

## Book Reviews

*Celebrating Your New Jewish Daughter: Creating Jewish Ways to Welcome Baby Girls into the Covenant* by Debra Nussbaum Cohen (Woodstock, Vt.: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2001), 233 pp.

From the time I received *Celebrating Your New Jewish Daughter*, I knew I was in for a treat. During my short time as a rabbi, I have culled, prepared, and edited dozens of services for welcoming young Jewish daughters into the covenant. Upon having our very own Jewish daughter, my wife and I were at the desk, in front of our computer, determining what to do to mark this most sacred of moments. Although we had models from other fine resources, Debra Nussbaum Cohen has put so much great material in one place. For that we should all say, "Thank you!"

Anita Diamant's *The New Jewish Baby* is already ten years old and in the intervening years has been somewhat of a standard for welcoming girls into the covenant. Debra Orenstein's *Lifecycles* offers us great information on welcoming daughters, but covers the full range of lifecycle and thus is limited in its coverage of children. Based on the ideas put forward by Diamant, Orenstein, and others, as well as the growing trend in our communities to welcome our daughters with the same flair, symbolism, and emotionality as we do our sons, Cohen gives the reader a nice range of sample liturgies, complete services, dozens of ideas for personalized rituals, and explanations of the rites, all these not available before in one location. She culled dozens of readings perfect for guests or family members; lists twenty-two significant verses to help people make acrostics for their children; has reflections and advice for gay couples, resources for adopted children, ideas for sanctifying space; and includes prayers written by the sages of old as well as by modern Jewish poets. She tells us why to sing at a *hachnasat habrit*, how naming is done, and how we can effectively choose a good name for our children.

As a rabbi, I love this book. I started using it before I even read it all the way through. It is easy to navigate and find resources for namings, conversions, adoptions, and welcoming girls into the covenant. If you are looking for more resources at a *brit milah*, many of the readings are appropriate for boys as well. To use the book effectively with laity, some explanations are needed. When I shared

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this book with couples, some, especially those not accustomed to creating services or drafting ritual ceremonies, found the book overwhelming.

The book is a good resource for our personal as well as congregational libraries. Anyone planning a naming (or a baby) should make sure to have it on hand for some good ideas and resources.

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*Hineni in Our Lives: Learning How to Respond to Others through 14 Biblical Texts & Personal Stories* by Norman J. Cohen (Woodstock, Vt.: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2003), 201 pp.

In 1927, Nelson Glueck (z'l) completed his doctoral thesis on *chesed* (grace) in the Bible, collecting every reference and explaining how its use helped define human and divine relationships. Glueck's work was divided into three parts: the first discusses the use of *chesed* to reflect human conduct in a secular setting, the second speaks of it in a religious context, and the third describes *chesed* as an integral part of divine conduct *vis-à-vis* God's human subjects.

Norman J. Cohen's recent book, *Hineni in Our Lives: Learning How to Respond to Others through 14 Biblical Texts & Personal Stories*, takes a similar approach to biblical and midrashic studies with the fourteen examples of *hineni* (here I am!) that appear in the Tanakh unaccompanied by any specific action. An important difference between the works of Glueck and Cohen is that in Cohen's approach there are no secular settings: "All relationships, whether between individuals or between individuals and God, are fraught with meaning and with the potential of holiness." He argues that "we must be fully present, responsive, and receptive to the other in our lives, whether it be God or the individuals whom we love—our parents, spouses, children, siblings or friends—if we want to experience real happiness and fulfillment" (p. ix).

Cohen categorizes the appearances of the word *hineni* as connoting three primary character traits. The first is the ability to be present for and receptive to "the other," as when Isaac responds to his son Jacob in Genesis 27:18. The second is a willingness to act on behalf of the other, as Esau does when Jacob calls to him to bring him venison (Gen 27:1-4). And the third is the willingness to sacrifice for the

other (or the Other), as Abraham does when God calls on him to bring his son Isaac to Mt. Moriah (Gen 22:1) or when God is present for humanity in Isaiah 58:1-9.

In his first section, Cohen begins each exposition of the use of the word *hineni* in the Tanakh with a contextual quotation, followed by a well-considered midrash on the nuances of the word in that particular setting. So, for example, he titles the beginning of the *akedah* passage in Genesis 22 “Recognizing the Other” and the angel’s call to Abraham to stay his hand and not kill his son “Awakening to Relationship.” He then offers his own insights as to how these passages might reflect on our own behavior with family and friends.

While the word *hineni* usually denotes someone fully present to the other, there is one instance where just the opposite is true: the Amalekite who announces to the future King David that he was present and, in fact, had a hand in King Saul’s death on Har Gilboa. He tells David that Saul called to him as he lay wounded, and he responded *hineni*. Cohen argues that this was not a *hineni* of being present for a holy action; rather, it was purely for the sake of personal gain. And when Saul responds, *mi attah*—Who are you?, he is challenging the Amalekite to look within himself, just as Isaac challenges his son Jacob, disguised as his twin brother Esau, to look within himself when presenting the venison to his vision-impaired father. In that instance Cohen suggests that Jacob’s *hineni* eventually rises beyond his desire for personal gain, even if it surely begins there. Both passages are a reminder that the spoken word is but the beginning of the expression of meaning and intention.

The second section consists of a collection of contemporary reflections on the theme of *hineni*, written primarily by rabbis and scholars. Each is attached to a particular biblical passage quoted in the first part of the book. Among the contributors, Peter Pitzele’s account of his difficulty in “hearing the call,” paralleling the prophet Samuel’s difficulty hearing it as a child, is particularly relevant and powerful. As Cohen points out “for most of us it is difficult to hear the call of the other in our lives. We are caught up in the day to day demands on us, and it is impossible for us to be open to the needs of those we love and who love us” (page 78).

