Correspondence

Theodor Herzl

To the Editors:

Ella Florsheim's editorial applauding the Knesset's establishment of a national day in honor of Theodor Herzl ("Giving Herzl His Due," Azure 21, Summer 2005) and Natan Sharansky's essay on the prescience and pragmatism of Herzl ("The Political Legacy of Theodor Herzl," Azure 21, Summer 2005), who predicted the Jewish state and set in motion a political program for its establishment, remind us of the importance to every nation—and person—of remembering our heroes.

In our post-modern world, as Florsheim correctly asserts, "it is generally more fashionable to belittle the qualities of founding heroes than to revere them." In doing so, however, we are doing ourselves, and particularly our young, a terrible disservice. The media, academics, and the rest of us are so critical of political, military, intellectual, and religious leaders that there is no one left to admire. Worse, the ideals that heroic figures advocate and symbolize are deprecated and debunked as the personalities of these heroes are tarnished. We are in danger of turning every "somebody" into a nobody through our withering critiques.

The result is a weakening of idealism in general. Since everyone—including our erstwhile heroes—is flawed, why should anyone engage in idealistic endeavors? If Herzl, Ben-Gurion, Menachem Begin, and, yes, Ariel Sharon are portrayed as morally, ethically, and intellectually blemished at least, and Machiavellian manipulators at worse, why devote one's life to Zionism, love of Israel, and leadership of the nation?

In fact, the veneration of heroes is one of the most powerful stimuli for heroic and idealistic behavior. I recall as a child in Camp Massad, a Hebrew speaking, Zionist educational camp in America, that the first Sabbath of the summer was known as "Sabbath Herzl and Bialik." Our discussions, dramatic presentations, songs and lectures over that Sabbath all served to instill in us a love of Israel, a belief in the need for a Jewish state—in 1945, my first summer, there was as yet no state—and an appreciation for the vitality and essential nature of the Hebrew language. Because of that first Sabbath, my life and that of thousands of other young people were decisively influenced.

The post-modern tendency to find flaws in our heroes, however, does more than render idealism unattractive to the young. The critical approach, focusing on one flawed idea or pattern of behavior, is often misleading as one tries to evaluate a heroic figure. Ecclesiastes correctly warned that "There is no person in the world who always lives righteously and does not sin." Every hero has weaknesses; no leader is right all of the time; but that doesn't make him or her non-heroic. It rather renders the hero human and, therefore, more worthy of emulation.

If we focus on the negative elements and not on the total personality and behavior, no human being will ever be worthy of praise. Shammai the Elder advises us in *The Ethics of the Fathers* to give everyone the benefit of the doubt, but he doesn't actually use the word "everyone" (*kol adam*). Instead, he chooses the awkward expression *kol ha'adam*, "the whole person." Judge a piece of a person, and one will find flaws; judge the "whole person," and one can give that person the benefit of the doubt—and maybe even find him or her worthy of veneration and emulation.

Haskel Lookstein
Senior Rabbi, Congregation
Kehilath Jeshurun
New York

American Judaism

To the Editors:

I am grateful for Jerome A. Chanes' many kind words concerning my *American Judaism: A History* (Azure 21, Summer 2005). Readers of the review, however, may not realize that what Chanes describes as errors of "fact" in my book are really disputes over interpretation. Moreover, Chanes gets some of his own facts wrong.

In the case of the Orthodox-Conservative divide, for example, it certainly is not a "fact" that the 1950 enactment permitting driving to the synagogue on the Sabbath was the "defining issue" separating the two movements. I discuss that enactment on pp. 284-285—not in a sentence, as Chanes claims, but in a whole paragraph. I continue to believe, however, that the issue of mixed seating was more significant. The latter visibly distinguished Conservative from Orthodox synagogues. Parking lots, by contrast, could be found in Conservative and Orthodox synagogues alike in the 1950s. Moreover, in much of the country, suburban Orthodox parking lots were only slightly less likely to fill up on Saturday mornings than Conservative ones.

Nor is it a "fact" that Jewish involvement in civil rights was "rooted… in Jewish self-interest." While I

specifically note "Jewish self-interest," on p. 309, I also observe that some Jews "considered Jewish organizational involvement in civil rights 'not an advantage but a liability.'" I also discuss other motivations underlying Jewish support for civil rights. Instead of reducing the motivations of millions of Jews to a single factor, as Chanes would have had me do, I insist in this section, as in the rest of my book, upon complex and sophisticated interpretations. Chanes may consider this evidence of my having a "tin ear," but I consider it to be the very definition of responsible scholarship.

