The Reconstructionist
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FROM THE EDITOR

From its inception, Reconstructionist Judaism has included both recognition of and advocacy for the place of the arts in Jewish life. Beginning in the 1940s, this publication regularly featured articles and editorials assessing the importance of Jewish music, art, poetry, dance, drama, theatre, literature, and a host of other areas of artistic endeavor. In 1941 and 1942, the Jewish Reconstructionist Foundation sponsored a "Festival of Jewish Arts," hoping that through such a venue "the cause of Jewish creative expression will be advanced."

The opportunities for Jewish creativity and spiritual expression through the medium of the arts have never been as expansive as they are today. The engagement of the Jew with the content and traditions of Judaism is particularly suited to expression through the arts, which draw us into relationship with the artist and the work of the artist. It is difficult to remain passive and disengaged in response to Jewish dance, drama, and music.

Dr. Judith Kaplan Eisenstein: A Dedication

Our beloved teacher, colleague, and friend, Dr. Judith Kaplan Eisenstein, was an early, articulate, and passionate advocate of the place of the arts in Jewish life. When Judith died in February of 1996, the Jewish community lost a voice that spoke for quality, integrity, maturity, and elegance in the creation of the Jewish arts. It is fitting that this issue of *The Reconstructionist*, celebrating "The Arts in Jewish Life," is dedicated to her memory.

Marcia Falk contributes two poems in tribute to Judith, which frame a remembrance by Paula Eisenstein Baker and an interview conducted by Reena Sigman Friedman.

The Arts in Jewish Life

Our discussion of the arts begins with two articles addressing the broad issues of religious creativity and Jewish culture, and then turns to the specific areas of music, dance, drama, and poetry.

With this issue, we begin a new feature, "Vintage Perspectives," in which we bring forward articles and editorials from the early years of *The Reconstructionist* that address the themes of our current issues. It is often remarkable to discover the ways in which the early volumes of this journal anticipated the issues with which we deal.

Marcia Falk's innovative and controversial publication, *The Book Of Blessings*, marks an important development in the history of American Jewish artis-

tic liturgy. Falk's work, and the analysis and theology that supports it, represents some noteworthy similarities with—and some essential differences from—Reconstructionist Judaism. We have invited three Reconstructionist reactions to this new liturgy, as well as a response by Marcia Falk.

Finally, we offer a review of the recent photographic essay on American Jews by Frederic Brenner, noting that photography can serve as a tool to articulate both an artistic as well as a sociological perspective.

About Future Issues

As we continue to experience production problems that delay timely publication, we present this issue as a combined Spring-Fall 1997 issue, Volume 62:1. We thank our readers for their patience and appreciate the inquiries as to when the next issue is due (indicating that we are missed when we are late!).

Our next issue, "Wrestling With Israel," will celebrate the 50th anniversary of *Medinat Yisrael* with a series of reflections and analyses about the impact of Israel on Jewish life, the evolving and emerging dialogue between Israel and the Diaspora, and internal developments within Israel.

The Fall 1998 issue will examine "New Midrash and New Ritual," and the Spring 1999 issue will be devoted to "The Theology and Practice of Caring."

We take this opportunity to wish our readers a *Shanah Tovah Umetukah*, a New Year filled with goodness, sweetness, renewal, and fulfillment.

— Richard Hirsh

Hearing of Judith's Death

BY MARCIA FALK

Judith Kaplan Eisenstein, 1909-1996

Clouds erupt in the enormous sky,
the kiawe fling their leaves into the wind—-

Oh, how a thing is swept away as one stands there, helpless,
watching the rain through a calligraphy of trees

while a small, light-feathered bird skims the surface of the rock—-
a'a lava, sharp as steel, but brittle, bony—-

then swoops up again and flies free.
Now another—-white-winged and slender—-takes the same arc,

its clear, aquamarine eye flashing a brilliant light
before it is gone.

February 1996 / Sh'vat 5756
Kealakekua, Hawaii

Judith Kaplan Eisenstein: an Appreciation

By Paula Eisenstein Baker

Judith Kaplan Eisenstein (1909-1996) began her adult life as the first Bat Mitzvah in American-Jewish history. But the eldest daughter of Mordecai M. Kaplan, the founder of Reconstructionist Judaism, considered this now-familiar rite of passage her father's achievement rather than her own. The accomplishments in which she took pride were all located at the intersection of Judaism and music. Whether she was translating Hebrew song texts, teaching liturgical material to adults and youngsters, or composing the music for a cantata, her focus was what she referred to not as "Jewish music" but always as "the music of the Jewish people."

A Combination of *Yiddishkeit* and Music

Judith had a remarkable combination of talent, background, and training for the area she made her own. From a musical perspective, she had a wonderful ear, was a good pianist, and had excellent training: She began when she was seven to study at the Institute of Musical Art (now the Juilliard School) in New York, and she attended the school until she was eighteen. She then studied at Columbia University's Teachers College, where she received both a bachelor's (1928) and a master's degree (1932) in music education. Many people have that combination, but only a few are also steeped in and have the devotion to *Yiddishkeit* that she did. She began the study of Hebrew when she was three, since she had already learned to read English. As a youngster she attended the Teachers Institute of the Jewish Theological Seminary. Her father, a man of tremendous intensity, certainly pushed her very hard, but apparently he managed to do it in such a way that it never alienated her either from Judaism or from intellectual pursuits. I think it is critical that she was a Reconstructionist, presumably from birth. Not only did Kaplan have answers for the questions posed by a bright, sensitive child growing up as an American Jew, but

Paula Eisenstein Baker, niece of Judith Kaplan Eisenstein, is a cellist and musicologist in Houston, TX, specializing in the works of early 20th-century Russian-Jewish composers.

he really believed in the importance of Jewish culture, the area that Judith adopted as her own.

Judith's Musical Legacy

From a musical point of view Judith was a pragmatist. From 1929 until 1954, she taught music pedagogy and the history of Jewish music at the Teachers Institute of Jewish Theological Seminary, and when she found that appropriate teaching and performing materials did not already exist, she created them. Her publications, in addition to the five cantatas she wrote with her husband, Ira Eisenstein, include the first Jewish songbook for children — *Gateway to Jewish Song* (published in 1937), *Festival Songs* (published in 1943), *Songs of Childhood* (written with Frieda Prensky, which appeared in 1955), and her magnum opus, *Heritage of Music: The Music of the Jewish People* (first published in 1972 and reprinted in 1990).

Many of these volumes include Judith's translations from Hebrew and Yiddish. They are not only accurate and poetic but they are often rhythmically similar enough to the original that they can be sung to the same tune. Two translations she created for Chanukah songs are now the standard English texts: "Oh Chanukah, oh Chanukah, come light the menorah" and "Who can retell the things that befell us?" are sung by English-speaking children everywhere. One of her more recent translations, of Naomi Shemer's song "*Al Kol Eleh*," appears in several of the volumes of *Kol Haneshamah*, the current series of prayerbooks published by the Reconstructionist movement.

Judith's favorite piece of Jewish liturgical music was the Kaddish from the Yom Kippur *Ne'ilah* service. Choosing my own favorite from among Judith's compositions is not easy. Revisiting the cantatas she wrote with Ira, to which many in my generation, at least, have a deep attachment, it becomes clear how difficult it is to excerpt set pieces from them: music, text, and background are far more integrated than I understood when I sang them as a child years ago. The works that were performed at the tribute to Judith at the November 1996 JRF Convention — the opening section of *Shir Hashahar* (1974), a cantata she wrote independently of Ira, and *Ba'arov Yom*, one of three song settings she created in the 1950s for New York's Interracial Chorus, are works that remind us not only of her own creative talent but of her determination to compose and to encourage composition on motivic material drawn from the music of the Jewish people.

A Striving for Quality

We read of this determination in a reflection she created for *Four Centuries of Jewish Women's Spirituality*. "I hoped to help preserve the treasures of the past," Judith wrote, "and see them transmuted into the monuments of the future."[1] This was truly her life's ambition, and it was responsible, I

think, for what some people perceived in her as single-mindedness, and even musical snobbishness, when she spoke disdainfully of what she referred to as "camp songs and Klezmer tunes." She was often a lone voice in her quest for quality in the music in our synagogues.

At the same time, she was totally democratic in her attitude toward music: it was not something reserved for a cultural elite — it was accessible to all. If anyone has ever handed you musical notation to accompany an unfamiliar piece of liturgy, you are seeing Judith's influence at work. If you believe, as I do, that anyone can be taught to carry a tune, you probably absorbed that idea from Judith. She was, in fact, catholic in her tastes: she laughed uncontrollably at Anna Russell's recorded parodies of Wagnerian opera, and she tolerated hundreds of playings of George Kleinsinger's "Tubby the Tuba," an orchestral work for children, when my cousin Miriam Eisenstein and I were seven. All music was grist for her mill; it just had to be of good quality.

A Mid-life Career Change

In 1959, at the age of 50, as if her professional career had not already been substantial enough (and this appreciation does not include her career as wife and mother and as *rebbitzen*), Judith not only entered graduate school but wrote a musicological dissertation on "The Liturgical Chant of Provencal and West Sephardic Jews in Comparison to the Song of the Troubadours and the Cantigas." Sephardic music was essentially a new field for her (and medieval church music wasn't exactly her specialty either) and she could have done a degree much more easily had she chosen a more familiar area of study. Whether this was Eric Werner's idea (he directed her dissertation) or just Judith's intellectual curiosity, I don't know.

After receiving her Ph.D. in 1966 from the School of Sacred Music of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York, she taught there until 1979, and she taught at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in Philadelphia from 1978 until 1981. In 1987, during her so-called retirement, she wrote, recorded, and broadcast a thirteen-hour radio series on the history of the music of the Jewish people. In between she wrote articles and reviews for *Hadassah Magazine, The Reconstructionist, The New York Times,* and *Musica Judaica,* among other publications.

Judith wore her learning lightly and was modest almost to a fault about her achievements: Few people know that she received an honorary Doctor of Hebrew Letters from Baltimore Hebrew College in 1977, or that she was the Jewish Music Council's Woman of the Year in 1988, and she routinely threw away invitations to appear in reference books like *Who's Who.* But when I was asked to write 500 words about her for *Jewish Women in America: An Historical*

Encyclopedia, a volume to be published by Routledge, Inc., she could not stop me. The last sentence of that brief biography reads, "Talented and superbly literate in both Jewish and musical tradition, by her own contributions and by her encouragement of others she expanded the understanding, enjoyment, and dissemination of the music of the Jewish people."

This is how I remember Judith. *Zikhronah livrakhah*: may her memory be for a blessing.

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1. Ellen M. Umansky and Dianne Ashton, eds, *Four Centuries of Jewish Women's Spirituality: A Sourcebook* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 291-92.

"Ilu Finu Maley Shirah": "Were Our Mouths Filled With Song"

An Interview With Dr. Judith Kaplan Eisenstein, August 28-29, 1995

BY REENA SIGMAN FRIEDMAN

Q. What was it like growing up as the daughter of Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan?

A. In my young years, (I was certainly) influenced by Father's thinking. I (was exposed to) Reconstructionism—although it wasn't called that then—from the time I was a little kid.

The summer before my ninth birthday, we were in New Rochelle, and Father had me *daven shaḥarit* (recite the morning prayers) every morning. I remember that I liked *Ilu Finu Maley Shirah*; I always loved that line![1] Father told me (regarding certain passages), "Skip this." In (the prayer) *Retzey*,[2] I remember, there were two lines that I could leave out. Anything that I could leave out was fine with me. *Asher baḥar banu*[3] was still there; he hadn't taken that out yet. I didn't raise any questions then because I didn't have any idea why I was skipping those things.

I was about eleven when I began questioning. At that point it took all my courage to say to Father, "I have to tell you that I don't believe in God." I didn't know what would happen next. Nothing happened. He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "You know, an old man sitting up there...." He said, "I don't believe that either." I looked at him and said, "What do you believe?" Then he began to explain it to me. I think the simile that he gave me at the time was about electricity. You don't see electricity, but it works. This is a power that works in you, through you, and you don't see it, you don't feel it, but it's something real.

That was the beginning of a lot of questioning. I asked things like: Why do you pray? Why do you have to go to *shul* (synagogue); why can't you pray alone? Why can't you do this on Shabbos? And he was always very patient, and answered my questions.

Dr. Reena Sigman Friedman is a member of the faculty of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, where she teaches Modern Jewish History. Dr. Friedman is also a Contributing Editor of *Lilith*, the Jewish feminist magazine.

Early Years

Q. Were you aware of the opposition that your father faced as he developed his ideas?

A. I was aware of the conflicts that he had with the (Jewish Theological) Seminary. My parents tried very hard to preserve us from that kind of stress, but little bits came through.

As a child of nine, I went through the whole change from the Jewish Center to the Society for the Advancement of Judaism (SAJ). I got intimations of dissension at the Jewish Center. Some people had been ardent admirers of my father, and then turned very strongly against him. I knew that Father gave speeches about unions, and our people hated unions more than anything in this world. They didn't want to talk about such things. Of course, Papa was on the right side, from where I sat. It (the conflicts) didn't make too much difference in my life otherwise, except that my mother may have been tense.

Q. What was your experience at the SAJ? Were there difficulties associated with being the child of the rabbi?

A. I didn't really feel like a "PK" ("preacher's kid"). No one told us (my sisters and me) that we were any different because we were the rabbi's daughters.

The SAJ was such a small place. I had friends among the kids. In fact, one of my closest friends (who remained so until she died) was the daughter of a family that remained at the Center, who was very Orthodox in her thinking.

(The one problem was that many) people at the SAJ seemed snobbish. My mother made my clothes all the way through high school. They did not look like what other people wore. And I didn't get the allowance that those kids got; I couldn't spend that kind of money. Sisters two and four did fine; they were very popular. My third sister and I had a harder time. My escape was to get away from them (her peers at the SAJ) in the Hebrew Club that I joined. There I was very comfortable, very much at home.

The Path of Jewish Education

Q. Could you tell me something about your early Jewish education?

A. I knew too much Hebrew for the SAJ Hebrew school, so I had private lessons with a wonderful teacher, Anna Konowitz (Anna Macklowitz in those days. She later married Isadore Konowitz, a Boston educator, and they went to Palestine). She was studying arts and crafts (and encouraged me to do artistic projects). I made pictures with the Hebrew letters and made up a Purim song for the children in the Hebrew school. My very New England music teacher helped me write the accompaniment for the song. The kids sang it, and it was included in my first book many, many years later.

The one explosive thing that happened was that Papa thought I should

learn Rashi.[4] Miss Macklowitz couldn't teach Rashi, so a Mr. Rabinowitz was to be my teacher on Friday afternoon. This was my one free afternoon, because I had two afternoons of music school and two with Miss Macklowitz. One Friday afternoon—it was also *erev Sukkos* (the eve of the Sukkot holiday)—all the kids were on the roof having a wonderful time stringing cranberries and apples and fixing up the sukkah, and I was supposed to go sit and read Rashi, which I couldn't stand. It wasn't for me at that stage. I had a scene with my mother who said, "You better do what your father wants." I cried and didn't go, and that was that. When my father came home, he said, "Drop it." My mother was more insistent on pleasing him. So I didn't learn Rashi until much later.

I later went to the (well known New York) Hebrew high school, the Marshaliah. My branch was housed on the East Side, at the Central Jewish Institute.

The Arts and Culture at the SAJ

Q. What was the SAJ's music program like?

A. We had a very lively musical life at the SAJ. They engaged Abraham Zvi Idelsohn, the only scientifically trained Jewish musicologist in the world, as the first cantor. It was quite fantastic. He was only with us for a half year, but he had this congregation singing complicated *piyutim*[5] to Oriental tunes, and they *schlepped* along. It wasn't very easy for them, but they did it. They did new and strange things all the time. His *nusaḥ*[6] was absolutely pure and correct.

It was Cantor Idelsohn who found Moshe Nathanson for us (to serve as our new cantor). He was a young fellow who had been born in Palestine and had come to this country. He had sung in a choir in Jerusalem as a child. He came to New York and studied at the Institute of Musical Art, the predecessor of the Juilliard School of Music, where I studied. He brought us a wealth of music, especially the first recorded Palestinian folk songs that we had ever heard. These included "*Hava Nagilah*," for which he wrote the words—eloquent words!

It was a work of art the way he led the service. His *nusaḥ* was impeccable, and his cantillation and Hebrew diction were magnificent. He had a beautiful Sephardic Hebrew. My kids learned more Hebrew just sitting in *shul* and listening to him than any other way. He was at the SAJ for a long time and retired after we left. He was a great influence.

The SAJ really pioneered in the use of Sephardic Hebrew in our service; it was one of the things that we did before many other congregations. We didn't use the Sephardic pronunciation in our family. I never did a *shaḥarit* (morning) service until after my mother died, and I found that I could not say it in Sephardit because I had learned it as a kid in Ashkenazit. When I was at the Teachers' Institute,

we fought with our teachers because they all spoke Ashkenazit, until we practically forced them to use the Sephardit pronunciation. They didn't change until the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948.

We (at the SAJ) were a singing congregation right from the start, and it stayed that way. The volunteer choir sang certain parts of the service, and other parts the congregation sang. We never gave up the congregational singing. That turned out to be a very good thing for us. When people got tired of the choir, they moved back into the congregation, but they would still sing along with the choir, so everybody was singing. It was really quite exceptional.

Also, the SAJ was home to many people in the arts, not just in music. We had exhibits by Jewish artists, and we had concerts. Robert Starer, a well known composer, came from Palestine with Zvi Zeitlin and gave their first concert at the SAJ right after the war. Moshe Rudinoff gave a concert. We had festivals of Jewish arts and dance in Carnegie Hall, sponsored by the Jewish Reconstructionist Foundation, the Farband, and other organizations. There were three or four such festivals in the forties. Some very good stuff was performed; it wasn't amateurish. The arts were taken very seriously.

Contributions to Music and the Arts

Q. What was your own role in the development of the SAJ music program?

A. I became a teacher in the SAJ Hebrew school in 1939-40. I had had experience teaching music at the Central Jewish Institute and at the Center Academy, which was a very fine experimental day school at the Brooklyn Jewish Center. I was a regular teacher in the Hebrew school and I also taught music. We organized a choral group and sang for various occasions—at a Thanksgiving joint service, at Chanukah time, etc.

Then Nechemieh Vinaver, a refugee musician, came to the SAJ to lead a congregational choir. So I handed over our volunteers to him, we got more people involved, and they sang every Shabbat. He was a first-rate choral conductor who knew the literature, and he had them singing much better than an ordinary volunteer choir.

I wrote a column in every issue of *The Reconstructionist* during those years. In one article, I suggested establishing an afternoon school that would teach both Hebrew and the arts (including evening classes for adults). This idea actually developed into the Hebrew Arts School, which first met at the Central Jewish Institute. It still exists, with a different name, on 66th Street near Lincoln Center (in Manhattan), but is no longer a specifically Jewish institution.

I also organized musical performances for the members of Reconstructionist youth groups during their conventions and retreats. We had the

kind of kids who could get their parts in the afternoon and then perform for the evening service. They sight-read. We had some instrumental parts too. There was an atmosphere of students caring about knowing music.

A Legacy of Cantatas

Q. I understand that you and your husband, Rabbi Ira Eisenstein, composed several unique cantatas that were presented at the SAJ and are still being performed today. Can you tell me about them?

A. The first cantata, "What is Torah?" was written for the first Confirmation ceremony at the SAJ in 1942. Ira had taught these students for two years, and he asked them what they wanted to do for Confirmation. They had all gone to deadly Confirmations where everyone made speeches and they didn't want that. We didn't want that. The kids had all heard of or sung the "Ballad for Americans," and they wanted to do something similar. So we decided to do a piece about Torah, which would be a learning experience for them. Ira developed the idea that Torah meant more than just the five books of Moses, and I used the cantata as a vehicle to teach basic traditional Jewish music (including the *eykhah* trope)[7] that I wanted the kids to have in their innards, as part of them. And it worked that way.

The next cantata was the "Bialik cantata," written on the tenth anniversary of the death of the renowned Hebrew poet, Chaim Nahman Bialik. Ira and I had been in Palestine at the time of his funeral. We started the work with the funeral itself, the marching in the streets. It gave us a chance to compose musical settings for great poetry.

The third cantata was entitled "Seven Golden Buttons," which stressed the idea of Shabbat. It was based on a story about the Baal Shem Tov.[8] We introduced people to *Ḥasidut*, to Ḥasidic song and movement. Not much was known about the Ḥasidic way of life at that time; Ḥasidim were just beginning to come to New York from Europe after the war.

The fourth one was called "Reborn." It was about a group of people who were saved from the Nazis by hiding in a bunker for a year. It included material on Jewish festivals throughout the year, along with the characteristic music for each festival.

The fifth cantata was commissioned by Hadassah, the women's Zionist organization. It was called "Thy Children Shall Return," celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of Youth Aliyah.[9] The piece was performed at Hadassah's convention in New York. I composed the music for this one. The others were all based on traditional and folk material, although I composed the background music and the arrangements.

These cantatas were performed all over the country over and over again. Some are still being performed. Some of [what is heard today in Jewish culture] are cliches in music. And people

love it. This is happening in general music all over the country. But, to me, Reconstructionism has to be a leader, and we've been following, not leading, in this respect.

Knowledge of music can't all come from your innards; it is a discipline that you have to learn from somebody else. There are many modern twentieth century composers to choose from, who are fine and should be heard. [We] should be educating [our] students [musically] and presenting something at a high level.

I am grateful to the Center for American Jewish History, Temple University, and to several governors of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, for their support of my work on this project.

