The Jewish Museum of the American West (jmaw.org) was established in 2013 as the online museum of the Western States Jewish History Association. Conceived as an open access showcase for the association’s journal, published quarterly from 1968 to 2018 and relaunched as a peer-reviewed biannual journal in 2021, the museum includes over 600 permanent exhibits highlighting the participation of Jews in the development of the American West during the pioneer period (19th and early 20th century). Exhibits are divided into virtual “exhibition halls” covering the states west of the Mississippi River, along with British Columbia, Canada, and various parts of the Pacific Rim.

Each hall features a variety of stories pertaining to the area’s early Jewish pioneers, their families, and historical sites, how and why they settled there, and what they were able to accomplish. Naturally, states with larger Jewish populations are more thoroughly represented, with the California hall, for instance, divided into twelve separate sections stretching from San Diego in the south to the Gold Country in the north. Exhibits are enhanced by the association’s archive of over 4,000 photographs, many of which are featured in two recent museum books, Jewish Gold Country and Jewish Los Angeles, both published by Arcadia Publishing in 2020.

The museum regularly receives documents, photographs, and family stories from visitors, which augment existing exhibits and occasionally inspire new ones. Beyond these, the association’s collection of rare books, fragile ephemera, and...
research files are housed at the Charles E. Young Library of UCLA, Huntington Library, Autry Museum of the American West, and American Jewish University—all in the Los Angeles area.

Most of the information at the museum is drawn from the first fifty years of the association’s journal, *Western States Jewish History* (called *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly* from 1968 to 1983), and indebted to the pioneering work of the journal’s founding editor Norton B. Stern (1920-1992) and his longtime research partner Rabbi William M. Kramer (1920-2004). David W. Epstein and Gladys Sturman, who co-edited and co-published the journal from 1998 to 2018, created the museum as an easily accessible, user-friendly, encyclopedia-style distillation of the journal’s extensive research articles, which are indexed on the museum website and available by request free of charge.

Because the museum is online, exhibition halls are expanded with ease, content is readily corrected and added, and images are inserted in just a few clicks. Newer exhibits have also moved beyond the journal’s offering. Among these are: “The Brownstein-Louis Company Catalog of 1918: Men’s Furnishing Goods in Los Angeles”; “The Jewish Agricultural Colony of Clarion, Utah, 1911-1916”; “The Jewish Settlement of Painted Woods, North Dakota”; “Murrieta Hot Springs: The Catskills of Southern California”; “Concordia Club of Los Angeles, 1891-1915”; “Louis Herman Heller: Jewish Photographer of the Modoc Indian War, 1872-1873”; “Walter Henry Rothwell: First Maestro of the Los Angeles Philharmonic”; and “Jewish Business Cards of Early Los Angeles and San Francisco.”

In addition to these curator-created exhibits, the museum provides opportunities for visitors to share their own family or local histories and work with museum staff on new exhibits. A submissions page helps guide them through this process. A recent exhibit constructed in this way is “Solomon Schocken: Pioneer Jewish Merchant of Sonoma, California.” Moreover, online visibility has enabled a variety of collaborations with other ventures and institutions. Examples from the past year include: assisting the Mining Foundation of the Southwest with a short video honoring Arizona pioneers; helping with the restoration of the Hochheimer building in Willows, California; providing images for the Smithsonian documentary series *Secret Cities* and the History Channel program *The UnXplained*; assisting an exhibit at the Levi Strauss Museum in Buttenheim, Germany; providing materials for the website of the National Park Service; and giving virtual presentations for Jewish organizations, genealogical societies, historical associations, professional societies, and synagogues across the country.

The Jewish Museum of the American West plays a central role in the discovery, collection, and dissemination of items and information pertaining to pioneer Jews of the American West, and telling how and why they were so successful. As David W. Epstein summarizes on the museum homepage: “This is the story of what happened when a group of people, persecuted for 2,000 years, was let loose in a vast new area—the American Wild West—where virtually no one cared about their religion, and where they were free to explore seemingly endless avenues to make a living and raise their families.”
Seven Questions With …
Award Winning Author
Nancy Churnin

Editor in chief Sally Stieglitz sat down with author Nancy Churnin to chat about Charles Dickens, Jewish kidlit, and some favorite reads! Nancy is the author of two new books, both published in October 2021, about courageous Jewish women, "Dear Mr. Dickens" (illustrated by Bethany Standliffe, Albert Whitman & Company) and "A Queen to the Rescue, the Story of Henrietta Szold, Founder of Hadassah" (illustrated by Yevgenia Nayberg, Creston Books). Dear Mr. Dickens received a starred review from School Library Journal and is being featured at The Charles Dickens Museum in London. A Queen to the Rescue has received starred reviews from Kirkus and Publishers Weekly. A native New Yorker, Nancy is a graduate of Harvard University, with a master’s from Columbia University. She lives in North Texas with her husband, a dog named Dog and two cantankerous cats.

AJL: How did you first come to hear of Eliza Davis and her correspondence with Charles Dickens?

Churnin: When I was growing up, Charles Dickens was one of my favorite writers. I always wished I could have written a letter to him, though, to ask him how someone with so much compassion could have created such an ugly, hurtful Jewish stereotype as Fagin in Oliver Twist. Years later, in 2013, I was in my local branch of the Plano Public Library, researching a subject on their computer that I don’t now remember, and found my attention drifting to a scholarly article about Dickens. A couple of lines in the essay stopped me. I went back and read them again. Could it be? A Jewish woman named Eliza Davis had written the letter I’d always dreamed of writing — and had changed his heart, just as I’d dreamed of doing. I had to know more. I had to find copies of the letters they exchanged. A wonderful librarian helped me search. She found two copies of an out-of-print book that contained them in the United States and one of those locations was in the rare book collection of the University of North Texas at Denton, just 40 minutes away. I felt as propelled to pursue them as if I had been assigned a mission.

AJL: As a woman, do you think Eliza’s voice was less or more welcome in an unsolicited letter about Dickens’ portrayals of Jewish characters?

Churnin: It’s possible that because Eliza was a woman, Dickens didn’t take her first letter seriously. His first response was dismissive as he accused her of not being “sensible” or “just” or “good tempered.” He may have thought his words would cause her to back down. But Eliza persisted. In fact, at a time when most women didn’t have the benefit of education, Eliza was a reader who thought deeply about what would move Dickens’ mind and heart. Her second letter appealed to Dickens’ own past, present, and future in a way that parallels how Dickens’s Ebenezer Scrooge was changed by ghosts of the past, present, and future. Plus, Eliza showed herself his equal in being gracious and charitable. One reason Eliza dared to write to him is that she and her husband had bought Dickens’ old Tavistock House and to Dickens’ surprise — because as he told a friend, he dreaded doing business with Jewish people — the arrangements went very well. In her very first letter, too, she talked about a Jewish charity she supported and asked if he’d contribute to it. Eliza was grateful that Dickens created his first sympathetic Jewish character, Mr. Riah, in Our Mutual Friend as a way of atoning for Fagin. I sometimes wonder if Eliza’s courage and willingness to speak up to the powerful, influential Dickens didn’t also find its way into the strength he poured into Lizzie Hexam in that same book.

AJL: In researching this story, what resources (special collections, databases, historical newspapers, etc) did you use from libraries, if any?

Churnin: The first and most important book I found that contained the letters was Charles Dickens and His Jewish Characters, edited by Cumberland Clark (Chiswick Press, 1918) in the University of North Texas at Denton rare book collections. It had been a gift to the library from Professor Don Vann, a Dickens scholar who along with his late wife, Dolores Vann, became a mentor through my research and writing. Over the years I worked on this manuscript, Professor Vann welcomed me to the Denton Dickens Fellowship and introduced me to two other Dickens scholars, who would also answer questions, give me historical context, and make corrections as needed: the late David Paroissien, Professorial Research Fellow at the University of Buckingham, England, and former editor of the Dickens Quarterly, and Professor Murray Baumgarten, Distinguished Emeritus Professor at UC Santa Cruz and Founding Director of the Dickens Project. Professor Baumgarten’s “The
Other Woman”—Eliza Davis and Charles Dickens” from Dickens Quarterly, Vol. 32, No. 1, pp. 44-70, March 2015 was an essential read. Professor Baumgarten and Professor Paroissien directed me to the University of Southampton in England to study and receive permission to reproduce the only known photograph of Eliza Davis for the back matter. I visited The Charles Dickens Museum in London in 2014 to study and soak up a sense of his life in a house where he'd lived. It's a great personal pleasure that the museum has embraced the book and I've been able to work with their education department on programs where we share Dear Mr. Dickens with British students. I studied Jewish history in England for context. And, striving to be like Eliza, I drew on my own knowledge of Dickens' own works to channel his thinking. Every quote in the book is sourced to the letters or to Dickens' own books.

AJL: When writing for children, how do you find the balance between shining a light on antisemitism or other prejudices and presenting these issues in a way that doesn’t frighten young readers?

Churnin: I reach back and try to write to the child I was — which sounds easier than it is! I started this manuscript in 2013 and revised it many times, trying to get a grasp on how to shine a light on this complex and painful issue in a way that doesn’t frighten children. Then I did something that I’ve never done in any of my previous books. I decided to speak directly to the readers, to ask the children (as I have asked myself), what would you have done? The book opens in the second person: “Think of someone famous you admire. What would you do if that person said or wrote something unfair? Would you speak up? Would you risk getting that person angry? Eliza Davis did.” I think that by framing it in this way, and by keeping the examples of antisemitism simple and understandable — that many jobs were closed to Jewish people, that they couldn’t live where they wanted, that they couldn’t vote, or study or work at universities — kids can feel the unfairness and want, like Eliza, to do something about it. I saved more painful details of the antisemitism Jewish people faced historically in England for the back matter. I credit the wonderful illustrator, Bethany Stancliffe, for giving gentle, visual, emotional, child-friendly clues to how Eliza and her young son are feeling through this journey.

AJL: What kind of reception is your book receiving from non-Jewish families, educators, and children...do they find it relatable to other kinds of ill-informed or hateful depictions of marginalized groups?

Churnin: It has been gratifying and uplifting to see how the book is being embraced by both Jewish and non-Jewish families, educators, and children and how they connect antisemitism to other prejudices they’ve experienced. For many non-Jewish readers, a love for Charles Dickens draws them into the book. When they see how this beloved writer could have done something so hurtful, it makes them think. When they see how he atoned for what he did, by doing better, and that Eliza not only forgave but admired him for doing better, that, I hope, makes them think again. We all make mistakes. We all need to be given room to atone and do better. And when we atone and do better, doing teshuva, as we say in Hebrew, forgiveness is a noble response. When I wrote this book, I thought about the story of Joseph. Joseph had every right not to forgive his brothers for how they’d wronged him. But Joseph knew that he shouldn’t judge his brothers by their past deeds, but by whether they had atoned and were doing better. He put them in a position where they could have sacrificed their brother Benjamin to save themselves. When they showed themselves willing to give their lives for their brother, he welcomed them back with a full heart. I think in this divided and polarized society that we are struggling to navigate, Eliza Davis shows us the importance of speaking up, persisting, and, when people do better, as Charles Dickens did, forgiving and moving forward together.

AJL: Overall, Jewish kidlit has struggled to be acknowledged in the diversity and inclusion movement. What can we do to move the conversation forward and to see meaningful change?

Churnin: We are fortunate to have leaders I admire in this area, reaching out to insist on fair representation and inclusion. I think Eliza Davis would have loved to see it! I love seeing how Association of Jewish Libraries member, Book of Life podcast creator and Jewish Kidlit Mavens co-founder Heidi Rabinowitz advised Little Free Library in their list of Jewish titles for their Read in Color series. I am honored that Dear Mr. Dickens is on that list! PJ Library has done great good in making Jewish-themed books more widely accessible. It would be wonderful to see a PJ Library shelf in all public and school libraries. When my kids were little, I used to get lists of Caldecott winners from my local library and make sure we read them all. I would have liked to have had a handout of award-winning Jewish books to guide me, too. I wonder if that is happening now that the Association of Jewish Libraries Sydney Taylor Book Awards are being announced by

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the American Library Association? I hope so! I enjoyed seeing author Caroline Pritchard have a conversation about her picture book, Gitty and Kvetch, with Michele Kirichanskaya of We Need Diverse Books and how she took that opportunity to kvell about other favorite picture books with Jewish representation. We need more conversations like that. The holidays are a terrific time to remind public and school librarians to include Jewish titles in the mix. Growing up in New York City, I never had to explain what the High Holy Days were. But when we moved to Texas and I kept my son out for Yom Kippur, his teacher questioned the note he brought in to excuse his absence. I thought she was joking, but she wasn’t. It would have made a difference if there had been books in the school library. It could have provided a teachable moment for his class and made him feel special rather than just different.

AJL: We can’t go without asking about your favorite books, both children’s and adult literature. What books were most important to or influential on you as a young reader and now as a writer?

Churnin: I could go on and on about this as I read and continue to read everything and anything I can, from poetry to fantasy, fiction to nonfiction to science fiction, history, drama, essays, mythology, midrash, humor, and heroic quest stories. I think, on reflection, the books I loved most were stories that addressed moral character and social justice, that addressed the question of how we can do better, how we can be better, how we can leave a better world.

That’s what drew me to want to tell the stories of Eliza Davis and Charles Dickens (one of my favorite authors), and also Henrietta Szold, the subject of my new book, A Queen to the Rescue, and the Story of Henrietta Szold, Founder of Hadassah (illustrated by Yevgenia Nayberg, Creston Books). I love fairy tales, folk tales, and stories that make me wonder. It was a joy to discover the tales of Rabbi Nachman, particularly when he challenges us to think bigger and dig deeper as in “The Seven Beggars,” where the beggars only seem like beggars to those not wise enough to truly see them. I love Flatland by Edwin Abbott, where we learn about the limitations of perspective as the dot cannot conceive of a line, a line cannot conceive of a shape and a shape cannot conceive of a three-dimensional object. I love J.R.R. Tolkien’s The Hobbit and its reminder that anyone, even a little creature with hairy feet and no great skills, can save the day if he uses his heart and wit to do the right thing when it counts most. I hope the books I write inspire kids to do the right thing. I hope my stories bring people together. That’s why I create projects for each book and dedicated pages on my website where I celebrate the great things kids do. The project for Dear Mr. Dickens is Dear… and, with permission, I will be sharing pictures of letters kids write to people in positions of influence, asking them to do better or help change something for the better. The project for A Queen to the Rescue is Heal the World and, with permission, I will be sharing pictures of kind things kids are doing to make the world a better place. In this way I hope the book’s journey won’t end with the last page but will continue as an inspiration to children to become the heroes and heroines of their own lives.

AJL: Thank you Nancy for a wonderful and inspiring conversation! We are looking forward to reading your latest and upcoming books.

The Dickens/Davis Correspondence at University College London

by Vanessa Freedman, Subject Liaison Librarian: Hebrew & Jewish Studies, University College, London

I was interested to read about the publication of Nancy Churnin’s children’s book Dear Mr Dickens (which tells the story of the correspondence between the author Charles Dickens and a Jewish woman called Eliza Davis) as the original letters are held in University College London Special Collections (MS MOCATTA/26).

The letters are beautifully preserved: mounted on card, they are bound together with typescript transcriptions in a red morocco binding with gilt edges. The title page reads:

CHARLES DICKENS AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE
Autograph Correspondence
BETWEEN THE NOVELIST AND MRS. ELIZA DAVIS (wife of James P. Davis) RELATIVE TO THE JEWISH PEOPLE, & AS TO THE CHARACTERS OF FAGIN IN “OLIVER TWIST”, & RIAH IN “OUR MUTUAL FRIEND”; ALSO CONCERNING THE PRESENTATION BY MRS. DAVIS TO CHARLES DICKENS OF A COPY OF THE HEBREW BIBLE.
INCLUDED IS
THE ORIGINAL DESIGN FOR THE PRESENTATION INSCRIPTION PLACED IN THE BIBLE; ALSO A LETTER FROM MRS. DAVIS TO MISS MAMIE DICKENS ON THE DEATH OF THE NOVELIST.
1863-1870

The volume, together with the Bible presented to Dickens by Mrs. Davis (STRONG ROOM MOCATTA QB 10 BEN), comes from the collection of Sir Louis Sterling (1879-1958), who was director of various gramophone companies before becoming head of EMI. He was a collector of rare books and manuscripts, which he donated to the University of London in 1956. Accompanying the letters are what appear to be pages from a catalogue, which state that the Bible was ‘included in the sale of Dickens’ Library in 1870, and by a happy coincidence the correspondence relating to the circumstances of the presentation were discovered in the North of England, and the whole were brought together after a lapse of fifty years.’

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In the first letter, dated 22nd June 1863, Davis (whose husband had bought Dickens’ former residence, Tavistock House) begins ‘Dear Sir, Emboldened by your Courtesy throughout my correspondence with you, on the transfer of Tavistock House to Mr. Davis I venture to address you on a subject in which I am greatly interested… Charles Dickens the large hearted … has encouraged a vile prejudice against the despised Hebrew’ in his depiction of Fagin. After delivering this rebuke Davis then has the chutzpah to ask Dickens for a donation to a convalescent home for the Jewish poor.

Dickens’ reply is surprisingly amicable but defensive:

Fagin in Oliver Twist is a Jew, because it unfortunately was true of the time to which that story refers, that that class of criminal almost invariably was a Jew. But surely no sensible man or woman of our persuasion can fail to observe — firstly, that all the rest of the wicked dramatis personae are Christians; and secondly, that he is called “The Jew”, not because of his religion but because of his race.

This reply was not good enough for Davis, who responded four days later:

I have a great dislike to making myself troublesome, yet trust you will pardon my venturing a few words on the subject of the Jewish Character. It is a fact that the Jewish race and religion are inseparable, if a Jew embrace any other faith, he is no longer known as of the race either to his own people or to the gentiles to who he has joined himself.

She goes on to argue against Dickens’ other points about Fagin and to write eloquently about the experience of Jews in England.

In November 1864, Davis again wrote to Dickens to thank him ‘very earnestly for what I am so presumptuous as to think a great compliment paid to myself and to my people’, namely the introduction of a sympathetic Jewish character, Riah, in Our Mutual Friend. Even when praising Dickens she can’t resist pointing out some inaccuracies in Dickens’ portrayal of Riah. Dickens replies briefly that he has received her letter ‘with great pleasure, and hope to be (as I have always been in my heart) the best of friends with the Jewish people.’

Davis wrote to Dickens again in 1867, presenting him with a Hebrew-English Bible, with the inscription:

Presented to Charles Dickens Esq in grateful and admiring recognition of his having exercised the noblest quality man can possess; that of atoning for an injury as soon as conscious of having inflicted it, by a Jewess.

