
*The Resurrection: A Critical Inquiry* is a dense, scholarly volume written in response to a challenge from the author’s friend to prove that Jesus did not physically rise from the dead. Although Michael Alter, a Florida based teacher, author and researcher, handles the topic with sensitivity, this work may make for uncomfortable reading for devout Christians. Biblical scholars and students of theology, however, will appreciate the depth of Alter’s research, the important historical and theological questions raised, and his devotion to the task, particularly the sheer range of sources cited within its 746 pages of text and 81-page bibliography.

The book refutes the evidence in the Gospels and other Christian writings by outlining 113 issues surrounding Jesus’ death and resurrection. Each section begins with the relevant biblical verses presented in parallel columns, followed by arguments listed as either “contradictions” or “speculations.” In all, Alter presents 120 contradictions and 217 speculations. Thus, for example, in a chapter dedicated to calendrical issues, Alter deals thoroughly with the question of when Jesus was crucified, examining and taking to task the contradictions within scripture and the various conflicting reports on the year, month, day and time, especially where those reports clash with the Jewish calendar and Jewish ritual practice. In addition to theological disputes, Alter introduces evidence based arguments from the fields of astronomy, geophysics, criminology and psychology to state his case.

This is a fascinating investigation which will spark much debate; it will be appreciated by readers who like to question and by readers whose faith will not be shaken by historical enquiry. Recommended for academic libraries with biblical studies or theology collections.

Rebecca Jefferson, University of Florida

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Knowing how often the teachers in my school request Rabbi Nachum Amsel’s *The Jewish Encyclopedia of Moral and Ethical Issues*, I was eager to see his new volume. It does not disappoint. This book is an extremely valuable reference work for learning the Jewish view on numerous topics, including some for which I was not even aware there was a Jewish view (i.e. self-esteem in Judaism). It provides a source for in-depth essays on classic moral and ethical issues, such as anger, jealousy and revenge, as well as other important topics that confront our generation, such as cloning, stem cells, the ethics of downloading films and songs, and many others. Rabbi Amsel includes over two hundred pages of source material, Biblical and Talmudic selections quotes from works of Jewish philosophy, so that the reader can follow up on the essay. This volume is highly recommended.

Beverly Geller, The Frisch School, Paramus, NJ


This book of collected essays is divided into sections: the first deals with Biblical characters, the second with trauma, the third with mourning and the final chapter deals trauma recovery from the Holocaust.

As any book with chapters written by multiple authors, the result is uneven content. Some authors are very academic; others are more subjective and are based on the author’s thoughts and feelings. One outstanding chapter, written by Moshe Halevi Spero, deals with Joseph’s dream coat and Jacob’s reactions to the story of Joseph’s death. Spero examines the meaning of *kitonet passim* from literary and psychological perspectives. Jacob never overcomes the loss until he is reunited with Joseph in Egypt. All of the articles are accompanied by copious bibliographic notes at the end of the chapter; some also have footnotes.

*Answering a Question with a Question* is for those who want to understand the covered topics from a psychoanalytic perspective. It is recommended for academic collections and other collections with readers interested in the confluence of Jewish sources and psychology.

Daniel D. Stuhlman, Chicago, IL


Ivan Backer was 10 years old when the Nazis invaded Czechoslovakia in 1939. He was among the 669 children rescued by the Kindertransport organized by Sir Nicholas Winton, a London stockbroker (the subject of the recent film *Nicky’s Children*). Raised in a comfortable and assimilated Jewish family in Prague, Ivan was educated in Christian boarding schools in England and later became an Episcopal priest. He details his childhood in Czechoslovakia, his escape to England, and his family’s relocation to America in 1944. One of the remarkable aspects of this lucid account is the relative ease with which he was able to transition from one situation to another. Backer describes how he moved from one country to the next, from one home and school to another, and even from his religion of birth, Judaism, to his adopted religion, Christianity. He became a parish priest after graduating from Union College and later moved to Hartford, Connecticut, where he held a number of positions at Trinity College. In Hartford he became a community activist and headed several grassroots organizations.

In one chapter Backer asks the question, “Why was I spared?” Other chapters include interviews with his mother, who narrowly escaped the Holocaust, and accounts by two other family members who survived the death march. Recommended for large Holocaust collections; optional for others.

Joyce Levine, AJL Publications Chair
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Ideology and Landscape is a unique reference book which charts the relocation and reburial of the remains of Jewish and Zionist leaders in the land of Israel during the 20th century. According to Jewish law, the possibility of moving a grave is greatly restricted. In general, it is forbidden to reintern a body. Such an event is considered disrespectful to the deceased whose soul can experience pain during the process. Though there are very few exceptions to this rule, one exception to emerge in modern times is reinternment in order to be buried in the Land of Israel. The ideology of such a process has created a kind of “civil religious” law in addition to Jewish halakhah (law).

The book comprises eight fully researched chapters, supported by extensive and illuminating footnotes, tracing the diverse procedures, over the course of the 20th century, of welcoming home recognized Jewish figures after their death. Such historical figures included Theodore Herzl, Zeev Jabotinsky, Haim Nahman Bialik, Baron Binyamin Edmund Rothschild, NILI underground members, ETSEL and LEHI martyrs, to name just a few on an almost endless list.

The book concludes with an explanation of the ideological and symbolic manifestations of Jewish reinternments in various locations of the land of Israel. A meticulous bibliography and index are most helpful in this dense historical volume, and archival photographs bring life to the text.

Ideology and Landscape answers many questions regarding the history of the Zionist movement and the creation of the state of Israel. It should be included in any academic library with works on Jewish history. Hopefully it will be translated into English and other languages.

Nira G. Wolfe, Highland Park, IL


Visitors to Israel usually see the main attractions such as the Old City of Jerusalem, Masada, and the Dead Sea, but there is so much more in this small but historically rich land. Julie Baretz, a tour guide licensed by the Israel Government Tour Guides training program, provides a guide to twenty-one sites off the beaten track where events recounted in the Bible took place. Using the books of Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, Ezra, and Nehemiah, she goes to a number of sites including Jericho, Mount Tabor, Bethlehem, Ein Gedi, Mount Carmel, and Jezreel. The sites are listed on a timeline at the beginning of the book and presented in chronological order. Each entry includes a map, color illustrations, historical context, appropriate passages from the Tanakh (Hebrew Bible), and the author’s commentary on the passage. An appendix contains information on finding the sites, opening hours, and nearby places of interest that tourists may visit. An extensive bibliography offers resources for further text study. This is a wonderful resource for anyone who wishes to add a spiritual dimension to travel in Israel.

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


Author Yemima Belmont intended her book, To Cross the Line with a Bridge, to be an exploration of the rift between religious and secular Israelis and to offer a bridge of understanding and reconciliation between the two groups. Yet, Belmont’s book is an offensive, disjointed repudiation of any Israeli culture that does not to conform to ultra-Orthodox mores. Belmont recommends more compromise on the part of secular Jews than she demands of religious Jews.

Through conversations between Yemima, a teacher, and her student, Ruti, a married Chasidic housewife, whose husband recently renounced Orthodoxy, shaved his payos (sidelocks), stopped observing Shabbos and moved the family out of the religious community, Belmont betrays her view that her ideal Israel is one in which everyone conforms to collective behavior, rather than to the voice of one’s conscience. Her dismissal of those who reject Orthodoxy is offensive and inflammatory and downright frightening.
Reviews of Nonfiction Titles for Adults

To be a true bridge of reconciliation between the religious and secular, Belmont should have engaged in meaningful dialogue with secular Jews and co-written a balanced book. If she had, the book would have been more interesting, thought-provoking for both sides and less of a drudgery to read.

Yossi Gremillion, Broward County Library


Reconsidering Israel-Diaspora Relations is the summary of the same-titled 2013 Klal Yisrael Project held in Tel Aviv University. The project explored the ways in which both Judaism and Jewish identity confront, in the 21st century, a multifaceted Jewish world with multiple challenges.

The volume has five main parts: Diaspora-Israel: Continuities versus Discontinuities; Religiosity and Ethnicity; Gender and Generation; Israelophobia, Anti-Zionism and “Neo”-Antisemitism; and, Configurations of World Jewry and The State of Israel. Each section contains four to five lectures by various contributors (twenty-five in total) from all over the world, and each one is followed by a conclusion and bibliography. The volume includes an elaborate Introduction, an Epilogue and Index.

Reconsidering Israel-Diaspora Relations presents pertinent information to global Jewry. The book follows the continuity and diversity of the changing Jew while defining contemporary Jewish collective identity. This reference volume is appropriate for an academic political and social science collection in a research-oriented institution.

Nira G. Wolfe, Highland Park, IL


This volume of photographs (mostly in color) illustrates how Jews identify themselves and to which group(s) they belong. Photographers Alina and Jeff Bliumis piloted two projects. In the first, they went to Brighton Beach in New York, and asked the Russian-Jewish beach-goers to pick any of 3 signs (Russian, Jewish, American) to serve as the back drop of their photographs. They also gave them the option of creating their own sign labels. In the second project, they went to six locations around the United States and asked people to fill in their own signs and take their picture.

The photographs are beautiful. The second project was particularly interesting since people created their own labels and mentioned their religion, nationality, personality traits, emotional states, family relationships or status, and many parts of their identity.

While the volume is chiefly photographs, there are 5 short essays included as well that address issues of identity. The last essay gives some statistical analysis of the photos.

Part art book, part sociological study, this book is recommended for synagogue or academic libraries.

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


Learning Hebrew can be a daunting task: a new alphabet, guttural sounds that are hard to pronounce, and reading from right to left. The authors of this small volume offer students an entertaining way to supplement their vocabulary with 235 new words. The book is divided into sections by subject: travel, home, cooking, etc. Each word has a cartoon and an English-language sentence containing a word that sounds like the Hebrew word that the authors are teaching: “They shook hands at the market.” The word for market is shuk. It appears in transliteration and in Hebrew with vowels under the illustration. American readers should note that the terms are in British English, so vacation is holiday, queue is line, etc. A master list of all the Hebrew words and an alphabet chart appear at the back of the book. Students who learn visually and tourists in need of a practical language guide will find this useful.

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

Why is it that a beautiful occasion can be marred by something trivial? Often it is because our focus has been diverted or in the (good) stress of the moment, we forget some key things to keep in mind. Going through the life cycle of moments to celebrate, from a birth to a wedding, each situation is described and accompanied by a gorgeous illustration with subtle details. The first page shows the simcha (joyous occasion) bulletin board and reminds the reader to focus on one’s own family and not run from kiddush to kiddush at the expense of family tranquility. From there, the lessons become bigger than the actual event: to have faith in God (birth); not to be shy in asking for advice (Pidyon Haben); to always try to plan ahead and be organized; to be consistent and maintain your principles, even when your customs may seem strange to others, and to try to maintain patience and a sense of humor. The sources that accompany each simcha explain the reasons for the rituals and customs associated with it.

The multi-talented Rabbi Chait is Rosh Yeshiva of Ma’arava Machon Rubin Yeshiva High School (in Israel), an accomplished composer and musician, and with amazing illustrator Gadi Pollack, the creator of many colorful and informative children’s books. This book follows the same large size format (10 3/8 by 15 inches) and by doing so may miss its target market of ba’alei simcha (those who are planning a celebration or observing a milestone). Without a glossary for Hebrew and Yiddish terms and the pictures (men with black hats and few women), the book is recommend for Orthodox libraries.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel


The author is a known writer in the area of Jewish-Catholic relations and has published this volume coinciding with the fiftieth anniversary of the Vatican document Nostra Aetate, which outlined how the Catholic Church can improve relations with the Jewish people as well as with other religions. The book is divided into two main parts: the first being an exposition of improved relations between Jews and Catholics guided by Christian scriptures, and the second being discussion of the path of improved relations since 1965. The book’s conclusion calls for greater efforts among Jews and Catholics as partners in learning about each other. The volume is well researched, as illustrated in the extensive bibliography, but it is clearly written for a Catholic reader. An academic library collecting in this area may find this book an important addition.

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


Warsaw was the home of the largest and most diverse Jewish community in the world, rival only to New York. It was the center of rich varieties of Orthodox Judaism, Jewish Socialists (Bundists), Diaspora Nationalism, Zionism and Polonization. This book’s articles range from the late 18th century to the city’s emergence as a Jewish metropolis within a few generations, to its destruction during the German Nazi occupation and to its tentative re-emergence in the postwar period. The original contributions in this collection draw on primary archival sources relating to Warsaw Jewry’s religious and cultural life, press and publications, political life, and relations with surrounding Polish society. They describe the social and economic conditions, intellectual life, and ethnic relations of this once great diaspora hub of Jewish diversity, religious life, and cultural flourishing.

Outstanding contributions include those of Dynner, who offers a tour de force examination of clothing decrees and the Warsaw career of the first Gerer Rebbe. Nathan Cohen’s excellent article outlines the Warsaw Jewish printing enterprise, including works on the sciences, medicine, lexicography, belle lettres, and shund (lowbrow) literature. Gershon Bacon studies the Warsaw Rabbinate in the interwar period. Highly recommended for all academic libraries.

David B. Levy, Touro College, NY
Reviews of Nonfiction Titles for Adults

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The Sacred Calling:
Forty Years of Women in the Rabbinate
Edited by Rabbi Alysa Mendelson Graf and Rabbi Rebecca Einstein Schorr

Women have been rabbis for over forty years. No longer are women rabbis a unique phenomenon, rather they are part of the fabric of Jewish life. In this anthology, rabbis and scholars from across the Jewish world reflect back on the historic significance of women in the rabbinate and explore issues related to both the professional and personal lives of women rabbis. This collection examines the ways in which the reality of women in the rabbinate has impacted on all aspects of Jewish life, including congregational culture, liturgical development, life cycle ritual, the Jewish healing movement, spirituality, theology, and more.

Songs Ascending
By Rabbi Richard N. Levy

A beautiful, poetic translation by Rabbi Levy of the Book of Psalms, with textual commentary that will take you inside the translation process, helping you understand the choices each psalm’s author seems to have made, and the choices facing us in the 21st century as we try to make each psalm our own. The spiritual commentary asks: to what events, struggles, triumphs in our own lives might this psalm speak? How might this psalm articulate an aspect of our spiritual lives, how might it help us celebrate a holiday or another special day? How might it accompany us when we are ill, or visiting someone who is ill? How might it provide comfort when we have lost someone dear to us?

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The title in part alludes to the light on the first day of divine Creation which, according to tradition, is stored up for the righteous in the world to come. The editor, Wineman, offers a scholarly introduction, a running commentary and notes, a basic glossary, and wide ranging bibliography. This welcome addition to Hasidic works available in English will benefit scholars, educated laymen, and those in the current generation searching for Jewish spirituality. Recommended for synagogue, school and academic libraries.

