The Thrill of Cataloging Hebrew Incunabula

By Haim A. Gottschalk

On October 5, 2020, I cataloged my first incunabulum; a Hebrew incunabulum to be exact. Incunabula are works printed during the early years of printing, usually 1455-1500. The work was the 1485 printing of Sefer ha-Ikarim by the Jewish philosopher Joseph Albo (c. 1380-1435). This is more than just a book, it has personality. Through cataloging, I am being taught to see this personality. I am almost becoming a kind of a book whisperer. This book spoke volumes.

The story begins with the work itself. Sefer ha-Ikarim is a philosophical work on maintaining one’s Jewish faith. It was first printed in 1485 in the municipality of Soncino in the Lombardy region of northern Italy (in what was then the duchy of Milan) by Joshua Solomon Soncino, only 50 years after Albo’s death, and barely 30 years after Gutenberg invented movable type. Joshua Solomon Soncino was the legendary printer who printed the first Talmud, Tractate Berachot, in December of 1483. With this printing of the Talmud, arguably the first printed Talmudic tractate, Soncino pioneered the layout of the multi-layered text that we have today. Making it essentially not just a Talmud, but a study Talmud. Holding this edition of the Sefer ha-Ikarim, knowing that it came from Joshua Soncino’s press, was a moment of awe for me.

The story continues with the book’s movement, which for me is very fascinating; the book did not stay in Italy, but eventually made its way to a kollel, Kollel Valin, in Tiberias. What we see is the dissemination of knowledge and now we have a footprint. Eventually, this specific volume made its way to the Library of Congress. Perhaps this volume was part of the collection assembled by Ephraim Deinard, a Jewish bookseller and bibliographer who assembled a major collection of Hebraica and Judaica books that included incunabula. This collection of some 10,000 items was purchased by New York philanthropist Jacob Schiff and presented to the Library of Congress between 1912 and 1921.

The book was in my hands. In leafing through the book, page by page, I learned that several leaves are missing. Perhaps this book was censored. One of the missing leaves was recreated by hand, perhaps by a scholar who studied at the Kollel Valin, in the holy city of Tiberias. We know this volume was at this kollel based on inscriptions found on various (Continued on page 2)
pages. As I am learning to catalog an incunabulum, I learn to pay close attention to the signatures. The book does not have page numbers. Rather we keep track of the number of quires and record the signatures as 1-2^3 3^4 4-13^5 14^6. What looks like a formula is really a description of the quires. The first two quires have eight leaves, as do the fourth through the thirteenth, while the third and fourteenth quire have only six leaves. In this work, I am beginning to understand and appreciate that the early years of printing were like the Wild West. Everything was new; there were no printing conventions like we have today. The printers had to be innovative and essentially invent the printed book. I look forward to working with more rare Hebrew books and learning more about what each book has to say.

Author’s Note: I am writing this article in my own personal capacity and expressing my own views. Ideas & opinions in this article are not intended to represent those of the Library of Congress or its staff.

AJL Forms Strategic Planning Committee

By Sean Boyle, Chair, Strategic Planning Committee

AJL Council has approved the creation of a Strategic Planning Committee, a group that will be proposing AJL’s goals and objectives for the next 3-5 years. This essential committee will allow AJL to have a strategic plan with broad and far-reaching implications based on the perspectives of members with a variety of backgrounds.

The committee has representation from all parts of AJL: RAS, SSCPL, new members, long-time members, North American, and International members, to name a few. Each participant will bring a unique set of skills and talents to the table, and together a workable and effective plan will be developed for the AJL Board and Council to approve.

The committee will first assess the Association's effectiveness at meeting the AJL Mission Statement and Vision. This will be done through membership surveys and interviews; all members are highly encouraged to answer requests to participate, so that the committee can have accurate data to work with. Once the committee has a baseline on the Association’s effectiveness, they will then conduct an environmental scan to identify external to AJL opportunities or threats to future planning.

After all the data has been collected and analyzed, the committee will propose goals and objectives for AJL Board and Council approval. The approved goals and objectives will then have proposed initiatives that either legacy AJL committees will then execute, or the AJL Council will create new committees to execute these aligned initiatives over the next several years.

This is a time consuming, but vital process that will help ensure that AJL continues to be the leading authority on Judaic Librarianship. Again, I encourage you to participate in all future membership surveys and select interview requests.

AJL at ALSC Institute

By Rebecca Levitan, AJL Public Relations Chair

On October 2nd, Erev Sukkot (an accommodation made by ALSC so that the presentation would not air on Shabbat or Yom Tov), AJL members Heidi Rabinowitz, Susan Kusel, Sylvie Shaffer, and Rebecca Levitan presented to the Association of Library Services to Children (ALSC) National Institute. ALSC Institute is a biennial learning opportunity with a youth services focus, produced by the ALSC, a division of the American Library Association. It is one of the only conferences devoted to children’s librarianship, literature and technology.

In a presentation titled “Diversity Needs Jewish Books: A Missing Piece of the Diversity Conversation,” Heidi, Susan, Sylvie, and Rebecca set out to dispel some myths about Judaism and Jewish children’s literature such as: Chanukkah is not the most important holiday; Bar/Bat Mitzvah is not the end of your Jewish journey, but really the beginning; that Jews are more than our worst moments and Holocaust books are far overrepresented; and that Jews come in all sorts of colors and observances. They then went on to discuss ways that people can easily include Jewish patrons in their library services, including paying attention to the Jewish Calendar, reconsidering how displays are done, ensuring Kosher snacks are available for any program involving food, and where to find quality Jewish book lists. Following the presentation, there was a bit of time for Q&A where attendees had very thoughtful questions including how to program if a library does not have Sunday hours, and a discussion of some favorite Jewish children’s books.

Feedback from attendees was very positive. “Thank you, everyone! Such a wonderful presentation and great expertise,” said Amy Forrester. Tara Vogel said, “This is such an important conversation. The panel has been SO helpful, extremely informative, and just an overall wonderful presentation. You all are such a joy to listen to!” And Linda Klein said, “In our library, we have a special holiday section. The only Jewish holiday we have in that collection is Hanukkah. From the presentation today, I learned that this is a more minor holiday than, for example, Sukkot or Rosh Hashanah. I’m going to work on that; I’ve had pushback from everyone in technical services, collection management, and youth services about that.” Additionally, at least one attendee happily joined AJL right away as a new member.

A resource sheet, the presentation slides, and a bibliography of books about Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg (z”l) were made available to the attendees as well.

Editor’s Note: The ALSC blog, dated October 20, 2020, gave this presentation enthusiastic praise, in post entitled, “An #aslco Highlight by Sarah West.”
SSCPL Division Updates

Shalom,

The SSCPL Division leadership and membership have been working since this Summer on ways to safely open our library buildings and provide safe services to our users during this global pandemic. Hopefully, you have been able to participate in the virtual Roundtables and have been following along on the Hasafran discussions. Luckily, the virtual Roundtables are available to be viewed later as videos, with links in the members' area of the AJL website. I encourage everyone to watch them and contact us if you have any further questions.

So far, there has been a Roundtable on the REALM studies recommendations for quarantining materials as they are returned; one on the issues and recommendations on how to conduct circulations with the many COVID restrictions in place, which will be covered a second time in November; and a Roundtable discussing the unique challenges and issues with being a ‘volunteer’ librarian. We are looking at a Roundtable in December concerning Weeding Your Collection, and will host one a month as we go into 2021 on topics SSCPL members feel are needed. This is a great opportunity for SSCPL membership to recommend topics for discussions, and for us to all learn from each other's experiences. If needed, I will find and bring in outside experts to help us, when members' experience is not sufficient.

One topic that requires addressing is E-resources consortia. Due to the fact that consortial agreements, in the United States, are bound by state lines, I am still researching how to best address that topic. An open to all members Roundtable is not a viable option, and instead it may require for members to gather other members inside their state that wish to create a consortium, and AJL/SSCPL can likely then facilitate a meeting with publishing representatives. I am open to any recommendations on how to make this work!

Lastly, I encourage everyone to work towards either Basic or Advanced Accreditation; it is a great Advocacy and Marketing Tool for your library. It also helps when requesting support from your administrators and helps you to ensure you have policies in place to run a more effective library.

Please contact me with any concerns that you feel AJL can help you with, and all recommendations on how we can help serve you better! Toda!

Sean Boyle, MLIS
President, SSCPL Division
Chair, SSCPL Advocacy Committee
Chair, AJL Strategic Planning Committee
boylesp94@gmail.com

Chapter Chatter & Member News!

We of Long Island are just as distanced as the rest of the country is ... We have Zoom sessions planned for the upcoming months. With November almost here we are planning a virtual meeting for November, highlighting Jewish Book Month, with our program entitled, “What are you reading Jewishly?” All interpretations accepted!! Our membership chair Arlene Ratzabi will be the moderator. She'll also update us on What’s New in Jewish Books.

When December rolls around, sure, we’d love to have an in person Hanukkah celebration, but … as you’ve heard of the EIGHT NIGHTS of HANUKKAH ... we’ll settle for Zoom sessions on the EIGHT MONTHS OF COVID. We look forward to illuminating the lives of all our members as this pandemic has led to too much isolation.

I hope to see our membership meet in the springtime. I look forward to seeing you, our AJL members next year in Chicago.

Shalom,
Wendy A. Marx
President, LIAJL

Yasher Koach to Michelle Chesner, AJL Vice President/President Elect, who was interviewed in Fine Books and Collections in “Bright Young Librarians: Michelle Chesner” on October 7, 2020! Michelle is the Norman E. Alexander Librarian for Jewish Studies at Columbia University.

David B. Levy gave a shiur before Sukkot upon invitation by Rabbi Moshe Pinchas Weisblum which touches on the organization of the Jewish calendar from the perspective of scientific rationalism as an epistemological mode of measuring time and Jewish mysticism, from the perspective Hashem as Being that is not finite (ayn sof), and who exists as perpetual peace in an Eternal paradoxical realm.

Visit the AJL Web site at www.jewishlibraries.org.
AJL is now on Facebook. Become a fan.
"About Face" tells the little-known stories of Jewish children who fled Nazi Germany before 1941, later returning to their homeland as avenging Allied soldiers. Based on over 2,000 hours of interviews with WWII veterans, including Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, the documentary chronicles these amazing journeys from Nazi scapegoats to honored Allied soldiers and spies.

"The impressive extent of research and storytelling reveals the quiet humanity of these veterans."
- Deborah Oppenheimer, producer of Academy Award-winning documentary Into the Arms of Strangers: Stories of the Kindertransport

"This deeply researched documentary is another opportunity to learn about Jews in WWII - not only as victims but also as active fighters against an evil regime."
- Guy Stern, Ph.D., former Provost, Wayne State University and a "Ritchie Boy"

"Using archival footage to set the stage for the terror that Hitler brought to a continent, mixed with interviews of men and women who went from victim to victor, is both exhilarating and stunning."
- Michael I. Berlin, Ph.D., Lecturer, University of California, Irvine

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Seven Questions with Jessica Meir, NASA Astronaut

Just before Rosh Hashanah, editor-in-chief Sally Stieglitz had the opportunity to interview NASA Astronaut Jessica Meir for AJL News and Reviews. Meir was selected by NASA in 2013 and holds a BA in Biology (Brown University), a Master of Science in Space Studies from the International Space University, and a PhD in Marine Biology from Scripps Institution of Oceanography (UCSD). Meir recently served as flight engineer on the International Space Station, where along with fellow astronaut Christina Koch, Meir took part in the first ever all female spacewalk in October 2019.

Astronaut Jessica Meir speaking with AJL News and Reviews

Image credit: Astro_Jessica/Twitter

AJL: Thank you for chatting with the Association of Jewish Libraries News and Reviews! You are a leader in two important milestones in representation: the first all women spacewalk and the iconic photo of the Hanukkah socks. Did you feel that was a shout out to all the Jewish kids? Like Hanukkah is cool!

JM: Yeah, it’s funny, I flew those Hanukkah socks and didn’t really anticipate them getting much attention, but they did seem to; it was one of my most popular posts so I’m glad that I could excite people a little bit in that realm, but to be honest it wasn’t something that I had given a lot of thought. It was just something that I knew I was going to be up there for the holidays and there’s always a lot of things up there for Christmas celebrations, but probably fewer for Hanukkah. So I did want to bring one small thing with me and it was those socks. So I’m glad that they did excite people and pay a little bit of tribute to the Jewish community.

AJL: Another pressing question for our readers...Were you allowed to and did you choose to bring any books with you? And if you did, were they print or digital books? And if so, what were you reading?

JM: I did not have much free time up there, so I actually did not read any normal book when I was up there for seven months, which is sad because I do love to read. We do have some books up there and we also have a kindle app or we have different apps on our tablets that we can use to read. Since launching items to space is really expensive and we’re very limited in our amount of space, people usually don’t launch books, they’ll use their tablet or something to read. So I did have stuff like that, I read a lot of newspapers and news while I was up there. I actually did not read a book when I was up there, which is a little sad but there were so many things we needed to be doing and we were so busy workwise. We had very little free time and in my free time I wanted to prioritize looking out the window and capturing images to share with everybody of my experience. I think maybe I felt that reading a book was almost a little bit too selfish because that would have been just about me in that moment and I wanted to spend my free time doing things that had impacts and I could use to further the mission and to do more outreach, and to share this with people in other ways during the mission. But, there absolutely is reading that is happening on the Space Station, it’s just most of the time we’re reading procedures and things like that, but people have definitely read books up there as well.

AJL: Switching topics a little bit, I know you grew up in Caribou, Maine, can you tell us a little about the Jewish community there?

JM: Well, there wasn’t much of one, actually. I think we were the only Jewish people in Caribou. There wasn’t even a synagogue in Caribou, but there was one in the neighboring town in Presque Isle so we would go there for the High Holidays, and I did have my bat mitzvah there as well. But, yeah, it was interesting, when I went to [Brown] University and met so many other Jews, it was really interesting to hear the comparisons of their experiences of growing up Jewish in America, their bar mitzvah and bat mitzvah stories which were suddenly a thing that was off the scale of what I had ever experienced.

AJL: So, what about the Caribou Public Library? I looked at their website, it looked pretty great, can you share any childhood experiences of going there?

JM: Yeah, absolutely. I loved the library, I loved to read as a kid, and I was really a voracious reader, tearing through books, from the time that I was really young and I lived on Main Street up a hill, and so I just had to walk down the hill a little ways and there was the public library. So it was very close, very easy for me to walk or bike to and I spent a lot of time there. I remember the card catalogs and searching for books and using it for research as I got into high school. I have lots of fond memories of using that library.

AJL: Did you have any favorite books while you were there, that you were reading growing up, a series like Nancy Drew or The Babysitters Club or anything like that?

JM: You know, a couple of my childhood favorites were Where the Red Fern Grows [by Wilson Rawls], that was definitely one

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I loved as a kid, and what was the name of the other one? Mildred D. Taylor...Aah, I’m blanking on the name ... I’ll have to look that one up and get back to you on it.

**AJL:** Growing up, did you ever struggle to see yourself represented in books? Either due to a lack of Jewish representation in books or because it was generally not reflective of Jewish families other than Ashkenazi families? I know your dad is from Iraq and Israel, I believe.

**JM:** You know, I don’t know that that ever was really apparent to me, but maybe that’s just because of the way I grew up. Both of my parents were from different countries, we were living somewhere where, background-wise, we were definitely very different from a lot of the other people in the community but it wasn’t something that really struck me in a negative way and I’m not sure why that is; maybe I just didn’t have the awareness to even think about it back then as a child, but I would look at it as a positive thing, I didn’t ever feel excluded from anything for any reason to do with my gender or my background or my religion so, certainly it wasn’t something I was aware of as a child.

**AJL:** That’s great. So, You have earned a PhD, and you’ve really had a significant number of years spent toiling in higher ed and academia. What are your experiences of using academic libraries to support your scholarship and research?

**JM:** I think I grew up in a time when we still physically went into libraries and I love the smell of books and I still vastly prefer reading a real book than having an e-reader, just the smell of the paper and the physicality of turning the pages is something that just really resonates with me and I certainly spent a lot of time, as I mentioned, going to the Caribou Public Library when I started doing research projects at school. We had a set of Encyclopedia Britannica in my home growing up and my brother and I were just talking about that recently, actually, remembering they were this kind of deep maroon color, and we would go and look something up. It’s just so different from the way that we do things now. I feel really fortunate to have grown up when people still really did utilize books in that way and attain knowledge that way. Maybe we’re all just a little bit nostalgic for what we grew up with but that carried over into college too. I spent a lot of time at Brown University in the libraries using them as places to study as well as using the resources in them. And I kind of like that whole process of finding where a book is and going into the stacks and finding it and I used, actually, a lot of old literature, too for my PhD. Some of the techniques that I used for my work were maybe quite antiquated, where I had to look up some older papers that were only in print, I actually enjoy that process of being a little bit more investigative and having a physical connection in terms of how I’m obtaining the information. There’s something about that that really appeals to me.

**AJL:** Even though there’s a great deal of increased career access and equity in STEM fields, it feels like there is still work to be done so far as gender equity for women. What can libraries in particular do to support girls and women interested STEM?

