

THE REFORM JEWISHLY QUARTERLY

Symposium: Disruption in Twenty-First-Century Rabbinical Life

Introduction: *Learning How to Cope the Mountains*
Rabbi Edwin Goldberg, DMin

The Future of Work: Lessons for Clergy from the COVID-19 Pandemic

Rabbi Liz P. G. Hirsch

Disruptive Leadership, Disruptive Partnership

Rabbi Allison Berry and Rabbi Laura Abrasley

Disruptive Technology in Jewish Life and Practice

Rabbi Daniel B. Medwin, MAJE

Trends in the Formation and Experience of Community

Rabbi Yoshi Zweifelback

Creative Disruption: A New Judaism Emerges

Rabbi Stanley M. Davids

Sorry, We Don't Have a *Mikveh* for You: Adapting Ritual for Gender Inclusion

Beyond the Binary

Rabbi Nikki DeBlosi, PhD, and Bonz Swencionis

Managing Change in Synagogue Life

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Disruption: Lifespan

Rabbi Beth Lieberman

Paula Ollendorff: Feminist and Liberal Jew

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Embracing Synagogue Disruption of the "New Now" and Beyond

Rabbi Paul Kipnes and Rabbi Julia Weisz

The Beautiful Pearls of Disruption

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The Reform Jewish Quarterly

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*Of Blessed Memory

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POETRY

Jerusalem's destined "place"
gallivants like the blood in our veins:
journeying is its only arrival.
Though at each archeological level,
mitzvot travel faster
than the speed of light, faster,
by far, than missiles can fall.

Note

*Albert Einstein, "Religion and Science," *New York Times Magazine*,
November 9, 1930, pp. 1-4.

General Articles

Art for Our Sake A Review Essay

Rabbi Michael Marmor, PhD

Reviewing

Judaism for the World: Reflections on God, Life, and Love by Arthur Green (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2020), 408 pp.

The year is 1941. Two Arthurs are born to Jewish families within a few miles and a few months of each other. While presumably more Jewish Arthurs were born in America that year, these two were to go on to become famous Arts. Garfunkel's sales have admittedly outstripped Green's, but if you care about the rabbinate, the history of Chasidism, spiritual search, and contemporary Jewish theology, Arthur Green is a rock star. And unlike his more famous co-Arthur, Green wrote the lyrics.

Arthur Green's first eighty years have had a profound impact on American Judaism. The next forty promise yet more. Since the 1960s, Arthur Green has been at the heart of many of the most distinctive developments in Jewish scholarship, spirituality, communal experimentation, and theological formulation. The non-Orthodox rabbinate has been shaded Green. Thanks to him and the circle that has taken shape around him, neo-Chasidism has found its voice. He has helped promulgate some of the most consequential developments in American Judaism. No contemporary American Jewish thinker has made as deep inroads as he in the Jewish renaissance unfolding in Israel. Green at eighty is more productive and more relevant than most rabbis, thinkers, and innovators half his age. His latest work, a recipient of a 2020 National Jewish Book Award, provides an

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opportunity for readers of the *CCAR Journal* to consider the ways in which Arthur Green has challenged and enriched us.¹

Rabbi Green is both Arthur and Art, both a child of mid-twentieth-century Jewish America and a leading figure of its emergent counterculture in the 1960s and beyond. He is also Avraham Yitzhak, the name under which his Hebrew work is published, and Avrom Yitzhok, heir to an Eastern European Jewish sensibility. All of these Greens are to be found in *Judaism for the World*.

There are at least three reasons why this book is not Arthur Green's crowning achievement. First, he has been piling up achievements (including, indeed, a significant book on coronation²) for decades. Secondly, this present work is a collection of pieces, and while Green has placed them within a structure, the constituent parts cohere less organically than some of his other theological output.³ Thirdly, we have good reason to hope for more important work yet to come. The Greening of Jewish America is a project still underway.

In one of the finest essays in the book, a remarkable piece on revelation offered as a reflection on the festival of Shavuot, Green summarizes a key aspect of his entire theological project:

What I seek to articulate here is a mature and believable Jewish faith based on an ultimate commitment to a *nonidolistic* vision of the universe, one that seeks to look beyond the radical separation of "God," "world," and "self." Such a worldview was broadly hinted at in the teachings of kabbalists and Hasidic authors centuries ago, but was buried by proclamation of a nonmystical "mainstream" in the emergence of modern Judaism.⁴

Reading this work serves as a good reminder of the fact that for many committed Reform Jews, Green's approach commands respect and demands response. Reform in its classical manifestations was a modernist movement, convinced that the inexorable march of progress would lead to the removal of external rituals and superstitious beliefs and move into the light of reason and progress. Over 130 years ago Kaufmann Kohler averred: "We want progress and enlightenment, and shall not rest until we have divested Judaism of all its disfiguring rites."⁵

The position epitomized by Kohler's statement was characterized by a breathtaking confidence in the capacity of historical

critique and philosophical reasoning to act as precise wrecking balls, demolishing traditional structures of superstition and obscurity while leaving the ethical Holy of Holies intact. Arthur Green did not invent the critique of this position. Thinkers of the caliber of Franz Rosenzweig, Leo Baeck, and Eugene Borowitz each undetermined Reform theology from within Western European liberal theological discourse.⁶

Green's project shares much with these precursors, but it also differs from them in significant ways. It is to the Jewish esoteric tradition—misunderstood, dismissed, reviled, and ignored by many in the Western European liberal camp—that Green turns in his search for a compelling Judaism of meaning. His postmodernist, postcritical, neo-Hasidic stance, characterized by thick engagement with traditional modes of study and practice, is not that of Rosenzweig, or Baeck, or Borowitz. As he points out in the more autobiographical sections of this book, Green's intellectual formation and spiritual growth owes far more to the likes of Alexander Altmann, Nahum Glatzer, Abraham Joshua Heschel, and Zalman Schachter-Shalomi.