David B. Levy, Touro College, NY


*The Secret of Chabad* updates the story of Chabad emissaries or *shluchim* covered in Sue Fischkoff’s *The Rebbe’s Army* (2003) from the viewpoint of Chabad insider, Rabbi David Eliezrie. Eliezrie, previously the Chabad rabbi at the University of Miami, is a Chabad shliach in Yorba Linda, California.

The first chapter, an account of the attack on the Chabad house in Mumbai, India along with the life stories of the *shluchim* family Rivka and Gavriel Holtzberg is riveting. Then, focusing on the spread of the network of *shluchim*, the book alternates between history and individual stories. Eliezrie has interviewed everyone involved and provides extensive endnotes, but the book is in want of an index.

*The Secret of Chabad* includes a fascinating history of Chabad’s underground networks in the Soviet Union, the escape of Chabad figures from Russia, and the beginning efforts of the sixth rebbe to send out emissaries, efforts greatly expanded by the last rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson. The book looks also at the expansion of Chabad in the U.S. and the areas of the former Soviet Union, as well as covering Australia, Central America, and more exotic locations. The number of *shluchim* has topped 4,000 in the over twenty years since the rebbe’s death. Other chapters deal with the issue of lighting menorahs in public; Chabad’s relationship to Zionism, the State of Israel, and Israeli politics; local Jewish communal politics; and the current expansion of Chabad in Jewish communities of the former Soviet Union, along with their role in Russian communal politics. Finally, Eliezrie provides insights into the education of the *shluchim*; their motivation; how they fundraise and operate financially; how they educate their children: including home schooling and online classes, and their support system.

Overlooking some Chabad triumphalism, and the author’s minimal treatment of Chabad messianism, this book is highly recommended.

Harvey Sukenic, Hebrew College Library, Newton Centre, MA


The role of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liady (1745-1812), the first Rebbe of Chabad-Lubavitch, in the shaping of this popular Hasidic movement is the focus of a thoughtful biography. Under the guidance of the Maggid of Mezritch, Rabbi Shneur Zalman worked to disseminate his unique philosophy through systemized study and practice and his belief in love for all Jews, regardless of intellect or lineage. Thanks to his organizational skills, he created a vibrant spiritual path accessible to laymen and scholar alike.

Citing many sources from the *Tanya* (the Rebbe’s seminal work) and the Rebbe’s correspondence, the author presents a balanced look at the Rebbe’s many battles with his opponents, called *Misnagdim* (i.e. “mitnagdim,” from the Hebrew verb which means “to oppose.”), many of whom equated Hasidism with the Sabbatean movement that had damaged East European Jewry earlier. His biggest adversary, the Vilna Gaon, was himself quite knowledgeable of mysticism, but felt that Hasidism favored worship at the expense of Torah study. Even among fellow Hasidim the Rebbe had adversaries: Rabbi Baruch of Medzhibozh, who considered Hasidism an esoteric, rather than public, practice reserved for the holy few; and Rabbi Abraham of Kalisk, who disputed the leadership of Chabad in Palestine. The Rebbe’s...
imprisonment in St. Petersburg helped him win over the Russian authorities, who equated Hasidism’s possibly subversive message with the recent French Revolution.

The Rebbe is presented as not only erudite but humble and respectful of his dissenters—one whose personality and character contributed greatly to the legacy and appeal of Chabad-Lubavitch. This engrossing book would do well in all academic/Jewish Studies collections.

Hallie Cantor, Yeshiva University, New York, NY


The essays in this book were written by rabbis and scholars affiliated with Yeshiva University. Each one is connected to the weekday prayers, and they range from long, scholarly chapters to short sermonic articles. The editors have tried hard to make them consistent, while allowing for individual styles. The first part of the book covers general themes within prayer, such as *shukkeling* (shaking in cadence to the prayers), women’s prayer, and prayer with a congregation. The second section examines individual prayers in greater depth. The essay on the *shemoneh esrei* prayer by Rabbi Uri Orlian is an excellent example of a scholarly exposition on the general aspects of this prayer as well as a philosophical study of its various components.

According to the editors of this collective work: “the weekday prayers are at once familiar and mysterious…” thus, while the words of the prayers are so familiar to us that they trip off our tongues, they have an inner meaning that is oftentimes hard to understand and elusive. This book is useful for readers who want to understand the mystery. In addition to its suitability for academic and congregational libraries, many people will want this book for their personal collection.

Daniel D. Stuhlman, Chicago, IL


In *Beyond Sectarianism*, Ferziger puts forward his central thesis that there is a counter intuitive realignment occurring within Orthodoxy. Namely, that the previously sectarian and increasingly confident Haredi Orthodox are become less and less insular whereas, concomitantly, the previously inclusive and open Orthodox have taken a more insular turn in many respects.

The first three chapters provide historical background and a context for the early divisions within early modern orthodoxy, as well as examples of an Orthodoxy tolerant and inclusive of mid twentieth century American life. The fourth chapter begins a new section of the book: one that describes a realignment within Orthodoxy and serves as the primary thesis of the book. This chapter tells the story of Modern Orthodox heritage trips to Holocaust sites in Eastern Europe: an activity that reinforced Haredi self-perception and fostered a movement towards a more particularistic Orthodoxy. Subsequent chapters detail the diminishment of hostilities within the Haredi community towards the Reform movement, and the changes to rabbinical school training signaling an increased openness. The penultimate chapter eight shows how the Haredi community has begun to engage in the type of outreach initiatives initially propounded by the Chabad movement, and the final chapter introduces the reader to the new found prominence of female Haredi leaders in their outreach efforts.

While each chapter of this book is interesting and persuasive on its own, the book still comes together as a compilation of essays on one central topic. Recommended to any student of American History and Orthodox Judaism, as well as to the general reader.

David Tesler, Yonkers, NY

In the summer of 2011, Sirius XM classical music host and programmer Martin Goldsmith plans a six-week trip to France and Germany. He wants to relieve his guilt and his late father’s guilt in not saving his grandfather and uncle from the Holocaust. In May 1939, Goldsmith’s grandfather, Alex Goldschmidt, and his uncle Helmut, boarded the ill-fated MS St. Louis, the ship of nearly 1,000 German-Jewish refugees shunned by Cuba, the United States, and Canada. Alex and Helmut disembarked in Antwerp and were taken to France. They spent the next three years in a series of refugee centers and internment camps before their ultimate murder in Auschwitz. Goldsmith retraced the journey and held a memorial at the family homestead in Oldenburg, Germany.

In a letter to his son and Martin’s father, George, Alex warned that if they weren’t helped, it would be on George’s conscience. Goldsmith admits the prescience of this statement. The warning affects two generations, and Goldsmith seeks to right the wrong as best he can. Working with researchers, authorities, second generation Holocaust survivors, and others, Goldsmith pieces together the horrific journey of his grandfather and uncle that culminates with a public commemoration: Alex’s wake. At the same time, Goldsmith is able to let go of the family guilt.

This memoir deepens the narrative that was first shown to a postwar readership in the 1974 Voyage of the Damned by Gordon Thomas and Max Witt. Goldsmith’s well-written and well-researched account is personal and poignant. More than a Holocaust memoir, Alex’s Wake, is a second-generation memoir that tells of two parallel journeys. Photos round out the narrative and a bibliography demonstrates the research.

Barbara Krasner, freelance author, editor, speaker

*Eight Questions of Faith* is Rabbi Niles Goldstein’s personal memoir and introspection trip into his life and beliefs. Midlife, he confronts marital, employment, and location challenges, and turning to the Bible for solace, guidance, and answers, Rabbi Goldstein encounters more questions that teach him invaluable human life lessons.

Rabbi Goldstein’s eight questions of faith are: (1) How do we live when we know we are going to die? (2) Why is humility so important? (3) Are we responsible for other people? (4) What is the purpose of human life? (5) Is some knowledge too dangerous to possess? (6) Has God abandoned us? (7) How do we return when we have lost our way? (8) (8) What happens to us after we die?

Throughout the book, Goldstein utilizes the Hebrew Bible, universal religious and spiritual works, as well as philosophical searches, to seek out and arrive at some conclusions. His own answer is that nothing is certain and life constantly provides humans with the opportunity to improve their characters and lives.

*Eight Questions of Faith* provokes readers to examine the meaning of their own life. The book should be part of public library collections as well as the spiritual and psychological departments of academic libraries.

"Nira G. Wolfe, Highland Park, IL"


*Meditations at Twilight on Genesis* is a commentary on each parsha (chapter) in the book of B’reshit (Genesis). Rabbi Granatstein provides his own insights and wisdom along with a wide range of traditional sources, including the Talmud; Midrashic classics, such as B’reshit Rabba, Pirkei de Rabbi Eliezer, and Midrash Tanhuma; Jewish philosophical works, such as Rambam’s *Moreh Nevukhim* (Guide for the Perplexed) and the Zohar; as well as the commentaries of Rashi, and Ibn Ezra, to name but a few.

This book by an Orthodox rabbi is not about ritual, rather it has universal appeal for all Jews. The chapters are short and provide a good supplementary commentary to the parshot in the Chumash (Torah) and ideas for discussion at the Shabbat table. For example, In Parashat Vaychi, which is the final chapter in Genesis, Granatstein cites the story of Joseph as to show how our ancestors strove to maintain their Jewish identity and how we might learn from them. Thus, Joseph, who had become second in command in Egypt, made the Israelites promise that he would be buried in Canaan. Joseph never forgot that he was a Hebrew and of the land that God promised our forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Recommended for any synagogue library.

"Ellen Share, Librarian, Washington Hebrew Congregation"


Svetlana Grobman, a Soviet émigré now living in the U.S., writes of her childhood during the Khrushchev era. Sensitive and bookish, “Svetka” led a double life: one as a Russian under Communism, which was recovering from the Stalin years; the other as a Jew, albeit secular, under anti-Semitism. She recounts being called “kike spawn” by drunken workmen and her mother’s warning to “stick to your own kind.” Exposure to her heritage came from Yiddish-speaking grandparents who recalled pogroms under the Tsar and the Revolution, and the killings at Babi Yar. Through encounters with friends and relatives of intermarriage, she learned that those with non-Jewish fathers had the advantage of claiming “Russian” on a passport.

The typo-laden copy might have benefited from more careful editing; nevertheless, the narrative is vivid, evoking bleakness with childlike wonder: drab food and weather; decrepit communal apartment buildings; fear of spies and informers. Grobman’s “traitor’s education” began when, witnessing the poverty of an elderly babysitter, she questioned why the government proclaimed there were no poor
people in Russia. Disappointingly, the memoir ends in 1966, when Svetlana was fifteen. An account of the years up until her departure in 1990, and the changes under Gorbachev, might have been equally fascinating (or depressing), although mentally Grobman had left the Soviet Union long earlier. The book ends with her entrance into high school and her late grandmother’s echoing words: “We’re all survivors.”

Engaging, though short on Jewish content, this memoir would interest anyone curious about that time and place. Recommended for public libraries or Russian studies collections.

Hallie Cantor, Yeshiva University, New York, NY


The authors of this book are co-founders of the Kohenet Hebrew Priestess Institute. Their book aims to further the conversation about re-integrating the role and history of women spiritual leaders into Jewish life. After an introduction presenting the history of the Hebrew priestess, starting with biblical figures such as Deborah and Miriam and rediscovering the forgotten women in-between the lines of rabbinic works, it presents thirteen chapters exploring specific priestess paths or models of leadership. Each chapter includes a history of that particular priestess or spiritual path (e.g., the role of “mother”), examples of contemporary Hebrew priestesses who embody that path, a practical priestess exercise, and other resources. Extensive endnotes accompany each chapter, as well as a lengthy bibliography. The Hebrew Priestess is an important contribution to feminist spiritual practice and leadership. It includes personal stories, and provides insight into Jewish history, legend and myth and as such is a valuable addition to Judaica collections in academic, public, temple and synagogue libraries.

Susan Freiband, Retired library educator; volunteer Temple librarian, Arlington, Virginia


This work, published in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, presents twelve essays on the subject of the postwar confrontation launched by Jewish individuals and communities against those Jews who had collaborated with the Nazis. After the war, Jewish Honor Courts were set up by Jewish communities and survivor organizations to deal with the issue of collaboration with the Nazis and wartime conduct of individuals. Some of these Jewish Courts emerged in several European countries because Jewish leaders wished to gain control of the cases of presumed Jewish collaborators from state courts, on the premise that Jews should judge fellow Jews and only a Jewish court could render justice. The new State of Israel created the Nazis and Nazi Collaborators (Punishment) Law in 1950, with the aim to identify and punish Jewish collaborators among the immigrants.

This subject has been rarely explored in other books. The contributors to this volume approach the topic from different perspectives: Jewish Studies, political, social and cultural history, law, literature and memory studies. Based on trial records, published and unpublished testimonies, diaries, newspapers and scholarly literature, this book is an important contribution to the history of Jewish retribution. Recommended to all libraries.

Sonia Smith, McGill University, Montreal, Canada


An important area of study about rabbinic culture in Babylonia has been its relationship with those cultures that surrounded it. In recent years much research has focused on Persian influences. Prof. Kalmin focuses on the influence of the culture of the Christian and pagan Roman East. He brings examples of stories in the Babylonian Talmud that do not have full parallels in the Jerusalem Talmud.
Reviews of Nonfiction Titles for Adults

or in Midrashim produced in the Land of Israel, but which do have parallels in Christian and related literature. For example, part of the story about the translation of the Bible into Greek as it appears in the Babylonian Talmud does not appear in other Jewish sources, including the Jerusalem Talmud, Josephus and Philo. There are however parallels in the Christian literature of the Roman East.

Kalmin is a very cautious scholar. He knows that we can’t always know if the influence is direct. He does a fine job of carefully analyzing the texts and parallels that he presents. His approach is quite convincing, and will hopefully encourage others to pursue similar areas of research.

Recommended for academic libraries, with interests in rabbinics or ancient Jewish history.

Jim Rosenbloom, Brandeis University


This book is a guide for Jewish parents on how to help their kids connect to their Jewish faith and develop their spirituality. The authors seem to have a very special family of which they should be proud, particularly as their own personal situation provides a great model for their teaching. Jewish Spiritual Parenting is divided into two parts and has 11 chapters including, “Partnership, pluralism, and Peace”, “Transmitting our Heritage through the Generations,” and “Living Holy Lives.” Great emphasis is placed on the themes of partnership, authentic spirituality (specifically our own relationship with God), and the uniqueness of each child. The writing exudes warmth, sincerity, and humor, and there are many personal stories throughout. Suggestions for further reading are provided at the back of the book. Recommended for all Jewish libraries, but particularly suitable for synagogue collections.

