

Good-Bye & Good Buy + A Few Surprises @ Fall Conference by HALLIE CANTOR Acquisitions, Yeshiva University

As of late, the End of Publishing as We Know It has become a virtual (no pun intended) jeremiad. Yet the printed page remains a vital part of Jewish life. Around us Jewish libraries and bookstores teem with readers and new releases. In an era where the Rambam can be either pulled off the library shelf or downloaded, the very accessibility of Jewish works points not to the disappearance, but the democratization of Jewish learning. Hard to believe that even a century ago it was unavailable for much of the population, especially the female.

Women's growing recognition in modern Judaica was the focus of NYMA's Fall Conference, "Celebrating Jewish Books and Those Who Love Them," held Tues., Dec. 2nd, at Ramaz Lower School. This topic was, in fact, a lucky surprise, as the keynote speaker Rivka Haut kindly filled in for Phyllis Chesler, who unfortunately was ill. Ms. Haut, in addition to being a friend of Ms. Chesler, was co-author of their *Women of the Wall: Claiming Sacred Ground at Judaism's Holy Site* (Jewish Lights, 2002).

Other Worlds

Rivka Haut began the conference – after reading a letter of regret from Ms. Chesler and wishing her a speedy recovery – with a discussion of her own love of books. As useful as the computer might be, she said, "I hope

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A Few Words

I am not a winter person. My hands are always cold, and I yearn for a few more hours of daylight.

It is a time of reflection, and this year, for our country, it is surely a time of change. The changes that have come about over the past 18 months have not been particularly good ones for the library community. In these difficult economic times our libraries are on the forefront of budget cuts: reductions in services, reductions in hours, and of course, reductions in staff. Now, more than ever, it is imperative that we maintain our professional affiliations and network with our colleagues. Our Fall Conference, which included our surprise tribute to Esther Nussbaum, proved to me once again that we are a warm, caring community.

We are also an aging community. As I looked around the room at Fall Conference, I couldn't help but notice that more than half of our participants were at least my age. I am a proud grandmother; I am eligible for those "55 and older" communities. And I wondered. "What will a NYMA conference look like 15 years from now?" Are there young people choosing the field of librarianship, or information science, and are they choosing to work in Jewish libraries? Are they being trained to work in Jewish libraries? Is there a need for Judaic librarians, and for what kinds of jobs?

These are some of the topics that we hope to explore at our Spring Conference. In the meantime, if you are planning to attend our Reference workshop on February 12th or the Day School workshop on March 19th, bring a (young!) friend or colleague with you. The highly intellectual stimulation and friendly atmosphere will warm your winter afternoon.

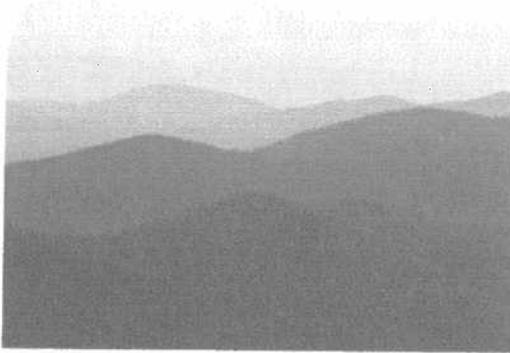
Be well and keep warm.

**Leslie Monchar
President, AJL-NYMA**

More Precious than Rubies?

On "Valuing Jewish Libraries"

by DAVID LEVY, Librarian, Touro College



How does one put a price tag on a Jewish library? How does one determine its worth?

The value of Jewish libraries is infinite because the ultimate good (*summa bonum*) is beyond boundaries and cannot be framed when we refer to a revealed religion of supernatural truths. If our G-d is not finite (*ain sof*), how can we place a measure to traditions generated out of such a transcendent deity's involvement with the Jewish people across history? The *summa bonum* is beyond measure because Jewish libraries preserve memories of an infinite G-d Whose tradition itself echoes timeless ethical, spiritual, and intellectual truths. When we enter into the infinite we of course have entered into what academics call the mystical, but this is a limited vocabulary to describe its experience.

Science vs. Secrets

The philosopher of science Albert North Whitehead once remarked that science knows things if it can measure them. Measurement is crucial in Judaism too, as testified by rabbinic interest in weights and measures. However, by glimpsing at the echoes of the transcendent realm, a realm that forbade Moses to sleep, eat, or drink for 40 days and nights, we return with an understanding of something beyond measure.