Reading *Judaism for the World*, I was aware of the presence of a figure positioned just beyond the reader's field of vision, occasionally coming almost into view. This invisible interlocutor is more rationalist and more historicist than Green himself. A psychological reading would no doubt lead us to conclude that the author is working out some issues with an aspect of himself, and this may well be true. I prefer to imagine that Green has a modernist, critical Jew he takes with him on his postmodern, postcritical journey.

This putative figure lives in the shadows, in parenthetical comments, and subtle asides. Nevertheless, I see her (maybe because I am looking for her). Here she is as Green tells us that Sinai represents the incursion of eternity into history at a particular place and time:

(metaphoric as it may be; don't bother me with the question of literal historicity) . . .

And here she is again, as Green argues for a Judaism far from Kohler's rejection of daily rituals:

We have to surround ourselves with a series of reminders: on our foreheads and our doorposts, on our calendars and in our

daily lives. Yes, I know about the evolving history of religions, including our own. I understand all the specifics of Jewish praxis to be of human origin, developed and constantly evolving over the course of our long history. Many of these forms of praxis were adapted from the majority cultures amid which we Jews lived, beginning in ancient times. But there is a divine voice behind them, one to which all these forms are *our human response*.⁸

Here and elsewhere, the postmodernist Green says to his modernist alter ego: yes, but. Yes, I know religion is generated by individuals who occupy particular times and spaces, *but* I believe that they are responding to an underlying unity that transcends time and space. Yes, the Festivals can be described in terms of their chronological development and cultural influence, *but* they can also be seen as profound spiritual adventures.

Green comes down clearly on one side of certain central preoccupations of contemporary Jewish theology. He is a monist, a postmodernist, a mystical panentheist, a neo-Chasid. These are all descriptions he adopts in this volume and elsewhere in his work, and they help place him within current debates and discourses. And yet, just as he exemplifies some of these clearly delineated positions, Arthur Green's approach to Judaism also serves to undermine some of the tired distinctions that often inform our thinking about the viability of a viable liberal Judaism.

Take, for example, the attempt made to contrast the inward-looking with the outward facing. From early in his career, Green has vigorously contested the reality of such a contrast. It was Arnold Jacob Wolf who set out this critique in a bracing article entitled "Against Spirituality," published in 2001. Poking fun at the titles of Jewish Lights publications and *Aleph* seminars, he argued that "boomers need more than inner peace to link themselves to a great, if often unwelcoming, Jewish polis."⁹ The spirituality of Arthur Green, and of many others in the circles he has helped bring into being, defy this dichotomy. In this book, Green engages not just with the Jewish polis, but with some of the greatest issues facing America and planet earth. In this sense a disciple of Heschel, Green's activist stance is not incidental to his spiritual posture, but rather its natural expression. The following statement is hardly that of a disengaged navel-gazer:

To be a Jew in America is still to stand out, to be different. Americans, even those without a shred of anti-Semitic animus, are still aware of the Jews as a group within American society . . . The question is whether being Jewish means not only to *stand out*, but also to *stand for* something. If it does, just what is it that our Jewish identity calls upon us to stand for?¹⁰

In this book Arthur Green demonstrates his willingness to go beyond the consensus views propounded by most within the American Jewish establishment. He refuses to be cowed into defensiveness by the rise of antisemitism and anti-Israel sentiment. He argues that

we Jews are undeniably a force in the power establishment that rules over others . . . This forces us to ask whether we may have switched roles in the Passover story. Could one part of our enslavement be that of being stuck in the role of oppressor?¹¹

Reading these words from the world's leading neo-Chasid should warn us against a banal dichotomy between a concern with the soul and an approach to the world.

Arthur Green spends much time in Israel, and his Torah has commanded significant interest beyond even the predictable liberal circles. In this book he adopts a bold stance, affirming his commitment not by hollow protestations of love, but with a remarkable mixture of distance and proximity, palpable solidarity with prophetic chastisement. His analysis of the differences between American Judaism, asking the post-1780 question of how Judaism may be meaningful, and Israeli Judaism, preoccupied with the post-1933 question of survival, is resonant. His observation that "a new Israeli Judaism is beginning to emerge"¹² is evidence of his remarkable position as insider-outsider in this renaissance. For when the story of that process is one day told, Green's role will prove to have been of great significance.

