

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Judaism and Psychology*, by ABRAHAM AMSEL (New York: Feldheim, 1969).

*Reviewed by Isaac Ahren*

In the Yeshiva world, psychology is looked upon as dangerous. When Chaim Potok transposed the story of Salomon Maimon into our century, Danny Saunders, the hero of his novel, *The Chosen*, becomes a psychologist. As the son of a Hasidic rabbi, Danny is fascinated by the psychology of Sigmund Freud and consequently breaks with the tradition of his family. More than thirty years ago Rabbi Twerski of Slotopoli-Tzortkov stated that psychology is in our days what philosophy was in the time of Maimonides: a major peril to the intellectual existence of the Jewish people.<sup>1</sup> Traditional Jewish literature is not blind to psychological questions, for the contrary can be shown to be true.<sup>2</sup> The *Mussar* movement, for example, was very interested with the problems that modern psychology treats. Rabbi E. Dessler's writings — to mention only one name — are full of psychological insight, but he never in-

tended to write "psychology." His thinking centered around ethics. Academic psychology was not generally recognized in Orthodox circles as a science similar to medicine.

Of late, some Orthodox rabbis have ventured into the field of psychology. Rabbi Amsel actually thinks that he has founded a "new school of psychological thought" (p. 14). He writes: "The Judaic therapist must be imbued with the conviction that it is his discipline and not those of philosophy, psychology or psychiatry which can properly lay claim to the title of a science in this area" (p. 137). No small claim! Does the book justify such parlance? Most certainly not. What impresses me most is the methodological naiveté with which *Judaism and Psychology* was written. Amsel admits he faces a dilemma, not really knowing where to draw the line between the domains of the various disciplines, such as those of the psychologist, the clergyman, and the philosopher

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(p. 20).

Blissfully ignorant of problems of science, Amsel keeps falling into pits which he doesn't notice. How do you construct a psychology? Amsel thinks you just have to collect sources. After saying that Judaism postulates two opposing powers in the individual he remarks that the student of behavior "cannot help but wonder whether it is not the Jewish source which provided Freud with his hypothesis in the first place" (p. 24). Of course, the basis for scientific psychology is the observation. To the student of psychology, reading Freud is a special thrill because he can follow the development of this psychology step by step. The psychologist tries to construct a circle between observable psychic phenomena and explanation. A collection of sources is at best raw material to the psychologist. "No one has yet told us candidly whether we can or cannot accept the concept of the unconscious" (p. 18). Which criteria of control does Amsel attribute to scientific psychology? The dilemma mentioned runs through the whole book and ruins it thoroughly. Besides, Amsel's statement about the unconscious can easily be disproved: No smaller authority than Rabbi Israel Salanter used the concept of the unconscious, as Rabbi J. J. Weinberg has pointed out.<sup>4</sup> The implication is not that a modern psychology must use this concept, but whether it be used or not cannot be decided by philosophers or clergymen; each constructor of a psychological system has to make his own decision.

Amsel's book contains correct

observations and interesting remarks, but not a system of psychology. He quotes about fifteen pages from the "ideological superstructure of the Cheshbon Hane-fesch" (sic! p. 46), but he fails to realize that Rabbi Mendel Lewin who came from Mendelssohn's circle, used the atomistic psychology that was popular in his days and that such a psychology cannot be combined with, let us say, *Gestalt* theory, behaviorism or psychoanalysis. Different frames of reference should be kept apart. (Rabbi Amsel does not even mention that important *Gestalt* school. For this theory in a Jewish context, study Rabbi J. B. Soloveitchik's interpretation of Maimonides' concept of *Vidui*)<sup>5</sup>. It is difficult enough to work in one system. If one is not very careful, contradictions are nearly inevitable. Let me demonstrate this: "To Judaism, the symptoms are the illness; to psychology, they are only the signs of an underlying disease" (p. 78).<sup>6</sup> Then we read: "It is immaterial whether or not the symptoms are equated with the disease" (p. 122). Amsel has changed his mind (or doesn't he agree with "Judaism?"). But then he repeats the first version again (p. 125) . . . Someone who wants to found a new school of psychology should have reflected on the relation between theory and method in his subject. He also states, "In spite of all failings of psychology, one must admit that method is not its weak point. In fact, psychology puts its best foot forward, when it comes to method" (p. 139). As the method is derived from the theory, I fail to grasp how the method

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can be better than its theory. It is very difficult indeed to argue with someone who does not even see the problem.

