for Jews around the world in the aftermath of the 1967 War is hard to convey to someone my age, who has grown up knowing only an established state of Israel. Thus it should be no shock to us that these two looming historical events appear to be losing their pull on young Jews today.

There is a more fundamental problem with such a view of Judaism, however — one that cannot be addressed merely by determining some new historical locus of Jewish identity. An historicist view of Judaism rests on the idea that there is some objective narrative that we can use to order our Jewish lives. However, for young Americans educated to question historical narratives, to know that there are always multiple accounts of any story, historicist claims for Judaism will always come off as one-sided and jingoistic, no matter how contemporary those claims may be.

For a large segment of 21st-century Jewry, historical narratives are not nearly as important as methods for understanding and making sense of those narratives. The story of the Holocaust — central and important though it may be — cannot be considered properly without meaningful methods of reading. Thankfully, that may be what Judaism can most authentically offer.

Earlier this year, I was asked in a seminar to prepare sources regarding the halakhic permissibility of inviting another Jew for Shabbat dinner, knowing that she or he would drive home after the meal. My study began as many would expect it to — seeing relevant texts in the Talmud, following those sources through the medieval commentators, and arriving in the end with 20th-century legal decisors addressing similar situations — a mess of seemingly obscure opinions. My initial concerns were also those one would expect in the context of an Orthodox yeshiva: What have the canonized voices of the tradition said about this and related topics?

As I began to delve into the sources, however, I soon came to realize that these texts were highlighting tensions that I had failed to discern. Attempting to understand the reasoning behind each voice in the debate did not necessarily make clear to me a correct position; it did, however, lay bare the costs of any one particular approach. Those sources arguing against permitting such an invitation expressed the value of considering oneself responsible for the care-taking of others: if one truly cares about another person, how can you lead them astray? The authorities who said that "heretics" are beyond the control of adherents and, as such, the latter needn't be concerned with leading the former "astray," were in effect saying that respect for the autonomy of another trumps the value of community: once an autonomous individual has made a decision, his or her actions are beyond your control. Being forced not only to engage with contrasting views, but to be able to articulate each of the voices in the debate in a compelling way, allowed me to understand what was at stake in a question that had at first seemed one-sided.

We are all in search of methods of reading that will help us make sense of our world. We do not want a dogmatic religion that tells us what is moral, but rather a hermeneutic that allows us to clarify the issues in a given moral dilemma. Such a view of Judaism does not necessarily deny the existence of an ultimate truth; rather, it valorizes our own ability to perceive that truth if given the proper tools to cut through the morass.

A Jewish commitment to engagement with

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[1] Exile—Hebrew phrases will be translated in footnotes throughout.
[2] Redemption

"texts" — be they in the forms of books, conversations, or rituals — speaks to a far larger audience than a specific theme or issue. We should not think that Talmud Torah, that is, the study of text is value-neutral. The move from historical appeals for Judaism to hermeneutical ones will not interest anyone if it is a bland, relativistic approach that validates everything and clarifies nothing. Rather, we need a passionate articulation of a Jewish mode of considering the world. The new locus of Jewish identity, then, must not be an historical event or a political entity but, rather, the value of Talmud Torah.

Preparing for the Pains of Peace

Keith Kahn-Harris

EVERYONE WHO CARES about Israel has their own dream about what happens when the guns fall silent. Thinking about what should follow the endless anguish of war is essential if we are to feel that the conflict has any purpose. Yet in the gaps between our dreams and the current reality, it becomes apparent just how hard it is to end a situation seemingly so entrenched. But more important, we are also forced to recognize that one person's dream of a post-conflict Israel is another's nightmare.

Everyone's vision for Israel involves somebody losing, whether that vision entails an equitable two-state solution, a Palestinian entity with limited autonomy, a theocracy on both sides of the Jordan, a Palestinian-free state, a Jew-free state. The losers, whomever they may be, are unlikely to shrivel up and disappear immediately, and this seems to imply — in the best case scenario — some kind of continuing low-grade conflict for a considerable time.

Even if the Israel-Palestinian conflict could be solved to the satisfaction of all parties, this would not eliminate all forms of conflict in Israel. There are endemic problems between, to name but a few: secular and religious Jews, rich and poor, Ashkenazi and Mizrachi, Israeli Arabs and Jews, Arab Christians and Muslims. Perhaps with the larger conflict out of the way, the country would be engulfed in a series of smaller, but still potentially violent conflicts. Post-conflict Israel also faces another threat — normality. From its inception, Zionism was split between the desire to see Israel as a "state like any other," complete with Jewish police and prostitutes and the desire for Israel to be different, a "light unto the nations." And there is no cure for life; even without conflict, that future will only be somewhat less difficult than the present.

Any worthwhile vision for a post-conflict Israel has to be a vision for *now*. This is where pre-state Zionism provides inspiration. From the first *aliyah* until independence, those who built Israel did not just build kibbutzim and the Haganah, they built schools, universities, cafes, and opera houses. They built all the basic elements of "the good life" in a land where simple existence was a perilous affair. This is the gift that the early Zionists — for all their mistakes — bequeathed to today's Israel. The gift ensured that life in Israel was not simply reducible to the conflict. Israeli art, culture, and everyday life does not *only* reflect Israel's many conflicts. Life in Israel today is full, vibrant, and culturally creative. It is worth living *now,* and thus it will be worth living post-conflict.