Dickens replies ‘I cannot thank you for it too cordially, and cannot too earnestly assure you that I shall always prize it highly’.

The final letter in the volume, dated 4th August 1870, 2 months after the novelist’s death, is addressed to Dickens’ daughter Mamie.

The letters were included in UCL Library’s 2012 exhibition Charles Dickens at 200, which can still be viewed online. Appointments to view the original letters can be made by contacting UCL Special Collections.

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A Beacon of Light in the Darkness: How the Temple Sinai Library Continued Serving the Congregation During the Pandemic

By Mitch Miller, Library Committee Volunteer

The Purim Spiel was barely over and the laughter still echoed when the dark cloud of the pandemic descended, ending for the foreseeable future any possibility of the congregation of Temple Sinai in Washington, D.C. gathering in person. For the Library Committee, the closing of the Temple posed a number of challenges: How could we function if we could not meet in the library? How could we provide our most basic service — the

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Mitch Miller in the Temple Sinai library.
lending of books — if congregants could not enter the Temple? And, most importantly, how could we maintain our cohesion as a committee and, at the same time, offer a lifeline to Temple members who now found themselves isolated in their homes, cut off from their social connections?

As thousands of Americans began dying of COVID-19, we faced our own, more personal angst; our beloved and much-admired committee co-chair was terminally ill. A person whose dedication to the Library Committee knew no bounds, he quickly saw a need for the committee to continue functioning and came up with a solution: Zoom meetings. It was from these meetings that many good things flowed.

Before the pandemic, committee members would volunteer in the library on Mondays or Wednesdays and perform their tasks in small groups or individually. This arrangement meant that many members did not get to know each other well, if at all. With the advent of weekly Monday morning Zoom meetings, we met as a group where we processed and shared the changes in our lives and the world, drawing strength and support from each other. In addition, meeting virtually enabled our co-chair to stay involved even as his condition worsened.

Ideas and programs quickly developed. Among the most significant were the Circle of Book Lovers, a weekly compendium of current literary news, and Book Lovers, a weekly compendium of current literary news. Longtime AJL member and program attendee Barry Walfish, himself a scholar of the Book of Esther, noted that the swooning of Esther comes from the Septuagint and is not in the Hebrew Masoretic text and that it is a principal theme in the visual depictions of Esther from this time period. Erica emphasized that although there is no depiction of fainting in the Masoretic text, anxiety is expressed. Audiences of Jewish background are therefore often surprised to see this painting. Erica went on to point out other features and actions: Esther seeking permission to approach the King; Esther pale and white, the light background are therefore often surprised to see this painting. Erica went on to point out other features and actions: Esther seeking permission to approach the King; Esther pale and white, the light highlighting shoulder and cleavage of her and other women and moving from the right-hand side to Esther’s hand. Drawing upon the work of writer Justina Chen, Erica discussed the centrality of foundational moments as a verbal frame for Tintoretto’s painting. She continued to foreground thresholds, transitions, and liminal spaces throughout her analysis.

Erica also discussed paintings of Esther by Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510), which were likely painted in the 1470s as part of decorative panels for marriage chests. In contrast to the work of Tintoretto and other artists, Esther here is depicted alone—the outsider looking in—before she’s taken into the palace. Nonetheless,
she is at the compositional center of the painting. Her toes are pointing out as a way of entering the space, toward the gate (threshold), while her hands are pointing upwards as if she’s aware that she’s ultimately answering to Heaven. Additionally, Esther’s figure is out of scale with the rest of the painting, perhaps suggesting a transcending of the space and its limited values which she does not share but which she will have to navigate as she walks through the walls.

In thinking about the threshold moment and about who Esther will have to become, Erica cited Sherre Hirsch, who wrote in her book Thresholds: “We spend a lot of time traversing the hallways — and crossing the thresholds — both in our homes and in our lives ... moments when we are in transition, those moments when we are standing between the way we were accustomed to living and a new of thinking, feeling, and being...” Indeed, when we are introduced to Mordechai, we are told that he’s a Judean man. We learn about his ancestry. But significantly, he is not introduced as part of a group and there is an emphasis on his exilic status. Indeed, the term “golah” (exile) is mentioned four times in a single introductory verse. Esther, we are told, is orphaned but beautiful, and thus particularly vulnerable, dependent on her uncle. The text moves quickly to the beauty contest, where the narrative highlights Esther’s beauty. She wins the contest, is absorbed into the palace, but her protector, Mordechai, is on the outside. Esther becomes extremely worried when Mordechai goes to the king’s gate in mourner’s clothing after learning of Haman’s decree to exterminate the Jews. As Erica argued, much of the Book of Esther is told through clothing — what Mordechai wears and what Esther wears. There is a dissonance between the Ish Yehudi and the royal consort/Queen. As a result of Mordechai’s actions, Esther feels that her worlds are collapsing. She can no longer protect her uncle, previously her own protector, because he has disobeyed the King and come to the King’s gate inappropriately dressed. Clothing sometimes expresses one’s identities and sometimes it conceals it. Interestingly, the word “beged” (garment) is connected to “bigud” (betrayal). Mordechai explicitly refuses to change into the clothing Esther has her servants bring him.

Erica noted that there is a considerable scholarship on the tradition of the Jewish courtier of the royal court. Joseph, Moses, and Daniel are placed in this tradition. And so too are Mordechai and Esther. Such figures had a name and way of being in their courtier life that was different from the one they had in their Jewish communal life. They therefore had to dance between the two spheres. Sometimes, this dance didn’t quite work. For Esther, this dance was particularly challenging as she had to plead on behalf of her people even as she was separated from them.

Indeed, as Erica argued, Esther’s distance is physical but also emotional. She is boxed in by bureaucratic procedure. Having not been summoned to the King, she doesn’t know if the king will extend his golden scepter when she enters his presence. She understands that he may no longer be interested in her and that she is breaking protocol by appearing without being summoned. She is all too aware that she might be a novelty who is no longer of interest. Esther fasts for three days before the meeting, along with her maids and the entire population. As Erica noted, something transformational often happens in three days, that it is a kind of pause and reflection before a major transformation. Esther understands that her life is at stake. This three-day period can therefore be understood as a threshold in time.

As an important point of contrast, Erica compared the Masoretic rendition of Esther’s story with the Apocryphal one. In the latter, Esther prays to God. Here, she is dressed in mournful clothing. Her head is covered in ashes and dung, and she tears out her hair. Esther prays to God “Only you are our King. Help me...” The Apocryphal text takes Esther through all sorts of gates (threshold spaces). This King is dreadful, looking fiercely upon her, the way she had been anticipating. She hasn’t been summoned. Says the text: “And the queen fell down and was pale and fainted.” This changed the King who then comforts her. “I am your brother; be of good cheer.” In the Apocryphal version, it is God who changes the King into mildness, getting him to call himself “her brother.” At this point in her talk, Erica circled back to Tintoretto’s painting. Now that work can be more readily comprehensible to Jewish audiences. Tintoretto humanizes God. It is God who changes Ahasuerus’s mood and causes his acceptance of Esther.

In conclusion, Erica underscored the importance of time spent in liminal space, demarcated by apparent markers such as gate and threshold. She argued that the Book of Esther is a book of exile par excellence and that its depiction of exile was communicated through clothing and speech. Erica invited us to think about what characters who occupied these “threshold” moments were thinking and then to reflect further on how we hide our own identities and how we can never truly be whole unless we acknowledge who we are.

Displaying her extraordinary skills as a scholar and an educator, Dr. Erica Brown welcomed the input of audience members throughout the Zoom program, thus creating a warm communal conversation and space. Her familiarity with art, the original text(s) and translations, and the ensuing centuries of scholarship as well as her interweaving of her own insights and concerns created a richly textured learning experience.

This program was sponsored by AJL/CAC with the support of AJL National. Special thanks to our guest speaker, Dr. Erica Brown; AJL/CAC members, Nahid Gerstein, Rebecca Levitan, and Gail Shirazi, and AJL National members Jackie Ben-Efraim and Michelle Chesner.
AJL 2022 IN PERSON
Call For Proposals!

With great pleasure, we announce our call for proposals for the 2022 AJL conference, to be held, safety permitting, in Philadelphia between June 26-29, 2022.

Librarians, scholars, educators, archivists, authors, and library advocates are invited to submit proposals for papers and presentations on all aspects of librarianship and on topics related to Jews, Judaism, the Jewish experience, or Israel. Presentations should be relevant to library professionals working in academic and research institutions, archives, synagogues, day schools, or Jewish community centers as well as public schools or libraries serving Jewish communities. Past topics have included collection development and management, programming, reader advisory services, special and rare collections, archival science, cataloging and classification, Jewish literature and literacy, digital and electronic resources, and emerging technologies.

As we will be meeting in Philadelphia, the “City of Brotherly Love,” after so many months of virtual meetings, our motto for 2022 will be “Together again.” This year we especially encourage submissions that highlight ways that Judaica collections create connections. Topics could include but are not limited to:

- Work to bring together dispersed collections
- National or international collaborations around collections
- Public outreach to different audiences around specific collections
- “Back to the office” challenges and solutions after remote work

Co-presenters and panel presentations are welcome; however, each presenter must submit a separate proposal. All submissions must be received by January 31, 2022. Proposals will be reviewed by the Programming Committee and all applicants will be notified in March 2022.

The call for proposals can be found here: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1pIqI8xnNqSU6qr50isyAAx8LInpm-EU-5lr2N_3qBUtA

Chapter Chatter and Member News

AJL-Canada Chapter

By Anne Dublin

The newly-revitalized AJL-Canada chapter is going strong! We promote Canadian-Jewish literature, history and scholarship, and provide a community for peer support and professional development.

AJL-Canada presented a virtual panel discussion in collaboration with AJL National: “Combatting Antisemitism through Children’s Literature” on Mon. October 4, 2021. If you couldn’t attend or would like to see it again, here’s the link: Comating Antisemitism Through Children’s Literature - YouTube. Since this program was open to the public, feel free to share it with friends, family, and colleagues. We’re planning more exciting programs for the future.

Our first general membership meeting will take place on Tuesday, December 7, 2021, 7:30 p.m. ET. It will include a special program: “These are a Few of My Favourite Things.” Collector and Herzl enthusiast David Matlow will present a sampling of his Collection of Herzl Memorabilia — the world’s largest collection (5000 items) of Herzliana. Our members will get to see objects (imagine Herzl in hockey gear!), letters, and books. We are grateful to David for allowing us to peer into his rich treasure trove.

Congratulations to AJL-Canada member, Kathy Kacer! Her historical novel, The Brushmaker’s Daughter (Second Story Press), has been nominated for the Geoffrey Bilson Award for Historical Fiction for Young People. The jury states, “Kathy Kacer has written a gripping tale full of friendship and betrayal, family and country...” A rich story in which terror and fear are so well conveyed by the author’s words that I found myself holding my own breath...”

Finally, AJL-Canada member, Anne Dublin’s essay, “A Writer’s Journey”, will be part of “Reflections from the Field”. It will be published in the December 2021 issue of Religious Studies and Theology — a special issue focused on Canadian Jewish women writers. This journal is published in Sheffield, UK: Religious Studies and Theology (equinoxpub.com). Thanks to Professor Catherine Caufield for her continuing research in this often-ignored field of study.

Stay tuned for more exciting news about the AJL-Canada chapter!

AJL Member David Levy shares links to Powerpoint presentations he uses in his library orientation in classroom library instruction at Touro College Library. More information is available at:

- https://tclibraryblog.wordpress.com/2015/06/16/research-guides-more-than-just-books/
- https://tclibraryblog.wordpress.com/2014/11/06/presentations-from-the-lcw-jewish-studies-program/

Additionally, David has shared Touro College Library’s short rifs on technology in library science for that layperson:

Dear Friends,

As 2021 ends, it is wonderful to look back and see how far this organization has come. We not only endured a second year of COVID — we thrived! We had a second virtual conference, have continued our Round Table and AJL Presents events, and started AJL Classroom, all of which have been extremely successful and drawn hundreds of people from all over the world to learn and to exchange ideas. Our outreach efforts have paid off in new memberships and joint projects with other organizations. AJL is the leading authority on Judaic librarianship, with our reputation growing daily. And there is so much more on the horizon!

As president, I have many goals for AJL, but chief among them are the financial stability of our organization and creating a culture of giving. Two years ago, we started an Annual Campaign to raise money from our membership (and beyond) to ensure a balanced budget. Our 2020 and 2021 campaigns have been hugely successful! This year, our Annual Campaign: “Together Again” anticipates our upcoming 2022 Conference in-person in Philadelphia June 26-30, 2022. We have set a goal of $6,000 for the campaign. We can meet that goal if each of our members goes to https://jewishlibraries.org/donation/ and gives a gift they feel is appropriate for them.

If you have benefitted in any way from the many programs AJL offers to support you in your work, I ask that you consider giving an end-of-year gift to AJL. Tell your friends and colleagues about AJL and how important it is to you. Encourage them to support this “international, professional organization that fosters access to information and research in all forms of media relating to all things Jewish, promotes Jewish literacy and scholarship, and provides a community for peer support and professional development” with a gift in honor or in memory of someone. Invite them to join our friendly, knowledgeable organization.

Of course, the success of all our efforts is the result of the time and energy of dedicated individuals. As a volunteer driven organization, AJL is always looking for people to serve on our many committees and to assist with the innumerable, ongoing tasks that help the organization run. We are also interested in new ideas for committees or programs that will support our members. Of course, if you suggest it, be prepared to lead the effort. If you are interested in getting more involved, please contact Heidi Rabinowitz, our Member Relations Chair at BookofLifePodcast@gmail.com.

I look forward to seeing you — in person — 2022. Stay healthy!

Kathy B.
Nice Jewish Books:
A Podcast

By Sheryl Stahl, AJL Webmaster

I am excited to announce that AJL has launched a new podcast, called Nice Jewish Books. (jewishlibraries.org/nicejewishbooks) It will be a sister podcast to the Book of Life, hosted by Heidi Rabinowitz. For many years, I’ve listened to Heidi’s podcast on (mostly) kid-lit and wished that there was a similar podcast for adult Jewish literature. After some encouragement from the AJL board, I decided to dip my toes in the podcast pond. I plan on posting a new episode every month on the 15th (give or take a couple of days)

Any book with a prominent Jewish character or theme will be eligible for inclusion. I plan to cover literature, popular fiction, and genre fiction. In my first episode, I spoke to cozy mystery author Mary Marks who wrote the Quilting Mystery series. Her protagonist, Martha Rose, is a middle-aged Jewish quilter who lives in the Los Angeles area. We had a wonderful chat about Martha and her friends, Jewish practice, quilting, and finding love later in life. My next episode will be a conversation with Talia Carner about her book, the Third Daughter.
REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

In The Spotlight

EDITED BY LISA SILVERMAN
and ELLEN DRUCKER-ALBERT


For Etan’s grandfather, hope lies with his Jewish faith and his belief in old rituals, miracles, and symbolic objects. For Etan’s dad, there’s little to lift his spirits outside of baseball and his devotion to the Giants, his beloved team. But in the fall of 1989, Etan struggles to find his own anchor, grappling with the fact that his mother has been hospitalized for her mental illness. Retreating into his sketchbook, he has stopped speaking. This distances him from classmates who now find him peculiar, and he interacts mostly with the more understanding adults in his close-knit, multi-cultural community. It’s as though Etan’s words have gone away with his mom. That’s the astute observation of Malia, a young Filipina who becomes Etan’s friend and soulmate. Suffering from an extreme and disfiguring skin condition that once led to kids anointing her “the creature,” Malia has an extraordinary voice. Her singing and Etan’s artwork combined with their forays into some mystical practices involving ancient clay create a bond that enables two lost kids to rise above misfortune and find their way back.

Like Baron’s earlier book—*All of Me*—this is a richly textured novel in verse that deals with a Bar-Mitzvah age boy. Here, the setting is a small town south of San Francisco during the time that the two home teams faced each other in the World Series. The tremors leading to the 1989 earthquake and the upheaval caused by that natural event perfectly parallel the emotional upheaval of the characters. There is a satisfying inter-generational element to the story, not only through the portrayal of a loving Jewish grandfather but also through his compassionate age-mates, all immigrants from a variety of backgrounds who arrived at Angel Island. And the hopeful conclusion relates more to the power of human beings to grow and change than to the power of magic.


In this collective biography, selected by Ruth Bader Ginsburg (RGB) before her death, we have in fact, thirty-two women (including RGB) who, the author hopes, will serve as role models for young people everywhere. With a prologue by Epstein and an introduction by RGB, the reader is quickly plunged into the story of these women’s lives and achievements, as well as the prevailing laws and mores of their time.

The book is divided chronologically from biblical times up to and including the twentieth century, with a brief introduction preceding each section. The biographies are weighted towards women from more recent centuries. A stunning portrait illustration with an evocative background precedes each short biography, which encompasses two to three pages. A brief sidebar, “Today,” gives a perspective of how that particular woman’s significance extends into the present time. The book ends with “A Call to Action,” where Epstein asks young people to “Be brave. Be brilliant. Soon it will be up to you to lead the way to a more just society.”

The dimensions of this hardcover book are 5-1/2” x 7-1/2”, so it can easily be tucked into a backpack or large purse. The digitally rendered illustrations using a bright and bold palette are gorgeous. From the cover illustration of RGB wearing her “tzedek” necklace, large glasses, and surrounded by a wreath of leaves and flowers to the decorative endpapers, interleaves, and borders, this book is a pleasure to hold. Written in a clear, straightforward style, *RBG’s Brave & Brilliant Women* is a book that several generations can read and enjoy together.

Anne Dublin, retired teacher-librarian, Holy Blossom Temple; author of *Jacob and the Mandolin Adventure* (Second Story Press), Toronto, Canada


The now published 2018 winner of the Sydney Taylor Manuscript Award brings the Megillat Esther (Book of Esther) to life through the eyes of Darya, a slave girl in Susa, Persia. Darya has no idea when or why she became a slave. Her memories of the “before times” are dark, frightening, and give her nightmares.

Gloria Koster, Retired School Librarian, New Canaan, CT Public Schools; member of the Children’s Book Committee of Bank Street College

Continued on page 13
Soon after becoming a slave, Darya is bought by a Persian army captain, a widower looking for a companion for his daughter Monir. He is about to leave for Greece to fight in Persia’s war against that nation. Darya’s new “family” consists of Jaleh, the cook and housekeeper, Parvaneh, Jaleh’s daughter, and Nasim, an old slave who takes care of the livestock. To be of utmost assistance to her new mistress, Monir’s tutor teaches Darya to read and write, skills rarely provided to women, children, or slaves during this period.

Life moves along more or less happily until news reaches the household that the captain has been killed during a battle. Monir’s uncle comes to take care of her and the captain’s estate. Monir sadly leaves her home with her aunt and uncle, and the household must be dissolved.