**JM:** That’s a good question. I try to use this job and everything I did previously as a scientist to try to inspire all kinds of people, and I think there really is something to be said for people identifying with...something they can identify with can really be the most powerful and inspirational. I noticed that when I went back to my hometown as an astronaut and gave a talk and a young girl came up to me and said exactly that, just how hearing me speak really brought out this connection for her. She’d struggled in a lot of different ways in high school, but realizing that I came from the same place that she did really helped her identify what it was that just made her feel okay about everything, made her feel inspired and motivated to go forward. So I think there is something to be said by making sure that we are having that diversity be very well represented in everything that we do, and I think that I was lucky enough to grow up in a time to have benefited from those generations of women and minorities that struggled to get where we are today. I came into an astronaut class that was fifty percent female and fifty percent male and we were all held to the same standard and it just seemed normal to us, but that’s not because of us, that’s because of the work that the generations before us, of women and minorities, pushing those boundaries and getting us where we are today. So I think that if we continue to showcase and represent that diversity, and to appreciate it, then kids growing up now will see all the faces that look like them and realize that whatever it is that their dream is, it’s possible. Chances are, there is somebody who shares something in common with them, whether it’s what they look like, their backgrounds, where they grew up, an interest they have; if they see that represented in one of us astronauts or in anybody involved in the STEM fields, I think that will help them have that drive and motivation and that dream and realize that they could fulfill their dreams as well.

**AJL:** That’s great. I agree with all of that. So that’s the end of our questions, I just want to tell you, I looked up the book for you, because that’s my job.

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**An Editor’s Insights: Using Hot-Links for References, Endnotes, and Glossaries**

by Israel Cohen

All of the major citation styles (APA, MLA, Chicago, IEEE) are outmoded. They were designed in the mid-1900s to facilitate finding a book or article in your favorite library, and if not found, to enable a librarian to obtain it via interlibrary loan, and finally, if necessary, to facilitate ordering a copy from its publisher. These styles no longer meet the needs of a computerized society. They wrongly elevate form over function and do not take into account advances in technology.

Nearly all readers of academic and professional publications have easy access to the Internet via PCs, laptops, iPads, and/or smart phones. A written description of an item they want to obtain is not nearly as helpful as hot-links to websites that can be immediately viewed successfully. These readers would much rather see an item they want to obtain displayed with a mouse click or finger tap. This is especially true if the link indicates the type of information that will be displayed.

Readers of a PDF or e-book need to be able to use URLs. They do not need to see them, much less know when they were viewed successfully. These readers would much rather see an indication of what they are likely to retrieve if they click a link. These should be links to safe, stable websites that provide additional data that a typical reader may need about persons, places, things, events, and concepts.

The displayed link should indicate its type. For example: review, preview, summary, synopsis, abstract, descriptor, analysis, critique, comment, preface, intro, foreword, TOC, refs, page, excerpt, pdf, full text, download, borrow, CV, home page, bio, wiki, quotes, thesis, interview, audio, video, obit.

The number of link tabs and their names should not be restricted. All that is required is uniform usage within a particular book or article. Of course, the tabs must be meaningful. Tags such as “click here” and “link” should not be used. Tags for multiple links of the same type should be unique. For example: review1, review2, review3. If displaying the target of a link requires payment or a paid subscription, the link should include the cost or “sub”, e.g., download_US $24, or online_sub.

Here are some sample endnotes from An Existentialist Theory of the Human Spirit (Volume 1): To Love and Create … or Not by Shlomo G. Shoham:


Talmud Yoma 77b (Sefaria in Hebrew, p. 233 in English translation online). Referring to the abduction of Dinah, Genesis 34:2.

Genesis Rabba 22b, pp. 180-192; full-text: Sefaria.

The same approach can be used for references in alphanumeric order by author and date of publication. For example, these endnotes are from Biblical Humanism and Suicide Prevention: Where Did the Greeks Go Wrong?, a contribution by Kalman J. Kaplan to a Festschrift in honor of Shlomo G. Shoham:


Preuss, Julius (German wiki) (1978). Biblical and Talmudic
Ever wonder what would happen if one of Judaism’s fiercest feminist theological minds trained itself on understanding the teachings of a tzaddik, a spiritual master, whose soul had manifested itself in this world in her new shelter cat? Can you imagine this gray tabby’s routine and unusual behaviors imparting the profound insights and moral lessons found in Judaism’s most revered texts and practices?

Wonder and imagine no more.

The book begins the way cat books usually do: as a series of autobiographical stories of Rabbi Adler’s amusing cat’s antics and quirky personality. But it becomes much more as you encounter not only the sage Mysticat, but also Adler’s creativity, erudition and mischievous humor as they connect us effortlessly to Jewish mysticism, history, prayer, customs, rabbinical teachings, and six thousand years of cherished tradition. Rabbi Adler certainly knows her territory! Readers will find this an accessible, lively, and thought-provoking way of gaining a new insight into the rich diversity and endless complexity of Jewish thought and practices. Even avowed dog lovers will relish Tales of the Holy Mysticat.

This is a book to be savored, like fine chocolate—or catnip.
From the President’s Desk

Dear Friends,

As President of AJL, one of my many areas of focus is to insure the future financial stability of our organization. Our Development Committee, ably led by Vice President Jackie Benefraim, has been hard at work creating plans for raising money to offset our operating costs, obtaining grants to benefit our diverse membership and establishing endowments for our many literary awards. This is a slow process that takes a great deal of attention, effort, and creative thinking.

Last year we established our AJL Annual Campaign. Many of our members responded by supporting our General Fund, Conference Fund, President’s Fund, Judy Cohn Conference Assistance Fund, Student Scholarships, and our Publications. This year’s AJL Annual Campaign will begin on December 1st. Please keep AJL at the top of your year-end Tzedakah list and be generous in your giving to the Leading Authority on Judaic Librarianship. I thank you in advance for your gifts.

Not everyone enjoys asking for money. Our Development Associate, Jerry Krautman, has been educating our Board and Council members on enjoyable ways to approach people effectively. Sharing our libraries and projects is one of the most effective ways to cultivate potential donors. Please say yes if we approach you to share a tour of your library or provide information about your collection for a potential donor. The generous gift of your time and knowledge could be the thing that opens a door for a much needed gift.

Thank you to all who joined me on Sunday, October 18 for AJL’s First Annual Membership Gala with Dr. Carla Hayden, Librarian of Congress, and Oren Weinberg, CEO of Israel’s National Library. The discussion was interesting and deep. It appears that a shidduch/match was made, and as a result, the conversation between our countries’ main libraries will continue. Special thanks to Michelle Chesner for leading the wonderful discussion. Thank you to the many members who enriched the discussion with their questions. And many thanks to Sharon Benamou, Michelle Chesner, Heidi Rabinowitz, Gail Shirazi, and Jerry Krautman for their hard work in putting together our successful Membership Campaign and this extraordinary day. 

Hanukkah begins on Thursday, December 10, 2020. I am looking forward to AJL’s celebration on Sunday, December 6 at 9:30 a.m. Pacific/12:30 p.m. Eastern with a Hanukkah Social and Open House. Share your Hanukkiyah and holiday decorations, play a rousing game of Kahoots, and schmooze with your colleagues. This is not a member’s only event. Friends are invited! So please ask anyone you know who might be interested in AJL to join us for a fun morning/afternoon/evening. I look forward to seeing you there.

Until then stay well,

Kathy B.

P.S. AJL is always looking for volunteers to serve on our many committees. If you are interested, please contact Heidi Rabinowitz, our Member Relations Chair, at BookofLifePodcast@gmail.com.

AJL’S Professional Affiliations

Do you know that AJL affiliates with and has a liaison to several professional organizations?

Association for Jewish Studies (https://www.associationforjewishstudies.org/), Liaison: TBD
American Library Association (http://wwwALA.org/), Liaisons: Emily Bergman and Susan Kusel
American Theological Library Association (https://www.atla.com/), Liaison: Sheryl Stahl
Catholic Library Association (https://catla.org/), Liaison: Daniel Stuhlman

If you are interested in getting involved with any of these groups, please be in touch with the appropriate Liaison, they can let you know what benefits AJL members receive as well as what you can do to help. And if you are a member of a professional organization that AJL should be affiliated with, please let me know. I will get to work making the connection.

Editor’s Note

shalom Safranim!

So much has been going on behind the scenes at AJL News and Reviews that I want to share with you. I am delighted to welcome Rachel Levitan to our team! Rachel is bringing many years of professional layout experience and we are very excited to have her join us as Design Director of AJL News and Reviews. Rachel’s position represents the same duties handled beautifully to date by Layout Editor Karen Ulric who is stepping down from her role, with our thanks and good wishes, to focus on other endeavors. Karen, your hard work and sharp eye as an editor over many years were much appreciated!!

I also hope you like the updated “look” we are sporting in this issue … thank you Rachel for bringing us your fresh outlook on design layout. Another change you may have noticed is with the dates for this winter issue from November/December to December/January. This slight shift in publication dates recognizes and honors the importance of the fall chagim that made an October 5 submission date for reviewers, writers, and editors a daunting task. With a revised submission date of November 5, we hope to reduce the strain on our many talented contributors.

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The genesis of an exhibition of cultural heritage objects bringing together manuscripts and printed books is more often than not spurred by a key idea, concept, or theme. Marking an important historical event or period, celebrating the life and achievements of an outstanding figure, showcasing a specific collection, highlighting landmark treasures or acquisitions, are just some of the core themes that might set the wheels of an exhibition in motion.

The impetus for putting up an exhibition of manuscripts from the British Library’s Hebrew collection emerged in 2018, on the threshold of the final stage of a major digitisation project. Between 2013 and early 2020, the British Library launched into a far-reaching, externally funded digitisation project—the Hebrew Manuscripts Digitisation Project (HMDP). Its principal aim was to provide free online access to the Library’s entire Hebrew manuscript collection, through manuscript conservation and imaging, metadata creation and online presentation. The project’s two main phases, each lasting three years, had been generously funded by The Polonsky Foundation and the National Library of Israel respectively. The benefits and outputs of this exceptionally challenging, large-scale project have been wide-ranging, the uppermost being:

- Improved access to a significant scholarly resource; ca. 2,700 Hebrew manuscripts (codices, scrolls, single sheets) digitised and catalogued in HMDP Phases 1 & 2
- Cover to cover digitised manuscripts and detailed, searchable catalogue records; available on the Library’s Digitised Manuscripts site.

The beautifully designed Hebrew Manuscripts: Journeys of the Written Word exhibition, was thus intended to celebrate the completion of the HMDP. Due to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, the exhibition could not be launched in March 2020 as initially planned. It finally opened to the public on 1st September.

**Exhibition proposal**

Between 2018 and 2019, the original exhibition proposal was altered several times. Likewise, the object list which at the start included close to 65 manuscripts, had to be adjusted and narrowed down substantially in order to accommodate several loans, and most importantly, to comply with the limitations of a small exhibition space.

A formative evaluation with visitor focus groups was conducted in April 2019. The feedback received from these consultations helped to shape the exhibition concept and scope in its initial stages, and to make the final selection of relevant artefacts.

An Advisory Panel composed of six academic members was established in autumn 2019. The main purpose of the Advisory Panel was to assist with advice and feedback as we curated and implemented the exhibition. The Advisory Panel acted as a forum for discussion, and had oversight of the exhibition narrative and exhibit list, with particular reference to individual areas of expertise and specialisation. Its members were

Or 12983, f. 12v (detail)—Perek shirah (Chapter of Song). Beginning of chapter on the four-legged beasts, showing 13 different animals. Vienna or Pressburg, around 1740
additionally expected to ensure consistency and academic rigour to the written materials, to advise on possible risk areas, and to make certain the content was as relevant as possible to our target audiences.

Exhibition content

Hebrew Manuscripts: Journeys of the Written Word exhibition transports the visitor on a voyage of discovery through magnificent objects arranged into four distinct sections: The Bible and beyond, Living together, the Power of letters and words, Science and scholarship.

The visitor’s experience is enhanced by the clever and creative design of the show that:
- Showcases 43 outstanding objects, including 39 manuscripts, a snapshot of the British Library’s remarkably rich and wide-ranging Hebrew collection
- Includes creative A/V platforms (e.g., one featuring animated micrography, another providing interactive simulation of the medieval Guidonian hand)
- Displays concise, informative labels and graphic panels, and a lit map showing the manuscripts’ places of production
- Makes optimal use of a fairly small space

Key messages

Hebrew Manuscripts: Journeys of the Written Word is not an exhibition about religious works, although its first section incorporates a number of core religious texts. Its principal aims and messages are as follows:

- Reveal the significance of written culture as the bond connecting the diasporic Jewish communities around the world
- Convey the centuries-long culture, history, and traditions of the Jewish people, while showing at the same time their interaction with the host cultures, and exchanges of ideas and knowledge
- Explore the high points and signs of conflict in the relationships between Jews and their non-Jewish neighbors in the communities they lived in
- Show the unflagging journeys of the Hebrew script, one of the oldest writing systems that has been in continuous use, from around the 10th century BCE to this day

Challenges

One of the main challenges has been striking a balance between items audiences expected to see and items they did not know about. We have successfully managed to create a unique, engaging, and visually attractive exhibition where iconic manuscripts sit alongside items unseen publicly before.

The speedy implementation of this stimulating exhibition—within barely ten months—shows unmistakably how digitisation has been instrumental through the laborious stages of selection, planning, and researching. These tasks could not have been successfully completed in such a short timescale, were it not for the digital corpus of Hebrew manuscripts available to us.

Promotion

Despite delays and closures due to the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been a flurry of activity promoting the exhibition that has been carried out predominantly on Zoom and via social media platforms. Here are some salient examples:

- Blogs about objects featured in the exhibition
- Twitter and Facebook posts
- Virtual curator’s walkthroughs
- Virtual PowerPoint curator’s presentations
- Study sessions with curatorial input
- Free cultural events on Jewish topics
- Press coverage and podcasts have also helped publicizing the exhibition, as have specially created stationery products on sale in the Library’s bookshop.

A 3D virtual tour is available for those who are unable to visit the physical exhibition.

All the Hebrew manuscripts on view in the exhibition are freely accessible on the Library’s Digitised Manuscript site.

For more information, please follow this link to the British Library’s Exhibition Page for Hebrew Manuscripts: Journeys of the Written Word.
Sometimes, a book comes along that gobsmacks you. They Went Left is such a book. This gut-wrenching historical novel begins in 1945, when Zofia, the eighteen-year-old protagonist, is liberated from the Gross-Rosen concentration camp. She is barely alive and is taken to the hospital by Dima, a kindly Russian soldier. Zofia is not only physically fragile, but mentally as well. She is haunted by nightmares of what happened to her family and the other Jews of Sosnowiec when the Germans invaded Poland in 1939. The novel takes place in two main settings: Lower Silesia, when Zofia travels from the hospital to Sosnowiec, and the Foehrenwald displaced-persons camp in Allied-occupied Germany. Zofia tells her story in first-person perspective point of view/present tense.

This novel is clearly a quest narrative, where the hero has a compelling mission. Zofia is driven by the last words she said to Abek, her younger brother: “Abek to Zofia, A to Z. When I find you again, we will fill our alphabet.” On her journey, she is accompanied by a variety of characters with strong and vibrant personalities. Along the way, there is arrival and frustration, as well as a final ordeal. The setting is authentic, described with sensory details and powerful images. Sometimes, the events are so horrifying that one wants to stop reading. However, the plot moves along quickly and there are even touches of humor and joy. Hesse has woven a story full of suspense, romance, heartbreak, but ultimate hope.

Few Holocaust novels deal with the aftermath of the war. They Went Left describes the utter chaos in Europe when tens of thousands of Jews and non-Jews were displaced and lost, wandering through the rubble of countries and trying to find a home and family. In her Note on History and Research, Hesse writes, “before the war, the Jewish population of Sosnowiec was twenty-nine thousand people. After the war, only seven hundred returned.” Among the 700 were this reviewer’s parents.

Anne Dublin, retired teacher-librarian, Holy Blossom Temple and author of the forthcoming historical novel, Jacob and the Mandolin Adventure, Toronto

**REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS**

**In the Spotlight**

**EDITED BY LISA SILVERMAN and ELLEN DRUCKER-ALBERT**


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This three-volume graphic novel treatment of the life of the famed Irena Sendler is a remarkable achievement. The first volume was published in French in 2017 and the last two volumes were published in English in 2020. All four authors and artists involved tell an age-appropriate, emotional story of Irena Sendlerowa, the righteous gentile who saved over 2500 Jewish children in wartime Warsaw. Their careful research goes further than most of the present biographies for young people by separating her life experiences into three volumes. Book One: Wartime Ghetto, describes how Irena, a young social worker, began her resistance work in the German-occupied Warsaw Ghetto of the 1940s. The amazing Where’s Waldo style of artwork provides numerous ways a reader can immerse themselves in ghetto life quite powerfully by simply staring at the opening two-page spread. The dark color palette recalls the period and sets the right mood. Irena saves children, gets arrested, refuses to reveal her contacts and is ultimately saved from death with bribes to the guards. The artists use the contrivance of an adorable little white dog named Shepsi that at first protects ghetto children and later accompanies Irena and her resistance network. The antics of this feisty little companion allows readers a respite from the many tragic scenes of Nazi cruelty, poverty, and smuggled babies, and will especially appeal to younger readers.

The second volume, Book Two: Children of the Ghetto, begins after the war in 1947, focusing on Irena’s imprisonment by the Nazis and her desperate search for the mostly-orphaned children, along with her attempts to reunite them with the remnants of their families. The narrative jumps back and forth in time to when Irena visits Yad Vashem and tells her story in 1983 upon receiving honors and acclaim in Israel.

