Museum of Jewish Heritage — A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, JewishGen, and Jewish Life Television to Launch the World’s First Jewish-Themed Genealogy TV Series This Fall

By Sally Stieglitz, Editor in Chief, AJL News and Reviews

Brad Pomerance was the kid making family trees with triangles and circles, always incredibly fascinated with genealogy. Now, the Jewish Life Television (JLTV) Host and Executive Vice President will be anchoring a brand new Jewish themed genealogy show, Generations, a collaboration between JLTV, The Museum of Jewish Heritage — A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, and JewishGen, the global home for Jewish genealogy. Generations will feature celebrities, in the broadest sense, and will tell the story of all Jewish brethren that represent our common pasts. “I feel incredibly lucky and fortunate that I will be the vehicle to help tell those stories,” says Pomerance.

According to Pomerance, Generations will be groundbreaking amongst genealogy shows in a few key ways. First, the producers are going to be pulling objects from the Museum of Jewish Heritage collections. The guests will actually be touching those objects, such as siddurim, found at the guest’s ancestors’ shul. “I think objects have a soul in a way...,” Pomerance notes. “That will be very powerful. Yes, documents matter, but if you can touch something that will be really special.” The Museum of Jewish Heritage maintains a collection of almost 40,000 artifacts. The television series will uncover and explore each featured luminary’s family tree, delve into where their ancestors lived, and reveal artifacts, objects, documents, and photographs that paint a full family portrait.

Additionally, the show is thoughtfully named, explains Pomerance. “It’s called Generations and we are going to make it generational...bring in the celebrity’s families, parents, children. “L’dor V’dor.” He adds, the resources available will be extraordinarily deep as JewishGen is the largest Jewish genealogical website in the world and that provides meaningful access to data.

Finally, Pomerance believes that the producers will bring context to the stories. It’s not to say if you’re not Jewish, you can’t understand a Jewish story, he explains, but “it doesn’t hurt.” The television show will also be looking at people who have Jewish roots who may not be living a Jewish life. DNA testing, as a tool, will be used when relevant. The show will cover the broad spectrum of Jewish experiences, Pomerance notes, and the Sephardic and Mizrahi stories will not be ignored, “as they are “so

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rich and deep"

Pomerance explains that he has been “always acutely aware of the miracle that we are—that our generation is, I’m just a couple of decades born after the Holocaust.” Now he wants to know more about our ancestors and how they lived; “it’s not that long ago.” He feels very connected to his central and eastern European roots.

Pomerance also recognizes the importance of librarians and archivists for the show. “There would be no Generations without librarians and archivists,” he exclaims. “Karen Franklin is our main researcher, “she’s phenomenal, what she can uncover is just miraculous. How else would we uncover the magic?”

This season’s guests will be celebrities, not just from Hollywood, but others in the limelight, who are interested in knowing their stories. The people Pomerance has spoken with about being guests are very humbled and inspired and are bringing in their siblings, uncles, cousins into the process. They are all in awe that we are here today, he explains. Celebrities are already reaching out to the production team about their interest in participating and 10 episodes are planned for Season One. The show’s challenges will include the issue of finding something that may be shocking to the family, and how you deal with that. “So many Jews in North America think they do not have relatives who died in the Holocaust, and they do and that can be really shocking,” says Pomerance.

The announcement of the show exploded on Facebook and is now creating interest around the world. In addition to JLTV, the producers are looking into streaming platforms both in and out of the United States. “The purpose of our show is to tell the stories of Jewish people from around the world—Ashkenazi, Sephardic, Mizrahi, whatever it may be— and while the Jewish People have faced a lot of persecution over the last centuries, there are a lot of stories that are quite affirming.”

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**Shul Records America**

By Ellen Kowitt, Director, JewishGen USA Research Division

The JewishGen USA Research Division introduces Shul Records America (SRA), a new finding aid pointing to the location of American synagogue record collections. Currently containing over 500 collections held at 50 repositories or websites, about 20% include links to digitized materials.

Synagogue records are created by congregations, their staff including rabbis and administrators, and other ritual leaders such as mohels, educators, and board members. The records that are preserved can contain a broad variety of materials including some that are of more value to community historians than family historians, but the real gems to genealogists identify Jewish two-generation names, establish relationships or residence, and include birth, marriage, and death registers, mohel or circumcision lists, ketubot, burials, and yahrzeit memorial plaques. Additionally, there are other types of synagogue materials that may be helpful such as membership lists, congregational bulletins or newsletters, board meeting minutes, donor lists, bar or bat mitzvot lists, photographs, eulogies, and more.

Finding synagogue records is problematic and time consuming though, particularly for hobbyists. They can be housed at an active synagogue or at an archive. You can certainly research where defunct or historical congregational records may have been deposited by searching for the congregational name, rabbi, or mohel on WorldCat, ArchiveGrid, or Google, and possibly find the location of preserved material hidden away at hundreds of small historical societies, museums, archives, or within commercial genealogy company catalogs.

The reality is that collections are not all cataloged, and when cataloged, they are not consistently tagged with the same search descriptions. Searching with a phrase such as “synagogue records” when a collection is described by “congregation register” or “rabbinical papers” or not described at all, may not point to where the records exist and are housed, or even adequately describe what they contain.

Other challenges include that foreign language transcriptions are inconsistent, there are boxes stored at archives that have not been processed, and there are errors in catalogs, so the only way to verify contents is to see the records in person or by digitizing them for broader access. If finding aids don’t exist and some never make their way to WorldCat or Google, how are end users supposed to know where these genealogically rich materials are housed?

To make it easier, and in one place to identify where congregational records are housed, the JewishGen USA Research Division has started the search with Shul Records America. This free finding aid is searchable by state, city, name of collection, year range, and repository.

We need you to grow this finding aid! Help us to identify where even more American synagogue record collections are located both online and offline!

To add additional collections, or for more information about Shul Records America, visit https://usa.jewishgen.org/synagogue-research/shul-records-america or contact USA-RD Director, Ellen Kowitt at ekowitt@jewishgen.org.

JewishGen.org is a non-profit organization founded in 1987 as an international electronic resource for Jewish genealogy. In 2003, JewishGen became an affiliate of the Museum of Jewish Heritage — A Living Memorial to the Holocaust in New York City.
Michigan Synagogue Braille Bindery Serves Blind and Low-Vision Children

by Beth Michelson, Temple Beth El Braille Bindery Volunteer

The more that you READ,
The more THINGS you will know.
The more that you LEARN,
The more PLACES YOU’LL GO.
Dr. Seuss

The Temple Beth El Braille Bindery in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan has a mission to put books in the hands of blind and low-vision children. Since 1959, the volunteers at the bindery have transcribed, hand-bound, packed, and shipped, braille books to anyone requesting them across the United States. And the books are free!

Last year the bindery produced and shipped over 1,500 individual books. Among the most popular titles: Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone, If You Give a Mouse a Cookie, and Charlie and the Chocolate Factory. The bindery operates a website, freebraillebooks.org, where parents, children, librarians, and teachers can browse over 2,000 book titles and place orders.

Volunteers fulfill those orders by embossing the books from computer files of transcribed books. Each week thousands of pages of embossed paper are piled up until Tuesday mornings, when a larger group of about a dozen volunteers arrive to assemble the books. Book pages are numbered, perforated paper is separated, books are spiral bound with covers and the books are labeled in print and braille. After a final quality-check, the books are packed and shipped across the country.

Temple Beth El Bindery is fortunate to have two volunteers who are certified braillists by the Library of Congress. In addition to brailling labels for the outgoing books each week, the transcribers create new books for the library collection, update books in the current library to the United English Braille format, and keep the current catalog error-free. The transcribers welcome special requests.

The bindery employs no paid staff, it operates on purely volunteer help. Most of the volunteers are senior citizens and reside in...
Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone is a 6 volume (~75 pages/volume) book in braille.

Braille comes in two versions, uncontracted and contracted. Uncontracted is when print is reproduced letter for letter. Contracted braille includes over 250 additional contractions representing the most commonly occurring words or letter combinations found in English. For example, the word “and” has its own symbol in braille, as does “ment”, “ed” and “con”.

Braille reading typically begins in childhood with uncontracted braille and moves to contracted braille as the reader becomes more proficient. Sadly, only about 10% of the blind population read braille. If you are blind and can’t read, your ability to learn and function in society is limited. It is commonly known that illiteracy directly correlates to low employment and poverty.

There are multiple obstacles to learning braille; insufficient access to qualified teachers, the difficulties of a sighted person (who reads braille visually as a code) teaching a blind child (who reads by touch), and access to materials. The Bindery volunteers feel grateful to be able to address the “access to materials” problem in some small way.

While most recipients of the braille books go to children, the bindery also has been able to serve adults who have lost their vision or are going blind. Starting to read with children’s books can be an entree into learning braille at an older age.

Temple Beth El and its volunteers are proud of working to bring literacy to blind and low-vision children.

The 30 black-and-white photographs of visitation stones in Remembered as a Blessing by Vince Leo honor these complex objects as they are: simultaneously hard, durable pieces of matter and embodiments of ineffable spiritual relationships. Essays by critically acclaimed author Daniel Mendelsohn and Rabbi Morris J. Allen reflect on this ancient Jewish tradition.
Who Knows Four... Haim Gottschalk!

Haim Gottschalk chairs AJL’s Librarianship & Education Committee and is a Judaica Librarian at Library of Congress.

Tell us about your best experience in AJL?

My best experience was planning the 2007 AJL conference that was held in Scottsdale, Arizona with Rachel Leket-Mor. This was the first conference planned at the national level and there were a lot of moving parts. Working with Rachel was a pleasure — she had a certain way of keeping calm during the entire planning process. I am glad we worked together. The conference was a huge success, btw.

Tell us about your favorite memory of Jewish libraries?

I have two favorite memories of Jewish libraries. The first being my library internship at the Taylor-Schechter Genizah Research Unit at the University of Cambridge. The internship was centered on Hebraica cataloging and it involved identifying, describing, and cataloging in Dublin Core 10th-17th century Hebrew manuscripts. Every day had “awe-moments”! My favorite was actually holding a manuscript of a page of the Mishneh Torah written by Maimonides himself.

My second favorite memory is very recent; when Michelle Margolis took me on a personal tour of the Corfu exhibition held jointly at Columbia University and at The Jewish Theological Seminary. I appreciated the time she took and her enthusiasm when she explained the various items on display. Moreover, I appreciated how she planned and organized the various talks, especially the conservation talk, which added a deeper appreciation to the behind the scenes work that goes into curating an exhibition. Amazing job!

What is your favorite summer treat? (s’mores, ice cream...?)

I had to stop and think about this one. To be honest, I don’t have one. However, that said, I do have a favorite memory of a treat, if I may answer this way — although not quite summer, in June of my senior year in high school, we had a trip to Disneyland for Grad-Night. Grad-Night is a unique experience, where high school seniors in the LA area are dressed up in formal wear and enjoy the Park all night. In a small group we went on a few rides, which was fun. What made that night a memorable experience was when we bought a lemonade — which was cold and so refreshing — which we passed around as we sat and reflected on our 12 years in school together and what our future might be. Graduation was less than 24-hours away. It was the perfect treat.

Where do you envision AJL’s Education Programs in the next year and in the next 10 years?

Next year, that is AJL year 2023-2024, I envision there will be a certificate program for synagogue librarianship. As for the next 10 years, I would love to see AJL Classroom be a recognized and respected brand name in librarianship studies in general and Judaica librarianship education specifically to further the training of future Judaica librarians.

Rachel Leket-Mor began her career as a Hebrew language editor at publishing houses in Israel. She edited translated fiction, scholarly articles, and monographs, mostly related to Jewish history, political science, and holocaust studies, in collaboration with authors, translators, and in-house editors. She began at Arizona State University (ASU) Library in 2002, first as the Jewish studies bibliographer, building collections, supporting curriculum and research, and providing specialized reference assistance. After two years in this position, she worked as a subject librarian for Jewish studies, religious studies, philosophy, and medieval and

Rachel Leket-Mor Wins 2023 Fanny Goldstein Merit Award

By Paula Breger, Public Relations Chair

The Association of Jewish Libraries (AJL) is proud to announce that longtime member Rachel Leket-Mor has been named the 2023 Fanny Goldstein Merit Award Winner. The award, named for the librarian, social activist, and founder of National Jewish Book Month, is bestowed in recognition of loyal and ongoing contributions to the AJL and to the profession of Judaica librarianship.

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Renaissance studies until 2017 and is currently the open stack collections curator. In this role, she provides leadership for the selection, management, and disposition of print collections and openly accessible resources. She also works with, trains, and guides selectors on purchasing materials. She holds two master’s degrees, a Master in Information Resources and Library Science from University of Arizona and an MA in Translation Studies from Tel Aviv University.

Ralph Taylor’s involvement with the AJL began when she joined the Association in 2003 as a new Judaica librarian. Her professional involvement in the Association began in 2007, when she co-chaired that year’s annual conference in Scottsdale, Arizona, with Haim Gottschalk. The following year, she was elected vice president of AJL’s Research, Archives, and Special Collections Division (RAS), serving alongside RAS President Jim Rosenbloom (2008-2010). As RAS president (2010-2012), she collaborated with Schools, Synagogues, and Centers Division President Joyce Levine to conduct a member survey to study trends in Judaica libraries and anticipate future developments across the AJL divisions. The survey results, including the number of librarians in AJL libraries, their educational level, age and years of service, and retirement plans, were used in AJL strategic and leadership organizational planning. Ralph served on several AJL strategic planning committees, from 2008 to 2010 and from 2013 to 2016, and has served on the AJL Council since 2007 and on the Association’s Constitution and Bylaws Committee since 2022.

In 2012, Ralph became the editor of Judaica Librarianship, AJL’s peer-reviewed journal. A year later, she transferred the print-only publication to electronic publishing, set up the electronic platform and a new peer-review process, designed a new textual “nusah,” and acquired the Adobe InDesign skills needed for the production of scholarly works. She arranged for each issue to become open access 12 months after publication and moved the journal to complete open access when shifting it to a new electronic platform with the Open Journal Systems in early 2020. Opening the journal to all resulted in a significantly increased number of readers and better exposure to AJL. For the journal’s fortieth anniversary this year, she has led an AJL volunteer team in a project to upload the remainder of the journal’s back issues, following prior success with making volumes 9-16/17 available online.

Lisa Silverman, award committee chair, commented, “On behalf of the Fanny Goldstein Merit Award committee, we are proud to have the opportunity to honor Rachel Leket-Mor as this year’s recipient of the Award. Rachel has contributed so much to AJL, to the field of Judaica librarianship, and to librarianship as a profession overall. Her work on the AJL journal Judaica Librarianship has been invaluable to the organization. Rachel personifies the values and legacy of the Award’s namesake, Fanny Goldstein, who devoted her life to books and her community.” Ralph received her award on Monday, June 19, 2023, at the Annual Conference of the Association of Jewish Libraries, which will be held virtually this year. Information about the conference is available at https://jewishlibraries.org/2023-digital-conference/.

