In The Spotlight


This historical novel is woven with strands of memory, magic, and longing. Eleven-year-old Celeste Marconi lives in Valparaíso, Chile, with her parents, her grandmother Frida, and Delfina, the family’s nanny and housekeeper. Celeste tells the story in three parts: I Lived on Butterfly Hill, In the North, and Only Returns. Chile is in turmoil as its left-wing government is overthrown in a military *junta* led by the General. People start “disappearing” and rumors spread of torture, murder, and exile. Celeste’s parents go into hiding and she escapes Chile to live in Maine with her aunt for two long years. How Celeste faces her many fears and challenges and how she eventually returns to her homeland is the crux of this fascinating and complex story. Interwoven throughout is Celeste’s desire to become a writer, her love of Spanish literature (especially the poetry of Pablo Neruda), her connections with other people—family and friends, teachers and strangers—and her hopes, dreams, and fears. Although occasional problems in continuity disrupt the telling, the narrative generally holds together well.

Award-winning poet Agosín is a masterful writer, using language filled with metaphors, similes, and symbolism to express the love of her native country but also her appreciation of the quiet beauty of her adopted home in New England. Interspersed in the story are evocative pen and ink drawings—sometimes filling the page; at other times, giving only a hint of the scene. The Jewish content comes from the backstory of Grandmother Frida’s escape from Vienna after the Nazi takeover and the destruction of her family during the Shoah. The lighting of candles, Hebrew prayers, and the use of German remind the reader of Celeste’s Jewish identity. The translation from the Spanish is generally smooth, although a few glitches mar the reading. Spanish words and phrases are used liberally throughout the book, and meaning can usually be guessed from context; however, a glossary would have been helpful. Luminous and moving, *I Lived on Butterfly Hill* will appeal to any reader who has faced fear, suffered loss, or overcome challenges.

Anne Dublin, co-author of *Odyssey Through Hell: Escape from the Warsaw Ghetto*, Toronto, Canada

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On Cape Cod in 1972, eleven-year-old Naomi “Chirp” Orenstein faces sixth grade and sudden changes in the family dynamic when her dancer mother is diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. Her father, a psychiatrist, and her older sister, Rachel, are also undergoing changes, leaving Chirp to search for her own answers. She finds comfort in local birds and forms a friendship with her neighbor, Joey. Together, Chirp and Joey create their own fantasy world and decide to leave home for adventure in Boston.

With her debut novel, Esther Ehrlich delivers a knock-out. Chirp is a deeply layered, complex character. Her affinity with birds gives her an interest she could share with her mother and a coping mechanism when tragedy befalls the Orenstein family. But Chirp is not the only fully realized character. Each secondary character, ranging from her father, her mother, her sister, and Joey receive similar respect and treatment. Ehrlich does a fine job of evoking the 1970s through attitudes and cultural references. Her language approaches lyrical. This novel shares some elements of *A Bridge to Terabithia* but gives readers a Jewish family in turmoil. *Nest* is quite simply stunning. It presents a heartfelt, emotional journey that will leave readers clutching lapels in sympathy. It is a book that deserves to be read again and again.

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


Young girls need strong role models. This picture book biography about an episode in Golda Meir’s early life in Milwaukee fits the bill. Barbara Krasner, historian, teacher, author, and book reviewer has written an engaging story about Goldie Mabowezh (also spelled Mabowitch) who, under the name of Golda Meir, became Israel’s first female prime minister (1969–1974). Zoom back in time to the year 1908 when Goldie was nine years old. Even then, her leadership abilities were outstanding. She formed the American Young Sisters Society by gathering together neighbors, relatives, friends, and classmates. An organization needs a goal and Goldie found one: to raise money for poor immigrant children at her school who could not afford decent textbooks. Krasner shows how Goldie was undeterred when various schemes to raise money failed. Finally, she decided to “think bigger.” The Society would have a fundraising gala at the biggest hall in the city. She persuaded the owner of the hall to donate the space, the girls created posters and invitations, people came by the dozen, and the children got their textbooks.

This is an inspiring story of one girl’s determination to help others and to repair the world (*tikkun olam*), but it also gives us some insight into Golda Meir’s personal story told through first-person narration. We learn that Golda struggled with writing speeches and usually spoke “from the heart,” without a prepared script. We learn that Golda valued education as a way to lift oneself out of poverty. Above all, we learn that Golda had determination, ambition, and drive; she would never let anything stand in her way. The illustrations are well-researched, accurately depicting room interiors and street scenes through a mix of gouache and collage with digital finishing. The back matter includes “Places to Visit to Learn More about Golda Meir” and a bibliography. For another book about a strong female activist in the same period, see Michelle Markel’s *Brave Girl: Clara and the Shirtwaist Makers’ Strike of 1909* (HarperCollins, 2013).

Anne Dublin, co-author of Odyssey Through Hell: Escape from the Warsaw Ghetto, Toronto, Canada
Reviews of Titles for Children and Teens

EDITED BY ANNE DUBLIN & RACHEL KAMIN

BIBLE STORIES


Over the centuries, artists have illustrated bible stories using a wide variety of media, such as etchings, paintings, woodcuts, mosaics, and even coloring books. In these two selections from *The Brick Bible for Kids* series, Smith, a master LEGO builder, constructs and photographs colorful LEGO dioramas to bring these familiar tales to life. This unusual and visually appealing medium, depicted above easy-to-read text, will be embraced by its intended preschool audience who are used to playing with these interlocking toy pieces. However, two pictorial elements do not pass the test for inclusion in a Judaic collection. In the Jonah story, God is portrayed as a white-haired and white-robed elderly man hovering level with the plastic treetops. Furthermore, both Jonah and Daniel get down on their knees and clasp their hands together when praying. These two strikes against otherwise fine books are sufficient to cause Judaic librarians to look elsewhere for appropriate materials about these biblical figures.

Allison Marks, Akron, OH

FICTION - MIDDLE GRADE


Over the past few years, there has been concern that the classics of Jewish children’s literature may be going out of print, and about the increasing cost of books. Fortunately, this new printing of Sydney Taylor’s series, at a reasonable price, puts those fears to rest. These books, the second and third in the series, take the family through World War I and away from the Lower East Side. There is romance for both Uncle Hyman and Ella in *More all-of-a-Kind Family*, and fears for Mama (who becomes ill) and Ella’s boyfriend Jules (who goes into the army) in *All-of-a-Kind Family Uptown*. At the same time, the books contain lots of humor and fun, both intended and unexpected, as the family grows up and adapts to American ways. But the stories are also instructive and informative about Jewish practices a century ago. In *More all-of-a-Kind Family*, the family visits a “modern” (Reform) synagogue, and Uncle Hyman and Lena’s wedding is the climactic event. In addition, there are chapters on Shabbat and Havdalah, their new cousin’s *Pidyon Ha-ben*, the Holy Days, and Shavuot, with Sydney Taylor’s literary touches and Mary Stevens’ illustrations intact.

Most Judaica libraries have these classics in one printing or another. For those who are missing these installments, this kid-friendly, appealing version, with a new introduction by June Cummins, will be welcome. It appears sturdy and should last a few hard readings as well as many careful handlings. At another level, a reader might wonder whether the series is now entering another place in our literary canon. The era the books lovingly describe, fully a century ago, is no longer accessible for most pre-teens. The family has now entered the realm of “historical fiction,” and might therefore be moved to the adult shelves, where grown readers can both remember and learn from them. They remain, indeed, a treasure from our past.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA
**Reviews of Titles for Children and Teens**

**FICTION – TEEN**


In *Rachel’s Hope*, Shelly Sanders completes the trilogy she began with *Rachel’s Secret* and *Rachel’s Promise*, but the third stands on its own as an independent story. Rachel’s journey as an immigrant from Russia, through Shanghai, and then to the streets of San Francisco is a compelling one. Her tale is coupled with that of Sergei, a boy she left behind in Russia. His revolutionary struggles with Maxim Gorky and his story of escape from a Siberian prison alternate chapters with Rachel’s. The Jewish immigrant experience, especially during the first years of the twentieth century, is a multilayered and dense history. Revolutions, women’s rights, invention of the automobile and the moving picture, as well as the shifting identity of American Jewry were all elements of that era. Ms. Sanders does a noteworthy job of combining many of these themes into Rachel’s daily life. There are points, however, where there is so much happening to Rachel that some of the writing seems rushed or arbitrary, with sweeping statements meant to convey a moment in history as quickly as possible. Rachel’s long sought-after reunion with Sergei was disappointingly short, albeit logical to the story. Sanders based her story on her own grandmother who survived pogroms and the San Francisco earthquake to become the first Jewish woman in UC Berkeley’s science program. A well-researched and exciting novel that will introduce readers to immigrant life in the early 1900s.

*Leda Siskind, YA writer and psychotherapist, Los Angeles, CA*

**GOD & PRAYER**


Humorous and age appropriate with an Orthodox point of view, this book is delightful. It is filled with nonsensical rhymes that will appeal to young readers. Cats bark, rain goes up, and people have feet where their hands should be. Unusual animals abound and the book feels derivative of others that preceded it, with the text reminiscent of Dr. Seuss and the whimsical graphics a jump-off from Disney creations. “From the knees to the bees / To the one-legged Perfect / Hashem has made everything perfectly perfect.” Despite the specific point of view and the explicit message of an appreciation of the work of Hashem, this book is appropriate for children of all Jewish backgrounds.

*Shelly Feit, Library Consultant, Teaneck, NJ*

**HANUKKAH**


“I am one lucky dog! Imagine a mutt like me picked as a Hanukkah present,” begins Latke, an adorable, medium-sized, golden brown puppy rescued from an animal shelter by Zoe and Zach and their parents just before the first night of Hanukkah. But each night of Hanukkah, Latke gets into trouble: he eats all the sufganiyot (jelly donuts) and *latkes*, chews on the dreidels and the candles, tears open the presents, knocks over the applesauce, and slobbers on the chocolate *gelt*. The family is forgiving at first, but by the sixth night of Hanukkah, Zoe wonders if they picked the wrong dog. Luckily, by the last night of Hanukkah, Latke figures out the rules of the house and his new family rewards him with a special gift—his own chew toy. Tiphanie Beeke’s delightful, textured illustrations, in bright pastel oil paints, outshine the rather bland storyline. Animated and expressive, the paintings depict a fun-loving, contemporary Jewish family and the menorah on each page marks the passage of time from the first to the last night of Hanukkah. A brief
Reviews of Titles for Children and Teens

explanation of the holiday is appended, though the story will be most appreciated by children already familiar, especially those who have experienced the highs and lows of bringing home a new puppy.

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


Woody Guthrie, nicknamed the “Dust Bowl Troubadour,” is known for composing folk songs such as the legendary “This Land is Your Land.” While living in Coney Island during the 1940s, he was influenced by Aliza Greenblatt, his mother-in-law, and composed a series of songs with a strong Jewish connection. Each page of *Honeyky Hanukah* pairs two lines of Guthrie’s catchy lyrics with Horowitz’s lively illustrations in construction paper, charcoal, and colored pencils. The book includes a CD featuring the Klezmatics performing a lively rendition of the song from their record *Woody Guthrie’s Happy Joyous Hanukkah*. Both the book and CD are sure to be hits, with everyone singing, “It’s Honeyky Hanukah Time.”

Allison Marks, Akron, OH


This shiny, dreidel-shaped, seven-by-seven-inch board book includes modified lyrics to the familiar song: “I have a little dreidel. I made it out of clay. And when it’s dry and ready, then dreidel I shall play! My dreidel’s always playful. It loves to dance and spin! And when it gets all tired, it drops and then I win!” Various animal families—mice, raccoons, beavers, owls, and bears—are depicted lighting the menorah, frying latkes, enjoying sufganiyot (jelly donuts), exchanging gifts, and of course, playing dreidel. The illustrations by Israeli artist Kober, who also illustrates the *Engineer Ari* series by Deborah Bodin Cohen, are cheery and playful but it’s curious that while the menorah is depicted on every page spread, it only shows the first, third, fifth, and eighth nights. Librarians, parents, and Hanukkah gift-givers looking to brighten up their board book collections should consider this adorable offering; however, *I Have a Little Dreidel* by Maxie Baum (Scholastic, 2006) remains the best picture book adaptation of the classic song.

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


Neighbors Sophie and Tommy both have Christmas trees and yard lights, but Sophie also has a menorah in her window. When she invites Tommy and his family over for a Hanukkah party, Tommy enjoys the latkes and gelt and plays dreidel. Sophie also explains to him why she has a Christmas tree: “We have a tree because Dad is Christian, and we have menorahs because Mom is Jewish. Our family celebrates both holidays.” When asked which holiday she likes better, Sophie replies that she loves them both (of course!). “Both have lights, and songs, and special food, and presents . . . and what I like best is that we all celebrate together!”

