

Dina expresses Jewish struggles, joys

New edition adds diverse voices

BY ANNDEE HOCHMAN

The Tribe of Dina. Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz and Irena Klepfisz, editors. Beacon Press: Boston, 1989. 360 pages. \$12.95.

The Tribe of Dina, when it first appeared as a double-thick issue of *Sinister Wisdom* in 1986, did not so much break new ground as open existing ground in all directions, allowing

Books

Jewish women to see clearly where they, and others, stood.

The book's editors, Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz and Irena Klepfisz, wrote in the introduction to the 1986 edition that they aimed to "express the wide range of Jewish experience and culture, and to develop more empathy and support for Jewish identities which we do not share."

The concept proved successful. The book sold. The first edition soon went out of print, and the editors could not afford to reissue it. The current version is published by Beacon Press.

The new *Dina* contains all the stories, poems and essays of the first version, plus several new pieces which reflect both hindsight and the shifting political terrain of the Mideast. The new work includes an essay by a woman visiting her relatives in the Soviet Union, a rabbi's story of her Sephardic grandmother and poems by an Israeli woman.

The value of *Dina* lies in its willingness to show Jewish women our differences, to dismantle the stereotypes and silences that prevent us from seeing each other, and ultimately ourselves, with clarity.

Layers of meaning inhabit many of the selections in *Dina*. Whether in the recovered, translated Yiddish stories from the early part of this century, a walking tour through radical Jewish women's history in New York or the thoughts of editor Kaye/Kantrowitz on how "To Be a Radical Jew in the Late 20th Century," sadness and anger, survival and humor and pride co-exist in these pages, as in their authors' lives.

One of the most moving selections is a story

added to this edition, by Elza Frydrych Shatzkin, a child survivor of the Holocaust who at first excelled after emigrating to America, then committed suicide at the age of 25.

Her story, based on her own experience of being placed in a Catholic orphanage in Poland, captures poignantly the mind of a child, working to make the new rules of her environment blend with her own curiosity and dreams. She writes:

"... They taught me Our Father, and other special prayers. We say them in chapel every night... The red light always burns, and a little tiny part of Jesus is always there.

"I was alone yesterday, and I climbed the stairs higher than ever before. I went to a bathroom only for the sisters. There was a window and I was high above the city. A train passed, and I heard the long whistle. It made me cry, because nobody loved me, and because there was nobody in the world. I want my Mama and my Daddy. But they are Jews. I hope they didn't die. Probably, if they are not dead, someone will come and take me back to them. It is cold, but I will sleep now. Jesus knows that I love him. He doesn't mind that I am Jewish."

What emerges from the collection is a sense of pride, of stubbornness, of survival sweetened with hope of a better world. Before we can value our heritage, we must be able to hear it, taste it, savor its language.

"Those who call resistance to assimilation a luxury might do well to think about calling 'sexual preference' a luxury, or reproductive rights, or access to education or creative expression," Kaye/Kantrowitz writes in her essay. "None of these is bread, but 'Bread and Roses' was a demand voiced by Rose Schneiderman, a union organizer and a Jew.

"What are the roses? As Jews we need our peoplehood, our culture, history, languages, music, calendar, tradition, literature... We need these things because they are beautiful and ours, and because the point of struggle is not bare survival but lives full of possibility."

By rescuing *The Tribe of Dina* from the desert of out-of-print books, Beacon Press brings the anthology to a potentially wider audience—women and men, Jews and non-Jews, lesbian and heterosexual—all of whom may find some possibility glinting on the broad ground that lies between its covers.

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