Members of the 2023 Fanny Goldstein Merit Award committee are Lisa Silverman, Jackie Ben-Efraim, and Elliot H. Gertel.

Looking Back to 1979! Ralph Taylor on Sydney Taylor at AJL Convention

A JL’s Lisa Silverman found a beautiful tribute made by Sydney Taylor’s husband Ralph at the 1979 AJL Convention (as it was called then), Jackie Ben-Efraim, AJL’s VP for Development, shared it with AJL News and Reviews for everyone to enjoy (again).

TRANSCRIPTION OF RALPH TAYLOR’S SPEECH AT BANQUET, JUNE 19, 1979 — ACCEPTING THE SYDNEY TAYLOR BODY OF WORK AWARD (FOR THE PROCEEDINGS)

I am just overwhelmed. As I look around at all the happy and contented faces, I have a suspicion it’s due mostly to the lovely dancing we’ve seen and the very fine meal we’ve had rather than to your looking forward to listening to me. At any rate, I’m sure Sydney Taylor would have loved being with you tonight because Sydney Taylor had an especially warm spot in her heart for librarians. It’s not by accident that the heroine of Sydney’s first book in the All of a

Kind Family series was a librarian. And those of you who have read the book know that library going was something very special and a very great event in the lives of the five little girls that made up the All of a Kind family when they lived on the East Side.

Sydney Taylor was in constant demand by librarians, groups of parents and by children, naturally, and she loved to talk to them and was constantly thinking in terms of the children. Those who were fortunate enough to attend some of the sessions with her really understand what I mean when I say that Sydney emanated a remarkable kind of quality that is difficult for me to pinpoint. This quality was a kind of combination of joy and sunshine. It was a sunshine that was not a sentimentality, although her writings were full of sentiment. She had no special ax to grind, and yet the rules and regulations by which Jewish family life exhibited itself at its best were prominent in her pages. She had no special theories and no desire to teach or to lead a cause and yet what she put down in her books were the kinds of things that did teach and did lead and did become a cause. Through this joy and through this sunshine, hundreds of thousands of children have enjoyed the

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remarkable quality that Sydney Taylor had. I would just like to give you a very small anecdote illustrating what I mean.

One of the invitations Sydney had was to address children in a Catholic parochial. After she was through speaking, as was her wont, she asked the children if they had any questions or if they had anything to say. A little boy in the back of the room got up and waved his hand. Sydney looked at him and said, “Yes?”

And he said, “I wish I were a Jew.” Startled, Sydney said, “Why?”

And he answered, “Because they have so much fun.”

And it is this joy in Judaism which is, thank G-d, on the printed page for future generations of children. And as long as there is a child to turn the page, there will be this wonderful recreation of childhood. And for every adult who will read the books, there will also be this same renewal of the marvelous things Sydney Taylor brought to life.

Sydney Taylor is no longer here. And so I, who happened to be extraordinarily lucky in being associated with her in marriage for over 50 years, am very proud and happy and also astounded — at the honor being given her tonight and I gratefully thank you.

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**From the Editor**

Dear Safranim,

At the exact moment of this writing, we are enjoying another AJL Virtual Conference, A World of Possibilities (I’m a multitasker!). I’m deeply impressed by the work of the conference committee on putting together an excellent program with something for everyone to enjoy. Kol HaKavod!

For this issue of News and Reviews, we have some exciting contributions. If you have an interest in Jewish genealogy, you will likely be happy to read our first two articles, one on a brand new television show, *Generations* (JLTV), and another on researching American shul records. We’re also fortunate to have articles on an exhibition at University of Pittsburgh Libraries on the history of the Yiddish press, on a Michigan synagogue’s braille bindery, and a *Who Knows Four* feature with AJL leader Haim A. Gottschalk. Plus chapter chatter and reviews of recent publications!

Thank you to everyone who contributed to the issue. I’m always happy to hear from you and invite you to contribute articles, become a reviewer, or share chapter chatter for future issues.

Warmly,

Sally Stieglitz
Editor-in-Chief

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**My Name Is Hamburger**

by Jacqueline Jules

In a small Virginia town in 1962, ten-year-old Trudie Hamburger struggles to accept her German last name, her father's accent, and the knowledge that being different is an integral part of who she is.

“"The title of Jacqueline Jules's highly recommended new novel-in-verse reflects the feelings of growing up Jewish in a small southern town in the mid-twentieth century." —Jewish Book Council

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Chapter Chatter and Member News

AJL-CANADA

Anne Dublin’s incredibly successful launch of her middle-grade (and up) collective biography, She’s a Mensch!: Ten Amazing Jewish Women (Toronto: Second Story Press) took place at Holy Blossom Temple (Toronto) on May 15, 2023. Anne’s presentation touched the hearts and minds of everyone in the audience as well as those attending online. Based on her solid research, Anne led the audience through the life stories of these ten remarkable women. Great artistic talent of the presenter and fully illustrated story has turned this presentation into a theatrical play based on concrete historical events. The launch was sponsored by AJL-Canada, Second Story Press, and Women of Holy Blossom. For more information, go to: https://secondstorypress.ca/2023-books/shes-a-mensch

AJL-Canada is now planning its fall program, a panel discussion about the Acrieli Series of Holocaust Survivor Memoirs. This series is guided by the conviction that each survivor of the Holocaust has a remarkable story to tell, and that such stories play an important role in education about tolerance and diversity.

Anna Skorupsky, President, AJL-Canada

AJL/CAC

On Sunday afternoon, March 19th, AJL/CAC, in partnership with Jewish Library of Baltimore and PJ Library, presented a program for the children in the community at the Jewish Library of Baltimore. The program included a reading of the book, a Q&A session, an art project, decorating picture frames, and an opportunity to purchase the book. Susan Kusel, author, and Sean Rubin, illustrator, discussed their Sydney Taylor Book Award winning book, The Passover Guest, which won a Gold Medal in 2022. This beautifully illustrated children’s book, certain to become a classic, tells the story of a family who lacks money to buy necessities for the Jewish holiday of Passover. The date is 1933 during the depression with the unique setting of Washington, D.C. during the blooming of the magnificent cherry trees.

In their presentation, Kusel and Rubin spoke about their creative process and how they worked together to bring the story to life. Kusel discussed how she came up with the idea for the book and her research to ensure that the story was accurate. The program was a unique opportunity to hear the collaboration between an author and an illustrator. As they both explained, this does not happen often in today’s publishing world. Rubin spoke about his illustration process. He showed examples of his sketches and explained how he worked with Kusel to ensure that the illustrations reflected the story’s themes. It was especially fascinating to see the preliminary sketches for the magician (actually Elijah) in the story. The children and parents were an enthusiastic audience and were eager to ask Kusel and Rubin about their favorite parts of the book, how long it took to create, and what advice they would give to aspiring writers and illustrators.

Overall, the presentation was a wonderful opportunity for children to meet an author and illustrator and to be inspired by the message of The Passover Guest. Kusel’s and Rubin’s collaboration serve as a powerful reminder of the importance of tzedakah, kindness and generosity, especially during times of celebration.

Members of AJL/CAC worked hard to make this a successful program. A thank you goes to Rebecca Levitan, President of AJL/CAC, Ellen Share, Vice-President AJL/CAC, Jessica Fink, Executive Director of Jewish Library of Baltimore, Haim A. Gottschalk, and Gail Shirazi. A thank you also goes to Susan Kusel, author, and Sean Rubin, illustrator, who traveled from Virginia to give their presentation.

Ellen Share, Capital Area Chapter/AJL Vice-President

From the President’s Desk

JULY | AUGUST 2023

Dear Colleagues,

Although you’ll read this after our annual conference, I am writing it in the week prior to the conference, and so that is very much on my mind. By now you will have enjoyed a wonderful array of presentations, roundtables, and discussions in all aspects of the Judaica Librarianship world, from local outreach and advocacy to the history of the Jewish book, creating inclusive libraries and classroom engagement, and as new databases and digital resources that are being built in the field. And of course, highlights from important books published over the last year and collections from around the world. It is my deep hope that the conference was a great success for each of you who attended it, and that you have gained a tremendous amount — not only in knowledge, but in new connections, friendships and collaborators.

I am particularly excited to celebrate forty years of Judaica Librarianship, our peer-reviewed journal, and the completion of its digitization—the entire run of the journal is now available and searchable online, openly accessible to all. I cannot emphasize enough how important this journal is to the history of our field, and to the study of Jewish books in the 20th and 21st century. I am so grateful to Rachel Leket-Mor for the incredible work she has done to continue to produce this important journal, as well as in stewarding its online availability. It was very fitting to be able to honor Rachel with the Fanny Goldstein award for service to Judaica Librarianship at this year’s conference.

As we move into the summer, I look forward to hearing from all of you: how can AJL help you in your work? Is there an area or a topic you’d like to delve into? As a volunteer organization, our strongest asset is our members. If you have something you’d like to see happen, be in touch! I would love to work with you to see it through.

With best wishes,

Michelle

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AJL News and Reviews
PRESSED: Images from the Jewish Daily Forward Exhibit at Hillman Library, University of Pittsburgh

Eve Wider, Director of the Millstein Library, Liaison for Jewish Studies, University of Pittsburgh Library System

t all started with a reference question about accessing a historic issue of the Forward, a newspaper published about Jewish life since 1897. As the Jewish Studies Program liaison for the University of Pittsburgh University Library System, I reached out to Chana Pollack, the archivist for the Forward newspaper. After Ms. Pollack helped me find the information, she mentioned an exhibit called “PRESSED: Images from the Jewish Daily Forward.” Ms Pollack created the exhibit in collaboration with Nancy Johnson the curator of the Museum at Eldridge Street. Ms. Pollack pointed out that Pittsburgh used to have a Forward office and therefore the idea of bringing an exhibit about the historic paper home to Pittsburgh was born. I contacted Dr. Rachel Kranson, Director of the University of Pittsburgh Jewish Studies Program, who was very supportive of the idea because it would connect to her course, “Jews and the City,” which follows the migration of millions of Jewish people from the shtetls of Eastern Europe to urban areas around the world.

Founded in Manhattan, the Yiddish-language Jewish Daily Forward newspaper grew to become the most widely read Jewish newspaper anywhere. By the 1920s, the daily had more readers than the New York Times. The PRESSED exhibit draws from the Forward archive, a selection of the original images depicting daily life and historical moments of Jewish life in America and around the world.” Ms. Pollack commented, “the images and the way they’re almost in negative ... It was so evocative to me. It’s just very moving ... Sometimes it looked very shadowy or very ghost-like. It reverberated the voices and sounds of machinery that are part of the history of the Forward.”

Hoping to highlight the local Pittsburgh connection to the Forward and Yiddish life in Pittsburgh, our group reached out to Eric Lidji, the Director of the Rauh Jewish History Program & Archives at the Senator John Heinz History Center, and he curated an adjacent exhibit “The Jewish Forward and Beyond: Yiddish Newspapers in Pittsburgh.” That exhibit tells the story of Pittsburgh’s early 20th century Yiddish presses through local newspapers reproductions and oral histories from the Heinz History Center and the University of Pittsburgh Library System collections.

Students in Dr. Kranson’s class viewed the exhibit and had a virtual tour and discussion with Ms. Pollack and Ms. Johnson. They then had the opportunity to create six-word headlines inspired by articles printed in the Forward newspaper in the early 20th century. The students also had the unique opportunity to print their headlines using typeset and the 1890s-era printing press at the Hillman Library’s Text & conText Lab. These headlines and the student narratives about the exhibit became the basis of an additional adjacent exhibit which we called “Making Headlines.”

If you are interested in hosting the PRESSED exhibit in your library please contact Chana Pollack, pollack@forward.com or Nancy Johnson, njohnson@eldridgestreet.org
“There are books that are transformative. This is one of those books.” —The Cultural Daily

“This remarkable volume at once offers snapshots from history and captivating, and at times inspiring, lyrical responses to an event we are still seeking to understand — and one we're trying not to repeat.”—Jewish Book Council

“Literature, history, and the depths of the human soul come together here—a must-read for anyone who clings to hopes that we can avoid atrocities like The Holocaust in the future.” —NewPages Book Reviews

"New Voices is ground-breaking."—European Association for Jewish Studies

Winner 2023 International Book Awards for Anthologies

“...an important contribution to post-Holocaust studies...a distinctly compelling publication.”

“It's different from what visits to the sites of atrocities do because it's creating forms that have to be reassimilated by individuals, it is creating an event that happens inside [each person].”—Joy Ladin, literary scholar, former David and Ruth Gottesman Chair in English at Stern College of Yeshiva University

“The New Voices Project looks really interesting and I love the integration of the arts into this project.”
—Victoria Barnett, retired Director of the Programs on Ethics, Religion and the Holocaust, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

“...survival of any historical event can be assured only when such events become transformed into various forms of art.... I think this book was created in order that the Holocaust not suffer this particular expected fate”—Anna Ornstein, Holocaust survivor, former Co-Director, Int. Center for the Study of Psychoanalytic Self-Psychology and Lecturer in Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School

Through images selected from noted collections matched to each contributor, uniquely interpreting these “silent witnesses” from the period creating new perspectives for our times; together this diverse group, including poets, short story writers and essayists of color, Christian, Jewish, Muslim, LGBTQ+, prominent and emerging writers from around the world have contributed a powerful body of work that challenges international trends of xenophobia and anti-democratic movements by using the power of art to portray truth.

Produced by www.newvoicesproject.org  Published by Vallentine Mitchell www.vmbooks.com
IN THE SPOTLIGHT

EDITED BY REBECCA LEVITAN AND JUDY EHRENSTEIN


"The worker must have bread, but she must have roses, too" is a well-known quote by Rose Schneiderman, the hero of this picture book biography. Rose immigrated to New York from Poland in 1890 when she was eight years old. However, when Rose was only thirteen years old, she had to leave school and go to work in a cap factory to help support her family. Her mother said she had a "big mouth," but Rose insisted she had a "big voice." That voice was to prove powerful in the fight for better wages and working conditions in the garment factories of the city and ultimately all over the country.

In spare but clear prose, Emma Berne weaves the fascinating story of this Jewish immigrant girl who helped to organize the historic 1909 strike of 20,000 women garment workers. However, two years later, the horrific fire at the Triangle Shirtwaist Company opened people’s eyes to the ways the workers, mostly women, were still being mistreated by many foremen and factory owners. Eventually, Rose Schneiderman helped to form the National Women’s Trade Union League and she became an advisor to President Franklin Roosevelt. He appointed her as the only woman on the National Labor Advisory Board, and later, she became New York’s Secretary of Labor.

The captivating and authentic illustrations are rendered digitally using a base of burnt sienna with added touches of blues, greens, and grays; Rose’s vibrant red hair stands out against this muted palette. What impressed this reviewer is Abeille’s careful research regarding the clothing, hairstyles, buildings (inside and outside), and street scenes of early twentieth century New York City. The back matter includes a photo of Rose plus a note to families about *tikkun olam*, repairing the world.

