

DEPARTMENTS

6 From the Editor

7 Contributors

8 Leonard Fein

The future of Jewish social justice is in good hands.

10 Suzanne Singer

Masa continues where Birthright leaves off.

12 Henry Glickman

Judaism is better off without God—at least for a while.

14 Dennis Prager

For Jews to be Jewish the Torah must be divine.

16 Hershel Shanks

A son-in-law's journey from a radical arts troupe to Chabad.

18 Letters

30 In the Moment  
5765-2005

37 Poem

90 Book Reviews

96 Spice Box

COVER ART: © CORBIS

63 Annual Music Guide

88 Books of Jewish Interest

The Moment Jewish Music Project presents

The Moment Anthology, Volume 1

For more information visit  
momentmag.com

FEATURES

Is he Jewish or not? After decades of wondering about Bob Dylan's religious identity, *Moment* discovers the answer.

NADINE EPSTEIN & REBECCA FRANKEL

*Moment* travels through time and space to meet these fringy, yet influential Jewish ideologues, left and right, secular and religious, American and Israeli.

LIEL LEIBOVITZ

Berenstein's Plague

"Our people were starving. Not dying yet, but suffering all the same. Ringworm seized the poultry swiftly, and the least hearty of the cattle fell within a fortnight of our arrival in Africa..."

JOSH LAMBERT

OLAM—THE JEWISH WORLD

The controversial Israeli conductor has no apologies for loving Wagner's music, befriending Edward Said and composing his own version of Middle East peace.

JENNIE ROTHENBERG

A best-selling author introduces *Moment* to two Gaza settlers who have no intention of leaving their home and greenhouses behind.

NAOMI RAGEN

Five hundred years after the Inquisition, Zion Ozeri photographs Portugal's Jews.



