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A CLUSTER OF ESSAYS on books that have been influential in the shaping of identity start off this issue, exploring how traditionally Jewish texts as well as books with seemingly little or no Jewish content have left an imprint on the search for a Jewish voice. Two essays explore how parents and teachers might instill the habits and love of reading so that books could (in Kafka's words) "break the frozen sea inside." The relationship with books as a solitary enjoyment and as a collective enterprise is also addressed in this issue, which reexamines reading as an essential Jewish activity.

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A Drawerful of Voices

Rachel Kadish

THE INFLUENCES OF Tanach and *midrash* were indelible in my early education. And the voices of Ozick and Roth and Yehoshua and Appelfeld argued and merged along with dozens of others in the conversations that shaped my Jewish identity. Yet for years, one of the books that influenced me most deeply was a book I hadn't read.

Bernard Malamud's characters, his sentences, his wisdom about humanity in the face of an unyielding world — all drew my attention from the moment I first read his work. I admired his fearlessness in tackling moral issues, admired it when his work was breathtaking and even more so in those few instances when I thought he'd fallen short. But for me the existence of the novel *The Natural* vaulted Malamud into an entirely different category. Once I heard that the book some referred to as the original baseball novel — a book devoid of any Jewish content — was penned by the same writer who wrote Yiddish-inflected magical realism and gritty novels of urban Jewish life, it reshaped my understanding of what it could mean, and what limitations it did and did not impose, to be a Jewish American writer. *The Natural* stood in my mind for years as a marker of freedom.

But it was, somehow, years before I finally picked up the novel. I cracked the spine with trepidation.

It was not a perfect book. At times it seemed a practice run — albeit with stunning prose and a riveting plot — for the issues Malamud would take on more fully elsewhere. But its impact remained profound. The author of *The Natural* was recognizable as the author of *The Assistant*; Roy Hobbs, the all-American slugger in *The Natural*, shares the blunt speech of Malamud's immigrant Jews. Hobbs too, like so many of Malamud's Jewish characters, tends to experience the world in metaphor rather than the more tentative simile. To these hard-bitten realists, the world doesn't *seem to be*; the world *is*, and the fact that the world is as it is supplies all the catalyst necessary for Malamud's often-tragic plots (suffice to say that the halcyon conclusion of the film version of *The Natural* departed completely from the ending of Malamud's novel). In *The Natural*, the past is not past until atoned for (though perhaps not even then). Malamud's writing, here as elsewhere, is profoundly moral in a way some people define as religious and others define as just fully and seriously human.

Yet for all these similarities to Malamud's Jewish-themed fiction, *The Natural* is indelibly American. A direct line seems to connect Roy Hobbs with Willy Loman and Jay Gatsby, even Billy Budd. Hobbs' story helped shape America's understanding of its national pastime, and




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in some sense itself.

Growing up, I was frequently asked, along with the rest of my Jewish day school classmates, whether I was foremost a Jew or an American. It was a thought-provoking question and so obviously well-meant that even now, years later, I'm reluctant to point out its simultaneous cruelty — its request that we choose. That we deny that we are, most of us, children of both worlds. The question is, of course, born of centuries of oppression. Had history not so violently accused us of difference, or (in those cases where renouncing Judaism purchased one's safety) forced us to choose between faith and nationality, would we so insistently foist this question on ourselves?

The Natural feels like a conscious choice,

by a writer who did not take the Jewish experience lightly but knew it in his bones, to refuse to answer this question. I don't mean to oversimplify; art requires no philosophical justification, and Malamud may have desired simply to tell a good baseball story — *the best*, to paraphrase Roy Hobbs, *that's ever been*. But for me, the novel is an affirmation of the right to be deeply Jewish without relinquishing a stake in the larger human race. The impact of Malamud's choice to write this book feels, even now, like a moment he describes in one of the novel's pivotal baseball games — the instant after a stunning play by the home team, in which the stands erupt around the field and the encircling universe of humanity "sounded like a gigantic drawerful of voices that had suddenly been pulled open." 

The Books in My Life

Mordicai Gerstein

I BEGAN READING at the age of four, and have been doing it ever since, so when asked about books that have influenced and shaped me, any book that comes to mind reminds me of others, and those bring up more and more; it's like one of my first favorites, *Millions of Cats*, Wanda Gag's great picture book in which an old couple try to choose one cat out of millions and wind up choosing them all.


I still feel the profound impact of the first book I ever read, *To Think that I Saw It on Mulberry Street*, by Dr. Seuss. It tells in pictures and words of a boy walking home to a father who, everyday, asks him, "What did you see on Mulberry Street?" And everyday, all the boy sees is an old horse and wagon, and so he imagines all the things he'd love to tell his father he'd seen: zebras, chariots, a circus parade accompanied by a squadron of cops on motorcycles. But when he faces his father he must answer the question with "... just an old horse and wagon on Mulberry Street." The book was essential to releasing my imagination to confront and overcome the ordinary and banal and to embrace the wonderful.

Alice in Wonderland has a very special place for me: it validated the bizarre world of dreams and showed me the absurdity in what we call rational and, along with *Mary Poppins*, let me glimpse the marvelous hidden behind the mundane. They both prepared me for Kafka and Poe and Joyce's *Ulysses*, in which words create a multidimensional world in

time and space, which in turn opened me to the desolate novels and plays of Samuel Becket in which language itself is the only comfort. But I could never be *me* without *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, the stories of I. B. Singer, *Genesis*, Louis Ginzberg's *Legends of the Jews*, *Freddy the Pig*, *Superman*, *Donald Duck*, *Li'l Abner*, *Plasticman*, and the now politically incorrect *Nize Baby* by Milt Gross, to name just a few of the myriad.

I thought I was aware of drawing on almost all of these sources in my new young adult novel, *The Old Country*. When it was done I came across a Wallace Stevens poem, "Dry Loaf," that I hadn't seen in years and had forgotten, and was stunned to realize that my book came in part directly out of that poem. Later, an adult reader of *The Old Country* told me that it reminded her of Kosinski's *Painted Bird*. Of course! I had read it in my teens, forgotten it, and now saw that it was essential to the character of my book.

So I've come to realize that *all* the books I've read have shaped and influenced me: the great ones surely, but also the middling and mediocre and even the comic books I'm sure my parents thought were trash.

We live good days and bad days and wonderful days, and we read good and wonderful and mediocre books; each gives us something essential to whom we are becoming, and all together, whether we love them or hate them or even remember them, they make up our lives and ourselves. 

Mordicai Gerstein, a graduate of the Chouinard Institute of Art, began writing and illustrating his own books in 1980. His books include *The Mountains of Tibet*, *The Wild Boy*, and *The Man Who Walked Between the Towers*, which was awarded the 2004 Caldecott medal. His young adult novel, *Victor*, was named one of the year's best books by the *New York Times*. A Koret Jewish Book Awards judge, he lives in Northampton, Mass.

