

BOOK REVIEWS

Why Me? Coping with Grief, Loss, and Change by PESACH KRAUSS and MORRIE GOLDFISCHER. New York: Bantam Books, 1988, 171 pp.

Reviewed by
Reuven P. Bulka

Why me? is an upbeat, positive, affirmative book, of the *When Bad Things Happen . . .* genre, but without its philosophical complications. One of the major strengths of this book is that it is written from the perspective of one who has been in the thick of life, was forced to confront a painful and potentially crippling loss early on in his life, and later on endured tragic circumstances within his family. This book speaks from experience rather than from the ivory tower.

This is a book of faith which, ironically, addresses not only the believer, but also the atheist. Appropriately missing is the trap of clichés or niceties that insult the intelligence with their simplicity and lack of caring.

Perhaps the most important lesson about caring that emerges in the book is that in approaching others, one must perceive and comprehend where that other person is, and that only after having done so can one attempt to alleviate the individual's burden. This comes through not only in the general approach, but also in the very candid admission that this approach was not always used, and that this resulted in the realization of the importance of doing it the right way.

The book does get caught in the jargon of the age, speaking of one's own self-esteem as an operative category, but it does it in a way which is not narcissistically one-sided. There is a sense that this self-esteem is related to transcending experience.

Another useful lesson which comes forth, and which most rabbis and therapists will corroborate, is that when a person asks "why me," or "why did God do this to

me," it is pointless to argue this theological point in the moment of actual rage, at the immediate experience of tragedy. Before speaking to anyone who is hurting, one must take care of the hurt. It is also pointless to take an individual who does not believe in God and convince him to become a believer. Ironically, through profound, religiously-imbued empathy, but without imposing religious values, the book is able to bring a sense of spiritual meaning to many an atheist.

When we read that every patient is responsible for bringing out the meaning of his life based on his uniqueness and the singularity of each moment—a moment that can be lived only once and never retrieved—we hear Viktor Frankl at his best. Then, on page 72, we read (what we have already sensed long beforehand) that Viktor Frankl is acknowledged as a seminal thinker and influence. Indeed, Frankl's influence is obvious from the very beginning. In the introduction, such phrases as "meaning of life" or "each individual is unique and irreplaceable" are words that spring out from Frankl's works. They are not copyrighted words, but they have a certain ring which in the context of the book, show a profound connection.

There are several points of concern in the volume that should be addressed. On page 57, we read a moving story surrounding a child who was severely retarded, had a speech impediment and who had been taught "the first two blessings" for the reading of the Torah. There really are only two blessings and I do not know what the author means by the first two blessings.

There are a number of occasions when

the sources for various citations are not given. This book will undoubtedly see more than one edition, and hopefully in the ensuing editions, this type of information will be made available, as indeed will be a bibliography of useful books.

Maimonides is noted as the source of the advice, that we should look at each day as if it were our last. Actually this is based on a Talmudic statement by R. Eliezer (Shabbat, 153a). The final chapter of this enlightening book is titled "The Most Important Drive of All—The Drive for Meaning." But meaning is not a drive, and to reduce it to a drive is to make it the equivalent of other innate drives of less profound nature, such as the drive for pleasure or power. Frankl makes the very cogent point that we pursue meaning, that

we will toward meaning, but it is not a drive, else it would suffer from being part of this homeostasis, tension release principle. Something drives us to find meaning, we find meaning, and therefore we feel fulfilled because the tension that has been created by the drive has been relieved, according to the homeostasis approach. But meaning is a unique human expression, that is willed by the human being, and cannot be reduced to a drive.

Those in the helping professions and those who are in need of help themselves will all benefit from this book. Whatever small shortcomings in the book are easily correctable and should not in any way deflect from the fact that this is a sensitively written, profoundly inspired, and genuinely uplifting treatise.

Born Guilty: Children of Nazi Families by PETER SICHROVSKY (Basic Books, 1988), 192 pp., \$17.95.

The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide by ROBERT J. LIFTON (Basic Books, 1987), \$12.95.

