So begins Ludwig Wittgenstein’s immensely influential *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. In the following seventy-five pages of elusive aphoristic propositions, Wittgenstein goes about simultaneously supporting and undermining this statement. In essence, he asserts that this world is all that is the case, but this world is not all that is.

This world is both everything, and not everything. The fundamental problem, he concludes, is the limitation of logic and language. *What we cannot speak about*, he proposes in his final sentence, *we must pass over in silence*. The key word here is “speak.” The world that is the case is that which we can express in words. Yet words fail. (In the equally influential posthumous work, *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein observes that some things cannot be said; only shown.)

I have had an enduring interest in the thinking of Ludwig Wittgenstein since I first encountered his writings as an undergraduate. His significance to me is drawn from two sources: an avocation for reading philosophy and the vocation of being a rabbi. After all, the principal role of a rabbi is to communicate, most of which is done through speaking and writing. Words matter as our livelihood is mostly dependent upon what we have to say, whether it be on the pulpit, in bulletin and other articles, before a classroom, or in a hospital or at a graveside. What makes the words matter is that both we and our audience expect them to be meaningful.

“Why did this happen to my child!” When directed at us from a parent dealing with illness, accident, or some other unfortunate circumstance, we know that the answer being desired is not a description of medical, physical, or sociological causes. It is something else, and it is our task to articulate in a meaningful fashion what that something else is. Wittgenstein is lurking behind us and muttering, “Good Luck!”

This introductory musing came to me as I looked over the contributions to this issue of the *RJQ*. As in all un-themed issues of the
Journal, the articles are diverse, drawing from textual analysis, theology (please note Adam Fisher’s *Two Ways to a Belief in God*, which especially touches on the theme I am presenting), social-psychology, history, and journalistic observations (I commend Shai Afsai’s journey with the pilgrims to Nachman of Breslov’s grave in Uman). So many of the papers touch on the challenge of getting the words right.

**Inside and Outside the Text**

This issue is favored with a contribution from regular contributor Stephen Passamanec, in which he examines the phrase *kiyum olam*, as it is distinguished from the much-better-known *tikkun olam*. Sandford Seltzer also investigates a nuanced but significant distinction in words: that between *galut* and the Eastern European inflected *golus*. Benj Fried studies the book of Job, particularly the climactic “speech from the whirlwind” (chap. 38–41), showing how, through the vehicle of a creation narrative, it develops an alternative to the Deuteronomic approach to reward and punishment. The result is not a challenge to Deuteronomy, but rather to our tendency to narrow the possibilities of the biblical message. (I invite you to compare and contrast Rabbi Fried’s reading of Job with that of Anson Laytner in the Spring 2017 *RJQ*.)

Textual analysis requires getting down, so to speak, into the tall grass. The text becomes a world unto itself as you attempt to tease out the connotative meaning of its terms and the coherence (implied or overt) of its narrative structure. Job, in particular, can be framed as a theatrical drama. One can focus exclusively on the stage and bracket out everything else. The text can also be analyzed at a distance; not just what it says, but who is its author, when and where was it written, how does its meaning and import change, if at all, over time. The meaning of words within their immediate context is fixed, and yet can shift, subtly or dramatically, when the context is broadened. Passamanec, Seltzer, Fried, and Charles Isbell, who revisits the primordial man and woman in the Garden, all strive in different degrees to be both inside and outside the text.

**Listening and Reading**

If the vocation of a rabbi is to speak and write, then there must be listeners to the speech and readers of the writing. The recipients of our communication are not passive. Even if they do not speak
themselves, they affect how and what we wish to say. As in the case of the anxious parent above, they demand not merely an answer, but a meaningful one. Four contributions highlight sensitivity to one’s audience.

Amy Goodman and Joel Baron tackle the daunting task of making the traditional liturgy of the High Holy Days resonate for Jewish patients in hospice care. Darren Levine draws from the relatively new discipline of positive psychology and how it can be brought to bear within the rubrics of Jewish thought and practice. Both of these essays touch on a critical element of communication: that as important as what is said is how it is said. (Some things cannot be said, they must be shown.)

While Goodman/Baron and Levine focus mostly on the interpersonal encounter, the papers presented by Anthony Holz and Rifat Sonsino attempt to address a collective audience, specifically the congregation of a Reform synagogue. What are modern, well-educated, science-prone Reform Jewish congregants prepared to hear? After all, the rabbi may be articulate and passionate, but it all comes to naught if people do not show up to listen.

I will readily admit that my own approach to the rabbinate has not been in the same camp as either Rabbi Holz or Rabbi Sonsino. They are both students of the late Prof. Alvin Reines, and my teacher was Eugene Borowitz. Their message and insights are extremely valuable, for they do indeed describe a portion of Reform Jews, for whom it is precisely the language of naturalism and nontheism that is meaningful and resonant.

A Congregation of Rabbis

I am especially pleased that with this issue of the Reform Jewish Quarterly, we print the Presidential Sermon delivered at the 2017 CCAR Convention. The presentation is part homily, part State-of-the-Conference, and part a vision for the Reform rabbinate in the coming year. David Stern, a third generation CCAR president, has admirably accomplished all three. I look forward to the publication of the Presidential Sermon being an annual addition to the Journal.

Gang of Five, Part 2

Richard Damashek’s history of the five exchange students brought to HUC in 1935—the Gang of Five—was published in the RJQ in
Fall 2016. It described their initial encounters in a seminary and a Reform Judaism that was conceptually far more than an ocean away from their experiences in Germany. This issue concludes their story, describing each of the rabbis’ professional careers. Both parts can now be acquired through Amazon in an expanded version.

When Part 1 was published, Herman Schaalman (subject of Damashek’s fine biography, *A Brand Plucked by Fire*) was alive, having celebrated his one hundredth birthday the previous spring. Within a few weeks, Rabbi Schaalman’s wife, Lotte, and then Herman himself passed away. As Herman approached his centenary, Prof. Damashek relayed this anecdote to me that is worth sharing.

When Rabbi Schaalman learned that the Commission charged with the preparation of the new Reform siddur, *Mishkan T’fillah*, was considering including the expression “*m’chayeih meitim*” (reviver of the dead) in the second prayer of the Eighteen Benedictions, he complained to Peter Knobel, the Commission’s chair: “If revival of the dead is included in the new prayer book, when I die, I am going to come back to haunt you.”

For those of us who knew Rabbis Schaalman, Plaut, Kaelter, Wolf, and/or Lichtenberg, and for those who are being introduced to them in these pages, we can only hope that their spirit and contributions continue to “haunt” the vitality and creativity of the modern American Judaism they helped to form.

Paul Golomb, Editor