

Some background to the articles in this issue:

On December 21, the New York Times published Anne Roiphe's "Christmas Comes to a Jewish Home." Ms. Roiphe may or may not have known how much of a stir her words would occasion in the Jewish community. (By now, she's probably learned.) Assimilation is a distressing mystery to Jews who delight in being and doing Jewish, and while we all know Jews who have meandered away from the fold, it's rare that they will talk easily about it. But here Ms. Roiphe plops herself down on the couch for all to hear, and provides us with a classic statement.

Recalling that not all MOMENT's readers are also Times readers, we decided at an editorial conference on December 22 that we would reprint Ms. Roiphe's piece, and we were enmeshed in a discussion of how to frame a response to it when the magazine fairy, in the form of our mailman, arrived with our daily allotment of dross and stardust. That Friday's stardust was an article by Samuel Hux, which is so brilliantly apposite a rejoinder to Roiphe that there was no need for further discussion. We immediately decided to print it, adding only a brief afterword that tries to express a specifically Jewish response (Hux is not Jewish, and writes explicitly from the perspective of a non-Jew).

There's also a small story attached to our interview with Yigal Allon. We met with Mr. Allon in his hotel room, and our conversation with him stretched over two hours. We began talking, as was inevitable, about the "present situation"—developments in the negotiations between Israel and Egypt. Mr. Allon—among other things, a former Foreign Minister of Israel—had a good deal to say about the way things are going, and why. Two-thirds of the way

through, we shifted the focus of our conversation from the Middle East and international affairs to domestic developments within Israel—specifically, to a discussion of the kibbutz movement and the Labor party, in both of which Mr. Allon plays a key leadership role. We talked also of emerging values in the Jewish state. And all the way through this last portion of our talk, I was conscious of the limitations of the print medium. We cannot capture on the printed page the dramatic increase in Mr. Allon's enthusiasm as we moved from the international sphere, about which Mr. Allon is asked wherever he goes in this country, to the domestic sector, about which most people know little—and care less. But for Allon, the subject is one which evokes real passion. He sits forward in his chair, his voice and his face alive in an entirely new way. And suddenly one realizes how incredibly distorting the Arab-Israel conflict has been, diverting and draining the energies of uncommonly caring people, people whose calling it is to fashion an ideal society, but whose burden it is to be trapped by sterile, debilitating conflict.

A couple of (actually three) corrections: (1) The Idyllwild retreat described by Al Wachtel in our November issue spoke of a "gracious woman" whose "selfless and untiring work" insured the success of the enterprise. That woman's name is Joyce Karchem, not Ketchum. (2) Copyright to the photographs which accompanied Martin Gilbert's article on the Balfour Declaration in that same issue belongs to Yad Chaim Weizmann. (3) Alex Schindler, whose article "The Odd Couple" appeared in our December issue, should have been identified as President of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

A word which should not even be necessary, about the Vietnamese boat people. Americans in general cannot, for obvious reasons, turn their backs on this problem, for whose existence this country is in

no small measure responsible. And Jews, more than others, should be sensitive to it, given our own history of homelessness, given the specific memories we have of refugees crowded onto boats that were turned away from every harbor. Can we not, at the very least, inform our president and our representatives in Congress that there is in this nation a substantial constituency that would support American efforts to offer aid, comfort and refuge to these unfortunate people?

Several readers have inquired how they can learn more, and do more, regarding the problem of Falasha Jews, described by Graenum Berger in November's MOMENT. Further information can be obtained from the American Association for Ethiopian Jews, 340 Corlies Avenue, Pelham, New York 10803.

And last, a quixotic effort to alter the face of American politics. How about Alfred Kahn for president? What a marvelously refreshing thing it is to encounter such wit and such wisdom in a high government official. I don't know how Mr. Kahn feels about defense spending, or about Rhodesia, or about most things, but I do know that he is blunt, smart, and civilized, and that he does not take himself too seriously. That's a virtue which would probably atrophy on the way to the White House, but it's worth the gamble. And, oddly enough, this inflation fighter whose hopeless task requires him to get everybody angry seems to have impressed just about everyone with his decency and good sense. Besides, nobody who sings Gilbert and Sullivan in his spare time can be all bad. And his campaign slogan is obvious: Kahn Can.

Happy Tu B'Shevat. Plant a tree. ★

*Cam Ari*

## LETTERS

### Cult Encounters

To the Editors:  
I have read Michael Appell's article, "Cult Encounters" (November 1978), with a mixture of interest and concern. I am pleased that an article on this subject appeared in MOMENT. Prior to the Guyana massacre, it was difficult for those of us who have been involved in combating the influence of cults to find a receptive editor who would publish anything other than the sensational exposé-type article mentioned by Appell.

Appell is correct when he states that all cult leaders "insist on total obedience to their leadership." However, this is never told to a prospective cult member until he or she has been isolated from society, removed from friends, family and a familiar environment. It is at such a time when the true colors of the cult are shown through the endless process of indoctrination, lack of sleep, control of diet, and direction as to how one spends every minute of every day. No one knows what the cult stands for when he becomes involved. The unsuspecting individual is told to join with other friendly, caring, sensitive, feeling people in pursuit of some vaguely defined goal. The leader, the cult, and its philosophy are never mentioned at this early stage. If such topics were introduced, Appell would have written no article, for no one would be participating in any aspect of cult programming.

Appell states that "cult membership also implies a rejection of deeply rooted general values," and that "the growth of cults may well be seen as a response to the absence of discipline and authority in other social institutions." Such statements emanate from the mistaken view that persons elect to join a cult. Not so. Instead, young people are brainwashed into believing all that the cult says. Because of peer pressure, fear, and continued indoctrination, they cannot separate themselves from the cult. This is why deprogramming is necessary. Appell mentions "the

cynicism" that surrounds deprogramming. I beg to differ with him. The deprogrammer is infinitely more concerned about the individual, including the soul, than is the cult leader or member. The goal of deprogramming is to bring the person to the point where he can once more think for himself and make his own decisions. It is *not* to restructure his life according to a preconceived plan agreed upon by parents and deprogrammer.

When Appell asks for "more campus workers and better facilities for the hundreds of thousands of Jews on campuses," he is absolutely correct. But we also need a society that is awake to the reality of what cults really are, what their leaders stand for, and how dishonest they are in their approach to individuals and society. The threat of cults is real; it is destructive and it will not go away. The Jewish family and community must respond in positive terms to this reality.

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### Peace

To the Editor:  
Leonard Fein's article, "In the Wake of Peace," (November 1978) is bold as it is thoughtful. Bold, in that it is predicated upon the assumption that there will be peace in the Middle East. It is the prospect of this long and fervently hoped for eventuality with which Fein confronts us as American Jews. The question is whether the contemporary American Jewish community can find a rationale for its existence other than crises and threats to Israel's existence? Fein proceeds thoughtfully to explore alternative rationales for sustaining the Jewish people in the wake of peace in Israel.

Conspicuous in its absence in the analysis is any reference to the Holocaust, a watershed event in Jewish history, and clearly a commanding reality in contemporary Jewish life. It could be argued that the Holocaust has forever made the