Reviewed by
Benjamin Eilbott

The record of the Holocaust persists and transfixes; assignment is still needed for abominations and guilt. Survivors, witnesses, and commentators—and the authors of *Born Guilty* and *The Nazi Doctors*—struggle to circumscribe the inexplicable in the hope that tightening the circle will distill some understanding. Sichrovsky's slim volume records the introspective words of the children and grandchildren of accused or convicted Nazi war criminals; the exhaustive and heavily annotated research by Lifton focuses on a group one would have expected to emerge guiltless from the Holocaust, but that instead is shown to have borne enormous responsibility for the killing.

There are fourteen chapters in *Born Guilty*; all are really self-examinations. They have been selected by the author from

interviews held by him in Germany and Austria with second- and third-generation descendants of Nazi families. There are no startling new insights, but there is renewed confirmation from a group that has been insufficiently considered and rarely interviewed, that what is so facetiously called the legacy of horror may more properly be seen as its inheritance. Far more disquieting, we may conclude from these selections that the lesson may be that there is no lesson.

The responses recorded include the guilt-ridden and the haughty, the pathetic and the chilling, the self-conscious and the contemptuous. Unfortunately, the language is often wooden and artificial, and the respondents themselves exist in only two dimensions, while also sharing some sameness in their anonymity. This may in part be a function of the format, attributable to the

lack of spontaneity in a translation of recorded conversations, but we are left with profoundly unsatisfied questions about these people, their missing dimension, and their exact motivation. Contributing to the superficial characterization was the author's decision to label these men and women according to his impression of them—"Stefanie, The Proud One," "Anna, The Decent One," "Rudolf, The Guilty One," "Johannes, The Innocent One," and so on. It should be noted, however, that the book makes important contributions; the painful themes in these selections cannot be ignored and do us the service of mocking any possible return to complacency.

Clearly expressed in several chapters is the seductive plaint that has been increasingly heard out of Germany and Austria, and too readily supported world-wide. It is the proposition that the post-war Germans and Austrians are victims as much as were those murdered in the Holocaust, and that murder, being irrevocable, can be kept at a distance, with charges of guilt by silence or individual guilt dismissable as unacceptable suggestions of collective guilt.

Sichrovsky writes in a postscript that the words of Stefanie were those with which German readers most frequently identified, and which they most often endorsed.

I didn't murder anyone, I didn't mistreat anyone, I didn't cheer Hitler. Enough that we Germans are always the bad ones that we have constantly to be reminded of it. What does that mean—WE started the war, WE gassed the Jews . . . It sure as Hell wasn't me . . . and none of my friends and certainly not my father. . . . They executed all the guilty ones back then at Nuremberg. They had their show. My own grandfather was among them. What do they want from me? Every year the same business in school. Movies about concentration camps, pictures of concentration camps. I'm telling you I can't stand anymore.

"But it was always the other ones who were the victims," complains Gerhard. "And what about us? Nobody talked about that. My father's brother was a prisoner of war in Russia and never came back. My mother's two brothers both died in the war. A half dozen of my father's relatives were killed in a bombing raid. . . . Our whole family suffered. . . . But

they never gave us a penny, only the others. Who knows who all the people were who got things after the war. . . . What happened to us is clear; my father lost his job."

As we read about this cynical reversal of victims and killers, we are repelled by the thought that shock and repugnance at the crimes of the parents may have run their course, to be replaced by "retroactive compassion" that is superficial and deludes both self and victim. The seeds of recurrence lie—not so dormant—in justification and explanation; if embarrassment and annoyance are the motivation, then compassion will be a necessary nuisance displayed as a public relations gesture. One looks not for desultory denunciation of the guilt of others, but for the unequivocal declaration of the relationship between national silence and genocide.

The book's recurring motifs of "We too are victims," and "I didn't do it," are found juxtaposed with a more crucial question, which is articulated in the two themes, "Would you have acted differently?" and "They were only doing the job that would ultimately be beneficial to the life of the nation; they were striving for the greater good."

