

### Reviews of Nonfiction Titles for Adults

EDITED BY DANIEL SCHEIDE AND REBECCA JEFFERSON

**Bareket, Elinoar.** *Eli ben Amram and his Companions: Jewish Leadership in the Eleventh-Century Mediterranean Basin.* Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press, 2017. 328 pp. \$84.95. (9781845198336).

Elinoar Bareket examines Jewish leadership in the eleventh century by focusing on Eli ben Amram, head of the community of Fustat, Egypt, one of the most important communities in the eastern Mediterranean world. As a politician, businessman, and poet, Eli ben Amram was dependent on support from higher ranking leaders, including the Gaon of the Palestinian yeshiva and Jewish and Karaite courtiers to the Vizier in Cairo, and being a contentious politician, he was involved in many controversies. Bareket uses letters, poetry, and legal deeds from the Cairo Genizah to trace his political life. The documents, included in the appendix of the original Hebrew book, are not included in this English translation.

Bareket, lecturer at Achva Academic College and Sapir Academic College (both located in Israel), has designed this book's structure so that it symbolically recreates the social rings of that world. Thus, chapter one's review of the wider Mediterranean basin and a study of Jewish leadership in that period forms the outer ring. The next ring focuses on Eli ben Amram's rise to power and his relationships with other leading figures. The middle section, based on a conference paper, is an interesting but general study of the uses of poetry and letters for rhetorical and political purposes in the medieval period, as tools to gain political and monetary favors. Many of the events in Eli ben Amram's life are then repeated in a close study of his correspondence with individual local figures and leaders. The book concludes with a useful historiographical essay arguing for the uniformity of culture throughout the Jewish Mediterranean world of the period.

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Unfortunately, this structure feels forced; the English translation is strained at times, with some scholarly rhetoric, and whereas a picture of Eli ben Amram's community leadership does emerge, the details will mainly be of interest to scholars of the period. I would recommend the book only for academic libraries that collect comprehensively in Jewish history.

Harvey Sukenic, Hebrew College Library, Newton Centre, MA

**Batthyany, Sacha. *A Crime in the Family*. Translated by Anthea Bell. Boston: Da Capo Press, 2016. 213 pp. (9780306902918). Reviewed from ARC.**

In 2007, at the age of 34, Sacha Batthyany discovered his great-aunt, Margit's role in the murder of 180 Jews in Hungary in 1945. *A Crime in the Family* is the result of his research into this horrifying event. He uses information from family members, his great-grandmother Maritta's diary, and the diary of her childhood Jewish friend Agnes.

*A Crime in the Family* was originally published in German in 2016. One can find conflicting reports and reviews as to how it was received in Rechnitz, Hungary and in Germany. Sacha Batthyany provides no objective historical information which will direct the reader to fill-in missing gaps. There is no index or reference sources. And whereas *A Crime in the Family* is a readable personal memoir, its subjectivity leads one to question the writer's motives. The terrible crime was well known of for many years: any search under the city of Rechnitz immediately brings authenticated references to it, all the way back to 1946. Unfortunately, nothing factually new is added by this book and the reader, after investing time, is not led to any new or clearer ethical or moral conclusions. *A Crime in the Family* may invigorate the readers to investigate the Holocaust in more details.

Nira Wolfe, Highland Park, IL

**Baumgarten, Elisheva, Ruth Mazo Karras & Katelyn Mesler (eds). *Entangled Histories, Knowledge, Authority, and Jewish Culture in the Thirteenth Century*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017. 368 pp. \$69.95. (9780812248685).**

This is an edited work containing thirteen chapters that highlight "a complex interdependence in thought and action among different groups of Jews, as well as between Jews and the Christian and Muslim majority cultures". The "entanglement" that is the title of the volume, speaks to just how entangled, both positively and negatively, the Jews were in relationship to the majority culture. The nature of the entanglement was extremely complex and the scholarship contained within the volume seeks to add a measure of nuance to the existing historiography on this subject.

The volume's range of subtopics is expansive. The first section details some examples of intellectual interactions in the 13<sup>th</sup> century such as an analysis of the different ways in which Ashkenazi and Sefardi communities arranged their children's marriages (Chapter 1) or a rabbinic luminary's correspondence with the son in law of Louis VII about certain chapters of the Bible that demonstrated the Rabbi's familiarity with secular aristocratic life (chapter 3). Part II focuses on secular and religious authorities in this time period. For example, one of the four chapters in this section centers on Nicholas Donin, a Jewish convert to Christianity who played a central role in the 1240 Talmud trial. The final section contains four essays on the translation and transmission of texts and knowledge, much of it focusing on the centrality of the translator who served as a "cultural mediator" and translated and transmitted texts ranging in topics from philosophy, law, scripture and medicine.

This book is a fascinating collection of essays on Jewish history and life in the thirteenth century. Although aimed at the scholar, the essays in this well-edited volume are easily accessible to the interested layperson, and they succeed in demonstrating the extent to which the Jews influenced and were influenced by their surrounding culture.

David Tesler, Yonkers, NY

**Broyde, Michael. J. *A Concise Code of Jewish Law for Converts*. Jerusalem and New York: Urim Publications, 2017. 180 pp. \$24.95. (9789655242492).**

When you encounter a book of Jewish law written by someone who is both a professor in a law school, a former dayan, and a former congregational rabbi, you will find content that is both well written and comprehensive in scope. Rabbi Broyde has arranged the book according to the volumes of the Shulḥan Arukh, i.e, Orach Chaim, Yoreh Deah, Even Haezer, and Choshen Mishpat. The book provides answers for the professional (rabbi) *and* the convert and covers every aspect of conversion and life afterwards.

Some of the laws covered here are applicable under very limited and oftentimes obscure situations. For example, the Torah states that a Jew may not marry an Ammonite or Moabite. Since these nations have disappeared, such restrictions obviously no longer apply. Nevertheless, this book is a useful addition to modern interpretations of Jewish law. Overall, the main idea underpinning this work may be summarized as follows: there is a special obligation to love the convert and extra care must be taken to determine how this obligation applies.

The author's conclusion is that there is no single origin story or theory that can explain who we are and how we became 21<sup>st</sup> century Jews. There is no easy explanation as to why we are a religion, ethnic group, and nationality. This book encourages the reader to understand the questions a convert faces so that one may understand and welcome them into the community. Recommended for academic, synagogue, and personal libraries.

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

**Bursztein, Jean-Gerard. *פרשת השבוע בראי הפסיכואנליזה Un Commentaire Psychanalytique de la Bible Hebraique*. Translated from French by Yoav Levi. Tel Aviv, Israel: Idra Press, 2017. 173 pp. 88.00 NIS. (9789659245246). Hebrew.**

Jean-Gerard Bursztein believes that "choosing life" is the essential message of the Torah. In order to explicate this thesis, he employs methods from the field of psychoanalysis to examine the Torah, using professional terms unique to the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1901-1981).

The Hebrew edition opens with "Conscious Reading of the Unconscious Aspects of the Torah" by Hanokh Ben-Pazi. This essay helps explain and summarize Bursztein's approach regarding the psychoanalytic reading of the religious text. Bursztein's work has five main parts, including: I. Epistemological Axioms. II. Commentary on the five books of the Torah, focusing on each *parashah*. III. Methodological Questions. IV. Basic principles of Bursztein's analysis. V. The Difference between Religion and Psychoanalysis in Choosing Intimate Sacrificial Object.

The book is written in a highly technical way that may qualify it as a worthy acquisition for a very limited readership. It may be of interest to psychologists, philosophers, and other professionals. However, the author has not sufficiently established his qualifications or understanding of the Hebrew Bible, which is fundamental to his work.

*Nira Wolfe, Highland Park, IL*

**Cohn, Gabriel H. Cohn. *Textual Tapestries: Explorations of the Five Megillot*. (Maggid Tanakh Companions). Jerusalem: Maggid Books, 2016. 433 pp. \$37.97. (9781592643981).**

This book is intended as a companion to the Five Megillot. The Maggid Tanakh Companions series is geared towards the serious lay student who may be unfamiliar with Hebrew and is not aided by the traditional sources. The studies presented in this work do not delve into the deeper philosophical meaning of each text: they are concerned mainly (although not exclusively) with the structure of the Megillot and their relationship to other parts of the Tanakh. And even though Professor Cohn does intersperse his studies with thought-provoking questions, this type of analytic approach is not his main focus. An exception to this is his section on Ecclesiastes in which he does try to analyze more deeply this complex and difficult text. He is also concerned with establishing the authorship of these Megillot; a topic that is of interest to some but not all readers of these important texts. This monograph would be appropriate for more traditional Yeshiva settings in English-speaking locations.

*Marion Stein, retired librarian*

**Falk, Marcia.** *The Book of Blessings, New Jewish Prayers for Daily Life, the Sabbath, and the New Moon Festival.* New York: CCAR Press, 2017. 545 pp. \$29.95. (9780881232929).

This new edition includes prose meditations, poems of Jewish women poets written in English, Hebrew and Yiddish (with new English translations), and Hebrew blessings with English transliteration and an English version. The book is divided into three parts. Part one contains the daily cycle, including blessings upon awakening, for meals, for the end of the day, as well as daily psalms. Part two presents the weekly cycle, the Shabbat, including Kabbalat Shabbat, the morning service and *havdalah*. Part three presents the monthly cycle, the new moon festival and surrounding rituals. An extensive commentary section discussing individual components of the liturgy is included in all three parts of the book. The concluding section contains author's notes, a detailed general index, and three afterwards. This is an important, ground breaking, innovative contribution to Jewish liturgy that is highly recommended for all types of Jewish library collections.

*Susan Freiband, Retired Library Educator and Volunteer Temple Librarian, Alexandria, VA*

**Feldman, Rabbi Emanuel.** *The 28th of Iyar: The Dramatic, Day-by-Day Journal of an American Family in Israel during the Six Day War.* Jerusalem: Feldheim Press, 2017. 176 pp. \$14.99. (9781680252941).

In 1967, Rabbi Emanuel Feldman was given a sabbatical from his rabbinic position at Congregation Beth Jacob in Atlanta. He and his family spent the time in Israel. As the end of his teaching tenure at Bar Ilan University was winding down, the situation in Israel was becoming more intense every day, with threats from President Nasser of Egypt and the resultant call up of Israeli reserve soldiers. Rabbi Feldman kept a personal journal of the period from Thursday, May 18th through Friday, June 9th – before and during the Six Day War. He recorded his interactions with both Israeli and “Anglo” neighbors, how he felt about keeping his family in Israel when the United States warned its citizens to leave, and the uneasy quiet on the streets because most of the men had been called to army duty. Once the war started, he heard conflicting reports from media sources and continued pleas from rabbis to pray. Brief entries for June 7th and 8th record the excitement of hearing that all of Jerusalem was in Israeli hands, and on June 9th, Rabbi Feldman describes the emotion of visiting the Western Wall and Rachel's Tomb.

First published by Bloch in 1968, the journal has been republished by Feldheim with a prologue, just in time for the 50th anniversary of the Six Day War. As with any personal account of a historical period, it is interesting to get a more intimate perspective on what was happening and how an everyday person reacted to the news and events. There are many references to the Torah and prayers, and the final entry particularly matches prophetic words with actual events. An author's note or editor's note describing what happened after the entry dates would have completed the journal: Rabbi Feldman wonders what happens on the border with Syria (the Golan Heights were captured on June 10th). Nevertheless, it is still a solid choice for all Jewish libraries.

*Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel*

**Friedman, Richard Elliott.** *The Exodus.* New York: HarperOne, 2017. 282 pp. \$18.43. (9780062565242). Also available as an eBook.

In his latest book, Bible scholar and University of Georgia professor Friedman argues, on the basis of archaeological and biblical scholarship, that the exodus was an historical event and not mere myth. He further argues that the exodus did not include the entire Hebrew nation (most of whom never left Canaan for Egypt), but only a relatively small element of it, namely the priestly tribe of Levi (although he fails to show why and how the Israelites came to think all their ancestors participated in the exodus). There was no massive conquest of the land led by Joshua, and Friedman also argues that the Levites worshipped Yahweh while the Israelites in Canaan worshipped a god named El; when the Levites entered Canaan, the two gods were fully identified with each other and thus the Hebrew religion became monotheistic. In

addition to engendering monotheism, the other major consequence of the exodus, in the author's view, is the moral notion of treating the alien as an equal and loving one's neighbor as oneself. Dr. Friedman acknowledges scholars who disagree with him. This extensively footnoted book presents an interesting and reasonable argument in a manner that is accessible to a lay audience. Recommended.

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

**Gold, Nili Scharf. *Haifa: City of Steps*. Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2018. 266 pp. \$29.95. (9781512601183).**

Gold successfully interweaves the architecture of Haifa with depictions of its history, people, and her experiences growing up in a city which she dearly loves. In the introduction, Gold makes it clear that the book *is not* about the whole area of Haifa but a small area known as Hadar HaCarmel, a small cluster of streets facing the bay. *Haifa: City of Steps*, enables the reader to tour the architecture, topography, schools and religious institutions in the area. An analysis of Arab-Jewish relations and a survey of Haifa authors add further dimensions to this once vibrant city. The decline of Haifa was brought about in part by the move of the Technion, the Israel Institute of Technology, out of the city; the city of Ashdod surpassing Haifa as a port, and diminished railroad travel.

This is a wonderful book for anyone who is going to travel in Israel. Tours in Israel take you to see the Bahai Gardens and give virtually no other information about Haifa. Before 1948, Haifa was a booming city that had active shipping docks, modern architecture, good Arab-Jewish relations, and a spirit of Zionism. Famous Israeli literary figures have lived in Haifa, including the poet Yehuda Amichai whose love letters to his beloved girlfriend provide further insights into the violence of everyday life in Haifa during 1947-48. Israeli novelist, A. B. Yehoshua's first book, *The Lover*, takes place in Haifa and features the city's steps. In describing the beauty of the city, Gold relates about the artist Hermann Struck, "he decorated his workshop with a painting of the cloudy bay even though he could see the bay, Acre, and Mount Hermon from his window."

This is a great choice for a synagogue library or for architectural and literary collections. It would make a good gift book for the traveler or armchair traveler.

*Ellen Share, Librarian, Washington Hebrew Congregation*

**Gruen, Judy. *The Skeptic and the Rabbi: Falling in Love with Faith*. Berkeley: She Writes Press, 2017. 219 pp. \$16.95. (9781631523021).**

How does a person come closer to God? Judy Gruen shares her personal story in this narrative.

