Pbk. Reviewed from an advance reading copy. Gr. 5–8.

“‘We have a strict rule. An unbreakable rule. The caregivers will not be permitted to speak to the babies. And you may not hold a baby beyond what is absolutely necessary for its physical care.’” These are the orders that Johanna is given when, hiding her Jewish identity, she gets a job in an orphanage. After experiencing the cruelty of the baby experiment, where lack of nurturing leads to infant deaths, her strongly held Jewish values impel her to take a huge risk. She runs away from the orphanage, taking a baby with her. Set in Germany in 1703, Johanna’s suspenseful story captures the harshness of the times: disease, poverty, crime, and rampant anti-Semitism. Her escape takes her, after many harrowing events, to Amsterdam, thanks to the kindness of strangers whom she meets during her flight. Jewish values provide the motivation for Joanna’s actions and imbue her character with its steely sense of knowing right from wrong. The novel’s other characters are also portrayed as realistic and distinct individuals, interacting against a vividly realized historical background. Anne Dublin is the author of numerous works of fiction and non-fiction for young people, including the award-winning *Bobbie Rosenfeld: The Olympian Who Could Do Everything* and *The Orphan Rescue*. Like those books, *The Baby Experiment* should not be missed.

Linda R. Silver, Cleveland, OH


Want a Passover story that is fun, family oriented, kind and charming? You have it right here in this well-made picture book: quality paper, strong binding, mobile layout, sprightly illustrations, and *portavoce* characters who dote on and highlight protagonist Miriam, a little girl the age of targeted readers. Miriam enjoys the traditional Seder at her grandparents’ home; readers will recognize the scene and relate to her. Mostly Miriam adores *matzo*. Her craving leads to overeating it. She refuses to take another bite. By the eighth morning before Passover ends, she refuses her grandpa’s famous *matzo brie*. Her family tries to cajole and convince her. She and grandpa compromise in a warm ending. The well-developed plot will appeal across age levels; it delivers much basic holiday content for tots as well as moral insights for elementary readers. Everyone can side with Miriam while they absorb the lesson.

Third-person narration and focused dialogue deliver Seder customs and the meaning of Passover. Each conversation is short—giving punch, holding young attentions, and providing information without boring. The grandparents’ Yiddish-sprinkled comments add *t’am* (taste) and Jewish identity. Miriam is a delightful central character with attitude, an only child starring in a galaxy of adoring adults who instruct her and the readers. Illustrations capture her colorful personality and help carry the story. The end of the book boasts an historical note which includes a specific “later” date for the biblical Exodus (though all dates are in contention), a *matzo brie* recipe, and a glossary of foreign words. Its quality and size make the book a bit heavy to hold, but perfect for lap or tummy reading. This volume is holiday genre at its best. Highly recommended.

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

*Without Tess* takes the reader on a heartrending journey. Lizzie Cohen is a fifteen-year-old girl whose world is falling apart. When she was ten, her older sister Tess died. Since that time, Lizzie has been grappling with her grief and guilt. Lizzie yearns to understand why her sister died. She hangs onto Tess’s journal filled with disturbing poems and sketches. Through vibrant prose and evocative poems, Pixley paints a picture of Lizzie’s turmoil and ultimate discovery of her inner strength. All the characters, major and minor, are portrayed in sensitive and insightful ways. The wounded parents react to their loss by withdrawing in helpless silence: “... their smiles look like they hurt and their eyes are full of shadows.” Theirs is a loving relationship sorely wounded by the loss of their daughter. Lizzie’s therapist, Dr. Kaplan, guides Lizzie to understand what happened and how to make a life for herself without her sister. The other characters—neighbors and friends—are unique individuals who care about Lizzie and try to reach her. Lizzie’s intelligence, creativity, and sense of humor elevate this novel. For example, Lizzie imagines her English teacher, Ms. Lozano, reciting a poem by Keats: “... her voice becomes breathless and she sounds like one of those nighttime telephone escorts.”

The setting of a coastal river is aglow with the colors and shapes of sea, land, and sky; the sounds of seabirds and the lapping of waves; the smells of fish and salt and sweat; the gentle touch of a family quilt or the searing pain of being stabbed. Evocative similes and metaphors fill the pages. For example, “The moon is yellow and heavy as a tablespoon of honey.” Here is a non-observant Jewish family who nevertheless has a strong Jewish identity. They follow certain rituals, like lighting a *yahrzeit* candle on the anniversary of Tess’s death. The contrast between Lizzie’s doubts about heaven and hell, and her Catholic friend’s certainty is portrayed in a sympathetic and convincing way. For another compelling book by Pixley, see *Freak*—this one about bullying. Highly recommended.

Anne Dublin, author of *The Baby Experiment*, Toronto, Canada

---


This novel by the author of *My Mother the Cheerleader* busts out of the ring. As the story opens in Berlin 1934, fourteen-year-old Karl Stern learns what it means to be Jewish in a country that has fallen under Adolf Hitler’s anti-Semitic dictatorship. Although raised in a secular household, he becomes the scapegoat of his Aryan classmates. With the help of German boxing champ and his father’s friend, Max Schmeling, Karl learns to fight for himself. As he matures, his determination to become a boxing champ intensifies, as do his artistic skills, against the backdrop of intensified anti-Semitism. His family facing a fight for their lives, Karl needs to decide how to pursue his own dreams. Sharenow has clearly done his homework, giving an authentic feel of 1930s Berlin—a cross between Cabaret and The Blue Angel—transporting readers through time, right down to the Max und Moritz comic characters. The cast of complex characters springs to life on the page—from The Countess, a transvestite who had fought in the Great War with Stern’s art-dealer father, to Karl’s uncle who calls him “buckaroo” and is arrested and sent to Dachau, to the men of the boxing club who help in his life education. Sharenow imbues each major character with endearing strength and weakness. Of particular note is the tender relationship between Karl and his younger sister, Hildy, for whom he draws “Winzig und Spatz” cartoon strips. Throughout, Sharenow paints an accurate depiction of the fate of the Jews in Germany and presents the dichotomy of assimilated and religious Jews, all subject to the same destiny. Winner of the Sydney Taylor Book Award (Teen) for 2012, *The Berlin Boxing Club* is a must-have for any Jewish library.

Barbara Krasner, Member, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee, New Jersey

[Editor’s note: For Barbara Bietz’s interview with Robert Sharenow, see: http://barbarabbookblog.blogspot.com/2012/01/sydney-taylor-book-award-blog-tour.html]

“Can a poor man be as happy as a rich man?” asks this Jewish folktale from Afghanistan. The shah doesn’t think so and wanders through Kabul, stopping when he hears laughter coming from a house in the very poorest section in town. There he finds a Jew who is happy with his lot as a shoemaker, despite having very little money. When the shah asks him what he would do if he couldn’t earn enough money to buy food, the Jew tells him that “If one path is blocked, God leads me to another, and everything turns out just as it should.” Deciding to test the man’s faith, the shah sets up a series of setbacks for him, each forcing him to assume a job that pays less and less. Still, the Jew’s faith in God remains strong; his outlook, optimistic. Finally, the shah makes him a member of the royal guard and gives him a silver sword which he promptly sells and replaces with one he makes from wood. When, to his horror, he is ordered to kill a man with his sword, the peace loving and pious Jew outdoes himself in resourcefulness, because his faith in God saves a life and earns him the shah’s everlasting respect.

This familiar tale is told with folkloric directness, a lively style that builds suspense, an attitude of kindness, and a respect for its traditional sources, discussed in an author’s note following the story. The handsome jewel-toned illustrations depict setting and characters in a way that invites readers into the tale, traveling down the dusty streets of Kabul with “a ragged band of woodcutters” or gasping with wonder in the shah’s opulent courtyard. The physical differences between the Jewish man and the Afghans are slight, with the distinction appearing in their headgear: the Jew wears a kippah; the Afghans, turbans. Ann Redisch Stampler is the author of several other excellent retellings of Jewish folktales, each beautifully and distinctively illustrated: Something for Nothing, Shlemazel and the Remarkable Spoon of Pohost, and The Rooster Prince of Breslov. This is a fresh version of a familiar tale, ten other versions of which are listed in Sharon Elwit’s (indispensable) The Jewish Story Finder.

*Linda R. Silver; Cleveland, OH*

Dear Readers,

This issue presents a record number of 147 reviews! I thank all our volunteer reviewers and co-editors for their work! Note that 2 titles in the Child & Teen section are reviewed twice, by two different reviewers with different views on same title. I would love to hear your opinion on this practice.

It is again that time of the year when many of us are getting ready to travel to convention. Please make sure to read the convention related articles in the News issue.

I wish you all a relaxing (yet fruitful!) summer and hope to see many of you next month in Pasadena!

As always, please don’t hesitate to email me with any concerns or suggestions.

With best wishes,

Uri Kolodney, Editor-in-chief.

**CONTENTS**

Titles for Children & Teens p. 1

Spotlight p. 1

Biography p. 4

Fiction p. 5

Folklore p. 5

God and Prayer p. 9

Holocaust and WWII p. 10

Jewish Life and Values p. 11

Non-Fiction p. 13

Picture Book p. 14

Shabbat and Holiday p. 15

Video p. 18

Reviews of Nonfiction Titles for Adults p. 19

Reviews of Literature Titles for Adults p. 47

Reviews of Multimedia p. 54

Credits and Contact p. 59
Reviews of Titles for Children and Teens

EDITED BY ANNE DUBLIN & RACHEL KAMIN

BIOGRAPHY


From her childhood in Kiev when she was known as “Little Goldie”, through her death in 1978, the amazing life of Golda Meir is chronicled in this engaging biography that will appeal to middle school students and beyond. Peppered with both color and black and white photographs, this biography is rich with facts not only about Meir but also with information about persecution of Jews, the formation of the state of Israel, Zionism, Hebrew, and Golda’s political peers. It is well organized and has a variety of classroom applications. A timeline, source notes, bibliography and a list of materials for further information is also included. Recommended for all libraries that serve middle school age children.

Aimee Lurie, The Agnon School, Beechwood, OH


With a title and cover that are sure to catch the young reader’s attention, this illustrated biography tells the story of Jean Laffite (also spelled Lafitte), the Jewish pirate who helped the Americans win the battle of New Orleans against the British in 1815. From numerous sources, including Laffite’s journal, Rubin distilled various facts (and legends) to write an engrossing and fast-paced account of Lafitte’s life. According to Rubin, Laffite’s Jewish identity influenced his activities; however, this biography touches only lightly on his Jewishness.

Rubin describes Lafitte’s Sephardic background and early education as the youngest of eight children growing up in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Laffite was fascinated by his oldest brother’s exploits as a privateer, and by the age of sixteen began voyaging (and pirating) on the seas. Lafitte’s life was morally ambiguous, a fact that Rubin enlarges upon in the author’s note at the end of the book: Although he was an American hero and patriot who was praised for his “courage and fidelity”, he profited from the sale of slaves he had “rescued” from Spanish slave ships.

This hardcover edition has generous dimensions (9” x 12”), large font, and action-packed illustrations—all enhancing the fascinating story about the exploits of this swashbuckling privateer and patriot. Muted tones of browns, blues, and greys expressively convey this era of early America as do the historically accurate clothing and hairstyles. One small error: The Hebrew Bible is drawn as if it were an English book, i.e. with the left to right opening, rather than the right to left opening. Jean Laffite contains an extensive bibliography, list of historical sites, and an adequate index. For more Jewish biographies by this prolific writer, see also: Music was It: Young Leonard Bernstein (winner of the Sydney Taylor Book Award for older readers, 2012), Haym Salomon: American Patriot, or Whaam! The Art and Life of Roy Lichtenstein.

Anne Dublin, author of The Baby Experiment, Toronto, Canada


Irena Sendler, a Catholic social worker and all-but-forgotten rescuer of over 2,500 Jewish children from the Warsaw Ghetto, is the subject of Marcia Vaughan’s engaging book. Vaughan introduces us to Sendler as a child, follows her through the Holocaust and its aftermath, and then to an excerpt of a letter she wrote the Polish Senate a year before her death in 2008. It is not a quick class read-through. The story, inspiring without whitewashing the events, fairly provokes student discussion on a particularly higher-order of questioning: “What did her father mean that you should rescue a drowning person even if you can’t swim?” or “How did Irena convince parents to give up their children?” or “How did she think so quickly during her rescues? What would you have done?” Ron Mazellan’s dark, off-focus illustrations lend a soft, depressed mood; the only shining, sharp object in the 32 pages is a Nazi helmet, which elicits another exchange of ideas. His portrayal of Irena clutching her father’s hand beside his typhus death bed is troubling and ultimately inaccurate. According to Jack Mayer’s account in his Life in a Jar, The Irena Sendler Project (Long Trail Press, 2011), Dr. Sendler refused to let anyone closer than the
hallway. The role of typhus in Irena’s life, first as the cause of her father’s death, and then as her entrée into the Ghetto as a nurse, bring about questions of destiny. Irena’s unrelenting modesty about her actions, even more. While Vaughan covers much the same ground as Susan Goldman Rubin does in her *Irena Sendler and the Children of the Warsaw Ghetto* (Holiday House, 2011), Vaughan’s simpler and more drama-filled text seems better suited for younger readers. Vaughan’s afterword and author’s sources give curious readers a surfeit of new paths to follow on their journey to learn more. A strongly student-recommended volume.

Charna Gross, MLIS, School Librarian at Sinai Akiba Academy, Los Angeles, CA

[Editor’s note: For a public librarian’s interview with Marcia Vaughan, see: http://shelf-employed.blogspot.com/2012/02/interview-with-marcia-vaughan-irenas.html]

FICTIoN


Greg’s mother insists that he visit Rachel, who is dying of cancer, but Greg would rather spend his senior year making movies with his best friend Earl and doing his best to fly under the radar of everyone in his high school. When Greg first begins to spend time with Rachel, he feels compelled to talk all the time and tries hard to make her laugh; as time goes on, he becomes slightly more comfortable with silence. Before Rachel dies, she extracts a promise from Greg that he will apply to film school, rather than attend the local university as a default, though his grades have fallen so much that he may not have that option, either. The novel is Greg’s extended letter to the admissions office trying to explain what happened.

Andrews has created main characters who defy stereotyping. Greg is a comedian who’d rather not be noticed. Earl has a heartbreaking home life, but loves watching and making art films with Greg. Rachel refuses to let other people turn her into the stereotype of a sick girl, a role that is sometimes sentimentalized in young adult novels. Note that the narrator is Jewish, as the reader learns when he mentions that he went to Hebrew school, but this is not a “Jewish book”. There is no Jewish content, and if he hadn’t met Rachel in Hebrew school, it probably wouldn’t have been mentioned at all. The language and sexual discussions are so crude, frequent, and graphic that it might not be appropriate for high school and public libraries—and certainly not for day school or synagogue libraries.

Marci Lavine Bloch, D&R International, Silver Spring, MD


One morning Hannah, a Jewish girl living in the 21st century, travels back in time to 1912 where she meets Abigail, another Jewish nine-year-old. Abigail is visiting her aunt Rose as she does every summer. Aunt Rose, as described by Abigail, is a feminist college professor active in causes such as women’s suffrage, racial equality, workers’ rights, and women’s rights. Rose is the only well-developed character. Aunt Rose’s Jewish observance is slightly confusing. She believes that a Jewish practice or holiday is worth supporting if it matches two criteria: Is it in the Torah and the Rabbis’ commentary, and is it good for women and other people? Abigail and Hannah spend one Sabbath together talking. Their conversation touches on important topics and differences in life in 1912 and the 21st century, but the topics are not fully explained. Yaldah Publishing is now Yotseret Publishing to differentiate the publisher from Yaldah Magazine to which it is not connected. Not recommended.

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

In 1811 London, Rebecca Lyon is a young Jewess with a lively imagination and aspirations of becoming a writer like her idol, Mrs. Ann Radcliffe. When Rebecca visits her good friend Harriet Franks, her experiences provide fodder for her next story. The Franks and their guest go to an art emporium for a demonstration of a recent invention—gas lighting. When Mrs. Franks faints, most assume it is because she inhaled fumes. But when Rebecca spots a print of a Rembrandt depicting a young lady wearing a ruby ring like Mrs. Franks’, and she sees a man with a scar slinking in the shadows, the story gets more complicated. Miss Lyon also suspects the Franks’ French maid. Mr. Franks is accused of spying. Ezra Melamed is on the case, but the situation worsens as Mr. Franks is accused of smuggling French silks. Through a series of twists and turns, it becomes clear that Mr. Moody, the assistant in Mr. Franks’ tailor shop, is in cahoots with Colonel Sinclair, who wished to discredit Mr. Franks in order to win the charter for his gas lighting company. The Prince Regent himself is responsible for bringing in the French silks (for his lavish wardrobe), and the man with the scar and the French maid turn out to be Mrs. Franks’ brother and sister-in-law. With the case solved and the family reunited, the Jewish community of London celebrates an especially festive Purim.

The first *Ezra Melamed Mystery* (Zahav Press, 2009) introduced the characters and the style of writing. This one delves into the historical period, successfully depicting the combination of fear and disdain for the French. There is a lot of build-up and detail of ancillary characters, often red herrings. The case is rather simply solved when handwriting samples are compared. While the first book was somewhat novel, the second does not have the same charm. It is still a good choice for teen mystery fans, and it is recommended for all Jewish libraries.

Kathe Pinchuck, Montclair Public Library, Montclair, NJ


In 1912 Portland, Oregon, fifteen-year-old Miriam Josefsohn has her future figured out. Finished with high school, she is determined to work in her father’s printing business. But her German immigrant father refuses to give her more than one day a week in the shop and her mother is busy planning a matchmaking trip to New York City. Miriam wants to plan her own life. She is drawn to a strange woman named Serakh, who sets her on a course of religious discovery, sparked by the magical powers of a family heirloom prayer shawl and its blue thread that transport her to Biblical times. Buoyed by the power of these Biblical women, Miriam befriends the new millinery shop owners, who introduce her to women’s suffrage. With the family still reeling from the unexpected death of her brother, Miriam grapples with directions she feels she must take, even if that means separation from her family.

Debut novelist Ruth Tenzer Feldman, a seasoned nonfiction writer, knows her way around archives and her meticulous research for this book serves her well. Use of a family heirloom prayer shawl as an endowed object gives Miriam the means to reconnect to her Jewish heritage, downplayed by her father, who wants to assimilate. Those sections of the novel with elements of time travel are filled with more energy than in the mainstream story. Miriam’s well-written interior dialogue in terms of typography lets the reader know she is serious about working in the print shop. The book suffers from the “kitchen sink” syndrome—too many subplots at the expense of deeper characterization. Miriam’s final argument with her father gives the impression that it is just a ruse to lead to a sequel. If Miriam had somehow been able to work things out with him, that would have given both the opportunity for growth and transformation. Recommended particularly for girls ages twelve to fourteen.

Barbara Krasner, Member, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee, Somerset, NJ


Desperate to help his debt-ridden large family in 1870 Prussian Poland, Leo ventures to the local baron for work. After defying the nobleman’s son, he is on the run and can never go home again. He sets off on a journey to eventually get to America, learning the hard way whom to trust and on whom he can depend for kindness as he sleeps in the streets, steals food, and fights off greedy soldiers. The narrative moves along at a quick clip and keeps readers engaged, helped along with brief chapters. Leo meets several interesting people during his journey, most notably Tomasz, who didn’t know for most of his life that he was Jewish. As a Jewish character,
Tomasz is nicely drawn as are Rabbi Zohn and his wife. The anti-Semitism they faced appears true to the times. The friendship between Leo and Tomasz has emotional resonance. The same could be said of the relationship between Leo and the dog, Bel. While well researched, some details of the book are inaccurate. For instance, Tomasz’s corpse was dressed in clothes and shrouded. The erection of his headstone happened quickly, well before a year had passed. Kaiser Wilhelm I is referred to as king when the title of emperor is more appropriate. Also, geographic direction confuses. The characters referred to going down to Danzig, when Danzig was actually to the north. At times, the narration and Leo seemed more adult than kid-friendly. It was difficult to pin down Leo’s age. The research showed in the dialogue, which could have been smoother. The book will appeal to boys and anyone interested in 19th century central European history. While the book targets grades four and up, the language and situations are better suited to grades six and up.

Barbara Krasner, Member, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee, Somerset, NJ


Sami’s sister Maya loves Camp Cedar Lake, and she is positive Sami will, too. But Sami just knows that she isn’t a sleepaway camp kind of kid. She has even written songs about how much she doesn’t want to go to camp, even for the short session she’s signed up to attend. Her parents tell her that she will have a wonderful time, and they urge her to keep an open mind. Making things even worse is the fact that Sami’s annoying cousin Daniel will also be at camp for the first time.

Jenny Meyerhoff gives readers a wonderfully appealing protagonist, letting them discover the fun of camp along with Sami and her bunkmates. In their few days at camp, they get to sample lots of fun activities, enjoy the special experience of a camp Shabbat, and make new friends faster than they thought possible. Sami even gets to help Daniel, who was so confident about his goals for camp before they went, learn to enjoy himself more. By the time the kids head home, Sami and Daniel are both excited about the prospect of returning to camp for a longer session the next summer. Highly recommended, especially for libraries serving children thinking about attending overnight camp for the first time.

Marci Lavine Bloch, D&R International and past member of the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee, Silver Spring, MD


This novel-in-verse begins in the summer of 1936 in Baltimore, just before our protagonist Edith enters the sixth grade, and follows her through a tumultuous year of births, deaths, Jewish holidays, revelations and rewards. From the first poem, we share her struggle to find her place in a big family in which she is “squeezed / between / two / brothers.” We feel her pain. One of twelve children, her identity seems unformed, her future bleak. Her distant father, her overwhelmed mother (“Mom’s looking right at me / fumbling for my name / Marian, Sylvia, Mildred, Annette, / I mean Edith”), and her hyper-critical bubbe (grandmother) (who “runs her finger across the top / of the china cabinet / that we couldn’t even reach, / just to show us the dust / we’ve left behind”) don’t offer any solace.

She envies her brother Lenny with his two broken legs for the attention he gets (“and the nurses are fluffing up his pillows / and bringing him grape soda all the time”), and her cousin Sonny who doesn’t have to share the bathtub with anyone. Often charged with the care of her younger siblings, Edith enjoys her reputation as a good little mother, until one day she slaps her younger sister so hard in the face, her hand leaves a print. Edith scraps her little mother identity, and one can’t help a moment of sadness for both girls.

Luckily for Edith, Miss Connelly, her teacher, takes a special interest in the lost girl, gently guiding her to discover her true gifts and value. Through Edith’s travails, and there are many, Ms. Connelly encourages her to go to college to be a teacher—an amazing dream for a poor, Jewish Depression-era family. The penultimate poem, “Awards Day, June 2, 1937” brings us onstage with Edith as she sees her entire family waving at her from the back of the auditorium “like a mirage— / Mom, both my bubbes, Aunt Ruth / Sylvia, Daniel, Marian all the rest / of my brother and sisters / Even / my father.” In the end, Edith knows that she is on her way to being “so much more than plain Edith who’s number four.”

We learn in the author’s afterword that Edith is based on Rosenthal’s mother, who became the only girl in
her family to earn a college degree. Rosenthal also includes family photos of the cast of characters we have come to love. A great book for tween girls.