"In my father's eyes the German nation was an organism, a body, and as a doctor it was his duty to shield that body against sickness and disaster, to remove the diseased part . . ." The quote is from Egon, "The Dweller in the Past." "The system failed not in its ideas, but in its execution. . . . Now, when fascism no longer exists, it is easy to be against it. . . . If what was said were true, we Germans were a nation of criminals and madmen. And we now know that's not so. Our former enemies have become our closest allies."

Not all in the book are unrepentant defenders of the faith, or even openly pessimistic cynics. Anna and Johannes have attempted to harmonize the dominant experiences of their lives—hate, ill will, and defeat—with their love for family and country, although Sichrovsky contends that the "strength to break with one's parents" is an essential prerequisite for avoiding the charge of guilt by silence, and editorializes about efforts at reconciliation that it "can only be a reaching out, and it is the

prerogative of the victim either to accept it or reject it." But arguably the Nazi years were more than an aberrant accumulation of individual actions subservient to the hypnotic principle of the supreme Fatherland. That principle has evolved whenever a society has succeeded in coercing or seducing the individual into yielding the right to opposition in favor of a mystical or frightened wish for identification with the group, a wish often only submission in anticipation of unknown but expected retribution. The traditional ex post facto contempt accorded "cowards of conscience" would not be so readily accepted were we to acknowledge that we are equally prepared to elevate to almost heroic stature those who have been ordinary human beings engaged in acts of selflessness and kindness. The irony of the inherent contradiction is obvious.

Most human behavior will be in the center between craven participation and gallant defiance; judgment should be made about the reluctance to know, rather than only about guilt and innocence. Being born guilty is not different from being born innocent; each is a weight with which we wrestle all of our lives. A young woman's confession that she "grew up in a generation where it was improper to ask your parents too many questions, and I didn't and I'm sorry," is a pitiful plea for understanding.

I always believed everything [my father] told me. . . . I believed his assurances. . . . But everything changed when my son demolished my view of the world. . . . Compared to today's youth we were stupid and naive and uninterested. . . . In the days after our talk . . . I forged a bond with my son against my father . . . I had found out that my father was a liar.

It required the impetus of the third generation to bring Susanne to that late break with her father; it is tragic that she does not recognize that her anger is with her father's deception, rather than with his actions. Sichrowsky calls the postscript to *Born Guilty*, "The Misfortune of Being Born Too Late." It may be comforting to be certain about one's behavior in the face of ethical dilemmas, but no one has the luxury or the comfort of that certainty.

The book's self-examinations may be glib, and its characterizations skeletal, but the stridency of many of its voices provides alarming evidence that too many of those who have labeled themselves "born guilty" do not finally concede that. Fortunately, we meet also those who have overcome studied ignorance and the reluctance to understand, and believe that recurrence is not inevitable. Let us hope that they are not in the minority.

The Nazi Doctors appeared in hard cover in 1986; it has now been published in paperback. Subtitled "Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide," it is in three major parts, labeled "The Genetic Cure," "Auschwitz, The Racial Cure," and "The Psychology of Genocide." More than half of the book focuses on Auschwitz—understandably, for extrapolation to other camps will always be made from that paradigm of horror. Lucidly and almost dispassionately we move from a documentation of medical ethics, efficiently subverted in the service of racial insanity and nationalistic hatred, to the larger contemplation of human nature under crisis. Author of important books on genocide, survivors, and death and life, Lifton, a psychiatrist, chronicles, on the basis of personal interviews conducted over a period of years, the medical actions of Nazi physicians detailed to duty in the service of Germany's glory. We read about acts of stupendous immorality, deeds so heinous that they defy both acceptance and understanding, as well as about those almost equally repugnant which can at least be illuminated.

Two quotes from *Born Guilty* appropriately reinforce the dual leitmotifs that dominate *The Nazi Doctors*.