Another of the contemporary respondents, Rabbi Sandy Sasso, observes that “in everything there is a Divine spark and we are in the places that we find ourselves not by accident but as part of God’s plan} to redeem the holy sparks present there.” Then, echoing

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Cohen's observation, she concludes: "Everything invites us into relationship, but we often refuse" (page 156).

The third section of the book is called "A Guide to creating our own personal Midrash—finding your own voice in the text." There Cohen elucidates the process by which he created his book, and encourages readers to tackle the passages on his or her own, raising questions, such as "What does it take to see the other, to hear the call," "What does it take to experience the other in our lives?" and "Do we not sometimes delude ourselves into thinking that we are truly responding to the other, when we are not?" This section, in particular, makes the book a major resource for adult education experiences in congregational, *chavurah*, and other informal settings. I think it would also be especially effective for family conversations on a Shabbat afternoon.

Cohen's book provides a solid biblical and midrashic framework for relationships between parents and children, siblings and other family members, teachers and students, employers and employees, and, universally, between human beings and God. This makes his book a particularly important resource for those involved in pastoral care, where we are present for those needing healing, and we try to help them sense God's presence and role in healing, too.

In fact, God can be sensed in every human encounter that is not totally based on self-interest. It is, therefore, possible to appreciate Cohen's book as carrying on in the tradition of Martin Buber's "I and Thou," where human-beings struggle to move beyond imposing their agendas on others, and are open to hearing about the other's needs. Becoming more aware of the presence of God in our lives and in our relationships bespeaks a challenge for so many of us to acknowledge a Higher Being who really matters to us. We look for miracles, when what we truly need is in the common-place, in the mundane, in the daily struggle. Cohen's book can help us triumph over our blinkered vision, and open ourselves to God's beneficent influence and presence.

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*Ehyeh: A Kabbalah For Tomorrow* by Arthur Green (Woodstock, Vt.: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2003), 192 pp.

Arthur Green, scholar and teacher of Jewish mysticism, co-founder of the *chavurah* movement, professor at Brandeis University and now head of a new rabbinic school, has in recent years published a number of works that relate to the current interest in spirituality. His latest work, *Ehyeh: A Kabbalah for Tomorrow*, has much to offer, both to us congregational rabbis in our own spiritual growth and as an aid in our efforts to guide our spiritually seeking congregants. As he notes in his introduction, the explosion of writings that have created a sort of pop-Kabbalah moved Green to overcome misgivings about his inevitable oversimplification of kabbalistic thought and practice in the present work. The resulting accessible and serious text offers a corrective to impressions that may have been created by this pop-kabbalah, from Madonna's "Die Another Day" music video, which (mis)employs kabbalistic symbols, to Kabbalah centers from Jerusalem to Los Angeles that promise to cure all ills.

Green brings to the task at hand many years of academic study of the sources, experience of kabbalistic disciplines, and the wisdom of a lifetime of sharing in the lived reality of the American Jewish community. After introducing himself, Green begins with an explanation of the word *ehyeh* that enables him to present the book's approach—bringing past, present, and future together in the same wisdom, just as the word *ehyeh* brings all time together in God. In "Rereading the Old Tradition," he explains basic kabbalistic concepts, through which we enter into the Jewish mystical approach to life. After relating the ancient wisdom to our own spiritual struggles, Green, in the second part of the work, "Looking toward Tomorrow," brings mystical insights to the challenges of modernity. He shares his personal spiritual journey and invites us to take our own as seriously, for, although this book is an excellent introduction to kabbalistic thought, "its primary purpose is not one of imparting information." In sharing Green's musings regarding the relevance of Kabbalah in a theology for our own times, we join the traditional learning circle of the Jewish mystics. He opens a path for us to move beyond the self-absorption of the personal spiritual quest, that we might see its connection to the world beyond the self. Here is the whole world, which is of the Self of the Universe, and not separate from the individual at all. To see the connection and to respond to it

is to begin to take up our own part in creating “a Kabbalah for tomorrow.”

The structure of *Ehyeh* signals to the reader that Green is looking beyond the scientific bias of modernity toward a different way of knowing. To read the book is to engage in a dialogue with Green that feels very much like the learning that takes place between a rabbi and disciple, or like sitting with the Zohar’s disciples around Shimon bar Yohai as he taught. Green includes a series of meditations throughout the book that the reader might use to achieve a contemplative understanding. “The ten *sefirot* must become a way of thinking for us, not a body of knowledge” (p. 59). Kabbalah is not about instant, or even rapid, mastery of knowledge: like the former masters, Green follows a warning “to go slowly,” followed by “a word to the wise is sufficient” (p. 84).

Derived from kabbalistic understandings of God’s nature as reflected in humanity, the theological aspects of *Ehyeh* have the potential to spark profound discussion in a congregational setting about both the Kabbalah’s inspiring visions of human potential and its sometimes unsettling approach to evil. Notwithstanding the kabbalistic vision that all is in and of God, it is still difficult for many people not to resort to a dualistic belief that ascribes evil to the place where God is not present (as Buber taught about the *Shoah*). Discussion may also arise over the Kabbalah’s tendency to image God in a personalistic way. Green introduces the non-anthropomorphic approach early, in his consideration of the name *Ehyeh* as “really not a noun at all, but a verb artificially arrested in motion” (p. 2). He shows that higher kabbalistic understandings of the world and God go beyond images of God to a place where words are completely inadequate. Yet he also asserts that “to contemplate the name of God...is to know the universal One in a *personal* way,” that “Judaism insists that the secret of existence is a ‘Who?’ not a ‘What?’ question” (p. 78).