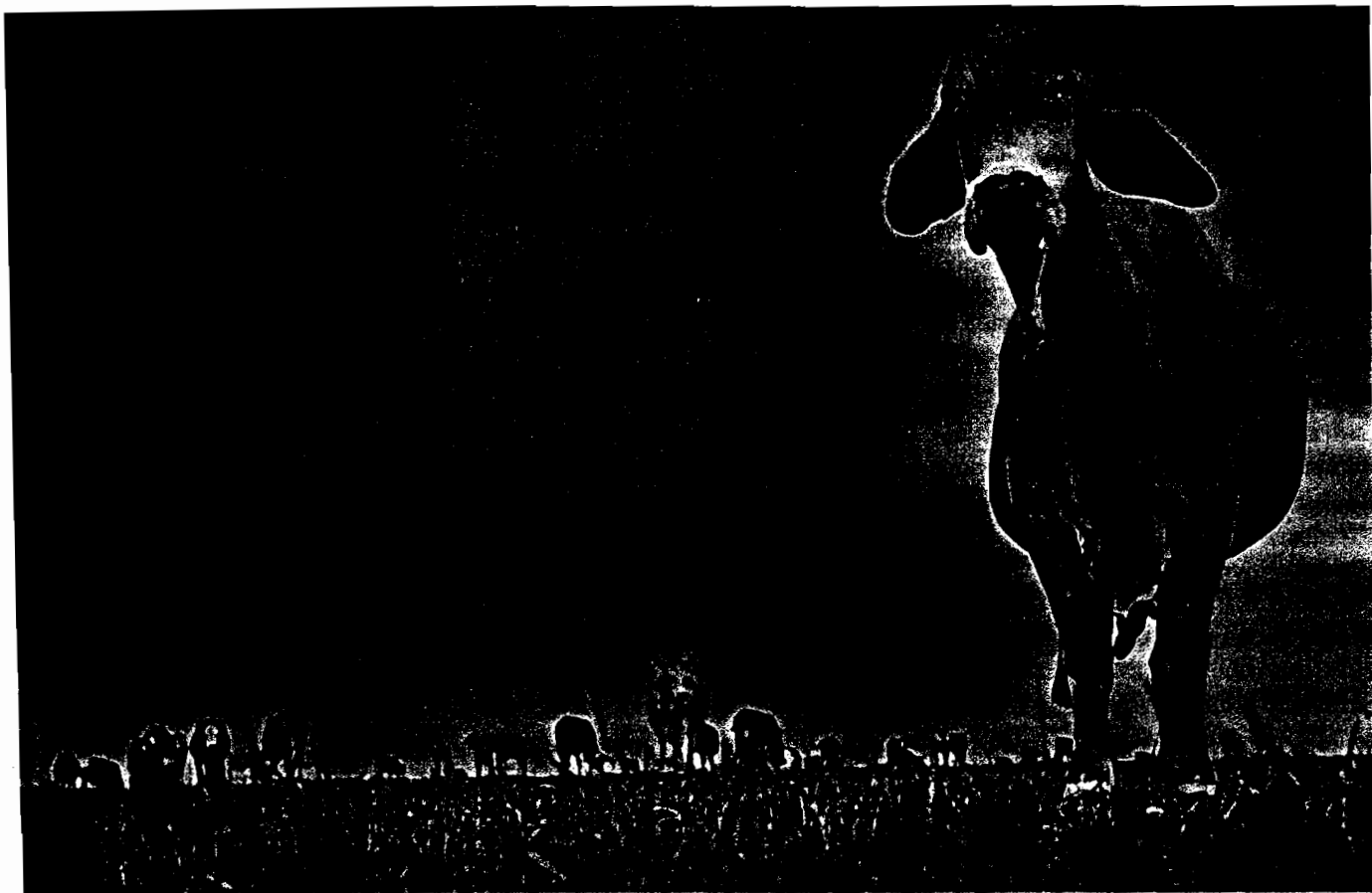
44



38



41



© GETTY IMAGES/BROWN W. CANNON III

# Berenstein's Plague

Josh Lambert

Our people were starving. Not dying yet, but suffering all the same. Ringworm seized the poultry swiftly, and the least hearty of the cattle fell to rinderpest within a fortnight of our arrival in Africa. Scavenging marabou scattered the cow and chicken skeletons throughout the settlement as if to chide us for dragging beasts so far from their native coops and pastures to perish in the wilderness. In the nights that followed, jackals ground down and swallowed these bones until nothing remained, not even stains on the veldt where the animals had been. The gnawing pain of hunger haunted me, as it haunted the

others. Needless to say, this was not the glorious Zionist homecoming we had imagined.

We were a proud colony but, for the moment, a poor one. Grants from the Barons de Hirsh and de Rothschild, tens of thousands of pounds sterling, were spent; these monies had secured the British land grant, financed our steamer passage, and bought lumber, metal, and agricultural implements. A month earlier, Dr. Herzl's Zionists telegraphed us to the effect that they could offer no funds until after the 1905 Congress. And so the colony's governing council had little cash to spare, and none for food when nourishment could—according to agri-

cultural experts' elaborate predictions—be raised in mass quantities from the fertile soil.

We had seeds for wheat, beans, and all manner of fruit trees. Our young farmers burned the elephant grass in great billowing waves, ploughed the blackened earth, and sowed the Guas Ngishu plateau in neat columned rows like bands of Hebrew script. Yet only the cottonseed supplied by the Colonial Office sprouted. As months passed, the young women harvested this crop, stuffing with white tufts the bales that filled the Uganda Railway freights bound for Mombasa, thereby discharging our obligation to the

Crown. But no maize or cassava took root, no bananafruit and no millet.

We survived on wheat-flour and rice from the British East India Company, shipped from Bombay by order of the Overseer of the Protectorate in Nairobi. Each of the enormous mahogany casks weighed two hundred pood. These were locked and chained so as to dissuade any colonist whose hunger might stir up the Evil Inclination. I wore the only key on a thong around my neck, whether waking or asleep. Though formal titles seemed ridiculous—there were only sixty families with us, everyone could be referred to by name—I, Isaiah Teitelbaum, was the Council's Minister of Welfare, administrator of foodstuffs and medicines. The Council trusted me with the grain, our most precious resource, it was said, because of my training as a botanist in Vienna and because Chava and I had no child whose suffering might distract me from my duty.

