

# Jewish Ideas Weekly

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FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 16

## The Real Jewish Geography

By Alex Joffe

If demography is destiny, geography is the stage on which destiny is played out. A new series of high resolution maps, produced by geographer Joshua Comenetz of PopulationMapping.com for the Mandell L. Berman Institute North American Jewish Data Bank, provide a view of American Jewish life that is seemingly familiar—but, beneath the surface, spread unevenly across the 50 states. What do these maps tell us about where the American Jewish future lies?

Earlier compilations were more limited. The Census Bureau's American Community Survey, for example, records languages like Yiddish and Hebrew and birthplaces like Israel, but not religion. Previous maps have relied on more general sources, like the *American Jewish Year Book* (American Jewish Committee) and surveys of communities that identify themselves as including Jews. But Comenetz, using sources like the American Community Survey and the North American Jewish Data Bank, along with his own thoughtful inferences, for the first time reconstructs the distribution of Jews across the United States down to the level of 3,200 counties. His picture of the Jewish population in the United States and Puerto Rico is a pointillist one.

At the most general level, the maps are familiar, reflecting well-known migratory history. Most Jews are clustered along the coasts, from Washington D.C. to Boston and from San Diego to San Francisco, with smaller populations around Portland and Seattle. There are clusters around the old industrial heartland: Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago, St. Louis, Minneapolis. There are the more recent migrations, following the sun and new opportunities to Atlanta, Den-

ver, Phoenix, Dallas, Houston and, of course, Florida. In all, there are 22 urban areas each of which has over 40,000 Jews; 13 have over 100,000. But is this really Jewish America?

Historical comparisons are revealing. In 1960 the *American Jewish Year Book* estimated the American Jewish population at 5.37 million. Comenetz's present figure of 6.74 million will no doubt be controversial because it is so high—but the total U.S. population was 179 million in 1960 and grew to 310 million by 2011. At the broadest level, American Jews have very nearly chosen not to reproduce.

Beyond raw numbers, there is literal Jewish geography. In 1960 there were 110,000 Jews in all of Florida; today there are that many in Miami-Dade County alone. But what of the 22,000 Jews who lived in Kansas City, Missouri in 1960? Today in the four counties around Kansas City there are perhaps 5000 Jews. Or the 150 Jews of Ardmore, Oklahoma in 1960, whose Temple Emeth, founded in 1890, was the first synagogue in the state? Today there are only two Jews in the whole county; Temple Emeth was dissolved in 2004, its records transferred to the American Jewish Archive.

Thus, Comenetz's maps and data invite a deeper look, transporting us into private realms—historical contingencies revolving around myriad individual decisions to come, stay, and move on. Lee County in eastern Alabama has some 30 Jews, no doubt connected to Auburn University and Congregation Beth Shalom. But why does Barry County in western Michigan have no Jews, while there are some 1,500 in neighboring Kalamazoo County to the south? Why do Jews, tumbling across landscapes, accumulate in some places like grains of sand while

others are swept nearly clean?

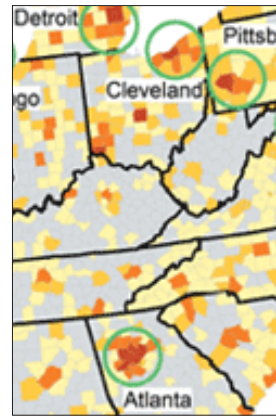
History can perhaps explain why Jews are live all across New York State, from 561,000 in Kings County—Brooklyn—to nine in Allegheny County in the state's southwest. But what kinds of lives, Jewish and otherwise, do the 100 Jews in Livingston County, New York live, or the 50 in Stewart County, Tennessee? What do they bring to their neighbors and communities, as individuals or Jews? Conversely, what does it mean for Comanche County, Texas or Roberts County, South Dakota that there are no Jews at all? Such ques-

tions turn two-dimensional data into lives, communities, and politics that affect all Jews and Americans.

The issue is hardly just anthropological curiosity. For one thing, the data demand that we break free of American Jewish life's stultifying emphasis on coasts and urban centers. American Jewish lives are everywhere, and the sparks of communal life are found in places that only the parochial find inexplicable. But the policy implications are equally significant: how

often are Jews outside the populous centers considered, much less brought into the larger American Jewish conversation? Is it condescending even to ask why these Jews live where they do?

In a still larger sense, individual geography shapes collective destiny. There is, for example, the question of critical mass. Jewish culture cannot be easily sustained or reproduced indefinitely even by the most determined individuals or families. Social reproduction requires schools, synagogues, and kosher food. One can order kosher food from the Internet and perhaps, one day, participate in a minyan the same way. But over time, can individuals or tiny communities sustain Jewish distinc-



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tiveness? American Jewish history suggests not; but the population numbers suggest that this is not always the paramount goal of either urban or rural dwellers.

Then, there is the Jewish relationship with America and Americans at large. The fact that most Jews are essentially restricted to two dozen urban centers means they will remain out of touch with the rest of Americans, who will be equally ignorant of Jews. Perhaps there will be a renewed cycle of Jewish migrations to small town America, like those of 150 and 100 years ago—though this

would run counter to the larger geographic trends that are emptying rural America. The more likely scenario is an ever more intense clustering of Jews in the pressure cookers of an expanding urban and suburban America, where some 80 percent of Americans now live. There, Jewish assimilation and intermarriage proceed apace, along with the ethnic balkanization and interest group politics of which Jews have a shrinking share.

The geographic data may also place the tired question of American Jewish politics in a new light. Norman Podhoretz famously

asked whether liberalism was the new religion of American Jews. The geography, however, suggests that American Jews are liberal because, at least in part, they adopt the predominant values of the communities in which they live. Whether such extreme concentration is politically or spiritually healthy for Jews and for America is an open question.

There are no guaranteed formulas for Jewish survival in America. Such survival will be possible only if Jewish survival becomes a Jewish value that transcends geography.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 19

## America's Religious Left

By Jonathan Neumann

Ever since the rise of the Religious Right in the 1980s, many people have associated American religion with political and cultural conservatism—grounded in tradition, more comfortable with the past than the future. Historically, however, American religion has been at least as liberal as conservative. *American Religious Liberalism* (Indiana University Press), a collection of scholarly essays edited by Leigh Schmidt and Sally Promey, aims to correct the more recent perception.

When it comes to definitions, the term “religious liberalism” is a moving target, not only because it has evolved over time but because liberalism itself welcomes change. Perhaps chief among them is an emphasis on ecumenicism—not just tolerance but an “openness to otherness,” as contributor Matthew S. Hedstrom puts it—that was always “much of what it meant to be a religious liberal.” This once intra-Christian impulse has been extended to Judaism, Eastern religions and, increasingly, Islam.

Such ecumenicism reflects a notion of religion as spirituality. “Feeling,” William James wrote in his 1902 work, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, is the “deeper source of religion,” while “philosophic and theological formulas” are merely “secondary products.” James’ intellectual heir John Dewey, in his book, *A Common Faith*, articulated a similar sentiment, offering his sympathy to those who “feel inarticulately that they have the essence of the religious with them and yet are repelled by the religions and are confused.” The same impulse underlies some religious liberals’ more radical emphasis on

omni-divinity, a kind of mystical pantheism found in a strain of religious liberal writing from Walt Whitman to Arthur Green.

