

# Editorial

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This issue contains the papers given at a special conference held at Leo Baeck College (22 May 2019), ‘Albert Friedlander: Comprehension, Compassion and Conciliation’, reflecting on his life and achievements. Among his many activities and achievements, Rabbi Dr Albert Friedlander z’l (1927–2004) was editor of this journal (1982–2004) and we marked his passing with many personal tributes (*European Judaism* 37, no. 2 [Autumn 2004], 103–122). However, this conference provides an opportunity to explore different aspects of his life and work. Originally conceived by Rabbi Dr Frank Dabba Smith in conversations with Evelyn Friedlander, he organised it together with Professor Michael Berkowitz, UCL, Rabbi Dr Deborah Kahn-Harris, Principal of Leo Baeck College, and Cassy Sachar, the Senior Librarian of the College, who developed an exhibition based on following traces of Rabbi Friedlander’s activities to be found in the library. As well as the papers included here, there was a panel chaired by Rabbi Dr Charles H. Middleburgh, Dean and Director of Studies of the College, including memories from Rabbi Colin Eimer, Rabbi Ariel Friedlander (via video link) and Rabbi Awraham Soetendorp. Evelyn Friedlander was interviewed by Frank Dabba Smith; it was fortunate that she could participate as she was frail due to ill health. Concluding remarks were given by Professor Lord John Alderdice (Director, Centre for the Resolution of Intractable Conflict, Harris-Manchester College, Oxford University). Plans are underway for a further conference, broadening the theme.

Born in Berlin, Rabbi Friedlander’s family were in hiding with Christian friends during Kristallnacht, and left Germany for Cuba on the last boat allowed to remain there. He was separated from his siblings in foster homes in Mississippi until the family obtained the necessary visa to be reunited. Ordained as a rabbi by Hebrew Union College in 1952, he served as a rabbi in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania from 1956 to 1961 before becoming Associate Counsellor to Jewish Students at Columbia University, New York (1961–1966). There he was part of the social ferment, including marching for civil rights with Martin Luther King. It was there, too, that he gained his PhD in theology, writing on Rabbi Dr



Leo Baeck, the beginning of his lifelong engagement with Baeck, publishing a biography, *Leo Baeck: Teacher of Theresienstadt* (Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1973), translating Baeck's *Dieses Volk: Jüdische Existenz* (Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1955, 1957) as *This People Israel: The Meaning of Jewish Existence* (W.H. Allen, 1965) and jointly overseeing the publication of the six-volume collective works of Leo Baeck (Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1998–2003).

Moving to the UK he served as rabbi at Wembley Liberal Synagogue (1966–1971) and Westminster Synagogue (1971–1997). He began lecturing at Leo Baeck College in 1967, becoming Director from 1971 to 1982 and Dean from 1982 to 2004. He was a frequent guest professor at German universities and speaker at the major German Christian conferences, *Kirchentag* and *Katholikentag*. His remarkable influence on a new generation in Germany led to the joint award for himself and his wife Evelyn of Germany's highest honour, the Cross of Merit, in 1993. He was awarded an honorary OBE in 2001 in recognition of his interfaith work.

All of the above provides the outer achievements of Rabbi Friedlander but does not touch on the very special quality of the man. Much of that can be found in the tributes paid in this journal in 2004. Among those, Lionel Blue summed him up well:

But he was more than all his honours because he was one of the kindest human beings I have ever known. He was forever reconciling, never allowing prejudice to distort his feeling for ordinary people and their problems. He tried to help, not to judge or batter people with his own superior learning ... I think it is the students who will miss him most ... He wanted them to have their chance. They loved him because they knew instinctively that he was on their side. They could tell him their truth and he would not use it against them. He gave them his time and attention and the service of his formidable intellect.<sup>1</sup>

Two articles provide an introduction to aspects of his work. Amy-Jill Levine, previously unfamiliar with his activities and writings which are not so well known in the United States, examines his important chaplaincy work, the impact of the Holocaust on his response to racism in the USA, his special approach to Jewish–Christian relations and his commitment to reconciliation. Michael Berkowitz revisits Friedlander's *Out of the Whirlwind: A Reader of Holocaust Literature* (UAHC, 1968), one of the key books that made a great impression on him as a student and led him to become a cultural historian, with Jewish history and the Holocaust as central concerns. He notes how ground-breaking it was:

With its focus on the ‘experiential’, in a decidedly expansive manner, it was on the cutting edge of later attempts to capture interdisciplinarity – encompassing the psychological and the social, as well as remembrance, forgetting and distortion.

Given Rabbi Friedlander’s many writings and engagement with the Holocaust, a number of the articles address the topic; two in particular explore an aspect of its aftermath. Alexandra Senfft discusses the personal challenge experienced by the offspring of perpetrators who attempt to address the silence and denial of the older generation. Keith Kahn-Harris explores how this very ‘unspeakability’ breaks down in today’s changing world, where desires are spoken of more openly and a past moral consensus can no longer be assumed.

