

# MANNNA



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called 'The Kid from Had Gadya'.

An exhibition of Boussidan's work will be  
held at the Manor House from the 3rd to the  
23rd November.

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# BRIDGING THE DIVIDE

**M**ANNA HAS OFTEN had occasion to refer to the vexed question of orthodox-progressive relations in Britain. Fairly consistent tension and sporadic bouts of open warfare have characterised this relationship for many years. It was therefore very helpful when Rabbi Norman Lamm, President of the Yeshiva University in New York, writing in the *Jewish Chronicle*, effectively defined that relationship in a way which, if needed, could minimise bickering in the future. In a key passage in his article Lamm wrote:

Facts cannot be wished away by theories, no matter how cherished. And the facts are that Reform, Conservative and Liberal communities globally are not only more numerous in their official memberships than the Orthodox community, but they are also vital, powerful and dynamic; they are committed to Jewish survival, each according to its own lights; they are a part of *Klal Yisrael*; and they consider their rabbis their leaders.

From a *functional* point of view, therefore, non-Orthodox rabbis are *valid* leaders of Jewish religious communities, and it is both fatuous and self-defeating not to acknowledge this openly and draw the necessary consequences – for example, establishing friendly and harmonious and respectful relationships and working together, all of us, towards those Jewish communal and global goals that we share and that unite us inextricably and indissolubly.

As an Orthodox Jew, I not only have no trouble in acknowledging the functional validity of non-Orthodox rabbinic leadership, but also in granting that non-Orthodox rabbis and lay people may possess *spiritual dignity*. If they are sincere, if they believe in God, if they are motivated by principle and not by convenience or trendiness, if they

endeavour to carry out the consequences of their faith in a consistent manner – then they are *religious* people.

But neither functional *validity* nor spiritual *dignity* is identical with Jewish *legitimacy*. “Validity” derives from the Latin *validus*, strong. It is a factual, descriptive term. “Legitimacy” derives from the Latin *lex*, law. It is a normative and evaluative term.

*Validity* describes the *fact* of one’s religious existence. *Dignity* refers to the *quality* of one’s religious posture, not its *content*. It is the latter which, to my eyes, determines what we are terming *legitimacy*.

Here I have no choice but to judge such legitimacy by my own understanding of what constitutes Judaism and what does not. The criterion of such legitimacy is the Jewish *lex* – the halacha; not a specific interpretation of an individual halacha; not a general tendency to be strict or lenient; but the fundamental acceptance of halacha’s divine origin, of *Torah min hashamayim*.

Two crucial points flow from Lamm’s definitions. First, non-orthodox Judaism is, by its very nature, illegitimate in the eyes of orthodoxy. There is a divide of belief which renders the most conservative, as well as the most progressive, irredeemably illegitimate viewed from the other side of the divide. As the American rabbi Eugene Borowitz has pointed out, we sometimes obfuscate the divide by using the same language to mean different things. Progressive Jews may believe in *halachah* (Jewish law) and in its divine inspiration but they do not believe in *Torah min hashamayim* (Torah from heaven) *in the same way* as orthodox Jews. There is nothing that non-orthodox Jews can do

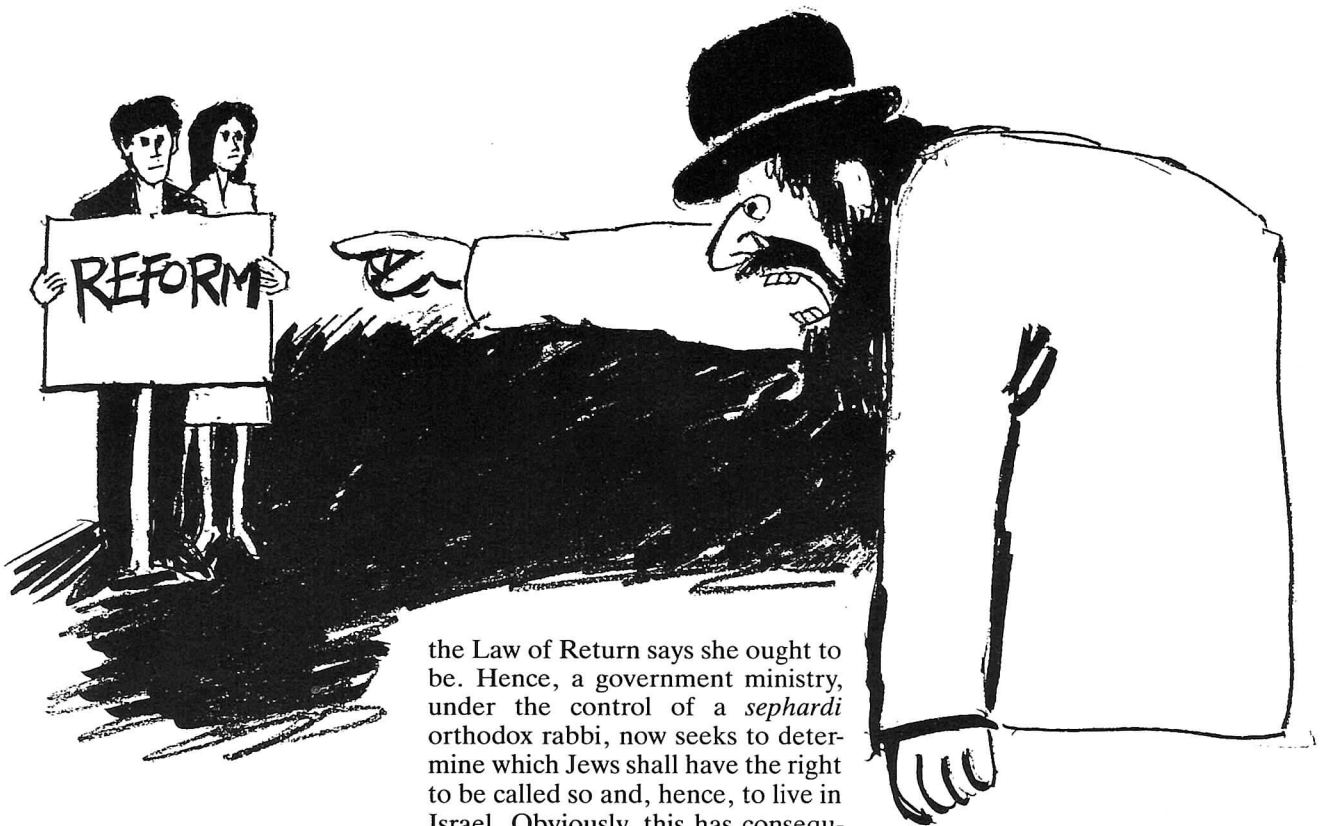
to legitimise themselves in the sight of orthodoxy. An acceptance of that reality can at least ease progressive frustrations and calm orthodox fears that the progressives want something that cannot be given.

Even more importantly Lamm’s definition forces progressive Jews to accept that what they do should be done because they believe that it is authentically Jewish and not because they are looking over their shoulders. Progressive Judaism can only find self-legitimacy in its own inner integrity and in its fidelity to God’s demands as progressive Jews hear them. No amount of genuflecting towards tradition will cut any ice with anybody unless it truly stems from conviction.

A second point, equally important, also flows from Lamm’s article. If the issue of legitimacy defines the limits of mutual acceptance, functional validity leaves ample scope for harmony and cooperation. Lamm sees no need for abuse, still less for writing out a whole section of the Jewish people. A disagreement over theology, however profound, must never hide equally profound common commitments to the Jewish people and to Jewish values. Would that the new year could bring a response to his call to establish “friendly and harmonious and respectful relationships and working together, all of us, towards those Jewish communal and global goals that we share and that unite us inextricably and indissolubly.” ■

# REFORM JEWS MUST INVEST IN ISRAEL NOW

Michael Boyden



**T**HE REFORM MOVEMENT is in the process of being written out of Israel. In a country in which the Minister for the Interior, Rabbi Yitzchak Peretz, can defer the introduction of Summer Time for religious reasons, anything is possible. It is not just that reform rabbis cannot officiate at marriages and funerals. Shoshana Miller, a committed Jew, who converted to Judaism in the United States of America under the authority of a reform rabbi, was not recognised here as Jewish, even though

the Law of Return says she ought to be. Hence, a government ministry, under the control of a *sephardi* orthodox rabbi, now seeks to determine which Jews shall have the right to be called so and, hence, to live in Israel. Obviously, this has consequences for reform Jews wherever they may choose to live.

Orthodox Jews represent but a minority of Israel's population and an even smaller percentage of World Jewry, but in the Jewish State their power is massive. This strength, in part, hinges on orthodoxy's politicization, which enables them to make or break any coalition government and, in consequence, gain all kinds of concessions from the ruling party. They control the Jewish section of the Department of Religious Affairs, which among other things, funds

the orthodox rabbinate and a host of religious institutions.

*Kochav Yair* is a new town of 1,100 families, being built within the Green Line (i.e. 1967 border) some ten miles East of Herzliya. From its outset, it will have a synagogue and religious day school to cater for the minority of its inhabitants who are orthodox. These facilities will be provided out of communal and state funds, while other Israelis will go to the secular day school and reform Jews will search in vain for suitable religious education for their chil-

dren and for somewhere to hold services. Judaism in Israel is virtually the monopoly of the religious establishment.

The implications of this are phenomenal. As Northern Ireland educates a segregated population of Protestants and Catholics, who largely live apart from one another, so Israel has built into its school system a divide between the so-called 'religious' and 'secular' that not only works against integration, but also writes off the vast majority of Israeli school children as being non-religious.

Given these realities, it is hardly surprising that reform gets a bad press. There is a massive propaganda machine at work, telling Israelis that the only legitimate form of Judaism is orthodoxy. Witness the large newspaper spreads prior to *Rosh Hashanah*, warning people to stay away from Conservative and reform synagogues, since the hearing of a *shofar* blown in their institutions would not fulfil the *mitzvah*!

Israeli secularists have been largely happy to swallow this anti-reform line and even collude with it. After all, it is much easier to condemn and write-off Judaism in its orthodox, obscurantist and coercive manifestation than to be forced by reform to confront one's heritage. As I left Tel Aviv airport for the World Union for Progressive Judaism conference in Toronto recently, I had a long debate with the customs officer about the validity of reform. (Where else in the world could that happen?!) Although she was largely non-observant and knew nothing about the content of reform Jewish practice, her schooling in Israel, combined with anti-reform propaganda, had been enough to condemn us in her eyes. So there is a tremendous task of re-education to be undertaken.

Religion in Israel is big business. Vast sums of money are ploughed by the State into religious education, institutions and personnel. Recently, Rabbi Peretz was able to distribute \$20 million to a variety of *yeshivot* and other institutions – part of the agreed pay-off for his participation in the coalition government. All attempts by the Reform Movement to get a reasonable share of the cake have met with failure. Reform Jews are not recognised by the Department for Religi-

ous Affairs and, as such, do not represent an officially accepted religious body. In consequence, we are out in the wilderness. We are on our own – or almost.

Those very coercive forces, which give orthodoxy such power in Israel, have also generated a growing resentment within the population at large. They do not want Judaism on these terms and have expressed their opposition in a variety of ways. Such people are ripe for a new intervention, for a credible alternative to religious obscurantism.