Koret Jewish Book Awards Winners 2004–2005

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BIOGRAPHY/AUTOBIOGRAPHY/LITERARY STUDIES

Amos Oz, *A Tale of Love and Darkness*, translated from the Hebrew by Nicolas de Lange (Harcourt, Inc.)

Amos Oz's memoir is a story — as seen through the uncannily persuasive eyes of a child — of his parents, of Jerusalem in the late 1940s and early '50s, and of a young, haunted Israeli state. It is a work of uncommon insight and passion, and deep, searching intelligence.

FICTION

Tony Eprile, *The Persistence of Memory* (W. W. Norton & Company)

A perceptive, often comic recollection of the youth of a conflicted South African Jew during the final years of the apartheid regime and the turbulence of the new African republic with its demands upon memory or its eradication.

HISTORY

Elisheva Baumgarten, *Mothers and Children: Jewish Family Life in Medieval Europe* (Princeton University Press)

A truly original, fascinating portrait of the intimacy of Jewish family, motherhood, and childhood in the context of life in medieval Christian Europe. It is a work of consummate clarity, skill, and sophistication.

PHILOSOPHY/THOUGHT

Rabbi Steven Greenberg, *Wrestling with God and Men: Homosexuality in the Jewish Tradition* (University of Wisconsin Press)

Learned, accessible, and unflinchingly honest, this bold theological work offers illuminating and compelling arguments for the possibility of being religiously observant and openly homosexual.

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Karen Hesse, *The Cats in Krasinski Square*, illustrated by Wendy Watson (Scholastic)

A quietly compelling, poetic rendering of a young girl's resistance to the horrors of the Warsaw Ghetto, that both illuminates a dark time and leaves young readers with at least a hint of hope. Sepia-toned, muted, and quietly powerful paintings intelligently and sensitively use light and shadow to focus attention on the dramatic contrasts of an important story.

SPECIAL AWARD FOR TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY

Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses* (W.W. Norton & Company)

The translation is outstanding and the culmination of a lifetime of the highest level of scholarly achievement.

YOUNG WRITER ON JEWISH THEMES

Tim Bradford

Few young writers today could blend fiction, poetry, photographs, and historical documents into a graceful story of beauty and significance. Tim Bradford has an ambitious imagination and enough talent to fulfill its demands.

Discussion Guide

Bringing together myriad voices and experiences in a sacred conversation provides Sh'ma readers with an opportunity in a few very full pages to explore a topic of Jewish interest from a variety of perspectives. To facilitate a fuller discussion of the ideas, we offer the following questions:

1. Is knowledge of Hebrew essential to be a literate Jew?
2. What makes a book Jewish?
3. In what way does the reading of Jewish books influence your sense of self — that is, your Jewish identity?

HENRY JAMES IS not known for having been a philosemite, but he helped make me a Jew. I discovered James in high school with *Washington Square*, *The American*, and *The Europeans*; I was captivated by a style and sensibility far more sophisticated than anything I'd encountered before. But none of those books prepared me for the brilliance of *The Portrait of a Lady* or its catalytic effect on me as a Jew whose parents were Holocaust survivors.

I started reading about the Holocaust because this was clearly where I had to begin to understand who I was Jewishly; it was also the stumbling block that had kept me afraid of affiliating with other Jews.

Though my parents read Yiddish newspapers, spoke Yiddish at home, and their friends were survivors, we were not observant, nor did we identify specifically as Jews. I had no bar mitzvah and no real connection to the Jewish past or even the Jewish present in terms of our calendar.

I knew little about what had happened to my parents in the Shoah, and the black hole of family history seemed to have absorbed Jewishness, too, especially its public manifestations. My parents were against my marching in celebration of Israel's Independence Day or in protest of the Soviet Union's treatment of refuseniks. Even signing petitions was dangerous in their view, but I also think that they were ashamed of being Jewish, or at least of having survived when so many had not.


It was in college that I read *Portrait* for a class on the American novel, and I was dazzled by its images, vision, story, poignancy, and wit. I had never loved a book so completely, and I felt as enveloped as I would come to feel later when putting on a large *tallis*. I reached the famous chapter 42 at three in the morning. In this chapter, Isabel Archer muses by the fire about a life that had once seemed so bright with possibility but now felt etiolated. The palazzo she lives in is "the house of dumbness, the house of deafness, the house of suffocation."

I could not fall asleep that night. The book


was doing exactly what Kafka said a book should do: breaking the frozen sea inside of me. Amid the ice flows many things began to be clear. I knew then that I was not going to pursue a Masters in English but rather an MFA in Creative Writing. I knew that I couldn't ever marry the non-Jewish girl I'd been dating for a year and a half, even though I loved her. And I understood for the first time that as a Jew, I had been completely adrift.

I dug out the books in our house on Jewish history and started reading. I bought others about Jewish observance. I joined a Jewish book club. I took out a subscription to a Jewish magazine. Most importantly, I started reading about the Holocaust, because this was clearly where I had to begin to understand who I was Jewishly; it was also the stumbling block that had kept me afraid of actually affiliating with other Jews.

Within a few years I was at my first-ever synagogue service, my first real seder, and I won an award at the University of Massachusetts — judged by *Story Magazine's* famed editor Martha Foley — for a story about a family of survivors that became my first publication, in *Redbook*.

I had also gone to bed with a man for the first time, equally thanks to Henry James, but that's another tale. As James said about the ending of *Portrait*, "The whole of anything is never told." 

Book Review, from page 13

With the founding of Israel, personal weakness was seen as antithetical to the national spirit. Oz, therefore, fled his family home to Kibbutz Hulda in search of a more heroic future. But, as a writer, he has been drawn again and again to the prosaic and personal, to writing about the foibles and weaknesses of real human beings. Politically, he has also championed an Israel not in the thrall of bombastic ideologies. With this memoir / tale, which may well be the best thing he has written, he has redeemed his father and mother by placing their very human failings in the historical drama in which they took part. They emerge no more heroic than before, but, like the historical drama itself, profoundly human. 

Lev Raphael is the author of *The German Money* (*Leapfrog*), *Winter Eyes* (*St. Martin's*), *Dancing On Tisha B'av* (*St. Martin's*), and twelve other books, including six *Nick Hoffman* mysteries that feature a child of survivors. He is the host of a weekly book on WLNZ 89.7 in Lansing, Michigan. His web site is www.levraphael.com.

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New Prayerbooks: Balancing Tradition and Innovation

Deborah Glanzberg-Krainin



I RECENTLY HAD occasion to sort and organize the books on my office shelves. There were volumes of poetry, critical essays, scholarly works, and a few of my children's novels and picture books thrown into the mix. None of this surprised me. But, as I returned the books to their newly appointed places on the shelves, I was quite startled to see just how large the section devoted to siddurim, prayerbooks, had become. There are literally dozens of different siddurim crowding my shelves, and I want to suggest that my collection reflects a larger trend: American Jews are publishing siddurim at a rate that is both rapid and intriguing.