Moreover, Chanes seems not to have read the manifesto of Ezrat Nashim. In that document, the women specifically define themselves "as products of Conservative congregations, religious schools, the Ramah Camps, LTF, USY, and the Seminary." My supposed "error of fact" is thus no error at all, and what is "troubling" instead is that the reviewer did not bother to look up the original source which I cite in my footnote.

Finally, Chanes also seems to have missed my reference to the journal *Judaism*, which he includes in his list of "glaring omissions." The journal is discussed on p. 281.

I am grateful that Chanes realizes that "in a book of *American Judaism*'s scope it is not possible to include everything." Reasonable people may disagree as to what should have been included, but it is important to emphasize once again that such disagreements concern the interpretation of facts, and not the facts themselves. Reviewers, above all, need to know the difference.

Jonathan D. Sarna
Brandeis University

To the Editors:

In his review of Jonathan Sarna's *American Judaism*, Jerome Chanes identifies a major omission in Sarna's work: Its lack of "any serious discussion of theology." This omission is particularly glaring in view of the fact that religion and theology have played a significant, albeit occasionally subterranean, role in the two decisive events in modern Jewish history, the Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel. Moreover, religion and theology continue to shape contemporary attitudes, both pro and con, toward Jews, Judaism, and events in the State of Israel.

Chanes is also correct in stating, contra Sarna, that the Holocaust was not on the American Jewish communal agenda before 1967. He notes that I was the first American Jewish theologian to "insist that the Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel be viewed in *theological*, and

not merely historical, terms…." My views on this issue became a matter of public notice with my contribution to the symposium on "The Condition of Jewish Belief" published by *Commentary* in its August 1966 issue and the publication of my book *After Auschwitz* later in 1966. The symposium itself offers an excellent overview of American Jewish religious thinking at the time. Thirty-eight "distinguished rabbis and theologians" were asked to answer questions concerning belief in the Tora as divine revelation, belief in the election of Israel, and whether Judaism had anything "distinctive… to contribute to the world." The final question was:

> Does the so-called "God is dead" question… have any relevance to Judaism? What aspects of modern thought do you think pose the most serious challenge to Jewish belief?

What was striking about the responses was their lack of connection, for the most part, to recent Jewish history. The disconnect was, I believe, not unrelated to the fact, reported by then-editor Milton Himmelfarb, that the greatest single influence on the respondents was Franz Rosenzweig. It was largely Rosenzweig's personal story that so many American Jewish thinkers found meaningful. At the time, the principal source in English on Rosenzweig was Nahum Glatzer's *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought*, first published in 1953. William Hallo's translation of Rosenzweig's complex, highly nuanced *The Star of Redemption* was not published until 1972. Unlike Herzl, there was little, if anything, that was useful or relevant in Rosenzweig's thinking on the issues of history, politics, and power as his community approached the terminal crisis of its long history. As the sinister shadow of the swastika lengthened across Europe, Rosenzweig made the astounding claim that, unlike Christians, the Jews are an eternal people "already in the Father's presence." The price they had to pay for that blessed condition was withdrawal from the concerns of power and "the course of world history."

One cannot say that Jewish thinkers of the period were indifferent to history and power in their practical lives. No Jew could be. Nevertheless, in the realm of thought they were hopelessly prone to fideism, defined by Zachary Braiterman as the "stubborn act of faith by which religious believers persist in their belief notwithstanding powerful, empirical counterevidence" (*(God) After Auschwitz*, Princeton, 1998, p. 138). In the *Commentary* symposium, the late Emil Fackenheim claimed that the "great religious demand" for contemporary Judaism was "radical *t'shuva*—a turning and a listening to the God who can speak even

though he is silent." A year later he had other thoughts. He told his readers, "Doubtless the greatest doctrinal change in my whole career came with the view that at least Jewish faith is, after all, not absolutely immune to all empirical events" (*To Mend the World*, Schocken, 1982, p. 13).

I was the only contributor to the symposium who stated unambiguously that "the greatest single challenge to modern Judaism arises out of the question of God and the death camps." I was also the only contributor to state that the question of the "death of God" had meaning for Judaism. Mindful of the Holocaust, I wrote, "the time that Nietzsche's madman had said was too far off had come upon us." Nevertheless, I had a word of caution. I wrote that "we live in the time of the 'death of God,'" but added that "This is more a statement about man and his culture than about God."

