JNUL Officially Becomes The National Library of Israel

ELHANAN ADLER

On November 26, 2007, The Knesset enacted the “National Library Law,” transforming the Jewish National and University Library (JNUL) at The Hebrew University’s Givat Ram campus into the National Library of Israel.

The JNUL was founded in 1892 by the Jerusalem Lodge of B’nai Brith. After the first World War, the library’s ownership was transferred to the World Zionist Organization. With the opening of the Hebrew University on the Mount Scopus campus in 1925, the library was reorganized into the Jewish National and University Library and has been an administrative unit of the Hebrew University ever since. With the founding of the State of Israel the JNUL became the de facto national library of Israel. This status was legally recognized in the Israeli legal deposit law, requiring two copies of all Israeli publications to be given to the JNUL, but the library itself remained part of the Hebrew University and its collections the property of the university. While the government did supply some special funding, the JNUL’s primary source of funding was the Hebrew University, and the library’s budget was subject to the university’s financial state and academic priorities.

With the passage of the new National Library Law, the JNUL will cease to be a department of the Hebrew University. The law stipulates a two-stage change of status: first the library will become a semi-independent subsidiary for a period of three years, and then a fully independent body. Even during the interim stage the library will be governed by a board of directors, manage its own finances, set its own budget priorities and do its own fund raising. Most of the library’s budget will come directly from the State, while the Hebrew University will continue to provide part of the budget (and have minority representation on the library’s board).

The library’s new name will be “ha-Sifriyah ha-Le’umit” (The National Library of Israel). Its mandate is to serve as the national library of both Israel and the Jewish People, as well as continuing to be a general humanities research library for both the Hebrew University and other scholars. After the change to full independence, the government will “own” 50% of the new national library, the Hebrew University 25%, and the remaining 25% will be allocated to other governmental or public bodies as approved by the government and university. The General Assembly of the library will be made up of 14 representatives from the government, the university, scholars from various fields, and representatives of the public.

The passage of the new law clears the way for further planning, already in progress, of a new home for the national library, either on the campus of the Hebrew University, or elsewhere in Jerusalem. The building will be constructed with the generous assistance of the Yad Hanadiv foundation, which previously contributed the buildings of two other state bodies: the Knesset, and the Supreme Court. The new building will include expanded reading rooms and state-of-the-art storage facilities, as well as a planned Museum of the Book.

The new formal status and the organizational change will enable the National Library to expand and to serve as a leader in its scope of activities in Israel, to broaden its links with similar bodies in the world, and to increase its resources via the government and through contributions from Israel and abroad. The law emphasizes the role of the Library in using technology to make its collections accessible to the public. The JNUL has been a leader in digitization of Judaica over the last eight years. We hope that with the change in status and expected increase in funding the new National Library of Israel will be able to significantly increase its digital collections and better serve its worldwide user community.

New Copyright Legislation in Israel

RIVKA SHEVEKY

The Knesset (Israeli parliament) recently passed two laws that have important implications for preservation in libraries and archives in Israel. The new copyright law addresses preservation needs in the clause “permitted usages in libraries and archives” for the sake of preservation. This clause includes permission to copy copyrighted works of which the library or the archive possesses a copy, as long as the library or archive does not use the preservation copies as extra copies for everyday use. In practical terms, this allows libraries and archives to copy works from obsolete formats to newer ones for preservation purposes. The law also indirectly refers to the preservation of online content, by authorizing the minister of education to permit copying of certain kinds of works and to determine the terms for public access to the copied works.

The National Library Law contains a clause that gives the National Library even more extensive rights to copy copyrighted works for the purpose of preservation. The National Library received the right to copy any publication that is subject to legal deposit but failed to be deposited for any reason. While Internet sites are not subject to legal deposit in Israel, the new law allows the National Library to copy Internet sites, and thus enables the archiving of the Israeli domain. Public access to the archived Internet sites will be subject to terms and conditions determined by the minister of justice and the minister of education.
President's Message

LAUREL WOLFSON

While working on a d’var Torah based on the Exodus from Egypt for the AJL midwinter meeting, I was struck by the coincidence of forty-odd years of development and maturation for AJL. The association has responded to the changing needs of our members and developing technology. Our libraries and our jobs as librarians are threatened by some of these developments, and it is our responsibility to value and support the libraries and librarians dedicated to providing access to, maintaining, and transmitting knowledge. For the profession as a whole, and by extension for AJL, it is now time to evaluate and carefully consider our mission and goals, and how best to respond to those changes.

A new AJL task force has been charged to examine the current role and future direction of the Association of Jewish Libraries. The task force was conceived in response to the Hasafran discussion and concern about curtailed service and shortened hours, staff layoffs, and library closings. A preliminary report is expected at the general membership meeting at the convention in Cleveland, June 22-25, 2008. I hope to see you there.

Laurel

New Slate of Officers for AJL’s Board

The nominating committee of the Association of Jewish Libraries is pleased to present the candidates for the national board for 2008-2010. Nominees for divisional officers are submitted by the RAS and SSC divisions. To nominate a write-in candidate, you must obtain written permission from the candidate and supporting signatures from five AJL members. Send nominations to Ronda Rose (rfrose@sbcglobal.net) or fax: 323-650-8414.

The AJL slate of officers for 2008-2010 is as follows.

President
Susan Dubin

Vice-president/president-elect
David Hirsch

Vice-president for membership
Laurie Haas

Vice-president for publications
Deborah Stern

Recording secretary
Elana Gensler

Corresponding secretary
Rachel Glasser

Treasurer
Sheryl Stahl

Past president
Laurel Wolfson

Correction

In last issue’s review of American Judaism in Popular Culture edited by Leonard J. Greenspoon and Ronald A. Simkins, the name of one of the contributors, Judith Neulander, was misspelled.
AJL Scholarship Fund

SARAH BARNARD

The Association of Jewish Libraries is pleased to announce a scholarship of $500 to a student enrolled in or accepted by a graduate school of library and information science. Prospective candidates should have knowledge of and interest in Jewish studies, and demonstrate the potential, ability and intention of pursuing a career in Judaica librarianship.

Eligibility requirements are: proof of acceptance for the next academic year or proof of current enrollment in an ALA-accredited library school in the United States or Canada or an accredited library school in either the United Kingdom, Australia or New Zealand or the graduate library school program at either Hebrew University or Bar Ilan University; and documentation showing completion of Jewish Studies courses at an academic level, or extensive participation in less formal Jewish studies, or extensive experience working in Judaica libraries, or any combination of the above.

Students who wish to apply for this scholarship should submit the following documents by Friday, March 14, 2008.

- Completed application form online, via email to the scholarship co-chair, available on the AJL website at www.jewishlibraries.org/
- Documentation of acceptance or enrollment in a qualified graduate library school program. Transcripts and/or letters on official letterhead, submitted via regular mail, will be accepted as documentation.
- Documentation of Jewish studies completed at an academic or less formal level or of experience working in Judaica libraries. Transcripts and/or letters on official letterhead, submitted via regular mail, will be accepted as documentation.
- A short statement (200/300 words), submitted as a Word or rtf e-mail attachment, highlighting the extent of your participation in Judaic studies and other relevant experiences. Relate how you feel your involvement in such activities might be reflected in your future career in library and information science.

Submit application and supporting materials to:
Lynn Feinman, Co-Chair, AJL Scholarship Award
92nd Street Y Library
1395 Lexington Avenue
New York, NY 10128
Email: lfeinman@92Y.org
Phone: 212 415-5543; fax: 212 427-6119

AJL Online

To subscribe to Hasafran, AJL’s electronic discussion list, send the message: “sub hasafran [your first and last name]” to: listproc@lists.acs.ohio-state.edu.

Visit the AJL Web site at www.jewishlibraries.org.

Keeping Current

LIBBY K. WHITE

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEH) has released a 99-page study, “To Read or Not to Read,” that finds that Americans are reading less. The study supplements anecdotal impressions and other government, academic, and foundation data. Among the NEH conclusions are the following: Money spent on books, adjusted for inflation, dropped 14% from 1985 to 2005; and adults “proficient in reading prose” declined from 40% in 1992 to 37% in 2003. On the other side of the ledger, elementary and middle schools have benefited from intensive efforts to teach reading. The emergence of “teen fiction” as a “rapidly expanding category in an otherwise flat market” is a phenomenon witnessed and encouraged by AJL. According to NEH chair, Dana Gioia, “After 13, you see this catastrophic fall off—if the kids are put into this electronic culture without any counter efforts, they will stop reading. The number of 17-year-olds who have “never” or “hardly ever” read for pleasure has doubled to 19%. Gioia applauds the success of the Harry Potter books, but also warns, “It’s great that millions of kids are reading one book every 18 months. It doesn’t make up for daily reading.”

Another recent survey uses a different method of viewing American culture. The “America’s Most Literate Cities” project weighs six indicators of literacy: newspaper circulation; number of bookstores, library resources, periodical publishing resources, educational attainment, and Internet resources. The 69 largest US cities (with over 250,000 in population) were studied and ranked.


AJL 2008 Ballot Goes Electronic

The AJL election is coming! This spring, we will hold our first electronic ballot. In order for this to succeed, we must have accurate email addresses for all members who have them. Please take a moment to go to the website at jewishlibraries.org/ajlweb/ and look up your name in the directory. Please make sure that the email address listed there is the one you prefer to use for this election. If your e-mail address has changed please contact our vice-president for membership, Yossi Galron, to correct it. Contact him at membership@jewishlibraries.org.

Members without e-mail may request a paper ballot by calling Ronda Rose at 323-654-3652 or Joy Kingsolver at 312-322-1741. We will also be contacting some members to try to increase the number of members who can participate. Instructions for participating in the election will be posted on the website, on Hasafran, and published in the newsletter. Please help us save AJL money and save some trees, too! It’s your AJL—vote!
Chapter Chatter

TOBY ROSENBER

Chapter Tips—Getting Your Members Involved

Heidi Estrin, president of the South Florida Chapter (and librarian at Feldman Children’s Library, Congregation B’nai Israel) had a great idea. She asked her chapter members to take turns as guest editors of the chapter newsletter, Headlines and Footnotes. It’s a great idea for several reasons: it takes the pressure off one person, allows members to showcase their own libraries and programs, and gives the guest editor a great public relations tool in their home library. We all need ways to highlight the value and expertise we add to our institutions. Way to go Heidi!

If you have a neat idea to share with other chapters, we’d love to hear about it and publicize it in this space!

Come To Our Convention Program in Cleveland. We’re planning a panel session for the convention titled: How to Run an Effective Chapter. Representatives from chapters will speak on some of chapter basics: organizing and maintaining a chapter, issues of member retention, leadership and succession, communication, and programming. Bring your questions, challenges, and success stories for a lively discussion! Don’t forget! Convention dates for 2008 are June 22-25.

Irene Seff and Roz Reisner

Judaica Library Network of Metropolitan Chicago (JLNMC)

Submitted by Rose Novil

Every summer our members hold a brainstorming session to decide the program topics for the forthcoming year. Our October program focused on the art of book reviewing. As Chicago is the home of ALA, we were fortunate to get Ileen Cooper, editor of Booklist, as our guest speaker. We were pleasantly surprised that Bill Ott, the editor and publisher, accompanied her. Mr. Ott showed us Booklist’s brand new website with new features that include a more powerful reader’s advisory, a free archive of reviews with grade levels included, and a “find similar titles” function. Check it out at: www.booklistonline.com.

Ms. Cooper was a delightful speaker. She explained that any review that appears in Booklist is for a recommended title; they do not publish reviews for books that they do not recommend. Each review runs about 175 words; the longer “focus” articles are about 500 words. One of her tricks is the 50-page test. If she can’t get into it in 50 pages, she usually passes on it. She noted that some reviewers approach their books as critics and others as readers. She reads, does not take notes, and monitors her feelings as she reads. When reviewing non-fiction, she suggested asking how it fits into the general genre of the literature.

Houston AJL/BJE Jewish Librarians Network

Submitted by Lisa Klein

The Houston AJL/BJE Jewish Librarians Network started the school year with a network meeting hosted by one of our day school/synagogue libraries. We had a briefing about the AJL convention by our two participants, Jennifer Jaeger from the Robert M. Beren Academy and Judy Weidman from Congregation Beth Israel. They shared materials from the sessions they attended and reported a very positive experience. Our network also discussed school book fair plans and author visits. We plan to meet in the spring to discuss plans for the annual community book fair held in the fall at the Jewish Community Center.

Greater Cleveland Chapter (AJL-GCC)

Submitted by Andrea Davidson

The Greater Cleveland Chapter continues to be hard at work on the 2008 AJL Convention. On January 20 the chapter met for a convention update and coffee at the Mandel Jewish Community Center of Cleveland. Wendy Wasman reported on AJL’s midwinter meeting in New York. Linda Silver presented a sneak preview of the convention programs, Bonnie Shapire and Andy Davison reported on the tours, local committee members gave an update on their assignments. The registration form and preliminary program are in this issue of the AJL Newsletter, as well as on the AJL website (www.jewishlibraries.org). Stay tuned to our convention blog (www.ajlcleveland2008.blogspot.com). We are looking forward to seeing everyone in Cleveland on June 22-25!

Capital Area Chapter (AJL-CAC)

Submitted by Yelena Luckert

Guest speaker at the AJL-CAC February meeting was our own Micheline Amir, reference archivist at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, who spoke about the International Tracing Service of the Red Cross World War II Records. The Museum just recently received copies of these records through a number of negotiations. This was a very interesting and informative lecture, particularly for those who are interested in finding individuals.

Southern California Chapter (AJLSC)

Submitted by Paul Miller

AJLSC extends a hearty mazal tov to Adaire Klein, who was honored by the Jewish Journal of Greater Los Angeles as one of Los Angeles’ top ten “menschen” of 2007. Adaire is director of library and archival services at the Simon Wiesenthal Center-Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles. She has grown the library’s collection from fifty books in 1978 to its present size of over 50,000 volumes. Her passion for teaching extends beyond her professional work. For twenty years she has taught Judaism to over 150 people who have converted through the local Orthodox Bet Din. During at least those same twenty years, she has contributed to AJL Convention programming on numerous topics, including CEU Courses. She is also a regular presenter at AJLSC.

Our January AJLSC meeting, held in the beautiful Library of Yeshiva of Los Angeles Girls High School, was a practical session entitled Launch! Your Ticket to an Evening of Brilliant Library Ideas. Judy Cohn, Ellen Cole, Susan Dubin, Adaire Klein, and Lisa Silverman shared some of their best ideas for engaging children and adults in reading and in interaction with Jewish texts.

The Fourth Annual Western Regional Conference: Jewish Literature for Children, jointly sponsored by Sinai Temple, AJL, and AJLSC in cooperation with the Los Angeles Bureau of Jewish Education, focused on picture-book illustration. The conference included a survey of children’s book illustration presented by Lois Sarkissian, a panel of illustrators (Amalia Hoffman, Marissa Moss, Steve Sheinkin, and Elisa Kleven) who led hands-on workshops, an art exhibit, and an autograph party.
with featured authors. Susan Dubin and Lisa Silverman were co-coordinators.

For more information about Southern California library events and to find many helpful resources, log on to the AJLSC Website at www.ajlsc.org.

Florida West Coast Chapter (FWC-AJL)
Submitted by Sylvia Firschein

The membership of the Florida West Coast Chapter is increasing; with new members from temples to the north and south of saratoga.

For the third time, on January 28, The Florida West Coast Chapter and the South Florida Chapter held a joint meeting in Naples, which is about two hours away for each chapter. We thank Temple Shalom for hosting us. We suggest that “sort of nearby” chapters can try a joint meeting at least once and share ideas.

We are discovering that there are many authors of Jewish-content books in the Saratoga area, and we have been inviting them one-by-one to speak at our meetings.

Long Island Chapter (LI-AJL)
Submitted by Wendy Marx

LI-AJL is feeling the spirit of Israel at 60. We will be having a meeting facilitated by a member of StandWithUs (www.standwithus.com), who will show and discuss the DVD Israel: Small Country, Big Ideas! Our annual meeting with the Long Island Public librarians will feature Dr. Marcia Posner, who will speak on the topic What’s New in Jewish Books—with a values oriented slant toward their use in public libraries. Members of the Long Island Chapter will review one or two books.

For material on Israel for teachers, librarians, and other educators check out the website of LearnIsrael.org, (www.learnisrael.org), an organization that provides materials and lesson plans for teachers and librarians with the goal of promoting fair and balanced information about Israel. LearnIsrael.org donates quality books, films & CDs to public schools and libraries.

From Sifria, the LI Chapter newsletter

Long Island librarians and educators have chosen the novel Joy Comes in the Morning, by Jonathan Rosen as its first Jewish Community Read. Community programs include a discussion with Rabbi Rank at the Midway Jewish Center and a number of “performance readings” in the style of radio drama.

New York Metropolitan Area Chapter (AJL-NYMA)
Submitted by Rita Lifton

Participants in NYMA’s fall 2007 conference, Are You Relevant?: Lobbying for Librarians and Libraries (November 8, Congregation Emanuel of the City of New York) were treated to a wonderful presentation by Joanne P. Roukens, the New Jersey Library Association’s Librarian of the Year and Executive Director of the Highlands Regional Library Cooperative. The goal of Ms. Rouken’s presentation, entitled “Valuing Libraries: Demonstrating Your Library’s Impact on Your Community,” was to demonstrate how valuable the library is and to communicate its impact to the school, synagogue or community center of which it is an integral part. How does one achieve this objective? 1) Define what is valuable to customers and funders; 2) Execute a seven-part strategic process; 3) Identify your library’s “value proposition;” 4) Quantify your library’s value; and, finally, 5) Make your case. Ms. Rouken’s PowerPoint presentation in its entirety can be accessed by going to NYMA’s website, www.ajl-nyma.org/past events/fall conference/2007-2008. In addition to the presentation itself, you can access all the handouts including a workbook, sample worksheets, and a strategy for communication.

