

Enriched by voices heard in counterpoint, discord and harmony, *Sh'ma* is honored to present three of our *gedolim*, great Jewish thinkers, speaking about the complexities and pragmatics of pluralism.

The Pragmatics of Pluralism

Harold Shulweis

Commenting on the contradictory words of the House of Hillel and the House of Shammai, the Tosefta says, "So make yourself a heart of many chambers." The heart must be open to include even contradictory judgments. The heart must be humble enough not to insulate itself in one room, locking out all others and maintaining that it alone possesses the heartbeat of God.

Inclusiveness and humility struggle against the hard disjunctive that would compel us to choose either/or. That hardness is the way of idolatry that deifies a part as if it were the whole. The power of monotheism is to search for both/and. This is the dialectic thinking that characterizes our sages.

In the Talmud Yerushalmi (Sanhedrin 4:2) Rabbi Yanneh offers the following insight: "Had the Torah been given as one cut (i.e. as one final, unchallengeable decision in all matters) without possibility for divergent opinions, we could not stand on our own feet." We have been given a gift. We are graced with understanding and discernment. This is our glory and our blessing. And it evoked from the rabbis a benediction that rejoices in pluralism. "If one sees a crowd of Israelites, one should say: "Blessed is he who discerns se-

crets, for the mind of each is different from that of the other, just as the face of each is different from that of the other." (Talmud Berachoth 58a)

Quotations are not enough. How can we create the conditions that will enable us to address an assembly of Jews with different judgments and different minds and greet them with this blessing of pluralism?

Something must be done to bridge the gap between *theoria* and *praxis* in regard to the principles of pluralism. I offer three proposals to readers of *Sh'ma*.

1. For the past two years, I have introduced a *Keruv*, pluralistic outreach program, to the community. This program reaches out to synagogues as well as un-synagogued Jews who wish to renew their Jewish spiritual roots. The program also speaks to "unchurched" non-Jews who are interested in exploring Judaism.

Relevant to our discussion is the fact that the faculty that teaches this group of four hundred people on a weekly basis is drawn from prominent Orthodox, Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist congregational rabbis. The re-

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sponse of the audience has been overwhelming. Clearly the people yearn for signs of Jewish unity and look to their rabbis for examples. There is much joy in sharing the teachings of Judaism on a common platform. God did not create denominationalism.

2. As in the past, this coming year I plan to present a series of sermon lectures on "The Best of Judaism" in which I deal with the fears and aspirations of each of our four movements, as well as sermon lectures dedicated to Satmar, Lubavitch, and the secular Yiddishist Movements.

We are challenged to consider what significance these movements hold for many of our people. This project is an exercise of emphatic pluralism that has proven to be of considerable help to me and to the congregation. The Cantor plays an important role in this appreciation. He chooses the liturgical music of each movement to complement the sermon lecture. To enter with imagination, the mind and heart of other movements is an act of self-revelation. It leads to a deeper respect for the other and strengthens our own self-respect.

3. It is our children who have been paying dearly for our divisive denominationalism. Our children who belong to NCSY, NFTY and USY live in a world of *de facto* apartheid for which we bear responsibility.

Our children do not play or pray together. They are kept apart from each other. A small people is made smaller yet by our smallness. The critical mass so vi-

tal for Jewish companionship and marriage is reduced even further by our denominational factionalism. Ironically while we may not be successful in preventing mixed marriage, we will be triumphant in seeing to it that Jews do not marry other Jews.

The alienation of our youth from each other is a terrible legacy with which to leave our century. It conjures up images from the twenty-second chapter of the book of Joshua in which fear is expressed about the consequences of the divisiveness among the tribes: "In time to come your children will tell our children 'What have you to do with the Lord God of Israel.'" We are rapidly approaching that tragic event.

Where are the intercongregational young people's choirs of our synagogues and temples to sing together and present their artistry on Purim or Chanukah? Where is the community-wide Jewish youth drama society to express the celebration of Jewish life? We owe our children more than rhetoric. I appeal to rabbis and especially to youth directors in synagogues and Jewish centers to join forces in order to cultivate Jewish talent and energy to help overcome the divisions we create. What a great service can be rendered to the ideal of pluralism through the vitality of the Jewish arts in concert with the youth of our communities. We have heard the rabbinic endorsements of unity in diversity. We cannot live only a life of quotations. It is time for our synagogues to implement their visions.

Rabbi Harold Shulweis is the spiritual leader of Congregation Valley Beth Shalom, and has been a supporter of synagogue innovation for many years. He is a long-standing and active contributing editor of Sh'ma.