Green concludes *Ehyeh* with guidance for further reading. Here he challenges the reader in one more way, asserting that to study the sources of Jewish mysticism, one must learn enough Hebrew to appreciate them in the original. While we may agree with him, it is helpful that he also gives a full list of readings currently available in English—for the time being. He ends by sharing his sense of urgency for the work that lies ahead of those who would join in the creation of a Kabbalah for the future. Any meaningful reinterpretation of kabbalistic wisdom for our times must engage with the world of

which we are a part. Torah, read with kabbalistic creativity, will yet yield up world-changing new wisdom.

*Ehyeh* does not represent a retreat to some mystical past, but an attempt to bring past insights to the post-modern present. Among the renewed, ancient insights of the Kabbalah is the importance of community. Some American Jews are, indeed, finding that their spiritual search leads beyond the centrality of the individual to a new appreciation for their companions on the journey. Paradoxically, we need others in order to become our best selves. Green shares a mystical teaching that the Sinai moment is essentially a glimpse of the dissolution of borders and differences, and that such revelatory moments are possible for us at any time. This is when the kabbalistic understanding of the Divine Attributes as opposites that must be balanced becomes a profound psychological insight, when we consider how the attributes are reflected in ourselves. We, just as God, must balance tensions between intimacy and separation, love and judgment, self and other. Only when we recognize and respect both realities can we merge them in a heightened understanding of who we might become, created in the image of *ehyeh asher ehyeh*. For those who choose to explore the path of Kabbalah in search of wholeness for ourselves and our world, this text will help us along the path.

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*Platforms and Prayer Books: Theological and Liturgical Perspectives on Reform Judaism*, edited by Dana Evan Kaplan (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 317 pp.

*Platforms and Prayerbooks: Theological and Liturgical Perspectives on Reform Judaism* belongs on the shelf of every person and institution concerned with Reform Judaism, or modern Judaism in general. The range of interests, the styles and goals of the writing, and the levels of scholarship range so greatly that every reader will find something of value. In general, the articles avoid being abstruse, technical, or narrow gauged. Most readers will find the volume immediately useful for their thinking and teaching. Some essays will serve as convenient reviews of familiar material; others will close a gap in one's knowledge, or introduce a new approach to some issue in Reform Jewish thought.



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The volume is divided into four sections: "Historical Context," "Liturgical Studies," "Comparative Studies," and "Autonomy and Authority in Texts." Within these rubrics, the articles vary in their approaches.

Several papers survey broad issues. These treatments are handy references for those who have already studied the topic, and are good introductions for those new to the study. The introduction by the book's editor, Dana Kaplan, the paper by Herbert Bronstein on "Platforms and Prayer Books," and Walter Jacob's paper surveying the renewal of Judaism in all four platforms/statements serve as able overviews of the platforms and their connection with liturgical work in Reform. All address the 1998 Pittsburgh Statement of Principles, and help put Richard Levy's work in the context of that of his predecessors—Kohler, Cohan, and Borowitz.

In the section on liturgy, Peter Knobel's paper offers an astute analysis of the issue of a "single prayer book for the Reform movement," while in the section on comparative studies, Richard Hirsh provides an insightful and thorough analysis of the differences between Reconstructionist and Reform Judaism. As the movements become closer and closer, though from different directions, an analysis such as Hirsh's is timely and useful. Dow Marmur's paper compares American Reform to British, Israeli, and Canadian Reform. He typifies the former as operating under the "Reform is a verb" rule. Judaism is something that is always "re-forming," and the current reforming, in the American context, places great emphasis on individuals' needs, predicaments, and experiences. The non-American Reform model is "Reform as an adjective"; Reform is one way to describe an approach to Judaism, and Reform itself must concern itself as much with continuity with the tradition and other interpretations of the tradition as with individualistic claims and needs. While his paper does give voice to the traditionalist wing of American Reform (where I place myself), his usage of Charles Liebman's terms "spirituality" to describe individual religious experience and "holiness" to describe communal religious experience seems unhelpful to me. In fact, a paper addressing precisely this type of issue would have been a welcome addition to this (or a future) volume.

In the section on autonomy and authority in texts, Peter Haas offers an overview of the problem of halakhah and Reform Judaism. S. Daniel Breslauer's paper on Eugene Borowitz, while making a case for the post-modern nature of Borowitz's thought, serves as



well as a very decent introduction to crucial aspects of the thinking of Reform's senior theologian.

Other papers penetrate into more narrow areas, elucidating the general by focusing on particular aspects. In the historical section, for example, Ya'akov Ariel's paper on cultural dimensions of American Reform, "Miss Daisy's Planet," is an aperture into how Reform Jews from roughly 1870–1930 experienced themselves in their world. Gary Zola's meticulously researched paper on the first Reform prayer book in America, in the liturgical studies section, is both fine scholarship and compelling narrative regarding an overlooked, crucial moment in American Reform history. Debra Kaufman's illuminating study of newly Orthodox women (*baalot teshuvah*) gives a view of women and Judaism that presents both a challenge to Reform religiosity and a challenge to much mainstream feminist theory about women's spirituality.

Other papers cover new ground or provide visions of where Reform ought to be going. For example, Judith Abrams' textually disciplined and spiritually deep examination of liturgy is a fine example of how liturgy ought to be taught to learners and shows us what experiences we ought to aim for in leading, writing, and participating in liturgical prayer. Michael Satlow's and Leon Morris' works are excellent entries into what phenomenological issues are at stake when one discusses studying sacred text as a Reform Jew. Their thinking is both original and compelling. These three papers taken together go a long way in creating a theory of Reform spiritual—as opposed to academic—hermeneutics.