The raw materials for a post-conflict Israel are already in place: a lively press, a thriving arts scene, a vigorous youth culture, and intellectually dynamic universities. The key task is to keep them viable, ensuring that they are not snuffed out in the quest for simple survival. It also means avoiding the opposite problem of turning Israeli culture into a kind of escape route from reality. There are worrying signs that, for example, secular Israeli youth's seemingly insatiable desire for clubbing stems in part from a desire to run away from the difficulties of life in Israel. Of course culture has to have some kind of distance from everyday life, but too much distance and it becomes escapism.

I can easily imagine my ideal vision of a post-conflict Israel. It actually looks similar to my current experience of Israel – the incessant debate, the street life, the bewildering diversity, the vitality that streams out of the country's every pore. The difference is that in a post-conflict Israel these aspects of Israeli society would not be overwhelmed by the crushing weight of existential threat. Rather, Israeli life would have space to develop into "the good life."

Dr Keith Kahn-Harris, born in 1971, is a sociologist at the UK's Open University, and a freelance research consultant and educator in the Jewish community. A Jerusalem Fellow, he is author of Beyond Belonging: The Jewish Identities of Moderately Engaged British Jews *(with Steven M. Cohen, Profile Books, 2004) and* New Voices in Jewish Thought: Volume 2 *(Editor, Limmud publications 1999). Keith's love of Judaism stems from experiences growing up as a founding member of a small Reform shul outside London. His engagement with Judaism is maintained by a 'davkanik' refusal to see his less coventional interests — Extreme Metal music, transgressive art, and leftist politics — as incompatible with membership in the mainstream British Jewish community.*

Sh'ma שמע

Rediscovering the Revolutionary Nature of Jewish Practice

David Siff

FRANZ ROSENZWEIG compared the relationship between Judaism and Christianity to that of a fire and its rays. Judaism, according to Rosenzweig, is the hot core of religious fervor and disciplined ritual, embodying a passionate and timeless spirituality. The rays of light, beaming off, symbolize Christianity, the work of that spirituality impacting history.

What does it mean to pray for the sick, but not to fight for a public health policy?

Although it is not a helpful depiction of Jewish-Christian relations, it does express a basic tension within Jewish religious life. Jewish practice needs the fire, the core of tradition holding it together, keeping it authentically Jewish, drawing on the fuel of a 3,000-year-old heritage. It also must be transformative, calling on us to change ourselves and sending us out to improve the world. Without the core of tradition and dedicated communal practice, our community members do amazing work in the world, but dissipate through assimilation. Without being an "*or lagoyim*," without being a leader on issues of universal relevance, Judaism becomes solipsistic, existing only to burn fuel.

The Jewish community needs the fire of tradition if it is to survive as a community, but it also needs to send rays of light into the world if it is to be relevant today. This dual identity might be described as Jews standing on the path from Sinai to the Messiah. Sinai gave us a game plan for *tikkun olam b'malchut Shadai*, for transforming ourselves into workers for God and for transforming the world into the kingdom of God. Such a world would physically resemble our own, but operate under the rules of cooperation rather than competition, generosity and concern rather than self-interest. In this world, we would see the presence of God in every person and every thing and live in constant awe and consideration. We would strive not for wealth, strength, or intelligence, but for spiritual accomplishments, to acquire *middot*, virtues, and to do mitzvot, good deeds. If Judaism is to be compelling, if we are to fulfill the mission of Jewish law, we must rediscover the revolutionary nature of Jewish practice.

Kashrut is not just a code of dietary practices, but a paradigm that can influence how we lead our entire lives. According to Moses ben Nahman of Gerona (Nahmanides), who lived from 1194-1270, kashrut was given to make us *rachamim*, compassionate human beings. One of the rules of kashrut is to minimize pain, as much as possible, while slaughtering an animal. Although it is has become possible to observe kashrut simply by checking labels, this misses the point. Kashrut teaches us to practice consideration for all beings at every moment.

Prayer is a call beckoning us to refashion ourselves and remake the world. What does it mean to pray for forgiveness, but yet to be judgmental? What does it mean to pray for the sick, but not to fight for a public health policy? What does it mean to thank God for choosing us, without hearing the imperative of personal and global transformation that chosenness places on us? Prayer calls us to conduct a radical and revolutionary evaluation of our own character.

Study, too, must be revolutionary if it is truly to be Talmud Torah, sacred study — that is, self-examination in the service of self-improvement and global transformation. The bulk of the Book of Job is not its theodicy, but its moral indignation in the face of injustice: "They steal the orphan from the breast, take pledges from the poor… who press out oil within rich men's walls, tread wine into vats, though thirsty themselves." (Job 24:9-11) Torah calls us to be moral critics of a world we take for granted and depend upon and even to question the way we lead our own lives.

The way to make Judaism relevant is not to throw away study and prayer while continuing to discuss contemporary issues or to discard kashrut and eat organic and local produce. There is a power in tradition that cannot be easily replaced. Tradition helps us relate to God, to our ancestors, and to the Jewish community. Tradition keeps the fire going; it keeps us going. The mistake is in separating the practice and purpose, as if one could exist without the other. Only by having both, filling

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the form of the mitzvah with its revolutionary content, do we unite the fire and the rays.

