The Jews of Corfu: Between the Adriatic and the Ionian

By Michelle Margolis, AJL President; Norman E. Alexander Librarian for Jewish Studies, Columbia University Libraries

In 1933, Professor Salo Baron orchestrated the purchase of about 700 manuscripts for Columbia University from his old friend, David Fraenkel, a bookseller in Vienna looking to move to the United States. In the Report of the Librarian for 1933, Roger Howson described the collection in depth, giving special notice to a particular subset of materials:

One special part of the Miller collection that has its own interest is a section that covers Jewish communal life in Greece from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. The printed catalogue of this section lists eighty manuscripts and forty printed volumes.

David Fraenkel knew this material was unique, and actually published a separate catalog (Le-korot Yiśrael be-malkhut Yavan : reshimat sefarim...uve-so-fab reshimat ba-pay-tanim ve-ha-piyutim shebha-Mahzor minbag Korfu = Zur Geschichte der Juden in Griechenland: Katalog 72.) to describe the items in this collection, which included over 20 ketubbot, illuminated manuscripts and community record books, books in Greek and Judeo-Greek, and much more.

Once the collection arrived at Columbia, Salo Baron, recognizing its importance for research, wrote a number of articles on the Jews of Corfu over the course of the next ten years. Baron also included a section on Corfu in his monumental Social and Religious History of the Jews, with information there drawn from Columbia's collections.

When I arrived at Columbia, I was fascinated by the color and beauty of the illustrated ketubbot from Corfu, as well as the many stories told in the various manuscripts from the area — told in Hebrew, Italian, and Greek. At the same time, I learned that the Jewish Theological Seminary, just a few blocks away, also held a large collection of materials on the Corfu communities. Looking at KTIV: The International Database of Hebrew Manuscripts,
it seemed that the majority of manuscripts relating to the Jews of Corfu were held in Morningside Heights in New York. The time thus seemed ripe for a joint exhibition between the two institutions that could bring the histories of this Greek island to a broader public.

After many delays due to construction at JTS and the Covid-19 pandemic, the exhibition, “Between the Adriatic and the Ionian: The Jews of Corfu” opened on August 22, 2022 at Columbia’s Chang Gallery in its Rare Book and Manuscript Library and in the Jewish Theological Seminary’s newly reopened Library, and features forty items from the 15th to the 20th centuries between the two locations.

The exhibit features a total of ten illuminated ketubbot, eight from Columbia and two from JTS, many showing a Venetian influence in their art. Also on display are communal records and prayer books, some illuminated. Particularly notable are medical diplomas for two Jews living in Corfu, and an illustrated document on parchment celebrating the rights of the Italian community of the island. One document records the many discussions over whether the Jews of Corfu, then under the jurisdiction of Venice, should be required to wear the yellow badge compelled on their coreligionists in Venice, while another documents discussions around the proposed expulsion of the Corfu Jews.

Perhaps due to the unique liturgy of the Jews in Corfu, manuscript production of liturgical books continued well into the 17th and 18th centuries. These manuscripts include holiday prayer books (mahzazorim), penitential prayers (selihot), and poetry for different occasions. Also highlighted in the exhibition are books and manuscripts that discuss a major controversy that erupted in Corfu in the mid-18th century over the particular style of singing the Shema prayer in the Italian community.

A formal opening for the exhibition took place on the evening of September 7, beginning at Columbia and continuing to JTS (there are eight blocks between the two institutions). A digital version of the exhibition launched in early September.

To Build a New Home: Celebrating the Jewish Wedding

By David Kraemer, Joseph J. and Dora Abbell Librarian, Jewish Theological Seminary

In May, 2022, the Library of JTS took a major step toward its full post-construction re-opening: the celebration of the opening of its inaugural exhibit in its new Dorothy T. Goldman Exhibition Gallery, “To Build a New Home: Celebrating the Jewish Wedding.” After years of dreaming about new audiences who might be inspired by the Library’s exceptional rare collections, further years of demolition and construction, and more than two more years of delays caused by the pandemic, we were finally where we wanted to be: offering a broader audience an inspirational view of materials relating to Jewish weddings, in an exhibit full of unexpected discoveries and surprises.

Our choice of the theme for our first exhibit was an obvious one. Not only did “building a new home” offer an irresistible double entendre, but ketubbah, an obvious center of any exhibit on Jewish weddings, are among the most beautiful pieces in our collections. This was a match made in heaven!

But this was not a ketubbah exhibit, however prominently ketubbah would feature in what we chose. The depth and range of our holdings made it possible for us to present a vast range of materials relating to Jewish weddings, from the twelfth century to the twentieth, from Cairo and Ukraine to New York, from Ketubah and wedding poems to provocative, unexpected pre-nuptial agreements.

Several themes defined the show, including the continuity of traditions, on the one hand, and creative adaptation of the cultures of neighbors, on the other. In two ketubbah from the Muslim world — a twelfth century decorated ketubbah from Cairo and an 18th century ketubbah from Yemen — visitors could witness the persistence of traditions of poetic quotation of verses from scripture in ketubbah decoration over the course of centuries. Other ketubbah from Italy illustrated the surprising and even shocking “quotation” of “pagan” images from the surrounding culture. One ketubbah, from Mantua (1689) even featured explicit images of God in its illustrations, a rather surprising expression in a tradition that, from the very beginning, forbade such images.

As these examples illustrate, items for this exhibit were chosen for the surprising stories they told. The JTS Library has, in its collections, more than six-hundred ketubbah (a comprehensive catalog of this collection is being published this fall). How could we choose between them for this exhibit? The answer, already
implicit in what we have said above, is in their capability to surprise and delight. These criteria explain not just the ketubbot we chose to show, but our choice of all the items featured in the exhibit.

For example, we displayed our very important manuscript of the Mahzor Vitry (1204) because of the provocative wedding poem it records. The poem is composed in two languages — Hebrew and French — woven together, line after line. Read separately, the French poem is a mildly suggestive, mostly romantic vision of the newly married couple and their relationship. The Hebrew poem, however — if read for its double entendre — is a bawdy, sexually explicit poem about the sexual conquest of the bride by the groom on their wedding night. What explains the difference between the two texts? Jewish women living in medieval France spoke and understood French, and the romantic French poem was intended for them. But they had little Hebraic education, so they would not have understood the Hebrew poem, which was for the entertainment of the men. However much things change, they also stay the same.

Another example relates to the development of the custom of marrying under a “huppah” — a free-standing wedding canopy. The word “huppah” is in its capability to surprise and delight of visitors — for years to come. We invite you to visit us and explore our collections. We are confident you won’t be disappointed.

AJL Announces Holiday Highlights Titles For Fall 2022

The Association of Jewish Libraries announced in August 2022 that nine titles were selected for its seasonal AJL Holiday Highlights list, celebrating Shabbat, Rosh Hashanah, Sukkot, and Hanukkah, as well as a story that honors the full year of Jewish holidays. In addition, this was the first Holiday Highlights list to include a book for young adults. These titles are AJL’s picks for the best Jewish holiday children’s and teen books of Fall 2022. Titles that are selected as Holiday Highlights exemplify the highest standards of authentic Jewish representation and holiday spirit in both writing and illustration. A committee of expert judges recommends these books for use by families, in schools, and in libraries. Holiday Highlights titles are named twice a year, for the spring and fall publishing seasons. An annotated list of the Fall 2022 AJL Holiday Highlights can be found HERE.

For a celebration of Jewish holidays year round, the committee recognized *Apples, Apples, All Year Round: A Celebration of Jewish Holidays* by Barbara Bietz and June Sobel, illustrated by Ruth Waters, published by Apples & Honey Press. The committee selected two picture books about Shabbat: *A Synagogue Just Like Home* by Alice Blumenthal McGinty, illustrated by Laurel Molk; and *Shoshi’s Shabbat* by Caryn Yacowitz, illustrated by Kevin Hawkes, both published by Candlewick Press.

Two picture books about Rosh Hashanah were named to the list: *Miriam and the Sasquatch* by Eric A. Kimmel, illustrated by Tamara Anegon, published by Apples & Honey Press; and *Measuring a Year: A Rosh Hashanah Story* by Linda Elovitz Marshall, illustrated by Zara González Hoang, published by Abrams Books.

Two picture books celebrating *Sukkot* were listed as well: *The Stars Will Be My Nightlight: A Sukkot Story* by Jen Halpern, illustrated by Chiara Fedele, published by Kar-Ben Publishing; and *The Very Best Sukkah: A Story from Uganda* by Shoshana Nambi, illustrated by Moran Yoge, published by Kalaniot Books.

In celebration of Hanukkah, the committee listed one picture book and one young adult novel: *Hanukkah in Little Havana* by Julie Anna Blank, illustrated by Carlos Vélez Aguilera, and *The Very Best Sukkah: A Story from Uganda* by Shoshana Nambi, illustrated by Moran Yoge, published by Kalaniot Books.

In the illustrations of several early printed books, from the 16th to the 18th centuries, we see the development and standardization of this custom, the creation of a definitive Jewish wedding tradition that was once anything but traditional. As the illustrations show, the “huppah” (the word originally referred, in the Talmud, to the bridal chamber to which the couple would retire after the wedding for their first relations) began modestly, in only one corner of Ashkenaz. It spread and became standard slowly, and only in the Ashkenazi world. The huppah as “the” symbol of a Jewish wedding is a late development, one that shows the creativity and adaptability of Jewish practice through time.

Like any rich exhibit, there are many other stories this exhibit told, including the adaptations of Jewish tradition and law to sensibilities of the twentieth (the status of women) and even twenty-first centuries (with new customs for the marriages of same-sex couples). This exhibit set a high bar for future exhibits in the JTS Library gallery, and we hope to maintain this standard — to the surprise and delight of visitors — for years to come. We invite you to visit us and explore our collections. We are confident you won’t be disappointed.

*Continued on page 5*
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published by Kar-Ben Publishing; and *Eight Nights of Flirting* by Hannah Reynolds, published by Razorbill.

AJL’s Holiday Highlights judges are experts in their field: Robbin Friedman is the head of children’s services at the Chappaqua Library in Chappaqua, NY. She has served on ALSC’s Newbery committee, written for School Library Journal, *The Horn Book* and *Guessing Geisel*, and taught Hebrew school once upon a time. Amy Lilien-Harper is the head of the children’s library at the Wilton Library Association in Wilton, Connecticut. She has been a professional children’s librarian since 1995. She has served on the Newbery committee, the Caldecott committee and the ALA Notable children’s recordings committees. She reviews picture books for School Library Journal, and has served four times on the Nutmeg Committee, which chooses books for the Connecticut Children’s choice awards. Sylvie Shaffer is the PreK-8 librarian at the Capitol Hill Day School in Washington, DC and is active in several overlapping kidlit-focused communities including ALSC, YALSA, and Capitol Choices. Sylvie served on AJL’s 2019 and 2020 Sydney Taylor Book Awards as well as on ALSC’s 2018 Geisel Committee.

**Heidi Rabinowitz & Susan Kusel Co-Chairs, *AJL Holiday Highlights Committee***

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**Solving a Mystery at the Temple Sinai Library**

By Mitch Miller, Library Volunteer, Temple Sinai DC

There are mystery books at the library at Temple Sinai in Washington, D.C. but not any which are mysteries in and of themselves. This all changed when Sue Levine, library committee chairperson, discovered a partially obscured treasure trove of some four hundred books written in Hebrew. What the titles were, who were the authors, and what was their significance was a mystery Sue and librarian Ruth Polk set out to solve.

After some initial investigation it became clear that some of the books were written in Hebrew and others in Yiddish. Realizing that professional help in deciphering these books was required, Ruth contacted the Yiddish Book Center (YBC) in Amherst, MA. The Yiddish Book Center is a cultural institution dedicated to the preservation of books in the Yiddish language, as well as the culture and history those books represent. The Center is both a repository for these books as well as a place where individuals can purchase books and reprints.

Every fall, the Yiddish Book Center welcomes a select group of recent college graduates who spend the following year working as full-time staff members, gaining valuable professional experience in Yiddish language and Jewish cultural work through the Center’s Fellowship Program. One of those fellows this year is Emily Mazza.

Emily is a recent graduate of Smith College who began her study of Yiddish at the YBC while an undergraduate. She has taught as a Fulbright fellow in Lithuania and completed her MA in comparative history with a specialization in Jewish studies and archives at Central European University. Fortunately for us, she was in Washington this past December and agreed to carve out some time to visit the Temple and evaluate our collection.

On the morning of December 27, Emily arrived at the Temple brimming with energy and enthusiasm. She efficiently reviewed the books and shared her discoveries along the way: a poetry collection published in Warsaw, books from the late 1800s, a nicely illustrated children’s book, a collection of machzors (prayer books containing prayers for the major holidays), and volumes written by Sholem Aleichem, I. L. Perez, as well as lesser-known Yiddish authors. Also hidden in the collection were a New Testament written in Cyrillic, two Ladino haggadot, and even a magazine with a picture of President Kennedy on the cover. She found striking examples of book plates from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which are of interest to the YBC. All in all, Emily packed up 52 books which she took back with her to the YBC.

Although the YBC does not maintain a library of Hebrew books, Emily graciously helped us in our plan to offer these books to a new Yeshiva that is opening in our area. She identified and labeled books that would be of interest to them.

Most gratifying to Sue, Ruth, and all the members of the library committee is our ability to find a home for many of these “orphans.” What binds all of us on the committee is our love of books. Once opened, a book springs to life. The thoughts, ideas, and stories which lay dormant within the covers suddenly are awakened with just the touch of a finger. And to know that these books written in languages we can’t read will find recipients who can and will read them makes our efforts all the more worthwhile.

To find out how to donate books to the Yiddish Book Center, visit https://www.yiddishbookcenter.org/collections/digital-yiddish-library/how-donate-books. There are instructions about what types of materials the Yiddish Book Center accepts, how to pack the books yourself, and how to connect with a zamler, a volunteer, who can come review your collection and help you identify and ship the books.
Seven Questions With …
Award Winning Illustrator and Author, Sean Rubin!

AJL News and Review: Editor-in-Chief Sally Stieglitz was delighted to chat with illustrator Sean Rubin about his art, life, and work. Sean studied art and archeology at Princeton University. Originally from Brooklyn, Sean and his family currently live in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Bolivar (Archaia, 2017), the first book both written and illustrated by Sean, received three starred reviews and was nominated for an Eisner award, an ELG, and a Ringo award and also led to a nomination for Sean for the 2018 Russ Manning Award for Most Promising Newcomer, a comics industry honor.

Sean is also an illustrator for the NY Times best-selling Redwall Series; The Astronaut Who Painted The Moon (Scholastic, 2019); and The Passover Guest, (Neal Porter Books/Holiday House 2021), which won the 2022 Sydney Taylor Book Award. This Very Tree (Holt, 2021) was his first self-authored picture book.

AJL: Congratulations on winning the 2021 Sydney Taylor Book Award for The Passover Guest, which was authored by AJL’s own Susan Kusel! Can you tell us about the process of creating that work? Was it collaborative?

SR: Thank you! Despite the usual practice of the author and illustrator of a picture book not talking while the illustrations are being made, Susan and I collaborated quite a bit. She shared her research with me — nice to be working with a librarian — and generally helped me realize the DC Jewish community in the 1930s with as much faithfulness as possible. Any inaccuracies, and blue cats, are entirely my fault.

AJL: Can you share what role, if any, that libraries played in your childhood? Were you a reader then?

SR: I grew up in Brooklyn in the late 80s and early 90s, and I remember the local library as being one of the few places in the city where my parents felt comfortable letting me out of their sight. We were members of RIF, and I spent a lot of time pulling DK illustrated dictionaries and reading stacks of weird nonfiction books, like a series about the Universal monster movies. And comics collections!

AJL: We’re also interested in learning about how you came to be an illustrator? What was the role of the arts for you growing up?

SR: Like many kids, I liked to draw when I was growing up. I think the difference is I just didn’t stop. Drawing characters from books was part of that. My mother had studied art history in school and had a substantial library of art history books at home, and took the family to museums, so art was both important and always around. I had an inkling illustration might be a fun career, but what really pushed me in this direction was Brian Jacques seeing my art at one of his book signings and asking me to start working with him, for Redwall projects.

AJL: How does being Jewish inform your work, which prior to The Passover Guest, was not topically Jewish?

SR: Jewish representation has been in my work since Bolivar, and so far as I know, Bolivar Eats New York is the only picture book on the market to include detailed depictions and explanations of both kosher delis and appetizer stores. Jewish people, places, and yes, food, are part of my world, so it’s only natural to include them in the books I make. Hopefully, this also brings Jewishness into the world of families that may not otherwise encounter it.