As with similar books—*Daddy Christmas and Hanukkah Mama* by Selina Alko (Knopf, 2012), *My Two Holidays: A Hanukkah and Christmas Story* by Danielle Novack (Scholastic, 2010), and *Light the Lights! A Story About Celebrating Hanukkah and Christmas* by Margaret Moorman (Scholastic, 1999)—the focus is purely on the customs and traditions. While Sophie and her mother light the menorah and recite the “short Hebrew prayer,” the illustration erroneously shows them covering their eyes, a tradition associated with the Shabbat candles, not with the Hanukkah candles. When Tommy asks about the significance of the latkes, he is only offered a very brief explanation of the miracle of the oil. Similarly, the religious significance of Christmas is also absent. Sophie describes how her family celebrates by decorating the tree, setting up the train, eating pancakes, and staying in their pajamas all day. The cartoon illustrations are colorful and pleasant, depicting contemporary, multi-generational, multi-racial
families, which will be affirming to those like Sophie’s who celebrate both Hanukkah and Christmas. However, there is no real story here. It’s merely a dialogue between two children about their family’s holiday traditions and fails to offer any meaningful insight, inspiration, or education.

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


This book is a sequel about Yetta, the multi-lingual escapee from the poultry market first introduced in Beautiful Yetta: The Yiddish Chicken (Feiwel and Friends, 2010). Yetta now lives in Brooklyn and is the mother hen to a flock of wild parrots. One cold night, she finds an orange kitten and wants to adopt it in spite of the parrots’ misgivings. Soon the birds realize they don’t know the first thing about proper feline care, so they take the kitten to their friend, an elderly grandmother who occasionally feeds them. The woman gives the kitten a home and the birds a platter of latkes (potato pancakes). The conversational bubbles above the loquacious birds and the tender-hearted grandmother include English, Spanish and Yiddish dialogue in different fonts. The illustrations are rendered using Prismacolor markers, brush pens, and ink on bristol board. The three languages are the book’s main focus. Its Hanukkah content is minimal, making it an optional holiday-lite addition to a Judaic collection.

Allison Marks, Akron, OH

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HOLIDAYS – OTHER


This book includes a picture book story that can be read aloud or listened to on the accompanying CD. When flipped over, a traditional *Haggadah* (with English translations) is provided. The first side (opening right to left), “Free at Last,” is the story of David Gold and his family as they celebrate their Seder. David is preparing for his *bar mitzvah* and struggling to understand the importance of Pesach. Miriam, David’s sister, is a know-it-all, always interrupting to add a bit of trivial knowledge to whatever anyone says. There is a grandpa, Mr. Cohen, who is very exacting about following the *Haggadah* precisely and pronouncing everything correctly. He is joined by David’s parents, Mr. and Mrs. Gold, and two guests, Mrs. Silverstein and her son Simon, who have been invited to the Seder. An “unknown visitor” knocks on the door right after the recitation of “*Ha lachma ania* … let him come and eat with us ….” The Seder, as this family knows it, changes dramatically. At every possible opportunity, the “unknown visitor” interjects insights into the history of the Seder or a *midrash* about Avraham. He reminds the group that Seder night is supposed to be different and not a casual recitation of barely understood words from a well-used *Haggadah*. He gets the family discussing how and why the Israelites reached *Mitzrayim* (Egypt) in the first place. When the family gets immersed in this discussion, the story and its significance to modern times begins to reveal itself, and the “unknown visitor” disappears.

The CD accompanying the book is read by actors relying on very stereotypical Jewish voices. Miriam has a clearly “Valley Girl” cadence, while Grandpa certainly grew up in Lower East Side, New York. There are two songs: “The Mud Song” and “The Haggadah Song” whose rhythm and rhyme are somewhat “off.” The three bonus tracks are lovely versions of “*Ma Nishtanah*,” “*Lo Al Yede Malach*,” and “*Dayenu*.”

Turning the book over (now opening left to right) reveals a traditional *Haggadah* with English translations, but no transliterations. Oddly, after “*Shulchan Orech*” (dinner), there are no English translations. In addition, the English response to the “simple child” is mistakenly translated to read exactly like the response to the “wicked child.” The Hebrew appears to be correct. The illustrations throughout appear digitally rendered with large-headed, thin-bodied characters; coloring and background closely resemble *The Prince of Egypt* movie. While this could be one more *Haggadah* to add to a very large list, the story at the beginning contains interesting information that could well be used to start discussions during a Seder.

*Kathy Bloomfield, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee Member, Washington, DC*


If you are looking for a colorful taste of the Jewish holidays, Hammer plants the seeds for this in *The Garden of Time*. Interestingly enough, the publisher is Unitarian. Whether or not the reader finds this fact troubling, Hammer nails the descriptions of the festive days of Judaism with a very helpful glossary at the end. Hammer is also adept in relating that the garden of time is a gentle teacher whose purpose Jewish people follow with the changing seasons. She also makes the analogy that Jews were as free as wild grain when they made the exodus out of Egypt. Less frequently written about holidays, such as *Tisha B’Av* and *Tu B’Av*, are mentioned, yet *Lag B’Omer* (a day remembering Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Shimon bar Yochoi) and more nationalist holidays such as *Yom Ha’atzmaut*, *Yom HaShoah*, and *Yom HaZikaron*, are not included.

The illustrations look like a mix of watercolor and computer-generated art. Biblical representations are fairly authentic and Cohen includes detailed references with the iconography in the back of the book. What makes this book stand out from the rest is the detailed foreword by Rabbi Sandi Eisenberg Sasso. For an elementary understanding of the major Jewish holidays, this book has the right seeds to plant in young minds or for people learning about the roots of Judaism.

*Ben Pastcan, Shalom School, Sacramento, CA*

Using Bella’s astute question as a springboard to talk about *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*, her grandfather explains why the *shofar* is blown, why the challahs are round and not braided, why we eat apples and honey and other symbolic foods like pomegranates, and finally, the answer to the titular question: We wear simple shoes on *Yom Kippur* so that we can think about more important things than footwear. Bubbe’s honey cake recipe is included.

Larry Neinstein wrote and self-published this book for his granddaughter Bella, and while the explanations of the rituals and customs are simplified, they are rather selective, focusing mainly on food with scant mention of the spiritual and religious significance of the High Holidays. The illustrations are beautiful—the apples and pomegranates are particularly lifelike. There is a disconnect between a question about *Yom Kippur* and the majority of the book being about *Rosh Hashanah*, a problem that could have been remedied by a subtitle or an author’s note at the end. As with many intergenerational stories, terms like Bubbe, Zeide, and “tennis shoes” will be new to younger readers, and the timing of a current-day grandmother’s mother coming over on a boat is a little off. Although the question-and-answer format is a good way to relay information and the final answer is important, this is a very personal story. An optional purchase for most Jewish libraries.

*Kathe Pinchuck, Past Chair, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel*

**HOLOCAUST & WORLD WAR II**


Young Werner Reich has been separated from his family and is alone in the Auschwitz concentration camp. He befriends a quiet man, Herr (Mister) Levin, who shares his bunk. One night, the guards enter the barracks and demand that Herr Levin, prisoner A1676, perform magic tricks. Levin explains to Werner that he does not perform for entertainment, but for his life and that of his wife and son. Werner is amazed by the magic, and the gifted magician gradually shares the secrets of not only a few tricks, but also of hope and friendship. After surviving Auschwitz, Werner passes the secrets on to his sons in America.

A brief prologue tells the reader about Nivelli, the renowned magician in Berlin. “How It Happened” back matter includes information about the real Nivelli, also known as Herbert Levin, and Werner Reich. Only due to Levin’s tattoo number did Werner realize later in life that Nivelli and Levin were the same man. A big plus is the inclusion of photos in the back matter. As a nonfiction picture book, however, the book is text-heavy and the illustrations are dark. The layout is unimaginative. However, the story itself is unique and is based on Kacer’s interviews with Reich at his Long Island home. While the publisher touts this as material suitable for seven-year-olds, it is better aimed at children at least one year older. Reading this book requires discussion between teacher and student or parent and child.

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


A Jewish girl and her mother are riding the tram in World War II Amsterdam when Nazi soldiers get on, ask for papers, and whisk the mother away. Hans and Lars Gorter, elderly brothers who are the driver and ticket taker, bring Beatrix home with them when she is still on at the end of the line. Their neighbor, Mrs. Vos, is suspicious at first, but Beatrix is introduced as the brothers’ orphaned niece, and she manages to charm everyone on the block. Soon they get into a routine, with the brothers braiding...
hair and cooking, Mrs. Vos giving advice, and their other neighbor, Lieve, making sure Beatrix has proper Catholic instruction. They suffer through the cold winter of 1944 with almost no food and no heat. In the spring, the Canadians arrive and the people of Amsterdam celebrate. As life after the war slowly returns to normal, a woman boards the train—it is Beatrix’s mother, who has been running and hiding since she was taken. She joins Beatrix, the brothers, and Mrs. Vos, who have become a family. Years later, Beatrix brings her daughter to Amsterdam to see where Beatrix lived as a child.

There is a strong sense of place, time and culture in Amsterdam, and the pacing and frame convey the ominous sense of fear and depravation with the focus on how the Dutch dealt with the war. The charm of the book is provided by the elderly bachelor brothers, whose attempts to take care of a six-year-old girl include giving her a toy train to sleep with, preparing an eight-course breakfast, and taking her on the tram every day, claiming she is their orphaned niece. The author combined history and fiction and made both come alive.

Kathe Pinchuck, Past Chair, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee, Ramat Bet Shemesh, Israel


Twelve-year-old Isabel Brandt hates all this talk about war. It’s the summer of 1942, and she is far more interested in having her hair bobbed and nose shortened in time to enter junior high. As she and her parents arrive at Moskin’s hotel for their usual vacation, she sees that last year’s staff has enlisted and certain foods are now rationed. Her mother’s friend, Mrs. Frankfurter, introduces her to her husband’s German-Jewish refugee niece, fourteen-year-old Helga. Isabel is forced to share a cabin with the elusive Helga, who shares nothing about her past. To make matters worse, Helga shares Isabel’s bedroom back home in the Bronx when Mrs. Frankfurter falls ill. Slowly, Isabel begins to realize this war is real—for everyone—and it exacts its costs. In a stunning twist at the end of the book, Perl prepares readers for the sequel to come.

Perl grew up in Brooklyn and the tone of her narrative benefits from her personal experiences. She vividly and expertly transports readers to the forties and wartime. She has crafted Isabel as a likeable, French-phrase-dropping character who’s coming of age at a difficult time. Isabel persists in learning Helga’s secrets that include harsh treatment as a Kindertransport refugee in England and her father’s death in the Buchenwald concentration camp. Isabel transforms from a carefree seventh-grader to a compassionate young woman, ready to tackle life’s challenges. The drawback of Perl’s book is didactic dialogue. Isabel and others tend to stand on their soapboxes to teach the reader about the horrors of Nazi Germany and the effect of the war on America. Also, much of the French phraseology Isabel casually uses is not explained.

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

After their mother dies and their father is taken away by the Nazis, Max and Zena Rosen are left to fend for themselves in a Polish ghetto. Following their gutsy escape, they are hidden by a Polish farmer. In addition to hiding the children, the farmer is also concealing Jewish partisans. Miraculously, one of them happens to be the children’s Aunt Hannah. Hannah and the other partisans decide to take Max and Zena to their hideout in the forest, but during their journey the forest is attacked. The children narrowly escape death after Max is shot and arrive at the partisan camp. Eventually, they are reunited with their father who managed to flee from a train heading to a concentration camp. The family survives the war and journeys to America.

*I Survived the Nazi Invasion, 1944* is the ninth book in the crowd-pleasing *I Survived* series by Lauren Tarshis. Despite a staggering number of coincidences within the plot, Tarshis successfully walks a fine line between exposing the brutalities of the Holocaust and respecting her young readers. The language is age appropriate and the short length (ninety pages) will make the book appealing to reluctant readers. According to the author’s note, Tarshis’ intention was not to terrify readers, but to inspire them. The focus on Jewish partisans does just that. Although the back matter is extensive and includes information about topics such as Jewish partisans, Hitler’s rise to power, and Nazi war crime trials, it lacks information about the Jewish ghettos. Readers may have questions about ghettos since that is the initial setting. A timeline and list of other resources are also appended. Scott Dawson’s black and white illustrations nicely complement the drama. Recommended for children who already have some knowledge of the Holocaust and World War II.

Aimee Lurie, The Agnon School, Beachwood, OH

ISRAEL


This little book strikes a number of emotional chords, especially in light of the recent events taking place in Israel and Gaza. Clare is a thirteen-year-old American girl who dies in a traffic accident and is reincarnated as a cat living in the West Bank. It is clear from listening to her story that Clare was a selfish teen who managed to always get her way, no matter whom she hurt in the process. As her story unfolds, we learn that Clare had been in a “wrestling match” with her teacher, who was trying to use the words of *Desiderata* as a method of disciplining her charges.