I searched a number of online bookstores and found literally hundreds of listings under the heading "siddur," including prayerbooks for Shabbat and everyday as well as machzorim for the Days of Awe, children's prayerbooks, and a wide variety of commentaries on the siddur. Space prohibits an exhaustive review of these many works, so I will, rather, raise preliminary questions about what the proliferation of siddurim might reflect about the American Jewish community and what this might teach us about ourselves.

To begin with, please note that this phenomenon covers a broad swath of our community. The publication of new siddurim is not necessarily equated with the creation of new liturgy. Indeed, Artscroll/Mesorah Publications boasts a wide array of traditional prayerbooks, many of which include inter-linear translations, commentary, and instructions regarding the choreography of prayer (sitting, standing, bowing, etc.). Indeed, this concern for accessibility is shared by siddurim reflecting the full diversity of American Jewry. Artscroll's commitment to commentary is shared by the Reconstructionist movement's *Kol HaNeshamah* series, which includes extensive commentary interspersed throughout each volume. Also notable in this regard are recent revisions to both the Conservative movement's *Siddur Sim Shalom* (1998) and Reform's *Gates of Prayer* (1995). Both volumes offer significantly larger amounts of transliterated texts than the original editions, published in 1985 and 1975, respectively.

The user friendly nature of most new siddurim points to an implicit acknowledgement of certain realities regarding much of American Jewish life. It suggests that many users of these prayerbooks do not read Hebrew, or if they can read Hebrew they might not understand it, and they may not be familiar with the content and structure of traditional Jewish prayer. Translations, transliterations, and detailed directions represent invitations to the Jew less schooled in the meaning and mechanics of Jewish prayer.

This commitment to accessibility is taken further in the newest siddurim published by — and therefore, I would argue, representing — the Reform, Reconstructionist, and Conservative movements. Each of these volumes casts a wide net by offering choices within the texts themselves; these choices reflect theological boundaries and concerns of the various movements while allowing "ways in" to the largest possible number of affiliated communities. For example, the new edition of *Siddur Sim Shalom* offers users two options for the *Amidah*: they can choose to recite it with, or without, the inclusion of the matriarchs along with the patriarchs in the opening blessing. Reflecting their own theological commitments, both *Kol HaNeshamah* and *Gates of Prayer* offer users different possibilities for individual prayers or even entire services.

Choices such as these may point to a trend toward decentralization in American Judaism, or at least among some of its branches. At the same time, however, a review of recent siddur publication also suggests the limits to that trend. As the last two decades saw the advent of desktop publishing, many observers expected siddurim to become a highly privatized liturgical genre, especially in communities not committed to the requirements of traditionally scripted prayer. Trends in siddur publications might lead us to think otherwise. While there are several siddurim published by individuals or by collectives based in a particular locale — and anecdotal evidence does suggest some experimentation with desktop and Internet technologies — it is also the case that many recent publications represent established segments of Jewish communal life. In

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this way, perhaps, we might say that recently published prayerbooks reflect some of the tensions that characterize much of contemporary Jewish American life: most notably, finding appropriate balances between tradition and innovation and articulating relationships to communal and textual authority.

We are the people of the book. Any sid-

dur provides textual evidence of the beliefs, fears, and longings of the Jewish people. The plethora of siddurim currently available point to American Jews' ongoing engagement with the text and what it represents. As we celebrate 350 years of Jewish life in America, the vitality of this engagement provides cause for optimism about our future. 

A Culture Loses its Flavor

Hillel Halkin

HEBREW-ENGLISH TRANSLATION — a field in which I got my start 45 years ago with a stiff and unpaid rendition of a worthless and never published story by a down-and-out alcoholic Israeli author in New York

Today the international language of the Jewish people has become English.

— is booming. Numerous English volumes of Hebrew novels, books of poetry, and historical and political works are published every year. Contemporary Israeli authors like Yehuda Amichai, Amos Oz, A.B. Yehoshua, and David Grossman are now known to American Jews almost as well as their own native writers.

And this is without mentioning Jewish religious texts, where developments have been even more impressive. The last years have seen the appearance in English of two complete new Jewish Bible translations; two more Jewish translations of the Pentateuch; 34 volumes of the still unfinished ArtsScroll Mishna; 27 volumes of Maimonides' Mishneh Torah; the first volumes of Daniel Matt's projected 12-volume Zohar; the first 22 volumes of the Steinsaltz Talmud; and the recent completion of the 72-volume Schottenstein Talmud. (Both the Zohar and the Talmud, of course, are written in a mixture of Hebrew and its sister language Aramaic.) Moreover, that's just a partial list. Many other Jewish philosophical, liturgical, halakhic, and homiletic texts can be added to it.

It's getting to the point that one soon won't have to know Hebrew at all to consider oneself Jewishly literate — and this is precisely the problem. Of course, every positive phenomenon has its down side. But the down side of the boom in Hebrew-English translation has been steep indeed. It has involved accepting,

and in a sense even legitimizing, the disappearance of Hebrew as the international language of the Jews.

It's true that most Jews in most times and places in the past could not read (much less write) Hebrew freely, although large numbers who couldn't still could cope with certain sacred texts. Yet until modern times, a fluency in Hebrew was considered a sign of being an educated Jew. Any such Jew from one part of the world could communicate in Hebrew with any such Jew from another part of the world. Books written in languages that other Jews didn't know, like the Arabic of Maimonides' *Guide To The Perplexed* or Yehuda Halevi's *Kuzari*, were translated *into* Hebrew. As late as the last decade of the 19th century, when the Russian Jewish intellectual Ahad Ha'am founded his international Jewish review *Ha-Shiloah* in Berlin, Hebrew seemed the obvious language for it.

Today the international language of the Jewish people has become English. Jewish intellectuals from different countries converse in it; Jewish leaders exchange views in it; when there is a scholarly conference in Jerusalem on S.Y. Agnon, Hebrew literature's sole Nobel Prize winner, it is held — I should know because I participated in it — in English, too. Knowing Hebrew is no longer the sign of the educated Jew. Indeed, far less American Jews can now read and speak Hebrew than can Palestinian Arabs!


We Hebrew-English translators are not to blame for this; it is, rather, due to the lack of Hebrew education in America. Of course, if we weren't working so hard to make Hebrew works available in English, perhaps more American Jews would have to learn Hebrew. Yet why should hundreds of thousands of Americans Jews have to learn Hebrew, you might ask, when a hundred Hebrew-English

Hillel Halkin, who settled in Israel in 1970, is the author of Letters To An American Jewish Friend: A Zionist Polemic (1976), the winner of a National Jewish Book Award, Across The Sabbath River: In Search of A Lost Tribe of Israel (2002), and the forthcoming A Strange Death. He translates Hebrew and Yiddish fiction and writes extensively on Jewish and Israeli politics, culture, and literature in such publications as Commentary and The New Republic. He is speaking as part of the Koret Jewish Book Awards program.

translators can save them the trouble? Let's be efficient!

