

precisely the ones that engage him most, for the moral and psychological questions they raise, as well as for the skill with which they are depicted.

Beginnings is a provocative, stimulating, and idiosyncratic collection of essays, each one building out from the first appearance of a single word—the first love, the first hate, the first dream, the first king—and moving on to an exploration of other stories linked to that category. The first love mentioned, for example, is Abraham’s love for his son Isaac, whom he is called to sacrifice on Mount Moriah. Shalev deals with the plain meaning of the text, but also shares his reactions to it. Concerning the binding of Isaac, known as the *akeidah*, he writes: “I don’t think the story is intended to combat the practice of human sacrifice, but rather to demonstrate how the obedience of the Bible’s most obedient believer may lead into the darkest of alleys.”

More to his liking is Jacob, who wants *specifics* when he bargains with God: “If God remains with me, if He protects me on this journey that I am making, and gives me bread to eat, and clothing to wear, and if I return to my father’s house, the Lord shall be my God.” According to Shalev, “Jacob’s very first word—‘if’—announces to God that here is a new type of believer.” Jacob understands that God also needs humans in order to be present in the world.

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Shalev’s assessments are often as acerbic as they are astute. King Saul, he writes, was a tragic figure “because he lived at the same time as Samuel and David. Up against the rigid extremism of the one, and the magnetic genius of the other, he didn’t have a prayer.” David, on the other hand, was a leader with too much charisma—“a man who was loved by so many, a man who didn’t need to lift a finger to win the heart of others, which is why his emotional life became so distorted and corrupt.” Likewise, Shalev compares Elijah, “the consummate prophet, his entire being given over to the Lord’s service,” with Jonah, who would rather see a city destroyed than a blemish on his record for prophecy.

As a secular Israeli, Shalev regularly gives voice to his distrust of politicians, religion, and religious establishments, both ancient and contemporary. In this spirit, he does not refrain from critiquing the tenth commandment, “Do not covet,” which is a prohibition not of an action, but of a feeling. “Everyone covets.... Everyone fails the last commandment,” he writes. “Thus, the biblical lawgiver made sure that no Jew would ever get a perfect ten in the test of the commandments. Nine is the highest score on the Jewish report card.”

The Eichmann Trial

by Deborah E. Lipstadt

(Nextbook/Schocken, 237 pp., \$24.95)

Many trials of Nazis and their collaborators were held following World War II—in the American and British-occupied zones of postwar Germany, in France (the trial of Vichy prime minister Pierre Lavel), and in Poland (the trials of concentration camp commandants Rudolf Höss and Amon Göth). Yet the first of the Nuremberg trials, in 1945, and the trial of Adolph Eichmann, in 1961, remain the best-known Holocaust trials of the

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20th century. In her brilliant analysis of the Eichmann trial, Emory professor Deborah Lipstadt explains why this trial was a watershed event in the world’s perception of the genocide.

The trial made headlines, beginning with the Mossad’s capture and abduction of Eichmann from Argentina and Israel’s decision to hold the trial in Jerusalem. Portions of the trial were broadcast on television worldwide. But the reason for its impact and lasting impression was its use of survivor testimonies, which did not happen at the Nuremberg trials.

“At Nuremberg, the murder of the Jews had been an example of crimes against humanity,” she writes. “Here it would be the centerpiece.” Chief Prosecutor Gideon Hausner decided to use survivor testimonies to “paint a broad picture of the entire destruction process” in which Eichmann played a part. He immediately saw the trial’s potential

to educate Israelis, Diaspora Jews, and non-Jews about the Holocaust.

Not all of the testimony was directly related to Eichmann, as the defense counsel and even the presiding judges were quick to point out. He did not have a direct role in many aspects of the Final Solution the witnesses described. But in Hungary, where he headed an SS unit dubbed “Sonderkommando Eichmann,” he was directly responsible for the deportation of a half million Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz. Contrary to his claim of being a “little cog” who “followed orders” in a bureaucracy, he was present at the Wannsee conference, where the so-called Final Solution, the plan to annihilate Europe’s Jews, was revealed to those who would carry it out. According to transcripts of an interview he gave to a Nazi colleague in Buenos Aires—which became damning evidence in the trial—he was proud of his work and carried it out zealously.

Lipstadt devotes a chapter to Hannah Arendt’s reportage of the trial, which in its own way has become as famous as the *continued on page 17*