1. From the *Nishmat Kol Ḥay* prayer of the Shabbat morning service. The English translation of the relevant text reads, in part: "And were our mouths oceans of song...our lips filled full of praises like the heaven's dome, our eyes lit up like sun and moon, our hands spread out like eagle's wings, our feet as light as those of the gazelle—we would never have sufficient praise for you, Abundant One, our God, God of our ancestors..." *Kol Haneshamah: Shabbat Veḥagim*, 236-37.

2. A paragraph in the *Amidah* prayer, central to the morning service. The paragraph requests that God accept the prayers of the people of Israel.

3. Literally, "who chose us (from among the nations)." This liturgical formulation, recited in the blessing over the Torah, is based on the traditional concept of Jewish chosenness, which Mordecai Kaplan rejected.

4. A reference to the biblical commentaries of the great eleventh century scholar, Rabbi Solomon Yizhaki, generally known as Rashi.

5. Liturgical poems, some of which date back to the Middle Ages.

6. Liturgical themes.

7. The traditional melody used for the biblical book of Lamentations.

8. Israel ben Eliezer Baal Shem Tov, often known as the Besht (1700-60), founder of the Ḥasidic movement in Poland.

9. The campaign led by Hadassah's president, Henrietta Szold, which brought 30,000 Jewish orphans and unaccompanied children from Germany to Palestine between 1933 and 1945.

In Memory of Judith, a Year Later

BY MARCIA FALK

The sun pours its last brassy light
on the surface of the Pacific.

My son makes sea-turtle sounds
to call one in to shore.

The blue of the water is sharp,
its spume white glass;

in the distance, turtleheads bob
like buoys in a storm.

My son climbs the young kamani
at the water's edge

one thin branch too high
for a mother to bear.

The sea turtle comes so near
we see its small feet paddling

before it turns and disappears,
darkening toward home.

Kona Coast, Hawaii

Toward a Jewish Theology of Creativity

By Elizabeth Bolton

Julia Cameron's book *The Artist's Way* is one element in a series of highly successful publications and events that offer a serious program of exercises and events designed to release in participants their full creative potential.

Although conceived initially for professional writers, it is intended for anyone seeking to access, and succeed in, a chosen artistic endeavor. While it can be practiced privately, Artist's Way groups have formed around the country; my next-door neighbor's women's group undertook the book's 12-week plan together. The author's traveling workshops are heavily subscribed, there are numerous websites and audio tapes, and bookstores stack the oversized books in high piles on the floor.

The original edition sports an intriguing subtitle: *A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity.* This particular combination of nouns and adjectives evokes a connection to the other expressions of search for meaning prevalent in North American culture. In fact, the goals of the program are no less lofty than those of many popular religious or spiritually-oriented enterprises, targeting the same seekers:

> With the basic principle that creative expression is the natural direction of life, Julia Cameron leads [readers] through a comprehensive twelve-week program to recover your creativity from a variety of blocks...whatever your spiritual orientation.[1]

There is also a serious cultural critique made explicit through this work:

> Questioning our "anti-art" culture, she discusses the imagination's unlimited capacity for transformation....The Artist's Way will guide you to a new understanding of creativity's life-changing power, while dis-

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Rabbi Elizabeth Bolton, a graduate of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (RRC), has also worked as a cantor, voice teacher, and opera singer. She presently works part-time as a pulpit rabbi, teaches voice and *nusaḥ* at RRC, where she also directs the Api-Chorus, and was the founding director of the RRC Center for Jewish Creativity.

pelling the "I'm not talented enough" conditioning that holds so many of us back from achieving our dreams.... [2]

Creative Genetics

Through my own explorations of theology, Jewish philosophy, and the belief systems of other traditions and disciplines, I have come to the following understanding: each of us, each human being, is born with a spirituality DNA. Just as our traditional DNA is given to us, waiting to be actualized only by the unfolding of age and time, so it is with our spirituality DNA. As a Jew and as a rabbi, I understand and hope that Judaism is the means through which Jews — by birth, choice, or chance — get to actualize their spirituality DNAs.

Encoded in that DNA, in one's genetico-spiritual make-up, is the creativity chromosome. So much of how one is in the world — one's *shelemut*, or wholeness of self — is tied to the unfolding of this feature of our make-up. Creativity, and its principle tool, imagination, enables us to transcend the earthbound-ness of our bodies, or the rest of our DNA.

The various modes of creativity — movement, song, telling tales with prose, poetry or drama, explorations of sound, image and shape — are basic endeavors that people have never needed to learn in order to utilize. Any one who has children, has taught children, has been around children, knows that the youngest are the most uninhibited about artistic expression. They dance at the drop of a hat, or at the sound of music being played, even those who have physical or developmental impairments. They delight in arranging colors, shapes, and textures, all with great enjoyment and intentionality. They are budding songwriters, rearranging the words of songs they know to tell a new story.

While we may delight in witnessing these outbursts of creativity in children, we also have come to expect that they will be increasingly limited as the maturation process unfolds. We who accept that as adults we lose this spontaneous and natural creativity seem complacent and comfortable in this self-knowledge. But the consequences of this loss are encoded in cultural modalities that should be regarded with indignation, rather than accepted with resignation.

Lamentations for Art's Isolation

One lamentable outcome of this complacency is that artistic expression has become isolated and ghettoized, relegated to special programs for children, the supplement in the weekend newspaper, or the provenance of professional practitioners. More than simply institutionalizing some hazy icons of the starving artist, the crazy artist, the suffering artist, we depend on those images to retain and reinforce this boundary between "their" lives and ours.

Further, it lends a perverse kind of credence to the perspective that creativity has a price tag, that it is to be

paid for and supported at a distance from our lives, safely in the hands of those who do it "best." Not only do we accept a whole range of dualities in the arts, such as amateur vs. professional, folk vs. high art, popular vs. classical music, but we maintain them in a severely ranked hierarchy. "Amateur" is almost an epithet, just as the term "high" art identifies its claim to superiority. The consequences of classical music's elitist/frill tags has been the elimination of much broad-based, publicly-funded music education, a loss for all.

Often without realizing it, we absorb ourselves into these polarizing hierarchies; but we also accept that success in a creative endeavor is judged by some ill-understood and barely-attainable level of perfection. Artistic competitions and juried events, combined with the highly democratic critical vantage point provided by television and the vagaries of the marketplace, allow many of us the opportunity to participate in the naming of winners and losers in the culture and creativity games. Success becomes a matter of numbers. Concerts are presented in ever larger venues and museums hold blockbuster shows. Simultaneously, smaller groups, agencies, and institutions are seeing decreased public funding diminish their capacity to nurture a new pool of creative artists and art lovers, at all levels and in all genres.

Spiritual Consequences

This complex of attitudes has profound implications for our spiritual lives, and for our capacity to enhance our religious practices. The concepts of success and hierarchy are antithetical to much of the liberal religious enterprise. When the primary quest is for authenticity, the stress on perfection as an appropriate end-point can easily smother the creative spark.

What is the alternative? For both amateurs and professionals, the unfolding of creativity in the self and in community should be the goal; rather than perfection, connection.

This is what happens, for example, when the RRC ApiChorus performs. The performers, all students at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, represent a range of musical backgrounds and skills. Some read music, most do not. For a few, this is a continuation of involvement in Jewish choral singing; for most, it is the first time they have sung in a choir. But when we rehearse and perform, we create a nexus of connections that weave us all together in a manner that obviates "objective" issues of technique and achievement.

What we are doing is seeking the sparks of connection through the medium of choral singing. There is the inner connection within each singer's body, which is prompted to align itself in the most comfortable, supported way; the connection to the text and its complex of meanings; the connection between the singers; and then, in performance, between performer and listener.

While I have been referring to the

realm of the arts, the same dynamic pertains to Jewish religious culture. Our rabbis, cantors, and educators may have the "job" of teaching, transmitting, and upholding our religious heritage, yet as Reconstructionists we accept that the partnership between *rav* (teacher) and *talmid* (student), rabbi and congregant, is an essential dynamic in the transmission of contemporary Judaism.

Reading a passage of Mishnah through a Reconstructionist lens, we find a helpful message for our creative spiritual enterprise: *aseh lekha rav ukeney lekha ḥaver* — provide yourself with a teacher, and acquire for yourself a friend.[3] Both may be the same person, and we may be one or the other at any given time. This teaching offers a framework for growth and learning that is both non-hierarchical and yet respectful of the one who, at any given moment, has risen to a particular challenge of learning and creative expression, and emerged with an even greater capacity to learn and teach. We model this at a variety of levels in Reconstructionist settings, and other Jewish communal institutions have freely borrowed and integrated this insight.

Providing a Religious Context for Creativity

The Reconstructionist model of Jewish life holds that culture is not a separate rubric for artists and their wares, nor is creativity to be relegated to the province of the pros. Rather, culture and creativity are our primary vehicles for our deepest, most intimate expressions of connection to a lived Judaism. This is central to the vision of the newly-conceived Center for Jewish Creativity at the RRC.

Art is about the transformation through representation, in time and space, of the human experience. Religion is about the transformation through representation, in time and space, of the human encounter with the Divine.

Our struggles with Judaism are about a search for meaning in life through a lived tradition, involving exploration at countless levels of learning, teaching, thinking, and experiencing. Art renders the search visible and tangible, communicating what is discovered through dancing, singing, drawing, creating, designing, building.

Both art and religion address transmission and transformation. The intersection of art and religion, creativity and spirituality, is fundamentally *about* transmission and transformation. Since the source of what we are transmitting is a centuries-old evolving tradition, the foundation must be firm in order for the enterprise to flourish. I am, for example, simultaneously a teacher of traditional *nusaḥ* and transcriber of freshly-composed melodies for our new prayerbooks. This is not a contradiction, but rather an integration, since the core of my mandate as a religious person is to nurture my spirituality and let my creativity chromosome work to its utmost capacity to create

holy sparks. Both Judaism and creative expression share the goals of discovering and situating oneself in the world.

Art and religion also share problems and questions of criteria and aesthetics. Who decides what is in and what is out? The discussion is not unique to these disciplines, of course. But we can learn from thinkers and critics like John Berger who, in his book *Ways of Seeing,* taught that "the way we see things is affected by what we know and what we believe."[4] Where you stand determines how, and what, you will see. Nowhere is this principle more necessary than in the realm of religion and religious studies. One scholar expresses the concerns of the art critic in the context of studying sacred text: "The social position of the one who confronts the biblical text is crucial to understanding."[5]

Understanding where I am as a Jewish woman, in the twentieth century, a lesbian able to become a rabbi, frames my picture. Once we accept that issues of identity, of social location, inform not only how we define culture but how we canonize text, we become keenly aware of the significant scope of questions encompassing religion and the arts, theology and creativity.

Through Reconstructionism, we may take a multitude of stances on the arts and Judaism — viewer, participant, shaper of ritual and consumer of ritual, wearer of mantle, weaver of mantle. It is not only the performing artist at center stage who deserves our applause and support, but the ones who enable the artist to take the stage, as well as the ones who practice their craft in order to feed their souls.

Therefore, in addition to the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College's curriculum tracks — training rabbis as educators, chaplains, communal leaders and Hillel directors — we can value the role of rabbi as ritual artist, storyteller, singer, musician, songwriter, dancer, illustrator, and more. Rabbis who know how to integrate creative midrash into liturgy and ritual, regardless of their own creative capacities, undoubtedly will be rabbis who will be more inclined towards the aesthetic, the creative, the cultural.

I want rabbis who can enable their congregants and communities to deepen their connections to their Jewish souls through artistic expressions and activities; more religious-school programs that integrate arts into their curriculum; more chaplains comfortable with singing at a bedside and creating *Mi Sheberakh* prayers.[6] And I want more: communities fostering Jewish artists, reading Jewish poetry, debating how to define Jewish art in all its forms, bringing in folks who know themselves as creative people, but who do not yet know their Jewish selves.[7]

The Mitzvah of Creativity

Ari Elon, author and Talmud professor at RRC, asks his students to imagine a particular midrash in the Talmud as if they were directing a film

of the scene. One could actually see the pictures jumping off the page of complex Hebrew and Aramaic script into 3-D relief. There is so much available to us in the realm of creative expression as students and teachers of Jewish life and living, if we are in earnest about fostering a vibrant, and viable, Jewish religious spirituality.

The challenge remains, in both the secular and religious spheres, to prioritize the mandate to nurture creativity. Jo Milgrom, teacher of art midrash, articulated the challenge in this way:

> If art has always been such a natural means of human identity and spiritual expression, it is important that we question the uncertain role of art in contemporary Jewish life.[8]

Our historical Jewish culture has been well represented in several art forms, and highly neglected in others. While we are just beginning to grasp this problem, new forms and, more significantly, our evolving historical encounters with other civilizations are continuing to break down the boundaries between practices, between what is identifiably Jewish and what is in the realm of generic creative quest.

The ongoing task of nurturing Jewish creativity means developing the tools for a *Jewish* Artist's Way, not *just* supporting art exhibits of Jewish artists, or debating whether art by Jews with non-Jewish themes counts as Jewish art. We need expanded opportunities to develop an understanding of the artist's place and time, incorporating the impact of art on our understanding of Judaism.

As a musician by training, I am particularly challenged by the prophet Isaiah's call: *shiru ladonay shir ḥadash*,[9] sing to Adonay a new song. It means learning the story of *Kol Nidrey* as we learn how to chant it in the traditional fashion, studying why it is the central Jewish tune of the liturgical-year cycle even if it had its origins in medieval Christian culture, while debating what it means to have Jewish music reflect a variety of contemporary compositional trends.

I want us to join in the endeavor of understanding Isaiah's message, through whichever artistic medium bubbles up from within or challenges us from without, thus "tearing the blinders from our eyes, by inventing and involving us in new kinds of art of unprecedented spiritual meaning."[10] It is an imperative that is central to our understanding of our religious civilization: to foster the human creative impulse, in order that we may "illuminate who we are as Jewish human beings."[11] Rather than accede to the ancient understanding of the proscription against graven images (Ex. 20:4),[12] we should be adding a new commandment, the mitzvah of creativity.

There is no doubt that creativity is a key to our search for godliness. We yearn to participate in the perpetual renewal of creation, as we pray in the first blessing before the Shema: *hameḥadesh betuvo bekhol-yom tamid ma'aseh vereyshit*, the One who renews

Creation's work each day. Julia Cameron offers what could be a *kavanah* (focus) for this prayer: "Because creation is always an act of faith and faith is a spiritual issue, so is creativity. As we strive for our highest selves, our spiritual selves, we cannot help but be more aware, more proactive, and more creative."[13]

Amen selah.

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1. Julia Cameron, *The Artist's Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1992), book jacket.

2. http://univstudios.com/putman/books/the-artists-way/book.html.

3. *Pirkey Avot* 1:6.

4. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (BBC and Penguin Books, 1972).

5. Sheila Briggs, "The Politics of Identity and the Politics of Interpretation," in *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* (Vol. 43, Nos. 1-4, 1989), 163.

6. "May the One who blessed ..."; while texts and occasions vary, this prayer form is often used to offer prayers of healing.

7. There are already many such creative rabbis in our ranks. Some who come to mind are: Rabbi Bob Gluck and his project integrating arts into the curriculum of his religious school at Congregation Ahavath Sholom in Great Barrington, MA; Rabbi Judith Halevy of the Malibu Jewish Center and Synagogue and her project "Sarah's Tent"; RRC students Micah Klein, Myriam Klotz, Geela Rayzel Raphael, Margot Stein, and Shawn Israel Zevit, along with Juliet Spitzer, who created "Shabbat Unplugged."

8. Jo Milgrom, "Art and Spirit in Contemporary Jewish Life," *The Reconstructionist* (Vol. 60, No. 2, Fall 1995), 53.

9. Isaiah 42:10; Psalms 96:1.

10. Milgrom, 54.

11. Milgrom, 54.

12. "You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image, or any likeness of what is in the heavens above, or in the earth below, or in the waters under the earth." (New JPS translation).

13. http://univstudios.com/putman/books/the-artists-way/excerpt.html.

Conflicts and Challenges of Jewish Culture

By Dan Schifrin

In San Francisco recently, several hundred mostly unaffiliated Jews crammed into a major synagogue to hear a night of foot-stamping klezmer music. Community leaders, not expecting such a large turnout, left scratching their heads, apparently unaware that a style of music inspired by shtetl and ghetto life could draw so many young, secular, sophisticated Jews into a synagogue.

But why should anybody be surprised at the effect arts and culture have on American Jews? The fact that a music concert should draw people to the core institution of Jewish life, people that might otherwise never or seldom attend *shul,* confirms what should be obvious: that the arts and culture are nearer the heart of Jewish life, and nearer the hearts of Jewish people, than many community leaders admit. The CJF 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, which indicated that more people identified themselves as "cultural" than as "religious" or any other category, further brings home the point. Our search for renewal and continuity should begin where people are often the most touched and inspired: the concert hall, the book of poetry, the film, the dance floor.

This essay has two primary points. The first is that arts and culture can help renew Jewish life because their dynamic, spiritual, and emotional nature can inspire individuals, create a sense of community, and provoke radically new ideas. This renewal can take the form of connecting with those outside the purview of Jewish institutional life, reenergizing those Jews within the community, and perhaps even bridging the gaps between different Jewish communities.

The second point is that, despite this potential for renewal, arts and culture are generally neglected, and to some extent even feared, in communal Jewish life.

Although "the arts" refers basically to music, drama, literature, etc., "culture" is a much more difficult word to define. Often taken to mean the sum total of how a community articulates

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who and what it is, this sociological definition excludes almost nothing, and is too broad for the purposes of this discussion. I understand Jewish culture to refer primarily to the arts, as well as to the humanities and the exercise of the intellect.

In order to understand the complex and conflicted role of culture in contemporary American Jewish life, we must look first at how Jews have traditionally understood the "use" of culture, especially since the *Haskalah* (Enlightenment period), and how culture is currently understood and used in the broader society.

The Arts in Premodern Jewish Culture

The arts have been a fundamental part of Jewish life since the very beginning, in some ways so obviously that their significance is hidden. The first, of course, is that the Torah and the other biblical books are of an uncanny literary quality and power; the Hebrew language itself has been invested, over millennia, with a certain life force of its own. The Torah has been perfectly reproduced for hundreds of generations, and if even one letter of the Torah is wrong the entire scroll is invalidated. The attention to the origin and quality of the Torah parchment, the type of quill and ink — everything about the process is suffused with sensuality and an artistic passion, and suggests enormous reverence for the beauty of language as well as for the Torah's religious content.

This attention to detail — also seen, for instance, in the instructions God gives to Bezalel, the builder of the Tabernacle[1] — stems from the injunction of *hidur mitzvah*, or the beautification of each commandment to the best of one's ability. This injunction includes everything from selecting the most beautiful *etrog* on Sukkot to composing the most beautiful melodies for prayers. King David, the author of the Psalms, was a musician before he was God's and Israel's servant, and one assumes he was picked for holy duty, in part, because of what his music said about the quality of his heart.

The significance of the arts — especially literature — took on a more complex, intellectual, and even burdensome role after the Jews first experienced exile. As David Roskies has noted in *Against the Apocalypse*[2] and *The Literature of Destruction*,[3] and Alan Mintz in *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature*,[4] literature has traditionally been a way for Jews to maintain a sense of continuity in the face of terrible communal rupture. At the same time, this Diaspora literature — commentary, poems, midrash, prayers, responsa, and other works — provided a standard way for individuals and communities to understand their persistent tragedies and wanderings in a way that gave emotional, spiritual, and creative release. The spiritual impulse of a people living in their own land was replaced, by and large, by the urgent need to remember and contin-

ue. And literature served the needs of a community struggling with unprecedented angst and dislocation.

Modern Questions of Identity

The situation became more complex during the *Haskalah,* one of a number of Jewish responses to modernity, when the idea of being a secular Jew as we understand it first became a possibility, and the tension between renewal and continuity became more pronounced. It was during this period, especially in Germany, that demonstrating mastery of the "culture" of the host society became a way to gain acceptance. Heine, Mendelssohn and Mahler are only the best known of many artists who became masters of their respective arts, through which they gained the opportunity to influence the surrounding culture (after they or their family formally converted, of course).

It was at this time, with the increased possibility of assimilation, that Jews began to divide their sense of identity into different categories. The *Haskalah* idea of being "a Jew in the home and a man in the street" meant that Jews would by necessity have multiple identities, with this rich confusion leading to a more ambiguous cultural production. In what way, for instance, could Heine's work be seen as Jewish by his Jewish contemporaries? How do we understand the generations of Jewish families who revered Heine? What did they tell their kids about the relationship between art and community? These are questions we could very well ask today about our secular Jewish artists.

In nineteenth-century Eastern Europe, as David Roskies explains in *A Bridge of Longing*,[5] Nahman of Bratslav can be seen as a conflicted Jewish artist on the cusp of modernity, as well as the founder of Yiddish literature. But how do we understand Ḥasidic stories and early Yiddish literature, Roskies asks, if Nahman's religious parables draw heavily from non-Jewish folk sources? This is a textbook example of how the conflicted, the spiritual and the new all come together to energize huge groups of Jews (those who became Ḥasidim or drew on Ḥasidic ideas) while infuriating their *mitnagid* opponents.

The Arts and Jewish Self-Understanding

In the nineteenth century, the arts became even more crucial to the community's recreations of itself. The flowering of Yiddish literature, for instance, was a way to maintain continuity with a culture already fading away; and the renewal of the Hebrew language and literature, among other things, was an expression of newfound self-determination.