Mercifully, there is an opportunity for all of them to serve in the palace of King Xerxes (Ahasuerus in the Megillah). After several mishaps, including almost being beaten to death by the Slave Manager, Darya’s skills at reading and writing find her a place in the Royal Palace where she becomes Esther’s seventh handmaiden. It does not take long for Darya to get involved with the complex politics of the Royal Court starting with being asked to spy on the quiet and misunderstood Esther while she awaits her introduction to the King.

Of course, when Xerxes meets her, Esther becomes his beloved Queen, and she bears Xerxes a son and heir. Soon however, the king gets a new advisor, Haman, who does not want Persia filled with “foreigners,” and the troubles really begin. Most of the rest follows the Megillah story, until the end finds Darya learning about a terrible betrayal, discovering the truth of how she became a slave, and resolving all the mysteries about who she is and where she came from.

This is a great addition to the Purim bookshelf, and an excellent book for middle readers who enjoy historical fiction.

Kathy Bloomfield, 
AJL President, Seal Beach, CA


Modeling herself on the heroine of the Purim story, Henrietta Szold employed courage and compassion throughout her life. It was fitting that she and a group of like-minded women named their humanitarian organization “Hadassah,” which was Queen Esther’s Hebrew name. Szold’s efforts on behalf of suffering people were established early on, as she and her family responded to the needs of individuals devastated by the Civil War and then to the needs of Jewish immigrants arriving on American shores, where they were unwelcome outsiders. Traveling to Palestine, she found aid for people of all faiths, focusing on healthcare, food, and education. Perhaps her bravest deed was her unflinching determination to rescue Jewish children from the Nazi regime by going to Germany, putting her own well-being at extreme risk. Unmarried and childless, she was nevertheless a source of maternal comfort, setting refugee children in homes through the Youth Aliyah program. Churnin portrays the organizational skill and human kindness of her subject with love and admiration. She expands the main text with comprehensive back matter that includes additional historical information, facts about the Purim holiday and a timeline. Nayberg’s stylized cubistic illustrations are striking and convey the human crises that called for a great woman’s intervention.

Gloria Koster, 
retired School Librarian – New Canaan, CT Public Schools; member of the Children’s Book Committee of Bank Street College


Ever wonder why “jeans” are called “jeans?” Why are they blue or have metal rivets? Ellen Labrecque’s *Who Was Levi Strauss?* answers all those questions, and more.

The story of Levi’s jeans opens in Bavaria, where Loeb (later Levi) Strauss’s father sells sewing supplies door to door, and where the family faces systemic antisemitism: “Jewish people were not allowed to vote, and had to pay more taxes to the government than...
non-Jewish citizens.” America was different, so Strauss's older brothers move to New York and in 1841 open a dry goods store. The family soon follows.

After helping his brothers, young Levi Strauss demonstrates his characteristic foresight, opening a branch of the business in San Francisco during the 1853 Gold Rush. He also “knew a good idea when he saw one,” partnering with the inventor of riveted pockets, thus establishing Levi's reputation for durability — a quality miners valued. The book traces the popularity of jeans from the Gold Rush through Elvis Presley’s Jailhouse Rock (1957). Today, we learn, a billion pairs of jeans — no longer just Levi’s — are sold around the world every year.

Interleaved sidebars entertain and provide additional information regarding the time period such as the fact that the legendary Pony Express operated for only eighteen months, stopped in its tracks by the transcontinental telegraph in 1861. Young readers will also learn about the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which "turned the United States from being a welcoming country for all immigrants to only accepting some people." (We also learn that Levi's factories refused to hire Chinese workers.)

Linework illustrations evoke time and place, but hand-drawn maps do not clarify the text. The text notes that the first gold was found “about a hundred miles inland to the American River,” but the map shows California and San Francisco, but no river.

Who Was Levi Strauss? tells the same story as Maryann N. Weidt’s Mr. Blue Jeans: A Story about Levi Strauss, but Weidt focuses on Strauss’ life story, while Labrecque tracks American, especially Western, history.

The “Timeline of Levi Strauss’s Life” is helpful, but the “Timeline of the World” includes irrelevant events like the year Minnesota became a state, while omitting events mentioned in the text, like the San Francisco earthquake.

The helpful bibliography highlights books for young readers.

Marjorie Gann, retired teacher, co-author (with Janet Willen) of Five Thousand Years of Slavery and Speak a Word for Freedom: Women Against Slavery (Tundra/Penguin Random House, Toronto, Canada


Touted by the Metropolitan Museum of Art as “an American original in the truest sense,” Iris Apfel nee Barrel started life as the only child of a Jewish family in Astoria, New York. This is the only information about her Jewish identity contained in this short picture book about the fashion icon’s life.

Describing her love of “treasures”: scraps of fabric, bargain clothes, and flea market finds, as the beginnings of her style sense, this charming biography exudes the love of color and the eccentricity of this living legend. After traveling the world with her husband and putting together an extraordinary collection of clothes and jewelry, she was asked by the Metropolitan Museum of

Ellen Share, Children's Librarian, Washington Hebrew Congregation, Washington, D.C.


Why is this Anne Frank book different from the plethora of others? It is the creativity of book design by Vegara in this series Little People, Big Dreams along with the outstanding illustrations by Dorosheva, an exceptional illustrator. Dorosheva creatively adds birds to the illustrations to help make the biography comprehensible to children. Quoting from Dorosheva’s website, she writes, “I also inserted an additional narrative motif of birds as symbols of this or that emotion (happiness, serenity, dream, menace, loss.)” The illustrations are black and white ink with the only color being the iconic red plaid diary of Anne’s. On the last pages, the picture of Anne’s eyes peeking over her plaid diary is very poignant. The text is sparse with only a brief description of Anne’s life. At the back of the book, there are recommended biographies including the Diary of Anne Frank. (The diary is not recommended until a student reaches adolescence). Little People, Big Dreams Anne Frank will spark the readers interest in learning more about Anne’s life, and books on Anne Frank are readily available.

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Art to curate an exhibition of her closet when she was 84 years old. The underlying message of this book is summed up in the last line, “…have fun, be good to others, and express yourself, whatever your age.”

With bright, bold colors and energetic illustrations, this charming book will be a lovely addition to the biography section of any Jewish library.

Kathy Bloomfield, AJL President, Seal Beach, CA


Strong women with strong careers star in these two short, focused, picture biographies. Their success comes in spite of being a woman. Both books have celebrity subjects, serious attitudes and information to stuff a book report. The text has a demanding vocabulary; the deep tones of the illustrations portray solid figures; art supports the words and adds emotion. The volumes are quality: sturdy hard backs, thick paper, and end pages with designs specific to the career of the woman inside the book. Each story ends with back matter consisting of a two-page spread highlighting events in the subject’s life, including her Jewish heritage and sharing personal photographs. Although each of these books opens with the first sentence announcing the biography is about “a Jewish girl,” this religious affiliation never appears again; it is not shown to encourage their work. The Rosalind Franklin book contains no scenes of Jewish family or communal celebration; the Ruth Bader Ginsburg book has one: the rabbi at her mother’s shiva.

Franklin’s life story is sad and distant; there is little family mention; she retreats from life into her scientific research; she practices tzedakah, which is not so identified; she helps save lives during the War. She is badly treated by her lab colleagues, some of whom steal her work only to be rewarded with a Nobel after her too young death from machines that no one knew to warn her about.

Ginsburg’s story is warmer, framed as being inspired by her mother who knew a good education meant a good future. Her mother dies as Ginsburg is finishing high school; Ginsburg’s career choices reflect what she thinks would have made her mother happy and proud. The book clearly explains Ginsburg’s difficulty being a woman and a lawyer. Her pivotal cases to end gender discrimination are tied to her appointment as a Supreme Court justice. Both women are role models. Readers who will absorb these life stories as indicating they too can aspire and achieve rather than hagiographies.

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

Fiction - Middle Grade


The rhythmic prose within short chapters is designed with generous spaces between phrases and sentences, as if Alma is speaking directly to the reader. Tina Cane’s language is often poetic: “…its opening notes / which sound like a tender ache / mixed with rain…” Letters, lists, postcards, definitions, synonyms, and song lyrics are scattered throughout this moving novel. Alma navigates her Judaism in various ways: She reads The Diary of Anne Frank, questions the existence of G-d, and enjoys sharing a breakfast of bagels with cream cheese and chives (“schmear”) with her dad. One of the last scenes in the book occurs when Alma is frying eggs and lox in her mother’s wok. A real symbiosis! Alma is a

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character who meets life’s challenges head on; one whom many young people will relate to.

Anne Dublin,  
retired teacher-librarian, Holy Blossom Temple; author of  
Jacob and the Mandolin Adventure (Second Story Press),  
Toronto, Canada


There were few educational opportunities for girls in the Russian-Jewish milieu where Clara Lemlich grew up. Determined to learn, young Clara secretly earned money by sewing buttonholes to buy the books she was keen to read. When these were discovered and burned by her father, a sympathetic neighbor shared his with her, and Clara began to frame ideas on how to reform the world.

In simple, readable text, She Persisted: Clara Lemlich traces Clara’s trajectory from clandestine reader in Russia to union organizer in New York. The book delineates the terrible working conditions dogging New York’s garment industry workers at the turn of the twentieth century: “There were three hundred girls crammed into a space much too small for them...[I]f you spilled food on the fabric, you had to pay for it. And if it happened twice, you would be fired.”

This unfairness lit a “fire of rage” in Clara. Once she learned about unions, she was all in. A lot was at risk; Clara got fired from her first factory job. A boss sent goons to attack her. “One was a burglar, the other a boxer...They punched her so hard, they broke her ribs.”

Undaunted, Clara inspired an audience at Cooper Union in 1909 to support a strike that led to better working conditions, higher pay, and shorter hours, and triggered other strikes across the United States. It also showed the toughness and effectiveness of women.

In a few strokes, the author captures what was unique about Lemlich (“She had a strong, powerful walk, a strut, and a real style.”) But her activism took a toll on family life: Her daughter Martha “often wished she had a different mother,” one who’d meet her with milk and cookies after school.

She Persisted offers more detail about Clara’s early life and later legacy than Michelle Markel and Melissa Sweet’s Brave Girl: Clara and the Shirtwaist Makers’ Strike of 1909, which captures the energy of the women’s strike through its dramatic illustrations.

The list of references points to useful primary sources, however nothing indicates which printed sources are for young readers.

Marjorie Gann,  
retired teacher, co-author (with Janet Willen) of Five Thousand Years of Slavery and Speak a Word for Freedom: Women Against Slavery (Tundra/Penguin Random House), Toronto, Canada


Shield of the Maccabees is acclaimed author Eric Kimmel’s first graphic novel. He uses the format to dive deeper into the Hanukkah story far beyond the familiar “Good Jews/Bad Greeks/Light candles/Let’s eat!” Kimmel explores Hanukkah’s rarely told back story: King Antiochus IV was looney and vengeful. He irrationally blamed the Jews for his devastating defeat in a war with King Ptolemy. This is when he decided to require the Jews to become Greeks and worship the Greek Gods. He decreed, “Worshipping the Jewish God, celebrating Jewish holidays, studying Jewish texts, and following Jewish laws and customs are forbidden. Those refusing to worship the Greek Gods will be put to death.”

Kimmel frames the story through the eyes of two young boys, one Greek and one Jewish. They meet when Jonathan, the Jewish boy, rescues Jason, the Greek boy, from bullies. The boys become fast friends. While improbable in real life but a strong plot device, Jonathan attends Jason’s Greek school and gymnasium as well as classes at his Jewish school in the evenings. The boys learn to respect one another’s culture. But when Antiochus declares war on the Jews, Jonathan and Jason become enemies. No spoilers here about their battlefield encounter. All you need to know is that it is exciting and satisfying.

The outstanding work of graphic artist Dov Smiley conveys the energy and chaos of war. Panels show the land filled with “anger, fear, hatred, madness. City fought city. Village fought village. Neighbor fought neighbor.” Red and orange hues illustrate the Greeks, while a blue and brown palette is used to represent the Jews. The battles are ferocious. The mercenary Greek soldiers who fight for money eventually lose to the Jews who fought for their G-d and culture. The panels where the Greeks summon their ultimate weapon, war elephants, bred and trained to fight, are

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particularly fascinating. Intended for the middle grade reader, Kimmel’s text and Smiley’s drawings create the perfect synthesis of words and pictures.

Rena Citrin,
retired Library Director of Bernard Zell Anshe Emet Day School, Chicago, IL; past member of the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee


The small town of Chokecherry, Colorado teeters on the brink of notoriety. A significant dinosaur fossil find could be its claim to fame, until the discovery of a succession of swastikas painted on middle school property draws nationwide attention, in part because it dredges up awkward memories of a KKK event that took place there in the past. The school’s attempts to handle Holocaust and racism education aren’t as effective as a student-led effort to create a 6-mil-lion-link paper chain in order to impress upon the town — and the nation — that Chokecherry’s residents aren’t as awful as they seem. The actual culprit is elusive, and in the end, nothing is as it appeared to be. Told from the point of view of a series of students, including Dana, the Jewish daughter of visiting paleontologists, and Link, the troublemaking son of the mayor, Linked explores a variety of timely issues and ideas: hate speech, generational guilt, the role of social media in spreading information, effective (or ineffective) antiracism education, and more.

As Dana becomes the focus of her schoolmates’ attempts to respond to the crisis, Link discovers that his grandmother was a hidden child during the Holocaust. He chooses to reconcile this newly discovered side of himself by preparing for and celebrating his bar mitzvah, despite his complete lack of Jewish experience up to that point. What could have been a cringe-worthy, tokenizing subplot actually turned into something heartfelt and educational, if awkward at times, that highlighted the effects of ignorance on future generations.

Linked has a lot going on at all times, and the attempt to address so many concerns in the midst of the mystery and project that are at the heart of the book can get a bit clunky and overwhelming. But overall this is a dramatic, timely, and riveting story that will appeal to wide audiences, both Jewish and not.

Aviva Rosenberg,
Children’s Librarian, Ridgefield Public Library, Ridgefield, NJ


Maple Mehta-Cohen loves stories. She loves listening to them, which has given her an impressive vocabulary, and she loves telling them, making up tales and dictating them into a pocket recorder.

Reading words on the page is a different matter. Last year, her teacher uncovered Maple’s biggest secret: “characteristics of dyslexia” that make fluent reading impossible. Now, instead of starting sixth grade with her best friends, Maple is in the fifth grade. Again.

Frustrated and humiliated by the whole situation, Maple tries to keep it under wraps. She can’t admit the reason she’s repeating the fifth grade to a new student, so she tells him she is a secret teaching assistant, due to budget cuts. This effort to disguise the academic challenges that have her repeating the fifth grade is doomed from the start. Until she can be honest with herself, Maple can’t focus on her reading intervention lessons. Until she can be honest with everyone else, Maple can’t make real friendships with her new classmates.

Maple is bright and creative, a thoroughly likable character who finds herself trapped by her own insecurities. She is surrounded by caring adults and potential new friends who want to support her, but she has to be willing to accept their help.

While religion does not play a significant role in the plot, Maple refers to her Jewish mother and Indian father, identifying herself a “Hin-Jew,” and mentions in passing that they do not celebrate Christmas. The casual representation of the diversity of the American Jewish community is refreshing.

This charming novel perfectly captures the complex feelings that come with being in the transition stage between elementary and middle school. In addition to facing her learning difficulties, Maple also has to navigate changing relationships with old friends, something many readers will empathize with. Readers will leave this book feeling like they know Maple and can’t help but hope for her future success.

Beth Gallego,
Children’s Librarian, Los Angeles Public Library, Los Angeles, CA

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(Parts of this review appeared on the Sydney Taylor Shmooze blog in October 2021.)

Meet Chunky: a hot pink, big-eyed, blue-tongued drawing come to life, courtesy of Yehudi Mercado’s vibrant imagination. When his doctor recommends Hudi lose weight, his parents decide he should start participating in sports. He gives it a try, even though he would much rather develop his skills in art or comedy, and he is remarkably accident-prone. He tries baseball, and he gets hit with the ball (twice). He tries soccer, and he sprains his ankle during halftime. Swimming is great until he injures his hand and can’t get it wet.

Meanwhile, Hudi is also supposed to memorize a reading for his sister’s Bat Mitzvah, but he really just wants to make people laugh. Things at home are tense; his parents are struggling to make ends meet, and his father’s job situation is uncertain. As Hudi’s personal mascot and biggest fan, Chunky is always ready to cheer him on or cheer him up, but most of all, he encourages Hudi to be true to himself. When Hudi begins developing a “tough guy” persona to fit in socially and becomes a “monster” on the football field, Chunky disappears until Hudi realizes that really isn’t who he wants to be.

The graphic memoir format is ideal for this story. Much of it is framed as a sports broadcast, with voice-over commentary running through the action sequences, and “postgame wrap-up” interviews with Hudi and Chunky after several of the chapters. An author’s note provides additional context about the real-life events and people who inspired the book. Mercado describes himself as “a Mexican Jewish kid with loads of health problems growing up in Houston, Texas,” and all of these facets are authentically represented on the page. Imagining a series of movies starring himself and Chunky, Hudi envisions posters for both “Lucha on Monster Island” and “Hanukkah Cops: 8 Nights of Danger.” There is a menorah on the hall table and a mezuzah on the front door frame, and Hudi’s sister’s Bat Mitzvah is a significant event, with half a chapter dedicated to the celebration day.

Middle-grade readers will identify with Hudi’s struggle to fit in and yet be his unique self. Mercado’s graphic style has broad appeal; the narrative’s serious moments are balanced by joyous ones and a self-deprecating humorous tone. Mercado leaves readers with a final encouraging boost: “Find that thing that sparks your imagination. Find your people. Find your Chunky.”

Beth Gallego, *Children’s Librarian, Los Angeles Public Library, Los Angeles, CA*


What do the Bermuda Triangle, UFOs, a telescope, spy notebook, a hairy fingered piano teacher, and a suspected kidnapping have to do with each other? When Danny Wexler lets his overactive imagination combine them, readers will quickly engage in *The Backyard Secrets of Danny Wexler*. Eleven-year-old Danny Wexler is the only Jewish boy in his blue-collar town. He recounts his experiences in such a believable middle school voice that his ridiculous misconceptions about life seem just as plausible as his achingly real encounters with an antisemitic bully in school. He makes two good friends, even though one has to sneak visits to Danny’s house because his mom doesn’t want her son hanging out with a Jewish boy. Readers will laugh out loud, or at least roll their eyes like Danny’s teenage sister, when they read how he convinces his friends that space aliens will land in his backyard when they’re contacted through a musical code. Danny and his friends are certain aliens are somehow connected with the Bermuda Triangle theory and a reported kidnapping by someone driving a white van.

