
*On the Edge of the Holocaust* describes how five Latin American intellectuals, important writers and diplomats, took a stand against Hitlerism. The author is Professor Emeritus of Hispanic Studies at Marymount Manhattan College, and an internationally recognized Borges scholar. She explains how Jorge Luis Borges, Clarice Lispector, Alberto Gerchunoff, Joao Guimaraes Rosa and Gabriela Mistral, interpreted the Shoah, and how they were impacted by and responded to the Nazi phenomena. She demonstrates the various ways in which the Shoah stimulated new forms of narration, journalism and poetry, as well as how to interpret these authors’ works in the light of the Holocaust. Extensive footnotes are supplied, together with quotes from the works under examination (in Spanish with English translation), and a detailed index. This is a valuable contribution to Latin American and Holocaust studies, and a useful, recommended addition to Judaica collections in academic and high school libraries.

Susan Freiband, Retired Library Educator and Volunteer Temple Librarian, Arlington, VA

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Much of the literature associated with 12-step programs has a similar format: a reading for each day of the year that includes a quote, some discussion relating to the quotes, and questions to think about or use as a prompt for writing. Rabbi Borowitz structures his book around the weekly Torah portion, starting with a quote and then examining the words and applying them to life’s challenges. Three questions follow each discussion. For *Parshat Bemidbar*, a line about how the tribes camp and display their flags leads to thoughts about one’s place in the world and making the world a better place. For *Parshat Metzora*, Borowitz compares the procedure used by Kohanim to heal those afflicted with tzaraat (skin disease) to that of recovering addicts, who must also “combine right action, right attitude and divine grace” to recover. The back matter includes an Afterword, the Twelve Steps, an extended calendar of the weekly Torah readings, a detailed glossary, and suggestions for further reading.

*Finding Recovery* provides structured daily learning for anyone “seeking a deeper connection with themselves, with their communities and with God.” Glaringly absent is the last *parsha* of the Torah – *V’Zot Habracha*, although this *parsha* is usually read on *Simchat Torah* and not according to the weekly schedule. This book is for those in 12-step programs who have identified God as their “Higher Power” and are looking to add something Jewish to their readings, and for those interested in growth through Torah – taking the lessons of the text and applying them to daily life. A solid choice for all Jewish libraries, especially those serving people in recovery.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel


Daniel Boyarin – a fascinating and iconoclastic professor of Talmud – offers his latest against-the-grain reading of the Sages, this time arguing that rabbinic texts in general and Babylonian Talmudic texts in particular view Talmudic study itself as a portable homeland, one that grounds national identity in the religious act of study rather than in control of territory or political sovereignty. Moreover, he argues that many rabbinic passages imagine the destruction of the Temple and the geographic and cultural dispersion that came with it not as a tragedy and divine punishment, but as a blessing that enabled study and the transmission of Torah. This is part and parcel of Boyarin’s larger intellectual project, to ground his post-Zionist vision of a weak and “feminine” Judaism in classical Jewish sources.

His readings are sensitive and very often intriguing. He creatively mines, for example, the medieval story of the “four captives,” a legend according to which four great rabbis are taken captive as they sail to Babylonia to study. These rabbis end up dispersed throughout Jewish communities outside of Babylonia, thereby establishing decentralized Torah centers. In these close readings, every detail of this legend helps imagine and celebrate a geographically diverse and politically decentralized Jewish community. Despite some convincing textual interpretations, Boyarin’s larger claim remains unconvincing, both due to the numerous other texts that present diaspora as catastrophic punishment and because he sometimes downplays those themes in the very texts he does read.

Yoel Finkelman


This book explores the relationship between Hebrew and Yiddish in the twentieth century. It begins with the brief period of Jewish creativity in Weimar Berlin in the 1920’s. It then covers the visit of Yiddish luminaries Sholem Ash and Perets Hirshbeyn to Palestine and the reaction that ensued. After examining the work of Zalman Shneour and Y.D. Berkovitz, two traditional writers who “self-
translated” in the prewar era, the book concludes with a look at Yiddish and Hebrew after the Holocaust. This book treats the interaction of the two languages from a literary standpoint, considering the venues for literature in both languages in the periods and countries where they were being read. The author analyzes several examples of poetry and prose in minute detail. She discusses the debates and theories about translation between the languages throughout the twentieth century. In addition to her own meticulous investigation of the particular bilingualism and translanguaging of these Jewish languages, she synthesizes all the modern research on this subject. This is an academic work that presupposes familiarity with the languages and writers under discussion. Highly recommended for academic collections on language, literature, and translation studies.

Beth Dwoskin, Proquest (Retired), Library Committee Chair, Beth Israel Congregation, Ann Arbor, MI


This book is an example of modern scholarship’s turn to the subject of New World Jews. Instead of examining the history of the Jewish presence in the Caribbean, it looks at how that history has been described in literature. This fascinating subject will introduce the reader to many new writers and new concepts. It focuses on the Sephardic experience and the mixed black and Jewish ethnicity of so many modern Caribbean people. The writers discussed here offer a way of looking at Afro-Caribbean-Jewish relations unfamiliar to the Ashkenazic, North American experience, and sometimes in contrast with the real history of the Caribbean, where Jews were “both agents and victims of imperialism”. Among the more well-known writers analyzed here are Derek Walcott and Jamaica Kincaid. Though Casteel quotes her subjects extensively, the reader who is unfamiliar with the works in question will be at somewhat of a loss. The author liberally uses the academic terminology of current literary analysis, and the subject fits in perfectly with the modern academic emphasis on post-colonialism, which is unlikely to interest the general reader. This book is highly recommended for academic libraries, especially those seeking to build or enhance a collection of material about New World Jewry. The bibliography can serve as purchasing hand-list for those who are interested in the subject matter.

Beth Dwoskin, Proquest (retired), Library Committee Chair, Beth Israel Congregation, Ann Arbor, MI


Rabbi Pinchas Cohen, a Jewish educator at Yeshivat Har Etzion in Israel, delivers a succinct and clear manual of the Jewish dietary laws. This is a topic that Rabbi Cohen teaches at the Yeshivat Har Etzion. As he writes in his introduction, he based his rulings “in part on the teachings of [his] esteemed rabbis, as well as on classical and contemporary halakhic literature.” He tried to include “more lenient approaches [to Halakhah] while still acting within the confines of halakhah.” Cohen reviews the mishaps in the kitchen, the laws of separation of meat and milk, the laws of immersing utensils, the separation of challah from dough, and the tithing of fruits and vegetables. The perspective presented in the book is fully consistent with Modern Orthodoxy, chiefly in Israel. The book ends with a four-page glossary of Hebrew terms. It will appeal mostly to the English-speaking Orthodox public in Israel, less to the Orthodox observant Jew in the Diaspora, and as a document on the Jewish dietary laws everywhere. Recommended for large University libraries and Orthodox synagogue libraries.

Roger S. Kohn, Silver Spring, MD.


A serious book on a tragic topic: “this book examines efforts to rehabilitate Jewish children and reconstruct Jewish families that had been fractured by the war … how children became objects of struggle
as French Jews and non-Jews reassessed their vision of France in the wake of Vichy ... how Jewish social workers, child welfare experts, and communal leaders working and writing in postwar France pinned their hopes and fears on the French Jewish community’s surviving thirty thousand Jewish youth.” The scope is quite narrow, focusing on Jewish youth in France; and it exploits one specific archival source for each chapter, including such sources as court custody disputes, children’s homes records, and conference proceedings on mental health. Doron excels at analyzing specific events, such as “l’affaire Finaly” (1945-1953) in which two boys were kidnapped and taken to Spain after baptism by the foster mother; or the fate of the Buchenwald boys (among them the writer Elie Wiesel; Rabbis Naphtali Lau-Lavie and Menashe Klein, and the Israeli official and diplomat Israel Meir Lau). The book is marred by incorrect French transliterations, misspellings of personal names, and some wrong characterizations, and it would have been much improved from the care of a good copy editor. Recommended to academic libraries.

Roger S. Kohn, Silver Spring, MD


Hidden Treasures from Europe is a research work supported by The Israel Science Foundation, grant no.250/09. The work analyzes many thousands of Hebrew pages that were torn from various old Hebrew manuscripts and used for book bindings and as folders for archive files. These treasures are appropriately called the European “Geniza.”

In 1863, six pages from the Babylonian Talmud were discovered in the book binding of a volume from Vienna. A year later, Rashi’s commentary on the Books of Daniel and Ezra was found in another Viennese bookbinding. In 1912, the Vienna National Library tried to catalog and organize these and other findings emerging from within their collections. Many other such discoveries, in diverse publications across multiple libraries, encouraged the establishment, in 2007, of the organization of “Books within Books: Hebrew Fragments in European Libraries” (http://www.hebrewmanuscript.com). The three main goals of the researchers include: locating and identifying the voluminous Hebrew documents that are hidden in book bindings in Europe from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries; cataloging this material; reconstituting the manuscripts to their original state.

Hidden Treasures from Europe is a well-structured study of these rediscovered manuscripts; it concludes with an erudite bibliography and well-prepared indexes. The book will be useful in academic libraries, yeshivot, and synagogue collections.

Nira Wolfe, Highland Park, IL


A warmly narrated story not only about Judaism’s history of giyur (proselytism or conversion), but also the evolutionary development of the Hebrew people as Jews. Epstein, a professor emeritus from Suffolk County Community College, has a publishing record reflecting Jewish thought and culture. While not sourced directly in the text, the book’s collection of references found at the end will assist the reader in learning the history of converts to Judaism from Ruth in biblical times to the present and the likes of Elizabeth Taylor and Sammy Davis, Jr. In each of the eight chapters, Epstein through the use of anecdotes and rabbinic thought and commentary, supplemented by discussions, covers the debates within the Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox communities regarding the advisability and opposition to conversion. This is a good contribution for a synagogue library that has an interested audience from young adults to adults, interested or somehow involved with the intricacies of the history of Judaism and the role of conversion in it. Similarly, the wealth of information provided would serve any Chavurah (Fellowship) a treasure trove of topics.

Sanford R. Silverburg, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC

*The Dream of Zion* combines popular history with commentary. The former is more compelling than the latter, and the historical core of the work is found in only two of the six chapters. These deal with the preparations for the First Zionist Congress and the events of Congress itself. Dr. Epstein (an emeritus professor of English) spends a lot of time musing about the morality of Zionism (which he defends) and discussing, in a nuanced way, the lack of attention paid to the Arab residents in the Land of Israel by Herzl and other early Zionists. Most of Dr. Epstein’s other remarks are not nearly as interesting.

Regarding Herzl, the author has both praise and criticism, but the overall picture that emerges is positive. This is a book written with conviction but of middling quality; an unnecessary purchase, especially for those libraries which have good biographies of Herzl.

Shmuel Ben-Gad, Gelman Library, George Washington University


Many written histories of Israel fail to include the human element. Eric Gartman tries to rectify this problem with his book *Return to Zion: The History of Modern Israel.* Beginning with a detailed preface, Gartman says he “wishes to tell the history of Israel in a way that explains why the existence of the Jewish state raises the passions that it does.” (page xiii).

Beginning with Masada, the last Jewish stronghold from Temple times and continuing with the evolution of modern Zionism and the history of Israel until the second Intifada, Gartman succeeds in bringing the human element into the history of Israel. With maps, a detailed bibliography, endnotes and an index, this book deserves its place in the lexicon of Comprehensive modern Israeli histories. This book is highly recommended for libraries that have a strong emphasis on Israeli history whether they be academic or school libraries.

Laura Schutzman, Hebrew Academy of Nassau County, Nathan and Doris Liebman Memorial Library, Uniondale, NY


The mishnaic tractate *Pirkei Avot* (The Ethics of the Fathers), is traditionally studied on Shabbat afternoons in the summer between Passover and Shavuot or up until Rosh Hashanah, and it has inspired hundreds of commentaries. Here, Rabbi Irving (Yitz) Greenberg presents a new translation and commentary to Avot, to make it “available to the broader public as well as those who have grown up with a rabbinic Jewish heritage.”

Greenberg has been at the forefront of a progressive Modern Orthodoxy. He states his goal as presenting the rabbinic wisdom from a contemporary perspective, relating it to today’s challenges, but here both his history and commentary are fairly traditional. He was educated in a musar yeshivah where Avot is considered an important text for shaping character and ethical traits. He admits he is not presenting critical biographies but serving up the lives and teachings of the sages as paradigms of how to live a good life, how to be a mensch.

The book opens with a good overall introductory essay, and throughout his commentary Greenberg provides “thumbnail sketches” of the lives of the rabbis whose wisdom is presented in Avot. The new translation reads smoothly. While providing some mishnayot with a line by line commentary, some mishnayot are treated extensively and others only briefly. Footnotes mainly reference biblical sources cited in the text. Providing a bibliography of sources for further study would have been useful.

Overall, Greenberg’s commentary succeeds in distilling the essential ethical teaching and meaning in each individual mishnah, as well as providing an introduction to the lives of the rabbinic sages. It achieves its goals as an introduction to the study of *Pirkei Avot.* I recommend it for all Judaic libraries.