We must build a community held together by a core of traditional communal practice, and impelled by that practice to act in the world as agents for a compassionate world order, if Judaism is to be both engaging and self-sustaining. A Judaism that sees only its mission of transforming the world but does not maintain a communal ritual life will, in the end, vanish like smoke. Judaism might be able to survive as a self-contained community, practicing *chesed,* lovingkindness, within its boundaries without having any impact on the greater world, but it would have failed at its mission.

The traditional and liberal sectors of the Jewish community need to see that they are, in fact, both pursuing the same values; only their methods are different. Traditionalists try to nurture sacred community by creating pockets of compassion isolated from a world lacking in values. Progressives try to live in that world and transform it through Jewish values. While they seem at odds ideologically, they do have something in common. They are both trying to serve the holy — the one as its guardian, the other as its messenger. It is in the mutual appreciation of the guardian and the messenger that reconciliation can occur.

We must stand on the path leading from Sinai to Messiah and relearn how to practice tradition in a way that transforms ourselves and the world around us.

Plotting a Future Course

Tony Michels

THE QUESTION OF how to create a vibrant American Jewish community has a long history behind it. Since the beginning of large-scale Jewish immigration in the 1820s, Jews have worried (with good reason) about the prospects for their community, religion, and culture in the United States. In a country without deeply-rooted Jewish communities and where Jews enjoyed unprecedented personal freedom (such as the freedom to discard Jewish communal affiliations and disobey erstwhile Jewish religious norms), committed Jews have feared that Jews as a group would assimilate out of existence. Isn't there a certain danger in freedom, they have wondered? This fear, and possibilities for creatively responding to it, is addressed thoughtfully by the winning essays of the *Sh'ma* New Voices essay contest, which fill this journal's pages.

Throughout our history in America, Jews have had to face an array of immediate questions about how to earn a living, adapt to American society, and deal with antisemitism. Indeed, such concerns have often superseded those about the maintenance or creation of Jewish culture and community. Jewish survival in a material sense has often trumped Jewish cultural survival.

Sh'ma's essay contestants, like many Jews before them, are concerned that American Jews have lost their way. These young writers attribute problems to different causes (ossified religious denominations or too much identification with Israel, for example), but all agree that American Jewry is experiencing a crisis. Responding to questions about recreating a vibrant American Jewish life, Joshua Gross and Koby Oppenheim identify the core problem especially well. Oppenheim, for one, sees many "talented young Jews" active in a variety fields of endeavor, but laments their general indifference to Jews as a collective: "Why aren't they together plotting our future course?"

This is an old but still relevant question. Since the era of Emancipation in Europe, the "best and brightest" among Jews have often left (or fled) the Jewish fold when given the opportunity. Some thinkers (such as the Polish-Jewish Marxist and former yeshiva student, Isaac Deutscher) have celebrated such "non-Jewish Jews" who have broken their Jewish ties to pursue their creative genius on the margins of society. (Spinoza and Marx are two of Deutscher's heroes.) Other thinkers have tried to come up with ways to appeal to the most creative and intelligent Jews and to harness them to the task of cultural reconstruction.

The Yiddish cultural nationalist and socialist, Chaim Zhitlovsky (a towering figure in the early 20th century), dedicated great energy to articulating and solving the problem of assimilation among Jewish intellectuals in the United States and Europe. One of Zhitlovsky's first endeavors in the U.S. was the creation of a highbrow journal in Yiddish, where issues of

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Jewish culture and politics could be discussed in a sophisticated manner. That was in 1908. Zhitlovsky's journal eventually died out, but others followed — published by people who knew little or nothing of Zhitlovsky, but shared his desire to create a magazine for intelligent yet disaffected or alienated Jews who, in some way, would negotiate a return to Jewishness. There is a long tradition of trying to build Jewish culture outside established channels by appealing to artists, writers, intellectuals, and other creative types, and doing so through publications, at least as a starting point.

Stephen Hazan Arnoff is thinking on Zhitlovsky's wavelength in his proposal to create an organization of Jewish artists. But whether artists can really be enlisted to serve the goals of Jewish communal organizations is an open question. (Artists of any worth will want to create what they want to create, regardless of whether it serves organizational interests.) Still, open-ended programs to cultivate the arts among Jews would probably be valuable in and of itself, especially for Jews who don't care much about more conventional forms of Jewish involvement.

But unlike Zhitlovsky and other thinkers who engaged problems of Jewish cultural viability (Mordecai Kaplan immediately comes to mind), these young essayists largely ignore the subject of language. Though an old and divisive question, language remains relevant. Can there be a worthwhile Jewish culture without a critical mass of people fluent in Yiddish, Hebrew, Ladino, or some Jewish language? Blacks and Latinos, for example, are changing the cultural landscape (in both the popular and literary realms) by using their vernaculars in combination with standard English. Jews used to do this too, especially second-generation Jewish comedians who were knowledgeable in Yiddish. A push for greater literacy might be a necessary communal goal if these young Jews want a community that resonates with their sense of mission, cultural and spiritual vitality, and group cohesiveness built on a respect for diversity and passion for social justice.



