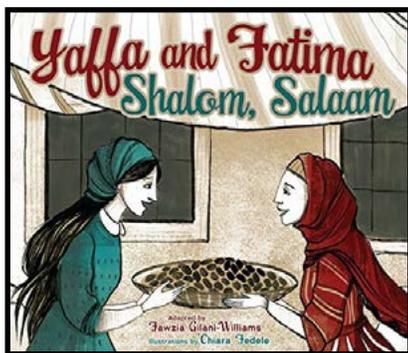


In The Spotlight



Gilani-Williams, Fawzia. *Yaffa and Fatima, Shalom, Salaam*. Illus. by Chiara Fedel. Minneapolis: Kar-Ben, 2017. 24 pp. \$17.99. (9781467789387) HC. Kindergarten - Gr. 3.

In this unique retelling of the classic “Brothers” legend, the title characters are two women - one Jewish, one Muslim – living side-by-side in Jerusalem. The women work together harvesting dates, and often share meals. They practice their faiths, which the book lovingly compares. When the crop fails one season, the two women search for ways to help each other through a difficult time. Of course, each is doing the same thing for the other – secretly placing dates in a basket

on her neighbor’s porch. Upon discovery, they hug, laugh and share a meal.

This version of the story is well told and strongly supports the Jewish values of kindness to strangers and hospitality. The language is simple, short and sweet, perfect for story time. The artwork provides a beautiful portrayal of “the Land of Milk and Honey” in muted tones of teal, maroon, and brown. As a delightful depiction of true friendship, a beautiful book about Israel, and a wonderful retelling of an old story, this is a must have for any Jewish library.

Kathy Bloomfield, President – AJL-SSC; President and Forwardsbooks.com, Washington, DC

Pinkney, Andrea Davis. *A Poem for Peter: The Story of Ezra Jack Keats and the Creation of the Snowy Day*. Illus. by Lou Fancher and Steve Johnson. New York: Penguin Random House, 2016. 52 pp. \$18.99. (9780425287682). Gr. 2-5.

This lyrical tribute to Ezra Jack Keats is told through what the author calls “collage verse” or “tapestry narrative”. In swinging, ever-so-sprightly language, Pinkney has captured the essence of

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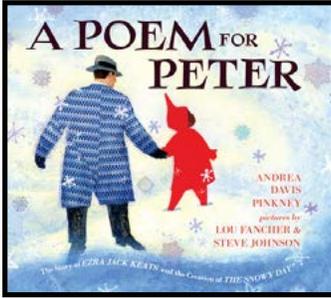
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Keats's life and work. Jacob Ezra Katz was born to poverty-stricken Jewish immigrants in Brooklyn. From a young age, Ezra had an unquenchable desire to express himself through art. Pinkney sketches Ezra's growth as an artist: hand lettering signs for storekeepers, painting murals in the WPA program, illustrating and coloring comics, and designing camouflage patterns for the U.S. Air Force during World War II. After the war, when the sign "No Jews Need Apply" was common, Ezra changed his name so that he could get a job. Finally, in 1962, after he had illustrated over sixty books by other authors, he wrote and illustrated his own picture book

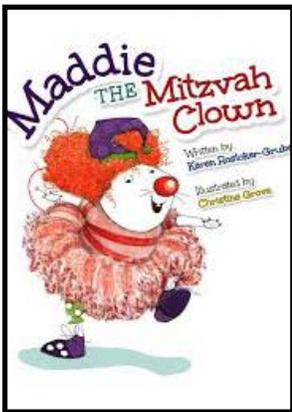
-- *The Snowy Day*, the first picture book that had an African-American child as the protagonist. The book resonated among children everywhere, for it showed in (deceptively) simple prose and layered collages how a child in the city delighted in the first snowfall of winter.

The design and layout of *A Poem for Peter* is breathtaking. Words and pictures collide, ricochet, and dance off each other to make a whole that is greater than its parts. The illustrations in acrylic, collage, and pencil incorporate images from Keats's work: *The Snowy Day*, *Peter's Chair*, *Hi Cat*, and *Jennie's Hat*. Ezra's clothes—coat, suit, pants, shirt—in various stripes, checks, and plaids—all ring true to fabric fashions of the time. Back matter includes: "Ezra's Legacy", a description of Ezra's life, career, and artistic process; "Keats, the Collage Poet", Pinkney's explanation as to why she used "collage verse"; and "Sources"—books, websites, archives, and interviews. For a more factual but still laudatory biography about Keats, see Dean Engel and Florence B. Freedman's *Ezra Jack Keats: A Biography with Illustrations* (Silver Moon Press, 1995).

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

[Editors' Note: *A Poem for Peter* is a 2017 Sydney Taylor Honor Book for Older Readers.]

Rostoker-Gruber, Karen. *Maddie the Mitzvah Clown*. Illus. by Christine Grove. Springfield, NJ: Apples & Honey Press, 2017. 32pp. \$17.95 .(9781681155234). Kindergarten - Gr. 2.



The sadness of shyness and the seriousness of *mitzvot* mix in a charming picture book. This warm animal tale introduces children to the kindness of visiting the aged. Protagonist Maddie can hardly talk to her grandmother's friends in the senior home because she is so shy. One day the Mitzvah Clown comes to perform. He teaches Maddie how to sing, dance, juggle, create balloon hats and incite laughter. As he gives her wigs, funny noses, silly clothes and hats, Maddie feels less and less herself and more and more brave as a "mitzvah clown" facing the world, because the world does not see her as she really is. Despite her fear, the shy mouse, once in costume, is rewarded with confidence and joy in her own ability to perform for her grandmother's friends and finds satisfaction from her good deeds. Eventually, Maddie feels strong enough to perform without her disguise. The ending is happiness

all around: for Grandma and friends, for the Mitzvah Clown who tutored Maddie and mostly for Maddie who finds inner strength, self-confidence and the will to do good in the world. The illustrations are as happy, energetic and bouncy as the characters they portray. The story opens in grey tones when Maddie is shy, then explodes into riotous color when she works toward her goal and conquers shyness through disguise.

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

Reviews of Titles for Children and Teens

EDITED BY RACHEL KAMIN & CHAVA PINCHUK

FICTION - MIDDLE GRADE

Krawitz, Susan. *Viva, Rose!* New York: Holiday House, 2017. 220 pp. \$16.95. (978032437566) HC. Gr. 3-5.

Krawitz takes full advantage of how little readers may know about Jewish involvement in westward expansion and combines it with a historical figure sure to provoke interest: Pancho Villa. The story's titular Rose is living a relatively quiet life with her Russian immigrant parents in El Paso in the early 1900s when she notices her older brother, Abraham--whom her family thought was in New York--pictured in a newspaper next to the revolutionary leader, Villa. While trying to understand more about her brother's situation and keep it hidden from her parents, she accidentally stumbles upon Villa's cronies and is kidnapped. Presented as an orphan, she is given over to spoiled, childish Dorotea, who calls Pancho Villa her uncle and treats Rose like a playmate and a servant. Rose is eventually reunited with her brother during and they have a secret Passover seder. As she learns more about the cause and the people behind Mexican Revolution, she must reconcile her desire for adventure and independence with her desperation to return home and uphold her family's values.

While the writing does not always land, Krawitz proves to be deft at middle grade historical fiction. She has also crafted a deceptively nuanced tale that takes effort to add dimension to characters that would elsewhere play as one-note, in particular, Dorotea, who is as frustrating as she is fascinating, as cruel as she is caring. Even Pancho Villa is shown to be both a hardened, hyper-masculine leader and a tender-hearted guardian to Dorotea. Best for school and some synagogue libraries who could recommend this to teachers looking for fiction to pair with units on the American West, or to readers who love tales of strong young Jewish women.

Alex Quay, Sinai Akiba Academy, Los Angeles, CA

FICTION – TEEN

Lieberman, Leanne. *The Most Dangerous Thing*. Victoria, BC: Orca Book Publishers, 2017. 240 pp. \$14.95. (9781459811843) PBK. Gr 8-12.

The author tackles three main storylines; first, protagonist Sydney suffers from depression and social anxiety, which she must navigate while also falling for her sweet, patient lab partner, Paul. Meanwhile, her theatrical older sister Abby is attempting to put on *The Vagina Monologues* at their school, and Sydney struggles with simultaneous repulsion and fascination with openness about sexuality and one's body. Lastly, the novel shines a light on the friction between tradition and progression in Jewish families through Sydney's interactions with her miserable widowed grandfather in the weeks leading up to Passover.

Lieberman (*Gravity*, *Lauren Yanofsky Hates the Holocaust*, and *The Book of Trees*) handles these many heavy topics in a way that is both realistic and gentle, offering readers a chance to grapple with these ideas through a main character that is relatable, decides what is right for her before taking action, and who takes advantage of the support of her friends and family. Librarians should be forewarned that this story does make frequent use of the "c" word, which could potentially ruffle some feathers, but know, too, that it comes with a thoughtful discussion by teenage girls repurposing it as a part of an effort to claim agency over their bodies and desires. This is a minor quibble, but for a book that makes such an effort to confront uncomfortable subjects like sex and depression, the depiction of racist, misogynist Zeyda is perhaps a little too kind. While it is understandable why Sydney maintains a close relationship with him, a teenage audience would benefit from seeing characters having difficult conversations with their beloved, but prejudiced, elders. An interesting and timely angle on female sexuality and feminism from the perspective of a teenager trying to understand what they mean to her.

Alex Quay, Sinai Akiba Academy, Los Angeles, CA

Nesbitt, Karen. *Subject to Change*. Victoria, British Columbia: Orca Book Publishers, 2017. 288 pp. \$14.95. (9781459811461) PBK. Gr. 9-12.

Small-town life in Quebec is anything but bucolic for sixteen-year-old Declan O'Reilly. Five years prior, his world imploded when his parents divorced after his father revealed he was gay. Seamus, his older brother, reacted to the news by turning into an alcoholic delinquent. Kate, his sister, coped with the break-up by marrying young and becoming a teenage mother. Declan struggles to be the responsible sibling by helping his mother with chores and by contributing to the household finances with money earned from a part-time job. Loathing the rigidity of school rules and racking up a record number of detentions, he's on the fast track to becoming the next O'Reilly high school dropout. In an attempt to break Declan's downward spiral and help him pass his history class covering World War II and the Holocaust, Miss Fraser, the guidance counselor, pairs him with Leah, a peer tutor.

Reluctant to work with "Little Miss Perfect," Declan comes to understand that even those who live in the fancy mansions on the better side of town have dark family histories. During their tutoring sessions, he meets Mrs. Zimmerman, Leah's grandmother and a Jewish Holocaust survivor of Theresienstadt. Having history come to life by listening to her first-hand accounts about conditions under Nazi rule, he learns how gay men like his father were also rounded up, tortured, and killed. She does not sugarcoat the truth because she wants Declan "to understand how destructive fear and misunderstanding can be." Her words lead Declan to reconcile with his father and uncover the truth of what really happened on the day the O'Reilly family split apart and "life had turned into confusion and chaos." By the book's end, he discovers that even the worst situations life can throw at you can be subject to change for the better.

Nesbitt's debut novel brilliantly captures the anger, angst, and alienation felt by a socially marginalized teenager struggling to make sense of his fractured family relationships. The book touches on an aspect of the Holocaust that many young people may not be aware of. A smattering of profane language and scenes involving marijuana use and alcohol abuse provide a gritty sense of reality to this finely written book.

*Allison Marks, co-author of *The Art Lesson: A Shavuot Story* (Kar-Ben, 2017)*

HOLOCAUST AND WORLD WAR II

Campbell, Isaiah. *AbraKApow*. New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2016. 391 pp. \$16.99. (9781481426343). Gr. 5-8.