In some areas we have had our successes. The Leo Baeck School in Haifa is a shining example of what can be achieved. Our *kibbutzim*, Yahel and Lotan, struggle with the reality of living out a reform Jewish life in the harsh terrain of the Aravah. Their idealism and commitment is impressive. A number of reform synagogues are making a valuable contribution to the religious fabric of their neighbourhoods. Recently I attended a lovely *Erev Shabbat* service and dinner held by our congregation in Holon, a suburb to the South-East of Tel Aviv. reform Jews, young and old, *sephardi* and *ashkenazi* met in a rented classroom to celebrate together. Bruria Barish's Arab/Jewish camps and programmes for the underprivileged also play their part. And then there is the new World Reform Centre being built in Jerusalem, which will provide hostel accommodation and seminar facilities for a wide variety of activities.

But the fact still remains that, when it comes to assessing the impact of Reform Judaism on Israeli society at large, our success has been limited. Whilst there are a variety of forces conspiring against us, it is arguable that a major cause for our lack of growth has been the fact that Reform has yet to take Israel seriously. It is one thing to send rabbinic students and youth leaders here for a year and to organise a wide variety of youth tours and programmes in Israel. It is quite another thing actively to encourage *aliyah* – as some sections of the orthodox community are doing – and to accept the mantle of responsibility for the religious life of the Jewish State.

The Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism, which employs nearly

all of Israel's Reform Rabbis, operated in 1985/6 on a budget of \$120,000, provided by the World Union for Progressive Judaism within an overall Israel budget of half a million dollars. Approximately one dozen Reform Rabbis are employed by the Israel Movement or the World Union on either a full or part-time basis. This is the level of our rabbinic investment in the religious future of Israel. It is difficult to believe that such a small scale commitment will ever make anything more than a marginal impact here. Present results would testify to this.

*Im ein kemach, ein Torah* – 'If there is no money, there is no Torah' – is a rabbinic saying that the Lubavitch Movement has understood well. They have invested millions of dollars in all kinds of programmes both here and in the diaspora and it has paid off well. By contrast, Reform Judaism has yet to get its act together. There are 3½ million Jews here, most of whom do not have a religious home. Why should we not provide that home? The secular school system is ripe for our intervention. The *kibbutz* movement is in search of a religious identity. Many Israelis, realising the spiritual emptiness of political Zionism and of the material society, are in search of their roots. The retreat of the *chotzrei be teshuvah* – 'born again Jews' – into ultra-orthodoxy is an answer for some, but is unlikely to provide a solution for most modern, thinking people. Unfortunately, we as a Movement have yet to take up the challenge in anything more than a token way.

We need to begin to talk in terms of real sums of money to operate here. An initial budget of \$1 million per year may sound extravagant, but it is the very minimum we need to begin to employ rabbis, teachers and the other personnel needed to work in this country. In relationship to the size of the task it is pitifully little. Representing less than \$1 from each reform Jew in the World, it is hardly a large price to pay in order to try to develop Reform Judaism in Israel.

There remain two questions: Firstly, why should not the Israel Movement fund itself as diaspora congregations and movements do. Secondly, why should the diaspora have to contribute towards the

*Continued on next page*

future of Reform in Israel?

There is not a single, purpose-built synagogue in the entire Israel Movement. Many congregations – in fact, most – meet in rented halls or classrooms. There just is not the capital to initiate building programmes and so we are hardly on the map. It has to be remembered that the average Israeli lives on a comparatively modest income, even by European standards, whilst the cost of living and the tax burden is extremely high. In consequence, the amount of disposable income available to the average family is small. Secondly, whereas joining a synagogue in the diaspora is an act of Jewish identification, with religion school, youth groups and Jewish burial being matters of considerable importance, in Israel you do not need a synagogue for these things. Membership tends, then, to be restricted to those who really care about their Judaism.

This has implications for programming and for budgets. The synagogue can only be one prong of our appeal to the public at large. We need to be involved in out-reach. We should be working in schools, in the youth movements, in the *kibbutzim*, and in a wealth of other contexts and institutions. After all, our target population is not synagogue members alone, but the Israeli public at large. Reform in Israel is urgently in need of a much higher profile. We need to be organising public meetings, advertising regularly in the press and making our presence felt through the media. But all of this takes personnel and money. The Israel Movement is enthusiastic and committed, but it cannot be expected to shoulder such a burden. So why should others shoulder it?

Israel is the concern of World Jewry. Whatever is decided here ultimately has repercussions for Jews wherever they may live. If reform Jews are disenfranchised here, our membership is also disenfranchised. If the orthodox establishment takes over Israel – and it is trying to – then progressive Jews in the diaspora will no longer have a Jewish State they can call their own. The campaign to discredit us here in Israel does not end with Israel, but has serious implications for us all.

But there is also a positive reason for our needing help. Here are over 3 million Jews, a sizeable propor-

tion of whom are Jews in name only. They ought to be the target of our activity in order to demonstrate to them that Judaism has a valuable contribution to make to their lives at the end of the 20th century. The tragic gulf between orthodoxy and secularism is crying out for our intervention. However, we cannot take on this task in any real sense with a handful of rabbis and a number of rented halls and classrooms.

The question is: Do reform Jews care enough about Israel's religious future to invest in it? In terms of *aliyah*, we have not been as successful as we might. However, in the meantime, we cannot allow the Jewish State to be hijacked by her orthodox minority. But it is happen-

ing and it is leading to our exclusion. It is not yet too late to halt and reverse that trend.

Is it not high time that we reform Jews set up our own Reform Israel Appeal, so that our members, as well as contributing through the JIA, can play their part in putting Reform on the map here? This will have consequences not only for Israel, but for progressive Jews wherever they may be. Ultimately, it will also determine our future. ■

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**Rabbi Michael Boyden** was born in London and read Hebrew at London University. He studied for the rabbinate at Leo Baeck College and then served the Cheshire Reform congregation before going on aliyah in 1985.

## POSTSCRIPT TO YOM KIPPUR

**Nick Carter** is a distinguished conservationist. Born in 1927 he has worked in many parts of the world including South Africa. The new High Holy Days *Machzor* of the RSGB provoked the following response from him.

**T**O OPEN THIS *MACHZOR* is to enter the awesome natural environment of Jewish life and time. Within these translated forms of prayer one shares the continuous procreative expression of the so far unlimited capacities of Judaism and Jews for adaptation to the perpetually changing and challenging forms and conditions of existence. And the *Machzor* conserves the characteristically sensitive yet tenacious faithfulness to the environment of Judaism whereon our nature remains wholly dependent in the contemporary world of major perceptual and conceptual changes.

It is awesome to recollect Jewish survival and development from the natural selection and response of Abraham till this day. The range of environmental conditions and cultures that have challenged us to adapt or die is an historic revelation of psychobiological conservation. With original scriptural and *talmudic* forms, translations and adaptations of them into current idioms, the *Machzor* brings in the harvest of sayings from centuries of sages, scientists, scholars, leaders and poets from

Johanan ben Zakkai to Anne Frank, Freud, Golda Meir and Einstein. In them we behold manifold challenges and responses of every nature from those of extinction to the equally awesome demands of inspiration that also may isolate and kill.

Peoples, cultures, species and their environments have been, and are becoming, extinct. As a small sub-species or variant of humankind we yet survive; though do well to know awe. For necessity now demands all the genius of our conserving heart and mind by which we have survived to dwell in a world whose conservation and development is indivisible from our own.

In facing present challenges to the biological environment further perceptual and conceptual adaptations are demanded of us. Without receptivity to the divine timeless environment of mind and spirit in the Days of Awe evoked in this *Machzor* we are, simply, inadequate to respond to the demand. For we shall be unable to see that every diverse thing in creation was, and is, very good.



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### Sally Greengross

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**S**OME 10-15 YEARS AGO the caring professions were preoccupied with trying to identify child abuse. Would it comprise only non-accidental injury or extend to the infliction of psychological pain, to neglect and to verbal or emotional ill-treatment? Clearly defined laws, and powers to act, have helped to clarify the position for doctors and social

workers, and for all of us who are understandably outraged when a child faces the uncontrolled anger and cruelty of a stronger and more powerful adult.

Sadly our thinking is far less developed when it comes to old people. Very little research has been done into the extent of old age abuse.

From time to time we are shocked

by horror stories in the newspapers or on TV when old people are subjected to physical cruelty, scandalous neglect or obscenely degrading treatment. Often this happens in residential institutions, occasionally at home. However unlike recent tragic cases of child abuse where a chain of accountability and therefore liability is recognised, there is usually confusion about who is

responsible, especially in cases of neglect, particularly when we hear about an old person treated badly by a member of his or her own family. It is easy to label cases of this kind as beyond our comprehension. Such a thing could not happen in the kind of families we know or come from. People who can treat their elderly family members in such a way are beyond the pale and have nothing to do with the Jewish community where the reputation for devoted family relationships and a strong tradition of respect for elderly people are still very apparent.

American research and British case histories however, point to the fact that old age abuse or 'granny-battering' as it has been inappropriately labelled, does not occur less among any particular section or group within the wider society. Neither is it confined to people from specific cultures and none are immune from the pressures and the 'trigger points' which can lead to such ill-treatment. Poverty, poor housing and overcrowded living conditions are only some pointers to the extreme stress which leads to high risk.

We should ask ourselves why old age abuse is only now beginning to be recognised as a potential or actual problem. One of the greatest triumphs of the 20th century is surely the fact that more people survive into old age. Advances in public health provision and medical treatment have eliminated the effects of most of the infectious diseases which used to wipe out large sections of the population at any age and life expectancy has dramatically increased. It has even been estimated that half the population of people of retirement age and over who have ever lived on this planet are alive today. In this country the numbers of those of 80 and over will double by the end of the century. It is amongst this group that the most frail and vulnerable are to be found. The 'survival of the unfittest' means that many physically and mentally frail elderly people will live for many years and, despite the frequent criticism unfairly directed towards today's families, over 95% of all elderly people in this country will remain at home cared for by their families for a period which often extends for 10 to 20 years. It is this fact which is so

often forgotten.

Never before have we expected families consisting of very few adult children to care for such a long period, often in very difficult circumstances. It is taken for granted that caring families are supported by the wider family and community, by neighbours and friends. In reality carers are usually women, isolated, often totally unsupported and living at a level of poverty which is exacerbated by the fact that they might have given up a job, pension entitlements and social contacts to offer long term care to a relative. Cultural pressures may be powerful enough to force a member of the family to persist in a task which has become overwhelming and far beyond the capacity of most people. We must ask ourselves how often such people may be unwilling to seek help because they cannot admit to themselves that the parent or partner they have always loved so deeply has become, through the tragic effects of dementia, an unrecognisable being housed in the physical presence of the person who shares their daily life. How can they accept that at times they feel hatred and resentment to a level which might become dangerous.

It is important to recognise that the majority of carers are themselves elderly people, often loving life-long partners, who are themselves suffering from chronic sickness and depression. It is also not uncommon today to have four and even five generation families where a daughter, herself over retirement age, is 'sandwiched' in the middle of several generations needing her support and care ranging from a declining grandparent to a difficult adolescent. Unlike the case of a mother caring for a dependent child who is beyond her control or capacity for care, there are very few statutory duties which require the local authority to provide help for an adult caring for a dependent elderly person. At the present time when resources are increasingly scarce, the mere fact that a daughter is available and offering care might place her mother at the end of a long queue of deserving cases. In any event many people are reluctant to admit that they need help. Many psychiatrists, for example, Klaus Bergmann, have emphasised the need for early and preventive intervention by medical and social ser-

vices at the time when the family is still able to cope because there comes a point at which the pressures are so great that the old person will be rejected permanently and forced into some form of institutional care. At this point the family carers are unlikely ever to take the old person back into their home however many additional resources are offered. Their sense of guilt, failure and the blame they place upon themselves should be recognised, particularly if they come from a Jewish background which expects and demands love, family care and continued respect for the older generation.