Green seems to believe a new generation of Israelis is set to question the moral blindness that has characterized many of the policies of recent decades. In point of fact, much evidence points to a hardening of positions among Israel's younger voters away from moderation and far away from a moral reckoning, so while there can be no doubt that a change of heart must one day come, it is

hard to see how, or when. Art Green does not pretend to know, but rather he calls upon his Israeli brothers and sisters with courage to face up to the unpalatable yet unavoidable implications of our conflict with and treatment of the Palestinian people. I predict that defenders of the Israeli establishment will be less than enthusiastic at some of his pronouncements. The prospect of discomfort is unlikely to deter him. Here we see the neo-prophetic mode alongside the neo-Chasidic.

Time and again, Green's oeuvre forces us to consider the clumsiness of our categories. In an important essay entitled "Scholarship Is Not Enough," he argues for "creating a space for personal encounter between the learner and the text,"¹³ going beyond the confines of arid philology and erudite jousting. This call is made particularly resonant in view of the fact that it is made by a leading scholar of Kabbalah and Chasidism, no stranger to the groves of academe.

A comment toward the end of that essay is of particular interest, showing once again that Arthur Green confounds any neat categorization of opinions. Here he takes issue with the postmodern predilection for unredeemable paradox and ironic obscurity. He prefers sentences one can actually understand:

The melting away of the self-confidence that characterized modernist readings of ancient texts, when history and philology seemed adequate tools to unpack what the sources "really" meant, has opened a great door of opportunity for us. Unfortunately, there are too many alternative systems of interpretation trying to rush into that doorway, uniting to create a sometimes impossibly abstruse style of thought and expression, rendering postmodernism a curse rather than a blessing.¹⁴

As much of Chasidic literature is to the kabbalist literature preceding it, so Green is to some of the more arcane hyper-intellectual deconstructions preferred by some academics. Never simplistic, Arthur Green does strive for simplicity and clarity.

His Judaism is directed to "those who stand with me in having abandoned—or, perhaps more accurately, having been abandoned by—the naïve religion of childhood fantasy."¹⁵ On numerous occasions in this work he contrasts his project with a childish credibility that will not serve the needs of sophisticated seekers.¹⁶ If the

contemporary Jewish conversation is usually construed as a clash between childlike fidelity and cerebral irony, between uncritical acceptance and overcritical distance, Arthur Green muddles the categories, and for this, too, he deserves our thanks.

Is Green conservative or radical? He is both. Conservative in the sense that Kohler's vision of a Judaism devoid of ritual baggage is not one he shares. Radical in that he is prepared to go to the root of the Big Questions and to offer new responses. Is he traditional or progressive? He is both: traditional in his embrace of Hebrew language, texts, practice, and worship; progressive in his embrace of "democratic governance, gender egalitarianism (including full respect for the LGBTQ community), concern for the oppressed, and acceptance of science as a legitimate source of knowledge about our lives."¹⁷ Time and again, Green exposes the poverty of banal binaries.

An attentive Reform reader is likely to be inspired and unsettled reading this book. Arthur Green has little time for denominational triumphalism, and his orientation is more countercultural, more Hebraically oriented, more spiritually centered, more Eastern European, than many in the Reform camp. Where classical Reform was modernist, Arthur Green is postmodernist. Where Kohler and his ilk believed that historical criticism would lead a new generation of American Jews to a new understanding of the essence of Judaism, Green's stance is postcritical, calling contemporary Jews to look beyond cerebral tools of demolition and to strive for a Judaism capable of evoking passion and depth.

And yet in profound ways, Art Green's remarkable contribution as researcher, synthesizer, loving critic, teacher, practitioner, serial entrepreneur, and above all rabbi has enhanced the prospects for a vigorous Reform Judaism in North America, Israel, and elsewhere beyond measure. In one of his asides directed, we might construe, to us, he says:

(Yes, I am aware that I am taking supposedly "secondary" meanings of *mitzvah* and making them primary. I know. This is how it works for me.)¹⁸

This is how it works for me. Repeatedly, Green makes clear that all he can do is to testify to the honesty and integrity of his own search. He challenges us to work out for ourselves how it works

for us. In recent years, as witnessed by the influence of the Institute for Jewish Spirituality and other initiatives with which Green is associated, some in the Reform camp have been moved in postcritical, postmodern and neo-Chasidic directions. In this way Green has exercised direct influence.

For the rest of us, I would argue that Green's work should encourage us to attempt an articulation of our own core beliefs, beyond dull apologetics, extravagant hand-wringing, or vapid protestations of superiority. Reading Green, I am reminded that I simply don't share some of his instincts and conclusions. To give one example: I find Art's account of the exclusion of the mystical tradition by mainstream Judaism to be compelling, and his account of the challenges posed by modernity rings true. When he goes on to assert that "only the mystics seem to offer adequate response to these challenges,"¹⁹ we part company. In my reading, the mystics should certainly be re-introduced into the Jewish conversation, and one could spend many lifetimes plumbing the depths of their insights. But I see no reason and feel no compulsion to privilege their work over that of the philosophers (Jewish and non-Jewish), Talmudic sages, poets (medieval and modern), and countless others. This makes for a more eclectic and less focused approach, but that is a price I am happy to pay. In my formulation, pilfered from Mordecai Kaplan, the mystics get a vote. They do not have a veto.

