The Cleveland Convention through a Veteran’s Eyes

RITA FRISCHER

I’ve been to Cleveland twice, both times for AJL conventions. The first time was memorable in that I arrived safely but my luggage never did. Never. It contained all the materials for my scheduled workshop along with my clothes. I stayed up much of the night making new charts and on Sunday morning Ralph Simon found me an open department store. After pulling together a convention wardrobe in a record 50 minutes, I got back to the hotel in time for my presentation, vow ing to stick to carry-on luggage in future.

This year’s convention was memorable too. By now, I’ve been to almost every AJL convention since my first one in San Francisco in 1978. Over the years, it’s become harder to pinpoint what stands out from each experience. So, before starting to write this article, I made the mistake of going back to some of my old presidential convention reports in Library Light, the AJLSC newsletter, to jump-start myself. I almost panicked. Obviously, I had gone to every session, written up every meeting, taken notes ad infinitum and passed all of them on as infinitely valuable. Facts were mostly what I absorbed and transmitted back then. But not now.

This time, it’s the wonderful sense of continuity in AJL, the people, the electricity, and the sense of purpose and belonging, which seem most important. Since I revisited Cleveland one week after we finished moving from our California home of many years to Seattle, Washington, I was particularly vulnerable, perhaps, to events and people that tied past to present. This convention offered several such triggers.

The first was seeing Ellen Frankel again. Her work at JPS had long been important to me, especially her effort to promote more children’s books, an uphill battle but a noble one. Next was seeing and spending time again with Marcia Posner, a very special friend and colleague whose work on children’s literature had inspired me as it did so many others. Our long distance friendship grew directly from my involvement in AJL.

Serving on a panel with Adaire Klein and Dr. June Cummins about Sydney Taylor’s literary legacy was both an honor and a trip into the past for me. I was chair of the AJL Children’s Book Award Committee in 1978 when, at my first convention, we proposed renaming it the Sydney Taylor Award after the author who had died in February of that year. And I was deeply moved the next year by having Ralph Taylor at the awards table when I presented the first Sydney Taylor Award to Doris Orgel, for The Devil in Vienna.

Cleveland’s special and innovative day-long Celebration of Jewish Children’s Literature, which marked the award’s 40th anniversary, was extraordinary. Never have I seen three YA authors (Sonia Levitin, Carol Matas and Margo Rabb) more effortlessly and honestly connect with an audience of librarians, to the extent that we all decided a box of tissues would have to be included at any such future meeting. Sid Fleishman as keynoter was, as always, a delight, and should be termed a national treasure.

But the best thing about revisiting Cleveland happened the first day as I walked the hall from the exhibits area toward the elevators. A young woman walked toward me and I thought I was seeing things. But I wasn’t. Rachel had been my front desk assistant at Sinai Temple Library for a couple of years before going over to work for Rick Burke at the University of Judaism. I heard she met someone and married; then I lost track. But here she was, married, with three children, working on building a Judaic library in the town where the family now lives, and happily attending her first AJL convention. When she thanked me for all she had learned and told me how happy she was working in her library, I flashed back to San Francisco and my first convention. I thought of Anne Kirshenbaum and Nettie Frishman, of Barbara Leff, Hazel Karp, and the countless other mentors, examples, influences, and friends I’ve been blessed with through AJL since then. For them, for young Rachel, for this yearly assembly, for being able to be still part of it, for all of you, I am grateful.

A First-Time Attendee’s Perspective

DEBBIE COLODNY

What a wonderful four days! This was my first AJL convention and I commend Wendy Wasman, Andrea Davidson, and the entire Cleveland chapter and national board for doing an outstanding job. Before I became a librarian, I was a synagogue education director for over 20 years. I attended the National Association of Temple Educators’ conventions and I must tell you that in my 20+ conventions I never learned quite as much, never met so many knowledgeable individuals, and never felt quite so welcome as I did at AJL.

I felt so proud to be a brand new member of the Sydney Taylor Book Award committee because the caliber of presentations offered by STBA members past and present was so outstanding. I had no idea that Wednesday’s offerings were experimental because the program was flawless—kudos to Rachel Kamin and the STBA Committee. I was absolutely star-struck meeting all the authors! It was also great to be able to put faces with names that I see on Hasafran and especially in our STBA emails. I’ve been telling everyone what a worthwhile, fun convention it was and I’m looking forward to helping with next year’s convention as part of the Chicago chapter.

Convention coverage continues on p. 27.
President’s Message

SUSAN DUBIN

Shalom aleichem! The outstanding Cleveland convention is now a pleasant memory, but on behalf of the whole organization I want to thank the hardworking Cleveland group led by Wendy Wasman, Andrea Davidson, Linda Silver, Marcia Klein, and so many others! You all made us feel especially welcome. Everything was so well organized with exceptional programs.

We are grateful to the 2006-2008 board and council members for their dedication and unstinting effort on behalf of AJL. Past president Laurel Wolfson has led the way in pushing AJL to grow and thrive. I consider it both an honor and a privilege to have been elected AJL president, and I will strive to follow along the leadership path that has been set by so many. I look forward to working with all of you, our members, AJL’s most valuable resource. The organizational chart on the website has an email link to each officer and chair. Please let us know how the board and council can best serve you.

This July, I started an AJL blog, People of the Books, at www.jewishlibraries.org/blog, as a means of communicating with our membership more often. Please check it out for news and views and post your comments. I would love to share some of your AJL experiences, too. Send me information and I will post it.

One of the mandates given to this board and council at last year’s midwinter meeting was to form a committee to re-evaluate our mission and goals and make sure our organization is truly meeting the needs of the membership. Etta Gold and Rachel Leket-Mor are chairing this committee. In conjunction with the Public Relations Committee, led by Heidi Estrin, they are using some of the excellent resources provided in the Valuing Libraries Continuing Education class at the convention to come up with a “value proposition” that defines who we are, and highlights how we meet the needs of our members. A search is being conducted for a consultant to help us in this important task.

One of my goals is to provide more services for our members. I have been speaking to some of the vendors we use and hope to arrange for member discounts. So far, I have established a discount program with Kar-Ben Publishers and Pipsypanny and Devora Press. [Details appear on the next page—Ed.] I have also contacted Demco to renew our discount program and am negotiating with Mackin, Baker and Taylor, and Ingram to see what I can arrange. Hopefully I will have more to report at a later date.

Although all of our council positions are currently filled, we do need someone interested in taking over as Proceedings chair. Joan Biella is mounting the 2008 convention proceedings, but she has asked to step down as of January. Also, many committees are looking to add people interested in taking a more active role in the organization. Please contact the chair of a committee you wish to join.

The 2009 Chicago Convention Committee, led by Shoshanah Seidman, Rose Novil, and Cheryl Banks, is hard at work in planning next summer’s big event. The convention will start July 5th and be held at the Sheraton Chicago Hotel and Towers. Plan to be there!

With all best wishes for a happy and healthy new year in 5769.

Dorothy Orenstein Memorial Fund

YELENA LUCKERT

The Dorothy Orenstein Memorial Fund helps our members attend their first AJL convention. Recent donations were received from: Ronda and Fred Rose, in memory of Noreen Wachs’s beloved husband Joel Libby White, in memory of Joel Wachs, husband of Noreen Wachs; and in honor of Cheryl Banks’s retirement AJL Greater Cleveland Chapter, in memory of William Herman, father of Aimee Lurie Rachel Glasser, in memory of Joel Wachs, husband of Noreen Wachs AJL Capital Area Chapter, in memory of Sally R. Kobarkin, beloved mother of Gail Shirazi; in memory of our past chapter member Dr. Edith Zober; and in memory of Sarah Brownstein, mother of Rita Kopin, AJL CAC member Sally and Robert Brown, in honor of Merrily Hart’s Life Membership Award Ellen Cole, in honor of her fellow Californians inducted as AJL Officers: Susan Dubin, David Hirsch, and Sheryl Stahl; in honor of the wonderful convention achieved by the Cleveland Chapter; in honor of Merrily Hart’s Life Membership Award; in honor of Fred Isaac’s Fanny Goldstein Merit Award; and in honor of Linda Silver’s Values Finder recognition luncheon Susan Dubin, as a mitzvah

Please consider sending a donation to the fund c/o Yelena Luckert, McKeldin Library, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742. For questions, contact 301-879-7035 or yluckert@umd.edu.
Discounts for AJL Members

As of August, three vendors have agreed to give AJL members discounts on their purchases—Kar-Ben, Pitspopany and Devora, and Mackin. The programs they propose are described below:

Kar-Ben: Kar-Ben Publishing is offering a 10% discount exclusively for AJL members available on all web orders of $5 or more at www.karben.com. Enter coupon code “AJL” at checkout. Also available is Kar-Ben’s automatic acquisitions program (ASAP—As Soon As Published). Information is on the Kar-Ben website.

Pitspopany and Devora: Purchase 6-24 books and get a 25% discount (5% more than non-AJL members). Purchase 25 or more books and get 30%. Those who enroll in the Automatic Purchase plan where books are sent as they are published with the right to exchange the ones you don’t want will receive 35% discount. If 30 AJL libraries join the automatic shipment plan, they will get the 35% off and free shipping as well as 35% off all backlist titles.

Mackin: Mackin is a book distributor. They offer many services for libraries and will provide most books including a lot of Judaica. They are offering an additional 5% over their library pricing which is about 30% of list when librarians identify themselves as members of AJL on their orders.

We have been speaking to many other vendors and hope to have more discounts to announce in the future. It really does pay to be an AJL member!

AJL Scholarship Fund

SARAH BARNARD

The AJL Scholarship Fund awards $500 to a talented library science student with an interest in pursuing a career in Judaica librarianship. For each gift, an acknowledgment card is sent to the appropriate person. It is a meaningful way to recognize simchas or honor the memory of a loved one. Your donation will always be appreciated! Send your contributions with the appropriate information. Please remember to include the addresses of those honored or remembered in order that we can notify the appropriate persons. We always have impressive candidates, and the awards will be given out at the convention in Cleveland. Please send your donation to Sarah M. Barnard, Serials Librarian, Hebrew Union College-Klau Library, 3101 Clifton Avenue, Cincinnati, OH 45220.

Have You Heard?

LIBBY K. WHITE

We just learned some happy news! Liza Stabler, AJL’s Life Membership and Fannie Goldstein Merit Award Committee chair, has become a grandmother. Her daughter gave birth to a baby boy in late August. Mazel tov to the whole family.

Anne Dublin’s short story “Degrees of Separation” will be published in the new Canadian Jewish literary periodical, Parchment Journal in November. The story is to be submitted for the Journey Prize.

Lilith Magazine reports that a film is planned, based on the life of poetess Rahel Bluwstein (1890-1930). The Russian-born Bluwstein came to Palestine to work the land during the Second Aliyah. She was a romantic figure and the love interest of several of Israel’s founding fathers. Anna Thomas, who was nominated for an Oscar for Frida, based on the life of Mexican painter Frida Kahlo, will be involved.

Empowering Judaica Librarians for the 21st Century

Mark your calendars for the 44th annual AJL Convention, July 5–9, 2009, in Chicago, Illinois. The convention will be held at the Sheraton Chicago and Towers, located right on the Chicago River, one block from Lake Michigan. Rooms will cost only $156/night (plus tax). The American Library Association’s annual meeting will be held in Chicago, immediately following ours, and our hotel is one of the ALA hotel headquarters.

Quick Facts:

- Airports: O’Hare International or Midway
- Airlines from your city: Practically all of them
- Transportation in the city: Walking, taxi, CTA El’s, and buses, trains to the suburbs
- Baseball teams: Division-leading Chicago Cubs (NL) and Chicago White Sox (AL)
- Things to do in Chicago: Too numerous to mention, but bring your families
- Weather: Perfect

At the upcoming convention, school librarians can anticipate sessions emphasizing collegial learning methodologies for librarians, teachers, and administrators. RAS opportunities will include presentations on digitization and web 2.0. We will also offer sessions on local Chicago Jewish history, Yiddish, music, art, and much more. Our exhibits will be huge so there will be plenty to learn about and to buy. Please see our “Call for Papers” in this issue for a description of how to submit your presentations for the Chicago convention.

For information about the convention, please contact the co-chairs: Cheryl Banks, at Cheryl.Banks@gmail.com; Rose Novil at rnovil@oakton.edu; or Shoshanah Seidman at sseidman@northwestern.edu.

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.
Chapter Chatter
TOBY ROSSNER

News from the Chapter Relations Committee
Submitted by Roz Reisner

Cleveland was another wonderful AJL convention; yasher koach to the Cleveland Chapter for its hard work! Irene and Roz love the convention for the opportunity it gives us to meet chapter members and hear what’s going on. Unfortunately Irene couldn’t make it this year—priority went to the arrival of her second grandchild, Anna.

Roz held the fort, and with Toby Rossner, moderated a great panel discussion How to Run an Effective Chapter, with Yelena Luckert (Washington DC), Marcie Eskin (Chicago), and Jean Letofsky (Cleveland). We also met late on Sunday evening for an informal get-together with members from established chapters and those who are interested in forming chapters. In both sessions it was very helpful to exchange ideas and learn what other chapters are doing. We’re hoping to put some of the shared ideas on the AJL website.

Please remember to send your chapter leadership changes to Irene (Irene@theseffs.net), Roz (Roz@thereisners.net) and Toby (tobyross@cox.net) so we can keep the chapters page updated on the website and can contact the current Chapter Chatter writer. If you want to establish a chapter in your area, let us know; we’ll help you get started.

Judaica Library Network of Metropolitan Chicago (JLNMC)
Submitted by Debbie Feder

We in Chicago are busy planning the 2009 AJL Annual Convention, to be held July 5-8, 2009 at the Sheraton Chicago Hotel and Towers. It’s going to be tremendous! We had a wonderful summer planning meeting where we discussed the upcoming year’s programs, including our midwinter conference, a new venture for our Chapter. We are off to a great year.

Greater Cleveland Chapter (AJL-GCC)
Submitted by Linda Silver

Planning an annual convention takes an enormous amount of time and local resources, so our chapter is just beginning to get back to normal. We have elected new officers: Andrea Davidson, president; Nina Rosner, vice president for programming; Gerry Powers Volper, recording secretary; Bonnie Shapiro, corresponding secretary; Fran Freedman, treasurer. Lee Haas will continue as editor of Reshet, the chapter newsletter, and Aimee Lurie will continue as membership chair.

Our annual meeting, delayed because of the convention, took place in late July. New officers were installed, outgoing officers Mark Weber and Wendy Wasman were thanked for their outstanding service, and the convention was reported on briefly. The rest of the evening meeting was devoted to short reviews of new books for children, teens, and adults. Annotated lists of new books were distributed and will become the basis for the Jewish Book Month lists that our chapter compiles annually.

Besides new officers, other changes are in store for AJL-GCC. Wendy Wasman has taken a job as librarian of the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, a position she held in the past. Anyone whose path crossed with Wendy’s before or during the convention knows what an extraordinary librarian, planner, and organizer she is, so her departure from the Judaic library community is a major loss! Happier news for AJL comes from Lee Haas, librarian at Temple Emanu El, who reports that the temple’s new synagogue, with a marvelous new library, is just about to open. And after being without professional library service for several years, Park Synagogue has staffed its new library with Heather Lenson (children’s services), and Sue Arnold (adult services).

Capital Area Chapter (AJL-CAC)
Submitted by Mindy Hecker

AJL/CAC was well represented by a dozen Judaica librarians at the AJL Annual Convention in Cleveland. On June 29 our members met for conversation and a potluck lunch. Madelaine Cohen Oakley and Marina Korenberg, this year’s recipients of the AJL/CAC annual convention travel awards, reported on some of the interesting sessions they attended, and highlighted some of the new resources they plan to explore. They also gave their general impressions of the convention, with rich input from other convention attendees. The Library of Congress Hebraica staff talked about their traditionally very informative and entertaining session. There was lively conversation about some new children’s and young adult materials that were evaluated in conjunction with the celebration of the fortieth anniversary of the Sydney Taylor Awards.

South Florida Chapter (SFAJL)

From Headlines and Footnotes, the SFAJL Newsletter

SFAJL will be bringing the workshop Valuing Libraries: Demonstrating Your Library’s Impact onYour Community to South Florida on January 8, 2009. This half-day program, led by Joanne Roukens was offered at the 2008 AJL Convention in Cleveland, and was so well-received that AJL is helping local chapters reprise the event regionally. The program assists librarians in evaluating their services, calculating the return on investment to their institutions, and articulating the library’s value in a demonstrable way. Complete toolkits are provided to participants, and additional materials are available online. Public and special libraries around the country have received this training and have given it rave reviews! They tout its “good pace, clear examples, good background materials, and timely subject.” Evaluations included “valuable, engaging, and insightful,” and “comprehensive and practical—a unique combination.”
Southern California Chapter (AJLSC)
Submitted by Paul Miller

We are proud that so many of our members are involved with AJL at the national level. Nineteen members attended the convention in Cleveland. Three serve on the national executive board: Susan Dubin, president; David Hirsch, vice president/president elect; and Sheryl Stahl, treasurer. Five serve on the national council: the three board members plus Ronda Rose and Judy Cohn. Three synagogues received library accreditation at the Cleveland convention: Valley Beth Shalom (advanced); Adat AriEl (advanced); YULA Girls (basic). Author and new AJLSC member Barbara Bietz serves on the Sydney Taylor Awards Committee and writes an excellent blog about children's literature (www.barbarabbookblog.blogspot.com).

Member kudos:
Barbara Leff, chapter secretary and webmaster, was named Friend of the Year by the Encino-Tarzana Public Library Friends Group.
Cathy Ryne, former head of Children and Young Adult Services at Sierra Madre Public Library and president of the Southern California Children's Literature Council, will be the new children's librarian at Stephen S. Wise Temple and Schools.
Lisa Silverman presented at the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) Congress in Copenhagen in late summer.
The Valley Beth Shalom Day School Library (Susan Dubin, Helene Gersuk, and Susan Rosner, librarians) has hosted many authors this year: Sonia Levitin, Miri Leshem-Pelly, Pnina Moed-Kass, Amalia Hoffman, Steve Sheinkin, Lois Ruby, Ann Stampler, and Cornelia Funke.
AJLSC board members are busy planning local activities under the able leadership of president Judy Cohn. For more news and information about the local chapter (and a whole lot more) visit the AJLSC website at www.ajlsc.org.

Houston Chapter
Submitted by Lisa Klein

Last May the AJL Houston Chapter met with Marilyn Hassid, the cultural arts director of the Jewish Community Center and the coordinator of Houston's annual Jewish Book Fair, to offer its suggestions for books and authors to feature. Marilyn was very appreciative of the recommendations. At the meeting we also established an AJL librarian position on the Community Book Fair Committee. We hope that our librarians will be able to take turns serving in this position and offering their expertise on books and authors.*

We also have made arrangements to bring in Susan Dubin, the president of AJL, to present three teacher workshops focusing on Jewish literacy at Yom Limmud, our community day of learning, on Sunday, February 15, 2009. We are happy that one of our members, Judy Weidman, was able to attend the AJL convention. We look forward to hearing about Judy's experiences at our fall meeting.

*An Note from the Chapter Chatter editor: The Rhode Island Chapter of AJL often teamed with the Jewish Community Book Fair Committee in a similar manner. One year we also contributed to the Book Fair programming by presenting children's story hours and book reviews, and by taking turns spending an hour or so on the book sale floor advising book buyers on their selections. The roving librarian wore a sandwich board headed by “ask the expert,” identifying the expert as a member of the AJL/Rhode Island Chapter, and providing her name and library affiliation. The “ask the expert” hours were included in the advertising of the book fair (more publicity for AJL).

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

Summer is the time for our annual get-together at a local restaurant. We recommend such an event to all chapters, where our agenda is only to better get to know one another. Even though this is not a business meeting, we had a timely discussion. One of our synagogue libraries inherited the Jewish Heritage Video Collection from the JCC and will be circulating it to the area's entire Jewish community. Our members will be involved in publicizing this collection and needed to learn about it.

Our next meeting will be in September at our member library in Kobernick House, the Jewish senior residence in Sarasota. This library was recently accredited by AJL. We have been invited to have a future meeting in Palm Harbor, our farthest north member library.

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

Out of sadness comes promise. Karen Cooper, our long-time treasurer, colleague, and friend, passed away most suddenly this past spring. At the same time, our chapter offered a scholarship and a year's free chapter membership to a library student interested in making Judaica librarianship his/her career path. The chapter voted to name this scholarship The Karen Cooper Memorial Scholarship. Three very promising students/librarians applied for the scholarship and it was decided to divide the award among them.

With younger members and a new board member list, including membership, programming and treasurer positions, we look forward to an exciting year. Just by partnering with other Jewish organizations we have found new members and have increased the depth of our programming to entice additional librarians and educators to join our Long Island Chapter.

New York Metropolitan Area Chapter (AJL-NYMA)
Submitted by Rita Lifton, et al.

The following description of NYMA's spring 2008 conference is excerpted from an article by Renate Evers, head librarian at the Leo Baeck Institute, Center for Jewish History, which appeared in the summer/fall 2008 issue of NYMA News. The full article will be available shortly on NYMA's website, www.ajlnyma.org. A digital recording of this incredibly informative and enriching conference is also available on NYMA's website.* Today, scholars, teachers and researchers make use of digital collections to cross disciplinary boundaries and bring new perspectives to the cultural record. “Digital Libraries: Building, Collaboration, and Effectiveness” brought this trend to light at NYMA's spring 2008 conference, held April 7 at the library of the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS). The conference was conceived and coordinated with AJL at the national level. Nineteen members attended the convention in Cleveland. Three serve on the national executive board: Susan Dubin, president; David Hirsch, vice president/president elect; and Sheryl Stahl, treasurer. Five serve on the national council: the three board members plus Ronda Rose and Judy Cohn. Three synagogues received library accreditation at the Cleveland convention: Valley Beth Shalom (advanced); Adat AriEl (advanced); YULA Girls (basic). Author and new AJLSC member Barbara Bietz serves on the Sydney Taylor Awards Committee and writes an excellent blog about children's literature (www.barbarabbookblog.blogspot.com).

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by Naomi Steinberger, director of library services at the JTS library, in conjunction with Leslie Monchar, NYMA president.

The first speaker, Bob Sink, chief of archives and library services, the Center for Jewish History (CJH), outlined the process of building a digital program for a consortium of five cultural institutions (American Jewish Historical Society, American Sephardic Federation, Leo Baeck Institute, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, Yeshiva University Museum) and highlighted some of the newly digitized resources on the CJH digital collections website. Mr. Sink stressed the importance of the establishment of uniform procedures and policies, and the adoption of standards, guidelines, and best practices when building a digitization program.

The CJH digital collections website, http://digital.cjh.org, provides access to digital books, archival finding aids, archival documents, photos, maps, sound recordings, posters, broadsides, etc. Mr. Sink demonstrated how to navigate through the YU Museum’s Grubere Collection of Women’s Clothes; audio files from the Austrian Heritage Collection at the Leo Baeck Institute; and a collection of children’s books, collaborative project between the YU Museum and YIVO.

Naomi Steinberger presented on the road that JTS traversed when it decided on its digitization program, a program that is embedded in the library’s mission to collect, preserve and make available the literary and cultural heritage of the Jewish people. The “Persistence of Memory” conference of the Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC) in 2005 helped the JTS library get the digital program on its way. JTS became a test site for an Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) funded project in winter/spring 2006. NEDCC/IMLS consultants visited the library for a digital needs assessment, and a questionnaire reviewed all early digital initiatives and projects.

In winter 2006/2007 the first steps were taken to implement the IMLS recommendations. DigiTool (Ex Libris) was chosen as the management system, and a grant application to the Metropolitan New York Library Council to digitize 250 wedding poems was successful. Other projects were to follow. Using examples from the JTS website, http://digital.jtsa.edu, Ms. Steinberger showed different challenges to the digitization process.

How to create a cultural commonwealth in Judaica and transcend proprietary ownership of collections? This question was addressed by the final speaker, Arthur Kiron, Schottenstein-Jeselson Curator of Judaica collections at the Center for Advanced Judaica Studies Library, University of Pennsylvania. The Judaica collection at Penn is a virtual library of 350,000 interdisciplinary volumes in 15 different campus libraries. The challenge was to build a digital program within a diverse setting and to manage the digital life cycle.

Two committees were established to formalize the guidelines with which to select the materials for digitization and digital management lifecycle. Mr. Kiron stressed that a mission statement, clearly stating what is to be done and why, is crucial. It allows for speaking with a level of confidence and authority to donors, planners, and consultants.

Mr. Kiron ended with words of advice: “Think through ahead of time and make judgments.” Specifically, think about which content to select, how to go about making those decisions, how to implement a project, how to see it through from beginning to end, how to make sure that sustainability is taken into account, and most importantly, think about the evaluation process, how to measure and judge whether the original judgments and actions have happened as envisioned.

NYMA’s final activity of the academic year was the spring 2008 cataloging workshop, held June 2, at the Abraham Joshua Heschel High School Library and coordinated by Steven Bernstein, with Marion Stein, librarian of the Heschel High School, serving as the onsite coordinator. The topic, “Expanding the Cataloger’s Role in the Era of Global Digital Libraries,” was presented by Charlene Chou, catalog librarian, Columbia University Libraries. Ms. Chou’s PowerPoint presentation, complete with an audio recording of the entire workshop, is available on NYMA’s website.

*For the past few months, NYMA has been digitally recording the audio of all of its workshops and conferences. These recordings are available on its website (www.ajlnyma.org) in Windows Media Audio format (*.wma). Choose the workshop under “Past Events.” In addition to the spring 2008 conference and 2008 cataloging workshop, other workshops currently available for your listening pleasure are the 2008 reference workshop and the 2008 day school/high school workshop.

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**Reviewers Wanted!**

The AJL Newsletter is eagerly searching for reviewers of books for children and teens!

**Requirements**

- A respect for and knowledge of children’s literature
- A conviction that books of Jewish content are important
- Critical judgment and writing skills that enable you to discuss both the positive and negative aspects of books being reviewed
- Ability to condense your review into 250 words
- Ability to meet reasonable deadlines

If you read kids’ books and would like to write short critical reviews of new ones for publication in the quarterly AJL Newsletter, please send a brief CV and, if possible, a writing sample to Linda Silver at silverlr@roadrunner.com.
ART & ARCHITECTURE


With the exhibition of Jewish comic book art in museums and community centers and with the discussion of Jewish content graphic novels at comic conventions, it is surprising that no definitive book on the subject of Jews and American comics has yet been written. Buhle’s collection of four essays, with over 100 pages of reproduced comic art, is not such a definitive book, but it is an important one for those interested in this subject.

While paying only lip-service to such mainstream talents as Jack “King” Kirby, Stan “The Man” Lee, and Joe Kubert, Buhle does provide in-depth historical facts about such underground comic legends as Harvey Kurtzman, Robert Crumb (who is not Jewish but who married a Jewish cartoonist), his wife Aline Kominsky, Harvey Pekar, and Peter Kuper. He also casts a spotlight on Jewish comic strip cartoonists who toiled in the years preceding the “Golden Age” of comic books, such as Samuel Zagat, Zuni Maud, and Harry Hershfield. Throughout the book, Buhle provides analysis of the works and their reception among readers and critics.

Although the book has copious endnotes, the inclusion of a bibliography and index would have made it easier to use. Buhle seems to have researched the material quite well, but the book suffers from errors and omissions. To give just one example, there are only nine female creators mentioned in the whole book (most of them, very briefly), which represents only about half of the women who have worked in comics.

This book is recommended (with reservations) for synagogue, academic, and center libraries.