My ideas concerning these issues had been germinating for several years. The philosophical question about reconciling the existence of an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God and human evil was not the same as the theological question. The theological question concerned the God of covenant and election, the biblical-rabbinic God of History who was said to have chosen Israel and bestowed upon it a covenant stipulating benefits for compliance and dire punishments for rejecting his commandments. Given belief in such a God, must Auschwitz be seen as a frightful expression of God's punitive retribution against a sinful Israel? The unreflective traditional answer was almost invariably affirmative. But the idea that Auschwitz could have served any providential purpose whatsoever or that Hitler, like Nebuchadnezzar, could in any sense be regarded as an instrument of divine wrath was to me patently obscene. I saw no alternative but unambiguously to reject the biblical-rabbinic idea of the God of History, covenant, and election.

Nevertheless, it was never my intention to abandon Judaism as a religion. On the contrary, I saw Judaism as having been forged in the crucible of Israel's this-worldly historical experience. I came to understand that Judaism is about identity, historical memory, and the sharing and commemorating of hallowed times and seasons in the life of the individual and the community. I viewed the Holocaust as largely the result of a single deficit, a deficit of power in the face of our most unconstrained enemies. Although I had begun my serious encounter with Jewish life in the early 1940s as an anti-Zionist member of the Junior Society of New York's Temple Emanuel, at the time a bastion of militant

anti-Zionism, by 1944 as a student at the Hebrew Union College I had come to understand the utter necessity of a Jewish state capable of defending its people. We were, I came to realize, a people both like and unlike all other peoples: Like them in that we were embedded in the immanent vicissitudes of history and power, unlike them in that our history was absolutely unique. My theological program thereafter was to spell out the meaning of Jewish religious existence devoid of all superordinate cosmic significance.

The silence of the symposium participants on the issues of God and the Holocaust and, for some, even the legitimacy of the State of Israel was largely shared by many of the great Jewish thinkers of the time. The trauma of the Holocaust had yet to be mastered in the realm of thought. In the realm of action, a beginning had already been made with the creation of the State of Israel, although as Yoram Hazony has pointed out, there were academic luminaries such as Martin Buber, Judah Magnes, Hannah Arendt, and others who did everything they could to undermine the legitimacy of the state. Theology, like philosophy, is a *nachdenken*, a thinking after the fact, and during the immediate post war decades, there was little time for reflection. The practical tasks were simply too overwhelming. Moreover, the thinkers with the training best suited for theological reflection were almost entirely men whose world had been smashed. In the face of catastrophic destruction, they were less interested in reformulating the tradition than in making it available, enriched by their own insights, to the next generation.

I have often wondered why I did not follow their example. I suspect that part of the reason was that I possessed both the advantages and disadvantages of having been unencumbered by a traditional Jewish background. My entry point into Judaism only came when I realized that my identity was indelibly Jewish. Both my rabbinic and my doctoral studies were not a quest for a sacred inheritance but a quest for an ever-deepening understanding of my identity in both its communal and its historic dimensions.

Richard L. Rubenstein
Florida State University

Jerome A. Chanes responds:

I thank Jonathan D. Sarna for his thoughtful comments on my review of his *American Judaism: A History*, and for his questions and clarifications. Sarna does raise an important question in his letter, that of the boundary between data and interpretation of those data. The boundary

is, to be sure, sometimes permeable; moreover, there arise occasionally conflicts between data that surround a particular issue. This appears to be the case in the three examples he has chosen among the many areas in his book about which I raise questions. It is this rather nuanced point that is the key, I believe, to our disagreements.

First, on the matter of the Orthodox-Conservative divide, an issue that is a matter of historical interpretation and judgment, Sarna is partly right—partly right, therefore partly wrong. A full discussion of the events of 1950—beyond what was possible in a telescoped review—is thus called for.

Who filled the parking lots in the 1950s is not the issue; everyone—Conservative and Orthodox—was driving to synagogue in the suburbs. The issue was joined in 1950—a time when Orthodoxy in America was weak, insecure, defensive; and when Conservative was regnant—when the rabbinic leadership of each movement placed the item on its respective agenda. The Conservative movement (to its regret to this day) gave halachic sanction to driving on the Sabbath, and the Orthodox—whatever the practice "on the ground"—said, "We will not sanction a halachically impermissible act, even if we know that everyone is doing it." The way in which the issue was approached was not about cars in parking lots; it was about how each movement viewed praxis, how each movement viewed the halachic process, how each movement viewed its own present and future. Driving to synagogue had implications far beyond the instant event, and far beyond the *mehitza* issue at the time. It is very much a "fact" that it was a defining moment.

The visibility of the *mehitza* was not the defining issue at the time, not the way in which driving was. This is not to say that *mehitza* and *aguna* were not important issues; they were, and over the long term may have proved to be more significant than driving, as Sarna avers—although the *mehitza* issue (played out in the secular courts) was highly nuanced, as Sarna correctly observes as well.

