

Book Reviews

Edited by
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Towards the Twenty-first Century: Judaism and the Jewish People in Israel and America: Essays in Honor of Rabbi Leon Kronish on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday, edited by Ronald Kronish. KTAV Publishing House, Hoboken, NJ, 1988.

This *estschrift* is a collection of essays on virtually every aspect of the organized Jewish community of the United States, its relationship to Israel, and selected aspects of Israeli society, all from the perspective of the mid-to-late 1980s. Its chapters include a moving "Introduction" and "Afterword" by Rabbi Kronish's two children: Ronald, himself a rabbi, with a doctorate in education from Harvard and who is serving as the Israel representative of the American Jewish Committee, and Maxine Kronish Snyder, a Jewish communal service professional who has spent years in the federation field. Between these two wonderfully warm and loving tributes to their father, there are nine essays in a section entitled, "On the Future of Israel"; Ronald Kronish's essay, "Israel and the Diaspora: Problems and Possibilities," which stands alone in a section entitled "Bridging the Gap,"; ten essays in a section, "On the Future of American Judaism"; and four pieces written by the subject of the *estschrift* himself—two essays and two examples of congregational materials.

Each essay begins with a brief tribute to Leon Kronish, and the picture of the man that emerges from the book is heartwarming. Rabbi Leon Kronish was one of the most influential of the Reform rabbis who rejected the anti-Zionist position that had characterized classical Reform; these rabbis brought about no less than a complete

reversal in Reform philosophy. The new identification of the Reform rabbinate with Zionism is symbolized by Rabbi Kronish's essay, "*Yisrael Goralenu: Israel is Our Destiny*," first printed in the *CCAR Journal* in June 1968 and reprinted here. From all accounts, Leon Kronish had a career of great success, as judged both by the outer trappings of a congregational rabbi in Miami Beach and, more important of course, by the influences that he exerted on his congregants, innumerable friends, and associates on both sides of the ocean; the leadership of American and Israeli Jewry; and, simply stated, all with whom he came into contact.

The book covers such a wide range of topics, all of them relevant to the understanding and work of the Jewish communal professional, that this reviewer is tempted simply to advise everyone in the field to read it and thus conclude his review. One possible gap in the book's wall-to-wall coverage is a serious and direct study of the changing roles of women in the organized Jewish community, as well as in the daily life of Jews in both societies. However, the issue of Liberal Judaism's acceptance of patrilineal descent is well and exhaustively discussed from at least three points of view. Strangely enough, the only really disappointing essay in the book is by, of all people, Elie Wiesel, whose "On Teaching Peace," which begins the book, seems strangely dated.

CLAL, the National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership, governs the fund that was established to help publish the book. Thus, it is appropriate that one of the most trenchant essays in the book is by Rabbi Irving "Yitz" Greenberg, director

of CLAL, who discusses "Toward a Principled Pluralism" with few holds barred. A few other highlights for this reviewer include Ze'ev Shaham's, "Zionism and Personal Commitment"; Gerald Bubis' sophisticated tracing of traditional Jewish views of fund raising and their relationship to the present and future of Jewish communal resource development; Harold Kushner's, "Can Liberal Jews Believe in an All-Powerful God?"; and Jonathan Woocher's prescient essay, "Jewish Education in a Multicultural Society: Goals and Challenges." In fact, the entire section on the future of American Judaism is unusually rich in perspectives and questions for consideration. This section includes, in addition to the articles cited, contributions by Alfred Gottschalk, Paul Hyman, David Polish, Bernard Reisman, Harold Schulweis, and Gerald Serotta.

One of the most interesting aspects of this book is its diversity of views on the roles of the Liberal (Reform, Progressive, non-Orthodox) rabbi in the present and future Jewish community. Once one accepts the perspective that the relationship between professional Jewish communal service staffs and rabbis should be cooperative rather than competitive, it behooves the former to become better informed about the struggles faced by the latter, as well as vice versa. As just one of the gems that abound in this volume, consider the quote that Alfred Gottschalk, writing both as rabbi and as president of the Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institute of Religion, cites from the late Rabbi Jacob Weinstein (1902–1974), an intellectual giant of the Reform rabbinate of his time:

The horizon is full of great issues. They are larger than the human fist so that any Elijah can read even while running. A rabbi who does not see the bush burning, nor feel the fire, nor hear the call in every vagrant mind, cannot be sincere. Such ears are waxed. Such eyes are blinded from looking outside for the glory which should be found within.

This book reminds us that the same is true of everyone whose profession or avocation is service to the Jewish community. The book deserves a wide readership.

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God's Choice: The Total World of a Fundamentalist Christian School, by Alan Peshkin. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1986.

Alan Peshkin's book is of interest in three distinct domains: effective education, religious education, and qualitative research methods in education.

Alan Peshkin spent a year and a half (together with two research assistants) as a participant observer in the Bethany Baptist Academy (BBA), a small private, born-again Christian school (K–12) in Illinois. His previous research on the relationship of communities to the schools they sponsored led him to study the especially close relationship between a religious community and its school. He was refused entrance to many such schools, since the school authorities were convinced that, as an unbeliever, he could neither understand nor effectively communicate the educational process he was seeking to study. (The fact that he was Jewish was no greater handicap, in this regard, than had he been a non-born-again Christian.)

