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# Sh'ma

A JOURNAL OF JEWISH RESPONSIBILITY

## Inside...

**P**ilgrimage is a journey in response to a calling.

For thousands of years, the Land of Israel has called Jews to its borders, and we have come. We go on "missions," we send our children, and we are moved.

In this Passover issue, we explore the sacredness and the substance of pilgrimage.



*A sweet and liberating  
Passover, from our  
house to yours.*

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## Something better than "Wow" (an excerpt) ■ Lawrence A. Hoffman

Everyone remembers that first trip to Israel. When I went there my first time, a veteran traveler remarked, "I envy you. You can visit Israel many times, but you can go there the first time only once." Then he added, "Wait and see. Jerusalem really is just a little bit closer to heaven."

Exactly a week later, I was actually there. The first morning, I wandered the Jerusalem streets, amazed at how modern the place was. Turning the corner, I found myself face to face with antiquity. It was the Old City, its walls rising from the ground like a great geological rift of time buckling up through the centuries. I knew instantly what Moses must have felt when he saw the burning bush.

### Ascending The Mountain

I had felt it the night before too as, in the dark, our taxi climbed the highway to Jerusalem. How many times had I read the old translation of Psalm 24, "Who shall ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who shall stand in His holy place?" How many pilgrims like myself had ascended this very hill through the centuries? At the side of the road, I thought I made out the shapes of rusted tank remains from the 1948 War of Independence, left there purposely, as symbols of the modern-day miracle of the birth of the State.

I would come to know that feeling many times, sometimes in the most un-

likely spots, like picnicking with my children in Ashkelon on an old rock that turned out to be part of a genuine Roman column more than 2,000 years old. My kids were unmoved. "Just more ruins," one of them sighed, completely unimpressed by history. We call such people "cultural philistines," I mused. Then I remembered that once, real Philistines sat here, maybe even Goliath himself. Goliath was long gone now, as were the Romans of old, but the Jewish People and its faith were still here, still alive and well.

### Preparing The Soul

Then there was the time I came across the old cemetery in Safed, with the graves of Judaism's brilliant sixteenth-century mystics. I had sung their songs, read their books, and knew their names as well as my own. Only then did their real presence become tangible to me. Or the sunny afternoon I stood in Jerusalem at King David's grave—whether he was actually buried there or not, his memory was freshly felt for sure.

And here was my problem: When I came across such places, I would just stare in disbelief. All I could find within me was something approaching "Wow!" Sometimes I'd clutch my wife's hand or put my arm around my children, but there was nothing I could say or do to express the religious awe that welled up deep inside my soul.

There must be something better than "Wow!" I thought. And indeed, there was. I had just never considered it. It had never occurred to me to look toward the Jewish tradition for ways to express religious feelings. For my family's stay in Israel I had purchased plane fare, rented an apartment, arranged for the children to attend day camp, and bought canteens. I had done all the things the guidebooks tell you to do, but I had not prepared myself spiritually for the occasion.

Secularism runs so deep that we often reduce spiritual moments to mere lessons in history. We come to Israel prepared for a detached appreciation of battles and monuments: how the great King Herod built the Jerusalem walls, or how sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Ottoman emperors added to them. We are ready to acknowledge the artistic side of Israel too. Guides take time out to admire the Chagalls in the Knesset or the antiquities at the Israel Museum. We are good at history, good at aesthetics, not so good at the life of the spirit.

### Expressing Our Awe

There must be an easy way for visitors to Israel to do better than "Wow!" when gripped by the feeling that perhaps we are just a little closer to heaven—or that heaven has dropped down a little closer to us. This book provides spiritual preparations for traveling to Israel, and the responses to being there that Jews have practiced since time immemorial. It combines ancient blessings with medieval prayers, modern poetry, traditional practices, and the opportunity for spiritual reflection, so you can more deeply appreciate the sacred sights and sounds that make Israel the center of the Jewish world...