After our first Shemini Atzereth in the New Zion—a harvest festival without a harvest—a caravan of men traveled to the baked-dung huts of Kasasa-town to barter with the Baganda tribesmen. We had little to offer in exchange for livestock. Our *zlotys* like all paper money, were useless to the savages, of course, and knives and clothing could hardly be spared. I traded a tinderbox and the small bezel-edged mirror in a copper frame that my mother presented to Chava on the occasion of our *chuppah*. In return, I received one humped African cow and half a dozen chickens. I watched the other men part with precious valuables—an inlaid brooch that should have been under glass in a store window in Kiev, a silver spice box five generations old. Like me, they traded their treasures for meat.

In the weeks that followed, Reb Kaminetz, our *shochet*, slaughtered a small army of livestock. When I made my rounds of the camp to distribute tins of wheat-flour and Indian rice to each colonist's family in the hours before sunrise, I often stopped in Kaminetz's yard to offer my assistance or watch him perfect his *chalafim*. He would run the blades against a stone until sparks showered his fingertips in the blue morning dimness. He was a gentle man, humbled by his role as our religious authority. He rarely spoke. Though his hands were large and calloused, he gripped the animals with the delicacy of a father's hand on his *bechor*, and when it came time to deliver the blow he could not have moved more quickly or caused less pain.

Small as Herzliya was then, when whispers carried on the breeze reached the opposite end

of the village, we never once heard the death throes of an animal. Reb Kaminetz's slaughters did not produce wailing, but rather a murmur—as if somewhere above, God were sighing in resignation, in His knowledge that one of His creatures had once again, according to His laws, butchered another.

I was in Kaminetz's yard, helping him rake the bloodstained dirt, on the overcast morning Baruch Berenstein sent a cow for slaughter. Berenstein, a Roumanian *chaver*, had three sons, all beneath the age of the commandments. I recalled that he had sacrificed more than anyone at the herdsman's bazaar in Kasasa: his ink, a set of copper bowls, two silver bracelets belonging to his wife, a leather-bound journal handmade in Leipzig, and all of his own clothing except a single tunic. He returned to Herzliya with four cows and a dozen chickens, and fed his boys on flesh throughout Cheshvan, Kislev, Tevet, and Shvat. They ate the last morsels of chicken leg in honor of the New Moon of Adar, and all that remained them was a single heifer.

Berenstein dispatched his young wife, Ruchel, to Reb Kaminetz's yard with the final cow. She grasped the tether between two fingers, as if being led rather than leading, and was obviously relieved when Kaminetz took control of the animal. I asked after her husband and the boys while the *shochet* began his examination. Before she could answer, though, and even before Kaminetz had gazed into the beast's mouth and ears, he frowned and raised a hand to his earlock.

"I'm sorry," he said. "She's *tameh*."

Terror flickered across Ruchel's gaze, but she did not object.

Kaminetz lifted the animal's left ear to reveal a purulent boil as large as a child's fist. "The skin is cracked and pus oozes from it," he said.

Ruchel nodded. She glanced at the cow as if ashamed, and at me, pathetically, as if I might offer some consolation. Kaminetz ducked into his tent and emerged with a pewter bowl of chicken bones, grey flesh clinging to them. "This month—it has been difficult." He considered the bowl. "Soup bones are not much."

"No," she said. "I cannot."

"Take them," I said.

Kaminetz pressed the bowl into her hands. She sighed and gathered up the tether. With priceless bones and a useless beast, she returned to her husband and sons.

As dinner fires sent up smoke throughout the settlement and the sinking sun painted Arabesques over the peak of Mount Elgon, Baurch Berenstein marched to Kaminetz's tent. The *shochet* greeted the Roumanian with a nod, and continued sweeping entrails and blood-wet dirt into a pile with his broom of mvuli fronds.

"You won't *shecht* my cow?" Berenstein demanded. His tunic was caked with the red dust of many days in the fields.

"The law is the law," Kaminetz said, raising his eyes to meet Berenstein's glare.

"I did not bring my sons to this place to starve to death," Berenstein said. "That much we could have done in stinking Bucharest. How do you expect a man to stand *shmirah* until sunrise, protecting you and the women and children from the wild beasts, when he has had nothing all day but a cake of molded, months-old flour?"

"We all suffer, Berenstein. I do not enjoy seeing your hunger—"

"And you will do nothing, even that which is in your power, to mitigate our suffering?"