One natural end of this impulse is the aspiration to a universal religion. A century ago, the idea was promoted by, among others, the scholar of Semitic languages Morris Jastrow, son of the Talmudic scholar Marcus Jastrow. The universal religion, the younger Jastrow wrote, would combine the best of the various religions, impelled by the common human feeling of sympathy that produces good will among individuals and nations.

Another identifying hallmark of religious liberalism is what Hedstrom calls the “liberal mission to decenter doctrine and focus the faith more fully on ethics and social justice.” But there is a complicating factor: in embracing social justice, religious liberals find themselves in the company of social justice advocates who are not religious at all—who are, indeed, secularists. Some religious liberals sharply differentiate themselves from their secularist allies. Morris Jastrow, for instance, dismissed theories that reduced religion to an illusion or an opiate administered by a manipulative ruling or priestly class. Today, religious liberals like the Renewal rabbi Michael Lerner are similarly emphatic. But the line between secularism, which often shapes the public climate to which religious liberalism seeks to adapt, and religious liberalism itself, which has in some cases entirely abandoned talk of a personal God, can be quite fine—sometimes, as political theorist William E. Connolly puts it, just a matter of “inflection.”

By and large, *American Religious Liberal-*

*ism* does not grapple with these matters of definition. Instead, it explores its terrain by means of case studies. The book’s first part considers the relationship between religious liberalism and the arts—for example, the Romantic movement’s elevation of poets into a kind of priesthood and a similar phenomenon after the death of Walt Whitman, who became something of a messianic figure to a movement of disciples.

The second part of the book deals with ecumenicism. One chapter tells the story of Rabbi Joshua Loth Liebman’s *Peace of Mind*, which appeared in 1946. After World War II, the perennial American self-help impulse was joined by a flowering of ecumenicism; it was now possible for a rabbi to speak to the Protestant masses in a way that earlier religious liberals—Emerson, Channing, James, Dewey—never could. Liebman’s volume became what was to that point the best-selling book of the 20th century, and Liebman himself

became the “most successful ambassador in print for religious liberalism.”

A particularly interesting chapter, by Yaa-kov Ariel, deals with Reform Judaism and its Christian counterparts. At first the relationship between liberal Protestantism and Reform Judaism was mixed: there was mutual admiration, but Reform Jews took exception to Protestant insistence that Christianity was a more evolved version of Judaism. Yet the influence of liberal Protestantism on Reform Judaism became pronounced; indeed, it seemed “to Jewish antagonists from the Orthodox camp . . . that the essence of Reform Judaism was the Protestantization of Judaism.” Liberal Protestants and Reform



Jews also co-operated on a largely shared social and political agenda.

The chapter also discusses post-Holocaust Catholic and Protestant initiatives aimed at reconciliation with the Jews. The Reform, Reconstructionist, and Renewal movements entered into dialogue with liberal Christians, leaving conservative Jews to do so with their Christian counterparts. One point of Jewish-Christian division among religious liberals remained: support for Israel. In fact, this disagreement widened in the 1970s and 1980s. By the 1990s, however, criticism of Israeli policies increasingly emanated from Reform Jewish pulpits as from

Christian ones. Reform Jewish leaders had to choose between a “protective attitude toward Israel” and a “more critical attitude, based on universal principles;” and they did so. Although the Reform movement still shows vestiges of the former, many Reform Jews today find more in common with their liberal Protestant neighbors, including a critical attitude toward Israel, than with conservative Jews in Brooklyn or Hebron.

The future of the Jewish variant of American liberal religion is unclear. Several decades ago, Reform overtook the Conservative movement as America’s largest Jewish denomination; and Reform has negotiated

the challenges of gender and sexuality far more successfully than its Christian counterparts. But Reform Judaism’s numbers are falling—and are bolstered by interfaith families with spouses and often children who would not be accepted by more conservative Jewish denominations.

Can liberal religion in general reclaim its lost energy in American life? To judge by the Episcopal Church, which has fractured into a thriving conservative bloc and a dissolving liberal remnant, the prognosis is poor. But if religious liberalism returns to its own tradition of innovation, it may yet reawaken.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 20

## An Open Letter to Philip Roth

By D.G. Myers

My dear Mr. Roth,

Say it ain’t so. The news that you have decided to retire from the “awful field” of writing fiction is terribly upsetting. Not because your readers and critics might have paid more respectful attention to *Nemesis*, or might have read it differently, if they’d only known that it was going to be your last book. (Absolutely everyone managed to overlook the concluding sentence of the biographical note on your dust jacket, which mentioned that the last volumes of your work in the Library of America were “scheduled for publication in 2013.” At all events, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, your publisher, has confirmed that it is true.)

No, the sad thing is that the world of books and learning—especially the outlying province that is dedicated to Jewish books and learning—has just gotten smaller and less interesting. “[I]f I write a new book it will probably be a failure,” you were quoted as saying. “Who needs to read one more mediocre book?” That a mediocre book by Philip Roth is a near-great book by anyone else—that your failures are among your best books—isn’t something you are allowed to say, and wouldn’t change your mind even if you believed it. By all accounts, you have been worn out, at the age of 79, by the daily struggle to find the right words for what, in *The Counterlife*, you called “the kind of stories that people turn life into, the kind of lives that people turn stories into.”

Apparently you have stuck a Post-It on your computer: “The struggle with writing

is over.” But your struggle was never just to write. A man may write at any time, as Dr. Johnson told Boswell on their tour of the Hebrides, if he will set himself doggedly to it. Plenty of men and women have written doggedly without much to show for it. Yours was the struggle to accept the *moral obligation to write well*. From the beginning of your career, you understood that a good writer shoulders a double burden. Not only must he, like the research scientist, make sure that what he says corresponds to experience. This is only one sense of getting it right. He must also, and this obligation the scientist need not undertake unless there is an extraneous literary dimension to his research, get it right in graceful uncompromising language.

This double obligation—both to truth and to beauty, for lack of better words—is what distinguishes the good writer. And no writer has been as successful as you—as steadfast, for so long, through so many books—at living by the insistence upon getting it right. The refusal to approximate, the denial of propositional and stylistic vagueness, has been your fury.

In *American Pastoral*, your masterpiece, you despaired of the possibility:

The fact remains that getting people right is not what living is all about anyway. It’s getting them wrong that is living, getting them wrong and wrong and wrong and then, on careful reconsideration, getting them wrong again. That’s how we know we’re

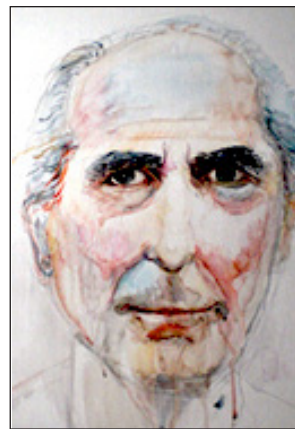
alive: we’re wrong. Maybe the best thing would be to forget being right or wrong about people and just go along for the ride. But if you can do that—well, lucky you.