Harvey Sukenic, Hebrew College Library, Newton Centre, MA
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way to usher in the beauty of Shabbat?

—Rabbi Shmuel Herzfeld, Ohev Shalom, the National Synagogue

How does a sacred work become authoritative? *The Zohar* is often labelled the definitive work of Jewish mysticism, yet its canonical status has been widely and passionately debated from its earliest appearance to the present day. While much of academic scholarship on the Zohar focuses on its authorship, Huss instead focuses on how the material of the zoharic corpus was compiled and formed into the book we have today. He painstakingly tracks the history of attitudes toward the Zohar and the types of arguments used for and against its acceptance. There are only minor differences from the original Hebrew edition and the English translation is very readable. Highly recommended for academic libraries.

Daniel Scheide, Florida Atlantic University


This work is devoted to the history of the Maccabiah Games or the “Jewish Olympics.” Just like the Olympics, the Maccabiah Games brings leading athletes from around the world to Israel to engage in sporting competitions. The Maccabiah Games are an integral part of the story of the Jewish people in the 20th century and the history of Israel as well. The book is organized chronologically and each chapter is devoted to one of the “Games.” Additional reference material in the back is very interesting and could be helpful for research on Jews in sports; statistics about the “Games” and interviews with athletes are also woven into each chapter. Graphics used to publicize the “Maccabiah Games” provide engaging visuals. The writing is clear and informative and the tone upbeat. Overall, a very enjoyable book recommended for Jewish libraries.

Debbie Feder, Director, Ida Crown Jewish Academy


While ostensibly a study of medieval halalakah, Menachem Kellner’s latest work is a polemic against xenophobia in the contemporary Jewish world. While Kellner usually writes in English, he chose to present this study in Hebrew as an attempt to combat the disturbing trend in Israeli Orthodox society of presenting non-Jews as inherently inferior. Sandwiched between the strongly-worded attacks on racist rabbinic leaders in the introduction and conclusion are close readings of Maimonides’ *Mishneh Torah* and other works highlighting the Rambam’s universalism. While there are no revolutionary insights into the thought of the Rambam, it is a timely and important work and highly recommended for university and yeshiva collections.

Daniel Scheide, Florida Atlantic University


Although this book is not a complete *siddur* (prayer book), it offers “a portal to the world of prayer.” First there are daily prayers, then a section with Grace After Meals (the “ultimate gratitude machine”). Prayers specific to Shabbat, like the blessing upon lighting candles and the Kiddush over wine are followed by a selection of prayers of a more specific nature. Five of the Psalms that are recited quite frequently are also included. These chapters are arranged with a short introduction, the words of the prayer in Hebrew, the words transliterated into English, and an English translation. After this is included a “Dear God” paragraph, where the author fleshes out the theme of the prayer or makes it more relatable to contemporary life, like when expounding on the Amidah for Shabbat: “You gifted Shabbat to us with love—because You love...
us, and You wanted us to have the gift of rest, of serenity, of getting off the hamster wheel once a week ...” A conclusion entitled “When God Says No,” and an excellent annotated recommended reading list are included at the end of the book.

Ruchi Koval is the co-founder and director of the Jewish Family Experience in Cleveland, as well as a popular lecturer and teacher. Her interpretations can facilitate a deeper connection to God and prayer (“Even the sounds of the waves crashing and the breeze blowing are a form of praise to you.”). The “Various Prayers” include many that are specific to women: a prayer to recite after a miscarriage or stillbirth, a prayer for raising special needs children, and a prayer for the health and success of one’s husband. The prayer “When Hearing of a Tragedy” is poignant and unfortunately pertinent for today. More suited to private purchase than library acquisition; it is a good option for Jewish Outreach Center libraries or those libraries that collect books about women’s prayer.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh Israel


Koenigsberg, not a professional archaeologist by training, has devoted years of study and digging on Mount Ebal, in the vicinity of the city of Nablus in the West Bank (biblical Shechem). The central thesis of the book is that the first Temple was not in Jerusalem, but rather was built on Mount Ebal. Koenigsberg further states that Shiloh was the site of the second Temple. In the book, he turns to Deuteronomy, the Mishnah, and other sources such as Maimonides to provide textual proof for his claims. For example, he places great significance on the words in Deuteronomy 27:4: “upon crossing the Jordon, you shall set up stones, about which I charge you this day, on Mount Ebal, and coat them with plaster.”

The book would be of interest to archeology buffs because it makes the subject interesting and leads to speculation of all kinds. For the professional, there are no footnotes or bibliography to examine. *The Lost Temple of Israel* can spark an interest in the settlement period and the Book of Joshua which can be overlooked in bible study.

Ellen Share, Washington Hebrew Congregation Librarian, Washington, DC


In 1973, when author Kushner was four years old, his eleven-year-old brother, Jon, was murdered near the family home in Tampa, Florida. In this memoir, Kushner revisits his memories and his understanding of this horrible event at different stages of his life. His four-year-old memories focus on the crowds of people around the family; the neighbors who came out to search for Jon, the police, and the congregants who brought over food and sat vigil. When his brother’s body was found, he was not told the details of Jon’s death and Kushner just remembers feeling confused that his brother was not coming back.

As he grew older, his parents focused on maintaining a happy home life for him and his older brother Andy and kept their grief private. Kushner described the bittersweet occasion of his bar mitzvah; knowing that he was older than Jon had lived to be. The story remained in the news over the years and other kids at school started telling him details, real and imagined, about Jon’s death. He pieced together some of the facts, but did not feel comfortable asking his parents for the truth.

As an adult with children of his own, Kushner decided to put his writing and research skills to use to find out what happened to his brother, his community, and the murderers. While a heart-breaking story, this book shows the importance and struggle of attempting to move past a tragedy. Highly recommended.

Sheryl Stahl, Senior Associate Librarian, Frances-Henry Library, HUC-JIR, Los Angeles.
Reviews of Nonfiction Titles for Adults

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**The Gate of Tears: Sadness and the Spiritual Path**

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**Lewando, Fania. The Vilna Vegetarian Cookbook: Garden-Fresh Recipes Rediscovered and Adapted for Today’s Kitchen, Schocken, 2015. 272 pp. $30.00. (9780805243277).**

YIVO scholar Eve Jochonowitz translates and updates Fania Lewando’s 1938 vegetarian cookbook for a modern audience. In 1938, Fania Lewando ran a kosher vegetarian-dietetic restaurant in Vilna Lithuania, and she produced her own cookbook which included recipes ranging from traditional Jewish dishes to new recipes using produce never seen before in Jewish cuisine. Lewando also used her cookbook to write about the benefits of vegetarianism.

A wonderful introduction to the book provides a history of the work. During her lifetime, Lewando’s cookbook sold well in Europe, but after she died during WWII, the book disappeared and was only re-discovered in 1995. when a couple came across a copy in an antiquarian book sale and donated it to YIVO.

This new edition of the cookbook is like the original: practical and user-friendly, and a good deal of the original artwork appears throughout. The recipes cover most areas of cooking; they are all kosher and vegetarian which makes this a great addition to any collection of kosher cookbooks. This book is recommended for Jewish libraries.

Debbie Feder, Director, Ida Crown Jewish Academy

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*How Free Will Works* is a serious investigation into the subject of free will and choice. Lieberman bases his conclusions upon a range of Jewish and universal sources; the source material is provided in notes at the bottom of every page.

Following a short Introduction, the book is divided into two main sections: 1. The structure of free will (7 parts divided into 25 chapters); 2. Dreams into action (4 parts divided into 15 chapters). Each section and each part opens
Reviews of Nonfiction Titles for Adults

with an abstract. The book has no Index, though there is a Glossary.

*How Free Will Works* is a useful reference book. It encompasses all aspects of life and directs the human being on how to achieve his full potential and in a logical way. The book will enhance all academic, public and synagogue libraries, as well as personal collections.

*Nira Wolfe, Highland Park, IL*


This 9th volume (spanning Bamidbar to Devarim) expertly translated by Daniel C. Matt clarifies a difficult subject for the thoughtful English reader. A leading academic authority on this obtuse text frees the reader from the errors, omissions, misrepresentations, and censoring of passages common among previous and current popular translations.

For anyone unable to access the original Aramaic of the Zohar, Matt offers the best academic translation of the text which, together with his running notes, make the text more easily accessible and understandable. Matt’s text is the most authoritative English version based directly on the source, unearthing many of the major surviving manuscript versions.

Rabbinic wisdom enjoins not only one to seek and quest for the truth, but to “buy” the truth. Acquiring this set of the Pritzker Zohar for all libraries is perhaps a first step “on the way” to that goal of the journey, but with all things Jewish, *Lefum Tzaara Agra* (According to the effort is the reward). Highly recommended for all libraries.

*David B Levy, Touro College*


For those who stutter, every interaction can be fraught with anxiety, and those afflicted often find themselves defined by their lack of speech fluency. Moe Mernick took the challenges of his life circumstances and has thrived as a businessman and public speaker. As a child, Mernick was ridiculed and despite excellent speech therapy, his stutter was not completely “cured.” Adding more stress to the teenage years, when fitting in and defining oneself are important aspects of growing up, Mernick found himself in a dark place. Moving from Canada to go to school in Israel, he embraced the spirituality of Safed and found himself questioning many of his assumptions. He came to the conclusion that God must have given him his challenges for a reason. Realizing his stutter was just a small part of a multi-dimensional person, Mernick developed his skills and talents. As a public speaker, he quickly outed the “elephant in the room” by introducing himself and telling the audience he stuttered. He has worked in outreach, education, and high tech.

His memoir details his development from childhood to adulthood. Much like Katherine Preston’s *Out with It: How Stuttering Helped Me Find My Voice* (Atria Books, 2013), readers will be inspired to look at their own handicaps or challenges as a way to grow personally and spiritually. The beginning is somewhat slow and repetitive, but the reader is soon engaged and anticipating a happy ending. While the author is Jewish and discusses his bar mitzvah and his spiritual journey, the book will have universal appeal and is a solid purchase for all libraries.

*Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel*


Gates of Tears explores “ordinary sadness,” not depression, defined by Michaelson as “part of the oscillations of mood which are part of the ebb and flow of the human experience.” Michaelson speaks from personal experience, acknowledging that he “confronted, wrestled with, and finally allowed [himself] to be defeated by, the sadness and loneliness that would often arise when the chatter of [his]
mind subsided.” The book is divided into three parts: “Opening” is about yielding to the unpleasant sadness, where Michaeleson draws chiefly from the Buddhist meditative tradition; “Listing” is about sadness and its teachings, and “Merging” is the more religious section, drawing partially from the teachings of Hassidic masters, showing “the ways sadness can be a gateway to realization.” Although the book has a bibliography at the end, it is not scholarly but rather a collection of musings around sadness with side-trips to bird watching, being gay, pop music, and other themes. Sometimes the book reads like a collection of creative writings commenting on the works of contemporary musicians, poets, and theologians. The writing is uneven, drab here, charming there, but overall worth reading. Recommended to all who ever experienced sadness and want to explore it more deeply.

Roger S. Kohn, Silver Spring, MD.


This classical festschrift with its diverse range of essays was prepared in honor of Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks upon his retirement. Such an honor is highly deserved given his world reputation as a scholar, speaker and thinker. All of the authors in the second section on Anglo-Jewry have some sort of connection to Rabbi Sacks, either as a student, mentor or colleague. They all acknowledge and thank him for his role in making them better rabbis or scholars.

The subjects range from the practical to the philosophical. For example: Rabbi Mendel Cohen addresses the question of buying German goods, an issue that was raised in the 1950s when Jews would refuse to buy German goods in response to World War II and the German boycotts of Jewish goods. This book is highly readable even for non-scholars. Recommended for all libraries—academic, synagogue, school, and personal.

Daniel D. Stuhlman, Chicago, IL


Born in The Hague in October 1942, Joseph Polak survived the Holocaust, but has few memories of Westerbork or Bergen-Belsen because he was so young. In this short and powerful memoir, Polak shows, “mostly through the memories of post-war years, that with respect to the Holocaust, you never ‘get over it’.” Polak describes his visits to the transit camp, concentration camp and Troebitz, where the train from Bergen-Belsen was liberated by the Russians and where his father died from typhus. As he tries to conjure memories in these places, he questions “what does it mean to witness an event which by your very survival, you negate?” You have to depend on others to give you an account of what happened. His first real memory is of being taken from Troebitz to Leipzig and then by train to Holland, where he is adopted by a Dutch-Jewish family. Later that year he is reunited with his mother, who is recuperating in a Dutch hospital. He and his mother moved to Montreal in 1948, where he grew up surrounded by other survivors. Besides Polak’s personal story, one learns about life in the Netherlands before, during and after the war.

