

Reviews of Nonfiction Titles for Adults

EDITED BY DANIEL SCHEIDE AND REBECCA JEFFERSON

Angel, Hayyim. *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi: Prophecy in an Age of Uncertainty*. Jerusalem, Israel: Maggid Books, 2016. 157 pp. \$24.95. (9781592644131).

The author is a prolific writer of books and articles, primarily in Bible studies. This volume is a brief but thorough analysis of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. The book is divided into two chronological parts. The first is set in the context of the period of the return from Babylonian exile and construction of the Second Temple in approximately 538-516 BCE. In this first part, the book of Ezra is reviewed in conjunction with Haggai and Zechariah, primarily regarding the construction of the Second Temple. The second part is placed in the context of the continuation of Persian rule in Israel with the renewed commitment to Torah in practice and the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem in approximately 483-433 BCE. The end of prophecy with Malachi is presented as a transition eventually leading to the rabbinic tradition. Ezra is seen as a prototypical rabbi using sacred texts and traditions rather than prophetic revelation in his guidance as a leader. This book would be appropriate in any library that collects biblical commentaries.

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

Bleich, J. David. *Contemporary Halakhic Problems. Volume VII*. Jerusalem/New Milford, CT: Maggid Books, 2016. 524 pp. \$34.95. (9781592644292).

In this seventh volume of his series, Rabbi Dr. J. David Bleich, a legal scholar, bio-ethicist and philosopher, who is well versed in contemporary technology and exhibits a familiarity with complex medical procedures, presents a comprehensive overview of fascinating *halachic* (Jewish legal) topics.

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When reviewing the legal precedents, he cites not only classic rabbinic responsa, but makes use of contemporary rabbinic discussions that have appeared in both English and Hebrew sources. Reading such a chapter reminds the reader that halacha can deal with the newest issue as clearly as the problems with which our sages dealt millennia ago.

In the current volume, there is a chapter called “Mitochondrial DNA Replacement” as well as one on “Posthumous Paternity.” Both are medically related subjects that have been discussed a great deal recently. Bleich clarifies the halachic problems involved and presents the various opinions on the matter in a clear and understandable arrangement. Other topics vary from property rights of the deceased to entering a non-Jewish place of worship. This work is highly recommended for Yeshiva high school as well as academic libraries, and for other collections with a focus on Jewish law. Note, however, that a reasonable background in rabbinic resources is required, as many phrases are in transliterated Hebrew and are not translated into English.

Beverly Geller, Librarian, the Frisch School, Paramus, NJ

Berman, Saul J. *Boundaries of Loyalty; Testimony Against Fellow Jews in Non-Jewish Courts*. Cambridge, 2016. 280 pp. \$99.99. (9781107090651).

This is a fascinating book about the history of a particular *halachic* (Jewish legal) concept; namely, the issue of a Jew providing testimony against a fellow Jew in a non-Jewish court. Early Jewish law forbade Jews to make use of non-Jewish court systems and an early corollary of that was the impermissibility for a Jew to testify against another Jew in such a venue.

The opening chapter provides the earliest legal provisions for these two assertions beginning in the Mishnaic period. Chapter two provides for the analysis of these positions by the Amoraim, Savoraim, and Geonim in the subsequent generations following the Mishna. Chapter three discusses some Geonic positions along with some positions of the Rishonim regarding testimonial restrictions. This chapter also discusses the concept of Mesirah (handing over another Jew to non-Jewish authorities, or collaborating with non-Jewish authorities against a fellow Jew). Chapter four focuses on the creation of a duty to testify against fellow Jews in a non-Jewish court and some of the reasons for the emergence of this duty. Chapter five describes the fascinating tension between two types of Jewish legal writing – responsa literature and legal codification. Chapter six details the further expansion of the “right to testify” in the period of the Achronim. The final chapter is about some modern attempts to expand and revert to the original law and reasoning of the original ban.

The book is a masterpiece of legal analysis and a brilliant case study of tracing an interesting and relevant legal concept through nearly two thousand years of legal history. In the conclusion, the author provides insightful commentary on the legal and public policy considerations of law and loyalty and the balancing act between these two important conceptual poles throughout Jewish history. The writing is clear and lucid, and even though it is structured in a manner similar to a legal treatise, this book can be understood by anyone interested in the subject matter at hand or someone with an even basic familiarity with Jewish law.

David Tesler, Yonkers, NY

Cohen, Michael J. *Britain's Hegemony in Palestine and the Middle East 1917-56: Changing Strategic Imperatives*. London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2017. 330 pp. \$84.95. (9781910383216).

This book consists of fourteen essays (three of which have never been published before) discussing various discrete topics concerning the British presence in the Middle East from the Balfour Declaration to the Suez War. The author is an emeritus professor of history at Bar-Ilan University. One recurring theme is that Britain undertook the League of Nations’ mandate for Palestine because it was considered strategically important to Britain’s empire and that their actions were influenced by a fear both of the perceived influence of American Jews over the U.S. government and a reduction of Zionist financing

of Mandatory Palestine. Essays on Harry Truman and Winston Churchill argue that they were not the friends of Zionism some maintain. There is another on the 1930 British government white paper which, if implemented, would have severely damaged the Zionist project. A pair of essays is devoted to Haj Amin al Husayni, the fiercely anti-Zionist Mufti of Jerusalem. This is a fitting follow up to Dr. Cohen's well regarded 2014 tome *Britain's Moment in Palestine: Retrospect and Perspectives, 1917-48*.

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

Eisenberg, Ellen. *The Jewish Oregon Story: 1950-2010*. Oregon State University Press, Corvallis. 2016. 316 pp. \$24.95. (9780870718694).

The past thirty years have seen an enormous upsurge in local and regional Jewish historical writing. In 1987, Steven Lowenstein's *The Jews of Oregon* chronicled that state's Jewish community from 1850 through 1950. The History Press has also published a pictorial history of Portland by Polina Olsen. Now Ellen Eisenberg, a local scholar of Western Jewish history, has moved the story forward.

Rather than tell the story chronologically, Eisenberg has selected several themes to describe the Oregon experience. Each chapter explores a different aspect of the community. Chapter one provides an overview of the community's rebirth in the 1960s and 1970s, after the demolition of its historic old neighborhood. Chapter two discusses how the Portland community arrived, grew and then dispersed after World War II. The third chapter examines the changing and expanding role of women beginning in the 1960s, and the fourth chapter reviews the Jewish role in social action, particularly during the Civil Rights era. Internal Jewish dialog and politics, from the Six-Day War through the Two-State Solution debate is covered in chapter five, and chapter six concludes the book by describing the development of Oregon's unique, sometimes quirky contemporary Jewish life.

This book is clearly a labor of love, and a valuable local resource. It will be of interest primarily to academic libraries developing large collections of local Jewish history. Its greatest value is in explaining how Portland Jewry left its historic downtown hub and re-constructed itself. Regrettably, much of it is "inside baseball;" without knowing who's who, the story loses some of its value as either a cautionary tale or an inspirational one. And while there is some coverage of smaller communities (Salem, Corvallis, etc.), almost all of the text is Portland-centered.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA

Eldar, Ilan. *הבלשנות העברית בימי הביניים: טקסטים ומחקרים* (Hebrew Language Study in the Middle Ages: Texts and Studies). Jerusalem, Hebrew University, Israel: Magnes Press, 2016. 411 pp. \$35.72. (9789654938648). Hebrew.

Hebrew Language Study in the Middle Ages is a collection of twenty newly edited and updated research articles written by Professor Ilan Eldar. Eldar has been working and publishing in this area since 1937. His new book pulls together his previous research into linguistic theory and reading in the Middle Ages and adds new insights.

The work is divided into two main parts: 1. The Hebrew Language; 2. The Reading of the Bible. Each chapter begins with an introduction and is structured in the same way. All aspects of the Hebrew language, including its origins; how it has been influenced by other languages (mainly Arabic); the ways in which it was studied by the Jews of Europe and in the Yemen; grammatical concepts like the triliteral root; the use of vowels and the study of vowel length, as well as the editing of dictionaries and grammars, are examined here. The book concludes with detailed indices, including an index of bibliographic abbreviations; an index of linguistic terms; lists of names of authors and places, and an index of previous papers.

Eldar's *Hebrew Language Study in the Middle Ages* will enrich every academic library that deals with the development of the Hebrew language. Hopefully it will be translated into English and other languages.

Nira Wolfe, Highland Park, IL



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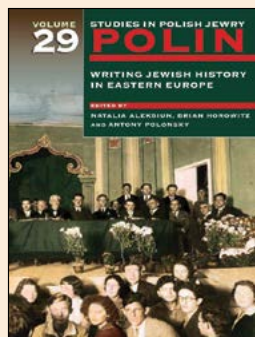
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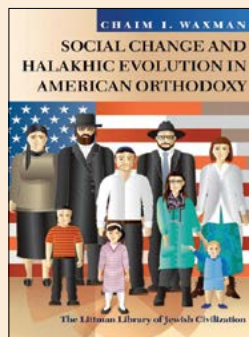
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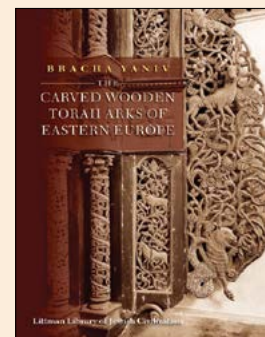
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Frieden, Ken. *Travels in Translation: Sea Tales at the Source of Jewish Fiction*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2016. 389 pp. \$65.00. (9780815634577).

Frieden examines the development of Modern Hebrew literature through the lens of sea narratives from the late eighteenth to early nineteenth century. He feels that sea tales make a good model since they have appeared from Biblical times and similarities in the settings and narrative make the vocabulary and grammar easy to compare. Frieden contends that Hebrew writing from Berlin (1780-1810) has been given too much credit as a foundation of Modern Hebrew writing. He further posits that Hasidic pilgrimage tales (1815-22) and works translated from Yiddish and other European languages (1815-1924) were important sources of vocabulary, naturalistic descriptions, and grammar. With substantial notes, bibliography, and index, the book is recommended for academic libraries.

Sheryl Stahl, Senior Associate Librarian, Frances-Henry Library, HUC-JIR, Los Angeles

Hellman, Rabbi David (Ed.). *ברכה תרוסמ ויכרב = The Mesorat Harav Birkon*. Jerusalem, Koren Publishers, 2016. 227 pp. \$14.95. (9789653018563). English & Hebrew.

Birkon Harav is an edited commentary on Grace After Meals based on Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's lectures and writings. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (1903-1993), known affectionately by his many followers and admirers as "The Rav" (The Rabbi), was the preeminent figure in Modern Orthodox Judaism. He was *Rosh Yeshivah* (head of school) at the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University and greatly influenced the practices of modern orthodox Jewry. The *Birkon* (blessings) contains the traditional text of Grace after Meals, Sabbath and festival Kiddush, songs sung at the Sabbath table, and other practices related to sanctifying eating and drinking. The text and its English translation are on facing pages. Commentary is on the bottom section of the page separated from the passage by a black line. The uncomplicated format and clear font make the book easy to read as a prayer book and as a reference. In addition to the prayers, the book contains three essays which further analyze the specific practices of *Zimmun* (inviting members to join in the blessing), Grace after Meals, and Kiddush. A unique and interesting feature of the book is a list of 41 distinctive practices followed by The Rav. English and Hebrew references are included in a separate section. Highly recommended for synagogue and school libraries whose patrons are interested in delving more deeply into familiar blessings and studying from a giant of Orthodox Judaism.

Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, OH

Henshke, David. *מה נשתנה: ליל הפסח בתלמודם של חכמים = 'Mah Nishtanah': The Passover Night in the Sages' Discourse*. Magnes Press, 2016. 626 pp. \$46.00. (9789654938709). Hebrew.

Despite its title and cover illustration from the Kaufmann Haggadah, this book is not a commentary on the Passover Haggadah. Rather, it is a scholarly tour-de-force that examines the Talmudic sources – Mishnah, Tosefta, Bavli and Yerushalmi – that served as the foundation on which the text of the Passover Haggadah was later built.

Henshke critiques a wide variety of scholars who have found in the Passover Seder all manner of ideas, influences and surprises. He relentlessly deploys textual criticism, contextual interpretation, and terminological precision in order to strip these fascinating but unfounded suggestions away from the sources. The essence of Henshke's approach is the distinction between different chronological periods, and between textual statements from different periods or different perspectives that were compiled together into the multi-layered corpus of rabbinic literature. To take one core example: Henshke claims that, during the Second Temple period, eating the Paschal sacrifice formed the focal point of Passover night. In the wake of the destruction of the Temple, different adaptations of the ceremony emerged. Rabban Gamliel moved other foods, matzah and maror, to the center to take the place of the sacrificial meat, while other rabbis placed their emphasis on learning and discussion the laws of the Festival. These conflicting positions are reflected in different places of the Mishnah, Tosefta, and Talmud. The intricate process of untangling these different traditions and realigning them into their original conceptual contexts makes this work both magisterial and captivating.

Pinchas Roth, Bar Ilan University

Glinert, Lewis. *The Story of Hebrew*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017. 281 pp. \$27.95. (9780691153292).

