(pp. 111–113). A signal example of this was the Eastern Jewish tradition of polygamy. Even as Herzog was seeking to impose a monogamy standard on all the Jews of Israel, he found himself in the uncomfortable position of defending polygamy before the then British authority. But even this served his agenda, as he sought to make issues of personal status an exclusive concern of the religious courts.

Ultimately, both the goal of a constitution enacting a halachic state and a comprehensive code of law faltered and the chief rabbinate found itself subordinate to the newly established secular court system (p. 127). But the quest for halachic supremacy has birthed many children. Kaye explores how the theocracy project has grown and expanded, right up to today (the book was published in 2020). For diaspora rabbis, of all stripes, who continue to approach Jewish law and its institutions from the perspective of legal pluralism, this book offers *binah*, if not a *n'chemta*, to issues that have been transpiring of late, such as the efforts to subordinate foreign *betei din* on matters of conversion to the oversight of the chief rabbinate.

Before reading this book, I characterized such moves by the chief rabbinate "wanting to become the Jewish Vatican." Kaye has shown this is more than just a casual pursuit. As such, he has given rabbis worldwide a gift, an insight in what is coming, what to defend, and what to address in our halachic traditions.

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A New Hasidism: Roots
Edited by Arthur Green and Ariel Evan Mayse
(Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2019), 432 pp.

A New Hasidism: Branches
Edited by Arthur Green and Ariel Evan Mayse
(Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2019), 496 pp.

I went to HUC in 1971. Over the five years of my training, I never learned about Jewish mysticism, about Kabbalah, and, if the truth be told, I can't recall even one time where students and our teachers

talked about how (or if) we experienced God in our lives. I was reminded of that when I read in *A New Hasidism* the essay called "The Turn to Hasidism in the Religious-Zionist Israeli Yeshiva" by Rabbi Elhanan Nir. Describing his being drawn to Chasidism after his years in a post–high school Israeli yeshivah, he writes: "This integration of the quest for God into our spiritual world had a tremendous impact because, believe it or not, the concept of God was never mentioned in yeshiva" (*Branches*, p. 411). I don't know Rabbi Nir; our paths were very different from each other's. He lives in Jerusalem; I live in Los Angles. He is a rabbi and a teacher at the Hesder Yeshiva Siah Yitzhak and Yeshivat Mahanayyim in Gush Eyzion and a poet; I am a retired Reform congregational rabbi. Yet both of us, from different generations, with different ways of living Jewish lives, were profoundly influenced by the transformation of the Chasidic teachings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries into a "new" Chasidism. As Art Green explains on his website:

> Neo-Hasidism, as I understand it, means loving and learning from the great spiritual revival of Judaism that took place in Eastern Europe two hundred years ago, while choosing to live outside the strictly regulated world of the contemporary Hasidic community. It means *choosing* among the many riches of Hasidic teachings to decide which ones might usefully be applied today and which others should be left to history. It is also a faith that some key elements of the Hasidic revival can be re-tooled and universalized to create a Judaism that will be spiritually alive and attractive to seekers—both Jewish and not yet Jewish—in our day.

The two-volume work by Arthur Green and Ariel Evan Mayse, *A New Hasidism*, subtitled *Roots* and *Branches* is so important because it helps us understand how much contemporary Jewish spirituality has been shaped by this transformative retooling

Volume One, *Roots*, is an anthology of the writings of the founding fathers of Neo-Chasidic philosophy: Hillel Zeitlin, Martin Buber, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Shlomo Carlebach, Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, and the first American born thinker fully connected to this movement, Arthur Green. Most of them were familiar to me; Hillel Zeitlin was not. It was actually fascinating to learn about his idea of an intentional community that would presage a spiritual regeneration of Judaism. But even for readers familiar

with these thinkers, the selections included in the anthology, along with the very helpful introductions, make this book a wonderful resource that can help the reader or student understand the vision of a reimagined Judaism. Volume Two, *Branches*, is a collection of seventeen essays by a diverse group of scholars, teachers, and seekers who wrestle with the questions that emerge out of that reimagining.

I too wrestle with that reimagining. And these essays help me do that. From Arthur Green's "Neo-Hasidic Credo," a thoughtful road map or even manifesto of essential principals to Nehemia Polen's dazzling exploration of Leviticus as "invitational" religion and a manual for an intimacy that should never be taken for granted between the Divine and us, the essays opened my mind and my heart. Some of the essays focus on questions that have not been central to my unfolding spiritual practice, including the role of halachah not as law but as "a steady place to walk." Others speak directly to my own evolution.

