"They Forgot to Tell Their Children": Where are the Jewish Children’s Books about Soviet Jewry?

By Leah Sokol

When Anat Zalmanson-Kutzenov was growing up in Israel, people often came up to her in the street and said, “Did you know your parents are heroes?”

Anat is the daughter of two Soviet Jews who were once famous throughout the Jewish world. In 1970, many Soviet Jews were desperate to get out of the Soviet Union but were repeatedly refused permission to leave. A small group of them, including her parents, hatched a desperate plan; they would steal a plane and fly themselves out. They all knew that they would likely end up in a Soviet prison or condemned to death—which is, in fact, what happened. But their arrest and trial alerted the world to the plight of Soviet Jews and helped spark a movement to set them free—a movement that energized and unified world Jewry.

But a couple of decades later, when Anat began working on a film about her parents’ attempt to escape the Soviet Union, she discovered that most people her age didn’t know what she was talking about.

Natan Sharansky, the most famous Soviet Jewish dissident, has expressed amazement that the inspiring story of the campaign to free Soviet Jewry is not part of the curriculum in most Israeli or American Jewish schools. People often tell him about how they were part of the inspiring campaign to free him and other Soviet Jews—a grassroots cause that succeeded against overwhelming odds, and that was a foundational part of many American Jews’ identity. “But,” he told one interviewer, “they forgot to tell their children this story.”

My own experience testifies to the truth of his lament. I’ve had a fairly intensive Jewish education; I went to a Jewish day school, studied in Israel for a year, and took several undergraduate and graduate courses in Jewish history. I also spent most of my first three decades in Brooklyn, where I heard so much Russian being spoken that I decided to start a Rosetta Stone course in that language.

Yet when I was asked to write a middle grade biography of Natan Sharansky, I knew almost nothing about Soviet Jewry. What knowledge I possessed didn’t come from school or from books, but from meeting ex-Soviet Jews and hearing snippets about their lives. (When I was in law school, a guy I met at a Shabbaton told me that in the Soviet Union, his identity card had labeled him as Jewish. “Really?” I said, completely astonished.)

When, in my 40s, I read When They Come for Us, We’ll Be Gone by Gal Beckerman, the authoritative account of the struggle to save Soviet Jewry, it was a revelation to me. I had literally never heard of 99% of what he describes in the book.

Continued on page 2
Now that I’ve researched the subject, I’m aware that the information is out there. But I had to search for it. There are a few documentaries and a small number of books, many of them out of print. More crucially, there are hardly any books for children. In all my searches, I was able to come up with fewer than a dozen:

- *Monday in Odessa* by Eileen Bluestone Sherman (JPS 1986)
- *Penny and the Four Questions* by Nancy E. Krulik and Marian Young (Scholastic 1993)
- *A Boy Is Not a Bird* by Edeet Ravel (Groundwood Books 2019)
- *Escape from the USSR: A Russian Refusenik’s Story of Survival* by Nesanel Yoel Safran (Menucha Publishers 2019)
- *The Blackbird Girls* by Anne Blankman (Viking BFYR 2020)
- *Natan Sharansky: Freedom Fighter for Soviet Jews* by Blake Hoena and Daniele Dickmann (Kar-Ben 2021)
- *The Genius Under the Table: Growing Up Behind the Iron Curtain* by Eugene Yelchin (Candlewick 2021)
- *A Visit to Moscow* by Anna Olswanger, Yevgenia Nayberg, and Rabbi Rafael Grossman (West Margin Press 2022)
- *Hidden* by Rivkah Yudasin (Hachai Publishing 2023)
- *Beneath the Stars* by Rivkah Yudasin (Hachai Publishing 2023)

After doing the research that led me to compile this list, I wrote two books to add to it:

- *Yosef Mendelevich: Leader of Soviet Jewry* by Leah Sokol (Menucha Publishers 2023)
- *Standing Together: The Story of Natan Sharansky* by Leah Sokol (Green Bean Books 2024)

(I look forward to comments excoriating me for the books I’ve missed. But I don’t expect there to be a large number.)

Jews from the Soviet Union, and their descendants, form a substantial and important part of the American and Israeli Jewish populations. They deserve to have their history and their stories told. So where are the books that are for and about them?

There would seem to be an audience for these books. In the circles of Jewish children’s literature, there is a widely-held (though much-debated) concern that Holocaust literature is overwhelming the field, presenting Judaism through the prism of persecution and victimhood. It seems like an obvious counter to that would be a groundswell of books about the Soviet Jewish experience: a story of Jewish unity, strength, and, ultimately, triumph against overwhelming odds. People strain to make uplifting stories out of the Holocaust—and here is a story that is by its nature uplifting. Why aren’t more writers leaning into that?

But perhaps they finally are. The children’s books I did find were mostly published after 2019. On the one hand, it’s rather concerning that had I embarked on this search in 2018, I would have found a grand total of three books. But perhaps that’s not a coincidence. Perhaps we are at the beginning of a surge of children’s books that will tell the story of the Soviet Jewish experience.

If so, I am looking forward to it.

Leah Sokol is the author of several Jewish children’s books. Her middle grade biography of Yosef Mendelevich was published by Menucha Publishers in 2023, and her middle grade biography of Natan Sharansky will be published by Green Bean Books in 2024. She is also the author of middle grade and young adult fantasy novels under the name “Leah Cypress.”
Seven Questions with....
Author and Publisher
Zibby Owens

AJL: News and Reviews Editor in Chief Sally Stieglitz spoke with publisher, podcaster, and author Zibby Owens. Owens is the creator of the Zibby-verse, a community of readers and writers. Owens’ most recent book, Blank: A Novel, was a USA Today bestseller, a GMA Best Book of March 2024, and AARP’s The Ethel’s Must Read Book.

AJL: Zibby, thank you for chatting with AJL News and Reviews! You are a writer, publisher, podcaster, and bookshop owner...how do you have the time to do all of this? And what is the Zibby-verse? Does it have heroes?

ZO: Haha. I don’t sleep that much and I do a lot of things at once! Plus I have a fantastic team with strong women leading all divisions of my company! And a very strong home team, too; my husband takes on a lot! “The Zibby-verse” is what the L.A. Times called my whole brand, which I thought was hilarious. They were referring to all the book-related initiatives we run plus the entire community we’ve built.

AJL: You have started your own publishing company, Zibby Books. Was any part of this prompted by the idea of trying to publish the books you would actually want to read, as opposed to what other publishers might think you want to read?

ZO: No, but that is one of the messages from my novel! I started it to try to give authors a better experience, uplift voices, give authors “without a platform” a fair shake, and to make every author a lead title. I also wanted to work directly with authors to usher original content into the world which I find so exciting.

AJL: In your recent comic novel, Blank, the main character Pippa is a mom who observes Shabbat by lighting the candles and saying the blessings. She is also dealing with a son who is reluctant to become a bar mitzvah. And there is a dog named Dayenu, which is possibly the best dog name ever!! How important was it to you to include visible Jewish characters in your work?

ZO: Thanks! I love the dog name, too. It makes me chuckle. For me, it was a foregone conclusion. Being Jewish is part of who I am. It would’ve been hard to write a main character who didn’t have that. Maybe I don’t have that great an imagination!! Pippa isn’t me, but we do have a lot in common.

AJL: You host a podcast called Moms Don’t Have Time to Read Books and that’s a fact! But we do have time to listen to books, while doing the endless mom tasks. Do you listen to audio books?

ZO: I listen to audiobooks sometimes, especially in the summer when I drive the kids to and from camp and activities outside of the city. But I can read much faster than I listen. My auditory processing must not be up to speed with visual processing! But it’s still a great way to get book content. Did you know, though, that audiobook sales don’t count towards the best-seller lists? Weird, right?

AJL: In recent years, the publishing world can be a deeply uncomfortable place for Jews. This has expressed itself in “review bombing” of Jewish writers on GoodReads, negative consequences for those who speak up against antisemitism, etc. Can you share any thoughts on how we, as professionals in the book world, can respond to these micro and macro aggressions?

ZO: Oh man. We have to be strong and carry on. We have to speak up when these things happen and not accept them. We have to block the haters and reschedule events and do whatever we can to safely usher our books into the world. We need our stories out there now more than ever.

AJL: Are you planning to write any new books, especially Jewish books?

ZO: Yes! My next novel is called Overheard and features a bookstore owner in Santa Monica. She’s Jewish and also has a very prominent Jewish in-laws from Beverly Hills. Her mother-in-law is quite a character! So far the Jewish element isn’t driving plot points of Overheard, but who knows. I’m only 15,000 words into it!

AJL: We always like to ask, what are you reading? Any favorite books of all time, including childhood reads?

ZO: My favorite childhood reads include Little House on the Prairie, anything by Judy Blume, and Charlotte’s Web. I’m reading The Paris Novel by Ruth Reichl and Matthew Haig’s upcoming book The Life Impossible. Favorite of all time? I can’t choose one, but some of my favorite authors include Dani Shapiro, Anna Quindlen, and Annabel Monaghan.

AJL: Thank you Zibby for speaking with us. We look forward to seeing what’s next in the Zibby-verse!
Who Knows Four?.... Heidi Rabinowitz

1. Tell us about your best experience at an AJL Conference.

It’s hard to pick, since I’ve been at every conference since 1999 in Boca Raton, when I jumped in at the deep end to help organize the “convention,” as they were known at the time. Here’s a memory that includes many of the best aspects of AJL conferences: in 2014 in Las Vegas, I was finishing my time as AJL President. To go out with a bang, I created a homemade version of the game Cards Against Humanity, creating my own questions for “Cards Against Librarianship,” and we played it after the awards banquet in the hospitality suite. I got this fun photo of my BFF Etta Gold with her cards: the question is “It’s important for libraries to create an atmosphere of ___” and the answer is “An all night party in the AJL hospitality suite.” This memory encompasses the mix of fun, friendship, collegiality, deep care about libraries, and the opportunity to serve, that are the hallmarks of AJL year-round and at every conference.

2. What’s your favorite book that you read for your podcast, The Book of Life?

I’ve been podcasting since 2005, so there are a lot of books to choose from. Sometimes there’s a book that I want to read again the minute I finish it, so of course I invite those authors onto the show; this was the case in 2006 for Vive la Paris by Esme Raji Codell and in 2023 for When the Angels Left the Old Country by Sacha Lamb. I also love when guests burst into song: that happened with Ruth Behar (Across So Many Seas, May 2024), Shoshana Nambi (The Very Best Sukkah in October 2022), and even back in 2006 with Simms Taback (Joseph Had a Little Overcoat, Kibitzers and Fools). One of the more important interviews I’ve done didn’t involve a book, it was a conversation with April Powers about Project Shema. I think it really helps listeners understand antisemitism better, and inspires us to push back.

3. What is your vision for the future of AJL?

I think the goals in the strategic plan are great. The goal of fostering partnerships may be harder since October 7, but also more important than ever. I’d love to see AJL develop strong relationships with other diverse librarianship organizations. I know we’ve been making this effort and it’s slow work, but it’s important to keep trying. We are not obligated to complete this work but neither are we free to desist from it.

4. What is your favorite Rosh Hashanah treat?

Chocolate rugelach. Or anything with chocolate.

Holocaust Libraries, Educators, Archivists & Authors @ NYMA

Hallie Cantor, Acquisitions Associate, Yeshiva University

Teaching the past was the focus of the New York Metropolitan Area (NYMA) chapter’s “Examining the Role of Libraries in Holocaust Education,” held Thursday, May 30, at Yeshiva University/Stern College for Women. The seminar was moderated by incoming AJL-NYMA president Emily Apterbach—Research and Instruction Librarian, Hedi Steinberg Library—in coordination with Edith Lubetski, Ina Rubin-Cohen, Noreen Wachs; previous AJL-NYMA president Rina Krawtirth introduced two highly experienced speakers who discussed the trends in Holocaust studies, from library science to publishing.

For all ages?

In “Rethinking the Holocaust Library: A Radical Suggestion,” Karen Shawn—Associate Professor of Jewish Education, Yeshiva University—discussed the methods of curating Holocaust collections. She opened her talk by handing out copies of “I Could Not Heal You”: The Second Generation Grapples With Its Holocaust Legacy—special edition of Prism Journal: An Interdisciplinary Journal for Holocaust Educators (Azrieli Graduate School, Yeshiva University), of which she is editor.

Dr. Shawn described at length the contemporary—and frustrating—problems teaching the Holocaust, which in many institutions has been lumped together with “genocide studies” and universalized, or even fetishized. The amount of time spent on teaching the subject to America’s Jewish youth falls woefully short—average 90 minutes a year—with little historical groundwork or foundation. There is no knowledge of the Third Reich, or the long tradition of European antisemitism. Students may learn about Gentiles who rescued or sheltered families, while wondering why Jews didn’t do anything, or why they were even hated by the Nazis in the first place. Other students made the Holocaust synonymous with World War Two, or expressed confusion as to when the Holocaust began (i.e., 1939 instead of 1933).

In contrast, Israeli children are exposed to the Holocaust from the start. Kindergartners may hear the words “camps” and
“showers” while discovering their alternate meanings. But all of this is done gradually, with knowledge increased and integrated as they grow older. Citing David Elkind’s classic work *The Hurried Child*, Dr. Shawn discouraged teaching “the wrong things at the wrong time” and stressed collections arranged and handled with restraint and according to age and chronology. Children’s collections, for example, may contain picture books, or begin with the early days of the Third Reich. Middle school readers, delving further into the establishment of ghettos and other racial measures, may go up to the camps, “but not yet inside.” High schoolers might learn about Auschwitz and the Final Solution.

A chronological approach not only avoids confusion but provides fuller context, building the youngster’s understanding. Holocaust collections can also be divided by theme or genre; sections containing oral or eyewitness testimonies, for example, can impart the importance of memory. While some novels were credited—including the earliest fictionalized anthology like *Star Children* (1946)—Dr. Shawn emphasized non-fiction, believing that “young people should know the truth” of this horrific era. While certain works may not be considered “suitable for children,” for many survivors “the Holocaust eliminated childhood.” Dr. Shawn also mentioned integrating post-October 7 events into instruction or curricula.

In addition to her special edition of *Prison*, Dr. Shawn’s selected lists of age-appropriate materials, from children to adult, were handed out. Many are already owned by Yeshiva University’s Mendel Gottesman and Hedi Steinberg Libraries; some were placed on display, among them *The Call of Memory: Learning about the Holocaust through Narrative* (Ben Yehuda Press, 2008), of which Dr. Shawn was co-editor.

**Hybrid Genre**

In many recent publications, the Holocaust may seem more of a background than the focus itself. In “Is it a Memoir? Biography? History? Something else?,” Bonnie Gurewitsch—Archivist-Curator Emerita, Museum of Jewish Heritage—discussed the shifting of boundaries within certain genres, and the altering of definitions.

Ms. Gurewitsch discussed the formal classifications of history according to Dewey and the Library of Congress. Normally, Jewish history would be included in that category. But where would a personal narrative fit in? Even one with footnotes and primary or secondary sources? Historical insights can be gleaned through diaries or everyday correspondence. An example was *The Letters Project: A Daughter’s Journey* (Post Hill Press, 2022), where a daughter, after the death of her refugee mother, finds an old leather purse full of letters written by her father four years after the war, yielding clues as to his past and a certain legacy.

Ms. Gurewitsch mentioned other recent titles as examples of cohesive narratives written with literary tension. *The Watchmakers: A Story of Brotherhood, Survival, and Hope Amid the Holocaust* (Citadel, 2022) conveyed not only the horrors shared by many but the bonding of three brothers who fixed watches for the Germans in the labor and death camps. Similarly, *The Counterfeit Countess: The Jewish Woman Who Rescued Thousands of Poles during the Holocaust* (Simon & Schuster, 2024), reads like a psychological thriller in its account of someone who faked an aristocratic identity in occupied Poland. Risking her life involved not only physical hardship but wary distance from informers and predators.

These memoirs, grounded in history, bring to life people and events in an exciting way. Yet how much do they actually teach about the Holocaust? Will these people and events eventually recede into history? Following her talk, Ms. Gurewitsch was asked about the popular trend in “creative nonfiction,” the hybrid of fact and skillful prose. Apparently, this trend is appearing in recent Holocaust memoirs, where “accidental heroes” were involved in extraordinary situations that went beyond the ghetto-camp experience.

Both speakers provided food for thought as far as reevaluating and possibly revamping Holocaust collections. A *yasber koach* to Emily for an informative afternoon.

---

**Association of Jewish Libraries 2024 Judaica Reference and Bibliography Award Winners**

The Association of Jewish Libraries (AJL) encourages the publication of outstanding works of Judaica reference and bibliography through its annual awards.

We are pleased to announce the 2024 awards (for works published in 2023):


*Jewish Documentary Sources in Lviv Archives* is a comprehensive guide to 235 collections related to Jewish culture found in Lviv archives, libraries, and museums. The collections cover the range of Jewish history, from the fourteenth century to today. The committee was duly impressed by the depth of the research that went into assembling this guide as well as its incredible scope. As a result of this guide, countless works have been made visible to the scholarly world for the first time, and many more newly introduced to the English-speaking scholarly community. *Jewish Documentary Sources in Lviv Archives* was published by the Jewish Archival Survey in Ukraine.

Continued on page 6
co-sponsored by the Jewish Theological Seminary of America and the Archival Survey of Ukraine. Three previous guides have appeared as part of the series.

The committee would also like to highlight and give honorable mention to *The Population History of German Jewry 1815–1939*, published by Academic Studies Press. This immaculate work of scholarship and statistical gathering is also an act of scholarly devotion. Not only is this work a posthumous tribute to Steven Mark Lowenstein, it is also based on the work of the late Hebrew University demographer Osiel Oscar Schmelz. The resulting book is a tribute to two extraordinary scholars and to scholarly cooperation itself.

Our Bibliography Award Winner, *Fables in Jewish Culture: The Jon A. Lindseth Collection*, represents traditional bibliography at its highest level. The editors, Emile Schrijver and Lies Meiboom, began with the arduous task of first convincing the skeptical reader that the Fable as a genre has a long history within Jewish culture, a task they accomplished with aplomb. The committee was equally impressed with the critical apparatus of scholarly texts, detailed descriptions composed for each item in the collection, and the beauty of the book itself. The committee, of course, also wants to acknowledge the work of Jon Lindseth in building this collection and assembling such a diverse library of texts on the fable. It is an incredible accomplishment—and a treasure for the Cornell University Library.

Finally, the committee would also like to highlight two books that do not quite fit the awards categories but are otherwise worthy of special recognition. First, *The Beauty of the Hebrew Letter: From Sacred Scrolls to Graffiti* by Izzy Pludwinsky and published by Brandeis University Press. Pludwinsky’s book is lovingly compiled and gorgeously published—a true showcase of the beauty of Hebrew script. Second, *101 Treasures from the National Library of Israel*. While not designed as a rigorous bibliographic catalog, the work features tremendous, erudite essays about each of the selected works. Published by the National Library of Israel and Scala Arts and Heritage, the book is truly special, something that deserves to find a home both in personal libraries and in academic libraries.

