

## SELECTION FOR AN ADULT JEWISH COLLECTION

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*Description:* How do I decide what to buy and where to buy it? What reference sources do I really need? How much do I spend on books, compared to videotapes, audiotapes, and compact discs? Speakers will discuss collection development policies, including the mission statement, management of donations, and weeding. They will present selection guidelines, resources for identifying and evaluating new materials and sources for purchasing. Maintenance of a current, relevant, balanced collection will be discussed.

**Merrily F. Hart** is a librarian at the Siegal College of Judaic Studies in Cleveland. A former synagogue librarian, she leads several book discussion groups. She has served as President of SSC, secretary of AJL, chair of the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee, and is currently chair of the Fanny Goldstein Award & Life Membership Committee. She is the author of *Creating a Collection: A Resource Booklist for a Beginning Judaic Library*. She was a co-chair of the 1997 AJL convention in Cleveland, and is outgoing President of the Greater Cleveland Chapter. Merrily received her MA in history from the University of California in Berkeley and her thesis from the University of Michigan. E-mail: [MFH3@adelphia.net](mailto:MFH3@adelphia.net) or [Mhart@siegalcollege.edu](mailto:Mhart@siegalcollege.edu).

The librarian needs to have an overall vision for the library collection. As you wrote your mission statement and selection policy you considered the nature and scope of your collection, what donations you should accept and what categories of books you should purchase. However, there are several other issues to bear in mind before you begin to select titles.

### **Beginning Considerations**

The library needs to include a good representation in all important subject areas. For lists of subject areas, consult *Creating a Collection: A Resource Booklist for a Beginning Judaic Library* (described below) or the AJL accreditation forms on the AJL website. The librarian also needs to have a definition of a Jewish book and/or a book appropriate to the library. Further, the librarian should:

1. Consult the mission statement of the relevant branch of Judaism for guidance.
2. Consider what books are needed to support your organization's programming, the religious school, the Sisterhood, (if you have a synagogue library), etc.
3. Know the approximate number of books you can afford to purchase.
4. Know how much room you have for new books. This could lead to a plan for weeding also.
5. Consider the formats you are willing to purchase. Periodicals are very expensive. Do the clergy and/or institution staff want certain periodicals available for their use and for the congregation's use? Do you have the magazines of your movement, which should be sent to you without charge? I.e. *Reform Judaism* (UAHC), or *United Synagogue Review*, or *Jewish Action* (Orthodox Union). Should you purchase the scholarly journal of your movement? Do your members want to read the *Jerusalem Report*? *Moment*? *Tikkun*? *Commentary*? Do you have a member or clergy who wants to (reliably) give you their journals after they have read them? See Barbara Raznick's *Basic Periodicals List for Jewish Libraries* (currently under revision) for titles to consider. Are you going to purchase, audiotapes, videotapes, CDs or software to loan?

6. Consider cooperative purchasing. If the budget is really tight, you may have a nearby library with which you can share. This works especially well for periodicals.
7. Decide what to do about literature/fiction. How much are you going to buy? Are you only going to buy fiction that you deem very good literature, books that will be last? How much modern fiction you can afford? It tends to be very popular, but after a year or two it sits on the shelf.
8. Consider how much “fluff,” popular but ephemeral, you’re willing to purchase (*Chicken Soup for the Jewish Soul*). How many Holocaust memoirs do you have money and space for? How many books do you need on spirituality, a very big theme in Jewish publishing right now? Some of it is good – some of it is mediocre. Can your patrons easily find these books in a nearby public library? Yet these books bring patrons into the library and, if that is also your goal, it may be worth spending the money on these titles.

### **Criteria for titles to purchase**

Consider Jewish content, accuracy, clarity, and subject area. The librarian hasn’t the time or expertise to read and evaluate all the adult Jewish books published so she must read reviews.

### **Lists of books for a Jewish collection**

Good sources for basic collection lists, include:

- Hart, Merrily F.: *Creating a Collection: A Resource Booklist for a Beginning Judaic Library*. NY: AJL, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., 2000.
- Raznick, Barbara: *A Basic Periodicals List for Jewish Libraries*. NY: AJL, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1996.(currently under revision)
- Reiter, Harriet: *Judaica: A Selected Annotated Bibliography for the College Library*. NY: AJL updated ed., 2001.
- Syme, Daniel and Cindy Frenkel Kanter: *One Hundred Essential Books for Jewish Readers*. NY: Carol Pub., 1998.
- Holtz, Barry W.: *The Schocken Guide to Jewish Books*. NY: Schocken, 1992.