Other papers are concerned with meditation in the context of the Reform prayer service, cultural anthropological analysis of Reform Judaism, a careful study of the thought of Kaufman Kohler, and an analysis by Michael Meyer on the new meanings of collective Reform Jewish identity in light of thought expressed in the Pittsburgh Statement of Principles.

My favorite papers were those by Gary Zola, Judith Abrams, and Michael Satlow. Zola's lively and thorough paper was an absorbing encounter with a heretofore unlit corner in the history of liturgical Reform. Judith Abrams' work in liturgy presents for me just where our balance should be—reverence for the text as it opens up dimensions of the holy. She suggests a basic truth—we need to spend less time writing new liturgy, and more time mining the treasures in what is before us. Satlow's paper was for me a moment of refreshing conceptual lucidity. His understanding of both the subtleties and

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importance of theoretical accuracy regarding text, hermeneutics, and transmission of culture is crucial for theoreticians of Reform. He writes, for example, "A culture's true heritage...is primarily transmitted not through its texts, but through its ability to transform its members into those who can read and do read its texts in a culture specific fashion." These words are hardly new for those embedded in the study of hermeneutics and culture, but their importance, for me, cannot be overstated. I hope to see more from Satlow's pen as he turns his considerable intellectual skills to the problems facing Reform Judaism.

Those learned in some given area or another may disagree with a point or two, as well as with some of the terminology the various authors use, but, overall, this collection of papers serves admirably on many levels: as reviews with new angles; as scholarship filling in lacunae; and as fresh thinking and theorizing about where Reform Judaism stands, what devotional life we are trying to create, and the tensions, struggles, and vistas that lie ahead. Teachers and expositors of Reform Judaism should take note carefully of the contents of this volume, as it addresses questions they often face and topics they may want to teach. Their work will be greatly facilitated by reference to this book.

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*Jews and Christians in Conversation* edited by Edward Kessler, John Pawlikowski, and Judith Banki (Cambridge, England: Orchard Academic, 2002), 290 pp.

There was a time when Jews and Christians did not speak to one another but shouted. Then came a period of silence: Christians disdained Jews and Jews distrusted Christians. With Vatican II all this changed and dialogue became the operative term. With increasing dialogue between Jews and Catholics and Jews and Protestants came greater candor, empathy, and even respect. The past forty or so years have been marked by a new frankness, a sense of caring, a genuine mood of remorse and understanding. Nowadays, Jewish-Christian conversation has become almost routine.

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*Jews and Christians in Conversation* is a compilation of papers that emerged from a consultation held in Cambridge, England in March 2001. What is unique about the participants is that they consist of some of the “old” veterans of dialogue and some of the younger ones from various European countries. The volume is divided into seven conversations covering different aspects of the Christian-Jewish encounter, offering some historical overviews and outlining parameters for more fruitful future encounters.

The first conversation consists of three papers that review the past achievements. Barbara E. Bowe surveys the past forty years of dialogue, the new understanding of Jesus the Jew, and the ongoing search for a new paradigm of the relationship between the two faiths. Marcus Braybrooke attempts to address the perpetually vexing issue of one covenant or two, indicating that “my sympathy is with Rosemary Reuther when she suggests instead of arguing about how many covenants there are, we should recognize God’s presence in every faith community” (p. 26). This would solve the dilemma of competition and the negative image of Judaism and other religions. Since Jews and Christians have a special agenda, bilateral talks are essential. But “the search for shared values and for a religious underpinning of human rights now has to be on a multi-faith basis” and can no longer remain the domain of Catholics, Protestants, and Jews—a view espoused by James. K. Aitken, Melanie J. Wright, and others in the volume. The third paper is a riveting and revealing autobiographical piece by Richard D. Rubenstein, whose *After Auschwitz* made such an impact forty years ago. He describes his own spiritual odyssey and the development of interfaith dialogue since the 1960s, dourly observing that “efforts on behalf of Jewish-Christian understanding can be compared to a Sisyphean endeavor, but no less worthwhile on that account” (p. 48). He cautions that there are dangerous latent emotions embedded in religious differences that lie beneath the surface like the plague in Camus’ novel of that name.

The second conversation is a basic analysis of the key documents in the field that have been published over the past years. Edward Kessler delineates three themes that have been highlighted in those documents: (1) realization of Jewish suffering; (2) reawakening to the Jewishness of Jesus; (3) recognition that the formation of Christian identity depends on right relations with Jews. Kessler describes Jewish reactions to these new developments as distrust coupled with defensiveness and a slowly evolving awareness of common

purpose. He reviews the sorry tale of modern Christian indifference to the malignancy of anti-Semitism, citing pronouncements of the World Council of Churches and the Anglican Lambeth Conferences that literally turn one's stomach. For example, in 1948, the Lambeth bishops never mentioned the tragedy of the Holocaust and anti-Semitism and fecklessly urged "efforts to restore peace in Palestine." But Kessler records the changing tide as the World Council of Churches began to recognize the Christian roots of anti-Semitism and the teaching of contempt that had prepared the soil for the Final Solution (doubtlessly catalyzed by Vatican II and *Nostra Aetate*). Kessler's review of Protestant and Catholic statements is a model of succinctness: he summarizes Lutheran, Anglican, Methodist, Evangelical, Roman Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox pronouncements on the Holocaust, Christian guilt and responsibility, and, most significantly, on the continuing covenant between God and Israel. He also deals with the thorny issue of the mission to convert the Jews, noting that, with the notable exception of the Southern Baptists, Catholics and most Protestant groups have come to renounce the mission and urge, instead, a common mission to bear witness together in battling the evils of our contemporary world. Kessler analyzes *Dabru Emet*, the only significant Jewish response to Christian efforts at rapprochement, and critiques it for having missed an opportunity "to reclaim Jesus as one of ours" (p. 64). He concludes with a challenge to Christians to learn the traits by which Jews define themselves and to Jews to develop a Jewish theology about Christianity.