"Critical people," declares Egon, a physician himself, "can be stirred up only if they have an enemy who corresponds with their critical consciousness . . . Germans can still be mobilized, only it's got to be the right enemy. . . . The nation, being a living entity, needs doctors. If need be they can also kill, but not out of joy in killing but out of necessity. . . . Just as a doctor can save the life of a patient by removing an appendix he can save the body politic by excising big tumors. The extinction of life also forms the basis of the survival of others."

"Would I have acted the same way then?" asks Egon in another context. "I think so. . . . The enemies were not only Russians and Americans, but also . . . Jews and Gypsies. . . . Why should a soldier who for years had shot at people . . . killing women and children, be allowed to return home after the war and to live in peace, while my father is considered a criminal? Both were ordered to kill, each in his own way. Both were convinced that what they were doing was right . . . I'm not going to deny my father."

Lifton has reconstructed the lives of certain Nazi physicians, of a number large enough to be representative. We are given their personal histories, including their voluntary decision to join the S.S., Hitler's elite corps, and note their cooperation in subsequently carrying out the tasks expected of them, assignments implemented by them not merely as party members, but as physicians. In his expert analysis of the psychological "doubling" that dominated the lives of these doctors, the Faustian bargain that enabled them to strive toward a "cosmic scheme of racial cure," Lifton delineates these physicians as they preferred to see themselves—as healers in the service of the greater good. The Jekyll and Hyde doubling permitted the healer to deceive the killer, and the human being to delude himself. There was pride in these doctors that they had been selected to perform the highest medical duty a nation could require of its physicians. They admitted to no conflict with the Hippocratic oath, nor saw themselves as forsworn, rejecting the oath as either irrelevant or superseded by that of fealty pledged to Hitler. Repeatedly, Lifton documents the ultimate irony of the healer-killer paradox, with even Mengele capable of acts of healing, and many others able to juxtapose their prolonging of life with their role in ending it.

The recent commemoration of Kristallnacht's fiftieth anniversary called it the "beginning of the Holocaust," neglecting, to the detriment of historical comprehension, to refer to the officially sanctioned killing begun by Germany with its euthanasia and sterilization programs almost immediately after Hitler's 1933 assumption of power. Programs that at the time were

widely unrecognized and disbelieved (by Jews to their ultimate sorrow), demonstrated early in the life of the Nazi regime that any actions could be subordinated to a seductively orchestrated and implacably coordinated plan, and the killers represented to the country, as well as to themselves, as hero-saviors.

The life of the nation took precedence over "dogma and conflicts of conscience," declared a Nazi party newspaper; within years even those conflicts had receded into a repressed background as the "philosophy" behind the planning showed itself to be as much an instrument of murder as were the acts themselves.

The state organism . . . is a whole with its own laws and rights, much like one self-contained human organism . . . which, in the interest of the welfare of the whole, also—as we doctors know—abandons and rejects parts or particles that have become worthless or dangerous.

This quote from a German professor of psychiatry encapsulates the Holocaust, and can serve as an imprimatur for the elimination of mongrelizing and destructive non-Aryans. Lifton almost numbs us with hundreds of such quoted exhortations, which legitimized, in an atmosphere of fanaticism and reborn national pride, surreal deeds that psychologically swallowed those who had spawned them. In obedient ranks doctors succumbed to the Siren songs, which sang of "lives unworthy of life," and of that truism, "The Jews are our Misfortune," and with terrible conviction these doctors rushed toward the Final Solution.

In one manner or another they all became part of the killing—as physicians, survivors, and witnesses, as non-Jews and Jews, non-Germans and Germans, Nazi doctors and Jewish or non-Jewish prisoner physicians. Overwhelmingly (and, it must be admitted, somewhat repetitively), Lifton makes it terrifyingly clear that the Nazi doctors who shared in the killing, the maiming experiments, and the cruel torture, who had been partners in the early planning for genocide, and who as individuals participated in ramp selections for the gas chambers, as well as in the fatal phenol

murders, did so in the conviction that they were *medically* assuring the Third Reich's future and the genetic survival of their Aryan nation. That conviction, moreover, was effectively reinforced by their certainty that they were murdering those already marked for death. "Killing someone already dead need not be experienced as murder. And since Jews . . . were more generally perceived as carriers of death, or bearers of the death taint, they became 'doubly dead.' Just as one could not kill people already dead, one could do them no harm . . . in medical experimentation."