Tobi Kahn
NATYH
Shalom Bat Chairs
(Chairs for a Ceremony Welcoming a Baby Girl)
1987
acrylic on wood
70 x 21½ x 19 inches

Lies, Yearnings, and other Strange Fruits

Etgar Keret

AFTER I FINISHED high school, I worked for about half a year helping out at the produce store next to my parents' home. It was a wonderful time in my life. I was thin, muscular, and ate lots of watermelon, but like all good things, this joyful experience had to come to an end, in this case, when I was inducted into the army. Ten years later on my way to my parents' home, I met that very same grocer. It was a moving encounter. The grocer, who was updated weekly by my mother as to my literary success, made a generous offer; out of strong feelings of love and nostalgia for what we once shared, he was willing, for the first time in his life, to read a story that I, his loyal apprentice in the past, had written. I took out of my knapsack the literary supplement of a daily paper, where my story had just appeared, and the grocer sat down on one of the crates, took a deep breath, like a diver about to dive to the bottom of the ocean, and began to read.

He stopped at the second sentence — "It says here," he said, "that your mother died when she gave birth to you. How could you write that? Why, I just saw her yesterday." I explained to him that the story was fiction and that it had never really happened. When he realized that all my stories are made up and that this was not a one-time slip, the grocer shook his head sadly. "What a shame," he said, "You should know, in the end they will find out that you lied."

"Who will?" I asked.

"These people at the paper," he waved the supplement in his hand. "All lies, even the most successful, are exposed in the end." I explained to him that at the paper they know that the story is fiction and that I'm not the only guy who writes imaginary stories; all writers use their imagination. "So you are saying that everyone knows," the grocer returned the paper to me in disgust, "and no one does anything about it. I always told my wife that I don't believe a word of what is written in the newspapers." Afterward, we — the grocer and I — had coffee prepared on a kerosene burner, and he suggested that I come back and work for him, hard work but at least honest. I politely refused and continued on my way. But nevertheless, his words never totally left me.

What is the driving force that makes a person spend most of his life in a room opposite a piece of paper or a computer keyboard and invent more and more plots that never happened? What impulse makes a person invent problems that don't really exist and set them up with beloved characters who were never born and then sit in front of the page and feel their pain? Surely there is no lack of real people out there with real stories whom one can go and meet — why did I, instead of going out to meet them, choose to stay at home and make up what the grocer calls "lies"?

The answer, at least for me, is simple. Order. I yearn for some sort of order and logic in a world that for most of my life I experienced as a chaotic non-logical phenomenon. This craving draws me to the world of fiction. In the average story there is a plot, there are desires, there are feelings that can be controlled and those that cannot. True, in life there is also all of that, but in life I can't always discern and distill them. In a story the name of the person or object that I make up actually creates the character. In reality, God or nature created the person, and all the facts that I discover about him do not presume to bring him into existence.

In this perspective, literature simplifies the existential chaos into an abstract but more comprehensible form. Just like a formula in physics can extract some rule from reality, so too the literary formula succeeds in saying something about the human condition. But it also does more than that. It not only presents the experiences of the writer, it becomes a redemptive exercise when all the arbitrary and seemingly meaningless events of a writer's life suddenly become part of a sensitive and perfect experience, when writing style and literary choices succeed in taking an encounter and implanting meaning into the heart of those arbitrary real-life occurrences.

Like in one of my stories where an angel who, unable to fly, crashes to the ground like a sack of potatoes, so, too, the human condition is one of discrepancies between the heights that humanity can reach and the moral and human depths that we crash into again and again. To describe these discrepancies, we cannot be satisfied with the superhighways of language communication; rather, we must discover, anew, dirt paths that attempt to transport us from one point to the next along

Etgar Keret is the author of The Bus Driver Who Wanted to Be God and Other Stories *(Toby Press, 2004). His new collection,* The Nimrod Flip-Out, *will be published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux in the spring, translated from the Hebrew by Felice Kahn Zisken. His short story, "Atonement," appeared on JBooks.com in October.*

a route that will be entirely novel to both reader and writer.

This might be the universal task of writers anywhere on earth, but living in Israel, a country that seems to be made almost entirely from conflicts and paradoxes, a place where no answer is simple but at the same time it is crucial that all questions are asked, makes writing different. Here, this need to communicate, to ponder, to query — which in other places may feel somewhat theoretical — turns into a practical and unique way for containing ambiguity without sliding into relativity. Writing is my way of fighting for ideological ground without losing my essential empathy for those with whom I disagree, or, in short, of accepting the inner contradiction of being without giving up on my moral spine.

Choosing to Remain Jewish

Svetlana Lantsman

AS A CHILD, I loved matzah. I loved the texture, the crunch. I had a special way of eating it: line by line, ridge by ridge, evenly, compulsively. Most of all I was intrigued by the secrecy of the ritual. My grandfather would arrive from Tulchin — a little village in the Ukraine, literally a *shtetl* where most of the inhabitants were Jewish — carrying a child-sized white-clothed bag filled to the brim with homemade matzah. Most of the pieces were irregularly shaped, broken from the bus ride to the town where I lived, Vinnitsa. I was not allowed to take matzah outside or share it with my friends; I was not even allowed to admit that we had it or that I knew what it was. In the last decade of the Soviet Union's existence, the act of making matzah, and by association transporting and eating matzah, remained illegal, dangerous even. This small act of defiance that my family undertook demonstrated the resilience of Jewishness in the virulently antisemitic Soviet Union.

Our move to the United States in 1993, when I was ten years old, presented my family, especially my brother and me, with opportunities we could only dream of in the Ukraine. In the former Soviet Union we had no choice; we were Jewish, but we could not fully and openly choose to accept Judaism. In America we could get a Jewish education and practice Judaism, yet this transformation could hardly happen overnight; we were more concerned with learning English and achieving financial stability than with learning Hebrew and practicing kashrut.

