

## REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR ADULTS

different path been chosen.

Halperin's book is a unique history of Zionist memory in that it does not limit its approach to actors from particular Zionist movements or institutions. The book while nominally focused on the "First Aliyah" generation is about much more: Labor Zionism, Revisionist Zionism, Palestinian agriculturalists, Holocaust survivor and Mizrahi immigrants to the State of Israel after its establishment, and even the history of continued settlement up until today. The book will serve as a fantastic resource for advanced undergraduate and graduate students in Jewish Studies and Middle East Studies.

**Ryan Zohar,**

*Middle East Institute, Washington, D.C.*

Kaplan, Thomas Pegelow and Wolf Gruner, eds. *Resisting Persecution: Jews and their Petitions During the Holocaust*. Studies in Contemporary European History, vol. 24. New York: Berghahn, 2020. \$29.95 (9781789207200).

In this new book, volume 24 in the series "Studies in Contemporary European History," the editors have collected many different written letters and other materials relating to Jews challenging their persecution during the Holocaust. This kind of material is enlightening in that it provides more counterarguments to the idea that Jews from Europe were passive victims. This also challenges the idea that only armed resistance does or should count as resistance to persecution during periods of persecution, Jewish or otherwise. Chapters include sections about French Jewish soldiers arguing that their status should provide protection or special status, Czech Jews arguing for honorary status as Aryans that may have protected them, intermarried couples after the war petitioning for special status, and other similar topics.

In some of the cases, the chapters include archival photos of letters themselves, photos of the officials involved, or records of their visits to the offices of said officials seeking redress. Seeing the actual document and its transcription, and especially the archival photographs of the authors or other people involved, leads to a deeper understanding than just reading the text of the chapters. This collection shows that scholars need to review their understanding of what constitutes a successful petition, as "even an evaluated and rejected petition could offer the author a much-needed partial reprieve or stay of deportation..." (p.213) that would allow for planning of next steps to attempt to survive.

This title is recommended for academic libraries and school libraries that want to deepen their collection(s) on the period. Written documentation, and especially firsthand accounts of

specific areas, people or episodes can help provide a deeper understanding of the varied ways Jews tried to survive this horrible period.

**Eli Lieberman,**

*Assistant Librarian, HUC-JIR NY*

Katz, Yossi. *Judaism and Human Geography*. Emunot: Jewish Philosophy and Kabbalah. Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2021. 208 p., \$109 (9781644695760).

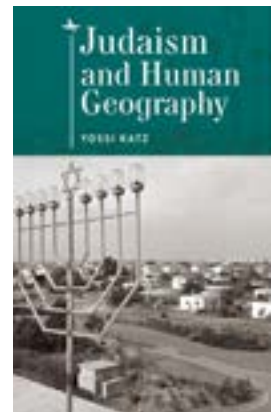
This book argues that Judaism impacts human geography in significant ways; it shapes the environment and space of its believers, thus creating a unique "Jewish geography."

Not just through symbols like the menorah, etrog and lulav, and star of David which as artistic works adorn the aesthetic geography of the tombs of the Sanhedrin carved into the rock walls, but also for instance in the replication of the architecture of the Chabad movement's Beit Moshiach on 770

[gematria paratzta] Eastern Parkway, New York, in venues such as Kfar Chabad (Israel), beit Menachem in Milan, Melbourne, Chabad house in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and Jerusalem, Israel.

A thesis of the book is that the diverse ways communities adapted to different geographical areas and adhered to traditions, customs, and habits give the Jewish community landscape unique hermeneutic resonance, and reflects how Judaism shaped it. Not only to ensure the existence of Beit Midrashot, synagogues, mikvaot, but also the cultural landscape of Jewish settlements from rural planning or urban design to means of transportation and communication, reflect the concerns and shaping of Judaism. The book demonstrates that Jewish geography is often shaped by the requirements of Judaism, thus making for a unique Jewish geography reflective of halakhah, customs, and folkways of Jews. The book pioneers the way for further research for geographers of religious landscapes.

This book contains nine excellent chapters on: "The Implementations of Jewish Religious Law in the Building of Neighborhoods and Agricultural Settlements in the Land of Israel," "Environmental Concerns in the Bylaws of Jerusalem's First Neighborhoods," "The Agricultural Settlement Attempt in Kfar Uriya," "The Religious Kibbutz Movement and Its Credo," "HaPoel HaMizrachi Movement and Urban Religious Settlement in the land of Israel," "Incorporating Jewish Law in Israel's Land Law, 1969," "770 Eastern Parkway," "Jewish Toronto: Street Names, Signs, and Symbols in North of Metropolitan Toronto," and "The



Continued on page 35

## REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR ADULTS

Failure of Jewish Agricultural Settlement in Western Canada.” The above diverse examples shed light on better understanding Jewish cultural landscapes, and offer insights into human geography across the globe.