Debbie Feder, Director, LRC, Ida Crown Jewish Academy

Levi ben Gershom (Gersonides) lived in Provence during the first half of the 14th century. His commentaries to the Bible are famous, as is his philosophical tract *The Wars of the Lord*. Famous, but rarely understood in all their depth. Gersonides’ prose writings are highly technical and unwieldy, while his thought was startlingly original and independent, and these two characteristics conspire to confuse and discourage his casual reader. Sara Klein-Braslavi, who has published many important studies on the philosophical and exegetical aspects of Gersonides and of his role model, Maimonides, presents in this volume a close reading of some of the most interesting parts of Gersonides’ biblical commentary—the sections devoted to Adam and Eve. She pays careful attention to structure as well as content, explicating the ways in which Gersonides built his commentary and how he used his sources. She makes extensive use of a vitally important but understudied component of the Gersonidean oeuvre—his supercommentaries on the Aristotelian corpus, which were written not directly on Aristotle’s books but on the commentaries to his books by the medieval Islamic philosopher Averroes. Reading Gersonides’ works intertextually allows Klein-Braslavi to expose common themes that run through the thinker’s various books and to illuminate gnomic lines in the biblical commentary from more expansive discussions in the philosophical-scientific works. This book is of crucial importance to students of medieval Jewish philosophy and philosophical Bible exegesis.

*Pinchas Roth, Talmud Department at Bar Ilan University.*


*Reading the Sacred Text* provides a short overview of the Five Books of Moses. The book’s purpose as stated by the author is, “a serious reading based on the proposition that the Torah says what it means and means what it says.” Well written and easy for anyone somewhat familiar with the Torah’s content to understand, Lichtenstein discusses only the plain and literal meaning of the text. Each sacred book is treated as a unique literary unit with a distinct beginning and ending. *Reading the Sacred Text* is recommended for all libraries because it is unique in its literal interpretation of Biblical text and it is extremely interesting and enjoyable to read.

*Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, OH*


Diana Linden presents an in-depth study of Ben Shahn’s New Deal murals (1933-1941) within the context of American Jewish history, labor history, and the impact of race and immigration on Americanism. Linden is an historian of American art, and she based her doctoral dissertation on Ben Shahn. In this book, Linden focuses on Shahn as one of the premier muralists commissioned by the New Deal programs, and a central figure in twentieth century American art. The introduction includes biographical information and presents the reasons for studying the Shahn murals in the context of the formation of American Jewish identity and history during the New Deal era. The main section of the work discusses selected murals in New York City, New Jersey, the Bronx, Queens and St. Louis. Numerous illustrations, mostly in color, are supplied, as well as extensive notes for each chapter, a detailed bibliography, and an index. *Ben Shahn’s New Deal Murals* is an important contribution to the history of twentieth century American art, as well as to Jewish studies, and a valuable addition to academic library collections.

*Susan Freiband, Retired library educator, volunteer Temple librarian, Arlington, Virginia*

This wide-ranging, well written, heartfelt, and absorbing book stems from the collaborative efforts of historian Suzanne Rutland and journalist Sam Lipski.

The book touches on big players such as righteous gentile Bob Hawke who challenged in a timely way the Russian leadership on behalf of refusniks who had been jailed for their struggle. Australian Jewry as portrayed in the book participated in the international struggle for over thirty years (1959-1989) to mobilize the international protest movement to help free the about three million Russian Jews, allowing about one million of them to eventually emigrate to Israel. What stands out is the crucial role of the personal crusade of Isi Leibler and his wife Naomi on behalf of Russian Jewry against all odds. The book brings alive the heroic exemplary efforts of the Australian Jewish community ranging from religious to secular, young and old, and its leaders who played a role in the movement to free Russian Jewry.

The book draws on an array of primary and secondary sources. Rutland researched in Jerusalem, Sydney and Canberra, and she mined the vast Leibler collection: a private Soviet Jewry archive. Leiber was Lipski’s ex-colleague and friend and an important Zionist. Rutland was given unprecedented access to Prime Ministers’ and Cabinet papers, previously unavailable Foreign Affairs cables, and Australian Security Intelligence Organization (ASIO) wiretap transcripts.

Recommended for all libraries.

*David B. Levy, Touro College, NY*

The mountains of Israel in the title refer to the areas of the Holy Land apportioned to the tribes of Manasseh, Ephraim, Benjamin and Judah, thus including the biblical heartland of Judea and Samaria including Shiloh, Shechem, Hebron, and Jerusalem. The book opens with a description of “The Kingdom of Israel,” which includes information about the king, the people, the law and the land. Clear maps of “The Land of the 12 Tribes” follows. Then each area is introduced with a focus on its place on the map and a short description, followed by double spreads with a quote from the Torah, Prophets or Psalms on the left and a photograph on the right. Between these sections are stories and folktales, some about Chasidic rabbis.

Something may have been lost in the translation, but the book seems disconnected. While the color photographs are clear and capture the beauty of the land of Israel, they often do not match up well with the accompanying text, like a picture of a donkey next to a quote from Ezekiel about the return to Samaria, and a shot of modern-day Shechem (Nablus—an Arab city) next to a quote about Joseph’s burial there. The Chasidic stories relate neither to the photographs nor the biblical quotes. Reading the acknowledgements and visiting the websites listed, it becomes clear that the book is intended for Scandinavian Christians. There is no overt Christian content, and the focus is on biblical Israel. The book would make an excellent gift and may be useful as a teaching resource, but it is an optional purchase for most Jewish libraries.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel


Intellectual fashion increasingly tends toward a materialistic worldview, according to which there is nothing other than matter, consciousness is either an illusion or at least an epiphenomenon of matter, there is no free will, and meaning or transcendence are nothing but wishful thinking. In the more vulgar versions of the new atheists, religion and ultimate meaning are ridiculed, even as the new atheists understand little of the religious worldviews they reject. In more sophisticated versions, materialists point to the successes of the physical sciences in explaining the universe, and point to the failures if not incoherence of much metaphysical thinking.

In response, Alan Mittleman offers a two pronged approach. First, he points to some of the challenges and internal contradictions in a thoroughgoing materialist worldview. He asks questions such as: If consciousness is an illusion, who or what is experiencing that illusion? Whatever one makes of the ultimate meaning of free will, human beings experience themselves as choosing. Can a human being go through life denying it? If ethics are nothing but social constructs, then do we have any real criteria for distinguishing genuine good from genuine evil?

Furthermore, he presents Jewish sources that reflect on meaning, choice, transcendence, and which can offer a religious-humanistic worldview for the 21st century. Following a respected tradition in modern Jewish thought (think Buber, Rosenzweig, Heschel, and Soloveitchik), Mittleman does not primarily argue that this worldview is true. Instead, he puts it forward as way of being in the world that can be compelling for religiously inclined individuals and communities.

Part of the Tikva Fund’s “Library of Jewish Ideas,” *Human Nature and Jewish Thought* is smart, thoughtful, well-written, and an important contribution of Judaism’s attempt to offer an alternative to the flat materialism so popular in many circles today.

Yoel Finkelman, Author, *Strictly Kosher Reading: Popular Literature and the Condition of Contemporary Orthodoxy*
Reviews of Nonfiction Titles for Adults

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The synagogue, irrespective of its affiliation, defines its goals in terms of fulfilling and supporting the spiritual needs of the community. However, underlying these activities are financial imperatives. *New Membership & Financial Alternatives for the American Synagogue* is a practical guide for handling the sensitive subject of financing synagogues in America.

Two rabbis are the authors, with a foreword by Rabbi-Dr. Ron Wolfson and an afterword by Rabbi Dan Judson. Debbie Joseph, a congregational consultant, added a checklist for determining the appropriate model for a specific synagogue, and “Ten Things to Do Following the Decision to Adopt a New Membership.”

The authors specify who should read the book, and how to use it. Each chapter includes examples from various appropriate synagogues, and ends with space for writing notes, implementing steps, and asking questions.

The Olitzky Rabbis recognize that every Jew is welcome to the Jewish community and the synagogue. However, is it a new era for the synagogue? Is it the time for change? Posing these questions, the Rabbis enumerate 25 reasons to join synagogues. Chapter notes and list of resources (books and organizations) conclude the book.

*New Membership & Financial Alternatives for the American Synagogue* is a useful resource that will help synagogue financial management explore new approaches to synagogue funding.

Nira G. Wolfe, Highland Park, IL


This new volume in the “Hebrew Masterworks” series (*Sifrut mofet ivrit*) continues the goal of the series, to provide classic works of Hebrew literature to a popular audience. *Piyyut* is Hebrew devotional poetry, written to be incorporated into the statutory prayer service. The early period in the development of that poetry stretched from the fifth century until the tenth, originating in the Land of Israel but spreading to the Diaspora. These early works are notoriously dense. They are rich with intertextual references and complex wordplays. Extensive academic studies have been written about their sources, themes, authorship and poetics. Presenting such texts to a wide non-specialist audience is a daunting task, and Münz-Manor has carried it off with grace. His comments are restrained, but they are written in plain Hebrew, revealing the intent of each line without plumbing its depths. The introductory sections, to each author and to each poem, are similarly short and to the point. Much of his work lies beneath the surface—in the collection of these poems (many of which were published in obscure publications over the past century), the selection of compositions most likely to interest and appeal to the contemporary reader, and in deciding which scholarly debates to tackle and which to leave for further reading. While this understated volume does not break new ground, it will hopefully bring a new audience to these ancient songs.

Pinchas Roth, Talmud Department, Bar-Ilan University.


The thesis of this groundbreaking book is that Israel and the American Jewish community initiated an unprecedented mobilization on behalf of the Soviet Jews, and the U.S. government embraced the struggle once it was convinced that the Jews’ emigration was a humanitarian issue requiring intervention. The secret orchestrator of this drama of competing agendas was the Israeli secret liaison bureau office named Nativ, (founded by Shaul Avigur and Isser Harel, the founding fathers of the
Israeli intelligence community) that clandestinely since 1953 sought to secure the immigration of Jews to Israel, effectively building up the Israeli population with a highly educated immigrant base, in an unprecedented “knowledge transfer” of intellectual capital assets.

Peretz’s research draws on primary sources from Israel, several European countries, the former Soviet Union, and the United States. Analysis is not limited to policy makers but includes broad social and intellectual movements. She draws on interviews with a number of the players conducted in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

The book contains a list of the directors and emissaries of the Lishka, a graph of Soviet Jewish emigration from 1954 through 1993, the text of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment by which the U.S. leveraged economic benefits to the Soviet Union via trade and credits to promote freer emigration, graphs of “dropouts,” i.e., Soviet Jews who claimed to emigrate to Israel but made an end run for the U.S., and US-USSR trade, a bibliography, a timeline, a list of acronyms, and an index of personal names.

Recommended for all libraries.

David B. Levy, Touro College, NY


While many Holocaust memoirs deal with personal war experiences, I Didn’t Tell Them Anything: The Wartime Secrets of An American Girl is told from the perspective of the daughter of survivors. Aleena Rieger was born during World War II in Kazakhstan and does not remember her early life. Before her parents died, she began to ask questions about her origins and her family’s wartime experiences. Originally from Poland, her family ended up in Siberia and somehow escaped via train to Kazakhstan, where they spent the war years. Aleena traveled as an adult to Kazakhstan and began to piece together her family’s journey to the United States based on what her parents’ had told her. She had the opportunity to meet people who had been in Kazakhstan the same time as her parents and find out more about what life was like for them.

Although the book contains information about the author’s life from when she came to the United States, the bulk of the book is dedicated to her parent’s history. Recommended for any library collection that contains Holocaust memoirs and is interested in possibly diversifying their collection.

Laura Schutzman, Hebrew Academy of Nassau County, Nathan and Doris Liebman Memorial Library, Uniondale, NY


Dr. Norman Stillman is one of the leading scholars of Jewish history, especially the history of the Jews in the Islamic World from pre-modern to modern times.

This excellent collection raises questions about the remarkable flexibility of Jewish law in the day to day life of Jews in Arab lands; Jewish cultural life, particularly material and musical culture; the role of women in these different societies; Antisemitism and Jewish responses to hatred against the Jews, up to modern political Zionism. The unique essay on the economic history of the Portuguese Jews of Bayonne in 18th century by Gerard Nahon, drawing on archival holdings of the archives of Bayonne and archives of the Pyrenees and various manuscripts, is outstanding.

The book includes a select bibliography of the Norman Stillman’s publications arranged chronologically. Highly recommended for all academic libraries.

David B. Levy, Touro College, NY
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In this new work Schaposchnik demonstrates that there has been a dramatic change in the field of Inquisition studies. No longer is it universally accepted that the sole function of the Inquisition was to inflict torture and death on those accused of Judaizing. Rather, Schaposchnik asserts that the Inquisition was a “highly complex institution” developed for the purposes of collecting revenue and instilling respect for and fear of the church and crown among the nobility and the peasants alike. Its focus was to “eradicate certain practices considered heretical or unacceptable according to Christian religion and morality…”

Basing her conclusions on information derived from the archives of the Lima Inquisition, Schaposchnik argues that the institution’s motives are discernible in their tactical use of punishment to extract revenues as well as altering the ideologies of its victims. She references studies that show that relatively few of those brought before the tribunal were executed. However, her focus is qualitative rather than quantitative. Schaposchnik is concerned with the cases of individual Crypto-Jews—following their trial proceedings and highlighting any “agency” the prisoners were able to exercise on their own behalf (those held in the Inquisition prisons were often given considerable time to mount a defense). She also notes that executions disproportionately affected “minorities.” The trial, torture and public execution of a small number of New Christians / Crypto-Jews sent a strong message to the rest of the community.

Replete with notes and bibliographies, this book presents a significant contemporary view of Inquisition history. Deviating as it does from earlier depictions, it is an important new acquisition for academic libraries.

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


Daniel Silva’s thriller novels featuring Israeli spy Gabriel Allon are perennial best-sellers. In this short volume Stan Schatt provides overviews and insights on all thirteen of them.

Schatt begins with a biographical summary of Silva’s life, followed by two chapters that include quick insights into the author’s working method, and some over-arching themes of his work. Schatt then provides chapters based on each of the novels, including the latest book, The English Girl (2015). Each chapter begins with a “Background” section and a quick “Plot Summary” followed by short discussions on a variety of topics related both to the specific novels and to more general ideas. The topics range from “Silva’s Writing Craft” to “Loyalty and Fidelity as a Theme” to “A Commentary on Anti-Semitism” and “Justice versus Vengeance”.

