

LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

Names will be withheld from publication on request. JEWISH CURRENTS reserves the right to edit letters to restrict their length.

AARON LANSKY SLIGHTED?

I thought Moti Rieber's review of *Outwitting History* by Aaron Lansky somewhat superficial ("A Biography of Yiddish," May-June issue). The book is much more than a "collection of anecdotes." Lansky literally went all over the world collecting books, including Russia (when it was the Soviet Union), Cuba, Argentina, etc. He was also a recipient of the MacArthur Award — not exactly kid stuff.

While calling the book a collection of anecdotes trivializes it, there is one anecdote Rieber should have mentioned. Lansky recalls that one spring morning he received a call

about a load of Yiddish books that had to be picked up Sunday morning — not Friday or Saturday, but Sunday. The caller was a veteran book collector for the Yiddish Book Center and he couldn't say no. Sunday morning it was raining hard. The windshield wipers on his beat-up truck were showing signs of age, but he went (to the Coops in the Bronx). The caller was dressed as if she were going to a party. Where were the books? What books? It turned out that she wanted a ride to the JEWISH CURRENTS Annual Luncheon. And he took her there, to the Hotel Roosevelt in Manhattan, rain and all.

Yes, Aaron Lansky had tea with a

lot of people. But that, again, is a simplification. He encountered history that you don't come across in a book, as in: "... born in the *shtetl*, versed in the Talmud, steeped in Marx, the Jews he met possessed erudition that I could appreciate."

It has been a long road to the National Yiddish Book Center and Lansky has enjoyed every mile.

BERNARD KRANSDORF
Montclair, New Jersey

RECONSTRUCTIONISM AND SECULARISM

It's been a long time since I wrote to JEWISH CURRENTS, but the article by Rabbi Richard Hirsh ("Can Secularism Save Jewish Religion?," May-June) stimulated me to thinking.

I guess I consider myself a secular Jew, but my involvement in the past with secular organizations left me unfulfilled. My background — having been brought up in an Orthodox home in Nazi Germany and then in Brooklyn in the mid- to late 1930s — turned me away from that kind of observance. It became a meaningless chore. I've tried Conservative and Reform Judaism with similar results.

I thought I could find something in Secular Judaism but I could not articulate what that something was.

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Cover: *Gimel* class from the Westside Yiddish Cultural School participating in AIDS Walk New York. Photograph by Adrienne Cooper.

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CORRECTION

• Our editor, who is pretty good with English but an *amhaaretz* when it comes to Yiddish, mistranslated *apikoyres* (heretic) as



"ignoramus" in Moti Rieber's review of two books about Yiddish in the May-June issue (p. 28). *Gevald!*



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The Shortest-Lived Empire

IT WAS TO HAVE BEEN the "New American Century." According to Donald Rumsfeld, Dick Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz and other *makers* in the Project for the New American Century, American military supremacy was going to permit them to reshape the world in the image of corporate America, while a doctrine of "preemptive war" would cut off any challenges to the "benevolent" U.S. empire before they could be mounted.

Five years into their rule, America is looking like the shortest-lived empire in world history. Our national debt is making the U.S. economy dependent on foreign banks and governments. Our armed forces, caught up in a vicious and unnecessary war, are unable to meet their recruitment quotas. General Motors, that classic symbol of American Big Business, is reducing its workforce by 25,000 and struggling to stay off the auction block. Millions of Americans are losing all or parts of their pensions, and even their Social Security may soon be legislated to shreds.

The valves that relieve pressure on the working class are clogged. Personal bankruptcy has been curtailed by Congress. Legal liability suits, one of the few ways for public watchdog groups to enforce corporate responsibility, are being restricted by "tort reform." Property taxes are rising as states get squeezed for revenue thanks to federal budget-cutting. College tuition-aid programs are shrinking. The price of gasoline has doubled in four years. Health insurance premiums are increasing each year by double digits and are beyond the reach of more than 45 million citizens.

Beyond our borders, meanwhile, America is now best known for "spreading democracy" by using torture as a tool of policy, by urinating on the Koran, by undermining the United Nations' credibility, and by stonewalling or complicating hopeful global initiatives to redeem the environment from global warming and Africa from debt and poverty. The very kind of religious fundamentalism that causes social and economic chaos in the Islamic world is being reproduced by the Christian right America (see Esther Kaplan's article, page 10) — and promises the same undemocratic, impoverishing results.

No wonder President Bush confused "dissemble" (to lie) and "disassemble" (to take apart) in a recent press conference. To him, the words are synonyms. ■

“The holding of Rabbi Yosef on this question of ‘land for peace’ stands in stark contrast to that of the rabbis who elevate Jewish sovereignty over the West Bank and Gaza above the saving of human life.”

It is time for American Jewish organizations to end their timid compromising with American Jewry’s right wing. Organizations like the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA), once led by such giants of American Jewish life as Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver, Louis Lipsky, Nahum Goldman and my father, Rabbi Barnett Brickner, are today distorted shadows of their former greatness, yet they are allowed to lobby Congress with their right-wing message almost unopposed. They can no longer be allowed to misrepresent both American Jews and the people of Israel. Someone must tell the Congress that today the ZOA, an organization of no more than 7,000, neither represents nor speaks on our behalf.

We also have an obligation to do all in our power to urge the U.S. government to initiate and facilitate grants,

loans, and whatever it takes to help the Palestinians achieve economic stability. It is in our self-interest to see the Palestinians prosper. People who feel they have a stake in their future do not send their young as suicide bombers into their neighbors’ malls and homes. The Palestinian Authority also needs its own strong security. American Jews should vigorously advocate in support of our government’s helping to train a Palestinian Authority-controlled security force.

Both Israel and America are seriously threatened by ideologies that, if triumphant, would radically change both societies. In Israel, if the fundamentalists succeed, democracy will be replaced by an Orthodox Jewish theocracy. In America, if the secular and religious right achieve their goals, democracy as we know it — rooted in church-state separation, freedom of speech and assembly, dissent as an expression of patriotism, and the expansion of civil rights and liberties — may disappear. God preserve us all from such a fate. ■

Final-Status Negotiations Now!

MARLENE NADLE

THE AMERICAN PEACE CAMP has been drifting ineffectively ever since Israel announced its withdrawal from Gaza. That lack of direction and passivity has made former Secretary of State James Baker the most radical person around. He is one of the few who have taken on George Bush and Ariel Sharon’s continuing obstacle course of preconditions that will make a final peace impossible.

As early as last December in a *New York Times* article, Baker wrote that “Israel should announce that upon election of a Palestinian negotiating partner it is prepared to resume substantive negotiations for peace . . . To require the absence of any terrorist act in advance simply empowers the terrorists themselves to prevent the resumption of peace talks.”

Lagging behind Baker and the Europeans leaders who share his position on rapid negotiations, dazed American progressives are not focused on this stalling strategy, which demands that Palestinians destroy the terrorists, reform their own security forces, create new insti-

tutions, build democracy and become Finns before final-status talks are possible. Most don’t notice that this some-day-over-the-rainbow approach can indefinitely postpone the discussion of borders, settlements, Jerusalem, water, and refugees needed to end the conflict. So there was no response to the press reports that Sharon had laughed off Mahmoud Abbas’s suggestion, at their summit in Egypt, that if Israeli domestic politics won’t permit open talks, the Israeli government and Palestinian Authority use back channels to discuss final-status issues. There were no protesters at the White House when Bush took Tony Blair’s plan for a London conference intended to jump-start negotiations and diluted it into a meeting on Palestinian reforms. There was no deluge of letters when Bush, during his meeting with Sharon, failed to urge a plan for final status negotiations and ignored Abbas’s warning that security measures not paired with a political process will produce neither security nor peace.

Ha’aretz columnist Akiva Eldar, alarmed by the lack of Israeli opposition to Sharon’s preconditions, berated his people in a way that also applies to Americans. “No one,” he fumed, “dares to question Sharon’s assertion

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that the cessation of terror is a condition for peace negotiations and for dismantling the outposts and the cessation of settlements in the territories. . . . [They] have adapted the rule of ‘Quiet — we’re disengaging [from Gaza].’”

The American peace camp must stop being suckered by Gaza and the pretext of preconditions about terrorists. Last January, an unidentified Israeli official told the *Forward*, “There will be an effort by the Americans and us . . . to steer the [Europeans] towards an incremental approach and away from fast-tracking.” The mainstream Israeli press has bluntly said that Sharon’s goal is to achieve a long-term interim solution that would leave the major issues unresolved and Israel in control of nearly 50 percent of the West Bank.

It is essential that the peace camp persuade Bush that backing an interim solution instead of final status negotiations for a Palestinian state is a mistake that will escalate terrorism. To be effective in opposing an interim semi-state, they can’t fall for another variation of the stalling strategy that says confidence-building measures are needed before negotiations are possible. Even former Ambassador to Israel Martin Indyk, who has been very critical of Bush on this issue, is now making statements about first building trust. This approach has already been discredited by history and by such Israeli experts as Carmi Gillon, the head of Shin Bet who resigned following the assassination of Yitzkhak Rabin. In an old interview in *Yediot Achronot*, Gillon described the phased approach to peace of both the Oslo Agreement and the road map as unworkable: “The stages were created to build trust between the sides, and in these ten years they have failed . . . We [must] make the agreements now, and then . . . begin to deal with the stages.”

Those who want peace must stop drifting along on Bush and Sharon’s timetable because the clock is running out on the Palestinian side. Analysts said when Abbas was elected that he had six months before he would begin to lose credibility with his people. Most of that time is gone. Amjad Atallah, an advisor to Abbas on peace negotiations, has said that great frustration is felt because the Palestinians can’t get final status talks now, or even an indication of when they might start. More than five hundred Palestinian moderates and intellectuals recently sent Abbas a letter telling him that an interim solution was an unacceptable dead end. He is under increasing pressure to meet the need for Palestinian sovereignty as well as Israeli security if he and the peace process aren’t

to be doomed.

To end the conflict, people must insist on final status negotiations, or, at least, pressure Bush to set a time frame for those talks. Doing that would supply the political hope Abbas needs to maintain legitimacy and more effectively coöpt the militants. It will give the Palestinian public and more of the young men with guns an incentive to further marginalize the diehards.

Last June, 26 percent of the Palestinians said they were opposed to attacks on Israel. By December it was 51 percent. In the election, 62 percent voted for Abbas’ non-violent strategy. The number could even go higher — if the Palestinians are given evidence that negotiations for a state will start soon. If they are only offered a stalling game of preconditions, plus a post-Gaza pullout delay of another six months for a probable Israeli election, the most extreme views will reclaim public opinion. Israelis and Palestinians will continue to suffer in a burning landscape of multiple bombers and vengeful tanks.

George Bush has given no indication that he understands the urgency of moving to political negotiations. So far, neither has most of the American peace camp. ■

FOR BETTER OR VERSE

HENRY FONER

PRAYER FOR THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT

Keep us free from vile temptation
As we thoughts of evil quench.
(Install in courts throughout the nation
Zealots on each judge’s bench.)

Shelter us from Satan’s story —
Save us from the fires of hell.
(Don’t permit a laboratory
To dissect a stemlike cell.)

As we kneel on hind limbs supple,
Spread our gospel o’er the earth.
(Don’t let any wayward couple
Halt a child’s unwanted birth.)

L’Envoi

Grant us freedom of selection
Of whatever gods we choose.
(But preclude from this protection
Muslims, Catholics and Jews.)



IT HAPPENED IN ISRAEL

SUSAN M. SUSSER

Jewish Identity Status and Conversion in Israel

RECENTLY, EDUCATION MINISTER Limor Livnat introduced a list of one hundred key concepts in Jewish history, culture and religion, to be taught as “Jewish Heritage Studies,” in Israel’s secular public school system. For one hour a week, pupils learn about Jewish holiday traditions, the weekly Torah portion, national symbols and more.

My friend Natalie, an immigrant from the former Soviet Union, teaches this subject to her junior high school class. Natalie is an outstanding teacher and I am sure her students benefit greatly from her lessons — but there is something unusual about her teaching Jewish Heritage Studies, for Natalie is not “really” Jewish — something she discovered only upon her arrival in Israel.

“I grew up feeling that I was very Jewish,” Natalie told me. “In the Soviet Union, Jews were considered a nation, not a religion. What counted was lineage from the father. My father is Jewish, although my mother is not. We ate *gefilte* fish on Friday night, *matzoh* on *Pey-sakh*. We lived in a Jewish community in the Ukraine and almost all my friends were Jewish. It was only when I accompanied my husband, whose mother is Jewish, to the Ministry of Interior in Israel that I was informed that according to *halakha* (traditional Jewish Law) only children of a Jewish mother are Jews. Therefore, I am not a Jew.

“The clerk asked to see my birth certificate and when she saw that my mother is not Jewish, she didn’t want to speak with me any longer, only with my husband. She didn’t even look at me! I felt like dirt!”

Natalie is one of nearly 300,000 halakhically non-Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union who have come to Israel in recent years under the Law of Return, which declares that anyone who is “born to a Jewish

mother, and is not a member of another faith, or someone who has converted” has the right to “return to the homeland.” The Law of Return also offers the right to receive automatic Israeli citizenship to any “child or grandchild of a Jew, to the spouse of a Jew, and to the spouse of a child or grandchild of a Jew.”

In the second half of the 1990s, researchers noted that the vast majority of immigrants arriving from the former Soviet Union were not halakhic Jews. In Israel, where religion and state are intertwined and the government recognizes only Orthodox law in matters of conversion, marriage, divorce and burial for its Jewish citizens, the consequences resulting from the influx of such a large non-Jewish population are enormous.

Individuals who immigrated to Israel under the Law of Return but are not halakhically Jewish cannot be registered by the Ministry of Interior as Jews and thus are barred from marrying Jews and from being buried in a Jewish cemetery. This issue has been especially painful,

as soldiers killed in battle defending Israel have been denied burial near Jewish soldiers if their mothers were not Jewish. “When I see that a ‘Russian soldier’ (*i.e.*, non-Jewish) must be buried in a separate place for non-Jews,



Nearly 300,000 halakhically non-Jewish immigrants have come to Israel in recent years under the Law of Return.

I am so angry!” Natalie says. “Jewish people are not better than others! Look how these young men go willingly into the army, fight to defend Israel, and when they lose their young lives, they cannot be buried together with Jews?!”

According to a survey conducted in 2001 by the Association for Intermarried Family Rights, non-Jewish immigrants are hurt to discover not only that their children (even with a Jewish father) are not recognized as Jews in Israel, but also that a close family member, often a non-Jewish mother or father, is not entitled to come because the Jewish spouse has died or been divorced. Such cases have been particularly publicized when a soldier serving in the Israeli army is involved. In March, 2002

for example, Lieutenant German Rojkov was killed during a terrorist attack on the northern border. Only a few weeks before, struggling with the Ministry of Interior to allow his non-Jewish mother to remain in Israel, Rojkov had written to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon asking: “Must I be killed in order for my mother not to be deported?!” Rojkov’s mother received permission to remain in Israel while on her way to identify his body. In the aftermath, since March, 2004, non-Jewish parents of soldiers have special status enabling them to remain in Israel under set requirements.

Issues of marriage and divorce are similarly complicated in Israel. Marriage and divorce are under the full authority of each religious community — Moslem, Christian, Druze, etc. For Jews, the controlling agency is the Chief Rabbinate, which is Orthodox. Since the rabbinic courts will not marry immigrants who are not halakhic Jews, they are forced to marry abroad.

For Orthodox Jews, following strict Torah law regarding marriage and divorce is essential in order to keep the Jewish people united, to know who is a Jew and who is not. In their view, guarding communal boundaries is what has, historically, enabled a Jew from a Western country who visits a place as far away as Tashkent in Uzbekistan (as I have) to celebrate the same holidays, follow the same traditions, and share similar historical memories as at home.

In the late 1960s, during a tour of several cities in central Asia that were part of the Soviet Union, my husband and I sought out local synagogues during the Jewish High Holidays. There I was in my stylish miniskirt, taking off my shoes, stepping onto the carpeted women’s section of the *shul* and trying, somehow, to sit modestly on the soft carpet among women in floor-length white robes and with veiled heads — who were, nevertheless, following the same Torah portion that was being read in my own Jewish community back in New York on that Rosh Hashanah day. And my husband? Sitting among thickly mustachioed men whom he later described as resembling Genghis Khan, he was singing the same Hebrew prayers he had sung (albeit with different melodies) throughout his Brooklyn childhood. As different as our physical appearance was from the Central Asian Jews who had welcomed us into their house of prayer, the fact that we shared common traditions enabled us to identify as part of the same collective identity.

The situation is muddled, however, when halakhically non-Jewish immigrants to Israel are given automatic Israeli citizenship but are not recognized by the Orthodox Rabbinical Councils as belonging to the Jewish community or permitted to intermarry with Jews. Over time, these immigrants usually identify with the Jewish customs that permeate Israeli society as they study in state schools, serve in the army, circumcise their sons so they may “fit in,” and celebrate Jewish holidays (not according to Orthodox law but in the same way as the secular majority of Israel’s Jewish population). They become, in the words of Dr. Asher Cohen of Bar Ilan University, “sociological Jews.”

Would it be in the interest of Israeli society to facilitate religious conversion to Judaism?

For ultra-Orthodox rabbis in Israel, the answer has simply been NO. In their view, only non-Jews who are sincerely committed to maintaining a strict Orthodox Jewish way of life should be entitled to convert to Judaism. The problems presented by the large influx of non-halakhic Jews to Israel does not concern the ultra-Orthodox who, despite their increasing political involvement, have never been committed to the entire Zionist Jewish collective in Israel, but only to those who follow strict Jewish law.

This narrow approach to conversion almost disrupted the marriage plans of Audrey, my neighbors’ daughter. Josette and David, her parents, moved to Israel from France over 30 years ago and Audrey was born in Israel. Josette, the “girl-next-door” with whom David had fallen in love, converted to Judaism while still in France and has considered herself completely Jewish ever since. Only two weeks before the wedding, the future bride went to apply for a marriage license. When the local rabbi checked into the details of Josette’s conversion abroad, they announced that the bride-to-be was not Jewish since they did not recognize the rabbi who converted her mother! Only after David wrote threatening letters to the Chief Rabbinic Council in Jerusalem did the family receive the compromise offer that Josette and Audrey reconvert by immersing themselves in the *mikve* (ritual bath) and saying the proper prayer. To their great dismay, the women felt compelled to do so that the wedding might take place as planned.

As opposed to the ultra-Orthodox view, Dr. Asher Cohen of Bar-Ilan University believes that for National-Religious Zionists, who have always been committed

to the unity of the entire Jewish community in Israel — both secular and religious — facilitating the conversion process as much as possible while keeping within the boundaries of traditional Jewish law is essential. Without such an approach, Cohen fears a splitting of the Jewish community into two streams: that in order to avoid “mixed marriages,” traditional Jews will insist upon a separate registry for halakhic Jews, while secular Jews will be open to a more flexible definition of “who is a Jew.” (Yossi Beilin, for example, like David Ben Gurion before him, has argued that self-definition should grant individuals the right to join the Jewish people, in the manner of a political movement or a club.) In the event of such a split, Dr. Cohen fears that all trace of Jewish unity would unravel and that, after a few generations, two entirely separate Jewish communities would evolve, with the religious community forbidden to marry anyone outside its borders.