Both in late nineteenth–century America, and in Weimar Germany, an emphasis on scholarship and history, and the creation of institutions to promote them, helped reenergize communities searching for new answers to the question of why they should remain Jews. This emphasis on the intellectual was not radical; but its

promoters realized that Jews needed to reconnect to Judaism through an association with broader cultural and intellectual ideas and venues. So the creation of *The Jewish Encyclopedia* in 1905 in America gave Jews a sense of pride in the sweep of their civilization, while Franz Rosenzweig's Lehrhaus, sensitive to the biases of the German Jewish middle class, hired well-known doctors and physicists, revered citizens, to teach about Jewish life.[6]

Even more compelling, perhaps, was the way in which Martin Buber resumed the Lehrhaus under the Nazis (and recreated it yet again in Jerusalem in the early 1950s) as a way to maintain community and raise spirits when, one could argue, there were more pressing problems than an unexplicated poem. But Buber — and Rosenzweig before him — believed that culture led to the strengthening of community, and that a sense of community is what makes the difference between a withering civilization and a thriving one.[7]

The enormous insecurity of German Jews at the beginning of this century, despite the cultural brilliance of that community, further indicates an ingrained conflict about a Jewish relationship with the arts. The best example of this is composer Arnold Schoenberg's musical response, in the form of his opera "Moses and Aaron," to Wagner's pronouncement in his infamous essay "Judaism in Music"[8] that Jews could never be "true" creators because they are essentially parasitic. Any outward shine of brilliance, Wagner said, merely reflects their ability to mimic and adapt. Underneath, they are only critics and commentators, never artists.

Freud, a man of letters as much as a scientist, grappled mightily with this idea. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the German medical establishment viewed Jewish creativity as pathological, indicative of a diseased and degenerate nature. According to Sander Gilman, much of Freud's work was an attempt to disprove this "fact," and return the Jewish creative mind to a normative place in history.[9]

We also cannot forget the importance of the arts for the secularists of the past century — including the Yiddishists, Zionists, socialists, and other radicals — who saw the renewal of language and languages as a key to their respective visions of a new Jerusalem. For the fans of the Yiddish stage in New York, or the radicals who first learned of Isaiah's moral teachings from Clifford Odets' "Awake and Sing," the arts were a window into Jewish life and a sign of its continuing importance and relevance, and perhaps — as for Irving Howe, Arnold Schoenberg, and many others — a way back in.

Anxiety About Aesthetics

There also seems to be lodged in the Jewish psyche a deep bias against appreciating art for its own sake, a fear of "merely" enjoying the aesthetically pleasing. An anecdote: During Sukkot a few years ago, I was invited to eat

with a religious family in New York. The family, and the neighbors who joined them, were part of a yeshivah community, learned and pious Jews. Many of them also owned advanced secular degrees. The evening's main discussion was this: How does one choose one *etrog* over another if both of them satisfy all the legal requirements? After an hour of discussion, during which diners quoted this text and that, I naively blurted out, "Can't you just pick the one that seems the most pleasing?" The answer: Moshe Rabbenu could just choose the etrog that pleased him the most, since he was a prophet. Everyone else has to rely on a legal checklist, and hope that the most appropriate *etrog* will somehow emerge.

One can't discuss Jewish ideas about art without noting the proscription against idolatry. This concern is more obvious for architecture and the visual arts; in a visual context one could literally worship a profane image. We see the continuing relevance of this fear in a book like Chaim Potok's *My Name is Asher Lev*,[10] about a young Ḥasidic painter who must choose between art and religion, and whose seduction by the aesthetic muse leads to the psychological destruction of his family. But the fear runs deeper. As Norman Finkelstein tells us in *The Ritual of New Creation*, Cynthia Ozick's greatest anxiety may be her suspicion that imaginative literature *of any kind* is a type of idolatry, even if that literature sets out to describe the power of a transcendent God.[11]

Cultural Conflicts Today

In many ways American culture is extremely conflicted in terms of how it views art and its religious and spiritual potential. On the one hand, embedded in the American psyche is work of the Shaker community, which connects art with deeply spiritual beliefs, as well as the tradition of "Negro spirituals," which have dramatically influenced the history of American music. On the other hand, we belong to a society that wants to abolish federal funding of all arts and culture, and whose defenders must now resort to the most utilitarian of arguments — that the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts help prime local economies when an arts institution receives a government grant. One need only compare the cultural budgets of the U.S. with France or Germany to see the relative value placed on arts and culture.

There is also a split in America over the use of the arts for the creation and renewal of community. Witness the ongoing, bitter dispute between African-American playwright August Wilson and theater director and critic Robert Brustein — about whether the theater exists to transcend differences or to build identity — to see how charged the issue is.

Today's emphasis on film, television, and other visual media, and the immediate gratification they promise, has also dissociated most people from the sacredness of language. As religious and spiritual values have

declined in importance in America, the need for powerful religious language has become less important. And so there are fewer people interested in seeing language as a holy vessel, or exploring and molding language in that manner.

My reading suggests that Christian thinkers and writers over the past few decades are, overall, more sensitive to this issue than their Jewish counterparts. Protestant theologian Paul Tillich wrote in 1959 that "words do not communicate to us any more what they originally did, and what they were intended to communicate."[12] And Langdon Gilkey, in 1969, wrote that the center of today's religious crisis was "the possibility of meaningful language about [God]."[13] Jewish thinkers like Rabbis David Wolpe and Lawrence Kushner superbly explore these issues, and Jewish Lights Publishing is putting out much of the best Jewish work in this area. But as we will see later, this attention to the renewal of spiritual language, and of finding better ways of talking about God, does not stir the heart of the Jewish community. Spirituality and artistic daring are frequently conflated in the Jewish mind, and often seen as a bit dangerous. It is no coincidence, perhaps, that the works of Martin Buber, and even David Wolpe, are sometimes welcomed into Christian congregations more easily than into Jewish ones.

An Absence of Interest

In what ways does the Jewish community neglect the arts or not view them with sufficient sophistication? Let's look briefly at the articulation of Jewish communal policy in this regard: basically, there isn't any. Very few standard works on Jewish communal life address the issues of art and culture. Daniel Elazar's important work *Community and Polity*,[14] for instance, which articulated a vocabulary of Jewish communal organization, has not a single reference in the index to either culture or the arts. And even though the landmark 1990 *National Jewish Population Survey* indicated that a huge percentage of American Jews defined themselves as primarily "cultural," there has been no formal elaboration of that finding. And if the impoverished arts budgets for most Jewish day or Hebrew schools are thrown into the mix, the picture looks even worse.

The National Foundation for Jewish Culture (NFJC), where I work, is the only national Federation-affiliated agency that has as its mission the promotion of the arts and culture as a viable strategy for Jewish community-building. But even the NFJC, which was founded in 1960 primarily to coordinate archiving and preservation activities, has only in the last decade begun to talk about *the creation* of art and culture, not just their study and preservation, as a communal imperative. The NFJC, in conjunction with Brandeis University's Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies and Institute for Community and Religion, is now under-

taking the first national survey of Jewish cultural life, which will evaluate what people mean by "arts and culture," quantify cultural production by category, and study any connections between culture and Jewish identification.

There is a continuing sense that Jews and "high culture" have nothing in common. In response to an earlier version of this article, which was published in *Sh'ma*, David Klinghoffer, Literary Editor of *The National Review*, wrote that "as artists of any kind, we Jews have lagged far behind our gentile neighbors in almost every country that has hosted us."[15] Klinghoffer's "idea of hell is to be locked in a room and made to listen to Israeli pop tunes for eternity," and his idea of authentic Jewish music is nothing more than the "Israeli-style kitsch-pop music one frequently hears piped into Judaica stores and at some unfortunate Jewish weddings, characterized by an electronic hand-clapping noise and endlessly repeated lyrics in a whining Brooklyn accent: 'Oy, oy, oy, oy, Moshiach!'"

On the one hand, then, there is much second-rate and even third-rate Jewish art, literature, and music. On the other hand, the perception that no high-quality Jewish art exists — in fact, could ever exist — seems to be widely shared.

Fear of Culture

Arts and culture frighten institutionally because they don't fit neatly into boxes. The American Jewish polity, by contrast, labors hard to create categories and divisions, from religious denominations to national organizations, even when the distinctions between them are virtually meaningless. I heard a joke recently that the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations will soon be joined by the Conference of Presidents of Minor American Jewish Organizations, in order to create another level of centralized community authority. The unfortunate truth is that our community ethos is more accurately captured in the prose of organizational memos than in poetry.

Even though there is no formal communal position on arts and culture, and the results of the NFJC's upcoming study of American Jewish culture are years away, a number of observations can still be made about the American Jewish community and the arts.

First, there is an element of fear regarding the arts, associated with the potential influence of a shockingly superficial popular culture. Within the more traditional segments of the Jewish community, the fear of being spiritually annihilated by film, television, advertisement, and pop music has grown enormously in recent decades. Many Orthodox families do not even own televisions, placing themselves in the 99th percentile among Americans, and their association of the most challenging art with plummeting standards of decency or even grossly impolite language has grown.[16]

Second, there is the sense that the arts may lead to an overemphasis on the spiritual, which many see as a dangerous, and growing, tendency. Professor Neil Gillman of the Jewish Theological Seminary has often spoken of the three dimensions of Jewish life — the intellectual, the behavioral, and the spiritual — and the fear many (including himself) have of a Judaism that errs on the side of spirituality. At a recent lecture he expressed the concern that much of Jewish spirituality today veers toward the "anti-intellectual and the narcissistic." Some note, with obvious displeasure, that Nahman of Bratslav and the Bal Shem Tov were radical religious thinkers *because* they were literary innovators of the first rank.

Third, contemporary Jews have turned their fear of joy and of "letting go" into an obsession with the Holocaust and an interpretation of history which focuses, not without some justification, on bloodletting.[17]

This idea may come as a shock to those who think Jewish life is full of joy, and who see in Jewish history the victory of exuberance over execution. But there is in the Jewish psyche a deep fear that security and freedom will soon be taken away; a certainty that Job, not Elijah, is the guide to our people's history.

Fourth, and on the most universalistic and individualistic level, there is the issue of being psychologically open to the world, even in a post-Holocaust era. Israeli writer David Grossman's profound comment about great literature — that which affects and teaches you before you have a chance to erect defenses — speaks precisely to this issue. Individuals, by and large, eschew profound works of art (or engage that art only superficially) not primarily because they find those works to be irrelevant or boring. Instead, we run for cover because we fear what will happen when we let our defenses down. And if that is so with individuals, how much more so for a Jewish community for whom change is as frightening as the hounds of anti-Semitism we always believe are at our heels.

The Case for Culture

Why does the American Jewish community need to consider and support the arts more wholeheartedly than it has in the past?

The more the Jewish community is divided over religion and Israel — and the fewer challenges which remain, like fighting for civil rights, battling anti-Semitism and freeing Soviet Jewry—the more it needs something inspiring to hold it together. To modify the old saying, when the fiddler comes around, the Jews stop arguing and listen. We could all use a fiddler these days.

The arts, by definition, cross all divides to educate and inspire. Not every artist's work, because of content or sophistication, will be meaningful to everyone, but there are still many artists who could make valuable contributions to Jewish life. Archie Rand, the well-known painter, is one. His

works, which include a mural at a Brooklyn synagogue and a series of paintings describing the weekly Torah portions, have made a striking impression on many Jews, shocking them into seeing Jewish life anew.

For Rand, the connection between the arts and spirituality is crystal-clear. As he said recently in *Hadassah Magazine*, "Belief is an essential component of artistic creation. Sometimes people think that passion, emotion, enthusiasm, subconscious psychological activity can exist totally removed from spirituality. You can't function as an artist and not have faith. It's inexplicable to me that the viewing public sees a division between religion and spirituality."[18]

The arts and culture are also a way to meet people where they are — a strategy the community honors principally in the breach. If the community wants Jews at the JCCs, then they need to add to their "Introduction to the Prayerbook" class one on "Kabbalah and Art," or else lose those Jews to the phonies teaching Jewish mysticism in fashion showrooms in Manhattan and Los Angeles. And why not a class on the Jewish themes in the work of Louis Kahn, or of Arnold Schoenberg, or on the mutual influence of klezmer and jazz? You'd need a video hook-up to accommodate the overflow.

Because we are a people of the Book, despite the current cultural climate in America and the domination of the visual media, it is still through the word that much of our community will inevitably renew itself. And without an evolving language that is fresh and vital and relevant, the likelihood of passing down a tradition of holiness diminishes. This doesn't mean that new prayers must constantly be written, or that the classic texts shouldn't be read and discussed in Hebrew. It just means that the language must live in people's hearts and minds for it to touch them, and our artists, who are naturally so sensitive to this, can offer invaluable guidance.

I have been much influenced by Buber's *I and Thou,* and the connections he makes between the freshness of language and of religious transcendence. For Buber, the tragedy of spiritual and relational life is when all interactions between people become objectified and we relate to everything and everyone as an "it." He advocates, instead, the much more difficult task of relating to people as "Thou," as manifestations of God, and this in turn becomes the model for seeing in people the manifestation of God.

The Arts as Gateway to Shared Jewish Culture

The implications concerning literature and the arts are clear: stale language and a reliance on cant leads to wooden spirituality and static relations with God as well as with other people. Conversely, serious creativity must emerge out of a dialogue and sense of community that sees the face of God in other people.

Despite the American Jewish antipathy to or neglect of the value of

Jewish art, there is a scent of change in the air. In recent years, The General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations has given platforms for scholars and artists to talk about the communal value of the arts, and communities are beginning to set up local cultural councils and plan community-wide cultural activities with the expressed intention of connecting the religious and the artistic.

The American Jewish community is only now beginning to acknowledge the unapologetically Jewish content of artists like Archie Rand who are transforming art and culture in Jewish and non-Jewish venues. Unlike previous generations, today's young artists can succeed in theater, dance, music, etc., with their Jewish sensibilities intact and positively asserted. Although there are still TV stars who play up their anxiety about Jewishness for laughs, an increasing number of well-known actors and other artists are addressing substantive Jewish issues in their work and/or lead strongly identified Jewish lives.

Apart from Rand, many other Jewish artists at the top of their field have taken this approach: playwright Tony Kushner, who begins "Angels in America" with a long midrash from a rabbi; rock star Peter Himmelman, with his references to God and *tzitzit* flying out during concerts; composer/dramatist Liz Swados, who has brought biblical themes to stages around the country. The head of one of most important Los Angeles theaters told me recently that he receives so many Jewish plays (and not just plays by Jews) that he could produce only Jewish works all year around and still fill the theater.

The flowering of Jewish Studies programs in recent years has created a cadre of professors knowledgeable about the role of arts and culture in Jewish history, and not afraid to talk about it at synagogues, Federations, and elsewhere.

As Stanford University professor Arnold Eisen told the General Assembly in 1992, the challenge is to provoke the Jewish community, "which is very rationalist in its orientation and quite conservative in the way it reaches out to people" to realize that "people are more than words and that they are more than ideas. If we are serious about Jewish education, then we must realize that people are reached and reach other people through symbols, through images, through all sorts of media."

I am waiting for the day when I can send my kids (well-educated Jewishly, of course) to a college where they can choose between a class on Talmud, a class on Jewish history, and a class on klezmer music. And if they choose the class on klezmer first, *abie gezunt!*

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1. Exodus, Chapter 33.

2. David G. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).

3. David G. Roskies, *The Literature of Destruction: Jewish Responses to Catastrophe* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1988).

4. Alan Mintz, *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature* (Syracuse University

Press, 1996).

5. David G. Roskies, *A Bridge of Longing: The Lost Art of Yiddish Storytelling* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 20-55.

6. Michael Brenner, *The Renaissance of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 100-125.

7. Martin Buber, *On Intersubjectivity and Cultural Creativity*, ed. S.N. Eisenstadt (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 9-10.

8. Richard Wagner, *Judaism in Music and Other Essays* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1995), 79-100.

9. Sander Gilman, *The Jew's Body* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 128-149.

10. Chaim Potok, *My Name is Asher Lev* (New York: Knopf, 1972).

11. Norman Finkelstein, *The Ritual of New Creation: Jewish Tradition and Contemporary Literature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 64.

12. Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), 21.

13. Langdon Gilkey, *Naming the Whirlwind: The Renewal of God-Language* (Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), 5.

14. Daniel J. Elazar, *Community & Polity: The Organizational Dynamics of American Jewry* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1976).

15. David Klinghoffer, "Kitsch, Schmaltz, and Other Jewish Values," *Sh'ma* (November 15, 1996), 3.

16. You can see their point in the first line of Philip Roth's recent novel *Sabbath's Theater*, a National Book Award winner: "Either forswear f—ing others, or the affair is over." Philip Roth, *Sabbath's Theater* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1995), 3.

17. Long before the Holocaust, Jews focused on what Salo Baron (borrowing from Cecil Roth) famously called the "lachrymose view of Jewish history." And during certain periods like the middle ages, the creative response of the Jewish community was to focus on martyrdom and embrace their share of affliction. See *Hurban*, p. 84 -105.

18. Zelda Shluker, "Too Jewish To Be Hip?" *Hadassah Magazine* (November 1996), 54.

Jewish Music or Music of the Jewish People?

BY BOB GLUCK

Written in memory of Judith K. Eisenstein and Regina Rubinoff[1]

The people gave the music life, and the music in turn pulsated in the people, passing from parent to child, and from land to land. The joys and triumphs, the tenderness and warmth, the atony and sorrows, the prayer and the protest, which were shared by Jews and made them one, were poured into music; and where they are still felt, that process continues today. When we live for a moment with that music, we are touching the pulse itself, and our own is quickened in turn.

(Judith K. Eisenstein)[2]

As a young child, I had three consuming interests: baseball, music, and being Jewish. Naturally, I sought ways to harmonize being Jewish with my baseball and musical concerns. Sandy Koufax and his refusal to pitch on Yom Kippur in the 1963 World Series related Judaism and baseball. But several experiences suggested that an easy connection between music and Judaism might prove more elusive.

Of my strongest childhood memories, two stand out: my *gimel* teacher lustily singing *Yigdal* in his deep bass voice, and the moment in my music theory class at Julliard when I hesitantly asked, "What about Jewish music?" Mrs. Schaefer, whom I admired greatly, paused and responded, "There is no Jewish music worthy of being taken seriously." Translation: Jewish music equals synagogue chant equals folk music, which by definition was little more than an interesting melodic source for the elaborate structures of Western classical music. Of itself, it was like an old used car without an engine. I felt crushed but kept my own counsel. Only years later did I discover that many of my Julliard teachers were no more or less Jewish than was I.

It took me many years before I was able to explore Jewish music on its own terms. Once I began to do so, it was possible to realize how difficult it is for practitioners of Western classical music to find familiar points of reference when experiencing the ancient

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chants of the synagogue. I could also acknowledge that much of the synagogue music created in this century, often mimicking the religious music of Western Christianity, is quite mediocre.

Music: A Universal Media

About ten years ago, I began asking the question: "How might one define Jewish music?" I wondered what it was that my childhood music theory teacher identified as "Jewish" within it. What distinguishing markers make a particular form of music "Jewish"? Were there particular musical forms or melodic turns that distinguished this music? Or was it the Jewish context that made it so? And equally to the point, how can one separate what is distinctive and unique in Jewish music from that which has been borrowed, incorporated, or assimilated from outside cultures? In short, what makes Jewish music Jewish?

Music, after all, is a universal media. Sound is an objective phenomenon—everyone with an ability to hear can experience it. How many stories have we heard about people from different cultures finding common ground in music. I recall the remarkable story about saxophonist and composer Ornette Coleman playing for several days in a row with the (North African) Master Musicians of Joujouka and discovering a shared language despite their cultural and musical differences.

Yet, as Jews we know that the universal can only be truly discovered in the particular. Every culture has its unique lens on reality, its own way of perceiving — seeing and hearing. Members of some cultures are able to pronounce certain language sounds but not others. Individual languages have particular sets of imagery upon which they draw as building blocks to capture ideas. English may include many words to describe variations on the color red, but we have only one prime word to identify the white material that falls from the clouds in winter. Aaron Copland wrote, "To a considerable degree...sound images are imposed on us from without. We are born to certain inherited sounds and tend to take them for granted."[3]

For a particular group of people to experience music as compelling and meaningful, that music must articulate sounds and forms that are part of their culture's sonic "library." Mordecai Kaplan articulated this idea when he described art as a civilization's "individual interpretation of the world in color, sound and image, an interpretation which is familiar and profoundly interesting to the people of that civilization."[4]

The selection of raw sound material and the forms within which it will be organized is only the first step in a process. The second step is the development of a musical vocabulary—musical gestures, melodies and textures—which, when shaped within musical forms, are expressive of the emotions and perceptions of members of the culture.

Kaplan spoke of the musician as

"creator par excellence...out of a few disparate sounds, he can fashion an environment of cultural or spiritual illumination."[5] As a result, Kaplan concludes, "The art creations become part of the social heritage which is the driving force of the civilization, and come to be the means of calling forth from the group the civilization's characteristic emotional reactions."[6]

While no two cultures have a completely equivalent set of sonic materials, even those who work with related raw material may create strikingly different types of works. What is meaningful and compelling to one culture may not even be considered musical to another.