The answer is obvious. It is not only poetry, as Robert Frost once put it, that gets lost in translation; it is the innermost pith of all language, the intimate feel and touch and interrelatedness of words that are never the same when translated. A page of the Mishna or Talmud in English may be a useful aid to studying the same page in the original, but it

doesn't begin to have the original's flavor. A Jewish culture in translation is a culture that has lost its flavor. It may be better than nothing — any competent translation is — but better-than-nothing is less than a people with a 3,000-year-old tradition in its own language deserves.

No, it's not the fault of translators that business is good. We just shouldn't feel so good about it. 

Back to the Future: Standing at the Intersection of Valley-of-the-Ghosts and Our-Mother-Rachel

Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi

AS SLAVES OF MEMORY, Jews tend to imagine cultural figures as recycled versions of the past. We in Israel should not then be surprised by the ghostly, reflected, images that have come to haunt our streets or the prediction that the future of Hebrew literature will entail a reappropriation of forms of the literary imagination that had persisted for decades as contraband in the recesses of Hebrew memory. I do not mean this primarily in the psychoanalytic or intergenerational sense, although it has become something of a truism that what is forgotten or repressed by the founding fathers and mothers is bound to be "recuperated" by those irrepressible agents of nostalgia, the grandchildren. I am making a claim about the particular cultural atmospherics of Zionist — and then Israeli — society, about the virtual boundaries around what could be thought, said, and written, and about the ways in which those boundaries are now being renegotiated in the unspoken and messy process that parallels the negotiations over physical boundaries.

This could be the most natural resolution to the basic paradox of Israel's birth narrative: that Zionism's mandate to forge a new future was at the same time a revocation of the license to imagine alternative futures, a revocation, at some profound level, of poetic license itself. The highly inventive literary forms and visions that engendered Zionism became, in principle, at least, illegitimate *in Zion*. Consider the most conspicuous early example of that literature, Herzl's utopian novel *Altneuland*, in which every detail of daily life is cheerfully accounted for and wholly reinvented. Herzl unwittingly sounded the death-

knell of imaginative literature in that novel with his famous epigraph, which became the clarion call of political Zionism: "if you will it, it is not a dream." Zionism itself *was* a dream, or something like a dream, an extravagant act of the imagination, with the utopian novel its perfect vehicle. But the logic of any utopian project, Zionism included, is that the very realization of the dream abolishes dreaming. By its very nature, utopia realized makes the imagination of alternative worlds not only unnecessary, but illegitimate. Plato banished poets from his republic because they could not be relied upon to represent the presumably perfected values of the unchanging, ideal state. Recovering the past, with its multiple visions of the future, is, then, nothing less than a reinstatement of the place of the imagination in the Hebrew soul.

In the Yishuv and the early years of the State, fictions of longing, of restlessness, of wandering, had no obvious legitimacy in the place that was both ground zero and *telos* of the Jewish journey. There were pressures to exclude foreign and subversive matter, especially literature that suggested the resiliency or authenticity of the Diaspora — Tevye's world, or Mr. Sammler's Planet. Instead, the literature that was officially valued conjured a perfect fit between map and territory, between blueprint and edifice. Much of the writing of Uri Zvi Greenberg, Natan Alterman, Moshe Shamir, the writers referred to as "*dor ba-aretz*," enacted a kind of "aesthetics of the whole" — it was ecstatic, celebratory, epic. Zionism in its many articulations shared a utopian vision: an expectation that the encounter with the landscape of Palestine would so overwhelm

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the senses that it would produce a perfect correlation between mind and matter. When it did not, as in S.Y. Agnon's epic *Tmol Shilshom*, the despair was palpable, and apocalypse emerged as the dark side of utopia.

The mandate to build a Hebrew alternative to diasporic Jewish culture concealed an even more fundamental paradox in relation to the reclaiming of "original" geographical and linguistic space. While Zionists were, much like other settler colonists, discovering new territory, they were at the same time, unlike other settler colonists, recovering an ancient, deeply-imagined community as a modern national entity. In reconnecting with the Holy Land as habitat, with its biblical flora and fauna and archaeological evidence of Hebrew origins, Zionism tried to tie up the loose ends in the national biography, reclaiming its source as its final destination and reinforcing the coherence of the utopian-messianic vision.


Outside the sacred center, what had characterized the literature that evolved over 2,500 years were metaphors, stories, and parodies that played upon the profound and complex link between memory and imagination — between the memory of the Temple and Hebrew sovereignty and the burden and privilege of creating alternative stories on foreign soil — since the story of return and redemption had to be postponed till the "end of time." Thus the memory of Zion both animated and liberated the work of the imagination in exile.

In this sense, perhaps, Herzl's *Altneuland* was at some level an acknowledgment of the great diasporic achievement it sought to supersede: it envisioned a Jewish state with a plurality of languages and multiple points of origin and tried to anticipate and preclude anything that smacked of cultural self-ghettoization. Jewish cosmopolitanism and a persistent longing for places beyond the horizon, a self-exiling impulse, fed by the inevitable dissonance between utopian visions and reality — the friction that generates fiction—were to become persistent subversive undercurrents in Israeli literature. None of the great writers of the Zionist canon — not H.N. Bialik, nor Y.H. Brenner, nor Leah Goldberg, nor even N. Alterman — wrote in a way that succeeded in banishing ambiguity, personal longing, skepticism — in short, diasporist "weakness" — from their work. Hebrew fiction was planted in the soil of *Eretz Yisrael* but never fully acclimated, never really relinquished the lower-case homelands

of the Jewish Diaspora.

Fiction trespasses, ultimately infiltrating even sacrosanct spaces. Amos Oz, one of the most Israeli of Hebrew writers, locates the genesis of his literary mandate and sensibility in the place where that trespass occurs: "I am fundamentally a Jewish writer. But I am a Jewish writer in the sense of writing forever about the ache to have a home, and then having one, aching to go away thinking that this is not the real one." It is not just that the Jew always dreams of being wherever he or she is not — and in this sense represents the universal human longing that we equate with exile. It is that Oz's kibbutz or Jerusalem, as microcosm of the state of Israel, was supposed to have put an end to such longings and dreams. To the extent that Oz sees them as restless, resilient sites for his fiction, he remains a Jewish writer. And he creates space in Hebrew fiction for the explicitly Jewish narratives of a displaced writer like Aharon Appelfeld.