Charna Gross, MLIS, School Librarian at Sinai Akiba Academy, Los Angeles, CA


Justin Goldblatt, a sophomore in high school, suffers from typical teenage angst. He longs to be popular and date Chuck Jansen, the quarterback. In an effort to accomplish these goals, Justin agrees to take part in a scheme. He publicly pretends to date Chuck’s girlfriend, Becky Phillips. Since Becky’s dad does not approve of Chuck but likes Justin, Becky can secretly spend time with Chuck. Justin’s best friend Spencer, who also happens to be gay, does not approve of the deception. Ultimately, Justin realizes that Chuck is not that great and that he has feelings for Spencer. Instead of focusing on Justin’s sexual preference, the author develops Justin as a character with emotions that most teenagers can identify. The story is enjoyable and teaches some valuable lessons about being true to oneself. However, the only Jewish part of the book is the mention that Justin and Becky are Jewish. Therefore, this book is recommended for general libraries, but not a necessary purchase for Jewish libraries.

Heather Lenson, Librarian of the Ratner Media & Technology Center, Jewish Education Center of Cleveland, and editor of the Jewish Valuesfinder, Cleveland, OH


In Berlin 1918, sixteen-year-old Moritz Schmidt is weary of war. The son of a fallen war hero, he finds refuge as a budding journalist for the *Berlin Daily*. His older brother risks his life in the trenches and his mother is a vocal part of a socialist movement to end the monarchy. On the way to visiting his wounded brother, he meets Rebecca Cohen and falls in love. He is taunted by his brother’s friends to join them in stealing food for their families. With food scarce, his mother running from the law, his brother maimed for life, his father dead, what price does his family have to pay for war? The national sentiment sweeping a war-torn Germany is a unique and interesting backdrop that adds context to historical facts. Moritz Schmidt is a well-drawn character and his scenes with his cynical older brother, Hans, reflect the emotional conflict of a family divided by war. However, the Jewish characters are one-dimensional and stereotypical. With all the choices of German Jewish surnames available, Cohen seems a poor one. The plot is riddled with coincidence. But in her narrative, Schröder sets up the contextual foundation for the Holocaust to come. Recommended for general libraries; Jewish libraries may find the Jewish content slight and unappealing.

Barbara Krasner, Member, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee, Somerset, NJ


This collection of true stories written by children is well written and engaging. It presents situations in which children face dilemmas that need to be solved speedily. These kids face real emergencies and it is their sense of values and experience that inform the actions they choose to take. This book could be a useful tool to spark discussions of various mitzvot and values in the classroom. It could be used as either a trigger or as a summation device. For example, “Until 120” is about a young girl who goes to visit an elderly woman in a nearby nursing home and how her difficult first visit turns into a life-changing experience for both the girl and the woman. The story takes into consideration many details in a clear and exciting way. In the right setting, this book could lead to in-depth, serious discussions and allow students to see value in their own experiences. Recommended for both classroom and library collections.

Marion M. Stein, retired from The Abraham Heschel High School, Brooklyn, NY and past president of AJL-NYMA


Isabel de Cardosa is the pampered, only child of Enrique de Cardosa, physician of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella in 1491 Toledo, Spain. She is raised in the Catholic faith. Isabel’s carefree life gets disrupted when Enrique betroths her to a cruel young man, Luis de Carrera. Isabel does not understand why her father continually stresses that Luis is “from an Old Christian family” that will protect her from the Inquisition. Finally,
Isabel’s parents confess that they are *conversos*. Their grandparents were Jewish who were forcibly converted to Christianity. Furthermore, Isabel’s parents still practice Jewish traditions secretly. Enrique shows Isabel one piece of protection against the Inquisition—a letter proving that Grand Inquisitor Tomas de Torquemada has Jewish blood. While Isabel is shocked about her true identity and distressed about marrying Luis, she befriends Yonah, a Jewish blacksmith’s son. Isabel’s courage is tested when Enrique is arrested. Isabel bravely visits Torquemada and shows him the proof of his Jewish blood. Enrique is released temporarily. However, he realizes that his family is in great danger along with the other Jewish people in Spain who are being expelled. Along with Yonah and his father, Isabel’s family escapes Spain en route to Morocco.

Unlike Eva Wiseman’s book *Kanada*, this title does not contain graphic violence. The narrative is told from a unique perspective, a Jewish girl who believes she is Catholic. Readers will empathize with her when she discovers that she is vulnerable to the cruel treatment meted out to the Jewish people. Another interesting twist is the reference to Tomas de Torquemada’s Jewish blood. The only downside of the story is that all the Jewish characters are portrayed as flawless. Yonah is bright, kind, and handsome. Enrique de Cardosa, Yonah’s father, and Isabel treat their slaves more kindly than do their Christian neighbors. Recommended for all libraries.

Heather Lenson, Librarian at the Jewish Education Center of Cleveland’s Ratner Media & Technology Center (RMC), Cleveland, OH

[Editor’s Note: Eva Wiseman’s novel, *Puppet*, is now available in paperback (Toronto: Tundra, March 2012). See Linda R. Silver’s review in the AJL Newsletter, February/March 2009, for a review of this book.]

**FOLKLORE**


Storytellers Schram and Davis team up to tell a tale about how unfulfilled wishes can make one dissatisfied with one’s lot in life. Way down on the forest floor, a little apple tree looks up at the night sky and sees stars which, from its viewpoint, seem to be hanging off the branches of the tall oak trees surrounding it. Tapping into the universal desire to fit in and be like those around it, the apple tree cries out to God to give it stars, too, for only then will it feel special. God reminds the little tree of its own unique gifts which manifest themselves with the turn of every season: having fragrant blossoms, being a resting place for birds, offering shade for nature lovers, and, by autumn, bearing beautiful apples. Even after hearing these gentle reminders, the apple tree remains adamant in its desire for stars. Only then does God show the little arboreal dreamer that it possessed all along the object of its heart’s desire. Lee uses a palette of greens, browns, blues, and reds in her watercolor illustrations to bring this nature story to life. A simple emoticon-type smile makes up the little apple tree’s primary expression. This story was previously published in the anthology *Chosen Tales: Stories Told by Jewish Storytellers* edited by Peninnah Schram. A version of the story was also included in *Apples and Pomegranates* by Rahel Musleah. Recommended.

Allison Marks, Temple Israel Library, Akron, OH

**GOD AND PRAYER**


The latest addition to the Artscroll series opens from the left and includes 30 berachos (blessings) divided into the following three categories: before and after we eat, when we do mitzvos (commandments), and to acknowledge God’s wonders and generosity. The appropriate blessing, in both Hebrew and English, is found at the top of each page, which is colorfully illustrated with children involved in activities—picking fruits and vegetables, putting on *tzitzis*, or watching a thunderstorm. At the bottom of each page are several boxes: “Did You Know?”, “A Closer Look”, and examples of foods upon which each blessing is made. The entire Grace after Meals is included, as well as the After Blessings for specific foods. The mitzvos for which blessings are said include ritual hand washing, learning Torah, putting on *tzitzis*, attaching a mezuzah to the doorpost, *lulav* and *etrog*, lighting candles, and lighting Chanukah candles. The final section includes some of the common blessings of “gratitude and praise”: the prayer said after going to the bathroom; the *Shehecheyanu* blessing on new items or
the first day of a holiday; weather events like lightning, thunder, and rainbows; and things like seeing the ocean or a Torah scholar. An introduction by Mesorah general editor, Nosson Scherman, answers the question, “Why do we need to say berachos?”

This is definitely a book for Orthodox readers. All the boys are wearing kippot, and their tzitis are visible. Boys and girls eat at separate tables in the same illustration, but most illustrations are either of boys or girls. There is no glossary, and no transliteration for those who need help with the Hebrew. The most instructive page is the one that includes a blessing upon hearing good news and a blessing upon hearing bad news. The note on the page explains why the blessing on bad news is recited. The author and illustrator team have produced many books for Artscroll (Siddur, Psalms, storybooks). This book is highly recommended for Orthodox readers aged three to eight. It may also be a useful resource for non-Orthodox teachers and parents.

Kathe Pinchuck, Montclair Public Library, Montclair, NJ


My First Brachos Board Book consists of brachos (blessings) recited when eating different kinds of food and drink. On the opening page, we see foods in the bread family that require the hamotzi bracha. On the facing page is a photograph of a cute toddler eating a bagel. At the top of the page is the bracha written in Hebrew and on the bottom is the transliteration of the Hebrew. The rest of the book follows this format. The last two pages show a food from each category and ask the reader which bracha is appropriate. The book provides an easy way for toddlers to review brachos they have learned. The pictures of the various foods are large, colorful, appetizing and appealing. Children will be able to relate to the smiling, sweet toddlers in the accompanying photographs. Recommended for synagogue and school libraries.

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


A new lovely book for young children addresses the issue of hakarat hatov, the quality of gratitude. Children are grateful in the text for the food they eat, for their family, for their body’s capabilities, their home, and for the beauty and pleasures of nature. The story is told in age-appropriate rhyme, with illustrations for each item that children are grateful for. The unusual component is that this is an “I-can-draw keepsake book”. On a framed blank page opposite each illustrated page of text, the reader can think about his or her personal blessing and draw pictures to illustrate them. Helpful suggestions for pictures to be drawn are on each page. Washable markers are recommended. The story is told from an Orthodox perspective, with illustrations also reflecting an Orthodox lifestyle. Little boys all wear kippot, while their mothers dress modestly in long skirts. A glossary of Hebrew words in the book follows the text. The coloring book aspect makes it difficult to recommend as a library purchase, but it can certainly be used as a read-aloud and discussion trigger without doing any drawing.

Shelly Feit, Moriah School Library, Englewood, NJ

HOLOCAUST AND WORLD WAR II


Our shelves are full of books about the Holocaust, both its tragedy and its heroism. Lila Perl, author of Four Perfect Pebbles, has combined them in this volume. Her new book provides two perspectives on the Shoah. On one side, Perl provides an extended and powerful explanation of life at Auschwitz, including quite vivid discussions of the process of the death camp and its many horrors. She vividly discusses the arrivals, the de-humanization of the thousands of Jews and others, their deaths, dismemberment, and disintegration in the crematoria. The other story features two young men, Rudolf Vrba and Alfred Wetzler. In April of 1944, the two hid under a wood pile at the edge of Auschwitz for three days before escaping. After several harrowing days they arrived in Hungary, where they were among the first escapees to tell about the death camp and its horrors. It was one of the first complete accounts of the horrors to reach the West.
This book is part of a new series that recounts several other tragic moments, including the Irish Potato Famine and the Underground Railroad. It is meant, apparently, to demonstrate people’s will to survive. At the same time, it shows the situations that lead them to wish to escape. Within that context, the book serves an important purpose. It also succeeds in painting a graphic picture of life and death in the camps—those who entered the gas chambers and those prisoners who survived. Finally, it tells the almost-forgotten story of Vrba & Wetzler, whose heroism gave us first-hand information. It is appropriate for fourth to sixth grade students who have previously been exposed to the Shoah.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA

JEWISH LIFE AND VALUES


Children at summer camp Knish are in the art room, trying to decide what to create from a big ball of clay. One wants to make a mezuzah out of it, while another decides to make it into a dreidel. The ball of clay makes a break for it, spinning out of the room and onto the camp lawn, where another camper almost captures it to make into a menorah. Campers picking vegetables for Shabbat want to make it into a Kiddush cup; the rabbi wants to make it into a yad for reading Torah. The ball of clay continues its journey, finally disappearing into the lake. Children are portrayed as being happy at camp and participating in healthy activities.

The reader immediately recognizes this tale as a cousin of The Gingerbread Man, with lots of Jewish content. Very humorous, brightly colored illustrations, which spread across two pages and are done in paper, photographs, and colored pencils, are the perfect accompaniment for the whimsical language of the text. This is a lovely picture book, selected for the PJ Library, and is recommended as a read-to for young children.

Shelly Feit, Moriah School Library, Englewood, NJ

Same title, different view:

The kids at Camp Knish are in for a surprise when the ball of clay they hope to mold into Jewish objects bounces off the table. It rolls out of the craft cabin and into the dance circle. It continues on its journey through the camp garden and into a soccer game. There it is inadvertently kicked, and it lands on the banks of Camp Knish Lake. When Tali Nudgeblatt finally catches up with it, it dives into the lake and is never seen again.

Stories have had great success with these elements: a funny name (Rumpelstiltskin), an object that runs away (Gingerbread Man), and adventures at camp. But, all three of these elements together make this book a little too contrived. Campers include Mira Farfelbottom, Mose Plotznik, Lewis Noshstein and Violet Shtickler, with Rabbi Shmaltzbaum playing goalie in soccer. Besides talking clay, one must stretch one’s imagination in other ways. When everyone sees clay, they immediately think of making a mezuzah, a dreidel, a menorah, a Kiddush cup, or a yad. Most will be glad when the clay drops into the lake. Unlike the gingerbread man, “clay” has no refrain when encountering the kids, and is quite snarky. And it neither tricks nor is tricked when it meets its demise. The colorful illustrations amplify the tone of the book, with a larger-than-life clay ball on the first page, and double page expanses of greenery as the ball of clay makes its journey. The ball of clay is depicted with a smirk in all the pictures. The signs around the camp are written in Hebrew and English, and one boy and the rabbi are wearing kippot. For funny names and Jewish camp, opt for Picnic at Camp Shalom (Kar-Ben, 2011) for more substance. If your four to seven-year-old patrons revel in silliness, it is a solid optional purchase.

Kathe Pinchuck, Montclair Public Library, Montclair, NJ


The publisher makes a number of puzzling claims within the front flap of this straightforward book about a nice family enjoying a camping trip. In fact, the anonymous flap writer certainly promises a more “Jewish” book than this one turns out to be. Yes, the parents of young children take them out into nature and plant trees, but nowhere in the actual text are we led to understand that this act is done as an offering of thanks for all they have received” or even for the purposes of a certain Jewish holiday having to do with tree planting. In fact, why mention the words “tikkun olam” (repairing the world) on the flap when the book makes no mention of this concept? And is the simplistic rhyming text in the book really a “lilting poem” of beauty, as promised? It
certainly has some moments, but when a line in thrown in about having to stop the car “so I could pee”, it sort of loses the mood. In one instance, the rhyme is so clumsily constructed that readers are led to believe that the family had actually left the lights on the entire weekend they were away. (“And though the day was done and gone, somehow the lights were all still on.”)

But the true pleasures of this book are the bright and engaging illustrations that will delight young children. This title has already been selected for inclusion in the PJ Library, so perhaps Jewish children reading it will enjoy picking out the various Jewish symbols within the marvelous artwork. They will quickly figure out that this family is Jewish upon noticing images such as a tzedakah box, a little girl’s Mogen David necklace, and a living room menorah. An informative author’s note would have elevated the Jewish content within the text had someone considered adding one. If there had been more thought to include Jewish terms or ideas as the flap implied, this book could have been enjoyed not only at Tu B’shvat but for a variety of Jewish purposes. As published, it represents another PJ Library title light on Judaism, heavy on universality.

Lisa Silverman, Library Director, Sinai Temple Library, Los Angeles


While we in North America can be justifiably proud of our wide range of wonderful books for children, our large output tends to blind us to interesting books from other countries. It is therefore valuable to discover how the rest of the world’s Jews view themselves and their Judaism. These three volumes from a Hungarian press demonstrate both the similarities and differences that exist today.

Becca’s Family Photos shows life for Hungarian Jews today from a six-year old’s perspective. She tells about her family and their lives. They have a mezuzah, pray the Sh’ma, and celebrate the festivals (Shabbat, Hanukkah, Purim), but there is no synagogue mentioned. One side of the family celebrates Christmas as well as Hanukkah.

Hebrew Songs for Jewish Holidays contains the text of 41 holiday songs in transliterated Hebrew from throughout the liturgical year. Some of them are well-known; others will be new to American audiences. The words are overlaid on colorful paintings, representing the spirit and symbols of each festival. In addition to the songs, there is commentary at the bottom of the pages briefly discussing the history and meaning of the holiday. Most of these short essays conclude with questions that will engage young people and their elders both in Jewish and general ways. (“Has a miracle ever happened to you?” or “What sort of a person do you think Moses was?”) A music CD is included in the back of the book.

What Does it Mean to be Jewish? is a short volume that contains fifteen questions and answers covering a multitude of issues about Jewish life and beliefs. The topics include: “What is a Jew?”, “What makes somebody Jewish?” and “Bible Stories: True or Fairy Tale?” Each double-page spread includes a simple discussion of the subject with drawings and follow-up questions for further exploration. While the questions are important, the responses reflect a distinctly non-observant attitude by the author (and by extension, an adult reader).

On one level, these books reflect the joy of Judaism as it is practiced in Europe today. Most of the drawings demonstrate Jewish life for young children (including a scene of the family visiting a cemetery in Becca’s Family Photos). The illustrations are simple, but evocative, using colors effectively. On the other hand, the images are of a non-observant lifestyle (probably reflective of today’s Hungary). The text is dismissive toward serious observance in Becca’s Family Photos and in What Does it Mean to be Jewish? — values that may not be consistent with those of most synagogues and day schools in North America. Hebrew Songs for Jewish Holidays may be useful in some settings though there is no Hebrew text — only transliteration and translation. Despite our desire to expose readers to the diversity of contemporary world Jewry, all three of these books raise questions about Jewish identity and observance that many parents (and even teachers) in North America do not feel compelled to address with a preschool audience.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA

[Editor’s note: The above three books are not readily available in North America. The publisher’s website has an English interface at http://saman.fszek.hu/WebPac/CorvinaWeb]
NON-FICTION


In the book of Exodus (25:8), God commands: “they shall make a Sanctuary for Me.” The standards of this endeavor were exacting, with specific details for vessels, measurements, and materials. This volume is an outgrowth of an interactive CD that enables viewers to literally walk through the Tabernacle and around the vessels. Beginning with the Ark, each page starts with the biblical verse that describes the item. It is followed by Rashi’s commentary, as well as some Talmudic discussion. The item is illustrated with intricate detail and shown at different angles. Of particular note are the wings of the Cherubim, the ornaments and branches of the Menorah, and the textiles. The layout, with the use of vibrant color, different fonts in various sizes and colors, makes the material easily accessible and fascinating. It includes a timeline of the building and consecration of the Mishkan, as well as descriptions of the materials and measurements used. An invaluable resource for all ages, this book is very highly recommended for all Jewish libraries.

*Kathe Pinchuck, Montclair Public Library, Montclair, NJ*


This well written, well-illustrated picture book presents a problem: how to use it. Geared to elementary readers, the title and content showcase well known athletes. Beware! This is not a sports book nor a biography, but a book about hate, specifically racism and anti-Semitism. The book spotlights a famous incident to prove getting along makes the world a better place: the 1947 baseball game when African-American batter Jackie Robinson collides with Jewish first baseman Hank Greenberg. The fans roar for them to fight and call them names. The next time Robinson lands on first base, Greenberg tells him to ignore angry shouts. Both victims of hate because of race or religion, they become friends. Their actions on and off the field are heroic for their teams and for humanity. The smartly organized text builds to the collision by noting the distance between the two men during parallel life events, first in miles, then feet, then pow! The author uses words carefully. The pictures deliver the feel of long ago. The colors in the art are muted; faces are serious and stern befitting the fine story they support with excellence.

The book is historically and morally honest. Yet the question arises: Would you offer it to a young reader? Although it is set in the past, the story discusses a current problem. It removes, distances, and tosses unaware readers into a threatening topic. Most of us do not teach anti-Semitism to picture book readers. There is no intention to sweep an ugly reality out of sight or put our children’s heads in the sand. Certain topics have an appropriate age for introduction. The volume promises comfort to a child victimized by a racial or religious slur or explanation to one who hears about such an incident on the news. It is an outstanding addition to a parenting shelf about unhappy issues to which our children are vulnerable. Highly recommended when the situation arises for these young readers.

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


The title refers to a quote from the 1890 book, *How the Other Half Lives* by famed social photographer Jacob Riis. In this well-researched glossy book, Marrin builds the narrative progression to the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire that claimed many young lives, including those of Jewish immigrants, and its legacy. Marrin begins with the end in mind in a brief introduction and then discusses mass immigration, mostly from Eastern Europe and Italy, who became the cheap labor American factories relied on and who lived in tenement conditions in New York City. He meanders into the Yiddish theater and other pastimes but then returns to focus with the rise of the sweatshop and the clothing industry unions. Finally, at about three-fifths into the book, we get to the Triangle fire. Two chapters deal exclusively with the fire and its aftermath. Fifteen pages are dedicated to back matter.

However, if there is such a thing as over conceptualizing, Marrin has achieved it. There is a slow build-up to the actual fire. I wonder what veteran kids’ nonfiction authors such as Jim Murphy or Russell Freedman might have done with this subject matter. While the book is clearly well researched, with photographs that add tremendous depth to the content, it is not the type of narrative read from cover to cover. This is more book
Barbara Krasner, Member, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee, New Jersey


A few gifted people are both exceptional artists and writers—Eric Carle, Maurice Sendak, and Marie-Louise Gay come to mind. However, most writers for children are wise enough to leave illustrations to the experts; most illustrators trust writers to convey their meaning through sparkling prose. Andrea Stillwater’s paintings of synagogues destroyed during the Holocaust—from Latvia to Italy, from France to Poland—are detailed, superbly rendered, lustrous. Each double-page spread is devoted to one synagogue. However, Strongwater’s writing leaves much to be desired. The prose is lackluster; the facts are presented out of chronological order and would confuse a young reader.

What’s the age level? The book can’t seem to decide. The front matter, which should have been placed in the back, includes a note from the artist and an essay, “Why this book?” by Stephen M. Goldman, Executive Director of the Holocaust Memorial Center in Detroit. They both contain overly dense text, appropriate for high school students. Turn the page and the large non-serif font presents a startling contrast. A number of spelling and punctuation errors, as well as inconsistencies of style, mar the telling. The author provides no references, such as sources used, places visited, or websites. Other books on this topic, like Neil Folberg’s And I Shall Dwell Among Them (2002) or Samuel Gruber’s Synagogues (1999) would be more useful to the student doing a research project. An optional purchase for a library specializing in Jewish architecture or Holocaust studies.

Anne Dublin, author of The Baby Experiment, Toronto, Canada

PICTURE BOOKS


This book is a beautiful contemporary Israeli life story. It portrays basic Jewish, and hopefully universal, values. It is about human relationships. The principal character is an eight-year-old boy named Itamar. The cute little boy is an enthusiastic soccer player who lives in a settlement and travels with his sister to visit his cousins in the big city. Itamar plans to play soccer with his cousins and he brings along his soccer ball on the trip. Problems start when he forgets his soccer ball in the park, where he confronts other boys in a threatening situation. The illustrations are colorful, expressive (all the boys are wearing kippot; the girls, skirts) and lively.

Itamar Makes Friends depicts how people should treat each other with kindness and civility in all situations. This picture book is a model for ve-ahavta le-re’akha kamokha (You shall love your fellow as yourself), Leviticus 19:18. In a note to parents at the end of the book, Josh Hasten reveals how he chose the name “Itamar” for his main protagonist. Itamar is the name of the settlement in the West Bank where the Fogel family was murdered by terrorists in March 2011. This book demonstrates that, in spite of differences, “All the house of Israel are brothers”. Recommended for home, school, synagogue, and public libraries.