But also: irresponsible you. The moral reality is that no one can dodge the obligation of trying to get other people right (“this terribly significant business of other people,” as you called it), and only lazy writers, those time-servers in the big business of creative writing workshops, think they can get away with the immorality of writing badly.

For the Jews, your retirement is especially bad news. You may not think so, since your relationship with the Jews has been stormy from the first. *Goodbye, Columbus* was difficult enough for official Jewry to accept, but *Portnoy’s Complaint* was worse. You were denounced from the pulpit, accused of Jewish anti-Semitism, “not just opposed,” as you put it later in *The Facts*, “but hated.” A bottom was struck when

Marie Syrkin said in a March 1973 letter to *Commentary* that your descriptions of Jews were “straight out of the Goebbels-Streicher script.”

As is your wont, you faithfully transmuted the hatred into fiction. In *The Ghost Writer*, the young writer Nathan Zuckerman, whose first story has ruffled his father, receives a letter from Judge Wapter, a Jew in a “position of prestige and authority,” who has been asked to straighten out Mr. Zuckerman’s son. The Judge asks Nathan a series of ten questions:





1. If you had been living in Nazi Germany in the thirties, would you have written such a story?
2. Do you believe Shakespeare's Shylock and Dickens's Fagin have been of no use to anti-Semites?
3. Do you practice Judaism? If so, how? If not, what credentials qualify you for writing about Jewish life for national magazines?
4. Would you claim that the characters in your story represent a fair sample of the kinds of people that make up a typical contemporary community of Jews?
5. In a story with a Jewish background, what reason is there for a description of a physical intimacy between a married Jewish man and an unmarried Christian woman? Why in a story with a Jewish background must there be (a) adultery; (b) incessant fighting within a family over money. . . .

*Et cetera.* These are, in the judge's words, a fair sample of the aggressive challenges you

have received from the Jews over the years. What few of your detractors noticed, however, is how seriously you took the charges. The official Jewish disgust with your work was never, for you, an occasion for satire and derision.

"To me," you wrote in your autobiography, "being a Jew had to do with a real historical predicament into which you were born and not with some identity you chose to don after reading a dozen books." In novel after novel, however, your permitted the harshest critics of this view to give a full venting of their counterviews. Voluble Jews—public Jews, believing Jews, scholarly Jews, Zionist Jews—took over your narrative to defend themselves, to make the best possible case for their commitments, and to excoriate the "American-Jewish novelist who steps back and from a distance appropriates the reality [of Jewish life] for his literary purposes." Sometimes, as in *The Ghost Writer*, the antagonist even had the better of the argument.

You might not agree with this, but for half a century now you have been the most Jew-

ish Jewish novelist in the world. Nearly all your novels have examined the predicament of Jewish identity—from the perspective of a "bad Jew" or a "decadent Jew," true, but a Jew nevertheless who is willing to listen to the best reasons for a different way of Jewish life. Nowhere else can a modern Jew witness the full range of Jewish varieties, in the highest intelligence and the best chosen language. Any Jew who is perplexed by the question of how he or she will be a Jew, which means any Jew who is alive, will find the complete transcript of the debate in the pages of your fiction. That you do not give the final answer, but permit every Jewish answerer to speak eloquently for himself, is the ultimate tribute to your greatness—and why so many of us will miss the novels that you might still have written.

Best of luck.

Very sincerely yours,

An admirer

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 21

## The Tish and the Thanksgiving Table

By Allan Nadler

In a scene in *Avalon*, Barry Levinson's cinematic memoir of growing up in Baltimore with his Yiddish-speaking immigrant parents, Uncle Gabriel Krichinsky, brilliantly played by Lou Jacobi, arrives—late, as usual—for the extended Krichinsky family's annual Thanksgiving dinner and sees that the meal has begun without him. He reacts to this violation of the established order with a hysterical tantrum, uttering what have been called the "best Thanksgiving movie lines, ever": "You cut da toikey widdout me? Vot? You couldn't vait? Your own flesh and blood—you cut da toikey!"

Still incensed, Uncle Gabriel storms out of the house and, from the sidewalk, delivers his final, righteous halakhic ruling: "You gotta vait until every relative is der, before da toikey is cut! I've said enough!" And off he drives, his indignation testifying to the way Thanksgiving, uniquely among non-Jewish festivals, has been adopted, with its food and rituals cherished, by American Jews. While parochial debates still linger

about the propriety of Jews celebrating this secular feast, they are limited to the ultra-Orthodox fringe.

It's different in Canada, where Thanksgiving was declared a national holiday only in 1957. In my native Montreal, few Jews celebrated it; our French Quebecois neighbors saw it as an Anglophone

artifice of recent vintage, hardly appropriate for the proud, *pure laine* descendants of Quebec's revered founding fathers. I fondly recall the utter novelty, when I was a graduate student in Boston, of my very first Thanksgiving dinner—not least because it took place in the Orthodox home of a new American friend who had just completed his rabbinical studies under Rabbi

Joseph B. Soloveitchik. It was that greatest of Modern Orthodox sages who endorsed the celebration of Thanksgiving with a festive meal. In subsequent years, in New York, I shared many a Thanksgiving dinner with Rabbi Soloveitchik's own son, the talmudic scholar Haym Soloveitchik.

For many American Jews, observance of Thanksgiving is more than merely permissible; it has evolved into something quasi-

sacred. There have been numerous discussions of the inherent "Jewishness" of the holiday. Some are serious, including analysis of a Puritan document that cites rabbinic laws mandating expressions of gratitude. Others are silly, like the etymological claim that the modern Hebrew term for turkey, *basar hodu*, is rooted in the Hebrew verb for giving thanks, *l'hodot* (as in the Hallel prayer, *hodu la-shem ki tov*).

Such speculation aside, it is a matter of historical record that when President Washington and the U.S. Congress first proclaimed November 26, 1789 as a national day of thanksgiving, America's Jews followed their religious leaders in embracing, celebrating, and even sanctifying it. America's first native-born Jewish preacher, Hazan Gershom Mendes Seixas of Manhattan's Spanish and Portuguese Congregation Shearith Israel, actually fashioned a special *Shaharit* service for America's first day of thanksgiving, beginning with five special psalms and concluding with *Adon Olam*. The service included Mendes Seixas' passionately patriotic sermon praising God for delivering "our nation" from British rule; the sermon



made such an impression that it was published within weeks of its delivery.

Just shy of a century later, after President Lincoln proclaimed Thanksgiving an annual national holiday in 1863, the most prominent Reform rabbi of the American North, David Einhorn, delivered a powerful Thanksgiving Day sermon in Philadelphia's largest temple, Knesseth Israel, analogizing the enslavement of America's blacks to the historic suffering of the Jews since their enslavement in Egypt. Einhorn began his homily with American patriotism, describing the day as "appointed by the President of the United States . . . to be observed by the loyal portion of the land." But he concluded on a distinctively Jewish note: "Bless Israel, imbue it with a spirit of devotion and thankfulness towards this land, the first that broke the chains its children wore for centuries."

