Each issue of the CCAR Journal, like each child, has its own personality and growth process, whether it’s a symposium focusing on a particular topic or an “open” issue bringing together articles that have been accepted for publication around the same time. The Fall 2011 issue combines those two types, focused and open-ended, in an unpredictably fertile way. My hope is that readers will be involved and appreciative, as I have been during its creation.

At the heart of this issue is what I’ve been calling “the Israel cluster,” now entitled more formally as “Progressive Religious Zionism: An Ongoing Dialogue.” Its guest editor, Larry Englander, traces the cluster’s history in his introduction. Missing, however, are three extrinsic but meaningful details that the editor’s prerogative enables me to add: that his initial inquiry got through my e-mail freeze during a July home-exchange vacation in Utrecht, Netherlands; that back in 1987, he invited then-rabbinic student me to teach about Purim in his Mississauga congregation; and that he served as Journal editor from 1990–1993, when I first joined the editorial board.

These background features help explain the way in which, “the project took on a life of its own,” as Larry puts this. The topic of Israel tends to do that to projects, as to conversations. For Israel arouses strong feelings and sharp ideas, especially in Jews. So, to my mind, it’s all the more important that such feelings and ideas be aired in responsible public forums like this publication. Thus I’m most grateful to Larry for his active role in conceptualizing and re-conceptualizing the dialogue while recruiting and welcoming its contributors; also, for being a delight to work with.

If the heart of this issue is in the East with Israel, then the events of early 2011 remind us that other great and ancient civilizations inhabit that region as well. When the Tahrir Square revolution surged in Egypt, my husband and I recalled e-mail messages that had come from Ruth Sohn in Cairo during her family’s 2006 stay there—messages so gripping and thoughtful that many recipients had urged her to shape them into the book that’s near completion as I write. I wondered whether we might be able to include
an adapted section of that book in what was shaping up to be an unusual issue of the Journal, and Ruth thankfully said yes. Juxtaposing Israel and Egypt invites parallelism and politicking, thus is a risky endeavor—but to my mind, a risk worth taking.

This issue will be typeset as Nisan begins, and its pages, proofread by authors and editors during the Omer period. Jewish life abounds in parallels and juxtapositions over time and space. And so threads wound up connecting the Israel and Egypt sections with some of the other documents slated for inclusion. Donald Tam writes of the extent to which his teacher Dr. Werner Weinberg “defined the role of Hebrew in rabbinic training during his years at the College,” teaching among other subjects, modern Hebrew literature. Brian Weinstein proclaims “Ich Bin Benjaminer,” making the case that “the Jewish people as a whole have the Benjaminite character—not because of genetics, but because of life experiences as Jews by birth or by choice. A small tribe set apart from others and often disdained for being different, their territory is tiny and is surrounded by hostile forces. They build a military force and fortifications that sometimes, but not always, withstand the enemies’ onslaught. They show solidarity and loyalty to each other probably even when they shouldn’t. They survive genocide and exile. They accept citizenship in states defined by others. A talented and courageous remnant returns to their true homeland.”

Furthermore and significantly, this issue brings Israel Zoberman and Stephanie Friedman reviewing a range of Israeli fiction. The four authors included by Zoberman “represent a rich sampling of Israel’s literary talent, reflective of Zionism’s proud accomplishment of a thriving modern language and literature.” And Friedman points to an “insistence on revealing messy contradictions without resolving them” on the part of one of the books she reviews; then she explains that “a novel’s plot cannot resolve the political circumstances in which it plays out. That is history’s job, as it inexorably spools out over time. Literature’s job is to render experience and to raise questions.”

Rendering experience and raising questions surely count among the primary purposes of the CCAR Journal: The Reform Jewish Quarterly. Let me wish our readers enjoyable and profitable hours as they read through, or choose among, the offerings ahead.

Susan Laemmle, Editor