The second part of the conference, moderated by Dr. Philip Monchar, market researcher, consisted of a focus group of six librarians representing a variety of libraries within the NYMA network. Dr. Monchar posed several questions: What services does your library offer? Does the visible part of library work often appear to be non-professional, both to the public and to funders? How do you respond to funders who, perceiving professional librarians and even libraries as unnecessary in the age of the Internet, think that scarce resources are better allocated elsewhere? The answers to these difficult but important questions brought out some uncomfortable truths but also provided solutions to librarians confronting these issues.

The conference ended on high note with a tour of Congregation Emanuel’s recently restored sanctuary which is, in a word, magnificent. Mark H. Heutlinger, administrator of Congregation Emanuel, described the research and meticulous attention to detail that went into the restoration. He was most generous with his time and knowledge; not only were tour participants treated to a description of Congregation Emanuel’s sanctuary but they were also given insight into the congregation’s philosophy of Reform Judaism.

This wonderful conference was coordinated by Leslie Monchar, NYMA president; the on-site coordinator was Elizabeth Stabler, librarian of Congregation Emanuel’s Ivan M. Stettenheim Library.


The theme of NYMA’s Day School/High School Workshop (March 1st, North Shore Hebrew Academy High School) was “Opals, A New Hebrew/English Open-Source Automation System.” The program included “An Overview and Practicum” by Joyce Levine; “Experiences with Implementation” by Beverly Geller and Leslie Monchar; and “OPALS Union Catalog” by Diane Romm. The School Workshop coordinators are Joyce Levine and Leah Moskovits.

Steven Bernstein is planning a cataloging workshop to be held in the spring.

Finally, save the date for NYMA’s spring conference which will take place on April 7th at the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary and will focus on digitized collections. This continues NYMA’s series of programs about the digitization revolution. NYMA’s Spring 2006 Conference, “Digitizing History: The Future of the Past,” coordinated by then president Marlene Schiffman, dealt with the digitization projects of the Center for Online Judaic Studies (www.cojs.org).
Have You Heard?

LIBBY K. WHITE

Within the AJL family, there are arrivals and departures. We are happy to welcome Debbie Stern’s first grandchild, Shoshana Hurwitz of Hurwitz Indexing, St. Louis, will be making aliyah with her family in July 2008. Shoshana is the sister of Daniel Scheide, the newsletter’s adult review co-editor and music columnist.

Sadly, Irene Seff, Chapters co-chair, recently lost her mother. We also received news from Jerusalem of the passing of Jacob Dienstag in early January. Jacob was a past president of AJL. He was director emeritus of the Mendel Gottesman Library of Yeshiva University. His scholarly specialty was the philosophy of Maimonides.

Many congratulations to Linda Silver, former SSC president and former Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee chair, on the publication of The Jewish Values Finder: A Guide to Values in Jewish Children’s Literature. See the announcement on page 20 for more information.

Ya’acov Aronson of Israel’s Bar-Ilan University is also celebrating an important literary achievement. Ya’acov, head of the Bar-Ilan Responsa Project, writes that in order to make more responsa material accessible, a DVD has been produced with the full text of more than 10,000 articles on halachic subjects. These articles appeared in over 100 Hebrew periodicals between 1970 and 1993, and were drawn from a bibliography on the subject, compiled by Rabbi Meir Wunder of the Jewish National and University Library. For further information, go to responsa@mail.biu.ac.il

Adaire Klein of the Simon Wiesenthal Center’s Library and Archives was honored by the Jewish Journal of Greater Los Angeles in December, 2007. The periodical selects members of the community upon whom it bestows the highly-prized moral and ethical designation, “menschen.” The journal’s profile, “Adaire Klein: Keeper of Memories, Nurturer of Souls,” describes Adaire’s career at Wiesenthal, where she now heads the archives, and her volunteer work teaching converts to Judaism. The article captures the secrets of Adaire’s success: her scholarly abilities and her personal warmth.

Warm congratulations and best wishes to Barbara L. Rosen, longtime Judaica, Yiddish, and Hebraica cataloger at the University of Michigan, who retired after over 33 years of dedicated service to the Judaica Unit in the Area Programs Near East Division of the University’s Graduate Library. Yasher-koyekh, Barbara!

Elliot H. Gertel, Irving M. Hermelin Curator of Judaica at the University of Michigan, taught the Advanced Yiddish class at U-M in the fall 2007 semester that just ended in December.

The Asher Library of Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies in Chicago has reopened. Director Glenn Ferdman shared some exciting features of the facility: an expanded, spacious reading room with glorious views of Grant Park and Lake Michigan, an electric high-density mobile shelving system for improved access, free wireless Internet, and a special collections reading room for viewing material from the archives, rare books, and map collections. As a reminder, the AJL Convention will be held in Chicago in 2009.

An International Conference on Jewish Genealogy will be held in Chicago from August 17-22, 2008. Co-sponsors will be the Jewish Genealogy Society of Illinois and the Illiana Jewish Genealogical Society. For further information, check www.IAJGS.org.

The 2007 National Jewish Book Awards have been announced. Among the winners are Spiritual Radical: Abraham Joshua Heschel in America by Edward Kaplan, A Guest in My Own Country: A Hungarian Life by George Konrad; Inventing Jewish Ritual by Vanessa Ochs; A Pigeon and A Boy by Meir Shalev; The Cambridge History of Judaism, v. 4: The Late Roman-Rabbinic Period; and Homeland: The Illustrated History of the State of Israel by Marv Wolfman, Mario Ruiz, and William Rubin. Rabbi Harold Kushner was named winner of the Jewish Book Council Lifetime Achievement Award. For the full list, see www.forward.com/articles/12478/.

SSC Accreditation

SUSAN GREENING

Applicants for SSC accreditation are working with their mentors from the Accreditation Committee to fulfill the requirements for either Basic or Advance Accreditation. Libraries awarded accreditation have achieved model standards for effective synagogue, school, and center libraries. Hopefully, accreditation will help these libraries be valued more highly by their institutions. Awardees will be notified May 1. The awards will be given out at the awards ceremony at the AJL National Convention in June. We hope all awardees will be able to attend.
This year there were seven applications for new basic accreditation, one for new advanced accreditation, and six for renewal of accreditation.

Get An AJL Mentor in 2008

Seeking a nice Jewish-library mentor? To get coached through challenges at work, or gain overall, long-term advice, find a mentor!

Contact the AJL Mentoring Committee at AJLmentoring@GMAIL.COM. We work hard to make the best matches possible based on your library type, location, and needs. Please contact us before the convention, if you will be attending, so you can “meet your match” in Cleveland.
Series books are busting out all over! In the latest reviews of children's and young adult books, you may notice a proliferation of series. From preschool board books ("What Do You See?") to books for older children ("The Burksfield Bike Club" and "The Gimmel Gang"), Jewish publishers are jumping on the bandwagon. Following the phenomenal success of the Harry Potter, His Dark Materials, and Lemony Snicket (to name just a few) series, the publishers figure they know a good thing (= money makers) when they see one, two, three, or more.

Now, series are nothing new. Many of us grew up with Nancy Drew, The Hardy Boys, or The Bobsey Twins books. These formulaic books offered familiar characters and fast-paced plots. They were books that were comfortable to slip on, like my well-worn mocassins. They were adequately written by authors, often using pen names, who churned them out to earn a bread-and-butter living. Everyone was happy—publishers, writers, and readers.

In the relatively small world of Jewish publishing, however, I see some troubling developments in new series books. Although there are commendable series books, like Sylvia Rouss' Sammy Spider picture books and Sydney Taylor's All-in-the-Family classic novels, many of the just-off-the-grill series are stilted and old-fashioned. They do not have the credible plot-driven action or engaging characters that children expect from modern literature. It is hard enough to encourage children to read books with Jewish content. Why should they be distracted by mediocre series?

It is little wonder that series books are rarely considered for awards, like the AJL's Sydney Taylor Book Award. The speed with which these books are produced does not allow an author (or editor) to make the book as good as it can possibly be. An average stand-alone book can easily take an author a year to write and edit; series books are often knocked off within a few months.

Finally, if the market becomes flooded with poorly-written and designed series books, people will buy these books and forgo the many excellent stand-alone books that sit in a dusty corner of the bookshelf. Go to any large bookstore. The series books have taken over the shelves like a bully elbowing out smaller (and weaker) opponents.

In this issue, you will see some excellent books highlighted. These books have been written, edited, and designed with care. Not one of them is part of a series.

Anne Dublin

Chicken Man Returns

Some of the best news in children's book publishing comes from NewSouth Books/Junebug Books. This publisher is reissuing Michele Edward's classic story, Chicken Man. Set on an Israeli kibbutz, Chicken Man's theme of contentment is delivered with humor and wisdom. The re-issue coincides with the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of Israel; a better way to celebrate is hard to imagine. NewSouth's publisher is Suzanne LaRosa and its website is www.newsouthbooks.com.

Linda R. Silver, Jewish Valuesfinder, Cleveland, OH

In The Spotlight


A charming group of preschoolers take an imaginary trip to Israel to celebrate its birthday on Yom Ha'atzmaut. Cohen's clear color photographs show the children pretending to have their passports stamped at Ben Gurion Airport, sampling a variety of tasty Israeli foods, floating in the Dead Sea, praying at the Kotel, learning to read and count in Hebrew, marching in a birthday parade, and then returning home. All of the play-acting is set in a preschool classroom, so readers will join the children in the book as they engage in creative fun. As in similar books by Cohen and Latifa Berry Kropf, the photographs show stimulating educational environments and developmentally appropriate practices in the teaching of young children.

The preschoolers themselves are a mixed group of boys and girls, with a few children of color. Whether dancing, singing, or eating—there's lots of eating—they convey the fun of celebrating Israel's birthday. With directions for making birthday hats appended, this is a first choice for school and synagogue libraries.

Linda R. Silver, Jewish Valuesfinder, Cleveland, OH


Home run! A terrific, Jewish sports biography hides in paperback packaging.

Author Doeden has done a wonderful job incorporating Judaism into the life, game, and team of the sport's hero, including jokes that work. Sandy Koufax comes alive through his baseball. This focus keeps the book sharp, avoiding off-diamond relationships not always appropriate for young readers. Briefly introduced to his parents and grandparents, we learn of their life-long, strong Jewish influence on Koufax.

Readers meet Koufax as the private, talented, Jewish athlete who wants to be an NBA basketball star. The book—interesting, humanizing and gripping—frames his pitching career as a search for the control necessary to handle his speed and power. Readers sympathize when he prioritizes his Jewish observances ahead of his game. They learn that his experience as a member of a minority group sensitizes him to others; Koufax befriended black players in an era when teammates of different races did not socialize. The Dodgers, aware of Brooklyn's large Jewish population, banked on Koufax to increase attendance. He did. Koufax was a true legend, a man who ruined his arm in a short career that was spectacular, who honestly deserved the awards given to so young a player.

Linda R. Silver, Jewish Valuesfinder, Cleveland, OH
This well-written book is fast paced despite its many statistics. Each year of games is presented in cliff hanger language that will enthrall baseball fans and non-aficionados alike. The black-and-white photographs are excellent, with informative captions. Highly recommended for readers and their nostalgic parents.

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


In 1866, J.A. Joel published an account of a seder he organized while serving with the Ohio 23rd Volunteer Regiment in West Virginia during the Civil War. It was a make-shift affair, but through what Joel called “Yankee ingenuity,” he substituted hard cider for wine, a brick for charoseth, and an unknown but very bitter plant for horseradish. Bryna Fireside has transformed this true account into an easy-reading and appealing story in which three former slaves who are also soldiers in the Ohio 23rd join the 21 Jewish soldiers and their commander, William S. Rosecrans, in preparing for and then celebrating their seder. As the preparations ensue and the seder begins, Passover’s blessings, symbols, and meaning are extended to include the experiences of the African-American soldiers and their hope for freedom. A humorous tone is also injected, as several of the soldiers indulge in too many glasses of cider and have to be carried off to bed.

Attractive, heavily-textured, full-color paintings adorn the story, written in a light, lively style and divided into short chapters. Reminiscent of two recent picture books that fictionalize Jewish American history—the 2007 Sydney Taylor award winner for younger readers, Hanukkah at Valley Forge (written by Stephen Krensky and illustrated by Greg Harlin) and Haym Solomon: American Patriot (written by Susan Goldman Rubin, illustrated by David Slonim)—Private Joel and the Sewell Mountain Seder is an excellent addition to the genre.

Linda R. Silver, Jewish Valuesfinder, Cleveland, OH


As the story of Sarah’s life with Abraham unfolds, she ages from a young and beautiful girl to a wrinkled old woman filled with joy for the child in her arms. In between, she and her husband are shown as followers of the one God, who obey his commandment to leave their home and journey as nomads to the land of Canaan. In most of the vibrant color illustrations, Abraham and Sarah are shown together, often embracing. As they grow older and remain childless, their strong, bright faces become pale and sad and they cling to one another for comfort.

At Sarah’s behest, Abraham has a child with her serving maid, but not until the three angels appear and announce that she will have a child does she laugh. Throughout the story, Sarah’s kindness is emphasized and both she and Abraham are portrayed as living, feeling human beings instead of as remote archetypes. The illustrations add a great deal to the story’s appeal; they are graceful, flowing, and full of life. Like the author and illustrator’s previous collaboration, Abraham’s Search for God, this is an appealing and reverent retelling of a Bible story, enhanced with midrashic elements that are cited in an afterword. Highly recommended.

Linda R. Silver, Jewish Valuesfinder, Cleveland, OH


Sometimes when you open a book, the look and feel of it are just right, like a finely-tailored garment. Such a book is Honey Cake. With its sepia cover, rough-trimmed pages, and old-fashioned font, this novel resonates of a time past—in this case, of German-occupied Denmark in the 1940s. The well-placed line drawings enhance the text, so generous they make Honey Cake feel almost like a graphic novel.

The story is told in the first person by David Nathan, a ten-year-old Jewish boy living in Copenhagen. The other main characters are his older sister Rachel, his best friend Elsa, and likeable adults—his teacher, parents, and the king—who are drawn with sensitivity and humor. The novel is staged like a movie—present time (1943), flashback to the past (1940), present time (1943). Although this change of time is somewhat confusing, the titles at the beginning of each chapter help to keep the framework of the story clear. A fast-paced story, based on real events, Honey Cake builds suspense until the final scene—the family’s escape to Sweden. Two letters written by David and Elsa serve as an authentic dénouement. An afterward by the author places the fictional events into historical context; a recipe for honey cake is a delicious bonus.

Honey Cake would serve as a fine introduction to the story of the German occupation of Denmark. Highly recommended for school, synagogue, and public libraries.

Anne Dublin, Holy Blossom Temple, Toronto, Canada

BIBLE


An earlier version of this collection of Bible stories is entitled The Illustrated Jewish Bible for Children, written by Selina Hastings and published by DK in 1997. The new version is more affirmatively Jewish, with references to “the Old Testament” replaced by “Tanakh” and references to “the New Testament” deleted. The narrative voice is proudly Jewish, beginning with the introductory statement: “The Bible is the great holy book of our people, the Jews.” The number of stories included in each version is about the same but the writing in the new one is livelier, with more use of the active voice. The copiously illustrated format, typical of DK publications, is also the same, with some slight re-wording. Historical and other background information to each story is provided for context through the use of text boxes, captioned photographs, and illustrations. Along with a list of biblical people, another of places in the Bible stories, and an index, the new version also includes an audio CD with 16 of
the concisely-told stories. While it isn't essential that the older edition be retired in favor of this one, the revised edition is all-around preferable.

Linda R. Silver, Jewish Valuesfinder, Cleveland, OH


Aram, a boy, and Tara, a dove, are friends as well as passengers on Grandpa Noah’s ark. The gentle story begins with Aram and Tara climbing aboard the ark, along with birds and animals of all kinds. The focus of the story, through its illustrations, is on the birds. Mostly exotic species, they are depicted in vivid colors, which contrast with Tara’s plain white. After dark sheets of rain surround the little ark for 40 days and nights, the rain stops falling, a pastel rainbow appears, and the ark alights on Mount Ararat. Continuing the familiar tale, Tara is set loose, returns with an olive branch, and a week later flies away again. This time, she does not return because she has found land.

A double-page spread shows the birds in a dazzling-colored flight that far surpasses the rainbow as they leave the ark. The next illustration is of a cozy domestic scene, as though nothing had ever happened to the world in which Aram, Tara, and Noah live. The last is of a crowd of children in modern or native dress dancing about a flag of peace. Peace is the theme of the story but it is weakened by the absence of any prior conflict and no suggestion of why there was a flood in the first place. Lacking the dramatic truth of Singer’s Why Noah Chose the Dove, Tara’s Flight is for those collections that can never have enough Noah stories. For others, it is marginal.

Linda R. Silver, Jewish Valuesfinder, Cleveland, OH


The Family Parsha Book touts itself as a “reader-and-listener friendly sourcebook.” For each weekly portion of the Torah, there is a list of “Parsha Points,” which presents the highlights of the reading. Following this is a list of questions whose answers are in Hebrew alphabetical order. Then there is a “Parsha Puzzler,” which will give children “an opportunity to show their parents what they’ve learned about the Parsha.” “Haftorah Highlights” is a short paragraph that explains how the reading is related to the Torah portion. This is followed by a “Learning Lesson,” which deals with the moral and ethical issues in the parsha, and an English translation of some of the Hebrew terms used.