When Clare, the cat, finds herself in the West Bank, she must learn to survive the heat, other cats, and the tensions of the area. When she sneaks into a house that has been commandeered by two Israeli soldiers, she becomes immediately aware that there is a child hiding under the floor boards. Clare can hear the child
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whispering the words of Desiderata. When the child is discovered, the soldiers do not know what to do. However, when the child’s teacher and classmates arrive at his home to bring him to school, the soldiers are discovered and find themselves trapped in the house surrounded by angry Palestinians who want nothing more than to murder the soldiers inside. As tensions mount, the Israeli army comes onto the scene and a stand-off ensues. When the soldiers decide to leave with the young boy between them, the cat does something extraordinary and utterly selfless which allows the boy to return to his classmates and the soldiers to be rescued. Finding herself once again alone on the streets, Clare realizes that her act was different from her “normal” behavior. She must stop blaming everyone else for her predicament, and make a plan for her survival.

Deborah Ellis has provided a thought-provoking story fraught with the reality of life in Israel and the West Bank. There is an enormous opportunity for discussion here. Every library should have this book in their Israel collection as an opportunity to examine different perspectives about this ongoing conflict.

Kathy Bloomfield, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee and forwordsbooks.com, Washington, DC

JEWISH LIFE & VALUES


Dovi, a small bear, uses initiative and desire to help rescue two bear cubs, two small gorillas, Mrs. Panda and her babies, and Gershon Giraffe. This is done with the assistance of his fishing rod, and in unique fashion. In one episode, his rod becomes a ladder, helping Pinchas, the balloon man, to rescue balloons that had drifted into a tree. In the next adventure, the fishing rod helps to drag a broken bicycle, acting in this case like a rope. At the end of each adventure, Dovi sums up the way in which his rod has been used, and says, “I am so glad I could do this mitzvah.” The message is that if someone really wants to help, assistance can be given in unpredictable ways. This is truly a story about friendship and the ways in which friends can be helpful to others.

Dolls and stuffed animals are the protagonists in this selection for the youngest readers. Uninteresting photographs provide the illustrations of static-stuffed animals and scenery. The tone is somewhat unrealistic and at the same time preachy in nature. On many pages, the text is too long but the use of repetition at the end of each interaction will appeal to young readers. Recommended as an additional purchase for libraries serving an Orthodox population only.

Shelly Feit, Library Consultant, Teaneck, NJ


Is it ever too late to learn, and by doing so, to teach? In this new book, Isabel Pinson (a librarian in Baltimore and AJL member) emphatically answers “NO!” Naomi’s great-grandmother is teaching yet another generation to crochet. As they work together, they talk about the family and its long history of bar and bat mitzvah celebrations. At great-uncle Charles’s bar mitzvah, he wore Bubbe’s very first kippah and she has made kippot for everyone in the family ever since. But Bubbe never studied Hebrew and was never called to the Torah. Over several weekly visits, Naomi convinces Bubbe that if she can read Yiddish she can learn Torah Hebrew. The two of them work together and the whole family pitches in. Bubbe’s big day comes, and as a special gift she gives Naomi a silver kippah in appreciation. Even better, Naomi reminds Bubbe that she needs to keep up and read at Naomi’s upcoming bat mitzvah.

This is a heart-warming true story; the author’s own mother celebrated her bat mitzvah at age ninety-five. The tale also includes a number of important lessons: the history of bar and bat mitzvah (and incidentally the rabbinate) over the generations; family solidarity and appreciation for special talents; and of course, the joy of teaching, learning, and helping. Recommended for all children’s collections, *Bubbe’s Belated Bat Mitzvah* might also be useful to clergy wishing to involve and inspire families for their own life cycle events.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA

Through his long-running series, Sammy the Spider has celebrated all of the Jewish holidays, visited Israel, and learned about the *mitzvot* of kindness to animals and welcoming guests. In this newest installment, Sammy learns about the *mitzvah* of visiting the sick. When Josh is home sick, Sammy observes Mrs. Shapiro giving him medicine and his friend Moti (first introduced in *Sammy Spider’s New Friend*) bringing over chicken soup. He also learns the Hebrew word *labri’ut* (to your health). As always, Sammy is full of questions: “Can I catch a cold, too?” “Can I have some medicine, too?” “May I have some chicken soup, too?” Children familiar with the series will chime in with Mrs. Spider’s predictable, well-known response. In the end, Sammy does figure out how he can help Josh feel better and performs his first *mitzvah.*

A brief explanation of *bikkur cholim* (visiting the sick) is appended. Katherine Janus Kahn’s recognizable, bright, cut-paper illustrations don’t disappoint and Sammy’s fans will welcome this latest Jewish values title. However, those looking for a less didactic, more inspiring demonstration of *bikkur cholim* should turn to *Chicken Soup by Heart* by Esther Hershenhorn (Simon & Schuster, 2002) and *The Trees of the Dancing Goats* by Patricia Polacco (Simon & Schuster, 1996), or the secular PJ Library titles *A Sick Day for Amos McGee* by Philip C. Stead (Roaring Brook, 2010) and *Bear Feels Sick* by Karma Wilson (Margaret K. McElderry Books, 2007).

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

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**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.

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You will receive a confirmation message.

A keyword-searchable archive of Hasafran messages posted since June 12, 2003 is now available.

Since the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls in 1947 the interpretation of ancient Jewish texts has provided new understandings of both Jewish and Christian identities in our own time. The scholars whose work is represented in this volume examine the ancient texts from a multidisciplinary point of view. For example, Maren Niehoff and Serge Ruzer examine texts from the Letter of James with references to Qumran and other Jewish texts. Michael Stone examines the terms “canon” and “Bible” in the context of the period when the Torah acquired a special holiness.

As a book of papers from a symposium each chapter is a stand-alone article, and only a weak theme connects their presence in this book. Because it took six years to publish, some of the authors have published other versions of the articles in other places.

This book is for those interested in first century Judaism and Christianity and the history of Biblical interpretation, but the cost is somewhat prohibitive. Recommended for academic and special libraries.

Daniel D. Stuhlman, Malcolm X College Library, Chicago, IL


Before the Second World War, the town of Tomaszow-Mazowiecki, in Poland, harbored a vibrant Jewish community. Nearly 14,000 Jews lived there, about one third of the city’s total population. This community was almost completely decimated by the Nazis. Only 250 Tomaszowers survived the Holocaust. This is a memoir written by one of the youngest survivors. Most of these survivors were tailors and dressmakers, and it was their skill with the thread and needle, a skill useful to the Nazis, that contributed to their survival. Rena Margulies introduces us to her extended family in Tomaszow and to the day to day life of the Jewish community in this Polish town. Born in 1933, her normal life was soon to end. Her father, brother, and grandparents, as well as many of the extended family were killed in Auschwitz. Rena and her mother survived the Blizyn slave labor camp and the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp. Liberated by the Russians in January 1945, she was 11 years old and in poor health. Returning to Poland and finding anti-Semitism very well alive, the author and her mother applied for a visa to the United States. It is in this new country where Rena built her new life and in her old age decided to speak about her experiences during the Holocaust. Well written and moving, this book is recommended for all synagogues and community libraries.

Sonia Smith, McGill University


This a book about economics and American Jewry, and it centers around the question of how “economic incentives affect decisions about time and money and how prices and incomes influence whether a law or custom is generally observed or broken, whether it is viewed as central or peripheral, whether it is perceived relevant or outdated, and therefore whether it persists as part of the culture.”

Chiswick organizes the book into four parts. Part I provides a background and contextualizes the economic situation of American Jewry in the year 2000, with regard to education, occupation and
income, and examines how Jews define and identify themselves. Part II demonstrates how economic concepts can provide a useful perspective for looking at American Judaism by examining concepts such as the cost of Jewish observance, value of time and the role of human capital. Part III analyzes how economic decisions affect American Jewish dating and marriage behaviors, and the economics of immigration. Part IV discusses the implications of all of these economic analyses and uses them to make some tentative predictions about the future of American Jewry.

The book is clearly written for the scholar and the general reader. However, this is primarily a book about economics and best suits readers interested in the intersection of economics and religion, specifically American Jewry.

David Tesler, Yonkers, NY


Progressive or “worldly” Judaism urged Jews to enter into the atmosphere of critically analyzing the past through learning to speak and read secular languages. This would be the portal through which they might leave the ghetto and play a greater role in the society which had shunned (but used) them for its own benefit. There must be a way, they felt, to be both in the world and yet Jewish! The Jew cannot perennially remain a “pariah people”!

This book is an investigation into Hannah Arendt’s inquiry into how liberal Judaism evolved and how such an inquiry may be seen as sort of “a hidden conversation” with fellow German-Jewish philosopher, Ernst Cassirer (1872-1945). Curthoys, a research fellow at the Australian National University, begins with the writings of Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1789) and looks at how Mendelssohn pioneered ideas
about how one might remain a Jew while still vitally interacting with the non-Jewish society. The author, who also has co-edited a book on the late Edward Said, systematically traces the evolution of liberal Judaism as well as the Haskalah/Jewish enlightenment.

Curthoys has selected an important topic on which to write, but his style is rather long-winded. However, anything dealing with the work of Hannah Arendt, a world-renowned scholar and the first woman to teach at Princeton University’s Institute for Advanced Learning, is bound to have significance. University as well as seminary libraries will find this book an essential addition to their collections.

Notes follow each chapter, and a bibliography and index are supplied.

Morton J. Merowitz


This book is “a study of Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi’s reading of biblical text,” and the way Zalman Schachter-Shalomi “uses reading of Biblical narratives to provide Biblical warrant for his theological vision and his re-visioning of Judaism.” Ms. Densmore uses the audio tapes made of seven weekend retreats called “Primal Myths” lead by the recently deceased leader of Jewish Renewal, Rabbi Professor Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, during the winter of 1988-1989. The transcriptions of Reb Zalman’s own words are immediately visible to the reader by being “set off with shading” on the page. Additional material includes either amplifications on Rabbi Schachter-Shalomi’s passages or summaries of passages not transcribed in the book. It was not always clear to this reviewer what was interpretation and what was straight summary. What comes out nicely from this book is the pedagogical genius of Schachter-Shalomi in adapting traditional texts—selected passages from the Pentateuch and from Ecclesiastes—to contemporary audiences. With index and bibliography. Recommended to Reconstructionist, Conservative, and academic libraries.

Roger S. Kohn, Silver Spring, MD.


Ronald Eisenberg is a Professor at Harvard Medical School, and a compiler—one might even call him a taxonomist—of important Jewish information. In previous books he has cataloged essential figures in the Bible and the Talmud, and other data related to our history and texts. In this volume he has provided over 350 short profiles of sages and scholars spanning Jewish history. The Introduction provides a useful summary of Jewish intellectual history, describing life in various nations and periods (Turkey, Italy, the United States, etc.) through the ages. The body of the work begins with Achai Gaon of Shabcha, an eighth-century Babylonian scholar, and concludes with Rabbi Zusya of Annapol (Hanipol), one of the third generation of Hasidic Rebbes. It includes all of the important figures one would expect (Rashi, the Maharal of Prague, Abraham Joshua Heschel), as well as many unexpected and minor figures.

The volume is divided into five sections arranged in alphabetical and chronological order: Geonim (4th to 8th centuries); Rishonim (9th to 14th centuries); Acharonim (1492 – 1700); the Modern Era; the Hasidic rebbes. Included are numerous additional lists: acronyms for the essential figures (at the front); an author index and a major works list; and a fifteen-page glossary for students.

There is no new scholarship here. Even so, Dr. Eisenberg has provided a useful encyclopedic overview of the Jewish writing and its creators. The citations are short (the longest are four pages; most are a couple of paragraphs), accessible for lay readers, and useful for rabbis and scholars as quick reference points. This is not an inexpensive book, but it will be valuable for a wide range of users. Recommended for academic libraries, and for larger synagogues.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA

This study examines changes within the Yemeni community since the late nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century in Yemen and abroad, making use of an extensive amount of primary sources, among them private archives and interviews. The author’s aim is to study developments unique to Yemeni Jews; the links between these processes and developments in the Jewish World; and how these processes were connected to spiritual, economic and political changes among the Muslim majority in Yemen. The book includes several case studies: Jewish enlightenment and the Kabbalah dispute in early twentieth century Yemen; the impact of Jewish immigration to Ethiopia and Abyssinia on the Yemeni community there; the impact of external Jewish involvement and Yemeni politics on immigration to Palestine; challenges of the Zionist enterprise on Yemeni Jews; the changing status of women as reflected in issues related to inheritance and polygamy among Yemeni Jews in Palestine and the state of Israel; and the strife between traditional education and the introduction of secular studies among Yemeni Jews in Israel. Many of these issues have not been previously studied, and the use of private archives and interviews greatly increases the value of this study. The book is an important contribution to the study of Yemeni Jews in Yemen and abroad as well as for Jewish-Muslim relations, relations between Yemeni Jews and other Jews, and gender studies.