"To flout the law is not within my power."

"That cow will be killed, and eaten,"

#### MOMENT MAGAZINE-KARMA FOUNDATION SHORT STORY CONTEST

Five years after the *Moment Magazine-Karma Foundation Short Fiction Contest* was founded, it is flourishing. Together, *Moment* and The Karma Foundation remain dedicated to publishing quality Jewish fiction and introducing new voices to the Jewish literary world.

We are grateful to Dina Elkins and Sharon Karmazin of The Karma Foundation, for their dedication, partnership and generous support. We also thank all of our donors including the Rolnick, Epstein, and Shanks families for their support as well as our 2004 judges, Dara Horn, Barbara Klein Moss and Harvey Grossinger.

Last but not least, we thank the 300 plus writers who submitted their stories in 2004. The 2005 winners will be announced in October. Our 2005 judge Judy Budnitz, author of *Nice Big American Baby* and the 2005 winners will read from their work at an Awards Ceremony to be held in Washington, D.C. in November.

Please visit [momentmag.com](http://momentmag.com) for information about this event and to learn more about the contest.

Berenstein growled, pointing at Kaminetz, “even if I have to wring its neck in my hands.” He shouted so that his voice could be heard even on the homesteads to the north: “How much longer will we allow this Kaminetz to decide whether we can eat what is ours?”

No one answered.

“Murderer,” Berenstein muttered, and stormed off.

I convened with the minyan that evening, as usual, to utter *Maariv* on the smooth slate shelf that served as our meeting hall and synagogue. Before the recitation began, Kaminetz related the afternoon’s confrontation to me in a hoarse whisper. I was not surprised to note Baruch Berenstein’s absence from the prayer service.

Not long after we recited *Barchu* to usher in the night, a high-pitched plaint rang out in the still, warm air. I hadn’t heard such a sound in months, but I recognized it well enough: the shriek of unnatural death, an animal wailing as

out to check on the grain in the storage tent next to my own. As I lowered my head into the dim space and held up my candle, I heard scratching, and saw two figures bathed in orange light and shadows, bent over the cask of wheat-flour.

“Who’s there?” I said.

They straightened. I squinted. It was a pair of teenaged Galician orphans, brother and sister. They were young colonists and shared a homestead to the northeast. In his hand, the boy clutched a strip of copper wire that caught the light. While I watched, he stuffed it into his breeches.

“What, trying to pick the locks?”

“What else?” the girl said. “We’re starving, you know. We’re not the only ones, either. What we get is not enough.”

“And you’ll make it better by stealing? Scoundrels! *Am haoretz!*” I stamped my foot on the dirt. The grain was locked, but other jars—medicines, chemicals, seeds—were not. And these two, charity cases, included on our

I glanced around at the tins and jars, at the casks. None had been disturbed, *baruch haShem*. These, the seeds and grains and potions, were the lifeblood of the colony. Our hope. Through them, we would perish, or through them we would survive.

The following morning, with not a thread of sunlight yet visible over Mount Kenya’s peak, I waited outside Berenstein’s tent and trembled in the chill. I held a tin of grain: a week’s ration. Berenstein emerged carting a slop bucket.

I greeted him. “*Baruch ha'boker.*”

He scowled and scattered slops—bones and black strings of sinewy meat—into a dugout pit resembling a grave for a wide, short boy. An odor wafted from the hole: the stench of Kaminetz’s yard, of butchery.

“Berenstein—” I began, but faltered when I perceived the fury in his eyes.

“You heard the cries last night,” he snapped. “What of it? I slaughtered a cow, my proper-

## “I would rather you starve than defile our people with sin.”

its life dribbles away through an uncloseable wound. It was a squeal like the brake of a railcar, and the men lifted their eyes and glanced first at one another, and then into the dim evening. Kaminetz, leading the minyan, raised his voice as he chanted, drawing us back to our prayers. The men muttered their responses and ignored the noise. While we mouthed silent praise for the King of the Universe, Who by His word brings on evenings and with wisdom opens gates, Baruch Berenstein hacked at his cow with a spade until she slumped to the veldt and her heart issued a final shudder.

