Faces and Hands

By William Meyers

Mindla Diament was a beautiful woman. We know that from the portrait her older sister Julia Pirotte took of her in Marseille in 1942. In Julia's picture Mindla's face emerges from darkness, classically Semitic, with large eyes, a full mouth, slender neck, and imposing spiritual depth. The two women, born in the first decade of the 20th century in a small town in Poland, had both served prison sentences in their homeland for their communist activities, and had washed up in Paris at the start of WWII. They fled southward to escape the Nazis, and both became active members of the French Resistance. In 1944, Mindla was captured by the Gestapo with documents sewn into the lining of her coat. As she and her friend Marie Dirivaux were being led to the guillotine they called to the prisoners in the death cells, "Courage! Courage!"

Julia Pirotte was a brilliant photojournalist whose work is little known; the circumstances of her career were such that not much of her work was preserved. A photographic archive in Belgium has the bulk of what remains, and the Emmanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw has 400 prints donated to them by the photographer. This spring the Institute mounted Julia Pirotte: Faces and Hands, an exhibition drawn from its holdings, and published a handsome catalogue with the same name. The portrait of Mindla Diament is on the cover.

Julia Diamant married Jean Pirotte, a Belgian labor activist, in the 1930s, and studied journalism and photography in Brussels. Her husband was mobilized in 1940 and disappeared: she never saw him again. Julia Pirotte left Belgium for Paris with just her enlarger and the Leica given to her by her friend Suzanne Spaak. The Leica she used throughout most of her career; Spaak was subsequently captured and executed by the Germans. In Marseilles, Pirotte worked for a while as a beach photographer, an experience that helped her develop her skills as a portraitist, especially her feeling for gesture, and in 1942 she became a photojournalist for Dimanche Illustré, a weekly. In the same kitchen where she printed her pictures, Resistance partisans forged IDs, work papers, and other false documents.

Pirotte's job entitled her to a press ID card that helped her move about, an advantage for both her photography and her Resistance activities. She photographed the citizens of Marseille, the young and the old, in their conspicuous wretchedness. The young seem preternaturally grown: in one picture two street urchins look at her; the boy with a cigarette in his mouth smirks, the other frowns. There is enormous empathy in these pictures, but no sentimentality. She photographed the citizens of Marseilles, the boy with a cigarette in his mouth smirks, the other frowns.

Her portraits of participants in the World Congress of Intellectuals for Peace, held in Wroclaw (Breslau) in 1948, are fascinating: the poet Paul Éluard, the scientist Irène Joliot-Curie, and the philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre are among them. She took Édith Piaf's haunting fragility, and was convinced her to be natural. The portrait captures Piaf's haunting fragility, and was one of her favorite pictures of herself. Like Henri Cartier-Bresson, Pirotte could take revealing portraits of people regardless of their status.

At 3:00 p.m. on August 21, 1944, the Marseilles Uprising began, and Pirotte participated as a partisan and as a photographer. Her pictures of armed civilians pursuing the German and Vichy soldiers—men in newsboy caps with machine guns, a woman in a helmet wearing an improvised insignia attached to her blouse with a safety pin—are an indispensable record of the city's liberation.

After the war Pirotte returned to Poland. Her younger brother, Marek, a poet, had died in the Soviet gulag in 1943, and both parents were killed in extermination camps. Still an idealistic Communist, she took photographs for propaganda purposes, and in July 1946 was assigned to cover the Kielce pogrom. In that city, the few Jews who survived the war were attacked, beaten and killed by Poles. Pirotte was the only photojournalist in Kielce, and when she returned to Warsaw her three rolls of film "disappeared," she believed on orders from the Communist authorities. The images on display in the exhibition—rows of coffins, bandaged victims in the hospital—are from 16 rough prints she managed to preserve.

