

## Spotlight on a Judaica Special Collection

### *The Tel Aviv Collection at the Stanford University Libraries*

ZACHARY BAKER

*This article first appeared in the 2007-2009 issue of the newsletter published by the Taube Center for Jewish Studies at Stanford University. It is reprinted here with the permission of the Center.*

In 2006 we reported on an exciting acquisition by the Stanford University Libraries: the Eliasaf Robinson Collection on Tel Aviv. Over a period of nearly four decades, Robinson, who is one of Israel's leading antiquarian booksellers, collected close to 500 books and thousands of archival documents, photographs, postcards, ephemera, posters, maps, architectural plans, building permits, and even sewer diagrams, dating from the formative decades of Tel Aviv. Taken as a whole, this collection is an extraordinary resource on the economic, social, and cultural history of "the first Hebrew city."

On April 23, 2009—almost one hundred years to the day since the founding of Ahuzat Bayit, the garden suburb that formed the nucleus of the future metropolis—the Taube Center for Jewish Studies presented an academic symposium to celebrate the opening of an exhibit of the Tel Aviv Collection, "The First Hebrew City: Early Tel Aviv through the Eyes of the Eliasaf Robinson Collection." The symposium was supported by the Shoshana and Martin Gerstel Conference Fund and the Shenson Fund. The exhibit, on view in Green Library from April through August 2009, was curated by Zachary Baker and designed by Becky Fischbach (Stanford University Libraries).

At the symposium, following brief introductory remarks by Dr. Vered Shemtov (co-director of the Taube Center) and myself, three noted specialists, drawing upon materials in the Tel Aviv Collection, gave presentations on aspects of Tel Aviv's history and culture. Maoz Azaryahu (University of Haifa; author of *Tel Aviv: Mythography of a City* [Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press; illustrated edition, 2006]) gave a paper on "Tel Aviv's Silver Jubilee, 1934." He was followed by Anat Helman (Hebrew University of Jerusalem; author of *Urban Culture in 1920's and 1930's*

*Tel Aviv* [Haifa: Haifa University Press, 2007, in Hebrew]), who spoke about "Sport, the New Jew, and the First Hebrew City." The symposium concluded with a presentation by Barbara E. Mann (Jewish Theological Seminary of America; author of *A Place in History: Modernism, Tel Aviv, and the Creation of Jewish Urban Space* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005]), on "What We Write about When We Write about Tel Aviv."

The symposium also marked the official launch of the library's Tel Aviv Web site: <http://lib.stanford.edu/telaviv>. The home page for the Tel Aviv Web site provides links to the online inventory for the archival segment of the collection; documents, images, and books in the collection, and to an online version of the exhibit. Researchers everywhere now have ready access to much of the Tel Aviv Collection's contents. In addition, the collection



A view of Herzl Street, leading into the Herzliah Gymnasium. Undated, 1920s or 1930s.

Stanford University Libraries, Department of Special Collections

Web site marks the following "firsts" for the library's Digital Library Systems and Services:

- It is the first collection of works in the Hebrew alphabet to be digitized at Stanford.
- It is one of the first collections of twentieth-century archival files in Hebrew to be digitized anywhere.
- It is the first time that such a heterogeneous body of materials is being made available at Stanford from a single launching page.

The Eliasaf Robinson Collection on Tel Aviv has generated an extraordinary level of interest and enthusiasm, both on the Stanford campus and well beyond. A small group of Second Life devotees eagerly spent evenings and weekends setting up a version of the exhibit on the Stanford University Libraries' "island" in that virtual world. And within hours after the Web site was launched, the library received a request from an Israeli publisher for permission to reproduce one of the collection's vintage cinema posters. The Tel Aviv Collection promises to be one of the most sought-after resources in the Stanford University Libraries.

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## President's Message

SUSAN DUBIN

It is hard to believe that current board members are coming to the end of their terms of office. There are so many things had I hoped to accomplish and time is growing short to get them all done.

One of my more challenging goals was to become an ALA affiliate organization. Becoming an affiliate has already increased AJL's visibility. Our awards are now announced on the ALA Web site and there is a link to the AJL Web site through ALA. We will have a voice at the ALA National Convention; Elliot Gertel and Ellen Zyroff, our AJL-ALA liaisons, will represent us there. In speaking to a publisher recently, I learned that book sales of Sydney Taylor Award winners have increased, because booksellers are seeing our awards on the ALA Web site. The increased visibility is a definite plus!

Another goal was to increase support for regional conferences. Through National funding, the Western Regional Conference on Jewish Literature for Children has become an important annual event for authors, illustrators, publishers, librarians, and educators. The conference draws many public and school librarians, who count on AJL to keep them informed about Judaica publications

The new Israel AJL Group, *Igud Safranei ha-Yahadut*, had its second all-day workshop at the Music Library in the National Library of Israel. (See Ya'akov Aronson's article on the next page). A regional conference also took place in Canada. Of course, the NYMA chapter held outstanding workshops again this year, offering librarians in the New York/New Jersey area the best in continuing education. Regional conferences that offer exciting and informative programs are especially helpful to AJL members who are unable to attend our annual conventions.

The annual conventions provide members from all over the world the opportunity to get to know and learn from one another. This year the convention will take place in the Pacific Northwest for the first time. Seattle will welcome us at the Fairmont Olympic Hotel, in the heart of the city, next door to the main branch of the public library (an architectural masterpiece) and a few blocks from the famous Pike's Market. Our keynote speaker is the "Internet Librarian" himself, Joe Janes. The conference will seek to explore library services in the 21st century and our connection to education in the schools. We are inviting educators to come and learn with us in the hopes that they will see how we can help them reach the common goal of providing quality education through information literacy. Many thanks to the hardworking Seattle group that is putting this program together.

Biennial elections for AJL officers were again held by electronic ballot. The new officers will be installed at the conclusion of the Seattle convention. I am confident that they will lead AJL on to even bigger accomplishments in the future.

Looking forward to seeing many of you in Seattle!

# AJL Scholarship Fund

ELLEN SHARE

You have an opportunity to help support a library student and at the same time promote Judaica librarianship by making donations to the AJL Scholarship Fund. Each year AJL awards scholarships of \$1000 to two talented library science students who show an interest in pursuing a career in Judaica librarianship. Donating to the fund is a meaningful way to recognize simchas, honor the memory of a loved one, or wish someone a speedy recovery. Please remember to include the address of the family of those honored or remembered in order that we can notify the appropriate individuals. Send your donation to Sarah M. Barnard, Hebrew Union College-Klau Library, 3101 Clifton Avenue, Cincinnati, OH 45220. A thank you note is sent to each donor.

## Have You Heard?

LIBBY K. WHITE



AJL members who regularly attend conventions will remember pleasant and interesting encounters with Ena Dankmeyer Maduro of Curaçao. Ena's library recently moved into a new building—and the library is named for Ena!

The Jewish Book Council has named *Jewish Renaissance in the Russian Revolution* by Kenneth Moss and *Plumes: Ostrich Feathers, Jews, and a Lost World of Global Commerce* by Sarah Abredevaya Stein as co-winners of the Sami Rohr Prize for Jewish literature. The prize was awarded on March 31 in Jerusalem. The council also honored Ruth Gruber with its 2009 lifetime achievement award.

Jerusalem's Second Annual International Writers Festival took place May 2-6. The theme was Hebrew literature and works translated into Hebrew. Foreign participants included Paul Auster and Jamaica Kincaid. Chinese, Cuban, and Egyptian writers whose works are available in Hebrew were guests.

Tel Aviv University presented the Dan David Prize to Michael Cunningham and Margaret Atwood.

Notable spring exhibits opened in Baltimore, Los Angeles, and New York City. Baltimore's Jewish Museum of Maryland celebrated the work of Nancy Patz, author and artist. The theme of her show is memory—personal and communal. Patz was winner of the AJL's Sydney Taylor Book Award for *Who was the Woman Who Wore the Hat?*

"Monsters and Miracles: A Journey Through Jewish Picture Books" was presented by the Skirball Cultural Center in Los Angeles. A discussion of the exhibit with author Ilan Stavans was featured in *The Forward* of April 16.

The Biblical Art Museum in New York offered "Uneasy Communion: Jews, Christians, and the Altar Pieces of Medieval

Spain." The church altar pieces reflected Christian attitudes of supersession through the use of symbols.

It was recently revealed that President George Washington owes fines for two overdue books borrowed in 1789 from the New York Society Library. This library is the oldest in New York and is still operating today. Other borrowers from the New York Society Library were Aaron Burr, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay.

The New York University Press will soon publish *The Jews and the Civil War: A Reader*, edited by Alan Mendelson and Jonathan Sarna. The work describes the war's effect on northern and southern Jews. An article in the May 14, 2010 *Forward* by Ann Levin quotes Rabbi Gary Zola of HUC-JIR on Lincoln's role in the formation of American Jewish identity.

Jane R. Eisner, editor of *The Forward*, was selected for a Sigma Beta Chi Journalism Award for a series of three editorials on gender and family issues.

Israeli painter Avigdor Arikha died in Paris at 81. *The Jerusalem Post* called him "one of the giants of figurative painting."

## Judaica Librarians' Group (Israel) Spring Study Day

YA'AKOV ARONSON

Forty librarians from all over the country gathered at the National Library of Israel on April 28 to participate in the Spring Study Day of the Judaica Librarians' Group. The event took place in the newly renovated lecture hall of the National Library's Music and Sound Archives Collection. At a brief business meeting Haim Levi of the Hebrew Cataloging Department of the National Library of Israel (NLI) was chosen to serve as chairman of the group. The existing Steering Committee of six members from five institutions will continue to assist the new chairman. It was also decided to hold the study days semiannually.

Opening the program was Gil Weissblei, director of the Chaim Hazaz archive at NLI. He talked about the ethical dilemma confronting an archivist when the owner of the papers requests that they be destroyed but his executor decides that the material is of such importance that it should be preserved. Examples were drawn from conflicts that arose concerning the archives of Chaim Hazaz and Franz Kafka. Arnon Hershkovitz, founder of the Internet Forum Family Roots, discussed resources for genealogical research available on the Internet and in printed format.

Project Europeana Judaica, a part of the larger Europeana project to create a multilingual online collection of millions of digitized items from European museums, libraries, and archives, was described by the director of the Israeli part of the project, Dov Weiner. Closing the day was Dr. Gila Flam, director of the National Library's Music and Sound Archives Collection, who discussed the unique challenges encountered in digitizing a music collection of over 30,000 hours, recorded in many different formats over more than half a century.

# See You in Seattle, The City of Goodwill

TOBY HARRIS

We hope you've registered for the conference, made your hotel reservations, and arranged your transportation to Seattle because here's what's in store for you when you arrive.

Blast off on Sunday with *Fourth @ the Fairmont*—the grand Fairmont Olympic Hotel where we'll be! We've invited the community to join us from noon to 5:00 to view exhibits, get a little culture and be greeted by an array of local talent including klezmer, Ladino and other Jewish music, poetry, storytellers and local authors.



Joseph Janes will give the keynote address on Sunday night.

Dinner begins at 6:00, to allow ample time for night owls to get to fireworks over lovely urban Lake Union or for sleepyheads to go to bed. The engaging and witty Dr. Joseph Janes will share his passion for reference, innovation and the digital world. He's the monthly technology writer for *American Libraries*, an associate professor at the University of Washington Information School, and the founder of the Internet Public Library.

Monday begins two days packed with fascinating, fact-filled, and informative presentations. Start out bright and early with a walk down to the waterfront to experience the steep and beautiful hills of Seattle. And the sessions... Do you have cataloging issues? Technology overload? Collection challenges? Digitization questions? Hear representatives from Yad Vashem, the National Library of Israel, Stanford, Yeshiva University, and the University of Washington. Visit the award-winning school library at Seattle Hebrew Academy, a unique historic building set in a Pacific Northwest urban forest.

A mere two blocks from the hotel, the Seattle Public Library Boeing Computer Lab will be ready for us. We'll be led on a tour of online reader advisory sites and we'll learn how to use Facebook to our advantage.

Meet authors Jacqueline Dembar Greene, Jacqueline Jules and Maggie Anton along with this year's Sydney Taylor Award winners, April Halprin Wayland, Robin Friedman and Margarita Engle.

At the Monday AJL Awards Luncheon, we welcome first-time attendees, acknowledge our Fanny Goldstein & Lifetime Award winners, and congratulate those who

achieved accreditation. Tuesday events conclude with our annual book awards banquet.

On Wednesday, our tours invite you to venture out of downtown, off to Seattle's old Jewish neighborhoods with a guide from Washington State Jewish Historical Society. Or surround yourself with native Pacific Northwest plants and trees on a guided walk through the Washington Park Arboretum.

You'll be able to enjoy face-to-face communication at one or more of many meetings and roundtable discussions scheduled throughout the convention. Colleagues all around you, sparkling bodies of water, majestic mountains, historic elegance, and continual brain food—you'll go home high and happy!

## And don't forget this year's Mentor Mingle ...

STEPHANIE (SARA LEAH) GROSS

Please plan to drop by the Mentor Mingle at the convention Sunday from 4:30 to 5:30 PM, directly after the Newcomers Meeting. Below is the preliminary program:

- Formation of mentor pairs for first-time attendees. If you'd like to be paired before the convention, please contact me at [ajlmentoringATgmail.com](mailto:ajlmentoringATgmail.com).
- Establishment of study buddies/partners for exploring new technology and trends.
- Panel of former mentees/mentors to shared wisdom gained [tentative]. Have any anecdotes, testimonials, pearls of wisdom to share? Let me know.
- Discussion of topics such as transfer of professional skills to Judaica librarianship. Participants may wish to review the chair's recent article on social media, which appeared in the February-March April issue of the newsletter and was to the wiki.
- Employment advice, issues, solutions
- Getting help from a distance: issues, aids, assessment.

Representatives from far-flung corners of the globe are especially encouraged to become delegates to the Mentoring Committee.

I will be available during breaks and in the evenings for private consultations, tutorials and networking. You may contact me ahead of time at the e-mail address above or by phone (212.960.5442). Looking forward to seeing you all there!

## JPS Ad

# Chapter Chatter

TOBY ROSSNER

## From the Chapter Relations Chairs

*Submitted by Irene K. Seff and Enid Sperber*

We hope you are planning to attend the Seattle Convention. We're looking forward to meeting many new first-timers, as well as reconnecting with old friends. The convention is a great place to share and to gain valuable expertise from librarians working in synagogue, academic, day school, and special libraries.

If you are a chapter officer, or if you want to learn more about a chapter in your area or create a chapter in your area, please plan to attend our evening chapters' workshop. We will share best practices as well as trouble-shoot problem areas.

## From Amalia Warshenbrot, Southeast Regional Chapter Representative

My model for chapters in the southeast is the Atlanta Chapter. Sheila Riegel, early childhood librarian of the Epstein Day School, is currently coordinating the Atlanta chapter. She arranges meetings every other month, which are attended by about fifteen librarians, among them, my mentor, Hazel Karp. Way back when, Hazel introduced me to AJL and encouraged me to attend conventions. Even though Atlanta was a four-hour drive away, the Atlanta Chapter was the closest to Charlotte, and she invited me to join the Atlanta Chapter meetings. When I attended meetings I stayed overnight as the guest of a chapter member. It felt like a family visit. The Speizman Jewish Library in Charlotte, where I worked at that time, received advanced accreditation with Hazel's help.

Sheila plans meetings in a professional and informative manner. Topics have included the copyright act for public performance of movies; cooperative purchasing among school libraries for greater discounts; and providing useful handouts, such as the American Association of School Libraries *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner*, book lists, and sources for Hebrew books. Chapter members have brainstormed ways to promote reading for middle school students and have shared ideas for fund raising. The Atlanta Chapter, currently made up of school librarians, plans to invite synagogue librarians to join. Kol Hakavod to Sheila Riegel and to the Atlanta Chapter.

## Montreal Chapter

*Submitted by Marsha Lustigman and Chaya Goldman*

AJL-Montreal recently organized a guided exhibition at the McCord Museum of Canadian History in Montreal. "Jewish Painters of Montreal: Witnesses of their Time, 1930-1948" re-

flects the rich and distinctive artistic contribution of painters in the Jewish community during this time of social and economic upheaval. The insightful commentary of museum docent and new AJL member Rona Vandelman, made it a rewarding and fascinating morning for all. The museum catalog, published in both French and English and written by curator Esther Trépanier, offers a fascinating view of the Montreal Jewish community during the depression and war years.

Long-time Montreal Chapter member Goldie Sigal has been awarded the 2010 Canadian Jewish Book Award for her illustrated Yiddish comic book, *Stingy Buzi and King Solomon/Der karger Buzi un Shloymeh Hameylekh*, (Lomir Hofn Press, 2009). A recent posting on Hasafran detailed this wonderful book: "Each page features an illustration in full color, with Yiddish script in the dialog "balloons," and transliteration and English translation beneath. The book will be enjoyed by children from about 4 to 10 years old, along with their parents and grandparents, and anyone who wants to learn or practice Yiddish while having fun doing so." Goldie Sigal was formerly the Judaica librarian at McGill University. She has presented at AJL conventions, most recently on the *Joe Fishstein Collection of Yiddish Poetry*, which she edited.

Bienvenue à Montréal—Welcome to Montreal! The AJL Convention 2011 Committee is revving up to offer the best of Quebec hospitality in all official languages to our membership next year. Our theme, Cultural Diversity—Cultural Mosaic: Bagels, Borscht and Borekas, gives you some idea of what is in store for you June 19-23, 2011, at the beautiful downtown Marriott Chateau Champlain. Our Convention Committee represents school, synagogue, and academic libraries. The world-class Montreal Jewish Public Library is actively participating to help us create the best convention ever. So apply for your passports asap and make plans to drive, fly, take the train, or swim across the Great Lakes to our

beautiful, multicultural, multilingual city on the banks of the St. Lawrence River. À bientôt—See you soon!

## South Florida Chapter (SFAJL)

*Submitted by Etta Gold*

The South Florida Chapter held its April meeting at Temple Beth Am in Pinecrest, where Etta Gold enjoyed showing off her newly remodeled library. This was the first opportunity for the chapter to tour the facility since its re-dedication last September. We were able to meet, lunch, and schmooze in the Adult Reading Room during school hours while the children's section was able to function uninterrupted—now that the areas are separated and each so greatly improved.

We enjoyed meeting our newest members, librarians Myrtle Joseph and Jaime Fogel from the Holocaust Documentation and Education Center of Hollywood. Founded in 1980, the Center has achieved international acclaim and recognition for maintaining the largest self-produced, standardized oral history library collection. The Center offers "meet the author" series every month, visual arts and writing contests, and museum/artifact tours.



Amalia Warshenbrot (left) was invited by Sheila Riegel, librarian at the Epstein Day School, to attend a recent Atlanta Chapter meeting at Torah Day School.

Jaime and Myrtle are brand new to our area and to this remarkable institution. We look forward to their increased involvement with our chapter and with national AJL.

Toby Rossner adds: The South Florida Chapter co-sponsored a family event centered around the children's book *Klez4Kidz* on March 6 at Florida Atlantic University's Wimberly Library. The event included a dramatic reading, live music, and a PowerPoint presentation from the book.

### **New England Chapter (NEAJL)**

*Submitted by Toby Rossner*

The New England Chapter will hold its annual meeting at the South Area Solomon Schechter Day School in Norwood, Massachusetts on June 11. One of the suggested topics is "marketing your library." The main purpose of the meeting is for Judaica librarians across New England to meet, learn, share ideas, and network.

### **Southern California Chapter (AJLSC)**

*Submitted by Judy Cohn*

On April 18th AJLSC joined National AJL, Sinai Temple Blumenthal Library, the Whizin Center for Continuing Education, and the Community Library at American Jewish University in sponsoring the annual Western Regional Conference on Jewish Literature for Children. This year the conference took place at the Skirball Cultural Center. Attendees visited the exhibit, "Monsters and Miracles: A Journey Through Jewish Picture Books," and heard a presentation by its curator, Tal Gozani. Lunch was at American Jewish University, where Joni Sussman from KarBen Books, Richard Michelson, Sydney Taylor Award winning author and gallery owner, and Eugene Yelchin, illustrator, discussed illustrated Jewish books for children. The event featured a book sale and silent art auction with contributions from the Jewish Artists Initiative of Southern California as well as manuscript consultations with editor Joni Sussman. A tour of the library and autographing by local authors concluded the day.

### **Chicago Chapter**

*Submitted by Debbie Feder*

The Chicago Chapter has had a great first half of the year. We started off with a very successful program at the Illinois Holocaust and Education Center, where we toured a powerful exhibit and visited the library. Matthew Sackel gave a fantastic presentation about the history of the collection and where it stands now. In February we gathered at the Book Stall in Winnetka, Illinois, to hear presentations by local authors including Brenda Ferber and Charlotte Herman. We were also privileged to hear from some local members of the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee, including Debbie Colodny, Rachel Kamin, and Debbie Feder.

### **New Mexico Chapter**

*Submitted by Rabbi Chavah Carp*

The Jewish Librarians of New Mexico met in January at the Myra Carp Memorial Library at Congregation Nahalat Shalom in Albuquerque. Although attendance was sparse, we were treated to a wonderful presentation by Santa Fe based Gaon Books publisher Ron Duncan Hart and book-designer Gloria Abella Ballen,

relatively new publishers of Judaica. Gaon publishes books on cultural diversity, with special attention to women's voices and Judeo-Spanish traditions. As a result of Gloria and Ron's visit to the Albuquerque group, Gaon Books took out an advertisement in the *AJL Newsletter* and will now send review copies to AJL. Please visit Gaon Books at the Seattle Convention or visit them online ([www.gaonbooks.com](http://www.gaonbooks.com)).

In April, we are planning an evening meeting to discuss donation policies: why they are important and what to include. After dinner at a local restaurant, we will reconvene at the home library of Rabbi Chavah Carp to browse through her very comprehensive Jewish collection.



Rabbi Chava Carp thanks Gloria Abella Ballen and Ron Duncan-Hart of Gaon Books for their participation at the Jewish Libraries of New Mexico meeting, held in January. Behind Rabbi Carp is the Nahalat Shalom Myra Carp Library dedication plaque, made in memory of Chava's mother, Myra Carp, z"l.