Non-stop action, great characters, mystery, and a little-known part of US World War II history turn this chapter book into a page turner. Protagonist, middle school student, Maxine - Max - Larousse moves from New York City to Texas when her soldier father becomes head of a camp for Nazi prisoners of war. The Larousse family is Jewish, hinted at but not revealed until the climax. Max must learn to deal with strange Texans and stranger Germans. She mourns this move and shields her hurt with her magic. She decides to give a magic show for the prisoners, which naturally puts her on the camp grounds, where she meets influential POW's. This helps her devise a plan when twelve of them escape. A subplot focuses on the lingering suspicion of an old lady down the street which is neatly, if sadly, solved at story's end. Middle school attitudes and prevailing politics underlie the involvement of Max's girl friends with the foreign soldiers, who may or may not be what they seem. Max's passion for magic arrives with black and white how-to-do-it diagrams of her tricks interspersed throughout the chapters. The ending author's note tells the bittersweet facts of German POW's, (most famously in YA Jewish literature in *The Summer of My German Soldier*) providing an unsuspected finale to this informative, entertaining historical fiction.

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

Chandler, Matt. *Behind Enemy Lines: The Escape of Robert Grimes with the Comet Line*. (Great Escapes of World War II, Volume 1). North Mankato, MN: Capstone Press, 2017. 32 pp. \$30.65. (9781515735304). Gr. 5-9.

Yomtov, Nel. *Death Camp Uprising: The Escape from Sobibor Concentration Camp*. (Great Escapes of World War II Volume 2). North Mankato, MN: Capstone Press, 2017. 32 pp. \$30.65. (9781515735328). Gr. 5-9.

Yomtov, Nel. *Tunneling to Freedom: The Great Escape from Stalag Luft III*. (Great Escapes of World War II, Volume 3). North Mankato, MN: Capstone Press, 2017. 32 pp. \$30.65. (9781515735311). Gr. 5-9.

Chandler, Matt. *Outrunning the Nazis: The Brave Escape of Resistance Fighter Sven Somme*. (Great Escapes of World War II, Volume 4). North Mankato, MN: Capstone Press, 2017. 32 pp. \$30.65. (9781515735298). Gr. 5-9.

This series turns true stories of World War II escapes described as “remarkable,” “gripping,” “heart-pounding,” and “extraordinary” into graphic history books for young people. Each book begins by giving a short background for the story, setting the stage for the three-section graphic depiction of the events before, during and after the escape. A Glossary, “Critical Thinking Using Common Core” section, “Read More” and “Internet Sites” lists and an Index complete each story.

These stories are interesting, educational and totally engaging. The workings of the Resistance, the plight of Concentration Camp victims, the lengths to which individuals went to escape the Nazis, and the support provided from the local community are drawn and described in excellent detail. Slow or reluctant readers will find these to be compelling reads. While *Death Camp Uprising* is the most specifically Jewish of the titles, they are all excellent additions to any World War II collection.

Kathy Bloomfield, AJL-SSC President and forwordsbooks.com, Washington.

Frankl, Victor. *Man's Search for Meaning: Young Adult Edition*. Foreword by John Boyne. Boston: Beacon Press, 2017. 200 pp. \$10.99. (9780807067994). Gr. 8-12.

Victor Frankl, who survived several concentration and work camps during World War II and whose parents, brother and wife were murdered in them, wrote his classic work in 1945, asserting that he survived because “everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms -- to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.” He is the founder of a school of psychology known as logotherapy which posits that “striving to find a meaning in one’s life is the primary motivational force in man.” Since then, there have been various editions with additions and revisions. Frankl wrote a preface to the 1992 edition of his work, which includes three main parts: “Experiences in a Concentration Camp,” “Logotherapy in a Nutshell,” and “The Case for a Tragic Optimism.” The volume also includes a chronology of Victor Frankl’s life and of the Holocaust, an afterword and selected letters and speeches. This abridged edition includes the preface to the 1992 edition, and the first part in its entirety. The section on logotherapy is abridged, with much of the discussion of scientific and philosophical references left out and more focus on the meaning of life and the meaning of suffering. The afterword and selected letters and speeches are presented intact, and the book also includes a glossary and the chronology.

Boyne, best known for *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* (David Fickling Books, 2006), includes a foreword that describes his introduction to Frankl’s book and its “profound effect” on him. This introduction will encourage young readers not only to read *Man’s Search for Meaning*, but to pursue subjects of interest and keep memories alive.

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

Graudin, Ryan. *Blood for Blood*. New York: Little, Brown, 2016. 481 pp. \$17.99. (9780316405157) Gr. 7-12.

The outstanding first book in this series, *Wolf by Wolf* (Little Brown, 2015), ended on a promising cliffhanger that left readers eagerly awaiting the sequel: the heroine, Yael, realizes that her attempt at

assassinating Hitler had been in vain, and she is in deep trouble. Alas, the writing and the plot of *Blood for Blood* are a letdown. The characters that were previously so interesting, now seem designed for a made-for-TV action movie. The title is particularly apt, as the book is filled with impossibly bloody scenes and torture described in excruciating detail. While the inventive writing of Graudin's first book is enjoyable, here the writing seems somewhat forced and sloppy. Jewish content is limited to the horrors of the Holocaust and the last scene in which Yael gets to eat challah. However, readers who enjoyed the first book, and those who love any mixture of fantasy, military combat and historical fiction, may want to have a go at this one as well. They may like the many rapid plot twists, the exciting final denouement, and the love story that develops between Yael, the Jewish shape-shifter, and her nemesis Luka, the Hitler Youth superstar. A map of Europe would come in handy, as the action unfolds all over the continent.

Joyce Levine, retired, North Shore Hebrew Academy and past AJL Publications Chair, North Woodmere, New York

McDonough, Yona Zeldis. *The Bicycle Spy*. New York, NY: Scholastic Press, 2016. 208 pp. \$16.99 (978-0545850957). Gr. 4-6.

In 1942, twelve-year-old Marcel Christophe is obsessed with the Tour de France, on hiatus due to the war. His parents ask him to use his bicycle to carry loaves of bread to family and customers. But one day Marcel learns there are messages baked into the bread and his parents work in the French Resistance. A new girl in his class, Delphine, loves the Tour de France as much as he does and she can beat any boy in a bike race. She confides her true identity as a Jew to him and he works with his parents and their network to bring her and her family to safety amid questioning by the Gestapo and bullying threats by Thierry, a classmate.

Marcel is a likable character with substantial boy appeal. Girls will appreciate the way he sticks up for Delphine. The story is well paced with plenty of tension. However, there are moments when the dialogue rings as 21st century. Back matter includes a brief history of World War II and a timeline of the Tour de France. Missing, however, is an author's note describing the interest in this subject matter and acknowledging any subject matter experts used to ensure credibility and accuracy. This book is reminiscent of Susan Lynn Meyer's *Black Radishes* (Delacorte/Random House, 2010) and Carla Jablonski's and Leland Purvis' *Resistance* (First Second/Macmillan, 2010).

Barbara Krasner, former member, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee, Somerset, NJ

[Editors' Note: *The Bicycle Spy* is a 2017 Sydney Taylor Notable Book for Older Readers]

MacKay, Jenney. *Children of the Holocaust. (Understanding the Holocaust)*. San Diego: Reference Point Press, 2015. 80 pp. \$29.95. (9781601528384). Gr. 5-12.

Allen, John. *Hitler's Final Solution. (Understanding the Holocaust)*. San Diego: Reference Point Press, 2015. 80 pp. \$29.95. (9781601528407). Gr. 5-12.

Blohm, Craig E. *Holocaust Camps and Killing Centers. (Understanding the Holocaust)*. San Diego: Reference Point Press, 2015. 80 pp. \$29.95. (9781601528421). Gr. 5-12.

Blohm, Craig E. *Holocaust Rescue and Liberation. (Understanding the Holocaust)*. San Diego: Reference Point Press, 2015. 80 pp. \$29.95. (9781601528445). Gr. 5-12.

Blohm, Craig E. *Holocaust Resistance. (Understanding the Holocaust)*. San Diego: Reference Point Press, 2015. 80 pp. \$29.95. (9781601528469). Gr. 5-12.

Allen, John. *Holocaust Survivors. (Understanding the Holocaust)*. San Diego: Reference Point Press, 2015. 80 pp. \$29.95. (9781601528483). Gr. 5-12.

Nardo, Don. *Nazi War Criminals. (Understanding the Holocaust)*. San Diego: Reference Point Press, 2015. 80 pp. \$29.95. (9781601528506). Gr. 5-12.

This excellent series on the Holocaust provides detailed and focused information about the subjects covered. Each book begins with a timeline of "Important Events of the Holocaust," followed by an

introduction describing the setting for the book's topic. They continue with historically accurate details about the subject matter, an informative narrative supported by quotes from primary sources and substantive photographs. The back of each book contains "Source Notes," short bios of "Important People," a "Further Research" section listing appropriate Books, internet sources and websites, and a thorough index.

Well researched and documented, the information in each title is thought-provoking and educational. The specialized focus of each book allows for interesting and timely perspectives. The introductory chapter of *Children of the Holocaust* quotes Heinrich Himmler, from "a secret speech... in 1943, 'I do not consider myself justified in eradicating the men...and allowing the avengers in the shape of the children to grow up for our sons and grandsons.' In other words, mercy was to be shown to no Jew...not even the children." The book goes on to describe how children were murdered, how they were rescued and the long-term consequences of this non-childhood on the survivors. *Holocaust Resistance* begins with a chapter entitled "The Myth of Passivity," decrying the idea that Jews were led "like sheep to the slaughter," followed by chapters describing the many ways Jews resisted the Nazis. *Nazi War Criminals* ends with, "We must be vigilant against all ideologies based on hatred and exclusion, whenever and wherever they appear." -- An accurate assessment for the continued need for these series.

Kathy Bloomfield, AJL-SSC President and Forwardsbooks.com, Washington, DC.

Mermelstein, Yael. *I Promise You*. Lakewood, NJ: Israel Bookshop Press, 2016. 279 pp. \$20.96. (9781600914737). Gr. 5-8.

Manusia Adler is 11 years old in 1939. She lives in comparative luxury in the town of Pabianice, Poland in 1939. Her father is a respected member of the court of the Rebbe of Ger. After the Nazis capture Poland, her father goes into hiding, and Manusia becomes the family manager for a year, before the community is moved to the Lodz ghetto. Along with the rest of the doomed community, the family struggles for almost four years, until the ghetto is destroyed and the survivors are transported to the camps. Over the following nine months Manusia and her new friends work, starve, and are transferred to several other camps, until the war ends in May 1945. The story continues with her struggles in post-War Europe, until she finds members of her family and marries. The postscript quickly tells that the couple moved first to Palestine, and then to New York.

I Promise You is told in short vignettes of one or two pages. Most of the lines are fewer than 8 words long. And yet the images are dramatic, incisive and captivating. Rather than extensive descriptions, Mermelstein expresses the pain of Manusia's experience in terse wording and the one-breath-at-a-time pacing. Middle grade readers, as well as adults, will respond to her powerful story. The photos at the back will help orient readers to pre-War Poland.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA

Watts, Irene N. *Seeking Refuge: A Graphic Novel*. Illus. by Kathryn E. Shoemaker. Vancouver: Tradewind Books, 2017. 128 pp. \$15.95. (978192689029) PBK. Gr. 4-7.

In this sequel to *Goodbye, Marianne* (Tundra Books, 2008), eleven-year-old Marianne Kohn leaves Germany on the Kindertransport to London, England in December 1938. There she is placed in a foster home that strips her of her name and her language. She is alone and lonely except for one school friend. On September 1, 1939, London children are evacuated and Marianne once again is transported by train, this time to Wales. She still does not fit in and faces both anti-Semitism and anti-German sentiment. She worries about her parents. She eventually reunites with her mother and they move to London where her mother has found a job. Still, Marianne's father was last heard from in Prague and the Nazis have invaded Czechoslovakia. His last postcard to Marianne said simply, "I love you. Remember me." This leaves the door open for a third installment.