A biography for this age group about Clara Lemlich, Rose’s “companion in arms,” is *Brave Girl: Clara and the Shirtwaist Makers’ Strike of 1909* (Balzer + Bray, 2013) by Michelle Markel.

Anne Dublin, AJL-Canada executive member
Toronto, Canada


This book is the 2023 Sydney Taylor Award Winner for Picture Books.

There are dozens of Holocaust books for young children; several have won the Sydney Taylor Award. Few have the power of Yaffa Eliach’s story as Chana Stiefel has presented it.

The primary story here is Eliach’s biography. She was born in Eishyshok, Poland, into a long-standing Jewish community. After the Nazi invasion in 1941, most of the town’s Jews were killed. Eliach escaped and went into hiding. Her most precious possessions were family photographs taken by her grandmother. After the war, she emigrated to Israel before moving to the US. In the 1970s, when the National Holocaust Memorial was being developed, President Carter asked her to contribute. This request led to Eliach’s collection of hundreds of photos, which were copied and placed in the “Tower of Life” in the Holocaust Museum.

We sing “Too l’hodot” on Shabbat; it is good to give thanks. This picture book, with its simply told story and wonderful illustrations by Susan Gal, is an appreciation of Yaffa Eliach, her commitment to pre-war Jewish society, and her dedication to the memory of the lives that were lost. It should be in every Jewish child’s library.

Fred Isaac
Oakland, CA

BIOGRAPHY


After the 1940 German invasion of France, Nazis patrolled the streets of Paris. They barged into homes, schools, offices, and shops demanding documents, and anyone identified as Jewish was immediately taken away to be part of Hitler’s “Final Solution.” In the midst of this terror, social worker Jacqueline Guthier bicycled all over the city, visiting young clients with her yellow and orange toy duck. But Jacqueline had a dangerous secret: she was part of the French Resistance, and the...
duck had a hidden compartment with fake identity papers that she distributed to Jewish families. Yet her role in the French resistance deflected from an even more deeply hidden secret: social worker Jacqueline’s name was really Judith Geller, a Jewish teenager whose own family was in hiding while she risked her life every day to save other Jewish lives.

Boxer specializes in picture book biographies about heroic women who find the courage to create change. In Hidden Hope, she does an excellent job of portraying the claustrophobic horror of living in a Nazi occupied territory in a way that is both realistic and comprehensible to children. Bates’ stark watercolor, gouache, and pencil illustrations include a generous palate of earth tones that soften and humanize the plot and setting. The story, though gripping and accessible, presupposes a basic knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust and is thus most suitable for elementary students.

The back matter includes an author’s note, illustrator’s note, and bibliography. There are also photographs of both Judith Geller’s false identity papers and the duck she used to hoodwink the Nazis on her perilous bike rides around France. This duck is now in Yad Vashem’s artifact collection, as a testament, along with this fine book, to her little-known heroism and the many lives that she saved.

Laurie Adler,
Hewlett Woodmere Public Library
Woodmere, New York

Dublin, Anne. She’s a Mensch!: Ten Amazing Jewish Women. Do You Know My Name?, 3. Toronto: Second Story Press, 2023. 112 pp. $22.95 (9781772603200) PBK. Gr. 4-7.

For book 3 in the “Do You Know My Name?” series, Dublin has selected “Jewish women who went beyond their field of work to make the world a better place.” Included are a South African journalist who combated apartheid and a Canadian music teacher who rescued Syrian Jews.

Included with each entry is a glossary and a “Sources Consulted” for each woman, including a highlight of resources that would be suitable for young people. Since several of the women included are still alive, Dublin also conducted interviews with a number of the women as well as with family members. The “Do You Know My Name?” Series highlights women “who you may never have heard of” but will remember, making this a great addition to all middle grade biography collections.

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


This picture book biography celebrates the life and legacy of a remarkable Portuguese Jewish woman living in the 1500s. Gracia Nasi was born in Lisbon in 1510, during a time when the Jews in Portugal were forced to convert to Christianity or face expulsion. Her family, therefore, lived a double life as secret Jews, meaning the family kept the laws of the Torah privately in the home, while posing as Christians to the public. While Gracia was tutored at home, she studied the tenets of her people, understanding the importance of saving lives, both spiritually and physically.

At 18 years of age she married Francisco Mendes, another wealthy secret Jew, who owned a huge shipping company which traded spices. Together, she and Francisco used their influence and wealth to protect the secrets Jews. When Francisco died on one of his trips at sea, 25-year-old Gracia inherited the family business along with Francisco’s brother, Diogo. How rare it was for a woman, especially one so young, to run a huge trading empire and be so respected that she was able to have audiences with rulers! When the situation became even more dire and Jews were forbidden to leave Portugal, Gracia arranged to escape with her nephew and many Portuguese Jews on one of her ships and set off to Antwerp. There she continued running the family business with Diogo until she felt she needed to escape again, always using her influence to save Jewish lives. She eventually made her way to Constantinople, where Jews could live openly. She had brought so many Jews that she built a new Jewish community there, including schools and a synagogue which is still in existence.

Using a mix of beautiful watercolors and pastels, Massari’s glorious illustrations convey the perfect mood of the time and place of the story. Massari’s detailed Azulejos patterns on all of the pages throughout the books depict the Portuguese tradition, while the ornate clothing reflects the Renaissance world Gracia lived in. One of the spreads is a gorgeous map allowing readers to follow the route of Gracia’s journey. A brief author’s note is included.

Esther Schnайдман,
Rosenbaum Yeshiva of North Jersey, Teaneck, NJ

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This engaging picture book biography of world-famous doll creator Beatrice Alexander, later known as Madame Alexander, highlights the influence her early childhood experience had on her unique renowned career. When she was growing up on New York’s Lower East Side she helped her father repair dolls in his doll hospital. This was the seed of her lifelong passion creating dolls for children to love. Beginning her journey of successful entrepreneurship by opening her own company at a time when few women had careers, she persevered through the Spanish flu, Great Depression, and two world wars. By the 1980s, her factories were producing more than one million dolls a year sold around the world. Her innovative ideas included doll eyes that opened and shut, rooted doll hair, a walking doll, international dolls, and a full-figured female fashion doll four years before Barbie, always with great attention to detail and quality.

Illustrator Sarah Dvojack’s choice of color palette and illustration style bring us into the early 1900s, the era of Madame Alexander’s childhood. The Jewish representation is minimal, with mention of the family being Jewish and their tradition of lighting candles for Shabbat. The backmatter adds information of her ancestors escaping antisemitic European mobs and her later generous philanthropy with Jewish organizations. Extensive sourcing is included.

Suzanne Grossman, MLS, Children’s Book Committee, Bank Street College


This picture book biography of Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise (1819-1900) follows him from his intellectually curious youth in what was then Bohemia, through his ordination as a rabbi, his immigration to the U.S., and the major role he played in Reform Judaism in North America as well as other accomplishments, such as founding a Jewish newspaper. The accessible text spells out changes that Wise proposed in terms comprehensible to primary readers: “Isaac believed that girls should have the opportunity to learn about their Jewish heritage, just as boys did.” It acknowledges differences of opinion within the Jewish community, noting that some Jews supported his initiatives while others were resistant to them, but concludes, “His ideas live on, inspiring others to pursue their dreams.” A sunny palette and frequent white space add to the positive feel. Back matter includes a timeline and an author’s note with brief additional historical background.

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


In the weeks leading up to his bar mitzvah, Ben notices strange occurrences in his neighborhood. First the shul disappears. Then strange lights and orbs appear in his backyard. Ben suspects aliens, but none of the adults will listen to him or believe him, and his classmates laugh at him. When Ben’s parents seem to be possessed by the aliens one morning, Ben gets Grandpa to help him hatch a plan to save the world. No one may know about it once they set things straight and send the aliens away from Earth, but Ben and Grandpa will always know about Ben’s heroism.

While the plot is an interesting premise for a coming-of-age story, the idea does not hold up. The book opens with Ben worrying about what being an adult means, and he returns to that thought process at the end. But throughout the action of the book, that theme is not apparent. The alien plot is also full of holes and doesn’t hold together well. A fun book for young readers interested in aliens but not so well-versed in alien lore as to be upset by glaring plot holes and errors in logic.

Dainty Bernstein, Postdoctoral Research Associate University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign


Forced by his artistic parents to sign up for at least one week of art lessons at his overnight summer camp in the Catskills, Emmett goes for what he sees as the least artsy option available and creates a life-size monster from some clay he found in a corner of the art shed. As campers do with all their art projects, Emmett writes his name on the monster — but he uses Hebrew letters. When he and his friend Jake notice the monster winking
and smiling at them, they consult Reisha from the girls’ side of camp, who makes a connection between Emmett’s creation and the legend of the golem. The secret group expands to include Emmett’s sister and a few other campers, who send the golem on errands like getting them all ice cream or cleaning their bunkhouse for them. The kids manage to keep their golem a secret from the adults, with lots of mishaps and hijinks, all while trying to figure out how and why this golem came to life. By the end of the summer, they may have gotten their answer.

Golem Goes to Camp is an excellent addition to the growing trend of middle grade golem books, with a focus on fun and excitement rather than a focus on learning. The camp setting and relationships are realistic and lots of fun, including details like sticky sweets attracting ants to the bunkhouse and campers attempting to sneak their phones out of the main office. An enjoyable, fun exploration of historical Jewish legend and contemporary Jewish experience.

Dainty Bernstein, Postdoctoral Research Associate University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign


Fourth grader Trudy Hamburger is the only Jewish student in her small Virginia town in 1962. She is proud of her religion but is bullied by classmates for being Jewish and for having a funny last name. She adores her German refugee father but is mocked because of his accent. She has genuine friendships but is excluded from a birthday party at a country club that denies admission to Jews; she loves singing but is forced to choose between isolating herself during music class or performing Christian songs. However, when Trudy’s father is hurt in an accident, members of the community come together to help and support Trudy’s family in surprising, and often quite sensitive, ways. This gentle novel in verse explores the meanings of friendship and prejudice as Trudy learns to find her own voice and say her name with pride.

Jacqueline Jules is a prolific author of chapter books, picture books, and poetry, and her skill at writing both prose and poetry is evident in this smooth and well-paced story. Positive Jewish representation runs through this book, and it has authentic and relatable Jewish characters. It is a historically accurate portrayal of many families’ Jewish American experience in the mid-twentieth century, with themes of anti-Semitism and anti-immigration that are relevant to today. My Name is Hamburger is a welcome addition to the canon of children’s novels in verse about the immigrant experience in America.

Laurie Adler, Director, Hewlett-Woodmere Public Library Woodmere, New York


This is the third book in the Pinky Bloom series, starring fourth grader Penina “Pinky” Bloom, the greatest kid detective in Brooklyn. Pinky has decided to start her own business and become the world’s greatest pet sitter. She still plans to solve mysteries but believes she can do both. With the help of her younger brother Ari, Pinky tries her hand at pet sitting, investigates the suspicious behavior at the pet store, and attempts to solve how Dad’s shofar has suddenly gone silent.

Pinky and her family are Shomer Shabbat, with descriptions of how Shabbat is started and completed, making the story accessible to less observant Jews as well as non Jews. Also included is a description on how to make a sound with the Shofar as well as what is required to be played for Rosh Hashanah. All of the Jewish portrayals are woven in seamlessly and would be enjoyed by any early reader that has interest in mystery books.

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

FICTION - TEEN READERS


Natalya Fox, aka Nat, aka Tal, has been living in New York City with her dad while her mom has moved to the West Coast. The summer is about to start, and Natalya needs to decide: does she stay in the city and hopefully meet the redhead girl she’s been crushing on, or does she go to Los Angeles, work as an intern at her mother’s marketing firm, and try to repair their relationship? What happens next is a Sliding Doors situation, so named for the 1998 movie starring Gwyneth Paltrow. In alternating chapters, we see Natalya’s summer unfold in both scenarios. In NYC she (spoiler!) does meet up with the cute redhead, Elly. She

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also helps at her friend’s backyard day camp and has Shabbat meals with her neighbor. In the other timeline though, she goes to LA and starts interning at her mom’s firm, which is where she meets the other intern Adam. Adam introduces her to his brother Evan and their group of friends that like to cook creative dinners, which leads to Adam cooking Shabbat dinners for Natalya and her mom as the two of them get closer together. Ultimately though, in both timelines, the summer comes to an end and Natalya returns to NYC to start school in the fall and who is the Happily Ever After?

The Sliding Doors concept executed perfectly, this fun, delight of a summer read is probably Adler’s most Jewish book to date. Great for all fans of a happily ever after, the only thing this book is missing is some delicious Shabbat recipes.

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


Imogen is the ultimate ally. All of her friends are Queer, her younger sister is Queer. She goes to the GSA meetings, she’s careful to not center herself in Queer spaces, but she’s impossibly straight, right? Well, she certainly thinks so, until she goes to visit her friend Lili at college and finds out that Lili told everyone that Imogen is bisexual, and that they used to date. When Imogen meets Tessa, a Jewish girl in Lili’s friend group, she starts to develop feelings for her, but also worries that she’s queerbaiting or just trying to fit in with the cool group. Tessa talks about Purim costumes and how her liberal Jewish parents love her, but are still coming to terms with the fact that she’ll probably never marry a nice Jewish boy.

Anyone who has been following Jewish author Becky Albertalli for a while will recognize the “ripped from the headlines” elements of the story because of her own forced outing as a bisexual woman. They will also recognize the discourse on straight celebrities playing Queer characters and the idea of appropriating Queer identity. This doesn’t detract however and helps fuel the searching for identity themes of Imogen, Obviously. Imogen’s questioning and anxiety are understandable but don’t weigh down the ultimately sweet and satisfying story.

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


old in alternating prose, A Million Quiet Revolutions is the story of two trans boys, who take on the names of two gay Revolutionary War soldiers in their quest to find new identities. Growing up in a small town, the two characters, who name themselves Oliver and Aaron, are trying to find their place in life with their new identities. Jewish Oliver has an easier time coming out to his parents, who are accepting of his new lifestyle. Catholic Aaron, in comparison, has a harder time convincing his family of his new lifestyle and the changes he wants to make in his life. Due to an event involving his older brother Jose, Aaron’s family is forced to move to New York City, where he is able to come out at school and use his art as an outlet.

The first part of the book is written as texts and phone calls that our two characters engage in when they go to school together, seeing each other on a daily basis. When Aaron moves away, the two main characters begin a writing relationship, writing letters to each other as if they were soldiers in the Revolutionary War.

The type of language that is unique to the letter writing medium is clear in this section of the text, with much more flowery and emotive language, especially the poetry. The concluding section of the book is the boys’ mission to attend a Revolutionary War reenactment and the ensuing drama that that decision causes. This book is highly recommended for public libraries, but synagogue and school libraries should be aware that abuse is mentioned and sexual orientation is discussed.