### **Capital Area Chapter (AJL-CAC)**

*Submitted by Ellen Share*

On January 17, the Capital Area Chapter met to discuss children's books. Naomi Morse gave a short talk on "Does this book look Jewish?: Adventures with Uri Shulevitz's *How I Learned Geography*." This was a 2008 Caldecott Honor Book. Mrs. Morse read to the group. A discussion of this book and Jewish children's literature followed. The setting of the book is Turkestan (now Kazakhstan), and in this autobiographical account, Shulevitz describes life with his poor family and his father buying a map even when he has no money to buy food. Shulevitz was raised Jewish, but the book itself has no direct Jewish content. There is no description of Jewish life, customs, or practices. As to the question of whether it is a Jewish book, the discussion reached no conclusion. We continued our discussion by focusing on Holocaust books for children, need for values in Jewish children's literature, and the Sydney Taylor winners. Mrs. Morse referred to the pamphlet on the AJL Web site, *Excellence in Jewish Children's Literature*, which she uses in evaluating books.

We appreciate the hospitality of Mindy Hecker and the insight and reflections of Naomi Morse.

### **Florida West Coast Chapter**

*Submitted by Sylvia Firschein*

The West Florida Chapter's January meeting featured a talk by our member Sharlya Gold, author of many books including the Yemenite story book *The Answered Prayer*. Sharlya and her husband now live in Sarasota; she was the librarian of the JCC.

We met in late April in St. Petersburg in the library of our good friend from New Jersey Esta Blaxberg.

### Long Island Chapter (LI-AJL)

Submitted by Wendy A. Marx

What is it with Judaism and time? As I write, Passover has ended, we are counting the Omer, and a successful LI-AJL year has ended. We held our annual meeting with the public librarians of Nassau and Suffolk Counties on April 20. Our members reviewed current children's and young adult books with Jewish values and themes that are suitable for public libraries. Marcia Posner, esteemed member and founder of LIAJL, spoke on the topic. Our chairperson was one of our younger members, who was guided by the former chair. We hope this will be a good model for the future.

And as our year winds down, we look forward to our annual end-of-year dinner in May/June, to be followed in July by our planning meeting for the 2010-2011 year.

### San Antonio Chapter

Submitted by Marlene Reynolds

The San Antonio Chapter is planning for its next event, which will be an informal dinner meeting.

### New York Metropolitan Area (AJL-NYMA)

Submitted by Marion Stein and Rita Lifton

NYMA's 2010 School Library Workshop was held on March 10 at the Abraham Joshua Heschel High School in New York City. Workshop coordinators Rachel Glasser and Leah Moskovits put together an excellent program about visual literacy and the future of publishing, and provided two outstanding presenters, Eric Goldman, founder and president of Ergo Media, and Larry Yudelson, founder and editorial director of Ben Yehuda Press. The morning began with the customary "meet and greet." It was rewarding to see such an excellent turnout for this event—no surprise as the topics are so timely and important to librarians.

Eric Goldman's topic was "The Film Library, Visual Literacy and the Future of DVD Publishing: Relevance for Today and Tomorrow." He began by showing clips from two iconic films. Before viewing them, he suggested to the audience that they watch from many different angles and "read the visuals carefully." The first clip from *Defiance*, a 2008 film about the Belorussian Jewish resistance during the Shoah, showed a Jewish winter wedding in the forest under the keen surveillance of both the Nazis and the partisan fighters. The clip elicited responses such as "it showed both joyful and violent resistance on the part of the Jews," "the snow falling symbolizes purity and cleansing," and "the cinematographer creates high tension throughout the entire episode."

The second clip was taken from *Avalon*, a 1990 film set in the immediate post-WWII era in Baltimore. It deals with the disconnect between members of a Jewish family residing in the United States and relatives who have recently come to the United States after having survived the Shoah. It is a film packed with rich opportunities for discussion of relationship issues as well as topics relating to the historical era in which it is set.

Mr. Goldman stressed the value of enhancing classroom work with visual materials. Teachers may be not know how to find all

the relevant materials that are available. This is precisely where the librarian can play a crucial role. Some schools have rich visual collections. Others may not. Mr. Goldman pointed out that many films are available online so that libraries need not own films in order to use them.

Mr. Goldman further pointed out the value of allowing students to make their own films. Students enjoy working with this technology, and some may even display unusual talent when given this opportunity. Attendees very much appreciated the expertise that Mr. Goldman shared with them. They came away feeling empowered and ready to make recommendations about the use of visual materials to the teachers in their schools.

The presentation by Larry Yudelson, "Books and Phones, Kids and Librarians: The Future of Book Publishing," offered a personal view of the situation facing book publishers today. Instead of bemoaning the demise of print media, Mr. Yudelson decided to turn each challenge into an opportunity for creative change—for himself, as a small "boutique" publisher, and for the industry as a whole. He noted with pleasure that despite Google Books, a venture that wants to put everything in print on the Web, he sees a statistically significant rise in the number of books sold over the past few years.

Mr. Yudelson began his talk by showing two books from his personal collection. One that is very special to him is the 1973 sci-fi book *Protector* by Larry Niven. He quoted from the book to show that what was sci-fi in 1973 is now reality. He continued this theme by giving examples of sci-fi vocabulary that is commonly used today e.g. Google, ebook, blog, Kindle, and Twitter. His takeaway—be open to changes and make them work to your advantage.

Mr. Yudelson then gave a brief history of publishing in the past century pointing out that many publishing houses were named for their founders, such as Simon and Schuster (named for Henley Simon) and Alfred Knopf. While these publishing houses have been bought out by big conglomerates, at the same time there is a counter movement to micro-publishing and even self-publishing. The world of publishing is definitely changing and we, as readers and librarians, can help publishers by writing online reviews that bump a title up on the Google and Amazon lists. In other words, we have to play the game and not be intimidated. We should not throw up our hands and lament books as a thing of the past. Mr. Yudelson feels that along with the availability of electronic texts, there is also a return to the art publishing field. Some people are creating beautiful books as desirable objects for their own sake.

Mr. Yudelson gave a most engaging and presentation. A marvelous storyteller, he infused his talk with unexpected moments that provoked many belly laughs from his rapt audience.

Events on the horizon are our annual cataloging workshop, currently in the planning stage, and the spring conference. NYMA president, Roz Friedman, is busily planning the June 10 Spring Conference at The Harriet and Kenneth Kupferberg Holocaust Resource Center and Archives in Bayside, New York. The on-site coordinator for the event is Sara Rofofsky Marcus, NYMA's discussion list moderator.



# Reviews of Titles for Children and Teens

EDITED BY LINDA R. SILVER

## In The Spotlight

**Deutsch, Stacia, and Rhody Cohon. *Hot Pursuit: Murder in Mississippi*. Illus. by Craig Orback. Minneapolis, MN: Kar-Ben/Lerner, 2010. 39 pp. \$17.95. ISBN: 978-0-761-33955-7. Gr. 4-7.**

Michael "Mickey" Schwerner has a dilemma. It is 1964, and Neshoba County, Mississippi police officers are demanding that the car he is in pull over. He and the other two civil rights in the car are wanted by the police and also by the local Ku Klux Klan. As the leader, Mickey must decide if he should tell the driver to stop the car or keep going. By starting the story at this crucial point, the authors convey the enormity of the situation, which is emphasized by illustrations that show the men's fear. From that tense beginning, the narrative weaves back to tell how Michael Schwerner, a Jewish boy from New York, was inspired to fight for social justice. The persistence of segregation in the South provoked Mickey to move to Meridian, Mississippi, where he opened Freedom Schools for better education of African Americans and helped African Americans register to vote.

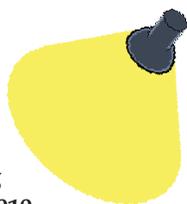
The narrative then returns to the present predicament, weaving in biographical information about the other two civil rights activists in the car. James Earl "J.E." Chaney was an African American from Mississippi. Andrew Goodman was a Jew from the North. Mickey decides to obey the law and has J.E. pull over. The police arrest them and hold them for a few hours. They are then set free into a KKK trap. The story ends with the terrible demise of these brave men. Forty-four days after Schwerner, Chaney, and Goodman went missing, their bodies were found in a ditch, beaten and shot.

Although this book is short, it is engrossing and informative. Young readers gain an understanding of the time period, without being burdened by lengthy text. Each chapter begins with a quote from a famous activist that encourages social justice. The realistic illustrations of the figures in the story including the KKK members, complement the narrative. *Hot Pursuit* is strongly recommended for all libraries.

Heather Lenson, Jewish Education Center, Cleveland, OH

**Glaser, Linda. *Emma's Poem: The Voice of the Statue of Liberty*. Illus. by Claire Nivola. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2010. 32 pp. \$17.00. ISBN 978-0-547-17184-5. Reviewed from an uncorrected proof. Preschool-Gr. 3.**

Emma Lazarus was a young woman full of passion and integrity. She was a writer, a Jew, and most important, a woman who wanted her voice to be heard. A member of a privileged family, she lived in New York City during the latter part of the nineteenth century. One day she visited the New York Harbor, where she saw many impoverished immigrants—Jews and non-Jews—who had traveled from afar for freedom in America. She began to help these people, which then inspired her to write one of America's most powerful poems. This poem, "The New Colos-



sus," eventually engraved (in part) upon the Statue of Liberty, voiced a welcome to all new immigrants to the United States. In *Emma's Poem*, author Linda Glaser writes about Emma Lazarus as a little girl and then a grown woman. Claire Nivola, the illustrator, creates elegant full-page illustrations done in watercolors and gouache. The magical pictures bring to life a beautiful story that is part of American history and should never be forgotten.

Linda Glaser is the talented author of several other picture books including *Mrs. Greenberg's Messy Hanukkah*, *The Borrowed Hanukkah Latkes*, *Our Big Home: An Earth Poem*, and the excellent immigration novel, *Bridge to America*. *Emma's Poem* has an author's note at the back of the book along with the full text of the poem, "The New Colossus." It is appropriate for children ages 4-8 and highly recommended for all libraries.

Lisa Katz, Greenbrae, CA

**Kimmelman, Leslie. *The Little Red Hen and the Passover Matzah*. Illus. by Paul Meisel. New York: Holiday House, 2010. 32 pp. \$16.95 ISBN: 978-0-8234-1952-4. Reviewed from a galley. Kdg.-Gr.3.**

In this charming twist on the classic folktale, the Little Red Hen works hard to prepare homemade matzah for her Passover seder. Her friends, Sheep, Horse, and Dog, rebuff her repeated attempts to enlist their help in the hard work of planting, harvesting, and milling the grain. Dog even goes so far as to say to her, "We're your friends, not your servants." When the famished farm animals come to Little Red Hen's house on the first night of Passover wanting to share the meal, the wise bird remembers the line in the Haggadah to "Let all who are hungry, come and eat." The true meaning of being a friend and a mensch wins out.

Meisel's illustrations, done in ink, watercolor, and pastel on Arches watercolor paper, humorously capture the exasperation the hardworking hen feels towards her idle barnyard companions. A trio of little yellow chicks patiently waiting in a high chair for the seder to begin is particularly delightful. The book includes a summary of the Passover story, a matzah recipe, and a glossary of Yiddish words and Passover foods. Recommended.

Allison Marks, Temple Israel, Akron, OH

**Littman, Sarah Darer. *Life, After*. Scholastic, 2010. New York: Scholastic, 2010. 288 pp. \$17.99. ISBN: 978-0-545-15144-3. Reviewed from an ARC. Gr. 7-10.**

"There was a time ... when I too was a normal girl who looked forward to the end of the school day, looked forward to going home..." But that was Before, before the Argentinean economic crisis of the early 2000s ruined countless Argentinean families, including that of teenage Danielle Bensimon, the Jewish protagonist of this extraordinary novel. As Dani tells it, her personal story is woven into the turbulent recent history of Argentina, where along with the dirty war, "disappearances," and economic ruin, Jews also experienced a deadly terrorist attack on the Jewish community headquarters, the AMIA, in Buenos Aires that killed and injured many people, including Dani's pregnant aunt. Against this background, Danielle's family is among the many desperate

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Argentinean Jews who emigrate to other countries; they move to New York. Although removed now from the site of such sad experiences, the family's cares persist and it is mainly through Dani's experiences in a new school that their moving and courageous striving for a normal, happy life is portrayed.

Sharply drawn, believable, and individualized characters abound: no stereotypically clueless parents or high school meanies here. Dani is a mensch, whose sadness over losing a home, a language, and a boyfriend; not fitting in at school; and being powerless to help her severely depressed father, is more than most teens face. But she never whines and she confronts her problems with a strength of character that eventually wins her friends in school, among whom are a brother and sister whose father was killed on 9/11, and that will also win her the admiration and affection of all who read this very fine book. The Jewish content is well integrated into the story, one of the characteristics of Littman's earlier novel, *Confessions of a Closet Catholic*, which won a 2006 Sydney Taylor Book Award. Like that book, this is no mere problem novel but an affirmative, beautifully constructed and superbly written exploration of the authentic challenges that face a strong, smart, sensitive, and spirited Jewish girl. Highly recommended for every library!

Linda R. Silver, Cleveland, OH

**Molnar, Haya Leah.** *Under a Red Sky: Memoir of a Childhood in Communist Romania.* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010. 302 pp. \$17.99. ISBN: 978-0-37431840-6 Pbk. Gr. 8–adult.

*Under a Red Sky* is a memoir that tells the little-known story of Bucharest's Romanian Jews under Communism from the late 1950s to 1961. This intense first-person narrative details the life of an extended family of seven adults and one child, who live in a few rooms in a house in Bucharest. Eva, the narrator, recalls the sounds, sights, foods, and Romanian words that draw the reader close to her experiences. Though the narrator is ostensibly a child, she writes with the perceptive and expressive voice of an adult, accurately recalling her childhood. We follow Eva's story during the years she grew from seven to ten, when the family, after much difficulty, emigrated to Israel. Living a secular life, her family is nevertheless branded as Jewish, and subjected to governmental scrutiny, loss of their jobs, and many punitive indignities. Perseverance, courage, and complicated love and support relationships keep them sane until their final escape.

Eva's connections with her beloved Grandpa Yosef, her Grandma Julia and her parents are memorable. The story moves swiftly, and the book is difficult to put down. One reads the last page with regret, wanting to know what happened next to people one has come to care for. When the book begins, Eva does not know that she is Jewish, though she frequently hears her grandparents speaking Yiddish. The passage in which grandpa Yosef gives Eva a mezuzah and introduces her to Hebrew letters and her previously unknown Jewish identity is especially moving. The book includes black-and-white photographs of the family, some by Eva's father, Gyuri Zimmerman.

It is necessary to issue a caveat about designating this as a children's book. In one chapter, Eva's grandmother Julia describes the atrocities committed against Jews in Bucharest during World War II, by the Iron Guard, the Legion of the Archangel Michael known as the Legionnaires. The description is unbear-

ably graphic, making the book inappropriate for the youngest members of the publisher's target audience of children ages 10 and up. The book is better suited to mature young adults, 14 and older, as well as adults. *Under a Red Sky*, Haya Leah Molnar's first book, brings to life an unfamiliar chapter of Jewish history. It is highly recommended for young adult and adult collections in Jewish and public libraries.

Naomi Morse, Silver Spring, MD

**Meyerhoff, Jenny.** *Queen of Secrets.* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010. 240 pp. \$16.99. ISBN: 978-0-374-32628-9. Gr. 8–12.

A Bible story in modern dress? Yes! Here is an excellent, engrossing YA novel with an honest voice, stylish writing, attractive characters, relevant issues, strong Jewish identity, and a smart plot that loosely follows the Scroll of Esther while tightly involved in its moral dilemma.

The plot takes place in the fall, creating a year-round read and not just a Purim book. Wonder which character is which biblical personage? The names begin with the same letter. Orphaned Essie lives with her grandparents. She is a public high school sophomore, thrilled with her new status as cheerleader, drawn to the magnetic football captain, Austin, when Micah, her estranged, observant, just-moved-to-town cousin, pops up on the team. Austin's best friend Harrison is a bully who flips out of control after a game injury. Tensions rise between characters competing for Essie. Buckling under teenage peer pressure, Essie hides her Jewish identity, hates her secret, and fears her cousinship with Micah will out her.

Essie switches to the popular crowd, but suffers conflicting loyalties. Her old friends—independent, creative young women—sharply contrast with the superficial beauty queens. Memories of her dead parents inject an undertow of grief. Essie finds one secret leads to another, each one harder to manage. As she decides what kind of person to be, family and friends divulge their secrets, making for an emotional, cathartic dénouement. A nasty act of anti-Semitism and chatter about prom-night sex peg the fiction for teen readers. This standout first-person narrative is well paced, delivered by empathetic characters communicating believably; it turns readers into page turners, even gluing those who know how the Purim saga ends. *Queen of Secrets* should not be a secret: it is highly recommended.

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

**Ziefert, Harriet.** *Passover: Celebrating Now, Remembering Then.* Illus. by Karla Gudeon. Maplewood, NJ: Blue Apple Books, 2010. 40 pp. \$17.99. ISBN: 978-1-60905-020-7. Ages 4–8.

Ziefert and Gudeon, the award-winning duo behind *Hanukkah Haiku*, blend straightforward storytelling with exquisitely rendered folk-art watercolors to create an enchanting Passover book ideal for every synagogue collection. Ziefert goes beyond merely recounting the Passover story by challenging readers with the question of "Why?" encouraging them to remember the past and cherish the modern-day Passover celebration. Ten gatefold pages serve as the book's centerpiece, linking the familiar features of the seder—a hard-hearted Pharaoh, the ten plagues, the parting of the Red Sea, the hidden afikomen, and more—to the biblical story of the Israelites' flight from Egypt to

freedom. A page describing charoset, for example, accompanies a fold-out illustration of enslaved Israelites preparing mortar for construction of the pyramids. Striking paintings of stylized, fanciful foliage frame the text, giving an appealing illuminated-manuscript quality to the book's design. Generations of young readers, as well as adults who appreciate a finely crafted book, will read, relish, and remember this stunning work, destined to become a favored classic. Highly recommended.

Allison Marks, Temple Israel, Akron, OH

## BIBLE

**Coulter, Laurie.** *Kings and Carpenters: One Hundred Bible Land Jobs You Might Have Praised or Panned. Jobs in History Series.* Illus. by Martha Newbigging. Toronto: Annick Press, 2010. 96 pp. \$16.95. ISBN: 978-1-55451-226-3. Gr. 4-7.

What tasks did people do in ancient times? Many occupations depended on where they lived, what their families did, and who was in charge of the area. Eleven chapters divide the jobs into categories that include farming jobs, city jobs, at-sea jobs, religious jobs, and military jobs. The reader will learn about different natural resources, animals common to the area, and the goods and services that were of importance for commerce and day-to-day living. Ancillary information includes biblical quotes, descriptions of some of the archaeological finds in the area, and the answer to what people did before there was indoor plumbing. Cute illustrations accompany the detailed descriptions, and there is a good index and recommendations for further reading.

The title is as catchy as the others in the series, but "Bible Land" is not quite accurate. While the occupations are typical of the Iron Age (about 1300 to 600 BCE), the only "Jewish" job described is that of "Levitical priest." There are several references to Jewish kings and prophets, but the main focus is on the Phoenicians, particularly their sea trade and alphabet. Although the book includes such jobs as necromancer and village elder, it is useful for descriptions of the period and better suited to younger readers than Sherman's *Your Travel Guide to Ancient Israel* (Lerner, 2004). Marian Broida's *Ancient Israelites and Their Neighbors* (Chicago Review Press, 2003) is still the strongest resource about the time period, but *Kings and Carpenters* is also recommended for all libraries. The illustrations and language are appropriate for readers aged nine to twelve; the wealth of information is useful to anyone interested in the historical era.

Kathe Pinchuck, Congregation Beth Sholom, Teaneck, NJ

**Krensky, Stephen.** *Noah's Bark.* Illus. by Rogé. Minneapolis, MN: Carolrhoda Books/Lerner, 2010. 32 pp. \$16.95. 978-0-8225-7645-7. Preschool-Gr. 1.

Krensky adds an original and humorous twist to yet another picture book about Noah's ark. The animals are making so much racket that Noah is having trouble concentrating on building the ark, so he barks at them to be quiet. Children will laugh at the comical illustrations and the mixed-up sounds the animals are making: the elephant is hissing, kangaroos are roaring, snakes are quacking, penguins are meowing, the lion is hooting. When the rain starts and Noah is able to get some of the animals into the ark, he comes up with way to resolve the confusion. He uses

a turkey feather to write a list of all the animals sounds he has ever heard. He has the toucan cut it into pieces, which he puts into the kangaroo's pouch, and then he lets each animal choose one. Now the animals can use their own sounds to work cooperatively with Noah. As they leave the ark after the flood is over, they thank him for saving them and their unique sounds. The best part of *Noah's Bark* is Rogé's boisterous illustrations, which are filled with so much energy they seem to jump off the pages. His paintings of animals and their sounds explode in a riot of color. Having each animal receive its permanent sound on the ark is imaginative, but there is nothing to make *Noah's Bark* particularly Jewish. God is never mentioned, and no Jewish values are imparted. It will be popular in secular libraries, as it is a good read-aloud for ages 3-6.

Andrea Davidson, The Temple-Tifereth Israel, Beachwood, OH

## BIOGRAPHY

**Finkelstein, Norman H.** *Jewish Comedy Stars: Classic to Cutting Edge.* Minneapolis: Kar-Ben/Lerner, 2010. 96 pp. \$9.95. ISBN: 978-0-8225-9942-5. Reviewed from an ARC. Gr. 4-7.

Finkelstein provides a succinct history of the Jewish role in American comedy and introduces readers to the Jewish comedians, performers, actors, and actresses who have made the most significant and lasting contributions. The book is divided into four sections, each with a brief introduction followed by short biographies accompanied by black-and-white photographs, date of birth and death, real name, and notable quotes.

"Act I: On Stage" begins with an introduction to Yiddish theater in America, vaudeville, and the Borscht Belt institutions, and includes entries for Morey Amsterdam, Fanny Brice, George Jessel, Molly Picon, and Henny Youngman. "Act II: On Air" explains the shift from live theater to radio and television, and includes entries for Woody Allen, Jack Benny, Milton Berle, Mel Brooks, George Burns, Sid Caesar, Rodney Dangerfield, Jerry Lewis, the Marx Brothers, and the Three Stooges. "Act III: On Fire" covers the stand-up comics of the 1960s, '70s, and '80s like Lenny Bruce, Joan Rivers, and Andrew Dice Clay; the stars of "Saturday Night Live" like Billy Crystal and Gilda Radner; and the popularization of television sit-coms like "Roseanne" and "Seinfeld."

