
Sara lives in a big city (New York?) in an apartment she shares with her mother and grandmother. She watches from the window as her mom goes to work. One day, she sees an old man in a yellow, green, and red plaid coat. He picks up a bruised apple from the discarded pile near Sol’s Market. As Sara eats her breakfast, she wonders if the man is hungry. As she shares Shabbat dinner with her mother and grandmother, she wonders if he’s lonely. Step by step, Sara, her family, her classmates, and her synagogue community demonstrate small acts of kindness: a packed lunch one day leads to a succession of food for the man to eat. As Hanukkah approaches, Sara makes a menorah at school. Her menorah from last year, as well as candles, *latkes*, and Hanukkah cookies with sprinkles, are left for the man. But that’s not all. The man, whom the rabbi introduces as Morris Berger, is invited for Shabbat/Hanukkah dinner. After dinner, Morris teaches magic tricks to Sara and tells lots of stories about the time when he worked in the circus. Morris, who was a stranger and has now become a friend, will be invited for many more dinners.

Oftentimes, stories about giving *tzedakah* (charity) are heavy-handed and pedantic. Then along comes a jewel of a story that shows how this *mitzvah* enriches the giver as well as the receiver. The lively acrylic illustrations are filled with whimsy and humor. With varying perspectives and an appealing layout, *Hanukkah Cookies with Sprinkles* is a book that will give pleasure many times over.

“A Note for Families” about the story of Hanukkah and its customs is included at the back.

*Anne Dublin, author of 44 Hours or Strike! (Second Story Press), Toronto, Canada*

Joan Skraggs lives on a hardscrabble farm in Pennsylvania in 1911. The motherless girl must cook, clean and care for her father and three brothers in a Cinderella-like existence. Joan’s love for her teacher and the few books she owns ignites a passion for learning that her father cruelly attempts to snuff out by forcing her to leave school and burning her books. At the age of 14, she runs away to Baltimore, where a wealthy Jewish family takes pity on her and employs her as a maid. Though she works hard, she is also encouraged to continue her studies by reading in the family library. In their employ, she learns a great deal about the Jewish religion and practices including detailed tidbits regarding *kashrut.* The author’s historical research is reflected in such themes as the tension between the established German-Jewish community and newly arriving Polish Jews, and the Orthodox-Reform schism. When Joan develops a crush on the son of the family, the issues of interfaith marriage and class inevitably divide and lead to conflict and the denouement of the story.

The theme of tolerance is treated with great delicacy and sophistication. Joan is imbued with sincere religious feeling and loyalty to her mother’s Catholic faith. However, she instinctively feels anti-Semitism is wrong, and defends her employers against her priest’s criticism. Her discussions with Mr. Rosenbach, the intelligent and kindly *pater familias,* lead to an understanding of the need to respect all people’s beliefs. Joan is a true heroine with whom readers are sure to sympathize, and her exciting and humorous adventures will keep readers engaged. Written in diary form with the Victorian eloquence reflecting Joan’s love of *Jane Eyre,* this novel is sure to inspire girls of any background and lead to greater understanding of Jews and Judaism.

*Joyce Levine, Chair, AJL Publications Committee, North Woodmere, NY.*

[Note: Laura Amy Schlitz is the author of *Good Masters! Sweet Ladies! Voices from a Medieval Village,* winner of the 2008 Newbery Medal.]

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**Reviews of Titles for Children and Teens**

**FICTION – EARLY & MIDDLE GRADE**


August Bondi may be a little-known Jewish hero, but this fictionalized story of his life, based on his autobiography, details what an interesting and adventurous life he led. Born and raised in Vienna, he became a leader of the student’s brigade, the Academic Legion, during the Austrian Revolution of 1848. While the fight still raged, he and his family departed for America, and settled in St. Louis. When he was 18, August travelled down the Mississippi to New Orleans, and from there worked on a boat that took immigrants and supplies to Galveston, and up-river into Texas. In his travels he saw slaves, and came to hate the institution. After a short time back in St. Louis, he joined the migration to Kansas in 1854. Barnhart vividly describes the process of settlement, and recounts Bondi’s involvement with anti-slavery politics. The book explains his relationship with John Brown and his participation in the Osawatomie incident in 1856. Bondi’s story concludes with his heroic service during the Civil War, and a short post-script on his later life. (He died in 1907).
Firebrand has only a few references to Judaism. They indicate August Bondi’s commitment to its religious principles, though not to strict observance. While recounted as fictional narrative (including dialogue), the descriptions and sentiments make the narrative more real. Regrettably, there are few dates cited, so the timeline may be unclear. Though not always true in detail, it brings the worlds Bondi lived in – Vienna, the experiences of slavery, life on the frontier, “Bloody Kansas” in the mid-1850s, and the Civil War – to life. It is recommended for schools and for larger congregations as an update to Lloyd Alexander’s Border Hawk (1958).

Fred Isaac Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA


Surprising the uninitiated can create a wondrous tale. Kar-Ben’s latest picture book uses this format in an exotic setting to entertain and explore new Jewish worlds. Two newlyweds raised in Morocco’s Atlas Mountains accept an uncle’s offer to move to the major city, Casablanca, where groom Josef can work in his carpet shop. Nervous about leaving home, they arrive to a prepared apartment that the family has kindly and generously furnished. What a change from the village! Estrella, the bride, shops in the fabulous market; Josef works. Family members add a missing piece of furniture while they are both gone: a wardrobe with mirrored doors which they place facing the door. Estrella returns first. She has never seen a mirror and thinks the image is real. She runs out, finds the wise rabbi, and cries that her husband has taken a new, more beautiful wife. Josef returns in her absence; he also has never seen a mirror image, and runs out thinking Estrella has found another more handsome husband. He too complains to the rabbi who decides he must go to the apartment to find the trouble. Opening the door the rabbi finds another wise rabbi; he tells the village youngsters their problem should be solved by the rabbi waiting for them upstairs. That is when the city folk grasp that all three have misunderstood the mirror. The tale ends happily with the three main characters wiser about identities.

The plot is weakened by the urban rabbi not recognizing a mirror when he sees it, a ploy that works for two country bumpkins, not for a learned man living in a bustling city, no matter how far he has kept himself from the outside world. The targeted readers will overlook this flaw, suspend disbelief and be charmed by a rare geographical setting, romantic newlyweds and the magic of mirrors.

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


Fourteen-year-old Emily Winter has moved from Long Island to the Upper West Side of Manhattan in 1955. She enters the Bromley School and encounters anti-Semitism from one of her upper-crusty classmates. But that’s only one of her challenges. Her mother, whom she refers to as Lady Lenore, is having a baby. Emily never hears from her best friend from Long Island, and her new best friend seems to be evaporating through anorexia. Emily has her eye on a boy she meets through dancing school (because all Bromley girls attend a dancing school), but he and one of his pals from Bromley’s brother school play tricks on her. Finally, she must work on a school project with Cressida, the girl who influences others to shun the Jewish girls at Bromley.

There is so much missed opportunity in this book for character depth. The book reads more like middle-grade than young-adult and if it is being marketed for the adult market, it is a clear miss. Still, Emily is endearing as a teen grappling with relationships with her parents, teachers, and friends. Readers will root for her and cringe with her at her most embarrassing moments. The narrative captures the feel of the Fifties. Bromley Girls, however, does not carry the literary heft of Curtis Sittenfeld’s Prep.

Barbara Krasner, former member, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee, New Jersey

Many books—fiction and non-fiction—have been written for all ages about the Jewish immigrant experience. This historical novel begins like other novels that take place in the early twentieth century, a time of mass immigration to the United States. Twelve-year-old Sarah’s father has been killed in a pogrom and Sarah arrives on Ellis Island with her mother, ready to start a new life. However, Sarah’s mother dies before they can be admitted. Sarah is ordered to return to her country and to her only relative, a disagreeable uncle. Here is where this novel deviates from the norm. Sarah jumps ship (literally), swims to Beddloe’s Island, and takes shelter inside the Statue of Liberty. Cold, hungry, lonely, Sarah derives some measure of comfort from the “Lady” and the words of Emma Lazarus’s poem. But Maryk, the night watchman, soon discovers Sarah and smuggles her into New York City. She subsequently meets a motley cast of characters: a Chinese landlady, a young Irish newsboy, and an African-American couple. They become her friends and eventually help her escape deportation and make a new life for herself.

Various problems are evident in this novel. Although several exciting incidents capture the reader’s interest, the storytelling generally plods along. Furthermore, questions arise that stretch credibility: How can a sheltered girl who was raised in a shtetl (village) survive so many obstacles? And why doesn’t Sarah seek more help from her fellow Jews? Unfortunately, the few experiences she has with other Jews are painted in a rather negative light. The back matter includes two author’s notes; sources (photography, music, sites in New York City, and family); a timeline of the Statue of Liberty, Ellis Island, and United States Immigration Policy. For another historical novel for this age group about coming to America, see Kathryn Lasky’s Dreams in the Golden Country (Scholastic, 2000).

Anne Dublin, author of 44 Hours or Strike! (Second Story Press), Toronto, Canada

[Note: Robert Sharenow is the author of The Berlin Boxing Club, winner of the Sydney Taylor Book Award for Teen Readers in 2012.]

HANUKKAH


Rachel and her family go on a plane trip to visit their Italian grandmother during Hanukkah. Rachel loves her Nonna, but is concerned that there will be no proper Hanukkah this year, as Nonna and all of her father’s family celebrate Christmas. Rachel’s mother packs a suitcase filled with dreidels, candles, chocolate gelt, decorations, and of course gifts, and the entire family joins in to share a beautiful Hanukkah. When Rachel’s special new menorah goes missing—the one with nine Maccabee women—her Nonna steps in to save the day with a creative solution. Nonna is the perfect loving grandmother that everyone would hope to have, and Rachel’s parents are beautifully sensitive to her emotional needs. Lovely and softly colorful stylized paintings perfectly illustrate the story. Recommended as a read-loud.

Shelly Feit, Library Consultant, Teaneck New Jersey


Originally published as a board book in 2009, this new paperback edition includes sixteen colorful Hanukkah stickers that coordinate with the illustrations. The text is simple and takes the reader through all eight nights of Hanukkah. A group of multi-cultural children light the menorah, eat latkes, play dreidel, exchange presents, enjoy chocolate gelt, sing, dance, tell stories, and host a party. The colorful, textured watercolor and collage illustrations are playful and appealing and on each page the
menorah is depicted with an additional candle. While this would make for an adorable and affordable Hanukkah gift for young preschoolers, the appended pages of stickers would have to be removed before circulation, so libraries might want to stick with the more durable board book edition.

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


A contemporary family prepares for Hanukkah by cooking latkes, wrapping gifts, rehearsing Hanukkah songs, practicing dreidel spinning, sampling the chocolate gelt, and marching like Maccabees. As with its predecessor, *Shabbat is Coming* (Kar-Ben, 2014), rhyming couplets are included on each page followed by the refrain, “Hanukkah is coming.” The final spread depicts the family looking out their window as their menorah blazes with the shamash and the first candle, and concludes: “Flames burning bright, Light up the night. Hurray! Hanukkah is here!” This is a nice, fresh addition for holiday board book collections, preschool classrooms, and for gift giving. This same family will star again in *Passover is Coming* which will be released in January 2016.

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


Fans of the bestselling Doreen Cronin-Betsy Lewin farm animal escapades will click immediately with this silly, joyous, warm, funny, holiday tale. The plot which searches for the right mate for the farmer does not need Hanukkah to succeed, but the combination gives a refreshing take on this over published celebration. Set in Israel on a moshav, the household is as communal as the co-op. Farmer Kobi has the largest farm and lots of domestically adjusted, well trained to serve and advise, polite, animal friends in his home, but no human one. He searches for his perfect match. First up is Polly, who is left alone with all the animals while Kobi finishes his Hanukkah feast of Israeli delicacies. Polly does not like the animals around; she tries to get them to leave; they do not budge. At dinner she pretends to like the animal company, but finally confesses she does not; she exits with a slam! Seconds later Ruthie arrives. She has more than a flat tire; she has a truck full of animal family. Kobi includes them all and finds his perfect match. This appealing charmer includes a glossary and notes on the *mitzvot* of compassion for animals and welcoming guests. The fast-paced story, narrated through humorous puns, is supported by active, happy, emotionally revealing illustrations which deliver the captivating, whirlwind household. What a grand addition to any library’s shelf.

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


Sammy the Spider whets his appetite in this slim book filled with Hanukkah recipes, crafts, and blessings. The kid-friendly recipes are pretty basic and aren’t really holiday specific aside from their clever names like “Maccabee Munch,” “Candle-Glow Biscuits,” “Sweet Potato Gelt,” “Maccabee and Cheese,” “Pocketful of Miracles,” and “Blue Shamash Shake.” Of course, a recipe for latkes is also included! Each recipe is labeled dairy, pareve, or meat but the number of servings is missing. With the exception of the “Sammy Spider Spinning Puppet,” the craft projects (a menorah, a menorah drip mat, gift wrap, and blue play dough decorations) aren’t particularly original. Instructions for lighting the menorah are appended but only appear in transliteration and English translation. Katherine Janus Kahn’s signature Sammy Spider collage illustrations are sprinkled throughout. Sammy Spider fans will want to add this new edition to their collection but it is otherwise an optional purchase. *Maccabee Meals: Food and Fun for Hanukkah* by Judye Groner and Madeline Wikler (Kar-Ben, 2012) is a more comprehensive children’s cookbook for the holiday.

Ben Pastcan, Librarian, Shalom School, Sacramento, California

From the author of *Shabbat Shalom, Hey!* comes the next step to understanding Shabbat and its customs. Delightfully cheerful Kayla, with hairdo reminiscent of Pippi Longstocking, goes about setting the table for Shabbat with the help of her equally cheerful dog, Kugel. In each colorful spread, Kayla introduces a different element of the traditional preparations and Kugel counters with playful mischief, like adding paw prints to the tablecloth and mouthing the Kiddush cup like a coveted bone. But with the table ready and tasks seemingly complete, Kugel suddenly looks sad. Kayla realizes the most essential ingredient is missing from the scene -- family! The sweet and simple story is enhanced by heart-warming illustrations and crisp, catchy descriptions (the tablecloth is “bright, white,” candlesticks are “shimmery, glittery,” plates are “fancy, shmancy,” salt is “shaky, tasty”), making this picture book a nice addition to a school or home library for the younger set. A letter from Koffsky at the book’s conclusion provides further thoughts on the meaning of Shabbat, discussion questions, and additional resources available on her website.

*Martha McMahon, Sinai Temple Blumenthal Library, Los Angeles, CA*

**HOLIDAYS - OTHER**

**Don’t Forget to Check Out AJL News!**

The November/December issue of *AJL News* has lots of information about the 2016 Conference, and lots of exciting articles about the activities of our members.
These are four of five books in a new series for middle grade students. Each volume has either 55 or 56 pages of text (colorful pages loaded with photographs) followed by chapter notes, a list of sources consulted, glossary, suggestions for further reading, and index. Three of the four also have a timeline.

**Working Together** gives an explanation of Israel’s early Socialist ideals as exemplified by the *kiibbutz* movement and by the *Histradrut*; explains the role of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in preparing its soldiers for post-army careers through the leadership skills, teamwork, and ingenuity required in Israel’s military; and touts some of Israel’s notable achievements in areas such as hi-tech—flash-drives and instant-messaging, for example, were invented in Israel, and agriculture—e.g. “drip irrigation” methods for farming in the desert. This is one of the best volumes in the series, it is best suited for the upper limit of the specified 4-8 grade level. Silverman’s other entry in the series is about Benjamin Netanyahu. Its opening chapters, tell of his family—illustrious historian-father Benzion and hero-of-Entebbe older brother Yonatan, as well as Netanyahu’s education at MIT, his IDF career as a member of Israel’s elite special forces unit, *Sayeret Matkal*, are interesting and worthwhile reading. The final four chapters unfortunately cover in too-great detail each election cycle in Netanyahu’s long government career; young readers’ eyes will glaze over at page after page of shifting alliances, political parties that form, merge or disappear after one or two elections, leaders that drop in and out of politics, and its account of Israel’s confusing multi-party system and its way of electing Prime Ministers. This volume would be better suited for grades 7-12.