The winners of the awards were celebrated both in person at the AJL conference in San Diego and through online programs. For his commitment and continuing support of the Bibliography Award, AJL would like to recognize and thank Mr. Eric Chaim Kline of Santa Monica. AJL would also like to thank all the members of the Reference and Bibliography Awards committee for their diligent work: Rachel Ariel, Sharon Benamou, Daniel Kestenbaum, Konstanze Kunst, and Diane Mizrachi. We also extend thanks to Haim Gottschalk for his many suggestions of books to consider.

### Highlights of the Association of Jewish Libraries Conference 2024

**As always, there were a plethora of interesting sessions relating to the diverse international attendees from academic, archives, special libraries, public libraries, and synagogue, school, and community center libraries as well as writers and publishers.**

**One mini-theme of the conference was that of provenance, especially regarding books looted by the Nazis.**

**White paper on provenance in Judaica books and manuscripts: A project of the international forum on Judaica provenance convened by the National Library of Israel and the Association of Jewish Libraries. Presented by Michelle Margolis, Columbia University.**

Michelle started from the assumption that curators (libraries, museums, booksellers, private collectors, etc.) want to acquire materials ethically and legally. The key to this is knowing the provenance of the item, i.e. the chain of ownership and how it changed hands.

There are obviously two sides to this situation: how do items leave their home collection and how they enter a collection. Most of the items under discussion at this session were looted by Nazis from Jewish homes, libraries, and schools. Other books were stolen individually by treasure-hunting thieves. Libraries acquire books through auctions, booksellers, and donations.

Curators need to make sure that the sellers can show the provenance of the material they are selling. They should look for “alarm bells,” books with missing first and/or last pages where ownership marks often appear or books with library markings which have not been deaccessioned.

And what happens when a curator determines that they have an item which had been stolen? While it seems like there may be the simple solution of returning it to its owner, there are many factors to consider. If an item has significant cultural relevance, should it be returned to a private owner or kept in a library where scholars can access it? If (and this is often the case) the original owner is dead or the organization has been destroyed or dismantled, should it go to its country of origin or stay where there is a Jewish community. Can the books be digitized? Can the original library be

*Continued on page 7*
virtually recreated online? What are the laws of the country from which the books were stolen and what are the laws where the item is currently located.

Michelle spent the later part of the session leading a discussion of how to launch and maintain a community of practice. We spoke about who should lead it, who to include, how to reach out to Jewish and non-Jewish groups, what type of forms and practices should be made to track provenance and who should create them, and who should act as resources.

It was a fascinating and informative session.
https://jewishlibraries.org/publications/white-paper-on-judaica-provenance/
Library of Lost Books has a site on learning about provenance.
https://libraryoflostbooks.com/

**Keynote speaker: Memory in the Archive: The many lives of historical material by Dr. Tessy Schlosser**

Dr. Schlosser is the director of the Mexican Jewish Documentation Center (MJDC). Located in Mexico City, she describes the MJDC as the center for Jewish connectivity. She began with a brief history of Jewish life in Mexico. This began in 1519 with Spain’s conquest of Mexico. Many Jews had fled the Inquisition in Spain. While there was an Inquisition office, it was not as active as in Spain. It was generally poorly staffed as Inquisitors in Spain were not eager to sail across the ocean and live in this strange place.

Around 1876, some Jews immigrated to Mexico and built businesses but not the structures of a Jewish community such as synagogues or cemeteries. Many of them left during the Mexican revolution in 1910. Modern migration began in the early 1900s and continued until the 1960s. In the first part of the century, Jews migrated from eastern Europe as well as the Ottoman empire. Some had hoped to go to the US but were unable to enter and landed in Mexico.

The MJDC holds many personal papers. They are also doing oral histories. They want to look beyond the basic information of the vital records (birth, marriage, and death.) They investigate what is the role of poverty or wealth on Jewish identity.

Dr. Schlosser showed some fascinating documents from the Brom family archive. Brom was a German Jewish immigrant who joined communist party and became a historian of Mexico. He and his wife and children traveled a circuitous route to get to Mexico. They went to Japan first, then took the train across the continent to Siberia before finally boarding a boat to Mexico. Schlosser showed their travel documents with Japanese stamps. The archive also had entertainment programs from the SS Ginyo Maru, the ship they took to Mexico. The schedule of activities included a cookie eating contest and evening parties with music and poems including Jewish songs.

**Feinstein Lecture: “The Distortion of Knowledge on Wikipedia” by Dr. Shira Klein.**

Dr. Klein is an historian specializing in Italian Jewish History and in Digital Humanities at Chapman University. She gave an assignment to her students instructing them to find a scholarly article on any topic that they were interested in and then to edit a Wikipedia article using that reference. This unexpectedly dragged Dr. Klein and a colleague into a multi-year struggle with the editors and administrators of Wikipedia. She found that a group of people from Poland were systematically editing the English language Wikipedia pages on the Holocaust and distorting the history. I wasn’t able to take notes during her talk, so I’ll pull this from her paper (link below.)

Four distortions dominate Wikipedia’s coverage of Polish-Jewish wartime history: a false equivalence narrative suggesting that Poles and Jews suffered equally in World War II; a false innocence narrative, arguing that Polish antisemitism was marginal, while the Poles’ role in saving Jews was monumental; antisemitic tropes insinuating that most Jews supported Communism and conspired with Communists to betray Poles (Żydokomuna or Judeo–Bolshevism), that money-hungry Jews controlled or still control Poland, and that Jews bear responsibility for their own persecution. Finally, distortionists inflate Jewish collaboration with the Nazis to make it seem an important part of the German policy of the extermination of European Jewry.

She spoke of the process of arbitration on Wikipedia, tracing the identity of some of the Polish editors, and tracking the changes as they went back and forth.

---

**From the Editor**

Dear Safranim,

What a pleasure it was to see so many of you at the AJL Annual Conference in San Diego this past June! The conference was terrific and congratulations and thanks to the conference coordinators, speakers, and volunteers. I learned so much and am already looking forward to next summer’s conference.

This issue of News and Reviews is full of great articles and reviews for your reading pleasure! We have a Seven Questions With... feature with author, publisher, and bookstore owner Zibby Owens and a Who Knows Four article with AJL’s own Heidi Rabinowitz, podcaster extraordinaire. Chapter chatter, articles, and columns fill out the newsletter as well! Thank you to all our contributors and please reach out to me if you would like to write for News in the future. Thank you also to our intrepid reviewers and editors, without whom we would not be able to put together this publication. You are appreciated!!

With warmest regards,
Sally Stiegelz

AJL News and Reviews

Summer 2024

7
How to Make Bookish Friends at PLA and Influence Publishers to Think About Jewish Books

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

A few months ago, I attended the Public Library Association (PLA) Conference, held in Columbus Ohio. I was on a self-appointed mission, as Editor-in-Chief of AJL News and Reviews, to have meaningful conversations about Jewish books with publishers and book vendors. My goal was to raise awareness about the importance of Jewish books for all readers and to encourage publishers to add books about Jewish joy and Jewish visibility to their already existing catalogs of holiday books and Holocaust books. I had a number of fruitful conversations with the representatives on the vendor floor, exchanged cards with more than a few, and let them know how to submit books for review in News and Reviews.

I was also there looking for any and all Jewish connections at PLA. Several months prior, I had looked at past PLA conference presentations, hoping to find Jewish content. Reader, I think you won’t be surprised to hear that I didn’t find any. But this only encouraged me to put in a proposal for the PLA virtual conference. And that proposal was accepted! Consequently, Rebecca Levitan and I presented Bring Diversity to Your Library with the Sydney Taylor Book Awards and our program was well received by the attendees who had genuine interest in learning about these high quality Jewish books for children and young adults. Score!

And I was also happy to find some other Jewish or Jewish-adjacent content in the 2024 PLA programming. Author Audrey Barbakoff presented at the virtual PLA conference on her recent children’s book, The Schlemiel Kids: Save the Moon. And by scouring the schedule, I found a program on reclassifying Dewey, called Increase Religious Equity by Reclassifying Dewey Equity. I reached out to one of the presenters, Elizabeth McKinstry, Springfield Public Library, and we arranged to meet up for lunch to chat about the limitations of Dewey classification and the work being done. I also had time to chat with ALA leader (now President-Elect) Sam Helmick about issues of concern to Jewish Librarians. Sam was and is always interested in conversations about inclusion and diversity and I was happy that they listened with an open mind and an open heart.

I also learned from Sam about important intellectual freedom issues and religious discrimination issues in housing in the state of Iowa.

And back to my original goal of raising awareness about Jewish books. Moving the needle is hard, and in person conversations are the opening we need to start people thinking about what is a Jewish book (no easy answers there). I’ve included some photos I took of Jewish books and books of interest to Jewish readers, so you can see that there is a Jewish presence at PLA.

So what did I learn? And what did I accomplish? These are two sides of the same coin, I believe. I was able to start the ball rolling on opening hearts and minds. So, PLA, is it good for Jews? Well, it’s getting there and with our continued work and that of our allies, I believe that Jewish books, libraries, and librarians will find more and more inclusion and Jewish diversity in the future at PLA and at other professional conferences.

Greetings from the Circulation Desk

I am still settling back in after returning from an amazing AJL Conference in San Diego but buoyed by the experience of seeing so many friends and colleagues in person and meeting so many new folks as well. It was by all accounts a great conference, and from personal comments and evaluation responses, many found it cathartic as well. For those who were unable to join us, I hope you read the proceedings when it comes out, and I strongly urge you to join us next summer during our online conference. I also encourage you to submit a proposal for presenting at the 2025 Online Conference. We learn from our members, and all of you are doing amazing work in your organizations. Please share your experience and knowledge!

As I spoke at the General Meeting, during the Conference, I want all members to know that as we go about in our day-to-day work, and often working as the sole Judaic librarian/archivist in our institutions or departments, that you are not alone. AJL is OUR organization, and we come together in person or online to help share knowledge, resources, and helpful hands to make all of our lives easier, and our programs and services that much better. As we hear of the shrinking of libraries and staffs or even the closing of libraries, it is easy to feel weary about our own situations. AJL is here for you and AJL will help. We have resources, programming, and educational opportunities to help you create the best programs and services possible. AJL will also help you to then successfully advocate and gain recognition of your hard work and to effectively demonstrate your programs and services impact on your stakeholders. I encourage you to join in all “Roundtables” and “AJL Presents” and take advantage of certification and accreditation programs, as well as the newly created Developing Leader Academy cohorts.

I would like to end with a positive note about AJL’s reach way beyond our libraries’ walls. I received a letter from a synagogue’s Rabbi thanking AJL for helping his library’s committee and how they are looking forward to becoming institutional members of AJL. He knew to ask for help from AJL, from his previous experience serving at an AJL member congregation. We will never know the full impact our work has on our stakeholders but do know that it is making a difference.

Ever onward,

Sean
New from Simon & Schuster
Featuring Jewish Voices and Stories

Where Is Poppy?
By Caroline Kusin Pritchard, Illustrated by Dana Wulfekotte
HC: 9781534489196 | eBook: 9781534489202
Ages: 4–8

The Keeping Quilt: The Original Classic Edition
Written & illustrated by Patricia Polacco
HC: 9781665948043 | eBook: 9781665962650
Ages: 4–8

Where Is Poppy?
By Caroline Kusin Pritchard, Illustrated by Dana Wulfekotte
HC: 9781534489196 | eBook: 9781534489202
Ages: 4–8

The Keeping Quilt: The Original Classic Edition
Written & illustrated by Patricia Polacco
HC: 9781665948043 | eBook: 9781665962650
Ages: 4–8

Not Nothing
By Gayle Forman
HC: 9781665943277
eBook: 9781665943291
Ages: 10 & up

Finally Fitz
By Marisa Kanter
HC: 9781665926072
eBook: 9781665926096
Ages: 12 & up

Not Nothing
By Gayle Forman
HC: 9781665943277
eBook: 9781665943291
Ages: 10 & up

Finally Fitz
By Marisa Kanter
HC: 9781665926072
eBook: 9781665926096
Ages: 12 & up

Essential Backlist to Add to Your Collection

I Dissent
By Debbie Levy
Illustrated by Elizabeth Baddeley
HC: 9781481465595
eBook: 9781481465601
Ages: 4–8

The Book Rescuer
By Sue Macy
Illustrated by Stacy Innerst
HC: 9781481472203
eBook: 9781481472210
Ages: 5–8

The Book Rescuer
By Sue Macy
Illustrated by Stacy Innerst
HC: 9781481472203
eBook: 9781481472210
Ages: 5–8

The Last Words We Said
By Leah Scheier
HC: 9781534469402
eBook: 9781534469419
Ages: 12 & up

The Last Words We Said
By Leah Scheier
HC: 9781534469402
eBook: 9781534469419
Ages: 12 & up
First Look! Photos from AJL Annual Conference 2024: Standing Together

All Images: Laurel Spul, Apples and Honey Photography
Chapter Chatter

AJL-Canada

On Sunday May 5, AJL-Canada presented a members-only event—a Canadian Authors’ Showcase. Fourteen Canadian authors introduced recently published, or soon-to-be-published works ranging from picture books to scholarly academic histories. Some were on Jewish themes, others were not. The variety of themes and genres was wide.

Attendees got a foretaste of board books for toddlers, of biographies of accomplished Jewish women, of books on Holocaust heroism, and of books on Canadian Jewish history.

Some publishers, like Owlkids and Nimbus, were Canadian; others, including Kar-Ben and Tobby Press, were American.

The session ended with a short talk by Toronto publisher Margie Wolfe, co-founder of Canada’s Second Story Press which has, since 1988, grown to be a major Canadian publisher of women-focused, social justice, and human rights books for adults and young people. Her insights into changes in publishing, especially in publishing Jewish books, were enlightening and engendered good discussion.

AJL-Canada was delighted to give our participants a chance to showcase their creative work, especially to the Americans in the audience.

Margie Gann, Programs Chair

AJL New England

We had a great start to our programming with our first meeting of the year in October (2023) when Betsy More, Director of Programs at the Jewish Women’s Archive gave us a presentation about the JWA collections, as well as the archive overall. In February (2024) we tried something new with a highly successful viewing of three movie shorts from the Jewish Film Festival in the UK. Watch free shorts - UK Jewish Film: Adieu Beloved, Last Word, and Niggun. The lively discussion that followed included topics covered by the films including ways to integrate film shorts of Jewish interest in education, the relationship between language (in this case, Ladino) and the survival of a community, and the use of science fiction and metaphor (in the form of animation) centering around biblical references to foxes and the destruction of the Temple. We look forward to more great programming after the summer.


AJL Capital Area Chapter

About fifteen people attended the Association of Jewish Libraries/Capital Area Chapter’s Sunday brunch for their members. The members had the opportunity to hear a special presentation by Maya Lerman, music archivist at the Library of Congress, who spoke about the Barry Sisters. She discussed the history and significance of the group which is often referred to as a Jewish version of the Andrew Sisters. She further went into detail about her effort and activities involved in the collection of musical scores, records, lead sheets, etc. that she has curated related to the Barry Sisters. This material that she archived can be accessed online or reviewed in person at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. There is a blog that you can open: https://blogs.loc.gov/music/2024/03/the-barry-sisters-and-yiddish-swing/

The two sisters were born with the name: Minnie Bagelman (April 6, 1923 – October 31, 1976) and Clara Bagelman (October 17, 1920 – November 22, 2014). The group’s first name was the Bagelman Sisters, but they took on the name of Barry Sisters believing it would resonate more with Americans. Their career started with an appearance on the Jewish Children’s Hour. These two sisters performed in person in the United States and toured the Soviet Union in 1959. It was fascinating to learn that members of our Capital Area Chapter from the USSR remember hearing the Barry sisters recording in the Soviet Union.

Everyone had an enjoyable afternoon. A recognition award was given by the Capital Area Chapter to Yermiyahu Aaron Taub, Head of the Israel and Judaica Section at the Library of Congress. Aaron was recognized for his many contributions to Judaica librarianship on a national and local level. I stressed to the group the importance of supporting their local Capital Area Chapter which provides networking, learning opportunities and friendship.

Ellen Share, President, Association of Jewish Libraries/Capital Area Chapter

Member News

AJL. Past President Michelle Margolis was promoted to the rank of Librarian IV at Columbia University Libraries.
AJL Announces Holiday Highlights Titles for Fall 2024

The Association of Jewish Libraries is pleased to announce that eight titles have been selected for its seasonal AJL Holiday Highlights list, celebrating Shabbat, Rosh Hashanah, Sukkot, and Hanukkah. These titles are AJL’s picks for the best Jewish holiday children’s books of Fall 2024. Titles that are selected as Holiday Highlights exemplify the highest standards of authentic Jewish representation and holiday spirit in both writing and illustration. A committee of expert judges recommends these books for use by families, in schools, and in libraries. AJL hopes that the publishing world will look to the quality of these examples when creating new children’s books about Jewish holidays.

Holiday Highlights titles are named twice a year, for the spring and fall publishing seasons. Submissions are being accepted now for the Spring 2025 list. Please email holidayhighlights@jewishlibraries.org to send digital review copies or to request instructions for sending print review copies.

The committee has selected two books about the holiday of Shabbat, which begins every Friday evening and ends every Saturday evening:

- **Challah for Shabbat Tonight** by Sara Holly Ackerman, illustrated by Alona Millgram, published by Algonquin Young Readers (a picture book for ages 4-8)
- **Ping-Pong Shabbat: The True Story of Champion Estee Ackerman** by Ann Diament Koffsky, illustrated by Abigail Rajunov, published by Little Bee Books (a picture book for ages 4-8)

The committee has selected two books about the holiday of Rosh Hashanah, which begins on the evening of October 4, 2024 and ends on the evening of October 16, 2024:

- **A Turkish Rosh Hashanah** by Etan Basseri, illustrated by Zeynep Özatalay, published by Kalaniot Books (a picture book for ages 5-9)
- **Happy Penny** by Aimee Lucido, illustrated by Jon Davis, published by Apples & Honey Press (a chapter book for ages 7-9)

One book was selected for the holiday of Sukkot, which begins on the evening of October 16 and ends on the evening of October 23, 2024:

- **Mixed-Up Mooncakes** by Christina Matula & Erica Lyon, illustrated by Tracy Subisak, published by Quill Tree Books (a picture book for ages 4-8)

Three books were selected for the holiday of Hanukkah, which begins on the evening of December 25, 2024 and ends on the evening of January 2, 2025:

- **Rachel Friedman and the Eight Not-Perfect Nights of Hanukkah** by Sarah Kapit, illustrated by Genevieve Kote, Henry Holt & Co. (a chapter book for ages 5-9)
- **Hanukkah Hippity-Hop** by Barbara Kimmel, illustrated by Ana Zurita, published by Kar-Ben Publishing (a board book for ages 1-4)
- **Eight Sweet Nights, a Festival of Lights** by Charlotte Offsay, illustrated by Menahem Halberstadt, published by Doubleday Books for Young Readers (a picture book for ages 3-7)

AJL’s 2024 Holiday Highlights judges are Rebecca Levitan, Librarian at the Baltimore County Public Library - Pikesville branch in Baltimore, MD; Jennifer Rothschild, Collection Engagement Librarian at Arlington Public Library in Arlington, VA; and Danielle Winter, Reference Librarian at the Brooklyn Public Library in Brooklyn, NY.

REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

EDITED BY REBECCA LEVITAN AND JUDY EHRENSTEIN


This middle-grade author’s star studded anthology brings a lineup of excellent stories related to Passover. Each author, Chris Baron, Ruth Behar, Adam Gidwitz, Veera Hiranandani, Amy Ignatow, Sarah Kapit, Joshua S. Levy, Mari Lowe, Naomi Milliner, Sofiya Pasternack, R. M. Romero, A. J. Sass, Laura Shovan, and Laurel Snyder, chose a section of the Haggadah and wrote a story along that theme. Starting with two-time Sydney Taylor Award winner Mari Lowe’s “Breaking Bread at the Seder” for the section of Kadesh, all the way through to Sydney Taylor Award winner Veera Hiranandani’s “Just Jaya” for the section of Nirtzah, the stories throughout this anthology are unique, creative, and well-written. From memoir to verse, historical fiction to sequential art, neurodiverse to nonbinary, Orthodox to questioning “am I Jewish enough,” there is something for everyone.

Continued on page 14
REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

within this book. While the stories are original and thoughtful, the overall format of the book is as well. Each section begins with an explanation of that section of the Haggadah and four thought-provoking questions such as “If you could invent your own ritual to mark the beginning of something, what would it be, and why?” The book finishes strong with recipes by Jewish celebrity chefs such as Adeena Sussman, Eitan Bernath, and Molly Yeh.

The book finishes strong with recipes by Jewish celebrity chefs such as Adeena Sussman, Eitan Bernath, and Molly Yeh.

Capturing what are arguably the best parts of Passover, family and tradition, this exceptional anthology is recommended for all libraries (and homes) serving children.

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


Occasionally, a novel comes along and one immediately thinks, “This would make a great movie!” Such a book is *Artifice.* From the beginning to the very end of this World War II historical novel, the reader is immersed in the characters and events. Seventeen-year-old Isa de Smit, the main character, sees the world and her emotions through a lens of colors and shapes. She has grown up in Amsterdam in her parents’ avant-garde art gallery. During the course of eight days in September 1943, she is swept up in the efforts of the Dutch Resistance to smuggle Jewish babies out of Amsterdam so that they can be adopted by non-Jewish families (for a price). Other characters, like Isa’s friends Truus and Willem, and her father Theodor are painted in an authentic and detailed way. Conflict and suspense pervade this novel: Will Isa be successful in forging artwork, sell it to Hitler’s and Goering’s agents, and thus be able to pay for the babies’ rescue? Will she be viewed as a collaborator and shot by the Resistance? Can she trust Michel, a Nazi soldier who declares that he wants to desert the army and go to Switzerland? These questions aren’t resolved until near the end of the novel.

Jewish content is interwoven in *Artifice* along with the themes of war, resistance, and art: the babies who are smuggled out of the city, the constant deportations, and memories of Isa’s Jewish friends whom she knew before the war. However, this story is primarily about the Dutch Resistance working against the Nazis. Cameron’s writing style is rich in sensory details, poetry, and rhythm. For example, “The silence was thick. Soft. A velvet glove.” This novel ends with an extensive author’s note, where Cameron provides information about the real people she based her characters on—like Han Van Meegeren, a master art forger who sold fakes to Hermann Goering, and Johann van Hulst, credited with saving 600 Jewish children from death in Amsterdam. This is a thrilling novel that you won’t be able to put down and is recommended for school, public, and synagogue libraries.

Anne Dublin, Retired teacher-librarian, Holy Blossom Temple, Toronto, ON, Membership chair, AJL-Canada

BIBLE STORIES & MIDRASH


n this charming, reimagined story of Noah’s Ark, a pair of cheerful and motivated hedgehogs, Lionel and Dolores, want to help plan and organize the animals as they embark on their journey to escape the flood. Despite their enthusiasm and strong organizational skills, Noah initially overlooks their talents, favoring larger and stronger animals for help who do not accomplish their required tasks. However, the hedgehogs remain determined and positive, eventually proving their remarkable worth and contribution to the journey. In the end, Noah realizes the invaluable contributions of Lionel and Dolores, reinforcing the lesson that size does not determine an individual’s abilities or importance.

Through colorful and captivating illustrations by Monica Garofalo, the book brings to life the comical and lively depictions of the animals. The bright, eye-catching tones of purples, greens and blues will keep preschoolers engaged. The artwork reflects the positive outlook and enthusiasm of Lionel and Dolores, making each page of the story appealing to young readers.

This reimagined biblical story not only entertains but also educates children about recognizing and valuing the strengths of others. While the author does depict a well-known biblical figure, the narrative focuses more on engaging ways to teach important lessons about individual worth and contributions. With its broad appeal and heartwarming message, this picture book is an excellent addition to any public library or synagogue collection.

Mimi Leyton, Greenberg Families Library, Ottawa, ON, Canada

Continued on page 15
**REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS**

**BIOGRAPHY**


This picture book biography tells the story of Dr. Jeffrey Hoffman, a Jewish astronaut who read from the Torah on a space shuttle mission. The book describes Jeff’s childhood fascination with outer space, his professional training as an astronaut, and the deep connection he feels to his Jewish heritage. During each of his five space shuttle missions he brought Judaica objects with him. With his congregation’s rabbi, he made a plan to read from a Torah scroll in space. The scroll would need to be small, as astronauts were limited as to the size of personal objects they could bring onto the space shuttle. The book details all the logistics involved in locating a Torah scroll, choosing which Torah portion to read, and figuring out how to read from the scroll in a zero-gravity environment. Since 1996, the “Space Torah” has been used by children and adults at Dr. Hoffman’s Houston congregation.

This book is a delight. The details will be fascinating to both children and adults. Spinning a dreidel as it floats in midair! Hebrew school students voting on which miniature Torah to take into space! How do you decide when it’s Shabbat in outer space when a day is only 90 minutes? Kids will definitely be intrigued. The realistic illustrations complement the story. They show the wonder of space and space travel while also helping to clarify the human story. The book concludes with an afterword by Jeff Hoffman and an author’s note that goes into more depth about the events depicted. A glossary of Jewish words is also included, making the book accessible to non-Jewish audiences. The afterword also mentions that a short independent film entitled *Space Torah* was produced in 2020. The movie trailer is available online.

It’s wonderful to have a book that emphasizes scientific expertise while at the same time subtly touches on spirituality, “With each orbit around the Earth, Jeff felt more connected to the universe.” This book will make a great read-aloud. It is probably ideal for second to fourth graders, but younger children interested in space exploration could enjoy it as well. Highly recommended for purchase for both synagogue and public libraries.

**Hillary Zana,**
*Retired teacher and school librarian, Los Angeles, CA*


A square picture book with pull-out pages opening on a lovely Shabbat dinner scene delivers biographical information on a Jewish celebrity and a pep talk on believing in your own self-worth through light-hearted text, dynamic illustrations with notably expressive faces, and mobile layout. The success of the two-part story rests on the fascinating main subject: Harry Houdini. A major attraction is the way the story reads from front to back, then when finished, readers turn the last page and again read new content from front to back. Those who wish can pull the accordioned pages out straight to mimic the tightrope that dominates the plot of the opening story where readers learn how Houdini mastered his first difficult circus act when he was the age of the targeted audience. The tale balances Harry’s determination, his constant practice, and his parents’ and mentors’ advice to always believe in himself as he practices, practices, practices. Once he conquers the tightrope Harry knows his calling is to be a performer. He grows up to be a professional performer, especially one doing magic for large audiences. The second part of the book is about Houdini’s Jewish family, his stage name, his career, and his special acts. Three acts are described, then dissected to theorize how they could be done. The author notes Houdini was so good, even 100 years later no one is sure how he did some of his tricks! The title page backs up his parents’ advice with a quote from Pirkei Avot about effort and reward. This volume is recommended for synagogue and religious school libraries for presenting a Jewish hero in sprightly words and bouncy illustrations while banging the drum of self-worth.

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


This collective biography examines over 100 Jewish change-makers. It includes contemporary Jewish figures from a broad array of vocations, such as entertainers, athletes, artists, and scientists, with a strong emphasis on social justice work. Each subject has a two-page spread, including a page-long biography and a full-page color portrait created with photographs...
and different digital tools. Heroes with Chutzpah does include Jewish thought pioneers and religious leaders, but the majority of chapters are on individuals who are well known for their contributions within their general field; Judaism is an important factor of some, but not the majority of the biographies. The book’s title, with the Yiddish word “chutzpah,” implies an emphasis on Ashkenazi Jewish tradition which is not reflected in the rich Jewish diversity showcased in this work.

This book originally began with a Kickstarter campaign, and the work comes across as a labor of love, with a noticeable attention to detail and high regard for readers’ experience. For instance, each chapter includes a discussion question and the end matter contains two indexes, one of names and one divided by field of interest, such as “Musicians” or “Writers.” The vibrant illustrations throughout the book reflect the tone and add to the content of the work.

Juvenile collective biographies based on different identity groups are having a moment right now, and a book highlighting Jewish heroes is timely and welcome. This work specifically celebrates Jews of different racial backgrounds, gender and sexual identities, and religious orientations. It effectively spotlights the richness and diversity of Jewish contributions to society and popular culture. Heroes With Chutzpah is recommended as a first purchase for public libraries, and for any synagogue, school, or general collection that highlights identity, diversity, or social justice.

Laurie Adler, Hewlett-Woodmere Public Library, Woodmere, NY

COOKERY


This book opens with a rhyming section. A glossary of Yiddish and Hebrew terms is in the center, followed by a set of recipes for young chefs to explore. Tu B’Shevat, Purim, Shabbat, Passover, Chanukah, and Shavuot are each introduced with a food typical for that holiday. The theme of filling our plates to celebrate is accompanied by a humorous conversational tone. The author addresses the reader as “Bubbeleh” and cautions us repeatedly by saying “Do Not Eat This Book!” The bright cartoon illustrations are an excellent match for the upbeat, lighthearted mood of the first part of the book. The food preparation section offers clear directions and will serve as a useful resource for families seeking a project when it’s time for the given festival. Shakkshuka for Shabbat offers a Middle-Eastern spin rather than providing a more predictable challah recipe, and vegetable latkes for Chanukah are a more health-conscious choice than potato latkes. The rhyme scheme could have been smoother and the holiday information a bit more expansive, but overall, this combination of breezy text and fun-filled kitchen activities make for a positive addition to the cookbook shelf at home and for both Jewish and secular libraries.

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

Continued on page 17
REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

FICTION—EARLY READERS


Based on a true story, this historical fiction chapter book, set in 1947 Toronto, introduces early readers to ten-year-old Barbara. It cleverly addresses the theme that “everyone needs a safe place to call home.” The novel depicts post-World War II Toronto and highlights the Canadian Jewish effort to bring Jewish Displaced Persons (DPs) to Canadian cities. Barbara’s father is deeply involved in the resettlement of Jewish refugees from Europe, finding them jobs as tailors. Meanwhile, Barbara takes on the responsibility of caring for a peacock that has appeared at her house. Determined to find a proper home for the peacock before winter, Barbara develops an ingenious plan to allow the bird to live in a safe and warm place to stay.

This novel is enriched with attractive and eye-catching black and white illustrations by Jaimie MacGibbon, capturing Barbara’s youthfulness, vibrancy and her various emotions. Barbara is portrayed as a strong Jewish female role model, capable of standing up for herself and defending her views in class, particularly when challenging about the government’s immigration policies. Reflecting the sentiments of many Canadian Jews at the time, Barbara argues that Canada is too selective, emphasizing that “all those DPs have nowhere else to go!” This particular chapter is accompanied by excellent illustrations depicting Barbara’s intense emotions.

The author skillfully uses Barbara’s peacock as a metaphor for Jewish DPs, allowing children to understand the concepts of refugees and their eventual resettlement in a compassionate environment. Just as Barbara’s father is involved with the resettlement of Jewish refugees, Barbara’s successful efforts to find a home for the peacock introduce readers to themes of compassion, empathy, good intentions and hope.

In the author’s note, Jennifer Tzivia MacLeod documents the true story of how her grandfather, Sam Posluns, helped to establish and lead the Tailor Project. He visited Jewish DP camps in Europe, gathering Holocaust survivors who needed jobs and a safe place to live.

The novel is a good learning resource for children and provides an excellent depiction of the Canadian experience in the aftermath of World War II. This early reader novel is perfect for a broad audience, and is highly recommended for public libraries and Jewish collections.

Mimi Leyton, Volunteer at Greenberg Families Library, Ottawa, ON, Canada

Shuman, Carl Harris. Max and the Not-so-Perfect Apology. Torah Time series, no. 3. Millburn, Apples and Honey Press, 2024. 64 pp. $16.95 (9781681156156) HC. Gr. 2–4.

Max, the protagonist of this young reader time-travel novel, loves to invent things and travel back in time to different biblical periods. He even has a smartphone, called Miri, which he has reprogrammed to help him time-travel. At school, he is super-excited for the diorama project for Mrs. Mooshy’s Torah class. Max is disappointed, however, when he is assigned to work with other students, not his best friend Emma. Feeling jealous and excluded when he sees Emma and her new partner, Eitan becoming good friends, he insults many of his classmates, including Emma. Feeling hurt, Max confides to Mrs. Mooshy that he can understand how Esau felt after “Jacobs stole his blessing.” When his teacher mentions that some scholars believe instead of a kiss, Esau bit Jacob’s neck, his curiosity is sparked and he decides to go back in time to witness the kiss/bite. With help from Miri, Max goes back in time and meets “Joey” aka Joseph. Unfortunately, one of our esteemed forefathers is portrayed in this alternate retelling as an immature, obnoxious, whiny, spoiled boy. In this version, Esau is a sympathetic character, duped by his sly brother, Jacob. Also in this version of this story, Jacob is so distraught for stealing Esau’s blessing, that he wants to make amends, for him to feel whole again. As an apology, and to show Esau how wrong he was, Jacob gives Esau the blessing back (!) and to show what a generous guy Esau is, he forgives Jacob.

This interpretation flies in the face of traditional Torah teachings and will confuse children who are taught the story from a conventional Torah angle. While the male characters are depicted in the pictures as kippa-wearing Orthodox, it’s unclear who the target reader is intended to be for this story. A young reader probably will not understand how the story jumps from Max feeling betrayed by his friends, to identifying with Esau’s having the blessing taken from him. Small and beautiful color drawings are placed throughout the book and succeed in depicting the various sections of the story. This title should be considered as an optional purchase for non-Orthodox synagogues or schools and for public libraries.

Esther Schnaidman, Librarian, Rosenbaum Yeshiva of North Jersey, Teaneck, NJ

Continued on page 18
My name is Becca Goldstein, and this is the story of how I became famous,” reads the opening line of this chapter book. Children will be instantly drawn into the story of two girls. Becca is an American Jew visiting Israel with her family, reluctantly participating in an archaeological dig at Tel Maresha. Rebeka is a Jewish girl living in the same spot 2,200 years previously. The book alternates chapters from each girl’s point of view as the reader sees how the location has changed and remained the same. Items, such as pottery shards, that Becca’s family finds are being used by Rebeka’s family. And, the origins of a special artifact that Becca finds are explained in Rebeka’s chapters. Both girls are concerned about their families needing to move and have similar resolutions to their problems. At the end of the book Becca realizes, “It wasn’t only modern girls whose parents needed to move someplace new,” while Rebeka thinks, “Perhaps her parents were right. Wonders awaited them.” The full-color cover illustration will attract young readers, and the black and white drawings in each chapter will add to the enjoyment and make it easier to understand how an underground cave could be used for storage. The book concludes with an author’s note that goes into more detail about the historical events depicted and the actual Tel Maresha dig.

As middle-grade historical fiction, the author was limited as to how much character development could be included, so while each girl has a distinct personality, it felt like they were only described in rough brush strokes. Conversely, the guide at the dig conveyed many facts about archeology in general and the Tel Maresha site in particular. Some readers might want more details about the girls, while others will find the historical information engaging. The book will appeal especially to independent readers in third through fourth grade and to younger children as a read-aloud. This title is a recommended purchase for homes, libraries, and schools.

**Hillary Zana,**
Retired teacher and school librarian,
Los Angeles, CA

**Fiction – Middle Grade**


It is 1942 in Paris and twelve-year-old Miri Schrieber, with her beloved two-year-old neighbor Nora, has narrowly escaped a Nazi roundup with the fortuitous help of a passing nun. Miri feels guilty for her inability to save other Jews from the Nazis and wholly responsible for Nora. She is desperate to find a way out of Nazi controlled territory to safety and to reunite Nora with her Jewish family. Nuns hide Miri, now known to all as Marie, in a Catholic boarding school convent in the Nazi-controlled border town of Chenonceaux, while Nora is adopted by a local Catholic family. Miri soon discovers that some of the nuns are helping to smuggle Jews across the border of Nazi controlled territory into French-controlled Vichy, and she takes on highly dangerous, nocturnal missions to help the refugees. Miri must navigate her own secret identity as a Jew while forming friendships with community members who are not always what they seem, including a cantankerous old woman who turns out to be the ghost of Catherine de Medici. To survive, Miri must figure out how to survive in the convent, form friendships, rescue Nora, and ultimately escape to safety in Zurich.

Bradley, a master storyteller, has already won two Newbery Honor Medals for her middle-grade books. This is her third historical novel set during World War II. Bradley excels at realistically depicting knife-edge situations featuring a hero who must gather her courage and find some way to safety. Emotions of anxiety, guilt, and fear, as well as bravery and friendship, run through this book and ring authentic. Even the ghost from the sixteenth century is a complex character; it is this supernatural touch that reminds the reader that this realistic portrayal of a child in Nazi France is a work of fiction. *The Night War* has broad appeal, and is a first choice purchase for school, synagogue, and public libraries.

**Laurie Adler,**
Hewlett-Woodmere Public Library,
Woodmere, NY

Continued on page 19

The stories of two people, one young and one quite old, intertwine in a book covering several complex issues including mental health, foster homes, the juvenile justice system, nursing facilities and care of the aging, friendship, misunderstandings, opportunities, and the Holocaust.

Some fifty pages in, readers will realize that 12-year-old Alex’s story is being told by Joseph Kravitz, age 107, master tailor, nearly blind, and selectively mute. Alex is an unwilling volunteer at Shady Glen Retirement Home, an opportunity (he hates that word) forced on him by his caring social worker. Alex has had some rough years. After doing his best to take care of his loving but clinically depressed and probably bipolar mother, she has disappeared, he’s in the custody of an aunt and uncle who seem to consider him a burden, and he’s facing a juvenile court hearing for having done something awful.