Judy Rosenfeld grew up in suburban Los Angeles in the 1960s and '70s. An active participant in her synagogue's youth activities, she continued her involvement in college. When she met Jeff Gruen she realized that, as full as her Jewish life had been, it lacked a spiritual component. Through a study group led by Rabbi Daniel Lapin, she became a *Ba'ala Teshuvah*, and began to understand and appreciate the value of observance in her life. As they began their marriage, Judy and Jeff continued to expand their knowledge of observance, accepting both the strictures and freedom it entailed. The book discusses her use of the mikveh, her developing sense of the value in strict kashrut, and her decision to cover her head and wear wigs. The author treats all of them openly as conscious decisions, and acknowledges that they take growing into.

This book is poorly named. The author was not a skeptic, but a young woman who, over time, discovered the value in observance. And while Rabbi Lapin is a significant figure, he is less important in the story than Judy's husband Jeff. It was Jeff who encouraged her, by way of his own increasing connection to tradition. In all, while Judy Gruen's story is not groundbreaking, her articulate, candid voice can serve as a model for readers seeking more spirituality in their Jewish lives. It can serve as a thoughtful guide for people—young and old, individuals and couples—seeking greater connection and meaning in Judaism. Recommended for synagogue libraries.

*Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA*

**Grumet, Zvi. *Genesis: From Creation to Covenant*. Jerusalem: Maggid Books, 2017. 480 pp. \$29.95. (9780592644773).**

Grumet's essential thesis is that the Book of Genesis provides a vision for a covenantal future. It starts with God's relationship with matter (i.e. creation), continues with a search for a covenantal partnership, and ends with the legacy of Jacob. Genesis tells the story of every kind of person – those who walk with God, those who make mistakes, those who repent, those who learn, those who become enemies of the covenantal people, and those who are the progenitors of the tribes of Israel (i.e. part of the covenant). It contains moments of growth and development, tragedy and triumph, crisis, migration and redemption. Genesis sets the stage for the rest of the events in the Bible.

Grumet uses literary analysis to connect ideas from parts of Genesis with other books of the Bible; he uses the tools of psychology and sociology to explain personal feelings and group relations, and he applies his knowledge of the Hebrew language to explain words in the text. Finally, he uses rabbinic sources and Jewish commentaries to connect the story of Genesis to what has become of the Jewish people. Grumet's way of explaining the text is innovative and will open the readers' eyes to new ways of understanding the events and personalities in Genesis. This is not a copy or even a rehashing of old ideas; this is a book for readers who want to understand the big picture and for readers who want to understand the details of the who, what, and where of the biblical characters. Grumet's book balances an easy-to-read narrative with a scholarly analysis of every aspect of Genesis. Highly recommended for academic, synagogue, and personal collections.

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

**Held, Shai. *The Heart of Torah: Essays on the Weekly Torah Portion*. Philadelphia and Lincoln: Jewish Publication Society and University of Nebraska Press, 2017. 2 vols. \$80.00. (9780827613058).**

Shai Held offers two volumes containing two short essays per week, each linked to *parshat hashavua* (the weekly portion of the Bible read aloud in the synagogue). The essays are collected from the *divrei Torah* that Held had shared with the community of students which surrounds Mechon Hadar, the New York based non-denominational educational institution and yeshiva, which Held helps run.

*The Heart of Torah* finds a wonderful place between academia and homiletics. Shelves are full of books of systematic attempts to use academic methods to understand Jewish texts. Synagogues are full of sermons, using a sacred source as a jumping off point to talk about current events or a life cycle event being celebrated.

Held's writing is something else, also with a long standing tradition in Judaism, something we might refer to as a *devar Torah* (word of Torah). It is, on the one hand, grounded in scholarship. Held is a close and insightful reader of the sacred texts, and he is in conversation with what has been written in the academic world on his topics. But this is not disinterested academic writing. Instead, like the sermonizer, he cares about contemporary relevance. Yet, rather than just artificially extrapolating contemporary meaning from the weekly Torah portion, he allows a close and interpretively rich analysis of the text to bring out a religiously significant point that should matter.

In Held's deft hand, these *divrei Torah* teach of human ethical responsibility in the face of pain that is interwoven into God's world. Biblical narrative tells stories of flawed humans struggling with greater or lesser success to live up to the divine ethical calling, in a world in which God's word was much closer and direct. Biblical law teaches us commandments that, should we keep them with integrity, would make us into more caring and compassionate people. And Biblical poetry – especially the Psalms – speak lyrically of the challenges and successes of people living up to the ethical demands of Torah in an imperfect world. The essays are beautifully written, richly woven, and speak honestly to the challenges facing religious people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

*Yoel Finkelman*

**Jachter, Chaim.** *Reason to Believe: Rational Explanations of Orthodox Jewish Faith.* New Milford: Menorah Books, 2017. 249 pp. \$24.95. (9781940516714). Also available as an eBook.

Rabbi Jachter thinks that not enough attention is paid, at least in contemporary Orthodox circles, to the rational grounds for believing in God and the divine origin of the Torah. This book, though, is a weak, and frankly disappointing, effort to provide such grounds. It is well and good that it presents one of the classic arguments for the existence of God (the argument from design) but it does not discuss any others such as Saadia Gaon's argument from the finitude of time or the ontological argument. More seriously, the book does not try to address, nor even seem to recognize the existence of, some strong counter-arguments to its positions. For example, the idea that the revelation at Sinai was a revelation made to the Israelite masses, and thus those masses can provide assurance of its reality, ignores that we only have one supposedly contemporaneous document, the Bible itself, attesting to that mass revelation, not the testimonies of numerous individuals who were there. Again, its argument of the fulfillment of Torah prophecies of exile ignores the possibility that these were written after the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles and in light of them. Some of the book's attempts to reconcile Judaism with science are handled better. Some readers may find telling its assertion that the survival and Zionistic revival of the people is evidence of the truth of Judaism.

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

**Jaradat, Mya Guarnieri.** *The Unchosen: The Lives of Israel's New Others.* London: Pluto Press, 2017. 276 pp. \$23.00. (9780745336442).

The plight of asylum seekers and migrant workers in Israel is a story that is in constant flux and rapidly changing. The situation has changed since this book was published and will most likely change further before this review is published, but the stories being told of the outsiders struggling to maintain a safe existence in the Jewish homeland become increasingly relevant as events unfold.

Jaradat tells the personal stories of those whose voices are rarely heard. She interviews caretakers in illegal kindergartens, refugees held in detention camps, victims of smugglers held for ransom, all left in legal limbo as Israel pressures them to leave the country. Rather than sensationalizing these accounts, Jaradat highlights the blandness of despair, the day-to-day struggles and insecurity faced by Africans and Filipinos who often are better integrated into Israeli society than many Jewish *olim*. These interviews put a human face on populations regularly demonized by the right-wing press.

It is important to note that Jaradat approaches the subject from a decidedly anti-Zionist point of view. From her perspective, Israel's moral failings and racism are a feature rather than a bug in the ideology of the Jewish state. She presents efforts of the Israeli Left to promote civil rights as hopeless and naïve. Nevertheless, highly recommended.

*Daniel Scheide, Florida Atlantic University*

**Kurshan, Illana.** *If All the Seas were Ink, A Memoir.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 2017. 299 pp. \$26.99. (9781250121264).

This memoir follows the life of a young American woman who, alone in Jerusalem after a painful divorce, begins studying Talmud, learning *dafyomi*, reading a page a day. It describes her life intertwined with the text, as she studies each of the tractates, including quotes from the Talmud and reflections on the arguments and the events in her life. The book is divided into six sections following the grouping of the tractates into orders; it begins and ends with the Order of Festivals, Yoma, when she has remarried and has three young children. The author is a graduate of Harvard and Cambridge universities, who has worked in literary publishing as a translator and foreign rights agent. She has written a moving memoir, sensitive and thoughtful, which gives insight into the power of rabbinic teachings and Jewish law in everyday life. The book is recommended for collections in Temple and synagogue libraries, as well as Judaica collections in public and academic libraries.

*Susan Freiband, Retired Library Educator and Volunteer Temple Librarian, Alexandria, VA*

**Lawrence, Beatrice J.W. *Jethro and the Jews : Jewish Biblical Interpretation and the Question of Identity*. Leiden: Brill, 2017. 178 pp. \$96.00. (9789004348912).**

The biblical figure of Jethro has always had a complicated legacy in Jewish tradition. Both an insider and outsider in the Jewish people, the rabbis struggled with how to view him. Unlike Esau or Ishmael, Jethro was never linked to a particular religious or ethnic group, he could become a symbol of the ethnic outsider who is portrayed as an insider. The rabbis used Jethro as a “locus of anxiety for Jewish interpreters trying to establish the nature of Jewish identity and the relationships between Jews and non-Jews.” In particular, Lawrence examines Midrashim and Targumim, finding a diversity of problems and solutions the rabbis discussed in regard to Jethro’s place within the Jewish people. From these discussions, we can gain greater insight in the rabbi’s views on issues such as conversion, intermarriage and the boundaries between Jews and non-Jews. A fascinating study, recommended for academic libraries.

*Daniel Scheide, Florida Atlantic University*

**Levin, Leonard (ed.). *Studies in Judaism and Pluralism: Honoring the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of The Academy for Jewish Religion*. Teaneck: Ben Yehudah Press, 2017. 369 pp. \$30.00. (9780934730607).**

The Academy for Jewish Religion in New York has been promoting the idea of pluralism in the Jewish community for 60 years. That is embracing Jewish people with acceptance and inclusiveness. We can learn from everyone. This is a collection of essays by people who believe we can have a more meaningful Judaism listening and learning from diverse opinions and interpretations of tradition. As Rabbi Asher Lopatin writes: “Pluralism in Judaism is about celebrating two of God’s gifts to us: the Torah and the journey to understand Torah.”

The first section of the book is about various facets of the pluralism issue. The second part comprises an academic analysis of pluralism in traditional sources and the third part discusses current thought in the application of pluralism.

This book is suitable for a broad readership as it balances the scholarly and journalistic aspects of these topics. Recommended for academic, synagogue, and personal collections.

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

**Londres, Albert. *The Wandering Jew Has Arrived*. Jerusalem: Gefen Publishing House. 2017. 203 pp. \$16.95. (9789652298898).**

As a journalist, Author Albert Londres reported on international human rights abuses, including abuses in the Cayenne penal colony, citizen brainwashing by Soviet authorities, forced prostitution of young immigrant Jewish girls in Argentina as well as the plight of African workers and the world’s mentally ill. Londres’s *The Wandering Jew Has Arrived* is an anthropological study and historical-social commentary of the suffering and precarious condition of Jews throughout the world.

Londres traveled from France to England, Warsaw, Lwow, Bessarabia, Bukovina, Prague, Subcarpathian Russia, and Palestine in his quest to demonstrate the sufferings of Jews. For the benefit of his target audience, those unfamiliar with Jews and Judaism, Londres provides a brief history of the origins of Judaism, an explanation of the cultural and religious lives of Eastern European and British Jews, a history of the European pogrom and the rise of and antipathy towards the founding of Palestine and Zionism. As he travels throughout Europe and into Palestine, Londres sees not only the suffering Jew, but those, accepting the gift bestowed on them by the Balfour Declaration and finding a homeland in which he or she can be openly proud to be Jewish.

*The Wandering Jew Has Arrived* introduces Jewish history, culture, customs and religion to those unfamiliar with Jews and Judaism and, in the pre-Holocaust era, makes a case for Zionism and the establishment of the State of Israel. It is a very short (203 pages), yet extremely dense book and remains relevant in this day.

*Yossi Gremillion, Librarian, Broward County Library*



**Medzini, Meron.** *Under the Shadow of the Rising Sun: Japan and the Jews during the Holocaust era. (Jewish Identities in the Post-Modern Society).* Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2016. 220 pp. \$79.00. (9781618115225).

First published in Hebrew in 2012 (*בצל השמש העולה*), this English translation of Medzini's work is a very good addition to Japanese-Jewish historical literature. The book itself is based on a radio series ('University of the Air' of the Israel Defense Force, 2008), and its structure somewhat reflects its radio roots. Each chapter focuses on a particular topic of Japanese-Jewish relations during the years 1933-1945. Chapters include brief overviews of early Jewish settlers in Japan pre-1933, including contact with large Jewish populations in Manchuria; Japanese attitudes toward Jews in occupied territories during the war (such as Shanghai and the Pacific arena) as well as in Japan; Japanese-German relations regarding Japanese Jews; and postwar Japanese relations with European Jews and Israel. Included is a chapter on the more well-known Righteous Gentile, Sugihara Chiune, who saved over 6,000-10,000 Lithuanian Jews.

Japan was not interested in persecuting Jews in Japan or following German requests to implement any policies regarding them. This book explores possible reasons of why they disregarded German pressure to do so, and therefore shows the nature of Japan's relationship to Germany during the war years. While there are other general books about Jews in Japan, this book's focus on the WWII years makes it somewhat unique. The book contains an excellent selected bibliography as well as endnotes which will aid students and scholars for further research.

Recommended for all academic libraries and libraries that collect in Diaspora or WWII history.

*Suzanne Smailes, Wittenberg University, Springfield, OH*

**Mendelsohn, Amitai.** *Behold the Man: Jesus in Israeli Art.* Jerusalem: The Israel Museum, 2017. 311 pp. \$50.00. (9789652784650).

The author is a senior curator of Israeli art at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem and the book is based on research for his doctorate. In this volume, analyses are made of artistic works found in the museum by Jewish artists utilizing Christian symbols, including the figure of Jesus of Nazareth. In his research, Mendelsohn found the representation of Jesus by Jewish artists to be uncommon but nevertheless notable, particularly in the past 150 years. The various chapters explore works of individual artists, including Marc Chagall, Moshe Castel, and Mordecai Ardon in their historical context, noting that the use of the figure of Jesus in Jewish art increased after the founding of the modern state of Israel. Selection of this unique title for any library may require sensitivity to the tastes of the patrons since some of the images could be considered disturbing.

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

**Parks, Richard C.** *Medical Imperialism in French North Africa: Regenerating the Jewish Community of Colonial Tunis.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, [2017]. 196 pp. \$55.00. (9780803268456).

This book "considers the ways in which the Jewish community grappled with regeneration as a reactionary movement obsessed with demarcating the limits and definitions of French colonial modernity and modern identity ... This book utilizes the methodological framework of the social and cultural history of medicine augmented by microhistorical accounts." In five chapters, four of which start with the word "regenerating," Parks presents—in a rather bland style—the transformation of the Jewish community of Tunis under the earlier part of the French protectorate (1886-1939), the relocation of the Tunis Jews outside the Jewish quarter (the hara), the municipal sanitary infrastructure in Tunis and its impact on the urban landscape. The following chapter is devoted to the role of the Alliance Israélite Universelle and its opposition to Zionism while the last chapter deals with the "notions of patriarchal supremacy and the power of modern science and medicine over women's health." Recommended to large academic libraries only.