To let you take it all in, the introduction has been divided into eighteen short readings: eighteen for *chai*, meaning "life." Whether you cover one reading a day or six on each Shabbat, the main thing is to take three weeks to go through them all. The three-week model is borrowed from ancient rabbinic advice on preparing for Passover. Passover was then a pilgrimage event so grand that the Temple had to triple its staff to handle the sacrifices. Roughly three weeks in advance of the holiday, a Torah reading advised Jews to begin their ritual preparation for their journey to Jerusalem.

Do not cram the night before you leave. Do not count on reading whenever you get the chance. Do not squeeze the readings into your crowded day, the way you would a newspaper editorial or junk mail that comes to your

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home. The operative word is *kavvanah*, the rabbinic term for focusing attention on the spiritual challenge of the moment and not letting your mind wander. Your trip can be just another vacation, or it can be the journey of your life. To make it the latter, do it right. Put aside some sacrosanct time, either five minutes for each of 18 nights or half an hour on three successive Shabbatot.

The Kabbalists began their prayers by saying *Hin'ni muchan um'zuman*, "Here I am, ready and prepared." But why both "ready" and "prepared?" Why the redundancy? "Ready" means outfitted physically—prayer book in hand, dressed correctly. "Prepared" means outfitted within, like an athlete or musician who knows that running shoes and tuned violin strings are only half of what goes into a great performance. The other half is *kavvanah*.

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## **Sh'ma** A JOURNAL OF JEWISH RESPONSIBILITY

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## Some Readings

I have three readings for landing. First, a meditative poem to be said as the plane begins to land. Then the traditional *gomel benschen* for when it actually gets there. And then, on the way to Jerusalem, an example of an old blessing from the *genizah*—the traditional blessing for Jerusalem that our ancestors in *Eretz Yisrael* said until the time of the Crusaders.

### Approaching Israel (to be recited shortly before landing)

I've seen the old-time films of how they kiss the ground,  
Those old-time Jews unblemished by sophistication.  
As for me, well, I'll just look around, unexcited-like,  
Cool as a cucumber.

(Or maybe as a *m'lah-f'foan*, as they call cucumbers here.)

This is just an airport where they lose your bags the same  
as any place on earth,  
But in Hebrew.

I've heard the tales of Jews who burst out crying on these  
shores,

Middle-aged men from the Middle Ages, mostly,  
Who had a thing for tears, I guess—

It was a wailing wall, back then, where they cried each  
day at sunrise and at sunset

And watched and waited for the Ninth of Av, with  
special joy, for all I know,

Because they could cry more then.

But as for me, well, thank you, I don't cry a lot,  
Not even in Jerusalem,

Let alone in Tel Aviv, where (after all)

People plod to work, smoke cigarettes, drink Coca Cola  
(Koa-kah koa-lah, as they call it here—

Who says I can't speak Hebrew?)

But then again, I've never really come like this,  
Never stood here, all alone with just my jet-lagged  
thoughts

On what I should be careful not to do,  
In case someone is watching.

Who doesn't wonder what it was like

To embrace the ground

And steal at least a single kiss,

From the dust of Israel's past,

The way they did

When pre-jet props used runways made of smoothed-out  
sacred soil, instead of tarmac?

### On arriving safely (to be said as the plane comes to a stop)

*Barukh atah adonai eloheinu melekh ha'olam hagomel  
l'hayavim tovot sheg'malani kol tov.*

Blessed is God who does favors even for the undeserving,  
and has treated me so kindly.

(In the book, Hebrew text appears along with this  
translation and transliteration.)

### For the road from the airport to Jerusalem (facing Jerusalem at the top of the mountain road, add:)

*Od yishama  
b'arei y'hudah  
uv'chutsot y'rushalayim  
kol sason v'kol simchah  
kol chatan v'kol kallah*

In the cities of Judah  
And the courtyards of Jerusalem,  
Let only this be heard:  
the sound of joy and happiness,  
weddings on every corner

*Barukh atah adonai, elohei david, boneh y'rushalayim*

Blessed is the God of David, who builds up Jerusalem. †

## Israel as a spiritual journey

■ Jay Rosenbaum

The children's story, *The Always Prayer Shawl*, by Sheldon Oberman, follows the life of a Jewish child, Adam, through the years, as his personal journey intersects with the upheavals of the twentieth century. Amidst the vast changes in lifestyle and location, a *tallit* handed down to him from his grandfather provides the "thread" of constancy that connects the experiences of Adam over time. But, not quite in the way we expect.