This collection of 14 essays traces the reception history of the Samson narrative in the book of Judges 16-18. The authors study the echo and influence of this narrative across the last two millennia, as it is reflected in religious communities (Jewish, Christian, Islamic) and in the cultural figurative and performing arts (music, poetry, fine arts, and film).

This work shows how and why different interpretative communities used the Samson narratives to reflect their own values and the spirit of the age. Rabbinic traditions scrutinize and recast the Samson evidence within the halakhic rubric of Tractate Nazir, and see in Samson’s tragic flaw his disobedience to his Jewish parents’ wishes not to marry a non-Jew. For example, Genesis Rabbah 768 condemns Samson for marrying a non-Jewish woman, noting that when Jacob was occupied with finding a wife he followed his parents’ advice to marry a woman from his own people and not to lust after the seduction of his eyes. So too Christian, Islamic, and even secular artistic traditions see in Samson’s narrative the affirmation of their own ideological values. Recommended for academic libraries with collections in Jewish studies, Bible, comparative religion, and cultural studies.

David B Levy, Touro College


It is fairly well recognized that American Jewish participation in voting and engagement in the political system is disproportionately greater than their assigned percentage of the population. Public opinion polls also show that Jews are left-of-center in their ideological leanings. For an explanation of this phenomenon, former academic historian, Henry Feingold, provides a highly readable treatment. Employing a sociological, political, and philosophical theory of political culture, Feingold makes the argument that three factors, by and large, motivate the American Jewish community. First, a response to the ghetto life of Europe: Jews in America have had the opportunity to be open and free, allowing for a more liberal expression of goals and an appreciation of liberty. Secondly, the Holocaust stands as a backdrop to the safety offered by not only the American political system but also a diverse and tolerant society. Lastly, the emergence of the Jewish state, Israel, which can be witnessed from afar, provides
Reviews of Nonfiction Titles for Adults

Feingold’s ingenuity and originality of explanation will serve political analysts well in their efforts to accurately define political events.

Sanford R. Silverburg, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC


“In Islamic lands, jewelry making was a Jewish profession.” This oversized book with large colored pictures of jewelry and art does great justice to the artistic and creative forces in contemporary Israel. More than just an overview of present-day jewelry design, this work includes the history of the Bezalel School of Art, a survey of modern artists and designers working in Israel, and an overview of contemporary Israeli art. Its author explains also how jewelry-making is similar to other art forms in that it reflects the society in which it is made. In addition to being a wonderful coffee table book, Jewelry in Israel provides a source of valuable information for artists, art historians (it includes a list of references and an index of artists’ names), designers and shoppers! It is truly delightful to see a publication that showcases talented Israeli artists, as well as a book that provides visitors to Israel an opportunity to think about buying unique objects rather than the typical souvenir.

Ellen Share, Librarian, Washington Hebrew Congregation


Volume one of this work offers 18 studies, and volume two (reviewed here) includes editions and analyses of unpublished texts. This excellent work deals with cultural transfer from Latin into Hebrew between the 12th and 15th centuries. This area has been under studied because the majority of medieval Jewish philosophy drew mostly on Hebrew translations from Arabic, and previous studies have emphasized the Arabic roots of this philosophy.

This groundbreaking work is important for the study of medieval scientific thought in Hebrew and Latin, as well as the study of Jewish-Christian relationships. It sheds light on the learning process between Christian and Hebraic scholars that is a sin qua non of the Latin-into-Hebrew transmission. It deepens understanding of the intellectual history of the Jews in Europe. Their history is expanded, enabling medieval Judaism to be better integrated into European history by demarcating the European interreligious networks.

Recommended for academic libraries with major collections in Jewish studies, Medieval history and thought, and for those interested in Christian-Jewish relationships.

David B. Levy, Touro College


Harry Freedman presents us with a fascinating tour of the history of the Talmud, the work that became the foundation of the Jewish legal system, the essence of the Jewish faith and the final authority on Jewish religious law and practice. The Talmud consists of the Mishnah, Gemara and the discussions and commentaries of the sages. The author introduces us to the scholars and rabbis of the academies of Israel and Babylon, as well as the historical events that were taking place during these centuries and shaping its development. We learn about the Jerusalem and the Babylonian Talmud, and how the latter came to prevail. The two thousand years of the eventful life of the Talmud is presented in an interesting, clear and very readable format, which makes this book an invaluable tool for all readers. Highly recommended for all libraries.

Sonia Smith, McGill University
Toledot Yeshu: The Life Story of Jesus
Edited and Translated by Michael Meerson and Peter Schäfer with the Collaboration of Yaacov Deutsch, David Grossberg, Avigail Manekin, and Adina Yoffie

The Book of the Life of Jesus (in Hebrew Sefer Toledot Yeshu) presents a «biography» of Jesus from an anti-Christian perspective. It ascribes to Jesus an illegitimate birth, a theft of the Ineffable Name, heretical activities, and finally a disgraceful death. Perhaps for centuries, Toledot Yeshu circulated orally until it coalesced into various literary forms. Although the dates of these written compositions remain obscure, some early hints of a Jewish counter-history of Jesus can be found in the works of Christian authors of Late Antiquity, such as Justin, Celsus, and Tertullian. Around 600 CE, some fragments of Jesus’ «biography» made their way into the Babylonian Talmud; and in 827, archbishop Agobard of Lyon attests to a sacrilegious book about Jesus that circulated among Jews.

In the Middle Ages, the book became the object and tool of an acrimonious controversy. Jews, Christians, and theists, such as Ibn Shaprut, Luther, and Voltaire, quoted and commented on Toledot Yeshu, trying to disprove the beliefs of their opponents and revealing their own prejudices. The narrative was translated into Latin and many vernacular languages and soon branched into numerous versions with only a few basic facts in common. The present publication provides researchers with reliable conclusions regarding the narrative’s origin and evolution. In addition, the purchase of the volume offers full online access to a comprehensive database of Toledot Yeshu manuscripts, designed to encourage and facilitate further research about this important book in the history of Jewish-Christian polemics. All Hebrew and Aramaic manuscripts are edited in the present book and database: an unusual combination of a traditional critical edition with an electronic research tool. The database features a full-text search of all manuscripts as well as printing and downloading capabilities.

The price includes access to the database (for one simultaneous user). Access for institutions is provided through the IP address, for private individuals through username and password. An activation code is enclosed in the book. Access to a free seven day trial period can be obtained here: toledot@mohr.de

In this intriguing study the author ponders Maimonides’ reasoning in enumerating the 613 mitzvot (commandments), traditionally assumed to be found in the Torah. Maimonides ostensibly designated these mitzvot as the basis for his Sefer ha-Mitzvot, which in turn was to serve as the core for his magnum opus, the Mishneh Torah.

Friedberg surmises that Maimonides actually derived his figures from a section of aggada found in Babylonia Talmud Makkot (aka Malkot) 23b-24a and attributed to Rabbi Simlai. He notes that this particular choice is somewhat curious since the great scholar typically focused more on the legalistic (halakhic) material in the Oral Torah corpus. In addition, many of the Rambam’s contemporaries looked upon this particular aggadic item with disapproval. It is apparent moreover, that this enumeration often forced Maimonides to perform legal gymnastics in order to make the mitzvot fit into the numbers and categories he had so-designated.

The book initially sets out to demonstrate that “Maimonides was not fundamentally attached to a specific commandment count.” Friedberg’s thesis is that the Rambam’s main objective was “to demonstrate that the two fundamental beliefs of the Jewish faith were actually enjoined by Scripture as commandments.”

Contrary to the Rambam’s assertion that his enumeration was “…founded on clear proof beyond a doubt,” Friedberg views the process by which Maimonides identifies the various positive and negative mitzvot as subjective. He suggests that at times Maimonides was unable to conclude that a commandment was based on the plain reading of scripture, even in the face of rabbinic interpretation, and he considers that these occasions were signaled using a literary device. Thus, within the context of Cairo, where Rabbanites and Karaites clashed over the use of the oral law, “Maimonides chose to keep his radical opinions hidden yet recoverable.”

With citation index, extensive bibliography, and informative notes, this book is an invaluable discussion of the objectives and motivations behind Maimonides’ Mishneh Torah. It provides an important contribution to the study of Jewish legal theory.

Randall C. Belinfante – American Sephardi Federation


Shia Getter, author and publisher of this work, is the owner of the Getter Group, which provides real estate services in Israel. This book serves as a practical handbook on how to buy, rent, invest, or build in Israel. Getter quotes the words of the Ramban: “According to the Ramban, then, not only is there a mitzvah to live in the Eretz Israel, but the obligation to fulfill all of the Torah mitzvos is actually contingent on that one mitzvah.”

When it comes to property ownership in Israel, the buyer has to be aware of issues involving currency and the importance of reading contracts carefully. Getter deals with these issues and covers a variety of other related subjects, including legal issues, investment opportunities, tax issues, fees, construction issues and options for renting. The result is a comprehensive and important guide for anyone interested buying or renting property in Israel. While an agent will probably be necessary, an investor, buyer or renter needs to be knowledgeable on the subject as he goes through the process.

Ellen Share, Librarian, Washington Hebrew Congregation
North America's largest independent Jewish magazine transcends the divides of the Jewish world. Fresh, engaging and always intelligent, Moment offers readers of all ages beautifully written articles, reviews and fiction. Our thoughtful profiles include fascinating people such as Albert Einstein, Jon Stewart and Google's Sergey Brin. Each issue is packed with diverse opinions, providing depth and perspective.

Many recent books have pointed to great leaders—Jesus, Lincoln, etc.,—as role models for modern managers and leaders. In this book, Zvi Grumet (formerly at the Lookstein Center) examines Moses as the exemplar of leadership, using the Torah and Jewish scholarship to develop his thesis.

Grumet divides his thesis into five parts, including: Moses’ “zealotry” and how he controls his emotions; “the man of the people or the man of God”; growing pains on “The Rocky Road” through the Wilderness; how “Leadership Emerges” in Deuteronomy; and “The Leader as a Teacher.” Each section contains three chapters dealing with the identified aspect of leadership. The first chapter poses the relevant issue as presented in the Torah. The second analyzes how the stories in Exodus and Numbers resolve the question both for the people and Moses himself. The third chapter summarizes the lesson both in Torah terms and for us. The arguments are made using Torah primarily, but other Biblical texts and Talmudic sages are also cited, as well as classical and modern scholars, to reinforce the discussion. The book contains indexes of names and relevant Biblical stories, and a timeline of chapters in Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy that chronicle the key events cited in the volume.

While it does not discuss contemporary society directly, Grumet’s book can certainly provide insights into the modern world. It is recommended for synagogue libraries with extensive Torah Study collections, as well as academic libraries interested in demonstrating the value of biblical tales. It may be beyond most Bar Mitzvah students, but rabbis and mentors can also use its perspective on well-known stories.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA


The inspiration for this book is a 1928 anthology titled Yidishe dikhterins (female Yiddish poets), edited by the critic Ezra Korman, which incorporated the work of 70 women, including four who wrote poems at the very dawn of Yiddish printing. Hellerstein is interested in the implications of Korman’s presentation of these women as poets worthy of critical attention. She discusses the four early poets and then concentrates on six twentieth-century women who are among the most well-known of the female Yiddish poets: Celia Dropkin, Anna Margolin, Kadya Molodowsky, Malka Heifetz Tussman, Miriam Ulinover, and Roza Yakubovitsh. Using modern and nuanced translations and close reading, Hellerstein studies the work of each poet with the intention of demonstrating that there is no one “tradition” of women’s Yiddish poetry. Rather, women bring gendered experience to their writing just as men do—in their case, the tkhines (devotional Yiddish prayers), that were part of an observant woman’s life, gender role dichotomies in traditional Judaism, the emancipation from those gender roles brought about by haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment), and urban/rural and Old/New World dichotomies.

Each poet’s work is explored exhaustively, along with bibliographic essays that trace the publishing history of each poet’s work, as well as notes, a thorough bibliography, and an index. Highly recommended for academic collections and collections concentrating on Yiddish.

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


There are many books designed to help B’nai Mitzvah families prepare for their events. Michael Hilton, a London Rabbi, has provided a contemporary overview of the ceremony, its many elements, and their importance.

The book’s first three chapters follow the fascinating development of Bar Mitzvah in Europe. Beginning probably in France in Medieval times, it expanded in geographic reach and communal significance until the 18th century. Chapter 4 discusses Jewish Confirmation. Hilton asserts that it was both an attempt to include girls, and a response to Christian pressure to convert. Chapter 5 is a wonderful
and surprising analysis of *Bat Mitzvah*. It traces the initiation of girls from the early 19th century until now, dispelling the general understanding that Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan created the ceremony from whole cloth for his daughter Judith. Chapter 6 explores practices in the past century. Hilton discusses Israeli and international celebrations, and summarizes the many changes in style and attitude. Chapter 7 discusses current trends, and raises the issues surrounding *B’nai Mitzvah* celebrations today. These include elaborate parties, the abandonment of Saturday services by many congregants, and other issues. In Chapter 8, Hilton reviews scholarly data past and present. His final analysis is that although *Bar Mitzvah* is “an invented tradition,” its many roles and traditions remain valuable today.