Biographies for contemporaries Sacha Baron Cohen, Larry David, Al Franken, Adam Sandler, Sarah Silverman, Jon Stewart, and Ben Stiller are labeled "Comedy 2.0" and appended, but an introduction to this new generation of Jewish comedians is lacking. Many of the biographies fail to mention how Judaism influenced the subjects' lives or careers. Similar in style and format to *Jewish Sports Stars* by David J. Goldman (Kar-Ben, 2006), this book will be a valuable addition to the biography collections of synagogue, day school, and community center libraries. The full-color cover, featuring Adam Sandler, will attract interested and reluctant readers.

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



## FICTION

**Arato, Rona.** *Mrs. Kaputnik's Pool Hall and Matzo Ball Emporium.* Toronto: Tundra, 2010. 188 pp. \$9.95. ISBN: 978-0-88776-967-2. Gr. 3-6.

A mother and her son and daughter emigrate from Russia and hope to reunite with the husband and father who preceded them to the Lower East Side. Typical story? Not with an interesting cast of characters and a dragon involved! Mr. Kapustin's family misses him terribly. When Moshe trades firewood for a strange egg, they end up with a baby dragon that saves them from the Cossacks. Soon they leave for America, dragon in tow. Salty, a sailor on the ship, hides Snigger, while the family passes through Ellis Island, where their name is corrupted to "Kaputnik." They find less than hospitable relatives, who steal their money and leave them a failing restaurant. Mrs. Kaputnik's matzo balls are inedible, but they are excellent for knocking over a stack of cans or shooting pool, which become the attractions of the restaurant. Soon the family meets Thornswaddle, a circus ring-leader, who introduces them to Dingle, the star pitcher for a losing team. They encounter Nick the Stick, the local gangster who demands "protection" money and "fixes" baseball games. With the help of Snigger, Moshe and Shoshi are able to find their father, who was a prisoner of Nick the Stick, and bring the criminals to justice. As Snigger grows, the children realize they cannot keep him, and Thornswaddle takes him to star in his circus.

Elements of an immigrant story, mystery, true crime, and fantasy combine for a thrilling and hilarious romp. A strong

sense of place through both location and characters will hold the reader's attention, and a pet dragon adds the right touch of whimsy. Ms. Arato's previous book (*Ice Cream Town*, 2007) also dealt with immigrant life in New York. This is a great choice for nine- to twelve-year-olds, especially boys and reluctant readers, and is recommended for all libraries.

*Kathe Pinchuck, Congregation Beth Sholom, Teaneck, NJ*

**Brandeis, Gayle.** *My Life with the Lincolns.* New York: Henry Holt, 2010. 56 pp. \$16.99. ISBN 978-0-8050-9013-0. Reviewed from an ARC. Gr. 6-8.

*My Life with the Lincolns* is an imaginative and off-beat novel, set in the 1960s. The twelve-year-old protagonist, Mina Edelman, is convinced that her intermarried family is really the reincarnated family of Abe Lincoln. She believes each child in her family represents one of the Lincoln boys, and fears that each one will meet an early death. Her main tasks are protecting her father from being assassinated, keeping her mother from insanity, and protecting herself—Willie Lincoln—from dying at age twelve. Mina also expresses her interest in the Lincolns by vigorously advertising her father's furniture store, Honest ABE's, which is named for her dad, Albert Baruch Edelman.

Although many of Mina's observations are humorous, they are often childish and far-fetched for a girl her age. The portrayal of her family members is somewhat one-dimensional. The first part of the novel requires a leap of faith and suspension of disbelief. However, when the story turns to the Chicago Civil Rights marches of the 1960s and the role of Martin Luther King Jr., the

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text becomes fast-paced and more convincing. Her father's avid, albeit naïve, support of civil rights introduces the role of Jews in the Civil Rights Movement. Mina's dad has a strong Jewish identity, and Mina is very conscious of her Jewish roots. This is both a coming-of-age novel and historical fiction. It is recommended as an additional purchase for readers ages 11-14.

*Shelly Feit, Moriah School Library, Englewood NJ*

Editor's note: Two other novels set during the Civil Rights era are *Hot Pursuit* by Stacia Deutsch and Rhody Cohon, reviewed in this issue, and *Speed of Light* by Sybil Rosen.

**Firestone, Beth. *Candles in My Window*. Southfield, MI: Targum, 2010. 167 pp. \$17.99. ISBN: 978-1-56871-530-8. Gr. 5-8.**

When twelve-year-old Libby Ross's family moves from Connecticut to Los Angeles, she has a hard time adjusting. Her sixteen-year-old sister Sheila makes friends easily. Her mother finds a partner (Abby) with whom to pursue her screenwriting ambitions. Mr. Ross is so busy working that the family rarely seems him, and when they do, he is arguing with Mrs. Ross. Libby meets Rebecca Klein at the ice cream store, and they become friends. Rebecca invites Libby to sleep over on Shabbat, and Libby is captivated by the Shabbat atmosphere and the interactions among members of the Klein family. Libby learns about mitzvahs by accompanying Rebecca on a nursing home visit, where she befriends Mr. Goldblum, a Holocaust survivor.

After stealing money from Abby's purse and getting caught, Libby runs away to the Kleins on a Friday night. Her parents find her there and stay for the Shabbat meal. Libby notices that her father knows the prayers. She later learns that her father had been Orthodox, but when his young wife and son were killed in a fire, he had abandoned his beliefs. After some heart-to-heart talks, Libby's mother vows to be more attentive to the family, and Libby's father agrees to let her light candles for Shabbat.

Originally published in 1990, the book has been updated to include a plasma TV and a Louis Vuitton purse. Secular readers may be put off by the portrayal of the Ross family. The Rosses are depicted as quarrelsome, sarcastic, and materialistic, while the Sabbath-observing Kleins are respectful and loving. The rapport between the Ross sisters is realistic, and readers will want to discover their father's secret. This book is a solid optional purchase.

*Kathe Pinchuck, Congregation Beth Sholom, Teaneck, NJ*

**Greene, Jacqueline Dembar. *Secrets at Camp Nokomis: A Rebecca Mystery*. American Girl Series. Middletown, WI: American Girl, 2010. 180 pp. \$6.95. ISBN: 978-1-59369-657-3. Pbk. Gr. 4-6.**

Rebecca Rubin, the Jewish "American Girl," heads to Camp Nokomis, a week-long camp for girls that is subsidized by the Children's Aid Society in an effort to get children out of the congested city into the pure country air. Polio has spread throughout New York and all the girls must have health certificates showing that they do not carry the disease. Rebecca's best friend Rose was quarantined in her apartment building when another tenant came down with disease, so Rebecca must attend camp alone and form new friendships. Instantly, she befriends petite, quiet Tina (Christina) and finds a rival in a feisty Irish girl named

Corky (Mary Margaret). As in the other *Rebecca* stories, the text conveys the time period accurately, especially in the descriptions of the polio scare and the Children's Aid Society's camping efforts. Stories told around the campfire and campers' cheers for the counselors represent authentic camp experiences. However, the narrative takes a predictable turn around Tina's secrets, including the mysterious contents of her trunk, her frequent disappearances, and her insistence on changing in private. For the most part, the characters are one-dimensional: Corky is bossy and manipulative, while Rebecca is kind and spirited. The Jewish content is nil, aside from a mention of Rebecca not keeping kosher at camp yet refusing to eat bacon. Still, the title is recommended for libraries that own the other *Rebecca* books.

*Heather Lenson, Jewish Education Center, Cleveland, OH*

**Kranzler, Gershon. *The Harpist of Granada*. Illustrated Family Classics Series. Illus. by Chedvah Rubin. New York: Feldheim, 2009. 53 pp. \$17.99. ISBN: 978-1-59826-473-9. Gr. 4-7.**

After the Berber massacre of 1014, the orphaned young Shmuel Abinoam leaves Cordoba with other Jews for Granada, hoping to find his uncle. Alone and cold, he stops to rest by a large house and hears harp music. He is soon invited into the home of Dona Ezra, who hires a scholar to teach him Torah. She teaches him to play the harp. Soon Dona Ezra dies, leaving her entire estate to Shmuel. One night as he seeks solace by playing the harp, Rabbi Shmuel ibn Naghrela (Rabbi Shmuel Hanagid), the king's advisor, walks by and hears the music. He recognizes a lullaby and realizes that they are cousins. After their heartfelt reunion, Rabbi Shmuel brings Shmuel Abinoam to the king's palace, where he plays the harp and comforts the agitated king. The king asks him to remain in the palace. Any animosity King Habbus may have shown toward the Jews of Granada has been averted.

The magnificent illustrations stand out with their lush pigments and exquisite detail. From landscapes to a close up of Shmuel crying, the pictures are stunning. The story itself has many profoundly sad moments: a boy orphaned by a massacre, the death of his new caretaker, the impending dread of anti-Semitic action by the rulers in Spain. While historically accurate, there is some incongruence between a beautifully illustrated book and Shmuel Abinoam's "unfortunate life experiences." This book is appropriate for all Jewish libraries, and best suited to readers aged nine to twelve. Originally published in *The Golden Shoes and Other Stories* (Feldheim, 1960).

*Kathe Pinchuck, Congregation Beth Sholom, Teaneck, NJ*

**Peacock, Shane. *The Secret Fiend: The Boy Sherlock Holmes, His 4th Case*. Toronto: Tundra, 2010. 260 pp. \$19.95. ISBN: 978-0-88776-853-8. Reviewed from an unbound advanced review manuscript. Gr. 7-10.**

The young, half-Jewish Sherlock Holmes returns for his fourth installment of the series. Changes abound in Holmes's life and in mid-nineteenth-century Britain. Holmes is fourteen years old and becoming more aware of the opposite sex. He now lives with the quirky, yet kind-hearted alchemist Sigerson Bell. Benjamin Disraeli, a man of Jewish background, has become prime minister of England, and he urges social reform, including the redistribution of wealth and women's right to vote. There are a few mentions of attacks by Irish terrorists seeking indepen-

dence from Great Britain. These factors lead to a fear of chaos reinforced by attacks by the "Secret Fiend" presumed to be the "Spring Heeled Jack."

Sherlock is dragged into the case by Beatrice Leckie, who claims her friend was attacked by the Spring Heeled Jack. Sherlock cannot resist Beatrice, a childhood friend, because he discovers himself feeling physically attracted to her. Everyone is under suspicion, including the young gang leader Malefactor and even Bell. In that time of uncertainty, the people of England divert their fears into anti-Semitism, blaming "Disraeli the Jew."

The Cockney dialect of the working-class English and the description of Holmes's physical maturation make Peacock's writing feel authentic. *The Secret Fiend* is recommended for Jewish and public libraries that own the other three titles in the series. Jewish readers will empathize with the Jews in the story who endure anti-Semitism.

Heather Lenson, Jewish Education Center, Cleveland, OH

## HISTORY

**Lefcourt, Jack.** *Four Thousand Years of Jewish History: Then and Now.* Jersey City, NJ: KTAV, 2009. 108 pp. \$16.95. ISBN: 978-1-60280-132-5. Gr. 5-9.

You might call it dumbing down or you might call it making history accessible, but here is 4,000 years of Jewish history condensed into 108 pages, all of them heavily illustrated. The organization is chronological, beginning with Abraham and ending with a section that addresses Jewish identity around the world. Pages are arranged in horizontally oriented blocks of text, each accompanied by at least one illustration or photograph. The coverage is quite brief but a generally accurate summary of the long Jewish journey is given by Lefcourt's informal writing style and graphic techniques. Unfortunately, there is no documentation and no index, so the book's reference value is nil. Most of KTAV's history books are for the classroom but this one seems to be intended for casual browsing. An additional purchase.

Linda R. Silver, Cleveland, OH

## HOLIDAYS

**Ho, Jannie, illus.** *The Great Matzoh Hunt.* New York: Price Stern Sloan/Penguin, 2010. 10 pp. \$5.99. ISBN: 978-0-8431-8969-8. Preschool.

Young readers will learn nothing about the Passover holiday from this board book, as it is lacking any Jewish content. Cheery watercolors illustrate a happy family of animals at a table holding an oval plate with six empty spaces, where each ceremonial food would be placed if this really were a seder plate. There are ten flaps to lift as we help Bunny, Turtle, Lamb, and Duck search throughout the dining room, the kitchen, and bedroom for the hidden matzoh. The thin lift-the-flaps are not sturdy enough to withstand many uses by pre-school hands. No attention is paid to Passover dietary laws, as a canister of flour is prominently displayed in the kitchen. Duck finally finds the matzoh under

the flap in the toy box. Children would only learn what matzoh is from adults reading this with them. Adults might also want to briefly explain what an afikomen is, and perhaps provide a simple explanation of a seder and the meaning of Passover. Better board books for very young children, which would help explain these concepts are: *Let's Ask Four Questions*, by Madeline Wikler and Judy Groner (Kar-Ben, 2001), *Let's Have A Seder!* by Miriam Sagasti (Kar-Ben, 1997), and *My First Passover*, by Tomie de Paola (Penguin, 2008.). If you are lucky enough to still have them in your collection, two others good choices are *Where is the Afikomen?* by Judy Groner, (Kar-Ben, 1989) and *What I Like About Passover*, by Varda Livney, (Little, Simon, 2002). Meant for ages 3-5 and not recommended.

Andrea Davidson, The Temple-Tifereth Israel, Beachwood, OH

**Owens, L.L.** *Hanukkah.* Illus. by Holli Conger. Cultural Holidays Series. Edina, Minn: Magic Wagon/Abdo, 2010. 32 pp. \$18.95. ISBN: 978-1-60270-603-3. Gr. 1-3.

This work uses cartoon-like illustrations of cheery family and historic figures wearing benign expressions, to provide facts on customs, traditions, and history. Short chapters, brief text, and large bold print impart information, with lots of white space on each page. The book is part of the Cultural Holidays series, which "investigates holidays all around the world." The series also includes books on Christmas, Chinese New Year, Kwanza, Cinco de Mayo, and Ramadan. It is organized with a table of contents, index, and glossary, and contains the words but not the music for the song "Hanukkah, Oh Hanukkah." A rabbi was the "cultural consultant," and a professor of anthropology from the College of Wooster was the "content consultant." *Hanukkah* is intended to be used as a third-grade textbook. It is over-priced, it lacks Jewish perspective, and it contains several errors. There are better choices to help young children understand the holiday of Hanukkah.

Andrea Davidson, The Temple-Tifereth Israel, Beachwood, OH

**Portnoy, Mindy A.** *A Tale of Two Seders.* Illus. by Valeria Cis. Minneapolis, MN: Kar-Ben/Lerner, 2010. 32 pp. \$17.95. ISBN 978-0-8225-9907-4. Kdg.-Gr. 3.

Rabbi Portnoy's newest story is an especially good picture book for young children who are dealing with a divorce in the family. It concerns a little girl whose parents have recently gotten divorced, and shows her observing Passover with them at two separate seders in two separate houses over a period of three years. Each year the little girl has different experiences with new situations while she watches her parents form new lives and traditions. Each year different people and family members attend the seders at the two different households where she has two different bedrooms. Sometimes she dreams of her parents' getting back together, but her father remarries and in the end the whole family celebrates Passover together at synagogue.

This sweet story, with colorful and expressive illustrations, portrays some of the emotions that children of divorce feel as they travel back and forth between two different homes. My favorite part is when the mother compares families to charoset. "Some families are like charoset. Some have more ingredients than others, some stick together better than others, some are sweeter than others. But each one is tasty in its own way." This

sums up the whole story beautifully. The author includes several charoset recipes in the back of the book as well as a glossary of terms. Recommended for children ages 5-8.

*Lisa Katz, Greenbrae, CA*

**Rouss, Sylvia. *Mitzvah the Mutt*. Illus. by Martha Rast. St. Paul, MN: Yaldah Publishing, 2010. 96 pp. \$8.95. ISBN: 978-1-59287-180-3 Pbk. Reviewed from an ARC. Artwork not seen. Gr. 1-3.**

Humorously narrated from a dog's point of view, this easy chapter book is meant to make it fun for children to learn about Shabbat, Hanukkah and Passover. Mitzvah is a mutt who gets his name from his new family—Mommy, Daddy, Rachel and David Berger—because he likes to help people. He also likes to eat people-food like hamburgers instead of dog food. Readers will laugh at Mitzvah's zany misadventures as he works hard to train his family. Bubbie, the grandmother, is hardest to train, but Mitzvah wins her over with his charming personality. As the family prepares for Shabbat, Mitzvah tries to play fetch with the tennis balls in the soup, but learns that they are really mouth-watering matzah balls to eat! To his amazement, Mitzvah sees Bubbie and Mommy turn raw potatoes into delicious potato pancakes called latkes, and he realizes that Hanukkah is the holiday that celebrates the miracle of the oil. During the Passover seder, Mitzvah learns the meaning of *dayenu* (enough) when he, along with Zaydie and the rest of the family, eats too much delicious brisket, chicken, carrots, kugel, and dessert.

Rouss uses Mitzvah's humorous interpretations of the celebrations and his reactions to the food, along with short chapters,

Sefer so  
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large print, and lots of white space, to make this appropriate for her intended audience of children 6-9. However, by having Mitzvah use the terms "Mommy" and "Daddy," she makes her reading audience younger, so that this could be read with children as young as five years of age. There are eleven proposed illustrations placed throughout the book, but no artwork was seen. Rouss is the author of the Sammy Spider series and many other books for children.

*Andrea Davidson, The Temple-Tifereth Israel, Beachwood, OH*

## HOLOCAUST and WORLD WAR II

**Burgan, Michael. *Refusing to Crumble: The Danish Resistance in World War II*. Mankato, MN: Compass Point, 2010. 64 pp. \$23.99. ISBN 978-0-7565-4298-6. Gr. 4-6.**

There are several children's books about Danish resistance during the Second World War, including the excellent *Darkness over Denmark* by Ellen Levine. Some of them include the heart-warming but apocryphal story that King Christian rode through the streets of Copenhagen wearing a yellow star. Michael Burgan's history ignores the legend and focuses on the more basic theme of resistance to tyranny.

The volume's six chapters give an account of the Nazi invasion of the country, its quiet resistance, and the slow but steady success of the Danish people's actions in thwarting German domination. The author notes that the Danes were sent British supplies, and that Allied bombing began fairly early, further assisting the Underground. The book includes several stories about grass-roots opposition to the Nazis, which are little known to Americans. The Danish response was deeper than in almost any other captured nation, and memorializing it seems to be the author's primary aim. Several events are described in some detail, including the General Strike of 1944.

There are only a few references to Jews, including a bland account of the mass escape of the Jewish population (p. 35-40). No mention is made of the deportations to Theresienstadt. A number of the book's photographs are only tangential to the Danish story, such as a photo of Hitler in Paris and two images of British aircraft in flight. The book appears to be aimed at 4th-6th-grade students. It would be useful for the study of resistance to the Nazis but it is of limited value in Judaica libraries. Includes illustrations, glossary, notes, bibliography, and index.

*Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA*

**Gleitzman, Morris. *Once*. New York: Henry Holt, 2010. 176 pp. \$16.99. ISBN: 978-0-8050-9026-0. Gr. 5-8.**

Felix, the narrator, is an imaginative and innocent Jewish child who is being sheltered in a convent. The son of Jewish booksellers, he believes that all of his parents' troubles are because the Nazis don't like Jewish books and want to rid the world of them. Everything is a story to him, even the convent, its nuns, and its customs. He seizes upon the appearance of a whole carrot in his soup as a message from his parents, who had placed him in the convent several years earlier.

When he escapes to look for them, he finds instead only devastation. Their bookstore and books are burned; their home is

occupied by former neighbors who, he puzzles, don't even like books. When he sees a man and woman lying slaughtered on their front lawn amidst their dead chickens, he reasons that they must have been Jewish book owners who couldn't bear to let the Nazis burn their books so they had put up a struggle. Upon finding their unconscious daughter, Zelda, he suddenly has an insight that maybe the slaughter is not due to Jewish books. Felix and Zelda soon run headlong into danger. They meet Barney, who temporarily shelters them with his other charges.

Felix's reasoning is fanciful, and occasionally farce-like, but perhaps such innocence is possible in a child. The author dedicates his story to Janusz Korczak, on whom the character of Barney is based. The publisher suggests that the book is appropriate for the 12-and-up group, but the writing style is better suited to children ages 10-12, who might however, take its magic realism style at face value.

*Marcia W. Posner, Holocaust Memorial and Tolerance Center of Nassau County, NY*

**Jablonski, Carla and Leland Purvis. *Resistance, Book 1*. New York: First Second, 2010. 121 pp. \$16.99. ISBN: 978-1-59643-291-8. Gr. 6-10.**

Paul and Marie Tessier live outside Vichy, France, during World War II. Their father is being held as a POW by the German army and their mother has taken over a local hotel, previously owned by the Levys, a Jewish family. After the Germans confiscate the hotel and Mr. and Mrs. Levy disappear, Paul and Marie work together to hide Henri, their son. When they discover that Jacques, who works in their vineyard, and their older sister Sylvie are members of the Resistance, they devise a dangerous plan to help Henri. With false papers and new names, the four children travel by train to Paris, witness a round-up and an execution, and journey underground through an 18th-century cemetery to reunite Henri with his parents in hiding.

A brief introduction explains the Nazi occupation of France and an author's note provides additional information on the Resistance. The text, however, all dialogue, with no narration. While the graphic novel format makes for quick and accessible reading, readers without much background about World War II, anti-Semitism, the Vichy government, and the Resistance may have trouble decoding the story line and filling in the blanks. Recommend to readers attracted to *The Search* and *A Family Secret* by Eric Heuvel and *Maus* by Art Spiegelman.

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

**Levy, Debbie. *The Year of Goodbyes; A True Story of Friendship, Family, and Farewells*. New York: Disney Hyperion, 2010. 136 pp. \$16.99. ISBN: 978-142312901-1. Gr. 5-8.**

A *poesiealbum* (poetry album), belonging to the author's mother, and written in 1938 by friends and family, forms the basis of this memoir. Poetry albums were popular at the time with young girls in Germany. The poetry, drawings, and dedications contained in the albums were created to express good wishes. Levy expands on the original diary excerpts with her own text and with poetry she has written, in consultation with her mother, to reflect the events of this period. Also included are reproductions of the album's original pages.