The third volume, Book Three: Life After the Ghetto finds Irena still in Poland in her later years, looking back on her life and her accomplishments. The color palette has been brightened, she has a new little dog, and her name is now recognized around the world. The authors repeatedly highlight Irena’s regrets that she was not able to do enough and save more children. She died

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Continued on page 14
in 2008 at the age of 98. The books should be read in order and although there may be some confusion from the time-jumps, the artistic style and colors are the clues to the time period in Irena’s life. This book will appeal to anyone who likes graphic novels, and although it is not a light-hearted read, it is a wonderful testament to a truly righteous person. For a taste of this excellent series see the trailer on YouTube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=LoheaVwEWtA

Lisa Silverman,
Co-Editor, Children’s and Teen Literature,
AJL News and Reviews


Mimouna is a Jewish holiday which generally flies under the radar. In the United States, this Sephardic holiday is essentially unknown. Israelis are more aware of Mimouna, especially those who live in proximity to a Moroccan Jewish community. Allison Ofanansky’s new picture book calls attention to this sweet celebration which immediately follows Passover. This book is particularly timely with today’s increased focus on multicultural cooperation and understanding.

Jewish Miriam and her Muslim friend, Jasmine, live in Morocco, not far from one another. Although their lives have much in common, Miriam is very aware of their differences. During Passover, Jews are prohibited from owning products containing leaven. In order to have access to the proper ingredients and be prepared to cook after Passover ends, many Jews transfer ownership of their flour and other leavened products to local non-Jewish families and reacquire them after the holiday. Moroccan Jews, who celebrate Mimouna, prepare a festive meal immediately after Passover and invite their neighbors.

Miriam and her mother go to Jasmine’s family home to retrieve their flour and Jasmine and Miriam bond as friends while acknowledging the many differences in their cultures. They later enjoy the Mimouna feast together, tasting the delicacies as well as sharing music and dance. When Jasmine hears the traditional greeting “Next Year in Jerusalem,” she asks whether the family is actually going to be in Jerusalem in time for next year’s celebration. And they are. By the following year, Miriam’s family is on the way to Israel; they are fulfilling their age-old dream of returning to the Holy Land, their ancient home.

This delightful story introduces the reader to a new community as well as a new holiday and ends with a gentle but powerful message: the true home of the Jewish people has always been Israel. It features cooperation and warmth between different ethnic and religious communities. The illustrations are subtly powerful, evoking time, place, and history. The author and illustrator subtly pack large amounts of information into a gentle story.

An afterword teaches more about the Mimouna holiday and includes a traditional Moroccan Jewish recipe.

Michal Hoschander Malen,
retired librarian; current library volunteer in Efrat, Israel; editor of children’s and young adult book reviews for the Jewish Book Council


The writing team of Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso and Amy-Jill Levine are back, with a new book that is derived from the first few chapters of Genesis about the creation of the world. The authors have written a midrash involving an argument between all of God’s creations in the world’s first garden. Arguments about who is better, smarter, more important, etc. are not uncommon in midrash. This tale does justice to that storied past, pitting everything and every creature against each other to solve A Very Big Problem: Who does God love the most?

The story is viewed from an interesting perspective. It begins: “God planted the very first garden in the whole world...” The accompanying illustration is a picture of the Earth with all the continents inhabited by many animals and plants. Humans are depicted as a plethora of children from many backgrounds (not just Adam and Eve). So, while “the first garden” may have readers envisioning the Garden of Eden, in this book, the Garden is the entire world, and all the inanimate and animate inhabitants live there together. God listens to all the challenges, complaints, and cries of “No way is that fair!” Of course, God smiles and explains that God’s garden needs each and every one to do their part in tending it, because without them, there would be no garden. They are assured that God is big enough to love them all.

The artwork is colorful and multicultural depicting a world filled with beauty. The details of the land and its residents are warm and engaging. The story is accessible and written in age-appropriate language and could be used as a Tu B’Shvat story or even at Simchat Tu B’Shvat.

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REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

Torah when we begin to read Genesis again. The back of the book contains “A Note to Parents and Educators” that explains what midrash is and how to use this book with children.

Kathy Bloomfield,
AJL President, Seal Beach, CA


A young boy in dinosaur PJs and a bright orange kippah waits out a storm in an indoor blanket fort, surrounded by his stuffed elephant, pig, turtle, and teddy bear. “It’s just a big rainstorm, so don’t be afraid. / We’re under the covers and warm,” he reassures his animals, “Let’s all close our eyes and pretend we’re with Noah. / Imagine an ark and a storm.” The boy then imagines Noah welcoming him aboard the ark, along with pairs of animals, some suspiciously like his own “stuffies.” The boy uses a massive toothbrush to soap an elephant in the rain, chats with all the animals in their own languages via corded phones, and nurses the menagerie back to health when almost every animal develops a cold. When the storm finally breaks and a dove returns with the symbolic olive branch, Noah and the animals thank the boy with a miniature ark of his own—which we see the boy clutching as he sleeps in his real-world bedroom.

Beyond the most basic premises (animals boarding two by two, and a dove returning to the ark with news of dry land), this journey is pure flight of fancy, and it doesn’t pretend otherwise. Still, preschoolers braving storms of their own may find the fantasy ark ride reassuring and even empowering. When the storm is at its worst, it remains securely shut outside, while inside the ark is full of smiling round-faced creatures, cozily snuggled together. Bright skies grace many pages—the storm breaks in time for the animals to go for a swim with inner tubes! And the boy’s quick thinking, plus some handiwork from the spiders and the elephants, renders a leak harmless. The A-B-C-B rhyme scheme, if occasionally cloying, reinforces the sense of safety and predictability. An author’s note reminds readers that “Treating animals kindly is a mitzvah” and may inspire further discussion.

Rebecca Fox,
Children’s Librarian II, Boston Public Library, Boston, MA

Biography


In a well-researched and conversational text, Conkling (Votes for Women!) delves into the life of the feminist icon, activist, journalist, Ms. magazine co-founder, and Presidential Medal of Freedom recipient Gloria Steinem. The first chapter, titled “Almost,” begins with a snapshot of Steinem at age twenty-two (accompanied by an actual snapshot from her 1956 Smith College yearbook), wherein she almost married her well-to-do college beau. “What made Steinem change her mind? What gave her the confidence to resist the social pressures of her day to marry and lead a traditional life?” Conkling begins her exploration via Gloria’s childhood, first providing background on her parents: “The Nunevillers considered Leo too Jewish, and the Steinems thought Ruth wasn’t Jewish enough.” There is little about Judaism in the book, and her family’s Jewish background is not addressed. A child of divorce, Gloria acted as a frequent primary caregiver to her mentally ill mother, while her father proved loving but undependable. Readers learn of Gloria’s dubious early education; her chameleonic time at Smith; her young romance (and subsequent abortion); travels to India; her journalism career (with her glam appearance and Playboy Club expose); her high-profile celebrity company; how in a male-dominated industry, she felt infuriatingly undervalued; her “Feminist Awakening”; and her political and social activism. Conkling conveys her subject’s passion and intelligence, while providing useful historical context; she also touches on controversies (“Feminist Feud,” “CIA Backlash”). Helpful back matter includes timelines of Steinem’s life and of First-, Second-, Third-, and Fourth-Wave Feminism, along with brief biographies of her “Partners in Justice,” information about the Ms. Foundation, a bibliography, thorough source notes, and an index (unseen). Quotes by Steinem and others begin each chapter, and photographs appear throughout.

Elissa Gershowitz,
The Horn Book, Inc., Boston, MA


Children often see failure as permanent. This book tells them about important people who only succeeded after disappointments.

The Lillies have identified twenty-two people who are famous

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for their accomplishments. They have arranged their subjects into 6 categories, from scientists to athletes. Many of them (Albert Einstein, Michael Jordan, J.K. Rowling) are well-known around the world. Others (Clara Barton, Dara Torres, Julia Child) may not be as easily recognized. The authors give two-page profiles of all of them. After describing the subjects’ initial failures, the book reminds readers of their ultimate greatness. The result, the authors hope, will inspire readers to continue striving. The subjects are wide-ranging, from George Washington to Pink, and from Gandhi to Audrey Hepburn. Most, but not all, are Americans. Four of the people are Jewish, but religion is not a is not a major theme in this collection of biographies. The opening page, “Everybody fails,” sets the tone. In the middle of the book is a “Hero Tree” which asks the reader to identify people they admire, and why. At the end is a page for “Quotes that inspire me.”

This small volume might inspire a child if given at the right moment. The format is consistent, but the biographical information is sketchy and the look is cluttered; there are photos and lists, questions and scant biographical information for every celebrity. There isn’t enough data for a biographical sketch; readers will have to go elsewhere (there is no bibliography). It is a thin book for 6th - 8th graders (the intended audience). But it should work as an “idea generator” for middle schoolers seeking topics. The Failure Book will be most valuable as an added resource for school libraries.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA


Now is the right time for The Polio Pioneer: Dr. Jonas Salk and the Polio Vaccine, a picture biography that shows how science can halt an epidemic.

Linda Elovitz Marshall tells a quintessentially American story: Jonas Salk, the bookish son of uneducated Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe, rises from relative poverty to attend City College of New York where “Jews were welcome.” An interest in chemistry leads to a career in medical research and the pinnacle of success, Salk’s conquest of the polio virus.

Salk’s Jewishness wasn’t part of the story in 1950s America, but Marshall highlights it: his mother lights Shabbat candles, his father davens with Jonas, and his parents “stress the importance of education, of kindness, and of doing good works.” Regrettably, we don’t learn that Salk magnanimously refused to patent his vaccine, declaring it belonged to “the people.”

Polio Pioneer recreates the fearful atmosphere of the era, when polio paralyzed children, frightened parents, closed swimming pools, beaches and movie theaters, and even struck the man who would become president. It successfully simplifies the complex science behind Salk’s innovative technique, applied first to influenza and later to polio: “What if a person was given some flu virus that was killed by chemicals so it could not cause disease? Then could that person’s body ‘practice’ fighting the flu ... and WIN?”

A two-page illustration of white-coated researchers, surrounded by vials, peering into microscopes, and recording results, underscores the time and patience required to develop a successful vaccine: “Dr. Salk researched, experimented, and tested ideas. He and his team of scientists labored day and night, night and day.”

Lisa Anchin’s cheerful acrylic gouache-and-pencil illustrations capture the optimism and prosperity of post-war America perfectly, though the broad racial diversity she displays (in suburban neighborhoods, in university labs) is a bit anachronistic. Talking directly to children about what it was like growing up with fear of polio, the Author’s Note is just right for today’s Covid-fearful reader, while the long list of diseases we no longer worry about—diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus, measles, mumps and rubella—offers welcome reassurance that scientists like Jonas Salk are out there working to keep us safe. The list of sources will be helpful to adults who want to learn more about this gifted scientist.

Marjorie Gann, retired teacher, co-author (with Janet Willen) of Five Thousand Years of Slavery and Speak a Word for Freedom: Women Against Slavery, (Tundra), Toronto, Canada


Brad Meltzer, a well-known author of suspense novels for adults, is also the creator of the “Ordinary People Change the World” series for young children. I Am Anne Frank is his contribution to children’s books about Anne Frank’s life and message.

The story begins with Anne’s birth in Germany, and continues with her happy life in Amsterdam. It describes the Nazi attacks on schools and businesses, as well as on Jews as individuals. When the family moves to the Annex, the illustrations become heavy. There are several scenes describing life in the apartment and her writing in the diary; the drawings here are small and the pages surrounding them are black. The bleak atmosphere surrounding Anne may frighten the intended audience. Following her life story, there is a spread with Anne reminding the reader about love and the importance of light and hope, followed by a summary of her
legacy. The final spread has a timeline, with photos of her, the family, and the Annex.

AJL has debated the appropriateness of picture books about the Holocaust. The discussion runs at least to 1995’s Sydney Taylor Award-winner, Star of Fear, Star of Hope. This volume raises the question, “What is the age children should be exposed to the Shoah?” Aside from the disturbing nature of Anne Frank’s story, the contrast between the facts and the illustrations (think “Powerpuff Girls” style) is disconcerting. The story is too old for the visuals, and the illustrations are too young for the intended audience (3-8 year-olds). While Meltzer’s intention is laudable, the ambiguous narrative and the black pages make this an uncertain purchase. Unless the institution has the “Ordinary People” series, this is an optional addition.

Fred Isaac
Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA


This beautiful book relates the story of the early life of Itzhak Perlman highlighting his drive, dedication, and passion for music and the violin. Growing up in a poor family in Tel Aviv, Itzhak is surrounded by many types of music at a young age and quickly becomes obsessed with the intensity and beauty of the violin. But when polio strikes, he is forced to put aside his dreams while he fights diligently to become physically active again. While his body limited his activities, he would not allow it to spoil his spirit or dedication to the violin. Music would be a part of his soul forever.

Itzhak studied, practiced, and worked extremely hard to develop his skills of spiccato, vibrato, staccato, pizzicato, and legato. He lived the music in his body and mind and transformed it into an intensely personal experience for himself and for those who were listening. He refused to become discouraged and was determined to rise above his limitations. Each obstacle was only a challenge to be overcome through hard work and passion for his music. Itzhak was performing publicly by the age of six and eventually was “discovered” on The Ed Sullivan Show which began his journey to Julliard, studying with master violin teachers, and eventually joining the ranks at the top of his field.

The author’s and illustrator’s notes at the end of the book reflect their dedication, admiration, and extensive research for the subject and his story. There is also a timeline, notes, bibliography, and a video list, all of which provide the reader with numerous references to further explore Itzhak’s life and career. The artwork with its bright colors, musical notes, Hebrew names on the beds in the hospital ward, and whimsical illustrations are deliberate and meaningful, chosen to create a feeling of dedication, hope, and life. The writing is appealing, honest, and straightforward and the message of determination, optimism, and excellence is clear.

Itzhak Perlman is a role model for children and adults alike. This book is a winner in every way!

Rachel Glasser, retired Librarian, Yavneh Academy, Teaneck, NJ


In this illustrated biography, Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso tells the story of Judy Kaplan, the first girl to have a bat mitzvah ceremony in the United States in 1922. Judy was the oldest daughter of Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, the founder of Reconstructionist Judaism. When Judy was twelve years old, Rabbi Kaplan decided it was time for a girl to have a bat mitzvah. Why shouldn’t it be his own daughter? In spite of opposition from her two grandmothers and Judy’s anxiety over something going wrong, Judy stood up on the bimah, recited the blessing, read the Torah portion (in Hebrew and English), and recited the blessing afterwards. This curious and independent-minded girl had done it! One criticism: There is no mention in the text of the year or place where this milestone event occurred.

The endnotes include several intriguing questions for the reader to ponder, such as, “Judy played piano to calm herself when she was feeling worried or anxious. What do you do to help yourself through changes in your life?” The endnotes also provide more details about Judy Kaplan’s successful life as a musician, teacher, composer, and musicologist. Margeaux Lucas created the illustrations using a combination of hand painting in gouache and digital art. The clothing, shoes, hairstyles, wallpaper, and furniture of the period are drawn with flair and expression; however, the sash that the suffragettes wear is not depicted accurately. The layout is varied, with Judy’s questions written in freehand script that jump off the page.

This duo also collaborated in Regina Persisted (Behrman House, 2018), the illustrated biography of Regina Jonas, the first woman rabbi ordained in Germany in 1935. During this time of pandemic and social unrest when so many people are worried, scared, or angry, this slim biography will inspire girls with the courage to take their rightful place in society.

Anne Dublin, retired teacher-librarian, Holy Blossom Temple and author of the forthcoming historical novel, Jacob and the Mandolin Adventure, Toronto

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Shulevitz, Caldecott Medalist for The Fool of the World and the Flying Ship and three-time honoree, presents a memoir in words and pictures about his Jewish family’s experiences during the Holocaust. We begin in Poland, and with great immediacy: “On September 1, 1939, Nazi planes burst into the Warsaw skies, some dropping incendiary bombs and spreading fires throughout the city, others dropping high explosive bombs and turning buildings into dust. Nature responded with heavy rains angrily pounding the pavement. Terrified people ran in all directions.” Accompanying black-and-white illustrations show several figures frozen in various poses, with a textured dimensionality and deliberate placement on the pages. “I was four years old,” we learn, and “my only refuge was drawing” (young Uri was named for “the biblical Uri, father of Bezalel, the first artist of the Bible”).

The book is split into eight sections (beginning with “Warsaw” and ending with “Paris”), with a chronological account of the family’s continual displacement; many of the WWII years were spent in the Soviet Union (Bialystok, Settlement Yura, Turkestan), at a somewhat geographical remove from the direct Nazi threat but under constant duress of extreme poverty, persistent illness, and near-starvation. Shulevitz’s memories come in piecemeal, with scene-setting anecdotes that range from utter despair (“Could our miserable lives sink any lower?”) to childlike diversion (“mainly we kids made our own fun. To pass the time we loved to tell stories, especially scary stories that made your hair stand on end”) to the vagaries of war: “It goes to show that our survival had little to do with our own decisions. Rather, it was blind chance deciding our fate.” Artwork, sketches, and the occasional marvelous photo—young Uri’s 1945 class picture from the Polish School in Turkestan, his smiling parents in the 1930s—illustrate many of the scenes.