The Story of Hebrew is a delightful, engaging, insightful, and well-written book by adept storyteller and expert scholar and linguist, Lewis Glinert. Throughout the book, Glinert addresses “what the Hebrew language has meant to the people who have possessed it.” The book examines the history of Hebrew using ethnographic, sociolinguistic, and philosophical approaches. Glinert’s work testifies to the marvelous resilience and creativity of Hebrew; why it refused to die out and what made its modern revival possible. Thus, we are shown the “tree rings” of its development, and the ways in which these rings or layers of the language have undergone seismic shifts, sea changes, turning points, and paradigm shifts.

While for traditional Orthodox communities, Hebrew is reserved as a *leshon ha-kodesh* (sacred language) and Yiddish used for everyday conversation, Glinert charts the fascinating ways in which Hebrew was reinvented and reborn to serve as the lingua franca of the modern Jewish state, to be used in such mundane exchanges as buying vegetables in the Machene Yehudah market in Jerusalem. Highly recommended.

David B Levy, Touro College, New York, NY

Goren, Rabbi Shlomo, (Avi Rath, ed.). *With Might and Strength: An Autobiography*. Jerusalem: Maggid, 2016. 457 pp. \$29.95. (9781592644094).

Rabbi Shlomo Goren was an Israeli pioneer. His family moved from Warsaw to Haifa in 1925. In his distinguished career, he served as the first head of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Rabbinate, Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv and third Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Israel. Most of the book deals with Rabbi Goren’s accomplishments as first Chief Rabbi of the IDF. The new state’s defense forces had just been created and there were no halakhic guidelines. Rabbi Goren made many controversial decisions that aided soldiers in times of war. He risked his life to collect the remains of men who died in the fierce fighting to establish the State and whose bones were scattered by the Arab forces. It was his decision, with the support of David Ben-Gurion, to make the entire IDF strictly kosher. In addition, he made sure that every division had access to a synagogue. The most moving description in the autobiography is Rabbi Goren’s emotional personal account of reaching the *Kotel* (Western Wall) at 11am and praying there for the first time in his life. This fascinating autobiography is based on Rabbi Goren’s own words which were either written or recorded. Avi Rath’s editing of these pieces makes Rabbi Goren’s actions affecting, exciting, and moving. *With Might and Strength* is highly recommended for the autobiography and, modern Zionist history collection of all libraries.

Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, OH

Gurwitz, Alexander Z. *Memories of Two Generations: A Yiddish Life in Russia and Texas*, Tuscaloosa, AL, University of Alabama Press, 2016. 416 pp. \$59.95. (9780817319038).

This rich and informative memoir is also a real page turner. The integration of the notes with the text is superb, enriching the narrative with details about life in late 19th to early 20th century Russia. In a similar way to *The Travels of Benjamin of Tudela*, Gurwitz’s memoir provides the reader with firsthand accounts of life inside the Jewish shtetls as well as life in general under Tzar Nicholas II. The text is brought to life with personal anecdotes, making the reader feel as though they are physically present with Gurwitz. In spite of its length, there isn’t a dull moment in this book which manages to surprise the reader with its twists and turns through positive and negative experiences.

Although the section of the book about Gurwitz’s life in Texas is much shorter than the rest, it is no less informative about Jewish life in San Antonio, Texas. We are privy to the communal intrigues and politics of the period there, and Gurwitz provides a balanced account of his successes and failures:

praising his own teaching abilities while revealing his shortcomings as a 'business man.' He takes great pride in having raised children that are people of values and character.

We should all be grateful to Rabbi Amram Prero, the translator, for having found this treasure and brought it to the reading public. This book belongs in all serious Judaica collection.

Marion Stein, retired librarian

Hess, Tamar S. *Self as Nation: Contemporary Hebrew Autobiography*. (The Schusterman Series in Israel Studies, Literary Criticism/Jewish Studies). Waltham, Massachusetts: Brandeis University Press, 2016. 213 pp. \$40.00. (9781611688801).

In her book, *Self as Nation: Contemporary Hebrew Autobiography*, Tamar Hess aims to show how contemporary Israeli-Jewish autobiographies reflect the writers' personal and Jewish-Israeli heritage. The various autobiographies explore personal family conflicts, memories of lost friends who have died in the Israeli wars, as well as the authors' viewpoint on contemporary issues like feminism and universal equality. The book delivers an optimistic message for Israeli society.

Tamar Hess analyzes ten contemporary Israeli Hebrew autobiographies. Six by men: *Post Mortem* (1992) by Yoram Kaniuk; *Mot Immi (My Mother's Death)*, 1997) by Natan Zach; *Havalim (The Pure Element of Time)*, 1998) by Haim Be'er; *Be-Guf Rishon (First Person Singular)*, 2009) by Shimon Ballas; *The Story of a Life (Sipur Haim)*, 1998) and *A Table for One (Od Ha-Yom Gadol)* 2001) by Aharon Appelfeld; Four by women: *Gan she-Harav (A Garden in Ruins)*, 1983) and *Kol ha-Proza (Collected Prose)*, 2001) by Esther Raab; *Bein ha-Sefirot: roman al hathalat ha-milhama* (1981) by Netiva Ben-Yehuda; *Kol ha-Kayitz Halachnu Yehefem* (1995) by Yehudit Kafri; *El Ma she-Namog (Not from Here)*, 1997) by Nurith Gertz and Deborah Gertz; *Mishakey Bdidut (Games of Loneliness)*, 1999) by Nurit Zarchi. Ariel Hirschfeld's "Bat Kol" a passage from his *Rishumim shel Hitgalut (Notes on Epiphany)*, 2005-2006) serves as a conclusion because Hess believes that it encapsulates the vital presence of contemporary autobiography in Israeli culture. *Self as Nation: Contemporary Hebrew Autobiography* should be considered by all academic libraries that deal with Jewish-Israeli-Hebrew literature and history.

Nira Wolfe, Highland Park, IL

Hirsch, Samson Raphael & Salomon Breuer and Joseph Breuer. *Moadim Perspectives: Days of Awe – Sukkot*. Jerusalem and New York: Feldheim Publishers, 2016. 296 pp. \$22.99. (9781680250480).

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888) was the rav of K'hal Adath Jeshurun in Frankfurt, Germany. He was a powerful voice for modern orthodoxy and the philosophy of "Torah with Derech Eretz," i.e., the idea that a Jew can both be observant and a member of the surrounding society. Salomon Breuer (1850-1926) was Hirsch's son-in-law and successor, and Joseph Breuer (1882-1980) was Hirsch's grandson and Salomon's successor.

This is a book of essays on Jewish life connected to the Tishre holidays. They were originally written and published in German. The essays are both timeless in subject matter and rooted in another time and place. Both style and content are more philosophical than sermonic and, lacking bibliographic references and notes, more opinion-based than academic. The essays are only loosely connected, leaving the reader with no compelling reason to complete the entire book.

New readers of this material may find the work inspirational, but this reader found very little new or exciting here. Thus, this book is only mildly recommended for collections of Orthodox Jewish thought or for a congregational library that wishes to have representational works by the great Rabbanim.

Daniel D. Stuhlman, Stuhlman Management Consultants, Chicago, IL

Ivry, Alfred L. *Maimonides' Guide of the Perplexed: A Philosophical Guide*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2016. 305 pp. \$48.98 (9780226395128).

No book has had a greater influence on the development of Jewish philosophy than Maimonides'

Guide of the Perplexed, and it remains a cornerstone of both academic scholarship and original Jewish philosophy to this day. But it is also a difficult and, at times, daunting work. Alfred Ivry, emeritus professor of Jewish philosophy at New York University, remains one of the most influential teachers and interpreters of the *Guide* today.

His new work assists intermediate level readers through their own close reading of the *Guide*. It assumes at least a minimal basic familiarity with the *Guide* and the issues it addresses, as well as some background knowledge of Judaism and basic information about the medieval Muslim context in which the *Guide* appeared. Each chapter is divided into two sections, a summary of the core arguments, which is then followed by an analysis that does more to contextualize the summary and determine the extent to which Maimonides arguments cohere and stand up to scrutiny. It could easily serve as a companion volume for a reader undertaking the long and arduous task of a going through the *Guide* cover to cover.

Maimonides wrote the *Guide* in large part to help work out tensions between traditional religion and medieval rationalism. Ivry argues that ultimately Maimonides himself never worked out these tensions, which remain unsolved. The contradictions embedded in the *Guide* – the raw materials that have occupied so much Maimonides scholarship – are often not deliberate attempts to keep Maimonides' core beliefs secret from certain readers. Instead, they reflect Maimonides own ultimate failure to square the circle and completely integrate traditional religion and rationalist philosophy.

Yoel Finkelman, *Judaica Curator, National Library of Israel*

Kadar, Naomi Prawer. *Raising Secular Jews: Yiddish Schools and Their Periodicals for American Children, 1917-1950*. (Brandeis Series in American Jewish History, Culture, and Life). Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2017. 282 pp. \$35.00. (9781611689877).

This book is a pioneering in-depth study and analysis of the periodicals issued by the four major Yiddish school systems created in the United States in the first half of the twentieth century. The school systems and primary periodicals include, the Labor Zionist Farband: *Kindervelt*; the secular Sholem Aleichem schools: *Kinder Zhurnal*; the socialist Workmen's Circle: *Kinderland* and *Kinder tsaytung*; and the Ord'n schools of the Communist-aligned International Workers Order: *Kinderland* (a different periodical than the Workmen's Circle one of the same name) and *Yungvarg*. The book traces the history of the different organizations, how their philosophies changed over time, and how the changes were reflected in the journals issued by those organizations. The periodicals were not published continuously, and the book traces and explains the story of and reasons for the stops and starts.

The first chapter provides background on the secular Yiddish school system. Chapters two through six each analyze a specific school system and its periodicals; later chapters discuss specific topics and themes and how they were treated in the different publications. Chapter ten, "Almost at Home in America," concludes the book and discusses the attitude to and treatment of America in the periodicals, including issues such as racism and patriotism.

The volume includes extensive footnotes, a bibliography, and a section of selected biographies of personalities involved in the secular Yiddish school systems and the periodicals. Black and white and color illustrations of some of the magazine covers are a highlight of the book. *Raising Secular Jews* is a valuable addition to the study of Yiddish children's literature as well as a contribution to the study of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe and their acculturation in the United States. Suitable for academic libraries, libraries with an interest in Yiddish or American Jewish history, and may also be of interest to school libraries since it discusses children's literature and the history of education.

Shulamith Z. Berger, *Yeshiva University, New York, NY*



Krause, P. Allen. *To Stand Aside or Stand Alone: Southern Reform Rabbis and the Civil Rights Movement.* Edited by Mark K. Bauman with Stephen Krause. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016. 401 pp. \$49.95. (9780817319243).

In the midst of the Civil Rights struggle, P. Allen Krause, a young rabbinical student at Hebrew Union College, attended the 1966 CCAR conference in Toronto. While there he interviewed thirteen rabbis from the American South about their lives and thoughts. This book contains the transcripts of these interviews, which some of the participants had requested not be published for at least 25 years.

The volume, co-edited by noted historian Mark Bauman and Rabbi Krause's son Stephen, contains a wealth of information. Each interview is preceded by a short history of the city in which the rabbi served, and a biography of the rabbi. The subjects include some of the most famous Southern rabbis—Jacob Rothschild of Atlanta; Charles Mantinband of Hattiesburg; and Perry Nussbaum of Jackson. But the book also contains conversations with Julian Feibleman of New Orleans; Alfred Goodman of Columbus, Georgia, and William Silverman of Nashville, among others. Each of them had a story to tell. Some, such as Milton Grafman of Birmingham, have been mischaracterized for the past half-century; some remained silent due to fears for their personal safety and that of their congregations. But all of them felt themselves burdened by conflicts between the well-being of their synagogues, the ethics they had learned and desired to practice, and the palpable dangers of the moment. Despite the long lapse in time, their stories resonate today. We are in debt to Rabbi Krause, and grateful to the editors who have made them available.

This book should be in every academic library, both for its near-contemporaneous portrait of the era, and as a window into the lives and minds of the rabbis themselves. Despite the price, major synagogues should also consider it.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA

Morgan, Michael L. *Levinas's Ethical Politics.* Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2016. 410 pp. \$40.00. (9780253021106).

Emanuel Levinas was a Lithuanian Jew who studied philosophy in France. Much of his thought and writings have been subject to considerable analysis and criticism as examined by the author, Michael Morgan, a professor emeritus of philosophy from Indiana University. Unless the reader is relatively well schooled in philosophical rhetoric and knowledgeable of current European philosophers, this book may be a difficult read. The major thread of Levinas's thought is the normative demand that community is established by face-to-face contact. This being a political statement, its connection to ethics is bound to a specific notion of "messianic democratic socialism" which is a form a democracy that opposes all that is harmful to humanity. Much of what Morgan treats is based upon Levinas's reading of the *Talmud* and prophesy, his appreciation of Zionism, and messianism. Brought into the discussion are such political philosophers as Avishai Margalit, philosophical critics like Martin Kavka, Jean-Luc Marion, and Judith Butler. Ultimately, Morgan finds Levinas a "metaphysical" thinker but leaves it up to the reader to make their own judgment. The potential audience for this densely-written work would have to be an academic one steeped in philosophy or at least deeply interested in Jewish ethics.

Sanford R. Silverburg, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC

Nathan, Joan. *King Solomon's Table: A Culinary Exploration of Jewish Cooking from Around the World.* New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 2017. 382 pp. \$35.00. (9780385351140).