Nira Wolfe, Highland Park, IL

Same title, different view:

Itamar is an eight-year-old Jewish boy who lives in an unnamed settlement in Israel. When he visits his cousins in the city he marvels at the tall buildings, the cars, and people. Right before he boards the bus to return home, he realizes that he left his soccer ball behind. When he returns to the soccer field, three “city boys” are playing with his ball. Despite his pleas, they refuse to return it taunting: “You are different from us, and you don’t belong here.” When Itamar falls and scrapes his knee the boys suddenly have a change of heart and quickly apologize for their behavior. Itamar invites them to visit him at his yishuv (settlement). Of course, they do and everything ends happily with all of the boys learning that they have more in common than they originally thought. A note to parents is appended explaining that one of the greatest threats to the Jewish people is sin’at chinam (baseless hatred) between fellow Jews. The unsophisticated, pedantic writing paired with amateur, lifeless, unattractive illustrations make this book boring, uninspiring, and contrived. Furthermore, there is a political subtext that is
completely ignored. Readers looking for books about overcoming differences, making new friends and “Jewish Brotherhood” have plenty of better options making this an unnecessary purchase for most libraries.

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

[Editor’s note: in his note to parents, the author originally refers to Itamar as a “yishuv in Israel”, while it is actually an illegal Hitnahlut (settlement) in the West Bank. This title was translated into Hebrew as “Itamar rokhes yedidim hadashim” and can be purchased from Gefen Publishing House at http://www.gefenpublishing.com/product.asp?productid=1003]


Written in graphic novel format, Laundry Day explores the teeming streets of what appears to be (to this reader) the lower east side of Manhattan in the early 1900s. A small unnamed shoeshine boy finds a scarf that has fallen from someone’s clothesline. He attempts to find the owner by asking the people who live in the tenements if the scarf is theirs. Immigrants of diverse backgrounds and countries live in the tenement building. Each one is kind to the boy and greets him in his or her native language. One of the people he asks is a rabbi whose wife gives the boy a bowl of chicken soup with matzo balls. Finally he finds the scarf’s owner, a Jamaican woman who wears the scarf tied around her head. Several pages do not have any text. They are wonderful full-page color illustrations or graphic novel style boxes which beautifully depict the hustle and bustle of the neighborhood. Although a rabbi happens to be one of the people living in the tenement, and the story could illustrate the mitzvah of hashavas aveidah (returning lost objects), there is not enough specific Jewish content to identify the book as a Jewish book. A glossary on the last page translates the foreign words.

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

SHABBAT AND HOLIDAYS


This book, produced for the PJ Library, is a brightly illustrated copy of the famous Hanukkah song written with very young children in mind. Each double-page spread contains one line from the song. The text is the American version of the familiar Hanukkah tune. Illustrations are brightly colored and show an extended family enjoying the holiday together. The dog, although very cute and lively, wears a kippah. The grandparents are the stereotypical old folks. Children nowadays may have trouble recognizing the old-school bubbe and zaydeh as the more modern grandparents most children have today. Unfortunately, the first picture shows the dining room table set with a large turkey while a later picture shows the family enjoying latkes with sour cream. For those who practice kashrut, this will be a problem. A nice addition is the last page which tells the history of the song with some of the original Yiddish words.

Susan Dubin, Off-the-Shelf Library Services, Las Vegas, NV


David Adler’s retelling of the story of Hanukkah is an effective way to introduce this holiday to readers in kindergarten through second grade. Bold and energetic illustrations in bright colors accented with various shades of blue will capture the attention of readers. The narrative is detailed and appropriately descriptive for the intended audience and the story would be a wonderful read aloud for religious school classes. Information is also given about how the holiday is celebrated today; a latke recipe and rules for dreidel are included. Recommended.

Aimee Lurie, The Agnon School, Beechwood, OH


Leah and the other girls in her preschool class are learning how to braid dough for challah. The other girls are able to braid the dough, but Leah cannot make a braid; so she molds her dough into a bird’s nest. Since Leah cannot make a braid, the other girls take their dough braids apart and mold their dough into other shapes. When
the challahs are baked, they come out of the oven perfectly braided. The story is a little confusing. How can strangely shaped challah dough be put in the oven and come out perfectly braided? The shiny laminated pages are beautifully illustrated. *Pat, Roll, Pull* is recommended as an alternate selection for young girls.

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


Kimmelman, known for writing Judaic children’s books featuring escaping potato latkes (*The Runaway Latkes*) and highlighting the antics of a hardworking fowl (*The Little Red Hen and the Passover Matzah*), now focuses her pen on the importance of finding quiet time with family members. Grandpa cherishes the Shabbat walks with his grandson Noah. Together, they discover nature’s wonders which, to the older man, symbolize Shabbat peace—fluttering butterflies, swimming ducks, falling leaves, a glistening spider web, the sweet taste of wild raspberries, and the quiet of falling snowflakes. Every Saturday morning, Noah pleads with his grandfather to include his rambunctious puppy, Mazel, on their nature walks. Grandpa repeatedly declines, saying he will never find Shabbat shalom (peace) with the noisy, muddy-pawed, mess-maker along. However, as the seasons change and Mazel matures, Grandpa finally relents one spring morning. While in the park, Mazel’s keen nose locates a baby bird which had fallen onto the grass. After it is placed back into its nest, both Grandpa and Noah hug the four-footed hero that saved the little bird, for in doing so the puppy restored a sense of peace to this small corner of the park. Zollars’ crisply colored illustrations in graphite and digital paint bring to life the beauty of a butterfly’s wing, the hushed stillness of falling snow, and the love a grandfather feels for his grandson. The only flaw in the book is a small typographical error—a dropped “l” in the sentence, “Grandpa nudges the fledgling onto his newspaper…” The correct word is “fledgling.” Even so, Kimmelman’s newest book will make a fine addition to any Judaic collection.

Allison Marks, Temple Israel Library, Akron, OH


Elmo is invited to Gil’s house to celebrate the first night of Hanukkah. Elmo brings some chocolate coins for dessert, which they will use to play dreidel. Elmo doesn’t know about dreidels. After the family lights the menorah, sings some Hanukkah songs, and eat latkes and applesauce for dinner, Gil and his sister Susie teach Elmo how to play. They explain what the letters mean and show Elmo how to spin the top-like toy. Elmo spins a gimmel, which means he wins all the chocolate coins, but he decides to share them with his friends. When Elmo returns home with the dreidel Gil gave him, he teaches his mother and father how to play dreidel.

Elmo fans will enjoy seeing the three-year-old red furry monster participate in a Jewish holiday. He stays true to character: polite, inquisitive, and willing to share with others. And of course, he speaks about himself in the third person: “Elmo really loves this little dreidel!” There is no explanation about the holiday, the rituals, or the significance of the dreidel, the menorah, the songs, the latkes, or the Hanukkah gelt, but these details would be distracting and probably be of little interest to the target audience. For libraries serving preschool children, *Elmo’s Little Dreidel* is a solid addition to the board book collection.

Kathe Pinchuck, Montclair Public Library, Montclair, NJ


Many books tell children about the Jewish holidays. Anna Levine, however, uses the holiday cycle to introduce young children to Israeli archeology. In this story, Jodie’s cousin Zach is visiting Jerusalem during Passover. She suggests that they visit Hezekiah’s Tunnel, and explains why it was dug. The next day, the two of them walk through the Old City to the ancient tunnel. Below ground, Jodie explains why the air smells bad, and tells Zach that the scratches on the wall were chipped by the ancient excavators. They find the “riddle in the middle,” evidence that the diggers met precisely, without any navigational tools. They also find an old coin, which Jodie’s father packs up for his students to investigate.

While Anna Levine’s books are titled as holiday fare, there is only a single reference to Pesach here. Rather, this book (like *Jodie’s Hanukkah Dig*, 2008) is actually an introduction to archeology, a very different topic. Children should be intrigued by the questions the book raises. The series can provide them with a way to ask about the
past, as well as confidence that they too can make interesting discoveries. In this spirit, *Jodie’s Passover Adventure* is a worthwhile means to tell this age group about gathering evidence and looking (and feeling) for clues. As a holiday book, however, it is unsuccessful.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA

---


Symbols of Passover, illustrated in bright colors and clearly defined shapes, are revealed when a flap on each right-hand page is lifted. On the opposite page, we have a short explanation of the symbol—not quite a riddle but short and catchy—that challenges children to identify the symbol before they lift the flap. Along with the name of the symbol, there’s a very basic explanation of its meaning. A pillow, for example, is said to “remind everyone that the enslaved Jewish people worked hard and could not rest on pillows,” a statement in contrast with a picture of a little boy taking a snooze amidst a pile of them. Preschoolers who have learned the Passover basics are the likely audience for this book, which quizzes them about what they may already know. Its only flaw is a hackneyed pictorial style that shows people with big round heads and little googly eyes, a far cry from the imaginative art that can make picture books one of the young child’s first artistic experiences.

Linda R. Silver, Cleveland, OH

---


Izzy is an inventor. To help his mother clean the house for Passover, Izzy invents a machine called Passover McClean which swallows rooms of soiled furniture and spits out the furniture completely clean for Passover. There is a glitch in the machine which Izzy repairs. Thanks to Izzy and Passover McClean, Izzy and his parents sit down for the *seder* in a sparkling and gleaming house. Carrie Hartman’s illustrations are charming: Izzy is a wide-eyed young boy who wears large circular glasses and a multicolored baseball cap. He looks like an inventor. Passover McClean is a whimsically drawn, gray metal machine with a very large mouth. The fanciful full-page illustrations add fun and whimsy to the rhyming text. *Izzy the Whiz and Passover McClean* is recommended for synagogue and school libraries.

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

---


*Bereishis 1* (Bereishis-Toldos) 80 pp. $25.99. (9781598268256).


“Suitable for the whole family” usually means a child who can read is able to read it to himself, younger children have it read to them, and adults will find some enjoyment in reading it to children. These wonderful books truly have something for all ages in terms of reading level, taste, and format.

The volumes are brimming with content, arranged in the order of the weekly Torah portion. Each section starts with a recipe, accompanied by a clear, color photograph, that can easily be prepared by young cooks, and two quotes about preparing for and observing the Sabbath. This is followed by the traditional songs and *Kiddush* for Friday night. Next is a bulleted list of subjects in the *parashah* (weekly Torah portion) and a commentary on one of the verses. Questions about the portion range from the easier Level 1 to the more difficult Level 3, and the answers must be ascertained by holding the book up to a mirror. “Halachos & Customs We Learn from This Parashah”, “Did You Know?” and “Brainteasers” provide more thought-provoking information. A quote from the Haftarah with commentary about how it relates to the *parashah*; a story, beautifully illustrated; and a comic strip that teaches a lesson related to the Torah reading provide interesting ways to learn more about the *Sedra*. The final entry in each section includes three biographies of great rabbis. Besides the information about when they lived and why they are noteworthy, there are small maps that show where they lived.

All quotes are referenced. There is no glossary, but this should not deter non-Orthodox libraries. The recipes are excellent, and the comics do not contain Hebrew words. The “Subjects in the Parashah” will be helpful to teachers, as will the questions and stories. Besides making a thoughtful gift, these volumes are very highly recommended for all Jewish libraries and, yes, appropriate for all ages.

Kathe Pinchuck, Montclair Public Library, Montclair, NJ

Simple rhyming prose and cozy illustrations accented with sparkles capture the warmth of Hanukkah for preschoolers. This is a great book for one-on-one reading or to share with a small group. Some readers may object that the men do not appear to be wearing kippot. Recommended for libraries that serve preschoolers.

*Aimee Lurie, The Agnon School, Beechwood, OH*


The Galinskys and the Lippas, were good neighbors in their little shtetl, but as Passover approached they found themselves in a feud involving geese and chickens. They were too angry to speak, and certainly too angry to have their Passover seder together. But the Galinskys’ son, David and the Lippas’ daughter, Rachel wanted to be together at the seder. So David and Rachel go to the rabbi for help. This is the framing for an original story, which has the circuitous trickery of an authentic Jewish folktale. Part Chelm tale, part Elijah tale, this has an appealing sweet and sour ta’am (flavor).

Rough woodcut illustrations further the folkloric flavor of the tale. The book’s format is large, 10” x 8”, with 8” x 8” tinted woodcuts on each page. Underneath each illustration are several lines of text in a typeface called Weiss, which has an old fashioned look. Heavy and smooth paper is used for the pages, an important detail of beautiful picture book making. *The Elijah Door* will lend itself to storytelling in a group, or with a single child. It may also lead to exploration of the many authentic Elijah stories in Jewish tradition. Woodcuts might be another area of exploration sparked by this book. Are there enough good Passover books? Not when you find one as appealing as this. Suggested for children ages five to ten, this is a recommended purchase for synagogue and school, as well as public libraries. Parents and grandparents might consider this as an afikoman gift.

*Naomi Morse, Silver Spring, MD*

**VIDEO**

Bar-Cohn, Kerry. *Rebbetzin Tap and Friends Jewish Holiday Celebration*. DVD. 68 min. New Yor: Aderet Music, 2011. $20.00

Rebbetzin Tap is back in a second DVD for girls. This time, she is on the hunt for a “holiday apartment” for a family member who is going to be visiting her in Israel. She certainly finds one. She answers an ad to find an apartment with a different holiday behind each door. Get it? It’s a “holiday apartment!” In each room, there is a song and dance to delight young viewers including “Shake the Lulav,” “Be the Brightest Light” and “Apples and Honey.” This DVD is well filmed and decently acted and young girls will enjoy the music. There are several bonus features as well: a short tap lesson, a latke cooking demonstration and a music video. The DVD is aimed at an observant audience and a request is made that it be kept for girls and women only. All in all, this DVD is recommended.

*Debbie Feder, Director, Library Resource Center, Ida Crown Jewish Academy, Chicago, IL*
Reviews of Nonfiction Titles for Adults

EDITED BY MERRILY F. HART AND DANIEL SCHEIDE

NONFICTION


Mr. Arens, who has served as both Foreign Minister and Defense Minister of Israel, has written a history of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising that is detailed, well-argued, and compelling. He takes issue with some, including Yisrael Gutman, author of *The Jews of Warsaw*, by giving a prominent role to the Revisionist-led Żydowskie Związek Wojskowi (ZKK; Jewish Military Organization). In doing so, Mr Arens does not scant the efforts of the Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa (Jewish Fighting Organization) comprised of Zionist and non-Zionist socialists and General Zionists. The book attempts a complete history of the uprising, not a mere brief for the ZKK. There is some repetitiveness in the narrative which gives the impression that some of the chapters were originally written as separate, self-contained essays, but this is a minor flaw. Especially notable are the appendices containing translations of SS Brigadeführer Juergen Stroop’s account of the uprising. (Stoop led the forces that attacked the ghetto). This is a necessary purchase for any library with material on the uprising.

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


Fifty-four essays, with nearly as many top-notch writers, make up the bulk of this collection commenting on films with Jewish themes or characters. Each excellent essay is followed by a bibliography that provides additional readings surrounding the topic of the specific film. The book is organized according to thematic explorations and time periods, and broken into ten major areas, including such topics as “Americanization of the Jewish immigrant,” “the Holocaust and its repercussions,” “contemporary Israeli experiences,” or “contemporary American Jewish identities.” Each section groups films and their essays by similar subjects; the largest number being the Holocaust theme. The selection of movies is excellent, but in addition, there is an appendix with many alternate films for each of the ten general themes. While the volume is called “world cinema,” the term is meant to depict the global Jewish experience of the films and authors, rather than specifically “non-Hollywood” productions. While most of the films are in English or have English subtitles, many of the scholars live outside the United States, giving this work a broad perspective not found in some other film anthologies. This book can be easily used as a text for an in-depth film course, or as readings to accompany films that are shown in history or Jewish studies courses. As a whole, the book has enough various films to depict Jewish life for roughly the last century. In this, it does an excellent job. Definitely one of the best Jewish film anthologies to date. Highly recommended.

Judith S. Pinnolis, RIS Humanities Librarian, Goldfarb Library, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA


In this volume Benaim presents 84 responsa from the Ottoman Empire composed in the 16th century and includes, in addition to Hebrew, text in Judeo-Spanish. The responsa themselves are preceded by four chapters discussing the field of Judeo-Spanish studies, the role of responsa in Jewish law and how they reflect Jewish society. The author also discusses her research methods and linguistic issues. The bulk of the book is the responsa themselves, composed by thirteen rabbis. Each responsum is presented with a facsimile of the text, its transliteration, and translation into English. In many cases, though, the facsimiles are hard to read due to small font size and poor clarity of the original source. The book concludes with a bibliography, appendixes including, among others, glossaries of words of Turkish origin, Hebrew terms, details of respondents and responsa collections as well as an index. The emphasis is on methodological issues and the presentation of the texts: their transliteration and translation. Thus, this book is an important resource for linguists, social scientists, scholars of Jewish culture and law, women studies and obviously for Sephardic studies, with special reference to the Ottoman period.

Rachel Simon, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ

Yeshivat Har Etzion was the first yeshivah to include the study of Tanach in a significant way in its curriculum. Combined with their associated Herzog Teacher’s College, they sponsor a yearly conference on Tanach and publish a scholarly journal, *Megadim*. Graduates of the yeshivah and the college have greatly influenced the way the Bible is studied in the Jewish world today.

In the introductory essay, Rabbi Ezra Bick outlines the principles in the Har Etzion approach to Tanach study: understanding Tanach in its own right and not just through the lens of the classical commentators, using modern literary analysis, understanding each part of the Bible within the context of the entire work, and never losing sight of the larger religious significance of the text.

Some of the contributors, such as R. Elchanan Samet, R. Yaakov Medan and R. Yoel Bin-Nun, have made important contributions to the study of Tanach in Hebrew, but few of their works are available in English. Others, such as R. Menachem Leibtag and Rosh Yeshivah R. Aharon Lichtenstein, are well known in the United States. This volume on the book of Genesis is endlessly fascinating and is an excellent introduction to the Har Etzion approach. Highly recommended. The only caveat is that the vast majority of the essays included (and a lot more) are available on the yeshivah’s website http://www.vbm-torah.org.

Daniel Scheide, Librarian, Wimberly Library, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL; RAS Vice President, AJL; Chair, Bibliography and Reference Book Award, AJL


This volume gathers sixteen articles, all in English, by students, peers, and colleagues of Dr. Menahem Schmelzer, Professor of Medieval Literature and the Librarian of the Jewish Theological Seminary (1965-1987). The introduction announces a second Festschrift in honor of Dr. Schmelzer, a companion volume (on liturgy, Hebrew poetry and literature; booklore, Talmud, Rabbinics, and history), to be published soon, which “will reflect the entire spectrum of Schmelzer’s professional stature, research writing, and expertise.” In the volume under review, the “essays are characterized by extrapolation from close textual study to implications for worship experience or related fields of inquiry. Topics treated herein coincidentally overlap at numerous points: printing, Ashkenaz, translation issues, manuscript transmission, linguistics, the role of editors and commentators, *piyut*, Temple worship, the High Holidays, and Passover.” Includes subject and sources indexes. Recommended for academic libraries despite its price.

Roger S. Kohn, Silver Spring, MD


Arthur Ruppin (1876-1943), one of the pioneers of the pre-State Yishuv, was born in a small Polish town, studied law and became part of a largely German-Jewish Aliyah. He headed the Palestine Office, which later became the Jewish Agency, and introduced bureaucratic efficiency into a nascent economy when it was most needed, leading ultimately to the formation of a vibrant self-sustaining secular Jewish state. At the same time, Ruppin was one of the founders of a movement, Brit Shalom, which advocated negotiating with a rising Arab population.

Written as part of Bloom’s doctoral dissertation at Tel Aviv University, the book contains a great deal of information and its style seems a bit arcane. Nevertheless, much of this work should serve as a springboard for further research into how a movement that originated from Central European, non-Hebraic roots developed into a modern secular Jewish state. The author invested a great deal of archival research in writing this biography of a man who had much to do with forming a Jewish state at a time when dark shadows were looming on the horizon of the 20th century. This book, which includes a bibliography, index and many plates, belongs in university and seminary library collections.

Morton J. Merowitz, Librarian and independent scholar, Buffalo, NY
Survival and Trials of Revival
Psychodynamic Studies of Holocaust Survivors and Their Families in Israel and the Diaspora

By Hillel Klein, Edited by Alex Holder
ISBN 978-1-936235-89-6 (cloth)
$85.00 / £53.99 375 pp

“Hillel Klein, himself a Holocaust survivor, was a pioneer psychoanalyst investigator of Holocaust survivors and their families. His reconceptualization of the experience of guilt as a positive rather than a pathological emotion was a vitally important contribution that has implications far beyond the role of ‘survivor guilt.’”

-Lewis Aron, New York University

Jews in the East European Borderlands
A Festschrift in Honor of John Doyle Klier

Edited by Harriet Murav and Eugene Avrutin
$99.00 / £53.99 285 pp

“Jews in the East European Borderlands offers a dazzling cornucopia of pathbreaking scholarship on Russian Jewish history and culture. It is at once a fitting celebration of the life’s work of a pioneering scholar and a moving tribute to his enduring influence.”

-James Loeffler, University of Virginia

Development, Learning and Community
Educating for Identity in Pluralistic Jewish High Schools

By Jeffrey Kress
ISBN 978-1-934845-30-8 (cloth)
$95.00 / £44.25 250pp

“This book presents an important and realistic treatment of Jewish education. Of particular value is the recognition that the formal and informal dimensions of Jewish education cannot in practice be separated.”

-Roberta Rosenberg Farber, Yeshiva University

Wisdom’s Little Sister
Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Jewish Political Thought

By Abraham Melamed
$109.00 / £74.50 430 pp

“Abraham Melamed is one of the foremost scholars of medieval and Renaissance Jewish political thought today. Wisdom’s Little Sister brings together a fine collection of his English studies, written over three decades.”

-Steven Harvey, Bar-Ilan University

Contemporary Jewish Studies Collection is now available on BiblioRossica, a new online platform from Academic Studies Press

www.bibliorossica.com/collections

BiblioRossica is a specialized platform for academics and scholars offering expertly selected collections that are fully searchable by key words or phrases. BiblioRossica has launched a project creating unique thematic collections devoted to the most relevant areas and topics of modern humanities. Each thematic collection is a unique product that reflects the experience, research, and pedagogical work of the curator-compiler.

The Contemporary Jewish Studies Collection currently features 57 titles from Academic Studies Press’s backlist and will continually be updated with new digital publications from all of our relevant series. The collection includes the works of leading Western specialists in the areas of Jewish history, philosophy, literature, sociology, and anthropology. A special part of the collection is made up of books on Israel Studies.