Elissa Gershowitz,
The Horn Book, Inc.,
Boston, MA

Fiction - Middle Grade


In January 1938, Esther, almost 12 years old and thus, “according to Jewish tradition,” almost an adult, sets sail from Govorovo, Poland, to join her father in Agramonte, Cuba. Papa has worked as a peddler in the Cuban countryside for three years and has finally earned enough money for just one of his children to join him—and Esther has persuaded him that, despite being a girl, she, his eldest child, is the best choice. Now, with danger to Poland’s Jews coming closer by the day, Esther must prove her worth and help Papa earn enough to reunite their whole family.

Written almost entirely in letters to her younger sister Malka, inspired by the story of Behar’s grandmother’s immigration, and the product of meticulous research, Esther’s story is in turns touching, thought-provoking, and heart-wrenchingly joyous. As Esther gets to know her new neighbors, she learns about Hispanic and Afro-Cuban traditions, tastes, and languages. Yiddish, Polish, and Spanish words dance within her, but sometimes all three languages cannot express the sadness that she feels. The most empowering events have a bitter tinge—Esther sells her own designs but cannot put the name of “a Jewish refugee girl from Poland” on the labels. And no matter how much she and Papa earn, there is always the threat of an antisemitic neighbor robbing them or, even worse, of immigration to Cuba coming to a halt before the rest of their family arrives.

Thoughtful readers will have a lot to ask themselves: What does it mean to stay true to one’s traditions? How can we embrace new traditions without losing the old? What sacrifices would we be willing to make to achieve a greater goal? In the darkest moments, there is a glint of light; in the brightest, a shadow falls. Esther is a steadfast, loveable heroine through it all.

Rebecca Fox,
Children’s Librarian II,
Boston Public Library, Boston, MA


Some stories, just like some lives, seem natural. Others have to be seen—or read about—to be appreciated. No Vacancy is one of the latter.

Eleven-year-old Miriam Brockman and her family were living
quietly in Brooklyn. But her father lost his job and decided to buy and operate a motel in a small town (population 510) in upstate New York. The family arrives in late June and discovers that the former owners have left. With the help of Uncle Mordy (who brings Kosher food) and their staff member Maria, the Brockmans make the place ready to open. The summer is filled with a new community (none of whom are Jewish), new friends, lots of guests, and too many chores to count. There is a bit of mystery (the local drive-in becomes a pilgrimage site for believers in miracles); an antisemitic incident (the motel sign is vandalized); and a near-tragedy involving Miriam’s 3-year-old brother Sammy. In the end everyone (almost) gets what they want, and the summer ends happily.

Miriam is an intelligent pre-teen with lots of worthy questions. The prose is easy to read and we see everyone clearly. The family’s joys and struggles are realistically portrayed, and there are several Jewish ritual scenes—the family even attends the nearest synagogue. As a result, No Vacancy should be intriguing to middle-school girls. Regrettably, there are no major explorations of issues. The primary focus is on family and the building of community. The book should be considered an option to immigrant stories and Holocaust narratives.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA

Benny Feldman has a huge problem. Since causing a fiasco during his first-grade play, he’s been teased mercilessly by Jason and the other kids in his class. Now he’s in sixth grade and things only seem to be getting worse. One day, however, he impulsively signs up to be in the school talent show. The only problem is that he now needs to find other kids who will join him in his klezmer band. How he solves that problem, how he learns to stand up for himself and others, and how he handles obstacles while still making friends are all interwoven in this contemporary novel.

Allison and Wayne Marks are a husband-and-wife team who have created diverse and distinct characters who live somewhere in Ohio. The reader is gradually introduced to each character as Benny finds members for his band: Jennifer (drums), Royce (clarinet), and Stuart (accordion). The adult characters are portrayed with warmth and insight: Uncle Maxwell, Benny’s violin teacher and mentor, the cantor at the synagogue, the owner of an unusual store, and Benny’s loving parents. Especially touching are passages written about Moshe, Benny’s great-great-grandfather, who was a klezmer fiddle player from Minsk. In Benny’s imagination, Moshe gives him wisdom and courage to overcome his challenges. The authors’ language is figurative, using fresh similes to enhance the narrative. For example, “Benny’s heart races like a metronome stuck on warp speed.” One of the main themes of this novel is to “enjoy the ride”, and indeed we do. Corny jokes are interwoven into the story, as are morsels of wry humor. The novel is chock-full of natural-flowing Jewish references: music (of course), Sunday school, Hanukkah, Yiddish, and of course, food. In the end matter, the authors have helpfully given a page of klezmer terms, as well as a note about Jewish traditions, as well as a note about Jewish

Michal Hoschander Malen, retired librarian; current library volunteer in Efrat, Israel; editor of children's and young adult book reviews for the Jewish Book Council

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THE young reader will surely enjoy this musical romp through sixth grade.

Anne Dublin, retired teacher-librarian, Holy Blossom Temple and author of the forthcoming historical novel, Jacob and the Mandolin Adventure, Toronto


To the twelve-year-old Noah, an aspiring filmmaker, often struggles to “read the room”—even when he is the only person in the room. So when his parents tell him they have a surprise for him, he is 95 percent sure they’re sending him to the David Lynch Film Camp in Los Angeles, where he can perfect his opus and maybe use cinéma vérité to uncover the truth about his peers and himself. Turns out, Noah is actually heading to Camp Challah to tackle pre-college classes and develop his Bar Mitzvah project. What could be worse? But Noah’s grandfather, Pops—doddering old man or former secret agent, finally revealing his true identity?—has a secret mission that Noah and his new “mates” can only complete at Camp Challah. The mission might be a chance for Noah to save the world, or at least make some new friends and begin to understand himself a little bit better.

Pops hints at the secret mission from the get-go, and mysterious notes delivered by a carrier pigeon who poops at inopportune moments will pique readers’ curiosity until more action kicks in. However, at its core, this is the story of Noah and his friends navigating the middle-school social scene, confronting bullies and their own self-doubt, and contemplating what doing tikkun olam (“helping to fix what’s wrong in the world”) might look like for them. Readers in it for the action may feel that the top-secret mission doesn’t fully pay off, but readers looking for a goofy, at times insightful, coming-of-age tale with plenty of gross-out humor might be satisfied. Pamintuan’s bold, cartoonish illustrations capture characters’ awkwardness à la Wimpy Kid and Big Nate. Occasional offhand remarks stretch historical accuracy—Noah expresses amazement that Jews in the 17th century were thinking about tikkun olam rather than running from Cossacks (more of a 17th-century problem)—but these comments do feel authentic to Noah’s narration.

Rebecca Fox, Children’s Librarian II, Boston Public Library, Boston, MA


Dona Gracia’s Secret is a young adult novel about the life and legacy of Doña Gracia, a sixteenth century convert who lived during the Inquisition. As a baby, Doña Gracia was baptized as a Christian to avoid persecution by the church. At eighteen she married into a wealthy and prominent Sephardic family. Doña Gracia and her husband Francisco practiced Catholicism outwardly but practiced Judaism in secret. Francisco used his vast wealth to help conversos by bribing officials and providing food and shelter for poor Jews. Francisco died at an early age and left his vast empire to his young widow. Doña Gracia became a successful businesswoman at a time when women were not given such important responsibilities. Kings, Queens, and Princes depended on her bank, the house of Mendes, to underwrite their wars and luxurious lifestyle. Yet she still had to move from country to country to stay out of the hands of the Inquisition. Throughout her life, Doña Gracia continued to use her vast wealth to help her people. Doña Gracia’s Secret is a good introduction to the terrors of the Inquisition and to this fascinating historical figure. Recommended for all libraries: this is a well-written and easy-to-read book for young people.

Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, OH

Fiction - Teen Readers


Bottner, best known as a picture-book author, presents a strikingly intense and dramatic YA novel in verse. In the 1960s Bronx, fourteen-year-old Maisie’s parents are among “the most unhappily married people / in all of Parkchester. / The most destructive, too.” Her father, a philandering “globe-trotting Perfume Magnate,” frequently goes “MIA.” Her mother’s abuse—physical, mental, and emotional—is extreme and starkly portrayed. Her younger brother, Davy, is a budding musician, whose role as Mom’s favorite engenders in Maisie feelings of both envy and protectiveness. Her family is Hungarian Jewish, and Maisie keeps a “list of famous Jews”: “Grandma thinks it’s important to remind ourselves / that the Nazis didn’t get us...And they never will.” She says the war only ended sixteen years ago. / And we can’t forget it.” She is also an artist, and finds in her best friend’s painter mother a role model (albeit questionable) and much-longed-for
maternal attention. Maisie isn't necessarily an easy character to like; she's prickly, selfish, insecure, and enamored of her best friend's boyfriend. But she's an easy one to sympathize with. Her wry narrative voice propels the verse with unfiltered observations, painting a clear portrait of place and time (a secondary storyline involves a friend's father's difficult return from Vietnam). Bottner provides a vivid portrayal of a complicated family scarred by dysfunction and tumult—and with hope to be healed through friendship and art. Her appended author's note describes the work as a “somewhat biographical but mostly fictional story in the tradition of the ‘wounded healer’...We never know who or what will rescue us, or how we will rescue ourselves.” Further resources include contact information for domestic violence and suicide prevention organizations, mental health and addiction services, and more.

Elissa Gershowitz, *The Horn Book, Inc., Boston, MA*


The “Pocket Change Collective” is a series of small paperback books that “ask big questions and propose even bigger solutions.” They are suitable for adults, but particularly useful to questioning teens. Adam Eli is an LGBTQ activist who writes movingly of his experience growing up in an Orthodox Jewish family as a closeted gay youth. He says that he never realized that he was just one of many queer kids feeling alone and trapped. His experience as a Jew provides impetus for his idea that the queer community around the world can actually come together in a similar way as the Jewish community does. He was fearful and lonely until he realized that queerness actually makes him part of another lineage and culture that he could identify with and find comfort within. He laments that “lessons on Jewish history were nowhere.” So in this book he posits a position of pride in Queer heritage wherein he proposes that queer people adopt a new set of rules that center on what they all have in common. Just as Jews and others band together to fight anti-Semitism, so too should governments be met with “global resistance when they try to murder their queer citizens.” This short and well-reasoned manifesto is his appeal to create a world where “Queer people anywhere are responsible for queer people everywhere.”

Lisa Silverman, *Co-Editor, Children's and Teen Literature, AJL News and Reviews*


Across the street neighbors Sophie and Peter have been inseparable best friends since they were little. An aspiring dancer and choreographer, Sophie would create dance numbers accompanied by Peter’s original compositions on the piano, they slept over at each other’s houses, and their families celebrated birthdays and Jewish holidays together. So, when Peter needs a kidney transplant and Sophie is a match, she doesn’t hesitate to donate her kidney to him the summer before her senior year in high school, despite her parent’s concerns. And while Peter once had a secret crush on Sophie, it’s Sophie who now has unrealistic expectations about their relationship: “I thought the transplant would make us better than best friends, that I’d somehow graduate to a new level of importance in his life. It’s not why I did it, but at the same time, I couldn’t fathom a future in which the transplant didn’t connect us even more deeply.”

However, the transplant has given Peter more freedom and independence than he’s ever had, leading him to make new friends, join a band, and explore his own sexual identity. The story is told through dual narratives, though the chapter headings are sometimes needed because Sophie’s and Peter’s voices, while compelling and authentic, are not always distinct. Secondary plotlines and diverse characters are fully developed, including Sophie’s younger sister who is co-parenting her 18-month-old daughter with her high school boyfriend. And while Sophie’s parents met on a Birthright Trip to Israel and describe themselves as “High Holiday Jews,” Sophie feels a deeper connection to her Jewish identity. Peter, whose father is Jewish, also explores the role religion plays in his life. As she did with her previous young adult novel, *You’ll Miss Me When I’m Gone,* Rachel Lynn Solomon has written a heartfelt, emotionally charged and unique coming of age journey that will appeal to teen readers who enjoy stories of first loves, first heartbreaks, and unexpected endings.

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


Based on the true story of a similar incident that took place in an Oswego County, New York high school in 2017, *The Assignment* is about two high school students
who stand up to their teacher, their peers, and the entire community to stop an assignment that was given to them in their History of World Governments class. While they both consider their teacher to be extraordinarily good at his job, they find the assignment he has given them to be untenable. They have been assigned to “as Nazis... thoroughly research and analyze five reasons supporting your position of a Final Solution of the Jewish Question.” The class is to pretend that they are attending the Wannsee Conference held in Berlin in 1942 and debate the issue of what to do about the Jews.

The book is well-written and profoundly disturbing. While it contains the expected backlash to the students from hate-mongers in their school and their community, there are also surprising revelations about the family of one of the students involved (spoiler alert: His grandparents were Holocaust survivors, hidden by Christians) and unexpected alliances that are formed as the situation escalates.

Overall, The Assignment is an emotional, page-turning read about a subject ripped from today’s headlines. Situations like this are happening in towns across the world, most of which do not make the morning news. The book provides a clear and detailed picture of the difficulties teens experience when standing up to their teachers and peers when they want to speak out for justice, while at the same time it completely supports those individuals who have the courage to do so.

A note from the author provides information about the origin of the story, resources and an excellent set of discussion questions.

Kathy Bloomfield, 
AJL President, Blogger at forwordsbooks.com, Seal Beach, CA

Editors’ Note: parts of this review appeared on the Sydney Taylor Schmooze blog in August 2020.

Winnie Friedman wants to be a stand-up comedian, just like her dad was prior to his deciding to be the stay-at-home parent while her mother pursued a high-paying marketing job. Unfortunately, Winnie’s first “gig”—at her own Bat Mitzvah party—was a huge flop. Now a high school sophomore, she is keeping her jokes to herself. However, when the funniest kid in school laughs at a joke she makes in the cafeteria lunch line, Winnie finds herself invited into the school’s Improv club. As she is pondering what to do, she learns that her father has been diagnosed with ALS (a.k.a. Lou Gehrig’s Disease.) While he does not want to face the implications of this tragic news, Winnie and her mother do their best to figure out the new reality. To this mix, toss in a few bad dates, a dash of misunderstandings among friends, and a pinch of disturbing revelations. Before blending, sprinkle in some belly-laugh humor and turn what could have been a guaranteed recipe for disaster into a delicious, heart-warming story.

Lots of crying and tons of laughing, combined with the love of family and friends, make this a great read for the YA crowd. While the Jewish part of the story consists mainly of memories of the horrible Bat Mitzvah party and an overbearing Jewish grandma, there are many Jewish values written in: honoring one’s parents, respect for elders, caring for the sick, tzedakah, teshuvah, etc. In addition, the cast of the story represents a full range of diversity as might be found in many urban high schools. This is an excellent and engaging book for YA readers and one that should have a place on all library shelves.

Kathy Bloomfield, 
AJL President, Blogger at forwordsbooks.com, Seal Beach, CA

God and Prayer


Since his first appearance (a very long time ago), Sammy Spider has experienced the panoply of Jewish experiences. He has lived through the entire year of holidays, attended a Bar Mitzvah, and even took a trip to Israel with his human “friend” Josh. In this book, the 29th in the series, he and Josh go through the cycle of prayers.

There are three sets of prayers here. The first contains the daily blessings, from Modeh Ani through Hashkiveinu. Next is Shabbat, including the Friday blessings and a Havdalah prayer. The second half contains a variety of brachot, from Shehechiyanu and Mi Shebeirach to prayers for Israel and for peace. Each page has a short preliminary rhyming passage connecting Josh to the occasion. The illustrations reflect the prayers beautifully. The text includes Hebrew, English, and transliteration. (Some of the English versions are more interpretive than others.) The shorter prayers are included in their entirety; the longer ones, including Birkat haMazon and Kaddish, have one line from the text.

It’s always wonderful to have a new Sammy book. The illustrations here are both descriptive and evocative of the occasions,
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making it easy to use. (Some parents may even have grown up with the series themselves.) This is a fine addition to a vital series. May it have a long and fruitful life.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA

Holocaust and World War II


A gentle Holocaust story is an oxymoron. This compelling picture book delivers the lack of understanding by an innocent boy, Fred, who suffers without his family for reasons he does not know; the painful loneliness and fear of a child hiding and the unease of an ugly world. His toy bear saves him. In a magnificent tour de force the bear tells this story, never straying from what Fred sees and hears, never explaining more than the mystified boy discovers. Fred only knows he needs his bear for comfort; the bear never disappoints, even when a snarling dog almost destroys it. Fred’s mother fixes Bear as best she can. The story takes place in Holland during the Holocaust. With only a few minutes from a neighbor’s warning, the family packs some things to go for a walk. They hide together as a family, until his mother separates him, taking Fred with Bear to live with his grandfather in Amsterdam. This does not last because grandfather sews the required yellow star on Fred’s coat so his mother removes him to another hiding place. Fred remains there until war’s end, never venturing out, with Bear as his only solace. The family is reunited, leaving Holland for America where Fred grows up, has his own family, but never discards Bear. The museum at Yad Vashem asks for Bear for a display. Suddenly Fred knows they must separate for the first time ever. Man and bear agree to part, but not to sever their unconditional love, the love that got them through the bad times and the sad hiding. Bear knew he had to support the boy, dry his tears, applaud his keeping his secret, be his comfort until real people could rescue him. The illustrations capture the dark times and the depression, contrasting these with the joy of being with his grandfather. Here is a deeply moving history lesson about a horrible time without the horror.

Ellen G. Cole, retired Librarian, Temple Isaiah, Los Angeles, CA


On April 10, 1938, race car drivers Rene Dreyfus and Rudi Cacacciola had more at stake than their personal reputations along the track of the Pau Grand Prix. Dreyfus represented France against the powerful and rising Nazi Germany. His car, furnished by the Delahaye company, was pitted against one of the Silver Arrows, a Mercedes-Benz. Dreyfus was of Jewish heritage and was barred from joining any German or Italian driving team. Lucy Schell, an American heiress and top rally competitor, persuaded him to join the Delahaye team she was financing. It was one thing to challenge the acclaimed Nazi driver. It was another to be victorious.