Another difficulty facing families whose relatives are in residential care where ill-treatment is suspected is to decide whether to complain or whether such a complaint will increase the likelihood of ill-treatment through the increased victimisation of the old person by the suspected member of staff.

We also have to consider the old people themselves – those at risk of ill-treatment or abuse. If an elderly mother sees her adult son transformed into a man who can reach out and hit her, is she likely to telephone the police and complain that the son she has loved and cared for has turned into a monster? Would that not in itself be an admission of defeat and taken as a criticism of her capacity as a mother? Is she not more likely to remain silent and share this terrible secret with no-one? Her changed behaviour and the gradual process of deterioration in her personality and capacities can be such that she has periods of lucidity when she understands completely what has happened but others when her loss of memory and irrational fears of persecution make her accuse her son of ill-treatment before it actually happens. This can exacerbate the risk. There are no 'At Risk Registers' of vulnerable adults, no ways of being certain that the caring agencies know when a tragedy is likely to erupt. Carers and their loved ones can be marooned in isolation and mutual dependency. Emotional blackmail on both sides and the lack of appropriate support can make it impossible for either to escape. What is needed is early intervention by agencies employing workers trained to recognise the early signs of this type of stress, who under-

stand its causes and have the tact and discretion to intervene in acceptable ways. They need to approach elderly people and their carers long before an explosive situation occurs. They need to recognise that their 'client' is not one person but at least two, the old person and the principal carer. They have to be skilled in counselling and avoid attributing blame to those who are not natural carers, nurses or angels but simply members of a family. They have to 'give permission' to a partner, a son or a daughter to admit they cannot cope and to seek some form of institutional care.

Permission is needed to live as well as to love and independence and dignity may be more important than duties or obligations. Jewish social work agencies and counselling bodies need to be much more aware of the stresses and difficulties which modern society places upon those who genuinely wish to care for their old but whose personal and environmental circumstances render this impossible at times.

It is important to look at the legislation used in child care practice and consider models which would help us to lessen the risk of abuse among elderly people while avoiding infantilising them. Early assessments of the needs of elderly people and their carers may have to be ensured through new laws. They could help to make the task of families much easier because they would then know clearly where to seek help and have some assurance that it might be available.

The Jewish community with its unique understanding and sympathy towards family life, its value and its stresses, can make an important contribution and perhaps even lead the way in introducing recognisable and well publicised models of good practice. ■

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*Lady Greengross is Deputy Director of Age Concern England and Secretary General of the International Federation on Ageing.*



**S**INCE THE LAST WAR, THE Jewish community in Europe has been pondering the necessities of its existence. Unlike Israel it has neither a state, nor a culture, nor a common language. Unlike the American community it is fragmented and not held together by a network of organisations, country clubs and group activity. It has only gradually felt its way to an understanding of its own situation.

In Europe there is not much future for a 'volk' culture, and togetherness is not a motive for survival. In a clumsy sort of way, the many groups and trends in Jewish life over here have centred on the word 'spirituality' as a key one in their thinking. It is not the most obvious of answers, but it is the only one which seems relevant to the day-to-day life of our communities, which are held together by a religious bond or not at all.

Most Jews are uneasy with the word 'spirituality', though they have nothing against it. It sounds suspect, even non-Jewish. And I agree that Jews have to work out their special relationship to it.

Firstly, Jews are very much aware that they are not see-through souls, they have bodies too. Their religious task is not to sacrifice the latter for the sake of the former, but to do justice to both and join their needs together because both come from God. In working this out for themselves, they also work it out for the society around them which has need of a precise, non-romantic, earthy spirituality that accepts consumerism and doesn't waste time deploring it. If it can make headway in this task, then it has the key to the ills of the present insecure affluence. These are not the classic ills of poverty and hunger, which are to be found in the third world, but lack of purpose, boredom, and inner violence.

Jewish spirituality is best when it does not work from theology downwards, but pragmatically from life situations upwards. What is the spiritual component in happiness? I am not referring to advanced spiritual states, but to the ordinary happiness people seek, for example, on holidays. They want something more than comfort! Also if you are a businessman, how do you keep your integrity in a tricky world?

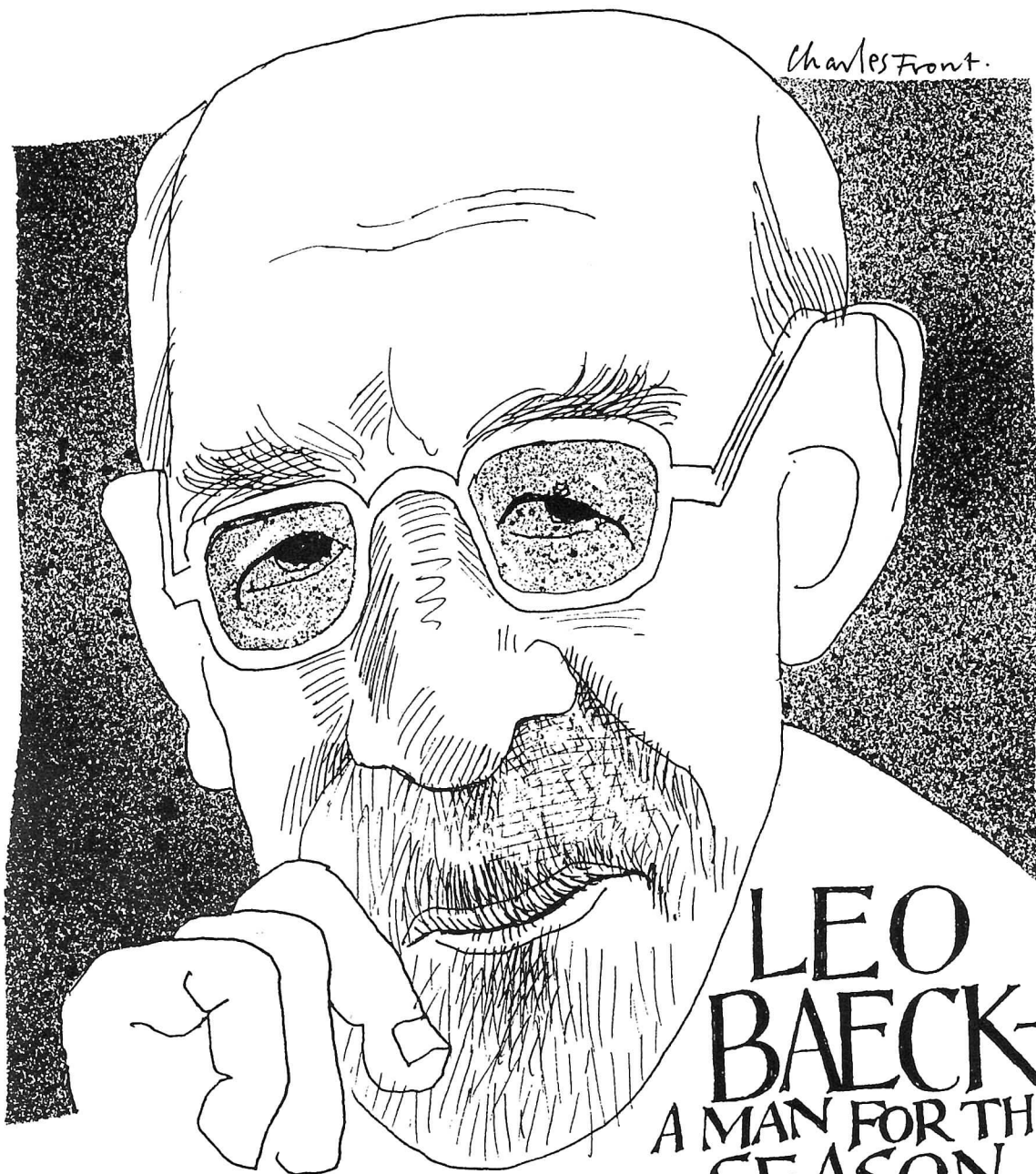
There is a great deal of fuzz around very basic religious issues. Take prayer for example. What is our understanding of it? Since most of us no longer think the universe is going to go off course to suit our convenience, what are the realities of prayer? What can it give, and just as important what can it not give? The answers will not be found in tomes of apologetics but in the life experience of ordinary people. Examples of such experience can be found in the *Musaf* service of the Reform *Yom Kippur* liturgy. They have the ring of relevance and truth and therefore break through the suspicion of being 'conned' which is present in many would-be believers.

Another characteristic of Jewish spirituality must lie in the close connection between the understanding of the self and the understanding of God. Without being exactly conscious of it, the role of rabbis and ministers has come closer to that of counsellors and therapists. This is a hard way, but the only way because it prefers the highest common denominator of individual awareness, to the lowest common factor of group emotion.

Every community has its own task, set by its own situation and experience. If European Jewry is faithful to its own religious reality, it may solve not just its own survival problem, but a spiritual one for the larger society around it. It was after all meant to be a blessing to the families of the world, and this is a condition of existence in the diaspora. ■

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*Rabbi Lionel Blue is convenor of the Bet Din of the Reform Synagogues of Great Britain. His Monday morning broadcasts on Radio Four's 'Thought for the Day' have made him a household name. Among his books are To Heaven with Scribes and Pharisees and Backdoor to Heaven. Bolts from the Blue was published last month.*



*Albert H. Friedlander*

**L**EO BAECK DIED IN 1956, thirty years ago. Throughout the world, there are institutions which carry his name: The Leo Baeck College, the Leo Baeck Institute, the Leo Baeck Lodge...The Home...the Hall – London itself is rich in places where this name is part of a continuing history of Jewish institutional life. Yet that very process has helped to obscure the reality of the person. These days, we think of institutions rather than of an individual. There is merit in this, of course – the proper commemoration of any person is the continuance of the work which was central to that life. The B'nai B'rith thus recall the name of the German leader of that organisation, the

Grand Master of those dark days, by giving his name to a Lodge which is particularly interested in the cultural and religious achievements of a Jewish world which has practically ceased to exist. In the same way, the Leo Baeck Institute is known for its work as a research organisation in the field of Jewish history. The Leo Baeck Yearbooks have established a standard of scholarship over the past thirty years which not only preserves a name but also an area of Jewish learning which has established itself in all major universities of the Western world. Synagogues carry on the progressive tradition of Baeck's religious teachings. Old age homes care for those whom he nurtured in the concentration camp.

And the Leo Baeck College trains young rabbis who follow in his footsteps.

And yet... and yet... thirty years after his death – how much is remembered of the man Leo Baeck, and of his teachings? The very fact that he became a monument to the best of German-Jewish life, that a mythology of sainthood began to surround him, and that he became part of the reminiscences of the elderly, has removed him from the centre of our lives. And that is a pity. The man and his teachings have much to give to us today, and the deepest problems of the contemporary world – war and peace, the reclaiming of the sense of

wonder, the acceptance of our duty as stewards of a ravaged world – all these can be illuminated by the wisdom which can be found in the books he wrote, in his actions which taught even more clearly than the books, and in an ironic, glowing personality which can and should come to life as we open ourselves to it.