This new and exciting website’s features include:

- Permanent, long-term accessibility; no expiration date for usage of the purchased collection
- Content licensed by agreements with publishers
- A search engine which allows the user to find something as large as a related group of titles and as small as a single phrase in a single book, using functions that will search for titles, authors, publishers, keywords, or thematic categories, as well as full-text search
- A new and improved online viewer that allows the reader to increase font and page size without sacrificing quality of typeface. An ebook-PDF format that allows the user to bookmark, review, and take notes on the content
- Multi-user IP access to the collection for corporate subscribers
- Capacity for a user to view, copy, download (up to 15%), and print from the ebooks in use. The structures of the ebooks are identical to those of the printed versions, for convenience in bibliographic referencing

This interesting collection of articles about Jewish ritual seeks to address the question, “...how and why do Jews repeat themselves and perform symbolic acts?” Ritual is certainly a way in which Jews define themselves, but as the book details, with several fascinating examples, ritual is also a strategy for self-perpetuation – both as a people and as a values-based religion. Bronner writes that ritual can be organized around the following four contexts: (i) liturgy and prayer, (ii) time and yearly cycle, (iii) passage and initiation and (iv) performance and practice. As an example of “liturgy and prayer” Gail Labovitz writes about the ritual and liturgical role of women and their expertise in the classic texts of Jewish law and thought. Jean Freedman discusses purimshpil (Purim plays) as an example of “time and yearly cycle” ritual. The upsherin (first haircut) traditionally given to a three-year-old boy is an example of a “passage” or “initiation” ritual. The haircut symbolizes the passage from infancy to childhood and the concomitant responsibility to begin learning the Hebrew alphabet and studying Torah. Shaul Kelner’s chapter on how the hakafot ritual practiced during the holiday of Sukkot was linked to the political movement to free Soviet Jewry is an example of the “performance and practice” of Jewish ritual that combines and even fuses disparate elements, such as the religious and the political.

Each of the chapters in this book analyzes a particular ritual from a historical, religious and sociological perspective. Regardless of whether these rituals are old or relatively new, they all seek the “continuation of culture” and an expression of a particular worldview. The book is a worthy read for anyone interested in Jewish ritual.

David Tesler, Yonkers, New York


Benjamin Brown is an academic specialist on the Israeli Ultra-Orthodox and his work on the Hazon Ish was recently published by Magnes Press. The Israeli Democracy Institute is a respected institute involved in education for democracy.

This pamphlet deals with the non-Hasidic Ashkenazi part of Israeli Ultra-Orthodox Jewry and the nature of its leadership. During the last 50 or 60 years, this group has been led by one rabbi, who has been called “gedol ha-dor.” This pamphlet deals with the sources of the leader’s authority and the nature of his leadership. The notion of “papal infallibility” is foreign to Judaism, but Brown (who does not use this term) does claim Rabbi Shah’s leadership approached this situation. However, his successor Rabbi Elyashiv, was less assertive. The pamphlet concludes with a discussion of the future of this group, asking whether the trend towards democratization will continue.

We are dealing with a relatively small group and it would be logical to ask why the research was published. First, this is a group which is growing and changing and their politicians wield considerable influence in Israeli coalition governments. Second, a large proportion of the group study in Talmudic seminaries rather than working or serving in the army. All in all, this is a very interesting pamphlet for Hebrew speakers.

Chaim Seymour, Director, Cataloging and Classification Department, Wurzweiler Library, Bar-Ilan University, Israel


The tensions between the ultra-Orthodox and secular in Israel run so high that it is often hard to believe that there is anything in between. But as journalist Dov Elboim notes in his introduction, “The weekly portion belongs to everyone.” Knesset speaker, peace activist, author and television personality, Avrum Burg recently was the subject of great controversy with his 2008 book The Holocaust is Over. Burg interacts with the weekly parashah, and the reader, like an old friend; he is not embarrassed to praise or to point out flaws. A master conversationalist, he engages and infuriates, jokes and preaches, quotes widely from rabbinic sources as well as Hebrew and world literature. He uses his family in the same way, frequently quoting a criticism from his wife or nephew on a previous week’s derashah (sermon), and incorporating that criticism into the next week’s essay. For Burg, delving into the weekly parashah is a way to escape the here and now and explore the eternal; however, the present concerns of Israeli and Jewish society are always at the forefront. Feminism, racism, vegetarianism,
gay rights, political hubris, and religious myopia are all effortlessly woven into the narrative. No matter your religious or political orientation, Very Near to You will resonate and may even repel, but it will always force you to think and reconsider.

Daniel Scheide, Librarian, Wimberly Library, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL; RAS Vice President, AJL; Chair, Bibliography and Reference Book Award, AJL


Based on rich and diverse primary sources and studies, Campos examines the meaning of liberty, citizenship and public life among Muslims, Christians, and Jews, during the last two decades of the Ottoman period, focusing on Palestine within the broader framework of the Ottoman Empire. Following an introduction, the study includes seven chapters, conclusion, notes, bibliography and index, as well as several maps and numerous reproductions of early 20th century photographs. Among the topics examined in the book are how people interpreted the meaning of “liberty” and how they reacted to it, the extent of the feeling of “brotherhood” among the various elements of the population, and attitudes towards equality. Among other topics, Campos discusses the municipal government of Jerusalem, and social and economic organizations in the city. Also examined are Jewish attitudes towards citizenship, relations with the Arabs and the status the Jews wanted to have in Palestine. The study is very well written, combining data from various local and foreign sources with enlightened analysis. I would have preferred, though, that names of periodicals be presented in the original language followed by a translation, and referred to later in the original name, rather than as done throughout the book -- would scholarly studies about the USSR refer to the “The Truth” instead of “Pravda?” All in all, this is a very important study of a crucial period in the Ottoman Empire and Palestine. Although it focuses on Palestine, it provides broad analysis of basic issues of the time, with implications on current affairs in the 21st century.

Rachel Simon, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ


Josef Dan is the Emeritus Gershom Scholem Professor of Kabbalah in the Department of Jewish Thought at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. His website lists nearly 600 articles and 70 monographs and edited books in Hebrew, English, German and other languages. He knows from whence he speaks.

This volume of twelve essays represent a selection of previously published articles tracing the career of Gershom Scholem from bibliographer to the creator of Kabbalah Studies as a academic field in Jewish Studies. Dan’s essays remind us of the unique position of Gershom Scholem in Israeli society and academia for over 50 years from his arrival in 1923 until his death in 1982. His collection of essays, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, remains the core text for anyone interested in the academic study of the Kabbalah. Dan’s essays analyze this text and explain how it actually represents the most critical turning point in Scholem’s career as an academic researcher of the Kabbalah. Anyone who can contend with the Hebrew is highly encouraged to read these fascinating essays. Perhaps one day we will see a translation into English.

Paul Howard Hamburg, Librarian for Judaica, Yiddish and Israel Studies; Curator for Judaica at The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, CA


In this slim volume (based on his doctoral thesis) Daniel Davies examines Maimonides’ Guide for the Perplexed. Davies’ concern in his intriguing but complex book is how the Guide has been read and how it should be read. Debates revolve around perceived contradictions in Maimonides’ philosophical opinions and charges of esotericism.

Davies approaches his task through the “close reading” of “key issues” discussed in the Guide. He explains that exegesis is the author’s central concern. Maimonides set out to assist those who were troubled by the disconnection between “philosophical truth … and the apparent meaning of scripture.” In guiding these students to the underlying meaning of the text Maimonides faced a dilemma: how to convey those meanings in writing
when his potential audience included readers with different levels of education and capacity for understanding. Hence, his goal was to explain the deep meaning of texts – but in a way that is opaque to those for whom the study of scripture should be confined to its surface meaning.

Davies posits that some of the apparent contradictions are due to Maimonides’ pedagogical method and the dialectical nature of some of his discussions. He points out that Maimonides confided that he himself employed contradiction in order to teach difficult matters. In his conclusion Davies states that he does not consider his book to be comprehensive. Nevertheless, he does feel that it provides an interpretive tool by which the rest of the Guide might be approached. It is indeed a thought provoking though challenging read, most suitable for the academic library.

Randall C. Belinfante, Librarian/Archivist, American Sephardi Federation, New York

Hador: The Hebrew Annual of America

Editor: Prof. Lev Hakak

(Vol. V will appear in 2012)

Hebrew Poetry in America; Hebrew Prose in America;
Research articles – Modern Hebrew Literature;
Hebrew Language; Teaching Hebrew in America;
Jewish Thought; Reviews of New Books;
In Memory of Scholars and Authors in America.

Please contact
Hakak@humnet.ucla.edu


Dr. Fishbane explores the ideas of holiness, the connection with God, and “the transformed state of mind that is connected to physical pleasures.” The text progresses in chronological order from “Candle Lighting” and “Spiritual Preparation” through different customs (wearing white), the Kiddush, challah and meals of the Sabbath, to the other aspects of the day. Between each of the longer thematic selections are passages from the personal prayers from Breslov Chassidim authored by Rabbi Nachman’s disciple, Rabbi Natan of Nemirov. These can be used as meditations, especially the ever-relevant “As Though All My Work Is Done,” which asks for freedom from work week distractions on the Sabbath. The author draws on Degel Machaneh Efrayim, by Rabbi Moshe Chaim Efrayim of Sudilkov, and Me’or Einayim, by Rabbi Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl, both written in the 1700s. He also looks at selections from the Sefer Sfat Emes by Rabbi Yehudah Leib Alter of Ger, and the Pri Tzaddik by Rabbi Tzadok ha-Kohen of Lublin.

The words “mystical reflections” and “transformative power” should not dissuade those who may suppose
this to be a new age or “Kabbalistic” work. It is steeped in the thoughtful scholarship Dr. Fishbane has demonstrated in previous works (As Light Before Dawn, 2009), and as faculty at the Jewish Theological Seminary. The format makes the biblical, talmudic, and liturgical sources easy to identify, and the clear prose make profound ideas easily accessible. This book will indeed add another dimension to the appreciation of Sabbath.

It is very highly recommended for all Jewish libraries.

Kathe Pinchuck, Montclair Public Library, Montclair, NJ


The word targum (translation) often refers to the Aramaic translations of the Bible, which exist on every book except Daniel and Ezra. Some are almost literal and some are creative renderings of the biblical text similar to Midrash. Some were undoubtedly recited in synagogues in the early centuries of our era to help worshippers understand the Hebrew of the Torah and prophetic readings.

Targums provides an in depth and excellent introduction to the nature of the different Targumim (plural form of Targum in Hebrew). For the novice and non-specialist, I recommend reading the first section called “Getting Started,” which gives a basic understanding of the nature of Targum. Much of the material in the next section on Pentateuchal Targums may also be of interest. A reader interested in a Targum on a specific part of Prophets or Writings will want to read its appropriate chapter carefully. Others will want to skim these chapters. This important work should be in any academic library dealing with Bible or Judaica.

Jim Rosenbloom, Judaica Librarian, Brandeis University; President, Association of Jewish Libraries


As anyone who attends the Megillah reading each year knows, the last few chapters of the Book of Esther are, shall we say, less than scintillating. Adults who have been fasting all day and children looking for one last opportunity to make noise have all wondered why we need to belabor the final details. Rabbi Fohrman tackles this problem and addresses other questions that, due to our familiarity with the story, often pass us by. Once the oddities in the tale are pointed out to us, it is difficult to ignore them. Rabbi Fohrman, in an engaging, conversational style takes us on a journey through the story of Esther, proposing hidden motives behind the actions of the players and making some sense out of difficult passages. Even if you are not convinced by his arguments, you are swept along with his ideas and the book is hard to put down. For synagogue libraries.

Daniel Scheide, Librarian, Wimberly Library, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL; RAS Vice President, AJL; Chair, Bibliography and Reference Book Award, AJL


Fradle Freidenreich’s comprehensive research on Yiddish schools in the United States and Canada is an important contribution to current knowledge on these institutions. In many cases, information Freidenreich located is new to scholarship and greatly enriches our picture of Jewish education, describing almost one thousand schools in 160 towns and cities. Yiddish history is like women’s history: because it has been ignored, it requires a separate effort to document and restore it. This leads to a tendency to provide a lot of background before starting on the meat of the matter. In this book, the author summarizes Yiddish culture, Jewish secularism and Jewish education, before launching into her study. Those familiar with these concepts can begin this book at page 50. The book suffers from an attempt to do everything: a section on Yiddish camps seems like an afterthought. The camps’ educational functions are not always clear, leaving this section separate from the rest of the book, and an accompanying CD of camp songs is even less clearly related. Nonetheless, Freidenreich’s research is prodigious. (Full disclosure: Freidenreich cites my research on Vancouver’s Peretz Shule, and I am thanked in the book’s acknowledgements).

Every secular Yiddish school will want a copy of this book, as will local historical societies, and research libraries supporting research on Yiddish, Jewish education, or multicultural community history.

Faith Jones, Head of Reference and Information Services, New Westminster Public Library, Vancouver, Canada
Frishman, Judith et al., editors. Borders and Boundaries in and around Dutch Jewish History. Amsterdam: Askant Academic; Dist. in the U.S. by the University of Chicago Press. 2011. 208 pp. $29.95. (9789052603872).

This book is a collection of papers delivered in 2007 at the Eleventh International Symposium on the History and Culture of the Jews in the Netherlands. These papers represent post-modernist historians who approach identity as something that is fluid. In this work, the historic lens is turned onto Dutch Jewish history and its borders.

The first three essays discuss the physical boundary of a ghetto. Sixteenth century Florence, 1940s Amsterdam and twentieth century Antwerp are the focus of a discussion of a Jewish “ghetto.” The second set of essays examines the boundaries of culture. I found the essays on Catinka Heinefetter and Anne Frank particularly interesting. The third section presents essays discussing the crossing of national borders; for example, the influence of German immigrants on the Dutch Progressive (also known as Liberal or Reform) movement from 1933; and the relocation of the diamond industry from the Netherlands to the British Mandate Palestine in the 1940s. The last section, “Jews in Limbo,” presents essays on Jewish identity, particularly as it creates social boundaries in citizenship.

The essays reflect the nature of papers presented at a conference: they assume the reader has some knowledge or expertise in the subjects presented; they are tied loosely together with an overarching theme but do not necessarily have a dialogue with each other; the essays are relatively short but are well documented and contain footnotes. Included is an index of names and places and a short biographical listing of the contributors. Recommended for all academic libraries.

Suzanne Smailes, Head of Technical Services, Wittenberg University Library, Springfield, OH


In six packed chapters, Garb presents the theory of shamanism, trance, and modern Kabbalah and covers “three main historical periods from Safedian Kabbalah through the eighteenth-century circle of [Moshe Hayim] Luzzatto and ending with Hasidism.” He discusses the techniques used to induce trance and the experiences reported by half a dozen Jewish mystics, either as a private or a social phenomenon. In Chapter 4 and 5 Garb focuses on Hasidism in the 19th and 20th centuries to address the magical power of the Hasidic leader, automatic speech, telepathic transmission, precognition, and other para-normal activities. Garb compares and contrasts Jewish and other religious traditions in an effort to underline common features. Garb excels at using contemporary specialized language to describe shamanism to a very limited circle of scholars able to understand him. Recommended only to academic libraries with extensive Jewish studies collection.

Roger S. Kohn, Silver Spring, MD


Pinchas Giller is a Professor of Medieval Jewish Thought at the American Jewish University (formerly the University of Judaism) in Los Angeles and the author of several important monographs on the Kabbalah and the Zohar.

The title of this book is highly ironic as The Guide for the Perplexed by Moses Maimonides is one of the most rationalistic and anti-mystical books in the entire corpus of Medieval Jewish Thought. As it happens, the subtitle comes only from the entire Continuum series of short introductions to a wide spectrum of subjects in Religion and Philosophy.

Giller’s book is highly recommended as an introduction to the study of the Zohar and the Kabbalah before embarking on a detailed study of texts. The book covers both historical and substantive topics including prayer, meditation and mysticism. Giller’s writing is generally clear with an occasional element of humor. A useful bibliography will guide the reader interested in extend their study of both primary and secondary texts. This book should find a place in academic and community libraries with collections for sophisticated adult readers.

Paul Howard Hamburg, Librarian for Judaica, Yiddish and Israel Studies; Curator for Judaica at The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, CA
Texts and Studies …

... in Ancient Judaism

Judaica-Palaestina, Babylon und Rome: Jews in Antiquity
Ed. by Benjamin Isaac and Yuval Shahar
2012. IX, 324 pages (TSAJ 147).
ISBN 978-3-16-151697-9 cloth

Revelation, Literature, and Community in Late Antiquity
Ed. by Philippa Townsend and Moulie Vidas
2011. VIII, 368 pages (TSAJ 146).
ISBN 978-3-16-150644-4 cloth

L. Stephen Cook
On the Question of the »Cessation of Prophecy« in Ancient Judaism
ISBN 978-3-16-150920-9 cloth

Catherine Hezser
Jewish Travel in Antiquity
ISBN 978-3-16-150889-9 cloth

Toledot Yeshu (»The Life Story of Jesus«) Revisited
A Princeton Conference
Ed. by Peter Schäfer, Michael Meerson and Yaacov Deutsch
2011. X, 448 pages (TSAJ 142).
ISBN 978-3-16-150647-5 cloth

Tal Ilan
Lexicon of Jewish Names in Late Antiquity
Part IV: The Eastern Diaspora 330 BCE – 650 CE. With the Collaboration of Kerstin Hünfeld
ISBN 978-3-16-150046-6 cloth

The Old Testament Apocrypha in the Slavonic Tradition
Continuity and Diversity.
Ed. by Lorenzo DiTommaso and Christfried Böttrich, with the assistance of Marina Swoboda
2011. XIV, 486 pages (TSAJ 140).
ISBN 978-3-16-149516-8 cloth

Holger Michael Zellentin
Rabbinic Parodies of Jewish and Christian Literature
ISBN 978-3-16-150647-5 cloth

Günter Stemberger
Judaica Minora
Teil I: Geschichte und Literatur des rabbinischen Judentums
2010. IX, 787 pages (TSAJ 138).
ISBN 978-3-16-150571-3 cloth

Sefer Shimmush Tehillim – Buch vom magischen Gebrauch der Psalmen
Edition, Übersetzung und Kommentar
Hrsg. v. Bill Rebiger
2010. IX, 559 pages + 117* (TSAJ 137).
ISBN 978-3-16-149774-2 cloth

Shaye J. D. Cohen
The Significance of Yavneh and Other Essays in Jewish Hellenism
2010. XV, 614 pages (TSAJ 136).
ISBN 978-3-16-150375-7 cloth

The Talmud in Its Iranian Context
Ed. by Carol Bakhos and Rahim Shayegan
ISBN 978-3-16-150818-7 cloth

Dorothea M. Salzer
Die Magie der Anspielung
Form und Funktion der biblischen Anspielungen in den magischen Texten der Kairoer Geniza
ISBN 978-3-16-150047-3 cloth

Günter Stemberger
Judaica Minora
Teil II: Geschichte und Literatur des rabbinischen Judentums
2010. IX, 559 pages + 117* (TSAJ 137).
ISBN 978-3-16-149774-2 cloth

Elke Morlok
Hermeneutics
Hrsg. v. Bill Rebiger
ISBN 978-3-16-150203-3 cloth

Naoya Katsumata
Seder Avodah for the Day of Atonement by Shelomoh Suleiman Al-Sinjari
ISBN 978-3-16-149732-2 cloth

Jewish Reception of Greek Bible Versions
Studies in Their Use in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages
Ed. by Nicholas de Lange, Julya G. Krivoruchko and Cameron Boyd-Taylor
ISBN 978-3-16-149732-2 cloth

Yaron Ben-Naeh
Jews in the Realm of the Sultans
Ottoman Jewish Society in the Seventeenth Century
ISBN 978-3-16-149523-6 cloth

... in Medieval and Early Modern Judaism

Rachel S. Mikva
Midrash YaYosha
A Medieval Midrash on the Song at the Sea
ISBN 978-3-16-151009-0 cloth

Stefan Schreiner
Die jüdische Bibel in islamischer Auslegung
Hrsg. v. Friedmann Eisler u. Matthias Morgenstern
2012. XIX, 407 pages (TSMJ 27).
ISBN 978-3-16-151011-3 cloth

Miriam Goldstein
Karaite Exegesis in Medieval Jerusalem
The Judeo-Arabic Pentateuch Commentary of Yusuf ibn Nūh and Abū al-Faraj Harūn
2011. XI, 228 pages (TSMJ 26).
ISBN 978-3-16-150972-8 cloth

Elke Morlok
Rabbi Joseph Gikatilla’s Hermeneutics
ISBN 978-3-16-150203-3 cloth

Mohr Siebeck
info@mohr.de
www.mohr.de

Why does one need another book on anti-Semitism? This book has a ten page bibliography, which gives some idea as to the number of books that have been written on the subject. Ms. Goldstein explains that the book was stimulated by the Durban conference on racism, which was marked by extreme anti-Semitism. In the author’s opinion, the fact that the many bystanders did not intercede to protect victims of anti-Semitic attacks was even more serious than the anti-Semitism itself. The author explains that this book was written as a primer for people with little or no knowledge of anti-Semitism.

I was also intrigued by the title: *A Convenient Hatred*. In the introduction, Ms. Goldstein mentions xenophobia in general and anti-Semitism in particular, which were and are used to unite a nation. The book emphasizes the different types of anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism began as “anti-Judaism,” a religious phenomenon. In the 19th century, it mutated into a hatred of the Jewish race and today Israel is the target of that hatred.

The book is extremely well written. It would be impossible to relate every instance of anti-Semitism, but the necessary selection of incidents is well-done. I was very impressed by the treatment of the Damascus blood-libel. I finished that chapter, thinking that the author had raw material for a “thriller”. All in all this is a good book, which I certainly recommend as a introduction to anti-Semitism.

Chaim Seymour, Director, Cataloging and Classification Department, Wurzweiler Library, Bar-Ilan University, Israel

---


Goodman’s controversial book is enlightening, riveting, and relevant to the times. Only in Israel are there so many intellectual “prime ministers” that keep books like this on the best seller list! Goodman is addressing an audience post-Yeshayahu Leibowitz (1903-94), but while Leibowitz understood that Rambam put Torah at the center of existence, Goodman celebrates perplexities which he believes allows for riddling wonder to enter.

Goodman asks what the human intellect can know through the method of negative theology taking thought to a *gevul* (limit) i.e. Hashem is not a body, Hashem is not finite, Hashem is not ignorant. Delusional thought assumes it can blitz the gap, storming the tower of Babel, between Hashem’s perfect, certain, self-sufficient thought and the limits of the human intellect.

The Rambam attempts to lead the perplexed individual (already proficient in both truths of faith and reason) to the light of clear understanding (*shelemut* of the highest level, rooted in intellectual attainment), rather than escorting them into the dark depths of doubt. The Rambam underscores the limits of human understanding (e.g., in Guide 3:51, the individual who ascends to the level of “being with the King in the inner chamber of the palace” is the one who has “achieved demonstration, to the extent that that is possible, of everything that may be demonstrated”), but clearly deems it possible, and imperative, to guide the student to the highest possible ‘madregah’ of intellectual/spiritual perfection. Recommended for the intellectually intrepid not afraid to encounter a challenging read.

David B. Levy, Touro College

---


*Jewish Culture and Society in North Africa* is a collection of papers delivered at an international conference of the American Institute of Maghrib Studies (AIMS) held in Tangier, Morocco in 2004. The participants came from Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Israel, and the United States, and brought with them a wide variety of world views. The stated goal of the conference was “to rethink the older work of the first generation of scholars on the Jews of the Maghrib and in the process try to shed light on questions not previously considered.” Encompassing topics that vary from Muslim/Jewish relations and Jewish identity to Jewish women and hybridity in saint worship, the book explores the concept that the most fruitful inquiry involves the integration of “the study of Muslim and Jewish culture in a shared historical space.” Individual papers investigate the commingling of Jewish and Muslim cultures in the development of place names and saint veneration; others examine different renditions of similar stories (i.e., Suleika), and still others deal with the historically influential place of Alliance Israélite Universelle within the region. The result of these inquiries is a highly informative and thought-provoking collection of essays, from which the reader is certain to derive satisfaction and knowledge of a region made all the more significant in light of the revolutionary changes that have taken place in North Africa since the spring of 2011.