Employing a tripartite distinction adopted from the Jewish esoteric tradition, Green organizes the pieces in three sections: first, Soul: Thoughts on the Inward Journey, followed by Year: On the Jewish Calendar, and finally World: Living in God's Creation. Perhaps inevitably for a collection of this kind, there is an uneven feel to the work. In particular, some of the essays in the middle part of the book are thin in comparison to some of the richest and most provocative pieces. On the other hand, one or two of the essays rank among Green's most resonant and fascinating writings. I predict, for example, that his essay on Shavuot will be read by many this Spring as they search for a way to comprehend Revelation between bites of cheesecake. Other essays of particular note include the chapter on prayer, which he added to the Hebrew version of *Radical Judaism* and which is now made available for readers of English, and a reflection on "Judaism as a Path of Love," dedicated to the memory of his wife.

Reading this important book I was struck by two interpretations of the same phrase from classical liturgy—appropriate, because one of the readings is from a Chasidic master in whom Arthur Green specializes, and the second by Green himself; and yet more apt in view of Art's preferred style of discourse. As he said in an address to the CCAR Conference in 2012:

I read the sources from within, weaving them together and seeking to stretch them, to make them open enough to embrace the meaning I find within them, rather than applying them to a structure that comes from without.²⁰

The first of these teachings is not to be found in *Judaism for the World*, but it speaks to its underpinnings. In the *Modim* blessing in the *Amidah*, the prayer *par excellence* in Jewish liturgy, God is praised as "the Good, for your mercy is without end, and the Merciful, for your lovingkindness is ceaseless." A remarkable reading of this latter phrase, *יְיָ תַמּוּ תַמּוּ תַמּוּ*, is offered by Levi Yizhak of Berdichev (1740–1809), a towering figure of early Chasidism, about whom Arthur Green has written, and with whom—along with many of the other founding fathers of the Chasidic movement—he is perpetually engaged in dialogue and exploration.²¹

Levi Yizhak asks a metaphysical question. We describe God, he notes, as constantly renewing the work of creation. Why, then, does so much stay the same in our everyday experience of the world? Why, for example, do humans not spontaneously transform into animals, and vice versa? The answer of the Chasidic master is that God's creations do not want to be caught up in a vortex of perpetual change and crave a degree of fixity, a consistency in their existence. The God of change hears this prayer for stability and answers it by tempering the divine potential for endless transformation. Every moment, so reads the Chasidic sage, God grants our deepest wishes and conserves us in our fundamental state. God's mercies do not end, he tells us, for if they did, we would all be condemned to live lives of ultimate indeterminacy.²²

This Chasidic teaching suggests that our thrice-daily repetition of praise to our Creator is that the divine urge for innovations is counterbalanced by the human need for consistency. We thank God that our identities have not been swept away in the hurricane of change.

It is between these two poles—the new and the old, creativity and tradition—that the thought of Arthur Green lives, and his approach to the relation between these two poles engenders both deep admiration and considerable consternation. Most Jews as embedded as he is in the sources of Jewish tradition are far less radical than Green in their political affiliations and theological daring. Most Jews as open as he is to spiritual exploration and the undermining of denominational stereotypes are far less conventional in their exercise of Jewish piety than he is. What makes him so hard to pin down, I would argue, is that he experiences God as the great *mechadesh* (the bringer of the new), who graces us with the capacity to stay true to, or to return, to something essential we crave to be.

In Green's universe of discourse, a perpetual creative tension between the One and the Many is at play. The first essay is subtitled "A Judaism for Monists" and begins with the statement "There is only One."²³ Distancing himself from theological models like that of Franz Rosenzweig in which the incommensurable elements of God, humanity, and the universe interact, Green's theology envelops all dimensions, the physical and the metaphysical, evolutionary processes and inner explorations, into the One.

But Green is keenly aware that our experience is of diversity, and not of some undifferentiated soup of existence. In a beautiful reflection on the competition between the *alef* and the *bet* for top billing (a theme with a long provenance in Jewish literature), he suggests that "creation begins with *bet* because that is precisely what creation is: the origin of multiplicity out of the realm of the undivided One."²⁴ The mystic's task is to reveal that the two are in fact one. "Emptiness and fullness, the one and the many, God and the world, need to be unmasked as two modes of the same reality, two perceptions of the same truth."²⁵ All is One, says Green, just as he celebrates variegation and diversity. "My theological position," he states, "is that of a *mystical panentheist*, one who believes that God is present throughout all of existence, that Being or Y-H-W-H underlies and unifies all that is."²⁶

God's unifying presence is both a license for radical innovation and also, as Levi Yizhak taught, a stabilizing presence. Through God's grace, the possibility of distinct identity is preserved, and we are not doomed to be drawn into the vortex of indeterminacy. *Lo tamu hasadecha*—thanks to Your love, we get to continue being who we are.