Her portraits of participants in the World Congress of Intellectuals for Peace, held in Wroclaw (Breslau) in 1948, are fascinating: the poet Paul Éluard, the scientist Irène Jo-
Ach, ex

and hands. He wears some sort of traditional
land, she photographed a young boy with a
the Ringelblum exhibition. In 1946, in Po-
dy elderly women are among the glories of
camps.

who had spent 21 years in Soviet prison
married Jefim Sokolski, a Polish economist
munism waned further when, in 1958, she
art. Her diminished enthusiasm for Com-
clutching the arm of this chair; delegates

Pablo Picasso. He looks forward with an ex-
lilot-Curie, and many others, but especially

and, in Jerusalem photographed an old woman
lighting her Sabbath candles. The woman is
backlit so the white cloth covering her hair
glows and, although her face is in darkness,
the back of her hands, which are raised to
shield her eyes, are visible; the bones and
rough texture tell us all we need to know.

A petite woman, Julia Pirotte dressed and
groomed herself simply, but elegantly. Her
demeanor was reserved. She was innately
modest, but at the urging of a Belgian friend,
submitted photographs in 1980 to Rencontres
Internationales de la Photographie in
Arles, France. She won first prize in this
prestigious competition, and the recogni-
tion led to articles and several exhibitions,
including one in 1984 at the International
Center of Photography in New York. In
1996 she received the French Order of Arts
and Letters.

Julia Pirotte died in 2000. Teresa Smiechowska, the curator of Julia Pirotte: Faces and Hands, said to me that the pho-
tographer’s biography was the history of the 20th century. Szymon Bojko, an art critic
who worked with her as a photographer in
the 1940s, ends his catalogue essay, “Ach, miała oko! Kochała życie”—“Oh she had an
eye! And she loved life.”

Monday, May 21

Abuse Among the Orthodox: Bad News, Good News

By Yoel Finkelman

First, the bad news: Sexual, physical, and
emotional abuse occurs in Orthodox Jewish
communities.

Next, the worse news: Though there is no
evidence that such abuse occurs more fre-
quently among the Orthodox than in other
populations, two recent front-page New York
Times stories are just the latest piece of evi-
dence that Orthodox communities are often
denial and worse. As publicized on the
muckraking website FailedMessiah.com,
rabbis and communal leaders, instead of sup-
porting victims and punishing abusers, often
seek to save the community from embarrass-
ment and, in doing so, protect the perpetra-
tors. If children complain of being abused,
their parents may silence them. Some com-

munity leaders deny that the problem is sig-
nificant. Educators charged with children’s

safety discourage victims from speaking up
or pressing charges. If victims and families
do complain, their neighbors, claiming a
religious prohibition on giving Jews up to
secular authorities, harass them to prevent
their going to the police. Indeed, the official
policy of the Haredi organization Agudath
Israel of America is that school teachers or
administrators who suspect abuse must ask
a rabbi before going to secular authorities,
despite New York State laws that prohibit
them from doing so.

In the Modern Orthodox community,
things are presumably better. But a Mod-
ern Orthodox rosh yeshiva is reported to

subject his students to humiliating verbal
abuse routinely and to insist that that psy-
chologists share confidential information
with him. He continues to attract hundreds
of students, without any apparent backlash.

But there is also good news: Even as deni-
al and stonewalling continue, the Orthodox
conversation about abuse is, albeit slowly
and gradually, changing; people’s behavior is changing as well. Mental health pro-
fessionals informed me that Orthodox parents, who in the
past would have tried to deny abuse or keep it hush-hush,
are now defending their vic-

mized children more active-
ly. True, some school prin-
cipals and community leaders
continue to put pressure on
parents to keep silent; but
many Orthodox communities
have sprouted activists, like Yakov Horowitz
of Monsey, New York and Phil Jacobs of Bal-
timore, who serve as resources and “go-to”
people in cases of abuse. Organizations like JSafe provide additional resources for com-
munities and individuals concerned about
abuse. The Bais Yaakov girls’ high school in
Baltimore has even published a child safety
protocol for both school staff and parents.