King Solomon's Table is a kosher cookbook by prolific cookbook writer, Joan Nathan. In the introduction Nathan provides an interesting detailed history of Jewish food as far back as Biblical times. A brief overview and Nathan's personal connection to Jewish dietary laws is included in the introduction as well. In a chapter entitled "Pantry," Nathan describes various kinds of spices and provides recipes for making (from scratch) harissa, preserved lemons, schmaltz and other ingredients

she uses to create dishes found in the body of the book. Each recipe is preceded by the history of the dish, where it originated, how it evolved, what it is called in different cultures and the individual who introduced Joan to the recipe. Most of the recipes are accompanied by beautiful, mouth-watering photographs of the food.

Despite its clear format, easy-to-understand instructions and helpful indexes, one problem with the book is that many of the recipes are time consuming, complex and include ingredients not easily found in the United States. Nevertheless, *King Solomon's Table* is highly recommended for all Judaic libraries that collect kosher cookbooks, not least because Joan Nathan is an important culinary personality and this book makes a very interesting read, even if the borrower does not plan on making any of foods.

Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, OH

Perelis, Ronnie. *Narratives from the Sephardic Atlantic: Blood and Faith.* (Indiana Series in Sephardi and Mizrahi Studies). Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2016. 192 pp. \$55.00. (9780253024015).

This book by Ronnie Perelis, Associate Professor of Sephardic Studies at Yeshiva University, studies the role of identity, community, family, and faith in three autobiographies written by crypto Jews in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

The largest section of the book examines the diary of Luis de Carvajal. Born in Spain in 1566, at age 13 his mother informed him that they were Jews; soon after, his family moved to Mexico, where his uncle, a devout Catholic, was a royal governor. In 1589, the Inquisition arrested Luis, his sisters and mother. Carvajal took his escape as sign of divine favor and he began keeping his diary to show the role of God's providence in his life. Arrested again Carvajal was burnt at the stake in 1596 along with his mother and five sisters. The second memoir was written by Manuel Cardoso de Macedo, who was sent by his merchant father from the Azores to England at age 14. In England he was first attracted to Calvinism, but after being arrested by the Inquisition and put in a cell with a Converso, he decided to become a Jew. Released he went to Hamburg and then Amsterdam where he wrote down his life's story. The last memoir is by Antonio de Montezinos, a merchant in South America, who was convinced that the Indian tribes he encountered there were the lost tribe of Reuven. He went to Amsterdam and Menassah ben Israel used his account as the centerpiece of his book *Mikveh Israel*.

Perelis compares each narrative against Inquisition files and other historical evidence. He examines the role of family ties, family betrayals, merchant networks, and religious self-perception, showing how the authors shaped their narratives and self-image to influence their various audiences. This interesting study of social, cultural history and literary analysis is highly recommended for university libraries.

Harvey Sukenic, Hebrew College Library, Newton Centre, MA

Pogrebin, Abigail. *My Jewish Year: 18 Holidays, One Wandering Jew.* Bedford, New York: Fig Tree Books, 2017. 325 pp. \$14.99. (9781941493205).

This personal account of one woman's immersion in the Jewish calendar, and her celebration of the holidays and fast days, is based on a series of columns for the *Forward*. Abby Pogrebin's aim was to give greater substance and depth to her Jewish identity by dissecting and digesting each Jewish holiday, writing before and after the major festivals, sharing her preparation and experience of each one. The result is a spirited, lively chronicle of the Jewish year. There are 26 chapters, starting with *Rosh Hashanah* (New Year). Before each of the chapters there is a short, pithy quote from interviews with a rabbi. In addition, the book includes a forward, an introduction, an epilogue, as well as five appendices. These enhance and enrich the book by including a Jewish year in bullet points, a list of the 51 rabbis interviewed, bibliography, glossary, and web links. Abby Pogrebin is the author of *Stars of David: Prominent Jews Talk about Being Jewish*, as well as *One and the Same, My Life as an Identical Twin*. Her articles have appeared in *Newsweek*, *The Daily Beast*, *New York Magazine*, *Tablet* and other publications.

My Jewish Year holds the readers' interest; provides useful information about Jewish holidays and fast days, in an informal, appealing way. It is recommended for Temple and synagogue, Jewish community center and public library collections.

Susan Freiband, Retired library educator, Volunteer Temple Librarian, Alexandria, Virginia

Portnoy, Eddy. *Bad Rabbi: and Other Strange but True Stories from the Yiddish Press*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017. 264 pp. \$19.95. (9781503604117).

This was a lot of fun: psychics, wrestlers, suicide epidemics, beauty queens, blackmailed rabbis and scandal after scandal. The Yiddish press in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century was filled with stories of everyday Jews for everyday Jews. From forgotten front-page news to hidden nuggets in the crime blotter, *Bad Rabbi* gives modern readers a taste of what urban Jews were gossiping about, challenging our romanticized notions of the shtetl. One hopes this volume will just be the tip of the iceberg and further explorations into the tabloid stories of the headline news that history has forgotten will be forthcoming.

Daniel Scheide, Florida Atlantic University

Ripp, Victor. *Hell's Traces: One Murder, Two Families and Thirty-Five Holocaust Memorials*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017. 206 pp. \$25.00. (9780865478336).

The title refers to the memorials and museums across Europe and Russia that commemorate the Holocaust and seek to honor its victims. Ripp's tour of some of these sites was prompted by his family history. In 1940, he left Paris as an infant with his immediate family and eventually settled in the United States. His father's extended family, the Rippes, including his three-year-old cousin Alexandre, was murdered by the Nazis. His mother's extended family, the Kahans, was spared. The author explores the caprices of luck and timing that influenced each family's fate.

He also raises many questions about Holocaust memorials: "Could a pillar or a bronze plaque or whatever else constitutes a memorial cause events that took place more than seven decades ago to appear vivid? Do you have to decipher a Holocaust memorial before its meaning is clear? (The Berlin memorial is so abstract that it can have different meanings for different people.) Could it be that the past erupts into consciousness most vividly in a mundane setting? Why bother to have a memorial at Auschwitz? Should a Holocaust memorial, which honors those who died in mud and squalor, be beautiful?" He notes how these installations in Russia, Poland, Hungary and Austria are presented in a way that revises the country's actions during World War II or presents the entire population as victims of the Nazis' Fascism and violence.

Family history, memoir of a journey, and an essay about memorials and remembering individual victims of the Holocaust, the themes are intertwined for a contemplative read. *Hell's Traces* is an essential addition to all Holocaust collections, and a worthwhile book for all Jewish libraries.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel

Rolnik, Joseph. *With Rake in Hand: Memoirs of a Yiddish Poet*. Translated by Gerald Marcus. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2016. 277 pp. \$29.95. (9780815634959).

Joseph Rolnik was a member of the American Yiddish literary group, *Di Yunge*, but his work did not conform to their modernist style. It is spare, modest, and realistic. As translator Gerald Marcus notes in his informative introduction, it resembles the work of Chinese poets. This memoir includes some of Rolnik's poems, along with a glossary, an index, and a list of the many well-known writers that Rolnik mentions. The memoir is not a chronological account of Rolnik's life, but rather a somewhat disconnected set of reminiscences about his years in Belarus and in New York, and the stark difference between the two milieus. The book is an invaluable narrative of the life rural Jews lived during years of enlightenment and upheaval at the end of the nineteenth century, and

then the difficulties and opportunities in New York in the early twentieth century. The story is at once very personal, with details about the author's physical and emotional joys and pains, and his relationships with family and friends, as well as containing meticulous information about the mill that his father leased, the dairy, the fields, the holidays, the yeshivas and *heders*, and much more. In New York, Rolnik describes his employment history, from being a "cutter" in the garment trade, to selling newspapers, to becoming a proofreader for *Der Tog*, a major Yiddish periodical. A wealth of information is presented here for historians as well as students of literature. Recommended for collections of Yiddish in translation.

Beth Dwoskin, Proquest (Retired), Library Committee Chair, Beth Israel Congregation, Ann Arbor, MI

Rozshanski, Shmuel. *Jacob Dinezon: The Mother Among Our Classic Yiddish Writers*. Translated by Miri Koral. Raleigh, NC: Jewish Storyteller Press, 2016. 140 pp. \$15.95. (9780979815683).

This book is the latest translation of works by or about Jacob Dinezon from Jewish Storyteller Press, which is the brainchild of Scott Hilton Davis. Davis is a non-Yiddish speaker who became intrigued by the story of Dinezon, the prolific writer who is known today not so much for his own work, but because he was a close associate of Yehuda Leyb Perets, the "father" of modern Yiddish literature. Shmuel Rozshanski was perhaps the leading editor of Yiddish in Buenos Aires. His critical study of Dinezon's work is naïve and his narrative of the writer's life is vague and lacking in penetrating analysis. Nevertheless, he was intimately familiar with Yiddish literature and he has interesting insights about both Dinezon and Perets, as well as the about the development of Yiddish literature at the turn of the last century. In addition, he was conscientious about attributing his quotes and references. Material about Dinezon in English is sparse, and this is a welcome addition to the field. Scott Hilton Davis intends to publish as much material relating to Dinezon in translation as possible. This work follows Jane Peppler's translation of Dinezon's novel, *Hershele*, which I reviewed in the November/December 2016 issue of *AJL Reviews*. Recommended for collections specializing in Yiddish.

Beth Dwoskin, Proquest (Retired), Library Committee Chair, Beth Israel Congregation, Ann Arbor, MI

Rydell, Anders. *The Book Thieves: the Nazi Looting of Europe's Libraries and the Race to Return a Literary Heritage*. Translated by Hening Koch. New York: Viking Press, 2017. 335 pp. \$28.00. (978073522122-2). [Reviewed from ARC.]

Millions of books, archival materials, and other library items written and owned by Jews and others were purposely and systematically plundered and stolen by the Nazis during the Holocaust Era. The Nazis intended to use them to wage an intellectual war against their enemies and to subvert history. This book is the story of those many acts of plunder, how many of the books ended up in public libraries, and the story of how some of the books have been and are still being returned to the heirs of the original owners. Chapter ten, for example, describes the tragedy of Thessaloniki (also known as Salonica), a thriving Greek city with a large population of Sephardic Jews who had lived there since the 1500's. The community's heritage, including Torah scrolls from the Middle Ages brought to the community by the immigrants from Spain, were confiscated during raids. Thessaloniki's largest bank, Union, had important documents that the Nazis wanted to use to chart the economic networks of Sephardic Jews. The Nazis invaded the bank vault and the documents were seized.

This is an interesting, yet sad book to read. It belongs in our libraries to warn us of what happens when an evil regime seeks to control the minds of people through the suppression of the literature, history, and culture of a people. While the book is well-written overall, some of the material is extraneous and could be used in another book or article. Nevertheless, *The Book Thieves* is recommended for academic, synagogue, and personal collections.

Daniel D. Stuhlman, City Colleges of Chicago and Temple Sholom of Chicago, Chicago, IL

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Sagi, Avi, *Reflections on Identity: The Jewish Case* (Emunot: Jewish Philosophy and Kabbalah). Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2016. 270 pp. \$79.00. (9781618115348).

Avi Sagi's *Reflections on Identity* begins by noting that an individual's identity is not a natural thing that is physically found somewhere in the world but that it is a "signifier denoting the complex story of human existence, and requires a cultural web that both concretizes it and constitutes it." This identity emerges from a process that involves an ongoing dialogue not only with other people or identities, but with one's history, culture, people and religion.

Chapter one provides alternative definitions of identity. Chapters two and three shift from the general construct identity to the actual context of Jewish identity. Chapter four tackles the distinction between a discourse of identity and a discourse of rights with the author contending that Israeli society follows a discourse of rights. Chapter five ventures into the relationship between religion and state and its impact on individual identity. The final chapter centers on the political/geographical realm and how that fits in the constitution of Jewish identity, with a specific focus on the role of the Land of Israel as it plays out in Biblical tradition.

This book is highly technical and is only recommended to the reader with an academic interest in philosophy in general and Jewish philosophy in particular. It is not recommended, nor is it written, for the casual, nonacademic reader regardless of his or her interest in these topics.

David Tesler, Yonkers, NY

Sigman, Jack Frank. *Israel Committed Genocide...! Really? The Accusations and Why They Are Wrong*. Ft. Myers, FL: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016. 152 pp. \$9.95. (9781539985990).

Mass murder has ever been part of human history; yet a definition of an official government policy to destroy a people did not appear until 1933 when Polish international lawyer, Raphael Lemkin conceived the term "genocide" as part of a petition to the League of Nations. This was followed up in 1948, when the United Nations passed the UN Genocide Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide and political evolution allowed for the recognition of such things as "war crimes." Since that time, the term "genocide" has been used and misused by politicians and academics in various contexts. Jack Sigman is an independent researcher who has collected the materials of academicians, anti-Semites and pro-Palestinian activists of various stripes, and he charts how they have manipulated the term for their own purposes to launch attacks on Israeli policies toward Palestinians. Sigman takes to task each accusation, and he skillfully rebuts their attacks. Many of the detractors are well known: Marwan Barghouti, Francis Boyle, Noam Chomsky, Richard Falk, Norman Finkelstein, Walid Khalidi, Ilan Pappé, John Quigley, and Edward Said. This would be an interesting read for an adult study group.

Sanford R. Silverburg, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC

Silver, Arthur M. *Wine and Judaism*. New York: Menorah Publishing Company, 2016. 268 pp. \$34.95. (9780932232120).