As Alex begins to find a place for himself at the retirement home, he meets Mr. Kravitz, who has observed Alex hides a quiet intelligence. When Alex asks the elderly man about the portrait of a young woman, Olka, hanging in his room, Josey Kravitz decides to speak again, telling Alex his story. The story, beginning in Poland in 1939, so different from the nursing home 80+ years later, has intriguing parallels to Alex’s. Josey and his beloved Olka disliked and insulted each other when they first met, just like Alex and “volunteer coordinator” Maya-Jade, whose elegant and overbearing grandmother lives at Shady Glen. And it is Olka, whip-smart but orphaned and poor, who knows people like Josey, scion of the town department store, think she is nothing. But Joseph sees something in Olka, and she in him, and they begin to talk. Olka teaches Joseph to sew and he teaches her German. They fall in love just as their world is falling apart, and as Josey, a Jew, is becoming less than nothing.

As he listens to Josey, Alex is befriended by Maya-Jade, who asks his help in hearing more of the residents’ stories for her *bat mitzvah* project. Soon Alex is spending weekends with Maya-Jade and her two moms, happier than he’s ever been. But his court case looms over him. Eventually, everything that Alex has held in comes out, emotionally, to Josey, who listens to his pain, gives him a path forward, and stands up for him in his final days.

*Not Nothing* covers many deep topics. It’s about listening, learning to apologize, helping those who seem to be unredeemable or in impossible situations, and standing up for those who may not be able to speak for themselves. It is recommended for all library collections.

**Carla Kozak, Retired children’s librarian, San Francisco, CA**


In this middle grade novel, British author Liz Kessler provides readers insight into the Dutch resistance and Jewish life in Nazi occupied Holland during World War II. Using familiar plot features such as the relationship between grandmother and grandchild, chapters organized with alternating perspectives, and two different time frames—the grandmother’s past and the grandchild’s contemporary life, Kessler has crafted a story of courage, family, and forgiveness. Thirteen-year-old Liv is facing new challenges as her forever best friend Karly has been avoiding her since she found new friends. To make matters worse, Karly and her new friends begin to bully Liv. For a school assignment, Liv must write about her family history and develop a family tree. Liv worries because she knows very little about her family history. When her Bubbe shows signs of dementia, Liv helps her father clean out Bubbe’s house in preparation for her move to a senior living residence. Liv finds a mysterious chest which offers clues to Bubbe’s past. When Liv learns Bubbe had a sister, Hannie, she and her new friend Gabi try to solve the puzzle of Bubbe’s past.

Filled with suspense and surprises, this book transports readers to 1942 Holland as they learn Bubbe’s story. They will also identify with Liv in the present day, how she confronts bullying, and learns to be true to herself. An “Historical Note” offers information about the Dutch resistance. *Code Name Kingfisher* adds a unique perspective to Holocaust literature and is recommended for public, school, and synagogue libraries.

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


Arden would love a dog, cat, or pocket pet; what she gets is Ludwig, her Uncle Eli’s African Grey parrot for six months of care while he is on a research sabbatical in the Republic of Guinea. Arden, a budding scientist, also turns to research, learning as much as she can about parrots, including Dr. Irene Pepperberg’s interesting studies (these are factual, and noted in an afterword).

Arden also is preparing for an upcoming science competition, and dealing with class bully Marli, who delights in threatening and belittling her. How she eventually handles Marli’s intimidation,
The story veers into magical realism when Arden realizes that Ludwig is smarter than the average parrot, possibly due to getting accidental overdoses of a tree bark supplement with which Uncle Eli has been experimenting (the author’s note at the end states the supplement is purely fictional). Parrots are indeed very smart, but as far as is known, they are not able to read, do math problems, or communicate with humans as does Ludwig.

Arden and her family are identified as Jewish with two brief mentions of Hanukkah, and a sentence recalling the mani-pedi she got for her older twin siblings’ b’nai mitzvah. There is no mention of seventh grader Arden preparing for a bat mitzvah.

Bird Brain is a fun but additional purchase for synagogue or religious school libraries, but better for public or secular school libraries.

Carla Kozak, Retired children’s librarian, San Francisco, CA

Josh S. Levy has successfully written a humorous, imaginative, and heart-warming novel centered around an extraordinary bar mitzvah weekend. In this story, Finn Einstein and Ezra Rosen are trapped in a repetitive 55-hour time loop, starting from Friday morning and resetting at 1:36 pm on Sunday. Both boys are becoming b’nei mitzvah on the same day, at the same time, in the same hotel. They are condemned to repeat their bar mitzvah weekend indefinitely unless they figure out the mystery behind the loop so they can finally move forward in time.

Finn and Ezra experiment with various methods to break the cycle, from chanting spells to experimenting with rhymes. But with each effort, the loop still resets, and they are back to Friday morning. Their schemes become more scientific when they discover a convention of leading physicists is taking place in the same hotel as their bar mitzvah celebrations. Determined to attend the conference and learn about the latest developments in quantum mechanics, the boys cleverly devise increasingly hilarious ways to raise money for the registration fee. For example, Finn and Ezra spend numerous time loops trying to rob a bank using creative methods to distract bank personnel, including the use of LEGO, mice and puppies. Their attempts reach a turning point with the help of a renowned physicist who offers advanced methods to break the loop. As Finn and Ezra come closer to solving the mystery of the time loop, they learn news from both their families that impacts their futures and adds an emotional layer to their adventure.

The time loop theme adds complexity and depth to the story, ensuring each repetition of the 55-hour period brings new plot twists and developments that keep readers thoroughly engaged. This novel provides excellent Jewish representation, while addressing universal themes such as friendship, faith, family ties, personal challenges, and the value of time.

Similar to his Sydney Taylor Honor Book, The Jake Show, Levy’s latest work uses creative and comical scenarios to highlight significant themes, making it particularly appealing to middle-grade readers. The novel demonstrates Levy’s skill in developing stories that are both entertaining and rich in emotional depth. Finn and Ezra’s Bar Mitzvah Time Loop is an exceptional addition to both public and Jewish libraries, as well as synagogue and day school collections.

Mimi Leyton, Volunteer at Greenberg Families Library, Ottawa, ON


The first two books in this planned trilogy satisfyingly raise the stakes with Nightmares in Paradise more intense in content and themes than Ring of Solomon. The series is advertised for ages 8-12, but librarians will want to decide whether younger children are ready for the second book’s intensity.

In Ring of Solomon, fifth-grader Zach Darlington buys a ring with Jewish symbols at a flea market as a gift for his mother, an avid collector of Judaica items. Zach discovers that the ring allows him to talk to animals, and he also accidentally summons Ashmedai, the king of demons. Zach wants Ash to help him defend himself against Jeffrey, a classmate who is bullying him for being Jewish and gay, though Zach has not come out to anyone except his best
friend Sandra. Before they can act on their plan, the ring is stolen. The thief belongs to the Knights of the Apocalypse, a secret society dedicated to raising the Behemoth, Leviathan, and Ziz in order to bring about the end of the world. Zach, Sandra, Sandra’s cousin Carmen, Zach’s sister Naomi, and Ash battle these terrifying demons to prevent the end of the world.

Zach has a few months of normalcy before the beginning of Nightmares in Paradise, when Naomi disappears during the Passover Seder. Zach’s parents think she ran away and blame his obsession with horror films for filling Naomi’s head with strange tales about battling the Leviathan and meeting demons. But Zach knows Naomi was kidnapped. He enlists Ash and Sandra’s help, and their quest takes them into the Garden of Eden, where they meet all kinds of supernatural creatures, most of them terrifying and dangerous. After they find and save Naomi, they make their way back home, where Zach’s dad apologizes for blaming him, restores his horror memorabilia in an accidental affirmation of Zach’s internal monologue that “I didn’t think growing up should mean abandoning the things you loved,” and lets him know that his parents know he’s gay and love him no matter what.

Exploration of self in relation to family and society, especially as a gay preteen afraid of his family’s rejection, is woven throughout epic monster battles. Zach’s conflicted feelings about his Jewish identity, stemming from anti-Semitic abuse at school as well as his interfaith family, are sensitively portrayed. The fantastical elements in the series are drawn from Jewish legend, and the narrative also portrays legends being shared across religions, like when Sandra, a Latine Christian, knows more legend than Zach at first, even though she calls the creatures different names (Asmodeus for Ashmedai, for example). Polydoros incorporates cross-religious representation without privileging one religion over the other or raising questions about which one is “real,” a risk often posed in fantasy based on religious legends.

Polydoros’s first Middle Grade series balances his Young Adult books’ gothic horror with pre-teen sensibilities. Zach’s fascination with horror films provides a great background for this frightening narrative, and the idea of monsters as metaphors for individuals Othered by society, including Jewish and gay people, is clearly spelled out. There are many references to media that young horror fans will delight in, from Frankenstein to Goosebumps and The Exorcist. As the latter indicates, some adults may not want their children reading these books, although the normative attitudes toward horror and otherness is one of the issues the books are meant to address. Another element that might give adults pause is the death of a preteen boy at the beginning of Nightmares in Paradise. The first book, which can stand on its own, is free of such potentially controversial references, though, and can be safely recommended to all Middle Grade readers. This title is recommended for public, school, and synagogue libraries.

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


Micah’s bar mitzvah is in ten months and he is having doubts about himself and the issue of being a responsible adult, in this eclectically drawn graphic novel with autobiographical elements. His sister, once his best friend, is now obsessed with popularity and her phone. Single mom Francine is juggling work, b’nai mitzvah plans (the kids are 10 months apart in age), and her mother’s sudden erratic behavior, which is soon diagnosed as Alzheimer’s disease. It’s all a lot for Micah to take in and he feels really alone with his feelings of inadequacy and worry. The rabbi (female) offers some advice and leaves the door open to him to talk when ready. A number of mishaps with the b’nai mitzvah planning are resolved along with a positive highlighting of Micah’s artistic abilities and the event happens without incident, much to Micah’s relief. A story Gramps would tell, about children born of magical blood “who were destined to accomplish great feats of wonder and heroism” is neatly tied into the conclusion, with Micah telling her the story, something he knows will keep her memory alive once she is gone.

The Jewish content is centered on the b’nai mitzvah but the tutoring sessions with the rabbi and Micah’s d’var torah on Vayeilekh contain solid Torah lessons. From the bimah, Micah notes that now he is responsible for performing mitzvot, “positive acts, links between God and humanity,” which he was not completely sure he could be selfless enough to perform, but knew it was worth a try. Readers of graphic novels will be engaged by this twist on bar mitzvah jitters.

This title is recommended for public, school and congregational collections.

Judy Ehrenstein, 
Children’s Librarian, 
Co-editor, Children’s & Teen book reviews, 
AJL News & Reviews, 
Silver Spring, MD

Continued on page 22
n the cusp of starting middle school, Dani Meyer and Eric Stein have been best friends since the second grade. They’ve spent hours together in Eric’s tree fort, arguing over which superhero is the best while munching on doughnuts. When Dani’s beloved grandmother passed away, she turned to Eric for support. When a school bully started picking on Eric, Dani promised to have his back. Even while Dani was away at baseball camp, they kept in touch by texting and looked forward to their annual Cape Cod camping trip with Eric’s dad. They set off on that trip immediately after Dani finds out she’s been selected for the (all-boys) baseball team for the fall, a goal she’s been working toward for years. A terrible accident at the campsite leaves Dani seriously injured, and Eric struggles with guilt and tries desperately to find a way to fix things, and both feel the other one - for the first time - just doesn’t understand.

Told in alternating chapters, this contemporary realistic novel sensitively explores changing friendships, grief, bullying, and learning to stand up for oneself from the differing perspectives of the two twelve-year-olds. Dani and Eric are both multi-dimensional, relatable kids dealing with the everyday challenges of middle school life as well as the problems arising from the circumstances of the accident.

The families are Jewish, revealed in early passing references by Eric to stains on the carpet left from an attempt “to dye wooden dreidels with beets and blueberries for the temple Hanukkah party” and Mr. Stein playing on “the temple’s 0-8 softball team.” Entering the hospital chapel, Eric is reminded to go to temple, but wonders at first if he ought to be more religious to even go inside. He prays for Dani’s recovery, making promises to be nicer to his sister and to keep his room clean in exchange.

Slight Jewish content aside, this is a touching story of forgiveness and friendship recommended for school and public libraries serving middle grades.


Eleanor is a 17-year-old Jewish girl living in Philadelphia in the Spring of 1942. She is a math whiz but does not want to show it because she believes she is responsible for her father’s, a math genius as well, debilitating stroke. Eleanor’s role model is Eleanor Roosevelt, who guides Eleanor in her life.

Attending a math competition, Eleanor’s brilliance is observed by Mrs. Mauchly, a math instructor who is recruiting women to join the war effort to help with calculations for the war. Eleanor decides to explore this opportunity and finds herself on a path that she never envisioned herself taking. She became a member of the Philadelphia Computing Section, a division of the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corp, tasked with doing calculations to help soldiers fight more effectively in World War II. These women, mostly white and with one black member, are told of the confidential nature of their work, and are essential cogs in the war machine.

Due to her extraordinary ability to fix machinery, Eleanor is first transferred to an army base in Southern California, and then to Pearl Harbor to help the bombers in their fight in the Pacific. She is tasked with helping fix the trajectory, hence the title of the book, to make sure that the Norden bombing system is able to hit its target correctly.

The book brings to light some of the hidden jobs that women did during World War II to help the Allies win. It includes some Jewish ritual, the destruction of European Jewry as a running undercurrent of the book, and some romance as well.

A light YA read, this book is recommended for school and public libraries.

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


In the sequel to *Today Tonight Tomorrow* (Simon Pulse, 2020), though it could be read as a stand-alone, Rowan and Neil are starting college. Rowan is studying writing at Emerson in Boston, and Neil is studying linguistics at NYU in New York City. They’re determined to make the long-distance thing work, especially

Continued on page 23
since they’ve only been together for a few months, while also doing their best to find their footing in college including Shabbat services and dinner at Hillel. What happens though, is that two kids who had been so sure of themselves in high school find themselves on unsure footing in this new chapter of their lives. Rowan was determined to be a writer, but within her first writing class she finds that she has writer’s block with all the pressure to create something perfect and worries that being in love is keeping her from being able to read romance. Neil finds that his psychology class is far more interesting than he was expecting (and also possibly because it seems Solomon doesn’t have a clear handle on what linguistics is), but it opens up fears that he is like his incarcerated father, leading to a deep depression and ultimately confronting him. After being at odds for so long, can Rowan and Neil make it through now that they’re really on the same team? This older Young Adult book, bordering on New Adult, has less Jewish content and more explicit content than its predecessor making it an optional purchase for school or synagogue libraries but recommended for public libraries.

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


A new golem story for kids is always welcome, and this one is a winner. *Too Many Golems* is an imaginative story that offers a fresh take on the traditional golem legend. Abi, the rabbi’s son who tends to be a bit absent-minded, is struggling with learning Hebrew at Hebrew school. One day he finds an ancient scroll at shul and takes it home to read aloud in his room. This act accidentally brings ten clay golems to life, who are eager to “sort out his misery.” Instead of fearing these supposed monsters, Abi, armed with his love of comic books and the lesson to “welcome the stranger,” befriends them. Over the next seven years, these endearing golems become his tutors and companions, helping him master Hebrew and supporting him until his Bar Mitzvah. The culmination of their friendship is a very amusing scene where the golems attend his Bar Mitzvah, dancing joyfully to klezmer music with the “elder ladies” before disappearing, having fulfilled their purpose.

The illustrations are vibrant, with a unique charm reminiscent of Jules Feiffer’s work. The golems, depicted with a humorous and non-threatening demeanor, will undoubtedly delight young readers. An author’s note provides context about Rabbi Loew and...
the Golem, providing a bit of historical and cultural significance. This enjoyable book not only entertains but also provides some valuable lessons about acceptance, friendship, and perseverance. This title is highly recommended for all children’s library collections.

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

HOLOCAUST & WORLD WAR II


In this fictionalized biography, the author narrates the life of a brave Jewish teenager caught up in the dire events of the Warsaw ghetto. Vladka (née Feigele Peltel) grows up in a secular Jewish family in Warsaw, but after the Nazis invade Poland, her parents and their three children are forced to move into the ghetto where they are crammed into one small room. Vladka’s father dies, and the rest of her family are transported to Treblinka. As the situation becomes more and more desperate for the ghetto residents, Vladka (the name she uses on the other side of the ghetto wall) becomes active in the resistance. Because of her “Aryan” looks and fluent Polish, she acts as a courier to smuggle documents and money, children to shelter on the Polish side, and eventually guns and ammunition. The suspense builds until the Warsaw ghetto uprising (April 19 to May 16, 1943). Vladka is trapped on the other side of the wall as she witnesses the determined courage of her friends in the resistance as they fight the Nazis, as well as the ultimate razing of the ghetto to the ground. Greene compellingly tells Vladka’s story, interspersing informative historical chapters between the narrative. The book ends on a hopeful note, for Vladka and her husband eventually make their way to America, where they raise a family and become active in teaching about the Holocaust.

The layout with wide margins and generous leading, a glossary, and appropriate choice of photos make this book a good introduction to the Holocaust in general and the Warsaw ghetto in particular. However, a bibliography would also have been useful. For a gripping graphic novel about the Warsaw ghetto for this age group, see The War Within These Walls (Eerdmans, 2013) by Aline Sax and Caryl Strzelecki. This title is recommended for public, school and synagogue libraries.

Anne Dublin, Retired teacher-librarian, Holy Blossom Temple, Toronto, ON, Membership chair, AJL-Canada


Near the end of this historical novel, one of the main characters says, “Heroes are those who stand up to do the right thing, no matter how the story ends.” Based on the diaries of Lidia Durr Zakrzewski, as well as interviews and extensive research, prolific author Jennifer Nielsen has written a riveting and heart-breaking novel about the German invasion of Poland in September 1939, the subsequent occupation of Warsaw, the Warsaw ghetto uprising in 1943, and the Warsaw city uprising in 1944. Lidia tells the story in first-person, reflecting her confusion and anger as a twelve-year-old girl whose comfortable life is turned upside down when war breaks out. She eventually must quit school and stop playing her beloved piano but joins the Polish resistance, first as a courier smuggling newspapers, messages, ammunition, and weapons, later, as a courageous fighter. She takes tremendous risks to sabotage the German invaders and, when all hope is lost, to guide civilians through the malodorous sewers out of Warsaw to relative safety.

As Lidia states, “Fighting is what gives us hope…. It means we still believe in a better tomorrow.”

The first two (out of four) sections of this novel include some Jewish content, especially when Lidia, her mother, and her brother hide a Jewish woman and her mother. However, after the two women are captured and sent to the ghetto, the action focuses on Lidia’s work in the Polish resistance. Nielsen effectively describes Lidia’s conflicts with her mother, her brother, and even the leaders of the resistance. Each chapter is headed by the date to help clarify the chronological events in this novel. With short, conversational sentences replete with emotional resonance, Uprising captures the occupation and destruction of Warsaw from the point of view of this brave, talented Polish girl. Back matter includes family photos and an author’s note.

Anne Dublin, Retired teacher-librarian, Holy Blossom Temple, Toronto, ON, Membership chair, AJL-Canada

Continued on page 25
ISRAEL


*Saliman and the Memory Stone* is based on the true story of a Yemeni Jewish family who emigrated to Israel in 1881, a time known as the First Aliyah. Unlike the later Yemenite Jewish migration of 1949, this migration consisted of only about 200 people, among them the ancestors of the author’s friend’s family. In this fictionalized version, perfect for young readers, we join six-year-old Saliman as he, with his family and community, leaves their village behind.