A chronology and several photos add perspective, and accounts from other survivors help Polak tell his own story. A stand out on the subject matter, it is very highly recommended for all Jewish libraries and a good book club choice with many points for discussion.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel


This excellent biography illuminates for the first time in English the life and work of the great Catholic scholar, Johann Reuchlin. Reuchlin was remarkable for his time (15th-16th century) in advocating the study of Jewish texts in their original languages and for his defense of Jewish books against censorship.
Reviews of Nonfiction Titles for Adults

Posset has an international reputation as a Catholic Luther scholar, particularly his work on the theology and history of the Renaissance and Reformation. His Reuchlin biography is deeply researched and draws upon a large corpus of letters written by Reuchlin. In addition, he explores the potential of using this biography to further advance respectful dialogue between Catholics and Jews. The timing of its publication coincides with the 50th anniversary of the Declaration on Relations with the Jews of the Second Vatican Council in 1965. Recommended for academic libraries, for scholars of anti-Semitism and theology, and for any reader interested in the study and promotion of Jewish Christian relations.

David B Levy, Touro College, NYC


Considered to be one of the leading authorities on the Samaritans, Reinhard Pummer sets out to demonstrate “...how the community dwindled from a substantial entity to a minute group which nevertheless succeeded in preserving its identity and traditions into the present.” He outlines the contemporary dilemmas they face and evaluates the community’s potential for continuity in the future.

The work opens with a brief survey of recent literature in the field and a presentation of differing views regarding the origins of the group. He describes the Samaritan awareness of themselves as the true Israelites (he does not use the Samaritan’s own term shomrim) from whom the Jews split prior to the monarchy and includes the traditional Jewish view that the Samaritans are a “mixed people” whose religion was distorted by the Assyrian settlement of foreign peoples in the Northern kingdom. Finally, he considers recent scholarly opinions. Thereafter, a large part of the book is devoted to an historical survey and an examination of demographic changes over the centuries. Pummer also dedicates chapters to the Samaritan scriptures and other writings and to descriptions of their liturgy, festivals and life cycle practices.

With regard to demography Pummer explains that it is difficult to assess historical changes because the best estimates come from those who overcame the Samaritans in battle or by forced conversions. In the last two decades however, the numbers have increased to over 750. The population is split between the cities of Nablus (West Bank) and Holon (Israel). The reason for the upturn in Samaritan numbers, he explains, is intermarriage with Jewish women. This circumstance brings to the fore the main issue confronting the Samaritans: how can a community preserve the essence of its faith, while at the same time adapting its traditions and way of life to the changes occurring around them?

Pummer’s book is a well-referenced, readily-accessible work, which relies on literary, epigraphic, and archaeological resources. The bibliography is extensive and there are some illustrations. It provides a welcome academic introduction to Samaritan studies.

Randall C. Belinfante – Director of Library and Archives-American Sephardi Federation


This book is sure to please a wide variety of readers: feminists, musicians, historians and any other reader who enjoys a good story, well written and well told.

In the late 1930s, when women and ethnic minority musicians were excluded from conducting and performing in professional symphony orchestras, the world needed someone as talented, charismatic, and tenacious as Ethel Stark to show everyone that women were as capable as anyone else to perform. Returning to her home in Montreal, Canada, Ethel decided to organize an orchestra made up of women, conducted by a women and managed by women. The orchestra was also open to any woman, regardless of class, race, language and age.

The Montreal Women’s Symphony Orchestra was, in 1940, the only all-women symphony orchestra in North America. Ethel Stark, a professional violinist and the orchestra conductor, faced formidable challenges, first as a woman and furthermore as a Jewish musician, at a time when anti-Semitic attitudes...
were common in Montreal. The passion of the orchestra members and their love for music, however, united them to excel and become the first Canadian orchestra to be invited to perform in New York’s Carnegie Hall. This book is highly recommended for all libraries.

Sonia Smith, McGill University, Montreal, Canada


When a marriage ends, everything changes for the immediate family, as well as the extended family, friends, and members of the community. A collection organized into ten parts, the essays are written from many perspectives: wives, husbands, children, parents of divorcees, and more. They deal with challenges like loneliness, handling social situations, interaction with an ex, and handing discipline. In “Payday,” Shifra Gutskind writes about her son’s bar mitzvah (without his father) and the rebbe and classmates that went out of their way to make it a simcha (joyous occasion). “Choosing Every Day” is Chaya Cohen’s description of saying the formulaic “I’m doing fine...” as a child, and how sad she felt while putting up a brave front. Aviva Weissman discusses how her parents’ divorce had both a positive and negative impact on how she interacts with her husband, concluding that “parental modeling is very strong and continues to affect our entire lives, but chiseling out a new way for yourself has a beauty and power of its own.” The “Better instead of Bitter” section includes practical advice from Jewish educators, rebbetzins (rabbis’ wives), and mental health professionals. Four appendices have information on finances, dealing with the holidays, how teachers can help their students, and a detailed resource list.

Although there are many books about the halachot (laws) related to divorce and even more books about improving one’s marriage, this book is unique in providing multiple perspectives, discussing real issues in a common-sense way, and addressing the range of emotions anyone touched by a divorce can experience. A short poem appears at the beginning of each section (on a reprint, they should be reformatted to fit on one page instead of having to turn the page for two lines). While written by Orthodox authors and published by an Orthodox press, the advice and the sentiment are universal. With approbations from noted Orthodox rabbis and teachers, Healing from the Break is an essential purchase for family service resource centers and recommended for all Jewish libraries.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel


This memoir describes the life and accomplishments of a deeply Orthodox Jewish educator and community leader in the United States and Israel. Daughter of a prominent Orthodox rabbi, educator and scholar, Irving Bunim, Chana presents her life story, highlighting important people, events and decisions of her childhood, teens, college years, marriages, family, teaching and involvement in community organizations. The book, written when she was in her eighties, concludes with a chapter on her children and grandchildren. There is a glossary of Hebrew terms and family photographs. The memoir would be of most interest to those in the Orthodox community who know of or have some connection with the author or her family. It is not an appropriate choice for Judaica collections in academic libraries, Temple, synagogue, school or public libraries, except those which serve large Orthodox communities.

Susan Freiband, Retired Library Educator and Volunteer Temple Librarian, Arlington, VA


It has been almost 35 years since Melvin Urofsky’s biography of Rabbi Stephen S. Wise. A new full-length examination of the mid-century’s most prominent American Jewish leader is in order, and Rabbi Rudin provides us with a worthy study.
The bulk of the narrative is on Rabbi Wise’s fascinating life. Each chapter focuses on either a time period or a topic. Rudin portrays Wise’s rabbinate in Portland, Oregon from 1900-1906 as important, but does not delve into his deep involvement in social services there. The book discusses the Emanu-El controversy, but does not uncover any new data. Several chapters cover Wise as the creator of the Free Synagogue and the Jewish Institute of Religion, through which he re-defined Reform Judaism for the 20th century. Rudin describes Wise’s whirlwind of activity between 1920 and 1945, when he seemed to take part in every significant issue. The volume examines Wise’s deep commitment to Zionism, including his opposition to Chaim Weizmann after World War I. It extensively covers Wise’s role as “America’s Rabbi” during the 1930s, including his relationship with President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his early stance against the Nazis. This continued through World War II, when Wise publicized the Shoah while the government refused to officially acknowledge its existence. Alongside Wise himself, Rudin provides valuable information on numerous institutions and people, including the Ethical Culture Society; Justice Louis Brandeis; and Wise’s best friend John Haynes Holmes.

*Pillar of Fire* includes numerous, often extensive quotations from Wise’s powerful speeches and letters. Overall, it provides a friendly and complete overview, but it does not substantially expand what scholars already know. Despite this, it should be in all academic libraries, and in synagogues that can afford it.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA


Miriam Peretz, known as the “Mother of the Boys,” represents a true symbol of a stoic mother having lost two of her sons in warfare. First Lieutenant Uriel Peretz (1976-1998) was killed in Lebanon. Twelve years later, her second son, Major Eliraz Peretz (1978-2010) was killed in an exchange of fire in Gaza Strip. She attributes the death of her beloved husband to “heartbreak.” She and her husband with trepidation gave the second son, Eliraz, permission to serve in an elite fighting unit. Permission is required by the IDF because their first son was killed in uniform. The book is a tour-de-force in expressing the sadness and loss of losing children. Peretz now spends her time volunteering for the IDF by giving lectures and classes. *Miriam’s Song* expresses her pain and anguish, yet there is still joy in her life especially when spending time with her remaining children, their spouses and grandchildren. She was born a Moroccan Jew, and she overcame prejudice toward Moroccan Jews to become an outstanding educator which included many years as a principal of a school. No politics or political positions are taken in the book. This book has similarities to *Raquela: A Woman of Israel* by Ruth Gruber which is the story of an Israeli woman who was a dedicated nurse and helped to make advances in infant care and children’s health. Both stories highlight Israeli women of outstanding character, professional accomplishment, dedication, and a total devotion to country and family.

Ellen Share, Washington Hebrew Congregation Librarian, Washington, DC


In 1942, at the age of 20, Marie Jalowicz became a “U-Boat” - a Jew living underground in Nazi Germany. This picaresque memoir recreates her experiences zigzagging through wartime Berlin and often hiding in plain sight.

Among Holocaust survivors’ stories, this one stands out for a nuanced and sympathetic portrayal of the Germans—some, fervent Nazis; many, resisters who offered shelter. As the daughter of a respectable family, Marie was forced to dwell in lower-class neighborhoods among vulgar, deviant, or colorful characters. “I must tread carefully,” she writes, “and adjust with lightning speed to the habits
and lifestyle of anyone who took me in.” Events and encounters became surreal. “It is no use behaving normally in an abnormal situation,” Marie learned. “One had to adjust to it instead.” This meant sleeping in hallways, sharing rooms and rations, and relying on the kindness of protectors. She even traveled to Sofia, on fake name and passport, to marry a Bulgarian boyfriend (this fell through). Later she hooked up with a Dutch guest laborer. She views wartime life around her in a somewhat detached manner; bombings are described offhand, as if her area had been possibly less affected than others in Berlin.

There are photos of her (a striking young woman), friends, and relatives, along with a list of people she had interacted with and their fates. Her son describes her postwar life in East Germany as a professor and member of the New Synagogue, as well as her resolution to marry someone Jewish and educated. Because of its adult content, this book, though pleasantly readable, would be more suitable for a public or secular library with Holocaust collections.

Hallie Cantor, Yeshiva University, New York, NY


This book is a well-written group of scholarly essays. The authors carefully analyze the writing and thoughts of ten great modern Jewish thinkers on the Torah. The audience is somewhat limited to those who can plough through a scholarly text, but the effort is worth it. The last chapter is of particular interest. Here Rabbis Shalom Carmy and Shlomo Zuckier write about Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, son-in-law of Rabbi Joseph B. Solovieck (“the Rav”). Lichtenstein believed that scientific knowledge and the liberal arts are important to understanding the world. God created the world and anything that helps understand creation is part of Torah. This is a thought that sets modern Orthodoxy apart from the closed mentality of other Orthodox groups. This idea is echoed in the other chapters of this book. This book is highly recommended for academic libraries and other libraries with patrons interested in understanding modern Orthodox thought.

Daniel Stuhlman, Chicago, IL.


Although the first Jews to settle in the United States were Sephardic, the major wave of immigration in the nineteenth century brought a major influx of Ashkenazim and they became the majority Jewish culture. There are, however, large Sephardic and Mizrahi communities in New York, Seattle, and Los Angeles, raising awareness of the languages and customs of these groups. This collection of studies by academics examines various aspects of Sephardic and Mizrahi culture in the United States and the impact it has on establishing Jewish and American identity. The articles are between ten and twenty pages long with bibliographies. The guest editor, Saba Soomekh, writes about the Maurice Amado Foundation, established to support Sephardic Jewish scholarship and education, which is based at the University of California, Los Angeles. Other articles look at the Ladino language, the proficiency of its speakers, and how multilingualism impacts their lives. There are also studies of Arab Jews in America, Iranian Jewish art, and the immigrant experience. A rabbi writes about the classic Sephardic spirit, which ignores the denominational divisions common in the United States. This is a small, but interesting collection that will be useful for libraries supporting programs in Jewish studies, Sephardic studies, and the social sciences.

Barbara M. Bibel, Congregation Netivot Shalom, Berkeley, CA.
THE BORSCHT BELT
Revisiting the Remains of America’s Jewish Vacationland
MARISA SCHEINFELD
ESSAYS BY STEFAN KANFER AND JENNA WEISSMAN JOSELIT
$29.95 CLOTH

"Susan Sontag famously observed that ‘all photographs testify to time’s relentless melt.’ One could scarcely imagine a more observant and poetic testimony than Marisa Scheinfeld’s eerie photographic record of the crumbling remains of American Jewry’s mid-century Xanadu, the Borscht Belt. These photographs invite us to consider the rich history of American Jewish life, the legacy of the Catskills, and the ways in which this complex history is enduringly present and woven into the very fiber of the region."

—Maya Benton, Curator, International Center of Photography

"This collection tells the fascinating story of the history of the once vaunted Catskills resort industry that at its peak included more than five hundred hotels and fifty thousand bungalows. This is the story of a paradise lost, and these photos are an invaluable tool in preserving the past for those who were not fortunate enough to have experienced it."