Many people in the town are employed at the fiberglass factory, where there is growing antisemitism. Danny’s dad hasn’t received a promotion in 20 years, something he attributes to the bosses’ dislike of Jews. Danny confides in an elderly neighbor who turns out to be Jewish. She helps him make sense of his many relationships, with gentle humor and wisdom. When his father is threatened by antisemites at work in the factory, Danny begins to realize the difference between imaginary and actual dangers. A serious explosion at the factory brings townsperson together as victims and helpers; people begin to understand each other and move beyond prejudice. Danny realizes some of his misunderstandings, and even the school bully pitches in.

This fast-paced story, humorous, yet touching, may be a “hard sell” with its childish looking cover. But make no mistake, there...
is much to think about and discuss. Characters are well drawn, with rich and believable emotions. The author skillfully weaves many disparate threads to create a clever and entertaining fabric of community.

Debbie Colodny,
Cook Memorial Public Library District, Libertyville, IL (recently retired); former owner Sefer, So Good,; former member Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee

Pinky Bloom returns in the second installment of this mystery series for younger readers. It’s Hanukkah, and that means lighting candles, eating latkes, opening presents, and having fun at the synagogue party. This year, though, the party ends before they even get to play dreidel, when a valuable ancient coin is stolen from a display. Pinky, Brooklyn’s greatest kid detective, has a new case!

With the help of her best friend Lucy and little brother Avi, Pinky gathers clues about who might have stolen the coin. While she tries to crack that mystery, she also wonders if some other strange happenings could be related to the possibly magical menorah a neighbor left with the Blooms for safe-keeping. If anyone can figure all of this out, it’s Pinky Bloom.

This is a fun, fast-paced mystery that will appeal to fans of Nancy Drew and the Clue Crew or Butler’s King & Kayla series, but with a distinctly Jewish flavor. Details of Jewish life permeate the text, from Pinky’s description of a past Purim costume to the Yiddish words that Madame Olga liberally sprinkles in her speech.

Pinky is a sharp and funny narrator, dedicated to carefully documenting her detective work even if she has to bring “the world’s most annoying little brother” along. Energetic cartoon-style illustrations complement the text in both full-page detailed spreads and small spot illustrations at the beginning of each chapter. The short chapters move the story along briskly, and the clues to the mystery are placed so that readers can figure it out alongside Pinky.

Expect to have readers eagerly awaiting another adventure with Pinky Bloom!

Beth Gallego,
Children’s Librarian, Los Angeles Public Library, Los Angeles, CA

Eddie Lewin begins his bar mitzvah project of volunteering at the Silver Brook Pavilion retirement home with the typical apathetic attitude of a teenager who would rather be out playing baseball or tinkering with his buddies in the robotics club at the middle school. The residents refer to him as “Eddie Whatever” not bothering to remember his last name, and Eddie is counting down his time until he is done with this obligation. However, it doesn’t take long before his boredom ends and the adventure begins.

In a narrative that is both humorous and compassionate, the author draws in the reader to experience Eddie’s development of relationships with the residents and his realization that people are more than what they appear to be on the surface. He soon discovers that these seniors have serious drama in their lives, including secrets, romance and crime! There is a mystery to be solved: residents’ belongings are disappearing. Although some residents claim there is a ghost involved, Eddie soon becomes the prime suspect. However, who would have thought there were two ex-gangsters hiding among the seniors? Eddie and his crush, who also volunteers at Silver Brook, are on the case and work together to clear Eddie’s name. When a resident shares their personal holocaust trauma, Eddie is prompted to discover his family’s holocaust-related history, encouraged by his supportive rabbi, a teacher at his Hebrew School. Family dynamics and stresses are explored in this novel as a parent loses a job and Eddie and his sister sustain a supportive, realistic and fun relationship.

The dialogue is fast-paced and amusing. Characters include references to non-binary, brown and hijab-clad persons. Despite the age difference, Eddie develops meaningful relationships with his senior friends who in addition to celebrating his coming of age with him at his Bar Mitzvah, as well as accompanying him to baseball games, are responsible for his personal growth, increased empathy and compassion. Middle schoolers will identify with the pressures of balancing school, Hebrew school and extracurricular activities while preparing for the upcoming milestone of B’ni Mitzvot, and Eddie Whatever will provide some welcome humor and meaning to help readers get through it all.

Ellen Drucker-Albert,
Co-editor, Children’s and Teen Literature, AJL News and Reviews; Manager, Adult & Information Services, Cold Spring Harbor Library & Environmental Center, Cold Spring Harbor, NY


Continued on page 20
The stated mission of Kinder-Loshin Publications is to "acquaint the world with the treasures of Yiddish children’s literature." David Forman has translated Solomon Simon’s (1895-1970) short stories about a tailor who outwits giants, who threaten the people of an Eastern European shtetl, bandits, who prey on anyone who dares travel on the roads leading out of town, a king, and other interesting characters. The book opens from right to left with Yiddish text on the right hand page and English text on the left hand side. The stories are very exciting. Each story presents a problem that no one is able to solve. The clever little tailor overcomes each obstacle by collecting seemingly unrelated items that help him solve each problem. Children will find it fun to try to guess how the clever little tailor will resolve each problem using the strange equipment he gathers. Illuminated Hebrew letters and other colorful illustrations by Yehuda Blum add interest to the book. Children who do not speak Yiddish will enjoy the lively translation. Adults who are learning Yiddish can follow the linear translation on facing pages of each story. The Clever Little Tailor is fun to read in any language.

Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, OH


When should something be kept secret, and when is it better to share? Who should be the one to reveal unknown information to others? These questions are at the heart of Summer of Stolen Secrets. Catarina “Cat” Arden-Blume escapes from an awkward friend situation at home in NYC into a new but equally awkward family situation in Baton Rouge. Her mysterious grandmother cut off Cat's father when he married a non-Jewish woman, and in response he refused to educate his daughter about the Jewish side of her heritage, despite her mother’s support. An aunt and uncle invite Cat to spend the summer with them and her cousin Lexie in Louisiana, in the hopes of building some relationships (and curbing Lexie’s rebellious tendency to sneak off with her "bad-news” boyfriend). Cat and Lexie are drafted to work in the family department store, Gerta’s, where Safta is a beloved presence rather than the rigid tyrant of Cat’s experience. The discovery of a secret horde of family history sets Cat on a journey towards better understanding of her grandmother and herself.

The book is written as a letter or journal addressed by Cat towards her grandmother; the significance of this format only becomes apparent towards the end of the book. Cat’s voice is honest, realistic, and genuinely humorous. The ups and downs of her summer with semi-strangers make for a compelling story. Shabbat is a focal point for Cat’s uncomfortable blend of familiarity with and distance from her Jewish roots, and ultimately a source of reconciliation for the whole family.

A couple of small things render this overall excellent story a bit unrealistic. Cat’s sudden friends-turned-bullies situation at home is never really explained or resolved. Lexie’s involvement with an older boy, complete with constant lying and sneaking around, seems forced for a 14-year-old. A pair of barely-teenagers working with customers in an upscale department store, even a family business, feels unlikely as well. Safta’s secret room of secrets behind a very public door in the store (to which the girls easily gain access) is a bit too tantalizing to be a logical hiding place for someone who had genuine reasons to want to keep things to herself.

Aviva Rosenberg, Children’s Librarian, Ridgefield Public Library, Ridgefield, NJ


(Parts of this review will appear on the Sydney Taylor Shmooze blog.)

In this poignant debut novel, originally published in the Netherlands as Ik zal je bewaren, Verstegen examines the toll unspoken grief can take on a family, inspired by her own childhood. In snapshot vignettes, eleven-year-old Jesje describes, at first, unremarkable days in the ordinary life of a girl in 1980s Amsterdam. She visits her best friend’s house, climbs high up in a favorite tree, and develops a connection with a stray cat that visits the garden.

Perhaps her mother is unusually anxious, but that’s just how Mama is. Bomma, Jesje’s maternal grandmother, is in a nearby nursing home, suffering from dementia that has taken a turn for the worse. During a visit, Bomma calls Jesje by another name: “Hesje". Mama refuses to say more than that it is the name of someone from far in the past. She also cuts off any talk about World War
REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

II, which Jesje's class has just begun studying.

Curious, Jesje investigates, gathering information from other family members and a trusty encyclopedia, puzzle pieces that when put together reveal a stunning picture - Mama does not talk about the war because while she and Bomma survived, many of their extended family did not. Even the fact that her mother's family was Jewish is a revelation to Jesje. Over the course of the novel, Jesje considers what this means for her own identity, and how she will honor those lost family members in her own life.

In an afterword, Verstegen shares that the events of the book are true to her experience, though some adaptations and name changes have been made. A photo of Hesje that is described in one of the later chapters is also included at the end.

This is a beautifully told story of family, secrets, and growing up. The Jewish content is most significant in its seeming absence; Jesje has no idea that her family is Jewish, let alone that they are Holocaust survivors. These are facts that have shaped her life without her even knowing.

Beth Gallego, Children's Librarian, Los Angeles Public Library, Los Angeles, CA

Fiction - Teen Readers


In her sophomore novel, Marisa Kanter brings readers and enemies-to-lovers romance with a passion for the arts. As long as Natalie can remember, it's been Natalie vs. Reid. Even though their families are close friends, Natalie and Reid don't get along and are often locked in prank wars. When their school cuts the art department's budget so that the orchestra, where Reid plays clarinet, gets all the money, and every single other department program is cut, Natalie decides to show the value of other programs by putting on an original play. When their prank battle gets out of hand, she and Reid are forced to be co-directors of the play, now a musical. Clearly the two of them must learn to work together, but when things seem to be going too well, can Natalie get over her feelings of distrust she's held for so long?

The Jewish content is seamlessly woven into the story. The High Holidays are celebrated, Natalie's sister has her bar mitzvah, and the characters deal with both implicit and overt antisemitism, learning to take a vocal stand against it instead of just laughing it off.

While readers may want to shake Natalie for her poor decision making skills, they will cheer her on as she learns to trust Reid, puts on a show-stopping musical, and figures out how to navigate a relationship with her band director dad. Perfect for fans of musicals and "rom-coms," this is a wonderful addition to the growing collection of contemporary Jewish Young Adult books.

Rebecca Levitan, Librarian III, Baltimore County Public Library, Pikesville Branch

Solomon, Rachel Lynn. We Can't Keep Meeting Like This. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2021. 336 pp. $19.99 (9781534440272) HC. Gr. 7-12.

With her fourth Young Adult novel, Rachel Lynn Solomon brings readers a jam-packed romance filled with family angst, mental health issues, identity, and of course, kissing. Quinn Berkowitz's family runs a wedding planning business. Mom, Dad, and her older sister Asher are all involved. Quinn is the resident harpist as well as general wedding go-fer. The Berkowitzes often work with Mansour’s Catering, which is how Quinn has spent a lot of time with Tarek, the Mansours’ son, in the past. However, when he ghosts her during his freshman year of college, they are on tentative footing when he returns in the summer. As they continue to spend time together, Tarek explains that he became so depressed at college he was unable to contact Quinn. Quinn, who suffers from anxiety and OCD herself is understanding of this and they begin a relationship. Or, at least what Tarek, a truly hopeless romantic, would call a relationship. Quinn however, would still call them “hanging out” since she is wildly skittish of relationships because she never got an explanation why her parents separated for six months when she was younger. While navigating her sister’s wedding planning, a new harp teacher, and trying to tell her parents that she does not want to be part of the family wedding business, she has to figure out if she’s able to risk her heart.

Readers of Solomon’s previous books will enjoy a cameo by Rowan and Neil from Today Tonight Tomorrow. Solomon’s portrayal of mental health issues is sensitive and thoughtful, and while light on the Jewish content, it is clear throughout the book that

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REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

Judaism is an important part of Quinn’s identity. Filled with all the angst and joy a “rom-com” reader should expect, Quinn and Tarek’s story is a delight.

Rebecca Levitan, Librarian III, Baltimore County Public Library, Pikesville Branch

Folktales


Released in time for Chanukah, *Winter Blessings* is a collection of a dozen delightful Chelm-inspired tales, and one novella, that brings together traditional style Jewish storytelling and contemporary Chanukah traditions. The stories are propelled by a cast of entertaining and humorous characters, who may not be as foolish as they first appear to be.

*Winter Blessings* introduces the reader to “The Village,” a tight-knit and quirky community of Chelm in Eastern Europe from several generations ago, populated by personalities such as Rabbi Kibbitz, Doodle the orphan, Rachel Cohen the genius, and Mrs. Chaipul, the caterer, who makes “Lethal Latkes.” There is young Shemini Schlemiel who suggests the idea of Chanukah presents, so as not to be outdone by her friends in the next town who receive Christmas presents, but realizes she can bring joy to her family by just giving the gift of her love. The author tackles the idea of the “Chanukah Bush” as well, by connecting it to a strategy for protection against the Cossacks and justifying this tradition as a tribute to the family’s survival. This storyline, however, may not resonate in more traditional homes. The novella, “Out of the Woods,” is a suspenseful account of how the villagers outwit the invading Cossacks by surprising, and unusual heroism. The content lends itself to a fun read-aloud, and is light in tone. This anthology includes a “A Village Glossary and Notes,” an entertainment in and of itself, and an “Historical Note” containing factual information about Chanukah.

*Winter Blessings* is a reboot of the 2011 version that was a National Jewish Book Award Finalist for Family Literature. It is part of the series, *Village Life* by storyteller Mark Binder as Izzy Abrahamson. As noted by the publisher, he has revisited the 2011 text, with some editing, giving some new titles changing the order of some of the stories resulting in a shift in the narrative. An earlier version, published as *A Hanukkah Present* (2007), was transformed into *Winter Blessings* with a reinvigoration of the series. It is primarily the same book. The order of the stories has changed, typos have been fixed, and the ending was sharpened. When reviewed in the Feb/March 2008 AJL Newsletter, Barbara Bietz had described it as “a fine example of Jewish tradition with a wink. It offers the young generation a peek into the past, with humor and a bit of schmaltz.”

This story is one of four books in the *Village Life* series that, although taking place in a Jewish village with mainly Jewish characters, are described by the author to be written for people of all backgrounds.

Ellen Drucker-Albert, Co-editor, Children’s and Teen Literature, AJL News and Reviews; Manager, Adult & Information Services, Cold Spring Harbor Library & Environmental Center, Cold Spring Harbor, NY

MacDonald, Margaret Read. *Kindness Tales: World Folktales to Talk About*. Atlanta: August House, 2021. 175 pp. $16.95 (9781947301665) PBK. Gr. 2-5.

In this compilation of short tales from a wide sampling of countries and cultures, MacDonald focuses on many aspects of kindness. Our choice of words and thoughts, our dealings with other people and animals, and our display of generosity through acts of caring, sharing and leading are a few of the categories that form the framework for this ambitious book. The origin of each story is included, along with a proverb from an entirely different place that serves to amplify the intended message and also suggest that human virtues and foibles are universal. In some cases, credit is given to a particular storyteller. The rich back matter is an impressive reference source for alternative versions of the selected tales as well as additional tales, information on the proverbs and indexing so that readers can easily search by culture or geographic region.

This book is less suited to cover-to-cover reading than to reading over time or for use in classrooms where familiar folklore motifs can be analyzed. It’s also a valuable source for anyone who aspires to storytelling, with many of the selections containing satisfying elements that seem organic like the use of the number three and humorous sound effects to engage listeners. Overall, these stories are a good match for Jewish values; however, “The Magic Ring of Kindness,” is the only specifically Jewish story included in the
collection. It’s about three sons who behave admirably upon their father’s death, as they are unsure as to which one of them has inherited a magical ring. There is also a single Yiddish proverb offered as a match for the lesson in a Siberian tale.

Gloria Koster, retired School Librarian, New Canaan, CT Public Schools; member of the Children’s Book Committee of Bank Street College

Picture Books


Anne-Marie Asner’s cheery, smiley-faced, cartoon-like characters are back and they are still teaching children Yiddish in an amusing, memorable, and effective way.

Shluffy Girl, Noshy Boy, Klutzy Boy, and their friends are joined by two new characters, each with their own special characteristics which readers will associate with a Yiddish vocabulary word and will integrate into their personal vocabularies to be remembered with a smile.

Shleppy Boy shleps (drags, lugs, encumbers himself with) things everywhere he goes. He feels the need to be prepared for all possible contingencies. A small package won’t do if a bigger one exists. His backpack is filled to bursting; he would rather play tuba or cello than flute or violin. When he invites his friends to camp out in his backyard, he is so determined to be prepared that he spends all his time shlepping supplies from his house to the campsite until his friends teach him that less can be more and that moderation can be an asset.

Kibbitzy Girl is a jokester, a wit, who always has a comment on life and suggests performing a standup routine in the school talent show, a perfect and satisfying solution which benefits everyone, both kibitzer and audience.

Asner’s smiling crew leaves readers smiling, too. They come away with an enriched Yiddish vocabulary accompanied by a gentle lesson in being a mensch (a good, honorable person).

A glossary of Yiddish terms is appended to each book.

Michal Hoschander Malen, retired librarian; current library volunteer in Efhat, Israel; Editor of children’s and young adult book reviews for the Jewish Book Council


The art of Eliahou Eric Bokobza is well known in Israel and his works appear in the Knesset and the Israel Museum, among many other places. His work often depicts colorful child-like paintings with plump human caricatures that are somewhat a mix of folk art and modern animation. On some of the pages in this book for young children, he places his colorful paintings before real black and white photographic images, which creates a unique storytelling style. For instance, a bright yellow taxi and a somewhat bewildered and colorfully dressed “Savta” from Tel Aviv, along with her brown suitcase, are placed within a photo of a tree-lined New York City street with the opening statement, “Savta arrived on Friday, just in time for the Shabbat Meal.” This is in large font, using both red and black. It is a striking image. She promises her grandson that they will go on a Sunday trip together. They travel by ferry to the Statue of Liberty and stop at a museum. Here they view an exhibition of paintings of all the Jewish holidays, which are not familiar to the boy, even though he is planning to have a Bar Mitzvah in Israel in a year.

Savta recounts family memories surrounding each painting. This is an opportunity for Bokobza to display his panels of Jewish holiday artworks. The issue with the paintings is that they are rather abstract for a children’s book and they do not really match Savta’s fond memories. When she relates how she marched, sang, and danced in a Simchat Torah parade, the painting illustrating this is static with a variety of symbolic images. But Savta’s joy in her heritage and her homeland shines through. By the time the family arrives in Israel eighteen months later, Savta has passed away, but her grandson is buoyed by his memories of his time with her and feels a part of the traditions of the Jewish people.