*Roger S. Kohn, Silver Spring, MD.*

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**Pearce, S. J. *The Andalusí Literary Intellectual Tradition: The Role of Arabic in Judah Ibn Tibbon's Ethical Will*. (Indiana Series in Sephardi and Mizrahi Studies). Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017. 262 pp. \$60.00. (978025302596).**

It is difficult to concisely summarize the many themes and discussions brought forward in *The Andalusí Literary Tradition*. At its essence, the title adequately describes the subject of the book: how Judah ibn Tibbon's ethical will encapsulates the encounter between Jews and Arabic language and culture in the Andalusí period, and if that would have been all, it would have been enough. But the author goes much further, clearly explaining to a non-specialist audience the difficulties and decisions inherent in translations, the impact of translation on the receiving culture, and, more broadly, the strong impact of Arabic literary culture on Judaism generally, even far beyond the Iberian Peninsula. Especially interesting to this reader was chapter 2, "Autobiography and Bibliography in the Islamic West." This chapter gives a comprehensive overview of libraries and book culture in medieval Andalus for both Jews and Arabs, and includes an extensive bibliography on the topic. The conclusion is introspective and self-aware, which seems appropriate for a book on an ethical will. The Appendix includes an accessible translation to English of ibn Tibbon's will, with references to critical editions of the next.

My one quibble with the book was the endnotes rather than footnotes, but that was clearly the publisher's choice, and no fault of the author's. Highly recommended for academic and research institutions.

*Michelle Chesner, Columbia University*

**Portnoy, Eddy. *Bad Rabbi: And Other Strange But True Stories From the Yiddish Press*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017. 264 pp. \$19.95. (9781503604117).**

This was a lot of fun. Psychics, wrestlers, suicide epidemics, beauty queens, blackmailed rabbis, and scandal after scandal. The Yiddish press in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century was filled with stories of everyday Jews for everyday Jews. From forgotten front-page news to hidden nuggets in the crime blotter, *Bad Rabbi* gives modern readers a taste of what urban Jews were gossiping about challenging our romanticized notions of the shtetl. One hopes this volume will just be the tip of the iceberg and further explorations into the tabloid stories of the headline news that history has forgotten will be forthcoming.

*Daniel Scheide, Florida Atlantic University*

**Rumshinsky, Joseph et al. *Di Goldene Kale (Recent Researches in American Music; 80-81; Music of the United States of America; 27)*. Orchs, Michael, ed. Middleton: A-R Editions, Inc., 2017. \$180.00 (vol. 1); \$160.00 (vol. 2). (9780895798527).**

This two-volume edition, with full score, transliterated Yiddish lyrics, dialogues, and English translations, represents an important moment in American-Jewish music. It is the first scholarly, completely orchestrated, edition of a Yiddish-American musical theater work to appear in print. Other than selected highlights as piano/vocal scores, music of the Yiddish theater is practically unknown as Yiddish operettas never had fully orchestrated realizations published, even in their heyday. Joseph Rumshinsky (1881-1956), one of the "Big Four" composers of Yiddish theater, wrote over a hundred Yiddish operettas. *Di Goldene Kale (The Golden Bride)*, represents a highlight of Yiddish musical theater that flourished between 1880 and the early 1950s. It includes songs in Yiddish, Hebrew, Russian, and Ukrainian. Michael Ochs reconstructed this work from manuscripts around the country. He tracked down the opening performance and cast, and provides information on stock Yiddish characters, Jewish musical elements, and even traced musical borrowings that will aid in understanding the genre and performance practice. The score includes twelve places for dances, making the realization on stage a fully-fledged musical event appealing to modern audiences. Volume 1 includes extensive introductory essays on the plot, the characters, Yiddish musical theater, and biographical sketches of the lyricists and composer. The edition is intended for contemporary productions; Orchs details how the modern performance edition differs from the original in length and structure. He includes images from the

original 1923 production, and an autograph image from the manuscript score. Volume 2 contains the second act. Highly recommended for libraries supporting music and theater collections.

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

**Schedrin, Vassil. *Jewish Souls, Bureaucratic Minds: Jewish Bureaucracy and Policymaking in Late Imperial Russia, 1850-1917*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2016. 292 pp. \$49.99. (9780814340431). Also available as an eBook.**

In the mid-nineteenth century, Imperial Russia established a Ministry of Internal Affairs which would provide liaisons with minorities to achieve integration. “Expert Jews” were recruited, some attending universities and government rabbinical seminaries, to service and represent the Pale. Analyzing the functions of these bureaucrats, this book shows how, up until the end of the Tsarist regime, their involvement both influenced and reflected social change.

The author draws on extensive research, including newly released archives – nearly 10,000 pages of records, with photos and appendices of names, lengths of term, regions, titles, and even salaries or pensions. He discusses the Western trends that produced these careerists and their administrative duties. Most were highly assimilated (some had even converted to Christianity) and therefore treated with hostility and suspicion by the pious, who had relied on *shtadlus*, the classic method of intercession. Hassidim, in particular leaders like the Lubavitcher Rebbes, were defiantly outraged at the encroachment of dietary laws and communal institutions. The tension highlighted ironic contradictions: purportedly benevolent, the ministry promised to leave tradition alone, yet, in its desire to “eradicate fanaticism” and “redirect the backward agrarian Russian society along the path of historical progress,” it trampled on religious rights and proved disruptive. Jews were expected to cooperate, yet most who did were, or became, secular and alienated, as they seized expanding educational and vocational opportunities.

Schedrin effectively conveys a transitional period in Russian Jewry and the painful conflict of a hybrid identity. Recommended for college libraries with Jewish or East European collections.

*Hallie Cantor, Yeshiva University, New York, NY*

**Sciarcon, Jonathan. *Educational Oases in the Desert: The Alliance Israelite Universelle's Girls' Schools in Ottoman Iraq, 1895-1915*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2017. 196 pp. \$85.00. (9781438465852).**

In 1864 the Alliance Israelite Universelle pioneered girls' education in Baghdad. Its goal was to change the lives of women in Iraq by westernizing them in dress, manners, hygiene, educational levels, and vocational skills, mainly sewing, embroidery, and ironing. One desirable effect was to prevent child marriages by allowing the girls to finish school. The school was to produce educated partners for the men who were graduating from the boys' school. One graduate reported that after her marriage, she insisted on eating her meals at the same table as her husband and being present in the living room when male guests arrived. In this society, it was hard to convince men to send their daughters to the school and even harder to get them to agree to pay for their education. The school directors often encouraged their most promising students to go on to teachers' training in Paris, but the families would not let their young women go. The AIU sent women directors to the school who had been trained often in Paris, but many of them were discouraged or could not bear the climate and stayed only a short time. Often a couple was hired – the husband to head the boys' school and the wife to head the girls' school – but the woman was paid only a quarter of the man's salary. In spite of all these obstacles, the school grew exponentially and even was attended by some Moslem daughters of the elite.

The book is well-written and relies on first-hand reports and correspondence of the directors of the school to their Paris superiors. Although the AIU was present in Iraq until 1951, this book presents only 20 short years in their efforts at women's education. There are four chapters about Baghdad and only one about Hilla, Mosul, and Basra covering an even shorter period, 1911-1915. Unfortunately,

the archival record ends with World War I when most of the schools were forced to close. Sciarcon belabors the point that his is a groundbreaking study based on material never before utilized to study a place and period heretofore neglected. His detailed and concentrated account adds a valuable piece to the history of Jewish women in this period, but only those who attended AIU schools. It should be acquired only by libraries that can afford specificity of a narrow topic in a narrow stretch of time.

*Marlene Schiffman, Yeshiva University*

**Shaw, Barbara. *My Jerusalem Book: Insider City Guide. Travel Journal. Activity Book All in One*. First Edition, 2017. 125 pp. (9789655722109).**

This touring book, as the subtitle reveals, it is a pot pourri of rather random highlights of Ms. Shaw's favorite city. Pleasantly illustrated throughout, with black pencil drawings of street signs, foods, buildings, famous people, etc., it could serve well as a handbook to carry along with a regular guide book. But it will not suffice as a guide book on its own: it lacks detailed information about the sites included; it has no table of contents; one must fill in the blanks of addresses and opening hours for all places mentioned, and one would need a detailed map of the city to find the places included here. In short, this book is not intended for someone new to the city. Rather, it would make a nice personal scrapbook of the reader's experiences in Jerusalem since it has lots of places to 'fill in the blanks.' As something of a curiosity, it would make a nice addition to a school or synagogue library. It could also work as a gift for young teens who might enjoy coloring in the illustrations.

*Marion Stein, retired librarian*

**Shyovitz, David I. *A Remembrance of His Wonders: Nature and the Supernatural in Medieval Ashkenaz*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017. 336 pp. \$59.95. (978081249118).**

The rabbis of 12<sup>th</sup> century northern Europe certainly had a lot of opinions about poop. And werewolves. But I'm getting ahead of myself. There is a widespread scholarly perception that the Haside Ashkenaz, a moralistic and idiosyncratic group of theologians in the Rhineland and Regensburg, were a superstitious sect uninterested in scientific inquiry. And that's somewhat fair, but as Shyovitz adroitly shows, this characterization does not paint the full picture.

The attitudes of the Pietists towards the natural world may not fit neatly into modern conceptions of science or philosophy especially compared to their Sephardic contemporaries, but this is not evidence of indifference. The Haside Ashkenaz engaged with the natural world, but on their own terms, addressing the concerns of their own interests. *A Remembrance of His Wonders* also closely examines medieval conceptions of the body and how Jews differed from their Christian neighbors.

Then we get to the good stuff. 'Monster theory' has been an emerging subfield within medieval studies and Shyovitz uses these ideas to examine the Jewish and Christian views of werewolves highlighting larger questions of corporeality and transformation. The final chapter deals with excrement, a subject which, in sharp contrast to Maimonides, held a particular fascination for the Pietists (and if I had realized what I was getting into, I probably would have reviewed a different book). Highly recommended for academic libraries.

*Daniel Scheide, Florida Atlantic University*

**Stark, Douglas. *When Basketball was Jewish: Voices of Those Who Played the Game*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017. 301 pp. \$29.95. (9780803295889).**

In the first half of the 20th century, basketball was already an urban game. And during that period, many of its biggest names were Jewish. This collection of interviews and oral histories will inform readers of all ages about the Jewish contribution to the game's development.

A few of the men included here have become legends. Nat Holman, Moe Spahn, and Dolph Schayes are remembered as players; Norm Drucker was one of the greatest officials in the NBA, and Red Klotz (a fine player in his youth) served as coach of the Washington Generals, who lost thousands of games

to the great Harlem Globetrotters over a decades-long career. Most of the others have retreated into obscurity. But they were members of the great college teams of the '30s and '40s at Yeshiva University (yes, YU was once a national power), New York University, and others. They also played on traveling teams based in New York and Philadelphia during the 1930s & '40s. One focal point is the South Philadelphia Hebrew Association (SPHA) and its decade of great players. Their memories take readers back to the sport's formative years, and remind us what basketball was like before Michael Jordan.

Douglas Stark provides an intimate look into the lives of young Jews whose athletic skills gave them an edge in society. Happily, each section has a short personal profile by Stark. Regrettably, the personal narratives appear not to have been edited from their original spoken format. Many stories are repeated (though from individual perspectives), and the men's voices become blurred. In the end, this is an interesting view of Jewish life, but only important for sports-history enthusiasts and to complete academic collections.

*Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA*

**Taylor, Derek. *Defenders of the Faith: The History of Jews' College and London School of Jewish Studies*. London; Portland: Vallentine Mitchell, 2017. 340 pp. \$59.95. (9781910383124).**

Jews' College, founded in 1855, was to become a well-known institution in England and internationally. It educated many rabbis who served in London, the Provinces, New York, Johannesburg, Jerusalem, and Bulawayo (Zimbabwe), to name a few. It was first created to train English speaking functionaries to cater to a British audience although its most distinguished professors and principals came from the Continent. In its early years, it educated teachers and ministers (reverends), and major arguments took place over whether rabbinical qualifications (*semicha*) were necessary for "pastors, preachers, and precentors." *Semicha* began with one graduate in 1896 and was ultimately attained by over 100 men. With a Sephardic component throughout, Jews' College also had a curriculum for *hazzanut* and teacher's diplomas (including women), but it always had fewer than 100 students at any given time.

Taylor points out that the institution was plagued by several disputes besides the yeshiva vs. vocational nature of its training. The most pressing was a perpetual shortage of funds. Neither congregations served by the College nor the United Synagogue would contribute significantly to the training of its graduates. An example of the poor ability to raise funds is that the Rothschild family contributed 200 pounds annually for 70 years! As a consequence, the staff was forced to make material sacrifices.

In his chapter on the library, Taylor describes its valuable materials but allows that there was a very small budget, most books were acquired from donated collections, and, as a result, the library remained largely out-of-date and poorly cataloged in spite of the valiant efforts of its librarians. World War II was in many ways a turning point. In the 1930s, lawyers who had escaped Austria and Germany applied to the College, and the College supplied many of the chaplains during the war. When the war was over, the College became the only rabbinical seminary left in Europe. Remnants of Jewish libraries flooded in from the Continent.

In about the year 2000, Jews' College gave up its rabbinical seminary and became the London School of Jewish Studies, specializing in adult education and teacher training for the modern Orthodox community. Taylor treats this transition as a rather seamless development and begins to refer to it as LSJS, but he doesn't explain how the name changed or when exactly. Instead he folds into this chapter what ought to be his conclusion--the great contributions of Jews' College over the years.

I note two small errors: Taylor refers to Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati as "Hebrew University College," and at one point labels it "Conservative." There are a few charming Briticisms: "If many a mickle makes a muckle," "everything went pear-shaped," the librarians had to "invigilate readers," and "gefrunzled" (not an English word) which Taylor happily defines in a note. The book is enhanced by several appendices such as lists of rabbis, chaplains in World War II, publications of Jews' College, the rules for attaining the rabbinical diploma, a bibliography, index, photographs and portraits.

Taylor's account is well-researched and informative although occasionally a bit too sanguine. Nonetheless, I recommend it for its treatment of this most important Jewish institution.

*Marlene Schiffman, Yeshiva University*

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**Tucker, Ethan.** *Gender Equality and Prayer in Jewish Law*. Brooklyn: Ktav Publishing, [2017]. 184 pp. \$24.95. (9789655241983).