The potential audience for this book is unclear. The point summaries are so simple that anyone familiar with the Torah would already know them. The aleph-bet listing of questions, while an innovative format, can only be answered by those who know the Hebrew text of the weekly reading. The Parsha Puzzler for Vayetze explains that when Jacob kissed Rachel, “this kiss was not one of desire,” a concept that may be hard to explain to children. Some translations require more explanation—“hafrashat challah” goes a lot deeper than “separating challah”—while others, like the translation for “Torah” in the middle of the book, are superficial. The Haftorah Highlights are the bright spot on each page because many people do not know how the Torah and Haftorah readings are connected. Since the answers are at the end of the book, readers will be constantly flipping back and forth, and because the text refers to the Torah and Rashi’s commentaries, readers also need both of these as reference. Possibly useful as a sourcebook for parents, this is an optional purchase for Orthodox families.

Kathe Pinchuck, Congregation Beth Sholom, Teaneck, NJ


As the rain begins to fall and puddles form, Noah tells Giraffe that in order to come aboard the ark, he must find a girl giraffe and bring her with him. And so begins Giraffe’s search. He begins by looking into a mouse hole and asking a mouse, who is reading a book about cats, if he has seen another giraffe. Elephant, fish, ostrich, kangaroo, camel, and penguin come next, each one on a double-page spread, all offering advice but no girl giraffe. Poor Giraffe, for it looks as though he has missed the boat and is doomed to drown until… Animal stories for young children have to end happily and this one does, after a bit of nonsensical suspense that is sweetly funny.

The short narrative keeps Giraffe’s search at the center and wins readers’ sympathy while the full-page, color illustrations capture to perfection the looks of the other animals as well as Giraffe’s plight. Originally published in the Netherlands, the publication information states that Pigni, an Italian artist, conceived the story and created the illustrations while Ronald Hermens supplied the words. Although it has very little to do with the biblical tale, which provides merely the setting, The Story of Giraffe is a charming animal picture book for young children.

Linda R. Silver, Jewish Valuesfinder, Cleveland, OH

[Editor’s note: Compare The Story of the Giraffe to Barbara Reid’s Fox Walked Alone (Scholastic Canada, 2006 Xoloitzcuintlis), a stunningly-illustrated story told in rhyme. Fox Walked Alone is in the manner of a prequel to Reid’s Two by Two.]


Animals from A to Z narrate a biblically faithful but uninspired re-telling of the Noah’s ark story. All of the life of the book comes from Litzinger’s engaging illustrations. They are full-page, in pastel colors, with bold shapes and interesting perspectives. As an alphabet book, it is rather confusing because several unfamiliar animals are sometimes found in one illustration, making it hard to distinguish the kiwis from the lorises or the urodeles from the vervets. And what animal’s name begins with an X? Why, the Xoloitzcuintlis, of course. If your dictionary, like mine, doesn’t include that word, you’ll be glad that an animal alphabet glossary is appended, with a small picture and a succinct description of each creature. Except for its biblical origin, there is nothing Jewish about the story. With all the Noah stories available, the only reason to consider this one is the artwork, created by the illustrator of Chicken Soup By Heart, a Sydney Taylor Award winner for younger readers.

Linda R. Silver, Jewish Valuesfinder, Cleveland, OH
**BIOGRAPHY**


Children, it seems, accept almost anything as the norm. A friend of mine who, along with her family, survived the Shoah in Russia, told me that even though they were starving, so was everyone else. If a friend had sickened and died, they simply played with someone else.

Tina Grimberg grew up in the Ukrainian city of Kiev. Although life was grey and foreboding with shortages in everything and “connections” a way of life, to a child it was the norm. There was much to enjoy as well—school, Soviet youth groups and patriotic youth activities, music, family, and warm friendships. When she and her mother had to endure endless “line ups” in the cold to obtain whatever the store had to offer, they enlivened the waiting by reciting poetry by Pushkin. Their close family life, lived in two rooms, was enriched by love and visits by the two babushkas (grandmas) who took many buses to visit them. Life in a communal apartment house with tiny apartments and a group of elderly widowed babushkas as informal guards mandated counting neighbors as family if one was to be able to pool furniture and food for company when celebrating seasonal and patriotic holidays. Religious holidays were not observed. Communism was the religion, but who could stop the intimate transmission of Jewish biblical tales to a grandchild or family values of love and literature?

Anti-Semitism was always present, even when it was not official government policy. When the Soviet Union needed grain from the United States but had to promise to allow Jews to leave as a consequence, the family voted on leaving. They spent a dangerous year in limbo and were ostracized. They had to part from family and friends who did not choose to take the gamble. They left all their savings and possessions behind, and their families. However naïve or unlikely, this cheerful story does manage to be a bit exciting at times. Hebrew words and phrases are not translated. Occasional black-and-white illustrations reinforce the impression that this book would have been completely at home in the 1950s.

Marcia Weiss Posner, Holocaust Memorial & Tolerance Center of Nassau County, Glen Cove, NY


With clarity and sensitivity, this award-winning author has written a new biography about Albert Einstein for young readers. How is this one different from all the others? Meltzer presents the essential facts about Einstein’s life, without glossing over the great scientist’s shortcomings: his failed marriage to Mileva, his difficulties at school, his problems making a living.

The design of *Albert Einstein* is appealing. With generous margins, large font, and ample leading, this book would not intimidate a young reader. Well-chosen photographs are judiciously spaced with clear captions in a different font from the text.

What comes shining through are Einstein’s many achievements and their significance to technological advances, like space travel, electronics, and the Internet. In clear, simple language, using apt analogies, Meltzer explains Einstein’s well-known but little understood theories. This accessible biography is a good introduction to Einstein’s life and work. A timeline and bibliography are included. Other fine biographies for young readers are Elizabeth MacLeod’s *Albert Einstein: A Life of Genius* (2003) and Don Brown’s *Odd Man Out: Young Albert Einstein* (2004).

Anne Dublin, Holy Blossom Temple, Toronto, Canada

**FICTION**


If you’re looking for a sweet, heartfelt, old-fashioned Hardy-Boys-type story within an Orthodox Jewish framework, this is the book for you. Fourteen-year-olds Boruch, Meir, and Dovid—the Gimmel Gang—accompany Boruch’s father, Rabbi Kahn, to Russia to help members of the Moscow kehillah (religious community) who have gone off the derech (Jewish path) and end up solving the mystery of a missing Torah, missing persons, and stolen and fake art. The enthusiasm, warmth, compassion, and empathy of the boys and rabbis help them understand why struggling Russian Jews might get involved in shady activities in order to feed their families. However naïve or unlikely, this cheerful story does manage to be a bit exciting at times. Hebrew words and phrases are not translated. Occasional black-and-white illustrations reinforce the impression that this book would have been completely at home in the 1950s.

Susan Berson, Denver, CO


In the second installment of this series, Avi Drimler and his friends create a lost-and-found service in order to perform “mitzvah” work. Reality, however, often gets in the way of their idealism. For example, one of their first clients is a little boy who has lost a tooth. In another instance, a man in the hospital yells at one of the boys and frightens him. The boys are also waylaid by friends and family who want their help. Every time they think they have an important job, they find it is an ordinary task. Some of their attempts go awry in humorous but understandable ways. Their biggest “case” involves a valuable bracelet that they themselves find, but whose owner they cannot identify. The climax comes when they are asked to collect supplies for a Shabbat celebration at a local hospital. As a result, they realize that their small jobs really do matter in the world.

*Lost and Found* should entertain elementary school children—especially boys—and encourage them to think beyond themselves. The Burksfield boys are not extraordinary or perfect, and for this reason alone they should attract a following. The book can be used as a take-off point for discussions among fourth and fifth graders in either day school or synagogue settings. Although there are several incidents, this is not a series of detached stories, but an extended novel.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA

In this retelling of the story of the Shirtwaist strike of 1909-1910, the tragedy of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory on March 25, 1911, and the events that might have led up to it, Margaret Haddix introduces three young women whose lives will be forever intertwined. Each one has many personal challenges, but finds strength in her new friends. Through thoughtful adherence to the history, atmosphere, and politics of the time, Ms. Haddix vividly recreates life on New York’s Lower East Side: the overcrowded streets, the abhorrent tenement conditions, and the repressive policies of the factory owners toward their workers. In this fast-paced novel, the author examines the private lives of both immigrants and New York elites, evoking the deep social chasm that existed during the early years of the twentieth century. The Shirtwaist strikers and the early suffragettes together struggle for women’s rights and the rights of factory workers.

Haddix skillfully articulates poignant messages. Wherever there is injustice, one needs to stand up and speak out; life is precious and worth fighting for. *Uprising* is a book meant for young adults, but could be enjoyed by strong elementary readers. At the conclusion of the novel, the author tells the true story and events behind the fire and includes a useful bibliography. Highly recommended for day school or synagogue libraries.

Tamra Gerson, Congregation Children of Israel, Athens, GA


Milton Meltzer has been a prolific contributor of Jewish literature for young people for decades. Now, at age 90, he has written what appears to be a fictionalized autobiography. In the early 1930s, 17-year-old Joey is attending high school and working to help his family survive the Great Depression. He and his girlfriend and confidante, Kate, have aspirations to go to college. But as the world gets darker, their plans are derailed in several ways, including their fathers’ job troubles and a brush with the law. In the spring of 1932, Joey, his father, and some friends join the Bonus Army protest against Congress and President Herbert Hoover. When soldiers destroy their camp and disperse the demonstrators, one of Joey’s friends is killed. Rather than return home, Joey leaves and joins other young people on the road. When he arrives in Chicago, he finds his voice as a writer and returns home, prepared for the future with renewed confidence.

This is more a novel about the Depression than an actively Jewish story. Joey’s family story is recounted here. They remember the Sabbath with wine, home-baked challah, and candles, but there is only vague mention of other rituals. On the other hand, the book contains rich images of life during those hard times. It belongs in all middle school libraries, and in synagogue collections that include works on the American Jewish experience and its connection to the wider realm of American history.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA


Looking for stories about disabled children? Looking for multiculturalism? Here is a well-written, mild chapter book for readers in upper elementary grades. It is not Jewish, however, despite superficial Hanukkah input. Dreidels, pancakes and menorahs are mentioned, but there is no historical setting and no mention of the Maccabees.

Zoe, the protagonist, has motor disabilities that are never fully explained, and is confined to a wheel chair. She is Christian, but has a Jewish best friend who honors Shabbat. Zoe appreciates the fine care from her special dog, her parents, her brother, her teacher, her neighbors and her friends. The tension in the story grows from her search for a real adventure. The frame of the story is Zoe’s fourth grade classroom study of diverse winter holidays associated with light: Hanukkah, Christmas, Kwanzaa, Divali, and Eid. As the students learn information about each festival’s celebration, Zoe learns more about herself.

Minaki, herself in a wheelchair, does a lovely job of communicating the emotions of disabled persons; if you are stuck in a wheel chair, you are stuck. Well-paced and honest, this innocent novel is recommended for school libraries wanting disability stories for readers. Note: Zoe gets a happy ending.

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


Two highly unusual protagonists are introduced to us in this coming-of-age novel that was first published in hardcover in 1994. Fifteen-year-old Harry Roth, sports jock, is the bane of 14-year-
old Alison Shandling’s existence, until a serious accident changes everything for them. Both protagonists feel alienated from their respective parents, and their relationship helps the young people to communicate with their elders. That Alison has an autistic brother adds another dimension to the narrative.

The Jewish component is introduced via Rabbi Roth, Harry’s father, who volunteers to prepare Alison’s brother for his bar mitzvah. Neither Alison nor Harry has positive feelings toward Judaism at the beginning, an attitude that changes during the course of the novel. Interesting characters and family dynamics as well as a compelling writing style make this a successful read for early teens. There is some kissing and discussion of sex, but no sexual relationship. Recommended.

Shelly Feit, Moriah School Library, Englewood NJ


If you like reading other people’s e-mails, this is for you. Well-written, as is Zenatti’s 2006 STBA notable When I Was a Soldier, her new novel depends on readers’ buying into both correspondents—17-year-old Tal Levine from Israel and Naim Al-Farjouk, a young man from Gaza. Tal is immediately embraceable as a modern Israeli teen. Naim, atypical of his population, is worrisome in his bona fides causing the reader of the book to question the content of his e-mails. A Bottle in the Gaza Sea wrenchingly jumpstarts with the September 9, 2003, Jerusalem cafe bombing, in which a bride-to-be is killed, ironically, ten years to the day after the Rabin-Arafat-Clinton Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement. Tal decides peace must come from such tragedy. To reach this goal, each side must know and understand the other; to know, one must “talk.” She asks her medic-soldier brother to place her dialog-seeking note in a bottle in Gaza. It is found by Naim, the only child of middle-class, employed parents who live in a city, not a refugee camp.

Zenatti’s style is literary, descriptive and poetic, not the stuff of daily e-mails, but wonderful to read. The uneven book drags with slow e-mail content. Occasional narrative chapters give a background to the setting, characters, and plot. The outcome of the relationship provides tension; the ending begs the question. The novel puts a human face on Middle Eastern despair, thriving despite the support of loving families. Tal’s hope is pervasive; however, this book contains much graphic violence, as well as strong emotions of grief and shock.

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

FOLKLORE


Caitlín Matthews tells these wonderful winter tales from Scotland, Russia, Austria, the Czech Republic, and Canada with fluency and passion. Helen Cann’s watercolor and mixed-media illustrations stunningly enhance each story. Of the eight stories, only one is Jewish—“The Cantor of the Trees” (from The Secret Weapon and Other Stories of Faith and Valor, selected, translated and edited by Azriel Eisenberg and Leah Ain Globe, Soncino Press, 1966). Highly recommended for public libraries, but an optional purchase for community or synagogue libraries.

Anne Dublin, Holy Blossom Temple, Toronto


The Middle East folktale of the two brothers—known to both Jews and Muslims—receives another telling in this new picture book. Two brothers divide a field and its harvest. Each decides that the other needs the larger share of the crop, and night after night, they secretly cross the land to enlarge the other’s supply of grain. Finally they meet during their crossing, and embrace in brotherly love. There are many subtexts and lessons one can draw from the story; here, the author’s focus in his three-page postscript is on today’s disputed city, Jerusalem, which, according to legend, was established on the site of the brothers’ meeting.

The artwork—very reminiscent of Jane Ray—is lovely and enticing, but curious. The opening panel for the first page of the story, where we meet King Solomon in Jerusalem, is a panorama of his city. Dominating the scene are the Dome of the Rock and the nearby Al-Aksa mosque—buildings which would not be built until some 17 centuries later. The tale of the two brothers can be told without reference to any religious group, but if one does choose to place historical religions into its telling, one would think that somewhere the reader would learn that Solomon was an Israelite, and that the temple he built was a Jewish place of worship. Yet curiously, Israelites are absent from this book’s biblical Jerusalem. The text provides asterisks at each appearance of Solomon’s name (and the names of Abraham, David, and Jesus in the postscript). This, we are told, is to invite Muslim readers to add their traditional blessing “May peace be upon him” as they read the names of these [Muslim] prophets. Recommended for collections of Middle East folktales that defer especially to Islam, as well as for libraries in Islamic schools.

Andrea Rapp, Wise Temple, Cincinnati, OH

GOD


The premise of this very simple, rhyming picture book is stated on the first page where the narrator, a little boy, tells readers, “There are so many things I cannot see. But still, I know they are there.” As he looks around his house and then strolls through his neighborhood, he notes that air, electricity, gravity, wind, feelings, thinking, magnetism, sounds, smells, and his neshama (soul) are all invisible, too. Finally, our young teacher concludes his lesson with the question, “What makes babies and flowers grow?” and answers it with, “I can’t see Hashem; that may be, But look what he does for you and me!” Big, bold illustrations of an urban neighborhood where everyone is Orthodox help tell the story, which is written without any flair but gets its point across to preschoolers.

Linda R. Silver, Jewish Valuesfinder, Cleveland, OH
HOLIDAYS


Children who enjoy puzzle books like the popular I Spy titles will enjoy this different slant on Chanukah. In a large picture book format, one side of each double-page spread features a full-color photograph of a Chanukah symbol. Latkes, dreidels, and candles predominate as objects, but a stone elephant and caves are more tantalizing. A matching photo faces it, containing eight changes for the reader to figure out; a few lines of text on each page encourage careful scrutiny. The photo puzzles have such subtle changes that older readers will probably be the ones to solve them. The large print text, colorful cover, and close-up photographs, however, have the look of a book aimed at younger readers. There is an answer key at the back with the changes circled and a page of information about Chanukah in the forbidden activities of Shabbos.

Andrea Davidson, The Temple-Tifereth Israel, Beachwood, OH


A Hanukkah Present is a compilation of original short stories that pays homage to classic Judaic storytellers. Binder has created characters and plots that read like authentic Jewish tales that have been passed down from generation to generation. Parents and grandparents will enjoy reading selections aloud and retelling the stories with or without the original text.

One of the best in this colorful collection, “The Challah That Ate Chelm,” about a baker’s apprentice named Muddle, is witty and charming. Muddle is the proverbial good hearted ne’er-do-well whose enormous challah destroys the baker’s oven, and nearly the entire town. Despite the damage, there is no retribution. Instead the town takes up a collection for poor Muddle to find himself a new business. Several stories focus on a “Chanukah Bush” in the home of a rabbi. While the explanations are clever, this storyline might not be appropriate in more traditional homes.

