

In Jewish Education, Deep Cuts Shape New Landscapes

ANTHONY WEISS

This article first appeared in the May 8, 2009 issue of the newspaper Forward. It is reprinted here with the permission of the author and the newspaper.

As the current economic downturn becomes the longest since the Great Depression, a series of painful cuts at America's flagship institutions of Judaic scholarship have produced a new and uncomfortable reality: Jewish higher education is shrinking.

The most dramatic example of this came April 14, when the Reform movement's Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, the oldest seminary in the United States, announced that it would close at least one, and possibly two, of its three American campuses. But even that news has quickly been supplanted by word that the Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary is still looking to close a \$5.5 million budget gap for next year. This gap persists despite a recent series of drastic cost-cutting measures, ranging from reducing faculty by roughly one-sixth to closing down the school on Fridays.

These are just the latest in a long series of moves by Jewish institutions of higher education. Other measures include selling off precious assets, raising tuition and even closing down entirely. In this process, the seminaries and graduate schools that are seen as providing intellectual vigor and leadership to Judaism's major movements are being forced to rethink how they will educate and ordain the rabbis, cantors, educators and thinkers who will lead Jewish life into the future.

Even now, the end may not yet be in sight for cuts in Jewish higher education. Most of these institutions are facing potentially steep deficits for years to come, even as applications are holding steady or rising. The result, experts in the field say, will likely be some radical changes.

"It's very painful, not only because one is personally involved, but also because it will change the landscape in ways that, at least at the moment, are not as promising or as exciting as I think we all had envisioned," said Steven Windmueller, dean of HUC-JIR's Los Angeles campus and an expert on Jewish communal life. "The obvious downsizing, the potential for some mergers, the possibility that some institutions may actually go out of business at some point—all of that is certainly now cast in reality."

Even schools with august histories and international profiles are being forced not just to scrounge for money, but to justify their very existence.

"The question that JTS has to answer, and every other institution like us, is, why are you necessary? Why are you essential?" said JTS's chancellor, Arnold Eisen. "We certainly cannot assume that the world needs us because we're here. It's a case that has to be made."

The pain has hit institutions both large and small. Yeshiva University, the central institution of Modern Orthodoxy for more than a century, already has reduced its administrative staff by 120 people and slashed its capital budget to \$4 million from \$25 million. Brandeis University, the premier Jewish liberal arts college, recently raised a furor when it threatened to close its Rose Art Museum and sell off its collection of modernist masterpieces.

In at least one case, the downturn has proved fatal to an institution that was already struggling. In January, 90-year-old Baltimore Hebrew University announced that it was in talks to merge into Towson University, where it would become the latter's Jewish studies department, ending BHU's run as an independent school.

Clearly, many of the changes have been painful. But experts say that not all of them are necessarily destructive.

"These years can't be a time for merely going more slowly and cutting back and doing with less," Eisen said. "It's got to be a time for imaginative thinking about the future."

Jack Ukeles, a consultant who specializes in Jewish communal affairs, cited HUC-JIR as an example of hard times forcing a long-postponed day of reckoning.

"They have been aware for a very long time that they're running more campuses than they can afford," Ukeles said. "In normal times, it's virtually impossible for nonprofits and governments to make the sort of decisions they may be able to make now."

But tight resources do not necessarily ensure that cuts will be made in the wisest fashion, he cautioned. "It is an opportunity, but it still requires a lot of courage and thoughtfulness. Good things do not automatically flow from crisis."

The crisis also has pushed Jewish institutions to think more flexibly about collaboration, including across denominational lines.

"This is a period in which institutions have to begin to think about collaboration in novel ways," said Rabbi David Ellenson, president of HUC-JIR. "It may be a turning point in the way in which American Jewish higher education is delivered."

JTS and HUC-JIR already have a small joint fellowship program for rabbinical students, and beginning next school year, they are planning to expand the partnership to their cantorial schools, which will run joint classes in Hebrew and in a variety of musical subjects. Several schools are also looking at expanding partnerships with non-Jewish schools, as well. Eisen said he believed that such collaborative projects could not only save money, but also attract new interest, and funds, from donors.

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President's Message

SUSAN DUBIN

I am writing this message in between packing and getting ready for a trip to Israel over Pesach. While there, I will meet with several of our members and I will discuss revitalizing a chapter in Israel. Needless to say, I am way beyond excited about this upcoming adventure.

I am also thrilled about the 2009 annual convention in Chicago. Thanks to the Chicago committee for pulling together an incredible program. Despite the economy, many of our members have already made plans to be there. Our Convention Subsidy Committee is working hard to help as much as we can those who need some assistance. When so many of us are looking at job losses or downsizing is when we especially need to join together and gain strength from each other. Nothing is as energizing as learning new things and meeting new people with like interests and concerns.

In the last issue of the newsletter, I reported that the International Liaison Committee had arranged for ten papers to be presented at the World Jewish Congress. Ya'akov Aronson, who, together with Edith Lubetski and Peggy Pearlstein was instrumental in setting this up, let me know that the venue is the World Congress of Jewish Studies, to be held this August in Israel, and that eight papers will be presented. I apologize for the error and thank Ya'akov, Edith, Peggy, and the committee for their work. We will look forward to hearing more about the conference next fall.

In an effort to broaden our outreach and bring more resources to our membership, we now have a link on our home page to a video feed from JTN, Jewish Television Network. They are providing videos of authors and other programs that may be of interest. Thanks to Harvey Lehrer of JTN for providing our organization with this resource and to Nancy Sack for making the connections possible.

Plans for our 2010 Seattle convention are starting to take shape. We would love to involve as many people as we can in helping to plan this convention. Please contact Fred Isaac or Shoshanah Seidman if you would like to help. If you are interested in presenting, please look for the call for papers on the AJL Web site, in the Chicago convention program book, and Hasafran. Seattle is in a beautiful part of the country. Plan to visit it next year for the convention!

Our best wishes go out to all those who are affected by the economy. I have been writing letters to institutions that have eliminated or curtailed library positions. A sample letter appears on the next page. Please let me know how AJL can help you. In the words of King Solomon, "This too shall pass." I hope it passes quickly and not too painfully for all of us.

Looking forward to good times ahead!



Doris Orenstein Memorial Fund

YELENA LUCKERT

The Doris Orenstein Memorial Fund helps members attend their first AJL convention. Funds are generated by donations from our members. Please think of this fund as you remember loved ones or commend others' achievements or simply want to do a mitzvah.

A recent donation was received from:

- Libby White, in honor of Ellen Cole's twin grandchildren

Donating to Doris Orenstein Memorial Fund is a wonderful way to remember your colleagues and friends in times of sorrow or times of celebration. These donations will be very much appreciated by first-time attendees to future AJL conventions.

Please consider giving to this good cause. Send a check to: Doris Orenstein Memorial Fund, c/o Yelena Luckert, McKeldin Library, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742. If you have any questions, please call 301-879-7035 or send e-mail to yluckert@umd.edu.

AJL Online

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

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

AJL Scholarship Fund

ELLEN SHARE

The great rabbi and sage, Maimonides, listed eight levels of charity. The highest level is to prepare a person for gainful employment. You have the unique opportunity to encourage a library student and, at the same time, promote Judaica librarianship by making donations to the AJL Scholarship Fund.

The AJL Scholarship Fund awards two scholarships of \$500 each year to talented library science students who show an interest in pursuing a career in Judaica librarianship. The awards will be made at the convention in Chicago. For each gift, an acknowledgment card is sent to the appropriate person. It is a meaningful way to recognize simchas or the memory of a loved one, or make a donation for a speedy recovery. Your donation will always be appreciated! Please remember to include the addresses of the family of those honored or remembered so that we can notify the appropriate persons.

Please send your donation to Sarah M. Barnard, Serials Librarian, Hebrew Union College-Klau Library, 3101 Clifton Avenue, Cincinnati, OH 45220.

Donors to the Margot Berman Memorial Fund and AJL Scholarship Fund since December 2008:

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- Philanthropic Collaborative Anne Bartley AB Fund in memory of Margot Berman
- Thomas D. and Sarah R. Selz in memory of Margot Berman
- Ellen Share in memory of Janet Fine Rosenblatt and Morris Klein

Letter Denouncing Library Closings and Curtailment of Services

As libraries are faced with the economic downturn, many of our members are finding themselves with reduced hours and/or a loss of position. The letter below is a generic copy of the letter I have sent as president to directors of institutions that are affected. Please inform me of institutions that should receive it and I will send it to them.

Dear Director:

The Association of Jewish Libraries, an international professional organization representing librarians from more than one thousand university, school, synagogue, center, public, and special libraries around the world, deplores the closing or curtailing of library services.

Numerous studies have directly linked educational achievement with library availability and services. The ready availability of information is essential to a free society. Libraries and the services of professional librarians insure the continued intellectual health of our culture. Any institution that is a long-time proponent of high educational standards must continue to fiscally and ideologically support, recognize and provide library services as part of a Jewish education.

It is in the best interest of the populations whom we serve to provide for their educational needs by encouraging the establishment and use of high quality library service. Especially in times of economic distress, strong libraries with professional staff and all associated library services are desperately needed by everyone.

Thank you for your attention to this most important matter.

Sincerely,

Susan Dubin, President
Association of Jewish Libraries, Inc.

Chapter Chatter

TOBY ROSSNER

News from the Chapter Relations Committee

Submitted by Irene Seff and Roz Reisner, Chapter Relations Committee Co-chairs

Our Chapter Relations Committee welcomes Amalia Warshenbrot from North Carolina as our third chapter representative, joining Judy Cohn from California and Sylvia Firschein from Florida. We're looking forward to seeing you at the AJL convention in Chicago in July. Plan to join us at our informative and always lively chapter relations meetings, being held for your convenience this year on both Sunday and Monday evening.

The Chapter Relations Committee sent all chapter presidents two new AJL publications: Merrily Hart's *Creating a Collection*, 5th edition, and Linda Silver's *Jewish Classics for Kids*, 2006. Thanks to publications chair Deb Stern for helping us out with this project. In February Irene traveled to Seattle and San Antonio to support our two newest chapters-in-formation. Congratulations to our new chapters.

Several individuals are interested in organizing chapters: Shelia Riegel in Atlanta (sriegel@epsteinalanta.org) and Rachel Leket-Mor in Phoenix (Rachel.Leket-Mor@asu.edu). If you would like to organize a chapter in your area, let us know; we can help you get started.

Irene (Irene@TheSeffs.net)

Roz (roz@theReisners.net)

San Antonio Chapter

Submitted by Marlene Reynolds

Irene Seff was the honored guest visitor at the second meeting of the San Antonio Chapter. She gave us excellent guidance and ideas. Our May meeting will take place at the only kosher restaurant in town.

Northwest Region

Submitted by Toby Harris

We Seattle-ites have been abuzz with activity and enthusiasm since last summer when we learned that the 2010 convention will be held in our city. A small group of devoted volunteers, Tessa Bennion, Margo McVicar-Whelan and others, has gained momentum under the leadership of AJL members Toby Harris and Janet Heineck, along with Rita Frischer, consultant extraordinaire.



AJL Northwest Conference organizers welcome Chapter Relations co-chair Irene K. Seff, center, to their February event. Left to right: Janet Heineck, Toby Harris, Irene, Rita Frischer, and Tessa Bennion

The first, very successful AJL Northwest Regional conference, From Word to Deed:

Teaching Our Children Through Literature, was held Sunday, February 15, in Seattle at Temple Beth Am. Noted educators and

lecturers Rivy Poupko Kletenik of Seattle and Lisa Silverman of Los Angeles led us in exploring values with Torah and picture books. Attendees learned about the Washington State Holocaust Education Resource Center (WSHERC) and about *Drash*, a literary journal published in Seattle by Wendy Marcus. Lisa also demonstrated the AJL Values Finder and distributed book lists with ideas for teaching children Jewish values.

Conference planners were enormously pleased to welcome Irene Seff to Seattle to attend the February conference and to provide wise words of council and encouragement for our next step toward establishing a chapter. Irene got a preview of this beautiful area and a taste of what's to come next summer! Watch for 2010 convention news and plan on discovering the emerald city's Judaic treasures and fabulous libraries! Our new Web site, at www.ajlnorthwest.org, will provide updates as the date gets closer. For information about forming a Northwest Regional chapter, please e-mail us at ajlnw@earthlink.net.

New England Chapter (NEAJL)

Submitted by Ann Abrams

The New England Chapter will be holding a one-day conference on Friday, June 19, at Congregation Beth Israel in West Hartford, Connecticut. The topic will be Sharing Resources, or, How to Save our Institutions Money during these Very Tough Times. For more information, please contact Ann Abrams at aabrams@tisrael.org.

South Florida Chapter (SFAJL)

From the minutes of the SFAJL meeting on March 25

The SFAJL chapter Web site at www.sfajl.org is now a blog. The newsletter will no longer be distributed in print form; all news can be accessed on the blog. AJL podcasts are available at www.jewishlibraries.org/podcast.

SFAJL cosponsored the opening event, Klez4Kids, of Florida Atlantic University's first annual Jewish Kultur Festival on February 25, in Boca Raton. Klez4Kids featured Heidi Smith Hyde, author of AJL notable picture book *Mendel's Accordion*, doing a reading with live back-up from the Klezmer Company Orchestra. The event was aimed at families with young kids.

The guest speaker at the March 25 meeting was Eric Brown, a musician and freelance editor. Eric recently edited Carol de Giere's biography of Stephen Schwartz, *Defying Gravity*. Schwartz is a successful composer and lyricist whose famous projects include *Godspell*, *Pippin*, *The Prince of Egypt*, and most recently, *Wicked*. Visit www.defyinggravitythebook.com for more information on the book.

Mazal tov to SFAJL's long-distance member from Tallahassee, Annette Goldsmith, who is now a Ph.D.! On the morning of December 12, 2008, she successfully defended her dissertation *Found In Translation: A Mixed Methods Study Of Decision Making By U.S. Editors Who Acquire Children's Books For Translation*.

Southern California Chapter (AJLSC)

Submitted by Cathy Ryne

AJLSC printed two Jewish Book Month brochures, replete with color photos and our chapter's stunning logo—one for children and one for adults—for the first time this year, after being inspired by the Cleveland Chapter's wonderful annual publications. These

publications went into the 72 branches of the City of Los Angeles public library system, the 89 branches of the Los Angeles County public libraries, and the libraries and lobbies of our members' synagogues and day schools.

The Dorothy Schroeder Memorial Award was presented on May 13 to Lisa Silverman, director of the Sinai Temple Blumenthal Library at Stephen S. Wise Temple. This award is presented to honor a chapter member who has made a significant contribution to Jewish libraries and Judaica librarianship. The AJL Convention Scholarship Awards were also announced, and the new and continuing ALJSC board members were introduced. Duplicate and extra books (Judaica and secular) were collected and given to our colleagues at Los Angeles Public Library and the County of Los Angeles Public Library to enhance their collections.

A bibliography by Lisa Silverman and other information from the February AJLSC Annual Western Regional Conference Exploring the Holocaust through Children's Literature is available on the AJLSC Web site (www.ajlsc.org/home.html).

After sixty years, the Jewish Community Library of Los Angeles will close its doors. The Federation, owner of the JCLLA collection, will no longer fund the library and wants to allow American Jewish University (formerly University of Judaism) to assume the collection and move it to their site. This poses problems, especially the lack of public transportation to such a community-oriented entity. Alternatively, *An Action Plan for A Jewish Library for All* proposes a temporary loan of the collection to a JCLLA coalition, representing a soon-to-be-formed corporation with a plan for an independent stand-alone library. The action plan has been submitted to the Federation, but so far the Federation has refused to meet with the coalition. AJLSC is asking people to contact the Federation and the editors of the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Jewish Journal* to let our voices be heard.

Houston Chapter

Submitted by Lisa Klein

The Houston Chapter met with Irene Seff. Irene talked about the upcoming Chicago convention with the group and we brainstormed ways for our members to become involved with our local book fair in the fall. We also talked about authors and sharing programs with each other. We are looking forward to our final meeting of the year with our local Book Fair staff person to give our recommendations on books and authors and also take our place on the committee. Thanks to Irene for meeting with us!

Capital Area Chapter (AJL-CAC)

Submitted by Yelena Luckert

The Capital Area Chapter had a very busy spring. On March 3 the chapter was invited to the screening of the film *Refusenik*, the first retrospective documentary to chronicle the thirty-year movement to free Soviet Jews. The film shows how a small grassroots effort—bold enough to take on a Cold War superpower—blossomed into an international human rights campaign that engaged the disempowered and world leaders alike.

On March 6 the chapter was treated to a special tour of the new exhibition *State of Deception: The Power of Nazi Propaganda*, at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The exhibition has received excellent press reviews in this country and around the world. The tour was conducted by Dr. Steven Luckert, the

exhibition's curator (and my husband). Both the exhibition and the tour were simply superb.

On March 22, Mark Ozer spoke about his book *The Litvak Legacy*, at the Washington Hebrew Congregation. After the talk members were invited to visit the exhibit *Jewish Life in Mr. Lincoln's City*, created by the Jewish Historical Society of Greater Washington at the Washington Hebrew Congregation.

On April 22 the chapter attended a private viewing of the current exhibition of books from The I. Edward Kiev Judaica Collection, at Gelman Library, George Washington University.

On June 7 the chapter presented the AJLAC Annual Life Achievement Award to Beila Organic for her life-long contributions to the profession and to Judaica libraries locally and beyond. A celebration to honor Beila was held at the Adat Shalom Reconstructionist Congregation in Bethesda.

Long Island Chapter (LI-AJL)

Submitted by Wendy Marx, with additions from SIFRIA, the LIAJL Newsletter

We are thrilled that our new member and last year's chapter scholarship recipient will chair our annual Joint LIAJL—Public Librarians' Program next year. Sometimes the hardest task we have as organization volunteers is to find new members to take on chapter responsibilities! We look forward to our annual dinner in May. I'm looking forward to the attending my first AJL convention. Chapter member Philip J. Perlman has recently published *Prayer, Proverbs, Prophets, and Psalms*, a collection of 57 paintings and calligraphy evoked by Jewish prayer. Contact me at xmarxts@aol.com if you are interested in acquiring a copy of this book.

In November the members of LIAJL made a trip to the Institute for Adult Jewish Studies of North Shore Synagogue in Syosset for an evening of theater. A dramatic reading titled *Harry and Eddie: The Birth of Israel* recounted President Harry Truman's friendship with Eddie Jacobson and the president's role in the birth of Israel. The March meeting, held at the East Meadow Jewish Center, was a creative writing workshop with Ellen Pickus, award-winning poet and poetry teacher, who helped our members skillfully tell their own stories. April's meeting featured Allan Mallenbaum, publisher of the Internet newsletter *Precis: Islamic Terror*, who spoke on "What Every Jew Should Know About Islam" at the Plainview Jewish Center.

