



Responses to Pluralism

Deborah E. Lipstadt

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Devora Steinmetz

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sh'ma
Book Reviews

The Jewish Moral Virtues

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Swimming in a Sea of Talmud: Lessons for Everyday Living

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Letter to the Editor

To Dizzy Gillespe, Plotzville,

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

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

Yours, Loilliem Safire

A Sh'ma Archive

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

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

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