LETTERS

To the Editors:

Bernard Choseed in his "Categorizing Soviet Yiddish Writers" (*Slavic Review,* March 1968) states that "*Sovetish Heimland* gave material proof that the overwhelming majority of established Soviet Yiddish writers who had flourished through 1948 had survived the holocaust" (p. 104). Unfortunately it is not true. Mr. Choseed quotes correctly that *Sovetish Heimland* in its very first issue published a list of 111 writers who would regularly participate in the journal. However, there were in the Soviet Union in 1941, before the outbreak of the Soviet-German war, nearly 800 Yiddish writers, journalists, researchers, scholars, and translators. About fifty writers fell on the various battlefields or died from war wounds. We will assume that one hundred died a natural death during the war years, and the years following the war. Still there were about 650 Yiddish writers at the end of 1948 when the liquidation of Yiddish culture began. At that time most of these writers were arrested. About thirty writers, the most creative and most prominent, were executed in August 1952.

Since about 111 writers were listed in the Moscow Yiddish journal, we assume that only these survived the holocaust, although they were in the concentration camps. Subtracting from the original figure of 800 (I have all their names) those who died a natural death (maximum 100), those who were executed in August 1952 (30), those who are listed in *Sovetish Heimland* (111), there are still missing more than 500 writers. We can therefore assume that they died in various camps.

As for Tsodek Dolgopolski—he was arrested during the purges of 1936–38, but evidently he was released. Since his books appeared in Russian during the holocaust, it is clear that he was not among those arrested during 1948–52. In *Sovetish Heimland,* No. 4, 1964, there is a note that he died on July 16, 1959.

Since he could not publish anything in Yiddish during the "dark period," he published in Russian. The note in *Sovetish Heimland* lists his Yiddish books, but does not mention any Russian works. Apparently the two books that Bernard Choseed lists by Dolgopolski that were published in Russian in 1955 and 1959 were translated from the Yiddish, either from the manuscript or from a book previously published in Yiddish. The book that Choseed mentions, *Na beregakh Sylvy,* is apparently a translation from his Yiddish book *Af Der Linker Zeit.*

As for Emmanuil Kazakevitch—it is clear that since he knew Russian very well, he drifted into Russian literature because it provided greater opportunities than Yiddish literature. But the fact that he himself translated his novel *Zvezda* into Yiddish shows that he did not abandon Yiddish literature.

April 16, 1968

Elias Schulman
Editor, *Der Wecker*

To the Editors:

Permit me to comment on that part of William W. Brickman's review of *Religion and the Search for New Ideals in the USSR* that discusses the article by Hans Lamm on Soviet Jews and Judaism (*Slavic Review,* March 1968, pages 172–73). Though at first I shared Mr. Brickman's feeling that it "has little to offer on religion and is but vaguely related to the theme of the book," I have since had reason to change my mind. Lamm's first paragraph begins, "It seems necessary to begin by clarifying the

concept 'Jews,' " and ends, "While we need not enter into this discussion [of what and who Jews are] we must still determine how the term 'Jews' is applied in the Soviet Union" (p. 102). If what follows seems sterile, it is because religious activities, cultural life, national life, evidence of anti-Semitism, international relations, suppression of culture, reactions to Soviet policy toward Judaism and Jewish life, and the attitude of Soviet Jewry (largely unknown) are discussed, as Brickman notes, from secondary sources. But this is not Hans Lamm's fault. As a student both of Soviet nationality policy and of religious sectarianism in Russia, I have been scouring Soviet booklists for some years for references to Jews in the Soviet Union because my two areas of interest are really rather closely connected (just how closely would make an article by itself).

I have in hand three books that contain references to the Russian Jews: M. Shakhnovich's *Zakat iudeiskoi religii* (Leningrad, 1965), which is a historical survey of Judaism as a religion in world history, prefaced by a few piquant details about Jews in the Soviet Union ("In 1961, 7,623 Jews were elected as deputies to local organs of power.") and followed by a short section on the extinction of belief in God. This section does at least tell us (p. 223) that if we could get, for example, *Cherkasskaia pravda,* we might read how a seventy-year-old woman broke with religion, the interesting part being that she had been a member of the synagogue's ruling board (*dvadtsatok*).

M. S. Belen'kii's *Judaizm* was written for the Library of Contemporary Religions (Moscow, 1966). Belen'kii has been writing atheistic propaganda since the 1920s, but none of his practical experience appears in the book, which treats Judaism almost exclusively in historical terms as a religion. By comparison with other books in the series (on Baptists, Mennonites, Adventists, etc.), it is thin stuff indeed.