In isolated instances participating doctors who survived the Nuremberg and other trials came to have some doubts about their actions, but their behavior in 1944, as the end of the war—and the Russian armies—approached, proved that even these doubts were not inspired by guilt, but rather by unremorseful criminals' apprehension at being trapped by enemies who would exact terrible punishment for "misguided" crimes. True defiance came from very few indeed, and brought with it varying consequences, with death not at all a certainty. More frequent were the instances of those who opted for non-participation, phrasing their refusal evasively, rather than in ethical confrontations. They too avoided death and even imprisonment, and perhaps the blemish of individual guilt; it is moot to wonder whether theirs were acts of courage or of understandable expediency.

A sense of the embodied self enables us to say . . . "We are always more than any machine we can construct." It must be emphasized that the problem is never merely, or even primarily, one of individual psychology. . . . Individuals vary . . . in the capacity to avoid destructive forms of doubling associated with victimization and genocide. Prophylaxis against the genocidal direction of the self . . . must always include critical examination of ideologies and institutions. . . . The physician with a strong sense of embodied self has a greater chance to hold on to universal healing principles . . . less susceptible to a technicized professional identity ('I am a professional healer and nothing else, in no way responsible for Auschwitz; so I go along with it and heal when I can') or to an

ideologized professional identity ('As a doctor to the Volk and a cultivator of genes, my participation in killing is in the service of healing the Nordic race'). But if the destructive ideological and behavioral pressures are sufficiently great, *virtually any professional self may be susceptible to moving in genocidal directions.* (Emphasis mine.)

It is impossible to do justice to the nuances, interpretations, and implications of this masterful book, and no reader, however distant in time and perspective from the evil it describes, will be able to evade its almost inexorable conclusions about the pivotal question that has always obsessed us:

"Can a good man do bad things?"

Yes, if he subordinates his conscience and upbringing to a mythical great goal.

Yes, if he wishes to be the best bureaucratic cog in the bureaucracy.

Yes, if he does not believe that he is killing fellow human beings, but rather experimental animals already condemned to oblivion beyond his powers of reversal.

Finally, a quote from a letter received by me from a young adult acquaintance in Germany, born of German and American parents. It speaks directly to the ennui and the cynicism in so many of the *Born Guilty* responses, and reveals its own doubts about lessons to be drawn from the exhaustive, and morally exhausting, themes in *The Nazi Doctors*, themes this review did not have the space to explore fully, but which the reader is urged to examine.

Today is the 8th of November, 1988. . . . On every channel in radio and TV, in the newspapers and magazines, you can hear or read commentaries and learned discussions. Politicians hold speeches, the President will speak in the synagogue tomorrow, and there are numerous public events. What effect all this has on the general public, I don't know. I am afraid that in spite of all efforts, the reaction of many is "Leave us alone. We have had enough already." My own feeling is one of great sadness. No matter how sincerely Germans try to face this nation's past . . . there is a loss that cannot be healed by analyses, commemoration or postage stamps.

ence or support its resolutions. R. Moses Schick, another leading disciple of Sofer and perhaps the foremost Talmudic scholar in Hungary, is noticeably missing from the list of those in attendance as are Sofer's son, Abraham Samuel (the *Ketav Sofer*), and Judah Aszod. All of the author's *pilpul* (Vol. 1, pp. 81–83) to try to attach Schick's name to the conference simply has no validity. Although Schick agreed with a number of the conference's resolutions, he also opposed some of them, as he explicitly states in one of his responsa (*Orah Hayyim* no. 70). One of the conference's resolutions was that sermons were not permitted to be preached in the vernacular. This resolution had its origin in R. Moses Sofer's ethical will where he admonished his followers not to appoint anyone who would deliver sermons in the vernacular (i.e., German; see also Sofer's responsa, *Hoshen Mishpat*, no. 197). Yet in the responsum referred to above Schick can see nothing wrong with sermons in the vernacular if they will have a positive effect on the community.

