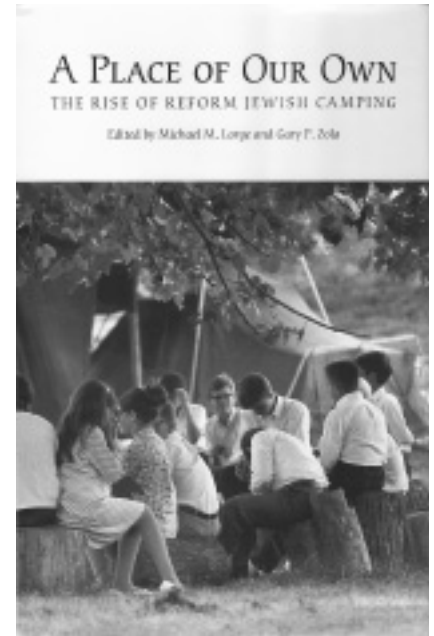


A Place of Our Own: The Rise of Reform Jewish Camping

Michael M. Lorge and Gary P. Zola, eds., University of Alabama Press, 2006

Reform Judaism is not the only religious group in America to make the summer camp experience a vital part of their effort to impart its values and beliefs to its children and adolescents, but perhaps no group relied more on camp as an adjunct to home and community for this purpose. Summer camp became an important part of Reform group identity, a bulwark against the attraction of assimilation into the greater society and mere nominal Judaism.

This volume commemorates the 50th anniversary of the founding of the first Reform Jewish educational camp in the United States – the Olin-Sang-Ruby Union Institute in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin. Essays by the editors and Jonathan Sarna, Donald M. Splansky, and Michael Zeldin cover the development of these camps within the socio-political and cultural context of American and Jewish life, and describe the educational and spiritual philosophies that were implemented within Reform Jewish summer camps.



Just as organized camping has today become a widely accepted social and educational institution in America, so too has Jewish camping become an established feature in the lives of many American Jews. In 2003 Jewish religious movements (Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist), Jewish Community Centers, Zionist organizations, Jewish youth organizations, and various other Jewish institutions collectively sponsored approximately 120 not-for-profit Jewish overnight camps in North America. In addition, hundreds of privately owned camps now cater primarily to a Jewish clientele. It has been estimated that fifty thousand Jewish youths attend the nonprofit camps on an annual basis, and an additional ten thousand individuals serve on staff for these camps. Clearly, Jewish camping is touching the lives of a significant number of Jewish young people in North America. Many contemporary leaders of American Jewry are convinced that Jewish camping experiences will contribute significantly to a young person's desire to participate in Jewish communal life as an adult.

...The history of Jewish camping is firmly rooted in the soil of a distinctly American phenomenon: the organized camping movement. The beginnings of Jewish camping in this country came as a by-product of the

social and ideological trends that enveloped the nation during the Progressive Era. By the end of World War I, an ardent group of progressive Jewish educators began to realize that organized camping programs could promote Jewish learning and strengthen the bonds of Jewish identification. It was at this very time that millions of first- and second-generation East European Jewish immigrants were integrating into American culture. Whereas many of the founders of the first generation of Jewish camping sought to Americanize Jewish children, the pioneers of the next generation of Jewish camps – camps with an explicitly Jewish ideological mission – were determined to reinforce Jewish identity.

By World War II, Jewish camping – like American camping in general – had become an accepted feature of American culture. Today, in addition to a steady proliferation of private camps that serve Jewish clientele, a diverse array of nonprofit Jewish educational camps have been established. Just as America exported the idea of organized camping around the globe, so too has American Jewish camping been a model for the creation of Jewish camping programs throughout the world. In fact, when American Sikhs contemplated the establishment of their own educational camping program, they used the American Jewish

camping program as their model.

Finally, Jewish camping's historic relationship to its American counterpart even extends to the descriptive rhetoric that has been used to characterize the institution's overall significance. In 1922 Charles B. Eliot, former president of Harvard University, concluded "The organized summer camp is the most important step in education that America has given the world." More than a half-century later, Gerson D. Cohen, chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, matched Eliot's flattering sentiments when he ebulliently remarked that Jewish summer camp has constituted "the greatest contribution made by American Jews to modern Jewish life." The zeal that Charles Eliot and Gerson Cohen share in evaluating the significance of organized camping is reflective of a shared exuberance that has characterized camping enthusiasts from the movement's earliest days. As Jewish camping in America evolved and matured, it eventually assumed its own unique character based on the recognition that the proven successes of the American camping movement's ideology could be tailored to serve a distinctly Jewish mission, thereby making Jewish camping a genuine hybrid of organized camping in America.