Randall C. Belinfante, Librarian/Archivist, American Sephardi Federation, New York
Reviews of Nonfiction Titles for Adults


Timing is everything. As we transition to new technologies for transcribing our knowledge it is important to look back at the last change from manuscripts to printed book format. We learn in The Hebrew Book in Early Modern Italy, a collection of essays, that Jews embraced this new method of publishing in its infancy just as many Jews are benefiting from today’s information explosion. This book can be read in the “lite” version without checking the footnotes that take up half of the book, or the reader can take a thorough survey of the topics covered in this volume by reading the detailed footnotes that are much more than citations but rather background information and side comments that can lead one many other topics of research. This book is aimed at university libraries, but could also be of interest to large synagogue libraries with membership interested in the world of printing.

There are essays on women’s role in reading and the influence of secular works from Italian literature. Topics covered in this book, such as censorship, distribution and copyright, were an issue in publishing in the 15th-18th centuries just as they are now. Censorship discussions often mention lists of titles held by Jews and if any of those items are on lists forbidden by the powers that be. These lists are invaluable to bibliographers today, but it made me wonder that when readers no longer leave behind physical books to be inventoried, how will future generations know what we were reading.

Jackie Ben-Efraim, Special Collections Librarian, Ostrow Library, American Jewish University, Los Angeles


Originally published by First Choice Books, a self-publishing service, this set has now been re-published by Magnes Press. The first volume and its accompanying “toolbox” volume were first published in 2009 and revised in 2011. The second (new) volume was published in 2011. Halabe is an educator and translator with over twenty years’ experience of teaching and developing curricula (many of those years at the Vancouver School of Theology) as well as holding a Masters in Education.

These volumes are made for use either in the classroom or as an independent study source. A prerequisite in using these texts is the ability to read Hebrew (at least well enough to sound out the letters). It rewards readers who learn broad concepts and vocabulary easily. The author does not attempt to teach all grammatical rules – her emphasis is on basic grammatical subjects and uses the qal stem in all the root groups in volume one. Volume two introduces the qal stem infinitives, imperative, and participle in addition to the remaining verb stems. The Toolbox volume contains parsing charts, frequently occurring adjectives, verb lists, etc. Each lesson is clearly presented with examples and plenty of exercises to reinforce learning.

I think these volumes would be most successful in a classroom setting or as a text for an independent learner who has already had some Hebrew instruction. It appears to be aimed at an adult audience (the answers to the exercises are found at the end of the book, for example). Recommended for libraries that collect Hebrew instruction textbooks.

Suzanne Smailes, Head of Technical Services, Wittenberg University Library, Springfield, OH


This book presents the earliest Ladino language memoir penned by Sa’adi Besalel (1820–1903), a journalist, publisher, founder and editor of the first Ladino newspaper in Salonica. The tone of the work is mixed, part memoir, part autobiography, part historical description and part ethnography.

Sa’adi, a muckraker and religious rebel, questioned the “authoritarian” rabbinic rule in Salonica. He was excommunicated in 1874 in part for using popular Turkish folk melodies for synagogue liturgy. With biting satire and bile he documents injustices he sees and writes to defend himself, presenting stories of superstitions, corruption and heavy-handed religious rule. One of the funniest sections is a description of the mishaps at his own wedding. Another relates how he and his son fled a mob attacking them after he was excommunicated. Other dramatic events include fires, wars, revolution and royal visits of the Ottoman Sultan, but Sa’adi’s historical writing is dry and his recounting of conspiracies against him is somewhat tedious.
In a lengthy introduction the editors put Sa’adi’s story into a historical framework. This long lost memoir is expertly presented in English and in transliterated Ladino, with the original soletreo, or Ladino cursive manuscript, available on the web. In presenting the Ladino transliteration and extensive glossary they hope that the work will aid students of the Ladino language.

This work, with its rare look at the struggle between traditional society and modernizing trends in a nineteenth century Sephardic community, adds to our understanding of the beginnings of modernity in a Sephardic mode.

Harvey Sukenic, Library Director, Hebrew College Library, Newton Centre, MA


This book “… locates its inquiries within ‘the black-Jewish imaginary,’ a realm of literary and cultural production in which Jews and African Americans imagined themselves and each other in relation to the white mainstream.” The author explores the work of the Jewish entertainer Sophie Tucker, and that of Jewish writers Edna Ferber and Fannie Hurst, as well as the eminent African-American writer, Zora Neale Hurston, who was a friend of Hurst. She examines Tucker’s autobiography and Ferber’s and Hurst’s black characters in their fiction, looking for evidence that these Jewish women were not merely exploiting the African-American experience to establish their own “whiteness” and acceptance in America. The academic language of the book allows the author to dance around the subject, never really deciding whether Tucker, Ferber, and Hurst were exploiting African-American women or not. She claims that aspects of their work “complicate” the question of their attitude to African-Americans, thereby preventing it from “reifying” the “black-white binary.” Despite these problems, this book is valuable for its investigation of Sophie Tucker’s use of blackface and her place in the history of recorded blues music, and for its consideration of Ferber and Hurst, two writers whose careers as successful women and activists are worth remembering despite their dated and forgotten literary output. The use of blackface by women such as Tucker and the concept of “passing” in the work of Ferber and Hurston are worthwhile subjects of inquiry. The book contains chapter notes and an index. Recommended for academic collections.

Beth Dwoskin, Proquest; Library Committee Chair, Beth Israel Congregation, Ann Arbor, MI


There have been some well-written, well-researched books about the failure of the Jewish-American community to effectively participate in the efforts to stop the Nazi torture and killings such as Arthur Morse’s While Six Million Died, David Wyman’s The Abandonment of the Jews, Deborah Dwork’s Flight from the Reich: Refugee Jews, 1933 and Henry Feingold’s The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust. Hurwitz’s equally well-written and researched book focuses on the American Jewish community leadership’s failure to rescue Jews during the Holocaust. Bickering about political and financial turf, organizational hurdles, blatant anti-Semitism from our State Department and other roadblocks made for a most frustrating era. Hurwitz explains that Americans were not all that hospitable to Jewish Americans and public opinion polls often reflected much sympathy for Hitler when the issue related to Jews. Hurwitz states “If such was the situation existing in the American Jewish community on the eve of the great trials they were about to confront, one can understand that the struggle was both formidable and complex, for at that very same time, the position of Jews in the U.S. was being challenged in an increasingly threatening manner.”

Reading this interesting book, one can almost feel the tension between various Jewish organizations, the stress of increasing the visibility of the plight of the Jews, the enormous financial burden to provide necessities to the victims, and the huge roadblock of the State Department. Highly recommended for high school, academic and public libraries.

Martin Goldberg, Penn State Univ., Monaca, PA


The academic study of kabbalah was pioneered by Gershom Scholem in the 20th century. However, to Scholem and his followers, this study was an autopsy, ignoring the living practitioners of these beliefs. Today, kabbalah is so prevalent in our culture that scholars could not help but to turn their gaze toward living expressions
Reviews of Nonfiction Titles for Adults

of Kabbalistic rituals and practices. This collection grew out of a conference of the same name at Ben-Gurion University in May 2008.

The movements studied range from Haredi yeshivot to Jewish Renewal to Bnei Baruch and the Kabbalah Center. Interactions with Buddhism, Hinduism and the New Age movement are examined as well as outreach to non-religious Jews as well as non-Jews. Many of the articles are also valuable in terms of their examination of certain facets of Israeli society: the West Bank settler, the Jew exploring Eastern religions, and those who just choose to dabble in kabbalah for a weekend. Highly recommended for academic collections and beyond.

Daniel Scheide, Librarian, Wimberly Library, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL; RAS Vice President, AJL; Chair, Bibliography and Reference Book Award, AJL


Kampen has produced the first comprehensive commentary on the wisdom literature from Qumran. His book includes original translations, critical notes, and line-by-line commentary of ten of the major Qumran texts classified as wisdom literature—Instruction, The Book of Mysteries, The Evil Seducress, Wisdom Composition, CryptA Words of the Maskil to All Sons of Dawn, Sapiential-Didactic Work A, Ways of Righteousness, Instruction-like Composition B, Beatitudes, and the Hebrew versions the Wisdom of Ben Sira. Kampen treats three major literary genres in this volume: sapiential instructions, collections of proverbs, and didactic speeches.

In his 35-page introduction (the part of the book that is most accessible to general readers) Kampen reviews previous scholarship on wisdom literature at Qumran and describes the corpus of wisdom literature within the Hebrew Bible, Qumran, and the New Testament. He also explains the relationship between apocalyptic and wisdom literatures, including their literary forms, social contexts and locations, and the role of the “sage” within these two types of literature.

For each Qumran text, Kampen provides an overview, including an explanation of its historical, social, and literary context and the important key terms used within the text and a description of the extant manuscripts/fragments and their content. He also includes a brief bibliography for each of the ten texts.

This volume is significant not only because it is the first of its kind, but also because of the genre it explicates. A better understanding of the wisdom literature at Qumran is essential for scholars of Second Temple Judaism and early Christianity. This volume and the series are recommended for academic libraries.

Beth A. Bidlack, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH


This collection of 62 original source documents, many of them translated from Hebrew, represents a marvelous array of materials that allow the reader to develop an historical and social appreciation of the early Zionist efforts to create a Jewish state. The documentary collection is meant to supplement *Israel and the Middle East, 2nd edition*, by Itamar Rabinovich and Jehuda Reinharz (2008) or other related basic texts or as a stand-alone source. The editors are academicians, Kaplan in Israeli Studies and Penslar in Jewish Studies, who have carefully separated the materials into six thematic sections, detailing the pioneers’ efforts in the early Yishuv with their personal writings, how a national home was developed, the Jewish cultural contribution, the Zionist role in the Arab-Israeli conflict, the effect of World War II and the Holocaust, and concluding with the transition from Palestine to Israel. While there are several extant document collections on the Diaspora and Zionism, this one focuses on Palestine with a great deal that has not previously been made widely available to an English-speaking audience. Supplementing the primary texts are the editors’ commentary and informative notes making this an absolute necessity for any collection that provides services to those seeking to understand the creation of Israel as a Jewish state.

Sanford R. Silverburg, Professor Emeritus, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC

Levi Ben Gershon (1288-1344) of Provence, also known as Gersonides and Ralbag, was a philosopher, physician, Talmudist, biblical commentator, scientist, mathematician, astronomer, and commentator on Averroes. Ralbag’s philosophic work known as Sefer Milhamot ha-Shem, translated by Seymour Feldman (JPS), is a classic -- treating familiar Maimonidean subjects such as (1) the immortality of the soul and resurrection, (2) prophecy and dreams, (3) providence: general and individual, (4) G-d’s knowledge, (5) astronomy--physics--metaphysics--the divine spheres, (6) creation and miracles.

Klein-Braslavi, who teaches at Tel Aviv University, discusses the contradictions and questions in the Wars of the Lord, as well as the expected subjects there of free choice and G-d’s foreknowledge. She also studies these subjects in the introductions to his Bible commentaries, as well as in his commentary on Proverbs. The last chapter, “Gersonides on the Mode of Communicating Knowledge of the Future to the Dreamer and Clairvoyant,” treats esotericism.

The eight articles in this book deal with Gersonides’ methods of inquiry and composition, the use of introductions to his own works and in his biblical commentaries, his method in the super commentaries on Averroes, and his methods of biblical exegesis, make this book a unique tour de force. It is an important contribution to our understanding of Gersonides. Gersonides’ method is Aristotelian. He reconciles by Aristotelian method the conflict of the material intellect and the acquired intellect.

Klein-Braslavi’s book includes bibliographic references and an index. It is highly recommended for all libraries that take seriously philosophy, the life of the mind and cognition.

David B. Levy, Touro College, New York


Philosopher Brian Klug loves to argue, that is, he loves to apply his intellect, passion, and humor to any political or social topic he encounters. This collection of his essays and lectures, many previously published over the past 30 years, demonstrates this love.

The volume is divided into two sections. The first, “Approaches to Zion,” addresses one of his greatest passions: Israel. Klug examines Israel’s place in the
thoughts of Jews and non-Jews around the world; the connections among anti-Semitism, anti-Zionism, and anti-Americanism, and most importantly the need to be able to criticize Israel without being declared a pariah or self-hating Jew. The second section, “Angles on Identity” examines Jews’ issues on identity as well as relationships between Jews and other groups, and Judaism and science.

The essays show their origin as lectures and are written in the first person. The language is scholarly, and each essay contains notes and bibliographical references. There is also a glossary of the Hebrew and Yiddish terms and an index. Recommended for academic collections.

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


The Orthodox Union is continuing its policy of partnerships. In 2009 they published a daily prayer book with their partner Koren Press, which contributed its Hebrew prayer book. The English translation was prepared by Rabbi Sacks for the British Authorised Daily Prayer Book and the original prayer book also included a commentary by Rabbi Sacks. In 2011, a new edition of the Siddur was published with a commentary by Rabbi Soloveitchik replacing that of Rabbi Sacks. This edition is designed for his pupils and the pupils of his pupils.

Unlike Rabbi Sacks’ commentary, which was prepared for the siddur, Rabbi Soloveitchik’s commentary was selected from his published works and recordings of his shi'urim (classes) together with notes taken by his students. The editors claim that their problem was what to omit rather than how to find material. I don’t believe in the possibility of 100% coverage where a commentary is selected from an existing corpus of works. I was disappointed that the Psalm for the Sabbath and the Tahnun prayer, for example, were not dealt with.

It is an unusual commentary in that the Rav does not hesitate to cite Kant or Heidegger. The siddur also includes a summary of the places where the Rav departed from common practice in his prayers together with an explanation of the reasons for the change. The editors do point out that the Rav did not encourage his students to adopt the changes. This Siddur is a pleasure to use!

Chaim Seymour, Director, Cataloging and Classification Department, Wurzweiler Library, Bar-Ilan University, Israel


This book traces the history of an idea through Jewish mystical texts, from the Hekhalot to the Zohar and beyond. The menstruant woman was portrayed in many of these works as an embodiment of impurity and of evil. Koren traces how these ideas developed from Late Antique myths into medieval thought systems, incorporating elements from the Talmud, Aristotelian medicine and widespread superstitions. The second part of Forsaken describes the attitudes towards menstruation that existed in medieval Islam and Christianity. These religions, in whose shadows Judaism existed throughout the Middle Ages, also had negative attitudes towards menstruation. But these attitudes were not as fundamental as those in Kabbalistic Judaism. Koren suggests this may be one explanation for the total absence of female Jewish mystics in the Middle Ages, while the other monotheistic religions saw women who became famous for their mystical visions. The book is dense, moving among many different literary texts and ideas, and would probably be most accessible to kabbalah scholars. It is also significant for gender studies.

Pinchas Roth, graduate student in the Talmud Department at Hebrew University, Jerusalem


Stewart F. Lane is a New Yorker who produced the Broadway hit, La Cage aux Folles. His book is a survey of the Jewish presence on Broadway, particularly in musicals. He begins by exploring Yiddish theater in Europe and its transplantation to America. He then looks at vaudeville, the classic musicals, political theater and the rise of method acting, the impact of the war and blacklisting, the Catskills, and developments on Broadway up to the present day. This book is broad rather than deep, covering its subject expansively but superficially. In general the writing is not bad, and the author unearths some interesting facts, such as a set of statistics showing the overwhelming Jewish presence among Tony Award winners. Unfortunately, the book contains numerous
egregious errors, both editorial and factual, such as attributing “By the Light of the Silvery Moon” to Nora Bayes, rather than the correct song, “Shine on Harvest Moon,” or a statement about performers who “…emanated toward the American theater …” The book includes an index and chapter notes, as well as a bibliography containing references to books, websites, and online articles, and a section listing books about individual artists. Libraries that want to build an authoritative collection on this subject should start with Making Americans: Jews and the Broadway Musical by Andrea Most. Vagabond Stars by Nahma Sandrow is the authoritative work on the Yiddish theater.

Beth Dwoskin, Proquest; Library Committee Chair, Beth Israel Congregation, Ann Arbor, MI


This is a very thorough and solid study of the Birkat ha-Minim, one of the blessings in the Amida of the work days. Langer presents all the angles of this “single persistent Jewish text that for much of its history was explicitly anti-Christian.” The author, who teaches Judaism in the theology department of a Catholic and Jesuit University in the Greater Boston area, devotes a chapter to each of the five periods of the prayer: antiquity, with the origins and early history of the prayer, the early Islam period, with the evidence from the Cairo Geniza, the High Middle Ages in Europe, the early modern period, and the post-Emancipation period. The book contains all the sources used, arranged also in five appendices, each with an introduction and footnotes. The critical apparatus is about half of the book which Langer values as “a modest contribution to the process of Jewish self-criticism, enabling that process to ground itself in the facts.” Recommended to interested scholars of Jewish liturgy and to academic and synagogue libraries.

Roger S. Kohn, Silver Spring, MD


Haifa-born novelist, Hadara Lazar, has written a marvelously entertaining and informative collection of memoirs from personalities in each of the relevant communities in mandated Palestine in conflict over the outcome of the British authority. This oral history captures the flavor of the time, when Palestinian Arab elites felt their social position threatened, when Zionists of various hues planted their ideologies in a reawakened Jewish homeland, and the perplexed British attempted to withdraw from Palestine while simultaneously maintaining order. Many of the subjects Lazar chooses to interview are located in various European capitals, an indication of the author’s fortitude to obtain her information. Since the author spent so much time in England, much of her narrative carries with it the contacts with English officialdom and military figures and a similar character brought to the language employed in the book. This is an easy read that takes the reader into a different time and offers an opportunity to appreciate the decisions made within a cultural context. This book is an extremely useful addition to the already well-plowed story of the origins of modern Israel.

Sanford R. Silverburg, Professor Emeritus, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC


En Yaaqov is a collection of Talmudic stories, culled from rabbinic literature in the 16th century by Rabbi Jacob ibn Habib. Ibn Habib was a Spanish Jew who left his homeland in 1492, and after a number of years in Portugal ended up in Salonica, then part of the Ottoman Empire. The first volume of En Yaaqov was first printed in Salonica in 1516, and since then it has been reprinted in dozens of editions. Ibn Habib wrote a commentary on the passages that he collected, but his commentary has been overshadowed by the numerous commentaries penned by subsequent generations. Perhaps one of the best-known of those later commentaries is Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook’s En Ayah, which takes En Yaaqov as the point of departure for expansive essays on Judaism.

Marjorie Lehman has delved into Jacob ibn Habib’s lifework, setting him in the context of his times and places. A major theme of ibn Habib’s commentary, according to Lehman, is the role of faith in Judaism, and its significance even for Jews living less-than-ideal Jewish lives, such as the Jews of Spain and Portugal who converted to Christianity willingly and unwillingly in the 15th century. The last chapter of Lehman’s book is devoted to a whirlwind description of the many subsequent printings of En Yaaqov, which transformed ibn Habib’s book while continually placing it on the Jewish bookshelf. The En Yaaqov is significant for studies of early modern Jewish rabbinic culture, especially in the Ottoman Empire, and for the history of the Jewish book.

Pinchas Roth, graduate student in the Talmud Department at Hebrew University, Jerusalem

This unique groundbreaking reference book fills a needed void. It is co-written by two distinguished New Testament scholars. For Jews, this book serves as a great introduction to the foundation source of Christianity. Understanding this key work is important to Jews as it is scripture for most of the English-speaking world and much art, literature and music of the Western culture was greatly influenced by it. The authors want the readers to understand what the New Testament meant at the time, place and in context, as well as to describe the impact of the New Testament on Jewish-Christian relations.

Besides an easy-to-read translation of the New Testament, this volume collects annotations and essays focusing on 1st and 2nd century Jewish sources that assist in understanding the customs, literature and interpretation of the New Testament. It specifically addresses some of the passages that have been used to perpetuate Jewish stereotypes and anti-Jewish feelings. While not apologizing for those statements, the authors contextualize them as well as indicate when the statements were actually misinterpreted by later Christians.

Each chapter contains a translation of a New Testament book and an introduction describing the title, authorship, date, setting, placement in the New Testament, structure and major themes of that book. Extremely detailed (but readable) footnotes fill about half of every page. Maps, diagrams, charts, and sidebar essays are located throughout the book. The last hundred pages include longer essays, a useful timeline, some tables, a helpful 14 page glossary of terms and an 18 page index. A must purchase for any school, synagogue, or university library.

Nathan Aaron Rosen, New York, NY


Rabbi Lichtenstein, one of the Heads of the Yeshiva Har Etzion in Israel, holds a doctorate in English literature and is recognized as one of the leading thinkers in the Modern Orthodox community. The eleven essays, previously delivered on varying occasions, deal with a variety of questions, some practical and others more theoretical or homiletic. He writes about marriage, how to relate to a non-Orthodox Jew and responses to our present egalitarian age, etc. There is also an essay dealing with the blessing prior to study. The common factor to most of the essays is that they deal with controversial subjects and Rabbi Lichtenstein gives clear-cut guidance.

I found the title a little confusing. The word “experience” doesn’t seem the appropriate word in the context. However, there is no doubt that the author has a lot to contribute to people who need guidance in this rather confusing age in which we live.

Chaim Seymour, Director, Cataloging and Classification Department, Wurzweiler Library, Bar-Ilan University, Israel


Sexuality “is understood in the broad sense of matters pertaining to sexuality rather than the more defined sense which we find in discussion of sexual orientation and sexual theory” in this volume, the third in a series. In addition to a short introduction, thoughtful conclusion, and extensive bibliography, this volume consists of three parts organized loosely by genre.

The first section discusses attitudes towards sexuality in apocalypses, testaments, and related writing, including the later Enoch literature. The second part examines attitudes towards sexuality in histories, legends, and related writings, including Tobit, Judith, Susanna, 1 & 2 Maccabees, the additions to Esther, and Joseph and Aseneth. The third part focuses on psalms, wisdom writings and fragmentary works, including the Psalms of Solomon, Ben Sira, the Wisdom of Solomon, Pseudo-Aristeas, 4 Maccabees, Pseudo-Phocylides, Theodotus, Ezekiel the Tragedian, and Pseudo-Eupolemus.

After providing a narrative overview and some general historical context for each text, Loader examines specific attitudes toward sexuality found within that work. For example, he examines how the book of Tobit defines the proper marriage partner via depictions of the marriages of Tobit and Anna, Raguel and Edna, and Tobias and Sarah.

In his engaging conclusion, Loader synthesizes the vast material treated in this volume by discussing a number of themes and motifs. He concludes with a short discussion of the foundation for sexual ethics within the Pseudepigrapha. This volume and the series are recommended for academic libraries and larger synagogue libraries.

Beth A. Bidlack, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH

With a sense of humor, detailed explanations and colorful pictorials, Sharon Lurie brings her second cookbook (her first - *Cooking with the Kosher Butcher’s Wife*) to life while focusing on holiday specialties. Readers get a glimpse into the South African kosher culture allowing readers to explore traditional, as well as creative approaches to holiday fare. Southern hemisphere celebration of Jewish holidays puts holiday observances at different seasonal times than their northern hemisphere counterparts – for example, chilled beet borscht drink is a Chanukah thirst quencher, hence one may choose to instead use the borscht for Shavuot, for example. Elements of traditional South African cuisine shine through with distinct elements of creativity such as Biltong Soufflé on a pool of mustard sauce. As Celebrating with the Kosher Butcher’s Wife is a South African imprint, readers may not be familiar with some terminology – such as scotch fillet, known as rib eye in America, though a search online or quick perusal in a good dictionary will remedy such quandaries. This work is a wonderful addition to collections that highlight cooking, regional kosher cuisine and holiday celebrations.