The power of these essays is that all of them are personal journeys in one way or another even as they present complicated and challenging theological and communal ideas. The article by Mayse, which attempts to "articulate a Neo-Hasidic theology of *halakhah*, an understanding of sacred deeds and the divine command that can redress the challenges of modernity and enliven the heart of the contemporary Jewish seeker" (*Branches*, p. 158) begins with his own story of his youthful practice of martial arts. Or Rose's journey began in the Jewish renewal community of his parents where he was introduced to the sermons, stories, and ritual practices of the Chasidic masters by his parents and their mentors and peers including Rabbis Zalman Schachter-Shlomi, Shlomo Carlebach, and Arthur Green. Estelle Frankel shares that Reb Shlomo Carlebach's soulful music and Chasidic storytelling provided the initial inspiration for her to explore her Jewish roots and how she continues to study Chasidic teachings and use storytelling through her work as a psychotherapist and spiritual director. Nancy Flam's powerful essay "Training the Heart and Mind toward Expansive Awareness" explicitly chooses "the modality of personal narration" as she shares her own journey with the hope that it will spark curiosity in those who read it. She also raises provocative questions about the challenges of confronting Chasidic texts that speak about valuing mind, spirit, and contemplation over embodied

awareness, when we know about the misogynistic tendencies of a tradition that objectifies women's bodies and devalues or ignores women's experience. Her description of the liberation that came for her through her female *chavruta* was illuminating. She writes: "In these strange and wonderful teachings about praying for the needs of *shekhinah*, our Hasidic masters were teaching something extraordinary about empathy, interconnection and compassion. However with the overwhelming maleness of rabbinic and Hasidic tradition, I would not have dared read the sources so boldly through my own experience as a woman and mother had I not studied them with another like myself" (*Branches*, p. 243).

Through all the essays we meet a *person* whose life has been illuminated by the teachings of particular classic Chasidic masters and, in some instances, by the writings of the Neo-Chasidic founders presented in the first volume. And this makes the book all the more powerful.

The editors rightfully take pride in the variety of voices and topics in *Branches*, and at the same time wish they could have included even more, especially more women's voices. I too wish for that. And I am grateful that these diverse voices don't shy away from lifting up some of the difficulties in Chasidic spirituality including gendered structures and a hostility to non-Jews, which sometimes make it hard to approach these classical texts with an open heart.

I was particularly moved by Jonathan Slater's article "Neo-Hasidism for Today's Jewish Seeker: A Personal Reflection" because he writes about the Institute for Jewish Spirituality (IJS), which changed my life. As a member of the first rabbinic cohort, my teachers were Sylvia Boorstein, Jonathan Omer-Man, and Arthur Green. It was there that I first encountered Chasidic texts, first explored Chasidic prayer practices, first learned meditation, first experienced silence as a spiritual practice, first really thought about what it meant to be "embodied," first embraced mindfulness —and maybe even first began not only to wrestle with God but to open my heart to the divinity that I had experienced around me but had not been able to name. Through the spiritual practices the IJS invited me to explore, I have actually become more compassionate and open hearted. It was a change that my congregants noticed and commented on with gratitude.

A New Hasidism describes the renewal of Jewish life that I and so many of our colleagues have found to be meaningful. It draws us

into an important conversation that will enrich our lives and the lives of those we touch as teachers and rabbis.

RABBI LAURA GELLER (NY76), rabbi emerita of Temple Emanuel of Beverly Hills, was the third woman in the Reform Movement to become a rabbi. Named one of *Newsweek*'s 50 Most Influential Rabbis in America, and by PBS's Next Avenue as a 2017 Influencer in Aging, she was a cofounder of ChaiVillageLA and is the chair of the Synagogue Village Network. She served on the Corporation of Brown University and on the boards of the Jewish Women's Archive, Encore.org, and B3:the Jewish Boomer Platform. Her book, co-authored with her husband, Richard Siegel (*z"l), Getting Good at Getting Older,* was named a National Jewish Book Award Finalist in the category of Contemporary Jewish Life and Practice.

When Rabbis Bless Congress: The Great American Story of Jewish Prayers on Capitol Hill
by Howard Mortman
(Boston: Cherry Orchard Books, 2020), 331 pp.

The author of this unique publication enriching American Jewish history, Howard Mortman, is C-SPAN's communications director covering the US Congress and a graduate of the University of Maryland. His family belongs to Temple Rodef Shalom in Falls Church, Virginia. In his relevant Introduction, Mortman concludes in a tongue in cheek style, "So, want to hear rabbis cite Moses and Scripture and Torah and Talmud and Mishnah to legislators and the public? Don't turn to Jerusalem—the Knesset does not open with prayer (although, arguably, who in the Knesset isn't a rabbi?). Instead tune into Washington, where Israel's chief rabbis can and have served as guest chaplains in Congress, just like hundreds of others" (p. 12).

While both the House and the Senate of the US Congress have full-time clergy chaplains, there is a long-standing tradition of guest chaplains for a day, which amounts to offering a brief prayer at the opening session of each chamber. Instructions are provided by both chaplains' offices for the invocation's length and content and is submitted ahead of time. C-Span provides live coverage, and the prayer is printed in the *Congressional Record*—which began operating in 1873—on the day of delivery. The guest chaplain is ordinarily recommended by the clergyperson's representative and senator, and it is truly a memorable experience to be invited for such an honor. A certificate and photo op are included.