Jewish Music As an Evolving Concept

> Jewish music is the song of Judaism through the lips of the Jew. It is the tonal expression of Jewish life and development over a period of more than two thousand years....Jewish song achieves its unique qualities through the sentiments and the life of the Jewish people. Its distinguishing characteristics are the result of the spiritual life and struggle of that people. (A.Z. Idelsohn)[7]

Reconstructionism is premised on the idea that Jewish civilization evolves. We associate particular genres as distinctive of an era. Within literature, the rabbinic age is marked by (among other things) the emergence of midrash, medieval times introduce the idea of codes, and the biblical age is noted for its epic narratives. We acknowledge that many of these forms have been borrowed from other cultures and filled with Jewish content and meaning. We agree that even in a particular age, the Jewish people as a whole has known diverse expressions, religiously and culturally. Yet, when it comes to music, we seem to assume that these principles no longer apply.

A popular misconception leads many to assume that unique "laws" of history and culture apply to music. While the ascription *mi sinay* (from Sinai)[8] attached to some synagogue melodies may best be translated as "very ancient," many people presume that Jewish music has remained static up until the recent past. While we generally recognize that there is not a monolith called Jewish tradition, such historical discernment falls away when the topic is music. The "tradition" coexists with "interesting" or "exotic" folk traditions of Jews in lands different from our own and with new melodies from Jewish summer camps. The benchmark in determining authenticity and appropriateness is too often determined by peoples' subjective experiences while growing up.

Reconstructionism holds that evolution is a constant, owing to changes in our historical circumstances and needs, and to changes in how we perceive reality. A significant factor in *how* our ritual, foods, and, I would add, music, has changed is due to the interaction of Jewish communities

with other cultures. Just as Jewish liturgical poets incorporated what they learned in Islamic Spain, so too have Jewish musicians incorporated approaches and forms from the Ottomon Empire and Eastern European peasants. Cultural borrowing is a constant. What makes the music Jewish is the context within that which borrowed material has been recast. The result becomes defined as "Jewish" by virtue of its resonance as meaningful and true to Jews.[9] Alexander Ringer writes:

> For in art, the ultimate test is rarely what but how, not the nature of the material but its treatment, its unique 'intonation.' And 'intonation' in that sense reflects not merely the individual psyche but the total historical experience of the community, physical and spiritual, to which the artist belongs, whether he identifies with it consciously or not.[10]

It is my goal in this article to trace briefly the evolution of Jewish music, and to offer examples of how it has been shaped by the music of surrounding cultures. I seek to demonstrate that Jewish music, like all other aspects of Jewish culture, is first and foremost an expression of the life of the Jewish people. Jewish music is the music created by Jews, relating to the their experience as seen through the lens of their culture. It is not an independent force existing outside of time and place. It is my hope that when we "normalize" our definition of Jewish music that we can more easily broaden our individual and communal musical palates. In truth, our tradition, and the possibilities it presents, is musically deeper and richer than we realize.

Modes of Jewish Music

To some people, Jewish music is defined by the use of a particular set of melodic material. Its Jewishness may be found in the melodic shape captured in the popular Goldfarb *Shalom Aleykhem* melody that sets the phrase "...*malakhey hashareyt*...": the use of an augmented second distinctive of the *Ahavah Rabah nusaḥ* (prayer mode).[11] Others simplistically speak of a mournful mood in a minor key.[12]

It may be that the popularity of the mode may in large part be due to its status as the major prayer mode of the European Ḥasidim, over and above the other three modes.[13] What is clear to musicologists is that *Ahavah Rabah* is just one of four distinctive Jewish prayer modes, that it was the one most obviously borrowed from another culture, and the one most recently incorporated into liturgical practice.[14]

Many North American Jewish musicians prior to 1970 exploited the culturally ascribed emotionality of the *Ahavah Rabah* prayer mode, as they sought to align Jewish experience with the mainstream. Jewish composers of works in both popular and Western classical styles found it easy to achieve a nostalgic emotional effect by using

the mode. As in Jewish cooking, what many define as distinctively Jewish is that which they experienced as children. *Ahavah Rabah* mode becomes like *kneidlah* as a universalized generic experience.

I recently discovered a fascinating example of how Jews have borrowed raw materials from their host and other cultures, shaping and casting it into distinctive forms of significance to Jewish communities. I had been researching the culture, religiosity, and music of 17th century Safed, as I began work on a multi-media musical composition set in that mystical community in the Land of Israel. To my dismay, I could find very few musical examples of the music of Safed. What scholars have at their disposal are the liturgical and poetic texts of people like Israel Najara. In some of these works, one finds signs, carefully hidden from unknowledgeble eyes, connecting particular poems with the melodic modes of Ottomon Turkish art music. The classical music of this era, early in its development, had not divided between music of the Sufi dervishes and more mainstream Turkish classical music. What I discovered was that Najara and his colleagues, including the noted mystic Rabbi Isaac Luria, essentially borrowed intact classical Turkish art musical modes (*Makam*) and forms to which they set their poems.[15]

Tracing the Music of the Jewish People

As I suggested above, musical borrowing by Safed composers was not a new phenomenon. While we know little about music of biblical times, archeological explorations have demonstrated that Israelite musical instruments were similar in kind to those found in other ancient Near Eastern cultures.[16] Musicologists such as A.Z. Idelsohn[17] and Eric Werner[18] have long pointed out that the parallelism in biblical poetry suggests an antiphonal style of musical performance. Parallelism and antiphony were devices likely shared with pre-Israelite and surrounding non-Israelite cultures. Just as the crafters of the great Israelite epic narratives (such as the flood and creation stories) reworked earlier material, adapting it to their own theology and culture, so is it likely that Israelite musicians did the same with melodies, forms, and instrumentation. As we will see below, these same scholars find evidence of musical and liturgical borrowing between early Christians and Jews during the first three centuries of the Common Era.[19] Of course, the truth, like the sounds of any ancient musics, can not be described with any certainty.

It is when we enter the rabbinic era, the time period following the destruction of the Temple, that we can first speak of "Jewish," as opposed to ancient Israelite music. Yet attempting to imagine what music sounded like during the rabbinic age presents as many challenges as attempting to recreate music of the Second Temple period. In a sense, we

are at an even greater disadvantage, since for this time period we lack the archeological resources that inform us about music in biblical times. What we know about music during the early centuries of the Common Era is recorded in, but also limited to, our literary sources.

That we have access to the traditions of *nusaḥ*, at least as they come down to us, is helpful, because that gives us greater access to the musical traditions supported by the rabbis (many of whom condemned instrumental music, leaving us limited and questionably accurate information about its nature).[20] Granted, it is unclear how close our received *nusaḥ* traditions are to those of rabbinic times. Here again, we are indebted to Idelsohn and Werner, among others, for offering historical reconstructions of the origins of the *nusaḥ* that later divided into Sephardic and Ashkenazic.

Early in this century, Idelsohn recorded Jewish musical traditions throughout the East, including that of long isolated communities such as Yemen. His goal was to document the living musical traditions of diverse communities in the East. What Idelsohn discovered were common threads between Jewish music in Arab lands and the chant modes of the early Church.[21] He then posited a common musical tradition of the ancient Near East, as exemplified by the music of the Second Temple. It was this music, according to Idelsohn, that provided the origins of the evolving *nusaḥ* of Jews in Arab lands. His conclusions depended upon the assumption that the music he uncovered had remained untouched, culturally pure, and expressive of a strong continuity with practice dating back to the Second Temple. More recent scholars[22] are critical of this assumption, and suggest that we have no way of knowing the degree or impact of cultural exchanges and (two-way) borrowing over the ages.

Attempts at Defining Jewish Music

Idelsohn's research offered a definition of Jewish music. He described it as a subset of Semitic (his term was "Oriental") music. The features of this music include: a focus on an ornamented, homophonic (i.e., unison) and improvisational vocal line; microtonality (i.e., melodic intervals smaller than those used in the West); a modal melodic structure; a rhythmic structure that is free floating, following the poetic rhythms of a text; and simple repetitive forms.[23] With this description, Idelsohn places traditional Jewish music squarely within the music of the Near East.

I believe that Idelsohn's assessment of the nature and structure of traditional Jewish music of the synagogue, is generally correct. Idelsohn's theory best represents Jewish music of the East, but traditional Ashkenazic synagogue music is also modally based and often improvisatory. His formulation suggests that the premodern Jewish musical tradition was part of a broad-

er Eastern musical culture.

Thus, the roots of Jewish music are not to be found in an insular subculture. We should not be surprised by the ease with which Jews appear to have incorporated the music of other Middle Eastern cultures into their own culture, as was the case in Safed. While the specific modes used within different Southwestern Asian and Mediteranean traditional music may vary, many of those cultures share the basic features outlined by Idelsohn. The Turkish classical music played in Safed may reflect important differences from other Near Eastern musical traditions, but it also "spoke" a related language.

Medieval Developments

Adaptation, invention, and borrowing continue to characterize Jewish music during the Medieval and Rennaisance periods. Fortunately for musicological research, more information is available about Jewish music during these eras.[24] The Islamic world, within which a significant portion of Jewish communities dwelled, was musically rich, and Jews were actively involved in it as performers, composers, and philosophers. Jewish philosophers and commentators, from Saadia Gaon (882-942) to Ibn Ezra (1092-1167), offered discourses on the "science of music," although they were clearly uncomfortable with unbounded Jewish musical practice. In Europe, while the rabbis tended to be more lenient about musical practice, they spoke more negatively about its theoretical value.[25] Jewish musicians are known to have participated throughout mainstream musical culture in all parts of the world, including having traveled with troops of troubadours in Europe. Clearly musical cross-fertilization took place between Jewish and non-Jewish cultures.

In 16th and 17th century Italy, Jews had access to the great musical scores of the time and so it comes as no surprise that we find Solomono de Rossi composing settings to the liturgy and Psalms in the style of Monteverdi. Italian Jewish philosophers drew upon musical imagery.[26] Surely, here, as in all times and places, a tension existed between the preservation of existing Jewish traditions intact, and the incorporation of musical influences from beyond. Shiloah suggests that cantors commonly played an often challenging role as arbiters in this domain.[27]

Defining the nature of Jewish music, even in the premodern world, is thus a more complex subject than usually assumed. The Semitic core (primarily vocal, solo or unison, improvisational, modal, ornamented, and following textual meter) was subject to numerous shifts and adaptations. As Jews spread throughout the world, stylistic and modal differences grew. The distinctions between Sephardi and Ashkenazi are only the most obvious. The dawn of European classical music in the Rennaisance suggested the first signs of the challenges to come when Jewish music

entered a world that was musically radically different and that welcomed, albeit highly conditionally, Jewish participation.

Encounter with Modernity

The development of a (theoretically) neutral, secular society opened the possibility of Jewish participation in the mainstream of European classical music. Jews began to establish musical lives in two civilizations, just as Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786) posited for literary intellectuals. One example is the 19th century German Jewish liturgical composer Solomon Sulzer (1804-1890). A contemporary of Franz Schubert, Sulzer wrote in a style reminiscent of this great Romantic composer. His work reflected an adaptation of *nusaḥ* to European classical harmonic and rhythmic structure.

Speaking of Sulzer's compositions, A.B. Binder observes that Sulzer:

> eliminated certain characteristics of the synagogue chant, such as the melisma[28] and traditional modulations. In his choral music, Sulzer set the nusah, when he employed it, behind bar lines. To the traditional Jew, his music sounded un-Jewish...later...he learned to value traditional hazzanut and incorporated it in his work, adapting it to his own style.[29]

Sulzer's life presents the possibilty, now common, of a Jew crossing the boundaries between the Jewish world and the broader secular society. From this time forth, Jews would increasingly seek sustenance and support from the European cultural world.

At this time, Jews who sought to move into the mainstream of European musical culture found that their entry ticket was conversion to Christianity. Those who indeed did convert included the Mendelssohn family, and some years later, Gustav Mahler and Arnold Schoenberg. Ironically, Mahler found that despite his rise to the directorship of the Vienna Opera, his identity was never secure. Mahler once wrote to his wife, Alma Mahler-Werfel, "I am thrice homeless, as a native of Bohemia in Austria, as an Austrian among Germans, and as a Jew throughout the world. Everywhere an intruder, never welcome."[30]

Schoenberg considered himself musically a German. In 1931, he wrote: "...my music, grown on German ground and untouched by foreign influences as it is, constitutes an art which has sprung entirely from the traditions of German music....My masters were in the first place Bach and Mozart, and in the second, Beethoven, Brahms and Wagner...."[31] Yet in his personal identity, he gradually began to see himself as a Jew, culminating in his return to Judaism as the Nazis came to power. This process had begun as early as 1923, when the composer experienced anti-semitism in the major German center of the arts of the day, the Bauhaus. He then wrote, distinguishing his personal identity from his musical heritage:

I have at last learned the lesson

> that has been forced upon me during this year, and I shall not ever forget it. It is that I am not a German, not a European, indeed perhaps scarcely even a human being (at least, the Europeans prefer the worst of their race to me). I am a Jew. I am content that it should be so![32]

One musicologist Peter Gradenwitz,[33] relates Schoenberg's 12-tone system to the primacy of melody inherent in Jewish tradition. Schoenberg wrote liturgical settings and several operatic works on biblical themes,[34] but these remain largely unknown in Jewish circles. During the 1930s, in exile, Schoenberg lectured and wrote about the question of a Jewish state, and during the 1940s, set a variety of Jewish liturgical texts, including *Kol Nidrey* and Psalms. Shortly before his death, he was elected honorary president of the newly founded Israel Academy of Music.

In modernity, it became possible for Jews to choose to become musicians and disaffiliate from Jewish communal life. Thus, musicians of Jewish descent often began to choose to move into the musically more compelling European mainstream. What effect that shift had on the music of the synagogue and Jewish communal life cannot fully be known. How would music of the synagogue have changed if the major European composers of Jewish background were its principle composers? We can only guess.

European Influences

Music of the great synagogues of Western European Jews, and that of liberal Judaism in America was highly influenced by cantors trained in classical European techniques and aesthetics, such as Louis Levandowski. Like Sulzer before them, traditional Jewish chants were cast into Romantic European melodies, harmony, and forms, at times reminiscent of Protestant Christianity, if not supplanted entirely.

Even though early German Reform and Eastern European Orthodoxy were moving in opposite directions in many regards, it is interesting that the movement that most actively embraced the notion of melodic borrowing may have been the early Ḥasidim. Amnon Shiloah cites the following story of the Karliner Ḥasidim as an example of the openness with which the Ḥasidim engaged in this practice. He suggests that the borrowing of foreign melodies might have been viewed as an exemplar of the Ḥasidic notion of redeeming holy sparks trapped in alien husks:

> ...at the funeral of Tzar Nikolai, the rabbi's son who would some day inherit his father's rabbinical post, the rabbi and Zadik R. Israel of blessed memory were all standing together with a few disciples. During the funeral a certain song was sung that the rabbi told his disciples would be worthwhile adopting; it would be good for singing the psalm consecrating the House of

David. And until today it is customary to sing that song during the Hanukkah festival or when celebrating a house warming.[35]

Shifting Perspectives of the Late 20th Century

As Western music went through significant changes in the 20th century, the very definition of what constitutes music was broadened. The innovations of composers such as John Cage, Edgard Varese, and others led to the incorporation into music of sound that was previously considered non-musical in the West. Alan Hovannes, Cage, and others brought musical approaches of the East into the Western mainstream. Composers such as Frank Zappa blurred the boundaries between art music and popular music. These changes have affected how we view Jewish music as well. Unfortunately, such thinking has rarely moved beyond the academy and into popular Jewish culture.

I personally compose in electronic media, often working with archival sounds from traditional Jewish music as raw material. *Nusaḥ* plays a role in my work in this media, just as it does in my more conventional pieces. Other Jewish composers during the past thirty years have set Psalms in minimalist style,[36] incorporated klezmer inflections into classical style works,[37] have drawn upon cantorial melody and haftarah cantillation trope as thematic material,[38] and created multi-media electronic operas.[39] Many have adapted folk harmonies and styles to liturgical and biblical texts. While some of these developments may appear more radical than those of the past,[40] they force to the surface the basic question of the ages: what is at the core of the music of the Jewish people?

Music of the Jewish People

Once we view Jewish music through the same lens with which we treat every other aspect of Jewish life, we discover numerous cultural and religious threads. Many of these are interpenetrating, although at times they are in conflict. Incorporation of new influences has been a constant. The innovative spirit that led Jews in Spain to learn from Islamic poetry, that encouraged Maimonides to integrate the best of Neo-Aristotelian thinking into his philosophy, and the adaptive force that has led Jews to recast Ḥanukah into a festival meaningful to our time, have been equally present in the work of Jewish musicians.

We may follow the work of Idelsohn in asserting that *nusaḥ* has provided a central core to at least some Jewish music, be it music of the synagogue, folk traditions, or popular music. But Jewish musical traditions are far too complex and varied to fit one mold. This is true even for the limited range of traditions explored in this article.[41] It is my contention that we do better to think conceptually about "the music of the Jewish people" than to try to describe a corpus called "Jewish music."

The defining qualities of the music

of Jewish communities may, at times, have been the use of particular modal structures, or the setting of texts in languages spoken by Jews, but we do ourselves a disservice by ending the conversation there. What draws together a popular Israeli song, a *Kaddish* written by the non-Jewish composer Maurice Ravel, an electronic opera, the Ottomon classic chants of Safed, and the music of a synagogue is the context. Music that is of significance to Jews, that gives meaning to Jewish life, that Jews hear as interesting and compelling, this is the music of the Jewish people.

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1. "Miss Rubinoff" became my piano teacher in 1962 and remained a life-long mentor and friend. Four years before her death in 1993, she gave me an edition of Idelsohn's *Jewish Music,* in which she inscribed: "To Bob who has the best of his possible world—the Rabbinate with his love of music." I am forever grateful to Regina for all she taught me.

2. Judith K. Eisenstein, *Heritage of Music* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1972), 3.

3. Aaron Copland, *Music and Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), 36.

4. Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization* (New York: Schocken Books, 1967), 205.

5. I have long lost the citation of this quotation.

6. Kaplan, 203.

7. A.Z. Idelsohn, *Jewish Music in its Historical Development* (New York: Schocken Books, 1967), 24.

8. In fact, *"mi sinay"* is a technical term to describe a genre of melodies that are considered to be obligatory in the music of traditional Ashkenazic synagogues. They were created during the four centuries following the Crusades (likely in the Rhineland). See Hanoch Avenari, "Mi-Sinai Niggunim," *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1972); and A.Z. Idelsohn, *Thesaurus of Hebrew Oriental Melodies* (New York: Ktav, 1983), 1922-28.

9. Premodern Jewish music is a substantially folk tradition. Inherent in the life of folk traditions, is its oral means of transmission. Folk traditions are noted for anonymity and borrowing of source material. Cultivated traditions tend to borrow and recast material from folk traditions. Scholars assert that Israelite musicians borrowed materials, instruments, and musical forms from surrounding cultures, folk and cultivated. If the Second Temple music of the Levites was the cultivated music of that age, I would assume that it borrowed from folk music. Western European Classical music, the cultivated music of post-Rennaisance European society, also tended to borrow from folk music, recasting it within the context of its aesthetics, forms, and social milieu.

10. Alexander Ringer, "Jewish Music and a Jew's Music," in *Arnold Schoenberg: The Composer as Jew* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 201.

11. Jewish liturgical music is generally characterized by the use of four prayer modes *(Ahavah Rabah, Adonay Malakh, Magen Avot,* and *Selikhah*). To offer one example of an augmented second, consider the musical interval between the notes d-flat and e-natural. It is called "augmented" because it is a larger interval than the stepwise move that our ears expect to hear (d-flat to e-flat).

12. The Western "minor" and "major" scales are derived from more ancient modes. A mode is a series of notes, moving stepwise from lower to higher. The modes of Eastern cultures, including the ancient Near East and Mediteranean, are greatly varied. It is common for people in the West to ascribe emotional qualities to the musical modes of antiquity and/or of more recent Eastern cultures. Often, these qualities, which are indeed conventions of the harmonic structure of European Classical music (e.g., minor conveys sadness), most often do not apply to modes and they do not provide an adequate portrayal of the nature of the modes. *Ahavah Rabah,*

for example, despite its similarity to a harmonic minor scale, lacks a mournful emotional content.

13. See note 11.

14. A.B. Binder describes *Ahavah Rabah* as "the most recent of the modes, for it does not occur among [those deriving from] the biblical [cantillation] modes [which many scholars view as the source of the nusah]. It came from southwestern Europe... [its sources being] Tartar, Persian and Byzantine..." ("Jewish Music, An Encyclopedic Survey," in *Collected Writings of A.W. Binder* [New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1971]. Composer, conductor, and teacher, Binder was Professor of Liturgical Music at Hebrew Union College's School of Sacred Music from the 1920s through the 1960s.

I do not believe that the relative lack of longevity (or its exclusive use by Jews) of a mode renders it less authentically Jewish. Communities ascribe authenticity to their preferred Jewish musical forms, at times assigning claims of eternality to them (e.g., as noted previously, when referring to melodies as '*mi Sinay.*') Generally, in the case of ritual and prayer, longevity or exclusivity are often seen as signs of authenticity. However, rabbis of the early centuries of the Common Era are noted for claims of historical continuity for ideas and rituals that were likely of recent vintage. Also, the title "traditional" can often refer to that which is familiar. Melodies common in contemporary liberal synagogues that are commonly viewed as ancient are often compositions from the second half of the 20th century.

15. For example, see Edwin Seroussi, "The Turkish Makam in the Musical Culture of the Ottoman Jews: Sources and Examples," in *Israel Studies in Musicology,* Vol. 5 (Jerusalem: Israel Musicological Society, 1990), 43-69; and Karl Signell, *The Turkish Makam System in Contemporary Theory and Practice* (Seattle: University of Washington, 1979); and Idelsohn, 363-365. Idelsohn (ibid., 412) reports that the favorite melody of R. Isaac Luria set to R. Israel Najara's Kabbalat Shabbat hymn, *Yedid Nefesh* is, for example, set in the Saba mode (eg C-D flat-E natural-F-F-E flat-D flat-C...).