But positive change cannot occur without
education; and three recent books that at-
tempt to tackle the horrors of sexual, emo-
tional, and physical abuse among Orthodox
Jews suggest that that education is becoming
more available, if not exactly commonplace.
One of these books addresses laypeople; one
speaks to mental health professionals and
community leaders; and one, most intrigu-
gingly, talks directly to kids.

In the first book, Abuse in the Jewish Com-

munity (Urim), Michael J. Salamon, a psy-
chologist with vast experience in treating
Orthodox Jewish abuse victims, has written
a readable guide for laypeople. Salamon of-
fers definitions of abuse and describes signs
that should indicate to parents, teachers,
and school officials that abuse might be occurring. He pro-
vides basic information about available methods of treat-
ment and discusses the unique cultural conditions in the Or-
thodox community that make prevention and treatment so
difficult. Critically, Abuse in the Jewish Community
explains without apology that the ideology of da’at Torah,
which accords great rabbis sole authority over communal
decisions, can make the problem of abuse worse: Laypeople can consult rabbis for ad-
vise if they suspect abuse, but the rabbis are unqualified to offer such advice.

Psychologist and activist David Mandel
has co-edited, together with Yeshiva Uni-
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clinical treatments for perpetrators. The book makes one especially startling but perhaps compelling argument: It contends that in circumstances in which a suspected abuser cannot be convicted and imprisoned, the Orthodox community should not expel the suspect. If it does, he will only continue his predatory behavior elsewhere. Instead, the community should keep him within its confines and maintain close watch on him, ensuring that he never has any contact with children or other potential victims.

But the most surprising of these recent books, and perhaps the most important in the long term, is addressed neither to parents nor to educators and community leaders but to kids themselves. The Haredi publishing house ArtScroll-Mesorah has teamed up with Agudath Israel to produce a new children’s book called *Let’s Stay Safe*. Each page presents an attractive, colorful illustration and short rhyming poem—instructing Orthodox children to wear a bicycle helmet or not to run into the street after a stray ball or talk to strangers. It’s the usual ABC’s of child safety.

Then, however, come two surprising pages. “Even someone we know/ And like very much,” they say, “Shouldn’t touch us in ways/ We don’t want them to touch./ And if I’m not sure/ If the touch was right or wrong/ I’d ask my Daddy or Mommy/ And not wait too long!” The illustration shows a child sharing with his parents his concern about an unpleasant interaction behind a bush at summer camp; the concerned parents are shown listening to and supporting the child.

The magic of this book is the way it broaches the topic of sexual abuse without making a big deal about it, integrating it seamlessly into discussions of more prosaic questions like crossing the street safely. Without making a splash, debating who is to blame, attacking this school or defending that activist, ArtScroll quietly acknowledges that friends, teachers, relatives, or camp counselors may be predators and suggests that the solution to the problem is straightforward, honest information.

The change is coming slowly, but there is no doubt that it is in progress.

**Tuesday, May 22**

**Sending *Mein Kampf* Back to School**

*By Alex Joffe*

Important literature can’t be kept under wraps forever. A case in point is *Mein Kampf*. The German state of Bavaria, which holds the German copyright, has blocked the book’s publication within Hitler’s homeland; as recently as 2010, the state went to court to prevent an unauthorized academic edition. But in 2015, 70 years after the author’s death, Bavaria’s copyright will expire. So, the state has announced plans to fund two new editions, the first in German since 1945, including critical commentary. The aim, say Bavarian authorities, is to “demythify” *Mein Kampf* and make other editions “commercially unattractive.”

The recent announcement was welcomed by, among others, representatives of Germany’s Jews, who would prefer to see *Mein Kampf* remain under careful state control.

Like most classics, *Mein Kampf* is often cited but rarely read, especially by those who pass judgment on it; but the book deserves careful study. It was published in two volumes in 1925 and 1926, after Hitler emerged from the Bavarian prison in which he wrote it after his failed 1923 Beer Hall Putsch. The work presents his life story, education, philosophy, and plans. Its structure is impossibly clever, beginning with a very modest snapshot of Hitler’s family and early life. Through this device Hitler poses as the German Everyman.