If I wouldn't write about free will, Rabbi Amsel would think that I apparently missed the intention of his book. In the Yeshiva-world, psychology is considered dangerous because it is said to deny the free will of man which is an essential of Judaism.<sup>7</sup> Amsel writes about "psychic determinism according to which man is not in control of his behavior" (p. 145). It is true that Freud insists on "psychic determinism," but as far as I can see this "determinism" does not touch the problem of free will. But I admit that some psychologists have confused these concepts.<sup>8</sup> This whole subject needs clarification which is beyond the scope of this review.

What is quite clear to me is that some of Amsel's rambunctious attacks on psychoanalysis cannot be justified. He states that psychoanalysis has encouraged violence (p. 199), but does not prove it. Whence came the murderer-rapist of the eight nurses in Chicago of Summer 1966? Whence came the urban Texan who struck down complete strangers on the street? From the marrow of psychoanalysis (p. 204)! This is more than ridiculous. I just wonder whence came the murderer-rapists of past centuries?

They must have been forerunners of poor Freud. To say that "A fatal Freudian inspired error, espoused by nearly all of psychology is the belief that man is totally good" (p. 175) means to accuse the innocent. G. Allport has remarked that "Freud — and this is virtually unquestionable — bequeathed to us a pessimistic view of the possibilities of human nature."<sup>9</sup> If man is totally good, why was Freud such a pessimist? In fact, Freud wrote in a letter: "I have found little that is 'good' about human beings on the whole. In my experience most of them are trash."<sup>10</sup>

I am not worried about defending Freud. What irritates me is things are said in the name of Judaism that are untenable. Rabbi Jakobovits wrote: "The most neglected field in the development of Jewish law on medical subjects is no doubt psychiatry."<sup>11</sup> He who wants to work in this field should be well aware of all problems and before he writes a sentence, he should check it at least twice. The author of *Netivot Hamishpat* said that a book is worthy of being printed even if it contains only one correct and true insight. Many writers seem to rely on this dictum nowadays. I sometimes have the impression that a book containing even only one grave mistake would better not being printed.<sup>12</sup>

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1. Wolf Josef Avraham, *Torat Hanefesh*, Bne-Berak 1969, p. 12.
2. Vide H. Raphael Gold in *Judaism in a Changing World*, ed. L. Jung, New York 1939.

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3. Cf. S. Freud, *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 11, London 1940, pp. 250f.
4. Weinberg J. J., *Seride Esh*, Vol. 4, Jerusalem 1969, pp. 333f and p. 337.
5. See *Panim El Panim* 22, 9, 68 pp. 24f; 1, 10, 68 p. 19; 12, 9, 69 pp. 24f. Cf. Nietzsche: "Wofuer wir Worte haben, darueber sind wir auch schon hinaus" in 2888, *Goetzendaemmerung*.
6. The view attributed to Judaism is that of Behaviour (reinforcement) Therapy (Ullman & Krasner, Beech and many other authors). It follows that the view ascribed to psychology is not shared by all schools.
7. Rabbi Wolf quotes Rabbi Aaron Kotler's dictum that psychology denies free will a few times (op. cit. p. 14, p. 50, p. 52), but he doesn't mention which psychology Rabbi Kotler was referring to. Cf. Patterson, *Theories of Counseling and Psychotherapy*, New York 1966, p. 145. Speaking of Salter's conditioning theory he writes: "Thus there is no volition, no free will, but only learned reflexes or habits." See also Mowrer quoted in Amsel pp. 149f. Amsel doesn't seem to have seen this problem. How else could he write: "The behavioristic or conditioning therapies are perhaps the closest to Jewish thinking" (p. 179)? Gifter, Rabbi M. *Pirke Emuna*, Jerusalem 1969, p. 154 speaks of psychoanalysis denying free will.
8. Eidelberg, L., *Encyclopedia of Psychoanalysis*, New York 1968, p. 152 quotes Freud to show that he denied free will: "I ventured to tell you that you nourish a deeply rooted faith in undetermined psychical events and in free will, but this is quite unscientific . . ." This seems good proof, but it is a wrong translation of G. W. Bd. 11 p. 104. The context shows that Freud is not talking of free will.
9. Allport, G., *Perspectives in Personality Theory*, ed. David & V. Bracken, New York 1957, p. 10.
10. Quoted by A. Storr in *The Sunday Times*, 26 April 70, p. 35.
11. Jakobovits, I., *Journal of a Rabbi*, London 1967, p. 172.
12. After this article was written, my friend M. Tabor showed me Dr. Samuel A. Weiss' review in *Jewish Life*, July-August 1969 pp. 52-58. I am glad to note that our evaluations of Amsel's book are similar. (Some remarks may seem copied; the priority of Dr. Weiss' is acknowledged.) But the careful reader will also notice differences in our critical approaches.