While the Law of Return defines a Jew as “a person who was born of a Jewish mother or has become converted to Judaism,” it does not define the manner of conversion. Thanks to this imprecision, the High Court of Justice, in 1989, recognized non-Orthodox conversions performed abroad. Conversions performed by Reform, Conservative or Reconstructionist rabbis in Israel, however, were not accepted.

In 1998, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu appointed the Ne’eman Commission to find a compromise between the Orthodox approach and the Reform and Conservative movements, which were demanding the right to have their conversions accepted even when performed in Israel. To prevent a power struggle, the Commission recommended establishing a Joint Conversion Institute that would include Reform and Conservative as well as Orthodox rabbis. In exchange for this right to help prepare non-Jews for conversion, the non-Orthodox leaders agreed to suspend lawsuits demanding the right to perform conversions in Israel.

In March of this year, the High Court of Justice ruled that when preparation for conversion is completed in Israel but the conversion ceremony takes place overseas in a Jewish community affiliated with any stream of Judaism, the conversion must be recognized under the Law of Return. Orthodox Chief Rabbi Yona Metzger called the ruling a “death blow to Judaism.” Writing April 1st in *Yediot Achronot*, he argued that the Jewish people has always preserved “its uniqueness

and its purity” by means of *halakha*. By contrast, an April 3rd *Ha’aretz* editorial praised the decision. Referring to a book by Zvi Zohar and Avi Sagi entitled *Conversion and Jewish Identity*, *Ha’aretz* pointed out that conversion to Judaism has often been on an ethnic, rather than religious, basis: “Even Ruth the Moabite, commonly viewed as the Bible’s first convert, said ‘your people will become my people’ before she said ‘your God will become my God.’”

The simplest process of conversion in Israel today is offered during compulsory army service, when a study program is offered to all immigrant soldiers, both Jews and non-Jews, enabling them to “taste” Judaism, and the Chief Military Rabbinate helps those immigrants interested in conversion. Soldiers are not forced to change their lifestyle because the army already provides a kosher environment and observes the sabbath. Problems involved in changing a spouse’s or children’s way of life are usually irrelevant since few soldiers are married.

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon advocates facilitating conversion procedures to help ensure a Jewish majority in Israel. However, many non-Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union simply do not wish to convert; data from the Prime Minister’s Office reveals

Would it be in the interest of Israeli society to facilitate religious conversion to Judaism? For the ultra-Orthodox rabbis, the answer has simply been NO.

that only 730 conversion certificates were signed for them in 2004. According to a 2003 survey by the Tzomet Institute, 77 percent of non-Jews surveyed do not intend to convert. The most common reason given is that since the Law of Return grants them full citizenship rights, there is no need to convert. About 20 percent said the conversion process was too difficult — but when asked how long the process takes (conversion studies take about a year, six to eight hours a week), only seven percent knew the answer.

There appears no consensus on the horizon as to how to best integrate halakhically non-Jewish immigrants into Jewish Israeli society. What remains beyond dispute, however, is the ongoing challenge they present to Israel’s self-definition as a Jewish and a democratic country. ■

The Christian Right and the Jewish Left

Remarks at the JEWISH CURRENTS Luncheon, May 15th, 2005

ESTHER KAPLAN

EVER SINCE GEORGE W. BUSH'S reelection in November, a victory secured at least in part by the intense devotion of his Christian right base, the rest of us have been wondering how to respond.

Tom Frank, the author of *What's the Matter with Kansas*, has argued that the reason progressives lost the great red middle of this country to George Bush is that they failed to put forward a strong, clear, populist economic agenda. Into that vacuum stepped the Christian right, with its drive for "family values." Republicans, by stirring up passions about such issues as gay marriage and abortion, duped social conservatives into voting against their economic self-interest for little more than a handful of symbolic gestures and empty promises. Frank's analysis has gained a lot of currency and has even been adopted by many progressive Democrats as a sort of road map. The trouble is, Frank is only half right.

He's right that when Americans are organized and educated about their economic concerns, they will vote differently. Data about how union families voted last November are persuasive in this regard: While most whites voted for Bush, most members of white union families voted for Kerry. While 22 percent of Americans listed "moral values" as their top concern, only 16 percent of union family members did, prioritiz-



Pat Robertson portrait by Marci Pepper

ing economic issues and the war in Iraq instead. These were the results notwithstanding a Democratic Party that refused to take up the fight against Bush's policies that rob from the working majority to buy Hummers for the rich.

Frank and his followers are wrong, however, about the nature of the threat posed by the Christian right and the extent of their accomplishments. The Christian right has won far more than symbolic gestures, as Frank seems to believe. In fact, Bush

has delivered so handsomely for the Christian right that Gary Bauer has called him the new leader of their movement.

Let's take abortion, for example: They won passage of a ban on "partial birth" abortion, the first federal restriction on abortion since *Roe v. Wade* was decided in 1973; they got fetal rights enshrined in law and policy through such measures as the Unborn Victims of Violence Act; they got Bush to implement a global

abortion gag rule around the world, which forces recipients of U.S. aid to abdicate their right to inform their clients about abortion options or even engage in policy debates on reproductive rights.

The Christian right has effected a wholesale shift in what kinds of organizations receive federal funds. The gag rule, for example, stripped millions of dollars from organizations at the top of their enemies list, such as Planned Parenthood. Gay organizations doing AIDS education and prevention work have been defunded through "obscenity" investigations; Muslim charities through the Patriot Act. At the same time, Christian right organizations have received a windfall of tens of millions of taxpayer dollars through the President's faith-based initiative and other programs. Pat Robertson, who blamed the attacks of September 11th on the ACLU, received \$1.5 million through a faith-based grant. Franklin

ESTHER KAPLAN was the keynote speaker at the JEWISH CURRENTS Luncheon on May 15, 2005. She is the author of *With God on Their Side: How Christian Fundamentalists Trampled Science, Policy and Democracy in George W. Bush's White House*, published in October by *The New Press*. She is a contributing editor at *POZ*, the national AIDS magazine, and was acting senior editor at *The Nation*. For ten years, she has been co-host of "Beyond the Pale," a weekly radio program covering Jewish culture and politics on *WBAI/New York*.

Graham, who called Islam an “evil religion,” received around \$10 million to preach abstinence in Africa. Chuck Colson, the Right to Life Committee, Concerned Women for America, dozens of anti-abortion counseling centers — they’re all cashing in.

There’s been a similar changing of the guard when it comes to scientific advisors on everything from AIDS to birth control to medical research and international family planning: out with the American Medical Association and other recognized experts; in with biblical literalists, self-professed virgins, anti-gay evangelists, and members of Christian right lobby groups.

Bush is also in the process of a profound remaking of the courts by appointing judges who, in his words, “understand that we received our rights from God.”

How else has the GOP given the Christian right more than merely rhetoric and empty promises? Let me mention just a few of these tangible, real world gifts:

- \$1.5 billion to push marriage on welfare recipients and \$1.5 billion to push abstinence-only education, domestically and internationally.
- Federal funds to restore and expand churches.
- A policy to promote adoption above abortion at family planning clinics.
- A secret land trade to save a giant cross standing on federal park land.
- The sale, for the first time, of creationist literature in national park bookstores.
- An FCC crackdown on obscenity and a Justice Department crackdown on porn.
- Access to Iraq for Christian evangelizers, obsessed with finding converts in the Muslim world but mostly

shut out to due proselytizing bans.

- Weekly strategy sessions with the White House and leaders of Congress.

None of these are merely “symbolic victories.” They are real gains for the Christian right agenda, and they’re affecting the daily lives of people across this country and around the world.

Frank and his adherents also misunderstand the anti-democratic nature of this movement.

When liberal evangelical leaders like Jim Wallis argue that liberals should soften their support for abor-

their base, and taking over Republican Party structures. The leadership of the Southern Baptist Convention, for example, has been purged of moderates, as has the Southern Baptist Seminary, which now imposes “family values” litmus tests on its faculty. From a handful of televangelists in the 1970s have sprung hundreds of radio and television programs, publishing houses, educational institutions, think tanks, and lobby groups. After steadily recruiting candidates for minor local offices and joining GOP clubs and committees, the Christian right now has decisive influence over forty-four of

The Christian right now has decisive influence over forty-four of fifty state Republican Party committees.

tion and gay rights, and when Democratic centrists like Bill and Hillary Clinton advocate this view, they are acting as if the Christian right had brought about a new national consensus to which liberals must accommodate themselves. Yet 85 percent of Americans want their kids to learn about condoms and birth control in their sex education, not abstinence only; 70 percent thought Congress should not have intervened in the Terri Schiavo case; two thirds say they support gay civil rights and gay civil unions; and the majority of Americans — even the majority of Republicans — still support legal abortion.

No, the Christian right has not convinced the majority of Americans of their views, but they have consolidated their ability to influence government policy by organizing circles around liberals and the left: by taking over entire religious denominations, developing a vast media and grass roots structure for mobilizing

fifty state Republican Party committees, and players such as Ralph Reed hold influential roles at the top of the party. White evangelical social conservatives make up no more than 18 percent or so of the country. But in the last two presidential elections, they comprised 40 percent of Bush’s electorate. Judging by Christian Coalition scorecards, their ardent backers make up a third of the House and the Senate.

Their wins in Washington are dependent on two important factors: an alienated electorate, a third of whom doesn’t vote, which enhances the power of an organized minority; and a GOP coalition strategy that says any constituency that can deliver votes or cash gets White House support for its top agenda items, even if these are profoundly out of step with America. So the NRA gets an end to gun control; the corporations get their tax cuts, deregulation and tailored-to-business legislation — and

the Christian right gets everything I just catalogued and more.

However, the Christian right is not just another “special interest” constituency. Many of the movement’s central ideas stand opposed to democratic values. They have spent years spinning a false religious history about the nation’s founding and now seek to “restore” America as a “Christian nation.” (David Barton, a leading advocate of this idea, was a paid advisor to Bush/Cheney ’04 and holds the No. 2 post in the Texas GOP.) They believe that the war on terror is a holy war against Islam. (When Deputy Undersecretary of Defense Jerry Boykin got bad press for telling evangelical churches that the enemy in the war on terror is “a guy called Satan,” evangelicals led a campaign to defend him, and he never received any formal censure, just a mild letter of concern.) They believe, overwhelmingly, in the “end

ance of powers. When they don’t like a court decision, they go to Congress to circumvent it, decrying activist judges — and when Congress doesn’t do the right thing in their eyes, they’ll circumvent Congress as well. When Bush’s faith-based legislation failed, the president simply created it through executive order; and when his most extreme judges failed to get Senate confirmation, he put some on the bench through recess appointments.

The Christian right has no respect for pluralism. Under pressure from Pat Robertson and others not to support “aberrant” religions, the faith-based initiative has directly funded only religious charities that are Christian. Already faith-based programs in at least three states have been found to overstep church/state law by directly using taxpayer funds to proselytize.

The faith-based initiative has funded only religious charities that are Christian. Already, faith-based programs in at least three states have been found to overstep church-state law by directly using taxpayer funds to proselytize.

times,” and they view our foreign policy through that lens. (Pat Robertson recently said that if East Jerusalem comes under Palestinian control, that would be “Satan’s plan to prevent the return of Jesus Christ the Lord.”) When it comes to public health, they believe that saving souls for the next life is more important than saving lives in this one. And many of them, including some inside the White House, believe that George W. Bush was chosen by God to be president — a belief that shields him from democratic accountability.

This movement and its Washington allies have no respect for the bal-

The Christian right has no respect for democratic dissent. The abortion gag rule has silenced organizations around the world from participating in public debates about women’s health. Loyalty oaths are being imposed on foreign aid recipients, requiring them to sign statements opposing prostitution in order to get U.S. assistance.

Members of the Christian right are not dupes, as Tom Frank implies, but ideologically driven people who are remaking our government. The question is what are we going to do about it. Liberal and left Christians have

begun to raise their voices in important ways, complaining that the Christian right has hijacked Christianity and abandoned its most basic teaching: to stand with the poor. They’re forming organizations and networks to amplify their voices. But secular people and religious minorities could play a vital role in defending the great values of pluralism and secular democracy and challenging the Christian right’s, and the GOP’s, abandonment of those values. With American Muslims facing deportations, interrogations, watch lists and frozen bank accounts, their ability to respond has been curtailed. The Jewish community isn’t constrained by such pressures — but has the Jewish community taken up this cause?

Certainly, a number of major Jewish organizations have stated their opposition to the Christian right agenda in Washington. The Reform movement said an antigay marriage amendment would “defile the Constitution” and called the partial birth abortion ban an unconstitutional infringement on reproductive choice. The Anti-Defamation League called Bush’s faith-based legislation “bad public policy” and the American Jewish Committee has challenged some of its excesses in court.

But massive rallies in Washington and New York? Those are only organized in defense of Israel. National lobby days on Capitol Hill? Only for the sake of Israel. High-powered meetings with Democratic leaders to insist that they take up the fight? Only on Israel. Hannah Rosenthal, the recently resigned director of the Jewish Council on Public Affairs, described to me a meeting held last year between top Jewish leaders and John Kerry. People like Malcolm Hoenlein, the executive staffer of the Council of Presidents of Major

American Jewish Organizations, were so insistent that the meeting be focused on Israel that Rosenthal, representing a domestic agenda, wasn't even allowed to ask a question.

There is not a single Jewish organization in the country that has put fighting the Christian right at the top of its agenda. Mobilizing support for Israel — even for the reactionary politics of the Sharon administration — has simply eclipsed other priorities. Worse, evangelical support for Israel has muted Jewish criticism of the dangers posed by the Christian right. Even though this support springs from a profoundly anti-Semitic millennialist worldview — in which Jews make *aliyah* only to enable Christ's return, at which point we will convert or be swallowed up into the pits of eternal hell — and even though this worldview requires inflexible opposition to a Palestinian state anywhere in "Judea and Samaria" — which the vast majority of American Jews acknowledge is the only path to peace — it has bought a great deal of silence and even gratitude.

Israeli tourism has become so dependent on the Christian right that the tourism minister now comes to the U.S. every year to give an award of appreciation to such Christian right firebrands as Pat Robertson. And listen to these words from Abraham Foxman of the ADL, from a 2002 article entitled, "Why Evangelical Support for Israel is a Good Thing": "American Jews," he says, should be "highly appreciative of the incredible support that the State of Israel gets from . . . the Christian Right . . .

"In the Congress, support for Israel is strong on both sides of the aisle, [but] there is no doubt that evangelical members are notably

aggressive in their support, proposing resolutions and speaking out forcefully. This is especially noteworthy during the current Administration, as they are conveying their sentiments to a President who shares many of their religious and social perspectives.

" . . . On many public occasions, including at rallies and meetings, on TV and radio appearances, evangelicals have become regulars, a pro-Israel presence alongside the Jewish community. While such support is evident from other significant parts of the body politic, support from evangelicals is especially consistent and unreserved."

Foxman adds that anti-Semitism is now "history" among evangelicals, "superseded by the new special role of the Jews in the modern state of Israel." He insists that American Jews can embrace evangelical support for Israel while "continu[ing] to articulate in forceful ways our significant disagreements on social issues."

Not long ago, the ADL paid for a *New York Times* ad containing an article by Ralph Reed, and Foxman publicly thanked Gary Bauer for his support for Israel. This is exactly the kind of validation these extremists need to soften the harsh edges of their reactionary agenda.

The failure of the official Jewish community to stand in opposition to the Christian right has presented some enormous challenges — and opportunities — for the Jewish left. To respond to these challenges effectively, we have to do a few things:

First, we have to push a populist economic agenda. A strong movement for a real living wage, national health care, taxing the rich, card check for unions, college scholar-

ships and day care would provide a substantive alternative to the current, two-party corporate embrace.

Second, we have to take on the values debate, in two ways. We have to attack the values of the Christian right and the current GOP leadership, in plain language, as immoral. They don't care if people die in sub-Saharan Africa, the heart of the global AIDS epidemic, as a result of their abstinence-only agenda. They don't care if the abortion gag rule puts women's lives at risk. They don't care if the war on terror, which they see as a war on Islam, kills innocents. We have to stop being afraid to call their values uncaring, cruel, and heartless.

We also have to talk about our own values: opposition to unjust wars; a deep moral concern about poverty; a commitment to human dignity and human liberation that make our support for gay rights and women's rights unwavering; a commitment, when it comes to a health crisis like AIDS, to throw out corporate and religious ideology and do what it takes to save lives; a deep belief in democracy and pluralism. These are beautiful moral values, and we need to stop hiding them.

Third, we have to take on the mainstream Jewish community. Committing to economic populism requires us to question the way wealth buys power in the organized Jewish community today. And challenging the Christian right's toxic values means pushing the organized Jewish community off its single-minded focus on "supporting Israel" at any cost.

The urgent task for the Jewish left at this moment in history is to fight these habits of organization and habits of mind, and to assume real leadership in the fight against the Christian right. ■

Secular Jewish Education, Then and Now

Remembering the Shule Systems in America

ISRAEL KUGLER

SHORTLY BEFORE World War I, a significant sector of immigrant Jews from Eastern Europe participated in an educational experiment that sought to develop cultural identification among Jewish youth through the establishment of *shuln* — Yiddish, secular, supplemental schools. These *shuln*, currently struggling for rebirth, affected hundreds of thousands of boys and girls and their parents. They reached their apogee in the 1930s and '40s — and they deserve a place in American Jewish history.

The founders of the *shule* movement shared roots in the struggle of Polish and Russian Jews against tsarist tyranny, anti-Semitism and economic exploitation. They were also animated by the desire to extend the *Haskalah*, the Enlightenment, to help Jews escape the narrow, poverty-stricken experience of the religious Hebrew school, the *kheyder* (limited to males) and the stifling confines of the *shtetl*. In their rebellion, they were caught up in a tornado of ideas embodied in labor Zionism, socialism, trade unionism, territorialism and anarchism; many experienced prison and Siberian exile for advancing these ideologies.

The Yiddish language was the key vehicle for many of their aspirations. It was the everyday instrument of communication for all East European Jews — a Yiddishland without government or strict boundaries. Hebrew was the *loshn koydesh*, the sacred language, limited largely to men in the synagogue; Russian, Polish and Hungarian were largely identified with



Illustration by Leah Post from Mayn Shprakh Bukh (*My Language Book*), a textbook published in 1938 by the Educational Committee of the Workmen's Circle.

oppressors, pogromists, and elitists. Yiddish flourished in song, poetry, stories, essays, dramas and novels, developing idiom, grammatical standards and timeless literary works.

The first shuln in America were established by the Labor Zionist Farband (Poale Zion) in 1910. Called National Radical Schools, they were permeated with the ideology of socialist Zionism, which sought the establishment of a Jewish cooperative commonwealth in Palestine. While these *shuln* used Yiddish for instruction, they looked forward to the ancient language of

Hebrew replacing Yiddish, which was identified by them with the misery of the Jewish diaspora experience.

Yiddish remained, however, the language of those who emigrated to America. Jewish writers were reaching the heights of artistic expression in the language, while New York had many Yiddish theater groups that spread from Second Avenue all across the U.S., Canada and Latin America. This Yiddish cultural upsurge was the basis for the creation of the Sholem Aleichem *shuln* and their parent organization, the Sholem Aleichem Folks Institute, founded in 1916 by Yiddish intellectual Dr. Chaim Zhitlovsky, literary critic Shmuel Niger, and educator Leibush Lehrer.