Laura Schutzman, Hebrew Academy of Nassau County, Uniondale, NY


n a rural town, best friends Jake and Declan are looking forward to a summer of baseball and fun following their freshman year of high school. But then in December, to impress his crush, Dec tries to climb a dangerous rock face. He falls and badly breaks

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his arm, eliminating the possibility of playing baseball that summer and potentially forever. On top of that, a new general manager, who happens to be Jewish, has been brought in to help “restructure” the company that employs many people in town, and Dec’s father is one of those laid off. Bored, lonely, scared, and angry, Dec spends most of his time playing video games and becomes friends with online gamers. These new friends, it turns out, are part of a racist, Islamophobic, anti-Semitic, and misogynistic hate group right there in his town. Unlike his old friends, who are too busy with the summer experiences that were stolen from him, and his parents, whose worry over money and medical bills makes them less attentive to Dec than he thinks they should be, Dec’s new friends accept him, welcome him, like him, and praise him. But they also introduce him to ideas about masculinity and the Crusades that turn his anger toward Jews, whom he now blames for the loss of his ability to play baseball and for the loss of his father’s job. His friends and family react in horror when he spouts ever-more hateful rhetoric, which only drives him deeper into a space where he feels accepted. But when acts of vandalism turn into a plan for murder, Dec can’t go through with it. It’s a long and hard process to face up to his actions and their consequences, to understand why he let himself believe such terrible things about people like his own best friend. The toll his actions took on the Jewish community, especially Jake, will echo for decades. But Dec is committed to doing the necessary work, to become a beacon of hope instead of hate.

As the author notes, this is a difficult book to read. It’s also, unfortunately, a very important book for teens — and adults — to read. Meticulously researched and told through dual perspectives alternating between Jake and Dec, the book shows how easily young people can be radicalized by contemporary neo-Nazi groups, especially online. While never excusing Dec for any of his ideas, comments, or actions, the book manages to create sympathy for him, casting him not as a villain but as a severely misguided teen who luckily wakes up to the truth before it gets too far. Aside from the practical lessons and follow-up discussions that this book enables, which is the main goal of the book, it is also very well-written and is sure to become a classic in educational settings.

Daisy Bernstein, Postdoctoral Research Associate University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign


During a game of spin the bottle, Margo Zimmerman, a smart and relatively popular girl realizes that she’s actually attracted to girls. With this newfound identity, Margo realizes she knows nothing about Queer culture and is determined to learn it all and fit in perfectly. To do this, she enlists the help of Abbie Sokoloff, who is bisexual, very comfortable in her Queerness, and like Margo, also Jewish. Abbie agrees to give Margo “Queer 101” lessons in exchange for History tutoring. What follows is a growing friendship as they tutor each other but also deal with ADHD, parental divorce, arguments over what’s “Queer enough,” sex positivity, and Autism. Spending all that time together, Margo and Abbie catch feelings for each other, but are they the right fit?

Co-written by Jewish authors Brianna Shrum (check out her previous book Kissing Ezra Holtz) and Sarah Waxelbaum, this casually Jewish, very Queer teen romance is a fantastic exploration of identity and finding your person. The only quibble to be found is that Margo’s polyamorous, pansexual brother is named Mendel, which, as someone who’s never met a Mendel that wasn’t Lubavitch, is a very jarring thing to read in this book. His joyful, and fiercely protective personality though, help to ground him in the story.

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

FOLKTALES


An artist wants to paint a picture, and the development of his scene follows the story of Creation. First “the sky is black,” and the artist colors everything blue, so it is light. He then ponders what he wants to include in his world. First water, then land, with plants and trees in beautiful colors, then a moon and stars. The artist realizes he is “missing creatures that swim, run and fly,” so he adds birds, sea life, and land animals. The painting is almost finished. But someone is still missing. “The world needs...you!”

First published in Hebrew in 2003, the book combines the...
talents of award-winning author Yael Gover, and Paul Kor (1926-2001), who designed Israeli banknotes and stamps before illustrating children’s books. The bright colors and smiling creatures are captivating, and the text that asks what the artist should add involves the audience and builds anticipation. The sun is glaringly (pun intended) missing from the story, but the whimsical pictures, and the message that the world needs you, leave the reader full of positivity.

Chava Pinchuck,  
Editor, Jewish Values Finder


This picture book’s tale is, per the copyright page, “told using the ancient Jewish tradition of studying and filling in the gaps of Bible stories called midrash,” and the gap being filled in here is from the Adam and Eve story (the earliest part—there’s no mention of a serpent or of forbidden fruit). The accessible third-person text imagines what it might be like to be Eve, who has a strong sense of wonder about all the new things she’s discovering. Her conversations with Adam portray her as the braver and somewhat smarter of the two, but the fears both experience are understandable; they’ve never seen the phenomenon of night before.

Young readers will likely enjoy knowing more than the characters do about how the world works, and the text and bright illustrations are reassuring. Ultimately, the message is one of faith; as the author’s note puts it, “having faith—whether it’s in yourself, in the people around you, or in God—helps make it easier to face whatever challenges come up.”

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

Jian, who goes to the market together to purchase food for Shabbat. Distracted by a trader’s beautiful jade trinkets, she becomes separated from her father. In a panic, Li Jian searches for her, bumping into a stranger, who identifies himself as the Great Fortune-Teller of Chengdu. Desperate, he pleads with the stranger to tell him where Zhen Yu could be found: “where green stones glitter like a serpent’s skin.” Thanked generously with words and coins, one more fortune is told: Zhen Yu will be bitten by a snake on her wedding night. Frightened, Li Jian keeps this prediction to himself and the years pass. The day arrives for Zhen Yu’s wedding, and while getting ready there is a knock at her door. She sticks her hairpin into the silk covered walls and finds a stranger, looking for assistance. Unable to turn away anyone in need, she gives him a basket of wedding gifts, claiming she has everything she needs. Pulling the pin from the wall, she tugs and finds a poisonous snake, dead. Her father rushes in, remembers the prediction, and compliments her good heart that saved her.

Rich digital art illustrations fill the pages, with the details of floral and nature scenes depicted in the fabrics and pottery. An author’s note summarizes the original tale (*Shabbat 156b*), concluding that Rabbi Akiva believed that good deeds might deliver one from death. A note about the origin and current status of the Kaifeng Jews is included.

Judy Ehrenstein,  
Co-editor, Children’s & Teen Literature, AJL News & Reviews  
Children’s Librarian, Montgomery County Public Libraries, Bethesda, MD

**GOD AND PRAYER**


Reconstructionist Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso is the author of 25 religious oriented children’s books. *I Am Not Afraid* is based on Psalm 23. On the first page a girl about to go to sleep states “God is my Comforter: I will not be afraid.” She says a prayer, counts sheep and tries to go to sleep, but dark frightening shadows slither under her closet door and keep her awake. The menacing shadows jump on her bed, rug and nightstand. The sheep she is counting fearfully run away. The girl clutches her blanket, takes a sip of water, and turns on her light which delivers peace. 


The Talmudic tale of Rabbi Akiva’s daughter and a snake is retold, set in 12th-century Kaifeng, China. This was the home of a little-known Jewish community that is largely lost due to assimilation. Zhen Yu is the daughter of scholar Li Jian, who goes to the market together to purchase food for Shabbat. Distracted by a trader’s beautiful jade trinkets, she becomes separated from her father. In a panic, Li Jian searches for her, bumping into a stranger, who identifies himself as the Great Fortune-Teller of Chengdu. Desperate, he pleads with the stranger to tell him where Zhen Yu could be found: “where green stones glitter like a serpent’s skin.” Thanked generously with words and coins, one more fortune is told: Zhen Yu will be bitten by a snake on her wedding night. Frightened, Li Jian keeps this prediction to himself and the years pass. The day arrives for Zhen Yu’s wedding, and while getting ready there is a knock at her door. She sticks her hairpin into the silk covered walls and finds a stranger, looking for assistance. Unable to turn away anyone in need, she gives him a basket of wedding gifts, claiming she has everything she needs. Pulling the pin from the wall, she tugs and finds a poisonous snake, dead. Her father rushes in, remembers the prediction, and compliments her good heart that saved her.

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A voice inside her comforts her by saying, “I am here.” As the moon and stars watch over her, she is able to fall asleep. Back matter includes “A New Revised Standard Version” translation of Psalm 23, a short essay on what the reader can learn from the psalm and how prayer can bring comfort in dark times. Sasso concludes with questions for the reader to think about. Marta Dorado’s full page color illustrations significantly enhance the text. She captures the frightening dark shadows that scare the girl and the sheep. Especially endearing are her illustrations of the live sheep and the plush sheep stuffed animal the girl cradles in her arms.

Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, OH

**HOLOCAUST AND WORLD WAR II**


In Morocco, two friends — Jacob, a Jewish boy, and Hassan, a Muslim boy — play together, sing together, do their family chores, and study in their synagogue and mosque. Always, in the afternoon, they find themselves in Jacob’s Spanish-style family garden where they rest and cool down, together tending to the garden’s needs. Weekly, their families share food and afternoon refreshments in the beautiful garden.

When news of the war in Europe, and the terrible things being done to Jews there, reaches the town, Jacob’s father knows his family must leave. Hassan and his family help them pack, and Hassan promises to take care of the garden: “A garden is a prayer and a promise! And a promise must be kept!” Many years later, Jacob returns to the garden with his own grandchildren, and finds Hassan still there taking care of everything.

Using engaging, age-appropriate language, the author describes two cultures living together in harmony, sharing *bimuelos* (donuts) and *kho lodge* (flatbread), and looking out for each other. The warm, colorful illustrations provide an entrance into life in Morocco in the 1940s. The author’s note describes how this book was based on a true story and the circumstances surrounding it.

A welcome and unique story about Sephardic Jews that deserves a place on every library shelf.

**Kathy Bloomfield,**
**AJL Immediate Past President, Seal Beach, CA**


This Graphic Novel version of the bestselling book *The Librarian of Auschwitz* is not a toned down, comfortable kids’ version of the Sydney Taylor winning Young Adult book. This is a book for mature readers with all the terror, anxiety, torment, and other emotions experienced in Auschwitz portrayed in artwork rather than left to the imagination as they were in the original book.

Based on the true experiences of Edita Kraus during WWII, *The Librarian of Auschwitz* tells Dita’s story of persecution and survival. She was housed in a unique area of Auschwitz called Camp BIIb, an area where prisoners received special treatment: no uniforms, a bit more food, etc. It turns out that Camp BIIb, like Terezin, was a ploy to fool the Red Cross (and the world) into thinking that Jews were well taken care of. In fact, the Nazis planned to kill everyone in Camp BIIb within six months of their arrival. Dita, as the Librarian, was responsible for guarding and distributing eight physical books and several “living books” — people who had memorized books. She took her job very seriously, knowing that discovery meant death for her and others. With courage and determination, she performed her duties and survived the Hell that was Auschwitz. Life in the Camp is illustrated in detailed drawings of beatings and other abuse, the starving faces of inmates, the horror of throwing bodies into mass graves, and several scenes of naked people waiting their turn in the showers.

The back matter of the book provides a “Historical Dossier” of how the novel became a graphic novel; more information about Camp BIIb; additional facts about Fredy Hirsch (leader of Camp BIIb), and Joseph Mengele (who makes several appearances in this story); a description of what happened to the Camp BIIb inmates; and details of how the drawings were made.

Whether or not you add this book to your Holocaust section, it may be better shelved in the adult section due to sensitive and graphic content.

**Kathy Bloomfield,**
**AJL Immediate Past President, Seal Beach, CA**

*Continued on page 19*
A ward-winning author Kathy Kacer has penned another engrossing middle grade novel for the Holocaust Remembrance Series. Based on the true, but little known, story of the Danner circus family in Germany during World War II, the book is told from the point of view of Irene, who is 13 when the book begins in 1939. Irene’s great-great grandfather founded the Lorch Family Circus. Her beloved grandfather owned the circus until he died and now it is owned by Irene’s father, who is not Jewish. Her grandfather was Irene’s teacher and she performed with the circus on the high wire. A special tradition for Irene was lighting Sabbath candles with her grandmother each week. When Nazi laws prohibit Jews from employment, the circus closes and Irene’s father is conscripted against his will into the German army. Irene, her mother, and grandmother live quietly in Darmstadt, Germany until Irene’s grandfather is taken by the Nazis. In 1941, Irene and her mother take refuge with the Althoff Circus under assumed names. Irene continues to perform on the high wire and her mother designs and sews costumes. This fast-paced book becomes suspenseful as Irene’s fears grow that their true identities will be revealed. Readers will marvel at Irene’s resourcefulness, determination, and bravery. Her father eventually finds them, and the family survives the war.

Interesting historical back matter with archival photos provide information about the Lorch and Althoff Circuses. Adolf Althoff and his wife Maria have been recognized as Righteous Among the Nations.

Evelyn B. Freeman, Professor Emerita, The Ohio State University Columbus, Ohio


This is the story of Salomon Kool, a Dutch Jew, who survived the Holocaust. The book begins in 1939 with 12-year-old Sal living in his Amsterdam apartment with two older brothers whom he idolizes, a doting big sister, and two loving parents. Sal is a very typical, well-rounded young boy of his time who loves playing ball with his friends, practicing sports at the gymnasium and embracing the freedom his precious bicycle provides. He is studying for his upcoming bar mitzvah and his mother is preparing the house for the upcoming celebration. Slowly, during the next few months, all of the rumblings of Nazi terror which had only seemed to affect other countries, start to seep into Holland and into Sal’s once idyllic world. Shockingly, various townspeople, including Sal’s own family members, start disappearing from his life. Before he can believe it, Sal is left completely alone in his once-lively apartment. Although just a young teenager Sal has no choice but to think like an adult, depending on his own wits to make crucial life and death decisions, to save himself. After being caught in a Nazi roundup, Sal eventually meets Walter Suskind, of the Jewish Council of Amsterdam. Suskind is tasked with organizing the Jewish deportations but is secretly a member of the Resistance who arranges various ways to smuggle Sal and other children into Gentile homes in the countryside. Sal tries to make sense of this new reality and is driven to survive.

Masterfully told, Sal relays his story in first person, allowing the reader to get an inside view of his harrowing experiences as events unfold. He lives by his wits and narrowly escapes for several months when running and hiding until the end of the war. The characters and dialogue are very well-drawn and relatable. The dialogue is authentic and Sal’s story will keep middle school readers spellbound to the very last page.