Look at lists of award winning books. The National Jewish Book Award winners are listed in several places. The most recent awards are listed on [www.jewishbookcouncil.org](http://www.jewishbookcouncil.org). Several years’ awards are listed on the JTSA website. Consider the titles on “100 Greatest Works of Modern Jewish Literature” prepared by the Yiddish Book Center. It is an interesting and controversial list that covers only literature, but you should be aware of the titles ([www.jewishreader.org](http://www.jewishreader.org)), even if you only purchase a few of them.

### **Sources for identifying new books and for reviews**

#### ***Professional sources for reviews***

- *AJL Newsletter*: Reviews tend to be a bit late, but good. Published 4 times a year.
- *Jewish Book World*: (Jewish Book Council) Long reviews and some short reviews. Good for identifying titles you might have missed. Published 3 times a year.
- *Jewish Book Annual*: (Jewish Book Council) No longer very useful, but you should be aware of it.
- *Library Journal* [www.libraryjournal.com](http://www.libraryjournal.com) and *Booklist* [www.ala.org/booklist](http://www.ala.org/booklist) (American Library Association): Both are published twice a month. Even if you can’t afford these

expensive subscriptions, look at the websites. *Library Journal* always comes out with an annotated list “Best Books of the Year” in the fall and it always includes important titles for a Judaic library. *Booklist* has a similar list, “Booklist Editors’ Choice.” There is other useful information on their websites. Share a subscription with another librarian or try to look at it at the public library. For example *LJ*’s “Best books of 2001” include:

- Babel, Isaac. **The Complete Works of Isaac Babel**. Norton. Tr. by Peter Constantine. ISBN 0-393-04846-2. \$39.95.
  - Carroll, James. **Constantine’s Sword: The Church and the Jews; A History**. Houghton. ISBN 0-395-77927-8. \$28.
  - Gross, Jan T. **Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland**. Princeton Univ. ISBN 0-691-08667-2. \$19.95.
- *New York Times Book Review* and reviews in the daily *New York Times*: A very important source of reviews, available in print and online. I cannot function without the *New York Times*, but that may just be my own addiction.

However, most of the books you need are not on the lists of best books in the general press or the library press.

### ***Websites of Jewish organizations***

- The Jewish movements will help you. The Jewish Theological Seminary has outreach information on its website [www.jtsa.edu](http://www.jtsa.edu). Click on “Reading Opportunities” at [www.learn.jtsa.edu](http://www.learn.jtsa.edu) to find titles of the past and current “Book of the Month.” Readers can participate in online book discussions but, whether you choose to or not, all these books are important. Lists of recommendations by faculty may be too academic; however, some of them will be appropriate to your collection. There is a very good list of books for prospective rabbinical students. All conservative synagogues should own all these titles, and all Jewish libraries should own most of them.
- In November 1997, Rabbi Eric H. Yoffie unveiled an initiative to encourage every Reform Jew to read significant Jewish books a year. Since then, the UAHC ([www.uahc.org/books](http://www.uahc.org/books)) has selected eight volumes each year and prepared study guides for them. Some of these books are very popular, but most of them provide good information and are thought provoking and readable. The guides are very useful if you are considering organizing study or book discussion groups. Also click on “Building your Jewish Library.” Although this is a very basic booklist for a home library, most of these titles should be in your library.
- [www.ou.org](http://www.ou.org) is also a very extensive site, with lots of information, but it doesn’t seem to offer book suggestions or book lists other than those published by the Orthodox Union and a few associated publishers. Judaism 101, a link on this site, is very useful for finding answers to reference questions.
- All three organizations have the offerings of their publishing arm on their website.

## ***Periodicals***

- Be sure to read the periodicals your patrons and clergy read. These magazines have reviews and your patrons will come in and ask for these books! So be ready to buy them or decide why you aren't buying them so you have an answer for patrons.
- Widely read Jewish magazines which include books reviews include:
  - *Hadassah Magazine* (10x/yr)
  - *Reform Judaism* (quarterly)
  - *Women's League Outlook* (quarterly)
  - *Jewish Action* (Orthodox Union –includes reviews, current issue is also online)
  - Also look at *Commentary*, *Moment*, *Tikkun*, etc.