**I Am Israeli:** devotes a chapter to each of five Israeli children from various parts of the country, including one from an Arab neighborhood of Jerusalem. The five children, ranging in age from five to twelve, share information about their favorite sports, foods, and activities. One loves tennis and camping, another is a swimmer, a third is interested in birds and provides a vehicle for informing that Israel is on the path for 500 million birds in annual migration—a spectacular sight. One uses crutches, but we are not told why. Their stories show Israeli children as “regular” kids; there is no mention of politics, of terror, or such concerns. Finally, **The Experience of Israel: Sights and Cities**, looks at Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Eilat, the Galilee, and Caesarea. This volume, too, features Israel as a mecca for bird watchers because of the annual migration of pelicans, cranes, storks, falcons, and other species for which Israel is on the flyover route from Europe to Central Africa in fall and the reverse route in spring. Nature preserves and UNESCO world heritage sites are also highlighted. Zohar’s occupation is that of tour guide and journalist, and his writing style reflects that in its conversational and very casual tone, which is not fitting for a secular history or geography book. Children will probably miss the intended irony in some of his observations, such as “Tel Aviv beaches are packed on Rosh Hashanah.” Another drawback is that Biblical stories are related as fact; for example, when it is mentioned that Jesus “performed another miracle, feeding 5,000 people with five loaves of bread and two fish.”

_Andrea Rapp, Isaac M. Wise Temple, Cincinnati, OH_
Zohar, Gil. *Culture, Customs, and Celebrations in Israel.* (Voices from Israel). Newark, DE: Mitchell Lane, 2015. 64pp. $33.95. (9781612286846). Gr. 8-12.

Zohar, Gil. *Israel and the Arab World.* (Voices from Israel). Newark, DE: Mitchell Lane, 2015. 64 pp. $33.95. (9781680200003. Gr. 8-12.

These two books by Gil Zohar are designated for students in junior high and high school. Both books are 55 pages of colorful, photograph-laden text followed by index, glossary, list of sources, and chapter notes. The author is a professional tour guide and journalist in Israel – his tone is sometimes snarky, with a fair amount of caustic humor and opinion, which is fine for a tour guide, but not for a factual book for students. Some historical references assume a knowledge probably not possessed by many secondary school students: “a kulturkampf over religion” or “an Ashkenazi grandmother might look askance at Kurdish kubbeh.” (Why?) There are observations that to this reviewer seem questionable for inclusion (“The Haredim don’t practice birth control,” “Will Israel become a theocracy like... Iran, Afghanistan, and Saudi Arabia?”), and some misleading captions (one accompanying a photo of Russian Orthodox monks in clerical garb leaves the impression that these monks are part of the massive emigration of Russian Jews to Israel). The author seems bent on using language that leaves a negative impression of his country, and one wonders why an entire chapter — one of eight — is devoted to the minutiae of which species of snail or fish should be used to make the blue dye for ritual fringes!

*Israel and the Arab World* is dedicated by the author to his Arab Muslim friend in Jerusalem who is described as “stateless.” (East Jerusalem Arabs can theoretically become citizens of Israel, but for political reasons, most choose not to. This piece of information might be worthy of inclusion.) The journalist’s code of ethics mandates that “fairness includes completeness. No story is fair if it omits facts of major importance or significance.” (Washington Post Standards and Ethics). Thus, writing that the 1967 War “led to a second wave of refugees” without telling what led to the war in the first place omits very pertinent information. In discussing the “stumbling blocks” to Israeli-Palestinian peace, how can one omit mentioning the refusal of Palestinian leaders to recognize the Jewish state’s right of existence? We learn that the separation wall makes life harder for the Palestinians and pages are devoted to sympathizing with them, but there is not one specific example of the terrorism that the wall was built to eliminate. There is brief, general reference to “violence” of the period 2000-2005, yet nothing about the 2001 Dolphinarium discotheque suicide bombing, the 2001 Sbarro restaurant suicide bombing, and countless other incidents; nor the numerous passenger-laden buses that were exploded by terrorists, and so on. “Jihad” does not appear in the text or glossary, despite the fact that the Palestinian leadership has repeatedly called the struggle against Israel a “jihad” — a religious war. These titles are not recommended.

*Andrea Rapp, Isaac M. Wise Temple, Cincinnati, OH*

**JEWISH LIFE & VALUES**


This latest book in the “Sadie and Ori” series is a sweet and poignant look at the relationship between a grandmother and her grandchildren over the years. Grandma is an active presence in the lives of Sadie and Ori. She reads them books, teaches them to catch a ball and swing a bat, and involves them in preparing for and celebrating the Jewish holidays. The blue “together blanket” Grandma knitted when Sadie was born is a constant presence throughout, whether they are sitting on it, playing under it, or wrapping it around themselves when they snuggle. As the children grow older, however, their grandmother is not able to do everything she used to: “Just as her arms were not strong enough to throw a ball, and her eyes were not strong enough to read a book, her mind was not strong enough to remember places or names.” Sadie and Ori miss the grandmother they had known, but realize that
they can still sit together under the soft, blue blanket, this time reading to her. The realistic depiction of a contemporary grandparent – she not only teaches the children to cook but also gets down on the floor to play and runs alongside their tricycles – as well as the sensitive treatment of aging, make this a recommended addition to school and synagogue library collections.

Marcie Eskin, Beth Hillel Congregation Bnai Emunah, Wilmette, IL

NON-FICTION


There is an increasing shelf of books about how to lead children through the death of a loved one. The Milevskys involve both young children (4-7) and adults through the process with sensitivity. The first two-thirds of the book deal with the process itself, with the child at the center. This includes a description of the steps – notification of friends and relatives, funeral, and shiva. The authors recognize that the child is frequently not involved in the activities, but that their emotions need to be accounted for. The child is actively encouraged to express him/herself. There are several pages with space to write about their feelings and memories. The final third of the book takes on a different tone; it refers to Olam Haba (the world to come), and what happens to our loved ones after death. Again, the child is given space to write what he/she thinks. The book concludes with some additional suggestions for children, as well as advice for parents, including psychological insights and recommendations to encourage the process as a family.

This book provokes ambivalent responses for this reviewer (my wife is a funeral director and cemetery manager). On one level, it is wonderful to have a volume that recognizes the need for families to move together through this traumatic process, from death through the shiva week. It is a family-oriented manual, and it does not reach the power of Sandy Lanton’s Daddy’s Chair. Written from an Orthodox perspective, it may be difficult for non-observant or unaffiliated families to connect with the material. Finally, the pages for children (and parents) to write their emotions on suggest that it is primarily meant for personal use, rather than for libraries.

Fred Isaac Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA


Some people hear modern atonal music and say, “That sounds like something my cat plays when she walks across the piano keys.” Such is the unlikely but true story of a cat named Ketzel, who actually walked across the piano keys of his musician-owner, and created a 21 second “composition” that the owner entered into a contest in 1998. The composition received “special mention”, and was played at concerts in the US and in Europe, resulting in the cat actually receiving a royalty check! The charming story has been embellished by the author to give Ketzel just a bit more kavana (intention) then she probably had in creating her musical piece, but the details of the real event are included in a long author’s note at the end. Popular author Lesléa Newman reports the events with a lovely cadence suitable for a read-aloud, not succumbing to cuteness or overreach in regards to what really happened. The kitty is realistically drawn and adorable, with a particular charm in the depiction of her arrival by taxi at the concert hall and being greeted like a virtuoso by the tuxedo-clad doorman. The Jewish aspects of the story are not many, other than the name of the owner, Moshe Cotel, and the information that after his musical career he was ordained as a rabbi. Still, a fun and engaging read that could be enjoyed by children of all ages.

Lisa Silverman, Sinai Temple Blumenthal Library, Los Angeles
**MEDIA**


For his bar mitzvah service project, Mica decides to collect baseball equipment for Cuba because he likes baseball, because his grandfather was able to escape Nazi-occupied Vienna to Havana, and because he knows that it is very hard for Cubans to get baseball equipment. The film follows the twist and turns of this endeavor, from Mica’s bar mitzvah ceremony, to arranging donations and collecting the equipment, and to doing research about how to get his donations to the kids who need them. Learning that he could not mail anything from the United States to Cuba, the family drives from their home in San Francisco to Vancouver to send the stuff. Mica cannot get confirmation that the packages were received, and after nine months, he decides to complete his project by sending boxes with Pastors for Peace, “an interfaith organization to assist oppressed peoples in their fight for justice and self-determination.” Two years after Mica’s bar mitzvah, the family travels to Cuba via Mexico. Mica meets baseball players, both young and old, and he visits the building where his grandfather lived. He gives out the equipment in various places and learns the packages sent from Canada were received.

Throughout the film, Mica ponders what he expected to get out of the project, what he learned, and how much of a difference his project made in his life and the lives of others. The pace of the movie is rather sluggish, and scenes of Mica tossing a ball with his father or peers seem to slow it down rather than create anticipation. The website, www.havanacurveball.info, includes a curriculum guide with discussion questions and post-viewing activities and supplemental resources. A timely subject in view of renewed United States - Cuban relations, the film is highly recommended for viewing with bar/bat mitzvah-aged students considering service projects. It will also spark discussions about the meaning of tikkun olam.

*Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel*

**BOOKS RECEIVED**

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

Ansell, Batya. _Among the Blossoms_. Self-Published, 2014.
Fox, Tsviyah. _Dirty Tzitzit Shiny Neshama_. Self-Published, 2013.
Goldstein, Mona. _Hope for the Holy Land_. Self-Published, 2014.
Lampert, Lior. _Little American Man_. Self-Published, 2014.
Michaels, Xianna. _Mindel and the Misfit Dragons_. Self-Published, 2014.
Strongwater, Andrea. _Where We Once Gathered, Lost Synagogues of Germany_. Eifrig, 2014.

Is it a cookbook? Is it a meditation guide? Is it a Rosh Chodesh book for women? It is all of these and more. After some tips about how to use the book and the procedures and blessings involved in making challah, a section is devoted to each month with its own significant challah recipe and shape. Thus, during the month of Cheshvan, a rainbow shaped challah with rainbow sprinkles is suggested to tie-in with the story of the flood.

During the process of making each challah, there are several pauses in the action, and these are used constructively. While the yeast proofs, one can learn about the “theme” of the month. The kneading of the dough is an appropriate time to meditate on this theme. While the dough rises, there is more to learn and questions upon which to reflect. When separating the dough, it is also important to have an intention in mind. For example, for the month of Cheshvan the intention for hafrashat challah is to ask God “to send rain to nurture the physical world...and to nurture our souls with the waters of Torah.”

The author has used this format with groups of women. She strikes a balance between spiritual, lofty ideas and the physical and practical aspects of baking. She draws from many Jewish sources and ties together ancient customs with some creativity: a cheese challah for Hanukkah; a challah with fruits and grains of Israel for Tu B’Shvat. As mentioned in the introduction, the book can be used for a Rosh Chodesh group, as a study guide for bat mitzvah girls or at a get together for a bride-to-be. The book is very highly recommended for all Jewish libraries.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel


The development of American Judaism in the 19th century has been the subject of several recent books. This volume by Professor Peter Adams, Old Dominion University, adds to the conversation. Adams begins with a cogent discussion on the status of American Jews in the first half of the 19th century. He then moves to external pressures: the Damascus Case (blood-libel) and the Mortara incident (church interference in Italy), and the attempts to generate a unified American Jewish response. This includes Isaac Leeser, the New York rabbis’ Board of Delegates, and Isaac Mayer Wise, all of whom claimed leadership of the community.

The Civil War is covered in chapters three to eight, primarily examining the first Jewish chaplains and General Grant’s Order 11. Chapter five deals in detail with the wartime cotton trade and the widespread corruption it engendered, leading to Grant’s infamous Order 11 which called for the expulsion of Jews from his military district. The final five chapters examine the post-war generations during America’s “Gilded Age.” The major topics include electoral politics, with a focus on the creation of a “Jewish vote;” the notorious Selinger incident (hotel discrimination) and its repercussions; the rise of the Reform movement, through the creation of Hebrew Union College; and the succession of crises faced by the Jews in Russia and Eastern Europe. The book ends at the turn of the century, including Kishinev, the Galveston Plan, and the new Zionist movement.

In many ways, this is an admirable overview of the period. Adams covers a wide array of topics and makes some interesting connections. At the same time, it is oddly non-chronological; for example, readers might wonder why the Pittsburgh Platform appears at the very end of the book, rather than in the chapter on the rise of Reform. The price ($40 paperback) may put it out of reach of most synagogues, which could benefit from it.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA
Uncovered

“How I left Hasidic life and finally came home

‘Fascinating and insightful.’
- Booklist, starred review

‘Groundbreaking.’
- Lambda Literary

Leah Lax

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**Reviews of Nonfiction Titles for Adults**


This latest book by Edward Alexander (Emeritus Professor of English at the University of Washington) is a collection of eighteen essays, at least ten of which have been previously published. The focus is on contemporary Jewish anti-Zionists, though there is one essay on Karl Marx and Benjamin Disraeli. The subject is depressing, but Alexander’s no-nonsense tone is a tonic. For example, regarding the claim by some Jewish anti-Zionists to be heirs to the prophetic tradition he writes, “The biblical prophets excoriated Jerusalem not because they hated and wished to destroy it, but because they loved it and wished to preserve it…” Elsewhere, he says of Europeans who object to circumcision and kashrut, that they “show no concern whatever about tonsillectomy or the way in which lobsters are killed.” Alexander claims that “self-doubt and insecurity” lie at the root of today’s Jewish anti-Zionists and their predecessors. Nevertheless, the book devotes little time to exploring motives, preferring instead to concentrate on exposing the “moral coarseness” and defamation of Israel that results from this anti-Zionist rhetoric.

*Shmuel Ben-Gad, Gelman Library, George Washington University.*


This book is a collection of brief essays on the Jewish holidays focusing on the inner meaning, symbols and synagogue readings for each holiday. It is written from an orthodox perspective by noted Jewish scholar, lecturer and author, Rabbi Hayyim Angel. Rabbi Angel is also the National Scholar of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. His aim for the book is to help readers gain greater access to the inner meaning and vitality of the holidays, in order to grow religiously and feel more closely rooted to tradition. The book includes many citations and references to traditional commentaries and thinkers, and these are listed in the bibliography, along with a selection of contemporary books and helpful articles. A useful addition to Judaica collections in academic libraries, yeshivas and Orthodox high schools.

*Susan Freiband, Retired Library Educator, Volunteer Temple Librarian, Arlington, Virginia*


Baigell, an art historian, reflects on the social, religious, and historical reasons that Jews have aligned with left-wing causes both in the United States and abroad. The author then examines greeting cards, posters, photographs, political cartoons, and fine art to show how the artists’ political views are manifested in the topics and esthetics of their work. There are numerous black and white illustrations. Includes artists’ biographies, and a glossary of Yiddish terms, along with bibliographical references and index. Recommended for academic libraries.