*Tina Weiss, Senior Associate Librarian, Klau Library, HUC-JIR, New York*


Henry Near has been a haver (member) of Kibbutz Bet Ha’Emek for more than fifty years, during which time he obtained a doctorate in Political Science and the History of Israel from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He has written widely on the history and ideology of the kibbutz. This volume contains essays previously published in a variety of journals. The kibbutz movement has been undergoing many changes over the past two decades and this volume is helpful in understanding what Near calls Utopianism and Post-Utopianism. According to Near, the kibbutz movement enters the 21st century with diminished expectations but remaining a protest movement against a commercialized and alienated world.

This volume of essays could find a place in academic and community libraries collecting reading materials for serious adult readers.

*Paul Howard Hamburg, Librarian for Judaica, Yiddish and Israel Studies; Curator for Judaica at The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, CA*


When using public transportation, or going on a long flight, books on demonology are quite useful for discouraging conversation. But they can serve other purposes as well. They show us how ancients dealt with issues of evil and theodicy. Don’t expect a discussion of dybbuks or mazikim, these demons are from the Second Temple period. Andrei Orlov had made a name for himself in the academic world by studying rarely-examined Jewish pseudo-epigraphic works that have come down to us in Slavonic, such as the Apocalypse of Abraham, 2 Enoch and 3 Baruch. Concepts like fallen angels and demons are often thought of as Christian ideas (and indeed one chapter covers the Gospel of Matthew), but they have strong precedent in Jewish apocalyptic literature. Orlov also shows the transformation and evolution of the enigmatic figures of Azazel and Satan in early Jewish and Christian literature. Recommended for academic collections.

*Daniel Scheide, Librarian, Wimberly Library, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL; RAS Vice President, AJL; Chair, Bibliography and Reference Book Award, AJL*


Pappé is one of the controversial Israeli New Historians revising the more traditional historical interpretation of Israel’s founding and early history. His less than fully-accepted approach to his birth country’s origins forced him to leave an Israeli academic position for one in the UK. In this segment of his on-going barrage of critical treatment of Israel’s policies toward Palestinian Arabs, he focuses on what he characterizes as a marginalized people who have been treated to a disproportionate coverage by observers since 1948 and the establishment of Israel. He decries the manner in which Israeli public policy responded to those Palestinians that remained in mandated Palestine with regard to citizenship and associated rights, land ownership, and...
something approaching proportional representation. Thus the major theme is wrapped around discrimination, disparagement, and dispossession. He focuses a great deal of his coverage on Israeli military rule on the West Bank and Gaza, a favorable approach to the two Palestinian Intifadas and how the general peace process has never been particularly fair to Palestinian needs, let alone demands. Because of the sober treatment of this aspect of social conditions in Israel and its effect on the Arab-Israeli conflict, the book’s reception by predominantly Jewish audiences will be qualified by their openness to an attitude not frequently heard in those circles.

Sanford R. Silverburg, Professor Emeritus, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC


The author’s extremely sensitive and insightful view of disabilities in the Bible provides new and perceptive understanding of familiar biblical personalities. She extends the meaning of the Bible by looking through an inclusive lens to read some of our well-known Bible stories in different ways. While some of the insights are obvious (regarding Moses), others require closer reading. As the Jewish community has become more sensitive to the needs of the differently abled, this book can provide spiritual food for students, families, and teachers.

It contains serious analysis of biblical text focusing on *peshat* (literal meaning) supported through a very careful reading as some of the conclusions may not be obvious or even accepted by everyone.

Chapters cover nine biblical personalities, among them, Moses – speech, Mephiboshet and Joseph – physical disabilities, Esau – ADHD symptoms, Isaac – mild mental retardation, Joseph – giftedness, and Miriam – gender. While some of the author’s conclusions are relatively easy to perceive and accept, others require more interpretation. Prouser does a great job in assisting us to look back at famous biblical personalities and recognize their disability, how it affected their life, and how they and their family learned to cope and compensate for the disability.

This book is highly recommended for school libraries, synagogue libraries, for teachers and other professionals who work with differently abled children and individuals who want to know more about disability.

Nathan Aaron Rosen, New York


This scholarly work explores the Judeo-Argentinean experience from different perspectives and reevaluates Jewish and Argentinean elements in contemporary fiction. It describes and analyzes the immigrant experience, the establishment of communitarian institutions and the integration of Jews within Argentinean society, as reflected in novels written by Mario Szichman, Sergio Chejfec, Gabriela Avigur-Rotem, Alicia Dujovne Ortiz, Ricardo Feierstein, and Andres Neuman. The book discusses notions of collective memory and identity from different angles as reflected in the literary text. There are extensive footnotes and a 13 page bibliography. The author is Assistant Professor of contemporary Latin American fiction and Jewish Latin American literature and culture at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. She is also a research fellow at the S. Daniel Abraham Center for International and Regional Studies at Tel Aviv University. The book is a useful addition to Judaica collections in college, university and research libraries.

Susan Freiband, Retired Library Educator, Arlington, VA


*Becoming Jewish* is a practical guide for those who are considering conversion to Judaism. It places a particular emphasis on contemporary American Jewish culture but also describes the historic religious tradition. The authors show great sensitivity to the concerns and questions of converts and provide helpful advice in meeting such a challenging life change. Topics include, among others, American Jewish denominations, finding a rabbi, learning Hebrew, telling family and friends, conversion study programs, facing the bet din, marriage and family, kabbalah, anti-Semitism, and Israel. The folksy, familiar style is easy to read, but occasionally the generalizations could be misleading to those not familiar with Jewish law and customs. It would not be the best choice as the primary textbook for a potential convert; however, its descriptions of the practical mechanics of converting make it useful for supplementary reading.

Paul A. Miller, American Jewish University, Bel Air, CA
“It’s totally blown the dust off the books and made them come alive with its strong visuals, comprehensive data base and interactive style.”

“Great product. The vendor is extremely responsive to our needs and questions.”

“We moved to OPALS a year ago and have been very pleased with service, response, options, usability, everything has been a plus.”

“Great product. The vendor is extremely responsive to our needs and questions.”

The author is a journalist and a Zionist. In this, unfortunately short, book, she presents a number of potted biographies of people living in Israel, who contribute to its society. Her aim is to try to fight the stereotyping of Israel in the press by showing a side of society that is not generally covered by the media. Her first rule is to exclude people who are prominent and newsworthy. Her choice includes, among others, a woman who feeds impoverished families, a surgeon who devotes himself to poor children, a sign language teacher and a professor of religion who is involved in Jewish-Christian relations. In each of the eighteen chapters, one feels the subject and identifies with him or her.

I remember that at one stage, somebody tried to open a newspaper which would only print good news. The newspaper, I believe, folded. Here is some good news that does leave an impression. Read and enjoy!

Chaim Seymour, Director, Cataloging and Classification Department, Wurzweiler Library, Bar-Ilan University, Israel


Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929) is widely regarded as the pre-eminent Jewish theologian of the twentieth century. But he took a long time to find his bearings, both personally and professionally. When his mother Adele was once asked about her son’s profession, she is said to have answered that he was a ‘letter-writer.’ His letters were miniature essays -- or simply essays -- and they were published, presumably from copies he retained, in 1935 and again, in even greater numbers, in 1979. A particular group of them, from the original compendium, attracted special attention: all were addressed to Eugen Rosenstock (later Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy; 1888-1937), a contemporary and close friend. In 1969, these were republished separately, in English translation, together with learned introductions by Alexander Altmann and others, under the title of *Judaism Despite Christianity*. Significantly, the 1969 edition included Eugen’s initial letter and subsequent responses, thus providing a rare insight into both sides of the exchange, so often unavailable in published correspondence. The 1969 edition, republished in 1971 as a Schocken paperback, has long been out of print, so this new edition serves a useful purpose.

But a second purpose is served by the new edition, if less admirably or overtly. It can be derived from some of the augmentations to the previous editions, notably the new preface by Harold Stahmer (whose Introduction to the previous edition is retained) and a new chronology by Michael Gormann-Thelen.

That purpose is to emphasize Rosenstock’s influence on Rosenzweig, to credit the former with the inspiration for some of the most seminal ideas of the latter, and to construct a competition between the two that never existed in their lifetime. Ironically, Rosenstock’s reputation does not need this kind of posthumous inflation. After immigrating to this country in 1933, he enjoyed a long and distinguished career, mostly at Dartmouth College, where he inspired a whole generation of devoted disciples.

The subtitle of the new edition, “The 1916 wartime correspondence between Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy & Franz Rosenzweig,” is an objective description of its content. A correspondingly objective assessment of its importance could well call it a free-wheeling dialogue on the respective merits of two of the ‘Abrahamic faiths.’ Happily it is now available once more to a new generation of students and other readers.

Nanette Stahl and William W. Hallo, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT


Rabbi Sacks, the British Chief Rabbi, is scheduled to retire in 2013. I assumed, therefore, that a book written at this stage in his career would represent a summary of his thought and emphasize those subjects of importance to him. The thesis of this book is that there is no contradiction between science and religion but rather they represent two different aspects of human thought. As he put it, “Science takes things apart to see how they work. Religion puts things together to see what they mean.” As a rabbi he emphasizes Judaism, but the discussion includes both Christianity and Islam. Monotheism is juxtaposed with science.

Rabbi Sacks is well known in England for social commentary. He claims that a non-religious society may be moral, but in an atomized society, where the individual is paramount, society suffers, especially the children who are no longer brought up by two parents in a stable relationship. One of the most painful comments for
me, was his quote from a British clergyman, who claimed that he could no longer explain “God the Father,” to children, since so many of them did not know what it was to have a father. This is an intensely personal and passionate book. At one point, he writes about his father, who was most certainly not a philosopher like his son, but understood intuitively what was required of a Jew and lived his life with that simple faith, which so many of us envy today. All in all, a profound book, to be recommended to people who think about their Judaism.

Chaim Seymour, Director, Cataloging and Classification Department, Wurzweiller Library, Bar-Ilan University, Israel


An enigmatic, controversial work, Toledot Yeshu was written in 4th century Babylonia. Or was it 16th century Europe? Or perhaps the various versions of Toledot Yeshu that have come down to us are not different versions of the same work, but entirely different works by different authors? In any case, Toledot Yeshu is a Jewish satirical counter-history of the Gospels, presenting the founder of Christianity in, to put it mildly, a most unfavorable light. The work was the subject of a conference at Princeton University in 2009 and the present volume contains expanded versions of papers given there. Given the nature of the work, it is no surprise that Toledot Yeshu was kept a secret so the work exists in many different versions, often only in fragments. In addition to attempting to trace the origins and motivations of the work, there are studies of the reception of the work in Christian and Muslim societies, literary, and linguistic analyses. An excellent collection of scholarship appropriate for academic libraries.

Daniel Scheide, Librarian, Wimberly Library, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL; RAS Vice President, AJL; Chair, Bibliography and Reference Book Award, AJL


Schuldiner is a professor of English (University of Toledo), a scion of Holocaust survivors, and a long time Holocaust educator. A difficult choice was made to confront nuanced versions of Holocaust denial that he encountered at the university level, in part fed by the German Historians’ Debate and by examining the attitudes of German Americans towards the portrayal of the Holocaust in the American media. His study begins with the rise of Nazism in the early 1930s and its public endorsement of anti-Semitism in Germany which had an impact on the German-American community and this country’s Jews. While the former group tended to side with and defend German policies, American Jews were divided over the issue of whether or not to boycott German goods, which pit the American Jewish Committee against the American Jewish Congress. There was also the sensitive question for many Jews of dual loyalty that troubled many during the pre-World War II era. A special contribution is made to the general field of Holocaust studies with Schuldiner engaging the (Daniel) Goldhagen-(Christopher) Browning debate with an exemplary discussion of the heart of the matter with perpetrator sympathies and victim identification among historians who study the Holocaust. Here is a necessary work to add to a collection that appeals to a full range adult audience interested in learning how mass murder can affect the Jewish and non-Jewish American population.

Sanford R. Silverburg, Professor Emeritus, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC

Segal, Michal. המגדל נפרק: חידושי מילים של ילדים וניתוחם = ha-Migdal Nifrak: Hidushe Milim shel Yeladim ve-Nituham (The Tower Falled [sic!]: Words Innovations Created by Children, and Their Analysis).


This cute little book has a potential to please many parents of Hebrew-speaking children, as it sets to explain the linguistic formation of their kids’ khokhmes, or creative innovations while they make their first steps in language acquisition. However, I would consider it a parent guide or logbook, rather than a book “meant for anyone who is sensitive to and affected by hearing children’s unique linguistic creations.” Of a total of 135 numbered pages, only 75 pages are really text, a nice guide for parents who get a kick out of their kids’ innovations, and may also be concerned about their linguistic development. Over-correctness regarding language usage prevailed in Israel for many years; this nice logbook sheds light on the intuitive understanding of Hebrew grammar as demonstrated by young native speakers, emphasizing that their innovations are part of
natural development and are nothing but mistakes. This is not a research book by any means, but it does provide clear, visual explanations about linguistic phenomena. Its eight chapters are subdivided into 15 numbered sections, each representing a linguistic principle demonstrated by a number of examples: innovative nouns based on known Hebrew roots (“migzarayim” for scissors); regular plural patterns for irregular ones (“ishot” for women; “shulhanim” for tables; “sandalayim” for sandals); doubled plurals (“kapotot” for spoons); etc.

Like any workbook type of publication, this parent practical guide cannot be checked out from libraries for the purpose for which it was published. For those interested in children’s linguistic development, there is enough research literature in Hebrew, which makes this book superfluous in libraries, but a possible purchase for families.

Rachel Leket-Mor, Arizona State University, Phoenix, AZ


This slim academic volume contributes to the scholarship on Johann Pfefferkorn, a fifteenth century Jewish convert to Christianity who zealously advocated for the confiscation of Jewish books. After receiving a mandate from the Emperor to confiscate Jewish books within the Holy Roman Empire, Pfefferkorn was temporarily stopped by a local Mainz archbishop, which ultimately led to the establishment of a commission to investigate Jewish works. Although the confiscation of books eventually ended, the investigations by the commission continued. One member of this commission, a Christian Hebraist by the name of Johann Reuchlin, was the sole voice in recommending that Jewish books not be confiscated. This set the stage for a war of words and ideas between Pfefferkorn and Reuchlin that extended well beyond these two protagonists.

The author seeks to answer the following the question: “How did the Christians conceptualize Jewish literature, and did their concepts relate to the positions they took on the confiscation campaign?” In the first three chapters of the book, Shamir discusses the imperial mandates, the actual confiscations and the advisory opinions published by the commission. The second chapter provides particularly interesting narrative about the manner in which the confiscation occurred and the number of books confiscated (1500). The last chapter attempts to contextualize the Pfefferkorn affair within early modern Jewish history and link it to the growing phenomena of Christian Hebraica and the censorship movement of the time. Shamir argues that Pfefferkorn’s actions revealed weakness and insecurity in Christian dogma, and that ultimately the Pfefferkorn affair was more than anything, “a conflict about books, knowledge, truth and authority.”

This book will mainly be of interest to an academic audience. Shamir’s contribution to the historiography on the subject is of interest mainly to scholars of early modern Jewish history.

David Tesler, Yonkers, NY


Romanticism/Judaica is the third in a series of conference proceedings edited by Sheila Spector, an independent scholar, devoted to the intersection of Romanticism and Judaica.

The two previous compilations, British Romanticism and the Jews: History, Culture and Literature (Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) and Jews and British Romanticism: Politics, Religion, Culture (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) prepared the groundwork for this volume. All three volumes are compilations of serious academic papers and will find an interested audience. There is no questioning Spector’s commitment to her subject. This volume contains twelve essays in four sections: Nationalism and ‘Diasporeanism’; Religion and Anti-Semitism; Individualism and ‘Assimilationism’; Criticism and Reflection. This volume will interest academic libraries with scholars with a special interest in British Romanticism and the possible intersections with Jewish issues.

Paul Howard Hamburg, Librarian for Judaica, Yiddish and Israel Studies; Curator for Judaica at The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, CA

*Maus*, the Pulitzer Prize-winning graphic Holocaust memoir about Vladek Spiegelman, is such a profound and unprecedented comics work that it was discussed in *The New York Time Book Review* before the first volume went into print. The book and its cartoonist author (Art Spiegelman) have continued to attract the attention of writers, artists, journalists, and academics ever since. It is not surprising, then, that the book's publisher has decided to publish *Metamaus*, which seeks to offer extensive insight into the book itself, the precursors of the book, and biographical details about Spiegelman's family which were not detailed in his memoir. Though primarily consisting of Professor Hillary Chute's interviews with Spiegelman, depth and perspective are added with the inclusion of the interviews she conducted with Art's wife Francois Mouly and his children, Nadja and Dash. *Metamaus* also provides a look at negative reactions to *Maus* (illustrated with a 2-page spread of samples of rejection letters) and the challenges of overseeing foreign-language editions (the Hebrew-language one being a specific example examined). Though Spiegelman is an atheist, *Metamaus* gives insight into what being Jewish means to him and his wife (who is a convert) and children.

The *Metamaus* interviews are supplemented by family trees, the complete transcript of Spiegelman's 1972 interview with his father, a Spiegelman chronology, and an index. The DVD includes the entire content of *The Complete Maus* (which is searchable by keyword), audio transcripts of Vladek's interviews, a “home movie” that Art and Francoise shot while visiting Auschwitz, three essays on *Maus*, and more.

This book, winner of a 2011 Nation Jewish Book Award, is highly recommended as an essential addition to the adult and young adult Holocaust sections of public, school, academic and synagogue libraries.

*Steven M. Bergson, Jewish Comics Blogspot, http://jewishcomics.blogspot.com*


Dr. Steven Steinberg was a practicing dentist, happy in his work, when personal calamity changed his life. A bicycle accident and a diagnosis of Parkinson’s put an end to his career and transformed him into an author and public speaker whose inspiring journey is a lesson for all. Dr. Steinberg shares the process that brought him to the realization that although we can never know why bad things happen; we can go beyond that question and even further. Finding what really matters most, focusing on our deepest human values, leads to true healing and happiness.

Dr. Steinberg directs our attention to the four key healing values of *Light, Love, Life, Shalom*, the title of his book. As a motivational speaker, he guides audiences through his powerful messages; and as an author, he shares personal experiences and challenges to teach the lessons necessary for personal contentment. His stories and messages are excellent teaching tools for groups or individual study.

*Etta Gold, Library Director, Temple Beth Am, Pinecrest, FL*


According to the introduction, “This book is a collection drawn from Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz’s writings and oral discourses on the festivals and special times of the Jewish year. The purpose of these essays and talks is to reveal the meaning and essence of the holidays. The book was not written as one work, but rather constitutes a collection of individual chapters. Most of these chapters are essays written under various auspices and for a variety of forums and audiences, appearing in the press and various philosophical works and collections. A smaller part is drawn from talks, lectures, and interviews.” This book is not a guide to observing the holidays, nor does it contain much information about their history. It is a classical view of the meaning of the holidays according to traditional sources, which are listed in the book’s bibliography. The writing is very clear, but Rabbi Steinsaltz refers to some traditions and beliefs that may be unfamiliar to non-Orthodox readers. This is not a modern approach. Rather, it is Rabbi Steinsaltz’s attempt to make the holidays meaningful by explaining his own insights into rabbinic interpretations of them, as well as his personal ideas. For example, the entire section on Tu B’Shevat is an extended comparison of man to trees, with citations from standard texts to back up the analogy. Recommended for collections of rabbinics, or libraries where Steinsaltz’s works are requested.

*Beth Dwoskin, Proquest; Library Committee Chair, Beth Israel Congregation, Ann Arbor, MI*
Reviews of Nonfiction Titles for Adults

The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization

JEWISH THEOLOGY AND WORLD RELIGIONS
HERBERT A. DAVIDSON
MAIMONIDES: THE RATIONALIST
SHAUL STAMPER
LITHUANIAN YESHIVAS OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Creating a Tradition of Learning
TORAH FROM HEAVEN
The Reconstruction of Faith

ANTONY POLONSKY
THE JEWS IN POLAND AND RUSSIA
VOLUME III
1914 to 2008

DAVID NOVAK
THE IMAGE OF THE NON-JEW IN JUDAISM
SECOND EDITION

TIRTSAH LEVIE BERNFELD
POVERTY AND WELFARE AMONG THE PORTUGUESE JEWS IN EARLY MODERN AMSTERDAM

A D A R A T O F O R T - A L S E Y
WOMEN AND THE MESSIANIC HERESY OF SABBATAI ZEVI 1666–1816

MIRA KATZBURG-YUNGMAN
HADASSAH: American Women Zionists and the Renewal of Israel

 Ars Judaica

The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization

The author is an Arabic linguist who uses her talent and training to examine the relationship between language and identification, feminism and nationalism, and the nature of spatial and temporal boundaries as it affects self-perception. Her analysis is accomplished through interviews largely with peace activists including Palestinian Arabs with Israeli citizenship, Israeli Jews, and Palestinian Arab residents of Ramallah who hold Jordanian passports. Suleiman delves into the political socialization of Israeli residents’ self-perception as influenced by the place of residence and subsequently the individual’s role in the Arab-Israeli conflict. With her focus on peace activism, a highly public form of participation, she questions interviewees on the effect of feminism, especially in a patriarchal Muslim society. The level of sophistication of this book narrows the potential interest to those concerned with Middle East studies, international relations, and conflict studies, therefore not for everyone.

Sanford R. Silverburg, Professor Emeritus, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC


*The Men’s Section* explores the relatively new territory of Partnership Minyanim - independent Minyanim that require both ten men and ten women to begin tefillot and are also ‘halakhically’ egalitarian. Sztokman delves into the subject matter as a participant-researcher, having a keen understanding of the unique place that the minyanim hold within observant Jewish life, while seeking to comprehend the decision of individuals to become part of a community that allows for an egalitarian, halakhic setting. Sztokman’s research looks at the “expected” gender roles within the Orthodox framework and shows that there is not one single rationale for male participation in Partnership Minyanim. The research indicates that participation crosses generational and international divides, as the Minyanim for which the study is based includes the United States, Israel and Australia and men interviewed range from twenty to above sixty years of age.

Exploring the type of men that would participate and attend the Minyanim, Sztokman finds there is quite a variety - from men that would identify as feminists, to those that are grappling with their own self-identity and issues of masculinity and those that attend for purely social reasons, while others seem to partake because of their wives. Criticism remains on the male and female sides regarding competency in areas of religious leadership, including serving as Sheliach/Shelichat Tzibur, Baal/at Keriyah, etc. The softer, open, nicer Minyan conception is not without external criticism and general fear – with anecdotes of an upcoming Bar Mitzvah for which a community member requests that women not participate, as it would highlight struggles among visiting family members and fear of not being considered Orthodox. This full-length treatment of Partnership Minyanim is an important addition to academic collections, particularly those that look at the history of modern religion and its developments globally.

Tina Weiss, Senior Associate Librarian, Klau Library, HUC-JIR, New York

Talon, Miri and Yaron Peleg, editors. *Israeli Cinema: Identities in Motion*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2011. 380 pp. $55.00 cloth; $25.27 pbk. (9780292725607; 9780292743991).

