

Rosaline and Myer Feinstein Lecture Series, 2008

From Otzar Sefarim to Otzar Hokhmah: Transitions and Transformations By Pearl Berger

I want to first express my gratitude to the Foundation for Jewish Culture for establishing the annual Rosaline and Meyer Feinstein lecture at the AJL Convention, and for affording me the opportunity to stand before you today.

Librarian scholars and librarian bibliographers precede me in a list of distinguished personalities invited to present the annual Feinstein lecture at the AJL conference. Most were and are seasoned individuals who served the profession for many years. As I am neither a scholar nor a bibliographer I was somewhat surprised, and of course flattered, when Elliot Gertel invited me to present the lecture this year. My experience is focused on administration of an academic library and it is from that perspective that I am speaking to you today.

With the dawn of our information age, the future of libraries became a frequent topic for discussion. Perhaps a better way to put it is that the survival of libraries began to come into question. All sorts of dire predictions were put forward and continue to be promulgated to this day. *The Commentator*, the Yeshiva College student newspaper, as an example, reported a statement this year, “Don’t worry too much about the Library, it’ll be gone in twenty years.” (Greenfield, 2008) Some of the cutbacks in our school and synagogue libraries may be partially attributable to this attitude. Meanwhile, at Yeshiva at least, we are continually pressed by students for longer hours and additional services.

In the Talmud tractate *Bava Batra* 12a Rabbi Yohanan says:

“תולוגיתלו מיטושל הנתינו מיאיבנה נמ האובנ הלטינ, שדקמה תיב ברחש סוימ :נחוי ר"א.”

“Since the Temple was destroyed, prophecy has been taken from prophets and given to fools and children.”

Given these two options I will not attempt to engage in prognostications about the future of libraries. My plan today is to look at some of what is happening in our libraries, to raise questions and perhaps to provoke thought about where our libraries are headed as the future unfolds. For this too there is a Talmudic dictum, of course, that appears in tractate *Tamid* 32a and incorporates a phrase from *Pirke Avot* (Ethics of the Fathers):

“דלונה תא האורה –מכח והזיא.”

“Who is wise? He who discerns what is about to come to pass.”

If I had to select an overarching theme that characterizes our libraries the theme is **change**. This is a word you may have heard once or twice this year in news coverage of the presidential primaries and it will no doubt continue to characterize the election campaign. For libraries

change is not a campaign promise. Fundamental change has taken place in libraries in the past few decades, important change is taking place as we speak, and libraries will continue to change for years to come. And this is very good news.

A second theme, one that motivates and drives much of the change is **relevance**.

While many of us argue that the traditional library remains essential for study and scholarship, libraries and librarians continue to find new ways to remain central to the educational and academic enterprise. Instead of fulfilling dire prophecies about our future, we continue to flourish. We continue to build new libraries and we see encouraging gestures of support such as the recently announced philanthropic gift of \$100,000,000 to the NYPL by Stephen A. Schwarzman for whom that institution's famous edifice will be named, and the Yad HaNadiv's (Rothschild Foundation) pivotal role in the transformations and planned building projects at the National Library of Israel.

What are the changes we have implemented to remain relevant? Driven by technology we buried the book and card catalogs of the past and replaced them with online catalogs. We discarded indexes and reference works in favor of online surrogates, taking advantage of advanced searching and linking options. Our journal collections are primarily online – the time honored functions of serials claiming and binding play a small and diminishing role in our libraries. We often replace the well thought out and carefully considered approach to purchasing individual books or journals with sweeping subscriptions to publishers' packages or aggregator collections. We offer virtual reference service, chat and instant messaging along with face to face encounters. We serve our clientele wherever they are. We digitize library materials to serve not only our own constituencies, but the world at large. In our new buildings and renovations we are focused on the library user as much as upon its collections, as we construct information or learning commons, especially in academic libraries.

While all this change may be said to have had a drastic impact on libraries, in fact it should be regarded as merely a transitional stage in this age of rapid transformation. In many cases what we are doing is a reflection of the modes and paradigms of the pre-Internet world, adapted to the web environment. With the advent of the Web 2.0 age, social networking and the interactive web, and with web 3.0 on the horizon, our paradigms are changing. Concepts that we took for granted are being questioned and rethought – the values of quality vs. quantity, the meaning of "authority" and its importance, what we mean by order, new definitions of "reading," as encompassing more than text, how and where knowledge is born. Add to that what are considered acceptable behavior patterns in a library environment, and what we would call reasonable expectations on the part of library patrons. Whether subconsciously or with full recognition, progressive changes implemented in our libraries reflect significant shifts in what were once our basic assumptions.