Green's own reading of the expression from the prayer book is offered as a tantalizing example of another great project yet to be published, his commentary on the siddur. A Hebraist fully attuned to the playfulness and possibilities inherent within the Hebrew language, Art chooses to read the phrase *חַסִּדִּי תָמוּ אֵלַי* in a different way. For him it can also mean "You are compassionate, Lord, even when your love is not simple."²⁷

There is much to learn of the method and intent of Green's approach from this ingenious reading. Not only does it exemplify an approach placing him squarely in the hermeneutical tradition of his Chasidic forebears, turning and turning the language of prayer and study in innovative and surprising ways, but it also represents a recurrent theme in the essays in this book, a theme echoed throughout his oeuvre. For Green, it is not necessary to be naive or self-deceptive in order to live a life of spiritual depth. Green's Judaism is joyful, but it's not happy-clappy. Similarly, he acknowledges complexity without making a virtue of confusion.

While this book does not constitute an autobiography (such a work, which I can only hope would be called *A History of Art*, would be a fascinating read), there is much here of great interest, particularly in the memoir of his own Jewish education. A scene set in Newark's Temple B'nai Abraham in the mid-1950s epitomizes the young Arthur's Jewish journey. Returning at thirteen from his first experience at Camp Ramah, he is upbraided by emeritus rabbi Julius Silberfeld for having stood to recite the *Amidah* prayer during the Torah service (the young Green had arrived late, and was catching up). The words uttered by the rabbi "We don't do that sort of thing here" were the last Green ever heard in that synagogue. He never returned. Rabbis would be well advised to apply the Silberfeld test: Did I just send tomorrow's Art Green away from the congregation?

As he reveals something of his own journey, an important Jewish story is being told: Young Arthur has an American childhood, and his journey to great erudition and insight is one from which deracinated Jewish kids of another generation may glean inspiration.

Some of the reminiscences concerning Art's influences are remarkable. The several references to Abraham Joshua Heschel, for example, speak to the depth of that influence and the complexity of that legacy. Another comment teaches us about another giant of the Jewish Theological Seminary:

I think it fair to say that I didn't take any teacher seriously who didn't come with a middle European accent. (That may be why, incidentally, I never had much attraction to Mordecai Kaplan's thought. It was just too *American*, in the Pragmatic sense. Where was the existential *Angst*? Where were Nietzsche and Sartre in his rather too-well-tied-up "Reconstructionist Answers" to "Questions Jews Ask"? I had already been taught that the only *real* questions were unanswerable.)²⁸

I find this incidental remark to be particularly striking because as I read Green, there is more Kaplan to be found in his thought than this would suggest. Art Green was not a follower of Kaplan, but there are Kaplanian strands in his thinking, whatever the accent.

I will confess that the essay in which Art and a group of trusted friends and colleagues trail round the sites where Chasidic masters dwelt centuries earlier left me a little bemused. The essay tells both of important locations and of an emerging neo-Chasidic circle comprising excellent people. In both cases, I predict that most of us identifying as Reform will stay on the outside of what Art describes as his pilgrimage. Supportive, attentive—but on the outside. My own great-grandfather Abraham Zonabend was a Gerrer Chasid in Łęczyca and I often think of him when reading work from the Ger tradition. But it is the decision of all of his children to leave the Chasidic milieu that has had the formative influence on my Jewish journey. I am still caught up in the drama of modernity, with all its disappointments and risks.

Art Green enriches Jewish life in significant ways in North America, in Israel, and elsewhere. He is one of the great teachers of Judaism in our day. This book reminds us of many of his great lessons. His *Judaism for the World* is for our world of associations and commitments, too. It offers, dare I say, a bridge over troubled water.

Notes

1. For a comprehensive and judicious appreciation of Green's still-evolving intellectual legacy, see Ariel Evan Mayse, "Arthur Green: An Intellectual Profile," in *Arthur Green: Hasidism for Tomorrow*, Library of Contemporary Jewish Philosophers 16, ed. Hava Tirosh-Samuelson and Aaron W. Hughes (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015), 1–52.
2. Arthur Green, *Keter: The Crown of God in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

3. See in particular *Seek My Face, Speak My Name: A Contemporary Jewish Theology* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1992); *Radical Judaism: Rethinking God and Tradition* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010).
4. Arthur Green, *Judaism for the World: Reflections on God, Life, and Love* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2020), 170.
5. Kaufmann Kohler, *Studies, Addresses and Personal Papers* (New York: Alumni Association of the Hebrew Union College, 1931), 213.
6. For a succinct and acute discussion of some of these critiques, see David Ellenson, "Autonomy and Norms in Reform Judaism," *CCAR Journal* (Fall 1999): 21–28.
7. Green, *Judaism for the World*, 27.
8. Green, *Judaism for the World*, 31–32. For other examples of this liberal interlocutor, see 143, 157, and 313.
9. Arnold Jacob Wolf, "Against Spirituality," *Judaism* 50, no. 3 (2001): 364.
10. Green, *Judaism for the World*, 231.
11. Green, *Judaism for the World*, 163.
12. Green, *Judaism for the World*, 266.
13. Green, *Judaism for the World*, 250.
14. Green, *Judaism for the World*, 252.
15. Green, *Judaism for the World*, 279.
16. See, for example, Green, *Judaism for the World*, 53, 56, 76, 79, 204, and 280.
17. Green, *Judaism for the World*, 221.
18. Green, *Judaism for the World*, 28.
19. Green, *Judaism for the World*, 7.
20. Arthur Green, "Personal Theology," *CCAR Journal* (Spring 2014): 11.
21. See, for example, Arthur Green, "Levi Yizhak of Berdichev on Miracles," in *The Heart of the Matter—Studies in Jewish Mysticism and Theology* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2015), 254–65. On p. 252 of *Judaism for the World* Green relates that he is currently engaged in a study of Levi Yizhak's life and work.
22. *K'dushiat Levi*, Part 2, *K'dushah Sh'lisheit*: the paraphrase is mine. The original reads thus:

תנה מאור שכלל נשימה ונשימה הקדוש ברוך הוא מחדש עולמו
 . . . וכל העולם כן בידו והוא מחדש אותם בכל רגע למה לא
 אדע שיתחנף מאדם לכבמה או מכבמה לאדם או מכבמה לחיה
 וכן כיוצא בו. אפס הענין הוא כן . . . כן תמיד בודאי כל
 בריאה ובריאה רצונו להשאר כך כמו שנברא מקודם ולא

להשתנות מבריא. לכן הגם שהקודש ברוך הוא מחדש עולמו בכל עת כיון שרצון הבריא שגברא שישאר כך הוא נשאר, כי הוא מחדש חסדו וכל רגע לברואי ממלא רצונם שיהיו כמו שנבראו ועל זה משבחם אותו והמרחם כי לא תמו חסדך . . .

- 23. Green, *Judaism for the World*, 3.
- 24. Green, *Judaism for the World*, 192.
- 25. Green, *Judaism for the World*, 196.
- 26. Green, *Judaism for the World*, 205.
- 27. Green, *Judaism for the World*, 283. In a note on p. 380 he explains that the word *tamu* is read in this interpretation, which he tells us is one he first offered decades ago, as being related to *tam* or *tamim*, "simple" or "whole", rather than "concluded." See Lam. 3:22.
- 28. Green, *Judaism for the World*, 298-99.

The Biblical K-R-H: Providence, Chance, Synchronicity?

Rabbi Elliot B. Gertel

In popular parlance, the term "synchronicity" has come to connote a coincidence that points to a mysterious convergence of events orchestrated by God or "the universe" in ways that thrill us and pique our curiosity regarding accident and causality.

New Agers regard synchronicity as a spiritual connectedness in all things that reveals psychological and even quantum factors, a "rhythm of creation," an "objective intelligence," a "formative generative principle that is neither matter nor mind." They also regard it as a cosmic impetus to self-help and personal growth.¹

Sometimes, synchronicity is invoked to argue that Western science, let alone biblical teaching, is not as enlightened as, say, Eastern beliefs that chance is not a theological problem.² Advocates of secular Judaism promote synchronicity as a traditional religion substitute that offers an element of spirituality for those who desire it.³

There may be some truth to an old Chinese saying: "Without coincidence, there is no story." But does the notion of "synchronicity" have anything in common with religious concepts of divine providence? How should we regard concepts of synchronicity, or of chance and providence, in light of biblical and Rabbinic teachings and of insights offered by Jewish and other philosophers and scientists from medieval times to our own?

In this essay I shall offer an overview of approaches to these questions. My hope is that the insights here gleaned, which I have found helpful, will enhance our individual perspectives on divine providence, chance, and synchronicity.

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(pp. 111–113). A signal example of this was the Eastern Jewish tradition of polygamy. Even as Herzog was seeking to impose a monogamy standard on all the Jews of Israel, he found himself in the uncomfortable position of defending polygamy before the then British authority. But even this served his agenda, as he sought to make issues of personal status an exclusive concern of the religious courts.

Ultimately, both the goal of a constitution enacting a halachic state and a comprehensive code of law faltered and the chief rabbinate found itself subordinate to the newly established secular court system (p. 127). But the quest for halachic supremacy has birthed many children. Kaye explores how the theocracy project has grown and expanded, right up to today (the book was published in 2020). For diaspora rabbis, of all stripes, who continue to approach Jewish law and its institutions from the perspective of legal pluralism, this book offers *binah*, if not a *n'chemta*, to issues that have been transpiring of late, such as the efforts to subordinate foreign *betei din* on matters of conversion to the oversight of the chief rabbinates.

Before reading this book, I characterized such moves by the chief rabbinates “wanting to become the Jewish Vatican.” Kaye has shown this is more than just a casual pursuit. As such, he has given rabbis worldwide a gift, an insight in what is coming, what to defend, and what to address in our halachic traditions.

RABBI GEOFFREY DENNIS (C96) serves Congregation Kol Ami in Flower Mound, Texas. He is an adjunct instructor in the Jewish and Israel Studies program at the University of North Texas. He is a Schuster Israel Fellow and an RAC Brickner Fellow, and the author of two books.

A New Hasidism: Roots

Edited by Arthur Green and Ariel Evan Mayse
(Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2019), 432 pp.

A New Hasidism: Branches

Edited by Arthur Green and Ariel Evan Mayse
(Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2019), 496 pp.