Adam travels from Russia to America, from the city to the suburbs, from childhood to grandparenthood. Through the years, pieces of the *tallit* wear out, and, one by one, need to be replaced, until, after four generations nothing of the original fabric remains. Yet, it is still the same *tallit*.

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This story reminds us that a *tallit*, like Judaism, changes—and in the very way it transforms itself, provides us with a model for how we ourselves can grow without breaking.

### Change And Constancy

Jewish experience provides us with such a model as well. How have our people reacted to change over the centuries? What can we learn from their adaptative strategies that could help us cope with the jagged discontinuities in our own lives? Can the healing of a broken homeland be applied to healing a broken home?

One way to find out is to travel to the homeland itself and probe the secrets of its renewal. In the summer of 1995, our congregation in conjunction with the Ramah Israel Institute created an Israel experience we called *Shalsholet: A Jewish Life's Journey*. We knew, of course, that any trip to Israel would provide us with a wealth of insight about our national past. Our particular goal, however, was to explore the nexus between the history of our people and our own soul's journey.

Israel provides the ideal setting for such an exploration. It is a land where, every day, the old and the new struggle to make peace with each other, where brokenness has been repaired, but not forgotten, and where fragmentation has sometimes deliberately been left standing, in defiant provocation.

Here the competing layers of human and Jewish experience are uncovered for us to examine with our very eyes. The tour guide directs our attention to the seam in the ancient wall which separates two civilizations. How skillfully is one identity grafted on to another? Is the impression given of seamless continuity? Or, would we rather that the scars that remain from our wounds be visible to all, proof of our character?

To see the Kotel through these eyes is to grapple with contradiction and disruption. What do we make of the fact that this most holy of places was built and refurbished by Herod, a most unholy man? And yes, we are home again, but we are not the same people who left. To come to Israel is to recover not just the Judaism of the Bible, but the panopoly of hyphenated Judaisms we have picked up "on the road." All of them are now here in this one place, in varying degrees of harmony with the whole.

What does this suggest to us about how to deal with our own past? A painful divorce, a career failure, the loss of a loved one. Do we isolate the pieces of our lives in separate rooms, or do we bring them together?

Not every human response to change is equally sound. Recently, *The New York Times* ran a photograph of the President's office on Air Force One, a kind of "White

House *shel maala*," "White House on high," recreating the decor and feel of One Pennsylvania Avenue. From the inside, you would never know that you were suspended in the air. Such is the tendency of human beings to create interiors that belie the shifting ground under our feet.

A far different model is provided by our national response to the loss of our spiritual focal point, the *Beit Hamikdash* (the Holy Temple). When the Temple was destroyed, we took the memories from our "old house" and moved them into our *mikdash m'at*, the Jewish home. Everything about the Shabbat table, for example, is reminiscent of the holy Temple, yet no one would mistake the one for the other.

We often cite this example as a model for Jewish renewal. But, it is far more. It also suggests guidelines for change in our personal lives. We, each of us, build our own *mikdash m'at*, incorporating our sacred memories into our lives. A Jewish couple who arrived here twenty years ago from Lithuania proudly showed me their china and ornaments, all from Vilnius. My *New York Times* arrives daily on my doorstep, though I have not lived in the state for eighteen years. And in a quiet neighborhood of Jerusalem, there hangs a rusty sign from a New England Jewish deli, a sentimental reminder of parental love in a home far away from home.

### Our Story

We grow up, we grow old. At each new stage of our journey, we take certain things with us, and we leave others behind. But, how to choose? How much of ourselves can we change, and still be "ourselves?" And, at what point does loyalty to our "old home" become a stubborn refusal to face change?