As with his previous book, Old Jewish Comedians, the title would have been more descriptive if it began with “Caricatures of ...” Friedman captures the likenesses of celebrities on paper with his photorealistic style, preserving the images of those Jewish-born comics who entertained millions—Jew and Gentile alike—during the Golden Age of comedy—on stage, radio, TV, and in film. The gestures, facial expressions and backgrounds are varied. Friedman sometimes sketches his subjects on stage (which makes sense, given their profession), but other settings include outside restaurants, hotel poolsides, and dressing rooms. As a collection of portraits, this publication is a remarkable art book (and its size makes it quite suitable as a coffee table book). However, those who are looking for information about the type of jokes these jesters told and what made them so funny (aside from the expressions of hilarity on some of their faces), will need to be satisfied with the single-page overview of Jewish comedy provided by Larry Gelbart in his introduction. They will also benefit from the books recommended by Friedman in his acknowledgements. Although the title page provides a dialogue caption to accompany the portrait of Belle Barth, the other pages consist simply of the illustration and the subject’s name (real name and stage name). I recommend this book for the art section of Judaic collections.

Steven M. Bergson, http://jewishcomics.blogspot.com, Toronto


The British conquered Gibraltar from Spain in 1704 and it became home to a vibrant Jewish community. In the mid-18th century, about a third of Gibraltar’s population was Jewish. This guidebook to Jewish Gibraltar is divided into two sections: the first is a guided tour with a separate part on the cemeteries; the second is an architectural essay on the four synagogues in Gibraltar. The book is lavishly illustrated and a pleasure to read. You don’t have to go to Gibraltar and use it as a guidebook to enjoy it. The only thing wrong with the book is that it is far too short!

Chaim Seymour, Bar-Ilan University, Israel


A fascinating look by an interdisciplinary group of scholars commenting on Jewish culture, this book is a collection of essays on widely divergent topics. The topics range from an examination of immigrant theater, to the Jewish Palestine pavilion at the New York World’s Fair 1939/40, the art of the Amsterdam Jewish Quarter, to the Philadelphia Russian shet, and Jewish art looted by Nazis. The essays are especially penetrating precisely because the particular work being analyzed is surrounded by materials that fully explain its context. Beyond that, the essays take up how art works matter and how they have had an impact. The title may mislead some readers to believe this book is about how to “be” or “act” Jewish. Instead these essays show how Jewishness is expressed through the arts, and how that expression often helps dictate or influence future conceptions and perceptions of being Jewish. The forms of art—whether music, theater, literature, architecture or dance—are the vehicles through which the dialogue between artist and the Jewish community or Judaism develops. Some of the essays focus on Jewish customs, such as synagogue music, and show how they have changed to fit into the British colonies or into Jewish communities in general. Other essays focus on Jewish art looted by the Nazis or looted in general. The thought of looted art is emotional, and this book shows why.

Judith S. Pinnolis, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA
BIBLE


Aiken and Michaels “revisit the stories in Genesis—illuminated by traditional Jewish commentaries history, science, and psychology—to present a logical and mature view of God and His plan for us, and as a relevant guide to living in the modern world.” The information is presented in short chapters, followed by “Implications for Us.” There are copious notes (one seven-page section has 22 notes), and the guidance is obvious. The authors are not explicit about whether they are using a Jewish translation of the Torah (e.g., Artscroll) or their own.

“What are the implications of new scientific discoveries for one who believes in God?” Dr. Aviezer, an Orthodox Jew and a professor of physics at Bar Ilan University addresses this question by analyzing the verses in Genesis that deal with creation in light of research in many scientific fields—cosmology, biology, and geology, to name a few. He shows that the scientific evidence provides an explanation of creation that is consistent with the biblical text. Michael Jarmus narrates the audio book version of *In the Beginning* in an authoritative, dramatic voice.

For the most part, the material focuses on the science and is more biblical than specifically Jewish. The fascinating though highly technical discussion covers such topics as electromagnetic radiation, the carbonate silicate geochemical cycle, and the Permian period of the Paleozoic Era. The most interesting and most Jewish part is the discussion of the uniqueness of man, which draws on Jewish commentaries. Also noted is the distinction between when “God created” and when “He made.” The narration frequently refers to “current scientific knowledge.”

Given that the book was written in 1990, there is probably more current information. Those interested in the material would welcome an update.

Rabbi Navon bases his book on a course he taught on theological issues in the book of Genesis and “tries both to present the richness of Jewish thought and to note its uniqueness in comparison to non-Jewish approaches.” He examines topics such as providence, violence, punishment, and prayer, and draws from many Jewish commentators (Rambam, Rashi, Rav Soloveitchik and others) and non-Jewish sources (Aristotle, Kant). Considering the many opinions presented, the arguments are coherent and easy to follow. The book is also well indexed.

Dr. Aviezer is quoted in both of the other books in chapters about reconciling science and religion. While Aiken and Michaels refer to challenging wording in the biblical text as “poorly written verses;” Rabbi Navon prefers to call them “textual problems;” they concur, however, that interpretation leads to a clearer understanding of God’s purposes. Rabbi Navon’s work demonstrates meticulous scholarship, while Aiken and Michaels use the book of Genesis as a springboard for advice.

Kathe Pinchuck, Congregation Beth Sholom, Teaneck, NJ


Both authors start with the same premise: in our society, we are bombarded with images of Eve in order to sell a huge array of products and it is time to set aside those images and look carefully at the biblical text again. But while the concept is the same, their approaches are every different.

Fohrman writes in the first person as if he is leading a seminar on Eve and Adam, Cain and Abel, and the nature of the “yetser.” He closely examines the text of Genesis, looking at the etymology of some of the Hebrew words and names, comparing parallel texts and rabbinical commentaries. Each of Fohrman’s arguments acts as a building block leading to the conclusion. Unfortunately, not all of his “blocks” are equally strong. For example, Fohrman spends a lot of time analyzing why and how Eve misunderstood G-d’s instructions about the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, but dismisses out of hand the possibility that Adam might not have reported them accurately to her. While the narrative is very readable, because of the selectivity of the arguments and the lack of bibliographical notes and references, this is an optional purchase.

In contrast, Lerner’s work has a large note section, bibliographical references, and index. She holds a three-way conversation with the biblical texts, midrash, and contemporary poetry. While examining the passages in Genesis, she notes the questions that arise and discusses how the early rabbis as well as modern scholars and poets have addressed the issues. The work is arranged by the stages of Eve’s life: her creation, life in Eden, and life after leaving Eden. Written in a scholarly tone, this book is recommended for academic libraries.

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


*Moses: Envoy of God, Envoy of His People* ably translated from the Hebrew by Perry Zamek, is a literary analysis of biblical Moses. Rav Mosheh Lichtenstein focuses on Moses’ character, personality and motivation. Why did Moses kill the Egyptian who was beating a Jewish slave? Why did Moses then run away to Midian? Why did he return to Egypt many years later at age 80 to become the greatest leader and teacher in Jewish history? The author delves into Moses’ psyche and offers midrashic interpretations of events in Moses’ life. The book includes footnotes, an index of topics and names, and an in-depth discussion of the definition and purpose of midrash. Rav Lichtenstein, scion of a
prominent Orthodox rabbinic family, has a degree in English literature from Hebrew University as well as rabbinic ordination from the Rabbanut in Israel. He teaches in Yeshivat Har Etzion located in Gush Etzion. Moses: Envoy of God is recommended for synagoge and academic libraries because it is interesting and well written, and offers new interpretations and insights into a monumental Jewish leader.

Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, OH


My Brother Esau Is a Hairy Man is an erudite, detailed discussion of hair symbolism in biblical texts and ancient Middle Eastern art. Topics included are Samson, the Nazirite vow, and the biblical trial of the woman accused of adultery. Niditch relies on 20th-century scholarly works and photographs of drawings on ancient panels and reliefs to illustrate her points. The drawings and references are interspersed within the text. An alphabetical list of references, a general index, and an index of biblical passages are included. Recommended for academic libraries.

Ilka Gordon, Cleveland, OH


In 2004, Dr. Schorsch published Polarities in Balance, a collection of essays and articles he wrote while chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary. He is perhaps better known, however, for his From Text to Context: The Turn to History in Modern Judaism (1994), or The Sacred Cluster: The Core Values of Conservative Judaism (1995). Now the chancellor emeritus has published a new collection of weekly Torah portion commentaries, written over the course of a decade while chancellor of JTS.

The book is divided into chapters of weekly parashot for each book of the Torah, with separate chapters for the holy day readings. Each chapter contains several essays on the parashah. Each essay is dated when written. Included at the end of each chapter is a list of footnotes. There is no index.

This book is really meant to be read for reflection on each of the essays. I found it more beneficial to read each essay separate from its fellows, instead of all the essays at once (there are eight essays under Bereishit, for example). Dr. Schorsch’s writings are firmely grounded in the Conservative movement. The essays reflect his interest and talents—historical, biblical, social, rabbinical—and he has a way of writing that is both scholarly and engaging. Dr. Schorsch states, “For Jews, the Hebrew Bible has always been a canon without closure, and the key to that historical paradox is the way we read it.” He provides us several ways of reading each parashah, and opens avenues for our own reflections.

Recommended for all libraries.

Suzanne Smailes, Wittenberg University, Springfield, OH


Eliezer Schweid is one of the premier Jewish thinkers of our time. This two-volume work begins with a consideration of the role of the Bible in Jewish culture and then offers a sophisticated and intricate analysis of the Pentateuch (and certain other parts of the Bible as well). Schweid does not try to separate legend and history or tease out original intent. This, of course, is not due to naiveté but to a wish to analyze the Bible as it has come down to us, that is, as a cultural source for the Hebrew nation. Perhaps for this reason, the author at times draws upon the oral Torah to inform his commentary on the text. The analysis itself reflects the author’s preoccupations, e.g., democracy and the relationship of the sexes. It does not, alas, always avoid tendentiousness. In discussing the binding of Isaac, Schweid (claiming insight into the “meaning of the story”) argues that Abraham believed from the first he was commanded to perform a symbolic ceremony and not an actual slaying of his son. If so why, when Abraham takes up the knife, does the angel command him not to “stretch out your hand against the lad?” Schweid ignores this, mentioning only what happens directly afterward: Abraham’s seeing the ram and sacrificing it. The author is a learned and acute thinker and his ruminations are always worthy of consideration, but it should not prevent us from recognizing this interesting book as a somewhat idiosyncratic piece of exegesis and more than a little subjective. For larger scholarly collections.

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

FICTION, LITERATURE & POETRY


In this intriguing new work, Rabbi Marc Angel’s first piece of fiction, the author describes the clash between the traditional yeshiva world of a rebbe and the more modern approach of a young Sephardic rabbi. The story revolves around the work of search committee organized for the purpose of selecting a new rosh yeshiva for a traditional Lithuanian-style yeshiva. The old rebbe has died without specifying a successor. His son, a talmud hakham of the old school, finds himself competing for the position against a newcomer—a vital young rabbi who had been mentored by the old rebbe. Whereas the son is zealous in his defense of the status quo, the young Sephardi represents a more innovative approach, reaching out to the world beyond the yeshiva.

In a manner reminiscent of the pairs of advocates found in the Talmud, the committee is presented with pairs of witnesses. One of the two supports the traditional rebbe while the other one favors the outlook and methods of the newcomer. Issues ranging from the covering of women’s hair to the offering of tzedakah to non-Jews are examined, as the committee evaluates the views and the impact on the community of the two rabbis. Almost im-
perceptibly the tension builds to a climax: the search committee must decide which of these two approaches is appropriate for the future. It’s a gripping conclusion that keeps the reader engaged to the very last page.

Randall C. Belinfante, American Sephardi Federation, NY


Foreskin’s Lament: A Memoir is a give-away title—the reader can anticipate the confession/diatribe against Jewish practices delivered in late-night-talk-show style—revelations aiming for audience/reader laughter. The author, Shalom Auslander, born into an Orthodox family and related to several noted rabbis, is a masterful wit. He recounts his early life as an unhappy yeshiva student, whose personal battle with God seemed to be a moment-by-moment affair. His youthful rebellion against the Orthodoxy of his dysfunctional family can never be complete because his fear of punishment for the “sins” he commits willingly and knowingly is constant. Whether eating traif, riding on Shabbat, dealing drugs, or shoplifting, Auslander’s interior monologue addressing God is his personal curse. Each episode, while fraught with guilt for the young “sinner,” is filled with satire reminiscent of Roth’s *Goodbye Columbus*.

As an adult, Auslander vacillates between attempts at conformity and resignation to the fact that he and Orly, his wife and love of his life who is also a maverick, are destined to live, outside the confines of their families’ traditional life style. It is when life cycle events such as circumcision force them to confront the issues of ritual (Auslander is still talking to God in his head) that the reader is left wondering, ultimately, on whom is the joke? Despite a disclaimer (in tiny print) that some names and places have been changed, the author’s locales are popular and familiar east-coast communities. Some readers might, therefore, wish that Foreskin’s Lament were fiction so that they could laugh more comfortably.

Esther Nussbaum, Halachic Organ Donor Society, NY


This book is the result of an important effort by Toby Press to make accessible to English readers the works of a key early Hebrew writer. Yosef Haim Brenner’s literary works will be published in translation in three volumes; this is the second volume. In addition to Out of the Depth, the book also includes the stories One Year, From A to M, and Impressions of a Journey, an excellent sampling of the writing of one of the most important authors in pre-State Israel, who was instrumental in moving the center of gravity of Hebrew literature from Eastern Europe to Palestine.

Brenner was born in 1881 in Novi Mlini, Ukraine where he studied in a yeshivah. As a young man he moved to the city of Gomel, became a left-wing Zionist, and started his literary career. After serving in the Russian army for three years he escaped to London and established a Hebrew language periodical. He immigrated to Palestine in 1909, where he continued writing and also taught at the famous Herzliah High School. He was murdered during Arab riots on May 2, 1921.

Of the four stories in this book, three are set in Eastern Europe and one in London. They are ably translated into English for the first time by David Patterson and Ezra Spicehandler, not an easy task, for they were written during the early period of the revival of the Hebrew language and often include Yiddish and biblical expressions. Extensive footnotes are included and these explain some of the more difficult idioms and quotes. The three volumes of Brenner’s works belong in every good Judaica collection.

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


This compilation of stories includes selections from two previously published collections, *Bodies of the Rich* (1984) and *Radiance* (1998), as well as uncollected and new stories. It contains an interesting preface by the author reflecting on his work. The stories are powerful glimpses of urban life in America and most of the major characters are Jewish. The author considers his writing to be religious fiction. He is a professor of modern literature and fiction writing at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. The book is recommended for public and community center libraries, as well as Jewish studies collections in academic libraries.

Dr. Susan Freiband, University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras


Grant takes as a starting point the real-life drama of Holocaust-survivor-turned-slumlord Peter Rachman, who died in England in 1962, but she wanders far from her source material in this novel. The narrator, Vivien, is the sheltered child of timid Hungarian refugees in London. Out of nowhere there appears an uncle, Sandor, who is flamboyant, wealthy, cunning, and given to inappropriate indulgences of the flesh. Much of the novel is set in mid-1970s England, where skinheads drive fear into the hearts of both timid and brazen Jews. Grant is capable of making a sudden swerve to illuminate a character, then moving right back to the plot. Just as Vivien has re-established contact with her uncle, she says: “There is a trick I often play when I am bored, or waiting, on a bus or a train, or in airport departure lounges, a knack of predicting when a person is going to stand up to buy a newspaper or a cup of coffee or take some papers out of a briefcase.” A few sentences later we are back with the uncle, and Vivien is getting inside his mind, figuring out his desires and failings. Ethical ambiguities are probed skillfully, uncomfortably, but never at the expense of the story. As Vivien herself points out, “there is no anaesthesia in the pages of a novel.” A gripping read from one of England’s foremost Jewish writers, this is an excellent choice for adult collections, and may appeal to young adults with high reading levels.

Faith Jones, Simon Fraser University, BC, Canada


Phyrne Fisher, the free-spirited, wealthy, single Australian flapper/private investigator, is enjoying a dance with Simon
Abrahams at the Jewish Young People's Society, when Simon's father asks her to investigate the death of a young student in Sylvia Lee's East Market Bookshop. The police have arrested Miss Lee, a tenant of Simon's father, and accused her of poisoning the victim. Phyrne works with police Detective John "Call me Jack" Robinson and her faithful companion Dot, as well as taxi drivers Bert and Cec to find the real murderer. As she works on the case, Phyrne gets to know the Australian Jewish community. Although Australia's Jews have not experienced much anti-Semitism, Mr. Abrahams is concerned because the victim is a Jew and "We are exiles, wanderers; we have no home. There is nowhere where we are safe, really safe." As Phyrne investigates, mildly distracted by a flirtation with Simon, she clears Miss Lee, but wonders if the coded message that the victim was carrying could be related to local Zionist activities. This plot is more serious and complex than Ms. Greenwood's other stories in this series, but it presents a picture of life in Australia during the 1920s. Phyrne Fisher is a righteous shiksa, pursuing justice and respecting her Jewish clients. The author even includes a bibliography and a glossary of Yiddish words. This book is a good choice for public libraries and synagogue libraries with fiction collections.

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


This novel is set in first-century Judea, or 3760 according to the Jewish calendar, in the town of Nazareth. The protagonist is a Jewish teenager, Miriam, who helps hide a rebel leader, Barabbas, when King Herod's mercenaries are searching for him. The author details Jewish tradition and the brutality of Roman occupation that the poorest suffer. While some of the principal characters are recognizable to Christian readers, the intent of the novel is not to further a faith agenda. In the end, Miriam is with child, insisting that her conception was not by a union with any man and that her son would be King of Israel. The author ends the novel with an explanation of the context and why he stopped before Miriam gave birth. This is a historical novel and, because of some vivid description of torture and crucifixions, it might be appropriate only for adult readers.

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


Halter creates historical fiction around the facts and legends of David Reubeni (d. 1538?), who was referred to, in his time, as the Prince of Chabor, the Messenger, and the Messiah. The novel depicts Jewish community life in Italy, Spain, and Portugal between the years 1524 and 1536. Major Jewish and Christian figures take part in Reubeni's plan to bring the Jewish people back to Israel with the help of the Christian world. The plan entails a lot of creativity and manipulation of these communities.

The book has two parts: the first 30 chapters describe Reubeni's entourage arriving in Venice to seek the help of the Jewish community in approaching Pope Clement VII. Many greet him as the Messenger of Redemption; however, some of the Jewish leaders see him as a threat to peaceful Jewish existence in the diaspora. The last 30 chapters describe Reubeni's trip to Portugal and the tragic consequences of his failed mission. The book ends with a very interesting historical note on the life of David Reubeni.

This book is more novel than history and should be primarily read for pleasure. It does, however, create interest in the characters, places, and events as they actually occurred. Because most readers will not be familiar with these events and places, a map and time-line would have been helpful. The personality of Reubeni is unfortunately too obscure for this book to be of broad interest and the slow pace of the book makes it difficult for the reader to sustain interest through the entire 487 pages. A library with budgetary constraints should not consider this book as a priority for acquisition.

Nira Glily Wolfe, Highland Park, IL


Below the cover picture of a teapot with a camel head spout is the statement that this book is “… a novel … inspired by a true story.” The reader is thus prepared for what turns out to be a family saga of several generations, knowing that the teapot must be a vital clue to the story within. The story opens in wartime England—London in 1944—and introduces Anna Grant, a rather disorganized woman dealing with several members of what can only be described as a somewhat dysfunctional family whose charming idiosyncrasies make interesting characters for the reader. The author then takes us back to mid-19th century Gibraltar, where David is living as a teen-age boy, having returned alone from “that place,” where something traumatic has happened. We learn that David is Anna’s grandfather, that “that place” is Safed, and that what had scarred David influenced his relationships and those of his descendants until the cause is finally discovered almost 150 years later.

The author’s deft handling of the narrative keeps the book’s revelations moving like a top-notch suspense novel. One interesting devices is to lead each chapter with a recipe or a typical-of-the-time piece of advice gleaned from a book published in the related period. The recipes are frequently incorporated into the story as well. (Judy Jackson is well known in England as a food writer.) The teapot appears and disappears throughout the story and the author neatly ties up all the threads of her tale in the final revelation of what occurred in “that place.” Not only does the book confirm that skeletons in the closet haunt latter-day inhabitants but its focus on the communities of Gibraltar and London 19th and 20th centuries gives the reader an intimate portrait of Jewish life and practices to flesh out the historical record.

Esther Nussbaum, Halachic Organ Donor Society, NY


Lieutenant Peter Decker is given a case to solve that is over 15 years old. A very rich lady has put up a large sum as a reward to find the killers of a favorite teacher, Dr. Ben, who was shot and then stuffed into the trunk of his Mercedes-Benz. This case was reopened when a Hollywood music producer, Primo Ekerling, was murdered in the same manner. Peter isn’t too happy about

Amen Allowed follows Aryeh Radinsky through his first year teaching at the Yeshiva of Kolyard. His neighbor is a superb photographer but a disastrous cook. His car turns out to be a lemon, and the garage seems reluctant to fix the problems. His mother is intent on fixing him up with every eligible young woman in town. At school, Aryeh’s class contains some typically rambunctious 7th-grade boys, while the rosh yeshiva seems to have problems keeping his coffee intact in Aryeh’s presence. In the midst of potential disaster, Aryeh decides to enforce the rule of saying the proper bracha every time a student wants to eat in class. As a result, he gains respect from the students and unexpected praise from a great rabbi. In the end, his experiment becomes a roaring success.

While Aryeh is an attractive character and his story is enjoyable, the intended audience for this book is not clear. Adults can connect with his desires and foibles, but the language and format appear to be directed to teenagers. Also, while we hear about Aryeh’s changed life at the end of the story, the leap is not demonstrated. For example, is his fiancée the young woman on the bus? In other ways too, the book leaves readers in unnecessary suspense. This is a pleasant short read about an admirable young man, but ultimately inadequate on many levels.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA


Rahel the poetess, as she is known, is one of the unofficial national poets of Israel. Her stature is perhaps comparable to that of Emily Dickinson in America. Originally published in England in 1994, this is the only collection of her work in English; this is the first American edition. The poems were translated by American-born oleh and poet Robert Friend, who died in 1998.

Rahel was one of the first to use the new-born modern Hebrew language for poetry. She described the details of everyday life, the beauty of Eretz Yisrael, and the powerful emotions of failed or illicit love affairs. She also wrote of the impending doom she lived with after she was diagnosed with tuberculosis. Her poetry is still renowned for its freshness and economy.

The problem of translating poetry is central to literature. The standard approach, which Robert Friend has taken here, is to render the translations as poetry, even if faithful translation has to be sacrificed. The reader is thus confronted with the work of two poets within one poem. Whether Robert Friend’s translations do justice to Rahel’s poetry is literally an academic question—there are not enough other English translations to make meaningful comparisons. However, individual poems from this collection, along with other poems by Rahel, can be found in English on the Internet. Libraries that have the British edition of this collection are holding a valuable work. For those that don’t, this book is essential for collections of Hebrew literature in translation.

Beth Davoskin, Proquest, Ann Arbor, MI


As with Sfar’s first book, The Rabbi’s Cat 2 involves a journey, this time in the form of a quest for the lost tribe of Israel in a mythic place known as the “Jerusalem of Africa.” The book takes on a dark tone, starting with a 33-page account of the death of Malka of the Lions as a result of his refusal to call Muslims to prayer (a tale which is, oddly enough, told by Malka of the Lions himself). It is perhaps a foreshadowing of other dark parts of the story, which include a mayor stirring up hatred against the Jews and Muslims, a Polish refugee leaving his hostile homeland in search of the land of the Falashas, and a group of angered Muslims threatening the expedition.

The artwork is simple, yet colorful and engaging, while the story itself is delightful. Throughout the story Rabbi Sfar (owner of the titular cat) approaches each situation and threat with humor, wisdom, and calm. When a Muslim tries to force him to accept conversion to Islam, the rabbi simply explains that with his progressing age and failing memory, it would be too difficult to learn new ways and a new language.

There is some nudity in the book, but nothing sexually explicit. I highly recommend this title for inclusion in the fiction or graphic novel collections of high school, academic, synagogue and center libraries.

Steven M. Bergson, http://jewishcomics.blogspot.com, Toronto


Toby Press must be commended for making books from the canon of modern Hebrew literature available to English readers. Married Life was translated well by Dalya Bilu and first published in 1988 in England. After being out-of-print for quite some time, it is now again accessible.

David Vogel was born in 1891 in Podolia, now part of Russia, into a religious family. In his youth, he traveled to centers of Jewish learning in Eastern Europe, where he absorbed world culture. He then settled in 1912 in Vienna. Vogel was predominantly a poet but he also wrote diaries and some prose. Married Life was the only novel he wrote and it was first published in Hebrew in Palestine in 1929 where he spent that year. Like Agnon, he felt that Palestine had its cultural limits and he yearned to return to Europe. He settled in Paris after spending a year in Berlin; it was from there that he was deported in 1944 and he is assumed to have perished in Auschwitz. Renewed interest in his works well into the 20th century resulted in the publication of a collection of all of his poems with an introduction and bibliographical notes by Dan Pagis, in 1966.
Married Life follows the tragic marriage of Rudolph Gurdweill, an impoverished, struggling Jewish intellectual, to an anti-Semitic, cruel baroness. Set in Vienna between the two world wars, the book is filled with individuals who could afford to live a life of pleasure, an empty, superficial life filled with cigarettes and endless cups of coffee, unaware of the impending doom. The characters are well developed and the historical period described is very interesting. The book, in translation, is compelling reading many years after it was written, and that in itself is a testament to Vogel's craft. Libraries with collections of Hebrew literary works should include Married Life; for it is an excellent example of the early genre of works written in the newly revived Hebrew language. It would also be a good candidate for book discussion groups.

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


Seventeen-year-old Jacob Silverman enters the ghetto, is transported to a prison camp, escapes to join partisans, and is captured and re-interred. On a death march, Jacob is able to escape again and lead all those with him to fight against the Germans. Jacob is not the only one followed in this lengthy novel; so too are his beloved, Rachael whom he marries in the prison camp, his father, a renowned surgeon. The reader sees events through the eyes of archetypal participants: a doctor forced to experiment on his own, a Sonderkommando, and a hero. The length of the book might deter some readers, but the work is well worth the effort.

Sara Roffoysky Marcus, Yeshiva Har Torah, Bayside, NY

HISTORY


Nina Caputo's book might better be entitled, "Nahmanides the Man: A Literary Historical Portrait." She covers much the same material as other scholars, with chapters on his position in the "Maimonidean controversy," his work as biblical commentator, the Barcelona disputation, and his eschatology. The author's goal is not to defend his orthodoxy or to prove him either the victor or the loser of the Barcelona debate. Her goal is to paint a well-rounded portrait of a complex individual who played many roles in his lifetime.

The book is well researched, as even a glance at Caputo's bibliography and extensive endnotes will reveal. The author proves herself a scholar of Nahmanides' extant literary corpus. While Caputo cites many other historians, her purpose in doing so is always to clarify or flesh out what Nahmanides himself actually says. Based on this book, I am honored to consider myself a student of Nina Caputo. She has clarified for me much about Nachmanides' writings, and his life and times. Caputo's writing style makes her work a pleasure to read. I highly recommend her book to all students of Nachmanides, whether professional or lay.

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


A historically accurate document of the Lower East Side's Jews from 1880 through 1920, this work entertains as it educates. It is a wonderful addition to the vast collection of writing already available on the history of Jews on the Manhattan's Lower East Side. The author wants his readers "to feel what it was like to shop on Hester Street ... [to go] into the sweatshops ... to share in the story of George Burns ... and the many other entertainers who spent part of their childhood on the Lower East Side." Epstein lives up to his aim, drawing the reader into the times and lives of the immigrants from Eastern Europe. Filled with photographs, "Remember This" boxes of tidbits related to the text, and "Stories to Tell" boxes of real-life situations, the work is a cornucopia of fact and narrative expertly combined. Headings and subheadings enable quick scanning for facts, while the writing enables facilitates cover-to-cover reading. Included are a comprehensive index of topics, names, books, and events, and a list of references categorized into books and articles, web sites, and films and videos.