Neal Bascomb, winner of the Sydney Taylor Book Award for Teens in 2014 for The Nazi Hunters, writes a fast-paced and tense narrative of the events that lead to this all-important race. Each page seamlessly reveals the extraordinary research he conducted that included many primary sources. The first part of the part builds slowly, however, as he introduces the major drivers in a sometimes confusing litany of names and races. Photographs add to the feeling of being a spectator along the track of these European races. Back matter includes an author’s note, source notes, and an enlightening explanation of Bascomb’s research. Bascomb’s narrative will appeal no doubt to young car enthusiasts as well as to those who like to read about the risks women took in a traditionally male sport. While it doesn’t have the same bite as The Nazi Hunters, it is a story of will, determination, and triumph against the odds.

Barbara Krasner, former member, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee, Somerset, NJ


Uncia Gamzer was born in Lvov, Poland in the 1930s. She spent three years hiding in family friends’ homes during the war, barely escaping notice and capture. She then spent four years as a displaced person in Krakow and Munich before finally leaving Europe for Brooklyn in 1949. There she took on the name Ruth, living with relatives as she attended public high school and acclimated to American life. The first third of the book recounts her experience as a child in hiding, the second third is about life as
a displaced person, or DP, waiting to come to America, and the last is about navigating high school and first jobs as a new American. Ruth tells her story in clean, vivid but unsensational prose. A unique point is how much of the book is dedicated to her post-war experiences, both the difficulties in getting to Brooklyn and acclimating to life as a teenager in the ’50s. Many Holocaust stories only cover that time in a single chapter or epilogue, so this angle is especially enlightening. This book would be good for someone interested in Holocaust narratives but who finds concentration camp stories and other detailed accounts of atrocities overwhelming. Ruth’s wartime experience is harrowing but not graphically so, which makes it appropriate for younger and more sensitive readers. And of course fans of Alan Gratz’s Prisoner B-3087 will appreciate meeting Yanek/Jack Gruener from the other side—he became close with the Gamzer family in Munich after the war, and eventually married Ruth.

Aviva Rosenberg, Children’s Librarian, Ridgefield Public Library, Ridgefield, NJ


As the brief introductory text explains, this picture book is the story of a house built by Harding’s great-grandfather near a lake on the outskirts of Berlin. Spare text with a storyteller’s cadence follows the inhabitants, the first of whom were Harding’s relatives, identified in the back matter as Jewish. Readers familiar with the Holocaust may infer why the family’s peaceful years ended with “a troop of angry men” evicting them, and why the next inhabitants’ sons “started marching click-click-click on the wooden floors.” The house’s story continues through the next decades of German history (the Berlin Wall goes through the backyard), with Teckentrup’s mixed-media illustrations providing more hints to the historical period as well as enhancing mood. Back matter provides more information about each family and the historical moments during which they lived in the house. The House by the Lake should work well as a discussion starter, or if paired with other titles, about the Holocaust and what happened in Germany afterward.

Shoshana Flax, The Horn Book, Inc., Boston, MA


Like the other books in Menucha’s series, this volume takes a young person’s view of danger and survival. It is adapted from Renee Worch’s book about her brother and father, and their long and arduous journey to escape the Nazis. The story begins in May 1940, as the Germans invade Holland and Belgium. Thirteen-year-old Brudy Berkowitz and his family leave Antwerp along with thousands of others. After several weeks, they reach the sea, where several boats are preparing to leave. The rest of the family boards, but Brudy and his father are left on the dock. They continue south, but are turned back and must return to Paris. After several weeks, they obtain documents to travel through France, but cannot enter Spain. Instead, they spend the winter in Paris. The pair again try to cross the border, but are caught and must return to Paris. They finally reach Marseille in the fall of 1941. On New Year’s Day, 1942, they cross the border into Spain. After stops in Barcelona and Bilbao, they travel to Portugal. After almost a year in Lisbon, Brudy and his father are reunited with the rest of the family in England, more than three years after leaving Antwerp.

Like the other volumes in this series, Escape from Belgium is both vivid and suspenseful. Because it is adapted, the historical detail is accurate and the writing is clear. The excellent photographs showing the towns and cities Brudy and his father passed through add to the narrative. The focus is primarily on Brudy, but there are also scenes depicting his father’s bravery and commitment. Their story is appropriate for 4th-6th graders who are interested in the Holocaust, but not ready for concentration camp scenes. It will be a very useful addition to school and synagogue collections.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA


In 1941, twelve-year-old Lillian Frey and her father race through the streets of Germany. Lillian guides her father, who is blind, but she doesn’t know their destination. Finally, they come to a set of gray doors and safety at Otto Weidt’s brushmaking factory. The factory hires only blind Jews and Mr. Weidt is partially blind himself. Lillian longs for her mother, who died the year before, and her friends. Mr. Weidt gives her a job and the employees form a community that is tested twice with Gestapo raids on the factory. The second raid brings the employees to trains bound for the Theresienstadt ghetto and transit camp until Mr. Weidt bargains with the Germans for their safety.

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Based on the true story of this factory, author Kathy Kacer weaves in her meticulous research conducted at the factory’s museum to present an untold narrative to young readers. The Brushmaker’s Daughter is tautly constructed and offers plenty of tension. Kacer’s attempts at emotional pull through the close relationship with Papa, a doll from home, and a birthday gift of Mama’s brooch, however, are noble but insufficient. The back matter explains the history of this factory and notes that Lillian and her father are fictional characters placed among historical ones.

Barbara Krasner,
former member, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee,
Somerset, NJ


When Sonia Levitin’s Journey to America first appeared, children’s Holocaust literature was in its early years, with few books tackling the subject for middle-grade readers. In simple language, Levitin told the story of one family’s flight from Berlin, engaging her readers’ sympathies for her young characters without dwelling excessively on Nazi horrors. She was honored with the National Jewish Book Award for Children’s Literature in 1971; this fiftieth anniversary edition speaks to the book’s enduring message.

It is 1938, and Margo Platt, mother of three daughters (twelve-year-old Lisa, fourteen-year-old Ruth, and little Anna) is determined to save her family from the oncoming cataclysm. Her husband will head to America, and she and her daughters will “holiday” in relative safety in Zurich until she can secure passports while her husband earns their passage to New York.

Through young Lisa’s eyes, we experience a crescendo of stresses: Ruth’s precious violin is confiscated at the border, the family can’t take enough money to live on, and the girls are placed in a charity camp whose director pockets the children’s food money. When Mother is hospitalized with pneumonia, Papa must be convinced to stay safe in America.

Some scenes are gut-wrenching, but the child-narrator’s voice attenuates the terror. In a letter from Berlin, Lisa’s best friend Rosemarie reports: “They told [an old man] to get down on his hands and knees and pick up the papers there in the park—that old, old man. And when he just stood there, shaking and confused, they started reaching into the trash can and they threw the garbage at him, but still the old man couldn’t move . . . I read over this letter, and I realize how dismal I must sound, but you know I’m never sad for long.”

The sombre tone is also lightened by the introduction of the Werfel family, who welcome Lisa onto their family farm, with bunnies to feed and a horse to ride, while Mother recovers in hospital.

The Afterword pays tribute to Levitin’s mother, on whom “Mother” is based: “My mother’s decision to leave was what saved us. She saw the signs of disaster very clearly.” Rooted in her family’s lived experience, Levitin’s Journey will ring true for a new generation of readers.

Barbara Krasner,
former member, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee,
Somerset, NJ


Marjorie Gann,
retired teacher, co-author (with Janet Willen) of
Five Thousand Years of Slavery and Speak a Word for Freedom: Women Against Slavery, (Tundra), Toronto, Canada
REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

Israel


What delicious fun! A truly offbeat protagonist draws readers to Israel revealing her inner self as she reveals highlights of her country’s geography and cultural attractions. Meet a Jewish Zombie who despite her troubles is a great personality. When first we are introduced, times are tough: she does not wish to moan, her walk is not stiff, her skin color is not sickly, she is no longer scary, and worst: humans invite her to tea! She understands she needs to relax; she tries massage, yoga, ballet. When all else fails, a vacation is the ticket. She visits famous Israeli sightseeing venues which make her want to go back to bed. She flies around the world to frightening areas, but vampires, bats, ghosts bore her. Flying home she reads about the Dead Sea, the perfect Zombie vacation. Sinkholes, roaches, bedbugs, scorpions and salt, salt, salt revive her. She hikes, discovers Israel’s rare fauna. She gets a Dead Sea facial. She faces down the crowds at karaoke and knows she is ready to return to her true self and all the best Israel has to offer.

Expressive illustrations highlight the silliness and playfulness of the text as they portray her wacky situations. Endnotes give serious scientific information about the Dead Sea. A super delightful read entertains as it informs in a swiftly moving if tongue in cheek travelogue.

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

Picture Books


Rabbi Yisroel Ben Eliezer (known as the Baal Shem Tov) was the founder of the Hassidic movement in the early 18th century and although not much is known about his early life, there are many legends that are often told about him. It is said that the last words his father said to him were to “fear nothing other than G-d.” It is also said that when he was a young man, his job was to accompany young boys from the village to the local cheder by crossing a forest. Once he saved the boys from an evil man/werewolf and taught them not to fear. This rhyming, very simplified version of his life as a youth focuses on a repeated stanza: “I won’t be scared. Oh no, I won’t! Hashem is always near. I know Hashem is with me, And there’s nothing else to fear.” The author extrapolates from the original legend of a *shtetl* and a forest to overcoming fears of modern children everywhere, such as thunder and lightning, going down a slide for the first time, or taking the bus to school alone. This upbeat story could be successful in soothing children’s fears while they also are introduced to an important historical figure in Judaism.

The book is part of the series by this publisher called “Laminated Pages for Little Hands” which uses a vinyl-coated paper to create a longer lasting book for children to read.


A poor peddler works hard everyday and just manages to scrape by. One of his few pleasures is smelling the aroma of freshly baked bread that comes from the bakery every morning. One day though, the baker decides he’s had enough and should be paid for the delicious smell since he is the one who works hard to create the bread. The baker takes the peddler to the rabbi, who declares that the peddler must work harder than usual that week and bring his earnings to the rabbi at the end of the week. Working harder than ever, the peddler manages to eke out a few more coins that week and brings them to the rabbi. There in the rabbi’s study, he shakes the coins, telling the baker that the sound of the coins is the payment for the smell of the bread. He reminds them that some pleasures in life, such as wonderful smells and beautiful sounds, are free and we should be appreciative of them.

Soft, lovely colored pencil illustrations accompany this timeless, well told folktale, and a recipe for *challah* is included in the back.

*Rebecca Levitan.
Librarian II, Baltimore County Public Library, Pikesville Branch*
Editors’ Note: This book was originally published in Hebrew in 2013. For a fun holiday version of this tale, see the 1992 book, In the Month of Kislev: A Story for Hanukkah by Nina Jaffe.

Zlatah Leah is known throughout her little village for making the best challah. When word comes from the palace that the prince is no longer smiling or happy, all the villagers try to cheer him up, including Zlatah Leah. She tries to make challah for the prince but encounters a few mishaps along the way. Thankfully the royal family is understanding and gives her a few tries. On her final attempt to make challah to cheer the prince, Zlatah Leah prays for his well-being and gives her a few tries. On her final attempt to make challah, she becomes his official challah baker, and eventually, after getting to know him (at her request, and a nice little nod to modernity) his bride.

Boldly illustrated with images of modestly dressed women, and men in kippot, The Challah Girl is set in a nameless town, with a Jewish ruler, making it feel like a familiar Jewish folktale. While some of the language feels a bit old-fashioned or needlessly verbose, it does tell a story of caring for others, persisting in the face of a challenge, and the importance of prayer. The author chooses to write “G-d” with a hyphen, indicating the book skewing more toward an Orthodox audience, the book also uses the word “sabbath” instead of “shabbat” or “Shabbos” and “Holy Books” instead of “Sforim” making it feel inconsistent as to who is the target audience of the book. Additionally, at one point a villager says he’ll make “a wonderful purple and crimson vest with two pockets” and the corresponding illustration is of a red and gold vest. Zlatah Leah’s challah recipe is included in the back matter.

While The Challah Girl might be good for cuddling up with your kids or grandchildren for a read aloud, it should be considered an optional purchase for schools, synagogues, or other libraries serving children.

**Lifecyle and Jewish Values**


In this poignant graphic memoir filled with frequent, honest humor, Feder recalls her mother’s death from cancer, and her own grief. She weaves in Jewish detail naturally, mostly as it arises in the funeral and shiva. The mourners participate in kriah; part of the Mourner’s Kaddish is spelled out in Hebrew; the rabbi’s words “hit the spot” for Tyler, who describes herself as “very culturally Jewish” but sums up her spiritual beliefs as “?????” Frequent diagrams, infographics, and other interludes (“My Mom Died Young’ Reaction BINGO”; “Things My Mom Would Totally Be Into If She Hadn’t Died in 2009”) provide commentary and make for an engaging read despite the emotionally difficult subject matter. Judaism is one of many fully realized aspects of young-adult Tyler’s experience, which lend specificity to her moving depiction of loss. The book, which takes place mainly when the author was college-aged, is likely to provide help and comfort to teens and adults processing their own grief or looking to understand someone else’s.

Shoshana Flax,
The Horn Book, Inc., Boston, MA


Fisher “Fish” Rosner is approaching a deadline: his rabbi has already granted too many extensions for selecting his Bar Mitzvah project. The easiest thing for Fish to do would be to partner with his friend Seth, who already has his charity drive for used hockey equipment well underway. But nothing about sports appeals to Fish. During Sunday afternoons with his grandparents, he’d much rather have his bubbie teach him to knit socks than watch the game on TV with his zaida. Only Bubby refuses, sending the unequivocal message that knitting is not for boys. This same gender-specific message is reinforced by his mom and stepdad (Fish’s father is deceased), who are both well-meaning but tone deaf when Fish attempts to assert his preferences for Zumba lessons over water polo. And it takes the wisdom and sensitivity of a teacher and the rabbi to keep Fish from abandoning his incipient passions, even when his friends mock him and abandon him. As this uplifting, gentle story unfolds, a twelve-year-old’s voice becomes stronger and self-assured as he convinces others that individuals are free to follow their own paths, regardless of gender stereotypes. And while he doesn’t have enough time to learn more than knitting basics, his sock dream paves the way.

**Rebecca Levitan.**
Librarian II, Baltimore County Public Library, Pikesville Branch
for an ingenious mitzvah project that engages others and exudes inter-generational warmth, family love, and friendship.

Gloria Koster, retired School Librarian, New Canaan, CT Public Schools; member of the Children's Book Committee of the Bank Street College of Education; author


Having panicked when put in the spotlight at her older sister's bat mitzvah party, Eliana Rachel Katz has dreaded standing in front of a crowd at her own ceremony and celebration. Her parents have planned the perfect party, but suffering from undiagnosed social anxiety, Eliana cannot bring herself to tell them that she would prefer a simpler and smaller affair. Instead, she enlists her best friend Zoe to help her sabotage the plans. With each attempt at waylaying the bat mitzvah—hiding the invitations, hacking into her mother's email to cancel the venue, trying to scare off the DJ, starting a food fight to embarrass the kosher caterer, and presenting her cantor with an outlandish topic for her speech—she just manages to hurt the people around her. When the truth of her actions finally comes out, Eliana is forced to acknowledge her fears and begins to learn how to cope. The author, who notes in the acknowledgments that she has dealt with anxiety her whole life, captures the physical and emotional toll of the condition with sensitivity and humor. Eliana's Jewish family and practice are portrayed positively but the book's focus on the party itself may lead to misconceptions as to what becoming a bat mitzvah is all about.

Marcie Eskin, Beth Hillel Bnai Emunah, Wilmette, IL


The appealing protagonist of this light-hearted but content-laden graphic novel is facing her bat mitzvah year with both ambivalence and trepidation. Brianna's mother is Jewish, her father is not, and Brianna just doesn't understand why this momentous, time-consuming rite is something she needs to add to her already packed schedule. Her mother, on the other hand, is determined to see Brianna participate in this traditional rite of passage.

Brianna is more concerned about excellence in academics, social tensions with her best friend, boys, and other adolescent concerns. She's a sincere young lady and understands that a bat mitzvah has substance; she respects the religious component of the event but doesn't see how it applies to her. She has never spent much time contemplating religious issues and feels disconnected from the entire scene. Nevertheless, her mother is pouring on the guilt so Brianna gives in.

Social pressures begin to mount. A rumor is floated around school that Brianna's bat mitzvah party will be unusually fancy and luxurious. Do Brianna's cool, new, older friends really like her or are they angling for an invitation to the party of the year? Brianna's long time BFF is expanding her horizons. Her amicably divorced parents are bickering. Costs associated with the bat mitzvah are rising. Performance anxiety rears its ugly head.

The author carries the reader back and forth in time between the bat mitzvah day and the year preceding it as the reader watches Briana mature, gradually address her concerns, learn more about true friendship, and gain confidence in her abilities. She emerges with a renewed understanding about where she fits in and with an enhanced appreciation of her Jewish heritage.