There were writers, like D. Fogel, U.N. Gnessin and G. Preil, who wrote in Hebrew but never joined political Zionism. They can furnish us now with a model for a non-utopian literature that is not enslaved to the material life it is made to represent. Living outside of the reterritorialization of Hebrew, even outside of the dream of reterritorializing Hebrew, meant imagining Hebrew speech in the streets of Odessa, the spas of Austria, or New York's Central Park. By these very acts, such writers point intriguingly to a zone of freedom that is always beyond reference — that is, beyond the materialization of Hebrew conversations on concrete Israeli street corners.

The good news is that, 103 years after the publication of *Altneuland*, if we spend more time on those very street corners, we can hear the cacophony of voices that signal a massive defiance of utopian dreams, a massive affirmation of the material of this world and a massive celebration of the elasticity of the Hebrew language: the Arabic accents of Sayed Kashua, the postmodern accents of Orli Kastel-Blum, the Yiddish accents of Yoel Birstein, the Russian accents of Gali-Dana Singer, the brazen amalgamations of Agi Mish'ol and Meir Wieseltier — and the persistent cadences of those who came of age in the 1970s and 80s and continue to astonish us with their recombinant flights of fiction: David Grossman, Yoram Kaniuk. And, always already, the haunting, teasing and enabling voice of the late Yehuda Amichai. 

Keeping Young Readers Turning the Pages

Judith Rovenger



The first duty of a writer is to keep the reader turning the pages.

— Isaac Bashevis Singer

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE, like adult literature, exists within the context of its time. So it is important to consider, while noting some of the literary trends of the last decade, the impact popular culture and events have had on children's books and children's reading patterns. American children, like their parents, are very busy. And they are bombarded by choice. The Internet, instant messaging, iPods and cell phones, along with homework, sports, and other after-school activities — not to mention television and movies — all compete with reading for children's time. Somehow, reading has managed to survive, and not just as a book report assignment.

J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* deserves some credit for revitalizing the joy of reading and reinvigorating fantasy as a genre. This young wizard captured the minds and hearts of readers and non-readers alike. Reading became, somehow, a not-just-for-nerds pastime. Books and reading made the agenda of dinnertime conversation as well as television news.

Inspired partly by Harry and partly by Oprah Winfrey's book clubs for adults as well as libraries' on-going efforts to nurture a love of reading in the young, a proliferation of book clubs and book discussion groups for young readers have sprung up around the country. Most libraries either offer reading groups or would be happy to launch one. And the Internet may actually be motivating some reading as it stimulates children's curiosity.

Book series continue to be a reading staple, with updated versions of the Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew as well as newer titles — plot driven, predictable and addictive, creating a habit for passionate reading.

The number of children's books published annually has increased over the decade, growing from 6,000 children's books published annually in the mid-1990s to around 13,000 in 2003. Similarly, there has been an increase in both the number of Jewish publishers and the number of children's books of Jewish interest published. This is due in part to the economics of children's publishing and partly to an

increased ethnic awareness and interest in honoring diversity in stories for the young.

One notable trend at some Jewish publishers is a move to be gender neutral in language, especially in reference to God, and to depict children in gender neutral roles.

Bookstore chains, price club outlets, and Internet bookstores exerted enormous pressure on editorial decisions as the library market became less lucrative. Short-term publishing with its eye on the mega hits seemed to drive many publishers, as opposed to building backlists, once the staple of children's publishing, intensifying the ever-present tension between art and commerce in publishing. This means editors must walk further out on limbs to publish titles they believe in, ever mindful of the pressures of the bottom line. It means more series titles, sequels, and books with tie-ins to movies and toys.

Amidst this surge of books is the growing numbers of celebrity titles sucking up attention and shelf space. With few exceptions, these titles add only to America's love affair with celebrity and do little for literature. Especially unfortunate are some of the hit songs turned into picture books. Many are nostalgic in tone, an emotion more relevant to adults, and seem to be an odd choice for children, to whom they are marketed.

On the other hand, nonfiction is experiencing a golden age, with enticing picture book biographies for the youngest and appealing photographs and facsimiles to illuminate texts for older children. Literary nonfiction titles compete with drier curricula-driven books for children's attention and offer reading rewards beyond their usefulness in answering homework assignments.

At the same time, edgy, sometimes unsettling books for youth continue to push the envelope in content, style, and format — exhibiting a frankness and respect for its young audience or, depending on your point of view, drowning them in grim, bleak, and vulgar landscapes. Books about dysfunctional families, abuse, and violence in schools and families, as well books reflecting a range of sexual behaviors (although accurately reflecting the world of some youngsters) can be intense and

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sometimes disturbing reading. For the most part, these books also contain images of resilience and inspiration. Graphic novels, novels in verse, and novels with multiple narrators and time shifts offer young readers new narrative pathways into stories.

Make no mistake, wonderful books for all ages continue to be published. What has become more challenging, however, is identifying them amidst the mediocre or banal in this crowded field. Thirty percent of children's books don't get reviewed and many titles receive only one assessment. Recommendations by children's specialists vie with marketplace bestseller lists in further tilting the power toward the side of commerce.

The events of 9/11 brought a yearning for comfort, a desire to escape, and a need to understand and make sense of life in the face of uncertainty. Against a backdrop of terrorism, national polarity, and international unrest, as well as the everyday concerns and triumphs

of growing up, writers and artists fashioned stories to entertain, comfort, and challenge children. One of the most unique is *Six Million Paper Clips*, a true story addressing intolerance through the examples of the Holocaust. Even before 9/11, authors were telling stories of resilience and hope set during the Great Depression. Simms Taback set his award-winning picture book in a *shtetl*, while Mordicai Gerstein's exquisite *The Man Who Walked Between Two Towers* is set in the recent past of Ground Zero, celebrating one man's dance on a high wire between the Twin Towers.

The stories that captured the attention and the hearts of children over this last decade — a decade with one foot in the 20th century and one in the 21st — have one thing in common. Whether looking to the past or into worlds created entirely from imagination, they kept young readers turning the pages and deepening their vision of themselves and our world as it might be. 

Wrestling with Reading

Joanne Baker

“EVERY CHILD IS a good reader once he or she has found the right book,” responded a dear friend and vice principal of a west suburban middle school when asked if it is possible to teach our students to love reading. While I don't disagree with her assessment, the time for reading, and the inclination of adolescents to spend what little free time they have doing so, is rapidly diminishing in a world of audiovisual media and gadgetry.

All young children love being read to and love to read, evidenced time and again in any home with youngsters. This love of reading and love of books is set long before children enter school. Thus, the salient question is: once children become students, what are we educators doing to foster this love of books and reading or, what are we doing, unconsciously, to suppress it?

Speak to teachers. Many rightfully believe that they are not responsible for teaching children to love reading; it is, rather, the parents who set the stage for their own children. Another friend and former colleague who teaches middle-school English, suggests that in the same way that today's parent must make a conscious effort to organize the family to eat dinner together, they, too, must set aside


time for reading together as a family. With iPods, IMs, VCRs, DVDs, TVs, land phones, cell phones and message machines turned off, parents must deliberately make old-fashioned pick-up-a-book-and-read-time an essential part of each week.