We belonged (and still belong) to a small Orthodox synagogue that sponsored our arrival in Richmond, Virginia. And though we feel welcome in this shul, we have never felt comfortable. My family and many other Soviet Jews do not feel that they belong in any synagogue, whether it be Orthodox, Conservative, or Reform. Most of us cannot read or understand Hebrew; we puzzle over when to stand and sit or when to bow during the service; we lack basic understanding of religious practices and rituals. Russian Jews know (and think that American Jews know) that they do not quite measure up. These feelings of inadequacy, whether perceived through one's own or another's eyes, can be summed up by one terse statement: In Russia I was too Jewish; in America I am not Jewish enough.

But my family remained Jewish despite the Cossacks and the Czars, despite the Nazis and the Communists. And we did not move to a country in which religious freedom is the cornerstone of government only to lose our identity. My parents brought me up Jewish, and in America, now as a young adult, I hope to discover what that means.

I explored that terrain initially through reading contemporary Jewish fiction, and then in college I took classes in Zionism, Jewish ritual and tradition, modern Jewish thought, and Jewish literature. This search is not uncommon among Jewish Russians who want to augment their cultural and historical sensibility with ritual and tradition. While levels of observance vary, it is noteworthy that our generation of Russian Jews is bringing home Jewish rituals to our families. For example, I know several families in which the children lead the Passover seder. Role reversal is a common trend in immigrant families; younger generations often take over the responsibilities of their elders who lack language and cultural skills that the society requires. However, a role reversal in a religious context appears to be a fairly unique

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phenomenon. Unlike our parents and grandparents, my generation feels less inhibited by our past and more open to change. And though we cling to our Jewish identity, it is no longer forced upon us; instead we must choose to remain Jews.

Choosing a Jewish identity is not a passive endeavor, but a conscious act. In the former Soviet Union, this choice was dangerous; the physical restrictions placed upon religion inhibited one's imagination. While defending itself from outside dangers, Judaism could only be experienced in relation to the external. In America's more open society, my generation of Russian Jews is beginning to redefine our Jewish identity. Having been freed of societal constraints, we can begin to re-imagine our relation to Judaism.

Guilt and the Divided Soul

Ruth Andrew Ellenson

WHEN YOU HEAR the words "Jewish Guilt," images of mothers sitting alone in the dark or Woody Allen agonizing over some *shiksa* goddess probably come to mind. You might smile and dismiss it. It's a stereotype with little basis in terms of what goes on in the heart and mind of a serious contemplative Jew. Guilt is just kitsch, right?

But guilt deserves a deeper look because when examined carefully it offers a window into the divided soul of the American Jew: Where do the obligations to community end, and where does what we owe ourselves begin? To be American is to believe that the individual is paramount, but to be Jewish is to know the community is what truly matters.

This dilemma takes on special poignancy for Jewish women: the enormous strides made by feminism and liberal thought over the past 40 years have opened up a new universe of ways to express ourselves, but have also increased the ways in which we can agonize. For Jewish women born in the 60s, 70s, and 80s, raised without a real threat of antisemitism and in a golden age of opportunity, the fact that we can study in a yeshiva in Jerusalem or walk down the street wearing a t-shirt that reads, "Yo Semite" without fear of being hauled off by either a *beit din* or a white supremacist can sometimes feel overwhelming. How do we live up to all the opportunity we've been blessed with?

Family legend has it that my *bubbe*, an immigrant from Russia, used to practically fall out of the shul balcony in her longing to join the men's service below. I, on the other hand, her privileged American granddaughter, could lead an entire Torah service if I chose to, but shamefully I'd probably rather fall off of a balcony. In addition to guilt, this story always inspires a question for me: How much do we owe our heritage, and how much do we follow our hearts?

This question, which poses a problem for many Jewish women in my generation, is explored in a collection I edited on guilt. One woman, a practicing Buddhist and the daughter of an African American woman and a Jewish man, found her heritage in the push and pull she had with her father over what to name her unborn child. She wanted Tenzin for the Dalai Lama, and he wanted Chaim for his grandfather. Another woman I know, whose sterling *yichus* links her to one of the most prominent families in Modern Orthodoxy, found herself divided as she waited to usher in Yom Kippur sitting in a nail salon trying to make sure she looked suitable for services while missing Kol Nidre.

When I heard these stories I was struck by the notion that as different as the circumstances were, the emotional arc remained the same. The push and pull, the love and ambivalence, and the guilt and pleasure of being Jewish caused us to reexamine who we are and what our traditions mean to us — and there are no easy answers. There is the straddling of two worlds — the guilt and pleasure of being Jewish — in which the love of Judaism is equal to the pressure felt in following traditions I might not have chosen for myself.

My book explores the challenges and situations I encountered in my life and the question of how conflicts of identity are resolved or not in the experiences of modern Jewish women. Guilt can make us laugh at its absurdity, break our heart, or — in choosing which guilt we accept or reject — help us come to a clearer understanding of who we are.

Ruth Andrew Ellenson is a journalist in Los Angeles and the editor of the anthology, The Modern Jewish Girl's Guide to Guilt *(Dutton, 2005). To learn more about the book, visit www.guiltguide.com.*

Thank You

In almost every generation, a great number of Jews in their twenties and thirties — alienated from the established communal institutions — approach Judaism with hesitation, navigating the waters of community with ambivalence and at times loathing. But oftentimes, the margins on which these young Jews hover are places of fertility, where new ideas gestate. To engage these young Jews *Sh'ma*, along with the Taube Foundation for Jewish Life and Culture, sponsored an essay contest focusing on imaginative ways of refiguring Jewish communal life.