This slim book has two parts: part one about women serving as a communal prayer leader; part two, about women counting in a quorum of ten. This book aims to answer a need: “though the halakhic questions regarding egalitarian *minyanim* have earned a fair amount of literature, there is still a need for a comprehensive treatment of the issue that seeks to understand the underlying concerns and issues of the different positions taken. This problem is most acutely felt by members of independent prayer communities who care about observing *halakhah* properly;” among them Mechon Hadar which is credited on the cover and the title page and presented as “the living instantiation of the theoretical model [the authors] sketch out throughout this book.” Knowledge of Hebrew is not required to access the excerpts from Talmudic sources and rabbinic authorities’ citations, as the authors give the Hebrew original followed by the English translation. Each school of reasoning is given a comprehensive analysis in the main text – what is explicit in each is underlined, but also what the quotation does not address – leaving controversial positions to (sometime very long) footnotes. Most argumentations require the rigorous attention of the reader, but there is a summary at the end of each section.

Should this book undergo a second edition, an index, especially of the scriptural and rabbinic sources, and a bibliography of secondary sources, would be a very valuable addition. Recommended to all synagogue libraries and to all interested individual readers.

Roger S. Kohn, Silver Spring, MD.

**Weiner, Jason.** *Jewish Guide to Practical Medical Decision-Making*. Jerusalem; New York: Urim Publications, 2017. 368 pp. \$25.95. (9789655242782).

Major technological advances in medical treatment raise many ethical and *halakhic* (Jewish law) issues concerning end of life and reproductive medical situations. Even though the Halakha has precedents in the Talmud and in the subsequent codes and responsa, one must keep current in the medical, psychological, and halakhic domains to be able to make decisions. For example, one congregational rabbi was consulted about removing life-support from a dying patient. The rabbi said that he would follow the ruling of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, who said that when the oxygen tank is changed, if the patient is able to breathe on his own, we can decline to connect a new tank. The author told the rabbi that hospitals supply oxygen from wall connections and have not used tanks for many decades.

The author reminds us that the role of the chaplain is to explain and console, not dictate final decisions. He gives an example where some patients and their visitors do not understand the role of the chaplain. When he introduced himself as the chaplain the family members said, “We are proud Jews and you won’t be able to convert us.” When he explains that he is Jewish and a rabbi they respond, “Oh, I thought they only have chaplains here.”

This book can be read on two levels. For the general audience, one should read just the basic narrative of each chapter, which is written in a highly readable manner; for chaplains, medical personnel, rabbis, and scholars, the notes at the end of each chapter include the sources and a discussion of point of halakha or medicine. True to the role of the chaplain, the author presents many sides to each issue. The final decisions must be made on a case-by-case basis. The book is highly recommended for academic, synagogue, and personal collections.

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

**Wolski, Nathan and Joel Hecker (eds).** *The Zohar: Pritzker edition (Volume 12)*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017. 770 pp. \$75.00. (9780804797740).

The twelfth volume of *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition* presents a discrete selection of Zoharic compositions. The first two chapters explore the different hierarchal permutations in angelology of the seven celestial *Heikhalot* (palaces), with incredible descriptions of the heavenly halls and angelic spiritual taxonomies,



which the soul of the kabbalist must journey through via meditation or prayer. *Piqqudin* is a kabbalistic treatment of the mystical reasons for the commandments. *Raza de-Razin* (Mystery of Mysteries) serves as a diagnostic manual (or key) for the ancient and medieval science of physiognomy. *Sitrei Otiyyot* (Secrets of the Letters) is a mystical essay that maps out the topology of divine and mundane existence, emanating from the arrangement of the tetragrammaton. *Qav ha-Middah* (Line of Measure) describes the divine measurement of the *sefirot*. The commentary on *Merkevet Yehezqel* (Ezekiel's Chariot) interprets details of Ezekiel's vision.

The last main chapter includes Zoharic commentary to varia or portions of the Torah. The volume offers "a riddling and perplexing signature" for a never ending stream of an eternal text hinting beyond text to the name beyond all names, with a short appendix hodge-podge of mysterious miscellanea that printers have labeled *Tosefta* despite their not fitting into that genre.

For this reader, a single word will suffice to describe this one volume of an already highly recommended set: Wow!

David B Levy, Touro College NYC

**Yadgar, Yaacov. *Sovereign Jews: Israel, Zionism, and Judaism*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2017. 279 pp. \$68.00. (9781438465333). Also available as an eBook.**

The author, a professor at the University of Oxford, argues that the concept of Zionism as a secularization of Judaism and the idea that there is a clash within the State of Israel between "secular" and "religious" are both untrue. He thinks that the use of what he considers a Protestant concept of religion as an apolitical belief in the supernatural, which arose in the context of the European nation states, as an analytical tool in the Jewish context distorts the Jewish, Zionist, and Israeli reality. Professor Yadgar's argument that persons and movements who do not believe in God or the supernatural may nevertheless have a "political theology" or "theopolitics" is confusing but he seems to equate religion or theology – at least in the Jewish context – with any worldview, including a nationalistic one. While this eccentric use of vocabulary makes his argument less clear than it might be, his point that Jewish traditions do not set boundaries between so-called religious and secular spheres of activity is a valid and important one and allows him to offer some insightful and thought-provoking interpretations of Zionism and the modern Jewish state. For academic collections.

Shmuel Ben-Gad, Gelman Library, George Washington University

## Reviews of Literature Titles for Adults

**Cohen, Nan. *Unfinished City: Poems*. Santa Barbara: Gunpowder Press, 2017. 60 pp. \$15.00. (9780998645803).**

The unfinished city of the title refers to the biblical Babel, and many of the poems in this book are prompted by biblical quotes and references. The poet's conceit is to take these references to divinity and Jewish history and refract them into the art of a modern, American, presumably secular, Jewish woman. The historical and religious experiences of the Bible become small, quotidian, and personal. For example, in "Crossing," the crossing of the Red Sea is narrated by a woman with her husband and daughter: "If you've heard the walls were mirrors,/ thronging with generations, this is true./ I saw a woman who looked like me,/ leading a girl by the hand. I saw/ the man they both belonged to./ And I understood: they were us, and not:". In a few of the poems, the author's voice is unclear, and the reader is not sure who is actually speaking. These poems exemplify the best of modern American poetry – spare, oblique, and demanding close reading. For collections of Jewish poetry.

Beth Dwoskin, Proquest (Retired), Library Committee Chair, Beth Israel Congregation, Ann Arbor, MI

**Katzir, Jeannette. *Footprints in the Forest*. Amazon Digital Services (print on demand), 2016. 488 pp. \$5.99.**

Chana Pershowski was fourteen years old when the Nazis occupied Baranovichi in 1939. Her father is murdered, and soon her sister-in-law and niece are killed as well. With few options, Chana, her brother Isaac and his friend Saul take to the forest with the Zhurov partisans, leaving her mother and younger sister behind. Life as a partisan is hard: cold, hunger, lecherous men, and sabotage missions where anyone can be killed abound. She is befriended by Leeza, a young Jewish woman widowed by the war who soon becomes Isaac's girlfriend. Soon an Auschwitz escapee, Gabriel, joins the group, and Chana becomes close to him. He is assumed dead after a shootout. The partisans are to meet up with and join the Russian army, but Chana, Leeza and Isaac hide in a barn and help on the family's farm. When they hear the war is over, they return to Baranovichi, but there is rampant anti-Semitism and no sign of surviving family.

After the war, they move to Brooklyn and create a new life for themselves. Chana meets Damek, another survivor, but his marriage proposal requires moving to Israel, and they part ways when Chana refuses to leave her brother and sister-in-law, who soon have a baby boy. Coming out of work, Chana meets someone who looks familiar—Gabriel has survived the attack and noticed her artwork in a store. They are happily reunited.

The chapters alternate between Chana's life in Brooklyn (1948-1949) and life in Europe (1941-1945). Told in the first person, there are quite a few strong elements: the action of partisan fighting and survival, and alternating chapters between, before, during, and after the partisan experience add anticipation to the happy ending. For the most part, the historical details are accurate and add to the sense of time and place. Elements that detract from the book's impact include using leading questions like "What was it like in Auschwitz?" to introduce a long description, as well as a myriad of typographical errors. Libraries that collect Holocaust materials, particularly about partisan activity, will be interested in *Footprints*; an optional purchase for other Jewish libraries.

*Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh*

**Rashkin, Leyb. *The People of Godlbozhits*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press. 2017. 471 pp. \$39.95. (9780815610922).**

Set in 1920s Poland, *The People of Godlbozhits* is a novelized depiction of the Polish town of Kuzmir, the birthplace of author Rashkin. Rashkin's Godlbozhits is an Eastern European shtetl whose residents struggle to adapt to the rapidly changing political, religious and social changes taking place throughout Eastern Europe. Rashkin, who died in the Holocaust, provided a depiction of a soon-to-be-extinct community.

Eastern European Jewry was the last remnant of Europe's Jewish communities to be influenced by the Haskalah, the Jewish Enlightenment movement responsible for the gradual modernization of European Jewry. In 1920s Godlbozhits, the lives of shtetl residents changes as the Jewish community is secularized through worker unionization, the implementation of sewer systems, sidewalks and other public works, and the changing sexual and familial mores. Traditional communal rule by the elite is threatened by worker unionization and mechanization of leather manufacturing.

Lengthy and as dense as molasses, *The People of Godlbozhits*, is not a light read. Rashkin offers no real plot, rather chapters of events that don't necessarily follow a logical order. *The People of Godlbozhits* can best be described as "a book in search of a reader." Unfortunately, it is doubtful it will find any.

*Joseph Gremillion, Librarian, Broward County.*

**Rideley, Barbara. *When It's Over*. She Writes Press, 2017. 344 pp. \$16.95. (979163152263).**

This great little novel has everything it needs—interesting characters, a love story, set against an important historical background. Lena, a young Jewish woman from Prague, has come to Paris. Hitler has just gained power in Germany. She works for Otto, a German and a leader in an international organization to fight fascism. They fall in love and somehow make their way into England, where they join a group of refugees from Prague in a little cottage. Wealthy, upper class couples take care of them, but their neighbors, low-class and ignorant, and the police, fear them as "foreigners" and possibly hidden Nazis. Lena and Otto

are married, but soon after Lena falls in love again, this time with Milton – a smooth, attractive member of the upper class. Lena’s father and brother have made their way out of Czechoslovakia and into the Free Czech Army, which takes them to England. Lena’s mother and her little sister are left behind, but Lena is sure they’re safe and looks forward to meeting them soon. The German bombardment of England begins. The book portrays strongly the deprivations, terror, and devastation. After the war, Lena decides that she wants to remain in England permanently but first she must find her beloved mother and little sister. Contrary to her optimistic belief, she discovers she was terribly wrong: her mother and sister have been dead for many years. For some reason the author has added an epilogue about an American girl, probably Lena’s daughter, driving in England. The section is out of character with the previous work and should have been omitted. More serious though, is an omission that may stem from what I assume is the author’s non-Jewish background. She fails to depict the serious concerns and efforts by American and British Jews to help their European brethren, and she fails to show how the news of the six million dead impacted them. Still, overall this is an absorbing book, one that is well worth acquiring.

*Jane Wallerstein*

## Reviews of Multimedia

**Levi, Halit. *Shmeina (I’m Fat)*. Israel, 2017. Hebrew with English subtitles. DVD. 53 min. See <http://www.go2films.com/Go2Films/order-information> for pricing.**

Halit Levi’s life partner tells her that “society considers fat the mark of Cain.” Halit is 5’7” and weighs 362 pounds, and while she has friends, a successful career working with at-risk youth, and a loving relationship, she cannot deny the impact her weight has on her life, and she considers weight-loss surgery. After speaking with a (skinny) nutritionist, a therapist, friends who have had surgery, and the surgeon, she ponders the benefits and drawbacks of having the procedure. Because her excess weight has defined most of her life, and has served as her “armor” of defense, she is scared of how her life will change if she loses the weight. But as she ages, she is suffering from more aches and pains, particularly in her knees and legs. She ultimately decides to have the surgery. The last scenes of the film show a significantly smaller Halit running on the beach, but she tells the viewer that “‘Fat’ is a self-definition, an inner sensation. I am beautiful, smart and successful. I am a fat woman; I will always be a fat woman, regardless of my weight or my clothing size.”

Filmed in Tel Aviv with angles that often make this seem like a home movie, the film is both typically Israeli and personal and universal. Sometimes funny, sometimes sad and raw, Halit is very real—showing a full range of emotions and articulating so many of the bigger issues at play with eating and obesity. The film is very highly recommended for all Jewish libraries because there is such much fodder for discussion on so many subjects: Israeli culture; food issues; LGBTQ relationships; and what defines us and shapes who we are.

*Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel*

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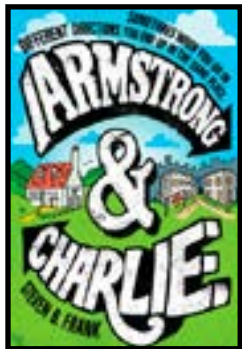
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# Reviews of Titles for Children and Teens

EDITED BY RACHEL KAMIN & CHAVA PINCHUK

## In The Spotlight



**Frank, Steven B. *Armstrong & Charlie*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Books for Young Readers, 2017. 304 pp. \$16.99. (9780544826083). Gr. 5-7.**

Set in mid-1970's California, this superbly crafted coming-of-age middle grade novel tells the story of two sixth-grade boys who form an unlikely bond. Charlie, who is Jewish, learns that his closest friends will no longer be attending Wonderland School because, as one boy confesses, "My mom says it's going downhill." Enter Armstrong, who is scheduled against his wishes to be bussed along with nine other black children to Charlie's all-white school. Their paths merge when the two sit next to each other in class, setting the stage for a tense relationship. At first neither can get past the barrier of their skin color, but over time a deep friendship blossoms as together they traverse the social pitfalls of this awkward age. The story unfolds with humor, warmth, and grit in alternating first-person sections within chapters. Frank imbues all of his main players—from Armstrong's one-legged Korean War veteran father to Charlie's mother, who is mourning the death of her eldest son—with distinctive voices, giving emotional substance to their triumphs and heartbreaks while never talking down to his audience. Most noteworthy is the lovely chapter detailing a Shabbat dinner at Charlie's house, in which Armstrong, feeling like an outsider, is set at ease by Charlie's mother's poignant words: "Shabbat is our day of rest, Armstrong. We bless the candles, the wine, and the bread to show our appreciation for light, laughter and food." Frank includes a handful of scenes with significant Jewish content, including a story of Charlie's father being called a "kike" in the navy. He tells his son it is "the worst possible word you can call someone who's Jewish. It's the equivalent of calling a black person the n-word. Which stands for *never*. Got that?" Frank's own sixth-grade experiences add a level of realism to the book, which includes plenty of period-specific references (e.g., the candy Razzles, ABC's Wide World of Sports, and Ford's pardon of Nixon). For many young Jewish readers, *Armstrong & Charlie* may serve both as an introduction to the longstanding connection between Jews and blacks in America and as an important reminder that today's race relation problems have deep roots.