Sara Roffoysky Marcus, Yeshiva Har Torah, Bayside, NY


Jews have lived in Greece, or areas that are now part of Greece, since ancient times. The Romaniotes date their origins to 70 CE, when the second Temple was destroyed, although some claim that they migrated in 586 BCE when the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem. They consider themselves to be indigenous Greeks. When the Jews were expelled from Spain, France, and Italy in the late 15th and early 16th centuries, a Sephardic community developed in Salonika and became a major center of Ladino culture. There were also smaller groups of Ashkenazic Jews living in various parts of the Balkan Peninsula. These groups did not form a cohesive Jewish community although the Sephardim established cultural dominance.

A real Greek-Jewish identity did not emerge until the 1920s and 1930s. The Nazi occupation and deportations that occurred between 1941 and 1944 destroyed more than 80 percent of the Jews living in Greece. The survivors went to the United States and Israel where they formed new communities and identified themselves as Greek Jews for the first time.

This fascinating book examines the concepts of identity and nationality as experienced by Jews, while paying tribute to those who were lost in World War II and to the righteous gentiles who saved the remnants of the community. Professor Fleming (Mediterranean and modern Greek history, NYU) has written an important work on a little-known subject. It belongs in all academic Judaic collections.

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


These two titles represent very different methodologies and views of the study of Second Temple Judaism. Flusser’s book is, for the most part, a translation of volume one of his collected Hebrew essays published in 2000 under the title *Yahadut Batit Sheni: Qumran ve Apocalypticim*. Horsley’s volume is an attempt at rewriting the basic understanding of Second Temple Judaism.

While Flusser covers mostly issues related to the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Essenes, he often touches on early Christianity, the Pharisees, and rabbinic Judaism. His mastery of primary sources is impressive, ranging over the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Hebrew Bible, the Apocrypha, the New Testament, rabbinic materials, the Pseudepigrapha, Philo, and Josephus, as well as the Church Fathers and classical Greek and Latin sources. He quotes secondary literature parsimoniously, and when he does it is usually a major continental or Israeli figure of the 19th or early 20th century.

Horsley is a very different sort of scholar. His research focuses mostly on Ben Sirah, and the books of I Enoch and Daniel. Beyond that, he appears to be an amanuensis for a circle of scholars affiliated with the Society of Biblical Literature as the Wisdom and Apocalypticism in Early Judaism and Early Christianity Group. Basing themselves on radical critical dating of the Pentateuch, particularly its legal portions, they view much of it as a production of the Second Temple period. They focus heavily on literacy and linguistic theory as supplemented by recent archaeological discoveries. Arguing that much of the literary product of the Second Temple period is the work of a handful of professional Temple and government scribes within a larger population of mostly illiterate farmers, they view that literary product as of secondary importance within a predominately oral culture.

I won’t hide the fact that my training has been under scholars much more in the Flusser than in the Horsley mode. I view Flusser’s work as based on the most solid evidence available, in contrast to Horsley’s work, which is based on secondary literature, selectively chosen and sometimes misapplied. My greatest criticism of the Flusser volume is not of Flusser, but of his editors. The English version, unlike the Hebrew text, does not include bibliographic citations for the original publication of the essays. The editors represent their work as a translation of the first volume of Flusser’s collected Hebrew essays; however, they have eliminated the last two, replacing them with three additional English essays without giving their source. I recommend both of these titles, especially Flusser’s, for inclusion in all academic collections on Second Temple Judaism.

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


Abraham Abulafia, a Jewish mystic who lived in the 13th century, was very well known—even notorious—in his time. But his fate—partly because of a ban placed against him by a prominent rabbi during his lifetime—was to be forgotten for hundreds of years. *Wissenschaft* scholars, including Gershom Scholem, paid him some attention, but not enough to raise him from obscurity. In recent years, however, Abulafia has made a huge comeback among academics, counter-culture poets, and ultra-Orthodox Jews.

Hames, whose first book dealt with Christian responses to kabbalah in 13th-century Spain, suggests that many of Abulafia’s ideas were based upon the thought of an Italian monk named Joachim of Fiore. Joachim died in 1202, but his apocalyptic prophecies, which included the belief in a mutual reconciliation between Jews and Christians at the end of days, became very influential among Franciscan monks in southern Italy throughout the 13th century. Joachim’s thought may be at the root of Abulafia’s most notable achievement—presenting himself in Rome in order to convert the Pope to Judaism, and living to tell the tale.

This book is historical rather than phenomenological, making it both more convincing and more readable than it would have been otherwise. It is relevant to any serious reader interested in kabbalah, medieval history, Jewish-Christian relations, and the feasibility of serious inter-faith dialogue.

Pinchas Roth, New York Public Library, NY


Over the course of the last decade, Marvin J. Heller has published 25 scholarly articles and several books focusing on the Jewish book as artifact. In the present volume, he offers a selection of these articles corrected, expanded, and extensively illustrated. Heller’s interests are wide ranging; they cover decoration, printers’ devices and monograms, book titles and their application by various authors, individual printers and centers of printing, publishers, plagiarism, censorship, advertising, non-Jewish printers of Jewish books, the layout of the Talmud page, and unica.

Everyone interested in the history of the Jewish book will want to own this title, but it is expensive, so much so that only academic libraries and the occasional deep-pocketed private collector will purchase it. It is also marred by the fact that the publisher clearly did not provide Heller with the level of support his work deserves. I found no fewer than 24 technical errors, which should have been caught by a copy editor. These include incorrect grammar, poor style, dittography, and at least one obvious factual error. I do not say this to impugn Heller in any way; anyone can make technical errors, but it is the job of the publisher to help an author locate and correct them. I expect better of a major academic publisher like Brill.

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


Meir Kahane was a controversial figure who, until his assassination in 1990, wore quite a few hats—Zionist, rabbi, politician,
warrior, and writer. His militant stance has clouded the public perception of an intense but thoughtful individual, whose principles based on love of Torah, Jewish identity, and Israel guided his life. This book, a literal labor of love by his widow, covers his early years, from a Brooklyn boyhood to his release from American jail, and captures the memory of a personage larger than life.

An abundance of letters, articles, and literature, along with many footnotes, chronicles Kahane’s Orthodox upbringing and involvement in the Betar youth group. He founded the Jewish Defense League (JDL) in the late 1960s, when Jewishness was an embarrassment in an assimilated world. The idea of organized Jewish activism discomfited many, as did his views on Arabs, for which he was labeled a racist and terrorist. Mrs. Kahane points out how the liberal media vilified her husband, often with help from certain Jewish leaders. Her husband, in fact, deplored reckless vigilantism and even tried to purge the JDL of this element. Yet he made no apologies for his causes, many of which remain relevant today. The book also traces his involvement in Israeli politics following his family’s aliyah, his efforts to preserve the country’s Jewish character, and his opposition to appeasement.

Anyone who might feel intimidated by this book’s length will find that it reads quite swiftly. In fact, one can get lost in all the details and walk away inspired by this dynamic individual and his impact on contemporary Jewry. This is a book that belongs in every adult Jewish library, and volume two is eagerly awaited.


Matthias Küntzel’s examination of Jihadism and Jew-hatred is an important addition to a burgeoning literature on the character and nature of radical Islam. Previously published in German, English-language readers will now be able to appreciate the emergence and development of Jew-hatred within radical Islam, including its rhetoric and motifs.

Scholars have for some time debated an appropriate term for this rabid ideology, employing inter alia fundamentalism and Islamo-fascism. Küntzel prefers Jihadism. Whatever the term, he demonstrates that the ideology has been gestating for close on a century—long before it burst onto the popular scene in 2001.

Küntzel traces the early beginnings of radical Islam to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in the 1920s, and goes on to examine the impact of Nazism, the writings of Sayyid Qutb, the rise of Hamas and the mindset of Bin Laden. Mining a range of secondary and primary sources, he reveals a hatred that is filled with disturbing fantasies, including a belief in the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, the notorious forgery that is ensconced comfortably in the Hamas Charter. The West, warns Küntzel, has to confront the ideology; it cannot blame its own behavior for the rise of Islamist terrorism. Both scholars and the general reader should take note.

Milton Shain, University of Cape Town, South Africa


Few 20th-century rabbis have been as flamboyant or as colorful as Joachim Prinz (1902-1988). A Reform rabbi, and a right-hand man of Stephen S. Wise (who played a major role in getting Prinz and his family out of Europe), Prinz evidently was the very opposite of the prototypical German Jew/Yekke, as exemplified by Leo Baeck (1873-1956). Prinz must have been a fiery fellow, brimming with charisma, who marched to his own drummer, a most fortunate trait to have had in Weimar Germany—where few Jews took Hitler seriously, or dared to stand up to the inevitable. He was an excellent speaker and he wrote on historical topics that were eye-catching and memorable. Prinz eventually became rabbi of Temple B’nai Abraham in Newark, New Jersey, in 1939.

Michael A. Meyer, professor of Jewish history at Hebrew Union College/Jewish Institute of Religion and the leading historian of modern Jewish history, has rendered Jewish and seminary libraries a major service by editing and publishing Prinz’s autobiography. There is an excellent editor’s introduction along with a chronology of Dr. Prinz’s life, the text of a speech delivered at the Lincoln Memorial in 1963, a list of books published by Prinz and an index. This is a work that should be in every large public, seminary, synagogue, and university collection.

Morton J. Merovitz, Buffalo, NY


Drawing on her earlier work, The Troubles of Templeless Judah (2005), Middlemas achieves her twofold purpose for this book: to provide a current introduction to historical, literary, and theological insights from an important period in Israel’s history; and to raise concerns about calling this period the “exile.” She begins by outlining several problems with the terms “exile” and “exilic,” including the fact that there was more than one exile so the term should be plural, not singular. Some people were exiled, but others were refugees, and still others remained in Judah. Scholars often adopt the perspective of the Babylonian exiles without regard for other perspectives. In addition, the exile never really ended. For these and other reasons, Middlemas argues that the term “templeless” is a more appropriate description for the period from 587-515 BCE.

She then turns to Israel’s theological responses to being templeless as expressed in the biblical texts of the time. Two genres express judgment and the lack of a future vision: lamentations (e.g., the book of Lamentations) and historiography (i.e., the Deuteronomistic history). Jeremiah and Ezekiel 1-39 express another response—the “intermingling of judgment and hope.” Isaiah 40-55 (i.e., Deutero-Isaiah) and Ezekiel 40-48 express a “turn to hope in divine reversal,” while Haggai, Zechariah 1-8, and the Holiness Code express a “hope in faithful human response to divine salvation.” This innovative, clearly-written book, which includes a helpful reference list and indexes, is recommended for academic and large synagogue libraries.

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

Dr. Raymond Scheindlin is a professor of medieval Hebrew literature at the Jewish Theological Seminary, where he teaches courses on the connection between the Hebrew and Arabic cultures in Spain. In addition he is interested in literary translation. *The Song of the Distant Dove* tells the story of Judah Halevi’s pilgrimage to the Holy Land through his poetry and excerpts of letters written by, to, and about him. Scheindlin covers such topics as Halevi’s religious development, his longing to set foot in the Holy Land, his stops in Alexandria, and Cairo and the ocean voyage itself.

Most of the book consists of Halevi’s poetry in Hebrew with the translation on the facing page and commentary on the top and bottom of the page. The book includes an epilogue, which discusses the veracity of the traditional belief that as Halevi knelt down at the gates of Jerusalem he was trampled and killed by an angry Arab on horseback. The book includes copious notes, poem sources, a bibliography and an index of poems. *The Song of the Distant Dove,* a scholarly work, is recommended for all academic libraries and libraries that collect liturgical or medieval Hebrew poetry.

**Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, OH**

**HOLOCAUST STUDIES & MEMOIRS**


The author has lived in what the famous Chinese curse calls “interesting times.” He was born in Transylvania, grew up in the 1930s, trained as a rabbi, and headed a community where he helped save Jews from the Nazis. He escaped to pre-state Israel and witnessed the declaration of statehood. After serving in the Israeli diplomatic service and as headmaster in Israeli schools, he accepted a teaching post at Yeshiva University.

The book is interesting, but flawed. The author, who had been very active at important junctures in modern Jewish history, had to choose what to omit in order to keep the book to a manageable size. Due to the omissions, the book sometimes seems a bit incoherent. Furthermore, Professor Carmilly-Weinberger uses the book to settle accounts with people who, in his opinion, hurt or opposed him. I certainly am very curious to hear the other side of the story in many cases.

Many of these “enemies” are of minor interest, but I regret that his diatribe against Dr. Kastner (who negotiated with Eichmann concerning Hungarian Jewry), was not accompanied by Kastner’s version. All in all, a book that adds to our knowledge of a crucial period in Jewish history.

*Chaim Seymour, Bar-Ilan University, Israel*


Naftali Deutsch was about 12 years old when the Nazis entered his hometown of Kimyat in Ruthenia (now Ukraine) and deported the Jewish population, most of whom perished in Auschwitz. Mr. Deutsch presents his memoir, subtitling it “a fascinating chronicle of a Jewish boy’s miraculous survival from five concentration camps.” The first 100 pages of the book relate his experiences in the camps and his eventual liberation. The rest of the book details his association with Zionist groups, his stint in the Israeli Merchant Marine, and his eventual immigration to the United States, where he started a family and became a successful businessman. He has strong opinions about many subjects, and includes many family photographs.

Mr. Deutsch has led a fascinating life, but this book could have used sharper editing. The writing alternates between first person and third person. Some words and concepts are explained in great detail, some are translated, and some are mentioned briefly with no explanation. Biblical references break up the story. Many childhood memories are presented with the hindsight of an adult, as when the author relates the selection process at Auschwitz to Spinoza. Better maps with details of Mr. Deutsch’s routes would have enhanced the narrative. Recommended only for those libraries that have extensive Holocaust collections.

*Kathe Pinchuck, Congregation Beth Sholom, Teaneck, NJ*
Those first days of occupation. They (Germans) must have had the horror, the fear and my feeling of total helplessness during occupation in 1944. Dick writes: “Now years later, I can still recall which had existed in earlier times, intensified with the German memoir of the three titles. Born in Budapest in 1925 to an assimilated Jewish family, the author was born and where he studied and taught. A disciple of Simon Dubnow, Ringelblum was determined to collect documentation for the writing of Jewish history much earlier than World War II. But his realization of the magnitude of what was going on around him, the scale of the destruction wrought by the Nazis both in lives and in Jewish culture, drove him to the unimaginable task of collecting a cache of documents during a time when most people could only focus on surviving. This archive will serve forever as evidence of that heinous crime.

This is one of the books that every Jewish library should own. It will be an excellent Holocaust studies resource for general readers as well as high school students and beyond for a long, long time to come.

Michlean Amir, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington DC


Dr. Emil Fackenheim was best known for his 614th commandment: not to grant Hitler a posthumous victory. In this book, Dr. David Patterson both elucidates and builds on the theology and politics implicit in that commandment. The book is organized thematically, with chapters devoted to the most important as-
pects of Fackenheim's philosophy. These include the historical encounter of Judaism and Western philosophy, the importance of the singularity of the Holocaust; Zionism and Israel; and Fackenheim’s appropriation of the kabbalistic concept of tikkun ha-olam. The first chapter, on the roots of Nazi anti-Semitism within the European philosophical tradition, excellently explains Fackenheim’s critique of the enlightenment and his complementary turn towards Judaism.

The most provocative sections of Patterson’s work are those in which he advocates a more parochially Jewish response to the Holocaust than Fackenheim himself endorsed. Patterson argues, for example, that given philosophy’s complicity in Nazi anti-Semitism, it is of no use in formulating a Jewish response. This complicity is exemplified in the person of Martin Heidegger. More subtly, Patterson lards his exposition of Fackenheim’s ideas with traditional sources; these references bolster his argument that the Jewish response to the Holocaust must be above all else traditionally religious.

In addition to its distracting repetitions, the book’s main fault is its narrow focus. In his discussion of Zionism, for instance, Patterson does not mention Palestine or Palestinians. This silence is confounding given the relevance of this issue to contemporary political discussions of Judaism, Zionism, and the Holocaust. An optional purchase for academic libraries.

*Samuel Thrope, University of California, Berkeley, CA*


This book, together with its companion volume, is designed to be used in Holocaust courses. The volume includes 27 stories by various writers, most of whom are survivors. The stories are grouped in the book under topical headings including: In the Beginning, The Gathering Storm, and The Gray Zone. Each topic is explained in an introduction to the book by the editor, Karen Shawn. Biographical material on each of the authors is also included.

The companion volume has extensive commentary on each story with references to literary theories, psychological conditions, and relevant historical data pertaining. Also included are biographical information about the contributors to the teacher’s guide, a glossary of educational terms, and state standards in teaching of literature compiled by the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association in addition to standards for the teaching of history.

These volumes constitute a rich resource for the teacher in planning Holocaust curricular materials for upper-level high school and college classes. The commentaries in the teacher’s guide are perhaps a bit too advanced for students at the high school level but may be of use to the teacher. The volume of narratives taken alone is of interest and this volume may easily stand alone.

*Marion M. Stein, Abraham Joshua Heschel High School, NY*


The amazing heroine Vera Atkins was a Romanian-born Jew, but most of the people working with her believed her to be British. According to Stevenson, Vera Atkins headed the Special Operations Executive (SOE), a secret agency responsible for supplying resistance organizations in countries occupied by Germany, and for organizing sabotage. The author focuses on the Second World War period and especially on France, and demonstrates an awareness of the complexity of situations and of conflicting interests. The enmity between the SIS (later MI6) and the SOE is emphasized, for example, since the SIS feared that the people trained by SOE might, at a later stage, fight the British or their allies. The author examines the Jewish situation, the use of Jewish refugees in the SOE, the American fear of a flood of Jewish refugees, and the British objections to the resettlement of Jews in Palestine. He also deals with the German interest in promoting emigration to Palestine in order to embarrass the British, and the struggle to establish Jewish units to fight the Germans.

This book is very interesting, but should be read in conjunction with Marcus Binney’s *The Women Who Lived for Danger* (2002). Vera Atkins has only a minor role but Binney confirms a lot of the facts. (Both books use the same sources.) Stevenson’s work is partisan; Binney’s is more balanced, but lacks the Jewish facet.

*Chaim Seymour, Bar-Ilan University, Israel*


Nineteenth-century central Europe was a study in contradictions: the Symbiose, or confluence of Jewish and German culture, versus the anti-Semitism that culminated in the mass annihilation of the following century. Historian Robert S. Wistrich examines the intellectual and artistic climate to ponder: what was it about that glamorous society which, along with Freud and Mahler, produced Hitler? Was it about that preexisting, albeit dormant, hatred and resentment? Or the natural result of secularism and liberalism? Several notable Jews are selected as egregious examples of the cultural schizophrenia. While some, like Zionist leader Nathan Birnbaum, returned to their roots, others, like writer Karl Kraus, became that vicious and cynical breed, the self-hating Jew. The handsome, regal Theodore Herzl envisioned his “Jewish homeland” replete with European cafes and orchestras; litterateur Max Nordau advocated sports and nature as a cure for the “degeneration” of the ghetto.

The “villains” get a more objective look. Nietzsche’s half-baked philosophies were largely misappropriated by his Nazi sister, Hitler himself, saved for last, had Jewish acquaintances in his boyhood; not until his vagabond years in the corrupting atmosphere of Vienna did his philosophy develop lethally. Evidently that decadent milieu was one wild ride, with Jew and Gentile alike on a collision course. Well researched with footnotes and bibliography, this book is essential for Jewish, Holocaust, and academic libraries.

*Hallie Cantor, Yeshiva University, NY*

Aziza Khazzoom examines the occupational attainment of Jewish immigrants during their first encounter with Israel's labor market in the 1950s, to explore the reasons for ethnic inequality. Her study is based on analysis of the 1961 Israeli census, published research, and interviews, and it includes tabular data and diagrams as well as endnotes, a bibliography, and an index. Khazzoom notes that the veteran Jewish political, economic, and cultural “gatekeepers” in the newly established state of Israel, who were mostly Ashkenazim, were determined to keep the state Western, as they understood the term. They therefore tried to prevent Levantinization, and treated new Jewish immigrants accordingly, based on their educational background, appearance, and behavior. This approach had occupational and settlement consequences, with a high proportion of Ashkenazi Jews settling in the big cities and the center of the country, and entering into white-collar positions, while large numbers of Mizrahi Jews, especially Moroccans, settled in development towns in the periphery, acquiring manual and factory jobs. Khazzoom focuses on the “Iraqi paradox” in which many Iraqi Jews, owing to their higher Western educational level and behavior, settled in Ramat Gan, in the center of Israel, and took white-collar jobs. This is an important topic, and Khazzoom provides some interesting comparisons with other societies and suggestions for further research. The book is appropriate for specialized academic libraries and readers who are well versed in sociological parlance.

Rachel Simon, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ


Between February and October 2003, two groups of citizens, one Israeli, the other Palestinian, gathered and groped for a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. What transpired and emerged from this set of meetings became known as the Geneva Initiative. The author, an Israeli academician and political scientist, was a participant in, and an observer of this historic occasion. Here he presents an in-depth and well-documented interpretation of the process that led to the formulation of this non-traditional diplomatic effort, and describes how it was ultimately received by the respective domestic audiences. This is a candid appraisal of Israeli sentiments along with an appreciation of Palestinian goals and objectives.

Klein analyzes the differences in the political designs of the Sharon and Barak governments and condemns what he sees as poor administrative control over the Jerusalem municipality. As one of the Israeli team members, he was able to evaluate the Palestinian negotiating style, which he found to be marked by exceptionally high and perhaps unattainable goals. Klein also notes their lack of established state apparatus, and discusses a range of other important issues including settlements, the status of Jerusalem, and international borders.

Although the Geneva Initiative proposal was not accepted by either government, it represents the potential for conflict resolution, or, as the author likes to conclude, a model for negotiations between the disputants and something that is far more viable than peace plans with no definite vision. The book is written for an academic audience and for general readers with an avid interest in current events.

Sanford R. Silverburg, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC


This is a pleasant story, frequently humorous and bordering on the tragic, of a young South African Jewish boy, who, with his parents, migrated to Canada and then attended law school in New York City. Looking for a change of pace, the author, now a professor of professional communications at Ryerson University in Toronto, sought an internship at the Israeli mission at the United Nations. He gained employment as a speech writer for the ambassador and served as a part-time diplomat, attending various committee meetings of both the General Assembly and Security Council as a member of the Israeli diplomatic team. He was then tapped for similar service with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in Jerusalem, and served a brief stint with Sharon’s successor, Ehud Olmert.

That is effectively when the tale ends. What may appear comical to some, but disconcerting to others, is the continual reference to what has become the stereotypical view of the Israeli: brusque, socially inept bordering on boorish, and generally unpleasant. When this set of character traits spills over to the government bureaucracy, we learn of nothing but dysfunction. Worse is how these anecdotal forays play out in the diplomatic arena, where any Israeli success becomes doubtful. Unfortunately, we learn

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little of the intricacies of Israeli diplomacy either at the UN or in the Prime Minister’s Office, even though the author is an “insider.” This book is perhaps well suited for an adult haskalah discussion group.

Sanford R. Silverburg, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC


The title’s implication that two negative conditions, “lost years” and some kind of related “failure” in the Middle East, presumably because of the connection between Israeli and American policies, gets to the heart of the matter. Matthews, a Washington-based journalist with more than a dozen years of field experience in the Middle East, tells of a relationship between American President George Bush and his Israeli counterpart, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. Together, these two leaders appear to be hand-in-glove in the post-Oslo period, attempting to find a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Sharon served as prime minister from 2001 until a debilitating stroke ended his political career early in 2006. During that time, he pushed through the Knesset a disengagement from Gaza plan, while Bush brought forth a European-initiated “roadmap” proposal to end the conflict with the Palestinians, who were simultaneously struggling to create a viable political system.

Without any supporting documentation or citations, Matthews introduces the reader to all the primary political actors in the White House, the State Department, and the Pentagon, and he describes the intricacies of the Israeli political system. The tragedy Matthews points to, is that all the politicians engage in what leads to a set of lost opportunities, misperception of intentions, and poor judgment. This book is clearly written, and will appeal to a wide range of readers interested in the politics and foreign policy of Israel and America.

Sanford R. Silverburg, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC


While Morris’s earlier books concentrated on the origins of the Palestinian refugee problem, 1948 explores the political, social, and military events that took place between 1947 and the early 1950s from both the Arab point of view and the perspective of the Yishuv. Morris’s writing is thoroughly engaging and highly informative. Especially interesting is his analysis of the interactions among Israeli political and military leadership in responding to the challenges and threats both within the Yishuv and from the outside. Another important element is his reading of the transfer of Arabs to areas outside of the Yishuv and the expulsion of Jews from Arab lands. Morris examines archival resources in Israel, the United Kingdom and the United States—The Arab World continues to keep its archives closed to historical research—as well as published resources, newspapers, and a wide range of secondary literature; 1948 contains nearly 2000 footnotes and an extensive bibliography.

This book is recommended for academic and synagogue libraries.

Paul Hamburg, University of California, Berkeley, CA


Reading this biography feels like going through a scrap book while sitting on the couch, shoulder to shoulder with an older friend or relative. Rubinger has taken some of the most iconic photographs of our lifetime—his photo of the Israeli paratroopers at the Western Wall during the Six Day War or of Begin and Sadat are ones you will instantly recognize. More recent images include such poignant photographs as the lyrics to “Song for Peace,” stained by Rabin’s blood when he was assassinated in 1995, and an Israeli sergeant welcoming a family member newly arrived from Ethiopia in Operation Solomon.

Through this book, Rubinger tells the story of his life, and the stories behind the photos. Rubinger began taking photographs in 1946. After the War of Independence he started working for Israeli news media and then for Time-Life in 1954. He writes of major historical events (the Six Day War, Yom Kippur War, Lebanon War, and the Intifadas), historical people (Meir, Sadat, Begin, Ben-Gurion, Sharon)—as well as personal events (his early childhood, his marriage to his wife, Anni, his life in the movies, his archives). He has led an interesting and fruitful life—this is not a dull book. The book contains a chronology that lists biographical events and his photojournalistic work, and an index.

Ruth Corman is also a photographer, and has organized exhibits in Israel and Britain. She is to be commended for doing an excellent job of organizing and presenting Rubinger’s life to an appreciative audience. Recommended for all libraries.

Suzanne Smailes, Wittenberg University, Springfield, OH


Growing up, Ariel Sabar had disdain for his father, who was a nerdy academic whose career did not provide the status or income of the younger Sabar’s friends in suburban Los Angeles. As an adult, the author grew to appreciate his father, who went from a remote village in Northern Iraq, to Israel in the 1950s, to Yale for a Ph.D., and on to UCLA to establish himself as the world’s foremost authority on neo-Aramaic, the language spoken by the Jews of Zakho. Yona Sabar’s fascinating story sheds light on the history of Jews in Iraq, the struggles and challenges of new immigrants to Israel, and the personality of Kurdish Jews.

Ariel Sabar did extensive research, traveling to Israel and Iraq and questioning his father. When there were gaps in his information, he “built on the framework of known facts and let himself imagine how the particulars of a scene or dialogue would be likely to have unfolded.” This creates a “family myth,” which is interesting to read, but may be off-putting to those looking for nonfiction or memoir. There is no sentimentality for Zionism or the early state of Israel, which is understandable given the treatment of Kurds as second-class citizens. This book is recommended for all libraries.

Kathe Pinchuck, Congregation Beth Sholom, Teaneck, NJ

The author emigrated from Russia to Israel in 1981 and then moved to the United States. One feels that she survived two traumatic experiences: her sister chose a Haredi (ultra Orthodox) framework which damaged their sibling ties. Second, that same group was not interested in the author. The author’s thesis is that Haredi Judaism is a cult.

Two things bother me about the book. The first is the many errors of fact, and the second is the author’s refusal to distinguish between the fundamentalism in mainstream religions and cults. It is very hard to separate the errors of fact from personal opinion. The author claims that Menahem Begin was on the *Al'talena* and that “There are rumors that scholarships are available in the Israeli universities for Israeli students, but I never met anybody who received one.”