New York Metropolitan Area Chapter (AJL-NYMA)

Submitted by Rita Lifton and Leah Moskovits

NYMA's Annual Reference Workshop was held on February 12 at the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary. The first presenter, Tzvi Muskal, Cataloging Group team leader at the United Nations Library, spoke about "The Global Library: Serving the International and Local Communities." The general Web site for the library is www.un.org/depts/dhl. During the second half of the program, Dr. David Fishman, professor of Jewish history at the Jewish Theological Seminary, and director of Project Judaica (joint venture of JTS and the Russian State University for the Humanities in Moscow), spoke about "The People of the Cyrillic Book: Judaica Publishing in the Former Soviet Union."

NYMA's Annual School Library Workshop was held on March 18 at the Frisch School in Paramus, New Jersey. This year's topic

was "Guidelines for Using Holocaust Literature with Middle School and High School Students." The presenters were Beryl Bresgi, librarian at the Solomon Schechter Day School of Bergen County, and Kathe Pinchuck, chair of the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee as well as Librarian at Congregation Beth Shalom in Teaneck and part-time librarian at the Montclair Public Library.

Audio recordings of the reference and school workshops are available on NYMA's Web site, www.ajlnyma.org. To access the recordings, click on the "events calendar," select the "past events" link, then the event and click on the "audio" link. In addition to the workshops, audio recordings of all 2008 programs are available on the Web site.

NYMA's Cataloging Workshop, "XML for Catalogers in 2009: Emerging Technologies, Tools and Trends," was held on April 22 at The Ramaz Middle School. Steven Bernstein was the coordinator.

Our spring conference is tentatively scheduled to be held on May 20 at the Park East Synagogue—the working title is "Jewish Libraries and Jewish Librarians in the 21st Century: The Next Generation."

Have You Heard?

LIBBY K. WHITE



It's truly wonderful to begin this column with joyful personal member news! In February Ellen Cole became the grandmother of twins Aaron Jay and Autumn Rose. They were born to the Bennett family, Ellen's daughter and son-in-law in Tallahassee, Florida.

In February Basya Karp and her husband became grandparents of Stema Sara, daughter of their Raizy Reich and her husband Shmuel. Stema is also a Floridian, born in Clearwater.

Anne Dublin's most recent book is *Dynamic Women Dancers*, published by Second Story Press in March. Anne's subjects became prominent internationally in a variety of dance styles from classical ballet to flamenco. Anne is now working on a historical fiction set in Poland in the late 1930s. This work will come out in 2010; it will have special meaning as the themes are drawn from Anne's own family experience.

Sotheby's Galleries in New York City exhibited the Valmadonna Trust Library, one of the world's largest privately held collections of Hebrew books and manuscripts. The collection features over 13,000 items. Included are a document written in England before the expulsion of the Jews in 1290 and a Talmud produced by Christian Hebraist printer Daniel Bomberg between 1519 and 1523. The British owners of the Valmadonna Trust Library, the Lunzer family, expressed hope that the collection would be purchased by a university or cultural institution.

The Jewish Publication Society has received a grant of \$90,000 from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) to assist funding of *The Lost Bible: Ancient Jewish Writings Relating to*

Scripture. Edited by scholars Louis Feldman, James Kugel, and Lawrence Schiffman, *The Lost Bible* features works of the Second Temple period. NEH awarded the society an initial grant of \$100,000 for the project in 2006.

At the ALA's Midwinter Meeting in Denver, Colorado, the Reference and User Services Association (RUSA) announced awards of Jewish interest. The 2009 Sophie Brody Medal for outstanding achievement in Jewish Literature was won by Peter Manseau for *Songs for the Butcher's Daughter* (Free Press). Honorable Mention titles were *Beaufort* by Ron Leshem (Delacorte Press), *Friendly Fire* by A.B. Yehoshua (Harcourt), and *From Krakow to Krypton: Jews and Comic Books* by Arie Kaplan (Jewish Publication Society).

The 2009 Dartmouth Medal competition selected *The Yivo Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* (Yale University Press) for honorable mention.

At the Jerusalem International Book Fair, Japanese novelist Haruki Murakami was honored with the 2009 Jerusalem Prize, designated for non-Israelis. Previous recipients include Mario Vargas Llosa, Graham Greene, and Arthur Miller.

On May 20, 2009 Baltimore Hebrew University (BHU) celebrated its 90th anniversary. On June 30, 2009 BHU will close its doors at 5800 Park Heights Avenue in the historical area of northwest Baltimore. In its lifetime BHU, an agency of the Baltimore Associated Federation, sponsored high school, BA, masters, and PhD Judaica programs. Beginning with the fall 2009 semester, BHU will merge into Towson State University in Towson, Maryland, as the BHU Institute. BHU's 75,000 volume library, including its rare book collection will be transferred to Towson.

New Landscapes in Jewish Education

Continued from p. 1

But the prospect of collaboration also reveals where some of the Jewish world's clear fault lines remain. Richard Joel, president of Yeshiva University, said he believed in cultivating close relationships with non-Orthodox Jewish institutions but didn't foresee new partnerships with them.

"The center of Orthodox life has different imperatives and different priorities than the liberal movements," Joel said. "We certainly want to be helpful one to the other, but I don't think any of us view that joint programming is the answer. I think cooperative understanding is the answer."

Though a number of institutional leaders saw the crisis as an opportunity to rethink how they carry out their mission, all of them argued that simply cutting away at their institutions would do long-term harm to Jewish life.

"I'm happy when we're all looking across the board at all aspects of our life and values as to how to do things more prudently," Joel said. "I'm just not prepared to allow the focus to be on Jewish education and say that's where we have to cut. That's a surefire way to save money across the board: There won't be any Jews left."

Reviews of Titles for Children and Teens

EDITED BY ANNE DUBLIN

The Reviewer and the Reviewed

"We fancy that any real child might be more puzzled than enchanted by this stiff, overwrought story." A reviewer wrote these words in 1865 about Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. These are hurting words, indeed. Or here's a more subtle barb by Toronto critic and poet Ron Charach, about another book: "Read this slender volume and experience eternity." Lately, I've been thinking about who writes and reads reviews; what gets reviewed; and why reviews are written in the first place.

Who writes reviews? One often hears the phrase, "Everyone is entitled to his opinion." I disagree. "Everyone" doesn't necessarily know children's literature or, for that matter, Jewish children's literature. "Everyone" can't write reviews for the *AJL Newsletter*. We expect our reviewers to be intelligent, well-read, and civil. Some reviewers have an area of interest or expertise that we, as editors, try to take advantage of. For example, Andrea Rapp is the *AJL Newsletter's* most knowledgeable reviewer of children's books about Israel, the Middle East, and Islam. Naomi Morse has a deep appreciation of the art of book illustration.

The reviewer must be an informed professional who knows the literature and how to convey information about a book—its style and content—and something more. There is an intangible element that takes a book beyond the mundane and makes it "art." Readers seek that extra something that makes them sigh with satisfaction and wonder after the last page is turned and the final word is read. The books that move, enlighten, engage—these are the ones the reviewer should recommend.

Who reads reviews? Our readers are, for the most part, cash-strapped librarians who must be careful of every dollar, shekel, or pound that they spend on library purchases. Who has not bought a book that was given a glowing review, only to find it disappointing and lackluster? It soon collects dust on the shelf and is eventually weeded out, its spine unbent, its pages pristine. Will the librarian trust the same reviewer next time? I think not.

If our reviews influence other purchasers, like teachers, parents, and grandparents, all the better. C.S. Lewis once said that a children's book should also appeal to adults. If you've ever been tortured by having to read a terrible book to a young child over and over again, you'll know what Lewis meant.

What about the effect of reviews on the author? Some authors complain to the reviewer or editor about a rotten or inaccurate review. (See the *AJL Newsletter's* February/March 2009 issue where Irene N. Watts writes to the editor and Tammy Gerson, the reviewer, replies.) But for the most part, an author will fume in injured silence or perhaps complain to family and friends about how the reviewer is an ignorant savage who can't write books, so writes reviews instead. Edna St. Vincent Millay once said, "A person who publishes a book willfully appears before the populace with his pants down.... If it is a good book, nothing can hurt him. If it is a bad book, nothing can help him."

What gets reviewed? Sometimes the reviewer gets to choose which book she will review; other times, the book is thrust onto her lap. In the *AJL Newsletter*, we give our reviewers a choice. Some

books the editors receive are not reviewed at all, usually because they are not new or because they are not Jewish. However, we manage to produce a lot of high-quality reviews that are subsequently published on the Internet in the Children's Literature Comprehensive Database (www.childrenslit.com/).

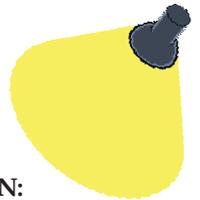
There is a controversy among book reviewers as to whether we should write negatively about a book. This policy is often decided by the publication itself. For example, *Jewish Book World (JBW)* publishes only positive reviews. If I wrote a negative review for *JBW*, I would have to explain my reasons to the editor. The review would probably not be printed. On the other hand, the *AJL Newsletter* publishes both positive and negative reviews, and sometimes both for the same book. We believe there should be opportunity for discourse and debate among our reviewers, and that people who read our reviews benefit from hearing differing opinions.

We reviewers are sometimes disliked and sometimes mistaken. So why do we do it? Because we love books and reading, and because we hold on to the small hope that good literature will drive out the bad. As print newspapers shrink or disappear entirely, and as book sections vanish along with them, our reviews remain vital. Whether the reader is a librarian with a limited budget, or a grandparent on a pension, we must continue to write and publish reviews that are well-crafted, intelligent, and honest—reviews that raise the bar for Jewish children's literature.

In The Spotlight

Koralek, Jenny. *The Story of Queen Esther.* Illus. by Grizelda Holderness. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009. 28pp. \$17.50. ISBN: 978-0-8028-5348-6. Grades 1-3.

Stop, look and listen to this sensual retelling of Queen Esther's saga which revels in and reveals its Middle Eastern roots. The exotic flavor of text and art draws the eyes and ears of the picture book crowd. Esther's story translates into the history of Purim with 90 percent of the biblical details. Streamlined for clarity for targeted readers, the story opens *in medias res* (in the midst of affairs) and never springs back to include Vashti. We go directly to search for a wife, then pause for (biblically correct) details of maids and cosmetics. Mordecai's attitudes and deeds strengthen Jewish identity and ethics. Esther's responses are strong and consistent with her character. "Mordecai prayed for help. Esther prayed for courage." The drama of the dinner invitation embroiders the JPS Bible text: Author Koralek has the king furious at Esther's uninvited approach. She faints; he repents, grabs her in his arms, and off we go to dinner, resuming the Bible trajectory including Haman and his wife's gallows idea. The text ends on a joyous note, perfect after pages of murderous plots, but this soothing, concluding paragraph may be lost: the economies of fewer pages put it on the end page where it is hard to see amidst swirling art. Economy has not, however, affected the glorious



illustrations. They magnificently suggest the setting, clothing, and aura of a rich, oriental culture through elegant bodies, pet leopards, and carrier pigeon messages between Esther and Mordecai. (Pigeons are all the rage in adult and children's Jewish books recently.) I highly recommend this new Queen Esther for its outstanding art and feminist text.

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

Podwal, Mark. *Built by Angels: The Story of the Old New Synagogue.* New York: Harcourt/Houghton Mifflin, 2009. Unpagged. \$16.00. ISBN: 978-0-15-206678-9. Grades 3-7.

Legends about Prague's Altneshul (Old New Synagogue) abound and Podwal has blended some of them into a spare, lyrical celebration of the ancient building, the oldest surviving synagogue in Europe. Readers will delight in his rendition of how the angels built it out of stones from the Temple in Jerusalem, how it has been saved from destruction time and time again by miracles, how the Golem was its caretaker, and how its attic is the Golem's resting place. Each page of the brief text is matched by dreamy full-page illustrations, done in acrylic, gouache, and color pencils, that depict the synagogue, inside and out, from different angles and perspectives. An end note by the author gives a short, factual history of the Altneshul, and describes some of the customs that are unique to it, such as the recitation of Psalm 92 twice at Sabbath evening services.

Adults as well as children will be an appreciative audience.

Linda R. Silver, Cleveland, OH

Wayland, April Halprin. *New Year at the Pier.* Illus. by **Stephane Jorisch.** New York: Dial, 2009. Unpagged. \$16.99. ISBN: 978-0-8037-3279-7. Reviewed from an advance reading copy. Grades 2-4.

The Rosh Hashanah ceremony of tashlich—the symbolic casting away of sins into water—is the subject of a picture book that blends information about Rosh Hashanah into a story of family and friendship. A little boy named Izzy is the main character and as he atones for the mistakes he made in the past year, apologizing first at home and school, then at Rosh Hashanah services, and finally with all of the congregation as they gather at an ocean pier to throw crumbs into the water, the meaning of tashlich is amplified. "Tashlich is the time we apologize for things we wish we hadn't done," says Rabbi Neil. "Tashlich is like cleaning your heart's closet. A new year, a clean heart." As Izzy participates with his friends, learning that they, too, have done things they are sorry for, his heart feels cleaner with each mistake that he casts away and he finally summons up the courage to apologize for one final mistake.

A child's perspective on atonement and repentance, expressed in meaningful and childlike ways, is sustained throughout a narrative that emphasizes both personal and communal atonement. Stephane Jorisch's illustrations, with shades of watery blue predominating in the muted color palette, are an outstanding complement to the story. Scenes of an ocean pier, with sea gulls soaring above the water, are peopled with stylized figures of every shape and age. The contrast between the illustrations' realistic composition and the slightly exaggerated depiction of human limbs and faces is especially appealing. Although tashlich is mentioned in several other children's books about

Rosh Hashanah, not since Carol Levin's *A Rosh Hashanah Walk* (Kar-Ben, 1987) has it been the subject of a picture book—and what a fine one!

Linda R. Silver, Cleveland, OH

Whelan, Gloria. *After the Train.* New York: Harper Collins, 2009. 152pp. \$15.99. ISBN: 978-0-06-029596-7. Grades 4-9.

It is 1955 and Peter is a typical German boy who loves fishing, soccer, and hanging out with his friends. He doesn't understand why his teacher is so emotional when he talks about the plight of Jews during the war. It was long ago, and certainly not the fault of young students who were just babies. Then Peter finds a letter that makes him question his own identity. Peter discovers that not only is he adopted but that his birth mother was a Jewish woman on her way to a concentration camp. Peter's sense of identity goes into a tailspin. Everything is different—his parents, his friends, his community. With the help of Herr Schafer, a Jewish man who works for his father, Peter is able to come to terms with his past and reconcile life with his family. Whelan touches on one of the many lingering effects of the Holocaust, and portrays Peter as a sensitive, sympathetic character. Peter's voice is fresh, young, and believable. *After the Train* is a part mystery, part coming-of-age novel that will encourage young readers to question their sensitivity to the struggles of all people. Historical elements are seamlessly woven into the story. The thought-provoking plot will keep readers turning the pages, and will leave lingering questions long after the book is read. Highly recommended for ages 10 and up.

Barbara Bietz, Oak Park, CA

Winter, Jonah. *You Never Heard of Sandy Koufax?!* Illus. by **Andre Carrilho.** New York: Schwartz & Wade, 2009. 32pp. \$17.99. ISBN: 978-0-375-83738-8. Grades 3-6.

"You gotta be kidding! You never heard of Sandy Koufax?!" the narrator exclaims to the reader. Slang that was popular in the late 1950s and early 1960s is used when the narrator talks directly to readers. This language style draws readers into the exciting era of Sandy Koufax, the lefty pitcher for the Brooklyn and later Los Angeles Dodgers. Throughout the story, the narrator establishes how Sandy Koufax became an American Jewish hero. The iridescent illustrations are a three-color artwork of gold, gray and black, with a few strokes of red outlining the players. The players' faces are muted. The cover has a hologram of Sandy Koufax pitching.

Koufax had a slow start in baseball. He was benched at first. When he boldly convinced the manager to let him play, he walked many players. At one point, he even left the game. Koufax returned and proved his talent pitching. This moment is illustrated with red surrounding Koufax and the player at-bat. The narrator tells how Koufax refused to argue with umpires, which angered his teammates. Koufax showed self-control when he encountered and ignored anti-Semitism from teammates. Koufax's pride in Judaism was apparent when he refused to play on Yom Kippur in the 1965 World Series.

Sports enthusiasts will be happy to find baseball statistics dispersed throughout the book. There is also a glossary of baseball terms.

Heather Lenson, Jewish Education Center, Cleveland, OH

BIBLE

Brett, Jan. *On Noah's Ark*. New York: Penguin, 2009. Unpaged. \$7.99. ISBN: 978-0-399-25220-4 (board book). Preschool.

A librarian once told me that the story of Noah's ark has been written and illustrated more than any other Bible story. So, aren't there enough versions of this story by now? *On Noah's Ark*, originally published in 2003, shows us why there is still room for new perspectives of this popular story. Noah's granddaughter (who knew?) tells the story in simple, flowing sentences. We are captivated by the sound and rhythm of the words. The story begins when "Grandpa Noah says that the rains are coming" and ends when "we will all be settled into this new place." On this ship, the animals push and shove each other, but ultimately "fall asleep all jumbled together" as if they were in a giant cradle.

The watercolor and gouache illustrations create the magic in this book with bright colors, exquisite rendering of realistic details, and lively expressions on the faces of the people and animals. The design is interesting and imaginative. Each double page has one central panel, with a small inset on either side, like a microcosm of the larger picture. There is only one proviso: Brett's version is completely secular, with no mention of God or why He caused the flood. Recommended.

Anne Dublin, Toronto, Canada

Shapiro, Zachary. *We're All in the Same Boat*. Illus. by Jack E. Davis. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2009. 32pp. \$16.99. ISBN: 978-0-399-24393-6. Preschool-grade 3.

When the animals on the ark become restless, Noah's holler of "we're all in the same boat" snaps them out of their bad moods. Using the alphabet, the animals—from "antsy ants" to "zoned-out zebras"—change their attitudes. Soon there are "cooperative camels" and "merry moose." The book ends with the clouds clearing as "the ark sailed on with a promise of peace."

There are many alphabet books with the animals on the ark, but Jack E. Davis's adorable illustrations distinguish this book with their detail and whimsy. The animals are always paired as they eat pizza, play tennis, "jam," and play kickball. As an alphabet book, it succeeds in keeping its focus. The animals are ones that most children will recognize—the "x" is in "oxen" rather than a more exotic species. The lower-case letters are clear, and there are no departures from normal pronunciation. As a Bible story, it's a little off, with the animals boarding the ark after it starts raining, but the book does illustrate the Jewish values of being kind to animals and making peace. Recommended.