A third system of *shuln*, named after the literary giant Yitzhok Leyb Peretz, was established by the Work-

ISRAEL KUGLER was president of the Workmen's Circle from 1980 to 1984 and is currently active, as well, in the New York Labor History Association, the Forward Association and the Jewish Labor Committee. He was president of the United Federation of College Teachers, which he was instrumental in organizing.

men's Circle/*Arbeter Ring* in 1918, eighteen years after the fraternal organization was founded by socialist-oriented Jews influenced most strongly by the Jewish Workers Bund. Within three years of the founding of the Peretz *shuln*, however, the Socialist Party split, the Communist Party formed, and an internecine Jewish struggle broke out over control of the Workmen's Circle's Camp Kinderland. This and other socialist-communist struggles led to the establishment in 1923 of a fourth group of *shuln* under the auspices of the Jewish Section of the International Workers Order (IWO). Formed by Communists who split from the Workmen's Circle, the Jewish Section became the Jewish People's Fraternal Order (JPFO) in 1933.

Beginning in the Jewish neighborhoods of New York, the *shuln* spread, multiplied and flourished. All urban centers with significant Jewish populations soon had *shuln*, including Philadelphia, Boston, Pittsburgh, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Los Angeles, Montreal, Toronto and Winnipeg.

Each of the Jewish political networks that supported the *shuln* also developed summer camps, publishing houses, theater groups, choruses, dance ensembles, orchestras, and daily Yiddish newspapers. The *Forverts* (*Forward*) was closely associated with the Workmen's Circle, especially through *Forverts* general manager Baruch Charney Vladeck. The *Tog* (*Day*), politically close to the New York Democratic Party, was a haven for secular Yiddishists of the Sholem Aleichem Folks Institute. The *Morgn Freiheit* (*Morning Freedom*) was the Yiddish Communist organ. The remaining Yiddish daily, the *Morgn Zhurnal* (*Morning Jour-*

nal), reflected the Orthodox sector. The anarchist newspaper, *Die Freie Arbeter Shtimme* (*The Free Voice of Labor*), appeared less frequently.

While the *shuln* did reflect the rival political ideologies of their parent organizations, the non-Communist organizations tended to share teachers and had a combined *mitlshul* (a secondary Yiddish school for students 14-17). Between 1934 and 1938, however, the Comintern characterized the socialists and the unions they controlled as "Social Fascist" — hiding their fascism behind false socialist slogans — a stand that precluded JPFO cooperation with the other Jewish socialist movements. This gulf was widened by the Nazi-Soviet Pact, the Soviet murder of Bundist leaders Ehrlich and Alter, and other earth-shaking events.

Some JPFO *shuln* met in the public schools until red-baiting public officials forbade this practice after World War II. They then met, like the *shuln* of the other movements, in converted stores, ground-floor apartments, labor lyceums and organization headquarters. Furniture consisted of cast-off desks from the public schools and flimsy blackboards. The walls had framed photographs of the giants of Yiddish literature and the sages of Jewish history, a map of the land of British-mandate Palestine, and a chart of the *alef-beys* in printed and written versions. Lighting and ventilation were poor. A miniscule kitchen and bathroom completed the setting.

Elementary school classes met daily during the week. They commenced at 3:30 p.m. for the youngest children, and changed each hour for progressively older groups, ending in time for *di eltste* (the oldest) to rush home for dinner.

Many of the *lerer* (teachers) were

Yiddish poets, novelists, journalists and trade union activists. A few were dentists and lawyers who sought more than their professions could provide. Among these teachers were graduates of the colleges and universities of New York. Most, if not all, had university and *gymnasium* educations in Russia and Poland. There also were a number who had gone through *yeshiva* in Eastern Europe. Some regarded their teaching work very seriously and absorbed principles of pedagogy from John Dewey, Friedrich Froebel, William Heard Kilpatrick, Maria Montessori and Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi. There were even graduate programs for post-*shule* system studies and a teachers' seminary for those who aspired to teach in the *shuln*.

New textbooks were written that reflected Yiddish usage, idiom, grammar — and ethical values. Curricula usually included Yiddish language, Jewish history from Biblical times to the present, and Yiddish *mayslekh, lider* and *gezang* (stories, poems and songs). Special teachers went from *shule* to *shule* conducting classes in dance, drama, choral singing and musical instruments (usually the mandolin).

The *shule* atmosphere was relaxed and friendly. There was no artificial discipline born out of fear of the *melamed's kantshik*, the cat o' nine tails so prevalent in religious schools in Europe. Meaning was emphasized, in contrast to syllabic phonetics and rote learning. Girls and boys, sitting side by side, listening to stories and singing the *folkslider*, experienced *shule* as a happy, pleasant dimension of their lives.

The social life of the *shule* was almost as important as the education, not only for the children, but for their parents. Periodic *vetcherinkas* (sup-

TWO JEWS, THREE VIEWS

SHULN IN THE 1920s: According to Hasia R. Diner's *The Jews in the United States* (2004), some "leaders of the Workmen's Circle considered it crucial to reach out to less ideologically committed immigrants through Yiddish-language cultural programs. Others disagreed and saw the immigrants' ultimate linguistic assimilation into the American working class as the desired goal. . . . By 1918 the former faction triumphed, and the *Arbeter Ring* launched a network of Yiddish schools for children . . . [in] New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Milwaukee, Newark, Baltimore, Rochester, Denver and elsewhere . . . By [1920] . . . the number had climbed to thirty and to forty-seven in 1922."

WHICH HOLIDAYS? According to Irving Howe's *World of Our Fathers* (1976), the "schedule of holidays established by the Workmen's Circle's schools in 1919 . . . include[d] Passover . . . May 1, Paris Commune Day, July 4, and the anniversary of the Russian Revolution (whichever Russian Revolution the local school preferred, February or October)." Howe continues: "[A]s first conceived, these schools were supposed not only to keep alive the ideas of secular radicalism but also to ward off the tide of Americanization threatening to wash away Yiddish culture. . . . Twenty years after their inception . . . a Yiddish educator [Shlomo Berkowitch] would write: 'We thought we could raise our children according to our spirit, and through our schools insulate them . . . Today we know that we cannot control the intellectual development of our children, and that both the home and community have a much greater impact on their education than we do.' [Still] the Yiddishists . . . kept on with their work, determined to leave behind a few young people who would love their language and remember their ways."

SHULE STATISTICS: According to Morris U. Schappes' *A Pictorial History of the Jews in the United States* (supplement, 1965), by 1965 the Workmen's Circle was sponsoring some 65 *shuln*, including seven *mittshuln*, with a total of 3,500 students. The Service Bureau for Jewish Education, inheritor of the JPFO system, sponsored some 70 schools, including three *mittshuln*, with 4,500 students. The Labor Zionist Alliance had 18 *shuln*, three all-day kindergartens, four *mittshuln* and one day school,

servicing a total of 3,000 students. The Sholem Aleichem Folks Institute operated sixteen schools, including one *mittshul*, with 950 students in total. "Apparent in all," wrote Schappes, ". . . is a search for the humanist content in Jewish history and culture, religious as well as secular."



Emma (right), the main character in Mayn Yiddish Bukh (*My Yiddish Book*), textbook of the JPFO shuln, illustrated by Morris Pas.

pers) were occasions for coffee, cake, raffles and a literary lecture by the *lerer*. Plans also had to be formulated for periodic *simkhes* (celebrations) of Jewish and secular holidays, reflecting the ideological bent of the parent organization. The *kontsertn* (concerts) saw the children, attired in costumes made by parents and grandparents, in dances, playlets, choral songs and instrumental performances. Families were involved in the hubbub of setting up chairs, decorating the hall, preparing stage props, preparing refreshments. The *lerer* was the chief impresario. What joy, *kveln* and *nakhes* were experienced by the *mames, tates, bobes* and *zeydes!*

A teacher's day did not end with classes, but continued into evening sessions with di farvaltung, the parents' organization. Here the lerer became the adult educator leading discussions on current Jewish affairs, reading from literary works, reviewing the Yiddish dramas being performed on Second Avenue. There were also practical matters: school budgets, teachers' salaries, rent, tuition, scholarships, canvassing for new students, and raising additional funds to rescue the shule from chronic financial emergencies.

Beyond the elementary *shuln* was the high school, the *mittshul*. This was usually centrally located to draw youth from all the Jewish neighborhoods of the city. The curriculum was departmentalized, with different teachers specializing in Yiddish composition, Jewish history, political science, Yiddish literature, Hebrew elements in Yiddish, labor history, and socialist thought. For adolescents, *mittshul* was the center of Jewish consciousness. Beyond the humorous and poignant works of Sholem Aleichem and Peretz, one read and

discussed contemporary Yiddish writers and poets and heard special lectures by outstanding Jewish personalities. Informal discussions beyond the classroom ranged to William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway, Theodore Dreiser and T.S. Eliot.

Political topics for student discussion included the New Deal, socialism, communism, unemployment and public housing. The *mitlshul* also had drama classes, choruses and dance groups at a fairly high artistic level, led by teachers with outstanding reputations in their artistic fields. Graduation ceremonies were often part of a citywide celebration in a large hall that included extensive pageants staged by the *mitlshulniks*.

The social mobility of shule graduates, the flight to the suburbs, the decline of the Yiddish-speaking home, the establishment of the State of Israel, and competition from synagogues created profound changes and new problems for the *shuln*. In some instances, the secular Jewish curriculum was altered to include preparation for *bar* and *bas mitsve*. Yiddish-English bilingualism replaced Yiddish-only instruction. Course content came to include the Holocaust, the struggles of Soviet Jews for emigration and cultural survival, and the right of Israel to exist in peace and security.

The Labor Zionist emphasis on *aliyah* ended its *shule* movement. The Sholem Aleichem Folks Institute gave up its *shuln* — and, in 1979, its beloved Camp Boiberik. A few *shuln* associated with the defunct JPFO remain in place today. Most remaining *shuln* today are associated with the Workmen's Circle, which is attempting, with some notable successes, to revive the *shule* movement for a new generation. ■

WORKMEN'S CIRCLE AND INDEPENDENT SHULN TODAY

Today, in the United States, there are nine Workmen's Circle *shuln* spread across the Northeast and Midwest — two each in Manhattan and New Jersey as well as *shuln* on Long Island, Westchester, Boston, Detroit and Cleveland. Some 400 students attend *shule* weekly; the Boston *shule's* 95 students meet twice a month. The Workmen's Circle/*Arbeter Ring* (WCA/R) *shuln* offer a secular Jewish education with a curriculum focusing on Yiddish culture, Jewish holidays and history and social justice. While many of the students come from secular families unaffiliated with synagogues, a number are ritually observant and come to the *shuln* for the unique *Yiddishkayt* curriculum, which offers elements of Yiddish literacy through language, song and literature, and for a link to the rich heritage of East European Jewry.

A *shule* education culminates in a collective *bar/bas mitsve* ceremony/class graduation, as well as individual *bar/bas mitsve* celebrations. Students spend their last year exploring their own Jewish identity through individual research projects. Some *shuln* develop teen groups that remain active in social justice causes, and some *shule* graduates go on to become *shule* teachers. In some *shuln*, adults have the opportunity, while children are in class, to explore a variety of Jewish themes as well as social issues on a regular basis. *Shule* families celebrate major Jewish holidays as a community, often bringing together three and four generations at *shule* seders, at Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur commemorations, in observance of Holocaust memorials, and in support of current social issues and social justice campaigns. This year, Manhattan's Westside Yiddish Cultural School's *gimel* class, with their teacher Sarah Gordon (herself a *shule* alumna), organized the *shule's* participation in AIDS Walk New York (pictured on the cover of this issue of JEWISH CURRENTS) and raised some \$3,000 for AIDS services and research. Boston's *shule* teen group organizes an annual anti-sweatshop action that brings out hundreds of protesters.

To enhance the *shule's* capacity to deliver quality Jewish education, the WC/AR Center for Cultural Jewish life holds twice-yearly conferences where parents, teachers, and *shule* leaders work to develop better outreach, curriculum, and effective pedagogy. Rich relationships among "sister *shuln*" also develop from these contacts. The farthest-flung relationship among *shuln* is now the connection between the Midtown *shule* in Manhattan and a secular Jewish Sunday school in Saint Petersburg, Russia.

Three of the longest-lived *shuln* now in operation, independent of the Workmen's Circle, are the Sholem Community in Los Angeles, founded more than 50 years ago; the *shule* of the 80-year-old Morris Winchevsky Center in Toronto; and the Jewish Children's Folkshul in Philadelphia, founded in 1962.

Lebn zol di yidishe shul — long live the Yiddish *shule!*

—Nikolai Borodulin and Adrienne Cooper

Nurturing Holocaust Studies in the Former Soviet Union

A Conversation with Ilya Altman, Director of the Center for Holocaust Research and Education in Moscow

THE JEWISH COMMUNITY Development Fund (JCDF), a project of the American Jewish World Service, has helped to fund and nurture grassroots Jewish cultural projects in the former Soviet Union for the past twelve years. [See our interview with JCDF founder Martin Horowitz in our July-August, 2004 issue. —*Ed.*] Among those projects is the Center for Holocaust Research and Education, founded in Moscow in 1992 as an arm of the Russian Holocaust Foundation — both headed by Dr. Ilya Altman.

Altman, age 50, and his colleagues are largely responsible for introducing Holocaust curricula in Russian secondary schools and universities. The Center has published books, monographs and teaching aids, and founded a Library of the Holocaust in Russia, consisting of catalogues, exhibitions, memoirs and documents for classroom use. Altman has also written the first university textbook on the subject, based on his research in the previously inaccessible Russian archives.

In a presentation at the American Jewish World Service in March, Dr. Altman observed that “about three million, half of all Jews killed in the Holocaust, were in the territory of the Soviet Union,” which suffered four million additional civilian casualties at Nazi hands and a total of 27 million war dead. Yet of the thirty different high school history textbooks the Center has examined, “only seven mention the word ‘Holocaust’ or describe what happened to the Jews of Europe, including on Soviet territory.”



Nazi killing squad in the Soviet Union (Yad Vashem photo)

The Center for Holocaust Research and Education has been vigorously seeking to change the status quo through outreach to writers, publishers, officials and educators and by translating European books and publishing its own materials. With the support of Yad Vashem, the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture and other organizations, the Center has set up seminars for teachers from Russia, Ukraine and Belorussia and sponsored writing competitions for school children, for university students and for educators, drawing up to 2,500 entries at a time. In the process, the Center has unearthed many testimonies about the Holocaust on

Soviet soil.

JEWISH CURRENTS Editorial Board member Nikolai (Kolya) Borodulin joined several reporters in interviewing Dr. Altman following his lecture. Kolya is the assistant director of the Workmen’s Circle’s Center for Jewish Cultural Life in New York and a master Yiddish teacher who grew up in Birobidzhan.

JEWISH CURRENTS: What is the main goal of your work?

ILYA ALTMAN: First, to establish a state Holocaust museum as an educational center. This is a goal we have not yet reached, although in 1998 we did establish in the center of Mos-

cow a memorial synagogue with a large exhibition about the history of Jews and the Holocaust. President Yeltsin took part in the opening ceremony of this synagogue, and during his 2003 meeting with Ariel Sharon, President Putin declared that it will be a permanent exhibition.

Second, we seek to introduce the subject to schools and universities. We published our own book, in 25,000 copies — but that is nothing for Russia, with 200,000 secondary schools. Still, there are now between three and four thousand schools that have the Holocaust in their curricula. About 10 percent of students now know what “the Holocaust” means.

JC: Why is this there so much ignorance about this subject in a country that is so conscious of the sufferings of World War II?

IA: The Russians rightly consider their suffering in the war to be much greater than the suffering of other European countries, hence, there is a tendency to minimize the Holocaust because they feel that they lived through their own holocaust.

Every person in Russia knows, many in a very personal way, about the 27 million Soviet war dead. More rarely mentioned are the seven million civilians killed by the Nazis during the war, though this number is now appearing in some books. But recognizing the three million Jews among these seven million civilians has been very difficult for our pedagogical system, which is very bureaucratic. During Soviet times, the Jews were not identified as a special group of Nazi victims. So there exist today generations of people — people who are not anti-Semites — who think only of Russians and Slavs as Nazism’s main victims. It is very difficult to change public memory.

Our Center was the first Russian organization to organize events for Yom HaShoah, Holocaust Memorial Day, which we have done since 1992. We do it not as a “Jewish event” but as a public event. More than a thousand people are invited — including teachers, students, and politicians. It was very significant that last April the Russian Orthodox Patriarch Alexei sent a special letter to this gathering about the necessity of remembering the Holocaust. What I cannot understand is that only one Russian Jewish newspaper published any part of the text, and only one non-Jewish newspaper mentioned it.

JC: What turned you to focus on this issue in your work?

IA: At the end of the 1980s, I successfully located in the State Archives of the Russian Federation the full text of the *Black Book*, which everyone thought had been destroyed. At the time, I was an historian at the Russian State University for the Humanities, with my own television program, a certain amount of success — but this discovery made me change my life. The *Black Book* is a collection of eyewitness accounts of Nazi genocide against Jews on Soviet territory. It provided evidence for two trials in Nuremberg. It was published in America in 1946 as a very interesting mutual project between Soviet organizations and American Jewish groups, but it was suppressed in the Soviet Union.

One of the reasons for this is that the *Black Book* goes into detail about who actually killed Jews. It was not only Germans who were involved in the Holocaust on Soviet territory. Soviet prosecutors would use this information against, for example, Baltic state nationalists, or Ukrainian nationalists, but Russian collaborators

would not be mentioned. Neither would the eighty million Soviet people who lived under the Nazi regime.

JC: What was the Russian response to the worldwide observance of the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz by the Red Army last January 27th?

IA: Five or ten years ago, the date was never mentioned. This year, because Putin visited Auschwitz and spoke of anti-Semitism in Russia today, there was some recognition.

Some years ago, we published the memoir of General Vassili Petrenko, who liberated Auschwitz, under the title *Before and After Auschwitz*. During the war, he said, he didn’t know that Auschwitz existed. Even in October, 1944, when Stalin was planning the campaign in Poland in the area of Auschwitz, he did not mention any word about the concentration camp to the chief military commander! Yet Auschwitz was mentioned in SS documents captured in August when Maidanek was liberated. The information appeared in Russian newspapers. Unfortunately, it was not a priority for Stalin to liberate concentration camps. It was only when Field Marshall Ivan Konev received information on January 25th about a big concentration camp that he ordered 1,000 tanks from the German territory near Oder to change direction. This saved the last seven thousand or so prisoners of Auschwitz from being killed.

Auschwitz, of course, was in Poland. But there are hundreds of places in Russia itself that are linked to the Holocaust, hundreds of sites that each saw tens of thousands of Jews killed. Right now there exist only twenty-three monuments at such sites, so there is a major opportunity

for young people to identify these places and set up monuments.

I will give you examples. For five years in a row, we held a children's conference in the Brest-Litovsk fortress — a sacred place for the Soviet people, where many soldiers gave their lives defending the border against the Nazi invasion on June 22, 1941. We brought our conference participants to a site where seventy-four members of a single Jewish family were killed during the war. Children from a nearby village joined us, and we all paid tribute to the Jews who were killed there.