16. See for example, Alfred Sendry, *Music in Ancient Israel* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1969).

17. Idelsohn, 412.

18. Eric Werner, *The Sacred Bridge,* Volume I (New York: Schocken Books, 1970) and Volume II (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1984).

19. Werner (Volumes I and II) also suggests that such exchanges may have taken place in Antioch, Rome, or Damascus. His thesis is that early Christian Fathers adopted the music of the Temple, across a "sacred bridge." Werner holds that it was in the music of the Second Temple (choral and antiphonal, well suited to a permanent, large physical sacred setting), which after the destruction was no longer useful to Jews, became the foundation of music of the Church. I might add that if Werner is correct, might the exchange have been two-way? If so, what might have been the effect on Jewish music and culture? It is difficult even to guess. One major midrash, however, uses a musical anecdote to comment on the cultural/religious divide between Hellenism and Judaism in rabbinic times. Elisha ben Abuya was a major early rabbinic scholar, a colleague of Rabbi Akiva, who became a non-believer and a defector from Jewish communal life. A cause of his apostacy is said to be his (excessive?) singing of Roman songs (B. Hagigah 15a-b).

20. Werner refers to the rabbinic attitude as a "studied indifference" to music. I have collected rabbinic sources on this topic in an unpublished essay, "Rabbinic Attitudes Towards Instrumental Music" (1988). It is my thesis that the negativity of the rabbis, especially those in the Land of Israel, may not be completely reduced to a desire to mourn the destruction of the Temple, as popularly thought. The rabbis associated instrumental music with the allegedly sexual rituals of the mystery cults of Asia Minor and they feared religious syncretism and the involvement of Jews in non-Jewish rituals. Sources from the (largely Palestinian) rabbis and the early Church Fathers share a similar world view on this topic, connecting instrumental music with fears about the human body, which,

they felt, would become engaged in dance in the presence of this music. Dance was connected with the cults and sexuality, as well.

21. A familiar example of a Church mode is Gregorian Chant.

22. Notably the Israeli scholar, Amnon Shiloah; see his *Jewish Musical Traditions* (Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1992).

23. Such as "ABA", where "A" and "B" represent melodic themes; following the presentation of "B", "A" returns.

24. The responsa literature (responses to questions addressed to major rabbinic leaders) addresses musical issues with relative openness, and musical traditions of *nusaḥ*, settings of *piyutim* and other texts have been handed down and preserved. The Responsa include an extensive dialogue reflecting a rabbinic desire to remove *Kol Nidrey* from the liturgy, an attempt that failed due to the popular love of its melodies.

25. See Shiloah, *Jewish Musical Traditions.* Readers may contact me (P.O. Box 276, Sheffield, MA 01257; Rjgluck@aol.com) for reference material and analysis contained in my unpublished article; see note 20.

26. See Shiloah, 50-52. The appropriation of Italian Rennaisance music by de Rossi for Jewish liturgical use clearly reflects a change in approach on the part of Jewish religious musical life. Granted the previous involvement of Jews in traveling European musical troupes, I am inclined to doubt it. Although de Rossi's influence was on the musical life of Italian non-Jews (few Jews were likely to have ever heard his music), de Rossi's liturgical settings represents the first hint of what would later prove to be the significant influence of European music and its emphasis on polyphony (multiple musical lines; Jewish liturgical music to date was generally monophonic, i.e. a single melodic line), and later on harmony on Jewish music in the West.

27. Shiloah, 67-73.

28. Melisma refers to an ornamented melodic line, usually extending a single syllable of text.

29. Sulzer, 152. Sulzer once wrote: "[traditional *nusaḥ* needs to be] improved and selected and adjusted to the rules of art." He qualified this statement by adding: "it should not be neccesary to sacrifice characteristics to artistic forms." Quoted in Peter Gradenwitz, "Jews in Austrian Music", in Josef Fraenkel, ed., *The Jews of Austria: Essays On Their Life, History and Destruction,* (London: Valentine, Mitchell, 1967), 18.

30. Cited in Peter Gradenwitz, "Mahler and Schoenberg," in *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book V* (London: East and West Library, 1960), 266.

31. Arnold Schoenberg to Josef Hauer, 1 December 1923, Erwin Stein, ed., *Letters,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 103-5. Also see "Music" from "Guidelines for a Ministry of Art," in *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 369. My unpublished article "Arnold Schoenberg and the Quest For a Modern Jewish Spirituality" (1988) traces the development of Schoenberg's Jewish identity.

32. Arnold Schoenberg to Wassily Kandinsky, 20 April 1923, *Letters,* 88-89.

33. Peter Gradenwitz, *The Music of Israel* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1949), 189. Gradenwitz theorizes that Schoenberg's 12-tone system reflects a restoration of melody to a harmonically excessive European Romanticism: "It cannot be incidental that the regeneration of melody was the achievement of a Jewish composer, who on his way smashed the edifice of Romantic harmony..."; I believe that Gradenwitz's conclusions are questionable. Ringer (see note 10) connects Schoenberg's free rhythmic style to traditional synagogue chant.

34. Two major dramatic works, "Die Biblishe Weg" and "Moses Und Aron", address the narrative of the Exodus and its aftermath. Schoenberg is especially interested in the leadership models of Moses and Aaron. "Moses Und Aron" is considered by critics to be a major opera, albeit rarely performed, in the 20th century repertoire.

35. Shiloah, 71.

36. Steve Reich: "Tehillim" (ECM, 1982); "Different Trains" (Nonesuch, 1988); "The Cave" (Nonesuch, 1995).

37. Ofer ben Amots's "Celestial Dialogues"

(on Giora Feidman, "Klezmer Chamber Music," Verlag Plane, 1995, a German release); Osvaldo Golichov's "Yiddish Ruah" (frequently performed but not yet available on recording).

38. Leonard Bernstein, Symphony No. I, "Jeremiah" (Israel Symphony Orchestra, Bernstein, Deutsche Grammophon, 1978); John Zorn's free jazz influenced "Masada" (DIW Records, 1994 (A Japanese release that may be found in larger North American CD shops).

39. Richard Teitelbaum's "Golem" (Tzadik, 1995).

40. I imagine that the wholesale adaptation of Turkish Makam-based music in Safed and its sister communities of mystics may have been considered shocking to Jews in other communities. Despite similarities in approach to Sephardic *nusaḥ,* Makam is an independent, clearly Ottoman tradition.

41. Such topics might include the wide range of Jewish folk and secular traditions.

Turn it Over and Turn it Over: Using Movement as an Exegetical Tool

BY ANDREA HODOS

Dance" and "*Parshanut*," biblical interpretation. Within the Jewish tradition, these are not the likeliest concepts to occur in the same thought. The *Bet Midrash* has a set of movements associated with it — shuckling, particular hand gestures — but these movements are quite specific; while they may form a dance of sorts, dance is not a mode of communication generally found in the *Bet Midrash*. Traditionally, dance has been an important factor in other aspects of Jewish culture — in life-cycle events, in religious celebrations, and within some Hasidic traditions, in prayer — but historically, dance has not been part of our rich interpretive tradition.

Recently, various individuals and communities have been finding new ways to bring Torah study alive using dance, theater, and movement. Over the past seven years I have been exploring — alone, and with *ḥevrutot* (study partners) — specific ways to use the performing arts as exegetical tools. I consider these explorations to be part of a larger project, ongoing in various places in the Jewish community, of finding new, dynamic contributions to the Jewish interpretive tradition.

Words are the starting point in this interpretive tradition. However, I don't think we need to end our interpretations at the linguistic level. My experience as a dancer and student of movement tells me that there are many modes of communication that the body has to offer, and that the combination of words and movement can be a powerful interpretive tool.

As a dancer and choreographer, my medium is the body. However, my dances have always incorporated language in some form. When I began "learning" within a Jewish context, and my dances became Jewish ones, it became even more important that my

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dances arise from the text. The aspect of Jewish culture and religion which most compelled me as an adult "returnee" was its long and rich history of textual interpretation. It was natural that once I began learning Jewish texts, part of my response would occur through the medium of movement.

I think of the forms with which I have been experimenting as related more to the Litvish rather than the Ḥasidish strain of Jewish tradition. That is to say, the spiritual impact of my work is grounded in an intellectual or linguistic engagement with the text which begins with study. My study starts at the level of *peshat* interpretation (an interpretation exploring the most straightforward reading of a text) before moving on to more creative, conceptual, or philosophical levels. Likewise, my choreography arises from concrete images and pedestrian movement that later become abstracted in order to add dimension to the interpretation.

"Turn It Over" — Literally

My first foray into movement interpretation began not with a biblical text, but rather with a rabbinic one. As students at the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem, Aliza Shapiro and I were searching for a way to take our experiences with traditional text study and translate them into movement. Over a period of a year and a half, we created an evolving dance/theater piece based on the mishnah from *Pirkey Avot, "Hafokh bah vahafokh bah dikhola bah"* — "Turn it over and turn it over, for everything is in it."[1] This statement is, at once, a physical image and a philosophical pronouncement.

Beginning with the assumption that Jews engage in this kind of "turning over" of Torah in *ḥevrutah*, our dance began as a representation of this interpretive process between two people and a text. We concretized what happens to the people and the texts as they encounter each other and affect one another; we embodied the intellectual dynamic of *ḥevrutah* by offering a physical interpretation of its moving metaphor.

Weaving Together Ourselves and the Text

Taking this "metaphor" seriously allowed us to get at another layer of the creation of meaning which happens between a reader and text. We turned the text over and the text turned us over (literally). We wove ourselves and the text together, creating a commentary on the experience of studying text. The piece that resulted then became a text which was commented on by each audience for which it was performed. The audience saw themselves in the piece and in the text. Reading the text and reading the piece, viewers created new meanings which we wove back into the piece, turning it over, once again.

"Turn it over" tells us the that process of interpretation is highly dynamic and even physical. "Everything is in it" tells us that the Torah

can contain, or withstand, any interpretation. In fact if we hear the statement in the imperative, we can say that the text demands from us to be read in as many ways as possible. This line of mishnaic text was the perfect place for us to start with our movement/text explorations if one of its translations is "Turn in it, and turn in it to find everything that is in it" — to *physically* turn in it, turn it inside out, turn it over and over is to open up the possibility for a wider interpretive frame by employing physical as well as linguistic modes.

In reflecting upon our process several years later, Aliza recalled the visceral feelings we had when we first began working:

> We felt overwhelmed about it — about the subterranean connections which were happening in our bodies and our minds at the same time. When those connections would happen, we would feel it in our *kishkes*. Something was taking flight... the movement and the text were working together.

We found that the audience responded to these connections which we felt between our movement and the text, as well as those connections which we hadn't consciously felt ourselves. Each time we performed, we let the audience interpret the piece through discussion. The image of two women dancing with a tallis was apparently a rich one — provocative and allusive at the same time. People discovered layers of meaning that we had not initially intended. The piece evolved over the period of its performance as we worked on developing, more consciously, the images identified by viewers which particularly interested us.

Creating Movement Commentary on the Torah

More recently, my physical engagement with text has taken a different turn. I started working on portions of the biblical text, engaging the idea of commentary. In separate stages, I created movements based on specific images in the text using choreographic techniques learned from Liz Lerman.[2] At the same time, through close reading of the text, I came up with a set of questions that focused for me a central problematic of the text. Through writing exercises, I scripted the question and then overlaid the movement on my new commentary text. The process of recontextualizing the movement with the script always generated a new and highly-textured commentary on the original biblical text, and itself became a source of commentary on the text for the audience.

I found that there was an interesting parallel between this process and the techniques of classical Midrash. At the heart of Midrash is the moment at which two seemingly unconnected verses are juxtaposed. Each verse is shorn of its original context, and when juxtaposed (based on phonetic, linguistic, or thematic affinity) gener-

ate their own narrative.[3] They create a new meaning or interpretation which would not have come into being if the verses had not been placed in relation to one another. Similarly, the decontextualized movement juxtaposed with my spoken text, creates a commentary which is different from that which would have resulted from either the movement or the words in isolation from one another.

When the movements and words are combined, there is an almost stereoscopic effect: the physical images (as seen by the viewer) or kinesthetic sensations (as experienced by the performer) reverberate with the spoken word to create simultaneously a physical, emotional, and intellectual experience of the text.

Torah Stories Brought to Life

Perhaps one of the most concrete examples of this occurred during a workshop in preparation for Shavuot on biblical sources of the revelation at Sinai. Some of the workshop participants chose to focus on the line, "All the people saw the thunder (lit., voices) and the lightning, and the voice of the shofar and the smoking mountain." (Ex. 20:15, my translation) Using the process that I will outline below, many of the participants found interesting ways to embody the Israelites' synesthetic experiences described in this statement.

In these movement commentaries, physical and spatial relationships are embodied in the choreography, making them more immediate and concrete than literary tropes alone. Several moments which illustrate this phenomenon come to mind. In a class that I taught on Joseph's adventures, a number of the commentaries created by class members demonstrated how the pit into which Joseph is initially thrown occurs as a physical and metaphoric reality throughout his life. Several of the commentaries employed movements derived from the action of the brothers throwing Joseph into the pit, or from the pit, itself. These movements were then placed in relation to spoken commentary on various episodes of his life.

While there is a clear literary parallel between Joseph's descent into the pit and his later descent into Pharoah's jail, one commentary made this parallel come alive by showing it in movement. A less obvious connection was illustrated in another commentary. One class member's movement consisted of outlining the contours of the pit, while her verbal commentary addressed the isolation that Joseph felt from his family, even while enjoying the height of his ministerial position. The viewers experienced his familial isolation as a pit, of sorts. We got a sense that when the brothers threw Joseph into the pit, they isolated him in such a way that no matter how far up he climbed, he could never completely emerge — until, perhaps, the reconciliation. Seeing this spatial relationship concretized led directly to this unique interpretation.

Movement, Commentary, and Textual Exegesis

Recently, in my own work, I made an interesting textual discovery as a result of creating a movement commentary. As part of a larger performance piece on which I have been working, I wanted to include a section on the *sotah*, the accused adulteress discussed in fifth chapter of Numbers. In a very immediate and visceral way, I discovered that the *sotah* is, *herself*, the jealousy offering — her body *becomes* the site of the jealousy offering.

I was working primarily with one line of the text: "After he has made the woman stand before the LORD, the priest shall bare the woman's head and place upon her hands the meal offering of remembrance, which is a meal offering of jealousy." (Num. 5:18, NJPS) The Hebrew of the final phrase refers to the jealousy offering in the feminine: "*minḥat kena'ot hi*," whereas in a previous line (Num. 5:15), it had been referred to in the masculine, "*minḥat kena'ot hu*." I performed movements associated with the woman's body as I spoke these words, and it became very clear to me that this was an instance in which the gender of the noun mattered. The phrase seemed to call out to be translated, "*she* is a jealousy offering" transferring the location of the offering from the meal to the woman, herself.

I might have reached this same interpretation through linguistic channels alone. In fact, it is quite possible that another commentator at some other point in history has. However, I believe that by embodying the text, this reading became immediately apparent, and *felt*, in a way that I don't think a purely linguistic reading would have. This belief on my part has been supported by some who have viewed the piece and remarked on the fact that the power of the interpretation lies in its visceral nature.

The power of the interpretation comes through its performance. I feel it in my body; I perform it and people respond to it. Viewers talk about feeling the interpretation in their guts as well as understanding it with their intellect. A variety of questions arise for me in relation to this work. Does this interpretation feel like truth in my body? Do I learn something new about the world from the way my body responds to this text? Do people learn or interpret into existence something new about the world from seeing and hearing the way my body responds to this text? In exploring the answers to these questions, I have found that using movement in the interpretive process can yield valuable discoveries for both the performer and the viewer.

A Formula for Creating Movement Commentary

I have developed a basic five-step process for creating movement *divrey Torah* or movement commentaries. I use this process when creating commentaries myself, but also in teaching workshops and classes. When participants present their commentaries at

the close of a workshop, the effect is one of a moving *Mikra'ot Gedolot.*[4] Various commentaries work together and work off of each other to create a multi-layered picture of what the text might be about.

The steps in the process include the following: (1) learning a particular text; (2) generating a verbal response; (3) generating a movement response; (4) combining the verbal and movement responses; (5) presenting and discussing the commentary.

The following is an outline of how I might use these exercises, either by myself or with a group to create commentary on the story of Sarai, Hagar, Avram, and the birth of Ishmael (Gen. 16).

Learning the Text

As part of the text learning, we raise as many questions about the text as possible — from grammatical to philosophical. In a workshop setting, I will ask each person to find a *ḥevrutah* with whom they will learn and with whom they will share their work at various points throughout the process. When offering workshops, I always encourage participants to raise their own questions, but for groups which are very new to textual study, I often provide a list of questions to get them started.

The following are examples of some questions that interested me in looking at this story: What is the relationship between the different uses of the Hebrew root *ayin - nun - hey* (eye, wellspring, oppress) within the story; why are there so many different body parts mentioned, and what do they have to do with one another; does Sarai really think that she, rather than Hagar, will be "built up" by having this son? These are questions that promote a close reading of the text, which is often a productive place from which to start.

Generating a Verbal Response

After generating some questions, we engage in a two-fold freewriting exercise: first, we generate a provisional answer to one of the questions, and then we generate a list of sensory details. I select (or encourage workshop participants to select) the most intriguing question, or set of questions. For example, I might begin with the lexical question regarding the Hebrew root *ayin - nun - hey.*

Using freewriting techniques, I write an "answer" to that question from the top of my head — whatever the "answer" is at the moment of writing — including further questions which might arise. I may write something like the following: "Sarai is objectifying Hagar 'through her eyes' and as a result, is able to oppress her. Hagar can see Sarai through different eyes once she has borne a son. Why doesn't that stop the oppression? She must go to the well in order to learn how to deal with the oppression — somehow, this well becomes her source."

Next, I imagine that I am present in the story somewhere and I generate a list of things that I might see, hear,

smell, taste, and touch. The images do not need to be directly related to the question or answer that was selected. The greater the detail, the more useful the images will be later on. For example, my list might include "the low and quiet gurgling of water in the well; the dark corners of the eaves of Avram's tent; the swelling of her belly." Upon generating the two pieces of writing — the "question and answer" and the "sensory details" — we set them aside and begin to move.

Generating the Movement

We begin with a movement warm-up, which serves to warm people up physically and to warm up their "movement imaginations." The following is one possible way to warm-up. Note that the words in parentheses describe what type of movement variation you might expect with the suggested change. An important choreographic tool that we will use throughout the process is "theme and variation." In this case, our movement theme is "painting" and the variations are offered as suggestions:

> Imagine yourself inside a globe. Paint the inside of the globe with broad strokes using an imaginary paintbrush; make sure to cover all areas (level changes: high, low). Change the size of the brush (size change: large to small). Change the quality of the brush strokes; try impressionism, pointillism — even Jackson Pollock (quality changes, speed changes). Paint with different body parts. Now, imagine you are Michelangelo painting a scene from this story on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel (this part of the exercise is a way of moving people back into the biblical material using their new choreographic tools).

After the warm-up has come to a close, I will ask people to try to identify the different variations, and discuss what it felt like to do them.

Next, using these tools, I and other participants return to our list of "sensory details." Taking one detail at a time I use each detail to generate a repeatable movement. For instance, I take the detail, "the dark corners of the eaves of Avram's tent" and find some way to use my body to recreate this detail in movement. I could trace the outline of the corners of the tent using any of the variations discussed above. I could "show" how the darkness obscures vision using waving motions in my upper body. I could simply make movements that echo the rhythm of the phrase itself. The important thing to remember is this: the source of the movement (the sensory detail) *does not need to be evident* to a viewer in order for the movement to be interesting and useful in the piece.

After deciding on one movement variation, I rehearse it until I am sure that I will be able to remember and repeat it, and then I move on to create movements for several of the other sensory details. When I have finished creating all of the movements, I

rehearse them in a sequence, adding transitional movements when necessary.

Combining the Verbal and Movement Responses

The next step is to find an interesting way to combine the movement derived from the sensory details while speaking parts of the question and answer. Again, there are many ways of doing this. One way would be to select a sentence for each movement and perform them at the same time. For example, I might take the movement I created from the detail of the darkened eaves and perform it while speaking the first sentence: "Sarai is objectifying Hagar 'through her eyes' and as a result, is able to oppress her." I may find that the sentence is rather clumsy, so I may edit it to fit with the rhythm of the movement.

In putting the next movement (derived from "the swelling of her belly") together with the next sentence of my "answer" ("Hagar can see Sarai through different eyes once she has borne a son"), I may find that the spoken words are fine, but varying the movement a little bit will help it to fit with the meaning and the mood of the sentence. Through these adjustments and experiments with different combinations of movement and text, one can discover a lot about the meaning of the text for themselves. As the piece becomes ready to be seen by others, it becomes a commentary that will shape others' reading of the text.

Presenting and Discussing the Commentary

Whether commentaries are presented by an individual at a Shabbat service or as a group at the close of a workshop, I have found several things to be true. First, it is often useful for the viewers to see the piece more than once. In the setting of the Shabbat service this is best accomplished by performing the piece once, engaging the congregation in a discussion, and then showing the piece again. In a workshop setting, it is useful to see some of the pieces twice in a row. During the discussion it is most valuable to get viewers' reactions to what they saw, and encourage their interpretations of the piece, before explaining what you intended. It leads to a much more layered discussion of the text at hand.