As all migrating children do, he must say goodbye to the familiar, but he takes a small stone from his home to remind him of all he’s left, calling it his memory stone. Small enough to fit in his pocket, he holds it to his cheek at night and memories of home comfort him. Sometimes he draws images with it of his Yemeni home in the sand or on cave walls. Through all the dangerous days and nights, he holds onto this small treasure, bringing it into his new life to always remind him of his first home.

Leaving one morning at dawn, his family began walking through the Yemeni desert sandstorms, sleeping out under the stars, sometimes with so little food the family shared a single pita bread. We follow their path by ship up the Saudi Arabian coast, then by foot across Egypt and finally up the Mediterranean to the port of Jaffo, a journey that lasted from the end of one Sukkot to the beginning of the next. The journey was difficult, with hunger, thirst, illness and poverty. But from his young point of view, the nights of singing, dancing, and poetry were joyful, and he was surrounded by the protective love of his community. Throughout, Saliman trusts they will succeed and arrive safely in Jerusalem and indeed they do. While the hope was they would find a land of milk and honey, the author’s note reminds us of the struggles the community experienced when they arrived.

Ptahia, an Israeli illustrator of more than twenty children’s books, created the atmosphere of Yemen over 100 years ago by using the traditional colors of Yemenite fabrics and jewelry combined with a textured brush. Readers can immerse themselves in Saliman’s village and follow the map of the family’s actual journey on the endpapers. Saliman and his family are dressed in their traditional conservative garments, all with head coverings. Their warm earthy skin tones are typical of the Yemeni people. The back matter includes the history of Jewish Yemeni migration to Israel, a glossary, and a recipe for kubaneh, a classic Jewish Yemenite bread.

This book’s focus on migration makes it ideal for all young children, opening opportunities for discussion about the immigrant experience. In addition, this selection is perfect to enhance activities focusing on Jewish life around the world. A worthwhile choice for family reading time and all children’s book collections.

Suzanne Grossman, 
*Children’s Book Committee, Bank Street College, West Orange, NJ*

LIFECYCLE & JEWISH VALUES


According to Zachary, “Shabbat is the best day of the week and today is the best best day of all.” That is because this is his baby sister’s first Shabbat, and her naming ceremony will be held today. Zachary is bursting with excitement as he and his mothers walk to the synagogue. Along the way, friendly neighbors ask about the baby’s name, but Mama’s answer is “Little Babka,” Mommy’s answer is “Shayneb Maideleh,” and Zachary’s answer is “Snuggle Bunny.” Her real name will be revealed during the naming ceremony, Zachary shares, inviting each person to come along. The entire congregation listens as Zachary explains his sister’s name, what it means, and why they chose it.

Prolific author Newman’s text describes a bustling neighborhood, which Gal’s vibrant illustrations bring to life. Rendered in digitally blended watercolor, painted textures, and pencil drawings, the scenes are full of motion and warm, bright color. The neighborhood’s beautiful diversity forms the backdrop of the growing parade on the way to shul.

An author’s note explains some of the customs around naming and invites readers to consider the story of their own names. This story of pure Jewish joy is a welcome addition to any library serving young children and families.

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

Continued on page 26
PICTURE BOOKS


Avi is asked by his mother at bedtime, “Avi, who loves you the most of all?” In a back-and-forth with his mother, he states why he thinks different family members and community leaders love him. For each person, his mother agrees that they do love him but tells him he needs to “discover life’s secret call” to then know who really loves him most of all. Each person described by Avi is shown on two pages performing the examples of demonstrating their love that Avi mentions. Eventually Avi realizes that it is Hashem that loves him the most of all.

Baron has published several books with Avi as the main character and each are in the engaging cartoon-like color illustrations. The books are available in English, Hebrew, and Yiddish and have Haredi portrayal. There are several pages of photos with the different Haskama (rabbinic scholar approval of a book concerning Judaism) received.

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


A moving intergenerational story, *Every Wrinkle Has a Story* celebrates the special relationship of a grandfather and his curious grandson. Originally written in Hebrew, kindergartener Yotam questions his grandfather about his wrinkles. Each query evokes a memory, some sad and some joyous, which the grandfather patiently and lovingly explains and connects to Yotam’s life. Each wrinkle becomes special as its explanation furthers the bond between the two. Yotam loves to draw and uses art to express his feelings and dreams. The close relationship of the two characters promotes love, respect, and admiration and the idea that there is so much to be learned from our elders.

There is no specific Jewish content in this book, but the names are Hebrew and the values of life, love, and respect are inherently Jewish. Public and Jewish libraries will benefit from including this book in their collections and find it especially appropriate for units on the elderly and generations or recounting family stories. The illustrations are simple, leaving much to the reader’s imagination. Younger children may not relate to their implied meaning or relationship to the characters. The illustrator uses brighter colors towards the end of the book to emphasize Yotam’s energy and optimism.

This beautiful story will be enjoyed by many age groups while encouraging loving discussion and unique personal memories.

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


The message of this gentle tale is each child is born with a unique gift, thought of as a light, to shine on the world. The reader shares Jewish life in modern day Buenos Aires with Dani as he struggles to appreciate his special light. Sometimes his light is a problem, lighting up a movie theater in the middle of a film, overpowering the glow of Shabbat candles, or blinding his teammates during a game of futbol. Sometimes it’s a blessing, lighting the home during a blackout or lighting dark spaces to help find lost objects. But while celebrating his birthday, Dani realizes everyone has a special light and together they all create a brighter world.

Cheery digital art, characters of diverse skin tones, back matter about the history and current experience of Jewish life in Argentina and a Spanish/English glossary enhance this book. This selection is perfect to enhance activities focusing on Jewish life around the world today. A worthwhile choice for family reading time and Jewish children’s book collections.

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

Continued on page 27

Jane Yolen’s historical picture book’s story is told through the eyes of a fictional young Rebecca and is based on true events surrounding the immediate aftermath of Abraham Lincoln’s death. Rebecca understands the ramifications of her father’s injuries from the War Between the States. She understands that without his right hand, he needs help with daily activities, such as tying his shoes and putting on his tallit. Although Papa personally lost a lot, he explains to his daughters that sadly, this war was necessary. He compares America’s slavery to their own Jewish experience when their ancestors were slaves in Egypt. While the Civil War ended on April 9, 1865, the country was still reeling over so many soldiers who were killed in battle. Lincoln was immediately faced with the enormous challenge of the war’s aftermath and tried to unify the country after so many human losses. On the night of April 14, 1865, Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln attended the Ford’s Theater, and tragically, Lincoln was shot. Because this happened on Friday night, Rebecca’s family is not aware of this tragedy because they were home celebrating Shabbat. It isn’t until the next day when the family attends Shabbat services at Temple Emanu-El, that the congregation finds out about Lincoln’s shocking death. The rabbi and cantor immediately pivot from the regular Shabbat service and lead the congregation in the Mourners’ Kaddish. They say this in memory of Lincoln and all of the slain soldiers, regardless of the side they were fighting for, and regardless of the color of their skin.

Laura Barella’s gorgeous digital pictures do an outstanding job of conveying this important but sparse story. A brief Author’s Note gives further context to the event. Photographs of Lincoln and Lincoln’s hearse are included to bring a sharp reality to this storyline. Also included are the words to the Mourners’ Kaddish and the prayer’s significance. This title is a worthwhile addition to any Jewish or public library.

Esther Schnaidman, Librarian, Rosenbaum Yeshiva of North Jersey, Teaneck, NJ

Babay, Michal. On Friday Afternoon. Illustrated by Menahem Halberstadt. Watertown, Charlesbridge, 2024. 32 pp. $17.99 (9781623543570) HC. Preschool–Gr. 3.

On Friday Afternoon is a sweet tale that beautifully captures the spirit of Shabbat through the eyes of a young girl and her mischievous dog. Leelie’s enthusiasm for helping her family prepare for Shabbat is both inspiring and infectious. With three hours left before Shabbat begins, Leelie and Pickles attempt to clean the house, but get sidetracked on their mitzvah mission, finding scattered coins that they decide to donate to tzedakah. This sparks a desire to collect more items to give away, along with the importance to wear favorite nice clothes and get themselves clean as the clock clicks down to a Shabbat Shalom. Each page is filled with delightful details that will make young readers smile, from the mess they create while running around the house to the joyous parade of family and neighbors they lead. The depiction of the Shabbat preparations, complete with mother baking challah rolls and making chicken soup, creates a cozy and inviting atmosphere. The culmination of the story, with everyone gathered around the big table just in time to light the Shabbat candles, exudes warmth and a sense of togetherness. The vibrant, cartoonish illustrations by Menahem Halberstadt perfectly complement the energetic narrative, bringing Leelie and Pickles’ adventures to life.

This fun Shabbat story would be a wonderful addition to any library serving young children and families.

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


This is a simple, yet charming rhyming Hanukkah story told by a noted Israeli children’s author. Uri and his sister, Shir, are concerned because their father has not yet arrived home to light the first Hanukkah candle with them. They imagine many scenarios from the time of the Maccabees when the Jews had to fight for their beliefs and survival, and creatively struggle against

Continued on page 28
the enemy, the King of Darkness as reasons for his tardiness.

The exciting, colorful illustrations fuel the battle and create an atmosphere of challenge, exhilaration, and confrontation. One must look carefully within the pictures to find the hidden enemies and tests. Young children will feel the Hanukkah experience and become excited to join in the celebration while older readers will decipher the symbols and historical references.

There is a short summary of the history of Hanukkah and a listing of the blessings in English, Hebrew, and transliteration at the end of the book. Uri is a strong, focused young boy who, along with his sister, eagerly anticipates the celebration of Hanukkah as well as the recognition of its miracles. This story will bring the light of Hanukkah to young children while connecting history to the modern world and is appropriate for Jewish and public library collections.

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


Avi takes a *cheder* trip to a lookout where the Rebbe tells stories about the Beis HaMikdash, as it would have been seen during the times of the Temple. The story is related to the “Three Weeks” (the three weeks of mourning between the 17th of Tammuz and Tisha B’av). The book introduces children to the concept of *sinas chinam* (baseless hatred). Avi and the Rebbe discuss examples of *sinas chinam*. With the Rebbe’s help Avi then comes up with examples of *chesed* that he can do daily to help rebuild the Beis HaMikdash. Introduces the concept that by turning away from *sinas chinam* and practicing *chesed* everyone will then bring the Geula (redemption).

Baron has published several books with Avi as the main character and each are in the engaging cartoon-like color illustrations. The books are available in English, Hebrew, and Yiddish and have Haredi portrayal. There are several pages of photos with the different *Haskama* (rabbinic scholar approval of a book concerning Judaism) received.

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


Journey to Istanbul with Rafed, his two younger cousins, and grandmother as they shop in the open-air market to prepare for Rosh Hashanah. Teamwork helps the cousins stand up to bullies and fend off a gathering of cats as they buy the best pomegranate, leeks, and whole fish needed for their traditional celebration. As the family gathers for their holiday meal, they enjoy their special foods as “yehi ratzones,” symbolic foods. For example, leeks represent friends to protect us and dates, peace. Interspersed Ladino words with close-up illustrations of the market and shoppers in traditional dress bring us into the culture of this community.

Cherry digital art, characters of diverse skin tones representative of the Sephardi community, back matter about the history and current experience of Jewish life in Turkey and a Ladino/English glossary enhance this book. Of particular note, a line from Song of Songs (6:7) is highlighted in the story and translated in the back matter with expanded information. This selection is perfect to enhance activities focusing on Jewish life around the world today. A worthwhile choice for family reading time and Jewish children’s book collections.

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


Fly around the world in five easy-to-read chapters with superhero Matzah Man. In the wild dash to get ready for the holiday, Matzah Man travels around the world to bring a shank bone, matzah, *charoset*, and Miracle Matzah Balls to a family’s Seder. But will he make it before sunset? With the more powerful superpowers of the Prophet Elijah, who is delighted to be invited to stay through the Seder, all ends well.

Digital art is in an early reader graphic novel format. Backmatter includes brief information about the holiday and ideas for designing your own *charoset*. A lively addition to Passover book collections or a fun read during the Passover season.

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

Continued on page 29
REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS


With the dozens of Pesach picture books available, is it possible to find a novel take on the perennial search for the afikomen? Indeed, Afikoman, Where’d You Go? A Passover Hide-And-Seek Adventure provides a new, fun, charming approach that a four-year-old book critic loved! It’s a smash-up of an engaging rhyming couplet text by Rebecca Gardyn Levington with the simple seek and discover vibe of Where’s Waldo?

A multi-cultural, multi-abled, multi-generational family gathers for the Pesach seder. Some men wear kippahs, some do not; some women wear pants. At just the right point, the anthropomorphized afikomen, with eyes and stick figure arms and legs, goes missing.

Have you seen the Afikoman?
He’s a silly, sneaky guy.
But together, we will find him.
We can do this – you and I!

All my cousins and my sister
Will be searching for him too,
But that prize is ours, I know it!
I’m determined. How ‘bout you?

Noa Kelner’s pencil, ink, and Photoshop illustrations invite the lap-sit through third-grade reader to look very closely at each engaging two-page spread. The kids, armed with binoculars and magnifying glass, search throughout the cross-section house: from the dining room to the den, from the bedroom to the kitchen, and from the bathroom to the backyard. The afikomen is elusive, but close examination by young eyes can find him. Smiles and glee ensue.

Afikomen Where’d You Go? is recommended for home, school and synagogue libraries.

Rena Citrin, Retired Day School Librarian


Each of the nights of Hanukkah in this vibrantly digitally-illustrated board book features googly-eyed latkes and other Jewish foods celebrating the festival in joyous and often raucous fashion. There are battling containers of applesauce and sour cream, dizzy dreidels, and presents, wrapped and wrestling. Careful readers will notice characters from Silverberg’s picture book Meet the Latkes (Viking, 2018) scattered throughout, including Judah Mega-Bee and Alien Potatoes from Space. The text contains some good alliteration, but it is the illustrations that will hold the attention of readers, which could include older siblings who would definitely get the humor. Do you need another Hanukkah book? This one brings some joy and silliness to the table, and everything pictured fits with most celebrations of the festival. So, yes, yes you do.

Judy Ehrenstein, Children’s Librarian, Co-editor, Children’s and Teen reviews, AJL News and Reviews, Silver Spring, MD

AJL News and Reviews Summer 2024
CO-EDITED BY DANIEL SCHEIDE AND TREVAN HATCH

FICTION


These two volumes of short stories provide readers with a unique glimpse of contemporary Jerusalem. They show the diverse communities, conflicts, and obstacles involved in daily living. The West Jerusalem volume features stories by Israeli authors such as Yiftach Ashkenazi, Nadav Lapid, and Liat Elkayam. These stories involve soldiers at checkpoints, working at top-secret facilities obscure religious sects, and murder at the prestigious Sam Spiegel Film and Television School. The East Jerusalem volume contains stories by Palestinian/Arab writers. They tell of the painful aspects of occupation, the loss of homes, and the difficulties of obtaining necessities such as medical care and being able to pray at Al-Aqsa Mosque when one lives on the other side of the line. Among the authors are Nuzha Abu Ghosh, Ziad Khadah, and Muhammad Shuraim.

These volumes are especially timely during the present conflict because they provide exposure to diverse points of view and a chance to appreciate the difficulties facing residents of Jerusalem. Synagogue and public library collections will want to add them. Book clubs will have much to discuss after reading these stories.

Barbara Bibel, Berkeley, CA

Feingold, Jeffrey M. *The Black Hole Pastrami and Other Stories*. Holyoke, Meat for Tea Press, 2023. 91 pp. $16.95 (979888289186) PBK.

Jeffrey M. Feingold’s slim book is a delightful collection of sixteen short stories. These vignettes, at first seem to be an unrelated hodgepodge of characters and events, but the reader will soon enjoy connecting the threads interwoven through the book. While the stories are not in chronological order, they all reflect different stages in a person’s life, making the tales a mix of nostalgia and reflection. Some of the same characters or events are revisited in later stories but from a different angle or age of the protagonist. While the stories vary from thoughtful and poignant to whimsical and quirky, the dialogue in all these narratives is sharp, often very humorous, and touching. Some stories are sweet and insightful like the protagonist in “The Sugar Thief.” Here, the author describes with great humor his warmhearted and wealthy Aunt Millie who had an embarrassing habit of pocketing sugar packets from diners. As a youth, it perplexed him, and finally, when he grew older, he questioned her. At this point, the story suddenly takes a serious tone as he now understands that by stealing the sugar packets, she was holding scars from the Great Depression rationing. He felt so ashamed of his younger self who foolishly judged her so callously. He muses (like many of us do in our mid-age when we have gained some life experience) how he wishes he could gather all of his deceased relatives around his kitchen table for coffee and listen to their stories again, this time with a more mature ear. Besides the author’s relatives, various pets make an appearance in many of the stories, as do random celebrities, like Itzhak Perlman and Bruce Willis. This short story collection is appropriate for all adult libraries and even as a book club choice.

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


Goldner’s first novel focuses on Sally Sterling, a Ba’al Teshuva who found her way to the Orthodox community in Skokie as a young journalist looking for a distraction from a terrible, unexpected breakup. Picking up ten years into her new life, Sally is married with three children and reveling in the comforting, meaningful, and predictable life she has created for herself. But when several changes come at her unexpectedly, including a significant trauma that her oldest son experiences at school, she questions the life she thought she loved so dearly. This book asks a lot of questions about what it means to be a woman, what it means to be a mother, how to regain trust when it has been broken, and what sacrifices are worth it for family and security. It paints a picture of life in an Orthodox community that doesn’t shy away from challenging moments but ultimately has depth and understanding of the values of community and forgiveness. This title is suitable for synagogue libraries, public libraries, and book clubs.

Talya Sokoll, Noble and Greenough School Dedham, Massachusetts

Continued on page 31

With this translation of Halpern’s *Blessed Hands* (*Gebentshte hent: dertseyilungen* in Yiddish), a lesser-known writer is brought to the forefront, adding to the growing, rich tapestry of translated Yiddish literature. Halpern emigrated to the United States in her early twenties at the turn of the century from, or around, Bialystok. This book marks the first publication of her complete short stories in English. Each story is beautifully told, focusing on the experiences and lives of everyday people. From the title story, which focuses on the “blessed hands” of a massage therapist (Halpern’s real-life vocation) to many others that follow individuals through all stages of life, Halpern’s voice shines, giving life to the struggles of all kinds of people. The strongest stories are those that reflect upon what it means to age and come toward the end of one’s life, but all entries are worthy of voracious discussion. In translating this text Taub has given us the blessing of reviving an important voice in the canon of Yiddish literature. This collection is suitable for synagogue libraries, academic libraries, public libraries, and book clubs.