I did not speak or move from my position, and neither did the other faithful men. We responded Amen to each of Kaminetz’s blessings. Following our pious *shochet*’s example, we did not interrupt the service, but chanted the closing prayers in accordance with the *Mishna*’s command: Even if a snake is wound round his heel, he should not break off.

After the service, the men peered at one another but said nothing. I returned to Chava and ate the meager supper she set out: a thin gruel of mashed rice spiced with rosemary. As was my habit, after eating I stepped

mission to Africa purely on the basis of Dvarim 14:29—these two, flouting the edicts of the council!

“It was not for this we fled Europe, so that we could cheat each other,” I shouted. “That I should have to protect our property from our own, from Jews—” It disgusted me. I thought of the tribesmen, wizened elders of the Nandi and Baganda who passed through our settlement in their caravans from time to time: pagans, with skin black as a *tefillin* strap. I had heard it said that they hunt by night with the eyesight of cats, and eat the flesh of their forbears to acquire ancestral wisdom. When they ravish a village, they rape the women first of all. Such barbarousness! It surrounded us on all sides—and to resist it, to hold at bay the seething African darkness, that was our task.

I grabbed the boy by his arm and flung him toward the threshold. He nearly fell. His sister followed, glaring at me with unabashed eyes.

“Let me find you here again,” I called after them. “Just once more, and you will forfeit your rations. I would rather you starve than defile our people with sin.”

ty, and now I will feed the meat to my wife and my starving children.”

“Yes. Reb Kaminetz—”

“Reb Kaminetz.” Berenstein mocked the title. After all, what had Kaminetz been, in Europe, but a country butcher? “Yes. He has acted after his principles, and I have acted after mine.”

“You—”

“No father could deprive his child of supper,” Berenstein snapped. “And only a father could know how it feels to do so.” He slapped the bottom of the bucket to ensure the dregs had come loose.

I had not expected such vitriol, but I collected myself. “All due respect, Berenstein, but the law—”

“The law. The law! Will you quote me scripture while my children moan?”

“Will you murmur for the flesh-pots of Egypt like the generation of the desert?”

He spat into his pit. “The lesson of Exodus 16 will not feed my sons.”

What had aroused such savage anger in this man? We all hungered and there was no shame in the suffering we shared. I wanted to see only the slightest regret in him, some glimmer of

respect for the community. Some show of humanity. I glanced at the powder in the tin in my hands. I had no great desire to punish him.

"Berenstein," I said. "Your children are not the only ones who cry."

He glowered. "Leave it to Hashem to sit in judgment, to our Holy G-d who hates suffering. I will thank you to hand over my family's grain and be gone."

I saw that no argument would sway him. He had hardened his heart. What else could I do? "I will not punish your children," I said, setting the tin of white powder onto the ground. "Mind, though, the words of the prophet: Now be ye not stiffnecked, as your fathers were, but yield yourselves unto the Lord, and serve the Lord your G-d, that the fierceness of his wrath may turn away from you."

"Wake up, fool. This is not the Promised Land. The prophets were wrong."

I shook my head and left. He had brought sorrow on himself.

After conferring with the Council, I announced at morning prayers our edict: it was forbidden to purchase meat from Baruch Berenstein or to eat with his family. Berenstein had *trayfed* himself and his home, and though he was not yet subject to the highest censure—*karet*, excommunication—he and his sons were to be treated as exiles from our community, in this harsh land where they had neither kin nor history.

Only Jabril, our *shabbos* goy, was not bound by the Council's decree. Jabril, a native Kikuyu, had been educated by French missionaries and put at our service by the Overseer of the Protectorate. He understood a hundred words of French, English, and German; he spoke Swahili and the language of his tribe, and living among us he amassed a vocabulary of Yiddish and Russian phrases. He derided our European tools as arcane and superfluous and could complete any agricultural chore in a quarter of the time it took one of us. He dwelled on the edge of the village in a lean-to and lit our lamps on Sabbath in exchange for the tenderloin and impure fats of our slaughtered cattle, and a weekly ration of grain. At dusk, he stalked game in the eastern swamps with an acacia spear and dragged back to camp the swollen carcasses of spring hares and *nzohe* antelopes.