Kathe Pinchuck, Congregation Beth Sholom, Teaneck, NJ

Slavicek, Louise Chipley. *King David*. Ancient World Leaders Series. New York: Chelsea House/Infobase, 2008. 126pp. \$30.00. ISBN: 978-0-7910-9583-6. Grades 6-10.

Louise Slavicek has written a readable retelling of the life of the Bible's most talked-about figure, King David. Beginning with the stories of the prophet Samuel and King Saul, and concluding with the rise of David's son and successor Solomon, the story reveals David's virtues and faults. The dialog consists of direct quotes from the biblical text, with citations, and these are woven smoothly into the narrative. The book's introduction informs readers of the almost-absent archaeological evidence for

David's life. Slavicek is correctly at pains to insert phrases such as "according to the Bible" throughout the writing. She draws on other works about David (such as the well-received works by Robert Pinsky and Jonathan Kirsch), but the fact that the Bible is the only primary source for David's "biography" means that this book should be considered part of a collection on Bible, not on history. It does not quite fit in the series on Ancient World Leaders, which includes Alexander the Great, Charlemagne, and Julius Caesar—figures with abundant historical documentation. This isn't to say that historical context isn't needed when writing about a figure like David. There are beheadings and mutilations aplenty. It would have been helpful if Slavicek had followed the lead of Barbara Cohen, author of an earlier life of David, who peppered her narrative with the information that this or that action was "the custom in those days," to help explain the cultural background of the biblical world.

The book lacks captions for its illustrations, which are mainly reproductions of Renaissance art. Because the paintings are not identified by name or artist, the editors give the misleading impression that biblical characters looked and dressed like Europeans of the early modern era. The author's own religious outlook creeps in a bit, in her concluding section on David's "legacy." Here she writes that the prophets predicted that "the final ruler from the house of David ... would not be a mere mortal but rather God's own son..." (p. 112). Clearly she intended no disrespect to Judaism, which finds no such statement in the prophetic books. Young students of the Bible, be they Jewish or Christian, will find this narrative an engaging rendering of much of the biblical books of Samuel and First Kings.

Andrea Rapp, Wise Temple, Cincinnati, OH

BIOGRAPHY

Colbert, David. *10 Days Anne Frank*. 10 Days Series. New York: Aladdin, 2008. 152pp. \$6.99. ISBN: 978-1-4169-6445-2. Pbk. Grades 6-9.

Colbert writes in the book's introduction that "the Holocaust was meant to be nameless" and that "the personal story of every Holocaust victim is an act of defiance because it gives them their name back." The retelling of Anne Frank's enduring story not only gives this courageous teenager back her name, but also extends to every new generation of children a powerful message about government-sanctioned anti-Semitism, which is not found in the pages of dry textbooks. The book's chapters are set up as distinct dates that provide historical snapshots of the war years and how events increasingly affected Anne and her family. A timeline of World War II and of Anne's life are included. A selected bibliography and Web sites of special interest guide readers to further research possibilities. Black-and-white illustrations feature photographs from the period and include a map of 1939 Europe and a diagram of the Secret Annex. A cautionary note: The reading level given for this book is ages 8 to 13. A suggested higher reading level of 11 and up may be more appropriate due to four illustrations of concentration camp conditions that may be too disturbing for younger children.

Allison Marks, Temple Israel, Akron, OH

Hill, Anne E. *Sasha Cohen. Sports Heroes and Legends Series.* Minneapolis: Lerner Publishing, 2007. 106pp. \$21.95. ISBN: 978-0-8225-7164-3. Grades 5-12.

Is Sasha Cohen Jewish? Unfortunately, the answer is not found in Anne E. Hill's biography of Cohen. The book touches briefly on Cohen's family, noting that her mother moved to the United States from the Ukraine when she was 16 years old. The majority of the book illustrates the high and low points of her competitive ice skating career. Those who are interested in Cohen's skating will appreciate the careful attention to detail Hill provides. The history of how Cohen became interested in skating, her journey through the competitive skating ranks, and a chronology of her coaches and injuries is recounted. Others who are looking for a little more substance and insight into her life off the ice will be disappointed. Recommended as an additional purchase for Jewish libraries since there is zero Jewish content.

Aimee Lurie, Fairmount Temple and The Temple Tifereth Israel, Cleveland, OH

Martin, Russell, and Lydia Nibley. *The Mysteries of Beethoven's Hair.* Cambridge, MA: Charlesbridge, 2009. 120pp. \$15.95. ISBN: 978-1-57091-714-1. Grades 7-12.

Surprisingly, there is considerable Jewish content in this highly readable account of Beethoven's life, the posthumous travels of a lock of his hair, and the search for clues to his illnesses via sophisticated scientific testing in the 20th century. In 1827, a Jewish boy named Ferdinand Hiller cut a lock of Beethoven's hair and later passed it on to his descendants. After subsequent Hiller generations endured persecution by Germany's Nazi

government, the family's whereabouts, along with Beethoven's hair, became unknown. The hair reappeared in Denmark in 1943, where its fate became intertwined with that of Jews who were hidden, escaped to Sweden, or ended up living in Denmark after the war. One of the men who eventually purchased the lock of hair at auction and researched its history at Yad Vashem in Israel was also a Jew. The authors successfully tie together the hair, Beethoven's passion for human rights, and the history of the Jewish community in Europe in the 19th-20th centuries.

Susan Berson, Denver, CO

Mullin, Rita Thievon. *Anne Frank: Hidden Hope. Sterling Biographies Series.* New York: Sterling, 2009. 123pp. \$12.95. ISBN: 987-1-4027-5148-6 (HC); 978-1-4027-6539-1 (Pbk.). Grades 5-8.

This biography has the generic format of a series written by a non-expert in the field. The same series also offers biographies about Cleopatra, Christopher Columbus, and other famous people in history. The author examines Anne Frank's dynamic personality and her relationships with her family and friends. Trivial details about her interests and childhood friends make the biography longer than necessary. No new information is provided here. There are some rare pictures of Anne and her family but they are unclear and hard to see. *Anne Frank: Hidden Hope* is not recommended for a Jewish library Holocaust or biography collection. A better choice is *Anne Frank: The Young Writer Who Told Her Story* (Ann Kramer, National Geographic, 2007) or *Anne Frank and the Children of the Holocaust* (Carol Ann Lee, Viking, 2006).

Heather Lenson, Jewish Education Center, Cleveland, OH

Rubin, Susan Goldman. *The Anne Frank Case: Simon Wiesenthal's Search for the Truth*. Illus. by Bill Farnsworth. New York: Holiday House, 2009. 40pp. \$18.95. ISBN: 978-0-8234-2109-1. Grades 5–9.

Susan Rubin has written several children's books on Jewish themes. This one begins in Linz, Austria, in 1958, where a group of teenagers disrupt a presentation of the movie *The Diary of Anne Frank*. They claim not to believe the story, and reject the truth of the Holocaust. Over the next five years, Simon Wiesenthal becomes involved in discovering proof of Anne's life by searching for one of the Nazi policemen who found the secret room above the Frank family store in Amsterdam. *The Anne Frank Case* follows the great Nazi hunter's path to the truth. The book's second narrative is Wiesenthal's own biography, including his miraculous survival during the Shoah and his long and amazing life after World War II.

Regrettably, this is not the proper venue for these stories. The two plot lines are both significant and tangentially related, but neither is necessary to the other. The illustrated-book format reduces the Shoah to a children's level that is inappropriate; although there are no truly frightening images here, the tone of the illustrations is dark. The text is too long for small children, but there is not enough for the ten-year-old-and-up group. Many of the words that are italicized in the text do not appear in the one-column glossary. *The Anne Frank Case* is recommended only for libraries that must have every book on the topics. Includes resources, glossary, index, and source notes.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA

COOKBOOKS

Grossman, Chaya Feigy. *The Cherry On Top: A Kosher Junior Cookbook*. Illus. by Ruchy Schon. Jerusalem: Feldheim, 2009. 79pp. \$16.99. ISBN: 978-1-58330-310-8. Grades 4 and up.

The recipes in this cookbook originally appeared in the *Binah Bunch* magazine, an Orthodox publication from Jerusalem for children. There are 43 recipes plus an introductory section of safety tips, instructions, and definitions. The publication has two major problems—the format and the content. First, the book is short and narrow (less than 7 inches wide and 9 ½ inches tall). A child eager to begin cooking will not plod through 15 pages of introductory information. The table of contents is also 15 pages long. Each recipe and its page number are presented in a large rectangular box with a photograph of the food. The photographs appear again with the actual recipes, which increases the number of pages needed and challenges the attention span of the intended audience. For each recipe, the instructions, tools, and directions are clearly separated, and the directions enumerated in various steps, but the design of each page is very busy, with several decorative elements, and the font is small and blurry.

Second, the recipes are unimaginative. They consist mostly of standard desserts like brownies and cookies, as well as a few “food” items like pizza and potato knishes. In general, the recipes are high in fat and sugar—even those that claim to be “healthful snacks”—and a number of recipes require two sticks of margarine. Susie Fishbein's 2005 publication *Kosher by Design: Kids in the Kitchen* (New York: Mesorah) is a direct contrast to this

cookbook. Fishbein's book is oversized with large black type on clean white pages, beautiful pictures, simple, short instructions and lots of interesting and fun recipes for all courses of a meal. The individual recipes in *The Cherry on Top* may have been fun additions to each magazine edition, but as a whole, their presentation and content are neither innovative nor attractive.

Deborah Abecassis, Cote St. Luc, QC, Canada

FICTION

Carter, Anne Laurel. *The Shepherd's Granddaughter*. Toronto: Groundwood Books, 2008. 192pp. \$17.95. ISBN: 978-0-88899-902-3. Grades 6–9.

All Amani wants is to tend to her sheep above the olive groves next to her house near Hebron, as her grandfather and ancestors have done for generations. But when a new settlers' highway threatens to cut through the heart of their fields, Amani's father and uncle disagree over how to handle the threat. Should they protest with the peace workers in Palestine and Israel and from the international communities, or should they fight back with weapons and violence? Amani's sheep are poisoned, her house is bulldozed, the donkey and the dog are shot and killed, her father is dragged away, the family orchards and groves are destroyed, and she witnesses the neighboring settlers celebrating. No wonder her heart hardens and becomes “as heavy and full as a powder keg” (p. 193).

This compelling, beautifully written coming-of-age story sympathetically illuminates the experiences and suffering of the Palestinians living in the disputed territories. Carter also skillfully attempts to show the diversity of positions within one community and even one family—from those who support suicide bombers and acts of terrorism to those who strive to work for peace and equality, and everyone in between. However, she fails to provide a complete historical or political perspective to the Israeli settlement movement in the West Bank. Most readers will come away with an unbalanced, biased, and distorted view of this most complicated conflict. With endorsements from various peace activists and a portion of the royalties being donated to the Children in Crisis Fund of the International Board on Books for Young People, *The Shepherd's Granddaughter* will likely find its way onto the shelves of secular collections. Jewish libraries that own books like *Habibi* by Naomi Shihab Nye and *Tasting the Sky: A Palestinian Childhood* by Ibtisam Barakat might consider this as a useful addition especially for use in the classroom or as part of a book club discussion. However, most will be better served by resources that provide a more evenhanded perspective such as *A Bottle in the Gaza Sea* by Valerie Zenati and the DVD *Promises*.

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

Another view

This artfully written book is a political tract in the guise of a children's novel. Amani, a young shepherd girl, lives near Hebron. Her large family is filled with sympathetic figures—parents, grandparents, siblings, and others—all evoking our warmth and concern. Israelis are there, too, but not as characters integrated

into the story. Usually out of sight, faceless, nameless, and without humanity, they swoop onstage, and set out to destroy Amani's physical and emotional world, piece by piece. With relentless momentum, Israelis take away her pastures, demolish her home, poison her sheep, harass, arrest, and beat her relatives, shoot her dog. While Amani's main concerns are her sheep and her family, her relatives' conversations are vehicles to present the evil of Israelis: "they have billions of American dollars," "their Mossad will shoot us," they "steal our children's dreams."

The narrative lacks subtlety. It features one humane Israeli figure, a teen-aged boy named Jonathan, who appears three-quarters through the book, wanting to befriend Amani. When he asks her name, she replies, "Palestine." After he witnesses an Israeli bulldozer pursuing her, and finds her safe, he says with relief, "Oh my God, Palestine. You're alive." At book's end, the kindly Jonathan reveals to Amani that he has decided to leave Israel for good. We get the message. And then there is the wolf. In the opening chapter, Amani learns that a wolf is prowling out there, and that he eats sheep. Appearances of the wolf—marking his territory, stalking and killing his prey—are sprinkled like seasoning through the story. Soon the pattern emerges: sighting of the wolf leads, within a paragraph or two, to the appearance of Israelis, often West Bank settlers; they become wedded together in the mind. But there is a difference. Amani learns that the wolf doesn't harm humans. Israelis are even more dangerous than wolves. *The Shepherd's Granddaughter* is not interested in presenting the Arab-Israeli conflict in more than one dimension, from more than one viewpoint. Using the various elements of fiction, the author advances her own viewpoint. Those who would give the book to children should at least be aware in advance.

Andrea Rapp, Wise Temple, Cincinnati, OH

Greene, Kimberly. *I'm So Not A Pop Star*. London: Usborne, 2008. 316pp. \$9.00. ISBN: 978-0-7460-8677-3. Grades 4–6.

Preteen Samantha Devine is the "I" in the title's *I'm*. She is not a pop star; her older sister Danni is. The girls live with their mother (father deceased), who exhibits loving discipline with her family, but nervous hysteria dealing with her daughter's career, currently threatened by a rival. Thanks to Danni's celebrity, the family is the subject of a reality TV show which jump starts this second novel about the Devines. Plot complications and Jewish content arise when Sam decides to learn more about her father before her fast-approaching thirteenth birthday. She discovers Jewish lineage, family history in refugee camps, and a never-met Jewish grandfather living in England. They fly to meet him.

The book opens slowly with Sam's endless blogs. The plot is narrated in the third person, the blogs in the first; voice transition is ragged. The blogs deliver ideas and feelings; they connect the dots in Sam's wild shenanigans. Sam, smart and bursting with youthful energy, acts out her own ideas. The blogs put her on the right side of technology, and her Mexican best friend on the right side of multiculturalism until the family finds they are themselves an ethnic mix. When Sam explores what it is to be Jewish, seeking advice from her sister's neurotic business manager, it's hilarious. The novel is for preteens, about preteens; animals are more important than boys; curiosity about the world is boundless. The book is fun and an age-appropriate dive into chick lit with some short, serious, history of survivors' lives

in post-Holocaust Europe. The Jewish grandfather is the best character of them all—a mensch! I recommend this zany novel for escape and pleasure.

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

Silverberg, Selma Kritzer. *Naomi's Song*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2009. 142pp. \$14.00. ISBN: 978-0-8276-0886-3. Grades 6–10.

Life in ancient Judea is precarious for women, widows, slaves, foreigners, and anyone who lacks property or family protection. In addition, there are the dangers of drought, famine, stoning, wild animals, childbirth, child sacrifice, severe weather, and attacks by Amalakites. A midrash based on the Book of Ruth, this work of historical fiction adds depth and personality to the story of Naomi, her husband Elimelek, and their Moabite daughter-in-law, Ruth. Naomi and Ruth are models of great character, courage, loyalty, and intelligence as they make their way following their husbands' deaths through a "beautiful yet hostile world" several generations after the Exodus from Egypt.

The story raises many questions about the legal status of women in their situation. For example, why is Naomi not protected by a ketubah? Why will Naomi be destitute even though she can inherit her father's land? Why is a Moabite woman who "converts" to Judaism treated so poorly by her fellow Jews? Despite this possible confusion in the mind of the reader, *Naomi's Song* is an enjoyable novel that includes adventure, history, and romance. According to the publisher, the book "contains some mature content."

Susan Berson, Denver, CO

Vogiel, Eva. *Hidden Diamonds*. Brooklyn, NY: Judaica Press, 2008. 288pp. \$19.95 ISBN: 978-1-607630-02-9. Grades 7–12.

During World War II, many Jewish children in Europe were taken in by non-Jewish families who protected them and saved their lives. At the end of the war, some of the children were left orphaned, while the lucky ones were re-united with their natural parents, whom they did not always remember. *Hidden Diamonds* is the story of three young women who survived. One is re-united with her mother and the other two sisters are left orphaned. Six years after the war, the three girls wind up in England, where Ellie and her Orthodox mother are striving to improve their tense relationship. The two sisters, who are now alone, are adopted by a loving, secular Jewish family. When the three meet again, huge changes develop in all their relationships.

The characters of the main protagonists are somewhat flat and need fleshing out to make them real. The challenges each girl faces are potentially traumatic and life-changing, and should be full of drama. However, the overly neat packaging of the story to make it moralistic and to bring all the characters back to their Jewish roots makes it less successful as a gripping historical novel. Readers who have enjoyed Vogiel's previous novels, also set in the Migdal Binah boarding school, will appreciate this latest work. Recommended mainly for Orthodox Jewish teenage readers in junior high and high school.

Shelly Feit, Moriah School Library, Englewood, NJ

Weil, Simone. *Elvina's Mirror*. Trans. from the French by the author. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2009. 164pp. \$14.00. ISBN: 978-0-8276-0885-6. Reviewed from an advance reading copy. Grades 6–10.

We first met Elvina, Rashi's granddaughter, in *My Guardian Angel* (Scholastic, 2001, translated 2004). In this second part of the trilogy, originally published in France, our heroine is fourteen years old and has new challenges to face. The Jews of the community of Troyes, France, are busy preparing for Passover, but ever-present is their fear of Crusaders who have recently terrorized Jewish communities in Germany. In addition, Jewish children in the town are becoming ill from an unknown disease. Finally, a family that was forcibly baptized in Germany has sought refuge in Troyes under the protection of Elvina's illustrious grandfather. Elvina befriends Columba, a Jewish girl from the family that is being ostracized by the community. Medieval superstitions and healing are woven into the novel. But most of all, we learn how one person can make a difference through her courage and determination.

With a varied cast of characters and an action-packed plot, *Elvina's Mirror* will keep the young reader's interest from beginning to end.

Anne Dublin, Toronto, ON

Whitney, Kim Ablon. *The Other Half of Life: A Novel Based on the True Story of the MS St. Louis*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009. 256pp. \$16.99. ISBN: 978-0-375-85219-0. Pbk. Reviewed from an advance reading copy. Grades 5 and up.

Kim Whitney has written a valuable and engaging story of events as they may have occurred aboard a ship filled with Jews fleeing from Nazi Germany. Based upon the true story of the MS St. Louis, the story takes place after Kristallnacht and fol-

lows closely the fateful voyage of over 900 passengers who are bound for Cuba. The ship is eventually turned away at several countries' ports, and forced to return to a few European cities that will shortly be under Nazi domination.