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



**Gratz, Alan. *Refugee*. New York: Scholastic, 2017. 344pp. \$16.99. (9780545880831). Gr. 4 - 9.**

Three separate stories, of three individual children, during three different historical periods, unfold in a book that is as timely as today's headlines. Josef is a Jewish boy in 1938, fleeing Nazi Germany on the MS St. Louis. In 1994, Isabel is escaping Castro's Cuba with her family and neighbors on a self-made boat headed for Florida. Mahmoud is a Syrian Muslim running from Aleppo to Europe in 2015. Each of these stories is universal, unique and powerfully told. Miraculously, the author connects all three by the end of the book. From fear

and sorrow to hope and joy and everything in between, a full range of emotions are described in vivid detail. The stomach churns when Josef's father, made insane by time spent in a concentration camp, jumps off the ship. The heart pounds when sharks circle Isabel's boat as it begins sinking into the water. The skin crawls when a taxi driver pulls a gun to rob Mahmoud and his family. The author's skill lies in his ability to allow the reader to truly experience each moment of these incredible journeys.

As in real life, there are no happy endings, tragedy happens to each of these characters in very personal ways. Nevertheless, there is a silver lining to each of the stories that allows a deep sigh and a feeling of, "It will be OK" when the book is over. At the end of the book, there is a well-illustrated map of each character's journey. In addition, the author's note describes the true, fascinating and historically accurate stories on which each fictional character is based. Finally, "What Can You Do" provides recommendations for how we can all help the refugees among us. Jews are commanded to "welcome the stranger." This is a book that supports this mitzvah with education, experience and emotion and belongs in every library.

*Kathy Bloomfield, AJL President-SSC Division, Seal Beach, CA*

[Editors' Note: *Refugee* is the 2018 Sydney Taylor Book Award Winner for Older Readers and the 2017 National Jewish Book Award Winner for Young Adult Literature.]



**Romero, R. M. *The Dollmaker of Kraków*. New York: Delacorte, 2017. 336 pp. \$16.99. (9781524715397) HC; \$10.99 (978152471510) eBook. Gr. 4-7.**

Several genres – historical, folklore, and fairy tale – are interwoven to create a story that will strike the reader with its power and originality. The novel begins in the Land of the Dolls where Karolina lives and works as a seamstress, stitching fine clothes and wishes into her garments. But ferocious rats invade her land and destroy everything and everyone in their path. Next, the setting switches to the city of Kraków, Poland, which the Nazis (the "witches") will similarly invade and pillage during World War II. Karolina is taken by a "kind wind" and deposited in the shop of a quiet, lonely man, Cyryl Brzezick, the Dollmaker, who possesses magical powers. Back and forth the story goes between the Land of the Dolls and the real city of Kraków. Cyryl befriends his Jewish neighbors, Jozef and his daughter, Rena. After the Jews are confined to the ghetto, Cyryl devises a scheme to save Rena and a number of other children. However, his fate along with that of the Jews is ultimately tragic. Karolina survives and, in the end, will always remember her best friend and the power of love.

Romero uses vibrant sensory details to describe significant places in Kraków, such as Wawel Castle, the Market Square, Planty Park, Podgórze, and Kazimierz. A chronology (June 1914 to September 1945) at the end of the book provides helpful information. Black and white illustrations throughout the book create a break from the tension and add another dimension to the narrative. Romero's website (<http://www.rmromero.com>) offers further useful resources for teachers and students. One is left with the fervent wish that magic could have worked to prevent the Holocaust.

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

[Editors' Note: *The Dollmaker of Kraków* is a 2018 Sydney Taylor Notable Book for Older Readers.]

## BIBLE STORIES AND MIDRASH

**McDonough, Yona Zeldis.** *What Are the Ten Commandments?* Illus. by Tim Foley. New York: Penguin Workshop, 2017. 112 pp. \$5.99. (9780515157239). Gr. 3-7.

This could have been a simple elucidation of the Ten Commandments with background information about when and where they were given to Moses along with a detailed descriptions and a bit of added commentary. However, it is a much, much more comprehensive approach to the topic than the title implies. It starts by telling the story of the Israelites when they were slaves in Egypt, proceeds through their escape from Pharaoh, Moses' ascent up Mount Sinai to receive the tablets, and continues with Joshua leading his people into Canaan. The reader learns about the battles to conquer the land, the people of Israel's perpetual struggle with faith, and finally, the establishment of Solomon's Temple. It then moves into modern times. Along with the history, there's quite a bit of added philosophy: a discussion about monotheism vs. polytheism, a section on comparative religion, and the system of numbering biblical verses. A book about the Middle East aimed at a general audience has some built-in complexities, here handled with a fairly light touch, but impossible to completely avoid. The most notable example is the two-page sidebar entitled Jerusalem Today. This section attempts to explain the competing claims to Jerusalem by Jews and Muslims and acknowledges recognition by some nations of Palestine. A book about the Ten Commandments for children could have been a bit less extensive and skipped a discussion of 21st century politics.

Part of the Penguin Workshop series "Who is/Was"... and What Is/Are"... which has become a phenomenon in homes and elementary schools due to the clarity of the writing and the choice of interesting subject matter, this one is no exception. Written by noted Jewish children's author Yona Zeldis McDonough, it is easy to understand, comprehensive (to a fault), and has many excellent features: black and white illustrations, photographs, timelines, and a bibliography. The part that explains the Ten Commandments as a system of rules governing behavior is useful in many contexts in homes and schools, for discussions of codes of conduct, both religious and secular, and for tie-ins with Shavuot, Simchat Torah and numerous other Jewish calendar events. Because the range of information included far exceeds a discussion of Commandments themselves, perhaps the title should be rethought to be more in reflective of the book's actual content. Or perhaps the content should be pared down to fit the original theme.

*Michal Hoschander Malen, retired librarian and Children's and YA Editor for the Jewish Book Council*

**Rylant, Cynthia.** *Creation.* Beach Lane Books, an imprint of Simon & Schuster, 2016. \$17.99. (9781481470391). Gr. K-3.

Caldecott Honor Award winning illustrator, Cynthia Rylant, has paired luscious acrylic illustrations with an adapted version of Genesis 1 and 2 from the King James Bible. The text has not been simplified (words like void and firmament remain) and creative details such as "And God created the great whales" have been added. The masculine pronoun "he" is used and only the sixth and seventh day are identified. Picture books depicting the creation story are plentiful in most Jewish libraries and several adhere more strictly to the biblical text from a Jewish perspective. *In the Beginning: Bereishit* adapted by Alison Greengard (EKS Publishing, 2000) and *Light: The First Seven Days* retold by Sarah Waldman (Harcourt, 1993) are preferable despite Rylant's superior illustrations.

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



## BIOGRAPHY

**Agrimbau, Diego. *Anne Frank*. (Graphic Lives). Illus. by Fabián Mezquita. Trans. from the Spanish by Trusted Translations. North Mankato, MN: Capstone Press, 2018. 80 pp. \$23.99 (9781515791614) Library Binding; \$6.95 (9781515791652) PBK. Gr. 4-6.**

Aimed at “reluctant readers,” this graphic retelling of Anne Frank’s diary is yet another addition to the numerous versions of Anne Frank’s life and writing (more than 40 have been reviewed in the *AJL Newsletter*). The essence of Anne’s diary comes through in an effective and even poignant way. *Anne Frank* is divided into four chapters which outline the different stages of Anne’s life from the ages of thirteen to fifteen. Mezquita expresses the events Anne describes in her diary as well as the characters’ emotions through a variety of colors, shading, perspectives, panel shapes, sizes, and placement. Throughout this book, art and text are balanced nicely; both are equally compelling. The reader thus becomes immersed in the story. Because this book is designed to be used as a teaching tool, the end materials include: “Anne Frank’s Story: A Legacy”, “About Anne Frank”, and “Anne Frank and the Movies”. In addition, the author provides a glossary, a brief teachers’ guide, and an index. *Anne Frank* can be useful to introduce the Holocaust to young readers or to complement other materials. This book is part of a series that includes Nelson Mandela, Leonardo da Vinci, and Pope Francis. For another graphic telling of events during the Holocaust, see Aline Sax’s outstanding *The War Within These Walls* (Eerdmans, 2011).

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

**Small, Cathleen. *Ruth Bader Ginsburg: Supreme Court Justice*. New York: Cavendish Square, 2017. 91 pp. \$39.93. (9781502626974). Gr. 7-12.**

This very detailed, well researched book chronicles the life and accomplishments of Supreme Court justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, covering her childhood, education, career, and time on the Supreme Court. Although sometimes repetitive, the informative text is interesting, with many quotations enriching the topics. The book goes into greater detail to explain Ginsburg’s continuing fight for gender equality and the equal protection clause of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment, sometimes used to fight gender discrimination. It traces, as just one of many examples of Ginsburg’s work, her dissent against the Supreme Court decision in *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Stores* regarding religious beliefs of companies governing women employees’ contraceptive choices. The book concludes at the time of the nomination of Neil Gorsuch to fill Justice Antonin Scalia’s seat, and comments about the “Notorious R.B.G.” blog, song, and book by the same title, that have all propelled Ginsburg to “rock star status.” While comprehensive, this biography mentions Ginsburg’s connection to Judaism only once, when it describes Ginsburg’s strong reaction to seeing a sign at a resort, during her childhood, that read: “No dogs or Jews allowed.”

The chapter and section headings are attractively posted in color, and quotations are boxed. Words that appear in the glossary are bolded within the text. End matter provides a detailed timeline of her life, source notes for all quotes and pictures, glossary, lists of resources with further information, bibliography with both print and Internet entries, index with illustrations and photos indicated in boldface page numbers, and a short paragraph about the author.

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

**Winter, Jonah. *Ruth Bader Ginsburg: The Case of R.B.G. vs. Inequality*. Illus. by Stacy Innerst. New York: Abrams Books for Young Readers, 2017. 38 pp. \$18.95. (9781419725593). Gr. 1-3.**

A beautiful picture book biography of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, at a slightly higher reading level than the outstanding 2016 publication *I Dissent!* by Debbie Levy (Sydney Taylor

Book Award Winner for Younger Readers). Winter puts the reader in the jury box at the outset, presenting a wealth of “evidence” leading to just one verdict: “Because she did not give up, because she refused to let other people define her limitations as a person, Ruth Bader Ginsburg has herself become a symbol of justice in America.” The facts of Ginsburg’s life are organized as if they were evidence being presented at trial, illustrating how unfair the world she was born into was, how males were valued more than females, how important she would become, how her parents provided experiences that shaped her values, and how a firsthand encounter with anti-Semitism touched her so deeply. Further evidence offered in the form of “exhibits” outline instances from her life before, during, and after law school that additionally show how wrongly she was treated. On the day she would have graduated high school with honors, her mother died and she didn’t attend graduation. Additional facts are presented as if in a courtroom, about law school, her marriage, the birth of her two children, the arduous search for a job after law school when nobody would chance a woman, a Jew, a mother. Several pages are devoted to her courtship and marriage, her husband’s illness during their early years of marriage, and her strength, physically and mentally, as evidenced especially in her powerful, strongly worded dissents.

Innerst’s illustrations use gouache, ink, and Photoshop, in a muted palette of earth tones. Facial features are rendered in caricature. The end papers show shelves of books. The back matter includes a “Glossary” that contains important words and concepts, but some of the explanations are more difficult to understand than the word or phrase they are describing. A full-page Author’s Note extends the learning by listing Ginsburg’s many accomplishments in overcoming obstacles in the unjust, male-dominated field of law.

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

[Editors’ Note: *Ruth Bader Ginsburg: The Case of R.B.G. vs. Inequality* is a 2018 Sydney Taylor Notable Book for Younger Readers.]

**Westheimer, Dr. Ruth K. and Pierre A. Lehu. *Roller-Coaster Grandma: The Amazing Story of Dr. Ruth*. Illus. by Mark Simmons. Springfield, NJ: Apples & Honey Press, 2018. 64 pp. \$11.95. (9781681155326). Gr. 5-8.**

While sharing a day at an amusement park with her grandchildren, Dr. Ruth Westheimer uses her experiences during World War II to illustrate life-coping skills in this delightful graphic autobiography. A scary ride in the haunted house recalls her trip on the Kindertransport from Germany to England. A game of miniature golf turns into a lesson on overcoming obstacles. The shooting gallery recalls her experience in the Haganah and her recuperation after being wounded by a bomb. As the story continues into Dr. Ruth’s life in America, as a radio talk show host, a therapist and ultimately a Celebrity (yes, with a capital C!), her mantra, “Sure. Why not?” resonates from the past to the present. This book illustrates the life of a woman who has been successful as a result of hard work, fierce determination, unparalleled resilience and a total lack of fear. The illustrator uses full color drawings to experience the amusement park and all its joys, then transitions to sepia tone graphics for the flashbacks into Dr. Ruth’s past. The art is wonderful, and the language is entertaining and captivating. A beautifully illustrated timeline of Dr. Ruth’s life concludes the book, and the final page provides questions to think about after reading the story, along with a short bio and pictures of Dr. Ruth now and then.

*Kathy Bloomfield, AJL President-SSC Division, Seal Beach, CA*





## FICTION - MIDDLE GRADE

**Klempner, Rebecca. *Glixman in a Fix*. Brooklyn: Menucha Publishers, 2017. 278 pp. \$18.95. (9781614651567). Gr. 5-8.**

Mendel Glixman's Aunt Rina, a scientist working on a painkiller, has disappeared. Add to this his mother's hoarding, which causes injury to his brother Leiby and stops Ari from inviting people to visit; a new student, Ari, who is black; lots of homework and a bully, and Glixman really is in a fix. While Ari and Mendel's other friend Ilan try to help him solve the mystery, Mendel and his family gently push his mother to face her issues. Mendel also enlists the help of his math teacher and local rabbi. As the situation gets more dangerous, with people chasing him and bugging the family home, Mendel soon discovers that the drug Aunt Rina was developing is coveted by someone sinister, and that is why she went into hiding. Her birthday card to him holds a clue, a sample of Laxamentum. Mendel turns it over to the authorities, but one of them takes it so he can replicate it. The rogue agent is caught with Rina's boss, and they confess to their nefarious plans. Mendel celebrates Shavuot with his family and friends.