Marianne's story reflects author Watts' own Kindertransport experiences. The penciled illustrations at first seem jarring because of their blurriness. But that is a strategic move; Marianna's mother's face is perfectly in focus. The combination of text and illustration produces a heart-wrenching story that is not to be missed. For another Kindertransport graphic treatment, see Trina Robbins' *Lily Renee, Escape Artist* (Graphic Universe, 2011).

Barbara Krasner, former member, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee, Somerset, NJ

ISRAEL

Benjamin, Amanda. *Journey through Jerusalem*. Illus. by Tamar Blumenfeld. Springfield, NJ: Apples & Honey Press, 2017. 24 pp. \$17.95. (9781681155319) HC. Preschool - Gr. 3.

A bare-bones Michelin Guide for the preschool and early primary set, the premise of which is simple: Olivia, a mother cat and her three kittens, Mirri, Jem and Bex, travel to Jerusalem in a basket in the back of a truck. When the truck stops, Olivia's inquisitive offspring jump out at the Montefiore Windmill. Mama cat follows and soon finds herself leading the young ones a tour of Jerusalem, the city where she was born. They travel from sight to sight in the Old City including the Cardo, the Arab shuk, the Western Wall, the Dome of the Rock, and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The feline family jumps on Jerusalem's light rail to go to the Mahane Yehuda Market – delish! A view of the Knesset and the Shrine of the Book round out the tour. Soon the exhausted group heads home with the wish to come back to Jerusalem soon.

Considering that Jerusalem is the most contested and controversial city in the world, *Journey through Jerusalem*, is told from a religion-free point of view. The cats visit "The Western Wall of an ancient Temple." "...the Dome of the Rock. It's built on a very sacred spot. People come here to pray." No judgment; no agenda (maybe that's the agenda.)

The author's simple approach to a complex city is matched perfectly with illustrator Tamar Blumenfeld's rich work. Each page combines gorgeous photography of the sites along with collage and photoshop illustrations of the cat protagonists as they move through the city. Every family planning a trip to Jerusalem with very young children could use this book to prepare their child for what they will see. A perfect accompaniment for preschool and early elementary pretend journeys to Israel.

Rena Citrin, Head Librarian. Bernard Zell Anshe Emet Day School, Chicago

Ofanansky, Allison. *Tisha B'Av: A Jerusalem Journey*. Illus. by Eliyahu Alpern. Minneapolis: Kar-Ben, 2017. 32 pp. \$16.99. (9781467789301). Preschool - Gr. 3.

A family learns about ancient Jerusalem in the days of the Temple and about the modern observance of Tisha B'Av in the best and most effective way of all – by exploring ancient sites in a hands-on way; they dig, they walk, they photograph, they touch, they ask, and they listen to knowledgeable guides. They walk where their ancestors walked and they learn as they go. The reader's own tour is accompanied by gorgeous full- and partial- page color photographs which make the city glow. Sites visited in Jerusalem's Old City include the Western Wall, Robinson's Arch, the underground tunnels where one can see buried sections of the Wall, and the Temple Mount Sifting Project where tourists have a chance to become archaeologists themselves. They get a good sense of what life was like in the days of the Temple and the magnitude of its loss.

When the touring day is over and evening falls, Tisha B'Av begins. The group returns to the Wall to pray with others and experiences the loss of the ancient Temple through a modern-day lens. A note with a historical explanation of Tisha B'Av is appended adding more perspective to this beautifully written and designed book.

Michal Hoschander Malen, retired, North Shore Hebrew Academy Library, Great Neck, NY and the Jewish Book Council.

Shem-Tov, Tami and Rachella Sandbank. *A Concert in the Sand.* Illus. By Avi Ofer. Minneapolis: Kar-Ben, 2017. 32 pp. \$17.56 (978-1512400991) Library Binding; \$7.99 (9781512401011) PBK. Preschool-Gr. 2.

This fictional account of the first performance by what was to become the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra (IPO), in December 1936, features presumably Hebrew-speaking Uri and his German-speaking grandmother. She plucks Uri from a day of boredom and leads him through Tel-Aviv with an undisclosed destination. He wonders about his grandmother's intentions and thoughts along their wordless journey, as they observe a growing parade of people heading in the same direction, including some "carrying funny-shaped cases." When the crowd ultimately gathers at a beach side auditorium, musical instruments emerge from those cases and musicians begin to play, under the direction of Grandma's friend, "Mr. Huberman," and conducted by Arturo Toscanini. The musical experience is filled with magic for Uri and emotion for Grandma. An historical note includes two photographs from the era, and an explanation of how violinist Bronislaw Huberman, recognizing the dangerous Nazi expulsion of Jewish musicians from German orchestras, traveled through Europe to assemble 70 top Jewish musicians and create the IPO. The soft pen and ink illustrations include clever nods to Jewish literature and culture in Hebrew lettering in street scenes, and beautifully compliment Uri's adventure through the city. The story is sure to inspire further exploration of this momentous event and fascinating history of the IPO.

Martha McMahan, Sinai Akiba Academy, Los Angeles

JEWISH LIFE & VALUES

Bietz, Barbara. *The Sundown Kid.* Illus. by John Kanzler. Atlanta: August House, 2016. 32 pp. \$8.95. (9781939160942). Kindergarten - Gr. 2.

A pioneer Jewish family moves to a small town in the American Wild West, but as the sole Jews, they are lonely without the extended clan that always joined them to celebrate holidays back East. Their days are full and busy, but Shabbat is sad. The family mantra becomes "too much soup, not enough family". Instead of kin knocking on their door it is windblown sage brush or the horse kicking his new shoes. The young son decides to solve the problem. He fills their wide-open spaces with town folk who love chicken soup: the sheriff, the blacksmith, the owners of the general store. As the guests pour in with their families, joy and holiday warmth abound.

This lovely tale is told in the first person by the young, unnamed son. The mitzvot of inviting guests alleviates their lonely sadness at being far from their roots. The art enhances the story, focusing on hearty people, adobe houses, horses and cactus. The lines in the illustrations convey the sense of oil paint on canvas. This is a wonderful way to express the pangs of homesickness even as the family savors the excitement of the new, the different and starting over again, a Jewish tradition itself!

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

[Editors' Note: *The Sundown Kid* is a 2017 Sydney Taylor Notable Book for Younger Readers and a PJ Library Selection.]

Berg, Melissa. *The Challah That Took Over the House.* Illus. By Shiela Marie. New York: Eclectic Ivri Press, 2016. 62 pp. \$12.95 (9780992163754) PBK. Gr. K-3. Reviewed from ARC.

Four girls live in the same apartment building and do not get along. Coming home from school on a Friday afternoon, each with their own challah dough to bake, the girls quarrel over whose recipe will be the best, which angers the dough, causing it to grow large enough to spill out of the house. The girls' efforts to tame the "Challah Monster" are unsuccessful until they work together, show kindness to each other, and do "the steps of teshuva," which the girls describe as "recognizing you did wrong,

saying you won't do it again, and giving to charity." While the concept of a "Challah Monster" might delight young children, the plot feels forced and the characters undeveloped. In an apparent effort to establish the discord among the girls, the book opens with one girl exclaiming to her mother, "But you promised! If I don't like it here, I can move back to Golders Green and stay with Auntie Aviva." The mother's response doesn't address any of these details and the situation is never mentioned again. Despite the fantasy of personified dough, what the girls accomplish in the ambiguous hours between the end of school and their parents' return from work is hard to grasp: covering the entire house with ten rolls of tin foil, holding a bake sale that they publicize to friends and announce to the local news station, and braiding the massive dough and dragging it by bicycle to a local homeless shelter. The lesson is learned and, "that Shabbat, all of the girls were nice to each other and played with each other," also relieved that the house is cleaned of every crumb since Passover is approaching. Other Judaic concepts and values are inserted with effort along the way with the highlight being each girl's challah recipe and instructions for dough braiding included at the end. This unoriginal, easy chapter book is reminiscent of the picture book *Way Too Much Challah Dough* by Goldie Shulman (Hachai, 2006).

Martha McMahan, Sinai Akiba Academy, Los Angeles

Claar, Fred and Joyce, eds. *Values and Ethics Through a Jewish Lens*. Waccabuc, NY: Buoy Point Media LLC, 2015. 178 pp. \$11.95. (9780982755495) PBK. Adult.

The website www.torahtopicstoday.com has morphed into www.valuesandethics.org. As part of its evolution, the editors have published this book containing topics for family discussion based on the values found in each week's Torah portion. Values such as compassion, courage, or gratitude are paired with an appropriate *parasha* – Re'eh "Giving to the Needy", Lech Lecha "Finding the Courage to Begin", or Tzav "Feeling Grateful" for example. Most *parashot* have more than one topic to be discussed and there are topics for all the Jewish holidays. Each page contains an overview of the topic, a synopsis of the Torah portion, and questions for discussion written by one of several rabbis and/or Jewish educators. The goal is to find the modern applicability of Torah.

While the concept is an excellent one, the execution is less than stellar. The writing is pedantic and pedagogic. Young children will have difficulty understanding the concepts while older kids will most certainly be rolling their eyes. A great deal of "rewording" would be necessary to produce the desired results in a family setting. Add to this a number of disturbing typos – in one case, the end of a paragraph is entirely omitted, in another, Balaam is referred to as Bilaam and Balaam in the same paragraph, and there are many misspellings throughout the book. Again, the concept is an excellent one, and this book could be used to assist parents and teachers in bringing Torah to life at home and in the classroom. It could also be used to aid B'nai Mitzvah in understanding their Torah portion and writing their D'var Torah. However, the reader is cautioned to heed the problematic issues described above.

Kathy Bloomfield, AJL President-SSC and forwordsbooks.com, Washington, DC

Hecht, Zalmy. *My Very Own Letter*. Illus. by Chani Judowitz. Brooklyn, New York: Hachai Publishing, 2016. 18 pp. \$10.95. (9781929628896). Preschool - Gr. 1.

Written in simple, rhyming verses, a very young boy tells his little sister about a special gift he received: "When I was a baby, so cute and so small, I got a great gift, the most special of all! It didn't light up, or rattle, or spring, It didn't have wheels – it wasn't a swing. Something brand new, Part of something so old. Something I'd have, that I could not hold. Can you guess what it was? What could my gift be? A real Torah letter that's written for me!"

My Very Own Letter follows a couple of children, who with their parents' help, fulfill the Rambam's directive, in *Sefer HaMitzvos*, to write a Sefer Torah. Prompted by the Lubavitcher Rebbe's global Torah Campaign initiated in 1981, all boys and girls under the ages of bar and bat mitzvah, are encouraged to sponsor a letter in a Sefer Torah. To date, more than two million Jewish children have participated

in the writing of five children's Sifrei Torah that are housed in the Tzemach Tzedek Shul in Jerusalem.

The unity of the Jewish people is the overriding theme of this book aimed for the lap-sit audience. The words and illustrations are simple, but the message is profound. Each and every Jew counts – even and especially the youngest among us. Colorful art printed on durable laminated pages make this an especially appealing volume.

Rena Citrin, Head Librarian, Bernard Zell Anshe Emet Day School, Chicago.

Kline, Lori S. *Almost a Minyan*. Illus. by Susan Simon. Austin: Sociosights Press, 2017. 40 pp. \$17.99. (978099132749) HC; \$7.99 eBook. Gr. 2-6.

There is one synagogue in the community, where each morning a girl's father attends morning prayers, carrying his tallis and tefillin. On the weekends, grandfather used to stay with the family, but recently Zayde died, and her father is weighed down with mourning. One morning, though, he tells her that she is now old enough to join the minyan. When they arrive, he gives her Zayde's ritual garments, saying "his tallis and tefillin carry his spirit/wrapped in his love you can always be near it." That morning, wrapped in her Zayde's love, she is the tenth person in the minyan.