An Invitation to the Journey

I hope that readers will experiment with these exercises. An important thing to keep in mind is that these are all exercises for generating interesting material, and there is no way to do them incorrectly. I often say to people throughout the process, "If you have a question about my directions, first assume the answer is 'yes.' If you still have a question after that, then by all means ask it." There are limitless ways to vary the structure that I present here; the ways you choose to interpret these directions will lead you to new and interesting interpretations of the texts. I wish you a good journey.

1. M. *Avot* 5:26.

2. Liz Lerman is the artistic director of Washington DC-based dance company the *Liz Lerman Dance Exchange,* an intercultural and intergenerational dance company. A key mission of the company is to make dance as accessible to as many people as possible. To this end, they have a developed a rich set of tools for easing people into creative movement and choreography.

3. Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 29.

4. The collection of classical medieval commentaries on the *Tanakh.* On each page, the various commentaries surround the Biblical text upon which they comment.

Bibliodrama: A Prophetical Advertisement

BY PETER A. PITZELE

A Vignette

A class is in progress: a group of fifteen adults are seated in a circle, studying the Bible. We have been reading the story of the Garden of Eden and have come to the end of that story, to the lines which say:

> Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the Garden of Eden to till the ground whence he was taken. So he drove out the man. (Gen. 3:23-24)

Rather than talking about this episode and giving our ideas about it, I propose to the class that we step into it and play it out. "Let's look at this scene in a bibliodramatic way," I suggest. "Let's see what Eve has to say about this moment of expulsion." The class, familiar with this approach from previous experiences with me, accepts this suggestion with nods of assent. "So, I'd like you to imagine that you *are* Eve at this moment in the story. Tell us, Eve, what is this like for you?"

Hands go up, each hand a potential voice of Eve.

"I am furious at the deception God practiced on us, the temptation, the duplicity, the curse. It will take me a long time, if ever, before I trust God again."

"Driven out is right. I don't want to leave. I straggle. I hide. I look back. All I know is being left behind."

"You know, it says in the story that God 'drove the man out,' but nothing is said of me. Here is another place where I feel invisible. This whole thing is always between God and Adam."

"But that's the point," says another participant. "You see, I am not being driven out. It's Adam who is all nostalgic and depressed. I can't wait to get out of here, anymore than I could wait to eat the apple. Eden is a place where I have no part to play, no

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future. It *has* all been Adam and God. In this world we're going to, there's going to be lots for me to do."

"So you feel?..." I ask.

"Excited. I have a sense of power and possibility. There's something coming. I have a purpose. I am to be 'the mother of all living.' Now that's a part to play."

"Not a bad exchange, if you ask me," someone adds by way of comment.

Another hand is raised, a man speaks as Eve: "It's even more than that. In a certain way, I don't really leave Eden at all, ever. Only Adam leaves. He really is banished. He's never going to know again what it feels like to be part of life in the way he is here. He goes into exile. But a part of me stays here. A part of me can go back. The garden is the womb, and I have that inside me."

"Can I speak for Adam?" another participant asks.

"Sure."

"I do feel the curse falling directly on me. Eve is not included in this expulsion. And yet she does come with me. Why?"

"I choose to go."

"Yes, but why?"

"I choose because it is what I want. I want out and I want a life with you. We were created *together.* Whichever way you want to think about how we came to be, it is clear that we belong together."

"I was angry at you because you caused us to lose the Garden."

"Well, I was angry at you that there was no place in that Garden for me, even for us. It was all you and God."

"So you deliberately..."

"Well, we have to give the serpent some credit."

"Where is that serpent anyway?"

"Here I am," says one of the group members, playfully easing himself from his chair to the floor.

"Are you coming with us?" Eve asks.

"He'll be nothing but trouble," says Adam. "You heard what God said about 'enmity' and 'bruising.'"

"Well," says the serpent, "you heard what God said about eating and dying. And here you are."

"I don't understand," says Adam, looking genuinely bewildered, "you're not saying that God is not to be trusted...are you?"

"Let's just say that with God you cannot always trust your human sense of things. Nothing is ever quite the way it seems."

"Let's take him with us," says Eve. "I think we're going to need him."

What is Bibliodrama?

Most simply described, Bibliodrama is a form of role-playing in which the roles played are taken from biblical texts. The roles may be those of characters who appear in the Bible, either explicitly and by name (Adam or Eve), or those whose presence may be inferred from an imaginative reading of the stories (Noah's wife or Abraham's mother). In Bibliodrama, the reservoir of available roles or parts may include certain objects or images

which can be embodied in voice and action (the serpent in the Garden or the staff of Moses). Places can speak (the Jordan River or Mount Sinai). Or spiritual figures may talk (angels, or God, or the Adversary). Then there are a host of characters from the legendary tradition (Lilith or the five perverted judges of Sodom) who can be brought onto the bibliodramatic stage. Finally, as an extension of the process in a different direction, there are the figures from history who have commented on the Bible (Philo, Rashi, Maimonides) whose presence and perspectives may be imagined and brought alive by an act of role-playing.

As I have developed it then, Bibliodrama is a form of interpretive play. To honor it with a venerable name, Bibliodrama can be called a form of midrash. The Midrash—used with the definite article and a capital "M"—is both a product and a process classically associated with the exegetical works of the rabbis of late antiquity. For the rabbis, this interpretive engagement with the Bible manifested itself in wordplays, analogies, and even puns which intensified the active experience of reading texts. Midrash is derived from the Hebrew root that means to investigate or explore. In the Midrash, the written text is closely examined for meanings and insights that will enrich our understanding and enhance our relationship to the Bible. In a more generic sense, however, midrash—and now in lower case—may be extended in time to later ages and to our own and may, from a more liberal perspective, include extra-literary acts of interpretation such as movement, song, visual art, and drama, which like their classical forebears, serve to illuminate meaning in the biblical narrative.

Why Bibliodrama?

In our time, a vital interest in religion and scripture exists within three different and often antagonistic communities. There are the religiously devout for whom the scriptures are an unquestioned and replenishing source of doctrine, law, and moral imperative. There are the academics and literary scholars—many of whom see the Bible as a patchwork of writings embodying complex literary, textual, archeological, political, social, and historical agendas—who give their professional lives to studying and teaching religious texts. And, finally, there are creative men and women—writers, artists, poets, actors, musicians—who still find inspiration for works of imaginative creation in the shaping myths of the Judeo-Christian culture.

But outside of these three communities, it is clear that the Bible is losing its meaning for regular people—and has been doing so for several generations—even though the stories and images of the Bible still run in our veins and haunt our dreams. The spiritually awakening, the spiritually hungry, to say nothing of the ordinarily literate, do not, by and large, turn to the Bible for nourishment and direc-

tion. They do not see it as a mirror and window for their souls.

The popular culture, despite all its talk about myth and soul, does not encourage us to revisit our inherited traditions and rediscover there the soul-myths we so deeply need. Few of our contemporary guides and spiritual pundits, not professionally associated with the pulpit or the business of religion, look to the Bible for those archetypes of human experience and feeling that might connect our struggles for meaning and continuity with the quests of our ancestors. We are so busy distancing ourselves from "patriarchy," from "institutional religion," indeed from the past itself, that we do not recognize how the old biblical figures are still able to tell us something about who we are, where we've come from, and where we're going.[1]

Bibliodrama As a Tool for Teaching

It is not my purpose here to make a case for the Bible and the place I think it should have in our culture. I am writing for those who are currently trying to teach the Bible to children or adults in religious communities or outside of them, in schools, academies, seminaries, or in the home. In whatever context, these people are teaching the Bible to people who no longer take the book's value for granted. We can no longer rely on a shared belief that the Bible is the great code, the supreme text of moral and spiritual pedagogy, the prerequisite for a literary education. The authority of the Bible and the respect it once conferred on those who taught it are gone, at least gone in all but the most orthodox sectors of faith. Unhoused from its haven in the church or synagogue, the Bible is in exile and must make its case, if at all, without benefit of clergy.

The Bible now shares the fate of all the great literature of the past; it is not so much embattled as ignored. People don't care and don't see why they should care. As a result and more than it ever did before, the Bible relies on teachers. The clerical collar, the rabbinic pulpit, the Ph.D., the list of publications—all these count for relatively little in the current scene and will count for less in the future. Today and tomorrow the Bible will need teachers who are passionate as well as literate, savvy as well as scholarly, street-wise as well as book-wise, and who can, without degrading it, make the Bible come alive as living myth, relevant, disturbing, and still capable of taking our breath away. We who love the Bible will have to learn new styles, new lingoes, new steps. If we fail in that, then, in its final reduction, the Bible will become only a whetstone for the fanatical.

Bibliodrama is a tool for teaching the Bible and for forming a unique kind of learning community. It is to traditional literary and biblical interpretation what avant-garde theater is to the Broadway stage. It is not meant to supplant traditional biblical study any more than the avant-garde seeks to or could ever supplant classical

drama. But in a climate where men and women who teach Bible are in need of new equipment to meet new needs, Bibliodrama has its place.

Bibliodrama As a Form of Healing

Modern psychology has utterly divorced itself from the psyche of the tribe. Individualistic and demythologized in the extreme, our postmodern sense of self has lost all connection with the narratives of our religious traditions. We are all isolated in our own little stories; we have no sense that our little stories belong to larger ones. The Bible, for so long the instrument of community—though admittedly too often the instrument of exclusion and persecution—no longer provides a sense of center, a place of connection.

I see the work of creating bibliodramatic interpretations as an attempt to connect our individual lives with the biblical myths, to connect our personal histories to a communal and transpersonal history. I believe that engaging in this process of connecting is healing in a number of ways.

In the first place, it is healing because part of the disease of postmodern life is our sense of personal isolation from the capacious and consoling patterns of the past. The idiosyncratic, taken to its extreme, is idiocy. In Greek, the word *idiotes,* from which our word "idiot" is derived, means a private person. The idiot is a person so private, so unusual, as to be incomprehensible to his or her fellow human beings. The idiosyncratic or private features of our self-images are now so predominant that we fail to recognize the common or homeo-syncratic elements of our souls.

When, in the course of a Bibliodrama, we forge a connection to the characters of biblical myth—when we speak as Eve or Adam, as Joseph or Miriam—we move from idiocy into relation; we discover ourselves within the traditions of the tribe. In that discovery, we are repatriated from our estrangement in an inanimate material world to one in which our mythic ancestors may still speak to and through us. The past becomes present as it does in ritual and dream. Imagination extends its boundaries, and we are more alive.

Play As a Form of Healing

Second, there is a healing that occurs simply in play. In our manic search for recreation, we forget the word "create" that is the heart of the word. Bibliodrama is creative; it is a group process, a kind of liturgical play. Perhaps before liturgy became the province of the priestly caste, it was a participatory, group-generated form of mythic re-creation. I believe that our hunger today is as much for vital liturgy, for living and liberating ritual, as it may be for private spiritual experience. God may be found when we close our eyes and breathe or pray ourselves into a state of ecstasy or to a place of profound peace. But God may also be found when we open our eyes and interact with other people in

ways that release our spontaneity and allow us to experience fresh and non-competitive forms of community.

Healing and Reanimating the Bible

Third, Bibliodrama heals the Bible itself. Bibliodrama has often been described as a kind of *living midrash.* I see midrash as a way of healing the Bible, not only of suturing its gaps and transforming its apparent inconsistencies into some larger coherence, not only of solving textual difficulties and threshing for meaning; it is also a way of easing its harshness by reinterpretation and of restoring to it a relevance to our lives. Bibliodrama, as a form of living midrash, becomes a way to liberate the Bible from its imprisonment in literalism or in coterie discourse, and to bring it back to where it belongs, as part of the center, as a resource of imaginative energy for our quests and perplexities.

When we embody a biblical character in the course of bibliodramatic play, we give ourselves to that character and, paradoxically, that character gives him- or herself over to us. In using our imaginations, we reanimate (literally, *re-soul*) the old letters with a living energy. Bibliodrama's simple, radical questions and elementary steps free the biblical stories from the chains of dogma and moralism. The wildness of biblical myths, the multiplicity of biblical meanings, suddenly open before us as a vista of fresh exploration. In Bibliodrama, the Bible—once the living issue of a supreme imagination—can, in some small way, be returned to our imaginations where it belongs.

I think, too, that Bibliodrama has a role in repairing a world in which holy wars and fanatical acts demolish the delicate bridges of religious tolerance. The barriers between Christian, Jew, and Moslem are increasingly barbed and armed. Those barriers between the faiths, like the sectors of the city of Jerusalem, seem now increasingly dangerous to cross.

Bibliodrama As a Way to Community

But Bibliodrama can remind us in a vital way that the stories and figures of the Western religious traditions belong to the same mythic, human family. Abraham is the father of Ishmael and Isaac. Ishmael, first born, is the sire of the Moslem faith; Isaac is the progenitor of the Jewish tradition; and Christianity, too, traces its origins to Abraham and his second son. The experience of call, wandering, prophecy, and the various dreams of deliverance and redemption are the family inheritance of all the Western faith traditions and are deeply embedded in the culture and therefore in the psyche of every individual born in the West and Middle East. When we play into these figures and tales, giving them our voices, we understand the human dimension of our sacred stories, the common, mortal, even humble qualities that characterize our sages, heroes, and icons. In this context, I have seen Bibliodrama create a kind of interfaith

arena in which we can explore one another's traditions, readings, cherished images without issues of creed or choseness, triumphalism or salvific privilege being uppermost.

Finally, beyond needing some healing to the painful history of warring faiths, we also need to find ways of having stories in common again. If, as a member of society, we are going to be able to talk to one another, then we need to have common references and inhabit, however diversely, a shared order.[2] Stories are what hold a society together. We call them "myths" when we look at the sacred stories of other cultures, and often we speak of these "myths" with a touch of condescension or skepticism. But our society too hungers for myth. The Bible was once our source book for identity, for moral and spiritual illumination, for the myths of soul. It no longer can be, nor perhaps should it be, our exclusive anthology, but its stories still have the potential to connect us to ourselves and to one another and to the past. Without such connections we are prey to the terrible forms of idiocy already loosed in our world. Bibliodrama, though by no means the only instrument useful for this cause, certainly has its place among the resources we can employ for the reimagining our religious lives.

What Is the Bible?

Implicit in all that I have said is my belief that the Bible is a book with which it is worth having a relationship. It may fairly be asked of me here at the end to say a few words about what I think the Bible is.

I do not dispute the findings of historical criticism which points to the constructed nature of the book, the various strands and traditions that are woven into its fabric. At the same time, the biblical critics I most admire—Aviva Zornberg, Phyllis Trible, Uri Simon, Robert Alter, Alicia Ostriker—treat the Bible's apparent inconsistencies, odd locutions, evident duplications as challenges to our interpretive abilities, as signs, rather than lapses, of sense and intention. Sometimes the intelligence required to find that sense rises to the level of wisdom and gives us a glimpse of a depth in the narrative design that can astonish us. Such writers have convinced me again and again that the Bible is a supreme poem, a superlative work of a timeless imagination.

And it is not just the imagination of a single artist, but of nameless and countless men and women: storytellers, legalists, poets, ritualists, singers, dreamers, historians, liturgists, prophets and visionaries whose legacies were preserved by word of mouth, in stone, on parchment scrolls, on paper, in folktale and song until a time came for an anthology, for a record, to be made. By whom and why that anthology was composed we will never know. But a great composite chronicle was set down of a mythic story, and it was set down so fiercely well that people said the Bible had been written in fire.

That fire is in the letters still, like

heat may be said to be in coal. But like coal's heat, the fire in the Bible cannot be released without some labor, some catalyst, and that catalyst is reading, study, thought, the application of the imagination to the letters on the page. The black fire needs the white fire of our own interest and attention. What is kindled from the mingling of these two flames is nothing less than sacred literature, and the sacred—whether in words or in places—is a vanishing category of human experience.

A Final Image

I think of the Bible as a strange and holy city. You arrive at the imposing outer wall that girds the city all the way around and you look for an entrance. You discover this city has many gates. One, for example, is called the Gate of Faith; here people enter because they believe that the city was fashioned by God. There is a Gate of Mind where the scholars and the critics and the historians enter; they believe the city is endlessly fascinating to study. And there is the Gate of the Heart, through which the children and the converts pass. Not far from here stands the Gate of Midrash, wonderfully decorated with images and wild designs. Beside it sit the sages and the storytellers; here the poets hold forth and the dancers dance. Nearby there is a broad, low stage on which some players improvise; overhead flutters a little flag on which the word "Bibliodrama" is inscribed.

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1. To give only a few examples: The popular and influential psychologist James Hillman, who has probably done more than anyone to bring the word "soul" and "myth" back into our cultural vocabulary, hardly ever refers to the biblical repertoire of archetypal images. In this, he is followed by his foremost student, Thomas Moore. And in their attempts to develop a mythopoetic imagination for contemporary men, both Robert Bly and his ally Michael Meade prefer the European fairy tale to the far more vexing and culturally central myths of the biblical tradition. Among contemporary feminists, the Bible is, by and large, anathema.

2. Some readers may remember a Public Television series in 1996 hosted by Bill Moyers on the Book of Genesis. No small part of Moyers' goal in that series was to do just this: to remind us that we have common stories, that we need them, and that they are still capable of stirring us and surprising us with their immediacy.

The Poetry of Liturgy; Liturgy As Poetry

BY REENA SPICEHANDLER

As I turn the pages of *Kol Haneshamah: Shabbat Vehagim*, I am struck by the fact that the first service, *Kabbalat Shabbat*, is composed almost entirely of poetry. Surely this is no coincidence, for poetry and liturgy have been connected from ancient times. But what function does poetry serve in the prayer experience? How do we decide which poems can work as prayers? How do we select poems that enhance rather than trivialize the prayer experience? These are some of the questions with which compilers of new liturgy must wrestle if we are to make meaningful contributions to the ongoing enterprise of creating Jewish prayerbooks.

The first poem appearing in *Kabbalat Shabbat*, "To Light Candles," by the Israeli poet Zelda Mishkowsky (1914–1984), can help guide us to an understanding of how poetry enhances our prayer life.

To light candles in all the
worlds —
that is Shabbat.
To light Shabbat candles
is a soul-leap pregnant with
potential
into a splendid sea, in it the
mystery
of the fire of sunset.
Lighting the candles transforms
my room into a river of light,
my heart sets in an emerald
waterfall.[1]

It is the "soul-leap pregnant with potential" that we hope to experience during prayer. Depending on our definition of God, we might describe our moments of prayer as efforts to connect to some indescribable force within ourselves or within our world. Because words must inevitably fail us when we try to describe the ineffable which *is* God, we must paradoxically make a "soul-leap" *beyond* words in order to enter into communion *with* God. Poetry is an art built upon such soul-leaps. It suggests connections rather than stating absolutes, encouraging the reader to participate in the poem's creation by filling in the spaces between the words and images and using imagination to create webs of meaning.

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Poetic Imagery

In her poem, Zelda describes the experience of Shabbat as one of lighting candles "in all the worlds,"[2] a concept taken from the mystical teachings of the Kabbalah. Light is created in the physical world by the act of kindling the Shabbat candles, but light is created in the spiritual world as well. This spiritual light leads to the "soul-leap" already mentioned. The spiritual aspect of light is emphasized by reference to "the mystery" and by use of the word *netzurot*, here translated as "potential," but rendered more literally as "secret things." The two terms suggest kabbalistic teachings concerning the hidden nature of God. Human beings have a limited capacity to understand God's inner workings but are nonetheless attracted toward God's light. The physical act of lighting candles draws one closer to this inner light of God. The verse ends by connecting the candlelight to the natural world as well through an evocation of the "fire of sunset."

In order to appreciate fully the complexity of this short poem, we must pay attention to water imagery as well. For the soul leaps into "a splendid sea" which contains the mystery, just as the amniotic fluid of the pregnant "soul-leap" surrounds the *netzurot* (secret things). In Jewish tradition water is a life-enhancing substance on the spiritual as well as the physical level, often used to represent the spiritual life of Torah.

In the first part of the poem Zelda constructs a complex structure of meanings, images, and associations, expanding the reader's consciousness of what it means to encounter God in the process of entering into Shabbat through the act of lighting candles. In the final verse she personalizes what has up until this point been somewhat abstract and impressionistic. Instead of *lehadlik nerot* (to light candles), we find *behadliki nerot* (in *my* lighting of candles). Lighting the candles becomes a transformative moment for the poet as an individual: "*my* room is transformed into a river of light, *my* heart sets in an emerald waterfall" (emphasis added). In this last verse candlelight and water are fused together into "a river of light."

The poem ends with both the sunset and the waterfall taking place within the writer's heart. The act of lighting candles, described in the first verse as occurring "in all the worlds," is now revealed as a phenomenon manifesting itself within the soul of an individual. As the sun sets and the candles are kindled, Shabbat enters, transforming the world and the poet's experience of the world. Reading such a poem as part of our own welcoming of Shabbat can transform the world for us as well. By suggesting complex relations between the words and images of her poem, Zelda helps us make the "soul leap" beyond words that allows us to come closer to God.

The Function of Poetry in Liturgy

In choosing to include such poems in a prayerbook, we affirm that the prima-

ry function of additional readings is to help individuals develop their own inner spiritual lives. I have examined "To Light Candles" in some detail because it represents a type of poem that succeeds in enhancing our prayer experience. In contrast, when one considers the additional readings chosen by the editors of the original Reconstructionist *Sabbath Prayer Book* published in 1945, it quickly becomes apparent that their criteria differed markedly from those of the present-day Prayerbook Commission.