The author details the story of Jutta Salzberg's family during their last year in Hamburg, Germany, as they try to lead somewhat normal lives while being systematically stripped of their rights. They see their Jewish friends disappear, as storm troopers come for them or the families depart by their own planning. As powerful as the diary itself is, the afterword, consisting of an account of what happened to all the people in the *poesiealbum*—who survived and who did not—is meaningful in its own right. Amazingly enough, seven of Jutta's friends from the Jewish School for Girls in Hamburg reunited in 2000 in Washington, D.C. Photographs of Jutta's family and friends from the 1930s give depth and poignancy to the book. A time line also adds to the narrative. Recommended for readers from ages ten to thirteen.

*Shelly Feit, Moriah School Library, Englewood NJ*

**Wivviott, Meg. *Benno and the Night of Broken Glass*. Illus. by Jose Bisaillon. Minneapolis, MN: Kar-Ben/Lerner, 2009. Unpaged. \$17.95. ISBN: 978-0-8225-9929-6. Gr. 2-5.**

Benno is a cat that roams Berlin's Rosenstrasse neighborhood, visiting stores owned by Jews and Gentiles, welcomed and loved by all of them. Neighbors and storekeepers in Rosenstrasse are friendly and hospitable with one another until the Night of Broken Glass. Even before that night, Benno notices that his Jewish friends no longer have as much patience for him, and that they seem testy and nervous. One night, men in brown shirts light a bonfire and throw books and papers onto the fire while crowds cheer. Benno observes that former friends are no longer friends, and that black boots are everywhere. Then comes a night—and here as the little cat describes what happens, illustrated pages erupt in chaos—when Benno's life is changed forever. This is an economically told, beautifully illustrated introduction to the Holocaust for youngsters ages 7-11. There are so many questions one could ask the readers and so many they could ask you. I would ask why the Nazis wanted to destroy books. Undoubtedly they would have wanted to destroy this one.

*Marcia W. Posner, Holocaust Memorial and Tolerance Center of Nassau County*

#### Another view

A cat's perceptions of events that culminated in Kristallnacht are necessarily limited. Despite good writing and stunning illustrations, this "picture book" will at best confuse readers unless they bring to it considerable background information about the Holocaust. Picture book readers are unlikely to have that information and, except in rare cases, there is no reason why they should. An explanatory afterword is an unsatisfactory substitute for the historical background and context that are missing from the story itself. In addition to inadequacies of content, the format is misleading because it implies that this is a book for younger children. The publisher's age and grade level recommendations are also way off base. Certainly not an introduction to Kristallnacht or the Holocaust, and certainly not a picture book in the commonly understood use of the term, *Benno...* is a misfit.

*Linda R. Silver, Cleveland, OH*



## ISRAEL

**Garfinkle, Adam.** *Israel*. Philadelphia: Mason Crest, 2010. 144 pp. \$25.95 ISBN: 978-1-4222-1402-2. Grades 7-12.

As noted in the *AJL Newsletter* review of the 2003 edition this title, Garfinkle's book is a "welcome departure" from many similar titles on the Middle East because its author is a genuine scholar in the field of Middle East studies. This updated and revised edition is a mere eight pages longer than its predecessor, and includes sketchy information on the events from 2002 to 2009, e.g., the building of Israel's security fence, its withdrawal of thousands of Israeli inhabitants from Gaza, the death of Yasser Arafat, the Hamas takeover of Gaza and its conflicts with Fatah, Israel's 2006 war with Hizbollah and its operation against Hamas rocket attacks from Gaza in 2008. The earlier material is left basically untouched, except that demographic and economic statistics have been updated. The emphasis is on political history and international affairs. The book is well written, with appropriate maps, charts, and photographs and other aids interspersed in its pages.

If readers find the book to favor Israel, that is only because, unlike so many others, it aims to present both sides, not just the Palestinian Arab side, to its audience. For example, Garfinkle writes that the border fence erected by Israel is seen by Israelis as protection from terrorist attacks, but by Arabs as a unilateral proclamation of borders by Israel. If anything, Garfinkle bends over backwards *not* to favor Israel. He speaks of Hamas acts of terrorism, but never refers to its charter calling for Israel's destruction. He buys into the view of Mahmoud Abbas as a moderate leader, without telling of Abbas's role in introducing the doctrine of Holocaust denial to the Arabs, or his past terrorist associations. In writing that the 2000 intifada "failed to bring Palestinians any closer to an independent state of their own," Garfinkle gives lip service to the belief that a two-state solution, rather than the destruction of the Jewish state, is the ultimate Arab goal.

This is indeed one of those rare books for junior and senior high students that makes a genuine attempt to present as legitimate the goals of both Zionism—the nationalist movement of the Jewish people—and the Palestinian Arabs.

*Andrea Rapp, Wise Temple, Cincinnati, OH*

## JUDAISM

**Beifus, Ruth.** *The Perfect Present*. Shlavim: Growing Up! Series, volume 3. Trans. by Sherie Gross. New York: Feldheim, 2009. 36 pp. \$14.99. ISBN: 978-1-59826-349-7. Preschool-Gr. 3.

Aunt Miriam comes to visit and gives Nomi a present "from when she was a little girl." Nomi does not know what it is, until Aunt Miriam tells her it's a sewing box. As first Nomi balks; she doesn't sew, and thinks she has no use for it. As her mother and Aunt Miriam continue their visit, Nomi realizes that her aunt wanted to give her something special, and she discovers many uses for the box, including steps upon which her dolls can sit, and an organizer for art supplies. She thanks her aunt for the gift. On her next visit, Aunt Miriam brings Nomi some sewing

notions, and sits with her and teaches her to sew. Now Nomi thanks Aunt Miriam for "the perfect present."

Of course there is a strong, unsubtle moral lesson. The Shlavim Series (whose literal translation is "ladder rungs") "is designed to stimulate thought about day-to-day challenges that come up in a child's life," and receiving a gift that one neither wants nor needs falls in this category. The exchange is realistic, showing both Aunt Miriam's and Nomi's disappointment that the gift was initially not quite right. Nomi's ingenuity, without parental prompting, demonstrates how children can address such a challenge.

Colorful illustrations are drawn from different perspectives; pictures of Nomi unwrapping the present, or a view looking down at what is in the box will hold the reader's interest. Aunt Miriam and Nomi's mother are depicted with their hair covered. While the target audience is Orthodox, the message is universal. The book is made with waterproof laminated pages, making it a good choice for children ages four through eight. Originally published in Hebrew as *Matanah Mat'ima Bidyuk*.

*Kathe Pinchuck, Congregation Beth Sholom, Teaneck, NJ*

**Schwebel, Devorah.** *Time for Torah*. Illus. by Tova Katz. New York: Hachai, 2010. 24 pp. \$10.95. ISBN: 978-1-929628-55-1. Preschool-Gr. 1.

"Men only" is one of the messages of this rhymed picture book about learning Torah. The narrator, a little boy, describes how all the men that he knows do something every day to show how much Torah means to them. Mr. Berk is a busy business man but each day at noon, he leaves his office to learn. Ditto Dr. Wassergold; the boy's teacher, Rabbi Rhett; the owner of the kosher grocery store; and the child himself, who makes "time for Torah every day!" Four-line rhymes express the child's enthusiasm for Torah and the cheerful illustrations underscore that attitude. The sincerity of the story is appealing but the sharply drawn dichotomy in gender roles—males learn, females care for children—is not. Primarily for Orthodox children.

*Linda R. Silver, Cleveland, OH*

**Sternfeld, Nathan.** *Rebbe Mendel... In a Class by Himself*. New York: Feldheim, 2009. 208 pp. \$21.99. ISBN: 978-1-59826-320-6. Gr. 6-8.

This is the third volume of stories told by Rebbe Mendel to his class. While the chapters can stand on their own, they add up to a semester of ethical teachings worthy of any tzaddik. The book is divided into four parts: "Life Lessons," "Changing Perspectives," "Laugh Lessons," and "Cast Your Bread." There are seventeen stories, all of which are in some measure didactic.

The primary theme is ethical living. The author (Rebbe Mendel) reminds us that what we do can dramatically affect others, whether we know it or not. Sometimes the message comes in surprising ways. "Nesanel & Yoel" gives an example of when it might indeed be appropriate to lie, in order to save one's friend. In "Maggid Shiur" a young teacher rises to the occasion by assisting a struggling shul. And in the final chapter, "Five Correct Answers," Rebbe Mendel teaches that success may mean alternative ways of thinking about tests and grades. It is a wonderful lesson directed at teachers at least as much as students. A helpful glossary is included. The stories here are written with a 6th- and 7th-grade audience in mind, but their lessons are not always

## Right On Ad

simple. In some cases the message remains hidden until the end. Other stories offer several levels of meaning to explore, by students and by teachers (and even rabbis). The book is encouraged for use with middle-school classes. While it is not an essential purchase, *Rebbe Mendel* will encourage classroom discussion. Because it was conceived for an observant audience, there are no girls present, but the messages are universal.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA

**Strauss, Yaakov Meir.** *The King's Special Loaves: A Young Boy, An Eager Kohen, Two Curious Romans, And Three Enthusiastic Bakers: A Historical Adventure, Including the Preparation of the Lechem Ha-Panim and Shte Ha-Lechem and the Laws of Menachos.* (Naftali in the Beis HaMikdash Series). Illus. by Tova Katz. Trans. by Nehemiah Klein. New York: Feldheim, 2009. 292 pp. \$23.99. ISBN: 978-1-59826-392-3. Gr. 5-7.

Shavuot is the backdrop for a "historical adventure" that takes place during the end of the Second Temple Period. Naftali is a curious boy who has made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem from Alexandria with his family. He observes all that is going on and spends some time in the study halls of the city and learns about the sacrifices that will be made. His friend Tzaddok, a Cohain, is also there, and he hopes to participate in the *avoda* in the *Beis HaMikdash*. There are also two Romans in the city, scouting to see if the Roman Legions will meet any resistance if they pass through the Land of Israel to get to Ludkia. Finally, three bakers from Alexandria have been summoned to Jerusalem to bake the special "breads" needed in the Temple. When Shavuot arrives, Naftali is knowledgeable about the various sacrifices, Tzaddok has learned he is ineligible for certain service in the Temple but is able to participate in other ways, the Romans see a lot of Torah learning in Jerusalem and know that it will protect the Jews in battle, and the bakers' services are not needed, even though they have been practicing their craft all week. A map of the Temple Mount is printed on the front and back covers, and detailed maps are placed throughout the book. There is also a numbered key to the maps and a glossary.

Sometimes it is hard to determine whether the *halachos* of *Korbanos* (laws of sacrifices) were laid out and the story written around them, or vice versa. The book is meticulously referenced, and the maps are an excellent resource. Some of the references are to sources from a much later era than the Second Temple Period (Rashi, Rambam). Because of the esoteric information, most readers will shy away. But the book fills a valuable niche: Orthodox boys in fifth through seventh grade will enjoy testing their knowledge of the Mishnah and Gemara. Originally published in Hebrew as *Minchah LaMelech* (2006).

Kathe Pinchuck, Congregation Beth Shalom, Teaneck, NJ

## PICTURE BOOKS

**Isadora, Rachel.** *Say Hello!* New York: Putnam/Penguin, 2010. 32 pp. \$16.99. ISBN: 978-0-399-25230-3. Preschool.

Big, bold collage paintings reminiscent of Ezra Jack Keats portray scenes of the multicultural neighborhood that Carmelita, her mama, and her dog Manny traverse on the way to visit Abuela

Rosa. At the bodega, they pause to say, "Buenos dias" to Señor Enrico. Mrs. Rosen and her many children wave "Shalom!" "Al salaam 'alaykum" is the greeting from the folks at the halal butcher shop, and finally, after several more stops, a hearty "Hola!" from Abuela Rosa. Carmelita's opportunity to say hello in many languages delivers the theme of ethnic diversity and celebrates a neighborhood where people of different nationalities and religions live together amicably. The illustrations expand on the brief text, showing signs in various languages, ethnic food, national dress, and a cityscape of fire plugs, pigeons, homes, stores, sidewalks, and playgrounds. In introducing young children to a few welcoming words, this talented author/illustrator also presents them with an embracing vision of an American neighborhood that someday they may help to make possible. Note that the Jewish content is confined to one illustration and one word.

Linda R. Silver, Cleveland, OH

**Tepper, Yona.** *Passing By.* Illus. by Gil-Ly Alon Curiel. Trans. by Deborah Guthman. San Diego: Kane Miller/EDC, 2010. 40 pp. \$15.99. ISBN: 978-1-935279-36-5. Preschool.

Kane Miller publishes children's books from foreign countries. Israel is the country of origin for this slight but winsome picture book which was written by an award-winning Israeli author. Full-page illustrations in a style similar to Dick Bruna's show a small child named Yael watching the street below from her balcony. Along come a dog, then a cat, a red car, a man on a bicycle, a tractor, and finally—Daddy! Most of the double-spread illustrations show scenes of a city neighborhood, pared down—like the writing itself—to the simple details that will mean something to very young children: birds, flowers, a tree, a few stores, a traffic light on the corner and finally, Daddy's familiar face and the prospect of a walk. Hebrew writing is apparent in a few of the street scenes but that and its country of origin are the closest to Jewish content that the book gets. Recommended for libraries that include books originally published in Israel and/or translated from the Hebrew, whatever their Jewish content may or may not be.

Linda R. Silver, Cleveland, OH

## TERRORISM

**Burgan, Michael.** *Terrorist Groups.* Terrorism Series. Mankato, MN: Compass Point Books, 2010. 48 pp. \$27.99. ISBN: 978-0-7565-4311-2. Gr. 6-10.

Ten short chapters cover organizations such as the Tamil Tigers, the Basque group known as ETA, Al Qaeda, Hamas, the Colombian FARC, and Hezbollah. Each four-page chapter includes large color photographs and double-spaced text about the organization's beginnings, goals, and tactics. The author avoids the superfluous, off-topic subjects that often find their way into political series books. "Terrorism is everywhere," says the cover blurb—using the present tense—and indeed nine of the ten organizations discussed are part of the contemporary world. The tenth, the Irgun of pre-state Israel, disappeared sixty years ago, making it the only long-defunct organization discussed, in

a chapter erroneously titled: "Irgun: Creators of Modern Israel." The Irgun, which was a splinter group of the main Jewish defense organization known as the Haganah, did not create Israel; the United Nations did that.

There are other errors in the text, for example, the assertion that Yassir Arafat sought "to peacefully create a Palestinian nation and allow Israel to exist." While Arafat may have talked peace in English, when addressing his people in Arabic he repeatedly called for jihad against Israel, even after he had signed the Oslo Accords. And despite its 2010 copyright date—five years after the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza—the book incorrectly states that Gaza is "a region under Israeli control" (p. 17).

A major problem with this title is its failure to distinguish between guerrilla warfare tactics, which involve attacking government and military targets, and terrorism, which directs its violence against civilian non-combatants. This failure allows the author to include the Irgun's operations against Britain in his book, and one wonders whether the lack of distinction between guerrilla war and terrorism was meant to permit the inclusion of an Israeli chapter in a work which, by necessity, highlights several jihadist, anti-Israel organizations in the Middle East. Well-written but a questionable purchase because of errors and omissions, including but not limited to those noted above.

*Andrea Rapp, Wise Temple, Cincinnati, OH*

**Eerdmans Ad**

These titles, reviewed in the Adult Readers section, may also be of interest to teenagers:

*Blooms of Darkness* by Appelfeld, Aharon (p. 22).

*If We Could Hear Them Now*, by Alice Becker Lehrer (p. 35).

## Department of Corrections

Contrary to what was stated in the Feb/March 2010 issue of the Newsletter, quoting the Jan. 1, 2010 issue of *Kirkus Reviews*, KIRKUS LIVES! according to a splash on the cover of the Feb. 15, 2010 issue. Although it never left, welcome back!

*Surviving the Angel of Death: The Story of a Mengele Twin in Auschwitz*, reviewed in the November/December 2009 AJL Newsletter, was written by Eva Mozes Kor, not Eva Mozes Kors. Eva Kor founded the Candles Holocaust Museum and Education Center in 1995 in memory of her sister, who died in 1993. It is located in Terre Haute, Indiana.

# The Twelve Steps of a Compulsive Over-Reader

KATHE PINCHUCK

*This is a presentation Kathe gave on behalf of the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee at the Jewish Children's Book Writers and Illustrators Conference held on November 22, 2009.*

Hi, my name is Kathe, and I am a compulsive over-reader. Most of us have been unwilling to admit we were real over-readers. No person likes to think he is different from his fellows. Therefore, it is not surprising that our reading careers have been characterized by countless vain attempts to prove that we could read like other people.

Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path. Our stories disclose in a general way what we used to be like, what happened, and what we are like now. If you have decided you want what we have and are willing to go to any length to get it, then you are ready to take certain steps.

At some of these we balked. We thought we could find an easier, softer way. But we could not. Remember that we deal with books—cunning, baffling, powerful. Without help it is too much for us.

Here are the steps I took, which are suggested as a program of recovery:

1. *I admitted I was powerless over books—that my life had become unmanageable.*

I have books everywhere: in my attic, my basement, my bedroom, my kitchen, my living room, my office, both bathrooms, and the car. Besides being the best customer of bookcloseouts.com and Amazon.com, I would borrow books from the public library where I work, the public library in the city where I live, and the synagogue library where I work. I also utilized paperbackswap.com and my friends to trade books.

2. *I came to believe that a Power greater than myself could restore me to sanity.*

I joined the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee to give service to my library association, but also because one of the perks is a bunch of Jewish children's books, which I thought my kids would enjoy. I've received 536 books to date, and my reading is focused on Jewish children's literature and secular books that promote Jewish values.

3. *I made a decision to turn my reading and my life over to the care of this power as I understood it.*

One of the benefits of being on this committee is how much I've learned about Judaism and what makes a Jewish book, how my understanding can be expanded from an excellent book, and how a beloved book can enrich the life of a child.

*The Rabbi and the Twenty-nine Witches* by Marilyn Hirsh has been re-issued by Marshall Cavendish. Based on a Talmudic story, this book has been enjoyed by three generations, and I no longer have to worry when it is checked out of the library by some of my less-responsible patrons.

I've learned from the good people at Kar-Ben that some books I've loved, like *Judah Who Loved to Say NO*, and *The Passover Parrot* were great, but they may no longer be relevant or interesting to today's young readers.

4. *I made a searching and fearless inventory of my books.*

As I've read my 536 books, I've formed some new opinions and reinforced some of my old ones, and I've thought about why I liked some books and not others.

5. *I admitted to God, to myself, and to another human being the exact nature of these books.*

I have a problem with rodents in Jewish homes, rodents living in doll houses or in rabbi's offices, rodents worrying about kosher food or playing with dreidls, and especially rodents and people talking to each other.

But I'm a sucker for cute animals, and I don't have a problem with them celebrating Jewish holidays and observances without humans. *Hoppy Hanukkah* is so adorable, and it captures the enthusiasm of young children who know it's a special day, but are not exactly sure how to celebrate it.

I cannot stand books about Israel that contain inaccuracies, political bias, or opinions stated as fact. *How to Ruin Your Boyfriend's Reputation* is the third book about Amy Nelson-Barak. While I liked the second one, *How to Ruin My Teenage Life*, better in terms of character and plot development, the latest book has Amy on an Israeli military base, and the respect for chayalim is obvious.

Tell me a story about the Holocaust that's hopeful and original. Do not include graphic details unless they are necessary to forward the plot or define the characters. *Guardian Angel House* is about two girls who were sheltered in a convent in Budapest during World War II. This non-fiction book is about World War II, and about the Holocaust, but it's more about the relationships between the nuns and the Jewish children they sheltered.

One of my favorite books from 2007 is *Silent as a Stone: Mother Maria of Paris and the Trash Can Rescue*. This book was published by Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press about someone whom the Russian Orthodox Church canonized. I don't think anyone would classify this as a Jewish book. But the story of an eccentric nun who saved Jewish children by convincing trash collectors to hide them in garbage cans, and sneak them out of the bicycle racing stadium and on to safe houses, is interesting and inspiring.

Just because a character has a Jewish name, walks down 13th Avenue, or has a grandmother that bakes bread and lights candles, a book about her is not necessarily a Jewish book. In *Paper Towns* by John Green, Margo Roth Spiegelman is at the center of the story. Her name is the extent of the Jewish content. *Fiona Finkelstein, Big-Time Ballerina*—alliterative title, no Jewish content. *Tillmon County Fire* is a compelling novel in multiple voices, including a boy whose father has left to explore his Jewish roots, but the main focus of the book is the fire and homophobia.

So what a book a Jewish book? The Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee has had an ongoing debate: is it the characters, the setting, the values, the language, the author, the publisher? For me, it's that Judaism is an integral part of the story.

I just read *Strawberry Hill* by Mary Ann Hoberman. It's a lovely book, and it will engage that 9-to-12-year-old age bracket



with the story of Alice Sherman who moves from New Haven to Stamford and must adjust to a new school and negotiate new friendships.

The Jewish moments in this book are Alice's old neighbor, Mrs. Goldberg, who serves tea and sponge cake; an anti-Semitic remark, and a celebration of Hanukkah. But as I said, these were moments, and in retrospect, any ethnicity or cultural group could have filled these moments and the story would have been the same. I would say it makes it more universal, but also less uniquely Jewish.

On the other hand, books with no overt Jewish content can have a Jewish *tam*. My colleague describes *Where the Wild Things Are* as a classic battle between the yetzer hatov and the yetzer hara. Perek Shira is the song that is sung every day by God's creations, each creation having its own song. Rav Chanoch Zundel Luria compares the shira to an orchestra with different instruments. Each instrument makes its own individual sound, and the conductor puts them together to make wonderful music. Here's a review from School Library Journal of *All God's Critters*, which uses the lyrics of a folk tune and is illustrated by Kadir Nelson: "A theater curtain opens on Bill Staines's classic folk song populated with the gorgeous array of animals featured in the lyrics. Each spread shows singing, howling, and yowling beasts set against dramatic lighting that varies from misty sunlight to darkest night. Nelson's rich illustrations display an exuberance that comes to a rousing finale in a foldout, rainbow-drenched spread followed by a view of the wildly cheering audience and the bowing performers."