Silva clearly does substantial homework for his novel writing, and the topics he has chosen as themes for his novels indicate that he is trying to stay ahead of the headlines, while reflecting on the realities of the moment. Each chapter in Schatt’s book ends with a set of discussion questions and several web citations, usually referring to reviews of the particular book. The final chapter, “Silva Views the World,” summarizes Silva’s opinions on a number of countries featured in his books.

Neither the writing nor the ideas here are complex. Schatt seems to have aimed his book at the leaders of reading groups, who want an overview of Silva’s work and ideas for discussion topics. In the end, this is an optional purchase; it may depend on whether there is a Silva fan-base in your institution.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA


A thought-provoking if not provocative study, Marc Shapiro’s Changing the Immutable examines the way in which some groups of Orthodox Jews rewrite the past to conform to their contemporary religious worldview. In an expansive introduction the author outlines the approach of what he terms “Orthodox history.” He cites one writer as follows: “… What ethical purpose is served by preserving a realistic historic picture? Nothing but the satisfaction of curiosity. We should tell ourselves and our children the good memories of the good people…We do not need realism, we need inspiration from our forefathers in order to pass it on to posterity.”
According to Shapiro producing “Orthodox history” means omitting inconvenient facts such as a famous sage’s mistakes or a respectful relationship between two leaders who are ideologically opposed. It requires censorship of their biographies, writings and even the photographs that they appear in. Even perfectly standard orthodox texts from the past might require modification to fit present needs. Shapiro describes different types of censorship and explores the concept of truth. He points out “truth, subjective concept as it is, may be understood differently, depending on the author’s own vision of that concept.”

Following the introduction Shapiro devotes chapters to the “censorship” of works of Jewish philosophy and of halakhah. Among the examples cited in the realm of halakhah is the deliberate omission in a reprint of R. Moses Sofer’s commentary on the Talmud of an opinion which would imply that the end of the Sabbath was thirty-five minutes after sunset (contrary to more stringent opinions). Other censored responsa include leniencies with regard to the wine of non-Jews and the covering of a married woman’s hair. Shapiro also details the treatment of Samson Raphael Hirsch and Abraham Isaac Kook by “Orthodox history.”

In this work Shapiro seeks to demonstrate that some orthodox Jews have been active in molding history and Jewish law in order to achieve their own vision of truth and righteousness. An illuminating work, Shapiro’s Changing the immutable is an invaluable addition to collections concerned with Jewish intellectual history.

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


The Rise of the Israeli Right is University of London Emeritus Professor Colin Shindler’s third tome on the Zionist Right (previous works include Israel, Likud, and the Zionist Dream and The Triumph of Military Zionism). The latest book rightly spends a lot of time on the figure of Odessa-born Ze’ev Jabotinsky, the founder of Revisionist Zionism. Shindler views Jabotinsky as a complex figure, combining Hebrew nationalism and a “universalist” intellectual outlook. He highlights Jabotinsky’s sometimes strained relations with his younger, more radical followers such as Abba Ahimeir. The book moves on to Menachem Begin’s leadership of the Etzel underground and the Herut political party. Shindler discusses how Begin, especially during his premiership, brought more of a traditional Jewish sensibility into Israeli politics, a notable difference from the secular, socialist ethos of Labor Zionism. He pays close attention to Begin’s strategy of building the Likud through Herut’s alliance and unification with other parties. The book then deals with the fracturing of this alliance along religious, ethnic, and ideological lines even while the Right as a whole was coming, in Mr. Shindler’s estimation, to dominate Israeli politics. The book is informative, detailed but readable. Sometimes the author assumes too much prior knowledge on the part of the reader; for example, he mentions without explanation the “Quartet Road Map.” The tone is largely neutral and objective though occasionally Shindler’s lack of sympathy with the Zionist Right comes through. Recommended for any collection on the State of Israel.

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

Rabbi Spitz’s goal is “to surprise you with ancient wisdom and imaginative insights that move you toward greater inner ease and effectiveness” and to provide you with “a fuller sense of awareness of your inner life and greater integration and strengthening of the physical, emotional, intellectual and intuitive dimensions of self.” To do this, the chapters of *Increasing Wholeness* focus on body, becoming fully engaged, “alertness to reality,” intuition, the power to touch (which discusses giving on a personal level and as commanded in the mitzvah of tzedakah) and “inner peace” and each chapter is full of ideas gleaned from many religions, stories, and practices. Rabbi Spitz also includes many personal experiences to illustrate his points. The book details several kinds of guided meditations, which may be enhanced with videos from Rabbi Spitz’s YouTube channel. An index of practices is included after the chapter notes, and he lists them by category: awareness, blessings, encouraging daily change, exploring new perspectives, guided imagery, and relaxation and balance. An extensive list of suggestions for further reading by subject accompanies the text.

Rabbi Spitz is a pulpit rabbi in California as well as the author of other books on aspects of Jewish spirituality. He strikes a nice balance between deep philosophical thoughts, non-traditional practices and exercises, and common sense. Meditation using the Shema and practices using the Amidah prayer draw on Jewish spirituality. His five steps for making change provide a doable framework and include celebration when meeting one’s goals. Spitz draws on a variety of sources both secular and religious, and traditionalists may be off put by many references to Hinduism and Buddhism. But as a guide to self-help and self-fulfillment, the book is thoughtful and well-organized and is highly recommended to libraries whose patrons are interested in the subject matter.

*Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel*


Jennifer Teege’s has written her life memoir together with Nikola Sellmair. Teege writes in the first person while Sellmair comments and adds information in the third person. Both interweave their writings in a way that is smooth and efficient, and the high quality of the writing helps to convey this incredible but amazingly true story.

Jennifer Teege, the daughter of a German woman, Monika Goeth and a Nigerian father, was born in Germany in 1970. Her mother put her in a Catholic orphanage when she was four weeks old. Fostered by a family at the age of three and later adopted, Teege grew up with the challenges of being a black girl in a white family in Germany and only had minimal contact with her estranged biological mother and beloved maternal Jewish grandmother, Ruth Irene Kalder Goeth. Teege’s college years were spent in Israel where she learnt fluent Hebrew and made lasting friendships.

Back in Germany, at the age of 38, married with two sons, Teege discovered by chance that her grandfather had been Amon Goeth, the Nazi mass murderer who was the commandant of Plaszow Concentration Camp. The discovery was shocking, confusing and depressing.

*My Grandfather Would Have Shot Me* presents Teege’s coming to terms with her past. It also provides the reader with a moving lesson in the history of the Holocaust and its aftermath. The book concludes with lists of resources about Amon Goeth, Ruth Irene Goeth (Amon’s mistress) and their daughter Monica, as well as resources about other descendants of perpetrators. Teege’s memoir is a worthy acquisition for a public library World War II collection. It will motivate readers to explore and read more about what happened in World War II, as well as help them to learn about the impact and implication of unusual personal happenstances.

*Nira G. Wolfe, Highland Park, IL*

Rebbe by prolific author, Joseph Telushkin, is a well written and highly readable biography of Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, the seventh Lubavicher Rebbe. Telushkin’s father was the Rebbe’s accountant, so Telushkin has an insider’s view and therefore an informed opinion of the Chabad movement and the Rebbe. Through anecdotes and personal recollections of Jews and non-Jews who were close to the Rebbe or who were granted a private audience with him, we learn about the Rebbe’s monumental global impact, his innovations, his brilliance and his keen understanding of American culture and the American psyche. In addition to being extremely interesting and readable as a biography, the comprehensive index allows *Rebbe* to be used as a reference tool. In extensive endnotes, Telushkin references and cross-references the reminiscences of the people he interviews. In both a glossary and within the text itself, Telushkin explains Jewish rituals and Yiddish and Hebrew terms which makes the book accessible to a broad audience. The important events in the Rebbe’s life are summarized in a separate timeline at the end of the book, beginning with his birth in the southern Ukraine in 1902 and ending with his death in Brooklyn in 1994. *Rebbe* is highly recommended for all libraries: it recounts the accomplishments and life of the seventh Lubavicher Rebbe in a clear and understandable manner, allowing a wider audience to understand why he is so revered.

*Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, Ohio*


The essays in this book are expanded versions of papers presented at the 9th Summer Colloquium of the European Association for Jewish Studies in Oxford, July, 2008. Its focus is on new research into medieval and early Modern Hebrew linguistics across cultures. The development of Hebrew linguistic literature has traditionally been seen as linear, containing four distinct periods. This book challenges that notion, bringing together essays that explore the geographical, linguistic, cultural and disciplinary contexts of various topics within Hebrew linguistic studies, and Saverio Campanini’s essay, “The Quest for the Holiest Alphabet in the Renaissance” is a good example of this cross-disciplinary approach.

The first section of *A Universal Art* examines theories and practices of linguistic analysis and the development of Hebrew terminology (grammatical and mathematical). These essays focus on specific lexicons and Pentateuch translations. The second part of the book examines the legacy of medieval Hebrew linguistics, looking at the life of a grammarian (Shabbethai Sofer of Perzemysl) and linguistic fragments from the “Italian Geniza;” that is, Italian archives and libraries which contain books bound with discarded or dismembered leaves from medieval Hebrew manuscripts. The essay devoted to this subject is accompanied by excellent reproductions of the six examples cited. The remaining two chapters address early Christian Hebrew studies: the “holiest alphabet” referenced above, and the examination of an unpublished Hebrew-Latin grammar created by medieval Christian scholars.

Recommended for academic libraries that support Hebrew linguistic literature studies.

*Suzanne Smailes, Wittenberg University, Springfield, OH*
Reviews of Literature Titles for Adults


This novel is roughly divided into three sections. In the first, the author focuses on Malcolm and his relationship to his partner Denis who is beginning to suffer from the effects of Alzheimer’s disease. Malcolm divides his time between their apartment and his job as a hairdresser in a shop that caters to older women. In the second part, the salon where he works is sold to a hip owner who brings in a new batch of young stylists including the naïve Alison and the brash gay Christian. The author focuses on the lives and relationships of the stylists. When Christian is killed in an apparent hate crime, Alison becomes unhinged. Linking the murder with the Holocaust, Alison begins obsessing about Auschwitz and in the third section of the book convinces Malcolm to travel to Poland with her to visit the camp.

Since none of the main characters are Jewish, and the Holocaust is shown as an archetype of hate crimes, rather than as a Jewish experience, this is an optional purchase for Jewish libraries.

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


A split second decision changes the destinies of Chiara Ravello, her sister Cecilia and a young Jewish boy, Daniele who, with his family, is being deported to the concentration camps. Risking her life and the lives of her sister and the young boy, Chiara becomes Daniele’s surrogate mother. Flash forward some thirty years later, a young Welsh girl named Maria, finds a letter mentioning Daniele Levi. Her mother informs her that Daniele is her biological father and an angry, confused and despondent Maria travels to Italy to find out more about him.

Baily’s *Early One Morning* is beautifully written, but the plot is overdone and lacks substance. For such a dense book, very little information is given as to Daniele’s rebellion, his troubles with drugs, and his troubled relationship with Chiara and Maria’s mother. Baily’s tale goes back and forth between World War II and 1974, and Daniele becomes little more than a background figure in his own story. Baily misses many opportunities to explore the experiences of a hidden child, orphaned by the death of his parents and raised with a different identity. Instead, this story is bogged down in appreciation of Italian culture and disappoints the reader who seeks a deeper and stronger story.

Yossi Gremillion, Broward County Library


While graphic novels with Jewish themes have been familiar mainstays in our culture for a number of years now, genuine familiarity with their creators is often limited to Spiegelman, Eisner, Pekar, Crumb, or Sheinkin. Notwithstanding the brilliance of these author/illustrators, Steven Bergson has done remarkable research to present the ‘hidden gems’ of Jewish “commix,” bringing us extraordinary examples of the works from 47 fantastic artists.

Bergson tells us that he was driven to compile this amazing collection because he believes “that a comix anthology could be a wonderful way to bring certain Jewish stories to life, while also gathering together the work of a talented group of artists and writers.” He is absolutely correct. The diversity of this assortment of tales conveys every aspect of our storytelling heritage, everything from ancient myths, biblical allusions, historic episodes, Yiddishkeit tales, and modern thinking is sampled in this significant volume.

This anthology beautifully enlightens the modern adult reader, not only to the variety of lessons and adventures that comprise our tradition, but serves to broaden our appreciation for an artistic approach. Though graphic novels are indeed popular with young adults, many of the samplings here are quite risqué; hence *The Jewish Comix Anthology* is truly for adult readers only.

Etta D. Gold, Congregational Librarian, Temple Beth Am
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Dr. Celia Rosenbloom is an art history professor living on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. A typical lapsed Jew, Celia participates in Jewish traditions, but finds her own modern way to create Jewish ritual. When Celia’s daughter Sharon, a former New Yorker moves to a remote town in British Columbia to practice law, Celia thinks it’s the worst idea in the world. Sharon invites her to visit and Celia reluctantly goes, not expecting to have a good time. Yet, once there she finds not only an established town, albeit a small one, but a Jewish community with a rabbi committed to enhancing the community. Through the course of events, living among the members of this unusual Jewish community, including the development of an unexpected romantic relationship, Celia’s perspective on her life and her religious aspirations are changed.

Due to the book’s attitude towards religious observance, I do not recommend this book for a religious clientele, but find that it would be suitable for a more liberal synagogue or public library.

Laura Schutzman, Hebrew Academy of Nassau County, Nathan and Doris Liebman Memorial Library, Uniondale, NY


Bob Morris is happily engaged in his writing, his partner, and his dog when his brother calls him to their mother’s deathbed. He shows up reluctantly, unwilling to interrupt his vacation. When he finally arrives and learns that there is nothing that the doctors can do for her, he encourages his father and older brother to start palliative care. Throughout this ordeal, he becomes aware that he is an impatient son. After his mother’s death, he strives to be a better son to his widowed father. But this turns out to be a harder task than he anticipated. Morris looks for the humor in his father’s and his own search for meaning in their lives. Recommended for larger collections.

Sheryl Stahl, Senior Associate Librarian, Frances-Henry Library, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Los Angeles.


Ronny Someck, born in Baghdad in 1951, immigrated to Israel with his family as a young child. He has published 11 volumes of poetry in Hebrew. His poems have been translated into many languages and he has won numerous awards, both in Israel and internationally. The poems in this slim volume, appearing in both Hebrew and English on facing pages, were translated by Hana Inbar and Robert Manaster who also wrote the introduction.

In their introduction, the translators characterize Someck as a bridge builder. He is of the East as well as of the West, Sephardi in heritage and culture as well as Ashkenazi in his literary approach. He is both Jewish and Israeli as well as universalist. This “pajama-Iraqi” as he calls himself, conveys a message of love, as in his poem entitled *A Sprinkler*.

Love bursts out in thin streams/ From the pores of the sprinkler /
We too are like the earth’s cheek / Thirsty for the kiss of water.