We follow fifteen-year-old Thomas, whose father has been sent to Dachau, and whose non-Jewish mother places him on the ship for safety. During the voyage, Thomas meets many interesting characters, including the German crew members and an official in the Nazi party. The characters and plot are very believable. The reader is at once sympathetic with the situation and drawn into the plot. Thomas's personality is driven by curiosity, distrust, and perception, and he uses these traits to survive. I recommend this book to synagogue and day school libraries, for it adds to the understanding of one tragic event of the Holocaust.

Tammy Gerson, Congregation Children of Israel, Athens, GA

Zalbin, Jane Breskin. *Brenda Berman, Wedding Expert*. Illus. by Victoria Chess. New York: Clarion Books, 2009. 48pp. \$16.00. ISBN: 978-0-618-31321-1. Grades 3–6.

Brenda Berman's favorite uncle in the whole wide world, Uncle Harry, is getting married to Florrie. Brenda is certain Florrie will change everything that is fun about her uncle. She is equally unhappy to hear that Florrie has a niece, Lucy, who will share flower girl duties with Brenda, and that Florrie is considering lavender as her color. In five chapters, Florrie tries to befriend Brenda and appease both nieces' insecurities, and Florrie and Harry fly off to Hawaii and elope. When the newlyweds return from Hawaii, Brenda and Lucy bond over their shared anger at the cancelled wedding and come together to make their aunt and uncle a special wedding party in which all hurt feelings are reconciled.

The Jewish content of the story is limited to the mention of Brenda's parents' wedding in a temple, the images of a (non-kosher) chanukiyah, some wine glasses with stars of David on them, and the presence of kippot on the men's heads. The ages of Brenda, her brother, Max, and Lucy are not mentioned in the story, and their actions, dialogue and representation in the illustrations seem incongruent. The illustrations themselves are bright and colorful, but the characters are unattractive and seem more like caricatures. The story is simple and a little too sweet, and the characters of Brenda and Lucy are not particularly sympathetic, but girls ages 8 to 12 will certainly relate to their melodrama. The book is recommended for school libraries.

Deborah Abecassis, Cote St. Luc, QC, Canada

HISTORY

Yasgur, Abigail, and Joseph Lipner. *Max Said Yes!: The Woodstock Story*. Illus. by Barbara Mendes. Los Angeles: Change the Universe Press, 2009. 32pp. \$17.95. ISBN: 978-0-615-21144-2. Kdg. to grade 3.

A pivotal moment in United States cultural history jumps to life in a piece of robust nostalgia and Jewish memoir. The Jewish second cousin of one of AJL's members, Abigail Yasgur, co-author, enabled the world-famous Woodstock rock concert to happen by providing the one thing the organizers—who had star perform-

ers, thrilling programs, and eager audiences—could not find: a venue. Farmer Max Yasgur agreed after others said no. He said, “Yes!” because of his personal vision. Max was a *mentsch* with a big heart. He welcomed all, valuing hospitality as Abraham did. He respected community spirit and kids with big ideas.

This picture book in rhyme is delightful. The meter never loses its beat as it delivers the philosophy of the man who proved one person can make a difference. Language the picture-book crowd will get celebrates the incredible three days with non-stop energy. Historic details make 1969 immediate again. Rock music; colorful, unwashed hippies; rain and mud; crowds take a back seat to the dreams of love, peace, and hope that youthful political activists could end the devastating Vietnam War and focus on social justice.

Vivid illustrations recreate action, period clothing, and hair styles. The illustrated tickets confirm the price of \$6 a day. A sound end note affirms music and peace were here “gigantic, messy and wonderful.” No wonder this Jewish cousin gets a line in the Joni Mitchell lyrics that close this jubilant memoir. I recommend this story to the picture-book crowd, their parents and their grandparents, especially those who might have been there.

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

HOLIDAYS

Heller, Linda. *Today Is the Birthday of the World.* Illus. by Alison Jay. New York: Dutton, 2009. Unpaged. \$16.99. ISBN: 078-0-525-47903-5. Reviewed from an advance reading copy. Preschool-kdg.

On the birthday of the world, the creatures pass before God, who asks them, one at a time, if each was the best little creature it could be. A short poetic refrain, adapted to each animal and child, is surrounded by one of Alison Jay’s pretty, pastel scenes. First, the giraffe is asked, “This year, little giraffe, my dear little giraffe / Did you eat the highest leaves on the tree / Happy that I’d chosen you to make a path for the sun? / This year, little giraffe.... Were you the best little giraffe that you could be?” This is followed by a series of animals large (an elephant) and small (an earthworm), each asked about its special gift, culminating with a child shown planting a garden, painting a picture, sharing toys, and having fun to “lift the world’s spirit.” After God’s questions are finished, the animals and child assemble to answer “Yes,” and God is pleased.

Although “birthday of the world” is a euphemism for Rosh Hashanah, the holiday itself is never mentioned. The story’s message celebrates life and the special contribution that each of us can make, so while it may allude to the holiday, it is at once less specific and more universal. The text and the illustrations are warm and appealing, even a bit sugary. Preschoolers will be charmed by the animals, stylized to resemble toys, each placed in its (idealized) natural habitat on the curved surface of the world. Whether they gain any insights into the meaning of Rosh Hashanah will depend on the comments and questions of the adult who reads the story to them. Linda Heller is best known to Jewish readers for her classic *The Castle on Hester Street*, which

was re-issued by Simon and Schuster with new illustrations by Boris Kulikov in 2007.

Linda R. Silver, Cleveland, OH

Leon, Carol Boyd. *Dayenu! A Passover Haggadah for Families and Children.* Illus. by Gwen Connelly. Jersey City: Ktav, 2008. 32pp. \$16.95. ISBN: 978-1-60280-039-7. Preschool-grade 3.

There are many stories and customs associated with the holiday that celebrates the Jews’ Exodus from Egypt. This book uses some of them, as well as traditional and original songs and elements of the seder, to teach young children about Passover. A double spread of the four questions and a song about frogs on a page replete with green amphibians are the highlights. But “Haggadah” is a misnomer. Of the 15 parts of the seder, five are missing. “Dayenu” is the final song. Moses is mentioned once in the Haggadah, but much of this short volume is his story. Frogs get their own song; the rest of the plagues get scant mention. The items on the seder plate are listed, but not labeled on the illustration. The Hallel song is probably fun for dancing, but Hallel is to praise God, not thank Him. The colorful illustrations are well placed but rather ordinary. The blessings are transliterated, but the English translations are tiny. The accompanying CD follows the book exactly, and those unfamiliar with the songs will need it. As a story and song book, this may be useful in schools and community centers.

Kathe Pinchuck, Congregation Beth Sholom, Teaneck, NJ

JUDAISM

Ajmera, Maya. *Faith.* Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge, 2009. Unpaged. \$16.95. ISBN: 978-1-58089-177-6. Kdg.-grade 3.

Similar in style and format to the “Celebrate” series from National Geographic, and using some of the same stock photography, this photo essay, developed by The Global Fund for Children, explores the many ways that faith is expressed around the world. Prayer, song, study, rituals, holy places, holidays, life cycle events, clothing, and food are all explained with simple, large-print statements such as: “We celebrate our faith in many ways,” “We observe holidays in our homes or places of worship,” “We care for those around us,” “We respect others,” and “Most of all, we hope.” The captions included with the contemporary, full-color photographs of children around the world provide further information along with a four-page afterword, glossary of terms, and map indicating the places included in the book. The Rastafarian, Christian, Buddhist, Jewish, Daoist, Muslim, Hindu, Native American, and Mennonite faiths are included with examples from over 30 countries. Judaism is represented with photographs of a bar mitzvah celebrant, Yeshiva boys studying, a father and son lighting the menorah, an upsherinish ceremony, a girl braiding challah, a funeral in Israel, and the shaking of the lulav. However, the caption accompanying a boy blowing the shofar is inaccurate: “A father teaches his son to sound the shofar at solemn Jewish feasts.” It is interesting to note that neither the Western Wall nor the Dome of the Rock is pictured on the page of holy places. Despite very minor weaknesses, this stunning presentation, celebrating the diversity of the world’s religions,

will be appreciated in Jewish libraries, especially those that own similar offerings like *Sacred Places* by Philemon Sturges.

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

Berne, Emma Carlson, ed. *Judaism. Introducing Issues with Opposing Viewpoints Series*. Detroit: Greenhaven Press/Gale, 2008. 118pp. \$33.70. ISBN: 978-0-7377-3976-3. Grades 7-12.

This book is part of a series that attempts to stimulate discussion and independent thinking in the next generation of American students. The book's three portions deal with significant issues in American society: "Is anti-Semitism a serious problem for modern Jews?"; "How should Jews view the Holocaust?"; and "What issues affect modern Judaism?". Each segment contains essays first published in books or in op-ed pieces that appeared in *Tikkun*, *The Jerusalem Post*, and other sources. They represent a variety of points of view: one essay argues that anti-Semitism has been exaggerated, while another says it remains a serious problem. In chapter 3, two articles argue over whether intermarriage is an important issue in today's society. There are certainly some controversial essays in this volume. The questions raised are important, and the development of children's critical faculties and their ability to analyze and discuss such weighty topics is vital in today's society. This volume should be considered an optional purchase for day schools. Includes glossary, bibliography, and index.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA

Hochberg, Dovid. *The Jewish Teen's Survival Guide: Honest Answers for Today's Teens*. New York: Feldheim, 2009. 121pp. \$14.99. ISBN: 978-1-56871-477-6. Pbk.

Being a religious teenager in the 21st century can be overwhelming, confusing, and exhilarating all at the same time. Rabbi Dovid Hochberg, the author and well-known psychotherapist, answers real-life questions in this book for teens. His advice is from an Orthodox perspective, and he often uses phrases and stories from the Talmud to explicate his answers. The book is written as a collection of letters, articles, and discussions with teenagers about important issues such as relationships and keeping shomer neigah (refraining from physical contact with a member of the opposite sex). The author discusses different types of music, habits such as smoking, and even some hard issues like bulimia. Hochberg also talks about dealing with anger, depression, and guilt. Included is a glossary of Hebrew terms such as chesed (kindness), shalom bayis (harmony between husband and wife), and neshamah (soul). Recommended for high school students in an Orthodox setting.

Lisa Katz, Lefferts Jewish Community Library, San Rafael, CA

Rosenfeld, Dina. *All About Us*. 2nd ed. Illus. by Patti Argoff. New York: Hachai Publishing, 2009. Unpaged. \$10.95. ISBN: 978-1-929628-45-2. Preschool.

Here is a new edition of a sweet story that was originally published in 1989 with different illustrations. New vibrant watercolor illustrations portray young boys laying tefillin and studying Torah, girls lighting Shabbos candles, and children dancing at synagogue during the Megillah reading. The story creatively teaches children about doing mitzvahs with different

parts of the body, including feet, hands, ears, and mouth. For example, the author writes that hands are used to give tzedakah. The story includes all the religious holidays throughout the year and a full-page glossary. This book is a welcome addition to an Orthodox synagogue or preschool.

Lisa Katz, Lefferts Jewish Community Library, San Rafael, CA

PICTURE BOOKS

Manushkin, Fran. *The Tushy Book*. Illus. by Tracy Dockray. New York: Feiwel and Friends (an imprint of Macmillan), 2009. Unpaged. \$14.99. ISBN: 978-0-312-36926-2. Preschool.

In the interest of fairness, it should be disclosed that this reviewer is on tushy overload. After five years of changing smelly diapers and constantly yelling, "Sit on your tushy!" to a two-year-old, the cuteness of the word wears thin. Fran Manushkin's homage to the derriere written in rhyme was going to have to be something pretty special to impress me. After reading the book, I decided to enlist the help of some very special assistants who I knew would have no trouble hearing a "bathroom word" over and over again. Thankfully, Manushkin's glorification of the gluteus maximus does not disappoint! It is a terrific read aloud and my co-reviewers (Mindy and Kate's pre-K class at The Agnon School in Beachwood, Ohio) thoroughly enjoyed listening to it. Many children commented on Tracy Dockray's engaging illustrations, which highlight the behinds of all shapes, sizes, ages of people, and even animals. One favorite is a dog pulling on a crawling baby's diaper and exposing his tushy. Others just liked hearing the word tushy in such a playful way. The rhyming text and lighthearted illustrations strike the perfect balance of being funny without being crude. Parents of toddlers will welcome this book when potty training. There is no overt Jewish content besides the word tushy which has a Hebrew and Yiddish origin. Perhaps I should take a cue from the tushy book: "Tushy's so much fun to say / Say it ten times every day." Highly recommended for any library that serves young children. Purchase multiple copies if budget permits.

Aimee Lurie, Fairmount Temple and The Temple Tifereth Israel,
Cleveland, OH

Schotter, Roni. *The House of Joyful Living*. Illus. by Terry Widener. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008. Unpaged. \$16.95. ISBN: 978-0-374-33429-1. Preschool-grade 3.

The House of Joyful Living is a large picture book (9.5 x 11.5 inches), lavishly illustrated with Terry Widener's paintings of sturdy, sculpturally modulated figures. The story recalls the author's warm family and community life in the Manhattan of the 1940s, before apartment houses were converted into expensive condos. Back then, it was still possible for young couples, artists, and families to afford to rent a Manhattan apartment within view of the Brooklyn Bridge. Author Roni Schotter recalls the idyllic rooftop garden that the neighbors in her family's building created cooperatively. There were flower beds, colorful umbrella tables and chairs, and even marble statues carved by the resident Italian sculptor. These neighbors, most of whom were immigrants to America, called their apartment house "the House of Joyful

Living." Widener's figures move through this landscape, giving weight and dignity to the idealized memory. There is a side story of the author's ambivalent anticipation of her first sibling's birth. But she is touched by the magic of the view of the Brooklyn Bridge at sunset with her parents and the Statue of Liberty silhouetted against the curvature of the earth. The world is too beautiful not to share. The firstborn is ready to welcome her sibling to the world, and to her own house of joyful living.

Although one may infer that the book's family is Jewish, *The House of Joyful Living* has no overt Jewish content. It does, however, present values important to Judaism. It may also be useful to teachers in their efforts to create community in their diverse classrooms and schools. This would be an optional purchase for Jewish school and synagogue libraries because of the lack of specific Jewish content. It may be of special interest in New York, and in immigrant communities in general.

Naomi Sussman Morse, Silver Spring, MD

VALUES

Gold, August. *Thank You, God, For Everything.* Illus. by Wendy Anderson Halperin. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2009. 32pp. \$16.99. ISBN: 978-0-399-24049-2. Preschool-grade 2.

August Gold's previous children's books explore the power of forgiveness, the purpose of prayer, and the concept of God's presence (*Does God Forgive Me?*, *Does God Hear My Prayer?*, and *Where Does God Live?*). These books engage the imagination and stimulate discussion among young readers in a multicultural and nondenominational manner, gently guiding them to reflect on aspects of their own spiritual journeys. Gold's latest book, *Thank You, God, For Everything*, is a perfect complement to her earlier works for it introduces the timeless topic of gratitude.

Every morning Daisy's father thanks God for the beautiful day, prompting her to ask, "What should I thank God for?" Daisy's mother does not provide a direct answer, but instead, encourages her daughter to "think about what God has given you." Daisy starts by being grateful for the people and things which make up her immediate world. In a typical day, Daisy wakes up in her bed, hugs her grandmother, spends time with her brother, decorates a chair, practices the piano, plays with friends, reads a book, and falls back into bed. Soon, Daisy's awareness matures as she realizes all the intangible forces in her life that she appreciates—the breath of life, peace from Mother Earth, and God's ubiquitous presence. When Daisy's parents ask her what she found to be thankful for, her hearty response is, "Everything!"

Gold writes easily understandable sentences to demonstrate how gratitude can blossom anywhere and at any time. Halperin's illustrations, in pencil and oil on canvas, mirror and expand on the text with identifiable objects, scenes, and situations. One striking two-page spread features 32 close-ups of different animals' eyes with the text, "Thank you, God, for letting me see the world with new eyes." The book could be a splendid springboard for parent-child talks or classroom discussions about the importance of expressing thanks. Recommended.

Allison Marks, Temple Israel Library, Akron, OH

Mermelstein, Yael. *A Car that Goes Far.* Illus. by Vasillisa and Vitaliy Romanenko. Brooklyn, NY: Hachai, 2009. 32pp. \$12.95. ISBN: 978-1-92962-847-6. Preschool-grade 2.

In this picture book, a man takes his children out in their new car to "do mitzvot" by picking up neighbors and friends who don't have a ride. The children think this is fun until it gets very crowded in the car. The son, who is the narrator, says, "but I didn't complain though the back seat felt tight / because deep down inside, I knew father was right / that a car full of mitzvot mile after mile / is sure to go far since it makes people smile." The example set by the father is acknowledged by the son who tells the reader that when he grows up, he wants to drive people around in a bus. This sweet story is told in rhyme which, because of its inconsistency, makes it clumsy as a read-aloud. Bright, bold illustrations, which are done in the same style as most of the Hachai books, enhance the story with their familiar, friendly images. The universal nature of the mitzvah to be kind to one another makes the book appropriate for all Jewish families.

Debbie Feder, Ida Crown Jewish Academy, Chicago, IL

Schachter, Rabbi Fishel, and Aryeh Mahr. *Yibaneh Hamikdash: To Build the Beis HaMikdash: Stories to Build Ahavas Chinam.* New York: Chofetz Chaim Heritage Foundation/Feldheim, 2008. 80pp. \$18.99. ISBN: 978-1-58330-954-4.

This new volume from the Chofetz Chaim Heritage Foundation is designed to teach about the inter-relationship of actions and results. "With every righteous act, the Temple is rebuilt, and with every sin, it is delayed." The story begins with Shloimy, who has ripped up his notebook in frustration. The rabbi, who sees the results, then takes Shloimy and his classmates through the history of the Jewish people, to demonstrate the benefits of honor and virtue. Each of the six chapters that follow elaborates on the theme: Kamtza and Bar Kamtza, a story about the Vilna Gaon, and others all emphasize the value of doing the right thing, even when it seems difficult or impossible. Like the other books for children from the Chofetz Chaim, this one is didactic. Its wonderful illustrations and the elegant manner of telling the stories allow the process to unfold easily. The rabbi's narrative is in blue balloons, while the boys' words and those of the characters are in white boxes. They may not be for every library, but this book and its companions have a place in the Judaica section of day schools, and should be considered by synagogues.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA

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

- Ben-Ishai, Anat. *The Prickly Pear: A Sabra in Two Worlds* (p. 18)
- Brodoff, Ami Sands. *The White Space Between* (p. 31)
- Goldish, Matt. *Jewish Questions: Responsa on Sephardic Life in the Early Modern Period* (p. 22)
- Roitman, Gina. *Tell Me a Story, Tell Me the Truth* (p. 31)

Reviews of Titles for Adults

EDITED BY MERRILY F. HART AND DANIEL SCHEIDE

NONFICTION

Abramson, Edward. *A Circle in the Square: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin Reinvents the Synagogue.* Jerusalem: Urim Publications, 2008. 208 p. \$23.95 (ISBN 978-9-65524-014-6).