Sefirat HaOmer/Counting Days from Redemption to Revelation

Counting the days from *Pesach* to *Shavuot*, *Sefirat HaOmer*, serves as a bridge from the experience of redemption in Egypt to the experience of revelation at Sinai. Like a toddler learning to walk, the Israelites began to understand their world step-by-step as they journeyed through the desert, guided by the pillar of fire and the pillar of smoke.

In the same way, each of us emerges from the constriction and the familiarity of our personal Egypt, journeying towards a moment of revelation, a vision of a new life in the promised land. We strive to be mindful, counting the unique experiences of each day, adding them together to bring us toward that revelatory moment at Sinai.

*Joel Ziff is a psychotherapist and author of *Mirrors in Time*, published by Jason Aronson Publishers.*

Respecting Limits in Pluralism

Eugene B. Borowitz

All of us need to be reminded from time to time that we can become too institution-bound, too defensive of our comfortable styles, too quick to find fault with other ways of doing things. I am not certain that the rabbis had a term for great-heartedness but I know that it is a central part of my Judaism. By all means, let us warmly reach out to one another and seek new means of enhancing our Jewish family solidarity.

But subscribers to *Sh'ma* are reading the wrong journal if they are not already committed to pluralism and its implementation, despite their occasional backsliding. Two other camps, I believe, need Harold Shulweis' inspired teaching more, but are also unlikely to be swayed by it. The first group consists of that mass of putative Jews who are happy being "a decent human being" and don't see why they should bother being Jewish. Yes, under Harold's charismatic leadership they may come to his non-denominational school and thus overcome their alleged objections to Jewishness and its parochialisms. But the several decades-long records of such transdenominational adult education institutes around the country indicate a highly limited success with marginal Jews. By all means, let us do what we can to increase Torah, but let us not anticipate messianic results from this or any other newly installed program.

The other camp of resisters comprises those who believe they have a reasonably accurate understanding of what God wants of us. The uncommon but telling case is Hebrew Christians, who know that the Messiah has already come. The more common case is the believing Orthodox. We may cite all the well-worn evidence of pluralism in our tradition or wave the banner of academic respectability over us, but they have Jewish standards —

revelation and tradition — to prove they are right. For sincerely Orthodox Jews, revelation — God's gift of the Written and Oral Torah at Sinai — is the spiritual spine of an upright Jew, and only such pluralism in accordance with its ideals of discipline and limits is acceptable. And with equivalent certainty, Hebrew Christians know that the classic Christian reading of the Bible is true.

We will not have much success encouraging people whose pluralism is more limited than ours to read their texts in our liberal fashion. But I agree with Harold that the best approach to greater openness among us is to take a pragmatic track. The *de facto* practice of pluralism has made our communities relatively more peaceful than many were in the past. That is a good, practical reason for all of us to be as accommodating as possible. Moreover, as

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Rabbi Soloveitchik said thirty years or so ago, while we cannot talk theology with other Jews, we can all discuss the numerous social issues that confront us. Something like that was the premise on which *Sh'ma* was founded. I have sometimes found it possible to discuss theology across the revelational divides — but only when we do not discuss or press for the equality of all voices. For many Jews, God not only has a vote but a veto and monotheistic pluralism never included both God and idols. Committed pluralist that I am, I will defend my sense of proper limits and deny Hebrew Christians an equal voice in the Jewish conversation.

Eugene B. Borowitz is celebrating his seventy-fifth birthday with the publication of two books, The Jewish Moral Virtues, done in collaboration with Frances W. Schwartz, and Judaism After Modernity, Papers from a Decade of Fruition. Rabbi Borowitz is the founding editor of Sh'ma.



The Principles of Pluralism

Irving (Yitz) Greenberg

Harold Schulweis is so sensible and so right. So why isn't everyone persuaded by the Talmud's pluralism? Why don't all the denominations practice joint learning, cooperative youth activity, and celebrate each other's strengths?

I submit that it is because most people do not understand the principles of pluralism. Most still believe that pluralism means that nothing is absolutely true; that that is why it is okay to let everyone teach and practice as they see fit. In the public mind, pluralism is the same as relativism. Naturally, the Orthodox will not accept this approach. Therefore, they legitimate only those who affirm the authority of revelation and of the Talmud itself.

Many liberal Jews share the conviction that were there an absolute truth, it should be upheld at all costs and the contradictory voices would not need to be heard. Such liberals often yield to the impositions of *haredim* because they sense that the others believe in something fixed and should therefore be deferred to (even if one resents them). Where such liberals have an absolute principle — say, the emerging value of egalitarianism — they then dismiss the legitimacy of alternate voices. More than a decade ago, the National Havurah Coordinating Committee (set up as a pluralist institution) organized all forms of *minyanim* at their summer session — except for the traditional Orthodox liturgy. When I remonstrated with the organizers, they explained that inasmuch as the *mechitza minyan* violated the ethical principles of equal women's rights, it was not entitled to legitimacy or equal presentation.

