In the spring of 2018, I received two amazing calls—Rabbi Hara Person and Rabbi David Stern were inviting me to assume the position of editor-in-chief of the CCAR Journal: The Reform Jewish Quarterly. It was the greatest honor of my life as a rabbi. With abundant gratitude, I accepted—and with abundant pride, I present to you the Winter 2019 issue of the Journal.

This issue is a mix of old and new. The outstanding quality of the material you are about to read is of course familiar; we are blessed with wise and sensitive scholars in our movement and among our contributors, and they are well represented in these pages.

The first section—“Theologies for Our Times”—reflects not only my deep interest in Jewish theology and God-wrestling but a yearning among our colleagues (and perhaps the people we serve) to seek divinity and meaning in our era and in our lives. Rifat Sonsino opens this theme with a challenging article that strips the biblical “miracles” of their apparent supernatural power, argues against hoping for miracles, and yet concludes by urging us to “give God our gratitude for the divine wonders of the universe that make our life possible.” In response, Clifford E. Librach counsels us to adopt a different definition of “miracle”—and rather than pursuing literal truth to embrace the “often-elusive truth that is beyond our capacity to prove,” and our Bible as “a remarkable, stunning, sacred catalogue of such truth.”

The discussion continues as William E. Kaufman offers a comprehensive examination of the theologies of Mordecai M. Kaplan and Arthur A. Cohen, exploring the “natural” and the “supernatural” Jew, the questions that must be asked of each, and how Kaplan and Cohen can help us illuminate our own belief in and relationship with God. Two other g’dolei Yisrael are invoked in David Benjamin Bloom’s study of evil in the teachings of Israel Salanter and Rachel Adler—culminating in the striking contrast between a theory of evil that “concerns itself with obedience to God” and one that
“concerns itself with respect, support, and love of fellow human beings.” Closing this topic is Presbyterian clergyman and retired professor Victor Shepherd, who lovingly memorializes his time as a student of Emil Fackenheim, shares episodes from Fackenheim’s life, and powerfully describes the influence of his beloved teacher. “My debt to him,” Shepherd states simply, “is unpayable.”

Between this selection of articles and the next is a fascinating interlude. Richard Damashek reconstructs of the lives of those who remained in Judah during the Babylonian Exile, their fate when the exiles returned, and the ironic result of Nebuchadnezzar’s campaign to destroy Jerusalem. And with another mingling of old and new, Damashek draws convincing parallels among our ancestors in Babylonia, post-Holocaust European refugees, and the nineteenth-century Reformers of Charleston, South Carolina. In “This Dor Swings Both Ways,” Mark Sameth poses what might seem a simple question—“What’s going on with Judah and Hi-rah?”—and analyzes what might seem a simple choreshi. His singular creativity and scholarship, however, yield an answer that may change how we understand the nature of Judah, of the Davidic line, and perhaps of the Holy One.

From theology and text we turn to education, practice, and identity in three articles that serve not only as scholarship but also as calls to action. Karen Fox—a member of the first generation of women rabbis and a leader in our movement—shares insights gleaned from teaching and counseling as she persuasively calls for a unified curriculum for continuing rabbinic ethics education. In his compelling article, Andy Kahn originates the concept of “performadox,” traces its growing pervasiveness among Reform Jews, delineates its incompatibility with Reform values, and offers important alternatives. Also concerned with Reform’s fortunes is Dana Evan Kaplan, whose innovative research verifies the long-suspected link between the status of Reform Judaism in Israel and the perceptions of Zionism and Israel among Reform Jews in the Diaspora.

The final article of this issue belongs to Anthony Holz, who develops his introductory assertion that “flexibility and openness to diversity are more justified and conducive to religious affiliation than rigidity and dogmatic judgments” with intriguing philosophical and pragmatic arguments. And the words with which he concludes his paper can perhaps serve as a n’chemta to this section of
the Journal: “It is as we come to accept one another as equally and preciously unique that we will build the better world we aspire to.”

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If you ever doubt the truth of Kohelet’s observation (lament?) that there is nothing new under the sun, turn to this issue’s Maayanot feature and savor Edward Zerin’s buoyant, vital translation of B. Yeushson’s “Sacred Pearls.” The third in a series of translations, this collection brings to life the trials and occasional triumphs of centuries-old Chasidic rabbis—and reminds us that perhaps not all that much has changed.

The blurred line between old and new is also found in remarkable book reviews contributed by Joseph Meszler and David Ellenson. In Ariel Burger’s Witness—a loving and personal account of Burger’s experiences as a student and friend of Elie Wiesel—Meszler finds a power that transcends Wiesel’s death: “This book,” he says, “allows us to sit in [Wiesel’s] classroom.” And Ellenson makes explicit the dynamic relationship between classical texts and new interpretations in his review of Pirkei Avot: A Social Justice Commentary, by quoting author Shmuly Yanklowitz: “These timeless teachings from the Rabbis are merely the start for endless discussions about our identities and values.”