If there is one teaching out of many which must be recommended to our society, it is that of 'positive neutrality'. Thirty years after his death, the battle lines between competing factions in the Jewish and non-Jewish world have become so firmly established that the middle ground is totally eroded. We live in a world of fanaticism. Two opposing positions, built at least partly upon ignorance of the flow of history which Baeck always stressed, and built, as well, upon ignorance of the opposing position have led to an open warfare which is destroying Judaism and the State of Israel. Secularists burn synagogues. Fanatic traditionalists destroy bus shelters, stone ambulances, and steal land which they claim for themselves as a divine gift.

Leo Baeck would speak out against the desecration of the Divine Name. He would be a voice for peace: peace with our brothers and sisters around us, peace within the land and the homes of Israel. He would also cast a critical eye upon the warfare within the camp of Progressive Judaism. We argue about such minor matters as separate us. We ignore so much of the basic approach to Judaism which unites us! If we look carefully at the life and thought of Leo Baeck, we quickly discern that the middle way he walked, his ability to unite opposing aspects of reality into polarities of dynamic tension – *was not a compromise*.

Weak, non-thinking, progressive Jews generally operate out of a specific inferiority complex. They assume that they are less than 100% Jews, and must therefore apologise for their behaviour and beliefs to the 'true Jews' of Orthodoxy. They define themselves against secularists, and hope that their position of being 51% Jews will somehow

prove acceptable to the world. And they ignore the fact, shown by the life and teachings of Baeck, that the middle way can be 100% correct, that it is the right decision, that it does not involve a 'compromise'.

When we examine the daily life of Leo Baeck during the difficult time when he led the Jewish community in Germany, we see that he had all the difficulties of political leadership as a daily burden. There were many factions – Zionist and non-Zionist, traditional and progressive, urban versus rural, secular against religious – and he had to listen to all of them. Most politicians overcome this by the ability of achieving compromises. But Baeck was not a political leader. He was a religious leader. And he made his decision on the basis of what was right in the sight of God. Of course he made many mistakes. Some may have arisen out of flaws within himself: there was pride; there was the reluctance to deal kindly with fools; there were his own emotions. But, in a world where he was watched and scrutinized to the fullest during every moment of his work, there existed the knowledge – shared by all – that this was a man of integrity, a man of faith. His motives were noble and just. And he had the brilliant mind and the good heart required by our tradition for spiritual leadership. It led him down a middle way in which there was no compromise.

They say that when Harry Truman was the president of the USA he was beset by advisers in every area who always covered themselves – on the one hand this, on the other hand, that... Finally, in desperation, he cried out: 'Aren't there any one-armed economic advisers?'

Baeck, having seen both sides of a question would make a clear decision. And we still live by these decisions. The dream he had for a theological college in London had this dimension of the middle way. His own traditional practices, which were also a teaching when he lived in the dormitory of the Hebrew Union College, were combined with clear instruction which indicate the way for progressive Judaism

as a non-faction Judaism, which can speak for all Jews and recognise the private and public dimensions which make up the way for 'this people Israel.'

Baeck was a teacher of hope. His was an optimism which lived through the concentration camp, which recognised endemic evil within ourselves and in the world, and which saw the clear pathway for the Jew and for humanity. In this short celebration of an anniversary, let us end with a quotation taken from a text existing so far only in German

'Human life does not reside beneath a decision made by fate beyond us. It is determined by our own decision. A goal has been given, and freedom is given us to lead us to it. If we turn away from the goal, we can turn back to it. We can go the way which leads us to God. We can be reconciled, can become pure. It is the deed, the moral action, which creates reconciliation. No miracle, no sacrament brings reconciliation. Freedom is the way. And, within the art of reconciliation, the human being achieves a new freedom and with it the new responsibility; and this becomes the way, the new task.'

(from *Die Lehren des Judentums*,  
Vol. 1, p.12)

During this anniversary year, we should remind ourselves that there are many teachings, many texts, many of his books which are available to us. More than that, we can rediscover Leo Baeck in his new disciples: the rabbis emerging from the Leo Baeck College in London and from Hebrew Union college and the Jewish Theological Seminary in the United States. Even more: there are traditional teachers who have been instructed by him, and who share his insights with the community.

The middle way, the path of Baeck's vision, may yet reconcile a Jewish community which needs that vision, kindness, and love. ■

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# HAROLD REINHART THE LONE SAVIOUR OF REFUGEES

Jonathan Romain

**I**N THE MID 1930's THE Reform Movement in England was small and relatively static. Apart from the West London, Manchester and Bradford Synagogues – all established in the previous century – there was only a slowly growing congregation in Golders Green (the North Western) a much smaller one in Glasgow and the bare nucleus of one in Edgware. There was no facility for training British reform Rabbis. Whilst home-grown lay prachers were available, such as Basil Henriques, the only way to obtain ordained rabbis was to invite Americans, for whom the English language would not provide a barrier. Thus it was that the West London Synagogue had brought Harold Reinhart over from the United States to succeed Morris Joseph. The few other ordained rabbis also came from across the Atlantic: Cashden at West London, Baron at Glasgow and Starrels at North Western Reform from the United States, and Perlzweig North Western Reform from Canada.

The situation was to change dramatically during the rest of the decade as a result of the influx of some 60,000 German Jews fleeing from Nazi oppression. It was Germany that had been the birthplace of the Reform Movement in Judaism at the beginning of the 19th century. Since that time, it had attracted wide support, had become well established and its rabbis enjoyed a high degree of respect amongst the general Jewish community for their combination of Jewish and secular scholarship. Many of the German refugees were sympathetic to Reform Judaism, and their arrival swelled existing congregations and led to the foundation of new ones. The result was the rapid growth of the North Western Synagogue and the expansion of Glasgow and Edgware to the point that both needed, and were able to appoint a full-time minister. Within four years of the war ending, six new congregations had been established: Leeds, Bournemouth, Southport, Cardiff, Hendon and Wimbledon. The influx of German Jews had thus helped to double the number of Reform Synagogues, and paved the way for continuous expansion thereafter.

Perhaps of even greater importance was the arrival of the many German Reform rabbis, who provided the Reform Movement with a quality of leadership to which it could not otherwise have aspired. Their unique combination of deep commitment to Reform Judaism and immense scholarship gave the British Reform Movement a new strength and distinction. Commenting on this unequalled chance, Owen E. Mocatta, the President of the West London Synagogue, wrote:

'Up to 1933, it had been impossible to provide embryonic Reform congregations with ministers. Now, thanks to Hitler, an opportunity was presented; and so, due to this unforeseen source of trained and qualified ministers, the Association of Synagogues came into being and Reform congregations began to multiply.'

But in itself, the arrival of some 35 German Reform rabbis and their families did not change anything. It was the warm reception that they received from Reinhart and the manner in which he used their talents that led to such major

effects. Reviewing the events of those years, Leo Bernard declared:

'From 1933 onwards, the growing plight of German Jewry and the welfare of those who were able to escape from oppression became a constant concern of the Anglo-Jewish community, and many organisations and individuals were deeply involved in the work of alleviation. But it can be said without reservation that no synagogue responded more effectively to the needs of the moment than Upper Berkeley Street, and that no one man acquitted himself more nobly than Harold Reinhart.'

It is a testimony echoed by many others, particularly those who benefited from his assistance and later became his colleagues:

'He saw the potential, and the rabbinic newcomers found in him guidance and counsel. He channelled this "manpower" with much understanding and care...He recognised that in these German rabbis there existed a trained and experienced group of communal and religious leaders. Thus he actively coordinated the activities of these ministers and the fledgling groups of Reformers in the provinces.'

According to another refugee rabbi, Reinhart not only gave them a warm welcome, but was the only English rabbi to do so, as Chief Rabbi Hertz and the Senior Liberal minister, Israel Mattuck, took virtually no interest in them.

Reinhart's efforts were indeed prodigious. He established 'The 1933 Club' at West London, which served as both a social club and a welfare organisation for Jewish refugees throughout London. He initiated the Monday Circle – weekly meetings and seminars for the refugee rabbis – which began in 1939. He was also active on behalf of the rabbis and their individual problems. When he heard that Rabbi Rosenthal had been refused help by the Advisory Committee for the Admission of Jewish Ecclesiastical Officers because he was a Reform rabbi and that he was currently wandering in the streets of Berlin to escape arrest, Reinhart took up his case personally with the Home Office and succeeded in gaining permission for him to find haven in England. He later found work for Rosenthal in the United States,

where he went in 1946. When another refugee rabbi, Pfingst, was interned, it was Reinhart who worked to secure his release. When the aged German cantor Feibelman, arrived in England in April 1939, destitute and in ill-health, Reinhart made sure he was provided for financially and saw to his medical expenses. It was also Reinhart who created, and often funded through the West London Synagogue, many jobs for the refugee rabbis. Rabbis Italiener, Katz and Cassell were all employed as Assistant Ministers at West London, while Rabbis Schreiber, Katten and Curtis were asked to teach.

Reinhart also acted as an unofficial employment agency for other Reform synagogues, and was in part responsible for sending Graf to Bradford in 1940, Van der Zyl to North Western in 1943, Sawady to St Georges Settlement in 1944, Cassell to Glasgow in 1945, Maybaum to Edgware and Berg to Bournemouth in 1947. In addition, some of the funding for these posts was supported by the West London Synagogue. Other refugee rabbis did not have regular positions but were supported by other means, such as Baeck and Lowenstamm, who were appointed President and Director respectively of the Society for Jewish Study which was founded in 1946 due to Reinhart's personal initiative. Rabbis Bienheim, Salzberger and Dorfler were also in regular contact with Reinhart, whilst his files on 'Refugee Rabbis' reveal that in addition he corresponded with and assisted Rabbis Krim, Lasker, Margules, Oppenheim, Popper, Eschelbacher, Sisenstendt, Rappoport, Seligmann, Schwarzschild, Schoenberger, Weil, Witebski, Wise, and Rev Seligson. Some were content to retire in peace in England, others later went to the United States to seek positions there, but all of them received much care and attention from Reinhart. It is not surprising, therefore, that Dr Leo Baeck, declared: 'The German rabbis should set up a monument to him'.

Reinhart's efforts, moreover, were conducted despite some initial opposition from the home-born Jewish community. The Council minutes of the North Western Reform synagogue in January 1940 record:

'A suggestion made by Dr Cahn

and seconded by Mr Stern that during Rev. Perlzweig's absence and on some occasion when no other preacher was available, a German rabbi be invited to deliver a sermon in German – the service in all other respects remaining unaltered. The suggestion was rejected, only two people voting in its favour.'

Reinhart persisted in his efforts on behalf of the refugee rabbis, and was singlehandedly responsible for their integration into the Reform movement. It is noticeable that, despite having rejected the services of an occasional German rabbi, the North Western's next appointment of a permanent rabbi was one of those same refugees, Van der Zyl. It was Van der Zyl, moreover, who was later to succeed Reinhart at West London and who eventually became Life President of the Reform Synagogues of Great Britain. Others also came to occupy leading positions: Curtis became Clerk to the Beth Din in 1948 and held office for the next 23 years, Maybaum became one of the leading Anglo-Jewish theologians, Katten and Dorfler were principal lecturers at the newly-established Leo Baeck College, which was responsible for training a new generation of rabbis and which enabled the Reform movement in Britain to provide its own religious leadership for the first time.