A Circle in the Square is another book about a prominent contemporary rabbi written by one of his awestruck followers. Although the book is interesting and inspiring, Abramson unfavorably compares other Orthodox rabbis to Rabbi Riskin, unfairly suggesting that his subject is the only innovative and brilliant Orthodox rabbi. The author describes how Riskin, at the young age of 23, became rabbi of a Conservative congregation in Manhattan and through his innovative teaching techniques and charismatic personality, influenced his congregation to become Orthodox. Abramson traces Rabbi Riskin's life from his childhood in Brooklyn to his *aliya* and his becoming rabbi of Efrat, Israel. This book is recommended for all libraries. Readers who were touched by Rabbi Riskin will enjoy reliving the memories; others will learn about a brilliant contemporary Orthodox rabbi.

Ilka Gordon, Siegal College of Judaic Studies, Cleveland, OH

Aron, Raphael. *Spirituality & Intimacy: Creating the Marriage You Want.* Jerusalem: Devora Publishing, 2008. 206 p. \$21.95. (ISBN 978-1-93268-786-6).

Readers enticed by the subtitle will probably be disappointed. No specific advice is offered because "ultimately, it is for the couple to decide how to balance their own individuality and the sanctity of the relationship with the physical pleasure and emotional satisfaction that it brings." This book is a meticulously referenced argument in favor of traditional Jewish marriage, which includes family purity. The author discusses God's love for us, the importance of modesty, and how man and woman relate to each other and the world around them. The book includes a glossary and a general bibliography listing classic Jewish and secular books about intimacy and relationships. Rabbi Aron is the director of a family counseling center in Australia, and his opinions and sources tend toward Chabad (Lubavitch) philosophy. He defines intimacy as "the means by which man and woman fulfill their purpose in life by elevating the mundane to reach the divine." Most Orthodox readers will be familiar with these arguments and will have read much of the source material. An optional purchase for libraries serving Orthodox patrons.

Kathe Pinchuck, Congregation Beth Sholom, Teaneck, NJ

Baskin, Samantha and Omer-Sherman, Ranen, eds. *The Jewish Graphic Novel: Critical Approaches.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008. 292 p. \$49.95 (ISBN 978-0-8135-4367-3)

In the 30 years since Will Eisner's *A Contract with God* was first published, dozens of Jewish graphic novels have appeared on the market. Individual titles have been explored in conference papers and journal articles, but few attempts have been made to publish an anthology of academic essays on Jewish graphic novels. *The Jewish Graphic Novel* is a wonderful attempt to fill this void.

The collection brings together four essays on specific books, five essays comparing pairs of graphic narratives, two overviews, two cartoonist interviews, an in-depth look at a Jewish comic book character, and an illustrated essay about Jewish biographical comix. The work of male cartoonists is predominant in the essays, but there is also discussion of the work of four women cartoonists. Although the anthology covers much territory, it shies away from certain topics (e.g., graphic novels by Judaica publishers), and it does not provide a consensus view as to what constitutes a "Jewish graphic novel," offering no fewer than four possible definitions.

There is no glossary, but unfamiliar terms such as post-memory and prosthetic memory are clearly explained within the essays. Bibliographical references, an index, and a bibliography of Jewish graphic novels are included. I highly recommend this book for public, academic, and high school libraries, particularly those that already have significant Judaica graphic novel collections.

Steve Bergson, Toronto, ON

Ben-Ishai, Anat. *The Prickly Pear: A Sabra in Two Worlds.* Minneapolis, MN: Langdon Street Press, 2008. 363 p. \$17.05 (ISBN 978-1-93493-807-2).

In *The Prickly Pear*, Anat Ben-Ishai tells the story of her life in a series of short vignettes. Her memories begin with her childhood in pre-state Israel and conclude with her life in the United States. The appeal of the short vignettes is uneven. Some are historically interesting and include significant and sometimes heart-wrenching information about life in Israel in the 1940s and '50s, while others describe childhood pranks and very ordinary experiences. The language is simple, and most vignettes are only a few pages long. Adults might find *The Prickly Pear* too unsophisticated to be enjoyable; it is more appropriate for grades 6-12. Recommended for school libraries and the teen collection of public libraries.

Ilka Gordon, Siegal College of Judaic Studies, Cleveland, OH

Berenbaum, Michael, ed. *Not your Father's Antisemitism: Hatred of the Jews in the 21st Century.* St. Paul: Paragon House, 2008. 382 p. \$21.95 (ISBN 978-1-55778-874-0).

In this collection of 17 essays, based on papers delivered at a conference at the American Jewish University, the approach of the scholars is remarkably consistent. Their first priority is to distinguish between anti-Semitism of the 1930s and contemporary anti-Semitism. The theme is that current anti-Semitism is not the official policy of European governments. Considerable emphasis is placed on the strange alliance of the radical left, the nationalist right, and fundamentalist Islam. Editor Berenbaum, in his essay on the situation in France, makes an additional point that anti-Semitism is associated with anti-Americanism in France and elsewhere.

The book is well written and the approach is academic. It should be included in any serious library with a collection of works on anti-Semitism.

Chaim Seymour, Bar-Ilan University, Israel

Bramson, Seth H. *L'Chaim: The History of the Jewish Community of Greater Miami*. Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2008. 160 p. \$19.99 (ISBN 978-5-9629-480-6).

Local Jewish community history is an important and generally neglected field. Many cities and synagogues have old books recounting their stories, but they have not been recently updated. Seth Bramson has attempted to add to the shelf with this recent paperback collection of photos and captions about Miami Jewish life.

L'Chaim begins with an appreciative section on the Cohen family, whose members were among the Jewish pioneers who created the city in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. A quick overview of the city's early history follows in the next chapter. The remainder of the book is divided topically, and includes sections on "Buildings, Businesses and Stores," "Schools and Temples," "Hotels," and "The Greater Miami Jewish Federation." A final chapter covers the Jewish Museum of Florida.

Some of the photographs are important, and many are valuable images of the city over the past century. In the end, however, this nostalgic book lacks narrative trajectory from a Jewish perspective. There is, for example, no serious examination of the growth and impact of Miami's many synagogues and rabbis, especially since 1945. Thus, despite its intrinsic interest and delights for the local reader, there is less value in this slim volume than a serious non-Miamian could want. It should be considered an optional purchase for most libraries.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA

Burg, Avraham. *The Holocaust is Over: We Must Rise from the Ashes*. New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. 253 p. \$26.95 (ISBN 978-0-23060-752-1).

Avraham Burg, a former speaker of the Knesset, argues that since the Holocaust, Jews have adopted an aggressive, non-trusting attitude toward the rest of the world. This is occurring despite a decline in anti-Semitism. Israel has a strong military and, he claims, an arrogant disposition, with every war supposedly a fight for survival. Burg goes on to cite numerous similarities to Germany between the world wars. America has many Holocaust museums, memorials, and commemorations. Burg asserts that the Shoah is more present in our lives than God, more significant than the Exodus from Egypt.

The author criticizes Jews for belittling other human tragedies and rebukes Israel for establishing trade relations with oppressive nations. Burg proposes that Israel and Diaspora Jews memorialize the Shoah by standing beside persecuted peoples and mobilizing world opinion to combat oppression. These actions would counter the isolation that is occurring in the Jewish world.

While Burg neglects to consider other reasons for Israeli "aggression," and ignores the role of Jewish philanthropy, his book should be taken seriously. Certainly the Holocaust should be remembered and its victims honored. But after six decades, it is time for Jews to be more trusting and inclusive of others, to see the world as it is today, and move on. I recommend this book for synagogue and academic libraries.

Lee Haas, Temple Emanu El, Cleveland, OH



Eber, Irene. *Chinese and Jews: Encounters Between Cultures*. London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2008. 187 p. \$35.00 (ISBN 987-0-85303-673-9 cloth, 978-0-85303-674-6 paper).

Irene Eber, a scholar of East Asian studies at Hebrew University, has produced a book that includes a history of the Jewish communities in China, extensive information about the refugees who fled from Nazi Germany to Shanghai, as well as information about S.I.J. Schereschewsky's translation of the Old Testament into Chinese and later translations of Yiddish literature.

Eber first provides interesting details of the early Jewish communities, particularly in Kaifeng. In the mid-1800s, Iraqi Jews established a separate community in Shanghai, where they were businessmen and trading partners, free of the anti-Semitism of their homeland. The Sassoon family emerged as an influential leader of the Shanghai community. By 1938, a flood of Jews reached Shanghai, due primarily to the relatively easy immigration requirements. By 1939 there were over 17,000 Jews in Shanghai, one of the last places they could find refuge, living in shabby conditions, often not permitted to work, depending on most everything from Jewish charities. At the war's end, the Jewish presence declined.

S.I.J. Schereschewsky (1831-1906) was born a Jew in Eastern Europe, but converted to Christianity. The Episcopal Church sent him to China as a missionary, and he eventually painstakingly translated the Torah into Chinese. Eber describes in detail the difficulty of choosing the written words as well as conveying concepts that might have been alien to another culture. The last section covers the translation of Yiddish works, as well as Martin Buber's writing and interest in Taoism. This well-researched book is unique in its topic and focus. Recommended for collections in Judaica, Asian studies, and academic libraries.

Martin Goldberg, Penn State University, Monaca, PA

Einbinder, Susan L. *No Place of Rest: Jewish Literature, Expulsion, and the Memory of Medieval France*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009. 267 p. \$55.00 (ISBN-978-0-81224-115-0).

This unique book presents, probably for the first time for most readers, the poetic heritage of a forgotten Jewish community. The Jews of southern France in the Middle Ages developed their own proud tradition of Judaism, a tradition that included Talmudic study and strict observance, but also a passion for rational philosophy, science, and culture. In 1306, most of the Jews were expelled by the King of France, but in areas that were not under his control, Jews continued to dwell for decades and even for centuries. In Avignon, which belonged to the Pope, a Jewish ghetto existed until the French Revolution. Over those centuries, but especially in the 14th century, several poetic compositions were written by Jews in Provence, as the area is sometimes called. Some poems were liturgical and some secular, some sophisticated and some quite simple, some described universal experiences and others expressed more personal feelings.

Susan Einbinder has woven all these poems together, placing them in a rich and fascinating historical and cultural setting. She discusses the manuscripts in which the poems are found, and what happened to those manuscripts over the years. She describes in stunning detail the kind of food that people ate, or at least what their doctors thought they should eat. We learn

about astrology and astronomy, Purim costumes, chivalry, and a dizzying list of other topics, all leading to an ever richer understanding of these works. The poems are not presented in full, but every quotation comes with a beautiful translation. The book has much to offer to students of Jewish history and Jewish literature, and will reward any reader interested in the Jews of medieval Provence.

Pinchas Roth, Hebrew University, Jerusalem

Elior, Rachel. *Dybbuks and Jewish Women in Social History, Mysticism and Folklore*. Jerusalem & New York: Urim Publications, 2008. 128 p. \$21.95 (ISBN 978-9-65524-007-8).

This slim volume is made up of two essays. The first is a general analysis of women's legal and historical position in Judaism, and the second is about dybbuk phenomena. Both are good overviews of their subjects, but I had assumed the second essay would be focused on the gendered aspects of spirit possession. In fact, most of the essay is background material, summary of existing scholarship, and footnoting. On many pages the footnotes overwhelm the text, yet there are tidbits in the footnotes that would have been most interesting explored and fleshed out in the body of the work. Elior's main point regarding dybbuks and women is that possession by a spirit allows a woman to escape certain norms. In particular, because such a large proportion of attested dybbuk events involve a woman becoming possessed by a male spirit just as her wedding approaches, Elior shows that spirit possession may have been a way to escape coercive marriages and unwanted sexuality. The essay is a good, rather dense, scholarly overview of the topic of dybbuk possession in Jewish history, but the gender aspect is far too undeveloped to earn its title.

Faith Jones, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, BC

Eshel, Hanan. *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Hasmonean State*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008. 208 p. \$28.00 (ISBN 978-0-80286-285-3).

This book provides detailed examinations of those documents among the Dead Sea Scrolls that describe, discuss, or allude to the Hasmonean kingdom. The desire for further information about the Hasmoneans is worthy, and the author, a professor at Bar Ilan University's Department of Land of Israel Studies and Archaeology, shows himself a careful scholar. However, many, or perhaps all, of the documents are fragmentary, and the texts tend to be somewhat symbolic. This makes many of the theories and conclusions the author develops tentative and uncertain. This technical book is appropriate for academic collections.

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

Feingold, Henry L. *Jewish Power in America: Myth and Reality*. New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2008. 164 p. \$39.95 (ISBN-978-1-41280-835-4).

Feingold's concern is to understand where American Jews, as a recognized group, fit within the open-ended American political system. Because Jews, particularly in the Diaspora, have historically faced serious threats to their survival, both individually and communally, a strong survival drive exists. This condition, added to the opportunity to participate politically at all levels, has provided the American Jewish community some influence

in government, which is frequently perceived to be disproportionate to the group's size and outside the arena of the dominant norm-creating culture. American Jews, Feingold notes, have also enhanced their social position with achievements in the professions, the arts, and in science. Through a series of case studies, the author turns his attention to a period of dire economic times at home and the rise of fascism in Europe, both accompanied by blatant anti-Semitism. With these crises at home and abroad, dissension within the Jewish community and insensitivity in the government largely kept Jews at a distance from the decision-makers. During the Republican administration of Richard Nixon, whose ideological orientation was at odds with the Democratic voting patterns of Jews since the time of Franklin Roosevelt, American Jews mobilized interest in aiding co-religionists in the Soviet Union which, by chance, was in line with the conservative national interest in fighting the Cold War. There is, perhaps, no interest that will bring American Jews together other than the survival of Israel, which Feingold discusses with impressive finesse. The brevity of Feingold's work combined with the developed perspective and comprehensiveness makes this book ideal for training Jewish youth to defend their identity against charges that they may face dealing with the public.

Sanford R. Silverburg, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC

Freund, Richard A. *Digging through the Bible: Understanding Biblical People, Places, and Controversies through Archaeology*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008. 352 p. \$44.95 (ISBN 978-0-74254-644-8).

Archaeology gives both scholars and lay readers an opportunity to learn more about what really happened in the ancient past. Reading the Bible provides a story, but digging up relics provides evidence that leads to greater understanding and, sometimes, new interpretations of the text. Freund, an archaeologist who is director of the Maurice Greenberg Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Hartford, has written several books on biblical archaeology. In this one, he looks at Mount Sinai, Moses, and the Exodus; David, Solomon, and ancient Jerusalem; Jesus; women in ancient Israel; ancient synagogues; the Teacher of Righteousness at Qumran; Mary, mother of Jesus; and Bar Kochba. The book has a chronology from 5500 BCE. Freund begins with a "crash course in biblical archaeology," then proceeds to examine specific subjects in detail. He notes the strengths and weaknesses of both science and religion and explains the difficulty of establishing what really happened and when it happened. Historians, theologians, and scientists all bring their own subjective influences to the interpretation of the Bible. Women, for example, are not well represented in the text, so archaeology does not offer much despite the number of artifacts found. On the other hand, although burning incense is associated with Christianity, archaeological evidence suggests that both synagogues and churches engaged in this practice through the fourth century CE. This is a well written, fascinating book that belongs in synagogue and public library collections.

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



Gershman, Norman H. *Besa: Muslims Who Saved Jews in World War II*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2008. 125 p. \$39.95 (ISBN 978-0-81560-934-6).

This is a pictorial tribute to the Muslim citizens of Albania and Kosovo who sheltered Jews during World War II out of *besa*, honor, a strict code that cemented the largely rural tribes over the centuries. The photographs, accompanied by brief but revealing testimonials, enhance the stolid piety of these folks, who state that Jews fundamentally share the same G-d, or that the act of saving lives is integral to Islam. Apparently, simple faith and communal spirit permeated their lives, both past and present. These "Righteous Gentiles"—some proudly display a letter from Yad Vashem—describe warm relations with Jewish neighbors and refugees, many of whom even lived with them. One Albanian mentions threatening a police chief, insisting that it was his *besa* to protect anyone under his roof. A few, despite the oppressive and isolationist regime that followed, managed to maintain or revive contact with their former charges. There is satisfaction in knowing that these hardy Muslims (along with the Jews) managed to outlive both the Nazis and the Communists.

Besa will grace any coffee table as well as any library with an adult Holocaust (or Islamic) collection. Its coverage of a neglected subject—the role of non-Christian communities during that era—vitality presents a more nuanced view of the Muslim world.

Hallie Cantor, Yeshiva University, New York, NY

Gillman, Neil. *Doing Jewish Theology: God, Torah and Israel in Modern Judaism*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2008. 283 p. \$24.99 (ISBN 978-1-58023-322-4).

For the past 20 years Rabbi Neil Gillman has been one of the leading American thinkers on Jewish theological issues. This volume can be seen as a summing-up of his thought over the past decades, as he prepares to retire from the faculty of the Jewish Theological Seminary. The essays come from a variety of sources, including *Sh'ma*, *Conservative Judaism*, and other journals and books from the mid-1980s up to 2006.

The book is divided into sections on God, Torah, and Israel, but is not rigorous in differentiating the topics. The first section contains a wonderful article on prophecy in the works of Heschel, and another on renewed interest in resurrection over the past half-century. In the second section Gillman discusses the role of the Jewish philosopher; this portion also includes an analysis of rabbinic education written in 1990. The third section focuses on the Conservative movement as it approaches its official centennial. It includes suggestions for establishing theological principles and "A New Aggadah" for the movement.

Rabbi Gillman's work is always worth reading. His essays give the serious reader food for thought. This book is recommended for academic libraries and Conservative synagogues, and also suggested for synagogues whose rabbis and members are interested in the ongoing flow of theological discussion.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA

Goldish, Matt. *Jewish Questions: Responsa on Sephardic Life in the Early Modern Period*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008. 180 p. \$22.95. (ISBN 978-0-69112-265-6).

Matt Goldish, professor of Jewish history at Ohio State University, presents an edited translation of 43 responsa—questions

about Jewish law addressed to leading rabbis. The book covers the period between 1492 and 1750. Cases come from major cities throughout the Sephardic world, such as Istanbul, Salonika, Amsterdam and Venice, as well as from smaller Jewish communities. The selections provide glimpses of life on an individual level, often with facts presented midstream. Goldish is less interested in the halakhic arguments than in "the narratives embedded in the questions—the stories people tell about their lives..." We read of war, plague, pirates, captivity, conversion, murder, family conflict, infidelity, mistaken identity, heresy, theft, and communal and business disputes. The book begins with an excellent introduction to the history of the Sephardic Diaspora, the nature of responsa literature and its use in social history. Providing short biographies of the rabbis who author the response, an introduction to each question, and a comprehensive bibliography, Goldish makes this an excellent textbook for use in advanced high school or university Jewish history classes.