In the 1945 volume, most of the selections (from contemporary writers in particular) share several characteristics. The readings are usually written in the first person plural; they seem to present universally acknowledged truths; they exhort congregants to live up to the ideals of Judaism and to dedicate themselves to the improvement of the world. "The Meditation on the Sabbath Day As Symbol of God's Kingdom," for example, speaks of the Sabbath in the following terms: "It should inspire us with confidence in the promise of our own souls and with faith in the coming of a future Sabbath era for mankind. Then all for which good men have hoped, prayed, striven and sacrificed in behalf of humanity will be attained."[3] These lines seem to suggest that there is only one acceptable and universally shared reaction to the Sabbath and that to be good one must strive to improve the world.

Similarly the interpretive version of *Emet Ve'emunah* declares, "Whenever human tyrant usurps divine authority, and lords it over his fellow-men to their hurt, the hardening of his heart proves his own undoing; his overweening arrogance writes his doom. Therefore will we never be discouraged nor dismayed, when unrighteous powers rise up to destroy us...."[4] The words express a certainty that rings hollow for those born into a post-Holocaust world. "We will never be discouraged...."; if we become discouraged, does this mean that we are no longer good Jews?

"The Meditation Before Kiddush" proceeds in a similar vein: "Both the wine and the Sabbath bespeak for us the happiness that comes to those who trust in God's goodness and love."[5] Once again the words seem to suggest a universal emotion at the time of Kiddush, leaving no possibility that there may be some who trust in God's goodness and love and yet do not feel happy.

My intent here is not to disparage the approach or style of an earlier generation but to come to understand why these selections that so inspired users of the first Reconstructionist *Sabbath Prayer Book* no longer work for many of us.

Changing Contexts for Prayer

We late-twentieth-century American Jews were mostly born and educated in this country. The European Jewish community which shaped Mordecai Kaplan and many of his followers, as well as the vibrant immigrant community that provided the

backdrop for their projects of Jewish renewal, are but a distant memory. The strong sense of communal obligation and belonging that Kaplan and others took for granted has mostly been replaced by an American search for individual meaning and fulfillment. Both assumptions of common experience and appeals on behalf of the communal good fail to move us in the same way that they moved our grandparents.

This is not to say that Jews of today completely turn their backs on Jewish community. Rather it is simply a much weaker motivator for leading a Jewish life than it was for our parents and grandparents. In addition we have lost the faith that an earlier generation had in the ultimate perfectibility of humankind, in the inevitable evolution of humanity to a higher and more civilized state. We have lost our sense of certainty as well. Having been taught that there is no absolute truth, that all human truths are relative, we are often reluctant to impose our own vision of a more just society upon others. Finally, we live in a much less formal world, so that the elegance of language of many of the pieces included in the earlier prayerbook sounds stilted and uninspiring to our more casually attuned ears.

For all of these reasons the current Prayerbook Commission and the Editorial Committee, while retaining some of the readings from the original Prayer Book, sought to include new selections that reflect personal experience of the Divine in an intimate and often highly informal way.

Some Examples of Poetic Liturgy

To return to Zelda's poem for a moment, it is important to point out that it is the description of a transformative ritual moment, as it is experienced by one particular poet, that gives the poem much of its power. The reader is invited into the poet's heart to witness a sacred encounter.

Many such invitations can be discovered within the pages of *Shabbat Veḥagim*. One of the most explicit is contained in the poem by the Yiddish poet Jacob Glatstein (1896-1971) entitled "Davenen Minḥah."[6] The opening verse reads, "I'll let you in on a secret about how one should pray the sunset (*minḥah*) prayer." Glatstein proceeds to describe his own prayer experience and how it transforms his appreciation of each day. The informality of the language as Glatstein describes *minḥah* as a *betamt shtikel*, "a tasty little morsel" of prayer, heightens the sense of intimacy.

The poem is in the form of a direct address to Glatstein's disciple, Nathan, whose name appears several times in the Yiddish original, although not in the translation. The Yiddish reader is placed in the situation of one eavesdropping on a private conversation in which the poet reveals the secrets of his inner life of prayer.

In Syd Lieberman's "A Short Amidah,"[7] the intimate moment of connecting with God is treated even more casually. The poet uses humor and a

matter-of-fact tone to deflate any grand expectations we may have, claiming that, "If a door opened to a real palace, I'd probably forget and carry in a load of groceries."

The poem ends with the following metaphor for praying the Amidah, "But in that small chamber, / for just a few moments on Sabbath, / God and I can roll up our sleeves, / put some schnapps out on the table, / sit down together, and finally talk." It seems hard to imagine a poem more different from Zelda's mystical account of God's light than this concrete description of mundane objects and events. Yet Lieberman's poem creates an effect similar to that of Zelda's poem. By sharing a highly personal version of an encounter with God, the poet helps readers expand their own spiritual potential. Lieberman encourages us to identify with the poet's situation by admitting to common everyday imperfections, "My kitchen faucet constantly leaks / and the kids' faces / usually need cleaning."

Both the poet and reader are revealed as ordinary people who yet have the capacity to experience the transformative moment of prayer: "No, the door we stand in front of / when the Amidah begins is silence. / And when we open it / and step through, we arrive in our hearts."

Criteria for Inclusion

We have considered several of the poems selected by the Prayerbook Commission for inclusion in *Shabbat Veḥagim*. There are many others contained within its pages, chosen with a view toward enriching the reader's prayer life. Judging whether a particular poem is suited to this purpose is no simple matter. To succeed within a liturgical context, a poem must combine linguistic simplicity and accessible imagery into a highly complex network of associations. The poem must be simple enough to be effective when first read aloud. At the same time it must be complicated enough to reveal new meanings upon subsequent readings, challenging us to stretch our imaginations and our souls.

Many moving and beautiful poems were excluded from *Shabbat Veḥagim* following a passionate discussion of their intricacies, when Commission members responded, "I still don't get it." Other poems, most notably some sections of Song of Songs, were dropped although they had appeared in the 1989 *Sabbath Eve* volume, because people felt that the explicitly sexual imagery was inappropriate in a synagogue setting. Worshipers were so embarrassed reading some of the verses aloud that the material remained unused.

Negotiating with Authors

In some cases poems were reworked so that they would be effective within a liturgical context. One interesting example is Merle Feld's "Sinai," which describes the revelatory moment from the perspective of the women who witnessed it but whose

experience is not recorded in our tradition. The poem concludes,

> How to hold onto that
> moment
> washed clean
> reborn
> holy silence[8]

ending with its own moment of silence suspended in space. The poem originally closed with a question mark followed by the additional verse, "We couldn't." The Commission felt that the original ending would leave readers with a sense of hopelessness and futility. Modifying the poem (with the poet's agreement) left open the possibility for future revelatory moments, both individual and communal. In its current version the poem is uplifting, pointing to as yet undefined possibilities lying in the future.

In this case the collaboration between poet and editors was successful largely because of Merle Feld's graciousness and her responsiveness to the Commission's concerns. Many other poets, most notably translator Joel Rosenberg, demonstrated similar creative flexibility. I like to think that on these occasions the conversation between poet and reader resulted in more effective liturgy. Nevertheless, changing a poem to meet liturgical needs is a delicate undertaking which must be approached with great caution. The fragile beauty of a poem is easily destroyed. When the poet felt that the requested modification would deform the poem, the Commission needed to reassess the situation, either omitting the work or risking its inclusion in a form that might not succeed as liturgy. These were often difficult choices.

Another difficulty in making poetic choices was alluded to briefly above. Poetry intended to function as liturgy must be successful when read aloud. This seemingly simple statement conceals several complex concerns. First the poem must not trip up the prayer leader. What appear to be impressive alliteration and double-entendres in a poem silently contemplated can easily degenerate into hilarious faux pas when read aloud. To prevent such unintended misfortunes, the Commission "test read" every selection aloud. It was here that the diversity of the Commission in terms of age, literary experience, and comfort with liturgy proved to be particularly valuable.

One brief example will suffice. The use of "THE VOICE" as a name of God appeared perfectly reasonable to many of us, while it called up the image of Jackie Gleason with the accompanying sense of hilarity for some of an earlier generation. We referred to such unintended evocations as the "ha ha factor" or the "Hebrew school effect." Reading selections aloud also assured that they were simple enough to be understood and their imagery accessible enough to be effective for the wide variety of congregants represented by the members of the Prayerbook Commission. The poems selected for inclusion

needed to be easy enough to read and easy enough to hear without being maudlin or trite.

From Poetry to Prayer

I have outlined some characteristics of poems that can help guide us to a more spiritually satisfying prayer life. While these qualities may make a particular selection suitable for inclusion in a liturgical setting, in many cases a poem remains simply a poem. It can only be transformed into a prayer when we so closely identify with the poet's experience of God that the words of the poem become our own. Such is the case with "To Light Candles" as well as with numerous other poems that directly address God.[9]

In a recent lecture, the Israeli poet Ḥayim Gury spoke of poetry as the quintessentially Jewish form of literary expression.[10] Centuries before Hebrew drama and novels were invented, Jews were writing poems exploring and celebrating their experience of God. The *Kabbalat Shabbat* service with which I began contains poetry from all periods of Jewish existence: psalms and selections from Song of Songs that originally appeared in the Bible; *Yedid Nefesh,* by the 16th century Kabbalist Eleazar Azikri; and *Shabbat Hamalkah,* by the father of modern Hebrew poetry, Ḥayim Naḥman Bialik (1873-1934). Creators of contemporary prayerbooks have the opportunity to contribute the insights of our own period to the ongoing collection of Jewish expression found in the siddur, adding to the spiritual resources available for contemporary Jews.

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1. *Kol Haneshamah: Shabbat Veḥagim,* ed. David A. Teutsch (New York: The Reconstructionist Press, 1994), 2-3.

2. The Kabbalists speak of four worlds that express a declining order of being, from the divine down to the nearly or completely material. These worlds are named *atzilut* (light); *beri'ah* (creation); *yetzirah* (formation), and *asiyah* (world of human activity). In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Ḥasidism, the actions of human beings in the world of *asiyah* were thought to effect activity in all the worlds.

3. *Sabbath Prayer Book* (New York: The Reconstructionist Foundation, Inc., 1965), 8-9.

4. *Sabbath Prayer Book,* 39-40.

5. *Sabbath Prayer Book,* 56.

6. *Kol Haneshamah,* 749-50.

7. *Kol Haneshamah,* 730.

8. *Kol Haneshamah,* 770-71.

9. See, for example, in *Kol Haneshamah,* "Prayer," by Leah Goldberg, 740; "Untie," by Sheila Peltz Weinberg, 748; "God, grant me the ability to be alone," attributed to Naḥman of Bratzlav, 762.

10. From a lecture at Writer's House, The University of Pennsylvania, 14 November, 1996.

Vintage Perspectives

With this issue, we introduce a series of retrospectives from the pages of the early volumes of our journal that address the topics and themes to which we devote our current issues.

What follows is an excerpt from an editorial in *The Reconstructionist*, 13 June 1941 (Volume 7, Number 9) entitled "Art and Jewish Revival."

Few realize how precarious our creative future is. In a word, the Jewish people has turned its back upon its creative artists, cheers them only when the non-Jewish critics praise them, then forgets them, and allows them to struggle without encouragement and without subsidy.

Not the musicians alone, but the artists of other media share this fate. The painters, sculptors, poets and playwrights languish, and there are none to demand their art. It is true that our people has been called again and again to succor the oppressed and the downtrodden; but they have neglected the opportunity to succor those who might have given beauty and meaning to the suffering.

The reconstruction of Jewish life will not be complete until the Jewish community has provided for its artists and writers, until the Jewish community considers the cultivation of the arts to be as vital to Jewish survival as religion, education, philanthropy, or civic defense. We...plead for a more wide-spread understanding of the function of art in the revival of Judaism in our day.

The Poet As Liturgist: Marcia Falk's *The Book of Blessings:* Three Reactions and a Response

The 1996 publication of Marcia Falk's *The Book Of Blessings* (San Francisco: Harper, 1996) marks a significant development in the history of American Jewish liturgy. The unique nature of the rewritten Hebrew blessings, the poetic renderings of prayers, and the commentary reflecting contemporary aesthetic and feminist concerns all advance the state of the discussion regarding liturgical revision.

For Recontructionist Judaism, *The Book of Blessings* represents an endorsement as well as a challenge. Much of Falk's immanentist theology coincides with the imagery of Godliness prevalent in Reconstructionism. But much of her reconstructed Hebrew and restructured format of blessings is at odds with the Reconstructionist emphasis on peoplehood and sancta.

In the mini-symposium that follows, three Reconstructionist rabbis reflect on *The Book of Blessings*, and Falk responds with reflections on prayer as poetry and poetry as prayer.

DAVID TEUTSCH

The Book of Blessings will stand as a major landmark in the history of American Jewish liturgy. That fact might be obscured by the previous publication of several of the pieces included in this book, making less obvious the extent of Marcia Falk's liturgical leadership. But in *The Book of Blessings*, we see for the first time the full power and range of her liturgical work. The immanentist theology behind Falk's work has never been so clearly and systematically expressed in liturgy. In the concreteness of her imagery, as illustrated for example in the newborn calf of Tussman's "Humble Hour," she makes vivid the indwelling presence of God in the world. In phrases like *yitromeym libeynu*/"may our hearts be lifted," she describes a process of the divine working from within but without any of the constraint typical of more traditional liturgy. Her use of *elohut*/godliness in her version of the Shema represents a further exploration of the

implications of fully immanentist theology. The opportunity this provides for giving voice to a major aspect of Reconstructionist thought is a wonderful — and partially intentional — by-product of her work.

The strongest single voice of the feminist vision for Jewish liturgy, Falk has had an influence on all those who are working in this genre. Her formula *nevarekh et eyn haḥayim*/"let us bless the source of life" figured in the Amidah that was published in the 1989 Friday evening volume of *Kol Haneshamah.* It subsequently became part of the rubric for reconstructing *berakhot* in our Shabbat and Festival prayerbook as well as the subsequent volumes in the *Kol Haneshamah* series. And it came to be a formula orally transmitted everywhere in North America where people were working on feminist approaches to liturgy.

In a similar vein, Falk's selections of Yiddish and Hebrew poetry by women have transformed the use of many poems from private reading into public prayer. The success of "Each of Us Has a Name" as an introduction to Mourner's Kaddish, a prayer to be included in Yizkor, and in its original place in her Shabbat Amidah shows the way that a single poem can take on a life of its own once it makes the shift into the liturgical realm. Falk's work has often had the effect of showing us poetry we might not have found and ways to use it that we well might never have imagined.

Uses of This Liturgy

The Book of Blessings, in part because of its clear and beautiful Hebrew and English, begs not only to be used in the original settings that Falk has suggested. Pieces from the book are frequently pulled out of their original context and blended into services composed primarily of more traditional liturgy. Partly because of the way Falk labels sections and uses of the liturgy, people feel encouraged to attempt this kind of activity. As a result, those less gifted as poets and liturgists find her work empowering them to structure new material into the services that they lead. In both public and private worship, people find in Falk's work material that more fully gives voice to their own views and concerns; This in turn encourages people to reengage the meaning of Jewish liturgy.

One of the areas that needs further work in Jewish liturgy is the overall aesthetic experience that comes from a prayerbook. The design of *The Book of Blessings* is beautiful! Its use of space, its openness, its invitation to focus on the beauty of the poetry is literally a matter of design.

One of the difficulties in using Falk's Amidah that was reported after its publication in *Kol Haneshamah* in 1989 is that while each part of it is beautiful, and while it works well as a cantata, it is too long and complex to be used as an Amidah. The result has been that many pieces of it have been used independently, both reworked blessings of the Amidah and the

poems, each of which can be used in a broad variety of liturgical settings. When Falk's work is used in a fairly consistent way to further reconstruct blessings and central passages in the Reconstructionist *Kol Haneshamah* series, the result is a more thoroughgoing immanentist construction than *Kol Haneshamah* itself undertook.

The difference here lies in part in the freedom that an individual poet, unconstrained by the needs of a movement or the politics of a decision-making process, has in producing work that represents purely her own point of view. But it is not that alone. Falk's work also represents a reworking of the balance between the new and innovative on the one hand and the traditional and customary on the other. There is no pluralism of theological views in Falk's work, and much of the traditional phrasing of Jewish liturgy has been eliminated. Thus the sense of continuity, safety and repetition that acts as one of the central functions of the liturgical experience does not now exist in Falk's work. While *The Book of Blessings* may achieve some of that through repeated usage, the fact that it is not primarily designed to be chanted and sung makes that less likely.(It should be noted here, however, that efforts are underway to set some of this material to music, and it is possible that my speculation will turn out in the course of a half century to have been premature.)

Absorbing Innovations

The course of liturgical history should be charted in centuries rather than months or years. Thus, it may be too early to evaluate fully the potential for Falk's work to become comfortably familiar in a manner analagous to the traditional Jewish liturgy. What can be said safely, however, is that the emphasis on the new elements will be experienced by many as disjunctive. That may be why people have been so welcoming of the individual selections of *The Book of Blessings* without necessarily using it as whole. This allows for the interpretation or reinvigoration of traditional liturgy without having to confront the full discontinuities. In fact, the traditional liturgy has always been multi-vocal in its theology and aesthetics. When some strands of Falk's work are *added to* the traditional liturgy, it speaks more clearly to the feminist and immanentist worshiper without giving the sense of discontinuity that some find disquieting.

This may be one reason why it is possible to use Falk's work as additions to the liturgy or commentaries on the liturgy more easily than it is to use it completely as a replacement. Thus "As We Bless the Source of Life," a composition by Faith Rogow based on Falk's work, has found its way into many Reconstructionist congregations as a *kavanah* preceding the *Barekhu* even though it was written to be a replacement for the *Barekhu*. It may be that Falk's singable version of the *Lekha Dodi* will in some places

replace the traditional *Lekha Dodi* of Alkabetz, but it is also possible that the new version will be added to the traditional one or substituted only in part. Some of this work may also function well as private meditation or reflection so that traditional daveners end up reciting Hebrew prayers while those who prefer read some of the poetry from Falk's book in English.

Issues of Proper Use

Using this poetry well requires a certain sophistication, including Hebrew skills, understanding of poetry, and familiarity with the traditional liturgy. Without these, finding the right balance of continuity and change is difficult. Furthermore it is complicated to find the right balance of music and silence, individual and group prayer, frontal control and the creation of personal space. All of these elements must be contained within a reasonable time frame. One of the reasons why many people prefer to recite the liturgy as it appears in a prayerbook is that while we lose a certain freshness in doing that, we also have an easier time maintaining quality control. In order for this new liturgy to find its way into worship, we need to do a good job of training service leaders about how it should be handled.

Liturgists lose control of their work the moment it is published or shared. This has advantages and drawbacks. The wonderful result is that liturgy takes on a life of its own. One drawback is that it can be used in ways that the author occasionally finds deeply objectionable. It is often fortunate that liturgy works this way, however, because the liturgist often does not see the full range of possibility in the work that service leaders do. Ultimately liturgy may be the most democratic of the literary genres in Judaism. If it is not acceptable to the Jewish people, it does not remain in place. That is a lesson that Saadya Gaon learned full well in trying to banish the verse "*or ḥadash*" ("May a new light shine upon Zion") from the *Yotzer* blessing on nature. It may be a theoretical truth that the theme of redemption does not belong in the section on creation, but it was certainly not the communal consensus that prevailed in the retention of that verse.

One of the outcomes of Falk's groundbreaking work is that the next generation of liturgical composers will borrow from her innovations without compunction. That will increase the impact of Falk's work but also lessen her control over it. Thus we will be depending on a broad and growing group of people to stay within the limits of good aesthetics and ideological propriety. That too is complicated because of the ongoing tension between aesthetic and ideological choices. Innovation often results in syncretism that goes beyond the pale. In the long run, however, I do not believe that such things need be greatly feared however painful and divisive they may be in the short-run. Somehow the Jewish people always takes

what it needs and sooner or later discards that which does not develop an air of authenticity.

Art and Livelihood

This broad range of liturgical uses and borrowings raises another issue: the property rights of the authors. In an ever more specialized world, artists and poets often earn their living from their craft. How do we balance our desire to use their work with their legitimate economic interests? Clearly we do not believe that prayers based on theft have much chance of rising heavenward, and we certainly need our poets and artists and their work. Thus it is critically important that we do what we can to avoid stealing from them. We ought to give credit and pay suitable royalties when we reprint their work. Equally important, we ought to obtain their permission when doing so. While it may be a wonderful form of flattery that you wish to sing a song or read a poem composed by a contemporary author, you are taking from them a part of their livelihood if you use it in a way that does not provide them the economic benefit that they request. It seems fair to me that we can borrow ideas and influences without necessarily paying a royalty. But when we use works directly, we owe our poets both credit and compensation. To do any less is to undermine the creativity and the honesty of the Jewish people.

The amount of excitement and debate that *The Book of Blessings* has generated is an indication of how many people it has already touched. But I believe that it is bound to have a far greater influence. While ten years ago the idea of making any change in the traditional *berakhah* formula was regarded with the utmost suspicion as potentially destructive heresy, today thousands of people are experimenting with new *berakhot.* This struggling with God in Jewish language can only be a source of new vigor and striving. May we gain strength from our ideological struggles and liturgical innovations.

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REBECCA ALPERT

In my early twenties I became a student at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College. Despite my Reform background and my personal predilection for the theology of Martin Buber, Mordecai Kaplan's thought appealed to me enormously. Though I had never articulated for myself my antipathy to anthropomorphism and supernaturalism, upon reading Kaplan's theology I felt he was speaking for me. I was also very taken with the anti-hierarchicalism inherent in Kaplan's repudiation of chosenness and of the distinctions among Cohen, Levi, and Israel.