If the influx of the German rabbis proved so important for the Reform movement in general, they were equally significant for the Reform Beth Din in particular. Having for years been one of only a handful of Reform rabbis in England, Reinhart suddenly found himself supplied with many rabbis of experience and learning. Moreover, the small constituency that had existed in the 1930's was increasing rapidly – no longer West London Synagogue with a few branches, but an independent movement – and in 1942, the Association of Synagogues in Great Britain was formed. Reinhart had long wished to establish a formal Beth Din for the Reform Synagogues to replace the ad hoc arrangements that were made whenever cases arose. The growth of the congregations made this increasingly necessary, while the availability of rabbinic manpower now made it possible in practice. In 1948, Rabbi Curtis was seconded by

West London to be the Clerk to the Beth Din. Apart from Reinhart himself, and Goldberg from Manchester, the Beth Din was exclusively manned by the refugee rabbis for the first six years of its existence, and they were to dominate it throughout its initial period. Those that sat on the Reform Beth Din were Rabbis Italiener, Schreiber, Katz, Van der Zyl, Graf, Maybaum, Cassell, Sawady, Bienheim, Berg, Curtis, Lowenstamm, Katten, Dorfler and Baeck. Without them, the existence of the Reform Beth Din would have been impossible, and it is difficult to imagine how that now well-established institution could have started otherwise. By making full use of their potential, Reinhart turned the refugee rabbis into pillars of the Anglo-Jewish community. Moreover, his interest in them was characteristic and long-term: when Cassell went to Austria in 1956 to assist in the relocation and welfare of Hungarian Jewish refugees, he received instructions from Reinhart to 'look out especially for rabbis'.

Commenting on the changes within the Reform movement that resulted from the arrival of the German Reform rabbis, Mocatta concluded:

'It may well be that this development will be regarded as the most significant event in Rabbi Reinhart's reign at Berkeley Street. The founders, a hundred years ago, did not conceive of a movement branching out in many directions and enrolling supporters wherever they might be found. They desired nothing more than to cultivate their own garden, and to be left in peace. Today, the Reform Synagogue has given birth to a Reform Movement, growing, expanding, strengthening. Thus while the influence of his predecessors was principally confined to the precincts of one Synagogue, Rabbi Reinhart's diocese extends from Lands End to John o'Groats.' ■

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Moelwyn Merchant

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**A**N INVITATION TO contribute to a series of articles, 'As Others See us' carries a deep unease, especially if the writer is a member of a racial minority – as I am. To be Welsh is to know the dismissive possibilities in the label 'The Welsh', just as 'The Jews' can be equally embracing, denying on the one hand the individual, differing identity of each Jew or Welshman and the common humanity which identifies all men of whatever race. The word 'Us' in the title therefore I have to reject, just as I am not one of the 'Others'. I can write only of what one Welshman can say of his great good fortune in knowing many Jews, singly or in families, throughout my life.

It began, of course, on the intensely religious hearth of my childhood. My first Jewish friends were Moses, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob – not one of them a lay figure in a black book called *The Old Testament* but living beings in an imaginative life fostered by ill-health. There was a large wooden armchair on

which I would kneel, facing my 'congregation', the assembled family and – so my parents told me – preached volubly at the age of five on the perils of the Exodus, as the Jews under Moses passed between *Pihahiroth* and *Baalzephon* – words which I still mouth with pleasure after nearly seventy years!

It was at this same time that I met my first Jewish patriarch. My father's gold 'hunter' had broken and he took me with him to the watchmaker, Joachim – known by all my family and our friends as 'Joe-chim'. I can remember him vividly, grave, grey-bearded and almost wordlessly courteous. His fingers delicately explored the mechanism of the watch and I still savour the tenderness with which he treated it, a living creature in his hands.

School – a broken schooling anyway – brought few Jewish friends, though Ethel Carengold was to be not only a fellow pupil but came also to the University College in Cardiff where she played the sister of Judas in a one-act play I wrote

for the Union Dramatic Society – a work now, alas, totally lost to the public! But it was at this time that I met for the first time the re-creative power of the Jewish artist – for Yehudi Menuhin was making his first world tour which I intercepted at Cardiff. The music I heard then has become one with all Menuhin performances and recordings I have since heard. What remains indelibly is the classical beauty of the clean-cut profile and the intensity of his eyes. In years he was an adolescent but the barely perceptible smile as he acknowledged our applause had the reserved security one saw later in the performances of Daniel Barenboim and Jaqueline du Prés. This interpretative power is surely Jewry's second greatest gift to the world it enriches.

The opening of the second world war, with its tragic overtones of the Holocaust, coincided with both my return to teach in my old department in University College and with my ordination to the Anglican ministry. Almost every day I travel-

led from my home in Caerleon to my work, with my friend Ivor Jacob, a Cardiff businessman. He and his wife Ena invited me, as I entered my first Holy Week as a clergyman, to share their family Passover meal. Close friendship, my own vivid sense of ritual as a young priest, the rich ambiguity of the Jewish ceremonial, both the root of our worship and yet so different from it, the radiance of a rite now experienced for the first time – the whole brought to me the conviction that here was a tradition that united me, and my friends, with that moment which we know as 'The Last Supper' in that upper room in Jerusalem. Jewry was a new and vivid life for me at that moment and I have never lost its power.

One of the deepest friendships of my life began a year or two after that Passover meal. I had been invited to a 'chat-show' in the Cardiff studios of the BBC and one of the other participants was a young artist from Ystradgynlais named Josef Herman. He was already embarked on that rich interpretation of the Welsh mining community which, at that time, was more significant to me than the fact that he was Jewish – for my paternal grandfather was a coal miner and I was proud of the roots which enabled me to understand something of the tragedy of the coal-mining communities of South Wales during my growing years. Josef's drawings then, as now, united the deep suffering of patient labour at the coal-seam, with the formal dignity of men and women who lived daily with potential catastrophe.

A dozen years later, in 1963, the awareness of Josef Herman's power as an artist was intensified. As the 1964 quatercentenary of Shakespeare's birth approached, I had the opportunity of inviting him to paint the final picture in an exhibition – 'Shakespeare in Art' – which I was arranging for the Arts Council. We had decided on *King Lear* as the source of the painting and his preliminary drawings and the final painting plunged deeper into the heart of that tragedy than any other work I know.

And yet it was to be another twenty years before I was to understand the Jewish secret at the heart of his insight. In his studio he showed me the large portfolio of drawings he had made when he first

came to this country at the opening of the war, drawings which recollected and defined for all time the vitality and the horror of those Jewish quarters of Warsaw where he and his family had lived and which were destroyed in one terrible week. No member of the British community of Jewry should fail to absorb the resonancy of Herman's autobiography, *Related Twilights*, or the substantial collection of his Warsaw and Welsh mining drawings published in 1985 as *Josef Herman - the Early Years*. It was a matter of great pride to me that I participated with some sculptors in the two exhibitions at the Ben Uri Gallery and at the Manor House, in the first substantial showing of these Warsaw drawings.

During those twenty years I had been driven back more and more to the Biblical origins of our civilisation and to the profound dilemma of Jewish-Christian belief. For me this focussed on what we vainly try to 'define' as 'The Doctrine of the Incarnation'. For us, as for Jewry, the *Shema* is the root of belief, the glory of 'the Unity' and our adoring love of 'the One'. What then of 'the Incarnation', that mystery for Christianity in which the Messiah dwelt with us?

Again I can appeal only to the moving experience of Jewish friendship, as the dilemma became critically focussed for me. We were relaxing after a meal in the Edinburgh home of a friend and she had invited to dinner two other Jewish friends from Glasgow, Elaine and Joseph Gerber. I was now embarked on my life of Jesus of Nazareth and was questioning Joseph closely on matters of daily worship and the high festivals. 'Why are you pursuing me in this way?' he asked. I told him – he already knew of my *Jeshua* undertaken and there was silence. Then – 'If we were to return to Nazareth nineteen hundred years ago and stood on the square would you point to a young man there and say "He's God, you know", – is that what you are seriously saying?' This was no question about that abstract formula, 'The Doctrine of the Incarnation'.

This was the great divide, the conviction of 'the Unity' on the one hand, the conviction on the other hand that 'the Unity' was 'made flesh' and became 'Very Man' and yet maintained 'the Unity'. I have

called it the 'great divide' but is it in fact? From that first Passover meal I have shared with the Jacob family in Caerleon, through my uninterrupted experience of Jewish creativity, with its tragic sense of Diaspora at its core, to these last days in which I have grappled with those events in Nazareth and Jerusalem, Jews and Jewish worship have been as vividly at my shoulder as Christian priests and our worship.

Again to be particular. In *The Times* on 14 January 1986, Rabbi Dr Albert H. Friedlander wrote a moving letter on Jewish-Christian relations. It ended:

'There are ancient and modern teachings within Christianity which recognise a shared heritage. Right dogma does not always lead to right actions but the path of reconciliation cannot be walked by those who would deny the vision and the anguish of their neighbours.'

This is profoundly true. There is a vision and an anguish in the Jewish soul which extends from the agony of Moses, the covenant of Abraham, to today. There is a vision and an anguish of unfulfilment in the Christian soul which extends from Moses and the prophets to the tragic divisions of today, with Arab and Jew in deadly conflict, with Christians tearing at each other. In our vision of 'the Unity – thou shalt love...' we have a common heritage of glory and of anguish. Perhaps, 'as others see us', both Christians and Jews, if they saw us with sufficient clarity, they might see in us the striving of fallible man towards a common vision.

In the name of God the Creator we both worship, in the name God the Sustainer we both adore, we can surely recognise the agonised striving we both share as we seek to 'walk with God in the cool of the evening.' We can surely also, to adapt a splendid phrase of Keats, seek 'to whisper truths to our neighbour,' truths we have hammered out and cherished for so many generations. ■

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Moelwyn Merchant was Professor of English in Exeter and in Chicago and a Canon of Salisbury Cathedral. He is now a sculptor and his book, *Jeshua*, appears this autumn.



## WHY MENDELE TOOK TO LAUGHTER

Chaim Bermant

**S**HOLOM ALEICHEM often spoke of Mendele as his master and Mendele may have suffered a little from his disciple, for he was a richly humorous writer. If he has not been sufficiently recognised as such it is partly because of the overwhelming dominance of Sholom Aleichem.

Mendele would have been insufferable without his humour. He was an intensely serious man and sought

not merely to divert or entertain, but to inform and improve. His style was schoolmasterly and didactic, his characters were imperfectly developed and represented types rather than real people, his plots were ridiculous even by 19th century standards. One suspects that he might have been happier as an essayist, but essays would have seemed like straight preaching, and heretical preaching at that, whereas by resorting to *maisalech* he could get away with messages which might have been offensive to orthodox opinion, much as the Chasidic masters used *maisalech* – and still do – to put over messages offensive to reason.

In his best known works – one thinks principally of *Fishke der Krumer* and *The Travels of Benjamin* – he touches upon the lower

depths of the Russian Pale of Settlement and paints a picture of almost unredeemed squalor.

'First of all, when you arrive in Glupsk ... you must leap over a mud hole. A little further on you must leap over another, and then a third, the largest of the lot, into which all the sewage flows. If the gutters are choked with mud, entrails, fish guts, fish scales and chicken heads, you know its Fri-

day and time for the *schwitz bod*; if, on the other hand, the gutters overflow with egg-shells, onion skins, raddish parings, herring skeletons and sucked-out marrow bones – why, good *Shabbos* to you, you Jewish children!

Mendele's objections to the filth was more than aesthetic. It is not *pogromchicks* who terrorise the *shtetl* in his stories, but the annual visitations of cholera and typhus. Though the connection between dirt and disease was well-known even then, the universal inclination was to turn to prayer and hope for miracles rather than clean the streets, though of course, as he is careful to suggest, miracles sometimes did happen:

'... that year there had been no cholera epidemic in Glupsk – not because the polluted nearby lake had been drained, or because the heaps of stinking filth and the dead cats and had been moved from the streets, or because the householders had decided to go against tradition and empty the rubbish in front of their homes under the noses of passers-by. Heaven forbid, no! Could anyone accuse a Jewish community of such a thing? Never. It was a miracle, that's all?'

