EDITORIAL

Editing a journal like *European Judaism* is a mixture of planning, intuition and chance. The Editorial Board maps out the general outline of a number of issues and seeks appropriate contributions; other possible articles arise out of lectures given within the various activities of Leo Baeck College, and yet others come unsolicited for our consideration. Therefore, every issue is a compromise between an original concept and the fascinating juxtapositions of available materials as deadlines draw near.

This edition is an example of a partly realised concept that leaves the door open for further exploration. The original idea was built around the figure of the great Jewish 'teachers', itself a term both evocative and fraught with debatable issues. The 'rabbi', as Albert Friedlander notes in his biographical sketch of Leo Baeck, is primarily a teacher. However the great 'teachers' of Jewish subjects of the past century have not all been rabbis. Moreover, how broad is the term 'teacher' when we consider the cultural and spiritual contribution of a variety of Jews to the wider society, whether impacting directly or indirectly on Jewish life and Judaism? Should the concept 'Jewish teaching' be restricted to the transmission in some form of traditional Jewish religious materials, or could it apply to a broader existential canvas? The former definition would indeed restrict the people under consideration, amongst whom Leo Baeck would figure prominently. The latter would open limitless possibilities for inclusion and debate about the particular contribution to contemporary Jewish self-understanding or experience of a wide variety of individuals.

An example of the latter would be Hannah Arendt, whose life and thought is examined by Jeffrey Newman. It could be argued that in the long term the Jewish world gains as much from its rebels as from those within the mainstream. That is the challenge posed by Spinoza in Esther Seidel's evaluation of his significance for our time. Similarly Jeremy Schonfield's study of the Talmudic arguments between Rabba bar Bar Hana and the rabbis opens the door to an examination of the confusion between the symbolic and pragmatic significance of terms like 'Zion' and the 'Holy Land'.

The idea for this issue was triggered by the article of Byron L. Sherwin on the Maharal of Prague and his search to discover more about this enigmatic figure. An echo of the legacy of the Maharal can be found in Benjamin Kuras' documentation of the controversy raging over one of the mediaeval Jewish cemeteries in Prague. As a writer and witness to the debate, Kuras is himself the author of a fine study of the thoughts and writings of the Maharal, presented in a humorous and popular format – *As Golems Go*,

Rabbi Loew, the Reluctant Czech, Benjamin Kuras (Baronet a Elk, Praha, 2000).

Paul Fenton's study of his teacher André Neher, originally delivered as a lecture at the annual Jewish-Christian Bible Week in Bendorf, Germany, brings us firmly into the twentieth century with a major figure who straddled the worlds of the university and the richness of traditional Jewish biblical commentary.

By a fortunate coincidence studies became available of two great 'Victorians', leaders of the emergent Liberal Jewish movement in Britain that celebrates its centenary in 2002. Harvey Meirovich's study of the life of Israel Abrahams follows his major work on Chief Rabbi Dr. J.H. Hertz (*A Vindication of Judaism: The Polemics of the Hertz Pentateuch*, Harvey Warren Meirovich, Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York, Jerusalem, 1998). This paper was originally presented as a seminar at Leo Baeck College, dedicated to the memory of Rabbi Michael Leigh, z'l, one of the first graduates of the College who had died shortly before.

The other pioneering figure, sharing his place amongst the 'three M's' of the Liberal movement with the Hon. Lily Montagu and Rabbi Israel Mattuck, is Claude Montefiore. It is more than appropriate to include an article on this pioneer of Jewish-Christian dialogue by Edward Kessler who has himself founded a significant new institution, the Centre for Jewish-Christian Relations in Cambridge, to further the work of interfaith studies for our own time.

Another 'pair', this time of writers of extraordinary power, Chayyim Nachman Bialik and Alfred Döblin, reflect the diverse fates and identities of Jews in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They were born within the same decade (1873 and 1878 respectively) to impoverished families, the former to a deeply traditional one in Volhynia, the latter to a highly assimilated one in Berlin. Rabbi Alexandra Wright in her detailed study of Bialik's 'On the Slaughter', shows his struggle with the fate of the Jewish people, both using and subverting the language of the Biblical and rabbinic tradition. Dr Gabriele Sander's study of the life and writings of Döblin shows the deep ambivalence about his Jewish identity while sharing the experience of forced flight from his 'homeland' of that generation of German Jews. His conversion to Catholicism towards the end of his life reflects both the disaffection with Judaism and at the same time the need for some kind of spiritual home, that has also been part of the Jewish confrontation with modernity.

Even more tortuous was the journey of 'Nick Carter'. I first met him through a rabbinic colleague, Hillel Avidan, one of the first to address environmental issues within the British Reform Jewish movement. Through

Hillel's influence Nick Carter became the representative of the Reform Synagogues of Great Britain (RSGB) on the Whaling Commission – a juxtaposition of middle class congregations, arctic wastes and NGO's that raised the occasional smile at the time but required little commitment. Yet the presence of this small religious organisation, and Nick's commanding presence, did encourage at least one other major church to seek representation.

More significantly, some of Nick's poetic writings on the need to protect the environment, deeply imbued with the language of the Bible and Jewish liturgy, found their way into the prayerbooks of the RSGB where they still make a powerful impact. I had not seen him for a number of years when a package arrived containing a letter intended to be delivered to me posthumously with a brief autobiographical sketch and some of his poems. It is a privilege to publish here parts of this document, together with reflections on his life by Hillel Avidan and Melanie Shepherd.

Though not primarily a literary journal, we are always open to short narrative pieces and our poetry section is a regular feature. We are pleased to publish in this edition Mike Lipstock's reminder of other, less rational, dimensions of Jewish experience.

The educational concerns of Leo Baeck College have until recently been reflected in *The Journal of Progressive Judaism*. That has now ceased publication to be replaced soon by a new one dedicated to education. While the transition is being undertaken we offer a very different perspective on our theme of 'teachers' through a recent study on informal education in the area of summer camps carried out in the UK by Maya Shabi and Walid W. El Ansari.

Jonathan Magonet