Whether out of spite for the Council and Reb Kaminetz, or sympathy for the African, or a desire to display his own righteousness, Berenstein sought out the goy and delivered

the tenderloin and fats from the impure cow. I learned this from Jabril himself, who was considerate of our traditions and confused to have received meat from someone other than the slaughterer. He approached Reb Kaminetz, who referred him to me for the Council's decision. I saw no reason to deprive Jabril of several meals. I assured him no one in the community would frown on him for receiving Berenstein's gift.

Three days after the slaughter of the impure cow, talk began to stir that all was not right in the Berenstein home. Baruch had not been seen, nor had his wife. Meryl, the Litvack girl who tended the well, reported that Avroiml, the eldest of the Berenstein boys, had arrived the previous afternoon to draw the daily water for his family. "But his skin was so pale, almost blue, sagging," she said. "He did not speak a word." Avroiml had not returned the next day, and neither did any other Berenstein.

I led a mission of eight men and boys to Berenstein's land. Four days after the slaughter, a faint odor of blood still hung in the air around his yard. And soon our senses were overpowered by the unmistakable tang of human waste.

We approached the tent. Despite myself, I peered over the edge of the trench. Blood from the slaughter, bile and vomit foamed; chunks of raw meat and bone bobbed on the surface. Elephant shrews squirmed through the offal, foraging for carrion. It could have been the remains of a fresh massacre, a most horrible pogrom.

"Berenstein!" I called. "Are you alive?"

A weak voice wafted from inside: "We are dead, and in *gebema*."

I threw aside the netting. Inside, the Berenstein family lay prostrate, each a more frightening shade of blue-white. The youngest rested with his milky cheeks in his mother's hands. The children respired shallowly, eyes wide and glassy. Excrement had been piled in the corners of the room.

"G-d protect us," I murmured, touching the mezuzah. I turned to the Galician boy, the orphan, who had accompanied our party of settlers, and exhorted him in a low voice. "Run to the Council. Bid them bring water and soap and blankets. Shovels, as well. Summon everyone." He sprinted to the village square.

I winced at the stench and motioned for the others to follow me inside. "We cannot leave them here to die."

Stepping over the bodies of the two youngest boys, I knelt by Berenstein, whose eyes revealed great pain. "Be calm. We will save you," I said.

Berenstein stirred, raising his shoulders off the floor. "The meat—" he wheezed.

I helped him up. "Come, we'll get you out of this filth."

Berenstein moaned. "My sons. They will die—"

"No. No one here will die."

Others lifted Ruchel and the boys to their feet. I carried Berenstein in my arms past the pit of waste, beyond the stench, to a grassy pitch shaded by *beroelias*. He sank to his knees and whispered, "Forgive me, Teitelbaum."

Settlers arrived with medicine, blankets, and wellwater for bathing. Food and drink were spooned into the mouths of the family. However Berenstein had transgressed, he was nonetheless our countryman, and no effort was spared to effect his recovery. The boys were mothered by every one of our women, cradled in arms and rocked into peaceful sleep. Under the guidance of the Council, the community nursed the Berensteins back to health; we swept the filth out of the Berenstein tent, and boiled their utensils and pots in water for three hours; we doused the pit in the yard with lye and covered it over with fresh soil. Soon the stench began to dissipate.

In the days that followed, the Berensteins rose, spoke, and ate. On the sixth day they returned to health, though haggard and thin. Kaminetz issued an edict absolving the Berensteins from the sunrise-to-sunset Fast of Esther. Baruch Berenstein proclaimed it a miracle that his children had survived, recited *Birkas Ha'gomer*, and rejoined the life of the colony with the prodigious energy of a saved man.

The festival of Purim has never been observed with more joyful abandon than it was by our colony that first year. Traditionally the celebration of inversion and absurdity, on that day we hailed the return of health, order, and reason. The Berensteins, cleansed and restored, danced arm in arm with all of the colony.

A week passed. Early one morning Kaminetz shuffled into the storage tent where I was portioning out the week's supplies of grain.

He spoke without meeting my eyes. "Yesterday," he said, "Goldweiss brought me a cow for *shechitab*. It was the first sent to me since Berenstein's."

I said nothing and he continued. "I slaughtered it, and sent a message to Jabril that he should come for the tenderloin. He arrived at noon, looking as healthy and full-spirited as ever."