Still, despite his personal opinion Schick concludes his responsum as follows: "This was my opinion in matters of preaching in German. But numerous colleagues opposed me, and I am compelled to accept their words in reverence and trepidation, and God forbid to depart from their words." Contrary to Jakobovics' understanding, this conclusion does not mean that Schick *agreed* with the opinion of his colleagues, only that he felt compelled to accept it. There is a great difference between the two. In addition, any attempt to associate R. Abraham Samuel Sofer with the conference is even more absurd. It was the younger Sofer, sensing the great need of his community in Pressburg, who ignored his father's warning and agreed to the hiring of a German preacher for his flock. This created a great split among Sofer's students with R. Chaim Sofer (no relation to his teacher) and R. Hillel Lichtenstein sharply opposing Abraham Samuel Sofer's actions (see Lichtenstein's responsa *Teshuvot Beit Hillel*, no. 35).

The author also distorts the dispute that existed between Hildesheimer and his

opponents Lichtenstein, Chaim Sofer, and Akiva Schlesinger, all of whom saw Hildesheimer as a heretic intent on destroying Judaism. While it is true that the latter individuals represented the views of many, their extremism was not totally shared and Hildesheimer's friendship with Aszod and Abraham Samuel Sofer is well known. Jakobovics is mistaken in believing the attacks on Hildesheimer were merely "emergency measures" dictated by the times. In fact, the dispute between them was never healed because what was under dispute were fundamental issues. Acquiring secular education to confront the challenges of the modern world was a necessity for Hildesheimer. Yet this was considered heresy for Hildesheimer's opponents who saw the "modern world," in its social and educational sense, as evil incarnate.

In the persecution of Hildesheimer it was not the latter's personality that was at issue. Rather, the very essence of his brand of Orthodoxy, indeed of German Orthodoxy as a whole, was anathema to these men. The author does not seem to understand that any expressions of support given to Hirsch in his dispute with Seligmann Baer Bamberger over Orthodox separatism must not be taken out of context. The Hungarian extremists were not aware of the true nature of Hirsch's Orthodoxy. Hirsch preached in German, held weddings in the synagogue and wore a special robe for prayer, thus violating decrees 1, 4, and 8 of the Mihalovce synod, which contrary to what the author asserts, were to be considered binding on Jews the world over (see the complete text of the decrees in Schlesinger's *Lev halvri*, Volume 2). If these aspects of Hirsch's life were known by Lichtenstein and his colleagues they would have condemned him as a heretic just as they did Hildesheimer.

Despite the reservations I have noted the books under review are still to be recommended for all interested in this often neglected period of Orthodox life. Although in his zealous opposition to Reform and Haskalah the author is, on occasion, led to make totally unfounded statements (e.g., that the *maskilim* were responsible for the

Zekhor Yemot Olam by Benziyon Jakobovics. Volume 1, Second Edition, Bene Brak 1987. 332 pp. + 55 photo-reproductions. Volume 2, Bene Brak, 1989. 488 pp. + 79 photo-reproductions.

Reviewed by
Marc Shapiro

A comprehensive history of Hungarian Orthodoxy is still a desideratum, but Jakobovics has done Jewish scholarship a great service with these two massive works which have become fairly popular in certain circles. The first volume quickly sold out and a revised edition was thereupon issued. Combining a mastery of sources in Hungarian—itself a rare occurrence today when the Hungarian language has joined the realm of the esoteric—German, and the rabbinic literature, both polemic and responsa, the author gives a very good and well documented description of the development of Hungarian Orthodoxy in the last two centuries. In the first volume he discusses in great detail, most of which is only of interest to the specialist, the inner conflicts in the Orthodox community and the disputes between the Orthodox and both the Neologist (Reform) and Status Quo communities which played such a great part in recent Hungarian Jewish history. (“Status Quo” refers to those communities that did not accept the religious separatism which was prevalent in Hungary). Had the author stopped here his work would have been significant, yet he goes further and in both Volume One, and more at length in Volume Two, manages to touch upon all aspects of Eastern European and German Orthodoxy of the last two centuries.