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


The central character and co-author of *Mike’s Place* is Jack Baxter, an American filmmaker whose poor sense of timing impacts the narrative at two crucial points. Having travelled to Tel Aviv to cover the trial of Marwan Barghouti, Jack learns not only that it was a poor decision to try to attend the trial during Passover, but also that a pair of journalists already beat him to the punch. On what was intended to be his final night in Israel before heading home, Jack visited Mike’s Place one final time, which turned out to be the night of its bombing.
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Mike’s Place was meant to serve as a sanctuary where politics and religion were verboten. Though one could understand how the bar’s workers and customers could easily be jaded into feelings of hatred and bitterness after the attack, instead most were determined to reopen the venue and to try to show that hope and goodwill could live on. While a sense of community is conveyed throughout the narrative, interpersonal and social tensions are also addressed. Secrecy, jealousy, infidelity and religious-secular friction are among the themes that permeate the book.

Occasionally, Jack focuses in on incidental scenes when what he experiences clashes with his expectations of what should be “normal” in Israel, e.g. a man on horseback riding towards the sea at a beach. When the club’s employees gather to party on Yom ha-Shoah, they explain to Jack that “In Israel, every day is Holocaust Remembrance Day.”

Being non-fiction, Mike’s Place offers a realistic view of a part and a subset of Israelis, its content and visuals offering the reader an unfamiliar yet engaging look at what Israelis can be and what Israel might become. Due to the violence and adult situations, Mike’s Place is recommended for the teen/adult sections of public, center and synagogue libraries.

Steven M. Bergson, Jewish Comics Blog


In 1982, Bernard Lewis and Benjamin Braude published the two-volume conference proceedings Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: the functioning of a plural society, which became a major study on the topic, both for its theoretical-historiographical approach and its pioneering research. Over the years the need was felt to provide a collection that would be suitable for classroom use. For this purpose, Braude has selected fourteen chapters from the original publication, and added a new introduction and a bibliography of English language publications published in 1979-2014.

The introduction is indeed a major contribution to the study of Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire for its historiographical and theoretical approach, providing a framework for the following chapters and future research. As is often the case with conference proceedings, contributions vary: some provide current, in-process, ongoing research, while others present comprehensive studies. Thus, while the chapters are interesting and provide the most up-to-date research for the late 1970s, having been published in 1982 many are now dated, in both language and contents. Thus, for example, when mentioning “recent” events (e.g., “a document recently came to light …”) would the reader regard it as “early 21st century” or “late 1970s” as is the case? The issue is even more critical when referring to contents: when discussing Moise Cohen (Tekinalp), Feroz Ahmed writes: “Judging by his writings, his contribution to the development of nationalist ideology, especially in the economic field, is considerable, though it has yet to be evaluated.” This was the case in 1982, but since then, in 1984, Jacob Landau published “Tekinalp: Turkish Patriot, 1883-1961” (which is missing from the bibliography at the end of the book). As for the index, one finds numerous persons with family names like “Bey”, “Efendi”, “Paşa”, etc.; while an indexer might presume these people are members of important large families, those responsible for a scholarly publication should prevent mistakes like this from happening.

The current edition is an important publication on Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire and the study of minorities, and could have been even more so if some editing was undertaken, making the chapters less dated.

Rachel Simon, Princeton University


This volume offers an analysis of the 14th century Hebrew translation (Sefer Hatsalat ha-Nefesh) of a
major 11th century Arabic philosophic text by Avicenna (980-1037) known as Kitab al-Najat (The Book of Salvation). The translator was Todros Todrosi of Arles in Provence, France. He was a key scholar in the great Hebrew translation movement in the 13th and 14th centuries, which collected, copied and translated significant portions of the scientific and philosophic texts existing in Arabic. Todros translated Arabic works in logic, physics, and metaphysics.

Berzin’s study includes a critical edition of Todrosi’s translation, based on two manuscripts. By analyzing Todrosi’s language and terminology and making his Hebrew translation available for the first time, Berzin’s study will enable scholars to trace the borrowings from Todrosi’s translations in Jewish sources, shedding light on the transmission process, translation theory and praxis, and the impact of Avicenna’s philosophy on Jewish medieval scientist/philosophers. Recommended for all academic libraries with Jewish studies collections and upper level graduates

David B Levy, Touro College, NYC


The heart-rending tale of the involvement of Polish citizens in the massacre of Jews in the Eastern Polish village of Jedwabne, on July 10, 1941 was first revealed to the English-speaking world by Polish-American historian, Jan Gross in Neighbors. This latest book by Bikont provides a complement to Gross’ work and a comprehensive follow-up on the survivors, witnesses and perpetrators. Bikont is a journalist for the main Polish newspaper Gazeta Wyborcza, and her book is part history, part journal covering a four-year period from 2000-2004. The work explores the background to the complex relationship between Jews and Poles in Catholic and anti-Communist Poland, where the Church had no qualms about characterizing Jews as Christ-killers and leftist sentiment often was the only opening for Jews to express a demand for equality. Bikont, with the reserved support of her editor, provides a wealth of sentiment-laden testimony, often guarded by guilt or anger, but little remorse from Polish wartime survivors and residents of Jedwabne and the nearby village of Radziłów. The testimony of those who went out of their way to save Jewish neighbors and brought unexpected hatred upon themselves is also included. Anyone interested in Polish-Jewish relations, the Shoah, or who has a copy of Jan Gross’s book will want to read and own this one by Bikont.

Sanford R. Silverburg, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC


Actually, this is a love story about how Menuchah grew to accept her autistic brother. Growing up in the ultra-Orthodox enclaves of Brooklyn in the 1980s, it was hard to have a sibling that was different. Despite the Torah dictate of loving your neighbor as yourself and its warnings against derogatory speech, the community looked askance at families of special needs children, not allowing their own children to play at their houses, much less wanting to marry into “such a family.” Brown’s memoir focuses on when she was eight years old and looking for an explanation as to why her brother Menachem was the way he was. One theory was that her parents had met and fallen in love, something that was considered a sin in the world of arranged marriages. Brown negotiates with God—at first to “fix” Menachem and then to get rid of him. Finally, unable to deal with his needs and attend to the other five children, her brother is sent to live with an aunt and uncle in Israel, where he gets the help he needs. Menuchah visits him four years later, and she is amazed at his progress. Her cousin explains his challenges, and the following year at Menachem’s bar mitzvah, Menuchah and her whole family celebrate.
Although many names have been changed, most people already know that Brown is the daughter of Ruth Lichtenstein, a prominent Orthodox educator and publisher. The eight-year old Menuchah is bold and sassy, mixing Chassidic lore and fairy tales and using her vivid imagination to conjure stories and explanations. She is also a keen observer of the incongruence between Jewish law and the culture of Brooklyn, and her “list of rules about getting married” is insightful and amusing. Weaving back and forth in time between age eight and thirteen and to her parents’ childhood and courtship sometimes makes the storyline hard to follow, especially with so many relatives (a family tree might have helped). If the inaccuracies can be attributed to the memoirist’s faulty memory, then this story is recommended for all Jewish libraries, especially those serving the parents of special needs children.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel


Daniel M. Cohen’s Single Handed tells the story of Teddy, a Hungarian Jew, who joined the U.S. Army and became known for his bravery, modesty and love for America. At the age of 14, he was held for over a year in the Mauthausen Concentration Camp where he witnessed first-hand the horrors of the Holocaust. In 1950, he volunteered for service in the Korean War, during which time he suffered abuse and was assigned dangerous missions by an anti-Semitic commanding officer. Performing great acts of heroism, he was later captured by the Koreans. While interred in a prisoner of war camp, he used the survival skills learned in Mauthausen to help other GIs and himself to stay alive. Thanks to the persistence of his war buddies, who campaigned for him to be honored, he was finally awarded the Medal of Honor in 2005 by President George Bush.

This book is recommended for both Jewish and other general collections. Single Handed provides a description of the hardships faced by American soldiers and battles fought during the Korean War (1950-1953), and it depicts the cruelty and depravity of the Holocaust for those readers interested in that period of history.

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


Over twenty years ago, early in her career, anthropologist Lynn Davidman published a pioneering work on newly observant Orthodox Jews, offering one of the first serious academic studies of the so-called ba’al teshuvah movement. Today, at the height of her career, Davidman has authored one of the first serious academic studies in English of the opposite phenomenon: individuals who leave ultra-Orthodox or Haredi Judaism to join the general culture. The topic has gained enormous attention in the past several years, as a slew of memoirs and journalistic pieces have put the spotlight on the difficult, often painful and scaring, journeys from the insular world of American Hasidic Jewry to non-observance.

She bases her analysis on forty in-depth interviews with no-longer Haredi Jews, which are carefully described and contextualized. Davidman argues that an abandonment of Orthodox Judaism can be best understood as a long process, one that is less focused on theological conviction and more on embodied practices and interpersonal relations. Interviewees do not so much describe a loss of faith or belief as they describe gradually changing actions, practices, and habits that are laden with emotional meaning and which have the power to overturn one’s life. Davidman breaks down these stories into stages – for example, first transgressions, stepping out of the Haredi enclave, and attempts to pass in the “outside” world. Yet, despite the many commonalities in these stories, each interview shows how each story line plays out differently, depending on the individual’s personality, family situation, or communal context.
Becoming Un-Orthodox is clear and readable, eschewing the jargon so prevalent in contemporary anthropological studies that touch upon identity transformation. And while the book might have benefitted from engaging with some of the insightful scholarship on this topic emerging from Israel in recent years, it still presents a sharp analysis of a subject which is central to understanding the shape of Judaism in the early 21st century.

Yoel Finkelman, The National Library of Israel


Unusual Bible Interpretations is Drazin’s 21st book of Biblical commentary, and it seems as though he titled these commentaries as “unusual” because they didn’t fit into his other books. The book is arranged by the weekly parasha (Torah portion) and can be read for a weekly insight into the Torah text. Many of the commentaries are based on Mikra ki-peshuto (= “The Bible Literally,” Berlin, 1899) by Arnold Ehrlich (1848-1919).

This book is problematic on many levels: Drazin needs a copy editor; the bibliography is inconsistent and contains mistakes, and many of his notes and comments are repeated on different pages. Thus, for example, on page 85 he discusses why the letter aleph in the word Va-yikra is small; then again on page 139 he provides this same explanation only worded differently. The biggest error occurs on page 122 where he provides four lines with the reason Yehoshua is spelled with a “J.” His explanation is at fault, and when an author makes a mistake in an aspect I know well, I am skeptical of the entire work.

While this work is insightful and will open your mind to interesting commentaries outside of the jaundiced eyes of ArtScroll, you must only accept what you read as entertainment, not scholarship. It is an interesting purchase for a home library and an optional purchase for other libraries.

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


This book was created to save the Georgian linguistic tradition of the Passover haggadah. In the Soviet Era, Passover traditions waned and Jewish education was difficult. Later the majority of Georgian Jews emigrated to Israel where they learned Hebrew and no longer needed the archaic translation. This book provides the translation in Georgian and romanized characters; neither translation is completely accurate to the Hebrew. There may be some deliberate missing words and some misunderstandings of the Hebrew text. The archaic Georgian vocabulary will be of interest to scholars of the dialectology of the Georgian language. This book will find a place only in an academic or scholarly library.

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


The field of Yiddish epic poetry has yielded new discoveries in recent years, although compared to other languages, this broad and deep literary tradition has received little scholarship. Professor Jerold D. Frakes, a medievalist and specialist in early Yiddish, has produced a substantial volume with translations of texts, accompanied by detailed notes, appendices and a bibliography. This collection makes texts accessible while also providing essential commentary and bringing a much-needed critical eye to issues of translation.

The epics included here are divided into two categories: midrashic and secular. Each epic or excerpt thereof includes a short introduction with the source, edition, translation, and research sources. The Yiddish epic tradition began in the fourteenth century and was quite active, although only a few dozen are extant today. Midrashic epics were based on biblical topics, such as Seyfer Shmuel (Shmuel bukh),
which even had its own tune. Secular epics, like the famous Bovo of Antona (Bovo bukh) were influenced by German and Italian epics of the time and were adapted to be more Jewish. The epics are fascinating and enjoyable to read, and the collection is an important contribution to the field of Jewish literature sure to be appreciated by scholars and by anyone who enjoys a good story. Recommended.

Amanda Seigel, Dorot Jewish Division, New York Public Library


This collection highlights four Jewish women from Poland who resisted the Nazis and survived the Holocaust, emphasizing the unique ways in which women survived and also the particular dangers they faced. It includes a brief overview of Jewish history in Poland, and of Jewish and gentile female resistance, followed by four interview-based narratives by survivors describing their resistance and survival: living and working with partisans, forging documents, assuming false identities, smuggling goods and people. Through these disparate narratives, common threads emerge: females who did not look Jewish and were acculturated could more easily pass as gentiles than Jewish men and sometimes aroused less suspicion, but their gender also made them vulnerable.

The book’s focus is educational; therefore the collection may serve as a condensed introduction to the topic for students. The narratives are truly riveting and inspiring, and each is a unique historical account. Three of the four women also published books on their experiences: Faye Schulman with Sarah Silberstein Swartz, *A partisan’s memoir: woman of the Holocaust* (1995); Lola Lieber, *A World After This: A Memoir of Loss and Redemption* (2010), and Miriam M. Brysk, *Amidst the Shadows of Trees: a Holocaust child’s survival in the Partisans* (2014). Recommended.

Reviewed by Amanda Seigel, Dorot Jewish Division, New York Public Library


*Rhetoric and Nation* is part of the Judaic Traditions in Literature, Music and Art series published by Syracuse University press. Shai Ginsburg, assistant professor of Asian and Middle Eastern studies at Duke University, challenges accepted scholarly criticism that written and spoken Hebrew share a collective rhetoric and contends that each work in Hebrew literature is unique and stands alone without being linked to other literature by a common idea. Ginsburg discusses the work of Amos Oz, David Ben Gurion, Ehad Ha-Am, and Moshe Smilansky among others. Each page includes footnotes and a reference and general index are included. Recommended for University libraries.

Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, OH


Trochenbrod was founded in 1835 as a farming community for dispossessed Jews in Poland. It grew and remained a predominantly Jewish town. During World War II, it came under Russian control, but was eventually decimated, the residents massacred by the Nazis and their Ukrainian collaborators in August and September of 1942. The town was then leveled to the ground; nothing of it remains today. Betty Gold was one of the few to survive.

She describes her life before the Holocaust, the details of the massacre, and how she and family members survived by hiding behind a false wall and then escaping to bunkers in the nearby forest. They scavenged and had the help of a non-Jewish friend. They were also helped by partisans, who put her mother to work as a cook and used her father’s skills as a leather worker to make boots for the Russians. After the war, they were sent to a DP camp and eventually settled in Cleveland, after relatives provided affidavits.
Ms. Gold relates the challenges of being an immigrant and a Holocaust survivor, trying to fit in and learn the language. She married relatively young and had three boys. As the boys grew older, she decided to divorce and work as a textile salesperson. After her retirement, Betty became a docent at the Maltz Museum in Cleveland. She tells her story there, as well as speaking at local schools and colleges. She plays an integral part in keeping the memory of Trochenbrod alive, also contributing to the movie *Lost Town*. She asserts that “the Nazis took me away from my town, but they can’t take my town away from me.” Betty not only survived, but thrived, and the before, during and after of her Holocaust experience effectively show what she lost and gained. Some of her story is extremely personal—her marriage and the death of two of her sons, providing details that may not be of interest to many readers. Otherwise, the book is recommended for libraries with Holocaust collections.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel


Rabbi Arthur Green is one of the best known contemporary scholars of Jewish Mysticism. In this compilation of essays he has brought together writings from his body of work and divided them into three main subject areas: Judaism: The religious life, Theology and Mysticism in Classical Sources, and Hasidism: Mysticism for the Masses. All of these essays are written for the cognoscenti and not for the casual lay reader. They are all thoroughly documented allowing the serious student to follow up on many aspects of the contents of these pieces. This is not a volume that one must read cover to cover; rather, it is a resource from which to read as one studies the various topics included.