Talya Sokoll,  
Noble and Greenough School  
 Dedham, Massachusetts


If a book has a dog named Dayenu, is it Jewish enough? It is sufficient! *Blank* is a contemporary chick-lit novel that explores the ups and downs of erstwhile successful writer and mid-life mom Pippa Jones. Pippa is so far past her publishing deadline for her next novel that she can’t even see it in the rearview mirror. In her personal life, Pippa has a long-term marriage and long-term friends, but cracks begin to show in both. And when her publisher suddenly asks for a finished manuscript ASAP, Pippa’s solution to having nothing to submit is to create a blank book that can potentially soar to success as a searing commentary on the flaws and corruptions in the traditional publishing industry. Structurally, she observes, art is a response to all art that preceded it and a blank book is no different as a scathing commentary than a blank canvas. Can this go wrong? Yes, and it does!

Following the enjoyable trope of unforeseen betrayals and a plucky main character’s path to recovery and success, Pippa makes professional strides and new friends and meets up with an old summer camp flame. Although some of the storytelling is uneven, some threads deserve either full attention (e.g., the MC’s mother’s alcoholism) or to be abandoned, there are genuine moments of relatability and humor. The Jewish content is Pippa’s focus on her son’s upcoming bar mitzvah, frequent comments on the importance of Shabbat in their home, and the presence of a Hebrew school teacher who becomes an important person to Pippa, along with his dog, the aforementioned, “Dayenu.” *Blank* is a light romance read, ideal for the beach; bring some sunblock and dayenu!

This novel is recommended for public libraries and for synagogue libraries that collect popular fiction.

Sally Stieglitz,  
Editor in Chief, AJL News and Reviews,  
Stony Brook, NY


Some novels pursue several paths to tell their stories. Daniel Torday has chosen an especially difficult set of narratives. Zeke Leger, a magazine writer, returns to central Ohio for the funeral of a college friend. While there he learns about a Jewish/Muslim sect that has settled there, and the death of the son of the group’s leader. He also re-connects with a former girlfriend and falls in love with her again. These stories weave together with the local sheriff, serious drug use, and the possibility of a Miracle to be performed by the Prophet. Zeke is at the core of the swirling plots, and the legal and moral issues. Zeke visits the Donme (believers in Sabbatai Tzi, the 17th-century false Messiah) and interviews their leaders, including Natan of Flatbush, trying to unravel the mysteries. But he is harassed and derailed by both the sect members and the townspeople, all of whom want the truth buried for their own reasons.

*The 12th Commandment* is a mix of disparate elements: the “Donne,” a real Jewish-Turkish offshoot dating to Sabbatai Tzi; connections to David Koresh and Jim Jones and their cults; a love story featuring Zeke and Johanna; the existence of a secret marijuana lab; and the mystery of who killed Natan’s son. In the end, the plot lines do not mesh. The book is recommended only for libraries with complete fiction sections.

Fred Isaac,  
Oakland, CA

---

Continued on page 32

This historical novel, which is set in Venice, has all the features that you associate with the city of Venice: bridges, canals, gondolas, and the ghetto. The reader will find this second mystery novel in a series, *The Gallery of Beauties*, to be captivating and engrossing. The courtesan, Belldonna, hides her Jewish identity from Venice society until she is forced to hide in the ghetto when she fears for her life. An envoy from the New World has a map showing the location of a large treasure, and it is believed that Belldonna knows the envoy’s whereabouts, which puts her life in danger of being captured by greedy criminals. She takes cover in the Jewish ghetto in Venice where she is told no one will suspect that she is hiding in plain sight. In the ghetto, she becomes familiar with her heritage as a Jew and becomes friends with Diana, the rabbi’s widowed daughter. She keeps her identity hidden while she seeks out all clues to her brother’s whereabouts after she finds out that he is also hiding in Venice. An interesting and engaging character is Rabbi Leone di Modena, who is based on the autobiography of a real rabbi who lived in Venice at this time in the 17th century. The Rabbi Leone di Modena as the rabbi in the novel was a brilliant scholar, orator, and author. However, his daughter and the community are faced with their rabbi who had a gambling addiction and lost large sums of money. The New World is brought into the story with Jamaica being a setting and the Jews fearing the Spanish Inquisition coming to the island. The history of the islands of the Caribbean are described as they relate to the fate of the Jewish characters in the book. History is intermingled with antisemitism and the social history of the ghetto in Venice makes this book a great read. This novel is recommended for readers who like historical fiction.

Fontaine, Resianne, *A Hebrew Encyclopedia of the Thirteenth Century: Natural Philosophy in Judah ben Solomon ha-Cohen’s Midrash ha-Hokhmah*. Leiden; Boston, Brill, 2023. 783 pp. $239.00 (9789004518582) HC.

This volume is a study of *Midrash ha-Hokhmah*, a comprehensive medieval compilation devoted to bringing Aristotle’s natural philosophy to Jewish audience. Originally written in Arabic in Spain, the author translated it himself in Hebrew while in Italy around 1247. Judah ha-Cohen, sometimes known as Judah ben Solomon, ha-Kohen, Matkah, based his encyclopedia on Averroes’ commentaries on Aristotle, “abridging, summarizing and paraphrasing them,” but did not have direct access to the Greek philosopher writings. Fontaine, a retired professor at the University of Amsterdam, offers in the first section of her eight hundred-page book a detailed presentation of the entire *Midrash ha-Hokhmah* and in the second part a critical edition and translation of the middle section, on natural philosophy, of Part One only. It is not easy to summarize such a sizable volume, but here are two ideas conveyed in the volume: “Judah emphasizes more than once that the study of the sciences should be preceded by fear of God” and he also “displays a certain ambivalence toward non-Jewish science.” One of his motivations for writing was to bring back the Jewish student of non-Jewish science to the Torah.

This title is recommended only to academic libraries because of its high price.

Roger S. Kohn, Silver Spring, MD


This book is an English translation of an award-winning book by a prominent French female Rabbi and leader of France’s Liberal Jewish Moment. Horvilleur tells eleven stories from her years of ministering to the dying and their loved ones. The book focuses on loss, mourning, and consolation by encouraging us to recognize and accept death as a fundamental part of life. The author recounts how people developed rituals to attempt to keep death away and how COVID reminded everyone that our power is limited and
death knocks on everyone’s doors. Stories are our way to create bridges between generations and open a path between the living and the dead. Her stories pay homage to the person by prolonging the place of the dead within the living.

While focusing on the stories regarding burial, death, dying, and mourning, the author introduces the reader to French Secularism. While her French Secularism is infused throughout the book it does not detract from the Jewish content and context while retelling the stories and customs historically found in Judaism.

The book is easy to read and moves quickly from story to story leaving one with many poignant thoughts. The reader who is experienced in Jewish customs and attitudes regarding death and mourning may not gain much new information from this book except for the feeling of a shared experience. The general reader will find much Jewish information as well as acquire a feeling of not being alone in their experience regarding death.

Ordained at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York in 2008, the author is the editorial director of the quarterly Jewish magazine Revue de pensée(s) juive(s) Tenouâ and leads a congregation in Paris. Horvilleur shares her very personal thoughts during her interaction with the family and while performing her duties in officiating at their funeral. Some of the stories reflect the effects of the Shoah and being a concentration camp survivor on the individual and on the family and how it plays out in the burial and mourning.

This title is recommended for both public and academic libraries.

Nathan Aaron Rosen, 
Law Research Institute 
New York

Jewish philosophy comes alive in these pages and Goshen-Gottenstein succeeds in having a wide-ranging and diverse conversation about the concept of ‘Idolatry’ in contemporary Jewish thought. The exercise of comprehensively analyzing this term from multiple angles is not a dry academic exercise, but an attempt to add fresh perspectives and new relevance to a concept that was somewhat neglected since ancient and medieval Jewish thought and law. The book requires no specific prior knowledge, is best suited to the scholar and educated layperson, and is recommended for academic libraries.

David Tesler, 
Efrat, Israel


The Jewish Publication Society has updated their well-respected 1985 English translation of the Jewish Bible to contempolate the translation and to provide a more accurate picture of how gender is used throughout Tanakh. When appropriate in its context, the translation utilizes gender-inclusive language and maintains gendered language when the original demands it. For example, in the 1985 edition, Joshua 1:18 states, “Any man who flouts your commands and does not obey every order you give shall be put to death.” The new edition instead begins the verse with, “Anyone who flouts your commands…. ” The injunction was not meant to imply only men could be so punished and the Hebrew word “אֲבָטָן” is better translated as “person” instead of man. Similarly, in some instances the word “אָבָא” means ‘fathers’ and in other contexts it means ‘ancestors,’ and this edition is careful to use the appropriate word depending on the proper context.

The second major area of change relates to references to God. Whereas previous JPS versions of the Bible used the masculine in reference to God, the new edition seeks to utilize gender-neutral designations more appropriate to the description of God. Therefore, “His Covenant” (Deut. 17:2), “Laws that He enjoined upon you” (Deut. 28:45), and “His people” (Deut. 32:43) is now translated “The Covenant,” “laws that were enjoined upon you,” and “God’s people.” This approach is more in line with present-day religious Judaism and is actually more inclusive in that it allows for either a non-gendered or gendered understanding of the divine.

This edition also makes some changes regarding archaic language and ritual terminology. For example, words such as “beseech” and “bewail” have been removed and ritual classifications like “clean” and “unclean” have been replaced with the more precise translation
of “pure” and “unpure.” The French philosopher and linguist Antoine Berman famously quipped that, “Every translation is a transformation. Every translation is also an interpretation.” Bearing that in mind, *The JPS Tanakh: Gender-Sensitive Edition* successfully seeks to translate the original text more accurately, faithfully, and readable to a modern audience. This edition is recommended for every major Jewish library.

David Tesler,
Efrat, Israel


Most New Yorkers from 1935 to 1980 knew about Marty Glickman. Historian Jeffrey Gurock ties the fascinating pieces of his life together in this biographical profile. Glickman grew up in Brooklyn. He first came to prominence in the early 1930s, leading his school football team and setting sprint records in track. In telling Glickman’s story, Gurock describes the times in detail. These include life in inter-war New York and the anti-Olympic protest movement against the Nazis in 1935 and 1936. The core of the account occurred at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, and “the Meeting” at which Glickman and Sam Stoller (another Jewish sprinter) were told that they would be replaced by Jesse Owens and Ralph Metcalfe in the 4x100 relay race. The decision was made by Avery Brundage (American Olympic Committee Chair) and the Track Team coach. This last-minute change has been considered one of the most antisemitic decisions in athletic history. From the 1940s to the 1970s Glickman was the local radio, and sometimes television, voice of the New York football Giants and the basketball Knicks, as well as other local sports events. Notably, he was never given a regular national presence as an announcer or analyst. A chapter is devoted to his role as a mentor to younger announcers, Marv Albert, Bob Costas, among others, in their careers. The final chapter is devoted to his role as a mentor to younger announcers, given a regular national presence as an announcer or analyst. A Knicks, as well as other local sports events. Notably, he was never a television, voice of the New York football Giants and the basketball 1940s to the 1970s Glickman was the local radio, and sometimes one of the most antisemitic decisions in athletic history. From the Track Team coach. This last-minute change has been considered A Avery Brundage (American Olympic Committee Chair) and the Ralph Metcalfe in the 4x100 relay race. The decision was made by Avery Brundage (American Olympic Committee Chair) and the Track Team coach. This last-minute change has been considered one of the most antisemitic decisions in athletic history. From the 1940s to the 1970s Glickman was the local radio, and sometimes television, voice of the New York football Giants and the basketball Knicks, as well as other local sports events. Notably, he was never given a regular national presence as an announcer or analyst. A chapter is devoted to his role as a mentor to younger announcers, Marv Albert, Bob Costas, among others, in their careers. The final chapter discusses Glickman’s anger at his treatment during the Olympics. As he aged, he spoke out about the situation more freely.

While it is a solid profile of a notable Jewish figure, Gurock’s book also provides a wealth of detail about mid-20th century American Jewish life. It should be considered by all libraries from synagogues to universities.

Fred Isaac,
Oakland, CA


In his study of the comics written and illustrated by Asaf Hanuka, Reingold makes the case that Hanuka infuses many different aspects of his identity into his comics, with important and meaningful questions being asked of Israel as well as the wider world. Reingold traces Hanuka’s personal life and career trajectory through personal interviews with Hanuka as well as very close readings and interpretations of his oeuvre. This is important because Reingold states that Hanuka utilizes autobiography in his many of works, which is a certain kind of “visual autobiography” rather than prose. These include Hanuka’s Israeli identity more generally and Mizrahi specifically, a secular Israeli, a husband and father, etc. Hanuka’s works range from satirical takes dealing with many aspects of Israeli society as well as the many facets of Hanuka’s identity to the fantastical Pizzeria Kamikaze, co-authored with Etgar Keret, among other works.

One of his most well-known series, *The Realist*, was written while he was employed by the *Calcalist* newspaper. It is this long-running series that Reingold states show the various ways in which Hanuka interrogates his own identity as well as many different aspects of Israeli society such as the history of Zionism, the history and current status of Mizrahi Jews in Israel, the Arab-Israeli conflict and Israel’s position in the wider world. Another important work in this regard is *Hayehudi Haaravi*, about the situation of Mizrahi Jews and Hanuka’s own family. Hanuka also teaches aspiring cartoonists and other artists at Shenkar College, and Reingold that this ensures his continued influence on the world of Israeli comics and graphic novels as Hanuka “understands…the degrees to which one must work to establish oneself.”

This book is recommended for academic libraries that collect other similar materials about artists in Israel or the Jewish world more generally.

Eli Lieberman,
Interim Director; Klau Library, HUC-JIR,
New York


The author (Professor, Bar Ilan University, Department of Arabic) has studied and written much on Saadia Gaon (882-942 CE) one of the preeminent Jewish religious thinkers. This book consists of six chapters that deal with Saadia’s concepts of Jewish leadership and its important role in guiding the people...
to correct understanding of Judaism, his emphasis upon encouraging people to be strong and faithful in the midst of their long exile, his relationship to Islam and the Arabic language, the special importance he ascribed to the role of Daniel as a prophet, and other topics. Though at times rather abstruse, this book provides insights into certain aspects of Saadia’s thought. Saadia comes through as a compassionate man deeply concerned with the spiritual and moral well-being of all Jews, far from an academic elitist. This volume is recommended for collections with a strong and sophisticated emphasis upon Jewish philosophy and theology.


This book began as a doctoral dissertation at University College London in 2019. The author eventually became a cataloguer for East European languages and a curator for East European collections at the British Library, dying in 2021. Dubno is a relatively obscure figure, but the book makes a strong case that he is an interesting one. He was an Eastern European Jew of traditional religiosity and was widely recognized as a scholar of Hebrew grammar in his day. His reputation led Moshe Mendelssohn to invite him to collaborate on Mendelssohn’s German translation of the Pentateuch and commentary, arguably Mendelssohn’s most important accomplishment. Dubno did write an introduction (mostly focused on Hebrew grammatical matters) and a commentary on some of the Pentateuch. Mendelssohn was unsatisfied with them and used only a small part of the introduction and some of the commentary. Dubno withdrew from the project. The book discusses other scholarly works of Dubno as well as his authorship of some poems and a fictional story in prose and his work as a book collector and seller. He was an accomplished scholar who worked for a greater appreciation for, and literary use of, Biblical Hebrew by Jews. He did not favor the revitalization of Hebrew as a daily vernacular.

The book points out that Dubno, while more open than strict rabbis to non-rabbinical literature (such as poetry and science), was not a follower of the more radical Enlightenment thinkers based in Berlin. Thus, this study contributes to an understanding of the non-monolithic nature of the Jewish Enlightenment. It is a fine work of scholarship that will mainly appeal to other scholars specializing in the Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment).


The account of King Saul consulting a witch is in the twenty-eighth chapter of First Samuel. God is not answering his prayers, Samuel the prophet has died, and Saul is anxious about his fate. Even though he has outlawed necromancy, he disguises himself and seeks out the woman who is an expert in summoning the dead. At first, she is hesitant, as it is against the law, but she sees that Saul is desperate, and summons Samuel, who tells Saul that he and his son, Yehonatan, will be killed in battle the next day by the Philistines. Saul falls to the ground, partly from the ominous news and partly because he has not eaten. The woman insists on giving Saul bread, and she slaughters her calf to feed him. After he eats, he and his servants leave. While most commentators focus on Saul, Frymer-Kensky looks at the witch and sees four lessons for success: Know your power, strive to excel, choose the moment, and win well. The first part of this short volume details the story from Prophets, while the second part expands on the lessons, using examples from the text. Frymer-Kensky points out that “the Bible knows that people who act in unorthodox ways are not necessarily evil.”

Tikva Frymer-Kensky (1943-2006) was a professor of Hebrew Bible and history of Judaism at the University of Chicago Divinity School. She was the author of several books: Reading the Women of the Bible, In the Wake of the Goddesses; Motherprayer: The Pregnant Woman's Spiritual Companion. The manuscript was found in her papers after she died. The preface (written by her husband and daughter), stresses the value of the story in terms of the role of women and the fear or shunning of the “other.” A quick and interesting read, the book is recommended for all Jewish libraries, especially collections focusing on Bible interpretation and women’s roles in Judaism.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel

Abbi Harper wanted to “facilitate her own spiritual growth,” so she started making challahs reflecting the content of the weekly Torah readings. This led to @lechlechallah, an Instagram account where Harper posted photographs of her creations with short commentaries on the parsha. Her book “is a refined and expanded version of four years of learning and teaching about challah and creative Torah.” In the Introduction, she discusses why she chose challah as her medium and provides a history of challah. The first section includes challahs for all the weekly portions. From challah that mimics the days of creation for parshat B’reishit, to challahs that reflect the poetic structure of Haazinu, there are clear color photographs, the verse or verses that inspired its shape, braiding and/or color, a short explanation of reading, “Reflections and Connections,” which include questions to ponder and more creative outlets, and “Kavanah” — an intention. The next section is for “The Cycle of the Year.” Using the same format, there is a pomegranate challah for Rosh Hashanah, a beautiful tree for Tu BiSh’vat, and more. Finally, there are recipes, tools, tips, illustrated instructions for making shapes and braids, and blessings. The Shavuot challah, two braided challahs with a flat “scroll” with the ten commandments in between, is more traditional, while the “T’rumah challah,” which mimics the screen for the entrance of the Mishkan, is full of colors and shapes — blue, purple, and crimson.

Those who are looking for ways to expand their creative repertoire and learn about the weekly Torah reading will have hours of enjoyment in making Harper’s challahs and creating their own. For those who don’t bake, the text is perfect for personal review or sharing at the Shabbat table. A great resource for schools and camps, Loaves of Torah is highly recommended for all Jewish libraries, especially those that collect cookbooks or whose patrons are interested in the history of Jewish foods.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel


Abbi Shulman, who is trained both as a rabbi and psychologist, presents a unique approach to understanding the High Holiday season. This book is a result of the struggle to present a unified approach to the world of the beit midrash and the modern psychological theory and practice. He learned from his grandfather, who was a PhD physicist and rabbi, how to think conceptually to balance the letter of the law with artistic creative thinking.