I went to HUC in 1971. Over the five years of my training, I never learned about Jewish mysticism, about Kabbalah, and, if the truth be told, I can't recall even one time where students and our teachers

talked about how (or if) we experienced God in our lives. I was reminded of that when I read in *A New Hasidism* the essay called “The Turn to Hasidism in the Religious-Zionist Israeli Yeshiva” by Rabbi Elhanan Nir. Describing his being drawn to Chasidism after his years in a post-high school Israeli yeshiva, he writes: “This integration of the quest for God into our spiritual world had a tremendous impact because, believe it or not, the concept of God was never mentioned in yeshiva” (*Branches*, p. 411). I don't know Rabbi Nir; our paths were very different from each other's. He lives in Jerusalem; I live in Los Angeles. He is a rabbi and a teacher at the Hesder Yeshiva Siah Yitzhak and Yeshivat Mahanayyim in Gush Eyzion and a poet; I am a retired Reform congregational rabbi. Yet both of us, from different generations, with different ways of living Jewish lives, were profoundly influenced by the transformation of the Chasidic teachings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries into a “new” Chasidism. As Art Green explains on his website:

Neo-Hasidism, as I understand it, means loving and learning from the great spiritual revival of Judaism that took place in Eastern Europe two hundred years ago, while choosing to live outside the strictly regulated world of the contemporary Hasidic community. It means *choosing* among the many riches of Hasidic teachings to decide which ones might usefully be applied today and which others should be left to history. It is also a faith that some key elements of the Hasidic revival can be re-tooled and universalized to create a Judaism that will be spiritually alive and attractive to seekers—both Jewish and not yet Jewish—in our day.

The two-volume work by Arthur Green and Ariel Evan Mayse, *A New Hasidism*, subtitled *Roots* and *Branches* is so important because it helps us understand how much contemporary Jewish spirituality has been shaped by this transformative retooling

Volume One, *Roots*, is an anthology of the writings of the founding fathers of Neo-Chasidic philosophy: Hillel Zeitlin, Martin Buber, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Shlomo Carlebach, Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, and the first American born thinker fully connected to this movement, Arthur Green. Most of them were familiar to me; Hillel Zeitlin was not. It was actually fascinating to learn about his idea of an intentional community that would presage a spiritual regeneration of Judaism. But even for readers familiar

awareness, when we know about the misogynistic tendencies of a tradition that objectifies women's bodies and devalues or ignores women's experience. Her description of the liberation that came for her through her female *chiavritta* was illuminating. She writes: "In these strange and wonderful teachings about praying for the needs of *shekinitah*, our Hasidic masters were teaching something extraordinary about empathy, interconnection and compassion. However with the overwhelming maleness of rabbinic and Hasidic tradition, I would not have dared read the sources so boldly through my own experience as a woman and mother had I not studied them with another like myself" (*Branches*, p. 243).

Through all the essays we meet a *person* whose life has been illuminated by the teachings of particular classic Chasidic masters and, in some instances, by the writings of the Neo-Chasidic founders presented in the first volume. And this makes the book all the more powerful.

The editors rightfully take pride in the variety of voices and topics in *Branches*, and at the same time wish they could have included even more, especially more women's voices. I too wish for that. And I am grateful that these diverse voices don't shy away from lifting up some of the difficulties in Chasidic spirituality including gendered structures and a hostility to non-Jews, which sometimes make it hard to approach these classical texts with an open heart.

I was particularly moved by Jonathan Slater's article "Neo-Hasidism for Today's Jewish Seeker: A Personal Reflection" because he writes about the Institute for Jewish Spirituality (IJS), which changed my life. As a member of the first rabbinic cohort, my teachers were Sylvia Boorstein, Jonathan Omer-Man, and Arthur Green. It was there that I first encountered Chasidic texts, first explored Chasidic prayer practices, first learned meditation, first experienced silence as a spiritual practice, first really thought about what it meant to be "embodied," first embraced mindfulness—and maybe even first began not only to wrestle with God but to open my heart to the divinity that I had experienced around me but had not been able to name. Through the spiritual practices the IJS invited me to explore, I have actually become more compassionate and open hearted. It was a change that my congregants noticed and commented on with gratitude.

A New Hasidism describes the renewal of Jewish life that I and so many of our colleagues have found to be meaningful. It draws us

with these thinkers, the selections included in the anthology, along with the very helpful introductions, make this book a wonderful resource that can help the reader or student understand the vision of a reimagined Judaism. Volume Two, *Branches*, is a collection of seventeen essays by a diverse group of scholars, teachers, and seekers who wrestle with the questions that emerge out of that reimagining.

I too wrestle with that reimagining. And these essays help me do that. From Arthur Green's "Neo-Hasidic Credo," a thoughtful road map or even manifesto of essential principals to Nehemia Polen's dazzling exploration of Leviticus as "invitational" religion and a manual for an intimacy that should never be taken for granted between the Divine and us, the essays opened my mind and my heart. Some of the essays focus on questions that have not been central to my unfolding spiritual practice, including the role of halachah not as law but as "a steady place to walk." Others speak directly to my own evolution.