A Hanukkah Present is a fine example of Jewish tradition with a wink. It offers the young generation a peek into the past, with humor and a bit of schmaltz. For parents, teachers, and librarians who enjoyed The Jar of Fools: Eight Hanukkah Stories from Chelm by Eric Kimmel, A Hanukkah Present would be a nice alternative selection. A Hanukkah Present is appropriate for most Judaic collections.

Barbara Bietz, Oak Park, CA.


Mish and Mush learn about the months of the Hebrew year, Rosh Chodesh, the four seasons, good jobs for grownups, and celebrating birthdays in a Jewish way. The “When I Grow Up” book has a traditional bent, i.e. a boy becomes a kosher butcher or rabbi; a girl becomes a teacher or mommy.


Mish and Mush learn about creation and the days of the week, Shabbos mitzvos, preparing for Shabbos, and, in adorable rhyme, the forbidden activities of Shabbos.


Mish and Mush search for chometz and burn it, bake matzah, follow the order of the seder, count the omer, and eat cheesecake on Shavuot.

[Reviewer’s note: Intended for Orthodox children, these sets of five little books in each box may introduce some unfamiliar vocabulary, but the terms are helpfully explained in a glossary. Each of the little books in the “Valupak” set can stand on its own, but the fun quotient increases sharply as the reader becomes more and more familiar with the colorful jelly-bean-ish characters and cute refrains.]

Susan Berson, Denver, CO


This collection of eight Chanukah stories is an example of what not to do when publishing stories for children. The stories are didactic, clichéd, filled with incredible coincidences, wooden characters, and stilted dialogue. They take place in many different time periods and many different places—from Eastern Eu-
rope to medieval Spain to ancient Jerusalem—with no apparent scheme for their placement.

With boring, careless design (Why divide G-d at the end of a line?) and unattractive illustrations, this book is an absolute last choice for Hanukkah stories. See Barbara Diamond Goldin’s While the Candles Burn (1996) or Eric A. Kimmel’s A Hanukkah Treasury (1998) for Hanukkah stories by master storytellers where the story is more important than the preaching. Not recommended.

Anne Dublin, Holy Blossom Temple, Toronto, Canada

HOLOCAUST


Paris Press specializes in publishing women authors, contemporary and out of print. This book is the re-publication of the 1961 edition with a 2007 afterword by the author. In 1941, Zdena Berger was 14 years old and living in Prague when the Nazis deported her and her family to the concentration camps. Tell Me Another Morning is the fictionalized autobiographical novel she wrote after World War II. She was the sole survivor of her family and wanted to tell her personal Holocaust trials.

Each of the book’s six parts opens with a lyrical introduction, followed by anecdotal incidents that describe the lives of three girls who are friends: Tania, Ilse, and Eva. These teenagers spent the war years in Theresienstadt, Auschwitz, and Bergen-Belsen, and helped each other survive the horrors of the Nazi regime.

Berger completed her education in Prague, moved to Paris, and from there immigrated to the United States. She wrote her book in English and maintained the relationship with her girlfriends. Tell Me Another Morning is a touching and heartbreaking book. One poignant scene describes Tania’s return to her aunt in Prague. She is shocked to realize that the world continued to live normally while she was being brutalized. The book should have included an excellent 2007 interview with the author, who is now 82 years old: www.parispress.org/level02/books/bergerinterview.html. Tell Me Another Morning will enrich every collection of Holocaust literature in Jewish and public libraries.

Nira Wolfe, Highland Park, IL


In simple, clear prose, Benny Grünfeld offers a memoir of his Holocaust experience as a slave laborer after deportation to Auschwitz at 16, and of his postwar life in Sweden. This work is written specifically for middle and high school students, to whom the author frequently speaks. It is a teenager’s eyewitness account of the brutality and horrors of the camps: sadistic beatings, severe hunger, hangings, and mass killings by shootings and, of course, in the gas chambers.

Primitive color illustrations by the author are detailed and carefully drawn. Benny survives because of his persistence, stubbornness, luck, wiles, faith, adaptability, and drive to be with his brother. The reader is inspired by the fact that Benny was not afraid of dying; rather, he was afraid that he would die without accomplishing something useful, without seizing the day to help others as well as himself. An extensive note by Olle Hager gives the historical background of anti-Semitism and puts Benny’s story within an historical context. Included in the note are two ideas which are often ignored in Holocaust books: 1) observations about how ordinary people, each playing a small role, participate in evil. Without them, the Holocaust could not have occurred, and 2) an honest discussion of the basis of anti-Semitism in Christianity. A glossary, timeline, historic photographs, and maps add to the usefulness of this book.

Susan Berson, Denver, CO

[Editor’s note: This book is the English translation of the widely-read Swedish edition.]


Don’t ask the “Mozart question,” a young reporter is warned as she sets forth to interview Paolo Levi, a world-famous violinist. Not knowing what the Mozart question is, she is filled with trepidation but Paolo, at home in Venice, is in a talkative mood. Over mint tea, he announces that he will tell her a story in order to reveal a life-long secret. The story is of Paolo himself who, as a child, is taught to play his mother’s violin by an old man whom he meets fiddling in a Venetian square. Paolo knows that his parents had both been violinists and that, for reasons they won’t explain, they never play. When he takes his teacher to meet them, they realize that they knew one another long ago, when they all were forced by the Nazis to play in the Auschwitz orchestra, mostly
cheerful Mozart pieces to pacify prisoners being herded to the gas chambers. The horror of this experience has caused Paolo's father to reject music, but he agrees to let his talented son play so long as it isn't Mozart. Now, with his father gone and his fiftieth birthday concert approaching, Paolo Levi is preparing to play Mozart for the first time in his life.

The story is filled with sentiment, coincidence, and a complete silence about the Jewish identity of the prisoners, but it is written lyrically and enhanced by evocative illustrations of Venice and the camp. The author and the illustrator are esteemed artists and their collaboration has resulted in a short, moving, and universalized Holocaust story.

Linda R. Silver, Jewish Valuesfinder, Cleveland, OH

ISRAEL AND THE MIDDLE EAST


The Grandpa of Grandpa's Mountain is Yoram Friedman, an American-born Israeli who moved from New Jersey to Kibbutz Misgav Am in northern Israel with his wife and young son after the Six Day War. The story opens in 1996, when now-retired Yoram receives a letter from his 12-year-old American grandson Steven, whom he has never met. The book is presented in the form of letters exchanged between young Steven in New Jersey and his grandfather on the kibbutz. Through the letters, the reader learns that the Friedman family's move to Israel back in 1967 was not a good one for Yoram's wife and child, who returned to America while Yoram stayed on in Israel. For decades they have been estranged and without contact. Now out of the blue, Yoram learns that his son is married and has a son, who is about to have a bar mitzvah, and who longs for a relationship with his grandfather. Their exchange of letters over the course of several years culminates in a dramatic reunion between grandfather and grandson in America, and an equally dramatic trip to Israel by Steven and his father.

The story line is appealing and interesting and seems to be partially based on the author's own life, but the letters exchanged do not ring true. Steven's "voice" doesn't change appropriately as he grows older. The letters get terribly bogged down in details of Steven's camping trips and Yoram's history lessons. Three-fourths of the way through the book, a narrator's voice awkwardly and suddenly bursts in to tell the reader how the two characters feel when they finally meet for the first time.

An affirmative novel for American youngsters that illuminates daily life for Israelis in the Oslo and post-Oslo era is sorely needed. Despite an appealing plot idea and brief scenes of drama, the sometimes amateurish, ponderous style of Grandpa's Mountain disqualifies it to be that long-awaited book.

Andrea Rapp, Wise Temple, Cincinnati, OH

JUDAISM


What Do You See? On Chanukah and What Do You See? At Home are books two and three in this series. Each double page begins with a stilted rhyme that describes the photographs on the facing page. For example, the Chanukah book rhymes the word "see" with "Mommy", "cozy", "carefully", "Maccabees" and "beautifully." On the facing pages are photographs of children, Chanukah foods, menorahs, snow clothes, the Bais HaMikdash, arts and crafts supplies, and dreidels.

The rhymes in the At Home book are less stilted. The text and pictures depict waking in the morning, getting dressed, eating breakfast, playing, helping mother, and bathing. The children photographed are adorable, and the clear and colorful photographs complement the text. Both books are recommended for a limited preschool audience because some words, such as "modeh ani", "tzitzis" and "Hashem," are not familiar to all patrons.

Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, OH

MITZVOT


The colorful illustrations in this rhyming book are somewhat cartoonish and old-fashioned in style as well as content—will today's children even recognize a public pay phone?—but the message is captivating and real: When one person does a mitzvah, it sets an example that others will follow. Young Dov, on his way to yeshiva, removes a rock from the street so no one will trip over it, and this simple act leads others to decide that they will resist the urge to put off doing mitzvot. In turn, they visit the sick, bake a free wedding cake, take a neighbor for a walk, ask a shy girl to play, and organize Torah study. For the most part, these are acts of loving-kindness that any child could do. The story encourages them to understand that their actions have consequences and that "one mitzvah can change the whole world for good."

Susan Berson, Denver, CO

PRAYER


Phyllis Tickle is the author of a series of set-time prayer manuals for adults. This attractively illustrated book is a collection of Psalm-based prayers for each day of the week: one to be said upon waking up, one when resting, and one at bedtime. The point of view is that of a young child, talking to God about the everyday things that make up her world and thanking God for
the good things in it. The serene pastel illustrations portray domestic scenes, like baking cookies, as well as farms, forests, and the seashore. The prayers, labeled by day and time, are framed and placed on top of the illustrations so that colors and shapes surround them.

Intended, says the author, for Jewish, Christian, and Muslim children, it is unlikely that Jews or Muslims will find much meaning in the prayers, since each faith has its own set-time prayers that are different from and more religiously authentic than these. In the course of their religious educations, children learn the set-time prayers and most Jewish children can recite the Shema by the time they reach Kindergarten. Books of prayers for young children that reflect Jewish tradition, such as those by Brichto, Edwards, and Groner, are a far better choice.

Linda R. Silver, Jewish Valuesfinder, Cleveland, OH

OTHER


The author, a well-known writer and editor whose audience is primarily teens, has written a history of race and racism in the western world, from ancient times down to the present. Much territory is covered, describing and analyzing what racial prejudice is, how it begins, the socioeconomic factors influencing it, and its terrible consequences throughout the centuries. Despite a wealth of informative data on such topics as race and slavery, so-called racial “differences,” and doctrines such as survival of the fittest, the book contains several egregious errors of interpretation which this reviewer finds offensive. For example, Aronson attributes the ancient Israelites’ belief in one God to paving the way for thousands of years of prejudice, war, and intolerance in the West. In addition, basing his argument on the tendentious New Testament gospels, he proclaims that Jesus was the first to preach the doctrine of universal love for humankind. This, of course, is contrasted with what Aronson sees as narrow Jewish particularism of the Second Temple period. His interpretation of the belief in the chosen people as exclusivity is similarly skewed. With regard to Jews, instead of revealing truths about the pernicious effects of racism, Aronson helps to perpetuate it. Very disappointing and not recommended.

Robert A. Silver, Cleveland, OH

The following titles, reviewed in the “Reviews of Titles for Adults” section, may also be of interest to children or teen readers:

Lamet, Eric. A Gift from the Enemy: Childhood Memories in Wartime Italy.
Solomon, Estie and Dovid Solomon. 101 Reasons to Visit Israel (& Perhaps Make Aliyah).
Research Rectangle

News and Views from RAS, the Research Libraries, Archives, and Special Collections Division

What’s New on the Ivory Shelves?

ELLIOT H. GERTEL
Reporting from New York, NY at the 2008 AJL Midwinter Meeting

Open Sesame Access: Where Are the Digits?
Under the initiative of James P. Rosenbloom, RAS vice-president, the division is beginning to investigate the possibility of synchronizing information about Judaica digitization efforts with the aim of creating a way to determine which institutions have digitized what Judaic resources, especially as relates to open-access journals and other freely-available electronic information sources. A lot of digitizing is going on, but we don’t always know who’s doing what where, and this ambitious enterprise aims to gather this information into one reference tool, if, of course, no one else out there has already done so. Even if so, it would be constructive to link as much of this data as possible in a single location. I look forward to seeing how this project evolves.

Independence Halls to Disneyland: JIC at ALA Midwinter & Annual
AJL’s 2008 Midwinter Meeting has just concluded in New York as the weeklong Midwinter Meeting of the American Library Association heads into its final two days in Philadelphia. As part of the latter gathering, the Jewish Information Committee of ALA EMIERT, the Ethnic and Multicultural Information Exchange Round Table, combined a tour of Gratz College in Melrose Park with a business meeting on Monday, January 14.

There are at least three Independence Halls in the US. That’s correct, just as there are replica “Statues of Liberty” in the U.S. and France, there are multiple versions of the Philadelphia landmark where the Declaration of Independence was ratified on July 24, 1776, announcing the official separation of the thirteen original English colonies of what became the United States of America from Great Britain.

And Disneyland is not the only theme park in Orange County, California. About six miles northwest in Buena Park is Knott’s Berry Farm, the location of a doppelgänger replica of Independence Hall. So, perhaps it is fitting that following up the Midwinter Meeting in Philadelphia, ALA Annual Conference will take place in Anaheim, California from June 26-July 2. At the summer conference, the JIC is planning to participate in “Eating across Cultures: Food is Culture” by discussing the Jewish aspect of this topic. “Panelists will speak to the role of food in communicating across cultures, preserving cultural heritage, in shaping our perceptions of cultures, and of the importance of collecting related materials” (Preliminary Listing of Programs).

Reference & Bibliography Awards
Deliberations on several titles being considered for the RAS Judaic reference and Bibliography Awards are in progress. Watch for details on Hasafran and in a forthcoming issue of the newsletter.

Oh, yes, so where is that third Independence Hall? As information specialists, end users, inveterate readers, and expert Web surfers, I’m sure you can easily figure that one out on your own!
Sydney Taylor Book Award Winners Are Announced

Rachel Kamin


The Sydney Taylor Book Award of the Association of Jewish Libraries recognizes new books for children and teens that exemplify high literary standards while authentically portraying the Jewish experience. The award memorializes Sydney Taylor, author of the classic All-of-a-Kind Family series. Awards will be presented at the Association of Jewish Libraries Convention in Cleveland, Ohio, in June, at a ceremony marking the 40th anniversary of the award.

Six Sydney Taylor Honor Books were named in 2008. For younger readers, Honor Books are: The Castle on Hester Street by Linda Heller with illustrations by Boris Kulikov (Simon & Schuster), Letter on the Wind by Sarah Lamstein with illustrations by Neil Waldman (Boyd's Mills Press), and Light, written and illustrated by Jane Breskin Zalben (Dutton Children's Books, an imprint of Penguin Young Readers Group). For older readers, the Honor Books are: Holocaust: The Events and Their Impact on Real People by Angela Gluck Wood with consultation by Dan Stone (DK Publishing in association with USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education) and The Secret Of Priest's Grotto by Peter Lane Taylor and Cristos Nicola (Kar-Ben). For teen readers, one Honor Book was selected, Let Sleeping Dogs Lie by Mirjam Pressler, translated from the German by Erik J. Macki (Front Street/Boyd's Mills Press). It should be noted that The Castle on Hester Street won the Sydney Taylor Book Award in 1982, when it was first published by the Jewish Publication Society; its Honor Award in 2008 recognizes Boris Kulikov's illustrations.

In addition to the medal-winners, the committee designated 23 notable books of Jewish content for 2008: 11 in the younger readers category, eight in the older readers category, and four for teens. Notable titles, and more information about the Sydney Taylor Book Award, including how to order the CD-ROM compilation of all of the committee's reviews, brochures, bookmarks, and gold and silver seals, may be found online at www.SydneyTaylorBookAward.org. A special video announcement of the awards can be accessed at www.youtube.com/SydneyTaylorAward, and a blog about the awards can be found at www.sydneytaylorbookaward.blogspot.com. An interview is included on the January episode of “The Book of Life: A Podcast about Jewish People and the Books We Read” at www.jewishbooks.blogspot.com.

Over 130 books published in 2007 were read and reviewed by the committee. Members of the committee were Nancy Austein, Susan Berson, Marci Lavine Bloch, Kathy Bloomfield, and Kathe Pinchuck. The committee was aided by Heidi Estrin, past chair, and Etta Gold, compiler.

Jewish Values Finder Print Edition is Now Available

What began as an AJL print publication known as Juvenile Judaica by Marcia W. Posner and evolved into an AJL-sponsored Internet guide to values found at www.ajljewishvalues.org, is now being published as a book. The Jewish Values Finder: A Guide to Values in Jewish Children's Literature, written by the online guide's editor, Linda Silver, is dedicated to Marcia Posner and published by Neal-Schuman, a leading publisher of professional books for librarians and teachers. Neal-Schuman calls it “a landmark reference book” because it is the first of its kind to evaluate and analyze about 1,000 books of Jewish content written for children and teens in terms of the values the books express. A beginning chapter discusses the development of Jewish children's literature in America. Other chapters are categorized by values such as awe and reverence, contentment, justice and righteousness, mitzvot, and remembrance. Books discussed within each chapter are organized by grade level. Each book entry includes bibliographic information and an annotation giving critical and descriptive information, comparisons with other books, and suggestions for its use with children. Following the last chapter, called “Many Stories, Many Values,” there are a glossary of Hebrew and Yiddish words, lists of Jewish holidays, Sydney Taylor Book Award-winning titles, and Jewish publishers plus several indexes. “This is one of those rare books that has multiple uses and offers a variety of ways to find information you need,” says Susan Roman, the dean of the Library School at Dominican University and the former executive director of the Association of Library Service to Children. The title is available directly through the publisher, on Amazon, and at a discount to AJL members through a link on the AJL website. The Jewish Values Finder: A Guide to Values in Jewish Children's Literature by Linda R. Silver. ISBN: 978-1-55570-624-1 Pbk. 2008. 6x9, 290p. $55.00.
2008 Convention in Cleveland Celebrates Milestones

LINDA SILVER

A variety of milestones will be celebrated at the 43rd convention in Cleveland, Ohio, June 22-25, 2008. In honor of the 120th anniversary of the Jewish Publication Society, the convention’s keynote speaker will be Ellen Frankel, CEO and editor-in-chief of JPS. In recognition of the 60th anniversary of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Israel’s founding, one session will feature Dr. John Kampen of the Methodist Theological School in Delaware, Ohio, presenting “An Update on Dead Sea Scrolls Research and Second Temple Judaism.” In addition, session coordinator, Marlene Schiffman, will speak on “Guidelines for Building a Dead Sea Scrolls Collection,” and Dr. David Levy will discuss “The Library of Dead Sea Scrolls Qumran Community Scriptorium.”