Harvey Sukenic, Hebrew College Library, Newton Centre, MA

Grob, Leonard, and John K. Roth, eds. *Anguished Hope: Holocaust Scholars Confront the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008. 253 p. \$25.00 (ISBN 978-0-80283-329-7).

Jewish and Christian scholars of the Holocaust, from three European nations and from the US, come together in this volume to project moral and ethical dilemmas from the Holocaust onto the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. By the editors' own admission, none of them possesses special expertise in Middle East history or political science. They come from the disciplines of literature and philosophy, education and theology. Attempting an "inner dialogue" among themselves, they address issues of guilt, retribution, and politicized theology, and attempt to shed light on the forces driving the conflict and the ethical and moral implications of not engaging in such a discussion.

Despite the stellar reputations and track records of the editors, as well as those of the contributors in their respective fields, and the good work in which they are engaged by addressing Jewish-Christian relations, the framing of the conflict in terms of the Jewish Holocaust is questionable and disturbing. No disclaimer to the contrary can undo the association between the Holocaust and the Naqba (the "dispossession") of the Palestinians. While one respects the moral imperative driving these scholars, one also remembers the vision the Kazar King has when trying to do good, and the voice guiding him to look deeper and further: "Your intentions are acceptable, but your deeds are not." The absence of Israeli and Palestinian scholars from this endeavor just adds to the dissonance. One is inclined, however, to recommend that academic libraries purchase the book for the excellent content of each individual article, as well for an example of misguided academic discourse.

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

Gunning, Jeroen. *Hamas in Politics: Democracy, Religion, Violence*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008. 310 p. \$34.50 (ISBN 978-0-23170-044-3).

This is an in-depth look at the internal structure and reasoning behind Hamas and what it stands for. Author Jeroen Gunning's impressive research includes many interviews with Hamas

members as well as Hamas critics. He even spends time living in Gaza in order to understand the ideologies and political views that have caused decades of warfare and terror. As always when dealing with this type of subject, it would be a good idea for the Jewish readership to take this with a grain of salt. It is yet to be determined if there is truly a way to report in a completely non-biased way.

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

Haggadah for Passover with Commentary based on the Shiurim of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik. By Yosef Adler. Jerusalem: Urim Publications, 2008. 143 p. \$24.95 (ISBN 978-9-65524-011-5).

This Haggadah contains the traditional text with English translation and commentary. The commentary is based on the lectures of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (the dean of the modern Orthodox world), as remembered by Rabbi Adler. The book is short and the commentary is brief. Rabbi Adler comments only on the first part of the Haggadah. A seven-page Hebrew text entitled *Imyenei halakhah*, without English translation, can be found in the center of the book. The last chapter is devoted to a "Commentary of the Pesach Haggadah by Rav Yosef Adler." In this chapter Rabbi Adler chooses random topics to discuss. The language is peppered with romanized Hebrew terms, which are not explained. This Haggadah is not recommended for libraries. It is an alternative choice for patrons who are looking for a new Haggadah with limited commentary to use at the seder.

Ilka Gordon, Siegal College, Cleveland, OH

Hasak-Lowy, Todd. *Here and Now: History, Nationalism and Realism in Modern Hebrew Fiction*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2008. 176 p. \$22.95 cloth (ISBN 978-0-8156-3157-6).

This slender volume presents an interesting analysis of the place of modern Hebrew literature in shaping Jewish society. The writer, a professor of Hebrew language and literature at Florida State University, believes that the early authors of the canonic fictional works of this genre saw themselves responsible for representing the reality of the new Jewish society, with all its flaws, in order to bring about positive changes. They were prophets of the new era whose job was to "narrate a past and shape the future." It was around this ideology that Hasak thinks the "literature emerged and crystallized."

The book raises questions such as: How did this happen? Why did such pronounced interests in the representation of reality in Hebrew literature come about primarily among eastern European Jews in the second half of the nineteenth century? What was the relationship between this literary project and the larger ideological programs of the time, especially Zionism? To answer the questions, Hasak-Lowy explores the central works of four authors: Mendele's *The Travels of Benjamin the Third*, Brenner's *From Here and There*, Agnon's *Only Yesterday*, and several Yizhar stories including *The Prisoner*. He shows how Hebrew literature was intertwined with the emergence and development of a new Jewish society, eventually in the Land of Israel. Recommended for all libraries with collections of modern Hebrew literature.

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

Henkin, Rabbi Yehuda. *Understanding Tzniut: Modern Controversies in the Jewish Community*. Jerusalem: Urim Publications, 2008. 141 p. \$21.95 (ISBN 978-9-65524-005-4).

Tzniut is simply defined as modesty, and there are many laws and customs in its application. The first part of Rabbi Henkin's book is a detailed examination of the laws and customs of tzniut. His discussion is replete with sources, and he fluently argues and refutes ideas from the Talmud, from rabbinic responsa, and from codifiers of Jewish law. Rabbi Henkin is not shy to point out the errors of other's assertions. The first three chapters review the Talmudic references, and the fourth reviews some of the principles of modesty, include the importance of local culture. The last two chapters in part I move away from dress and hair covering to discuss habituation.

Part II is a gathering of Rabbi Henkin's essays on related topics, including "Response to Women's Aliyot in Contemporary Synagogues," "Blessing Daughters," "Honoring a Gadol Who Maligns Others," and "After Gush Katif: May One Oppose Israel's Government." All of these demonstrate the rabbi's scholarship and are meticulously referenced. "Blessing Daughters" reinforces points made in part I regarding respecting women and searching original sources for guidance and establishment of custom. Rabbi Yehuda Henkin is the grandson of Rabbi Yosef Eliyahu Henkin (1881-1973), one of the *g'dolei hador* (leaders of the community) of his time. An afterword with personal memories is included. Given the depth of the arguments and the esoteric material, this book is recommended for Orthodox readers familiar with the subject and the method of presentation.

Kathe Pinchuck, Congregation Beth Sholom, Teaneck, NJ

Hoffman, Edward, ed. *The Wisdom of Maimonides: The Life and Writings of the Jewish Sage*. Boston: Trumpeter Books Press, 2008. 172 p. \$15.95 (ISBN 978-1-59030-517-1).

An introduction to the writings of Maimonides for the uninitiated, this book contains a short biography of the man, selections from his writing arranged thematically, and folktales that later generations told about him. The biographical sketch is easy to read, emphasizing the psychological aspects that the author is most interested in. This psychological interest is reflected most clearly in chapters on human personality, social relations, and Maimonides' advice on physical and mental health. Hoffman's interest in spirituality comes through as well, especially in the section of passages on "Spiritual Awakening and Prophecy." The stories featured in the final part of the book, "Visionary Tales," are an odd mix. These stories make no claim to historicity—they were collected by folklorists, and reflect the imaginations of other Jews in later communities. Some of them are fascinating, but most of the stories seem quite strange. All in all, this book is like a medical drug—the words of Maimonides have been watered down and additional ingredients have been added, making the result more palatable for the modern reader who would be overwhelmed by the philosophical or legal works in the original or even in translation.

Pinchas Roth, Hebrew University, Jerusalem



Hyman, Arthur and Alfred Ivry, eds. *Maimonidean Studies, Volume 5*. New York: The Michael Sharf Publication Trust of Yeshiva University Press, 2008. 442 p. + 48 Hebrew p. (ISBN 978-0-88125-941-4).

After a hiatus of several years, this journal devoted to all aspects of Maimonides has produced a new and impressive volume. Seventeen studies in English and two in Hebrew cover a wide range of topics relating to Maimonides. His philosophy, of course, is treated in a number of articles, as is his influence on contemporaries and later thinkers. More innovative are the pieces on the scientific and medical works of Maimonides—an area that few Jewish scholars are qualified to study. Fascinating also are several chapters that compare Maimonides to Muslim philosophers—Averroes, Avicenna, and Al-Farabi, and even the Muslim mystic Ibn al-Arabi. As in previous volumes, *Maimonidean Studies* continues to bridge the gap between studies of Maimonides as a philosopher and the Rambam as a halakhist, by including three important studies of Maimonides' codification of Jewish law. Most of the articles were originally delivered as papers at a conference in New York in 2004, commemorating the 800th anniversary of Maimonides' death. Four years later, they are still exciting and interesting. This volume belongs in every Jewish studies library, even those that do not have the earlier volumes in the series.

Pinchas Roth, Hebrew University, Jerusalem

Ives, Yossi. *There Must Be a Better Way: Life Coaching Strategies for Successful Living*. New York: Devora Publishing, 2008. 296 p. \$21.95 (ISBN 978-1-932687-71-2).

The title of the book says it all. Life coach Yossi Ives gives advice on making life better in all of its aspects: improving your attitude; dealing with different kinds of people effectively, from bosses to children; controlling stress and finances and finding happiness. Although not many books have been written about life coaching from a Jewish perspective, the values are really all the same, when one thinks about it. That the type of person you become is based on your actions is a concept taken straight from the Torah. The book's message of developing the motivation to take action instead of just complaining about life is refreshing and truly inspiring. Highly recommended for all types of Jewish libraries.

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

Kaltner, John, Steven McKenzie, and Joel Kilpatrick. *The Uncensored Bible: The Bawdy and Naughty Bits of the Good Book*. New York: HarperOne/HarperCollins, 2008. 205 p. \$19.95 (ISBN 978-0-06123-884-0).

John Kaltner and Steven McKenzie are professors of Bible and religious studies. Joel Kilpatrick is a journalist and the creator of LarkNews.com, a satirical Christian Web site. They have taken some of the Bible's best known stories and examined them in unusual ways. Eve, for example, was created from Adam's rib according to the traditional tale. A Hebrew Bible scholar named Ziony Zevit, who teaches at American Jewish University, says that the Hebrew word *tsela* may refer to the baculum, a bone found in animal penises, rather than a rib. Other stories, such as Joseph's coat of many colors, Samson and Delilah, and the expulsion from the Garden of Eden, receive similar treatment, with humorous,

sometimes off-color comments beside commentary from eminent scholars such as Jacob Milgrom. Despite the irreverence, the authors have great respect for the Bible. Many Orthodox readers will find the book offensive, but others will enjoy a look at these new interpretations. This work could lead to interesting discussions in book groups. It is suitable for public library collections as well as synagogues with a liberal bent.

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

Kanaaneh, Rhoda Ann. *Surrounded: Palestinian Soldiers in the Israeli Military*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009. 213 p. \$24.95 (ISBN-978-0-80475-858-1).

The author's contention, which is important to state at the outset, is that Israel is a colonizer state and that its Arab citizens are Palestinians who live in the Jewish State of Israel. Within that framework are two important topics: one, purely academic, is the role of a national minority in a multicultural state; the second—something few Jews or non-Israelis are aware of—is the voluntary service of 3,000 Israeli Arabs in the Israeli Defense Force (IDF). Israeli Arabs, generally Muslim, bear a stigmatized social position in the Jewish state and have difficulty establishing a national identity. Why would they join the military to defend the state against its Arab neighbors? The author gathered much of her information from interviews and found that the general lack of occupational opportunities and the chance to receive a stable and reliable income drew Israeli Arabs to the IDF, despite the attached high risk of fatality. Participation in national military service can also bring other "social rewards" to the soldier's family in return for various kinds of "cooperation" with government authorities. The author includes the unique difficulties that other minorities—the Druze and Bedouin—face. This is a sound sociological study that brings a sober analysis to a portion of Israeli society not always considered by outsiders. Kanaaneh's study needs to be placed in a more balanced perspective with a comparison to similar work on other multiethnic societies, globally or in the Arab World.

Sanford R. Silverburg, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC

Kaplan, Kalman J., and Matthew B. Schwartz. *A Psychology of Hope: A Biblical Response to Tragedy and Suicide*. Rev. and expanded ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008. 261 p. \$22.00 (ISBN-978-0-80283-271-9).

Kaplan, a psychologist, and Schwartz, a historian, argue that "the study of Greco-Roman and biblical precedents is fundamental both for an understanding of intellectual history and for practical treatment in counseling situations." They begin by establishing two continuums: individuation—deindividuation (describing the degree to which an individual can "show autonomous or independent thought, feeling, and action") and attachment—detachment (describing the degree to which an individual can "show a capacity for bonding or cooperating with others"). The key to suicide-prevention therapy is finding a balance between individuation and attachment. The authors contrast Greek tragedies, which promote suicide by depicting characters (e.g., Oedipus, Antigone, Ajax, and Iphigenia) who are too separated from or too enmeshed with their families or others, and the Hebrew Bible, which advocates suicide preven-

tion by showing its characters (e.g., Elijah, Moses, Job, Rebecca, and Jonah) turning to God for help in overcoming their psychological fears. God offers nurturance, support, renewal of faith or friendship, punishment of evil, and guidance. The authors note that there are examples of suicide in the Hebrew Bible. Some resemble Greek tragedy and are egoistic (Ahitophel, Zimri, Ahimelch), but others are examples of covenantal (Samson and Saul) or altruistic suicide (Saul's armor-bearer). In these cases, the person is neither overly isolated nor overly integrated, as is the case of Greek tragedy. This revised edition contains a new chapter—"Contemporary Confusions about Life and Death"—which discusses Jack Keivorkian and Terri Schiavo. Although the authors' depictions of biblical characters are idealized at times, I recommend this book for academic libraries and practitioners of pastoral care and counseling.

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

Kavanaugh, Sarah. *ORT, The Second World War and the Rehabilitation of Holocaust Survivors.* London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2008. 156 p. \$49.95 (ISBN 978-0-85303-806-1).

An important document for students of the Holocaust, especially in the postwar rescue and rehabilitation period, this book is filled with factual accounts of the heroic work of ORT. ORT, originally "The Society for Trades and Agriculture among the Jews of Russia," started in the 1880s as a philanthropic organization to help Jewish artisans and farmers. It evolved into a worldwide organization dedicated to education and vocational training, continuing that work today. The focus of this book is the work ORT performed for Jews of Europe as they were liberated and emerged from the death camps of World War II. ORT was instrumental in establishing aid to those placed in DP (displaced persons) camps. The Jewish populations, though wanting to leave the camps, were weighed down by the enormities of grief, depression, lack of will to work, lack of skills, and places to go. By 1947, ORT had used "a network of over 700 courses located in the DP camps of Europe" to help change all that, including establishing ORT in Israel. By 1951, ORT had trained or graduated between 45,000 and 80,000 persons from the camps. Understanding the impact of ORT on Jewish DPs is a story long overdue. Recommended for academic and synagogue libraries.

Judith S. Pinnolis, Brandeis University, Newton, MA

Kessler, Rainer. *The Social History of Ancient Israel: An Introduction.* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2008. 273 p. \$29.00 (ISBN 978-0-80066-282-0).

Kessler maintains that biblical texts cannot be understood theologically without first understanding the social world of the people who produced them. While the Bible divides history into clearly defined epochs represented by famous individuals (e.g., the patriarchs, prophets, and kings), social history is not so clearly defined, but evolves over time as "continuity through change." The goal of this introductory textbook is to describe these larger patterns of social change within Israel's history. The book is divided into two parts. The first briefly outlines methods for studying the social history of Israel—material remains, the texts of the Hebrew Bible, and ethnology and sociology theory—while the second describes the epochs of Israel's social history (origins as a kingship-based society, from statehood to full de-

velopment, the formation of an ancient class society, the exiles and their consequences, the provincial society under Persia, and the Jewish ethos in the Hellenistic Age). Much of the book (one hundred pages) is supplementary material—a list of abbreviations, endnotes, glossary, bibliography, and indexes. While its objectives are important, the book's treatment is very cursory. A "Key points" outline begins each chapter, but sometimes detracts from the content of the chapter rather than enhancing it. The style is sometimes choppy and awkward, perhaps because it is a translation from the German. With these reservations, this book is recommended for some undergraduate academic libraries. For a more thorough study of Israelite social history, see Leo Perdue's *Families in Ancient Israel*.

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

Kotek, Joël. *Cartoons and Extremism: Israel and the Jews in Arab and Western Media.* Translated from the French by Alisa Jaffa. Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 2008. 201 p. \$26.95 (ISBN 978-0-85303-752-1).

This study was inspired by the increase of expressions of anti-Semitism in the Arab, Muslim, and Western media in the 2000s, and especially their manifestation in cartoons. Kotek discusses the history of anti-Semitic myths and expressions in the Christian world as a background to current Arab, Muslim, and Western anti-Semitism, Judeophobia, and anti-Zionism. The text includes numerous cartoons (mostly in color) from all over the Arab and Muslim worlds as well as the West, demonstrating the use of ancient anti-Semitic myths (e.g., ritual murder and blood libel) and Nazi motifs. Following the historical analysis, Kotek examines Arab, Muslim, and Western cartoons by subject. He also shows that both the extreme Left and the far Right use the same anti-Semitic visual images for political ends, and their anti-Zionism is in essence anti-Semitism in other terms. One of the appendixes has examples of cartoons presented at the 2006 Iranian competition about the Holocaust. The repetition of these horrifying images is responsible for the spread of anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism, especially in states with strong censorship and difficulty in getting different sources of information. This very interesting and clearly-written study is an important contribution to collections dealing with Arab-Israeli and Jewish-Muslim relations as well as anti-Semitism and public visual arts.

Rachel Simon, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ

Leviant, Curt, ed. *Masterpieces of Hebrew Literature: Selections from 2000 Years of Jewish Creativity.* Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2008. 577 p. \$22.00 (ISBN 978-0-8276-0881-8 pbk.)

This reprint of an anthology published by Ktav in 1969 contains excerpts from sacred Jewish texts, Jewish literature, travel writing, poetry, and philosophy. While the word "Hebrew" appears in the title, there are entries in the book that were written in other languages, for example, the *Talmud*, which was written in both Aramaic and Hebrew.

The readings provide insight into Jewish beliefs and values. For instance, in the *Mishneh Torah* Maimonides writes, "children are to be sent to school at the age of six or seven years, according to the strength of the individual child and its physical development." Passages like this one indicate the importance of learning

and study in Judaism. This book does not substitute for a library of sacred books, but it provides a survey of the vast literature. Recommended for synagogue and public libraries.

Ellen Share, Washington Hebrew Congregation, Potomac MD

Lichtner, Giacomo. *Film and the Shoah in France and Italy*. London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2008. 244 p. \$74.95 cloth (ISBN 9788-0-85303-786-6).

Italy and France have been slow to face their past as it relates to anti-Semitism, in general, and to their role in World War II, in particular. Lichtner examines films produced in the two countries to study responses to the Shoah in the years following the war. This is a very important analysis because of the "growing influence of the visual media on popular understanding of history."