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*The Jews in Soviet Russia Since 1917*, edited by LIONEL KOCHAN (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970).

*Reviewed by* Herbert H. Paper

The continuing tragedy of Russian Jewry needs daily reminder to all who claim concern for their fellow men. For any Jew outside the USSR — and especially for those like this writer who, but for a historical accident, would have been inside and not outside — the human tragedy of this hostage population is unforgettable and this book,

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indispensable.

*The Jews in Soviet Russia Since 1917* is a compendium of information soberly presented, restrained in tone, and fully documented from every pertinent source. There are seventeen contributors, each a highly qualified specialist. Every article is a mine of material replete with statistics, legal documentation, and historical accounts. In every essay the discussion is clear and to the point. And from every page a taut scream can be heard: "Please do not forsake us."

If there is still anyone who believes that the plight of Russian Jews is an exaggeration created to serve the selfish interests of Zionists, or anti-communists, he has only to read this book's account of half a century's anti-Jewish repression. For fifty years, the Russian Jewish community has lived a nightmare from the pogroms of the czars to the systematic persecution policy of the communists. As Leonard Schapiro wrote in his introduction: "It would not be far wrong to regard Russia as the classical home of anti-Semitism." There is little consolation in learning that other Russian groups have at various times been similarly victimized. The 'evenhandedness' of Soviet tyranny is hardly reassuring — for, after all, Jews have suffered like everyone else, only more so! Furthermore, the manipulation and involvement of Jewish participants in the *apparat* from the days

of the Yevseksia to the present-day apologists is a particularly sordid tale.

Space does not allow for detailed commentary on every contribution to this collection. There are, however, several essays that impressed me as being particularly apt, where human tragedy and poignancy are most directly evident.\* I refer to the chapters written by Maurice Friedberg ("Jewish Themes in Soviet Russian Literature" and "Jewish Contributions to Soviet Literature"), Yehoshua Gilboa ("Hebrew Literature in the U.S.S.R.") and Chone Shmeruk ("Yiddish Literature in the U.S.S.R."). Surely no more accurate reflection of a society exists than that mirrored in its literature. The Soviet experience is an ideal proof instance.

Gilboa's essay is particularly valuable, though I find it incomplete in one respect. He makes no reference to the fact that several works written in Hebrew have been smuggled out of Russia in recent years and published in Israel. One such work, a story entitled *Ha'es-rim* ('the twenty') by the pseudonymous A. Tsafoni ('a northerner') appeared in an Israeli newspaper in 1966. Ultimately it was published in English in an American Jewish non-Communist magazine, but in an emasculated version that falsified the slightly hopeful ending. A novel by the same A. Tsafoni, *Esh Ha-tamid* ('the eternal fire') was also published in Israel in a widely

\* Several of the contributors know the Soviet Union from extensive direct and personal experience as inmates rather than as visitors. Nowhere does this fact enter their presentations, except perhaps to provide a particularly trenchant and informed vantage point.

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distributed paperback edition. Editorial time limits may have made it impossible to include a reference to the excellent Hebrew poetic translation of the Georgian national epic, *The Man in the Tiger's Skin*. The Hebrew translation is of the highest literary quality writing meeting the Tchernichowsky Prize.