While Hanukkah and Passover figure prominently, either find a new angle or write a great story about a lesser-known ritual. *Menorah Under the Sea* has a marine ecologist in Antarctica making an underwater menorah out of sea urchins and starfish. The book concludes with a powerful message: that the Jewish people survived by not forgetting to light the menorah wherever they were in the world.

*New Year at the Pier* is about the Tashlich ceremony of April Halprin Wayland's synagogue in Manhattan Beach, California. Another great message: Rosh Hashanah is a time to clean out your heart and soul.

Same things goes for Bible stories—there are enough books about Noah to fill an Ark. I'm enjoying the books by Jacqueline Jules, especially *Benjamin and the Silver Goblet*, and I was thrilled to see *Nachshon Who Was Afraid to Swim*, which is a new riff on the Israelites crossing the Red Sea.

If you're writing an alphabet book, keep your focus, and be careful with U, X, and Z. This new one by Yael Zoldan is called *We Can Do Miztvos from Aleph to Tav*. It will probably appeal only to Orthodox readers, but the alphabet is clear, and each letter represents a commonly known mitzvah.

6. *I was entirely ready to have publishers send new and interesting books.*

7. *I humbly asked them to send them by distributing the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee submission guidelines.*

- The book has literary merit.
- The book has positive or authentic Jewish religious or cultural content.
- The book is appropriate for the intended grade level in style, vocabulary, format, and illustration.

- Whether fiction or nonfiction, the book is solidly rooted in authentic and accurate detail, through scholarship and research by the author.
- Textbooks and reprints are not eligible, although revised editions and re-illustrated editions are eligible.

8. *I made a list of all these books, reviewed them, and submitted scores to help determine which books would be recognized by the committee.*

9. *I talked about these books and gave my opinion, except when to do so would injure authors or publishers.*

10. *I continued to look for excellence in Jewish children's literature by reading journals and blogs, and by attending book related events.*

11. *I sought through contemplation and study to improve my reviewing skills, hoping only for knowledge and the gift of expression.*

12. *Having had an awakening as the result of these steps, I tried to carry this message to other over-readers, and to practice these principles in all my affairs.*

The opinions stated here are my own. After a moment of silence, I will conclude with the serenity prayer: God—Grant me the serenity to accept the books I cannot change, the courage to change the books I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

I wish you the courage to keep writing great Jewish books, and I hope that, one day at a time, they will all be published. Thank you.

## The Importance of Wings

### A Second Reading

NAOMI MORSE

Surprised that Robin Friedman's *The Importance of Wings* won the 2010 Sydney Taylor Book Award for Older Readers, I reread it, focusing on Jewish content, to see what I may have missed the first time. *The Importance of Wings* introduces a secular Jewish family living in Staten Island in the 1980s. They are former Israelis who immigrated to the United States when Roxanne (formerly Ravit), was 5 years old, and have become American citizens. We never learn why they left Israel, or about their history there. There is no synagogue in their lives, no Jewish community, no Jewish or Israeli friends, no kashrut, no Shabbat, no books, and little family life. The Hebrew words *abba* and *imma* are spoken, but there are no conversations in Hebrew.

The girls (Roxanne and her 9-year-old sister Gayle) have no meaningful conversations at all with their father, who is away most of the time driving a cab. Their mother has been back in Israel taking care of her sick sister for three months, and they miss her terribly. Roxanne longs for family life, for which her models are the TV programs *Brady Bunch* and *Little House on the Prairie*. After school one day, Roxanne scrapes up a few dollars and goes down the street to Kelly's house to buy hot dogs and Doritos out of her kitchen. She's hungry, and there is simply not enough food in the house. Roxanne is fearful, trying to fall asleep at night in a house without an adult present. She and Gayle are clearly neglected children.

No adults would call this a safe or wholesome situation. Yet this is the book that captured the Sydney Taylor Book Award,

given annually for excellent books of Jewish content. Jewish content need not be religious. Jewish content could consist of strong cultural, educational, or Zionist values. It could exemplify important Jewish family or spiritual values. It could even center around meals and cooking. But all of these are absent. It seems that even basic parental concern and attention are lacking.

Roxanne's problems are temporarily eased when Liat, an Israeli just Roxanne's age miraculously moves into the vacant (cursed) house across the street. Liat is a model of bravery, maturity, and composure. We are told—unconvincingly, and against all known effects of trauma—that having a mother who was killed in a bus station bombing in Tel Aviv, has conferred on Liat a kind of emotional strength and security. She has moved around the United States eight times in as many years, but it hasn't upset her. The bullies in the neighborhood are no problem. She's not afraid of anything and she doesn't worry. Liat becomes Roxanne's best and much needed friend. She helps Roxanne to worry less and become more confident. But in the end Liat's father decides to return his family to Israel. Behind the stereotypes and gloss of this story about hairdos, sports, and popularity, there is an undercur-

rent of loss. Roxanne and Gayle suffer from loss of their country, their culture, their family, and their lovely Hebrew names. They suffer, in fact, from lack of Jewish content and meaning in their lives. Rather than exemplifying the Sydney Taylor Award ideals, these insubstantial values contradict them.

Is there excellence in writing here? *The Importance of Wings* lurches along a track of plot contrivances and implausible happenings. Would their father routinely leave his two daughters home alone from Saturday afternoon until breakfast Sunday morning? Would he leave them in a house without adequate food? Would these parents leave their daughters unsupervised for so long? Is Liat a real girl, or a sabra who conveniently appears and disappears? Could a house burn clear to the ground leaving the houses on either side completely unmarked and unharmed? What is the point of the cursed house anyway? Are we to believe it is truly cursed?

All these glibly told episodes seem implausible. Like the snack foods the girls crave, this book is quickly and easily consumed, but not very nourishing. The Sydney Taylor Book Award deserves better.

## Good Reasons to Apply for Library Accreditation

AMALIA WARSHENBROT

When I started working as a Judaica librarian, the Speizman Jewish Library was a classroom with about 800 books. Fifteen years later the collection had grown to 5000, and after integrating other collections, it now contains 17,000 titles. Hazel Karp, an AJL past president, sent me the *Guidance for Excellence*, which is now on the AJL Web site accreditation page. Over 20, it helped me find the ideal direction for the development of the library.

I followed each step, starting with creating a committee to approve my proposals for a mission statement, collection development policy, and budget. The guide helped me make decisions about acquisitions as well as circulation, policy, gifts acceptance, and even programs.

Later, when I applied for basic accreditation, I found that the questions provided me with ideas for improvement. I examined the fruits of my work from a different perspective. I began keeping records of titles by category and of circulation statistics (before computers became available). I put more thought into the number of donated books, items recently published, and titles in high demand.

When I worked with an architect on the design of the expanded facility, the Levine-Sklut Judaic Library and Resource Center, I followed the accreditation requirements for important details like good lighting, a separate workroom, and a welcoming area for children. Luckily, by then,

we had already integrated technology into the library, as is recommended for the advanced level of accreditation. The criteria in the accreditation process about computers led me to use them for circulation and cataloging, and also to provide an online catalog and offer computer access to patrons in the library—a must.

With the guidance of the accreditation questions, I became more detail-oriented in how I evaluated the library. The SSC standards were a good start and continued to be helpful throughout my career. Meeting the requirements for accreditation for both basic and advanced levels helped the Levine-Sklut Judaic Library and Resource Center reach the model that was designed by teams of experienced and highly professional librarians in libraries of synagogues, schools, and community centers. A letter announcing that the library received accreditation was sent to the rabbis, school directors, and funders, highlighting for them not only the library's success but also my accomplishments in creating an accredited library, positively regarded by AJL, a national professional organization.

Applications for accreditation can be found on AJL Web site. For more information, please do not hesitate to contact me at [AmaliaIma@ATT.net](mailto:AmaliaIma@ATT.net) or call me at 704-365-3313. You may also contact my co-chair Michal Davis at [davis@yuhsg.org](mailto:davis@yuhsg.org).

# Reviews of Titles for Adults

EDITED BY MERRILY F. HART AND DANIEL SCHEIDE

## FICTION

**Appelfeld, Aharon.** *Blooms of Darkness*. Translated by Jeffrey M. Green. New York: Schocken Books, 2010. 279 p. \$25.95 (ISBN 978-0-80524-280-5).

*Blooms of Darkness* takes place in Ukraine during the Holocaust, and follows eleven-year-old Hugo, who is being hidden by Mariana, a prostitute. Mariana protects, feeds, and shelters Hugo, and guides him through the beginnings of puberty and early sexual longings. Hugo spends the nights locked in a dark closet, but delights in the bright quasi-elegance of Mariana's room, which she allows him to share at times. At war's end, the Russian conquerors march in and administer cruel "justice" to the prostitutes who had served the German occupiers. In the final scene, the author describes, in spare prose, the changes in Hugo's world as he attempts to return to his former home. Somehow, life goes on. But how? An unnamed woman provides an answer: "We have to leave together and watch over one another... We have a lot to give. We don't know yet how much we have." This is a novel of darkness and of hope and rebuilding. Recommended for adults and mature teens.

Susanne M. Batzdorff, Congregation Beth Ami, Santa Rosa, CA

**Liebling, Lawrence.** *In Eight Days: A Journey Toward an Open Heart*. Bellmore, New York: Silent River Press, 2009. 419 p. (ISBN 978-0-96428-743-3). Reviewed from an ARC.

Jonathan West is involved in a car accident. Months after the event, he still has questions. His obsession with finding answers puts a strain on his already distant relationship with his wife, Karen. His mental health is being questioned because he pesters the police and keeps reviewing the accident in his head. Jon hopes a family vacation at the beach will help. He takes with him a book, *The Diary of Every Man* by Arya ben Eliazer, which was found near the scene of his accident. The book relates how the author overcame his alienation from God and Judaism. As the story comes to a climax, Jon realizes it parallels his own challenges, and that he must forgive himself and others and show love to the people in his life.

Using a first-person narration allows for a contemplative examination of Jon's feelings and motives. The vehicle of a story within a story allows the tale to unfold without the need for long speeches. The length and pace may dissuade a few readers, but for those looking to explore meditation and spirituality in the Jewish tradition, it is a good introduction.

Kathe Pinchuck, Congregation Beth Sholom, Teaneck, NJ

**Marcus, Wendy.** *Polyglot: Stories of the West's Wet Edge*. Seattle, WA: Beth Am Press. 2009. 176 p. \$12.95 (ISBN 978-0-76602-838-8).

*Polyglot*, written by Wendy Marcus, a former reporter for the *Seattle Times*, was a 2009 National Jewish Book Award finalist. The stories in the book cover an array of Jewish and universal experiences. Some of the them are heart wrenching and highly

emotional. Not every story deals with Jewish characters, values, or themes and several stories lack any Jewish content whatsoever. Recommended for libraries whose patrons will not be offended by the portrayal of gays and lesbians.

Ilka Gordon, Siegal College of Judaic Studies, Cleveland, OH

**Martel, Yann.** *Beatrice and Virgil: A Novel*. New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2010. 197 p. \$24.00 (ISBN 978-1-4000-6926-2).

This is not a book about the Holocaust. It is set in the present, and none of the characters is Jewish. It is a novel that attempts to answer the author's question: Can a work of art on the subject of the Holocaust be successful and valid? Martel borrows heavily from Beckett and Hitchcock, and uses a kind of Russian-doll method in which he, the writer, writes a play by his fictional character and then critiques the play as his fictional self. This is not as clever as it may sound. The story begins with vague creepiness and ends in horror, but instead of providing the satisfying, cathartic thrill of an escapist, fictional construct, this book makes the reader feel somehow cheated, as the persecution of animals becomes a simplistic allegory for the persecution of Holocaust victims. The setting of the play is a clumsy concept—the back of a striped shirt—and the first part of the book is given over to an arch, barely disguised portrayal of the tribulations of an unusually successful author, i.e., Martel in disguise, whose second work is rejected by his publishers. Perhaps because the plot is less far-fetched and more obviously symbolic than in *Life of Pi*, it does not work, even though the writing is just as fine. This is an optional purchase for Judaic libraries.

Beth Dwoskin, Proquest, Ann Arbor, MI

**Steinberg, Milton.** *The Prophet's Wife*. Springfield, NJ: Behrman House, 2010. 364 p. \$24.95 (ISBN 978-0-87441-140-9). Reviewed from an ARC.

What is more exciting than the discovery of a long-buried manuscript? The tale becomes more dramatic when we realize that the author has published only one other novel, a book that appeared in 1939, that became a Jewish classic, still in print, admired, and discussed today. The publication of *The Prophet's Wife* is the culmination of such a story. Milton Steinberg, a respected rabbi, author of several books still on the basic "Jewish bookshelf" today and the author of the classic *As a Driven Leaf*, was working on *The Prophet's Wife* at the time of his death. Now, 60 years later, Behrman House has brought out an edition of the still-unfinished tale, edited and introduced by Ari Goldman with very useful commentaries by Rabbi Harold Kushner and Norma Rosen. Although it is the story of the prophet Hosea and his harlot wife, the issues explored in the book are still relevant to Jewish life today. The reader is slowly but surely drawn in by the story and characters. The language is frequently awkward and repetitious, but whether that is due to the fact that the author attempts to retain echoes of the biblical language or to the unfinished nature of the manuscript is unclear. The unfinished ending forces the reader to examine possible outcomes and turn to Scriptures to reread Hosea. Although novels of biblical

and Talmudic figures are currently popular, Steinberg's style is didactic and this novel is much tougher reading than *The Red Tent* or Marek Halter's and Maggie Anton's books. It may appeal more to Torah study groups than to book groups, but the many fans of Steinberg's earlier novel will not be disappointed.

Merrily F. Hart, Ann Arbor, MI

**Wishnia, Kenneth. *The Fifth Servant*. New York: William Morrow, 2010. 400 p. \$25.99 (ISBN 978-0-06172-537-1).**

In the Prague ghetto in 1592, on the eve of Passover, the body of a young girl is found in a Jewish shop, and a blood libel is charged against the shopkeeper. Benjamin Ben-Akiva, a young shammas is teamed with Rabbi Loew, a legendary figure in Jewish history, to find the real culprit. The author paints a detailed picture of Jewish life in the ghetto: the trials and tribulations under the rule of Emperor Rudolph II, the uneasy relations with Christians, and the factions within the Jewish community. Benjamin has three days to find the real killer, or all the Jews will be put to death. This book is a real thriller. Highly recommended for fiction collections.

Lee Wixman, Boynton Beach, FL

## VIDEOS

**Campbell, Yisrael. *Circumcise Me: The Comedy of Yisrael Campbell*. DVD. 47 min. Clarksburg, NJ: Alden Films, 2009. \$49.95 (ISBN 978-1-87768-474-6).**

Yisrael (born Chris) Campbell has a life story that seems perfect for a stand-up comedian. Born in Philadelphia to an ex-nun and a Catholic teacher but still searching for spirituality, Chris captivates audiences with his fascinating journey from alcohol- and drug-addicted Catholic teenager to Jewish adult, undergoing Reform, Conservative and Orthodox conversions and finally becoming "Yisrael" and moving to Israel. This DVD intersperses bits of Campbell's comedy act with interviews of him and his father discussing his upbringing, conversion, *aliyah*, marriage, and parenthood, and topics like the second Intifada, and Jewish and Israeli life in general. His humor is universal and is likely to appeal to all types of audiences. A great addition to Jewish video collections.

Shoshana Hurwitz, Hurwitz Indexing, Ma'ale Adumim, Israel

***The Missing Piece*. DVD. 26 Minutes, Clarksburg, NJ: Alden Films, 2010. \$24.95.**

*The Missing Piece* (*Lagaat baAvar* = To touch the past) is an archeological production of The Israel Antiquity Authority. This informative DVD is in Hebrew with English subtitles. It contains a promotional section from the Jewish National Fund (Keren Kayemet I'Yisrael) about the Children of Israel Garden project in the Peace Forest in the Jerusalem Mountains.

*The Missing Piece* illuminates the work of archeologists in Israel today. With a history of more than 5,000 years buried in the ground, archeologists discover how people lived in the past. The Sidonite-Edomit-Greek decorated cave from 4,500 years ago was recently renovated and is open to the public. The Roman amphitheater in Beit Shean hosts modern concerts, and the

Kumran Scrolls, from 2,000 years ago, teach about old Hebrew Psalms. Mosaics and burial artifacts all bring life to bygone periods reconstructed like a puzzle from the archeological findings. The aerial photos of Jerusalem are magnificent. Day school, synagogue, and public libraries should welcome this interesting and instructive DVD.

Nira Glily Wolfe, Highland Park, IL

## NONFICTION

**Angel, Hayyim J. *Revealed Texts, Hidden Meanings: Finding the Religious Significance in Tanakh*. Jersey City, NJ: KTAV, 2009. 275 p. \$25.00 (ISBN 978-1-60280-128-8).**

This is the second collection of essays on biblical topics by Rabbi Hayyim Angel, rabbi of Congregation Shearith Israel in New York and professor at Yeshiva University. The first four articles explore the methodology that is applied in the following sixteen articles, mainly dealing with Tanakh. There is some overlap between the articles, some of which were previously published and are slightly revised. Angel describes his work as "literary-theological," using "rigorous analysis as a means to furthering spiritual development ... "lead[ing] to greater spiritual growth and experience." His approach involves a close text reading, in its literary and historical context, with a focus on the religious significance of the passage. Angel makes use of midrash and classical rabbinic commentaries along with modern academic biblical scholarship with impressive breadth and insight.

He deals with a number of questions including the chronological order of the Torah, the connections between books of the Bible, and the multiple depictions of various biblical characters. One theme, explored in a number of essays, is the different theological perspectives and historical presentations of the same events in the books of Kings, the Prophets, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles.

As Shalom Carmy points out in his foreword, Angel provides a model of analysis, allowing the student to see the questions, his conclusion, and his method in reaching the conclusion. These essays are scholarly but also accessible, and are recommended for use by classroom Tanakh teachers in high school and college courses.

Harvey Sukenic, Hebrew College Library, Newton Centre, MA

**Angel, Marc D. *Maimonides, Spinoza, and Us: Toward an Intellectually Vibrant Judaism*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2009. 197 p. \$24.99 (ISBN 978-1-58023-411-5).**

**Bakan, David, Dan Merkur, and David S. Weiss. *Maimonides' Cure of Souls: Medieval Precursor of Psychoanalysis*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009. 183 p. \$65.00 (ISBN 978-1-43842-745-4).**

Rav Moshe ben Maimon—known also as Maimonides or Rambam—is one of Judaism's greatest thinkers. Although he lived in the twelfth century, many of his ideas are very modern. These two books examine his thought from different perspectives and provide interesting insights for readers. Rabbi Marc Angel, the rabbi emeritus of Congregation Shearith Israel in New York City, examines the teachings of Rambam on topics such as the

## **Vallentine Ad**

role of reason in religious faith, the nature of God, the authority of Torah and rabbinic teachings, and the role of Jews and Judaism in the world. Maimonides believed that Jews needed to understand philosophy and science as well as Torah and felt that reason and religion led to the same truth. Rabbi Angel contrasts Maimonides with Baruch Spinoza, the seventeenth-century Dutch philosopher whose commitment to reason led him to abandon traditional Judaism. He was excommunicated as a result. While acknowledging Spinoza's many contributions to philosophy, Rabbi Angel is clearly in the Rambam's camp.

David Barkan and his colleagues, psychologists with academic affiliations, examine Rambam's views on mental health. The Rambam was a physician as well as a rabbi and he incorporated spirituality into his medical practice. He believed in the modern concept of holistic health, caring for his patients' minds, bodies, and souls. He felt that rationalizing evil as good limited a person's ability to reason, imagine, and behave well. This could lead to physical symptoms and the cure depended on repentance and the love and fear of God. The interpretation of dreams and visions and mystical meditation all played roles in his treatment. Maimonides was in some ways a precursor of Freud and his psychoanalytic practice.

Both of these books provide new insights into Rambam's thoughts. Rabbi Angel's book is an excellent choice for general readers. It would be a good choice for book clubs whose members enjoy discussing philosophy. *Maimonides' Cure of Souls* is a good choice for academic collections supporting graduate programs in philosophy and psychology.

Barbara M. Bibel, Oakland Public Library, Oakland, CA;  
Congregation Netivot Shalom, Berkeley, CA

**Baer, Marc David.** *The Dönme: Jewish Converts, Muslim Revolutionaries, and Secular Turks.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010. 332 p. \$24.95 (ISBN 978-0-80476-868-9).

This is a thorough study of the Dönme—the descendants of the Jewish adherents of Shabbatai Tzevi who, following him, converted to Islam in the 17th century. The Dönme were not crypto-Jews and the larger society did not question their adherence to Islam. Most lived in Salonika, where they attained high social, economic, and political status. Baer examines the reasons for their conversion, the uniqueness of the group, and its composition and development over the years. The Dönme emphasis on remaining a separate, close-knit entity through physical location, education, religious practice, and marriage is what kept the group alive—and what is ultimately causing its disappearance. Dönme involvement in the Young Turks revolution and regime and the forced transfer of Muslims, including most Dönme, from Greece to Turkey in 1923-24, are explored in detail, concluding with the reasons for the gradual disappearance of the Dönme in modern secular Turkey.

The book is clearly written and provides much data and analysis on the cultural, social, economic, and political life of the Dönme, though not much is said on their unique form of Islam. The study is based on extensive archival and published resources, which are mentioned in the notes. The book lacks a bibliography and a list of abbreviations; photographs and an index are included. This is a major study of a community that

contributed greatly to the growth of Salonika and to the emergence of modern Turkey.

Rachel Simon, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ

**Baram, Phillip J.** *The Department of State in the Middle East, 1818-1945: Augmented Edition.* Jersey City, NJ: KTAV, 2009. 343 p. \$39.50 (ISBN-978-1-60280-122-6).

