

SYNAGOGUE LIBRARIES

Attracting Patrons to the Synagogue Library: Information, Interest, and Involvement

Margot S. Berman

*Temple Beth Am
Miami, Florida*

Today, after establishing a library policy and building a fine collection, a librarian must also spend considerable time and effort on getting the community to focus attention on the library. Many synagogue libraries have moved to larger quarters in the suburbs, and many with the most extensive and interesting collections are no longer within walking distance for most patrons. School buses and carpools reduce the number of parents who spend time in the library during religious school hours. More generally, with so much competition for the synagogue member's time, the library must offer both valuable services and tempting programs to attract patrons.

Beyond the traditional library programs discussed elsewhere (Berman, 1982), this article offers three ideas for bringing today's patron into the synagogue library:

1. an in-depth source of current information about community services,
2. an ongoing study program, and
3. a project that involves the members of the congregation in a direct, personal way.

Information About Community Services

The librarian may maintain directories—published or in-house—of organizations involved in education, social services, or health care. (In time, of course, your files should include detailed, up-to-date information on other community resources.) The way to start is to maintain a folder of information about these services, with addresses and phone numbers. I chose to begin with *library services to the homebound*. A folder on such a topic should contain answers to the following questions:

- a) Does *your library* have a way of sending books to the homebound? Are volunteers available to offer transportation to those who cannot drive?
- b) Does the public library have a *bookmobile* with a regular (or irregular) schedule and route?

- c) Does the public library *mail books and tapes* to the homebound? Can titles be ordered by phone, or are order forms supplied? Do videotapes circulate?
- d) Do the Jewish libraries in the community have a common policy that allows special borrowing privileges for the homebound? Again, are rides available, or can material be delivered to the patron?
- e) Is there a synagogue or Jewish Center library in the community with a comprehensive collection of Large Print books? Does the local library have a bibliography that you can obtain? Do you have one of your own? Do you have a copy of Helene L. Tuchman's bibliography? (Tuchman, 1983).
- f) Which local libraries have special collections in Hebrew, Yiddish, or other languages?
- g) Can you keep on hand copies of forms from agencies that send catalogs and information to the homebound and the disabled? For example, The Jewish Braille Institute, which only lends to individuals, will send libraries a subscriber registration form; a request form for catalogs by topic; request forms for individual titles; and a list of items available in Braille, on tape, on cassette, and in Large Type. Liturgical works for the Conservative, Orthodox and Reform are available, as are books in English, Yiddish, Hebrew, French and German. (There are complex eligibility rules. Write directly to The Jewish Braille Institute of America, 110 East 30th Street, New York, N.Y., 10016.)

After you have gathered the facts on a particular service, the next step is to publicize the availability of the material. Consider it a publicity campaign for the library.

An Ongoing Study Program

My second suggestion, an ongoing study program, is illustrated by the formation of a *journal club*. It would be ideal if this proj-

ect could be coordinated with courses in the adult education program. I suggest "starting small": one discussion session per month for four months. Each registrant should receive, in advance, a photocopy of the articles to be discussed.

Establish one rule: only those who have read the article may speak; all others must be content to listen. Leading a discussion and keeping attention focused on the article takes skill. If this is not your forte, find a discussion leader or teacher with experience. Choose articles for their diversity and the controversial nature of the topics. If at all possible, the class should meet in the library. My choice would be to call the program "The Library's Journal Club." With luck, it may become a year-round activity in the library.

A Project Involving Congregants Personally

The project I describe here is more elaborate, although in simple terms, it boils down to immigration histories, or "When We Got Here."

Each congregant is invited to come to the library and volunteer the following facts:

- his or her name,
- country of family's origin,
- date when first family member emigrated, or
- date of arrival in the U.S., and
- date first family member settled in the library's city.

Make a time line, and pin either a card or a cutout of an ocean liner with the name, date and country listed for each participant in the appropriate position.

In addition, use maps, placing a pin in each country reported. You may need Africa, South America and Asia in addition to Europe. You may also make a graph to illustrate the years when the families first came to your city. Finally, you may display related

library materials. When the exhibit is all finished, hold an open house.

Since the group of cards or boats will fall into obvious time periods, you have some interesting history lessons ready-made. Perhaps you can involve one of the religious school classes in researching the events, both worldwide and in Jewish history, that caused emigration.

You could stop here or go on to a more elaborate project, for instance, a history of the synagogue or of the library. For such projects, you would need considerable space to hang copies of documents and photographs.