Perhaps the fact that Thanksgiving's central observance is a festive and abundant meal with increasingly ritualized elements—akin to the Passover seder's *shulchan arukh*, a table set according to sacred custom—has also attracted American Jews to the holiday. In 2010 the American Jewish Committee published *America's Table: A Thanksgiving Reader*, an interfaith booklet that clearly resembles, in form if not content, the Passover Haggadah.

But what of those Hasidim who do not partake of the Thanksgiving table?

These Jews have their own table, though very few American Jews have ever heard of, let alone attended, it: the rebbe's Sabbath *tish* (Yiddish for table), the most sacralized feast in the history of Judaism, with bizarre, mystically infused customs and ritually sanctified foods. The *tish*, conducted on Friday evenings and before dusk on Saturday, during the *seudah sh'lishit* or third meal, is among the most central and enduring religious rituals in Hasidic life.

Hasidic lore attributes the origin of the *tish* to Hasidism's putative founder, Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov, the "Besht." According to the hagiographical collection *Shivhei haBesht* (*Praises of the Besht*), the Baal Shem Tov would gather with his small circle of disciples for Sabbath and festival meals. Sources that depict the activities of the Hasidim in the generation following the death of the Besht in 1760 provide more elaborate evidence of such sacred gatherings. An embryonic form of today's Hasidic *tish* certainly took place in the very first organized Hasidic "court"—that of Rabbi Dov Ber of Mezeritch, revered as the "Great

Maggid" (preacher)—just a decade before the first American Thanksgiving. The Great Maggid's court serves to this day as a socio-religious model for most Hasidic communities (Chabad is an exception).

However, what began as a genuinely communal meal, a repast the Hasidim shared fully with their master, over time became elevated (or degenerated, depending on one's perspective) into a highly structured sacrament in which the Rebbe increasingly took the role of priest rather than dinner host. Only he consumed a full meal; after he did so, he ritualistically distributed minute portions of leftovers, *shirayim*, to his followers. Today, the high point of the Hasid's pilgrimage to his Rebbe's court is the opportunity to sit at the Rebbe's table, hear his recitation of the *kiddush*, intently observe his every holiness-infused movement, listen to his teachings and, most important, participate in the sacrament of the Rebbe-sanctified *shirayim*.

The change occurred for complex reasons, mainly the decline of Hasidism's early populist spirit and the growing elitism of its leadership. Most important was a growing consensus that the doctrine of *avodah b'gashmiyut*—serving God by sanctifying material pleasures—was fraught with danger and, thus, required, for its safe exercise, the kind of mystical prowess possessed only by the *tsadikim*, the holy Hasidic leaders. According to common Hasidic belief rooted in earlier kabbalistic doctrine, only the Rebbe has the power to sanctify the food he eats, by engaging in theurgic activity that separates the inherent and essential sparks of holiness in all created materials, food among them, from their corporeal matter. And only after he has sanctified the food can he share it in a diffused manner with his followers by, quite literally, throwing them some crumbs, namely the *shirayim*.

Similarly, although the general idea of elevating food to its divine source through sacred eating was well developed by the time of the 16th-century schools of Cordoveran and Lurianic Kabbalah, Hasidism popularized this kabbalistic concept and gave it concrete expression in the rituals of the *tish*, that communalized a previously esoteric and socially restricted mystical practice. One aspect of this popularization was to apply the earlier theories very concretely to specific items on the rebbe's Sabbath and festival menu. Using a variety of startling hermeneutic devices, Hasidic exegetes assigned particular mystical significations to such distinctly east Europe-

an Jewish foods as kugel, lokshen, gefilte fish, farfel, and kishke.

To this day, each Hasidic sect maintains distinct, if minute, variations, depending on its place of origin in eastern Europe, regarding the items on the ornate, super-sized silver platter placed before the Rebbe, always in a spirit of fearful reverence. Certain delicacies, however, are common to all, most notably kugel and fish. The kugel, the single culinary item most distinctive to all Jews of Eastern Europe, is associated in Hasidic lore with the kabbalistic orb of *yesod*, the source of human procreation. Moreover, according to Hasidic doctrine, the kugel's traditionally round shape (in one etymology the word is derived from the Hebrew *ke'igul*, "as a circle") symbolizes the divine presence pervading the world.

As for the fish, an old kabbalistic tradition deems the fish the holiest of God's creatures. Its perpetually open eyes are said to symbolize God's unceasing providence. Thus, Hasidic literature records many strange customs surrounding the eyeballs of the massive fish presented to the Rebbe at the *tish*. Some rebbes consumed the eyeballs first; others placed them in the pockets of their *kapotehs*, or caftans. It is not the most appetizing image, but it well captures the surreal, mystical atmosphere permeating this uniquely Hasidic religious observance.

Uncle Gabriel ruled, "you gotta wait." And the Hasidim do wait patiently, sometimes for hours, for their rebbes' arrival at the *tish*. But once the proceedings are under way, any semblance of table etiquette is quickly thrown to the winds. I was 16 the first time I attended a Hasidic *tish*, held during a visit to Montreal by the Viznitzer Rebbe of Bnei Brak. The Rebbe ate a few bites of the massive carp presented to him, then pushed the silver platter to his *shames*—attendant—for the distribution of *shirayim*. The Hasidim surged, pushing and shoving their way towards the *shames* for their chance at the carp. In the melee, with the *shames* upended, the platter was overturned, and the carp landed on the shul's far-from-pristine floor. But the hundreds of Hasidim kept grabbing for their morsels of sanctified fish like pigeons fighting for crumbs on a New York sidewalk.

It was not exactly an American Thanksgiving. But, then, the Hasidim were celebrating not only America but the creation of the very cosmos—in the words of the Sabbath *kiddush*, *zekher l'maaseh b'reishit*. No wonder their frenzied determination.

## The Peacemaker

By Seth Lipsky

About Menachem Begin the thing that I remember most was the way he talked. Begin wouldn't say that he was born on the eve of the First World War; he'd say, as he did when a group of us from the *Wall Street Journal* interviewed him in 1981, that he was born "into" the First World War. "He wouldn't say that his family was living in Poland at the time," I wrote in an obituary editorial in the *Forward*. "He would say, as he did, 'I lay on the battlefield between the Czar's army and the Kaiser's army.'" Begin was, the *Forward* noted, but two or three years old at the time.

Begin's fastidiousness about the language of leadership, his temptation to vainglory, and his unalloyed heroism are all captured in Avi Shilon's new biography, *Menachem Begin: A Life*, published by Yale. It is the most detailed narrative yet of the man who became the sixth prime minister of Israel and led the Jewish state onto the road that is causing such consternation among the desiccated Left today. For those of us who came to love Begin, the book's welcome reprise comes just as his political heirs, in a new hour of peril from Iran, are being tested against the example he set.

Shilon, a Ph.D. student at Bar Ilan University and the op-ed editor of *Israel Hayom*, writes at the outset that throughout Begin's life, "he appears to have borne the hallmarks of manic depression—or bipolar disorder, as it is now known." Shilon notes that some experts have argued that he suffered from the condition but announces that he has "resisted such speculation," preferring Begin's deeds to "any psychological analysis." It's a sage strategy for telling the life of a man who so clearly lived for a cause greater than himself.