Esther Schnidman, Rosenbaum Yeshiva of North Jersey, Teaneck, NJ


Young Saul dreams of moving from Romania to the Land of Israel, and he imagines what it would be like there. When he is old enough, he plans the complicated trip—a train and then a boat. When he arrives in Tel Aviv, he takes off his heavy boots and walks barefoot through the sand. He praises God with the first verse of Psalm 114 (from the Hallel prayer), “When the Jews left Egypt—a place so strange to Jacob and all his descendants—the Land of Israel became their haven and their home.” Soon he sees another man walking on the sand. He looks very different from Saul, but
they are both barefoot. Saul starts singing Psalm 114, and the man completes the verse. He is Solomon, and he traveled from Yemen through the desert on a donkey to reach the Land of Israel. They learn that each is barefoot because they have been dreaming of feeling the sand of the Land of Israel beneath their feet. They dance together to celebrate their shared dream come true.

Hava Deevon is a script and screenplay writer for Israeli television and co-creator and writer of the series Srongim. Rotem Teplow has illustrated many children’s books, including My Israel and Me (Kalaniot, 2021), and And a Cat from Carmel Market (Kar-Ben, 2021). The text works well with the illustrations, which are full of blues and tans in its depictions of Israel, and the longing of all Jews for their homeland is clear. A double-spread when Saul says the Hallel prayer depicts the vibrant fruits of Israel. Detailed maps of both Saul's and Solomon’s routes would emphasize the length and difficulty of the journey for both men. Grandparents may realize that the story takes place sometime after the founding of the modern State of Israel, but an author’s note would have been helpful to put the story in context for readers.

Chava Pinchuck, Editor, Jewish Values Finder

*Editor’s Note: We have been advised by reliable sources that this version of the book was censored by the Chinese printer to remove the map of Israel.


Originally published in Hebrew, the author based this story on his experience as a parent trying unsuccessfully to put his children to sleep. As is true with many children, Dora tries to put off the inevitable bedtime by asking her father one question after another about a variety of topics. As both author and illustrator, the reader can sense Halberstadt’s personal connection to his daughter and this dilemma. The pictures portray a realistic family life where there’s a mess on the floor after a child’s shower, the father’s facial expressions show weariness and love, and the family is consumed with Dora’s very vivid and active imagination. There are questions about the universe, Dora’s smaller world, and numerous other important issues. The charming interaction between father and daughter highlights patience, understanding, curiosity, and love.

There are numerous Jewish references throughout the book such as Shabbat and other terms. The pictures offer much flexibility for interpretation of the father’s reactions and feelings for his family. This story will easily resonate with parents everywhere as they try to work through their bedtime frustration with patience, ingenuity, and love as well as some amusement.

Rachel Glasser, Retired Librarian
Yavneh Academy – Paramus, NJ


Some words are just funny sounding. Bupkes is one of them. Bupkes (sometimes spelled bobkes) means trivial or worthless in Yiddish. But author Leslie Kimmelman has cleverly turned the meaning around—what appears to be nothing can often be something — something quite wonderful. Her examples may seem prosaic at first, but they’re really part of the glue that makes life enjoyable. An empty vegetable garden picked of veggies (bupkes) feeds the neighbors; clean-up day at the park turns the terrain free of litter (bupkes); a lonely girl sitting on a bench is invited to play and voila, the bench is empty (bupkes), and kids are having fun. Bringing a big bowl of “delicious, sneezing-and-sniffling-curing chicken soup” makes Mommy feel so much better after she has emptied the bowl (bupkes).

The watercolor and ink illustrations by illustrator Roxana de Rond are full of expressive exuberance that will appeal to the intended audience.

Kimmelman gives children agency to do good and make meaning when, at first glance, there doesn’t appear to be any. Bupkes means a lot more than nothing in this delightful picture book.

Rena Citrin, Retired School Librarian
AJL Fiction Award


The Abraham family is expecting their new neighbors for a visit, instead cartoon-like aliens appear at the door when their spaceship breaks down nearby. Drawing on the Jewish ethic of welcoming the stranger, young Dina starts off the visit warmly inviting them in. These are surely the strangest of all strangers ever to receive hospitality. Soon her parents join in the efforts to make these peculiar guests at home, offering drinks and food which are met with amusing bewilderment. After the Abraham...
family helps repair the spaceship, the aliens fly off and the new neighbors arrive. They are odd as well, appearing to be a species of humanoid with dark skin tone and monkey-like hairy bodies. The story ends as they are graciously led in.

The artwork shows an Israeli countryside setting and a home decorated with Judaica. The host mother is fair skinned, the father is a bit darker and Dina is a blend of these two. Careful observation of the first page shows a small detail of the new humanoid neighbors bringing boxes into their home as the alien spaceship is landing. Back matter includes information about Abraham welcoming guests in Bereisheit/ Genesis 18. The author states, “Welcoming guests is like welcoming G-d into our home because G-d created all of us,” and emphasizes the importance of extending hospitality to refugees.

Suzanne Grossman, MLS, West Orange, New Jersey, Children’s Book Committee, Bank Street College


Hamor (Hebrew for donkey) was an ugly animal, His back was bent, his ears were droopy, and he had a sagging belly. He belonged to Rabbi Moses Maimonides (aka Rambam), who was the sultan’s physician. Maimonides rode him to the palace every day. The beautiful horses in the sultan’s stable looked down on Hamor, but Hamor did not care. He was proud because his rider was the wisest man in the entire kingdom. On Rambam’s journey to the palace he spoke his thoughts loud and Hamor listened carefully and learned many important lessons. One day, the sultan asked Rambam to write a medical guide. Since Rambam had so many other obligations he told the sultan that he did not have time to write the book. To save time, the sultan suggested that the rabbit ride one of his beautiful and fast horses instead of his slow donkey. Maimonides was not happy riding the fast horse because when he rode slowly on Hamor he had time to think and organize his thoughts and now that precious time was gone. So the rabbit went back to riding Hamor. Maimonides had learned a lesson from Hamor. “Every creature was created for its own sake.”

Back matter includes a drawing of Maimonides wearing a turban and a brief historical note. Diana Rennin’s full page color illustrations are charming. The haughty, elegant horses have handsome long flowing manes and graceful tails. The Jewish value highlighted in this appealing picture book is that all G-d’s creatures are important in their own right and were created for their own sake.

Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, OH


The animals on Noah’s Ark all finally fell asleep on their first night aboard to be awakened by a frightening and strange sound. Two rabbits try to determine who is making the noise and finally determine that a pair of scary goblins are somewhere on the ark and trying to find each other. The story is filled with friendly animal noises, very cute animals, a simple exploration of the senses, and ultimately a plan for the paired animals to all work together for a solution. Once the fear has been explained and conquered, the animals shift to accepting and helping the goblins.

The story focuses on differences, safety, and friendships while creating a fun atmosphere through the animals. There are no real biblical references to the Noah’s Ark story or any appearance of Noah, but the concept of the animals and their role in the world comes through clearly.

This cannot be considered a retelling of the Noah story, but rather a fun fictional account set on the ark. An author’s note at the end highlights these concepts for parents and teachers. The illustrations are funny and appealing, especially the animal sounds which will delight young children in a read aloud.

Rachel Glasser, Retired Librarian Yavneh Academy – Paramus, NJ


Early one morning, Daniel, a boy of elementary school age, awakens to the sound of crunching snow and sees his father walking away from the house, a box in his arms. When asked where he was going, the reply was “out and about.” The next day

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Daniel sees both his parents out early; again they say they were “out and about.” When he returns home after school, Daniel finds his mother talking with a neighbor about her financial issues and hears that the family has received some anonymous help. Daniel begins to understand what his parents have been doing. He also remembers a time when others helped his family when a grandparent was ill.

Wanted to contribute and go "out and about" himself, Daniel chooses some toys from his room to donate to the family along with helping to create a Shabbat dinner. The lesson learned, now it is Daniel telling his wondering younger brother, that he’s just been “out and about,” continuing the family’s quiet acts of kindness without needing recognition or thanks.

Back matter includes an explanation of the importance of tzedakah, Maimonides’ Eight Levels of Tzedakah, and a glossary. Full color illustrations, with muted tones, fill the pages, showing a diverse student body at Daniel’s clearly Jewish school. A mezuzah is seen on one page, kippot are worn by Daniel and other males, and the females all wear skirts. Offered with a sophistication and detail not seen in books about tzedakah for younger children, this gentle and accessible introduction to the concept is perfect for sharing with elementary aged students.

Judy Ehrenstein,
Co-editor, Children’s & Teen Literature, AJL News & Reviews
Children’s Librarian, Montgomery County Public Libraries,
Bethesda, MD

Review Of Titles

SHABBAT AND HOLIDAYS


With a roll or two of duct tape and cardboard from the recycling bin, readers can create their own costumes and accessories in time for Purim, with little to no adult assistance. Bookending such projects as “Queen Vashti’s Royal Bracelets” and “Mordechai’s Horse” are tips for working with this super sticky tape and how to store creations for lasting enjoyment. Each project begins with a few sentences for how it relates to the Purim story, followed by a materials list and clear instructions accompanied by photographs of important steps. A page at the end explains the basics of the holiday. A table of contents is included, but no index. Useful to spark the imaginations of young crafters who may not be ready for Pinterest and who want to be independent in creating their Purim costumes.

Judy Ehrenstein,
Co-editor, Children’s & Teen Literature, AJL News & Reviews
Children’s Librarian, Montgomery County Public Libraries,
Bethesda, MD


After watching Bubbe make matzah balls each year for Passover, Matilda comes up with her own fun improvements which include one giant matzah ball and many little ones in the shape of stars while also creating pink soup. This intergenerational story highlights Bubbe’s encouragement and acceptance of Matilda’s ideas, never judgmental or negative. The cartoon illustrations add to the fun and loving relationship between grandmother and granddaughter and foster a love for cooking, tradition, and creativity. There is little information about Passover, but this is a fun, lively, and cute story that is sure to delight young children.

Rachel Glasser,
Retired Librarian
Yavneh Academy – Paramus, NJ


This beautiful wordless picture book opens with a colorful two-page spread depicting a large oval table surrounded by 17 participants at a typical Passover seder. The male leader then breaks a matzah and places it in a drawstring bag labeled “afikomen” in Hebrew, then continues reading from the Haggadah as the children giggle, hide, grab the afikomen bag, give it to the dog, and then follow the animal under the table. The scene opens up as the three children and dog are magically transported to ancient Egypt. The entire story of the birth of Moses now unfolds as the children sometimes stand as onlookers, and occasionally act directly, to steer baby Moses’ reed basket away from various dangers

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Skateboarding over to Granny to deliver hamantaschen, Lily Blue Riding Hood makes the acquaintance of Mr. Wolfe. In this up-to-date retelling of the classic Little Red Riding Hood, Mr. Wolfe arrives first. Lily is not fooled for a second. Brandishing her skateboard she trips up the imposter, sending the hamantaschen flying. Well, it turns out Mr. Wolfe is Granny’s friend! They both live in the same Florida condo community where they enjoy

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hrough a text full of alliterative rhyme, each night of Hanukkah finds another group of animals at the door ready to help prepare latkes for a family celebration. Double page spreads of richly colored animals, reminiscent of the artwork of Jan Brett and Jane Dyer, take over the kitchen and fill the house with smells, music, and fun. An upbeat

on the river where he has been placed by Miriam. Moses is ultimately rescued by Pharaoh’s daughter and Miriam waves a grateful thank you to the three children and their dog from the opposite bank. They return home to the present time by crawling back through the desert tent they had originally entered and resurfacing from under the family tablecloth. The youngest child returns the afikomen bag, the seder concludes, and the story ends as the parents stare uncomprehendingly at the contents of the bag — now containing desert sand along with the original matzah.

Different age levels will be able to discern points of nuance with careful attention to the illustrations. For example, the action begins while all the participants are on a page in their Haggadahs that reads, “Hin’eni muchan u-m’zuman l’kayem mitzvat afikomen” — meaning, “Behold, I am ready and prepared to fulfill the mitzvah of the afikomen.” This appears to be the author’s original prayer, but it highlights the activities of the children’s heroic actions saving baby Moses from harm as he travels down the river. (They are always depicted as holding the magical afikomen bag as they perform these mitzvot.) All in all, this is a satisfying and imaginative retelling of this story, and it is particularly welcome in wordless format because children of all ages can narrate the scenes as they wish. It is a wonderful idea for a family Passover book and would be a popular teacher resource for sharing with a group.

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


through a text full of alliterative rhyme, each night of Hanukkah finds another group of animals at the door ready to help prepare latkes for a family celebration. Double page spreads of richly colored animals, reminiscent of the artwork of Jan Brett and Jane Dyer, take over the kitchen and fill the house with smells, music, and fun. An upbeat addition to the growing selection of Hanukkah stories, this will be a useful choice for story times and reading at home.

Judy Ehrenstein, Co-editor, Children’s & Teen Literature, AJL News & Reviews Children’s Librarian, Montgomery County Public Libraries, Bethesda, MD


Little Miri is bored and disruptive at her family’s less than child friendly seder. After being scolded she escapes beneath the table where fish, a submarine, and finally sea serpents whisk her away to direct a magically exuberant seder. Accompanied by her cat, Miri leads the event starting off with a snippet of the Four Questions, followed by singing and dancing. Called back to reality, her earlier behavior is forgiven as the second half of the seder is enlivened with singing and dancing.

Readers will likely notice the plot line is quite similar to Sendak’s Where the Wild Things Are. Back matter provides simple ideas to bring excitement to the celebration. The bright mixed media cartoon style illustrations add to the appeal while the imaginary sea creatures are cheery and engaging. The characters are portrayed as a white grandfather, mother, father and child with one additional Black attendee. This is a fine book to share while planning a seder that will include opportunity for child engagement.

Suzanne Grossman, MLS, West Orange, New Jersey, Children’s Book Committee, Bank Street College
pickleball, mahjong, golf, and bridge. A joyous Purim celebration follows with Granny, Mr. Wolfe, and Lily as the stars of the shpiel. Finally, shalach manot are delivered by the trio to neighbors Hillel and Gretel, Yankel’s Beanstalk, and the 3 Little Chazzers. Back matter includes information about Purim traditions and, of course, a recipe for Lily’s Skateboarding Hamantaschen.

The colorful digital art is cheery and amusing. Lily’s mother and grandmother are fair skinned while Lily has a slightly darker complexion. The audience at the shpiel is diverse with many of the boys and girls wearing kippot. This is a lively and entertaining addition to books for the Purim holiday.

Suzanne Grossman, MLS, Children’s Book Committee, Bank Street College West Orange, New Jersey NJ


This charming Hanukkah story, told in rhyme, is about a little dreidel named Tizzy, who has a problem: spinning makes her dizzy. When the family decides to play dreidel, only four-year-old Sara is confident enough to choose Tizzy as her special dreidel. Tizzy looks carefully at Sara’s face and then confidently twists, spins, dances, swerves, cruises, races, and skates through the house until she reaches the menorah with the candles all ablaze. This was a truly a Hanukkah miracle and adventure as Tizzy spun for eight days all around the house. Sara had given Tizzy a chance with a spin, some hope, and the opportunity to change.

There’s a limited explanation of the history and customs of Hanukkah at the end of the book. This colorful tale is just a fun addition to the extensive collection of Hanukkah stories to be enjoyed by young children.

