

Introduction

The longing for home is as ancient as exile from Eden and as contemporary as the dilemma of finding home in Havana, Shanghai, or Jerusalem. History and the Holocaust have intensified the struggle of Jewish women everywhere to redefine the idea of home. The selections in this anthology reflect a variety of historical, cultural, political, and religious contexts while illuminating each author's private world. Through memoir, poetry, and fiction, forty Jewish women writers from around the world address questions such as: What is home? Is it a concrete place? Is it the place you were born and raised, or is it a place you were forced to leave because of nationalism, racism, or violence? Is home where you live now, or is it an abstract composite of memories? Is home embodied in the art you create, or in the Jewish rituals you observe? This book offers accounts of journeys of discovery and the many possible meanings of home. The authors in *Where We Find Ourselves* write about Argentina, Australia, Chile, China, Cuba, France, India, Iraq, Iran, Israel, Mexico, Romania, Russia, South Africa, and the United States. Most contributors are accomplished writers, others write because they find the topic compelling. For some, English is a second, third, or even fourth language.

The anthology has been divided into four sections: Displacement and Exile; Place and Memory; Language and Creativity; Family and Tradition.

Displacement and Exile

Displacement and Exile create suffering and a perpetual search for home whether that displacement is caused by war, anti-Semitism, communism, or unique circumstances. Yet many find unexpected opportunities in exile.

Nava Semel raises the eternal question: Where is the true Jewish home? Can it only be Zion or is there an alternative? Diana Anhalt, a political *exilée*, claims descent “from a long line of refugees—wandering Jews—who changed their addresses more often than they changed shoes.” One can feel displaced in one’s own home, as Ben-Yoseph points out in her short story. Helen Degen Cohen writes about the war Ghetto, the formal Ghetto instituted by the Nazis that was home to Jews until they were sent to worse places. In the background of Dina Elenbogen’s story about postpartum depression, exile, and longing for home is the larger story of Jewish and Palestinian exile. Jyl Lynn Felman meditates on a Jewish North American lesbian’s “herstorical” search for home and the complications that arise when she arrives in Havana.

Estrangement is also possible in one’s own country. S. E. Gilman mourns the fact that after September 11, the American government seeks to make the country safe by controlling immigration. Sara Paretsky tells her grandmother that for immigrants the welcoming beacon from the Statue of Liberty has dimmed. Dina Rubina’s essay comments on the difficulties encountered when bringing cultural values and linguistic associations from one’s previous home (Russia) into one’s new home (Israel). Else Lasker-Schüler, a German Jew, mourns the human condition as one of intrinsic exile but out of that feeling comes a poetry shimmering with childlike magic and wonder. Eve Perkal describes a life of exile in Shanghai, but she also recognizes that this was the only place on the eve of World War II that would accept a family without papers.

Place and Memory

Over the centuries home has evolved from country and clan, becoming progressively more portable and idiosyncratic. In the twenty-first century, the idea of home oscillates between concrete places and more abstract concepts located in memory and in individual perceptions.

For Marjorie Agosin, a quintessential citizen of the Jewish Diaspora, home is in the landscape of Chile where she grew up. Dalia Kaveh sees snow-covered Jerusalem as the home that connects her to the Palestinians who also regard Jerusalem as home and to her ancestors who lived for generations in the harsh winters of Poland and Russia. Marcelle Levy traces her family odyssey from Basra, Iraq, to Cairo, Egypt, to Chicago, USA, which for her becomes home. Ada Molinoff writes about the difficult process that immigrants experience while trying to reestablish themselves in America. Caroline Smadja, who survived several uprootings, locates home in the French villa where she spent her childhood.

Davi Walders describes the role of home in memory. She considers herself lucky to have been born in America during World War II; using her deceased mother's recipe to bake challah in her adult home evokes a tender memory of mother and child working together in the quiet moments before Shabbat. For Gerda Weissmann Klein, a Holocaust survivor, home is firmly rooted in America. She loves America "as only one who has been homeless for so long can understand." Arlene Zide's notion of home is linked to an apartment in the New York neighborhood where she and her family once lived. When she finally returns to this place she realizes that memory and reality do not coincide and that, in fact, one cannot go home again.

Viva Hammer writes that home is a metaphysical concept, a place to go when you are alone in an unfamiliar setting. Rochelle Mass believes that home faces Jerusalem, source of King David's wisdom and kaffiyehed men at roadblocks. Home for Deborah Nodler Rosen is a place where she can be her authentic self and feel free

to create. After visiting England, Maria Roth realizes that home is in Romania, where she can live by her parents' values and be a Jew without speaking Hebrew or following Jewish practice. Similarly, Madeline Tiger asserts that a house without Jewish ceremonies can still be a home for a Jewish woman observing her own rituals.

Dalia Kaveh describes a Tel Aviv neighborhood with courtyard gardens as a framework for the home hidden within the soul. Cha Johnston traces the journey of her soul that leads her to identify her home as herself—a white African Jewish woman.

Language and Creativity

Many women find home not in a physical place but in language and creativity. Their creations reflect the sum total of their history which includes their Jewish heritage. Ellen Cassedy travels to Vilnius to study Yiddish in order to connect with her forebears and therefore herself. Dalia Kaveh writes about the process of creativity that emerges when she is alone in her home surrounded by emptiness and silence. Angelina Muñiz-Huberman, a lifelong traveler and *exilée*, regards her literary creation as her true home: language and words are the construct inside which her life unfolds. Sara Schwarzbaum finds home in the music and languages that her immigrant family share. Judith Ilson Taylor lives in Jewish myth. Central to that myth is the nomadic tradition, and through her life and her work she tries to express the meaning she finds in that myth and that tradition. Linda Stern Zisquit uses her work to imagine wholeness in the fragmented experience of living in at least two places. Jewish thought and ritual as well as biblical texts are integral to her life and work.

Family and Tradition

Family and Jewish tradition form the core of home for many women. Dorothy Field wants to knit peace, a crucial aspect of home, out of

clamoring family voices. Barbara F. Lefcowitz imagines a correspondence with her great-aunt Dina who immigrated to New York City, and defines home as a place where she would feel unconditionally accepted despite her deformed spine. Erusha Newman, whose family emigrated from Iran to India to America, defines home in terms of family celebrations of the Jewish holidays. Julie Parson-Nesbitt discovers after tragedy that prayer, family, and her love for poetry helped her re-create the safety and meaning of home.

Jyl Lynn Felman wishes she had been born a kosher chicken so that there would be no separation from her mother and her people. Helen Degen Cohen evokes a second meaning for the “roots” she puts into her soup, whose steam is the spiritual mist that connects her with her mother’s sad past in her shtetl. Although Iran was Farideh Dayanim Goldin’s original home, now home is wherever she can re-create her Iranian Sukkah. Her daughter Rachel Goldin Jinich finds home in shared food, language, and stories. Arlene Hisiger discovers home not in bricks and mortar but in the spiritual realm of the Sabbath. Tracy Koretsky finds that Jews are a people beyond borders whose homeland is in their Jewishness. Edith Altman’s study of Jewish mystical teachings informs her thinking about the creative process and serves as an inspiration for *tikkun olam*, repair of the world.

The central question of our contributors is: Where do we find home? Their answers differ because their journeys differ, but all of them have unique connections to Judaism. All these women are intent on establishing home—a place, literal or metaphorical, where they can be Jewish, establish safe havens for themselves and their families, and freely express their essential selves.