But once children are in school, can we keep the early childhood reading flame oxygenated by choosing the right books for our students? Should we allow more time to read in school? Perhaps “study hall” should be replaced with “reading hall,” a time and place in which students and teachers, collectively, share the quiet power of books — especially in Jewish schools, where reading books and texts is not only a skill to be developed, but also an ancient passion to be sustained in our Jewish children.

Perhaps it is not the love of reading we seek to keep alive, but the love of books. I occasionally wonder if some teachers inadvertently destroy their students' love of books by the assignments given to cultivate the reading experience. Most teachers are women, and regardless of our conscientiousness and sensitivity to the books we choose for our classes, we do not *really* know how male students react or feel about those choices. Recognizing the variable

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and abundant learning styles present in any given classroom, should adolescent students be given a choice as to the books they read and the book projects on which they work? Will this enhance their interest in reading? Will a night's assignment to read a chapter feel less like punishment than enrichment?

Reading is still a joyous, life-changing experience for many of my students. In my decade of teaching English at Jewish day schools, I have had a large number of students with a great passion for reading — several from families for whom Shabbat *is* reading. Each Friday afternoon, the family van drives from school to the library, where all its passengers check out books to be read over Shabbat. Other students find solace and comfort in the worlds to which they travel through the pages of a book. And some children recognize the power of the written word, which, unlike its celluloid counterpart, is enduring and permanent, leaving indelible images in their memories. 

Ethics, from page 16


dren to emerge from college with significant savings. Her instincts are always frugal (or as her less nuanced siblings might say, “cheap”). We wonder whether her first summer on this planet when we lived in five different houses as part of a rocky transition to a new city might have led her to value security differently than her brothers. It is always humbling to contemplate how children growing up in the same household can turn out so differently from one another.

With both these successes and shortcomings in mind, I would be more than satisfied if our children walked away with an attitude reflected in this lovely poem by Martin Buber on *Love and Power* (here I think of money as a form of power):

I do not know what would become of us if love were not transfigured power and power not straying love.

Do not protest let love alone rule. Can you prove it true?

Instead let us resolve each day anew to honor the line between the love deed yes and the power deed no and pressing forward let us — cautious in diction and mighty in contradiction — love powerfully.

May our children be wealthy enough to become *tzedakah* giants. And may they use money potently and ethically. 

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Throughout this year, in honor of the 350th anniversary of Jewish life in America, Israeli Ruth Calderon is sharing her observations about living as an Israeli in America and her perceptions on the complexity of American Jewish identity. As she moves acrostically through the alphabet — America, Bank, Camp, eventually ending with “Zionism” — Calderon offers American Jews an opportunity to view their everyday experiences through an Israeli prism.

RABBI — The variety of rabbis available here is, unfortunately, unimaginable in Israel. Rabbis, the voices of the Talmud and Mishna, invented Judaism as we know it. To be a rabbi is to be an innovative, critical, and determined leader. Most American rabbis have not assumed that pinnacle of spiritual leader — neither in the American public sphere nor even in the Jewish community.

Is it a lack of classic textual education and Hebrew? Is it a lack of intellectual freedom while having to renew a contract with the community's *baal habatim*? I don't know, but I do wish we would see (on both sides of the ocean) more Heschels and Gordons, more Biliks and Martin Luther Kings, more of those spiritual and religious leaders who affect the real agenda. More individuals who believe that *tikkum olam v'or l'goyim* are about using the Jewish lens to address the human experience, more rabbis who use their voices to fight for health insurance for all. I would like to see more rabbis who say, “I have a dream...”

SHABBAT — I miss the lead up to Shabbat. Friday mornings at the neighborhood café, reading the newspaper's weekend edition oh so slowly, seeing everyone and discussing major gossip and world issues in the same breath. The streets drawing quiet, the shops closing, the last minute stop for supplies. And I miss Shabbat. Friday night — dressing up, going to your parents (or his), lowering the volume on the news to make *kiddush* and hearing the neighbors doing the same from the balcony. Saturday morning: our children lazy in our bed, people walking the streets to shul, or struggling against crowds in the parking lot of the beach. The sun comforting everything away, and sun drunk, we walk into the sea full of thanks. Shabbat afternoon: a big lunch, another long nap, and the evening Motzei Shabbat blues.

TZEDAKAH — American society is not fair. The rich are very wealthy, and the poor often have no prospects. The country makes no pretense to provide equally for all. There

is no serious discussion of national welfare, equal education, or opportunities. In response to this, the Jewish community has returned to a traditional concept of justness. Jews do not expect equity from the government, but feel a moral responsibility to reduce injustice and help wherever possible: they care for the needy, rescue the oppressed, and give charity.

American Jews, in part, organize their *tzedakah* like this because they have given up on a fair American state. Giving up on a just Jewish state is a serious matter. As more Israelis start to give in this “heart-warming American manner,” it hints at the fact that they are starting to lose faith in Israel's capacity or intention to provide for its people. Like most Israelis, I am aware that the Jewish State is also full of injustice and corruption and certainly doesn't provide its non-Jewish inhabitants with what it gives to Jewish Israelis. But in Israel this lack of justice is not accepted. People rage against it and fight it: youngsters in youth movements; adults in summer evening discussions with friends; protesters in the plazas; single mothers in a march to Jerusalem. Israelis maintain a faith that life can be made better, that we should not just accept the situation as is while busying ourselves with charitable activities.

On the other hand, how impressive is American charity! Bar mitzvah boys pledge charity. Adults give their time and money to charitable causes. The tax authorities view charitable donations as an important factor in the economy and provide significant tax exemptions to stimulate and increase charity. The state in Israel provides proper ideas about a just and equitable world, but has brought about the deterioration of the individual Jew from a position of responsibility toward the poor of his city to a position of bitterness and complaint.

The full text of “The Balcony” is posted on www.shma.com.

Ruth Calderon is the founder of Alma College in Tel Aviv and Alma, NY. Her book, *The Market, the Home, the Heart*, is being translated into English. *The Balcony* is translated by Marc Glickman and Kerrith Salomon.

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Upcoming from Sh'ma

May:
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Memoir and Family Redemption

David Biale



Amos Oz, *A Tale of Love and Darkness*. trans. Nicholas de Lange. New York: Harcourt, 2004. 544 pp.

EVERY WRITER OF fiction mines to one extent or another his or her own life, turning reality into food for the imagination. But when a writer turns to his own biography, he can do the opposite: use the tools of fiction to uncover truths hidden by reality. For the past is not a real place, but an artifact of memory, and who better to create that artifact than the writer of fiction?