Then there is a place that almost everyone in the Jewish world knows about, Lubavitch, where the original Lubavitcher hasidic rebbe was born and lived, near Smolensk. There is a museum there devoted to the rebbe and his movement, but almost nobody knows that exactly five hundred meters from the museum is a grave with no words or signs. More than five hundred Jews, killed in the fall of 1941, lie in this grave. Each year we bring students from Germany and Austria, together with students from Moscow, to view this site.

JC: What is the status of Holocaust denial in Russia?

IA: In my opinion, Moscow has become a worldwide center of Holocaust denial. Jurgen Graf, the Swiss Holocaust denier, is living now in Russia and has visited Moscow, as has David Duke, the American racist leader. One of Graf's books was published, 200,000 copies, and made widely available in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Unfortunately, too, many university teachers today get most of their information about the Holocaust from a Holocaust-denial website and begin to think, "Maybe the deniers are right."

JC: What is the situation with anti-Semitism in Russia? Are you afraid to run a Jewish organization?

IA: The Center for Holocaust Research and Education is not a Jewish organization. In our activities, we invite all people — it doesn't matter who is Jewish and who is not. We teach about the Holocaust as part of Russia history, European history, international history. This was reinforced by the Swedish teachers who came to educate our teachers about the Holocaust, which showed vividly to our bureaucrats that the Holocaust is not only a Jewish subject. Yet the focus of the Swedish educators was not tolerance, not genocide as a whole, but solely the Holocaust. They provided their services to more than a thousand teachers from forty regions of Russia.

Still, in the eyes of the anti-Semites, we are a Jewish organization. On November 10th last year, the anniversary of *Kristalnacht*, a swastika appeared on our building with the words, "Holocaust is a big lie." We caught on camera a man of about 40 preparing the swastika, and we sent our information to the Moscow Bureau for Human Rights and press releases to all the Jewish newspapers. It was included in a report about anti-Semitic incidents, but it was not mentioned in any article.

Many of your readers have probably heard about the anti-Semitic letter signed initially by nineteen members of the Russian Duma. When the letter was published, it had more than 500 signatures; when they put it on the Internet, it will be signed by thousands. Interestingly the letter was published exactly one hundred years after the Black Hundreds, the notorious anti-Semitic organization of tsarist times, appeared in Russia.

After this letter appeared, the editor of the Moscow *Evreiskaya Gazeta*, Tankred Galenpolskii, wrote to President Putin and mentioned that there were 250,000 Jews who had made their choice to stay in Russia, and that these kinds of anti-Semitic letters could change the situation. Of course, we are living in a country where one person decides everything — so Galenpolskii sent his protest not to the Duma, but directly to Putin, in order to put a stop to this outburst.

Russian anti-Semitism has deep roots, but at the same time, it's not as dangerous as is often portrayed in the press. When one journalist came to me and told me that he saw my name and home address on the website of one of the anti-Semitic organizations, he asked if I was afraid. I don't think about it, and I'm not afraid.

JC: How is the economic situation in Russia affecting Jews?

IA: The situation is difficult for Jews and for everyone. Many old people come to our discussion club at the Center. We offer tea and something to eat — and I have seen that, for some of them, this was very important as a supplement to their modest food ration. For my own children, who have graduated from university, it is very difficult to get a good job. I don't think the economic situation is getting better. With oil prices jumping so high, Russia, which possesses huge oil resources, has an advantage, but it doesn't use this advantage to make the living conditions of its population any better. An enormous portion of Russia's people lives in poverty. It is painful to observe the country, which played the major role in the victory over the Nazis, permitting its own people, including the war veterans, to become paupers. ■



OUR SECULAR JEWISH HERITAGE

YANKL STILLMAN

Superstitions Among Our Ancestors

SUPERSTITIOUS BELIEF has not played a significant role in conventional rabbinic Judaism, but in the minds of the mass of Eastern European Jews from the 17th century to as late as the early 20th century, extreme elements of *kabbalah* (Jewish mysticism) penetrated deeply. They mixed with folk beliefs to produce, in the words of literary critic and historian Meir Wiener (1893-1941), “air so filled with *rukhes* (spirits), *shedydim* (devils), *leytsim* (mocking demons), *klipes* (female demons), dead souls, *mashkhisim* (destructive demons), *melokhim* (angels), *dybukim* (spirits that take possession of people), [and] *gilgulim* (reincarnated spirits) that there was no room on earth to drop a needle in.”

In *On the History of Yiddish Literature in the 19th Century*, a seminal two-volume set in Yiddish, Wiener attributes to Tsvi-Hirsh Koidanover, a rabbi and kabbalist who died in 1712, the belief “that 1500 kinds of spirits and devils could be found in every menstruating woman. Crazy conceptions of the past and of the future,” Wiener continues, “and of punishment and reward in the ‘next world’ squeezed and frightened the plain person.” These are only some of the many spirits and demons in Jewish folklore. The fact that they are identified and classified, with names for each of them, is proof enough of their prevalence in Jewish culture.

Philologist Max Weinreich (1894-1969), a founder of the YIVO, quotes part of a verse by S. An-sky (1863-

1920), author of the play, *The Dybuk*, in a collection published in 1922. Before you read it, I will add several other classes of demons to those listed by Wiener above: *mazikim* (injurers), *yeytser-hores* (evil inclinations), *mekatreygim* (accusers), *lantukher* (gnomes), *kundeysim* (mischievous imps).

An-sky’s verse reads as follows (with no attempt on my part to duplicate, in translation, its rhyme or rhythm:

“If, God forbid, it will be midnight

And roosters will crow,

Then who will come a-flying?

Shedim, *leytsim*, and *mazikim*,

Yoitzer-hores, *mekatreygim*,

Rukhes, *lantukher*, *kundeysim*

To give an account and report

To their master Ashmeday. . . .” (Ashmeday is Hebrew for Asmodeus, king of demons in Jewish legend.)

Weinreich goes on to deal with the derivation of each of these names. For example, he shows that *mekatreygim* comes from the same Greek stem as “category,” which, in Greek, means “to accuse.” *Kundeysim* comes from a

Polish word for sheepdog or court-dog, but over time acquired the meaning, “vile creature.” Weinreich was fascinated by the little devil *lantukh* — a friendly devil who loves to play tricks and laugh at the victims. He gathered several stories about *lantukher*. One is about an ascetic scholar who was staying up late to study. After a while, wrestling with sleepiness, he said to himself, “Wouldn’t it be nice to be able to sniff some snuff now,” and before he knew it, a pinch of snuff appeared before his eyes, served on something red. He looked closely



and saw that it was a tongue stuck in through a window and long enough to reach him. On the end of it was the pinch of snuff. A *lantukh* had done him a favor.

Another *lantukh* story from Weinreich: A village Jew was driving to town to attend penitential prayer services (*slikhot*) just after Rosh Hashana. The nights at this time of year were very dark and rainy, and the dirt road was very muddy, so that his little horse could barely lift his legs out of the mud. Suddenly, the man heard the lowing of a calf at the side of the road. He got off his wagon

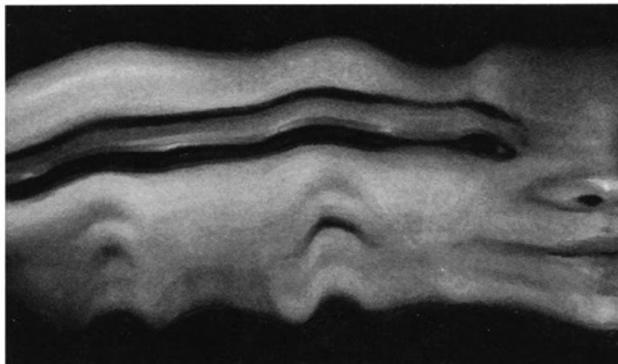
Illustrations by Lawrence Bush

and sank into mud up to his knees. He felt around and found a calf tied up. He carried the calf back to the wagon — amazed, all the while, by its heaviness. He drove off thinking that God had sent him an expensive gift — probably some drunk-en peasant had lost it on his way to town. Just when the wagon was nearing town, the calf laughed loudly in a human voice, jumped off the wagon and disappeared. It was a *lantukh* that had played a trick on the village Jew.

Here is a *lets* (singular of *leytsim*) story from Weinreich. One winter night, a shoemaker got up very early to get his wares ready for the market. He sat working, and near him lay a pile of finished shoes. Suddenly someone stuck his tongue in through the window. It was so long that it reached to the shoemaker. He had never seen a tongue this long, so he took his sharp knife and cut the end off it. He thought the owner of the tongue would run away, but no! The tongue came right back with a new end. The shoemaker was intrigued, so took his knife and cut the end off again. The more times he cut, the thicker was the tongue that the unknown creature stuck in. The game continued until morning.

When the dawn's light came in, the shoemaker saw his calamity. He had not been cutting off the ends of a tongue but the ends of his shoes! This trick was played by a *lets*. *Leytsim* lived in attics, in cellars or in sheds and they loved to make trouble. The khasidic *rebbe*s got after them and chased them all into the forest.

A dybuk visits mostly atheists and women who leave their houses at night without an apron. It is particularly dangerous for a woman to do this *erev shabes* (the evening before the sabbath). A *dybuk* is the soul of a person who has unfinished business involving injustice in this world at the time of death. The soul can enter the body of a living person who has wronged it. It can be driven out of the body (exorcised) by a khasidic wonder-worker, a *tsadik*. The *dybuk* prefers to leave through the throat or the nose, but the *tsadik* can command it to leave in the form of a ring through the little finger or the little toe. It then leaves the house through a window, which shatters.



In 1928, Khayim Khiyes (?-1941), a research associate at the YIVO in Vilna, published an article in Yiddish entitled, “Beliefs and Customs Dealing with Death.” He identified a number of these and proceeded to categorize them systematically. Major categories included: words or phrases dealing with illness or death; premonitions of death; caring for the corpse; the funeral; the grave; unnatural death; the mourner; restless spirits. Here are some of his specific examples:

Words or phrases dealing with death: *nisbakesh vern* (to be invited to heaven); *nistalek vern* (to expire); instead of *beys eylom*, (cemetery), *beys khayim* (house of the living); instead of *mes* (corpse), *bar minen* (remains).

Khiyes gathered proverbs and practices in different towns:

- When you remember death, you’re not sure about your life.
- *Moshiakh* (the messiah) will kill the angel of death.
- When a person falls asleep, his soul flies up to heaven where it inscribes, with the little finger of the right hand, the sins of the person into the Book of Sins. When the soul returns, the person wakes up.
- The soul of a person is the pupil of his eye. The little people in the pupil of the eye constitute the soul. (Interestingly, Mendele Moykher Sforim used this concept in his first novel, *Dos Kleyne Mentshele* [The Little Man].)

Premonitions of death:

- When a dog howls, it’s a bad sign; one spits three times — “tfu, tfu, tfu, may it be on your head.”
- When dogs howl, it’s a sign that the angel of death is in town, and folks turn their shoes, or a glass, upside down.
- A dog is the first to recognize the onset of a misfortune, and he howls because he has seen the angel of death.

Overcoming fear: Generally, the attempt is to transfer the fear onto another creature.

- If you have a sudden fright, spit three times and

say, "I don't care," or raise your upper eyelid.

- If dogs and cats howl in the house of a sick person, that person will die.

- If a crow sits on your roof, it's a bad sign.

- If cows moo, they are predicting a fire.

- When a candle goes out, a soul expires; that's why you're not supposed to blow out a *shabes* candle.

- Never tease your shadow. It may return to haunt you at night.

- If you don't see your shadow on Yom Kippur night, it's a sign that you will die that year.

- If a dead person appears in a dream and takes something from your house, it's a sign of death or a great calamity. If, on the other hand, a dead person brings something and the living person accepts it, it's a sign that the person will live.

- To prevent bad dreams, a religious book should be placed under the person's head.

The death agony:

- If the sick person turns towards the wall, it's a bad sign.

- If the sick person complains of a sore throat or choking, it's a bad sign. If the person turns toward the wall, it means the end is near.

- If the sick person rubs or picks his/her nose or bites his/her nails, it's a sign that the person will recover.

- If someone recovers from an illness, people say that the dead have interceded or that the person's sins have been forgiven.

- One must not sew new clothes for a sick person because they may be mistaken for shrouds.

The moment of death

- To tell if a person has died, a feather or mirror is placed at the nostrils. The feather is supposed to tell if the soul has left yet.

- Right after a person has died, if there are many people in the house, they line up in two rows to make a passage for the angel of death, as for a bride.

- A person who does not want to leave this world dies with eyes open. To reconcile the soul, the eyes must be closed so that they may not cast a look on anyone in the house. The same for the mouth.

- The more candles placed around a corpse, the better it is for him or her. That is why candles should not be placed near a living person's head.

- While a corpse is lying on the ground, everyone

comes over to beg his or her pardon — not only relatives, but neighbors also and anyone who has quarreled with the person while alive.

- When a person dies, we stop the clock.

- If a pregnant woman looks at a corpse, she will get jaundice.

The funeral

- When a corpse is being conveyed, its feet must always point toward the cemetery.

- Children may not follow after their father. They are escorted to the burial site before the corpse arrives. However, they are permitted to follow after their mother.

- For a poor person, the beadles are the pallbearers. When a rich person's corpse is being conveyed, there is a lot of competition for the pallbearing. When a very honorable person's corpse is being conveyed, the hearse is stopped and the family pulls it.

- The corpse hears everything until the coffin is covered with dirt. Until the third shovelful has landed, the corpse doesn't believe he or she has actually died.

- Before entering the cemetery, everyone watches to see if the horses have stopped. If they have, it's a sign that devils will not permit the hearse into the cemetery.

The above constitutes only a fraction of the superstitions connected with death that are listed by Khiyes. These superstitions were not necessarily prevalent all over the old Pale of Settlement (the zone of the tsarist empire where Jews were permitted to live); Khiyes actually gives the names of the towns where each superstition prevails. His article is a goldmine of information that gives us a feel for how our ancestors lived and thought — and the primitivity that prevailed, particularly regarding health and illness. ■

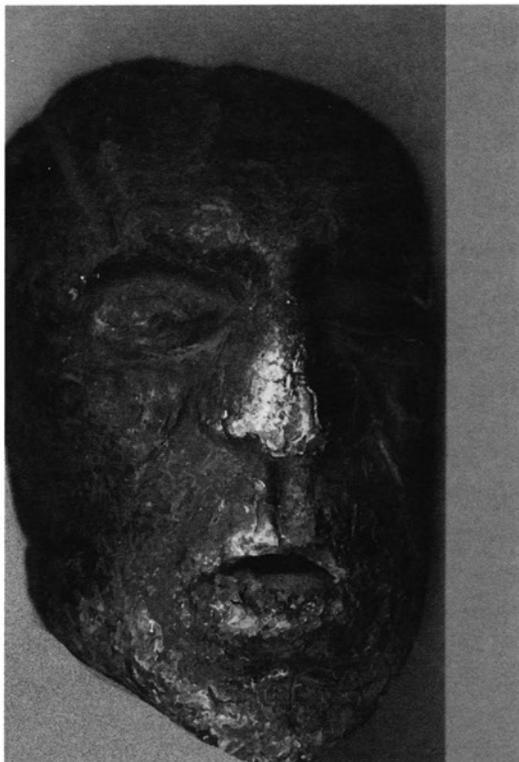
*New Secular Jewish communities now forming
in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
and the Tri-Valley area in Northern California.
If you or someone you know
might be interested, please call the Congress of
Secular Jewish Organizations:
Voice of Cultural Jews
at 866-333-CSJO (2756).*

MAME-
LOSHN

אבא

Three Poems by Menahem Stern

TRANSLATION BY BARNETT ZUMOFF



MENAHM STERN of New York has been contributing poetry and prose to the *Algemeiner Zhurnal* for more than twenty years. He is the author of four books, two in Yiddish and two in English.

BARNETT ZUMOFF of our Editorial Board is a prolific translator of Yiddish literature, with eight published volumes and a ninth in the works. A former president of the Workmen's Circle, he serves as professor of medicine at Albert Einstein's College of Medicine in New York.

PRAYER FOR YIDDISH

Shield, O God, the Yiddish words
that share our wandering and need,
like our poor, hard-earned bread,
in the face of ridicule
by cheap little street-urchins
and blasphemy by learned men
in the name of our holy Torah.
Watch over the shamed letters and words.
Restore the poets and poems
that are wandering in the shadowy depths
under their harsh sentence.
May our ears yet hear one day
the revived sound of Yiddish
on the mountains and in the valleys
of the new Zion and the Diaspora.

OLD RIVER

I'm a tired old river.
I bear on my surface
the darkness of heavy, crumbling bridges
and the sorrow of smoky port cities.
The bright clouds and high, wise mountains
that I encounter along my way
sneer at me.
My once clear and rushing waters
have polished rocky deserts and marked the shores,
like sheets of papyrus,
with lasting hieroglyphics.
Now they moan and wail
all along the shore's rocky cliffs.

LETTERS

I'm afraid of letters
that lie for long days and nights
in quiet, shadowy corners
of locked hotel-rooms,
and no one comes
to ask about them
and no hand reaches out
to open the old, dusty envelopes.

Who knows the dark meaning of words
that are written on old, yellowed letter-paper
and bring a rush of fear to relatives and friends?

תפילה פֿאַרן ייִדישן וואָרט

באַשירעם גאָט דאָס ייִדישע וואָרט
וואָס טיילט אונדזער וואַנדער און נויט
ווי דאָס אָרימע, שווער-פֿאַרהאַרעוועטע ברויט,
קעגן שפּאָט און געלאַך
פֿון ביליקן גאַסן-יונג
און דעם וויל-קענערס לעסטערונג
אין נאָמען פֿון די בלעטער פֿון תּני"ך.
וואָך איבער די פֿאַרשעמטע אותיות און ווערטער.
ריכט אויף שעפֿער און ליד
וואָס בלאַנקען אין שאַטנדיקן נידער פֿון גזר-דין.
אַז אונדזערע אויערן זאָלן נאָך פֿאַרנעמען
דעם אויפֿגעלעבטן ייִדיש-קלאַנג
אויף די בערג און טאָלן
פֿון באַנייטן ציון ובתּפֿוצות הגולה.

אַלטער טייַך

כ״בין אַ מידער אַלטער טייַך.
כ״טראָג אויף מיין פֿלאַך
דעם טונקל פֿון שווערע, קרישלענדיקע בריקן
און דעם טרויער פֿון רויכיקע פֿאַרט-שטעט.
די העלע וואָלקנס און הויכע, חכמהדיקע בערג
וואָס איך באַגעגן אויפֿן וועג - שפּאַטן פֿון מיר.
מינע אַמאָל קלאַרע, יאָגנדיקע וואַסערן
האַבן שטייניקן מדבר געשליפֿן,
און די בערג ווי פֿאַפּירוסן
פֿאַרצייכנט מיט דויערנדיקע העראַגליפֿן.
היינט פּלעסקען זיי מיט קראַנקן לאַמענט
לענגוויס ברעגס פֿעלזיקע ווענט.

בריוו

כ״האַב מורא פֿאַר בריוו
וואָס ליגן לאַנגע טעג און נעכט
אין שטילע, שאַטנדיקע ווינקלען
פֿון אָפּגעשלאָסענעם האַטעל-צימער
און קיינער קומט נישט
זיך פֿרעגן וועגן זיי
און קיין האַנט שטרעקט זיך נישט אויס
צו עפֿענען די אַלטע, שטויביקע קאַנווערטן.
ווער ווייסט דעם טונקעלן מיין פֿון ווערטער
וואָס זיינען געשריבן אויף אַלטן, פֿאַרגעלבטן בריוו-פּאַפּיר
וואָס יאָגן אָן אַ פּחד אויף קרובֿים און פֿריינט?