Frank Dabba Smith’s article on ‘Ernst Leitz of Wetzlar and Helping the Persecuted’ explores Leitz’s role during the war in helping a number of Jews and non-Jews to leave Germany, while at the same time managing to maintain critical relationships with those in power in order to survive and retain ownership of his firm. The research led him to experience the difficult task for those who have inherited this history of upholding memory without transmitting hostility.

Lisa Peschel examines the cabarets that were performed in Theresienstadt concentration camp and the nature of the humour they contained. Studies have indicated two kinds of humour, that which is ‘self-enhancing and affiliative’, which is associated with psychological health, rather than ‘aggressive and self-defeating’, which is maladaptive. Perhaps intuitively the performers chose the former, which may have helped them to preserve their psychological equilibrium.

Susanne Kord brings to life an aspect of the Berlin world of 1927 into which Rabbi Friedlander was born through three extraordinary, larger than life characters, the Sass brothers, Berlin’s most daring and beloved thieves, and the Jewish crime writer Walter Serner. She calls her article ‘intersections’, explaining that Rabbi Friedlander’s *Out of the Whirlwind* was one of the first books she read as a young German when seeking to learn about the Holocaust, and that various coincidences brought her in contact with places that had been part of his life some forty years earlier. In telling their stories she is fulfilling something he had called for in the introduction to his book with Eli Wiesel, *The Six Days of Destruction*.<sup>2</sup> ‘By celebrating the rogue’s wit and humanity, we evoke a decency that existed even in the darkest days.’

Cassie Sachar writes of the intimacy of her encounters with ‘Albert’, whom she never met in person, in the shelves and storerooms and hidden corners of the Leo Baeck College library. She writes of the different

dimensions of the man she found while reading through his books left to the library, the evidence of his research and personal correspondence, particularly for his work on Leo Baeck, and the role he played in locating the College publicly within the tradition of pre-war German Jewish learning and scholarship. She argues that a broad concept of reading can offer new ways of being in relationship with the living and the dead.

As indicated above, Evelyn Friedlander was able to attend part of the conference, but it was one of her last public engagements shortly before her death following a long illness. Our In Memoriam for her emphasises her role as a companion and supporter of Rabbi Friedlander in all his various activities, but also as an independent scholar in her own right.

As a colleague and friend of Albert for over thirty years, the Editor would like to drop the formality of 'Rabbi Friedlander' for a moment and close with one small example of Albert's renowned sense of humour. In the 1970s, Jewish groups visited the Soviet Union out of solidarity with the 'Refuseniks', Jews who had applied to leave Russia but as a result had lost their citizenship and existed in a state of limbo until such time as permission to leave was granted. Our visits were to support them, sometimes financially, sometimes to teach aspects of Judaism to people whose knowledge of Jewish culture and faith had been suppressed for generations. One ambitious plan was to hold a full-scale conference of Jewish studies in Moscow taught by a delegation of Jewish scholars from the UK. In the end the necessary visas were not granted and it came to nothing. But before that, the scholars gathered to discuss the programme and other details. One professor expressed his anxiety about what might happen if the Soviet authorities were suddenly to arrest us and cart us off to prison. Quite worked up, he suggested that we should have some kind of code word that we could use in a telephone call to London to express what was happening. Albert brought us down to earth with his quiet suggestion. 'How about 'Mayday!'.

In an issue dedicated to Rabbi Friedlander, with his many years' leadership of Leo Baeck College, it is appropriate that three articles represent the work of current students on the rabbinic programme.

Lev Taylor challenges the view that Liberal Judaism's pre-war stance against Zionism was motivated primarily by a desire to assimilate into bourgeois English cultural mores. By focusing on the speeches and writings by Liberal Judaism's three primary founders, Lily Montagu, Claude Montefiore and Rabbi Israel Mattuck, he argues that their opposition to Zionism stemmed, instead, from a desire to contest definitions of Jewishness, and that national conceptions of Jewishness undermined their ethical and spiritual project.

Iris Ferreira offers a Hebrew liturgical composition for a particular Jewish festival occasion. The Kabbalist Isaac Luria introduced into the festival of Sukkot (Tabernacles) the custom of inviting as guests, *ushpizin*, into the Sukkah the three patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as well as Joseph, Moses, Aaron and David. In the 1995 edition of *Forms of Prayer for Jewish Worship: II Prayers for the Pilgrim Festivals* (The Reform Synagogues of Great Britain) the editors introduced, in addition, as *ushpizin* seven significant women from the biblical tradition. On the last day of the festival one of the customs is to circle the interior of the synagogue seven times, while chanting *piyyutim*, poetical prayers, called *Hoshanot* ('please save!'). She has composed a new liturgical *piyyut*, linking the historical contexts of the paired 'guests' to the theme of the festival.