Upon reading Kaplan I immediately began to call myself a Reconstructionist and to pray accordingly. I

adopted Kaplan's liturgical changes that removed chosenness from the prayer service, believing that he and I were adhering to the principle that he articulated: in prayer as in all things, we must say what we mean and mean what we say. Falk takes this idea to its fullest meaning, and develops a liturgy consonant with a non-supernaturalist, non-anthropomorphic view of divinity.

Limited Innovations

Falk's work makes clear the ways in which Kaplan's liturgical innovations, bold though they were for his time (and which got him into much trouble in traditionalist circles, including the burning of his prayerbooks and his excommunication) fell far short of the implications of his theological writings. The reaction to Kaplan's small innovations, his desire to influence American Jews to follow his philosophy and his basically traditional bent kept him from going any further. To say that further changes would have been inconceivable at the time is also a fair statement. It is as if Falk picked up where Kaplan left off in 1945 and has created the blueprint for a prayerbook which truly represents Kaplan's philosophy.

Note carefully my reference here to Kaplan's philosophy and not Reconstructionism as a movement. Since the retirement of Ira Eisenstein from the presidency of the congregational and rabbinic arms of the movement in 1981, Kaplan's theology has not been a focus for the leaders of Reconstructionism. As is the case in all but the most dogmatic religious movements, the ideas of the founder were subjected to revision and reinterpretation. The most controversial elements of Kaplan's theology have either been downplayed or challenged by a more traditional approach. It is not surprising that Falk found in Ira and Judith Eisenstein her greatest supporters. While the new Reconstructionist leaders may recognize that the language of liturgy is not consonant with their theology, they seem completely comfortable with this contradiction.

Reconstructing Blessings

That is why I, as one who fully appreciates Kaplan's teachings, wholeheartedly welcome Falk's approach to liturgy which adheres to Kaplan's idea that we must mean what we say and say what we mean, even and especially when we are talking about God.

The most compelling adumbration of this idea comes in Falk's reconstruction of the blessing formula. To Kaplan, Jewish life was vested wholly in community. Falk's rendering of blessings in the first person plural, and in the active rather than the passive voice, is a perfect way to explicate Kaplan's theological focus on the Jewish people as the center of Jewish life. Replacing "you are blessed" with "let us bless" captures that magnificently. Others of Kaplan's followers have tried to explain his thinking in terms of grammatical examples (Harold Schulweis's predicate theology; my own prepositional theology, where

God works through rather than over or on the world, for example). But Falk's rendition brings together Kaplan's theological orientation and his understanding of the centrality of community.

I differ with Falk when she worries that any of her blessings might become formulaic. In this, and in other areas I will look at later, she fails to understand one of the dimensions of the role of prayer in people's lives. While of course words fail to retain their full meaning when used formulaically, it is not possible to imagine prayer without some fixed points. If *"Nevarekh et eyn haḥayim"* has found resonance, it means people are prepared to accept this change. This is the only way her liturgical changes will come into usage.

I also admire Falk's refusal of hierarchies, so clearly presented in her Havdalah liturgy. Again, Kaplan met this challenge in Havdalah by removing the phrase *"beyn yisrael le'amim"* ("between Israel and the nations") from the final berakhah. Falk sees more deeply into the basic hierarchical structure of difference and refuses the elevation of the Sabbath over the rest of the week, and of light over darkness in terms of its implications for racism. These innovations are crucial to a new understanding of the ways in which we can, as Kaplan suggests, see the Jewish people as distinct, without making odious comparisons, or separating ourselves from the rest of the world. This is a crucial vision and Falk's development of it is a most appropriate way to persuade Jews of the importance of this idea.

Liturgy As Art

Finally, Falk's understanding of liturgy as art and her passionate love of the Hebrew character of prayer are another link to Kaplan. Kaplan's efforts at innovation always focused on retaining the Hebraic character and nuance of the liturgy. Falk succeeds masterfully at this objective as well. For Kaplan a major component of Jewish civilization was art; Falk's ability to render the prayer service as poetry is also in keeping with Kaplan's vision. Beginning in the 1920s, Kaplan insisted that women's roles should be enhanced and that women's art should be incorporated in Jewish life. Falk's work clearly achieves this goal as well.

Of course, Falk's goal was not to realize Kaplan's vision, and she certainly differs with him in places, most particularly in his excision of *"meḥayeh hametim"* ("[God] resurrects the dead") which she retains. Of course, including the idea of reviving the dead as a form of rebirth that we often experience still conforms to Kaplan's idea that we judge whether to retain an idea based on what it means. Kaplan's whole plan to reconstruct Judaism entailed finding new meanings in old concepts so that they would come alive for each generation. This Kaplanian concept, his most conservative modality, is still central to the Reconstructionist approach today.

It should be obvious then that I believe Marcia Falk's *Book of Blessings* to be a major contribution to Reconstructionism — one that should compel this movement in Judaism to rethink its connection to its original teachings. My only concern is that Falk's work may not succeed any better than Kaplan's in furthering acceptance and appreciation of the theology it espouses, because American Jews seem to have little interest in intellectual honesty in prayer.

Heart Versus Mind

In a study of Reconstructionism in the 1970s, Orthodox sociologist Charles Liebman concluded that although most Jews agreed with Kaplan's theology, they saw no need to have their religious lives accurately reflect their beliefs. For most Jews today, prayer is an experience of the heart, not of the heart *and* mind. Those who pray seem not to be troubled that they do not believe what they are saying, and that the images in the prayerbook do not reflect their concept of God, that their opposition to hierarchy is not represented or that their need to find new ways to explore women's contributions goes unheeded. In a religiously conservative age, it is not surprising that nostalgia and conformity are the values that dictate our religious lives.

While Falk wants to reach out to those who are alienated from Jewish life, I do not think they will find *The Book of Blessings* to be their point of entry. What *is* compelling about this work is its sophistication; its nuanced and passionate use of the Hebrew language; its close renderings of the traditional passages and images changed only to conform to Falk's theology and ethics. Its power is *not* in its accessibility, the lack of which is underscored by both its price and its size.

These cautions notwithstanding, Falk's first volume is a revolutionary act that will raise questions about Jewish theology, ethics, and prayer for generations to come. I applaud this work, and eagerly look forward to subsequent volumes. And, yes, I will surely pray with it.

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IRA EISENSTEIN

Problems of Contemporary Prayer

No discussion of Marcia Falk's new volume, *The Book of Blessings,* can avoid the larger question of the role of prayer in the contemporary Jewish world. It is obvious to any observer that praying has lost its former attraction. While attendance at formal worship has been increasing, this does not

correlate with a revival of prayer. People come to the synagogue for a variety of reasons — a sense of belonging to a community, a reaching back to roots — but rarely do they come for the experience of true worship.

The reasons for this reluctance to engage in heartfelt praying are evident to anyone who has observed the effects of modernity upon the sensitive Jew. The pious assumptions of two or three generations ago are no longer honored—the belief that there is a (inevitably male) God who sits on a throne and hears the praise and petitions of all His creatures, and Who is not above intervening in the flow of nature to enrich life or avoid catastrophe. While there has been a recrudescence of supernaturalism in recent days, the prevailing mood is one of scepticism.

For those who still feel a bond to the traditions, other problems have arisen, particularly the male imagery of God, which seems to permeate traditional prayers. The Hebrew language does not lend itself to neuter forms, and the ancient and medieval mindsets invariably stamped the language of prayer in the language of the masculine. Feminists such as Marcia Falk have put behind them this age-old phrasing which for generations has been taken for granted.

Beyond the issues of language, however, has been the denial that one can address God as "Thou" or "You" altogether, as if one were actually addressing a conscious entity with a mind and a disposition to be addressed altogether.

Attempts at Revision

In order to meet some of these objections, recently edited prayerbooks have sought to "clean up" the ancient texts and to eliminate those passages which shock the modern ear. Editions of the Siddur, Maḥzor, and Haggadah have been edited so as to anticipate the objections to the traditional doctrines of revelation, chosenness, miracle, resurrection, and so on. Basically, however, they have retained the language of the tradition, keeping such familiar formulae as *"Barukh Atah Adonay."*

At first, this may have been an adequate attempt to deal with the problems of the liturgy, but for many it was not sufficient. One might avoid the obvious intellectual conflicts but basically the same problems remain: how does one speak *of* God if one does not speak *to* God, and how does one avoid the male imagery of God given the nature of the Hebrew language?

Radical Rewriting

In *The Book Of Blessings*, Marcia Falk attempts to resolve these problems by way of a radical rewriting of traditional blessings. She is a greatly talented poet, in Hebrew, English, and Yiddish. In every respect these blessings meet the requirements of the most fastidious worshiper, who tries always to say what is meant and to mean what is said. Gender is eliminated and the direct address to God (*"Atah"*, "You") is avoided. In their place are brief blessings which retain the same theme as the traditional prayers to which they correspond.

For example, *"Eyn Haḥayim"*, "Wellspring of Life", is a new name for the Divine; Falk also uses *"Ma'ayan,"* "Fountain", conveying the mysterious energy behind the phenomena of life. Frequently, the worshiper is invited to articulate, through the word *"nevarekh,"* "let us bless", what the prayer expresses.

For some, this may not be considered "prayer" at all; after all, how can it be prayer if it does not address God as a "Thou"? But as Falk indicates (quoting me, which I appreciate) praying can be understood as "passionate reflection" and need not be addressed to a "Thou." Prayer can articulate our deepest hopes and highest purposes.

Seeking Consistency

Many Jews have frequently remarked that they do not want to check their brains at the door when they enter the synagogue; and yet that is precisely what many of them do. Contemporary Jews are not entirely consistent. The most radical of them talk as though they would never be found repeating formulae of millenia ago—and then one finds them, albeit infrequently, davening like their grandparents. I am not certain what is reflected by this; perhaps the tug of the past is stronger than the demands of the mind and of reason.

But even if we turn our attention to those dedicated to an absolute consistency in their worship, we must ask if Falk's efforts are entirely satisfying. Apart from the broader issue of the unfamiliar nature of the Hebrew blessings, *The Book of Blessings* omits the major sanctum of Jewish religion, the Name of the Divine, YHVH. There is no mention of *"Adonay,"* *"Hashem,"* or the double-*yod* abbreviation which represents the Tetragrammaton. This omission represents a total separation from the tradition, and raises the question: what makes these blessings Jewish?

The answer lies in the context of Falk's *berakhot.* Her volume is not merely a collection of original prayers; these are prayers set into the pattern of the Jewish calendar. Surely no-one but Jews observe Shabbat and Rosh Ḥodesh. The fact that the language is Hebrew surely stamps these blessings as Jewish. While it may take time to get used to, this collection of original prayers will certainly be identified as Jewish—even without the Divine Name YHVH.

One may also hope that in Israel, secularists who are searching for a new way will discover in these blessings the answer to their "prayers." Not having been raised with *"Barukh Atah Adonay,"* they may well be drawn to these eloquent expressions of deep spirituality.

All in all, *The Book of Blessings* is a tour de force. It is recommended to as many as are searching for a language of prayer that meets the needs of heart, mind, and contemporary conscience.

Dr. Ira Eisenstein is President Emeritus of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College and Editor Emeritus of The Reconstructionist. *He served as one of the editors of the first generation of Reconstructionist liturgy.*

MARCIA FALK

In their responses to *The Book of Blessings*, three distinguished Reconstructionist leaders — each a rabbi and a scholar — have reflected on the role of poetry as prayer. Their thoughts — each in a different way — have stirred my own thinking, my own musing.

In the context of this special issue of the journal focusing on the arts and dedicated to the memory of Judith K. Eisenstein — a musician and scholar who devoted her life to the continuation of Jewish civilization — I take the liberty of offering my own contribution in a slightly different mode. Here are a few (somewhat random) thoughts on art and the creative process from the poet *qua* liturgist.

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Why writing a poem is, for me, like trying to pray

The poem is an elusive thing; grabbing hold of it sometimes feels like catching one's reflection in a stream. The poem's moment does not stand still; just as it bubbles up on the ripple's edge — it is gone.

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Writing down poems is like taking dictation from the birds: miss one note and you've got to let it go and go on to the next; look back or hesitate — you lose the whole line. And if you're too quick to go at it; or if you're too slow, too relaxed; or if you strain too hard to hear it — the melody's gone.

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The poem's moment cannot be summoned, but it can be readied for.

How poems remind us that the world is sacred

Someone brought me part of the meadow today, in a large glass jar. Though its colors are already fading, its scents remain strong. In scents reside memories, which return us to origins. So even in captivity, the meadow reaches out and draws us back in.

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Heard at the poem's distance, the highway trucks sound like the ocean. In the mind, even pain can become succor, balm to old wounds. But, careful! the mind can also take joy and turn it into pain.

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The mind is ever-hungry for engagement, but the world — no matter what we seek, what we think we need, the world keeps on. The poem keeps the world in front of the mind.

Why poems—and prayers—need room to breathe on the page

There is a vacancy, a silence, where the poem settles in, like a breeze in a field of unmowed grass, scything out shapes in space and time. Without the field, the wind is invisible; without the grass, the wind has no sound.

Poet, translator, and Judaic scholar Marcia Falk taught Hebrew and English literature on the university level for fifteen years. She now lectures widely on college campuses and in the Jewish community, on topics ranging from the love lyrics of the Bible to contemporary Jewish women writers. She also leads congregations in services and rituals from The Book of Blessings *and conducts workshops on spirituality and prayer. Her other books include* The Song of Songs: A New Translation and Interpretation *(San Francisco: Harper, 1990) and* With Teeth in the Earth: Selected Poems of Malka Heifetz Tussman *(Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1992).*

Representing American-Jewish Acculturation: Reflections on the Photography of Frederic Brenner

Jews/America/A Representation, photographs by Frederic Brenner with an essay by Simon Schama (Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1996)

In a brief flurry of extraordinary publicity in the fall of 1996, the American public was treated to a rare display of an artistic effort, which has tried to capture in a series of black-and-white photographs a process that has bedeviled some of the most gifted scholarly attempts at understanding the cultural dynamics of modern American Jewry. The problematics of American Jewry were succinctly articulated decades ago by such observers as Will Herberg (*Protestant - Catholic - Jew*, 1955), Charles Liebman (*The Ambivalent American Jew*, 1973), and Milton Gordon *(Assimilation in America Life*, 1964).

American Jews want to be part of America as well as apart from America. They want both to remember and to forget. They want to be free, to live the much vaunted individualism that is the promise of America, yet they want to remain linked to their people.

How those competing if not contradictory desires are embodied in the psychic formation of American-Jewish identity, in the evolving customs and manners of ordinary social life, and in the formal institutions that comprise the organized Jewish community is the key question that has framed the sociology and anthropology of modern American Jewry for at least the past half-century. Mordecai Kaplan summed up the results in a widely familiar construct of the Jew as a person living in two civilizations, two time frames. While literary and social scientific depictions of such bifurcated people are widely available, few if

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any visual artists have attempted to capture the species.

Before turning to the photographs themselves, it is worthwhile to reflect on two images not found in Brenner's opus. As a friend of the artist, I had a privileged glimpse into the creative process, including thwarted objectives. Among the photographs that Brenner very much wanted and planned for his list of "representations" was to be a photograph of Woody Allen, to be included among the forty so-called icons of American Jewish life. Allen never consented to be part of the project. Brenner also sought to include a photograph of a group of young Ḥasidic boys at the Museum of Natural History to be arranged in a circle staring at the famed replica of the Tyrannesaurus Rex dinasaur. That photograph also never came to be taken because he could not obtain the necessary cooperation from the Ḥasidim. The dinasaur was obviously willing.

The point of these missing images is that their absence tells us something about those who were willing to be party to Frederic Brenner's somewhat whimsical, irreverent, yet loving "portraits" of the layered personae of American Jews. What Brenner's images represent are the processes of cultural transaction between dimensions of the Jewish-American selves — but only for those Jews who are, indeed, living in multiple civilizations. The images embody varying levels of comfort and discomfort of a people who are at least to some degree conscious of their own duality. These are not photographs either of or for comfortable Jews. At the same time, they are also not portrayals of Jews in crisis...psychic or otherwise. Hence, there is no picture of either Ḥasidic boys, for whom the world of the Jew is essentially monolithic, nor a picture of Woody Allen, whose crises have long gone far beyond issues of Jewish ambivalence.

Starting with an almost surrealistic black-and-white photograph of some forty-nine, thirty-something men and women, facing the deep-end of an empty swimming pool at the Concord Hotel in Kiamesha Lake, N.Y., Brenner portrays that paradox of American Jewish life in a series of thirty-eight equally challenging images.

Unlike some of the more conventional photographic depictions of Jewish life, which tend to focus on the special moments of life, the high points of the calendar or the life cycle, the central themes of Brenner's photographs are mostly drawn from the hum of ordinary everyday life: in routine family situations, at leisure, at work. Thus, his opening photograph is not a wedding ceremony, but the process of mate seeking. Likewise, in subsequent photographs of modern Jewish family life, he trains his lens upon the climate of the ordinary nest of the family (see "Josephson family" and "December dilemma").

For one who has studied these dimensions of modern Jewish life for many years through the more remote and systematic approach of social sci-

ence, these photographs raise profound questions about accuracy and method. At first blush, one is inclined to ask: What makes these pictures "Jewish"? At the second, they raise the deeper question of what makes this form of photography "Jewish"? Obviously, it is the contention here that, indeed, Brenner has invented a "Jewish" photography by turning the very notion of "representational art" inside out.

Generally, art analysis distinguishes between "representational" and "abstract" art based on the commonsense notion that images of identifiable figures and objects — be they on canvas or photographic paper — are visual representations of things as they are. By contrast, "abstract" art is understood to consist of images that attempt to capture feelings, processes, and states of mind through non-identifiable shapes, colors, textures, and images. In that general framework, "representational" or "figurative" art captures and freezes the moment, while abstract art opens to insight the on-going flux of some aspect of life. From a traditional Jewish perspective, therefore figurative or "representational" art borders very closely on the violation of the first commandment: You shall make no graven images.

As traditional Jew, Brenner is caught in a fundamental dilemma: How to create not only pictures of Jews — an enterprise that is inherently suspect from a Jewish point of view — but a Jewish photography — that is to say, a photography that does not idolize, that does not turn its subject into an object. He accomplishes this seemingly impossible task by placing his subjects into settings or poses, and at times both settings and poses, which clearly signal to both the subject and the viewer that beneath or alongside the fixed, black-and-white image on paper there is a process that very nearly contradicts what is actually visible to the eye.

Perhaps nowhere is that process more clearly revealed than in Brenner's photograph of the Hebrew High School of Las Vegas. In a very real sense this photograph is not of the high school students, even though they are the apparent subjects. Rather, it is a photograph of the paradoxical nature of Jewish education in America. The very idea of a Hebrew High School in Las Vegas strikes one as oxymoronic. How do you teach Torah, the picture asks us, in the city that symbolizes all that is *tamey* — a place that does not distinguish between day and night, where luck, not divine providence, is venerated, where sins of all kinds are raised to an art and a profession. As if to answer that question, the photograph depicts the high school class in the shape of a pyramid, that ultimate symbol of the degredation of Egyptian slavery, facing the Sphinx, the other ancient Egyptian symbol, which signifies mystery. For lack of a better term one might say that each photograph is an excercise in symbolic compression.

Arguably, the manner in which a people articulates an image of itself,

both in substance and the medium of its expression, is itself a profound reflection of an existential condition. Thus, for example, Biblical commentary as a genre of writing — quite apart from any of its substance — is an indicator of a particular kind of human encounter between the putative words of God and those who see themselves as the audience to or recipient of those words. By contrast, for example, the *piyutim* of the Middle Ages reflect an entirely different mode of encounter with that very God and those very same words that are the subject of biblical commentary. From that perspective, the modern Jewish experience in America has bred its own model of self-reflection and self-examination. That model has been principally in the form of sociological treatises, demographic studies, and — in a very different vein — novels. To a considerably lesser extent, Jews have also turned to film as a form of self-examination.

Brenner's photographic essay has probably been the first to grapple consciously with the delicate balancing-act that the Jews of America engage in routinely, both to affirm distinctiveness and to disappear within the larger society. As such, it invites our interest and analysis both for what it has to say about us and also for what it has to say about the more conventional modalities of our self-representation.

Some years ago, the sociologist Herbert J. Gans coined the concept of "symbolic ethnicity" to describe the manner in which modern American ethnic groups come to define themselves once they get beyond geographically defined community ("Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Culture in America," *Ethnic and Racial Studies,* January 1979). Symbolic ethnicity refers as well to the condition of freedom in an open society where individuals are at liberty to lay claim to a variety of labels and signifiers of distinction, without those labels or signifiers having any ultimate claim on their possessors. In that sense, the cultural heritage of a group is little more than a treasure-trove of symbols one may apply to one's self for purposes of one's own choosing, without thereby granting any final claim to that heritage in determining one's total identity. This point and its implications for the study of American demography were reinforced more recently by Mary C. Waters in her book, *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America* (Berkely: Univ. of California Press, 1990).

More than any other depiction of American Jewish life, Brenner's *Jews/America/A Representation* has captured the playfulness with which contemporary American Jews rummage through the treasures in the trove of the heritage in search for a useable past. As such, his photographs throw the spotlight on some of the more dramatic or ironic blends and elisions of modern-day Jewish identity that inevitably infuriate those in search of purity.