The Project Director for the essay contest was Elana Gruen, who meticulously shepherded the essays and the contributors through the process of being judged anonymously. In addition to the sponsorship of the Taube Foundation, the Bronfman Youth Fellowship participated as a co-sponsor of the contest. Winning essays were chosen by two successive judging panels. The initial panel selected the essays to be submitted to the final judges. Judges included Barry Shrage, President of the Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston; Rabbi Dov Y. Bard, Director of Judaic Studies at the Alperin Schechter Day School in Rhode Island; Rabbi and educator Cherie Koller-Fox of Boston; Dalia Pollack, executive director of the Charles Bronfman Prize; Rabbi Joanna Samuels of Congregation Habonim in NY, NY; Rabbi Jonathan Spira-Savett, teen educator and publisher of machar.net youth philanthropy website; Diane Troderman, chair of JESNA; and Dr. Steve Windmueller, Director of HUC's Jewish Communal Service Program.

The final panel of judges included Brigitte Dayan of the Wexner Foundation; Rabbi Sharon Cohen Anisfeld, Associate Dean for Student Life at Hebrew College's Rabbinical School; Steven M. Jacobson, Director of the Dorot Fellowship; Stefanie Rhodes, Senior Program Manager of the Jewish Funder's Network; Rabbi Andy Bachman, Executive Director of Reboot and Brooklyn Jews; and Naomi Less, Vice President of Programs for the Foundation for Jewish Camping.

An event to honor the winners is scheduled for this winter. In order to encourage "next generation" Jews to have a voice in revisioning Jewish life in America, we limited the ages of entrants to 22 – 40-years-olds. We received 39 submissions, arriving from across North America, Europe, and Israel. Each contestant used one of the following questions to guide his or her essay:

1 What is your vision for a post-conflict Israel?

2. How would you create a more engaging, sustaining, Jewish community?

3. What are the two most pressing contemporary Jewish concerns, and how should they be addressed?

4. In the 20th century, the Holocaust and Israel served as the two primary focal points for Jewish identity. What is that focal point in the 21st century?

5. How would you prioritize the Jewish communal agenda?

Once again, we acknowledge our winners:

Sarra Alpert of Brooklyn, New York
Stephen Hazan Arnoff of New York, currently in Jerusalem
Joshua Gross of Trumbull, Conn.
Koby Oppenheim of New York
Sarah Tauber of Rye, New York
Amy 'afo' Fornari of Great Neck, New York
Keith Kahn-Harris of London, UK
Michael Rosenberg of Kibbutz Ma'ale Gilboa, Israel
David B. Siff of Philadelphia, Penn.

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Koret Book Review

The Koret Foundation-*Sh'ma* literary pages include literary essays and reviews of books, films, and other cultural arts. These pages feature an array of talented writers who bring our readers new expressions of Jewish thought, imagination, and spirit.

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The Young and the Restless:
Works by Young Writers

Michal Lemberger

Jubana! The Awkwardly True and dazzling Adventures of a Jewish Cuban Princess, Gigi Anders. Rayo, 2005, 298 pp., $23.95

Schlepping Through the Alps: My Search for Austria's Jewish Past with its Last Wandering Shepherd, Sam Apple. Ballantine Books, 2005, 304 pp., $23.95

Beware of God: Stories, Shalom Auslander. Simon & Schuster, 2005, 194 pp., $19.95

Raymond and Hannah, Stephen Marche. Harcourt, 2005, 207 pp., $14.00

WHAT DOES IT MEAN to say "young Jewish writers"? I've been to panels featuring them; I've even written reviews of their books, but it is becoming harder and harder to write about this large coterie as a unified group. The four books on my desk right now, for example, seem to defy all attempts at coherence. For one thing, only three of the writers are young; for another, one of them isn't even Jewish. And yet they all write about Judaism.

There was a time in the mid-20th century when young Jewish writers were accomplishing two groundbreaking milestones: they were gaining popularity by writing about Jews rather than trying to fit into a literary culture that was overwhelmingly gentile, and they were, simultaneously, coming to define American literature as a whole. That newfound openness for "ethnic" literature opened the floodgates to other minorities whose stories had not previously been read. The multiplicity of voices and stories available to us is largely due to a few especially well-received minority authors, among them Ralph Ellison, Saul Bellow, and Philip Roth. Now that we've grown used to an expanded literary landscape, we've also become accustomed to extreme levels of variety within distinct ethnic groups. The diversity was always there: Bellow and Roth (as well as Ozick, Malamud, etc.) were never cookie-cutter versions of one another but, for better or worse, they were grouped together as somehow encompassing the Jewish American experience.

It has become increasingly difficult, though, to lump together writers with aims so different they produced the following four books: a memoir by a Jewish refugee of the Cuban Revolution; a nonfictional account of a journalist's travels through Austria with a Yiddish folk-singing, wandering shepherd; a short story collection that affectionately skewers Orthodox ritual and tradition; and a novel about two lovers separated by space and belief in Judaism. When all they have in common is some connection, no matter how vague, to one distinct aspect of Jewish culture or practice, what is a reviewer to say?

