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BOOK REVIEWS

*Sigmund Freud and the Jewish Mystical Tradition*

by DAVID BAKAN

(New York: D. Van Nostrand & Co., 1958)

*Guardians of our Heritage*

by LEO JUNG

(New York: Bloch Publishing Co., 1958)

*Step by Step in the Jewish Religion*

by ISIDORE EPSTEIN

(London: Soncino Press, 1958)

## REVIEWERS IN THIS ISSUE

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## Book Reviews

### *Sigmund Freud and the Jewish Mystical Tradition* by DAVID BAKAN

Prof. David Bakan, associate professor of Psychology at the University of Missouri, here attempts to analyze and understand the genesis and place of Freud's thought in the history of ideas. Together with the intriguing ideas that he presents in fulfillment of this task, we also find several extremely tenuous arguments in the author's effort to link Freud's ideas to the mystical tradition in Jewish life. Specifically, it is his thesis that the tradition which includes the *Sefer Yetzirah*, the *Zohar*, and other writings of the Kabbalists, and which found distorted expression later in the pseudo-Messianism of Sabbatai Zevi and Jacob Frank, prepared Freud with a special receptivity to a particular view of man and to certain aspects of behavior.

Bakan grants at the outset that the nearly assimilated Freud was not in fact a secret student of Kabbalah or Chasidic thought. He adds, however, that this pattern would not have been inconsistent with the usual practice of the masters of Jewish Mysticism. The principal point is that these Kabbalistic ideas were rife in the environment of the Jewish communities in which Freud received his early education, even that of Vienna. There is reason to believe that Freud was influenced by the mystical tradition to a much greater extent than has heretofore been believed. Bakan suggests that the anti-Semitic environment in which Freud lived, certain personal reasons, and the tradition of *remez* in mysticism led Freud to dissimulate and seem to deny his debt to this tradition.

Nevertheless, perhaps for the very reason that the thesis is extreme, Bakan's book is a fascinating and enlightening work. The points which seem most far-fetched are at the same time the most rewarding. The presentation of this thesis leads the reader into such intriguing topics as the development of Jewish Mysticism, the role of Sabbatai Zevi and other false Messiahs in the pattern of Jewish assimilation, Freud's Jewish identification, his Moses-concept and its expression, his actual religious Jewish education, and the relationship of psychoanalysis and Kabbalah. In this reviewer's opinion, these topics are covered in a competent though sometimes elementary manner. The author is writing for an audience that includes those who are not necessarily well versed in either discipline. The popular emphasis of the book therefore enhances its expository scope.

Among the influences which Bakan proposes as significant in the understanding of Freud's limited affirmation of his Jewishness, there are two which seem most important. The first, and most obvious, is the anti-Semitism of the Viennese society of that day. Bakan points out that when in 1882 Freud's admired mentor Brucke dissuaded him from continuing his academic career because of his limited financial resources, Freud was really being reminded that, as a Jew, his advancement would be severely limited. This direct and frustrating manifestation of anti-Semitism, if such it was, was only the personal experience of an ever-present reality. The anti-Semitism of Prof. Rohling and Kurt Leuger has been chronicled by many historians who consider it one of the

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best organized and most pernicious attacks on Jews and Judaism in the pre-Hitlerian era. In such a setting, Freud would certainly have conflicting feelings about his Jewish identity, and therefore would not emphasize the Jewish sources of those concepts which he hoped would gain wide acceptance in medical and scientific circles.

A second important element, one that embraces a fifth of Bakan's work, is that of the Moses figure in Freud's thought and writings. One dramatic example of the meaning of Moses is found in Freud's discussion of Michaelangelo's Moses, which he perceives not as a projection of the mind of its creator, but almost as an autonomous figure with whom he establishes his own relationship. Freud tells of the three weeks that he spent "in front of the statue," studying it, measuring it, sketching it, until he captured an "understanding" which he ventured to publish. At first, Freud says, he "used to sit down in front of the statue in the expectation that [he] should now see how it would start up on its raised foot, hurl the Tablets of Law to the ground, and let fly its wrath." When nothing of this kind happened, the stone image "became more and more transfixed, and an almost oppressively solemn calm emanated from it, and [he] was obliged to realize that something was represented here that could stay without change: that this Moses would remain like this in his wrath forever." To Bakan, this reaction was Freud's acting out of his feelings about his defection from traditional Judaism, particularly from the Law, and his subsequent realization that his stern super ego would not vent its punishing fury upon him. Freud

therefore did not consider himself a fit spokesman for his people, nor did he expect that his views would find greater acceptance if they were identified as emanating from a Jewish source.