Sarna next raises the question of Jewish communal involvement in the civil rights movement. Much of the historiography of civil rights—a broad arena, to be sure—surrounds the simple question, "What was going on within the Jewish community?" What was going on was an ongoing debate, over a number of years and in many communities, over the question of whether to make common cause with blacks. The issue came to a head at a 1947 Plenary Session of the National Community Relations Advisory Council (NCRAC, later the National Jewish Community

Relations Advisory Council and now the Jewish Council for Public Affairs; the national coordinating body for Jewish public policy). In a forum on "Relations with Negroes" a vigorous debate took place, involving many national agencies and numerous communities, on the wisdom of coalition building with blacks. Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, an American Jewish Congress and NAACP leader, made the cogent case for broad and deep involvement based on Jewish self-interest. The Wise rationale carried the day, and this dynamic informed the movement, from its very beginnings through the 1950s and into the 1960s.

The "Jewish self-interest" rationale is the key point. "Specifically noting" in passing Jewish self-interest (as Sarna does on p. 308) does not quite do it. Whatever else was going on—and Sarna does us a valuable service in cataloging in a concise manner the many dynamics of the movement—Jewish involvement in civil rights fit the pattern of all issues that were "selected" as priorities by Jews across the decades: The question, "Does this issue implicate Jewish security?" was answered by numerous national agencies and in hundreds of communities with a resounding "Yes!" Sarna either ignored, or did not take the trouble to consult, the records of the various national Jewish "defense" agencies, local community relations councils, and other organizations involved in Jewish public affairs—especially the annual Joint Program Plans and annual Plenum Proceedings of the National Community Relations Advisory Council; nor did he read the memoirs or listen carefully to the interviews conducted of Jewish leadership of the movement. All of these assert that, to a national Jewish polity at that time, it was clear that civil rights was a core issue of Jewish security (right up there with anti-Semitism) and was firmly rooted in Jewish self-interest. Unfortunately, conventional wisdom of many years' standing, refracted through the prism of a Jewish "liberal" past, has subverted the realities of history.

With respect to Ezrat Nashim, I do know the enabling documents of the group; I know as well each and every one of the original women who comprised the original "layers" of Ezrat Nashim, and who informed its agenda and activities. These women cast a broader net than just the Conservative; they represented everything, including Orthodox, and this to me carries at least as much weight as does the formal documentation. Indeed, Ezrat Nashim first sought out Orthodox, rather than Conservative, institutions as agents of change. The fact is that Ezrat Nashim, almost from its very beginnings, had

an impact that was felt beyond the Conservative movement, and this in large measure was a result of its variegated membership. As Sarna suggests, this is a matter of interpretation, about which there can be legitimate disagreement, but it is not about "original sources in footnotes."

Part of the issue here (as is the case in that of the Orthodox-Conservative divide) is that Ezrat Nashim is one of those areas in which history abuts religion—all the more reason for Sarna to be scrupulous in his own narrative and analysis of religion. It's a case of "nomen omen": Sarna's book, entitled *American Judaism*, is about American Jewish religion, as he takes great pains in telling us in his opening chapter. But what emerges (especially in his final chapter) suggests that Historian Sarna has little interest in being Theologian Sarna.

Finally, I fully accept Sarna's rebuke for having missed his mention of *Judaism* in his book. But Sarna's reference to *Judaism* is almost an afterthought. Even in his cursory mention of this pre-eminent intellectual journal, Sarna had an opportunity to include a sentence on its significance and impact: The pages of *Judaism* were the very representation of the ferment around theology, society, and history of the time. *Judaism* (together with other journals) established the intellectual and theological linkages that were crucial to the maturing of American Jewish thought. This is the "glaring omission" to which I referred. Again, it's about interpretation of data, or lack thereof.

Ultimately, Sarna is right: It is impossible to include everything. The world is informed by the Yiddish expression *Alles in einem is nishto bei keinem*—you can't have everything in any one thing. This is especially true in a survey volume, and Sarna's choices in his superb book are for the most part right on the mark. But it is the task of the reviewer to set a context for reading the work. He and I clearly differ on interpretation and the boundaries between data and interpretation.

I thank as well Richard L. Rubenstein for his erudite letter, which recalls for the contemporary reader the issue of the Holocaust and the "death of God," words unfamiliar to most under the age of fifty. Indeed, it was Rubenstein who first (and later with Rabbi Irving Greenberg) taught us to articulate the theological—and not merely historical—vocabulary of the Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel. Rubenstein's letter is a service to a new generation.