BBA is sponsored by the Bethany Baptist Church, and the church's pastor was also the founder and leader of the Academy. Taken together, the church and the school strive to provide a total, round-the-clock, year-round, environment not only for the students but also for their families and all

school personnel. The world view that dictates this "educational" approach is the same that led to the founding of the school in 1972: Those who want to achieve salvation in this world and the next, in keeping with God's revealed word in Scripture, can do so only by separating themselves from the evil world of secular humanism that prevails not only in the public schools but also in the surrounding secular culture, especially the media.

BBA achieves its goals of inculcating its world view, as measured by the current attitudes and actions of most of its students, as well as their preference for continuing their education in born-again Christian colleges. Its success derives from a *constant* pursuit of purity in thought and action, on the part of everyone involved in the school. On admission, both students and parents sign pledges that spell out their obligations, with the understanding that major infractions will lead to expulsion—and they do. The pledges run the gamut from parents' committing themselves to *not* trying to change the school and to allow physical punishment, to the students' agreeing to a strict dress code and no rock music or movies at any time.

All school staff (including bus drivers and janitors) sign a pledge that they are born-again Christians and will behave at all times in keeping with that testimony (no smoking, dancing, etc.). Moreover, they all donate time to help the school (e.g., teachers may drive the school bus), as well as attend numerous church services and functions on their "free" time. (For example, male teachers attend the 7:00 AM Saturday prayer breakfast, and female teachers prepare the food!) Finally, students are expected to adhere to their code of behavior after school hours, on weekends, and during summer vacation when leadership aspirants are expected to attend the Summer Youth Trip and regular students participate in Vacation Bible Camp. They are also expected to chastise backsliding classmates for their shortcomings—telling them to "get right with the Lord".

In short, this is a Christian *haredi*, *musar* educational institution, for three reasons. First, the school seeks total separation from the values of the surrounding culture. "Be ye separate, says the Lord" (2 Corinthians 6:17) is a lesson that is constantly stressed. Second, the life goal that the school promotes for its students is not a successful career plus Sunday church attendance, but a vocation in some aspect of church work, either as pastor, teacher, or even office employee. Failing that, the school expects its students to live a life suffused with BBA's beliefs and values, whatever their chosen endeavor. Third, BBA is really not so much a school, as a total *educational* institution, seeking to shape the life-long values and world view of each student. Subject matter mastery is far less important than spiritual mastery. Hence, Bibles must be brought to and are used in *all* classes, and some teachers give extra credit on tests for those who attend church regularly.

Given this brief introduction to BBA, let me now return to the three areas of educational interest.

Effective education. BBA certainly meets the criteria for an effective school (strong leadership, orderly school climate, etc.), especially the explicit norms of behavior that the school enforces with an elaborate demerit system and the home reinforces. Can Jewish schools achieve this level of commitment? Probably not. Most Jewish schools—even day schools—practice open admissions. Almost any Jewish student who wants to attend can attend and would be expelled from school only for blatant behavioral problems. Not BBA. Admission is restricted almost exclusively to born-again Christians willing to adhere to the school's regimen. BBA is considered a liberal Christian school because it accepts some non-born-again students *if* they demonstrate receptivity to the school's outlook. The readily enforced expulsion policy corrects any admission errors.

Religious education. *God's Choice* demonstrates what fundamentalist education is all about. Given the high level of commit-

ment of family, students, and staff, one wonders what they need schooling for at all. To the contrary, BBA would argue that it is educating for deviance from the prevailing culture, and maintaining their "society within a society" requires intensive, ongoing attention. Moreover, it is educating for distinct adult roles, which draw on specific skills and knowledge that future evangelists need to learn in their youth. Drama, music, and speech are all required high school courses at BBA because they underpin another required course in "Soul winning" (*with lab*).

The book raises a host of perplexing questions for the Jewish educator. By Peshkin's criteria, Judaism too is a deviant subculture. To what extent can we balance our modern sensibilities and those of our students and their parents with the demands of the tradition, however that may be interpreted? Can we succeed in educating for the kind of commitment that BBA achieves without engaging in its tactics, which include limiting school admissions, as well as reassuring the students that other religions are "just dead wrong"? How much individual autonomy and pluralism should we endorse? From our nonfundamentalist viewpoint, BBA has gone off one deep end. Have we gone off the other?

What BBA students do learn they learn well, and it is functional for survival in their own community and beyond. The price they pay is what they do not become, what they cannot enjoy, what they fail to comprehend (p. 286).

Everyone reads the current Jewish demographic data differently, but it seems we

have yet to formulate an educational approach that will, on a large scale, ensure both commitment and cosmopolitanism.

Qualitative research methods. Peshkin has done an admirable job of combining intensive ethnographic fieldwork with quantitative sociological survey data. He has also published a methodological article describing the dilemmas of how much of an insider a researcher can try to become during fieldwork ("Odd Man Out: the Participant Observer in an Absolutist Setting", *Sociology of Education* 57(4), 1984), as well as coediting a book on the debate over qualitative research methods in education (*Qualitative Inquiry in Education*, TC Press, 1990).

The narrative, ethnographic methodology that Peshkin uses is based on a post-positivistic subjectivism that rejects the scientific claim of pursuing "the truth." That subjectivist stance would certainly anger the folks at BBA, who have found the Truth in the Lord and would close their school if they had any doubts about it. On the other hand, ironically, it is the *individual* search for truth that BBA fosters among its students, albeit along God's right paths.

Although *God's Choice* is an important contribution to educational research in general, it will be especially valuable, thought-provoking reading for Jewish educators. If we are not prepared to pay BBA's price for success, what changes are we prepared to make to better achieve our goals?

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