Rabbi Hilton has performed a mitzvah with this book. While filled with scholarly data, it is written with lay readers in mind. It is an optional purchase for smaller libraries, but should be a welcome addition to academic and larger synagogue collections. Regrettably, it appears to be available only in paperback format.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA


The *Hirsch Pirkei Avos* is a revised edition of Rabbi Hirsch’s (1808-1888) classic commentary on the tractate in the Mishna called Avos (Avot) which outlines the ethical truths in Judaism. The previous edition, published in 1966 by Feldheim Publishers, and the new edition are translated by Gertrude Hirschler. The layout of the revised edition is easier to read, because the print is larger and the font is clearer. The first edition is 117 pages long and the new edition has 177 pages. Archaic words have been replaced by modern terms, but otherwise there are no major changes. The *Hirsch Pirkei Avos* is highly recommended for all synagogue and school libraries who do not own the previous edition. Recommended as an alternative selection for libraries that have the previous edition, since the changes are minor.

Ilka Gordon, librarian, Beachwood, OH


Danny Lewin’s biography is simultaneously an inspirational American-Jewish-Israeli success story and a tragic tale of a 31-year old whose murder (in the 9/11 attacks) left behind two young children and a wife he’d begun to reconcile with. Lewin was a struggling graduate student at MIT’s Laboratory for Computer Science when he and his mentor—Tom Leighton—figured out how to use algorithms to speed up the delivery of website content over the Internet. Together, they built upon this discovery to co-found the company Akamai—a business which managed to survive the dot-com crash and which proved its effectiveness on 9/11 when news websites faced an unprecedented demand for information about the terrorist attacks.

Lewin was a complex man who juggled several roles over the course of his brief life—husband, father, bodybuilder, elite soldier, mathematician, businessman, and leader. Molly Knight Reskin deftly tries to present the reader with a sense of what Lewin was like and the impact he had upon those around him using personal interviews, e-mails and photographs. She adds context by summarizing key events in the history of the business, computer science, and military spheres which affected Lewin’s life. Her use of plain language and simple analogies enables even tech-challenged readers to appreciate the problem that Lewin tried to solve and the ingenious way he tackled it.

Though most of the book’s tone is serious, there are humorous anecdotes, such as the April First phone call from Apple CEO Steve Jobs which was almost dismissed as an April Fool’s joke (in fact, it was a bona fide offer to buy the company). Lewin’s remarkable life story is a fascinating tale which reminds readers that they should strive for excellence and hold on to their dreams, no matter how impossible they seem. Knight Raskin’s book—which includes an index and bibliographical citations—is highly recommended for public and high school libraries.

Steven M. Bergson, jewishcomics.blogspot.com, Toronto, Canada
Named after the Jewish concept of mending and transforming a fragmented world, *Tikkun* offers analysis and commentary that strive to bridge the cultural divide between religious and secular progressives. The magazine provides rigorous and unconventional critiques of politics, spirituality, social theory, and culture. *Tikkun* is recognized for its coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict, social justice issues, and the environment.


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For individual subscriptions, visit tikkun.org. For institutional subscriptions, e-mail subscriptions@dukeupress.edu or visit dukeupress.edu/tikkun.

This collection of recipes from the “Singing Chef,” Mitchell Kowitz, is disappointing. While there are the classic sections (starters, entrees, desserts) the recipes are not new or innovative. Most people already have a version of these recipes in their personal collection. The techniques and ingredients are simple; the artwork is tacky, basic and unappealing, and the food styling leaves much to be desired. A plan to “match” each recipe with a song did not materialize and several recipes are left unmatched. Some cooks may like this collection due to its simplicity and familiarity, but there are many superior kosher cookbooks including, “Spice and Spirit,” or “the Kosher Pallet “series. Not recommended.

Debbie Feder, Director, LRC, Ida Crown Jewish Academy.


Modern technology presents new challenges to the application of the laws of Shabbat in the modern world. For example, the Internet allows businesses to sell 24/7. Among the questions that Rabbi Kushner addresses are those concerning sales through a web site on Shabbat. After much investigation, Kushner concludes that sale is not complete until the merchant finishes the processing and thus the actual ‘sale’ is not performed on Shabbat. Most shomer (observant) Shabbat companies do not shut down their web sites on Shabbat. The company B & H Foto, however, has a notice that they do not process orders on Shabbat or Jewish holidays.

Kushner’s method of addressing these questions, providing an overview of the general situation, the halacha (Jewish Law), and a footnote with the source, is to be commended. When dealing with the details of individual situations he recommends contacting an expert. This approach makes the book easy to read on more than one level. What is missing is a discussion of what is considered Jewish ownership. Kushner discusses buying and selling and the hiring of employees as if all businesses are sole proprietorships, and he fails to mention corporations. This book is recommended for personal, synagogue, and academic libraries.

Daniel D. Stuhlman, Malcolm X College Library, Chicago, IL


The thickness of this book matches the power and dynamic quality of the complex persona of the subject. Considered by some to be the “butcher of Sabra” and regarded by others as “Arik the King,” Ariel Sharon was, to be sure, an energetic nationalist, an avowed patriot, a proud Jew, and a Zionist in his own personalized mold. David Landau is a most articulate wordsmith in detailing the life of one of the most intriguing Israeli military officers and heroes, a politician who put a stamp of controversy on any subject of his interest, but one who always put his idea of Israel’s interests first. His early life is detailed as can be expected, growing up as a “poor little fat boy;” the son of Russian immigrants enduring a rough time adjusting to the hard life of communal existence in the pre-State period. The bulk of the personal history necessarily focuses on the aggressive and brash experience of Sharon as a military officer in the IDF through each of the country’s wars. Landau’s judgments are clear and insightful, while not damning, they certainly are direct. Another serious contribution to this history is Landau’s discussion of the development of Sharon’s political career in the Knesset and various ministries. Landau’s biography will set the standard as an index for which historical assessments will be made about this illustrious person.

Sanford R. Silverburg, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC

The author chronicles the steps in her conversion to Judaism and, apropos of the title, starts with the first sparks that led her to question what she was being taught and asked to believe. After much research and reflection, Lawson concludes that her faith was simplistic and Judaism offered the opportunities to examine and explore the issues in which she was interested. She soon decides to convert, and looking at her options, decided an Orthodox conversion in Israel would be her choice. This path brought the challenges of dealing with Israeli bureaucracy and much hard work, which was frustrating and challenging, but finally rewarding. There are warnings against people who ask for fees and those who are really espousing Christianity. The book includes a section about how Jews relate to converts, and from a convert’s perspective, what would be helpful and supportive. Three other converts share their stories—all unique, but with some similarities. A glossary is included at the back of the book.

These very personal journeys will inspire prospective converts, converts, and Jews from birth as they see the lengths people were willing to go to be Jewish and wholly embrace their beliefs. While many terms are explained well, family purity is glossed over, and while a very personal process, a note for those unacquainted with the concept would have been helpful. A list of recommended websites promised at the end of the book did not make the final edit. Orthodox conversion is espoused, so those who chose to be Jewish through other affiliations (Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist) may find inspiration, but may also be off put by discussions about universal recognition of Orthodox conversions. The book will be of interest to those concerned with conversions and spiritual journeys, and is a strong optional purchase for most Jewish libraries.

*Kathe Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel*


Confessional tell-alls are among the most popular bestsellers to be found in bookstores. However, autobiographical comics and graphic novels by Jewish women seem to be the least visible genre to comic readers, art critics, readers of Judaica, scholars, journalists, and literary critics. Sarah Lightman has significantly helped raise awareness of the artists responsible for such works—and their stories—by co-curating a travelling exhibition which combined displays of original artwork and commentary on gallery walls with a selection of the books themselves which were available to visitors for browsing. Lightman has further promoted the genre by editing this marvellous anthology of essays, interviews, and artwork.

In addition to discussing the work of creators whose work appeared in the exhibition (such as Sarah Glidden, Trina Robbins, and Sarah Lightman herself), the book’s essays make reference to artists who were not included (most notably Charlotte Salomon). It also provides the larger historical context of Jewish autobiography (e.g. Gluckel of Hameln) and Jewish literature. Some authors delve into highbrow concepts (e.g. semiotics, postmemory, and “lesbian continuum”) which may be challenging for the average reader.

Nonetheless, *Graphic Details* is an engaging book which belongs on the shelves of Judaica libraries, whether placed in the “Women’s Studies”, “Comics”, or “Biographies” section. Bibliographical references point the reader to additional sources, while the index is useful for finding specific topics. It is hoped that *Graphic Details* will not be the final book on the subject, as there is more to be written on these themes and the works of these artists. Also, the work of emerging biographical cartoonists (e.g. Roz Chast, Sarah Leavitt, Emily Steinberg, Phoebe Potts) has yet to be analyzed. *Graphic Details* is recommended for public, academic, and synagogue libraries.

*Steven M. Bergson, jewishcomics.blogspot.com, Toronto, Canada*

Lundbom’s commentary draws on language, archaeology, and comparative Near Eastern material. It employs rhetorical criticism to explicate the biblical text. Among the topics discussed in the book are manuscript versions and papyri, Dead Sea scrolls, ancient Near Eastern treaties, and archeological findings. He discusses the particular language and rhetoric of Deuteronomy, its organization and structure, as well as its relationship to the prophets Amos, Hosea, Micah, Isaiah and to wisdom literature, Theological ideas in Deuteronomy, including God’s names, Election, Covenant, Land Gift, Holy War and Blessing, are examined.

Lundbom places the date of Deuteronomy sometime during the Josianic Reform and holds that the text was authored by Levitical scribes, probably from the north of Israel. He concludes, along with other scholars, that the tribe of Levi which supplied ministers for the sanctuary were the authors. He argues, based on the work of Levine, that stratification of the tribe into two groups—priests and Levites—occurs only in Numbers (ch. 3-4, 8, 16-17). There is also no evidence of subordination of Levites in Exodus. This book is recommended for academic libraries with collections on the Bible or the Ancient Near East.

David B Levy, Touro College


Yehuda Mirsky’s beautifully written biography of Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook is a fascinating and spiritually uplifting read. Rabbi Kook, known today in Israel as “HaRav” was among the most important and influential religious figures of the past century. Mirsky takes us through Rabbi Kook’s
early years, from his birth in Lithuania in 1865, through his school years, describing his learning from elite teachers, and his experience as a student in the world’s premier Yeshiva. Even at a young age, Kook’s formidable intellect and unique spiritual personality was already evident to all who came into contact with him. After serving in a couple of rabbinic positions in Europe, Rabbi Kook was appointed the Rabbi in Jaffa. In pre-War Palestine, Kook encountered the old vanguard of the religious establishment who created endless friction with Kook until the end of his life. Kook’s relationship with and openness towards the secular Jews of the “New Yishuv” was one source of this friction.

Mirsky’s book continues with detailed descriptions of Kook’s writings, his time spent in Europe (where he got stranded during World War I), his invitation and acceptance to serve as the first Chief Rabbi of the Yishuv and his struggles within that position. One of the tragedies of this great man’s life was that every position he took caused contention on one level or another. For example, when he was urged to give a speech at the inauguration of the newly opened Hebrew University, he was criticized by those to his right for even agreeing to speak and providing legitimization to this secular endeavor. Kook also managed to offend the professors and officials at the University when his speech urged the university to pursue its education goals hand in hand with Yeshiva and Torah values.

Rabbi Kook was a unique, complicated, brilliant and original personality who was often unappreciated in his life. Thankfully, as Mirsky describes, his legacy has been cemented as one of the most original and important thinkers of the twentieth century and Mirsky’s book is a welcome addition to advancing that legacy.

David Tesler, Yonkers, NY


Petrovsky-Shtern has written a fascinating book about the misconceptions (or at least partial misconception) many have of the shtetl. Most people upon hearing the word think about the famous shtetl depicted in Fiddler on the Roof, a town mired in poverty and on the descent. Petrovsky-Shtern, however, tells in brilliant detail the lesser known story of what he calls the “golden age of the shtetl”, the fifty years between 1790 and 1840 when the shtetl experienced a period of prosperity, stability and economic and cultural opportunity.

The Russian partition of Poland began in 1772 and was completed by 1794. The new Russian presence offered fresh economic opportunities. When the Russian bureaucracy initially began analyzing the shtetl they did so with “caution and respect” because of the successful environment that the Jews had helped to create in these locales (Jews were often at least half of the population). It wasn’t until the 1840’s when an increased Russian nationalism, xenophobia, militarization and economic rivalry led the Russians to begin suppressing Polish shtetl owners and introducing laws that had a severe negative economic effect on the Jewish residents. These circumstances led to the more common perception of the shtetl as a poor and crumbling town where the Jews subsisted with great hardship.