This is a comprehensive and meticulously researched history of the use of wine in Jewish observance. Silver, who has authored many articles on halakhic subjects and is the co-author of *Ibn Ezra's Commentary on the Pentateuch* (Menorah Publishing Company, 1988-2004), has applied his impressive in-depth knowledge of halakha and Jewish sources to this under-researched and fascinating topic. For every instance when wine was introduced into the major rites and holidays, Silver supplies a source, including all possible references from the Bible, Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Synoptic Gospels, Josephus, and rabbinic texts up to and including the codifiers of the 20th century. In addition, readers can find discussions and reasons for the religious use of wine; what makes wine non-kosher and what constitutes valid ritual wine, as well as engaging insights into the ways social, cultural and historical conditions affected halakha. For example, the section on the "Cup of Elijah" shows how a custom of relatively recent origin probably arose as a result of historical conditions. The ritual of the Cup of Elijah appears at a point in the Passover *Seder* which is eschatological in nature, most likely as a response to

the Sabbatean movement and the widespread messianic speculation it inspired.

Silver's book concludes with a good set of indexes listing the sources, abbreviations, transliterations, and a subject index, as well as a bibliography. This volume is highly recommended for all Judaica reference collections.

Rebecca Jefferson, Isser and Rae Price Library of Judaica, University of Florida

Sobel, Eliezer. *L'Chaim! : Pictures to Evoke Memories of Jewish Life*. Virginia: Rainbow Ridge Books, 2016. 28 pp. \$17.95. (9781937907440).

L'Chaim! is a collection of 26 realistic colored photos underlined by easy-to-read captions in large print. The photos represent Jewish life in random order. Sobel explains, in his introductory comments that the album is geared towards people who require no memory (like his parents) to enjoy it. This book will bring joy to personal collections which serve Alzheimer and Dementia patients, as well as young children of mainly Jewish families.

Nira Wolfe, Highland Park, IL

Tenenbom, Tuvia. *The Lies They Tell*. Jerusalem: Gefen, 2017. 405 pp. \$14.50. (9789652299116).

The author is an Israeli Jew, now a United States citizen and resident, founder of the Jewish Theater of New York, and a journalist for the German newspaper *Die Zeit*. He is thus both an outsider and something of an insider in this account of his travels through the United States. He tries to learn about the country by speaking with the people he meets along the way. In this, the book is similar to his two earlier popular books that dealt with Germany and Israel, but while they each had a specific topic they explored, this is wide-ranging. Notwithstanding, Tenenbom has certain preoccupations (e.g. race) and he comes to certain conclusions, notably that many Americans are reluctant, even afraid, to state frankly their opinions because the bonds that hold United States citizens together are "artificial" (Tenenbom's travels occurred in 2016 before the presidential election). The author displays a sense of humor and empathy and he is open-minded in acknowledging both the good and evil he encounters. He does not fit neatly into any ideological profile. For example, he has great sympathy for Native Americans, deploring how they were treated by the Europeans who fought and conquered them, while at the same time he regards their efforts to preserve and revivify their culture as sterile. He is skeptical of ideological packages of unrelated issues. In part by chance and in part because of some of the people he intentionally meets and the questions he asks, this book has a strong, though far from exclusive, Jewish content. Indeed, the most chilling encounter, as he relates it, is with a Jewish Voice for Peace demonstrator. This idiosyncratic book provides a pointed and textured portrait of the United States. It is a fine example of a particular kind of journalism.

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

Unterman, Jeremiah. *Justice for All: How the Jewish Bible Revolutionized Ethics*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press/Jewish Publication Society. 2017. 292 pp. \$35.00. (9780827612709).

Jeremiah Unterman, resident scholar at the Herzl Institute in Jerusalem, brings readers a fresh, insightful examination of the Tanakh, referred to in his book as the Jewish Bible. By examining the ancient Near Eastern scriptures that existed before the Hebrew Bible was codified and comparing the ancient myths of these cultures (creation, the flood, etc.), Unterman finds common elements and shows how the Jews used them to develop an ethical monotheism. He notes that, unlike the ancient texts of early Middle Eastern peoples, the Jewish Bible was meant to be shared with the entire population. Since not everyone could read, scholars read it aloud in the marketplace so that all could learn from it.

The book looks at a series of specific concepts, comparing the ancient Near Eastern and Jewish interpretations. He begins with the creation and the flood and proceeds to the revelation at Sinai, the treatment of the underprivileged, the ascension of morality rather than ritual as the central component of Judaism, the importance of repentance, and the prophetic teaching of redemption that provides hope.

The basis for all of this is the concept of a single god who rules the world justly. This god created humans with free will, enabling them to control their actions and giving them responsibility for their destiny.

Although written in a scholarly tone, this book will appeal to general readers interested in serious Bible study. It is an excellent choice for academic, synagogue, and public libraries.

Barbra M. Bibel. Congregation Netivot Shalom, Berkeley, CA.

Walke, Anika. *Pioneers and Partisans: An Oral History of Nazi Genocide in Belorussia*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 317 pp. \$74.00. (9780199335534).

Over 800,000 Belorussian Jews were murdered during the Holocaust. Drawing on research, interviews, and testimonies the author examines through an intersectional lens the impact on survivors and overlapping national, religious, and ideological identities. They recall idyllic childhoods as model Soviet citizens during the 1930s, when they embraced the egalitarian ideal and assimilated, enjoying new opportunities. The Nazi invasion in June 1941, and the targeting of Jews and Communists by both the SS and local populace, tested their self-perception as real Russians. Bewildered by the round-ups and killing fields, some children hid, relied on help or rescue from former neighbors, or joined the resistance.

The author discusses the injustices and conflicted loyalties that occurred on many levels. The number of Jewish victims was publicly glossed over as general Soviet casualties. She also brings up gender dynamics, as heroines, and Jewish background, were until recently omitted from the history books and victory celebrations, which glorified instead the Soviet army and its masculine virtues of physical prowess. Along with anti-Semitism was sexual exploitation, a subject painful to some female interviewees. Mothers who before the war actively engaged in public and professional life reverted to traditional cooking, cleaning, and child care, both in the ghettos and the “family camps” – Jewish partisan detachments. Nevertheless, these camps offered shelter and the chance to acquire weapons, fight the “fascist enemy,” and bond with other Jews. Some of these survivors even reconnected, later in life, to their Jewish roots.

This book offers a rich, multilayered look at that region and era, also bringing to light the part played by women and children. Recommended for academic Holocaust collections.

Hallie Cantor, Yeshiva University, New York, NY

Warburg, A. Yehudah. *Rabbinic Authority: The Vision and the Reality; Halakhic Divorce and the Agunah; Beit Din Decisions in English*. Volume 3. Jerusalem; New York: Urim Publications, 2017. 368 pp. \$26.95. (9789655242515).

Rabbi Warburg continues his series on Jewish law in this third volume of *Rabbinic Authority*. The ramifications of divorce and resolving end of marriage issues while deeply personal are also important for the Jewish community. When the husband withholds the *get* (Jewish legal divorce document) or the wife refuses to accept the *get*, the parties end up fighting in both civil and religious courts. Since outside of Israel, the *Bet Din* (religious court) had no authority to force the giving of a *get*, Warburg discusses from several points of view the definition of marriage and ways of ending a marriage with a coerced *get* or without a *get*.

As with the other volumes in this series, Warburg discusses the vision of rabbinic reality in the first part and actual cases in the second part. His discussions and listing of sources help us understand the issues and how halakha interacts with civil law and the decisions of the Jewish court. This scholarly book uses many Hebrew and sometimes Latin terms which are not always explained. Warburg has a deep understanding of Jewish law and has personal experience dealing with couples as the director of a *beit din*. He read hundreds of *beit din* cases in the research for this volume. The number of footnotes is impressive: some pages have more space for the footnotes than the main text. But a major shortcoming of the volume is the lack of a comprehensive bibliography and lack of subject or topical index. Nevertheless, this book is highly recommended for academic libraries and other libraries with patrons interested in understanding modern Jewish law.

Daniel D. Stuhlman, Stuhlman Management Consultants, Chicago, IL

Wasserman, Rabbi Asher. *The Concise Ahavas Chesed: A Page a Day: The Laws Concerning Kindness & Charity, Condensed from Sefer Ahavas Chesed of HaRav Yisrael Meir HaKohen, zt"l.* Translated by Rabbi D. Worenklein. Jerusalem: Feldheim, 2016. 161pp. \$14.99. (9781680252613).

Those who enjoy a daily “dose” of Jewish learning will appreciate this new translation for several reasons. The book gives dates for three cycles of learning the material, which is laid out on the pages with plenty of white space and clear fonts. Additional sources are noted in parentheses, and the short book is easy to take along wherever one may go. Included after some of the lessons and at the end of the book are “Pearls of *Chesed*” that expand or explain the ideas presented in the daily lessons. Section one covers lending money and objects and paying workers; Section two discusses such acts of *chesed* (wisdom) and their importance; the third section delves into specific *mitzvot* like welcoming guests, visiting the sick, and rejoicing at weddings.

The index is an expanded table of contents, which is superfluous in a book of this nature. The book has approbations from several Torah luminaries, and while an excellent choice for personal study, it is an optional purchase for most libraries.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel

Weinshall Liberman, Judith. *An Introduction to My Judaica Art. Colored Artwork.* Indianapolis, IN: Dog Ear Publishing, 2017. 30 pp. \$23.99. (9781457553974).

In *An Introduction to My Judaica Art* Judith Weishall Liberman provides her own explanation of the development of her artwork together with samples of her life work. It seems that though she is a secular Jewess, Jewish symbols and the Holocaust inspired and were the subjects of her artistic creations. *An Introduction to My Judaica Art* may motivate or interest other artists or would-be artists, but on the whole this seems to be a self-promoting exercise for this specific artist and her achievements. Those who are interested in or follow Liberman’s work may find this a useful book.

Nira Wolfe, Highland Park, IL

Zorgdrager, Heleen & Michiel Driebergen. *The Jews of Lemberg: A Journey to Empty Places (translated from the Dutch edition 2014).* London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2017. 97pp. \$59.00. (07890383278).

Lemberg was a city with a rich religious and cultural Jewish history. Anti-Jewish feeling had long been present in Lemberg (the blood libel accusation against the Reizes brothers in 1728, for example), but it was the Nazis, together with their Ukrainian and Polish cohorts, who put an end to over 1000 years of vibrant Jewish life by annihilating the city’s Jewish population in a period of just a few months.

This book attempts to revive the memory of these murdered Jews and their culture. The authors ask: Can anything be found of that Jewish culture? What is left of the Yiddish Jewish culture of this now space emptied of Jews? Where can traces of the Jewish past, now haunting ghosts, be found? What are some of the stories behind the places made Judenrein? What of the former large Jewish influence and presence of this city? Can it be rediscovered? The book tries to uncover some of the stories behind the facades that once teemed with the gusto of Jewish life: the now silent or repurposed former synagogue buildings, gymnasiums, department stores, *mikvot* (ritual baths), Yiddish theaters and Yiddish newspaper offices.

Although not comprehensive in scope, the book does reference three key eyewitness survivor accounts and other primary resources like Rabbi David Kahane’s Lvov Ghetto Diary. It also includes 38 maps, YouTube videos, social media sites and websites, as well as many worthwhile secondary studies.

One problematic aspect of this book, however, is that it serves as a form of public Ukrainian Jewish relations. While the authors are well intentioned, some readers might object and feel uncomfortable with the quote cited in the name of Boris Dorfman that opens chapter one and concludes the book: *Dos Lebn set sich fort waiten* (Life goes on).

David B Levy, Touro College NYC



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Reviews of Literature Titles for Adults

Boorstin, Paul. *David and the Philistine Woman*. United Kingdom: Top Hats, 2017. 316 pp. \$19.95. (9781785355370). [Reviewed from Editor's Proof].

Written as biblical fiction, the main characters in the book are David who combats the Philistines; Saul, who has uncontrolled anger, and a made-up character, Nara, who learns to craft weapons from iron and becomes Goliath's wife. Nara has faith in the female goddess and trusts that she will protect her. After Goliath kills her beloved father, her hatred for Goliath is so great that she wishes him dead. There is an additional element in the story involving the "ashdoda stones" which Nara believes have special powers. I would not recommend this book if one hopes to learn about the biblical account of David and Goliath, but it does give a good portrayal of the advancement of the Philistines in the production of iron weapons, and the prevailing widespread belief in female goddesses. This is a good choice for a general library collection.

Ellen Share, Librarian, Washington Hebrew Congregation

Gundar-Goshen, Ayelet. *Waking Lions*. New York: Little Brown and Company, 2016. 341 pp. \$26.00. (9780316395434).

Waking Lions by Ayelet Gundar Goshen is a story with two main characters: Dr. Eitan Green, a disgraced neurosurgeon, and Sikrit, an Eritrean refugee, whose lives collide on one fateful night. Through one action their lives become inexplicably connected, and their fate and the fate of those around them is changed as a result. Over a period of two months, Eitan and Sikrit develop a relationship based on deception and extortion and ultimately one of redemption. This book is recommended for all libraries with a Jewish following, especially public libraries.

Laura Schutzman, Hebrew Academy of Nassau County, Nathan and Doris Liebman Memorial Library, Uniondale, NY

Harris, Rayna Sue. *Bronx Heart Jerusalem Soul*. Charleston, SC: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016. 495 pp. \$19.95. (9781534834828).