The title I chose for this lecture, "From Otzar Sefarim to Otzar Hokhmah," is literally translated as "From a Collection of Books or a library to a Collection of Wisdom." *Otzar Ha-Seforim* is the title that Ben Yaakov chose when he undertook the compilation of his comprehensive bibliography. But when Rabbi Erez Sela and his wife decided to go from institution to institution and scan *seforim* (traditional Jewish books,) to create as comprehensive a virtual Torah library as they could, in a somewhat prescient move, they chose the name Otzar HaHochma, not Otzar

haSeforim. They probably didn't know it then, as their goal was to provide access to the books, but the shift from physical object to bits and bytes may be said to unpack a book's contents from its container and toss into that great sea of information, the World Wide Web, an Otzar Hokhmah, offering a whole new range of possibilities and leading to many of the changes we are experiencing. Such possibilities are described and analyzed in a recent fascinating and stimulating book by David Weinberger, *Everything is Miscellaneous: The power of the new digital disorder*. "Suppose," asks Prof. Weinberger, challenging us to think in new ways. "Suppose that now, for the first time in history, we are able to arrange our concepts without the silent limitations of the physical. How might our ideas, organizations, and knowledge itself change?" (Weinberger, 2007, p.7)

In the time remaining we will look briefly at some of the standard features of libraries, the catalog, library patrons, encyclopedias, books and journals, and examine how the evolving digital developments are changing and re-shaping the future directions of all libraries, including Judaica libraries.

THE CATALOG

We may as well begin with the library catalog. Back in the 1980s and in the 1990s when libraries discarded their card catalogs and implemented OPACs (online public access catalogs) it was quite a drastic change. The OPAC built upon the features of earlier catalogs, followed the same evolving sets of rules, and offered improved access to the library's collections. Today libraries are beginning to implement "discovery tools" which facilitate searching across all of a library's resources, not just those in the OPAC, and also import information from web sites, such as reviews from Amazon. These tools may offer such features as spelling correction and relevance ranking. David Lovins, in his article, "The changing landscape of Hebraica cataloging," tells us that "the very word catalog seems to be losing traction...the catalog looks increasingly like a knowledge portal, a gateway to resources that the library may never have selected or purchased in the traditional sense." (Lovins, 2008, p.14)

What is more important, however, is that the fundamental principles of cataloging are being questioned and rethought. Time honored canons of bibliographic control such as the Anglo American Cataloging Rules, the MARC format, ISBD punctuation, Library of Congress Subject Headings are all being called into question. In what Deanna Marcum, Associate Librarian for Library Services at the Library of Congress, describes in a letter as "a global initiative to update bibliographic practices and to make library resources more accessible and useful to users," the Joint Steering Committee for Development of RDA officially began working in 2005 towards a new standard: RDA: Resource Description and Access, scheduled for release in early 2009 (Marcum, 2008).

In November 2006, one year after work on RDA officially began, Deanna Marcum convened a "Working Group to examine the future of bibliographic control in the 21st century." In its January 2008 report, *On the Record*, "the Working Group envisions a future for bibliographic control that will be collaborative, decentralized, international in scope, and Web-based. The realization of this future will occur in cooperation with the private sector and with the active collaboration of library users. Data will be gathered from multiple sources; change will happen quickly; and bibliographic control will be dynamic, not static." (LC, 2008, p.1) This scenario,

even without a good grasp of how it might work, is clearly quite a departure from the traditional modes of cataloging and of creating metadata in libraries. And there is disagreement of course.

Despite the Working Group's recommendation that LC suspend work on RDA, in her May 1, 2008 letter, Ms Marcum affirms that work will continue (Marcum, 2008). In a review of the Working Group's report, "*On the Record*" but *Off the Track*, Dr. Thomas Mann lists no less than twenty "major points" where the Working Group's Report is "off the track in many of its major assumptions, assertions, and recommendations" beginning with "the very real and important differences between the research needs of scholars and those of 'quick information' seekers;" and "in not understanding what the LCSH continues to accomplish in providing crucial overviews of relevant literature across multiple languages" not "superseded by Web 2.0 mechanisms." (Mann, 2008, p.1).