TFILE FARN YDISHN VORT

Bashirem got dos yidische vort
vos teylt undzer vander un noyt
vi dos orime, shver-farhorevete broyt,
kegn shpot un gelakh
fun bilikn gasn-yung
un dem voyl-keners lesterung
in nomen fun di bleter fun tanakh.
Vakh iber di farshemte oysyes un verter.
Rikht oyf shefer un lid
vos blonken in shotndikn nider fun gzar-din,
az undzere oyern zoln nokh farnemen
dem oyfgelebtn yidish-klang
oyf di berg un toln
fun banaytn tsion ub'tfutses hagoyle.

ALTER TAYKH

Kh'bin a mider, alter taykh.
Kh'trog oyf mayn flakh
dem tunkl fun shverer, krishlendike brikn
in dem troyer fun roykhike port-shtet.
Di hele volkns un hoykhe, khokhmedike berg
vos ikh bagegn oyfn veg
shpotn fun mir.
Mayne amol klore, yogndike vasern
hobn shteynike midbor geshliffn,
un di bregn vi papirosn
fartseykhnt mit doyerndike heroglifn.
Haynt plesken zey mit krankn lament
lengoys bregts felzike vent.

BRIV

Kh'hob moyre far briv
vos lign lange teg un nekht
in shtile, shotndike vinklen
fun opgeschlosnem hotel-tsimer
un keyner kumt nisht
zikh fregn vegn zey
un keyn hant shtrekt zikh nisht oys
tsu efenen di alte, shtoybike convertn.
Ver veyst dem tunkeln meyn fun verter
vos zaynen geshribn oyf altn, fargelbtn briv-papir
vos vogt a pakhad oyf kroyvim un fraynd?

Ariel Sharon: Old Warrior, New Peacemaker?

Two Biographies Present a Complex Portrait

RALPH SELIGER

ARIEL SHARON was the caretaker head of a weak opposition party after Benjamin Netanyahu's defeat by Ehud Barak in 1999. Two years later, following Barak's political collapse in tandem with the peace process, Sharon was overwhelmingly elected as prime minister — and again in 2002.

This unexpected turn in Sharon's career is the central subject of two biographical books that are opposites in most ways. *Sharon: Israel's Warrior-Politician* is meticulously researched and documented, calm and neutral in tone. It is written by two Chicago-based American writers with no prior professional background involving Israel, in collaboration with an Israeli-American art historian who has no experience in writing about Israeli politics. *Politicide: Ariel Sharon's War Against the Palestinians* contains no notes documenting research and is impassioned and political to the point of being an ideological screed. It is written by a Hebrew University sociologist deeply versed in the evolution of both Israeli and Palestinian societies.

Ariel Scheinerman was born in 1928 into a family of cooperative farmers (*moshavniks*) on the Plain of Sharon northeast of Tel Aviv. Scheinerman took the name Sharon for himself after the 1948 war of independence, in which he served as a company commander and survived a nearly fatal wound.

In 1953, Sharon was appointed to organize a commando battalion, Unit 101, to stem murderous infiltrations along Israel's long and porous borders with Jordan's West Bank and



Reviewed in this essay:

Sharon: Israel's Warrior-Politician, by Anita Miller, Jordan Miller and Sigalit Zitouni. Academy Chicago Publishers and Olive Publishing, 2002, 613 pages, indexed.

Politicide: Ariel Sharon's War Against the Palestinians, by Baruch Kimmerling. Verso, 2003, 234 pages, indexed.

the Egyptian-occupied Gaza Strip that took over five hundred Israeli civilian lives from 1949 to 1953. In response to the murder of a mother and her two young children in a border village, Unit 101 launched a raid on the neighboring West Bank Jordanian village of Kibya. The plan was to destroy houses, but sixty-nine Arab civilians were reported killed when their homes were blown up in the night. Baruch Kimmerling reports that when the raid was investigated, Sharon's men denied his testimony that he had ordered them to warn villagers to leave their houses. Sharon was protected, however, by Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, who took a liking to this vigorous young sabra as an effective military commander, nominally loyal to Ben-Gurion's Mapai (Labor Zionist) party.

Sharon has continued to this day to be associated with controversial actions, often marked by heavy loss of life. Another such event occurred

during the 1956 Sinai war, when Sharon is widely regarded to have gone beyond his orders in initiating a tough firefight with Egyptian forces in the Mitla Pass. His paratroopers extricated themselves from an ambush, but not before suffering thirty-eight killed and 120 wounded. Sharon's reputation was tarnished, but his career survived an inconclusive post-war inquiry.

In 1967, he commanded one of Israel's three armored thrusts into the Sinai. In October, 1973, Israeli forces recovering from the initial Egyptian offensive across the Suez Canal rallied under the separate commands of Ariel Sharon and Avraham Adan. Sharon is given credit for exploiting an unguarded seam between the Egyptian Second and Third Armies, which enabled the Israelis to counterattack across the Suez to within 60 miles of Cairo and effectively surround the Third Army. Kimmerling, however, cannot bring himself even to grudgingly acknowledge Sharon's talents as a military tactician. He relentlessly accuses Sharon of fighting one war with the Egyp-

RALPH SELIGER, a member of our Editorial Advisory Council, is a vice president of Meretz USA and editor of its publication, Israel Horizons.

tians and a second against General Adan and the army's general staff in pursuit of personal glory and political ambition and at the expense of unnecessary casualties and risk to his men.

Sharon entered politics in the early 1970s at the head of his own party, after exploring his options. His explorations included a discussion with a leader of the left-wing Mapam. "He's not a socialist," was the dismissive Mapam verdict. During Yitzhak Rabin's first stint as prime minister in the 1970s, Sharon served him as a military advisor before joining with Rabin's right-wing successor, Menachem Begin, to become a leading figure in Likud.

Sharon is infamous for his orchestration of the Lebanon war as Begin's minister of defense (Sharon defied Cabinet instructions not to move beyond twenty-five miles north of the border), for his indirect complicity in the slaughter of 800 Palestinians by Lebanese militiamen at Sabra and Shatilla, and for his single-minded efforts, as minister of agriculture and later as minister of infrastructure, to expand Jewish settlements on occupied Palestinian land.

Kimmerling coins the word "politicide" to describe Sharon's presumed purpose to kill any prospect of a Palestinian state. His book went to press before Ariel Sharon spoke out against "occupation" and for a Palestinian state, but it's doubtful that the author has changed his appraisal of Sharon's intentions. Kimmerling's book also has some mischaracterizations that provoked doubts, in this reviewer, about his political judgments. For example, he describes Rabin's first coalition government in 1992 as a minority government of Labor and Meretz (it was

GETTING IT TOGETHER

Reports from Left Field

a majority government that included the populist, ultra-Orthodox Shas). In this 2003 book he describes Meretz as it was in 1992, a coalition of three small dovish parties, rather than the unified entity it became in 1997. He criticizes the Zionist left, particularly Meretz (now Yahad), which he describes as "ruled by Yossi Sarid with an iron fist." Sarid can be brutal in his sarcasm, but the notion is ludicrous that Meretz could be dominated as if by Stalin or Tammany Hall.

During Sharon's first term as prime minister, from 2001 until 2003, Yossi Sarid, as head of the largest party not in the government, was the official leader of the parliamentary opposition. Kimmerling considers Sarid to have been ineffective because he did not accuse Sharon of "war crimes" and refrained from supporting conscientious objectors within the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). Kimmerling does not even consider that Meretz was a weak opposition, with only ten Knesset seats, against a national unity government of Likud, Labor and all parties to their right. The notion that the electorate would have flocked to Meretz if it had campaigned against Sharon as a war criminal and supported IDF refuseniks — especially when terrorists were frequently committing crimes against Israeli civilians — seems quite fanciful.

The Zionist left, basically consisting of Peace Now, Labor Party doves and Meretz/Yahad supporters, views service refusal as a courageous individual choice but not as a practical political tactic. Thoughtful people, in fact, see selective refusal as a dangerous precedent. At the Brit Tzedek

ANNETTE RUBINSTEIN'S 95TH BIRTHDAY

GERALD MEYER

ANNETTE T. RUBINSTEIN, renowned educator, author, and activist, allows her students, colleagues, friends, and family to celebrate her birthday every five years. On April 9th, three days early, more than two hundred people from this charmed circle gathered at the Brecht Forum's new headquarters to raise their glasses and lustily shout *l'chaim* in honor of her ninety-fifth.

The celebration evoked a large response from the JEWISH CURRENTS community. Annette has been a member of the magazine's Editorial Advisory Committee since its founding and has contributed more than forty articles and reviews.

At the birthday celebration, Carol Jochowitz, the former longtime production editor of the magazine, spoke movingly of Annette's "brilliance, her wit, her absolutely unflinching, unyielding, uncompromising, un-anything standards of honesty and justice. Annette sees the truth and speaks it — in complete sentences."

Harry Magdoff, editor of *Monthly Review*, reminded the audience via a taped recording that "Annette in personality, in her life of creativity, activity, and humanism, illustrates the ways of socialist women and men." He concluded by saying "I love you" in Yiddish. Among the other speakers were Annette's four nephews and a niece, as well as many other friends and colleagues.

Annette closed the event with a thought-provoking and affecting talk. She reported that she has had "an extraordinarily fortunate life. . . . [Despite] the great many tragedies, what has made it a very happy one are two reasons. . . . I do have a real passion for poetry, and that actually, even in the darkest times, art . . . is very important." A second reason Annette cited was that she had "a great cause to believe in. . . ." →

v'Shalom 2005 conference in New York [see "Inside the Jewish Community," May-June issue — *Ed.*], dovish Labor MK Colette Avital indicated that 10,000 soldiers have signed on as refusers. This prompted

her appearance with Brit Tzedek, Colette Avital indicated the following to an audience of Meretz USA and Labor Zionist Alliance/Ameinu supporters: "When Sharon first announced his desire to see a Palestin-

we in Labor came to believe that Sharon was really serious."

A few weeks earlier, at the same venue, Yahad MK Avshalom Vilan characterized Sharon as a pragmatist rather than a rigid ideologue. Vilan believes that Sharon is always resolute, to the point of being unstoppable, once he sets his eyes on a goal. For this reason, Vilan sees the Gaza disengagement as something that will happen, but he still does not consider Sharon a dove. Vilan does not believe that Sharon has a desire to move the peace process much beyond his narrowly-conceived withdrawal plan and sees him as still envisioning a so-called Palestinian state within "provisional borders," including only about two thirds of the West Bank and excluding the Arab areas of East Jerusalem.

These views from the moderate left are corroborated by Uri Avnery, head of the radical-left Gush Shalom (Peace Bloc). Avnery wrote online in March about Sharon's intentions re the Gaza disengagement: "His huge ego is now identified with this operation. He has already split his party, become an enemy of the settlers and turned the whole political system upside down. Retreating from the plan now would shatter his self-esteem and public image.

"Withdrawal from the withdrawal could arouse the anger of President Bush. Sharon has only contempt for the *goyim* and thinks that cheating them is a national duty, but he knows where Israel would be without the unlimited support of the U.S."

Sharon is often flawed, even warped, in his strategic vision — but he is a master tactician. This is why the left is correct in fearing that his exit from the Gaza Strip and a small part of the West Bank is meant to

Avshalom Vilan characterized Sharon as a pragmatist rather than a rigid ideologue. He believes that Sharon is always resolute, to the point of being unstoppable, once he sets his eye on a goal. For this, Vilan sees the Gaza disengagement as something that will happen, but he still does not consider Sharon a dove.

a smattering of applause — until Avital explained that she was speaking of soldiers who have pledged to resist orders to remove settlers. (Left-wing refuseniks who resist serving in the occupied territories number perhaps five hundred.)

One can't predict exactly what will come of Sharon's new career turn as a peacemaker. A few days prior to

ian state . . . most of us thought he was bluffing. Shimon Peres was one of the few who argued that Sharon was serious. . . . The turning point came when part of his coalition started to disintegrate as a result of tough decisions that had to be made for the sake of disengagement. When the National Religious Party and the National Union left the government,

AN OPEN LETTER TO PRIME MINISTER SHARON appeared in the *New York Times* May 22nd expressing "support for your courageous disengagement plan — possibly the most difficult decision of your political career and certainly a painful one for those Israelis who have to move out of their homes. . . Two thirds of Americans . . . and two thirds of American Jews . . . agree with the Israeli government's decision to withdraw from the Gaza Strip. . . . At this critical hour, ripe with opportunity, we pledge to intensify our efforts to build support for Israel in the United States, to encourage our government to do everything in its power to help the disengagement plan succeed and to urge our nation's leaders to then help Israel achieve your vision of 'a democratic Palestinian state fully at peace with Israel,' which 'will promote the long-term security and well-being of Israel as a Jewish state' (Aqaba Summit, June 4, 2003).

Organizations signing the letter included Americans for Peace Now, the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress, the Anti-Defamation League, B'nai B'rith International, the Central Conference of American Rabbis (Reform), Hadassah, the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, the Jewish Labor Committee, the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation, Jewish Women International, the National Council of Jewish Women, the Union for Reform Judaism, the United Synagogue for Conservative Judaism, the World Jewish Congress, the American section of the World Zionist Organization, and several more.

camouflage the incorporation of a sizeable chunk of the West Bank and all of East Jerusalem permanently into Israel. For this goal, he is willing to implement his disengagement plan even in the face of ferocious opposition from his former supporters in the settlements.

Yet the moderate Israeli left, as represented by the unofficial Geneva Accord, actually shares Sharon's objective of incorporating into Israel the three major settlement blocs near the pre-1967 Green Line. As detailed in the Geneva Accord unveiled in December 2003, this incorporation would happen as part of a land swap as a result of negotiations with the Palestinians, not as a unilateral dictate.

The moderate Israeli peace camp also supports the incorporation of Jerusalem's Arab neighborhoods and Muslim holy places into a Palestinian state with territorial contiguity in the West Bank. Sharon, however, has not committed himself to negotiating on Jerusalem. To the contrary, his announced plan to fund Jewish settlement expansion between Maaleh Adumim and Jerusalem indicates the opposite intention. He could change course, however, if effectively blocked by the U.S., which has voiced objections about such expansion plans.

Sharon's deputy prime minister, Ehud Olmert, has already pronounced his vision of a Palestinian state with borders approximating the dimensions explored by Ehud Barak and Bill Clinton in 2000-2001— even including Arab parts of Jerusalem. Of the new Palestinian leadership under Abu Mazen, moreover, Olmert has stated that “we could not forgive ourselves” if this opportunity for peace is missed. It is possible that Olmert is simply serv-

ing as a dovish stalking horse for Sharon, who has so far played a cagey game with Abu Mazen by changing his rhetoric and some of his actions on the ground in a more positive direction while continuing to build the security barrier and to pursue settlement expansion. (The fence/wall has been downsized under U.S. pressure to a point where it's expected to incorporate seven to eight percent of the West Bank, down from 15 percent as planned previously.)

What is certain from a clear-eyed reading of Sharon's life is that he is more clever and harder to predict than most people realize. He is a warrior at heart, seeking to maneuver for advantage in a “zero-sum” conflict that resists “win-win” compromises. Yet his ultimate intentions are subject to influence by events and by the U.S.

Uncertainties abound: first about Sharon, then about the willingness of George W. Bush to “invest political capital” in cultivating peace. It is also uncertain whether Abu Mazen will be willing and able to settle for less than maximal demands regarding Palestinian territory and refugees without incurring a deal-breaking return to violence. If one were to bet on peace, the variables would be too numerous for the wager to be other than a long shot. ■



→ Annette closed with a six-line poem by Bertolt Brecht, in which, in her estimation, “he succeeded in summing up the law of dialectics”:

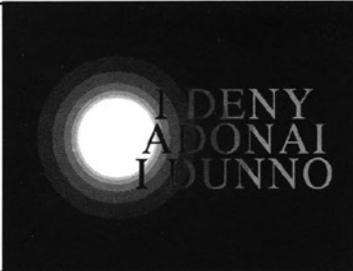
Everything changes.
You can begin a new life with your latest
breath.
What has happened has happened.
The water you poured into the wine
cannot be drained off,
But everything changes.
You begin a new life with your latest
breath.

Annette's accomplishments are monumental — as a master teacher in the Jefferson School and, from its founding thirty years ago, at the Brecht Forum (where she just finished teaching a course on Brecht); as a high school principal until she was deposed by McCarthyism; as author of five books and over two hundred articles; as leader and candidate for the American Labor Party; as founder of the Charter Group for a Pledge of Conscience; and as an activist in a wide range of movements. For the progressive community, she is a *mentsh* who, while doing her tremendous political work, has never neglected her family, friends, comrades, and those at hand. Her steadiness of purpose and consideration for others has encouraged and inspired so many.

Annette, who “has everything,” as one speaker explained, suggests that, in lieu of presents, friends, students, and other well wishers can send a contribution to the capital fund of the Brecht Forum (currently renovating a new headquarters), 451 West Street NYC 11014.

GERALD MEYER, professor emeritus at Hostos Community College (CUNY), is the author of *Vito Marcantonio: Radical Politician* and co-editor of *The Lost World of Italian American Radicalism*.

Annette T. Rubinstein and Pete Seeger. Photo by David Eisenbud.



LAWRENCE BUSH

The Blessing of Christianity?

AS AN ATHEIST AND A JEW, I've always related with guilty pleasure to the image of my superstitious forebears spitting — *ptui, ptui* — at the sight of a church. I've always laughed a little too loud at the Lenny Bruce routine in which he admits to killing Christ (in the basement, at a party, “things got out of hand” because the Son of God refused to become a doctor or a lawyer) and at other cynical Jewish jokes about popes, clergy and converts. The atheist in me found Christian dogma too damned *religious* — too miraculous, otherworldly, doctrinaire and beyond the pale of humanistic interpretation — while the Jew in me saw Christianity as a bloody persecutor, plain and simple, the source of tortures and auto-da-fés, pogroms and expulsions, political reaction and repression.

Growing up in the 1950s and '60s, I thought of Jewish organizations such as the American Jewish Congress as “defenders of the un-faith,” insofar as they regularly weighed in against school prayer and school Bible readings, religious requirements for housing and employment, and other efforts to “Christianize” American culture. This activism brought them into alliance with various secular organizations that were, to my mind, true guardians of freedom, enlightenment, and diversity against the relentless reactionary force of Christianity — the same force that today is overwhelming American political culture.

I guess my views have broadened quite a bit over the years (though I still love the jokes), thanks to encounters with many kind, decent, neighborly, believing Christians — and with the many progressives from American history whose social values were rooted in their social gospel. I came to understand, for example, that Martin Luther King, Jr., the great 20th-century prophet who so deeply affected my sense of political possibility in America, did not invoke Biblical verses or the “beloved

community” of Christian faith for insincere or opportunistic reasons. Nor were radical clerics such as Daniel Berrigan, who was willing to spend years in prison to oppose American weapons of mass destruction, somehow less devout than Billy Graham, Pat Robertson or other bedroom-peeping Christians of the political right.