At this intersection, the "macro" and the "micro" perspectives of our lives merge. The Torah teaches us that exile and dislocation are more than the pattern of our national history. They are endemic to the human condition. *Eretz Yisrael* was, and is to be the new Garden, a land where "you shall not eat bread in scarcity," reversing the curse of Adam and Eve. If the destruction of the *Beit Hamikdash* was a cosmic catastrophe, then the yearning to return to the land reflects the soul's search to find a resting place amid the shifting sands of human destiny.

The story of our love affair with the land mirrors the human condition. It is a story of hope lost and hope regained, of family breakup and recovery, of exile and return, of shattered harmony and recovery of innocence. No wonder our attraction to the land of Israel has always been as deeply personal as it has been fiercely national.

When Solomon dedicated the Temple, he proclaimed to our people, "Blessed is God who has given rest to his

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people Israel.” Later generations saw in this rest a human contentment far more profound than the feeling of security from our enemies. †

## One Jewish life's journey

■ Evelyn Herwitz

A huge, full moon hangs above the Old City, its golden face the color of sandstone. It seems bolder than the moon I know in Worcester, not simply a heavenly orb, but an integral piece of the landscape—beautiful, haunting, ancient and ageless. Beneath this Jerusalem moon we link arms, 55 fellow travelers making *havdalah* on the first Shabbat of our congregational trip to Israel in the summer of 1996.

For me, my husband and our two young girls, this *Shalsholet* journey is our first visit to *Eretz Yisrael*. It is a trip full of wondrous riches—of texts enlivened by the land, of history etched into every hillside, of friendships found and deepened, of the sandstone moon that cools our searing days. We tour and study, pray and sing, swim, hike, dance, plant trees, and return home, transformed.

A dream realized, this journey is a watershed in another way: it is also the first trip that any member of my family has made to *Eretz Yisrael* in at least three generations. I grew up in an assimilated Jewish home, where Jewish values were taught, but Jewish identity was buried—smothered by nightmares of Hitler's fury.

As a child, I understood Judaism as something odd, distant, and distasteful. It was linked to fear, to the Nazi Germany my mother escaped and the death camps where my great grandparents perished. In its place, I prized our annual overnight train ride from New York to Cincinnati to spend Christmas with my Jewish grandparents, and my mother's fond tales of how I was born on Easter Sunday. Only as an adult did I begin to unearth my family's deeper Jewish roots—stories of my father's grandfather, a stern Talmud scholar, and of my mother's grandmother, who attended High Holiday services in Berlin.

My cloaked identity was a source of great confusion and emptiness. Christian friends would ask why my family celebrated Christmas; Jewish friends would tease about the Hanukkah bush in our home. I could never find a good answer for them or myself. Struggling to fill the void, I skimmed Torah when I was 10 and attended a few

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Jewish services as a teen. But without a mentor or community, I left for college convinced that organized religion in general and Judaism in particular were a waste of time.

A decade later, seeking to heal my soul from a failed marriage, I returned to synagogue, certain only that I had no answers and many questions. In the years since, I have filled the spiritual void of my childhood, reclaiming my family's lost past as my own—studying texts, attending synagogue weekly, creating a kosher home, sending my children to Solomon Schechter Day School, and contributing to my community. At 43, I am finally beginning to decode Hebrew grammar and follow in my great grandfather's footsteps of Talmud study. And now that my children are both in elementary school, I have begun a new career as a Jewish professional.

This winter morning, a year-and-a-half after the *Shalsholet* trip, a small, silver moon hangs over our backyard as I leave for work. It is 6:15, and I am driving to Hebrew College in Boston, where I am responsible for convincing potential students why they should come to this wonderful institution to become Jewishly literate. It is a welcome challenge, because I am sharing the gift that has made me whole. As the sky lightens, tinted salmon and lavender, I recite the morning *Sh'ma*, and continue on my way. †

## My spiritual journey

■ Patricia Bizzell

I have always been struck by the extent to which Judaism as a spiritual journey is a journey in company. One needs to be a part of a community to practice Judaism and to receive support along the way. My first trip to Israel, with Rabbi Rosenbaum's group, is a case in point.