RDA, *On the Record*, *Off the Track* – one does not have to be technically trained to understand that there is roiling controversy on issues of bibliographic control, and whatever the outcome or compromise, big changes appear to be forthcoming. What will be the impact of these changes? How will they affect the quality and reliability of library catalog information and the specificity often generated by specialized approaches? Will they succeed in addressing the backlog problems we face? How will they affect scholarship and research? Is the push to import data such as reviews and to alter the neutral nature of library catalogs a positive step? How will catalogers participate in these changes? Daniel Lovins offers encouraging words. "Hebraica catalogers have an important role to play...in developing standards for machine processing, building the Virtual International Authority File, shaping development of a truly international cataloging code, and providing high-quality structured metadata to Hebraica items whether they be 'in the catalog' or out on the Web." (Lovins, 2008, pp.10-11)

LIBRARY PATRONS

What would be the value of a library without its patrons, without the students, scholars, community members, children, all of the people to whom we deliver library service? If you have been in the profession for some time you may have noticed change here too in recent years. The millennial generation, that is people born in about 1982 or later, has come of age. Maybe some of the librarians here belong to this group. I am obviously speaking primarily from the vantage point of those who were born a bit earlier. Millennials come to us with some very different basic assumptions and unless we reach out and make a real effort to understand and communicate we may fail in important ways. Working in a University environment I began to notice the differences in my conversations with students even before I knew the official term. Did you know for example that if you have a table that seats more than one person in a library reading room it is clearly meant for group study rather than individual quiet study? So I was told, in passing, by one of our students. Are you surprised by a serious student, who inquired of a Jewish history professor whether students are responsible for an article on the required reading list for the course, being that a digital version does not appear in the electronic reserve system? The expectation is that everything must be online. *A trip to the Reserve desk is apparently becoming an alien concept.*

In a 2003 article in *Educause Review* entitled "Boomers, Gen-Xers, and Millennials: Understanding the New Students", Diana Oblinger writes that Millennials, "exhibit distinct learning styles ... tend toward teamwork [noise in the library], experiential activities, structure,

and the use of technology. Their strengths include multitasking, goal orientation, and a collaborative style.”

The article continues: to millennials “the computer is not a technology- it is an assumed part of life. The Internet is better than TV... Doing is more important than knowing... Results and actions are considered more important than facts... Learning more closely resembles Nintendo than logic... a trial and error approach to solving problems” replaces the “more logical, rule based approach” of previous generations. [Not the best prescription for teaching research strategies.] Multitasking and staying connected are a way of life. [The ipod entertains while reading and studying proceeds, accompanied by the ever present cellphone, which is treated as if it were an added appendage to the human body.] “There is zero tolerance for delays,” 24 x 7 services are expected. [While we are not quite there yet at Yeshiva, we are steadily moving toward service 24 x 6 – thank heaven for Shabbat.] And “in a cut and paste world, distinctions between creator, owner and consumer of information are fading” [which makes it necessary to teach the difference between citation and plagiarism to people who may very well lack any intuitive concept of the distinction.] (Oblinger, 2003, pp. 38-42)

GOOGLE

One can hardly speak about changes in our libraries and about directions for the future without at least a brief mention of search engines, specifically the most pervasive information tool of our time – Google. Google is ubiquitous and powerful, offering countless advantages but also presenting challenges. Try a Google search on “truth about the holocaust” and what you will find are holocaust denial sites. What comes up first in a Google search may not be the same for different people or in different places. Siva Vaidhyanathan, who is working on a publication called *The Googlization of Everything: How one company is disrupting culture, commerce and community and why we should worry*, points out that we are being processed by Google. Google keeps dossiers on individuals – Google collects data to serve you better (Vaidhyanathan, 2008). The challenge while using the resources that Google provides, is to find ways to utilize Google and other web tools to lead patrons to our Library collections, and to educate our users to the world of library and research resources beyond. Just one example of employing Google for access to library collections, beyond Worldcat, is promoting Google Scholar and placing it behind the institutional proxy server or authentication system. This leads to immediate (one click) access to articles listed in the search results, which are available through the Library.

ENCYCLOPEDIAS

A Yeshiva College student was in the library recently, trying to find a book by Shai Agnon and he did not remember the title. He had written down the call number but he couldn't find the item on the shelf and was somewhat confused. The call number, PJ5053.A4 O713, has an o in it and he didn't know if it was the letter o or a zero. What does he do? He goes to *Wikipedia*, looks up Agnon, finds the name of the book, and then goes to the catalog to search for the call number once again. Scrolling through 99 entries in the [YULIS](#) catalog under the author Agnon would have taken much longer wouldn't it? He had obviously started with *Wikipedia*, and he needed to go back to find his reference. Note that the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, which would most likely have been the starting point only a few years ago and which we do offer online, played no role at all.

