

American Jews have long struggled with their European roots. In their new homes, the immigrants from the shtetls tried, often with success, to preserve something of the past in a world that was strange to them. They gathered in *landsmanshaftn* with fellow immigrants from their native towns to be with someone who remembered their villages, someone who could sing a familiar song or pray with the proper intonation, someone for whom the sights and the sounds of the Old World could evoke a sense of nostalgia.

In truth, those immigrants had broken with their European roots. They had left behind parents and siblings, even spouses and children, to journey forth to an unknown land. Often when they parted with their family, they knew that this was their last meeting, their final goodbye. They would not return for illnesses or funerals; they would not be there when needed. Separation by an ocean so large was somewhat final. Communication was confined to letters. The break was not without guilt.

Their children were first-generation Americans, embracing all that was American. Even if they arrived in school speaking only Yiddish, they soon spoke an unaccented English fluently and absorbed American culture. Bernard Malamud wrote *The Natural*, still today one of the great baseball stories. Chaim Potok began *The Chosen* with a confrontation between Hasidim and more worldly Orthodox Jews on the baseball field—not quite a diamond, but a concrete schoolyard. These first-generation children of immigrants entered the American mainstream. They moved from the Lower East Side and other Jewish enclaves to less intense neighborhoods—more Americanized, less ethnic. They regarded everything American as progressive and their European roots as backward, something to throw off, to abandon and leave behind. Only the future was of interest. The past did not beckon.

The second generation, however, and later the third and the fourth, sought to remember what their parents had chosen to forget. They turned back to Europe in search of something. But it was a different Europe at which they looked back. The fires of the Holocaust had consumed the world that was. Only the ashes remained, of abandoned graves, destroyed synagogues and memories. Ukraine and Moldova were the home of dead Jews or of oppressed Jews, of victims of nazism and communism, of graveyards and killing fields, often unmarked, often without any recognition of the Jews—who died there as Jews because they were Jews.

The Holocaust, the systematic, state-sponsored annihilation of the European Jews, destroyed the world that would have permitted American Jews access to a living past. The Holocaust looms large in American



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Jewish consciousness, larger in the past decade than when I was growing up in the 1950s and '60s, larger still than in the decades of the '70s and the '80s. Thus, interest in the European roots of American Jews grows as the links that bind us with our European roots become ever more attenuated.

In recent years, a new ritual has arisen. Or, more precisely, an ancient ritual has been renewed. Pilgrimage. It is among the most ancient religious acts. One journeys to and one journeys from. A part of all religions, it is an essential part of Judaism.

The first call to the first Jew, God's summons to Abraham, was *Lech lecha*—Journey forth from your land, your birthplace, from your father's house to the land that I will show you. Hasidic sages offer a different reading: *Lech lecha*—Go unto yourself. We leave everything behind in search of the unknown, yet it is the great unknown, ourselves, that we take along.

Our ancestors journeyed from Egypt to the Sinai Desert to the Promised Land. Save for two, Caleb and Joshua, those who began the journey did not enter the land. Even Moses could bring them but to the edge. He then had to cede his position to Joshua, his disciple.

In our generation, pilgrimage has returned as an essential religious act, but along a new path. If our ancestors went from Egypt to the Promised Land, if our parents, grandparents or great-grandparents went from Europe to America, we, their descendants, follow the tortured path of modern Jewish history from Auschwitz to Jerusalem.

We go as pilgrims back to Europe. For many of us, planes, trains and buses provide the means of return. For those who cannot make the pilgrimage physically, it is the access to documents that allows for the return, for the encounter with the past, for the sense of self-discovery.

Thus Miriam Weiner's painstaking work *Jewish Roots in Ukraine and Moldova*, like her earlier work *Jewish Roots in Poland*, is most valuable. She has initiated and made available to the public for the first time, in a concise and readable form, the inventories of records relating to the Jewish experience in these countries that are held in their archives. She has taken us through these archives and offered us a peek at their treasures. She has empowered fellow pilgrims—scholars and novices alike—to begin their own search, to commence their own journey.

We travel with Miriam on the path that she has taken. We traverse the cities of Ukraine and Moldova with their once vibrant Jewish populations, and we explore their remnants—physical buildings and documents—in a way that may permit those of us who trace our roots there to rediscover our past, to touch the generations that preceded those who came to America.

These efforts must be celebrated. Miriam was brave and bold, persistent, disciplined and demanding. She has opened to us an entire world for exploration and has saved all of us, even the most informed, months of effort and false starts. She has made a daunting task appear ever more possible, even more beckoning.

This book is not Miriam's first contribution to memory, but it must surely rank among her finest. I first met Miriam when she worked with the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors as it was beginning to gather what is now known as the Benjamin and Vladka Meed Registry of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, located today in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. She worked with skill and dedication. She created order and empowered the survivors, especially Benjamin Meed, the indefatigable president of the American Gathering, to do so much. I admired Miriam then, and that was just the beginning. I am honored to have written the *Foreword* to this book as well as for her earlier work on Poland.

She then wrote on the issue of genealogy. She became a guide, a mentor and a leading authority. Still later,

she helped people to find their past, and in turn she discovered her mandate, perhaps even her destiny.

Both *Jewish Roots in Ukraine and Moldova* and *Jewish Roots in Poland* are Miriam Weiner's singular achievements. Yet she did not work alone and did not write the books on her own. She asked for and received the assistance of the state archives in Ukraine and Moldova and of individual archivists throughout both countries. From archives large and small, from scholars of distinction and ordinary paper pushers, she received splendid cooperation. Only one who has worked in these archives and with these people can understand the magnitude of her achievement. She must have been cajoling and persistent. She must have persuaded by force of reason and of personality.

As a rule, archivists belong to one of two schools. They are hoarders or sharers. The hoarders gather treasures that they deem all the more valuable because they are unknown and unexamined. They know the true mystery of what they have, and they have a sense of power in knowing its importance and how only a handful of people know the true value of what they possess. From these archivists, Miriam demanded the ultimate sacrifice: to reveal the concealed, to make known their treasures, to share what they have.

For the sharers, she became the midwife, the vehicle by which their treasures could become known, their documents explored. Reading page after page, I could sense the depth of their gratitude as well as the anguish of those archivists for whom sharing is so difficult.

Miriam Weiner's book is a gift to all of us would-be pilgrims. The true measure of its value is to be found in the journeys we undertake, the secrets we uncover. These acts of pilgrimage return us far beyond the world of the Holocaust, to the moments when Berdichev, the ancestral home of my father-in-law, was synonymous with its Hasidic rebbe, Reb Levi Yitzhak, whose very breath echoed a love of Israel, when Kiev was a town of so many Jews and Uman was the site of pilgrimage for the disciples of Rabbi Nachman of Bratlav, when Hasidim and Misnagdim, secularists, Zionists and Bundists walked the streets of these towns and cities and the alleyways of the hundreds of Jewish villages and hamlets. We return with Miriam's aid not to the world of destruction, but to a time when the world was whole. We can taste its spiritual richness and be charged by its vibrancy.

Such a journey can change our sense of who we are, of where we have come from, and, above all, of what we must become.

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