It is certainly a life that offers more drama than could be cooked up by even the most perfervid psychiatrists. Begin's mother was murdered by the Nazis in a hospital at Brisk. His father, a Zionist, and his brother, Herzl, were also slain by the Nazis. In Begin's account, his father warned his killers that a day of retribution would come upon them, before he was gunned down with other Jews and thrown into a river. In the version told by Begin's sister, their father had snuck out of a holding area in order to give a proper burial to a Jewish elder who'd died a natural

death. When challenged by a Nazi officer, their father announced, "This is what I have to do," and was shot to death.

Begin, in any event, rose quickly through the Betar youth movement. His weapons course was taught by an aide to Avraham Stern. It was, Shilon relates, the only instance in which a firearm was physically touched by the man who would lead a revolt against the British Empire and order some of the most consequential military attacks in history. After Begin met—and fell in behind—the Revisionist prophet Vladimir Jabotinsky, Begin felt, as Shilon puts it, like "Stalin in the power triangle" along with Marx and Lenin, except that Theodor Herzl was Marx and Jabotinsky Lenin. Shilon notes that Begin, who came from a religious home, had a different starting point from that of the liberal and secular Jabotinsky.

When Begin was arrested by the NKVD in 1940—his wife Aliza was standing beside him in their home—he demanded before he was taken away he be permitted to shine his shoes. He argued constantly with his interrogators, no doubt driving them half-way nuts. Eventually Begin was sentenced to seven years in the Soviet camps. He was in Tashkent when learned that his family, save for his sister Rachel, had perished. He made his way to Israel via the Polish force known as Anders' Army and was reunited with Aliza.

We sometimes hear that in pre-state Israel the leadership of the underground simply stepped aside for Begin. Shilon's account is—as others have been—more nuanced and satisfying. For one thing, Begin refused simply to desert the Anders force, declaring, "I am a soldier in the Polish Army; I cannot desert; I have to be legally discharged." He stuck to this position until he gained a discharge.

The story of the years of the revolt against the British is well told here, though the narrative of the 1944 assassination of the British minister Lord Moyne contains no mention of his role in Britain's refusal to allow the sailing to Palestine of the refugee ship *Struma*, which was then sunk by the Russians, killing 768 persons, a catastrophe for which Moyne was held to account. The assassination of UN mediator Count Folke Bernadotte in 1948 is related with but a glimpse

of the mischief the count was concocting. The account of the shelling of the *Altalena*, though, touches most of the bases.

What is so exciting about this period in Begin's life is the way in which his defeat and isolation in the post-revolt years and his display of character during his decades in opposition became the seeds of his ultimate credibility. That years in the wilderness can set the stage for glory may be an old story, running from Moses to Churchill to Reagan, to name but a few who have lived it. But rarely has the victory been sweeter than the one enjoyed by Menachem Begin.

All the more bitter his despair at the end. The peacemaking felt good while he was doing it. Begin seemed to savor every hosanna from the left; he went to Oslo to accept the 1978 Nobel Peace Prize even though President Sadat declined. (My own view is that Begin is the one who really deserved the prize. Even though Sadat would later pay with his life, what he delivered was merely a cold peace ending a war that Egypt should never have precipitated and may soon resume.) The peace was followed by the settling of the liberated



territories, a process in which Shilon portrays Begin as a centrist tilting slightly to the right, ground then held by Ariel Sharon.

This was also the period in which economic reforms were launched. Shilon portrays Begin as an opponent of socialism with a soft spot for social justice (he favored the minimum wage). "I want social justice without socialism," he is quoted as saying. I smiled at the line because once, when Shimon Peres was finance minister, he told me he wanted Israelis to make money like capitalists and spend it like socialists. It was under Begin, though, that the Nobel laureate Milton Friedman was brought in as an adviser. This period, no doubt, saw the formation of the strategy that has led to the atrophy of Labor and, at least for the moment, the dominance of Likud.

The 1981 bombing of the Iraq nuclear reactor is related in a chapter dealing with Begin's larger world view. While editing an announcement of the bombing mission's success, Shilon says, Begin changed a draft to add, at the end, "We shall not allow our enemies to develop weapons of mass destruction against our people." Writes Shilon, "This declaration became known as the



Begin Doctrine, according to which Israel would not allow any Arab nation to acquire nuclear arms.” Was that formulation, one could puzzle, intended to exclude the Persians?

The story of the 1982 Lebanon war is told here in a straightforward way, as is Begin’s precipitous slide and resignation from office after the death of his wife. Aliza died while Begin was in America. When he was told, he locked himself in a bathroom in his

hotel room. When he emerged, he wanted to change his tie. His collapse from public life followed quickly but was not entirely a surprise. A little more than a year earlier, he had received a group of *Wall Street Journal* correspondents. It was an optimistic moment, since it looked at the time as if he would quickly secure his goals in Lebanon. Even then, before all the complications, he talked about how he was hungering to step down from public life.

“Begin on Begin: Soon I Will Retire to Write My Book” is the headline that the *Journal’s* page one editors put on the dispatch. Begin said he wanted to write a book called “The Generation of Holocaust and Redemption.” How sad that he died too soon. It can be said, with no slight to the author of this brimming biography, that in Jewish libraries there will always be the void where Menachem Begin’s memoir might have stood.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 27

## Inheriting Abraham

By Jon D. Levenson

On August 28, Jon D. Levenson, the Albert A. List Professor of Jewish Studies at Harvard University, spoke with the current class of Tikvah fellows about his latest book, the first volume in the Library of Jewish Ideas: *Inheriting Abraham: The Legacy of the Patriarch in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton University Press). The following is an edited transcript of the event.

**QUESTION:** What prompted you to write this book?

**LEVENSON:** For various reasons, probably having to do with where and when I grew up, I’ve always thought of religions and religious communities comparatively, in terms of each one’s connection to others—both the similarities and the differences. In the last 20 or 30 years, I’ve focused on the role played by exegesis of the Hebrew Bible in Jewish and Christian communities in late antiquity and the way in which communal interpretations change the self-understandings of the communities involved.

For a long time, I’ve also had a concern with interfaith dialogue, and a certain dislike of the way it’s mainly done. The challenge is to do justice to both commonality and difference—not simply to put commonality and difference in two separate categories but to treat them as organically connected to each other.

Precisely because Abraham is often described as the common father of the Jews, the Christians, and the Muslims, it seemed to me that he’s a very good test case for comparing similarities and differences and for

defining the basis of the comparison, so that you don’t end up with a case of just apples and oranges.

**QUESTION:** Tell us something about the substance of the book itself.

**LEVENSON:** One central focus is the interplay between what you might call a more universal or cosmopolitan pole and a more communal or particularistic pole. A verse that has had a huge impact on interpretations of Abraham is Genesis 12:3: *ve-nivrekhu vekha kol mishpehot ha’adamah*. Does it mean that all the nations or families of the earth *will be blessed in you*, or that all the families of the earth *will bless themselves by you*? The former suggests that there is something in Abraham that results in a universal blessing. That reading is very, very important in Christian interpretations, and over the centuries it’s also been linked to a critique of Judaism. That is to say: the Jews claim the Abrahamic promise only for themselves, but really this verse and others imply a larger, more inclusive, more cosmopolitan understanding of Abraham.