The book then maps Hitler’s struggles—as a child, artist, soldier, and revolutionary—onto the struggles of the German nation, whose corrupt leaders have failed its pure, if naïve, people. Hitler’s life becomes Germany’s life. “The Goddess of Fate,” Hitler addresses Germany, “clutched me in her hands and often threatened to smash me; but the will grew stronger as the obstacles increased, and finally the will triumphed.”

The purely literary merits of such declarations are few, but the emotional appeal to the German masses of 1925—or, Bavaria fears, 2012—is apparent.

What is needed, the book explains, is to uplift and “nationalize the people.” But as a struggling artist in Vienna, Hitler came to see the obstacles: His “eyes were opened to two perils, the names of which I scarcely knew hitherto and had no notion whatsoever of their terrible significance for the existence of the German people”: Marxism and Judaism. Even more fundamentally, social democracy, finance, capitalism and Communism, the press—all these corruptions stemmed from “the life which the Jew lives as a parasite thriving on the substance of other nations and States.” The book, initially taut, then becomes baggier, suitable mostly for dipping in and out rather than reading through; but it remains saturated with a pure anti-Semitism that even the most episodic reader could not miss.

One of the book’s virtues, so to speak, is honesty. “The art of leadership,” it explains, “as displayed by really great popular leaders in all ages, consists in consolidating the attention of the people against a single adversary and taking care that nothing will split up that attention into sections.” Hitler makes clear from the beginning that single adversary will be. No one who had persevered through the first 100 pages should have had any doubt about his beliefs or intentions; and no one reading it after Hitler’s appointment as Chancellor of Germany on January 30, 1933 should have doubted that the book’s racialized, anti-Semitic, anti-democratic program would become state policy.

In his so-called “Second Book,” written in 1928 but not published in his lifetime, Hitler laid out concisely his vision for a national socialist foreign policy, based not on industry and trade but on the expansionist pursuit of Lebensraum. The Second Book is a policy statement, not a personal one, and perhaps for that reason was unavailable until 1961 (thanks to the discovery of a typescript among materials seized by the U.S. government). Yet whereas credulous readers of *Mein Kampf* insisted until 1939 that that book was not to be taken seriously, the Second Book leaves no doubt of Hitler’s aims.

Does *Mein Kampf* remain too dangerous for uncontrolled publication? The question is
in one sense academic: Copies can be downloaded from the Arctic to the Kalahari, and the book is a bestseller in the Muslim world. In fact, the problem may be that the book is not read enough—or, at least, not read enough in the right places. Its current Amazon ranking is a relatively high 16,946, which suggests that it is indeed being read. But Mein Kampf is largely invisible in public discussions of fascism, history or anything else. It is once again not being taken seriously.

Why isn't Mein Kampf taught prominently in American schools? Several explanations occur. The first is the fear that the book's overt racism would be offensive—or, paradoxically, that it would radicalize students. True, today's students are otherwise saturated in school with anti-racist messages; but when Tom Sawyer is bowdlerized to shelter children from a single word (and teachers and administrators from parental outrage), Mein Kampf is unlikely to make many middle school or high school reading lists.

But perhaps there is a more pernicious reason. If we admit that Mein Kampf is clearly murderous literature and that it must be taught so that we can condemn it, what other books are we obliged to teach in the same way? What about Communist, socialist, or Islamist literature—like Mao's Little Red Book, which inspired even more killing than Mein Kampf, or Sayyid Qutb's Milestones? Educators may not wish to start down this slippery slope—which is not just a pity but a disgrace, because it contributes to a worldview that does not take words at their face value.

Ignoring the details of Hitler's message—or Stalin's or Mao's—waters down the critically important specificity of historical experiences into generalized and empty laments for “all victims of genocide.” It furthers, for example, the dejudазiation of the Holocaust. Reminders of precisely how the Holocaust was different, in intent and execution, are most unwanted. Reminders of how the current Chinese communist regime is heir to Mao's slaughter of tens of millions are equally unwelcome. By celebrating all victims, we celebrate none and forget all.