One of the fundamental changes I mentioned earlier is in the concept of “authority” and this change is brought into sharp focus by the phenomenon of *Wikipedia*. In the words of David Weinberger, experts or “authorities have long filtered and organized information for us, protecting us from what isn’t worth our time and helping us find what we need to give our beliefs a sturdy foundation.” In the Web 2.0 world, however, he continues, “knowledge – its content and organization – is becoming a social act.” For the *Britannica*, “the credibility of its authors and editors is the bedrock of [its] authority... *Wikipedia* has no official editors, no well-regulated editorial process, no controls on when an article is judged to be ready for publication. Its authors need not have any credentials at all.” *Wikipedia* does have a de facto community of several hundred people with special privileges who can undo the work of vandals and freeze pages when necessary. Unlike other encyclopedias, *Wikipedia* offers all sorts of apologetic or qualifying statements about articles such as “the neutrality of the article is disputed,” or “the truthfulness of this article has been questioned...” (Weinberger, 2007, pp. 132-140) Of course these qualifiers do not cover all instances. Even when an article is accurate it may exhibit a lack of balance and limitations in scope. Bias and perspective were always an issue, but so much more the case with a social tool like *Wikipedia*. Note a recent *Jewish Week* (Manhattan edition, 5/16/08) headline “Latest front in Mideast Wars: *Wikipedia*, Pro-Israel advocates have been banned from contributing articles on the popular encyclopedia, but battle rages.” Yet *Wikipedia* is extremely powerful and works well so much of the time. It is more or less obvious that, as librarians, our challenge is to channel the use of such social tools, to make sure our users understand issues regarding authority, to help them to distinguish reliable from questionable information, and to guide them to other sources beyond the most obvious.

BOOKS

Robert Darnton, Director of the Harvard University Library, in his article “Old books and e-books,” writes about the crisis in academic publishing and university presses. Academics must publish to advance their careers, but the business model of University presses is in jeopardy. Darnton says, “I don’t want to join the prophets of doom who have announced ‘the death of the book,’ because the book has been declared dead so often that it must be very much alive.” He concludes that “old books and e-books are not enemies. They are allies.” (Darnton, 2007, pp.165, 170) A library is an Otzar Sefarim and books are the core of what we are about.

Changes in the nature of books must lead to change in libraries. How are Judaica library collections faring in the developing e-book world? Sara Spiegel of The Jewish Theological Seminary maintains a web list of sources for Jewish interest e-books on the del.icio.us site, jtstech. Library websites list many such sources as well. Books in Jewish Studies are represented in general e-book collections, both free and commercial. Aggregated and selected collections, such as Ebrary, Netlibrary, Humanities e-books, and individual publishers offer Judaica in their lists. It is the Rabbinic literature, however, that is by far the most well represented in collections such as Hebrewbooks.org with its 23,000 volumes, Otzar HaHochma with 28,000 volumes, and the Online Judaic Responsa database from Bar Ilan which has had a transforming impact on how research is conducted in the field.

In addition of course there are smaller more specialized collections each with its distinct niche. Magnes Press and Varda books are marketed under Publishers’ Row. The National Library of Israel’s *Online Heritage* and other book digitization projects undertaken by libraries, play an important role. And there is more to come. A recently announced project, “The Jewish Digital

bookstand,” to be developed under the auspices of Bar Ilan University, promises to make thousands of Jewish religious and other texts in Hebrew available free on the web (*Haaretz*, 2008).

The e-book project that currently attracts the most attention, however, is Google Book Search, the project that is digitizing millions of volumes from some of the largest research libraries. Most will agree that quantity prevails over quality in Google’s undertaking. (Remember in contrast, the carefully composed guidelines and quality controls that were developed for microfilming projects a few decades ago.) The Google book scans show extraneous objects such as fingers, missing pages are not uncommon, and the selection process favors volume rather than selectivity. At one library the process is described as follows: “A staff member removes an entire shelf of books, places the books on a book truck, then moves on to the next shelf, until the quota for the day is reached.” (Schaffhauser, 2008, p.35) Little attention appears to be paid to completeness of the volumes, issues relating to multivolume sets or items that may have tight bindings. Nevertheless, despite the shortcomings, Google Book Search represents a major leap forward and it too is a source for digitized Judaic books. Lists of books of Jewish interest discovered in Google Book Search are appearing in the blogosphere. Last October, Michael Pitkowsky started a list on his Menachem Mendel blog and in April he supplemented it with “More digital books online.” (Pitkowsky, 2008)