Kline and Simon know the world they portray, and there are touching images of small-town Jewish life. The minyan includes both men and women. The rhyme scheme is sweet (but not cloying) and a bit complex. The book takes davening seriously, and reminds us that every person matters. At the same time, there are several seeming incongruities, including women wearing tefillin. Zayde's death turns the story more somber than it needs to be. Finally, the artwork portrays what seems like a mixed-race family, yet another issue to be discussed with young readers. In the end, while young children want to emulate their elders, the story has too many pieces for the suggested 3-6 target age group. Despite its many worthy ambitions, *Almost a Minyan* tries to do too many things.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA

Snyder, Laurel. *The Forever Garden*. Illus. by Samantha Cotterill. New York: Schwartz & Wade, 2017. 40 pp. \$17.99. (9780553512731) HC; \$11.44 (9780553512755) eBook. Preschool-Gr. 2. Reviewed from ARC.

Loosely based on the Talmudic story about Honi and the carob tree (Ta'anit 23a), this gentle picture book teaches several important values: passing traditions from one generation to another, caring for the earth, and cherishing friends and neighbors. Honey is a woman who lives next door to a young girl. Told in first-person from the girl's point of view, we learn "In sunshine and shower, in darkness and wind, / Honey tends her garden." But Honey tends more than her garden. She teaches the girl how to sing to the kale, to look at fireflies and stars at night, to get her knees muddy. Most of all, Honey teaches the girl how to plant for future generations and to pass on what she's learned to new friends.

The illustrations are skillfully rendered in pen-and-ink on watercolor paper and then colored digitally. The design and layout are varied and thus keep the reader's interest. Aside from the implied theme about Honi, and the fact that the girl and her mother invite Honey over every Friday night for dinner, there is little overt Jewish content. The *Forever Garden* might be useful in the primary classroom in a unit on trees, gardening, or even Tu B'Shevat.

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



PICTURE BOOKS

Michelson, Richard. *The Language of Angels: A Story about the Reinvention of Hebrew.* Illus. by Karla Gudeon. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge, 2017. 32 pp. \$16.99. (9781580896368) HC. Kindergarten - Gr. 4.

“Once there was a child without a friend.” So begins Michelson’s picture book about Eliezer Ben-Yehuda’s revival of Hebrew into a living, modern language, which he tells from the perspective of Ben-Yehuda’s young son, Ben-Zion. Determined to raise Ben-Zion speaking only Hebrew, Eliezer did not want him to hear the Yiddish, Arabic, Ladino or other languages spoken by the residents of late 19th century Jerusalem. He even covered the boy’s ears to prevent him from hearing animal noises. “‘You shall hear only Hebrew, the Language of Angels,’ he told his son. ‘You will be the first child in more than two thousand years who will grow up speaking only the beauty of our ancient tongue.’” Michelson captures the loneliness of a child who is unable to converse with his peers and who is taunted for being different, but he also explains in simple language Eliezer’s painstaking work in creating new Hebrew words by relying on ancient Hebrew and other languages. Ben-Zion’s peers eventually begin to learn to speak Hebrew as well, “[a]nd by the time Ben-Zion was grown, he had made lots and lots of friends.” Karla Gudeon’s colorful, watercolor illustrations, including many Hebrew words, nicely complement the text. An afterword contains brief biographies of Ben-Zion and his parents Eliezer and Devorah, as well as the history of Hebrew and the land now known as Israel.

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

SHABBAT AND HOLIDAYS

BEYOND BLINTZES & CHEESECAKE: NEW SHAVUOT PICTURE BOOKS

by Rachel Kamin

Jewish holiday picture book shelves are overflowing with Hanukkah and Passover stories. Shabbat, Rosh Hashanah, and Yom Kippur are also well represented and Purim and Sukkot have been catching up. However, for many years, the only picture book specifically dealing with the holiday of Shavuot for younger readers was *A Mountain of Blintzes* by Barbara Diamond Goldin (Houghton Mifflin, 2001). Resourceful librarians and Jewish educators also relied on books like *The Ten Commandments for Jewish Children* by Miriam Nerlove (Albert Whitman, 1999) (as well as *Ten Good Rules* by Susan Remick Topek) (Kar-Ben, 2007), *How Mama Brought the Spring* by Fran Manushkin (Dutton, 2008), *Ruth and Naomi: A Bible Story* by Jean Marzollo (Little Brown, 2005), *When the World Was Quiet* by Phyllis Nutkis (Hachai, 2004), and *No Rules for Michael* by Sylvia A. Rouss (Kar-Ben, 2003) as spring boards to discuss the themes, values, and customs of the holiday. In recent years there has been more focus on the Festival of Weeks with *Shuli and Me: From Slavery to Freedom* by Joan Benjamin-Farren (Black Jasmine, 2006), *Sammy Spider’s First Shavuot* by Sylvia A. Rouss (Kar-Ben, 2008), *A Dozen Daisies for Raizy* by Rebecca Klempner (Hachai, 2008), *The Littlest Mountain* by Barb Rosenstock (Kar-Ben, 2011), *Sadie and the Big Mountain* by Jamie Korngold (Kar-Ben, 2012), *Cheesecake for Shavuot* by Allison Ofanansky (Kar-Ben, 2013) and *Kopecs for Blintzes* (Kar-Ben, 2016).

The three new Shavuot related books reviewed below will certainly be welcome additions in Jewish libraries and classrooms: *Yossi and the Monkeys: A Shavuot Story* by Jennifer Tzivia MacLeod, *The Art Lesson: A Shavuot Story* by AJL member and reviewer Allison Marks and her husband Wayne, and *The Greatest Ten* by Janice Surlin. Now, if we could only get some more new picture books for Lag B’Omer (Simchat Torah and Tu B’Shevat would be nice too)!

MacLeod, Jennifer Tzivia. *Yossi and the Monkeys, a Shavuot Story*. Illus. by Shirley Waisman. Minneapolis: Kar-Ben, 2017. 32 pp. \$17.56 (9781467789325) Library Binding; \$7.99 (9781467794213) PBK; \$6.99 eBook. Preschool- Gr. 2. Reviewed from ARC.

A monkey, escaped from the circus, uses his juggling talent and comical personality to help a poor man sell the kippahs and vests his wife makes in order to earn a little money to buy things for his family's Shavuot celebration. In a tale that will bring Slobodkina's classic *Caps for Sale* to mind, the author makes a few references to Shavuot to justify the subtitle: the family is so poor there is no money for challahs, blintzes, or flowers; Shavuot is referred to as the birthday of King David; and the illustrator shows the month of Sivan on the wall calendar. There is also a paragraph about Shavuot in the inside front cover. The rest of this entertaining story tells of the monkey's antics that force the manager of the circus to buy 8 kippahs for his monkeys and to trade his star monkey to the poor man in exchange for 8 little vests, also for his monkeys. The text is well written, spaced attractively among the whimsical, full page illustrations, and printed in a clear, child-friendly font. The setting is drawn as a shtetl and the townspeople are all dressed in tattered clothes, with the exception of the occupants of the largest house in town. The people's and the monkeys' expressions are funny caricatures of a variety of emotions, rendered in mostly green and brown shades. A very cute, but superfluous picture book.

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

Marks, Allison and Wayne. *The Art Lesson, A Shavuot Story*. Illus. by Annie Wilkinson. Minneapolis, MN: Kar-Ben Publishing, a division of Lerner Publishing Group 2017. 32 pp. \$17.99 (9781467781725) Preschool- Gr. 2. Ed from ARC.

A young girl's art lesson in her grandmother's studio is the setting for an interesting exchange about Shavuot traditions of celebrating the spring harvest, studying Torah into the night, and decorating with papercuts. As the girl learns to make papercuts, she learns the meaning of her Hebrew name, Shoshana. On the last two pages of the book, the reader will learn a bit about the four Jewish artists whose names Grandma uses as nicknames for Shoshana, as well as more facts about Shavuot, and how to make a Jewish star papercut. Hopefully the publisher will correct the two misspellings of Shavuot on page 31 in the actual printing.

For the most part, the child-like illustrations provide a lovely complement to the well written, nicely flowing story. Full-page bleeds show the detailed description of the studio and Shoshana's imaginings, once she gets the hang of seeing images in her own papercuts. Wilkinson cleverly wove the various styles of art of the four Jewish artists of Shoshana's nicknames into the art of the book. However, there are several instances where the illustrations are inconsistent with the text.

While there isn't a great deal of information about Shavuot, this is a nice addition to the few picture books we have for the holiday, and you can learn a little about Chagall, Modigliani, Krasner, and Pissarro, while you're at it.

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

Surlin, Janice. *The Greatest Ten*. Illus. by Rivka Krinsky. Hummingbird Jewel Press, 2016. 24 pp. \$11.95 (9780998170008) PBK. Preschool.

Coming just in time for Shavuot, this delightful self-published book offers a new look at the Ten Commandments for very young children and is wonderfully inclusive for all levels of Jewish observance. Surlin suggests that her rhyming explanations of the "Aseret HaDibrot" be sung to the tune of the popular folk song, "This Old Man", but the poetic text can certainly be enjoyed as a fun

read-aloud if your voice is not meant for that sort of thing. The Ten Commandments are explained in child-friendly language, such as commandment number two: “You must have only Me as your God eternally; Never make an idol or an image of Me, I am here though you can’t see”. (Try singing that to the folk tune and see how much fun it would be for a library story time!)

The bright, watercolor illustrations are charming and inclusive to people with all abilities. Particularly affecting is the dreamy double-paged spread of commandment number three, telling children that “words with God’s name must be nice” Interesting author notes at the end of the book include definitions of terms such as “Aseret HaDibrot” or “Moshe Rabeinu” and also information about the illustrations that will be quite useful in a discussion with children. A reference to God as “Hashem”, making certain that all male heads are illustrated with either kippot or various hats, and depicting Hebrew text and a variety of Jewish rituals accurately makes this gem of a book appropriate for all audiences.

Lisa Silverman, Burton Sperber Jewish Community Library at American Jewish University, Los Angeles

Adler, David A. *Yom Kippur Shortstop*. Illus. by Andre Ceolin. Springfield, NJ: Apples & Honey Press, 2017. 32 pp. \$17.95. (9781681155210). Kindergarten - Gr. 3.

Jacob is proud to play shortstop for the Lions; in his three years on the team, he’s never missed a game. Now he faces a dilemma: Wednesday is a big game, but it’s also Yom Kippur. Jacob loves baseball, but he knows how important the holiday is. Mom and Dad take a hands-off approach (“Dad says, ‘Think about what you want to do’”), but sitting in shul and listening to the story of Jonah and the whale leads Jacob to make one decision...and then change his mind. Adler’s first-person text puts readers right alongside Jacob as he puzzles through his options. He doesn’t want to let his teammates down (“Baseball is a team sport. It takes a whole team to win,” is his coach’s mantra), but in the end he realizes he’s “on lots of teams – my family, my friends, my people, and the world. The Lions, too.” Ceolin’s illustrations, which show observant Jews with a variety of skin tones, reflect Jacob’s thoughts and emotions, from the pride, excitement, and camaraderie he feels while playing his favorite sport to the wonder he experiences from being at synagogue and the friends that he has there. A useful appended note tells about Sandy Koufax and other Jewish baseball players and ends with the questions: “Do you think Jacob made the right decision? What would you do if you had a similar decision to make?”

Elissa Gershowitz, Senior Editor, The Horn Book Magazine and member of the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee.

Kimmel, Eric A. *Big Sam: A Rosh Hashanah Tall Tale*. Illus. by Jim Starr. Springfield, NJ: Apples & Honey Press, 2017. 32 pp. \$17.95. (9781681155258). Kindergarten - Gr. 3.