Science does deal often with what can be measured, as testified in the 36th chapter of Job, whereby Job demanded that G-d be tried for all the injustices in the world. G-d eventually responds out of the whirlwind: "Where were you when I created

the heavens and earth? Can creation be measured?" No, G-d is a circle Whose circumference is everywhere. Yet His spirit is particularly potent within the Holy Temple.

G-d then asks Job questions relating to the sciences: Do you know the secrets of oceanography? Do you know the secrets of geology? It is the question "what is...X..." that science asks. These are the secrets scientists search. Yet ultimate secrets will be cleared up by Elijah the Prophet in the Messianic era.

Judaica librarians are guardians of a tradition that is beyond limit, beyond time, beyond the transcendent itself.

These secrets of Elijah, however, cannot be measured. These are secrets so awesome that they may defy conventional logics. Yes, dear patrons, these secrets of the Messiah and Messianic age, i.e. esoteric wisdom, are also cached, and hidden in our libraries if there are competent Judaica librarians to cull, gather, and hunt them out. This is what we mean by a *Torah shebe-al peh*, a living oral tradition that is not just written, although the glowing coals of the "white fire on black fire" can be found in some of the *sefarim* on our shelves.

For instance, try a key word search on *ma'aseh merkavah* (Ezekiel's mystical chariot) in Bar Ilan Responsa, Torah Treasures, RAMBI, Otzar HaHokmah, etc. and you will see some traces of what cannot be framed, something infinite. However these traces are merely the echoes of *ain sof* (infinity). The Judaica librarian may have tools to echo their hypnotic hymns and creatively assist the patron how to begin a lifelong search and way of life into the diverse, multifaceted palaces that constitute Judaism.

Thus, dear quantifier, I hope you will understand that Judaica librarians are guardians of a tradition that is beyond limit, beyond time, beyond the transcendent itself. In my, what you may call, subversive Derridean argument I hope you will see

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NYMA News is published twice a year, Winter/Spring & Summer/Fall, by the AJL-NYMA Committee. For questions or comments, contact Hallie Cantor, 383 Kingston Ave. #81, Brooklyn, NY 11213, or e-mail above.

Focus on Libraries

“Enter at Your Own Risk”

ADL Library –

Secretive & Controversial

By LAURA SCHUTZMAN

MLIS Student, Pratt Institute

This article is part of our series on Judaica libraries & collections in the New York Metropolitan area.

Upon stepping into the library at the Anti-Defamation League one is greeted with a row of high-density shelving and a copy machine. There is no indication that this room is being used as a library instead of a storage facility. There is no personnel, no reference staff, no viewing equipment; the stacks practically scream “enter at your own risk.” However, after closer examination, it becomes clear that this room is in fact a library.

Similar to other special libraries, the library at the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) is restricted to employees, and the online catalog is only accessible on-site. The 500-1,000 books and several-hundred audio-visual items are all specifically about issues near and dear to the ADL: Judaism, anti-Semitism, racism, Holocaust, Israel & the Middle East, and religious freedom.

As a student cataloger working under head librarian Marianne Benjamin, I was able to view the breadth of the collection. Many of the materials that I worked with (using the LC cataloging system) are unavailable in any other library in the United States or even the world, the reason being their sensitive and inflammatory nature. Some, like *Mein Kampf* (Hitler’s autobiography) and anything on the Jewish supremacy conspiracy might be professionally useful to researchers, but highly harmful to the casual reader. Additionally, much of the material consists of original manuscripts or documentation of speeches and presentations, many or which were published exclusively for the ADL or by the ADL itself. As a result, cataloging this information involves some creativity and research, as Worldcat lacks the bibliographic information or subject headings.

The ADL library collection is unique, and working there was a rewarding experience. It taught me how to use different bibliographic tools and classify various texts. The skills I learned at the Anti-Defamation League will be useful for the rest of my library career. Moreover, my work with the ADL library exposed me to the dangers facing Jewry today, and the very reason for the ADL’s existence.

(Conference, cont'd from Pg. 1)

books never get replaced by the screen." She loves the very feel and smell of books.

She commented on the abundance of Jewish literature available to the modern public, and, of course, the role of librarians as access providers. With Jewish learning literally at our fingertips, it has become something easily taken for granted. Yet, this was not always the case.

While historically even many men had been denied a systematic education, most Jewish women found themselves completely shut out.