This book is a novel about a young girl, Tyra, who embarks on an adventure to attend university in Jerusalem in 1966 and finds herself involved in the Six Day War. Her whole life changes as a result of her experiences in Israel, and her life ambitions do as well. The book contains many flashbacks, about Tyra's childhood and life prior to her trip, and the bulk of the book is written as correspondence between Tyra, her family, and her friends.

Although the premise of the novel is a good one, the book itself is about 200 pages too long. Much of the story is lost in the extraneous prose and the reader is confused by the back and forth. This book is recommended for any Jewish library, synagogue, school or even a public library, but not recommended for an academic institution.

Laura Schutzman, Hebrew Academy of Nassau County, Nathan and Doris Liebman Memorial Library, Uniondale, NY

Hoffman, Alice. *Faithful*. New York: Simon & Schuster. 2016. 258 pp. \$26.00. (9781476799209).

Two years after the car crash that left her best friend comatose and after her own suicide attempt, Shelby Richmond remains a shell of her former self. She wanders aimlessly throughout town, smoking pot with her high school friend, fellow loner Ben, who has carried a torch for her since high school. It is through Ben, whose unrequited love for Shelby remains steadfast, that Shelby finds her life's purpose.

Hoffman's *Faithful*, is reminiscent of Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life*. However, Shelby's life is saved by several angels who remind her that she is, indeed, loving, selfless and caring. Shelby saves abused animals from their drug-addicted owners, to whom she shows compassion; helps her single-mother friend, Maravelle, care for her children, and nurses her long-suffering mother as she battles

cancer. Shelby is reminded that her life was spared for a reason - that her life has a purpose.

Faithful is a very pleasant read, yet seems to be written for small screen adaptation: a Hallmark or Lifetime television movie. The reader cannot help but wonder who will play each role. This book will surely be enjoyed and discussed thoroughly by book discussion groups.

Yossi Gremillion, Librarian, Broward County Library

Krasikov, Sana. *The Patriots*. New York: Random House. 2017. 538 pp. \$28.00. (9780385524414).

An alternative title to Sana Krasikov's *The Patriots* could be 'Trapped in Paradise.' To the family of Florence Fein, a radicalized, liberated young woman in 1932 America, the idea of her journey to the Soviet Union was crazy. Her father, whose family had escaped the oppressive Czarist and Revolutionary Russian regimes, points out that the people to whom Florence saw as great equalizers of the people were actually starving them by stealing the grains of collective farmers. But Florence ignores his warnings and, upon her arrival, ignores the forced searches, confiscation of Western literature and forced labor of the lower classes. When she finally heeds the warnings of her former Russian lover and others who warn her of Stalinist oppression, Florence, her husband, Lenny and son Yulik are trapped and caught up in the paranoia of informants, forced confessions, hard labor and executions.

Flash forward some seventy years later. Yulik's son, Lenny, after having lived in the United States for most of his life, returns to post-Communist Russia to make his fortune. His father, now known as Julian, on a multi-faceted mission, travels to Russia to convince his son to return to the United States. Lenny is imprisoned on trumped up charges and his release is secured by a shady business colleague of his father's, who promises Lenny's release if Yulik's company chooses a vendor whose bid is far higher than the lowest bidding shipping company.

Krasikov's story is one of parallel lives: Florence and Lenny, both sought a promised land that turned out to be a broken promised land of corruption. Both suffer aftereffects of their stubbornness and naiveté. Florence saves her own life by helping retrieve aeronautic information from a captured American soldier during the Korean Conflict and Yulik must make a corrupt business decision to keep his son from prison. *The Patriots* is a very intense, well-researched novel. The Russophile and the historian will attest to its honest portrayal of Stalinist oppression and the Historical Fiction reader will remain on the edge of his or her seat as Krasikov's superb story plays out. *The Patriots* is well worth the read.

Yossi Gremillion, Librarian, Broward County Library

Levi, Jonathan. *Septimania: A Novel*. New York: Overlook Duckworth, 2017. 324 pp. \$27.95. (9781468314281).

How do we understand the universe? Is it through the lens of physics? Math? Music? Literature? Religion? Or love? Levi weaves all these themes into the story of Malory, a Catholic Ph.D. student in physics. Malory is having trouble finishing his dissertation and focuses more on his side-job as an organ tuner at nearby churches. It is while working on one of these organs that he meets Louiza, a mathematics student, who realized that their names have the same value according to her own *gematria* type scheme. With her help, he finds the apple-seed, "pip," which had been throwing the organ out of tune and afterward he and Louiza share a passionate day together.

But then Louiza disappears, the extensions on his dissertation eventually run out, and Malory receives a bequest of a train ticket to Rome from a grandmother he barely knew. So Malory heads to Rome where he finds a very pregnant Louiza. He carries her to the hospital, and meets expecting couple, Tibor and Cristina. But before either woman gives birth to her child, Malory is whisked away by the mysterious Settimio. Settimio informs him that Malory is the King of the Jews in the Kingdom of Septimania, the Holy Roman Emperor, and possibly the Caliph of all Muslims. After a brief unsuccessful search for Louiza, Malory cloisters himself in the splendid Septimania library for decades, trying to

understand his kingdom and the laws of physics that rule the world. He is shaken out of his routine by the arrival of a young woman, Ottavia. She explains to Malory that Tibor is in a crisis and needs the pip to put him back in tune with his life and work. Malory reluctantly agrees to go to Tibor in the United States, not knowing that this will lead him back to Louiza.

Book clubs will love dissecting the many references to classic Western and Arabic literature and art and the numerous forces that influence behavior, but Jewish libraries should be aware that the Jewish content is only one small strand in this tapestry of a work. Recommended for fiction collections.

Sheryl Stahl, Senior Associate Librarian, Frances-Henry Library, HUC-JIR, Los Angeles.

Sofer, Dan. *An Unexpected Afterlife* (Dry Bones Society; Self-published). 276 pp. \$12.97. (9780986393235).

You might think that waking up alone and naked in the Mount of Olives cemetery would be the most confusing thing that could happen to Israeli Moshe Karlin, but this is just the first odd thing in what would be the weirdest day of his life. Well, not actually his life, because as Moshe discovers soon after he finds his wife in bed with the man he thought was his best friend, Moshe had actually died and been buried two years earlier. After being kicked out of his erstwhile apartment by his freaked-out wife, Moshe is taken in by his rabbi. The rabbi's crowded household soon takes in another newly alive again person, Irina.

Meanwhile, the Prophet Elijah, aka Eli Katz, is across town in a hospital recovering from a motorcycle accident.

We follow Moshe as he tries to get his old life (and wife!) back and as he gains insights into the life he had taken for granted. The growing collection of alive again people struggles to make a living in an Israeli society whose bureaucracy insists they are dead. In addition to being financially overwhelmed by his guests, the rabbi is theologically overwhelmed and approaches his rabbinic council for guidance. And Elijah, who has not instantly healed as he expected he would, struggles to understand what task God wants him to do.

The first in the Dry Bones Society series, this was an engaging page-turner. Highly recommended.

Sheryl Stahl, Senior Associate Librarian, Frances-Henry Library, HUC-JIR, Los Angeles.

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Hasafran is the electronic discussion list of the Association of Jewish Libraries. It was created in 1991 to provide a forum for the discussion of Judaica librarianship. The list is moderated by Joseph (Yossi) Galron, Jewish studies librarian at The Ohio State University. The views expressed in the list are the opinions of the participants and not necessarily the views of the moderator or of AJL.

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Reviews of Multimedia

The Disorientalists (Yuriy Gurzhy, Marina Frenk, Daniel Kahn). *Who was Essad Bey?* Berlin: Oriente Musik, 2016. Audio CD. 17 tracks. 50:04 minutes. Accompanied by a booklet with a biographical essay on Essad Bey in German by Dr. Sonja Hegasy, commentary and lyrics in English, German, Russian; and color illustrations by Alexej Tchernyi [32 pp.] (LC 03592)

This audio CD tells life story of Essad Bey, aka Kurban Said, who was born in 1905 as Lev Nussimbaum, a Jew and died in 1942 as a Muslim, and all his adventures in-between, in a 50-minute musical program. Lev Nussimbaum grew up as a Jew in Baku, the son of an oil baron and a mother who was involved in left-wing politics and rumored to have connections to Stalin. She committed suicide when Lev was five. Lev and his father wandered between East and West: to the Caucasus, Persia, Paris, Constantinople, Berlin, and Italy. Lev converted to Islam and adopted the name Essad Bey. He became a prolific and well-known author, bringing stories of the East to the West. His life was buffeted by the political forces of his day, including Fascism, for which he had some affinity, in part because he thought it could successfully fight Communism. Wikipedia, the source librarians love to question, is quoted in the booklet accompanying the CD, as cautioning that “the neutrality of this article is disputed.” Indeed, most of the facts of Essad Bey’s life and work are disputed, including the authorship of his most famous novel, *Ali and Nino*, originally published in German in 1937. It’s a love story of an interfaith romance between a Muslim Azerbaijani youth and a Christian Georgian princess set in the Caucasus just before the Russian Revolution. The novel even has its own Wikipedia entry.

The title of the compilation is a riff on Essad Bey’s identity as an Orientalist, and the book, *The Orientalist: Solving the Mystery of a Strange and Dangerous Life*, a scholarly biography of Essad Bey by Tom Reiss (New York: Random House, 2005).

The CD encapsulates Essad Bey’s enigmatic biography in words and music, with lyrics in German, English, and Russian, utilizing a variety of ethnic folk styles, including klezmer, and modern Western and traditional string instruments. The combination is compelling and reflects the displacement, constant reinvention, and cosmopolitan life of Essad Bey. In an age of identity fluidity and reports of false news, it is a recording for our time. Recommended for music libraries with an interest in world music and fans of Essad Bey.

Shulamith Z. Berger, Yeshiva University, New York, NY

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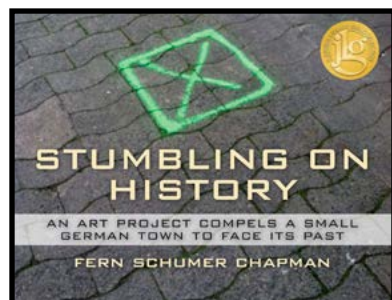
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Reviews of Titles for Children and Teens

EDITED BY RACHEL KAMIN & CHAVA PINCHUK

In The Spotlight



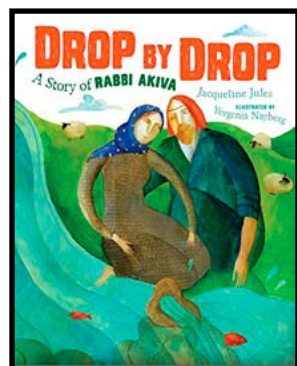
Chapman, Fern Schumer. *Stumbling on History: An Art Project Compels a Small German Town to Face its Past*. Lake Bluff, IL: Gussie Rose Press, 2016. (Now available from Kar-Ben Publishers) 56 pp. \$17.99. (9780996472517). PBK. Gr. 3-5. Reviewed from ARC.

The central story of this illustrated non-fiction book is about unique public art project honoring individual Holocaust victims. It explains one way modern Germans are recognizing and atoning for their country's involvement in the Holocaust. All over Germany and other European countries, *Stolpersteine* – German for “Stumbling

Stones” – small bronze plaques set in sidewalks near homes of displaced and murdered Holocaust victims “confront Germans with their past sins and their communities’ involvement in this horrific historical event.” When the author’s mother, Edith Westerfeld, was 12 years old, she was sent alone from Nazi Germany to America on a ship, in 1938. Now, the 89-year-old Holocaust refugee returns to her birthplace in Stockstadt am Rhein to be honored in a ceremony to place a Stumbling Stone in front of her childhood home. Westerfeld wonders if the memory of the Nazis murdering her parents, along with millions of other victims, will outlive the survivors.

An attractive layout of text, photographs, historical primary sources, extensive excerpts from the public record, and artifacts, documents the details of Edith’s past, the Stumbling Stones public art project, and the ceremony recognizing the part this German town played in the Holocaust. End matter includes credits for the 46 photos and a list of nations’ crimes, such as use of chemical warfare, religious intolerance, displacement of native peoples, etc., and a list of how some countries have taken responsibility for terrible acts in their past. Front and back inside covers display over 100 Stumbling Stones. A Readers’ Guide is available on the Kar-Ben website. Chapters include Memory, Recognition, Atonement, and an Afterword, with questions and activities following each section. Use Chapman’s three other titles – *Motherland* for adults and *Is It Night or Day?* and *Like Finding My Twin* for middle school grades – for a compelling congregational or community read.

Debbie Colodny, Cook Memorial Public Library District, Libertyville, IL. Former owner Sefer, So Good, and former member Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee.



Jules, Jacqueline. *Drop by Drop: A Story of Rabbi Akiva*. Illus. by Yevgenia Nayberg. Minneapolis: Kar-Ben, 2017. 32 pp. \$17.99. (9781512420906) HC; \$7.99 (9781512420913) PBK; \$6.99 EBook. Gr. K-2.