Israeli cinema has come a long way since the Israeli state’s establishment in 1948. Cinema was, for the most part, largely recruited to promote the Zionist idea and settlement and overtaking of what Herzl called Altneuland. Early films like Oded the Wanderer and This is the Land from the 1930s stressed the beauty of the land and its rich history. Later films such as *Hill 24 Doesn’t Answer* and *He Walked through the Fields*, highlighted the bravery and the unlikelihood of victory of little Israel against her numerous invincible neighboring states.

The establishment of the state has finally given way to “civilian” themes; films such as *Sallah* focused on life in the making of the young country. And conversely, from the late 60s, a lighter trend takes its cinematic turn in the form of Bourekas films (a genre of mostly simple sentimental content and value), light comedies about the incompetence of Israeli bureaucracy, army-themed films and love stories.

Diaspora groups who arrived in Israel over the years become more apparent on screen. In films such as *Late Marriage*, *Turn Left at the End of the World* and *The Band’s Visit*, Israeli cinema not only moves beyond its narrow days of settlement, but can now take its place proudly in the national cinema community.

This critical collection of essays, covering the history of Israeli cinema from its inception to today, is the first of its kind in the English language. The editors accomplished a tremendous task choosing a spectrum of articles
covering the history, sociology, ethnicity and universality of Israeli film. The subjects covered include war and its aftermath, the cultural kaleidoscope, Holocaust and trauma, Orthodoxy, army and soldiers, the Palestinians and the other. I heartily recommend this book both for academic and community Jewish libraries; it’s a real gem.

Noa Wahrman, Jewish Studies Collection Manager, Wells Library, Indiana University Bloomington, IN


Today I am a Woman is a compilation of stories by women describing the experience and the lasting memories of their Bat Mitzvah. The book includes women from different branches of Judaism, different ages (however, most of the stories are told by girls of 12 and 13) and different countries. An interesting aspect of the book is the variety of regions that are represented: Africa, Asia, Australia and New Zealand, the Caribbean, Europe, the former Soviet Union Eastern Europe, Latin America, Middle East and North Africa and North America. If glossy and colored pictures rather than grey tone reproductions had been used, it would have added to the appearance of the book and made it more appealing to young adults. The appearance of the book limits its appeal to an adult audience. Today I am a Woman makes a contribution to the history of Jewish women in depicting the experiences of women in this important life cycle event. Recommended for synagogue libraries and women’s collections.

Ellen Share, Librarian, Washington Hebrew Congregation, Washington, D.C.


The content of the book includes stories that are found in the Tanakh (Torah, Prophets and Writings) and the Christian Bible. In addition, there is historical information on the Crusaders, Knights of the Temple, Freemasons, and Jerusalem. The illustrations are absolutely magnificent and make the book memorable. Works of art and photographs are produced in bright, clear and shiny pictures. The book, which is written from a Christian perspective, presents Jesus as a figure, “come to lead God’s people on the next stage of their sacred journey.” It does not belong in a Judaica collection for content, but it could be used for the illustrations which include pictures of the tabernacle, Ark of the Covenant, Temple of Solomon, and Temple built by Herod. It presents a sympathetic picture of Israel. The illustrations are exceptional – reproductions of famous works of art, computer generated illustrations, and maps. Includes maps, bibliography, and index.

Ellen Share, Librarian, Washington Hebrew Congregation, Washington D.C.


Qumran studies is a wide and popular field within the study of Ancient Judaism, but few scholars grapple with the legal dimensions of this material. Cana Werman and Aharon Shemesh have been working, independently and in tandem, for more than a decade on reconstructing the legal system of the Qumran community and its place within Second Temple Judaism. Shemesh published a monograph in English, titled Halakhah in the Making, in 2009, and the two have published many articles in both English and Hebrew on specific aspects of their work. Revealing the Hidden is an ambitious volume, aiming to summarize the entire gamut of halakhah as expressed (or hinted) in the Dead Sea Scrolls. The first part of the book presents the foundations of Qumran Halakhah, some of which were common to some or all of Second Temple Judaism while others were unique to this sectarian community. The second part delves into the details of Qumran laws in a series of areas – marriage laws, agricultural laws, communal rules and the calendar. The book is written for a non-specialist but erudite, Hebrew-speaking audience. The chapters are written without extensive citations to previous scholarship and with explanations of relevant biblical passages and their corresponding rabbinic and sectarian interpretations.

Pinchas Roth, graduate student in the Talmud Department at Hebrew University, Jerusalem


How does a language change over time when limited to ritual practices in a small, isolated community? The Haggadah of the Kaifeng Jews of China is important, less for what it tells us about the Haggadah itself, but for what it
tells us about the community’s knowledge of Hebrew. Using two manuscripts from the early 17th century (now housed at HUC), the authors painstakingly dissect the minute differences between this text and the traditional texts of other Jewish communities. These differences teach us a great deal about how Hebrew was pronounced in Kaifeng and how the surrounding Chinese and Judeo-Persian languages affected this pronunciation. This text also sheds light on how the Kaifeng Jews performed the Seder-night rituals. For a very specialized audience, to be sure, and cost-prohibitive (it is Brill, after all) but an important work of scholarship.

Daniel Scheide, Librarian, Wimberly Library, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL; RAS Vice President, AJL; Chair, Bibliography and Reference Book Award, AJL


Daniel Matt continues his monumental project with the sixth volume of translation and commentary of The Zohar. With this volume Matt completes the text of The Zohar on the Book of Exodus (Shemot). Projected are three additional volumes completing The Zohar’s commentaries on the final books of the Torah (Vayikra, Bemidbar and Devarim). An additional three volumes will include the Zohar’s commentaries on other books of the Bible.

Volume Six deals primarily with two themes – First, the building of the Dwelling (mishkan) by Moses and the Israelites in the desert. The Dwelling in the representation of the Shekhinah (the feminine presence of God); Second, the incident of The Golden Calf (egel ha-zahav) encountered by Moses upon returning from his encounter with God on Mount Sinai. The building of the Golden Calf is seen as the rejection of the Shekhinah by the Israelites.

As with the five previous volumes, Stanford University Press provides the Aramaic text on its website (www.sup.org/Zohar/). The Zohar is a notoriously difficult text and it is not surprising that the rabbis limited its study to those who had mastered much of the preceding rabbinic literature before embarking on learning this text. Slow and meticulous study of the original text along with Matt’s brilliant translation and extensive commentary will prove ultimately rewarding. The Pritzker Edition should finds its place in any serious Judaica library together will all of the other major texts of Judaism. As an introduction, A Guide to the Zohar by Arthur Green is highly recommended.

Paul Howard Hamburg, Librarian for Judaica, Yiddish and Israel Studies; Curator for Judaica at The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, CA


Rabbi Shmuly Yanklowitz has been involved in various forms of social activism for many years, but was often the only Orthodox Jew in the room. This experience prompted him to found Uri L’Tzedek, the first Orthodox social justice organization. The book compiles Yanklowitz’s articles on a wide variety of topics that have strong grounding in traditional sources, yet seem rarely to be a part of the conversation in Orthodox circles. The range is astonishing: prison reform, workers’ rights, the health care debate, vegetarianism, globalization, economic responsibility, natural disasters and far more. Given the large scope, an index would have been nice. The self-congratulatory tone in a few of the articles is grating and there is at least one misattributed quote, but the importance of the book far outweighs these problems. It’s hard to think of another book that is so tied to tradition, yet focuses on the most relevant questions of the 21st century. Recommended for all libraries.

Daniel Scheide, Librarian, Wimberly Library, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL; RAS Vice President, AJL; Chair, Bibliography and Reference Book Award, AJL


Zahavy, an ordained rabbi and professor of religious studies, draws on his observations of those who attend synagogue and describes six archetypes. The Performer, a cantor, Torah reader, shofar blower or dynamic rabbi; the Mystic, who looks back and hopes to transcend time and place. The Scribe is interested in the textual content of the actual prayers, while the Priest seeks God through familiar symbols and notions. The Meditator focuses on brachot (blessings) and the Celebrity is the high profile leader. Obviously these personalities interact to form a congregation, and one person could fit into more than one paradigm, depending on the liturgy.

These ideas and opinions are the author’s, as he makes no reference to sources that support or negate his views. While five different prayer books are listed in the sources at the end of the book, few prayers are referenced.
During this discussion, there are many times when Zahavy "will explain in the following pages," "explained previously," or "will suffice to say," which give it the feel of a term paper. It is disappointing that in a discussion of Jewish meditation there is no mention of Aryeh Kaplan, whose classic texts have inspired many. It is unclear for whom this book is meant. Some prayers are defined in great detail, others are described briefly. There is neither a glossary nor an index, and no biographical notes. Finally, despite the old adage, the bright pink cover with a bright yellow arch and shadows of men wearing fedoras is unlikely to attract those browsing the shelves.

Kathe Pinchuck, Montclair Public Library, Montclair, NJ

**PUBLISHING NOTES**


This *Haggadah*, favorably reviewed in a previous issue (Sept./Oct. 2011, p. 27), is now available in English translation.

**LITERATURE: MEMOIR, FICTION AND POETRY**


Dr. Ida Ackerman-Tieder is a pediatrician and a psychoanalyst. She is also a Holocaust survivor and tells her story in a unique way. Of course the biographical details are there: born in Berlin, she lost her parents in the Holocaust and lived in France until she made aliyah. This is not, however, a typical Holocaust memoir. She interweaves her story with lessons learned from it. Using both prose and poetry, she finds evidence of strength, faith, and courage. She faces difficult situations, but refuses to be defeated and uses what she learns to build a positive life. She feels that her personal history is bound up with that of the Jewish people, often persecuted, but surviving and emerging stronger than before. This is a good addition to Holocaust collections. Book groups will also find much to discuss here.

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


Aharon Appelfeld is a storyteller par excellence – not surprisingly he is often mentioned as a candidate for the Nobel Prize. His readers can easily see in their imagination the beautiful landscapes of the Carpathian Mountains, smell the spring air of the region, hear the sounds of the chirping birds and taste the delicious fresh-picked fruit eaten by the people who inhabit his many novels.

Although the Holocaust is the backdrop of all his books, one only senses the tensions, fears and horrors in the far distance. The people Appelfeld describes are affected by the distant events, think about the upheavals about to happen, and question their Jewishness, but there are no concentration camps mentioned or described, no crematoria, only a constant fear.

When not autobiographical, Appelfeld’s books still are steeped in his fond childhood memories, and this book, like many of his other books, brings to mind him as a child with his loving, doting mother. In this case it is Otto and Blanca who wander the Carpathian landscape, Blanca trying to shield her son from the possible German onslaught and the memories of her abusive husband, Otto’s father. The short chapters, Appelfeld’s signature writing style, move back and forth from Blanca’s beautifully bucolic, if sad, childhood to 1940 and the
catastrophe looming in the background.

To read Appelfeld’s works is to be transported to another planet and dwell there for the duration of the story. This book, winner of a 2011 Nation Jewish Book Award, is recommended for every Judaica library, large or small, with a Holocaust book collection as well as any Israeli literature collection.

Michelen Amir, Reference Coordinator, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC


Terry Gordon Colbert successfully portrays a beautiful friendship between two American soldiers who met in Iceland while serving during WWII. Michael is a homeless uneducated Christian man from a broken family, and Jay is a cherished, well-educated, and intelligent homosexual from an intellectual Jewish family. Michael is a budding poet and an author who is encouraged by Jay to pursue his calling as an artist. The close relationships between Michael and Jay and their patriotism sustain them during their military service. The fact of Jay’s homosexuality is never revealed to Michael or to Jay’s parents.

The plot is interesting and conveys unexpected information about subjects such as Iceland, the army service experience, WWII, and sexuality, in addition to bits and pieces on a broad range of scholarly subjects. The publisher claims that its objective is to publish “...works that tackle important issues or represent marginal voices.” Unfortunately this reviewer could not find the “important issue or the marginal voice” in this book. Jay is clearly in the “closet” with respect to his homosexuality and that does not seem to be a problem for him during his military service.

*The Aim of Art*, the title of the novel, follows Oscar Wilde’s saying that “to reveal art and conceal the artist is art’s aim.” The reader is left pondering the truth of this epitaph. The book is printed in an unusually small font, which may not please readers. This book has nothing of relevance to qualify it as Jewish and therefore it is not recommended for any Jewish collection.

Nira G. Wolfe, Independent researcher, Highland Park, IL; Head Librarian Hebrew Theological College (retired), Skokie, IL


College professor Dinnerstein loves her “stuff.” Each object in her home holds either a precious memory or the seed of amazing potential. She loves giving a home to damaged items that nobody else wants and thrills at finding treasures in second-hand stores. But gradually the overflowing clutter in her life starts to impinge on her relationships with people and her work, and leaves her feeling spiritually isolated. She realizes that she needs to simplify her life and hopes that this will help her strengthen her relationship to her husband and friends and to reconnect her to God.

Dinnerstein turns to a variety of people and places for help: therapy, a 12-step Clutterers Anonymous program, and a Kabbalist in Israel. Throughout the process of learning about her relationship to the many objects in her life, Dinnerstein has the active support of her circle of women friends. Through her journey, she realizes that she doesn’t have to wait until she’s solved all her problems before she can turn to God.

The Jewish content seems oddly out of balance. While written in what seems to be a traditional Jewish voice, with references to the holidays and a trip to Israel, there is no mention of the formal Jewish institutes; no conversations with her rabbi or support of a congregational community.

Written in a conversational tone, this enjoyable memoir is full of soul-searching humor. It would be a good candidate for book club selections. Recommended.

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


Traveling back and forth from the story of 1960s star-crossed lovers Mickey Moe Levy and Laura Anne Needleman, to the struggles of Mickey Moe’s father, Bernard Levy, in the 1920s and 1930s, the author attempts to illuminate the story of Jewish life in the South, relationships between Jews and African Americans and also the overwhelming experience of the great Mississippi flood of 1927. Scenes of Mickey Moe fighting in the swamps of Vietnam in 1965 bookend the novel. Traveling back and forth in short chapters, reading the love story of Mickey Moe and Laura, and also of each of their parents and even his grandparents, keeps the reader slightly confused...
and feeling distant from the story. But after 105 or so pages the story melds, some of the characters develop personalities and the reader is swept along.

This National Jewish Book Award finalist is more than just another multi-generational family saga, but it has little Jewish content and really tells the reader little about Southern Jews, other than their obsession with proper behavior, good family and bloodlines, and it suffers mightily in comparison to a somewhat similar popular recent book, The Help. The structure is awkward and the framing device and ending are unconvincing. Nevertheless it raises provocative questions and will be enjoyed by book groups.

Merrily Hart, Ann Arbor MI; Librarian, Siegal College, Cleveland, OH (retired)


Yoram Gross, an award-winning children’s animation filmmaker living in Australia, has produced a riveting autobiography.

Born in Krakow, the author begins his story in 1939 when the Germans invaded Poland, just as he was to celebrate his bar mitzvah. Thanks to a combination of Aryan papers, courage, luck, quick thinking, ingenuity, and the help of good friends, some of them Christian, Jerzy (Yoram) succeeded in surviving the war. After the war, he assisted film directors and attended lectures at the National Film School in Lodz. Immigrating to Israel in 1950 and adopting the name Yoram, he started to experiment with animation and eventually produced a full-length feature, Joseph the Dreamer, which became extremely popular. In 1968, Yoram moved to Australia, where he pioneered animation with live-action against real backgrounds, a technique never before used in Australia. He achieved great success with animated features for children such as Dot and the Kangaroo and Blinky Bill. Yoram explains that some of the characters and animals in his films are based on his past. He combines his passions – love of creating films for children, and love of animals, which are not capable of creating death camps – in his films.

The book recounts life and death events in a style which is on one hand matter of fact, and on the other hand, impossible to put down. It is suitable for high school and adult readers, especially for those interested in Holocaust memoirs or in the arts.

Shulamith Z. Berger, Curator of Special Collections, Yeshiva University, New York


Visiting the desert hilltop palace/fortress of Masada, the author Alice Hoffman encountered “...a spiritual experience so intense and moving I felt as though the lives that had been led there two thousand years earlier were utterly fresh and relevant.”

And so, in this very ambitious novel, four different women tell their tale of death and suffering, romance and sisterhood, and the author succeeds in bringing to life the events and the people who lived and died on Masada, as the Romans destroyed the Second Temple, the Jewish state and the Zealots on the mountain.

Alice Hoffman has always been an excellent storyteller, with a fluent writing style and general readers, especially devotees of historical fiction, will love this book. Her research was thorough and although the language is too modern, I could detect no egregious errors. It’s a bit of a soap opera, too long and repetitious, and the four voices sound very similar, but it sweeps the reader into the story and into that time and place.

This will be very popular with the reader who loved James Michener’s The Source and Anita Diament’s The Red Tent and a good choice for Jewish book groups.

Merrily Hart, Ann Arbor MI; Librarian, Siegal College, Cleveland, OH (retired)


Life in Israel for Palestinians is the topic of this thoughtful, well-written memoir. The author, Sami al Jundi, grew from a rebellious teenager to a leader of Seeds of Peace, an organization devoted to fostering personal relationships between Israeli and Palestinian teens. Sami was born in 1962 in Jerusalem. His grandmother’s family left their home in Zakariyya in 1948 when the Jewish soldiers came and the family finally settled in Bethlehem. As a teenager in 1979, Sami and two friends tried unsuccessfully to build a bomb. One friend was killed and another lost two fingers. Sami, unhurt, was arrested, tortured and sentenced to ten years in prison. In prison, a
close network among the Palestinian prisoners organized classes, lectures and reading lists. Sami expanded his horizons through books and classes on revolution, economics, philosophy, Jewish history and other topics.

After his release and marriage, Sami saw the world with different eyes. He realized that Fatah leaders did not adhere to the values of the movement and had disdain for average citizens. At the same time, Sami met Jews who sympathized with Palestinians. In 1996, Sami learned about Seeds of Peace, a camp in Maine for Israeli and Palestinian teens. Sami and an American Jew facilitated additional contacts among these teens when they returned to Israel. Seeds of Peace declined in 2002 with the Second Intifada. Sami slowly watched the “soul of Seeds of Peace” drain away until he was fired in 2006.

The memoir is definitely seen through Palestinian eyes although criticism is leveled at both sides. However, Al Jundi never notes that the Israeli army was responding to atrocities committed by Palestinian terrorists. Perhaps this omission indicates that even knowledgeable Palestinians see no connection between the actions of their own terrorists and the violent Israeli response that affects the average citizen. If this is so, it enhances the purpose of the book of portraying the Palestinian viewpoint. Recommended for academic, synagogue and center libraries.

Lee Haas, Temple Emanu El, Cleveland, OH


How is it possible, if it is indeed possible at all, to capture the idiomatic flavor of an original work in a translation? This new translation features Yiddish short stories by Heershadovid Menkes (also known as Professor Dovid Katz), a renowned scholar of Lithuanian Yiddish culture. Katz’s 1996 collection, titled in the original Misnagnishe Mayses: Fun Vilner Gubernye (Tales of the Misnagdim: From the Vilnius Region) deserves a broader audience, not only for its rich descriptiveness, authenticity, and artistic merit, but also for its portrayal of a sometimes overlooked group.

This is an attempt to transmit not just language, but an entire culture and civilization, to readers who likely have a less intimate and less informed relationship to the text than readers of the original language. To that end, a brief introduction on the historical context of the stories, as well as footnotes, help readers to understand some of the words and concepts in the stories. For Yiddish readers, a comparison between the original work and the translation is inevitable. The Yiddish text flows and sounds natural, in part due to the idiomatic flexibility of the author’s word order and his use of regional vocabulary. This English translation is somewhat shorter, and some phrases seem to lose their flavor, depth, or even their meaning.

This work is nonetheless an important effort to reach English readers interested in misnagdim and in Yiddish literature. Recommended for academic libraries.

Amanda (Miryem-Khaye) Seigel, Dorot Jewish Division, New York Public Library, New York


Approaching You in English is a book of forty-three Hebrew poems by Admiel Kosman. The excellent English translation appears on each page opposite the original Hebrew. Shlomit Naim-Naor, also a poet and scholar of Israeli poetry, concludes the book with an Afterword titled “Gender and the Sanctity of the Jewish Home.” There are a helpful Forward, Notes to the Poems, and short biographies of Kosman, Katz, and Naim-Naor at the end of the book.

Kosman’s poems are rooted in the Jewish religion (“Kiddush” ; “A Poet”) and Jewish heritage (“Lament for the Ninth of Av”). His poems express his political views on contemporary life in Israel (“When the terrorists murder me at my window”; “I told the Jerusalem city watchman...”). The notes to the poems and the analysis of Kosman’s universal philosophy and several of his poems add to the reader’s understanding of Kosman’s ideas and message; especially regarding his thoughtful concept of “The Other” and of his Jewish-Israeli identity. It will be interesting to follow up on Kosman’s poetry output from his new location in Germany.

Poetry is an abstract vehicle for the human’s soul. In the case of Admiel Kosman, the language he writes in is an added element. He inserts transliterated English words in his Hebrew writings: “I say “help” instead of ah-zor, “save” instead of Ho-sha-ya.”; he also writes poems (“A Prayer”; “A Plea”) in English transliterated into Hebrew. Approaching You in English is a beautiful presentation of a serious Israeli poet. The volume will enrich all academic Jewish and general poetry collections.

Nira G. Wolfe, Independent researcher, Highland Park, IL; Head Librarian Hebrew Theological College (retired), Skokie, IL
Set in Temple Fortune, a small, tight-knit Jewish suburb of London, Francesca Segal’s debut novel is a triumphant and beautifully executed recasting of Edith Wharton’s *The Age of Innocence*.

“Segal’s debut novel is an example of how one can be influenced by great writers who’ve come before yet not be trapped by them....Inspired by *The Age of Innocence*, Segal’s book is warmer, funnier, and paints a more dynamic and human portrait of a functional community that is a wonderful juxtaposition to Wharton’s cold social strata in Gilded Age New York...Lively and entertaining.”

—Publishers Weekly (starred review)

With so many Holocaust memoirs being self-published at present, important books can appear without being reviewed. *Sidonia’s Thread* belongs to that category. It was written by the daughter of a survivor who was born in a Displaced Persons’ Camp to a single mother. After the war they managed to make their way to Springfield, Massachusetts, where Sidonia made a living as a seamstress, first as a piece work manager and eventually as the designer seamstress of the city. She brought up her daughter in a community which included other survivors of the horrors of Europe, and she was the best dressed girl among her peers.

There was a secret Sidonia was not able to reveal to her daughter while she was alive, but after her death, Hanna succeeded in finding answers to questions that had haunted her for many years. The resolution of the mystery and the interesting manner in which the book is written, with chapters titled after sewing themes, along with photographs and documents, make this work not only very interesting reading about the lives of two extraordinary women, but one more important testimony to how lives were indelibly affected by World War II. It would be interesting for a book group discussion and certainly belongs in every library that has an extensive collection of works on the Holocaust.