Despite my shedding of some naivete and some bias, however, I have remained largely baffled by the capacity of intelligent and courageous people to embrace as real the story of Jesus the Christ and to make it the touchstone of their lives. Of course, as a writer who champions the secular interpretation of the metaphors and ethical principles of Judaism, I understand that there must

The atheist in me has found Christian dogma just too, well, *religious* — too miraculous and otherworldly, and therefore beyond the pale of fruitful, humanistic interpretation.

be many Christians who are inspired by the figure of Jesus without being convinced of all details of Christian dogma. For me, however, even the basic, grim storyline of Christianity — God offering redemption from sin to humanity by sacrificing his “only begotten son” in a torturous death — has always been more repellent than inspirational. The notion that this world of ours has ever known a messiah/redeemer flies in the face of the reality that I perceive around me — as does the idea that redemption is a matter of individual faith rather than collective works. As for those Christian apologists who view the atrocities of Christian history as corruptions of the Gospels, I find their views undermined by the triumphalism implicit in such passages as John 3: 18 — “He who believes in [the Son] is not condemned; he who does not believe is condemned already.”

As I said, I'm an atheist Jew!

*With great interest, therefore, I recently read David Klinghoffer's well-narrated study, *Why the Jews Rejected Jesus* (Doubleday, 2005), to see if my ancestors some twenty centuries ago shared my bafflement about Christianity. To some extent, the answer is yes, according to Klinghoffer: While many Jews of Jesus's era had strong hopes for the arrival of their messiah, they found Jesus to be a highly unlikely candidate, for while the Hebrew prophets had predicted a redeemer “expected to radically change the world,” Jesus' emphasis was on*

the world-to-come. (“My kingdom is not of this world,” he declares in *John* 18: 36, and similarly elsewhere in the New Testament.)

“You can easily imagine his contemporaries dismissing him with characteristic Jewish irony,” Klinghoffer suggests. “So Jesus gathered crowds of five thousand. So he performed magical feats like producing food for a multitude from a few loaves or fishes. . . . Very nice! But let him do what the ‘son of man,’ the promised messiah, had been advertised as being destined to do from Daniel back through Ezekiel and Isaiah and the rest of the prophets. Let him rule as a monarch. . . . Let him return the exiles and rebuild the Temple and defeat the oppressors and establish universal peace, as the prophets also said.” As a messiah, in other words, Jesus — *ptui, ptui* — was a disappointment.

Klinghoffer’s book works best as a tidy review of ancient Jewish history and its overlap with the origins and spread of Christianity. He is an excellent guide for readers who want to tune up their understanding of developments within Judaism under Roman rule — the crushed uprisings of 70 and 135 CE, which ended the Temple system; the codification of the Mishna by 200, of the Jerusalem Talmud by 400 and the Babylonian Talmud about a century afterwards (decades after Rome fell to the Visigoths) — and how such events were influenced by the evolution of Christianity, first as a sect within Judaism during the first half-century of the Common Era, then as a rival faith launched by Paul of Tarsus in the second half of the first century, then as the official religion of Rome after 312, and finally as a persecutor of the Jews by the 400s.

Klinghoffer also brings us into the medieval period, when “Jews were forced to engage in public ‘disputations,’ elaborate formal debates, with learned Christians, intended to humiliate the Jewish debaters and lead their communities to accept baptism. . . . Not all Jews were cowed,” however: “The more aggressive had no objection either to debating with Christians, or to converting them.” He also reviews the centuries of Rashi (1040-

1105) and Maimonides (1135-1204), of the expulsion from Spain (1492), and of the modern era following the Protestant Reformation in the early 1500s — all from the perspective of how Jewish religious authorities interacted with Christian authorities, who “could never entirely abandon the project of winning over the Jews. After all,” writes Klinghoffer, “if the Jews did not accept Jesus — his very own people! — as messianic savior, this constituted a serious stain on the honor of Christianity and on its own sense of internal coherence. . . . Some part of the Christian soul would always be . . . disturbed by the apprehension, however suppressed, that the Jews were right.”



St. Paul debating with the Jews. Copperplate, circa 1150.

The actual reasons Klinghoffer offers for the ancient Jewish rejection of Jesus range from “simple unaware-

ness of his activities and skepticism about the roles he was casting himself into” to outrage over his rejection of the authority of the Pharisees and Sadducees to interpret Biblical law. Klinghoffer considers it especially significant that Jesus, as portrayed in the Gospels (written from thirty to seventy years after his execution), “felt it was appropriate to teach solely on his own authority, rather than by citing previous sages . . . This was a repudiation of the very heart of rabbinic faith.” Worse, once Paul abandoned circumcision and other *mitzvot* in order to proselytize among gentile communities, contemporary Jewish authorities began to view Christianity as a form of “internal subversion” that “led Jews away from the commandments.”

All of these explanations, however, assume a religiously-based critique on the part of Jews who rejected Christianity. Although Klinghoffer acknowledges the Jewish penchant for “skepticism” and “debate,” he does not entertain the possibility that heretical or even atheistic Jews existed until the modern era. Yet the ancient book of Psalms castigates (14:1) “the fool [who] has said in his heart, ‘There is no God’ ” (or, in a more modern translation, “God does not care”) — which confirms the existence of at least some ancient Jewish heretics. The Talmud, moreover, includes several stories that challenge God’s providence, most notably about Rabbi

Elisha ben Abuyah, known as Akher (the Other), who is influenced by the spectacle of cruelty and suffering in our world to doubt whether there is a just God concerned with human affairs. Such Jewish doubters might well have rejected Christianity, not for being too heedless of Jewish law but for being, as I said, “too damned religious.”

On the very last pages of Why the Jews Rejected Jesus, Klinghoffer tips his hand by revealing an outrageous antipathy, rather than a simple indifference, towards secularism. First, he attacks it by selectively quoting from Franz Rosenzweig, Abraham Joshua Heschel, and other modern Jewish sages. “Heschel understood,” Klinghoffer claims, “that the same force that animated Hitlerism also was behind a leading ideological force that persisted and drew adherents, including many Jews, with increasing success. This force is called secularism, the will to erase the vestiges of all biblical religion from public life . . .”

Klinghoffer then suggests that we try to understand the rejection of Jesus by the Jews “from God’s perspective.” Here goes:

It served God’s purposes that there be a unique religion, acknowledging Him, for the people who spread out from Europe. It was not Judaism. It [Christianity] departs from Judaism in many ways. But in revering the God of Israel, it contains the seeds for an ultimate reunification of the people in God’s service.

Christianity is admirable, in other words, because it brings more people to “God’s service” than Judaism, with all of its demanding ritual practice, can hope to bring. The implication is that “revering the God of Israel” is universally uplifting to human beings, so we should be grateful to Christianity for reaching beyond Judaism to civilize the masses. This, writes Klinghoffer, is “the blessing to the world that came about through the Jewish rejection of Jesus.”

Some blessing! Ask the millions of native peoples of the Americas how blessed they felt by the genocidal export of Christianity to their shores. Ask the millions of infidels who were beaten, broken, and burned in the name of the blessing. Ask hundreds of millions of women how blessed they have felt to be denied birth control, the right to divorce, property rights and other tools of autonomy by the enforcers of Christian sexism. Ask the millions of European victims of inter-

necine Christian warfare throughout the centuries, and the millions in other lands blessed by the Crusades and other imperialistic Christian sorties. Ask the hundreds of thousands of “Christ-killing” Jews whose own killers were promoted by the Orthodox and Catholic Churches in Russia and Poland. All of this in the name of an aggressive, soul-saving triumphalism that is fully proclaimed in the New Testament.

David Klinghoffer’s book adds another Jewish voice to the religious rightwing chorus that vilifies secular humanism by arguing that unless we revere God, we are doomed to be “moral relativists” and therefore unable to control our sinful human natures. No surprise there: Klinghoffer is a religiously and politically conservative columnist in the *Forward* who has urged the Jewish community to abandon its historic frostiness towards the Christian right in common cause against secular humanism and “in support” of Israel. Never mind Jewish alliances with the ACLU in defense of the First Amendment; he would instead have Jewish organizations embracing those “Christian Zionists” who support hardline Israeli policies because of their end-of-days religious fantasies. For the “defense of Israel” that these delusional people offer, David Klinghoffer wants the Jewish community to abandon its role as defender of the un-faith.

Ptui. ■

Hooded Crows, Jerusalem

I. CENTURY

Their hoods, as black as my grandfather’s yarmulke,
cannot disguise who they are;
Penitent Jews, they fly from tree to tree,
cawing and cackling,
pretending to look for food.
When they believe no one is looking,
they silently glide away to cemeteries
searching for the names of people they have harmed.
Finding one, they form a minyan on the gravestone
and make such a racket saying Kaddish
they wake up the dead
and ask for forgiveness

I. CENTURY has been published in *Midstream*, *Jews*, and other publications. He is the author, most recently, of *Stumbling to Jerusalem*, a book of poems.

A Taste of Country Living

With the Fresh Air Fund, 1924

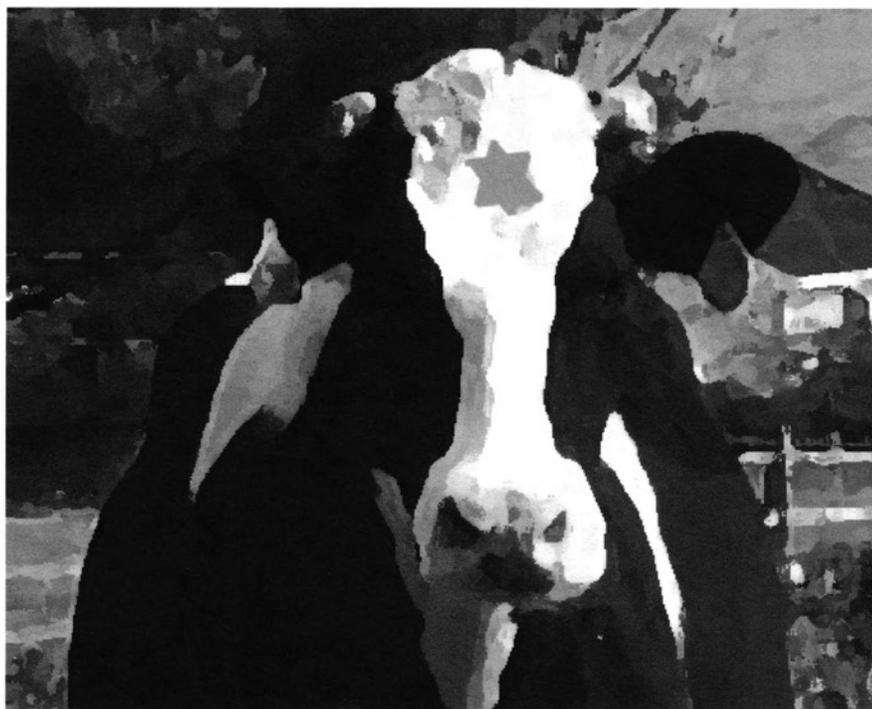
DOROTHY EPSTEIN

IN THE SUMMER OF 1924, I saw, then milked, my first cow, patted, then rode, my first (and last) horse and spent two weeks in the lush, green surroundings and the exhilarating fresh air of the mountainous state of Vermont.

Mama had registered me at the Fresh Air Fund of Lincoln Hospital in the Bronx, established for children whose parents could not afford to send them to camp for the summer. People in outlying rural areas opened up their houses and hospitality to from one to a dozen youngsters, usually for a fortnight, so that these children could enjoy the pleasures and duties of farm living.

There were about ninety children assembled on the two buses that left that August day — one bound for Pennsylvania and ours for Vermont. For most of us, it was the first time away from our families. Despite the general sense of anticipation and excitement, there were a few tearful parting scenes. Two of the kids refused to go, even after their mothers had forcibly thrust them into their seats. We left without them, gulping down our own fears. We had no encouraging hand to grip as we departed.

Mr. and Mrs. Bradford were a childless couple who owned a medium-sized farm in St. Johnsbury in northern Vermont, not far from the Canadian border. Their home was surrounded by verdant hills. They had a dozen well-fed cows, three dozen noisy chickens, two mongrel dogs named Vernon and Spotty, and a sedate, even-tempered aging horse they



called Bessie, who earned her keep by helping with the spring plowing. During the rest of the year, she moved about the farm with all the authority of a co-owner, surveying the general activity with approval, watching the growing corn, overseeing the vegetable garden and graciously accepting the gentle stroking of her back by the ever-present well-wishers. Bessie often accompanied us — the two children who were guests — as we helped with the chores, and she even allowed us to ride her bareback.

Nora and I had met each other for the first time on the bus to Vermont.

We each had our own room — a pure, undiluted pleasure that neither of us had ever experienced before. Mine had a single bed, with a fancy, metal, gold-painted headboard, at the center of which was a cherubic angel with a bright smile and short, spread wings. There was also an oak dresser of indeterminate age and style, with three commodious drawers and an oak framed round mirror attached by curved oak strips. A straight-backed chair with a worn yellow silk seat, and a closet, set on the wall, with two lower drawers for miscellaneous socks and handkerchiefs, completed the furnishings. The window, framed in a yellow lace curtain, looked out on the vegetable garden, where tomatoes, string beans and squash were ripening. It not only looked like

DOROTHY EPSTEIN is a long-time political activist who is the founder of the Institute for Senior Action in New York. The piece published here is excerpted from her recently completed memoir, *A Song of Social Significance*.

heaven, but the smell of new-mown hay made it smell like heaven, too.

On those nights when Nora and I were not too tired after supper, we would exchange tales of our experiences that day. We were taught to visit the chicken coops every morning to gather fresh eggs in our baskets without disturbing the clucking mother hens. Each day, we compared our collections, and the one who had picked the greatest number by the end of the week was declared the winner. Since Nora won the first week and I the second, we had to draw lots to determine who would sit by the window on the bus on the way home.

Every cow had a name, and on the third day, I learned to milk Rachel. I milked her every day in the late afternoon, after we had gone with Mr. Bradford to drive the cows home. Nora milked Nancy. When we finished our work, we each had a cup of the fresh, warm, foamy milk, and Mrs. Bradford brought us corn or blueberry muffins, just out of the oven, to help us adapt to the strange taste.

Mrs. Bradford was a kind-hearted, middle-aged, buxom woman with graying hair pulled back in a tight bun. As she bent over her work, single strands continuously escaped, which she pushed back impatiently. She greeted us affectionately every morning and kissed us at night before we went upstairs to bed. She fed us well with fresh food, almost all of which she and her husband grew or produced on the farm. We had ham and eggs for breakfast, washed down with two huge glasses of milk; fresh cheese sandwiches on homemade bread for lunch; corn or blueberry muffins with our milk at milking time, and for supper, thick vegetable soups and roast chicken or beef with

boiled or baked potatoes. For dessert, there was always a freshly baked pie — apple, blackberry or sweet potato.

On the first Saturday after our arrival, Mrs. Bradford took us on a picnic, where we had cold chicken, newly picked tomatoes, fresh corn and pie. Mr. Bradford remained at home to take care of his afternoon chores and read his weekly newspaper. Afterward, Nora and I climbed a tall, hilly knoll about a mile from the house and marveled at the view

They had heard there was a Jew at the Bradfords, and never having seen one before, they were curious to see what I looked like.

of the unbroken stretch of green, cultivated fields below and the long line of gently rounded mountains above. It was a perfect day and left us totally unprepared for what was to follow.

When we returned home at about 3 p. m., there was a delegation of fifteen people waiting for us — five children, ranging in age from five to fifteen, four men and six women. They had heard there was a Jew at the Bradfords, and never having seen one before, they were curious to see what I looked like. Would I, they must have wondered, have horns — even small ones — growing out of my head? We learned later that they had arrived about a half hour before we did, and Mr. Bradford had spent the entire time trying to convince them, first politely, then more firmly, that they should leave — that there was nothing to see. He was just succeeding when we arrived.

I think they were disappointed and embarrassed when they were unable to tell which of us, Nora or I, was the “freak.” Nora was a pretty Irish girl with penetrating brown eyes,

short blonde hair and a pleasant grin. The visitors stared at me unblinkingly, then someone, probably one of the two boys from town who sometimes helped Mr. Bradford with the farm work, pointed me out to them. I stared back at them — even as I am staring now at the four photographs that remain as souvenirs of the brief sojourn in Vermont that summer. In those photos, I see a tall, gangly, somewhat solemn-looking kid of 11. I was five feet, three inches tall — a height I never exceeded — just about

Mrs. Bradford’s size and a head taller than Nora. I had brown hair shading into auburn, cut in the Buster Brown style. My eyes, too, were deep brown, large and expressive, my nose Greek-straight, and my smile, to my eyes, infectious. I could well have been the Irish one and Nora the Jew.

Finally, one of the men spoke, sounding frustrated: “But she doesn’t look different.”

“I’m not different,” I replied angrily. “Why should I be?”

No one could give an answer until the oldest boy said, “She sounds different, though. She doesn’t speak like us.”

His mother reminded him that everyone who came from New York spoke that way.

After apologizing for their rudeness, they returned to St. Johnsbury, from whence they had come. When they had left, I broke into tears, sobbing. Both Mr. and Mrs. Bradford comforted me, patting me gently, and telling me that I should pay no attention to these people — that they were just plain ignorant. ■

INSIDE THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

JOSEPH DIMOW

AIPAC and the Gaza Withdrawal

AIPAC, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the 800-pound gorilla in the American Jewish community, became the focus of attention for the Jewish world at its annual meeting during the last week of May. Widely considered to be one of the most powerful lobbies in Washington, AIPAC has been in big trouble and is fighting back with some surprising changes in its image.

AIPAC's reputation for power rests on its ability to mobilize volunteer lobbyists and fundraisers to pressure members of Congress in both houses. The organization has ruthlessly targeted officeholders who voice criticism of Israel by recruiting and helping to finance opposition candidates. For those who are "pro-Israel" (in the lobby's view), AIPAC members are generous with money and other help. Among those who have been targeted by AIPAC, some have questioned whether the lobby is really more loyal to Israel (especially when its government is right-wing) than to the U.S.

That charge surfaced again last autumn when two top executives of AIPAC came under an FBI investigation on suspicion of passing classified government documents, which they had received from a Pentagon officer, to an Israeli embassy official. The Pentagon officer has since been arrested. The two AIPAC employees were first placed on "administrative leave" (with pay) and then fired when FBI tapes of their meetings with the embassy official became available to AIPAC's lawyer. The two were Steve Rosen, AIPAC's director of research, and Keith Weissman, deputy director of foreign policy issues. Rosen has also been identified as AIPAC's policy director, and Weissman as senior analyst, on Iran.

Rosen's firing was especially startling for AIPAC members since he has been a key official since joining AIPAC in 1982. According to the *Forward* April 29th,

he was a "red diaper baby" who later differed with his parents' politics. He reportedly tells friends that his parents were too involved in such issues as McCarthyism, union organizing and the Spanish Civil War to think about Israel. (This is somewhat confusing since Israel didn't exist at the time of the Spanish Civil War and Rosen was born in 1943, after the Spanish Civil War was over.) In his years at AIPAC, Rosen was credited with promoting the joint American-Israel Arrow anti-missile defense system, building the relationship among the U.S., Israel and Turkey, and pushing America's confrontational policy with Iran. He also led an effort to establish a "pro-Israel" lobby in the United Kingdom. AIPAC's current executive director, Howard Kohr, was originally hired by Rosen, whose legal fees, along with Weissman's, are still being paid by AIPAC. One congressional aide was quoted as saying "It's bizarre to think of AIPAC firing Rosen; it's like a body deciding to sever its own head."