Kimmel invents an original Jewish tall tale starring Samson the Giant, a Paul Bunyan-esque character, nicknamed “Big Sam.” Rosh Hashanah is approaching, and Big Sam knows just what to do to make a special challah. First, he digs a hole in the Southwest to use as a mixing bowl (“It’s still there today. We call it the Grand Canyon”), then he dumps in a bunch of ingredients, adds water (by damming the Colorado River), and whittles a mixing spoon from a giant redwood; he flattens the hills in West Texas to knead the dough; then uses first a geyser (to help with the rise) and then Mount St. Helens to bake the bread. Along the way, he helps a train cross the Mississippi by using his shoulders as a bridge: “Hip, hip, hooray!” But not everybody is pleased: “You flattened our hills. You blocked our rivers. Didn’t you think about the creatures who live here?” ask the eagles. Kindhearted Big Sam quickly makes amends, in the spirit of the holiday, and shares the challah with everyone, including folkloric heroes Paul Bunyan and Babe, Pecos Bill and Slue Foot Sue, John Henry, and Annie Christmas. Kimmel’s tall tale is entertaining with an environmentalist message that feels natural rather than tacked-on. Starr’s earth-toned illustrations depict a cheerful, bearded, larger-than-life Jewish frontiersman.

Elissa Gershowitz, Senior Editor, The Horn Book Magazine and member of the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee.

Koffsky, Ann D. *Judah Maccabee Goes to the Doctor*. Illus. by Talitha Shipman. Springfield, NJ: Apples & Honey Press, 2017. 32 pp. \$17.95. (9781681155227). Kindergarten - Gr. 2.

Young Judah wants to protect his baby sister Hannah. At Hanukkah bubbe tells her grandson about a Judah long ago who was a great protector of his brothers and his people. She gives her Judah a sword with a Jewish star and Hebrew letters like the one historical Judah used. Modern Judah puts it to good use shielding Hannah until dad takes them to their pediatric checkup. Judah needs a shot he does not want. Dad cleverly relates it to protecting Hannah; it is an inside shield: when Judah guards himself from illness he guards Hannah. Judah braves the hypodermic. The book barely mentions holiday ceremonies, but they are depicted in the colorful, cute illustrations: dreidels, the menorah in the window, Hanukkah gifts, unnamed fried foods on the table next to a challah and a menorah and Hebrew sign in store windows when they drive to the doctor through a snowy town which marks Hanukkah a winter holiday. The book assumes Jewish literacy of even young readers, letting their familiarity with the Hanukkah holiday resonate, encouraging readers to recall more customs. The illustrations parallel the text highlighting a multicultural cast of characters as appealing as the story.

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



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Reviews of Nonfiction Titles for Adults

EDITED BY DANIEL SCHEIDE AND REBECCA JEFFERSON

Acoca, Rabbi Ilan. *The Sephardic Book of Why-A guide to Sephardic Jewish Traditions and Customs*. Saarbrücken, Germany: Hadassa Word Press, 2016. 114 pp. \$12.00. (9783639794854).

Not since Dobrinsky published his exposition of the customs and practices of the Sephardi / Mizrahi Jews in the 1980s have we seen further exploration (in English) into the culture and traditions of this multi-faceted group. Rabbi Ilan Acoca takes on the mantle as expositor of Sephardic custom in *The Sephardic Book of Why*, but with a slightly different approach to Dobrinsky. In this work, Acoca seeks not to describe and distinguish the many different customs and traditions of the various groups of Sephardim, but rather to delineate the underlying rationale behind some of those customs and rulings. Thus, for example, Acoca explains that Sephardim laugh during *Havdallah*, after reciting the blessing on the wine because "This custom is cited by Rabbi Yosef Benaim (in *Noheg Behochmah*, p. 54) as a good omen to have a week filled with joy laughter and blessings." Acoca also draws attention to instances where the customs of the Sephardim differ from those of their Ashkenazi brethren. Acoca notes, for example, that among the Sephardim, only a single blessing is usually said in donning a pair of *tefillin* (based on the custom of Rav Yosef Karo in *Shulhan Arukh, Orach Hayyim*, 25:9); whereas the Ashkenazim pronounce two separate blessings on the *tefillin shel yad* and the *tefillin shel rosh* (based on the ruling of Rav Moshe Isserles in *Shulhan Arukh, Orach Hayyim*, 25:5, who argued that since a pair of *tefillin* involved two *mitzvot*, they required two blessings).

Sephardic traditions however, are not altogether homogenous, as Acoca himself acknowledges. One example of this can be seen in the assertion that Sephardim don the *tefillin shel yad* while sitting, and then don the *tefillin shel rosh* standing up. Acoca presents an excellent explanation for this custom, but he points out that it is by no means one that is universally observed by all Sephardi / Mizrahi Jews. Acoca notes that with regard to the variations within Sephardi traditions, individuals will follow the traditions of the group with whom they associate.

Rabbi Acoca has thus done a great service to the Sephardi community by articulating many of the distinctive traditions of the Sephardim, while at the same time delineating reasons for their observance. A more expanded discussion of the traditions would be quite useful, but for the time being, this work is an essential for any library concerning itself with various Jewish traditions.

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

Appel, Gerson. *The Concise Code of Jewish Law: A Guide to the Observance of Shabbat*. Revised edition by Rabbi Daniel Goldstein. New York: Oxford University Press; Yeshiva University Press, 2016. 543 pp. \$29.95. (9781592643929).

This is a revised edition of a book first published in 1989, part of a four-volume set of which only two were ever published. The revised edition of volume two, *A Guide to the Observance of Shabbat*, is shorter by seven pages than the 1989 edition but the layout of the text is more pleasing to the eye. Otherwise, the revisions seem to this reviewer more cosmetic than real; for example, to accommodate the preference of contemporary Orthodox readers: instead of "Reading of the Torah" we have "*Keriat haTorah*," instead of "Classes of labor forbidden on the Sabbath" we have "Classes of Labor (*Melachot*) forbidden on Shabbat." As the editor of the revised edition notes "the writing has been changed from the more formal style of the 1970s, and many of the practical applications have been updated and new ones added." But was it necessary to replace Isaiah with Yeshayahu in order to reference a Biblical verse? Nevertheless, such a compendium is not to be read cover to cover but rather consulted. To this end, the editor provides a good selection of indexes and reference tools at the back of the volume, including a list of Hebrew sources and references, a topical list of Halachic annotations, a comprehensive index of subjects, a list of "codes, responsa, and other works," and a glossary of terms.

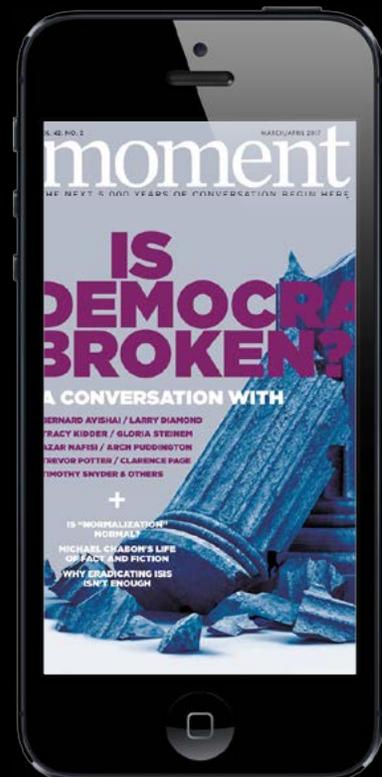
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Baron, Joel & Sara Paasche-Orlow. *Deathbed Wisdom of the Hasidic Masters: The Book of Departure and Caring for People at the End of Life*, Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2016. 213 pp. \$29.99. (9781580238502).

This book is a translation of Benjamin Mintz's *Sefer haHistalkut* (1930) which gives accounts of the deathbed wisdom of 42 Hasidic *Tsadikim* who passed from *olam ha-zeh* (this world) to *olam ha-bah* (the world to come) between the years 1760 and 1904. Baron and Paasche-Orlow not only offer a good translation of Mintz's earlier work, but as rabbis specializing in pastoral end of life care to hospice patients they bring additional insights based on their experience. Together they enrich these Hasidic tales with introductions, notes, and comments, and they provide 19 brief essays called "insight sparks" on related topics such as ethical wills, and the timing of *yahrzeit* dates in the Hebrew calendar. By extracting modern pastoral lessons from historical accounts, they help readers make meaning out of caring for others on the brink of breathing their last breath. Although Baron and Paasche-Orlow construct a framework of meaning to help readers come to grips with mortality, the book does not exhaustively demarcate the complexity of rabbinic views about the world to come. It does focus, however, on the importance of last words (traditionally the *shema* (prayer) and *vidui* (confession)).

Deathbed Wisdom of the Hasidic Masters will be of interest not just to those seeking further knowledge about Hasidic wisdom; it will also interest professionals of all faiths and backgrounds involved in end of life care in hospitals and geriatric facilities, and individuals facing the death of a loved one. Recommended for all libraries.

David B Levy, Touro College

Berger, Yitzhak. *Jonah in the Shadows of Eden*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016. 172 pp. \$60.00. (9780253021298).

This relatively short book makes a complex, somewhat dense argument: namely, that the Biblical book of Jonah is constructed in a very sophisticated way and contains many, often subtle, connections and allusions to numerous other Biblical texts (e.g. the tales of the Garden of Eden and the Exodus, the book of Ezekiel). Further, the author (a professor at CUNY's Hunter College) argues that the book intentionally draws two contradictory portraits of the prophet. One is of a stern man who flees God's call to him because he does not want to see the sinful city of Nineveh repent and be saved from destruction. That is the traditional interpretation of the book. The second is that of a "dreamy idealist" who does not recognize the seriousness of sin. A man who flees from God because he thinks God means to destroy Nineveh. The book of Jonah, in Dr. Berger's interpretation, comes out against both extremes and asserts the beneficial nature of repentance and efforts at moral improvement. For collections of Biblical studies.

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

Brodsky, Adriana M. *Sephardi, Jewish, Argentine: Community and National Identity*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016. 280 pp. \$35.00. (9780253023032).

In this insightful new work, Brodsky shows how the Sephardim living in Argentina escaped the nationalistic attacks directed against Ashkenazim because they distinguished themselves from the latter, and integrated more into the larger Argentine Society. The price they paid for this integration was great however, because it threatened Sephardi efforts to maintain their links to the larger Jewish community.

Brodsky points out that the Sephardim had themselves initiated their immigration to Argentina at the beginning of the 20th Century, and had not been forcefully compelled from their homelands, as had their Ashkenazi brethren. When they reached their new land, they worked individually and industriously to build homes right alongside their non-Jewish neighbors, unlike the Ashkenazi Gauchos who were aided by Baron de Hirsch in building agricultural communities independent of the surrounding culture. With a language (Ladino) that was relatively similar to the Spanish spoken by

their neighbors, and their integration into the larger culture, the Sephardim became invisible to all but the most discerning of their neighbors. Though the Sephardim did tend to settle in locations close to their co-religionists, they did not isolate themselves from those around them. Nor did the Sephardim avoid the political sphere, working actively for liberal, and even socialist causes.

All of these actions came at a cost, however, for in trying to navigate their overlapping and sometimes combatting loyalties, the Sephardim ran the risk of total assimilation, and the loss of identity. In order to combat this, Brodsky shows that they demonstrated their involvement in the Jewish community through such actions as participation in constructing the Jewish hospital in Buenos Aires, and in representing the Jewish community in provincial towns, alongside the Ashkenazim. Overall, Brodsky's analysis of the tensions between assimilation and the maintenance of Jewish identity among the Sephardim in Argentina is a significant contribution to the study of identity. It will be a valuable contribution to all Jewish studies collections.

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

Collins, John J. *The Scriptures and Sectarianism: Essays on the Dead Sea Scrolls*. Reprint Edition. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016. 341 pp. \$45.00. (9780802873149).