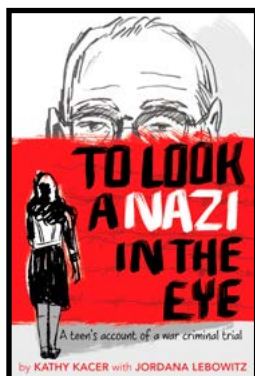
Poor, uneducated shepherd Akiva meets and marries wealthy Rachel despite her father’s protests. Rachel, recognizing the emotional intelligence in her husband, encourages him to begin his education despite being in his forties. Eventually he leaves home to study Torah, again with his wife’s support, and after many years he becomes a famous Rabbi and educator, emphasizing for readers that anything can be achieved with patience and self-determination.

Author Jules, a many-time Sydney Taylor Honoree, presents a tale that is at once universally accessible and yet so vital to young Jewish readers.

She allows her audience to get to know an admirable, kind, and important Jewish hero, but also makes an effort to give credit to Rachel for Rabbi Akiva’s success. Without her, he would not have pursued his Jewish education, let alone excelled at it. Illustrator Yevgenia Nayberg offers up a

mixture of watercolor and collage to beautifully compliment the story, creating visuals that feel both modern and true to the first century during which Rabbi Akiva lived. While young readers will be sure to enjoy this title during story time, all audiences will appreciate the reminder that success does not come with an age limit.

Alex Quay, Sinai Akiba Academy, Los Angeles, CA



Kacer, Kathy with Jordana Lebowitz. *To Look a Nazi in the Eye*. Toronto, Canada: Second Story Press, 2017, 231 pp. \$13.95. (9781772600407). Gr. 7-12. Reviewed from ARC.

In 2015, determined Canadian college student Jordana Lebowitz goes to Germany and maneuvers her way into attending the trial of 94-year-old former SS officer, Oskar Groening, who collected the belongings of Jewish deportees on the ramp at Auschwitz. This “Bookkeeper of Auschwitz” has been charged as an accomplice in the murder of 300,000 Hungarian Jews in 1944. She snags a blogging assignment for the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles and prepares herself for what’s to come, despite the protestations of her parents. Jordana attends for one week and comes to terms with her own Jewish identity, her relationships with Toronto survivors, and Germany. She also confronts both supporters and protestors and learns the difference between moral and criminal guilt.

Kacer deftly handles the complex and tense dramatic nonfiction narrative and its layers of emotion. Since there were no official transcripts of the trial, she pieced together a transcript-like report culled from newspaper accounts. Lebowitz’s blog posts are also excerpted. An extraordinary young woman represents a new generation to tell the tales of the Holocaust and give readers hope for some kind of justice. A must-have in a YA collection, because the horrific acts of the Holocaust are just too incomprehensible, and because the Holocaust continues to affect us all.

Barbara Krasner, former member, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee, Somerset, NJ



Rosenberg, Madelyn and Wendy Wan-Long Shang. *This is Just a Test*. New York: Scholastic, 2017. 258 pp. \$17.99 (9781338037722) HC; \$10.99 (9781338037746) eBook. Gr. 3-6. Reviewed from ARC.

The year is 1983 and U.S.-Soviet relations are tense. Twelve-year-old David Da-Wei Horowitz has just watched *The Day After* on TV and now he’s worried about what will happen if there’s a nuclear war. But he has other worries/tests, too: his *upcoming bar mitzvah*; the animosity between his new friend Scott and his old friend Hector; his two feuding grandmothers – one Jewish, the other Chinese; the inter-school trivia contest; and not least of all, how to talk to girls (in general) and Kelli Ann (in particular). Put all these ingredients together, stir well, and you have a laugh-out-loud romp through a few months in the life of this thoughtful and engaging character. By the end of the novel, David manages to work out most of his problems – except for the Cold War, of course. He grows in maturity and realizes that peace starts in the family and in the community: “Real peace doesn’t come just from not having conflict. It comes from everyone feeling right with the world.” Most of all, David understands that friendship is based on trust and honesty.

The story is deftly told from David’s point of view. It’s chockful of 1980s references: Atari games, *Star Trek*, “Thriller”, and even an early portable phone. When David stands on the *bimah*, the reader is rooting for him; when he gives his *bar mitzvah* speech, we’re blown away by its insight and humor. For an added bonus, see the witty thank-you notes at the end of this novel. This is Just a Test is a must-read for any kid who has the *bar/bat mitzvah* jitters, and for parents, too.

Anne Dublin, author of *44 Hours or Strike!* (Second Story Press, 2015), Toronto, Canada

BIBLE STORIES AND MIDRASH

Schwartz, Barry L. *Adam's Animals*. Illus. by Steliyana Doneva. New Jersey: Apples and Honey Press, 2017. 32 pp. \$17.95. (9781681155302). Preschool.

The author's note states that the book is a midrash, a "commentary that fills in the gaps of Torah." It opens with a quote from Genesis 2:19 explaining how God brought the birds and beasts that He had made to "the man", and "whatever the man called each living creature, that would be its name." We meet Adam (who has more resemblance to Mowgli of "Jungle Book fame, than anything Michelangelo would have painted), who "smiled when he was happy and cried when he was sad." One day, Adam decides it is time to name all his animal friends and they crowd around him with great anticipation of the event, eventually forming one very long line that is delightfully realized by the illustrator on a realistic-looking double-page spread. Young children will enjoy pointing out the various animals that they can identify here. Later pages provide the names of unusual animals, such as the caracal, caiman, dabchick and matamata. After Adam is finished naming so many animals, there are a few complaints, such as from the stinkbug, who thinks her name is too smelly or the pufferfish, who thinks her name is too puffy. Other animals also complain, but Adam tells them to "do the best you can with the name you are given" and they all go back to their homes. Adam soon realizes he is lonely and is rewarded when he wakes up one day with someone beside him, who looks like him, only a bit different, and who tells him her name is "Eve" [deviating from the Biblical text where Adam calls her Eve (Genesis 3:20)]. Together they join hands and Adam takes her to meet all his animal friends. The book would be particularly appropriate for preschool audiences or to read to children at a baby-naming ceremony. The engaging and colorful watercolor illustrations should be a big hit with all ages.

Lisa Silverman, Burton Sperber Jewish Community Library at American Jewish University, Los Angeles

FICTION - MIDDLE GRADE

Herz, Libby. *Toba's Passage*. Illus. by Dena Akerman. Brooklyn, NY: Hachai Publishing, 2016. 190 pp. \$10.95. (978-1935882022). Gr. 4-6.

In 1905, twelve-year-old Toba Czapinsky prepares to travel from her shtetl in Poland to America with her aunt and brother to join her father. Her beloved grandfather gives her a treasured siddur to take with her. But in the ship's steerage during a storm, Toba loses the book and meets up with an unsavory book dealer who wants it too. She and her brother become detectives and spot a red-haired girl with it. Once settled in on the Lower East Side, they come across both the book dealer and the red-haired girl, and they are able to solve the mystery of the lost siddur.

Promoted as a chapter book for grades 2-4, this narrative misses the mark. It lacks historical and geographic authenticity, despite its historical note in the back matter, and relies more heavily on family lore, which can be unreliable. The reading level surpasses chapter book word choice and structure. At times, Toba sounds much more mature than her adolescent years. The plot is predictable, but the characters, particularly Toba, are endearing. Unfortunately, the use of first-person narrative works against her and the chapter book genre.

Barbara Krasner, former member, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee, Somerset, NJ



Powell, Maud Macrory. *City of Grit and Gold*. Forest Park, IL: Allium Press of Chicago, 2017. 164 pp. \$16.99 (9780996755856) PBK; \$6.99 (9780996755863) EBook. Gr. 4-7. Reviewed from uncorrected proof.

Imbued with the adaptability of youth and an inquisitive mind, twelve-year-old Addie straddles many worlds. Living in Chicago during the spring of 1886, she finds herself immersed in a number of disparate settings -- her family's middle-class apartment in a Jewish neighborhood, the small hat shop co-owned by her father and uncle, and even inside a noisy garment sweatshop. Addie's greatest challenge comes when she tries to make sense of the marching laborers clashing with police officers during the days of unrest leading up to the Haymarket Affair. The contentious political discourse and public discord spills into all aspects of Addie's private life, pitting her father against her brother, her uncle, and her usually complacent mother. Absorbing the conflicting opinions swirling around her, Addie learns to fashion her own moral compass in regard to the ongoing drama between the interests of business owners and the demands of the working class.

Powell's debut novel features a likeable, multi-dimensional protagonist and strong characters acting out a history lesson about a pivotal time in the labor movement's drive for an eight-hour workday. The only hiccup in her otherwise flawless story is the overuse of hyphenated adjectives to describe the characters' vocalizations (e.g., "called in her sharp-warm voice," "spoke in brittle-hot tones," "shouted in his loud-terrible voice"). This textual quirk aside, *City of Grit and Gold* warrants a spot alongside *Fire at the Triangle Factory* (Carolrhoda, 1995) and *Missing from Haymarket Square* (Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2001) as an engaging book for teaching young readers about a piece of American history that remains relevant today.

Allison Marks, co-author of A Gefilte Fishy Tale (MB Publishing)

FOLKTALES

Fine, Arnold and Goldstein, Zalman. *The Silly World of Chelm*. Illus. by Howard S. Spielman. Brooklyn, New York: The Jewish Learning Group, 2017. 407 pp. (9781891293047) Gr. 2-6.

As Zalman Goldstein admits in the introduction to this volume, he decided to publish the collection as a "nostalgic trip down memory lane." It certainly is nostalgic, since all the stories and illustrations are reprinted from the archives of The Jewish Press and are decades old. The book aims to be encyclopedic and includes a total of 170 stories, each only a page or two long. The main character, who shows up in most of the stories, is the Sage of Chelm, who is known to be the wisest man in the village -- and that doesn't say much for the "smarts" of the other townspeople!

The book might be well received in a Chabad or ultra-Orthodox setting, where the column was beloved for generations. Librarians and teachers may want to mine the volume for clever storytelling ideas. However, the old-fashioned style and Yiddish-inflected language would not resonate with most of today's children.

*Joyce Levine, North Shore Hebrew Academy H.S. (retired) and former AJL Publications Chair,
North Woodmere, NY*

HOLOCAUST AND WORLD WAR II

Berne, Emma Carlson. *Escaping the Nazis on the Kindertransport*. North Mankato, Minnesota: Capstone, 2017. 112 pp. \$7.95. (9781515745464). Gr. 4-6.

On the final page of *Escaping the Nazis on the Kindertransport*, Berne writes the following chilling sentences: "Six million Jews were killed by the Nazis during the Holocaust. One and a half million of them were children. But these 10,000 children lived." This non-fiction book describes the experiences of seven Jewish children who travelled from Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, or Poland in order to reach a haven in Great Britain just before Europe was engulfed by war. Although separated from their families -- most of whom did not survive the Holocaust -- these children survived and often thrived. (Berne chose not to tell about the kinder who were neglected or abused.) On sepia-colored, glossy paper, the children's writings, interviews, and photos are interspersed so that we can almost hear their voices. End matter includes: timeline, glossary, the Kindertransport Association, a scanty bibliography, source

notes, and index. A map is not included. *Escaping the Nazis on the Kindertransport* might be a useful resource for reluctant readers who are doing a research project. It is based extensively on the book for adults, *Into the Arms of Strangers* (Bloomsbury, 2000). For a better organized, more readable telling of this topic, see *Rescuing the Children: The Story of the Kindertransport* (Tundra, 2012) by Deborah Hodge.

Anne Dublin, author of *44 Hours or Strike!* (Second Story Press), Toronto, Canada

Brehl, Sandy. *Bjorn's Gift*. Milwaukee: Crispin Books/Crickhollow, 2016. 271 pp. \$14.95. (9781883953843). Gr. 5-9.

In this sequel to Brehl's 2014 *Odin's Promise*, twelve-year-old Mari faces continual challenges under the German occupation of her Norwegian village. She and her family move into her grandmother's cottage, giving up their main house to German soldiers who are constantly on the hunt for contraband. Her friends leave the village to work on a farm to the north. School first mandates the instruction of German and German history and then shuts down.

Bjorn's Gift is an admirable second volume, refreshing events and characters of the first volume while setting the stage for the third and final volume. The most impressive element is Brehl's ability to capture the feeling of Norway. She also presents a realistic young woman in Mari, questioning everyone and everything around her. The most quixotic and complex character is Leif. He is more than what he appears to be as a young Nazi sympathizer. Mari's friends Astrid and Per get lost in the narrative, however.

While there is brief mention of the Jews who once lived in the village, *Bjorn's Gift* is more a World War II occupation story than Holocaust. The titular Bjorn, Mari's brother, is absent from this book; he is working for the resistance. He believes Mari has a role to play, and her transition to helping Dr. Olson with his practice and her keeping a journal for Bjorn are important elements to lead to the climactic third volume. The epistolary journal allows Mari to report on events. Back matter includes a Norwegian and German glossary and pronunciation guide.

Barbara Krasner, former member, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee, Somerset, NJ

Kaurin, Marianne. *Almost Autumn*. Trans. by Rosie Hedger. New York: Scholastic, 2017. [Originally published as *Nærmere høst* (Oslo: H. Aschehoug & Co., 2012)]. 288 pp. \$17.99. (9780545889650). Gr. 6-10. Reviewed from ARC.