## ***Publisher's catalogs, fliers and websites***

- Jewish Lights [www.JewishLights.com](http://www.JewishLights.com)
- Jason Aronson [www.aronson.com](http://www.aronson.com)
- Jewish Publication Society [www.Jewishpub.org](http://www.Jewishpub.org)
- KTAV [www.ktav.com](http://www.ktav.com)

On these excellent websites the publisher highlights new books, includes long reviews or descriptions of books, etc. There is also a complete list of Jewish publishing houses at [www.avotaynu.com/ajbp.html](http://www.avotaynu.com/ajbp.html)

## ***Other websites***

- Other sources on the web include [www.MyJewishBooks.com](http://www.MyJewishBooks.com) which is also [www.SeferSafari.com](http://www.SeferSafari.com). The lists of new books are very useful and the reviews are a bit idiosyncratic, but usually on target. There are too many typos on this site, though.
- Finally, don't dismiss [www.Amazon.com](http://www.Amazon.com). You can get information on almost every title you are considering and the reviews are usually from *LJ*, *Publishers Weekly*, or *Booklist*.

## **Sources for purchasing used books:**

- [www.Abebooks.com](http://www.Abebooks.com) is easy to use and you buy directly from the bookseller
- <http://www.bookfinder.com/> similar to [www.Abebooks.com](http://www.Abebooks.com)
- Alibris also has a large stock of used books: <http://www.alibris.com/librarians/librarians-home.cfm>
- [www.antiquebooks.com](http://www.antiquebooks.com)
- Amazon (BiblioFind) may be more expensive and less useful

There was a series of e-mails on HaSafran regarding prices at sources for used books

You will notice I have not really given you directives. I haven't said you must buy this series or you must always consult that source, or you need everything on one particular list. But I will give you one hard and fast commandment. You must use the Internet in this day and age! It will make your life better and easier!

**Discussion following presentations**

- What is your experience using a jobber or standing order?
- Where do you buy your books?
- What do you do about CDs (sound or software), audiotapes, and videotapes?
- How much modern literature/fiction should you buy? Do we need an AJL list for literature?

## Collection Development: Selection for an Adult Jewish Collection

### From AJL:

*Creating a Collection: A Resource Booklist for a Beginning Judaic Library*, 2000

*Basic Periodicals List for Jewish Libraries*, 1996 (under revision)

*Judaica: A Selected Annotated Bibliography for the College Library*, 2001

### Jewish Collection Development:

Syme, Daniel & Cindy Frenkel Kanter: *One Hundred Essential Books for Jewish Readers*, Carol Pub., 1998.

Holtz, Barry W.: *The Schocken Guide to Jewish Books*, Schocken, 1992.

You can be overwhelmed with lists but consider titles awarded the National Jewish Book Award (most recent year listed at [www.jewishbookcouncil.org](http://www.jewishbookcouncil.org))

Yiddish Book Center's list of 100 Greatest Works of Modern Jewish Literature on their website at [www.Jewishreader.org](http://www.Jewishreader.org)

### Identifying new books & reviews:

*AJL Newsletter* 4/ year

*Jewish Book World* (Jewish Book Council), 3 /year

*Jewish Book Annual* (Jewish Book Council)

*Library Journal* [www.libraryjournal.com](http://www.libraryjournal.com) & *Booklist* [www.ala.org/booklist](http://www.ala.org/booklist) 2/month (American Library Association)

*New York Times Book Review* 4/month

*Hadassah Magazine* monthly

*Reform Judaism Magazine* (UAHC) 4/year, *Journal of Reform Judaism* (CCAR) 4/year;

*Women's League Outlook* 4/year, *Conservative Judaism* (JTS & Rabbinical Assembly) 4/year;

*Jewish Action* (Orthodox Union) 4/year -- *Tradition* (RCA) 4/year

[www.jtsa.edu](http://www.jtsa.edu) especially [www.learn.jtsa.edu](http://www.learn.jtsa.edu)

[www.uahc.org/books](http://www.uahc.org/books)

[www.ou.org](http://www.ou.org)

### Publishers' catalogues, fliers and websites:

Jewish Lights [www.JewishLights.com](http://www.JewishLights.com)

Jason Aronson [www.aronson.com](http://www.aronson.com) (follows Amazon model with reviews, etc.)

Jewish Publication Society [www.Jewishpub.org](http://www.Jewishpub.org)

Ktav [www.ktav.com](http://www.ktav.com)

Jewish Publishers listed at [www.avotaynu.com/ajbp.html](http://www.avotaynu.com/ajbp.html)

[www.MyJewishBooks.com](http://www.MyJewishBooks.com)

**Used books:** [www.Abebooks.com](http://www.Abebooks.com) (easy to use & you buy directly from the bookseller);

<http://www.bookfinder.com/>

<http://www.alibris.com/librarians/librarians-home.cfm>

[www.antiquebooks.com](http://www.antiquebooks.com)