Professor John J. Collins of Yale Divinity School is a prolific scholar and this tome brings together fifteen previously published articles and one conference paper in one place. All exhibit an admirably cautious scholarship, trying not to go beyond what the evidence provides. The essays, taken together, give us one scholar's perspective on the Dead Sea Scrolls and the sect that collected them. For example, Dr. Collins believes that the Qumran community was probably Essene, but he does not think it a certainty. He is inclined to think the sect broke with the mainstream not over who should be high priest, as some maintain, but over interpretation of the Torah. While there is much Enochian literature at Qumran, he argues that the sect itself was not Enochian (seeing Enoch as the primary, if not only, revealer of God's will) because it was so focused on the Law of Moses and its proper interpretation. Much of Dr. Collins' views are summarized in this volume's introduction. Recommended for libraries with large, strong collections on the Dead Sea Scrolls.

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

Dee, Leo. *Transforming the World: The Jewish Impact on Modernity*. Jerusalem and New York: Urim Publications, 2016. 190 pp. \$25.95. (9789655242140).

Why and how should Jews adapt to the modern world? An immediately emergent problem is that the author fails to present his understanding of modernity other than to claim that secularism and its many variants represents the phenomenon's character. With this assumption, Dee (a British-born, Israeli-trained rabbi and resident, involved with public health) presents his reply in the form of 66 brief statements, in three sections. The first treats how Torah transforms the individual's life in a positive manner, then how Torah makes the world better through its normative strictures, and finally a message of a Messianic era that would introduce a global peace. This book is meant to be a spiritual inspiration for Jews confronting complex issues in a fast-paced globe and to provide a set of guidelines found in Judaism's cultural tradition to help in a process of adjustment and adaptation.

Sanford R. Silverburg, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC

Elias, Marius J, Marilyn E. Gootman & Heather L. Schwartz. *The Joy of Parenting: Insight and Wisdom from the Jewish Tradition*. Springfield, NJ: Behrman House, 2016. 248 pp. \$15.95. (9780874419429).

The need for additional parenting books always exists, and even more so Jewish parenting, which lends itself to a separate category of books. *The Joy of Parenting: Insight and Wisdom from the Jewish Tradition* attempts to provide new parenting advice drawn from ancient texts and rituals, but a lot of it seems to be common sense and not new information. The importance of being a productive member

of society is not a uniquely Jewish concept, and therefore the book does not add much to the canon of parenting books.

The book is written in a clear format with an introduction, forward, and clearly written chapters, but the content is not wholly specifically Jewish.

I would cautiously recommend this book to parents who have limited knowledge of Jewish parenting practices, and those from more secular backgrounds. It does have a place in a synagogue library for those who are less religious, and even in a public library, but does not seem appropriate for an academic or school setting.

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

Friedlander, Saul. *Where Memory Leads: My Life*. New York: Other Press, 2016. 283pp. \$24.95. (9781590518090).

Where Memory Leads: My Life, is volume two of Friedlander's autobiography; *When Memory Comes*, the first volume, was published in New York forty years ago in 1979. Friedlander has a fascinating story to tell. After having devoted sixteen years of his life to writing his Pulitzer Prize winning book *The Years of Extermination*, the author records the effect of the Holocaust on his personal life and how, at the age of 81, he now feels a need to review various facets of his complex and rather astonishing life.

Born in Prague and an only child, Paul (later Saul) was hidden and baptized in a Catholic seminary as his parents tried in vain to cross the Swiss border. They died in Auschwitz in 1942. He subsequently lost his Catholic faith, became a Communist and then a Zionist.

Where Memory Leads: My Life is an incredibly sad and moving book. Friedlander has led a full, exciting and dramatic life and the story he tells, in a most forthright manner, is bound to touch most, if not all, of his readers. He reveals, in passing, astonishing information about friends and colleagues: for instance, that Uriel Tal (author of an exceptionally fine book on Christian-Jewish relations during the Second Reich) committed suicide.

This work should be read by Jewish and non-Jewish students of history alike. Although it doesn't have an index or a bibliography, it is an important contribution to Holocaust literature.

Morton J. Merowitz

Goldfinger, Yisrael Shlomo. *Coming Closer: Understanding and Experiencing Tefillah*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. 216 pp. \$21.99. (9780997095715).

Rabbi Yisrael Shlomo Goldfinger deals with the paradoxes of prayer. How can man approach God? Does God need our prayers? Rabbi Goldfinger argues that the daily prayer service is structured to bring us closer to God. Goldfinger analyses the sequence of the prayers and the patterns of language used. He focuses on the language of relationship between man and God and particularly the names of God used in the prayers. Goldfinger's thesis is that through prayer we have an opening to reach a closer relationship with God. The language of the daily prayer service and our act of praying reveals God's sovereignty over the world. God needs our prayers. As we deepen our prayer experience we increase God's influence and involvement in the world.

Goldfinger traces how the language of the prayers moves us from experiencing God as sovereign to forging a closer relationship to God as master, parent, and friend. Our language switches from third person to second as we move from the preliminary prayers through *Ashrei*, the *Shema*, to the *Shemonah Esrei*. He also briefly treats the differences in the evening and Sabbath prayer services from the daily morning service.

Rabbi Goldfinger received *semichah* from Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik. After a career in business he joined the kollel of Yeshivas Ohr Hachaim in Queens, NY, where he learns and lectures. This work is an adaptation of his Hebrew book on prayer *Tehillos Yisrael*.

Large chunks of the traditional siddur in Hebrew are presented here without translation or

critical notes. Hebrew terms are transliterated with Ashkenazic pronunciation and are not always translated. The book is targeted to someone with a yeshiva background who is already familiar with the traditional liturgy. Studying this book can deepen one's daily *davening* practice. Recommended only for yeshiva libraries.

Harvey Sukenic, Hebrew College Library, Newton Centre, MA

Goldstein, Joyce. *The New Mediterranean Jewish Table: Old World Recipes for the Modern Home*. University of California Press, 2016. 458 pp. \$39.95. (9780520284999).

Americans usually think of corned beef, matzo balls, brisket, and borscht when considering Jewish cuisine. Most of the Jewish immigrants arriving in the United States in the early 1900s were from Eastern Europe, so they ate a diet based on meat with few vegetables. It was not particularly healthy. There are other traditions that, until recently, were less well known even though the earliest Jewish immigrants to this country were Sephardim. Jews from southern Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East brought delicious, varied, healthy food traditions to this country. They are now becoming better known and popular. Cooking instructor, chef, and cookbook author Joyce Goldstein provides an excellent guide to these tasty dishes.

Her introduction offers an overview of the various communities and their culinary traditions along with a discussion of the ingredients used, the cooking techniques, and the recipe sources. She also discusses the basics of the dietary laws and the foods associated with specific Jewish holidays. Chapters on appetizers spreads and salads; savory pastries; eggs; soups; rice, pasta, and grains; vegetables; fish; poultry; meat; condiments and preserves; and desserts provide opportunities for cooks to expand their culinary horizons. Delectable treats such as Moroccan-inspired lentil salad with carrots, dates, and mint, eggplant gratin, Venetian style marinated fish, and chicken with apples, will whet the appetites of readers. Lemon marzipan and Greek Passover cake from Ioannina will add variety to Seder tables. Clear instructions, a glossary of ingredients, and a bibliography provide more information for users. This should inspire adventurous cooks.

Barbara Bibel, Congregation Netivot Shalom, Berkeley, CA.

Gordon, Justin. *Holocaust Postal History: Harrowing Journeys Revealed through the Letters and Cards of the Victims*. Chicago: Six Point Watermark, 2016. 170 pp. \$79.99. (9780997840100).

"Every cover tells a story," we are told in the preface to this meticulously-researched book on Holocaust history. A "cover" is an envelope or postcard, together with its stamp, cancellation message, and markings. Justin Gordon is an optometrist who has spent many years collecting and studying postal documents of the Holocaust. He has written a moving book that is also an invaluable reference source for interpreting the marks found on mail that passed through the hands of German and Polish censors. The stories told by these covers give us a unique view of Holocaust history.

The book's chapters take us through the rise of the Nazis, the introduction of anti-Semitic laws, the ghettos and camps, ending with the founding of Israel. Each envelope or card is shown in color photographs with the markings explained. Biographical details about the sender or receiver are noted, along with enough history to establish a context. Many cards are translated.

Gordon catalogs the many administrative markings found on these documents: stamps, abbreviations, notes, and initials. He discusses regulations for correspondence established by different camps. In one instance, he shows a card from Hagibor, a camp for Jews with non-Jewish spouses; prisoners were permitted just 32 words on each postcard, and the example shown has the censor's tiny numbers penciled above each word.

This book includes a map, illustrated glossaries of philatelic terms and postage stamps, a bibliography, and an index. It will be most useful for archives, museums, and research collections.

Joy Kingsolver, Shel Silverstein Archives, Chicago, IL

Halkin, Hillel. *After One-Hundred-and-Twenty: Reflecting on death, mourning, and the afterlife in the Jewish tradition.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016. 226 pp. \$27.95. (9780691149745).

In *After One-Hundred-and-Twenty*, Hillel Halkin, New York-born, Israeli critic, writer, and translator of both Hebrew and Yiddish works, explores what Jews have thought about death and mourning from the perspective of “a man of a certain age and background with certain opinions and biases who lives in a certain place.” In addition to personal recollections, Halkin does cover some of the highlights of Jewish tradition, starting from the Bible and biblical period writings such as Job, Kohelet, Enoch, proceeding to the Talmud & Midrash, Zohar, and then the Middle Ages. He manages to engage the non-academic reader by making the content both compact and easily understandable, seizing us with his particular brand of narrative flair and grace.

After One-Hundred-and-Twenty is recommended as an excellent addition to any Jewish library. While it does not replace any of the standard Halachic works, it is an engaging personal account that stimulates the mind and imagination leaving the reader with many questions and concepts to think about. The organization of the material, with five untitled chapters and 214 endnotes, is somewhat lacking, but the quality of the writing is excellent and will engross and enchant the reader. Time reading Halkin’s book is time well spent and a worthwhile investment in understanding Jewish beliefs and customs regarding death and mourning.

Nathan Rosen, New York, NY

Harari, Yuval. *Jewish Magic Before the Rise of Kabbalah.* Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2017. 569 pp. \$64.99. (9780814336304).

To echo United States Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart’s famous statement on pornography, it is far easier to discuss magic than to define it. In fact, the author, a professor of Hebrew literature and Jewish folklore at Ben-Gurion University (Not to confuse with Yuval Noah Harari, author of *Sapiens* and *Homo deus*), devotes the first two hundred pages of this work to different definitions of the term. This is followed by a detailed survey of the texts and artifacts (including gems and incantation bowls) that inform us of Jewish magical practice in the ancient world. The last third of the book examines what is likely more familiar territory for many readers, references to magic in rabbinic literature. The academic study of Jewish magic has been a burgeoning field of study in recent years and this volume serves as an excellent introduction to the subject.

Daniel Scheide, Florida Atlantic University

Jablonka, Ivan. *A History of the Grandparents I Never Had.* Trans. by Jane Kuntz. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016. 334 pp. \$30.00. (9780804795449).

This book is a thriller, as compelling as any work of fiction. Jablonka’s exhaustive research into the lives of his forebears, combined with his own current experience and observations, creates a book that allowed this reader to experience the Holocaust in a way no other Holocaust literature has done. Jablonka’s own father, whose survival as a very young child was thanks to non-Jewish friends of his parents, has no clear recollections of his parents so it was Ivan’s task to recreate his grandparents’ lives as best he could from the myriad sources he consulted. The book is his journey (both literal and through his research) over the course of quite a few years. Many times, he takes the reader on his journey from visiting the past through to seeing the same places in real time today. In a similar way, he also relates his present life as a Parisian who sends his own daughter to a school very near the place where his parents once lived.

This book is both poignant and penetrating; gruesome and horrifying. We experience the extremes of human interactions. Recommended for all adult and senior high school Judaica collections, I can also see this being used by book clubs. It includes extensive notes, a bibliography and a glossary.

Marion Stein, retired librarian

Kanarek, Jane L. & Marjorie Lehman (Eds.). *Learning to Read Talmud: What it Looks Like and How it Happens.* Academic Studies Press, Boston, 2016. 229 pp. \$79.00. (9781618115133).