Dr. Gary P. Zola is the Executive Director of The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives and Associate Professor of the American Jewish

Experience at HUC-JIR/Cincinnati, where he was ordained in 1982 and received his Ph.D. in 1991. He is the author of *Isaac Harby of Charleston: Jewish Reformer and Intellectual*, editor of *The American Jewish Archives Journal*, and has served as editor and contributor to numerous books in the area of American Jewish history, including *Three Hundred Fifty Years: An Album of American Jewish Memory*, *The Dynamics of American Jewish History: Jacob Rader Marcus's Essays on American Jewry*, *Women Rabbis: Exploration and Celebration*, and *Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion – A Centennial History, 1875-1975*.



Dr. William (Bill) Cutter, Director of the Kalsman Institute on Judaism and Health, Dr. Paul and Trudy Steinberg Distinguished Professor of Human Relations, and Professor

of Education and Modern Hebrew Literature, has been on the faculty of HUC-JIR/Los Angeles since 1965, where he was the Founding Director of the Rhea Hirsch School of Education, and the first Director of the Louchheim School of Judaic Studies. In 2000, through the inspired gift of the family of Lee and Irving Kalsman and Peachy and Mark Levy, Dr. Cutter developed the Kalsman Institute for Judaism and Health, which has sponsored over 30 forums on health and healing in the Jewish community, helped develop pastoral training programs in Israel, and supervises the pastoral education of students at HUC-JIR/ Los Angeles. Dr. Cutter received the A.B. from Yale University (1959), was ordained by the College-Institute (1965), and received a Ph.D. from UCLA (1971). He serves on the Spiritual Care Committee of UCLA Medical Center and is the editor and author of numerous books and articles on literature, interpretation, and health and healing.

Healing and the Jewish Imagination: Spiritual and Practical Perspectives on Judaism and Health

Rabbi William Cutter, Ph.D., ed., Jewish Lights Publishing, 2007

Healing and the Jewish Imagination: Spiritual and Practical Perspectives on Judaism and Health explores the Jewish tradition of providing comfort in times of illness and explains Judaism's perspectives on the inevitable suffering with which we live. Drawing from literature, personal experience, and the foundational texts of Judaism, celebrated thinkers push the boundaries of Jewish knowledge through unique, sometimes controversial perspectives. Using a modern interpretation of Judaism's ancient texts, these essays discuss the distinctions between curing and healing, and show us that healing is an idea that can both soften us so that we are open to inspiration as well as toughen us – like good scar tissue – in order to live with the consequences of being human. Topics include the importance of the individual; hope and the Hebrew Bible; health and healing as part of the mystical tradition; from disability to enablement; Jewish bioethics; and overcoming stigma and knowing its roots. Contributors include Dr. Rachel Adler, Rabbi Elliott Dorff, Dr. Arnold Eisen, Dr. Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, Dr. Eitan Fishbane, Rabbi Arthur Green, Dr. Tamara Green, Dr. Peter Knobel, Dr. Adriane Leveen, Dr. Louis Newman, Rabbi David Ruderman, David Schulman, Dr. Howard Silverman, and Albert Winn.



The Deuteronomic Perspective

Dr. Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, Professor of Bible, HUC-JIR/Los Angeles

The perspective of Deuteronomy shapes many parts of the Hebrew Bible, including prophetic books such as Jeremiah. At a time of crisis, the prophet Jeremiah asks “Is there a healer?” Jeremiah himself answers the query with a negative: There is no healer. There is no balm. Therefore, calamities will follow. Therefore, God weeps. Like many others in the Tanakh, Jeremiah holds that there is an inevitable connection between sin

and human suffering. This ideology comes especially from Deuteronomy and forms the backbone of large portions of our Bible. This ideology, commonly labeled, “Retribution,” comes to a particularly vivid expression in the blessings and curses at the end of the Book of Deuteronomy.

These chapters represent Moses's final words to the Israelites who are about to enter the Promised Land. They disclose a theology that is often hard to swallow. In chapters 27 and 28 Moses instructs the Israelites to proclaim the curses that will befall them should they fail to follow the teachings of

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Deuteronomy. The list includes famine, disease, and all other manners of devastation. According to these chapters, the curses that follow are the inevitable result of Israel's sin, especially breaking the covenant and disobeying God. Such threats and their supporting ideology are, at first glance, anathema to us. Readers cringe when reading the lists. Over the years, I have come to know many a rabbi who bemoaned these chapters, saying, "WHAT am I going to say about THIS text on Shabbat?"