There can surely be no one who can read Gilboa's account of the careers of the Hebrew writers Abraham Freeman, Elisha Rodin, and Chaim Lensky and still sleep soundly that night. Rodin's letter (pp. 227-8) to the military censorship authorities asking for permission to send his Hebrew poems to Palestine is a classic document. The request was granted and the poems indeed published: they were written to the author's son both before and after the young man's death as a Red Army soldier in March 1942. Later the same authorities connived to keep the poet from seeing the published book.

Chone Shmeruk is undoubtedly the consummate expert on Yiddish literature in the USSR. The monumental memorial anthology that he together with B. Hrushovski and A. Sutskever published in 1964 [Tel Aviv: *A shpigl oyf a shteyn* ('a mirror on a stone'), an anthology of poetry and prose by Yiddish writers] is a classic.\*

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\* A beautifully pertinent literary counterpart to this anthology is the poem by Chaim Grade, one of the leading Yiddish poets of our time. He knew the "hospitality" of the USSR during WWII where he met many of the Yiddish writers who later became victims of the Soviet cultural genocide. His poem is entitled *Ikh weyn af aykh mit ale oysiyes fun dem alef-beys* ("I weep for you with all the letters of the alphabet") — It is available as "Elegy for the Soviet Yiddish Writers," in Howe and Greenberg, *A Treasury of Yiddish Poetry* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1969), pp. 338-345.

Its availability only in Yiddish keeps it sealed from those whose linguistic skills do not extend to that language that is so important for many aspects of Soviet studies. In some ways, Shmeruk's essay in the volume under review is a summary of the larger work. It deserves careful reading and study. The quintessential paragraph, after some thirty-four pages of history and careful analysis, is this (p. 266):

In the final years of Stalin's rule most of the Yiddish writers in the Soviet Union were imprisoned. Der Nister died in prison. Dovid Hofshiteyn, Dovid Bergelson, Perets Markish, Leyb Kvitko, Itzik Fefer and Shmuel Persov were executed on 12 August 1952. At the same time most of the Yiddish writers were scattered in remote prison camps in the northern part of the country. In the years 1955-6 a start was made with releasing those writers still alive. Shmuel Halkin, greatest of the surviving poets, died in 1960 as a result of his experiences in prison.

J. Rothenberg, in an otherwise excellent treatment of the "Jewish Religion in the Soviet Union" commits an injustice in discussing the Bukharan Jews (pp. 176-7) by stating that they "always enjoyed a greater measure of religious freedom than the western (Ashkenazic) Jews . . ." One of the reasons he

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cites for this — it is quite possible that “the greater measure of religious freedom” may be something of an illusion — is the “smaller degree of Jewish ‘nationalistic’ consciousness prevalent among oriental Jews . . .” I find it difficult to understand how the author could have come to this conclusion. Bukharan Jews began a “return to Zion” movement in the 1860’s and even before, began to build one of the first Jewish quarters outside the Old City of Jerusalem (the ‘Bukharan quarter’ that was originally named by them *Rechovot*), and sponsored an emigration to Jerusalem specifically that went on throughout the last decades of the 19th century and well into the 20th (and up to our own times in a small but clear trickle). Before World War I, young men from Tashkent and Samarkand were sent to the yeshiva of Rabbi Reines in Lithuania precisely because he was a Zionist; and in the earliest days of Communist regime, local Jewish schools in Tashkent were conducted in Hebrew, since this was declared to be the national language of these Tajik-speaking Jews and permitted in the less sophisticated years of Communist rule. If it is true that oriental Jews did indeed enjoy greater religious freedom than did their Ashkenazic confrères, the chief reason might lie in the relatively greater distance from Moscow and from a conscious restrictive policy that was weaker and more difficult to carry out in every detail from afar.

As for the Mountain Jews of Daghestan and the Georgian Jews who are discussed together with

those of Bukhara, suffice it to say that the same correction needs to be made. In the early 1920’s when a communist party worker was sent to work among the Mountain Jews and proceeded to translate the ‘Internationale’ into their language, they already had a Judeo-Tat version of *Hatikva* which they sang. The Georgians have always been more independent and nationally proud *vis-à-vis* the Russian or Great Russian entity. And Georgian Jews (from the reports of many Western visitors) display their religious practices more openly and fearlessly.