John Pawlikowski is his lucidly compelling self in his contribution sketching the important changes in relationships and the desiderata that still remain. The most significant theological shift, in his view, is "covenantal inclusion"—the radical about-face in church theology that reverts back to Romans 9-11, in which Paul makes it abundantly clear that God has not reneged on his covenantal relationship with Israel. "It is vital," he writes, "that these documents which assert continued Jewish covenantal inclusion begin to impact Christian theological reflection as such" and he is dismayed that "many Catholic Church leaders have not assimilated *Nostra Aetate* any more than had Catholic theologians" (p. 78). As to the issue of evangelizing Jews, Pawlikowski records the lingering ambivalence despite the clear and unequivocal statement of Cardinal Kasper, which I myself heard in May of 2001 that the Roman Catholic Church does not currently have any office to proselytize Jews. He suggests that there are "profound Christological implications" that the

Church is unwilling to confront at this time (p. 80). Indeed, the recent contretemps in *America Magazine* between Cardinal Dulles and a group of leading Catholic theologians over this issue reinforced Pawlikowski's concerns (*America Magazine*, vol. 187, no. 12, October 21, 2002, pp. 8–16). Father Pawlikowski argues that Christianity cannot be presented as the fulfillment of Judaism, as current catechisms have it. The need to acknowledge the Christian roots of anti-Semitism in curricula is still apparent and lectionaries and liturgy lack evidence of the new documents and perpetuate a "fulfillment Christology" reducing Judaism to a mere prelude to the truth. He agrees with Kessler and others that we face a global challenge that demands a global response in religious ethics and social action to issues such as the death penalty and ecology. And he, too, criticizes *Dabru Emet* for not mentioning the Jewishness of Jesus.

David Sandmel's brief analysis of *Dabru Emet* reminds us that the document enjoys no official status and is but a first step in fashioning a Jewish theology of Christianity. He urges that we bolster Christian scholars, "some of whom took great risks challenging fundamental aspects of church teaching." At the same time, he is concerned that with Jews turning more inward of late, dialogue has lost much of its luster.

Roman Catholic theologian Jurgen Manemann leads off the next conversation, speaking of the negative aspects of the Judeo-Christian tradition while calling for the Catholic Church to "face its tradition in terms of contradictory pluralism." The Church must think less of its self-preservation and more of the victims of the world. Michael Signer is also concerned about the recent turning within that he detects in Jewish circles and he reiterates his challenge that the "most productive dialogue between Jews and Christians is grounded on face-to-face studies of texts in the Hebrew Bible through the lenses of pre-modern interpretations in both traditions."

Polish journalist Konstanty Gebert and British journalist Clifford Langley discuss the heart-breaking tale of the Jedwabne tragedy when, on July 10, 1941, the entire Jewish community of 1,600 souls was burned alive. For years the accepted version was that the Nazis committed the atrocity. Then, recent scholarship revealed that the perpetrators were Christian Polish neighbors. Gebert documents the sluggish response of Polish churchmen to the news, including the infamous Cardinal Glemp, who blamed the Jews themselves for having failed to assimilate into Polish society and for supporting the

Communists during the brief period of Soviet control. This section does not make for pleasant reading; but it is symptomatic of pre-Vatican II notions that inform much Christian thinking, especially in Eastern Europe.

The conversation on liturgy is perhaps the least satisfying in the book. Catholic theologian Liam Tracey describes liturgy as a cultural reality that grows and changes and is influenced from the outside but also influences outside culture. To his way of thinking, the essential challenge is "How is experience of God communicated in liturgical celebration?" Worshipers feel infantilized by the liturgy that is often androcentric and misogynist and lacking in interaction with local cultures and institutions. Marc Saperstein records some of the Reform innovations in liturgy (most recently, in developing gender-neutral language) and he presents the dilemma of what to do with Scriptural language and texts that are clearly male (e.g., the *Avot*), or texts that are offensive (e.g., chosen people). He also challenges the groups to integrate new historical events into the liturgy (e.g., the Holocaust and the State of Israel). But, in truth, all these issues have been addressed for years, first by Reform Jews, then by the Reconstructionists, and most recently by the Conservative movement. And still Jews do not pray very ardently! As Abraham J. Heschel wrote, the problem is not basically bad liturgy but bad theology. If we do not believe in a God who "hears prayer," then worship becomes problematic (Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Man's Quest for God* [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954], pp. 61, 87, 88). Neither author addresses, what to my mind, is the key issue.

The final conversations include an essay by James K. Aitken, who urges that interfaith work must develop a positive image of each faith group, combat negative attitudes and prejudices, and promote a multicultural reading of sacred texts. Judith Banki reiterates the need for preachers and teachers to absorb the post-Vatican II teachings. Melanie J. Wright cautions that Jewish-Christian relations cannot be built on "guilt" and she insists "it is not theology as much as practice"—"the ability of individuals to engage with humans of the Other"—that matters most. Helen Fry repeats the need for preachers to be selective in choices of texts and she reiterates, "Jews need to begin to work out a *Jewish theology of Christianity*" (author's italics). The postlude by Martin Forward reaffirms that pluralism is here to stay, because "diversity is built into the contemporary world." He urges Jewish-Moslem dialogue (easier said than done these days!) and joint social activism, reminding us that it will take



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more than a few years to eradicate centuries of religious biases, with the hope that we might ultimately persevere together in fashioning a world theology.