The author threw away an opportunity to treat an important subject. Her view is apparent in two statements: “Israel offered us a choice between two Jewish identities … a religious identity is a fanatical one. A secular identity is a demoralized one. Israel … almost became a fundamentalist state by the end of the 20th century.” Israel absorbed many Russian immigrants in a short time and mistakes were made. This book should be read to understand that the human cost of such mistakes is very high.

*Chaim Seymour, Bar-Ilan University, Israel*


*Baghdad, Yesterday* includes autobiographical vignettes by Sasson Somekh, professor of modern Arabic literature at Tel-Aviv University, of his life in Baghdad, where he lived until he immigrated to Israel in 1951 at the age of 17. The book is rich in personal descriptions of Somekh’s family, Jewish life in Baghdad in the 1940s, and Baghdadi intellectual life, and offers glimpses into Somekh’s life after immigration. Somekh was involved in literary circles in Baghdad and he describes his contacts with famous Iraqi intellectuals, several of whom were influential in his early literary career. As is well known, Jews were involved in Iraqi intellectual and political life to a much greater extent than in any other Middle Eastern or North African country.

These vignettes describe the life of a young Jew in Baghdad, at home in the Jewish community and in Arab intellectual circles. His positive view of life in Baghdad is neither nostalgic nor glorifying. The book is appropriate for academic, community center, and public libraries with collections on the Middle East, North Africa, Jewish studies, and minority studies.

*Rachel Simon, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ*

**JEWISH LIFE & PRACTICE**


*Esra’s Meatless Meals* is the third publication of ESRA (The English Speaking Residents Association), a group of English-speaking volunteers raising funds to support community projects in Israel. This spiral-bound book has more than 100 vegetarian and fish recipes, including side and main dishes, pasta (including Danny Kaye’s lemon pasta), quiches, kugels, rice, lentils, tofu and wraps as well as egg and cheese dishes. It does not have any dessert recipes. Most are similar to ones I have seen in other cookbooks, but I did find a few that I had not seen elsewhere. They include some simple but creative bite-sized vegetable appetizers and tofu kababs. The book also contains eight eggplant recipes. I was especially pleased with the “make your own white cheese” recipe and have since made it more than six times. Some recipes seem a bit high in calories, and a number contain cream sauce. But on the whole, it is a practical cookbook for the home and would make a fine gift. While some recipes are definitely Israeli, most are just the usual vegetarian fare. Unless your Judaica library has a large cookbook collection, this is an optional purchase.

*Dina Tamnes, Seattle, WA*


These are two very different books in their coverage of the subject of Jewish mysticism. *20 Minute Kabbalah* presents exercises in Jewish mystical practices and in connecting to God. The accompanying compact disc guides listeners into the meditative practices outlined in the book. Cantor Kathy Robbins’s beautiful voice has a very calming effect. *20 Minute Kabbalah* is in the mode of popular kabbalah that has permeated our popular culture. It is not specifically aimed at a Jewish reader, which can be seen in the suggested practices in meditating on a death. On the death of a loved one, the authors write, “Kaddish is not only a faithful affirmation of God, but, also, words of condolence spoken directly to God.” Dosick further writes that when he could not get to synagogue, he would say *kaddish* alone. He gives “The Lord’s Prayer” as an example of a prayer that can be recited instead of *kaddish*. The authors do not see it as a problem for Jews to say this prayer. *20 Minute Kabbalah* is recommended as a gift book for Jews and non-Jews (with reservations for Orthodox Jews) who are interested in the subject of kabbalah and spirituality.

The *Way of Splendor* is an updated edition of a classic, which provides an easy-to-read-and-understand historical overview of Jewish mysticism. In one of the chapters, “The New Land of the Mind,” the author examines the merging of psychology and kabbalah. He discusses the neshamah and reincarnation in another chapter on death. With footnotes, glossary, index and bibliography, it is a good source with which to begin the study of mysticism. *The Way of Splendor* is highly recommended for synagogue, public and special libraries.

*Ellen Share, Washington Hebrew Congregation, Washington, DC*

Readers often lament the absence of literary merit in those books targeted to the Jewish (often Orthodox) community. How refreshing to find a collection of stories written in clear, subtle prose, about everyday life, life cycle events, and occasions of happiness and sadness. The book is divided into seven sections: Chance and Circumstance; Writing about Our Tribe; Fiction—The Invented Life; It’s All About Character; Looking within—The Personal Journey; Voices from the Workplace; and Humor. Before each section, Ms. Feuerman, an accomplished author, gives constructive suggestions for aspiring writers to hone their skills, and, in the last section of the book, discusses getting published and getting rejected. A glossary is included.

Feuerman culled many of these stories from writing workshops, which she has conducted for over 15 years. The stories are personal enough to make readers feel they are getting a secret glimpse of someone else’s life, as in a story about infertility, yet universal enough for identification and inspiration, as in a “grandmother story.” Of particular note is a novella, “The Star and the Crescent,” which captures the tension and ambivalence of a teenage female homicide bomber and the religious fervor of her Jewish counterpart in Jerusalem. The section based on interviews other stories reveals the mysterious worlds of the Jewish Burial Society and a mohel who does circumcisions for adults. This book is recommended for all Jewish libraries, especially those that collect short stories or whose patrons include aspiring authors.

*Kathe Pinchuck, Congregation Beth Shalom, Teaneck, NJ*


It’s Erev Shavuot. We are visiting friends who live in a small rural community in southwest Colorado. We decide to follow Rabbi Korngold’s instructions: to find an outdoor opportunity that fosters a deep connection with Judaism. We hike a moderate trail. Surrounded by majestic mountain peaks, we read and discuss the Ten Commandments. Rabbi Korngold reminds us of a saying by Abraham Joshua Heschel: “God begins where words end.” We pay special attention to our surroundings. As the blue sky darkens, a glorious full moon rises over the mountain peaks, still capped in clean white snow from last night’s storm.

The crickets are chirping, frogs are croaking, the creek is running fast from this year’s heavier-than-usual snow pack. Words of Torah, commentary, lots of God talk, and good fellowship blend in perfect harmony with our well-chosen place to celebrate God’s revelation.

Raised in New York City, Rabbi Korngold, now living in Boulder, Colorado, has re-structured her life in order to offer the wilderness lessons of our ancestors to those back-packers, mountaineers, cyclists yearning for Judaism’s vitality. *God in the Wilderness* contains quotes from Bible, Talmud, midrash, Buber, Walt Whitman, Heschel, and others, and includes lots of personal reflections and anecdotes from her Adventure Rabbi trips. Chapter-by-chapter discussion questions can be found on her website: www.adventurerabbi.com. Highly recommended, although this pocket-size paperback may get bent and wet as it goes into the wilderness.

*Irene K. Seff, Albuquerque, NM*


For readers whose knowledge is scanty, *A Chapter of Talmud* provides a guide expressly for beginners, using a section of Bava Metzia as an example. Gently steering the reader, the author explains complex arguments but never compromises the integrity of the text. He anticipates where Talmudic logic has its own rules and identifies the speaker when there is ambiguity. Occasionally, to demonstrate a rabbi’s flexibility, he talks about the same sage in other chapters or volumes. The paradigm for Talmud study is two students working together, but when a partner is not available, this brief introduction can be a useful companion. For public, synagogue, high school and college libraries.

* Rochelle Berger Elstein, Evanston, IL*


Reading Moses’s book is like sitting with a close friend of a long and witty chat. The author’s life is altered when her husband Stuart accepts a position as a law professor at Louisiana State University, and she needs to move her household and kids from a liberal and affluent neighborhood of Washington, D.C. to Baton Rouge. Arriving in the South, in the Bible belt, she experiences a period of crisis regarding her faith, while serving as a volunteer at an AIDS hospice. Surrounded by terminally-ill patients who find comfort in their evangelical Christian faith, Moses begins to consider how a deeper spirituality might improve her life. The author looks for a synagogue, finds a rabbi, and rediscovers Judaism and the deepening of her Jewish faith. She studies Hebrew and Judaism, and becomes the first woman in her family to celebrate a bat-mitzvah. Moses’s spiritual journey helps her become stronger when she herself must face a cancer diagnosis. This is a well-written, humorous, remarkable story of self-discovery and acceptance, which will resonate with many readers, particularly those living in small Jewish communities. Recommended for all synagogues and community libraries.

*Sonia Smith Silva, McGill University, Montreal, Canada*


As a teenager, Danya Ruttenberg rebelled against the unsatisfying Judaism she saw around her. In high school and college, she explored philosophy and intellectual inquiry, while maintaining “a comfortably distant relationship” with religion. Following a trip to Poland with her father (including visits to several death camps) she bought a Magen David.

After college, she moved to San Francisco, enjoyed the club scene of the 1990s, and slowly discovered the power of Judaism. She struggled to balance her new interest with the tug of her old life, as she developed a deeper commitment at Congregation
Beth Shalom, under Rabbi Alan Lew. An extended trip to Israel and involvement in congregational life brought her even more satisfaction and additional questions. The path eventually led her to rabbinical school, where she is now finishing her education.

_Surprised by God_ recounts the path of a member of the current generation of young people who have rediscovered Judaism. The author includes wonderful quotations from across the spectrum of religion—including medieval mystics, Buddhist authors, and contemporary writers, as well as Jewish sources. She vividly describes the unsettling quality that surrounds “becoming religious,” and explores the implications of her transformation with appropriate appreciation and uncertainty. Her book is most suitable for synagogue libraries, and may be appropriate for teenagers and book groups.

_Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA_

**JEWISH PHILOSOPHY & RELIGION**


Recent books about kabbalah explore the subject from different angles and perspectives. Dunn, a professor of foreign languages at San Antonio College (Texas) has worked for over 25 years researching Judaic mysticism and Jungian depth psychology. His approach is academic, and he presents a “comprehensive selection from the teaching of Isaac Luria as preserved in the _Etz Hayyim_ that gives clarity to his conceptual system.” The main focus of the book is pre-creation. After an introduction, the author provides lists of aspects of kabbalah, and a prayer to say before studying the sources. The teachings are divided into four sections: The Kings of Edom, Divine Rebirth, Adam among the Worlds, and Benedictions of the Soul.

Although there are extensive notes and references to the original sources, the teachings are presented in numbered groups with no context or explanation. The foreword, by Rabbi Yattah, asserts that “if our souls are not already aflame when we open the first page and turn to the first word, we will encounter only the outer husks of Luria’s teaching.” But without a competent kabbalist, who has a thorough knowledge of all of Jewish teaching and Jewish law, the pursuit of this knowledge is intrinsically hollow and merely a philosophical exercise. Readers would need an extensive background in the subject matter to grasp most of the material presented. Most libraries can pass on this one.

_Kathe Pinchuck, Congregation Beth Sholom, Teaneck, NJ_


These recollections illuminate the erudition (lomdei) of an ilui (genius), by incorporating anecdotes, stories, perspectives essential to the yet unwritten definitive biography, and insights on this Jewish philosopher and Talmudist.

Rav Soloveitchik (z”l) ordained rabbis at Yeshiva University, and worked for _klal Yisrael_ to further the resurgence of Orthodoxy. While the Rav illuminated the understanding of the _mabliot_ in the Shas (the true _milhamot HaShem_), he also was expert in the tensions enlivening secular traditions. The Rav embodied what Rambam understands to be essential for a _talmud hakham_.

Outstanding essays in the collection include those by Rabbi Bernard Lander, Dean Rabbi Samuel Boylan, and Dr. David

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Cleveland Convention

My Bat Mitzvah Year With AJL
RITA SACCAL

It was June 1995. Thirteen years ago in Chicago. Both of us (at that time Irene Munster was with me) came into the hotel trembling. It was our first contact with AJL, and it was our first meeting with librarians outside of our country, Argentina. Three wonderful ladies received us with big smiles on their faces: Shoshanah, Cheryl and Nancy. Five minutes later we were meeting most of our colleagues. My mentor at that time was Laurel Wolfson, recent past president of AJL.

Thirteen years have passed since then. Each convention has better than the last. Each convention offered me the opportunity not only to make new friends, but to learn what is going on in the library world. I have passed through different stages at AJL, from a newcomer, to chair of the Reference and Bibliography Awards Committee, to R&S vice president and then R&S president, and now I am the Latin American correspondent for the AJL Newsletter. Every year I learn more and more thanks to the wonderful support of AJL and the Littauer Foundation, who enable me to travel every year to different places.

Each year I look forward to the next convention. Travelling from so far away is an adventure—it takes so many hours—but this type of adventure is worth it. To be a librarian in South America, and especially in Argentina, where we have to cope without a budget, is completely different from being a librarian in the United States or Europe or Israel. And that is why it is so important for me to attend these conventions. Every year I learn something new to apply in our local library. In my bat mitzvah year, I want to thank AJL once more for its continuous support. Le-shanah hatehila'ah be-Chicago!

Cleveland Convention Delivers
RANDALL BELINFANTE

This year’s AJL convention in Cleveland, Ohio, was a wonderful experience. Our Sunday we arrived in time for a wonderful dinner and a fascinating address by Dr. Ellen Frankel, the CEO of the Jewish Publication Society, in which she outlined the convoluted path taken by the Jewish publishing industry in its development in America.

The theme of the convention, “Jewish libraries: Tradition, Text, and Technology,” embraced a wide spectrum of topics. Monday began with a fascinating session delving into the “Documenting of the Holocaust,” Robert Rozett from Yad Vashem demonstrated how the field of Holocaust publishing has changed over the years. Particularly significant to those of us called upon for genealogical assistance was the discussion of the opening of the Red Cross International Tracing Service (ITS) archive. The discussion noted that since all 11 countries that oversaw the ITS archive at Bad Arolsen in Germany had ratified an agreement officially opening up this archive, the materials will now be accessible, in machine readable format, to researchers around the world. Unfortunately, although this archive will be digitized and located in two notable Holocaust museums, it is not readily searchable. Moreover, as in other such databases, it includes names of people who had perished, but frequently fails to list those who survived, although there is now more information available regarding DP camps.

In another session were two excellent presentations about Haggadot. The first was a discussion delivered by Hannah Miryam Belinfante, who used the Rose Family Haggadah—part of New York Public Library’s collection—as a starting point for an exploration of the ways in which successive generations have used the Haggadah to express their experiences within the context of an enduring narrative. The second presentation was a discussion of the Szyk Haggadah, given by Irvin Ungar. As Ungar explained in his presentation, the Haggadah, which has been recently republished, draws parables between the ancient Egyptian and the Nazi taskmasters.

On Tuesday morning, the ever-popular LC Cataloging Update was, as usual, extremely informative and also quite entertaining. The series of talks dealing with Dutch Jewish library collections since World War II also drew a large number of attendees. During the war, the Nazis seized thousands of books and artifacts from various Dutch Jewish cultural institutions, and only a portion of the items have been recovered. Presenters Julie Marthe Cohen, Frits Hoogewoud, and Abraham Rosenberg focused on some of the recovery efforts. The discussion was particularly pertinent because of preparations for the celebration of four hundred years of the Dutch in America currently being planned for 2009.

The next session saw an exploration of different aspects of Dead Sea Scroll research. The first lecture, delivered by John Kampen, dealt with some of the major developments and discoveries that have emerged in response to new access granted to the scrolls in 1990, along with thousands of previously unknown fragments. David Levy presented a paper delving into the differences in worldview between the Essenes, the Sadducees, and the Pharisees as they are depicted in the DSS. The third presentation was a review of some of the available literature, focusing on the materials that should be of interest to Judaica libraries. Delivered by Marlene Schiffman, wife of noted DSS scholar Lawrence Schiffman, it offered something for children, interested adults, non-specialists, and DSS researchers.

The final session on Wednesday morning examined Jewish communities in various locations around the Americas. Rita Saccal discussed the Ashkenazi community in her native Argentina. (In previous years she has talked about the Sephardic Argentine community.) She noted how the Ashkenzim (i.e., the Gauchos) had come from Czarist Russia and settled in free Argentina. She looked at their life in the colonies, different aspects of the Jewish publishing industry, and the recent revival of the colonies in response to tourism. Sean Martin then discussed research on the Jewish community of Cleveland. He mentioned the significant role played by Jews in the development of northeastern Ohio, and included a description of a number of resources available to researchers in the Cleveland Jewish Archives. Randall Belinfante concluded the session with a discussion of the fascinating
community of Syrian Jews residing in Brooklyn, New York. This insular community is growing at an astronomical rate, resists assimilation into external culture, and maintains its own ways through a combination of external and internal forces.

Session on the Dead Sea Scrolls

Marlene Schiffman

In conjunction with the 60th anniversary of the State of Israel we are also celebrating the 60th anniversary of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. This theme was covered in our AJL session from three different points of view. Professor John Kampen opened “The Changing Face of the Study of the Qumran Texts” with a discussion of Jewish scholarship prior to 1947. He traced the critical study of the Second Temple era with regard to the Essenes that is found already in the 19th century. Subsequent excavations at Qumran and surrounding caves between 1947 and 1956 provided compositions previously unknown that were directly related to the issues of sectarian lifestyle and beliefs.

After the publication of a few volumes of these scrolls in the 1960s, progress by the Jordanian-constituted International Team ceased, yet new scholars were not permitted access to these materials. Then in the fall of 1991 some well-known events changed the course of Qumran studies, as scholars in the field became more restless to see the remainder of the material. Under international pressure, the Israel Antiquities Authority finally granted full access to its photograph collections in 1991.

What this means for research and for librarians who support this research is that the world of Qumran studies changed dramatically in 1991. Works written before and after that date betray remarkably different perspectives because the availability of the sources upon which the work was based had been so transformed. In fact, Dr. Kampen noted, scholars teaching in related areas are rather reluctant to incorporate Qumran materials into their teaching and research due to the increase in the complexity of the issues occasioned by the expansion of material and the development of appropriate methodologies. Whole new bodies and genres of literature have become available to an extent previously not imagined, and they engender new questions and new theories of much greater sophistication. An interesting phase in Qumran studies began in 1991, and its effects will be apparent on the study of Second Temple Judaism for the foreseeable decades. Dr. Kampen distributed a bibliography including the sites where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found, text editions, reference works, archaeological discoveries, and theories of Qumran origins. He also provided a survey of the non-biblical scrolls and a list of the texts classified according to content and genre.

Dr. David Levy followed with a presentation on “Theology, Halakhal, Politics, and Esotericism of the Dead Sea Scrolls Essene Sect.” He pointed out that there were mention of the Essenes in classical Latin citations of Solinus, Dio, and Agrippas, and Pliny located them north of En Gedi. Dr. Levy explained how the Essene hypothesis links the Qumran site and scriptorium to the scrolls found in the caves. Then he made comparative remarks about the nature of Essene beliefs. For example, the immortality of body and soul and the concept of angels has some equivalence with the Zohar. The Essenes differed on the question of providence and free will. While the Pharisees acknowledged God’s foreknowledge of man’s deeds yet allowed him free will, the Essenes insisted that God’s “glorious design” amounts to predestination so that in actuality man has no free will. The Pharisees believed that God created both light and darkness, peace and evil, but the Essenes recognized dualistic forces in the world which are at constant war with one another—the powers of Prince of Light and the Angel of Darkness. At the time of the eschatological war, which was soon to dawn, the sons of light would forever vanquish the sons of darkness and usher in the messianic era. The Essenes also differed on the use of a solar calendar rather than the lunar and disputed various purity regulations with the Pharisees. Their close-knit, insular community was stricter on laws regarding gentiles and proselytes than the Pharisaic rabbis.

The third talk was given by Marlene Schiffman whose theme was “Guidelines for Building a Dead Sea Scrolls Collection.” Part I, “A Survey of Research Trends” discussed the four phases of research on the scrolls and demonstrated how they were intimately linked and influenced by the history of the State of Israel: The Discovery Phase, 1947-1959, including the work of the International Team to piece together the fragments; the Transcription Stage, 1960-1991, which saw the effort to transcribe and translate the texts; the Period of Analysis, 1991-2002, which is characterized by the completion of the official publication series, exponential growth of publications in the field, new editions, new photographs, and new technologies being applied to the scrolls. Today we are on the verge of a fourth period of research, what we might call Integration, as the scrolls are brought into the discussion of the larger picture of ancient history and even popular culture.

Part two of Marlene’s presentation was a bibliography divided along the lines of specialized, academic works, general interest books, videos and documentaries, and children’s books. She also noted the many catalogs resulting from scrolls exhibitions that have taken place in Israel and in many major cities in the US.

The three papers dovetailed nicely with one another, giving a picture of the discovery, meaning, and research trends of the Dead Sea Scrolls. A spirited question-and-answer period followed the presentations, which demonstrated how this fascinating topic generated interest in the audience.

Tradition, Text and Technology

Kathy Bloomfield

I am not a librarian. I am a former Jewish children’s bookseller and past editor of the BabagaNewz Book Club. My report focuses on the people I had the good fortune to meet during my time at the convention. I was very busy collecting autographs.
Cleveland Convention

What a treat to dine and converse with Sid Fleishman, Sonia Levitin, Carol Matas, Jane Breskin Zalben, Dina Rosenfeld, and Sarah Lamstein. It was awesome to develop relationships with new authors and illustrators. I was honored to meet a Righteous Gentle of the 21st century, Chris Nicola. I had the opportunity to connect with publishers I had known for years, Hara Person and Claudia Varas. Then I was able to talk about children's books with my Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee colleagues at the “Adventures in Book Reviewing” session.

I am always nervous before our panel presentation. I think that the format is excellent, but two minutes per book is not very much time. Oh well, that is the burden of the STBA Committee—so many books, so little time. The banquet was, in award-winning author Norman Roth's words, “a unique gathering of librarians across the spectrum—children’s librarians, synagogue librarians, academic librarians.” Roth commended AJL for its scholarships, its efforts in preservation, and its promotion of excellence in Jewish children's literature.

Presentation of the Sydney Taylor Book Awards was a highlight. Listening to the inspiring acceptance speeches of Sarah Gershman (Bedtime Sh'ma), Sonia Levitin (Strange Relations), and Sid Fleishman (The Entertainer and the Dybbuk) made all the hours of reading, reviewing, pondering, and discussing the many books that I received over the course of the past year well worth it! A Celebration of Jewish Children's Literature: The Sydney Taylor Book Award’s 40th Anniversary from start to finish was one of the best days I have experienced at any conference anywhere. Beginning with a panel discussion outlining the history of Jewish children's literature and ending with a fabulous dessert buffet and author signing, no stone was left unturned in exploring the world of books for Jewish children.

Another Wonderful Convention

Kathy Steinberg

In addition to absorbing material from formal and informal scheduled sessions, conventions are for sharing ideas, successes, challenges, and plans for the future with librarians from many organizations. Although this was only my second AJL Convention, I felt that I was more focused in knowing what to attend. I knew many more people than I did last year, which improved my opportunities for good networking! Once again, the talks by Sydney Taylor Book Award winning authors and reviews by the STBA Committee were among my favorite presentations. I also found the session on book clubs for all ages to be particularly interesting and motivating. The roundtable for synagogue and center librarians and the discussion on online cataloging were useful. I hope that we can continue to sharing information throughout the year!

All in all, I feel fortunate that I was able once again to attend convention and meet so many interesting people. Thanks so much to the detail-oriented and efficient organizers! I hope to see everyone in Chicago in 2009.

Margaret Chaiken Honored with Manuscript Award

Aileen Grossberg

Despite the absence of the winning writer, the presentation of the Sydney Taylor Manuscript Award was one of the highlights of the recent AJL convention banquet. Margaret Chaiken’s manuscript “Stealing the Show” was selected from a group of manuscripts that ranged from ridiculous to realistic, silly to somber, weird to wonderful. But each showed great effort, imagination and love of writing.

Inspired by her fourth grade students, Margaret beautifully captured a child’s imagination through vivid description, child-friendly language, tense plotting, and exciting narrative in this time travel historical story set in 16th-century Antwerp and beyond.

From her student days, Margaret has been interested in other times and places. She spent summers teaching in Nepal, Thailand, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, and the Ukraine. She has studied at the Sorbonne and earned a master’s degree in international relations from New York University. She has lived and worked in Israel and is now temporarily retired from teaching at Park East Day School as she cares for her daughter, Aravah.

Every manuscript author owes a debt to Sydney Taylor, whose body of work has provided the inspiration for the Manuscript Award and whose family has so generously supported it. Although Sydney Taylor might not recognize the modern ten-year-old heroine of “Stealing the Show,” she would certainly applaud Margaret Chaiken’s ability to link both the Jewish character of Ana and the contemporary challenge that faces her: soccer or seder? Like Sydney Taylor, Margaret Chaiken beautifully integrates Judaism into the story while appealing to a broad audience.

Margaret wrote in her acceptance remarks that several years ago she had taken her fourth grade class to see a biographical play about Harriet Tubman. When the class returned to school, she asked each student to share something that he/she had learned from the play. She expected the students to regurgitate facts. Instead students replied that they had learned that you can smile even when things in your life are tough and that you can be proud of who you are even if you are different from other people.

Margaret was impressed that a middle aged Black woman from a different century could speak so intimately to these Manhattan Jewish children.

At around the same time, Margaret read a biography of Dona Gracia Nasi, the 16th-century Jewish entrepreneur who defied the Inquisition. As Margaret wrote, “just as an African American woman stretched across centuries to speak to a fourth-grade immigrant from Russia, struggling to adapt to American life and to a ten-year-old coping with the challenge of a disabled sibling, I hope that through “Stealing the Show,” Dona Gracia’s story will reach across barriers to speak to children from diverse backgrounds.”
The 2008 Fanny Goldstein Merit Award and Life Membership Awards

Elizabeth F. Stabler

Each year the Association of Jewish Libraries recognizes the outstanding work of its members. At the awards luncheon in June the Association honored Merrily F. Hart and Fred Isaac for all they have contributed to the AJL and to Judaic librarianship. Merrily F. Hart was granted life membership in recognition of outstanding leadership and professional contributions to the association and to the profession of Jewish librarianship and Fred Isaac was given the Fanny Goldstein Merit Award, named for the librarian, social activist and founder of National Jewish Book Month, in recognition of loyal and ongoing contributions to the association and to the profession of Jewish librarianship.

A hearty yasher koach to Merrily and Fred. We are so grateful for all they have done.

Ever wonder how to get involved in the AJL? Merrily’s curriculum vitae provides many answers. Currently Merrily is the editor of the “Adult Book Reviews” section of the AJL Newsletter. She has served as vice-president (1988-1990) and president of the SSC division (1990-1992), secretary of AJL, chair of the Travel Stipend Committee, member and chair of the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee (1984-1988) and chair of the Fanny Goldstein Award & Life Membership Committee (2000-2005). Her articles have been printed in Judaica Librarianship and the AJL Newsletter.

She is the author of several AJL publications including Creating a Collection: A Resource Booklist for a Beginning Judaic Library (1989, 2000; a revised edition is in press).

Co-chair of the 1985 Cleveland AJL convention and a member of the steering committee that hosted the 1997 convention, she also chaired a regional conference in 1994 and co-chaired another regional conference in November 2004, celebrating 350 years of Jewish life in America. Merrily is one of several members of the Greater Cleveland chapter who faithfully assembles and edits the chapter’s annual Jewish Book Month booklist, now shared with the national organization on the website, and has been active in this productive and vital chapter in a variety of posts, including president.

Merrily F. Hart has been librarian at Siegal College of Judaic Studies in Beachwood, Ohio for almost 20 years. She received her MA in history from the University of California at Berkeley and her MLS from the University of Michigan.

Fred’s resume was so modest and unassuming that we asked to reprint his acceptance speech, complete with rubrics.

Fanny Goldstein acceptance, June 2008, by Fred Isaac. [Fumble through the manuscript] Let’s see, now that I have you all together, where was I? ... No, that’s the wrong speech. Last year I received sound advice about giving speeches: “Be brief, be brilliant, be seated!”