The text has a few technical issues, including a typographical error on page 104, which should read: ‘Eliezer ben Hircanus’. In addition, some of the footnotes are difficult to follow; for example, note 4 on p. 97 does not provide the author’s full name, and note 13 on p. 115 seems to refer to something other than the text to which it is attached.

This is a rich, varied and important book that will best serve as a companion volume for the advanced student of Jewish mysticism in addition to the primary texts. It could also be used as a textbook at the college or graduate level, and it may be considered useful to synagogue library collections. Apart from a few minor discrepancies, this is a welcome addition to the scholarly literature on a subject that is finally getting the attention it deserves.

Marion M. Stein, retired librarian


Greenstein demonstrates how the “walking motif” enables the Zohar to address the prosaic and mundane. He argues that the walking motif conveys us into everyday spaces that are present alongside the holy and sacred. His method is to focus on statements such as “Rabbi A and Rabbi B were walking along the road, and Rabbi A opened up and expounded”. He subjects the recurring walking motif to sustained interrogation to reveal a theosophy that metaphorically signifies paths of Torah. He distinguishes in Zoharic thought between the two journeys of each soul: the physical one, and the spiritual one guided by the Shekhinah (dwelling or settling of the divine presence of G-d) who protects the individual on his journeys. The author asks how this motif should be defined and catalogued. How many times does it occur? When in the Zohar topically does it appear? He then offers a taxonomy of these narrative shards. Because the rabbinic hevraya (companions) learn words of Torah theurgically on their journeys to effect divine unifications, they are protected by the Shekhinah until reaching the mitzvah loci of their destination, such as a circumcision, visiting the sick prayer at the grave of a Tzadik, or the study hall. This book is recommended for all academic libraries.

David B Levy, Touro College, NYC
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The role of Modern Hebrew in the formation of national identity and character is the focus of this provocative book. Through analyses of early twentieth-century documents, statistics, and media, the author presents the challenges and contradictions facing the “Zionist official discourse” to effect through language a unifying force within Mandate Palestine, a polyglot society pulled in myriad directions—class, gender, and ethnicity.

The author describes the zealous battles to suppress outside influences. The pursuit of vernacular Hebrew, in place of the ancient, became a religion in itself, with fluency a sort of secular piety; the prevalence of European tongues was anathema to purist, Zionist ideology and its promotion of the farmer-warrior. Therefore, Yiddish, the language of the Old World peddlers, was frowned on for its associations with Diaspora passivity and vulgarity. Arabic was even more problematic—authentically Semitic, yet not Jewish; its speakers would be further separated. Within the British administration, Hebrew was eventually integrated. Yet, in spite of cultural wars in immigrant homes, offices, schools, coffeehouses, and cinemas, efforts to suppress foreign languages proved unsuccessful within the emerging Israeli state. Multilingual knowledge became crucial both for international trade and business, and for military security and intelligence. The author’s conclusion: Modern Hebrew was a partial victor. It prevailed among the post-1948 population, yet reconciled with other languages, out of necessity.

Well researched and argued, this book sheds light on a refreshingly new topic. Recommended for all college libraries with Israel/Middle East collections.

Hallie Cantor, Yeshiva University, New York, NY


This book is an exhaustive examination of three treatises on music by three Renaissance Italian scholars: Judah Moscato, Leon Modena, and Abraham Portaleone. Moscato discusses music from a spiritual viewpoint, Modena considers the propriety of art music in the synagogue service, and Portoleone explains his theories about music in the First Temple. In addition to the translations, each treatise is included in its original Hebrew. In the introductions the author provides footnotes for each work. In contrast, for every musical term in the actual translations of the works, the author provides a note giving the transliteration of the Hebrew term for the original. This is a very useful and insightful way to demonstrate the differences between Hebrew and English regarding musical terminology, although it’s curious that transliteration rather than printed Hebrew was used for the translations. Harrán’s approach is thorough, meticulous, and very readable. His knowledge of this subject is impressive. In addition to a lengthy bibliography and an index, he provides a lexicon of the Hebrew musical terms that he noted in his translations (again, transliterated), and an index of the biblical, rabbinic, and classical sources that the three writers used. Books on Jewish musical theory are rare, and this is an excellent addition to the corpus. Recommended for academic libraries with comprehensive collections focused on Jewish music.

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


This is another excellent book in the Maggid Book Studies in Tanach series that focuses on the biblical book of Joshua. The book of Joshua is a continuation of the Pentateuch and recounts the story of the Israelite entry into the Land of Israel. Like other books in the series, it is intended as a study guide to the biblical text. The chapters in the book follow the biblical text by chapter and verse; thus, for example, Chapter 1 is titled “Transitions” and comments upon Joshua Chapter 1, verses 1-9. In
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This chapter, Hattin discusses how Joshua begins where the five books of Moses ends and explains the transition. Subsections within the chapter provides information such as (i) a brief overview of Joshua’s exploits, (ii) Joshua’s Role in Completing the Torah and (iii) an explanation of a recurring phrase in this book “Be strong and courageous.”

Subsequent chapters follow this same pattern. Hattin provides supplemental analysis that encompasses classical and medieval rabbinic commentary, literary theory and modern biblical scholarship. All of this provides the reader with an excellent study guide to the book of Joshua. The experience of using this book alongside the text is akin to having a private tutoring session with a subject matter expert that illuminates and expounds upon the biblical work.

Highly recommended for anyone studying the book of Joshua. While a certain familiarity with the Bible and famous commentators are assumed, this book would be very useful for high school and college students first reading the Book of Joshua, as well as an educated readership returning to its study.

David Tesler, Yonkers, NY


This haggadah will keep the reader inspired for many years because it contains many books in one volume. First, the Hebrew text is printed very clearly, as are the accompanying modern English translation and instructions. Second, lively illustrations, together with questions, help keep the interest of the participants. Third, the work includes extended essays connected to the haggadah, Passover, and hot topics within contemporary Judaism, and some of these essays are supplied by “guest voices.”

One of the most impressive essays is written by the person who buys the hametz (forbidden leaven products) every year from Rabbi Herzfeld’s Washington, DC synagogue. This synagogue is one of few American synagogues that bakes its own matzah shemurah (“guarded matzah”) and offers a free communal Seder for hundreds of people. This would not be possible without a great deal of community co-operation and support, including from their neighbors Billy and Michel Martin. Michel, a veteran journalist for NPR, contributes an essay on the buying side of the hametz. She learned about the Jewish holidays from her father who was a firefighter in the Williamsburg area of Brooklyn. This essay alone is worth the price of this book. It sets the tone for Rabbi Herzfeld’s commentary and for other essays on contemporary topics such as interacting with non-Jewish neighbors, women’s voices, inclusive communities, agunot (women who are “chained” to their marriage), darkness, Down syndrome, and redemption.

This haggadah will find a welcome place in many Seder night celebrations and in many libraries as it seeks to show new ways for observant Jews to connect to the ancient texts and halacha on the one hand, and on the other fills the spiritual and communal needs of a diverse Jewish population. After reading this book you may change the way you look at being a modern Jew.

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


This book offers a very scholarly study of Biblical Hebrew from the period of the Second Temple to the time of Rabbinic Hebrew. The author and his three collaborators, Leeor Gottlieb, Aaron Hornkohl and Emmanuel Mastéy, have done excellent work connecting early Biblical Hebrew to later forms. By seeing similar phrases side by side one can understand the development of Hebrew and see how Hebrew was influenced by Aramaic and other languages. This is not a standard dictionary: each entry opens with the word in vocalized Hebrew characters, followed by an English definition and many examples of where the word appears in classical Biblical Hebrew, late Biblical Hebrew, Targum and
other sources outside of the Bible. The entries end with comments and a list of sources. The bibliography is 26 pages in length, and a glossary explains all the abbreviations.

Hurvitz’s approach to orthography is interesting, particularly the article on the orthography of “Yerushalayim” which analyses its chronological development.

This book opened my eyes to new ways of understanding Biblical Hebrew, and it will find a welcome place in an academic or scholarly library. The audience is limited to those scholars who know Biblical Hebrew and appreciate developmental Hebrew linguistics.

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


The eleven essays in this edited collection apply recent transnational historiographical approaches to nineteenth and twentieth century American Jewish history. Studying immigrants with transnational identities and examining trends that cross national borders, the articles vary widely across time and in theme.

The first section deals with Jews in the Anglophone world, exploring the changing role of the cantor and communal organization in the 1840’s through the lives of three brothers with careers in England, the US and Australia; the movement of Jews from Australia and New Zealand to California during the Gold Rush; and Holocaust survivors living in Australia who developed suburban shopping malls in California.

The second section looks at cultural and economic ties between the U.S. and Europe, first examining a group of German brokers in the U.S. who supplied shipping tickets and banking services to immigrants until their banks collapsed in bankruptcy. The next article argues that American Yiddish pulp fiction and newspapers had a large role in the development of classical European Yiddish literature.
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The third section deals with immigrant identity with a fascinating clarification of the geographical origins, cultural influences, identity and status of 19th century American “German Jews”; a study of Romanian Jews in New York who identified with Gypsy culture; and lastly presenting the cultural community of Jews in Harbin, China as an alternative choice to emigrating to the “Goldene Medina.”

The final chapter looks at the varied success of Jews who formed agricultural settlements in Argentina and the U.S.; the different immigrant experiences of Bene Israel Indian Jews in Israel and the U.S.; and attempts of American Jews to bring American values to the kibbutzim they founded in the 1940’s and 1970’s. This volume breaks new ground in the study of American Jewish history from a wider diaspora perspective. Recommended for academic libraries.

Harvey Sukenic, Hebrew College Library, Newton Centre, MA


This book offers a meticulous examination of the birth of YIVO, the Yiddisher Visnshaftlekher Institut (Yiddish Scientific Institute), and its life in Europe before the Holocaust. The author has made a thorough study of correspondence between the Institute’s founders and supporters, men mostly unknown to modern Yiddishists, as well as relevant periodicals. She provides details about the debate over where YIVO should be located, how it should be funded, and most important, what should be its mission. She shows how these three considerations were interwoven, and how they determined the future of YIVO. This critically important academic and social organizational center for Yiddish culture developed over what now seems to be a brief period, a little more than 15 years. It was established in Vilna, where it enjoyed the greatest support. Funding was a perpetual problem. It came at times from municipalities in Poland under the Minorities Treaties Act, from impoverished Eastern European Jews who loved Yiddish, and eventually, from American and Western European Jews before the Depression. Most importantly, Kuznitz describes the development of the zamler idea, in which ordinary Jews who were enthusiasts of Yiddish culture gathered artifacts and recorded folkways that became the precious core of YIVO’s collections. The decision of YIVO leaders such as Max Weinreich to keep “the folk” invested in Yiddish scholarship led to its survival. The book is exhaustive in its explication of YIVO’s life in Europe, bringing all the facts together with notes, a bibliography, and an index. For the post-war years, Kuznitz offers only a summary. Highly recommended for academic and Yiddish-oriented collections.

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


Roberta Kwall, a Depaul University law professor, analyzes Jewish culture through the lens of halacha (Jewish law) as only a law professor can do. She uses secular legal analysis tools to offer a new approach to the understanding of Jewish culture and law. Kwäll’s statement that law and culture are intertwined is not a new idea; yet, she still manages to demonstrate how the environment influences the law and how the law influences behaviors. She provides examples of how the law works both top down (rabbinic decisions) and bottom up (community actions), and many chapters deal with contemporary topics such as the birth of modern denominations, homosexuality, the role of women in the ritual, Jewish identity and more.

This is a brilliant book because of Kwäll’s grasp of sources and her recognition that the language of halacha and the traditional sources furnish us with a vocabulary for further discourse to connect the past with the present. The answers are not strictly black and white, but more gray. This book will find a welcome place in various libraries, but it is aimed at a knowledgeable reader. For readers who can master Kwäll’s cerebral style, it will change the way you look at being a modern Jew.

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

This book rightly assumes the importance of studying Jewish targumim in light of the traditions of the Second Temple, studied against their late antique background and context. It raises issues about their connection to earlier sources and traditions. It asks, "how do the existing targumim link up with an oral translation of scripture and what is its dating?" How do the targumim transmit traditional exegetical material in a distinct form? What is the relation between the targumim and the para-biblical literature of the Second Temple period, including the New Testament? What is the nature of the Samaritan targumim? How do the figures of Zebulon and Naphtali in the Targum echo in Mathew 4:13-16? What is signed by the lost tomb of Moses in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan on Deut. 34:5-6? How may the targumim offer a critique of power in the Second Temple period? What is the nature of miracles in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan as an echo of Second Temple literature?

Ten essays in English, German and French, organized around topics such as (1) targumim and targumisms, (2) comparative approaches, and (3) thematic issues which draw on findings of the Dead Sea Scrolls [including the Temple scroll, Damascus Document, Testament of Levi, Genesis Apocryphon], philology, linguistics, Biblical archeology, history of the 2nd Temple era and its literatures i.e., Book of Jubilees, cognate semitic languages, and of course the intricacies of the different dialects of Aramaic. Recommended for all academic libraries.

David B Levy, Touro College, NYC


Levy is a native-born Canadian political analyst. Angered by the demonization of Israel, Jews, and much of Israeli domestic policy by the political left and others, the author has interviewed members of the Israeli religious right, anti-Israeli academicians, the ex-wife of Fatah’s founder, an Israeli intelligence specialist, a Shoah authority, and former Knesset members in order to provide varied perspectives of Israel. Including some of the most hateful forms of anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic sentiment, Levy is able to counter this with strong arguments against Israel’s detractors, and he comes down hard on much of the mainstream media reporting with its anti-Israeli, pro-Palestinian bias. This short book will certainly find favor with politically conservative Jews and supporters of Israel.

Sanford R. Silverburg, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC


This magnificent volume presents a catalogue of the 554 printed broadsides in the Valmadonna Trust Library in London, England, largely acquired by its custodian Jack Lunzer. A broadside is defined as a sheet which has been printed on one side. The Valmadonna broadsides range from communal promulgated regulations (e.g. sumptuary laws where the Rabbis tried to tone down manifestations of luxury), wedding riddles, public settlement of commercial disputes and wall calendars spanning over 200 years from Mantua (1558-1778) and from Venice (1548-1801). Broadsides from other parts of Europe, the Ottoman Empire, Israel, India, Yemen and Iraq are also included. They are written in Jewish languages and in the vernacular.

The first section of this book is made up of five scholarly essays. Adam Shear provides context by describing the connection between the printing of broadsides and the printing of books. Elisheva Carlebach analyzes the complex wall calendars, like that produced in Mantua in 5364 (1604-1605). Ruth Langer studies the phenomenon of liturgical handouts. What prompted their production and for which environment? Dvora Bregman examines the Hebrew poems written for special occasions. Interestingly,
major Hebrew poets encouraged the lay people to pick up their pens too. Nahum Rakover shows how the sumptuary laws functioned and how these can be used as sources.

After the essays, follow plates of the thirty-six broadsides that had been on exhibit at the Herbert & Eileen Bernard Museum of Judaica at Temple Emanu-El in New York. Each broadside is provided with an informative caption offering the reader a snapshot of Jewish life, such as “The Jews of Tuscany Sponsor a Horse Race in Honor of the Grand Duke, Livorno, 1766.” The bulk of the book comprises the catalogue which, in addition to the basic description, supplies historical and biographical information. Bibliographies, a general index, and an index to the First Lines of Poems in the vernacular and in Hebrew, are additional useful tools.