Jakobovics is not objective nor does he pretend to be. He writes from the standpoint of Hungarian Hasidism and this ideology completely permeates his books. Thus, one of the stated purposes of his work is to show the value of Orthodox separatism and a great many pages elaborate upon the negative aspects of those Orthodox communities that did not accept this approach. When the

reader understands that Jakobovics’ books are not all-encompassing historical accounts and are written with an ideological bent, he can appreciate the great service the author has rendered in both the enormous amount of material he has gathered and in his analysis of it. Having this in mind, it is no surprise that these books contain no description of R. Ezriel Hildesheimer’s activities in Hungary. R. Moses Schick’s early years when he preached in German and was interested in the works of Mendelssohn, and the fascinating career of R. Solomon Schück. Given the special character of these books it is fitting to analyze what the author has chosen to include rather than criticizing what has been left out or rehearsing old polemics over the wisdom of *Austritt*.

One of the author’s major contentions is that it was the influence of R. Moses Sofer that decisively shaped the image of Hungarian Orthodoxy. The author dwells at length on this and the evidence he gathers is very convincing. It was this influence which led to the famous Hungarian rabbinic conference in Mihalovce which was organized in 1865 by the religious zealot R. Hillel Lichtenstein, a leading student of Sofer. This conference, which passed a number of important resolutions, was of great importance and had a significant impact in molding Orthodox attitudes to the Neologists up until the destruction of Hungarian Jewry. Not surprisingly, this impact runs like a thread through both of the volumes and it is precisely with regard to this conference that the author makes a number of important errors.

The fact remains that a number of important rabbis did not attend the confer-

Book Reviews

arrest of Shneur Zalman of Lyady and that the Reformers made life miserable for Marcus Horovitz, the Frankfurt *Gemeinde* rabbi) these slips are few. At the end of Volume Two, the author mentions that a

third volume is currently under preparation. If the previous two volumes are to be a guide, this latter volume will also prove to be a valuable addition to Hungarian Jewish scholarship.

Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism by
MICHAEL A. MEYER. Oxford University Press, 494 pp.

Reviewed by
Simcha Krauss

Modernity as a challenge to tradition is not limited to the realm of religion. The new, the contemporary, and the avant garde pose challenges to anything traditional, be they institutions, ideas, values, or religion.

The response to that challenge may be expressed in different ways. At one extreme, the tradition will build hermetically sealed walls around itself. It will refuse to make contact with anything new. The modern will be totally rejected. At the other extreme, the tradition may feel so weak, and may view the challenge of modernity so overwhelming and so redeeming, that it will capitulate to its demands. Thus the old will be totally rejected in favor of the new.

Between those two extremes lies another possible response. Tradition may dialectically accept the challenge, grapple with it, and ultimately create a synthesis whereby both the old and the new are accommodated.

At the end of his brilliant, sweeping and comprehensive history of the Reform movement, Michael Meyer defines Reform as “the ongoing and common task of creating ever anew that shifting and delicate balance between Torah and modernity—and of relating the two to each other.”¹ Indeed, the very title of the book, *Response to Modernity*, infers a dialogue, a confrontation with modernity that elicits a response from the Reform movement.

In truth, Meyer is not accurate in his definition. The attempt to relate Torah to

modernity and to balance the two is not an innovation of the Reform movement, even if we were to agree that the movement was formed for that purpose. Well before the eighteenth century, Jews as individuals and as a community have responded, albeit in different ways, to their environment. At times they borrowed and adapted some features of their environment, at times they rejected it, and at other times they accommodated to the external world. In Alexandria, in Spain, and in Germany, for example, Jews related to the culture around them and tried to synthesize Torah with contemporary times. In Alexandria, the attempt ended in failure; in Spain it was successful; in Germany, Samson Raphael Hirsch attempted to relate “the beauty of Yeffeth to the tents of Shem” with apparent success.