Other Israel-related sessions planned include Steve Bergson on “From Tintin to Migdal David: Representations of Israel and Israelis in Comic Books, Comic Strips, and Graphic Novels,” Miriam Libicki talking about “Tales of a Tank Secretary: IDF Comix with a Twist,” Rachel Leket-Mor on “Haredi Films from the Israeli Popular Collection at Arizona State University,” Zieva Konvisser reflecting on “Life After Terror: Israeli Experiences,” an update on the Jewish National and University Library (JNUL) by its new academic director, Carl Posy; and “Trends in the Publication of Books about the Holocaust from 2000-2007” by Robert Rozett, director of libraries at Yad Vashem.

The 40th anniversary of the Sydney Taylor Book Awards will be commemorated with a special post-convention program on Wednesday, June 25th, entitled “A Celebration of Jewish Children’s Literature,” which will feature authors, illustrators, and children’s literature specialists. Presentations by current and past Sydney Taylor Book Award recipients will highlight this event. Book signings and book sales will conclude the celebration on Wednesday afternoon, 3:30-4:30 PM. The Sydney Taylor event is an all-day program that will be open to the public as well as to convention attendees for a separate fee. CEU credits will be available for an additional $45.00. The celebration will kick off on Tuesday evening, June 24th, with the presentation of the 2008 Sydney Taylor Book Awards during the convention’s annual banquet.

Another special event is a hands-on technology session aimed at school librarians, which will be held at an off-site location. A second CEU course of the convention has been planned in response to the need expressed by many AJL members for developing skills in library advocacy. National chapter chairs Rosalind Reisner and Irene Seff will present a session on increasing AJL chapter effectiveness. Finally, the annual Freshman Seminar will once again impart practical skills that all Judaic librarians need in order to be effective.

Cleveland convention attendees can take advantage of tours of Jewish Cleveland and the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage. Updates will be posted on both the AJL website and on the Cleveland convention blog, www.ajlcleveland2008.blogspot.com.

The RAS Perspective on Convention

ELLIOT H. GERTEL

What can we expect in the way of RAS programming at the 43rd annual convention? The Greater Cleveland Convention Planning Committee is taking a novel approach in swapping annual divisional and general membership meetings, which traditionally take place on Wednesday morning, with the programming that normally concludes on Tuesday afternoon. There is now stronger incentive to stay at the convention through at least part of Wednesday. Here’s a brief but tantalizing preview of what’s in store. At press time, there were ten separate RAS sessions scheduled, consisting of 20 presentations and some two dozen speakers plus the annual Feinstein Lecture.

In reference to history, culture, and community, sessions will include “Jewish Cleveland in the Late Twentieth Century”; the Syrian Jewish community of New York; the JCA agricultural colonies in Argentina; Jewish library buildings from a historical and contemporary perspective; and Jewish news and commercial periodicals, past and present. In Shoah studies, there will be programs encompassing “The Opening of the Red Cross International Tracing Service Archive” and publishing trends in Holocaust books for the last seven plus years. Other topics include Israeli publishing in America; “Copyright and Halakhah,” liturgy; cuisine; music; and Haredi film. Also to be discussed are “The JNUL: From Midrash Abarbanel to the National Library of Israel” and “The Recuperation and Reconstruction of Dutch Jewish Collections in Post War Europe.” But, I must admit that the title that really caught my attention is “Yeshiva’s Edifice Complex: Vision and Reality.”

AJL Convention Travel Grant

Long-standing members active in AJL, newer members who would like to participate more fully, and convention participants who are current paid-up members may apply for a travel subsidy.

You must be a current member of AJL at the time of application and for the convention. Full registration at the convention is required, and there is an expectation that recipients will attend the entire convention. An article describing your convention experience should be submitted to the AJL Newsletter within one year of receiving the grant.

Members in the local area are not eligible for this travel subsidy. Members wishing to apply for this grant should complete the application form (a link to the form is at www.jewishlibraries.org/ajlweb/scholarships/convention_travel.htm) and forward it by e-mail to the AJL past president. Submit any additional documentation via email, fax, or regular mail to: Ronda Rose, Past President AJL, 11257 Dona Lisa Drive, Studio City, CA 91604, 323-654-3652, Fax: 323-650-8414.
Reviews of Titles for Adults

EDITED BY MERRILY F. HART

FICTION, POETRY & MEMOIR


Among so many memoirs, diaries and autobiographies of the Holocaust, this book stands out as well written, interesting and focused; a bond forms immediately between writer and reader. James Bachner was born in Berlin in 1922, into a successful family. Fearing the worst, as conscription of young men commenced and Nazi persecution increased, Bachner fled with his father to Poland. (His mother and brother joined them later.) Eventually, he was summoned to work in a slave labor camp; he became a medic in the hospital, a desired position. The workers assisted in construction of roads, and conditions were more relaxed than most other camps. Eventually, he went to Auschwitz where he experienced the selection process of Dr. Mengele. Following many horrifying experiences, he was sent to the remains of the Warsaw Ghetto to remove evidence of the Jewish resistance. Later, as the Allies advanced throughout Europe, he became part of a death march to Dachau. In the final days of the war, he was reunited with his brother, and they escaped together from a transport. This moving, informative autobiography is highly recommended for high school, college, and adult readers.  

Martin Goldberg, Penn State University, Monaca, PA


Haroun Soussan, the narrator of this novel, is a Jew who converted to Islam. He is based on the historical figure, Ahmad (Nissim) Soussa, whose accomplishments were used as propaganda by Saddam Hussein. Haroun trained as an engineer in the United States, married an American woman, and had a son. His love for Iraq made him abandon his family to return to his homeland. The story begins as Haroun, now 70 years old, is honored by the public, synagogue, and academic libraries. This powerful novel will interest readers in forgotten. He finds himself an outcast from the Jews, the West, and his homeland. This powerful novel will interest readers in public, synagogue, and academic libraries.  

Barbara M. Bibel, Oakland Public Library, Oakland, CA; Congregation Netivot Shalom, Berkeley, CA


While the title mentions only Sarah, this collection of poems covers most of the major themes and stories in Genesis. For each chapter, Goldhaber gives a biblical quote and a short explanation of the passage. Her sonnets are midrash/commentary rather than just poetic restatements of the biblical verses. In the first section, she examines Eve’s feelings about Lilith and Adam and includes her interpretation of Eve’s conversation with the serpent. In her commentary on Noah, she describes the carnivores’ yearning for “a bit of juicy steer.” The author has a long section on Abraham as well as Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. Each sonnet is accompanied by an illustration on the facing page. The illustrations are bright watercolor-and-ink paintings done by the author’s husband and collaborator, Gerson Goldhaber. The style is whimsical and a little cartoonish. Adam and Eve are shown in the garden sans fig leaves. I worried that the sonnets might be overly formal and inaccessible, but I found them to be very readable, thoughtful, and humorous. Recommended.  

Sheryl Stahl, Hebrew Union College-JIR, Los Angeles, CA


This memoir is one of a series of Holocaust testimonies published under the auspices of Yad Vashem and the Center of Holocaust Studies at the University of Leicester, Great Britain. I must confess that I had a personal motive in asking to review this particular book: the subtitle indicated that the author is a survivor of the same circumstances that my mother and her family endured during WWII. My mother’s recollections were scattered and reluctant at best, and I took the opportunity to learn more about this part of the world and these experiences from a child survivor who became a writer. Govrin’s story is a well balanced narrative of the personal and the historical as he relates the murderous actions directed at Romanian Jewry. Stories of the death marches to Transnistria towards the end of the war are scarce (in English) and this one is a prime example of the need for such testimonies to be documented, publicized, collected, and read. Govrin’s personal story of survival, growth, and service to the State of Israel deserves a place in every library that collects such testimonies, and is highly recommended for teens and adult readers.

Yaffa Weisman, Hebrew Union College-JIR, Los Angeles, CA


Katz’s first solo work, and his first fiction book, after four co-written works of nonfiction, demonstrates his research skills as well as his imagination. Traveling with a railroad inspector from Philadelphia through the West, readers follow David Goldstein
through the strange land of anti-Semitism, Indians, guns, tracking, and horseback riding. Going from a bookish, civilized life to the life of a bounty hunter, Goldstein travels with Red and his two assistants, Jake and White Crow, as they seek the missing money from a train robbery. Along the way, they are forced to join with one of Pinkerton’s spies, they encounter “brush haired” (African American) soldiers who were hired as scouts by the train robbers, and Chinese immigrants striving to make a living in an unwelcoming town. Well written and attention-grabbing, Shalom on the Range deals with issues from the past that are still relevant today—prejudice against gender, race, and religion. An underlying theme is David’s Jewishness, explored through his encounters with other Jews. Adventurous gunfights, trickery, and a surprise ending will keep the reader wanting more. This novel is a welcome addition to any Western fiction collection, and to historical fiction collections in Jewish libraries.

Sara Marcus, CUNY, Flushing, NY


The number of memoirs published by Holocaust survivors has soared in recent years. With time on their hands and a sense of ‘if not now, when,’ survivors have been writing to document their suffering for posterity. In Israel alone, over 5,000 memoirs have been published. Still, many have difficulties getting their work published. Kopel Kolpanitzky’s memoir was published in Hebrew and now is available in English translation.

The history of the Jewish community of Lahwah, Poland (now in Belarus) is well documented in a Yizkor Book published in Israel in 1957. The survivors were proud of the fact that they were first to resist the onslaught of the Nazis on September 3, 1942. Many perished, but about 1,000 managed to flee and survive for a while in nearby marshes. A few were able to join Soviet partisan groups and later the Red Army, as Kopel did. Kopel was on the run for many weeks in the area surrounding his home town. Assisted and hidden by local people who had known his family, he felt that the Belarusians were different from the Ukrainians, who were willing assistants to the Nazis. Only the author and his father survived. They were reunited in Israel after ten years of separation, and established a respectable lumber business there. The book belongs in libraries with large Holocaust collections including memoirs.

Michlean Amir, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC


This captivating memoir gives us a glimpse of wartime through the eyes of a young boy. Fleeing Vienna after the invasion of the Germans in 1938, Eric and his mother ended up in Italy, while his father returned to his native Poland. In 1939, Eric and his mother were sent to Ospedaletto, an internment village in northern Italy. There they lived alongside other internees and villagers, cut off from much of the war news and struggling with an unfamiliar culture and language. Throughout the story, the author describes his terror and uncertainty, but also his moments of joy and small boyhood triumphs—and his mischievous adventures. Although at certain points the author adds information he learned later, the adult voice never intrudes too far into the story. As Eric grows and learns to face difficult truths, we feel his confusion and pain, but we also share in the love he has for his family. This is a remarkable memoir and a great read. The glossary defines Yiddish and other foreign phrases, but they are usually translated in the text as well. Family photographs enrich the text. Although the book is not marketed for young adults, it would be suitable for older teens. Highly recommended for synagogue, public, and academic libraries.

Joy Kingsolver, Spertus Institute, Chicago


Mann’s memoir of entering into and eventually leaving an ultra-Orthodox marriage vividly conveys her struggle to find a nurturing place for herself within Judaism. In polished, lucid prose that is often startling in its openness about the rigors of Orthodox life and its honesty about both the difficulty and joy of striving toward a holy life, she narrates her journey from rebellious adolescent daughter of a respected London rabbi to wife of a zealous ultra-Orthodox scholar and continues through her divorce and re-entry into secular life. Her story offers a compelling look into a world of young Jewish people often moving between extremes of observance and secular living as they seek an authentic spiritual path in cultures defined by independence and freedom of choice. It is likely to be a compelling read for a wide audience of adult, non-specialist readers in public and academic libraries; its content will resonate with all who have sought to balance the demands of tradition with contemporary life. At times, the memoir dwells more on action than insight. Mann could, perhaps, have delved more into the motivation that drove her first to renounce secular life in favor of strict religious observance and the realizations that spurred her to reject that extreme, as well as the social repercussions of her choices. This is a minor point, however, and it remains a well-crafted work with deep emotional impact.

Elizabeth Rodrigues, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL


Literature provides an excellent window into the culture of a nation and Israeli authors have enriched our understanding of the human condition during the first 60 years of the existence of the State of Israel.

In his new novel, award-winning author Meir Shalev brings life an age-old military method that used homing pigeons to relay messages. He describes in detail a chapter in Israel’s War of Independence. The lives of a young pigeon “expert” from a kibbutz, “the Baby,” and his great love, a girl from Tel Aviv, are woven into a story that takes place in present-day Israel. A group of dignitaries on a bird-watching tour are guided by Yair Mendelson, who was conceived during the war. They visit a monastery near Jerusalem, which was the site of a battle during the War of Independence. Here the contemporary portion of the novel unravels. Shalev is a master story teller who manages to draw us
into what may be a more symbolic than real story, a story filled with mourning for losses and yearnings for the innocent world of the newborn state. The people inhabiting Shalev's story are very real, sensitive human beings, deeply rooted in the life of Israel. The book reads easily and smoothly in translation, even though Shalev's Hebrew is filled with beautiful biblical expressions and allusions. It is a highly recommended novel, which belongs in any library that includes books by the best of Israel's authors, and is also excellent for a book discussion group.

Michlean Amir, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC


In many ways, Mort Zachter's childhood was typical of children whose parents had grown up during the Depression. His parents worked hard—his father in an office and his mother at her brothers' bakery, without pay, since she was family. Zachter's two bachelor uncles worked all day, seven days a week for their entire lives. They only closed their store on Yom Kippur and Passover. By the time Zachter was 36 years old, one uncle had died and the other was suffering from senile dementia and living with Zachter's elderly parents. One day while Zachter was at his parents' apartment, helping his mother prepare for his father's cancer surgery, the phone rang. The voice on the line identified himself as his father and uncles' stockbroker. He was calling to discuss the best place to put the million dollars in his father's account. This news was shocking to Zachter as he stood in his parents' dilapidated apartment. After more conversations and investigation, Zachter realized that his family had accumulated approximately 6 million dollars among many different brokerage firms and accounts. In this memoir, Zachter revisits his childhood, looking at it through the lens of this newly acquired information about his family's finances. He works through his shock and anger at the disparity between the way his family lived and the way it might have been. In addition, Zachter confronts his own bitterness at his family's failure to help him financially when he and his wife went through the expensive process of adopting children. The tone of the book is conversational as Zachter moves easily between the past and present. He relates his experiences going to shul with his family, the seders at which the family counted the food stamps they received in the store, and the search for a Jewish home for his uncle. Recommended.

Sheryl Stahl, Hebrew Union College-JIR, Los Angeles, CA

On the contrary, Rabbi Aaron explains, “Not only can you love being Jewish, when you truly understand it, you’ll wonder how you could have ever not loved it.” He discusses the nature of emunah (faith), questions on the existence and unity of G-d, and “What Does G-d Want?” Prayer, kashrut, and Shabbat are also explored at length.

The writing is warm and breezy, never severe or pedantic, and laced with anecdotes. The author, founder and dean of Isralight, comes across as remarkably sophisticated and in tune with today’s youth, who are bombarded with competing lifestyles and ideologies. Not only does he know how to address the pertinent questions in a way that would engage their interest, but he can even stop the cynics in their tracks—those who, for example, might ask “What’s in it For Me?” to which he devotes an entire chapter. The presentation of traditional Judaism is thoughtful and highly intelligent. This book might whet the appetites of those who are spiritually hungry and provide a quick fix for those who already consider themselves observant. Recommended for adult Jewish or college libraries and outreach centers.

Hallie Cantor, Yeshiva University, NY


Both a biography of Commentary's brilliant founding editor, Elliot Ettelson Cohen, and a history of the first 15 years of the magazine, this closely-written detailed study provides plenty of intellectual gossip, politics, history, footnotes and even a suicide. Although supported by the American Jewish Committee, Commentary was never a “house organ,” and the structural and editorial independence that Cohen maintained allowed him to shape the journal to his view of the new Jewish American culture and to publish the best of the New York intellectuals. Commentary focused on opinion, not Judaism, and was always ready to speak in opposition to mainstream Jewish views. To provide a few examples: its literary critics did not approve middlebrow tastes, and Diana Trilling's review of Laura Z. Hobson's highly praised Gentleman’s Agreement was very critical; despite the book's high moral purpose she found it dull and clichéd. The magazine's 1947 essay depicting New York Times editor Adolph S. Ochs as a “court Jew” caused an uproar. The emphasis of the book, however, is on the magazine's contributors and the development of the journal as a shaper of the modern American Jewish image and a molder of national and international opinion.