Also valuable is Rubenstein's underscoring a point I made in my essay, that conventional wisdom that holds that the Holocaust was on the American Jewish communal agenda in the

1950s and early 1960s is wrong. Most Jews expected that the Eichmann trial would generate widespread Holocaust "consciousness" in America. It did so in Israel, but not in the United States. It was the trauma of threatened annihilation that preceded the Six Day War that served to place the destruction of European Jewry firmly on the agenda of American Jews.

Divine Love

To the Editors:

In attributing to Judaism a vision of the God-Israel relationship marred by chauvinism—and ultimately by racial bias—Meir Soloveichik conflates the two biblical ideologies of chosenness ("God's Beloved: A Defense of Chosenness," Azure 19, Winter 2005).

According to Soloveichik, Deuteronomy depicts a God-Israel relationship based on the parent-child model, a bond of privilege in which the Jewish people need not justify their favored status. If the Jews are like "sons to the Eternal" (Deuteronomy 14:1), sentimentally desired on account of their forefathers (Deuteronomy 7:7, 10:15), then they are "chosen" no matter what they do. Israel is thus categorically unique, and other nations, however worthy, cannot hope to compete with the elected status of God's sons. They simply aren't part of his family.

Instead of discomfort with the implicit racism in this depiction of election, however, Soloveichik embraces it, and makes it the cornerstone of his Judaism. In his reflections on "divine love"—itself a Christian term, and one at odds with the Jewish predilection for "covenant" and "election"—he ignores the primary biblical model of Israel's election, which has nothing to do with blood ties or nepotism and everything to do with a covenant with Abraham and his meritorious descendants.

In the book of Genesis, election is not about love at all, but about virtue, character, and just desserts. God chooses Abraham and his descendants because he knows that they will keep the ways of righteousness and justice, not because he loves them or sees them as part of his family. Thus Abraham is called God's servant but never his son, because, like a servant, he was chosen for his talents, and not for his lineage. Consequently, Soloveichik's claim that God loves the Jews more than other peoples, far from being "one of Judaism's central premises," runs counter to large parts of the Hebrew Bible.

Likewise, Israel as the "servant of God" becomes the primary symbol of election in the book of Isaiah. This is

as it must be, for only a people chosen by the content of its character can be emulated by others as a "light unto nations" (Isaiah 42:6, 49:6). Only an inclusive vision of chosenness in which other nations of moral magnitude can be similarly elected allows for the possibility that "nations shall walk by your light; kings by your shining radiance" (Isaiah 60:3).

Soloveichik's prejudicial tilt towards Deuteronomic privilege is obvious in his references to "the Bible's depiction of God's love of Abraham," and God "falling in love with Abraham." Yet not one verse in Genesis says that God loved Abraham—this despite the fact that love is a fundamental motive in Genesis: Abraham loves Isaac, Isaac loves Rebecca and Esau, Rebecca loves Jacob, and Jacob loves Rachel, to name a few.

More troublesome still is the ethical intuition that drives Soloveichik's argument. He seems to believe that God loves a Jewish child more than the child of a Muslim, Christian, or Hindu. Why push a racist version of election, when Judaism provides plentiful resources for a doctrine of enlightened chosenness?

Finally, there is Soloveichik's crude anthropomorphism: With reductive statements like, "Judaism, in contrast [to Christianity], argues against such a sharp distinction between divine and human love," Soloveichik dismisses eight hundred years of Maimonidean rationalism. In his view, Maimonides' philosophic rescue of Judaism is misguided, for the Jewish God is remarkably like man, and he loves his Jews as if they were his one and only son. Ironically, in this, his version of the Jewish God is about as Christianized as one can get.

Akiva Tor
Beit Shemesh

To the Editors:

Contrary to Meir Soloveichik, many Christians believe that God understands people as individuals, but expresses his love for them universally—that is to say, the universality can be applied to his love, not to his view of persons. Just as we can love more than one person in his particularity, so can an infinite God love every individual in this way. Thus his love is not "directed at all humanity"; rather, it is directed at each person, and is discovered after the fact to include everyone.

It seems to me that the best analogy we have for how God loves each of us individually yet extends that love to mankind is a parent's love for his children. One can have multiple children, and love each of them equally. (It may be true that parents sometimes have favorites, but this is generally not considered a good thing.) Thus

Jesus describes himself as the Good Shepherd who, if there is one sheep among his flock missing, will leave all the others in the pen and go in search of that one. This doesn't seem like "loving a totality," but like loving many individuals.

Moreover, Soloveichik writes that "one acts justly only if he takes nothing personal or familial into account in bestowing justice on another." This seems eminently untrue. The very imperfection of man-made laws is that they are blind. They may be the best we can do without perfect information, but that does not make them just. After all, we can never really know people's motivations, yet we think that perfect justice would require it. In fact, perfect justice would demand that we take into account the personal and familial story of the one being judged.