The poems in this collection are short, disarmingly simple at times, and packed with emotional content that can startle the reader with their incisive impact. The poem *Abraham on the Way to the Sacrifice* begins:

The explosives belt was ticking / On his terrified body

And ends:

Luckily, a minute before the blast /God reminded him there is / A God.

Although it is quite difficult to render poetry accurately across linguistic and cultural barriers, this translation is both precise and reflective of tone and intent. The book was awarded the Cliff Becker Book Prize in Translation, bestowed annually on one volume of literary translation in English.

Joyce Levine, AJL Publications Chair, North Woodmere, New York

Angels at the Gate is a second historical novel for T. K. Thorne, following on from her well-received debut novel, Noah’s Wife (2011). Both books rely on the Bible for their historical setting, and both feature strong female protagonists. Noah’s Wife is an engaging and well-researched adventure set against the backdrop of the Black Sea flood, hypothesized to have occurred in 5600 BCE; a flood so devastating it is thought to have served as the catalyst for the biblical story of Noah in Genesis 5-10. The main protagonist, Na’amah, based on the Midrashic tale of Noah’s wife in Genesis Rabba, lives in a cruel and dangerous world and she must use her wits and her own peculiar extra-sensory perception to survive.

In Angels at the Gate, Thorne switches her focus to Adira, and the untold story of Lot’s wife. Once again, she presents her readers with a well-rounded, intelligent and highly engaging female lead. The setting is beautifully rendered as the reader is transported to the harsh desert landscape, made austere by the endless sun. Thorne’s research into the historical, geographical and social setting of her story is notable and the attention to detail shines through as she easily brings to life the smells and sounds of the biblical cities, markets and thronging people. Her character development has matured even further with the creation of Adira whose passion and misery is palpable as she is torn between her own yearnings and her loyalty to her father. Angels at the Gate provides the reader with another gripping tale of love and adventure while raising questions about choice and how to balance familial duty with personal freedom. Thorne’s ability to transform the reader to another time and place is seamless; her novels are highly recommended.

Rebecca Jefferson, University of Florida

Reviews of Multimedia


Because I Was a Painter represents a laudable effort to bring to a broad and interested public artistic images of the Holocaust that the perpetrators never realized would be revealed. The viewer sees artworks that were hidden from the Nazis, providing a completely uncensored insider view of the Holocaust as recorded by a small community of talented artists. The film includes drawings, paintings, sculptures by artists known and unknown; some of whom perished and some of whom survived, and their depictions of life, but mostly death, in the camps. The artwork of some of the surviving artists who continue to express themselves via this medium is also shown here.

The main question that arises from this film is: can art which portrays death, torture and chaos be considered beautiful? Can one appreciate through art all of the emotional turmoil the victim and survivor carry within them?

Because I Was a Painter is an important addition to Holocaust studies. It brings to life the victims’ experiences through their unique artistic language and enables the viewer to grasp the enormity of the genocide, its results, and the importance of preventing it from ever happening again. Technically, the film could benefit from some improvement to the translations or the provision of better subtitles, especially since several languages (French, Russian, Hebrew Yiddish, etc.) are covered here. But this minor production fault aside, this DVD should be added to all Holocaust collections.

Nira G Wolfe, Highland Park, IL


“Open Mind” host Richard D. Heffner and Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel discuss the moral responsibility of the individual in dealing with many issues, including social and moral responsibility; the transition from nationalism and group feeling into confrontation, and the wish to dominate that can
lead to wars and ethnic cleansing; “mercy killing;” genetic engineering, political correctness; the role of the intellectual; capital punishment, and leadership to name but a few.

These discussions are exercises in questions and thinking, which the speakers obviously enjoy as an intellectual workout, but as a viewer, it can get monotonous. Much has happened in the 18 years since these shows were first broadcast—technologically, politically, etc. Although these DVDs might be useful in a philosophy or ethics course, besides Wiesel’s Holocaust experience, there is little “Jewish” content. Most Jewish libraries can pass on this set.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel


The first installment of The Skipper (1987) sees boat captain Chico Ben David fight to keep custody of his son, Ben. Chico ends up falling in love with the beautiful lawyer representing him in court. In The Skipper 2 (1989) Chico and Ben move from Tiberias to Tel Aviv, where Chico now runs his tour boat and lives closer to Galia, who he loves but has reservations about marrying. When Galia takes a lucrative client away from Kugler, who represented Chico’s wife in their divorce case, Kugler seeks to revoke Chico’s custody of Ben. Chico decides to escape the situation and go to Greece, but Ben does not want to be there, and takes the boat and heads back to Israel. During a dramatic search at sea, Chico jumps on the boat and breaks his leg. While he is recuperating, Ben and Galia plan a surprise wedding.

In the final film of this trilogy, The Skipper 3 (1991), Chico and his new family have moved to Eilat, but the construction of a big waterfront mall threatens his livelihood. Things get ugly and Chico ends up in jail. The mall owner turns out to be Chico’s ex-wife’s new husband. Maggie promises to fix everything if she can take Ben to America for three weeks, but Chico refuses the offer. Ben decides to go for the sake of all the fishermen and his family.

The warm relationship between father and son and the beautiful Israeli coastlines are strong positives, however, the movies are very dated in many ways. The running jokes are stale by middle of the first movie, and the pace is very slow. While the series is homey and charming, it just cannot compete with more recent releases in terms of plot development, cinematography, etc. It is an optional purchase for libraries that collect Israeli films.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel


Holocaust: Genocide & Survival is a collection of three documentaries which emphasize the power of the human spirit in the face of adversity. In I’m Still Here (48 minutes) Lauren Lazin presents diaries by youngsters who lived (some also perished) during the Holocaust. Various actors read excerpts while the diaries and personal information are supplied on the screen. The voices from the past challenge the viewer to live a better and more humble life.

Last Stop Kew Gardens (54 minutes) by director Robert H. Lieberman describes the post-Holocaust “immigrant village” in New York that gave birth to the stars of film, TV, and comedy. Here the community is shown to play an important role in the achievements of personal goals. Finally, in Out of Europe (55 minutes) Richard Lerner follows the footsteps of one lucky affluent Jewish family that survived the Holocaust by escaping from Belgium, to Portugal, and then to America. The film documents the variety of refugee experiences.

This DVD should be included in all Holocaust collections. High schools should especially utilize the important information conveyed in these stories while teaching this difficult subject. All three DVDs enhance our understanding of the enormity of the Holocaust and the challenges that human beings face to this day.

Nira G Wolfe, Highland Park, IL

*Big Galut(e)* (the Hebrew term for “diaspora” and part joke) is a work of collaboration between musicians with a very strong background in Klezmer music. This CD has a distinctive sound and can be described as Klezmer with a twist. Many influences from many places can be heard here, including Calcutta, the world of Tango, and Georges Bizet’s world of Carmen, to name just a few. The CD is supplemented with printed biographical information about each member of the group and the history of how they came together. Brief descriptions explaining each song are also included, which is very enlightening for the listener. *Big Galute* is a lovely example of the thriving, lively klezmer genre of music. Recommended for any library with a Jewish music collection.

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


*Exile: A Myth Unearthed* is a two-disc set: one disc has English narration, the other French; both include subtitled Hebrew and other languages. The film is divided into two parts: the first focuses on archaeological evidence of Jewish life in Sepphoris during and after the revolt against Rome in the first century; the second looks at the modern Muslim city which was destroyed in the Israeli War of Independence and rebuilt as a moshav.

The narration begins with an intriguing question: “Why has exile been perceived as a tangible reality for thousands of years? And if it never existed what accounts for the millions of Jews who over centuries have settled around the world? And perhaps the inevitable question, what happened to the inhabitants of places like Sepphoris who were never exiled. Until 1948, a predominantly Muslim Palestinian village stood on the ruins of Sepphoris. The village was destroyed and its inhabitants barred from returning. Is it possible that some of the Palestinian refugees are decedents of the ancient Jews who were never exiled?”

Yet the answers it supplies are a confusing mishmash of data-points with huge gaps between them. The producers use the archaeological evidence at Sepphoris to show that Jews were not exiled and the archaeological evidence in Rome to show that Jews were in living in exile. It skips over almost two thousand years of history between the destruction of the Temple and the destruction of the village of the Palestinians’ village which included Christian occupation of the area. And finally it claims that while the Jews were not exiled, Jews (with little to no mention of war) did exile their possible Palestinian descendants from that city.

Sepphoris is a fascinating place. A video describing the full history of the city and perhaps including the results of genetic testing of the Palestinians would have been an interesting and valuable project. This however, is not that project. Not recommended.

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

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**Keep Up to Date with Hasafran**

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

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


When Edith Westerfeld was 12-years-old, she was sent alone from Nazi Germany to America on a ship, in 1938. On board, she became best friends with Gerda Katz but the two girls lost touch when they went their separate ways with foster families in the US. Over 70 years later, having read about the journey in Edith’s daughter Fern Schumer Chapman’s Is It Night or Day? (Farrar Straus & Giroux, 2010), an eighth grade class in northern Illinois pressed Chapman, wanting to know why, in this age of the Internet and social media, Gerda couldn’t be found. It became a class project to reunite the two friends.

The first page immediately engages readers of all ages by inviting them to imagine they are being sent, alone, to a faraway country to live with relatives they’ve never met, and that it’s uncertain whether or not the other members of their family will be able to join them some day. This illustrated non-fiction highlights the research and heartfelt dedication of the class. An attractive layout of text, photographs, historical primary sources, and artifacts documents the girls’ journey in well-written detail, making this an excellent introduction to the Holocaust. The second half of the book, showing photos and newspaper clippings the students used to find Gerda, traces the research process and touching reunion of the two friends. End matter includes credits for all of the photos and a list of diverse examples of children coming to the US on their own. Front and back inside covers contain comments from the students about their emotions upon hearing the story of the girls’ journey and during the reunion. This is an important addition to any library, especially those serving elementary and middle school students. The combined reading of Chapman’s three titles, Motherland (Penguin, 2001) for adults, Is It Night or Day? for middle school ages, and Like Finding My Twin for slightly younger, would make a compelling congregational or community read.

Debbie Colodny, Cook Memorial Public Library District, Libertyville, IL. Former owner of Sefer, So Good, and past member of the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee.


A somewhat foolish and impatient young man goes to Jerusalem in search of a great rabbi to teach him the entire Torah while standing on one foot. He meets several rabbis, but each, in turn, laughs at him, yells at him, or shakes his fist at him, until he meets Rabbi Hillel. The gentle, wise Rabbi Hillel calmly answers, “Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you ... The rest is just comments and explanations.” After the boy thinks about the answer, he decides to try to behave as instructed, and Rabbi Hillel invites him to study.

This well-known Talmudic tale is conveyed through whimsical illustrations of paper, cloth, and colored pencils in a collage appearance, with a vivid text easily understood by grade school
students. The large, easy to read text is artistically placed in and around these full page, full color illustrations. Some of the papers used for various rabbis’ garments are covered in Hebrew print. While boldface type designates the conversations between the young man and the various rabbis and group of children whom he asked for help, bold, maroon letters focus attention on Rabbi Hillel’s famous answer. The Author’s Note gives some historic information about Hillel and quotes his famous “If [I] am not for myself, who is for me? And if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?” (omitted from ARC, hopefully corrected in published copy). It would have been helpful to list Pirke Avot 1:14 for this quote, and to reference Talmud Shabbat 31a as the source for the story told in this book. This is an attractive picture book that would be useful for teaching about Rabbi Hillel and the verse often referred to as the Golden Rule.

Debbie Colodny, Cook Memorial Public Library District, Libertyville, IL. Former owner of Sefer, So Good, and past member of the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee.


Michael “Misha” Gruenbaum was born in 1930 in Prague, where he led a peaceful life with his parents, older sister, and extended family. He went to a Czech school, took long walks with his father, and played soccer with his friends. All that changed when the Nazis invaded Prague on March 15, 1939. The Gruenbaum family is forced to move into the crowded Jewish ghetto, where numerous (and sometimes bizarre) rules are imposed on the residents regarding food, school, recreation, and wearing the yellow star. Misha’s fear, confusion, and anger grow. Just when he thought the situation couldn’t get any worse, it did: his beloved father is taken away by the SS and tortured and murdered. In November 1942, Misha, his mother, and sister are taken to Terezin. Misha lives with forty other boys in a crowded dormitory. The conditions in the camp are deplorable, but during his time in there, he is relatively protected from the horrors of the camp. He plays on a soccer team, performs in the opera Brundibar, and helps prepare the camp for the sham Red Cross visit. Finally, the Soviet army enters the camp. The inmates were liberated on May 8, 1945.

That is the crux of the story but there is much more to say: it’s important to note that this is a fictionalized memoir. In the Afterword, Todd Hasak-Lowy explains his writing process and speaks about completing gaps in Michael’s memory, reconstructing characters and events, and creating dialogue. Telling Misha’s story in the first-person, present tense brings an immediacy and poignancy to the story. The reader is drawn in as Misha grows from an innocent, curious, energetic eight-year-old boy into an independent, far-too-mature thirteen-year-old. The characters, especially Misha, his madrich (counsellor) Franta, and his mother seem to jump off the page, so real do they seem. The writing strikes a balance between symbolism, foreshadowing, sensory images, and rhythm to move the plot along. Hasak-Lowy did thorough research to provide a strong sense of place. The author included photographs and documents -- some may be too graphic for younger readers.

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

[Editor’s note: Somewhere There is Still a Sun: A Memoir of the Holocaust was a Finalist for the 2015 National Jewish Book Award for Young Adult Literature. For an interview with Todd Hasak-Lowy, see Deborah Kalb’s blog.]

“In a little brick house with a welcoming air lived four little girls with bows in their hair.” They play games, rake leaves, read books, and sell pink lemonade. Avigail is the youngest, the smallest and always last: last out the door, last to get *challah* on Shabbos, last for a pony ride, last in line to brush her teeth, and last to get tucked in at night. But, what bothers her most is that she is the last to grow and is always stuck with hand me downs. When her Aunt Mindy gets engaged, Avigail is shocked when the bride-to-be chooses to wear a hand me down wedding gown rather than purchase something brand new: “But what’s in a dress—only cloth and some thread,” is what Aunt Mindy so wisely had said. “It’s what’s in your heart and what’s in your head that gives you true happiness inside instead.” Avigail follows her lead and, rather than choosing a new dress, decides to wear an “old” flower girl gown at the wedding. That night, Avigail and all of her sisters, dream of wearing Aunt Mindy’s borrowed wedding gown. And, as the story concludes: “Together they grew in every which way, happy with all that they had every day.”