The author mentions many important Holocaust films produced in Italy and France between 1956-1998 but mainly "those which best reflect the change in popular perceptions of the Shoah in these two countries." He chooses three key documentaries, *Night and Fog*, *The Sorrow and the Pity*, and *Shoah*, for a thorough textual analysis, dedicating a chapter to each. Questions answered in each study include: Where and when was the film made and by whom? Who provided the funding for it? Did the representations of the past influence perceptions of history? Lichtner also analyzes their reception by the public in order to assess opinions and attitudes on the subject of the Holocaust.

Because of the specific focus of this book, it is recommended only for academic and special libraries with extensive Holocaust book and film collections.

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

Myers, David N. *Between Jew & Arab: The Lost Voice of Simon Rawidowicz*. Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press (Tauber Institute for the Study of European Jewry Series), 2008. 308 p. \$35.00 (ISBN 978-1-58465-736-1).

The core of this study is an English translation by David Myers of a thirty-three page Hebrew manuscript "Between Jew and Arab," dealing with the "Arab Question," which the Jewish studies scholar Simon Rawidowicz (1897-1957) suppressed from his study on the "Jewish Question," *Babylon and Jerusalem* (1957). Myers's book examines Rawidowicz's life, his scholarly work, and his views on the role of the Hebrew language in Jewish life and on relations among the various elements of the Jewish people. Myers also analyses Rawidowicz's views on the treatment by the State of Israel of its Arab citizens, focusing especially on its policy towards the 1948/49 Arab refugees. This is followed by an annotated translation of the suppressed chapter, in which quite a few notes repeat issues discussed earlier. The book includes several appendixes containing Israeli official documents (in translation) and UN documents related to issues examined in "Between Jew and Arab." Notes, bibliography, and index are included. The publication of the suppressed chapter is of interest for historical and political reasons, though the preceding analysis on Rawidowicz's personality, work, and ideas is quite lengthy, and parts of it are included in the notes to the translated chapter. Similarly, while it is convenient to have all the material in the appendixes handy, it is easily available elsewhere, making the framework to the small chapter quite bulky. This study

will add a less popular and quite polemic view on Israeli-Arab relations to academic libraries with collections on Israel studies and Middle Eastern studies.

Rachel Simon, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ

Neusner, Jacob. *Theological and Philosophical Premises of Judaism*. Boston: Academic Studies Press (Judaism and Jewish Life), 2008. 245 p. \$50.00 (ISBN 978-1-93484-319-3).

The prolific professor Neusner argues that rabbinic Judaism sees Israel as having a unique status in time and space while it is constantly under the judgment of the Creator. He tries to tease out theological and philosophical premises from the concrete commandments in the Mishnah and other classical post-biblical writings with thought-provoking results. As he writes, "... the fundamental program of the Mishnah: to make concrete and orderly the encounter of Israel and God." This is a learned and very detailed study if also a bit prolix. For academic collections with a strong emphasis on rabbinic theology.

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

Ozer, Mark N. *The Litvak Legacy*. Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Corporation, 2009. 680 p. \$24.99 (ISBN 978-1-4363-6778-3 pbk.).

This remarkable work is a compendium of the social, political, and cultural life of the Jews who lived on the western edge of the Russian empire in an area called Lita. The inhabitants of this area are known as "Litvaks," which distinguishes them from other Jews and non-Jewish Lithuanians. The book is divided into two sections: "The Litvak Homeland" (describing the history of Lita from the 13th century through the Holocaust) and "The English Speaking Litvak Diaspora" (the Litvak legacy in the United States, Canada, Great Britain South Africa and Israel). Topics include the Haskalah, mussar, the Jewish labor movement, the language of Yiddish, and the literary legacy of the Litvaks.

This engrossing and very readable book is a resource for the scholar and also a fascinating read for non-specialists interested in learning more about the Litvaks. Mark Ozer, who is a medical doctor by training and a historian by avocation, conducted an enormous amount of research to compile such a thorough study. Included are a glossary, index, and footnotes at the end of each chapter, which list the bibliographical sources. Highly recommended for synagogue, university, and specialized collections, and as a gift book.

Ellen Share, Washington Hebrew Congregation, Potomac, MD

Putnam, Hilary. *Jewish Philosophy as a Guide to Life: Rosenzweig, Buber, Levinas, Wittgenstein*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press (The Helen and Martin Schwartz Lectures in Jewish Studies), 2008. 121 p. \$19.95 (ISBN 978-0-25335-133-3).

American philosopher of science and mathematical logician Hilary Putnam shares his autobiographical journey from atheism towards embracing his Jewish religion and reconciling it with his philosophical outlook. He introduces the ideas of three major twentieth-century Jewish philosophers who have influenced him: Franz Rosenzweig, Martin Buber, and Emanuel Levinas. These philosophers, all observant Jews, tackle the issues of faith and Judaism. Putnam adds the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, a

non-Jew and a contemporary of the three, as a complement to Rosenzweig in dealing with the three essences: God, Man, and World. Wittgenstein considered religion “a deep-going way of life.”

Jewish Philosophy as a Guide to Life summarizes the main ideas of Rosenzweig in his *Understanding the Sick and the Healthy* and *The Star of Redemption*, Buber in his *I and Thou*, and Levinas in many of his writings. This is a challenging task, especially when the reader is unfamiliar with basic philosophical terms of metaphysics, experiential philosophy, moral perfectionism, and ontology. There are extensive notes; however, a glossary and an index would have been helpful.

The book is an interesting, thought-provoking volume that enhances the general reader's intellectual understanding, and stimulates the desire for additional reading on the subject. It is a good choice for academic, synagogue, and public libraries.

Nira Glily Wolfe, Highland Park, IL

Rosenberg, Shalom. *In the Footsteps of the Kuzari: An Introduction to Jewish Philosophy.* Ed. by Joel Linsider from a translation by Gila Weinberg. New York: Yashar Books in conjunction with ATID, 2007-2008. 2 v. (326, 288 p.) \$24.95 each (ISBN: 978-1-93314-318-7; 978-1-93314-322-4).

Shalom Rosenberg is an Argentinian-born professor of Jewish philosophy at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, where he specializes in medieval logic. He is also a modern Orthodox thinker, one of the most mature and nuanced voices on the Israeli intellectual

scene. In the late 1980s, he delivered a series of lectures on the *Kuzari* of Rabbi Yehudah ha-Levi, and those lectures appeared in book form in Hebrew in 1991. The book under review is an English translation of that work.

Yehudah ha-Levi was a highly educated Jew, a poet and thinker of 12th-century Spain, who fulfilled a personal dream towards the end of his life by immigrating to the Land of Israel. The *Kuzari* uses the legend of the Khazar king who converted to Judaism as a foil for exploring his approach to Judaism, a uniquely anti-philosophical philosophy that stemmed from his disappointment with the culture of medieval Spain. Rosenberg uses the *Kuzari* as a framework for considering the religious challenges for Orthodox Jews in the late 20th century. Therefore, his method is avowedly phenomenological and not historical; he is not concerned with explaining the different positions raised in the *Kuzari* on their own terms, but only insofar as they lead to positions that exist today. With references to recent history, the gamut of Western philosophy, popular culture, and Israeli poetry, Rosenberg's style is engaging and accessible. The book was written in 1991 and so some references are somewhat dated, but this book is a wonderful resource to anyone teaching Jewish thought to a young audience. It is an impressive example of how an age-old text can be opened up to the concerns of modern readers.

Pinchas Roth, Hebrew University, Jerusalem

Salamon, Michael J. *The Shidduch Crisis: Causes and Cures.* New York: Urim Publications, 2008. 141 p. \$21.95 (ISBN 978-9-65524-006-1).

A must-read for singles, parents of singles, and *shadchanim*, *The Shidduch Crisis* explores in depth the reasons the “singles problem” has gotten so out of control in the past generation or so. The book talks about a value system gone horribly wrong in some Orthodox communities and overprotection of children leading to more divorces than ever, but also provides suggestions for getting the dating situation in the religious world back on track. For those people who choose to ignore the advice given in the book, the appendix even includes the “right” answers to all the ridiculous questions *shadchanim* ask these days! Recommended for libraries with an Orthodox readership.

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

Schneerson, Shalom Dov Baer. *The Simple Servant: A Chasidic Discourse.* Translated and annotated by Rabbi Yosef Marcus; additional annotation by Rabbi Avraham D. Vaisfiche. Brooklyn, New York: Kehot Publication Society, 2008. 103 p. \$14.95 (ISBN 978-0-82660-746-1).

The Simple Servant is one of a series of twenty-one select Chasidic discourses by various Lubavitcher rebbes. The editors provide a clear Hebrew text and a very readable translation, together with a preface, an introduction and summary of the contents, extensive footnotes, a bibliography, and an index.

I have read the text twice, first in English and then in Hebrew, both times consulting the footnotes extensively. The Hebrew itself is clear and simple, although the beginner should be warned that in either language, the text is full of cabalistic imagery. The notes are very helpful in bringing the reader “up to speed.” Chasidic discourse is not concerned with history, archaeology, or literary interpretation. It is psychological and spiritual, and

addressed to the heart and life of the individual reader or hearer. It is cabala made practical. The thrust of this particular essay is an interpretation of Numbers 32:1 and following. Rabbi Shalom Dov Baer interprets the nature of the tribes of Reuben and Gad, which because they have many cattle (*u-mikne ra'v*), wish to settle to the east of the Jordan River rather than ascend to the Land proper. They are like most of us, ordinary people who serve God out of duty, but who struggle to find a level of love and commitment beyond duty. I highly recommend this book and indeed the entire series to any and all with an interest in discovering a more spiritual approach to the biblical text and to their own lives.

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

Segre, Augusto. *Memories of Jewish Life: From Italy to Jerusalem, 1918-1960*. Translated with an introduction by Steve Siporin. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008. 507 p. \$40.00 (ISBN 978-0-80321-378-4).

Rabbi Augusto Segre (1915-1986) published his *Memorie di Vita Ebraica* in 1979 when he was 64 years old and a citizen of Israel. He was born during World War I, in the northern Italian town of Casale Monferrato, and his memoirs open with him sketching the men attending early Selihot services in that town, where his father was the rabbi. Segre documents with vivid anecdotes the rising influence of the local fascists and how it felt to be the only Jewish pupil in the Italian public school system, with latent anti-Judaism prevailing. He lashes out at the widespread anti-Zionism of his fellow Jews, beneficiaries of the recent Jewish Emancipation, who would soon be killed in the Holocaust.

Moving to Rome for his studies, seeking both rabbinical ordination and a degree in law, Segre makes friends with fellow students, fights the anti-Zionist Jewish fascists, and avoids Mussolini's secret police. During the German occupation of Italy, Segre becomes a partisan in Piedmont, constantly moving in search of a refuge from the German and fascist soldiers, hiding and avoiding denunciation by fascist sympathizers. His dog helps him to avoid capture several times.

With the liberation, he returns to Rome and becomes general secretary of the Zionist Federation of Italy, visiting Israel during the War for Independence. Steve Siporin includes clarifying footnotes to assist the reader unfamiliar with Italian culture and history. Recommended for all college collections in Jewish studies.

Roger S. Kohn, *Silver Spring, MD*

Shapiro, Sorah. *Whither Thou Goest: The Jewish In-Law's Survival Guide*. New York: Devora Publishing, 2008. 247 p. \$24.95. (ISBN 978-1-93444-009-4)

Perhaps no in-law relationship is as famous as that of Ruth and Naomi. *Whither Thou Goest* (Ruth 1:16) signals the religious slant of this text helping Jewish in-laws coexist peacefully. The bulk of the book, however, contains case studies of men and women complaining about their in-laws, and mostly mother-in-law and daughter-in-law issues. Only part of the work, "The Religious Approach to In-law Relations" actually has halakhic content.

This book is written from an Orthodox perspective for Orthodox families. Even though there are good essays from social workers, lawyers, and rabbis on halakhah, they are not necessarily helpful to a more secularly-minded individual. Recommended

for Orthodox congregations and those serving an Orthodox community only if extra funds are available. Otherwise, librarians would do better to ask their rabbis for book suggestions on this subject.

Rachel M. Minkin, *Lansing Community College, Kehillat Israel, Lansing, MI*

Sokol, David. *The Golem of Church Street: An Artist's Reflection on the New Anti-Semitism*. Burlington, VT: Kasini House Books, 2008. 60 p. \$22.95 (ISBN 978-0-97713-973-6).

Not quite a graphic novel, art book, or collection of essays, this book incorporates elements of each as the author/artist explores the "new anti-Semitism." Sokol painstakingly points out that this new anti-Semitism's danger lies in its subtlety and thinly disguised political rhetoric in news reporting and political action. It also comes from the political left and former allies of the Jewish people. Sokol is concerned that this new anti-Semitism equates all Jews, living anywhere in the world, with Israel. As Israel is accused of being the sole cause of Palestinian suffering and as the source of the anger many Muslims feel toward the United States, Jews, then, are viewed as being indirectly responsible for terrorism.

This book has texts and art on facing pages. The texts include personal stories, news clippings, quotes, anecdotes, and personal musings. Sokol uses a variety of printing techniques. His color palette is mostly somber earth tones. The first image in the book is that of the Golem, flying directly at the reader, ready to champion the cause of human rights.

This book was surprisingly emotionally challenging to read. Being confronted with so many examples of this new anti-Semitism from political leaders and current headlines was alarming and disquieting. Endnotes give the sources for many of the texts and offer suggestions for further reading. Recommended for larger collections.

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

Spring, Chaim, and Jay Shapiro. *Saints and Sinners... 103 Comprehensive Rules of Interpretation Used by Rashi*. Jerusalem: Urim Publications, 2008. 367 p. \$35.00 (ISBN 978-9-6555-319-2).

If the Torah is a book of laws, why do we need so many stories about so many people? The answer is that we are required to learn from their conduct. The authors present the biographies of six biblical characters, all based on midrashic sources. There is a running commentary within the text pointing out what we can learn from each action. The presentation is popular, but the English text is accompanied by scholarly notes in Hebrew.

The second part of the work deals with the rules that govern the work of the premier Bible commentator, Rashi. The approach is strictly Orthodox Jewish, but the presentation of rabbinical insights and the explanations as to how the authors reached their conclusions may be of interest both to students of Judaism and of the Bible. The proceeds of the book are donated to charity.

Chaim Seymour, *Bar-Ilan University, Israel*



Stoetzler, Marcel. *The State, the Nation & the Jews: Liberalism and the Antisemitism Dispute in Bismarck's Germany.* Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2008. 530 p. \$55.00 (ISBN 978-0-80321-625-9).

Heinrich von Treitschke (1834-96), an esteemed and admired German professor, began what became known as the Berlin Antisemitism Dispute. He wrote an article demanding that Jews become more "German," and claimed that they dominated the press. The article provoked a response, with some expressing anti-Semitism. A section of the book contains Treitschke's article, along with articles and letters involved in the dispute. The debate continued between 1879 and 1881 among the educated elite in Germany. The book is recommended for university collections and specialized libraries. There is an index, a lengthy bibliography, and extensive notes.

Ellen Share, Washington Hebrew Congregation, Washington, DC

Trachtenberg, Barry. *The Revolutionary Roots of Modern Yiddish, 1903-1917.* Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2008. \$ 24.95 (ISBN 978-0-8156-319-0).

Whereas the period prior to 1903 produced the forefathers of the Yiddish language—Mendele Moykher Seforim, Yitskhok Leibush Peretz and Sholem Aleichem—and the revolution of 1917 augured the heyday of the Yiddish language, the period in between has been largely ignored. This monograph by Barry Trachtenberg, assistant professor of European Jewish studies at the University of Albany, SUNY, aims to fill that gap. In the context of the upheavals of the Kishinev pogrom of 1903 and the Russian revolution of 1905, Trachtenberg examines how the Yiddish language was elevated from its status as a corrupt form of German—a jargon—to the dominant language of the Russian Jewish press, a medium for literary criticism, science, and serious intellectual debate.

Through the prism of the works of the major Yiddish literary critic, Shmuel Niger, the Yiddish linguist, Nokhem Shtif, and the Marxist Zionist historian, Ber Borochov, Trachtenberg investigates the ideological-cultural origins of Yidishe Visnshaft (Yiddish Science), which was concerned with standardizing Yiddish grammar and orthography, establishing a literary tradition, and creating an institutional structure to support the language's development. In contrast to the earlier Wissenschaft des Judentums (Science of Judaism) in Germany, which gave birth to the movement for Jewish emancipation and assimilation, Yiddish science spawned a proliferation of revolutionary Jewish Diaspora nationalisms.

While this is essentially a book for Yiddish literature specialists, its highlighting of the variety of Jewish nationalist ideologies that surfaced between 1903 and 1917, make it important reading for anybody with a serious interest in the history of Russian Jewry. For academic and research libraries.

Veronica Belling, University of Cape Town, SA

Wurzburger, Walter S. *Covenantal Imperatives: Essays on Jewish Law, Thought and Community.* Edited by Eliezer L. Jacobs and Shalom Carmy. Jerusalem: Urim Publications, 2008. 325 p. \$28.95 (ISBN 978-9-65524-000-9).

Prepared after Rabbi Wurzburger's death as a representative selection of his writings, this collection spans 30 years, yet the

author's approach remains highly consistent. Rabbi Wurzburger was a professor of philosophy at Yeshiva University. He served as a working rabbi, occupied senior positions in rabbinical organizations, and was editor of *Tradition*, the leading American journal of modern Orthodox thought, for more than 25 years.

Rabbi Carmy's introduction emphasizes both the differences in approach between Rabbi Wurzburger and his mentor, Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, and the considerable similarity in their thinking. The book is divided into four sections: ethics, Jewish thought, the Jewish community, and Jewish life. A number of the essays originally appeared in Catholic publications, showing their interest in this area of Jewish thinking. Five of the essays present a philosophy of halakhah. This first-class collection succeeds in presenting the thought of a major modern Orthodox Jewish thinker.

Chaim Seymour, Bar-Ilan University, Israel

Zornberg, Aviva G. *The Murmuring Deep: Reflections on the Biblical Unconscious.* New York: Schocken Books, 2009. 445 p. \$27.95 (ISBN 978-0-8052-4247-8). Reviewed from an advance uncorrected proof.

The author's reflections "on the dynamics of communication in a set of biblical narratives" are commentaries on select narratives, informed by theories of psychoanalysis, literary allusion, and midrash. Although divided into three distinct parts—Between God and Self, Stranger Within, Between Self and Other—the vignette-like nature of these reflections is consistent throughout the book, which makes for very short statements about questions asked and answered by the author. This method of delivery of ideas and intuitions about biblical narratives and verses does a disservice to what otherwise could have been a comprehensive view of biblical narrative as a struggle between what is consciously and explicitly communicated and the hidden psychological meaning of the text. Heavily footnoted and accompanied by an extensive bibliography, this book could be used by readers looking for different perspective when contemplating a biblical story or preparing a d'var Torah.

