Short fiction is back!

By popular demand, the CCAR Journal proudly presents a new symposium of short fiction—the second in our editorial history, and also in the past fifteen months. We were thrilled with the enthusiastic reception that greeted our inaugural selection of short fiction in the Fall 2020/Winter 2021 issue, and—with abundant thanks to our visionary and talented editor/curator Marc Steven Dworkin—delight in bringing you new work by familiar authors as well as stories from other established writers making their Journal debut. Marking a welcome return to our pages are Jonathan Wilson (with Benny in tow), Stacey Blank, Robert J. Ratner, Nancy Lefenfeld, Matthue Roth, and Enid Shomer; joining them are Mara Fein, Howard Schwartz, Lane Steinger, and me. Although the theme for the symposium is “Contemporary Jewish Life,” you will see that we have interpreted the words rather broadly—and that you can travel through these pieces of short fiction from the Garden of Eden to a tin shack on a desolate hilltop outside modern Jerusalem. We trust you will enjoy—and be intrigued and inspired by—the journey!

In addition to short fiction, we bring you six outstanding articles from six outstanding colleagues and scholars. In “Liturgical Responses to Catastrophe,” Dalia Marx offers the brilliant, sensitive analysis for which we’ve been longing throughout these pandemic years, examining the impact of crisis on Jewish liturgy and ritual—and the creativity that emerges from these periods. Catastrophe is “decreed upon us,” she writes, “but the ways in which we allow it to affect our spiritual life is at least partly within our hands.” Jonathan K. Crane guides us through another fascinating connection between our history and today’s plague in his marvelously titled “Of Pigs, Pandemics, and Public Relations,” locating a Talmudic reference to a zoonotic disease that might have transferred to human beings—and wreaked havoc upon the population—had the initial outbreak been handled less carefully. Deeply researched and urgently written, his article reminds us: “Despite the impulse to squash the flow of information . . . this ancient story insists that
truth-telling is vital, especially when it includes information that some may not wish to hear or have disclosed.”

The contemporary resonance of ancient text is felt differently—but with equal intensity—in new and important studies by Dan Ornstein and Admiel Kosman. Ornstein considers our sage Rabbi Yochanan in the role of healer: first as a wounded healer in light of the teachings of Henri Nouwen, and then—based on a close reading of Bava M’tzia 84a—as a wounding healer, “heedlessly turn[ing his own] wounds into piercing weapons, even to the point of spitefully refusing to reach out to another person in crisis.” And lest we read his splendid article merely as study for its own sake, Ornstein warns: “Yochanan’s story is also a complex pastoral mirror for us, if we are willing to see ourselves reflected in it.” In “A Religious Approach to Sexual Behavior for Our Liberal Communities from a Dialogical Jewish Perspective,” Kosman mines Talmudic text—along with the work of Maimonides, Nahmanides, Horowitz, Plaskow, Lamm, and especially Buber—to craft a daring, provocative, and altogether magnificent argument for reconsidering our understanding of the sex drive and our sexual urges. Among his more memorable passages is this one: “Any action in the realm of sexuality that results in seeing the other as subject and not as an object (i.e., that mirrors Buber’s ‘I-Thou’ relationship)—would be considered as a holy act.”

Our oft-overlooked forefather at last takes center stage in Edward S. Treister’s “Isaac in the Triumvirate of the Patriarchs,” a sensitive retracing of Isaac’s story—and a surprising, insightful meditation on the relationship he and God forged with one another, and its influence not only on his son Jacob but on all who would follow. “Isaac and God are both present for each other, sufficiently so for God to become immanent and for Isaac to be affirmed in his intimacy with his God,” Treister writes. “His example is sufficient to impose on his descendants the centrality of a God focus, and sufficient too to give them pride and dignity.” And while the subject of our final article—Mordecai Kaplan—is far from overlooked, author Mel Scult profoundly employs his own expertise alongside personal interviews and excerpts from Kaplan’s twenty-seven diaries (which Scult himself has edited, annotated, and published) to offer new consideration of his work. “We might say that all human beings have a deep yearning, a profound need, to be complete, to be their best selves, to make their lives an expression of the ideals
they hold dear,” Scult concludes. “We all have a need for salvation, Kaplan would say. Religion in general and Judaism in particular is the embodiment of that need and of that yearning.”

Short fiction and articles—in the spirit of the season, we might say *dayeinu*. But then we might miss reviews of five noteworthy new books that all, in varied but significant ways, touch on the character, theology, ritual, identity, and interpretive tradition of our people. We offer appreciation to our honored teacher and friend Lawrence A. Hoffman and our wonderful colleagues Jessica Kessler Marshall, Suzanne Singer, Geoffrey Dennis, and Israel Zoberman for bringing to our attention these works by Tony Bayfield, Edwin C. Goldberg and Elaine S. Zecher, Marcia Falk, Simon Rabinovitch, and Aaron Koller. And our spring issue concludes as it began—with creativity and lyricism, now in the form of poetry by debut *Journal* contributors S. J. Pearce, Steven Riel, and Scott Fox alongside returning poets Deborah Bacharach, Daniel Polish, Israel Zoberman, Roger Nash, and Norman Hirsh.

Before I invite you to turn the page and savor the scholarly and literary feast laid out before you, I ask your attention for one more moment—well, maybe two. Unless you have been keeping meticulous track of the months and *Journal* issues these past few years (and I hope for your sake that you have had more exciting things to occupy your mind!), you may not have realized that my tenure as editor-in-chief is rapidly approaching the four-year mark. By the time you read this, I will have only two more issues to edit—and much of the day-to-day work of overseeing the *CCAR Journal* will be passing to my amazing colleague and successor Edwin Goldberg. I am so grateful to my incredible editorial board for their brilliance, wisdom, and generosity in serving the *CCAR Journal*; to professional staff Hara Person, Rafael Chaiken, Debbie Smilow, Michael Isralewitz, Deborah Constantine, and Otto Barz for their partnership; to the CCAR leadership, especially David Stern, Ron Segal, and Lewis Kamrass, for entrusting me with this role—and to each of you for reading and engaging with the *Journal*. Thank you all!

With all best wishes for a happy spring, a joyous Passover, and an ever-renewed hope for goodness and redemption.

Elaine Rose Glickman, Editor
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