In his stunning memoir, which is already a best-seller in Israel and in several European countries, Amos Oz is entirely conscious of what it means for a writer of fiction to write his own autobiography. He deliberately calls this not a memoir but a “tale” (*sippur* in Hebrew). Its focus is his childhood, with some brief forays into later periods of his life. In fact, its real focus is his parents, and in that respect it is really more the story of their lives — and deaths. Since they and their generation are largely gone, Oz is free to plumb the depths of his own memory and, where memory fails, to use the novelist’s clairvoyance to reconstruct what must have been true.

The event around which the memoir gingerly circles — and only fully encounters at its end — is the suicide of Oz’s mother, Fania. The pain of this trauma remains as fresh to him now as it was then — perhaps even fresher for having tried to reconstruct it. It was she who bequeathed to him storytelling in the strange Gothic tales she wove for her young son. Highly educated in Prague and the Hebrew University, her illness and, perhaps, her unhappy marriage to Oz’s father, stifled her enormous creative potential.

It is Oz’s father, Aryeh, increasingly helpless and inept in the face of the mother’s descent into depression, who comes into even sharper focus. Scion of the Klausner family (the great historian Joseph Klausner, whom Oz brilliantly and hilariously lampoons in all his self-important pomposity, was Aryeh’s uncle), his potential also remained largely untapped. He emerges like a figure out of an Agnon novel (Agnon makes several appearances here since he was very much a part of the Jerusalem world of Oz’s parents). Aryeh is full of trivial knowledge, which he deploys

endlessly, but his scholarly endeavors add up to very little, despite his obsessive efforts. He never achieves the professorship he covets and spends his whole career as a librarian at the National Library. Aryeh’s book learning cannot compensate for his emotional bankruptcy and, in the wake of his wife’s suicide, he and his son become increasingly estranged.

In order to draw this portrait of his parents, Oz tells a sprawling family saga of his father’s family in Russia and his mother’s in Poland. I can think of few better introductions to Eastern European Jewish history. And, since branches of the family (including Oz’s cousin who was exactly his own age) were murdered in the Holocaust, he also brilliantly relates that chapter of Jewish history.

These two families found refuge from Europe in Jerusalem in the early 1930s. While the heroic pioneers were building the land and themselves (as the popular song had it), the Jerusalem of Oz’s youth was a provincial European outpost. One of the funniest passages in the book is Oz’s description of his grandmother, who became obsessed with the ubiquity of germs in the Middle East and died in her bath, which she took several times a day in order to wash off the microbes. Desperately trying to recreate Europe in the Middle East, these new Jerusalemites felt themselves just as much estranged from the “true” Zionism as they were in exile from Europe. Moreover, the Klausners were Revisionists and therefore politically opposed to the majority Labor Zionists. The story that Oz tells here is, therefore, a counter-narrative to the much more familiar one of the Zionist mainstream. But it is a crucial story to tell because so many of the Jews who founded Israel were really more refugees than they were “New Hebrews.”

It was this Jerusalem that endured the siege of the 1948 war and, once again, Oz succeeds brilliantly in capturing the terror and claustrophobia of that epoch. Characteristically, his father fails to learn how to operate a rifle and, as in the earlier Revisionist underground to which he belonged, played the role of an anti-hero.

continued on page 4

Koret Book Review

The Koret Foundation – *Sh'ma* literary pages include literary essays, author interviews, and book, film, or art reviews that complement the Koret Jewish Book Awards and provide visibility and distinction to a wide range of Jewish books and authors. These pages feature an array of writers and others who bring our readers new expressions of Jewish thought, imagination, and spirit.

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Taube New Visions

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ENCYCLOPEDIAS HAVE existed for more than 2,000 years in order to make available a summary of extant knowledge. The *Encyclopedia Britannica*, the largest and oldest in the English language, was first published in 1768 and has been followed by many competitors. Jews came relatively late to the production of encyclopedias. The first encyclopedia of Jews and Jewish culture, the twelve-volume *Jewish Encyclopedia*, which was published in the United States but conceived in Europe, did not appear until 1901. Traditional rabbinic scholars, with their close study of texts, had no need of comprehensive summaries. And the first academically trained scholars of Judaica in the 19th century had published research articles in journals dedicated to their fields and only gradually created a body of scholarship that could be synthesized.

Encyclopedias dedicated to Jewish subjects came into being only as acculturated and relatively prosperous Jewish communities desired to display, to themselves and a broader public, the accomplishments of Jews and the riches of Judaism. Jewish encyclopedias also depended on the existence of a sufficient number of scholars to sustain the ambitious endeavor of gathering a massive amount of biographical data and historical information. The early encyclopedias devoted to Jews and Judaism served as an argument for full integration of Jews in their respective societies and as a refutation of antisemitic vilification. During the past century a variety of Jewish encyclopedias has been published in English, German, Russian, French, and Hebrew, with the *Encyclopedia Judaica* the largest and most influential.

We now confront an explosion of encyclopedias, in Judaic as well as in general publishing. The driving force for the proliferation of this genre is not the academics who are recruited to construct the format of the encyclopedias and edit them. Academics still prefer books and articles as the most appropriate way to present their own scholarship to their fellow scholars and to a wider audience. But changes in the structure of the publishing industry, in reading habits, and in information technology have made the creation of encyclopedias a popular academic endeavor.

While scholarly monographs — the bread

and butter of academic publishing and careers — are purchased by fewer individuals and libraries, encyclopedias, in contrast, are reference works that are viewed as a necessity by university libraries. Moreover, universities that have multiple library venues are likely to purchase more than one set of an encyclopedia, whereas a single copy of a monograph is most often deemed sufficient. In short, academic presses, which rarely have a “best seller,” expect to make far more money from encyclopedias than they do from monographs.

I suspect that the economic rationales of publishing decisions point to a more fundamental change in the way we — and especially the younger generation — process information. Most Americans receive their news from television, and television news shows provide stories in easily digested “sound bytes,” rarely more than two minutes long. The rise of the Internet has made the “video byte” the equivalent of the sound byte, the standard form of information retrieval. Each website divides information into small components, and a Google hit is rarely longer than a page and a half. Internet sites, like encyclopedias, summarize knowledge; unlike journals or monographs, they are rarely refereed or carefully edited. Reading a book chapter, never mind an entire book, requires more time than most contemporary readers, including students, are willing to invest. Our cultural attention span has been truncated; in a sense we suffer from “Cultural Attention Deficit Disorder.”

Those of us who prefer books to the Internet are not simply intellectual Luddites who resent technological innovation. We use the Internet to find data that would otherwise require hours in libraries or archives. We recognize the value of encyclopedias, particularly in areas of Jewish Studies that have been relatively neglected, such as women and gender or Eastern European Jewry, to name the themes of recent or forthcoming encyclopedias. What we worry about is that students and other readers are seeking predigested knowledge. Both the academy and the Jewish community have long valued the intellectual struggle to understand the interpretation of a text or the nature of a complex argument. And for that there are no shortcuts.