AJL: With This Very Tree: A Story of 9/11, Resilience, and Regrowth (Henry Holt and Co, 2021), you were both author and illustrator... was that an easier or harder process?

SR: The process is very different. In some ways illustrating another author’s manuscript is easier because there’s less decision-making. The challenge becomes working in a set of constraints that the author and editor have created. When you’re illustrating your own work, there’s more freedom, but that also means it can be difficult to know when to settle on an idea.

AJL: What picture books do you read to your own children and do you select them because you loved them as a child, because they resonate now, or for another reason?

SR: We do read picture books, but my kids gravitated towards comics — comic books, graphic novels, and newspaper comics collections — pretty early on, just as I did. The hundreds of comics in our house may have had something to do with that. We’ve developed a shared world of Calvin and Hobbes, Uncle Scrooge, Tin Tin, and now Silver Age Marvel superheroes.

AJL: We always want to ask, what are you reading now? Any recommendations for us?

SR: I listen to audiobooks while I draw — right now I’m in the middle of The Dawn of Everything by David Graeber and David Wengrow. I’m also on a steady diet of Second Temple Judaism books that I check out from the UVA library, which I admit is a funny habit for an illustrator.

Thank you to Sean Rubin for sharing his time and insights with AJL News and Reviews! For more information on Sean’s work, visit his website seanrubin.com.

Continued on page 6
The Book of Life: How A Podcast About Jewish Kidlit (Mostly) Came to Be
Heidi Rabinowitz, AJL Member Relations Chair

When I finished my term as chair of the Sydney Taylor Book Award committee in 2005, I was casting about for another project. Podcasting was a new art form so I dived in and taught myself how to do it. I had a tiny in-ear microphone that I used to record phone calls, so the sound quality was pretty rough, but I was immediately hooked by the fun of getting to converse with authors and the craft of editing audio.

My model was NPR, so my early episodes had multiple segments. The very first episode, back in December 2005, included Eric Kimmel talking about Hershel and the Hanukkah Goblins and Rebecca Tova Ben-Tzvi talking about Four Sides, Eight Nights: A New Spin on Hanukkah, along with “local celebrities” from my own Congregation B’nai Israel. I’d met Eric at that year’s AJL conference (“convention” at the time) because he’d won a Sydney Taylor Honor for Wonders and Miracles AND been named Body-of-Work Award winner. Rebecca had been a colleague of mine at the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh before I became a synagogue librarian. All past episodes are still available at BookOfLifePodcast.com and you can listen to that very first episode HERE.

My goal with the podcast was to bring more attention to the materials in my synagogue library by sharing their back stories. In recent years I’ve focused mostly on Jewish kidlit, which is my main love both personally and professionally. In fact, I created the Jewish Kidlit Mavens group on Facebook (with Susan Kusel’s help) under the umbrella of The Book of Life as a way to build more community around the genre of Jewish children’s literature. The group has over 1200 members now, so it seems to have worked!

Ordinarily, I produce one podcast episode per month, interspersed with additional non-audio blog posts at BookOfLifePodcast.com. Sometimes I throw in a few extras, especially when I have a special project going on like the Books in the Time of Coronavirus episodes that helped Spring 2020.

Artifacts of Orthodox Jewish Childhoods
Personal and Critical Essays

Discover frum female heroes in Haredi fiction, a visual guide to modesty, the power and pathos of parodies, cartoons with an ethical message, the courageous creativity of camp songs, and personal accounts of invisibility, heresy, and imagination. No two essays are alike.

“Bernstein and the contributors show us the diversity of childhoods and the diversity of Jewish Orthodoxies. Highly recommended!”
—Ayala Fader, author, Hidden Heretics: Jewish Doubt in the Digital Age

An Angel Called Truth
& Other Tales from the Torah

A collection of funny, engaging micro-tales for each of the portions of the Torah and one for each of the Jewish festivals as well, told from the perspective of young people who feature in the Biblical narrative, in classic Rabbinic commentary, or just made up for this book.

“A delightful, accessible, engaging introduction to midrash for kids. I know it’ll be in heavy rotation in my home; I imagine yours, too.
—Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg, author, Nurture the Wow and On Repentance and Repair

Expecting Jewish!
A Millennial Mom’s Practical Guide

From conception to birth to newborn days, Expecting Jewish! is the best resource for practical advice and helpful insight on preparing for motherhood from a Jewish perspective.

Covering everything from the essentials of bris and baby-name planning to the mysticism of the mikvah, Expecting Jewish! is a guide for infusing Jewish customs and wisdom into each stage of the parenthood journey.

Expecting Jewish!
A Millennial Mom’s Practical Guide

As a Millennial mom, I was faced with the daunting task of preparing for motherhood from a Jewish perspective. Expecting Jewish! is a comprehensive guide that covers everything from the essentials of bris and baby-name planning to the mysticism of the mikvah, helping parents infuse Jewish customs and wisdom into each stage of the parenthood journey.

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AJL members save 10% with coupon code “AJL”
BenYehudaPress.com
Jewish books whose launch events were canceled, or the Mitzvah of Voting 3-part series in which authors encouraged listeners to vote.

The most high profile guest I’ve had was probably Pulitzer Prize winner Geraldine Brooks, talking about People of the Book. I had a particularly moving conversation with Theodore Bikel’s widow Aimee about his posthumous book The City of Light. A few episodes with unusual formats include a video episode with artist Patricia Portillo (who knitted me an incredible Simms Taback doll), and a call-in show with Pamela Ehrenberg in which we tried to answer the question “what makes a book Jewish?” My most frequent guest is my friend and AJL colleague Susan Kusel, who’s been on the show seven times and counting(!), as Sydney Taylor Book Award chair (2018, 2019), Highlights Foundation panelist, Sydney Taylor Shmooze mock award blog partner, author of The Passover Guest and then Sydney Taylor winner for same, and co-founder of AJL’s Holiday Highlights recommended reading list committee. And my kvetchiest episode is surely the spontaneous interview that took place at the 2016 AJL conference when Rachel Kamin and Kathy Bloomfield vented their feelings about Shmelf the Hanukkah Elf.

The 3-minute trailer on the podcast’s About page gives a great sense of the show’s flavor with funny and heartfelt quotes from many guests. Other helpful parts of the web page include Listen (a how-to), Read (links to booklists), Shop (buy books and support the show), and most importantly Justice, a list of resources to help listeners fight antisemitism. A For Guests section explains how to submit your work for coverage consideration.

The Book of Life podcast has been going for 17 years now and I expect to keep going until I drop. It’s been a delight to mentor Sheryl Stahl in the creation of AJL’s Nice Jewish Books podcast about fiction for adults, to have the honor of promoting activism with my Tikun Olam Time segments, and to do live interviews at all sorts of conferences from AJL to Book Expo to Limmud to Podcasters Across Borders. If you’re not already a listener, I hope you’ll give the show a try and share your thoughts about it on The Book of Life Facebook page or at bookoflifepodcast@gmail.com. Thanks for listening, and Happy Reading!

Who Knows Four?

Kathy Bloomfield, AJL Past President!

Tell us about your best experience in AJL?

Of course, my best experience in AJL was serving as AJL President for the past two years. It was an honor, and I am very proud of all that the Board and Council accomplished.

My most MEMORABLE experience, however, would have to be introducing Dr. Ruth Westheimer during the AJL Conference in New York. Dr. Ruth is a true celebrity, as well as a brilliant and delightful person.

Do you have favorite Jewish books?

Yes! Hershel and the Hanukkah Goblin by Eric Kimmel with illustrations by Trina Schart Hyman is always at the top of my list.

I also love, and often recommend, As a Driven Leaf by Milton Steinberg.

Are apples and honey or another sweet food going to be on your table for sweet New Year?

Definitely apples and honey, along with raisin challah and possibly apple strudel, will be on our holiday table. We will be celebrating the New Year in Austin, Texas where a dear friend of mine is the rabbi at a synagogue there, so there will also be barbecue somewhere on the menu.

What is your vision for the future of AJL?

My vision of AJL is an international, professional organization with thousands of members, and one that has an endowment that underwrites all of its book awards and student scholarships while also supporting our members’ attendance at our annual conferences.

From the Editor

dear Safranim,

In this autumn issue of AJL News and Reviews, I am delighted to feature a terrific article by AJL president Michelle Margolis on the new Columbia University/JTS exhibit of ketubbot from Corfu. Bonus!: It is followed by a companion piece by David Kraemer about JTS’ previous exhibit, “To Build a Home.” Family and home seem just right as our focus this fall and these two articles shine a light on important Judaica exhibits.

We also have a great article on a library mystery written by Mitch Miller, a library volunteer at Temple Sinai in Washington, D.C. What a great story and thanks to Ruth Polk, Temple Sinai Librarian, for bringing it to us.

Along with chapter chatter and member news, we have interviews as well! Thank you to award winning illustrator Sean Rubin for sharing his time and insights in “Seven Questions With…” and to AJL Past President Kathy Bloomfield for telling us “Who Knows Four?” AJL Member Relations Chair Heidi Rabinowitz writes about the creation of “The Book of Life” podcast and also shares the recent Holiday Highlights list. Of course, we have reviews of the latest in children’s, teen, and adult books as well!

Please feel free to reach out to me about News and Reviews. I enjoy hearing your feedback and suggestions.

Shana tova,

Sally
Chapter Chatter

New York Metropolitan Area (NYMA)
Remote from NYC: Historical Jewish Press Project

by HALLIE CANTOR,
Acquisitions Associate, Yeshiva University, NY

On Wednesday, May 4, the New York Metropolitan Area (NYMA) chapter held “The Historical Jewish Press Project: Presenting Phase V.” The Zoom session, moderated by NYMA president Rina Krautwirth, featured three speakers who are completing the fifth stage of a joint project: digitization of Jewish-American newspapers.

MARLI & Beyond

The first speaker, Michelle Chesner—Norman E. Alexander Librarian for Jewish Studies, Columbia University—discussed the project’s three-way inception by herself, Steve Corrsin, former New York Public Library Dorot Chair, and Evelyn Ehrlich, formerly of New York University, in conjunction with the Jewish Historical Press at the National Library in Jerusalem. In 2010 Evelyn asked the NLI to create a scoping report on requested materials for Jewish Studies. The most desired were Yiddish-language newspapers. Evelyn, herself involved in Yiddish studies, was intrigued: apparently these newspapers were viewed as “deep desiderata”—Forverts (Forward), Morgan Journal International (International Morning Journal), Der Tag (The Day), and Yiddische Tageblatt (Jewish Daily)—and were already undergoing preservation.

During a 2012 conference on digitization at Manhattan’s Center for Jewish History (CJH), the question was asked: “Why are institutions giving their newspapers to vendors to digitize, then sell back to us at insane prices?” Consequently, Columbia’s Butler Library, NYU’s Bobst Library, and the New York Public Library decided to pool their resources. The Manhattan Research Libraries Initiative (MARLI), a larger endeavor by the library systems of their respective institutions, allowed not only cooperation among libraries but extension of borrowing privileges to students and scholars. Funding made newspapers available in perpetuity.

In 2013 the three institutions partnered with the Jewish Historical Press Project, which is now ending its fifth phase. Selecting the newspapers, Michelle explained, “We looked at titles not already available in digital format” to avoid duplication or co-option of titles not already included in other digital plans. Those selected ideally had microfilms or master negatives already owned by the NYPL, which sent copies among its vast collection to Jerusalem to be digitized.

Because titles had to be in the public domain, year 1923 was made the deadline. American-Jewish historian and professor Jonathan Sarna, who was a member of the advisory board, provided a list of the “Top 10” English-language newspapers. Eventually, however, the need to diversify in topic, theme, and language led to the representation of newspapers in other than English.

“It’s exciting to see how many have been added to the Jewish Historical Press Project,” Michelle gushed.

Broader Scope

For Lyudmila Sholokhova—Curator of the Dorot Jewish Collection, NYPL—this project was one of her first at NYPL. And she is already amazed at its scope. Throughout phases I-IV, approximately 700,000 pages were digitized—totaling 21 periodicals.

Like Michelle, Lyudmila considered copyright issues, consulted with an advisory board, and reviewed selections. In 2021, it was brought to her attention that 200 reels of the most popular selections, including Der Tog (The Day) and Der Morgen-Zshurnal (The Jewish Morning Journal), had been affected by the “vinegar syndrome.” Being not easily replaceable, they were moved to a certain area in the stacks where the other microfilms with similar issues are located. The librarians continued to serve the reels to the patrons with precautions.

Meanwhile, Lyudmila discussed the issue with today’s other two speakers, and the group agreed that it would be important to prioritize digitization of these titles. Their request was met with complete understanding by the National Library of Israel.

The National Library was kind in terms of not just prioritizing, but making it possible for patrons to do research,” Lyudmila remarked. This included patrons from all walks of life and all interests. “There were instances when patrons requested pages from the 1960s, and the NLI went ahead and digitized these years for us to accommodate these particular requests,” she added.

Although the group had planned some 25 new newspapers to be digitized in the Phase V, the actual number could be smaller, because of very large runs of Der Tog and Der Morgen-Zshurnal. However, the total projected amount of pages—approximately 300,000—will be the same. The remaining titles will be carried over and digitized in the following, sixth phase of the Project.

Digitizing Der Tog and Der Morgen Zshurnal would be a milestone, since along with Forverts, these New York-based Yiddish daily newspapers are essential for understanding the American-Jewish history of the 20th century.

“Walking” Tour

Showing the work already done, Guy Burak—Librarian for Middle Eastern, Islamic, and Jewish Studies, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, NYU—lauded the careful attention paid by the NLI to quality control. Texts and images, scanned through optical character recognition (OCR), may vary according to script, but accuracy is generally high, thanks to NLI’s tight standards. Newspapers are spot-checked, even to the finest detail, ensuring that everything is correct.

“The combination of robust OCR and metadata allows getting ready to the level of addresses,” Guy remarked. Viewers, for example, can do a “walking tour” of Ladino communities.

A strong OCR made the platform powerful for answering historical questions. Newspapers, which have been digitized in their entirety, appeal to different researchers for different reasons—some because of ads, others because of articles.

What does Guy find fascinating? The press’ synoptic view of
events on a given day, “what different newspapers in different parts of the world had to say about certain events.” One example was the reception of poet Bialik in the Jewish world.

“Students love it,” Guy said, “because you can see how the American press, Palestinian press, etc., responded to the same issue.”

He displayed features and search engines. Newspapers can be narrowed down to a specific country or language, although the default setting is the regional language and years of publication. A timeline can filter the search for an event, of particular use for genealogists.

In addition, ads and articles can be downloaded as PDFs.

“The interesting thing about OCR text,” Guy explained, “is a box on display where you can actually see the text as a text—not just an article. It can be cut and pasted to a Word document or any other software.”

The database is far from complete. There are gaps in years, which staff is trying to fill in. And there are always improvements. Basically, staff keep making changes.

“We’re in conversation with the NLI,” Guy explained, “to get metadata for individual titles so we can load them to our catalogs and do work that is complicated.”

Nevertheless, he added, “If there is a will, there is a way. And we hope it will work.”

“Broad & Targeted”

Earliest newspapers date from 1783, although not all are American-based or focused. Nevertheless, the collection encompasses all aspects of Jewish-American life and communities—i.e., Orthodox, Zionist, Bundist—and all subjects—religion, Holocaust, labor.

During the Q & A, Michelle addressed some of the difficulties. “Remember, older papers had the pre-YIVO Yiddish. Spelling might be different.” Historical Yiddish was basically a free-for-all; finding a unique word and spelling it in different ways helps.

Concerning updates, migrations to new platforms, and internal work, the speakers were asked: “How do you see the future with all the changes in technology?”

Answer: “We have no idea.” Michelle elaborated: “We are working on the concept of LOCKSS (Lots of Copies Keep Stuff Safe).” Libraries will still have microfilm as back-up.

So, what’s in store for Phase VI?

Answer: “Dying Jewish newspapers,” Michelle answered. There are many that are looking for “homes.” The publishers and editors know they will soon run out of business, and this decade is basically the last to get the clearance and digitize content more easily than it will be 20 years from now.

How to gain financial support? Fortunately, the institutions themselves have allotted funds. Michelle added, “Vendors know that because our consortia are working on digitizing Jewish press, they are willing to work with us in making things accessible.”

How to let people know about the project?

Answer: “We get invited to NYMA sessions.” Networking at AJL conferences has been helpful, if not crucial. “That’s why we want to get in touch with you guys,” Michelle explained. There are smaller newspapers in need of digitization.