The editors have succeeded in their stated aim to “strike a … balance between producing a volume which provides a contribution to scholarship … while at the same time remaining informative to the general public …” Recommended for community and academic libraries.

Leah Cohen, Jacob M. Lowy Collection, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada


At first glance, The Song of Songs deals with love between humans. However, Jewish tradition (probably dating back to the time of the inclusion of this scroll in the canonical Bible) understands the lover to be God and the beloved to be the people of Israel. Prof. Lieber’s outstanding book shows how this interpretation of the scroll is one of the major motifs of the synagogue poetry (piyyut) that was created in the Land of Israel through the seventh century. The first part of the book shows how the interpretations in the piyyutim relate to the way in which the scroll was understood in Biblical commentaries, Midrash and Targum. Lieber presents major themes in the poets’ understanding of the Biblical text, such as wedding imagery, the physical image of God, and exile. She examines the rhetoric of the poems, as well as the political background of the period in which the poems were written.

The second part of the book is a detailed study of six piyyutim that focus on motifs from The Song of Songs. Lieber presents an accurate Hebrew text and a fine translation into English. She has added extensive notes to the text, which explain Biblical illusions, motifs, uses of Hebrew expressions, why the text has been interpreted in a particular way, etc. After each poem there is a detailed discussion, based on the issues raised in the first part of the book. Recommended for research level collections of Judaica.

Jim Rosenbloom, Brandeis University


Taking John Lennon’s paean to Utopia, “Imagine” as a foil, Ze’ev Maghen, a professor at Bar-Ilan University, has written an informal, conversational defense of Jewish nationhood and particularity against the ideology of universalism and the philosophy of rationalism. Dr. Maghen clearly and insistently values emotions over the intellect and thinks that the binding essence of Jewish peoplehood is “an affection-based tribal affinity” rather than religious doctrine. His arguments against universalism are more compelling than those against rationalism. Against the former he argues that a love that is not preferential is not really much of a love at all and that we learn to empathize with others by analogizing their emotions to our own. For example, we can know what it is for another to grieve over the death of a child if we imagine how we would feel at the loss of our own. The arguments he musters against rationalism make up the bulk of the book but do not amount to very much in the end. He seems to be opposed to rationalism, in part because he thinks that believing one is in possession of truth easily leads to political crimes and persecutions in service of cultural uniformity, and in part because he thinks it militates against a healthy emotionality. The book is laden with a humor that tends to be broad and labored rather than witty or dry. An uneven, idiosyncratic and verbose argument for Jewish nationalism.

Shmuel Ben-Gad, Gelman Library, George Washington University.
Reviews of Nonfiction Titles for Adults


This interdisciplinary volume deals with the stabilization, standardization, and transmission of the oldest manuscripts of the Masoretic text. It seeks a precise definition of related terms such as Ur-text, recension, citation, and redaction. It draws on knowledge from study of the Septuagint, Qumranic, Rabbinic, Targumic, and Masoretic traditions.

It asks questions such as: What happened from the time of standardization of the consonantal text until the appearance of the first Masoretic codices? How was the biblical text preserved in the meantime? What was the role of the Tiberian Masoretes of the Ben Asher and Ben Naftali families in compiling notes, fixing vowels, and cantillation? How can we better understand the textual traditions contained in the Masorah? Who were the sopherim (scribes)? Were they editors of ancient texts who aimed to standardize the written form of the Bible text? Did they perform textual criticism? What relationship existed between the sopherim and the rabbis, or were they a subset of rabbis? What were the methods and mechanisms of rabbinic textual transmission? How can rabbinic literature be used to study the textual history of the Hebrew Bible? What is the function of pre-Masoretic notes in rabbinic literature? What is the history of the Masorah? Was the transmission oral or written? If oral, when did it get written down? Highly recommended for all academic libraries

*David B Levy, Touro College, NYC*


The Second Temple Period ranks as among the most formative periods of Jewish history. Mermelstein describes the era as being one of “profound religious and political turmoil.” Jews of the era had to contend with a lack of political sovereignty, economic struggle and internal domestic strife and the general fear and anxiety that God had broken His covenant with the Jewish people with the destruction of the First Temple in 586 BCE.

Mermelstein analyzes four works from the Second Temple Era: (i) Wisdom of Ben Sira, (ii) The Book of Jubilees, (iii) The Animal Apocalypse and (iv) Fourth Ezra. The central question at the heart of the book and in the analyses of these four works is: “How did the historical experiences of Second Temple Jews affect their imagined shape of time, and how did that conception of time, in turn, allow them to construct a narrative of history that made sense of those experiences?”

Essentially, Mermelstein contends that in order to deal with the cognitive dissonance between prophecy and its inevitable expectations of redemption and the less than perfect political, religious and economic reality, texts of that era reveal differing methods in which time and history was experienced. For example, rather than viewing the giving of the covenant at Sinai as the establishment of the covenant and the destruction of the Temple as the breaking of the covenant—a view was advanced that really the covenant began at creation and that all of history, including the exile and the Second Temple period, was one long era that would last until God implemented the plan he “formed” at creation.

This book advances an interesting thesis that the author substantiates convincingly. This is a book directed at academics and the interested, well-educated nonprofessional. It is not recommended for the general reader.

*David Tesler, Yonkers, NY*


This is a collection of 100 short essays, presumably originally written in Hebrew and translated by the author, a professor at Jerusalem Orthodox College, instructor at Tel Aviv University, and a Senior Fellow of the Kohelet Policy Forum. The essays are divided into three sections: Israeli domestic politics,
Reviews of Nonfiction Titles for Adults

the Israeli-Arab conflict, and Israel’s relationships with countries outside of the Middle East. They are, on the whole, lucid and vigorously argued. Dr. Navon draws upon a solid scholarly grounding but writes in a popular, journalistic, and sometimes even pungent, style. The introduction and conclusion do a nice job of providing a framework for the disparate essays. The author’s tone is optimistic without being complacent; his point of view is right-of-center with religiosity rarely manifesting itself. A certain amount of repetition is found among the essays, as well as some editing or translating errors, and it’s a pity the book lacks an index. Nevertheless, a good addition for libraries wanting an intelligent, accessible, nationalistic analysis of Israel’s political situation.

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


Time and eternity are concepts that have occupied an important place within classic Jewish thought, but less academic attention has been paid to the concepts of time in Jewish mystical thought. This present volume proposes six diverse approaches to time and eternity in Jewish mysticism: the theoretical approach to temporality, philosophical definitions, the idea of time and pre-existence, the idea of historical time, the idea of experiential time, and finally, the idea of eternity beyond time that transcends the limit of human finitude. The book interrogates Kabbalistic testimonies that claim entrance into the boundless eternal light of Ein Sof, the root of all roots that existed prior to creation. The book examines the mechanism of withdrawal known as tsimtsum (the contraction of G-d’s existence by a negation of a part of Himself), leading to the breaking of the vessels of light. The fractured world can be mended by doing mitzvot which metaphorically gather the dispersed sparks of light.

This multi-vocal treatment of Jewish mysticism and time is based on novel academic approaches, and it should lay the groundwork for further discussion and exploration. Highly recommended for academic libraries.

David B Levy, Touro College, NYC


Oestermann is a Danish-born journalist who writes on Israeli and Middle East politics from Israel for the Scandinavian press. Here he provides 67 vignettes broken down into four time periods: 1926-1957, in which he gives the reader a taste of his biography; 1958-1967, a period of Israel’s 10th anniversary to the Six-Day War; 1968-1983, which covers the 1973 conflict and the celebration of a peace treaty with Egypt; and 1984 to the present. The brevity of each story makes this book an easy read and highlights even more strongly the widely varying individual topics. Some of the more interesting tales—often the result of the author’s access as a journalist, the timeliness of the subject, and the subject itself—include the Eichmann trial, an interview with David Ben Gurion, the “Who is a Jew” debate, coverage of Pope Paul’s visit to Israel, the Six-Day war, and the connection to UN Resolution 242. In addition to that are the author’s writings on the Yom Kippur war and the War of Attrition, followed by the entire saga of Egyptian President Sadat’s visit to Jerusalem, interviews with Menachem Begin and Teddy Kollek, and visits to Amman and Cairo. Thus packed into this small book is an encyclopedia of insight, information, and drama that a range of audiences will find a true pleasure. A great addition to all types of synagogue collections.

Sanford R. Silverburg, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC


This thoughtful and well written book forms part of the English edition of Rabbi Pincus’s popular
Sichos series. It shows how the High Holidays are a time for necessary introspection and striving to put God at the center of our lives. Rabbi Pincus also gives practical guidance about the process of repentance during the Days of Awe, while also noting that repentance should be a process one should strive for throughout the whole year. This book will inspire readers to higher levels of faith, fear and love of God, love of Torah, and love for the Jewish people. It helps us learn how to truly engage in repentance (teshuvah), charity (tsedakah), and prayer (tefilah)—which can bring one into a closer in relationship with God.

The book wisely enriches and adds greater depth and joy to the experience of the Days of Awe, and better understanding of such components as the power of the blasts of the shofar. It is a must read for those who want their Days of Awe experience to be elevated to a higher level of spirituality and to strive to seek to become closer to G-d. Recommended for all Jewish libraries.

David B Levy, Touro College, NYC


“The approach taken in this book is to examine the moment when Jews began to call themselves nationalists and believed themselves to be participating in something called nationalism” writes Rabinovitch who aimed to “explain the relationship between Jewish autonomy and the genesis of Jewish nationalism more generally” and “to examine in totality the movement for Jewish autonomy in late imperial and revolutionary Russia, the process of Jewish politicization.” Within a chronological framework, chapters of Jewish rights, national rites successively deal with an explanation of the intellectual and historical origins of autonomism; the state decentralization as debated by Russian intellectuals; the impact of the Russian Revolution of 1905-1907; the Jewish culture and autonomy in the years leading to World War I (1907-1914); how the Jewish community in Russia and abroad responded to the crisis of Jewish refugees during World War I; the issue of autonomy as debated during the events of the year 1917 and at the Peace Conference in Paris in 1919. Each chapter presents in broad strokes the overall situation in Russia and then presents the debates around autonomism in a clear and engaging prose. The key ideologue shaping the debate around autonomy is Simon Dubnov (1860-1941), and Rabinovitch excels at presenting how he engaged and disengaged from the political party building and daily struggles and how his ideas influenced the entire spectrum of ideologies at the time. Highly recommended for academic libraries, especially for undergraduate studies.

Roger S. Kohn, Silver Spring, MD.


Holocaust literature draws from a wide “geographic, linguistic, thematic, and generic range,” and this collection of essays “chronicles not the history of the Holocaust, but rather the wartime and postwar response in literature to the victims’ plight. Some of the literature was written by victims who eventually perished, some by the minority of victims who gratefully survived, and some either by contemporaries who, in Israel, England, the Americas, or elsewhere were not on the scene, or who were born after the events took place.” The book is divided in three parts. The first deals with “Wartime Victim Writing” in both Eastern and Western Europe. The second, “Postwar Responses” addresses literature from different countries including Italy, Germany, Russia, Poland, Hungary, and France. The authors often note how the history of each country, including Communism and nationalism, influenced what was published. Also included in this section are specific language literatures include Hebrew, Yiddish and English. The final section addressed “Other approaches” and includes an excellent essay about oral memoir, particularly among Italian survivors; songs of the Holocaust, Sephardic literary responses to the Holocaust, and Holocaust anthologies.
Reviews of Nonfiction Titles for Adults

As with any collection of essays by a variety of authors, readers will be interested in some and not others, dependent on both subject matter and style. Eric J. Sundquist’s “The historian’s anvil, the novelist’s crucible” in Part III is unique in that it discusses how events were treated in both fiction and non-fiction, particularly the shooting of SS Officer Schillinger by a woman who was about to enter the gas chamber. These are scholarly reviews of the literature, but the “Guide to Further Reading” is an excellent resource in and of itself. The book is highly recommended for libraries with large Holocaust collections and academic libraries that support Holocaust and/or literature curriculums. It is a strong optional purchase for other libraries.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel


This book attempts to answer three questions: How can God be considered to have created the world when, according to evolution, everything just happened? How can we believe in the truth of Genesis when it conflicts with the facts of evolution? How does human evolution relate to human moral behavior? In answering the first two questions, Rutman refers to Stephen J. Gould’s characterization of science and religion as “non-overlapping magisterial.” He seems to disagree with Gould regarding the first question, while agreeing regarding the second. He looks at evolution in physical and genetic terms, taking the reader through the process step by step, with a fair amount of scientific content. Using aspects of evolution such as constraint, contingency, and predictability, he attempts to show divine purpose in the universe. In contrast, when discussing Genesis specifically, he favors the viewpoint that the Genesis story is a strictly religious account, with no relation to science. His discussion of morality looks at animal behavior and the development of empathy and altruism as part of the process of maturity. This book is thoughtful and very well-researched, with extensive notes, bibliography, and index. The three parts are not quite cohesive—the discussion of moral behavior does not seem directly related to evolution in the book’s discussion. There is a lot of scientific material, some of which may well change in the next five to ten years. This book will fit into collections on Jewish thought and philosophy, especially those that already have material on Judaism and science.

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


This book examines an important semantic distinction between the work (and concept) of the terms “Judean” and “Jew.” A Judean is someone whose identity derives from a geographical fact, namely that he or she was born in Judea. A Jew is more of an ideological concept, one that is tied not to geographical locale, but instead connotes a belief or ideology that is more Universalist in orientation. Chapter 1 discusses the differences between the authors and viewpoints of the first and second book of Maccabees. The first book is a Judean work, while the second is a Jewish book written by a Jew of the Hellenistic Diaspora. The second chapter analyzes the differences between Priestly Judaism and Rabbinic Judaism. Priestly Judaism, connected as it was to the Priestly class and geographical presence of the Temple was “Judean” in nature. Rabbinic Judaism is more law or nominalism focused and therefore better situated to flourish in the diaspora and therefore more “Jewish” in nature. Chapter 3 focuses on Josephus and how his early writings written in Judea are obviously more “Judean” while his later writings written in Rome reflect a more “Jewish” orientation. The final chapter demonstrates through dissecting the work of Heinrich Graetz how the failure to understand the differences between these labels and their underlying meaning can cause confusion in historiographical writing.

The author’s premise is that it is important to understand the distinction between these terms and to use them appropriately and in their proper context because each term reflects a particular mind
set, belief and ideology. Particularly interesting is a side note of the author attempting to apply some of the concepts in this book to the current political landscape in Israel in what the author refers to as “the revival of priestly Judaism in Israel” in the religious national movement. This book is academic in nature directed to the scholar or interested layman.

David Tesler, Yonkers, NY


Seidenberg shows that ecological problems in part stem from a fundamental misuse of G-d’s divine creation. We should seek to poetically dwell in it, as shown in Adam and Eve’s injunction to care for, protect, conserve, and safeguard the Garden of Eden in which they were placed originally. After their expulsion it is the task of Humanity to restore the planet and human consciousness to this more “Edenic” state.

The book shows that there is much proto-ecological material within the Jewish tradition, from the topic of bal tash’hit (not wasting or destroying needlessly) to the rhythms of the Jewish calendar—Tu Bi-Shevat, and the revolutionary ideas of Shemitah and Yovel (the Sabbatical and Jubilee years, when the land is allowed to rest). This system of rest and renewal fulfills on a grand social scale the ideal of Shabbat. Seidenberg shows that the Jubilee year is directed equally toward creating a right and environmentally ethical relationship with ‘the land’ and toward creating a right relationship between human beings. It heightens our consciousness of our dependence on Nature and our responsibility to other creatures. The Jubilee year helps us to understand the right way to balance human needs with the well-being of the environment. It reminds us that human beings are a part of the natural divinely created world and not in opposition to it.