The irony, as read in English, is on the heavy side. It reads more lightly in Yiddish. It is amusing in its way and is infinitely more effective than a straight tirade.

While Mendele himself is steeped in Jewish tradition and learning, and suggests that the barely tolerable existence of the *shtetl* Jew would have been wholly intolerable without them, he has deep reservations about some of the usages, especially the tendency to add to the burdens of daily life, the burdens of past misfortunes, as one can read in the opening passages of *Fishke der Krumer*:

'Just when the bright sun begins to shine proclaiming another summer to the land, when people feel newly born and their hearts fill with joy at the sight of God's glorious world – just then the time for wailing and weeping arrives among Jews. This time of sorrow brings with it a host of mournful days: days of fasting, days of mortification, days of grief and tears, starting at the end of Passover and lasting well into the damp, cold and deep

mud of autumn.

'This is the very time when I, Mendele the book peddler, am busiest. I travel from fair to fair and from town to town to provide the children of Israel with all the accessories of the tear trade: Books of Lamentation, Penitential Books, women's Books of Supplication, *shofars* for the Day of Atonement, and prayer books for festivals. In short, while Jews weep and wail all summer long, my business thrives.'

Note the way in which he piles weeping on to wailing, fasting onto mortification, and the holy books, each more forbidding than the other, and together blotting out 'God's glorious world.'

The passages have little to do with the narrative. They arise out of Mendele's habit of button-holing the reader with some inspired aside. Critics have complained that this self-indulgent habit impedes the flow of the narrative. But given the nature of the narrative it would not be a bad thing if it were brought to a dead halt, for the asides are Mendele's saving grace. Dull is the page that lacks them.

There are certain obvious influences in his work. His choice of place names like Glupsk or Tuneyadevka, which in their different ways imply a resort of simpletons, owes something to Dickens. One can find Gogol everywhere. And no one who writes a humorous story, especially a picaresque one – and nearly all Mendele's stories are picaresque – can escape the influence of Cervantes, though none of his characters have the pathetic grandeur of Don Quixote, and there is, of course, no Dulcinella. His women are all viragos or screaming banshees, which may explain why nearly all his male characters are on the move.

Benjamin, in *The travels of Benjamin*, is a *nebbich*, and his companion Senderel, is a *nebbich's nebbich*. But both are proteges of fortune compared to the biggest *schelimazel* of all, *Fishke der Krumer*, the bath-attendant at Glupsk, 'a creature like so many other poor souls who appear among Israelites from nowhere, like toadstools after rain.' He had a large, flat head, sagging mouth, crooked yellow teeth and crooked legs, lisped, could not pronounce the 'r', limped badly, was getting on, and was not what one

might call a catch.

It was apparently the custom in those days during a cholera epidemic, to marry the most hideous cripples and vagrants of the community among the tombstones of the cemetery, presumably to frighten the angel of death away. Thus, during one visitation, they married the legless Yontl to a beggarwoman 'who had teeth like spades and no underlip'. On another, they matched Nehemitch the village idiot to a girl whose head was clustered with cankers and who was said to be a hermaphrodite. But the cholera came and went and poor Fishke was overlooked. And to remain single in the *shtetl* was an insufferable calamity.

Then one day they found him a bride, and that without the benefit of cholera, a blind beggarwoman. Her blindness is her dowry, which is to say her misfortune is her fortune, for pockets fly open at the sight of her, and Fishke leaves the bath-house and they go begging.

Which brings one to the greatest defect in Mendele's humour. He could be relentlessly cruel. Some of his characters look like a parade of fairground freaks and one sometimes has the dark suspicion that one is invited to laugh at them. Taken overall, however, his compassion was unmistakable, yet avoided the besetting sin of many Jewish writers of sentimentalising the wretched and the poor and endowing them with special virtues. He denounced the rich with vehemence and wit, but did not suggest that poverty was a state of grace, if only because both he and his readers knew otherwise. He exaggerated grotesquely, loved to dabble in Jewish legends – some of which he derided – used allegories to bring home a social message, yet rarely lost touch with reality. He was, in a way, a lay preacher, like many of the *magidim* who moved through the Pale putting the fear of heaven into the hearts of their listeners, except that he had come round to the view that fear – and perhaps heaven – were not as effective as they were cracked up to be. So he resorted to laughter instead. ■

**Chaim Bermant** was born in Breslev, Poland in 1929. He was educated in Scotland but now lives in London. He is a prolific author and well known columnist.

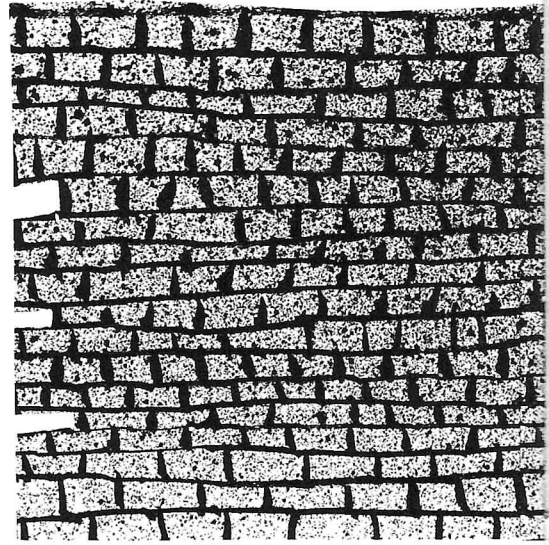


# KNOCK DOWN TODAY'S GHETTO WALLS

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Francesca Klug

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**T**HE NEW GHETTOS will be transformed as were the old.' What is required is 'patience' and 'faith' along with educational attainment, a stable family life, and economic self-reliance. This, in a nutshell, was the much publicised response of the Chief Rabbi to the Archbishop of Canterbury's report on inner city life, *Faith in the City*.

But of course the old ghettos have never been transformed. It is just that the people who live in them have changed.

This is my starting point in presenting a critique of the Chief Rabbi's views on race and poverty in modern Britain as expressed in his article 'From doom to hope' (*Jewish Chronicle* 21.1.86.). Although I have had a religious education I am not a theologian and will not attempt to challenge Rabbi Jakobovits's interpretation of Jewish teachings. I write as a Jewish woman brought up with a strong awareness of my people's history, who now lives and works in the inner city.

The point about the old ghettos or the new inner cities, depending on terminology, is that they were not created by the people who live in them. They are a product of the very way our society is structured. The fact is that Jews have not abolished unemployment or poverty by having 'channelled the ambition of our youngsters to academic excellence, not 'flashy cars'. That statement, incidentally, struck me as particularly ironic; in that Finchley, where I grew up, was noticeably more characterised by the 'flashy car' than Hackney where I now live. Rabbi Jakobovits places great emphasis on the importance

of encouraging 'economic self-reliance and self-sufficiency.' But of course, it hardly needs to be said, wealth is created by the employee as well as the employer. Britain is a wealthy country.

It is the distribution of that wealth, and the income which flows from it, which determines the degree of poverty in our society.

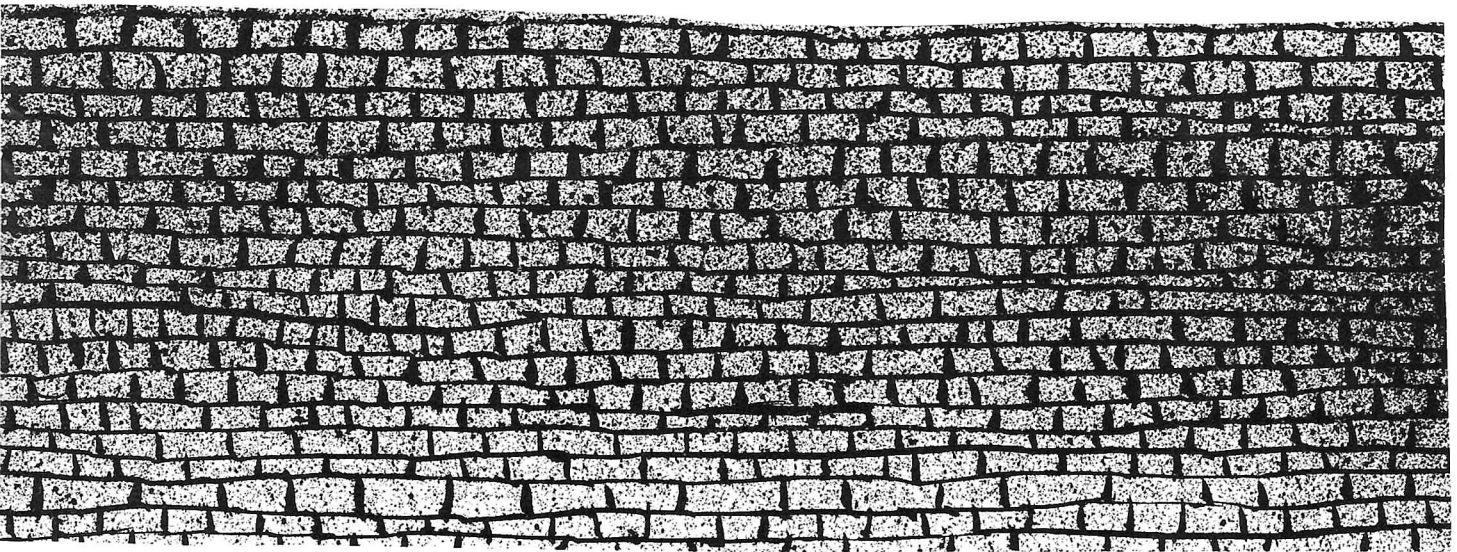
The present government's own statistics demonstrate that the rich have got richer and the poor have got poorer over the past decade. The share of income of the bottom 40% has fallen from only 10.2% to a mere 7%, whereas that of the top 20% has increased by nearly 4%. They now earn almost half of the country's income. (*Social Trends*, 1986). This redistribution from the poor to the rich cannot be accounted for by a sudden decline in the entrepreneurial endeavours of the working class. Likewise the more than two million people who have joined the dole queue since 1979 have not all suddenly developed a prolonged bout of idleness, anymore than the homeless who camp outside the National Film Theatre nightly have unexpectedly discovered the joys of open air life! It is government policies which must take the main responsibility for the dramatic decline in the living standards of lower earners with over 7 million people on the breadline. While higher earners have gained from massive tax cuts, the unemployed have seen their benefit taxed and their earnings-related supplement abolished. While mortgage relief has been increased, public house building has been reduced by an astounding 65%.

This is not political propoganda. It is simply a fact that governments

can shift the distribution of wealth and income, either directly or indirectly. Such shifts have a major impact on life in the inner cities. While it is the case that no modern society has eliminated the problems of poverty and inequality, things can get better or worse. The fact is that the present government has managed to *reverse* a 60 year long-term trend towards a more equal distribution of wealth. My point is that while the solutions to the problems of the inner cities may be extremely complex, they do not lie purely, or even mainly, in the enterprising spirit of their inhabitants. Poor areas, like poverty itself, cannot be blamed on the poor.