The book is one of a series of graphic novels featuring multicultural characters. The color drawings are expressive, filled with humor, and perfectly complement the text. A glossary of bar- and bat-mitzvah terms is appended. This frothy-looking offering turns out to be substantive while remaining accessible and fun.

Michal Hoschander Malen, retired New York day school librarian; current library volunteer in Efrat, Israel; editor of children's and young adult book reviews for the Jewish Book Council


The Abba Tree, originally written in Hebrew by Israeli author Devora Busheri, relates the story of a young girl and her father who are spending time together on Tu B’Shevat, the festival that celebrates trees. The well-known Talmudic legend of Honi the Circlemaker introduces the story in which Honi encounters a man planting a carob tree. Honi asks how long it will take for the tree to bear fruit, and the man replies that it will take seventy years. Honi asks if the man will live seventy years to eat the fruit of the tree, but he replies that since his ancestors planted trees for him, he is now planting trees for his descendants.

The book begins when Hannah wants to climb a tree, but...
each one she encounters has a problem. Abba, her father, rests against the carob tree. She tries several trees—the eucalyptus is too slippery, the bark of the pine tree is too rough, the olive tree is full of dents and knobs, and the branches of the carob tree are too fragile. Her father suggests an Abba Tree, and so Hannah climbs up her father’s tall frame which is just about perfect. He then tells her the story of the nearby carob tree and how he planted it when she was born so there would be a world filled with trees for her children.

The tale is a sweet story about the warmth of the father-daughter relationship and trees, but there is no discussion or information about the holiday of Tu B’Shevat. The illustrations are done in soft, warm colors with various animals and birds making appearances in the trees. The characters are cartoon-like with large heads on thin bodies, but the overall impression is one of love within the cycle of generations.

Rachel Glasser, retired Librarian, Yavneh Academy, Teaneck, NJ


Barbara Diamond Goldin’s Night Lights: A Sukkot Story sure has legs. It first appeared in 1995, illustrated by Louise August in luminous linocuts with oil and pastel, to be reissued in 2002 with Laura Elizabeth Sucher’s watercolors. The illustrations for this retelling are digitally executed. The results, for both story and art, are uneven.

First, the positive: In the new edition, both parents, not just the father (who was “Papa” in the 1995 version but is “Dad” in 2020) build the sukkah, assisted not only by young Daniel, but by his older sister Naomi.

But in focusing on the psychological core of the story (Daniel’s fear of sleeping outdoors, exacerbated by bad memories of the “scary sounds” he heard a year ago), Goldin loses sight of the Jewish one. The 1995 family decorated their sukkah with paper chains, apples, and pictures of “holy places and people from the Bible.” Today’s family sticks to chains and apples, and big sister Naomi attends “religious,” not Hebrew or Jewish, school.

Papa, back in 1995, gave a traditional Jewish account of why we sit in a sukkah: “To remember how our ancestors left Egypt in a hurry, thousands of years ago … They had to sleep in huts like this one when they stopped at night in the desert.” The Israelites did not just “leave” Egypt, but in focusing on the psychological core of the story (Daniel’s fear of sleeping outdoors, exacerbated by bad memories of the “scary sounds” he heard a year ago), Goldin loses sight of the Jewish one. The 1995 family decorated their sukkah with paper chains, apples, and pictures of “holy places and people from the Bible.” Today’s family sticks to chains and apples, and big sister Naomi attends “religious,” not Hebrew or Jewish, school.

In today’s retelling, Dad’s account is de-Judaized: “That way we remember our ancestors who left Egypt thousands of years ago … They had to sleep in huts like this one when they stopped at night in the desert.” The Israelites did not just “leave” Egypt, and it makes little sense not to mention their destination.

Most—not all—of the illustrations in this retelling pale beside August’s. Huq’s sombre processions of ancestors are dramatically set against desert sand and a tawny sky, but the children’s faces lack the warmth and joy within the cycle of generations.

The original Author’s Note mentions slavery in Egypt and the Israelites celebrating Sukkot by “bringing the fruits of their labors to offer to God.” The revision, directed to the child reader, replaces the Biblical background with a universalist social justice message about “refugees from war-torn countries” who live in “temporary shelters.” Something important is lost in the transition.

Marjorie Gann, retired teacher, co-author (with Janet Willen) of Five Thousand Years of Slavery and Speak a Word for Freedom: Women Against Slavery, (Tundra), Toronto, Canada

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In the third installment of the Kayla and Kugel series, Kayla and her spunky dog, Kugel, get ready to celebrate Hanukkah. As Kayla searches the attic for her box of menorahs and moves aside a seder plate and Shabbat candles to make room for the menorahs on the windowsill, she explains that, “long, long ago, a king said that the Jewish people couldn’t celebrate their holidays anymore... The Jewish people fought back—and won!” However, the Temple was “wrecked” and there was not enough oil to light the Menorah. Luckily, the oil miraculously “lasted for eight days and nights.”

Kugel may be too busy trying on Purim costumes, spewing Hanukkah candles out of their box, and running in circles like a dreidel to fully register Kayla’s rapid-fire Hanukkah lesson—but readers will absorb this CliffsNotes intro to Hanukkah, along with the enthusiastic spirit with which Kayla shares what she knows. Saturated, painterly images of springy-haired Kayla and on-the-go Kugel preparing for the evening’s rituals keep readers grounded in modern times, while finely detailed gold-and-brown line art offers glimpses into history. Kayla’s explanations of Hanukkah, both historic and contemporary, are far from comprehensive, but this cheery intro captures key elements of the holiday and may inspire young readers to ask questions and learn more.

*Rebecca Fox,*
*Children’s Librarian II, Boston Public Library, Boston, MA*


It seems that every couple of years publishers like to find a way to appeal to a more general audience for their Hanukkah books, so we find that we get an appearance of Santa or an elf or some other odd mix. Santa again makes an appearance in this gorgeously designed and illustrated book, and although the story may appeal to some interfaith families, there are real issues with the plotline.

The author has invented a “great big spirit” called Nate Gadol, who can answer people’s prayers to make things last longer. (Apparently, we have him to thank for the oil lasting for eight days.) He appears as a sort of magical Jewish Paul Bunyan figure (stopping a dam from breaking in one illustration) who can also make small miracles happen, which he does for one particular Jewish immigrant family named the Glasers. The action takes place in 1880. The Glasers are traveling on the “boat over from Europe” during Purim and they are poor so they have no money for “gift baskets.” Nothing about any of this is explained at all, but Nate makes three squares of chocolate appear for them instead of only one.

Unfortunately, Nate Gadol’s magical powers make no sense to the reader, nor do his choices of what to “stretch.” He can stretch medicine to last longer for the Glaser’s Christian neighbors, but not money for the impoverished family, or seemingly any other food but chocolate. Unfortunately, the Glasers have no Hanukkah chocolate to stretch, so when Nate Gadol meets Santa on a rooftop on Christmas Eve, Santa gets some Gadol magic to jump-start his sleigh and Nate gets a bit of chocolate that was certainly meant for someone else’s Christmas gift. Nate stretches the chocolate into more chocolate. He places it outside the bedroom doors of each member of the Glaser family, along with a big pile of presents, which were not a Hanukkah tradition at that time, but we are told that “the idea really caught on” later.

A menorah (with no differentiation in the height of the shamash) and a Christmas tree are clearly illustrated in the two windows of the Glaser’s and their neighbors’ homes. For those looking for some magic in a Hanukkah book, stick with the goblin-in-the-well from Eric Kimmel’s wonderful, *The Magic Dreidels.*

*Lisa Silverman,*
*Co-Editor, Children’s and Teen Literature, AJL News and Reviews*

Little Flicker is a small candle who lives in a drawer with eight other larger candles, a pair of Shabbat candles, and a Havdalah candle. When Hanukkah approaches, the candles vie to be the one lit on the first night—all except Little Flicker who is quiet and does not like to stand out. As they discuss the history and rituals of the holiday, however, he contributes important facts to the discussion—a quality that leads the others to conclude that he would be the perfect shamash, or helper candle. Information about Hanukkah and its traditions are simply and accurately presented in both the text and afterward, but having the candles brush their teeth, blow-dry their wicks, mop the drawer floor, and eat a meal seems silly. Harder to understand is the candles’ obliviousness to the reality that they are going to burn down completely once they are lit. Although well-intentioned, The Littlest Candle is an optional purchase in the already overcrowded field of Hanukkah books. It is exciting, however, to have a new publisher of Jewish children’s books on the scene.

Marcie Eskin,
Beth Hillel Bnai Emunah, Wilmette, IL


The strong desire to celebrate is to be celebrated. A carefully plotted drama of a missing moving carton brings Hanukkah to the multicultural residents of an apartment house. The protagonist family finds clever ways to substitute missing items, but as the nightly refrain notes: “It didn’t feel quite like Hanukkah.” From a barren first night of pizza, the days bring homemade items that require borrowing which means meeting new neighbors. The children’s craft menorah needs candles from next door; dad’s lost latke pan leads to fries with the building superintendent; hunting a dreidel leads to another neighbor’s hula hoop. The children contrive a great dreidel using an umbrella, but lack gelt for winners; they get chocolate coins from another neighbor. Mom’s missing guitar leads to yet another neighbor’s ukulele and Rock of Ages chord lessons. Hanukkah gifts lack wrapping until an elderly neighbor suggests, “Let’s do it the unexpected ways strangers can become friends and the joy of Jewish celebration even if it is more creative than kosher.

Ellen G. Cole,
retired Librarian, Temple Isaiah,
Los Angeles, CA


Nana and Sadie spend every Shabbat together. As they prepare the Shabbat table together, Nana shares the stories behind the origins of the family’s candlesticks, Kiddush cup, and challah cover. As Nana tells Sadie these stories, her family history comes alive for Sadie as each of these religious objects has a connection with her ancestor’s immigration challenges and family history. It is Sadie’s hope that one day she will be able to tell wonderful Shabbat stories like Nana.

The Chagall-inspired illustrations perfectly complement the narrative providing a surreal, dreamlike, but recognizable canvas in which Nana and Sadie’s ancestors join the family in the story-telling and Shabbat experience. The illustrations include fanciful representations of the portions of the various brachot (blessings). As an added bonus, Sadie’s Shabbat Stories coloring pages and activities are available to download from the author’s website.

This story does depart from traditional Friday night rituals as it is only Nana and Sadie that perform the blessings of the candles, Kiddush, and HaMotzi with parents as observers only. However, they do join in as part of the story, becoming part of the animated and whimsical family tableau that accompanies the narrative. A pronunciation guide for the Hebrew words used in the story is provided.

Inspired by the author’s own family history and stories, this beautifully illustrated Shabbat story is about the importance of connection with family through the sharing of history and experiences, and the lessons we can learn from each other, from one generation to the next. Sadie, through the love and example of Nana, finds her own voice and continues the tradition of Shabbat stories for the next generation and beyond.

Ellen Drucker-Albert,
Co-Editor, Children’s and Teen Literature, AJL News and Reviews; Manager, Adult & Information Services, Cold Spring Harbor Library & Environmental Center, Cold Spring Harbor, NY

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Children’s Judaic librarians have always been on the lookout for books about the holiday of Shavuot because there are so few. Often teachers come to the library to request a good book explaining the holiday suitable for a young child and there just isn’t anything good to give them. Librarian Sherry Wasserman “saw the hole in the collection” and started working on this book twenty years ago. When she finally found an illustrator, she decided to self-publish and the collaboration turned into a great success. The book retells the story of the Jewish people’s encounter with God at Mt. Sinai through the eyes of a modern young girl who embodies the rabbinic interpretation that all Jews were once present at this miraculous event. The girl’s name is Sarah, and she guides us through what our tradition says happened there, emphasizing the power and wonder and even fear that would have been felt by children who observed the wonders of God giving the Torah on the mountain. The brightly colored illustrations are fluid and bold. There is a ribbon of Hebrew Torah script that snakes through the pages, illuminating the passages that are explained in the child-friendly text below. In a nod to her librarian roots, the author has included a useful glossary, citations and translations of all the Hebrew Torah quotations. This book will serve as a much-needed teaching source for educating children on this important but overlooked Jewish holiday.

Lisa Silverman, Co-Editor, Children’s and Teen Literature, AJL News and Reviews

This Hanukkah tale shares the joy of a family celebration of this holiday borrowing the rhythmic, cumulative style of “There Was an Old Woman Who Swallowed a Fly” nursery rhyme. The focus of the text is the young rabbi, who “…made latkes yummy and filled up her tummy. She read from the Torah and lit the menorah. She lit the menorah, as we all know, to remember a miracle from a long time ago.” This rabbi also “made a nice brisket. It’s kosher of course, or she wouldn’t risk it!” The rhyming fun continues with holiday traditions such as playing dreidel, enjoying sweet applesauce, chocolate gelt, and spending time with family.

The energetic style of the text is furthered by the animated, whimsical, yet relatable illustrations that convey warmth and enthusiasm for the holiday celebration, but reflect a family dynamic that would only be present in a non-orthodox household. Traditional roles are modified in this tale. Both mother and father, female- and male-presenting children wear kippot in a synagogue setting and at home. The female rabbi leads the religious observance in the synagogue and home, and the food preparation, with the father playing a supporting role. The family celebrations consist of Ashkenazic style food, and are inclusive of a child with a disability and presumably the grandparents, or other older relatives or friends.

Refreshing in this Hanukkah tale is the downplaying of gift-giving; although the illustrations do include a few gifts, these gifts are not a part of the rhyming narrative. The text also includes a side-bar to explain that although the story of Hanukkah does not appear in the Torah, the Torah is read during the holiday, a note about the seven branched menorah from the Temple, and back matter which provides a synopsis about the origin of the Hanukkah holiday.

The text presents not only a positive Jewish female role model able to balance both her professional and parental responsibilities, but through the rhythmic rhyme a reminder of the roots of this celebration: “… as we all know, to remember a miracle from a long time ago,” and rituals that we can share with family and friends. This entertaining tale is a wonderful holiday read-a-loud that invites lively family participation.

Ellen Drucker-Albert, Co-Editor, Children’s and Teen Literature, AJL News and Reviews; Manager, Adult & Information Services, Cold Spring Harbor Library & Environmental Center, Cold Spring Harbor, NY

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Esther Amini is an author, painter, and psychoanalytic psychotherapist who grew up in Queens in a Jewish-Iranian household to parents originating from Mashhad, one of Iran’s most religious Muslim cities. Thus, she grew up between her parents’ beliefs and behavior patterns, shaped as a result of their life in Iran, and the American way of life of the 1960s. The Jewish community of Mashhad, founded in the 1740s, was forced to convert to Islam in 1839 and since that time lived a double-life: appearing as Muslims in public, and keeping Judaism at home, concealed from the Muslim majority and marrying exclusively among themselves. Thus, habits of concealment and suspicion followed many of them even upon emigrating to non-Muslim countries, including the USA. Amini starts her memoir in describing her family life in Iran; being a family history, it presents rich and colorful details absent from non-personal and academic studies.

The bulk of the memoir revolves around Amini’s own life, her relationship with her strict and secluded father who prohibited her to talk, read books, further her education, or socialize with classmates and who pushed for early pre-arranged marriage with a man of a similar background. Her mother, on the other hand, was a flamboyant, lively, loud, and sociable person, who wanted her daughter to adjust to the American way of life, while at the same time she kept many of her traditional feelings and biases. On the way we learn a lot about Persian foods, entertainment habits, not to mention swear words (translated into English in the glossary). Amini describes her transformation from a dutiful, shy, and private person, mostly trusting her helpful and understanding brothers, to an independent and accomplished person. Being men, Amini’s brothers had an easier path to becoming involved in American society, benefiting from educational opportunities, and entering work life.

This is a very readable memoir, emotional, and detailed, which lets the reader learn a lot about the life of the forced converts of Mashhad inside and outside of Iran. It tells us about the emotional scars they carried with them as immigrants to the USA, and how this impacted in different ways both women and men of the new generation of Iranian Jews.

Rachel Simon, Princeton University


Dr. Boyarin is an anthropologist and ethnographer whose work has studied Jewish culture in numerous city settings, including New York. This book is the story of the year he spent at Mesivtha Tifereth Jerusalem (MTJ), New York’s oldest rabbinic institute, situated on the Lower East Side. Boyarin refers to this year at the Yeshiva as his “Kollel year” alluding to the time after simikha (rabbinical ordination) for postgraduate study, even though he himself was undertaking Yeshiva studies as an observer. Since Boyarin was writing about MTJ he sought the permission of the Rosh haYeshiva, Rabbi Dovid Feinstein, son of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, MTJ founder. Sadly, Rabbi Feinstein passed away in November this year.

While this is an academic book, Boyarin is careful to explain every Hebrew or Yiddish term and has a glossary for the general audience. He not only tells of his personal experiences, but he also teaches the reader some points of Jewish law (halachah). Through this collection of stories Boyarin shares his feelings towards and analysis of the community and people he lived and studied with. It is not a chronological or dry report.

The only complaint about this book is that it is too short. This reviewer would like to know more about MTJ and the community than is shared here, particularly in light of the fact that most of the Lower East Side Jewish institutions have moved away or have disappeared. Nevertheless, this book will give the reader a taste of what yeshiva learning is all about for an adult. Recommended for personal, synagogue, and academic libraries.