Any objective observer would conclude the two thought they were acting in line with AIPAC policies. They were even caught on tape making jokes about passing secrets. It is likely that they will be indicted by an investigating grand jury which could also possibly charge other AIPAC officers and the organization itself as an unregistered foreign agent.

At the annual meeting, Kohr told some 5,000 delegates that AIPAC will meet this "unique challenge" and insisted that neither the organization "nor any of its current employees" are targets of the investigation. His opening remarks were obviously aimed at presenting AIPAC as an American organization motivated by patriotism. The conference slogan was "Israel, an American value," and a new logo showed an American flag framed by a six-pointed star. While in past years "The Star Spangled Banner" was followed by "Hatikvah," Israel's national anthem, this year the American anthem was sung alone.

Kohr boasted that the organization has grown, despite the FBI investigation. He claimed 16,000 new members, bringing the total to 100,000. When representatives of Brit Tzedek v'Shalom, the Jewish Alliance for Peace and Justice, visited some members of Congress about a year ago, they were asked for membership numbers and then told to compare their figure (less than 10,000) with AIPAC's, which was then 60,000. AIPAC's annual budget is over \$40 million and

a new permanent home office building is being planned.

According to the *Forward* May 27th, nearly half of the members of Congress participated in the AIPAC conference, with many attending the gala dinner. Among the speakers were Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. Before the current FBI investigation, a large part of an AIPAC audience might have been expected to express vocal opposition to Sharon's Gaza evacuation plan, but on this occasion he was greeted with applause and cheers. Also of interest was Secretary Rice's speech, in which she included the following: "To strengthen our present opportunities, all nations must meet their obligations. Israel must take no actions that prejudice a final settlement or jeopardize the true viability of the Palestinian state. And Israel must help to create the conditions for the emergence of that democratic state." Such a statement would certainly draw applause at an Americans for Peace Now or Brit Tzedek gathering, but such reaction was surprising at AIPAC.

A poll done in March for the Anti-Defamation League found that two-thirds of the 1,600 people asked believed that evacuating Gaza, even without an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement, would be "a bold step toward peace." The ADL placed ads in the *Forward* and elsewhere drawing attention to the poll. Another poll done by Ameinu, formerly the Labor Zionist Alliance, found that 64 percent favored withdrawal. With AIPAC now supporting Sharon's withdrawal plan, opponents in the U.S. may be overwhelmed. Although AIPAC's most militant activists are widely seen as supporters of the hard right in Israel, they, too, are clearly having to adjust to pressure and changing circumstances.

Some opponents of Gaza withdrawal are nevertheless ranting and raving as their numbers and influence shrinks. A group called "Stop the Expulsion" placed an ad in the *Forward* April 22nd comparing Warsaw in 1943 to Gaza in 2005. The ad used the infamous photograph from the Strop Report on the destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto, showing a group of Jews under the guns of Nazi soldiers, with a terrified small boy holding his hands up in surrender. The text of the ad condemned the possibility of Jewish soldiers "deporting" other Jews as the Nazis did. It went on to speak of "the right of Jews to live freely as Jews anywhere in the world, including their ancestral homeland." (Would the sponsors of the ad recognize the right of Palestin-

ians to live freely anywhere in the world, including their ancestral homeland, which is now Israel?) Nowhere in the ad did the sponsors identify themselves; only a post office box and a website were given. A second ad, on May 27th, also carried an anti-withdrawal message, though this time the photo and theme were less outrageous: the ad showed rows of coffins and claimed that Sharon's disengagement plan calls for the destruction of Jewish cemeteries and the exhumation of Jewish dead. No evidence for such a charge was offered, but this time there was a name attached to the ad: "Eileen Gottlieb, Secretary."

The first ad drew a flurry of letters in protest of the *Forward* accepting such material for its pages, including one from a furious Abraham Foxman, national director of the ADL. Foxman recognized the principle of freedom of the press but argued that it does not require a publication to accept objectionable ads. I agree! ■

Egrets

I. CENTURY

They reminded me of my Aunt Sadie
and Uncle Dave,
and as the train raced across the Jersey swampland
I counted two, then three.
They stood in the water like white garden
ornaments.
I rarely see them fly.
Perhaps they share a collective memory of
years ago,
when they were slaughtered in their nesting areas
for their then-fashionable feathers,
and they have learned the old Yiddish saying,
makht nisht kayn geruder,
don't attract attention.
I remember my Uncle Dave telling me
the first time he had seen Aunt Sadie:
at a party on Rivington Street,
she made her entrance in a wide-brimmed red hat
with a long egret feather that seemed to flutter
in his direction.
He did not remember much else,
but his impulsive vow to marry her,
which he did.

I. CENTURY's bio appears on page 32.



AROUND THE WORLD

LYBER KATZ

Holocaust Restitution

The process of distributing the roughly \$10 billion still left in Holocaust restitution settlements “has set off rancorous arguments about how fairly and swiftly it is being spent and how much will reach the survivors before they die out,” reported Joseph Berger in the *New York Times* May 8th. Although most of the money has been allocated as compensation to individual victims or their heirs, at issue are “discretionary pools” of communal and unclaimed individual properties. The Claims Conference, representing twenty-four worldwide Jewish organizations, has allocated 20 percent of these pools over the years for Holocaust research and education, leaving 80 percent for social services for victims. Roman Kent, chair of the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, objects to this split, arguing that “reparations must first go to survivors, and that education and research should be the responsibility of all Jewish organizations.” But Sam E. Bloch, the group’s senior vice-president, praises the 80-20 split: “How do we expect the world to remember? . . . only by publishing books, creating films, building museums and training teachers, and for this you need money.” Typically in contention is an allocation of \$138.4 million, out of a \$184.5 million settlement with Swiss banks, to survivors in the former Soviet Union who have no safety-net programs like Medicare, while survivors in the U.S. will get only four percent (\$7.4 million) of that fund. “We need the recognition of compensation,” said one survivor who lives in New York City. “I may not need a meal now, but I needed a meal then.”

Supporting Israel Costs Him Two Sons

On a visit to the U.S. in early May, Mital Al-Alusi was given the American Jewish Committee’s Moral Courage award. A Sunni Muslim and former director

of the “de-Ba’athification” program in Iraq, he was imprisoned by the U.S.-installed interim Iraqi government and stripped of security protection “for violating a law, established under Hussein’s dictatorship, against visiting Israel,” according to Heather Robinson in *JTA Global News* May 9th. Al-Alusi had attended an international forum on terrorism in Herzliyah, and had refused to drop out although his family began receiving death threats. The charges against him were eventually dropped, and on his release, Al-Alusi and his sons — Ayman, 30, and Gamal, 22 — founded the Democratic Party of the Iraqi Nation, a party “forged on the principles of individual rights and cooperation with other democracies.” The sons were then murdered. Al-Alusi still believes that “the new Iraq should defy the longstanding policies of most Arab nations and normalize relations with Israel.”

Defending London’s Mayor

The Simon Wiesenthal Center (SWC) in Los Angeles has initiated a campaign against London’s progressive mayor, Ken Livingstone, demanding that he apologize for “anti-Semitic and anti-Israel comments.” Ben Rickman, the secretary of the Brent Trade Union Council (BTUC), which is based in the district that originally elected Livingstone to Parliament, sent a letter of protest to the SWC detailing Livingstone’s record of fighting racism and fascism. When the letter from Rickman, who is Jewish, was ignored, BTUC sent an “Open Letter to the Simon Wiesenthal Center.” The letter points out that the SWC demand for an apology lumps together “swastika daubings, hate attacks, and controversy about Israel in one long sentence, without any evidence to link them, and without citing one anti-Semitic remark by Livingstone. . . . If anything threatens to undermine the relations and exacerbate tensions, rather than building bridges, it is to falsely equate Jews or any other people with a particular political leadership, or policy of state.” Referring to Israel’s Kahane Commission, which found Ariel Sharon culpable in the Lebanon massacres of February 8th, 1983, the letter states, “To pretend that anyone who calls Ariel Sharon a ‘war criminal’ must be anti-Semitic is to insult Jewish people; but worse, it creates a very dangerous smoke-screen of confusion behind which real anti-Semites can operate.” The letter concludes with the hope that “well-

resourced U.S.-based bodies like the Wiesenthal Center will learn to listen to those they profess to assist, and not let their views be distorted or campaigns be misled to serve particular political interests or policies.”

Harassment at Air Force Academy

The Air Force Academy in Colorado, training ground of future officers, “has been under investigation because of complaints that evangelical Christians have harassed cadets who do not share their faith. Some cadets have complained of anti-Semitic slurs, and one of the top chaplains at the school claims she was fired because she criticized what she saw as proselytizing at the Academy,” according to an Associated Press report in the *New York Times* June 4th. The superintendent of the Academy, Lt. Gen. John Rosa Jr., met with representatives of the Anti-Defamation League to discuss the problem and acknowledged that “religious intolerance permeates the military school. . . . If everything goes well, it’s probably going to take six years to fix it.” The ADL’s Abraham Foxman reported, “We walked away with the feeling that the man is committed to solving the problem. The question is whether the system will let him.” We wonder why it should take six years to deal with the problem and how much more intolerance will be experienced during this interval.

Jewish History in Poland

A Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA) dispatch on April 26th noted that a textbook on Polish Jewish history and the Holocaust has been produced by the Polish Education Ministry in cooperation with Jewish groups. Five thousand have already been distributed, with another 50,000 due by the end of the year.

Jewish Red Army Veterans Honored

More than 20,000 Soviet Jewish World War II veterans now living in Israel received Russian state medals commemorating the 60th anniversary of the victory over Nazism. According to JTA dispatches April 26th and 29th, Russia’s Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexander Yakovenko stated that “more than a million of our compatriots live in Israel. They per-

ceive both Russia and Israel as their homelands.” In Russia’s Rostov-on-Don — where the Nazis massacred 27,000 people, including almost all of the city’s 20,000 Jews, on August 8th, 1942 — about a hundred aging Jewish veterans gathered to commemorate the anniversary at a feast sponsored by local businessmen. The feast was in stark contrast to the poverty endured by these veterans, who now scrape by on meager pensions.

Ukrainian Anti-Semitism Denounced

Early in April, a petition calling for a probe of Jewish participation in Soviet investigations of Ukrainian collaboration with the Nazis was signed by some hundred public figures. In response, Ukraine’s State Secretary Aleksandr Zinchenko issued a statement to the state’s UNIAN news agency denouncing anti-Semitism along with other forms of xenophobia and ethnic intolerance. According to the JTA, Zinchenko stated that the petition “was an outrageous act of intolerance.” He did not indicate whether action against the instigators is contemplated.

Hate Libel Yanked by Palestinians

The Indianapolis *National Jewish Post and Opinion* May 25th reported that the Palestinian Authority has removed from its Ministry of Information website a copy of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, the anti-Jewish forgery disseminated by Russia’s 19th-century secret police. The article also reported that the P.A. “disavowed a Muslim preacher whose sermon in a Gaza mosque,” carried live on P.A.-run television, “likened Jews to the AIDS virus. The cleric, Ibrahim Mdaires, denied that Nazis killed six million Jews.” Nabil Shaath, Palestinian Minister of Information, requested that the “Muslim Waqf and Religious Affairs Ministry, who employ the cleric, suspend him and bar him from delivering Friday sermons.”

Bill O’Reilly’s Anti-Semitic Remarks

In December, Bill O’Reilly, host of the Fox News program, *The Radio Factor*, advised a Jewish caller who questioned Christmas observance in public schools, “If you are really offended, you gotta go to Israel.” Christmas is simply “a federal holiday honoring the philosopher Jesus,” O’Reilly said. When the ADL protested, O’Reilly called Abraham Foxman “a nut” and the ADL “an extremist group that finds offense in pretty much everything.” ■

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Congress of Secular Jewish Organizations,	Emily/Harold Sosnow, Tucson, AZ	TOTALS
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Clyde Hertzman, Vancouver, Canada	the Moishe Katz Award”	New Subs for 2005: 72

In Memory of ED SMITH

**He meant so much to so many people.
He was a sweet, soft-hearted man whose kindness
and spirited good cheer touched and ennobled everyone.**

**Our hearts go out to Gloria,
David and Denise, Erica and Eric and the grandchildren,
Matt, Allison, Kersey, Jamie and Danielle.**

Shirley Bernstein	Paul Jacobs and Jennifer Swender	David Melman and Janet Morrison
Nettie and Sherry Farber	Margo and Martin Kagan	Laura Melman
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Larry Jacobs and Julie Schumacher	Clara and Heshie Melman	Betty and Alan Trachtenberg
Mai Jacobs and David Bernz		Allison and Marc Turkel

Letters

(Continued from page 2)

I found that much of the time, especially in Humanistic Judaism, was spent denying the existence of God. But after reading Rabbi Hirsh's article, I realize what I was missing: the poetry, the music, the hasidic *nigunim*, the community of my early years. I can do without English translations but give me a cantor, klezmer music and Adrienne Cooper and I become transformed to a higher spiritual level. Let it be in Hebrew and/or in Yiddish. Let the secular practices be positive and refrain from spending energy in denying other factions of Judaism., They have their own *tsuris*.

MENDEL KLEINMUNTZ

Santa Monica, California

I think it was a great step forward for Jewish Currents to publish Rabbi Richard Hirsh's guest column defending Reconstructionism ("Can Secularism Save Jewish Religion?", May-June).

I was amused by Rabbi Hirsh's defense of Hebrew prayer as a form of "let's pretend." Don't worry what the words actually mean, he says. Look upon a synagogue service as a play and the congregants as actors playing a role.

But his analogy does not hold up. A play is performed for the benefit of an audience, not the performers. And who would want to act in or watch the same play every Friday evening or Saturday morning? Boredom would set in after a few showings.

Rabbi Hirsh thinks that there is no substitute for the Jewish religious rituals, prayers, songs, symbols, etc. that are present in synagogue services. But most secular Jews have

no interest in reciting *Avinu Malkeynu* ("Our Father, Our King") or any other prayer to a God they don't believe in.

According to Reconstructionist philosophy, God is a human creation. But I have attended Reconstructionist services and they are nearly identical to those offered by mainstream Conservative congregations. Their liturgy contradicts their philosophy.

That's where the Congress of Secular Jewish Organizations, the Society for Humanistic Judaism and the Workmen's Circle come in. We are the real alternative for secular Jews. We offer rituals, songs, symbols, poems, folktales, readings, etc.,

consistent with a secular-humanist Jewish world-view. That's integrity, not "let's pretend."

BENNETT MURASKIN

Morris Plains, New Jersey

In his article, Richard Hirsh raises two questions: First, why are secular Jews so unwilling to participate in Jewish liturgy and ritual? Second, how can secular Jews play a meaningful role in the survival of the American Jewish community? As a Jewish atheist who is actively affiliated with several cultural and progressive Jewish organizations, I will attempt to address these questions.

Rabbi Hirsh speaks at length about the discomfort of secular Jews with

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of my wonderful cousin,
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in a thoughtful, progressive
and wise secular Jew.
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 to
JUDITH ANN SEID
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 for Jewish Communal Service
 from
 Hebrew Union College

Her Family

the liturgy and text of religious Jewish practice. He asks that we suspend our unease with words such as “God,” “revelation,” “sin” and “chosenness,” for example, and look to the poetry and philosophy in the text. He also suggests that we might consider the recitation of prayers as the equivalent of acting in a play—it’s just words, you don’t have to believe to participate. Additionally, Rabbi Hirsh posits that we secularists judge the text of the liturgy too harshly, looking for truth, and that we should respond to the prayers in a more open-ended manner as we might to music, art, or literature. All in all, he suggests that we take the words too seriously.

My response is simply that words have meaning. They are not “just” words. And the words used in the liturgy of all religious faiths have been imbued with specific meanings over the centuries. While I might offer alternative, philosophic interpretations for such constructs as “God” or “sin,” it is the commonly held definitions, not the alternative interpretations, that frame most conversations.

Words have meaning. Rabbi Hirsh refers to “*Avinu, Malkeynu*” and rec-

ommends that we not take the words “Our Father, Our King” too literally but read the prayer as a poetic metaphor for life’s central moral questions. However, to do so would be to deny the power of the words “father” and “king” when considering these issues. As a secular Jew, when I search for understanding of morally complex issues, I do so on equal footing with others — not under the guidance or gaze of a male father figure, ruler or deity.

How, then, can we secularists play a meaningful role in the continuity of Jewish experience in America if we reject the text of religious Judaism? Although we have rejected the traditional liturgy and text, those of us who are passionate in our experience as secular Jews still lay claim to many of the underlying values that are the foundation of Judaism, such as *tzedakah, tikkun olam, gemilut khasadim*. Why assume that we are not deeply engaged in the discussion of the central moral questions of humanity from a Jewish perspective just because we omit much of the religious terminology?

While we may not engage in the traditional rituals of religious Judaism, we are not without rituals that enrich our communal experience. Many secularists have transformed the holidays and rites of passage into ones that have more meaning for us — such as the cultural *bar / bas mitzvah* ceremony or the cultural *peysakh* seder and Haggadah. Our discussions on Yom Kippur may not take place in a synagogue and focus on sin, redemption and the almighty — but we do, in fact, engage in deep self-questioning about our responsibilities to humankind.

Perhaps, as engaged secular Jews, the role we can play to sustain Jewish life in America is to help the un-

The Family of
BERNIE SHULDINER
Wishes to Announce His Death
on February 4, 2005

He was much loved
by many, and will be long
remembered with respect
for the person he was,
and the good work
with which he was
always involved.

affiliated and those disengaged from religious practice see that there is, in fact, more than one vibrant way to express one’s Jewishness.

TAMAR ZINN
New York, New York

I read and reread Rabbi Richard Hirsh’s column, “Can Secularism Save Jewish Religion?” while trying to grasp the essence of the article. Its title seems to me ambiguous and ill-fitting. The essay points rather to a way of saving secularists from their secularism. But why need secularists read the words “God” or “*Avinu Malkeynu*” as poetic metaphors that “can evoke encounters with central questions of life”? They know they are accountable to other human beings and that they can find comfort in and acceptance by other human beings.

Speaking for myself, I would feel morally compromised reciting a prayer without believing the words I am saying. And any art that does not conform to some standard of truth would be of inferior quality.

Secularists can read the prayers and study the Torah as literary ex-

pressions and their cultural heritage. They can delight in traditions and recite secular blessings without flattering the God they don't believe in.

YALA KORWIN

Flushing, New York

Rabbi Richard Hirsh replies:

I appreciate that the letter-writers took the time to read and respond to my article.

Somewhere between my secular religiosity and Mendel Kleinmuntz' spiritual secularism lies the territory I was hoping to explore. I certainly appreciate his caveat that we not elevate ourselves by diminishing others, advice I hope I honored in my article. The other letter writers, regrettably, seem less interested in exploring areas where we might converse without controversy.

Tamar Zinn and Bennett Muraskin note that words have meaning, a point I will not contest. But the range of meanings they are willing to allow strikes me as narrow. Words never simply have "a meaning," they have many meanings depending on who is using them and for what purpose. "Mitzvah," for example, means "commandment," which implies a "Commander," yet most Jews (secular among them) have no problem

mutating "the meaning" of "mitzvah" into "good deed." "Tikkun olam" derives from a very specific set of mystical theological assertions, yet many Jews (secular among them) use it to mean "progressive-liberal social policy." At least, for the sake of consistency, the objection that words like "God" or "Avinu Malkeynu" cannot be used because they have "a" meaning ought to be applied as rigorously to the appropriation of other terms.

