

MAYER SCHILLER, a young American *ba'al teshuva* teaching at the Yeshiva High School in Queens, New York, had the particular and "simple" purpose in this book of presenting "...a convincing case for the truths of Tora Judaism and, in so doing, to prod the individual Jew back to his faith."

His purpose is to convince, he is writing propaganda for a particular life style and world view. But he leads rather than prods, and the erudition, humility, humour and integrity of the presentation compensate for the difficulties (which he admits are inevitable and inherent) in any rationalistic polemic for faith. (One important Orthodox precept is that we perform the mitzvot not because they are pragmatically good for us, they are that of course, but because they are divine commandments which a Jew obeys.)

Perhaps the simplest and best way to become an observant Jew is to have been born into an observant Jewish family living in Israel. But lacking that advantage, readers will find here a wealth of useful information (and source references) about Judaism and what it means to be a religious Jew. What the literature, rituals, duties and community consist of. What they require of a life and what they, in turn, confer upon a life.

"Living in Israel" is the key phrase. Who can deny that being a Jew in a country governed by Jews, where the majority of citizens are Jews, the calendar, the landmarks, the environment relate directly to Judaism, is more conducive to strength and wholeness than life as a diaspora minority in an environment which is not merely indifferent, but in many ways positively antithetical to one's entire frame of reference? The most pervasive, the loudest values out there are simply not Jewish values.

THE FIRST section of this book,

Letting Him in



THE ROAD BACK: A Discovery of Judaism without Embellishment by Mayer Schiller. Feldheim Publishers. 271 pp. No price stated.

Miriam Fleischman

"Where We Are" (in two parts), takes a good look at the current state of Judaism and Jewish life in the U.S. The conclusions indicate that both the community and the individual Jew is under siege in a losing battle.

Section 2, "How Did We Get Here" (also in two parts), describes the inroads and ravages made on religious faith since the French Revolution ushered in the "age of enlightenment." Subsequent waves

of rationalism, materialism, relativism and individualism have eroded Jewish belief and observance, and Schiller emphasizes in particular the negative influence of the Reform Movement which began in Germany.

In fact there is nothing intrinsically wrong with reason, or things, or the concept of relativity, or with cultivating one's individuality. The Tora and Tora study and Jewish religious life are all concerned with these aspects of existence. The problems begin if one takes an "ism" on to the word, takes the quality for a panacea and by doing so falls into idolatry. One can ponder the relationship between style and substance in that rationalist Voltaire. But the truth of his value system cannot be proved either. He packaged it well as did

the other enlighteners, and they found a ready audience in Jews who were not sufficiently sophisticated in their own religious and philosophical tradition to see that actually it had all been said before.

SECTION 3, "Why Go Back?" reviews the many philosophical "proofs" of the existence of God. A bit heavy going and overshadowed I think by a reference Schiller includes about Mendel of Kotzk.

"Where is the dwelling of God?" So asked the Rabbi of Kotzk, Poland, Menachem Mendel, of a group of learned men who were visiting him.

Scoffingly, they replied, "What an absurd question! Do not we know that the 'whole world is full of His glory'?"

Slowly and sharply the Rabbi gave a different answer to his own question:

"God dwells wherever man lets Him in."

Section 4, "Back to What?" describes the trellis on which the faith may flourish, as it were: Tora, the Prophets, the Writings, the Mishna, Karo's Code of Jewish Law, the Thirteen Declarations of Faith, and a brief description of the nature of the Messianic era.

Section 5, "How to Get Back," suggests ways to begin observing the mitzvot: observance of the Sabbath, the dietary laws, prayer, laying *tefillin* and wearing *tsitsit*, and family purity. Quite rightly Schiller stresses that "The need for the Jew seeking to reclaim his faith to establish a close proximity to a community of believers cannot be overestimated. *Life is with People* was the title of a popular sociological study of the great Tora communities of Eastern Europe, and indeed life most certainly is most fully realized together with one's fellows." Another way of saying this is to compare reading about the Sabbath with the actual living through it in its varied moods and delights in the company of

friends or family. Then one can really experience what the Talmud teaches.

"On the Sabbath, man is endowed with an additional soul, which is taken away from him at the conclusion of the Sabbath."

Or by going to Tora classes over a period of time to experience how sweet and spicy Tora learning can be, pursued as it is for no other reason than learning itself.

WITHIN A religious community, one can also see from examples around one that "the turning or returning" is a continuous process. One can always be more aware, more kind, do a better job at work, pray with heightened sensitivity and concentration. It becomes obvious too that just being religious in ritual and in Sabbath observance and diet provides no guarantee of suitable behaviour or righteousness. We all live our lives in time. Every second or minute is an opportunity for good or evil. The sensualist chooses pleasure, the rationalist "objective fact," the artist beauty. A religious person must try to discover truth, which in turn will lead to proper behaviour; and in this trial by life, Jewish tradition and learning are his sole support. Life lived like this, on the edge, rarely becomes routine. It also helps if one can extend the imagination so as to sense each and every minute as one's last — literally — a perspective which neatly clarifies the essentials and makes superfluous the stifling weight of spurious ideas and useless gadgetry pressed upon us by many types of commerce.

Section 6, "Welcome Back," describes the several Orthodox communities and their various philosophic positions, with the writer maintaining a neutral position.