It is essential to teach people the nature of principled pluralism. There are absolute truths; there are true and false positions. There are contradictions that are rejected because they are wrong or, even in some cases, illegitimate. However, pluralism stems from the recognition that even absolutes have limits. The

limit may grow from the discovery that beyond my world there is another realm of discourse and truth that may coexist with mine. In the past, one's own cultural centrality left the impression that one's truth extended over the whole of reality; others were non-existent or were experienced as inferior and non-legitimate. In the open society, however, "the other" appears in all its dignity and independent existence.

As a result, one often discovers the limits of one's own truths. Perhaps these other truths are beyond the parameters of my own; since they fall outside, they are not contradicted or excluded even if they differ. Or, I discover that my truth does not cover the situation of all people. Sometimes, even if my value system addresses all people, it simply cannot reach them all — thus leaving room for other systems. Or perhaps, my truth does not cover all

people all the time in all circumstances — and this leaves room for other (even contradictory) truths. Thus I allow for other views, even as I challenge or reject truths that fall within the same circle as mine when they clash with it.

Pluralism may also grow out of my recognition of the limits of specific teachings or truths, which allow room for incorporating contradictions (Schulweis' example) or even for coexisting with clashing truths/religions/faiths. The very concept of *brit*/covenant suggests that God enters into circumscribed, humanly concrete partnerships with different people including differing prophets and teachings that may vary or even clash without being totally invalidated. (Compare Isaiah's vision of Israel, Egypt and Assyria all being covenanted peoples, all being a source of God's blessing for humanity. Isaiah 19, 24-25).

Ultimately, pluralism grows out of the essential dignity of human beings in the image of God. Given their dignity as images of God, i.e. as crea-

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tures of infinite value, equality and uniqueness, they are entitled to be heard. This dignity means that they should not be coerced or suppressed even if they are wrong in their views — as long as those views do not turn them into inhuman beings or lead them to evil behaviors that destroy the images others have of God (such as in the case of Nazism).

In appreciation of an open society and of the equality and uniqueness of others, I come to affirm the value of living and of teaching in the presence of other truths and systems. Other approaches teach me the limitations of my own views — preventing an imperialist extension of my truth/faith beyond its legitimate sphere into realms where it becomes a lie or is wrongly applied. And while I may come to refute or reject some contradictories, I may also learn from others' insights and may even integrate them, thus improving my own system.

Both the standard practice of all the synagogues to preach their own views, separate and "undiluted" and the "de facto apartheid" between youth movements, prove that all the movements have failed to grasp the profound transformation of culture in an open society. If youth (or adult members) cannot handle the variety of views found in the denominational variations, how will they be able to handle the incredibly wider, richer, more contradictory variations found in the overall society? In fact, hearing a truth/faith/religion in the presence of other (even contradictory) varieties gives it a richer, more unique, more persuasive character. The monolithic view sounds thinner, less nuanced, less convincing. That all denominations practice censorship and offer exclusive voices reveals the dirty secret of the absolutist/relativist alliance in each denomination. When we break this fallacious all-or-nothing conception, we will be able to teach and practice the profoundly enriching, more human truths of pluralism in the Jewish community — and far beyond.

Rabbi Irving (Yitz) Greenberg is the President of CHAverIm Kol Yisrael/Jewish Life Network (CKY/JLN), a Judy and Michael Steinhardt Foundation. From 1974 through 1997, he served as founding President of CLAL-The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership. He has done pioneering theological work in the areas of Holocaust Theology, the relationship of Judaism and Christianity, and principled pluralism.

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Responses to Pluralism

Deborah E. Lipstadt

Congregational rabbis could use the following steps to nurture pluralism as well as specific beliefs:

1. According to Dr. Daniel Elazar, the Jewish world is divided into serious and non-serious Jews. In the 3rd century, the neo-Platonist philosopher Plotinus observed "like knows like." The pockets of success which break across the denominational divide — for example the programs at Pardes and Wexner — are composed of serious Jews. They respect commitment to an ideal even if they disagree with the specifics of the commitment.

2. Use Torah as a way of creating these relationships. Studying the same text with other people creates a common universe of discourse. When people engage in Jewish activities, ideologies are transcended and something far more binding emerges.

3. Acknowledge what you abhor about your own movement and what you admire about another movement.

4. Rather than simply condemning another movement's decision, educate congregants as to the context of that decision. Explain how that movement's conception of revelation, its attitude to the past, and its understanding of the process of change, permitted or prevented it from doing something.

5. "*Hachmim he'zaharu b'devraeychm*" "Scholars, teachers, and leaders: be careful with your words." Now, more than ever, is the time to remember this teaching. Differences of opinion must be voiced in a way that demonstrates that we remember that the person we are attacking is created *b'tzelem Elokhim*, in the image of God.