Baram's study of the decision-making process within the U.S. Department of State has remained a standard reference work since it first appeared in 1978. This edition has been updated with some additional material devoted to the issues of Saudi Arabia's oil and Zionism and Palestine. The author's original purpose was twofold: to provide a detailed examination of the bureaucratic nature of the State Department in the post-World War I era, and to follow the developments of American foreign policy toward the Middle East in the post-World War II period. Much has changed in the world since the events of 9/11, but Baram contends that the general practices at State have not changed greatly. The concern for political stability in Saudi Arabia is premised to no small degree on its ability to supply oil to the industrialized West. A section on Israel and its continuous struggle with the surrounding Arab and Muslim world has also been updated. The author argues in support of the Bush Doctrine of preemption in its approach to Saddam Hussein's Iraq. Those unfamiliar with past U.S. foreign policy toward the Middle East could not do much better to educate themselves than to read Baram's book. Others more familiar with the policies might find the work refreshing.

Sanford R. Silverburg, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC

**Blaschke, Olaf.** *Offenders or Victims? German Jews and the Causes of Modern Catholic Antisemitism.* Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press (Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem Studies in Antisemitism), 2009. 224 p. \$50.00 (ISBN 978-0-80322-522-0).

The author's aim is to offer a balanced discussion of anti-Semitism from both a Catholic and Jewish perspective. At first glance it appears that he seriously considers whether the Jews themselves are responsible for the hate and discrimination against them. That turns out not to be the case. The book is instead a detailed examination of writings and speeches found in Catholic sources as well as in Jewish newspapers in Germany, mostly from the 19th century. Special emphasis is given to the time of Bismarck and the "Kulturkämpfe" (1872-1887), the struggle between church and state. Each chapter is followed by many pages of endnotes and the bibliography comprises 27 pages.

The author is an assistant professor of modern history at the University of Trier. His sources are almost all in German. The preface states that Blaschke wrote in English, but that major parts of his original German text were translated by Eleanor Toal. It is therefore impossible to determine whether the author or the translator is responsible for the convoluted, ponderous style of writing, which makes the text hard to understand. Recommended only for very large academic collections.

Susanne M. Batzdorff, Congregation Beth Ami, Santa Rosa, CA



**Brook, Vincent.** *Driven to Darkness: Jewish Émigré Directors and the Rise of Film Noir.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009. 285 p. \$70.00 hardcover (ISBN 978-0-81354-629-2); \$26.95 paper (ISBN 978-0-81354-630-8).

Film noir, which portrays the world as uncertain, dark, and dangerous, is one of the most highly regarded American film genres. This book relates the Jewish identity of a number of directors of film noir to their artistry. The author examines the ambiguities and conflicts these directors experienced as Jewish American émigrés, and the tension between their often high artistic—even avant-garde—European sensibilities and Hollywood, at best a middlebrow entertainment industry. Brook argues that Jewish film noir is often different from the mainstream, especially in its downplaying of the femme fatale and the tough male hero. Some of the analyses are more convincing than others and there are occasional errors (Arnold Schoenberg converted to Lutheranism, not Catholicism and Miriam is Moses' sister, not his wife). Still, this is a respectable study aimed at an academic readership. For larger collections on film.

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

**Brown, Erica.** *Spiritual Boredom: Rediscovering the Wonder of Judaism.* Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2009. 185 p. \$21.99 (ISBN 978-1-58023-405-4).

Dr. Erica Brown, popular author and lecturer, analyzes classroom boredom, childhood boredom, synagogue boredom, and boredom with life in general. Using quotes from philosophers,

statesmen, scholars, educators, and rabbis, she argues that boredom acts as a catalyst for human creativity. The final chapter presents ten suggestions for dealing with boredom. The book includes extensive notes on sources quoted in the text. Recommended for all academic libraries.

*Ilka Gordon, Siegal College of Judaic Studies, Cleveland, OH*

**Carneiro, Andrea Marks, and Roz Marks.** *Jewish Cooking Boot Camp: The Modern Girl's Guide to Cooking like a Jewish Grandmother.* Guilford, CT: Three Forks, 2009. 244 p. \$19.95 (ISBN 978-0-76275-088-7).

This cookbook was originally conceived as a means for one woman to learn her family's holiday recipes from her mother during a long weekend crash course. Andrea Marks Carneiro and Roz Marks turn family recipes, preserved only on scraps of paper, into a tour of cooking and general practices for Shabbat and Jewish holidays. Included are stories about traditional foods, blessings pertinent to each holiday, menus, wine lists, and hints for entertaining.

No attempt is made to keep dishes or menus kosher and some recipes contain treyf ingredients. The book is aimed at young, unaffiliated Jews who want to begin celebrating holidays. The recipes are simple but at times the directions are unclear. (Is the dill supposed to be fresh or dried?) The book records one family's holiday traditions and encourages others to explore and learn their own.

*Sharon Benamou, University of California, Los Angeles,  
Los Angeles, CA*

**Chelst, Kenneth.** *Exodus and Emancipation: Biblical and African-American Slavery.* Jerusalem; New York: Urim Publications, 2009. 446 p. \$34.95 (ISBN 978-9-65524-020-7).

Rabbi Dr. Kenneth Chelst received his academic degrees in engineering, and his rabbinic ordination from Yeshiva University. Chelst is a nationally recognized researcher in the application of mathematical models to the management of police, fire and EMS. He has taught adult Bible classes for more than two decades. *Exodus and Emancipation* is clearly the product of his expertise in these disciplines.

The book is based on the author's knowledge of victimization studies in the field of criminal justice and classical texts of American slavery, and on his knowledge of biblical texts and their commentaries. Comparing the biblical descriptions of the Israelite experience prior to and during the Exodus to the African American slave experience, Rabbi Chelst draws methodical and systematic parallels that "enrich the reader's understanding of both experiences." The author discusses the social and psychological implications of a past rooted in slavery and of oppression on two peoples' roads to freedom and emancipation. The epilogue offers the author's reflections on the continuing struggle of African-Americans to achieve full equality. The parallels drawn in the book illustrate in detail a certainty that goes back to the days of the Civil Rights Movement: that Jews and descendants of African American slaves have much in common, and that one group's experience can be an inspiration to the other.

As to the place of the book in an academic library—it clearly belongs in institutes teaching the historical and anthropological aspects of the story of Exodus. My only ambivalence about it is

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the target audience, which is perhaps reflected in the Library of Congress decision to classify the book in the area of sociology rather than in biblical studies.

*Dr. Yaffa Weisman, Hebrew Union College-JIR, Los Angeles, CA*

**Clark, Caryl.** *Haydn's Jews: Representation and Reception on the Operatic Stage.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. 244 p. \$99.00 (ISBN 978-0-52145-547-3).

This book on representations of Jews in the eighteenth century is part of a current trend in musicology that studies the "other," i.e., the means by which composers musically depict members of minority or outside groups. The title of this book is somewhat misleading, as Haydn only wrote one work that depicted a Jewish character: his comic opera *Lo Speziale* (The Apothecary).

The first chapter is an overview of Jewish representation on the German stage and in literature during the period. Clark makes the case that Haydn had become familiar with these representations both while living in Vienna and from traveling theater troupes. He focused on the character of the "limping devil" from a fantastical French novel and its coded Jewish references. Clark argues that the main character, the apothecary Sempronio, is identified as Jewish because of his lack of professionalism, hyper-obsession with reading the newspaper, perverseness, and interaction with Muslims. Haydn musically depicted his identity in his arias by likening him to a cantor, singing in a high, nasal pitch, accompanied by a similarly high-pitched oboe. His physical appearance was portrayed with a lopsided dotted rhythm, mimicking a limp. The opera, while short lived, gained new life when it was revived in the 19th century by Hirschfeld and Mahler. Born as Jews, both men perceived the coded references to Sempronio's Jewishness and used the opera to develop their careers.

*Sharon Benamou, University of California, Los Angeles,  
Los Angeles, CA*

**Cohen, Arnold.** *An Introduction to Jewish Matrimonial Law.* Jerusalem: Feldheim. 2009. \$29.99 (ISBN 978-1-59826-342-8).

In a clear writing style, Cohen sets out the principles, sources, and debates surrounding the *halakhot* from Kesubos, Kiddushin, and Gittin. He follows the order of the *Tur* and *Even HaEzer*, beginning with "Peru u-veru." The *Ritva* referred to is the one published by Mosad Harav Kook and the references given in the *Tur* (R. Jacob ben Asher) are from the edition published by Mechon Yerushalayim, whereas normally references are to the Beis Yosef (R. Yosef Karo). Lacking are laws of family purity, which are found other works, for example those by Jung (*A Hedge of Roses*) and M. David Tendler (*Pardes Rimmonim*). Cohen could have devoted more analysis to the *moredes*, i.e., the wife who withholds her husband's conjugal rights. Recommended.

*David B. Levy, Brooklyn, NY*

**Cohen-Kiener, Andrea.** *Claiming Earth as Common Ground: The Ecological Crisis through the Lens of Faith.* Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths, 2009. 176 p. \$16.99 (ISBN 978-1-59473-261-4).

In her introduction, Cohen-Kiener asks the question, "Can the religious save the environment?" In answering this question, the author stresses the importance of finding common ground among religious groups, setting aside areas of disagreement, and

working together to protect the environment. The author's thesis is that every religion has a "green" core. People may disagree about the exact nature of God and of the human relationship with God, but everyone is part of God's creation and is responsible for preserving the earth. While Cohen-Kiener tries to present diverse religious views, most of the essays and quotes are from various denominations of Christianity and streams of Judaism, with only a few contributions from Islam and non-Western religions. Because of the limited Jewish content, this book is recommended only for large collections of social justice or interfaith work.

*Sheryl Stahl, Hebrew Union College-JIR, Los Angeles, CA*

**Enkin, Ari N.** *Amot shel Halacha: Halachic Insights.* Jerusalem; New York: Urim Publications (The Dalet Amot Halacha Series), 2009. 249 p. \$23.95 (ISBN 978-9-65524-028-3).

The genre of halachic responsa is more than a thousand years old. Since early consultations between rabbis were not limited by political boundaries, responsa were usually written in the common language, Hebrew. The late twentieth century witnessed new sorts of responsa. In Israel, responsa are to be found on Web sites, and they are far shorter than the traditional answers to questions, omitting detailed discussion and citing fewer sources. Rabbi Enkin, like other American rabbis who have abandoned the conventional format, retains the sources, but writes in English. His discussions are fairly traditional, replete with footnotes and extremely relevant to the Orthodox Jew's daily life. Rabbi Enkin's conclusions are usually normative with the exception of shaving on *Hol ha-Moed*, where he embraces the most lenient view. I was impressed by the book's intuitive organization and I will certainly refer to it in the future.

*Chaim Seymour, Bar-Ilan University, Israel*

**Fewell, Danna Nolan & Gary A. Phillips.** *Icon of Loss: The Haunting Child of Samuel Bak.* Boston: Pucker Art Publications, 2009. 83 p. \$36.50 (ISBN 978-1-87998-521-6).

"Never, never, never was pity so twinned with outrage, or visionary image-making so united with unforgiving fact," writes Cynthia Ozick on the back of the dust jacket. Saying more is so much less in reviewing these powerful reiterations of the Jewish child lifting his arms in surrender in the forefront of a photo documenting the liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto in 1943. Bak's artistic obsession with this haunting image is documented in close to one hundred paintings, beautifully reproduced in this book. Accompanied by analytical essays and an interview with Bak, as well as his biography and a comprehensive catalog of his work, this book is highly recommended for academic and school libraries wherever the Holocaust is taught. It is especially recommended for programs that teach constructing memory and identity as responses to genocide.

*Dr. Yaffa Weisman, Hebrew Union College-JIR, Los Angeles, CA*

**Fleshler, Dan.** *Transforming America's Israel Lobby: The Limits of Its Power and the Potential for Change.* Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2009. 267 p. \$24.95 (ISBN-978-1-59797-222-2).

Fleshler, billed as a media and public affairs strategist, is a Reform Jew, a pro-Israel political activist, and, more important, an objective analyst of Israeli domestic and foreign policy. In *Transforming America's Israel Lobby*, he provides a clear under-

standing of the real source of influence that the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) has in the halls of Congress and in the White House. Those for whom Israel can do no wrong will be duly troubled by his analysis as will be the knee-jerk opponents of any American support for Israel. Fleshler's ultimate goal, perhaps naïve, is to find a way for Israelis and Palestinians to coexist in a relatively peaceful region.

The author argues that AIPAC, in actuality, is not as powerful as it appears. Rather, the lobby is seen within the Beltway as a power broker and is treated in a manner that matches this image. Fleshler pleads for a new generation of Jewish activists to emerge and focus on American national interests with strong advocacy for Israel's welfare only when the goals of both countries coincide. If nothing else, this is a stimulating and provocative read.

*Sanford R. Silverburg, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC*

**Freidin, Gregory, ed. *The Enigma of Isaac Babel: Biography, History, Context*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009. 270 p. \$60.00 (ISBN 978-0-80475-903-8).**

Characterized in the *Encyclopedia of Soviet Writers* as the "first real Soviet writer," yet executed during Stalin's ferocious reign, Isaac Babel has attracted renewed interest in the 21st century and his small body of writings have been reissued in English editions in the last decade. Thus it is unsurprising that scholars and readers are once again searching for answers to questions about his life, death, and work, especially now that the archives of the former Soviet Union are open to researchers. Most of the 12 essays in this interesting collection were developed from presentations at a workshop on Isaac Babel at Stanford in 2004. The authors reflect on questions about his life and his death at Stalin's hands, but also thoroughly explore and analyze the ambiguous meanings in his stories and plays, often indecipherable to the modern reader. As with any academic essay collection, the focus of the essay is occasionally very narrow and the quality varies. The volume includes footnotes and an index. It is an appropriate purchase for academic collections.

For a very different view of this conference, read Elif Batuman's humorous description of her experience working on the event in her delightful book, *The Possessed: Adventures with Russian Books and the People Who Read Them*, 2010.

*Merrily F. Hart, Ann Arbor, MI*

**Garfinkle, Adam. *Jewcentricity: Why the Jews Are Praised, Blamed, and Used to Explain Just About Everything*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2009. 308 p. \$25.95 (ISBN 978-0-470-19856-8).**

The book's title, "Jewcentricity" is a novel term coined by its author and defined by him as "the various roles Jews are imagined to play on the world stage that they do not, in fact, actually play." By Garfinkle's own admission, much of the content of the subjects he expounds on—philo-Semitism, anti-Semitism, celebrity culture, Jewish urban myths, Jewish communal professionals, self-hating Jews, obsession with Israel—is not so new. However, Garfinkle effectively summarizes and distills the arguments and observations of historians, writers, and academics, presenting the facts in an informal and casual style that makes it easier for a general audience to digest. He occasionally sprinkles the text with humor, illustrating one point with a description of

a "Pearls Before Swine" comic strip, and chiding the way that certain Jews try to claim that famous non-Jews are actually Jewish via e-mail chain letters ("electrons are cheap").

*Jewcentricity* is, for the most part, a wonderful read that describes a plethora of Jewish and non-Jewish thinkers and highlights the dangers of exaggerating the impact of the Jews, whether doing so positively or negatively. At times Garfinkle injects a personal slant on the issues, particularly with respect to what "professional Jews" have been doing and the (perceived) threat of non-halachic Jews to Jewish continuity. He implies that self-hating Jews encourage the anti-Semitism that is then manipulated by Jewish agencies to raise funds. The book includes bibliographical references and an index. It is recommended for the adult Judaica collections of synagogue, academic, and public libraries.

*Steven M. Bergson, UJA Research Department, Toronto, Ontario*

**Gillerman, Sharon. *Germans into Jews: Remaking the Jewish Social Body in the Weimar Republic*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press (Stanford Studies in Jewish History and Culture), 2009. 238 p. \$50.00 (ISBN 978-0-80475-711-9).**

This book describes Jewish social and welfare institutions during the Weimar Republic and their impact on the poor, youth, sick, and aged. Jewish organizations established youth homes and orphanages, offered medical care to East European Jewish children, and promoted educational reform. There was a mythic stress on the family: "German-Jewish commentators portrayed the family as having played an unparalleled role in the history and culture of the Jewish people." A discussion of the Jewish women involved in social work includes Bertha Pappenheim, known as the "mother of Jewish social work." With a proportionally larger number of Jewish women found in the profession of social work, the view was held that social work provided a unique connection to the Jewish community. Recommended for university and German Jewish collections.

*Ellen Share, Washington Hebrew Congregation, Washington, DC*

**Greenspahn, Frederick E., ed. *Women and Judaism: New Insights and Scholarship*. New York: New York University Press (Jewish Studies in the 21st Century), 2009. 268 p. \$21.00. (ISBN 978-0-81473-219-9).**

This book's ten essays summarize the state of scholarship on the subject of Jewish women up to the present. Most of the essays are in the form of surveys that review the historiography of some facet of the study of Jewish women, such as Jewish feminist approaches to the Bible, women in Jewish law, medieval Jewish women as revealed through Cairo genizah documents, and women in American and Israeli fiction. Most are fairly general while others are more narrowly focused. All the essays are well written and copiously footnoted. The introduction and epilogue suggest frameworks to approach the study of Jewish women in the context of history and gender studies as they stand today. The writers include several of the leading scholars on Jewish women, such as Judith Hauptman, Chava Weissler, and Sylvia Barack Fishman. This book belongs in collections geared primarily to undergraduates or graduate students who are new to Jewish studies.

*Beth Dwoskin, Proquest, Ann Arbor, MI*

## OU Press Ad

**Halkin, Hillel.** *Yehuda Halevi*. New York: Nextbook/Schocken Books (Jewish Encounters series), 2010. 368 p. \$25.00 (ISBN 978-0-80524-206-5).

*Yehuda Halevi* is an outstanding biography. It includes an English translation and analysis of Halevi's major poems and an evaluation of his philosophical work, *The Kuzari*. Halkin connects Halevi's impact to his own life, and to the religious Zionist movement, including Gush Emunim.

The author presents an overview of Jewish life in Spain under Christian and Muslim rule during the 11th and 12th centuries, using techniques of investigative reporting to hold the reader's attention. Halevi wrote his poems in Hebrew. Halkin, a frequent translator, uses his sensitivity to the rhythms and meters of the language to produce excellent English translations. Halevi's defense of Judaism, *The Kuzari* was written in Arabic, and translated into Hebrew by Yehuda ibn Tibbon in 1167. Halkin has considerable knowledge of Arabic and Hebrew literary terms, which he shares patiently with readers. He examines the implications of *The Kuzari* through Jewish history, and compares it with the Rambam's *Guide for the Perplexed*.

The book includes erudite appendixes and an adequate chronology, but would have benefited from an index, a map, and a glossary of Arabic and Hebrew terms. *Yehuda Halevi* will enjoy readership among laypersons, poets, philosophers, and historians. It belongs in academic, synagogue, Jewish high school, and public libraries.

Nira Gily Wolfe, Highland Park, IL

**Harris, Constance.** *The Way Jews Lived: Five Hundred Years of Printed Word and Images*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland Publishers, 2009. 477 p. \$95. (ISBN 978-0-78643-440-4).

Constance Harris presents the many ways in which the Jews of Europe and America perceived themselves and the ways they were viewed by others through vivid images taken from an assortment of historical sources, offering both positive and negative representations. In doing so, the author conveys a fascinating history of Jewish life over a span of five centuries. Weaving together Jewish art, history, and culture, *The Way Jews Lived* includes 385 illustrations by and about Jews from the fifteenth century to modern times. The illustrations include woodcuts, engravings, etchings, serigraphs, and lithographs, tracing Jews and Jewish life chronologically while individual emphasis is given to regions and countries where Jews have lived in significant numbers. Ranging from grotesque, anti-Semitic caricatures to beautiful, engaging images of Jewish ceremonies, rituals, historical events, and day-to-day happenings, the illustrations collected here are taken from a variety of sources, including portraits, cartoons, posters, magazine covers, newspapers, and books. Harris's accompanying text is well written and the illustrations, all black and white, are nicely reproduced. A glossary provides a helpful guide to the terms used in the text and the foreword by Shalom Sabar, professor of art history at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, is a concise overview of the history and meaning Jewish art. Constance Harris is a collector of art prints and Judaica and is also the author of *Portraiture in Prints* (McFarland, 1987). *The Ways Jews Lived* is recommended for academic and museum libraries.

Sheila L. Darrow, Central State University, Wilberforce, OH

**Horowitz, David.** *A Cracking of the Heart*. Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2009. 188 p. \$24.95 (ISBN 978-1-59698-103-4).

Usual life cycles include having children and watching them grow, and laying to rest previous generations. But when this cycle is altered, and parents must bury a child, tragedy strikes the heart. This memoir was written by the well-known author David Horowitz after the passing of his daughter Sarah, who was 44 years old. Sarah was born with Turner Syndrome, a rare genetic disorder that left her in constant pain, nearly deaf and nearsighted, and that complicated her life with many health problems. But this chronicle is not about the tragedy of a life cut short; it is a celebration of the many accomplishments of Sarah Horowitz, who was determined to live life to the fullest.

Sarah never saw herself as a victim. On the contrary, she strived to help the less fortunate, like the poor and homeless. She traveled to El Salvador to help rebuild houses, went to Uganda to teach English to a group of African Jews, the Abayudaya tribe, and flew to Mumbai to help with sexually abused children. Sarah was also a writer. Many of her writings are included in this book, together with correspondence between her and her father. Although the book records political and familial conflicts between the two, it book is an uplifting example of a father's love and admiration. Recommended for community centers and synagogue libraries.

Sonia Silva Smith, McGill University, Montreal, Canada

**Isaacs, Roger David.** *Talking with God: The Radioactive Ark of the Testimony, Communication through It, Protection from It*. Edited by Janice Williams Miller. Chicago: Sacred Closet Books, 2009. 448 p. (ISBN 978-1-41254-997-4).

The author's claims are summarized in the title. The first is that the Ark of Testimony, built by the children of Israel in the desert after leaving Egypt, was radioactive. The second is that the Ark was a means of communication between God and man. The author is puzzled by a number of questions. What is leprosy? Why was touching the ark fatal? Why do the priests undergo certain ceremonies and why do they need what he calls protective clothing? His answer is that the cloud that accompanies God's revelations is radioactive, and that the radioactivity inheres in the Ark. Leprosy thus becomes radiation sickness.

The author's approach is based upon a number of key words used in connection with the Ark, which he claims are technical terms. Much of the discussion is philological. The approach certainly seems strange, however, Isaacs succeeds in producing a consistent and coherent body of material. From a logical point of view, the answer is Occam's razor: one tends to reject a complex approach, where there is a simpler explanation that serves the purpose. This work belongs to that body of literature that explains God to man in contemporary terms. The problem with such works is that they are only good for their generation; the next generation will need a new work. I respect the author's investment in his theory, even if he did not succeed in convincing me.