Let's start here: the books differ in quality, of course. Gigi Anders, who can remember the Cuban Revolution and so is not really a member of the younger generation, has written a memoir utterly juvenile and free of insight or charm, while Sam Apple's book is an imperfect but endearing portrait of both his shepherd subject and his own obsession with both the Holocaust and antisemitism. Shalom Auslander's stories contain both wit and an acute sense of the hypocrisy of religious belief, while Stephen Marche has written a spare, inventive, and beautiful novel of love, longing, and human fallibility.

One thread that does tie together the works of Apple, Auslander, and Marche is an acknowledgement of the communal nature of Jewish life and thought. Apple's book is based on his own understanding of Austrian antisemitism — knowledge he imbibed from his grandmother, Bashy. His book stands as testament to how strongly beliefs can be passed from one generation to another, from one person to another. And like the American Jewish community's ongoing concern with antisemitism, American Jewry is also preoccupied with the ways in which belief in God and adherence of custom are instilled into young people's minds. Both Auslander and Marche indicate through their fictions that a culture's ideological imperatives have a seductive power that can be hard to deny.

Auslander's story, "God is a Big Happy Chicken," stands as a case in point, indicating how hard it is to go against received wisdom, even when one has an inside scoop on the

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truth. In a frankly hilarious turn, God is depicted as an enormous chicken, and Morgenstern, a recently dead, pious Jew, is horrified to find that all his life he'd been praying to a fowl deity. Given a chance to return to his family, Morgenstern tries to tell them the truth. Ultimately, faced with their unshakeable faith, he can't go through with it. Belief, like everything else, this story assures us, represents an agreement among people to believe.

In some ways, Marche's novel is the most interesting of the three, especially because it shows how a set of communal beliefs can be taught and learned. Although his novel is so sympathetic to his character Hannah's growing attachment to Jewish rituals and ways of thinking, Stephen Marche is not Jewish. Unlike Apple, who revels in his own neuroses, or Auslander who writes about the Orthodoxy that he no longer practices, Marche approaches Judaism without any preconceptions; he treats its beauties and its limitations with the same sincerity. Judaism remains foreign and problematic for Raymond while, at the same time, it evinces a tribal but never simplistic pull on Hannah's emotions and loyalties. Perhaps this is the greatest testament to the inroads ethnic literature has made in just over half a century: a gentile can convincingly write about Judaism now with the same authority as someone born into its strange and wonderful ways.

Offering Rebuke in an Age of Understanding, *from page 28*

reasons. Maimonides adds that rebuke needs to be spoken patiently, gently, and privately. (*Hilchot De'ot* 6:7)

Clarity of motivation

Maimonides' point suggests a second guideline: clarity of motivation. There may be complicated conscious or unconscious motivations for offering apparently helpful rebuke, including causing shame, showing our own superiority, or even getting back at someone who has criticized us in the past. Before we offer rebuke we need to do our own *heshbon hanefesh* (self analysis): why are we choosing this role? Only if we are certain (or as certain as we can be) that our motivation is clear and simple should we proceed.

Following up

Rabbi Shneur Zalman in the *Tanya* insists that "your neighbor" only applies to one who is with you in Torah and mitzvot, that is, to a fellow student, or in contemporary terms, someone with whom you are in a long-term relationship. (Chapter 32, citing *Babylonian Talmud Shevuot* 30a) Because change comes painfully and slowly (masters of the *Musar,* or ethical tradition, speak of 40 days of concentrated effort to change even a minor habit), any proffered critique implies a contracting to help in the process of making change. "I will call you next week to follow up"; "you may call me any time if you need support"; "let's make a plan to go to the gym or take a daily walk together."

Dealing with rejection

Rabbeinu Yonah of Gerona in his *Gates of Teshuvah* recognizes the problem of inhibiting anxiety: "perhaps they will not listen if I tell them the truth." (Section 196) The book of Proverbs warns us to avoid rebuking a scorner "lest he hate you." (9:8) Critique involves an analysis of how the rebuke will be heard. If we feel that our words will be rejected we may only be compounding the problem, stiffening our neighbor's resistance to change and ruining our relationship. My late uncle, Rabbi Shmuel Schechter, once told me that he had avoided rebuking one of my decisions lest I sin intentionally rather than unintentionally and also be guilty of disobeying an elder. (see *Babylonian Talmud Beitzah* 30a)

Ultimately, the rabbinic tradition directs us to take responsibility for one another and offer our friends and family needed correction to help them lead a healthy and balanced life. To accept that challenge, we need to build trust in our relationships, offer praise, lead by example, be humble, and understand ourselves and our motivations.

Sh'ma שמע

נשמע
NiSh'ma
Let us hear

I have three favorite ice cream flavors. Vanilla. Chocolate. Strawberry. But, pistachio is the best of all. A mathematical incongruity.

How many crowns? Three? A fourth?

Now this. Three favorite flavors….but ice cream sundaes are the best of all.

As the ice cream sundae is the ultimate creation derived from three flavors, a good name is the supreme entity "*oleh*," rising from the three crowns.

What *is* it in a name?

Must we attain the praise and admiration of others? Can we not simply know, within our hearts, that we are striving to do right?

Our name is much more than simply our *own* name. Everything we do and say — even the perceptions of others — radiates outward, becoming inextricably intertwined in the fabric of who we, as a collective, are. A true good name — not one achieved by superficial trappings — has limitless power and is the foundation of a good world.