When Suzi Dubin informed me that I was this year’s Fanny Goldstein recipient, my first reaction was “ Couldn’t they think of anyone more deserving?” My second was, “WOW!” This is truly one of the greatest honors in our profession. Over the past years we have presented it to our very best, most committed members. I arrived in Judaica librarianship in 1990, when I became director of the Jewish Community Library in San Francisco after 15 years in academia. A few months later I took a quick trip to Los Angeles to meet my colleagues. That day I met Rita Frischer, Rachel Glasser, Barbara Levi, and Rick Burke, all of whom have been deeply involved in AJL and its work for many years. They encouraged me to join them. In June 1991 I attended my first convention, at the Fontainebleau in Miami, where I began my deep involvement. Those who were there will recall that our banquet took place across the lobby from the finals of the Miss South Florida transvestites’ pageant. Our guest of honor that night was Eric Kimmel. (Pause) The conference was so memorable that I haven’t missed another. More important, I recognized the association’s open-ness, and decided to see how I could become more active.

The AJL is, most importantly, an organization of volunteers. We do the work of the association when we are not doing the many other things in our busy professional and personal lives. In that spirit I have spent my time trying to improve our organization in whatever ways I could find. “Sure, why not” has been one of my guiding principles. Another has been, “What questions need to be asked in order to improve the particular program or the AJL at large?” I have spent the past 18 years saying “Why not,” and asking lots of questions. Over that time, I hope I have persuaded some people to think differently about what they want to do. I hope I have encouraged others to commit themselves to new projects. My desire has always been to support the association in whatever ways I could, and to improve what we do and how we do it. I hope I have made a difference.

Like any Bar mitzvah candidate, I would like to thank a few people before closing. Obviously, my wife Robin has been a great support of my work for the past seven years, and must be mentioned here. In my role as convention chair, I also need to recognize the creators of our conferences, past, present and yet to be. Without your commitment, the association would not have the coherence it does, and we would not have the connections that mean so much to us. In particular, I want to recognize the 2005 committee from Oakland. Also, the people who have served on our award committees. Our prizes are important in large measure because of the dedication you show by reading and commenting on the many books that come before you every year.

Finally, I also wish to extend my appreciation to the association as a whole. We are told that librarians are a serious, committed group with their noses in their tomes. T’ain’t true, folks. I have found commitment and knowledge here, but also and a fine—at times wry—sense of humor here that I would not trade.

I am thrilled and honored to receive this prestigious award from the AJL. Thank you.
Association of Jewish Libraries General Membership Meeting Minutes
Annual Convention Meeting, Marriott Cleveland East, Cleveland, Ohio, Tuesday, June 24, 2008

Laurel Wolfson, president, called the meeting to order at 3:40 p.m. Minutes of the June 20, 2007 meeting were approved. Past president Ronda Rose reported that the first election by electronic vote went very well. There were positive comments made. Yossi Galron and Joy Kingsolver were thanked for their assistance with the electronic election. Paper ballots were sent to those members without e-mail.

Officer Reports

President Laurel Wolfson reported that a task force was established to examine the current and future direction of AJL. Over the past year, Laurel worked on conventions, copyright issues, tax and financial issues, the AJL handbook revision and funding for RAS awards. She thanked the Board and Council for working with her. Outgoing Board members were discharged. Incoming president Susan Dubin presented a gift to Laurel.

Esther Nussbaum installed the new board. Susan Dubin thanked the outgoing board. She said that AJL must support librarians and make institutions aware of what we do. In order to accomplish this, a task force will work with a professional consultant.

Susan Dubin is arranging consortium agreements with several vendors. Details will be announced on Hasafran and in the newsletter. Members should take an active role in the organization. Suggestions are welcomed. Members should share their wants and needs with the board and council.

Financial records were sent to the CPA and tax returns were filed. CDs were opened. [Editor’s note: the treasurer’s report and budget for the new fiscal year will appear in the next issue of the AJL Newsletter.]

Membership vice president Yossi Galron reported that AJL had 1,089 members in 2007/8. Over 400 have already renewed for the new year. Wearing his other hat, Yossi announced that the software used for Hasafran is being changed. The subscriber list was cleaned up. There are approximately 900 subscribers. Yossi was enthusiastically thanked for his many years of service.

Publications vice president Debbie Stern reported that 1,400 publications were sold this year. There has been good feedback for the online Weine publications. It has proved to be very popular. A copyright form was created for all AJL publications. A wiki may be created for best practices and other publication issues.

Outgoing SSC president Etta Gold thanked Susan Greening for her work as chair of the Accreditation Committee. This year, 22 libraries were accredited. The Sydney Taylor Book Award committee was a very productive and hard working group. The new chair is Kathe Pinchuck. Thanks to Aileen Grossberg and her committee, a Sydney Taylor Manuscript Award was given this year for an historical novel.

Outgoing RAS president Elliot Gertel invited everyone to an ALA/AJL program on Sunday night entitled “Eating Across Cultures.” ATLA may have a program with AJL. There is a call for papers for the World Congress of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem. The cataloging committee has a change in leadership. Another issue of Judaica Librarianship is in the works. There is a higher level of funding for the awards for the next five years. The Feinstein lecture will continue to be a part of the AJL convention. Thirty people attended the first meeting of the Digitization Committee. RAS brainstormed about programs for next year’s convention. Kol Hakavod to the Cleveland Convention committee. Yasher Koach to Linda Silver for programming.

Committee Reports

Productive meetings of the new task force have been held. There is nothing concrete to report yet. External issues will be dealt with via the Public Relations committee. To deal with internal issues, AJL’s goals will be examined. Anyone with ideas should contact either Etta Gold or Rachel Leket-Mor. The new organizational chart will be posted shortly.

The 2009 Convention will be held at the Sheraton in Chicago from July 5-8, which is right before ALA in Chicago. This will be the first convention organized by National with a large active chapter. The tag for posting should be “ajlchicago2009.” The Cleveland Committee was thanked for its hard work.

National Convention Committee chairs reported that future AJL conventions are scheduled as follows: 2010, Seattle; 2011, Montreal; 2012, Los Angeles. The committee is looking for new members. It was suggested that flights for the July 4, 2009 weekend be looked into.

Mentoring chairs announced that any member of AJL can be mentored. Library students and new librarians will be targeted by the mentoring committee. A wiki will be created. Job resources will be explored.

Development (formerly Fundraising) announced that the possibility of videostreaming future conventions will be explored. Members with good writing and communication skills are needed on the committee.

The CEU program was very valuable and timely. The speaker can travel to make presentations. The Professional Development committee was thanked. The podcast of the convention sessions should be available toward the end of the summer.

Respectfully submitted,
Elana Gensler
Recording Secretary
Luchins. This work helps the *dor asher lo yada es Yosef*, preserve a sketch of the *yiras shama'am* leadership, and outstanding intellectual excellence, as a master of the mesorah of emesik Yiddishkeit. Recommended for all libraries.

Dr. David B. Levy, Brooklyn, NY


This book is a discussion of the Mishnah, part of the Jewish oral law. The author starts his discussion with the assumption that the rabbis aimed to construct a utopia under their tutelage. Although the Mishnah was written after the destruction of the Second Temple, much of the text discusses issues relevant to life in the time of the Temple. Fishbane claims that the various groups that did not belong to the mainstream, were seen by the rabbis as threatening and were neutralized. The book deals with such outsiders as the Nazirite, a menstruating woman, and a witch.

The author’s thesis is interesting. The book is academic with a liberal framework of notes and references. One aspect that provided annoying repetition was the author’s need to restate his thesis and assumptions at the beginning of each chapter. This is a book for the specialist but may be of interest to the general reader.

Chaim Seymour, Bar-Ilan University, Israel


Sarah Kofman (1934-1994) taught philosophy in Paris, France and authored over 20 books. Seven of her books have already been translated into English and this volume provides the English-speaking public with additional materials, containing six new translations in a total of 16 essays. The editor took extreme care in providing reference to the French original sources and carefully reviewed the citations given by Kofman in their original French or German sources.

The 30-page introductory essay by Jacques Derrida is a eulogy for Kofman, celebrating their friendship. Derrida’s essay is full of hard-to-translate puns in the French language, and the meaning of individual sentences is sometimes to grasp. The editors “have chosen for inclusion in this volume a series of texts that speak in one or more ways to six topics with which Kofman’s work has in particular been identified by its readers, and with which her work has in particular identified itself: (1) Freud’s writings; (2) Nietzsche’s writings; (3) the figure of woman in Western philosophy and metaphysics; (4) visual art and aesthetic theory; (5) Judaism and anti-Semitism in European history, literature, and philosophy; and (6) autobiography.” The topic of Jewish identity aspect is treated last, and, because it occupies the least space in the volume, the title is only marginally relevant to Jewish studies.

Roger S. Kohn, Silver Spring, MD


This book by the late Cardinal Lustiger (d. 2007) focuses primarily on the Christian understanding of Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. The author instructs the reader in the Torah and its connection with the life of Jesus as found in the Gospels. Towards the end of the book, Lustiger discusses the long history of Christian anti-Semitism, pointing out that the persecution of Jews by Christians in the name of faith reduces that faith to a lie. Lustiger sums up the book with discussion of Jewish-Christian dialogue and the requirement of mutual trust for such dialogue to be successful. This book, originally published in French in 2002 under the title, *La Promesse*, seems written more for a Catholic audience. At first glance, the title might appear to be devoted to Jewish-Christian relations since the author had worked in this respect. However, this is not the case, and the cataloging-in-publication information reveals this with the principal subject identified as “Jesus Christ-Messiahship.” It is not likely that this title would be an appropriate addition to most Jewish libraries.

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


*Mi-Moshe le-Moshe lo-kam ki-Moshe*. Yet Rambam’s son, Rabbeinu Abraham, was *mi is al-Yahud*, the leader of the Jewish community in Egypt. This ethical text describes the *chasid*, who goes beyond the minimal requirements of law, being *mahmir* taking on *humras*, to experience a stronger link (*kesher*) with G-d.

The influence of the father on the son is apparent, e.g., in “On Abstinence” both ascetically discharging *gashmiyas* (physicality), exot the intellect (*sekel-hapoel*), and virtue (*middot tovot/arite*). Rabbeinu Avraham, like the Rambam, analyzes acting *lifnei misharat ha-din middot chasidut* (going beyond the call of duty). Rabbeinu Avraham recapitulates how the Rambam advocates departing from the mean by being very humble and by never getting angry, i.e., worshiping idols. How different is the Aristotelian gentleman, *Kalos Ka-agathos* vs. *HaTzadik & Chasid*?

Rabbeinu Avraham is known from the Rosenblatt translation of a Judeo-Arabic Leningrad manuscript, and Gershon Cohen’s classic article on Abraham ben Maimon’s soteriology. Wincelberg’s non-literal translation widens the circle to the larger public. We can decipher some of the father’s encrypted oral teachings, by decoding R. Abraham’s thought—*Hodos Pater via filios*. The sublime light of both shine together. *Ohr zarua li-tzadik, ohr li-tzadikim ba-olam ha-bah, zeh ohr genus, ohr nistarah*. Both (*Hilchot Teshuvah*) understand the light, enjoyed by the righteous, in *olam ha-bah*, as the light of the *Shekhinah*, where the righteous names in *Gan Eden* shine with crowns correlating to wisdom (*baknah/Sophia*), understanding (*binah/noesis noesis*), and knowledge (*daat/episteme*) attained in *olam ha-zeh*.

Dr. David B. Levy, Brooklyn, NY

David Novak, professor of Jewish studies at the University of Toronto, considers himself a traditionalist—one who accepts the entirety of the Law. He is also a philosophically-minded theologian, one of whose main influences is Abraham Heschel. This collection of 22 essays, almost all of which have been previously published, covers a broader range than the title indicates. While some essays deal with political questions such as abortion and homosexual marriage, most do not. Dr. Novak’s essays are both careful and creative. “Creation and Election” is a fine example, wherein he tries to fathom why Abraham accepted God’s election. It is very thought provoking as well as insightful, though one may well question the historical validity.

A particularly interesting theme, which runs through a number of the essays, is the importance of the seven Noahide laws (precepts that, in rabbinic thought, are binding upon all human beings), not only in themselves but as a way to help us understand Judaism. Given Dr. Novak’s commitment to Judaism and his philosophical bent, it is a pity that no essay attempts an explication of the reasons one ought to commit oneself to observance of the Torah (though he does defend the possibility of revelation).

The essays will generally be most convincing to Dr. Novak’s fellow traditionalists but any open-minded person will appreciate their seriousness and intellectual quality. Recommended for larger academic collections.

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


“These and these are the words of the living God.” This line from a Talmudic story about the controversies between the School of Hillel and the School of Shammai has been the base text for Jewish thought on the nature of debate and halakhic truth for centuries. Avi Sagi, who teaches Jewish philosophy at Bar Ilan University, surveys a dizzying range of opinions and comments, placing them into categories and philosophical models. A gamut of positions, ranging from monists who believe that there can be only one correct answer to any legal question, to mystical harmonizers who find all opposites unified in God, is presented, each with its own reading of that same Talmudic statement. Sagi explains the philosophical underpinnings of each approach and its parallels in modern philosophical and legal thought. He also presents their practical ramifications for Jewish law. Sagi’s philosophical vocabulary, aided by a fine translation, makes this work of scholarship accessible to a wide audience interested in Jewish legal theory and the place of pluralism in religion.

Pinchas Roth, New York Public Library, NY

SOUND RECORDINGS


This duet of violin and piano performs music by George Perlman, Joseph Achron, Max Bruch, and Ernest Bloch. Also included are an arrangement of the Abraham Goldfaden chestnut, “Ro-zhinkes mit Mandlen,” and three selections from the music for the film, Schindler’s List, by composer John Williams. The violin is the featured instrument; the pianist has occasional solos but is mainly here as accompanist. Durin approaches the material with respect and avoids the schmaltzy style that can be the ruin of a presentation of Jewish folk and romantic music. Her youthful awe of the material is evident in a slight restraint to her playing, but the recording is not really marred by this.

Durin has selected her pieces with care. The three pieces by Perlman have a traditional feel, and are very accessible. The three pieces by Williams feel surprisingly authentic and thoughtful, and work well on their own, without the movie. The Kol Nidre of Bruch, typically played on the cello, makes a successful transition to the violin here. The pieces by Bloch and Joseph Achron are more obscure, but are worth the extra attention they demand. Music by Achron has not been recorded to any significant extent, and this exposure of his work is important.

This is not brilliant playing along the lines of Itzhak Perlman, but it is highly accomplished. The liner notes, clearly written by Ms. Durin herself, are in an earnest, tortured English, but her reverence for the material is clear. For libraries collecting recordings of 20th-century Jewish music.

Beth Dwoskin, Proquest, Ann Arbor, MI


Although the Italian Jewish community is the oldest in Europe, through immigration it has felt the influence of the Ashkenazic and the Sephardic communities. In addition, the Jews of Italy have had close cultural ties with their non-Jewish neighbors. These influences have left their mark on Italian Jewish music, which, for the most part, was transmitted orally. Ensemble Lucidarium attempts to reconstruct this musical tradition through extensive research “to give an idea of the musical soundscape of the Jews of Renaissance Italy.”

The CD is full of pleasant surprises, including the fact that it does not limit itself to Purim music. It includes instrumental music as well as settings of Judeo-Italian, Yiddish, and Hebrew poetry sung and played by various combinations of the nine performers. The longest track, which provides the album title, is a delightful collection of excerpts from the Megillah, dance numbers, and Purim plays in the vernacular. A Pesach section includes two settings of Chad Gadya and the female duet, Fuggi, Fuggi, Fuggi. This last poem is set to the tune, Montovanni, which has appeared at various times in music history and served as the basis for the melody of Hatikvah.

The bulk of the recording is music for celebrations and everyday life. One could easily imagine performers in colorful costumes dancing and singing to the energetic drum, lute, and
Accompanied by pianist Cantor Eric- 

notes at the same time that he hears the word being chanted.

It would be helpful, especially for a beginner, to be able (such as the techniques used in the program “Navigating the cipient advantage of opportunities created by computer technology melodies and customs of congregations, and the important role of the chazzan. Unfortunately the program has not taken suff-


Shir ha-Shirim, the Song of Songs, is playful and joyous on its surface, but contains a treasure-trove of hidden beauty and complexity. These are qualities that are perfectly captured in Mayim Rabin, a song cycle by Ayelet Rose Gottlieb, which sets texts from the biblical love song. As with the music of Haydn, Mozart or Duke Ellington, it is easy to get caught up in the surface beauty of a work and ignore the tremendous craft that goes into it. While Gottlieb is primarily known as a jazz artist, composer, and vocalist her music incorporates elements of Middle-Eastern musical styles, classical composition and post-Sgt. Pepper pop music in a comfortable fusion. Gottlieb’s voice has great versatility and is accompanied by an impressive group of musicians, yet this remarkable performance seems effortless in their hands. This is a recording that will yield further rewards upon repeated listenings.

Highly recommended for all libraries collecting Jewish music with the following caveat: For some communities, there may be halakhic concerns with this recording, both in regards to kol ishah and the rabbinic prohibition against popular musical settings of Shir ha-Shirim. In these cases, you may want to consult with your rabbi before purchasing this disc for your library.

Daniel Scheide, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL


These two CDs of Yiddish songs provide a complete contrast in styles and performers. Friling (Spring) is a collection of 16 Yiddish songs that were written (music and lyrics) by Beyle Schaechter-Gottesman. The Dutch soprano Lucette van den Berg performs them with the accompaniment of various instruments. The included booklet contains a list of songs, song lyrics in transliteration and English translation, and photographs of all participants including the instrumentalists (four men and one woman).

Mir Basaraber (We Bessarabians) is a classical klezmer CD. It includes 17 Yiddish songs and traditional melodies. Efim Chorny, the main soloist, wrote and arranged some of the songs. The accompanying booklet includes the songs in Yiddish, transliteration, and English translation. In addition there are photographs of the group and of old Bessarabia (Moldova). The Klezmer Alliance includes vocals, double bass, piano, drums, guitar, clarinets, and Moldovan flutes (fluiers).

Both discs are entertaining and can be considered as an addition to a music collection. Neither CD, though good, contains anything unique as compared to other material available in this genre.

Nira Glity Wolfe, Highland Park, IL

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Renaissance wind instrument accompaniments. This recording is highly recommended for libraries that collect recorded Jewish music.

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


This CD is billed as “contemporary arrangements of traditional and original songs from the Jewish diaspora.” The musicianship is top-notch, as is the production, but the quality of the songs varies. Some of them are earnestly new-age, and the English lyrics are not only trite, but sometimes scan awkwardly. A nice version of “Elí, Elí” is a just a bit too slow. Most interesting is a section of Haftarah done as a chant. It is arresting, but marred by the cheesy background sound of a synthesizer. The best cuts feature irresistibly compelling Middle-Eastern rhythms and instrumentation, along with traditional or traditionally-inspired melodies. The standout include the Sephardic “Eit Dodim,” a setting by Fineman of “Mah Gadlu” and possibly the best version of “Ocho Kandelikas” on record. It should be required background music at Hanukkah parties everywhere.

Fineman is a fine musician, and this is her first CD of Jewish music. She is exploring the new-age, mystical approach to Jewish music and liturgy, which is popular all over the country, but especially in the West. This album is a less-than-perfect example of this trend in Jewish music, but is recommended for libraries that are collecting in this area, or that serve patrons with this interest. These songs are also on iTunes, for those who want to purchase only the three standout cuts mentioned above.

Beth Dwoskin, Proquest, Ann Arbor, MI


Be a Ba’al Tefillah is based on the curriculum of the Philip and Sarah Belz School of Jewish Music at Yeshiva University. This MP3 audio CD can be played only on a computer or MP3 player. Cantor Sherwood Goffin presents with clear pronunciation (nusach) and musical accuracy the following Shabbat prayers (tefillot) of Kabbalat Shabbat, Maariv, Shacharit, and Musaf.

Included are three brochures: short introductory comments that include content information, installation instructions, and technical support information; the text of the Shabbat tefillot in Hebrew; and detailed information about the Shabbat service, explanations about the musical selections and the two styles of pronunciation, Ashkenaz and Sefarad. The descriptions of the prayers present valuable information regarding the various melodies and customs of congregations, and the important role of the chazzan. Unfortunately the program has not taken sufficient advantage of opportunities created by computer technology (such as the techniques used in the program “Navigating the Bible”). It would be helpful, especially for a beginner, to be able to see and follow the actual text of the prayers and the musical notes at the same time that he hears the word being chanted.

There is a sizable market for people who would like to be able to lead prayer but do not have access to a qualified instructor. It is hoped that the next edition of this worthy instructional disc will have the appropriate technology and presentation updates to enable someone to achieve the aspiration to be a ba’al tefillah.

Nira Glity Wolfe, Highland Park, IL

Aristotelian monotheism, falafel, and instrumental surf rock are all Arab inventions. But much like Maimonides’ Guide for the Perplexed and the all-chickpea falafel ball, Meshugga Beach Party shows that Jewish contributions to these fields are nothing to sneeze at. As with their previous releases, Let’s Go Shleprippin’! provides generous portions of traditional Jewish melodies interpreted in a surf rock idiom.

Biblically-based spirituals receive the Meshugga Beach Party treatment, as do Hasidic melodies, bar mitzvah band classics, “If I Were a Rich Man,” and the theme to the film Exodius. Aside from the novelty factor, these are enjoyable performances, even for those who won’t get the joke. A lot of fun and, if you like borderline-offensive Jewish stereotypes, you’ll love the liner notes.

Daniel Scheide, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL


While one may be hard-pressed to find distinctly Israeli or Jewish elements in much of this music, the very concept of contemporary harpsichord music invites parallels with the Hebrew language and the modern state of Israel. After the pianoforte became the standard keyboard instrument in the late 18th century, harpsichord music became increasingly rare. Because the sound of the instrument is so tied to the 17th and 18th century, even the most modern sounds made on this instrument cannot help but evoke images of the past. In a similar fashion, the Hebrew language and the modern state of Israel are inherently tied with the ancient world.

This disc is a recital of solo harpsichord music as well as the Petite Suite for recorder and harpsichord by Benjamin Bar-Am and Paul Ben-Haim’s Sonata a Tre for harpsichord, guitar and mandolin. The novelty and beauty of the instrumental combination of the last work is marred by the fact that the guitar sounds like it was recorded underwater. Otherwise, the recording quality of the disc is brilliant. The works on the disc span the course of over 40 years, the most recent piece composed in 2007.

All of the composers and performers represented are Israeli, mostly immigrants. Each work is a delight, taking full advantage of the harpsichord’s unique properties. A marvelous introduction to contemporary Israeli composers and a sheer joy in its own right.

Daniel Scheide, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL

Red Hot Chachkas. Spice it up! [S.l.]: Red Hot Chachkas, 2007. 1 compact disc. $15.00. #8247-89196-2.

Red Hot Chachkas, a klezmer band with a mainstream style, plays a central role in the Northern California klezmer scene. This is the band’s second CD. Of the 18 cuts, only four are from the traditional repertoire; the rest were composed by members of the band. The compositions are all stylistically bold, with elements from other genres (such as reggae, R&B, and bluegrass) integrated in the best klezmer revival tradition. The works by band leader Julie Egger are especially compelling.

This is a dance and performance-oriented sound, and on CD it lacks the requisite excitement that a party or concert atmosphere would provide. It would work well at a wedding or party on a CD player with a knowledgeable dance leader in attendance. This is particularly true for cuts Tzanz Medley and Shal! The first is a klezmer dance sampler, while the second has the freylakh beat that usually gets people dancing when nothing else will. Perhaps the most successful cut is the last, Rocky Horror, composed by Tony Phillips. It features a simple bass line under layer after layer of improvisation, influenced by jazz, rock, and R&B.

Overall, the CD never quite reaches that quality of transformation into a modern genre that makes klezmer revival music so irresistible, but it is an example of excellent musicianship and interpretation. It is recommended for all klezmer collections, as well as collections that serve a dancing community or patrons looking for simcha music.

Beth Dwoskin, Proquest, Ann Arbor, MI


The Sisters of Sheynville, a Canadian sextet, are explicitly channeling the Barry Sisters. The Barry Sisters were the vocal representatives of the crossover of klezmer and Yiddish theater music to swing interpretation in the 1940s. Their approach was revolutionary and had a satisfying swing, but sometimes their work sounds dated to modern ears. Their rich harmonies can be almost cloying and, as they moved into the 1960s they fell victim to brassy, overly-orchestrated arrangements.

The Sisters of Sheynville have lightened the harmonies, and brought the instrumentation closer to true jazz. The change is done with reverence for the original on a standard such as Eyshes Chayil or A Vaibele a Tsnije. Even better is their treatment of Sheyn vi de Lezene, a real klezmer-revival triumph, because it enhances and modernizes the original, retaining its yearning soulfulness while avoiding the tendency to schmalzt that can overpower this song.

Then there is I’m an old Cow Hand, the western-swing chestnut, with new lines such as “Yippee I oh oy vey.” No doubt this is a crowd-pleaser, and even the most serious bands need this kind of thing for live gigs. Also included is the country classic Blues Stay Away From Me with Yiddish lyrics, and a light but thoughtful Czech song. Apart from these three cuts, and a sweet new song, Halfmoon, the focus of the album is on Yiddish standards with a swing treatment, always quoting the Barry Sisters sound and style, with great success. Recommended for libraries collecting mainstream, accessible new Jewish music.

Beth Dwoskin, Proquest, Ann Arbor, MI


Since the larger Jewish world has become more aware of the Abayudayan Jewish community in Uganda, there have been a number of very popular a cappella recordings of their music. Noting the success of local Christian missionaries, this community began to include instrumental accompaniment in their liturgical music and Sing For Joy showcases the results. The songs are all taken from the traditional liturgy, mostly from the Psalms, sung

Beth Dwoskin, Proquest, Ann Arbor, MI
in Hebrew, Luganda, or both, with one song in English. Like much African popular music, the accompaniment is deceptively simple on the surface with a great deal of hidden complexity. The music is joyful and driving. It will get you out of bed and doing your chores and the melodies will stick in your head all day. There is no doubt that this music will be integrated into the musical traditions of the global Jewish community in no time.

Procedes from this album go directly to the Abuyudaya as well as surrounding multi-faith communities. Recommended for all libraries with Jewish and/or African music collections.

Daniel Scheide, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL


This collection celebrates the “... deep affinity between the historic struggles of Blacks and Jews, and a rich common ground in their music as well.” The performer is classically-trained singer Denise Williams, who is of Antiguan ancestry, and lives now in Toronto. Her soprano voice is clear and lovely and she pays attention to her diction. Her pronunciation is as good as any non-native Yiddish or Hebrew speaker can produce. The instrumental arrangements on all the pieces are exceptional—spare, thoughtful, and played with consummate skill. Especially notable is the pianist, Nina Shapilsky.

Of the 20 cuts, six are in Yiddish and one is Ladino. The CD also contains Stay Well, a haunting song from Lost in the Stars by Kurt Weill. The other eight songs are Caribbean folk songs or African American spirituals. Her version of Ose Shalom is done with an unusual and exciting Latin beat, and her treatment of The Last War, by Dov Seltzer, is painful and moving.

The Jewish and non-Jewish songs are not related to each other, but this is still cross-cultural inspiration of a rewarding kind, showing how music can bring people together. Williams came to Jewish music through her work with the Toronto Jewish Folk Choir. This CD is a tribute to the open and adventurous spirit of the Toronto music scene, and everyone involved in its production should be proud. It is only “half-Jewish” and some of the spirituals are explicitly Christian, so librarians will have to weigh its value to their collections.

Beth Davoskin, Proquest, Ann Arbor, MI

**Winningham, Mare. Refuge, Rock, Sublime. Sherman Oaks, CA: Craig N’ Co., 2007. 1 compact disc (38 min.). $15.00. CNC-0150.**

At first glance, this disc seems like the kind of thing you would want to play for all of your friends, for the sheer incorrectness of the concept. The idea of an actress from several hit television series singing Jewish bluegrass music seems doomed to failure. Surprisingly enough, it works, quite well in fact. Raised Catholic, Emmy award winner and Oscar nominee Mare Winningham first became interested in Judaism after attending a lecture by Rabbi Neal Weinberg in 2001, and converted two years later.