In her article in *Campus Technology*, Schaffhauser suggests “maybe participants should not get so hung up on quality that they obstruct the flow of an astounding amount of information...knowing that with time the rest of what’s important will follow.” (2008. p.38)

Will it? What does the future hold for our world if speed and quantity prevail? Will other efforts such as that of Brewster Kahle and the Open Content Alliance succeed in providing a balance for Google? How will our Judaic literature be represented? With finite resources, how should we balance our collection development when faced with the choices of paper copies and/or e-books? What must we do to ascertain the preferences of our users and to satisfy those preferences? Are we confident of the continued availability and preservation of the e-book for the long term?

JOURNALS

A word about journals: It is clear to all that the world of journals has been transformed by the online environment. Most libraries are opting for online versions rather than paper. At a meeting I attended recently a library director boasted of having weeded 100,000 volumes from his library, presumably many journal back-files now accessible through JSTOR. In Jewish studies we still have a long way to go, especially with respect to Hebrew titles. A search for Hebrew titles among the Electronic Journal Subscriptions of MALMAD Member Libraries shows few of the classic titles in Jewish studies. Many journals in other languages are making their way to the web, and Heidi Lerner’s articles are a good source for identifying these. Yet much remains to be done so that we have current and retrospective access to the journal literature in the field.

With respect to journals too, we seem to be at the precipice of far greater change than the switch to digital versions, and that is the movement toward open access. A much discussed regulation at the National Institutes of Health, now law, is a significant step toward open access: “The

Director of the National Institutes of Health shall require that all investigators funded by the NIH submit or have submitted for them to the National Library of Medicine's PubMed Central an electronic version of their final, peer-reviewed manuscripts upon acceptance for publication, to be made publicly available no later than 12 months after the official date of publication." (BioMed, 2008) This twelve month embargo or delay weakens the NIH move, but the requirement is nonetheless significant.

On February 12, 2008 the Arts and Sciences Faculty at Harvard University voted unanimously to adopt an open access policy. "The Faculty of Arts and Sciences of Harvard University is committed to disseminating the fruits of its research and scholarship as widely as possible. In keeping with that commitment, the Faculty adopts the following policy: Each Faculty member grants to the President and Fellows of Harvard College permission to make available his or her scholarly articles and to exercise the copyright in those articles. ... The policy will apply to all scholarly articles written while the person is a member of the Faculty ... The Dean or the Dean's designate will waive application of the policy for a particular article upon written request by a Faculty member explaining the need." (Crawford, 2008) University repositories, online platforms for storing, preserving and offering access to digital information – articles, data, etc., have been slow in attracting submissions from faculty. Unlike the usual case with university repositories where faculty members make a conscious decision to deposit articles, at Harvard the faculty member must request a waiver to withhold an article. If the Harvard model is successful, and if faculties at other universities elect to follow its lead, we may well be approaching a turning point with respect to journal literature.

Furthermore, at Harvard the Library is central to the process, "The Harvard University Library will set up an Office for Scholarly Communication to make the open-access repository an instrument for access to research across all disciplines in the spirit of the "one-university" environment that the HOLLIS catalog now provides for holdings in all the libraries..." (Crawford, 2008)

What will the journal literature of the future look like? How much control will remain in the hands of publishers? Will open access eventually prevail over the field? Will print journals survive? Who will purchase them? How will peer review function? Might we have articles in disparate repositories with centralized indexing or tables of contents to bring together a journal issue? What role will the universities play and how will the academics respond? Whatever transpires, if the recent Harvard developments are any indication, libraries may well play a central role in absorbing and facilitating the transitions.

We are indeed experiencing an age of transitions and transformations with very profound implications for libraries. While it may be foolhardy to adopt far reaching changes without adequate preparation and supporting data, there is danger as well in being too slow to respond to the unfolding environment – the risk of becoming irrelevant. Many of us are accustomed to work in a slow, methodical, painstaking and exacting manner and we are proud of the quality and dependability of our product. Will we be able to sustain this quality and dependability? Does it matter? How will librarians be trained to meet the new paradigms? Will our Judaica libraries continue to maintain their distinctive character and how will that be manifested?

Finally, perhaps we ought to ask ourselves if there are new synergies, new areas of cooperation and partnership that Jewish libraries should explore as we design the contours of the Jewish library of the future.

Thank you.

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