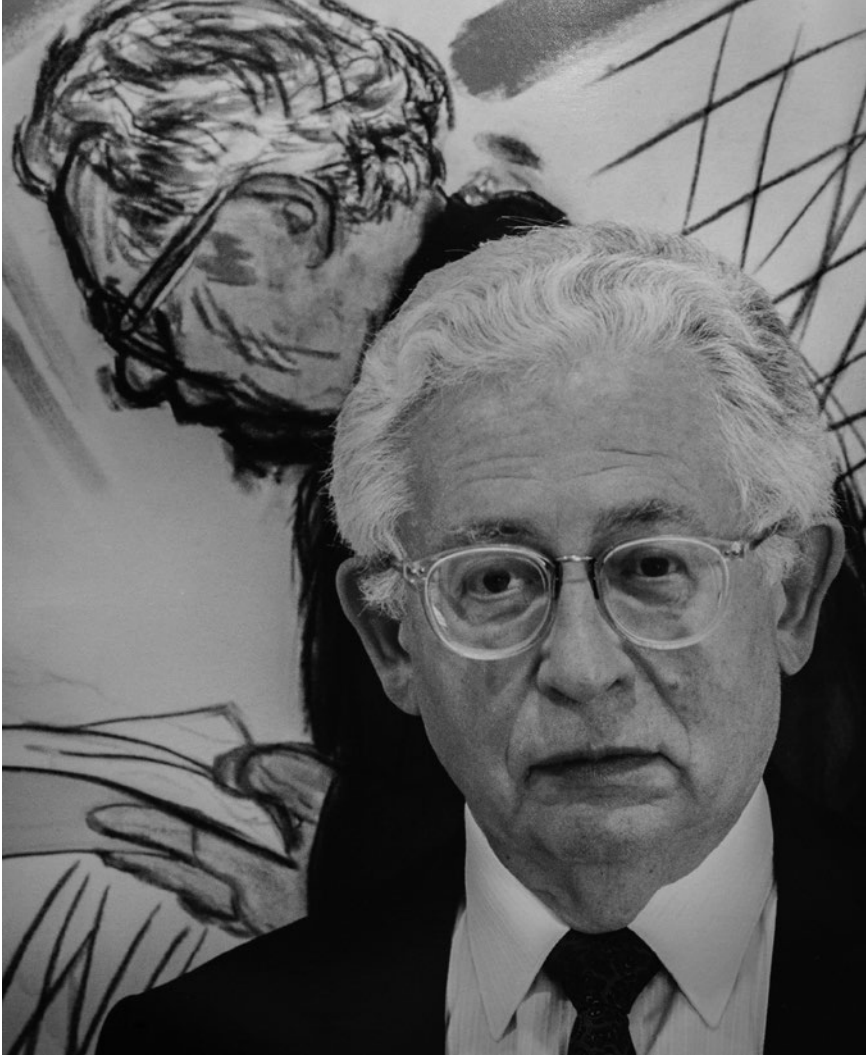
Gabriel Kanter Webber contrasts how divine fallibility can be addressed in a polytheistic and monotheistic world. The gods of the ancient Greek pantheon could show fallibility through their behaviour among themselves, but a different strategy was required in Judaism.

Humans may have been created in God's image, but so too has the narrative God of Judaism been created in human's image ... A fallible God might not be God according to the strictest definitions of Jewish theology, and yet an infallible God cannot be God according to the emotional needs of Jews as human beings. Within the Jewish narrative, God created humans; outside of it, Jews created God. It is a moral relationship in the fullest sense of that phrase.

Book reviews complete the issue.

## Notes

1. Lionel Blue, 'Rabbi and Colleague', *European Judaism* 37, no. 2 (Autumn 2004), 103–122, here 108.
2. Eli Wiesel and Albert Friedlander, *The Six Days of Destruction: Meditations towards Hope* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1988). An excerpt from the opening chapter by Eli Wiesel as well as the introduction by Albert Friedlander appeared in *European Judaism* 21, no. 2 (1988), 10–14.



Rabbi Dr Albert H. Friedlander and the portrait painted by RB Kitaj, exhibited at the Marlborough Gallery, London in 2007. Kitaj and Rabbi Friedlander met for conversation regularly over the course of many years. According to Albert's daughter, Rabbi Ariel Friedlander, the staff at the gallery would not tell him the price of the painting when he inquired. Upon being refused this information, he replied that '... for a little bit less he would be happy to stand in the prospective purchaser's home so they could look at the original'. Photograph by Frank Dabba Smith.