Daniel D. Stuhllman,
Temple Sholom Library and City Colleges of Chicago,
Chicago, IL


With 72% of non-Orthodox Jews marrying someone who is not Jewish, it is vitally important to engage these couples and families. While in the past, the focus has been on convincing the non-Jew to convert, Case shows three ways to “invite” or engage both partners in the community. The first is for both partners to “find meaning and spiritual connection to Jewish life.” Whether or not a person accepts all Jewish precepts, Judaism has much to enrich someone’s spiritual life. The second invitation is to “find belonging in Jewish community.” There are many opportunities for people of any faith to

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engage in Jewish practices and participate in the congregational life. The last invitation is to “raise children with Judaism.” Since each couple is different, there are many challenges in supporting them in raising children in a Jewish-only home, or some kind of mixed home. Most importantly, congregations and organizations need to have an attitude which promotes inclusion and the policies which back it up. Highly recommended.

Sheryl Stahl, Director, Frances-Henry Library, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Los Angeles, CA


Hasidic communities do what they can to create a hermetically sealed culture and society, supposedly uninfluenced by the outside. In practice, however, such a goal is aspirational and cannot really succeed, particularly not in the wired age of the Internet. Ayala Fader’s rich ethnography of ultra-Orthodox heretics offers an illuminating picture of an extreme example of blurred boundaries between inside and outside: Jews who continue to live and conform to Haredi norms within their Haredi communities, while secretly thinking heretical thoughts and being involved in prohibited behaviors. The social, educational, and economic realities of Haredi life make it difficult for even heretical members to leave their communities, even as they live in a web of beliefs that they reject and practices they do not find meaningful.

Fader refers to these individuals as “double lifers,” and she talks about their “life-changing doubt,” and how those influence their personal, social, and familial lives. Her approach is sympathetic and critical, neither celebrating nor vilifying players and stakeholders in these complex dramas.

The book focuses particularly on the online and in-person social encounters between these double lifers. Blogs offered a voice and audience to double lifers, who could discover others who felt and lived their lives in similar ways. Social media expanded the online platforms to include even more interactive and interconnected sub-community of double lifers, who could share friendship, frustrations, and advice. In-person meetings—and even extra-marital affairs—offered a needed escape from the alienation that individuals felt in their ultra-Orthodox communities.

Like good anthropological writing, Hidden Heretics helps us understand the surface situations and hidden tensions in the experience of people so different from many readers. Fader’s prose is clear and readable, if a bit repetitive, and she avoids the jargon that can plague some others’ works of this kind.

Yoel Finkelman, Curator of the Haim and Hanna Solomon Judaica Collection, National Library of Israel


This is a non-fiction work that few readers will be able to put down. From the moment the author, Sanford Greenberg, describes walking through the gates at 116th and Broadway of Columbia University, this reviewer was hooked, recalling the same experience of walking through those awe-inspiring gates. The title should be familiar to most, as it’s the title of the Simon and Garfunkel song written in Greenberg’s honor. Greenberg and Garfunkel were roommates at Columbia (Class of 1962). When they were juniors, Greenberg became blind. Yet, in spite of his sudden and unexpected disability, Greenberg went on to graduate from Columbia and Harvard where he earned his MA and PhD degrees and later served as a White House fellow under Lyndon Johnson.

This memoir is not a comprehensive autobiography but rather a recollection of significant moments in an inspirational life. His stories are told well; for example, he shares the nerve-wracking occasion when the President asked to see him in the Oval Office and his feelings of fear. The meeting was fine; Johnson wanted to praise him. While the Jewish content is limited, there is a story of a family vacation and their efforts to observe Shabbat. Greenberg wanted his children to know that Shabbat occurred everywhere, not just at home. Since they didn’t find challah, they used rolls. They bought wine for kiddush, sang Shalom Aleichem, and made a Shabbat meal in their hotel.

Ultimately, this is the inspiring story of someone who overcame his blindness and the loss of his father at the age of five. Greenberg and his wife Sue set up a center to overcome blindness. This he says is his tikkun olam, his part to fix the world. This book is highly recommended for personal, synagogue, school, academic libraries. It can be read in one day and it will be an uplifting experience.

Daniel D. Stuhlman, Temple Sholom Library and City Colleges of Chicago, Chicago, IL
REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR ADULTS


Rabbi Ashlag acquired the name “Master of the Ladder” from his book *Perush Hasulam*. Hasulam (the ladder) is a metaphor for a tool that allows the reader to climb to the heights so that the language of Kabbalah can be fully understood, and the work of the Zohar explained. Rabbi Gottlieb is one of the foremost teachers of the works of Rabbi Ashlag, and he has written more than thirty books on the subject.

Yet, this particular book with its lack of narrative coherence, fails to impart empathy in the reader for the subject at hand. It does not sufficiently convey Ashlag’s worldview, his tendency to see God everywhere and in everything, and his deep love of Israel. Nor does it adequately explain his personal character enough to account for the pure, unquestioning devotion of his students.

Even though it is not intended as an academic book, the bibliography is poorly constructed, lacking key information such as publisher and date of publication. An optional purchase for most libraries.

Diane Mizrahi, PhD, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California Los Angeles


There are many Haggadot out there; enough to have a *seder* every night of the year with a different Haggadah. So what makes *Unbound: The Recreated Haggadah* by Eli Kaplan-Wildman different from all other Haggadot? Although different, this Haggadah is not an adaptation. While containing the entire canonized text, with an accompanying English translation, what makes this Haggadah different is its physical structure. This Haggadah comes unbound, thus the title. Twelve cards, which come in a case and accompanied by an explanation pamphlet, are held together by a loose tassel. Although this Haggadah can be used just for the text, according to the website (https://unboundjerusalem.com/) its creator intended it to be used by “unbinding” the cards and passing them around the *seder* table. While most cards can stand alone, some were meant to create a bifolium, thus bringing people together.

This *Haggadah* does a wonderful job enabling the participants to retell the story of the Exodus in a different way. With vibrant, thought provoking, and even tactile artwork, it allows room for creativity: each card can be passed around and each person can offer his or her ideas, or maybe even go out of order. The explanation pamphlet provides food for thought and discussion for each card, which can help guide and move the *seder* along. Of course, one can just read the *Haggadah* in a traditional manner if one chooses. This beautiful and unique *Haggadah* is recommended for special collection libraries.

Daniel D. Stuhlman, Temple Sholom Library and City Colleges of Chicago, Chicago, IL

Winning Every Moment begins with the historical and philosophical contexts of Chassidic and Lurianic Kabbalistic structures, and then introduces the “practical steps for facing the reality of the times and for infusing it with meaning and purpose,” as found in the *Tanya*. Throughout the nine chapters, Harari describes strategies to win the constant battles every person faces between their Godly and naturalistic souls, and why these ‘victories’ are actually our purpose in life.

Though appearing as a self-help book, readers interested in applying the principles of the *Tanya* will need to begin with a recognition of God in the world, and they must truly invest themselves to apply its teachings. Recommended for academic and synagogue libraries.

Haim A. Gottschalk, Olney, MD

Harari, Yehiel. *Winning Every Moment: Soul Conversations with the Baal HaTanya*. Jerusalem: Gefen, 2020. 244 pp. $18.00 (9789657023372).

The *Tanya*, first published in 1797, brings kabbalistic principles into an accessible format, and serves as the core of Chabad-Lubavitch philosophy and teaching. Hundreds of volumes of commentaries and elucidations on this work have already been published. Harari comes from an academic and professional background to present this newly translated volume, which prescribes soul-healing and growth methods for the modern reader. According to Rabbi Schneur Zalman (the author of the *Tanya*), explains Harari, “treatment and self-realization have always been seen as part of a broader system of values, attitudes, and approaches to the world and man’s purpose.”

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REVIEW OF TITLES FOR ADULTS


S cholars differ in their interpretation of the influence of Roman law on Jewish law and its practice. Ranon Katloff, emeritus professor of Classics at Bar Ilan University, believes that the influence is minor. He first studies a number of documents from the Babatha Archive, a collection of documents found near the Dead Sea relating to the young twice-widowed Babatha. Issues such as inheritance are studied, showing that Roman law is not the criterion used for making legal decisions (and also thus strengthening the case for those who support acceptance at this period of rabbinic law). In the second section of the book, Katloff reviews cases related to intermarriage and dowries, demonstrating that such principles as matrilineal descent were not “grafted” onto Jewish law from the Roman. The third section deals with the Jews of Rome. Katloff intertwines classical and Jewish sources to prove that, contrary to the belief of many scholars, these Jews were substantially influenced by the Rabbis. One of the miscellaneous articles at the end of the book deals with the prayer *Unetaneh Tokef*.Dating it to the fifth or sixth centuries, Katloff presents a fascinating analysis using both rabbinic and classical sources. Recommended for all academic research collections in Rabbinics, classics, or history of law.

Jim Rosenbloom,
retired Judaica Librarian, Brandeis University


T he story of Jews and Germany is an intriguing one. With the exception of the period of Nazi German dominance (1933-1945), Germany was the epicenter for the acceptance of the emergence Jewish cultural and scientific contributions, especially during the Weimar period, albeit without real social acceptance. Assimilation in Germany by many of its Jewish nationals contributed to an impression that German Jews identified Germany with a higher priority than their Judaism.

Lewy, German-born, and a resident during the early period of Nazi rule, witnessed the cultural tensions stretching the German-Jewish mindset. Ultimately emigrating to the US, he was able to obtain a doctorate from Columbia University and became an historian and a professor emeritus from the University of Massachusetts. His research, and his own observations of modern German political history, has enabled him to describe the transition of the Liberal-Left associations of many German Jews in the pre-World War II era to Communist control over East Germany after 1945 and their membership in the Communist Party.

For those unfamiliar with the basic history of this theme, here is a basic primer.

Sanford R. Silverburg, PhD.
Catawba College, Salisbury, NC


O n March 26, 1942, nearly one thousand Jewish women from Slovakia were placed on a train to Auschwitz, having been promised government work service for a few months in occupied Poland. By war’s end, only a handful survived. Drawing on research from Yad Vashem, USC Shoah Foundation’s Visual Archives, and the Slovak National Archives, as well as extensive interviews with the survivors, the author vividly recreates not only these women’s genteel prewar backgrounds, but their intersecting day-to-day lives in the camp up to its liberation in January 1945 and even beyond—death marches and postwar rehabilitation.

The prose is tense and riveting, the details harrowing: mud and dirt that clung to them, food that was little more than offal, lice that burrowed into their bodies. Their reactions devolved from initial shock upon arrival to a sort of numbing to the horrors and a slide into blasé routine. Starvation, disease, selections, and beatings were part of everyday life, although each day of staying alive was a miracle. Evading the gas chambers depended on luck or connections, especially relatives or landsmen. Prisoners vied for coveted jobs—sorting valuables in “Canada,” joining the secretarial pool—yet helped each other by sharing food or hiding the sick.

The focal character, Edith Grosman, who spent three years in hell, describes her relationships and remembers meeting villains like Mengele. Photographs include her and her doomed companions. Their powerlessness, the author argues, was partly gender-based: fewer women than men were recorded in the Nazi ledgers, implying lesser importance. She restores them to a rightful place in history. This gripping book belongs in a public or temple library, or a Holocaust collection.

Hallie Cantor,
Yeshiva University, New York, NY

Continued on page 37

Benjamin Nehemiah ben Elnathan was a Jewish money lender and one of the leaders of the Jewish community of Civitanova Marche on the borders of the Papal States in the mid-16th century. The short pontificate of Paul IV (1555-1559), during which time the Pope issued anti-Jewish regulations and increased the reach of the Italian Inquisition in his territory, created a crisis for the Jews living in the Papal States. The chronicle reports on the burning at the stake of the Portuguese conversos in Ancona (1556), his own arrest and transfer to Rome’s Inquisition prison, and the riots after the death of the “evil Pope.”

The Hebrew chronicle was first published by the Galician (then Israeli) scholar Isaiah Sonne (1887-1960) in an article in *Tarbiz*. Mampieri provides almost 200 pages of historical background placing the Hebrew chronicle in its context before offering a revised edition and an English translation, followed by a facsimile of the only surviving copy of the chronicle done in the 19th century. Recommended to all academic libraries.

Roger S. Kohn, Silver Spring, MD


A remarkable and impressive anthology of seventy-nine prominent Jewish figures who provide excerpts from their foundational writings bound into seven parts (God; Revelation and Commandment; Spirituality; Hermeneutics and Politics; the Holocaust and Israel; Feminism, Gender and Sexuality; Peoplehood). The editors are both academicians associated with the Hebrew Union College: Michael Marmur, Associate Professor of Jewish Theology, and David Ellenson, chancellor emeritus. Both are well situated to be aware of this outstanding group of Jewish intellectuals and litterati, and any readers aware of the purveyors of modern Jewish values and thought will find at least one recognizable contributor here.

This display of erudition and all-round excellent portrayal of Jewish thought will provide much material for further examination and reflection for Jewish communities and by non-Jewish groups for a better understanding of American Judaism. Contemporary subjects on movements concerning post-Holocaust theology, neo-Hasidism, feminism, and queer theory, among others, are offered for further discussion. Well recommended for a full appreciation of modern Jewish thought.

Sanford R. Silverburg, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC


This book contains essays that Michaelson wrote between 2002 to 2012 for an online magazine that he co-founded called Zeek, a Jewish Journal of Thought and Culture. These essays, of which he is “enormously proud,” are arranged in three parts: Part One, Uncoiling, “tracks [his] slow unfolding into the

Sanford R. Silverburg, PhD, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC
spiritual path;” Part Two, Unraveling, about his “relationship to religion in general,” and Part Three, Unknowing, “represents the theological and personal maturation of some of the processes from Parts One and Two.” The essays are not arranged in chronological order, but rather in a non-linear way, Michaelson addresses fundamental questions, such as monotheism, meditation and sensuality, truth, and more frequently, mysticism and meditation practice. He presents his views on New Age theology, Jewish ethnocentrism, and “Jewish fear of change.” His reserve toward organized religion led him to “finally learn to accept Christ in [his] heart” but also to blot out any reference to mystics and contemplatives within the Catholic Church. Much of his views of the world was nourished by his own experience of and activism on behalf of LGBTQ issues and from being Orthoprax but not Orthodox. He clearly sees himself practicing “both Buddhism and Judaism,” a proud “queer, spiritual, progressive, meditating, neo-Hasidic Jew ... the heretic who preaches, the lawyer-poet, the Jew who thinks that God loves him when he's at Burning Man.” The index is too compact to be glanced at quickly.

Recommended to searching souls seeking a Jewish identity outside of the beaten path.

Roger S. Kohn, Silver Spring, MD


Schoen's description of pushing a cart along our roads and highways brings a welcome respite to an isolated routine.

Ellen Share, retired Judaica librarian & currently religious schoolteacher, Potomac, MD


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Given the recent diplomatic activity between the Emirates and Israel, this work's importance takes on increased significance. There is so much more involved in this book than the title implies. The author, schooled at the Yeshiva University, has been associated with the Department of Defense, has close contacts with Israeli government agencies, is fluent in Hebrew, and maintains extensive arrangements with Emirati officialdom. Additionally, the author has had access to a considerably large collection of US and Emirati governmental documents all of which are used to support an exceptionally fine interpretation and analysis of the ongoing political conflict between Saudi Arabia and Qatar, and other Saudi-Emirati disputes. All of this is published, interestingly, by a publisher with deep Jewish religious interests.

The author introduces the reader, with incredible detail, to the core issue in intra-Arab world concerns over the role of Iran in regional politics. In this matter, it is pointed out how Qatar's policies fit into this complex issue. Then follows an examination of President Trump's foreign policy objectives, primarily directed at isolating Iran, while simultaneously relying on support from Israel and Saudi Arabia.

While it is difficult to understand how and why this book would find an audience outside a Jewish community, largely because of the publisher, this is an extremely strong contribution to an understanding of contemporary Middle Eastern political dynamics and related US foreign policy objectives.

Sanford R. Silverburg, PhD, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC


The early prophet books of Joshua, Judges and Samuel recount many occurrences of ostensible violations of the Torah law by Biblical characters. Rabbi Allen Schwartz's extensive and unique work shows how the sages of the Talmudic area dealt with these apparent conflicts and the solutions they presented in order to solve them. A brilliant and illuminating book reminding us how important it is to always judge people favorably. A significant message for all of us to study.

Rabbi Dr. Moshe Weisblum, Wantagh, NY

Continued on page 39
REVIEW OF TITLES FOR ADULTS


This is an exhaustively researched intellectual and political biography of the influential Jewish historian Lucy S. Dawidowicz (1915-1990), compiler of The Golden Tradition (1967) and author of several books about the Holocaust, most notably The War against the Jews (1975). Nancy Sinkoff, Professor of Jewish Studies and History at Rutgers University, situates Dawidowicz as one of the few women among the New York (mostly) Jewish intellectuals whose political views had shifted from Marxian socialism during the Depression to neoconservatism in the 1970s and beyond. Uniquely among her neoconservative peers, Dawidowicz was influenced by the Diaspora nationalism of the Jewish historian Simon Dubnow and the Yiddish scholarship of Max Weinreich, Zelig Kalmanovitch, and Leibush Lehrer. In From That Place and Time (1986), Dawidowicz recounted her experiences in Vilna in 1938 and 1939, as a fellow in the YIVO Institute’s Aspirantur program for junior Yiddish scholars, and her role in the postwar recovery of YIVO’s prewar archival and library collections.