Dr. Deborah E. Lipstadt is Dorot Professor of Modern Jewish and Holocaust Studies and Director of the Institute of Jewish Studies at Emory University in Atlanta. Her most recent book is Denying The Holocaust: The Growing Assault On Truth And Memory. She has served with a small group of leaders and scholars as an advisor to Secretary of State Madeline Albright on matters of religious persecution abroad. She is also on the faculty of the Wexner Heritage Foundation.

Devora Steinmetz

The dialogue between Rabbis Borowitz, Greenberg, and Shulweis, and the comment by sociologist Peter Berger which provoked the questions posed by *Sh'ma*, address an issue which plagues many contemporary, committed Jews as they strive to find their places within Judaism and the Jewish community. Can I find a place which is open to ideas, which encourages the search for meaning, which respects the individual — but which also has high standards, seriousness, and passion? If "an era of choices" means "an era of uncertainty," does that mean that I have to pray, learn, and live a *pareve* Jewish life — or else that I must give up my American and (as Shulweis points out) Jewish values of choice and diversity in order to find a synagogue, school, or community which is passionately and deeply committed?

While that, indeed, has often seemed to be the case, I believe that we can get beyond the either-or trade-offs of contemporary Jewish communal and institutional life. But we can't do it without drastically upgrading fluency (not just literacy!) in classical Jewish texts and ideas. Choice and openness should not be confused with a soft *laissez-faire*, "I'm OK, you're OK" attitude. As Jews and as Americans, we should know that the right to choose what to believe and how to live one's life goes hand-in-hand with the responsibility to learn, to reflect deeply, to make hard choices, and to engage in debate with people who believe differently and who may challenge one's own interpretation. So choice and even lack of certainty, rather than undermining commitment and passion, should thrust us directly into the place where commitment and passion come to life — into a deep and rigorous engagement with Jewish texts and ideas, into a deeply personal quest embedded in a vigorous, shared communal discourse.

Our challenge, as we re-envision synagogues, adult education, Israel programs and, most importantly, schools, is to re-create community as *beit-midrash* — as a place where people come together to learn, question, challenge, seek, and deepen commitments. We especially need schools — and teachers and principals to staff them — that will teach

young children strong skills and knowledge, that will foster a love of ideas and a passion for learning, and that will teach children how to think critically, question openly, and search for answers. Our schools and classrooms should be places where children learn to grow as individuals *within* community — a place where children learn how to develop strong ideas, opinions, and beliefs as they engage in respectful discourse with other children and adults who may disagree with them and who challenge their ideas and interpretations. Our schools and classrooms should be communities — in formation, where children learn

how to take responsibility for the life of the community—and where they gain the knowledge, wisdom, vision, humility, drive, and guts to shape the future Jewish community.

Devora Steinmetz is the founder of Beit Rabban, a day school and center for education in New York City. She teaches biblical and rabbinic literature at Drisha Institute and the Jewish Theological Seminary. She is the author of From Father to Son: Kinship, Conflict, and Continuity in Genesis. Dr. Steinmetz is on the faculty of the Wexner Heritage Foundation.

Sh'ma
Book Reviews

The Jewish Moral Virtues

Eugene B. Borowitz and Frances Weinman Schwartz (Jewish Publication Society, 384 pp, \$24.95, 1999)

My first perusal of this book revived a memory of one of the more dramatic moments in my rabbinic education. The year was 1956, the course was *Midrash*, and the instructor was Mordecai Kaplan. Kaplan had assigned us a book titled *Ethics* by a professor at some school in the American Southwest that was noted more for its athletic successes than for its teaching of the humanities. The book was supposed to treat ethical values in general, while Kaplan would introduce the Jewish dimension. But the book was simply impossible: two columns to a page, small print, and seemingly interminable. The class, to put it mildly, rebelled. Kaplan flew into one of his classic rages and stomped out of the room, only to return the next week and to concede, "Gentlemen, the book *is* impossible. Where do we go from here?"

Kaplan would have been thrilled with this new volume by our teacher, the prolific Gene Borowitz, and by Frances Weinman Schwartz, who is associated with the New York Kollel at HUC-JIR. The authors base their work on a volume by the 13th century Yehiel b. Yekutiel b. Binyamin Harofe, *Sefer Maalot Hamiddot* (The Book of the Choicest Virtues), the first systematic, comprehensive and analytic treatment of the virtues that Judaism esteems. Using Yehiel's twenty-four categories, the authors effectively rewrite the book for contemporary Jews. Fleshing out each discussion is a rich assortment of classical Jewish texts on each of the virtues, collected by seven generations of students in Borowitz' seminar on Jewish Moral

Virtues at HUC-JIR. The authors generously identify the names of the students who did that research; they are effectively collaborators in this volume.