Surprisingly, the first book devoted to the story of Commentary Magazine is written by a British academic in remote Bangor, North Wales; he is definitely an objective outsider. The author’s forthcoming book, Struggling for Empire: Norman Podhoretz and the Rise and Fall of the Neo-Cons, will continue the story. Although there are many journal articles on Commentary and books on the New York intellectuals, this well-researched book fills a niche and is recommended for academic libraries.

Merrily F. Hart, Siegal College, Cleveland, OH

GENERAL NONFICTION


This charming book enhances the collection of literature aimed at the uninvolved or uninitiated Jew. Rabbi David Aaron, himself a ba’al teshuva (returnee to Judaism), applies his wisdom and experience to topics for the searching individual, particularly one who, like himself, grew up assimilated. Certain myths are debunked: religious observance does not mean we’re not allowed to be happy; the Torah life does not mean oppression.

Joyce Antler, a professor of American Jewish history and culture at Brandeis University, describes the Jewish mother as emblematic of the American Jewish story as she traces major developments across the 20th and early 21st centuries from immigration and acculturation, through women's response to World War II, the Holocaust, and the feminist movement. Examples from fiction, sociological studies, film, stage and television illustrate the development of the Jewish mother's image. From the indomitable, courageous defender of her family, preserver and protector of Jewish tradition, to crude, often cruel depictions of the domineering, interfering, nagging harridan, which creates neurotic, dependent sons and ineffectual husbands, the Jewish woman remains a personage to be reckoned with.

Antler reviews the roles played by Gertrude Berg, creator and actress in “Molly Goldberg,” Jennie Grossinger, Roseanne Barr, the “domestic goddess,” as well as literary characters such as Marjorie Morningstar and feminist writers such as Wendy Wasserstein. Throughout she struggles with the question, “How does the comic distortion of the Jewish mother compare to the image revealed in memoirs, autobiographies and oral histories?” While the stereotype seems destined to live forever, it is here put into healthy perspective and confined to reasonable boundaries. Clearly Antler has done painstaking research in archives. The result is informative as well as poignant and funny. Copious illustrations enhance and complement the text admirably. Recommended for its scholarly soundness and entertaining style.

Susanne M. Batzdorff, Congregation Beth Ami, Santa Rosa, CA


Hannah Arendt, noted political thinker, was born in Germany, to a secular Jewish family. In 1926 she became involved in Jewish and Zionist politics. She fled from the Nazis to Paris in 1933, and moved to the US in 1941.

Reflections on Literature and Culture is a collection of 34 of Arendt’s essays published or presented as lectures between 1930 and 1975. The first essay analyzes Rilke’s Duino Elegies; the last chapter is Arendt’s commemoration of W.H. Auden. In between there are serious discussions of the Berlin Salon, Stefan Zweig, The Jew as Pariah, Franz Kafka, French existentialism, the poetry of Bertolt Brecht, Bernard Lazare, culture and politics, and Isak Dinesen. Ms. Gottlieb’s introduction is instructive and erudite. Notes at the end of each essay and at the end of the book add valuable information. This work provides clear insight into the intellectual and creative character of the 20th century and is recommended for academic libraries.

Nina G. Wolfe, Highland Park, IL


The Origins of Totalitarianism, widely published, and often controversial, established Hannah Arendt as a modern political theoretician and thinker. Beyond the Border analyses the impact of Arendt and other Jewish thinkers and writers from Weimar Germany. These include Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Franz Rosenzweig, Gershom Scholem, and Leo Strauss. Aschheim writes, “All have been recognized as being, in some way or another, ‘Jewish’ thinkers but their thoughts, writings, and reception have far transcended those borders.” Aschheim also examines the ideas of Martin Buber and Hans Kohn, who lived in Israel prior to 1948, and their thoughts on solutions to the Arab-Israel conflict. The book, based upon a series of lectures at the University of California, Berkeley, is an interesting study in Jewish historiography and German-Jewish history. It includes extensive footnotes helpful to students and researchers. Recommended for a university or special collection.

Ellen Share, Washington Hebrew Congregation, Washington, DC


This technical work, dealing with urban planning, examines the case of Jerusalem. It opens with a short description of the factors involved in urban planning, with special reference to Israel, followed by a highly compressed history of Jerusalem. The author points out how complex life is in a city so central to mankind, with so many national and international actors trying to influence the decision making. Having set the scene, the authors state: “…no one can aspire to understand urban planning in Jerusalem.” If so, why was the book written? The authors spend the rest of the book proving their point with case studies. The projects studied include building the defense barrier, the planned railroad to Jerusalem, the light railway within Jerusalem, the football stadium, and provision for immigrants. The analysis is first-class and many of the facts are new to an Israeli who reads a good newspaper but does not research technical subjects. The authors demonstrate the complexity of decision-making with regard to Jerusalem. This is primarily a professional text for urban planners, but is also of interest to the general reader.

Chaim Seymour, Bar-Ilan University, Israel


Books on Jews and sports abound, and the last few years have seen the publication of Jewish Sports Stars (Kar-Ben, 2006), The 100 Greatest Jews in Sports (Scarecrow Press, 2004), and The Big Book of Jewish Sports Heroes (S.P.I. Books, 2007), among others. The newest book by the Boxermans, authors of Ebbets to Veeck to Busch (McFarland, 2003), is a grand slam hit as it engages readers in a comprehensive and chronological look at Jewish involvement in the great American pastime. From Lipman Pike, the first Jewish professional baseball player, to Hank Greenberg, the first Jew to be inducted in the baseball Hall of Fame, the authors show how Jewish immigrants used baseball as a means to assimilate into American life. Whether playing the game, managing a team, keeping statistics, covering a game for the newspaper, manufacturing baseballs, or cheering on the players, Jews were able to enter the mainstream culture of their new country. With a clear
writing style, plenty of black-and-white photographs, detailed notes, a comprehensive bibliography, and an index, this high-quality reference book would make a winning addition to all types of library teams.

Wendy Wasman, Anshe Chesed-Fairmount Temple & The Temple-Tifereth Israel, Beachwood, OH


Using hundreds of interviews conducted in the years before Anna Spector’s death in 1997, Dr. Lawrence Coben has created a fascinating account of Anna’s childhood in the shtetl where she lived in Korsun, Ukraine; telling the story from her birth in 1905 through her immigration to America in 1919. This biography is especially rare because there are very few firsthand descriptions from this time and place written from a female perspective. With remarkable clarity and detail, Anna describes the relationship between Korsun’s Jews and Christians, both in good times and later, as she and her family become victims in several terrifying pogroms. The story of the long journey that finally takes them to America is a page-turner that keeps the reader’s attention to the very end. In addition to the interviews with Anna, this book is well documented with extensive outside sources. Highly recommended for all types of Jewish libraries.

Shoshana Hurwitz, Hurwitz Indexing. St. Louis, MO


First, a recommendation: because of the absence of a volume that gathers and defines many terms relating to Jewish myth, magic and mysticism, this title should be in the reference section of Jewish libraries for its breadth and scope in bringing together these three related disciplines under one alphabetical roof.

Now, a disclaimer: as a librarian, you should be prepared to help your patron navigate through concepts, abbreviations, citations and illustrations that are not self-explanatory and are geared towards researchers. A few cases in point: “Frankists” get a mention, but Jacob Frank does not. Rather, his name is folded into the former entry, without much information about his significant role in Messianic Judaism.

“MTzPTzMTzPTz” : An example of a circular reference that gives a mouthful of an explanation (Atbash, Tetragrammaton, God’s attributes) and two source citations (Zohar and Exodus) without a morsel of the actual texts that include the term itself. An appendix includes six illustrations of concepts and refers the user back to a list of relevant terms, but lacks descriptions that would make their meaning clear.

This is one of the drawbacks of the encyclopedia as a whole; it assumes a familiarity with basic and esoteric Jewish texts and terms, listing them and their abbreviations without putting them in historical or canonical context. The quick reference list and the very short bibliography point users toward further research, which is the good news/bad news of this volume.

Yaffa Weisman, Hebrew Union College-JIR, Los Angeles, CA


Silent No More is a history of the Soviet Jewry movement of the 1960s-1980s. Feingold’s book is a detailed account of the organizations in the U.S., Europe and Israel that fought for the release of Jews from the Soviet Union. Among the subjects that Feingold discusses in great detail are the Jackson-Vanik amendment, the approaches of the various organizations to the Soviet Jewry problem, and the rivalry between the different groups both in the U.S. and Israel, whose goal was to extract Soviet Jews from the USSR. Silent No More is a complex and detailed historical reference work that assumes the reader has some familiarity with the movement’s history and the politics. The book is slow reading for the lay person, even one who has an interest in the topic, but is not an historian or a scholar. Feingold includes a list of abbreviations (which he uses copiously), over 40 pages of bibliographic notes, a glossary of foreign words, and an exhaustive index. Silent No More is recommended for all academic libraries and any library that has a Jewish history collection.

Ilka Gordon, Cleveland, OH


Jamie Geller has written an excellent cookbook that will be savored by new brides and seasoned balabustas alike. Her book is peppered with humor and Yiddish and Hebrew terms. As Geller promises in the title, the recipes take no longer than thirty minutes to prepare. The fish recipes are excellent; the salads are interesting and the soups are hearty and satisfying. Added features include an excellent kitchen equipment list and tips on buying and serving wine. Jewish holiday menus and a glossary of Yiddish and Hebrew terms are also included. One of the unique features of the book is a chapter on adjusting year round recipes for Passover use. The beautiful photographs and large size enhance the book’s esthetic appeal. Quick and Kosher, Recipes From The Bride Who Knew Nothing is highly recommended for the kosher cookbook collections of all libraries.

Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, OH


The author’s aim is to prove that the first king of Israel, Saul, was a worthy leader, a decent man and a successful strategist. He was deeply wronged by David, who usurped the kingdom. The author also claims that a redactor who was “pro-David” rewrote the original first Book of Samuel. “It is a form of collage, where the text is cut up, then pasted together in a configuration more supportive of the required agenda.” This is precisely what the author does also. He takes the existing Samuel I and, progressing in stages, rewrites it to support his thesis. At the end of each stage he reaches a somewhat convincing conclusion. Some of the points which he did not succeed in proving are: “The first meeting between Saul and Samuel occurred long before the disaster of Aphek…” (conclusion 3) or “David’s taking of Keilah was part of a planned rebellion against Saul…” (conclusion 19).
I was impressed by the close and intelligent reading of Samuel I but remain suspicious of the methodology. It is very easy to prove any point if you rewrite the text!

Chaim Seymour, Bar-Ilan University, Israel


Zeev Gries offers the English reader a summary of his Hebrew-language teaching and research on the history and printing of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Hebrew books. Based on one of his earlier Hebrew titles, Gries’s book includes additional material as well.

The author focuses on the eighteenth century and later because, “the number of [Hebrew] titles printed during that period almost quadrupled.” He offers an alternative perspective on Jewish intellectual history. Rather than base his conclusions on the study of the lives and times of writers or the contents of their books, he focuses on the numbers of printings and editions of particular titles, where they were printed, by whom, under what circumstances, and where they were circulated. Gries strives to place his work within the larger parameters of the study of the history of books and printing and of reader studies. One of the more interesting conclusions he draws is that traditional religious texts remain the overwhelmingly popular choice of printers and readers and that through the end of the nineteenth century Haskalah literature remains the concern of a minority.

While not all aspects of Gries’s work are equally persuasive, his work is very detailed and worth reading multiple times. I recommend this book for all academic libraries.

Daniel J. Retthberg, Hebrew Union College-JIR, Cincinnati, OH


Charles Haddad, businessman and freelance columnist, has put together his thoughts on how to enjoy whatever comes your way in life on a daily basis. His essays give advice on topics such as living in the present, breaking bad habits, taking charge of your life, learning from others and having a good attitude. General common sense would bring most people to the same conclusions, but this neat little book may help those who are stuck in a rut gain some insight, incentive, confidence, and patience to deal with life’s inconveniences. The book does not contain specific Jewish references, but it is Jewish in outlook, as Haddad uses his own experiences with his synagogue in his examples. He expounds on teaching children responsibility and making a difference in the community. This title is an optional purchase for most synagogue collections.

Susan Berman, Temple Oheb Shalom, Baltimore, MD


There are ten chapters in this volume, but only chapters two and six are original. The book is a collection of essays written in English on various occasions, focusing on very specific issues of Hebrew or Yiddish literatures, especially poetry. Several essays are introductions to reprints of Hebrew or Yiddish works.

“All essays were edited for this volume, yet substantially they remained as first written.” Appropriate for large academic libraries, with a comprehensive program in Hebrew or Yiddish literature, this book is likely to be too expensive for the average college library.

Roger S. Kohn, Silver Spring, MD


Rather than the more nebulous “traditional Judaism” mentioned in the title, Tova Hartman’s book deals specifically with Modern Orthodoxy. Her observations of the movement are so insightful that this work should be required reading for students of contemporary Judaism, whether or not they have any interest in feminism. Hartman approaches her subject both as an Orthodox Jew and as a feminist psychologist, observing the often conflicting sets of values within herself.

At the heart of this book are the ways that Modern Orthodoxy reacts to 21st-century values of egalitarianism in the realm of Jewish law and in society at large. Hartman discusses women’s roles in the synagogue and liturgy, modesty in dress, and ritual purity. The reader may initially be disappointed that Hartman does not tackle the halakhic issues head on; she increasingly makes the case that much of the discourse resisting feminist innovation is taking place on a meta-halakhic level. She also finds fault with mainstream feminism, which she feels talks about women in traditional societies without talking to them.

One small criticism is that Hartman often presents Modern Orthodoxy as a monolithic whole, writing as if the same attitudes permeate every community in Israel and in the diaspora, while in actuality, there may be vastly disparate views of women’s roles within individual communities. This delightfully perceptive book may be too controversial for some synagogue libraries and irrelevant for others, but is a valuable addition to academic and public library collections.

Daniel Scheide, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL


Many of us wonder why the public thinks that the Internet has all the answers and libraries are not so necessary. Mark Y. Herring, dean of library services at Winthrop University in Rock Hill, South Carolina, expands his article “10 Reasons Why the Internet Is No Substitute for a Library” in this book. While we may or may not agree with his feeling that the Internet is contributing to a decline in literacy and intellectual rigor, he does remind us of the library’s function as a teaching institution and makes a strong case for making the Web a tool for librarians rather than changing the library to accommodate the Web. Recommended for academic and library school libraries.

Barbara M. Bibel, Oakland Public Library, Oakland, CA; Congregation Netivot Shalom, Berkeley, CA

My first encounter with Dvora Baron’s writing was when her story Fradel appeared on the required reading list for the high-school bagrut (matriculation) exam in Israel in the late 1970s. The small-format volume that included Fradel, and 11 other stories has moved with me across apartments, cities, and continents, and brings me the same comfort one usually receives from a volume of poetry. I was unaware of the tragic figure whose stories left such a strong impression on me. Baron lived in self-imposed seclusion for most of her adult life, confining herself to her apartment, tended to by her sickly daughter.

Jelen’s treatment of Baron is literary and personal, historical and contextual. The book portrays Baron as part of the modern Hebrew renaissance, and highlights the uniqueness of her gender in the male-dominated literary world of the early 1900s. Five of the chapters surround the “imperatives” of Baron’s life, from the autobiographical to the intertextual. For scholars, these chapters are invaluable, if only for the fact that this is the first literary treatment of Baron in English. But for lovers of Baron’s fiction, the attraction of this book is in the beginning and ending chapters—Baron’s biography and the translation of two of her stories into English, and perhaps most important, a detailed bibliography of Baron’s primary and secondary works in Hebrew, English, and Yiddish.

Debbie Rabina, SILS, Pratt Institute, NY


For this review I compared the 2006 and 2007 editions of the Jewish Travel Guide. I then compared the information about Cleveland, where I live, to the services that exist in the city. The historical information that precedes each country’s listing was identical in both editions, and even the population statistics were the same. Much of the information about synagogues, bakeries, etc. was also identical in both editions. The 120 pages that comprise the US are difficult to navigate because state names are not used as key words on the top of the pages. If the information about Cleveland is any indication, the descriptions are inaccurate. There are more mistakes than I am able to include in a 250-word review, but I will mention a few important ones. Cleveland and Cleveland/Beachwood are separate entries. According to this book Cleveland and Beachwood have three Orthodox synagogues, one Reform synagogue and no Conservative or Reconstructionist synagogues. In fact, Beachwood/ Cleveland has at least two or three Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist congregations. Abba Hillel Silver’s landmark, The Temple was left out. The only kosher bakery listed in Cleveland is Breadsmith. There has never been a kosher Breadsmith in Cleveland. When I called the number listed in the guide, there was no answer. Ruchama’s restaurant, out of business for several years, is listed, but none of the pizza shops appears. Based on the listing for the Cleveland area, Jewish Travel Guide 2007 International Edition is not recommended and I would not trust the information about other cities. The web is an excellent source for Jewish travel information.

Iika Gordon, Beachwood, OH


This volume is part of a research project examining attitudes towards sexuality in Judaism and Christianity between the 3rd century BCE and the end of the 1st century. Offering a detailed analysis of each of the texts, it aims to put them in their historical and canonical contexts before focusing on the study of sexuality, marriage and intermarriage. These are 300 plus heavily annotated and detailed pages that would gladden the heart of any scholar interested in these early and complex (and sometimes fragmented) apocryphal texts. The book also offers an extensive bibliography and two indices, and is highly recommended for academic libraries collecting in the areas of apocryphal literature, the Greco-Roman period, and human sexuality.

