

life, it will rescue us from all troubles). The physical pain of heart-ache which I experienced during my drive to school, gradually began to vanish as I faced a classroom of children. Involvement with life issues helped ease the pain of death. It was interesting too, again confirming Levinson's statement of "the discomfort that so many people feel in paying a *shiva* call," that a few of my colleagues couldn't face me, didn't know what to say. It was I, with a sense of determination that life must go on, and also wanting to face the reality of what had happened, who had to break the ice and call them over to speak to me in the faculty room.

The Other Life that Lives in Ours

Another aspect of coping is remembering. Not for a moment did we ever avoid mention of Joel's name. When we speak of experiences with young children, we never hesitate to tell of Joel's *chochmas* as a child. When the subject under discussion may turn to adolescent children, or young adults making their way, we include Joel, just as we do his sister, in our frame of reference.

Yes, of course, we have memorialized Joel with the usual plaques in our synagogue, both here and in Israel, and Prayer Books and *chumashim* given in his memory, but our true monuments to his memory lie elsewhere. They lie in reaffirming and enjoying life to the fullest, much as he did. And by talking about him in a very natural way, thus keeping our memory of him alive. Our formal means of doing this is to read, each *Seder* night the following *midrash on a midrash*:

"It was *Seder* night. We had just completed reading the *Midrash* of the Four Children, when Joel Abba, the son of Shnair Zalman and Ruth, said: 'The four kinds of children do not necessarily mean four different people. They can readily refer to one person at different stages of his/her life. The *She'ayno yoday'a lishol*, the child who does not yet know how to ask, is the infant, as yet unable to articulate. The *tam*, the simple child, refers to the young, innocent school child who asks simple questions. The *Rasha*, the wicked child, could be the rebellious teenager, only too eager to remove himself from the established group. The *chacham*, the wise child, alludes to the young adult who has become a mature personality.' "

This was Joel's last *Seder* (in 1974). He was taken from us the following December, just as he was taking sure and certain strides on the road to becoming a *chachem*.

He left us a heritage of many warm and wonderful memories, among which is his *midrash* on a *midrash*. We have incorporated it into our *Haggadah* to read each year on *Seder* night. □

Finding god in an israel that isn't zion

Arthur Green

I know it is impolite to argue with the dead. I had great respect for Arthur Cohen in his lifetime and regret having to take issue with the article published posthumously in *Sh'ma* (17/324). Nevertheless, I find myself so disturbed by this little essay on Zionism and theology that I cannot behave nicely and keep silent.

Jewish theology is reflection in the religious mode on the shared life experience of the Jewish people. This experience includes the liturgical life of the community, the shared observance of the mitzvot, the study of sources, so uniquely important in our tradition, and the *historical reality through which the Jewish people together has lived*. All of these are vital components in the life of Jewry and none of them can be set aside by the theologian. One who sets aside the liturgical or textual elements in the Jewish experience will produce a theology that is shallow or trendy. Cohen, nothing if not profound in all his writings, shows us that he remained to the end a faithful Rosenzweigian or "Supernatural Jew." In doing so he chooses to ignore history, creating a theology that is seriously out of touch with the most important life experience of the Jewish people.

"Go out and look at the people!" is advice given more than occasionally to the Talmudic sage who seeks to legislate from within the cloistered academy. The same, even more so, needs to be said to theologians. Any observer of the Jewish people can see that we as a body have been transformed by the experience of the return to Zion and the creation of the state no less than we have by the holocaust. The new age of Jewish history before which we stand is not only that ushered in by the tremendum of the holocaust, but is also that characterized by the renewal of Israel: nation-state, cultural center, political power. Jews are excited, even inspired to greater commitment to the life of the Jewish people, more by the historical event of the return to Zion and the chance to participate in it, however vicariously, than they are by texts, prayers, or commandments. Rabbis and theologians may like this or not, but it is the Jewish reality of our times.

The Divine Sparks are Glowing Here

How are we religious types to look upon this phenomenon? I fear that Cohen submits to the tempta-

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לא עליך המלאכה לגמור.
ולא אתה בן־חורין להבטל ממנה.

*It is not incumbent on you to complete the work,
but neither are you free to abstain from it.*

Perel Apt

on to treat it with disdain. It is too easy to put Zionism aside as a sort of political avodah zarah, strange worship/idolatry, a distortion of the traditional religious values and eschatological dreams of Jewry. The building of a free Jewish society in Eretz Israel has been the great collective undertaking of the Jewish people in the twentieth century. As such, it deserves to be the object, indeed one of the central objects of theological reflection. A Jewish theology that stands aloof from Zionism denies the Jewish people the right to set its own agenda and to reorder its priorities.