The preoccupation of Western scholars, even Jews, with their European brethren is understandable. If more attention were to be paid to some of the non-Ashkenazic communities in Russia (and elsewhere), the effort would be amply rewarded. There are significant stories that remain to be told.

Nothing can more appropriately serve as conclusion to this review than the concluding paragraph and poem in R. Ainsztein’s chapter “Soviet Jewry in the Second World War.”

The effect of the physical losses and spiritual experiences undergone during the war was not, of course, to make all Soviet Jews see the world with the same eyes. It was to make them shed a number of illusions about their Jewish fate in a communist Russia — illusions which only the religious and the Zionists in their midst had not shared.

The poetess Margarita Aliger gave public expression to the reawakening of Jewish awareness in Russia-

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fied Jews when she made her mother tell her sternly, in a poem published in 1946: "We are Jews. How dare you forget?" And even in Ehrenburg's memoirs we find several admissions that he was not justified in his facile optimism and faith in the ability of communism to eradicate the heritage of centuries of anti-Semitism in a few decades. As for the mass of Soviet Jews, whether religious or atheist, Russian-speaking or Yiddish-speaking, their reactions were expressed by an anonymous poet, who answered Margarita Aliger's pathetic questions: "Mama, Mama . . . who is after us? Who are we, you and I?"

The anonymous poet replied:

Our only crime is that we are Jews.  
Our crime is also that our children  
Strive to achieve the wisdom of the  
world,  
And that we are scattered over the  
earth  
And have no homeland.

Did not thousands of us, unsparing  
of our lives,

Fight battles worthy to become a  
legend  
Only to be told: "Where were the  
Jews?  
They fought their battles in Tash-  
kent!"

We are not loved because we are  
Jews,  
Because our faith is the source of  
many faiths.  
And yet despite it all — yes, de-  
spite it all —  
We shall live on, Comrade Poet-  
ess!

Our people is immortal. It will  
bring forth  
New Maccabees, who will inspire  
future heirs.  
Yes, I am proud. I am proud and  
willing to forget  
That I am a Jew, Comrade Poet-  
ess!

In the linguistic history of the world, a people is often remembered quite unobtrusively by words from its language that have been taken over into other tongues. It is to the eternal shame of Russia that one of its contributions to ideas is the word "pogrom."

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*Pesikta Rabbati*, Translated by DR. WILLIAM G. BRAUDE (Yale University Press, 1969).

*Reviewed by*  
Manuel Laderman

Yale University Press has made it possible for the English reader to become acquainted with a number of important Jewish works that were never before presented in English.

The 18th in this series is the translation of the famous Midrashic anthology, *Pesikta Rabbati*. The present translation is an asset to the library of anyone to whom Midrashic literature is important.

*Pesikta Rabbati* is a larger version of the *Pesikta De'Rav Kahana*. This work was originally a collec-



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tion of Rabbinic homilies on passages for special occasions, such as *Rosh Chodesh*, the special Sabbaths before Passover, those of the three weeks, of the seven weeks following *Tisha B'Av*. There were also special treatments of the periods of the holidays, *Rosh Hashanah*, *Yom Kippur*, *Sukkot*, *Passover*, *Shevuot* and *Chanukah*.

There is a great deal of scholarly debate as to when the *Pesikta* was compiled. Leopold Zunz dated it at 845, in Greece. Dr. Braude tends to feel that it was prepared earlier, in the seventh or even possibly in the sixth century.

This work contradicts the assertion that the rabbis of old preached only twice a year — on *Shabbat Hagadol* and *Shabbat Shuva*; it indicates how frequently the Sab-

baths and the holidays were used for both exposition of classic texts in the Bible. *Yelamdenu Rabbenu*: (will our Rabbi please teach us) was the very frequent request made by people. In response the rabbis used the pulpit as a vehicle for halakhic, moral, and ethical instruction.

Six chapters deal with the Ten Commandments, each one of them a beautiful elaboration of the significance of both the religious and dogmatic importance of these statements as well as their ethical and social import. There is an immense mine of Rabbinic treasures in these volumes. Rabbi Braude has benefited all who would like to delve into this fine Rabbinic source, to whom the original may be too difficult.

### REVIEWERS IN THIS ISSUE

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