The opening chapter, "What is *Musar*? An Introduction," is a superb, concise introduction to that genre of Jewish writing which is largely unfamiliar to contemporary readers. There follow chapters on Wisdom, Trustworthiness, Lovingkindness, Common Decency, Compassion, etc... (each identified by both the English and the original Hebrew term). In each case, the authors echo Yehiel's tendency to discuss the vice that is antithetical to the specific virtue.

Throughout, the writing is clear, gracious and eminently accessible. It's a great text for adult Jewish education: accessible but not simplistic. The authors are very much aware that virtues frequently conflict and that we have to choose between competing virtues. There is no hint of a moral straightjacket here; the approach is honest, open, fluid, and pluralistic, but the sense of firm advocacy is never lost.

The unique richness of the discussion stems from the wealth of texts it provides. The Bibliography itself runs ten pages, and the generous Index of names and books quoted, runs eleven more pages. The list of authors includes most of the familiar biblical, talmudic and later authorities, including Buber (of course!), Hermann Cohen, Samson Raphael Hirsch and Heschel, and some more surprising names such



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as Mohammed Ali and Jimmy Carter. The melding of text and discussion is impeccable. The equally extensive Glossary contributes to the accessibility of the book as a whole.

For this theologian-reviewer, the gems are the last three chapters dealing respectively with Knowing God, Fearing God, and Loving God. The subtle discussion of the tensions between the mind and the heart, knowl-

edge and feeling, philosophy and psychology – all in a few brief pages – are paradigms of exposition.

I've learned a great deal from this book. An enthusiastic thank you to the authors.

Dr. Neil Gillman teaches Jewish Philosophy at The Jewish Theological Seminary of America. His most recent book is The Death of Death.

The Language of Truth, The Torah Commentary of the Sefat Emet

*Yehudah Leib Alter of Ger, translated and interpreted by Arthur Green
(Jewish Publication Society, 408 pp, \$34.95, 1998)*

S*efat Emet* is the commentary by Hasidic master, Rabbi Yehudah Leib Alter, who lived in Gur, Poland from 1847 to 1905. The commentary itself is a marvelous weaving of traditional, *midrashic*, Hasidic and mystical interpretations on the Torah portions. It is a surprisingly contemporary text that speaks directly to the spiritual search for meaning. In the original, it reads almost like a spiritual manual for the adult seeker. The Hasidic master's wonderfully radical and innovative readings of the Torah text reveal Judaism's treasure-house of spiritual riches hidden inside the very words themselves. As the Baal Shem Tov taught, the special light of the First Day of Creation was hidden away in the words and letters of the Torah. In his very methodology, the Gerer Rebbe shows how words can either conceal or reveal Divine Truth. In the substance of his teachings, he shows how this is also true of life.

Now, for the first time, Professor Arthur Green has brought to light these marvelous teachings and made them accessible to the "uninitiated and non-Hebrew reader" alike. As Green states, the *Sefat Emet*, from within his own historical context of battling secularism, materialism and differentiation from the non-Hasidic Orthodox world, necessarily presented his Hasidim with "...this constant emphasis on inward spirituality as the true goal." In so doing, the Gerer Rebbe creates "a post-kabalistic Jewish mystical language." He presents us with a "return to mystical consciousness...expressed in simple direct language." *Sefat Emet* reflects its influence of the "reformist character of Polish Hasidism and its desire to base itself on a search for the true presence of the spirit in the current moment rather than on tradition and memory..." These fundamental sensibilities truly form the serendipitous connection bridging what Green coins as "the old Jewish spirituality and the new." No matter what Jewish denomination the reader may be, Green's book provides a response to the pressures of the then approaching

20th century even as we envision our entry into the next millennium.

Providing this bridge becomes Green's express purpose. To this end he has given the reader not only accurate English translations and personal responses, but also the original Hebrew text. His Introduction provides an academically original and informative historical context within which to approach the Gerer Rebbe's teachings as well as an exploration of key concepts.

Green's insistence, that the book include original teachings along with his responses, underscores a respect for the teachings to speak for themselves. His responses, which also serve as a *supra* commentary, provide the reader with a nice balance of historical reference while modeling the importance of establishing a personal context and engagement with the text. Green's seamless shifting from the personal to the academic is part of the richness of the book, and invites the reader to engage with the text as well.