As against this, there’s the interpretation you find in the medieval commentator Rashi and elsewhere that reads the verse as reflexive: “All the families of the earth will bless themselves by [with reference to] you.” The notion here is that Abraham is a byword of blessing; it’s like saying “May you shoot baskets like Michael Jordan.” And you might be tempted to say that it’s the Jewish, or particularistic, reading: people will want to bless themselves by reference to the good fortune of Abraham, the first Jew.

This seems to suggest a simple and convenient dichotomy between Judaism and Christianity, but the fact is, you can find both interpretations in both traditions. You can certainly find in Judaism, and especially among Jewish thinkers who associate Abraham with the discovery of the true God, the notion that the blessing of Abraham has universal import.

Another focus of *Inheriting Abraham* is the Aqedah, or binding of Isaac. As it happens, the Jewish understanding of this episode in the late Second Temple period had a deep influence on the claims made for Jesus in the early Church, much deeper than most Jews or Christians recognize. It’s also true that a version of the Aqedah makes it into the Qur’an. There, however, the son in question is unnamed. For centuries, Muslim exegetes divided pretty much evenly as to whether it was Isaac or Ishmael. Ishmael won out, but only gradually, which makes this an ideal story to analyze in terms of interconnections between texts and their afterlife in later traditions.

When you get to modernity and someone like the great German philosopher Immanuel Kant, the picture shifts again. Jewish, Christian, and Muslim interpretations all celebrate Abraham for his willingness to sacrifice his son. To Kant, by contrast, the Aqedah is a negative archetype: Abraham should have talked back to God and insisted, “No, I’m not going to kill an innocent person.” The Kantian inversion has had a whole afterlife, too, all the way down to today’s post-Christian West. By now, we seem to have lost touch with the logic of sacrifice underlying the Aqedah—the logic that plays so profound a role in



Jewish and Christian understandings of the religious life and of the relationship between God and human beings.

Then there is the subject of monotheism. Many people refer to Abraham as the first monotheist, the first person to say there is just one God. But I see nothing at all in Genesis to support that. Nor do I see any reason to think that the individuals whom Abraham interacts with are portrayed as any less monotheistic than he, or as if they were worshipers of false gods who ought to be abominated. He is separate from them, but I discern no element of an interreligious polemic. Think of a figure like Elijah, one of the great prophets of Israel, inveighing against false gods; there's nothing like that in the story of Abraham in the Hebrew Bible.

True, there is a suggestive little statement at the very end of the Book of Joshua: "In olden times your fathers, Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, lived across the river"—the Euphrates—"and worshipped other gods. And then I took your father Abraham [out of there]." This seems to be the first hint that Abraham's leaving his Mesopotamian homeland was not simply a response to a promise or a command but also involved a kind of religious revolution, that there was, in other words, something wrong religiously with his father's household.

In Second Temple Judaism, a very rich literature came to be devoted to Abraham's supposed controversies with his townsmen and with his father, who is depicted as an idol-maker. That literature was well-known to rabbinic Judaism and also found its way into the Qur'an; some rabbinic *midrashim* on this theme are very closely echoed in the Qur'an—particularly the one in which little Abram smashes the icons in his father's workshop and attributes the misdeed to the largest one, thereby trapping his dad into admitting that they're not gods at all but simply material entities.

Indeed, Islam is actually called *millat Ibrahim*, the "religion of Abraham," in the Qur'an. Islam, that is to say, is the true religion, restored after the distortions of it in Judaism and Christianity. It's a conception that fits with these stories about Abraham—the idea, that is, that he was the restorer of the primal Adamic religion that was monotheistic before the generations between Adam and Abraham messed things up.

My book also takes up the question of Abraham as forerunner of Judaism and Christianity. Here my key question is, what

did Abraham practice: Torah, or Gospel? And if Torah, was he a law-observant Jew before there was a Torah, or did he somehow practice a form of spirituality that was apart from the Torah and the commandments and yet profoundly pleasing to God?

In Judaism, you have both positions. According to a text that's appended to Mishnah Qiddushin 4:14, "Abraham observed the entire Torah—all of it—before it was given." This is the maximally observant Abraham and it's a very popular position—but, as you might expect, some dispute it. There's also the minimally observant Abraham, an Abraham who observes what all human beings should know without any special revelation, plus ritual circumcision. The argument between maximalists and minimalists continues in the Jewish tradition into the Middle Ages.

In early Christianity, the question takes another turn. Abraham is promised to become *av hamon goyim*, "the father of a multitude of nations." Do the members of those other Abrahamic nations have to observe the Torah the way the Israelite nation does? Do their men have to be circumcised? Abraham is first pronounced righteous by God in Genesis 15, when he is still uncircumcised; only in Genesis 17 do we hear of circumcision. If you think being a full, authentic descendant of Abraham requires you to practice the Torah, to keep kosher, to observe the holidays and everything else, why did Abraham our father and spiritual paragon not have to do that?

The minimalist position was thus very useful in early Christianity, in which a very important stream—the one that would eventually become dominant—argued that Gentiles did not have to observe the Torah in its entirety or even become circumcised. In some ways, this became a major flash-point between Christians and Jews, though the rabbinic tradition, too, agrees that Gentiles (Christian or other) are not obligated by most of the commandments of the Torah, including circumcision.

**QUESTION:** What about the modern idea of Abrahamic religion? What's true in the idea, and what's false?

**LEVENSON:** Certainly Judaism and Christianity share a common text, which is Genesis; and they have a continuing discourse about Abraham. The case of Islam is more complicated, because Islam does not share a common text with the other two: Genesis

*per se* is not scripture in Islam. On the other hand, there's a great deal about Abraham in the Qur'an that you don't find in Genesis or anywhere in Judaism and Christianity, just as there are things in Judaism and Christianity (and in Genesis) that you don't find in the Qur'an. Not only Islam but also the other two traditions have material about Abraham that the others lack.

What links the three together, at least to some degree, is that each engages in exegetical discourse about Abraham, despite the significant differences among them in how the texts are used. The late Michael Signer once said something like this: "Jews and Christians have a common lexical stock but make different meanings with it." The same goes for Islam—with the added difference that it does not share with the others a common textual base.

The big problem with the notion of a common Abrahamic religion is very simple. It is encapsulated in my title: *Inheriting Abraham*. You can talk about monotheism and faith, and that's all fine. But if this is your sole focus, you're leaving out a major dimension of the Abraham story in Genesis (albeit one not echoed to a significant degree in the Qur'an)—namely, which son is Abraham's heir? In Genesis, Ishmael inherits the promise of a great nation; he does not inherit the covenant. Isaac inherits both the promise and the covenant. As far as Genesis is concerned, it's quite clear that by the next generation, Ishmael has left the scene, as will Isaac's elder son Esau in the third patriarchal generation. In other words, particularity, communal particularity, is internal to the Abrahamic narrative; it's not something that later traditions have imposed on it.

The monotheism of Abraham and the Abrahamic traditions is not primarily philosophical, even though it comes to be perceived as such. Martin Jaffe has used the term "elective monotheism" for it. This is a form of monotheism whose "essential marker . . . is not the uniqueness of God alone. Rather, it lies in the desire of the unique God to summon from out of the human mass a unique community established in His name and the desire of that community to serve God in love and obedience by responding to His call."