Putting Mein Kampf back in the schools raises a final, even more unwanted issue: the question of evil, a question that schools, including Jewish ones, may be unequipped to address. They ask students to seek historical explanations rooted in politics, culture, economics, or the irrational. But if students were to look for evil in Mein Kampf, they would actually find it; and, in recognizing it, they might be persuaded to look for it elsewhere.

That, perhaps, is the most compelling reason why the book should be taught.

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F)rum Runners

By Lawrence J. Epstein

Prohibition is perennially making a comeback, at least in the media; and this is one of those revival times. It began with the HBO TV series Boardwalk Empire, now in its second season, set in Prohibition-era Atlantic City and priding itself on its historical accuracy. The show is filled with gangsters, including prominent Jewish gangsters. This fall Ken Burns' three-part PBS documentary Prohibition went beyond the subject's curiosity and entertainment value to treat Prohibition as part of America's struggles over self-definition. Banning alcohol, Burns shows, was not simply a battle over the "liquor question"; it was no less than an effort by rural white Anglo-Saxon Protestants to reclaim the country's culture from the hard-drinking moral demons—that is, the immigrants—who had managed to pass through the gates.

Jews, of course, were among those immigrants; they were also among the targets of prohibition advocates. In Jews and Booze: Becoming American in the Age of Prohibition (NYU), Marni Davis describes the Jewish role in the alcohol trade and the Jewish response to the attempts to stop it. The title is cute; the subtitle better reflects the book's story, that of an immigrant community struggling to adapt and become part of the American community at just the time when Americans were struggling with the place of alcohol in that community.

The Jewish relationship to alcohol began with the Babylonian exile. But the story picked up pace in the 19th century, because producing and selling alcohol were among the few occupations in which Jews were legally allowed to engage in the Russian Pale of Settlement. In 19th-century Belorussia, for example, Jews owned somewhere between a third and two-thirds of all the distilleries. A census taken in 1890 reflected the startling fact that Jews ran 190,000 taverns.

Jewish immigrants carried this expertise across the Atlantic to America, where Jewish participation in the beer, wine, and liquor trade brought Jews commercial success and increasing entry into the larger society. Many Jews saw no conflict between this alcoholic commerce and their own community's commitment to temperate drinking habits. As Davis quotes one 19th-century American rabbi, “The Jew drinks but . . . knows when to stop.”

Jews arrived in an America whose history of anti-immigrant sentiment was almost as long as that of the republic itself. The anti-alcohol campaign was not the only concrete expression of this sentiment; popular entertainment was another target. But alcohol became one of the principal battlegrounds: Prohibitionists found in alcohol consumption the seeds of national destruction through moral dissolution. In the early 20th century they increased their efforts to enact an anti-alcohol amendment to the Constitution.

As the prohibitionist efforts gathered steam, the economic connection to alcohol put Jews at risk of being socially marginalized or even excluded from Christian America. The upward mobility fueled by Jewish commerce in alcoholic beverages became a potential liability. Jews went from being viewed as skilled, hard-working entrepreneurs to being seen as bootleggers.

There was also considerable debate within the Jewish community about the anti-alcohol argument itself. Many Jews agreed that excessive alcohol consumption could have profoundly detrimental effects on the individual, family, and nation. They didn't pretend to be unaware that alcohol consumption had rapidly increased in post-Civil War America and was connected to poverty and crime.

On balance, though, the great majority
of American Jews opposed the prohibitionists. True, their opposition had elements of economic and social self-interest: Alcohol had provided their income and facilitated their acceptance as Americans. But Jews also opposed prohibitionism because they saw in it ethnic intolerance and a distasteful moral arrogance. And they feared that those Protestants who pushed the prohibition on liquor, having drunk victory, would next press against Jews themselves. This fear was not misplaced. As legal efforts to prohibit alcohol grew, there was indeed an accompanying growth in suspicion of Jews for their involvement in the alcohol industry.