The search is vast; organizations, like the Center for Sephardic Studies in Seattle, are constantly solicited for content. “We are somewhat targeted, somewhat broad.”

Michelle placed on the screen a comprehensive list, created by Yossi Galron, of currently digitized Jewish periodicals on all platforms, and in Roman and Cyrillic scripts, as well as Hebrew and Arabic: https://library.osu.edu/projects/hebrew-lexicon/JewishPress.htm. In addition, she mentioned a list of repositories available by subscription through JSTOR or Proquest, but these must be searched individually.

It is hoped that this May 4 session has been equally helpful. Yasher koach to Rina, and to our speakers for “making” history.

Long Island Chapter

Wendy Marx and Arlene Ratzabi attended the national AJL conference this past summer. We look forward to sharing our experience with our membership when we meet in September. Come October, we’ll meet up for our annual lunch/dinner in the Sukkah at the home of our treasurer Ronni Zolin. As a program, we will discuss the Torah...

Speaking of which, Soferet Adeena Eisen (adeenaeisen@gmail.com) is a great person for a program for your library. She’ll teach our group how to be a Torah Scribe for two hours. Our sacred Torah is the ultimate book.

Once again this past spring, our LIAJL sponsored a Librarians Shabbat at President Wendy’s synagogue. The service brought in members who never attend any of our programs. One congregant even became a new member and made a donation to LIAJL. Whatever it takes to get AJL’s name out there is important to me as President. I refuse to let our Long Island chapter fold.

Shana Tova, Sweetness and good health and Shalom to all.

Wendy Marx

JLMNC

Judaica Library Network of Metropolitan Chicago had a productive and enjoyable 2021/22 year, including Zoom programming that attracted over 40 viewers for each program.

2021/22 RECAP: The Pritzker Military Museum and Library was presented online by Pritzker Oral History Librarian and JLMNC Past President Leah Cohen, with special attention to Jewish content; Jewish Books, Jewish Bookclubs: Best of the Best was an outstanding online look at recent wonderful Judaica fiction and non-fiction, and how to run groups to discuss them, presented by JLMNC members Rachel Kamin and Debbie Steinberg; and The Unique Tri-Faith Initiative and Its Synagogue Library looked at a unique endeavor in Omaha, Nebraska that hosts a synagogue, church, mosque, and interfaith building on one campus. The synagogue library’s creation and partnership with Tri-Faith was also explored. Additionally, our busy group added new members, updated our Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/JLNMChicago, and hired GeistCreatives to design a new logo, create our flyers, and help with technology.

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AJL Celebrates Judaica Reference and Bibliography
Anna Levi

On Thursday, September 15th, AJL celebrated this year’s award winners for outstanding works of Judaica reference and bibliography.

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Bibliography award: Marvin J. Heller, Essays on the Making of the Early Hebrew Book
Reference award: Eugene M. Avrutin and Elissa Bemporad, eds., Pogroms: A Documentary History
Honorable mention, Bibliography: Dov Cohen, Thesaurus of the Ladino Book 1490 — 1960: An Annotated Bibliography

Following recognition of the authors, Eugene Avrutin and Elissa Bemporad gave a talk on their book Pogroms.
From the President’s Desk

SEPTEMBER 2022

My dear friends and colleagues,

Happy New Year, both on the Jewish and school calendars! Fall is always exciting for me, on a university campus—new students are excited to learn and experience the libraries on campus, the weather is starting to cool down, and there’s a sense of renewal in the air. For me personally, there’s an added bonus of a new exhibition, and the opportunity to share unique and rare materials to a broad audience.

Within AJL, we are looking toward our new membership year: By now you’ll have received some reminders about renewal, and I’m very much looking forward to our annual member gala with Michael Twitty on October 23, chaired by Amanda Seigel of the New York Public Library. Amanda gave a wonderful presentation at this year’s AJL conference on the cookbooks at the NYPL; I’m excited to hear her bring her historic knowledge about cookbooks into conversation with Michael Twitty’s new book on Jewish and African food cultures.

With most people back to work in-person (or mostly in-person), our regular online programming is slowing—but not going away! Fall programming includes a talk on Yiddish-language libraries in 1930s Paris, an upcoming series on synagouge archives, and a session to combat antisemitism through books. In recognition of a reckoning with historic antisemitism, I recently sent a letter on behalf of AJL to the president and the board of trustees of Fresno State University thanking them for reckoning with the deep antisemitism of their former librarian. On a more positive note, I was very pleased to see that the president of the American Library Association included AJL as an example of diverse organizations with which she is proud to affiliate.

AJL is here to support all of our librarians. I am thrilled to announce a new program added to our Continuing Education corpus: the Judaic Librarianship Certification for RAS librarians, which will be offered in partnership with the Jewish Theological Seminary. The first course, in spring of 2023, will feature Judaica cataloging. Our AJL Classroom program, supporting our SSCPL members, has exciting programming on the agenda as well—take a look!

My very best,
Michelle

Michelle Margolis
President, Association of Jewish Libraries

REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

EDITED BY ELLEN DRUCKER-ALBERT AND REBECCA LEVITAN


The fascinating preface and introduction are required reading in order to understand the content and format of this unique and engaging book, an adaptation of six autobiographical stories written by teenagers living in “Yiddishuania” (“the largest, most concentrated Jewish population in the world has ever seen;” see introductory map sketching Eastern Europe) in the 1930s. The stories were submitted anonymously as entries in a contest series sponsored by “Yiddishuania’s de facto university without walls,” YIVO, but before the winners could be determined, the Nazis invaded. (What happened to the stories before their retrieval in 2017 is its own captivating tale.)

Krimstein, known for his *New Yorker* cartoons and his comic-format biography *The Three Escapes of Hannah Arendt*, has selected six of the entries to adapt into comic form. His challenge was steep, as both visual and narrative translation were required for each as well as creating a cohesive whole. Every entry begins with archival imagery (a handwritten page of the contest entry; photographs) and the age and gender of the writer, plus a simple descriptive title: “The Eighth Daughter,” “The Rule Breaker,” “The Boy Who Liked a Girl.” What follow are Krimstein’s thoughtfully crafted interpretations, with dynamic limited-palette art in black, white, and swaths of orange and incorporating speech bubbles, well-paced panels, and some single pages or double-page spreads. (Occasional cartoonish humor appears where appropriate: “Guys, come on, let the kid tell his story already, ok?” and dialogue can be saucy: “What? I’m as sober as a goddamn priest,” protests a drunken father.) Characters are fleshed out through interplay between art and text. “I was the eighth daughter,” states the first protagonist, shown alongside her family members as candles in a Hanukiah. Though the art is dominant, the real-life narrator’s voice comes through, with her straightforward direct-address dialogue well-matched by her steady gaze throughout. Of course, what readers know is that these young people’s lives—along with the nearly nine million Jews living in Yiddishuania—are on the cusp of disaster, adding extratextual poignancy. This volume provides a welcome, little-heard, non-trauma-focused perspective on that specific place and time.

Elissa Gershowitz,
The Horn Book, Inc., Boston, MA

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REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS


This wonderful treat of a picture book surprises readers by being so innovative while also shedding light on a different aspect of the Jewish-American experience. This story starts out as a typical immigration tale of a boy and his parents leaving their small Russian shtetl in fear of government-led pogroms targeting Jews. But noticeable immediately is the illustrator’s color palette, using a bright mix of bright rainbow colors to depict the old world, including the village, the train and the ship, and then continuing those choices for city tenement living upon their arrival. This appears to be a curious style for an immigration story for the first few pages, but from the moment the family boards a stagecoach to arrive at their New Mexican home at a trading post near Santa Fe, the pages burst with more color representing hope for the new immigrants and echoing the art of the Navajo people who surround them. (The illustrator was born on the Navajo Nation in Arizona.) The story about a young Jewish boy who befriends a Navajo boy and the language barriers that ensue is poignant and beautifully told. Yossel’s family runs the store and surely epitomizes the experience of so many Jewish immigrants who moved out west to begin their lives anew.

The author’s notes mention that the Danoff and the Bibo brothers were some of the few Jewish families who operated trading posts in the Southwest. This lovely, upbeat story is a real winner and would be a great read-aloud for elementary grades, certain to spark lively discussion while also exposing children to both the Jewish and Navajo cultures.

Lisa Silverman,
Retired director, Sperber Jewish Community Library, Curator, Jewish Journal Streaming Guide


As a young woman, Sally Priesand was told in no uncertain terms that she could not become a rabbi. Her application to rabbinical school was rejected, and it would be many more years before she finally could pursue her dream. Even as a fully admitted student at the seminary, fellow students and professors shed doubt on her ability to finish and land a successful career. Sadly, they were right. Sally did finish but she was the last in her class to find a job as an assistant rabbi, and later found it almost impossible to find a position as a senior rabbi. Fortunately, one synagogue took a chance on Sally, and she became a much loved and admired leader. Like other feminist role models of the 1970s, Sally Priesand served as an example for young girls aspiring to have full professional lives. In the Jewish world, her success marked a new era in which girls who dreamed of becoming rabbis could do so as easily as boys. Told in a straightforward manner, this life story is inspirational, not only for the achievement it celebrates but also for the reminder that successful people often encounter obstacles along the way.

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

BioGraphy


The life of Harry Houdini (1874-1926), one of the most famous entertainers who ever lived, has fascinated and challenged children and adults over many years. The Little People, BIG DREAMS series beautifully highlights historical figures with vibrant bold colors, informative reading, and a simple overview of accomplished men and women in all facets of life from designers to artists to scientists.

At the tender age of four, Ehrich emigrated with his family from Hungary to America where they settled in Wisconsin. Life was difficult, and Ehrich had to leave formal education. He was schooled by the acrobats and magicians on the streets, whom he emulated and respected. Any job he could find or experience became an opportunity to learn useful skills such as his job at a locksmith where he practiced picking locks all day. In the evenings, he returned to his passion of magic and then took on a new stage name of Harry Houdini. He read and studied and practiced to become an escape artist.

Harry married the love of his life, Bess and they joined a circus to bring entertainment, challenges, and terrifying excitement to the masses. He stunned the crowds, helped train soldiers in the art of escape, and went on to accomplish death defying feats like no others.

The only mention within the story of his heritage is on the first page, stating that he was of Jewish extraction and born on the Navajo Nation in Arizona. The story about a young Jewish boy who befriends a Navajo boy and the language barriers that ensue is poignant and beautifully told. Yossel’s family runs the store and surely epitomizes the experience of so many Jewish immigrants who moved out west to begin their lives anew.

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page where the author states that “Little Ehrich was a Jewish boy from Budapest, Hungary.” His biography at the end of the book mentions that he was the son of a rabbi and one of seven children. There is no reference to any Jewish customs or observances or sensitivities concerning Houdini or his family.

The quality hardcover volume features a short timeline with specific details of Houdini’s life at the end of the book. The front and back endpapers are filled with chains and handcuffs depicting his most noted tricks and escape acts. There are few sentences on each page, mostly filled with illustrations which allow younger readers to become involved and inspired by his hard work, persistence, and pure enjoyment from performing for others. His motto and message to all was: the impossible is possible.

Rachel Glasser,
Retired Librarian, Yavneh Academy, Paramus, NJ

BOARD BOOKS


“Join latkes, dreidels, and more in this whimsical Hanukkah celebration!” The illustrations are definitely whimsical, with bright colors, bold shapes, and cute, smiley candles, dreidels, presents, musical instruments and food. These aspects of the book give the pages a lot of energy and a celebratory feeling. The touch and feel features provide a tactile experience for young readers (which may not hold up well in library circulation). But it seems like this book was written to fit into a holiday series that includes *Fa-La-La Llama, Every Bunny Dance Now!* and *Boo-nicorns*.

While people listen and play music for Hanukkah celebrations, it is not an integral part of the holiday. Neither are challah, which is mentioned in the rhyming text, nor matzah ball soup, which is included in the illustrations. In fact, Hanukkah is not mentioned once in the entire book.

Most of the rhymes work well (except for “I caught ya!... I love you a latke!”), but the vocabulary is advanced for the target audience, with words like “glimmer” and “shimmer” and phrases like “belting songs” and “you’re a de-light.” With the overabundance of Hanukkah books available, this one is an optional purchase.

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


While having exposure to “own voices” in literature is important for all children, in *My First Book of Famous Jews*, author Julie Merberg highlights “own people.” Merberg identifies seminal Jews in diverse categories: comedy, science, law, music, movies, writing, art and activism. Some figures are contemporary and some are long gone, but all have made huge contributions to their professions and the Jewish experience. Children today will undoubtedly know of Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Albert Einstein and Anne Frank, but so many other personalities will be new to them. Gertrude Stein, Betty Friedan, Sigmund Freud, Bob Dylan, and many others are identified.

The board book format permits only an introduction to the wonderful array of famous Jews Merberg selected. But the real purpose of the book is to intrigue and guide further inquiry. Fortunately, excellent children’s biographies exist for most of the

Chava Pinchuck,
Editor, Jewish Values Finder, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel
subjects so that children and their caregivers can learn more. The muted palette illustrations by Julie Wilson are fun and appealing.

In our world today, where Jewish identity is often assaulted, it is critical for children to internalize a sense of pride for their heritage. *My First Book of Famous Jews* helps young people do just that, and it is a worthy addition to children’s book shelves everywhere.

**Rena Citrin,**
*Retired Library Director of Bernard Zell, Anshe Emet Day School, Chicago AJL Fiction Award Committee Member*

**HOLOCAUST & WORLD WAR II**


In an unusual paragraph of forewarning before the novel begins, Kessler tells us that “mature themes and depictions of violence and cruelty” will be depicted in the coming pages. She is true to her word. Based on her father’s experiences before, during, and after the war, she has drawn a riveting portrait of how ordinary Jews and non-Jews were sucked into the maelstrom of World War II and the Holocaust.

This historical novel begins in Vienna in the year 1936. Three nine-year-old friends, Leo, Elsa, and Max are riding on the Ferris wheel on the occasion of Leo’s birthday, a time when “the bonds of their friendship felt as deep and wide as the Danube itself.” Kessler has told this story skillfully and with psychological insight through the point of view of these children: Leo and Elsa, the Jewish children, in first-person; Max, who becomes a member of the Hitler Youth, in third-person. In short, succinct chapters, we follow these main characters and their families as they try to navigate through the years up to and even beyond 1945. Their paths diverge through various countries, Austria, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and England, until the powerful, heartrending climax. We see how Leo and Elsa and their families are victimized; how Max and his family fervently believe Nazi antisemitic propaganda about Jews and thus become part of the German war machine, even up to the hell that was Auschwitz.

Throughout the novel, Kessler seamlessly incorporates well-researched historical material into the narrative, thus evoking a vivid sense of time and place. This title includes a list of resources and further reading.


In this historical novel based on Monique Polak’s mother’s experiences, the author tells the story of fourteen-year-old Anneke, who is sent from the Netherlands with her father, mother, and younger brother to the ghetto of Theresienstadt. During the almost two years the family spends in this infamous “model city,” Anneke must work hard every day, scrubbing an enormous cauldron in the kitchen while her father, Joseph, is forced to create artwork for the Nazis. Because they had secretly created artwork that depicted the realities of the camp; the sham “Embellishment” in advance of the visit from the Danish Red Cross.

These historical events are skillfully woven into the fabric of Anneke’s personal story and never overshadow them. We observe how she is moved by her first love and the friendship she makes with another girl. However, after these friends are sent away on transports, Anneke says, “My heart has become as hollow as my belly.” She also grapples with the fact that her father is forced to work for the Nazis, to “use his talent to tell lies.” Does he have a choice? Are Anneke and her whole family therefore complicit in the guilt, knowing that they have survived as “prominent” inmates while thousands of others have not? By the end of this riveting novel, Anneke has matured and is ready to ask hard questions as well as to defend her father. On their release, she decides that she must look for “a small slice of loveliness” in the shattered world that is left. The novel includes an author’s note, references, and discussion guide.

Anne Dublin,
*Retired teacher-librarian, Holy Blossom Temple, Toronto and Membership Chair, AJL-Canada*

Note from the editors: This title was originally published in 2008. The 2022 version includes a new cover, introduction, and study guide.

Anne Dublin,
*Retired teacher-librarian, Holy Blossom Temple, Toronto and Membership Chair, AJL-Canada*
REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS


With the plethora of Holocaust books published, especially for middle grades, it is becoming difficult for authors to distinguish their offerings from others in the crowded genre. With this beautiful collection of poems written by Rosen and illustrated by Blake, both Children's Laureates in the UK, comes a refreshingly unusual option. Following Rosen’s carefully researched mix of history, poetry, and memoir, The Missing: The True Story of My Family in World War II, the author has zeroed in on his family, some of whom were lost in the Holocaust, with personal poems, mostly free-verse, evocatively illustrated with Blake’s blue-gray watercolor and ink drawings.