In Judaism and Christianity, that notion of a unique community is expressed in the doctrine of chosenness, or election. In Islam, chosenness and election are downplayed or eliminated, but there still is a unique community—the *ummah*, the fraternity of Mus-



lims worldwide—as well as a strong differentiation between Muslim and non-Muslim. The way I put it at the end of the book is that one of the salient characteristics of the three Abrahamic religions, one of the most defining aspects of the three Abrahamic religions, is that each of them thinks the other two are not fully Abrahamic.

That is a paradox that I fear most people who talk or write about “Abrahamic religion” have been missing. In embarking upon interfaith dialogue, an enterprise I endorse, it is a point that I would urge all parties to keep in mind. Doing so makes the dialogue harder but also potentially much more fruitful.

**QUESTION:** How does this bear, or does it bear at all, on interreligious discourse with non-Abrahamic faiths?

**LEVENSON:** Let’s put it this way. Anyone who adheres to one of the three Abrahamic religions is necessarily going to be at odds to some degree with members of the other two (while also sharing commonalities with

them). But all three of them, again to some degree, will be at odds with non-Abrahamic religions—and also with modern secularism, especially when the secularism entails some form of materialism. Still, whether any contemporary person or practice qualifies as idolatrous is a very, very complicated question that can’t be answered just by reading the Bible or giving some glib description of the person or practice.

The question points to something else that’s very important. People who promote the idea of Abrahamic religion usually think of themselves as making a bold claim for universal human brotherhood. They miss the fact that most people in the world don’t look to Abraham at all.

And that raises still another point, which is how long the universalistic, humanistic message can supersede the traditional religious message before people begin to ask: “Why, if our goal is simply human unity, do we bother speaking of Abraham in the first place?”

The fact is, none of the three Abrahamic traditions simply affirms the ideal of an un-

differentiated humankind. They all believe there’s some act that differentiates a particular community, that separates it out. If you want to do away with that notion, then you’re back to “I’m okay, you’re okay,” in which case you shouldn’t be citing Abraham as your example. The ideas of chosenness or election in Judaism and Christianity, and of Abraham’s fearless opposition to idolatry in Judaism and Islam, are just too strong for him to serve effectively as the patron of so vapid a model of interreligious conversation.

In the scriptural religions, the fathers of the human race are Adam and Noah. The Mishnah relates that God created humanity out of one man precisely so that nobody could say to anyone else: “My daddy’s greater than your daddy.” That we all belong to the same human race is a major theme in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and obviously an important theme for members of all three religions to keep in mind. But it’s not the whole story, and it’s not the story of the texts associated with Abraham.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 28

## The Twenty-Seventh Man

By Diana Muir Appelbaum

On the night of August 12, 1952, a group of Yiddish writers was executed on Joseph Stalin’s orders for the crime of writing while Jewish. The executions, remembered as the Night of the Murdered Poets, were the tragic culmination of the grand romance between Jewish intellectuals and Marxism. Author Nathan Englander now has a new play, *The Twenty-Seventh Man* (Public Theater, New York), based on a short story he wrote about the murders. He imagines the 27 imprisoned writers in a Russian prison cell, caught between the Marxist promise of a brotherhood of workers, liberating the oppressed to create a bright new world, and the reality of Soviet Communism. In Englander, the murdered writers have found their bard.

In Marxist theory, national identity is a shallow, ephemeral phenomenon. Nation-states, a modern invention created by self-interested capitalists and politicians to manipulate the masses, will evanesce with the coming of the Marxist utopia. In reality, Lenin and others in the Socialist International exploited the Tsarist empire’s national

liberation movements, which were, struggling for self-determination, in order to bring about the revolution.

When the revolution came in 1917, the victorious Bolsheviks announced that each of the peoples oppressed by the Tsars would have a sovereign nation-state; these states would form a union of equals building the Marxist future—a Soviet Union. Each liberated nation would have the right to its own schools, newspapers, and even national theaters in its own language. The catch was that all these cultural institutions would have to be “national in form, socialist in content.” And the structures of self-government were hollow: in reality, all power was held by the Communist Party Central Committee.

Nevertheless, the 1920s saw the flourishing of a remarkable Jewish cultural nation within the Soviet Union. Jewish schools taught Marxist doctrine in Yiddish—but not Hebrew or Jewish texts. There were government-supported Yiddish newspapers, publishing houses, even a Yiddish National Theater—but all the stories they told

were correctly Marxist. To the extent that Jewishness is defined as having a positive relationship with God, Torah, Jewish tradition, or Israel, Yiddish-speaking Soviet Jewish nationalism was intensely anti-Jewish.

The dedicated Jewish Marxists of the Yevseksia, the Jewish section of the Communist Party, carried out an aggressive secularization campaign. Breadcrumbs were added to town water supplies at Passover. Stores were opened and synagogues closed on the Sabbath. These and other anti-religious measures were sometimes enforced by thugs, sometimes by such legal techniques as requisitioning a synagogue for use as a worker’s committee room. There were campaigns of intimidation against parents who might have tried to teach their children Hebrew and Torah.

Yet, until 1928, Jewish prayer and practice were, technically, legal. Some observers—even some secular Yiddishists—looked at the Potemkin village of a flourishing, Yiddish-speaking Soviet Jewish nation and thought it real. Thus, the Yiddish poet Dovid



Hofshteyn returned from Palestine to Russia in 1926, and a number of Marxist intellectuals returned from other countries. The last of the well-known returnees was novelist and poet Dovid Bergelson, who went home to Russia in 1934. He is undoubtedly part of the inspiration for Englander's character Moishe Bretzky, compellingly played by Daniel Oreskes, who has some of the play's sharpest and funniest lines. Bretzky must account to himself for having so loved the Yiddish-speaking Jewish world of Russia that he returned to it even though he knew Communism for the fraud that it had become.

By 1928, Russia had become a totalitarian state controlled by Joseph Stalin, who, though born a Georgian, was dedicated to the imposition of Russian culture on the entire Soviet empire. Englander ratchets up the pressure on his Yiddish writers by putting an important proposition into the mouth of a Stalinist functionary, chillingly played by Byron Jennings as a man who is simply doing his job. Part of that job is believing the anti-Semitic lies he is required to tell. In order for a lie to have power, he ex-

plains, it has to be believed.

The Yiddish writers murdered by Stalin were not dissidents or anti-Communist activists. Some were men like Vasily Korinsky, persuasively played by Chip Zein, who worked to build the Marxist dream, and, at some point, began to lie to himself about Marxist reality. Yet, at the point when it became necessary for good Russian Communists to believe in a nefarious international Jewish conspiracy, it also became necessary for Jewish Marxists to confront the truth about the world they had helped create. Englander has written both Korinsky and Bretzky so well that playgoers may squirm with the uncomfortable self-recognition.