A five page bibliography of Jewish primary sources and an abundance of excellent scholarly footnotes provide a valuable resource for further exploration. This book will be of interest in numerous disciplines, including Jewish studies, conservation and environmental studies, and religion. Recommended for all Jewish Libraries.

David B Levy Touro College, NYC


Shir HaShirim, the Song of Songs by King Solomon, has been interpreted as an allegory of God’s love for the Jewish people (and Jesus’ love for the church). Rabbi Shapiro asserts that “the Song of Songs is about the realization of Wisdom through the unification of the spiritual (feminine) and the physical (masculine). The woman in the Song isn’t Israel or the church but Lady Wisdom, and the man in the Song isn’t God but you, the seeker of Wisdom.” After several introductory chapters that discuss the origins of the text (which may have been authored by someone who ascribed the Song to King Solomon), the feminine in Biblical texts, and love poems from ancient India, Shapiro provides his translation lined up next to his interpretation of the text. For example, although the Hebrew word tapuach translates to “apple,” Shapiro deems “apricot” a better fit for fruit native to Israel and representative of the poet’s intent. In a chapter after the text, “The Path of Ecstasy: How to Use the Song of Songs,” the author outlines ways to unify the spiritual and the physical. Notes and a bibliography are included in the back matter.

A prolific author, Rabbi Shapiro received ordination from Hebrew Union College and is also initiated into the Ramakrishna Order of Vedanta Hinduism. With a Foreword by Rev. Cynthia Bourgeault, an Episcopal Priest, numerous references to the Divine Feminine in Eastern practices, and comparisons to Christian ideas with quotes from the New Testament, the author embraces the publisher’s mottos of “Walking Together, Finding the Way” and “For People of All Faiths, All Backgrounds.” With Rabbi
Shapiro’s bold disagreement with Rashi’s allegorical interpretation and suggestions for “a fuller ecstasy” practice with a partner, this book is not for traditional Jews. It will have a place in libraries that collect feminist-oriented literature and novel interpretations of Judaic texts, and whose patrons are interested in comparative religion and creating their own rituals.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel


The chronological scope of this excellent volume covers the first seven centuries of the Jewish presence on the Italian peninsula, from the days of the Maccabees to 476 CE in the time of Pope Gregory the Great. It is based on archaeological finds in Rome and elsewhere in Italy, on relevant literary and legal sources, and on other primary records. Attention is given to ethnic relations, demographics of Jewish settlement, Jews’ civil status under the law, the economic activities of Italian Jewry, gentile views of Jews, Jewish views of the Romans and Christians, the culture and communal structures of Italian Jewry, and social relations in the host Roman and Christian cultures.

Includes excellent bibliographical references and helpful indexes (Persons, Geographical, and Subject), photos, plates and maps. Highly recommended for all academic collections of Jewish studies, ancient history in general, and Italian history.

David B Levy, Touro College, NYC


Through looking at the weekly portion, the author “attempts to show that the Torah encapsulates a development growth pattern akin to human development. Each parasha is like watching a therapy session unfold.” Focusing on individuals as well as the nation as a whole, the “Biblical text becomes more than a historical account of compelling religious interest, but a modern instructive guide into the dynamics of human behavior.” Adam and Eve needed to learn about observing boundaries. Abraham harbors unconscious anger at Isaac for taking Sarah’s attention. Isaac, suffering from post-traumatic stress from the Akeidah, does not become a distinctive creative personality in his own right. Joseph is a model for the Freudian interpretations of dreams and received “the first psychoanalytic referral” when he was called on to interpret Pharaoh’s dreams. Moses’ issues stem from his separation from his birth family, often displayed as inappropriate anger. By the last parasha, the Israelites have matured as a nation, having built self-esteem in their journey through the wilderness. Each discussion is preceded by a short summary of the weekly reading. A bibliography and a glossary of Hebrew terms are included.

Dr. Skolnick is a registered clinical psychologist and a psychoanalyst in private practice. Many of the essays are based on discussions at the Skolnicks’ Shabbat table. They are presented clearly and coherently, and Dr. Skolnick uses Jewish sources as well as the experience from her practice to illustrate her points. The entries are relatively short, perfect for sharing at your own Shabbat table. While there is a glossary for Hebrew terms in the book, a glossary of psychological terms would have been helpful to lay people. Those who are interested in the subject will find this an interesting and valuable resource; those who aren’t may deem some of the discussions as psychobabble, so if library patrons are interested in the psychological aspects of Torah, it is recommended.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel


The fourth book of the Torah chronicles the Israelites’ years in the desert, but there are many themes running throughout Bamidbar. This collection of essays explores them with an eye toward their
relevance today. The power of speech, particularly when making vows is the topic of Parshat Mattos, but this theme is evident in instances of lashon hara (derogatory speech) in Beha’aloscha, Shelach and Balak. For Parshat Chukas, the nature of Amalek is explored. In Parshat Pinchas, the Temple sacrifices are enumerated. Rebbetzin Smiles focuses on the daily sacrifice and asserts that its meaning today is to remind us to do all the mitzvot with intention and alacrity. Two related essays about the Jewish approach to achieving greatness and an appropriate perspective on suffering are included. The latter discusses the difference between fate and destiny, and provides suggestions for maintaining a “lofty destiny mindset.” Each essay ends with a wish that incorporates the topic of discussion. The book includes a bibliography of sources as well as a glossary, though the definitions of Hebrew and Aramaic words are included in parentheses within the text.

This series about the weekly Torah portion (Breishis - Feldheim, 2010; Shmos – Feldheim 2012; Vayikra - self-published, 2013) maintains its strength and consistency. As in previous volumes, Rebbetzin Smiles poses several thoughtful questions, and then proceeds to answer them, sometimes relying heavily on one source, other times bringing in a range of commentaries and sources to present a clear explanation of the topic. Either on its own, or to add to the previous volumes, her book is highly recommended for all Jewish libraries.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel

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**Why Was Moses Not Allowed To Enter The Promised Land?**

This is a novel of Moses’ special bond with YHWH, depicted through the events surrounding the Exodus from Egypt and how the most famous Prophet ever becomes tainted by the very process in which he is put in charge.

**Tainted Hands: An Encounter With The Mosaic Code**

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**Hebraic Influences On Greek Civilization**

Was Achilles A Jew?

Dr. Larry S. Milner argues that a group of Hebrews devoted to the traditions of the patriarchs left the Exodus following the parricidal reprisals instituted by Moses and migrated to Mycenae, where they became immersed into the culture. His analysis provides the most persuasive argument to date about where the Eastern influence in Greece was generated. The author presents cogent evidence in this book to substantiate his position that a breakaway group from the Hebrew Exodus migrated to Mycenae in the Mediterranean basin and became influential as they immersed in the Greek culture.

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**Explore The Impact Of The Exodus On The Ancient World**

With Dr. Larry S. Milner, MD, JD, MLS

**Contact The Author**

Dr. Larry S. Milner, MD, JD, MLS

Email: infanticide@ameritech.net

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This excellent collection reflects the wide research interests of Prof. Seltzer, among which are modern Jewish life and identity, American Jewry and Jewish historiography. Articles include such subjects as language acquisition as a criterion of modernization in East Central Europe, lay and rabbinic conflict.
in mid-nineteenth century American Jewry, and the counter-enlightenment in Jamaica. Prague Zionist
thought is studied in two articles. In one of them, on Martin Buber and the influence of World War I on
Shmuel Hugo Bergman, Robert Weltsch and Hans Kohn, the author shows how the views of the latter
three toward the war and toward Zionism change quickly as they experience the reality of war.

The effect of European Jewish thought on American Jewish thought is discussed in an article on
Jacob Agus. The relationship between Abraham Geiger and Heinrich Graetz, and a fresh look at the
development of the myth of Sephardic aristocratic lineage are among the many other topics researched
in this volume. Recommended for all academic collections in Jewish studies.

Jim Rosenbloom, Brandeis University

Sorek, Tamir. *Palestinian Commemoration in Israel: Calendars, Monuments, and Martyrs* (Stanford
Studies in Middle Eastern Studies and Islamic Societies). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press,
2015. 312 pp. $90.00. (9780804795180).

Tamir Sorek’s study focuses on commemoration modes by Palestinians who are Israeli citizens
(but not Palestinians living outside Israel, nor those who work in Israel). The commemorations are
of events and martyrs related to the Arab-Israeli conflict. The study opens with an examination of
commemorations under British mandatory rule, pointing out several events which had a large impact
on Palestinians, but only one of which (Balfour Day) was commemorated throughout the whole period
of British rule. Sorek then examines several events which entered the calendar of commemoration:
the Nakbah (Arabic for “disaster” or “catastrophe” [Palestinian defeat in 1948]), Kafr Qasim massacre
(1956) and Land Day (1976). This is followed by chapters dealing with memorials for martyrs (1976-
1983; 1998-2013) and events which are on the margin of commemoration because they were mainly
commemorated locally, by specific party or movement, had limited press coverage or public following.
He then discusses how memory is disciplined by means of intimidation and censorship by the Israeli
authorities and how Palestinians confront the ideological effects of the Israeli formal education system
and its implications on the young through informal education, such as after school events and summer
camps. Sorek’s work is based on published research as well as newspapers, websites, and numerous
interviews. This study combines detailed description with nuanced analysis, and is of interest not only
for those studying the Arab-Israeli conflict, but also for those interested in the condition of minorities
in war afflicted regions and the study of memory and commemoration.

Rachel Simon, Princeton University.

Soyer, Francois. *Popularizing Anti-Semitism in Early modern Spain and its Empire: Francisco de
(9789004250475).

In this new study Francois Soyer provides an analysis and a translation of the text of Francisco de
Torrejoncillo’s *Centinela contr Judios*, one of the most widely read anti-Semitic tracts in early modern
Spain. Acknowledging that the *Centinela* benefitted from the author’s use of Castilian rather than Latin,
Soyer seeks to determine what other factors contributed to its tremendous popularity. He surmises
that the *Centinela* artfully played upon the heightened fears of the “… alleged threat posed by crypto-
Judaism and New Christians of Portuguese origin” that re-emerged in Spain at that period. Torrejoncillo
cites a plethora of “crimes” allegedly committed by the Jews / *conversos*, including the power of breast
milk from *converso* wet nurses to lead others into the evil world of Judaism.

Soyer suggests that the work may have been commissioned by the Holy Office of the Inquisition,
though he admits that he has not sufficient evidence to substantiate this idea. He identifies the work
as an early example of the two aspect transformation that occurred in anti-Jewish polemic in Spain’s
late Medieval / early modern period. The initial aspect is the traditional theological debate wherein
the Christian observer seeks to prove to readers the superiority of the Christian faith, the assuredness
that Jesus was the Messiah, and of the error of the Jews. The second aspect goes beyond this simple debate with Torrejoncillo’s assertion that the diabolical Jews (and conversos), in their evil beliefs and pursuits, cause not only their own people to go astray, but also posed a terrible threat to the old (true) Christians of Spain. Soyer explains that Torrejoncillo, “…wanted to expose what he believed to be a wide-ranging and potentially disastrous conspiracy orchestrated in secrecy by Judaizing conversos who were in league with their unconverted co-religionists in the Ottoman Empire as well as with Spain’s Muslim and Protestant enemies.”

Soyer recognizes the Centinela contra Judios (1674) as a revolutionary step in the development of anti-Semitic thought, not only in Spain, but throughout the world. Though it makes for unpleasant reading, it must be understood for the impact it had upon later writings of the same genre. This study is an important addition to any academic library and will also be enlightening to those interested in the interrelationships between Jews and non-Jews as they have developed over the past 500 years.

Randall C. Belinfante, Director of Library and Archives, American Sephardi Federation


In this well-written book, the author tells the tale of Aleppo Jews in the twentieth century through the experience of one man—her father, Mike Sutton. It is a very personal narrative. The author appears in the story, along with members of her extended family going back three generations. As she tells her father’s history, she skillfully weaves in the history of the Jews in Aleppo—their antiquity, their prominence, their Sephardic-Mizrachi duality, and their presence in the New World. The narrative is interwoven with the Jewish history of Shanghai, where Mike spent the war years. Though Mike did not return to Aleppo, his daughter includes material about the difficulties for Jews there after the State of Israel was established, and the vagaries of travel for stateless people in a volatile world.

As an introduction to the Syrian Jewish experience for the layperson this book is unique and timely, especially given the current events in Syria. The Shanghai piece of the story is a little-known sidebar to Holocaust studies. The author frankly admits beginning from a place of ignorance. Her two-page bibliography shows that she relied heavily on the Jewish Virtual Library and JewishGen. She also includes less familiar works about Aleppo Jewry, along with the standard work, The Jews of Arab Lands, by Norman Stillman. The book contains a discussion guide for book groups. The questions in the guide focus on personal reactions to the book. This small press work is nicely edited and laid-out, but the print and pictures are slightly fuzzy. Recommended for synagogue and academic collections. Some may want to purchase items from the author’s bibliography or more scholarly works on Jews from Arab lands to complement this book.

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


This self-published work by Dr. Starr is more than a memoir augmented by 70 historic photographs; it is an outstanding examination of Israeli political and social culture in a comparative analysis with its American counterpart. With many years spent in Israel as a political analyst and interacting on a personal level with Israel’s elite, the author presents probably the most perfect picture available of how Israelis negotiate diplomatically with the United States. With the utmost candor, the Jewish reader will be able to understand how rough and tumble the relationship between Israel and the United States has been from the beginning and why it will not always be smooth. There are numerous vignettes and heretofore unpublished stories of Israeli leaders, David Ben-Gurion, Yitzhak Rabin, Menachem Begin, Shimon Peres, and perhaps lesser known figures such as Yehuda Ben-Meir, Zalman Enav, and Hanan Baron, but also their American partners. Within this compact
story is all the necessary information to understand how Israel interacts with American diplomats, its perception of American Jews and the support given to the Jewish state. This is simply a marvelous book that should be welcomed by synagogue libraries and academicians who specialize in American and Israeli foreign policy-making.

Sanford R. Silverburg, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC


Tenenbom’s Catch the Jew! is a lively and humorous tour through Israel as the author visits and interviews the multifaceted State of Israel. The book consists of 55 short chapters where the author speaks to Israelis of every political, religious, ethnic and racial stripe in addition to Bedouins, Palestinians and Europeans. The catch is that the majority of people Tenenbom encounters believe him to be an outsider, a non-Jewish German journalist when in fact he is quite the insider—born into an ultra-Orthodox Israeli family prior to immigrating to Germany and becoming secular. This allows him surprisingly easy access to the unguarded opinions of those whom he meets, which include politicians, diplomats, rabbis and rabbinical students, peace activists, journalists, terrorists, illegal immigrants, taxi drivers and even prostitutes.

The book is simultaneously extremely funny but also very dark and disturbing as Tenenbom forces the reader to confront the painful realities facing the Jewish State, not only from fundamentalists but also from their European supporters. Jewish politicians and fundamentalists do not escape the author’s ire—but in such a way that (in my opinion, thankfully) does not fall into the trap of moral equivalency.

This is an excellent book for those interested in an unvarnished and eminently readable depiction of the opinions and beliefs of and about the Jews and the State of Israel. It is filled with humor and eye-opening insight into Israelis and Palestinians and the hope and challenges found everywhere in the Promised Land. I particularly liked the fact that no person or ideology is spared from the author’s scathing critique but at the same time, the worst actors bear the brunt of it. If someone were to ask me to recommend one book to help him or her understand Israel today—they could do no better than to read Tenenbom’s Catch the Jew!