The simple, pleasing, pastel illustrations perfectly match the mood and tone of the story and will certainly have lots of girl appeal. The sisters start their day with *Modeh Ani*, refer to their mother as *Imma* and are only shown wearing skirts and dresses. The few men depicted are pictured with *peyos* and black hats. Other minor details in the illustrations indicate that the family is part of an Orthodox Jewish community. The story and message of this charming, well-told picture book, however, is accessible and appropriate for all streams of Judaism making this a welcome addition to all Jewish values collections.

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

**BIBLE STORIES**


Og, a giant, is in need of a good night’s sleep. Unable to find a bed that can accommodate his large stature, he sleeps outside on “the hard ground under the stars.” The lack of sleep makes him grumpy and his loud yawns scare people, but animals know he has a kind heart. His over-sized body becomes a refuge for animals looking for a safe place to sleep at night. Even though their chatter keeps him up a night, he lets the animals sleep in his beard, pockets, and curled up at his feet. Noah sees his kindness to animals and asks Og to help him bring the animals to the ark before the flood. Og agrees and Noah lets him ride out the storm on the Ark too. When the flood ends, God rewards Og with a palace, complete with an enormous bed.

Young readers will be captivated by Og’s gigantic size and his kindness to animals. The illustrations are colorful and appealing. Unfortunately, readers looking for more information about Og will be disappointed by the short author’s note which simply mentions that the story “blends the tale of Noah and the Flood with the biblical reference to the giant’s bed.” However, as with *Naamah and the Ark at Night* by Susan Campbell Bartoletti (Candlewick, 2011) and *We’re All In the Same Boat* by Zachary R. Shapiro (Putnam, 2009), *Og’s Ark* provides a retelling of the Noah’s Ark story from a unique perspective.

Aimee Lurie, Branch Manager, Cuyahoga County (OH) Public Library - Beachwood Branch

[Editor’s Note: Allison Marks is the former librarian of Temple Israel in Akron, Ohio and an AJL reviewer. *Og’s Ark* is her, and her husband Wayne’s, first children’s book.]

When the Israelites left Egypt, it was with a 30-day supply of food and the faith that God would provide for them after that. The Torah describes (Exodus 16:13-36) how the Jews collected the manna that fell to earth and how it sustained them throughout their journey through the wilderness. Rozen’s narrative mixes rhyming and non-rhyming prose to retell the biblical story with a focus on children: their wonder in seeing the mon (manna); their delight in collecting and tasting it — “it’s like stars mixed with honey, like sun mixed with wine, Hashem’s way of saying these children are Mine.” Other nomadic people learn of the mon through seeing the layer of dew on the ground of afar and from eating the meat of animals that sipped from the mon that melted. The children try to stay awake to see the mon fall, but they always fall asleep before dawn. An Author’s Note is included at the end.

Rozen asserts that her emphasis is on the marvel of the mon and God’s love for Bnei Yisrael (the Israelites) and bases the story on the biblical narrative and Rashi’s commentary on the verses. Muted illustrations accompany the text, and the scenes of the barren wilderness are particularly striking. The poem at the beginning is lovely; the people’s rhyming response to Moses, almost like a chorus, seems out of place. While a mention of the “procedure” for the Sabbath and a “frosty” description would complete the story, the book is probably the first to explain the miracle of manna for young children. A short glossary would make this book more accessible to non-Orthodox audiences, but a creative reader can easily translate. That, and the uniqueness of the subject, makes it a highly recommended book for all Jewish libraries.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel

**FICTION – EARLY & MIDDLE GRADE**


It is 1942 and nine-year-old Anna Bauman has been living in the Warsaw Ghetto with her parents for two years. Massive deportations have begun and Anna is whisked out of the ghetto with the aid of Jolanta, (based on Irena Sendler, who saved hundreds of Jewish children from almost certain death). Anna must take on the identity of a Polish girl, Anna Karwolska, but at night she remembers and worries about her parents and her extended family. For one year, she lives in an orphanage run by Catholic nuns; for two years, with a Polish family in the countryside. Anna’s time in hiding is fraught with danger as she fears the German soldiers as well as possible betrayal by Poles. Although the Polish family who shelters her are kind and loving, added perils arise because they are involved with the Polish Resistance. When the war finally ends, Anna is wrenched away from them and brought to a Jewish orphanage. Although Anna is reunited with her beloved cousin, Jakub, she learns that her parents and the other members of her family were all killed in a death camp. The book includes an author’s note and the poem “To the Young” by Adam Asnyk.

Told in first-person, present tense, the reader can relate to Anna’s feelings: fear, confusion, loneliness, and sorrow. Cerrito creates suspense through fast-paced action and snappy dialogue. However, a few weaknesses mar the telling: Anna can speak Polish, French, and German, along with a smattering of Yiddish expressions she picked up from her grandmother. How can this young girl, whose father is a carpenter and who went to school for only a few days, know so many languages and speak in such a mature way?

Secondly, Anna states that there was no snow during the 1945 winter in Poland, but that fact is inaccurate. Finally, this reviewer found more than seven proofreading errors, including one in Yiddish. For other Holocaust books that portray a young child in hiding, see Jack Kuper’s *Child of the Holocaust* (Key Porter, 2006) or Uri Orlev’s *Run, Boy Run* (HMH Books,10th ed., 2007).

Anne Dublin, co-author of *Odyssey Through Hell: Escape from the Warsaw Ghetto*, Toronto, Canada. [Editor’s Note: *The Safest Lie* was a finalist for the 2015 National Jewish Book Award for Children’s Literature and a 2016 Sydney Taylor Notable Book for Older Readers.]

Yes, Mirka, the feisty eleven-year-old Orthodox girl is back with another adventure as scary as her first two: babysitting her step-sister Layele. This rather complicated yarn involves a magic troll (see *Hereville*, Book 1), who gives them a magic hairband that enables time travel; a witch (again, see *Hereville*, Book 1), who had interactions with Fruma, their mother in the past; a wishing fish and a seashell water charm. The magic fish finds Layele and lures her to the water with the promise of wishes and kidnaps her. Mirka and Fruma try to get her back, but they cannot defeat the fish. They return home for Shabbos, and shortly after, Fruma starts turning into a tree. Mirka enlists the witch’s help, and is able to rescue Layele and save Fruma. The whole experience has brought Mirka closer to her stepmother, who she now calls “Mame.”

As in *How Mirka Got Her Sword* (2010) and *How Mirka Met a Meteorite* (2012), the graphic format is fully utilized with a variety of angles, panels, and great facial expressions. Particularly creative is the double spread of Fruma and Mirka walking across the Shabbos table. The story itself is a little hard to follow as the magic hairband transports the characters back and forth in time and the wishing fish starts speaking through Layele. It was interesting to learn more about other members of Mirka’s family, and there is a mini- Yiddish lesson, with phrases translated at the bottom of the pages. Recommend to readers who enjoyed the previous Hereville books and other graphic novels, but *How Mirka Caught a Fish* can also be enjoyed by those new to the series.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel

[Editor’s note: *Hereville: How Mirka Caught a Fish* is the 2016 Sydney Taylor Honor Book for Older Readers.]


In Anne Dublin’s latest novel, set in Toronto during the Great Depression, she delivers a gripping story about the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) Dressmakers’ Strike of 1931. Rose and Sophie are Jewish sisters forced to drop out of school after their father’s death and mother’s illness. They support the family by working in a garment district factory, a place “where poor people spent long hours producing clothes they could not afford to buy.” When their fellow union members decide to go on strike for better working conditions, the two join the picket line. Life soon unravels. Rose is arrested and sent to jail. Their mother falls and is hospitalized. And for the first time in her life, 14-year-old Sophie is left to fend for herself. The nearly ten-week-long strike forces each family member to adapt to changing circumstances and, as a result, all become stronger and more resilient.

Dublin keeps the narrative lively while skillfully weaving complex topics like health care, sexism in the workplace, child labor, anti-immigrant sentiment, abuse within prisons and interfaith dating into the text. A sprinkling of Yiddish words and folk sayings lend authenticity to the dialogue. Black-and-white archival photographs represent the fashion and feel of Toronto in the 1930s. A map of the city gives the reader an orientation to the city’s streets and neighborhoods. Lists of suggested readings and websites about the labor movement are also included. For young readers not far away from first jobs, “44 Hours or Strike!” will be a worthy introduction to the men, women and children who collectively fought for workers’ rights -- a struggle that still exists today.

Allison Marks, co-author of Og’s Ark (Kar-Ben Publishing, 2016), Akron, OH

[Reviewer’s note: Other recommended historical novels by Anne Dublin include: *The Orphan Rescue* (Second Story Press, 2010), *The Baby Experiment* (Dundurn Press, 2012) and *Stealing Time* (Dundurn Press, 2014).]

Minna Steinholz’s situation is dire. Orphaned and living with her aunt and her abusive uncle, she must go out on London’s cold streets and sell matches. After returning with a poor showing, her uncle threatens to beat her and she runs away. Knocking on the door of a family she knows to be observant Jews, she is taken in by the Kornhandlers as a companion for their ailing daughter Ellie. But soon Ellie’s brooch goes missing, and their budding friendship cools as Ellie and the housemaid, Leah, suspect Minna. Then comes the news that the Kornhandler’s business is in trouble. Mr. Yaakov Kornhandler had been in Palestine assisting Moses Montefiore and came back to the financial crisis. Minna and the governess, her old neighbor Mrs. Engel, must leave the house, though the Kornhandlers send a weekly stipend to support Minna. Soon a cholera epidemic breaks out in their squalid neighborhood, and Mrs. Engel must be hospitalized. When she is released, she and Minna return to the Kornhandlers and spend the fall holidays at Montefiore’s home in Ramsgate. Everything works out at the end, as the brooch is found, the business back on track, and Minna and Ellie are best friends and sisters.

The author has written several books of historical fiction (including *This Is America!* (Israel Bookshop, 2013), and has an eye for detail that gives a strong sense of time and place in 1860s London. Sometimes the dialog can be unrealistic for 12-year-old girls, and Mrs. Kornhandler often seems preachy (“You modernists are lemmings, rushing away from Yiddishkeit to destroy your Jewish identity and yourselves.”). Some of the vocabulary is dated or uncommon, and a glossary would have been helpful. For appeal beyond the Orthodox market, an additional glossary of Hebrew and Yiddish would be necessary. Despite this, the story is compelling and historically accurate, making it a good choice for Orthodox libraries.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel


Children can put themselves into this book as they explore what it was like to be a spy during World War II, imagining a range of scenarios, and deciding how he/she would act. The story opens with a very sketchy outline of the start of World War II. It then gives the reader three options for working in the espionage services: stealing Japanese secrets in the Philippines (Pages 13-42); becoming a wireless operator in France (43-70); or serving as a spy plane photographer over Europe (71-100). Within each sequence, the reader is asked to make life-altering choices on almost every page. Some of them lead to success, while others end in the imprisonment and death of the character. There are references to the Bataan Death March and to Nazi prison camps here, though there is no explanation about any of them. The stories are based on fact; the text is accompanied by interesting photos that set the scene for the reader. An index is included.

While the premise of this book seems legitimate, there are several problems. The author provides little historical context for the time period and it is unclear whether the target audience (3rd and 4th graders) has sufficient background knowledge to fully appreciate and comprehend this complex period of world history. Also, the use of multiple story lines may confuse readers. While a couple of Jewish characters appear throughout, the overall Jewish content is insignificant. The “Do-It-Yourself Jewish Adventure Series” by Kenneth Roseman from URJ Press, though thirty years old, provide a better model for this style of interactive fiction.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA


In this collection of short stories, middle grade readers are introduced to Chaim and his family and friends living in an Orthodox community in Florida. The stories focus on Chaim’s religious education and upbringing (studying for halachah tests, finding a Shabbos goy during a dinnertime blackout, or accidentally buying food without a hescher) and his everyday experiences, like making friends and struggles with his siblings. Every story has the same basic structure: Chaim faces a difficult situation, he finds inspiration in
an analogous experience or another’s wisdom, and then takes action to solve the issue at hand. As the title reminds us, the book is intended for “thinking kids,” and yet the author tells the reader exactly what to think. Each story is neatly tied up at the end, often with a pun or one-off joke, and with Chaim consistently and quickly making the right choice in every situation. While the book does encourage positive values with some consideration for common childhood mistakes, there is a noted lack of nuance as to what it takes to choose these best possible moral paths, how long this can take, or what mistakes a child might continue to make even with the best intentions. There is little depth to the book’s characters, which serve simply as vehicles to deliver the author’s lessons in self-conduct.

Alex Quay, Sinai Akiba Academy, Los Angeles, CA

FICTION – TEEN


In this sequel to 2014’s Prisoner of Night and Fog, Gretchen Müller follows Daniel Cohen back to Nazi Germany in 1933 to clear his name of a murder he did not commit. To solve the crime, they encounter a prostitution and thievery ring that oddly protects them. Their ultimate goal is to prevent the Enabling Act that will surely allow Chancellor Hitler to become dictator. They suspect conspiracy in connection with the Reichstag fire. But when they find a crucial diary of the murdered prostitute and enter Berlin’s Kuhle Wampe to track down a fireman with the real story of the Reichstag fire, they pass a point of no return. Gretchen faces a showdown with Uncle Dolf and must win.

Anne Blankman continues the stunning tension that turns pages. But she also drills deep into Gretchen’s emotions—her love for Daniel and her betrayal by the ideals she had grown up with. The plot, although at times unbelievable, takes unexpected twists and each chapter ends with a cliffhanger. The pace starts off slowly and picks up once Gretchen and Daniel start their investigation of the murder. The setting places the reader into 1930s Berlin and its confusion and poverty. Conspiracy is a worthy sequel and wraps up nicely in England where Gretchen and Daniel can use their knowledge to continue to defeat the Nazis.

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

[Editor’s Note: Conspiracy of Blood and Smoke was a Finalist for the 2015 National Jewish Book Award for Young Adult Literature.]


Helene, a 20-year-old archaeology student in Paris, stands perched on the cusp of adulthood. But before she can make the leap, she must uncover family secrets springing from the adoption of her great Uncle Daniel decades prior when he was a young Jewish boy during the Second World War. Helene gathers and pieces together clues: a reproduction of Soutine’s Girl with Menorah, snippets of family stories, a pencil dagger, a horn-handled vintage magnifying glass, exotic flea market finds, forged postmarks on correspondences, a tiny atlas containing penciled journal entries, and lastly, a brown suitcase that serves as a portal to a pre-war apartment. After connecting the dots, Helene realizes how closely Uncle Daniel’s Black Insignia adventure books he penned parallel life and became a novel way for him to rewrite his own history, one with a more satisfying ending that “ensure[s] justice and truth win out.” Only upon learning the truth about her great uncle’s past can Helene discover who she truly is. The book’s French-to-English translation is speckled with charming turns and lovely details. But unless the reader carefully collects all the clues, too, the ending may be confusing. Further, not much space is devoted to the German occupation of France, leaving out the historical context that could breathe needed emotional impact into Helene’s quest. The book may appeal more to seasoned readers who have their own histories of familial drama and greater patience for the gradually unfolding
plot. Hunter’s black-and-white illustrations are freely sketched and echo one of the book’s themes: recapturing lost youth before memories fade.