One point that should be of great interest to students of the Talmud is Bakan's suggestion of the derivation of the analytic approach to human personality from the analytic approach of the traditional commentaries to the Bible and the Talmud. Bakan maintains that these are directly linked by the equation, affirmed in the Zohar, of man and Torah. Whether this link is a valid one, or simply coincidence in this case, it certainly is true that there are abundant similarities between the two types of analysis. There is the underlying assumption in traditional Jewish exegesis that every work, every letter has a meaning beyond its literal meaning (*peshat*). There are no repetitions, elisions, or unusual sentence structures that occur by chance. All are indications of hidden meaning. The deeper meaning is available to the trained interpreter who is willing to take everything into account. The interpretations that are yielded will present a consistent pattern. The same holds true in psychoanalysis. Dr. Bakan suggests that this is logical extension of the mystical view of man as Torah. Others might prefer to retain the *le-havdil*, even while granting the similarity of methodology.

In all, Bakan has produced a work that is readable and informative, though far from definitely convincing. Considering the widespread impact of Freudian ideas on contemporary society and contemporary thought, an impact that cannot as yet be

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fully appreciated, the book provides both provocative fact and intriguing conjecture with regard to the Jewish and Sabbatian origins of Freudian thinking.

C. B.

*Guardians of our Heritage* edited by  
LEO JUNG

The appearance of Rabbi Leo Jung's eighteenth volume is a happy and fortunate event that will be warmly welcomed by all to whom the Jewish tradition is dear. *Guardians of our Heritage*, edited by Dr. Jung, is a significant contribution to a field of Jewish study which has not yet received sufficient attention by Jewish researchers and historians—that of the most recent past of Torah Jewry, from 1724 up to the last day of the year 1953.

The structure of the book is in the form of short biographies—mostly, one might say, intellectual profiles—of some of the most outstanding guardians of the Jewish heritage written, in many cases, by disciples or relatives, and usually by people who were personally acquainted with their subjects. There is a ring of authenticity in these essays that will serve to enhance their scholarly value, as well as their readability for the layman.

A cosmopolitan quality is attained in the variety of the subjects. They range from Italian bibliophiles to Lithuanian *Roshei Yeshibah*, from modern German scholars to early American rabbis, and from a founder of Mizrachi to a stalwart leader of Agudah. The one element that unites the illustrious "Guardians," subjects of these brief but penetrating biographies, is—their common "Heritage." They are all champions of the Jewish Torah tradition. Read-

ing through these informative essays about such fundamentally different personalities, who are all, nevertheless, "Guardians" of our "Heritage," one becomes aware of the multifaceted character of the heritage itself. Judaism, to judge by its foremost exponents, is decidedly not a monolithic structure which encases its communicants in a rigid ideological pattern.

It is this total impression that makes Rabbi Jung's own contribution so felicitously appropriate. In the introductory essay, entitled "The Rabbis and Freedom of Interpretation," he points out that while Halakhah (Jewish law) is authoritative in its claims upon the practical conduct of our lives, Agadah—which includes philosophy, theology, and Bible interpretation, the "non-preceptive" part of Torah—allows a wide margin of freedom of interpretation, a freedom that makes possible the variety of the subjects of the book.

It is difficult, in a brief review, to mention all the chapters deserving the praise of a critic. We must be satisfied with mentioning only a few important selections, chosen at random. The biography of Rabbi David Hoffmann, by the late Israeli ambassador to Switzerland, himself no mean thinker, is surprisingly comprehensive for only sixty pages. Dr. Adlerblum's memoirs of her childhood in Jerusalem are a superior, charming autobiography. No reader should miss any one of her delightful recollections that, together, present a precious picture both of childhood and the Old City. Interestingly, the essay concludes with a philosophy of Jewishness derived from the experiences the writer relates. The essay on Rabbi

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Hayyim of Volozin is an excellent pen-portrait of the thinking of an eminent intellectual giant and sage of the Halakhah, with an insight into the problems of the mysticism of that day. The reader will, undoubtedly, enjoy the story of the American rabbi, Isaac Leiser, and his periodical, the *Occident*, and its revelations of the unfolding of traditional Judaism in the United States.