Rachel Glasser, Retired Librarian Yavneh Academy – Paramus, NJ


When Daniellito visits his grandmother (Boba) for Janucá, she gives him a dreidel. When he meets the neighborhood kids, they play Trompo (a traditional game of tops). But Daniellito’s dreidel keeps spinning and revives the other toys. They all leave the circle and travel through the community, chased by the children. When the dreidel finally stops, Daniellito invites his new friends to join him in lighting the candles and eating latkes. An author’s note tells the story of Hanukkah and also describes the Mexican connections to the holiday.

The story is reminiscent of Kimmelman’s Runaway Dreidels and other similar stories. Full of expressive illustrations by Maria Mola, the re-framing to a Mexican locale should create an awareness of Latin Jewish culture and should find an audience in pre-schools and early grades.

Fred Isaac, Oakland, CA


A little boy is able to accomplish a series of tasks by asking his parents for help. But instead of “making him tall” to reach something in the closet, or finding a lost object for him, they empower him to solve these hurdles on his own. Dad brings a stool to make him tall and holds his hand as he climbs “up and up to the top step” to choose his own shirt for Shabbat. Mom helps him look for his comb by showing him how to sort his toys into bins. Various Shabbat preparations serve as teaching moments by his attentive parents, such as showing him how to hold a grape juice bottle and tip it gently into his Kiddush cup, saying the blessings together, and singing songs he knows. The boy feels pride in his accomplishments of the day. The upbeat book ends with, “and now let’s enjoy this beautiful Shabbat we all made, together.” The family is depicted

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as multiracial, and the large illustrations and adorable family dog create great kid-appeal.

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


Hannah is a delightful young girl—except when she really isn’t. She makes a poor behavioral choice and breaks her mother’s favorite glass apple right before Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. But she doesn’t know how to sincerely apologize.

Her mother designs a game to teach Hannah what a real apology is. Each step brings Hannah closer to understanding her actions and how to atone for them. She must admit to doing something wrong, feel bad about what she did and wish she had not done it, and finally try her best to never do it again.

This short, colorful story provides an excellent introduction to young children about the consequences of their actions and how those deeds may affect others. This is an important lesson which should be learned early in life and incorporated into our daily lives.

Rachel Glasser, Retired Librarian Yavneh Academy – Paramus, NJ


This joyful Lift-the-Flap book provides rhyming clues about the various aspects of Sukkot, with answers found under the flaps on the nearby pages: “I am picked from a beautiful tree, /Be very gentle when you’re holding me./ I am yellow, with a lovely smell—/ A fruit whose name you know so well./ Who am I? Esrog-Etrog.”

The pages are sturdy cardstock with securely attached flaps, perfect for tiny hands. The brightly colored, cartoon-like illustrations reflect an Orthodox family celebrating the various aspects of this eight-day fall holiday. While the language is lyrical, there are words and phrases that may be unfamiliar to those not practicing traditional Judaism. Fortunately, the clues and a Glossary at the back of the book provide all necessary definitions.

Probably most useful to Orthodox libraries, however, the joy of Sukkot for all Jews is very evident throughout.

Kathy Bloomfield, AJL Immediate Past President, Seal Beach, CA


In this clever retelling of the Hanukkah Miracle, Mrs. Maccabee is constantly called upon to assist her five sons in locating items they have lost. With her oft repeated refrain, “[items] don’t grow legs and walk away, where you leave them is where they stay,” they find what they are looking for.

When King Antiochus, the Greek king, declares that Jewish practice is forbidden, the Maccabee boys head for the hills to fight against the King’s army. Incredibly their under-equipped, small band of warriors wins, and their first task is to reclaim the Temple in Jerusalem. Seeing the mess created by the Greeks, clean up begins with delighting the Temple Menorah. But where is the oil? Recalling their mother’s rhyme, they think hard and remember where they last saw that small jug of oil. Finding it, they discover there is only enough oil for one day, but of course, miraculously, it lasts for eight days.

A charming story in simple language that will delight very young readers who “lose things” and need a grown-up’s help to find them. Mrs. Maccabee’s simple poem will find its way into many households after reading this story.

The illustrations are appealing and with soft colors reflecting the various emotions represented by the story—frustration, anger, joy, discovery, wonder. The back of the book includes “The Story of Hanukkah” by Jacqueline Jules (@2018) which provides both the historical view of Hanukkah events as well as the rabbinic “miracle” story.

If looking for a new Hanukkah book, this one will surely please the Read-Aloud crowd.

Kathy Bloomfield, AJL Immediate Past President, Seal Beach, CA
New York’s Lower East Side is the setting for this charming picture book about an enterprising little girl and her strong Jewish community during the flu pandemic of 1918.

★ “Endearing.” —BOOKLIST, starred review

lauriewallmark.com
Fiction


Set in Washington, DC during the early 2000s, Miranda's fiancé, Russ, is worried that Miranda’s parents’ past arrests as Vietnam War protesters will cause him to fail his security clearance investigation for his dream job as a lawyer for the U.S. Government. What is discovered by the FBI is that Miranda neglected to tell Russ that she was once arrested for kidnapping. Miranda was helping her Israeli friend, Ronit, flee with her daughter from Ronit’s abusive husband in 1996.

The novel bounces between Miranda, Ronit, and Miranda’s mother Judith’s pasts, and the lies of omission that each has committed, as well as the new personas they’ve created to help hide parts of their pasts. While there eventually is discovery of their lies, it feels like there is very little accountability for the past lies and made-up personas. The reader’s feeling that there is no accountability may also be from the disjointedness of the story line’s ricocheting narrative.

It is a surprising story with many emotional twists. Recommended for book clubs, especially ones located near Washington, DC.

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

Non-Fiction


This very scholarly book delves into the relationship between photography and the narrative in novels, specifically in works by several well-known Israeli authors, such as Ronit Matalon, Yoel Hoffmann, Ruth Almog, and many others. Pictures are included in the essays. Amihay studied many general works on the subject and gleaned a great deal of information on the topic. The study of the dialog between literature and photography is not a new one. It was explored as early as 1846 in a book published then. Although images in Israeli novels have been included at the same time as in world literature, this phenomenon has not been studied extensively by scholars of this literature. In five chapters, the author explores examples of literary works that include photographs and how these inform and influence the text.

One of the author’s central beliefs is that “...scholarship can contribute to a truly democratic and egalitarian culture by highlighting the benefits of studying literature and visual culture in tandem.” She believes that the authors discussed in the book wrote in a multi-layered method with the purpose of reflecting and describing the various struggles within Israel’s complex society.

This pioneering work is an important addition to the general study of the relatively young oeuvre of the Hebrew literary world. The book also attempts to explore some political issues that could be expressed well with illustrated literary works.

A discussion of the place of graphic novels as part of the genre of Israeli literature is also explored and examples are provided.

Because the book is very dense and almost half of it includes notes and an extensive bibliography, it is recommended only for academic libraries with extensive collections of Israeli literature.

Michlean Lowy Amir, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, (Retired) Washington, DC


This consummate scholarly work, by Karma Ben-Johanan with the Department for Religious Studies/Comparative Religion at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, began its publication journey in 2020. The volume, now updated and revised, was originally written in Hebrew, and was published by Tel Aviv University Press under the title, *A Pottage of Lentils: Mutual Perceptions of Christians and Jews in the Age of Reconciliation*. Engaging with this book calls upon the reader to undertake a serious intellectual commitment, and is a volume perhaps best housed in a research library. For the reader short of time or deterred by the highly detailed chapters in Part I (“Judaism in Catholic Theology”) and Part II (“Christianity in Orthodox Jewish Thought”), an introductory/initial encounter with this work might best come from perusing its Introduction and the Epilogue. Of particular value, as well, is the book’s initial chapter, “Historical and Theological Transitions,” in which the author thoughtfully, concisely and

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clearly sets out the history of Jewish-Christian encounters from the inception of Christianity through the end of the papacy of Pope Benedict XVI. In the volume’s subsequent chapters, Dr. Ben-Johanan devotes considerable attention to the convening by Pope John XXIII of Vatican II, the development and promulgation of the “Jewish section” of Nostra Aetate — a Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religion — issued during Vatican II, and the later personal efforts of Pope Paul II, to develop strong personal bonds and ties with rabbis, as well as more secularly-oriented Jewish organizations. Ben-Johanan goes to some length to explicate the reasons why deliberations by respected Jewish and Christian religious figures on matters of theology, doctrine and eschatology, looking to identify areas of doctrinal convergence and even agreement, were not successful and have, essentially, been put on ongoing hold. Rather, she underscores efforts to foster deeper acquaintance and personal experience of Jewish rituals and traditions by Christian clergy have been relatively successful.

She concludes her study with discussion of a dialogue initiated by Pope John Paul II in 2020 between the Chief Rabbinate of Israel with the Vatican, and the challenges in its implementation.

For anyone interested in studying Christian-Jewish relations, from beginner to advanced student, this volume is a must-read.

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


The Shemoneh Esrei (the eighteen) is one of the central prayers of Judaism, also called the Amida (standing up) because it is recited while standing. It contains eighteen blessings (now nineteen) which each contains a few words and then finishes with a formula starting with “Blessed are you God…” This volume is the translation in English of the book published by the same publisher in 2014. The author is American born, a rabbi trained at the rabbinical seminary under the auspices of Yeshiva University who made aliya in 1977. Rabbi Bick is a teacher of Talmud and Jewish philosophy at Yeshivat Har Etzion and his pedagogical expertise is apparent: he goes through each of the Eighteen Blessings prayer, one after the other in order, starting each with its Biblical references and Talmudic sources, gleaning insights from early (medieval) commentators and bringing our attention to the essence of the blessing. For him, the fundamentals of Jewish faith are that all which is in our world is from God, that the Shemoneh Esrei prayer starts by requests for the individuals, then the focus is on “national destiny of the Jewish people.” In conclusion, “the eighteen blessings are a framework of service of the King, of submission and acceptance of His kingship.” The citations to the Hebrew Bible are according to Hebrew (e.g. Tehilim and not “Psalms”). The author follows mostly the Ashkenazic formulation of the Prayer and only sparingly brings in Hasidic or Kabballistic commentaries. Recommended to any library of Orthodox institutions and interested individuals.

Roger S. Kohn,
Silver Spring, MD


The Jewish community of Rome is the oldest Jewish community in Europe [and maintains] the longest continuous history, having avoided interruptions, expulsions, and annihilations since 139 BCE.” For nearly two millennia, European anti-Semitism and Jew-hatred emanated from the Catholic Church and its followers, causing untold misery. How is it possible that Jews were allowed to live uninterrupted in the heart of the Catholic world, a circumstance unlike anywhere else in Europe? What kind of relationship fostered such a possibility? The Roman Jews certainly did not always thrive; their everyday lives were subjected to contesting church policies which vacillated from passive tolerance to economic and spiritual oppression. But they did survive. The author, a former archaeologist, college professor, and attorney, characterizes the Church and the Roman Jewish community as “intimate strangers:” which “encapsulates a contradictory relationship through which, despite real difficulties, two very different communities have managed to live together, uninterrupted, for almost two thousand years.”

Through eleven chapters, the author begins with archaeological evidence of the earliest Jewish presence in Rome, relations between the Church and the Jews through the Middle Ages, ghettoization, fascism and Nazi occupation until today. Formal interactions, such as the presentation of a Torah scroll to each new pope at his inaugural ceremony, are discussed, but, perhaps even more interesting, are the examinations of how church policies affected the Jews’ everyday lives: where they lived, what occupations they could pursue, and their family life. The early nineteenth century revealed glimpses of Jewish emancipation, but it was not fully realized until

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1871 when Italy was unified under a secular government.

This is a scholarly work that any enthusiast of Jewish history will enjoy. It includes illustrations, citations, and a thorough bibliography. Some charts listing the various popes in each century and their major policies towards the Jews would help the reader keep track of the historical fluctuations.

Recommended for academic libraries as well as Jewish high school, community, and synagogue libraries.

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

The best-remembered paintings of Samuel Hirszzenberg depicted Jewish responses to the shocks of modernity. Some of his works responded to the palpable dangers confronting Jews in a time of pogroms and revolutionary crisis: Exile (now lost), The Wandering Jew, and The Black Banner were widely reproduced and have enjoyed an enduring influence. Other pictures, such as Sabbath Rest, Yeshiva, Uriel Acosta and Spinoza, and The Excommunication of Spinoza, reflected the artist’s confrontation with secularizing trends that influenced Eastern European Jewish intellectual life during his lifetime. Raised in a large, impoverished, and traditional household in Łódź, Poland, Hirszzenberg trained at art academies in Kraków and Munich. His extensive travels included sojourns in Paris and Italy; he ended up in Jerusalem, dying there less than a year after taking a post at the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Crafts.

Samuel Hirszzenberg 1865-1908 represents an exemplary collaboration between a historian of modern Jewry (Cohen) and a historian of Jewish art (Rajner). Over the course of a decade, they uncovered previously untapped sources on Hirszzenberg and enlisted the collaboration of scholars and curators worldwide, but especially in Poland, where the country’s Jewish artists are increasingly treated within the framework of Polish culture in general. In addition to creating specifically “Jewish” works, the authors underscore Hirszzenberg’s fluency in contemporaneous artistic techniques; many of his paintings reveal the influence of impressionism and symbolism. Among this book’s outstanding discoveries are the murals that Hirszzenberg painted for the Poznański family’s mansion, which now houses the Museum of the City of Łódź. The text is accompanied by over 175 illustrations (most of them in color) of works by Hirszzenberg and fellow artists. Though expensive, Samuel Hirszzenberg 1865-1908 is essential for Judaica research libraries and art libraries.

Zachary M. Baker,
Emeritus Curator, Stanford University Libraries


In this book, architect Kyle Dugdale recounts the history of the Tower of Babel both as historical/mythological narrative and as metaphor for the practice of architecture itself. He argues that the architectural form of the Tower exemplifies the drive to emulate the capacity for building and creation attributed to God. After Nietzsche’s pronouncement of the death of God, Dugdale argues, architecture exemplifies the anxieties about life and the human condition related to death and other troubles. He meticulously chronicles the written history of architectural manuals and philosophical treatises, which were sometimes the same item, from Europe and elsewhere. He also traces the fascination with the historical Babylon through the Bible and other near-eastern texts through time to modern-day museum exhibitions and other works. He states that “...Babylon is arguably more famous today than ever before. And its fame ties together what are often held to be quite disparate disciplines: among them architecture, philosophy, theology, and recent military history.”

These exhibitions include reproductions of artifacts including the Ishtar Gate in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin and other artifacts from Babylon and elsewhere. Dugdale discusses the works of Uriel Birnbaum at length. Birnbaum was an Austrian Jewish illustrator, writer, and painter who created many famous illustrations and works relating to the Tower of Babel and other architecture and Biblical themes and stories, including Moses and the Book of Jonah. Many of Birnbaum’s illustrations, paintings and other works are included in the book as well as manuscripts and other artifacts by other authors and artists relevant to Dugdale’s arguments about the significance of architecture to human history and daily life.