Lisa Silverman, retired Library Director, Sperber Jewish Community Library, Los Angeles; Co-Editor, Children’s and Teen Literature, AJL News and Reviews

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A wonderful winter holiday book for the entire community.

Kathy Bloomfield, AJL President, Seal Beach, CA


Rumi is a sweet young girl who has moved to a new town with her mother, grandma, and grandpa along with her best and closest imaginary friend, Bixby Bear. It’s the first day of school, and Rumi is fearful that she won’t be liked or accepted because of her stutter. Her mother reassures Rumi that friendship is just waiting for her, and she is further encouraged by her teacher and family to embrace learning, friendship, differences, imagination, and the challenging experiences of growing up. She is told to “be a good friend to others.”

Together in a series of dreams, Rumi and Bixby Bear travel far and wide looking for answers to the questions in her heart on the great long road of life. They look for friendships with other people as well as with nature and within themselves.

Certain concepts and inferences within the story may not be totally understood by younger children. The ideas of self-confidence, social influences, and the struggles of individuals are examined through a child’s eyes and innocence, but also portray far reaching life consequences. Children will enjoy the fun adventures in a world of make believe. The brightly colored illustrations combine the fantasy world of ancient times with modern situations. The story is not really a Jewish story, but the ideas and message reflect Jewish values and basic tenets. The only obvious connection is a sign at the Dead Sea in Hebrew, Arabic, and English in a dream sequence where Rumi and Bixby Bear travel to the depths of the earth.

The story is inspired by the 13th-century Persian poet, Jalal ad-Din Mohammad Rumi. A website listed at the end of the book includes a printable workbook for parents and teachers with activities, questions, and exercises, and an animation of the complete story which will be very helpful when using with classes or with individuals.

Rachel Glasser, retired librarian, Teaneck, NJ

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It’s a new day, and the children are very excited. Each morning we must take the time to acknowledge the miracle of waking up and thank God for all that we are able to do. This simple, bold, lively book reminds us that each day is a gift during which we can breathe, move, share, and experience the opportunity to live our lives to their fullest.

Modeh Ani is a Hebrew phrase meaning “I give thanks” and is part of a short prayer which we recite upon waking each day. In this book, children recognize their various body parts and how they come together to create each individual while enabling us to function on various levels physically, emotionally, and spiritually. They jump, sing, dance, and play through their gratitude and excitement. The colorful, light illustrations include children of all types with distinct differences in age, race, body type, and religious expression, and also include an adorable, lively dog that joins in the fun. The constant movement and joy portray the exhilaration that each day brings as we are given a new chance to strive even higher, accomplish more, and appreciate the exciting world in which we live.

Rachel Glasser, retired librarian, Teaneck, NJ


Just when you think there couldn’t be another take on Hanukkah latkes, along comes Jenna Waldman’s delightful picture book, Larry’s Latkes. The main character, Larry, is an alligator with a friendly toothy smile who owns a once-a-year food truck that sells only latkes. All the animals in town look forward to patronizing Larry’s mobile establishment every Hanukkah because Larry makes the best latkes using his Grandma Golda Gator’s secret recipe. This year though, Larry starts thinking about changing things up, “But years of just potatoes make him wonder, ‘Is there more?’/The world is full of flavors I have never tried before.”

Larry rushes to the fruit and vegetable market to purchase artichokes, plums, melons, okra, peaches, tomatillos, etc. He soon learns that this rainbow of colors and flavors, although beautiful, don’t make tasty latkes. Larry has a big problem and wonders how to fix it. In a eureka moment, with potatoes dancing above his head, Larry realizes, “My latkes need POTATOES like a bagel needs its lox!” Just in time for the Hanukkah party, all the animals in the neighborhood help Larry peel, chop and mix the potatoes into a new hybrid latke that combines “the taste of something new with flavors from the past!” Soon everyone is celebrating the first night of Hanukkah around Larry’s fun food truck, lighting the candles and eating the tasty new latkes.

Waldman brings together the best of all story elements in this fine addition to everyone’s Hanukkah collection: food, friendship and innovation. She even includes a must-try recipe for “Big Larry’s Rainbow Latkes with Fresh Rainbow Salsa” at the end.

Ben Whitehouse’s digitally rendered illustrations pack a lot of color, information and emotion into each page. By the end, the reader wishes Larry would drive his latke food truck to their neighborhood.

Rena Citrin, retired Library Director of Bernard Zell Anshe Emeth Day School, Chicago, IL; past member of the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee


His universal immigrant story starts with a Jewish boy and quickly moves to other races and religions. It is a grand showcase of the promise of the United States as a haven to those suffering, but does not dwell particularly on the story of Jewish immigration. The central idea is touching; it rests on an historical diary belonging to the author’s great, great grandmother. Six different immigrant experiences are chronologically relayed, with each main character getting a brief mention. A wooden rocking chair is passed down from one generation to the next, but eventually ends up in various multicultural families. Each family carves the word “Welcome” in various languages onto the back of the chair. We start with a personable, brave German Jewish boy, then his daughter. Next we skip to the Irish seamstress who works for the daughter. After her comes a pair of heroic Caribbean nuns, a black doctor helping in Haiti and a teen Syrian boat refugee. The boy carves in German first, and later, when he has a son, he carves “Baruch Ha’ba” in Hebrew. (This seems an unlikely choice at the time, considering Hebrew was

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not as yet a modern language, and Yiddish was most likely used in the home in the mid-19th century.) His first generation daughter adds English, the seamstress Gaelic and so on. The art by noted illustrator Jerry Pinkney is beautiful. He delivers mobile figures in constant movement in strong colors. The book is a heart-warming series of vignettes supported by impressive art, tied together by a chair which highlights multicultural immigration. It is not specifically about the Jewish experience and does not attempt to emulate Polacco’s classic, The Keeping Quilt. The multitude of characters and historical settings, along with the high word count may require an older reader to retain interest.

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

Lifecycle And Jewish Values


Written with preschoolers in mind, but relevant to all, And So Is Hashem, relates the concept of the Mishnah in Pirkei Avot 3:10 that those who please others by acting in a good and right way, also please God, and God’s approval or disapproval with a person depends on how one acts towards others. The text follows three siblings who encounter situations and opportunities to help others and make them happy, including other members of their family, neighbors and friends. Following each “mitzvah moment,” is the refrain, referring to which person is happy (Mommy, Tatty, sister, neighbor etc.) … “And so is Hashem.”

The colorful and cartoon-like illustrations depict an orthodox family, with male characters wearing both kippot and tzitzit, and the female characters dressed in a modest fashion. There is a brief glossary in the front of the book defining Babby (Grandmother), Hashem (G-d), and Tatty (Father). This title is part of the Hachai series “Laminated Pages for Little Hands,” which uses a vinyl-coated paper for enhanced durability. The illustrations and text are intended for Orthodox audiences, however the message of acting in good and right ways, pleasing and helping others, are lessons that make this simple and repetitive text a valuable read-aloud choice for all.

Ellen Drucker-Albert, Co-editor, Children’s and Teen Literature, AJL News and Reviews; Manager, Adult & Information Services, Cold Spring Harbor Library & Environmental Center, Cold Spring Harbor, NY

Shabbat And Holidays


With simple clever text, this charming book about apologizing is a perfect introduction to the Holy Day concepts of Slichah (apology) and T’shubah (repentance) for the very young and young at heart. Making it clear that everyone makes mistakes, and that mistakes that hurt a person or property require an apology, this delightful picture book proceeds to give several funny examples of “how to apologize.” With understanding that apologizing can be difficult, excuses are not really apologizing, sincerity is always required, and it’s never too late to apologize, it is made clear that apologies make everyone feel better.

The cute, pastel toned gouache illustrations provide the appropriate pictures to demonstrate the many ways to apologize and clear examples of how not to apologize at the start of each New Year, books about saying sorry are very sought after. Here is a lovely addition to the High Holiday bookshelf.

Kathy Bloomfield, AJL President, Seal Beach, CA


The strength in Sharkbot Shalom is the whimsical and anthropomorphic creature named Sharkbot (combination shark and robot) which children will find imaginative and engaging. The illustrations of the deep ocean are fanciful and cleverly depict the Sharkbot with changing facial expressions throughout the book as he prepares for a Shabbat meal with his sea creature friends. The poetic verse contains rhymes as the countdown to Shabbat begins, which will also power down Sharkbot’s motor. “The stingray brings SIX plates of treats, from seagrass cakes to algae sweets.” The friends need to hurry to prepare for Shabbat before it arrives so they will be ready before his battery dies. When Shabbat begins, Sharkbot “calms from tail to nose.” In the final pages, a spread is confusing which shows on the verso Sharkbot plugs in his battery. The traditional approach to Shabbat is not to plug into electricity after the Shabbat candles are lit. This sequencing could possibly confuse the reader, especially in Orthodox homes.

Ellen Share, Children’s Librarian, Washington Hebrew Congregation, Washington, D.C
AJL Reviews for Adult Literature and Media
EDITED BY LAURA SCHUTZMAN AND DANIEL SCHEIDE

Non-Fiction


rabbi Wayne Allen is co-chair of the Rabbinics Department of the Anne and Max Tanenbaum Community Hebrew Academy of Toronto and author of several books on Judaism. This book is dedicated to the concepts of good and evil, and suffering in the human experience from the perspective of Jewish reflection throughout history. In the introduction, the author raises the question and central theme of the book as how to reconcile belief in the Almighty with human suffering.

Chapters one through seven proceed chronologically through examples of Jewish writings, beginning with Bible reflections and continuing through the Talmud, Kabbalah, and Zohar, as well as selected Jewish thinkers in the medieval and modern periods. Chapter eight is specifically devoted to the Shoah, and includes analyses of the scope and exceptionality of this cataclysm as well as different perspectives by Jewish writers.

The conclusion provides a question and answer summary of the responses given throughout Jewish history that address the problem of good and evil, and suffering in this world. The book would be appropriate as both a reference resource or a textbook for adult readers interested in this topic. It is recommended for any Jewish collection.

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


With an increased lifespan ahead, many in the American Jewish community may well wonder what insights the rich rabbinical writings in the Mishnah, the Palestinian Talmud, the Babylonian Talmud and other sources have to say about this important part of the life course. Mira Balberg, Professor of History and Endowed Chair in Ancient Jewish Civilization at the University of California, San Diego, and Haim Weiss, Associate Professor of Hebrew Literature at Ben Gurion University in Israel, have jointly authored a book that will provide the reader an unusually thought-provoking immersion in this world. While this most engagingly written book would be a natural for an academic library, members of a synagogue library would certainly significantly expand their intellectual horizons through an encounter with this volume.

The book, in its carefully constructed introduction, five chapters and epilogue, takes the reader from rabbinic discussion of the aging body to discussion of aging in the family household, old age in the study house, and social interactions with strangers beyond the rabbinic realm. A special gift of the volume is its counterpointing contemporary thinking on the process of aging and old age with rabbinic conceptions, and its incorporation of particularly apt quotations from a broad range of writers looking at aging from diverse cultural and philosophical perspectives. The book also affords a valuable opportunity for the reader unfamiliar with rabbinic literature an opportunity to gain exposure to the stories, debates, pronouncements, of diverse Talmudic texts — writings they would probably not otherwise ordinarily encounter.

Balberg and Weiss approach the rabbinic writings from a literary perspective, rather than as constituting a history of events that have actually transpired. Deeply familiar with the extensive body of research and commentary on the rabbinical texts, their approach takes a somewhat different direction. In their own words. “We aimed to go beyond the window dressing and to explore representations and depictions of old age that are not declarative and didactic, but rather emerge out of the rabbis’ engagement with lived experiences and human relationships. We found such multilayered and complex depictions of old age in rabbinic narratives, which we made a point of approaching as artfully crafted literary texts.”

Reading When Near Becomes Far will challenge the reader of whatever age to question their assumptions as to the meaning of old age, societal expectations of the aged, and what the Talmudic writings have to truly teach.

Mindy C. Reiser, Ph.D., Vice President, Jewish Study Center, Washington, D.C.

Ben Rafael, Eliezer and Orna Shemer. eds. The Metamorphosis of the Kibbutz. International Comparative Social Studies Series, vol. 49. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2020. $198.00 (9789004439603); ebook $198.00 (9789004439955); PBK, December 2021, $54.00 (9789004505506).

For American Jewish boys and girls of a certain age, no trip to Israel was complete without spending some time on a kibbutz, an enduring symbol of the innovative social experiments that have taken place in Israel. But for the past few decades,
little news of or from kibbutzim has found its way to the American Jewish press. How, indeed, was the kibbutz faring and why had its profile so dramatically receded?

A comprehensive response to this question lies in The Metamorphosis of the Kibbutz, an edited volume bringing together the results of a 2016-2017 research seminar organized by Yed Tabenkin, an Israeli research institute focusing on the kibbutz. Seminar participants were distinguished Israeli social scientists and other academics engaged in kibbutz studies from diverse perspectives. This volume with its research findings provides a searching look at the kibbutz through the lenses of Economy, Organization and Employment; Community; Ideology and Politics; and Culture and Language. While the fifteen chapters plus introduction, book outline, and epilogue, often cover the same ground on the dramatic transformation of the kibbutz to a much more privatized economy, and a shift from a collective to a cooperative orientation, a number of chapters do focus on areas that will be new to most readers. Particularly illuminating were the chapters on the changing roles of women in the kibbutz, the kibbutz and its relation to Jewish tradition and practices, the changing language in which the kibbutz discusses itself, and consideration of a new kibbutz ideology for the 21st century, able to encompass its radical transformation.

The volume is part of Brill’s International Comparative Social Studies Series, so it should find a place in a research library. While this is a book written by academics and often employing scholarly language (copyediting could have been improved at various points), it is a volume whose subject would be of interest to wider audiences for browsing through at synagogue libraries, libraries at community centers, and day schools. The book addresses a real gap in the understanding of most observers of the Israeli scene as to the role of the kibbutz in contemporary Israeli life and would be a valuable addition to any library.

Mindy C. Reiser, Ph.D.,
Vice President, Jewish Study Center, Washington, D.C.

Bezalel, Chaim. The Bible is not for Children: Illustrations from the “OLD” Testament, Dekel, 2021. $20 (19780999595886).

This volume is a small selection of poems from the Hebrew Bible. Unlike the title suggests, the poems themselves are not necessarily unsuited for children, they are adult in their use of irony and humor - and many of the topics chosen are iconic sections of the Hebrew Bible. The book contains thirty-six Biblical stories as small poems with a one page introduction and a one page epilogue. The author of these poems was born in New York but made Aliyah in 1988. His wife and he are painters and sculptors and there is artwork accompanying each of the poems.

David Tesler,
Efrat, Israel


Kevin Burrell’s primary objective in his revised dissertation, Cushites in the Hebrew Bible, is to explore representations of Cushite ethnic identity in the biblical text. He maintains however, that in order to proceed effectively with such an investigation, one must consider the framework within which contemporary African identity is constructed. He notes that there is a “Euro-American” bias in biblical scholarship and that despite the numerous references to “Cushites” in the Hebrew Bible, the study of Africans in the biblical text was, until recently, largely neglected. In his contribution to this new scholarship Burrell examines how “Israelite/Cushite ethnic interrelations” were represented by the biblical writers. Asserting that ethnicity in the biblical text is discerned either through material remains or through the literature (i.e., the Bible and other Near Eastern texts), Burrell’s primary focus is on the literature, with the inclusion of archaeological evidence when pertinent. He takes a synchronic approach, working with the text as we now have it, albeit with due notice given to social and historical contexts. His exegesis is based on the assumption that the biblical texts “are records of the cultural and collective memory of its [Israel’s] past.” Additionally, he makes use of recent work in Nubian studies to provide further historical context. Burrell concludes that representations of the Cushites in the biblical text were rooted solely in the religious concerns of the biblical authors. Beyond these considerations, ethnic identity was of no import. He further asserts that providing “…a more balanced representation of Cushites/Africans in the biblical text and the biblical world” has an impact on contemporary African communities and people of African descent. Besides extensive footnotes, a bibliography, and indexes, the author provides an appendix which further examines the concept of ethnicity. Dr. Burrell’s work would make a thought provoking addition to an academic or research library.

Randall C. and Anne-Marie Belinfante,
AJL Members

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thorough study of a neglected topic - the activities of the JLC during the formidable years 1934-1945. The book focuses on the activities intended to rescue, find relief, and develop a resistance strategy. In six chapters, the author explores the foundations of the organization, how it constructed international links prior to World War II, prewar politics of anti-Nazism, trajectories of exile, rescue operations, working with the French resistance, and finally, activities of the organization in Poland, Russia, and Palestine. A third of the book is dedicated to notes, bibliography and index which is evidence of the thoroughness of this work.

This book should be in any academic library with large collections on the topics of the Holocaust, American Jewish history, and the activities of labor movements in the United States.

Michlean Lowy Amir,
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Archivist/ Librarian, Retired


From Sarah to Sydney is a biography of the life of the trailblazing children’s author, Sydney Taylor, known for the popular All-of-a-Kind Series. The book covers a wide range of topics: a summary of the content of her children’s books, an insight into German-Jewish identity in American families, a description of Jewish life in New York in the early 1900s, and a critique on family dynamics. The biography is engrossing with details and facts that are referenced in the lengthy Notes at the end of the book and an indication that extensive research went into the writing. This book was conceived and researched by June Cummins, but it was sent to the press by Alexandra Dunietz. It is very sad that June Cummins, a professor of children’s literature, never lived to see the book published, but she succumbed to death after long suffering from ALS. Fortunately, she worked with Dunietz, who was able to complete the task.

In the introduction, the authors write that All-of-a-Kind-Family is viewed as a groundbreaking book because it was “the first book from a mainstream publisher to feature Jewish children and reach a sizable general audience.” The authors further write about the long range impact: “the next twenty-five years, introduced millions of Americans to Judaism, forging a bridge through literature that moved Jewish characters and themes from the margins of children’s book publishing-and American culture at large-into the national arena, enlarging the public’s understanding and increasing its acceptance of American Jews.”


This excellent book is not only about the unique family law in Israel, but also gives clarity to the bureaucratic quagmire of the American legal system.

Cohen points out a flaw in American matrimonial law that encourages costly relitigation of divorces, is not in the best interest of offspring, clogs up court dockets, may put the person being pursued in a kind of double jeopardy, and risks one spouse being defamed post facto. He deploys legal concepts such as res judicata that protects a litigant from dealing with already decided matters. As Justice Brandeis in a different context calls “the right to be left alone.”

Functus officis urges that settlement and stipulations should be final and binding as much as possible as a “clean break,” and not subject to further uncertainties through malicious prosecution and needless litigation.