—John Conway, Sullivan County Historian

"I will never forget my childhood in Brooklyn and my days visiting the Catskill Mountains. I worked one summer at Grossinger’s as a busboy and it was a memorable experience in my life. It is sad to see these pictures of what once was and what will never be again. They are brilliant photographs and the memories will be indelible in my mind. This is sadly joyful."

—Larry King, television and radio host

THE ACCOMMODATED JEW
English Antisemitism from Bede to Milton
KATHY LAVEZZO
$65.00 CLOTH

"The Accommodated Jew is a very significant contribution to the discussion of antisemitism in English literature. I find Kathy Lavezzo’s readings brilliant."

—Lisa Lampert-Weissig, University of California, San Diego

MIXED FEELINGS
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KATJA GARLOFF
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"Katja Garloff is one of the most interesting, highly acclaimed scholars working in German literature today. Mixed Feelings is another important contribution."

—Liliane Weissberg, University of Pennsylvania

THE CONSUMING TEMPLE
Jews, Department Stores, and the Consumer Revolution in Germany, 1880–1940
PAUL LERNER

"Lerner excels at questioning and reflecting multiple perspectives on the figure of ‘the Jew.’"

—Gerulf Hirt, Oxford Journals: German History

*The Weekly Mitzva* is a compilation of Rabbi Benjamin Tabory’s, (founding Rabbi of the Torah Mitzion Kollel) columns posted on the Yeshivat Har Etzion’s Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash. The series comprises an in-depth halakhic analysis of a mitzvah that pertains to the weekly Torah reading. Each short (three pages) scholarly discussion focuses on one mitzvah. For example: Parshat Vayera focuses on the mitzvah of visiting the sick. Rabbi Hama ben Rabbi Hanina says that just as God visited Abraham after his *brit milah* (circumcision) we must emulate God and visit the sick. Rabbi Yosef (Bava Metzia 30b) and Rabbi Yitzhak of Korbeil in *Sefer Mitzvot Katan* bring other proof texts to explain why visiting the sick is a halakhic obligation of all Jews. In the essay on *Parshat Va Yakel*, Rabbi Tabory elaborates on the punishment for lighting a fire on Shabbat. The discussion is complex and detailed. Rabbi Tabory cites primary sources from the Gemara, the Rema, and the Matteh Yehuda among others. Although the Hebrew terms are translated, readers not familiar with them would have trouble following the thread of the involved discussion. Recommended for academic libraries.

Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, OH


This is a collection of essays about the history of the ethnographic study of Eastern European Jewry. In four sections, it moves from the nineteenth century beginnings of Jewish ethnography to the postwar era in the Soviet Union and Israel, to reflections on twenty-first century Hasidic and immigrant Jewish communities in America and Europe. It includes observations from the most prominent academics in the field as well as the youngest practitioners. It is an excellent modern guide to understanding the way ethnography has written the history of modern Ashkenazic Jewry, as much as academic study and research on history and religion have done. Among the contributors are Nathaniel Deutsch, an expert on the work of S. An-sky; Mikhail Krutikov, a Yiddishist who is well-informed on Soviet Jewish history; Deborah Yalen, who studies official Soviet policy regarding Jewish history; Haya Bar-Itzhak, possibly the leading Jewish ethnographer of our time; and the editor, Jeffrey Veidlinger. Veidlinger has strong professional ties to both Indiana University and the University of Michigan, and much of the work here represents scholarship from both those institutions. Several of the articles have illustrations and all have copious notes. There is also an index to the entire work. Highly recommended for academic collections on mainstream Ashkenazi history.

Beth Dwoskin, Proquest (Retired), Library Committee Chair, Beth Israel Congregation, Ann Arbor, MI


This collection of sixteen excellent, thought-provoking, well-written essays is occasioned by the seventieth birthday of prolific scholar Steven T. Katz. The essays are organized in four areas of study in which Katz has made a mark: (1) comparative mysticism, (2) philosophy of religion and comparative religion, (3) modern Judaism, (4) post-Holocaust theology. A diversity of themes are explored here, including Indian and Chinese perspectives on Jewish thought (Sharma & Fou), Jewish mysticism and Hasidism (Idel, Polen), modern Jewish thinkers (Hochman, Mendes-Flohr, Hand), and the theological implications of the Shoah (Portnoff, Pllefeyt, Anderson).

This reviewer particularly enjoyed the essays by Idel, Polen, and Lior in the section on comparative mysticism. Lior brilliantly shows how Kabbalah and Neo-Confucianism stem from Rabbinic and Confucian traditions, resulting from their contact with Greek philosophy and Indian Buddhism, respectively, and as a historical outgrowth.
Recommended for beginning and advanced students of Jewish and comparative mysticism, Jewish thought, modern Jewish history, post-Holocaust theology, and American Jewish culture. Includes a bibliography of select publications by Katz.

David B Levy, Touro College NYC


Habima (“the stage”) was first established as a Russian-Jewish-Hebrew theater in Moscow in 1917. It was innovative and bold from the start. Not only in its language but also in terms of what it defined as its goals. Habima’s members were idealistic and went far beyond practical and economic considerations. Habima traveled and performed all over the world and was seldom far away from financial crisis. While in Berlin between 1926 and 1931, however, it firmly developed its Zionist character.

Zer-Zion divides Habima in Berlin into three distinct periods: 1. The first visit in 1926 with a Jewish repertoire—HaDibuk, Jacob’s Dream, The Eternal Jew, and HaGolem. 2. The years 1927-1928, during which Habima was established as a Zionist-Jewish Theater. A “Friends of Habima” was also created; among the organizers were: Sami Groneman, Wilfrid Israel, and Margot Klauzner. 3. Habima’s last stay in Germany during the years 1929-1931. A separate conclusion evaluates Habima’s German heritage once it settled in Palestine in 1931.

Habima in Berlin ends with an elaborate multilingual (Hebrew, Yiddish, English, German, Russian) List of Sources. Photos dispersed throughout the book lend a personal quality to the work. Habima in Berlin is a research-reference book that should be in any academic library, especially in theater departments.

Nira Wolfe, Highland Park, IL


In this short book, Rabbi Uri Zohar shares his and his wife’s experiences in raising their own Jewish observant children. Rabbi Zohar actively collaborated with the translator, Rabbi Doniel Baron, and Yonoson Rosenblum, in creating this new edition of Rabbi Zohar’s 2004 Hebrew essay.

The conflict between adolescent kids and their parents (or caregivers) is a familiar phenomenon. It is in the repertoire of virtually every parent’s experience. When the additional discipline of religious-observance is added to daily life, there are simply more areas for parent children conflict. Breakthrough has four chapters: Embracing the Challenge; Giving Only What They Can Receive; The Challenge; Understanding Rebellion. The notes that appear at the bottom of the appropriate pages are in Hebrew. The book has no index or bibliography.

Breakthrough is an inspiring guide book to parents of struggling teenagers. The relevance of the approach presented in this book extends beyond issues of religious observance. The book supports and focuses on the important idea that parents believe in their children’s ability to respond to sincere parental support and direction. Parents believe that free will leads children to finding an appropriate and consistent Jewish way of life. This book is a worthy addition to any public library or personal collection. It can be a useful reference for all parents committed to facilitating their children’s embrace of good and productive values consistent with their personality and tradition.

Nira Wolfe, Highland Park, IL
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In Laura Diamond’s novel, *Shelter Us*, Sarah, a former lawyer, and current stay-at-home mother is having a tough time getting over the death of her daughter at six weeks. She and her husband’s relationship is suffering and Sarah has a hard time dealing with her two remaining sons. Her whole life changes when she sees a homeless woman and her baby walking in downtown Los Angeles and decides to befriend her. Over the course of the next few months, Sarah gives the woman food, and a way back to her family, but it also helps Sarah heal from her loss. *Shelter Us* is about one woman’s journey from grief to healing by helping the unfortunate.

This book is recommended to public and high school libraries. It does not have a very strong Jewish component, and therefore is not appropriate for synagogue libraries and as a novel is not a necessary addition to an academic one.

Laura Schutzman, Hebrew Academy of Nassau County, Nathan and Doris Liebman Memorial Library, Uniondale, NY


The demonic figure of Lilith has featured consistently, if not always prominently, in Jewish sources over the ages, including the Bible, Talmud, Midrash, and Zohar. Lilith was said to have been the wife of Adam before Eve and banished for claiming equality with and refusing to submit to him. As punishment, Lilith gives birth at twilight to one hundred baby-killing demons that die at dawn. Understandably, feminists have recently sought to portray Lilith in more sympathetic terms, reclaiming her as a symbol of resistance to normative patriarchy.

This collection of poems by Julie R. Enszer, editor of Lambda Literary award finalist *Milk & Honey: A Celebration of Jewish Lesbian Poetry*, can be located within this tradition of feminist reclamation. The book is divided into three sections—Lilith, Lilith’s Demons, and Lilith’s Angels—and a deep empathy and attention to paradox is apparent throughout. For example, Lilith describes the birth of the demons from her body yet she asserts “I am no mother.” And even as humans despise and fear her, Lilith stakes her bond with humanity through shared conditions of loss and isolation. Lilith proclaims her aloneness and loneliness with a kind of determination and pride and maintaining ignorance of “sisterly camaraderie.”

Each of the poems in the second section is in the voice of a particular demon, and so we meet Ada, Zohara, Rivka, Dimona, among others. The demons describe their missions of death directly yet dispassionately, without self-judgment or condemnation. As they search for their victims, as they enact their end, the demons know they are following the imperative of Lilith, a drive beyond themselves. Enszer masterfully paints the specific circumstances of each demon—their methods for locating their victims, their relationship to the victim, and sometimes their relationship to Lilith herself.

In the final section, with the emergence of the angels, the tone lightens somewhat. All too aware of Lilith’s troubled relationship with God, the angels still protect her while recommitting to their own divine service. In one of my favorite poems, “Lilith’s Garden,” the garden is visualized as her home terrain, a dark but vibrant alternative to Eden.

This is a brief but visionary book about a figure that has haunted our consciousness for centuries and her offspring who have received considerably less attention. In a letter to this reviewer, Julie R. Enszer noted that the poems arose from a brief period of insomnia when she imagined Lilith’s demons were speaking to her. And indeed *Lilith’s Demons* has the feel of a hallucinatory conscious dream state, a place outside quotidian reality. How fortunate we are to have such fine poems as testament to that communication. Recommended for academic, community, and synagogue libraries.


Jere Krakoff spent many years as a civil rights attorney with the American Civil Liberties Union National
Prison Project, the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, and the Pennsylvania Institutional Law Project. The things he discovered and the people he met doing this work inspired him to write a novel. *Something Is Rotten in Fettig* tells the story of Leopold Plotkin, a gifted kosher butcher who has a hard time making ends meet. He also hates conflict, so he blindly obeys his father, who gives very bad advice. This advice leads to an arrest for a crime against the government. A Secret Blind Jury indicts him and he ends up in the Purgatory House of Detention with assorted lunatics and criminals. The pro-prosecution judge, jury, and prosecutor are convinced of his guilt before the trial starts. Plotkin expects the worst, but there are surprises. Readers will enjoy this humorous trip through absurdity. The author has drawn caricatures of some of the characters to enhance the story. He also provides a list of characters at the beginning to help readers keep track of the large cast.

The story is especially relevant given the current challenges to civil rights. The author’s gift for satire and his well-defined characters demonstrate “Tzedek, tzedek tirdof.” This is an excellent choice for book clubs and anyone who enjoys stories in the tradition of Shalom Aleichem.

Barbara M. Bibel, Congregation Netivot Shalom, Berkeley, CA.

**Leviant, Curt. *Kafka’s Son*. Ann Arbor, MI: DZANC Books, 2016. 504 pp. $15.95. (9781938103384).**

Amsehl/Curt is a documentary filmmaker who is obsessed with the two Ks; Franz Kafka and Danny Kaye. By chance on a visit to the historic Eldridge Street Synagogue he meets Jiri, an eighty-year-old Jewish man, who persuades him to go to Prague to film a documentary about Franz Kafka. When Amsehl arrives in Prague, he meets a man emerging from the Kafka museum who claims to be Kafka’s son. Stranger still are the other characters in the novel, a beautiful elusive girl in a blue beret, the *shamash* at the *Altneu shule* who looks like a golem, Mr. Klein, who claims to be Jiri’s father, and Eva who is Mr. Klein’s caretaker. The novel is Kafkaesque. It is a mystery and a fantasy. The reader is not sure what is real and what is imagined by Amsehl. As in his other novels, Leviant uses many Yiddish and Hebrew terms which are translated in the text. The last 70 pages are Kafka’s imaginary journals which are written in short, (sometimes only one paragraph long) entries as imagined by Curt Leviant. Recommended for all libraries whose patrons are Curt Leviant fans and patrons who are interested in mysticism, love and Jewish history.

Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, OH


Curt Leviant’s comic and tragic story follows the life of Shmulik Gafni, a renowned Yiddish scholar and professor at a fictional Israeli university. Gafni is plagued by two obsessions: the first is his quest to find the Polish sheigetz (gentile young man) whom he helplessly watched mercilessly murder his father and uncle during the post-World War II Kielce pogrom (July 4, 1946). The second is his fascination with the young, buxom, Polish, Yiddish scholar Malina who happens to be a shikse (gentile young woman). Leviant explores family, identity, love, Yiddishkeit and vengeance. The narrative alternates between Gafni’s frequent trips to Poland in search of his father’s killer and his budding sexual relationship with Malina. Leviant’s prose is witty and playful. At one point the author steps outside the narrative to give his readers advice. Some of the characters and situations are comic and unusual. One of his characters is a wise thumb sized Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart who owns a restaurant Gafni frequents. In a comic scene, Gafni is kidnapped by a group of Hassidim who forcefully try to convince him to sever his relationship with Malina. King of Yiddish is recommended for the adult collection of all libraries, especially libraries whose patrons understand Yiddish phrases.

Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, OH


Newman chronicles the death and dying of her mother, Florence Newman, in a series of poems that vary in style, format and tone. The poems follow their journey during this difficult time. She touches on all
phases of the mother-daughter relationship as well as the physical and emotional challenges for both parent and child. Between the prologue and the epilogue, the poems are arranged in three parts: “Stoic as a Stone,” “Alive and Not Alive,” and “Quiet as a Grave.” “My Mother Is” alphabetically lists the gamut of competing feelings her mother experiences: “dead set on living as long as she’s able/eager to have all this over and done with.” “Once” observes “once my mother pushed my stroller/now I push my mother’s wheelchair.”

The author of over 65 books for readers both young and old, including the ground-breaking *Heather Has Two Mommies* (Alyson, 1990), Newman found inspiration in classic Dylan Thomas, Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens and Dr. Seuss works, as well as more modern voices. Her own voice shines through with rhymes that are full of love, sadness, and often irony. She vividly captures the experience of a daughter dealing with her mother’s dying and death: “My mother tells me where she hides her jewels/a nurse come in to ask about her stools.” And in the aftermath “but I know, too, that my mother is involved in everything I know.” The Jewish content is in “How to Bury Your Mother,” which mentions a rabbi mumbling prayers and the last names of others buried in the cemetery; mention of a mezuzah in “Missed By;” and “Sitting Shiva,” which evokes the weird feelings of seeing one’s parent’s cup and chair without the parent there. Highly recommended for Jewish libraries with large poetry collections, and an excellent choice for inclusion with books about death and mourning.

*Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel*


Claire is a plump, 40-year-old divorcee living with her teenage son. While she is organized, successful, and resourceful in her job in human relations, her home life seems driven by anger and chaos. Her house is a mess; she struggles with her snarky son, and is angry at her absent ex-husband who has remarried a younger slimmer woman.

Things slowly change when she joins a gym and meets Rob, an overweight man about her age. They begin a warm flirty friendship and he offers her advice on dealing with her son. After this, events seem to conspire to draw her into the local Jewish community; her son’s best friend invites him to join the youth group and Claire’s dear friend and neighbor, Joanie hosts the sisterhood reading group. When Joanie has a medical crisis, Claire sees how the congregation and especially the Rebbetzin support Joanie and her family.

During this, Claire is shocked to learn that “Rob,” her friend from the gym, is actually “Reuven,” Rabbi at the local congregation. At a vulnerable time for both of them, they engage in a brief affair. Rob/Reuven comes to the realization that he and his wife need to go to marriage counseling. Claire similarly has a breakthrough; that she can find love again, even at her age and weight.

While it would have been nice to see Claire more connected to the Jewish community at the end of the book, Orenstein provides likeable, relatable characters that are able to change and grow. Recommended.

*Sheryl Stahl, Senior Associate Librarian, Frances-Henry Library, HUC-JIR, Los Angeles*

It’s not every day that a research institute puts forward a CD that is both valuable as an academic recording as well as suitable as worthy entertainment. This compilation of materials honors the 50th anniversary of the Jewish Music Research Centre in Jerusalem. Andre Hajdu (1932-2016), took up the challenge of creating new art arrangements of Yiddish songs and outstanding cantorial selections. The music takes familiar repertoire from Eastern European Ashkenazi *hazzanut* (Jewish cantorial compositions) and marries it to contemporary musical language, incorporating the piano accompaniment as an integral part of the music rather than mere accompaniment. Hajdu was deeply influenced by his early musical training with Bartók and Kodály in incorporating folk melody into classical composition, as well as Cantor Berele Saltzman from Russia, whose presentation of Eastern European *hazzanut* remained a formative encounter for the Israeli composer. Hajdu reworked many of the songs on this album over the years, but each version on this album represents a fresh interpretation in collaboration with Cantor Asher Hainovitz. One of most successful of these is the *Raza Deshabat*, based on the music of Cantor Pierre Pinchik. The intensity of the presentation and the tasteful integration of instrumental and vocal music in this familiar cantorial piece will remind listeners of the musical power in classical lieder. The songs on this album are just as powerful. Eliyahu Schleifer’s footnoted commentary in the Hebrew and English booklet are illuminating. Recommended for home and all libraries.

*Judith S. Pinnolis, School of Jewish Music, Hebrew College*


Michael Lukin’s herculean task of collecting, sorting, and selecting archival recordings of Leibu Levin (1914-1983) resulted in this excellent Jewish Music Research Centre CD. Leibu Levin set music to many great Yiddish and Hebrew poems, including those of Itzik Manger, Jacob Glatstein, Abraham Reisen, Chaim Grade and Zelik Barditshever, often adapting or altering their texts. Levin’s art results not only in traditional “song” but includes a declamatory style that is part melodic and part spoken poetry; each style encompassing a deep interpretation of the texts. Many of these archival recordings have a nature akin to field recordings sung a capella, or in staged poetry declamations, or are even improvisatory, while others are from concerts or recitals with accompaniment. Levin’s rough, yet disarmingly sensitive voice, betrays him as someone who endured through the Holocaust and imprisonment under Stalin in labor camps. Tossed around by the world, Lukin notes that Levin’s “true homeland was his singing.” Levin’s œuvre is extensive, but he relied on others to write musical notation for him, (if songs were transcribed at all). Therefore, until recently, many of his songs were available only because of recordings that survived. Levin lived his last decade in Israel at a time when Yiddish was considered a vanishing memory. Thus, this salvaging of his works and release of his recordings by JMRC will give scholars and Yiddish preservationists fertile soil for years. English translations from the Yiddish are by Itzik Gottesman in a booklet with Russian, English, and Hebrew translations and commentary.

*Judith S. Pinnolis, School of Jewish Music, Hebrew College*
New Editions of Award-Winning Favorites

Submitted by New Editions of Award-Winning Favorites

When a new edition is released, the first question librarians ask is how is it different from the original? And, do I need to buy the new edition if I already have the original, in perfectly good condition, on the shelf? New editions of three award-winning favorites – Hana’s Suitcase, The Journey that Saved Curious George, and The Book Thief – are all being released in 2016. Here’s what you need to know to make an informed purchasing decision.

Originally produced as a radio documentary for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Hana’s Suitcase by Karen Levine tells the story of Hana Brady, a Czech girl who died in the Holocaust. It is also the amazing story of how Fumiko Ishioka, a curator at a Japanese Holocaust education center in Tokyo, received a suitcase on loan from Auschwitz and worked with her students to learn about the life of the suitcase’s original owner. The first edition was published by Second Story Press in Canada in 2002 and won the Sydney Taylor Book Award for Older Readers. Albert Whitman & Company released the US edition in 2003. In 2013, Second Story Press released Hana’s Suitcase Anniversary Album which includes a foreword by Desmond Tutu and over sixty pages of new material. Reflections of the years since the book was first released by each of the principal players - Karen Levine, George Brady (Hana’s brother), and Fumiko Ishioka – is appended along with full color photographs, letters from students, additional archival material, a list of all of the awards and honors the book has received, book jacket images of the 45+ foreign editions, ideas for classroom projects, and much more. A CD of the original CBC radio broadcast (which is also available online) is also part of the package. A similar edition, Hana’s Suitcase: The Quest to Solve a Holocaust Mystery, was just published in paperback by Crown Books for Young Readers in January 2016 (list price $9.99) but don’t let the new sub-title fool you. This edition includes only a sampling of the bonus material that appeared in the Anniversary Album and no color photographs. The hardcover Anniversary Album is far superior to the new 2016 edition and is a preferable purchase despite its higher price tag ($24.95 CAD). Unfortunately, new copies are hard to come by outside of Canada, but used copies abound from online booksellers. The newest edition is only a necessary purchase if the Anniversary Album is unavailable.

The Journey that Saved Curious George: The True Wartime Escape of Margaret and H.A. Rey by Louise Borden and illustrated by Allan Drummond (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2005) was a Sydney Taylor Honor Book for Younger Readers in 2006. A unique large format book that resembles a travel journal and includes full-color illustrations in the style of H.A. Rey, along with original photos and archival documents, tells the true story of how the Rey’s fled their Paris home by bicycle in 1940 as the German army advanced. Among their few possessions was the children’s book manuscript that became the beloved Curious George. An identical paperback edition was released in 2010. In September 2016, a new “young reader's edition” will be republished featuring a new introduction and extended back-matter by the author (an interview, notes on her research, and activities). The most noted difference though is the new 8x6 inch trim size. The page layouts and design are identical but everything has been
shrunk to fit the smaller size – a smaller font, less white space, and smaller illustrations and photos. While it doesn’t have the same handsome and nostalgic qualities of the large hardcover, this new, affordable $7.99 paperback edition might attract new, independent chapter book readers who are turned off by the original picture book format.

The 10th anniversary edition of The Book Thief by Markus Zusak (Knopf, 2016) is striking with its pristine, off-white, embossed cover, and its elegant off-white dust jacket. The interior is identical to the original that won the first Sydney Taylor Book Award for Teen Readers in 2007, but an additional twenty-six pages of bonus material are appended. Readers are treated to a rare glimpse of a master author’s writing process, including marked-up manuscript pages, original sketches, and pages from Zusak’s writing notebook about how he develops chapter titles, the flow of the book, how he keeps track of the characters, the time frame of the years, how he came to using Death as the narrator, and even the choices he made about font type and size. Zusak shares his 2-year development of the narrator Death, from the first, much too macabre and sinister characterization, to finally realizing that “Death is haunted by us and that’s how he should narrate . . . telling Liesel’s story to prove to himself that humans can be beautiful and selfless and worthwhile.” Zusak reveals insights about each major character and the different kinds of love that unify the book. He shows his own rough drafts of some of the illustrations and discusses how the final versions were improved by illustrator Trudy White. The bonus material concludes with the author’s short note of thanks to the over ten million readers “who’ve given this book its own life of sorts” and a conversation in which he urges readers to see another side of Nazi Germany where people risked their lives to save others. Librarians, book collectors, and fans shouldn’t hesitate to add this new edition (list price $19.99) to their book shelves alongside the beloved, modern classic.

These three Holocaust related titles are widely used in school curriculums and regularly appear on recommended reading lists. The new editions will help to facilitate teaching and student research projects and the fresh “face lift” will also help to introduce them to newer audiences.

Debbie Colodny is a children’s librarian for the Cook Memorial Public Library District in Libertyville, IL, the former owner of Sefer, So Good, and a past member of the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee. Rachel Kamin is the Director of the Cultural & Learning Center at North Suburban Synagogue Beth El in Highland Park, IL, a past chair of the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee, and co-editor of the book reviews for children and teens for AJL Reviews.

Keep Up to Date with Hasafran

Hasafran is the electronic discussion list of the Association of Jewish Libraries. It was created in 1991 to provide a forum for the discussion of Judaica librarianship. The list is moderated by Joseph (Yossi) Galron, Jewish studies librarian at The Ohio State University. The views expressed in the list are the opinions of the participants and not necessarily the views of the moderator or of AJL.

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You will receive a confirmation message.

A keyword-searchable archive of Hasafran messages posted since June 12, 2003 is now available.