The book begins with a message from Rosen explaining the difference between migrants and refugees: migrants are people who move somewhere else to seek a better life but who could return home if desired, even if it was to poorer conditions; refugees are forced to leave and would be in great danger if they returned. In On the Move, he organizes his forty-nine poems in four sections: “Family and Friends,” which explores his own life growing up as a Polish Jew in London; “The War,” “The Migrants in Me,” explaining his search for his European relatives; and the last, “On the Move Again,” that explores present and future displacement throughout the world.

Because the poems read like prose and each is fairly short with lots of white space and illustrations, they are accessible to lower grade readers who may not understand the underlying hardship represented, and to older readers who will find them useful for school units on human migration, as well as emotionally powerful and healing.

Notes at the end of the book provide resources and ways to help in the plights of refugees and displaced persons, as well as ways to continue research and consideration of the unanswered questions the poems may generate. The list includes charities and organizations, websites, and a source for recordings of the author’s poems about his family’s experience of the Holocaust and about racism and prejudice, in his own voice.

Debbie Colodny, Cook Memorial Public Library District, Libertyville, IL (retired)

FICTION - MIDDLE GRADE


Third grader Penina is the youngest child of Rabbi and Mrs. Farina and is excited about a surprise snowstorm coming to the quiet Catchupspill Valley just two weeks before Passover. Mrs. Farina does not believe it, since it is warm, and nothing is mentioned about a potential storm on the local Jewish radio station. But Penina heard from a classmate and swears it will be a huge blizzard. Penina turns out to be correct, a huge storm is going to arrive shortly, and everyone needs to prepare. Since they live in a deep valley that takes the plows days to clear the roads, Mrs. Farina is worried about having enough food for the family while they are potentially stuck for a few days. Since the Farina family is well known for their love of eating pasta, Mrs. Farina buys several boxes in preparation for the storm. But as each family member and the surprise guest arrives to wait out the storm, Mrs. Farina is forced to realize the boxes of pasta everyone is bringing is way too many for the storm and more importantly it is too close to Passover to have an entire closet filled with pasta. Luckily Penina and the surprise guest, who is discovered to be a yeshiva classmate with her Zeidy, come up with a heartwarming plan to use up all the pasta.

Fradl Adams is from Jackson, New Jersey, and writes weekly for The Lakewood Shopper and other publications about Orthodox women and family topics. Although the book is written and illustrated for an Orthodox audience (males all wear kippot and have visible tzitzit), it is still enjoyable and relatable while providing many great lessons for non-Orthodox readers. Although there is no Hebrew/Yiddish glossary, Adams does include a glossary of different types of pasta, including an illustration of each type. Excerpts of other Penina Farina adventures are included weekly in The Lakewood Shopper, but this is Adams’ only book about Penina Farina and her family.

Sean Patrick Boyle, Librarian, Congregation Keneseth Israel, Allentown, PA Vice President, President-elect, Association of Jewish Libraries

Continued on page 17
**REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS**


The life and scientific achievements of Albert Einstein are conveyed in the book through infographics - a layout of pictures and texts. Included is a timeline which shows the events in the life of Einstein, and information provided on famous philosophers and other scientists. The book presents an easy to comprehend explanation of Einstein's various scientific achievements including his discoveries on gravity, the speed of light, and nuclear fission. When describing nuclear fission, the subject is made clear by an illustration showing a neutron, an atom nucleus, and the fission product. A short and concise explanation is given, “a particle called a neutron is fired at the nucleus of a uranium atom.” These subjects are very difficult to understand, and they are made comprehensible in Albert Einstein by the infographics. The book does not have much Jewish content. There is the mention that Einstein was Jewish and turned down the presidency of Israel in 1952. The book could be useful in a STEM curriculum or science class. Einstein biographies are very popular with students, and this book is a different approach with less biographical material and more space devoted to explaining Einstein's scientific achievements.

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Visiting Barcelona with a school group is a big change for Ellen Katz in multiple ways. For a kid with autism, visiting a new place where two new languages are spoken can be tough. Having your expectations of the trip schedule upended and working in a group without your best friend is even harder. And meeting a new classmate who doesn't identify as male OR female is confusing for someone who is accustomed to seeing the world in binaries. But Ellen takes on the scavenger hunt format of the trip, and the new friendships she's almost forced to develop, with spirit, making a conscious effort to absorb new ideas, and to care for herself when things get overwhelming. Mistakes are made and lessons about herself, about others, are learned as she navigates some tricky situations that she never saw coming.

Ellen's father is Israeli and formerly Haredi: she speaks Hebrew with him (words are seamlessly interspersed throughout the text), and they navigate *Shabbat* and kashrut in a foreign country in a realistic and meaningful manner. The social conflicts in this story are real and organic without relying on tropes to create drama: the foreign setting and scavenger hunt provide action and mystery, and the developing friend and family situations provide emotion without falling back on obvious sources of tension; the cool girl clique and the hyper jocks in this book aren't bullies; and no one makes fun of Ellen or deliberately excludes her due to her autism. Ellen's new friend Isa is nonbinary and they are confident explaining what that means, which is helpful to Ellen, who is attracted to girls but unfamiliar with the idea of being anything other than strictly male or female.

A thoughtful coming of age story about a girl who has a hard

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Aviva Rosenberg,
Children’s Librarian, Ridgefield Public Library

NONFICTION - MIDDLE GRADE


n eleven short chapters that include gender identity, sexuality, love and affection, children, privilege, intersectionality, and discrimination, the author has aimed to write a book that will be readable and welcoming to Hasidic speakers of Yiddish as well as to secular learners of Yiddish. The language is conversational in tone and replete with common expressions, such as “Vos far a nariskheyt/What nonsense.” Because of the subject matter and specialized vocabulary, the translator has written a number of English words in Yiddish letters. For example, “gay” is written as “gei.” A few paragraphs have been added to help ultra-Orthodox readers feel more comfortable with the content. For example, the role of a matchmaker to make a “shidikh/match” between a boy and girl is explained.

The design and layout of this book is rather dull. For the most part, text is at the top of the page and illustrations are at the bottom (or vice versa). The cartoon-like illustrations are clear and colorful, depicting people of various races, ethnicities, abilities, and family groupings. An illustration of a Hasidic wedding and a title page illustration have been added in this version, but the rest of the illustrations are similar to those in the English book. Aside from the content, other aspects about this book will probably present problems to ultra-Orthodox readers. For example, many of the females wear pants and short sleeves, and the men don’t wear kippot; the illustrations of anatomy are explicit in nature; the intended age group is rather young. Herein lies the fundamental question: Will Zey Getrey Zich Aleyn be read and discussed by its intended audience? There must certainly be young people who want and need this book. Perhaps it will reach them.

Anne Dublin,
Retired teacher-librarian, Holy Blossom Temple, Toronto and executive member, AJL-Canada

FICTION - TEEN READERS


R eaders should be aware that this book deals with rape (including group rape), sexuality, murder, torture, and cannibalism. The Dressmaker’s Daughter is written like a memoir, but it is really a fictional account of the survival of a woman during the Holocaust in Romania. Daniela, who has dreams of becoming a doctor, falls madly in love with her tutor, Mihail, and they engage in a clandestine and passionate affair. It comes to a sudden halt when Nazi troops invade Romania. Mihail joins the partisans. Daniela sees her family brutally murdered, is sent on a death march, and becomes by force the concubine of Romanian Iron Guard Commander, Major Dragulescu. She is assigned to work as a nurse in the hospital and learns to care for the injured. Mihail appears in an assassination mission and tragically is killed. Daniela escapes, uses her knowledge of caring for the injured to help the wounded, and becomes a partisan. In lieu of this title, a recommended Holocaust memoir, based on true experiences is Signs of Survival: A Memoir of the Holocaust by Renee Hartman which is comes across as being more authentic.

Ellen Share,


A cranky grandmother and her grandson go grocery shopping. She complains about the laziness of today’s youth and the rudeness of the baker (but he makes a good babka). When her grandson tells her that they missed a turn, Bubbe berates him and tells him he’s not so smart. She has a flashback to elementary school in Nazi Germany, where all the “dirty Jews” are kicked out.

It is soon obvious that Bubbe’s memory is failing. She remembers stores in which she used to shop that are no longer there and remarks total strangers. After a rest in the park, Bubbe and Benji take a cab to the bakery and pick up one of those good babkas.

Continued on page 19
While the plot is basic, the graphic novel format gives it an edginess with mostly muted panels, a few pops of color, and a kind of naïve style. After Bubbe rebukes a man with a lot of tattoos, she notes that she knows people with tattoos. The full page filled with arms with numbers from the concentration camp is striking. The reader gets a little idea of Bubbe’s life experience through a double spread that looks like a photo album, and one can surmise Bubbe’s and Benji’s relationship through their interaction, but neither character is fully developed, and the reader never learns what happened to Bubbe’s husband or sister.

A glossary is included at the end for the Yiddish and Hebrew words. As much as Bubbe berates Benji for not knowing what it means to be Jewish, she gets the prayer that a man says thanking God for not making him a woman wrong, the sign above the green grocer reads “Shirts and Suits” in Hebrew, and immigrants were more likely to greet each other on the Sabbath with “Gut Shabbos” than “Shabbat Shalom.” Still, the book could work in a unit about grandparents and grandchildren, and fans of graphic novels will enjoy it.

Chava Pinchuck, Editor, Jewish Values Finder, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel


Written in the second person, and set in Connecticut during the late 1960s, we learn of 12-year-old Ariel Goldberg’s experiences as she and her family copes with her older sister’s serious relationship with Raj, who is a recent immigrant from India. Not only are there interracial concerns there are interfaith as well, since Ariel’s Jewish parents are concerned with Raj being a Hindu. The book is set immediately after the *Loving v. Virginia* Supreme Court decision striking down laws that forbid interracial marriages, and the court ruling plays several large roles throughout the story.

When Ariel’s older sister, Leah, elopes with Raj and disappears into the Hippie culture of New York City, the tear it makes in the family exposes Ariel to many more previously unknown family secrets. This traumatic experience also makes Ariel much more sensitive to those around her who she had previously just taken for granted.

The story comes to a climax as Ariel and her classmate sneak into New York City determined to find her sister and hopefully save the Goldberg family from collapse.

Hiranandani demonstrates throughout the book that it is better to be open and honest with people instead of keeping secrets and trying to act in ways that you think are making the situation better but are making things much worse. From a misunderstood classmate, a teacher trying to help a struggling student with an undiagnosed learning disability, to complex parent-children’s relationships, and many different types of prejudices, Ariel learns that looking and acting through a lens of love and honesty is the best way to solve conflicts.

Hiranandani’s mother is a Jewish American woman from Brooklyn who decided in 1968 to marry an Indian immigrant against both their parents’ wishes, and they have been married for over 53 years. One of Hiranandani’s children also has the same disability as main character Ariel. So, she writes with authority and experience on many of the main topics throughout the book.

Note from the Editors: *How to Find What You’re Not Looking For* is a 2022 Sydney Taylor Book Award Winner.


The first book of a planned trilogy, this book is set in an America of the near-future after Christian nationalism culminates in The Split: the division of the country into the God-Fearing States (GFS) comprising the South and Midwest, and the United Progressive Regions (UPR) comprising the East and West coasts. Orthodox and Hasidic Jews had chosen to live in the GFS, where their presence has been tolerated at most, while liberal and secular Jews chose the UPR.

As antisemitism in the GFS escalates, Jeffrey Schwartz wrestles with his growing disbelief in God and his sexuality, and Judith Braverman, who can see souls, begins to question authority and her own sexuality. When the Jewish organization of the GFS pilots a pen-pal program to build Jewish unity across the border, Jeffrey meets Dani, a lesbian living in the UPR. Together with their friends and assorted adults, the teens begin clandestine communication using codes embedded in Judith’s Hebrew paper-cutting art. By the end of this first book in the planned trilogy, after Jewish Studies programs are axed from universities and a bomb in the Jewish organization’s headquarters kills one of the teens’ mentors, the teens and adults have formed a group they call the Minyan of Resistance to fight back and save their fellow Jews.

The premise of this book, a dystopia in which Christian nationalism and the current state of politics in America is taken to its...
logical end, is a good one. Unfortunately, the book entirely fails to deliver. The tone is overly didactic and explanatory, becoming a parody of social justice initiatives instead of a champion of social justice. There are numerous internal inconsistencies, as well as several questionable details with regard to race and religion despite the attempt at progressive attitudes. Both characters and plot are underdeveloped, and the world-building is flat and too much of a parallel to current events to be unobtrusive. Jewish teen literature could use a good Jewish dystopia, but this book does not meet the mark.

Dainy Bernstein, Visiting Lecturer in Literature, University of Pittsburgh


A fter their grandmother’s funeral, three cousins, smart-aleck stoner Oscar; overly earnest Matt; and peace-keeping Ethan, embark on a road trip from Portland, Oregon, to Albuquerque, New Mexico, in Grandma Lupe’s 1988 Ford Thunderbird Turbo Coupe. The cousins aren’t close, and as they get reacquainted, readers learn more about them through brief first-person chapters that alternate perspectives. Matt is an aspiring filmmaker whose chapters are sometimes formatted as scripts, so we learn early on that Oscar is “Latino”; Ethan (who is gay) is “mixed Jewish and Latin[o]”; and Matt, an Evangelical Christian, is “mixed white and Latino.” Their religious backgrounds and beliefs are casually integrated into the narrative. Matt’s not trying that hard to convert me.”

Deftly avoiding caricature, Zepeda, winner of her publisher’s New Visions Award, uses realistic-sounding teen dialogue to touch on theology without passing authorial judgment. Many other issues, too, including gun violence (Oscar’s father was killed in a school shooting), mental health, cultural identity, queerness, familial expectations, and suicidal ideation, are raised and discussed. But the story doesn’t feel overly weighed down by its messaging. Instead, the characters’ distinctive personalities and backstories help illuminate tough topics for readers as they go right along for the ride.

FOLKTALES


In The Village Feasts by Izzy Abrahmson (pen name for Mark Binder), readers are invited into Chelm, a farm town “somewhere between Russia and Poland” and meet some of the many zany and warm-hearted citizens. Readers are treated to 10 humorous tales that weave in these townspeople as they prepare and celebrate Passover in this legendary town. Abrahmson smoothly introduces all of his main and secondary characters by using them repeatedly throughout the stories. By the time the tales are all told, the reader feels very familiar with the townsfolk.

Some of the vignettes are downright laugh out loud. For example, the first time the townspeople tried Mrs. Chaipul’s lead sinker matzah balls they are too surprised and polite to complain, but they end up using them to stop a flood, making Mrs. Chaipul a town hero. Other stories are more subtle in humor as in the time when Mark Twain gets lost and ends up in the home of the Levtskys, right when they open the door for Elijah at their seder, leading them to believe that Twain is Elijah. And still others are light-hearted poignant as in the time the women decide to lead the seders and their men have no choice but to prepare and cook the food, using family recipes they find in the shul library.

Important to note is that a few of the stories might prove too confusing for the intended audience as in the tale where the town rabbi gets lost and ends up in the neighboring town’s non-kosher bakery during Passover or the story when one of the townsmen moves to America with his “gypsy” wife, who is unfamiliar with Jewish laws and customs. Interesting to note is that the Chelmeners in Abrahmson’s version are much less foolish and simple-minded compared to other stories about these legendary townsfolk. Instead, the characters demonstrate sensitivity among themselves as their comic escapades are relayed.

An extensive “Village Glossary” is included in the back of the book to explain all of the Hebrew and Yiddish terms used in the book.

Esther Schnaidman, Rosenbaum Yeshiva of North Jersey, River Edge, NJ

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REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS


A modern version of a Jewish folktale, this story features a single working mother and her two children who want to let her rest while they finish the preparations for Shabbat.

But a neighborhood invisible goblin finds his way into the house and interrupts and complicates their work, and they must figure out how to deal with his mischievous deeds. Rose and Benny finally capture the imp and convince it to leave. After responding, "Your house is no fun!" the goblin races away and the children complete their pre-Shabbat chores and enjoy a beautiful meal and Shabbat celebration with their mother.

An endnote provides very basic information about celebrating Shabbat as well as some details about goblins in Jewish folklore. The whimsical illustrations are bright and fun, and the few Jewish customs are accurately and appropriately portrayed. Children will connect with the issues of problem solving and approaching challenges with courage and persistence. They should find this short tale fun and enjoyable.