The power of these essays is that all of them are personal journeys in one way or another even as they present complicated and challenging theological and communal ideas. The article by Mayse, which attempts to "articulate a Neo-Hasidic theology of *halakiah*, an understanding of sacred deeds and the divine command that can redress the challenges of modernity and enliven the heart of the contemporary Jewish seeker" (*Branches*, p. 158) begins with his own story of his youthful practice of martial arts. Or Rose's journey began in the Jewish renewal community of his parents where he was introduced to the sermons, stories, and ritual practices of the Chasidic masters by his parents and their mentors and peers including Rabbis Zalman Schachter-Shlomi, Shlomo Carlebach, and Arthur Green. Estelle Frankel shares that Reb Shlomo Carlebach's soulful music and Chasidic storytelling provided the initial inspiration for her to explore her Jewish roots and how she continues to study Chasidic teachings and use storytelling through her work as a psychotherapist and spiritual director. Nancy Flam's powerful essay "Training the Heart and Mind toward Expansive Awareness" explicitly chooses "the modality of personal narration" as she shares her own journey with the hope that it will spark curiosity in those who read it. She also raises provocative questions about the challenges of confronting Chasidic texts that speak about valuing mind, spirit, and contemplation over embodied

into an important conversation that will enrich our lives and the lives of those we touch as teachers and rabbis.

RABBI LAURA GELLER (NY76), rabbi emerita of Temple Emanuel of Beverly Hills, was the third woman in the Reform Movement to become a rabbi. Named one of *Newsweek's* 50 Most Influential Rabbis in America, and by PBS's *Next Avenue* as a 2017 Influencer in Aging, she was a cofounder of ChaiVillageLA and is the chair of the Synagogue Village Network. She served on the Corporation of Brown University and on the boards of the Jewish Women's Archive, Encore.org, and B3:the Jewish Boomer Platform. Her book, co-authored with her husband, Richard Siegel (*z"l*), *Getting Good at Getting Older*, was named a National Jewish Book Award Finalist in the category of Contemporary Jewish Life and Practice.

When Rabbis Bless Congress: The Great American Story of Jewish Prayers on Capitol Hill
by Howard Mortman
(Boston: Cherry Orchard Books, 2020), 331 pp.

The author of this unique publication enriching American Jewish history, Howard Mortman, is C-SPAN's communications director covering the US Congress and a graduate of the University of Maryland. His family belongs to Temple Rodef Shalom in Falls Church, Virginia. In his relevant Introduction, Mortman concludes in a tongue in cheek style, "So, want to hear rabbis cite Moses and Scripture and Torah and Talmud and Mishnah to legislators and the public? Don't turn to Jerusalem—the Knesset does not open with prayer (although, arguably, who in the Knesset isn't a rabbi?). Instead tune into Washington, where Israel's chief rabbis can and have served as guest chaplains in Congress, just like hundreds of others" (p. 12).

While both the House and the Senate of the US Congress have full-time clergy chaplains, there is a long-standing tradition of guest chaplains for a day, which amounts to offering a brief prayer at the opening session of each chamber. Instructions are provided by both chaplains' offices for the invocation's length and content and is submitted ahead of time. C-Span provides live coverage, and the prayer is printed in the *Congressional Record*—which began operating in 1873—on the day of delivery. The guest chaplain is ordinarily recommended by the clergyperson's representative and senator, and it is truly a memorable experience to be invited for such an honor. A certificate and photo op are included.

I have had the privilege to offer the invocation, so far, twice in each chamber, vividly recalling the accompanied solemnity with the opportunity to schmooze with present members of the august bodies—though most members are usually not present in person, watching from the screens in their offices the offered prayer followed by the Pledge of Allegiance and the session's agenda, unless there is a vote to take place on the floor. I watched from home on TV the deadly attack on Congress on January 6, 2021, with the defiled desecration of both chambers and the rest of that magnificent and historic citadel of democracy known the world over. To witness it, though from a distance, was painfully shocking and beyond unfathomable with alarming ramifications for American democracy and the Jewish community.

As the book's title reflects, there is much expressed pride in Jewish clergy representing a minority participating as co-equal with other religious figures in what some regard as violation of constitutional church and state separation, though upheld by the Supreme Court in 1983. The book's impressive treasure trove collection of a myriad of fascinating and intriguing items with sprinkled humor is grouped into two parts, including nine sections. Part One: Who They Are is made up of Section I: Setting the Scene: A Congress at Pray; Section II: Who Are These Rabbis? and Section III: Media Portrayal. Part Two: What They Say includes Section IV: Religious Awareness; Section V: Policy and Politics; Section VI: War, Evil, Terror; Section VII: Congress Institutions; Section VIII: America the Exceptional! and Section IX: Diversity: Including the Christians.

Given the close proximity of Washington Hebrew Congregation, the oldest synagogue in the capital since 1852 and chartered in 1856 by a Congressional act, it holds the record of guest chaplains. Its Rabbi Solomon Landsberg was invited to be the first rabbi to offer a prayer in Congress. Since his English was not yet as fluent as his native German, the honor went to the eloquent Sweden-born Rev. Dr. Morris Jacob Raphael of New York's Congregation B'nai Jeshurun, who delivered in the House on February 1, 1860. Both his message and traditional garb were generally well received but reportedly along with some discriminatory comments. Professor Jonathan Sarna of Brandeis University refers to an unofficial Episcopal publication claiming, "no less than the official rejection of Christianity by the Legislature of the country" (p. 17). Historian Rabbi Dr. Bertram Korn is quoted, "In more than a theoretical