The 27th man of the play's title, played by Noah Robbins, captures hearts as a youth so filled with ideas that he can hardly write fast enough to get them all down. But at the heart of the story is the character of Yevgeny Zunser—acted by Ron Rifkin, who doesn't so much play an aging Yiddish writer as inhabit one. Here is a man who once watched an entire Jewish civilization go up in the smoke of a burnt offering to the anti-Semit-

ic ideology of Nazism; now he is slated to become a victim of Stalin's decision to annihilate the world's largest surviving Jewish community. Knowing this, he behaves with humanity, moral intelligence, and unshakable dignity.

By 1928, Stalin had enough control so that he could end the pretense of Communist support for the self-determination of peoples within the Soviet Union. This was a Russian empire, and Stalin was determined that its peoples would become Russian or be extinguished. He intended to deport the Jews to an empty patch of ground along the trans-Siberian railway, a plan stopped only by his death in 1952.

The play's staging and set are starkly perfect and, in the final scene, achieve a fearsome power. This is compelling theater, and was especially on a night when another intensely anti-Jewish government was shooting at Jews. But, unlike the Yiddish writers, Israel's Jews are not helpless victims of a totalitarian regime; they live in a democracy and defend themselves with a citizen army.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 29

## Israel's Friends in Gaza

By Alex Joffe

Hamas was quick to declare victory in the latest conflict with Israel. A closer look at the price it paid in terms of personnel and equipment shows that its bravado was false. But the fact that Israel was able to destroy so many installations, weapons teams, smuggling tunnels, and high-ranking personnel, including Hamas's military chief, Ahmed Jabari, reveals another, less evident fact: substantial numbers of people in Gaza have "betrayed the Palestinian cause," in Hamas's terms, and collaborated with Israel by providing it with intelligence. These people do not "love death more than Israelis love life," as Hamas would have it. Instead they represent, within Gaza, a slender, complicating affirmation of life.

Israeli intelligence capabilities are estimable, but collecting precise information about an enemy territory like Gaza poses particular problems. Israel's intelligence collection starts in space, where Israeli satellites (like their far more numerous U.S. counterparts) track Iranian weapons moving by ship to

Sudan, Egypt, the Sinai, and the Gaza coast. But these satellites make their rounds only a few times a day. Compensating for this limitation, Israeli unmanned aerial vehicles can stay aloft for hours or even days. During the recent conflict, the skies over Gaza buzzed constantly with these drones; more than one reporter likened their sound to that of lawnmowers. Night and day, electro-optical, infrared, and radar sensors allow the aircraft to see what goes on above ground and, to a limited extent, even below it, by detecting minute variations in heat or soil composition. The drones detect and jam electronic communications. They are the eyes of attack aircraft and artillery and can even attack targets themselves.

But what Israel accomplished in its bombing campaign required more information than drones can provide. There were strikes on 1,500 sites, including 19 command centers, 140 tunnels, and 26 weapons manufacturing and storage facilities, as well as what an IDF spokesman laconically called "hundreds of underground rocket launch-

ers" and "dozens of rocket launchers and launch sites." This feat could have been accomplished only with the much richer information that Israel had: a vast, three-dimensional map of Gaza's every street, block, building, and floor, including names of families, their relationships, and their telephone numbers. And movements in and out of this maze were not only mapped but to some extent tracked in real time.

In part, this picture was created by satellite and drone imagery together with signal intercepts, the meticulous monitoring of telephone, cell phone, and internet traffic that conveys, to teams of listeners with powerful computers, who is talking to whom about what. In this way, ci-

vilians can be partially distinguished from "militants"—but only partially. Israel's vast targeting lists, which involved hitting one floor of a building rather than another with precision munitions, or knowing just when an individual was traveling down a particular street in a single vehicle, required much more. These lists could have been compiled



only through use of human informants.

That is Gaza's secret, the one that allowed the place to survive this latest round of fighting: It is full of Palestinians working ever so quietly with Israel against Hamas.

Since the beginning of the Zionist enterprise, substantial numbers of Palestinians have been willing to work with it, selling land and providing information. Many of them, as Hillel Cohen makes clear in his book *Army of Shadows* (University of California Press), have done so for their own reasons, such as personal gain, family grudges, social divisions, and a kind of "local nationalism" that aimed to preserve their particular lands and possessions. Such motivations are still at work. Gaza is also directly and indirectly accessible to Israeli handlers who collect information from hundreds, if not thousands, of Palestinians. Some of them, Cohen notes, actually view collaboration with Israel as patriotic, because it pursues a vision of the Palestinian national project—not Judeophilic, certainly, but resigned to Israel—that is marginally realistic.

Mainstream Palestinian movements are understandably bitter about this phenomenon: few epithets are more contemptuous

than "collaborator," and the shocking recent spectacle of bodies of murdered collaborators being dragged behind Hamas-driven motorcycles sent a clear message (though, it turned out, at least one of those murdered was not a collaborator but an Islamist rival).

Under this circumstance, the fact that Gazans inform at all is notable; and in fact the extent of collaboration, though unquantifiable, is clearly large. It speaks to the failure of Palestinian nationalism, as opposed to local and family identification, to attract the loyalty of Palestinians. Villages and clans remain more dependable and predictable repositories of allegiance than the reliably authoritarian and kleptocratic Fatah movement.

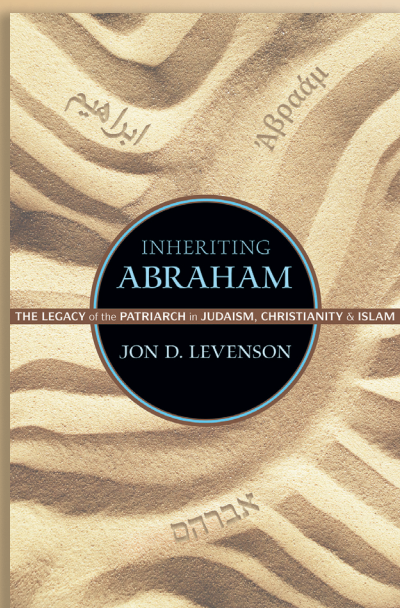
The fact of collaboration also shows the shortcomings of Hamas's Islamized version of Palestinian nationalism, confounding easy notions about Hamas's iron control and the radicalization of the populace, as opposed to the leadership. Hamas leaders indeed love death, but for other people. They are happy to consign eager young men to suicide and to contemplate the blood of the children who are sacrificed as human shields when Hamas hides near schools and

hospitals to avoid Israeli airstrikes.

The attraction of dying for Islam has limits. The average Gazan, when he makes a phone call to a particular number to say that a specific individual is walking down this or that street, is embracing life in a roundabout way. Gazans, like other Palestinians, have no love for Jews and Israel and readily celebrate their murder; but they are not anxious to die themselves. There remains, then, this spark of humanity, if only the impulse to self-preservation.

Does this realization change the military calculus? It certainly made possible the most detailed sort of pinpoint bombing campaign. It also shifts perceptions of the conflict, at least slightly. But it yields few specific prescriptions. Palestinian collaboration, however widespread, is hardly a sign of a people who wish to be free, or even free of Hamas. As America discovered in Iraq and Afghanistan, militarily defeating fascism, religious or otherwise, means little unless populations challenge its patriarchal, theocratic, or authoritarian culture. Supplying human intelligence is not the same thing. So, the war continues.

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