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

FICTION & POETRY

Appelfeld, Aharon. *Laish.* Translated by Aloma Halter. New York: Schocken Books, 240 p. \$23.95 (ISBN 978-9-8052-4159-4). Reviewed from an advance uncorrected proof.

The dark story of *Laish* calls to mind Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage*. In this allegorical tale, fifteen-year-old Laish is part of a caravan of people leaving Eastern Europe headed for Jerusalem during the pre-WWII period. It is a motley group of "rabbis and mystics, widows and orphans, the sick and the dying, adventurers and con artists, victims of pogroms who have no place else to go." No one has a life independent of the group. When some members die or leave the caravan, the reader feels their absence intensely. By the end of the tale, with only a remnant of the original travelers present, the reader is deeply saddened. This novel is recommended for synagogue, center, and academic libraries.

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

Azriel, Yakov. *In the Shadow of a Burning Bush: Poems on Exodus.* St. Louis, MO: Time Being Books, 2008. 115 p. \$15.95 (ISBN 978-1-56809-122-8).

This collection of 64 poems by an award-winning poet is based on lines from the book of Exodus and other parts of the Bible. Even though they don't all succeed poetically, they are interesting as musings or interpretations of the lines they invoke. Some of the best poems in this collection conflate the experience of slavery in Egypt with the experience of being an inmate at a death camp—a powerful and disturbing idea, especially in “The Ballad of the Jewish Slave Boy,” where it's only an implicit idea. Others use the haiku form to great effect, especially the Egyptian haikus detailing the ten plagues, and the “Haikus from Jacob's Garden,” describing the 12 sons and Dina as plants. Also noteworthy is the conceit of a Haggadah having four different owners over time in “The Four Sons.” In “Four Daughters and Their Mother,” the four sons are transformed into four girls leaving Egypt.

Somewhere in the middle of the book, the poet's voice falters, and he begins to write that blood is like “scarlet toothpaste” and that “... time ... melts ... like cheese on grills ...” The language is less flowing and the reader almost feels that the poet is trying too hard to include all of his ideas. Rhyme schemes that scanned beautifully in earlier poems become forced. Nevertheless, the book is interesting enough overall to make it a worthwhile purchase for comprehensive collections of Jewish poetry.

Beth Dwoskin, Proquest, Ann Arbor, MI

Brodoff, Ami Sands. *The White Space Between.* Toronto, ON, Canada: Second Story Press, 2008. 307 p. \$18.95 (ISBN 978-1-897187-49-4).

Roitman, Gina. *Tell Me a Story, Tell Me the Truth.* Toronto, ON, Canada: Second Story Press, 2008. 155 p. \$17.95 (ISBN 978-1-89718-753-1).

A psychiatrist I know once said there is no more complex relationship than that of mothers and daughters. Two recent novels further tighten these tangled threads of love, control, and resistance by making the mothers Holocaust survivors, whose daughters grow up in homes haunted by ghosts and loss. Published and set in Canada, they are very different, both in format and feel.

In *The White Space Between*, Jana Ivanova renames herself Jane Ives and is determined not to inflict her Holocaust memories on daughter, Willow, her only child. Of Jana/Jane's original family, only she survived, together with a treasured album of black-and-white photographs. Now a teacher in Princeton, Jane tells nightly stories to Willow, basing each on a picture. But it is an edited past she shares, manipulating secrets and people like puppets to keep her beloved sculptor father and the others alive. Willow's own father, supposedly dead, and Jane's postwar years in Canada remain hidden. Brodoff's loving depiction of Montreal, emphasizing snow and cold, reflects the white distancing spaces in Willow's life and Jana's stories.

The story has merit but the author's style got in the way. Too much is told, with too many clichés. Like a Punch and Judy show, the characters showed me their strings. I didn't believe many of the emotions nor did I share them.

Mother/daughter tension and sometimes overly detailed descriptions of puppet making might interest YA readers, but the

work seems more appropriate for an adult audience. Be advised that the book also contains detail about the crematoria, Jane as a probable unwed mother, and Willow's healing love affair with a Montreal playwright.

Tell Me a Story, Tell Me the Truth feels more like the truth. A collection of linked short stories told from the daughter's viewpoint, it takes Leah Smilovitz through her ghost-haunted childhood into an adolescent struggle for independence, to her eventual finding of a new self, released from past fears and accepting, even welcoming, the truth of her mother's constant prediction: “You will remember my words.” A powerful figure, often angry, Leah's mother nonetheless sometimes lapses into tears, missing her four dead sisters, welcoming comfort from her little girl. Still, she has no qualms about controlling her strong-willed daughter by looking upward and asking God, “I survived Hitler for this?” Leah imagines that her mother's world “was split into two: the past where Hitler was the source of all her misery; and the present where I was.”

The first three stories are set in childhood. Later, Leah gradually learns more about people outside her home. “Mr. Greene and the Studebaker” is one of the best stories, with never a false note. The last, “Pesach in Provence,” celebrated far from home, evokes her mother's daily command, “Remember.” When she ponders why she didn't just serve dinner instead of making the effort to celebrate a seder, she realizes “Where's the memory in that?”

Gina Roitman is a poet. This book, filled with strong writing, absorbing characters, believable events, and complicated relationships, reads like poetry, restrained and full of emotion. There is some sensuality and a reference to adultery and abortion, but I would recommend this title for mature YA readers.

Rita Berman Frischer, Lake Forest Park, WA

Brown, Danit. *Ask For a Convertible.* New York: Pantheon Books, 2008. 305 p. \$22.95 (ISBN 978-0-37542-454-0).

This deftly-written work is not a traditionally-plotted novel. It is subtitled, *Stories*, and in fact it is a collection of vignettes about characters surrounding the protagonist. Osnat is the child of an American father who doesn't like living in Israel, and an Israeli mother who doesn't like living in America. The sad consequence for Osnat is that she feels at home in neither place. The book takes place mostly in Ann Arbor and in other parts of the Midwest, as well as in Israel, but it is a study of people, rather than places. Its sensitive portrayal of Efrat, Osnat's mother, delineates her homesickness, her perplexity regarding Jewish assimilation, and above all, the anguish of speaking and hearing a language that is not her own. The compromises that Efrat and Marvin make to keep their marriage alive, the fundamental differences between Israelis and American Jews, and the struggle for a Jew to define the meaning of the word “home,” are the core concerns of this book.

Osnat herself is a less interesting character, mostly because she lives her whole life in reaction to her parents' decision to leave Israel, and the other characters are symbols more than they are flesh and blood. Readers will laugh at the reactions Efrat and Osnat have to America but may be put off by the book's unconventional structure or by its rather bleak portrayal of life in Israel. Recommended for fiction collections.

Beth Dwoskin, Proquest, Ann Arbor, MI

Elliott, Elissa. *Eve: A Novel of the First Woman.* New York: Delacorte Press, 2009. 421 p. \$24.00 (ISBN-978-0-38534-144-8).

In this fictional account of the biblical first family, the tale is told from the perspective of the women, Eve and her daughters. Eve wrestles with the reasons for their expulsion from Eden and longs to return to it, until she finally gains an understanding of how she can live in the present, make her peace with it, and still maintain a loving relationship with Elohim. The dynamics in Adam and Eve's family are vividly imagined, with a good deal of sibling rivalry, conflict between monotheism and idolatry, love, hate, family affection and jealousy, sex, and violence in the mix. In her afterword, Elliott gives evidence of an impressive amount of biblical study and research of ancient cultures, particularly Sumerian, in preparation for writing her book. Though the tone is somewhat didactic at times and the characters are drawn in black and white, this is a readable, even suspenseful novel. Recommended for adult fiction collections.

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

Gregory, Jill, and Karen Tintori. *The Illumination.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 2009. 309 p. \$24.95. (ISBN 978-0-31237-597-3).

Natalie Landau, an antiquities expert at a small New York museum, receives a "trinket" from her sister Dana, an MSNBC reporter stationed in Iraq. Natalie is pulled into a whirlwind of political intrigue, religious zealots, and power-hungry killers as she discovers her sister has been murdered. The "trinket" is a 3,000-year-old jeweled amulet, the "Eye of Dawn," containing the tzohar, a piece of primordial light first given to Noah (Genesis 6:16). Natalie joins with Dana's colleague Jim to unravel the mystery of the eye and Dana's murder. But others want the "Eye of Dawn": The Church of Radiant Light, a fringe grouping hoping to bring about the Rapture, and the Guardians of the Khalifah, a group of Arabs hoping to establish Muslim rule over the world. Natalie and Jim race from New York to Rome to Jerusalem, where Hamas and Israel will be signing a peace treaty. The Mossad, the CIA, and the National Security Unit (NSU) also want a piece of the action.

With this and *The Book of Names* (St. Martin's Press, 2007) the authors have created "Jewish Dan Brown books," in the style of *The Da Vinci Code*, with a speedy pace, international settings, a character expert in ancient artifacts and symbols, and an interesting history of the tzohar and its place in the Bible and legend. Although there is a lot of violence and killing, this book is highly recommended for all fiction collections.

Kathe Pinchuck, Congregation Beth Sholom, Teaneck, NJ

Kwitney, Alisa, and Joëlle Jones. *Token.* New York: DC Comics, 2008. 176 p. \$9.99 (ISBN 978-1-4012-1538-5).

Shira Spektor—like many Jewish teenage protagonists—feels a great sense of alienation. While dealing with the social awkwardness that besets most adolescents, she comes to feel increasingly distant from her father, and is shy around boys. She has trouble fitting in with the other girls in her Jewish high school and has bonded—to some degree—with her grandmother and her grandmother's friend Minerva. Minerva and her grandmother become surrogate mother figures for Shira, as her own mother died when she was just four. Perhaps due to her rejection by her Jewish peers, Shira becomes attracted to a mischievous but

kind-hearted Hispanic youth named Rafael. As Shira becomes ever more infatuated with Rafael, her self-confidence and assertiveness slowly develop. Unfortunately, part of her assertiveness is due to her transformation into a kleptomaniac, her thefts encouraged by Rafael (who becomes her "teacher").

This mature graphic novel also deals with such issues as racism (directed at Rafael) and learning when and how to bend established rules. It is not just Shira and Rafael who violates certain rules, but Shira's father, who seems to set a poor example at times and feels justified in making exceptions when it suits himself. Although there is some suggestion of nudity in two scenes, the illustrations are tastefully done (e.g., using silhouettes). Highly recommended for the teen section of public, synagogue, and high school libraries.

Steve Bergson, Toronto, ON

Neuberger, Roy S. *2020 Vision.* Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishers, 2008. 321 p. \$24.99 (ISBN 978-1-59826-213-1).

The values implicit in modern literature and other media are problematic from an Orthodox Jewish point of view. A new genre has appeared in the last decade in both Hebrew and English to meet the Orthodox Jewish niche in the market. Roy Neuberger has written a thriller set in the near future, which opens with a world war between Muslims and Christians, destroying civilization as we know it. The unusual feature of this novel is that the author has inserted himself into the fictional world and he leads a group to safety. Most of the characters in the book are Orthodox Jews and they get their chance to explain their values. This type of fiction usually has a message, which, in this case, is sometimes expressed too stridently. Although the thriller is exciting, the characterization is disappointing. I recommend this novel, both as a nice, clean exciting read, and as an opportunity to get acquainted with Orthodox Jews as they portray themselves.

Chaim Seymour, Bar-Ilan University, Israel

Semel, Nava. *And The Rat Laughed.* Translated from the Hebrew by Miriam Shelsinger. Melbourne, Australia: Hybrid Publishers, 2008. 232 p. \$25.00 (ISBN 978-1-87646-265-9).

Nava Semel is a prolific writer of prose, poetry, and fantasy. *And the Rat Laughed*, published in Israel in 2001, followed *Flying Jews*, a fantastic story of a child that attempts to fly as a way to control remembering, and the ways in which Israeli identity is shaped in the shadow of the Shoah. *And The Rat Laughed* adds a penetrating treatment of remembering, documenting, and the impossibility of forgetting, through a meta-narrative of a child's school assignment to interview a survivor—her grandmother. The telling, initiated by the child, forces the grandmother to remember her reality and the unthinkable horrors she endured as a child, compelled to hide in a farm during the Holocaust. The account is presented through multiple genres: story, legend, poems, dream, and diary viewed/read in a 2099 post-ecological-disaster society. The varied genres and time periods reveal powerful and disturbing images that guide the reader toward the meaning of a rat that sought laughter. Recommended for all libraries collecting Holocaust literature, with a cautionary note to school librarians that although it is a child survivor's story, the book itself is not for children.

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

Tregebov, Rhea, ed. *Arguing with the Storm: Stories by Yiddish Women Writers*. New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2008. 169 p. \$14.95 (ISBN 978-1-55861-558-8).

The brain-child of the Winnipeg Women's Yiddish Reading Circle, this collection, originally published in Canada, attempts to publicize the works of lesser-known women writers of Yiddish. The stories were chosen, and in some cases translated, by members of Reading Circle. They include works of nine authors along with a short biographical essay. The authors represent a wide spectrum of backgrounds, religious upbringings, and experiences. The stories are also very diverse, ranging from whimsical to bittersweet to gut-wrenching. They examine issues of family, work, poverty, and love. One of my favorite entries is "A Love Story," by Sarah Hamer-Jacklyn, in which an elderly woman rediscovers her first love when she moves into a retirement community. I could find only one other similar collection: *Found Treasures: Stories by Yiddish Women Writers* (Toronto: Second Story Press, 1994). Highly recommended for academic and synagogue libraries.

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

Yellin, Tamar. *Tales of the Ten Lost Tribes*. New Milford, CT: The Toby Press, 2008. 156 p. \$22.95 (ISBN 978-1-59264-213-7).

In ten chapters, named after the ten lost tribes, Yellin presents ten individuals whom the narrator encounters on her travels and who appear to embody the characteristics of ever-seeking, ever-searching, never quite belonging: "that hidden tribe of wanderers and strangers, aliens and misfits to which I, too, belonged." Each chapter is preceded by a quotation from a historical source that deals with the topic of the ten lost tribes. The author's style is luminous and poetic; each character instantly springs to life by the force of her descriptive genius. While this is not a "must" acquisition for budget-stressed librarians, it is surely a gem to enrich your adult fiction collection and delight all who appreciate fine writing.

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

SOUND RECORDING

Carlebach, Neshama. *One and One*. New York: Neshama Carlebach, 2008.

Neshama Carlebach, best known for being the daughter of singer Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach and for the "duets" mixed after his passing, has released another winner with *One and One*, her sixth album and her first in English. Neshama's amazing vocal range and versatility in song styles from pop to rock to jazz make her appealing to many types of audiences, and with this latest effort she has proven that she is just as amazing in English as she is in Hebrew. Recommended for all types of Jewish libraries.

Shoshana Hurwitz, Hurwitz Indexing, Maale Adumim, Israel



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.

Bashkin, Orit. *The Other Iraq: Pluralism and Culture in Hashemite Iraq*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009.

Simmons, William A. *Peoples of the New Testament World: An Illustrated Guide*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008.

Letter to the Editor

As president of Jewish Vegetarians of North America and associate producer of *A Sacred Duty: Applying Jewish Values to Help Heal the World*, I appreciate your including a review of the documentary in the November-December newsletter. However, in an otherwise fine review, I think Kathe Pinchuck missed our essential message when she states "there is little in the way of concrete suggestions of how to help heal the world." While many articles and films discuss ways to reduce global warming, *A Sacred Duty* stresses a message that is generally being ignored, even by experts like Al Gore: that a major societal shift toward plant-based diets is an essential step to avoid the unprecedented catastrophe that the world is rapidly approaching. As Ms. Pinchuck mentions, the film indicates that "eighteen percent of greenhouse gases [in CO2 equivalents] are coming from livestock agriculture." Incredibly, this is 30 percent more than all the cars, ships, planes and other means of transportation combined. And making the situation even worse, experts project that the consumption of animal products will double in the next 50 years. Hence, without a major shift away from present animal-based diets, there is no way that our imperiled world can reach a sustainable path.

The message in *A Sacred Duty* is so important that we will send a complimentary DVD to any librarian or other educator who contacts me at president@JewishVeg.com. The documentary can also be seen at ASacredDuty.com.

Very truly yours,

Richard H. Schwartz

Don't miss Lee Wixman's history of the AJL, an essay published on the Mission & Goals page of the AJL Web site. Lee was present at AJL's birth and is a fount of information about our organization, its development, its scope, and its members. Lee dedicates the essay to the memory of his wife Irene, the newsletter's founder.

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Western Regional Conference on Jewish Literature

SUSAN DUBIN

The Western Regional Conference on Jewish Literature for Children was held February 1, at the Simon Wiesenthal Center-Museum of Tolerance. The 80 attendees heard panel members Hamida Basmajian, Lisa Silverman, Talma Shultz, and Eric Sundquist speak about the types and quality of Holocaust literature available for children and young adults, strategies for using them, and philosophical and educational theories related to the use of Holocaust materials with young people.

The program included a tour of the museum, lunch, and small group sessions. Adaire Klein, director of the Library at the Museum of Tolerance-Simon Wiesenthal Center, moderated the panel, and joined Lisa Silverman and Talma Shultz in their small group session that looked at picture books and novels for middle school and high school. Professors Basmajian, from the University of Seattle, and Sundquist, from UCLA, spoke on viewing the Holocaust through the lens of literature.

The program also offered manuscript consultations with a literary agent. Several Sydney Taylor Award-winning and notable authors including Sonia Levitin, Erica Silverman, Susan Goldman Rubin, Ann Stampler, Sylvia Rouss, were there, as well as many other authors from the southern California area. The event attracted attendees from as far away as Vancouver, British Columbia and Arizona. In the words of one of the attendees, "What an amazing day!"

Children's Book Publishing Notes

ANNE DUBLIN

Once Upon a Shabbos (Jacqueline Jules, Illus. by Katherine Janus Kahn) was out of print but is now back by popular demand! The title won a Joan Sugarman Children's Book Award Honorable Mention, and was a Sydney Taylor Notable Children's Book. 32pp. \$7.95. ISBN: 978-1-58013-021-9. Ages 3-8, Grades pre-K-3.

A new edition of *The Jewish Americans* by Marissa Lingen has been published, copyright 2009, by Mason Crest. The immigration statistics in it have been updated to 2008.

RAS Convention Programs

JIM ROSENBLUM

RAS attendees at the Chicago conference are fortunate to have a wide selection of programs of interest to them, including digitization, archives, electronic collections, Israeli film, Jewish bookstores, art and ethnomusicology, Yiddish theater and publishing, linguistics, manuscript conservation, the annual LC cataloging update, a special session on RDA, and many other fascinating sessions. The annual Feinstein lecture, given by Michael Grunberger, formerly of LC and now at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum will be presented on Tuesday at 5:30. Please note that the annual OCLC users meeting will take place at a special time—Wednesday morning at 8:15, just prior to the RAS division meeting.