In the state of Israel, the unique family law derives from ancient Jewish law, halakhic traditions, and rabbinic legal reception history spanning millennia. This book brilliantly examines Israeli family law in comparison with the U.S. matrimonial laws and connects the dots in international legal systems. The Israeli system is primarily controlled by religious law and granted enforcement powers equivalent to those of the civil courts.

This insightful book seeks to clarify the tension and offer solutions. It surely will guide those interested in family law: civil court judges, rabbinical court judges, lawyers, mediators, arbitrators, and families. Cohen exposes not only the weaknesses in Israeli law but other inequities in Western democracies, often with giving practical models to fix the flaws and overhaul dysfunctional procedures.

Topics include issues subject to modification, the right of a minor to independent status, extramarital relationships, joint property, the phenomenon of Israelis seeking foreign civil marriages, and issues of document disclosure.

Recommended for all libraries.

David B Levy,
Touro College, LCW, NYC


It is curious that a French scholar took upon herself to research and write about the Jewish Labor Committee (JLC) that was formed in New York in 1934. She did extensive research in the United States and in France and completed a well written, very
The All-of-a-Kind books are still available in libraries and bookstores across the country and continue to captivate children who read about the daily lives, aspirations, holiday observances, and family squabbles of a Jewish immigrant family. This biography compares both the narrative found in Sydney’s books and the actual experiences of the family. While there are times when they are one and the same, this is not always the case. It is fascinating to see in this biography how these two are juxtaposed. The mother, Mama, in All-of-a-Kind Family is presented as warm, loving and somewhat strict. While these traits did exist in Taylor’s mother, Cilly (Mama in the books) was overworked, unbending, suicidal, and tried to induce a miscarriage when she found she was pregnant.

This book is a significant study of an influential children’s author and a recommended book for librarians working in children’s services, especially Judaica librarians. A children’s librarian can pick up information from the book to use in book talks. It is fascinating to learn how All-of-a-Kind-Family got its name. The five girls were given the name by the principal of the school, who noticed the five girls wore starched and matching pinafores along with hair ribbons that made them look special. The book reveals the struggles, creative process, and challenges that a children’s author faces. There is also a glimpse into the experience of dealing with publishers, editors, and the handling of illustrations. (More about the illustrations and illustrators of the books would be interesting in a follow-up book.) The Association of Jewish libraries has a coveted award, Sydney Taylor Book Award, in Sydney’s memory. This was established by Ralph Taylor, Sydney’s devoted husband. In 1979, Sydney Taylor was awarded posthumously the Sydney Taylor Body-of-Work Award. Highly recommended for libraries specializing in children’s collections.

Ellen Share, 
Children’s Librarian, Washington Hebrew Congregation, Washington, D.C.

David B Levy, 
Lander College for Women


Organized into five coherent sections with over twenty one scholarly contributions, including a list of Figures and Tables, an index of ancient, medieval, and modern works quoted or referred to, an index of 15th and 16th century printed books, an index of manuscripts quoted or referred to, an index of names, and an index of proper names, this academic collaborative magnum opus is a tour de force. It represents the first full-scale treatment of the reception of Gersonides (1288-1344).

In the final chapter of Charles Touati’s La Pensée Philosophique et Théologique de Gersonide (1973), the French scholar laid out the history of the reception of Gersonides’ thought. Gersonides’ Afterlife is beginning to fill the Aufgabe Touiti forecast, specializing in different areas and diverse perspectives of research to shed light on Gersonides oeuvre and reception in the medieval ages, Renaissance, during 19th Century Wissenschaft des Judentums Bewegung, up to contemporary scholarship.

Gersonides is an extraordinary late representative of Hebrew Jewish culture that flourished in medieval Provence, France. He wrote on mathematics, logic, astronomy, astrology, physical science, metaphysics and theology, and commented on almost the entire bible. Although Gersonides is clearly greatly influenced by Aristotle as was Maimonides his predecessor, both Aristotelian Jewish philosophers offer a synthesis and harmonization of Torah and science, Jerusalem and Athens.

For the first time, the twenty-one papers collected here describe Gersonides’ impact in all fields of his activity and the reactions from his contemporaries up to present-day religious Zionism.

The five rubrics for organization include: (1) The reception of Gersonides’ philosophical and halakhic oeuvre, (2) the reception of Gersonides’ Astronomical and Astrological oeuvre, (3) printing and reading histories, (4) Gersonides’ oeuvre in the 19th century German Wissenschaft des Judentums Bewegung, (5) Late repercussions of Gersonides oeuvre.

Highly recommended for all scholarly academic collections.


An extremely powerful narrative and informative tale, in distinct disproportion to the book’s size. This is a true examination of a personal relationship between Eddie Jacobson and a fellow army comrade, a future US President. The fact that Jacobson was Jewish and a strong supporter of what was to become the State of Israel was the linchpin that brought these two people together and whose personal relationship greatly...
influenced President Truman’s diplomatic support for the establishment of the Jewish state, despite the vigorous opposition of such a move by members of his administration. Rabbi Elkins is a much-published author on Judaica, but this work covers a number of important topics well beyond the central thesis of how the United States was to diplomatically recognize Israel early on in its existence. The reader is also treated to an unvarnished view of the inner workings of the executive department and how a president goes about functioning as the chief diplomat of the country. This is an extraordinary contribution to our understanding of the development of US-Israeli relations.

Sanford R. Silverburg, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC


The priestly and sacrificial laws of Leviticus (referred to in the academic literature as source “P” or the “Priestly Narrative”) have historically, and even to this day by many, been viewed as devoid of any literary character, and therefore, not deserving of attention and analysis. Feldman’s book, premised on the assumption that P is an independent source within the Pentateuch, contends that there is “literary value to these supposedly 'non literary' texts” and that the “description of sacrifice in Leviticus along with its laws are as much a part of the story as the poetic-sounding tale of the creation of the universe.”

The primary substance of the book involves important analysis about the interrelationship and interdependence of the detailed ritual instruction contained in Leviticus with the rest of the Priestly Narrative. This is not to say that the book attempts to analyze and uncover the relationship between textualized ritual and historical practice; in fact, says the author, the search for historical kernels could “obscure” the original purpose of the literary function of this material. Therefore, descriptions of ritual or “literary ritual” are not the same as practiced ritual. Rather, its existence is meant to “create the story world and to subvert the rigid boundaries constructed within that world.

Contrary to older notions of the specialized and priestly focused nature of the text, Feldman demonstrates that the detailed ritual descriptions in Leviticus allows the ancient Israelite reader “to hear and see the internal workings of the cult” and in many respects democratizes and publicly educates what has traditionally been seen as more esoteric and cultish aspects of religious practice.

The Story of Sacrifice is a fascinating scholarly work aimed at those expert in academic biblical scholarship. The book will also be of interest to scholars of literary theory and other ancient texts.

David Tesler, Efrat, Israel

Furstenberg, Ariel. המאמריה של החכם משהaira, פארא老太太. תהלומדים על פילוסופי ברד התרמקות של התלמוד. The Languages of Talmudic Discourse: A Philosophical Study of the Evolution of Amoraic Halakha. Jerusalem; Magnes, 2017. $22.00 (9789657755358); ebook $22.

This book was born because of the author’s interest in natural language. The author studies issues of concepts and how they convey meaning, how language is dynamic and develops, and how this language shapes halachic perceptions.

The author says that Talmudic discourse should be viewed as reflecting a natural language and puts background to the legal, scientific, and religious aspects of the Talmudic discourses.

The book is aimed at those who want to examine the philosophy of language. While this book can help the reader understand new areas of Talmud halachic interpretation, it is for experts in Talmud and language. It is recommended for experts in the field and academic libraries.

Daniel D. Stuhlman, Temple Sholom Library, Chicago, IL


Rabbi Abraham ha-Kohen of Kalisk, along with Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk (ztsl), made Aliyah to Tiberias, around Adar 1777 forging a mystical Hasidism outside of Eastern Europe. Rabbi Abraham, while yet continuing in the masorah of his teacher Rabbi Dov Ber of Mezritch who received from the Besht, forged a meditative mystical praxis allied to the majesty of Eretz Yisrael and redemptive expectation.

The Hasidic Tzadik Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav, referred to his encounter with Rabbi Abraham as one of witnessing “truly integrated spirituality” while the Baal ha Tanya noted that Kalisker’s hasidim were in the habit of “turning somersaults in the streets and marketplaces” when in spiritual ecstasy and enthusiasm. This mode of worship and other factors may have unfairly caused the
Hasidim to be placed by Mitnagdim in herem.

Tiberian versions of Hasidic teaching outside of Eastern Europe serve as a road map to future contemplative pathways for an age yearning for spiritual authenticity to rediscover the magic, mystery, and enigmatic expanded consciousness of the mystically informed contemplative life that brings glory and delight to the divine light of Hashem.

This volume contains an introduction of a spiritual portrait of Rabbi Abraham ha-Kohen of Kalisk by Gershon Hundert, teaching stories, seven essays by distinguished academics, and translations of selected homilies from Chesed le-Avrhaam, by Aubrey Glazer and Nehemia Polen. It also contains a glossary (containing more than just key terms such as chokhmah, devequt, qatnut, gadaut, dibbuk chaverim, hasagat ha-ayin (Iyov 28:12), hitlahabut, bital mabut atzamah, emunah, etc.), an index of names, an index of sources, and Hebrew critical edition.

The audience/readership will not only include Jewish studies academics, historians of religion, but also spiritual seekers drawn to mysticism. This carefully and clearly written important book containing scholarly essays along with translations of sefer Chesed le-Avrhaam accompanied by the original Hebrew, is highly recommended for all libraries.

David B Levy, Lander College for Women, NYC


This is a very interesting and informative work describing and comparing the gradual evolution of ideas for memorial sites in Germany and in the United States. It is not surprising as there were many components and many ideas presented by those involved in the planning and execution process, not to mention sensitive political issues. The long process of creating such memorials was fraught with struggles over creative ideas on architecture, art to be included and much, much more. The completion of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum took 14 years from the establishment of the Commission for the Holocaust by President Jimmy Carter to the dedication of the museum in 1993. It has become a place that is not only a memorial for reflection on the horrors of the Holocaust, but also a center for research and education on the subject by scholars from all around the world. It is curious that the author writes “Upon paying the entrance fee, the visitor is given an ‘identity card’...” (p. 110). There has never been a fee to enter the Museum because it is a quasi-governmental institution. One can’t help but wonder about the accuracy of statements about other memorials.

This book would be of use in academic libraries with significant collections on the Holocaust.

Michlean Lowy Amir, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Archivist/ Librarian, Retired


n Kabbalah in Print, Andreas Gondos uses the works of Rabbi Yissakhar Baer of Prague, a 17th century Kabbalist, as a case study in the influence of print on the popularization of previously esoteric texts and ideas. Grounded in the most recent research on book history, she contends compellingly that medium and message influence one another. Print changes not only the manufacture and distribution of books, but the production and consumption of words as well.

Print, as has already been demonstrated, played a critical role in creating the book “The Zohar” out of what had previously been a looser and more flexible collection of texts. Though the basic Kabbalistic texts were printed in the second half of the 16th century, they still presented a challenge to any but the most dedicated scholars, both due to the difficult language of the Zohar and other works, as well as the complicated and difficult to follow metaphysics. Rabbi Yissakhar Baer’s major contribution, according to Gondos, was to use the cheaper cost of printed books and the ease of distribution to simplify Kabbalah for scholars of lesser prowess. Not only that, but he attempted to focus the attention of readers on those aspects of Kabbalah that could most easily be incorporated into daily life and religious practice. The secondary elites, like Yissakhar Baer, used new technologies to effectively reach lay and non-elite audiences.

Gondos focuses on four of Yissakhar Baer’s works. Pithei Yah summarizes in ten chapters the basics of the more complicated and less organized works of Moses Cordovero. Yesh Sakhar explains the mystical meaning of daily observance, organized according to the structure of the wildly influential halakhic code, Shulhan Arukh. Imrei Binah functions as a dictionary of difficult words in the Zohar, and thereby also as an index. Finally, Meqor Hokmah is an anthology and translation of Zoharic passages that Yissakhar Baer considered most central.

The book’s argument is compelling and clearly written, and integrates the developing literature and book history with important advances in early modern Jewish intellectual history.

Yoel Finkelman, National Library of Israel

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Every translation is by definition an interpretation. Greenspoon writes a fascinating and original work of scholarship, analyzing (specifically) Jewish attempts at translating the Hebrew Bible. Each chapter focuses on a specific translation or group of translations, organized by a unifying theme, such as geographic region or language. In each instance, the author contextualizes the translation, providing an understanding of the purpose — or purposes — of the translations and the reception of the translations by its intended audience. For example, some translations (in this instance, the medieval translation of Sadah Gaon) consistently avoided any use of anthropomorphism, rendering Genesis 11:5 to read, “And God caused something hidden to descend to the see the city and the tower that the people built” rather than the more literal translation — “The Lord came down to look at the city and tower that man had built.” Examples of such translator’s agendas and perspectives abound throughout this book.

Chapter one discusses the first translation of the Bible — the Septuagint, a third century BCE translation of the Bible into Greek. Chapter two focuses on the Targum, a first century Aramaic work. Chapter three centers on Islamic translations of the Bible. Yiddish translations from central Europe over a nearly 600 year time period is the topic of chapter four. Bible translations into Spanish, French, Italian, Hungarian and Russian are treated in the fifth chapter. Chapter six describes English translations of the Bible and the final chapter delves into non Jewish translations that contain Jewish Features, such as messianic Jewish translations.

This important book is truly aimed at a wide audience. Written clearly and accessibly, the book will be of interest to scholars and students alike. The author has even provided additional resource material for teachers and clergy on the publisher’s website.

David Tesler, Efrat, Israel


In this newest book, Professor Liora R. Halperin examines how successive generations in Mandatory Palestine and later the State of Israel have remembered the “first” generation of private Jewish agriculturalists. While most histories of Zionism or even Zionist memory have set their sights on the role of the Second Aliyah, kibbutzim, and their afterlives in contemporary Israeli political discourse, Halperin instead focuses on the underexamined place of the private agricultural colony [s. moshava, pl. moshavot] and the First Aliyah generation of Zionist settlers (1882-1904).

Discussing the historical memory of this group of early settlers, Halperin also asks what it means to call this generation the “First Ones” [rishonim] or part of the “First Aliyah.” She takes the emphasis on “firsting” embedded in this periodization to be characteristic of settler societies and reveals how this generation’s claim to firstness overlooks “preexisting Jewish populations in Palestine as ‘outside’ the settlement project” as well as “the Arabic-speaking, mostly Muslim Palestinians who constituted an overwhelming majority of Palestine’s population” (24). By contrast, the relationship between Jewish agricultural settlements and Palestinian villages as well as between Jewish farmers and their Palestinian laborers informs much of Halperin’s work.

Using a wealth of primary and secondary sources such as farmer’s journals, press reports on commemorative events, fictional works, and government documents, Halperin’s work at times is an exciting history of this historiographically overlooked period. Still, the central argument of the book is concerned not as much with these historical events but rather how this generation has lived on symbolically—and towards different ends—in Zionist settler memory for those across the Israeli political spectrum, including Labor Zionists and right-wing Revisionists alike.

Halperin’s reading of these sources focuses on the afterlives of two purported characteristics of the “oldest guard.” First, the agriculturalists, their political organizations, and other representatives espoused a type of pro-capitalist politics which disavowed its own partisan nature altogether as opposed to the Second Aliyah Labor Zionists who were explicitly partisan. Halperin calls this a “politics ofapoliticism [which] presumes that nationalist economic activity, technological development, and the pursuit of economic growth undertaken outside of a partisan political structure are not political” (22). Second, as opposed to other currents which sought ethnonationalist exclusivity in the Mandatory Palestinian labor market, the moshava farmers would frequently hire Palestinian Arab laborers. Contrasting this practice with Labor Zionist calls for “Hebrew Labor,” moshava farmers would frequently stress the possibility of benevolent, even friendly, relations with Palestinian Arabs. These relations, as Halperin shows, however, were always bound within a racialized owner-laborer hierarchy. Still, as later generations looked back on these labor practices, they often viewed them nostalgically as a symbol of what ‘might have been’ had a
Halperin’s book is a unique history of Zionist memory in that it does not limit its approach to actors from particular Zionist movements or institutions. The book while nominally focused on the “First Aliyah” generation is about much more: Labor Zionism, Revisionist Zionism, Palestinian agriculturalists, Holocaust survivor and Mizrahi immigrants to the State of Israel after its establishment, and even the history of continued settlement up until today. The book will serve as a fantastic resource for advanced undergraduate and graduate students in Jewish Studies and Middle East Studies.

Ryan Zohar, 
Middle East Institute, Washington, D.C.


In this new book, volume 24 in the series “Studies in Contemporary European History,” the editors have collected many different written letters and other materials relating to Jews challenging their persecution during the Holocaust. This kind of material is enlightening in that it provides more counterarguments to the idea that Jews from Europe were passive victims. This also challenges the idea that only armed resistance does or should count as resistance to persecution during periods of persecution, Jewish or otherwise. Chapters include sections about French Jewish soldiers arguing that their status should provide protection or special status, Czech Jews arguing for honorary status as Aryans that may have protected them, intermarried couples after the war petitioning for special status, and other similar topics.

In some of the cases, the chapters include archival photos of letters themselves, photos of the officials involved, or records of their visits to the offices of said officials seeking redress. Seeing the actual document and its transcription, and especially the archival photographs of the authors or other people involved, leads to a deeper understanding than just reading the text of the chapters. This collection shows that scholars need to review their understanding of what constitutes a successful petition, as “even an evaluated and rejected petition could offer the author a much-needed partial reprieve or stay of deportation...” (p.213) that would allow for planning of next steps to attempt to survive.

This title is recommended for academic libraries and school libraries that want to deepen their collection(s) on the period. Written documentation, and especially firsthand accounts of specific areas, people or episodes can help provide a deeper understanding of the varied ways Jews tried to survive this horrible period.

Eli Lieberman, 
Assistant Librarian, HUC-JIR NY


This book argues that Judaism impacts human geography in significant ways; it shapes the environment and space of its believers, thus creating a unique “Jewish geography.” Not just through symbols like the menorah, etrog and lulav, and star of David which as artistic works adorn the aesthetic geography of the tombs of the Sanhedrin carved into the rock walls, but also for instance in the replication of the architecture of the Chabad movement’s Beit Moshiaach on 770 [gematria paratzta] Eastern Parkway, New York, in venues such as Kfar Chabad (Israel), beit Menachem in Milan, Melbourne, Chabad house in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and Jerusalem, Israel.