As in all such anthologies, not all contributions are up to the standards of others. The endnotes are not well edited (Michael Signer's notes have been dropped entirely) and an index would have been useful. Moreover, it is naïve to assert, as several do in the volume, that theology is not the main issue. Quite the contrary, theology informs everything including liturgy, daily living, business practices, and even social action (e.g., abortion, birth control, euthanasia). The call of several contributors for the development of a Jewish theology of Christianity is indubitably most intriguing—and ultimately most difficult. As Emanuel Levinas wrote, in evaluating similar challenges from Edmond Fleg and others, "It is not enough to call Jesus Yechou and Rabbi to bring him closer to us. For us, we who are without hatred, there is no friendship. It remains far off. And on his lips, we no longer recognize our own verses" (Emanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom* [Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1990], p. 105). It would seem that a volume on a Jewish theology of Christianity is our next agenda item. In the meantime, it is heartening to know that Jews and Christians are talking, at long last. May it continue!

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*God in Our Relationships: Spirituality between People from the Teachings of Martin Buber*, by Dennis Ross (Woodstock, Vt.: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2003), 118 pp.

Sooner or later, a rabbi will discover that while theological discourse may nourish one's days in study-houses and even in synagogues, it suffers limited applicability in coffeehouses, bedrooms, and, worst of all, in hospitals. Neither friendly *barrista*, harried spouse, nor suffering patient is likely to welcome the intrusion of theologizing into everyday meetings and conversations. And the patient or the bereaved may end up feeling deprived when her rabbi responds to her needs with a discussion about God, even when questioned directly: "Rabbi, how could God let this happen to me?"



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As he recounts in his lectures, when Rabbi Dennis Ross encountered Buber for the first time, in a Modern Theology class in rabbinical school, he too found himself frustrated by Buber's dense, specifically German idiom (much of which is mutilated by translation), and the uber-pedagogic mien of a work that, our professors assured us, aimed to speak to the heart, to the common seeker of meaning. Buber intended, after all, to help us apprehend the Eternal in everyday encounters, accessible to all, not only in academies. Instead of *pilpul* or philosophy as the conduit of spiritual insight, Buber favored popular Hasidic stories and parables (which, drawing from Buber's *Tales of the Hasidim*, Ross incorporates liberally into his own).

Part introduction to Martin Buber's theology of relationship, part self-help book, part lunchtime companion, *God in Our Relationships: Spirituality between People from the Teachings of Martin Buber* is a welcome addition to the bookshelves of spiritual leaders and laity alike. While the frame for the book remains unmistakably Jewish, the author's intention (like Buber's) is to serve an interfaith community, and, for that matter, a broad array of spiritual seekers, with a readable guide to one of the twentieth century's most influential and, for the casual learner anyway, least-readable thinkers.

Three features distinguish Ross' book from other secondary sources on Buber, and, for that matter, from other self-help books: (1) The book is foremost an extended meditation on the application of the *I-Thou* concept to living in twenty-first-century America. (2) The material is presented in digestible reflections on key lines from Buber's masterwork. Ross does not set out to analyze *I and Thou* systematically or comprehensively. It is more a popular digest of ideas and applications than a theological treatise. Hence this book's primary application is to everyday living—in coffeehouses, bedrooms, and hospital wards, rather than seminaries. And (3) Ross' eloquent phrasing, gentle sincerity and playfulness in relating personal anecdotes, and unsentimental prose elevate the work from its peers on the self-help shelf—where Jewish Lights Publishing is marketing it.

What makes *God in Our Relationships* enjoyable, thought-provoking, and occasionally inspiring, is the disarming way in which Ross unpacks Buber's theology through anecdote, parable, and illustration. Any chapter begins with an epigram from *I and Thou*, say, "Rising voices pre-empt all other sounds yet acknowledge that the whole world sings" (p. 63). Ross explicates by relating a hospital

cafeteria conversation that attained an *I-Thou* dimension. "As we entered the conversation in earnest, we entered *I-Thou*, looking beyond the details. We enjoyed the food and drink. We shut out the conversations at nearby tables. The only reality that counted was in our words." A paragraph later, a concluding metaphor ties the anecdote to the epigram:

Imagine a picture on the wall of a museum. The frame, the canvas, the hook, and the wire on the back of the frame make possible the display of art and yet are not actively considered when a viewer studies the artwork. The studs in the wall and the floor and ceiling joists are essential to the picture on display but do not enter the mind. *I-Thou* fills the awareness. Everything else exists in the light of *I-Thou*, even as we ignore all other distractions (p. 64).

Many will enjoy reading *God in Our Relationships* on its own. Teachers, preachers, and students may find it valuable to read it side-by-side with *I and Thou*, or to return to the epigrammatic quotations in the original source, understandings enhanced by Ross' humanizing contexts.

Though nearly every chapter consists of but a handful of paragraphs, the whole of the book follows a logical architecture, articulating the meaning and applications of *I-Thou* theology first by defining *I-It* as we encounter such moments (sometimes menial, but no less mandatory) throughout each day. Especially effective is Ross' thorough investigation of the ways in which the lives so many of us lead (hectic, distracted, stressful) promote *I-It* encounters and stifle *I-Thou* experiences.

Gradually the book focuses attention on the meaning, message, and role of *I-Thou* encounters in relational moments with which all are (at least conceptually) familiar, finally reaching an elevated cadence with the introduction of *I-Eternal Thou*, glimpsing the Divine in relationship.