Allison Marks, co-author Og’s Ark (Kar-Ben Publishing), Akron, OH


Promoted as a sequel to Lila Perl’s posthumous novel, *Isabel’s War, Lilli’s Quest* gives Lilli’s/Helga’s side of the story. The narrative consists of three distinctive time sequences and opens with Kristallnacht, when Lilli’s father is arrested and taken to Buchenwald in November 1938. His family never sees him again. The family moves to Lilli’s mother’s family, the Bayers, who are not Jewish, but it’s clear to Lilli they are not wanted there. Her younger sister Helga is slated to participate in the Kindertransport to England as September 1, 1939 nears. But Helga wants no part of it and runs from the house. Lilli tackles her and breaks Helga’s arm. Lilli now takes Helga’s place on the Kindertransport and travels to England. There she experiences British attitudes, sometimes kind and sometimes not, and befriends a German POW at a dance hall. Lilli finally hears back from her uncle in America and she leaves England in 1942. The narrative now shifts from third person to first as Lilli recounts her experiences with Isabel in first person. The remainder of the book stays in Lilli’s voice as she travels to Europe after the war to find any survivors of her family.

*Lilli’s Quest* is a hodgepodge of narrative. The first section, covering 1938 to 1942, has an omniscient voice and explains history occasionally. The second section, covering 1942 to 1946, redundantly recounts events from *Isabel’s War*. The third section, covering the summer of 1946, moves the story forward and is the most poignant when Lilli reconnects with the German POW and with a surviving member of her family. Still, the character of Lilli lacks personality. The postwar relationship between Lilli and her family member, however, smacks of reality. It is heartbreaking and Perl created a world that is all too believable — in Germany, in England, and postwar.

Barbara Krasner, past member, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee


In some ways Raina Resnick is a typical 16-year-old: fashion junkie, Red Sox fan, worried about fitting in. She’s also a matchmaker. After being expelled from her Brooklyn school, she moves to Toronto to live with her aunt and uncle (her parents work in banking in Hong Kong). While riding the bus to school, she meets a young woman who is looking to get married. Raina thinks Tamara might like the lawyer who frequently visits her aunt’s house. Jeremy and Tamara start dating and eventually get engaged. But the happy occasion has several repercussions. Raina’s sister Leah was engaged to Ben, who claims to have broken the engagement because of Raina’s bad behavior, and the family had their eye on Jeremy for Leah. Tamara spreads the word, and soon Raina is the “Matchmaven,” anonymously setting up Jewish singles. There are some hits and misses, and in the process Raina’s school work suffers. She is assigned nerdy Dahlia as a study partner, and they soon become friends. Leah has frozen Raina out because of the broken engagement, but soon she is one of Matchmaven’s clients. And when Raina meets Mr. Kellman, a retired professor after delivering a *chesed* meal to the wrong house, he eventually becomes a client. Throw in a feisty Bubby (her uncle’s mother), a Great Dane that ingests chocolate, and the school principal, and things get out of control. Raina ends up fixing up her principal with the professor, and at their engagement party, Bubby reveals Matchmaven’s true identity. At the party, Raina meets his grandson Ari -- a perfect match for Leah.

While Jewish YA readers will enjoy Raina’s world of secret matchmaking, much of the story is predictable: delivering a meal to the wrong house, the lonely “Esther” turning out to be Raina’s principal. Raina, Bubby and Bronx the Great Dane are strong characters, but the rest fade quickly. Still, humor and a happy ending make for an enjoyable read.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel

This somewhat interesting historical novel is reminiscent of the lives lived by servants of English nobility in PBS programs. Set in an English castle in the year immediately prior to World War II, Hannah is a charming German young woman whose Jewish father is owner of a cabaret in Berlin. Sent to England for her safety after Kristallnacht, she has a well-developed sense of self and is a strong character. Her destination is Starkers, the estate belonging to a relative by marriage, where she will be taken in by the lord and lady of the estate. Randomly, and at the same time, Anna, the daughter of a foreigner-hating British grocer, has been placed on the same estate, to be a kitchen maid, in order to spy for the Nazi movement. The twist is that they are mistaken for each other and have their roles reversed. Anna is spoiled and vain, and not a very likable character. Hannah, who is the heroine, is spunky, a good soul and hard working. Both subsequently fall in love with the same foolish young son of Lord Liripip, the lord of the estate. Confusion abounds as to which is really “the” beloved one, in addition to cases of mistaken identity, and at times a comedy of errors. Attempts to kill the King of England, who is visiting the castle, run afoul of documents being misdirected from Anna to Hannah. While following the adventures of the central characters, the reader needs to suspend his/her disbelief at some of the mistakes, misunderstandings, and double entendres.

The focus of the story is overly romantic in relation to the major historical events taking place at this time, and their impact on the lives of the girls. There are lapses in the identification of the points of view of the two girls; sometimes the reader is not certain whose life is under discussion! There is mature mention of sexuality and sexual identification. Readers interested in the British upper class may enjoy this humorous, though sometimes silly, romance.

Shelly Feit, Library Consultant, Teaneck New Jersey.

JEWS LIFE & VALUES


The first half of this book traces to journey of Pinny the happy, smiling peanut from the farm field to the factory when he is released from his shell, roasted, salted, and “mooshed” and “mashed” into peanut butter. He’s poured into a jar, labeled with a big kosher star, and transported to the grocery store where he’s plucked from the shelf, along with strawberry jam and rye bread, purchased, and made into a peanut butter and jelly sandwich in Avi Weinstein’s kitchen. Avi brings his lunch to the playground but at lunchtime his friend Yoni discovers that his own lunch is missing. Yoni asks if he can have a taste of Avi’s sandwich and Avi happily shares with him. The book then goes on to explain Yoni’s allergic reaction to the peanut butter using terms such as histamine, allergen, mast cell receptors, antibodies, and immune system. Yoni’s mother arrives on the scene, administers medication (but not an epi-Pen), and Yoni quickly recovers.

The illustrations are cartoony and cutesy but the rhyming text is unsophisticated and awkward. However, the message of the story is the most problematic. Pinny the peanut feels terrible that he caused Yoni’s allergic reaction. (Never mind the lengths the reader has to stretch their imagination to believe that the peanut can still see, talk, and feel even after he’s been made into peanut butter, spread on a sandwich, and ingested!) But Pinny is quickly told that it’s not his fault. While it’s important to teach children not to share food, it’s crucial to teach children with food allergies that they should never eat anything without checking the ingredients. This is not stressed, or even mentioned, anywhere in the book. Useful facts about food allergies along with random peanut trivia are appended and an endorsement from a pediatric allergist appears at the beginning of the book. Regardless, this uneven, overly simplistic, naive story completely misses the mark in addressing this vitally important topic for the Jewish community.

Rachel Kamin, North Suburban Synagogue Beth El, Highland Park, IL
Reviews of Titles for Children and Teens


Shimmy Shambone is a typical kid who loves to run, jump and play. He does not like to take baths or showers. In fact, while he does many good deeds, he would rather do math than step into the tub. But with some encouragement from his Rebbi (teacher), Rav Gert, Shimmy learns that cleanliness and order are important mitzvot, especially for those who learn Torah. When he eventually takes a bath and scrubs away the dirt, Shimmy actually enjoys himself while learning an important lesson.

A simple rhyme scheme and cute, colorful illustrations make this an excellent choice for learning about the merits of keeping clean. Two Hebrew words and phrases -- “b’tzelem Elokim” and “nikayon” -- are not translated, but are easily understood in the context of the story. While Rav Gert and the boys are depicted in Orthodox garb (black hat for the rabbi; kippot and tzitzit on the boys), the lesson of keeping clean overrides these details, making this an accessible highly recommended choice for all Jewish libraries.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel


After clearing up his issues with personal hygiene in Shimmy Shambone Will Not Take a Bath (Feldheim, 2014), Shimmy’s mother must deal with the next challenge: bedtime. Shimmy is a very active boy who does not like to lie down. At bedtime he can be found counting the stars, playing with puppets, playing games and singing songs. He finds sleeping a waste of time. His mother sits him down and explains that people need sleep in order to have strength and energy to do Hashem’s will and perform mitzvos. She describes how when Shimmy sleeps, his neshamah (soul) goes up to Hashem and tells God all of the good things that Shimmy did during the day. Shimmy then goes to sleep cheerfully and wakes up fresh and full of energy the next day. The Bedtime Shema is included in the back endpapers. Easy, unforced rhymes and color illustrations with varying perspective (full face, profiles of mother and son in discussion, alternating squares of words and pictures) make this a fun and lively read and a good bedtime story. Written for an orthodox target market, Shimmy wears a big kippa, but the tzitzit are just big enough to be noticed and there are girls (and the mother) in the pictures. A short glossary for words like Hashem, nachas, and neshamah would open the book to a larger audience. The idea of the soul going up to Hashem while one sleeps is somewhat advanced for the intended age group, but will invite parental discussion.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel

NON-FICTION


Georg Rauch, a high school boy in Nazi-occupied Austria, considered joining Hitler Youth along with many of his classmates. His mother quietly explained the reasons that this would be impossible: Georg was one quarter Jewish. As the Nazi power increased, Georg and his family began hiding local Jews in their attic and, on more than one occasion, George bravely risked his life to keep the hidden protected and his family safe. Nevertheless, one day a draft notice appeared in Georg’s mailbox and he found himself called to serve as a soldier in the German army. He included his Jewish ancestry in his official paperwork. He did manage to evade becoming an officer but somehow all his declarations that he was a Jew raised remarkably few hackles as he proceeded through his improbable career as a German soldier.

The tale of his wartime experience, his capture by the Russians and his eventual journey home is engrossing reading. His story is told through reminiscence but also largely through letters he sent home to his mother from the front which she saved and were later translated from German by Georg’s wife,
Phyllis. This unusual perspective leaves the reader once again pondering the old saw – truth is stranger than fiction. Added bonuses are the included photographs, foreword, author’s note, glossary of German words and glossary of Russian/Ukrainian words. Particularly engaging are the many sketches Georg included in the letters to his mother, some of which show some humor in a difficult situation.

Michal Hoschander Malen, Retired Librarian; Children’s and YA Editor - Jewish Book World


Irena Sendler, a Polish social worker, provided health services to Jewish people in the Warsaw Ghetto and later organized the rescue of Jewish children in the Warsaw Ghetto. Roy’s account is told in a series of vignettes that mark the different episodes of Sendler’s work helping Jewish people and eventually getting caught and arrested by the Gestapo. The dialogue is fictionalized but based on actual events. The illustrations are grey and brown hues of oil paint signifying this dark and dangerous period in history. Mary Skinner, the Director and Producer of the PBS documentary “Irena Sendler: In the Name of Their Mothers,” was a content consultant. An Afterword, Author’s Note and Glossary are included in the back matter. In the Author’s Note, Jennifer Roy explains that she wanted the world to know about the work of Irena Sendler; as she wanted to share the story of her Aunt Sylvia, a child of the Lodz Ghetto, the subject of Roy’s *Yellow Star* (a 2007 Sydney Taylor Honor Book).

Similar in scope and content to *Irena Sendler and the Children of the Warsaw Ghetto* by Susan Goldman Rubin (Holiday House) and *Irena’s Jars of Secrets* by Marcia Vaughan (Lee & Low, both 2011), Roy’s version is recommended where there is a demand for illustrated biographies on the subject.

Heather Lenson, Librarian at the Joseph & Florence Mandel Jewish Day School


After explaining the Nazi era and the threat to the Jews of Europe, the authors provide short profiles of many of brave people involved in Saving the Persecuted under a variety of headings. They include well-known individuals such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Oskar Schindler, and Raoul Wallenberg. In addition, the book profiles Georg Duckwitz, who warned the Danish Jews of the coming deportation; Chiune Sugihara, the Japanese envoy to Lithuania, who wrote over 1,000 visas that allowed Jews to escape; Father Andre Trocme, who hid many Jews in France; and Giorgio Perlaska, an Italian who saved Hungarian Jews. In all, more than 20 rescuers are mentioned. There are also short sections on Anne Frank and Miep Gies, and on Hannah Senesh at the back of the book.

*Resisting the Nazis* has a similar premise – identifying and quickly describing the work of those who opposed the regime -- both in Germany and throughout Europe. It also begins with a short overview of the era. The authors then discuss the various forms of resistance and identify several agents, particularly those attached to Britain’s Special Operations Executive (SOE): Nancy Wake, a New Zealander who helped people escape France; Raymond Aubrac, a Jewish French Resistance leader; Sophie Scholl, a young German who belonged to the White Rose underground in Munich; Mordechai Anielewicz, who fought in the Warsaw Ghetto; Sydir Kovpak, a Ukranian partisan leader, and several others.

In both volumes the profiles are very short, but they flesh out the lives of both well-known people and less-famous heroes. The books are filled with topically appropriate photographs. Both include a timeline, glossary, “Find Out More” section with a short book list and suggest website, a bibliography.
and an index. Providing an adequate introduction to the various types of rescuers and resisters during World War II, this series may be most useful in day school libraries.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA

SHABBAT AND HOLIDAYS


Tilda Balsley (ABC Hanukkah Hunt, Let My People Go, Oh No Jonah, and others) has created a holiday hit with her new title. Instead of the typical, worn out “A is for afikomen” text, Balsley has penned a clever and humorous rhyming search for Passover customs, symbols and foods. There is real content in this book that elevates it above most holiday picture books for the youngest readers. For example, on the “Land of Israel” page, children are asked, “At last the Jews had found their home,/How many long years did they roam?” The answers range from 1 year to 10,000 years. The “Nisan” page shows a calendar and states, “This is the month that Passover’s in. On which day does it begin?” Answers and a brief explanation of the holiday are on the last page. The illustrations are colorful, engaging, and humorous, and digitally realized pictures integrate seamlessly with the rhyming text. Children and caregivers will enjoy reading ABC Passover Hunt over and over.

Rena Citrin, Bernard Zell Anshe Emet Day School, Chicago, IL


A brother and sister spend Shabbat with a picnic lunch and a visit to the barn to see the new baby calves. The family recites the blessing before eating challah but there is no mention of attending synagogue or any other Shabbat rituals. Rather than concluding with Havdalah, the book ends with the children taking their afternoon nap. The rural setting is unique and the watercolor and gouache illustrations are pleasant. However, there’s no real story here making this an optional purchase for Jewish board book collections.