I did not want to go. I did not understand why I had to go to Israel to deepen my religious commitment. Israel held little emotional resonance for me. On the contrary, I was simply increasingly dismayed by the way the Israeli government was handling relations with its Arab inhabitants and neighbors. But I knew that if I went with Rabbi Rosenbaum's group, I would go with my friends, with a leader I admired and trusted. Since my husband and children wanted very much to go with their friends, too, we decided to do it.

Traveling in such good company got me to Israel—it's

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clear I would not have made the trip alone, or even just with my own family. And getting there enabled me to experience privileged moments of encounter with this truly holy land. The first moment was on our first day in the country, sweltering hot, when I climbed up to an overheated room for a lecture, and going to the window for air, found I was looking out at the Western Wall. I started to cry, I didn't know why.

At twilight the next day, we drove up into the hills behind Masada for dinner in a Bedouin tent. Looking at that stark, barren landscape, I felt suddenly and powerfully how hard it would be to hide from God out there. I saw my face reflected dimly in the glass of the tour bus window as I couldn't tear my eyes away from the land. And something reached right through the glass and touched me deeply and permanently.

These were individual, personal moments, to be sure. But American society generally places far too much emphasis—or perhaps I should say, too much confidence—on the solitary person's ability to make such moments happen for herself or himself. While there must be such moments of personal connection, that no one else can experience for you, such moments, I have found, are far more likely to happen if situated within the supportive environment created by friendly fellow travelers.

The journey of my life has been in large part a spiritual journey, a search for a satisfying religious practice. But my conversion to Judaism did not end the quest. Within Judaism, the journey continues—heightened by certain defining moments of personal connection, but warmly in company. ✦

## 🌹 Endthoughts 🌹

### We've come a long way, baby!

■ Shuly Rubin Schwartz

In this age of the quick fix and instant e-mail messages, any user-friendly reference work that makes important information easily accessible is a cause for celebration. *Jewish Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 1997), a new 1800-page encyclopedia on women, is surely such a work. The presentation of vast amounts of information about Jewish women, material which has previously been inaccessible in both biographical and topical format, is a remarkable achievement. And yet the

publication of this encyclopedia is so much more than the sum of its entries. It is an event of cultural and intellectual significance that highlights the coming of age of Jewish Women's Studies. This beautifully produced two-volume set reflects the fruits of a generation of research into the experiences and accomplishments of Jewish women and the growing awareness of the significance of gender as a category of analysis in understanding the past. This event symbolizes the recognition that neither the American nor the Jewish experience can be fully understood without reference to its women.

### Reclaiming Lost Names And Voices

Encyclopedias both Jewish and general reflect the concerns of their age. The 1971 *Encyclopædia Judaica* is defined by the two seismic events of the previous generation, the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel. Its entries are influenced in shape, tone and content by these fault lines. Looking back still further to the twelve-volume *Jewish Encyclopedia* (1901-06), the first comprehensive collection of information concerning the Jews, we find a work that embodied grandiose ambitions. It was designed to bring the best of European Jewish Wissenschaft scholarship to an American audience, foster the development of American Jewish scholarship, educate American Jews, and battle antisemitism by presenting a positive portrait of Jews and Judaism. Above all, it would signify the transference of the center and language of Jewish scholarship from German-speaking central Europe to the English-speaking United States.

Similarly, *Jewish Women in America* reflects many of the concerns of our age, and its publication signals the changed consciousness of the last twenty-five years. *Jewish Women in America* takes its place beside the award-winning *Black Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia*. Just as this encyclopedia sought to redress the imbalances of previous reference works concerning the role of black women, so too does *Jewish Women in America* seek to secure the essential role played by American Jewish women in the American Jewish experience.