Shulman addresses those people who are searching. He tells about a man who performs mitzvot, davans (prays) daily, and learns regularly, but still feels as though he has no spiritual feelings, that something is wrong with his religious life. Shulman says that the solution to this man’s struggle is not to increase his religious actions. One cannot force sleep, eating, or feelings. The answer is to examine the process of achieving deep satisfaction. An example is a writer who once struggled to publish something and later published so many stories and books that they no longer need to produce works for a living. The writer writes for the love of writing and to share. Shulman suggests focusing on the process, not the results.

Think of the process of doing household tasks. Feel the movement of your limbs and notice the feel and smells of things you touch and approach. You don’t have to love washing the dishes, but you need to wash them. The process will not make you more spiritual, but the kavanah (intentions) will make a chore into a positive experience.

This book will make the reader think about the High Holidays and Sukkot from a new point of view. Sitting and praying will not be the focus of Jewish observance. The reader will find some freedom to be at peace with Jewish traditions. Even the non-observant Jew or non-Jew will be able to relate to the examples and stories found in this book. This book is highly recommended for personal and institutional libraries.

Daniel D. Stuhlmans, Librarian, Temple Sholom of Chicago


Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks (1948-2020) was a well-respected international Modern Orthodox leader, profound philosopher, dedicated teacher, and a remarkably prolific writer. Tradition in an Untraditional Age was first published in 1990. Its essays focus on the enduring challenges to Jewish continuity, antisemitism, and assimilation. With eloquence and insight, Rabbi Sacks clearly explains the Enlightenment and Emancipation movements and the profound impact they had on the Jewish community. Through the views and writings of orthodox iconic Jewish thinkers such...
as Samson Raphael Hirsch, Abraham Isaac Kook, and Joseph B. Soloveitchick, Rabbi Sacks explores the clash between tradition and modernity revealing how orthodox Jewish luminaries have grappled with the problem. Topics include responses to modernity where the positions of the rabbis are sometimes antithetical. Rabbi Soloveitchick’s significant book Halakhic Man is discussed in depth as well as Martin Buber’s philosophy and why Buber is embraced by non-Jewish thinkers. An essay on Franz Rosensweig’s life and philosophy is also included. Each essay is enriched by copious notes and references to other scholarly works. All library patrons will benefit from this scholarly exploration of topics that are still relevant today. This title is recommended for all Jewish libraries.

Ilka Gordon,
Beachwood, OH

Zoloth, Laurie. Ethics for the Coming Storm: Climate Change and Jewish Thought, NY, Oxford UP, 2023. 254 pp. $29.95 (9780197661352) PBK.

Heat waves, deadly torrential rains, sudden floods, drying rivers, melting of the arctic ice caps, and boreal forest fires are signs of global warming and climate change. These environmental disasters are thought to be the result of the misuse of technological gadgets, machines, and other artificial apparatus. This book gives voice to the warnings to raise alarm, and to brainstorm to find solutions to the crisis, to get technology spiritually in hand rather than have it destroy the environment and fragile ecosystems by carbon and pollution emission. In essence, the book is about religious ethics, particularly Jewish ethics regarding these destructive changes due to misuse of technology and failing to safeguard G-d’s creation. It enriches and deepens public discourse about what to do in the face of the crisis, how to live more mindfully and thoughtfully and who to be, and how to make a difference in the face of the coming storm. It is a clarion call to address global warming and the consumptive exploitive patterns that are disastrously changing the climate and alienating the environment. The book is more than a scolding of “I told you so” and why Judaism has a long tradition of safeguarding the environment; it is how to respond by drawing on historical, philosophical, and halakhic texts, and postmodern critical thinking. The essays in this book call for more impactful and radical sacrifices such as giving up meat, walking instead of driving, living in smaller spaces, recycling, using fewer resources. This title is recommended for academic Jewish collections and for synagogue libraries that collect on contemporary discussions of technology and halacha.

David B Levy,
New York


This informative graphic novel explores the origins of The Bund, a socialist and secular Jewish organization with its roots in Tsarist Russia and the Pale of Settlement. Though concise, this book packs in a significant amount of information, told in chronological order, providing a wealth of detail for the reader in an easy-to-read, captivating style. Much of the current scholarship available on this aspect of Jewish history is through significantly more academic tomes, the publication of this text opens up an important part of the story of the Jewish people to a wider audience. The text includes personal stories, humor, and moving anecdotes about the impact of the Bund on its members, as well as how the lessons they learned impacted their lives after the Bund no longer existed. A worthy addition to anyone looking to expand their knowledge of Jewish leftism and a fascinating playbook for those engaging with it now. This graphic treatment is suitable for synagogue libraries, academic libraries, and public libraries.

Talya Sokoll,
Noble and Greenough School, Dedham, Massachusetts


This book argues against secular forms of Judaism, that God is of central importance to Judaism, and consequently that God “talk,” what God reveals about Himself in the Bible, what human beings can speculate theologically about God, and what Judaism says human beings can properly say about themselves to God in prayer—is “the heart of Judaism.”

It is evident from his latest book that Rabbi Dr. Novak, an emeritus chair of Jewish Studies at the University of Toronto and president of the Union for Traditional Judaism, is steeped in the biblical-rabbinical tradition and also in philosophical theology. In the five essays that comprise the book, Rabbi Novak considers God in a variety of contexts. For example, the author thinks natural law, the notion that certain universal moral truths can be known by human beings apart from religious revelation, plays a very important role in Judaism and argues that the universe, created out of nothing by God, has

Continued on page 38
a “normative constitution” that “stems from God’s cosmic authority…” Another of the many subjects he discusses is the ambiguous relationship of kabbalah to the doctrine of creation out of nothing. This deep and sophisticated book can help readers think about, and draw closer to, God. This volume is recommended for public and academic libraries.

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

Garb, Theo. Emerald Ark: Memories of a Jewish Irish Youth. Independently Published. 2023. 239 pp. (978392946068) PBK.

In this beautiful and heartfelt memoir, Theo Garb describes his idyllic childhood growing up in Dublin, during the World War II years and beyond. Garb’s parents moved from Warsaw in the late 1920s and lived briefly in Antwerp, London, and Manchester, and finally settled in Dublin in 1930, as Cantor Garb was hired by an Irish synagogue, giving the family a special status in the community. Unfortunately, most of their families stayed in Europe and couldn’t escape the horrors of the Holocaust, ignoring the Dublin Garbs’ pleas to move to Ireland. While his family was always at the forefront of his mind, Garb focuses this memoir on his Jewish upbringing in Ireland. Through numerous vignettes, we come to know Theo and his family members especially his father Cantor Garb, who along with Theo’s mother set a delightful and wholesome Jewish tone as they raised their children. Although Dublin had a small Jewish community, the country was a safe and welcoming place for Jews. Garb never experienced antisemitism while growing up as Garb describes how respectful and inclusive the Irish were to the Jews. The Garbs were strictly Orthodox, as evident in most of Theo’s stories. Detailed descriptions of his mother’s delicious Shabbos food, tales about his holy and wise grandfather, and dilemmas, such as how to keep a 50-pound note that he found on Saturday safe until he can bring it home after Shabbos, are among the delightful tales described in the book. Readers should beware that Garb mentions some of his boyhood romances in fair detail. Beautiful Irish country scenes, along with famous people such as Chief Rabbi Isaac Herzog and Prince Aly Khan make their appearances in the book. This memoir is full of rich storytelling, and amusing anecdotes of a mischievous lad who gets in light trouble in school, at home, and with friends. It is a pleasure to read! Filled with lots of wonderful photos of family members, pictures of Yiddish posters, letters, and other documents, all fascinating to see. This heartfelt memoir was a labor of love between the author and his son and would be appropriate for all adult libraries, both Jewish and secular.

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


Alice Nakhimovsky investigates the lives of five Jewish men and three women who were true believers in the dream of Soviet Communism and later became disillusioned. All eight left behind memoirs or books that Nakhimovsky, Professor of Jewish Studies and Russian at Colgate University, skillfully mines to intertwine their biographies chronologically with the history from the period of the 1917 Russian Revolution through the show trials against the Jews in the 1950s.

The eight figures include two famous writers, Leib Kvitko, a prominent Yiddish poet, and author of children’s poems and Vasily Semyonovich Grossman, a journalist, war correspondent, and novelist. Lina Stern was a biochemist and the first female full member of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Solomon Lozovsky was a high-place government administrator. Nadia Ulanovskaya was a Soviet intelligence officer, translator, and English teacher. Mary Leder, also a translator, was brought by her parents to Birobidzhan from California as a teenager. Lilianna Zinovyevna Lungina spent her childhood in France, Germany, and Palestine before moving with her family to Russia in 1933. Doba-Mera Medvedeva grew up in a shtetl, worked in factories, joined the party, and took part in clandestine activities.

All eight bought into the dreams of social justice of the revolution until at some point they were disillusioned. Nakhimovsky traces the twists and turns of their careers and the choices they made to remain loyal to their beliefs. She explores how they reacted after conditions changed for Jews in Russia with the Holocaust and the later repression of the Jewish intellectuals, especially during the 1952 trial of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee and the Doctor’s Plot. The reader learns how they resisted, caved in, or professed their Jewish identity after arrest and the pressure of show trials. This title is highly recommended for academic libraries and of interest to synagogue libraries.

Harvey Sukenic, Hebrew College Library, Newton, MA

Continued on page 39

This is a popular work of concise, yet deeply meaningful, sixty-two Hasidic stories that are masterfully presented by Rabbi Dov Peretz Elkins. There is much food for contemplation in this book that can readily be applied to life lessons today to inspire, guide, challenge, surprise, and provide profound purpose for the real reader thirsting for spirituality and authentically living in the now. The stories are also laced with a wonderful dose of humor! Elkins has carefully chosen germane pertinent stories, representing them in simple easily digestible form, that particularly can speak to the needs of our age, revealing truths in the genre of simple Hasidic wise parables. Elkins, as well as succinctly framing the sixty-two Hasidic stories, offers interpretations that provide core lessons for living the good life, drawing on comparisons to other thinkers (Abraham J. Heschel, Benjamin Franklin, Ralph Waldo Emerson), psychologists (Viktor Frankel, Abraham Maslow, Carl Jung, Carl Rogers), doctors (Deepak Chopra) and writers (Ivan Turgenev, Mark Twain, Y.L. Peretz). This book is a pure delight, not only because it is beyond mere self-help, but because it makes and draws out the timely wisdom of the Hasidic tale relevant to today and any life filled with meaning! While a fun read, it is profound yet light, serious and extremely comic at times, and easily accessible but profoundly deep, spiritual, and telling. This title is recommended for public libraries, JCCs, and synagogues.

David B Levy, New York


The German universities of the 19th century were the birthplaces of the social sciences. That is the study of the nature of humanity by observing the history and struggle of human society rather than the “hard” sciences such as chemistry and physics. The medieval university was largely connected to the Church. As the principles of rationalism and objectivity were applied to all human knowledge, Jewish scholars changed their approach to the study of Jewish history, Jewish law, and society.

This book is a selection of 33 scholars who wrote about Jewish theology or how Judaism relates to God. Some of the articles try to define what is meant by the term “Jewish theology.” Some of the articles are in response to Christian explanations of their theology. Each chapter introduces the author’s biographical information and explanations of the person’s thoughts. The editors supplied many footnotes with explanations and sources that do not appear in the originals. Almost all of the articles were originally written in German. The authors are some of the most important scholars in the camp of Wissenschaft des Judentums (science of Judaism). These are the rabbi-PhD scholars who are the predecessors of Yeshiva University and Jewish Theological Seminary.

The articles are very truncated and left this reviewer wondering what the point the authors were trying to make. Looking at some of the originals helped with understanding the author’s ideas. The editors should have done a better job of explaining the ideas of the authors and putting the ideas in a better context. While this book is interesting and highly informative, it is unclear what audience the publisher has in mind. This is an optional purchase for academic and personal libraries.

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

Marx, Dalia. *From Time to Time: Journeys in the Jewish Calendar*. New York, CCAR, 2023. 377 pp. $32.95 (9780881236132) HC.

His book by an important Israeli rabbi and scholar was originally written for an Israeli audience and published in Israel in 2018. The translation, adapted for an English-speaking readership, provides insight into Israeli culture and religious expression as it presents a panorama of the Jewish year and its holidays. The text, in blue and black, reads well, is clear and easy to follow. Each monthly chapter provides information about the name of the month, zodiac sign, tribe, and stone, as well as a meditation for the month, poems, and prayers (in Hebrew and English). The book’s final section includes a glossary, a diagram of the Hebrew calendar year, and extensive notes, sources, and permissions for each of the chapters. The author is a Professor of Liturgy at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Jerusalem and the author and co-editor of several books. *From Time to Time* is a valuable, unique, and insightful contribution to understanding Jewish time, the Jewish calendar, holidays, and celebrations. It is recommended for Judaica collections in academic, public, and synagogue libraries.

Susan Freiband, Alexandria, Virginia

Continued on page 40

In *England’s Jews*, John Tolan demonstrates that, although England expelled its Jews in 1290, relations between Jews and their neighbors in earlier centuries were not altogether hostile. Serving as loan agents and traders they were considered so important in the economic life of the country that Jews sought and found protection, particularly from England’s nobility. This resulted in some church leaders seeking to limit fraternization between Jews and Christians. They demanded that Jews wear distinguishing badges and desist from employing Christian servants. Their demands went unheeded by nobility and commoners alike.

Unhappy with the multiculturalism and distressed about financial dependency on Jews, Church intellectuals entered the fray, one arguing that Jews recognized Jesus as Messiah but disavowed this knowledge to lead Christians astray. Under pressure, Henry III, who regarded the Jews as his own wards, was forced to withdraw some of his protections. When rumors reached Henry that a child had been martyred by the Jews of Lincoln he immediately sought to exterminate the city’s Jewish community. More temperate voices intervened, but the position of the Jews in England became much more tenuous. Faced with escalating debt, Henry tried to extract the funds from England’s barons. Their response was an insurgency during which debts owed to Jews were nullified and Jews were subjected to violence and massacre.

When Henry died Edward I inherited his father’s debts, but not his desire to protect the Jews in order to mitigate those debts. Tensions reached their peak in 1290 when Edward realized that expelling the Jews would replenish his coffers and placate his critics. Thus began a period of 350 years when Jews were officially absent from England.

With extensive endnotes, a bibliography, and an index this volume would be a valuable addition to academic collections supporting studies in medieval European history.

Randall C. and Anne-Marie Belinfante, Herkimer, NY

Schilling, Christopher L. *The Japanese Talmud: Antisemitism in East Asia*. London, C. Hurst, 2023. 144 pp. $32.00 (9781787389540) PBK.

This is a short book based primarily on Shilling’s travels through several East Asia countries as a guest professor. The first several chapters highlight the antisemitism, portrayals of Jews in books, and the business schools modeled on Jews, that Shilling was able to discover. It includes several examples from past decades, as well as highlighting claims by other Western writers that there is a lack of antisemitism in East Asia, which Shilling refutes. Instead, Shilling introduces the term “bisemitism” stating that one-quarter of the world’s population holds Anti and Philo views simultaneously. East Asians revere Jews based primarily on their exposure to Western antisemitic tropes and stereotypes. The author explains that although many in East Asia claim to admire and want to emulate Western Jews, that just demonstrates how antisemitic they are. The book contains an extensive Notes section, Bibliography, and Index. This volume is recommended for Judaica collections and public, synagogue, or academic libraries.

Sean Patrick Boyle, President, AJL, Librarian, Jewish Day School of the Lehigh Valley, Librarian, Congregation Keneseth Israel, Allentown, PA

Brody, Shlomo M. *Ethics of Our Fathers: A Jewish View on War and Morality*. Jerusalem, Maggib Books, 2024. 412 pp. $32.95 (9781592646760) HC.

Waving in the philosophy courses he teaches, his PhD in Law, and his rabbinical knowledge, Brody provides an accessible look at how Jewish morality and ethics are applied to the secular international and rabbinical laws governing warfare. Beginning right before World War I and proceeding through the modern day, the author uses case studies to provide a few pages of dramatic account of military action and then lays out the often-contrasting evaluations of the event from political leaders, military commanders, academics, and rabbinical scholars. Acknowledging the plurality of voices, Brody introduces the “Jewish multivalue framework,” where instead of creating a hierarchy between the values and selecting a main one to guide behavior, all moral claims are taken equally into consideration when making an ethical assessment of a given scenario.

Brody not only goes chronologically through his case studies but also conceptually. He begins with looking at justifications for fighting and who gets to make those decisions. Then the author looks at if it is ever acceptable to do preemptive attacks and preventive strikes. He concludes with actions that are always off-limits and addresses the questions of ‘proportionality’ along with the justification for civilian deaths and collateral damage. Although written before October 7, 2023, the case study examples are playing out in the daily news and provide an accessible way to better understand

Continued on page 41
justifications for the decisions being made in how the war is being fought. This book is recommended for all libraries.

Sean Patrick Boyle, President, AJL, Librarian, Jewish Day School of the Lehigh Valley, Librarian, Congregation Keneseth Israel, Allentown, PA


This collection of essays on Jews of Provence in the Middle Ages with essays in Hebrew, French, and English is the third of four volumes in Collected Studies, by an outstanding foremost scholar and expert on Provencal Judaism. It draws on unpublished archival manuscripts such as handwritten Latin manuscripts and other primary sources, revealing previously unknown texts discovered during years of research in the archives of Southern France, mostly on those of the county of Provence, particularly from the cities of Marseille and Aix-en-Provence and the town of Digne. Shatzmuller draws on the evidence of legal registers of the High Middle Ages (1250-1350) as well as those produced by the counties’ administration which introduce the reader to the ordinary people of the region and their daily life and preoccupations. His research shows the significance of Provencal Jewry within the larger framework of Jewish communities in the Mediterranean and western Europe in the Middle Ages.

The central poles of the book are the tensions between the rationalist adherents of Maimonidean philosophy and its opponents with more mystical, superstitious, theurgic, and astrological leanings that also fueled the Maimonidean controversy after Rambam’s passing. Treated by Shatzmiller are attitudes to the Albigensian controversy, the impact of translations from Arabic to Hebrew, and the intellectual contributions of Rabbis Kalonymus ben Kalonymus (Arles), Jacob ben Eliyahu, the renowned biblical commentator, astronomer, and philosopher Rabbi Levi ben Gerson (Gersonides), and others.

This superb instance of Jewish historical scholarship is highly recommended for all Jewish studies collections and University Libraries.

David B Levy, New York


A tattered suitcase brings a big surprise for this noted cookbook author. It has her great-grandmother’s, Blanche Lévy-Neymarck, recipes from occupied France. Blanche died in Auschwitz, but her memory lives on in these delicious recipes. Bitter Sweet also contains a diary kept by Prosper Lévy, her great-grandfather, and a highly respected medical doctor. Prosper served the French in World War I and received the highest honor by being awarded Légion d’honneur. His diary provides a first-hand account of the daily fear of the Jews and the rabid antisemitism. He writes, on December 8-10, 1940, “The Germans ordered the chancellor of the University de Lorraine to deny admission to Jewish applicants.” On the fateful day of November 9, 1940, Prosper writes, “Blanche and I register at the central police station again, where an officer adds the words ‘Juive’ and ‘Juif,’ respectively, on our identity papers, in red letters two centimeters high.”