Ilse Stern is a fifteen-year-old teenager who is preparing for her first date with her neighbor, Hermann Rød. She argues with her mother, steals lipstick from her mother's purse, and gets angry at her nosy neighbor, Ole Rustad. However, these rather innocent concerns soon fade away as the Nazi noose tightens around the Jews, and as ordinary Norwegians must make life-and-death decisions. In this action-packed, suspenseful novel, Kaurin examines how and why people choose different paths: Hermann gets involved in the underground resistance movement; Ole helps in the roundup of Jews by driving his taxi but later decides to work for the Resistance; a Norwegian policeman actively helps the Nazis; most people try to stay out of the path of the storm. Kaurin doesn't pull any punches. In the autumn of 1942, Ilse's mother, father, and two sisters are herded together along with other Jews to the harbor and, after a long and harrowing journey, arrive at Auschwitz. However, since this novel is for young people, it ends with a ray of hope when Ilse and Hermann are reunited at the end of the war.

Kaurin uses third-person point of view, but changes from character to character; thus, we get a closer understanding of the events that occur as well as each character's motivations and emotions. The writing is effective, with many sensory details and powerful figurative language. As the suspense builds, the sentences grow shorter and the scenes become starker. In the afterword, Kaurin describes her family's background and how the concept of chance in determining people's survival motivated her to write this book. For another dramatic YA novel about the Nazi occupation of Norway, see *Shadow on the Mountain* by Margi Preus (Amulet, 2012) (reviewed Sept/Oct 2013 issue of *AJL Newsletter*).

Anne Dublin, author of *44 Hours or Strike!* (Second Story Press, 2015), Toronto, Canada

ISRAEL

Benenfeld, Rikki. *I Go to Eretz Yisroel.* (Toddler Experience Series). Brooklyn: Hachai, 2017. 32 pp. \$10.95. (9781929628926). Preschool.

After tackling topics such as going to school, shul, farms, weddings, and doctors and dentists in her previous books for this publisher, prolific author/illustrator Benenfeld introduces another important topic with her typical breezy, rhyming style and colorful, but simplistic illustrations. The book is useful to read to a very young child before a trip on an airplane ("I'm packing my suitcase – It's ready to zip, We're all set to go, on a wonderful trip!"), because of how clear the process of boarding, safety, eating, etc., are explained in simple verse. The cheerful, Orthodox family (consisting of a mom, dad, and young brother and sister) recites *Tefillas Haderech* and eats a glatt kosher meal before arriving in Israel, getting into a taxi and going straight to Yerushalayim and the *Kotel* (Western Wall). The family gives *tzedakah* (charity), and travels to Chevron to pray at *Me'aras Hamachpeila* (Cave of the Patriarchs) and *Kever Rochel* (Rachel's Tomb). The children pray for Moshiah to come so we will all be able to stay in Israel in the future. "Laminated for little hands," the latest in the series is aimed at Chabad/Lubavitch preschoolers, but may be useful with other young readers.

Lisa Silverman, Burton Sperber Jewish Community Library at American Jewish University, Los Angeles

Cohen, Deborah Bodin. *Engineer Arielle and the Israel Independence Day Surprise.* Illus. by Yael Kimhi Orrelle. Minneapolis : Kar-Ben, 2017. 32p. \$17.99 (9781512420944) HC; \$7.97 (9781512420951) PBK; \$6.99 eBook. Gr. K-2. Reviewed from galley.

The roof of a train and the roof of the sky deliver a picture book about Israel's Independence Day. Engineer Arielle, energetic, 21st century, modern, urban train engineer is the great, great granddaughter of Engineer Ari renowned for his adventures driving the first ever train in Jerusalem in the last 19th century (and the star of previous titles *Engineer Ari and the Rosh Hashanah Ride*, *Engineer Ari and the Sukkah Express*, *Engineer Ari and the Hanukkah Mishap*, and *Engineer Ari and the Passover Rush*). Arielle and her pilot brother, Ezra, here combine in a sweet story about *Yom Ha'Atzma'ut*, giving libraries a topic rarely covered in picture book stories and readers a link to a favorite hero. While most Israeli natives take a holiday from work to celebrate, Arielle and Ezra take joy in the importance of their work on this special day. The tale sets up a mystery about why everyone will see Ezra no matter where they are. Arielle tapes a poster whose message we cannot see to the roof of her light rail cab. As she drives by buildings and through neighborhoods picking up passengers, readers learn about Jerusalem landmarks, historical events and national holiday customs. The text contains transliteration of Hebrew words. The mobile illustrations in muted colors capture the spirit and pride of the characters and the plot. The climax of the picture book is the actual acrobatic, annual air show, a special flyover all of Israel performed by the Israeli Air Force. Ezra is the lead pilot and as the pilots write Israel across the sky, we discover the poster message on the train roof: "*Yom Ha'Atzma'ut sameach Ezra.*" A happy holiday and a happy read!

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

JEWISH HISTORY

Liberman, Judith Weinshall. *Ruthie and Her Ancestors: A Brief Journey Through Jewish History.* Illus. by Al Margolis. Indianapolis: Dog Ear Publishing. 32 pp. \$23.99. (9781457552779). Gr. 1-3.

Ruthie and Her Ancestors begins with the titular character asking her father about their family's origins during dinner. Her father then goes into such detail that young Ruthie falls asleep and begins to dream herself into the historical events that he is describing. In her dreams, she meets Moses, King David, and Rabbi Samuel Judah. She visits Egypt, Babylon, and Poland as her father covers large swaths of Jewish history in a single night.

While the historical events included are depicted accurately and should be moving, it is unclear how much of an impact this knowledge has on Ruthie. She moves from scene to scene in search of her ancestors, but seems unaware that she is speaking to slaves, refugees, and others struggling to overcome oppression. One would hope that Jewish children are able to find pride in their ancestry regardless of royal connections, so it is baffling that Ruthie's only take-away from this experience is that she may vaguely be a princess. Aside from these issues with the story, *Ruthie and Her Ancestors* also has issues of aesthetics. The typeface is very large and bold, as if to accommodate readers with visual impairments, but can be physically uncomfortable for anyone else to read unless it is held at a distance. This becomes additionally problematic with so many text-heavy pages which are broken up every other page by dated illustrations. Readers with a desire to understand their Jewish heritage would be better served by any other publication that includes Bible stories or Jewish history and makes efforts to tackle historical events individually and thoroughly so that a young audience may understand and enjoy them.

Alex Quay, Sinai Akiba Academy, Los Angeles, CA

JEWISH LIFE & VALUES

Herman, Debbie. *Rosie Saves the World*. Illus. by Tammie Lyon. Minneapolis: Kar-Ben, 2017. 24 pp. \$17.99 (9781512420852) HC; \$7.99 (9781512420869) PBK; \$6.99 eBook. Preschool – Gr. 2.

Caring for the world and people in need around the globe is an essential Judaic value, and so is *Areyvut* (Jews being responsible for one another). Rosie learns in Hebrew class about *Tikkun Olam*, or repairing the world by doing good deeds, and sets off to do just that with impressive determination. However, she realizes through her own introspection that in her grand efforts to help those in her community, she lost sight the needs of her family, those closest to her. In an endnote, the concept of *Areyvut* is explained further. This sweetly conveyed and important message should have an impact on children and adults alike.

Martha McMahon, Sinai Akiba Academy, Los Angeles

Herman, Michael. *The Cholent Brigade*. Illus. by Sharon Harmer. Minneapolis: Kar-Ben, 2017. 24pp. \$17.99. (9781512408447). HC; \$7.99 (9781512408454) PBK; \$6.99 eBook. Gr. K-3.

Mr. Monty Nudelman is a *mensch* (good person). On Friday morning following a big storm, he happily shovels snow from the sidewalks, alleys and front porches of his neighbors so they can prepare for Shabbat. When he does not show up for Shabbat services on Saturday morning, the congregation is worried. They learn he is home because he hurt his back shoveling snow – for all of them! Just before lunch, neighborhood children are sent to Monty's home with bowls, pots and thermoses filled with *cholent* (Shabbat stew) – a Cholent Brigade – to help him feel better. The children stay to help him eat all the varieties of *cholent* “each dish filled with warmth and comfort, happiness and friendship,” and on Sunday morning they return to shovel Monty's yard.

This sweet, simple story of friendship, *bikkur cholim* (visiting the sick) and *tikkun olam* (repairing the world), is a wonderful lesson for the current times. The illustrations, a mixture of digital art combined with hand drawings and paint, are colorful and perfectly reflect a snow covered town. There is a recipe for *cholent* in the back of the book.

Kathy Bloomfield, President – SSC, forwardsbooks.com, Washington, DC

Massry, Sarah. *What's Best for Me: Being Glad with What I've Got*. Illus. By Robert Salanitro. Lakewood, New Jersey: Israel Bookshop Publications, 2016. 24pp. \$9.75. (9781600914751). Gr. K-3. “Which person is rich? He who is happy with his lot.” (*Pirkei Avot*; Chapter 4:1) Using simple rhyming text, Massry aims to help children understand the concept of being happy with what they have. From the home they live in to the grades they get; from physical appearance to the family they have, are just right for them because “*Hashem* decides how it should be, because He knows what's best for me!”

It is never too early to deal with jealousy, one of the most basic human emotions. The picture book concludes with the message that we each have exactly what we need because of God's divine plan: "It's not by chance, oh, no, it's not! And so I'm glad with what I've got. It's for the best; it's plain to see, because I know Hashem loves me!"

The colorful illustrations show a brother with yarmulke and *tzitzit* (fringes) and a modestly dressed sister happily navigating their world of home, school and play. God is referred to as *Hashem*. While the milieu of this story is aimed at an Orthodox audience, the message is universal. Consider pairing with Margot Zemach's classic *It Could Always Be Worse*.

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

Newman, Vivian. *Moti the Mitzvah Mouse*. Illus. by Inga Knopp-Kilpert. Minneapolis: Kar-Ben, 2017. 24 pp. \$17.99 (9781512426472) HC; \$7.99 (9781512426496) PBK. Gr. Preschool – K.

Moti is a busy mouse, performing acts of kindness in the Berman family household that are particularly special because he does them secretly while the family is asleep. On each page, Moti sees a quiet way to do a mitzvah, and the reader is actively engaged by the repeated question, "What mitzvah is Moti doing?" Other questions to the reader encourage observation of each scene, all of which are full of detail and charm. The last spread illustrates examples of several Judaic values and asks, "Can you tell Moti what mitzvah you'd like to do?" This introduction to mitzvahs and the concept that acts of kindness are rewarding, even without recognition, is perfect for the preschool set.

Martha McMahon, Sinai Akiba Academy, Los Angeles

NON-FICTION

Weiss, Mendy. *The Spy, the Fire, and the KGB*. Illus. by Yacov Yarhi. Brooklyn: BSD Publishers, 2016. 40 pp. \$14.95. (9780985525095). Gr. 3-6.

This volume contains ten vignettes featuring twentieth century rabbis, each headed by the name of the heroic master, and the dates he lived. The events run from World War II until the end of the century, but are not chronological, and do not constitute a historical narrative. The first two tell of how the Jews avoided or evaded the Nazis. One tells how Rav Zusha the Partisan warned the Jews of Vilna to evacuate the city before the ghetto was destroyed and they were sent to the Camps. Most of the rest of the stories take place in Russia, under the Communists. They describe a variety of ways the rabbis fooled and sidestepped the authorities, and acts of kindness they performed. One takes place in New York (helping a family into Jewish practice), and one in Paris, where a merchant known for his kindness avoided being beaten by a gang. Each 4-page (two double-page spreads) account contains vivid illustrations showing the action in the text. Some of them are quite powerful.

BSD is focused on the Chabad/Lubavitch Community, but the stories may also be selectively useful in other libraries wishing to demonstrate the terrors of the Nazis and the perils of life under Communism.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA

PICTURE BOOKS

Bernhard, D. Yael. *The Life of an Olive*. New York: Heliotrope, 2016. 36 pp. \$19.50 (9781942762287) HC; \$10.50 (9781942762270) PBK. Gr. 3-5. Reviewed from ARC.

In this illustrated book is the story of a 2,000-year-old olive tree growing in the Galilee, Bernhard tells thirteen separate narratives about a child or adult who comes in contact with the tree. Against the backdrop of historical events from 70 CE to 2016 CE, each episode incorporates information about olives and olive trees, as well as nature and the environment. The stories are told from the point of view of Jews who have lived in Israel from ancient times. However, other groups are treated with respect and authenticity. Bernhard's storytelling

is lyrical, with gentle rhythms and strong sensory details that closely match the events. Her gouache and watercolor illustrations are evocative of the flora and fauna in the land of Israel — past and present. The design of the book is varied and eye-catching. Additional matter includes a timeline, glossary, and facts about olives.

Anne Dublin, author of 44 Hours or Strike! (Second Story Press), Toronto, Canada

Carlson, Claudia and Koffsky, Ann D. *Avi the Ambulance and the Snowy Day. Avi the Ambulance Series.* Illus. by CB Decker. Springfield, NJ: Apples and Honey Press, 2017. 32 pp. \$9.95. (9781681155289). Gr. K-2.

In his third appearance, Avi the Ambulance faces one of the problems that emergency medical crews must contend with in the real world -- ice and snow and the double-whammy they present, as traffic accidents become more prevalent due to inclement weather and the emergency crews have a harder time getting to the scene. Nevertheless, Avi and his sister Maya, and their medics Zack and Leah, are well-trained and have the situation in hand. They manage to come to the aid of those who need their assistance in spite of the slippery roads, teaching young readers many gentle lessons along the way, including being prepared and anticipating problems, staying calm during emergencies, appreciating important community helpers and others. The illustrations are appropriately monochromatic suggesting wintry weather and the vehicles are amusingly personified. A section about the vital, lifesaving work of Israel's ambulance and disaster relief organization, Magen David Adom, is included as well as a page which clearly lays out and illustrates the parts of an ambulance, a page of associated vocabulary words, and an explanation of some terms in Hebrew and English.