Chaim Seymour, Bar-Ilan University, Israel



**Jacobs, Jill.** *There Shall Be No Needy: Pursuing Social Justice Through Jewish Law & Tradition.* Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2009. 257 p. \$21.99 (ISBN-978-1-58023-394-1).

Rabbi Jacobs examines the subject of social justice through the lens of *halakhah* and a wide range of hermeneutic source material. There is, perhaps, nothing more real than the self, nature, and the connection between the two, which can be understood as economics and this is where Rabbi Jacobs begins. She points out the biblical references to the poor and poverty and the general communal responsibility to assist those in need. The establishment of progressive Judaism, she notes, rests on *tikkun olam* (assuming an obligation toward humanity's existence), *tzedek* (justice), and the wisdom proffered by the Jewish prophets of the biblical period.

Common social themes in contemporary America are placed within the context of Jewish responsibility. An essential discussion follows on what constitutes "poverty" and "the poor," and considers the writings of famous rabbis of the past and the American labor union movement. The homeless and the sick are also discussed with reference to sacred literature. Troubling issues arise in the discussion of crime and punishment, a sore topic for many Jews. In the end, the rabbi urges American Jews to participate in public life with a greater appreciation of the historic tradition that undergirds much of their social practice.

*Sanford R. Silverburg, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC*

**Kelman, Ari Y., ed.** *Is Diss a System?: A Milt Gross Reader.* New York: New York University Press, 2010. 293 p. \$35.00 (ISBN 978-0-81444-823-7).

About a half-dozen excellent books have been published discussing the Jewish contribution to the comic book and/or comic strip fields in just the last five years. However, there is little to no mention in these books of the work of Milt Gross, whose illustrated work was syndicated in such publications as *Cosmopolitan*, *The New York Globe* and *Commercial Advertiser*, and *The New York Journal*. The non-Jewish press seems to have appreciated Gross's humor; the Jewish press mostly ignored him. Some Jews in the public eye (such as Gertrude Berg) spoke out against what was perceived as the negative portrayal of Jews in Gross's work. Kelman argues that the real targets of Gross's cartoons were the Gentile establishment and the absurd attempts to "convert" immigrants into Americans.

Kelman's book gives Milt Gross his due, providing a mini-biography, extensive analysis of Gross's work and reception, and finally reprinting a cornucopia of excerpts from such works as *Nize Baby*, *Dunt Esk!*, and *Hiawatta*. Though the illustrated pieces, using transliterated Jewish-accented dialect, may seem difficult to read (Kelman strongly suggests that they be read aloud) and the humor rather dated, this book provides valuable insight into the Jewish-American past, giving today's generation an idea of how difficult it must have been to integrate the language and ways of new world. The bibliographical references are especially helpful in explaining obscure terms in the cartoons, such as "blind pig."

Highly recommended for the "Jewish comics" or "Jewish Americana" collections in academic, public, and synagogue libraries.

*Steven M. Bergson, UJA Research Department, Toronto, Ontario*

**Keinon, Herb.** *Lone Soldiers: Israel's Defenders from Around the World.* Photographs by Ricki Rosen. Jerusalem: Devora Publishing, 2009. 160 p. \$27.95 (ISBN 978-1-93444-060-5).

Many young people altruistically leave their countries of origin to serve in the Israeli army. The challenges for the "lone soldier" (*hayal boded*) are many. Lone soldiers rarely have a family support system close by and, unlike their Israeli comrades, they have not been socialized from childhood for army duty. The first of the 15 profiles in this book is of Lt.-Col. Tzvika Levy, founder and director of the IDF Lone Soldier Program for the Kibbutz Movement. He supports lone soldiers by advising them what to expect, attending induction ceremonies, and dealing with army protocol on their behalf. The soldiers and kibbutzim have formed a mutually beneficial arrangement whereby the kibbutz can generate income and the lone soldiers have a place to call home.

The other 14 individuals profiled exemplify the diversity of the lone soldiers and the multitude of reasons they choose to volunteer for the Israeli Army. Many developed a deep connection when they visited Israel. Others felt out of place in their country of origin, and still others were born in Israel and felt a duty to serve. Women from Morocco, Argentina and the Dominican Republic discuss their motivation, and challenges, and there is a profile of Michael Levin, an American lone soldier killed in the second Lebanon War in 2006. Color photographs accompany the profiles.

Keinon is a reporter for the *Jerusalem Post*, and the chapters read like a collection of feature articles. Libraries whose patrons are interested in Israel and *aliyah* will want this one; otherwise it is a solid optional purchase.

*Kathe Pinchuck, Congregation Beth Sholom, Teaneck, NJ*

**Klitsner, Judy.** *Subversive Sequels in the Bible: How Biblical Stories Mine and Undermine Each Other.* Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2009. 196 p. \$35.00 (ISBN 978-0-82760-888-7).

Do yourself a favor. Don't bother with the rest of my review; just buy this book and start reading it. While it is tempting to make the inevitable comparisons to the work of Nechama Lebowitz and Aviva Zornberg, Judy Klitsner's approach to studying Tanakh deserves to be examined on its own merits. Klitsner sees certain biblical narratives as sequels to other biblical texts and shows how conclusions drawn from one story might be refuted with another. The first chapter, comparing the book of Jonah with the story of Noah, overflows with insights that seem so ridiculously obvious once someone else has pointed them out, it seems impossible not to have noticed them before. A large portion of the book deals with attitudes toward women in the Bible, playing the book of Judges off of the stories of the Matriarchs in Genesis. *Subversive Sequels* is very readable and Klitsner takes great care to write in a way that respects both traditional and academic approaches to the biblical text. Buy this book for your library, get yourself a copy and buy one for a friend. If you don't have a friend, make one.

*Daniel Scheide, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL*



**Kranz, Jacob ben Wolf.** *The Voice of Nobles: Commentary of the Dubner Maggid on the Book of Ecclesiastes.* Translated by David Zucker. Jerusalem: Feldheim, 2009. 271 p. \$14.99 (ISBN 978-1-59826-432-6).

The aggadic genius, the Dubner Maggid (Jacob ben Wolf Kranz), illustrated sublime sermons and astute homiletic commentaries with parables from human life, incorporating fables, stories, penetrating humor, epigrams and folklore to champion the field of *darshanim*. With spicy logic, keenly honed peppered parables, and biting irony he explained biblical verses. The Maggid's aggadic virtuosity resolved many contradictions. He was considered by both laymen and scholars to be one of the greatest *maggidim*. David Zucker has translated and conveyed the thoughts of the Dubner Maggid in an eloquent, magisterial, highly readable, lucid, faithful manner, bringing his ideas alive in idiomatic prose. Headings and subheadings aid the reader, along with citations of biblical and rabbinic sources. This book and the entire five-megillot commentary set are highly recommended for all libraries.

David B. Levy, Brooklyn, NY

**Kranz, Jacob ben Wolf.** *A Voice Shall Sing Forth: Commentary of the Dubner Maggid on the Song of Songs.* Translated by David M. Zucker. Jerusalem: Feldheim, 2008. 345 p. \$24.99 (ISBN 978-1-59826-180-6).

*A Voice Shall Sing Forth* is the fifth title in the Dubner Maggid series translated by David M. Zucker. Other books in the series include Ecclesiastes, the book of Ruth, the book of Esther and Megilat Eichah. Included is a foreword by Rav Daniel Belsky, rosh Yeshivas Oholei Yaakov, a translator's preface and historical background on the Dubner Maggid and his works. Letters of endorsement by Rabbi Zev Leff, the Bostner Rebbe and Rabbi Shmuel Kamenetsky precede the table of contents. Each verse of Song of Songs is translated and followed by the Dubner Maggid's commentary. Copious footnotes supplement the text. Recommended for academic libraries.

Ilka Gordon, Siegal College of Judaic Studies, Cleveland, OH

**Lehrer, Alice Becker.** *If We Could Hear Them Now: Encounters with Legendary Jewish Heroines.* Jerusalem; New York: Urim Publications, 2009. 176 p. \$19.95 (ISBN 978-9-65524-031-3).

Those of you who are looking for feminist literary or historical criticism can look elsewhere. However, if you are interested in fictionalized interviews of Jewish biblical and historical heroines, read on. Ms. Lehrer tells the stories of biblical and historical heroines in the first person, that is, she presents the women's responses to her questions as if they are in the room. Ms. Lehrer does not "interview" only biblical women; she adds historical depth with women such as Rashi's daughters and Henrietta Szold. The combination may spark readers' interest enough to further research. Recommended for synagogue libraries, particularly those with young adult collections, as well as for religious school libraries.

Rachel M. Minkin, Lansing Community College, Kehillat Israel Congregation, Lansing, MI



**Loader, William.** *The Dead Sea Scrolls on Sexuality: Attitudes towards Sexuality in Sectarian and Related Literature at Qumran.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009. 439 p. \$44.00 (ISBN 978-0-802-6-391-1).

This book is not an easy read. Rife with the abbreviations used by Qumran scholars, it plods methodically through three major books and more than a dozen smaller fragments. It is also not as "sexy" as it sounds: this is a sexuality of prohibitions and impurities, concerns and accusations. But it is certainly an important book, one that allows the reader to focus on the texture of day-to-day life in the Qumran community. Loader's book is written as a close, line-by-line reading of the relevant texts, with a chapter allotted to each major book or category of fragments. Since the chapters are not arranged thematically, the summary in the last chapter provides a crucial synthesis of the investigations in the rest of the book. Based on the latest scholarship in the very rich field of Qumran studies, this book will be an important addition to Jewish studies and biblical studies collections.

Pinchas Roth, Hebrew University, Jerusalem

**Mackenzie, Don, Ted Falcon, and Jamal Rahman.** *Getting to the Heart of Interfaith: The Eye-Opening, Hope-Filled Friendship of a Pastor, a Rabbi and a Sheikh.* Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths, 2009. 183 p. \$16.99 (ISBN 978-1-59473-263-8).

The authors explain their concept of inclusive spirituality as a path toward interfaith dialogue. They identify five steps to success: moving beyond separation (working together), inquiring more deeply (keeping an open heart), sharing (acknowledging obstacles to dialogue), moving beyond safety (acknowledging misperceptions), and exploring spiritualities (appreciating other traditions). The authors write frankly about issues of awkwardness and confusion, and about matters of pride. All agree that through sharing they have gained a greater appreciation for their own traditions as well as for the traditions of their dialogue partners. The style of writing is accessible to a general adult audience. Recommended for all libraries with adult users.

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

**Malkiel, David Joshua.** *Reconstructing Ashkenaz: The Human Face of Franco-German Jewry, 1000-1250.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press (Stanford Studies in Jewish History and Culture), 2009. 357 p. \$65.00 (ISBN 978-0-80475-950-2).

Malkiel argues "that medieval Ashkenaz was not a community of saints and martyrs but simply of people, with both the heroism and the foibles found in other eras and locales." He devotes three chapters to the impact of the First Crusade on Ashkenaz Jewry and "establishes a less fraught, more normal image of Jewish-Christian relations in place of one that recognizes only alienation and confrontation." Further areas of Malkiel's inquiry are the apostates, the evidences of deviance from normative rabbinical law, especially among Jewish women, and relations with Christians. Finally, Malkiel devotes a chapter to Sepharad and concludes that "the gap between the Spanish and Franco-German communities is narrower than it has appeared." For most of his topics of research, Malkiel documents clearly the past and current historiography, quoting judiciously from

all the major Jewish historians of the 20th century and of this generation. He provides a clear, well-documented, well-written, and interesting summary of the major issues of the formative period of Ashkenazic Jewry and its heyday. Recommended for academic libraries with Jewish studies programs.

Roger S. Kohn, *Silver Spring, MD*

**Matthaus, Jurgen, ed. *Approaching an Auschwitz Survivor: Holocaust Testimony and Its Transformations*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. 224 p. \$74.00 (ISBN: 978-0-19538-915-9).**

*Approaching an Auschwitz Survivor* takes a unique approach to understanding the Holocaust. Instead of simply compiling stories of survivors, this book presents the testimony of a single survivor, Helen “Zippi” Tichauer, and has it analyzed by Holocaust scholars who have known her personally. Zippi’s detailed testimony covers over fifty years, from her time in Auschwitz to meeting and marrying her husband in a DP camp, surviving the war, and making a new life for herself in New York. Five scholars who have interviewed Zippi independently of one another analyze different aspects of her story: order, death, and survival in Auschwitz; comparative aspects of camp life; translating and transforming Zippi’s first testimony dating back to 1946; post-war Jewish life and the role of survivors for classroom teaching. These scholars have put together a fascinating read about how survivor testimony helps in understanding the Holocaust itself, and they delve into the deeper meaning of collecting testimonies and their value in history. Highly recommended for all types of libraries.

Shoshana Hurwitz, *Hurwitz Indexing, Ma’ale Adumim, Israel*

**Merkle, John C. *Approaching God: The Way of Abraham Joshua Heschel*. Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2009. 121 p. \$19.95 (ISBN 978-0-81465-456-9).**

This book, written by Heschel’s leading Christian interpreter, professor of theology at the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John’s University, provides a short, scholarly introduction to Heschel’s work. It is well documented, including many endnotes, and a final selected bibliography of books by and about Heschel. A brief introduction with biographical information sets the context for the rest of the book. The remaining four chapters examine Heschel’s tasks as a philosophical theologian and explore the relationship between human experience, belief, and faith in God. The final chapter focuses on God and religious diversity. This work will be a useful addition to Judaica collections in academic libraries of all types, as well as in Jewish community center and public libraries. It offers a valuable guide to understanding Heschel’s thought.

Dr. Susan Freiband, *University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras, PR*

**Nahshon, Edna, ed. *Jewish Theatre: A Global View*. Leiden: Brill (IJS Studies in Judaica), 2009. 305 p. \$145.00 (ISBN 978-9-00417-335-4).**

Edna Nahshon is a professor of Hebrew at The Jewish Theological Seminary. She specializes in Jewish theater and has published extensively in that area. This volume offers papers that were originally presented at an academic “Jewish Theatre” conference in 2002. The book includes five sections that cover

the spectrum of Jewish theatre, historically, geographically and thematically. The authors come from Europe, Israel, and the United States, and offer insights, analyses, and discussions about Yiddish, Jewish and Israeli drama and theatre in Poland, Italy, England, Germany, Austria, Israel and the US.

A “must read” and a heads-up for catalogers is an essay at the end of the book, written by Paolo Puppa, that traces Abraham’s scene in biblical texts. The essay offers midrashic, anthropological, philosophical, and psychological perspectives on Abraham the Patriarch, and serves as an introduction to a four-page dramatic monologue that has Abraham confronting an audience in an attempt to justify his choices.

Highly recommended for academic libraries and readers collecting in the areas of Yiddish, Jewish theater, Israeli drama and cultural identity.

Dr. Yaffa Weisman, *Hebrew Union College-JIR, Los Angeles, CA*

**Pedahzur, Ami and Arie Perliger. *Jewish Terrorism in Israel*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009. 243 p. \$29.50 (ISBN-978-0-23115-446-8).**

Terrorists in Israel? They must be Muslim extremists or radicals—if not, then Palestinians attacking Israel, Jews, or both. But that is not necessarily so for two Israeli political scientists who have painstakingly examined Jewish terrorists operating in Mandated Palestine and then in Israel. The contemporary manifestation of political violence is set in historical context, beginning in the biblical period with accounts that most Jewish children have learned as tales of heroes. The authors examine the activities of two ideologically oriented Zionist groups: the Irgun, which targeted British facilities; and the Stern Gang, which assassinated British officials during the Mandate period. Most troubling, but informative, is the discussion of right-wing Israeli Jews attacking Palestinian officials and civilians in the West Bank.

The authors go beyond a mere chronicling of events to delve into the motivations of a segment of religious Jews in Israel. Having said that, there is a useful chronology appended of Jewish-initiated, terrorist events from 1948 to 2007. There is also a penetrating examination of the mindset of the terrorist—non-Jew and Jew alike. This book should be read along with the highly controversial *The King’s Torah* by Yitzhak Shapira and Yosef Elitzur (2009, in Hebrew). *Jewish Terrorism in Israel* can—and perhaps should—be a rude awakening for many Jewish readers.

Sanford R. Silverburg, *Catawba College, Salisbury, NC*

**Polak-Sahm, Varda. *The House of Secrets: The Hidden World of the Mikveh*. Translated by Anne Hartstein Pace. Boston: Beacon Press, 2009. 248 p. \$28.95 (ISBN 978-0-80707-742-9).**

In her prologue, the author likens immersion in the mikveh to death and rebirth. She admittedly went to the ritual bath with preconceptions that it was repellent and dirty, and that it was a symbol of religious coercion and intrusion. But she had such a positive powerful “overwhelming sensory experience” that she decided to “pursue a searching and wide-ranging investigation into what the mikveh is all about.” The result is a candid and fascinating exploration of a diverse group of women and their motivations for engaging in this ancient practice. The title is taken from the Hebrew term, which also means “hidden

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places," and refers to female body parts as well. The book is well referenced and well indexed, and there are Hebrew and English bibliographies.

The excellent translation captures the author's and the women's opinions, as well as their unique personalities. The reader feels as if she has been let into a "house of secrets" as one woman describes her reunion with her husband after twelve days of abstinence and a paraplegic bride, injured in a terrorist attack, goes into the mikveh with the loving assistance of specially trained attendants to the joy of her family. The author's disdain for the mikveh as a way for the rabbis to control women turns into a deep respect for the wisdom of the attendants and an appreciation for how women embrace their femininity through the process of ritual purification. Less philosophical than *Ritual Immersion* (Jason Aronson, 1996), this book is highly recommended for all Jewish libraries.

*Kathe Pinchuck, Congregation Beth Sholom, Teaneck, NJ*

**Reinharz, Shulamit and Sergio DellaPergola, eds. *Jewish Inter-marriage Around the World*. Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2009. 221 p. \$44.95 (ISBN 978-1-41281-016-6). Reviewed from an advance uncorrected proof.**

The Jewish population in the Diaspora is faced with a sharp increase in the rate of intermarriage. This is creating a breakdown in the family and the community, because these institutions have unified the Jewish people for so long. In many places, the intermarriage rate is threatening to wipe out whole communities.

This new book is edited by Professor Della Pergola, a widely acknowledged authority in demography and statistics, and Shulamit Reinharz, a professor of sociology at Brandeis University. It presents the results of studies on intermarriage in 21st-century small communities around the world. Specifically, the book offers data about marriage patterns in 13 different countries: France, Great Britain, Sweden, Finland, Norway, the former Soviet Union, Canada, South Africa, Australia, Mexico, Venezuela, Argentina and Curaçao. It is difficult to find figures on intermarriage in these smaller communities, because most of the research is concentrated on the two largest Jewish communities in the world: the United States and Israel. This book offers recent demographic data and also information on the challenges facing Jewish leaders, who are struggling to keep Jewish communities together. Recommended for all academic libraries.

*Sonia Silva Smith, McGill University, Montreal, Canada*

**Rosenthal, Ruvik. *Milon ha-Tserufim: Nivim u-Matbe'ot Lashon ba-'Ivrit ha-Hadashah: Gilgulim, Mekorot, Shimushim / Dictionary of Hebrew Idioms and Phrases*. Jerusalem: Keter Books, 2009. 962 p. (ISBN 978-9-65071-775-9).**

With nearly 18,000 entries representing all periods, this dictionary is especially strong in idioms and phrases coined in modern Israeli Hebrew, covering all linguistic strata: formal, poetic, conversational, and slang. Based on an unpublished dictionary by the late Avraham Stahl, *Milon ha-Tserufim* lists an impressive wealth of sources: fiction and poetry, Internet sites (government, sports, lyrics for popular music), media outlets, and classic Israeli skits.

Most entries are explained etymologically, whether they originated in other languages or were coined in Hebrew, and are

presented with equivalents in other languages and a citation, but not additional examples of usage. The fact that citations are used as examples is somewhat tricky, as the specific context in which entries were created is elusive to users unfamiliar with Israeli culture. To some degree, then, the dictionary is more a coffee table book than a useful reference work. Some flaws detected include inaccurate definitions, citations not matching entries, and entries that offer no citations. However, written by an authority for modern Hebrew linguistics (see his recent *Dictionary of Israeli Slang*, 2005), this dictionary is recommended for all libraries.

*Rachel Leket-Mor, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ*

**Rubin, Aryeh, ed. *Jewish Sages of Today: Profiles of Extraordinary People*. Jerusalem: Devora Publishing (A Targum Shlishi Project), 2009. 264 p. \$16.95 (ISBN 978-1-93444-096-4).**

Aryeh Rubin, with the help of an editorial advisory board, selected 27 contemporary people as models of present-time Jewish heroes. Being politically correct, the 20 authors who wrote the profiles and their subjects are about equally divided between the sexes.

The book is a example of a Jewish biographical-anecdotal encyclopedia. In his preface, Rubin explains his motivations for this project, as well as the controversy surrounding the choice of the individuals and the use of the word "sages" in the title. Indeed the word "sages" is a misleading term to describe the accomplished individuals in this volume. When we think of a Jewish sage, names such as Rabbi Akiva, Hillel, and Shammai come to mind. With all due respect, would one consider as Jewish sages Ruth Calderon, Debbie Friedman, Aaron Lansky, and Dennis Prager? *Jewish Sages of Today* will enhance collections of Jewish day schools, public and synagogue libraries. An index would have facilitated the usefulness of this light reference volume.

*Nira Gily Wolfe, Highland Park, IL*

**Ruttenberg, Danya, ed. *The Passionate Torah: Sex and Judaism*. New York: New York University, 2009. 439 p. \$19.95 (ISBN 978-0-81477-604-9).**

It is not easy to conduct a serious and productive conversation about sex. *Passionate Torah* keeps one foot in objective academic discourse, while the other pokes mischievously at sacred cows. For example, an article entitled "The Goy of Sex" contains a fascinating and well-researched history of intermarriage from biblical times to 20th-century America. The articles are divided into three sections, revealing the theological agenda of the volume as a whole: "I-It," "I-Thou" and "We-Thou." They move from the descriptive into the prescriptive, suggesting ways that Jewish sources can be read and applied in new and surprising ways, to speak to the sexual mores of today's Jews. The tone is sometimes sociological, sometimes theological, and sometimes personal. Some readers are bound to be shocked and offended by some comments, but overall it is an important and courageous collection of thought-provoking essays.