Kimmel first adapted I.L. Peretz’s story “Seven Years” for his collection *Days of Awe: Stories for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur* (Viking Press, 1991). Here is another version of the story in picture book format with a modern boy as the main character and a horn instead of a samovar. As Gabriel’s family is preparing for Rosh Hashanah, a US Army soldier appears at their door. He asks them to keep his grandfather’s French horn safe for him while he serves overseas. While the family owns an antique shop, Gabriel’s mom is hesitant to take on the responsibility of storing the instrument. Gabriel convinces her after the soldier promises that the horn will bring them good luck. He then vanishes before they can ask him his name. The horn is black and tarnished and no matter how hard she tries, Gabriel’s mother is unable to polish it. But, when Gabriel gives *tzedakah* (charity) to two girls collecting for the poor, a streak of polished brass shines on the bell of the horn. As time passes, good luck and fortune follow the family and they, in turn, perform *mitzvot* (good deeds): they help to build a new playground in their neighborhood, they buy furniture for a new immigrant family, and they donate to the local food pantry. And with each good deed, the horn’s tarnish slowly disappears. After seven years, the soldier returns and says: “Do you know how old this horn is? It’s older than the world. In all the time this horn existed, no one ever used its blessing better than your family. That old horn never shined brighter than it does now. You’ve earned the right to keep it.” The soldier again vanishes but not before Gabriel figures out who he really is – the prophet Elijah (the name on the soldier’s uniform - Tishbi - gives astute readers a clue)! The textured, multi-dimensional illustrations, with vibrant reds and purples, beautifully depict a multi-cultural, contemporary urban setting. “The Samovar” in *Days of Awe* still makes for a nice read-aloud but this illustrated edition will introduce the timeless tale to a new audience. The Rosh Hashanah tie-in will make it a welcome addition to the holiday bookshelf but the story can be enjoyed all year long to discuss the Jewish value of *tzedakah.*

Rachel Kamin, North Suburban Synagogue Beth El, Highland Park, IL


Eric Kimmel’s latest is a well-meaning but toothless play on the classic *Little Red Hen,* wherein a young girl, a toucan, a parrot, and a hornbill, make challah bread for their community’s Rosh Hashanah dinner. While the animals of the original tale scoffed at helping the hen, Rosie’s birds are eager to lend a figurative hand. Although Rosie is young, she takes on a position of leadership and guides her bird friends through the baking. She models the process to the birds, showing kindness and patience as she supports their enthusiasm and forgives their untidiness. The warm illustrations reflect the increasing messiness of Rosie’s kitchen as the bread is made, which, although appropriate for the story, can make for busy pages on which it is hard to find a focal point. At the story’s simplistic conclusion, Rosie and the birds have persevered to clean up after themselves and serve their delicious bread.
Some Rosh Hashanah traditions appear to be softened for a wider, perhaps non-Jewish, audience; the illustrations show two kinds of challah (both the round shape traditional for the holiday and the more commonly seen braided challah), and Rosie and the birds bless the challah in English. However, Kimmel does explain in an author’s note at the end, that based on the Jewish value of *hachnasat orchim* (welcoming guests), he wants readers to feel inspired to host more inclusive holiday celebrations. This sentiment is vaguely reflected in the illustrations of Rosie’s ethnically— and possibly, religiously—diverse dinner guests, but it would have been better served if it was more obviously reflected in the story itself. Adult readers are likely to appreciate the use of the birds as a way to encourage young children to participate in holiday traditions and to strive to better themselves through their experiences. Libraries with a significant Eric Kimmel fanbase, who are looking to expand their Rosh Hashanah picture book collection, or who teach comparative literature units on classic children’s tales may consider *Little Red Rosie* for their collection.

*Alex Quay, Sinai Akiba Academy, Los Angeles, CA*


Two young children celebrate the Jewish New Year by making a round challah, blowing the shofar, dipping apples in honey, delighting in a juicy pomegranate, putting on new clothes, and enjoying a festive holiday meal with family. As with its predecessors, *Shabbat Is Coming!* (2014), *Hanukkah Is Coming!* (2015) and *Passover Is Coming!* (2016), the detailed computer-generated, cartoon illustrations are bright and cheery and rhyming couplets are included on each page followed by the refrain, “Rosh Hashanah is coming.” The final spread depicts the children looking out their window at the starry night sky and concludes: “Together we cheer: Shana Tova! Happy New Year! Hurray! Rosh Hashanah is here!” While there is no mention of the family attending synagogue, this is a nice, fresh addition for holiday board book collections and preschool classrooms.

*Rachel Kamin, North Suburban Synagogue Beth El, Highland Park, IL*


Cute runs with reality to a heartwarming finish line in this sweet fall holiday tale. Leah and Ari are Jewish youngsters living in high rise buildings in a city. They want their own sukkah. Where to put it? Their parents face the modern problems of urban life: no space, no car, no money for expensive extras, limited access to roof tops. A Hebrew school Sukkot poster contest offers the prize of a free sukkah. Ari will enter; can he keep it if he wins? When he does, the concept of *kehilla* (community) takes over. Ari’s family may use their roof; neighbors help put the sukkah prize together; Leah’s family will store it after the holiday because other neighbors will help carry. Yet, the finished product leaves the children sad. It has only paper chains until the local non-Jewish grocer arrives with gorgeous fruits and vegetables from his stand. A Jewish holiday provokes a neighborhood response that all can enjoy. The explanation of a sukkah, what it looks like, when and how it is used, arrives naturally as Leah tells the grocer. However, because the story stays true to the young children’s point of view, there is no discussion of the holiday of Sukkot, its meaning or its reason to be in the Jewish calendar. The desire to celebrate in a real sukkah is contagious and joyous as both the words and illustrations in this story show with honesty, fluidity and pleasure.

*Ellen G. Cole, Temple Isaiah, Los Angeles, CA*

On her way to deliver homework to her friend Wendy who is home sick, Maya passes all of her friends in the neighborhood outside enjoying the beautiful, sunny fall weather. Mrs. Cisneros is hanging clothes on the line to dry, the Papadakis family is packing the car for a picnic, Mr. Patel is painting his fence, Mrs. Kelly is setting up for an outdoor birthday party, Tommy Bilecki is giving his dog a bath, Nadia Ali is about to release her butterflies, and Jason Hu is heading to the ball field. When she arrives at Wendy’s house, her friend asks her if she is going to synagogue for Shemini Atzeret, the holiday that falls after the seven days of Sukkot, just before Simchat Torah. Wendy reminds Maya that part of the Shemini Atzeret service includes a prayer for rain. Maya is distraught: the rain will ruin all of her neighbor’s plans! She runs to the Rabbi who calms her down: “You can relax, Maya. When we pray for rain today, we’re not praying for the rain to fall here. We’re praying for it to fall in Israel! This is the start of the rainy season in Israel, and we want Israel to have lots of rain so crops and trees will grow. Jews always pray for it to rain in Israel on Shemini Atzeret – no matter where we live – to show our love for Israel.” Maya is relieved and attends Shemini Atzeret services with her family where she happily prays for rain in Israel. The cute, colorful illustrations depict Maya’s multi-cultural suburban neighborhood but the use of such obviously (and stereotypically) ethnic names seems a bit contrived. An author’s note provides a basic explanation of Shemini Atzeret but no information about Sukkot or Simchat Torah. The story is a bit thin and overly simplistic and leaves some questions unanswered: How does Maya have time to do all this before morning services? How come she doesn’t know that it’s Shemini Atzeret? Why is she delivering homework to Wendy on Yom Kippur? But, there are no other picture books about Shemini Atzeret so teachers in Jewish settings will certainly welcome Maya into their classrooms this fall.

*Rachel Kamin, North Suburban Synagogue Beth El, Highland Park, IL*

**BIBLE STORIES**


This picture book retelling has handsome a format with breezy changes to the story. This volume exudes energy in its short, fast paced text and busy illustrations. While correctly explaining that the tower is the product of a united people speaking one language, the authors take liberty with the wording of Genesis 11, changing the purpose of the tower. These builders want a tower to hold up the sky to reach God and keep them above the waters, safe from a repeat of Noah’s flood which they ‘remember’ because it was not so long ago. God sees unity provokes arrogance, a trait which he does not want his people to have. He sends angels to create different languages. Unable to communicate, the builders get the point -- they are humble in a big world with a bigger God; they split up.

The original Genesis Babel story has no mention of the flood, and mere mortals cannot “threaten” God. Besides the lamb on the cover (often used for Christian storytelling), the illustrations are charming; they will captivate children with their crashing storm scenes and elephants climbing to build the tower. If Biblical accuracy is not your thing, this fun volume is yours.

*Ellen G. Cole, Temple Isaiah, Los Angeles, CA*

This Noah’s Ark tale will satisfy those pragmatic kids who wonder: “But what did they eat?” or who are themselves picky eaters. Working nearly around the clock (to satisfy both diurnal and nocturnal creatures), Noah, Na’ama, Shem, Ham, and Japheth prepare meals for all the different types of animals: “A treat of meat for wild beasts...piles of seeds for the birds.” Everyone seems satisfied...except for the pair of chameleons who “refuse every dish.” Noah decides to observe the female chameleon, bringing her with him wherever he goes in order to see if he can determine what she might like to eat. As she grows thinner and thinner, another problem arises: Na’ama finds worms in the fruit bins, threatening the family’s food supply. Luckily, with the chameleon lies the solution, and the story ends with Noah’s sage observation that “everything and everyone has a place under the sun.”

Molchadsky’s text is straightforward and accessible, graciously allowing Bergman’s acrylic illustrations to stop the show. The art is both witty in a child-friendly way (the smiling chameleon hitchs a ride on Noah’s head) and breathtakingly expansive, with textured brushstrokes and hues that reflect the blues and greens of the sea and of the flora and fauna alongside bold pinks and accent colors. Noah’s family is beautifully diverse: his own skin is a warm brown underneath his white beard, Na’ama is a pale-skinned redhead, and their sons resemble them both. It’s a different take on Noah’s Ark, and one that will be welcomed by a wide variety of readers and listeners.

_Elissa Gershowitz, The Horn Book, Boston_
BIOGRAPHY


When dollars are tight, do we really need another Anne Frank book? In the case of Peggy J. Parks’ new addition to the ReferencePoint Press series *Influential Women*, the answer is “yes” for two reasons. First, this middle grade nonfiction book does an excellent job of explaining the complex historical context of Frank’s life both in time and place. Parks explains the Nazis’ rise to power clearly, chronologically and succinctly. *Anne Frank* reads almost like a novel. Parks helps to humanize Frank and her fellow Jews by explaining the mundane rhythms and the shattering fears of their existence in hiding. Second, students’ interest in Anne Frank has not waned. Each year a new crop of young readers becomes interested in Frank. It is always good to have fresh resources to put into the hands of an inquiring student. The index, notes, timeline, and sources “For Further Research” are excellent. *Anne Frank* is a first-rate nonfiction text that will be welcomed by students, teachers and librarians alike. The other titles in the *Influential Women* series are Cleopatra, Hillary Clinton, Malala Yousafzai and Marie Curie.

Rena Citrin, Head Librarian; Bernard Zell Anshe Emet Day School, Chicago

FICTION – EARLY & MIDDLE GRADE


Dogs are dogs and humans are human, except, apparently, in the Pittsburgh suburb of Squirrel Hill. There, a Chabad family owns a black Labrador named Kelev (a bit odd as traditional Jewish families rarely own dogs.) The book begins with Kelev (Hebrew for ‘dog’) feeling “a spiritual void.” As he kvetches about all the rules his guardians have for him, his neighbor Schmalzie explains that Kelev has Jewish roots and “religious obligations to uphold.” Schmalzie then describes the concept of *mitzvot*. With this information, Kelev proceeds to look for “souls to save.” The rest of the book follows Kelev as he looks for opportunities to get closer to his Judaism. He creates Midrash about himself with the hope that he will be included in the Bible, peacefully mediates an invasion of migrant squirrels into the neighborhood, deals with a bully bulldog, confronts prejudice, helps his cat friend Kefir find her Jewish roots, and ultimately makes Aliyah to Israel.

Besides the absurd notion that a dog can be a Jew required to follow Torah obligations, the writing is poor and so pedantic that its preachiness oozes from almost every sentence. It is replete with “dog puns” (e.g. “bind *tefillin* on the foreleg,” “we are the Chosen Pack,” etc.) that make the reader groan. The few illustrations are cartoonish.

Kathy Bloomfield, President – SSC, Washington, DC


Book One: *The Grizzbears Discover the Golan*. HC (9789367782186); PBK (9781936778256); Kindle.

Book Two: *The Grizzbears Make New Friends*. HC (9781936778010); PBK (9781936778041); Kindle

Book Three: *Momo Fox Learns How to Be a Good Neighbor*. HC (9781936778065); PBK (9781936778089); Kindle

Book Four: *Excitement in the Air for All!*. HC (9781936778411); PBK (9781936778195); Kindle

The author/illustrator created these books to teach about character development. The lessons are presented in short chapters with questions for thought and discussion at the end of each one. (“What do you think about when you see the sunset?” “What does it mean to you to pray?” “What are some examples you have of self-discipline?”). The text is accompanied by colorful modernistic illustrations.
In Book One, the animals are introduced to the reader. They include a bear family, carob-addicted Giveret (Hebrew for ‘Mrs.’) Deer practicing for an animal Olympics, orphaned and depressed Momo Fox, and wise Saba Owl. In Book Two, Miss Lulu Fox starts teaching at the Golan Animal School, and Momo Fox is smitten. Book Three finds Saba Owl counseling Momo Fox, and Momo later apologizing to the deer for not rescuing her when she was injured. Everything wraps up in the fourth and final book, with Giveret Deer breaking her carob habit and winning the steeple chase in the animal Olympics and Momo and Lulu Fox getting engaged.

Some of the text is highly questionable for the suggested age range in terms of content and vocabulary: “Sometimes she [Giveret Deer] was nervous and even unsettled, probably from the caffeine and carobs;” “The pain was excruciating! And the fur on her leg was very bloody;” “Momo felt a freedom from the fact that he was now able to talk about it, instead of just being embarrassed and disappointed in himself;” “I pray only to be more worthy of your love, and give of myself in every way to you.”