A thesis of the book is that the diverse ways communities adapted to different geographical areas and adhered to traditions, customs, and habits give the Jewish community landscape unique hermeneutic resonance, and reflects how Judaism shaped it. Not only to ensure the existence of Beit Midrashot, synagogues, mikvaot, but also the cultural landscape of Jewish settlements from rural planning or urban design to means of transportation and communication, reflect the concerns and shaping of Judaism. The book demonstrates that Jewish geography is often shaped by the requirements of Judaism, thus making for a unique Jewish geography reflective of halakhah, customs, and folkways of Jews. The book pioneers the way for further research for geographers of religious landscapes.

Failure of Jewish Agricultural Settlement in Western Canada.” The above diverse examples shed light on better understanding Jewish cultural landscapes, and offer insights into human geography across the globe.

Recommended.

David B Levy, Touro College LCW, NYC


His sharply written book argues for the value of an old-fashioned commitment to religion, tradition, and tribe, including a harsh polemic against universalistic progressive values. It compares and contrasts two semi-fictional characters, Shimen (with a deliberately Yiddish spelling) and Heidi (plus a few other characters with cameo appearances).

Shimen is a Yiddish-speaking Holocaust survivor who lived after the war, somewhere in an Orthodox orbit around Hassidic circles. His Judaism and religious practice are second nature and only partially reflexive. It is, as Koppel describes it, Judaism as a first language. He is observant as a matter of course, and feels at home in the tight-knit community of other observant Jews, particularly men. He is an unabashed particularist, not because he rejects non-Jews or non-observant Jews, but because the observant community is his tribe, his people, a group to which he is so intimately attached that he can barely imagine himself without them.

Heidi, in contrast, is a universalist progressive. Coming from a Jewish background, she gradually lost her particularistic commitments, replacing them with a universal doctrine of fairness. Her utilitarian ethical approach does not distinguish between treatment of “my people” versus those who are distant. Indeed, Heidi gradually becomes suspicious of the very notion of “my people.”

Koppel writes in a clear and attractive prose, if at times too self-assured. Judaism Straight Up is at its strongest when it offers a rich analysis of a wholesomen religion practiced with minimal self-consciousness, such as the analogy between Judaism and language as self-regulating collective social phenomena. He provides a strong defense of a tight-knit, close community that respects its members’ autonomy even as it makes demands. His description of Shimen is compelling apologetics of the best kind — an attempt, through a sympathetic and thick description of an uncommon or counterintuitive hero, to make that hero more attractive to outsiders.

The book is at its weakest in polemical mode. Make what you will of the fact that the three female characters in the book are all secular and are subject to harsh critiques, while the male characters, with one exception religious, are treated either sympathetically or in a balanced way. Koppel does his best to present Heidi as generously as he can, but in the end, he doesn’t like her that much, which comes through loud and clear. For some reason, Koppel presents Heidi as having no social ties, with the exception of a daughter and ex-husband, which makes it too easy to contrast Shimen’s rich community life with Heidi’s rootless cosmopolitanism. His portrayal of Heidi’s daughter Amber, a humorless social-justice warrior, is just an unattractive caricature.

This reviewer, at least, shares many of the book’s convictions and instincts, having been born and grown up with Judaism as a first language. He appreciates a religion that is comfortable in its own skin, even particularistic up to a point, without becoming militant, overly ideological, or xenophobic. He is similarly suspicious of some of the self-righteous posturing that seems to be part of some progressive circles. But he would give much more benefit of the doubt to those who have not chosen the path of communal religion. Sometimes the book’s choice to focus on the advantages of small-group solidarity and the disadvantages of universalism is more of a choice of the author than of reality.

Judaism Straight Up faces another challenge of which Koppel is quite aware. Judaism Straight Up argues for the value of an unself-conscious commitment to religion and community, but it does so by arguing in a self-aware and self-reflective way for the value of un-self-reflective and instinctive membership in tribe and family. In the end there is no second innocence. Reasoning about the value of choosing something undermines the attempt to come to it intuitively. One cannot take an adult education class and learn the instinctiveness of a first language. Koppel’s optimism about the future of Judaism in the future notwithstanding, it is no accident that Shimen passed away several decades ago, and nobody has been born to replace him.

Yoel Finkelman, National Library of Israel


The tales told by Hasidic rebbe Nachman of Braslav (1772-1810) have captured the imagination of many Jews. Professor Lewis (Duke Kunshan University in China) explores the tales and teachings of R. Nachman in the context of both Jewish literature of Eastern Europe, and the intellectual and literary nature and development of Hasidism. He
considers, for example, the responses of various Jews (including Nachman) and Jewish movements to the attempted forced modernization and integration of the Jews to the Russian empire by Czar Alexander I and to the alternative “negotiated emancipation” offered by Napoleon. Dr. Lewis argues that Nachman was very much aware of, and concerned about, the uncertainties confronting Jewry in a time of great changes. These are deep matters and his analysis of Nachman reflects this, trying to avoid potentially misleading simplifications such as, for example, deciding whether or not Nachman was a literary modernist.

Shmuel Ben-Gad,
Gelman Library, George Washington University


This is an historical interpretation of the Palestinian, Muslim, Arab migration to what was to become Palestine-Israel during the period 640 to 1914. There is no clear attempt to objectively survey this historical period since there is little to no effort to include a Palestinian perspective based upon original Arabic sources or historic testimonies. Therefore, what is offered here is a purely Jewish qua Zionist approach to the existence and presence of an Arab population in Palestine-Israel. The author is an Israeli-educated and trained historian who puts forth the argument that Arabs migrated over time from several Muslim areas of the region to what was to become Palestine-Israel. It is argued that Jews, under Roman rule, were the original settlers of the region and endured Muslim domination as a coerced condition. Somewhat controversial is the belief that the idea of a Jewish nation was a Zionist undertaking for purely ideological purposes. Rather, the current Israeli Jewish population, says the author, is the result of conversion of ethnic groups to Judaism from ancient times. This is an interesting historical treatment of the development of the modern State of Israel.

Sanford R. Silverburg,
Catawba College, Salisbury, NC


Sherri Mandell’s words flow beautifully. Already a writer and a teacher of writers, she and her American family made aliyah in 1996. In 2001, her thirteen-year-old son Koby and his friend were brutally murdered by terrorists. She and her spouse created the Koby Mandell Foundation to provide support for Israeli families rebuilding their lives after terrorist attacks. A 2004 memoir, The Blessing of a Broken Heart, won a National Jewish Book Award. She wrote a 2015 book about resilience. She went through training to become a pastoral counselor in a hospital setting in Jerusalem soon after the profession came to Israel. “Reaching for comfort” -- she knows whereof she speaks,

This book suffers from the basic limitation that the patients and their families described must be “fictional composites” to protect their privacy. The trajectory for the points she wants to make seems to be over-simplified, contrived, and transparent (example being encounters with non-Jewish patients and the placements in the book’s chronology). The book is about her omnipresent loss and her own coping, more than her experience with other sufferers; “How I blew it” in the subtitle is a nod to that. For readers fascinated by others’ lives the details she includes are engaging: she and her mother were both cheerleaders; her mother flirted with the male ambulance attendant twenty minutes before she died; her parents’ gravestones quote Liza Minnelli; Greek and Roman mythological allusions speak to her; she found solace in the kabalistic The Palm Tree of Deborah (Tomer Devorah). In the United States, people who are still too raw after trauma are usually not admitted to hospice training, certain kinds of pastoral counseling, or similar programs; the book helps one understand why.

Jonina Duker,
AJL Member


This is a book about the other, the different, the uncanny in the Jewish society of eastern Europe ... Marginal people were consistently ridiculed, mocked, sometimes exoticized, even fetishized; on rare occasions, they were held up as paragons, or even treated as fellow human beings ... The undesirable of Jewish society frequently served as surrogates for the entire Jewish people [to the external society]”. Focusing more on the indigence and pauperism, Stepchildren of the Shtetl is divided
REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR ADULTS

in seven chapters, on Jewish marginality in pre-modern Europe, blind beggars and orphan recruits in the early 19th century Russia, the poorhouse, the cholera wedding, the Jewish idler, madness, and “the Jewish outcast as national icon.” With sturdy contemporary documentation often lacking, the author turns to the literary works of mostly Yiddish writers and to records of the charitable elites, except for two topics: the cholera weddings and madness, exploiting the petitions to Rabbi Elijah Guttmacher of Grodzisk Wielkopolski (1796-1874). “Literature reconstructs the voices we seek, sometimes in extraordinary ways, but ultimately it has its limitations,” as Meir notes in his conclusion to this pioneering work. Includes bibliographical references and an index.

Recommended for large academic library collections only.

Roger S. Kohn, Silver Spring, MD

Green, Menachem Nahum. The Light of the Eyes: Homilies on the Torah. Translated by Arthur Green. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2021. $85.00 (9781503609853); ebook $85.00 (9781503611023).

This is a collection of originally oral sermons by a great early spokesman of that movement [Hasidism], Nahum, of Chernobyl (ca. 1730-ca. 1797), a disciple of both the Ba’al Shem Tov and R. Dov Baer, the maggid of Mezritch, a key member of his circle of disciples, of what is conventionally called the “third generation” of Hasidic leadership. The collected homilies of R. Menahem Nahum represent what is perhaps the boldest and clearest presentation of the legacy of both the BeSHT and the Maggid and their teachings, combined in a distinctive manner, which Green analyzes in a superb hundred pages introduction.

The sermons on the weekly portion of the Torah were delivered in Yiddish, transcribed in Hebrew with “highly limited vocabulary and frequent disregard for rules of syntax or grammar” and the translator took the liberty to use ellipses to replace “excessive repetition; nothing has been deleted for reason of content.” The translation itself is very fluid, accessible, and in excellent English. What makes this translation unique are the footnotes of Arthur Green, which not only give reference to the citations of the Me’or enayim, but provide a modern perspective on the topics addressed in the weekly sermons, creating for the reader the opportunity of a fruitful dialogue with this core text of Hasidism. The romanization of Hebrew terms seems to follow ISO 259 and not the ALA/LC transliteration of Hebrew more frequently used in scholarly publications. Green’s translation is a major contribution to the field of early Hasidism and will make an important text from this Jewish movement more available to a larger audience, despite the high price of the volume. Includes bibliographical references and an index.

Recommended to all readers interested in modern Hasidism.

Roger S. Kohn, Silver Spring, MD


Alexander Hamilton’s life and world are a current fascination for both amateur and professional historians. In this short book, Andrew Porwancher discerns a continuing Jewish connection in Hamilton’s life and associations.

The volume can be seen as a quilt. At the center is a basic biography of Hamilton. It begins with his birth and asserts both direct and indirect relationships with Judaism as a boy in the Caribbean, including his education in the Jewish school on Nevis. The second element is 18th century American Jewish history and its major figures, including Gershom Seixas and Haym Solomon, as well as synagogues (Shearith Israel in New York and Mikveh Israel in Philadelphia). They are linked by Hamilton’s relationships with Jews in various ways throughout the narrative. They are stitched together by American history, including the Revolution, Washington’s administration, and several major court cases involving Jews that he argued. The third thread relates to Hamilton’s comments about Jews and his defense of them in writing throughout his life. Through these themes, the author argues that Hamilton, unlike other Founders, had an especially close relationship and positive attitude toward the Jews throughout his life.

Porwancher has pursued the question of Hamilton’s relationship to Judaism seriously. But his argument is based as much on negative evidence (what is not there) as positive assertions. Ultimately, Hamilton’s connections and statements argue strongly for philo-semitism, but not a personal religious affirmation of Judaism (unlike his wife, Hamilton never joined a church). For these reasons, the book should be considered by academic libraries. Synagogues may decide to steer clear of it. Contains illustrations, notes, and an index.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA

Continued on page 38

Ksawery Pruszynski (1907-1950) a Polish journalist and diplomat, spent five weeks in Mandatory Palestine in 1933, travelling its length and breadth in order to see what the Zionist project was doing there. He came away impressed and even enthusiastic. His book records his meetings with the people he met, ranging from those newly arriving on his very ship, to veteran settlers, and his observations of what was developing there. For example, he did not see the kibbutzim he visited as simply idealistic socialist experiments, but rather as places whose hard working residents adapted to their situations rather than unreflectively accepting abstract Marxist dogmas. He saw that a Jewish state there could become an industrial country in addition to an amazing agricultural success. His analysis of the role of private capital is interesting and his discussion of the three major cities of Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, and Haifa is thought-provoking. It is a book rich in content and commentary. The author regards the Yishuv as having already had a major impact on worldwide Jewry.


While many institutional religions tend to frown on divinatory practices among their adherents, there can be little doubt that many people have employed such practices. Rodriguez-Arribas describes several reasons for the persistence of the phenomenon. Most significantly, people sought to anticipate the future in order to avoid errors in their decisions and to improve their prospects. She points out different attitudes towards the prediction of the future. There was the perspective where nothing could be changed (the *hard* version) and a *soft* version, where there was the possibility of changing the future or at least preparing for it.

This volume comprises a selection of 10 papers (given at a workshop held in Germany in March 2010) which deal mainly with the *soft* version. The papers are presented mostly in chronological order with the first paper providing a theoretical framework for what follows. The editors have restricted the scope of the contributions to post-biblical divination practices on the grounds that there is already much scholarship focused on divination in the Bible. There is also no concentration on the relationship between divination and magic, even though it is undeniable that the two phenomena are often found in combination.

A variety of divination practices are explored, including the use of Aramaic calendars for horoscopes, dream interpretation, physiognomy and bibliomancy (or *gorilot*) i.e., using passages in the Bible to point the way for the diviner. One paper examines a defense of astrology “... as a legitimate, beneficial and required knowledge and practice for Jews.” This defense was articulated by the 11th century Catalan Abraham bar Abīya in a *responsum* addressed to Judah bar Barzillai when the latter supposedly accused bar Abīya of “...the consultation of Chaldeans” in his selection of a date for a wedding.

Maimonides was vigorously opposed to astrology. Yet, in his paper Dov Schwarz contends that Maimonides differentiated between professional divination, (which he branded as astral magic and held in contempt) and popular magic, which he considered experiential and reliant on tradition or the authority of others.

Rodriguez-Arribas considers that the book “… makes an intriguing and variegated display of what divination meant and implied in Jewish cultures.” It is clearly a valuable resource for those studying varieties of divinatory practices as well as those interested in the evolution of Jewish culture through the ages.


Rosenblum, Jordan D. *Rabbinic Drinking: What Beverages Teach Us about Rabbinic Literature*. Oakland; University of California Press, 2020. $95.00 (978052300422); PBK $34.95 (978052300439); ebook $39.95 (9780520971837).

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Randall C. and Anne-Marie Belinfante, *AJL Members*
the book: a thief steals wine and the wine turns into vinegar. Since
wine is more valuable than vinegar, does the thief pay compensa-
tion based on the value of wine or vinegar? The storage of the oral
law is like saving to the “cloud.” People memorize the text and can recall it as needed.

Beverages are used for rituals as well as nourishment. The laws concerning wine are meant to keep us separate from the non-Jews. The separation of meat and milk creates a social boundary. Cheese is not milk and chickens don’t produce milk. However, rabbinic law prohibits consuming cheese and chicken together. In the end, the author encourages those who finish the book to celebrate with a festive drink and return to reading once more.

The book is aimed at those who want to delve into the “sea of Talmud” and examine the laws associated with the production and consumption of beverages in the Talmud from an academic perspective. This book is written for scholars who know little and those who are knowledgeable about rabbinic literature and other Jewish sources. Concepts are explained for the readers who know little about rabbinic literature or other Jewish sources. This book is recommended for personal, research and academic libraries.

Daniel D. Stuhlman, Temple Sholom Library, Chicago, IL


In this volume comparing the religious political parties in Turkey and Israel, Rubin contends that the religion-state relationship can provide deeper or greater democratic political performance and participation. He argues that the notion that only Western-style secular democracies are truly democratic is problematic. This is because the secularization thesis that argues that religion and religious commitment in secular industrialized countries is in terminal decline, and that religion should or must be restricted to the private sphere has many faults.

These include the fact that religious, political, and secular spheres are interdependent and cannot easily be separated, the trajectory of religious commitment around the world has been increasing, not lessening, and that the multiple styles of democratic government do not preclude the participation of religious political parties. The idea that only Western-style secular democracy is the only legitimate, stable, and functioning type is shown to be false, at least in certain aspects. The different chapters in this book highlight the roles and functions of the religious parties in Turkey and Israel and provide a greater understanding of how religious political parties, their members and followers deepen but also challenge democracy and democratic participation.

Rubin traces the trajectory of secularism in the nascent Turkish and Israeli states, and how that impacted the states’ relationship to Islam and Judaism, respectively. Recent history in both these countries illustrates the increasing power of the religious political parties in government and society. Rubin concludes the book by discussing how the two cases, and especially the Turkish case, can be used to provide an example, both positive and negative, for the potential Arab democracies in the Middle East.

This book is recommended for academic libraries looking to expand their collections on politics, religion, democracy, and history in the Middle East and elsewhere.


The book is aimed at those who want to delve into the “sea of Talmud” and examine the laws associated with the production and consumption of beverages in the Talmud from an academic perspective. This book is written for scholars who know little and those who are knowledgeable about rabbinic literature and other Jewish sources. Concepts are explained for the readers who know little about rabbinic literature or other Jewish sources. This book is recommended for personal, research and academic libraries.

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and the slaughterhouse operators), and the emerging power of women in American society.

Seligman first identifies the players in his drama and describes life on the Lower East Side. He then explains the power of monopolies and trusts, and how the meat industry manipulated prices. At the center of the book are the women who led the boycott in the streets and at meetings, forcing change on the existing system. The author explores the anti-beef movement in some detail through the sometimes-violent weeks it lasted; stores were destroyed, families lost their businesses, and boycotters were beaten by the police. There are extensive quotes from many newspapers, including the Jewish press (the Yidishes Tageblatt and Forward) and theuptown Times, Tribune, World and others. Seligman also makes a nod to Rabbi Jacob Joseph, whose funeral became a riot. The author concludes by connecting it to later uprisings in the area and to women’s rising status.

This is a small but important story, and Seligman covers it well. The notes are useful and extensive (the bibliography is much more general), and the author has expanded his vision to include American society at large during the late Progressive Era. While he could have done more (including linking it to political movements), the book is useful and enlightening. It should be in academic libraries; larger synagogues should also consider it.

Included: Chronology. Dramatis Personae, Notes, Further Reading. Index

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA


Tikon Tefilati was published in Hebrew in 2017 in Israel by the same publisher with the same editor. The translator, in her Translator’s Preface, characterizes the book this way: “It is a book that takes the age-old words and movements of the traditional Jewish prayer service and attempts to “carry them over” to the modern worshipper.” The author sits within the Orthodox definition of Judaism, with a deep interest in the Hasidic tradition of individualized prayer directly addressing the Creator. The Creator is The King, but there is intimacy with Him. Rabbi Singer assumes that prayer and praying is a natural aptitude of humans but he wants to expand the idea of prayer beyond the known boundaries of the synagogue and the prayer book.” He provides practical steps to address the Divine and he calls them “recipes” because two people following the same recipe “each one will create a different dish.” Some of his recipes are for the individuals, others for the group. The book is divided in eleven sections, “gateways... each one on a different aspect of prayer.” To introduce each section, Singer provides a citation from one or two books by Nahman of Bratslav (1772-1811) and also from contemporary Israeli poets. The volume is very well designed with blue pages or blue borders and its smaller than usual size (20 cm) will allow it to fit neatly in a tallit bag.