With no glossary, the book is for Orthodox readers. That said, kudos to Klempner (and Menucha) for a book with well-developed characters with flaws, several strands of plot running concurrently, and attention to details, like making sure that men prayed at the proper times and everyone said blessings before and after eating. Mendel Glixman is a relatable character that grows as the plot progresses, and there is enough development of the secondary characters that they don't fade in the background. First serialized in *Binah Between Magazine*, the book flows well because most of the chapters do not end with a dramatic cliffhanger. Although the involvement of arms dealers, Iranians and North Koreans stretch believability, it's a fun, quick, "boy book" that will be welcome in any library that services the Orthodox community.

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

## FICTION – TEEN

**Behr, Shaul. *Ari Barak and the Free-Will Paradox*. BookLocker (print on demand), 2017. 386 pp. \$19.95. (9781634925006). Gr. 9-12.**

Ari Barak is a seventeen-year old with ADHD. When his hijinks prove too much for his local school, his parents send him to Israel, where he is enrolled in Rabbi White's most unusual yeshiva. The only other student is Howard Segal, a brainy South African. From the comings and goings of Rabbi White to the almost magically tasting food, the boys realize something is going on. They are soon outfitted with headphones that are really "Stream Engines" that heighten the boys' perception and allow them to see when people are exercising their free will. They go back to biblical times with Rabbi White: to the point where Korach is planning his rebellion, and to the Garden of Eden to see what would have happened if Eve had not eaten the fruit. But Kayin returns to the present time with them and wreaks havoc. When they try to get him back to Eden, there are more complications -- another Kayin comes back. It is soon revealed that Rabbi White and his associate, Dr. Naresh, are "back from the future" and Igor, the golem-like helper is actually a clone. Working on a clue, the crew goes back to ancient Egypt, where the story sorts out: Yithro and Korach are believed to be reincarnations of Kayin. The boys return to their yeshiva and review their adventure.

Touted as "kosher science fiction," the story has many elements of the genre: time travel, well-defined characters, and a transporting device. The author also presents moral questions and looks at the nature of human relationships. But the pacing is rather sluggish -- the real action starts close to half way through the book and long philosophical discussions and explanations further slow the plot. Most readers looking for "kosher" reading would not need the footnoted definitions and translations

and will know the plot from their studies. While the idea of parallel universes created by the exercise of free will is intriguing, neither science nor a convincing fantasy world underlies every aspect of the book -- Judaism does -- making it a selection for Orthodox teen readers.

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

**Schulman, L.B. *Stolen Secrets*. Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mills Press, 2017. 304 pp. \$17.95. (9781629797229). Gr. 7-12**

How would a teenager feel having to parent her own mother, a relapsed alcoholic, and abruptly drive across the country from Vermont to San Francisco? How would anyone feel if they had to start a new life with only lies to justify the move? Livvy, the heroine of this story, has had to shoulder many responsibilities beyond her years and she's used to taking care of her mother. But she is shocked to discover that the sudden upheaval was orchestrated by her mother in order to care for a grandmother suffering from Alzheimer's disease. Her grandmother's very existence was a secret kept from Livvy by her mother, and she can only guess at the reason. Even more shocking is the mystery surrounding Oma. Her fleeting references to Anne Frank, and her frantic search for missing diaries from Holland, are both intriguing and disturbing. It becomes increasingly clear that there was some relationship between Oma and Anne Frank. Was her grandmother a Holocaust survivor? Was she actually Anne Frank herself? Livvy finds an ally in her quest to discover the truth: a "nerdy" Jewish boy she meets in her new school. This love interest adds a little romance to the story in a sweetly innocent way. Other more nefarious agents are after the documents as well, and Livvy gets caught up in a tangled web of subterfuge and even violence. Fortunately, the story ends on a positive note, with her mother in recovery and her new life straightening out nicely. The twists and turns in the mystery will keep readers engaged. This novel, which bridges the gap between Holocaust books and contemporary young adult fiction, will appeal to teens who are familiar with the story of Anne Frank.

*Joyce Levine, North Shore Hebrew Academy H.S. (retired) and past AJL Publications Chair*

[Editors' Note: *Stolen Secrets* is a 2018 Sydney Taylor Notable Book for Teen Readers.]

## HOLOCAUST AND WORLD WAR II

**Bisson, Michelle. *Hedy's Journey: The True Story of a Hungarian Girl Fleeing the Holocaust*. (Encounter: Narrative Nonfiction Picture Books). Illus. by El primo Ramón. North Mankato, MN: Capstone Press, 2017, 40 pp. \$15.95. (9781772600612). Gr. 4-6.**

Michelle Bisson uses her mother's first-person voice to tell the tale of escape from Nazi-occupied Hungary to Vienna, Barcelona, Lisbon, and the United States. In the summer of 1941, Hedy's cousin Marike declines Hedy's family's offer to stay with them. Hedy knows Marike has decided to be deported and die with her parents and Hedy cries for her. Hedy and her family attempt to leave Hungary, but the travel agency can only find three train tickets. Hedy waits behind with her Aunt Cili while her mother, father, and little brother travel on. Hedy leaves a week and a half later and passes through Austrian customs, because she does not "look Jewish." She reunites with her family in Lisbon, but Pearl Harbor in Hawaii has been attacked and American ships are no longer going from Lisbon to New York. They find a Portuguese ship that will take them to South America and Cuba. But supplies run short and the ship stops in Bermuda. There it is able to refuel and continue on to Newport News, Virginia. Finally, Hedy and her family arrive in New York in February 1942.

Illustrations track Hedy's journey and the use of a muted palette is effective. The story is filled with real-life conflict and determination to reach safe haven, but it also explicitly addresses death in the camps (beginning on page 4) and even the death of a two-year-old who falls into the ship's engine room. The subject matter and vocabulary are advanced, despite the glossary included in the back

matter, which also includes a timeline, photos, an author's note, and suggestions for further reading.

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

[Editors' Note: *Hedy's Journey: The True Story of a Hungarian Girl Fleeing the Holocaust* is a 2018 Sydney Taylor Notable Book for Older Readers.]

**Fishman, K. Heidi. *Tutti's Promise*. Bethesda, MD: MB Publishing, 2017. 232pp. \$9.95. (9781541375383). Gr. 5-9.**

Like the Frank family, the Lichtenstern family was forced out of Germany in the mid-1930s, and settled in Amsterdam. The reader learns about their lives in the years following the Nazi invasion of Holland. Throughout the family's ordeal, Tutti's parents try to save her and her younger brother Bobby and to protect themselves. Tutti's perspective, as she grew from 5 to 10 years old, is also provided. The narrative is filled with small, telling, and sometimes graphic details of the family's life as their situation in Holland deteriorated. In 1943 they were sent to Westerbork and from there to the concentration camps. Through all of it, Tutti's voice is strong. Tutti's immediate family survives the War but some beloved relatives did not. While Tutti's experiences are not particularly unique, her daughter's narrative describes many dramatic -- even harrowing -- scenes, and includes words and phrases in German and Dutch, which add verisimilitude. There are numerous photos throughout the book, as well as a glossary.

*Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA*

**Fitzgerald, Stephanie. *Kristallnacht*. (Eyewitness to World War II). North Mankato, MN: Compass Point Books, 2018. 112pp. \$35.99. (9780756555832) HC; \$8.32 (9780756555870) PBK. Gr. 4-6.**

The first half of the book sets the background for *Kristallnacht* and deals with the rise of Hitler and the Nazi party, explaining Germany's political and economic situation and exploring how Nazism was able to succeed. In the second half we meet Herschel Grynzspan, a Jewish teenager whose family was recently sent to a transit camp. On November 7, 1938 he shot and killed Ernst vom Rath, an official at the German Embassy in Paris. In "retaliation" for this murder, Hitler unleashed violence and arson. On the night of November 9, the Nazis destroyed nearly 300 synagogues, as well as over 7,500 Jewish-owned businesses and homes. In addition, they destroyed property and arrested innocent Jewish civilians; hundreds of Jews also died in the attacks. In the aftermath of the night, the already severe restrictions on the lives of Jews were made even tighter. As a sign of the fear of Germany, there was no outcry from the European nations. Only President Franklin Roosevelt spoke against the horror, and there was no American follow-up. Because the story of *Kristallnacht* is so concise, this volume expands its reach. It includes detailed information about the entire era, from World War I to World War II. As a result, school-aged readers may not appreciate the horror of the central incident. The back matter includes a timeline, glossary, suggestions for further reading, notes, a bibliography, and an index.

*Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA*

[Editors' Note: *Kristallnacht, The Night of Broken Glass: Igniting the Nazi War Against Jews* (Snapshots in History) by Stephanie Fitzgerald was published by Capstone in 2008.]

**Giff, Patricia Reilly. *Genevieve's War*. Illus. by Becca Stadlander. New York: Holiday House, 2017. 240 pp. \$16.95. (9780823438006). Gr. 4-7.**

American thirteen-year-old orphan Genevieve, who has been living with a beloved aunt, has been sent for the summer of 1939 to her grandmother's farm in Alsace, France to get to know her grandmother and the area in which her father grew up. She barely understands this taciturn, cold-seeming grandmother and this unfamiliar culture but she makes some good friends and has an interesting experience. She is just about ready to return the U.S. as the summer comes to a close, but some of the social and political events she sees around her in this increasingly Nazi-dominated area are

not easy for this bright, sensitive, analytical young girl to ignore, including deportation of Jews and the threat of a Nazi takeover of the region which the Germans have always claimed as their own. At the last moment, she lets the ship sail without her and return to her grandmother and the farm in Alsace. The Germans invade and life becomes challenging and frightening. Gen joins the Resistance and works to protect her family, their town, and their friends, but it isn't always easy to know who is friend and who is foe. With false starts, uneven progress, a difficult learning curve, and developing a respect and relationship for those she thought impossible to care for, including her grandmother, the protagonist grows and matures and learns to become unexpectedly brave and resourceful.

Genevieve is a realistic and likable heroine and the story is full of adventure, surprise, and suspense. There is minimal Jewish content, although shades of the Holocaust are not far in the background due to the Nazi presence, and the reader learns about a part of World War II that is not often written about for this age group.

*Michal Hoschander Malen, retired librarian and Children's and YA Editor for the Jewish Book Council*

**Pearl, Sydelle. *Wordwings*. Toronto: Guernica Editions, 2017. 199 pp. \$20.00. (9781771831963). Gr. 6-12.**

Twelve-year-old Rivke Rosenfeld lives in the Warsaw Ghetto with her grandfather and two little sisters. The year is 1941, and the conditions within the ghetto are deteriorating daily. As cold and starvation set in, a small group of people maintain their humanity by conducting a secret school and kitchen for children that is graced by Rivke's storytelling. Though so young, she is an extraordinary storyteller mainly of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales, but also her own stories. Against the law, she bravely records her stories in the margins of one of the few remaining books in the ghetto. It is clear that life is completely perilous and degraded, yet *Wordwings* is a story of exquisite bravery and spirit. Although Rivke and her family are fictional, the time, setting, and circumstances are factual. Important historical figures from the Warsaw Ghetto ground the story. Of particular interest is Emanuel Ringelblum, the archivist of the *Oyneg Shabes* collection of documents, who asks Rivke to include her stories in the archive. The actual Ringelblum Archive was buried beneath the Ghetto and almost everyone associated with it perished at the hands of the Nazis. Author Sydelle Pearl has created a wonderful work of historical fiction that poignantly allows the middle school and young adult reader to enter the harrowing world of the Warsaw Ghetto through the eyes of a young and sympathetic protagonist.

*Rena Citrin, Library Director, Bernard Zell Anshe Emet Day School, Chicago*

[Editors' Note: *Wordwings* is a 2018 Sydney Taylor Notable Book for Older Readers.]

**Platt, Randall. *The Girl Who Wouldn't Die*. New York: Sky Pony Press, 2017. 349 pp. \$16.99. (9781510708099). Gr. 9 and up.**

In August 1939, sixteen-year-old Abra Goldstein, a.k.a. the androgynous street thief Arab, returns to Warsaw after her father banished her to a girls' school in Vienna. Her father considers her dead, with a gravestone to prove it. When the Nazis invade Poland, Arab finds ways to keep herself alive by selling cigarettes at Three Crosses Square, banding together with her former comrade, Lizard, but staying away from Sniper, who betrayed her during a botched robbery. Equipped with street savvy, Arab stays alive, but when the ghetto walls go up, she pleads with her father to let her help him. He refuses. She then decides to save her club-footed younger sister, Ruthie. With the help of a couple of kind Nazis, she and Lizard move Jewish children out of the ghetto to safety.

Arab is a self-hating Jew, hardly the basis for a book to demonstrate the Holocaust. But the real set of problems with this poorly planned, researched, and executed novel comes from the lack of authenticity and accuracy and from rampant anti-Semitism. Any Jewish sensibilities here, or Polish or German for that matter, are researched and peppered in. The author acknowledges help from experts and first-

person accounts. Arab (and why that name?) calls one of the Nazis the Messiah but her understanding of the Messiah is Christian, not Jewish. The author strives to make Nazis sensitive to the Jewish situation and makes Jews appear stupid, fearful, and vengeful. Further, the logistics inside and outside the ghetto are confusing. This is not a book that demonstrates positive Jewish values. The book offends these values within the first few pages. Further reading does not improve the experience.

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

**Renaud, Anne. *Fania's Heart*. Illus. by Richard Rudnicki. Toronto: Second Story Press, 2018. 32 pp. \$18.95. (97817772600575). Gr 1-4.**

The true story of Fania Landau Fainer, a Polish Jew who was imprisoned in Auschwitz, is compelling from the start. Despite unthinkable torture, Fania is one day gifted a birthday "cake" (made of bread rations) and a card created by her fellow prisoners, offering her a tangible symbol of sacrifice, hope, and the unceasing spirit of the Jewish people. Anne Renaud's picture book *Fania's Heart* endeavors to tell how Fania's daughter discovered this heart-shaped card while living in 1950's Canada, which prompts Fania to finally tell her story of survival. Ultimately, readers find inspiration in the ways that kindness can exist even in the bleakest places.

It is telling, unfortunately, that the most captivating section of the book is the author's note at the end, which includes photographs of the heart and Fania, as well as information about the museum in Montreal where readers can see it. Renaud's writing, too, has more impact when it is being purely informational, which makes one wonder why the "story" portion at the beginning was necessary. The most beautiful words were those that Fania's friends wrote to her in the card, and highlighting those alone would make for a worthwhile publication. Rudnicki's watercolor illustrations are stylistically dated and do little to enhance the story. Regardless, the tale of Fania's birthday card should be known, making this title worth consideration for synagogue and elementary school libraries looking for additional Holocaust biographies for young and middle grade readers.