But before we toss out Deuteronomy, let's be clear about the Deuteronomic claims. Deuteronomy maintains that the various disasters, the "curses," are not simply natural phenomena to be endured passively. They are contingent upon the behavior of the society. The underlying presumption is that the moral society, constructed along the lines the Tanakh commands, uses its human and natural resources responsibly. The respectful use of land and the compassionate care for the disenfranchised create and sustain a healthy society. And that is what secures the entire world. When a society fails to construct an equitable life-support system, the entire ecosystem suffers and disaster follows.

Epidemics, according to Deuteronomy, are not accidents. They signal, on some level, human disregard for the physical, religious and moral aspects of life. It is tempting to read these threats from Deuteronomy as another case of simplistic theological cause and effect. Even worse, it has been possible to use the curses as another chilling excuse for blaming the victim, claiming that those who suffer must have done something to deserve their fate. This misguided theology and ideology represents the outlook of Job's friends in the Book of Job. Responding to the death of Job's children, one so-called comforter states: "If your sons sinned against Him, He dispatched them for their transgression" (Job 8:4; JPS). God, however, unambiguously chastises these friends for their position (see Job 42:7).

To attribute this simplistic perspective to Deuteronomy is to misread. Deuteronomy is not proclaiming a simple, individual cause-and-effect theology. For Deuteronomy, the world remains an interlocking system, governed by a just and compassionate God who cares deeply for those in the world, and who is trying to shake those of us who are part of the covenant to care and to take care as well. Moses is addressing those about to "arrive" ("When you enter the land," *ki tavo*, Deuteronomy 26:1). By listing the diseases and disasters that would follow disobedience, Deuteronomy is essentially saying to those who have arrived, or who are on the verge of arriving, "When you come to the land, you have the privilege and the power to make a difference. You have arrived. Your life as an individual is woven into the larger fabric, for which you are also responsible." It claims that suffering individuals in our midst are evidence not of their own transgressions, but of the corporate, communal failure to build a healthy society of economic covenant. Deuteronomy therefore urges those among us who have arrived to monitor ourselves and our communities, to care and to act. Optimistically, it assumes that we are capable of doing just that.

Many of us remain troubled by the picture of wholesale punishment for the crimes of the few. We cringe at the prospect that the innocent perish along with the guilty. Yet, when we look around us, we must admit that today, as in our past, we are living in a world where countless people suffer because of the crimes of the few. The few, in many ways exemplified by those of us privileged to live in North America and Western Europe, are the cause of so much that is economically rejected by the rest of the world. We help perpetuate disease not by wanton transmission and infection (as was once the case), but because we have not devoted nearly enough of ourselves or of our vast resources to creating solutions. We have not taken responsibility.

Inadvertently and without our consent we in fact exemplify the phenomenon that Deuteronomy describes. Our ancestors explained this perspective through theological language in which God plays a direct role, and sought to remedy it by invoking the fear and love that the relation with God can generate. By recognizing these diseases and disasters as communal problems, the ancients learned to lift from the individual the guilt that is so often attached to suffering. They made it clear that the source is not with the lone sufferer, but those who have the means and options to make a difference yet fail to do so.

In Memoriam

Maria Bamberger, dear wife of the late Dr. Fritz Bamberger, HUC-JIR faculty member and advisor to Presidents Nelson Glueck and Alfred Gottschalk. A dramatic presence in Israel, she was instrumental in the founding of our Jerusalem campus and her life, together with Fritz, reflected an abiding devotion to HUC-JIR.

Leah Fishbane, beloved wife of our colleague, Eitan Fishbane. Her memory is a source of blessing.

Lisa Goldberg, beloved wife of John Sexton, President of New York University, was tireless in her resourcefulness and personal advocacy on behalf of others. She was a catalyst for change through her singular leadership at the Revson Foundation.

Teddy Kollek, inspiring statesman, visionary, and honorary alumnus of HUC-JIR, was ever mindful of the prophetic tradition and the words of Nehemiah, "With one hand we build and with one hand we protect." His life reflected his courage and determination to establish Jerusalem as a home of peace and harmony in the hearts of all people.