Sinkoff covers these episodes and Dawidowicz’s subsequent career, which included two decades as a policy analyst with the American Jewish Committee, followed by her emergence as a firm proponent of the “intentionalist” school of Holocaust scholarship. Dawidowicz’s rightward political evolution was presaged by her unyielding anticommunism during the Cold War and catalyzed by the upheavals of the 1960s. While her lasting legacy resides primarily in her scholarship, Sinkoff pointedly observes that Dawidowicz’s writings on politics and race relations “anticipated many of today’s polarities and cultural challenges.”

From Left to Right is a lucid study that is aimed at scholars and general readers alike. As a bonus, its extensive appendix includes correspondence to and from Dawidowicz, enabling readers to sample her “distinctive personal voice.” Highly recommended.

Zachary M. Baker, Stanford University Libraries (Emeritus), Palo Alto, CA


The title of this book suggests that the author is offering a simple book with practical advice for the community or shul rabbi. However, Sperber has put together an in-depth discussion that teaches the reader how to think more deeply about the methods used to issue a halachic ruling. While there is a tendency toward greater stringency and conservativism, the author talks about sensitivity to the questions and questioner.

When new situations occur, the rabbi has to weigh the legal codes of the past with the implications of the facts in front of him. What was once forbidden could now be permitted and what is forbidden to one may be permitted to another. For example, Sperber considers how to deal with the issue of congregants with hearing problems and the use of hearing aids on Shabbat. Normally, electronic devices such as microphones, phones, screens, etc. are forbidden on Shabbat. However, someone who is hard of hearing would not be able to hear the Torah reading or respond to Shabbat greetings without a hearing aid. Thus, the author guides community rabbis to lead by considering that humanitarian needs may override the rabbinic limitations of mukhshah (items forbidden to touch on Shabbat).

The Importance of the Community Rabbi is very well done except for some minor typos. But this book is not for the general reader; it belongs in academic collections and some personal rabbinic collections. Libraries without academically interested readers will find this an optional purchase.

Daniel D. Stuhlmans, Temple Sholom Library and City Colleges of Chicago, Chicago, IL


For Kenneth Stern, a lawyer and the director of the Bard Center for the Study of Hate, the Constitution’s First Amendment provides an important vehicle for enabling the free expression of multiple positions on contentious issues. The academy, Stern argues, is the best venue for statements on both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and for its proponents to air their views and positions without censoring the other. Stern’s own Jewish background informs his opinion towards Israel and its relation to Palestinians, but it is one that appreciates how certain unyielding elements in both communities can lead to their inability to appreciate or even hear an alternative view. The hate that can be observed from each group’s display of their respective political positions can only be abated, says Stern, when each can appreciate the other’s perspective. This is a great book for a specific psychology class or an advanced chavarah.

Sanford R. Silverburg, PhD, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC

Continued on page 40

Marvin Sweeney is a professor of Hebrew Bible in California. The book is divided into twelve sections. In the Introduction, the author explains that Jewish mysticism has been a topic of growing interest in recent decades. In Chapter 1, a historical survey is presented of the visionary experience typical of Canaanite and Near Eastern religious expression up to the time of the Exodus. In chapters 2 through 4, the author details visionary experiences as testified in the Torah, Prophets and Psalms in the form of dreams, visions and inspiration. In Chapter 5, the author covers visionary experiences as described in apocalyptic literature such as Enoch, Fourth Ezra and Second Baruch.

The book continues in chapters 6 through 10 with examples from *Hekhalot* literature, Kabbalah, Zohar and Hasidic practices to further the historical survey from Talmudic times through the present. There is a brief conclusion commenting on the long tradition of visionary experiences of the divine followed by a bibliography. While a survey of Jewish mysticism, the book is fairly extensive in its treatment of the various traditions and literature. This would be a good addition to an academic collection that includes material on this subject.

Arthur G. Quinn, 
St. Vincent de Paul Seminary, Boynton Beach, FL


Aside from accusations of deicide, there has not been a more trenchant Christian attack on the Jews than the blood libel. The notion that the Jews murdered Christian children to extract their blood for ritual purposes has a long history on European soil. In her massive historical narrative, Magda Teter, a history professor at Fordham University, introduces the reader to this aspect of European antisemitism through her emphasis on the role of printed books, broadsheets and images in spreading the libel.

The story begins in the middle of the 12th century in England with the death of a twelve-year-old William of Norwich. At first, the blood libel was relegated to rumor, passed on by folklore and the instructions from church pulpits. A major change came in the middle of the 15th century with the introduction of the printing press which allowed the transmission of ideas to the literate as well as the vast illiterate population through the addition of imagery. Teter’s coverage includes an extensive examination of Roman Catholic teaching, the involvement of various members of the Church hierarchy over time, and the impact at the local level across the European Continent.

This is an essential addition to any collection that focuses on antisemitism, Jewish-Christian relations, and medieval European history.

Sanford R. Silverburg, PhD, 
Catawba College, Salisbury, NC


The author is the President of the Volunteers for Israel, an organization that works with its Israeli counterpart Sar-El. Together they organize and recruit mainly Jewish volunteers, but non-Jews are also occasionally registered to volunteer as logistical supply personnel on a variety of Israeli military bases for periods of one to three weeks. The description of Werner’s many volunteer periods give the reader an impressive view of the basic quality of life in an Israeli military installation. Volunteers, it is shown, provide essential support services to each of the Israeli military branches, army, navy, and air force. In return for unremunerated service, volunteers are offered a variety of cultural events on bases by military components. On weekends, volunteers enjoy an opportunity to spend time with relatives if they have any in Israel or do any of the other traditional tourist activities. But more than this central theme, the reader gets an unvarnished perspective of Israeli military life and life in Israel in general. This is a real-life character portrait for an important *mitzvah* and *tzedakah* opportunity as well as a window into the political situation in Israel and the Middle East.

Sanford R. Silverburg, PhD, 
Catawba College, Salisbury, NC


*Jerusalem in Israeli Cinema* provides an in-depth exploration of the film portrayal of all aspects of the city of Jerusalem: its private and public side; its earthly and heavenly symbolism; its past, present, and future. The strength of this book lies in its critical theoretical approach to classifying and analyzing the sheer range of films on this subject.

Chapter 1, with its focus on “City and Wandering: Rewriting Jerusalem,” looks at key films such as Ron Havilio’s *Fragments* (*Shivrei Tmunot Yerushalayim*, 1996), which considers the city as “a palimpsest space from which traces of the past emerge.” Chapter

Continued on page 41
2 explores themes of the sacred and profane by examining, for example, films like Yoram Gaon’s Ani Yerushalmi (1971) and David Grossman’s 2006 work inspiring the mini-series Mishehu Larutz. Chapters 3 and 4 address the traveling and wandering of exiled figures to and from the holy city through films based on novels, such as Michael Sheli by Amos Oz. Chapter 5 looks at films that convey “Conflicting Voices of Memory” like Himno Melch Yerushalayim based on Yoram Kaniuk’s novel. Chapter 6, “The End of Days: History that has Not Yet Occurred,” is a tour de force, taking a close look at recent films (e.g., World War Z and JeruZalem) that imagine utopian, dystopian and heterotopian futures for the city.

This brilliant study is recommended for Jewish studies, critical theory, art, and film libraries.

David B Levy,
TC Lander College for Women, NYC


n open and honest presentation of controversial issues in modern day Israeli politics and security. Moshe “Bogie” Ya’alon, former Israeli Minister of Defense and chief of General Staff of the IDF, brings his vast knowledge and experience in the Israeli military to this autobiographical account of his experiences. With his unique perspectives and insights, he offers a different approach to change the landscape of the Middle East. A captivating and exciting book.

Rabbi Dr. Moshe Weisblum.
Wantagh, NY

Fiction


A cat named Mysticat has become Adler’s friend and teacher of Jewish wisdom (although, one might suppose that Adler, who is a professor of Jewish studies, is speaking through the cat). Adler describes her cat as having a Jewish soul, but his behavior is truly cat not human. In describing the activities of Mysticat, Adler writes, “His simple surroundings are clean and abounding in s’farim, holy books, whose holiness the Mysticat takes into himself by lying on them to absorb their content.” A charming illustration of Mysticat on a pile of s’farim also accompanies this tale.

This is a book that could be enjoyed by adults and even read out loud to children who will love the antics of the cat. In addition to the narrative of Mysticat and the words of wisdom that are dispersed throughout the text, there is information on Jewish holidays and practices in an extensive appendix in the back with an added glossary.

Ellen Share,
retired Judaica librarian & currently religious school teacher,
Potomac, MD


While there are dozens of books about Jewish immigrants, this novel includes those struggles and much more. The story opens with the Kishinev Pogrom of 1903, and the reader is immediately immersed in a situation that involves both heroism and tragedy, including the death of the Raisky family’s son. In the wake of their loss, Meyer and Sadie Raisky decide that it is time to leave. Israel is the only country willing to accept them, but when they resettle in Jerusalem they experience major culture shock. Learning Hebrew is difficult. Yuri decides that he wants to be a real Jew and begins studying with a charismatic Orthodox rabbi. Manya remains secular and becomes obsessed with marrying Galina off so that she will not have to join the army. The family’s attempt to survive intact with so many obstacles makes for a humorous, if somewhat trite, tale involving shady Russian emigrés, an archaeologist, and a TV dating program. There are interesting issues about religious identity and observance for book clubs to discuss. It will be a good addition to synagogue and public library fiction collections, especially those that serve immigrant communities.

Barbara Bibel,
Congregation Netivot Shalom, Berkeley, CA

Continued on page 42
conditions in the garment industry, but some relief is provided through the love interests of Miriam and her best friend. Most importantly, the book covers the great strike of 1909, in which Miriam is arrested and beaten, and finally the Triangle factory fire of 1911. The true story of this inferno is recast dramatically through the experiences of Miriam and her co-workers, many of whom die. The book ends happily, with Miriam’s wedding.

Sharon Gloger’s novel, while a worthy attempt to deal with an important historical subject, provides an uneven mixture of history, triumph and disaster, and romance. In terms of Jewish content, the story provides several Jewish references but only two ritual scenes: a Shabbat dinner at home, and Miriam and Jacob’s wedding. On the whole, the writing is somewhat pedestrian, and there are several uneven time-shifts. Finally, the book would have benefitted from a longer concluding essay explaining the main historical topics and people (e.g., Kishinev, the Lower East Side, Clara Lemlich, and the Triangle Fire). Though it was probably written with an adult readership in mind, it may be best suited to interested teens who will appreciate the love story while learning some history.

Fred Isaac,
Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA


In 1960s Chicago, someone knocks on Detective Hank Purcell’s door. It is a snowy winter evening, and the visitor is Sister Mary Philomena, a nun from Saint Fidelis Church. She tells the detective that she has seen something terrible happen at the church. A few days later, Purcell and his partner, Marvin Bondarowicz, get called to the convent near the church. Sister Mary’s body lies in the basement near the furnace. Old papers and photographs are stuffed into the furnace. The situation is puzzling, and it may involve improper conduct on the part of a priest with a young altar boy. As if this were not enough, Hank’s teenage daughter, Margaret, has disappeared. She tells the detective that she has seen something terrible happen at the church. A few days later, Purcell and his partner, Marvin Bondarowicz, get called to the convent near the church. Sister Mary’s body lies in the basement near the furnace. Old papers and photographs are stuffed into the furnace. The situation is puzzling, and it may involve improper conduct on the part of a priest with a young altar boy. As if this were not enough, Hank’s teenage daughter, Margaret, has disappeared. She tells the detective that she has seen something terrible happen at the church. A few days later, Purcell and his partner, Marvin Bondarowicz, get called to the convent near the church.

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Fred Isaac,
Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA

Kane, Andrew. The Other Hand: A Novel. Chicago: Brewick Court, 2019. 315 pp. $16.95. (9781944376086). Also available as an eBook.

Jonathan Bauman is the rabbi of a thriving Modern Orthodox congregation in Lawrence, NY, a New York City suburb where Bauman and his wife raised their three children. His life had settled into a smooth comfortable (and dare we say “boring”) groove. Then suddenly his life seemed to fray from all directions. His best friend, the Temple president, was indicted on embezzlement charges; his son came out as gay, and his daughter became involved with a non-Jewish man. While Bauman struggles to apply the Jewish values he’d been teaching to his own life, he is acutely aware that the congregation is watching and discussing his situation. While the characters and situations seem real and timely, they wrap up unrealistically quickly and painlessly. Recommended.

Sheryl Stahl, Director,
Frances-Henry Library, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion,
Los Angeles, CA


Diary of a Lonely Girl was first published in Yiddish in New York in 1918. The term “free love” from the title is a synonym for what today we call pre-marital sex. Reading this memoir is like watching episodes of a TV rom com in which the main character pines for the man she loves, A., while fending off the advances of C., a proponent of free love. Additional comedy is supplied in the presence of Miriam’s nosy landladies, who have no compunction about walking into her room at all hours. Miriam is alone in New York, with her family left behind in war-torn Europe. She’s also in a certain amount of danger from the Tenement House Act, a law that targeted single women as potential prostitutes. Like any contemporary young adult, Miriam is fixated on herself and her feelings. Though she’s earnest and depressed, unintended humor comes through in her dialogues with the insufferable C. The book is less an exploration of immigrant life and more the story of a single Jewish woman’s search for love in New York. Though it’s 100 years old, it reads like a modern tale of woe from a romance magazine. For collections of Yiddish in translation.

Beth Dwoskin,
Cataloger, University of Michigan,
Hatcher Graduate Library,
Ann Arbor, MI

Continued on page 43

Alan Kaufman’s second novel combines contemporary intellectual life and the chase for erotic fulfillment. Nathan Falk is a prominent Israeli/American author on a tour promoting his recently translated book. On his first stop, in Berlin, his hostess Lena casts a spell on him, both personally and sexually. Over the following several weeks, he travels through German-speaking Europe, from Berlin to Graz, Zurich, Vienna and Salzburg. He gives talks, meets his agent and publisher, and tries unsuccessfully to write his next book. All the while his obsession with Lena remains; they talk intermittently and renew their relationship obliquely and unhealthily. Through his wandering (both geographic and intellectual) as he frets and wonders about her, he ruminates about the state of European contemporary philosophy and the German relationship with the Holocaust and its aftermath. The couple reconnect briefly in San Francisco, only to part badly again. As the book ends, Falk finally writes his next book, on the controversial life of Israeli Meir Har-Zion.

Kaufman’s novel contains a fevered mix of elements. There is a story about an author struggling to write his next book while on tour. There is a tone of cynicism and bitterness about the European (French and German) contemporary intellectual world, in which Nathan (and probably Kaufman) rails about the current state of intellectual life, name-dropping post-war thinkers and their philosophies. And overlaying it all is a disturbing, at-times graphic tale of sexual desire, fulfillment and separation. The result is a confusing combination of elements. It’s hard to know how this uncomfortable novel will fit into a Judaica library, other than the most broad-based university setting.

Fred Isaac,
Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA


*Shemhazai’s Game* by Harry Ringel is a novel that is heavily inspired by *Kabbalah*, the pseudepigraphal Jewish texts and passages from the Talmud and other sources. Based on these teachings and texts, what he calls “Other Judaism,” Ringel creates a story infused with these ideas in every passage, which gives the story more layers than simply just the plot it tells. The story is about two adult main characters, Deborah and her brother, Jacob, who is on the autism spectrum and has savant syndrome. The story starts with her going home after two students at her school injure each other in a fight, and she needs to tend to her brother Jacob, who is being watched by his succession of caregivers. One of these caregivers seemingly shows up out of nowhere, although he claims to be an attendee at her local Chabad where Deborah has begun studying. It turns out that this caregiver is one of the fallen angels mentioned in the Book of Enoch. From there, the novel turns into a struggle for survival in the videogame this fallen angel has created for Jacob, ostensibly to help free him from his syndrome. The reality however is much different as the reader discovers as the story unfolds.

The book functions on multiple levels, as Ringel uses the characters and plot as devices to impart teachings and lessons from the *Kabbalah* and other Jewish sources, traditions and legends. It can be enjoyed simply for the qualities of the novel and the story itself can be used as a teaching tool to introduce these texts and concepts to those who may be unfamiliar with them. Recommended for Jewish libraries in general, as all levels of students may find this novel useful in introducing these concepts and texts.

Eli Lieberman,
Assistant Librarian, Hebrew Union College, NY


If you are looking for Tevye-style Yiddish stories of lovingly intertwined shetel life, you won’t find them in this book of translated tales. Rosenfeld’s Yiddish fiction was more about isolation and disconnection. In the title story, an unemployed man attempts to do the “women’s work” at home while his wife works. But he doesn’t feel secure even at this degrading position since his ten-year-old daughter is convinced she can do a better job at running the household. In another story, a young woman who knew she could have found a husband if she wanted, decided that perhaps a boy who had died years earlier had been her intended spouse and that now, death was her only choice. Many of the stories in this collection are about relationships that failed or ones that missed their chance to develop at all. Rather than making the stories sound like they were beamed over directly from the old country, Mines translated them into a modern colloquial English, making them feel very contemporary. Highly recommended for fiction collections.

Sheryl Stahl,
Director, Frances-Henry Library,
Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion,
Los Angeles, CA
The AJL Newsletter (Irene Levin-Wixman z”l, founding editor) was published in print from 1979 to 2010 by the Association of Jewish Libraries to inform members about AJL activities and issues related to Judaica libraries. From January 2011 through August 2019 it was split into two separate electronic publications – the AJL News and the AJL Reviews. As of September 2019 it is published digitally as AJL News and Reviews. Receipt of this publication is one of the benefits of membership. Please see the AJL website at http://www.jewishlibraries.org for membership rates.

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