To do so would be to follow one of the book's opening and most radical teachings of all. On Shabbat, we sing, "*ki mitziyon tetzeh Torah*" (for out of Zion comes Torah). *Sefat Emet* teaches that "*tziyon*" is the inner point inside every individual that distinguishes his/her entire being — namely, their direct connection to God. How we transform ourselves, how we clarify that inner truth, becomes the story of our lives, and that, teaches the *Sefat Emet*, is the meaning of the Oral Tradition. With Green's newest book, continuation of the Jewish tradition of learning has been greatly enriched.

Janet Zimmern teaches Jewish adult education classes on text and spirituality, with Sefat Emet continuing to be a favorite focus. She is also a clinical social worker who seeks to help people weave together a reading of traditional texts with the unfolding texts of their lives.

Swimming in a Sea of Talmud: Lessons for Everyday Living

Michael Katz and Gershon Schwartz
(Jewish Publication Society, 368 pp, \$24.95, 1998)

The Talmud is such an immense collection of Jewish wisdom, law, and legend that it is often compared to the sea. If you have ever thought about testing the waters of Talmud but didn't know how to dive in, *Swimming in the Sea of Talmud*, by Michael Katz and Gershon Schwartz, is a good place to begin. This intelligent and readable soft-cover provides the beginner, or even those who have already wet their toes, with an excellent introduction to learning Talmud. The authors, congregational rabbis ordained at the Jewish Theological Seminary, show that though the Talmud is complex and its style confusing, its wisdom and values can be accessible and applied to everyday life.

The book is divided into three parts. Part I, a basic introduction to Talmud, describes in clear and concise form how the Talmud evolved, its unique literary style, its language, its logic, and why it remains important today. The Talmud, the authors explain, is not primarily a book of Jewish law or even a philosophical treatise, but rather a record of differing opinions by rabbis concerning minute and trivial matters. By weighing arguments about specific details, the Talmud teaches general principles that help us make sense of the world and discover what God wants from us.

The second part of the book comprises over ninety Talmudic texts focusing on a wide variety of subjects.

Each entry loosely resembles the look of an actual page of Talmud. An entry begins with a short maxim and the paragraph of Talmud text in which it is contained. In the "Context" section, the authors explain and simplify the often baffling Talmud text and provide necessary background information.

The "D'rash" section follows. Here, the authors bring the meaning of the text to everyday life by providing examples of contemporary issues that can be understood using what we've just learned. Notes in the margin of each page help identify people and define terms in the text. In Part III, the authors encourage the reader to continue learning Talmud with a list of texts for further study, a glossary, a timeline, a table of generations of rabbis and an index.

Swimming in the Sea of Talmud shows the wisdom and depth of the Talmud in a user-friendly way and whets the reader's appetite for more serious learning. It is recommended for individuals as well as for group study in adult education classes. As the Talmud says, "Go and learn!"

Lori Erdley Gilman coordinates adult education courses for parents at the Solomon Schechter Day School of Greater Boston and pursues an interest in lifelong Jewish learning.

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Our Editorial Office Has Moved...

Sh'ma

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Irving Howe, Socialist, Critic, Jew *Edward Alexander (Indiana University Press, \$35.00, 1998)*

Betty Friedan and the Making of The Feminine Mystique: The American Left, The Cold War and Modern Feminism *Daniel Horowitz (University of Massachusetts Press, \$29.95, 1998)*

I doubt that either of the biographers, Edward Alexander or Daniel Horowitz, or the subjects of their books, Irving Howe and Betty Friedan, would have noticed, but to this reviewer it is ironic that neither account of the ideas, politics, and writings of these two influential Jewish intellectuals living in New York City during and after World War II mentions the other. (To be fair to Horowitz, who has written an exceptionally thorough and well-researched book, I should note that he does cite Howe for his 1965 lament that a generation was missing between the Old and New Lefts, exacerbating communication between younger and older radicals.)

New York City in the 1940s, an intensely Jewish, liberal, imaginative, politically charged place, nurtured the specific visions and ambitions of activist intellectuals like Betty Friedan and Irving Howe. The city's social spaces, its capitalist landscapes of modernity, its ethnic working classes, and, yes, its Jewishness, sustained and shaped new ways of thinking until anti-communist purges shattered possibilities for left-wing, popular front crusades. Reading these biographies together, it is striking to see how New York City created the critical context for the radical Jewish intellectual endeavor of the 1940s.

Two rather different trajectories carried Howe and Friedan to New York City. Born within a year of each other in 1920 and 1921 respectively, Howe and Friedan grew up in homes separated by geography and class. Howe spent his boyhood in a working-class family in the Bronx and attended City College, New York's free university. A mediocre student, he focused his considerable intellectual energies on socialist politics. Friedan came of age in an upper-middle-class home in Peoria and attended Smith College, one of the elite "seven sister" colleges. A brilliant student of psychology, Friedan became radicalized as an undergraduate. As editor of the college newspaper, she supported the maids in their drive to unionize.