Not too long ago, Jewish learning was highly elitist, limited chiefly to those of wealth, lineage, or intellect. The concept of mass literacy was relatively new. Even materials that were made publicly available were heavily censored. Certain portions of the Mishnah, as well as parts of the Bible (i.e. the rape of Tamar), were considered inappropriate for certain readers. Aramaic passages were left untranslated; *Haftarot* and mystical sections were not to be read out loud.

Today it is the Orthodox, ironically, who have become among the most enthusiastic disseminators of Jewish works, their publishing houses regularly touting new releases. However, Ms. Haut is deeply critical of the women's literature, which often suffers from simplistic or mediocre writing, a "one-size-fits-all" category that apparently lumps a woman's intellect with a ten-year-old's.

This might partly reflect the level of women's education, a concept that is newer than mass literacy. While historically even many men had been denied a systematic education, most Jewish women found themselves completely shut out.

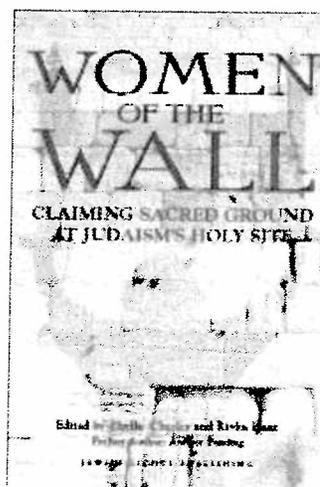
Not until the early 20th century did the barrier begin to break. Sarah Schneirer, the indefatigable seamstress from Cracow, recognized the need for formal women's education, and saw access to rabbinic literature as the weapon against secularity, the tool to keep Jewish girls out of Polish schools and the corrupting influences. Although she focused on the negative -- if women did not learn, something bad would happen to them -- rather than the positive -- love of learning, i.e. Torah learning *l'shma*, for its own sake -- her efforts bore fruit: the Beth Jacob schools have become the educational

standard bearer for Orthodox women and a bulwark against assimilation.

Jewish women's education has come a long way from a small classroom above the seamstress's shop. Today, there are numerous women's seminars, as well as programs available for more sophisticated learning. Students are now not only permitted but encouraged to learn, and tackle rabbinic literature head on.

Other Women

In the broadening intellectual horizons for women, the world of prayer would naturally follow. Ms. Haut, herself an advocate for women's prayer groups, spoke of the "Women of the Wall," that famous group -- subject of her book and a later documentary by Yael Katzir -- which recently celebrated its 20th anniversary. These women, who have tried to meet together in a halachic, "non-minyan" way at the Kotel, have been harassed, often violently. They sued three times, all unsuccessfully, to bring a Torah scroll there, and have resorted to sneaking one in through a duffel bag. Currently they are allowed to gather 11 times a year---every Rosh Chodesh, except Rosh Hashanah.



Ms. Haut has also been actively laboring on behalf of *agunot*, Jewish women trapped in bad marriages and unable to divorce their husbands. She mentioned the help from sympathetic rabbis, most notably Emanuel Rackman, *a"h*, and a book she has tried to publish condemning the Jewish divorce courts. The publisher cancelled the contact, considering the book too explosive. It is dangerous

knowledge, she was told, which should be kept hidden from the Jewish community. Yet, she reminded the librarians, it is up to them to disseminate this knowledge and ensure that all kinds of books get into the mainstream.

All Together Now

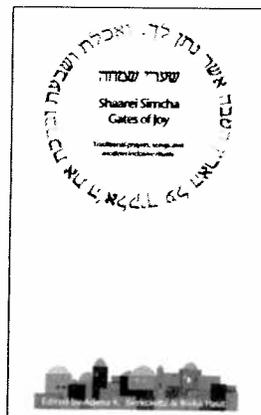
The next speaker, Adena K. Berkowitz, connected women's participation with an overview of the current publishing industry.

Although nobody knows if the next generation might become the People of the iPod (or Kindle), Ms. Berkowitz insisted that people still like books - certainly Jews, in spite of the new technologies and their financial ramifications. The threat to Jewish books, she said, echoing Ms. Haut, lies in literacy. A large segment of Jews - single, divorced, female -- have become alienated not out of ignorance of Judaism, but exclusion. Simply put, they feel left out; somehow the liturgy just doesn't speak to them.