Rachel Glasser,
Retired Librarian, Yavneh Academy, Paramus, NJ

LIFECYCLE & JEWISH VALUES


Tuli (short for chatul, the Hebrew word for cat) is curious about an empty box with Hebrew letters on it and, since she is a cat, she tries to play inside. Her mother says, “Silly Tuli! It is not a toy. It is a tzedakah box.” This charmingly illustrated concept book (exploring words like “light” “heavy,” and “empty”) is also a sweet introduction to the practice of putting coins in a special box to be used to “help people” in the future. The illustrations and typeface are large and engaging, reminiscent of some of the bold black outline work of Kevin Henkes. The kittens are curious and adorable. The book must be turned sideways twice to properly display the pouring of a full box of coins into an empty purse that will “help people buy things they need or want.” This sweet and simple book will be an excellent introduction in understanding the important mitzvah of giving tzedakah. It will surely serve as an encouragement to do so for very young children and their parents.

Lisa Silverman,
Retired director, Sperber Jewish Community Library, Curator, Jewish Journal Streaming Guide

NONFICTION


This collection features poetry, fiction, essays, and artwork originally submitted to *jGirls* Magazine, written by Jewish teens who self-identify as women, girls, or nonbinary. The book is divided into five themed sections, though there is much thematic overlap across the whole book. The first and last sections frame the book’s central concept based on tikkun olam, beginning with a section on memory, family, history, and heritage, and ending with a section on contemporary teens’ views of the future.

Between these bookend sections are three sections focusing on childhood, body image, and self-image; faith and tradition; and social injustice. Themes of social justice are threaded throughout each section, and a wide array of Jewish experiences is represented in the writers’ and artists’ identities of gender, sexuality, race, and level of observance, as well as the topics they address. Back matter includes resources for teens, including both Jewish and national organizations for a variety of issues and identities. There is also a reader’s guide with insightful questions and creative prompts associated with each of the book’s five sections, leading teen readers to thoughtful introspection and self-expression.

The tone of the book is somber and urgent, summed up best in the words of one of the teen contributors: “My generation grew up in a world on fire, yet we have the potential to build a world of dignity for all.” The book is a good choice for any library serving teens, and especially for those with teen programming.

Dainy Bernstein,
Visiting Lecturer in Literature, University of Pittsburgh

Continued on page 22
PICTURE BOOKS


Eli is envious of his older brother Adam, who always seems to be a higher achiever and who is now getting extra attention as his bar mitzvah approaches. Then Brisket, a furry green monster only Eli can see, appears under Eli’s bed, and...well, sometimes hinders event preparations, but also helps Eli to help his nervous brother. This short graphic novel (four chapters and a “Punchline” section delivering jokes and morals) with workmanlike cartoon-style illustrations should appeal in format to many early elementary students. A serviceable, if didactic, story for newly independent readers in a Jewish setting, with accurate details interspersed. Casual diversity in the illustrations is a strong point.

Shoshana Flax
The Horn Book, Inc., Boston, MA


When Jillian’s mom remarries, a brand new grandma, Bubbe, joins her interfaith, ethnically diverse family. Jillian is not welcoming, not wanting to displace her Italian Noni nor her Latina Gram. Bubbe tries with toys and games but it’s the joy of making matzo ball soup together that finally wins over Jillian. Taking it upon herself, Jillian invites all of her grandmothers to come together to cook a “super soup celebration.” Jillian learns “like soup, family was made with love. And there was always room for more.” Happily, at the end the whole family is gathered for a soup feast, including a great-grandmother, showing the joy and celebration that comes from acceptance and tolerance. Recipes for gazpacho, meatball soup and of course matzo ball soup are included. Extensive resources for interfaith families make this a valuable resource. Pair this one with My Two Grandmothers by Effin Older for comparing and contrasting.

Landy’s exuberant cartoon style digital art amplifies the expressive characters, engaging the reader with every page. Sara Aronson, author of The Wish List series and Just Like Rube Goldberg once again demonstrates her exemplary choice of words, moving the story along at a rollicking clip, guaranteeing a page-turning choice for group story time, or family reading fun.

Suzanne Grossman, MLS, Morris Public Schools, N.J. retired


Can Help is the newest addition to Rikki Benefeld’s Toddler Experience series. The story follows a brother and sister, possibly twins, throughout a typical day. From washing negel vasser upon waking to dressing, from helping Mommy shop for food to putting away toys, the text affirms the growing child’s increasing desire for independence and mastery. Simple rhymes such as “I like to help a lot – Don’t you? The more I grow, the more I do!” allow this book to double as an early reader, too.

Benefeld’s illustrations are friendly and inviting. The book is printed on laminated pages with a sewn binding that will withstand much handling. Using a primarily pastel palette, the children appear engaging and confident. The family is identifiably Orthodox, boys and men wear yarmulkes, girls and women wear skirts, but the message is universal. Young children desire agency and will be able to see themselves in this story.

Rena Citrin, Retired Library Director of Bernard Zell, Anshe Emet Day School, Chicago AJL Fiction Award Committee Member


Blips on a Screen is the true story of Ralph Baer, the inventor of video games. Ralph was born in Germany. When he was ten years old, he was kicked out of school and his friends refused to play with him because he was Jewish. Those few lines are the only Jewish content in the book. We do not know if Baer identified himself as being Jewish, if he practiced any form of Judaism or celebrated any Jewish holidays.

His family escaped Germany and fled to New York in 1938.

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Isadora brings the Hora back to her ballet class, and soon everyone is swept into the circle. “Magnifique!” says Madame Delphine as everyone is exuberantly stepping and swaying. Kol hakavod to Isadora for proudly sharing her culture.

The charming illustrations by Barbara Bongini were made on a computer using a graphic pen. The artist used pastel textures to enrich the clothing and other details. Dance the Hora, Isadora? can be paired with Freda Lewkowics's 2021 picture book, I Am Hava: A Song's Story of Love, Hope & Joy, which is the origin story of the song, Hava Nagila.


Ralph trained as a radio repairman, joined the American army in 1943, and worked with radios in the military. When he returned to the U.S. he was employed by a military electronics company. Baer wanted to make TV more interesting so in his spare time he designed video games which started out as “blips on a screen.” The book shows Baer’s process and frustration as he tried to get his idea accepted and manufactured, but he persevered. Perseverance and determination are important Jewish values which are a big part of Baer’s life. Ralph Baer is an excellent role model for all children.

The bold illustrations greatly enhance the book. A particularly charming picture is of his children playing the video games their father invented. Back matter includes relevant questions and answers about Ralph’s life and creations. This title includes a timeline starting with his birth in 1922 and ending July 2015 when his lab was installed in the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of American History. Children who play video games will enjoy reading about Ralph Baer and the games he invented.

Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, OH

Rena Citrin, Retired School Librarian
AJL Fiction Award Committee Member


The Boston Chocolate Party is a fast-paced picture book that combines the drama foreshadowing the American Revolution, the heroic Maccabees fight for freedom, and Sephardic Hanukkah customs. This Jewish colonial tale reaches readers through the eyes of a young boy missing his best friend. Joshua lives comfortably in Newport, Rhode Island where his father imports chocolate by ship. Tea is so expensive, Papa hopes people will change their drink to his chocolate. We see the hard labor as the family roasts, shells, grinds the beans into paste for cooking. They are making chocolate during Hanukkah which they call Janucá. They eat buñuelos, fried dough balls; light the oil lamp they brought from Spain; retell the Maccabee legend. When Papa travels to Boston to promote chocolate, Joshua goes to see his pal Isaac whose mother has no work; they are poor. Joshua suggests a chocolate shop in their shed; everyone works to set it up. Later, as they celebrate Janucá they see a crowd through the window; it is heading to Boston Harbor. Isaac knows it is not party; they are going to dump British tea in protest. Papa connects the Maccabee struggle we celebrate at Hanukkah to this American one in the book’s upbeat ending.

The author has done fine research to tie the date of the famous Boston Tea Party to Hanukkah in 1773. But the story itself begs the question: tea is expensive, thus confusing readers about why the price of tea connects to liberty. (Although the end notes explain this issue, few children read this part of the text). The warm, gentle illustrations in a fitting brown-gray palate show Isaac’s one room home.
Compared to Joshua’s spacious house, common holiday objects and colonial environment, including George Washington’s two handled chocolate cups.

However, they err in showing members of the Boston action dressed in regular colonial clothing. History notes the involved participants disguised themselves as Mohawk Indians. Forewarned, readers can enjoy this lively historical vignette while feeling proud to see Jews at the founding of our nation.

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


Places, just like people, need to be taken care of in order to be at their best. This book reminds readers that this is one of the ways community grows.

Rabbi Ruben wants his lovely old synagogue to be loved. But the building is in serious need of repairs. The rabbi does his best to maintain the structure, creating make-shift repairs in a variety of amateur ways. Unfortunately, everything goes wrong on Friday night. The Shabbat candles go out in the draft, the floor-boards in the library squeak, and the kitchen sink springs a major leak. As the disasters mount, the congregants join in commiseration and hope. “A synagogue is like a home, and a home is about helping, sharing and caring.” Over the next week everyone pitches in (even the kids) and the families make the needed repairs. On Shabbat everything works fine, and the old synagogue has a new life.

Rabbi Ruben begins by trying to be helpful, and attempting to solve all of the problems himself. Happily, his community knows how to do the repairs properly. The result is a pleasant story that children will connect with (who doesn’t love a plumbing repair made with challah dough?), but will also remind them that help and teamwork always work. The book should be considered by all schools and synagogues.

Fred Isaac, 
Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA

Note from the editors: *A Synagogue Just Like Home* was named a Fall 2022 Holiday Highlights Book.


How can early readers connect with stories from the Torah? And how can ethical principles be made easy to understand? Carl Harris Shuman’s new series may be an answer.

Max is a creative, day-dreaming boy who is put off by Emma, a new girl in his class. While he is shy, she seems to know all the answers. When their teacher tells them about Abraham and Sarah and the three angels (Genesis 18.1-8) they discuss the idea in class. At home, Max constructs a time machine and (after Shabbat) travels back to ancient times, where he takes part in the Biblical story. He meets the three travelers, eats with them, and learns about hospitality. (Abraham even washes his feet.) Back home, he learns another *Torah* story, and invites Emma to join him on his next adventure.

This is a sweet story with several important lessons for 4-6 year olds. It honors both the smart child and the creative one. Max is slightly goofy but endearing, and easily recognizable. The *Torah* tale is truthfully repeated, and Max serves a useful role. More importantly, the recounting asks powerful questions (are there angels, and how can we know?) and teaches *mitzvot*, including welcoming the stranger and finding a friend and a teacher. It should be considered by all school and synagogue libraries.

Fred Isaac, 
Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA


What would you do if there was an alien in your house?

Two friends, Sarah and Talya, discover that their brothers have turned into secret aliens and their single goal is to annoy the girls. After trying several strategies, they girls figure out that their best weapons are patience and kindness, which will eventually minimize and remove the aliens’ power.

The story opens on Shabbat morning when an alien appears and tries to stop Sarah from her normal routine while truly annoying her. He follows her to the synagogue while poking her and singing loudly off-key. Talya offers her brother’s advice on how to
overpower the alien, but nothing seems very effective. Then the girls notice certain similarities and realize that it is actually their brothers who have turned into the aliens.

Sarah and Talya create their own strategies and realize that all the aliens want to do is to annoy them – just as brothers often do. Talya then understands that “when humans get upset, our anger gives the aliens power. Or keeps them alive. Or maybe just makes them happy.” This important lesson is easier said than done, but the girls work diligently at ignoring their brother aliens, giving them compliments, and remaining calm in difficult situations. The aliens are defeated, and the real mischievous brothers are back!

The endnote explains that our tradition places great emphasis on how we treat and react to others. Kindness and patience should be our response, and not anger. Learning how to deal with conflict can influence the entire family and home.

The illustrations are bright and fun while the oversized faces, both human and aliens, are filled with expression and feelings. The setting of Shabbat is minimal and does not add much Jewish content to the story. But it is a happy and quirky story for younger children who are often annoyed by their siblings.

Rachel Glasser,
Retired Librarian, Yavneh Academy, Paramus, NJ

SHABBAT AND HOLIDAYS


The youngest lap-sit reader learns that apples have a place in Jewish holiday celebrations throughout the year, not just on Rosh Hashanah, in Barbara Bietz and June Sobel’s newest book, *Apples, Apples, All Year Round: A Celebration of Jewish Holidays.* Using rhyming couplets, Bietz and Sobel charmingly place juicy apples in the center of culinary treats for each Jewish holiday:

- Apples, apples, stars above, apple cake to eat. (Sukkot)
- Apples, apples wave your flag, candy apple treat. (Simchat Torah)
- Ruth Waters’ cut paper illustrations are as integral to the story as are the words. Working in the style of Eric Carle, Waters’ visual world is populated by friendly animals and beautiful ritual Jewish objects such as a Purim basket and a seder plate. The animals are personable, and the apples are always delectable. Children will enjoy the simple rhymes and beautifully rendered paper art. This slim volume will be a welcome addition to any school, synagogue or home library.

Rachel Glasser,
Retired Librarian, Yavneh Academy, Paramus, NJ


Autumn has arrived with leaves of yellow and gold. It’s Rosh Hashanah time. From her window, Miriam sees apple trees and rushes to the orchard with her shofar. Tekiyot! Shevarim! Teruah!

She practices blowing in a spot where nobody will be bothered

Note from the Editors: *Apples, Apples, All Year Round: A Celebration of Jewish Holidays* was named a Fall 2022 Holiday Highlights book.

Rena Citrin,
Retired School Librarian Current member of the AJL Fiction Award Committee
by the noise. But Miriam is surprised to find out she’s not alone. A large creature seated on a tree branch is busy munching and crunching, seemingly disinterested in Miriam, who orders it to stop eating. And when she attempts to chase the creature away with the sound of the ram’s horn, it howls back. Miriam’s adversary is Sasquatch, the legendary creature of the Pacific Northwest who proves to be more of a gentle giant than a fearsome enemy. When a tossed apple hits a beehive and sends angry bees swarming, Sasquatch and Miriam find refuge together in the safety of a nearby pond. Later, there is a family’s holiday gathering with a table filled with challah, rugelach, and honey cake. Of course, there are also plenty of apples and honey for all to enjoy, including the special guest, Sasquatch. Playful illustrations accompany this clever story that is packed with humor and regional flavor.

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

Note from the editors: Miriam and the Sasquatch was named a Fall 2022 Holiday Highlights Book.


A satisfying continuation of the series, A Donut in Time is sure to delight early chapter book readers. Illustrations throughout complement the text and help bring Saralee, Gigi, and Grandpa to life. While the donuts are being made for Hanukkah, this delicious story is great for readers year round.


In the third installment of the Saralee Siegel series, we find Saralee getting ready for Hanukkah. She and her super nose are helping to make donuts at the family restaurant when her grandpa tells her she’s not the only super nose in the family. Her great grandma Gigi also had a super nose! Saralee wishes she could meet her great grandma and share with her all about her super nose, so grandpa gives Saralee Gigi’s peanut butter and banana donut recipe. As Saralee works on making the donuts, the amazing smells she experiences creates a portal back in time to Gigi’s! Saralee was under the impression that Gigi was a force to be reckoned with, especially since she was the one who founded the family restaurant, but when she arrives in the past she finds that Gigi’s wearing a clothespin on her nose to make her super nose normal, and is being cowed by her father to not sell donuts for Hanukkah. Saralee returns to the present disappointed in Gigi and to find that the family restaurant is gone, grandpa lives in a nursing home, and nothing is as she knows it! Determined to set things right, Saralee makes the donuts again, and once again travels back in time to a young Gigi, who she convinces to stand up for her super nose and for her dreams of opening a restaurant. Gigi and Saralee end up selling the Hanukkah donuts, and when Saralee returns to the present, all is right in her world again.

A satisfying completion of the series, A Donut in Time is sure to delight early chapter book readers. Illustrations throughout complement the text and help bring Saralee, Gigi, and Grandpa to life. While the donuts are being made for Hanukkah, this delicious story is great for readers year round.

Rebecca Levitan,
Co-editor, Children’s and Teen Literature, AJL News and Reviews
AJL SSCPL Division President Librarian III, Baltimore County Public Library, Pikesville Branch

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REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS


Practicing a variety of yoga poses is now quite popular at Jewish schools and even preschoolers learn how the values of yoga have commonality with Jewish values. In her forward, the author states that “The link between the two can strengthen and fortify our separate practice of each and, ultimately, our quality of life.” The storyline follows different children throughout the days of the week as they experience a variety of troubled feelings and then remember some aspect of the peacefulness of Shabbat, which prompts them to perform a yoga pose to counteract the discomfort.

