It’s not every day, or even every year, that the CCAR Journal: The Reform Jewish Quarterly introduces a new section! So I’m excited about the debut of Maayanot (Primary Sources), to which we give pride of place for this occasion.

Bernard Mehlman’s presentation of Maaseh Avraham Avinu Alav HaShalom represents a coming together of the broadly scientific with the spiritually imaginative. Through his translation, introduction, and annotations, Mehlman grants us direct access to a document we might well have missed otherwise, while contextualizing it through the tools of modern scholarship. We are in his debt for making this unusual text accessible to Journal readers and a wider audience.

Two members of the Journal’s editorial board get credit for the new Maayanot rubric: Michael Shire for suggesting it, and Daniel Polish for refining the concept and assuming responsibility as section editor. With the entire editorial board, they welcome further submissions that bring readers in touch with primary sources from all periods of Jewish civilization.

As if to demonstrate that scholarship and imagination, prose and poetry can nicely coexist, this issue includes two poems by Dan Polish. It also includes both an article and two poems by Reeve Brenner. These four poems, like all poetry submissions, are read blind—without identifying marks of the author—by our poetry editor. Other rabbi-poets have been published within these, as within other published, pages. We encourage rabbis to send us their poetry, along with primary-source studies and articles.

Speaking of articles, this issue includes a wide range of topics and approaches—some with common threads. Several authors challenge prevailing practice and received wisdom. I direct your attention to Jeffrey Brown’s “Preaching against the Text: An Argument in Favor of Restoring Leviticus 18 to Yom Kippur Afternoon,” Reeve Brenner’s “Shabbat Weddings Revisited: The Pro Side for a Change,” David Kline’s “Sh’ma Echad,” Stephen Passamanec’s “An Eye for an Eye—Indeed!” and Farhad Arbab and Daniel
Berry’s “Why Jews Wear Costumes on Purim.” I hope that these carefully reasoned pieces will stimulate your thinking, whether or not you wind up agreeing with their authors.

As for common threads, that of our first Patriarch connects the Maayanot piece to Naomi Graetz’s provocative “Trauma and Recovery: Abraham’s Journey to the Akeidah.” At the same time, the Persian background of Maaseh Avraham links to Arbab and Berry’s study of dressing up on Purim. Admiel Kosman gives us Alexander of Macedon “dressed up” in fool’s motley as he encounters the wisdom of women. And in another article where gender and public presentation figure importantly, Darren Kleinberg grants us access to the world of “Orthodox Women (Non-)Rabbis.” In their article chronicling the transformational leadership of the late Rabbi Eric Bram, Samuel Joseph and Jeffrey Schein invoke the Dutch theologian Jans Huzinga’s Homo Ludens, which rejects the characterization of human beings as Homo sapiens (the wise species) in favor of Homo ludens (the playful creature)—the sort of creature that dons costumes and creates midrash. And finally, Ilana Grinblat’s “Parent’s Torah” is both playful and serious, modeling for us an ability to find Torah in the ordinary moments of parenting. Her article concludes with a poem that draws on traditional sources to create seven similes for Torah, beginning with “Torah, you are like a prince,/You have the power to give life.”

In addition to all these riches, four striking book reviews offer insight into a wide range of scholarly works. All these reviews, and the books upon which they focus, are worth our consideration.

Writing of Rabbi Bram, Jeffrey Schein says that he knows of “few other rabbinic colleagues who combined playfulness, skill, and wisdom in the same way Eric did.” Playfulness, skill, and wisdom seem to me a special, almost magical combination—a combination from which life-giving nourishment is likely to issue, a maayan, as is Torah. Hopefully, this publication too provides such nourishment. Drink deeply!

Susan Laemmle, Editor