By involving the patron directly and personally, you are not only focusing on the library, but are also promoting the concept of the congregation as a family with shared experiences. The librarian should provide the idea, the magnet if you wish, to attract the patron to the collection. Then reinforce each visit. Plan to give every participant a book mark, a card listing the library's hours, a copy of your recent acquisitions list, and a book-reserve card which can be mailed back to you.

All the time and effort you will have spent on any of these three projects will have been worthwhile if the goals attracting the attention of the members of the congregation to the library, increasing circulation, and serving the community's information needs are achieved.

References

Berman, Margot S. *How To Organize A Jewish Library: A Source Book and Guide for Synagogue, School and Center Libraries*. New York: JWB Jewish Book Council, 1982.

Tuchman, Helene L. *Large Type Books of Jewish Interest*. New York: JWB Jewish Book Council, 1983.

Margot S. Berman is the Librarian of Temple Beth Am in Miami, Florida, and is also in charge of the Resource Center in its Day School. She is a former President of the Association of Jewish Libraries and represents the AJL on the Council of National Library and Information Associations.

Writing for Newsletters: Positive Publicity for Libraries

Rita Berman Frischer

*Sinai Temple Library
Los Angeles, California*

A vital part of every Judaica librarian's job is to engage in public relations (PR) outreach efforts in order to present his or her library and its many activities in a positive way and attract various "audiences." The librarian should give high priority to making his/her library known to current and

potential patrons. In-house publications are usually an outstanding avenue for communicating what the library does, and the newsletter editor will view a lively, interesting librarian's column as an asset. Therefore, this introductory guide to PR articles is offered.

LIBRARY LINES

by Rita C. Frischer

In late August, I joined **Aviva Lebovitz** and several teachers from Sinai's school in attending the Annual **CAJE Conference of the Coalition for Alternatives in Jewish Education**, held this year on the campus of Stanford University. We had lots of company. More than 1600 educators, administrators and specialists — some in sandals and cut-off shorts, others in black suits and full beards — met in workshops, modules and **rikkuzim** to share information, insights and knowledge. From all over North America, from as far away as South Africa and Argentina, they came. Many brought families. They lived in the dorms and took advantage of the excellent child care offered so the adults could learn together. The questioner in one topic proved the **maven** in another; the instructor today became the novice student tomorrow. Giving and attending workshops, I was constantly impressed by the depth of caring most of these people demonstrated and the sometimes faltering, but constantly renewable, sense of dedication to Jewish education. May it always be so.

While at **CAJE**, and earlier in the summer when I attended the Association of Jewish Libraries convention in Atlanta, I discovered many new materials which will soon be on our library shelves and available to our teachers, students and adult learners. I also had a chance to preview the exciting **HERITAGE: CIVILIZATION AND THE JEWS** series now being shown on public broadcasting. I hope you are all watching it and following **Muriel Mosler's** coverage of the supplementary reading matter available here in the Blumenthal Library.

However, **Muriel** is dealing with adult books, and before I end this column I want to mention to you an excellent work for young readers, 8 to 12, which can be a marvelous adjunct to this program, as well as to any family visit to **THE PRECIOUS LEGACY: JUDAIC TREASURES FROM THE CZECHOSLOVAK STATE COLLECTIONS** now in San Diego.

JOSEPH AND ANNA'S TIME CAPSULE, written by award winning **Chaya Burstein**, is an absolutely lovely book put out by Simon & Shuster Summit Books in cooperation with the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service and based loosely on the adult book documenting **THE PRECIOUS LEGACY** exhibit. It recreates the lives of two children, 12 and 10, in 19th century Prague. **Joseph** and **Anna** speak for themselves as they describe their daily lives in the first half of the book. Then, the second half suggests to the modern reader that he or she assemble a **personal** time capsule representing the life of a **20th century Jewish child**. Gently the book encourages examination of values and assignment of priorities, as the child of today chooses what is important enough to carry the message of today to generations yet to come. Continuity and responsibility to the future are implicit but not preached about; and the blend of watercolor illustrations by **Nancy Edwards Calder** with actual photographs of items from **THE PRECIOUS LEGACY** helps to blend past and present, representational and real.

Incidentally, to find a full-color, beautifully illustrated book at the low price of \$8.95 currently marked on **JOSEPH & ANNA'S TIME CAPSULE** is extraordinary in this day of \$14.95 picture books. I can comfortably recommend this book to you as a gift for your own children or anyone else's. Come look at the library's copy and see if you don't agree.

Figure 1. Report on new books seen at professional meetings (*Sinai Speaks*, October 1984).