Refuge, Rock Sublime is made up of familiar Hebrew songs, Al Kol Eleh, Etz Hayim, Hatikvah, as well as original material in English. While it is tempting to see Christian influence in the imagery and subject matter of her songs, particularly when placed in the context of bluegrass music, it is an important to note that the content is thoroughly Jewish and the deeply personal nature of these songs is clear.

Often, when a celebrity records an album, we are subjected to one-dimensional, stylistically inappropriate, or just plain bad singing. Thankfully, Winningham is not a “golden throat,” but an accomplished vocalist in her own right. Despite a few bum notes in “Karev yom” and occasional difficulty with Hebrew pronunciation, it is clear that Mare Winningham thinks like a musician, not simply a singer. Recommended.

Daniel Scheide, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL

**Yedid, Yitzhak. Oud Bass Piano Trio. Koln: Between the Lines, 2008. 1 compact disc (72 min.). $16.98. BTLCHR 71207.**

Despite this five-movement suite’s generic title, composer and pianist Yitzhak Yedid’s work is a tribute to the land of Israel. Yedid turned his back on a promising career in the United States to return to his native Israel, and his love for his homeland is evident in his work. Oud Bass Piano Trio draws inspiration from Jewish prayer, Christian myth, Arab dance and the great cultural diversity that exists within the past and present of the Israeli landscape. In the course of five movements, each instrument is thoroughly explored. The oud is not used simply as ethnic flavor, the bass not just accompaniment; they are each equal partners with the piano, not relegated to their traditional roles. Each member of the trio regularly works in more than one musical world. Contrabassist Ora Boasson Horev performs in both classical and jazz ensembles and Yedid’s music straddles these two worlds as well. They are joined by oud player Mikhail Maroun, an Israeli Arab from a Druze village in northern Israel who is both a master of traditional Arabic music and an accomplished classical guitarist. Oud Bass Piano Trio comfortably bridges the gaps between classical, jazz, Arabic and Jewish music. Recommended for libraries collecting Israeli jazz and classical music.

Daniel Scheide, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL

**Yidcore. They Tried to Kill Us, They Failed, Let’s Eat! West Melbourne, Australia: Rubber Music Pty Ltd., 2007. 1 compact disc. $10.00**

Yidcore, the Australian band that is well on its way to gaining fame for its punk versions of traditional Jewish songs, has branched out in its latest disc by doing mostly original music. A new listener must know that Yidcore is an acquired taste. After a pretty negative first draft of this review, a certain AJL editor convinced me to give Yidcore a second chance, and several weeks later I still can’t stop listening. Some lyrics contain foul language, so although the disc is recommended for more liberal Jewish libraries, a content warning is suggested.

Shoshana Hurwitz, Hurwitz Indexing, Ma’ale Adumim, Israel

**VIDEO RECORDINGS**


This documentary is based on the personal photographs and notes taken during the Second World War by a German soldier, known only as Gerhard M. Born in 1919, Gerhard joined the
Hitler Youth at age fifteen. In 1941, he was assigned to a unit in the Eastern Front, whose mission was to take part in “retaliatory measures in captured areas.” With his own camera, he recorded the burning of houses, killing of partisans, and the “resettlement” and killing of Jews and prisoners of war. He wrote entries in his diary about his actions and his fighting for the Fatherland. This hobby of recording atrocities committed by him and his men was used as evidence by a Soviet court, which convicted him of crimes against humanity and sentenced him to execution by a firing squad in 1952.

The album was found in the KGB archives, and the filmmaker used this material more as a slide show than as a background for a more complete story. It is narrated in German followed by English. The soundtrack of Marlene Dietrich’s singing “Lily Marlene” adds an incongruent twist to the film. Even though it won some awards in film festivals, this video is not recommended.  

Sonia Smith Silva, McGill University, Montréal, Canada


A poignant piece of serendipitous history allowed up to 200,000 Jews to avoid annihilation at the hands of the Nazis, but at the price of being subject to deportation from Russian-occupied Eastern Poland to labor camps in Siberia. Asher and Shyfra Scharf were two of this group who, 60 years later, chose to retrace that forced travel from their home in Krakow to the village of Chelyabinsk in Siberia, where they had toiled for two years in a coal mine. In June 1941, the Soviet Union was invaded by Nazi Germany and Polish deportees were allowed to leave, but to where? The West was closed, as was the Shanghai route to the East. The only possibility left to them was south through Persia, so they began walking. Their trip took them to Khujand, Tajikistan, then to Jeezax and Samarkand, Uzbekistan, where they remained for four years. At the war’s end, they were to allowed to return to Poland via Moscow, but were met by virulent anti-Semitism. While the Scharfs are Hasidic, they were treated warmly and hospitably in the largely Muslim areas of Central Asia. The Scharfs’ story is augmented by the testimonies from other Polish Jews, now all living in the United States, whose recreated experiences are presented mostly in English; when the Scharfs report from Poland and Central Asia, the commentary changes to Russian and Yiddish with added subtitles. The stories cover the full gamut of human emotions, but there is a noticeable lack of anger or revenge. Instead, the viewer is enriched by scenes of rural life in Eastern Russia and Central Asia, combined with rare historical footage. At the end of the war, the Scharfs were able to rebuild their lives by immigrating to the United States, settling in the Hasidic community in Brooklyn, New York.  

Sanford Silverburg, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC


The little-known story of how the Mossad tried to get a group of Viennese Jews to Israel is told in a “hybrid” documentary that combines dramatization of the events, interviews with those who made it to Israel, and footage of the film makers creating the movie. The participation of Ruth Klieger, “a beautiful woman who saved Jews,” is highlighted, as she uses her charms and knowledge of nine languages to procure boats, get the proper documentation, and ensure safe passage to Israel.

In 1939, Eichmann gave permission for 822 Jews to leave Austria. The group was joined by others from Germany, and they proceeded by boat down the Danube River. Because of delays, the progression of World War II, and politics, the passengers were stranded in Yugoslavia for the winter. Ruth managed to arrange passage for some of the group, but the remaining members were murdered when the Germans invaded Yugoslavia.

While the story is interesting and needs to be told, those unfamiliar with the already-complicated story may find that the switching between the dramatization, the interviews and the filmmaking process makes the story hard to follow. The black-and-white cinematography enhances the sense of history and the “shadowy” operations of the Mossad, but this and the subtitles make it more challenging to watch. The film is recommended for those libraries that collect Holocaust films.

Kathe Pinchuck, Congregation Beth Sholom, Teaneck, NJ


This film presents a relatively short history of Jewish music in America, tracing its origins to the shetel and those who brought it to and developed it in the United States. The pogroms of 1881 encouraged those who could to leave Eastern Europe for the Goldene Medine. Here in the “Land of Milk and Honey” everything was possible.

Using only documentary film footage, which is not always of excellent quality, that history is traced with clips of the many individuals who made great contributions: Irving Berlin, the Gershwin brothers, Fannie Brice, Eddie Cantor, Sophie Tucker, Al Jolson and more. They were the pioneers and often suffered from tensions within their families and communities, for they broke various boundaries. In the process, great music and musicals were written and the synergistic energies of jazz and klezmer worked together to produce amazing results. The humor of the improvisations of the Jews of the shtetl added a dimension that still resonates in these “oldies but goodies.”

The film, shown on PBS as part of the Great Performances series, is an important contribution to the history of this genre of music, though perhaps most appropriate for adult audiences, especially those who remember some of the stars of that era.

Michlean L. Amir, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC
Books 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.


Research Rectangle

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

From the “Metropolis of the Western Reserve” to Disneyland: On the Summer Library Conference Circuit

ELLIOT H. GERTEL

First Stop: Motoring to AJL in Jewish Cleveland The first known Jewish settlement in Cleveland, Ohio, is said to date to 1836 with the arrival of Daniel Maduro Peixotto (1800–1843), a faculty member of Willoughby Medical College. He was followed a year later by fur trader Simson Thorma (1812–1881) of Unsleben, Bavaria and in 1839 by a number of his landsleymen from the same town. By the 1950s, Cleveland’s Jews had moved out to the eastern suburbs of Beachwood, Cleveland Heights, Shaker Heights, South Euclid, University Heights, and others. How appropriate then that the 43rd Annual AJL Convention took place in Warrensville Heights near the Jewish center of Metropolitan Cleveland, and home of Ohio’s largest Jewish community.

The number of simultaneous first-rate programs was again such that it was difficult to choose which ones to attend. In my final year as RAS president, I had the privilege of working with Linda Silver in assembling the RAS sessions. Linda helped make what is always an exciting, though demanding task, go smoothly, resulting in yet another outstanding conference.

In “Documenting the Holocaust,” we heard about the rich general resources of a major center of materials on this era and about the vast number of records in an archive that was only very recently made available to the public. In “The Opening of the Red Cross International Tracing Service Archive: What Does It Contain and What Does Access to It Mean for Scholars and Family Researchers?” Michlen Amir described her own research at the ITS in the small German town of Arolsen. She discussed the contents and challenges of searching the machine-readable database of over 100 million images.

Robert Rozett spoke on “Trends in the Publication of Books about the Holocaust from 2000-2007.” After presenting an overview of the institution’s library, which attempts to collect all materials dealing with the Holocaust, he discussed what literary styles have been published in the last seven years (memoirs, albums, fiction, etc.), in what numbers, and in which languages.

A truly diverse session was “Orthodoxy and Radical Jewish Culture.” Heidi Lerner spoke on “Researching Orthodox Judaism,” where she displayed numerous Orthodox online resources representing a wide range of political and ideological stances.

“Haredi Films from the Israeli Popular Collection at Arizona State University,” by Rachel Leket-Mor, illustrated increasing participation of Israel’s Haredim in moviemaking in a effort to create appropriate forms of entertainment for this community.

“Tsadik Ka-Tamar Yiﬁrah: Radical Jewish Culture and the Future of Jewish Music,” by Daniel Scheide, focused on John Zorn and his combining such disparate styles as jazz, classical, klezmer,
liturgical, punk rock, and avant-garde to distill a unique brand of new Jewish music.

“Haggadot” featured “And When Your Children Ask You... (Exodus 12:26)” by Hannah Miryam Belinfante, based on “I am the Rose,” the NYPL’s 2005 exhibition marking a gift of a three-volume 20th-century Haggadah set from the Rose Family containing commissioned original art works for the family’s annual seder s over five decades. Irvin Ungar presented “Freedom Illuminated: Understanding the Szyk Haggadah” wherein the similarities between the depiction of Nazi and Pharaonic opress-ion in Arthur Szyk’s illustrations were discussed.

I was privileged to take part in the session “Lost and Found,” chaired by Phil Miller, who some 37 years ago was a key player in the subject of my presentation, “The 36- to 78-Year Passage from Carton to Collection Shelves of a Gift of Rare 16th- and 17th-Century Italian Hebraica.” Phil even stepped out from the role of moderator to read his own words, which I had quoted in my paper. The presentation traced the odyssey of a gift of nine books that “went missing” and unprocessed in the University of Michigan Library for as long as 78 years before finally being rediscovered and “mainstreamed” in 2005. I shared the bill with Rachel Leket-Mor, the new RAS vice-president, giving her second presentation, “Hebrew Publishing in America: The Forgotten Building that was actually constructed.

The Ethnic and Multicultural Information Exchange Round Table (EMIERT) presented “Eating Across Cultures: Food is Culture” in the Anaheim Convention Center at ALA on Sunday morning, June 29. The speakers in this program discussed “the importance of food among immigrant populations as they assimilate into new homes, retain their culinary heritage and foodways, and contribute to shaping new cuisines and culinary traditions.”

Sandwiched in between food historian Robert W. Brower, who spoke about “Searching for Identity in Italian-American Community Cookbooks” and food critic Charles Perry, whose topic was “Five Centuries of Middle Eastern Food Influences in the Americas” was the Jewish Information Committee (JIC) speaker, food columnist Judy Bart Kancigor, author of Cooking Jewish: 532 Great Recipes from the Rabinowitz Family. She discussed the ways in which Jewish traditions are preserved in recipes and the great variety and history of Jewish cuisine.

Judy referred to her “memoir cookbook,” which she calls “the history of our family through our stomachs.” Judy posits that Jewish cooking has largely been a result of taking co-territorial peoples’ dishes and adapting them to the laws of kashrut. This led to a discussion on what constitutes “genuine” Jewish dishes. She went through a number of foods, ruling each out. In truth, the actual origin of most of these “quintessentially Jewish” foods is indeterminate.

Bagels are linked by popular legend to a Jewish baker in Vienna in 1683, although some say they originated in Cracow in 1610, and others claim they go back to the Roman Empire. The word “challah” comes from the Hebrew for “loaf,” but the braided bread itself may be from 15th-century Germanic tradition. Gefilte fish (German gefüllte, “stuffed”) might have been popular with numerous cultures. Kugel (German for “ball” or “globe”) possibly dates to early-13th-century Germanic peoples. Latkes are a popular dish in central and eastern Europe; possible sources for the Yiddish word are Russian latka and Ukrainian oladka.

Subsequently, Judy posed the question: what three foods are intrinsically Jewish? While you may not agree with her selections, there are some merits to her choices. The answers appear below, but see if you can guess which ones she designated before taking a peek.*

Following the EMIERT program, a meeting of the JIC took place wherein plans for a program jointly sponsored by AJL and ALA on the cusp of the two associations’ annual conferences, both to be held in Chicago in the early summer of 2009, were among the topics discussed.

*Matzoh, haroset, and cholent.

Second Stop: Anaheim—What’s Cooking at ALA in Disney Resortland? Amongst the very earliest European settlers of Anaheim, California was Benjamin Dreyfus, a Jew from Bavaria, who arrived in 1858 not long after the founding of the Los Angeles Vineyard Society colony in Southern California by German immigrants in October 1857. Dreyfus established a store to sell goods to the new settlers. Seven years later, he was the first in California to produce kosher wine, which he provided to San Franciscans and to residents of the East Coast.

And so it was that after AJL, I made my way to the American Library Association Annual Conference in that Northern Orange County resort city.

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The final RAS program took “A Look at Three Distinct Jewish Communities” with Rita Saccal’s “Shalom Argentina: Tracing the Jewish Gauchos and Agricultores Who Incorporated ‘Mate’” and Sean Mar "Without Leaving Aside Their Own Traditions: Life in the JCA Community Cookbooks” and food critic Charles Perry, whose topic was “Five Centuries of Middle Eastern Food Influences in the Americas” was the Jewish Information Committee (JIC) speaker, food columnist Judy Bart Kancigor, author of Cooking Jewish: 532 Great Recipes from the Rabinowitz Family. She discussed the ways in which Jewish traditions are preserved in recipes and the great variety and history of Jewish cuisine.

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*Matzoh, haroset, and cholent.
Jewish Children's Book Writers' Conference

The 92nd Street Y Buttenwieser Library and the Jewish Book Council are cosponsoring the Tenth Annual Jewish Children's Book Writers' Conference at the 92nd Street Y in Manhattan on Sunday, November 23, 2008, from 9:00 am to 5:00 p.m. Conference organizers include AJL members Steve Siegel and Anna Olswanger.

Featured speakers are associate agent Michelle Andelman of Andrea Brown Literary Agency, publisher David E. Behrman of Behrman House, executive editor Michelle Frey of Alfred A. Knopf and Crown Books for Young Readers, editor Larry Rosler of Boyds Mills Press, director Joni Sussman of Kar-Ben Publishing, and illustrator's agent Melissa Turk of Melissa Turk & The Artist Network. Award-winning author Johanna Hurwitz will give opening remarks, and the day will include sessions on publishing and writing in Israel, the Sydney Taylor Book Award and Manuscript Competitions (with AJL members Kathe Pinchuck and Aileen Grossberg), and individual consultations with editors and agents from past conferences.

The registration form is available for download at www.92y.org/content/pdf/jewishchildrensbookwriters.pdf. Call 212-415 5544 or e-mail library@92Y.org for additional information or to request the form by mail. The final registration deadline is November 17. If you write or illustrate children's books for the Jewish market, this conference is for you!

World Congress Of Jewish Studies

YA’AKOV ARONSON

The AJL Committee responsible for organizing AJL sessions at the WCJS in 2009 is happy to announce that seven outstanding presentations on a variety of topics have been arranged. The program, subject to change over the next year, is:

Elhanan Adler. Digitization of Hebrew Manuscripts: The Final Frontier
Roger Kohn. Recent Trends in Judaica Bibliography in the United States
Rachel Leket-Mor. When Kliff Gones Spent the Night at Stafflag 13: The Value of Popular Israeli Literature in Academic Libraries
Edith Lubetski. Considerations in Preparing a Biblical Bibliography
Peggy Pearlstein. The World Digital Library and Other Digital Internet Resources for Jewish Studies
Daniel Scheide. Tzadik Ka-Tamar Yifrah: Radical Jewish Culture and the Future of Jewish Music
Rachel Simon. The Contribution of Hebrew Printing in Istanbul to the Development of Ladino Scholarship and Culture

Anyone is interested in presenting a paper is invited to submit a topic to the committee. For information about the WCJS, contact any of the committee members (aronson@mail.biu.ac.il; lubetski@ymail.yu.edu; ppea@loc.gov).

From Bagels to Chipá (The Equivalent of Bagels in Paraguay)

RITA SACCAL

A week after my return from the AJL Convention, I went to Paraguay to attend the VII Convention of the RLIT (Red Latinoamericano de Información Teológica-Latin American Network of Theological Information). The convention took place at the Instituto Bíblico Asunción, a branch of the Faculty of Theology at the Universidad Evangélica del Paraguay. There were 28 librarians in attendance, hailing from Buenos Aires, Entre Ríos (Argentine province located in the “Argentine Mesopotamia”), Mendoza (another Argentine province located in the southwest), Cuba, Mexico, Brazil, Ecuador, Paraguay, and the United States.

We also had a meeting at the Centro Evangélico Mennonita de Teología de Asunción, another branch of the Evangelical University. We visited their wonderful library, and, of course, I looked in their files to search for Jewish items (which I was very pleased to find). After a week of interesting meetings, and good Paraguayan food (lots of chipá), it was agreed, for the first time in the history of the Red de Información Teológica (Network of Theological Information), to add Judaica in theological librarianship studies.

I was the only Jew invited, and I was representing not only the Association of Jewish Studies, but the Seminario Rabínico Latinoamericano as well. It was a great experience. The first day we met, they started thanking G-d for the food being served. I taught them our “hamotzi” prayer, which they repeated from that day on, with me.

This type of meeting is very fruitful for all librarians, especially for those of us who live in Latin American countries.

Western Regional Conference on Holocaust Literature for Children

This full-day conference will be held on Sunday, February 1, 2009, at the Simon Wiesenthal Center-Museum of Tolerance, in Los Angeles. Events include:

• A tour of the facility, led by its library director, Adaire Klein
• A panel of experts on using Holocaust literature with children
• Special guest speaker Hamida Bosmajian, author of Sparing the Child: Grief and the Unspeaking in Youth Literature about Nazism and the Holocaust
• Breakout sessions
• Jewish literature for children marketplace and book sale
• Manuscript consultation with Joanie Sussman of Kar-Ben

Attendees are eligible to receive 0.5 unit BJE credit. For reservations and information call Susan Dubin at (818) 886-6415 or send email to Lisa Silverman at lsilverman@sinaitemple.org.
Reviews for Children and Teens

ANNE DUBLIN AND LINDA R. SILVER

Around 150 books of Judaic content for children and teens are published each year. We try to review all or most of them in the AJL Newsletter. Our purpose is to publish concise, comparative, critical reviews of new trade books to assist readers in making informed selection choices for their libraries. As a rule we will not review textbooks, reprints, manuscripts or toy books.

Reviewers are asked to provide a concise, critical evaluation of each book’s literary and artistic quality, to compare it with others of its type, to indicate the suggested grade level, and to recommend or not recommend the book for purchase. The editors hope that the Children and Teens review section will also become a forum for differing viewpoints about Judaic children's literature. Readers’ comments are invited and should be addressed to either of the co-editors. The editors will print differing reviews of the same book at their discretion.

High caliber professional reviews are the goal of the AJL Newsletter, so reviewers are urged to take these guidelines seriously and to contact the editors by email with any questions. Children's book reviewers must have signed permission forms allowing AJL to share their reviews with other media.

When you receive a book to review, it will have a due date on it—usually three weeks from the date it is mailed. If this is not enough time, please contact Linda Silver. Email your reviews to Linda Silver at silverlr@roadrunner.com.

**Reviews should not be longer than 250-300 words.** Your review should be descriptive enough to be helpful to colleagues who will not see the book. A brief summary of what the author is trying to convey should be included along with an evaluation of the book’s literary and artistic qualities and its appropriateness for its intended readers. Comparisons with other books of a similar nature or by the same author are encouraged.

For picture books, please consider in your evaluation: content, illustrations, medium (if you recognize it or if it is stated somewhere in the book) and style of illustrations, and format. For fiction, consider genre, plot, setting, characterization, theme, and style. For nonfiction, consider accuracy, authenticity, content, perspective, style, organization, illustrations, and format.

Reviewers are advised to read the article called “What is and What is Not a Jewish Book” in the May/June 2007 issue of the AJL Newsletter and to refer to the guidelines in Excellence in Jewish Children's Literature: A Guide for Book Selectors, Reviewers, and Award Judges, accessible on the AJL website. Also helpful are two books: From Cover to Cover: Evaluating and Reviewing Children’s Books by Kathleen T. Horning (HarperCollins, 1997) and Children's Literature In the Elementary School, edited by Charlotte Huck, et al. (McGraw Hill, 2001.)

At the top of your review, state the author, title, illustrator, series, place of publication, publisher, copyright date, pages, price, ISBN. If the book is a paperback, type Pbk. after the ISBN. No special formatting is required. Last, give your name, your place of employment, and the city where you live.

Reviewers are responsible for the accuracy of statements they make in their reviews. Reviews will be edited for grammar, style, and length.

If You Can’t Say Something Nice...

LINDA R. SILVER

“*The critics of children’s books are remarkably lenient souls … Most of us assume there is something good in every child; the critics go on from this to assume there is something good in every book written for a child. It is not a good theory.*” —Katherine White, ca. 1939, quoted in “The Lion and the Mouse” by Jill Lepore, New Yorker, July 21, 2008, pp. 66-73.

Many of us, when we were children, were taught that “if you can’t say something nice, don’t say anything at all.” Whether or not they make sense, lessons like this are often carried into adulthood, influencing us even when we think we have cast them off for something more honest, more mature. Being “nice” and accentuating the positive may have some social benefits in an uncivil world but in the area of book reviewing or criticism, it is a tendency that needs to be balanced by the willingness to say—very clearly—something not at all nice when the occasion demands.

The reviewer of children’s books is challenged to break the rule of silence—the rule of only saying something nice—rather often because so many books for kids are—to put it nicely—not good. But all too often, her early training gets the better of her, to the detriment of the review she is writing and to the detriment of the libraries whose collections are built on the basis of published reviews. Most books have weaknesses, many are thoroughly mediocre, and some are outright bad! If a plot is predictable or dull, characters unbelievable, the setting imposed rather than integrated, if there are inaccuracies, biases, a trite or wooden use of language, a moralistic tone that overwhelms every other element of the book, if the art work is amateurish or inappropriate to the text, if it resembles the most crass of commercial art then reviewers must say so—even if what they are saying isn’t “nice.”

An unwillingness to state the negative as well as the positive about a book makes a review unreliable and virtually worthless as a guide for those who haven’t actually read the book themselves. Moreover, reviewing a book means more than reading it and deciding if you like it or not. Personal preferences naturally shape our opinions but reviewing is more than giving an opinion—it is applying relevant literary criteria to a book, whether it is nonfiction, biography, historical fiction, fantasy, etc. There is—or should be—an aspect of objectivity to reviewing that transcends personal preference.

It can be more difficult to write honest criticism of a bad book. You may hurt the author’s feelings. You may offend the publisher. You may influence librarians not to buy the book. You may discourage people from reading a book whose subject you think is important, even though the treatment of the subject is poor. This may be the fall-out from a negative book review but if a reviewer is doing his job of being a critic instead of a fan, it is worth the risk. So the reviewer’s guide is: If you can’t say something nice about a review book, bite the bullet and state clearly what is wrong with it. It may be more comfortable to say nothing negative at all, but it isn’t good reviewing.
In The Spotlight


All aboard for delicious historical fiction perfectly grounded in the emotions of its targeted readers. Author Cohen uses the 1892 inauguration of Israel’s first steam train to focus on friendship, hurt feelings, teshuvah, the symbols of Rosh Hashanah and the flora and fauna of central Israel. Whew! Heavy duty values delivered with a light touch of words and adorable illustrations. Ari is the engineer chosen to drive the first train from Jaffa to Jerusalem. He is so proud and excited he lords it over his fellow engineers—note, one is a woman—and forgets to say goodbye as he steams away. His route takes him through several Israeli landscapes, described verbally and drawn in earth tones. At each station he receives a delivery local to the neighborhood and necessary to celebrate the New Year: apples, honey, round challah and shofars. But rather than enjoying himself, Ari worries the whole trip about hurting his friends by his inadvertent self-absorption. He wishes he had said goodbye; he knows he can change and ask their forgiveness as this is the season for it. Despite cheering crowds in Jerusalem, he delivers his goods and hurries back to Jaffa to make up with his friends. The story captures place, history, and ethics in an appealingly winsome way. The protagonist worries about his problem just the way youngsters do, creating and sustaining empathy. A warm and fact-packed historical note ends this charming and highly recommended picture book.

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


The author of Tough Questions Jews Ask (Jewish Lights, 2003) has rewritten and compiled a collection of 36 stories organized under the topics of “What Really Matters in Life?,” “Doing What’s Right,” “It’s Up to You,” “Teachers and Friends,” “Hidden Truths,” and “The Miracle of Jewish Life.” As these inspirational sounding headings might suggest, the stories are written in the form of homilies, meant to instruct the listener or reader in the application of Torah and other Jewish teaching to everyday life. Many are familiar and can be found both in other collections and in individual illustrated versions for children. The title story is a well-known Chelm tale (albeit with an un-Chelmlike wise rabbi), and there are others about Elijah, a poor man who searches for a treasure and finds it in his own home, challahs in the synagogue, the man who feeds his clothes, and the mysterious visitor. A short paragraph introduces each story’s theme and several discussion questions follow it. In what is called a Values Index, lacking page numbers, each story is categorized under the values it imparts or the special occasion it addresses.

The audience includes both children and adults because Rabbi Feinstein’s writing style is simple, lively yet thought-provoking, inclusive, contemporary yet thoroughly grounded in traditional Jewish teaching. While the retellings are compatible with modern speech, they avoid the jarring usage that mars some so-called updated versions of traditional tales. There are no source notes for the stories but the introductions sometimes cite their place in the Torah, Talmud, midrash or as stories told by the Hasidic masters. The settings range from the Bible to modern times, and several of them are particularly apt for telling at holidays. Although the discussion questions are a little pedantic, the stories themselves are told with conviction and are often very moving. Following on the heels of another fine collection of traditional Jewish stories for somewhat younger readers, The Hungry Clothes by Peninnah Schram (reviewed below), Capturing the Moon merits the attention of rabbis, educators, discussion group leaders, and students in elementary school on up.

Linda R. Silver, Cleveland, OH


A Jewish girl’s diary from 1943 was hidden under Polish floorboards in 1943, retrieved in 1945, and miraculously rediscovered only in 2006, allowing Zahava Laskier Scherz to explore the brief life of the half-sister she never knew. Like Anne Frank, Rutka Laskier did not survive the Holocaust, but her diary did. Opposite each page of the diary, Scherz explains and comments on the journal entries, adding relevant historic photos of the family and their community. In this extraordinary book, readers become a “fly on the wall” of a Jewish adolescent in wartime Poland. We see how Rutka uses her diary as her escape—how she writes about the ups and downs of teenage life to avoid thinking about her fate. Ghetto news, deportations, and Aktions are juxtaposed against descriptions of friends and adolescent angst. More and more, Rutka retreats into a shell of bravado—“I couldn’t care less”—and claims to be indifferent, even as “the rope around us is getting tighter and tighter” and she clearly knows what is coming. Rutka died in Auschwitz in 1943. This gem of a book is a memorial to her keen intelligence.