The Kav haYashar reminds us that our affection and respect for a *sefer* is both physical and emotional. Even in this age of digital information we cherish the physical object. Although we are constantly amazed at the wealth of texts now available in an electronic format, I know few people who prefer to read and study a text on their computer screen rather than reading a printed book.

The Kav haYashar's thought follows the teachings of Sefer haHasidim of Yehudah haHasid, which tells the story of a community that worried about damaging a book in the process of copying it. The rabbi replied to them: What are books for? To sit on the shelf? Let people use them and study them!!

The most exciting part of my day is the arrival of a shipment of books. Whether new or old, the notion that our community of learners, scholars, and students will have access to a new work or a new edition fills me with joy. We also have the responsibility to care for our books and preserve them so that future generations will also share the emotional and physical experiences of our people and our books.

— Paul
Hamburg

This is my practice. In the synagogue I would walk among the pews, finding upside-down prayerbooks and Bibles, kissing them, and setting them aright. In a way, this was a small way to make the world right, bringing order to chaos, lining things up “the way they should be.”

But there were times when finding books awry would generate an inner voice of criticism – comparing, judging, complaining: “Who would leave books this way? Can't they see they're upside down?” or “I really am a thoughtful guy to do this.” How can my love for these sacred books help me to be more balanced in the world?

When we come across a book – or life – and find it upside down, other than how we want it or expect it should be, we are invited first to simply examine and recognize “what is.” Only then, when we can be fully present without self-aggrandizement or judgment of others, will we be able to act to make it right, still embracing the truth of this moment with love and a kiss.

— Jonathan P. Slater

When you invite books into your home, they're not just friends. They become your guests. I imagine the books on my shelves in constant conversation and think about how best to arrange them; every good hostess wants the conversation to be interesting, stimulating, challenging.

My *sefarim* fill several rows. But they aren't granted the respite of separate seating: they sit in close proximity to my books on feminism. On

the bottom shelves are books I don't like but can't bring myself to disinvite. It makes sense to seat my beloved Welty near Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor. But she shouldn't have to sit next to these fellow Southerners in perpetuity. I imagine she's tired of that grouping. And Phillip Roth, a favorite guest of late, where should he sit? Perhaps between past favorites Virginia Woolf and Jane Austen? An unlikely arrangement, but sometimes the order is personal. I seat them based on when I read them, how they affected me. It's my party, after all.

If they're anything like their authors, books must be a prickly lot. There are undoubtedly unwieldy discussions and heated arguments. But these books — at least, they're always talking.

— Tova Mirvis

מצא הספר מונה מהופך יהפכנו וינשקנו

— ספר קב הישר נד

One who has found a book placed upside-down should turn it over and kiss it.

— *Sefer Kav haYashar*, 54
(Tzvi Hirsch Koidonover, d. 1719)

The rabbis of the Talmud decided to keep the bulk of what they knew in oral form. That kept Judaism fairly portable. Even during the middle ages, personal libraries stayed fairly small. But with printing, Ecclesiastes' warning “of the making of books, there is no end” (Eccl. 12:12) really took off. Ecclesiastes might have added, “and of the acquiring of books, how much the more so!”

I confess to acute bibliophilia. Some people buy books as an insurance policy against forgetting an idea. Others like to bask in the glow of accumulated wisdom. But I buy books because they are my friends. I love my books; I kiss my books; I surround myself with my books.

R. Koidonover teaches us to turn over an upside-down book (*m'hupakh*), but Ben Bag Bag, a first century rabbi in *Eretz Yisrael*, said to turn the book over and over again (*hafokh bah*), for everything is found in it. (Avot 5:22) I don't believe that all of my books are found in Torah, although I believe Torah can be found in most of my books. Nevertheless, maybe Ben Bag Bag has something important to say about how I treat my “friends.” I won't stop buying new books, but perhaps I can try to reread one book for each new book I acquire.

— Jeffrey Spitzer

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Sigi Ziering Ethics

This year, the practical ethics column will focus on money and power. The column is co-sponsored by Shelley and Bruce Whizin and Marilyn Ziering in honor of Marilyn's husband Sigi Ziering, of blessed memory. The series of columns, with responses, is available on www.shma.com.

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WHAT MESSAGES do we, as Jewish parents and educators, want to convey to our children about money? What are the most effective ways of transmitting Jewish values about wealth, poverty, and the material world?

Let's begin with the obvious. *Lo hamidrash haikar eleh hamaseh*. It's not what we say about money that makes the critical difference; it's how we spend our money. If our children see us writing *tzedakah* checks, "tithing" new sources of income, and demanding that our children tithe a proportion of their own allowances (not "entitlements" but "earned" income from fulfilling household responsibilities), they might get the message.

I asked my children to share with me any anecdote (positive or negative) that might capture what we taught them about money. Here is one of my son's recollections:

"I will never forget the first time I learned that a dollar was more than 80 cents. As a five-year-old, I received 25 cents a week for allowance. And I knew that four allowances equaled one dollar. However, every week five cents of my allowance went to *tzedekah*. This was all well and good, but in my five-year-old mind, four allowances were still one dollar. So one day I gathered all of my change and meticulously counted it in piles. I proudly presented my bounty to my mother and told her my grand total. Upon inspection my mother saw that my count was quite inflated. This can happen when you count four 20-cent allowances as one dollar. Not only did I learn that day that 80 cents was not a dollar, I also learned the lesson that some of your income should always go to *tzedekah*."

Another son remembers our tradition on *Ta'anit Esther*, the fast of Esther, of donating the money associated with eating a meal to *tzedekah*. He also remembers donating five percent of his

bar mitzvah "loot" to a rain forest protection fund, a cause that remains near and dear to him in his environmental consulting.

These examples are "successes" of parenting Jewish values regarding money. From my 56-year-old life-cycle perch, though, I also see the shortcomings of our parenting. For example, while we certainly rejected any implication from the New Testament that money was the root of all evil and perhaps even transmitted a strong hasidic sense that everything in life could be made holy, I don't believe we modeled good practical strategies for managing money.

It might have helped to integrate into our lives more *musar*, ethical teachings about financial planning. Had we put aside a modest amount of money each month for retirement and for retirement-era *tzedekah*, we might now look forward to more meaningfully living a Jewish ethical longing: to disburse during the last 35 years of our lives what we accumulate during the first fifty-five years. Although we try to communicate this failure to our adult children, they now give every indication of privileging family vacations, experiencing new cultural vistas, education, and having fun as we did at their stage of life. I'm not sure we've prepared them very well for tougher financial times or instilled the values (not so clearly Jewish but still good values) of thrift and savings. Perhaps in toasting *l'hayim* so fully we forgot some of Ben Franklin's helpful maxims about saving pennies.

Of course generalizing about children is always a dangerous business. It turns out that our third child and our only daughter is an exception to the Schein household role. She is a master of finding dollar- or 50-cent movies. She is the only one of our three chil-

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