*Guardians of our Heritage* is a most important collection, which every thinking Jew ought to own and read. It should become a sourcebook for mature adults to acquaint themselves with the lives of the *Gedolei Yisrael*, and then to digest them for their children and grandchildren. The Guardians presented in this valuable compilation have themselves become part and parcel of our immortal Heritage. The Jewish public owes a debt of gratitude to the editor for perpetuating for us this "heritage of guardians." M. S.

*Step by Step in the Jewish Religion* by  
ISIDORE EPSTEIN

The increase in the number of "guide-books" on Judaism written for young people is an encouraging sign, indicating a desire on the part of individuals as well as of groups to learn more about the Jewish religion and its ethical and moral teachings. However, with the multiplicity of books, it becomes important to know who the guide is and in what direction he is leading his youthful readers. Does he lead the reader toward a traditional understanding of religion, or toward merely a "humanistic" or "cultural" interpretation of Jewish beliefs and practices?

Rabbi Dr. Isidore Epstein, the

distinguished editor of the Soncino Talmud and principal of Jews' College in London, wisely interprets for the younger reader the basic philosophical principles and practical observances he previously enunciated in his well-known *The Jewish Way of Life*. Written in clear, lucid style, one which can be understood and appreciated by the average high school student, the present volume leads the young reader "step by step" through the portals of Judaism. Because of the importance of these basic steps in the understanding of Judaism, and hence the significance of this excellent volume in our present traditional religious literature for young people, it is in place here to review briefly the general contents of Dr. Epstein's newest work. The basic teaching considered is Hillel's famous dictum: "What is hateful to you, do not do unto your fellow." This is the guiding principle of teachings which deal with man's duties to his fellow-man. Dr. Epstein then demonstrates that this thought embraces the first three steps leading to a good Jewish life—justice, righteousness, and love. He discusses these concepts not as abstract ideas, but as daily living experiences. Justice, for example, means to respect the life of others, their feelings, and their possessions. In all cases, the author provides appropriate verses from the Bible and Talmud to serve as the basis of ethical principles and to show the relationship between Law and daily living.

However, the author emphasizes, the process of teaching does not insure the fact of learning. Many fine ideas are taught, but not all people learn them sufficiently well to apply them to their personal lives.

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To incorporate these ideas into daily life, Dr. Epstein calls for a process of self-education: the conscious subjugation of such bad traits as envy, greed, and pride, and the acquisition of such qualities as faith, contentment, and humility.

The ultimate goal of these lessons and the developed good qualities is, Dr. Epstein declares, *kedushah* or holiness. This step he defines as a separation from "evils within and outside ourselves." The road to holiness is not an easy one, and cannot be reached by faith and good intentions alone. It requires training and self-discipline, provided for by the commandments of the Torah. Some *mitzvot* offer negative training, while others offer positive training. Dietary laws, for example, provide training in temperance and moderation; the *mitzvot* of *tefillin* and *tzitzit* serve not only as reminders of Divine Law, but help us to train our hearts and minds in the ways of holiness. These laws are everyone's laws. Holiness, then, is not something attainable only by a few individuals—saints and rabbis who isolate themselves from the community for constant study and prayer. Holiness, on the contrary, is within the reach of the ordinary man and woman; it can be attained through the normal activities of everyday life. It exists in performing even one's commonplace work with honesty and sincerity.

Dr. Epstein now is able to ask the most tenuous question: What role does belief play in this training process? His answer is by way of an apt analogy: Just as a soldier must be imbued with a firm belief in the

righteousness of the cause for which he is fighting, so must the training of the religious person be supported by correct beliefs and ideals about God, the Torah, Israel, the Messiah, and immortality.

To strengthen these beliefs and to inspire the individual in his striving for holiness, Judaism has set aside special days known as "holy convocations" or "holy rallies." These days are the Sabbath and the holidays. The author discusses them at length, pointing out their significance and their contribution to the spiritual development of the Jew. The training centers for holiness are, of course, the home, the school, and the synagogue.

The reader will realize that in a brief guide like *Step by Step in the Jewish Religion* it is impossible to deal adequately with the entire nexus of Jewish beliefs and practices. Of the three fundamental requirements of Judaism—*Torah*, *Abodah*, and *Gemilut Chasadim*—this book places the greatest emphasis upon the third, the practice of good deeds. Indeed, the principles of *Torah* and *Abodah* might have received a fuller, more adequate treatment.

Well planned and well organized, this book is heartily recommended as a textbook for religious schools. Quotations used in the text of the book are listed in Hebrew at the end of the volume, a characteristic that will prove valuable to the advanced young reader. All in all, this is a most welcome addition to an important area of Jewish life and education.

H. A.