Susan Berson, Denver, CO


Imagine if you will that Peninnah Schram is standing in front of you. The lights are dimmed. A hush descends upon the room. The storyteller speaks. She tells stories about people and places long ago and far away; about kings and rabbis, clever tricksters and wise women. And as she weaves her stories, you learn many lessons about Jewish values and morals: You must plant trees for...
your children and grandchildren; you must forgive even when you have been wronged; when you give a gift, always give it with your whole heart.

Schram is a storyteller par excellence. Not only does she tell these stories with clarity and charm, but she introduces each story with the appropriate background information. Every story is treated with love and respect—whatever the source or the tradition. At the end of the book, she details her source(s). A helpful glossary also explains non-English words as well as words the reader might not know, such as “dinar” or “mellah.” The design of The Hungry Clothes is gorgeous. With the occasional colored border that looks like ancient fabric, as well as muted, slightly surrealistic paintings, this book is not only a pleasure to read, but also a delight to look at again and again. Highly recommended for all Jewish libraries.

Anne Dublin, Toronto, Canada


My first visceral response to the tragedy of the Holocaust came after reading Siegal’s Upon the Head of the Goat. I lit memorial candles for her family for many years. Now, Siegal revives her grandmother in all her charm and wisdom with these stories. Piri, a city girl, spends her vacations with her grandmother, Babi, who lives on a farm in the country outside a little Ukrainian village with few Jews and mostly Christians. Country life is fascinating, demanding, and different. Piri not only learns how to gather wild mushrooms before dawn, but also the importance of honest hard work, caring for the less fortunate, and of having the courage to stand up for those who cannot stand up for themselves. The nine stories are charming, wise, and often witty. It is impossible to choose a favorite, but “Yahrzeit” leads us into the final tragic sentence: “For Babi, my greatest hope is that her unquestioning faith in God sustained her through her own terrible last hour, when she was taken away from the home and land she loved so much by the Nazis…” Now I will start to light a candle for Babi.

Dr. Marcia W. Posner, Holocaust Memorial and Tolerance Center of Nassau County, NY


Naming Liberty tells the story of an Eastern European Jewish family seeking a new life in America. Their story is cleverly balanced with the history of the Statue of Liberty. Seen through the eyes of seven-year-old Gitl, readers gain a sense of the personal struggles as the family gives up the life they knew to seek freedom in America. On alternating pages, the parallel story of the creation of the Statue of Liberty comes to life. The monument was created in France as a gift to America for its 100th birthday. Readers will learn about Frederic Auguste Bartholdi, the artist who created the statue, and the passion that fueled his work. As the Statue of Liberty makes its way to America, so does Gitl’s family. The story of the statue is as emotional and heartfelt as the journey of the immigrant family. The two stories merge as Gitl’s family reaches the shores of New York. When Gitl learns that Lady Liberty came to America “… in crates, by train, then by boat,” she responds, “Just like me.” Wanting to choose a new name in her new country, she asks, “Is Liberty an American name?” Later, she declares, “Here in America … my name is Liberty. But you can call me Liby.”

The details of both stories are fascinating. The stunning art is done in a muted palette, reflecting the era represented. Yolen has done a tremendous job of bringing history to life in a dual story that is full of heart, hope, and pride. Naming Liberty is a “must” for both Jewish and secular libraries.

Barbara Bietz, Oak Park, CA

Another view

As Good As Anybody: Martin Luther King Jr. and Abraham Joshua Heschel’s Amazing March Toward Freedom by Richard Michelson, illustrated by Raul Colon, (Knopf, 2008) was first reviewed in the May/June 2008 issue of the AJL Newsletter.

Discrimination against Black Americans was a bad thing. Hitler’s destruction of millions of European Jews was a bad thing. However, they were not the same bad thing, and were not equally bad or equivalent. This reviewer’s concern is that evils of the Holocaust are portrayed as similar to those of segregation. The two men profiled in this book, Martin Luther King and Abraham Joshua Heschel, did not have similar histories, nor were the arc and purpose of their life works the same. Nevertheless, As Good As Anybody draws a strong symmetry.

Martin Luther King’s mother assured him that he was “as good as anybody” after a bus driver in Atlanta told him to give up his seat to a white boy. The book tells us that Heschel’s father told him the very same thing. However, Heschel’s problem in Poland was not that he was made to feel inferior, but that he feared for his life, and the lives his family, because he was Jewish. His fears were well founded: Heschel’s mother and three of his sisters were later killed.

When Heschel immigrated to America, he pursued justice according to the Hebrew command, “Tsedek, tsedek, tirdof!” He marched to Selma, Alabama with King in 1965, and fully supported social justice. Most American children are well schooled regarding Martin Luther King. They probably have never heard of Abraham Joshua Heschel and may conclude from this book that Heschel was primarily a civil rights figure. His greater importance to American Jews was as a creative and innovative theologian and rabbi. Heschel’s power as a Jewish thinker has here been lent to serve a politically correct thesis. Well-intentioned adults may think political correctness is good for children, and for us all, and will immunize us against discrimination and bigotry. Artistically, As Good As Anybody is a beautiful book. The sensitive illustrations by Raul Colon communicate the weight and seriousness of the subject. Some pages have an almost monumental quality. Ironically, this very attractiveness makes examining the book all the more important. As Good As Anybody will no doubt be enthusiastically added to the Black history and MLK biography collections of secular school and public children’s libraries. Jewish schools, synagogues and libraries may be less well served by this highly fictionalized version of a part of their own history.

Naomi Morse, Silver Spring, MD

Rabbi Cohen has compiled messages given in the Stanmore and Canons Park communities of London over the past 20 years. They are a “set of reflections, based on the weekly Torah portion, for young Jews in search of guidance, identity and ideals.” The book starts with a foreword by Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks, which is followed by an introduction that summarizes the stories and themes of the Torah. Then there are six parts: one for each book of the Torah, and a section for special occasions, festivals, anniversaries, and interests. Rabbi Cohen asserts that there is much to learn from biblical personalities’ mistakes as well as their triumphs. He has found the perfect tone: familiar and relevant enough for young people, yet scholarly and instructive without being pedantic. In one essay, “For American baseball-loving youth,” Rabbi Cohen uses the Negro leagues as an example of perseverance, laying a foundation upon which others might build. He supports this example with quotes from the Mishnah and midrash. The short essays are good for sharing at the Shabbat table or for learning about the weekly Torah portion. In a few instances British colloquialisms are hard to understand but otherwise it is a valuable addition to any Jewish library.

*Kathe Pinchuck, Congregation Beth Sholom, Teaneck, NJ*

**BIBLE**


The midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 13:15) explains that there are 70 facets to the Torah, providing many valid ways of understanding. Some are literal and others are more profound. This ambitious project has captured the facet model well. By examining the first book of the Bible through inquiry, through such sources as kabbalah and legends, and through numerous commentaries, both ancient and modern, the author aims to “give children a taste of the richness of the Jewish tradition.” The 12 parshiot are accompanied by colorful illustrations reminiscent of folk art. Selected verses of biblical text are in large colored type. These are followed by commentaries. The margin boxes provide further commentary, historical background, and source material. Separate boxes contain questions for children and parents to discuss.

While the attractive pictures and the sections “For Kids—How to See Seventy Faces,” and “I hope you have fun on your journey” are kid-friendly, the rest of the book is not. It is quite cumbersome in size and weight. The type size and the vocabulary of the commentaries are more appropriate for adults. To find the sources for the commentaries, one must consult endnotes. There is a list of the biblical commentators and commentaries but biographical and explanatory information is scant. An index would have helped to unite themes such as marriage, sibling rivalry, or praying to God. Discussing Torah thoughts with children is important, but the material is better presented at the child’s level, not the adult’s. This book would be appropriate for ages 16 and up, and better suited to adult study. It is an optional purchase.

*Kathe Pinchuck, Congregation Beth Sholom, Teaneck, NJ*

**BIOGRAPHY**


Film buffs, aspiring directors and Steven Spielberg fans will enjoy this middle school biography about a movie-maker who promotes reading. An exciting opening chapter about the making of *Jaws* segues to the customary chronological account with chapters organized movie-by-movie. The author presents a man with a dream and a goal, with a passion for his art that he sees as “story telling,” and with Jewish roots and identity maturing from shame to pride. The text quotes Spielberg often; he recounts his fears and feelings about teasing his sisters at home, facing anti-Semitism at school, and standing his ground at work. Details and statistics dominate once Spielberg starts his career, with numbers on everything from cameras to days shooting to expenses to profits to props to … . This is wearying, but the minutiae are quickly balanced by another dream, Spielberg’s creative philosophy, and presto! The next film’s history is underway.

The book does an excellent job with Spielberg’s myriad movies, categorized by adventures and adult themes. The Holocaust’s impact on Spielberg connects his youthful interaction with survivors, his Academy Award-winning *Schindler’s List* and his Shoah Foundation. There is bare-bones information about Spielberg’s adult personal life (wives and children), entirely appropriate for the targeted age range. Many colored photographs enhance the text. True to form, there are endless annoying factoid boxes; when will publishers stop fearing coherent nonfiction without jazzy sidebars? Chronology, filmography, notes, bibliography and index make the volume as useful as it is interesting.

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


In addition to the 60th anniversary of Israel’s statehood, 2008 marks the 70th birthday of one of the best-known fictional characters: Superman. Cleveland, Ohio, long known as the birthplace of Superman, is marking the occasion by declaring this the “Summer of Superman,” and welcoming the traveling exhibition “Zap, Pow, Bam!” which celebrates the Golden Age of comic books. Meanwhile fans all over the world are being treated to film festivals, comic book conventions, and a burst of new adult books that celebrate Superman himself, as well as the contribution of Jews to the creation of superheroes.

At last long, children as young as nine can read a smart and engaging biography of the two Jewish teenagers who created Superman. Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster lived in Cleveland during the Depression, and their high school years were marked by their intense interest in science fiction and adventure stories. As a way to combat adversity in their personal lives, and in the world around them, the friends sought escape in the pulp magazines of the times and decided to invent their own hero. With Siegel’s words and Shuster’s pictures, the boys created Superman and endowed him with his well-known strength and speed. They also gave him an alter ego, Clark Kent, so that he would fit into human society, a trait that both teens desired.
Sieg and Shuster prepared a series of comic strips featuring Superman, but faced rejection for many years. One publisher finally agreed to publish Superman, and the rest, as they say, is history. Marc Nobleman’s interesting text and Ross MacDonald’s vibrant illustrations are the perfect combination to tell a serious story in a light-hearted tone that will appeal to even the most reluctant readers. The book is capped off by an afterword that addresses some of the legal battles over the rights to Superman that Siegel and Shuster faced as adults. This section of the book, which is aimed at adults, is the only place where Judaism is mentioned. With the exception of the afterword, the book is ideal for readers, especially boys, in third through sixth grades.

Wendy Wasnian, Cleveland Museum of Natural History, Cleveland, OH


Combine a love of magic and a talent for storytelling with a strong dose of humor and you understand why Sid Fleischman’s books are so appealing to children. This lively biography, generously illustrated and attractively designed, informs and entertains as it blends biographical facts with a succinct account of Fleischman’s dual careers as magician and writer. Magic fascinated Fleischman in his youth, providing him with an income to pay his way through college. When he discovered he liked to write and could do it well, he supported his wife and three children by writing books and screenplays, many of which involved magic. Fleischman is quoted throughout the book, describing several of his stories and explaining his way of working. His numerous honors are mentioned and some of his many award-winning books, although not the recent Sydney Taylor winner, The Ventriloquist and the Dybbuk, are listed. He calls that book “the most personal novel I was ever moved to write,” because it was inspired by the memory of the deaths of his father’s entire family in the Holocaust. In several other instances as well, Fleischman’s Jewish heritage is woven into the narrative. Accessible in looks and content to children in the elementary grades, it contains a selected list of books by Sid Fleishman, a glossary, a bibliography, a few Internet addresses, and an index. Recommended for any library whose children’s collection includes Fleischman’s books.

Linda R. Silver, Cleveland, OH


Love Every Leaf is an inspirational biography of one of the first successful women landscape architects. Seventeen-year-old Cornelia Hahn fled Nazi Germany with her Jewish family in 1938. They reached New York in 1939, to a life, in free world, of unlimited possibilities. The author, Kathy Stinson, met Cornelia Hahn Oberlander in 2004. With Oberlander’s encouragement, Stinton documented the story of how she persevered to achieve her childhood dream of becoming a world-renowned landscape architect. Upon her marriage to Peter Oberlander in 1953, she moved to Vancouver where she designed innovative children’s playgrounds and rooftop gardens, emphasizing environmentally sound design. Oberlander triumphed over her Holocaust experience and, in a symbolic act, visited Berlin, as a guest of the German government, in 1998. There, she had the satisfaction of seeing one of her creations—the rooftop garden of the Canadian Embassy.

Love Every Leaf is a feminist story more than a Jewish one. In a field dominated by men, Oberlander reached the top, practicing her five important P’s: patience, perseverance, politeness, professionalism, and passion. The book contains important information regarding ecology and environmental responsibility and its format is pleasing: black & white photographs of family, projects, and architectural landscape designs, are presented along with clear text and boxed informational anecdotes. Love Every Leaf presents a profession that young people are unlikely to contemplate on their own, and it is about optimism and the achievement of difficult personal goals. Oberlander’s personal recovery from the Holocaust qualifies the book for Jewish day school and synagogue libraries as well as for the teen collections of public libraries.

Nira Wolfe, Highland Park, IL

CRAFTS


This reviewer is unaware of any other Jewish craft book in recent years with such broad scope and good production values. The photos are lavish and attractive, the instructions are clear, the techniques are varied, and, in particular, the introductory information about each holiday is extremely well written. In addition to holiday crafts, there are tzedakah boxes, yahrzeit candles, a mizrah, siddur covers, and a variety of other home or gift items. This is a good resource for parents and teachers. The finished products are not especially sophisticated, but they are attractive, creative, and varied. When the children are finished, talented adults could also adapt the ideas and techniques in this book with great success. The website for information about the book is www.celebratingwithjewishcrafts.com.

Susan Berson, Denver, CO

FICTION


This historical novel soars with mid-century flavor, but sinks its audience appeal with plot issues. The protagonist, Tommy, who tells the story in the first person, is not Jewish; neither is his best friend, Beth. Their new classmate, Sarah, a European refugee, is; she serves as a stinging reminder of how marginal the Holocaust was to the prewar United States. The main characters share the problem of sick mothers, the major tension that threatens to change Tommy’s way of life, and not exactly a draw for male readers. Beth is interested in the news, especially news-
paper stories tracking the progress of World War II in Europe. Tommy is interested in baseball, especially on the radio, to the exclusion of almost everything else; he reflects on it endlessly, a real drag for most female readers. How he becomes sensitive to current events in the world around him arcs the fiction. The only Jewish issue is Sarah’s pain about her trapped family, a fact important to Tommy’s maturation. However, nothing related to this is vital to the plot, making the references to the early Holocaust feel shallow. There is savvy political, cultural and social information about life in 1940 New York and a blossoming crush that will appeal to the middle school crowd. Adler writes well, but language alone cannot make it hit out of a tale of family responsibility and first romance in days long ago when radio and newspapers imaged the outside world for everyone. His weak plot and nice, but stock, characters inhabit a book that is bland Americana, not Jewish enough for religious school libraries, but historical enough for day schools.

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


Adapted from the author’s adult novel about Rashi’s daughter, Yocheved, this is for teenage readers. It is set in Troyes, France, in the 11th century and offers a view of a vibrant and close-knit Jewish community coexisting with its Christian neighbors. As Yocheved and her younger sister Miriam study Talmud with their father, a renowned scholar and vintner not yet known as Rashi, their more conventional mother fears community disapproval and the possibility that they will be too learned to ever find husbands. Yet match-making, betrothal, romance, and childbirth are major parts of the story, assuming as much if not more importance than Rashi’s daring decision to teach his daughters Talmud.

The plot is filled with Jewish lore and superstition of the period, with the omnipresent threat of demons and the need to ward them off coloring a great deal of the characters’ behavior. In contrast, Yocheved’s devotion to Talmud and her father’s vast knowledge rise above the mundane and earn them the respect of both their co-religionists and Christians. Rashi’s character is well-developed and multi-dimensional: he would prefer to be away from his wife and daughters learning at one of Europe’s great Torah centers yet must stay at home tending his family’s vineyards and selling wine to earn a living. The conflict he feels is sometimes expressed in outbursts of temper, especially against his wife and aging mother, creating a portrait of the great sage as a human, not a tzaddik. Yocheved and Miriam are also sympathetic characters, and teenage girls of today will find some things in common with them, despite the differences that have developed in Jewish culture over the centuries.

Modern Jewish feminism is the underlying inspiration of the story but it is well integrated with the plot and characters and not anachronistic. In Sylvie Weill’s outstanding novel, My Guardian Angel, Rashi’s granddaughter is the main character and feminism is also the animating idea. It is for slightly younger readers than this book, and together they offer a fascinating look at what Rashi’s life, family, and world might have been like.

Linda R. Silver, Cleveland, OH


This historical novel is set in the time of the Judges, when the Israelites were fighting the local tribes for control of the land of Canaan. It begins as a pair of alternating stories that ultimately merge. The heroine is Bat-Shachar, the bright, rebellious and naive daughter of a local Kohen. Her father is a tyrant, and Bat-Shachar is led into adventures and troubles. Her hero, Tzuriel, is a young metal-worker who seems destined to fall into snares. The pair meet by chance and fall in love. He later saves her from death after she is accused of consorting with Canaanites. Following the trial, a young man dies of injuries which Tzuriel accidentally inflicted. As a result the pair run away and find safety in the nearby city of refuge. The book ends with a “happily ever after” feel.

The intended audience for this book is unclear. There is lots of information throughout, including household and town life, metal-working, and the application of Torah law (tzaraat, kashrut and other observances) in biblical times. The footnotes and appendices indicate that it could be read by an adult education class, but the writing style, romantic plot, and narrative voice indicate that it is probably meant for teenagers. City of Refuge is cautiously recommended for the shelves of large synagogue and high school libraries.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA


It’s 1945, and fifth-grade chocoholic Dorrie Meyers has to come up with a recipe for her class’s Sweet Semester essay and dessert contest. Cooking disasters abound until her cousin Victor, a Holocaust survivor recently arrived from a DP camp in Europe, shares a recipe from his lost family’s bakery. This mild family story evokes 1940s Chicago down to the last detail. Adults whose memories are stirred by egg creams, Margaret O’Brien, and home-sewn dresses will enjoy the book immensely. However, the setting may not come to life for today’s children, and the lack of tension in the story might make the book slow going for them. The chocolate “hook” feels somewhat forced, with Dorrie’s elevated focus on food bordering on the obsessive and even overshadowing significant events like Victor’s arrival in America and Aunt Esther’s wedding. While including recipes for the foods Dorrie encounters does nothing to improve the story’s pace, it may add some interest.

Although the chocolate theme feels somewhat self-conscious, the Jewish content is naturally integrated into the novel. Dorrie’s extended family and most of her classmates are Jewish. Typical of the era, they have Yiddish-speaking bubbies, relatives with European accents, large family gatherings for Jewish holidays, and they worry a lot about the Jews of Europe. As a portrait of Jewish-American life of the time, the story rings true. The brown-and-white illustrations are sweet and old-fashioned, matching the feel of the text. Printed entirely in chocolate-brown ink and decorated with period details, the book is a light confection that, like an extra helping of dessert, is unnecessary but pleasant.

Heidi Estrin, Congregation Bnai Israel, Boca Raton, FL

Noa is a brash 16-year-old Israeli girl with an older sister and brother and parents who are sympathetic to the peace movement. Her older brother, Ari, chooses, with parental support, to go to jail rather than serve in what the author calls “the territories” or “the occupied territories.” Noa’s growing friendship with a Palestinian girl mirrors her parents’ friendship with a Palestinian doctor and only her older sister, Shoshana, a talented violinist, is uninterested in politics. The story, told by Noa, is set in 2002 at the height of the suicide bombings; the narrative is taut with tension. It reaches a climax at Passover, when a suicide bomber attacks a seder in Netanya. Most of Noa’s family is at that seder and they are shattered by the terror: her parents are both injured, her grandmother is killed, and her sister is so badly burned that she will never play the violin again.

The plot arcs with the Passover massacre and henceforth, the author’s voice as a psychologist tends to intrude upon the story. Levy is good at describing pain but less adept at analyzing its causes in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Each member of Noa’s family is shown dealing with trauma in a different way. Her mother, for instance, begins to observe Shabbat and kashrut and to attend synagogue services. Noa reacts by withdrawing from friends and failing at schoolwork. The psychological insights that are offered (Noa comments that “when we refuse to acknowledge hurt and loss, it doesn’t help us heal. It only makes us angry or depressed”) slow the plot down and sound inauthentic because they are imposed upon Noa’s narration. They are combined with the characters’ intense reassessment of their feelings about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Throughout the story, the author has taken a “cycle of violence” or moral equivalency approach, which means that both sides’ positions are presented as equally valid and that both sides are equally blamed. As Noa begins to heal psychologically, she renews her friendship with Maha, the Palestinian girl, and observes “Once you have lunch with the ‘enemy,’ it’s harder to make generalizations. None of us believe that the past should be forgotten, but maybe we can use it to build on rather than to destroy one another.” This sounds hopeful, but what, practically, does it mean? The author’s reliance on therapeutic and personal solutions to the conflict ignores the profound political and religious factors that are fundamental to it, so the thematic development is based on flawed assumptions. With scenes as powerful as those in Kass’s *Real Time, Checkpoints* is less successful in exploring the multiple causes of the conflict. Despite successfully presenting, through her characters, the feelings of both Israelis and Palestinians, Levy’s adoption throughout the book of the questionable cycle of violence theory makes it problematic. Recommended with reservations noted above.

Linda R. Silver, Cleveland, OH


In this addition to the Enslow Historical Fiction Adventure series, 11-year-old Galena, a Russian-Jewish immigrant, and her activist older sister Anya live with their family in New York in 1911. Through them, young readers can begin to understand the hopes and struggles of the many turn-of-the-century immigrants who flooded this country hoping for a better life. The fictional story is woven seamlessly with factual detail, as it describes the family’s lives and the terrible exploitive conditions at the Triangle Shirtwaist Company where both girls work. Galena fears for Anya’s safety, worried about her possibly joining the union and losing her job. But her fears are misplaced. It isn’t worker activism but owner neglect and unbelievable indifference that bring about tragedy. A dreadful fire destroys the Triangle factory building, trapping and killing many young women. Galena survives, but is forever changed. Lieurance implies clearly that this disaster will be a watershed event, helping transform America’s industrial future into a struggle to protect workers’ rights through labor unions and collective bargaining. And Galena, drawing on her sister’s example, her Jewish traditions, and her family and friends, will join the fight. *The Locket* has a teacher’s guide available at www.enslow.com. It contains discussion questions, activities, and supplemental reading suggestions and is excellent for both educators and parents to use.

Rita Berman Frischer, Seattle WA


Ramon, 15, works with his father as an apprentice scribe in 15th-century Spain. Aware of his Jewish roots (his great-grandparents were baptized by force), he is fearful of being turned in to the Inquisition as a heretic. Like Ramon’s family, their young Muslim slave, Amir, is also persecuted by the Catholic Church and royalty. *The Apprentice's Masterpiece* tells the story of the boys’ jealousy, adventures, compromises, sacrifices, and narrow escapes in this horrific and violent era. Jews/converts and Muslims/moriscos demonstrate mutual respect and support because both groups are hunted by the Inquisition, “the great hymn to the glory of God,” as it seeks a pure Christian Spain. Well written in free-verse style, the book is filled with historic details, including the way of life of a scribe before the development of the printing press, and the shocking actions of the Church. A prologue and epilogue place the story in its historical and geographic context. Once again, Jews are victims and violent descriptions are not spared but readers looking for a good story set during the Inquisition will not be disappointed.

Susan Berson, Denver, CO


This sequel to *Eye of the Crow* continues an imagined chronicle of Sherlock Holmes’s early years and the beginnings of his detective career. In this volume, Sherlock happens to observe the death of a trapeze artist during a performance at the Crystal Palace. Certain that the man’s fall was no accident, he sets in motion a dangerous investigation which takes him across London in the dead of night, into the lair of criminals. Inspector Lestrade (senior) deprives young Holmes of the credit he deserves in solving the case, further fueling the boy’s determination to become the world’s greatest detective, and setting the stage for future
adventures. Plausible motivations for Holmes's future quirky characteristics are offered, from a mentor who teaches him about chemistry, disguise, and martial arts, to a young woman named Irene Doyle who foreshadows his special relationship with Irene Adler. Colorful characters, dramatic action, and fascinating details about aerialism make the book compelling reading. In the first volume, themes of racism and Sherlock's identity as a half-Jew played a significant role. In the sequel, he is called "Jew-boy" a few times by his nemesis Malefactor, but his personal identity plays no important part in the story. Recommended for secular collections, but an additional purchase in Judaic libraries.

Editor's note: Shane Peacock's first book about Sherlock Holmes has been nominated for the Canadian Children's Literature Award. For more info, see www.bookcentre.ca.


Fans of Joann Sfar's adult graphic novels The Rabbi's Cat and Klezmer have an obligation to the young readers in their lives: introduce them to Little Vampire and his world. Originally published in France beginning in 1999, this new compilation collects the first two stories published in English by Simon & Schuster in 2003, adds a third story, and bundles them together in an affordable and handsome paperback that will be treasured by both children and adults. Little Vampire and his cast of friendly ghosts and monsters welcome Michael, a human boy, into their lives. Through stories of going to school, defeating bullies, and saving dogs from the clutches of evil scientists, readers learn about responsibility, friendship, respecting differences, caring for animals, and courage.

Though religion is not a prominent feature of the stories, the character of Michael is definitely Jewish. In the first story, the Captain of the Dead encourages the little boy to make the sign of the cross after he swears an oath to protect the secret of the ghosts. Michael refuses and says that since he is Jewish the cross doesn't mean much to him. The Captain suggests that Michael does the "sign of the star," to which Michael responds "we don't do that either." In the second story, Michael is having trouble with a bully at school, so Little Vampire takes him to see Rabbi Solomon, a "Cat-balist," who is also a kung fu master. The cat rabbit lives inside a painting in Little Vampire's haunted house, and he greets the boys with "shalom." When Little Vampire asks the rabbit to help Michael with his problem, the rabbit offers to build him a golem, which he explains is "a giant dude" who will go to school with Michael and protect him. Michael refuses the offer of a golem, so the rabbit sends him on a quest to find his lost kung fu book. Along the way, Michael draws on his inner resources to defeat dragons and fighting monkeys, and learns that he has the strength to conquer the bully on his own terms. Sfar's captivating illustrations and creative color choices serve to enhance the fantasy quality of the stories. Third graders on up, especially boys, will take great delight in immersing themselves in Sfar's universe.

Wendy Wasman, Cleveland Museum of Natural History, Cleveland, OH

FOLKLORE


The tzaddik Reb Yisroel Ba'al Shem Tov appears at a critical moment to offer his guidance and wisdom to Shlomo, an honest man who takes his friend's money to teach him a lesson about carelessly storing his many rubles. Shlomo realizes he has become a thief himself when he can't admit that he carried out the prank. We learn that sometimes our acts have unintended consequences and that shame, embarrassment, or fear may keep us from doing the right thing. Nice color illustrations, information about the Ba'al Shem Tov, and a brief glossary embellish this simple tale.