Where does such a view lead us? Surely it need not embrace the shallow triumphalism of the post '67 chief rabbinate or the dangerous false messianism of Gush Emunim. For those of us who are theologically unorthodox it simply means this: *the return of the Jewish people to its land in our century is one of those events in which we must seek out elements of religious meaning.* We do not believe that God gave us the land or the victory over the Arabs any more than we believe that God is responsible for the holocaust—or the Exodus, for that matter. The Exodus was a transforming event in the history of Israel, one preserved in mythic guise and remaining central to the religious lives of all later generations of Jews. It is an event in which Jews seek meaning, in which even we unorthodox find traces of divinity. Can we say less of the return to Zionism in our own time?

Perhaps it is hard for us, sitting on the sidelines in America, to find divine presence in the military victories of Israel. I do not condemn us for this. But it is crystal clear to me that there is divine joy as the streets of Jerusalem are filled again with children laughing and singing in the tongue of Israel's ancient prophets. Jews returning to the land and making the desert bloom—thereby learning techniques that will help produce crops in drought-stricken regions of the world—the shekhinah rests on such Jews, and we must not be too blind to see

it, even if they cannot. The very return of Jewry to contact with land and soil, the recovery of bird names and flower names in the language of this people that for so many centuries were ghetto dwellers—how can the religiously attuned Jew not hear in this something of celestial music?

Discerning the Holy Means Serving It

An acceptance of the religious meaningfulness of the return to Zion is also crucial for another reason: it provides a stance from which to engage in Jewish criticism of the state and its actions. If the State of Israel is religiously neutral, the arms merchants who work more or less in concert with its Department of Defense are simply Jews engaged in a dirty business as a way of making a living. They are hardly the first and surely not the last. But if the existence of this experiment in the renewal of Jewish statehood does have something sacred and spiritually precious about it, as I believe it does, the arms merchants are betrayers of our dream. It is only we who believe, in whatever non-literal and somewhat inarticulate fashion, that the establishment and existence of Israel is somehow a *mitzvah*, who can cry out against the arms industry and say that it is turning Israel into a *mitzvah ha-ba'ah ba-'averah*, a *mitzvah* resting upon a transgression, eating away at the very moral core of our divine/human attempt at redemption.

Cohen, who was personally far from Orthodoxy, is led into the dilemma of having to reject a religious reading of Zionism by the retention of a surprising theological orthodoxy. God either is or is not the author of history, according to this view, one that hardly goes beyond the view of the deity formulated in Judea some 2500 years ago. If God created the state, he also created the holocaust. I, too, would "have none of it" if I thought those were the only alternatives. But the theological legacy to Judaism does not limit us to those options. Both holocaust and return to Zion are trans-

forming events in Jewish history. As such, we are called upon to seek in them the face of God. That face, to be sure, remains mysterious; it is not related to the event in a positive historical sense. The events "reveal one handbreadth but conceal two." Yet they become moments of religious encounter for us, however terrifying aspects of that encounter might be. Arthur Cohen knew, like few others, how deeply we have to face God in confronting the holocaust. Would that he were still here so that I could challenge him to see the divine countenance in the renewal of Zion as well! □

...but others say about zionism...

The Messianism of Reines' Zionism

I differ with Eric Yoffie's view of Rabbi Yitzhak Reines (*Sh'ma*, 17/324). One must see him in historical context. As an Orthodox rabbi and talmudic scholar writing in the 1890's, he was consistently being attacked by the ultra Orthodox. Reines was even forced to close a *yeshivah* he had founded because its curriculum included secular studies. Moreover, anti-Zionist influences (Agudah, Breuer) were already being felt in the East. To survive within the Orthodox community, Reines had to publicly separate Zionism from messianism. Given the *weltanschauung* of the Lithuanian Orthodox rabbinate, however, it is hard for me to believe that Reines did not rationalize Zionism as part of the redemptive process.

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THE SHAPES AND FORMS OF THE ALEPH BETH. *Eli Teitelbaum.* Vaad Mishmereth Stam. \$1.75.

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There's many an interesting tale in this autobiography and readers who only know of some of these legendary figures and events will surely enjoy these eye-witness accounts. But Ira is so multifaceted a person and was involved in so many intriguing American Jewish developments, he has only provided us the first word on his richly lived life.

JEWISH BOOK ANNUAL, 1986-7. *Jacob Kabakoff, ed.* JWB Jewish Book Council. \$25.

As varied and as numerous as the fare on cable television and much more delightful, not to mention Jewish, are the numerous ten (give or take a few) page essays on everything from a Judeo-Spanish novelist to Sholem Aleykhem's early pieces to Biblical poetry to Yiddish typefaces to Wouk, Lazarus, Schweid and Shneour, etc. Enjoy!