Each chapter of this book describes a different facet of life in the shtetl during this “golden age” period with wonderful anecdotes and, more importantly, hard data. We are introduced to economic competition, the liquor trade, violence, crime, punishment, family life, real estate and intellectual and spiritual life within the shtetl.

Anyone interested in Eastern European History and the shtetl will be fascinated by this lively book that is as accessible to the general reader as it is valuable to the academic.

David Tesler, Yonkers, NY

*The Spanish Holocaust* contains an exhaustive discussion of the atrocities carried out during the civil war that occurred in Spain during the years 1936-1939. Although Preston goes into the numerous crimes committed by both the Republicans and the fascist Nationalists (whom Preston refers to as “Rebels”), Preston differs from many of his contemporaries in that he is particularly earnest in his efforts to disclose the violence of the Rebels. Whereas many historians, looking at the attacks on Catholics during this period, assert that the Left was the worst protagonist in this affair, Preston argues that the rightist Rebels were responsible for promulgating the ugliest incidents. Franco, he asserts, enacted a ruthless plan involving the “detention, torture, forced disappearance and physical elimination of thousands of people for political and ideological motives … a state of affairs that continued, to greater or lesser extent, after the civil war ended.” Preston further argues that whereas the atrocities carried out by the rightist Rebels were “part of their official policy,” those crimes committed by the Republicans came about more as “the result of chaos, fear, ignorant hatred, and criminal thuggery.”

The number of Jews living in Spain during the civil war was negligible, and we find fewer than 16 pages of references to them in the index, out of a total 700 pages in the book. Nevertheless, Jews could not escape the vitriolic attacks that became part of the campaign executed by the Rebels. Preston notes that the Rebels evoked the notorious “Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion,” and mounted a concerted assault on the spurious “Jewish-Masonic-Bolshevik conspiracy.” Franco was actually paranoid about just such a conspiracy, Preston states, and he was concerned likewise about “Mohammedan utopias.” Nevertheless, for the most part, Jews were merely one part of the xenophobic campaign carried out by the Rebels against Masons, Democrats, Marxists, Muslims, trade unionists, “free” women, and socialists.

Preston’s work offers an in-depth study of the atrocities executed during the Spanish Civil War but reveals little about the Jewish community during this period.

Randall C. Belinfante, American Sephardi Federation


In the late 1920s and through the 1930s, Stefan Zweig was one of the best-known writers in Europe, and was widely read in America as well. Today he is hardly remembered, and his books are hard to find. Even the fact that his writings inspired the movie “Grand Budapest Hotel” is still little known. This odd but compelling volume seeks to return him to prominence.

George Prochnik has not written a biography of Zweig. Rather, this is a story of the mind-set of the Nazi-era émigré community, filtered through one of its most prominent members. It addresses the dislocation and confusion felt by Hannah Arendt, Berthold Brecht and others who left success behind in search of freedom. Prochnik describes Zweig’s many moves, from Austria to England, the US, and finally to Brazil (where he died in 1942). He sees these relocations in terms of a quest for peace of mind, and a simultaneous attempt to re-construct the world that nourished him. In addition to mining Zweig’s published and private writing, the author visited the places Zweig lived, and interviewed people who remembered him. Prochnik also reflects on his own father, who left Europe as a boy during that period.

Zweig is a compelling subject, but difficult to understand. His problems are hard to appreciate without knowing his life story and an understanding of European cultural history, particularly Viennese inter-war life. This book also suffers from the lack of an index, which would help connect the stories to the people. The “Notes” include references to Zweig’s writings (he was a prodigious correspondent as well as essayist, novelist and biographer), and other related books. In the end, *The Impossible Exile* is a fascinating but difficult read. It is meant for those interested in Zweig himself and issues surrounding Exile, and thus it is cautiously recommended for academic libraries only.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA

The Library of Congress classifies this book under the first subject heading “Self-realization—Religious aspects—Judaism.” The Oxford English Dictionary defines “self-realization” as a term in philosophy which refers to “the fulfillment by one’s own efforts of the possibilities of development of the self.” According to the author’s preface, this book is his “attempt to find wholeness between three facets of life … our relationship to the Torah and G-d, our relationship to who we are, and our relationship to others.” Rapaport hopes that the reader “will develop a deeper understanding and connection in each of these relationships, and between them, and find greater wholeness in their lives.” Obviously, Rapaport goes well beyond the accepted meaning of self-discovery or self-realization to include Torah and the divine creator. *The Jewish art of self discovery* contains some eighty chapters, each consisting of one to two pages. The chapters have very secular titles (“Individuality,” “Awareness,” for example) except for one or two (“Daas” and “Working out our middos”), but the content is very focused on Judaism. The sources—rudimentarily referenced—are chiefly the Midrash, the Babylonian Talmud, several Hassidic masters, and the Mishneh Torah of Maimonides; there are also implicit references to Lurianic kabbalah. The style is somewhat colloquial and is positively lacking in elegance or style. Each chapter ends with a “Reflection:” a series of three or four very brief questions to allow the reader to make the chapter more relevant to his or her self. Endorsements from Orthodox rabbis recommend this book to the English speaking Orthodox public.

Roger S. Kohn, Silver Spring, MD


The image of the shepherd is a recurring theme in sacred Jewish texts. Especially familiar to Jews and Christians is the 23rd Psalm, the main theme of this book, which begins “The Lord is my shepherd.” Two beloved biblical figures were shepherds: David and Moses. They impressed God by the kindness and concern they showed to their sheep. The author writes: “Being compassionate toward the weak and frail are necessary requisites for eventually becoming a true spiritual leader.”

While the chapters of the book explaining the passages in the 23rd Psalm are highly recommended, the book deals with other topics around this theme, such as the metaphor of the shepherd in Christian and Jewish beliefs, and the meaning and efficacy of prayer. If the reader wants a more concise explanation of the 23rd Psalm, they can read *The Lord is My Shepherd: Healing Wisdom of the Twenty-Third Psalm* by Harold S. Kushner. Samuel’s work, however, is recommended for anyone who wants to delve into a deeper understanding of the nature and meaning of prayer and the reading of sacred text. *A Shepherd’s Song* is written for an inter-faith audience; it includes an index and notes.

Ellen Share, Librarian, Washington Hebrew Congregation


When people think of kosher cooking, they often think of heavy meat dishes. *Dairy Made Easy: Triple Tested Recipes for Every Day*, offers a refreshing alternative. Filled with simple and quick recipes, this cookbook includes dairy recipes that can be made for a regular weeknight, or for a Yom Tov meal, or for when you are tired of eating meat all the time. The cookbook also includes recipes for breakfast. Colorful pictures and very clear instructions on how to make each recipe, including exact temperatures and timings for the recipes, are provided. Each recipe is submitted by a different reader of a website called, “CookKosher.com,” and includes either a small blurb from the contributor or tips on the recipe well placed on the page. *Dairy Made Easy* is clearly divided into sections, and includes a table of contents and an index. An additional page lists which recipes can be made parve and which specific substitutions can be made. I highly recommend this book for any synagogue, public or school library with a strong cookbook collection.

Laura Schutzman, Librarian, Hebrew Academy of Nassau County, Uniondale, NY

What does it mean to be a marginalized member of marginalized community? In this volume, Shoham Steiner examines issues of daily life for Jews in medieval Europe who were outside of the norm because of disease (leprosy or other skin conditions,) mental deficiency (either mental illness or developmental delays,) or disability (of mobility, sight, or hearing.)

For each of these groups, the author notes the Biblical citations and whether they were part of a legal or narrative passage; the early Rabbinic understanding; the medieval comprehension of the passages and the science available at the time to decipher them; and how the Jews applied all these factors in community life. Shoham-Steiner closely examines the responsa written during this period and points out how the rabbis tried to maintain the cohesiveness of the Jewish community.

While geared to scholars, this book is accessible to the layperson. The volume includes extensive notes, bibliography, and index. Highly recommended for academic libraries.

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


This book is an updated version of an academic paper submitted by the author during her studies at the Academy for Jewish Religion (2002). After presenting short excerpts from recent books published by leading American authors on the subject of Jewish meditation, Schotz offers only three practices to be conducted in a group: chanting, guided visualization, and “textual meditations and blessings with spontaneous responses.” A “Jewish meditation journal” occupies almost forty percent of the printed page. This journal consists of, on the left page, a large Hebrew letter and a short citation of a line or two at most, and an almost blank page on the right page. After this, one finds a questionnaire and the responses of five professional Jews (rabbis, cantors, and a rabbinical student) on how they define Jewish meditation. A very slim and light book, with some fresh and mildly interesting insights from the author. Not recommended for libraries, however.

Roger S. Kohn, Silver Spring, MD


This book is a compendium of articles about the concept of faith and the “many layers of meaning” that have been poured into it. As the authors describe in the introduction, in various periods throughout Jewish history the word “faith” had different meanings and connoted different things. In the biblical period, the word described an individual and his or her reliance and trust in God. In the medieval era faith was tied into the concept of knowledge of God. In modern Jewish thought, faith acquired new meanings that were more open and complex, a trend that has continued into our postmodern era. Of course these Jewish conversations and writings about faith did not take place in a vacuum and must be understood and properly contextualized within both a “conscious and unconscious” dialogue with the outside world. This present work contains essays about the concept of faith as a tradition that struggled, responded and ultimately dialogued with the outside world.

_Faith: Jewish Perspectives_ is split into three sections. The first section provides a conceptual analysis of faith and explores “Faith as Temptation”, “Religious Belief in a Postmodern Age” and the age old question of faith and theodicy. The second section focuses on faith within the context of Kabbalah and Hasidism. The third and final section have five essays that focus on particular people and their ideas, such as Rabbi Judah Halevi, Hillel Zeitlin, Bialik, Soloveitchik and Leibowitz.

The essays are not aimed at the general reader; they were composed for readers with an adequate background in philosophy in general and Jewish philosophy in particular.

David Tesler, Yonkers, NY
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Joseph says to his brothers, “You should know that a man like me practices divination,” which is countered by the injunction “For there is no enchantment with Jacob, neither is there any divination with Israel” (Num. 23:23). While Maimonides urges one to reject such magical and superstitious practices, Ibn Ezra articulates an original esoteric “rational” astrology.

This volume is an important complement to previous volumes in this series, which deal with: Ibn Ezra’s explanations of astrological concepts; a history of meteorological astrology from antiquity to Ibn Ezra’s day; the most auspicious moment for actions; Sefer ha She’elot (Book of Interrogations), or questions posted to the astrologer; Sefer ha-Me’orot (Book of Luminaries) on medical astrology. The present volume under review offers the first critical edition, accompanied by translation and commentary of Sefer ha-Moladot, which addresses the doctrine of nativities and system of continuous horoscopy, and Sefer ha-Tekufah (Book of the Revolution).

The doctrine of nativities holds that the destiny of a new born is determined by the constellation of celestial bodies at the instant of birth and is further learned from the natal horoscopic chart. Continuous horoscopy in nativities or anniversary horoscopy posits that further deciphering of an individual’s fate should be cast on every full ‘revolution’ of the year. This is when the sun arrives at the same point in the zodiac where it was at the time of the individual’s birth. These esoteric methods of decipherment allow one to make predictions about the fate of an individual and his character. The limits in space of the current reviews do not allow me to clarify the incredible complex nature of this mystical medieval science set out in this highest of quality scholarly edition. Highly recommended for major academic Judaica collections.

David B Levy, Touro College


Shalev argues that the origins of American political culture currently characterized as a Christian nation, can be traced to the Hebrew Bible. America, which was viewed in its colonial period as Zion on the Hill according to Calvinists in New England, found the source for republicanism in Hebraic scripture. Long after the Calvinist influence waned in Europe and Puritanism followed suit in America, the rhetoric of the Hebrew Bible, the author points out, remained a stable referent to interpretation of the new constitution, a justification for slavery, and even the source for the presence of Native Americans. Perhaps most unique is Shalev’s inclusion of the origins of Mormonism in the American cultural development. The distinctive influence of the Hebrew Bible while strongest in the earliest history of the country, it is pointed out, peaked in 1830 and diminished as the Civil War approached and was less present in the post war period. A great deal of the extensive supporting evidence relies heavily upon colonial newspapers and period published literature. *American Zion* is certainly a necessary read for colonial American historians and anyone interested in American religious history.