An example would be to perform a “chair pose” after a “little sister scribbled red crayon all over my rocking chair.” By doing a chair pose, the child is remembering “the love of Shabbat” and is no longer upset. The concept of matching yoga poses with Jewish practices (such as “candle pose” and “table pose”) could be a good one but the rhymes here are forced, and connecting every aspect of a child’s glumness to Shabbat peace simply does not work.

In addition, the illustrations are serviceable but not professional; there is an editing error in the introduction that is jarring. In addition, the use of the “eagle pose” in the middle of the night (because of a nightmare) appears to be inaccurate (and shown with two children intertwined for some reason). *I Am the Tree of Life: My Jewish Yoga Book* by Mychal Copeland, a 2021 Sydney Taylor Honor book, would be a better choice for this subject.

Lisa Silverman,
Retired director, Sperber Jewish Community Library, Curator, Jewish Journal Streaming Guide


A collection of short rhyming poems cover all of the Hanukkah bases from the Maccabees, the miracle of the oil and the shammes to chocolate gelt, dreidels, latkes, jelly donuts, and more. “Apple Sauce vs. Sour Cream” is especially clever and fun: “When you eat a latke, you must pick a team: Are you on Team Apple Sauce or Team Sour Cream? It’s an age old dispute that goes on to this day. Apple Sauce? Sour Cream? What do you have to say?” Some readers might be dismayed by the emphasis on presents, mentioned on the first page and the focus of two more poems. But, the detailed gouache, acrylic, and digital media illustrations are charming and vibrant depicting a diverse cast of contemporary children and adults, in various skin tones, celebrating with warmth, love, and joy. Part of the *Here I Come* series that includes Easter, Halloween, Thanksgiving and Christmas, this paperback edition, with a stickers included, might be more suited to gift giving than library circulation.

Rachel Kamin,
North Suburban Synagogue Beth El, Highland Park, IL
REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR ADULTS

Edited by Daniel Scheide and Laura Schutzman

FICTION


This entertaining novel, all the Jewish hotels in the Catskills have closed except for The Golden Hotel, which was built and has been run for the past sixty years by close friends and partners Benny Goldman, Amos Weingold, and their wives, Louise and Fanny. The families have been offered a large sum of money to sell the property to investors who want to tear it down and build a casino in its place. Brian Weingold, the new manager, has summoned the extended Goldman and Weingold families to the hotel for an emergency meeting to discuss the offer and to decide the fate of the declining hotel. The children, now grown with children of their own, reminisce about the happy and carefree summers they spent together at the Golden. In the course of the weekend secrets are revealed, jealousies are rekindled, and crushes are revived. The complex, engaging characters are facing serious issues of their own that include a gay grandson who has not yet come out to his parents, a daughter whose doctor husband is being investigated for overprescribing opioids, and a son who spends too much time in his office and neglects his family. All issues are resolved in the satisfying ending. Anyone who has spent time in the “Borscht Belt” will enjoy once again being immersed in the magic of summers in the Catskills. Those who have not had the privilege of spending time in this special place will understand the nostalgia many people feel for this now vanished era.

Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, OH

Roitman, Gina. Don’t Ask. Hamilton, ON: Guernica Editions: 2022. 275 pp. $17.95 (9781771837118) PBK.

Don’t Ask is an excellent, well written literary thriller which is difficult to put down. The book is based in part on the author’s own life as the child of Holocaust survivors, born after the war in a Displaced Persons camp. Roitman is a writer, a coach, and a film producer whose documentary film, My Mother, the Nazi Midwife and Me, has been shown to much acclaim. This book, her first novel, centers on the life of Hannah Baran, the only child of Holocaust survivors living in Montreal. She becomes a successful real-estate agent working with another survivor, who is a good friend of her father. Her responsibilities create a great dilemma when she is asked to travel to Germany on a business mission and meets a gentleman who becomes her romantic interest.

The powerful and complex relationship between Hannah and her mother, Rokhl, dominates the book. Rokhl cannot bear the fact that her daughter plans to travel to the accursed country of Germany and she commits suicide. Notes left for Hannah by her mother help clarify some secrets she kept from her daughter all her life.

This powerful novel explores the complex lives of survivors who remained alive in body, but lost a great deal of their soul and had difficulties conducting themselves “normally” for the rest of their lives. The war had an indelible effect on them and often on the next generation.

This book belongs in a synagogue library and would be an excellent book discussion choice.

Michlean Lowy Amir, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Retired

NON-FICTION


Jean Amery was born Hans Chaim Maier (or Mayer) in Vienna in 1912 to a Jewish father and a Catholic mother. His father was killed during World War I; therefore, his mother was the major influence on the young Amery, including his religion. In his early adult life he studied philosophy and was an essayist who published 5,000 articles, mainly in newspapers. After the Anschluss (annexation) of Austria to Germany in 1938, Amery fled to Belgium where he joined the resistance. He was caught distributing leaflets and when discovered to be Jewish by Nazi definition, he was sent to Auschwitz and to other camps. Amery suffered a terrifying fate as did so many during the Nazi regime. However, he managed to survive and established himself in Brussels after the war where he alienated himself from his German cultural heritage and began writing in French as Jean Amery.

The biographical background of this brilliant man is important because it informs his writing. Between the years 1966-1978 he...
wrote powerful books, mainly related to his Holocaust experiences. Most famous among them, available in English translation are: *At the Mind’s Limits, On Aging, and On Suicide*.

Three experts in the field of antisemitism studies joined to publish ten essays on the topic written by Amery and not translated into English previously. Alvin Rosenfeld, among the three, is Professor of Jewish Studies and Antisemitism, at Indiana University, and is a leading writer and speaker on the history of and on contemporary antisemitism.

Amery’s essays, written in the 60s and 70s, seem fresh and relevant in today’s world. Not an observant Jew, his roots were imposed upon him by the Nazis and he believed in the importance of the existence of a Jewish State. In spite of his long-standing belief in the New Left’s tenets, he broke away from them when it had to do with the State of Israel where he visited on a short visit just once. Antizionism and antisemitism were one and the same in his mind.

This book belongs in every library that serves a public that deals with antisemitism, whether high school, academic or synagogue. Though the essays are considered dense and highly intellectual, they would generate important discussion on the subject. This small book includes Notes on Sources, a Biographical TimeLine and an Index.

**Michleen Lowy Amir**,
*United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Retired*


Peter Applebaum, Emeritus Professor of Pathology, Pennsylvania State University, has moved from microbiology and antibiotic research to a focus on the experience of Jewish soldiers (“officers and men”) in World War I. An author of several books addressing World War I Jewish soldiers, *Habsburg Sons*, Applebaum’s latest volume, concentrates on the experiences of Jewish combatants serving in the Austro-Hungarian army, as part of the combined forces of the Central Powers in World War I battling the Allies.

While the book provides background on Jewish service in the Austro-Hungarian military prior to World War I, its primary concern is providing a revealing depiction of what Jewish officers and ordinary Jewish soldiers encountered in the war’s battlefields and away from the front. Relying on memoirs, personal letters, reports, newspapers and novels, Applebaum’s mission is to bring to wider public attention the conditions Jews found in their military service. He underscores the enthusiasm with which most Austro-Hungarian Jews greeted the call to war, and their rapid enlistment in the military.

Just as the Austro-Hungarian Empire was multi-ethnic, its subjects speaking a multiplicity of languages and adhering to different cultural traditions, Jewish soldiers, too, reflected varied Jewish practices and levels of observance. Applebaum, throughout his book, cites descriptions of the wartime encounters, whether in combat or in civilian dealings, between the Ostjuden (Jews from the Eastern European reaches of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Yiddish-speaking and often Orthodox in Jewish practice) and Jews whose Jewish connection was largely secular, having university education and speaking, German, Hungarian and other languages.

Applebaum devotes an entire chapter to the Austro-Hungarian Feldrabbiner, or Field Rabbis, who filled the roles of both chaplains and rabbis for Jewish troops of all ranks (Feldrabbiner also served with German forces – Central Power allies). They oversaw provision of kosher food to the combatants, and organized religious services for both Shabbat and the Jewish holidays. Interestingly, collaboration among Jewish, Christian, and Muslim religious authorities in serving the men at war was a valued component of military life in the Great War.

Applebaum pays attention to the experience of the Austro-Hungarian forces who fall into the hands of their Russian adversaries and quotes extensively from accounts of prisoner-of-war camps in European Russia, Siberia, and Central Asia, which appreciatively note the support given to the Jewish prisoners by nearby Jewish communities. Through the photographs he provides and the first-person documents he presents, Applebaum does succeed in bringing to life an important piece of Jewish history, now at risk of fading from memory.

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


From Biblical times to modern times, Jews have been strangers. Beginning with Abraham settling in Canaan, to the Jews in Europe and America, the Jews have been the “stranger,” people whose customs and laws were different from those who surround them. The *Torah* puts great emphasis on treating the stranger with love and respect.

This book is a collection of scholarly articles examining aspects of the Jew as (Continued on page 30)
the “stranger” in history, such as in 16th century Tzfat, Germany, African American Hebrews in Jerusalem, and Russia. Other articles examine the “stranger” in literature and philosophy. One of the purposes of these articles is to build a framework, in which different feelings and experiences of strangeness can be discussed and understood.

This book is recommended mostly for scholars who want to learn another aspect of the Jewish experience, not covered in a traditional history book. The book is primarily aimed at an academic audience, but non-academic libraries could benefit from adding it to their collections.

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


Angela Kuttner Botelho, is a former California Deputy Attorney General and daughter of a German couple of Jewish heritage who converted to Christianity and fled Germany as the Nazis increasingly marginalized and attacked the country’s Jews. She has authored a book exploring Jewish identity in her own family. Botelho interviews her seven living siblings and eighteen members of the third-generation in her quest to discover how her parents’ Jewish heritage has impacted the self-definitions and identifications of these twenty-five men and women, a number of whom were raised in the Catholic faith. Her respondents, living across the United States and overseas, ranging in age from forty-two to eighty-seven, span diverse occupations and are nearly all college graduates.

What is particularly distinctive about the Kuttner family is the fact that Stephan Kuttner, the pater familias, and convert to Catholicism, became an internationally recognized expert on canon law, the body of ecclesiastical law that developed within Christianity, particularly Roman Catholicism, governing the internal hierarchy and administration of the church. While Professor Kuttner was deeply engaged in his scholarly research, his wife Eva took particular care to let her children know of their Jewish heritage, the fraught escape of the family from Germany and the death of extended family members in concentration and extermination camps.

The author cites liberally from her siblings’ reflections on what role their Jewish heritage has played in their lives. The responses reveal a range of engagement—from little to no connection, to varied efforts for reconnection, sometimes including study in Israel, which often underscored their identification by the Jews they encountered as “other.” The author’s own identity quest led her to a deep immersion in Jewish life and thought, and a Master’s degree in Jewish History and Culture from Berkeley’s Graduate Theological Union.

This is a volume particularly apt for a research collection. In this work, Angela Kuttner Botelho looks to situate her family’s grappling with what it means to identify as a Jew within a larger historical, philosophic and literary framework of such self-interrogations by prominent European Jewish intellectuals. Readers of this book will find it catalyzing their own reflections of what their own, or others, Jewish identity means and coming away with a broader understanding of the varied components which combine to shape such an identity.

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


In this book, Jewish Cultural Studies by the eminent scholar Simon Bronner, a volume in the Raphael Patai Series in Jewish Folklore and Anthropology, Bronner argues convincingly that Jewish Cultural Studies should be separated into its own field of study from the fields of Jewish studies and ethnic/cultural studies. He proposes this due to the idea that Jewish culture, writ large, is distinct from other cultural groups, largely because of the Jews being a worldwide diaspora population. This presents challenges in categorizing Jewish cultural output as there are many varying local religious customs, internal community histories and histories of cultural exchange, and would best be served by being its own discipline.

The first section of the book details the history of how Jewish people conceptualize their own self-image in various cultures and how they relate to members of out-group populations and explains what it means to be Jewish to Jews in their own communities. These differences in understanding manifest themselves, for example, in the ways in which the Jewish home is constructed as a space of cultural production and signification. This is in relation to both the Jewish and wider communities, the synagogue(s), schools, and other sites of importance to the Jewish community.

The second part of the book examines the ritual structure of Jewish life, especially as it relates to innovation/rediscovery of

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ritual practices such as the Zeved Bat/Simchat Bat, the naming ceremony for newborn girls, and what such practices say about the continuation and understanding of Jewish peoplehood.

The third section includes chapters on the history and uses of Jewish comedy and participation in politics, among other topics, especially as it relates to Joseph Lieberman’s campaign for U.S. Vice President.

This book is recommended for academic libraries looking to expand their materials on Jewish cultural production, identity, history and participation in the wider cultures in which Jews have lived.

Eli Lieberman, Assistant Librarian, HUC-JIR NY


This meticulous account of the Warsaw Ghetto’s medical community, doctors, nurses, and pharmacists, is a long overdue tribute to an era’s unsung heroes. Drawing extensively on archives, with appendices and a photo gallery listing over seven hundred individuals, backgrounds, specialties, hospital affiliations, the author sheds light on a subculture that emerged in 1940, following the ghetto’s establishment, and their dedication under the most hellish of environments to saving or helping Jewish lives.

Chapters are divided chronologically, beginning with Congress and interwar Poland, when many, barred from local universities, received training abroad or faced barriers in employment or careers. Most were highly assimilated; some had even converted to Christianity, resulting in later friction from devout staff and patients. Nevertheless, they nobly treated everyone, even offering instruction and research. They constantly regrouped and relocated following edicts, and faced ethical dilemmas such as offering a “ticket to life” through medical dispensation. The author describes their commitment to standards under deteriorating conditions: starvation and epidemics, paucity of drugs or materials, and, above all, the Nazi brutality which culminated in August 1942 with the deportation of thousands, including fellow doctors. Those who remained continued tending to the sick and dying, even up until the famous revolt, in April 1943; some, hiding in the Aryan side, treated citizens during the Warsaw Uprising the following year. Sadly, the author concludes, the majority shared the same fate of their lay brethren. This poignant but well-researched book is essential for Holocaust collections.

Hallie Cantor, Acquisitions Associate, Yeshiva University


Rabbi Hirsch was an Orthodox rabbi best known as the intellectual founder of the Torah im Derech Eretz. He believed that one could be an observant Jew and part of the greater community. He wrote Torah commentaries and books on Jewish philosophy.

Clark mentions little about Hirsch’s life and publications in his introduction. Clark lists the sources that he used, and they include two versions of the Hirsch hhamash. He does not mention Timeless Torah edited by Jacob Breuer (New York, 1957) where this reviewer found some of Hirsch’s ideas that Clark used. The book has no bibliography of items consulted or listing of additional sources by or about Hirsch.

Clark has three divre Torah for each parasha of the Torah. Each starts with a quote from the Torah portion and Clark’s translation. The author states one is for each meal and suggests using this book for table conversation.

The ideas are well presented, and the book is very readable except for sections with a dark gray background due to the lack of contrast. This book is recommended for Judaic collections in libraries including personal, synagogue, high school, and academic settings that collect more traditionally centered texts.

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


Yakir Englander has written a respectful and comprehensive book about the male body in ultra-orthodox Jewish theology within the Lithuanian subculture from after the
Holoage through the first decade of this century. Englander grew up in the ultra-Orthodox world, and now inhab-its the world of academia as a scholar at the Shalom Hartman Institute, a non-denominational Jewish education-al center in Jerusalem.

The book begins with a discussion on different images of the body in the Musar (ethical/religious) literature. Chapter 1 centers on the Musar literature on the body in the decades after the Holocaust. Chapter 2 discusses the different problems associated with the body, namely its various wants and needs that at best take away from ideal activities such as Torah learning and at worst could lead to sin. Chapter 3 details the Musar movement’s response to battling these challenges. Chapter 4 specifically addresses the topic of the body and sexuality and how sexuality plays a “crucial role in defining the identity of today’s yeshiva students.”

Part II of the book changes focus to Ultra-Orthodox hagiography as it concerns the theology of the body. Chapter 5 sets forth the teachings of Rabbi Avigdor Miller (1908-2001) and Englander demonstrates how Miller incorporated various secular values within ultra-Orthodox thought. Chapter 6 discusses a fascinating and controversial formerly ultra-Orthodox blogger that has had an impact on the community and its thought. Chapter 7 describes Lithuanian hagiography as a Musar genre and Chapters 8 and 9 on the body of a Gadol (a revered Rabbi or Torah Giant) in childhood and as an adult.

