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C O N T E N T S

From: JEROME A. CHANES
To: David Roskies

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Jewish Communal Workers Must Confront the Reality of Israel Today
Daniel J. Elazar, Ph.D.
page 95

The Feminization of Jewish Communal Service
Rita F. Lowenthal, MSW and Bruce Phillips, Ph.D.
page 102

On Being a Jewish Foundation
Melvin B. Mogulof, Ph.D.
page 106

Community Relations Council—Campus Cooperation:
Mutual Barriers, Mutual Benefits
Rabbi Douglas Kahn
page 112

Issues in International Transfer in the Social Services:
The Los Angeles-Jerusalem Cooperative Cities Program Experience
Saul Andron, Ph.D., and Yitzchak Berman
page 117

Developing Excellence: Education and Training Personnel for Federation Work
Max L. Kleinman, Ruth Greenfield and Daniel Ducoff
page 126

Teen Participation in Israel: A Taste-Oriented Framework for Interaction
Gail K. Auslander, DSW
page 132

Recruitment: Who Is Really in the Job Market?
Abe Vinik
page 138

Toward the 21st Century: Transforming the Jewish Community Center
Ronald L. Leibow and Avrum I. Cohen, DSW
page 145

Service
201-821-1871

Curriculum: Sharing the Responsibility for Jewish Educational Excellence
Gavriel Goldman, Ph.D.
page 152

Letters to the Editor
William Avrunin, Florabel Kinsler, Mel Mogulof
page 157

DEPARTMENTS

BOOK REVIEWS
Edited by Leivy Smolar
page 161

And Hannah Wept: Infertility, Adoption and the Jewish Couple, BY Michael Gold;
REV. BY Lucy Y. Steinitz, Ph.D. 161
Groups that Work: Structure and Process, BY Paul H. Ephross and Thomas V. Vassil;
REV. BY Solomon H. Green, DSW 164
The Meaning of Addiction BY Stanton Peele; REV. BY Lou Jacobs, LCSW 165
Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture,
BY David G. Roskies; REV. BY Rabbi Paul D. Kerbel 167

FROM OTHER JOURNALS
Edited by Ernest M. Kahn, Ph.D.
page 169

Journal of Jewish Communal Service invites submission of articles on practice, theoretical principles or research in Jewish communal service—the general field and any of its component divisions—or in related fields of practice and knowledge.

Careful editorial consideration is given every proposed article by members of the Publication Committee as well as the editor with the author's name masked. Usually, therefore, three or four months will intervene after article submission before authors can be advised of the editorial decision that has been reached.

Published articles may express opinions that do not reflect the official position of the Conference of Jewish Communal Service or even the views of most of its membership. Being a forum of opinion, the *Journal* also welcomes letters from readers for publication.

All manuscripts must be submitted in triplicate, double or triple spaced (even to the footnotes), and optimally

3500-5000 words in length. Manuscripts cannot be returned to authors unless at submission they have been accompanied by self-addressed and stamped envelope.

Galleys of accepted articles will be sent to authors for their prompt perusal and return. Minor corrections only are permitted at this point. The *Journal* format calls for footnotes placed at the bottom of appropriate printed pages. However, in manuscript, footnotes should be listed in sequence and appended at the end of the article. Positioning of footnotes on appropriate pages is done at a later stage of technical preparation. The *form* in which footnotes are to be written and punctuated should be evident at a glance in any recent issue of the *Journal*.

Manuscripts are submitted to the Managing Editor at the Editorial Office, address below. Inquiries about advertising and subscriptions should be made to the business office, same address.

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as the ability to master relevant parts of the environment and the confidence that our actions make a difference for ourselves and others."

Lou Jacobs, LCSW
Executive Director
Jewish Big Brother and Big Sister League
Baltimore

Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture, by David G. Roskies. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1984. 374 pp. \$9.95 (paper).

As we try to grasp the enormity of the Holocaust, we often accept its uniqueness uncritically and ignore the vast literature pre-dating the Holocaust which comprises a history of Jewish tragedy. This significant corpus indeed seems to anticipate the Holocaust.

Dr. David Roskies, Associate Professor of Jewish Literature at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, challenges this apocalyptic nature of the Holocaust and places it within the context of centuries-old Jewish literary responses to the persecutions, pogroms and other communal catastrophes.

Winner of the 1984 Ralph Waldo Emerson Award of Phi Beta Kappa, *Against the Apocalypse* is a masterful work. There will be few opportunities to read a book as elegantly and movingly written.

Roskies weaves an extensive and learned literary history of response to catastrophe. He challenges our assumptions on the uniqueness of the Holocaust in his thesis. "History," he writes, "has conspired with literature to repeat the patterns of persecution . . . everyone could recognize the unprecedented horrors as something already experienced. The greater the catastrophe, the more the Jews have recalled the ancient archetypes."

For the writers and the thinkers of each generation, historical continuity provided emotional security by placing their particular tragedy in historical context. They were able to experience tragedy, write about it, respond to it, and then move beyond it with a renewed commitment to life and community.

According to Roskies, we have survived throughout our history not only because of our power of remembrance, but also because we have been able to call upon our historical awareness to respond to tragedy and withstand the onslaught. There was a sense among Jews that as real as the destruction before them was, there was a certainty and faith as well that the Jewish people would survive and endure.

In addition, *Against the Apocalypse* helps put our discussions and debates on "Jewish continuity" into perspective. With the Emancipation of the 19th Century, the assimilation and acculturation of most of 20th Century Jewry, and our lack of fluency in Yiddish and Hebrew, this literature has been lost to us. It is because we have no sense of literary and historical continuity that the Holocaust has "become the crucible of our culture." Roskies argues that, "of all Jewish traditions, response to catastrophe remains the most viable, coherent, and convenantal." His work returns the literary and historical context to us.

Roskies also explores the role of mourning in the Jewish tradition and the very important limitations which were designed to prevent excessive personal and national mourning.

1. The observance of days of mourning and fasting as well as celebration of the normalcy are vital to Judaism. Our tendency to ignore or make irrelevant the observance of Tisha B'Av or the Fast of Esther causes an imbalance in Jewish expression.
2. Our days of fasting and mourning are intended "to bring the individual into the

collective memory of the people of Israel's historical tragedy."

3. Limits were set to mourning to prevent the development of extreme asceticism or a cult of death.

"What the rabbis did," Roskies writes, "was to incorporate the high and low points, the fasts and the festivities, into a permanent tension within the liturgical calendar, which in turn becomes its own self-regulation mechanism."

Finally, Roskies recognizes in the history of the literary response a communalization of memory and remembrance. Roskies notes that, "one rule was rarely violated . . . the literature did not treat the individual victim as worthy of memorialization." There are no individual heroes in the observance of our fast days that com-

pare with Catholic martyrs and saints. Our tragedies are observed as collective disasters.

As Roskies concludes, "it has been the Jews' ability, in the midst and in the wake of apocalypse, to know the apocalypse, express it, mourn it, and transcend it."

Against the Apocalypse is testimony to the enduring importance of collective memory and individual remembrance. It is a testimony to the power of the Jewish literary tradition to give hope to the Jewish people in the face of adversity.

Rabbi Paul David Kerbel
Nevey Shalom Congregation
Bowie, Maryland



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