*Alex Quay, Lainer School, Los Angeles, CA*

**Strauss, Gwen. *The Hiding Game*. Illus. by Herb Leonhard. Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing, 2017. 40pp. \$17.99. (9781455622658). Gr. 2-5.**

Varian Fry was an American who helped artists and writers hide and escape from the Nazis during World War II. Fry's chief assistant, Danny Bénédite, set up the hiding place in the south of France, Villa Air-Bel, where refugees lived in safety until they could be smuggled out. The author, grandniece of Bénédite, tells his story through the eyes of one of the hidden children, Aube Breton, daughter of the famous surrealist poet. Frightening things happen with Nazi police bursting in on a raid, threats of camps and fear of discovery. However, these things are related as happening mostly to grown-ups. The children spend their days playing games, eating substitute foods, and running in the garden. Fry and Bénédite did dangerous work; their tale is thrilling, but daily life for the refugees, not so much. The author admits she met her great uncle a few times, but was too shy to ask him directly about his war exploits. This nicely written, well-illustrated volume – the art is shadowy and in complete harmony with the text – includes terrific photographs. The endnotes provide the historical facts and biographical information. This is a sensitive book about an individual who made a difference – a great difference to very many refugees – as seen through the eyes of a peer of readers.

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



**Throp, Claire. *The Horror of the Holocaust. (Deadly History)* North Mankato, MN: Capstone Press, 2018, 48 pp. \$33.32. (9781484641668). Gr. 4-6.**

It is an ambitious undertaking to describe the Holocaust in 48 pages. *The Horror of the Holocaust*, using a central, balanced narrative and many sidebars, ably attempts to achieve this ambition. Each of its nine chapters responds to a question: “What Was the Holocaust?”, “Who Were the Nazis?”, “What Was Kristallnacht?”, “What Happened After World War II Began?”, “What Was the Final Solution?”, “What Did Non-Jewish People Know?”, “What Help Did the Jewish People Get?”, “What Happened to Survivors?”, and “What Effect Did the Holocaust Have?”. The book explains the murder of vom Rath that triggered the implementation of the planned Kristallnacht. It also effectively stages the loss of rights among German Jews, their exclusion, their isolation in ghettos, and their execution in death camps. Further, it discusses non-Jewish victims. It notes the most heinous perpetrators: Heydrich, Eichmann, Höss, and of course, Hitler and Himmler. Because of the way the chapters are set up, there is a certain amount of redundancy. For instance, Nazis are introduced in the first chapter before they are featured in the second chapter. This title provides a solid overview of the Holocaust. The list of books for further reading and the list of critical thinking questions in the back matter can help the young reader explore the topic in greater depth with the help of the librarian and/or teacher.

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

**Wees, Janet. *When We Were Shadows.* Toronto: Second Story Press, 2018, 200 pp. \$14.95. (9781772600612). Gr. 4-8. Reviewed from ARC.**

Young Walter is on the run. He and his parents leave their home in Germany to escape Nazism and settle in the Netherlands. But in May 1940 Germany occupies Holland, and Walter, now eight, is on the run again. He describes his war years to his granddaughter, Jenny. The narrative mixes with Walter’s letters to his grandmother brought to her by members of the Underground. Walter explains various phases of hiding, from staking out places in barn lofts to building and living in a hidden village. Most effectively, Wees conveys the gnawing fear that does not go away, as Walter questions, “What was it about being Jewish that was so bad?”. The narrative highlights the importance of members of the Underground and the risks they took to save the lives of refugees. It also notes, importantly, the devastation the German occupation brings to the Dutch people, including homelessness and starvation.

The concept of continual fear is one today’s young readers need to understand, -- that there are children today who are refugees, existing much the way Walter did. Wees also captures the point of view from a child. The book is historical fiction (based on a true story), not “nonfiction” as the book is tagged. In her author’s note, Wees pays homage to specific Righteous Among the Gentiles personalities, including Opa Bakker, Tante Cor, and Edouard and Jacoba von Baumhauer, all of whom are mentioned in Walter’s story.

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

## JEWISH LIFE & VALUES

**Fishman, Rivka. *Sara the Bucket Filler.* Illus. by Miriam Sin-Shalom. Israel: Mosaica, Press, 2018. 32 pp. \$14.99. (9781946351166). Gr. K-3.**

Sara is excited to share during show-and-tell; she brought the crown she wore at her aunt’s wedding. Classmate Dina responds to Sara’s story with “Big deal, who cares?” Although Morah Ilana intercedes and asks Sara to continue, Sara did not feel like sharing anymore. During recess, Dina continues to bully Sara. The teacher again steps in. She explains that everyone has a bucket that holds good feelings, and it can be emptied by people who are mean. Morah Ilana advises that “one of the best ways to fill up your own bucket is by filling other people’s buckets.” Sara proceeds to invite lonely Devora to play

on the slide with her. Then she holds a door for a mother with a stroller, lets her cousin sit where he wants in the car, wipes up her sister's apple juice spill, and compliments her brother's school project. She goes to sleep that night with an overflowing bucket. At school the next day, she compliments Dina's sweater, which confounds the bully; her teacher winks in approval. The back matter includes a letter from "Sara the Bucket Filler," a "Bucket Filler Quiz," and additional information for parents and teachers. Additional resources include a Facebook page and a website ([www.sarathebucketfiller.com](http://www.sarathebucketfiller.com)).

Extra points for practical advice and a happy ending. Sin-Shalom's colorful illustrations with expressive facial expressions, especially snarly bully Dina, complement the text. The little buckets over people's heads when they interact and do good things are a great visual for young readers. *Have Your Filled Your Bucket Today?* (Ferne Press, 2006) "has become one of the most effective character development programs offered to all ages," and although Sara Lamstein's *I Like Your Buttons* (Albert Whitman, 1999) remains the gold standard, *Sara the Bucket Filler* is a great addition to the shelf to amplify the message for Jewish readers.

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

**Levin, Menucha Chana. *My Recycled Brother*. Monsey: Jewish Children's Book Club (print on demand), 2017. 40 pp. \$12.00. (9781974008810). Gr.K- 2.**

Dovy likes Friday because besides being *erev Shabbos*, it is recycling day. He learned about the environment in school, and he does not want the world to be a big garbage dump when he grows up. He likes to carry the receptacle to the curb, but his big brother Avi takes his turn. Frustrated by Avi's attitude and teasing, Dovy dreams of putting Avi in the bin for recycling. Avi would be taken away in the garbage truck, and eventually come back "recycled" and improved through the process of *teshuva* (repentance). Avi would include Dovy in his activities, buy him treats, and never tease or make fun of him. But Dovy concludes that he will have to wait until they grow up until they become best friends.

The themes of sibling rivalry and recycling are combined creatively, although it is surprising to see a mother suggest "recycling" her son. The illustrations are so basic they detract from the message of the book, and vocabulary like "a thousand zillion years" and "humongous" is used to give Dovy a more authentic voice. Lo that siblings would fight over taking out the garbage! While repentance and respect for the earth are Jewish values, Dovy's imagined plans for Avi could be interpreted as cute or vengeful, depending on one's perspective, so the book is best used with other materials about siblings' relationships and/or recycling.

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

## NON-FICTION

**Kaufman, Rivka. *What's Going on with My Mother?* Illus. by Sarah Schwab. Israel: Mosaica Press, 2018. 32 pp. \$14.99. (9781946351197). Gr. 3-6.**

Yoni's mother starts acting differently -- grumpy, crying, not taking care of the house as well as in the recent past. Yoni's father has picked up some of the slack, but he is also busy with work. Yoni does not understand the situation, and he thinks he is to blame. A heart-to-heart talk with Bubby over milk and cookies reveals that Yoni's mother is suffering from depression, and that it is not Yoni's fault. His grandmother patiently explains about depression and its treatment and that seeking help for mental health issues is a brave endeavor, to be likened to seeing a doctor for a physical ailment. Yoni is free to express his feelings of sadness, anger, and fear with Bubby, who reminds him that both his mother and Hashem love him very much. The last page lists mental health resources for the Orthodox community.

For the most part, the book is an important resource. The mother's depression is explained in a clear and straightforward manner, and many aspects of mental health issues are discussed. The

illustrations serve to break up the text, but a few of them, particularly the shot of a woman with “tired eyes” wearing a snood and holding a pharmacy bag, are almost comical. Yoni’s description of things improving at home is a little abrupt after his discussion with this grandmother, and the tone of that portion is somewhat off for a nine-year-old boy. To quote the approbation from Rabbi Zev Leff, “the book is to be distributed by professionals who will use it where deemed necessary in specific situations to serve the needs of specific children.” Adept mental health professionals can use the text with non-Orthodox clients as well.

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

## PICTURE BOOKS

**Chang, Pei-Yu. *Mr. Benjamin’s Suitcase of Secrets*. New York: North-South Books, 2017. 48 pp. \$18.95. (978735842809). Gr. K-2.**

An odd subject for a children’s book: the tragic story of Walter Benjamin, a famous German-Jewish philosopher who committed suicide after attempting to flee the Nazi occupation of France. The tale of his almost-escape, and the disappearance of the mysterious suitcase he was carrying, clearly piqued the interest of Chang, a Taiwanese author-illustrator who moved to Germany to complete a doctorate in “Chaos Theory in Literary Studies” and also learn the art of book illustration. The plot centers around the adventure of Benjamin’s escape from France because he is persecuted for his “extraordinary ideas” that unnamed others don’t like. He treks over the Pyrenees Mountains and into Spain with the help of “Mrs. Fittko”, where he and his party are refused entry and the next day “he disappeared”. His stuffed and heavy suitcase is the focus of the narrative and although everyone fleeing with him encourages him to lighten his load, he refuses. The other refugees say, “If such a clever man really wanted to take a heavy suitcase across the mountains, then he must certainly have a very good reason for doing so.” And that’s the basic story. Readers get no information, even in an author’s note, about who Benjamin was, or why he had to flee, or that he was a strongly identified Jew and “cultural Zionist”, whose work was influenced by Gershom Scholem and other well-known Jewish intellectuals of the time. For this children’s book the writer focuses on a mystery and an adventure, though the mystery of what was in the titular suitcase is never solved. It remains a stretch to integrate the knowledge of Benjamin’s difficult philosophical theories and his tragic suicide (which is not mentioned in the book) with this somewhat jaunty take on people escaping Nazis in wartime France. The illustrations are bold and imaginative and show great talent for a first-time illustrator. The last page relates the heroic deeds of Lisa Fittko, the Austrian resistance fighter who helped 80,000 people escape over the mountains though it is troubling that the author neglects to mention that these people were mostly Jews and provides no explanation as to why they were forced to flee.

*Lisa Silverman, Library Director, Burton Sperber Jewish Community Library,  
American Jewish University, Los Angeles, CA*

**Darvick, Debra B. *We are Jewish Faces*. Springfield, NJ: Apples and Honey Press, 2018. 32 pp. \$15.95. (9781681155364). Gr. Preschool-2.**

In this celebration of Jewish people for young readers, *We are Jewish Faces* puts the many aspects of Jewish life--secular and religious, mundane events and milestones--on joyful display. Author Darvick presents a diverse array of Jewishness, showing that these Jewish faces come in a wide variety of colors and ages and from many walks of life. The simple, straightforward text touches on many holidays and Jewish traditions, as well as some basic words in Yiddish and Hebrew, and the repetition of phrases will encourage early literacy skills in preschoolers. Each page features a number of photographs accented with colorful doodles of Jewish people in real-life situations. The



presentation and layout prompts the audience to feel as if they are looking into their own scrapbook or photo album.

While this is an engaging update to 2009's *I Love Jewish Faces*, the quality of the photographs contained within this version is sometimes lacking, with a number of pictures slightly out of focus or pixelated. Additionally, this title may have benefited from an author's note at the end clearly explaining who some of these "faces of all races and places" are, which would have been a powerful teaching tool for its readers. Regardless, this should make for an enjoyable storytime and lesson on inclusivity in Judaism or pride in Jewish identity.

Alex Quay, Lainer School, Los Angeles, CA

**Goldberg, Leah. *Room for Rent*. Illus. by Shmuel Katz. Trans. from Hebrew by Jessica Setbon. Jerusalem: Gefen, 2018. 24 pp. \$17.95. (9789652299208). Gr. K-3.**

*Room for Rent* ("Dirah le-haskir") was first published in its current format in 1970, and has remained a favorite with Israeli children. English speakers can now enjoy this classic based on an Eastern European folktale. Sir Reginald Mouse has vacated the top floor of "a fine old house that's five stories high." The other occupants -- a fat, lazy hen; a flighty cuckoo; a very clean black cat, and a squirrel search for a new tenant. First Miss Ant stops by, but as a hard worker, she cannot abide living in the same building as someone lazy (the hen.) Next is Mrs. Bunny, who thinks the cuckoo is a bad role model for her children. Mr. Pig, who is white, does not want to live with a black cat, but the neighbors do not want him there either: "Scoot! Run along! You're the mistake; you're the one who's all wrong!" The Nightingale looks around, but she decides that Mr. Squirrel will make too much noise with his nuts. Finally, the Dove inspects, and although she is not thrilled with the apartment, she decides to take it because she likes the neighbors very much. "With laughter that rings from every floor, True friends and good neighbors, who could ask for more?"

Leah Goldberg (1911-1970) was a prolific poet whose works are classics of Israeli Literature. Jessica Setbon's translation is amazing. The rhyme scheme and rhythm is excellent and captures the spirit and flow of the original. The original illustrations are as charming as ever and give the book a "retro-hip" mood. The lessons of not judging others based on appearances or labels, getting along with everybody, and being true to who you are, are clear but not preachy. Although there is no overt Jewish or Israeli content, there are so many ways to utilize this wonderful book: regular story time; Hebrew/English story time; and any curriculum promoting tolerance and respect.

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

**Spielman, Gloria. *French Toast Sundays*. Illus. by Inbal Gigi Bousidan. Springfield, NJ: Apples and Honey Press, 2018. 32pp. \$17.95. (9781681155296). Gr. 1-3.**

A sad little girl named Mina misses her recently deceased grandmother and the special things they did together. She reviews these happy occasions and feelings while trying to understand what the grownups are doing at her house during the days of *shiva*. Traditions of *shiva* are noted, but there is no mention that *shiva* is observed by Jewish people. In fact, there is no mention of religion at all in this post-burial story until a note at the end when the author explains that this is Jewish tradition. Mina can see her parents and older relatives are remembering grandmother as she is doing, but she cannot grasp their sadness because she is so consumed with hers. We share what she did with her grandmother, especially making French toast together on Sunday mornings from a recipe only revealed to Mina, as well as her feelings then and now. It is a lovely delivery of how a child grapples with loss and grief. The words are direct and succinct; the mobile illustrations with expressive faces mirroring emotions are in a soft, but deep palette. The feelings are real and well communicated. Reader and Mina learn there is comfort in sharing without denying the sadness the book conveys to readers.