This brings me to my other major disagreement with the views of the Chief Rabbi on this subject – the question of why certain groups are more affected by structural poverty than others. The modern inner cities are far more mixed than the term 'ghetto', with its connotation of segregation, implies. Traditional working class communities who have inhabited these areas for hundreds of years live side by side with Irish people who have been in this country for more than a century and Black people, most of whom have come to Britain since the War. And it should not be forgotten that, contrary to one of the Chief Rabbi's most astounding 'assertions that 'these areas are now denuded of Jewish communities,' there is still a significant number of Jews in some parts of the inner cities. Nearly 20,000 Jews live in Hackney, for example – about 11% of the population of the borough.

In some areas, notably London's East End, black people live in a situation of relentless persecution on a



scale as bad as, and at times even worse than, that suffered by Jews from the 1880s through to the 1930s. In other parts, such as neighbouring Hackney, the different ethnic groups live in comparative harmony. But in all these areas people are poor and black people are generally poorer, unemployment is widespread and black people suffer disproportionately from it, housing is bad and black people's homes tend to be the worst. There are countless research studies from both prestigious and grass-root bodies to demonstrate this. The regular harassment black youth experience from the police is equally well documented. To relate just one anecdote on this. I recently went to the police to complain of vandalism to my car. A group of four white and one black youths was involved. But the officer concerned only asked me for a detailed description of the black youth. The discrimination is really that blatant!

Black people have not needed to wait for Rabbi Jakobovits' advice to have realised that state institutions alone will not help them maintain their identity or improve their standard of living. That is why all over inner city areas you will find black supplementary schools, black sports halls, black co-ops, black training centres. Many of these have been assisted by local authorities including those, like the GLC, who have recently been abolished. It is precisely this act – giving financial assistance to self-help institutions for minorities – that has led to so much derision from the press and opposition from the government. Major restrictions on the autonomy of local democracy have taken place on the grounds of saving ratepayers'

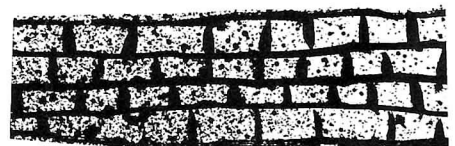
money from abuse. Yet the Jewish Welfare Board and other voluntary organisations, like Dr Barnardos or the Salvation Army also rely on assistance from local government without attracting comparable criticism. The concerted attack on public support for black self-help projects is a prime example of the institutionalised racism which Rabbi Jakobovits so completely fails to understand. For racism is not only about the petty insults, the violent attacks, the denial of culture and history – oppressions which black and Jews share. It is also the systematic refusal to employ by an employer, the barely conscious low expectation of a pupil by a teacher, the belief in a suspect's inherent criminality by a judge or the total lack of faith in a prospective entrepreneur's capabilities by a bank manager. These are the kinds of barriers black people face every day. Barriers which, by and large, Jews do not face now, nor ever have faced to the same degree in modern Britain. The reasons for this difference are more complex than this space allows me to explore. But the explanation must at least partly lie in the fact that Jews generally have had the opportunity, for better or for worse, 'to pass' – to change their name, clothes, accents, culture – until they have been considered educable, employable etc. Those Jews who have not tried 'to pass', such as the orthodox in Stamford Hill, will testify to the obstacles they face. Obstacles that are arguably even greater for black people in a society where the majority population have been brought up with that sense of racial superiority which allowed the British to proclaim the right to rule up to a quarter

of the world only a few decades ago. It was these same rulers who, of course, encouraged the ruled – black British subjects from the Caribbean or the Indian sub-continent – to come to Britain in the first place. And it is their children who frequently receive the message that they are lucky to be allowed to stay. They are angry. And given our history and experiences, different as they are in certain crucial respects, we Jews should be able to empathise with this anger. For wasn't it a comparable indignation which led so many Jews to join radical protest movements in the earlier part of this century?

Our common cause surely lies with all minorities who suffer from racism in whatever form. But for those of us who are middle class or wealthy, like all others in that position in our society, we cannot simply talk about a common cause with people in the inner city – be they black or white. We must recognise that to the extent to which we support policies which contribute to the growing disparity in income and wealth we are helping to keep the ghettos standing. It is all of us, not just those who live inside them, who must fight to bring the walls crumbling down. ■

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*Francesca Klug worked as a researcher for the race relations charity, the Runnymede Trust, for four years. Since that time she has been actively involved with the anti-fascist magazine, Searchlight. She now lives in and works for the London borough of Hackney.*



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Jonathan Wittenberg

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# IN THE HEART OF JUDAH HA-LEVY

‘In Toleda in Castilla  
His eyes first saw the light of day;  
There the golden river Tayo  
Sung to him his cradle songs.’

**T**HUS HEINRICH HEINE describes the coming into the world of the great Jewish ‘singer’ of Spain, Judah ben Samuel ha Levi. Most scholars today would favour Tudela rather than Toledo as his birthplace, but there is general agreement that Judah ha Levi was born about 1075 and received his education in Moslem Andalusia through which he travelled widely before practising as a physician in Toledo. But here events soon left him in no doubt as to how precarious the situation of the Jews really was. Caught between Edom, the Christians on the one side and Ishmael, the Moslems on the other, what help was there but God? This painful awareness of political reality combined with his spiritual longing to lead him on his great voyage to Zion:

‘My heart is in the East, and I –  
on the far verge of the West...

How easy it seems to me to leave  
behind all the good things of  
Spain,

How precious to behold the dust  
of the ruined Shrine.’

We know that he reached Egypt, but there, in Alexandria, we lose sight of him. He died in 1141, possibly on the way to Palestine. Legend has it that he was trampled to death by a horseman while reciting his famous Ode: ‘Zion, will you not ask

how they fare, who are bound for your sake?’, a poem to which we owe the phrase ‘prisoners of Zion’. Or, as Heine puts it, in a presumably conscious anachronism: Judah ha Levi, the great lover, of life and of God, was singing the *Lecha Dodi*.

The poem offered here is a short and beautiful piece written for a particular moment in the *Shacharit* (morning) service. It cannot be adequately appreciated, however, unless some general thought is first given to the state of Jewish poetry in Spain. When the Arabs came to Iberia they created around their courts a culture of fine arts which is still fabled today, and poetry took pride of place. This literary achievement the Jewish poets imitated. Some features they copied, – thus the importation of Arabic models of scansion and rhyme as well as of certain genres. Other features they paralleled with their own, or bettered. If the Moslems had the Koran as the source of a language of purity and beauty, then they had the Bible itself.

How did these developments relate to the synagogue? If poetry now had such standing in the secular world, with an audience accustomed to such high levels, then it would scarcely do to come before God with anything less! At the same time, however, as this change in the

status of poetry in general, came a change in its function within the traditional service. No longer were poetic compositions an alternative to sections of the fixed format of the prayers because, by now, the latter were there to stay. Liturgical poems became just an extra. But what poetry lost by way of right of access into the service, it gained in terms of new freedoms. Poems were composed for new areas of the liturgy, in the new and beautiful styles adopted from the Arabic, and they expressed fresh themes as well. In particular, poetry was now more open than before to the internal world of the human spirit and the inner relationship with God.

It is in the light of these changes that the following piece must be understood.

Thinking on Your name I come  
awake,  
Your acts of faithful kindness I  
descry;

They cause me understand this  
soul, Your fashioning,  
Bound unto me, yet wondrous in  
my eye.

My heart saw You and believed  
in You  
As if it had been standing at  
Sinai;

I sought You in my visions and  
descending  
In my clouds Your Glory passed  
me by;

My meditations hie me up from  
where I lie  
To bless your Name of Glory,  
Adonai.'

We note immediately certain formal features. Thus there is the acrostic on the poet's name, and the single rhyme in 'ai' which unites the poem from beginning to end. We should also note the heavy use of allusion, in this case specifically to events and words surrounding God's revelation to His people at Sinai. This internal evidence suggests that the piece was written for *Shavuot*, 'the Time of the Giving of the Torah'. The final line with its reference to blessing tells us that it was meant to be said before the *Barechu*, the Reader's call to begin the serious morning prayers.

The poem is about revelation, but it is an internal revelation of which it speaks. The personal voice is present from the first: 'I come awake', 'I descry'. In fact the very rhyme of the poem consists of the first person singular ending. The second verse calls on us to pay deeper attention to this inner dimension, to turn our thoughts to 'this soul, Your fashioning.' But the most telling evidence of what the poem is really about emerges from a comparison of the words of the third and fourth lines with the exact text of the verses in Exodus which they echo:

'the people saw, and they trembled'.  
(Ex. 20:15)

'My heart saw You and believed  
in You'

'And (Moses) said: "Show me  
Your glory." And (God) said: "I  
will cause all my goodness to pass  
before you".' (33:18-9).

'And the Lord descended in the  
cloud' (34:5)

'I sought You in my visions and  
descending In my clouds Your  
Glory passed me by.'

What happened to Moses and the  
people once far off in space and

time is happening to the poet right  
now in his own heart. What was an  
external event has become an inner  
one. The line at the very centre of  
the poem puts it best: it is as if he  
himself were standing at this  
moment at Sinai.

But any modern reader who interpreted this to mean that Judah ha Levi did not literally believe that an actual event took place on a certain mountain in the wilderness some three thousand years ago, would be greatly mistaken. The very first comment that the Jew makes to the King of the Kusars in the *Kusari* puts paid to such an idea: 'I believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who brought the Children of Israel forth out of Egypt with signs and wonders, Who sustained them in the wilderness and caused them to inherit the land of Canaan, after He had made them pass through the Red Sea and the Jordan amidst many wonders, and Who sent unto them Moses with His Torah.' Nowhere is belief more firmly founded on the truth of historical revelation and less on speculative thought than with Judah ha Levi. The inner voice is not therefore a negation of the outer; its strength comes, on the contrary, from the ability to reconstitute in thought and feeling what really happened. The God of Sinai has visited his heart.

This poem is quite clearly a product of the Spanish Jewish period, and not just because of its form. Although the door had first been opened to it by Sa'adiah Gaon, there had not really been before such a place for the inner, the personal experience of God in Jewish poetry. The credit for creating it, if it is to be given to any one poet above all, must go to Ibn Gabirol rather than to ha levy. But it is the latter who brings to that relationship with God the verve, the natural, simple, overflowing sense of joy and inspiration which we find in our poem:

'My meditations hie me up from  
where I lie  
To bless Your Name of glory,  
Adonai.' ■

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**Jonathan Wittenberg** was born in 1957 and read English at Cambridge. He qualified as a teacher before entering the Leo Baeck College where he is a final year rabbinic student.

## LETTERS

### DREAMS AND VISIONS

Sir,

**R**UTH COHEN'S LETTER IN THE last issue of *Manna* illustrated precisely what many rabbis in the Reform movement are justly complaining about.

It is true, that not all rabbis are 'inspiring leaders, obedient servants, scholars, counsellors, social workers, orators, administrators, fund raisers, Jewish thinkers, motivators and have a home and family open to all.' Mrs. Cohen's assertion that the rabbis she met in her grandfather's home possessed all these qualities is highly unlikely. It sounds much more like the idealised picture a little girl would have of god-like figures, but hardly that of real life people – even of rabbis, who in spite of scholarship and great human qualities remain human beings, *Baruch Hashem*.

It is natural for children to expect grown ups to meet all their needs and to be god-like. As adults we have to accept that even the leaders of the community are fallible and human, no matter how good they are. We also need to accept the interdependence between all those involved in a common task, such as the creation of a well-functioning congregation. It is every member's responsibility to contribute to the best of his ability.