Finally, concerning Soloveichik's point about the differing views on family in our two religions, while I agree that the distinction he describes does exist between Jews and Christians, I would add that in Paul's lists of requirements for leadership in the Church, it is explicit that being able to manage one's own family is a prerequisite for being allowed to help manage the family of God.

William Britt
New Haven, Connecticut

To the Editors:

In his response to Meir Soloveichik's essay "God's Beloved: A Defense of Chosenness," Shubert Spero takes issue with Soloveichik's view of Judaism's understanding of divine love (Correspondence, Azure 20, Spring 2005). He maintains that we are dealing with an unknown, and he objects to the "conflation of human and divine love."

On the contrary, however, Soloveichik is standing on firm ground. The greatest love story in the written Tora—and possibly in world literature—is found in the Song of Songs. Spero knows that the poetic depiction of the relationship between the shepherd and his beloved is interpreted allegorically as representing the love between the Divine and the Jewish people. Moreover, R. Akiva states that if the Bible is holy, the Song of Songs is the "holy of holies." Meir Soloveichik is thus standing in good company, and his theology is far from incoherent.

Fred Ehrman
New York

Meir Soloveichik responds:

Akiva Tor, if I understand his letter correctly, agrees with me that the Bible, in Deuteronomy, does explicitly state that God loves Israel

preferentially, and that he chose Israel because of this preferential love. The implication of Tor's argument is, however, that Jews ought to reject Deuteronomy, and construct a theory of chosenness based solely on Genesis. Yet I do not believe that an authentically Jewish theology can be constructed by jettisoning an entire book of the Bible. Moreover, Tor is mistaken. The notion of God's love for Israel is not restricted to Deuteronomy; it is a recurrent theme from the beginning of the Bible to its end.

Tor also insists that Abraham's election in Genesis has nothing to do with love. But what Tor misses, and what Genesis informs us, is that God loved Abraham precisely because he sought to father a faithful family. "For I know him, that he will command his children and household after him, and they will keep the way of the Eternal, to perform justice and righteousness" (Genesis 18:19). The Bible here does not, of course, refer to God's "knowing" in a cognitive sense. As both the rabbinic tradition and modern scholars have noted, for God to say that he knows someone is to state a love for and intimacy with that person. For example, when the Jewish people lay suffering in slavery, we are told that "God hearkened to their moaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob, and God saw the children of Israel, and God knew" (Exodus 2:23-25). The prophet Amos, using the term "knowing" in like manner, insists that precisely because Israel has been loved more than any other nation, it is held to a higher moral standard: "You alone have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore, I shall hold you accountable for all your iniquities" (Amos 3:2).

Tor further contends that God never refers to Abraham as his son, but then, I never claimed that Abraham is so depicted. What I did contend, quoting Michael Wyschogrod, was that God sees Abraham not as his child, but as his beloved with whom he wishes to found a family. It is the children of God's beloved Abraham that God sees as his own children, and this, contra Tor, is made clear in the Bible long before Deuteronomy. For example, in Exodus, the Almighty demands freedom for "my son, my firstborn, Israel" (Exodus 4:22). God then informs Pharaoh that he will be punished because "I said to you: Send free my son, that he may serve me, but you have refused to send him free" (Exodus 4:23). The Bible only confirms what we already know when we are told in Deuteronomy that God "loved your fathers, therefore he chose their seed after them" (4:35-38), and that the Jews are chosen "because the Eternal loved you, and because he

would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers" (7:7-8).

Nor are descriptions of God's love for Israel limited to the Pentateuch; the books of the prophets are replete with descriptions of God's preferential love for Israel. Tor cites Isaiah as a biblical book in which God's election of the Jewish people is portrayed as having nothing to do with love. Again, however, Tor errs: The book of Isaiah abounds with metaphors for God's familial relationship with the Jewish people. Indeed, one such example was cited in my article explicitly, in which God depicts himself not as Israel's father, but as its mother. When Israel is depicted as having been forsaken by God, God responds, "Can a woman forget her suckling child, refrain from having mercy on the fruit of her womb?" (Isaiah 49: 15). This image is reiterated by God later in Isaiah: "As one whom his mother comforts," Israel is consoled, "so I will comfort you" (66:13).

It is true that Abraham is loved by God for the content of his character, and Tor is correct to note that Israel, too, is often loved for its virtue. But as I noted in my article, God, the father of Israel, loves Israel even when it fails to live up to its potential, even when its actions are worthy of divine rebuke and even punishment.

