

Kanarek, Jane L. & Marjorie Lehman (Eds.). *Learning to Read Talmud: What it Looks Like and How it Happens.* Academic Studies Press, Boston, 2016. 229 pp. \$79.00. (9781618115133).

'Talmud' is a peculiar word. It can refer both to the text itself, and to the ways it has been studied and learned. This set of essays by noted academic teachers explores how they approach the text and its pedagogy in their classes. The volume is based on the work of the Mandel Center at Brandeis University. The contributors took part in a collaborative analysis of the scholarship of teaching and learning as it pertains to their college and university courses in Talmud. At the core of the book are the participants' descriptions of their classes. They include seminars for rabbis and courses directed toward both graduate students and undergraduates. Some students had Jewish backgrounds, while others did not. One of the repeated themes (sometimes desired; sometimes unintended) is that the study and teaching of Talmud involves "making the strange familiar and the familiar strange." That is, the authors/teachers attempt to connect the topics of the Talmud to the lives of their students, while they seek to change the students' understanding of how to study and how to value the results of their inquiries.

Learning to Read Talmud is **not** for ordinary readers of Talmud, though there are useful segments for them throughout the essays. Its intended audience is academic teachers of Jewish Studies seeking insights to use in their own pedagogy. The volume is expensive, but it contains valuable, practical ideas. It should be in academic libraries where Jewish Studies are taught, and in research centers that seek to enhance the value of creative thought.

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Kravel-Tovi, M. & Deborah Dash Moore (Eds.). *Taking Stock: Cultures of Enumerations in Contemporary Jewish Life.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016. 262 pp. \$35.00. (9780253020543).

This book began with a 2012 workshop dealing with how Jews use numbers to describe themselves and their relationship with God. Numbers are not just statistics, they also have symbolic meanings and stir emotions. Counting is not just counting people, but also includes the significance of numbers (the number 6 million, for example); numbers as part of place names (e.g., names of Israeli streets) and numbers of materials goods (books and kilograms of foods for instance).

Kravel-Tovi's exploration of the use of numbers is fascinating. There is a story of Bais Yaakov school in Kraków, where 93 school girls committed suicide rather than surrender to the Nazis. Several streets in Israeli cities were named for the 93. Only one small problem – the story is a myth. Another chapter deals with the history of the Yiddish Book Center and Aaron Lansky's dream to save Yiddish books. In 1980, scholars believed 70,000 physical volumes of Yiddish language books remained, but Lansky claimed to have saved 1.5 million.

This book covers aspects of history and sociology that are usually ignored. This is a scholarly book recommended for academic collections, but it will also appeal to individuals interested in this fascinating topic.

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

Kulski, Julian. *The Color of Courage: A Boy at War: The World War II Diary of Julian Kulski.* Los Angeles, CA: Aquila Polonica Publishing, 2016. 304 pp. \$29.95. (9781607720157).

Julian Kulski was ten years old in 1939, when war broke out over Poland. Following his liberation from a German POW camp in 1945, he created a sort of retroactive diary based on experiences reconstructed from memory.

The writing is youthfully straightforward with a sense of wonder over the growing horror. Son of prewar Deputy Mayor of Warsaw, Julian watched his genteel family life crumble under the occupation, as he describes one Nazi edict after another. Recruited into the Home Army, he began training for military tactics and weapons handling. Whether or not he was typical of other Poles of his class and

privilege, Julian had Jewish friends; he himself claimed Jewish ancestry (great-great grandson of Rabbi Dov Beer Meisels.) The Polish resistance is presented here as largely sympathetic to the Jews, with whom he had clandestine dealings. He describes a harrowing secret mission to Warsaw Ghetto: "People moved like skeletons, scarecrows with sunken, glassy eyes." He later witnessed the Ghetto revolt, in April 1943, from the Aryan side.

Nevertheless, his focus here is more on the gentile experience. Julian describes the shocking discovery of the Katyn massacre of 10,000 Polish officers by the Russians, and the punitive acts on Polish citizens. Half the diary is devoted to year 1944 and the Warsaw Uprising. Accounts of the Poles' sophisticated planned attacks are riveting. There are maps and photos; readers are directed to YouTube links of footage from German and Polish propaganda reels.

Although this diary might do best in a general public library collection, Holocaust libraries might find this book useful for its insights into the role of the Polish underground.

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Lipsh, Sara Rivkah. *Super Special Shneur: A Mother's Search for Hidden Blessings in Raising an Autistic Son*. Brooklyn: BSD Publishers, 2016. 130 pp. \$9.95. (9781945288005).

With the growing number of children being diagnosed with autism, it is not surprising that this is affecting the Jewish community. What is surprising is the dearth of books on the subject. This volume is a collection of articles written by Lipsh, the wife of a Chabad rabbinic emissary in Israel about her family's experience with raising their sixth child Shneur who has autism. In the articles, she describes her initial dismay and shame at her son's diagnosis. She worried both about her son's well-being, and also about how the community would view his behavior since he had a hard time communicating and following directions. Lipsh also struggled with figuring out how to best get help for Shneur since most of the child development centers were secular and few resources existed in the Chabad community.

For guidance, Lipsh and her husband consulted their rabbi as well as the letters of the Rebbe for inspiration. Lipsh also realized that she couldn't be the only one in her community with a special needs child and reached out to others creating *Yad l'Yeled ha-Meyuchad*, an organization dedicated to providing services to special needs children and their families.

The language of the essays is sprinkled with Hebrew and Yiddish terms. While this makes sense for their original Chabad audience, with no glossary, it might be difficult for others to follow.

I hope that the future will bring books that are accessible to a wider Jewish audience, but until then, this one is highly recommended for synagogue libraries.

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

Mandel, Rabbi Gavriel. *Judaism Unraveled: Answers to the Most Challenging Questions about Judaism*. Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishers, 2016. 268 pp. \$22.99. (9781680252309).

Judaism Unraveled covers, in five chapters, the following topics: God, the purpose of life, free will, the Jewish people, and non-Jews. The author's intentions are that this will be the first volume in a series of four volumes. The next three volumes will each deal with seven fundamental topics that are intended to reveal further the vast dimensions of Jewish belief.

Each chapter opens with a list of the questions that it addresses, and each page provides footnotes. The volume concludes with a short index, including various Hebrew sources.

Rabbi Mandel presents the readers with the idea that Life's purpose is, per Judaism, "to experience the greatest possible pleasure". By logical analysis, Mandel shows that humans "strive to achieve the ultimate pleasure of connecting to the infinite". Having actual "free-will choices" ("moral choices"), human beings are "like God and experience the reality of being an independent being". The role of the Jewish people, as a chosen group, is "to serve as a light unto the nations".