This incredibly detailed and wide-ranging study of the impact of the Tower of Babylon on both ancient, medieval and modern history is recommended for academic Jewish libraries which are looking to collect works on architecture, Biblical/Near Eastern studies, history, and theology.

Eli Lieberman,
Assistant Librarian, HUC-JIR NY

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His deeply researched book, by a distinguished Israeli scholar, richly illuminates a complex and disputation time in the encounter between American Jewish leaders and Zionism in its diverse facets. Nathan A. Efrati, the volume’s author, in addition to serving as director of the Academy of the Hebrew Language, has earlier brought his historian’s eye to diverse aspects of the Yishuv, or Jewish community, in what he calls *Erets Yisrael* (rather than terming it Palestine).

Dr. Efrati applies his historical lens to the critical period of 1897 to 1918, significant in the development of contemporary Israel. He documents the many twists and turns in the relationships between Jewish leaders in the United States, *Erets Yisrael*, Germany, and elsewhere through his extensive research in the archives of such organizations as the American Jewish Committee, the Federation of American Zionists, major American Jewish newspapers, and the collected papers of major American Jewish philanthropists and leading American Jewish religious and cultural figures.

Efrati works to illuminate the complex play of personalities and passions among the major international players concerned with the development of *Erets Yisrael*, with particular regard to their response to Zionism. He describes the debates and dialogues, the disputes and declarations by American Jewish leaders as to how the Zionist movement should be approached and its impact (both perceived and actual) on the relationship of American Jews to the United States. He lays bare, in painstaking detail, the spirited and at times acrimonious international exchanges in what was to become known as the Language Wars over whether German or Hebrew should be the language employed in the Technion (earlier called the Technikum).

This is a book calling for close and sustained study and its home would be the research library. The volume was originally published in 2020 in Hebrew under the title, *Ideology and Reality: American Jewry and the Yishuv in the Late Ottoman Period*, and has a forward by President Isaac Herzog (translated in the English edition).

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


This beautifully written book is based on journalist Michael Frank’s one hundred interviews with the nonagenarian, Stella Levi. She was one of only a few Holocaust survivors from her very old, small Jewish community of Rhodes. Its demise in the Holocaust began in 1938 with racial laws enacted resulting in life for the community becoming very difficult. Then, six years later, in July of 1944, most were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau on a long, arduous journey, first to Greece by boat, and then on a long journey, by train. Most were murdered upon arrival.

In the first part of the book Stella describes the close knit community, which was steeped in Jewish tradition and observance. Stella’s grandmothers were examples of ‘old world’ Jewish Rhodes. Both of them influenced Stella in many ways.

It is also a saga of one family, the Levis, Stella being the youngest of six siblings. She described for Michael Frank their rich everyday Jewish life. She spoke extensively about her parents and each of her siblings, some of whom she did not know well because they left for the United States and elsewhere, early in her life.

It took many Saturdays before Stella was ready to talk about her Holocaust experiences and her liberation and life in a Displaced Persons camp. Stella didn’t want to be defined as a Holocaust survivor. Eventually Michael Frank succeeded in getting her to share her thoughts on that period in her life and on life in general. The book, written beautifully in one hundred sections, is enriched with beautiful illustrations by Maira Kalman.

Because it is a very readable book with an interesting history of a little known Jewish community, it should be in every Jewish library, from synagogue to school and even academia.

Michlean Lowy Amir,
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, (Retired),
Washington, D.C.


Halper shows that Jewish understanding of Socrates during the *Rishonim* (the leading rabbis and Jewish legal authorities who lived during the 11th through 15th centuries)
based their knowledge on legendary and or fragmentary quotations from Plato or Aristotle. He shows how the Rishonim viewed Socrates as either wise amongst prominent Spanish Jews (Solomon ibn Gabirol, Moses ibn Ezra, Joseph ibn Zabarah, Joseph ibn Aqin, Judah al Harizi, Shem Tov ibn Falaquera) and Provencal Jews (Moses Nahmanides, Joseph Kaspi, Moses Narbóni, Zerahyah HaLevi Saladin, Joseph Albo), or a vocal skeptic (Judah HaLevi and Averroes).

Socrates influenced Maimonides’ negative theology with regards to God’s non-imitative attributes (infinity, omniscience, and incorporeality). He is not: finite, ignorant, and a body. Rambam like Plato differentiates: the knower, the object known (ding an sich), and body of knowledge. With regard to God’s perfection. He is the Knower, the object known, and knowledge itself (Gnosis)— ayn oed mivaldo.

Halper traces how such inquiry of the divine arises in Maimonides (Moreh HaNevukhim), Jacob Anatoli (Malmad ha-Talmidim), Gersonides (Milhamot ha-Shem) and Abraham Bibago (Derekh Emanah). Halper notes not until the 15th century did Johanan Alemano and Judah Moscato become more familiar with Plato’s writings through Ficino’s Latin translations.

Halper shows how Jewish thinkers understood the potential censorship of philosophic Socratic quest (Apology).

This title includes bibliographical references and an index. Highly recommended for all libraries that collect on the topics of religion and philosophy.

David B Levy, New York

The cookbook is the first known Iberian recipe collection and its author is anonymous. Jawhara Piñer’s analysis identifies, within its pages, recipes that are explicitly labeled as “Jewish” and other “buried” recipes marked out as Jewish by methods of preparation and by their ingredients. The recipes show a strong preference for dishes that preclude meat, favoring fish, eggs, and particularly vegetables. For both Muslims and Jews meat was subject to regulation. Daily consumption of meat would have been complicated, so vegetable dishes were simply easier. The humble eggplant appears in many of the dishes, often used as a substitute for non-kosher foods and it is distinguished as a “Jewish food.” Jawhara Piñer explains: “Multi-shaped, multicolored, and multipurpose, the eggplant became an indispensable ingredient in cookbooks on the Iberian Peninsula under Muslim rule.”

The author precedes her conclusion with recipes accompanied by color photographs. In addition to the copious footnotes and bibliography, this work also has a useful index. It would be a valuable addition to an academic Jewish history and culture collection as well one focused on food studies.

C. and Anne-Marie Belinfante, Herkimer, NY


The medieval charge of ritual murder, that Jews killed Christian children to use their blood for Jewish ritual purposes, died out with the rise of the Enlightenment. Blood libel charges revived in the late nineteenth century, with over one hundred accusations between 1870-1910 in Central Europe and Eastern Europe, resulting in six show trials. Hillel Kieval, the Gloria M. Goldstein, Professor of Jewish History and Thought at Washington University in St. Louis, examines four of these trials, in Tiszaeszlar, Hungary (1882-83); Xanten, Germany (1891-92); Polna, Austrian Bohemia (1899-1900); and Konitz, then Germany, now Poland (1900-1902).

Kieval originally thought the new cases were a revival of traditional Christian antisemitism, but through years of archival work became convinced that these trials reflect a post-Enlightenment mentality framed by concerns for forensic science and rational respect for legal practices and expert witnesses. Kieval approaches each murder case as a micro-history that would be

Jewish Cookbooks in an Age without Print: Potency and Portrayal in Medieval and Early Modern North Africa

Jewish food is an important key to unraveling the complexities of the Jewish cultural heritage, especially in early Medieval Spain. Using the 13th century Arabic language cookbook Kitab Tabikh as guide, she explores what can be discerned from its contents regarding Jewish culture and its evolution in the multicultural setting of Al-Andalus. Cuisine, as Jawhara Piñer explains, is so much more than just recipes: “it is a language, a universal language which unveils what we are and what we are not.”
familiar to fans of forensic murder mysteries, using “thick descriptions” of the social and economic contexts, closely following the events from the time of the murder, through the investigations, doctor’s reports, forensic studies, dueling expert witnesses during the trials, the newspaper coverage, and political manipulations. Kieval traces how local superstitions and social tensions at the village level allowed charges of Jewish conspiracy to be leveled by local prosecutors and state functionaries. Rather than imitating the Crucifixion, these Jews were accused of using an expert “Jewish butcher’s cut” to drain the bodies out of “Jewish depravity” and “criminality.” The forensic evidence was often disputed by defense expert witnesses, and sometimes even by prosecutors. Kieval details the national antisemitic political parties and newspapers served by these trials, with pushback from liberal politicians, scientists, and Jewish organizations. Riots and pogroms spawned by the trials are detailed in passing. This title is recommended for academic libraries.

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


Dr. Landes, a one time professor of history and director of the Center for Millennial Studies at Boston University, argues that contemporary global jihadism is a millennial or apocalyptic movement that believes in a utopian transformation of life on earth in which Islam will rule the world and everyone will either convert to Islam, be killed, or be dhimmis, protected but with an inferior status to Muslims.

He analyzes four events of the early twenty-first century: the alleged killing of twelve year old Muhammad Al Durah, the supposed “massacre” at Jenin, the 9/11 attacks, and the affair of the cartoons of Muhammad published in a Danish newspaper. He maintains that the second Intifada was “the opening salvo” of Global Jihad’s assault on the democracies of the west, rather than a war of national liberation for the Palestinians. Dr. Landes goes on to discuss the progressive elites who so hate their own societies and are fixated on the imperfections of the West even while they excuse the barbarism of the jihadists (e.g. suicide bombings). As for the mainstream media, it has become corrupt “lethal journalism” by presenting global jihad propaganda as news, claims the author. Dr. Landes sees the global jihad’s hatred of Israel as a victor over Muslims and a non-Muslim sovereign state in the middle east as fundamental if generally unacknowledged. His portrayal of the global jihad as hateful, dangerous, and detached from reality is convincing. This is a scholarly and passionate tome.

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


Wolfgang Lotz (1921-1993) spied on Egypt for Israel from December 1960 until February 1965, when he and his wife Waltrud were arrested and eventually put on trial and convicted. This book is Lotz’s memoir of his and his wife’s time as spies in Egypt, their capture, trial, imprisonment, and eventual release in a trade for Egyptian prisoners-of-war after the Six Day War.

Lotz was the child of a Jewish actress and a German father. After the divorce of his parents and the death of his father, his mother fled Germany and took him with her to Mandatory Palestine in 1933, when national socialism came to power. He eventually joined the British army during the Second World War, smuggled weapons to the Haganah after the war, and joined the Israel Defense Force in 1948 where he rose to the rank of major. He was eventually approached by the Mossad to spy on Egypt. Lotz spoke German and Arabic in addition to Hebrew and English. He established a cover as a German who says he had served as an officer under Rommel but actually was an SS officer, and became a wealthy horse breeder in Australia after the war. He succeeded in mixing with the Egyptian political, military, and economic elites and was able to obtain a great deal of relevant information that he regularly sent on to the Mossad. The book tells an interesting story in clean, untheatrical prose and also gives readers glimpses into an unfamiliar society.

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


This encyclopedia is the fourth published of seven planned volumes on German camps and ghettos during the years 1933-1945. It covers specifically camps and other

The Shamama Affair examines the legal status of a Jew born in Tunis who died in Livorno, Italy, in 1873. Nissim Shamama left a substantial estate after his death and his will was contested by individuals and the Tunisian authorities who all wanted a part of the assets. Was he a Tunisian national? A properly naturalized Italian citizen? A Jew to have his will adjudicated according to Jewish law? A stateless individual? Each of these possibilities was argued in legal briefs for a full decade in various Italian courts by dozens of lawyers and experts. The most renowned legal minds of Italy at the time argued about the case, around the issues of nationality, nationalism, full and partial citizenship as they were understood and were evolving at the end of the nineteenth century in Western Europe and North Africa.

The book is written in a clear and accessible style, broadly depicting the various locals and participants, Marglin even provides a “cast of characters.” Recommended for academic libraries, especially law libraries.

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


In this book by author Ari Mittleman, he profiles eight non-Jewish people who have taken it upon themselves, for different reasons, to defend the Jewish community as a whole. These people range from a Black American firefighter who volunteered his time to fight fires in Israel that were started by incendiary balloons launched from the Gaza Strip in 2018, a Croatian diplomat, a German lawyer assisting Holocaust survivors trying to reclaim their property that was stolen by the Nazis, a Black South African Christian woman, two Guatemalan Christian preachers and musicians, and a Catholic priest who diligently recorded sites of Nazi exterminations of local Jewish populations in Ukraine, who authored *Holocaust by Bullets*, among other individuals profiled.

Mittleman profiles these people in a very accessible style, giving biographical accounts that illustrate why each person has chosen to learn about, study, and defend the State of Israel, and the Jewish population around the world as well. He discusses the varied ways each approach provides different models of how to understand the causes of antisemitism, and how to defend against this phenomenon in the varied contexts in which the people profiled act for the Jewish community and Israel. The fact that these people have chosen to assist the fight against antisemitism in varied ways, for many different reasons, should bring the Jewish community both hope and the knowledge that we are never alone in this battle.

This book is recommended for all levels of Jewish libraries, but especially for school and synagogue libraries that want to illustrate the many ways antisemitism can be confronted and the people who help the Jewish community do so.

**Eli Lieberman,**
*Assistant Librarian HUC-JIR NY*

Based on the Hebrew edition published in 1940 by Aaron Z. Aescoly (1901-1948), this English translation prepared by Professor Verskin presents a colorful person who claimed to be the ambassador of a Jewish kingdom deep in Arabia and who went on meetings with the powerful rulers of Europe. The purported mission of Reubeni was to ask for weapons to fight the Ottoman Empire to restore a Jewish state in the Holy Land. Reubeni earned early support from Italian Jewish community leaders, some who hailed him as a messiah and arranged for him to meet with the Pope Clement VII. The Pope heard him and sent him to the King of Portugal to get ships and weapons. Reubeni’s presence in Portugal raised such a turmoil among the recently Jewish converts to Christianity (Conversos) that he was escorted out of the

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Kingdom and placed on a ship to promptly leave.

Beside the recording of negotiations, the Reubeni’s diary is replete with details on his ordinary life, his clothes, his servants who get into brawls and steal from him. Reubeni’s ship out of Portugal had to get into a Spanish port (where no Jews were allowed since the Expulsion) and he was arrested, not once but twice. This is where the diary ends. Verskin’s solid introduction allows the reader to fully appreciate how unique this diary is for modern Jewish history. Includes bibliographical references and index.

Recommended to those with interest in Jewish history of the Early Modern Period and to academic libraries.

Roger S. Kohn, Silver Spring, MD


“Alone and Wrestling” is both a concrete quotation (Jacob wrestles with an angel, Bereshit/ Genesis 32:25) and metaphor as Jews continue wrestling with texts. The eclectic anthology is a very personal work by a very literate Jew with sections: Fictions, Fascinations, Sermons, and Essays in Education, publications as both author and editor, and a brief biography. The pieces that cite text often have end-notes; there is no index. There are a handful of interesting illustrations.