Recommended to all adventurous seekers of the personal and accessible Divine.

Roger S. Kohn
Silver Spring, MD.

Sion, Abraham A. To Whom Was the Promised Land Promised? Some Fundamental Truths About the Arab-Israeli Conflict. Jerusalem: Mazo, 2020. $35 (9781946124838); PBK $24.99 (9781946124753); Kindle ebook $9.95.

This book presents a challenge to those institutions and individual scholars who deny or minimize the Jewish people’s ownership rights over Mandatory Palestine in international law. The author, an emeritus professor of law from Ariel University, insists upon the vital importance of decisions made during and after the First World War. The defeated Ottoman Empire renounced its rights to most of the areas of the Middle East, which it had ruled in, in favor of the allies who had defeated them. Thus the Balfour Declaration, the San Remo Resolution, and the Mandate for Palestine created a new political and legal reality in the Middle East, creating new Arab states in Lebanon, Syria, and Mesopotamia and a Jewish national home in Palestine. Sion explores this history closely (including Britain’s failure to live up to the requirements of the mandate it held over Palestine) and reads the historical documents closely. This is an important contribution to the research and debate concerning international law, the State of Israel, and the Land of Israel.

Shmuel Ben-Gad, Gelman Library, George Washington University

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The snake in the title is one character in the aggadot that Moshe Sokol studies, seven from the Babylonian Talmud and one from the midrash. Sokol, Dean of Touro’s Lander College and Rabbi of the Yavneh Minyan of Flatbush, presents the original text, his translation and a close reading of the tales. While many of these stories have been much studied, Sokol provides fresh insights.

The first three stories deal with R. Eliezer b. Hyrcanus, his youth and early studies, his quarrel with the rabbis and excommunication over the oven of Akhnai, and his death. The fourth chapter continues with the excommunication of Akavya b. Mahelelel. The next set of stories treat R. Yohanan bar Nappaha, his early decision to leave the beit midrash and his return; his relationship with Reish Lakish; and in later life his dealings with R. Kahana. Honi HaMe’aggel’s seventy-year sleep, return, and death is the subject of the last chapter.

This work is not an academic study of the aggadot. Sokol, looking at the finished stories, examines the inner lives, attitudes and motives of the participants, while stressing that we cannot truly understand their inner lives. He is interested in how the text presents these men, and what we can learn from the text. Tending toward a rationalist reading of the text, Sokol sees the more fantastic elements in the stories as metaphor or symbolic or using dream language.

Sokol explores the relationships between rabbis and students and family members. Themes included are the respect owed to a scholar by his student, status, jealousies, pride, misunderstandings, the need to uphold the position of the rabbinate, traditional received interpretation versus innovated rulings, and changes from Palestinian authority to Babylonian scholars.

This book will be of interest to school, yeshiva, and academic libraries with collections in Rabbinics.

**Harvey Sukenic,**
Hebrew College Library, Newton Centre, MA


Ilona Steinman has written a fantastic text on the study of the Jewish book by Christians that addresses a topic that adds an important dimension to both Christian Hebraism and the history of the Jewish book: that of Christian creation of Hebrew books. Using about twenty codices from the turn of the sixteenth century, Steinman successfully utilizes the study of material texts to shed light on how, why, where, and when Christians might have been creating Hebrew books in the course of their studies. A comprehensive overview of Jewish attitudes toward Christian use of their books provides a good introduction to the topic, followed by a discussion of the various Christian scholars who worked in this genre. Steinman also discusses the different uses of Hebrew script in these books, as well as the various genres (grammar, kabbalah, philosophy, etc.) that are represented in this format. Particularly interesting to book historians may be the section on how Christian scribes incorporated their work into existing text styles (such as copying owners’ inscriptions and adding their own names to the end of a long list of Jewish owners or using Jewish date notation for the date of ownership). The only quibble with the book is its format: a large softcover book is unwieldy and difficult to hold, and thus to read. Recommended for libraries interested in Jewish-Christian relations and the history of the book.

**Michelle Chesner,**
Norman E. Alexander Librarian for Jewish Studies, Columbia University; AJL Vice President/President Elect


*A Concise Guide to Mahshava* is part of the Erez series which consists of 5 books written by Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz. (A Concise Guide to the Torah, A Concise Guide to the Sages, A Concise Guide to Mahshava, A Concise Guide to Halakha and Reference Guide to the Talmud). Rabbi Steinsaltz, a prolific Jewish scholar, wrote numerous commentaries on Jewish religious texts. His magnum opus is his monumental 45 volume translation of the Talmud into modern Hebrew. The philosophical work, *A Concise Guide to Mahshava* addresses profound Jewish questions, such as, faith, free will, old age, and the...
soul. Rabbi Steinsaltz brings quotes from scholars who lived in the eighth century up to Jewish scholars of the twentieth century. Sources include the writings of early commentators, such as Rashi, Rambam, and Ibn Ezra. Contemporary thinkers include Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, Rabbi Elhanan Wasserman, and Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak Schneersohn. Short interesting stories that relate to the topic are printed in a purple box that is separated from the main text.

An eighty-two page section called “Biographies” presents a brief biography of each Jewish thinker in the text. A concise explanation of Kabbalah Musar and Hasidism are included in this section as well. This comprehensive part of the book can stand alone as an informative reference tool. An extensive bibliography and a glossary to all the books in the series is found at the end of the book. A Concise Guide to Mahshava is an excellent reference book for patrons who want a brief explanation of important Jewish religious issues. The “Biography” section captures the essence of the figures it examines including dates of birth and death, place of birth, books they wrote, and their contribution to the Jewish community.

Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, OH


The Erez series consists of 5 books written by Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz. (A Concise Guide to the Torah, A Concise Guide to the Sages, A Concise Guide to Mahshava, A Concise Guide to Halakha and Reference Guide to the Talmud). Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz (1937-2020) was one of the leading contemporary Jewish thinkers He was a teacher, philosopher, and writer who greatly influenced and continues to influence the Jewish community. His magnum opus, the monumental translation of the Talmud into modern Hebrew, is studied by both laymen and scholars. A Concise Guide to the Torah, written entirely in English, presents the five Books of Moses in a clear, easily understandable translation.

At the beginning of each parsha is a brief summary of the themes and events in the parsha, printed in italics so it can be easily distinguished from the Torah text. Each parsha is further divided by topic which is introduced by a brief commentary. Ancient maps and illustrations further enhance this volume. For example, a map which traces Jacob’s route when he flees his brother Esau, the probable place where the Israelites crossed the Red Sea during their flight from Egypt, and the cities mentioned by the scouts who spied out the land of Israel augment the text. Also included are illustrations that make the descriptions in the Torah come to life, such as detail of the Temple candelabra, sacrificial portions of a sheep, and arrangement of the Israelite camp in the desert. A comprehensive glossary to the entire series is included at the end of the book.

A Concise Guide to the Torah is an excellent brief introduction to the parsha of the week which can be easily understood by adults, children, or anyone who wants to know the major ideas of the weekly portion read in the synagogue. The book is an especially good reference for anyone who comes late to the synagogue and misses the weekly torah reading.

Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, OH


This memoir, written by the author in his nineties, looks back on a well lived life, as a Holocaust survivor, soldier, scholar, professor and literary figure. He is Distinguished Professor Emeritus in the Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures at Wayne State University, and currently Director of the Harry and Wanda Zekelman International Institute of the Righteous at the Holocaust Memorial Center Zekelman Family Campus. He was born in Germany, and was able to escape Nazi Germany, and emigrate to the United States as a teenager. His immediate and extended family perished in the Holocaust.

In this autobiography, he describes the many chance encounters that impacted his life. The title comes from his father’s profoundly cautionary words, “…we must all resemble invisible ink. Stay hidden until we can re-emerge again and show ourselves as the individuals we are.” The narrative is clearly presented, and holds the reader’s interest. The book includes a section of black and white family photographs. It is a noteworthy addition to resources about the contributions of German Jewish immigrants to the United States. It is recommended for college and university Judaica collections, as well as for Temple and synagogue library collections.

Susan Freiband, Volunteer Synagogue Librarian, Agudas Achim Congregational Library, Alexandria, VA

Continued on page 43

Kay Wilson made aliyah from England and qualified as an Israeli tour guide. Guiding a hike in the Matta Forest, she barely survived a vicious attack by serial antisemitic terrorists on December 10, 2010, while her client and friend, American Kristine Luken, did not. Wilson’s easy-to-read prose works on many levels. She writes with conscious irony and even humor; for example, she uses lyrics from “Over the Rainbow” as chapter epigraphs and allusions (did you know that both composer Harold Arlen and lyricist Yip Harburg were both cantors’ sons?). Her account of a notable day capped by an encounter with Israeli police is not to be missed. Her memoir describes an adult life with a cataclysmic “fault line” that transformed her sense-of-self and identity along with her body, her new mental consciousness, her ability to sleep, her ability to earn a living, her ability to be in the outside world, her social relationships, her dependence on various bureaucracies, and more. Her writing describes her struggles to go on after the devastating event in terms of how it would look to an outside observer and how it felt internally with both severe PTSD — even the sight of trees became a trigger for PTSD symptomology — and physical disabilities.

Also available are her TED talks (for example, “Step By Step, The Idiot’s Guide To Surviving A Machete Attack,” 9 June 2015) and a documentary (“Black Forest,” 2018; please note that the IMDb title listings are not this film). She is a forceful advocate for eradicating the “pay for slay” machinery fueling antisemitic terrorism, funded in part by her own UK government among other nations. Not surprisingly, the book and the author have been ignored by the secular press including the BBC. This is an extraordinary book, well worth purchasing by any library.

Jonia Duker, *AJL Member, USA*


This is Jane Yolen’s thirteenth book of poems for adult readers. She is a master storyteller and well-known author of hundreds of books for children and adults in all genres. This book is divided into three sections: Before (Woman’s Midrashim), The Shoah’s Many Voices, and Mitzvahs and Miracles. The poems are short, mostly less than a page, powerful and arresting. They are presented in a clear, easy to read manner. The acknowledgment section lists the poems that have previously appeared in other sources. The book will be of interest to a wide audience, and is recommended for high school, college and university collections, as well as synagogue, public and community center libraries.

Susan Freiband, *Volunteer Synagogue Librarian, Agudas Achim Congregational Library, Alexandria, VA*


Ziegler’s *Lamentations* is another important contribution to the Maggid Book Studies in Tanach series that focuses on the biblical book of Lamentations. The author states at the onset that she is attempting to present a traditional and literary approach to the book of Lamentations. The book is split into three basic sections. The opening section has four introductory chapters: a basic introduction, a historical introduction, a philosophical and theological introduction dealing with issues of suffering, and one on poetry within the book of Lamentations.

The primary part of the book is a chapter by chapter analysis of the five chapter book of Lamentations. In each chapter, Ziegler provides supplemental textual analysis that encompasses classical and medieval rabbinic commentary, literary and poetic theory, theology, and modern biblical scholarship. All of this provides the reader with an excellent study guide to the book of Lamentations. The experience of using this book alongside the text is like having a master teacher at your side illuminating and expounding upon the biblical work. The volume finishes with three chapters: the consolation within the prophecies of Isaiah, the midrashic work of Eikha Rabbah, and a theological minded chapter on the structure of Lamentations.

Ziegler writes beautifully and this book is highly recommended for anyone studying the book of Lamentations. Like other books in the series, a certain familiarity with the Bible and classical commentators is assumed and a traditional approach to the Bible is closely adhered to. Nonetheless, even those approaching the book with a different set of assumptions will have much to gain from the close reading of the text. This book would be very useful for high school students and older people first reading the Book of Ruth as well as an already educated readership returning to the study of Ruth.

David Tesler, Efrat, Israel
REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR ADULTS

Film


Muranow was a thriving Jewish neighborhood in Warsaw, which in November 1940 turned into part of the Warsaw Ghetto. After completely being destroyed during WWII, the neighborhood was entirely redeveloped with the ruins of its own destruction.

Intertwining personal interviews, animated graphic segments, and original archival footage, this intriguing documentary depicts the life experiences of Moranow’s current residents. Some believe that Moranow is haunted by ‘Jewish ghosts’ from the past and are fascinated by its mystic ‘vibe;’ others find it too ‘heavy’ and move out. In a popular and ‘chic’ café, walls are partially bare, unveiling original bricks and cement, in a sensitive attempt to remind patrons of the local history and respect the life of past inhabitants. One of the interviewees reminds us that the mortar used while rebuilding the neighborhood, was a mixture of rubble and human bones.

As much as the film is about the modern, lively nowadays’ Muranow, it is also a discussion about the Polish, Jewish, and Israeli collective memory and the challenging struggle of these groups with a painful past. The past is present not only in the walls or basements, but also in institutional and public spaces such as the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes and the POLIN Museum of the history of the Polish Jews. Both are eminent locations in Muranow.

Shelach interviews Polish and Israeli historians, and brings to light the strategic political use of Muranow by various groups as they exploit history while advancing their current agendas. Neo-Fascists deliberately march in the neighborhood, chanting “Poland belongs to Poles; Europe belongs to Europeans,” while Jewish youth delegations from the US and Israel participate in a memorial ceremony in front of the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes, telling the narrative of the Holocaust being a justification of contemporary political actions by Israel.

A poignant and thought-provoking work, this documentary would be an important addition to Jewish collections in any academic library, and could be of interest to scholars who deal with collective memory and the teaching of the Holocaust.

Uri Kolodney,
Hebrew, Jewish, and Israel Studies Librarian, Film & Video Librarian, The University of Texas at Austin Libraries,
Austin, TX

Fiction


Rachel Beanland has told a story, based on one she has heard from her family quite often. Using the points of view of multiple characters, some truly drawn and others not so, she turns her family story into so much more than a beach read. The place is Atlantic City, New Jersey and the year is 1934. Author Beanland has researched the place so accurately and writes with such attention to detail, that the reader could hear the seagulls and smell the Coppertone. The tale is told through points of view of the characters with such tenderness that we almost forget that the titular character does not live past chapter 1!

Beanland has a special gift as a writer of getting into the heads of each of her narrators. She also has the ability to show, not tell, the frustrations and frank abrasions that family can create. Nevertheless, her portrayal of faith sustains the family as well as the readers. The author brings the deceased protagonist to life by weaving a tapestry from the recollections of family and friends. When Florence’s swim coach attempts to show what he loved about Florence, his admiration is palpable. “I suppose I loved how brave she was…and capable. There was almost nothing she wouldn’t or couldn’t do...You felt lucky if you got the chance to watch her make a sandwich.”

One overarching theme of the book is the lengths a parent will go to protect a child, even when that is not actually possible. Beanland allows the readers to glimpse the heartache of a parent who tries, in the face of deep pain and fundamental impossibility to protect the unborn generation and to undo errors that may or may not have been of the parent’s own making.

This book is recommended to anyone who has ever had a parent, been a parent or is even considering becoming a parent. Beanland’s ability to reach into the hearts of people she knew and share them with her readers is a gift that she gives to us, and eventually, to her family and herself. Florence Adler swims forever, indeed, and that image shines, even after we turn the last page.

Linda Blasnik,
Librarian, Tycher Library

Continued on page 45

Solomon is a Boston college student residing at Havurat Chaim, a Carlbach-like Jewish commune, during the late 1960s through early 1970s. At a time when “America was a crazy, exploding place,” he was one of thousands exploring their religion, in various permutations, and seeking a kind of spiritual haven. He invites the readers for a Shabbat inside the ramshackle house, accompanying each meal with youthful recollections. The novel, a fictionalized account of the author’s experiences, was originally a manuscript composed in 1978, and recently scanned onto a PDF for publication. It was, by his own admission, in need of editing—misspelled words, faulty punctuation—and many scenes tend to be dialogue-heavy. Nevertheless, the novel is entertaining, some tales laugh-aloud funny and borderline raunchy—e.g. lighting up joints during Passover and wondering if the wrapping papers are chametz.

The other characters—fellow students, ex-Orthodox, drifters, and hippies—are, in a word, wacky, but probably relatable to the Woodstock Generation. Group activities consist of egalitarian prayer services (seated on the floor), vegan dinners, and sex, drugs, and rock ’n roll. Judaic practice is an eclectic mix of ritual, Torah commentary, Kabbalah, Eastern philosophy, and leftist doctrine (a copy of Marx is found in a glove compartment). The author depicts this motley crew, including himself, as earnest yet confused, very much part of a nation undergoing social, cultural, and political upheaval. More development as to these people’s lives post-commune might have been helpful, as they seem to simply move on. The author himself, following Havdalah, bids his readers “Gute Voch” and hauntingly asks them to remember him, along with an era that is fading. Yet this era might have possibly inspired future Jewish outreach movements. For adult readers; liberal synagogues.

Hallie Cantor,
Acquisitions Associate, Yeshiva University, NY
DON’T LET QUARANTINE LOCK YOU DOWN!
More access to more information, right at your fingertips

In “normal” times, we would have returned to school and resumed library services following proven procedures: updating calendars, uploading summer acquisitions, restarting student and teacher directories and organizing library facilities. The sudden March closings led to virtual learning, and now to diverse school and learning strategies. “Quarantine” blocked access to familiar “routes” we all frequently used to bring learning, cultural and recreational reading resources to the community members we serve. Quite suddenly, those wanting access to these resources were and might still be unable to come to us.

These developments prompted us to consult librarians and regional administrators, to help the OPALS community adapt to these changing circumstances.

New experiences and technological outcomes have been released incrementally this past summer and will continue to be released throughout the fall.

This release consists of several documents which can be found on our help page:

- School library services guide: facts, challenges & procedures for “new normal”
- Services quarantine management utility instructions
- Opals self-service requests & management updates

Please visit opalsinfo.net/covidhelp
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*The AJL Newsletter* (Irene Levin-Wixman z”l, founding editor) was published in print from 1979 to 2010 by the Association of Jewish Libraries to inform members about AJL activities and issues related to Judaica libraries. From January 2011 through August 2019 it was split into two separate electronic publications — the *AJL News* and the *AJL Reviews*. As of September 2019 it is published digitally as *AJL News and Reviews*. Receipt of this publication is one of the benefits of membership. Please see the AJL website at http://www.jewishlibraries.org for membership rates.

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