Both Howe and Friedan turned to journalism to propagate their views and express their political commitments. Howe wrote for and edited *Labor Action*, a paper of the socialist, anti-Stalinist Workers party. Friedan wrote for Federated Press, a news service for unions. From 1946 to 1952 she worked as a reporter for *UE News*, the official publication of the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America, one of the nation's most radical unions.

Although Howe and Friedan articulated similar opinions — opposition to fascism, British imperialism and American participation in World War II — they also differed. Friedan understood the capitalist construction of gender; what the war meant for women workers and how labor unions could promote women's equality as part of a larger popular front effort to provide minorities, including African Americans and Jews, with opportunities in workplaces, schools, and housing. Meanwhile, drafted into the army in 1942, Howe spent over a year on duty in Alaska. He used this time to read literature and discovered literary modernism. If Howe sought to join socialism and literary criticism, Friedan struggled to blend Marx and Freud. Neither paid much attention to Jewishness in those years, but both recognized it as an essential element of their identity. Specific Jewish political issues, like the establishment of the State of Israel, seem not to have moved them (or at least merit little or no discussion by their biographers).

Horowitz and Alexander have written "unpleasant" biographies. Alexander polemicizes with Howe, sniping and criticizing his views from within parentheses (and without them as well). The book reads like a long, argumentative tirade from a man Howe called his "favorite reactionary." Horowitz has written a careful, thoughtful study that uncovers aspects of Friedan's radical past that she preferred to conceal (or at least obfuscate). She refused him permission to use some of her papers and worried out loud about scholarship as "innuendo," a term that evoked attacks of anti-communists in the era of McCarthy. Yet Horowitz argues persuasively that the continuities and disruptions in her thinking between her years as a labor journalist and publication of *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), complicate in useful ways our understanding not only of Friedan's intellectual and political development but also of the sources of modern American feminism. Alexander writes approvingly that Howe found it painful to go back to his old writings for *Labor Action*; perhaps Friedan felt similarly about her work for Federated Press and *UE News*. Horowitz recognizes this possibility but begs to differ. His book suggests how embedded history writing is in our own contemporary searches for a usable past.

Deborah Dash Moore is Professor of Religion at Vassar College and co-editor of the award-winning book, Jewish Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia.

One can only agree with Rabbi Samuels, that the rabbinic teaching about clearing stones challenges us to reconsider the methods of Jewish communal problem solving. One aspect of this challenge is represented in our talmudic text by the language of communication. The pious man chooses to address his associate as "Empty one." Was it really necessary to open the dialogue by addressing the other person as "Empty one?" What chance does such a dialogue have, if this is its point of entry? We wonder if the pious was really interested in addressing and entering a dialogue of learning with the "Empty one," or was he putting forth his "learned opinion" only for the sake of the argument?

As we can see, the talmud teaches us that although the pious was right, he couldn't change the wrong behavior of the other. One can claim that when the "Empty one" stumbled over the stones he marked the failure of both men. The text teaches that while exploring shared issues of "public grounds," we should not neglect the centrality of proper language.

True pluralistic dialogue between American Jewish communities or between Israeli and Diaspora communities should be reflected always in an honorable manner of communication.

Eitan Eliram is a research fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem, and is currently teaching Talmud at the New Jewish High School in Waltham.

Rabbi Samuels is correct that the essence of this story is about understanding communal responsibility. The boundaries between public and private are often far more permeable than we might think. As a member of a particular community, it is in my own self-interest to improve not only my personal private property, but also the space around me. If I upgrade my own property at the expense of the community, in the end, I only harm myself, for I end up living in a palace amidst the slums.

The man in this story indeed is an "Empty one," for only too late does he realize that in improving his private space, he is being shortsighted. The story cleverly shows how communal property, theoretically owned by no one individual, is in truth the only permanent possession we have.

We define ourselves by what we give to. Improving the world around us is more permanent than investing for our personal gain.

Rabbi Shoshana Gelfand is the Director of Programs at the Wexner Heritage Foundation in New York.

Are the Jewish people a collective of individuals or a uniform totality? Is our primary responsibility toward ourselves, each other, or God? Is separatism

a religious evil or sometimes a spiritual necessity? All of these questions are implicit in the Baba Kamma text as well as Rabbi Samuels' commentary to it.

Essential responsibility may precede a discussion of accountability and liability, but disagreement and discord are inevitable - and at times positive. The leadership methods of Moses and Aaron were radically different, yet it ultimately took both of them to lead the Israelites to the promised Land. The schools of Hillel and Shammai fought against each other tooth and nail, but in the end the views of both were included in the Mishnah as valid expressions of Judaism.

