I sit down to write this during Sukkot, trying hard to vault my imagination toward Spring 2013. The past three issues—fine, important symposia on Health and Healing, Gender, and the Arts—possess a timelessness that rendered it unimportant when they would arrive and be read within the annual Jewish cycle.

This Spring 2013 issue, in contrast, manifests the strong influence of our holy days, as well as our textual lectionary. As an “open” rather than symposium issue, its Articles section came into being through the Journal’s ongoing process of submission, blind review, and individual selection of articles. What emerged was an unusual constellation of material. The thematic connections jump out from the Contents page. These connections occurred mostly through serendipity or providence, with only a small bit of arranging on my part.

To my mind, several distinctly Jewish elements spur the questions and approaches that recur within this issue: (1) We revere our texts, but we also interrogate them. (2) The wisdom of the Rabbis matters to us, but we also press on that wisdom, asking with Nehama Leibowitz (and my beloved teacher in Jerusalem Ben Hollander, z”l): ma kasheh l’Rashi? (3) We continually look both back and forward, recalibrating what we’ve learned and seeking to pass on what endures. (4) Both the individual and the community matter to us.

These elements can be glimpsed in articles by two distinguished senior colleagues, Steve Pearce (past editor of this journal) and Ed Zerin, both of which were originally presented orally. By example, Ed urges all of us to open our minds and hearts to renewed visions of the Divine. And Steve takes the founders of HUC-JIR as models for our own reinvention. Then, in the article directly following, 2010 ordinee and current Ph.D. student Owen Gottlieb, as it were, picks up and runs with Steve’s friendly gestures toward today’s breathtaking technological developments; readers will enjoy and learn from his charmingly titled and forward-thinking “You Can’t Wrap Herring in an i-Pad.”
Another rabbi ordained quite recently, Sarah Bassin, distills the essence of her rabbinic thesis as she analyzes humor in the Book of Esther. Her concern over that book’s violence joins hands with similar concerns in the articles by colleagues who’ve written in these, and other, pages before: Amy Scheinerman, David Zucker, and Yossi Feintuch. All four authors see Esther as a complex character, someone who must control what she reveals to others. This awareness, in turn, echoes in Yakov Azriel’s poem “The Marrano Woman.” Azriel is new to these pages, and it’s nice that we’re able to include Adam Fisher’s review of his recent book of poetry as well.

We are also happy to include five additional biblical text studies: on Jacob, Esav, Jonah, Jeremiah, and the Akeidah—by our teacher Norman Cohen, Ed Treister, Moshe Reiss, Mark Dov Shapiro, and Ian Silverman respectively. All the texts focused upon in these articles figure prominently in Torah study groups and synagogue services. These studies of ancient texts are joined by a contribution dealing with modern Hebrew texts under our innovative new Maayanot (Primary Sources) rubric: “‘We Have Not Reached God,’ an Essay by Chava Pinchas-Cohen on Two Poems by Admiel Kosman,” featuring translation, notes, and commentary by another of our teachers, Stanley Nash.

Amidst this issue’s bevy of rabbinic authors, lay leader Claire Gorfinkel reminds us that living, often suffering people matter as much as revered texts. She examines the way in which individual privacy needs to be respected while building caring communities.

Claire dedicates her piece to Rabbi Carole Meyers, z”l, with whom I was privileged to study on a weekly basis for several years. Carole had a truly special way of supporting inquiry while maintaining relationships, a keen mind and a searching spirit, and a smile that spread from her face into surrounding space. These qualities displayed themselves within the CCAR as within congregational, community, and study-group circles. Let me take the editor’s liberty of dedicating this issue of the CCAR Journal to Carole.