Delicious, Delicious, Delicious!  
**KOSHER DELICIOUS**  
 Great Recipes for Living

There's no better way to describe the 300 carefully-tested dishes in this scrumptious cookbook lovingly assembled by Maimonides Academy in Los Angeles. Full-color photos. Hardcover spiral binding for easy opening. A stunning presentation. Diana Kastenbaum & Penny Brenner, editors.

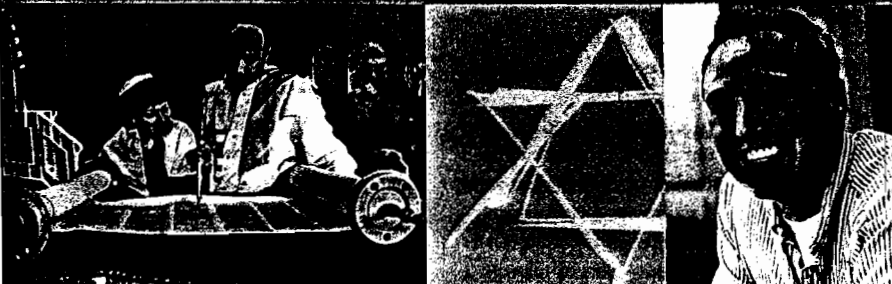
0-8246-0460-1 • 7 1/4 x 9 1/4 • 384 pages • \$29.95

Available at your bookstore  
 or directly from Jonathan David Publishers.

E-mail: JonDavPub@aol.com • Tel: 718-456-8611 • www.jdbooks.com



# Seize the opportunity...



Learn about the **Academy for Jewish Religion, CA's**  
 uniquely pluralistic and spiritually-based  
**Rabbinical, Cantorial and Chaplaincy Programs!**



**Academy for Jewish Religion | CA**  
*Serving as a bridge between the pillars of Judaism*

FOR INFORMATION

CONTACT US AT (310) 398-0820

OR VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT [www.ajrca.org](http://www.ajrca.org)



AJR, CA is based in Los Angeles, California

Kaminetz tugged on an earlock. "Something—something crossed my mind. After giving him the meat, I asked, 'Jabril, have you been ill?' I wasn't sure whether he understood me. He nodded, as if to say, 'Yes, *kenainabora*, wonderful.' I asked him again and we could not understand each other. But he appeared nothing like the Berensteins, who still wear suffering on their faces now, after almost two weeks. And no one nursed Jabril to health."

He observed for a moment as I measured one family's ration into a tin. The casks of wheat-flour and rice stood between us, the flour open so that I could dip my measuring can into it. His eyes roamed the shelves heavy with agricultural potions, medicines, seeds, and dried herbs.

"Jabril, though he shared Berenstein's meat, never suffered from it."

"Yes," I replied.

"I—I wonder why."

I did not answer.

He studied my canisters, and after a moment reached for a quarter-full glass jar of white powder among the herbs. "Could you tell me, Isaiah, what this is?"

He extended the bottle toward me so I could identify it, but I didn't bother to glance up.

"That's my tartar emetic," I said.

"Yes," he said. "And what does it do?"

"Various functions. Used mostly in case of poisoning."

"And what would be the symptoms, if a healthy person were to—"

"Various symptoms, rabbi."

"In small doses, it might—might induce cramping and vomiting?"

"Perhaps."

He replaced the jar on the shelf as I ladled another cup of white wheat flour into another family's tin.

Reb Kaminetz exhaled noisily, as if in pain, and opened his mouth to speak again. I interrupted him to recite quietly a verse of Leviticus: "Thou shalt rise before the aged, and show deference to the old, and fear thy God."

Kaminetz hesitated a moment, but did not argue. He did not speak again. He returned to his yard, to the slaughters. That was his place. And mine was in the storage tent among the casks of grain and jars of medicines.

I dipped my ladle into the flour once more. In the distance, the clucking of a tree-dassie—Doot, doot, doot, doo, doo, doo—heralded dawn. I did not want to be a soldier. And I had done no more than my duty. In a colony beset on all sides by enemies, in a young nation surrounded by wilderness, every man must fight. ☺