'Talmud' is a peculiar word. It can refer both to the text itself, and to the ways it has been studied and learned. This set of essays by noted academic teachers explores how they approach the text and its pedagogy in their classes. The volume is based on the work of the Mandel Center at Brandeis University. The contributors took part in a collaborative analysis of the scholarship of teaching and learning as it pertains to their college and university courses in Talmud. At the core of the book are the participants' descriptions of their classes. They include seminars for rabbis and courses directed toward both graduate students and undergraduates. Some students had Jewish backgrounds, while others did not. One of the repeated themes (sometimes desired; sometimes unintended) is that the study and teaching of Talmud involves "making the strange familiar and the familiar strange." That is, the authors/teachers attempt to connect the topics of the Talmud to the lives of their students, while they seek to change the students' understanding of how to study and how to value the results of their inquiries.

Learning to Read Talmud is **not** for ordinary readers of Talmud, though there are useful segments for them throughout the essays. Its intended audience is academic teachers of Jewish Studies seeking insights to use in their own pedagogy. The volume is expensive, but it contains valuable, practical ideas. It should be in academic libraries where Jewish Studies are taught, and in research centers that seek to enhance the value of creative thought.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA

Kravel-Tovi, M. & Deborah Dash Moore (Eds.). *Taking Stock: Cultures of Enumerations in Contemporary Jewish Life.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016. 262 pp. \$35.00. (9780253020543).

This book began with a 2012 workshop dealing with how Jews use numbers to describe themselves and their relationship with God. Numbers are not just statistics, they also have symbolic meanings and stir emotions. Counting is not just counting people, but also includes the significance of numbers (the number 6 million, for example); numbers as part of place names (e.g., names of Israeli streets) and numbers of materials goods (books and kilograms of foods for instance).

Kravel-Tovi's exploration of the use of numbers is fascinating. There is a story of Bais Yaakov school in Kraków, where 93 school girls committed suicide rather than surrender to the Nazis. Several streets in Israeli cities were named for the 93. Only one small problem—the story is a myth. Another chapter deals with the history of the Yiddish Book Center and Aaron Lansky's dream to save Yiddish books. In 1980, scholars believed 70,000 physical volumes of Yiddish language books remained, but Lansky claimed to have saved 1.5 million.

This book covers aspects of history and sociology that are usually ignored. This is a scholarly book recommended for academic collections, but it will also appeal to individuals interested in this fascinating topic.

Daniel D. Stuhlman, City Colleges of Chicago and Temple Shalom, Chicago, IL

Kulski, Julian. *The Color of Courage: A Boy at War: The World War II Diary of Julian Kulski.* Los Angeles, CA: Aquila Polonica Publishing, 2016. 304 pp. \$29.95. (9781607720157).

Julian Kulski was ten years old in 1939, when war broke out over Poland. Following his liberation from a German POW camp in 1945, he created a sort of retroactive diary based on experiences reconstructed from memory.

The writing is youthfully straightforward with a sense of wonder over the growing horror. Son of prewar Deputy Mayor of Warsaw, Julian watched his genteel family life crumble under the occupation, as he describes one Nazi edict after another. Recruited into the Home Army, he began training for military tactics and weapons handling. Whether or not he was typical of other Poles of his class and

privilege, Julian had Jewish friends; he himself claimed Jewish ancestry (great-great grandson of Rabbi Dov Beer Meisels.) The Polish resistance is presented here as largely sympathetic to the Jews, with whom he had clandestine dealings. He describes a harrowing secret mission to Warsaw Ghetto: "People moved like skeletons, scarecrows with sunken, glassy eyes." He later witnessed the Ghetto revolt, in April 1943, from the Aryan side.

Nevertheless, his focus here is more on the gentile experience. Julian describes the shocking discovery of the Katyn massacre of 10,000 Polish officers by the Russians, and the punitive acts on Polish citizens. Half the diary is devoted to year 1944 and the Warsaw Uprising. Accounts of the Poles' sophisticated planned attacks are riveting. There are maps and photos; readers are directed to YouTube links of footage from German and Polish propaganda reels.

Although this diary might do best in a general public library collection, Holocaust libraries might find this book useful for its insights into the role of the Polish underground.

Hallie Cantor, Yeshiva University, New York, NY

Lipsh, Sara Rivkah. *Super Special Shneur: A Mother's Search for Hidden Blessings in Raising an Autistic Son.* Brooklyn: BSD Publishers, 2016. 130 pp. \$9.95. (9781945288005).

With the growing number of children being diagnosed with autism, it is not surprising that this is affecting the Jewish community. What is surprising is the dearth of books on the subject. This volume is a collection of articles written by Lipsh, the wife of a Chabad rabbinic emissary in Israel about her family's experience with raising their sixth child Shneur who has autism. In the articles, she describes her initial dismay and shame at her son's diagnosis. She worried both about her son's well-being, and also about how the community would view his behavior since he had a hard time communicating and following directions. Lipsh also struggled with figuring out how to best get help for Shneur since most of the child development centers were secular and few resources existed in the Chabad community.

For guidance, Lipsh and her husband consulted their rabbi as well as the letters of the Rebbe for inspiration. Lipsh also realized that she couldn't be the only one in her community with a special needs child and reached out to others creating *Yad l'Yeled ha-Meyuchad*, an organization dedicated to providing services to special needs children and their families.

The language of the essays is sprinkled with Hebrew and Yiddish terms. While this makes sense for their original Chabad audience, with no glossary, it might be difficult for others to follow.

I hope that the future will bring books that are accessible to a wider Jewish audience, but until then, this one is highly recommended for synagogue libraries.

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

Mandel, Rabbi Gavriel. *Judaism Unraveled: Answers to the Most Challenging Questions about Judaism.* Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishers, 2016. 268 pp. \$22.99. (9781680252309).

Judaism Unraveled covers, in five chapters, the following topics: God, the purpose of life, free will, the Jewish people, and non-Jews. The author's intentions are that this will be the first volume in a series of four volumes. The next three volumes will each deal with seven fundamental topics that are intended to reveal further the vast dimensions of Jewish belief.

Each chapter opens with a list of the questions that it addresses, and each page provides footnotes. The volume concludes with a short index, including various Hebrew sources.

Rabbi Mandel presents the readers with the idea that Life's purpose is, per Judaism, "to experience the greatest possible pleasure". By logical analysis, Mandel shows that humans "strive to achieve the ultimate pleasure of connecting to the infinite". Having actual "free-will choices" ("moral choices"), human beings are "like God and experience the reality of being an independent being". The role of the Jewish people, as a chosen group, is "to serve as a light unto the nations".

Volume One of *Judaism Unraveled* is an outreach-educational volume that encourages in-depth discussions of common philosophical enquiries: What is the cause of anti-Semitism? How could the Torah sanction the killing of certain ancient non-Jewish peoples, such as the Amalekites? Does Judaism consider belief in Christianity or Islam acceptable? The book will make a valuable addition to Academic, as well as public, libraries and personal collections. After reading this first volume, I eagerly await what will come in the next three books.

Nira Wolfe, Highland Park, IL

Mazzeo, Tilar J. *Irena's Children: The Extraordinary Story of the Woman Who Saved 2,500 Children from the Warsaw Ghetto*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016. 317 pp. \$26.00. (9781476778501). Also available as an eBook.

In the past few years, at least four books and three films have been produced about the life and work of Irena Sendler (1910-2008). In this latest biography, Mazzeo has skilfully brought together numerous puzzle pieces to create a fleshed-out picture of this complex woman. Irena Sendler was a Catholic social worker in Warsaw during World War II. She directed a secret network of friends and co-workers who smuggled approximately 2,500 infants and young children (as well as adults) out of the Warsaw ghetto. The rescuers then placed the children in foster homes, orphanages, or convents. Irena compiled a list of the real and "Aryan" names of the children so that their parents could find them after the war. And even when she was caught and brutally tortured by the Gestapo, she did not betray her fellow conspirators or the location of the precious lists of children.

Mazzeo has crafted a compelling biography that reads like a suspense novel. She reconstructed situations and conversations to make them sound authentic. Furthermore, she took some liberties by showing a character's thoughts and feelings, or reframed dialogue to suit the setting and situation. This approach might bother the reader who is looking for only the "facts", but the book is backed by sound research—interviews, books, articles, testimony, websites, and visits to the places described.

Irena's Children is the biography only of Irena's early life (until 1945), although some details are added in the coda of the book. Back matter includes: notes, bibliography, photos, list of characters; unfortunately, a map and index are lacking. In 1965, Yad Vashem named Irena "Righteous Among the Nations"; in 2003 and 2007, she was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. In spite of the many honors heaped upon her late in life, Irena refused to see herself as a hero. We may beg to differ.

*Anne Dublin, co-author of *Odyssey Through Hell: Escape from the Warsaw Ghetto* (2014) and *44 Hours or Strike!* (2015), Toronto, Canada*

[Editor's note: the "Young Readers Edition" of this title was reviewed by Anne Dublin in the February-March 2017 AJL Reviews issue. Mazzeo, Tilar J. *Irena's Children: Young Readers Edition; A True Story of Courage*. Adapted by Mary Cronk Farrell. Illus. by Shana Torok. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016. 272 pp. \$17.99 (9781481449915) HC; (9781481449939) eBook. Gr. 7-12.]

Meir, Jonatan. *Kabbalistic Circles in Jerusalem (1896-1948)*. Leiden: Brill, 2016. 269 pp. \$132.00. (9789004321632).

A common theme, in both academic and literary writings in pre-State Israel is the decline of the famed kabbalistic yeshivot of Jerusalem. Delving deeply into primary documents, both within and without these institutions, Meir counters these long-held assumptions, detailing the everyday activities as well as the long-term goals of the yeshivot. A social history rather than a theological study, there is a focus on the internal and external discussions of the aims of these seminaries. A great deal of attention is also given to publishing efforts as well as investigations into the fabled lost tribes of Israel. This excellent study is marred by an awkward, unidiomatic English translation. Nevertheless, recommended for academic libraries.

Daniel Scheide, Florida Atlantic University

Renov, Michael & Vincent Brook (Eds.). *From Shtetl to Stardom: Jews and Hollywood (The Jewish Role in American Life; 14)*. Purdue University Press, 2017. 190 pp. \$25.00. (9781557537638).

The major role that Jews play in the American entertainment industry is well known and often the subject of commentary. The history of that role is somewhat obscure, in part by choice. The anti-Semitism of the 1930s and 1940s led Jewish studio heads and film stars to hide their identities. Betty Joan Perseke became Lauren Bacall and Asa Yoelson was better known as Al Jolson. This eventually changed as comedians such as Amy Schumer and Jon Stewart owned their Jewish identities and filmmakers like Woody Alan and the Coen brothers explored Jewish themes.

This collection of nine essays by academics looks at a variety of topics that represent the Jewish presence in Hollywood. From Lawrence Baron's article about Hollywood's acquiescence to Nazi pressure from 1934 to 1939 to Joshua Louis Moss's examination of Jewishness in *Transparent* and Michael Renov's conversation with Matthew Weiner about the Jews of *Mad Men*, readers will discover how Jews have participated in the American entertainment industry. Ross Melnick documents the history of the Laemmle family. Carl Laemmle, a film distributor, saved many Jews fleeing the Holocaust. Other family members founded the well-known Laemmle theatre chain in Los Angeles. Students and anyone interested in film will find new insights here.

Barbara Bibel, Congregation Netivot Shalom, Berkeley, CA.

Scheyer, Moriz. *Asylum: A Survivor's Flight from Nazi-Occupied Vienna Through Wartime France*. New York: Little, Brown And Company, 2016. 305 pp. \$28.00. (9780316272889).