Mr. Muraskin objects: "A play is performed for the benefit of an audience, not the performers. And who would want to act in or watch the same play every Friday evening or Saturday morning? Boredom would set in after a few showings." I am not so sure. A performance finds its meaning in the relationship between the performers and the audience. Actors are, in fact, happy to act in the same play every performance because they, the audience and the world are different each time. One might as well ask why anyone would read the same book, hear the same symphony, or go to the same museum more than once. As I suggested, however, synagogue services should always be a mix of the familiar and the innovative — something we'd rightly resent if applied to the perfor-

mance of a Broadway hit for which we finally got a ticket.

Taken to extremes, any analogy becomes an easy target for ridicule. While I suppose I should be pleased to have brought some "amusement" to Mr. Muraskin, I was not trying to be funny.

I cannot account for the perplexity expressed by Yala Korwin. We agree that "the prayers . . . and the Torah [can be read and studied as] literary expressions [of the Jewish] cultural heritage." I have trouble understanding why singing those prayers or studying that text is a morally compromising act if committed in a synagogue, whereas studying that text and "reading" those prayers in a discussion group is a morally acceptable act.

If one insists on reading religious language literally and will not allow for poetry, myth and metaphor, then any and all attempts to appropriate the religious heritage of Judaism will be problematic. I was hoping to suggest ways in which Jews who feel comfortable participating in Jewish religious ritual and those who do not might find a common language with which to share the Jewish religious heritage.

Nothing ventured, nothing gained. I was curious if, interpreted in a secular way, Jewish religion could be a shared system of symbols between Jews who are "secular" and those who are "religious." (Ugh, such ridiculously banal bumper-sticker labels.) I certainly don't consider the objections of three "secular" Jews to have closed off that conversation. But I find the hardened objections of this sort of "secularism" to a reasonable attempt to engage Jewish religious tradition to be as disappointingly rigid, uncompromising and self-assured as any form of reli-

GREETINGS

und

אבי געזונט

Leon Sverdlove

In Honor of Our Parents
who had the conviction, vision and foresight to build the Workers Cooperative Colony
(lovingly nicknamed “The Coops”) alongside the beautiful Bronx Park.
Their dreams and goals were for them and their children to live in a communal world,
caring, sharing, and politically involved,
and to build a world free of prejudice against any races or religions.

They gave us club rooms, a library, a gym, an auditorum, and fresh air
to encourage our interests in science, photography, gymnastics, even boat-building —
and let us grow and become *mentshn*.

In Memoriam to One of These Coopnik Children

STANLEY KRASNICK

(1925-2005)

Loving husband, father, grandfather, friend

Caring, fun-loving, always smiling, with a beautiful tenor voice —

We’ll all miss him.



*From Members of Club Sidor, who knew him as “Kranley” for 70 years,
and from his Coop Friends and Relatives*

Besame Mucho

giously orthodox Judaism with which I am familiar.

**JEWISH-BLACK MUSICAL
COLLABORATIONS**

Adrienne Cooper, who has our deepest respect as a musicologist and a musician, wrote a very insight-

ful and informative article in the March-April issue on recent Black-Jewish musical collaborations. I would like to add a little historical perspective on such interethnic collaborations.

In the late 1940s and early '50s the Jewish Young Folksingers (JYFs) — of which my wife, Millie, and I were

members — was an offshoot of the IWO's Jewish Young Fraternalists. JYFs presented a chorus under the direction of Robert DeCormier, which not only collaborated with Black (“Negro” at that time) choruses and church choirs but included African-Americans in the chorus. The venues included YMHAs of the

**The Editorial Board and
Management Committee
mourn the death
of our Life Subscriber
EMMA DAVIS
and condole with her
sister and brother-in-law,
LIL and JOE DIMOW**

Bronx, Negro churches in Harlem, and such nonsectarian venues as Town Hall, the Brooklyn Academy of Music, union halls and street marches for May Day.

DeCormier subsequently organized and conducted the (Harry) Belafonte Folksingers, which was also a “mixed” chorus (of ethnicities as well as voices) and included such Jewish choralists as Walter Raim (who later became its conductor), “Dudle” Bernstein and Maddy Simon (who directed the JYFs after DeCormier). We were privileged to see and hear the Belafonte Singers in performance in the late 1950s and ’60s in Buffalo, New York, and then again in the mid-1970s under the DeCormier Folksingers name, at a community concert in a small town in Maine.

Of note: Woody Guthrie recorded his “This Land Is Your Land” in the late 1940s in the three-verse version now widely known. Around 1949 the Jewish Young People’s Folksingers Chorus directed by Bob DeCormier in New York started singing it in a choral arrangement. By the mid-1950s, a few school songbooks dared to include it; by 1971, they all did — but only the chorus and three verses (the story is told at <http://mysongbook.de/msb/songs/t/thisland.html#notelink>).

In 1954, the Jewish Young Folk-

singers, in association with the predecessor to JEWISH CURRENTS, *Jewish Life*, commissioned poet Aaron Kramer to write “The Ballad of August Bondi,” which was set to music by Serge Hovey and first performed at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in 1955. In the book, *When Every Tear is Turned to Stone*, it is reported that the Jewish Young Folk Singers, with Madeline Simon conducting, sang “Song for Peace” at New York’s Town Hall on February 4th, 1956.

The Jewish Young Folksingers appeared on Folkways No. FN 2511, 1959, *Hootenanny Tonight!*, singing “Home in That Rock,” the Negro spiritual, and “*Hamentashn*” (“*hop mayne hamentashn*”). In addition there are many recordings of the Belafonte and DeCormier Folksingers singing songs of African-American and Jewish origin.

Bob DeCormier, now 83, has been a prime mover in the field of Black-Jewish choral collaborations. Neither African-American nor Jewish, he has not received the credit he deserves. In addition to folksinging and folk-chorus direction, he directed “civic” choruses singing “classical” as well as popular songs, and was a producer for Peter, Paul and Mary and Harry Belafonte. He was music director of

Camp Unity, an interracial summer camp. He produced an anti-war opera, *Good Soldier Schweik*, in New York, directed the music for three Broadway shows and for two ballets with renowned African-American choreographer Donald McKayle: “Rainbow ’Round My Shoulder,” based on Negro folk material, for CBS-TV (which remains standard repertoire for Alvin Ailey Dance Theater), and “They Called Her Moses,” based on the life of Harriet Tubman.

DeCormier received the Vermont Governor’s Award for Excellence in the Arts in 2002 and was responsible for the formation of the 100-voice Vermont Symphony Orchestra Chorus and the 11-voice Counterpoint, Vermont’s only professional vocal ensemble, both of which he continues to direct. Mary Travers, Mary of Peter, Paul and Mary, says of him, “He chose to do what was meaningful to him. He didn’t go for the bucks . . . he went for the humanity, and that’s what shines through his work.”

I would be happy to hear from any of the old JYFs alumni at the email address below.

JULIAN CHAZIN
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San Diego, California

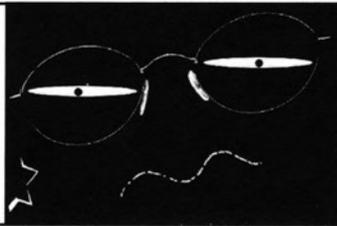
**In Memoriam
MORRIS DIAMOND**

Died July 30, 2004

Shirley, Peter and Paul
West Hartford, Connecticut

**In Memory of
Our Dear Sister
EMMA DAVIS**
of New Haven, Connecticut
A lifelong supporter of
JEWISH CURRENTS
Lillian and Joseph Dimow
and a dear friend,
Josephina Diglio

The Rootless Cosmopolitan



ROKHL KAFRISSSEN

The Problems with Being Rootless

I JUST READ Dovid Katz's new book, *Words on Fire*, and it was a *mekhaye*, let me tell you. Falling into the non-*mekhaye* category was a jarring Yiddish mistranslation in the May-June JEWISH CURRENTS piece about Reb Katz's fine book. Believe me (and Dr. Weinreich), an *apikoyres* is not an "ignoramus." While I'm sure many *apikorsim* are ignorami, an *apikoyres* (related to the Greek for "Epicurean") is a heretic — a state of being to which many JEWISH CURRENTS readers can relate.

This is the kind of error I would expect from *am-haretzim* like the kids over at *Heeb: The New Jew Review*, a magazine that has been publishing semi-regularly out of New York for about three years. If porn, hip-hop and/or making fun of JAPs is your bag, you might give *Heeb* a whirl. Frankly, I'm a fan of all three and I still hate the magazine. Every issue drips with a poisonous mixture of irony and self-indulgence. Much of their Jewish cultural coverage is really just finding the "Jew" in whatever they happen to think is cool: Jews doing graffiti art, Jews in the boxing ring, etc. Jews creating culture with non-ironic Jewish content are the exception in a typical issue of *Heeb*.

I will say this: the magazine is brilliantly executed and features some beautiful photography. But the visual verve usually doesn't translate into intelligent commentary. Shock value tends to take the place of substance, as last year's photo spread on Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* proved. *Heeb* produced a multi-page photo spread featuring a super-hot Jesus wearing a *tallis* like a loincloth (in a nod to Marc Chagall) and lounging on the lap of a topless Mary Magdalene. According to an interview with editor-in-chief Joshua

ROKHL KAFRISSSEN, our new columnist, is a full-time *Rootless Cosmopolitan* and a *Diaspora Nationalist*. She is the graduate of two schools named after Jewish Supreme Court justices. She fit in at neither.

Neuman (at www.suicidegirls.com), the reason *Heeb* chose to address *The Passion* with photos rather than with a written piece is that "Our generation is going to pay [only] so much attention to an editorial and we wanted people to pay attention to this." Yeah, and their lips probably move when reading the captions.

Taking a page from modern advertising, Neuman recognizes that when your message is too important to be ignored, don't say it with words, say it with tits. And what are the tits saying? According to Neuman: "What I think the spread does is articulate our anxiety and am-

***Heeb* recognizes that when your message is too important to be ignored, don't say it with words, say it with tits.**

bivalence about the campaign [around the *Passion*]." Puh-leeze. What it actually does is provoke and titillate and then try to get credit for being intelligent commentary. *Heeb*: It's narcissistic, shallow and representative of all things wrong with Jewish American culture. Which is why I also love it. Love love love to hate it, that is.

I am a single, thirty-year-old attorney drone with problem hair. My dance card, as they say, is less than full, and someone out there on the Internet knows it, as I am the lucky recipient of e-mail such as: "Webmaster at fastweb.com wants to notify you Rokhl about the Elwood Grimes Literary Scholarship," or, "You have new mail on Jewish American Singles.com." New e-mail from Jewish American Singles.com makes me want to sew up my own birth canal, especially when my internet suitor turns out to be a smooth talking 5'2" Hasid looking for a woman with an elementary school education. At least.

In this sad context, e-mail from *Heeb* really makes my day. Thank you very much, webmaster@heeb. I most certainly want to know about *Heeb*'s calendar of events. Let's be real: You and I *know* I'll never get that Elwood Grimes scholarship, but at least I can pay twelve bucks to attend *Heeb* Storytelling at Joe's Pub. Among the Yiderati performing, announces the e-mail, are the children of two figures of paramount importance to Jewish American culture today: Erica Jong and Edward Said. Hell, I'd pay fifteen dollars and a THREE drink minimum to see that. I know I'll be genuinely

entertained. Or filled with *Schadenfreude* (spiteful pleasure). Either way it's win win.

The best part of the Heeb Storytelling evening April 5th was a musical set by one David Israel. I know what you're thinking: *Is that some kind of stage name, like Moyshe Pipik? Why not just get up there and call yourself Yudel Jewison?* But I'm here to tell you, David Israel is for real. And he is a stone cold fox. He played acoustic guitar and sang sweet songs with the driest of deliveries. He sang about the "it" girls (Dorit, Sagit, Nurit) he had loved from afar while in Israel. He sang about Jdates and possibly being Ben Stiller's double. He was funny. Very funny. Not too religious, not too anguished, juuuust right. (David Israel, if you're reading this: call me.)

You see, I'm on a self-improvement kick. I'm trying to find a nice boy whose religious temperament is more in tune with mine. Problem is, I have a tendency to attract fallen yeshiva boys: the cuties whose deeply felt rebellion fall somewhere between screwing Asian porn stars and wearing *shatnez* to *shul*. Living in Washington Heights doesn't help me either. I see good-looking Yeshiva University guys all the time, but it's kind of awkward to go up and introduce myself to a guy when he's in the middle of a *shidekh* date in Starbucks.

I *could* meet someone at the Washington Heights YM-YWHA. On May 8nd I tried by attending an exhibition of local Russian artists from the neighborhood. My Russian being what it is, I was unable to ask the price of a particularly striking bust of a rabbi sculpted out of a tree root. I was also unable to ask any of the artists whether their grandsons were artists too, and if so, were they looking to meet a grumpy contrarian who prefers to conduct her pillow talk in broken Yiddish. I left without any phone numbers or art. Feh.

Finding someone, anyone, who speaks Yiddish up here is challenging, though Washington Heights isn't the *yekke* stronghold it was fifty years ago. As a rule, however, finding other rootless cosmopolitans involves a subway ride out of my ghetto. Seeking such fellowship, I found myself on Orchard Street on April 6th to see the Klez Dispensers. Despite their silly name, the kids in this band make many of their contemporaries look like golems blowing into the wrong end of a B-flat clarinet. The Klez Dispensers play a very American brand of Jewish swing most people associate with

the Barry Sisters, but while they play standards like "*Sheyn Vi Di Levone*" and "*Bay Mir Bistu Sheyn*," they feature stunning new arrangements by piano player Dr. Adrian Banner. The night I saw them on the Lower East Side, Susan Watts was sitting in on vocals and trumpet. Susan and Amy Zakar (violin) shared harmonies on "*Bay Mir Bistu Sheyn*." If you can imagine a song that has been covered by approximately 519 different artists over fifty years sounding fresh, you're getting an idea of the miracle taking place in this, *l'havdil*, dump of a nightclub.

The Dispensers also had their musical mentor, Pete Sokolow, sitting in on piano in place of the absent Adrian Banner. Sokolow is known to some as the youngest of the old guys and to others as the oldest of the young guys, having played with everyone from the Epstein Brothers in the 1960s to, well, the Klez Dispensers in 2005. He is a master of pretty much every style of American popular music that can be played on the piano. He was also a link to the artists being invoked that night. The Dispensers played "*Sheyn Vi Di Levone*," a 1939 Barry Sisters song that featured klezmer giant Dave Tarras on clarinet. Pete Sokolow played his first gig with Tarras in 1959. For a moment there, 1939 was in the room with us. I had such chills I had to put on a sweater. Pretty damned ironic, then, that *Heebsters* have accused klezmophiles such as myself of being more like civil war reenactors than participants in a living culture. Feh.

I'd like to hear them say that after seeing Aaron Alexander's Midrash Mishmash project performed, as I saw it last summer, in the giant auditorium of the B'nai Brith Quebec campgrounds, known for five days each summer as KlezKanada. With more people on stage than in the audience (including Alex Kontorovich, clarinetist of the Klez Dispensers), Aaron and his jewnormous band took everything they had learned from the masters (I think Pete Sokolow was in the audience), turned it inside out and served it back on a plate of insane jazz with a whopping side of horseradish. Now *that's* a *mekhaye*.

I know there were some JEWISH CURRENTS readers there with me at Klezkanada. Maybe there will be more this August. Who knows, there might even be a *Heeb* reader or two there in search of an intense musical experience. I hope I'll see you all there, and we can toast together over a couple of (Rootless) Cosmopolitans. ■

KAMINSKA'S

Mother Courage

ART: SPAIN '05

STORY: JOEL SCHECHTER

HOW CAN WE HAVE A WAR WITHOUT SOLDIERS? *

WARSAW, 1957: YIDDISH ACTRESS IDA KAMINSKA PERFORMS BRECHT'S PLAY, "MOTHER COURAGE." THE JEWISH MOTHER PULLS A CANTEEN WAGON ACROSS BATTLEFIELDS AND TRIES TO KEEP HER CHILDREN OUT OF THE ARMY.



VI KENEN MIR FIRNA MILKHOME VEN S'ZAYNEN NITO KAYN SOLDATEN?*

OBER ZEY DARFIN NIT ZAYN MAYNE**



** DO THEY HAVE TO BE MINE? *

KAMINSKA'S MOTHER, THE FAMOUS ACTRESS ESTER-ROKAL KAMINSKA, COULD NOT KEEP HER DAUGHTER OUT OF WAR OR THEATER. IN 1916 IDA, AT AGE 17, PORTRAYED ISAAC IN GOLDFADEN'S "THE BINDING OF ISAAC" WHILE GERMAN TROOPS OCCUPIED WARSAW.

IN 1941, KAMINSKA'S COURAGEOUS YIDDISH TROUPE PERFORMED GOLDFADEN'S "THE TENTH COMMANDMENT" WHILE BOMBS FELL ON ROVNO.



WHAT ABOUT THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT?

AFTER THE WAR KAMINSKA DIRECTED THE ONLY STATE YIDDISH THEATER IN POLAND. BUT MOST YIDDISH THEATERGOERS WERE GONE. POLISH CRITIC JAN KOTT LAMENTED THIS TRAGEDY WHEN HE SAW KAMINSKA'S "MOTHER COURAGE" IN WARSAW.



HARDLY ANYONE THERE COULD UNDERSTAND YIDDISH. THE TRAGEDY OF "MOTHER COURAGE" WAS NOT PERFORMED ON THE STAGE. THE SPECTATORS MAKE THE THEATER AS MUCH AS THE ACTORS DO.

1967, KAMINSKA'S MOTHER COURAGE SPOKE YIDDISH IN NEW YORK, TOO, AS THE ACTRESS PULLED THE COURAGE CANTEEN INSIDE THE BILLY ROSE THEATER ON BROADWAY.



HOW LONG WON'T YOU STAND FOR INJUSTICE? ONE HOUR? OR TWO?

AFTER BRAVING ANTI-SEMITISM IN POLAND AND PERFORMING OVER 150 DIFFERENT ROLES THERE, KAMINSKA EMIGRATED TO NEW YORK, WHERE SHE HOPED TO START A NEW YIDDISH THEATER BEFORE SHE DIED IN 1980.



BRAVERY! IN A GOOD COUNTRY, SUCH VIRTUES WOULDN'T BE NEEDED. WE COULD ALL BE COWARDS AND RELAX.

MYSTERIES

LAST WORDS

ROBERTA GOULD

Before I leave I want
to know where
that balloon man takes
his happily rising
tree of floating colors
too big for any doorway
bright package rising
enormous and trying
to lead the way

How this will be revealed
I don't know
Nor how to ask the question:
where does he park his bright wares
when day is done?

Another puzzle
impossible to fathom
is how that old woman
on the corner
tiny and sitting on the pavement
survives on almost no food at all
I, who missed just one meal,
thought I was starving

Does old age exempt the poor
from the need for nourishment?
Is death the only answer?

And why do a few souls
drop coins in her cup?



ROBERTA GOULD (www.robertagould.net) is the organizer of an educational campaign that urges international tourists to leave generous tips and desist from price haggling when on vacation in Third World countries. *Other Possibilities*, her ninth book, will be published this fall.

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