Yaffa Weisman, Hebrew Union College-JIR, Los Angeles, CA

This readable, compact book consists of two parts. In the first, Lyke describes the theology of love in the Hebrew Bible by outlining the “prophetic critique” in Hosea, Jeremiah, Nahum, and Ezekiel. He then explores the representation of the temple as a woman and the imagery of women, wells, water, and wisdom. In the second part of the book, Lyke gives a brief overview of early Jewish and Christian interpretation of the Song of Songs as found in the Targum, Midrash Rabbah, and Origen’s Homily and Commentary on the Song.

This work is important to those interested in biblical theology and the history of biblical interpretation; it has interesting implications for Jewish-Christian dialogue. Lyke moves from the sexually explicit nature of the Song to a discussion of the theology of love. In Second Temple Judaism the Song is understood as an allegory describing God’s love for Israel; in early Christianity it is interpreted as describing Christ’s love for the Church. Both religious traditions see elements of renewal, restoration, and redemption—“the consummate expression of the theology of love” in the Song. At times, there are gaps and jumps in Lyke’s argument, but his clear chapter summaries help to keep the reader on track. Lyke mentions topics that warrant further discussion such as the “nakedness-exposed motif” and the later associations of wisdom and Torah with the Greek concept logos. Recommended for academic and larger synagogue libraries.

Beth A. Bidlack, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL


This anthology of Yiddish folksongs from “the mouth of the people” is a posthumous edition primarily prepared by Ruth Rubin nearly 20 years ago. The YIVO Archive, which received the near-finished manuscript of this book among her materials, is releasing it with her notations intact. While the folk nature of Yiddish song means that true origins will never be definitively ascertained, the value of this anthology lies in its stark originality. Music from informants has not been altered by “adaptation, standardization, and harmonization” typical of other publications. The layout of the book indicates that it can serve as a musician’s performing edition. The pages open nicely, with the music and text printed in clear, large type for easy reading. The songs contain transliterations and translations of the texts, with references to other editions, variations of the song in other books, or original Yiddish. As with many other Yiddish song collections, this one is broken down by topic, such as love songs, lullabies, weddings and marriage, dancing, Hasidic nigunim or anti-Hasidic songs. Also included are excellent essays in the introduction, a bibliography, a list of publications of Ruth Rubin, and an index of first lines of the songs. Included with the book is a CD re-release of the 1964 Folkways album, “Jewish Life: The Old Country.” All songs on the CD are sung a cappella by various singers, with only one instrumental piece. Selections in differing styles come from many sources and places. Highly recommended for all.

Judith S. Pinnolis, Brandeis University, Boston, MA


Professor Neusner is a leading scholar in Jewish studies. This book is a collection of essays, written for a variety of periodicals between 1962 and 1999, which express his opinions about Jewish communal life. The author’s aim is to show that they are still relevant today.

Although I disagree with Professor Neusner on many issues, I find his writing stimulating and his criticism highly relevant. I can only illustrate my point by quotations, “Jews in the West tend to be more concerned with self than society.” Defining Zionism, he states, “Though you do not have to go and live there, it is a mark of piety to feel guilty for not living there.” When asked why his academic specialty is the Talmud, he answered, “But when I started learning Talmud, I was just stunned by it... I never wanted to do anything else, and I never did.”

The book includes some excellent material, but since it is a collection of essays it can be repetitive. Furthermore, a minor point, but I fail to understand why a book written by a Jew primarily for a Jewish audience uses B.C. and A.D. in conjunction with dates.

On the paperback copy Suzanne Neusner supplied the cover illustration combining Jewish and American themes in a highly imaginative manner. My congratulations!!

Chaim Seymour, Bar-Ilan University, Israel


In a time of increasing religious polarization, a work that promotes interfaith dialogue and understanding is most welcome. Rabbi Daniel F. Polish brings readers the first volume in the Center for Religious Inquiry Series, which explores spiritual matters in order to promote understanding of various faith traditions. The center is based at St. Bartholomew’s Church in New York City, but has programs operating in churches and synagogues in other cities.

Rabbi Polish has chosen four scholars representing modern theological thought, two Christians and two Jews: Søren Kierkegaard, Paul Tillich, Martin Buber, and Abraham Joshua Heschel. Each of these men focuses on the personal rather than the doctrinal aspects of his religion and the experiential rather than the received. By examining their treatment of the Bible in general and the story of Abraham in particular, he finds common threads that unite rather than divide religious traditions. Rabbi Polish examines the way the scholars approach the limits of human understanding, the ability of the finite mind to comprehend God, the language used to speak about God, and the interpretation of religious symbols as an acknowledgment of God.

This very accessible, thought-provoking introduction to four great religious thinkers will be an excellent discussion guide for adult education courses and interfaith dialogue. Academic, public, and synagogue libraries will want it for their collections.

Barbara M. Bibel, Oakland Public Library, Oakland, CA; Congregation Netivot Shalom, Berkeley, CA

This book is a compilation of the many articles that journalist Rifka Rosenwein wrote for her monthly column in *The Jewish Week*. For seven years she chronicled her personal life as a mother, juggling her numerous responsibilities with three kids, carpools, soccer games, job deadlines, Shabbat, and holidays. With humor and a critical eye for the day-to-day nuances, she relates the pleasures and challenges of life. Her subjects range from the experiences of being a child of Holocaust survivors to her life in suburban New Jersey in a close-knit, modern Orthodox community. She writes of the stress and reaction to the New York terrorist attack on 9/11 and of the day-to-day violence and uncertainty of life in Israel during the second intifada. She also shares with her readers her cancer diagnosis, which ultimately cut her life short at age 42. Living on “cancer time,” her perception of life is challenged. This is a sensitive book that will resonate with a large audience (mostly female readers), who will identify with the many facets of a Jewish woman’s life. The touching afterword was written by Barry Lichtenberg, Rifka’s husband and partner in life. The book is recommended for all synagogue, community center, and public libraries.

*Sonia Smith Silva, McGill University, Canada*


Sol Roth believes that the covenant between the Jewish people and God is a one-sided unconditional commitment. In this philosophical book he tries to prove, through logical analysis, that Jewish ethics and Jewish morality are obligations that exist on their own and are independent of each other. He does not achieve his goal. In fact, in certain instances the author seems to make a stronger argument for the functional interdependence of these two domains. Is an observant Jew a moral and ethical human being by definition? Jewish morality contains rules of justice and mercy. Judaism assigns priority to the rules of mercy over the rules of justice. Jewish ethics, on the other hand, defines the rules that pertain to the achievement of individual happiness. The Jewish religion, in principle, gives more importance to obligations (mitzvot or commandments) than to transcendentinal theological beliefs. In *The Jewish Idea of Ethics and Morality* Sol Roth illuminates the fundamentals of Judaism. He examines The Social Covenant, The Guaranator, Justice and Mercy, The Right and the Good, Rationality, The Pursuit of Excellence, Human Dignity, Joy, Truth, Humility, Reverence, Religion and Morality. He points out the uniqueness of the Jewish approach to the above issues and contrasts it to other philosophies. The book has an instructive introduction, short conclusion, sparse footnotes, and an index. The writing is hard to follow: run-on sentences are common, and many key concepts are not consistently defined. The book is appropriate for academic philosophers and their students.

*Nira G. Wolfe, Highland Park, IL*


Albert Einstein is best known as a theoretical physicist whose theory of relativity placed him in the pantheon of brilliance. Although not an observant Jew, he maintained his original name when he emigrated from Germany in 1932 and abhorred the plight of European Jews as the Nazi regime rose to ascendency in Germany. Utilizing a meticulously collected set of both published and unpublished materials, the editors set forth in admirable detail his writings on the issues of the day, which are inextricably connected to his support for the Zionist movement and the creation of Israel.

If readers connect Einstein only to the world of science and mathematics, this volume will clearly serve to expand their horizons. Readers are introduced to Einstein’s writings on a wide range of political topics, beginning with the emergence of liberal democracy in Germany during the early 20th century, the relationship of science to politics in Germany during the interwar period, and perhaps of greatest significance, Einstein’s role in the development of nuclear energy and weaponry and the potential for its devastating effect on the globe. Einstein was, of course, involved with world luminaries, and his communications with many are included in this volume. The density of the material presented here might lead the casual reader to consign this volume to an academic library. However, its overwhelming character would also please the sophisticated segment of a large congregation library.

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


David B. Ruderman presents us with a vignette of a time and place without which our age would be difficult to imagine. We, who live in a time when Jewish-Christian dialogue flourishes and when opportunities for Jews in the larger society abound, should look back on our spiritual predecessors with great empathy even if we cannot affirm all their personal decisions.

Among those predecessors is Moses Marcus, the grandson of Glikl of Hameln, who converted to the Anglican form of Christianity in 1723 and published a pamphlet defending his decision. Marcus, living in a time of intellectual ferment, tried to find his place as a Christian in the larger world by defending the biblical Hebrew text and by teaching Christians about Judaism through his writing and tutoring. Having been won to traditional Christianity, however, he was never able to engage in the kind of creative thinking that other scholars born and raised in the church were able to effect. Nonetheless; his story, as a Jew who struggled with his convictions throughout his life, is worth examining and placing within the larger framework of his times. Ruderman does this effectively, and offers much food for thought about where we have been as Jews living in Christian society, where we are, and where we may go. I heartily recommend *Connecting the Covenants* for all academic libraries,

Jacques Faitlovitch, a Polish Ashkenazi Jew, was one of the discoverers of the Beta Israel community of Ethiopia. He was an adventurer, traveler, missionary, and scholar who devoted his life to helping the Ethiopian Jewish community survive in Ethiopia. He believed that Ethiopian Jews should remain in Ethiopia and should abandon their traditional rituals, animal sacrifices and prayers in favor of Ashkenazi “mainstream” Judaism. He traveled to France, Germany, and the United States to raise money for the education of a select group of Ethiopian boys in European Jewish ritual and Hebrew prayer. The group, after spending time in European schools, was expected to return to the primitive life in their Ethiopian villages and teach Ashkenazi Jewish ritual, prayer, and Hebrew language.

Between 1904 and 1929 Faitlovitch led seven missions to Ethiopia. He tried to establish schools in the big cities and rural areas of Ethiopia, but failed in most of his attempts. In addition to the well-researched text, Ms. Semi includes photographs of Faitlovitch, his family, and his students. Each chapter is followed by copious footnotes. Recommended for academic libraries and synagogue libraries whose patrons are greatly interested in the minute details of Faitlovitch’s work.

Iika Gordon, Beachwood, OH


Although Sicker begins with an easy-to-read introductory chapter describing the structure and canonization of the Tanakh, he admonishes the reader, “What will quickly become evident to those previously unfamiliar with rabbinic literature is the fact that virtually none of it … is designed or intended for casual perusal … In other words rabbinic literature is not designed for reading, but for study.” By chapter three the author plunges into the intricacies of Mishnah tractsates Seder Mo’ed, Seder Nashim and Seder Tohorot. This volume is a good beginning for those who wish to study Mishnah, midrash aggadah, and/or law codes and related literature. The book is clearly written and the index, footnotes and list of references assist the student in taking the next step. Recommended for academic libraries and synagogues where there are serious students of Talmud.

Merrily F. Hart, Siegal College of Judaic Studies, Cleveland, OH

Radio and the Jews examines over 100 programs from the “golden age” of radio featuring Jewish themes and characters. With extensive use of original scripts and audio recordings, the Siegels explore the ways shows such as *The Goldbergs*, *Abie’s Irish Rose*, and *The Eternal Light* influenced popular notions of Jews—many of whom were newly-arrived immigrants. The authors begin with an examination of Jewish involvement in the early development of network radio and its programming, including a look at the careers of William S. Paley at CBS and David Sarnoff at NBC. Of particular interest is the discussion of the use of radio as a tool for promoting anti-Semitism, notably by Gerald L.K. Smith, Father Charles Coughlin, and Charles Lindberg. The authors also note how Jewish organizations used the airwaves to counter such attacks. Also of interest is the discussion regarding the controversy surrounding the use of Yiddish dialect and the vaudeville roots of early radio programs and performers. A CD of program excerpts accompanies the book; a bibliography and an appendix providing a list of scripts and audio recordings and suggestions for locating them, make this book a useful guide for researchers and collectors alike. The Siegels are collectors of old radio broadcasts, scripts, books, and ephemera and co-authors of *A Resource Guide to the Golden Age of Radio and Radio Scripts in Print*. Recommended for public and synagogue libraries.

Sheila L. Darrow, Central State University, Wilberforce, OH


Designed for families, this inexpensively produced picture book focuses on the joy and value of living in Israel. Mainly photographs, with explanatory captions and some “feel-good” text, the book explores family and school life, holiday and Shabbat celebration, the beauty of nature, favorite historic sights, spiritual life etc. The photographs are attractive but the inexpensive paper and production lower their quality. Although pleasant to page through, better photos and commentary are available on many of the website slide shows devoted to Israel.

Merrily F. Hart, Siegal College of Judaic Studies, Cleveland, OH


Taitz asserts that many assume that “only those who experienced and survived concentration camps were true survivors.” In this extensively-researched two-volume set, she demonstrates that Europe’s Jews survived many other atrocities including the separation of children from their parents, hiding under harsh conditions, and the constant threat of danger. An introduction reviews the political climate and events from 1933 through 1945, and a chronology lists key dates. There are 278 entries that often describe members of the same family. The entries range from the famous, like Elie Weisel, Primo Levi, and Senator Tom Lantos, to the not-so-famous, and include experiences from over 25 countries. Rescuers such as Chiune Sugihara, the Japanese diplomat who issued transit visas in Lithuania, are included, as is Raoul Wallenberg, whose story has been well documented elsewhere. Taitz used a variety of sources including websites, personal interviews, articles, memoirs, and other Holocaust encyclopedias, and she includes many photographs of the subjects, taken before, during, and after World War II.

There is a wealth of information in these volumes, and the detailed subject, name, and country indexes facilitate its use. The personal stories are fascinating. The hefty price makes this an optional purchase for most libraries, though it should be in the collection of every Holocaust resource center.

Kathe Pinchuck, Congregation Beth Sholom, Teaneck, NJ


The author relates her story, starting as a child in the Holocaust, surviving, marrying, starting a family in postwar Poland and her subsequent emigration to Australia. She also tells her husband’s story and the text includes the letters from her father-in-law written to his sons in 1944 when they served in the Polish army. This title provides a clear and lively picture of the author’s environment and most certainly has much to tell readers who have not lived through these historical periods. The detail of the account is occasionally confusing, but these details will become more and more important as time passes and the historical period discussed becomes more and more alien to readers. I recommend the text to both Holocaust specialists and the casual reader.

Chaim Seymour, Bar-Ilan University, Israel
her book is intelligent, clear, sober, and non-polemical. Recommended for all libraries.

Shmuel Ben-Gad, George Washington University, Washington, DC


This profusely-illustrated book is published in conjunction with an exhibition of the same name at the Museum of American Folk Art in New York. That exhibition will travel in 2008 to the Fenimore Art Museum at the New York State Historical Association in Cooperstown. Researching remnants of lost wooden synagogues in Warsaw’s Jewish Museum, artist Murray Zimiles discovered, in an incidental conversation, that carved, decorated wooden decalogues, similar to the one before his very eyes, existed in the U.S. Further research indicated that the craftsmen who decorated the pulpits, arks, and other synagogue elements immigrated to the U.S in the 19th century and continued their craft, making trade signs, religious decorations, cigar store Indians, and spectacular carousel horses. American folk art has neglected Jewish American folk artists and, although many famous collections include carvings by these Jewish immigrants, most are neither identified nor classified as “Jewish.” Zimiles’s book will remedy these serious omissions. This beautiful book includes a foreword by Gerald Wertkin, director emeritus of the Museum of American Folk Art, an interesting but overly annotated essay by Dr. Vivian Mann, bibliographical references, and an index. It is important to synagogue libraries and collectors of Americana, as well as to museums.

Rita Feigenbaum, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL


The title of this book gives the reader a clue to the content. The basic idea of a life-transforming diet is simply stated, but the subtitle is unwieldy and so too is the text of this book. The author is knowledgeable in many aspects of nutrition and has combined the principles of healthful eating expressed by Rambam in various places in his writings with information taken from many other sources. In so doing, he has taken what might have been a very neat and useful thesis and turned it into an encyclopedia of nutrition and health with no index. It reminds me of the Encyclopædia Britannica’s Macropedia/Micropedia, which has a very idiosyncratic structure and is difficult to use. If Mr. Zulberg had held to the initial statement of Rambam’s ideas with his own very practical suggestions for implementation, he would have created a book that was both useful and elegant. His main principle is simply to eat less, more often during the day, exercise, and drink water at the right times. Because of the many digressions, this book loses its impact and is instead a complex and less user-friendly volume. With the myriad diet advice materials on the market, it is a pity that the excellent kernel of truth presented here is mired in unnecessary complexity. Not recommended.

Marion M. Stein, A. J. Heschel High School, NY


In his efforts to fulfill the important mitzvot of saying kaddish, Rabbi Zweig, an Orthodox rabbi, has collected personal stories from many Jews of varying backgrounds who have found themselves saying kaddish in extraordinary circumstances around the world. These inspiring stories are not unlike those in Chicken Soup for the Jewish Soul. The desire to say kaddish has caused many minyanim to be created in some of the most unusual places, such as an old warehouse in Brussels, the top of a ski lift in Colorado, in Idaho Falls, Idaho and, in our fast-paced lives, in the air on a Jet Blue flight. In addition, Rabbi Zweig gives a detailed explanation of the kaddish prayer and customs surrounding it, as well as a glossary of terms for easy reference. Recommended.

Susan Berman, Temple Oheb Shalom, Baltimore, MD

SOUND RECORDINGS

With this issue of the Newsletter, reviews of sound recordings will become a regular feature, including music and spoken word. We have listed the format and price in the citation, but many of these recordings can also be purchased as digital downloads, sometimes less expensively than the compact disc, through itunes, emusic and similar websites.