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


After Nancy Miller’s father dies, she finds family memorabilia with which she is unfamiliar when she cleans out the apartment. Analyzing each item carefully, Miller establishes contact with relatives she had never met, and learns about her family and their legacy. She initially thought the Kipnis family came from Kishinev, and their immigration was prompted by the 1903 pogrom. It turns out her grandparents lived in villages outside the city and came to America in 1906. She examines photographs and letters and travels to Tucson and Kishinev to flesh out details. Miller describes her process as well as her shifting emotions as many of her assumptions are proved wrong. Miller is a professor of English and comparative literature, and this is evident in phrases like “typing a long and coruscating complaint about my father’s epistolary skills.” There are many literary allusions and quotes. She shares very intimate details of herself and her family: suicide, unhappy marriages, and estranged relatives. At times these details are interesting. For the most part, they add intrusiveness to a story that is already very personal, thus making it less useful as a guide to family research and genealogy and more cathartic exposition for the author. With many memoirs and books about Jewish American history from which to choose, this one is a pass unless your library collects Jewish memoir or is located near Tucson, Arizona.

Kathe Pinchuck, Montclair Public Library, Montclair, NJ


“We were black elephants, stripped of our humanity, trapped like wild game,” states the author, conveying a striking image of a couple, wearing their gas masks, enclosed in their sealed room to defend against Saddam Hussein’s incoming Scud missile attacks on Israeli cities during the first Gulf War. The image conveys the psychological distance that increasingly fractures their life together, as well as their relationship to a country longing for peace but perennially at war.

A memoir of love and failure, Karol Nielsen’s remembrance of her relationship and marriage with Aviv, an Israeli she met while backpacking in Peru, is an accessible story that sweeps you along in their adventurous peripatetic courtship. But once they are forced to settle down in New York or Israel, the differences in their outlook, background and identities threaten their love.

Religious differences are the least of their problems and Nielsen captures all the angst suffered by an American non-Jewish woman and Israeli man as they struggle with national identity, responsibility to country and aspirations for the future.

The writing is often jumpy and the representation of Aviv’s less-than-perfect English, written in the present tense, is awkward and often doesn’t ring true. The author has some difficulty moving back and forth in time, with large chunks of exposition to fill in the background of their lives. Phrases, which seem charming and original when they appear, such as “...Bolivian women wore English bowler hats and baby-doll skirts” seem
the result of careless editing when they are repeated exactly a few pages later. Nevertheless, it is a compelling memoir which should appeal to a wide audience.

*Merrily Hart, Ann Arbor MI; Librarian, Siegal College, Cleveland, OH (retired)*

**Paloma, Vanessa. The Mountain the Desert and the Pomegranate: Stories from Morocco and Beyond. Santa Fe, NM: Gaon Books (Kol Bat Series, Voices of Jewish Women, v. 11), 2011. 88 pp. $21.95 cloth; $14.00 pbk. (9781935604167; 978-1935604037).**

An interesting small collection of stories based on the life and experiences of the author, a professional singer, researcher, and specialist in Sephardic traditions and music, who lives in Casablanca. The stories are about multiple universes and perceptions, about paradox. They are short, and hold the interest of the reader. The book includes striking black and white illustrations, digital photographs, which enrich the text. There is also a glossary, and a listing of titles in the Kol Bat series. The book was published in collaboration with the Gaon Institute, an organization that supports tolerance through literacy. It is recommended for school, academic and public library collections, as well as temple and synagogue libraries.

*Susan Freiband, Retired Library Educator, Arlington, VA*


Mysticism and kabbalah, the physics of time travel, science fiction and a love story crossing time and worlds -- what more could a reader ask for? First-time novelist Wendy Polins also grapples with the balance between emotion and reason, art and science. The title, taken from T.S. Eliot's “Four Quartets” is the most obvious of the many weighty references to literature, Einstein and his famous theorems, etc. Set in the Judean desert, New York, Gloucester, Massachusetts, and Jerusalem, among other significant locales, the novel is filled with interesting ideas, but is a little too heavily freighted with lofty sentiments and earth-shaking moments of recognition.

“We are all taking our place along a wavelike continuum that will create the history of our culture. Humbled by the traditions we are taking on, we have come from colleges all over the world. In this moment are all those who have come before and their accomplishments. I feel the endless possibility and promise that the opportunity holds. This is what fuels the burning desire in every one of us to make our mark and be different, add something new.”

Nevertheless, the quirky characters, a good love story and interesting ideas are linked through smooth writing to provide a compelling story that individual readers and book clubs should enjoy. The slender slips imbedded in the binding with topics such as “Einstein, Darwin, Hitler” or locations such as “Judean Desert, 1943 under the British Mandate” provide an interesting gimmick and useful bookmarks!

*Merrily Hart, Ann Arbor MI; Librarian, Siegal College, Cleveland, OH (retired)*


Quiet Motti and brash Menachem are friends in an unequal balance-of-power relationship and when a drunken Menachem accidentally runs over a pedestrian, Motti impulsively steps in and takes the rap, spending years in jail. The plot can be summarized in a sentence. But is that what the book is really about or is it focused on the possibilities of fiction and imagining life stories? It is a study of the interior life of Motti, who spends his time imagining all the possibilities of wonderful futures with Ariella, but in real life, seems to have a relationship only with his dog, Laika. What a load of symbolism that little dog, named after Russia’s space dog, carries!

Constantly intruding, the author opens with a brief chapter addressing the reader, “You’re the performers and the audience all at once, and everything is already out of my control. Therefore I can only request that you read attentively, or at least not with complete indifference.” Chapters are short and the brief quotations from Ludwig Wittgenstein that separate the sections are wordy philosophical statements. This is a “post-modern” novel of self-consciousness. The translator, Todd Hasak Lowy points out, in his excellent afterword, that most novels from Israel are shaped by the history and situation of Israel; however, this novel, if you changed a few names and a few sentences, could take place anywhere.

This is a challenging read, but well worth the effort for any lover of literature.

*Merrily Hart, Ann Arbor MI; Librarian, Siegal College, Cleveland, OH (retired)*

Sixteen year old Minnie has quite a story to tell. Born in Odessa, she finds herself wanting to escape her troubles and decides to volunteer to be a mail order bride and journey to America. The little information that she is given leaves her imagining a wonderful, easier life with a new husband. However, when she arrives and meets her much-older fiancé and his sons, she discovers that she will be tested by an attraction to Max’s oldest son. Mid-nineteenth century South Dakota is a rough, lonely place and Minna’s new home is a hut dug out of a hillside. She is not sure she is prepared to confront all these issues however she digs deep to try. Masterfully written, this is the debut novel for Solomon. Her description of the setting draws the reader in and the desire between Minna and her stepson is also palpable. Religious differences between these family members are explored with reverence and care. These discussions amongst the characters add much to the book's Jewish content and readers will enjoy these characters and cheer this family on. This book is recommended for Jewish libraries.

*Debbie Feder, Director, Library Resource Center, Ida Crown Jewish Academy, Chicago, IL*

**SOUND RECORDINGS**


Theme and variations of Kol Nidre tune by Guitarist and Sitarist Nicolas Jolliet are explored. There are two parts on this short CD: 1. Kol Nidre on sitar; 2. Kol Nidre free interpretation. Jolliet uses several exotic Eastern instruments: Sitar, Srbahar,Tabla, Oud, and Dumbek. The rhythm evolves from traditional Ragas into Reggae beat. The second part also utilizes male singing. The CD will enrich any musical collection, especially those who specialize in ethnomusicology.

*Nira G. Wolfe, Independent researcher, Highland Park, IL; Head Librarian Hebrew Theological College (retired), Skokie, IL*


The twelve compositions on this CD are the result of collaboration between Roger Davidson, well-known pianist and composer, and Frank London, trumpeter, bandleader, and the album’s arranger and producer. This is not your father’s klezmer music. Although the songs feature traditional klezmer instruments, Davidson’s sounds travel in different circles than what we have come to expect. This contemporary incarnation of klezmer music, is no longer chained to the shtetl, but also never forgets where it came from. The album takes us on a journey which delights us with musical gifts from the Middle East, Hungary, England, Russia, and Spain. We also visit the worlds of jazz, folk music, dancing the hora and tango along the way. This is a high quality recording by top-flight musicians. I would recommend it to anyone who is musically adventurous.

*Maxine Schackman, Director, Judaica Sound Archives, Florida Atlantic University Libraries, Boca Raton, FL*


Robert Saxton is a modern British composer. At the age of 21, he won the Gaudeamus International Composers prize in Holland. He is currently Professor of Composition and Tutorial Fellow in Music at the University of Oxford.

*The Wandering Jew* is his first radio opera and was over twenty years in the making. Performed flawlessly by the BBC Symphony Orchestra and the BBC Players, this recording was first broadcast on BBC Radio 3 in 2011. It tells the story of the Wandering Jew, a central character in medieval Catholic Mystery Plays. Saxton tells the tale from the Wandering Jew’s perspective and follows him from a Nazi death camp back to Jerusalem, Cordoba and Venice. He finally returns to the death camp where all are dead, save one beggar whom he meets centuries
earlier in Venice – Jesus. Their ensuing conversation ends with them agreeing that they share each other’s pain. Jesus sings the words of the Birkat Kohanim (Priestly blessing) to the chorus of innocent dead spirits of the camps and they reply with singing the words of Mah Tovu (all in English). The Wandering Jew sings the last words of the opera: the Shema.

The music is accessible to a general audience, and Saxton does interesting things with specific notes and tones (expanding and contracting a seven note set to symbolically show wandering and return, for example). I enjoyed the orchestration more than the libretto. The music is superb. Short online clips of the tracks for review can be found at: http://www.nmcrec.co.uk/recording/wandering-jew-0. Recommended for libraries that collect contemporary opera.

Suzanne Smailes, Head of Technical Services, Wittenberg University Library, Springfield, OH


Though it calls itself a “klezmer ensemble,” the British group She’koyokh does an effective job of blending classic eastern European style riffs with Sephardic modes and melodies, as well as bringing a modern sensibility to standard tunes. One of the most successful cuts on the CD embodies this wonderful fusion. “Üsküdar,” which will be familiar to klezmer listeners as “Der Terk in America”, is given a lively and authentic treatment with a traditional approach to the vocals. The playing is uniformly excellent, and the instrumentation supports the fusion quality of the CD—clarinet and violin for the klezmer aspect, with mandolin, oud, and hand drums to back up the Sephardic and Arabic pieces. Sometimes the ensemble doesn’t quite blend smoothly, though this may be a production issue. The group’s treatment of the Sephardic standard “Los Bilbilicos” is disappointing—too fast-paced and harsh, with none of the haunting and mysterious quality the song calls for. Overall, the style of the songs is both respectful and novel, and the CD is a good introduction to music that Jews listened to and performed in areas outside of the Pale, particularly Turkey and the Balkans. The liner notes, in English, French, German, and Spanish, are thorough and contain words to the songs. Recommended for libraries that are collecting CDs.

Beth Dwoskin, Catalog Librarian, Proquest; Chair, Library Committee, Beth Israel Congregation, Ann Arbor, MI


This is the fourth album by SIX13, a six-man vocal band. Already well-known for their top selling a cappella CDs and iTunes downloads; this current CD provides a breakout with “P-A-S-S-O-V-E-R” which is already a YouTube hit.

With the ten songs on this CD, the band clearly attempts to provide something for everyone from teenagers to grandparents. Original music, parodies, upbeat tempos, creativity and spectacular a cappella harmony make this an album that will satisfy those who are fans of SIX13 and impress many who are not already familiar with their music.

The album has been criticized for not having a “singular artistic vision” and for being “schizophrenic.” This might be true, but what has been lost in conformity and consistency has been more than gained back by exciting creative performance and variety. I would recommend this CD to anyone who can enjoy modern Jewish Rock.

Maxine Schackman, Director, Judaica Sound Archives, Florida Atlantic University Libraries, Boca Raton, FL


This compilation features a delightfully interesting and high-quality cross-section of Jewish music originally issued by the defunct Tikvah record label. Ranging from the sublime Jo Amar to the hilarious Leo Fuchs, the variety of styles include Israeli, Yemenite, Yiddish, English and ‘Yinglish.’ I found most songs to be enjoyable, if not outstanding, representing virtuosity as well as historical value. The selections showcase beautiful singing and instrumentation, Jewish and international flavor, and humorous lyrics. The liner notes are thoughtfully compiled, providing a good overview of each featured artist or group as well as a glimpse into the Jewish music scene of the time.

The charmingly kitschy design includes numerous color images of vintage album covers and photos of artists. I look forward to more productions of this innovative organization. Recommended for all libraries.

Amanda (Miryem-Khaye) Seigel, Dorot Jewish Division, New York Public Library
Reviews of Multimedia


This CD contains music that was played in the 2011 radio drama, “The Witches of Lublin,” which was inspired by evidence that Yale Strom uncovered of female klezmer musicians in the seventeenth century. Other music is included as well, either written by Strom or traditional pieces arranged by him for the group. The music may sound unfamiliar to casual klezmer listeners by virtue of the central instrument used here—the tsimbl or cimbalom. The compelling, mysterious sound of the tsimbl is traditional, but American klezmer bands are more likely to feature the clarinet, the violin, or the accordion, since the tsimbl is not an instrument that American children typically learn to play. In fact the player on this CD is a native Ukrainian, Alexander Federlouk. The accordion player, Peter Stan, also does fine work with improvisational lines. Along with the ubiquitous “Tumbalaika,” another standard included here is “Lustig Zayn,” which will be familiar to most listeners as “Yoshke,” a.k.a. “Tanz, Tanz Yidn” a.k.a. “Reb Dovidl’s Nign” and most importantly, as “Ma Yofus.” This very Eastern European tune also exists as a completely different, more Germanic zmira with the same history claimed for it. British actress Miriam Margolyes narrates the CD, providing background for each song. The liner notes, in English, French, German, and Spanish, are thorough and include words to several of the songs. Recommended for klezmer CD collections.

Beth Dwoskin, Catalog Librarian, Proquest; Chair, Library Committee, Beth Israel Congregation, Ann Arbor, MI


Navona Records’ “eclectic catalog offers listeners a fresh taste of the leading innovators in orchestral, chamber, and experimental music” and Warshauer’s compositions aptly fit this description. There are two commissioned pieces on the recording.

“Symphony No.1: Living Breathing Earth” consists of four movements. The first, “Call of the Cicadas,” is rather discordant, with the strings’ mimicry of the insect’s clicking “song.” The adagio section, “Tahuayo River at Night” is sonorous, flowing like its Peruvian Amazon namesake. Listening to “Wings in Flight,” one can imagine flocks of birds leisurely traveling and swooping by the river. The final movement, “Living Breathing Earth,” imitates breathing with its steady crescendo/diminuendo. The second piece, “Tekeeyah” (44:40), is unique in that it was composed for a shofar hewn from an African antelope horn. In the liner notes, the composer asserts that she wished to capture the process of awakening. The first movement, “A Call,” is sparse, with a slow tempo and few chords or harmonies. About halfway into “Breaking Walls,” the first shofar blasts are sounded. It also proceeds slowly with the orchestra mimicking the different shofar sounds. “Dance of Truth” provides a climatic finale with lots of loud shofar blasts and lively orchestration.

The composer is Jewish. These pieces are not overtly Jewish, though an argument could be made that reverence of nature and shofar blasts are both very Jewish. They are definitely more experimental than liturgical, making the CD a strong optional purchase for libraries that collect music. “Tekeeyah” could also be used in a Jewish educational setting.

Kathe Pinchuck, Montclair Public Library, Montclair, NJ
VIDEO RECORDINGS


The executive director of this video, Joe Amaral, is a Pentecostal Christian, who operates a Canadian-based film company out of Toronto. Working with the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Jerusalem, he seeks, in this effort, to counter what he finds to be a highly biased, anti-Israeli orientation in the mainstream media projecting an antagonistic and vituperative image of Israel. His approach is to excerpt clips obtained from Palestine Media Watch detailing the support for his thesis based upon selections of anecdotal statements of Palestinian politicians and clerics. In a highly popularized manner, the video covers the history of Palestine through the mandatory period, the activities of Yasser Arafat and the PLO, publicizing the augmenting of the self-created Palestinian myth of oppression and subjugation by Israel. The history of Palestine as presented by a variety sources selected for this video is clearly a revisionist version with no acknowledgement of a Jewish presence in Israel. He clearly points out that there is a segment of the media that vilifies Israel and then exposes their portrayal. His coverage is contemporary with discussions of Hamas and Fatah fed by radical Islam. The manner in which the information is presented on such sensitive and timely topics in such a popular form may make the utility of this video better suited for a non-Jewish audience.

Sanford R. Silverburg, Professor Emeritus, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC


Romuald Jakub Weksler Waszkinel was born in March, 1943 in Lublin, Poland. She gave him to a Catholic family, and at age seventeen, he entered seminary. When he was 35 years old (twelve years after his ordination as a Catholic priest), his Polish mother told him about his Jewish origins. Waszkinel has made his way to Israel, where he decided to study Hebrew in an Ulpan and learn more about Judaism. He is currently living in Jerusalem and working at the Yad Vashem Holocaust Center.

The film depicts Waszkinel’s challenges on his journey and juxtaposes his Catholic life against his longings to be Jewish. It opens with the last mass he performs in Poland before he leaves for Israel. He cannot immigrate under the Law of Return because he has been practicing a different religion.

Most viewers will need the subtitles, as the conversations switch between Polish, Hebrew and French. Much of the film shows head shots of Waszkinel discussing his thoughts and explaining his feelings. His motivation for exploring Judaism, especially at this point in his life, is never mentioned. One incident shows the crux of his dilemma: when he goes to Yad Vashem, he corrects his birth family’s records. His mother and brother were shot in the Ponar forest, and his father was killed in Stutthof. He visits the garden where his Polish parents’ names are on a plaque (they were named Righteous among the Nations for saving him) and weeps. The film is thought-provoking and emotional. It is recommended for all Jewish libraries, especially those that host film series or discussion groups.

Kathe Pinchuck, Montclair Public Library, Montclair, New Jersey

Klein, Alexander. God Went Surfing with the Devil: Divided by Politics, United by Surf. Canoga Park, CA: Cinema Libre Studio, 2011. DVD. (84 min.) $19.95 individuals, $150.00 non-profits, $250.00 educational institutions.

In 2007, as rockets landed in Sederot, a group of Americans, Arabs, and Israelis started an organization called Surfing 4 Peace. This film tells the story of their efforts to bring 23 donated surfboards to Gaza. The young people may be from different cultures, but they share a love for surfing that transcends politics. The Israeli surfers do their best to avoid military service because it interferes with their surfing. They all talk politics while waiting to deliver the boards. The consensus is that they hope that the war against civilians will pressure governments to make peace. Their naïve efforts are touching, but the film, full of talking heads, moves slowly and the waves are nothing compared to those at Mavericks, the California surfers’ beach.

Barbara M. Bibel, Oakland Public Library, Oakland, CA; Congregation Netivot Shalom, Berkeley, CA
Legendary Voices: Cantors of Yesteryear. Teaneck, TJ: Ergo Media, 2011. DVD. (78 min.) $29.95. #765D

This DVD is a remake of a VHS from 1991. It contains several excellent video excerpts taken from the films of Joseph Seiden, including The Voice of Israel (1931) and Singers of Israel (1950). Additional footage comes from short films shot by Seiden in the 1930s. Also included are clips from The Dream of My People (1933) and Shtot haznu/ Overture to Glory (1940). Eight renowned cantors from the “Golden Age of Chazzanut” are featured: Mordecai Hershman, Adolph Katchko, Samuel Malavsky, Moishe Oysher, David Roitman, Josef “Yossele” Rosenblatt, Josef Shlisky and Louis “Leibele” Waldman. Additional materials on the DVD include biographical information from Velvel Pasternak and Noah Schall’s work, The Golden Age of Cantors. Unfortunately, there has been little done to improve the quality of the films on this DVD. New introductions to each historic cantor are given by Jack Mendelsohn, who is known for spirited explanations lending depth to our understanding of chazzanut (cantorial singing). He shares his enthusiasm and some personal knowledge of the cantors, primarily in a light manner -- but is limited to very short anecdotes. However, some casual comments such as Roitman’s followers were so loyal “you had to hold it in” don’t lend to the dignity that the great cantors deserve. Today, (whether rightly or wrongly), most of this film material is available on YouTube. Without significant commentary, one wonders where the “value add” is to this new DVD. I expected more, and was overall disappointed that Ergo didn’t allow more time to hear significant commentaries from Mendelsohn.

Judith S. Pinnolis, RIS Humanities Librarian, Goldfarb Library, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA

Vinik, David. A Peace of Bread: Faith, Food and the Future. Produced and written by Debra Gonsher Vinik. Diva Communications, 2011. DVD. (57:30 min.) $25.00 individuals, $100.00 non-profits, $250.00 educational institutions.

People of faith have always believed that feeding the hungry and taking care of the poor is an obligation. In these challenging economic times, where “hunger” has been re-defined as the nebulous “food insecurity,” much work is being done by faith-based groups to address the growing problem in the United States. Some of the more innovative and youth-targeted methods are documented in this film. These include a Christian rapper, a Jewish organic farm camp, Challah for Hunger, and community food pantries and gardens. The film emphasizes the importance of telling stories over presenting statistics, and includes a pastor whose son went hungry, and a woman whose medical bills decimated her savings and was forced to apply for welfare.

The film captured a variety of groups of different denominations in different geographic locations. For Jewish viewers, it is interesting to see the involvement of groups like Mazon and Eden Village Camp in combatting hunger. There were many references to verses from the Bible about taking care of the hungry and leaving the corners of the fields for gleaners, as well as quotes from the New Testament. The narrator’s voice detracted from the message, sounding much like a commercial. Other than that, the film is a solid addition to Jewish libraries. It would work well for school and bar/bat mitzvah project classes about mitzvot and social responsibility.

Kathe Pinchuck, Montclair Public Library, Montclair, NJ

Keep Up to Date with Hasafran

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

To subscribe to Hasafran, please see instructions at https://lists.service.ohio-state.edu/mailman/listinfo/hasafran
To post a message to Hasafran, send your message to: hasafran@lists.osu.edu
You will receive a confirmation message.

A keyword-searchable archive of Hasafran messages posted since June 12, 2003 is now available.
The AJL Newsletter (Irene Levin-Wixman z”l, founding editor) was published in print from 1979 to 2010 by the Association of Jewish Libraries to inform members about association activities and issues related to Judaica libraries. As of January 2011 it is split into two separate electronic publications – the AJL News and the AJL Reviews. Receipt of these publications is one of the benefits of membership. Please see the AJL website at http://www.jewishlibraries.org for membership rates.

General Editor
Uri Kolodney
University of Texas Libraries
The University of Texas at Austin
One University Station S5400
Austin, TX 78712-8916
general-editor@jewishlibraries.org

Adult Review Editors
Merrily F. Hart
5090 Oak Tree Court
Ann Arbor, MI 48108
merrilyhart@gmail.com

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

Please send adult books for review to D. Scheide

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

and Anne Dublin
adublin@sympatico.ca

Please send children’s and YA books for review to R. Kamin

All links to online resources were checked for accuracy on May 7, 2012. We cannot be responsible for broken links to those resources in the future.

Advertising:

Advertising Rates
Full page $200
Half-page (vert) $110
Half-page (horiz) $110
Quarter-page $55

Ads may include color and hyperlinks. Dimensions are in inches

All ads must be prepaid. Please submit all inquiries, finished copy, and checks to:
Jackie Ben-Efraim
Ostrow Library
American Jewish University
15600 Mulholland Dr.
Los Angeles, CA 90077
(818) 383-9672 (cell)
ajadmanager@gmail.com