This book is a history and cookbook. It presents the story of a French family who is living during the occupation of France and still managing to cook delicious food with limited resources. It is important to point out that this is not a kosher cookbook. There is the mixing of milk and meat and non-kosher cuts of meat are used. A skilled cook could make substitutions in the recipes if they wanted to keep kashrut. The recipe for a Yule Log (Bûche de Noël) is included in the book which was baked in addition to holidays on birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, and other celebrations. The pictures are gorgeous and especially enticing are the desserts for which the French are famous. The recipes for the pastries are not overly complicated and appear beautiful and delicious in the illustrations. They are usually made with milk or cream and would need a substitute if you wanted them to be parve. Bitter Sweet is a cultural history, recipe book, a family legacy and memorial to Holocaust victims. This book is recommended for cooks and pastry chefs, especially Francophiles. Libraries that collect food history would do well to look at this book.


Continued on page 42
Fishbane, Eitan and Elisha Russ-Fishbane. *Jewish Culture and Creativity: Essays in Honor of Professor Michael Fishbane on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday*. Brookline, Academic Studies Press, 2024. 410 pp. $139.00 (9798887193069) HC.

There is no shortage of books by Michael Fishbane or his students. *Jewish Culture and Creativity* isn’t even the first book in honor of Fishbane. Inside are loosely chronologically ordered essays by many of his past students, ranging from history, to theology, to rabbinic texts. Individually, the essays are all rather enjoyable. While some of them are rather dense, none of them are beyond the grasp of your average reader, whoever that might be. The variety of topics means that even if some of the essays do not speak to an individual reader, there is likely something in this book for everyone. Several of the essays speak about Fishbane’s Hermeneutic Theology, but overall there is no strong theme that appears across all of them.

Due to the unfocused nature of the book, it becomes hard to recommend it for any given kind of library outside of academic libraries. It is possible for any given library, public, academic, or synagogue, to have an audience for this book. However, a reader picking this book up won’t find a very strong theme that creates a specific draw to itself. But as mentioned before, due to the variety of essays in the book, it is hard to imagine no appeal to any given audience.

Andrew Lillien, Treasurer, AJL


The pictorial representation of Jewish women throughout history is very limited due to modesty considerations and access to female subjects. It also was biased towards the patriarchal nature of art in Jewish culture. Luckily, in the modern age, pictorial representation of women has expanded to allow more representation of various types of Jewish women. Photographs, paintings, and other mediums have expanded to allow for the female body and experience to be expressed.

One of these mediums is comics. In their book, *Jewish Women in Comics: Bodies and Borders*, editors Heiki Bauer, Andrea Greenbaum, and Sarah Lightman provide a glance into the role that Jewish women play in modern society through the lens of comics. The book is divided into three parts: a snippet of the comics themselves with detailed information about the author and their motivation for creating the comic, interviews about female representation, and essays about said female representation. The book goes beyond the mundane issues of Jewish modern life and delves into some of the harder topics: health, fertility, Jewish ritual, and cultural diversity. It deals with generational trauma regarding the Holocaust and being Jewish as a LGBTQ member of a Jewish community. A truly unique collection, this book would be appropriate for any academic institution, due to its extensive collection of essays on female representation.

Laura Schutzman, Hebrew Academy of Nassau County, Uniondale, NY, AJL Publications Chair


In a revised edition of his 2016 work, *Transforming the World: The Jewish Impact on Modernity*, Rabbi Leo Dee explores how Judaism and Jewish ritual have impacted the modern world. Following the tragic murder of his wife and two daughters in a terrorist attack in 2023, Rabbi Dee revised his book to include his new perspective in light of this tragedy. The book goes through many aspects of the *Torah* life that can benefit the modern world, internal happiness, friendships, and the purpose of work. It also discusses how the *Torah* can make our world better, the Noahide laws, justice as a guide to peace, and the role that the Jews play in keeping the world a moral place. It then delves into Jewish practices that can benefit the modern world, especially the concept of Shabbat, which allows humans to rest one day a week. A short primer on the role that Judaism plays in modern civilization, this book is appropriate for a public and synagogue library.

Laura Schutzman, Hebrew Academy of Nassau County, Uniondale, NY, AJL Publications Chair

Continued on page 43

Here have been quite a few exhibitions or “treasures” catalogs appearing in print in the last few years; *Encounters of Beauty* is unique. This exceptional catalog, based on a physical exhibition at the new National Library of Israel, includes text in Hebrew and English. The exhibit showcases two of the most important Judaica collections today, one public and one privately owned, in conversation with one another. The concept is simple, but the result is extraordinary. Renee Braginsky has been remarkably generous in digitizing his unique collection and making it available online. This exhibition connects material in the Braginsky collection with that of the National Library of Israel, bringing together similar manuscripts (such as two by the scribe/artist Joel ben Simon) or manuscripts covering similar themes (such as four manuscripts dealing with the concept of “Time”). Overall, it is a delightful volume, with digestible information about the contents, and breathtaking images throughout. This volume is recommended for all Judaica collections.

**Michelle Margolis, Columbia University, New York, NY**


The central question of the book is how Hasidism, or Hasidut, a religious movement best known for its sometimes radical, but certainly novel views about God, revelation, and personal religiosity produced a commitment in its adherents to the structure and obligations of the commandments (mitzvot) and ritual behavior. Mayse argues that law, passion, and mystical piety merged within the Hasidic movement to “produce a daring and highly original theory of the commandments and their significance.” To demonstrate this, Mayse focuses on many kinds of Hasidic texts (homilies, philosophical and legal writings, letters, hagiographic material, etc.) from the early but very formative and creative years of early Hasidut in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. In addition to focusing on internal dynamics within Hasidut, Mayse also explores how Hasidut was impacted by and reacted to modernity and the general Jewish and non-Jewish religious currents of the era.

In setting forth his thesis, Mayse seeks to undermine the preconceived notion of the “incompatibility of mysticism, myth and ritual” and set forth evidence that directly ties “spiritual flourishing to the mitzvot and to the Halachot that govern their performance.” Law of the Spirit is not merely a work of intellectual history and Jewish thought, it is also a reflection of the “relationship between ritual, devotion and the life of the spirit” that will find meaning with the observant practitioner. This accessible academic book will resonate deeply with scholars and learned readers. However, general or novice readers may find its language too academic and its level of detail overly granular.

**David Tesler, Efrat, Israel**


The expulsions from Spain and Portugal at the close of the 15th Century caused a seismic shift in Jewish history and is generally considered the start of what is now called the “early modern” era of Jewish history. Beginning with the expulsion, and continuing over the next hundred and fifty years, Jews from Spain and Portugal, many of whom had lived as “New Christians” or conversos for generations, would make their way to establish (or join established) Jewish communities throughout Europe, North Africa, and the Ottoman Empire.

Debby Koren has translated eight different “she’elot v’ishuvot” or Rabbinic responsa that gives flavor to the challenges facing these Jews and Jewish communities. The responsa Koren selected deal with fascinating and diverse issues such as (i) a woman in Jerusalem whose husband had disappeared but the divorce document provided to her via a messenger was lost when she fled Spain, (ii) a contract issue centered around the heavy taxes (often) imposed on Jewish communities for the right to settle in some lands, (iii) a Rabbi who comes to the defense of a man labeled as a heretic for his study of secular philosophy, (iv) inheritance law for those families torn apart (geographically and religiously) by the expulsion order, (v) the permissibility of maintaining use of a Christian name after returning to Judaism, (vi) inquisition informers, (vii) the nature and scope of excommunication and (viii) a question of proper liturgical practice from a far-flung community on the other side of the world.

Each chapter has a helpful historical and halachic (Jewish legal)

This is a fascinating translation and updating of Haym Solveitchik’s master’s thesis on the Halachic (Jewish law) development of the religious ban on Gentile wine (*yayin nesech*) in the High Middle Ages. Solveitchik, the preeminent intellectual historian of Halacha, explores the intersection of Jewish law, economic practices, and religious ideals in medieval Jewish communities.

Solveitchik examines how wine, as a significant economic and ritual commodity, was subject to various halakhic regulations. He discusses how these regulations influenced and were influenced by the economic realities and social conditions of the time, and interestingly, how different Jewish communities in medieval Europe handled the very same ban in different manners, based on a myriad of factors (both internal and external, religious and economic, social and political) unique to each community or geographic location.

Solveitchik is a master historian and teacher and in this slim volume uses the case study of the ban on Gentile wine to take the reader on a journey through social, economic, religious, and intellectual history before engaging in rigorous textual analysis of the relevant halakhic positions to come to truly fascinating and convincing positions that illuminate the nature of the halakhic process in general and medieval (northern) European Halacha in particular.

This book is recommended for academic libraries.

---


The *Guide to the Perplexed* by Moses Maimonides is perhaps the seminal work of medieval Jewish philosophy. The *Guide* seeks to harmonize Aristotelian philosophy with the teachings of the Hebrew Bible. Written in the 12th century, it addresses the intellectual challenges faced by those attempting to reconcile reason and faith.

Maimonides, known by the acronym “Rambam” delves into complex issues such as the nature of God, creation, prophecy, and the problem of evil, offering interpretations that often favor allegorical over literal readings of biblical texts. By emphasizing the symbolic meanings behind biblical narratives and commandments, the Rambam provides a framework for understanding religious texts in a rational context. This work has had a lasting impact on Jewish thought and continues to be a subject of intense study and debate among scholars.

Goodman and Lieberman’s modern and lucid translation with accompanying footnotes is sure to become the standard English translation for the next generation and beyond. The translation is prefaced by several introductory chapters that contextualize the social and intellectual world of Maimonides in general with his objectives in writing *The Guide to the Perplexed* in particular. This translation is highly recommended and belongs on the shelf of every comprehensive Jewish library. As the translators note in the introduction, “Maimonides’ project in the *Guide* is a vital reminder to Jewish thinkers today who fancy they can somehow sidestep like questions raised in our own far freer, more open society if they expect Judaism to survive.”

---


Based upon in-depth studies of biblical literature, ancient inscriptions, and scribal communities, William Schniedewind proposes a theory of biblical formation that emanates from apprenticeship learning and scribal communities. In doing so, Schniedewind seeks to counter the more common theory of biblical formation, namely, individualistic authorship.

The claim advanced throughout the book is that the authorship model misunderstands how writing occurred in ancient times. Schniedewind posits that individual writing is a reprojection of a more modern understanding of authorship (only beginning in Hellenistic times) and it was scribal communities that “were the primary setting for the creation, preservation and transmission of literature” in the pre-Hellenistic era. At the center of these scribal communities were the apprentices who learned their trade from more experienced scribes and were
attached to specific communities, such as the Temple, palace, military, or a particular commercial industry such as merchants or landowners.

Schniedewind makes his case by exploring a mountain of textual, archeological, and epigraphic evidence. He further locates the example of scribes of ancient Israel within the larger ancient Mesopotamian world. While the rise of scribes occurred within the context of Neo Assyrian conquest and rule, the destruction of the Temple and the Babylonian exile saw the decline of these specific communities and the emergence of the priests as the new scribal community leaders. *Who Really Wrote the Bible: The Story of the Scribes* is an important work in academic biblical studies. Although written in very accessible and clear language, this is not a book aimed at the general reader. Its level of detail and evidentiary findings are best suited to the expert reader and academic libraries.

David Tesler, Efrat, Israel

Rosenfeld, Ben Zion. *Credit and Usury in Jewish Society in the Mishnah and Talmud*. Leiden, Brill, 2024. 254 pp. $133.00 (9789004681958) HC.

Dr. Rosenfeld, Professor Emeritus of Jewish History, Bar Ilan University, uses in this study, the Mishnah, the two Talmudim, other rabbinical texts, and epigraphy to try to understand the rabbinical attitude and teaching regarding credit. The most well-known and striking aspect of the Biblical/rabbinical teaching regarding credit is its disapproval of charging interest on loans. Dr. Rosenfeld deepens the reader’s understanding of this and related matters by considering the rabbinical approach to credit generally and by exploring how rabbinical teaching developed in Roman-ruled Palestine and Sasanid-ruled Babylonia. This volume is recommended for collections on Jewish commercial and financial ethics, and for academic libraries.

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


Philosophy professor Goodman of Vanderbilt has written a most useful and insightful book. This “compan-ion” to Maimonides’ *Guide* aims to show how Maimonides sought “to reveal the harmony of biblical truths with those grasped by reason’s encounter with the natural world...When a text seems to clash with what reason and experience teach, the necessary adjustments must be disciplined by intellectual honesty and synthetic intelligence...” Dr Goodman’s portrayal of Maimonides is of a scholar who tries to assist ordinary Jews to live a mitzvah-oriented life and so refine themselves morally and intellectually. A great deal of text in the book is devoted to refuting Leo Strauss’ famous argument that Maimonides engaged in secret writing in the *Guide* and did not believe in Judaism or any other religion. Dr Goodman analyzes how the *Guide* deals with subjects such as the creation versus the eternity of the universe, Adam, Eve, and Job and moral and physical evil in the world, bodily resurrection as a symbol or as a literal future event, freedom and providence, and the mind as the human link to God. This title is recommended for public, synagogue, and academic libraries.

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


This study examines the direct and indirect influence of Russian 19th and 20th-century thought on Hebrew literature. Dr Lapidus compares leading Russian writers (many of whom, but by no means all, part of the Slavophile school or tendency) with several Hebrew (notably Enlightenment) writers (e.g. Y. L. Pinsoner and Y. L. Gordon), noting similarities and differences, for both were critical of what they considered to be the weak national consciousness of their people. A particularly fruitful theme of this book is that while Russian writers often wrote profound theological novels, Hebrew writers rarely did because

Continued on page 46
religious issues are dealt with in Jewish religious writings in an intensive and sophisticated way. They instead wrote fiction that dealt with ideological and political issues. This is an interesting contribution to Jewish literary and intellectual history and is recommended for academic libraries.

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

Finkelstein, Norman H. Saying No to Hate: Overcoming Antisemitism in America. Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society, 2024. 299 pp. $29.95 (9780827615236) PBK.

When Norman Finkelstein died earlier this year, he left a wide-ranging legacy of well-researched, easy to read books for both young people and adults. This is his final publication to see print. Saying No to Hate can be read as a history of American Jewry from a negative point of view. It begins with a summary of European antisemitism, including the Shoah. The bulk of the narrative follows the major anti-Jewish acts throughout U.S. history. Finkelstein begins with the struggles of the first Jews in New York and the other colonies. The book includes profiles of Jews who succeeded against the odds (including Mordecai Noah) and examines Washington’s famous statement to the Jews of Newport. The story includes the Jewish responses to the Mortara Case, General Grant’s Order #11, the Leo Frank case, the Nazis and other hate groups of the 1930s, and contemporary incidents up to the Pittsburgh shooting in 2018. There are also less-remembered antisemitic events, including the anti-immigrant sentiment of the 1880s that led to the creation of HIAS; the riot during the funeral of Rabbi Jacob Joseph in 1902; and the Massena incident in 1928. Chapter 11 shifts to the antisemitic and anti-Israel activities of the international community over the past 50 years. One major event the book misses is the 1936 Berlin Olympics.

Saying No to Hate can be used as a high school resource and as a companion to American Jewish history courses in synagogues and colleges. The writing is serviceable, and the endnotes and bibliography are basic but useful. Norm was a true friend of AJL whose work spanned several decades. This book should be considered by all Judaica libraries. It is a fitting final work from a wonderful man.

Fred Isaac, Oakland, CA


Darling, a retired professor of Journalism and Media, collected stories and photographed 150 survivors of the Terezin transit camp and ghetto for over a decade. This volume includes the testimonies of seventy-seven of them: what they witnessed, and how they survived. Nearly all had been teenagers or children during their stay and they are among the quickly diminishing numbers of camp survivors. The black and white portraits of each subject are powerful — many were taken in locations around Prague or the camp itself where their suffering occurred. Drawings and artwork, several by the subjects themselves, add poignancy to the memory of life and death in Terezin.

The ghetto was used as a ‘show place’ where the Nazis impressed outside visitors with their benign treatment of the Jews. Survivors recount stories of the many lectures, concerts, plays and educational programs they attended, including a prison library. But actual conditions were extremely harsh and over 33,000 people perished in the camp from disease and malnutrition. Some of the subjects in the book lived in Terezin for many months while others just passed through. Each story is mesmerizing. The book is large, nearly five pounds, and two feet in length when opened. It can be read cover-to-cover or selectively. This volume is highly recommended for college, research, and synagogue libraries.

Diane Mizrachi, PhD., Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California Los Angeles
The AJL Newsletter (Irene Levin-Wixman z”l, founding editor) was published in print from 1979 to 2010 by the Association of Jewish Libraries to inform members about AJL activities and issues related to Judaica libraries. From January 2011 through August 2019 it was split into two separate electronic publications — the AJL News and the AJL Reviews. As of September 2019 it is published digitally as AJL News and Reviews. Receipt of this publication is one of the benefits of membership. Please see the AJL website at https://jewishlibraries.org/ for membership rates.

**Editor-in-Chief**
Sally Stieglitz
Communications and Outreach Coordinator
Long Island Library Resources Council
627 N. Sunrise Service Road
Bellport, NY 11713
generaleditor@jewishlibraries.org

**Adult Review Editors**
Daniel Scheide
S. E. Wimberly Library
Florida Atlantic University
777 Glades Road
Boca Raton, FL 33431-6424
561-297-0519
dascheide@gmail.com
Please send adult books for review to D. Scheide

Trevan Hatch
Ancient Near East, Middle East, & Religion Librarian
Brigham Young University
Provo, Utah 84602
801-422-6118
trevan_hatch@byu.edu
Please send adult reviews to T. Hatch

**Children and YA Review Editors**
Rebecca Levitan
Librarian III
Baltimore County Public Library - Pikesville Branch
ralevitan@gmail.com

Judy Ehrenstein
Children’s Librarian,
Montgomery County Public Libraries—White Oak Branch
jehrenstein.ajlnews@gmail.com
Please contact Rebecca Levitan by email to inquire where to send children’s and YA books for review.

**Assistant Editor-in-Chief**
Ellen Drucker-Albert
Head of Reference & Collections, Lecturer in Law
Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, Yeshiva University
edruckerajlreviews@gmail.com

**Design and Art Direction**
Rachel Levitan
Nachal Matah 5/3
Ramat Beit Shemesh A, Israel
ajlcopyeditor@gmail.com

**Advertising Rates**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Rate</th>
<th>Dimensions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full page</td>
<td>$200</td>
<td>7 1/2” x 9 1/2”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half-page (vert)</td>
<td>$110</td>
<td>3 5/8” x 9 1/2”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half-page (horiz)</td>
<td>$110</td>
<td>7 1/2” x 4 3/4”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarter-page</td>
<td>$55</td>
<td>3 5/8” x 4 3/4”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ads may include color and hyperlinks. Dimensions are in inches.

All ads must be prepaid. Please submit all inquiries, finished copy, and PDFs to:

Hannah Srour
ajladmanager@gmail.com