This belief that Jewish books should reflect the new demographics was the force behind the brand new *bencher* edited by Ms. Berkowitz and Ms. Haut, *Shaarei Simchah: Gates of Joy: Traditional Prayers, Songs and Modern Inclusive Rituals* (Ktav, 2008). This compilation features everything, including the esoteric - i.e. prayers for the state of Israel and the IDL, mysticism, revived lore, recent customs. It is, they feel, the answer to a Jewish community heavily balkanized. (Copies were available at the conference for purchase.)

A large segment of Jews - single, divorced, female -- have become alienated not out of ignorance of Judaism, but exclusion. Simply put, they feel left out; somehow the liturgy just doesn't speak to them.

Putting together the *bencher*, however, presented an interesting set of problems, such as Hebrew grammar and masculine semantics. For example, *techinot*, the special women's prayers, would be ideally suited for this kind of book. The woman plays a dominant role, right? Well, sort of: a woman blessing her husband refers to him as *baali*, meaning not only "my husband" but "my master." An asterisk by the word will take the reader to a footnote explaining its original form.



The over-representation of male figures posed another problem, like the *ushpizin*, the 7 biblical patriarchs who visit the *sukkah*, one for each night of the holiday. Aren't there any female guests? After extensive research, it was found in the Zohar the mention of 7 prophetesses. Then there is another problem: the word *ushpizin*, which is male. Is there a female equivalent? After consultation with specialists, an Aramaic feminine form was discovered - *ushpizan*. However, which Aramaic was it - Palestinian? Galilean? Persian?

Nevertheless, the *bencher* should accomplish a certain mission, by making Judaism not only accessible but relevant to the ignorant. "Like Jacob's ladder," Ms. Berkowitz stated, "everyone wants to ascend, but needs baby steps."

Sephardic prayers and customs have also been integrated, implying it is no longer an Ashkenazic world. Nor is it a world where we can assume everyone is married and with families. Blessings for spouses or children are placed in parentheses. Matriarchs are given their due - Rachel, Leah, etc.-- and the mention of a woman's *mezuman* (gathering of at least three). This information provides the spiritual impetus, creating a meaningful experience for those either unlearned or marginalized.

Surprise!

The third part of the conference turned out to be a surprise - for Esther Nussbaum. A "panel" convened to bid a fond farewell to the founder and past-president of NYMA and to wish her all the best on her retirement.

The panel consisted of longtime colleagues of Esther's - Marion Stein, Edith Lubetski, Eileen

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Past / Present / Future

Coming Soon

Reference Workshop, Thurs., Feb. 12, 1:00-4:30 p.m., at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. Topics include "The Global Library: Serving the International & Local Communities" and "Resources on Israel & the Middle East at the UN Library."

Up & Running

Yeshiva University's new library blog:

<http://www.yu.edu/libraries/liblog/>.

Come see the latest addition to YU's digital collections, an illustrated late 18th century manuscript: link directly to the Auras Memorbuch,

<http://www.yu.edu/libraries/memorbuch/>.

YU welcomes your comments.

News from JTS

Starting Spring Semester (Jan. 20-May 14), the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America will be open the following hours: Sun. 10:00 a.m.-7:30 p.m., Mon.-Thurs. 8:00 a.m.-8:00 p.m., Fri. 9:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. The Special Collections is open by appointment. Appointments can be made for Monday through Thursday, between 12:00 noon and 5:00 p.m. Contact

Naomi Steinberger, 212-678-8982.

The JTS Library is pleased to announce their new Library Research Guides in video format. The three guides cover Bar-Ilan Responsa, Music Research, and History & Literature Research. Go to

http://www.jtsa.edu/Library/Library_Services/Research_Guides_-_Videos.xml

Kids at Heart

Who said books are so 2007? On Sun. Nov. 23rd, the 92nd Street Y held the annual Jewish Children Book Writer's Conference. Co-hosted by Anna Olswanger and

Buttenweiser librarian **Steve Siegal**, the once again sold-out conference attracted authors, editors, & illustrators of children's Judaica. Topics included "How I Got My First Book Published," and "Releasing Your Inner Publicist," while attendees were provided with helpful lists of phone numbers and websites. **Aileen**

Grossberg and **Kathe Pinchuk** of AJL's Sydney Taylor Manuscript Competition Committee presented opportunities for publication. The very first Jewish Fiction Writer's Conference will take place Sunday, March 15th, at the 92nd St. Y.

Organize This!