Finally, Tor resorts to hyperbole by calling my views racist. But he knows very well that even as traditional Judaism insists that God preserves a preferential love for the Jewish people, it is equally insistent that one need not be of genetic Abrahamic descent in order to experience this love. Conversion to Judaism is possible, and indeed a convert was the ancestor of David and therefore of the Jewish Messiah. But any convert to Judaism must not only love the God of Abraham; he or she must share God's love for the Jewish people, as well, and desire to become part of the Jewish family. It is noteworthy that the archetypal Jewish convert is Ruth, who converted by declaring to Naomi not only that "your God is my God," but also "your people is my people" (Ruth 1:16). Once converted, a convert is fully a Jew. God elected a family, and descent from Abraham is the most common way one becomes part of this family. But it is not the only way.

In short, Tor quotes selectively from the Bible in order to describe a faith for which familial identity plays no significant part in determining God's love, for which God's covenantal favor does not distinguish between Jew and Greek. Such a faith exists; a version of it can be found in Paul's Epistles. But it is not Judaism.

William Britt questions the sharp distinction I draw between the Jewish and Christian approaches to divine love. I argued that for Jews, human

love is not wholly unlike divine love. God can be drawn to human beings the way one is drawn to one's spouse, or a parent is drawn to his child. In contrast to this, I argued that for Christians, God's love is unmotivated, an agapic and purely benevolent love, a love of human beings despite how wretched they may truly be. The question Britt asks is whether the Christian approach to divine love is not actually similar to the Jewish one. Why, Britt asks, can God not be drawn to all humanity in the same way that I speak of God being drawn to the family of Abraham? In response I note that this distinction between Judaism and Christianity was first drawn not by me, but by the Christian theologian Anders Nygren; but I do find Nygren's account persuasive. In answering Britt's question, theologians such as Nygren take note of Jesus' insistence that God loves the egregiously wicked as much as he loves the righteous, that he makes no distinction between Hitler and Mother Theresa. This being the case, it would be difficult for Christians to believe that God's love is akin to preferential human love. Consider a father, one of whose children killed several siblings. Would a father be drawn to this fratricidal child to the same extent that he would be drawn to his other children? I think not, and that is why I find Nygren's account of Christian love so convincing. If, as Christians believe, God loves all human beings without preference, it must be because his love is unmotivated and agapic, a love for humanity utterly unlike preferential human love.

Regarding Britt's comments on the Christian philosophy of the family, Britt is correct that one who has a wife and children must prove himself in the way that he cares for that family. The fact remains, however—and this is the pivotal point—that Christians do not consider themselves religiously obligated to father or mother a family in the first place. Any honest reader of Christian Scripture must admit that for Paul, family is a distraction from more spiritual pursuits.

In his recent letter to Azure, Shubert Spero took issue with my contention that God's love can be compared to human love. Fred Ehrman notes that Spero's view conflicts with the traditional Jewish understanding of the love poetry of the Song of Songs. I thank Ehrman for his letter, and agree wholeheartedly with its contents. I would add that Spero's approach to divine love conflicts with biblical and rabbinic tradition in a more severe respect. In his letter, Spero disagrees with my thesis and asserts that unlike human beings, "God does not love the individual for his uniqueness, but rather for some gen-

eral characteristic that God deems of intrinsic value. God's love, therefore, is conditional. When Israel sins and does not repent, God's love may be forfeit." Yet the Bible insists, and Jews have always believed, that God's love is never forfeit. Even as Israel was exiled for its sins, it was informed by the Almighty that (Jeremiah 31: 2) "I have loved you with an eternal love (*ahavat olam*); therefore, I have drawn kindness over you." In times of sin, Israel experiences the Almighty's anger, but the divine love is eternal and ever-present. The verse is the source for a rabbinic prayer recited daily before the declamation of the *shema.* "With an everlasting love thou hast loved us," Jews all over the world assert, concluding, "Blessed art thou, O Eternal, who loves his nation Israel." As an Orthodox Jew, Spero himself recites this prayer *every day.* I wonder how he can daily state a proposition that, in his opinion, expresses such a grave error of theology.