Recommended.

**David B Levy,**  
*Touro College LCW, NYC*

Koppel, Moshe. *Judaism Straight Up: Why Real Religion Endures*. Jerusalem: Maggid, 2020. \$24.95 (9781592645572).

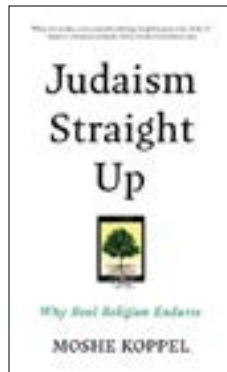
This sharply written book argues for the value of an old-fashioned commitment to religion, tradition, and tribe, including a harsh polemic against universalistic progressive values. It compares and contrasts two semi-fictional characters, Shimen (with a deliberately Yiddish spelling) and Heidi (plus a few other characters with cameo appearances).

Shimen is a Yiddish-speaking Holocaust survivor who lived after the war, somewhere in an Orthodox orbit around Hassidic circles. His Judaism and religious practice are second nature and only partially reflexive. It is, as Koppel describes it, Judaism as a first language. He is observant as a matter of course, and feels at home in the tight-knit community of other observant Jews, particularly men. He is an unabashed particularist, not because he rejects non-Jews or non-observant Jews, but because the observant community is his tribe, his people, a group to which he is so intimately attached that he can barely imagine himself without them.

Heidi, in contrast, is a universalist progressive. Coming from a Jewish background, she gradually lost her particularistic commitments, replacing them with a universal doctrine of fairness. Her utilitarian ethical approach does not distinguish between treatment of “my people” versus those who are distant. Indeed, Heidi gradually becomes suspicious of the very notion of “my people.”

Koppel writes in a clear and attractive prose, if at times too self-assured. *Judaism Straight Up* is at its strongest when it offers a rich analysis of a wholesome religion practiced with minimal self-consciousness, such as the analogy between Judaism and language as self-regulating collective social phenomena. He provides a strong defense of a tight-knit, close community that respects its members’ autonomy even as it makes demands. His description of Shimen is compelling apologetics of the best kind — an attempt, through a sympathetic and thick description of an uncommon or counterintuitive hero, to make that hero more attractive to outsiders.

The book is at its weakest in polemical mode. Make what you will of the fact that the three female characters in the book are all



secular and are subject to harsh critiques, while the male characters, with one exception religious, are treated either sympathetically or in a balanced way. Koppel does his best to present Heidi as generously as he can, but in the end, he doesn’t like her that much, which comes through loud and clear. For some reason, Koppel presents Heidi as having no social ties, with the exception of a daughter and ex-husband, which makes it too easy to contrast Shimen’s rich community life with Heidi’s rootless cosmopolitanism. His portrayal of Heidi’s daughter Amber, a humorless social-justice warrior, is just an unattractive caricature.

This reviewer, at least, shares many of the book’s convictions and instincts, having been born and grown up with Judaism as a first language. He appreciates a religion that is comfortable in its own skin, even particularistic up to a point, without becoming militant, overly ideological, or xenophobic. He is similarly suspicious of some of the self-righteous posturing that seems to be part of some progressive circles. But he would give much more benefit of the doubt to those who have not chosen the path of communal religion. Sometimes the book’s choice to focus on the advantages of small-group solidarity and the disadvantages of universalism is more of a choice of the author than of reality.

*Judaism Straight Up* faces another challenge of which Koppel is quite aware. *Judaism Straight Up* argues for the value of an unself-conscious commitment to religion and community, but it does so by arguing in a self-aware and self-reflective way for the value of un-self-reflective and instinctive membership in tribe and family. In the end there is no second innocence. Reasoning about the value of choosing something undermines the attempt to come to it intuitively. One cannot take an adult education class and learn the instinctiveness of a first language. Koppel’s optimism about the future of Judaism in the future notwithstanding, it is no accident that Shimen passed away several decades ago, and nobody has been born to replace him.

**Yoel Finkelman,**  
*National Library of Israel*

Lewis, Yitzhak. *A Permanent Beginning: R. Nachman of Braslav and Jewish Literary Modernity*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2020. Hbk \$91.08 (9781438477671); Pbk \$32.95 (9781438477664); Kindle ebook \$31.30.

The tales told by Hasidic rebbe Nachman of Braslav (1772-1810) have captured the imagination of many Jews. Professor Lewis (Duke Kunshan University in China) explores the tales and teachings of R. Nachman in the context of both Jewish literature of Eastern Europe, and the intellectual and literary nature and development of Hasidism. He



Continued on page 36