We are each granted unique circumstances, king, *kohen*, or scholar. No one can be all. But we can, through our innate flavors, strive to personify goodness, kindness, and justice — together creating a good society, together becoming the allegorical ice cream sundae. No flavor on its own, but the perfect balance of cool, creamy, luscious sweetness.

— *Judith Eisner*

Rabbi Shimon says: There are three crowns: A crown of Torah, a crown of priesthood, and a crown of rulership. But the crown of a good name surpasses them all.

— *Pirkei Avot (Chapter 4 Mishna 17)*

At least three sorts of Jewish leadership exist — teacher, ritual leader, and administrative leader. Each is necessary, and each exerts a power that may become entrenched in the machinations and pitfalls of institutional life. Who confers the privileges of leadership? Is leadership attained according to birthright or *protektzia,* or is it earned?

The crown of a good name means that a person's innate sanity and goodness are cultivated and developed to the point that these virtues overflow. Someone with the crown of a good name may be a teacher, or a ritual leader, or an administrator. Or those leaders may not wear a crown of a good name. Through actions and words our leaders should radiate a goodness, and that goodness should be nurtured in all of our Jewish leadership programs.

— *Jonathan Glass*

What is in a name? A name means nothing; it is simply an arbitrary title. Then what is in a good name? A good name does have meaning. It carries relevance and significance. A name is that by which you will be known; a good name is that by which you will be judged.

The three crowns that Rabbi Shimon mentions are names – simply arbitrary titles, perhaps ascribed, perhaps attained. But the crown of a good name transcends designation. It is earned not from study or birthright, but from being. The good name is earned from the integration of logic, compassion, open-mindedness, and experience.

The good name deserves more relevance today and not just for Jewish leaders. A person should be judged not by whether he or she wears the crown of President, CEO, or Prime Minister. People should be judged by whether they deserve the crown based on their good name – by their interaction with other human beings and the world around them and by their wisdom and respect.

— *Yoav Fisher*

The crown of a good name is rooted in the intimate precincts of the mind and heart. Those who possess a crown of leadership, whether it be one of Torah, of priesthood, or of rulership, must be judged on account of how effectively they inspire others to put their humanity in touch with their spirit, restoring them to their better selves. Those who don a crown of leadership must struggle with the burden of responsibility and strive to be agents of our best humanity. Those who don a crown of leadership must reject the false distinction between the small cloistered world of ethnic concerns and the universal aim of achieving the greatest good for the greatest number. For the crown of a good name is achieved by those brave enough to position themselves at the rugged, problematic intersection of these two moral imperatives. Let the poet Delmore Schwartz serve as guide to the perplexed. "I am to my own heart merely a serf." Follow humbly.

— *Evan R. Goldstein*

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Offering Rebuke in an Age of Understanding

Leonard Gordon

"YOU SHALL SURELY rebuke your neighbor." (Leviticus 19:17)

The biblical text and the rabbinic commenting tradition are clear: we are responsible for one another, and part of that responsibility demands that we confront a friend who endangers her own health and welfare. This requirement is complicated and difficult: we value privacy, and it can seem impolite, even a breach of etiquette, to confront someone about a personal matter; we risk inspiring anger when we ask someone to be self-reflective, leading to the loss of the very friend whom we hoped to help; finally, we may doubt our capacity to be effective and worry that we will do more harm than good.

As a rabbi, I struggle with these doubts both in my public role and in the privacy of my office. Because I believe that Judaism requires us to take care of our bodies, which have been entrusted to us by God, in whose image we are made, I do speak from the pulpit, especially during the High Holidays, about this aspect of *teshuvah* (ethical transformation). While I hope to inspire self-care, I am humbled by the difficulty of leading by example. Over the years I have learned that more important than the teachings themselves is what my delivery communicates about me as rabbi. I need to convey accessibility, disinterested caring, and, most important, freedom from personal judgment, and then — harder still — I have to live up to those expectations.

It is of course harder to deliver messages that are difficult to hear in the office than from the pulpit, where people have more freedom to decide what is and is not intended for them. Sometimes, family or friends hope that the rabbi can interfere with a beloved person's self-destructive habits. Sometimes I can see for myself the importance of trying to intervene in someone's life. Often I am not sure. What I have learned from my experiences and from Jewish tradition, which recognizes the obstacles to effective chastisement and offers direction about how to intervene when someone disregards the needs of body and soul, is the importance of staying in relationship, self monitoring, following up, and dealing with rejection. I have also learned that the responsibility to rebuke is best exercised by those who can manage to be selfless and nonjudgmental, by friends who can be trusted to stay present after the hard words are spoken.

Jewish tradition actually recognizes the obstacles to effective chastisement and offers direction about how to intervene when someone disregards the needs of body and soul.

Rebuke in the context of relationship

The interpretive tradition that links us to our verse from Leviticus takes seriously the meaning of "neighbor." Rebuke should only take place in the context of an established relationship: no "hit and run" criticism. We offer loving critique to someone who has heard us offer prior words of praise. Extrapolating from the tradition of reading three *haftarot* of rebuke before Tisha B'Av and seven *haftarot* of consolation afterward, we learn that words of rebuke and support should come in ratio of three to seven. We are told that Moses offered his critique to the children of Israel only at the end of his career for similar

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Leonard Gordon is rabbi at the Germantown Jewish Centre and Chair of the Rabbinical Assembly Social Action Committee.

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