Spero concludes his letter by arguing that "while there are texts that speak of God's love for the forefathers as a whole, Abraham, as an individual, is nowhere singled out as a recipient of God's love." Therefore, he argues, the notion that God loves every individual child of Abraham because of his love for our forefather is "nice poetry, perhaps, but incoherent theology." He is certainly entitled to his opinion, but perhaps he should be wary of charging my theological position with incoherence. In its spring 1991 issue, *Tradition* published a review of Michael Wyschogrod's *The Body of Faith*. The reviewer took issue with Wyschogrod's assertion that we do not know the reason for God's love of Abraham, and argued, citing the very same verse in Genesis that I cited in my own article, that the Bible does tell us why God loved Abraham, and why Abraham's children were chosen:

> It seems clear to me *that the Bible* (Genesis 18:19) *would like us to understand that God loves Abraham and chooses his seed* because of the moral qualities he finds actual or potential in him: "Thou art the Lord, the God who did choose Abram and brought him forth out of Ur of the Chaldees and gave him the name Abraham and found his heart faithful before Thee." (Nehemia 9:7) (emphasis added)

The author of this review? Shubert Spero.

Rammstein

To the Editors:

"Rammstein's Rage" by Claire Berlinski (Azure 20, Spring 2005) is a well-reported article, and offers some chilling moments. But Berlinski's

reprints of lyrics fail to shock—despite their clear intentions to do so—and her conclusions fail to worry.

Berlinski's publication of English translations of Rammstein lyrics reminds one of the "Reefer Madness" school of mainstream worry about "edge" cultural phenomena. "Reefer Madness" is the camp anti-marijuana cult classic film of the 1930s, in which nice young kids who smoke pot immediately become murderous, drug-crazed fiends. The movie is so laughably ridiculous it spawns the exact opposite of its intended reaction: Legions of college kids went to see it stoned on marijuana and laughed hysterically. Similarly, the anti-rock 'n' roll zealots of the 1950s and 1960s in America used to recite rock lyrics to show either their inanity or how their dangerous "jungle rhythm" would induce teens to become sex-crazed freaks who defied parental authority.

Rammstein's lyrics are no more nihilistic or idiotic than other teen anthems, and reprinting them with an intent to shock and awe falls on its face. Her descriptions of the powerful, martial impact of Rammstein's music, and its intentional or unintentional references to Nazi-era efforts, are far more alarming.

In the end, however, her conclusion—that Rammstein represents a reason why German membership in the European Union is likely to fail—falls short. The group may be popular, it may reach into the German zeitgeist, but any rock and roll band—and in the end, that's all Rammstein is—is unlikely to be so important and so symbolic as to set a clear trend for a nation. Just remember, at the same time such songwriters as Phil Ochs and Paul Kantner were calling for a revolution in America in 1970, an equal and opposite number were writing songs such as "Okie from Muskogee," which lauded patriotism and short hair.

In sum, the problem with any "trend" story is that its exact opposite can usually be written the next day.

Alan D. Abbey
Editor, Ynetnews
Tel Aviv

Claire Berlinski responds:

I appreciate Abbey's kind words about my reporting, and I am glad to know he shares my sense that there is something both sinister and familiar in Rammstein's music and dramaturgy. I would observe that while Abbey is willing to acknowledge the sinister impact of the music itself—and to recognize that this has something to do with the German musical tradition—he is unwilling to

accept his own reasoning by extending it to the lyrics that Rammstein employs. But if anything, the lyrics are far more explicit. They would have to be: They are lyrics.

I would also remark that Rammstein is not an adolescent band—its members are grown men—and that these are not, therefore, teen anthems. Their lyrics, like their music, are hardly the expression of adolescent anxiety:

> My black blood and your white flesh
> I will always become hornier from your screams
> the cold sweat on your white forehead
> hails into my sick brain
>
> Your white flesh excites me so
> I am just a gigolo
> my father was exactly like me
> your white flesh enlightens me

I certainly did not describe these lyrics as "idiotic." If only they were. They express, because they are a part of, a specifically German sensibility, one that cannot forever be hidden. It is right there in plain sight, in all of its familiar, doomed, torture-loving, pain-inflicting, swaggering old self. If Abbey does not wish to see this, he need not look; but by the same token, let us not pretend it is not there.

No one is saying, by the way, and for sure not I, that because the Germans feel right at home with Rammstein they are for that reason only unlikely to remain for long in the EU. By the same token, no one would have said in 1928 that because Gottfried Benn wrote a cycle of poems about his splendid times in the Berlin morgue, ten years later Hitler would march into the Sudetenland. All that I did say, and all anyone could say, is: Look at this. My, doesn't it look familiar.

I am not sure that I fully understand Abbey's final point. Is he arguing that articles about trends should not be published because, theoretically, their opposite could also be published? And finally, would this argument extend as well to letters to the editor?

Azure welcomes letters from its readers. Letters should be sent to: Azure, *13 Yehoshua Bin-Nun Street, Jerusalem, Israel. Fax: 972-2-560-5560; E-mail: letters@azure.org.il. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.*