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


With Shavuot approaching and no money to buy blintzes, Yankl and Gitele of Chelm agree to save money by each putting a coin into an empty trunk. They end up cheating, are caught in the broken trunk, and go careening through the town until they are spotted by the town rabbi. He then announces three new rules for the town about how to prevent this sort of thing from happening again. Here, the author connects the new rules to the Ten Commandments, which gives the story a second layer of Shavuot meaning. Well-told with fun, expressive and charming illustrations, on the surface this appears to be a lovely, much needed addition to the holiday bookshelf. However, the book is problematic for two reasons. The first concern for librarians looking for something new is that the source material for this story has been done in picture book form by Barbara Diamond Goldin in A Mountain of Blintzes (HMH Books for Young Readers, 2001), which is one of the only Shavuot stories available. For this new book, author Judy Goldman reverts the story back to its Chelm origins, as in “Because of a Blintz” in Solomon Simon’s collection, More Wise Men of Helm (Behrman House, 1968) or Steve Sanfield’s picture book, Strudel, Strudel, Strudel (Orchard Books, 1995), among many others within Jewish folklore collections but neglects to give credit to the origins of her story. The additional problematic element involves the jarring illustration of the town rabbi, who is depicted as wearing a kaffiyeh. There is some historical precedent of ancient Middle Eastern rabbis or priests wearing something similar, but that is quite a stretch for a Chelm story set in Eastern Europe.

Lisa Silverman, Blumenthal Library, Sinai Temple, Los Angeles

“On a sizzling summer Sunday, Squirrel hears skateboards sliding through the park, salsa dancing, dogs that bark.” On Monday Mouse hears motorcycles and music, on Tuesday Turtle hears trucks and trains, on Wednesday Worm hears whistles and wheels, on Thursday Thrush hears thumping basketballs and thundering voices, and on Friday Frog hears fire engines and farmers in the market. “But each and every Shh . . . Shh . . . Shabbat, Squirrel, Mouse, Turtle, Worm, Thrush, and Frog listen as soft winds blow, rhythms slow. Noises hush, there’s no rush. In a peaceful, quiet home, it’s Shh . . . Shh . . . Shabbat . . . Shabbat Shalom.” The rhymes scan well and the use of alliterations is clever and works well although few toddlers or preschoolers will recognize the word Thrush as a type of bird (but it may be the only animal that would work with Thursday!). Contemporary Israel (though not known to be home to a large population of squirrels or thrushes) is depicted with cheery, cutesy, colorful cartoon illustrations and the final spread shows a happy, contemplative family gathered around the Shabbat table. An attractive offering that will certainly appeal to fans of Kar-Ben’s “Very First Board Books” series.

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


Mixing the three little pigs, the big bad wolf and Purim proves not every cautionary tale supports a Jewish twist. The three pigs are living together in one brick house (original lesson learned). They make King Ahasuerus crowns for the holiday parade, each in effort as the fairy tale home builders: quick paper, slightly longer poster board, all day decorated papier-mâché. They head to the fair at the same time as the wolf, who smells hamantaschen and wishes to buy some. The wolf arrives aware that he needs a disguise to purchase goodies and decides to steal a costume. He chases down the three pigs, each in the act of a traditional Purim custom. Wolf demands the crown; answers each pig in turn: “not for all the hamantaschen in town.” The famous refrain pops up: “Then I’ll huff and I’ll puff and I’ll blow”…your crown off. The paper and poster board fly away in quick work. Wolf cannot dislodge the third crown. He grabs it, prompting a child dressed as Mordecai to give him a Haman hat which sets off every grogger, upsetting the wolf who is really not a bully. The wolf apologizes for huffing and puffing; the children forgive him; and all troop to the hamantaschen stand; the wolf eats and returns the crown. Three little pigs happily return home from the Purim fair, fearful incident notwithstanding. The wolf happily learns he did not have to bully from a child’s lecture. Readers happily (?) gain a socializing lesson.

The use of refrain gets two work outs: the original huff and puff and the new eponymous response. The Hebrew pigs remain graduated in effort, but, confusingly, the wolf is no longer a bad guy. Neither the glossary nor the story explains Ahasuerus. Esther is in the glossary, not the story; vice versa for Mordecai. The picture book cannot decide if it is a moral lesson on bullying or a Jewish holiday pig fable.

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


As with its predecessors, Shabbat is Coming! (2014) and Hanukkah is Coming! (2015), simple, rhyming text and repetitive language make this board book an age-appropriate introduction to Passover. The child-friendly illustrations of a contemporary, multi-generational family preparing for Passover complement the text. They set out the matzah, clean the house (though most people clean before putting the matzah on the table!), make matzah ball soup, prepare the Seder plate, and learn the Four Questions. Teachers and families will enjoy sharing this book with toddlers.

Aimee Lurie, Branch Manager, Cuyahoga County (OH) Public Library - Beachwood Branch

Shmulik is an artist who’s asked by the mayor to create a mural and decorate the town park for the Yom Ha’Atzmaut (Israel Independence Day) celebration. Excited about the opportunity, Shmulik walks the town, searching unsuccessfully for inspiration and finding excuses like drowsiness, hunger, and taking care of a kitten to delay the project each day, while his loyal and cheerful canine companion, Ezra, trots behind him, quietly bursting with creative ideas. Ezra dips his paws into Shmulik’s paint cans and transforms the park into a brilliant, colorful surprise and ultimately the perfect setting for the festivities. While the story is told simply, Catalina Echeverri’s illustrative style makes this selection stand out. Background scenes are depicted in soft hues and patterns of greys, while the artistic elements of the story – Shmulik’s splotchy smock, his appropriately messy studio, and Ezra’s creations – are done in vibrant colors making a wonderful contrast. Ezra’s mural is particularly dazzling, with Israel-inspired images like pomegranates, camels, palm trees, menorahs, and children holding Israeli flags, all depicted in a Matisse-like design.

Two concerns for Jewish librarians are the story’s ambiguous setting and its questionable authenticity. While not stated, one would assume from various images that the setting is Israel. Therefore, the choice to make all of the background signage in the town in English except for two lone, identical store signs in Hebrew lettering seems inconsistent. In addition, the last letter of these two Hebrew signs, which are meant to say, “open,” is inaccurately printed, making the word untranslatable. Other Judaic elements include the brief description of Yom Ha’Atzmaut, Shmulik and Ezra both taking a creative rest for Shabbat, and the mayor’s exclamation of thanks to Shmulik in Hebrew. Children will enjoy Ezra’s fearless approach to art, and art teachers may find it can serve as an inspirational classroom tool though discerning Jewish librarians may take issue with some of the details.


The author and illustrator team behind the beloved “Sammy Spider” series has created Ari Ant as another vehicle to teach about the Jewish holidays. Ari Ant, who lives on the school playground, joins the class as they sit under a tree to learn about Lag B’Omer. Initially excited to take part in the picnic, explore caves, and make an art project, Ari gets discouraged as he tries to nibble on play food, gets sand dumped on him, and gets stuck in the glue. After each mishap he repeats the refrain “I’m not sure I like Lag B’Omer!” But when the holiday finally arrives, Ari tags along with the class on their picnic, indulges in all of the crumbs, listens to the stories, enjoys the bonfire, and changes his tune: “I love Lag B’Omer! It’s the perfect holiday for me!” The collage-like illustrations are muted and a bit flat. A brief author’s note is appended with additional information about Lag B’Omer. There’s not much of a plot in this slim 8x8 inch paperback and the book could have just as easily been titled “Sammy Spider’s 1st Lag B’Omer” but teachers will nonetheless welcome *A Holiday for Ari Ant* as it joins *Sadie’s Lag Ba’omer Mystery* by Jamie Korngold (Kar-Ben, 2014) on this holiday’s very slim book shelf for preschoolers.

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


On a cold, rainy spring evening, Sarah and her family set the Passover Seder table with room for all the invited guests, including a seat for Elijah the Prophet. Sarah’s mother lights a fire to warm the house. The Seder begins, and the story of the Jewish people in Egypt and their escape from slavery into the Promised Land is recounted, during which the *afikomen* is hidden. A knock on the door does not bring the expected guest, Elijah, but Mrs. Faaiiz, one of the neighbors. She has lost power and is looking for a place with light and heat. Mama invites her to join them, and Sarah sets another place, sure that
Elijah still has a seat. Papa explains the Seder meal to their new guest, including the reasons for matzah and the Seder plate, which includes the charoset, horseradish, parsley, salt water, and a shankbone. Another knock on the door brings Bagel Ben, a neighbor who has also lost power and is looking for a place to warm his soup. He too is invited to the Seder and accepts. As the Seder progresses, multiple additional and uninvited neighbors come in, including Manny the monkey, to share the apartment’s power; all are invited to join the Seder. The meal continues and the last guest to knock and get invited in uses the last available seat in the house, saddening Sarah who no longer has a seat to set for Elijah. This last guest is the magazine seller, a boy everyone knows, but not by name. He introduces himself as Elijah! The children are thrilled that their patience waiting for Elijah has been rewarded!

This sweet and family oriented story illustrates a neighborhood of people inclusive of differences and nationalities, and helpful to each other. The story is followed by facts about the Cup of Elijah and the tradition of filling a cup at the Seder for this special guest.

Shelly Feit, Library Consultant, Teaneck, NJ.


This newest installment in the already established Shira series (Rimon for Shira, Shira at the Temple and Miracle for Shira), is based on a clever concept of inserting Hebrew vocabulary (in block letters with vowels). Little Shira learns all about searching for chametz at school and decides to become a chametz detective at home. Donning her father’s trench coat and armed with a magnifying glass and flashlight, she scour her house for chametz with her parents in tow to light up and vacuum the chametz.

Author and longtime Hebrew teacher, Galia Sabbag, gives Shira way too many words to speak. The text is excessively wordy and Shira is a bit of a scold to her long suffering parents. In the end, on the day before Pesach, Shira discovers the afikomen that her parents hid in the dryer. That the afikomen is hidden and searched for 24 hours before the chag is a confusing error. The illustrations by Erin Taylor are inviting, but this well-intentioned Passover picture book sadly misses the mark.

Rena Citrin, Library Media Specialist, Bernard Zell Anshe Emet Day School.


Young Oskar escapes from Europe in the nick of time, in 1938 right after Kristallnacht. His parents send him to New York and he is all alone in an unfamiliar, cold, frightening city. It is the seventh night of Hanukkah and also Christmas Eve. He has the address and a photograph of aunt he has never met, and he hopes to reach her home in time to light Hanukkah candles with her. Along the way, lurk all the dangers of a strange and scary city and an ice cold winter night. But what does Oskar, the optimist son of an optimistic family, find during his fraught journey? Blessings, that’s what he finds! Blessing in the hearts and eyes and hands of kind people. Because amidst and among the dangers and the frightful scenes along the way are hidden blessings if only one is open to seeing them and willing to recognize them.

Beautiful, evocative illustrations enhance the narrative, adding to the depth and meaning of the tale, with art and text combining to make the book an elegant, haunting story. An author’s note adds further dimension. A map of the New York City of the time is included along with a glossary of terms. Sometimes, even in today’s world, it seems like there is little hope for this fragile world of ours. Here is a very special book, which can perhaps help remind us that there is good out there even where we least expect it.

Michal Hoschander Malen, Retired librarian; Children’s and YA Editor, Jewish Book World.

[Editor’s Note: Oskar and the Eight Blessings won the 2015 National Jewish Book Award for Children’s Literature.]

This newly illustrated version of Singer’s well-known story, originally published in his collection, The Power of Light (Farrar Straus Giroux, 1980), has been given fresh life in this stand-alone picture book. The adult narrator tells the story of how, on the eighth night of Hanukkah, a green and yellow parakeet lands on the windowsill of his family’s Brooklyn apartment. Fearing that the parakeet might freeze, he opens the window and lets the bird inside. After flying around a bit, the parakeet makes himself at home, perches on his son David’s head, and even speaks Yiddish: “Zeldele, geh schlofen.” (Zeldele, go to sleep.) When no one answers their posters or advertisements, they decide to keep the parakeet and name him Dreidel. The story continues with a double-page spread that looks like a photo album. In each black-and-white illustration, Dreidel adds a touch of color and reflects the action of the photo, whether he’s bathing in a bird-size bath or sitting on the narrator’s shoulder while he writes. The story ends when David goes to college, meets a young woman named Zelda, and they discover to their amazement that Dreidel is indeed Zelda’s long-lost bird, Tsip-Tsip. The story has a satisfying ending, for David and Zelda decide to marry and take Dreidel to their new home. The last page is a Chagall-like illustration of the couple plus baby floating through the air above a snowy street, with Dreidel flying alongside the happy couple.

With its bright blue cover and green end papers, The Parakeet Named Dreidel is a book that will appeal to children and adults alike. The illustrations are outlined in black and filled in with watercolors. They illuminate the love and caring in the home; the compassion towards all creatures. The miracle of the oil that we celebrate at Hanukkah is repeated in another kind of miracle when David and Zelda meet and fall in love, and Zelda is thus reunited with her pet bird. The adult narrator who speaks in first person might be off-putting to some, but the skillful classic storytelling by Singer will surely charm all readers.

Anne Dublin, author of 44 Hours or Strike! (Second Story Press, 2015), Toronto, Canada

[Editor's note: The Parakeet Named Dreidel is a 2016 Sydney Taylor Notable Book for Younger Readers.]


In this book for young readers, April Halpin Wayland (winner of the 2010 Sydney Taylor Book Award for New Year at the Pier: A Rosh Hashanah Story) follows a family as it prepares for and celebrates Passover. Their activities – shopping for ingredients at a farmer’s market, rescuing a kitten from a shelter, making charoset, dashing through the rain on the way to Nana’s house, and participating in the Seder – are recounted in simple, melodic prose, punctuated by the refrain of “dayenu.” We are meant to see and be grateful for the blessings in each of these moments, whether everyday (“We wander the market surrounded by colors – dayenu. We buy apples and walnuts, lilacs and honey – dayenu”) or Passover-specific (“We open the door for Elijah, the prophet. And baa like a goat singing Chad Gadya’s verses – dayenu). Although the word “dayenu” (it would have been enough) is never explained in the text itself and the specifics of the holiday and Seder are only alluded to, a glossary of terms provides relevant definitions and background information. The book’s theme of gratitude, accompanied by Kath’s colorful and engaging illustrations, make this a nice addition to a school or synagogue Passover collection. See Miriam Latimer’s board book Dayenu! A Favorite Passover Song (Scholastic, 2012), for a more traditional version of the song's celebration of the Jews being brought out from Egypt, receiving the Torah, and returning to the land of Israel.

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