Tzvi Avni is a distinguished member of the “second generation” of Israeli composers. Born in Germany in 1927, as a child
he moved to Israel where he received his musical training with Paul Ben-Haim and Mordecai Seter. He also studied in the United States with Aaron Copeland and Lukas Foss and at the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center.

This recording includes works from throughout Avni’s career, from his early Mediterranean style of the 60s to his mature works at the beginning of the 21st century. Avni’s music is both universal and Jewish-Israeli. The sources of inspiration include paintings, classical composers, and events from the composer’s life. Although the compositions make few overt references to Jewish melodies, their inspiration includes Jewish texts and themes. For example, *Epitaph* (*Piano sonata no. 2, 1974–1979*) includes a section that has as its spiritual starting point “A Tale of Seven Beggars” by Rabbi Nachman from Bratzlav.

The performers are Arie Vardi and his students, past and present. Each meets the technical demands of his or her pieces well, with occasional flashes of brilliance. I especially enjoyed “From My Diary” (2001) performed by Daniel Gottler. In the movement, “Heroic Fiddling,” a piece based on Paul Klee’s painting of the same title, one can easily image being in the presence of a virtuoso violinist. Highly recommended for libraries that collect classical music.

*Paul A. Miller, American Jewish University, Bel Air, CA*

**Hajdu, André. Book of Challenges. Tel Aviv: Israel Music Institute, 2006. 1 compact disc (65 min.) $12.00 IMI-CD-14.**

While much of Israeli composer André Hajdu’s music is a reflection of his Jewish identity, the *Book of Challenges* might be seen as a representation of his Hungarian heritage. Indeed, it is difficult to listen to this collection of piano miniatures without being reminded of Béla Bartók’s *Mikrokosmos*, the *Etudes* of György Ligeti or the *Games* of György Kurtág whom Hajdu consulted on this work. These works, written over the period of 14 years, developed from the composer’s teaching of young adults at a school for gifted students in Jerusalem. He used brief sketches as a springboard for improvisations that would bounce back and forth between teacher and student. These improvisations served as the building blocks for these pieces. The work is divided into three parts. The first 19 pieces are concerned with technical challenges particular to the piano and specific techniques. The next 13 revolve around various rhythmic ideas, and the remaining pieces are inspired by theoretical and historical concerns. Many of the works are pastiches of composers of the past: Scarlatti, Rameau, Beethoven, Ives and Ligeti.

The five performers are young Israeli musicians, most of them still in high school when the recording was made in 2001. These short works are clever and engaging—fun in the spirit of Haydn or Ives. All of them are under three minutes in duration, most of them under two. Potentially a good introduction to modern classical music.

*Daniel Scheide, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL*

**Israel Unleashed: The Very Best Metal and Rock from the Holy Land. Studio City, CA; Jewish Music Group, 2007. 1 compact disc (77 min.) $15.98.**

This CD, a compilation of what claims to be the “very best” Israel has to offer in the genres of heavy metal and rock music, leaves the listener hard-pressed to find any redeeming qualities in it at all. The name itself is misleading; one expects that Israeli music would be in Hebrew. Although there is a good representation of the diversity of types of heavy metal and rock music on this CD, there is nothing distinctly Israeli about it; there is a single track in Hebrew. This is disappointing, but not as much as the fact that these bands seem to have only taken the worst aspects of the music of the American and British bands they have been influenced by and put them together on one disc. There are a few songs that are enjoyable (most notably “Heartbreaker” by Crossfire) but not nearly enough to buy the whole CD. If this is the best of the Israeli heavy metal and rock bands, they should stick to producing other genres of music. Too narrow to be a recommended for any library.

*Shoshana Hurwitz, Hurwitz Indexing, St. Louis, MO*


This CD claims to be “… one step in the long, arduous task of rescuing … synagogue music from otherwise near-certain oblivion.” This is a puzzling ambition. Though cantorial music is certainly in a state of flux and challenge, it is far from oblivion. Dozens of recordings of classical cantors are for sale; young people are graduating from cantorial school; several websites are devoted to chazzanut; and the rock-star status of cantors that was common in the inter-war period has been revived in the case of at least one cantor, Yitzchak Meir Heligott. In any case, it would be impossible to encapsulate the entire cantorial tradition in one series of CDs. Rather, this is a sampling of cantorial music, emphasizing choral settings with featured solos and piano. Sholom Kalib, the director of this project, calls his choir “the only choir of its kind in the world today,” but in fact, there are several male Jewish choirs in Europe. The tenor soloists featured here are all a pleasure to hear and it is important to note that theirs is not the histrionic, operatic, vibrato-laden solo style that many American Jews associate with chazzanut. Unfortunately, the soprano boys section of the choir is, for the most part, quite painfully off-key. This is a significant detraction from the beauty of the music. The selections are composed or arranged by Kalib, as well as other prominent composers such as Louis Lewandowski. This collection belongs in libraries that are collecting comprehensively in the area of chazzanut.

*Beth Dwoskin, Proquest Information and Learning, Ann Arbor, MI*


Listeners could not be faulted for mistaking this 19th- and 20th-century synagogue music for 18th-century Catholic or Lutheran church music. As Spanish and Portuguese conversos returned to Judaism and settled in Amsterdam, they rebuilt hazzan practically from scratch, developing a new liturgical tradition that relied heavily on the music of the Italian Baroque. The music on these discs was meticulously researched and arranged for chorus and instrumental ensemble by hazzan Daniel Halffon and composer Raymond Goldstein. The discs are accompanied
by a lavishly illustrated hardcover booklet, over 100 pages, containing detailed program notes and essays on the communities and musical traditions represented, complete with generous bibliographies. Even if these recordings were of mediocre quality, they would be extremely valuable for musicological research alone. Thankfully, this is far from the case. The performances and recording quality are nothing short of exquisite. The arrangements are beautiful; (one can occasionally detect harmonies that are not stylistically appropriate, but if one is not too particular about historical accuracy, these moments give the music some welcomed harmonic variety.) It goes without saying that institutions with programs in Jewish music or ethnomusicology should purchase this set, but any library with a sound recording collection would find Kamti Lehallel to be a valuable academic resource as well as a collection of beautiful music.

Daniel Scheide, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL


Fraidy Katz sings 13 Yiddish songs, with instrumental accompaniment and backup vocals by the Lonesome Brothers. This enjoyable collection was recorded in November 2005; the last bonus song, Vilne, was recorded in 1992. The CD comes with an informative booklet: a forward by Fraidy Katz, details on the performers, and lyrics in Yiddish, in Yiddish transliteration, and in English translation. Notes provide background information on the songwriters in addition to interesting information about the Yiddish music world. Fraidy Katz is gifted with a clear, warm voice and clear and easy-to-understand diction. The innovative modern arrangements of the songs inject them with new rhythms and upbeat arrangements. The songs reflect the life of Jews in Eastern Europe, be it in Alexander Olshanetsky’s longings in the piece, “Vilna,” or Fraidy Katz’s arrangement of “The Eternal Question.” A valuable addition to Jewish folk music collections in private, public, and academic libraries. Appropriate for all ages.

Nira G. Wolfe, Highland Park, IL


Although Professor Reuven Kimelman’s previous publications have been aimed at a scholarly audience, this series of lectures will appeal to anyone interested in a Jewish understanding of the Bible. Kimelman introduces the biblical text being discussed in each lecture by reading it in full, then asking the listener to consider a number of key questions. In an approach similar to that of Nechama Leibowitz, he asks listeners to pause the disc and attempt to answer the questions for themselves before delving into the material. The individual lectures are grouped into larger themes, such as the role of leadership in the Bible.

While Professor Kimelman’s interpretations are all rooted in traditional sources, he does not specifically cite them. This is likely done so as not to distract the listener, particularly those unfamiliar with the standard commentators. The recordings are accompanied by “mind maps,” organizational diagrams used by educators to enhance creativity or memory. While the diagrams are interesting, they do not add a great deal to the lectures. Citations for the source material may have been a better choice for inclusion.

These lectures will primarily be of interest to synagogue libraries of any denomination. University libraries won’t find these lectures appropriate for their biblical studies departments, but they may find them useful for their education students as a model for school and community teaching. While I strongly recommend these lectures, my only caveat is the price; $220 seems a bit excessive when comparing this product to audio lectures of comparable length and quality.

Daniel Scheide, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL


This is an exquisite collection of eight short cuts: four nigunim, interspersed with a version of “Bei mir bist du shein,” a freilach, a klezmer dance piece, and a slightly longer “Dance of the rebbitzen” by the late, respected composer George Perelman. The trio arrangements are ideal for the soulful, melodic nigunim as well as the more joyous freilech. All of the playing is masterful, especially the piano work of Yaron Gershovsky, the musical director of the Manhattan Transfer. The violinist at the heart of this work, Leib Levin, shows tremendous understanding of Jewish music. His upper register is somewhat shrill but he gives the lower notes a magical warmth. There is no showiness here; the
music takes center stage. The jazz arrangements achieve a perfect fusion, avoiding the awkwardness that so often accompanies attempts to inject jazz into Jewish music. Because these pieces are short and unpretentious, they have a kind of background quality. They may not seem like concert pieces but they command the listener's attention. The nigunim are played with a particular reverence and appreciation, and the violin substitutes well for the wordless voice. “Bei mir bist du shein” is the only piece that perhaps works better vocally. It is suitable for all Jewish libraries that are collecting recorded music.

Beth Dwoskin, Proquest Information and Learning, Ann Arbor, MI


Trying to fit Levitikus’s self-titled debut CD into one genre was a futile task from the beginning and deemed impossible by the time the last track played. For those who enjoy both variety and uniqueness in a band’s sound, you are in for a real treat. Levitikus blends pop, rock, alternative, metal, and more in tracks that are partly English, partly Hebrew, and partly a mixture of both, even providing a nice variety of both Jewish-themed material and mainstream pop/rock. Overall their sound is more mainstream than is typical of “Jewish” bands, and it is obvious that their influences stem from the best of American bands in each of the genres as well as other crossover American-Jewish bands. If you like American rock and Jewish-flavored lyrics, you are going to love Levitikus. Recommended for inclusion in most types of Jewish libraries.

Shoshana Hurwitz, Hurwitz Indexing, St. Louis, MO


Those who love Sephardic music, and those that love contemporary composition will enjoy the pleasant combination of violin and guitar that graces this CD. Composed by Jorge Liderman in a highly accessible instrumental style, these new compositions are interesting arrangements of familiar Sephardic tunes performed in a sensitive manner by Matt Gould and Beth Schneider. Liderman organized the 46 short character pieces in a song cycle with a harmonic structure that progresses by fourths, and occasionally changes to the dominant or parallel minor, even although most of the pieces retain the flavor of modal harmonic structures. Some of the musical ideas and textures repeat in various songs, such as an occasional returning motive. Many sections, based on traditional Sephardic songs from Isaac Levy’s Chants Judeo-Espagnols, have very quiet and calming effects. While the violin is usually the dominant thematic instrument, in some songs, the guitar carries the familiar melodies. The individual arrangements are sophisticated, representing different aspects of Spain, but never overbearing in their reshaping. Liederan composed rhythmically interesting segments, with some polytextic textures. This CD is an important example of current thinking by Jewish composers who are using native Jewish musical materials to expand Jewish composed art music. While this is not necessarily a CD for a core Jewish music library collection, it is quite nice for home

and synagogue collections, and those libraries collecting Israeli or South American contemporary composers.

Judith S. Pinnolis, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA


Recorded Books’ Modern Scholar series likens itself to a university, offering courses taught by university professors. The Dead Sea Scrolls is a course you would re-arrange your schedule for, but with the convenience of the audio format, you won’t need to. There is so much controversy and confusion, both academic and sensationalistic, surrounding the scrolls, that it is often difficult to assess the value of the overflow of available resources. Professor Schiffman helps the listener sort through this labyrinth of information, highlighting legitimate scholarly debate and dismissing theories that are not worthy of consideration. He presents his ideas clearly, never talking down to or confusing the audience. Schiffman clearly outlines where his own opinions deviate from the common view, and does not neglect plausible but lesser-known theories, even those he disagrees with. This is a refreshing approach, especially in an area as hotly debated as the Dead Sea Scrolls. He also makes a strong case justifying the great interest in the Scrolls, both in academic and popular spheres. The discs come with an illustrated booklet containing a summary of each lecture. Considering the high level of scholarship and Schiffman’s deep concern regarding accurate information on the scrolls, it’s disappointing that the accompanying bibliography is so meager. This is a negligible flaw considering the format. Highly recommended for all Jewish libraries.

Daniel Scheide, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL

Lenny Solomon, lead singer of the parody band Shlock Rock and one of the most diverse and influential artists of the Jewish music world, has once again produced a winner in his latest solo effort, *Osher V’Osher*. This CD is a delightful mix of new original tracks, almost entirely in Hebrew, sounding more Israeli than ever since Lenny’s *aliyah*, and remakes of old favorites. He includes four updated versions of songs he recorded in the mid-80s with his previous band Kesher, a cover of the Mordechai Ben David classic, “Someday,” which has become an anthem at NCSY shabbatons, an upbeat instrumental track, and one tune from his most recent Shlock Rock CD. *Osher V’Osher* represents the best of Lenny past, present and future while retaining that magic that has kept him one of the frontrunners of Jewish music for over two decades. It is great listening both for those who are familiar with his older music and for the younger generation. Highly recommended for inclusion in public and Jewish libraries.

Shoshana Hurwitz, Hurwitz Indexing, St. Louis, MO

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**Books And Audio Received**

*These titles will not be reviewed in the AJL Newsletter for reasons of space, scope, or date of publication. They are listed here as a courtesy to the publishers and a service to AJL readers. The materials themselves are donated to libraries.*


Harris, David. *In the Trenches: Selected Speeches and Writings of an America Jewish Activist v. 4*. Jersey City: KTAV, 2006.


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**See you in Cleveland …**

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**CEU Class to be Given on Monday, June 23**

**Valuing Libraries: A Program for Library Advocacy**

Presented by Joanne P. Roukens, director of the Highlands Regional Library Cooperative and Librarian of the Year in 2007.

After this program, participants will be able to:

- Define what is valuable to customers and funders/stakeholders
- Execute a seven-part strategic process
- Identify their library’s “Value Proposition”
- Quantify their library’s value
- Identify Your Funders and Stakeholders

Learn how to:

- Construct Your Argument
- Talk to Power
- Create Your “Elevator Speech”
- Write an Impact Letter
- Market and Create a Brand
- Identify advocates

The course will include tools for taking action:

- Valuing Libraries Toolkit
- Create “Value of Services” Document
- Go Advocate!

Fee: $45.00, payable to AJL. Participants will earn .5 CEU from the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Please send your registration form and check to Leslie Monchar, 2 White Meadow Road, Rockaway, NJ 07866.

**CEU Registration Form**

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Be-Kol Ram: Focus on Jewish Music

DAVID SCHEIDE

With the resurgence of interest in klezmer around the world, it is no longer unusual to hear non-Jewish musicians playing this Jewish music. The Czech band Klec, clarinetist Don Byron, as well as scores of musicians recording on John Zorn's Tzadik label are performing Jewish music, not because of any cultural ties, but due to a deep, abiding love for the music. There being nothing new under the sun, we can easily find precedent in the classical music of the last century.

Dmitri Shostakovich wrote a great deal of music drawing upon Jewish themes, a great act of courage in the anti-Semitic climate of post-war Soviet Union. In Jewish folk music, Shostakovich found a surface of joy with undercurrents of sadness and resistance. While his second Piano Trio and first Violin Concerto evoke Jewish folk music melodically, he also drew upon Jewish texts. Political considerations forced him to delay publication of his song cycle From Jewish Poetry for seven years. His 13th Symphony is a setting of Evgeny Yevtushenko's poem “Babi Yar,” commemorating the massacre of over 33,000 Ukrainian Jews by the Nazis in less than two days. After the premiere, Soviet authorities objected that non-Jewish victims were not mentioned in the work, forcing Yevtushenko to revise his poem.

Despite maintaining a number of personal and professional associations with Jews, Igor Stravinsky’s private correspondence was peppered with anti-Semitic slurs. After the premiere of his Symphony of Psalms, he vigorously denied any Jewish influence on the work, later changing his story when the association was more fashionable. His late work Abraham and Isaac, dedicated to the Jewish people and the state of Israel, is a setting of the biblical story in its original Hebrew. Despite being a strictly serial work, it evokes strong echoes of traditional cantillation melodies.

While much of Scottish composer James McMillan’s music reflects his Catholic faith, in 1997-1998, he wrote two major works on Jewish subjects. Raising Sparks, a song cycle using texts inspired by the classic Hasidic text Me’or Enayim by Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl. McMillan’s second String Quartet is subtitled Why is This Night Different? The composer felt that the Mah Nishtah of the Passover seder perfectly captured themes already present in his work: celebration amidst violence and suffering, as well as reflections on childhood.

Although he was frequently subjected to false “accusations” of Jewish ancestry, Maurice Ravel did not hesitate to compose Yiddish songs, in French translation, as well as a setting of the Kaddish in the original Aramaic. Iannis Xenakis, who lost an eye as a member of the anti-Nazi resistance in Greece, wrote several Judaic works, including the vocal work N’shima, which uses Hebrew texts from the work of Nachman of Bratslav. Luciano Berio had strong ties to the state of Israel, as evidenced in much of his later works. These composers all found some resonance within Jewish tradition to inspire their music, and their remarkable work serves to blur our definition of “Jewish music” while greatly enriching it.