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HANOCH TELLER's

StoryLines

Stories for the whole family

Arzei Habirah 46/7 Jerusalem 97761

Dear Rabbi Lamm ^{ishe}

Enclosed please find my review of your book. I

do not know if they will be running it in the
internal edition of the paper.

Arzei Habirah
Hanoach Teller

Spiritual hero

TORAH FOR TORAH'S SAKE: In the Works of Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin and His Contemporaries by Norman Lamm. New Jersey, Ktav Publishing House. 368 pp. \$25.

THE GOLDEN TRADITION: Jewish Life and Thought in Eastern Europe by Lucy S. Dawidowicz. New Jersey, Jason Aronson. 502 pp. \$35.

EVERYDAY MIRACLES: The Healing Wisdom of Hasidic Stories by Howard W. Polsky and Yaella Wozner. New Jersey, Jason Aronson. 497 pp. \$40.

Hanoch Teller

ALMOST two centuries have passed since the death of Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin, Tora genius and leader of the Lithuanian Tora community and Jews everywhere. His greatest legacy, as so marvelously articulated by Dr. Norman Lamm in a translation of his Hebrew book by the same title, was his commitment to *Tora Lishma*, Tora for Tora's sake.

Rav Hayyim was the founder of the famous Volozhin Yeshiva, the leading disciple of the Gaon of Vilna, outstanding rabbinic leader of his time, and author of two scholarly volumes. Nonetheless, pristine devotion to Tora study remains his greatest contribution.

Prior to Rav Hayyim's assuming leadership of Russian Jewry, Lithuania suffered from a dearth of Tora scholarship. The emergence of the Gaon of Vilna highlighted the value of Tora study, but it was up to Rav Hayyim to carry through the lessons and example of his master on a mass scale.

How did this spiritual hero inculcate a value and sensitize his contemporaries



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and succeeding generations? Norman Lamm, in an eloquent work of genuine scholarship, answers this question. *Torah for Torah's Sake* is not a biography, it is an erudite, piercingly analytical excursus into the texts of Rav Hayyim of Volozhin.

ANOTHER BOOK of scholarship which has just been republished is *The Golden Tradition: Jewish Life and Thought in Eastern Europe*, edited by the author of *The War Against the Jews*, Lucy S. Dawidowicz.

Dr. Dawidowicz's anthology of autobiographies, memoirs, reminiscences and letters of pre-World War II Eastern European Jewry is excellent. It is not a scissor-and-glue job.

Most of the book is newly-translated from Hebrew or Yiddish, and the selection is superb. *The Golden Tradition* is an affirmation of the diversity of the Jewish spirit, and a powerful refutation of the Fiddler on the Roof persona which would encapsulate all of Eastern European Jewry into the rubric of impoverished pietistic fools. The author's insightful introduction is in itself a major

contribution to a golden tradition.

ANOTHER anthology, *Everyday Miracles: The Healing Wisdom of Hasidic Stories*, fails in its attempt to serve as a psychological guide for today. As an anthology it is fine and well-written, but the very pretext of the book reveals a misconception of the lesson inherent in a hassidic story.

Traditionally, hassidic stories were told by hassidic rebbes or their adherents to teach a lesson, or subtly highlight a point. To transcribe hassidic stories without a context and then dissect the psychological impact will never achieve what was intended. One of the principles of storytelling, and certainly one of the foundations of hassidic stories, is not to dilute the ontological message of a story.

Polsky and Wozner have presented the reader with a glimpse as to how hassidic leaders counselled and educated their followers. The book must be commended for showing how these very stories can help the reader cope with his problems. If the problem persists, the sufferer should seek a hassidic court. □