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

## SHABBAT AND HOLIDAYS

**Hardyman, Robyn. *Origami for Hanukkah. (Origami Holidays Series). New York: Rosen Publishing Group. 2017. 32pp. \$27.50. (9781508151074) HC; \$11.75 (9781508151128) PBK. Gr. 3-6.***

In this welcome addition to Jewish crafting books for middle grades, readers can create paper versions of a variety of festive items associated with Hanukkah, including a *Hanukkiah* (Menorah), candle, dreidel, box for coins, envelope, Hanukkah card, Star of David, and *Sufganiyah* (Hanukkah donut). Also included is basic information on the history of the holiday, as well as fun facts and explanations of each item's meaning. Folding and design instructions are, for the most part, clear and relatively easy to follow, with basic origami techniques and terms illustrated in an introductory guide. It should be noted that while the items vary in complexity, even the simplest designs might require adult assistance. A glossary and suggestions for further reading round out this engaging activity book.

*Martha McMahan, Alice and Nahum Lainer School Library, Los Angeles, CA*

**Korngold, Jamie. *Sadie's Snowy Tu B'Shevat. Illus. by Julie Fortenberry. Minneapolis: Kar-Ben Publishing, 2018. 32pp. \$17.99. (9781512426779). HC; \$7.99 (9781512426793) PBK; \$6.99 eBook. Gr. Preschool-2.***

Sadie (*Sadie's Sukkah Breakfast, Sadie and the Big Mountain, Sadie and Ori and the Blue Blanket, and more*) returns in her seventh book to educate us about the holiday of Tu B'Shevat. Sadie wants to plant a tree to celebrate Tu B'Shevat. She gets a shovel, finds the perfect spot in the yard, and digs a big hole – through a mountain of snow! Asking her mom to help her plant “a young sapling,” she learns that she can't plant a tree in the winter. “It will freeze,” says her mom. “It can't live,” says her dad. “Its roots won't be able to grow,” says her Grandpa. When her brother, Ori, offers to help her plant a tree, they go outside, and “plant” a beautiful tree out of snow and branches. Grandma provides the hot chocolate to drink as they sing “Happy Tu B'Shevat” to the tree. She then explains to Sadie and Ori that while it is winter where they live, it is spring in Israel [the date is mentioned in the Talmud as the time the sap begins to flow], and spring is the perfect time to plant trees. Grandma goes on to share a story from her own childhood about planting parsley seed in winter to use at the Passover Seder in the spring. Sadie and Ori proceed to follow the steps – get a shovel (spoon), a sapling (parsley seeds), and a special spot (the windowsill). Two months later, their “trees” are ready for the Seder.

The watercolor-style illustrations are soft and pastel in tone and clearly reflect the cold winter season. In addition, Sadie's subtle facial expressions reflect her excitement at wanting to plant a tree and her disappointment upon learning that it is not going to happen. The illustrations of Sadie having fun with the large tree of her imagination are delightful. The back of the book has a short paragraph about the holiday of Tu B'Shevat. Here, rather than a story about trees and ecology, this wonderful title provides the Jewish background for the holiday along with a fun activity to do with the kids.

*Kathy Bloomfield, President – SSC, forwordsbooks.com, Washington, DC*

**Newman, Tracy. *Sukkot is Coming. (A Holiday Is Coming!) Illus. by Viviana Garofoli. Minneapolis: Kar-Ben, 2017. 12 pp. \$5.99. (9781512408287). Preschool.***

**Newman, Tracy. *Purim is Coming. (A Holiday Is Coming!) Illus. by Viviana Garofoli. Minneapolis: Kar-Ben, 2017. 12 pp. \$5.99. (9781512408270). Preschool.***

**Newman, Tracy. *TuB'Shvat is Coming. (A Holiday Is Coming!) Illus. by Viviana Garofoli. Minneapolis: Kar-Ben, 2018. 12 pp. \$5.99. (9781512426762). Preschool.***

Cute, round, happy, Caucasian faces introduce the youngest readers to each holiday with rhyming couplets. Full color, sturdy board book pages will delight babies and toddlers. The illustrator does an excellent job of matching the visual to the age-appropriate brief text that conveys the most important

traditions while leaving room for adults to discuss them in greater detail. In a few instances, the text is unrelated to the holiday, there for the sake of rhyming. Holiday and seasonal concepts are mentioned in each of the texts. *Sukkot is Coming* explains that the holiday occurs after Yom Kippur and is a time for building and decorating the *sukkah*, handling the *Etrog* carefully, waving the *lulav*, and eating in the *sukkah*. In *Purim is Coming* the children roll dough, prepare baskets of sweet treats, bake *Hamentaschen*, wear costumes, hear the *megillah*, and shake noise-making *groggers*. Planting seeds, leaving treats for birds, eating fruit, nuts, and dates, and showing our love for the earth as we celebrate the New Year of the trees are all covered in *Tu B'Shevat is Coming*. There are one or two men and boys wearing kippot in the Sukkot and Purim books, an older person or two, and one non-Caucasian person in the Sukkot book. The series also includes Shabbat, Hanukkah, Passover, and Rosh Hashanah.

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

**Polak, Monique. *Passover Family*. Victoria, BC: Orca Book Publishers, 2018. 24 pp. \$9.95. (9781459818521). Preschool. Reviewed from ARC.**

*Passover Family* attempts to show a family celebrating the holiday, but from the opening page (“Ding, ding, dong! Your aunts, uncles and your cousins are here!”) to the last (“Snuggles from me.”), there is little in the text nor accompanying stock photography that distinguishes a Passover *seder* from any other family get-together. The one image of girls eating at a table set with a *seder* plate and matzah illustrates “look at all the food we made. Open wide for something yummy.” The page noting “We read and sing. What a lovely little voice you have.” is accompanied by a photo of two children looking at what appears to be a Hebrew primer! We do not expect board books to go into great depth on a topic, but with no meaningful mention of even the most basic symbols, rituals, and themes of the holiday, this book does nothing to add to a child’s understanding of what makes this family night different from all others. There is a page of explanation about the celebration of Passover for the adult reader, but with its emphasis on death (three full sentences covering Moses killing the Egyptian and the Angel of Death coming to the Egyptian families) and only a passing reference to the Israelites being led to freedom, it fails to provide appropriate context for the vague references contained in the book’s main text. The author has more than a basic understanding of the holiday; her title for older readers, *Passover: Festival of Freedom* (Orca, 2016), does a serviceable job of providing an introduction to the festival. It is disappointing that she and her editor did not do the same for younger readers.

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

**Ribowsky, Helene and Rachel Zlotowitz. *The Search is On!* Brooklyn: Artscroll Mesorah Publications, 2017. \$15.99. (9781422618707). Gr. Preschool-2.**

On the night before Pesach, Ari’s family searches for the hidden bread, or *chametz*. From the attic, bedrooms, basement, and den to the living room, dining room, and kitchen, Ari and his brother find all ten pieces and use the spoon and feather to place them in the paper bag to be burned the next day. Hints in the rhyming text will help readers find each piece before they turn to the next page. Digital cartoon illustrations depict a contemporary Orthodox family and the appended glossary defines *chametz* and Pesach as well as other objects that appear in the book, like breakfront, inkwell, and quill, that may be unfamiliar. As perhaps the only children’s book to focus exclusively on *bedikat chametz*, this will be a welcome addition for all families who practice this fun and important Passover custom.

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



**Rouss, Sylvia A. *Sammy Spider's Hanukkah Colors*. Illus. by Katherine Janus Kahn. Minneapolis: Kar-Ben, 2017. 12pp. \$5.99 (9781512458718) Preschool.**

**Rouss, Sylvia A. *Sammy Spider's Passover Shapes*. Illus. by Katherine Janus Kahn. Minneapolis: Kar-Ben, 2017. 12pp. \$5.99 (9781467779708) Preschool.**

Sammy Spider does double duty in these two colorful board books by introducing the youngest of readers to Jewish holiday customs, while reinforcing concepts of colors and shapes. In *Sammy Spider's Hanukkah Colors*, Sammy watches the Shapiro family carrying out Hanukkah traditions, such as lighting the yellow menorah, eating brown latkes, and spinning a purple dreidel. In *Sammy Spider's Passover Shapes*, as the Shapiros prepare for the holiday, Sammy spins webs of different shapes that mimic the shapes he sees in Passover: a square like a piece of matzah, a circle like the *seder* plate, and triangles like the *afikomen*. Sammy's final product reveals itself as a Star of David. The spare text along with Kahn's distinct, collaged illustrations will inform and delight, and are sure to become staples for the youngest readers.

*Martha McMahon, Alice and Nahum Lainer School Library, Los Angeles, CA*

**Shem-Tov, Tali and Rachella Sandbank. *A Queen in Jerusalem*. Illus. by Avi Ofer. Minneapolis: Kar-Ben, 2018. 32pp. \$17.99. (9781512444414) HC; \$7.99 (9781512444421) PBK; \$6.99 eBook. Gr. K-3. Reviewed from ARC.**

This delightful picture book provides a window on Israeli culture as an angry little girl stomps off from home when her mother has no time to make her desired Purim costume. Malka (queen in Hebrew) is determined to be Esther at the holiday dressed in golden threads. She angrily pounds through Jerusalem with a heart as cold and grey as the weather. She stumbles into a courtyard where a sculptor works and meets a pivotal historical person, Boris Schatz, the Russian immigrant who founded the first art school in Jerusalem. He leads her through the building introducing her to student artists of all kinds who collaborate on her outfit: weavers, goldsmiths, sculptors, and painters. The art school is named for Bezalel, the artist in the Tanach who designed the Mishkan (though the text incorrectly gives him credit for designing the Temple). The story's text does not set the time, but in the opening picture her mother is hanging laundry on a line. The flap notes the tale is early 20<sup>th</sup> century, while the endnote reveals Schatz founded the still active school in 1906. This lighthearted romp brings interesting information about the development of cultural life in Israel in a seamless blend of fact and fiction supported by humorous art. The authors/illustrator are the same team that brought us the equally delightful *A Concert in the Sand* about the founding of the Israeli Philharmonic Orchestra.

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

**Sutton, Jane. *Paulie's Passover Predicament*. Illus. by Barbara Vagnozzi. Minneapolis: Kar-Ben, 2018. 32pp. \$17.99. (9781512420968). Gr. PreK-2.**

Not since Bullwinkle has there been as charming a moose as Paulie. Paulie is a moos-ician who cuts his musical practice short in order to prepare a *seder* for his friends that evening. He is thoughtfulness personified, although a tad misguided, when he uses some unusual items on his *seder* plate: an ostrich egg for greater visibility, salt water with pepper added (so that the pepper wouldn't be jealous of the salt), *charoset* made of apples and pine cones, grass instead of parsley, a radish carved in the shape of a horse to stand in for horseradish, and lamb's wool instead of a lamb bone. Paulie's eyes fill with tears when his guests laugh at his *seder* plate choices. Soon his friends reassure him when they say that "Your *seder* plate is different, but each thing still reminds us of Passover—in a Paulie way." All is well as the search for the *afikomen* ensues until Paulie finds himself and the *afikomen* stuck in the basement. "What a predicament!" he thought. Paulie is released from his basement bondage when he thinks of a very clever way to signal his guests. Paulie declines a reward for the *afikomen*. "I don't need one," said Paulie. "My reward is being free, like our ancestors on Passover. And that's enough for me!" Barbara Vagnozzi's illustrations strike just the right tone. Paulie and his animal friends are colorful and full of expression.

*Rena Citrin, Library Director, Bernard Zell Anshe Emet Day School, Chicago*

Zusman, Evelyn. *The Passover Parrot*. Illus. by Kyrsten Brooker. Minneapolis: Kar-Ben, 2018. 32pp. \$17.99. (9781512428827) HC; \$7.99 (9781512428834) PBK; \$6.99 eBook. Gr. Preschool-3. Reviewed from ARC.

In celebration of the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its initial publication, Kar Ben has issued a new edition of *The Passover Parrot* with full color illustrations. Leba is finally old enough to ask the four questions in Hebrew at her family seder. Her neighbor is moving out of town and gives Leba her pet parrot. Leba wants to practice the *Mah Nishtanah*, but the entire family is too busy to help. *Hametz*, the parrot, is soon chanting the Four Questions, phrase by phrase as Leba practices. During the Seder, *Hametz* is banished for repeating after Leba! There is a problem when the afikomen can't be found. Leba saves the Seder with a little help from *Hametz*.

The bright new color illustrations enhance the original text. Most of the drawings are reminiscent in style and format of the original. The illustrations help to modernize the story, though it has an intentional 1950's flavor. One of the brothers now wears jeans and the two pages at the end without illustration, used to create a suspenseful ending, have been eliminated.

Ellen Tilman, Meyers Library, Reform Congregation Keneseth Israel, Elkins Park, PA;  
Past Chair, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee

## FEBRUARY/MARCH 2018 BOOKS RECEIVED

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

- Berg, Melissa. *Challah vs Matza* (Eclectic Ivri Press, 2016)  
 Drucker, Malka. *Portraits of Jewish-American Heroes* (Penguin Random House, 2008)  
 Goldstein, Yosef. *Uncle Yossi's Big Book of Stories, Volume 1* (Jewish Learning Group, 2016)  
 Guidry, Ari. *Navi Illustrated: Shoftim Chapters 6:1-7:8* (Feldheim, 2015)  
 Hauser, Julie. *When I Check on You at Night* (Israel Bookshop Publications, 2014)  
 Kurzweil, Amy. *Flying Couch: A Graphic Memoir* (Catapult/Black Balloon, 2016)  
 Lipman, Denis. *Striking Terror* (Piscataqua Press, 2016)  
 Marsico, Katie. *World War II: Why They Fought* (Capstone/Compass Point, 2016)  
 Millman, M.C. *Class-ified Information 3: Naomi Lustig, Esther Heller, Aliza Isaacs* (Feldheim, 2016)  
 Mitchell, Sandra Emily. *Son of Hilkiyahu and the Voice* (Mazo Publishers, 2016)  
 Passaro, Joseph. *Me, Me, Me, Broccoli: A Holocaust Parable for Children* (Ktav/Targum Press, 2015)  
 Raphael, Rayzel. *New Moon* (Three Gems Publishing, 2016)  
 Simmons, Walter. *Exploring Countries: Israel* (Bellwether, 2011)  
 Smith, Shoham. *An After Bedtime Story* (Abrams, 2016)  
 Steele, Philip. *The Holocaust: The Origins, Events, and Remarkable Tales of Survival* (Scholastic, 2016)  
 Yehoshua, A.B. *The Story of Crime and Punishment* (Pushkin Children's Books, 2016)

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AJL Reviews  
February/March 2018  
Volume VIII, No. 1  
ISSN 2160-0910

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