Ross relies on Hasidic parables:

As Rabbi Hayyim of Zanz taught us, this world is like a deep forest where each person wanders alone. Hearing a voice in the distance, I lift my voice and call out in the dark. A voice calls back. Hand reaches for hand, and voice lifts voice in *I-Thou*. These quiet triumphs of the spirit never make the newspaper headlines. But they make the world a better place and leave a permanent impact in *Eternal Thou*. "[I]n each *Thou* we address the *Eternal Thou*," said

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Martin Buber. As we converse with each other, we also speak to God in the *Eternal Thou* (p. 100).

A book like this, that cobbles together disparate material from its primary source, could have fallen into disarray. Further uniting the narrative is Ross' poignant retelling of an ongoing encounter with a terminally ill patient. And while his ruminations on brief encounters with waitresses and workmen and family members inform the whole, it is his dialogue with the dying man that gives *God in Our Relationships* its resonance.

Valuable lessons come through without the reader feeling that Ross preaches at us, which makes *God in Our Relationships* the best kind of sermon of all. Enjoy it in its entirety in a few hours; keep it handy as a reference for sermons, prayer services, or daily inspiration; use it as a teaching supplement (but not the primary source) for Adult Education seminars or Confirmation classes; let it inform your work in chaplaincy and pastoral care; share it with non-Jewish friends and colleagues to broaden their perspective of Judaism. This elegant little paperback may indeed provide good company in coffee shops (where I read it), bedroom night-tables, and, yes, hospital rooms.

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*Judaism and Environmental Ethics: A Reader*, edited and introduced by Martin D. Yaffe (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2001), 422 pp.

*Judaism and Ecology: Created World and Revealed Word*, edited by Hava Tirosh-Samuelson (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 515 pp.

Much of the last thirty years' worth of writing on Judaism and ecology can be seen as a response to two challenging articles: Lynn White Jr.'s "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" (1967) and Steven S. Schwarzschild's "The Unnatural Jew" (1984). White, as well as many environmental activists following in his footsteps, points to the "Judeo-Christian" heritage in general, and the verse (Gen 1:28) granting humanity dominion over the rest of creation in particular, as the root of the West's exploitative relationship with the earth. Schwarzschild, by contrast, praises Judaism for doing

precisely what White condemns: holding morality over nature, emphasizing God's transcendence, and deriding theologies of immanence as neo-pagan idolatry. White and his followers criticize Judaism for its supposed antagonism toward nature; Schwarzschild wears this antagonism as a badge of pride.

Jewish environmentalists took both of these essays as a call to arms. They contested the premise that Judaism is at odds with the natural world. Pro-environment rabbis, scientists, and academics authored an outpouring of articles citing proto-ecological passages in Tanakh and Talmud. They defended the creation narrative from White's attack, noting that dominion is subsequently defined by God's commandment in Genesis 2:15 to "work and watch over" the land. They also contested Schwarzschild's claim that nature and morality are irreconcilable. This first generation of Jewish environmental writing held up traditional observances such as *bal tashchit*, *tzaar baalei chayyim*, Shabbat, and the sabbatical year as evidence of Judaism's "green" credentials.

This was ground-breaking scholarship. Still, given its origins as a defense of Jewish environmentalism in the face of a rather harsh attack, it is no surprise that much of this writing suffers the weakness associated with apologetics: it tends to blur the subtlety and ambiguity that a more objective consideration of Judaism's position might reveal.

Two recent anthologies, *Judaism and Environmental Ethics: A Reader* and *Judaism and Ecology: Created World and Revealed Word* represent a new wave of Jewish ecological thought that seeks to redress this balance and critically examine Jewish attitudes toward the creation in their full complexity. It is a sign of progress that we are now comfortable enough to engage these issues without having to defensively flaunt our "greenness" to the rest of the environmental world. One of the central assumptions underlying each of these collections is that Jewish environmentalists can and should bring Jewish tradition to bear on their ecological views just as much as we let contemporary environmental thinking shape our Judaism. This is a major step forward.

Both books offer a high level of scholarship, a wide array of perspectives, and insightful introductions by their editors. Yaffe's anthology includes essays by over twenty different writers, spanning the spectrum of Jewish observance and political outlook, from Eric Katz's article inspired by Deep Ecology to Schwarzschild's seminal piece. Most were written in the late 1980s and 1990s. Tirosh-

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Samuelson's book is a collection of papers delivered at a recent conference on Judaism and ecology sponsored by the Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions. Most of the contributors are academics working in the fields of Judaic studies, philosophy, and theology. As a result, generally speaking, *Judaism and Environmental Ethics* tends to focus on more concrete ecological issues (such as animal experimentation, *kashrut* and vegetarianism, observance of *bal tashchit*, and Shabbat) while *Judaism and Ecology* addresses the philosophical underpinnings of these matters. Still, the books overlap a great deal, and present several recurring themes: the connection—or lack thereof—between the natural world and the revealed word of Torah, the meaning of dominion, and the larger, related question of whether the Jewish worldview is human-centered (anthropocentric), earth-centered (biocentric), or God-centered (theocentric).

The first of these issues, the relationship between creation and revelation, provides the subtitle for *Judaism and Ecology*. It is also the primary subject of that book's chapter "Nature and Revealed Morality," which includes thoughtful papers by Shalom Rosenberg, Lenn E. Goodman, and Moshe Sokol, and a very incisive critical response by Barry Kogan. However, the most comprehensive treatment of this subject can be found in Jeremy Benstein's essay in *Judaism and Environmental Ethics*, "One, Walking and Studying...: Nature vs. Torah," a detailed analysis of *Pirkei Avot* 3:7.

Benstein offers a close reading of that text, which he translates as follows:

Rabbi Ya'akov says: One, who while walking along the way, reviewing his studies, breaks off from his study and says, "How beautiful is that tree! How beautiful is that plowed field!" Scripture regards him as if he has forfeited his soul.