There are and ought to be distinctions between the whole and the part. Boundary issues may on occasion be damaging to a community, but community can also sometimes smother individuality. In music, dissonance can generate great beauty. In religion, conflict can lead to creativity. Division can produce growth. Pluralism is not about avoiding partisanship and "making nice" - it's about sharing a destiny, even in the face of serious differences.

The petty turf wars and hatred that plague today's Jewish community are often hurtful and destructive. Our desire for unity and harmony should not supersede our commitments to our principles, to truth, and to God. The belief that we can whitewash the differences between us is the real illusion.

Rabbi Niles Goldstein is the Program Officer/Educator for the Jewish Life Network, a foundation and think tank devoted to the transformation of Jewish institutions and the revitalization of Jewish life in North America.

תנו רבנן: לא יסקל אדם מרשותו לרשות הרבים. מעשה באדם אחד שהיה מסקל מרשותו לרשות הרבים, ומצאו חסיד אחד, אמר לו: ריקה, מפני מה אתה מסקל מרשות שאינה שלך לרשות שלך? לגלג עליו. לימים נצרך למכור שדהו, והיה מהלך באותו רשות רבים ונכשל באותו אבנים, אמר: יפה אמר לי אותו חסיד מפני מה אתה הסקל מרשות שאינה שלך לרשות שלך.

Tanu Rabanan — Our Rabbis taught: A man should not remove stones from his ground and throw them onto public grounds. **Ma'aseh** — A Happening: A certain man was throwing stones from his ground onto public grounds, when a pious man found him doing so and said to him, "Empty one, why do you remove your stones from ground which is not yours and throw them onto ground which is yours?" The man laughed at him. After a time, the man had to sell his field, and when he was walking on that public ground he stumbled over all those stones. He then said, "How well that pious man said to me: 'Why do you throw stones from ground which is not yours to ground which is yours?'" — T.B. Baba Kamma 50b (translated according to Rashi)

This brief rabbinic teaching about clearing stones challenges us to reconsider the manner of Jewish communal problem solving. Its interplay between private and public sector speaks powerfully to the illusion of Jewish separatism and the reality of Jewish Peoplehood and inter-connectivity. And its clever conclusion reminds us that all too often our moments of realization come too late and at too high a price.

With precision and deliberation, our Sages explore the idea of responsibility, often asking, "Who pays?" and "How much?" Case after case, they teach us that *after every action and inaction, after every intentional deed and negligent behavior, we must ask both literally and figuratively, "Who pays?"* There are consequences to the choices we make, and we are liable for the damages.

This passage, however, comes to remind us that essential responsibility precedes a discussion of accountability and liability. True responsibility is not responsive, but proactive. Put on a communal plane, Jewish responsibility must consider the whole and not just the part, for ultimately the boundaries separating the two are indistinguishable. Partisan problem solving too often creates bigger and more pervasive problems. And until we as a People realize this, we'll all keep arguing "Who pays?" and "How much?" as we slip and stumble over all those stones.

Benjamin J. Samuels is Rabbi of Congregation Shaarei Tefillah, Newton Centre, MA, and an instructor of Jewish Studies at Hebrew College, Boston.

Letter to the Editor

To Dizzy Gillespe, Plotzville,

Be informed that the "Chewed up Furby" is, in fact, a pomegranate, spilling seed (the only "one" allowed to do this.) Cf. Exodus 39:24-25. So quit kvetching and start enjoying Sh'ma, whatever its length and color.

And to Richard Hirsch, rabbi in Wyncotte, Know that the word "Responsa" is the Latin plural of Responsum. One may have several responsa, but for one, responsum is correct.

Yours, Loilliem Safire

A Sh'ma Archive

We have received several bundles of early issues of *Sh'ma* in response to our request for back issues. Re-reading some of these back issues is a study in the development of American Jewish consciousness, and a perusal of the historical map our thinking has charted. We are hoping to create a complete *Sh'ma* archive. Please continue to call and send us your old copies. We extend our appreciation to those who have already sent us past issues of *Sh'ma*:

Deane Berson, Barry Bernstein, Jay M. Siegel, Edith Schapiro, and the Blaustein Library.

Sh'ma Classified Ads

Sh'ma will be including a few ads each month for Jewish organizations and institutions seeking Jewish professionals in the areas of rabbinics, education, academia and communal service. To post a listing (\$100.00), please contact the *Sh'ma* editorial office. Advertisements may be faxed to: (781) 449-9825 or sent by email to: jifsusan@aol.com.

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Sh'ma is thrilled to announce recent grant allocations from the Koret and Avi Chai Foundations for special editorial projects. A devoted and generous supporter of *Sh'ma* who wishes to remain anonymous has sponsored a challenge grant of \$15,000 for which we are seeking a matching grant. A heartfelt appreciation to all of our supporters.

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