In 1919 the prohibitionists won. The 18th Amendment to the Constitution made commerce in alcohol illegal, and the 1920 Volstead Act implemented the ban. Jews were faced with a loss of business and the potential collapse of their standing as good citizens. Some Jews actively contributed to the collapse: Jews were in fact involved in selling illegal alcohol. In part, however, this involvement came about because of the law itself. The Volstead Act allowed Jewish families to make and possess 10 gallons of kosher wine per year for religious purposes, but no enforcement structure was put in place. The year 1924 saw the distribution of 2,944,764 gallons of "kosher wine." The periodical American Hebrew expressed amazement at how fast Judaism was growing.

The Jews involved in producing illegal alcohol also became prominent among the gangsters distributing it. Max "Boo Boo" Hoff in Philadelphia, Longy Zwillman in Newark, Solly Weisman in Kansas City, and Moe Dalitz in Cleveland were part of the roster that included the more familiar Arnold Rothstein, Meyer Lansky, and Bugsy Siegel. Disturbingly to Davis, these men became—and, to some, may remain—heroic for their fight against the army of prohibitionist crudders, their "protest against power."

But the Jewish gangsters, in notable contrast to other ethnic groups, did not pass the family business on to their children. There were also Jews on the other side of the fight—like Izzy Epstein, a Jewish Prohibition agent on the Lower East Side who arrested many rabbis for distributing brandy, champagne, and much else that was supposedly designated for religious purposes. The rabbis argued that because they were Jewish, they were distributing their wares legally. It did not help the rabbis’ case when their names were Maguire or Houlihan.

Many contemporary Jews are most comfortable with the picture of Jews as model citizens, consistent exemplars of sobriety and other American virtues. In fact, the response of Jews to Prohibition was considerably more mixed. It was also vastly more interesting.
cated Sabbath culinary laws. Here, Liberles shows, authorities like Jacob Emden (Altona 1697-1776) and Ezekiel Landau (Prague 1713-1793) displayed a decided inclination towards leniency, reasoning that coffee’s contribution to the enhanced enjoyment of the Sabbath offset the largely technical concern over whether its brewing involved “secondhand cooking” (bishul ahar bishul)—a dilemma that has long since been ameliorated by the introduction of instant coffee.

Illustrating the halakhic community’s awareness of the effects of caffeine and its connection to the midnight vigil, Horowitz cites a 1673 responsum by Moses Zacuto of Italy, who was asked a mundane question about the prohibition against eating or drinking before morning prayers. After distinguishing between beverages such as wine and beer, which were prohibited, and water and medicines, which were permissible, Zacuto placed coffee in the medicinal category because of its stimulant properties: “We may cite as proof the custom throughout the land of Israel and the kingdom of Turkey, where they are accustomed to drink coffee [qawi] after every midnight, for it resembles a medicine that drives away sleep, as is well-known.”

Tikkun hatzot and coffee both spread westward from Safed and Palestine across North Africa and into southern Europe during the 16th and 17th centuries, acquiring considerable popularity among Jews. The question is whether the two developments were interrelated or just coincidental. Horowitz admits that characterizing coffee as the sole or even primary stimulus (pardon the pun) for the institution of the midnight tikkun would be “reductionist.” Nevertheless, he asserts, “The introduction of coffee brought with it, beyond the mere availability of a new stimulant, the emergence of a new perception of the night in which the hours of darkness could be shaped and manipulated by human initiative rather than condemn man to passive repose.”

But drinking coffee became even more than that; it acquired an independent standing as a mark of closure for both business dealings and social affairs, akin to the status enjoyed today by a champagne toast. Liberles, reflecting on this development, speculates, “It is possible that the role of coffee went beyond its caffeine content. I would suggest that by incorporating coffee into the very protocol of the ritual, it was transformed into a sacred version of the secular coffee gathering.” In short, says Liberles, “coffee continually proves itself quite a versatile performer, and in that sense it is ideal to fill multiple functions, from the secular to the more sacredly enhanced.”

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