*Jewish Women in America* also stands as corrective and challenge to previous Jewish reference works. No women served on the editorial boards of either the *Jewish Encyclopedia* or the *Encyclopædia Judaica*, only a

(continued, p. 8)

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**D**AVID KRAEMER: I just don't buy David Nelson's explanation. It seems to me that the expression, "Next year in Jerusalem," is a prayer for the arrival of the Messianic age, and the Jerusalem of this prayer is the *real* Jerusalem, but one ruled over by an anointed king of Israel. The problem with this prayer, I would argue, is twofold: first, many of us do not believe that the Messiah will come and, second, many of us do not feel that the Messiah *needs* to come. The first problem is both ideological and practical. We have difficulty believing the Messiah will come because he/she has not come, even in the darkest moments of our history, when we needed her/him most. We also have difficulty believing because, in our experience, those who believe most fervently are fanatics, and they act—tragically—on their fanaticism. I want no association with their kind. The second problem is that many of us live in freedom and comfort as Jews; what do we need the Messiah for? Where we now live is "Jerusalem," perhaps even better. We live according to our consciences, without coercion, free to observe or not, respected by our neighbors and protected from our enemies. "Next year in Jerusalem"? For a visit—sure. But we can wait for the Messiah.

DR. DAVID KRAEMER is a Senior CLAL Associate.

**N**ATAN MARGALIT: For me, "Next year in Jerusalem" remains a real prayer for a real place. One of the most important things about Judaism is that we hold onto real spaces, real physical things and actions, and resist too much "virtualizing." When the early Christians said that the mitzvot were symbols, that we circumcise our hearts and not our flesh, they "virtualized" too much and created a new religion. Enjoying all the freedom and comfort of America is wonderful, but it is not the same as living in our own land. Knowing the intimate, detailed love of particular places, the smells and sights and sounds of a corner of the world that I have worked to nurture and that has nourished me, provides a fulfillment which I don't think one can achieve on New York's Upper West Side. If fanatics have done it wrong, I won't let that rob

me of my messianic hopes. If I am not there yet, I can still work towards living rooted, humbly, in real place and real time, in a truly rebuilt Jerusalem.

RABBI NATAN MARGALIT is a Steinhardt Fellow at CLAL.

**L**AURENCE TROSTER: While it is true that the Jerusalem of the Seder is a virtual place of perfection and harmony, we cannot deny that there is today a real city called Jerusalem. It is a place to which we can go. We can even hold a Seder there.

Those of us who have had that experience, who know the special feeling of a Seder in Jerusalem, know that the real Jerusalem is not the perfect, peaceful, shining city of redemption. We know we live in an unredeemed world where the real Jerusalem is a modern city of roads, buildings and typical urban problems. But today, as we sing at our Seder, we hold both images in our minds. We maintain a kind of suspension of disbelief, where the heavenly city *meets* the earthly one. We see the real Jerusalem while praying for its redemptive rebuilding.

RABBI LAWRENCE TROSTER is a Steinhardt Fellow at CLAL.

**B**ENAY LAPPE: To understand the Haggadah's Jerusalem deeply, we must push its virtual quality even further. This Jerusalem is a place of *complete* freedom—not just freedom from external oppression, but also freedom from the inner psychic chains that bind us all, each in our own way.

The "place" of complete peace and closeness to God will never be a physical place, nor will it come as the result of an external event like the arrival of a messiah. This "place" is really a spiritual and psychological *state*, a state of inner peace, towards which we can all strive. Today, when we live, as David Kraemer points out, with remarkable freedom from physical oppression, this is the level on which we should understand the seder's movement from slavery to freedom.

RABBI BENAY LAPPE is the Spielberg Fellow at CLAL.