*The Male Body in Ultra-Orthodox Jewish Theology* is an interesting work and is recommended to anyone (scholar and layperson alike) interested in ultra-Orthodoxy in general or the subject in particular.

David Tesler, Efrat, Israel


This book is a true great work of design art, from the choice of the cover stock to the use of tinted pages for the three elements of text, and to how the flower illustrations convey the feelings of the night. However, this is not a traditional Haggadah in any sense of the word. Even though Falk lists the order of the traditional *seder* (*Kadesh, urchatz, karpas*) there is not a single traditional element. Falk invents her own text of sanctification, and the book includes no traditional blessings. The author says that she is following the teachings of Mordecai Kaplan, but there is no evidence of his thought. In Mordecai Kaplan’s *The New Haggadah for the Pesab Seder* (c1941), every traditional bracha including lighting the candles, kiddish, karpas, and birchat hamazon are included.

Falk has some interesting insights. She tells the Exodus story that is much more comprehensive than the traditional Haggadah. For example, the story of Moshe is included from the time the midwives Shifrah and Pu’ah saved Jewish boys, to his childhood, to the killing of the Egyptian taskmaster, to the Exodus, and beyond.

This book has a mixed recommendation. It is a contribution to Jewish creative scholarship concerning the celebration of the first nights of Pesach. However, it does not do what it claims to do. The book may have a place in a library that wants many points of view for the *Seder* night. For those for whom *seder* traditions are important, this book is not recommended for a *seder* night, even in the most liberal or secular home.

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


This lavishly illustrated book serves as an exhibit catalog of the Arch of Titus exhibit. The arch commemorates the victory of the Romans over the Jews and the glory of the Emperor Titus. (The arch was built after the triumphal march and the death of Titus in 81 C.E.) The exhibit was mounted at Yeshiva University Museum in 2018 and the culmination of the Yeshiva University Arch of Titus Project. The book can be of interest to readers in many different disciplines: museum studies, historians, architects, curators, and religious studies.

An article, “The Spoils of Jerusalem in Color: The Making a Polychrome Model” explains the rationale for depicting elements of the Arch of Titus in color as it appeared in the exhibit rather than white and black and gray gradations. Included in the article, there is an amazing two-page spread of the Arch of Titus Spoils in color and with areas added to previously lost sculpture created with use of modern computer technology. Another article discusses the depiction of the *menorah* as a universal symbol of Israel. Debate has raged questioning if the *menorah* on the Arch of Titus accurately represents the one in the holy Temple. Among those

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who expressed their doubt was Moses Mendelssohn who wrote that the base differs from the one in the Temple.

This title is recommended for university and special collections.

Ellen Share, 
Washington Hebrew Congregation Children’s Librarian, Washington, DC


The Samaritans: A Biblical People is a lavishly illustrated new anthology that serves as an introduction to a multi-media exhibition to be held at the Museum of the Bible in Fall of 2022. Its twenty-four essays strive to describe the history and culture of the Samaritans, as they interacted (at times peacefully and at times otherwise) with Jews, Moslems, and Christians from biblical times to the present.

At the beginning of the book, Badri Cohen, the daughter of the former High Priest and herself a current leader of the Samaritan community, tells a story handed down to her which demonstrates the tenuousness of the community’s relations with its neighbors. Focusing on the crucial ritual, the yearly Pascal offering on Passover, the story uses metaphor to show how relations with Jews and Moslems have served through the centuries to promote or impede the Samaritan community. Developing this theme, Steven Fine, the editor of this work, has assembled a collection of essays which articulate various facets of Samaritan identity and their cultural interaction with the peoples around them.

In the early chapters of the book contributors explore issues of Samaritan identity in interaction with Jews, the Greco-Roman world, and the world of Islam. The authors explore the Judeo-Samaritan split, which generated the divergent historical trajectories of the two groups. In one, the Jews were dispersed, but increased in number in the diaspora, while in the other, the Samaritans restricted their movements and their growth, concentrating exclusively on their sacred site of Mt. Gerizim.

In another cluster of essays, the scholars discuss the return of the Jews to Israel at the end of the 19th century and the Samaritan response to Zionism. Figures such as Izhak Ben-Zvi and David Ben-Gurion are discussed as prominent protagonists striving to incorporate the Samaritans into modern Israel. The Six Day War is acknowledged as profoundly impacting the Samaritan observance of their pascal ritual. Additionally, Fine notes that examining the ethnographic work of Johanna Spector sheds light on how the dynamic changes in Israel in the 20th Century affected the hearts and minds of the Samaritans.

Several essays explore the folklore of the Samaritans providing a deeper understanding of the people and their culture. In conclusion, Fine raises the question of whether the Samaritans warrant such an intensive study, and his own response is a definitive “Yes”! With a comprehensive bibliography and an index, this volume would be an incredible addition to any Judaica library.

Randall C. and Anne-Marie Belinfante 
Herkimer, NY


Seymour Gitin, the retired director of the William Albright Institute of Archeological Research, was an archeologist who started his career as a military chaplain and congregational rabbi. In The Road Taken, Gitin shares the many interesting things he has experienced throughout his life. While serving as a chaplain in Anchorage, Alaska, he felt the ground shake for four minutes at 5:36 pm, then a Richter scale earthquake. He had been preparing for servicemen and the local community. The Seder never happened and the food was distributed to the needy.

After the military, Gitin was hired as an assistant rabbi for a Los Angeles congregation. In his first week, he was told the board voted to change the Hebrew pronunciation for services from Ashkenazi to Sephardic. The head rabbi was planning to be away that first week and Gitin, fluent in Hebrew after studying in Israel, thought he could handle the situation. After Shabbat services, the congregation was confused. While the board voted and approved the change, they did not decide on the implementation date, which frustrated the senior rabbi.

Like other memoirs, this is an uneven story. Partly it is the remembrances of the author and partly the history of the Albright Institute. For the reader, there are many amusing and amazing stories that refer to many famous scholars and interesting people. At times, the reader would like to know more about the events and, other instances, Gitin tells the reader more than is necessary.

The bibliography and endnotes are not done clearly. Many endnotes make the reader refer to the bibliography, which is difficult to navigate. Despite these shortcomings, this title is recommended for personal, synagogue, and academic libraries.

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

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Shaul Harel was born Charles-David Hilsberg in Brussels in 1937. His family had moved there from Warsaw to escape poor economic conditions and antisemitism in 1932. When Harel was five, the Nazis invaded Belgium, and he and his sister were separated from their parents and hidden with non-Jews. After the war, he was placed in an orphanage and then a school with other war orphans. He immigrated to Israel when he was twelve (his parents, a brother, and a sister were murdered at Auschwitz; another brother and sister also made it to Israel after the war). He spent his teenage years on a kibbutz in Northern Israel, fought in the 1956 Arab-Israeli War, and went to medical school. He concentrated on pediatric neurology, a specialty that was not recognized in Israel. Through fellowships in the United States, he was able to learn and practice, and he returned to Israel to establish a Pediatric Neurology Department at a leading hospital and a child development center. He attended conferences around the world, and organized conferences in Israel.

For most of his life, he blocked out his experiences during World War II, but sixty years later, he decided to learn about his past. He visited Belgium and was reunited with Andree Geulen, the woman who saved him and other Jewish children, and with Siegi Hirsch, the teacher who helped Shaul learn to laugh and play again. He learned the details of what happened to his immediate family, and he visited the places where he was hidden. Although "officially retired," Harel is still active in pediatric neurology and Holocaust remembrance events.

A truly inspiring story of determination and resilience but, as with many self-published memoirs, sharper editing would have made Shaul’s story more impactful. There is both foreshadowing and back shadowing, so the reader learns about Shaul’s children before learning that he married and there is a bit of repetition throughout. While the author’s memory of his life is amazing, sometimes there is too much information (details of infertility problems, some of the descriptions of medical research). But overall, a worthwhile read and recommended for all libraries with Holocaust collections.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel


Parables, fables, and stories of fantasy and wonderment are central tools in the belief system of the Hasidic world. In this Hebrew language book: הstory, a researcher of Kabbalistic and Hasidic literature at Bar Ilan University, presents new insights into the origins, evolution, and elements of Hasidic stories. Throughout its eight chapters, this unique multidimensional approach explores the various kinds of stories and their characteristics and purposes. Purposes can be educational, consciousness, a social tool, a response to suffering, redemption. In addition, there are instances where the story is not used as a medium for an external purpose, but as a reflection of the different ways of understanding reality. The stories are thus a primary medium, which cannot be replaced by any other. This unique multidimensional approach to understanding the role of Hasidic stories is a groundbreaking accomplishment.

The writing style is dense and scholarly, making the book most suitable for scholars and advanced students who are fluent in Hebrew. Recommended for academic and research libraries.

Diane Mizrahi, PhD., Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California Los Angeles


While serving as a reference volume on differences between the practices and traditions of Jews who trace their ancestral heritages “from lands on the Mediterranean Sea and the Middle East,” the Sephardim, and those whose Jewish heritage comes from “France and Germany” and later movement to Central and Eastern Europe, the Ashkenazim, this book, in its five hundred and thirty-three pages, provides an extraordinary rich immersion into the practices and traditions of contemporary Orthodox Jewish life.

The book’s one hundred and one chapters, often just several pages each, take the reader through the observances and rituals of a Jewish life journey through an admixture of citations from generated Sephardi and Ashkenazi rabbis and scholars on the correct

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The core of the text examines Yeshiva life during the 1920s and 1930s from four angles. First, the author discusses the economic situation. This includes the broadening of their fund-raising to include the Jews of Western Europe and America, and the creation of Congregation Sharei Orah, the Sephardic Congregation of Teaneck, New Jersey, pays special attention to the distinctive ritual traditions and minhagim (or customs) among the varied Sephardic communities, tracing their origins to Syria, Morocco, Yemen, Egypt, Turkey, and elsewhere. Rabbi Jachter, while providing painstaking detail over differences in Sephardi and Ashkenazi practice, repeatedly underscores how much is shared across the two traditions.

Bridging Traditions is a volume that academic libraries, as well as synagogues, day schools, and community centers would want to have. Some readers may want to consult the book to explore differences between the two traditions in specific areas of Jewish life; others may want to browse through the book to discover customs and teachings new to them and word of rabbinic authorities in the past as well as present, previously unknown to them. Rabbi Jachter does assume readers of his book will come with a good grounding in Jewish life and religious practices. A reader without this background may need to seek some guidance and explanation from others on specific points.

Bridging Traditions does fill an important need, and whatever the level of knowledge of the reader, most assuredly, new appreciation of the history and sweep of Jewish scholarship and continuity will come from an encounter with this book.

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


This book focuses on the figure of King David as he appears in Jewish mystical, and particularly kabbalistic, literature “... The question at the heart of this study is this: why does almost every zoharic homily that refers to King David do so in terms of the female divine presence, the Shekhinah? The aim of this book is to expand upon existing research in order to enable a new understanding of the nexus between gender and Kabbalah,” more specifically, in the Zohar corpus. In four chapters, Kara-Ivanov Kaniel, a lecturer at Haifa University, reviews pre-Zoharic midrashim, King David in the Zohar, as the “Fourth Leg of the Divine Chariot,” and “The multiple selves of King David.” Her presentation is very didactic; each chapter begins with a summary of what will be covered, the topic being analyzed almost always chronologically, from Iberian Kabbalah, Zoharic sources, to Hasidism and Sabbateian sources. She suggests “different answers, viewing the topic through the lenses of theology, polemics, ethics, and psychoanalysis ... applying the methodologies offered by diverse fields of academic inquiry such as literary theory of myth and mysticism, different constructs used in gender studies, interfaith dialogues, and current theories of masculinity and sexuality.” Kaniel concludes that “this different, feminized version of David was innovated by the Zohar ... this shift may be rooted in an anti-Christian polemic.” The printed volume has an “index of Rabbinic and Zoharic primary sources” but not an index of Biblical references. In the body of the text, books existing only in Hebrew are given in footnotes with an English title without the mention “[Hebrew]” which is rather misleading.

This title is recommended for large academic libraries.

Roger S. Kohn,
Silver Spring, MD
of the Va’ad to coordinate their finances and regularize their organization. The book then turns to the academic situation: in particular, the inclusion of Musar studies as part of the previously Talmud-driven curriculum. The author also examines the changing demands on the curriculum.

Next, Klibansky analyzes the leadership of the academies, specifically, the power dynamics of the Rosh Yeshiva and the Mashgiach, and the problems that arose between the two positions. Finally, he comments on the students (the talmidim) from several perspectives including their ages, living conditions, and their increasing influence on Yeshiva life.

The book concludes with two chapters on their fate after the German invasion of Poland and Lithuania. Some of the schools went into hiding, others survived in Russia and elsewhere, while the remainder were destroyed.

This is an important study for those interested in the history of 20th century European Orthodox Judaism. It successfully uses both statistics and stories to develop its thesis. It includes both overviews and specific information on some of the larger schools. Regrettably, the translation from Hebrew is somewhat uneven. Even so, it will be useful for scholarly institutions.

Fred Isaac, Oakland, CA


Lasker has written an outstanding, albeit introductory, English language work on what he labels as the oldest surviving alternative Judaism in the world. The origins of Karaism date from the ninth century Islamic Middle East.

Chapter 1 discusses Karaism’s origins and the similarities to some of the popular Islamic trends of that era. Chapter 2 describes Karaism’s golden age between the 9th and 11th centuries in the land of Israel. Chapter 3 describes Karasim under Byzantine rule and Karaism’s slow decline by the end of the 16th century. Chapters 4 and 5 tell the history of Karaism in Eastern Europe and their return to the Land of Israel in modern times. Chapter 6 turns to the behavioral and details Karaite law and religious practice and notable differences between it and Rabbinic Judaism. The principles and theology of Karaism are set forth in Chapters 7 and 8 and interestingly are quite close to the principles of Rabbinic Judaism. Chapter 9 discusses Karaite exegesis and its contribution to Rabbinic exegesis. Chapter 10 provides a sketch of Karaite polemics, while Chapter 11 looks at their language and literature. The final chapter looks at the future of Karasim.

Lasker has organized this book in a clear conceptual chapter format. Each of the chapters could be profitably read on their own. The book is an excellent and authoritative introduction to Karaism.

David Tesler, Efrat, Israel

Horowitz, Daniel. *Leibowitz or God’s Absence*. Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2022. 139 pp. $119.00 (9781644697948) HC.

This book is an idiosyncratic and eclectic introduction to the thought of Yeshayahu Leibowitz. The author notes that he is attempting to “encompass the thought of Leibowitz from various angles.” Leibowitz himself is an idiosyncratic and eclectic thinker. He was born in Lithuania in 1903 and moved to Palestine in 1934. He was trained in the natural sciences and taught chemistry, biochemistry, neurology, biology, neurophysiology as well as philosophy and Jewish thought at the Hebrew University.

Leibowitz, a lifelong Orthodox Jew, was what some would call a radical Maimonidean, in that he followed a very strict and uncompromising line of Maimonides’ thought. Leibowitz was a hyper rationalist and believed that most forms of popular religion/Judaism should properly be thought of as idol worship. He was against magical thinking of any kind and rejected any notion of divine intervention or historical revelation. Leibowitz was staunchly committed to the (in his words, obviously human created) process of Halacha, but always in the service of God and never for the benefits or satisfaction of the practitioner.

Leibowitz’s thought is always fascinating even if occasionally paradoxical or contradictory. The book consists of seventeen short chapters highlighting different aspects of Leibowitz’s philosophy. There is not much scholarship in English on Leibowitz, and what is extant, tends to be academic and requires some measure of philosophic training (see the works of Avi Sagi). This book will serve as a good primer for the interested generalist.

David Tesler, Efrat, Israel

Continued on page 37
REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR ADULTS


*Time to Gather* is a deeply absorbing, thought-provoking read that raises important questions about the ownership and control of Jewish history and culture. The book examines in great depth the remarkable “archival turn” taken by key Jewish individuals, groups, and institutions in their efforts to preserve Jewish historical documents during the great upheavals of the twentieth century. Its primary focus is on the historical development of three major repositories that exemplify three distinctive but connected approaches to Jewish archive creation. The first, the Gesamtarchiv der deutschen Juden in Berlin, provides “a leitmotif for the development of Jewish archives during the 20th century as a whole.” Indeed, the collecting philosophy of its early 20th century founders was reflected in its name: Gesamtarchiv (a total archive). In attempting to collect the historical records of all deutschen Juden (German Jews), unlike the later Nazi archive of the Juden in Deutschland (Jews in Germany), the founders had the lofty aim of creating a national monument to cultural synthesis.