The ultimate measure of success in the creation of a synthesis lies in the final product. The summary question to be answered is, who exerts the pressure, who influences whom? In the cross-fertilization that inevitably occurs when two cultures meet, in which direction does the vector of the new synthesis tilt? For example, does Torah change and lose its sanctity, or does the new and modern become touched, ennobled and transformed by Torah? It has been very perceptively observed that both Mendelsohn and Hirsch translated Torah into German. To Mendelsohn, the translation was a way of teaching German Jews the German language. To Hirsch, on the

other hand, the translation was a way of reaching and teaching the Jews of Germany the verities of Torah.

There is no doubt that with the shattering of the ghetto walls, and with the onslaught of the Enlightenment, major new challenges confronted Judaism. Yaacov Herzog relates the following: "It is told of Baron Nathaniel Rothschild that, after winning his battle of many years to have the disabilities to members of the Jewish faith removed from the House of Lords, he slipped away from the hierarchy of Britain congratulating him on the achievement and was to be found prostrate in prayer in a small synagogue . . . his lips murmuring 'would that this freedom shall not mean the diminution of our faith.'"²

Rothschild was justified in his concern. Religious freedom can result in the diminution of faith. In fact, it did result in the abandonment of Judaism. Moritz Steinschneider, for example, was so enamored by the new spirit of the times that he felt that there was nothing left for Judaism except "to give it a decent burial." Others were more charitable. A leading Jewish intellectual and convert to Christianity, Eduard Ganz, while not speaking of the demise of Judaism, predicted that it would, in time, lose its identity, "like the river after it enters the ocean."³ To both Ganz and Steinschneider, the encounter of Judaism with modernity resulted in the complete and total embrace of modernity.

An analysis of the history of the Reform movement, now made easy thanks to Meyer's comprehensive work, leads one to the inevitable conclusion that Reform, both in Germany where it originated and in the United States where it grew, became so enamored of the new and the modern that it regularly capitulated. If Meyer is correct that one of the characteristics of Reform is the "re-establishment of the scale's fulcrum in every generation," we must say that the scale was terribly unbalanced.

Let me proceed to the evidence with a question. There is no doubt that in the United States, Reform, both institutionally and organizationally, had a head start. Meyer describes the reaction of Bernard

Felsenthal, an ideological opponent of Isaac Meyer Wise, to Hebrew Union College's ordination of its first four students in 1883.

Dr. Wise is now at the head of the college not only, but of all Israel in the United States. It is he who educates the rabbis for America. It is he who defines the course in which Judaism in this country has to run. It is he who gives shape and color and character to our Jewish affairs. He is the central sun, around which the planets and trabants are moving, some near to him, some more distant. That is all right, and we submit to the hard facts. He has succeeded, and "*nothing is so successful as the success.*"⁴

Indeed, the college had grown in academic stature and influence. In fact, as late as 1893 the only organized Rabbinic body that spoke in a combined voice to the community, both Jewish and non-Jewish, was the CCAR.⁵ With such an organizational and institutional advantage, and with the special receptivity that America had for new ideas and new forms, Reform should have become the dominant force in American Judaism. According to Meyer, Reform today numbers about 20% of American Jewry. Why did not Reform live up to those early expectations?

That question yields, of course, more than one answer. The sociology of Jewish immigration to the United States, as well as the demographic dynamics of the various movements, all have a bearing on the question. Yet, Reform claims to be a religious movement, so it is best to analyze the question accordingly.

Reform, Meyer's contention notwithstanding, did not balance the questions of modernity with its own answer to man's religious needs and to his spiritual quest. It seems to this reviewer that Reform did not struggle with the challenges that were posed by modernity. Reform simply abdicated to the demands of modernity. It did so without first evaluating the truth claims of modernity and without even giving Judaism the benefit of the doubt.

An example from the "classical" period of Reform, taken from Meyer's history, is instructive:

Yet on the whole, classical Reform clearly intended to minimize the role of symbol and