Finally, there are six pages devoted to Judaism in the collection *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma i preodolenie religioznykh perezhitkov* (Moscow, 1966, pp. 121–25). This particular book shows very clearly the attempts of Soviet scholars to make all religions part of the same phenomenon. Accordingly, on page 122 we read that in the city of Korosten, Zhitomir Oblast, the leaders of the Jewish community violated Soviet law by taking up a collection to aid "the poor." Sociologically, this has greater significance than that the Jewish leaders were fulfilling a religious commandment. Such an act is specifically forbidden in the Soviet criminal code because (particularly among non-Russian Orthodox communities) in the early years of Soviet power, the money of the faithful was successfully used to mount a campaign for culture change in the countryside on a non-Soviet (and therefore anti-Soviet) basis.

The Director of the Institute of Ethnography, Iu. V. Bromlei, in an article devoted to the achievements of Soviet ethnographers, took specific note of the fact that the daily life of many peoples is often determined by the religion they profess (*Voprosy istorii,* No. 1, 1968, pp. 43–44) and that there has been renewed interest "in such traditional ethnographic themes as popular morals, customs, and ceremonies," largely because of a current Soviet need to find alternatives to religious ceremonies. The very slight extent to which ethnographic investigation has touched upon the Jews has been noted by Stephen P. Dunn (*Slavic Review,* December 1965, pages 702–5). It is noteworthy that a recent collection testifying to increasing interest in the sociology of religion (*Konkretnye issledovaniia sovremennykh religioznykh verovanii,* Moscow, 1967) contains no study of Jews, and thereby implies that none are being conducted.

As it happens, current Soviet sociology of religion has begun to discuss religion in terms of what might be called the last gasp of nationalism, and the farther back one

goes into Russian history, the better case can be made for this approach. Read in this light, Hans Lamm's article does not seem so unsatisfactory to me as it does to Brickman. The article does, after all, suggest that what is involved is "culturecide" rather than genocide, but before we condemn the former absolutely, we would do well to remember that genocide has been practiced on the Jews by nations with strong Christian traditions and that certain aspects of Jewish culture (from a Soviet point of view specifically Zionism) are quite definite reactions to that fact. The way in which Lamm has dealt with Soviet Jews and Judaism makes his article one of the most important in *Religion and the Search for New Ideals.* From a Soviet point of view all religions are parochial—they set up artificial divisions between people. Anti-Semitism is inherent in the entire Christian world view, insofar as Christianity claims exclusive knowledge of the truth. If, therefore, Communism asserts that it is another, more viable alternative to the way of life presented by either Christianity or Judaism, Communism can tolerate neither anti-Semitism (in this context the ideology of "Christian culture") nor Jewish culture (a defense mechanism against anti-Semitism). Under Soviet conditions there has been a certain convergence among all religions, although it is a moot point whether this convergence has helped to eradicate anti-Semitism as effectively as Soviet nationality policy. It seems to me that Hans Lamm's article discusses the effect (or lack of effect) of the Soviet nationality policy on religion, and is therefore very much to the point, though by no means easy to read.

Finally, if Brickman is doing more than—to paraphrase the editorial—emitting the customary angry snort of protest, I wish he would say why he thinks that Lamm's unfamiliarity with Jewish life leads him to feel that "only a small remnant cares for Jewish life." Serious theoretical issues are at stake, issues that serious scholars should document rather than dismiss with yea or nay. Zvi Gitelman's summary paragraph in his review of the question ("The Jewish Question," *Survey,* January 1968, p. 83) indicates how complex the problem is: "The decision taken in the 1920s to eliminate religious education has probably sealed its [Judaism in the USSR's] fate. Many young Jewish people are intensely interested in Jewish culture and history, but few are religious believers. The thousands who dance in the street near the synagogue on the holiday of *Simkhat Torah* do so because they are Jewish, not because they are religious. They are affirming their national identity, not their religious faith. Only in the unlikely event of the Soviets permitting a general revival of Jewish culture might some religious forms and practices survive—and they would survive as national customs, not as religious ritual. . . . If such a revival does not occur, then it must be assumed that the eclipse of the Jewish religion in the USSR will become total." Lamm speaks of "Jewish life" and Gitelman makes a distinction between Jewish religion and Jewish culture. Whether or not such distinctions can be made, I wonder if Brickman really has enough data at his command to be able to tell when an author has or has not failed in his task.

March 26, 1968

ETHEL DUNN
University of California, Berkeley

TO THE EDITORS:

In disagreeing with my appraisal of Hans Lamm's chapter, Mrs. Dunn first calls attention to his discussion of the concept "Jews." However one wishes to consider it, the term "Jew" has a basis in the religious tradition of millennia. Some Jews have become assimilated, and their descendants have ceased to identify themselves as such.