David Tesler, Yonkers, NY


Jonathan Boyarin translates this account of internal schism within Polish Hasidut. Originally published in Yiddish in 1949, Boyarin brings to life Menashe Unger’s dramatic account of how a particular subsection of Hasidism (the Pshiskhe School) was widely seen as being upended and replaced by the eclectic, sharp-tongued, fiery and witty Rabbi Menacham Mendel Morgenstern, best known as the Kotzker Rebbe.

Menashe Unger, himself an ordained Rabbi, grew up the son of a Hasidic Rabbi before giving up his observance, attending the university, joining a secular Zionist movement and becoming a journalist. The majority of Unger’s writings focused on Hasidic tales in Eastern Europe. In A Fire Burns in Kotzk, besides describing the crisis engendered by the Kotzker School, the real magic of Unger’s book is the colorful descriptions of everyday life within the Hasidic court, including some of its darker aspects.

What remains unclear from this book is how much should it be taken at face value? Is the entire book factual? Loosely based on the truth? In all likelihood, much of it is based on stories the author heard repeated throughout his childhood. Unger certainly would have wanted to make the stories as entertaining as possible for his readership while still telling an “accurate” tale.

Recommended only to a reader with a particular interest in Eastern European Hasidic Life and the ethnographic details of that society. As a novel or even historic work, it will fail to engage or educate.

David Tesler, Yonkers, NY
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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This is a collection of scholarly essays on Jewish women writers in Britain from the Victorian era to the present. The editor begins with an overview of the subject and also contributes an essay about Victorian writers. There are recognizable names here—Grace Aguilar, Amy Levy, Linda Grant, and Anita Brookner—but most of the women who are subjects of this collection will be unfamiliar to American readers. The essayists discuss the unique perspective of British Jews, such as their *Kindertransport* heritage, their strong family ties, their issues with assimilation, and the British tendency to feel separate from the rest of Europe by virtue of escaping invasion by the Germans. Each essay has endnotes, and there is an index. This book is recommended for academic collections focusing on Jewish literature. It pairs well with *The Origin of the Modern Jewish Woman Writer*, by Michael Glachinsky. That work focuses more on the nineteenth century, while this one concentrates on the twentieth century.

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


In this engaging new work, David Wacks seeks to demonstrate how the competing influences of Jewish tradition and nationalistic feeling for the country of residence were interwoven in Jewish literature throughout the initial “Zionic” diaspora and then into a second diaspora when the Jews were driven out of the Iberian peninsula. Wacks is emphatic in asserting that Sephardic culture can be understood: “not as specifically Jewish but as categorically diasporic,” i.e., not altogether different from other cultures described as diasporic. Using samples of Jewish literature from before and after the expulsion from Iberia, Wacks endeavors to prove his hypothesis that the two influences described above persisted throughout Sephardic literature.

Wacks begins by exploring the concept of “diaspora” and applying it to the Sephardic experience. He then presents “case studies” of the literary works of Sephardic authors/poets spread over a period from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century. He argues, for example, that the poetry of Todros Abulafia (late thirteenth century) bears the marks of not one but two diasporas. His work expresses a longing for the land of Israel and bears witness to the troubadour tradition of al-Andalus: an Andalusian diasporic poetic form which re-emerged in Christian Iberia. Wacks explains that Abulafia’s work is the “product of dual symbolic loyalties, to the literary cultures of the Iberian Peninsula and to the Zionic diasporic imaginary.”

With the expulsion of Jews out of the Iberian Peninsula in the sixteenth century, writers such as Solomon ibn Verga and Joseph Karo sought to understand the reason for this second diaspora. They deliberated over whether human action lay at its source (Verga’s view), or whether it was actually part of the divine plan (as the mystic Karo would have us believe). Nevertheless, Wacks notes “Karo’s revolutionary innovation in articulating the divine-human relationship was to place a human agency at the center of the divine drama.” Neither he, nor Verga wavered from their longing both for Zion and for the Iberian Peninsula. Finally, we see in the case of Jacob Algaba’s 1554 Hebrew rendition of the popular chivalric novel *Amadis de Gaula* (1508) that the Ottoman Sephardim continued to identify with the land from which they had been expelled.

Wacks has provided an interesting exposition of the shifting tides of cultural sensibility evident in the literary output both before and after the expulsion from the Iberian Peninsula. Replete with extensive notes, this work is a useful and relatively inexpensive contribution to the study of the cultural legacy of the Sephardim.

*Randall C. Belinfante-Director of the Library and Archives, American Sephardi Federation*
Reviews of Nonfiction Titles for Adults

New FROM The Toby Press

THE BLIND ANGEL
NEW OLD CHASSIDIC STORIES
Rabbi Tovia Halberstam,
Translated by Joshua Halberstam
“These stories are at once profound, disturbing, and inspiring…”
-Professor Lawrence Kushner, Hebrew Union College

THE AMBASSADOR
Yehuda Avner and Matt Rees
“Not only an evocative story, but an urgent reminder that decisive actions by courageous people can, in fact, make a profound difference in our world.”
-Rabbi Dr. Daniel Gordis

THE SECRET OF CHABAD
INSIDE THE WORLD’S MOST SUCCESSFUL JEWISH MOVEMENT
David Eliezrie
“You will never see your local Chabad rabbi in quite the same way.”
-Dennis Prager

THE PATER
MY FATHER, MY JUDAISM, MY CHILDLESSNESS
Elliot Jager
“A daring and very personal book on an important subject we rarely get to hear about: Jewish male childlessness.”
-Naomi Danis, Managing Editor, Lilith

Available online and at bookstores everywhere.

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David Ben Gurion, Israel’s first Prime Minister and Defense Minister, used to assert that the Israeli Defense Force was not only the means of defending the country, but also the means of integrating and building Israeli society. As military service is compulsory for both males and females, with some exceptions, the army has played an important role as a social leveler.

In this ethnographic study, Weiss explains the ethical qualms of individuals that refuse to participate in sanctioned violence, and how this refusal affects their social status and moral authority.

Through extensive fieldwork with ex-soldiers, as well as with younger pacifists that decided against enlisting, the author examines their common denominator of defending the acts of conscientious objectors on moral, ethical, legal and democratic grounds. Recommended for academic libraries.

*Sonia Smith, McGill University*


This book is a very scholarly study of the character and writings of Rabbis Akiva and Ishmael in the Midrash and Sifra. Yadin-Israel points out many contradictions in the text concerning the biography of Rabbi Akiva. For example all the texts do not agree that Rabbi Akiva was poor or didn’t start learning Torah before age 40. The author analyzes Rabbi Akiva’s legislative derashot and his midrashic interpretations.

The Sifra is difficult to understand because it engages in a hermeneutics of camouflage producing arguments not found in the Torah. Also the Sifra is not a coherent, edited work; it is reworked and edited from an oral tradition that was tainted by the tradition of a later time and place.

This book will find a welcome place only in an academic or scholarly library. It is well written, but only those with an expertise or interest in Tannatic and post-Tannatic literature analysis will be able to assimilate its knowledge.

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


This scholarly but readable study by a Professor Emerita of art history and visual culture in York University, Toronto, explores the history and challenges of Jewish visual art in the modern diaspora. The five chapters consider Jewish artists that deal with the status and character of Jews in modern diasporic communities, with a focus on Ashkenazi culture.

The introduction discusses the term “diaspora” and its historical variations. The book begins in 1920’s Poland with the photography of Alter Kacyzne and Moshe Vorobiehich; chapter two presents the visual images of Bruno Schulz; chapter three the work of Roman Vishniac, and in chapter four “Difference in Diaspora: The Yiddishe Mama, the Jewish Mother, the Jewish Princess, and Their Men” the focus shifts to North America. The concluding chapter discusses late-twentieth century artwork that conveys the continuing cultural force of the diaspora.

*Looking Jewish* includes many footnotes, an extensive bibliography and an index; it is profusely illustrated, but only in black and white. Zemel’s work is a valuable and important addition to Judaica collections in academic and research libraries.

*Susan Freiband, Retired Library Educator, Volunteer Temple Librarian, Arlington, Virginia*


Ziegler’s *Ruth* is another important contribution to the Maggid Book Studies in Tanach series that focuses on the biblical book of Ruth. The author states at the onset that she is attempting to fuse traditional and academic approaches to the book of Ruth—and she succeeds admirably. The book is split into five
Reviews of Nonfiction Titles for Adults


War widow Carsie Nussbaum is determined to make a good life for her family: her two daughters and new husband Chat. She works from home as a milliner and home schools her daughters. Drew chronicles the family from the early 1920s through the late 1930s as Carsie’s strength and determination are tested. Carsie must deal with the worsening side-effects of the bromine she was taking to calm her nerves, the vagaries of the fashion industry, a bitter mother-in-law, and her husband’s stroke. But most importantly, she had to cope with the return of her first husband who, she had been told, died in World War I, and his threats to destroy her new life.

Carsie is a flawed but likeable character. While clearly identified as Jewish, her family is mostly secular until her mother-in-law shows up for Passover. She interacts with many historical figures of the time, including gangsters, artists, and social activists although it is not clear how she met them. This is the second book about Carsie; this reviewer did not have access to the first, City of Slaughter, which might have explained more. Recommended for large fiction collections.

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


Rabbi Batya Zahav serves at a Reform congregation in the Twin Cities. When she begins receiving hate mail, she contacts her colleague, Conservative Rabbi David Cohen for help. Her overprotective husband, Israeli-born Minneapolis homicide detective, Arik, becomes involved as the seriousness of the threats increase. Rabbi Cohen feels obligated to find the identity of the perpetrator before he inures or kills someone, so he investigates while trying to perform all of his synagogue duties and maintain family relationships. His friend, Eli, and Eli’s wife Bev, are visiting for Hanukkah, and Eli soon gets involved in the investigation as well. In addition to the hate crimes, both rabbis have ongoing relationship issues to resolve. David’s wife, Sara, is trying to find her role as a rebbetzin and his oldest son is sullen and withdrawn. Batya must deal with a husband who has no interest in organized religion. The author’s background in psychology and education is evident in her character development. In addition to an

Reviews of Literature Titles for Adults


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interesting plot, this book offers readers a look at the life of a rabbi and its effects on family life. Strength to Stand is a good choice for public libraries serving Jewish communities and synagogue libraries with fiction collections. The issues raised will be good for book club discussions as well.

Barbara M. Bibel, Congregation Netivot Shalom, Berkeley, CA


Salim Al-Ishmaeli wants to change his life, but he is mired in memories. Growing up in Jaffa, he loved the family house and orange grove and the Mediterranean Sea. During the Nakbah (Arabic for “disaster” or “catastrophe” [Palestinian defeat in 1948]), when Salim was eight, the family members run to relatives in Nazareth and lose their property. Soon after, Salim’s older brother moves to England, and his mother moves back to Lebanon with his younger brother. Salim also moves to London, where he studies accounting and falls in love with Jude, a beautiful Jewish girl. They marry, have twins (a boy and a girl) and move to Kuwait for Salim’s work. Meanwhile, Rafan, his younger brother is working for the PLO. Soon Rafan involves Salim, and Jude takes the twins back to England. Looking at his failures in life, Salim decides to try and get his family’s property back. With help from Rafan’s “friend,” demonstrations are organized to draw attention to his cause. The day of the big rally, the house goes up in flames: Salim’s unstable son Marc had set the fire and died in the process.

The novel is inspired by Hajaj’s family: her Jewish mother grew up in Northern England in a close, observant family, and her Arab father lived in Jaffa until 1948. He later worked in Kuwait. What could be written off as a story of an impossible romance and a clash of politics is actually quite compelling. Both Salim and Jude are nuanced and likable characters, and the reader finds herself rooting for a happily-ever-after. The book captured both of their ambivalent feelings over embracing their own destiny versus holding on to their family traditions and beliefs. Salim and his brothers illustrate some of the complicated facets of Palestinian responses: move on and don’t look back; stay mired in memories and sadness; or look for payback and revenge. Although Jude is a prominent part of the story, it is mainly about Salim, so the book is recommended for libraries whose patrons are interested in Arab-Jewish relations.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel


A priceless brooch, handed down from generation to generation since the fourteenth century, falls into the hands of Adam a drug addict on the lam after committing a violent crime. Adam ends up in Kibbutz Sadot Hadar to redress his crime by seeking to give the brooch to the woman to whom his late, beloved grandfather wanted to give the brooch. Adam is not the only person to come to the kibbutz for shelter. Meet Ulya, a Soviet émigré of dubious lineage and honesty, who schemes to go to New York City to be rich; French-Canadian Claudette, who suffers from a crippling OCD; Ofir, a young soldier whose wounds from a bus bombing ends his aspiring career as a pianist, and Ziva, a founding member of the Kibbutz who came to Israel to escape Nazi persecution and who fights valiantly against the privatization and capitalization of the kibbutz. Set in 1994, reaching back to World War II and the fourteenth century, Hope’s Safekeeping is not about the brooch, but about the love that is handed down from one person to another and each person’s desire for it.

It has been said that we often hurt most the person whom we love the most. Adam, Ulya, Ziva and Claudette have all hurt people that they have professed to love and, in the aftermath of hurting them, must deal with the consequences of losing what is most precious to them.

Hope’s Safekeeping is exquisitely written and beautifully tragic. Readers will fall in love with each character and hurt when each character is hurt or inflicts hurt. Don’t be surprised if this story makes it to the big screen.

Yossi Gremillion, Librarian, Broward County Library.

The talent of a poet is to take the ordinary and make the reader look at it in a different way. Sarah Lamstein casts her keen eye on pregnancy, friends, and families and captures them in simple, yet eloquent verse. In “Pregnant” she states “I am rich and bursting, a giantess, my engulfing waters an ocean;” in “Unloading the Dumpsters,” she focuses on “two mastodons, heads lowered, do battle in the parking lot of the A&P,” and in “Toronto Airport” the meter mirrors the speech patterns of its subjects: West Indians meeting at a terminal. Several of the poems have Jewish content: “Arbeit Macht Frei” is obviously Holocaust-related, and “This Evening” describes the special feeling in the house when challahs are baking. “Hebrew School Boy” is not particularly Jewish, but reminiscent of those waiting for carpool pick up.

Ms. Lamstein is also a children’s book author whose credits include the ever-popular *I Like Your Buttons* (Albert Whitman, 1999) and the Sydney Taylor Honor Book *Letter on the Wind* (Boyds Mills Press, 2007). This collection of poems is useful for school libraries who service curricula with poetry, and is recommended for libraries that collect poetry. Otherwise it is an optional purchase.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel


Izzy Edel is searching for revelation. In his drug-induced college days, he sought revelation through hallucinogens and Jewish mystical writings. When his family receives word that his ne’er-do-well father is missing and presumed dead, Izzy returns to New York to search for him, retracing his father’s steps, falling into his life and adapting his shady business dealings with gangsters and shadowy figures. While peddling his father’s supply of used books, Izzy meets a runaway woman, from a prominent Hasidic family, who strangely resembles a figure from his father’s sketching from a painting of a famous dead artist and whom he is eager to help and protect.

Nadler’s story is one of reflection: Izzy’s remembrance of his father, and of revelation in which he realizes that his father was not the father he remembered him to be. Izzy, whose later childhood is one of privilege (his mother remarries to a man with money), rebels by falling into the street life of New York City while his successful sister, Becca, repeats their mother’s mistake of falling for men of dubious character.

It’s refreshing to see young authors, such as Nadler, embrace Yiddishkeit and Judaism, in general, in their literary works. Nadler’s narrative shows a strong knowledge of Jewish thought and culture. The Sea Beach Line is an important part of contemporary literary repertoire. Expect (and hope) to hear more from Nadler.