*Pinchas Roth, Hebrew University, Jerusalem*



**Rynhold, Daniel.** *An Introduction to Medieval Jewish Philosophy.* London: I.B. Taurus (International Library of Historical Studies) 2009. 256 p. \$34.00 (ISBN 978-1-84511-748-1).

Philosophical texts from the Middle Ages are difficult reading, especially for a beginner. Their terminology and methodology, and even the questions they are concerned with, are very foreign to the modern student. Daniel Rynhold provides an introduction to the central issues in medieval Jewish philosophy. He guides the reader, step by step, through the arguments and assumptions of five or six major thinkers. For the most part, he paraphrases rather than quoting from the original texts, and this allows the text to be readable, and even enjoyable. Written for students with little or no background in either philosophy or Judaism, Rynhold does a good job of slipping in important concepts and terms at a slow but steady pace.

Each chapter is devoted to a major issue in medieval philosophy, starting with the existence of God and progressing to more specific questions. The text has very few footnotes, but chapters end with suggestions for further reading, a very good way to introduce the student to the classics of modern scholarship. The introduction provides basic historical background about the figures that appear in the book, but the focus is on ideas, not the people who wrote them. Nevertheless, the explanation that runs in close parallel to the original texts gives the reader a feel for the flow of the *Guide for the Perplexed*, the *Kuzari*, and Gersonides' *Wars of the Lord*.

*Pinchas Roth, Hebrew University, Jerusalem*

**Safrai, Shmuel, and Ze'ev Safrai.** *Haggadah of the Sages.* Translated from the Hebrew by Miriam Schlusberg. Jerusalem: Carta, 2009. 266 p. \$56.84 (ISBN 978-9-65220-706-7).

This Haggadah was first published in Hebrew in 1998. The English translation includes minor revisions. The book is highly readable and the English is excellent. It differs from other Haggadot in that it is an academic edition.

It is divided into three sections. The first section discusses the formation of the Haggadah after the destruction of the Second Temple, the two main versions from Eretz Israel and from Babylonia, and their combination into one accepted text. The second part of the book is a detailed analysis of the Haggadah itself. The third part includes the modern text with an English translation, along with an abbreviated commentary, appended to the text, that summarizes the main points of the second part. The text is illustrated, but unfortunately only in black and white. I am sorry that Carta decided to save a few dollars on the illustrations. This is an impressive work, summarizing current research, and is highly recommended.

*Chaim Seymour, Bar-Ilan University, Israel*

**Salkin, Jeffrey K, ed.** *The Modern Men's Torah Commentary: New Insights from Jewish Men on the 54 Weekly Torah Portions.* Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2009. 331 p. \$24.99 (ISBN 978-1-58023-395-8).

This book has something in common with feminist Bible commentary in that it was written specifically for one sex. The editor explains that since the Reform and Conservative move-

ments have opened up all aspects of synagogue life to women, it has become apparent that women are far more active in the synagogue than men. This book is part of a determined effort to return men to the synagogue. Each weekly portion is analyzed by a different person, all of them male. Many of the commentaries involve the reader in their authors' personal lives; for example, Rabbi Artson talks about his relationship with his father. One of the most moving essays is that of Professor Julius Lester, who also refers to his father, a Christian clergyman, and to his conversion to Judaism.

The writing is modern and the book includes images such as a comparison of the Israelites in the desert to squabbling children in the back seat of a car. I am somewhat skeptical that this book will return many men to the synagogue, but it most certainly will give a lot of pleasure to the interested reader.

*Chaim Seymour, Bar-Ilan University, Israel*

**Shulevitz, Judith.** *The Sabbath World: Glimpses of a Different Order of Time.* New York: Random House, 2010. \$28.00 (ISBN 978-1-4000-6200-3).

Judith Shulevitz asks "what is the Sabbath, and why should we care about it?" Her book explores the question through the Bible, literature, scholarship, and her own life. Seven chapters approach the issue from a variety of angles. One is an investigation of the sociological and psychological need for such a break in our daily routines. This leads the author to Weber and other scholars who have analyzed the idea. Another is through religious history.

The book devotes a significant number of pages to the history of Christianity. The final chapters discuss the American history of the weekend in its religious, legal, and social aspects. The author's recounting of Judaism is serious but occasionally odd—for example, she spends considerable space on the story of Hanukkah as a struggle over religious meaning. She tells her own life story, including an early rejection of Judaism, and several unsuccessful attempts to re-connect, concluding with her current acceptance of Sabbath observance and its personal meaning.

Despite her earnest attempts to resolve the intricate meaning of the Sabbath, Shulevitz's book remains puzzling, rather than enlightening. Much of it seems pasted together, rather than intimately connected. She appears to be talking to a Christian audience interested in justifying a renewed spiritual connection to the Sabbath. *The Sabbath World* may be of interest to non-Jews, and would be an appropriate purchase for public libraries and book groups. Except for large institutions though, Judaica libraries can do without it.

*Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA*

**Sidur Koren = The Koren Siddur.** Introduction, translation, commentary, Jonathan Sacks. Jerusalem: Koren, 2009. 1244 p. \$31.95; various editions and prices (ISBN 978-965-301-067-3).

For decades, the Artscroll translation of the traditional prayerbook has been ubiquitous in the English-speaking Orthodox world. Koren, in cooperation with the Orthodox Union, offers a new alternative by British Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks. In comparison with the Artscroll, Chief Rabbi Sacks's commentary takes a more universalistic view of the liturgy. The Koren siddur is also more Zionist in outlook, containing prayers for the Israeli government and its soldiers as well as services for Yom

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ha-Atzma'ut, Yom ha-Zikaron and Yom Yerushalayim. One criticism leveled at Rabbi Sacks's commentary is his inconsistency in citing his sources. The commentary is appropriately sparse and those looking for an introduction to the thought of Rabbi Sacks will probably want to start elsewhere.

Koren's reputation for excellence in typography, layout, and book design is well deserved. Koren could publish a shopping list and it would be a joy to read. The translation is elegant and clear. There are Ashkenazic and Sephardic editions available as well as different editions for the United States and Canada. While appropriate for most communities, this siddur is particularly recommended for Zionist Modern Orthodox communities. It is beyond the scope of this review to evaluate this siddur for liturgical use, but it is safe to say that this siddur belongs in nearly every synagogue and school library.

*Daniel Scheide, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL*

**Socken, Paul, ed. *Why Study Talmud in the Twenty-First Century? The Relevance of the Ancient Jewish Text to Our World*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009. 252 p. \$75.00 (ISBN 978-0-73914-200-4).**

The question posed in the title places the respondents on the defensive. All sixteen of the contributors to this volume teach Talmud professionally—whether in the academy or in other frameworks. To answer the editor's question "Why Study Talmud?" would be to justify their occupation. Some of the writers answer this challenge directly. Others expand upon the ways in which Talmud can become meaningful to people today; Devora Steinmetz's essay is particularly compelling. Several respondents simply provide a personal account of how they came to be teachers of Talmud. Reframing the question (perhaps following the Talmudic methodology of "hisure mehsera") as "Why I Study Talmud," they open a window into their own development and give other educators much food for thought about the significance that Talmud, as a text and as a lifelong practice, can have for different kinds of people.

*Pinchas Roth, Hebrew University, Jerusalem*

**Taubes, Jacob. *From Cult to Culture: Fragments Toward a Critique of Historical Reason*. Edited by Elishava Fonrobert and Amit Engel. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press (Cultural Memory in the Present), 2010. 397 p. \$24.95 (ISBN 978-0-80473-984-9).**

This collection of essays is an important introduction to the work of a writer and thinker who isn't widely discussed today. Taubes (1923-1987), an intellectual historian who was the first Jewish studies professor at the Free University in West Berlin, also taught at Harvard, Princeton, and Columbia. His writings are important to students of Jewish law and history, New Testament history, Jewish mysticism and the writings of Theodor W. Adorno and his colleagues at the Frankfurt School.

Many issues facing today's Jewish and non-Jewish intellectuals come under discussion. Taubes questions the legitimacy of the concept of the Judeo-Christian tradition, carefully examines the thinking of Gershom Scholem on messianism, and offers a variety of insights into modern Jewish history. His essay, "Nachman Krochmal and Modern Historicism" is a study of the fascinating but arcane work of Nachman Krochmal (1785-1840). This collection has an introduction by Aleida Assmann, Jan Assmann and

Wolf-Daniel Hartwich, extensive notes and an index. It belongs on the shelves of university and seminary libraries.

*Morton J. Merowitz, Buffalo, NY*

**Tawil, Hayim ben Yosef. *An Akkadian Lexical Companion for Biblical Hebrew: Etymological-Semantic and Idiomatic Equivalents with Supplement on Biblical Aramaic*. Jersey City, NJ: KTAV, 2009. 503 p. \$79.50 paperback (ISBN 978-1-60280-114-1); \$125.00 hardcover (ISBN 978-1-60280-120-2).**

Tawil's *Akkadian Lexical Companion* begins with a preface in which the author clearly and thoroughly explains the purpose and underlying theory of his work. He notes the cultural closeness of the various ancient Semitic languages and peoples to one another. This closeness, combined with the survival of a massive number of Akkadian texts in comparison to Hebrew, makes Akkadian language and literature the logical context in which to interpret Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic words and idioms.

Tawil has designed his dictionary not for Semitic linguists, but primarily for students of the Hebrew Bible. He cites all of his Akkadian in transliteration, and provides many quotations showing the Akkadian term in context. Tawil also provides a "Brief Overview of the Akkadian Language." The dictionary concludes with Akkadian to Hebrew and Akkadian to Aramaic concordances and a select bibliography, citing both classical and modern scholarly sources. The major drawback of Tawil's work is that he often uses technical linguistic terms that are not part of the vocabulary of a generally educated person and are not in a typical English desk dictionary.

It is a truism that the Bible is not only among the foundational canonical books of Judaism, but of all of western society. The appearance of a tool that can help to clarify biblical text in new and unexpected ways is to be applauded. I recommend this work for all academic libraries, and, selectively, for congregational libraries as well.

*Daniel J. Rettberg, Hebrew Union College-JIR, Cincinnati, OH*

**Taylor, Derek. *Solomon Schonfeld: A Purpose in Life*. London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2009. 205 p. \$54.95 (ISBN 978-0-85303-891-70).**

Rabbi Schonfeld was one of the most dynamic and dedicated rabbis of twentieth-century England. Taking the mantle of Jewish leadership from his father, Victor Schonfeld, he is credited with saving thousands of Jews from the Nazis, and for working tirelessly to ensure high-quality Jewish education for the children of London, many of whom had been saved by his efforts. Taylor's biography presents Schonfeld as a man of his times, so there is a lot of detail about the internecine squabbles within the Jewish community and the situation in Europe before, during and after World War II. These challenging times gave Schonfeld a chance to demonstrate his leadership and finesse. The schools he established are still thriving. Schonfeld had strong opinions about Zionism and Orthodoxy, which often put him at odds with other clergy and influential Jews. His determination made it hard for him to work with committees or to compromise.

With many intimate details and references to "Solly," the narrative reads more like a chatty reminiscence than a presentation of life events. While Rabbi Schonfeld is presented "warts and all," the details and the back stories also detract from the book's focus.

A timeline or chronology may have helped. Much of the book discusses his family and the influence his mother had on him and his relationships with his siblings. The subject matter and the price would make this a better choice for Jewish libraries in Great Britain than in North America. Many family photographs and a comprehensive index are included.

*Kathe Pinchuck, Congregation Beth Sholom, Teaneck, NJ*

**Taylor, Penina.** *Coming Full Circle: A Jewish Woman's Journey Through Christianity and Back.* Jerusalem: Hatikva Books, 2009. 272 p. \$27.00 (ISBN 978-9-65546-005-6).

In this memoir, the author presents her spiritual journey from her secular Jewish childhood to her conversion to Christianity and finally her embrace of Orthodox Judaism. Penina Taylor was raised in an unobservant Jewish household. At age 15, encouraged by some friends, she became a born-again Christian. After attending a Bible college, Penina married Paul, another fervent Christian. Penina and Paul's understanding of Scripture inspired them to observe kashrut, light Shabbat candles and wear kippot and tzitzit. Criticized by their fellow Christians, they joined a messianic Jewish congregation, but discovered they were still alone in following these practices. When they moved into an ultra-Orthodox neighborhood, Penina and Paul found that their religious practices were similar to their neighbors' customs. After a long struggle to earn the trust and friendship of the community followed by Paul's conversion to Judaism, their search for a meaningful religion was resolved.

The book is a strictly chronological account of Penina's experiences. There is very little analysis, background information, or history. While the story itself is engrossing, its impact is weakened by poor writing. Readers may gain some insight into how fundamental Christians win converts and how they view Judaism. Not recommended.

*Lee Haas, Temple Emanu El, Cleveland, OH*

**Weiss-Wendt, Anton.** *Murder Without Hatred: Estonians and the Holocaust.* Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press (Religion, Theology and the Holocaust Series), 2009. 476 p. \$45.00 (ISBN 978-0-81563-228-3).

Estonia, a country with a tiny Jewish population and little anti-Semitism, proved amazingly complicit in the Nazi genocide. In *Murder Without Hatred*, the author explores the cultural and political history of the country, and examines the work of renowned Holocaust scholars, to suggest possible motives for Estonia's role during the Holocaust. One of the Baltic states created after World War I, Estonia, had long had a substantial and influential German minority. The ethnic Estonians, seething under Soviet annexation in 1940, hailed the Nazi "liberators," whose tanks rolled in a year later. The prevailing nationalism and the hatred of the Russians were exploited to recruit lackeys for the security police. The region, valued for its shale production, became the locus of labor camps, the most notorious being Klooga.

The small size of the Jewish population afforded the author access to police records of individual Jews, each with his or her personal tragedy. Although the personal accounts of Estonians reveal that not all were collaborators—some even fed or sheltered Jews—there was no organized resistance movement to speak of. Estonia was truly the model Nazi protectorate.

Maps and photographs show the camps and killing fields; appendices provide the numbers of police (nearly 2,000) and victims (over 31,000), including Russians and Gypsies. There are ample footnotes, proving this little part of the world a gold mine for research. *Murder Without Hatred* is not only informative but, for its long-overlooked subject alone, is essential for Holocaust collections.

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

**Wistrich, Robert.** *A Lethal Obsession: Anti-Semitism from Antiquity to the Global Jihad.* New York: Random House, 2010. 1184 p. \$40.00 (ISBN 978-1-40006-097-9).

Dr. Wistrich is a professor at Hebrew University and heads its Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism. In his latest book, *A Lethal Obsession*, he covers the entire history of anti-Semitism, with emphasis on the nineteenth century to the present. This is a detailed and sophisticated synthesis that traces the development of anti-Semitism from a "hostility to the other" in ancient times, to the demonization of Jews as deicides in Christendom, to modern racial anti-Semitism that has combined with the notion of a Jewish conspiracy for world domination found in the forgery known as *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. The latter sections of the book delineate the transmogrification of anti-Semitism to anti-Zionism and include a particularly painful chapter on Jewish anti-Zionism. The author avoids oversimplification, admitting there is an element of abiding mystery to this phenomenon. An essential purchase.

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

**Zickel, Lewis L.** *The Jews of West Point in the Long Gray Line.* Jersey City, NJ: KTAV, 2009. 210 p. \$35.00 (ISBN 978-1-60280-117-2).

The United States Military Academy at West Point, the institution that trains leaders of the American Army, is not a place one may think has much of a Jewish presence. There have been fewer than nine hundred Jewish alumni of West Point since its inception in 1802. According to the author, however, the Jewish impact on the Army as a whole has been tremendous; the army is known to insiders as being very accepting of its Jewish members, and being part of a tiny minority has influenced their own religious outlook as well.

Zickel relates his personal story in the second part of the book, describing the circumstances that led him to join the Army during the Korean War and his role in creating the West Point Jewish Chapel. Mostly positive memories from Jewish West Point graduates make up the final part of the book, relating how the chapel's activities brought its members together into a close and active group, even after graduation, and played a part in bringing some of them closer to Judaism. West Point graduate Steve Rotkoff summed it up best: "Judaism made me a better officer and the Army made me a better Jew." Highly recommended for all types of libraries.

*Shoshana Hurwitz, Hurwitz Indexing, Ma'ale Adumim, Israel*



## Books Received

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

Hoenig, Mark. *Back To The Beginning: Weekly Divrei Torah – Pathways to Jewish Identity*. [S.l.]: M. Hoenig, 2009.

Kessler, Lauren. *My Teenage Were-Wolf: A Mother, A Daughter, A Journey Through the Thicket of Adolescence*. New York: Viking, 2010.

Levi, Jascha M. *The Last Exile: The Tapestry of a Life*. [S.l.]: Booksurge, 2009.

Politis, Yael. *Lonely Tree*. London: Holland Park Press, 2009.

Rosmarin, Leonard. *Getting Enough*. New York: Strategic Book Publishing, 2008.

Safran, Eliyahu. *Sometimes You Are What You Wear: An Argument for Tzniut – Modesty*. [S.l.]: Xlibris, 2010.

“On the Run” is a middle grade novel loosely based on the heroic actions of Maria and Adolf Althoff, a circus master and his wife, who hid members of a Jewish family for several years during the Holocaust. In 1995, the Althoffs were recognized as “righteous among the nations.” The story follows eleven-year-old Janna, who has been hiding for two years. When Janna and her mother are forced to flee again, Janna’s grandmother, a former circus performer, sends them to an old friend. Confined to a tiny room, Janna and her mother create a world for themselves.

The story is peopled with colorful characters: the circus master and his wife, a deaf-mute who shares the circus wagon with Janna and her mother, an unfaithful friend, members of the underground. The book is rife with the tension of surprise visits from German soldiers as well as the fear of betrayal from within the circus. This tension holds until the very end, when Janna hears soldiers outside the circus wagon. But this time, instead of hiding, Janna leaves the wagon to find in front of her “good men,” not the tall blacked-booted German soldiers.

The committee was impressed with the uniqueness of the story and the character development, as well as with the way Jewish values are infused into the narrative. While “On the Run” is a Holocaust book, the treatment is original and the elements of adventure, mystery, and intrigue draw the reader into the story. The reader becomes aware of the danger Jews faced during the war years but is not terrified by horrific details. Readers will especially identify with Janna and the tension under which she lived.

One reviewer thought that “children will enjoy the circus and animals that are an important part of the story. They will also like Janna’s mischievous nature.” Another reviewer stated, “This is a work which simply reveals human nature at its most selfless while also describing examples of the opposite, all told in a manner appropriate for 8- to 11-year-old readers.”

The author, a former classroom reading teacher and literacy specialist, has been teaching children’s literature at California State University, Fresno since 1994. Ms. Schoettler shares her large collection of Holocaust picture and chapter books with university students every semester. She is elated by the honor given her story. “Children must know and understand the ordeal others before them have had to struggle through as a result of injustice,” she said. “Now I have the responsibility to take it one step further by doing all I can to find the right publisher for this manuscript.”

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## Circus Story Wins Sydney Taylor Manuscript Award

AILEEN GROSSBERG

Since 1985, the Association of Jewish Libraries has awarded a prize of \$1000 to the author of an unpublished fiction manuscript for middle elementary grade readers. The award is currently supported by Jo Taylor Marshall, Sydney Taylor’s daughter. Mrs. Taylor, the author of the classic series All-of-a-Kind Family, was herself the recipient of a manuscript award funded by Follett Publishing Company.

The award is administered by AJL and coordinated by a chairperson who heads a committee of five judges, selected from applicants representative of AJL’s constituency. Committee members read the anonymous manuscripts, whose authors are known only to the chairperson, share their ratings and comments, and select the winning manuscript based on the quality of the writing, originality of the story, appeal to readers and positive Jewish content.

The Sydney Taylor Manuscript Award Committee has selected “On the Run” by Joan Schoettler as the winner of the 2010 award.

# Association of Jewish Libraries

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## The Third Annual Israeli Film Festival in Milan, Italy

NANETTE HAYON

The third “New Israeli Cinema” festival, curated by Nanette Hayon and Paola Mortara of the Contemporary Jewish Documentation Centre, has just come to an end in Milano. The goal of the event was to offer a wide range of Israeli feature films and documentaries in their original language with Italian subtitles—the kind of films that usually do not reach Milano movie theatres.

A presentation by Maurizio De Bonis, expert on Israeli cinema and author of several essays on this subject, and the beautiful *A History of Israeli Cinema*, a documentary by Raphael Nadjari, provided a valuable historical framework. Some films selected for the festival focused on the complexity of human relationships (*Seven Days, Jaffa*) or dealt with “the other” (*The Tale of Nicolai and The Law of Return, A Matter of Size*). Several films featured characters that could exist anywhere in the world, enabling viewers to feel an intimate connection with them. This quality is, in my opinion, one of the main reasons for the great success of Israeli films on the international stage.

The ingenious “detective documentary” *The Green Dumpster Mystery* showed how the fortuitous discovery of a photograph led an Israeli film-maker to uncover the story of an entire family, and to give it its place in contemporary history. Screening the documentary gave us the opportunity to illustrate to the general public, far more quickly than any conference could, the everyday work of historians and archivists in institutes like the CDEC.

The audience feedback was very good; movie-goers especially appreciated the variety of films offered and the introductory presentations, which explained the films’ background and narrative goals. *A Matter of Size* was voted the favorite film. In his welcome address, Umberto Maerna, arts and culture councillor for the province of Milano, said that the films explored with artistic sensitivity the historically controversial and delicate issues that have marked the history of Israeli nation and people, and enriched the cultural offerings in Milano and its province.

In a movie theatre near the one that hosted the festival, protesters painted graffiti urging people to boycott Israel. They also sealed the theatre’s doors with silicone, trying unsuccessfully to bar people from entering. At CDEC, we are grateful that public institutions support our initiative to present modern Israeli films to an audience largely unfamiliar with Jewish life.

Films selected for the festival were: *The Beetle, The Fire Within, For My Father, The Green Dumpster Mystery, Gut Shabes Vietnam, A History of Israeli Cinema, It All Begins at Sea, Jaffa, Life According to Agfa, A Matter of Size, Seven Days, The Tale of Nicolai and the Law of Return, Tel Aviv Stories, and The Valderama Sisters.*