*Michal Hoschander Malen, Retired librarian, North Shore Hebrew Academy,
Children's book review editor, Jewish Book Council*

Cohen-Janca, Irene. *The Golem of Prague.* Illus. by Maurizio A.C. Quarello. Toronto: Annick Press, 2017. 51 pp. \$17.99 (9781554518883) Gr. 2-6.

The 1580 legend of the Golem of Prague is retold in this gorgeous picture book for older readers. The classic tale explains how the huge, clay creature with the Hebrew letters *Aleph-Mem-Tav*, which spells *emet* (truth) on his forehead was fashioned by Rabbi Judah Loew to protect the Jews of Prague from persecution. All was well until the Golem ran through the city in a destructive rage. He came to Miriam, a young girl, and stopped, mesmerized. Rabbi Loew told the Golem he had fulfilled his purpose and ordered Miriam to remove the Aleph from his forehead, leaving the letters *Mem* and *Tav* which spell *met* (dead). The Golem collapsed, lifeless, and was taken to the synagogue attic.

In alternating chapters, young Franz's 1892 related dream is told. Torn between fear and curiosity, the boy snuck into the Old New Synagogue, climbed the dark stairs, and pushed open the forbidden attic trapdoor. He picked up a huge, shabby coat covered with mud. Wearing it, he suddenly felt invisible hands transport him back through time. He awoke, shed the coat, and walked the streets of 1580 Prague. There, he met the same Miriam, who described her dream of the clay giant kneeling before her, and erasing Aleph from his forehead. Franz felt as though Miriam had opened a door in his mind. He reminded her that they shouldn't keep secrets from each other, for they were pledged to marry someday. Miriam said she didn't fear the giant because she saw something in his eyes that reminded her of Franz.

Poetically descriptive text and mystical, full page watercolor and pencil illustrations rendered in rich, earthy tones help the reader share the characters' emotions and bring the two intertwining stories to life. Moving between Franz's and Miriam's stories may be a bit confusing, but if disbelief is suspended for even a few pages, a well told, stunningly illustrated story will be the reward. Chapter headings, printed in stylized capitals mimicking Hebrew letters, tell the date and setting for each. A small Glossary explains key terms. While not as detailed as other retellings, this one will engage any age reader's imagination.

*Debbie Colodny, Cook Memorial Public Library District, Libertyville, IL. Former owner Sefer, So Good,
and former member, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee*

Herzfeld, Rabbi Shmuel. *An Extra Seat*. Illus. by Caryl and Jacob Herzfeld. Jerusalem: Gefen, 2016. 32 pp. \$12.95. (9789652298737). Gr. 2-5.

Two children hear about the fight to free Soviet Jews in the late 1970s and early 1980s, in particular the struggle to release Anatoly Sharansky, from Rabbi Avi Weiss. They later attend a rally, where they protest the imprisonment of Soviet Jews. Still later, they and their friends set a chair aside at celebrations and Shabbat dinners, “to remember those who don’t get to have fun.” The children also wear bracelets with the names of imprisoned Jews, acknowledging that many people are not free. Sharansky’s struggle ended with his freedom in 1986. He later visited New York, telling his audience that he never gave up hope. The book ends with the line from *Pirkei Avot* (2:21): “It is not our responsibility to complete the task, but we are not free to desist from it, either.”

The book’s visual design adds to the story’s effect. The text is in uneven type; the visuals include photos, black and white drawings, and color paintings. No page-spread is like the others, yet they tell the story compellingly. Though presented as a picture book, *An Extra Seat* would be more appropriate for 3rd and 4th graders. Because it tells three interwoven stories -- Sharansky’s quest, the protests, and the child protesters -- its meaning may be unclear to younger children. Used properly, though, the book should lead to important class and home discussions.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA

Klein, Zoe. *The Goblins of Knottingham: A History of Challah*. Illus. by Beth Bogert. Springfield, New Jersey: Apples & Honey Press, 2017. 30pp. \$17.95. (9781681155265). Gr. K-2.

Rabbi Zoe Klein, the spiritual leader of Temple Isaiah in Los Angeles, mines the tradition of goblins and ghosts found in the Talmud and Jewish folktales to create a fantastical world where goblins tangle the hair of young school children every day in their classroom. All of this takes place in the alliterative town of Knottingham where the goblins are named Knotty, Knotsalot, and Notnow. Worn out by the effort to untangle their hair each day, the children band together to stop the goblins. One Thursday at recess the children gathered. How could the fed-up friends stop such sticky, tricky, prickly goblins? Lots of ideas are suggested and rejected until Dina Dipitinsoup declared, “What about dough?!” All the children wear hats to school the next day except for Ryan Raisin whose hair is covered in challah dough. The goblins descend and are trapped in the sticky dough that the children braid around them. The goblins beg for their freedom. The kind children grant it (after all “goblin bread sounded abominable”) when the goblins promise never to tangle children’s hair again. And every Friday ever after, “the people of Knottingham have made braided, sweet bread called challah to celebrate the end of another tangle free week of school.” The pastel watercolor and pencil illustrations by Beth Bogert are delightful. All the production elements of this book are first rate.

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

Oppenheim, Joanne. *The Knish War on Rivington Street*. Illus. by Jon Davis. Park Ridge, Illinois: Albert Whitman, 2017. 32 pp. \$16.99. (9780807541821). Gr. Preschool - 2.

Benny and his family are immigrants to America in this humorous, food-related story based on a true event that occurred in New York in 1916. Benny’s mother bakes delicious knishes that become so popular, the family opens a small store called a “knishery” on the Lower East Side. They cost five cents. Business is booming until a rival knishery opens across the street selling fried knishes, not baked, and offering them for four cents. The knish war begins and Benny meets his rival – the young son from the other family – as the two families begin their schemes to outdo each other that will just possibly put them both out of business. The mayor is called in to solve the dispute and all ends happily as Rivington Street earns the title of “Knish Capital of the World.” The comic style pen and ink illustrations perfectly complement the rollicking text that serves as a great read-aloud. The author’s note informing readers that the story is basically true is a fun revelation, and the recipes for both fried and baked knishes are included. There is no overt Jewish content in the text, author’s note, or illustrations (no Yiddish street signage, for instance) with the exception of the exclamation, “Oy vey!” by Benny’s mother. Knishes are a known entity in New York City, but not so much

in the rest of the country. After reading this book, parents will definitely need to find some to offer to their kids—even the frozen variety if necessary—because children will surely be inspired to try one.

Lisa Silverman, Burton Sperber Jewish Community Library at American Jewish University, Los Angeles

SHABBAT AND HOLIDAYS

Gehl, Laura. Koala Challah. Illus. by Marla Mola. Minneapolis: Kar-Ben, 2017. 24 pp. \$17.99. (9781512420876) HC; \$7.99 (978-1512420883) PBK; \$6.99 eBook. Gr. Preschool - 2.

Lila wants to help her family get ready for Shabbat. She tries making eucalyptus oil candles and eucalyptus wine like her sisters. She tries making decorations for the Shabbat table. Unfortunately, everything she tries makes a huge mess that her parents have to clean up in a hurry which is very unhelpful. When she decides that she will make the challah for Shabbat, her father agrees as long as she practices first. It takes several attempts, but at last Lila produces her special contribution – Eucalyptus Challah!

This is a charming story about persistence. While Lila appears to be a bit young to be given challah baking duty, she is carefully assisted by her parents and sisters. When at last she produces her very special treat, you can almost feel the pride in her and her family. The illustrations are a colorful and appealing combination of digital and traditional media that makes for an interesting collage look. A clever story for a family Shabbat dinner or a synagogue Tot Shabbat storytelling.

Kathy Bloomfield, President – SSC, forwordsbooks.com, Washington, DC

Glaser, Linda. Way Too Many Latkes: A Hanukkah in Chelm. Illus. by Aleksandar Zolotic. Minneapolis: Kar-Ben, 2017. 32 pp. \$17.99 (9781512420920) HC; \$7.99 (9781512420937) PBK; \$6.99 eBook. Gr. Preschool-2. Reviewed from ARC.

In the town of Chelm, where foolish ideas often turn out for the best, Faigel can't find her latke recipe. She sends her husband, Shmuel, to ask the rabbi for advice. Too many potatoes? No problem. Use them all! Too many eggs? Ditto. Too many onions? Ditto. At the end of this amusing tale, Faigel has made way too many latkes. What to do? Why, share them with everyone in Chelm, of course – until “there were just enough mouths and just enough latkes, down to the very last one.” The expressive artwork by Serbian artist, Aleksandar Zolotic, jumps off the page. He describes his art as “digital painting”. The muted greens, browns, and oranges enhance the atmosphere of an idealized shtetl life. Can we ever have too many Hanukkah and/or Chelm stories? Perhaps not. Here you get two for the price of one.

Anne Dublin, author of 44 Hours or Strike! (Second Story Press), Toronto, Canada

Koster, Gloria. Little Red Ruthie: A Hanukkah Tale. Illus. by Sue Eastland. Chicago: Albert Whitman and Company 2017. 32 pp. \$16.99 (9780807546468). Gr. K-2. Reviewed from ARC.

Little Red Ruthie is a spunky, brave little girl who makes her way to the other side of the forest to go make latkes with her Bubbe Basha. She carries sour cream and applesauce in her basket, and when she gets lost and meets the wolf, she cleverly convinces him that she'll eat an entire plateful of potato pancakes each day of Hanukkah, so she'll make a much better meal if the wolf waits to eat her in eight days. While her heart races, she makes up her mind to be brave as the Maccabees, explaining the Hanukkah story and the tradition of serving foods fried in oil as she makes latkes for the wolf.

Whimsical, humorous illustrations show the wolf trying on Bubbe's dresses and boots when he arrives at Bubbe's cottage before Ruthie and can't read the note saying nobody is home. The wolf makes quite a picture, sprawled across the kitchen table, impatiently waiting for “a treat that is crispy on the outside and silky smooth on the inside.” When Bubbe comes home, the wolf is so full of latkes that he doesn't argue when he is sent out the door with a jelly doughnut. A recipe for “latkes so good a big bad wolf will eat them up instead of you” concludes the book.

Debbie Colodny, Cook Memorial Public Library District, Libertyville, IL. Former owner Sefer, So Good, and former member, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee

Londner, Renee. *The Missing Letters : a Dreidel Story.* Illus. by Iryna Bodnaryk. Minneapolis : Kar-Ben, 2017. (32)p. \$17.99 (9781467789332) HC; \$7.99 (978-1467794138) PBK; \$6.99 eBook. Gr. Preschool - 2. Reviewed from galley.

Set in the wood carver's shop as the festival approaches, all the separate pieces of the dreidel are ready to be assembled. They come to life. Letters *nun*, *hey* and *shin* are jealous of *gimel*, popular with players because of its promised gains. They decide to hide the *gimels* so they cannot be pasted onto the dreidel form, then rules will have to change; the other three letters will have a happy ending. The concerned dreidel maker explains to his apprentice that all the letters as well as the spinning top are important in Jewish history: they are more than toys. In the days of the Maccabees as in other times, Jews were not allowed to study Torah. They did so in secret. When soldiers came to check on their activities they found the students playing dreidel rather than pouring over the Torah scroll. This bravery made the dreidel a Hanukkah tradition. In vain, dreidel maker and helper tear the shop apart to find the missing *gimels* as there is no time left to carve them again. That night the three letters pull the *gimels* from their hiding places. Next morning, when the *gimels* are back in their tray, the carver cannot figure it out. He finishes the dreidels. The text works if readers immediately suspend disbelief. The illustrations work from start to finish: they are lively, engaging and smart. The double page spreads that reveal the hiding, then the retrieving of the *gimels*, pinned to a blueprint-like ground, are terrific. The book is directed at knowledgeable readers. The Maccabees are cited, not explained; there is no further holiday background or information. The end page gives dreidel rules.

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

Steinberg, Laya. *The Best Sukkot Pumpkin Ever.* Illus. by Colleen Madden. Minneapolis: Kar-Ben, 2017. 32 pp. \$17.99 (9781512408638) HC. \$7.99 (9781512408652) PBK. Grade Preschool -2.

Micah visits a pumpkin patch with his family on a mission to find "the best pumpkin ever" for Sukkot. Upon arrival, he learns from the farmer the value of *Tikkun Olam* (repairing the world) and that the pumpkins he finds can be donated to feed people in need at a soup kitchen. The farmer's words stick with Micah and, as he works hard to find fabulous pumpkins, he overcomes his urge to keep them. Instead, his biggest pumpkin will be a decoration at the soup kitchen, his smallest pumpkin will make soup, and an overripe pumpkin can become compost. But Micah proclaims he has still found "the best pumpkin," revealing a handful of seeds he stashed in his pocket in order to have the best pumpkins ever for next year. This simple tale of selflessness and charitable acts makes a nice addition to a Sukkot collection. The endnotes include brief information on the Jewish harvest holiday, as well as basic family activities for *Tikkun Olam*.

Martha McMahon, Sinai Akiba Academy,
Los Angeles



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