## *Sh'ma mina\**

*L'shanah ha-ba'ah bi-yerushalayim*

*Next year in Jerusalem!*

FROM THE HAGGADAH FOR PASSOVER

**W**hat is the real meaning of this line sung at the very end of the Seder? In our day it cannot mean that we really hope to observe Pesach in Jerusalem next year, for if it did, the constant annual repetition would begin to sound somewhat disingenuous in an era of relatively quick and affordable flights to Israel. Rather, I think the Jerusalem mentioned at the end of our Seder is a "virtual" place, a sacred space that we imagine to have all the characteristics of every space that ever has been, or could be, sacred: It is a place of complete peace and serenity, a place of community solidarity, and a place of closeness to God. The text is a fitting conclusion to an evening celebrating redemption. It expresses our sense that the redemption from Egypt was not complete, but that it is an ongoing process—one which we hope will be complete by next year at this time, regardless of our geographical location. As such, the text teaches us that sacred space has little if anything to do with geography and maps, and everything to do with a kind of perfected world that we can only imagine.

RABBI DAVID NELSON

\*Learn from this—a page of text study composed by CLAL

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handful of entries were written by women, and entries on women were few and far between. The place of women in Jewish life and history—both individual women and women in the collective—is largely neglected or relegated to apologetics. In fact, the most striking portrayal of women vis-à-vis the *Jewish Encyclopedia* is the use of women in early publicity material.

In the promotional brochure *The Jewish Encyclopedia: The Launching of a Great Work* [1901], women are prominently displayed in an illustration of stenographers and other support staff—all female, under a male supervisor—as they “man” the office of the *Jewish Encyclopedia*! *Jewish Women in America* demonstrates the sheer numbers of Jewish women of accomplishment and the central role that they played and continued to play in American Jewish life.

### Making Choices

Like encyclopedia editors before them, the editors of *Jewish Women in America* worked amidst controversy both within and without. First, the choice of an all-female editorial board was meant to signal that women scholars could produce a quality reference work on their own. Yet this decision excluded first-rate male scholars who might have contributed to the quality of the finished product. Similarly, problems of defining what to include in a reference work are no easier today than they were almost a century ago.

The first boundary to be considered in any biographical work is whether to write about living individuals. Though *Jewish Women in America* is a historical work, it was felt that excluding the living would slight 20th century achievements. General guidelines thus called for including living women over the age of sixty. Similarly, the editors wrestled with the issue of “Americanness.” How long did someone need to live in the United States to merit inclusion? The entry on Golda Meir illustrates the complicated nature of this decision, and the contributor enumerates half a dozen reasons why this Israeli prime minister merits inclusion in an American encyclopedia.

Furthermore, the editors pondered the question of who is a Jew. Opting for a definition sensitive to but not bound by *halakhic* categories, the encyclopedia included women who were daughters of a Jewish mother or father

or who were converts to Judaism—provided they identified as Jews or were perceived as such by their contemporaries. They also included women who were born Jews but who later explicitly rejected Judaism.

Finally, editors grappled with how much the feminist perspective of collaborators ought to influence the entries. These central issues get to the heart of contemporary issues of Jewish women’s self-definition in America, and as a result, the decisions inevitably led to resentment as some individuals who felt that they ought to have been the subjects of entries looked in vain to find their names and protested their exclusion.

### Redefining History

By producing a standard reference work on American Jewish women where none existed before, the editorial board has established a new yardstick against which to gauge the thoroughness of future investigations into the past. Moreover, this publication creates new knowledge by expanding the contours of the field. The *Jewish Encyclopedia* calculatively included some of the earliest research on the history of Jews in America, in part to bolster the legitimacy of the United States as a center of Jewish life. Similarly, *Jewish Women in America* notes in its promotional material that “a special effort will be made to include information on the ordinary lives of women during all time periods and in all sections of the United States,” thereby consciously broadening the outlines of Jewish women’s history to include not only notable accomplishments but also the day-to-day experiences of women.

Controversy and shortcomings notwithstanding, the publication of *Jewish Women in America* is reason for applause in all quarters. As we near the end of the 20th century, we see frequent reminders that Jewish culture and Jewish learning are reaching new levels of accomplishment in this country. Amidst cries of assimilation and erosion of Jewish identity, works such as these exemplify precisely the opposite—the flourishing of Jewish life today. *Jewish Women in America* will also go a long way toward ensuring its vibrant future by providing an easy resource guide for the next generation of Jews, stimulating new research, and increasing awareness of the role of women in American Jewish life. †