Yossi Gremillion, Librarian, Broward County Library


This novel takes place at vacation resort in Canada, during two weeks which are separated by 70 years. In 2003, Emily visits her grandparents, Blima and Moshe Kogan, at their lodge during Passover to avoid her advisor, who is waiting for a draft of her Master’s thesis. Emily is trying to quantify how information and influence is spread among networks of people and hopes that her family tree will be the example that ties the whole thesis together. The only problem is that her family tree is not making sense and her aging grandparents and aunt are not cooperating in untangling it.

In 1933, Harpo Marx and his brothers are spending time at the Kogan’s lodge to grieve over the death of their parents and to regroup after their last film flopped. Harpo befriends the young Blima, and her mother Ayala. Blima knows that there are family secrets and she holds onto documents that she doesn’t understand, but suspects will bring unwanted changes to her family.
The book goes back and forth between the two eras; one in which Blima is trying to bury a secret and the other in which Emily is trying to unearth it. While the characters’ evasiveness is sometimes frustrating, this is an engaging read. Recommended for synagogue and academic fiction collections.

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

**Wallant, Edward Lewis.** _The Pawnbroker._ Bedford, NY: Fig Tree Books, 2015. 279 pp. $15.95. (9781941493144).

Fifteen years after his imprisonment in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, Sol Nazerman schleps through life as a zombie, numb to the selfishness and greed of his sister and her family, whom he supports financially, and to the desperation of the poor souls who frequent his pawnshop. The emotions that he feels are manifested only in his nightly dreams in which he is haunted by the violence that he and his wife and child experienced at the hands of the Nazis. Everyone wants something from Sol, particularly his mistress, Tessie and her elderly father and his protégé, Jesus Ortiz, an ambitious former petty criminal who dreams of escaping poverty by opening a business. Only through a violent act involving Jesus and through an unexpected friendship with a woman is Sol able to tap into his pain and feel again.

Unlike many of the Holocaust-themed books that it inspired, _The Pawnbroker_ speaks very little about the experiences in the camps, but focuses mainly on the post-camp life of Sol. Only in Sol’s dreams, does the reader see the daily horrors experienced by the Jews and others persecuted by the Nazis. The Pawnbroker was originally published in 1961, in an era in which Holocaust survivors spoke very little about their experiences in the ghettos and camps. Wallant is most effective at addressing the Holocaust when Sol responds drolly to others’ praise of Europe’s beauty and enchantment and when his characters see his tattoo and realize its significance. Like _Night_, Elie Wiesel’s account of his own experiences in concentration camps, Wallant’s story is very subtle and the reader is forced to understand Sol by what is left unsaid, reading between the lines of Sol’s subtle responses. This 2015 republication of _The Pawnbroker_ is most welcome, and I highly recommend it to book clubs.

_Yossi Gremillion, Librarian, Broward County Library._

**Reviews of Multimedia**

_**Blue & White Crime Stories: Israel’s Hilarious Cops and Robbers.** 4 films on 4 DVDs. 346 minutes. Distributed by SISU Entertainment, 2015. $49.95._

While the theme ties the four films together, they vary in audio and video quality. While _Max and Morris_ and _She’s Got It_ have a lighter touch, _Big Shots_ and _Clean Sweep_ are more intense. All contain that unique brand of dark Israeli humor. This package is a good choice for libraries that have large film collections or collect Israeli materials. Be sure to secure licensing rights before use in a film festival or course.


Alon Aboutboul ( _The Dark Knight Rises, NCIS_ ) portrays Reuven Shechter, a policeman torn between his job and his mistress, who is out for revenge. (Note: Reviewer’s copy of DVD was damaged and unviewable).
Goldwasser, Jacob. מקס ומוריס Max & Morris: Everyone’s After the Loot. 76 min. Hebrew with English subtitles.

An over-the-top comedy, including musical numbers, the action spins from a small restaurant owner to assorted thieves and schemers as they make deals and elude the law. When the title characters learn that their newly religious friend shares a wall with the Georgian/Italian gangster who collects protection money, yet a new scheme is launched. Max and Morris and Zbish and Morduch each plan break-ins, but they are all double-crossed by Morris’ girlfriend Bella, who takes the money to become a rock star in America. Running jokes of falling down stairs and flatulence punctuate the movie, and there is a lot of foul language. The film quality is somewhat blurry (especially when compared with today’s HD, etc.), but along with the fashion, creates a nostalgia for Israel in the 1990s.

Goldwasser, Jacob. מתחת לאף Big Shots, 1982. 95 min. Hebrew with English subtitles.

Moshe Ivgy and Uri Gavriel from Max & Morris again play the leads in a story based on a real-life incident, titled “Under the Nose” in Hebrew. Small-time thugs Sammy and Hertzel team up with Jhana, a “big-time” criminal, to steal a safe from the police station. Drunkenness and some bad fish lead to a lot of scatological humor and complications in the plan. Once they get the safe open, their fortune leads to greed and fighting, with Hertzel informing the police and Sammy’s girlfriend escaping with a third of the loot. Although the pace can drag, there is more timely Israeli culture and lots of smoking. There are several crude scenes and lots of obscenities (in Hebrew and in the subtitles).

Goldwasser, Jacob. אין לה אלוהים She’s Got It, 2007. 87 min. Hebrew with English subtitles.

When the sewing factory where Malka works closes, she and her husband must figure out how to make ends meet. She learns that her co-worker and neighbor Irena’s husband and her sister Yafit’s cheating boyfriend are planning to rob the armored truck that delivers the money from the casinos in Eilat to the bank where Yafit works. When the women learn about it, they follow the advice of a rabbi, “A woman of valor, who can find? ...Her husband’s heart relies on her and he shall lack no fortune,” and plan to ambush the heist and take the money. Through a comedy of errors, the money is lost, but true love may have been found. Amidst the action is the stark beauty of southern Israel. This cops and robbers, girl power movie will appeal on several levels.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel


This is a documentary about Saul Friedlander, who was been awarded the Israel Prize (1983), a MacArthur Fellowship (1999) and a Pulitzer Prize for General Non-Fiction (2008). He was born in Prague in 1932 to German-speaking Jewish parents. After the Annexation of Czechoslovakia, they moved to France. From 1942 to 1946, Friedlander was hidden in a Catholic monastery and eventually converted and began preparing for the priesthood. In 1948 he immigrated to Israel on the Altalena. He completed high school and college, and at one point was an assistant to Shimon Peres. At present, he is a professor of history at UCLA and one of the foremost historians of the Holocaust period. Having lived through this history (his parents were murdered at Auschwitz), the focus of his studies and writing is to “describe the extermination of the European Jews without losing or repressing a primary feeling of disbelief.” The film integrates Friedlander’s life story with the events before, during and after World War II.

Through most of the film Friedlander is either speaking about his life and his perspective on the Holocaust, or in conversation with the director, Jack Diamand. They discuss the pros and cons of the “Hollywood treatment” of the Holocaust in movies and on television, as well as the fascination and
misconception of the Nazi era. The square boxes that surround the section titles and the discordant music are somewhat distracting, and while the topic is very interesting, the monologue/dialog format makes the film move extremely slowly. It is a good choice for libraries with large Holocaust collections, or for a film series highlighting the Holocaust and/or a memoir of the period.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel


Love does strange things to people. These four films prove that passion leads people to strange places. This collection provides both drama and comedy along with a look at Israeli lives.

The Belly Dancer, a film by Marek Rozenbaum tells the complicated story of a belly dancer named Debbie. Someone has stolen a collection of priceless Judaica, but things have gone wrong. Debbie, who is trying to clean up her life by becoming a ba’alat teshuvah, is now caught between a boyfriend newly released from prison and a former criminal who is now frum. Which path will she choose?

Gideon Kolirin’s Zur Hadasim is the comic tale of three crooks and a woman in search of a better life. They are searching for the village of Zur Hadasim, but will they find it? This film won the award for best screenplay at the Jerusalem Film Festival in 1999.

Jewish Vendetta, Alexander Shabataev’s 1996 film is a tale about love and revenge told in Hebrew and Russian. Russian-Israeli Nathan pretends that he is dying to make his wife confess to a long-ago love affair that she had concealed. He takes his son, David, back to his village to find and kill the former lover, but what ensues is surprising.

Avanim (Stones) introduces viewers to Michal, a thirty-something woman with a complicated life. She has a young child, a job, a husband, and a lover. Juggling all of that is not easy. When her lover is killed in a suicide bombing, it all starts to fall apart. With awards from film festivals in Cannes, Berlin, and Geneva, this 2004 film offers much to contemplate.

Barbara Bibel, Congregation Netivot Shalom, Berkeley, CA.


Included in this set of DVDs is an outstanding video about the life and accomplishments of Teddy Kollek, who was the beloved and long-time mayor of Jerusalem. His dedication, love of the city, and respect from all religious leaders made him a unique figure in the history of this holy city and certainly the kind of leader who is greatly needed with the current strife. Jerusalem: The City Touched by God shows sites holy to Jews, Christians and Moslems. The film provides beautiful panoramic views and can be used as a travelogue with children, adults and seniors and Jews as well as non-Jews.

I am a Jerusalemite likewise shows Jerusalem views along with music video clips and singing by the legendary singer, Yehoram Gaon. You can feel the passion for the city in his voice. The audio is in Hebrew. Voices of Jerusalem presents interviews with residents who, in their own words, explain the “holiness and magic” of the city and their passion for it. Hebrew with English subtitles. I am a Jerusalemite and Voices of Jerusalem can be used with Hebrew audiences or in Hebrew instruction classes.

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


This collection of “Three films of Mirth, Miracles, and Music in Jewish America” is a great resource for students and lovers of 20th century American Jewish History and culture. The first movie, The Golden Age of Second Avenue, is a documentary about the Yiddish theatre. The Yiddish actors are introduced by name, and the history of the Yiddish theater is recounted. The film includes beautiful photographs and a few delightful
Reviews of Multimedia

*Bubbe Meises* is a one-woman musical about a granddaughter’s two “bubbies” (grandmothers) and how their stories and lives impacted her own story and life decisions. A winner of two Emmy awards, this movie is moving and entertaining to watch. The Third movie, *Do you Believe in Miracles?* stars Chanoch Teller who takes the viewer on a magical journey through many stories to discover the power of what some of us believe are miracles. This collection can be used in many ways in Jewish libraries and is recommended.

*Debbie Feder*

**Nights of Tel Aviv: Israeli Detective Stories. SISU Home Entertainment, 2015. 3 films on 3 DVDs. 263 minutes. $39.95. Hebrew with English subtitles.**

Israel produces excellent hard-boiled detective stories and the three videos in this collection will satisfy fans of the genre. The films were first released between 2000 and 2002. Marek Rozenbaum’s *The Investigation Must Go On* is the story of an ambitious detective named Stein who is trying to find a thief. He meets has-been club singer Shalom Shalom and the results are disastrous for all. Is Shalom the thief? What about his wife and his lover? Stein’s obsession with the case leads to dire consequences.

Itai Lev’s *A Five Minute Walk* leads detective Samo to a difficult place. Arresting a drug-dealing pimp puts him on the receiving end of sexual harassment charges. The accusers are two prostitutes who are unhappy about the fate of their boss. Viewers will think of Tarantino and David Mamet as they follow this gritty story.

Ori Inbar’s film *Sherman in the Winter* is a more classic story. Sherman works in a small town. When the twelve-year-old daughter of a councilman disappears along with her teacher, Sherman has to find her. He uses some unorthodox methods and discovers secrets that will truly surprise the viewers.

Mystery lovers will enjoy these diverse cases which introduce some fascinating characters and prove that life in Israel is just as strange as it is everywhere else.

*Barbara Bibel, Congregation Netivot Shalom, Berkeley, CA.*

**Stories of a young nation: Israeli Comedies and Drama and Everything in-Between. 4 films on 4 DVDs. 370 min. Distributed by SISU Home Entertainment (2015). Sale (DVD) $49.95. Hebrew with English subtitles.**

These four Israeli films together provide a wonderful study of the history of Israel and its cultural development. The subjects, stories, and characters change in ways that express the changing world for the people of Israel.

The first story, *Newland*, is quite serious and deals with two children, survivors of the Holocaust, who find themselves in an Israeli DP camp. Brother and sister must learn to live again and find a home. The second movie, *Over the Ocean*, is a story of a couple who now have a moderately secure life in Israel with their children. They are dreamers and are not sure they want to stay in Israel rather than travel to Canada in search of a wealthier lifestyle. The children have been born in Israel and don’t want to leave the only home they’ve known. The third movie, *There was no War in ’72*, is about an Israeli boy with an American mother and an abusive father. This is the story of the loss of innocence.

The last movie, *The Flying Camel*, is a comedy from the eighties that is somewhat silly; yet some of artsy, strange moments show cultural development and growth in Israel. This collection of movies is recommended for all Jewish libraries.

*Debbie Feder*


This DVD has six sections devoted to the biblical figures, Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Abraham and Isaac, Job, Moses, and David. The series was originally broadcast on Public Television and designed for educational purposes. Wiesel has the unique talent to describe the life and events of biblical characters while never glossing over their shortcomings and weaknesses. He brings in traditional commentary and midrash along with his own insights and reflections. The visuals, which include reenactments and works of art, are
enhanced by Wiesel’s words and add to the entire learning experience. The video is highly recommended for all Jewish and Christian audiences. In addition, it can be used in the classroom for bible study.

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


What do you get when you take elements of Ethiopian music (Anbessa means “lion” in Amharic) and dub, the subgenre of reggae that emphasizes the drum and bass parts? The eight-member Israeli group’s latest album “blends roots reggae within the context of the unique vibration of Ethiopian culture.” Using traditional instruments as well as Ethiopian ones like the krar, a five or six-stringed lyre tuned to a pentatonic scale (seen on the CD case), and the masinko, a single-stringed bowed lute, the songs range from modern Ethiopian music to Roots Reggae to “a new sonic manifestation that crosses borders and cultural boundaries.”

Most of the songs on Anbessa Dub (except “Tsbukti Fetret,” which is sung in the Tigrinya language of Northern Ethiopia) are in Amharic, which is not easily translatable. Because music is a universal language, listeners will pick up the typical reggae beat and horns that run through the compositions, but will still be delighted and surprised by switch ups in rhythm, the instrumentation and the singing style of the guest vocalists. “Man Begelagelgni” and “Yehoden Aweteche Legeresh” are so breezy and catchy that you will quickly be able to pronounce the titles and sing along. According to producer Asaf Smilian, “Yene Almaz” is a love song to a woman / to Zion. The song is telling the story of the immigration of Gili Yalo (lead singer) and his family from Ethiopia to Israel in 1984.

While not a typical “Jewish” or “Israeli” CD, the inventive tracks will intrigue listeners. Recommended for libraries with large music collections or in conjunction with any programming related to Ethiopian Jewry.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel

ERRATUM:

In the last issue of AJL Reviews (September-October 2015, page 18) we mistakenly noted that the book Bernard Revel: Builder of American Jewish Orthodoxy by Aaron Rakeffet-Rothkoff (2014) was published by Oxford University press, while it was actually published by Orthodox Union Press.
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.

Editor-in-Chief
Uri Kolodney
University of Texas Libraries
The University of Texas at Austin
One University Station S5400
Austin, TX 78712-8916
generaleditor@jewishlibraries.org

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

Please send adult books for review to D. Scheide

Children and YA Review Editors
Rachel Kamin
1054 Holly Circle
Lake Zurich, IL 60047
rachellkamin@gmail.com
and Chava (Kathe) Pinchuck
kpinchuck@gmail.com

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

All links to online resources were checked for accuracy on November 24, 2015. We cannot be responsible for broken links to those resources in the future.

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