An Appendix lists the names and addresses of new yeshivas for beginners located in the U.S., Israel, Australia and England. □

HISTORIES OF smaller and remote Jewish communities are often object lessons in the study of Jewish survival. Despite their distance from the mainstream, they form tightly-knit communities, determinedly struggling to preserve their identity and tradition.

The history of the Jews of Zimbabwe (which my generation knew as Southern Rhodesia goes back only a century but has known its own special complications in the framework of the black-white struggle in the country, especially in recent decades. *Majuta* was what the local blacks called the Jews, although generally they did not single them out but saw them only as part of the white population.

This history has been most competently written by Dr. Barry A. Kosmin, director of the Research Unit of the Board of Deputies of British Jews. He has gone very thoroughly into all the sources, and combines stories of individuals with descriptions and analyses of historical, social, economic and demographic trends.

Jews were already prominent among the early white settlers of Rhodesia. Rhodes was a Judeophile who aroused their admiration and support while the Administrator, Dr. Jameson (of Jameson Raid fame), also appealed to Jewish pioneers. There was a high degree of Jewish participation in the early wars against the native populations.

However, the Jews were essentially traders — such as Ikey Sonenberg of Victoria, of whom the

Mugabe's majuta

MAJUTA, A History of the Jewish Community in Zimbabwe by B.A. Kosmin. Gwelo, Mambo Press (distributed by Zimbabwe Independent, P.O. Box 5, Salisbury, Zimbabwe). 223 pp. \$29.00

Geoffrey Wigoder

following story is related: Lions had been doing damage in the vicinity of the townlet, and a group of sportsmen prepared to round them up. As they walked down the main street with their dogs and rifles, they passed Ikey at the door of his store. "Where are you boys off to?" he inquired. "We're going to look for the lions," they replied. "Will you come along with us?" "No thank ye," said Ikey, "I ain't lost no lions."

IN THE MID-1880s, Jews constituted 6 per cent of the populations of the young centres of Bulawayo and Salisbury (although from the outset Jews were prominent in the former), and almost 4 per cent of the white population of Mashonaland and Matabeleland (the book could have done with a map). Many of them made important contributions to the communal, economic and cultural life, but they also provided brawlers and criminals. The first white man

hanged in Rhodesia was a Dutch Jewish sailor on a murder charge; he was executed in 1893, after a Hebrew service.

Bulawayo's first mayor was Jewish, as were many of his successors. An indication of the ecumenical mood is to be found in the account of the laying of the foundation stone of the new Bulawayo synagogue in 1897. It was attended by the Anglican bishop and by 100 freemasons in full regalia, while the organ was played by a Catholic.

Up to World War I, there was a continual and sizeable Jewish immigration from Britain and Eastern Europe (especially Lithuania), and from South Africa; and a Sephardi community developed originating from the isle of Rhodes. The Ashkenazim had an advantage in the mandatory literacy test for immigrants as Yiddish was a recognized language but Ladino was not. As a result, many of the Sephardim went to the Belgian Congo where entrance requirements were easier.

By World War II, over 3,000 Jews were living in Southern Rhodesia. Most of them were British subjects by birth, having been born in Rhodesia, South Africa or Britain. Three-quarters of the Jewish population were engaged in commerce.

Under the impact of events in Europe, anti-Semitic attitudes took on significance for the first time in the interwar period. Kosmin documents the rise of anti-Jewish feelings among the British settlers, which reached tangible expression in the opposition to the immigration of Jewish refugees from Central Europe in the 1930s. In fact, the immigration issue dominated Rhodesian politics during this period.

It is telling that the Labour Party, in response to popular feeling, called for an end to uncontrolled Jewish immigration. In the end, pressure by the Jewish community persuaded the government to admit a certain number of refugees, and the record eventually was better than that of many other countries, such as South Africa.

AFTER THE WAR, various unsettling elements affected the Jews of Southern Rhodesia. For one thing, anti-Semitism continued to be felt in nationalist circles. For another, Jews were hopeful of the success of the Central African Federation, and were disillusioned by its disintegration. Moreover, many Jews were involved in liberal multi-racialist politics and were uncomfortable under Ian Smith and his Unilateral Declaration of Independence.

The book ends around 1970, with some 5,000 Jews in the country, who comprise a wealthy and important element, but are subject to constant attrition. Probably half of these left during the subsequent decade as a result of the worsening situation,

and trepidation concerning the fate of the white population under a black government. The attainment of independence, and the subsequent policies of the Mugabe government, have allayed initial fears, and reassured those who remained. Apart from diminished numbers, communal life continues as previously.

The community has always been highly developed organizationally, and has a strong religious affiliation (fewer than 10 per cent in 1969 did not belong to a congregation). Inter-marriage has been estimated at 12 per cent since the 1950s. The community has always been deeply Zionist, with one of the highest per capita contributions to Zionist funds in the world. Kosmin notes, however, that Rhodesian Zionists never tried to build bridges with the black majority. When the time came, the concept of Zionism as "colonialist, militarist and racist" easily won currency in black circles. The Jews were known colloquially in the local dialect as "the rich whites."

The future of the community depends on unforeseeable factors. One is the future of the entire white minority. Another is the demographic challenge in the light of continuing emigration, even if only small, and of intermarriage. The viability of small Jewish communities is always uncertain, although, if external circumstances remain unchanged, the Zimbabwe community may well have several generations of history ahead of it. □