Sanford R. Silverburg, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC


There are many histories of American Zionism. Most of them focus on specific aspects of the movement between 1890 and 1948. Ben-Gurion University Professor Ofer Shiff takes a different perspective. He analyzes the writings, speeches, and actions of Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver, one of America’s great Zionists, in the decade after the establishment of Israel.
This is neither a complete biography of Rabbi Silver, nor a new overview of Zionism. The author begins with Silver’s surprising resignation from leadership of the American Zionist Organization in early 1949. In the first part of the book, Shiff describes and analyzes Silver’s attempts to balance his lifelong commitment to American society, and his recognition of the importance of Jewish values. In the second part, Shiff explores the Rabbi’s long opposition to Anti-Semitism at home and the Nazi threat abroad. Silver’s activities included gathering support for the proposed Jewish state in Washington in the late 1940s. After losing the fight for control of Israel’s relationship with the Diaspora, he became an independent and contentious partner. The third part of this volume deals with the 1950s, when the Rabbi unsuccessfully sought to regain control over the Diaspora’s relations with Israel; his status as an American Jewish leader; and his support for Israel during the Suez crisis of 1956. The epilogue attempts to reconcile Silver’s conflicting roles as an American student of the Biblical Prophets and his desire to serve as a Zionist leader in the first years of the Jewish state.

This is a densely written and closely-argued short book. Readers should have a deep knowledge of Abba Hillel Silver’s life and his writings (which are extensively quoted), as well as an understanding of Zionist and Israeli political history. Its premises are intriguing and the argument is challenging. It is recommended for academic libraries and those deeply interested in the history of Zionism.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA


Sniegon, a historian at the University of Lund, focuses on the role of the Holocaust in both Czech and Slovak historical cultural development beginning during the time of the political upheavals in Europe in 1989 until both countries’ entry into the European Union in 2004. What interests Sniegon most is how Czechs and Slovaks, within their relative separate historical consciousness, viewed the Holocaust as well as the Nazi treatment of other religious and ethnic minorities in their territories.

The way in which the history of the Holocaust was presented in Czechoslovakia from the end of the Second World War to 1989 forms the background to the author’s study. Following is an examination of the geopolitical division of the country into the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Interestingly, one section is devoted to studying the Czech response to the American-made movie Schindler’s List. The horror of the Holocaust that took place at two concentration camps at Lety and Hodonin u Kunštátu, both established for the extermination of Roma from the Bohemia and Moravia Protectorate, is also presented, as well as a discussion of how a museum in Slovakia presented the Holocaust during the period of Communist rule.

This slim volume is not particularly heavy on the history of the Jewish presence in either the Czech community or Slovakia. Nor will the reader learn much about the Jews from the region in the Holocaust. The text is dense and extremely well researched from Czech and Slovak sources; it is in this context that the material is best understood and appreciated.

Sanford R. Silverburg, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC


Rabbi Daniel Sperber has written a short but lovely book about the relationship between the commandments that are directed between ‘Man and his Neighbors’ (meaning commandments that connect one person to another) and between ‘Man and his Maker’ or ritual commandments. This is a familiar dichotomy within Jewish Law and Rabbi Sperber argues that when there is a tension between the two and it becomes impossible to follow both commandments, there is a requirement to favor and prioritize the interpersonal commandment.
In the first part of the book, Sperber offers 21 examples of this prioritization. The second part relates famous stories of great Rabbis who integrated this concept into their lives. In one moving example, the author tells us about Rabbi Salanter (1810-1883) who ritually washed his hands with what his contemporaries thought to be too little water. When asked why he wasn’t using the proper amount of water, Salanter said that he saw how difficult it was for the maid who was tasked with drawing the water from afar and carrying the heavy load to the house. Rabbi Salanter felt that it was “forbidden for a person to be overly religious at the expense of others.” A similar story is told of a Rabbi who would cut short his long prayers when there were working men present waiting for him to finish so as to avoid negatively impacting their earning potential.

While On the Relationship of Mitzvot… is an admirable effort to document and prove Rabbi Sperber’s thesis, it lacks a systematic approach. The book is well footnoted but remains anecdotal in nature, a bit haphazard in layout, and ultimately is designed for a reader familiar with Hebrew and rabbinic sources.

David Tesler, Yonkers, NY


This engrossing biography of the seventh Lubavitcher Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson, is also a personal tribute to a twentieth-century giant. Noted scholar Adin Steinsaltz integrates firsthand accounts and Chassidic notions in discussing the life of the Rebbe and his spiritual force. The background history of Chabad is provided, together with an overview of the Rebbe’s early years in Europe, where his brilliance soon became apparent; and his special bond with the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe, Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, led to marriage with the latter’s daughter Chaya Mushka. Even before he assumed leadership, in 1951, Chassidim recognized in this shy but intense man the qualities of an heir. Under the Rebbe’s vision of mass outreach, Chabad evolved, forty years later, from a small group of refugees in Brooklyn into a global network.

The writing is frank but reverential, albeit with printing errors (the Rebbe’s father died in 1944, not 1904) and subjective: the author regularly uses the phrase “it seems to me” when interpreting certain provocative debates and events, such as the Rebbe’s stand on Zionism and squabbles among family members. Photographs, some with the author, are included along with recollections from Jews who waited outside Chabad headquarters for either a blessing or private audience, and so-called “miracle” stories. While critical of those who believe the Rebbe is the Moshiach (Messiah), the author is assertive about messianism and Chabad philosophy, particularly the interdependency of tzadik (righteous man) and follower. In all, My Rebbe leaves readers inspired by the subject’s achievements, which are still felt today. Recommended for all Jewish libraries.

Hallie Cantor, Yeshiva University, New York, NY


Dr. Wright of Emory University argues that the David narratives in the books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles are various in nature. Some affirm the legitimacy of the Davidic dynasty, others reflect upon the relationship of the nation to the monarchical state, and yet others deal with the membership and status of numerous groups within the nation. In addition, in three separate chapters, Wright deals with the Caleb texts as an especially strong example of attempts to define membership and status within the nation—in this case for the Calebite clan. Certainly the complications and differences in the biblical narratives and the resulting complexity of the figure of David that emerges invite attempts at explanation. Wright’s boldest attempt is based upon the assumption that the texts that deal only with David and those that deal only with Saul were originally unrelated and that the attempt to synthesize them on the part of the biblical authors leads to a largely fictional text. This conclusion is not impossible
but it is based upon an assumption and the evidence he adduces in support of this assumption is, overall, pretty thin. Wright is on much firmer ground when he discusses the differences between the David of Solomon and Kings on the one hand, and the David of Chronicles on the other, and also in recognizing the ambiguous, depiction of the monarchy as an institution. One needn’t be a biblical literalist to find much of this book highly conjectural and sometimes tendentious.


Countless studies have been published in recent years on the Zohar literature, from a wide range of scholarly, popular and mystical perspectives. Traditionally, the Zohar was considered a midrash—a commentary on the Bible from the classic rabbinic period. Scholarship places its authorship in a very different time period—thirteenth-century Castile—while the perception of the Zohar as a midrash has been neglected but never overturned. Oded Yisraeli, an expert on the Zohar and its hermeneutics with a rich background in the study of rabbinic midrash, calls for a return to the Zohar as a midrash. In doing so, he places it in the context of earlier Jewish biblical hermeneutics and takes advantage of the many advances made in recent years in the critical study of midrash.

The book opens with a methodological introduction, staking Yisraeli’s claim that the Zohar should be read in light of earlier midrashim, as well as other ancient Jewish interpretations and medieval Jewish philosophy. Then he turns to a series of studies, mostly of biblical stories from Genesis that are developed in the Zohar into full scale myths. They reveal the daring ways in which the Zohar reinterpreted the Torah and manipulated older hermeneutic traditions to create new and surprising ways of reading the most basic of Jewish texts. Yisraeli’s approach enriches Zohar studies while providing a solid philological basis for a field whose connection to critical scholarly practice is sometimes precarious.

Pinchas Roth

Reviews of Nonfiction Titles for Adults


In Anton’s first book on Rav Hisda’s Daughter (Apprentice: A Novel of Love, the Talmud, and Sorcery), Hisdadukh, daughter of a wealthy and renowned rabbi, discovers that she can protect the welfare of pregnant women, ensuring safe and healthy births through the creation of amulets. In Enchantress, Hisdadukh's powers increase to include the ability to summon demons, bidding them to do her will and to control the sorcery of other, malevolent sorceresses.

When, as a child, she was given a choice to marry either Abba bar Joseph (also known as Raba) or Rami bar Chama, Hisdadukh chose both, to the shock of her father. After being widowed by Rami, she marries the man who was destined to give her many sons and to be her last husband. Hisdadukh discovers that she was born into a magically powerful family and has married someone who is able to use the powers of the Secret Torah to invoke magic. The enchantress uses her power to protect her husband and sons, ensuring that they do not die before her.

Anton’s books are acclaimed for being historically accurate and spellbinding (pun intended). Enchantress does not disappoint. As a fan of historical fiction and the supernatural, I could not put this book down. Anton entertains and educates readers about the superstitious world of Babylonian Jewry. I thoroughly recommend this book.

Yossi Gremillion, Librarian, Broward County Library, Fort Lauderdale, FL
Reviews of Literature Titles for Adults

**Jewish Studies and Holocaust Education in Poland**

By Lynn W. Zimmerman

with Contributing Scholars

$45 softcover (6 x 9)

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e 978-1-4766-1360-4

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Translated by Abramo Ottolenghi and Joan D. Ottolenghi

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There are liminal moments that can shift the way we view the world. In this collection of short stories, Clayton focuses on these types of moments, although his characters don’t always realize it until years later. Some of these moments can alter family relationships: a man realizes that his abusive father had been struggling not to perpetuate the abuse he himself had experienced as a child; another young man feels proud when he witnesses his father standing up to his boss for the first time. Some moments are more spiritual: a sick man sees himself differently when a rabbi gives him a new name or when a man who describes *tefillin* (phylacteries) as a radio connection to God suddenly starts feeling God’s presence. Clayton also knows that changes and new perspectives don’t always ‘stick.’ Some of his characters slide back to their previous views.

Rich with Jewish characters and themes, these stories are highly recommended.

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


Elisabeth de Waal’s novel, published posthumously with an introduction by her grandson Edmund (*The Hare with Amber Eyes*), captures the atmosphere of postwar Vienna. The city is crumbling from bombs and those who remain include fallen aristocrats with worthless titles, unrepentant Nazis, and others ravaged by the war. Jewish exiles seeking to return find that there is no welcome mat. Professor Kuno Adler, a scientist who found life in America unfulfilling returns to his lab now run by a self-confessed Nazi. Theophil Kanakas, a wealthy Greek businessman, hope to profit from postwar opportunities. Marie-Theres, the American daughter of an exiled princess goes to stay with her aunt in the Austrian countryside. She wastes no time and joins the decadent Vienna society elite with all of its pettiness and intrigue.

De Wall was a lawyer who wrote poetry and novels in the 1950s. Her lyrical story captures the gap between public and private behavior and evokes the atmosphere of prejudice, disintegrating society, and the shock that greeted the returning exiles. Readers who enjoy Irene Nemirovsky and the classic novels of Henry James and Leo Tolstoy will want to read this. Book clubs will also find much to discuss here.

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


Written from the perspective of the main character, Lillian Dunkle, *The Ice Cream Queen of Orchard Street* tells the tale of a Jewish immigrant girl, who quite by accident, ends up spending her childhood with an Italian family, whose family business is making and selling ices. Lillian is trained in how to make this delicacy and eventually she and her husband create their own soft-serve ice cream company, Dunkle Ice Cream. Throughout the 20th century, the company goes through many ups and downs, and finally opens many franchises throughout the country, including a special ice cream barge for American soldiers during World War II. Lillian finds herself in legal trouble in the 21st century, and so the act of writing her personal history becomes her defense. This novel, based on historical fact, is well written and engaging. Although not short, it will prove worthwhile reading for any lover of historical fiction or confections.

*The Ice Cream Queen* is a welcome addition to any synagogue, public, or school library looking to diversify their fiction offerings and possibly a good book-club suggestion because of its amusing writing and interesting topic.