Susan Berson, Denver, CO


The Princess and the Ziz is the fourth in the series about the mythical bird called the Ziz. According to the author's note, it is based on versions that she found in several Jewish folktale collections. The other books in the series are Noah and the Ziz, The Ziz and the Hanukkah Miracle, and The Hardest Word: A Yom Kipper Story. In this story the Ziz is summoned by King Solomon to entertain his daughter, whom he keeps locked in a tower so that she will not marry the wrong person. To make the princess happy the Ziz flies with her to different places around the globe. On one of their outings the Ziz rescues a scribe who has fallen into the ocean. The princess falls in love with the handsome scribe and wants to see him again, but the jealous bird lies about his whereabouts until King Solomon intervenes. After the couple marries, the Ziz gives rides to their many children, just as he did with the princess. Even though Katherine Janus Kahn's vibrant and colorful illustrations are similar to those in the other Ziz books, they are still fresh and pleasing. The story, however, is trite and has no real climax. The issues of jealousy and lying come up as they influence the big bird's behavior but they have no resolution, not even the pat, moralistic ones that conclude the other books about the Ziz's character flaws. The Princess and the Ziz is recommended only for libraries that want to own the entire series.

Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, OH


The fictional town of Elk Spring, Colorado, might have a small population, but it boasts Rabbi Harvey, the swiftest problem solver in the West. In this second helping of Jewish folktales gone wild, Rabbi Harvey continues to solve the thorniest dilemmas with his trademark thoughtfulness and patience. He meets some familiar foes from the first book, such as the father-son team of Big Milt and Wolfie Wasserman, and he triumphs over them by using his weapons of choice: wisdom, intelligence, and humor.
Rabbi Harvey encounters new characters, such as Abigail the gold-miner-turned-schoolteacher, and he explores new places, such as the big city of Denver where he goes to buy a new suit. As in the first book, Rabbi Harvey's adventures and resolutions have a familiar feel. Sheinkin takes his themes from Jewish folktales and Talmudic teachings, tweaks them a bit, combines them with American lore from frontier days, and then serves up new versions in his quirky artistic style. Future generations of folklorists will add Rabbi Harvey to the list of sages who have enchanted readers for thousands of years. The author includes a helpful list of sources for each story, as well as suggestions for further reading. Children in grade 6 to adults will fully appreciate the humor and lessons; fluent readers as young as 3rd grade will thoroughly enjoy the interesting characters and Wild West setting.

Wendy Wasman, Cleveland Museum of Natural History, Cleveland, OH


The Wedding That Saved a Town is based on an old Eastern European shtetl belief that the marriage of two orphans in the local cemetery would bring happiness to them and ward off community epidemics. The author’s choice of story is certainly novel and interesting. The language is simple and the sentences are short. Although peripheral to the story itself, there is a useful glossary at the end of the book that defines characters’ names such as Yamferd (Walrus), Tsigel (Goat), Helfand (Elephant), etc. The use of Yiddish words, by means of the characters’ names throughout the story, is a valuable tool for promoting the Yiddish language and the author’s long career dedicated to klezmer music as well as Yiddish culture is evident in his choice of wording.

The content of the story, however, has some troubling aspects such as the overriding theme of death due to different causes, and especially the mention of death due to pogroms. Although it is clearly for younger children, the concept of pogroms—indiscriminate murder of Jews on a mass scale—is not appropriate to their emotional or intellectual understanding. While the story has a happy ending, parents and educators may find it problematic. The younger reader will also be left with questions about pogroms and cholera epidemics. The illustrator, Jenya Prosmitsky, expressively captures the essence of the story and time period with soft hues and whimsical characterizations. The Wedding That Saved a Town would be appropriate for reading aloud, paraphrased for younger children.

Tamra Gerson, Congregation Children of Israel, Athens, GA

HOLIDAYS


For children who prefer the ease of reading comic books or watching TV to the more cerebral pleasure of reading good books, this humorous story about a family of superheroes is just the ticket. It’s about a family of Jewish superheroes and their surly cat, Purr, who fight evil. The villains are some rodents from outer space who steal all of the hanukkiyot in the neighborhood just as Hanukkah is beginning. Its authors are quick with the quips and puns so the simple story bubbles with the kind of obvious yukks that kids are accustomed to from Disney movies and cartoons. Folded into the story is some information about Hanukkah and following it are some recipes, instructions for playing the dreidel game, and a glossary. The black and white illustrations are a good match for the writing, being simple, undemanding, and a little goofy. Like many books inspired by comics, Rabbi Rocketpower … is unlikely to expand a child’s horizons or arouse anyone’s curiosity about the wider world but it does provide some wholesome fun.

Linda R. Silver, Cleveland, OH


Hershel and the Hanukkah Goblins, instead strikes too many false notes. Too bad, for it has promise.

Linda R. Silver, Cleveland, OH

Simple repetitive language and colorful illustrations attempt to explain and introduce young children the concept of Shabbat in this new board book from Kar-Ben. The story begins with a picture of a Shabbat table and then follows a family observing Shabbat by singing songs, walking to synagogue, and celebrating havdalah. Each page presents a Shabbat concept or symbol and then ends with the sentence: “This is where Shabbat lives.” It concludes with a collage of photographs and ends with the text: “In our wondering/ In our wandering/ In our caring/ and our sharing/ This is where Shabbat lives.” While the pictures are beautiful and appealing, the overall concept is too abstract for the publisher’s intended audience of ages 1-4. First time author, Jan Goldin Fabiyi would find a more welcoming audience if she expanded the book for kindergarten through 2nd grade readers in a hardback format. Not recommended.

Aimee Lurie, Fairmount Temple, Cleveland, OH


For the past several years, Barefoot Books has published books intended to introduce children to the world’s many traditions. These books are accessible, friendly in tone, and broadly accurate in their portrayal of the various cultures. This “calendar” includes stories from eight traditions, demonstrating how holidays are celebrated by stories through the year. Four of them have specifically religious origins: A Hindu story about Krishna, “The Life of the Buddha,” “The Christmas story of Jesus’ birth.” The Jewish component is “The Story of Esther.” The one-page introduction quickly but inaccurately explains the origin of Purim. The story itself is told in a sweet way that avoids the festival’s unpleasant, joyous, and powerful elements (a bland play-let version of a Spiel). As a result the reader is led to think of Purim as the celebration of a love story with a happy ending—even though Haman is hanged.

The illustrations are pleasant with a different color palette for each story, but the storytelling style is bland. It is good to see Jewish stories included in multi-cultural children’s literature. This does not, however, make the “Calendar of Festivals” an important addition to Jewish children’s literature. It is not recommended.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA


Margaret Hillert is the author of many beginning-to-read books, including the Dear Dragon series. Happy Hanukkah, Dear Dragon has the same elements as these earlier books, including a text composed of common sight words. The book has the feel of beginning readers from the author’s early period of productivity of thirty years ago, which is not necessarily appealing to children today. Illustrations are colorful and simple. Jewish content is limited to symbols peppered throughout the book, though never mentioned by name. A boy puts on a kippah, his father lights a menorah, the two boys play dreidel and eat latkes. A word list of the 61 words used follows the text, as do hints for reading reinforcement. An additional purchase for Judaica libraries.

Shelly Feit, Moriah School Library, Englewood, NJ


According to midrash, Mount Sinai was covered with flowers in honor of the giving of the Torah. Following a Shavuot tradition, Babbe and Raizy shop for flowers and Raizy decides to get a bunch of daisies. On her way home, she finds many opportunities to do mitzvot including inviting a new girl to help with her family’s celebration, inviting an elderly woman to share in a holiday meal, and offering to babysit so a neighbor can go to synagogue. She gives each person two daisies. When her brother criticizes the scant bouquet in the vase, their grandmother explains that it is a bouquet of mitzvot that “is half as big as it started out, but twice as beautiful.” The idea of sharing flowers and the mitzvot of Shavuot provide a good story line and the inclusion of characters from Ashkenazic and Sephardic communities will widen the book’s appeal. There is a glossary. But the illustrations are rather flat, and the people look absolutely miserable. With the scant offerings about this holiday (e.g., Sammy Spider’s First Shavuot; A Mountains of Blintzes), this will be a welcome addition to most Jewish libraries.

Kathie Pinchuck, Congregation Beth Sholom, Teaneck, NJ


Noted children’s author Steven Kroll has written an unusual addition to the large library of Hanukkah books. A family of mice are the protagonists. The mice children, who watch all the activities in the house as they transpire, are fortunate to share in all the gifts that Rachel, daughter of the “Big People” receives for Hanukkah. The mice derive as much pleasure from the beautifully carved doll house and its miniature furniture as Rachel herself does. Not only do Rachel and her family get to enjoy the holiday; they are joined by the mouse family in every aspect of the holiday, including lighting a tiny menorah and sharing delicious latkes and applesauce. The Hanukkah Mice is a sweet story that will appeal to young children; however, it does perpetuate the idea that Hanukkah is about children receiving a gift on each night of the holiday. Joyous illustrations, which perfectly fit the tone of the book, are created by Michelle Shapiro, who has also illustrated Rebecca’s Journey Home by Bryn Sugarman.

Shelly Feit, Moriah School Library, Englewood, NJ


Eeek! A mouse! Get rid of it and the book it came in. Author Larner employs the hackneyed plot of human-befriending-animal (in this case—how gross—a rabbi and a rodent) to teach
about holidays, using the ploy of food crumbs falling to the floor in the rabbi’s study; naturally the crumbs differ with each different observance. The mouse, who talks, gets a Hebrew name and does human actions of religious observances. At the end of the year man and beast part in a surprise ending (or so the back cover announces): a ghastly scene of hundreds of mice dressed in tallitot listening to the rabbi’s mouse reading from a book (sidur?) through his sunglasses. The volume’s layout is beyond the attention span of targeted readers. There are too many words on each page; the font is too small and often positioned on murky background. The rabbi, wise and kind, is first and foremost a slob. The illustrations are realistic of the mice, stilted to cartoonish of the humans. The last picture is reminiscent of Nazi propaganda spreads. For readers who miss the point of the text there is a CD of holiday songs. May we find lots of Jewish cats to eat the mice before any more rabbis find them and instigate more stories like this one. Not recommended.

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

Another view

A mouse makes his winter home in the synagogue and eats all the crumbs and leftovers provided for him by the kindly rabbi, who calls him Mazel. Predictably, Mazel is captivated by the rabbi’s stories about Jewish holidays as they occur throughout the year. After Passover (and enjoying all the matzah crumbs), it’s time for Mazel to rejoin his large mouse family, who, in the final illustration, have been transformed into a large Jewish congregation in kippot and tallitot, led by “rabbi” Mazel. This is a somewhat silly story with appropriate holiday information and colorful illustrations, in the tradition of animals who become Jewish. The glossary pronunciation guide has its shortcomings. The book is enhanced by a music CD, including the entire text of the book, read in various voices, and nice holiday songs with guitar accompaniment.

   Susan Berson, Denver, CO


Jody, who appears to be about eight or nine, wants to be an archaeologist like her father. When she accompanies him from their home in Jerusalem to Modi’in, where a group is digging at the site where Judah Maccabee fought against the Greco-Syrians, her small size and bravery prove to be very useful. The qualities she possesses of a good archaeologist—keen eyesight and the ability to overcome her fear of spiders—combined with her small size help her slip into a hole the adults can’t fit into, and she finds an arrowhead which may be from Judah Maccabee’s time. Topaz’s watercolor wash illustrations in glowing colors are perfect for the text. Levine, the author of Running on Eggs, has done a fine job of writing a story about a family living in Jerusalem, making this a good addition to books about present-day Israel. The only other connections to Hanukkah are that the action takes place during Hanukkah vacation, and when they return to Jerusalem from the dig, Mother is waiting for them to light the Hanukkah candles.

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


What a delightful Hanukkah book with a new twist! The simplicity of the haiku poems (three lines with exactly 5, 7, and 5 syllables) contrasts with the lively, movement-filled, joyous illustrations, including wonderful end papers. The book is designed in such a way that, when we arrive at the fully-lit menorah, we can look back at a progression of beautiful borders in bold color and pattern, laid out aside each other. In addition, we get progressively revealed twisted candles to count, numbers for saying aloud, instructions for lighting the menorah, the Hanukkah blessings, words to the song Rock of Ages, and a special Hanukkah reading.

   Susan Berson, Denver, CO

HOLOCAUST


This straightforward, dispassionate account has a cool tone with no “heart.” Occasional sidebars of personal testimony provide a modicum of personalization in a history that largely lays the blame for the Holocaust on worldwide economic depression and Hitler’s power, with a nod to anti-Semitism, bystanders, and the inaction of the Catholic Church. Jews are often mentioned alongside Roma, Poles, and other victims, and the creation of the Jewish homeland of Israel is noted as coming from “land of Arab Palestinians.” Jews are depicted as dehumanized (a son denies food to his father) and passive (no mention of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising in the text, only a brief, disconnected reference in a photo caption). Full-page sepia-toned historic photos illustrate the text, but their captions are inadequate. A bibliography includes some well-respected Jewish sources, and the postwar DP camps, Nazi trials, and Holocaust denial are covered. Not recommended.

   Susan Berson, Denver, CO


After Hershel Grynszpan, a Jewish student studying in France, learns of his parents’ deportation to the no-man’s land between Germany and Poland, he acts out his despair by shooting a German officer, who eventually dies. This event sparked the Nazi pogrom in Germany and Vienna that has come to be known as Kristallnacht, the night of broken glass, with all its accompanying destruction of Jewish stores and Jewish bodies. Of course, this is nothing new to readers of the AJL Newsletter; at issue is: is it a worthwhile book for children to read and begin to understand what happened to the Jews of Germany and Austria?

   It absolutely is. In addition to the personal testimony and significant points of view, an excellent historical background is provided. Beginning with World War I, the ramifications of Germany’s defeat and the terms of the Versailles Treaty, the book describes Hitler’s rise to power, his aborted coup against the post-
war government, his distorted point of view, and his preparation for war contrary to the terms of the Versailles Treaty. It is hard to believe that so much is communicated in this slender book with its brief sentences and clear graceful writing. Much can be attributed to the book’s design: generous spacing between lines, large photographs and informative boxed inserts that describe the incidents and their significance. Includes a timeline, sources, source notes, and index.

Dr. Marcia W. Posner, Holocaust Memorial and Tolerance Center of Nassau County, NY


Grim but handsome illustrations that evoke the hardships of concentration camp life are a powerful accompaniment to a simple prose style. Formatted like a picture book, with 32 pages and pictures that are at least as important as the narrative in telling the story, it is told by a boy who was only eleven when he was imprisoned. Never able to get over the feeling of being abandoned by his mother, the boy survived because he was fed one apple a day by a girl from the other, free side of the barbed-wire fence. In a dream, his mother has told him that an angel girl would save him and years later, in America, the lonely young man has a dream in which his mother once again tells him, “An angel will save you.” He meets his “angel girl” on a date and incredibly, they discover that she was the girl who gave him food during the Holocaust. Several photographs of the couple on whom the story is based and the full story of their meeting are appended.

Despite its happy ending, portrayed in brighter colors than the scenes in the concentration camp, this is a sad story pervaded by a sense of the child’s loss. Without a mother and without a childhood, the boy is aptly pictured as gaunt and suffering. His story, well-told by both Friedman and Amit, belongs in the category of illustrated Holocaust books and not picture books because of the nature of its subject.

Linda R. Silver, Cleveland, OH


In 1940, Varian Fry volunteered to go to France for the Emergency Rescue Committee, set up after the fall of France to rescue intellectuals and others hunted by the Nazis in the Vichy Zone. He went with a list of 200 names and rescued 2000. Many books, including two of Fry’s own, have been written about this American Schindler; there have been films and books for teens and children before, but none as spare as this one. What does it contain, for whom is it intended, and is it necessary?

The book devotes six pages to Hitler and the Nazis and the fall of France; 16 to Fry and those he rescued, much of the pages taken up with photos and captions. There is a glossary, an index and a page for further information. It appears that the book and most likely the series, are intended for those with learning disabilities. The reading level is about second grade, but the interest level is from grades 4-7. It is quite amazing that in few words and large photos so much can be conveyed and that the author and editor have been able to bring a part of world history and this noble man’s feat to those who would have remained ignorant of it.

Dr. Marcia W. Posner, Holocaust Memorial and Tolerance Center of Nassau County, NY

**ISRAEL**


“No harm’s done to history by making it something someone would want to read,” said bestselling historian David McCullough. Martin Gilbert, another celebrated historian, must have been thinking along the same lines when he prepared his new book, The Story of Israel. It is arranged as 28 double-paged spreads, each intermingling the historian’s clear, well-researched narrative with abundant historical photographs. The two-page spreads cover topics such as Theodor Herzl and the founding of modern Zionism, pre-World War I settlement, the opening of Hebrew University, the War of Independence, and the exodus from Arab lands. The story concludes with Israel in the 21st century. Sidebars highlight individuals whose life stories have influenced Israel’s history—people like Yitzhak Rabin and Moshe Dayan, Judah Magnes, Vladimir Jabotinsky, Hannah Szenes, Ilan Ramon, Ehud Barak, and even Harry Truman. Adding to the book’s appeal is its inclusion of several dozen facsimile documents, tucked into folds and pockets of its oversized pages, representing significant moments in Israel’s history. The reader can pull out a copy of Arthur Balfour’s letter to Lord Rothschild promising British support for a Jewish homeland, a letter written by a paratrooper on the eve of a battle in the Six Day War, pages from Herzl’s diary, the front page of the Jerusalem Post on the day after Rabin’s assassination, and orders issued by Colonel Mickey Marcus in 1948, commanding the Israel Defense Forces Jerusalem Front. These items are replicas of genuine documents, and a “Translations booklet” provides translations of those documents that are not in English. This well-written, visually attractive historical keepsake volume would make a marvelous gift to a pre-teen or teen student curious about the historian’s craft and about the story of the State of Israel. In libraries, it may need special circulation rules because of the physical design of the work, as explained above.

Andrea Rapp, Wise Temple, Cincinnati, OH


In this pleasant offering by Allison Ofanansky and photographer Eliyahu Alpern, the rich colors of nature are as abundant as the olive harvest which the reader follows in chronological detail through a child’s first participation in the harvest in her family’s olive grove. Simple sentences with a large font accompany the delightful photographs as we learn all about different olives—which ones are for eating and which for oil—and the process of getting them from the branches to the olive press. Readers will appreciate the genuineness and realism of the story and how, within a few short pages, the young girl becomes a friend from
Israel. This story will also appeal to young children as an example of how family members depend on one another to accomplish goals. Even the youngest can participate and develop a sense of responsibility and achievement. *Harvest of Light* can be a springboard to talk about Israeli families, industry, and even how oil is used to light the hanukkiyah. Recommended for synagogue libraries, day school libraries, and nursery schools.

Tamra Gerson, Congregation Children of Israel, Athens, GA


The good news is that here is a book without an axe to grind against Israel. Its author makes clear the 3,000-year-long connection between the State of Israel of today and the ancient history of the area. Also, there is recognition that guarding against terrorism is a part of daily life for Israelis. The bad news is that, like so many other series books, it is not free from errors, although there are fewer than in many others and they are relatively minor. Two needing correction are: the Dome of the Rock is not a mosque, and the Romans conquered the land 130 years before the author’s date of 70 C.E. Another shortcoming is the absence of explanation of the terms CE and BCE in the dates. Written as a first-person account by a third grader in Colorado, whose class is learning about Israel in preparation for the arrival of a new student from Tiberius, the last chapter shows Ziv’s arrival. His new classmates, having studied up on Israel, greet him with “shalom” and “boker tov.” He feels welcome and tells them a bit about himself. This is a satisfying conclusion to a book with enough information about Israeli life and culture to make it a serviceable source for “country” reports for grades 2-5. The additions of a hummus recipe and an Israeli craft project, for the welcome party the class gives to new students, are nice extras, as is the short bibliography of books and websites. An index, glossary, and bibliography are included.

Andrea Rapp, Wise Temple, Cincinnati, OH


This new entry in series books about Israel opens with inviting chapters about Israel’s physical geography, flora and fauna, enhanced by appealing National Geographic photographs. The ensuing chapters, dealing with history and politics, have eye appeal (lots of color photographs, ample white space between lines of type, colorful text boxes), and some worthwhile information, but there are too many drawbacks to earn the book a recommendation. For example, there are inexplicable bits of trivia (“When some stores opened on Shabbat to sell a new Harry Potter novel, the government fined them”); innocent errors (“In 1949 Israel signed treaties that established its borders with its neighbors”); some not-so-innocent errors (Jews of the Yishuv sought to “drive out non-Jewish people” through terrorism); unsubstantiated interpretations (In 1967, “Nasser probably had no real plans to invade”); and important omissions (such as the thousands of rocket attacks on Israel that followed its withdrawal from Gaza “as a necessary concession to the peace process.”) The color photographs of Israelis are mainly of soldiers, police, or very Orthodox Jews. Palestinians, on the other hand, are seen as hapless souls waiting at checkpoints with gun toting Israelis in the background, or as villagers fleeing Israel in wartime. Israelis as victims of terror or as having to go through “checkpoints” themselves (to enter a restaurant or shopping mall in Israel, people must have their belongings searched as an anti-terror measure), are not depicted. Other books, such as Margaret Goldstein’s *Israel in Pictures* (Lerner Publications, 2004) or Louise Slavicek’s *Israel* (Chelsea House, 2003) do a better job of presenting Israel, without the errors and subtle bias.

Andrea Rapp, Wise Temple, Cincinnati, OH

JUDAISM


On a beautiful sunny day Rina decides to go to the Jewish bookstore with her friend Bina but has to cancel her plans because of rain. The little girl makes several alternative plans but all are thwarted by circumstances beyond her control. After each disappointment Rina says, “Gam zu l’tova, I trust this is good, Hashem makes things happen the way that they should.” Rina’s story has a happy ending. Mrs. Stein who was walking in the rain and needed a place to rest knocks on Rina’s door. Rina invites her in and serves her lunch. Mrs. Stein is so grateful that she gives Rina a gift that happens to be the book Rina was planning on purchasing in the Jewish bookstore. These events prove to Rina that Hashem makes things happen the way that they should. *Rina’s Rainy Day* is written in rhyme. The vibrant, colorful illustrations complement the text although they are somewhat stilted and childish. Recommended for ages 3-7.

Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, OH


If it were not for the dreadful rhymes, there might be several things to like about this book, one of a series of alphabet books from the publisher. It has an attractive format, highlighted by evocative color illustrations and informational sidebars that expand on the subject of each rhyme. The point of view is inclusive of all branches of American Judaism. Michelson writes in an author’s note that “Judaism is a tree with many branches, but all are nourished by the same roots, and we need to support and respect one another.” That graceful sentiment is then stained by an awkward and ungrammatical rhyme that typifies many in the book: “Like a choir sounds best when it blends different voices/ Jews should applaud Jews who’ve made different choices.” Other examples of the forced rhyming style are “blessed her” to rhyme with “ancestor;” “lower” with “Noah;” “lotta” (as in matzah balls) with “Haggadah;” and “ma” with “Sh’ma.” In addition, some of the rhymes are simply ridiculous, topped by the letter E: “… And E’s for Einstein’s fine idea: E equals MC squared/ Which proves that even geniuses forget to comb their hair.” Moreover, the book is random in subject matter, suggesting that the subjects were
chosen to fit the rhymes, rather than vice versa. And, while the sidebars reveal some interesting aspects of contemporary American Jewish culture, that isn’t enough to rescue the book from its fatal flaw—those rhymes! Malka Drucker’s A Jewish Holiday ABC (Harcourt, 1992), while more limited in subject, remains a better choice for families.

Linda R. Silver, Cleveland, OH

LIFE CYCLE


The round-faced, cheerful, and always well-behaved sister and brother who, in previous books in this series, have gone to shul, to school, to the doctor, shopping, and visiting, now attend their first wedding. Dressed in their best, the little boy does the things that men do at rigorously Orthodox weddings while the little girl stays within the feminine role. Seated separately, they watch and recount every significant part of the ceremony and then participate, separately, in the festivities that follow. Although the rhyming couplets in which the story is told are choppy and the color illustrations are prosaic, the childlike point of view and enthusiastic attitude toward a joyful Jewish event lend charm. Written for Orthodox children and using the Ashkenazi pronunciation of Hebrew words, this is a pleasant addition to the series.

Linda R. Silver, Cleveland, OH

PRAYER


A lovely addition to the Jewish board book library for young children, this rhyming text is written by well-known author Jacqueline Jules, who has also written the Ziz series and Clap and Count. A small boy climbs into bed with a book and a bear, with the moon prominent through the window behind his bed. After his mother reads to him, the little boy hugs his bear, closes his eyes, and says the Sh’mah. “I pray to one God of the earth and the skies.” Opposite the words of the Sh’mah, animals romp as the stars tumble in the sky, giving a sense of the many creatures inhabiting the universe. Pastel illustrations set an appropriate tone for bedtime.

Shelly Fett, Moriah School Library, Englewood, NJ


This beautifully illustrated book is a collection of prayers and poems. A note located on the title verso states, “Many of the prayers and poems included here are unattributed; they have been passed down through the generations and information about their original authorship has been lost.” Attributed authors include Isaac Watts, Edith Rutter Leatham, Cecil Francis Alexander, and St. Clement. Ms. Kangas skillfully interprets the various prayers with only slight reference to religious heritage. Most are of a non-gender and non-sectarian nature; however, a few use the words “Lord,” “Him,” and “Father in Heaven.” This does not detract from their beauty and simplicity, as they may be adapted to fit the settings in which they are read. The prayers are not categorized, but pertain to such topics as food, nature, home, and family. The semi-gloss paper helps to magnify the predominately orange and green colors. The illustrations of children and adults are diverse and not characterized stereotypically. Most of the poems/prayers are short and can be easily memorized. Kangas is a talented illustrator and she has done a superb job conveying the beauty of simple prayers that very young children will love.

Tamra Gerson, Congregation Children of Israel, Athens, GA

These titles, reviewed in the Adult Readers section, may also be of interest to teenagers:

Sfar, Joann. The Rabbi’s Cat 2. NY: Pantheon, 2008. (p. 15)
If you have been following recent developments in the world of Hasidic music, then you will be aware of the controversies surrounding Lipa Schmeltzer and other performers. Many Hasidic leaders have banned this music for a variety of reasons, chief among them, non-Jewish musical influences on their work. To anyone familiar with the history of Hasidic music and Jewish music as a whole, the irony inherent in this story is glaring.

The music of any culture cannot help but be influenced by those surrounding them. This may be particularly true of the Jewish people who, due to persecution, have migrated from country to country, picking up elements of their hosts’ culture and incorporating them into the Jewish tradition. While a natural unconscious development for these circumstances, this was often done quite consciously. Anticipating Lenny Solomon’s Schlock Rock by nearly four hundred years, the great kabbalist and poet Rabbi Israel ben Moses Najara, wrote hundreds of religious hymns using the melodies of well-known Arabic, Turkish, Greek and Spanish songs. His intent, similar to sentiments voiced by Lipa Schmeltzer, was to attempt to keep the masses away from secular songs by giving them what they wanted musically in a religious context.

Hasidim were quite explicit about this practice, giving it a theological justification. Basing their ideas on Lurianic kabbalah, 18th-century Hasidim believed that by appropriating secular melodies for religious use, they were redeeming hidden sparks of holiness within these tunes and thereby helping to hasten the coming of the Messiah in some small way. Often a rebbe would overhear a popular melody and declare it fit for adaptation. Lubavitchers use French military tunes in their liturgy. Kotzker and Gerer Hasidim adapted melodies of the great Romantic composers. Even the Israeli national anthem “Hatikvah” uses a Romanian folksong as its basis.

And lest you think that Jews are the only musical borrowers, it could be argued that Western music as a whole has a Judaic source. Classical music has its origins in the liturgical music of the Catholic Church, which in turn, stems from synagogue music and a mistaken notion of what ancient Greek music sounded like. Those seeking to purge Jewish music of its outside influences are faced with quite a challenge. Not only is this cross-cultural dialogue what keeps our music fresh and exciting, but it is so ubiquitous that it would be extremely difficult to isolate any purely “Jewish” elements. Even if we wanted to, if we were somehow able to eliminate all traces of non-Jewish influence, it is hard to imagine how much we would be left with.