So many missed opportunities - no maps of Israel, no pictures of animal habitats (Giveret Deer is shown in what looks like a human kitchen), two Hebrew words left untranslated, no overt Jewish content nor discussion of Torah or mussar (Jewish character development). And just plain misses: There have been no bears sighted out of captivity in Israel in almost 100 years, and the ones that inhabited the Golan were Syrian Brown Bear, not Grizzly; owls are nocturnal, carob does not contain caffeine and deer usually graze on grass. Safed and Tiberias are cities in the Galilee, not the Golan Heights. The assignment of human activities and emotions to animals is both disturbing and anathema to Judaism.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel


In this sequel to her Sydney Taylor Honor book, Black Radishes (Delacorte, 2010), Meyer continues the gripping story of Gustave Becker, a twelve-year- old Jewish boy in Nazi-occupied France. Fleeing with his family to escape the turmoil, they book passage on the Carvalho Araujo, catch a train in Baltimore, and finally make their way to New York City. With the help of relatives and the assistance of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, the Beckers settle into a small apartment, find jobs and begin the bewildering process of adapting to life in America. Cast as a stranger in a strange land, Gustave muddles through the first weeks as a seventh-grader at Joan of Arc Junior High School. He contends with a home-room teacher who shouts instructions at him as if he’s deaf and tries to make sense of what’s going on when surrounded by “a whole room full of kids who only spoke this strange, fast, difficult language.” Developing a sense of belonging happens once he joins the Franco-American Boy Scout Troop 582. However, after befriending an African-American girl named September Rose, Gustave soon learns that the ideals of liberty, equality, and freedom in his adopted country do not apply to every citizen. He sees similarities in Rose’s brother’s fight against racial segregation and the Jewish resistance movement against anti-Semitism unfolding in war-torn Europe. Meyer deftly weaves historical details and cultural references into her text which gives the book a richness, flavor and understanding of what life was like for immigrants and natives alike. For instance, in this pre-texting world of 1942, when Gustave sends an air-mail letter to Nicole, his friend in France, the stamp costs 45 cents, which is almost the amount he earns working two days after school as a delivery boy at Quong’s Hand Laundry. Skating with the Statue of Liberty is a beautifully written story about balancing the desire to fit in while retaining the courage to stand up for one’s ideals.

Allison Marks (co-author of A Gefilte Fishy Tale, MB Publishing, 2016)


When ten-year- old Sarah Nossovsky receives a package from Aunt Manya who lives in far-off New York City, little does she realize how soon her world will be turned upside-down. Inside is a letter
telling of her father’s recent death, his prayer book, a boat ticket, money, and the promise of a new home. Fearing an upcoming pogrom in her Russian village and eager to be free of her stepmother’s nagging, Sarah accepts her aunt’s generous offer to come to America. Neighbors help smuggle the girl past the German border guards, and along with other illegal immigrants, she makes her way to Bremerhaven and onto the SS Werra. During the transatlantic crossing, the plucky heroine meets new friends, learns English from a Norwegian passenger, procures a makeshift cradle for a newborn, and survives injuries sustained during a storm at sea. Most of the imaginary conversations at the end of the chapters between Sarah and her aunt all begin with the words, “Before I forget,” reinforcing the girl’s intense desire to connect fully with her last living relative. Even when faced with the unexpected plot twist at the end of the book, Sarah manages to approach whatever life throws her way – both good and bad – with the oft-repeated phrase, “It’s beshert!,” meaning “It’s fate.” Drew’s black-and-white sketches act as bookends to each of the 12 chapters and portray different aspects of Sarah’s journey to a new life. *My Aunt Manya* is a middle-grade novel destined to be read and enjoyed for many years.

Allison Marks, co-author of *A Gefilte Fishy Tale* (MB Publishing, 2016)

**FICTION – TEEN**


Eighteen-year-old Sara has called the Benevolent Home for Necessitous Children, located in Hope, Ontario, home all of her life. Sara and the other orphans are displaced after the orphanage catches fire and is destroyed. While arrangements have been made for the youngest residents of the orphanage, Sara and six older girls are forced to make decisions about their future. Sara knows nothing about her past and when the warden of the orphanage reveals that she was born in a refugee camp in Germany to a Jewish mother, she is shocked. She was brought to Canada as an infant by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. The warden gives Sara a necklace with a Star of David charm that belonged to her mother and encourages Sara to return to Germany to discover her roots. Sara decides to leave everything behind, including her boyfriend Luke (who has been “pressuring her to go all the way”), and find out about her past. She takes what little savings she has and flies to Germany. Unable to speak German and not having much information about her family, Sara turns to Peter, a young Jewish man, for help. Through a series of coincidences and lucky breaks, Sara learns the awful truth about her parents and is reunited with her grandfather.

Set in 1964, *Stones on a Grave* is part of a seven book series that focuses on each of the older girls from the orphanage. Although the plot is predictable and some of the minor characters are underdeveloped, the depiction of Jewish life in Germany after World War II, an uncommon setting, makes this a worthwhile addition to collections serving teen readers. Kathy Kacer does a good job at showing the shame and embarrassment of some Germans, and she skillfully describes some of the more horrific aspects of the Holocaust in an age appropriate way. Sara is a likeable character and readers will be satisfied with her story.

Aimee Lurie, Branch Manager, Cuyahoga County (OH) Public Library - Beachwood


Andy Crockett is an insecure tenth-grade boy plagued with problems. He’s lost a recent wrestling match at the regional tournament, underwent a confusing breakup with his “two-times non-virgin” girlfriend, lives in the shadow of a more successful older brother, and shares his home with an alcoholic uncle. This relatively recent transfer student hangs out with a group of social misfits called “The Six,” whose fortes are looking bored and communicating with “a lot of raised eyebrows and body language.” To top it off, T-Ho, the clique’s leader, repeatedly reminds Andy he’s a hanger-on instead of “a jen-yoo-
wine member.” Feeling disheartened by life’s curveballs, Andy becomes the poster child of a young person searching for his niche in the world. Unfortunately, he ends up seeking answers in all the wrong places. Enter Martin Retzlaff, the popular teacher of Twentieth-Century World History. Andy fails to realize that this person is actually a Holocaust denier spreading his own brand of anti-Semitism. Mr. Retzlaff ends up cleverly manipulating Andy and two other “Six” members into carrying out his personal vendetta against the elderly Jewish woman living alone on the outskirts of town. If the trio’s fiery plan is successful, it will have devastating consequences.

Written in first-person narrative, the book gives the reader immediate insight into the evolving mindset of a confused teenager who is struggling with the conflicting demands of peer pressure and the inner resolve to do the right thing. Poulsen brilliantly captures Andy’s angst, detailing his downward spiral and single-minded pursuit to please a disturbed teacher. Numbers is a cautionary tale about the importance of questioning authority and demonstrates how easy it is to be swayed by charisma over facts – lessons which need to be re-learned over and over again from one generation to the next.

Allison Marks, co-author of A Gefilte Fishy Tale (MB Publishing, 2016)


“There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, then are dreamt of in your philosophy” (Hamlet). Indeed, and so begins a historical novel set in fourteenth-century Strasbourg. Another Me starts with a dramatic, violent scene. Natan, a handsome seventeen-year-old Jewish youth is returning from a secret midnight meeting with Elena, the non-Jewish daughter of the master draper. Natan is the accidental witness to the scheme by three ruffians who plan to poison the town well and blame the nefarious deed on the Jews. The scoundrels discover Natan and stab him to death. All his hopes and dreams of making a life with Elena are thus dashed in an instant. Here is where the plot becomes fantastical. Wiseman uses the device of an ibbur, the concept from Kabbalah that a righteous person’s soul may take up residence in another person’s body in order to complete a task of great benefit to the Jewish people. The ibbur of Natan enters the ugly body of Hans, the journeyman draper. The story then flashes back four months earlier and is told in alternating voices by Natan and Elena. Wiseman has skillfully embedded these fictional characters within the context of real historical events. Their love story — and the question of whether a person with an outwardly distasteful appearance can be loved — is central to the plot. The reader begins to understand the precipitating events and the horrendous results of the accusation that the Jews poisoned the well and thus spread the plague. By the end of the novel, most of the Jews of Strasbourg are burned to death and the few survivors are expelled from the city. However, Natan accomplishes the task of saving one Jewish person and thus his soul returns to his dead body.

The characters of Natan and Elena are fleshed out nicely, their alternating narratives segueing smoothly from one to the other. However, minor characters such as Peter Schwarber, the Ammeister (head of the town council) and Shmuli, Natan’s eight-year-old brother, are not as fully developed. Aside from this minor criticism, Another Me is an engrossing, heartbreaking novel about a little-known tragedy in Jewish history.

Anne Dublin, author of 44 Hours or Strike! (Second Story Press), Toronto, Canada

[Editor’s note: Anne’s interview with Eva Wiseman will be included in an upcoming episode of the Book of Life podcast: http://jewishbooks.blogspot.ca]
reviews of titles for children and teens

holocaust and world war ii


Pierrot Fisher lives in 1930’s Paris with his French mother and German father. The six-year-old lives a happy life -- playing with his dog and his best friend and downstairs neighbor, Anshel Bronstein, a deaf Jewish boy with whom he uses sign language and share stories. But Pierrot’s parents die and he is sent to an orphanage. Soon his father’s sister claims him. He takes the train to Austria, and he lives with her at Berghof, Hitler’s retreat in the Bavarian Alps, where Aunt Beatrix is the housekeeper. She warns him to behave and to forget about his friend and about France; his is now “Pieter.” The Führer takes an interest, giving him Hitler Youth uniforms and as he grows older, encouraging him to embrace Nazi ideals. When Beatrix and Ernst the chauffeur plot to poison Hitler, Pieter exposes them, and he sees them executed by gunshot. Pieter’s arrogance and self-importance grow and distance those who once liked him. When the war ends, Pieter is alone at Berghof with nowhere to go. American soldiers find him and place him in a detention camp. The Epilogue describes his lonely life moving through different countries and jobs and contemplating his actions. He sees a book by his childhood friend in a store window and tracks him down, asking Anshel, who was hidden during the war, to write down his sad story.

Much like Boyne’s controversial The Boy in the Striped Pajamas (David Fickling Books, 2006), the naïve perspective of a child sucked into a dangerous situation makes the story that much more chilling. Pierrot/Pieter is as much a victim as a perpetrator, and the detailed descriptions of Bavaria and personalities of the era (Nazi officers, the Duke and Duchess of Windsor) create a strong sense of place and time. While the focus is on life at Berghof, there is enough Jewish content to warrant inclusion in a large Holocaust fiction collection, and Pierrot/Pieter’s transformation will spark lively book club discussions.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel


Expert nonfiction writer Russell Freedman brings pathos and ethos to the story of the Scholl family and their involvement in resistance activities against Hitler and the Third Reich. Using a character-driven narrative, Freedman first introduces the reader to members of a family devoted to their homeland. He traces the transformation of Hans and then Sophie as they begin to doubt the dogma handed to them even as they have risen in the ranks of the Hitler Youth. He follows them to their mandatory service in the state labor force and on to Munich University. When Sophie arrives on campus, she finds her older brother embroiled in the White Rose movement he helped to found. She eagerly joins in. Ultimately, they sacrifice themselves for the good of the country they love. They and several others are found guilty in a bogus court, are sentenced to death and beheaded.

Reinforcing the powerful text is an array of quotes gained from both primary and secondary sources and photographs, some of which are classic and appear in many other books but also include many lesser-known ones. Freedman rightfully demonstrates the legacy of Hans and Sophie Scholl with commemorative text and photography, showing the impact an individual can have on the present and the future. There are a couple of glitches in the German (for instance, the text mentions Schilling instead of Schiller, the famous dramatist), but these are minor and can hopefully be rectified in a second printing. As with his many other award-winning books, Freedman brings nonfiction on difficult subjects to an accessible and intellectually- and emotionally-engaging level.

Barbara Krasner, former member, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee, New Jersey
Reviews of Titles for Children and Teens


What differentiates Gottesfeld’s book from others - *Anne Frank’s Chestnut Tree* by Jane Kohuth (Step into Reading, 2013) and *Anne Frank and the Remembering Tree* by Sandy Eisenbeg Sasso (Skinner Books, 2015) - is that the tree itself the narrator of the story of Anne and the Frank family, betrayed in 1944 and sent to concentration camps. The text is simple, almost lyrical, and highly reminiscent of Sasso’s book. It effectively opens with a quote from the Anne Frank diary. The sepia-tone drawings evoke a feeling of sadness. Like Sasso’s book, it includes an afterword providing a brief overview of Anne Frank and a listing of where the saplings from the chestnut tree have been replanted in America. It is clear Gottesfeld has done his research with his specific references to places in Anne’s diary that mention the tree. It would have been helpful, however, if the afterword listing included the international locations to show the range of impact Anne’s story has had. It also would have been helpful to mention that the house is now a museum. By using the voice of the tree, this narrative provides an introduction to the Holocaust and its impact on a person, family, city, and the world.