The commentaries on this passage fall into four categories. The most anti-nature commentators, reading at the *peshat* level, denigrate the created world as a distraction from proper Jewish concerns. Fore-shadowing Schwarzschild's "Unnatural Jew," Meiri derides the appreciation of nature as "idle and vain." A second, more moderate approach, which probably represents the majority of traditional Jewish opinion, appreciates the divine handiwork of nature as a legitimate good, but still considers Torah study the preferable way to God's presence. A contemporary advocate of this position,

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Reuven Bulka concludes, "Nature is God's work, but the Torah is God's formula for life." The third category consists of those who consider Torah and nature to be separate but equal paths. It includes Chaim Nachman Bialik, who maintained that eventually the Land would take its rightful place "alongside the Book." Other Zionist writers, such as Saul Tchernichovsky and Micha Berdichevsky, went even further. Influenced by the Nietzschean call for a transvaluation of all values, they considered nature superior to Torah. Commenting on the pertinent passage from *Avot*, Berdichevsky wrote:

I assert that Judah and Israel will only be saved when another teaching is given unto us, namely: Whoever walks by the way and sees a fine tree and a fine field and a fine sky and leaves them to think on other thoughts—that man is like one who forfeits his life! Give us back our fine trees and fine fields! Give us back the Universe.

In his conclusion, Benstein calls for a new approach to both nature and Torah that diverges from all those cited above. He refuses to pit one against the other, suggesting a synthesis, a bridging of the gap between creation and revelation, in which our view of one informs and shapes the other. He offers this as a kind of *tikkun* for both our endangered world and our divided souls. It is advice well taken.

Another issue, which the initial response to Lynn White's essay did not fully put to rest, is the meaning and consequences of dominion granted to humanity in Genesis 1:28. All the contributors to these two volumes agree that White's critique erred in laying the burden of blame for our modern ecological failures upon the Jewish scriptural tradition. Jeremy Cohen's article, "On Classical Judaism and Environmental Crisis" definitively demonstrates that pre-modern readers of the verse, both Jewish and Christian, did not interpret it as license to exploit the natural world. Cohen notes that in Judaism, humanity's relationship to the creation was codified in halakhic restrictions such as *bal tashchit* and Shabbat and sabbatical laws.

Yet modernity threatens this balance in two essential ways. First, it makes human dominion a genuine possibility. Whatever Torah may have said on the matter, practically speaking, during the biblical and rabbinic periods, neither Jews nor gentiles possessed the technological tools to exert their authority over God's creation on a global scale. This is no longer the case. For better or worse, humanity

now has the power to “rule over” much of the natural world. It is unclear whether traditional halakhic rulings will constitute adequate restraints on human ambitions in the face of this new reality. Furthermore, the second sea change wrought by modernity, secularism, undercuts those same constraints. David Ehrenfeld and Philip J. Bentley’s essay, “Judaism and the Practice of Stewardship,” written in 1985 and included in the Yaffe anthology, sounds this warning: “Without the influence of the Sabbath, stewardship in practice is corruptible and unstable. . . . It is the Sabbath, ultimately, that completes and confirms the environmental wisdom of Judaism.” Given the current state of Shabbat observance among even committed liberal Jews, how can we establish limits that would keep our notion of stewardship from deteriorating into a rationalization for environmental exploitation?

Some have responded with the suggestion that contemporary Judaism should develop a less anthropocentric worldview. This harkens back to a celebrated dispute between Saadia and Maimonides, detailed in David Novak’s piece, “The Defense of Creation and the Idea of Nature” in *Judaism and Ecology*.

Saadia insists that humankind is the intended purpose of the entire creation. Maimonides rejects this notion, declaring, “All beings should not be believed to exist for the sake of man’s existence.” This is not to say that the Rambam’s philosophy is biocentric. It is, instead, radically theocentric, asserting that both human beings and the rest of the creation exist for God’s sake alone. Still, as Barry Kogan notes, a theocentric outlook can yield a functional equivalent to a biocentric approach, tempering human arrogance and fostering respect for God’s creatures. How we might successfully promote such a theocentric outlook in our fiercely secular age is another question to ponder.

This is just a taste of the riches that these two anthologies offer the discerning reader. I will conclude with my one lament, which applies equally to each of these collections: the nearly complete absence of wilderness from the discussion of Jewish environmental ethics. Eilon Schwartz, the only writer to be included in both books, shares this concern. He admits that wilderness is problematic, both in theory and in practice. Defined as landscape without people, wilderness removes nature from the realm of history. It is, as Schwartz notes, “an escape in space as well as time.” Still, it can be a humbling and invaluable corrective to the prevailing technocratic model.



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We Jews like to emphasize the order of God's creation; after all, the Genesis narrative is fundamentally about God's imposing boundaries on chaos. But our pursuit of order can all too easily become an obsession with control. Perhaps a bit of wild chaos is just what the earth's doctor ordered. Long before Thureau taught, "In wildness is the preservation of the world," the author of the book of Job gave us the wilderness-inspired Voice from the whirlwind. While much of biblical nature serves as the instrument for Israel's reward and punishment, a kind of mirror of our morality, Job—and wilderness—reminds us that it is not always this way. As E. L. Allen writes in "The Hebrew View of Nature" in the Yaffe anthology, "The untamed world beyond the frontiers of human society is fraught with the numinous; it is a constant reminder that man is not master of the world." Given that the Hebrew word *midbar* comes from the verb "to speak," and that God chose the wilderness as the setting for the giving of the Torah, shouldn't we, too, allow wilderness a voice in our emerging Jewish environmental ethics?

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