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“Yes, all of my poems are Jewish poems, and no, none of my poems are Jewish poems. That is, I don’t see how any poet could entirely erase her history, her family, her spirituality, and her being from the work she produces.”

—Hadara Bar-Nadav, cited by Jamie Wendt

Here, perhaps, is something altogether new: This issue of the Journal features eleven poems—and several additional poems have already been accepted for the Spring 2019 issue. In partnership with poet Adam Sol and the Journal’s poetry editor, Marc Steven Dworkin, I have made poetry a new priority for the Journal—seeking previously unpublished poets and published poets whose Jewish identity has not heretofore been highlighted in their body of work, and expanding the definition of “Jewish poems.” The outpouring
of interest, and of high-quality submissions, has been absolutely incredible.

Leading this season’s poetry section are two selections from Adam Sol’s evocative series based on *Birchot HaShachar*—the Hebrew title is not a misprint but an invitation to read and to consider deeply new facets of prayers that offer praise “On First Waking” and for “Ducts and Conduits.” I am also proud to publish acclaimed poet Roger Nash’s first works for the *Journal*; lovers of poetry will be glad to hear that more of his poems will be featured in the Spring issue.

Jessica Kirzane’s magnificent translation of “Elul”—accompanied by the Yiddish poem as it appeared in the *Forverts* on August 24, 1918—brings to English readers the poignancy, beauty, and pathos of “the whole world /[saying] Kaddish for the summer.” The theme of *Kaddish* is echoed in Leah Rachel Berkowitz’s affecting “Kaddish in Monessen,” while “Bontsha the Silent in the Afterlife” haunts us with its image of Bontsha sitting voiceless in a vinyl booth, wishing there could be more to his eternity. The theme of “Elul” resonates also in Susie Petersiel Berg’s tender poems; we enumerate with her her sins in “Mercy Has Thirteen Faces,” and we stand with her at the water’s edge in “*Tashlich,*” companion and witness as the gates begin to close. And in our final poem, “On a Cantor’s Breath,” Charles van Heck evokes both death and life as he beautifully recalls Cantor Max Fuchs’s chanting of the Sabbath hymns on a German battlefield in 1944.

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Sadly, there exists an absence in this issue that is not new—it is, in fact, painfully old, painfully familiar. The dearth of women’s voices in the *Journal* is a phenomenon with which many of us have struggled; as the second female editor of the *Journal,* I would love to present an inaugural issue more balanced among the genders, but that is not to be—at least, not yet.

While I urge my male colleagues to continue submitting their work to the *Journal,* I also wish to address my female colleagues: We want your scholarship. We want your wisdom. We want your voices. We have initiated several new programs to encourage submissions from female rabbis, scholars, and poets; and my door (or at least, my inbox) is always open to those who wish to learn
more. I am not promising that if you submit an article, it will be accepted—virtually all of the articles in these pages have undergone significant revisions, and some articles are indeed rejected outright. But I am promising that if you submit your work, it will be read with respect and with care, and that you will be treated with dignity and with friendship.

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I have kept you long enough from the treasures of this winter’s Journal, but before you turn the page, I hope you will join me in thanking those who helped bring it to life. My predecessor Paul Golomb and CCAR’s Chief Strategy Officer and CCAR Press Publisher Hara Person have been amazing, wise, and infinitely patient mentors; I am also grateful to Susan Laemmle, Mary Zamore, Deborah Smilow, Sasha Smith, Carly Linden, Mike Isralewitz, and the staff of Publishing Synthesis. Thank you also to my rabbi Samuel E. Karff; words cannot express what an honor it is to follow him in this role.

Most of all, I thank what is likely the most talented and capable editorial board ever assembled. Marc Steven Dworkin, Evan Moffic, Daniel Polish, Yoki Amir, Oren Hayon, Beth Kalisch, Shira Lander, Rachel Sabath-Beit Halachmi, and Brian Stoller continue to serve with dedication, wisdom, and grace; and Joel Abraham, Lisa Sari Bellows, Edwin Goldberg, Erin Polansky, Daniel Reiser, and Amy Scheinerman have stepped forward to add their own gifts of intellect, thoughtfulness, and insight. Working with each of them is a blessing for me; and we all benefit from their stewardship of the Journal.

The beginning of wisdom is—acquire wisdom;
With all your acquisitions, acquire discernment.
Hug her to you, and she will exalt you;
She will bring you honor if you embrace her.

— Prov. 4:7–8

Elaine Rose Glickman, Editor
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