Stephanie (Sarah Leah) Gross has been appointed organizer of the New York Librarians' Meet-Up (www.meetup.com/nylibrarians). The group includes many Jews, and members are encouraged to join for social networking. The next meet-up will take place Sun., Feb. 15th, at the 92nd St. Y. Stephanie is looking for assistant organizers. Anyone interested should contact her at ereserves.stephanie@gmail.com.

Take a Bow

To **Hallie (Chaya Sarah) Cantor**, for her editorial work on *My Encounters with the Rebbe*, volume 2, by Zalmon Jaffe. Editor Pinchas Lew; PCL publishing. Hallie is currently working on a series of Torah psychology lectures given by noted therapist Miriam Yerushalmi.

Mazel Tov

Lawrence & Marlene Schiffman, on the birth of their grandson Benjamin Meir. Parents Dovid & Leah Helfgott.

Meir & Edith Lubetski, on the birth of their granddaughter Atara Bayla. Parents Ari & Leah Feldman.

Ronnie & Michal Malen, on the birth of her grandson Emanuel Zivan. Parents Noah Leibowitz & Susannah Malen.

Alex & Leah Moskovits, on the birth of their grandson Matanel Shlomo. Parents Hillel & Abigail Moskovits.

Yosef & Basya Karp, on the birth of their grandson Shmuel Yaakov. Parents Ari & Yocheved Karp.

Liza Stabler, on the birth of her grandson Ari Milo. Parents Scott David & Caroline Aviva Schaeffer Lewis.

Steven & Ilana Bernstein on the birth of their son Moshe Lev.

Mo & Esther Nussbaum on the birth of their grandson Eitan Rahamim. Parents Shmulik & Tamara Nussbaum Kedmi.

& on the bat mitzvah of their granddaughters Aliyah (parents Gabriel & Ruti Nussbaum) & Samantha (parents Yossi & Judy Nussbaum Rothman). May they all *schep nachas*.

Refuah Shaleimah,

To **Philip Monchar**, husband of **Leslie**, for his recent surgery.

(Conference, Cont'd from Pg. 5)

Shmidman, Naomi Steinberger, and Chaya Wiesman. Each member discussed her personal experiences with Esther, who was lauded for her grace and intelligence. In addition to her work with NYMA, Esther has worn several hats – medical librarian, *Jewish Book World* editor, *AMIT* editor. While co-chairing (with Edith Lubetski) the AJL National Convention in New York, which coincided with the first World Trade Center bombing (1993), she managed to keep her head above the chaos. Always she was practical, yet creative.

Edith gave over a *dvar* Torah, explaining that Esther's name had the same *gematria* (numerical value) as *nerot* (candles), a hint to her "shining" qualities. Naomi mentioned how Esther had encouraged her to attend library school at Columbia University. A poem by Noreen Wachs (who,

because she was teaching class, was absent) was read. Finally, Esther was presented with a vest, a gift from NYMA.

Esther, though "deeply overwhelmed," summoned her usual poise and delivered an impromptu but eloquent speech. She compared librarians to art dealers and museum collectors. While the latter are dispassionate and detached from their subjects, "librarians," she said, "are service-oriented, nurturing, and sharing in their profession."

She mentioned her involvement in the Halachic Organ Society and the time she plans to devote to her children and grandchildren in Israel. Our loss, without a doubt, will be their gain. The NYMA chapter of AJL bids *shalom*, goodbye and hello, to a true "Jewish star" of librarianship and a new "chapter" in Esther's life.

*(Rubies, Cont'd from Pg. 2)*

that the Jewish people have withstood the currency values of the Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, and many other nations. Ultimately these coins are of interest to archeologists and historians. Yet I ask you -- why are the Jewish people still on the stage of history, across the valued currencies of past empires? I respond that when they murder the Jewish people, they murder G-d Himself, Who is infinite, transcendent, and limitless. Jewish blood is beyond value and that is why the principle of *pekuah nefesh* (saving a life) is operative even on Shabbat. If we can perform *brit milah* (circumcision) on Shabbat to save one limb, how much

more so can we do *pekuah nefesh* on Shabbat to save all limbs. Let him violate one Shabbat in order to observe many.

I end on this *halakhic* note, a music of the infinite, because ultimately Judaism affirms everlasting life of a Deity beyond death, Who is eternal, beyond limit, not finite, not ignorant, and yes beyond human measurement. Our fountain of life is eternal, and may the Judaica librarians offer some of Judaism's eternal waters to all who come and thirst. *Zomeh Nafshi!* These sublime waters are beyond any human value. They are redemptive, limitless, and transcendent.