The engaging style is easy to read. A reader can read the pieces out-of-order or pick up the book and put it down with a long break without losing continuity. The author’s sense of humor is apparent from the first words. Some witticisms tend toward the conventional, such as losing hair as one worries and ages and ex-wife financial demands for shared children, while others are more thought-provoking: “I like to think of the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States as a kind of Old Faithful of the legal system. Routinely, it throws up a spewing fountain of opinion, resolutions, ink, and invective.”

Rossel, in his role as educator, was a leader of long-standing in CAJE, the Conference for Alternatives in Jewish Education, and its parent, the Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education. CAJE, part of the chavurah movement, offered conferences from 1976 to 2008. He served as Dean of Education for HUC-JIR. Rossel was also a public speaker and publisher, working for the HUC Press, Behrman House, and his own Rossel Books.

Libraries that offer memoirs, with readers interested in personal “takes” on Jewish history, education, and continuity might want to acquire this title. In Rossel’s words about the educational imperative: “so that this generation may pass on what it knows, and the next generation know more.”

Jonina Duker, Certified Book Discussion Facilitator and Judaic Educator


This is the second book published by Rabbi Ruttenberg with Beacon Press, after Surprised by God: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Religion (2008), and her fifth book altogether. It received the 2023 Contemporary Jewish Life and Practice Myra H. Kraft Memorial Award of the Jewish Book Council. Rabbi Ruttenberg stated that “This book started on Twitter. Well, actually it started when a journalist I know emailed me ... The Twitter thread led to an op-ed, which led to a couple of NPR interviews.” The style of the book is right there: almost chatty, very informal (“As our friend Maimonides put it ...”). It is also very centered around what has happened in the United States, even in the last decade or so. There is reference to the Civil War, the White Southerners’ abuses of Black slaves in the South, even to President Trump and Senator Rubio. Ruttenberg believes that she can offer “a new way to navigate personal relationships, to read the news, and to participate in the organizations, institutions, and society in which we play a part.” It is a book for everyone, Ruttenberg claims, Jews and non-Jews, drawing from some Jewish sources (chiefly from Maimonide Laws of repentance).

The structure of the book starts with the personal relationships and moves to the public sphere, the obligations of institutions, then of the nations (mostly South Africa and Germany, for obvious reasons, Apartheid and Holocaust). Further in the book, Ruttenberg addresses restorative justice, forgiveness and atonement. The book has a bibliography and index.

Recommended to any institutional libraries, congregational, Jewish or not, or public libraries.

Roger S. Kohn, Silver Spring, MD


Believe is a compilation of the last written essays by the highly respected orthodox rabbi and scholar Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks z”l (1948-2020) who served as Chief Rabbi of the

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United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth from 1991-2013. When Rabbi Sacks was approached by George Carey, Archbishop of Canterbury, and asked to embark on a project of Bible reading with England’s Jewish community, Rabbi Sacks explained that for the Jews, reading the Bible is more than just reading. He further explained that Bible reading means close reading, interpreting, studying and engaging with the text. I Believe contains short essays on each parasha (portion) read weekly in synagogues around the world. The essays are insightful and profound close readings and interpretations of an aspect of the weekly portion. At the end of each essay is a statement in boldface type prefaced with “I believe” which answers the question “What does the text mean to me?” The concluding statement of each essay is personal and reveals an insightful and powerful message that each of us should take away from studying the parasha.

Libraries who own Rabbi Sacks’ series Covenant and Conversation will want to add this book to their collection. Academic, synagogue, and school libraries who do not yet own one of Rabbi Sacks’ 30 books can start with this one.

Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, OH


For those already familiar with the series, Leviticus is more of the same. If you liked the previous ones, get this as well. If you are not familiar with the series, a look at the introduction is a good summation. Quoting the author, “The Koren Tanakh of the Land of Israel does not assume any background on the part of its readers...The series is written from a Jewish perspective and is consistent with an Orthodox Jewish Worldview...This series strives to present the most up-to-date scholarship in order to connect the Tanakh and its events, concepts, language, and cultural interactions to the ancient Near East — in a way that is accessible to a contemporary audience.”

This volume has absolutely achieved all those points. The Koren Tanakh of the Land of Israel manages to combine an Orthodox Jewish perspective with academic commentary and footnotes about Israel, Tanakh, and history. There is a handy “how to read this book” section that highlights what topic a section of commentary deals with, and if that section is academic, rabbinic, or something else.

The Tanakh series is replete with pictures and maps to set Israel as the context of Tanakh. The paper is thicker and glossier than most Tanakhs on the market, which lets the images really stand out. Highly recommended for any synagogue or school library, as well as personal use. This book can also be a good inclusion for a public library.

Andrew Lilien, AJL Treasurer


An experienced Associated Press photographer, Hassan Sarbakhshian, and young researcher, Parvaneh Vahidmanesh (whose Jewish family origins were a closely held family secret in her Iranian Muslim family) joined together in a shared project to document contemporary Jewish life in Iran in 2007-2008. In two years of traveling throughout Iran, the two Iranians, with the support of diverse Iranian Jews and Iranian Jewish associations (despite wariness and skepticism by some Jewish organizations as to their motives and reasons for the project), worked to capture Iranian Jewish life in business, everyday activities, religious life and rituals.

The result of their efforts is this volume combining rich color photographs of Iranian Jewish life captured in celebration and in mourning, in commerce and in prayer, with accompanying text describing the events portrayed.

The authors were prohibited from publishing their book in Iran, accused by political authorities as serving as propagandists for Judaism. In exile in the United States, the book’s authors connected with Lior Sternfeld, Israeli-born Associate Professor of History and Jewish Studies at Pennsylvania State University. Professor Sternfeld, of Ashkenazi ancestry, had earlier developed a strong interest in contemporary Iranian Jewish history and sought to redress the absence of scholarly research on the role of Iranian Jews in Iranian political developments in the 20th century, particularly the 1929 Iranian Revolution. Professor Sternfeld also sought to explore the complex role of Zionism in Iranian Jewish life in his 2019 book, Between Iran and Zion: Jewish Histories of Twentieth Century Iran.

It is through Professor Sternfeld that The Jews of Iran ultimately was published by The Pennsylvania State University Press in 2022.

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In the Introduction, Professor Sternfeld provides an invaluable overview of the forces affecting Iranian Jewish life amidst the country’s tumultuous political developments in the 20th century.

He is at pains to underscore that for a significant period of time, Iran’s Jewish community was “the biggest Jewish community in the Middle East outside of Israel” and had been in the area for some 2,700 years, following the Babylonian exile. At the eve of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, it is estimated that some 100,000 Jews lived in Iran. The current figure is but a small fraction of that number.

This text will certainly fill a gap in both research and synagogue/Jewish community center library collections of material on Iranian Jewish history and culture. The depiction of Iranian Jewish holy sites — synagogues and cemeteries — families in celebration of Shabbat and of weddings, Passover and Sukkot — should catalyze readers’ interest in learning more about the current state of Jewish life in Iran and potentially generate a desire to reach out to Iranian Jewish organization based in Los Angeles — now a center of Iranian Jewish life in exile.

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


Koren Publishers is noted for offering accessible-to-all traditional texts, easy-to-read fonts, and pleasing graphic layouts. This siddur (prayer book) completes Koren’s three-part series for Selichot liturgy from different Diasporas: Minhag Anglia (Anglo-Jewish custom) and Minhag Polin (Ashkenazi customs of Polish Jewry) which were published in 2016. Different Diasporas developed different customs for when penitential prayers known as selichot are first said during the sixth Hebrew month of Elul. Ashkenazim begin on different days during Elul depending on the day of the week. Rosh HaShanah falls out. Jews across the Diaspora have selichot prayers for the Yamim Noraim, the Ten Days of Awe (Rosh HaShanah to Yom Kippur, days 1 to 10 in the seventh Hebrew month of Tishri).

This siddur has a comprehensive 70-page introduction to the prayers’ history, meaning, and Diaspora differences; the liturgy in both Hebrew and English for the other days besides Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur prayers would be said according to the traditions of this community; and a helpful index with both Hebrew and English for phrases. This siddur uses its own fonts, Koren Tanakh Font, (for the Hebrew Bible) developed in 1962 and the Koren Siddur Font developed in 1981.

This is a great choice for a sample prayer book and Selichot itself. Alternatives include: Artscroll’s interlinear for more basic Hebrew literacy; The Open Siddur Project online; and Sefaria online.

Jonina Duker,
Certified Book Discussion Facilitator and Judaic Educator


This book offers a fascinating academic study of four accomplished men who came to the States as European refugees, worked for Zionist organizations, and later immigrated to Israel around the time of Statehood. “The personal stories ... give practical expression to the international nature of American Jewish history after World War I.” All four individuals, while perceiving themselves as foreign and marginal while living in the States, had remarkable impacts on history.

This text shares the life stories of: Aryeh Tartakower, born in Galicia, moved to the U.S. in 1939, to Palestine in 1946, was a leader of the World Jewish Congress in both countries, a founder of the discipline of Jewish sociology, and was on the Hebrew University faculty; Aryey Leon Kubovy, born in Lithuania, was a leader of the World Jewish Congress, moved to the U.S. in 1940, to Israel in 1948, was a diplomat, Yad Vashem chair 1959 to 1966 (Jerusalem’s Kubovy Street is named for him); Benjamin Akzin, born in Latvia, moved to the U.S. in the 1930s, to Israel in 1949, was on the Hebrew University faculty, and received Israel Prize Laureate in Jurisprudence in 1967; and Jacob Robinson, born in Lithuania, member of Parliament 1923 to 1926, moved to the U.S. in 1940, was a researcher for the Nuremberg trials, moved to Israel circa 1948, and was a member of Jewish Agency leadership, in charge of reparations agreement with West Germany. Additional context is provided through a general discussion of American Zionism throughout the relevant years and overall conclusions.

This scholarly work, published by a venerable academic press, might also find readers from synagogue libraries with interests in twentieth-century American Jewish history, the early years in the modern State of Israel, archival holdings for individuals, and research methodologies. Included are extensive footnotes, bibliography, and index.

Jonina Duker,
Certified Book Discussion Facilitator and Judaic Educator

Continued on page 38
A s survivors have aged, they had time and often felt the urgency to document for their loved ones and, for posterity, their Holocaust experiences. Many testimonies have been written in English, Hebrew and other languages. This book is an example of a book translated from Hebrew into English. It is well written and has a unique story of survival. This painful story of the author’s survival, his family members’ fate, and his life after the war, though very painful, is very readable.

Yochanan Fein was born in Lithuania in 1929. He describes his family, his parents, and siblings. His father was a righteous man who died close to the end of the war in Dachau. His mother and two sisters survived by miracle. As a child he studied violin and in 1941, already as an accomplished musician, separated from his parents, he was taken into the Kaunas Ghetto. There he spent three years, part of the time in hiding. On occasion he managed to continue to play his small violin and that saved his life. He was one of sixteen Jews saved due to their education and possible value for continued Jewish life after the war. He describes the terrible conditions in the ghetto and his survival because he could teach violin playing. This was thanks to a righteous gentle who saved him and 15 Jews in his underground “Noah’s Ark,” which Yohanan describes in great detail.

Yohanan writes extensively about the family of that man who would not accept any payment for his dangerous efforts. After the war, he was recognized by Yad Vashem as a Righteous Among the Nations. The author’s descriptions of the man and his family are presented with much love and appreciation (including many photographs), and in great detail, not only during the war but after the war as well. The political situation in Lithuania before, during and after the war years is included in the book. Yohanan also describes his life after the war under the Soviet regime and his Aliya to Israel in 1950 after escaping.

This book is recommended for all libraries with basic Holocaust collections. The memoir could be read by book groups and by students who are learning about the Holocaust.

Michlean Lowy Amir, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, (Retired) Washington, DC


How does nonbinary gender figure in rabbinic laws? How do messy, unruly, and multiply penetrable bodies fit within the ordered taxonomies of ritual and legal obligation?” This book participates in a “much-needed criticism of rabbinic androcentrism” and is a contribution to “the burgeoning fields of trans and intersex history.” Strassfeld carefully establishes the definition of each of the terms used in Tannaitic literature as well as the terms used now by the trans and intersex
REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR ADULTS


The Algemeyne entsiklopedye was an ambitious project that was launched in Berlin in 1931 and concluded publication in New York in 1966. Twelve volumes were issued: five devoted to (mostly) general topics and seven to Jewish subjects. A companion, four-volume set in English, Jewish People Past and Present, came out after World War II.

The encyclopedia’s founders were secular intellectuals, diaspora nationalists, and socialist activists who responded to the historian Simon Dubnow’s call for “a bible for the new age, in Yiddish.” They sought to produce the Yiddish equivalent of a Britannica-style set (from alef to tav) for the Yiddish-speaking masses but their plans were waylaid by the Nazis’ seizure of power and the outbreak of war. The encyclopedists were forced to relocate twice under emergency conditions: from Berlin to Paris in 1933, and then to New York in 1940. In the process, they shifted their focus from summarizing useful information (the five general volumes spanned only the first two letters of the Yiddish alphabet) to providing in-depth treatments of Jewish topics, including the Holocaust.

Given the challenging circumstances under which the Algemeyne entsiklopedye was published, it’s not surprising to read that its archives are scattered and incomplete. In researching this book, Professor Trachtenberg, who teaches Jewish history at Wake Forest University, consulted repositories on four continents. “Taken as a whole, it is an unrivaled depiction of how Yiddish cultural and intellectual activists tenaciously responded to the hopes, traumas, and triumphs of the middle decades of the twentieth century,” the author states. Not only is The Holocaust & the Exile of Yiddish a scrupulous work of scholarship; the print volume is also quite handsome.

Highly recommended for research libraries and for anyone who wishes to learn how reference works get made.

Zachary M. Baker, 
Palo Alto, CA 
Judaica/Hebraica Curator Emeritus, Stanford University Libraries


The dissemination of aphorisms, maxims, and proverbs that contain wise words were commonly copied in the ancient world. The topics of these wisdom collections were vast and mirrored the full gamut of ancient life. Topics most widely written about were social relations such as marital and familial responsibilities, wealth management, how to relate to superiors and inferiors, self-control of one’s emotions, and the place and role of deities in one’s life.

The introduction to this work seeks to define the different styles and structures of these texts and to provide some context as to the author’s aims. These wisdom offerings are sometimes meant to teach and sometimes to entertain—they may contain laws, morals, precepts, advice, admonishments or commands. The author then maps out the different constructions and contexts of these wisdom collections. This collection of wisdom sayings contains twenty nine texts. One Near Eastern text, one Egyptian text, eight Greek texts, two Latin texts, three Jewish texts, two Christian texts, two texts of poetry, and ten instructional texts of which three are Near Eastern, five Egyptian, one Jewish and one Christian text. Each text is followed by a list of references.

This book will be of interest to anyone who wants to understand the range and diversity of ancient wisdom and is accessible to scholars and laypeople alike.

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