*Barbara Krasner, former member, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee, New Jersey*


“Our young people must be given hope for the future and an understanding that evil was indeed resisted during the darkest of times—and can still be confronted today.” *Witness*, based partially on a United Nations exhibit, “When You Listen to a Witness You Become a Witness,” is an ambitious attempt to summarize the Holocaust and link it to both the March of the Living and the March of Remembrance and Hope. It succeeds. It draws on survivor testimony, young people’s writings, and ample archival and contemporary photography to transform the reader into a witness of genocide. It opens with a bilingual approbation by Pope Francis and a message from the founder of March of the Living International. It explores anti-Semitism and genocide, mass murders in the camps and by Einsatzgruppen, the reaction of the West, the death camps, resistance and profiles of resisters, survivor testimony of those participating in the commemorative marches, and passing the torch to the next generations. The narrative is well-written and emotionally provocative. The book delivers on its promise and catalyzes thinking around one particular sentence from a 20-year-old’s poem: “No one survived the Holocaust.”

*Barbara Krasner, former member, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee, New Jersey*

**ISRAEL**


Mitchell Lane’s nonfiction series aims to shed light on the lives of Israelis and the events, religions, and peoples that have shaped the country as we know it today. It is divided into two sets; the first (from which *Returning Home: Journeys to Israel* was reviewed) is written for elementary and middle school readers, while the second (which includes *Americans in the Holy Land, Israel: Holy Land to Many, and Israel: Stories of Conflict and Resolution*) is written for a high school audience. The format shifts from title
Reviews of Titles for Children and Teens
to title and chapter to chapter, with some reading more like a standard informational text, and others like an interview or a personal essay. Overall, the titles, while written from a Jewish perspective for an American audience, make a clear effort to neutrally present a variety of experiences, highlighting not only citizens of European descent or those practicing one of the three major religions of the area, but also groups like the Bahá’í, Egyptian Copts and the Golan Druze.

The titles, while covering a breadth of interesting and timely topics pertinent to Israeli life, can at times be dry or plodding. Of the two authors, Zohar is slightly more approachable, with a conversational style, whereas Silverman is straightforward in her presentation. It is doubtful that children will pick up these books for pleasure reading, not just because of the content but for the series’ visual aesthetics, which appear slightly out of date and include pictures of a range of quality and clarity. However, these titles can easily be used as a part of larger academic discussions on Israel or for American families preparing for aliyah whose children can begin to acquire a sense of daily life in their new country. School and synagogue libraries may consider certain titles from this series based on the age and interest level of the population they serve or if they identify a need for nonfiction texts on Israel that focus on the social and political history of the area in concert with its religious influences.

Alex Quay, Sinai Akiba Academy, Los Angeles, CA

[Editors’ note: Other books in the Voices from Israel Series were reviewed in the November/December 2015 issue of AJL Reviews.]

JEWISH LIFE & VALUES


Genendel Krohn provides concrete examples of ethics and appropriate behavior that can benefit all of us in our everyday lives. The book is divided into two parts: Section One includes thirty-nine situations in which derech eretz (ethical behavior) has a role. Many of them are instances we encounter every day: responding to compliments, phone etiquette, and being a good host or guest. The author often provides simple Torah or Talmudic text, or a quote from the Sages (with the citation) at the top of the page. Below it, are illustrated examples of wrong or insensitive responses (shown by red arrows), and better, kinder answers (indicated in green). There are also instances of active bad behavior, but those are fairly few. Section Two has additional cases specifically dealing with bullying and evil speech. We are reminded that “it’s not only what you say, but how you say it” -- tone and timing matter. It also includes pages on name-calling and body language.

Useful at all levels, from teachers in school classrooms to Rabbis wanting teaching tools for adults, it should find a place in every level of library. The only (minor) caveat is that gender roles are strongly delineated.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA

NONFICTION


Jewish children spend years learning to read Hebrew and later read from the Torah as a Bar and Bat Mitzvah, but probably don’t know much about how Torahs are made. The standard text used to share this information, A Torah is Written (JPS, 1986), is rather dated and contains only black and white photos. This new, attractive offering fills the important void in the subject with appealing photography, lively font size changes, and fun do-it-yourself projects that will appeal to children. Using a question-answer format, the author begins with “What is the Torah?” (opposite a photo of a Bat Mitzvah girl reading
from a scroll surrounded by her family—possibly in Jerusalem), and continues on with questions such as “What is a Torah scroll?”, “Who writes Torah scrolls?” and “How does a Torah scroll get dressed?” One interesting page states that “traditionally Torah scribes have all been men, but today some women write Torah scrolls,” and is accompanied by a photo of the hands of scribe Shoshana Gugenheim holding a quill ever so carefully over Hebrew letters written on parchment. Other photos depict traditionally dressed male sofrim (scribes) and artisans.

The inclusiveness of women and girls in this book is to be commended as a contrast to the dated literature surrounding this topic that is surely still on library shelves in so many non-Orthodox Jewish communities. Also, the variety of short, boxed questions directly addressed to the reader, such as, “Would you like to write a Torah scroll?” or “Is your writing straight or crooked?” serve to emphasize the direct connection a child can feel to the centuries-old process.

Lisa Silverman, Library Director, Burton Sperber Jewish Community Library, American Jewish University, Los Angeles, CA

PICTURE BOOKS


A classic rhyme combined with a beloved Jewish tale, 15 Greenbaums live in the proverbial shoe. The parents, Lou and his (un-named) wife, have twelve sons and a baby daughter Maxine. Overall, the family seems noisy and generally content. But Lou feels crowded and says “Oy vey, it’s loud and much too tight.” He takes his wife’s advice and goes to the Rabbi, who tells him to bring the chickens into the house. When things get worse, Lou returns to the Rabbi, who says they need three goats inside: “Ask me no questions and do as I say. You don’t need to worry. Now go on your way.” When the goats prove annoying, Lou returns to the Rabbi, who tells him to add a pair of geese. When the flying geese only add to the chaos, he goes back to the Rabbi a final time. The advice is obvious: “Take all of the animals out of the shoe. They don’t belong inside there with you.” In the end, all is well—“just singing and laughing, kvelling too, and a baby playing peek-a-boo. Yelling, jumping, a snoring wife, with love in the shoe it’s a bustling life.”

The illustrations contain some small Jewish touches (The Rabbi’s house is built of books and he wears a kipah; there are Hebrew blocks and a Tzedakah (charity) box). It should be a fun read for preschoolers but unless new versions of this classic tale are needed, this is an optional purchase.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA


As if Mensch on the Bench (self-published, 2013), Maccabee on the Mantle (self-published) and The Gelt Giving Golem (Suca Arts, 2014) were not enough to scratch some specious Jewish itch for Christmas, we now have our own Elf – Shmelf the Hanukkah Elf. A hardworking elf in Santa’s workshop, Shmelf finds in the course of his duties that some children are not getting a visit from Santa. When told that these are Jewish children, he does not believe that “Kids with no Christmas” can possibly exist. To double check, he visits a Jewish family and witnesses them celebrating a wonderful Hanukkah. Santa is so impressed with Shmelf’s concern for Jewish children, he promotes Shmelf to Hanukkah Elf, with a blue and white elf suit, a Star of David on his elf hat, a special sled and a reindeer named Asher. Shmelf is tasked with visiting every Jewish child to make sure the latkes are crispy, the menorahs burn bright and the dreidels always land on gimel. In addition, he will whisper your special gift desires into your parents’ ears so you always get what you want. But wait, there’s more! As a reward for putting Christmas magic into Hanukkah, “You can leave out some gelt and a nice kosher dill.”
While the pencil on paper, digitally colored artwork is excellent, and the rhyming text is well done, that is about all that is good about this book. Organized lists of Jewish children; yellow Stars of David everywhere from wrapping paper to Shmelf’s hat; a complete disregard for children of other faiths and traditions that do not celebrate Christmas (don’t Hindu and Moslem children deserve an elf?); all converge into an insulting, patronizing and totally ludicrous picture book. The authors bio says Greg Wolfe “was raised a nice Jewish boy...a true believer in Santa.” He wrote this book for his son “to prove that Santa believes in him too...” These statements, along with the overall message and tone of the story, will cause concern for anyone working in Jewish education. However, the fear that unsuspecting parents and public and school librarians might be enticed by this attractive new “Hanukkah” book, is definitely cause for alarm.

Kathy Bloomfield, President-SSC, Washington, DC

**SHABBAT AND HOLIDAYS**


Most readers are familiar with Aesop’s fable, “The Ant and the Grasshopper.” It tells the story of the grasshopper who lazes away the summer days while the ant works industriously to save food for the winter. However, when winter comes, the grasshopper goes hungry while the ant has plenty of food. Israeli author, Naomi Ben-Gur, has created a Jewish rhyming version of this well-known fable. Music-loving Cricket chirps and warbles, trills and dances the week away until it is late Friday afternoon. His cupboard is bare and he wants to bake a cake before Shabbat begins. What to do? He pleads with Ant, his neighbor (who has been working hard all week) to borrow sugar, oil, an egg, and finally flour with which to bake a cake. Meanwhile, Ant rests from her labors but wakes up when she smells her cake burning! Although she has wine and challah, she wonders, “How could she welcome Shabbat without cake?” Not to worry. Cricket comes along with a magnificent cake that he shares with his friend and neighbor and thus “They sing and they dance, and their joy has no end.”

As opposed to Aesop’s rather harsh moralistic fable, Ben-Gur’s telling is much gentler. The lesson is that friends and neighbors help each other in time of need. Although the text of The Cricket and the Ant was originally in Hebrew, for the most part the rhyme and rhythm work smoothly in English. Kober’s sprightly illustrations enhance the text using a limited palette of reds, greens, and yellows—and delightful black lines to add just the right touch of whimsy. Here is a light-hearted picture book about Shabbat that will appeal to young children—secular and religious alike.

Anne Dublin, author of 44 Hours or Strike! (Second Story Press), Toronto, Canada

[Note: This book was originally published in Hebrew with the title *Ulai efshar garger sukar?* (Can You Spare a Grain of Sugar?) by ha-Kibuts ha-me’uhad, Tel Aviv, 2014.]


Never before have the trials and tribulations of opening a jar of gefilte fish in time for *Shabbat* been so much fun! Using rhyming text in both English and Yiddish, the authors have created a slapstick day of adventure. *Bubbe* (Grandmother) and *Zayde* (Grandfather) use ice, a vise, and even pickle juice to open the jar. Nothing works! They enlist the help of friends and neighbors — the bodybuilder, the inventor, the auto repairman, the doctor, the dentist and even the fisherman — but the lid will not budge. Finally, their grandson, Jack, is successful when he intones the magic word, “please,” just in time for *Shabbat* dinner.
The illustrations in *A Gefilte Fishy Tale* are reminiscent of the style and color palette of *The Berenstain Bears* series. All of the characters have expressive faces that help to make the lap sit child or story time audience want to see what happens next. Common Yiddish words are scattered throughout the rhyming quatrain text (*challah, kugel, maven, noodle, nosh, schmeared, tsuris* and more.) A fun, visual glossary appears at the beginning of the story instead of its usual placement at the end. A bonus recipe for gefilte fish mini muffins and an original song with music, “Shabbat a Lot,” appear at the end.

*Rena Citrin, Head Librarian; Bernard Zell Anshe Emet Day School, Chicago*

**MUSIC**


Engaging songs in Ladino provide a unique opportunity for young children to be exposed to the language. According to her website, Aroeste, an opera-trained singer whose family roots originated in Greece and Macedonia, has composed the only all-original Ladino children’s album. The use of simple tunes and lyrics with lots of repetition allow for easy absorption of basic vocabulary. Conceived as an educational tool to reinforce a language which has a diminishing number of native speakers, the 11 tracks on the CD entice the listener with clear enunciation, sound effects and instrumental accompaniment. There are songs about daily activities, food, parts of the body, the family and other concepts. Particularly charming is “Komo vas a ser?”, a lyrical musing by a parent about what his or her child might become.

*Joyce Levine, formerly AJL Publications Chair, retired children’s librarian and singer/songwriter, North Woodmere, NY*
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Editor-in-Chief
Uri Kolodney
University of Texas Libraries
The University of Texas at Austin
One University Station S5400
Austin, TX 78712-8916
generaleditor@jewishlibraries.org

Adult Review Editors
Daniel Scheide
S.E. Wimberly Library
Florida Atlantic University
777 Glades Road
Boca Raton, FL 33431-6424
561-297-0519
dascheide@gmail.com

Dr. Rebecca Jefferson
Head, Isser and Rae Price Library of Judaica
539, Library West
University of Florida
Gainesville, FL. 32611-7010
Phone: (352) 273-2650
Fax: (352) 392-8118
jefferson@ufl.edu

Please send adult books for review to D. Scheide

Children and YA Review Editors
Rachel Kamin
1054 Holly Circle
Lake Zurich, IL 60047
rach elkamin@gmail.com

and Chava (Kathe) Pinchuck
kpinchuck@gmail.com

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