Asylum is the lost memoir of Moriz Scheyer, a respected published author and an editor of an important newspaper in Vienna, before the German invasion of Austria in 1938. Scheyer's stepson destroyed the manuscript, because he felt it was anti-German. Recently Scheyer's step grandson found a carbon copy of the memoir and translated the text into English. The story is well written, mesmerizing and emotional. Scheyer was captured by the Germans and spent time in a Concentration Camp. He describes the starvation and cruelty he endured in the Camp. Fortunately, he was among twenty men who were set free. Upon his release he, his wife, his daughter and their non-Jewish housekeeper immediately fled. Finally, after an unsuccessful attempt to escape to Switzerland, they are rescued by the Rispal family and taken to a convent in the Dordogne region of France where they are hidden, in a back room, by the nuns until the end of the war. After the war Scheyer finds it difficult to adjust to "normal" life. He is angry at the apathy of the ordinary French and Germans to the persecution and suffering of their fellow Jewish citizens. *Asylum* is highly recommended for the Holocaust and WWII collection of all libraries. The story is riveting, extraordinary and well written.

Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, OH

Teixeira, Rabbi Robert dos Santos. *The Psalm Cards and Messages from the Psalms*. Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing, 2016. 176 pp. Includes 150 cards. \$34.99. (9780764351914).

Robert dos Santos Teixeira worked as an intuitive reading tarot cards, chicken bones, dominoes and tea leaves; a social worker; a psychotherapist specializing in addiction, and he was ordained as a rabbi by Joseph Gelberman (founder of the modern interfaith movement). All of these experiences led to the creation of *The Psalm Cards*. Teixeira "noticed that every psalm had at least one picturesque verse that embodied a rich image of symbol." There are five steps for using the cards and the accompanying guide book: reciting a prayer of protection, composed of verses from several Psalms and Psalm 91 in its entirety; shuffling the cards, then spreading them out, facedown; silently repeating your yes-no question and pulling a card. After selecting the card, you refer to the companion book which explains its message. If the card answers your question, you are done. If it does not, you can pull up to four cards. For example, if you pull the card for Psalm 1, it depicts a plant, to represent the verse, "He is like a tree planted beside streams of water, which yield its fruit in season, whose foliage never fades, and whatever it produces

thrives" (Psalm 1:3). The message of this card is "Go for it! The card for Psalm 23, verse 4, "Though I walk through a valley of deepest darkness, I fear no harm, for You are with me," means "You're scared, very scared." The guide book includes an "Appendix of Power Words" that "can be used as mantras."

The 150 cards corresponding to the 150 Psalms are for the most part, primitively drawn. It is not clear either how the author determined the "key" verse in each Psalm, or how he interpreted it. Moreover, the Torah clearly states "you shall not indulge in sorcery and you shall not believe in lucky times," (Leviticus 19:26) and considers divination, sorcery, and consulting spirits as an "abomination" (Deuteronomy 18:9-13). Only the most new age, alternative, spirituality oriented patrons will have any interest.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel

Teller, Hanoah. *Heroic Children: Untold Stories of the Unconquerable*. New York: New York City Publishing Company, 2015. 351 pp. \$26.97. (9781881939238).

Nine accounts of bravery and survival may have some things in common, but each story is unique. After an author's note, a foreword, a preface and an introduction that prepare the reader for gruesome details of life in concentration camps, in hiding, and on the run, the reader learns about Michael Thaler's life in the Ukraine; about a brilliant violinist, Cecilia Boruchowitz, who performed before German audiences; and about Albert Sharon (Szajdholc), who went from Brussels to France and Italy to save himself and his family. Israel Starck, claiming to be older than he was in order to survive, worked in several slave labor camps, as did Shlomo Zalman Teichman. Gutta Sternbuch had worked with Janusz Korczak in the Warsaw Ghetto, while Isser Fisher and his family survived by being buried in a hole under a tree. Dolly Hirsch Bestandig and Esther Biegelman survived the concentration camps by staying out of sight -- Dolly in a garbage bin and Esther in a bunk in Bergen-Belsen. There are photographs of the subjects before and after World War II, as well as a glossary, a short bibliography, acknowledgments, and a very detailed index. The endpapers of the front and back covers are a useful map with colored dots indicating each subject's journey to survive.

The title is somewhat of a misnomer, as most of the subjects were teenagers or young adults and in the case of children like Dolly, the account details her mother's struggle to keep her alive. [Israel Starck tells his story with his daughter in *A Boy Named 68818* (Feldheim, 2015).] The accounts are given in excruciating detail, which is a credit to the subject's memory, but slow down the pace of the stories. Teller is a masterful storyteller, and his metaphors will either delight or irritate the reader: "A harmonious chord was struck between them [Rachel and Aryeh], and they were married in 1939. But the backdrop to their wedding was a cacophony of doom." There is also an emphasis on Jewish observance in the camps. The book is a worthy addition to libraries with large Holocaust collections, particularly Orthodox ones.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel

Waxman, Dov. *Trouble in the Tribe: The American Jewish Conflict over Israel*. Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016. 316 pp. \$29.95. (9780691168999).

Waxman, a professor of political science, international affairs, and Israel studies (Northeastern University), tackles an issue at the core of American Jewish political culture; namely, the American Jewish relationship to Israel. American Jews, on the whole, tend to identify ideologically and politically with the Democratic Party, religiously more with the non-Orthodox orientation. The Jewish connection to Israel traditionally revolved around the principles of Zionism. Once Israel was established, there was a bond to the state, the government, and its leaders, with the bulk of American Jewry solidly behind the Jewish State in opposition to the Palestinian Arabs. Much of this attitudinal position changed after the euphoric victory of the 1967 conflict and the subsequent occupation of Palestinian territory. What Waxman does so marvelously and as objectively as reasonably possible is to examine the place of Israel in American foreign policy and the strong influence American Jews have historically placed

in this country's policies toward Israel. The author discusses not only how popular sentiment has fractured, largely over Israel's continued occupation, but also and more importantly over the Jewish state's continued efforts to create exclusively Jewish populated settlements in the West Bank. Within the American domestic political setting, Waxman examines the long-standing pro-Israeli lobby, AIPAC, which has now been challenged by the J-Street PAC, a less stringent Israeli supporter. By focusing on these sensitive issues, Waxman seeks to invite discussion and debate in an attempt to develop a more sober and civil position American Jews can hold onto that will ultimately benefit all concerned parties.

Sanford R. Silverburg, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC

Weinreb, Tzvi Hersh. *Person in the Parasha: Discovering the Human Element in the Weekly Torah Portion.* New York and Jerusalem: Oxford University Press; Maggid Books, 2016, 624 pp. \$29.95. (9781592644629).

This book is designed for all readers who seek the wellsprings of living Torah. To all Jews, whatever their educational background and whatever their degree of religious observance. Dr. Rabbi Weinreb, a Talmudic scholar, exemplary communal leader, and expert psychologist, brings together some of his fascinating *parasha* insights, combining powerful intellect with sincere authentic faith and devotion.

The author raises fundamental human questions about the *parasha*. Not only is there a unique focus on the human and psychological dynamics of the biblical personalities, but the title allows the author to incorporate into his exegesis numerous other individuals drawn from his personal life experiences. Each discussion delves into the world of human emotions and is further enriched with references to a wide spectrum of humanistic literature, including verses of the Indian poet Tagore, the French poet Baudelaire, and the philosophers Plato, Dewey and, Kant, as well as insights from major psychologists such as Freud, Jung, and Erving Goffman, and ideas drawn from Greek and world mythologies. Yet this erudite book is very accessible and draws the reader in so they will be unable to put it down. My only caveat with the book is that it deserves an index of biblical and rabbinic citations, a name index, and a subject index. Highly recommended without reservation

David B Levy, Touro College NYC.

Reviews of Literature Titles for Adults

Bernstein, Jonathan. *The Ivy League Impostor.* Pittsburgh: Pebble Stone Press, 2016. 171 pp. \$9.95. (9780997271607).

This captivating first novel, set mostly on the Princeton University campus, is in the form of an informal memoir, written by Thurston Green who transforms himself into a Princeton University student after making a delivery of bathroom supplies to the University. It is a funny, out-of-the-box guide to making it in the Ivy League. Thurston's adventures with girls, love, sex and Jewish life make for an enjoyable reading experience. It is witty and serious at times, poking fun at campus traditions and student life. The author, who has an MFA in creative writing from Brooklyn College, has had firsthand experience with Ivy League colleges, graduating from Yale and attending Princeton.

Susan Freiband, retired library educator and volunteer temple librarian, Arlington, VA

Ben-Haim, Rivka Basman. *The Thirteenth Hour, Poems.* Translated from Yiddish by Zelda Kahan Newman. Woodstock, NY: Mayapple Press, 2016. 91 pp. \$15.95. (9781936419715).

This bilingual (Yiddish/English) edition presents a selection of the work of one of the last representatives of the golden age of Yiddish poetry. Rivka Basman Ben-Haim, a well-known Israeli poet, is the author of 14 previous publications, dating from 1959 to 2016. She started writing poetry as a

teenager in the Vilna Ghetto. She has won many awards in the world of Yiddish writers. The translator, on the faculty of Lehman College, CUNY, is a linguist whose specialty is Yiddish language and culture. She has written extensively on Ben Haim's poetry, as evidenced in the bibliography included in the book. The forty poems, each on a single page, English on one side, Yiddish on the other, are powerful, arresting, and deceptively simple. The book is illustrated, including a beautiful cover, by Mula Ben-Haim, late husband of the poet. It is a valuable addition to collections in academic, public, school and Jewish community center libraries.

Susan Freiband, retired library educator and volunteer temple librarian, Arlington, VA

Wineberg, Ronna. *Nine Facts that Can Change Your Life.* Florham Park, NJ: Serving House Books, 2016. 266 pp. \$14.95. (9780997101003).

This collection of short stories is another "feather in the cap" for author Ronna Wineberg. Many of them have been published in other places, but there is something powerful about reading them together as a group. The stories are honest, emotional and have a lot of depth; each one has a modern feel and addresses universal issues such as marriage, divorce, parenting and loss. It is easy to identify with the characters and to be drawn in by their stories. The Jewish content and values come through strong and clear. *Nine Facts that Can Change Your Life* will provide rich material for any discussion group or other programming, and it will make a fantastic addition to any library collection. Recommended for all Jewish libraries.

Debbie Feder, Director, Learning Commons, Ida Crown Jewish Academy, Chicago, IL

Reviews of Multimedia

Di Tsaytmashin. *Yiddish Baroque Music from the Book of the Rejoicing Soul by Rabbi Elkhanan Kirchen.* Brilliant Classics. (music, CD) \$7.99

What if you took a bit of Handel or Vivaldi, added in an ensemble of early Baroque instruments (including baroque guitar, recorders, viola da gamba, krummhorn and theorbo), took a dash of falsetto singing, and mixed in early Yiddish texts and occasional Jewish music modal moments or klezmer-sounding violin? You might have the idea about the sound on this CD. The singer and force behind this strange mixture of cultural forces is Avishai Aleksander Fisz, a musician and actor born in Israel, who also studied Yiddish and singing at Oxford and in Hamburg. The texts come from an Ashkenazi songbook, "Sefer Simkhes HaNeyfesh" or "The Book of the Rejoicing Soul" written at the beginning of the eighteenth century by Rabbi Elkhanan Kirshen. The volume contains a rare instance of Jewish notated music with a single melodic line that is realized by Fisz and the ensemble. It is not known who composed the old melodies. According to Fisz, they were not likely notated by professional singers but amateurs, and possibly by non-Jews (who could not completely follow the Jewish modal characters in some tunes). Nevertheless, these songs allow us to hear a reconstruction of Jewish sounds from that time. While the CD liner notes give a general overview about the songs, there are no exact texts or links to a source provided, which is a large oversight for this project. The title transliterations reflect the older Western Yiddish, possibly hindering some readers. Recommended for specialists interested in Baroque music or early Yiddish.

*Judith S. Pinnolis, Berklee College of Music/Boston Conservatory at Berklee
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