*Laura Schutzman, Librarian, Hebrew Academy of Nassau County, Uniondale, NY*
Reviews of Nonfiction Titles for Adults

Changing the Immutable
How Orthodox Judaism Rewrites Its History
Marc B. Shapiro
A wide-ranging discussion of Orthodox literature that adds a new perspective to Jewish intellectual history and to the understanding of the contemporary Jewish world.
978–1–904113–60–7 256 pages, 71 illustrations $39.95, Spring 2015

Reading Maimonides’ Mishneh Torah
David Gillis
Gillis reveals Maimonides’ Mishneh Torah as a work of art, its form reflecting the belief that observing divine commandments brings alignment with cosmic order.
978–1–906764–06–7 448 pages, $64.50

Collected Essays, Volume 2
Haym Soloveitchik
A powerful demonstration that understanding the history of halakhah requires substantive, in-depth analysis of sources together with a consideration of context.
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Leadership and Conflict
Tensions in Medieval and Early Modern Jewish History and Culture
Marc Saperstein
A multifaceted analysis of how Jewish leaders in medieval and early modern times responded to and occasionally fostered diversity and conflict within their communities.
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Intrigue and Revolution
Chief Rabbis in Aleppo, Baghdad and Damascus, 1744–1914
Yaron Harel
A dramatic account of traditional Jewish society in the Ottoman Empire at a time when societal norms were being challenged.
978–1–904113–87–4 352 pages, $64.50

Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry, Volume 27
Jews in the Kingdom of Poland, 1815–1918
Edited by Glenn Dynner, Antony Polonsky & Marcin Wodziński
The modern Jewish world is largely a product of cultural and political movements that originated in the Kingdom of Poland, and this volume explains why. 512 pages, 6 photographs, map
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Edited by Jane S. Gerber
An examination of the complex past and changing circumstances of the Jewish diaspora in the British and Dutch Caribbean, with particular emphasis on Jamaica.
978–1–906764–14–2 444 pages, 18 colour illustrations, 17 text figures, 4 maps, 8 tables, $64.50

Jewish Cultural Studies, Volume 4
Framing Jewish Culture: Boundaries and Representations
Edited by Simon J. Bronner
An exploration of how Jews frame their identity and how this establishes the dynamic of their social relations with other Jews and non-Jews.
978–1–906764–08–1 paperback, 436 pages, 23 illustrations, table, $34.95

Ars Judaica, Volume 10
The Bar-Ilan Journal of Jewish Art
Edited by Bracha Yaniv, Sara Offenberg, Mirjam Rajner, and Ilia Rodov
New contributions to the visual arts and architecture from antiquity to the present from a variety of perspectives.
978–1–906764–36–4 paperback, 128 pages, 100 illustrations (33 in colour), $55.00

The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization

www.littman.co.uk

In *Fields of Exile*, Judith Gallanter, peace activist and Zionist, considers her time spent in Toronto, as her own personal exile. However, Judith discovers that the people and places in her life are not exactly as she thought they were.

On his deathbed, Judith’s father asks her to remain in Canada to get her Master’s Degree in Social Work. After reluctantly agreeing to do so, Judith resents being away from her friends and her work in peace activism while enjoying being around her cohorts in the MSW program at Dunhill College. However, Judith soon discovers that, except for a timid few, her professors and fellow students do not share her love for Israel and her fight against anti-Semitism, anti-Zionism and freedom of speech. She is afraid to ‘rock the boat’ by speaking out against, what she considers, anti-Semitism that is masked as anti-Zionism.

Judith is a very conflicted person. She is attracted to men, such as the married Israeli, Moshe, who don’t share her liberal political views yet who share her sexual passion. In Canada, she is reunited with a high school sweetheart, Bobby Kornblum, a politically conservative attorney, who disagrees with her politics yet waits, ever-so-patiently, for her to agree to marry him. She views her time in Canada and her relationship with Bobby as temporary. Isolated in the college environment, feeling ostracized by those who she trusted to be defenders of injustice and freedom of expression, Judith finds her only true allies to be Bobby and her politically ambivalent friend Cindy.

This book can be appreciated by people of all political and religious persuasions. Given the climate of anti-Israel hatred, this book is an excellent choice for book discussion clubs and interfaith and inter-political dialogue.

Yossi Gremillion, Librarian, Broward County Library, Fort Lauderdale, FL


Saskia Goldschmidt has written an interesting novel based on her family history. Mordechai de Paauw, co-founder and CEO of Farmacom, is on his death bed. Looking back at his life as the time of reckoning approaches, he tells readers the story of his life. He wanted to study chemistry at university, but his father forbade it, insisting that he take over the family slaughterhouse. He did this, but his interest in science inspired him to branch out and start a pharmaceutical company. Using the leftovers from the meat processed at the plant, he hired scientists to do research that led to the discovery of hormones and the invention of the contraceptive pill. Mordechai has an insatiable sexual appetite and cares little for ethics in the conduct of business. Seducing female employees and testing drugs on them without their knowledge are standard operating procedure. Hitler’s rise to power and the impending exposure of his conduct force him to choose between his ambition and his upstanding, honest Jewish family. *The Hormone Factory* allows readers to meet a thoroughly despicable man. It is a thought-provoking book that raises questions of business and scientific integrity. Book clubs will have a great deal to discuss here.

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


It has been said that Jewish history has been written through tears. Pogroms such as those led by Bogdan Khmelnytsky in the 17th century, which left numerous Jewish communities destroyed, have become part of the collective Jewish memory. Those who survive violence are often haunted by memories of what they witnessed or experienced. In Olga Grjasnowa’s *All Russians Love Birch Trees*, violence and death remain in Masha Kogan’s memory. All that Masha wants is to have a home, a familiar place, something that she had never experienced. For Masha, she has always been a stranger in a strange land.
During the 1987 campaign to integrate Nagorno-Karabakh into the Armenian Soviet Republic, Armenians became victims of violent pogroms instigated by Azari gangs. People who once lived side-by-side, sharing the same culture were now enemies. Members of the National Front went from apartment to apartment, mutilating, raping and killing Armenians. Masha’s most vivid memory, which she kept her entire life, was the sound of the body of a woman hitting the asphalt and her blood staining Masha’s shoes. Flash forward to Ramallah. Masha, who was Jewish, yet did not identify with the Jewish people or Israel, finds herself in Israel, working for a German peace organization. Masha finds herself, yet again, in the battlefield, witnessing violence. Death has become normal for her. She has survived violence, as her grandmother survived the Holocaust. Yet, the question remains: Does one ever fully recover from trauma and loss? Masha may have survived but she has never fully had the normal life she yearned for.

All Russians Love Birch Trees is a very somber book that may be very therapeutic for those in need of healing from traumatic events.

Yossi Gremillion, Librarian, Broward County Library, Fort Lauderdale, FL


Hesh Kestin uses his background as a foreign correspondent in the Middle East and his eighteen-years serving in the Israel Defense Forces to create an intense, ripped-from-the-headlines political thriller. His large diverse cast of characters centers around Mohammed “Edward” Al-Masri, a Canadian professor and Palestinian activist, and his childhood neighbor Dahlia Barr, a human rights attorney in Jerusalem who is now serving as the “Special Advisor for Extraordinary Measures to the Chief Commissioner of Police.” When Edward is arrested at Ben Gurion airport with one million dollars in a suitcase, Dahlia holds the authority to interview and interrogate him. But when her son, a lieutenant in the IDF, is kidnapped by Hezbollah things become even more personal as Dahlia, and the reader, become entangled in a race against the clock to determine if there is any connection between Al-Masri and the kidnapping. The 229-page novel is divided into 88 brief chapters, some only as long as a paragraph, and switches perspective between Edward, Dahlia and the equally developed secondary characters: Dalia’s soon-to-be ex-husband, her sons, her American lover, her left-wing peace activist mother, Edward’s mother (who is also Dahlia’s mother’s best friend), a Palestinian Military Commander in South Lebanon, the kidnappers, the Chief Commissioner of Police, and others. The short chapters, interspersed with the Memorandum of Record from the Security Cabinet of the Office of the Prime Minister, create suspense and tension as the lie, referred to in the title, is revealed. A few too many contrived plot twists mar the narrative, but this fast-paced, highly readable and accessible thriller, will still give readers plenty of insight into the moral issues surrounding torture, security, and human rights, as well as the complexity of the current situation in Israel.

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

Don’t Forget to Check Out AJL News!

The November/December 2014 issue of AJL News has lots of internal AJL organizational news, and lots of exciting articles about the activities of our members all over the world.
**Pressman, Steven. *50 Children: The Rescue Mission of Mr. & Mrs. Kraus*, 2013. Distributed by Seventh Art Releasing. 63 min. Sale (DVD) $295.00.**

HBO Documentary Films in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum have produced a little-known story of initiative and bravery. Philadelphia lawyer Gilbert Kraus and his wife Eleanor led a comfortable life, but when they heard the reports of what was happening in Germany and Austria in the late 1930’s, they took it upon themselves to rescue 50 children. Gilbert met with US State Department officials while Eleanor prepared affidavits for friends and acquaintances to guarantee support for the children. Enlisting the help of a friend, Dr. Robert Schless, they traveled to Europe in April 1939, interviewed candidates and secured their visas, and returned to the United States with the children on June 3, 1939. The children spent the summer at Camp Brith Sholom, and joined relatives and foster families in the fall. Many of them, now senior citizens, describe their lives before and during the period, meeting the Krauses, and their trip to America. Mamie Gummer reads entries from Eleanor’s journals at the time. Liz Perle, the Krauses’ granddaughter talks about them, and several historians give background to add context. The fate of the children’s parents and others who helped with the rescue mission is dispersed through the credits at the end.

Narrated by Alan Alda, the film focuses on the danger of the mission and the fear of those involved. The first person testimony combined with archival footage puts the Krauses’ heroic mission in perspective. The background music is often distracting, and events described out of order — the Wagner Rogers Bill (February 1939), the Aunschloss (March 1938), obtaining affidavits (March 1939), and Kristallnacht (November 1938) — is a bit confusing. Nevertheless, it is an important and interesting story of both Holocaust history and what two people can achieve. Very highly recommended for libraries with large Holocaust and/or film collections; recommended for all Jewish libraries and appropriate for patrons 14 and older.

*Kathe Pinchuck, Ramat Bet Shemesh, Israel*

**Goldscheider, Jeremy and Richard Goldgewicht. *Lost Town*, 2013. Seventh Art Releasing. 85 min. Sale (DVD) $249.00.**

Avrom Bendavid-Val’s father grew up in Trochenbrod, an all-Jewish village in Western Ukraine. It was founded in 1835 as a farming colony. During World War II, the village was liquidated and only 33 residents survived. His father spoke of his hometown with such longing that Bendavid-Val wanted to find out all he could. The village does not appear on the map and there are no signs on the ground. Through research, multiple visits and interviews with descendants of residents and local Ukrainians, Bendavid-Val learns what daily life was like and what happened during the Holocaust. His father had left in 1932 for Palestine, but Betty Gold vividly describes how her family hid in a bunker in the forest. The film documents this, as well as the group trip to Trochenbrod in 2009.

The film was inspired by Avrom Bendavid-Val’s book *The Heavens are Empty* (Pegasus, 2010), and he is the narrator. Jeremy Goldscheider, a producer and director of the project, also has ties to Trochenbrod. The film moves very slowly as Bendavid-Val describes his meetings, the connections between the people he meets and the piecing together of events and families. The animated depictions of events in the village, though narrated with first person testimony, are not as effective as the actual interviews. Given the plethora of Holocaust material available, this film is suggested for libraries with large Holocaust collections, or whose patrons have ties to Trochenbrod.

*Kathe Pinchuck, Ramat Bet Shemesh, Israel*

This film about Shimon Peres and his history of leadership in Israel is crisp and well done. The footage is beautiful. Older footage is mixed with newer footage and creates a feeling that is modern and authentic at the same time. The material is presented in a clear manner, and the speakers are easily understood. At 77 minutes this film is not long or cumbersome, and there is a large amount of interview footage with Peres himself which is exceptional. This film would be a useful jumping-off point for many discussions: it raises many important questions and does not presume to know the answers. The many voices that are presented through a variety of interviews reveal the different sides of Shimon Peres, and in this way provide a complex and vibrant picture of who he is as a man. Among other films in English about Shimon Peres, this film is set to become a standard. Highly recommended for Jewish libraries.

Debbie Feder, Director, LRC, Ida Crown Jewish Academy


*Tradescantia zebrina* is the plant genus and species better known as “wandering Jew,” an appropriate name for a group that uses the Rhodes (electric piano), electric organs, clarinet, guitar, electric bass and percussion to create music with elements of klezmer, rock, jazz, and Middle Eastern melodies and harmonies. “Chant of Ages” starts out sounding like a familiar traditional Jewish song, then veers into jazz improvisation. “Revolution in My Mind” follows and literally revolves from discordant to a simple melody and from fast to slow. “The Spirit Within” opens with a great baseline, proceeds through a pleasant jazz section where the drum and keyboard stand out, then hits a spacy, futuristic-sounding bridge before continuing with jazz guitar before coming back to the original theme. Solo clarinet is featured in the title song, as well as “The Guru’s Advice.” The tracks “Higher Power” and “Breath of Life” have the ‘klezmer jazz’ sound, and “Freedom Groove” is a great name for the last selection, which is probably the only “danceable” track.

While Jewish motifs are recognizable throughout the CD, with liner notes thanking John Zorn and the eclectic blend of instruments and styles, this is not a typical collection of Jewish music. It is recommended for libraries with large music collections, and those whose patrons enjoy new and different sounds.

Kathe Pinchuck, Ramat Bet Shemesh, Israel
The AJL Newsletter (Irene Levin-Wixman z”l, founding editor) was published in print from 1979 to 2010 by the Association of Jewish Libraries to inform members about AJL activities and issues related to Judaica libraries. 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.

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AJL Reviews
November/December 2014
Volume IV, No. 4
ISSN 2160-0910