The accusation of 'whining rabbis' is offensive and untenable. It is not whining to point out the absurdity and danger of totally unrealistic expectations like those mentioned by Mrs. Cohen. It is, of course, very tempting to blame another for our own shortcomings, and we are all inclined to do it at times, but it might be more constructive, if we could all look to the mote in our own eye, in order that our sight may be improved and there is less distortion in our view of the existing situation. It has been my privilege to teach several generations of reform rabbis at the Leo Baeck College over the past 12 years. I have always been much impressed by the enthusiasm, motivation, scholarship and leadership qualities shown by the majority of students. But the

highest motivation will suffer when the task becomes impossible which happens when they accept some of the unrealistic expectations put upon them.

I recognise, that lay leaders and ordinary members of congregations also make vast contributions. It would be tragic, if much of this good-will and devotion were frittered away in mutual recrimination rather than collaboration.

Collaboration requires mutual respect and an acceptance of adult status and responsibility on everyone's part. What Mrs. Cohen seems to be asking for is a rabbi as super-parent who takes all the responsibility for the congregation. Unfortunately, it is often very easy for the rabbi to collude with this wish, thus finding himself in an impossible situation, in which mature and creative working together becomes very difficult. In this way, he may have contributed to what he is complaining about.

Perhaps, we all need to take the mote out of our own eyes, including Mrs. Cohen.

**Irene Bloomfield**  
Maida Vale  
London W9.



Sir,

**H**AVING CONSIDERED the learned views on 'Who killed Jesus? and Why?' (*Manna 12*), may I be allowed these observations.

I regard the whole incident as one episode in Jewish history, by no means an extraordinary one: the appearance of the dissident who is apt to arouse the displeasure of the Establishment. Jeremiah, for example, made himself so unpopular, he had to flee abroad, having been threatened with death. Amos was acceptable so long as he criticised others but was promptly shut up

when he urged a little self-criticism. Maimonides so perplexed some fellow-Jews that they were prepared to burn his books, and the story of Spinoza is perhaps the most revealing.

These are only some outstanding illustrations of the clashes between Establishment and dissident. Often enough there was no hesitation to call in the secular arm to deal with disturbers of the communal peace as if they were subversives threatening Law and Order. On this ground, for instance, the rulers of the Amsterdam synagogue secured the banishment of Spinoza.

Having excommunicated the heretic, they feared, or purported to fear, they might be charged with harbouring one who, by denying the divinity of the Bible, was threatening the religious basis of Holland's constitution. The Magistrate approached by certain Jewish leaders, diplomatically turned the matter over to the Calvinist clergy and these, while finding nothing wrong in the accused's defence, felt they could not, without disregard for their office as clergymen, absolve a man charged with seeking to overthrow the established order.

It is in this setting that I see the Jesus affair. He also made himself unpopular with the powers that be. Not that he preached a new religion; he did not. As has often been said, he was born a Jew, lived a Jew and died a Jew – not a Jew concerned with the affairs of State and uncommitted to the politics of Roman rule. He was not a 'freedom fighter' or any other kind of zealot in the cause of patriotism. These things were far removed from his mind as they have been from the minds of many of the greatest of men. The kingdom he struggled for was not 'Right or wrong my country' – it was not of this world. He was a Hebrew patriot preaching the Hebrew message of the love for our neighbour whoever he be and of the last days. He was not the founder of the Christian religion. This was Paul who built upon the teachings of Jesus a theology which Jesus himself would hardly have approved.

The guardians of orthodoxy interrogated Jesus, found him guilty and since the offence was such that they had no authority to execute the punishment prescribed by Jewish law, they turned him over to the secular power which applied to the pre-

judged, theological issue, now presented as a political one, the verdict in terms of Roman law.

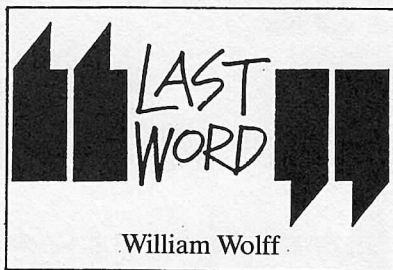
The fact which is often stressed that crucifixion was not a Jewish but a Roman form of execution seems to me irrelevant as I believe it is the motive force behind it that matters. If our forefathers had been free, living under a government of their own, they probably would have stoned the offender. If Jesus had written a book they would have burnt it, for book-burning is not merely a Gentile occupation. It was practised for the first time probably by King Jehoiakim who burnt the scroll of Jeremiah, and we do not have to rely on Heinrich Heine for the knowledge that once books are burnt it is not long before human beings are burnt too – or destroyed in other ways.

For the ire of the orthodox Establishment is deadly, and to know this we need not delve into the far off past. We only have to look into current issues of the *Jewish Chronicle*. It is not long since an orthodox rabbi denounced dissenters as 'a cancer in the body of our people ... violating and desecrating every *mitzvah* known to God'. Others have deplored the fact that Hitler had forgotten to gas the fellow-Jews of whom they disapproved, and the Reform movement has been dubbed 'a greater danger than the Nazis'. Branding dissenters as 'traitors' is common form among the orthodox; the late French political scientist Raymond Aron already found himself considered a 'traitor' because he was married to a non-Jew.

The penalties for traitors and the cure for cancer are well-known, and it can be taken for certain that few of the orthodox fundamentalists will scruple to enforce them. Rabbi Louis Jacobs, himself a victim of bigotry, has exposed 'the absurd claim that Judaism has always been tolerant of dissent and freedom of thought'.

So 'what crucified Jesus?'. I believe it was the ancient bigotry and intolerance – of all denominations and of none – which did not recoil from physically destroying the nonconformist. And would do it again if it could.

**C C Aronsfeld**  
Kenton Road  
Harrow



**T**HE PUBLIC DUEL BETWEEN those in our movements who want us to go on giving to the JIA till it hurts and those who insist that our Israel cheques should be made out only to progressive causes is as out moded as Golda Meir's handbag.

Most of our congregants have settled it.

Or rather, the increasingly aggressively anti-reform stance of most of the institutions which benefit from Zionist funds settled it for them.

As did the Lebanon war.

I know that most of our leaders find it impossible to face the fact that Lebanon was a watershed in the attitude most Anglo-Jews adopt to Israel.

They find it harder to talk about this than about their dear old Bubba's extra-marital adventures.

Until they do, our leaders, on this issue at least, will remain with few followers.

**M**EANWHILE THE LEO Baeck school in Haifa, Har-El synagogue in Jerusalem, and those working for the World Union for Progressive Judaism in Jerusalem all have imaginative schemes for a much more effective battle on behalf of a sensible Judaism in Israel.

And each one is manacled by lack of cash.

**I**AM ASSAILED BY BITTER protests against papers, Jewish and otherwise, which give rabbis who depart from the norm such generous allocations of column inches.

We should not complain. We should cheer with full hearts.

For an event is 'news' only because of its rare occurrence. Nobody thinks a death from cancer

worth reporting because it is, alas, now 'routine'.

By the same token, headline making rabbis are proof of the overall health of the rabbinate.

I see in the headlines public confirmation of personal conviction that most of us lead unremarkable, even respectable, though far from boring lives.

**O**NE OF THE BURDENS shouldered by those who have any contact with the Anglo-Jewish community is its champion inefficiency.

In a previous life I used to try and inoculate my secretaries against the danger of nascent anti-semitism by telling them that in any contact with Jewish organisations, the people at the other typewriter or telephone were not at all mean or rude, just more than usually sloppy or inept.

And I continue to marvel at the way our zeal for *mitzvot* marches is outpaced only by our passion for the slipshod.

With a pressing invitation to my non-existent family to attend an *Oneg*, followed by three invitations to the launch of their *Kol Nidre* appeal the Israel Appeal's position near the top of the league is secure.

I quote you one other example from a pile that could fill several issues of *Manna*.

I suddenly became deeply indebted to an organisation in a sister community. As a token of my gratitude I finally sent a modest cheque.

Within a week the rabbi of that community and I happened to be taking part in the same service. Just before we stepped on to the *bimah*, he said he had heard of my contribution, thanked me, and said I would get an official letter.

'Please, no, my debt is greater...'

After the service, the lady principally responsible for the act of great kindness, spotted me under the canonicals, came up and also thanked me. 'You will, of course, get a letter from our president.'

'No, please, it is I...'

A fortnight later the letter arrived. Addressed to Mrs. W. Wolff.

No, it was not the slip of a tired secretary before her teabreak. Inside the President's thank you letter began 'Dear Mrs. Wolff...'



**E**VEN A BRIEF TRIP TO the States provides eye-rubbing discoveries.

Like the *Tefillin* date.

It is, I was told, the latest rage among orthodox teenagers.

On certain dates, the boys take along their *tefillin* because they expect to stay the night. And, of course, they would not dream of having breakfast with the girl next morning before they had also laid *tefillin*.

It is the most wondrous instance yet of the dazzling selectivity with which those who swear by *halachah* treat it in practice. ■

*William Wolff, a former Fleet Street journalist, is serving the West London Synagogue as an associate rabbi. Later this autumn he becomes rabbi of the Newcastle Reform Synagogue.*

### Apology

In his 'Last Word' (July 1986) David Goldberg stated that Rabbi Isaac Bernstein attended a funeral and shiva held under ULPS auspices. Arising out of this assertion Rabbi Goldberg made imputations as to Rabbi Bernstein's character. We now accept that Rabbi Bernstein was not present on these occasions and the imputations were quite without foundation. We apologise to Rabbi Bernstein for this error and for the embarrassment he has been caused.



# The Manor House Society

*The Manor House Society is an ambitious cultural venture. Its aim is to bring a wide range of Jewish cultural and intellectual events of a high level within easy reach of a large audience. Regular activities include concerts, debates, exhibitions, drama, seminars and lectures.*

Membership of the Society gives easy access to the many amenities of the Manor House Centre for Judaism, the largest Jewish centre in Europe. These facilities include a bookshop, library, coffee-shop, extensive grounds and tennis courts. Membership also brings advance information about events, priority booking and ticket discounts and automatic subscription to *Manna*. Membership can be on either an individual or family basis.

Subscriptions are modest:

Single membership	£10 per annum
Family membership	£15 per annum
Senior citizen/student single	£7.50 per annum
Senior citizens – family	£10 per annum

Existing subscribers to *Manna* may deduct the unexpired portion of their subscription from the Manor House Society subscription.

## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

**2nd October – 28th October**

*JEWISH THEMES: LIMITED EDITION GRAPHICS BY SIMON PRAIS*

Monday – Thursday 10.00 a.m. – 2.00 p.m.

Friday 10.00 a.m. – 2.00 p.m.

also 7.30 p.m. – 9.30 p.m. on Wednesday 15th and 22nd  
with Simon Prais

**Sunday 19th October 8.00 p.m.**

*A FUNNY KIND OF EVENING WITH DAVID KOSSOFF*

**Sunday 3rd – 23rd November**

*WORKS BY YA'AKOV AND MAZAL BOUSSIDAN*

**Sunday 30th November 7.30 p.m.**

*FIRST SUNLIGHT CONCERT*

**English Chamber Orchestra**

Conductor – Geoffrey Simon Soliost – Ruth Waterman  
Elgar: Introduction and Allegro Mozart: Violin Concerto No. 4  
Sarasate: Introduction and Tarantelle for violin & orchestra  
Ben-Haim: Music for Strings Schubert: Symphony No. 5

**Sunday 21st December 7.30 p.m.**

*AN EVENING WITH ANDREW SACHS*

**Lunchtime Recitals – Autumn Series**

1.15 p.m. Wednesdays 1st, 15th, 29th October · 12th, 26th November · 10th December