The second repository, ha-Arkiyon ha-kelali le-toldot Yisra’el (the Jewish Historical General Archives), was first established in Jerusalem on the eve of WWII. It finally opened to the public in 1947, and its collections were shaped according to a philosophy which regarded documents as part of the “ingathering of the exiles.” Ha-Arkiyon, was also built on the dream of a “total” archive, but in this case, even more ambitiously and impossible to fulfill, as a national monument to the entire history of the Jewish diaspora.

The third repository, the American Jewish Archives (AJA) in Cincinnati, which concurrently opened in 1947, likewise aimed to tell the complete story of American Jews and to create a monument to the world’s “greatest Jewry,” but unlike the other two, it envisioned a network of archives around a central idea. The AJA’s major emphasis on acquiring copies allowed the originals to remain in situ; the knock-on effect, however, was to downgrade the importance of the object itself.

Lustig’s study also includes a chapter on the struggles in postwar Germany to recover stolen materials and establish new Jewish archives. This chapter brings into sharper relief complex questions about the ownership of cultural heritage and where an archive should be located, and the related issue of provenance vs pertinence.

The final chapter concerns the “digital turn” which represents a new type of ingathering. It considers the implications of reassembling digitally scattered collections, which can lead to false impressions about the original documents themselves and their original context. Overall, as this book most engagingly demonstrates, archives are not neutral; it is the archive creator who shapes the past and influences the histories we write and the knowledge we share. This title is highly recommended for all libraries.

Rebecca J. W. Jefferson, University of Florida


This coming-of-age novel provides a fascinating glimpse into the world of rural, small town Jewish life in White Russia (now Belarus) in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It was completed in 1939, written by an important figure in the world of Yiddish letters, who emigrated as a young girl in 1907 from her village of Ugli, lived briefly in New York city, then settled in Montreal, where she died in 1962. Ida Maze supported and helped many Yiddish writers, wrote four books of poetry for children and adults, and this novel. In a series of interconnected vignettes, the novel describes the author’s childhood and early youth, ending with her leaving for America. It presents the dreams, visions, fantasies of Dineh, her interrelationships with family, relatives, neighbors, and the broader community. It is a vivid, compelling portrait of women’s lives, joys and sorrows.

The book includes a short introduction, as well as a useful, insightful afterword. There is also a glossary and translator’s notes. *Dineh* is a rich and valuable addition to works by Yiddish women writers that deserve a place in Judaica collections of academic, public, school and synagogue libraries.

Susan Freiband, Volunteer Synagogue Librarian, Agudas Achim Congregation, Alexandria, Virginia

Continued on page 38

Bruce McComiskey characterizes his book as an extended case study focusing on rhetorical strategies within a selection of non-biblical Dead Sea Scroll texts. He emphasizes the importance of the Dead Sea Scroll texts in understanding Israelite and Jewish rhetoric in the transitional period between well studied biblical rhetoric and Talmudic rhetoric. McComiskey writes: “the Dead Sea Scrolls are examples of rhetorical texts from a historical period that, until 1947, had very little documentary evidence available for study....”

Rhetoric is the art of persuasion, of using text/speech to bring an audience to the author or speaker’s point of view. The context within which the discourse takes place is an important element in understanding the rhetorical strategy. Although McComiskey acknowledges the significance of the “rhetorical situation” (author, purpose, audience, the immediate need or demand), he also views it as “static.” He extends his examination of rhetorical situations into a broader consideration of “rhetorical ecologies.” Attending to rhetorical ecologies involves taking into account the evolving social and historical forces that provide the context to the discourse.

McComiskey’s analysis focuses on six texts which he asserts illustrate this dynamic and the shifts in rhetorical strategies that the Essene community employed as they adapted their goals to the changing social and historical situation. He concludes that according to his analysis the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE has been portrayed erroneously as the major “rupture” in the shift from biblical to rabbinic Judaism. On the contrary, the innovations developed over centuries.

McComiskey’s work presents both a case for the significance of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the study of religious rhetoric as well as providing evidence for a gradual transition from biblical to rabbinic Judaism during the Second Temple period. With extensive notes and bibliography the book would be a welcome addition to academic libraries.

Randall C. and Anne-Marie Belinfante
Herkimer, NY


As the Shoah recedes and the last survivors are dying, documentary history becomes more critical in telling the narrative. Rafael Medoff’s large-format volume will help the next generation understand the horror.

Medoff presents the story in one hundred vivid documents, organized topically and chronologically. Each of the twenty sections has five pieces of evidence. Two items are shown as they originally appeared; the others are presented as quotations. Every piece has both a short introduction and a following commentary, to set its context and implications. Every section has a short reading list, in addition to the longer bibliography.

The book begins with a 1933 political cartoon; it shows Hitler as a schoolboy, with “nice safe conservative checks” to keep him in line. There is a letter from Einstein to Eleanor Roosevelt, asking for her assistance. Another letter, from Avery Brundage of the US Olympic Committee, justifies American participation in the Berlin Olympics of 1936. Several items demonstrate the antisemitic attitudes of State Department officials, who raised the barriers for Jewish refugees as their situation worsened. Part seven follows the S.S. St. Louis as it sought refuge in Cuba and the U.S. We hear from Vian Fry and Rabbi Stephen Wise, and read about the various meetings, protests and prevarications that cost so many lives. We also see the confirmation of the Final Solution (Part ten); the Bermuda Conference, which discussed the situation of Jewish refugees (Part fourteen); and the wartime response to Zionism (Part seventeen).

*America and the Holocaust* is an important achievement. It provides a valuable entry point for readers of all ages. It should be in all high schools and synagogues, and will be useful in college and research libraries as a first line of research. The bibliography and index, while not extensive, will guide students and adults further into the topic.

Fred Isaac,
Oakland, CA

Continued on page 39

During her long and impressive career, Peninnah Schram wore many hats — professor, performer, author, and recording artist. This delightful biography, written by a fellow academic, author, and storyteller, captures the poise and intelligence of a highly talented lady and celebrity. Through a “bio-storying” approach, it recreates idyllic moments, beginning with a childhood in Connecticut where Peninnah learned sterling Jewish values from her observant parents, who also exposed her to the Jewish oral tradition and the power of tales to impart both parochial and universal lessons. Chapters, accompanied by photos and arranged in pivotal eras, cover years in college, where Peninnah majored in speech and drama; a happy marriage and residence in Paris; and her eventual home in New York City. But the focus is storytelling, which Peninnah developed in earnest following a providential chain of events after her husband’s sudden death. Reconnections with former classmates and acquaintances, who had become theatrical instructors, led to her own pursuit of a teaching degree and eventual faculty positions, initially at Iona College, then at Yeshiva University’s Stern College for Women, where for 45 years she inspired hundreds of students (and occasional semesters at YU’s Azieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration). Workshops at other institutions like Manhattan’s 92nd Street Y further showcased her narrative gifts. Also described are encounters with Jewish luminaries, including Nobel Prize winners Elie Wiesel and Isaac Bashevis Singer. Peninnah herself joins the ranks of cultural icons, a catalyst who raised a popular craft to an art form; her life story is sure to enchant audiences.

For public and synagogue libraries, and theater and folklore collections.

Hallie Cantor, Acquisitions Associate, Yeshiva University, NY


In nine chapters, Nehemia Polen, a professor of Jewish Thought at Hebrew College in Newton, MA, guides the reader through the “Seventh Day” in the Jewish Bible and in the writings of the Hasidic masters, describing in detail the practices of the Orthodox Jew and the experience of a full day dedicated to spiritual growth. “Shabbos has its own flow, a sequential arc ... in sync with the path of the sun – sunset, sunrise, gradual fading of sunlight.” Polen has “adopted the rubrics Stop, Look, Listen for these stages, [remembering] these terms fondly from [his] childhood as essential features of road-safety education ...” Deeply rooted in Jewish texts, Polen makes the case that the reader should participate in a community where the Sabbath is fully celebrated.

This book is recommended to any reader interested in the Sabbath and in the perspective of a firmly Orthodox Judaism lens on the topic.

Roger S. Kohn, Silver Spring, MD


The Rational Passover Haggadah is another volume in Dennis Prager’s “rational” explorations of classical Jewish scripture. (The Rational Bible Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy). The purpose of the book, according to Prager’s introduction, is to explain the Haggadah text and to make it relevant to today’s Jews and non-Jews.

The book is organized in an easily readable and useful manner. Traditional rituals and their meaning are introduced at the beginning of the book. The steps included in a traditional Seder are written in large red print, in Hebrew, English and in translation. The blessings and text in Hebrew are followed by a translation written in italics. Instructions on how to perform the various rituals are printed in a different font.

What makes the Haggadah unique is that Prager presents topics for discussion. For example, he suggests that “The Problem of Goodness without Wisdom,” can be discussed when the Seder participants read about the four sons. Another interesting suggestion, connected to the song Dayenu (The song of Gratitude) is “Gratitude---the Mother of both Goodness and Happiness.” Prager presents his own philosophical explanations and ideas after each discussion suggestion. Six essays from The Rational Bible are included at the end of the Haggadah. Fans of Dennis Prager’s radio show and other books will learn how to conduct a traditional Seder and be inspired by his philosophy, and beliefs about Judaism.

Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, OH

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The *Instant Pot Kosher Cookbook*, written by cookbook author Paula Shoyer, is an excellent resource for anyone who owns an instant pot. Shoyer introduces the book by describing the benefits of an instant pot and how to use it. She devotes two pages to how the pot can be used for kosher cooking, but she says the bottom line is to ask your rabbi.

In addition to the traditional recipe sections, breakfast, meats, and soup, Shoyer gives suggestions for dishes that would be appropriate for holidays. The recipes are simple to make and range from well-known recipes, such as tomato soup, apple sauce, brisket, and borscht to more gourmet fare including Persian lamb, pulled chicken tacos in mole sauce, and Moroccan fish stew.

The photographs of the dishes are mouth-watering and spectacular. Shoyer prefaces each recipe with a personal note about her relationship to the dish. A sidebar for each recipe informs the reader if the dish is gluten free, meat, parve, or kosher for Passover.

Useful information, including hands on time, time to pressure, release time, if advance prep is advisable, and an index of recipes is also included.

Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, OH


Rabbi Dr. Avraham Steinberg offers historical, medical, and halachic perspectives (Part I) along with a Q&A practical halachic issues section (Part III) that sandwiches critical care physician Ari Ciment’s Covid-19 stories of tragedies, triumphs, and connectedness.

Emphasis is made on the importance of Jews heeding precautions and following the expert guidelines of world health organizations and scientists, under legal rubrics of *pikuach nefesh* and *rodef*, even if such regulations limit communal prayer. Such was the position of Rabbi Akiva Eiger who lived during cholera pandemics. However, the authors are aware that the *Torah* and *Chazal* (the ancient sages) preceded the current medical world in understanding that isolation and quarantine are methods of preventing the spread of contagious disease. The authors affirm the sanctity of human life in Jewish law in that *pikuach nefesh* overrides the entire *Torah* other than the three cardinal sins.

Some of many questions explored include: triage when there are more patients in need of lifesaving measures than available resources, and if one should give limited lifesaving resources to the one who has greater chance of survival or “first come first served”; medical parity when there is the same need for a lifesaving resource and equal prognosis; what is the balance to be struck between the principle of fair disclosure and the harm versus benefit that such disclosure might cause; and is there a *chiyuv* (obligation), *heter* (rabbinic allowance), or an *issur* (prohibition) to risk your life for another.

At the time of this publication there was no vaccine for the coronavirus so a future edition will need to bring this volume up to date.

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Research libraries may be interested in other treatments of this topic such as the article “Piskei Corona” by R. Hershel Schachter and a dedicated Corona volume of Minhat Asher by Rav Asher Weiss, and access to Eliezer Brodt’s “Towards a Bibliography of Coronavirus related articles and seforim written in the past month (updated), Black Weddings and Other Segulot,” (Seforimblog.com (May 4,2020). 

David B Levy, 
Landers College for Women, Touro University, NYC


A n Executive Order issued by President Clinton in 1995 declassified almost every previously classified record from World War II. When this happened, the story of Fort Hunt in Arlington, Virginia emerged. At one time part of George Washington's farmlands and eventually designated a National Park, in 1942, the War Department issued a special-use permit that made Fort Hunt a “Joint Interrogation Center.” More buildings were constructed, and three main projects were administered during and after World War II. The Military Intelligence Service-X (MIS-X) specialized in escape and evasion, creating equipment and communication strategies to help U.S. POWs escape from German prison camps. The Military Intelligence Service-Y (MIS-Y) served two functions. Soldier interrogated high-value German prisoners and listened on their conversations around the fort. Military Intelligence Research Service (MIRS) translated and analyzed captured German documents. Many of the soldiers involved in these projects were Jews whose families had escaped Nazi Germany. The book details their backgrounds and how their intelligence and language skills had a major impact on the United States victory in World War II and preparedness to deal with the Cold War with the Soviets after the war. Some were set to Nuremberg after the war to help with interviews of notorious Nazis like Rudolf Hess and Hermann Göring.

In 2006, Brandon Bies, the historian at George Washington Memorial Parkway (which manages Fort Hunt) began putting together the story and interviewing the men who were stationed at Fort Hunt, and there was a reunion in 2007. While many of the participants have passed away, the research about the projects continues. The back matter includes an extensive bibliography, endnotes, and an index. Maps of both Fort Hunt and its proximity to Washington, DC would have put its strategic location in jeopardy.

The book is informative, and the presentation is extremely detailed and straightforward. Some of the information is repetitive, particularly the stress that no torture or physical abuse was used to get information from prisoners. A standout for libraries that collect materials about Jewish American History.


For half a century, Rabbi Moses Gaster was a major figure in British Jewry. This short biography is a reminder of his prominence. Born in Romania, Gaster was taught by some of the leaders of German Jewry. He became a follower of Frankel’s “Historical School” and attended the Wissenschaft in Breslau. He emigrated to England in the mid-1880s and was appointed Haham (Chief Rabbi) of the Sephardic community soon after.

In addition to serving in that role for 30 years, he was a controversial intellectual figure. He was an early supporter of a Jewish homeland; he joined Hovevei Zion while still in Romania and remained committed throughout his life. He was a book and manuscript collector and left his large library and papers to the British Library and other institutions. He was also an early researcher, lecturer and author on Romanian Judaism, Jewish magic and spells, folklore, and the Samaritans.

Derek Taylor’s volume is both a biography and a helpful intellectual study of Gaster. It includes important insights into British Jewish history between the 1880s and 1930s, including internal and intellectual conflicts. It discusses the fierce disputes Gaster had, including his removal from leadership in 1918. It also summarizes his wide-ranging scholarly life and his impact on those topics. The final chapter summarizes his large extended family’s commitment to British Jewish life through the 20th century.

While Gaster’s name is remembered by scholars, his broad learning and passionate opinions have been forgotten by the general public. This volume fills a hole in our historical memory. While the price is high for synagogues, it is a significant addition for universities with British Judaism as a focus.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA

Continued on page 42

How should we prepare for the High Holy Days? Rabbi Wildes (founder of the Manhattan Jewish Experience) has some provocative suggestions. The book poses one question for each day of the period of Teshuva (from the beginning of Elul to Yom Kippur) and asks the reader to explore it. The topics are easy on their face but may also reach deep into our souls. How can we re-interpret weaknesses as strengths (Day 4)? How can we better understand other people’s reactions to us (Day 18)? What daily activities make us aware of God’s presence (Day 26)? The questions do not feel progressive from beginning to end, but they are not random. Individually and collectively, the process leads readers into a deeper appreciation of their abilities, their spiritual needs, and opportunities to set goals for the coming year that will heal and improve their lives. In these ways the “40-day Challenge” is derived from Mussar concepts and also reflects the Omer’s progression from Passover to Shavuot.

There are several other books available that help prepare people for the Holy Days. Rabbi Alan Lew’s, *This is Real and You Are Completely Unprepared*, takes a broad approach linking Zen meditation with Jewish life. Agnon’s *Days of Awe* uses Torah, Talmud, and legends to teach us the many meanings of the period. *The 40-Day Challenge* takes a personal approach, similar to Olitzky and Sabath’s *Preparing Your Heart for the High Holy Days*. Although this title is especially appropriate for individual use it may also be used by rabbis and other professionals in study groups and other settings.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA
THE CONVENTION OF WIVES
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