COMMENTARIES

July 8, 1990

Dear Bella,

I am most appreciative of your gift of the latest issue [vol. 5, no. 1] of Judaica Librarianship. It is a most impressive and instructive periodical. I spent several enjoyable hours reading it. Especially moving, for me, was Leonard Gold's article on Abraham Berger, who was a cherished friend. Just as Gold received a book from Abe Berger, I was also the recipient from him of Sefer Toldot Aharon by Aaron of Z[h]itomir, which I have still, although most of my book collection I have distributed to libraries and some individuals.

Libby Kahane's list of reference books called to my attention a most useful source that I hope to use in connection with research I am doing.

Warm regards,

Rabbi Philip (& Hanna) Goodman
Former Editor, Jewish Book Annual
Jerusalem, Israel

Editor's Note: Rabbi Goodman and his wife were guests at the AJL banquet held in conjunction with the First International Conference of Judaica and Israeli Librarians in July 1990. Ten years earlier, I spent a year in Jerusalem; my residence was down the block from the Goodmans', and I had the honor of being invited to their home. In speaking with them at the banquet, I learned that Rabbi Goodman had never seen the journal, and I gave him one of the three copies I had brought with me to Israel.—B.H.W.

IN THE BEGINNING

August 7, 1990

To the Editor,

In reflecting on the serious issues raised in your most recent editorial, "Negative Attitudes to Judaica Reference Works" (JL, vol. 5, no. 1, Spring 1989—Winter 1990), primarily on the question posed in the opening paragraph, "Are Judaism and reference librarianship antithetical?", I believe that clear-cut distinctions need to be drawn as to the intent and ultimate purpose of the reference works. When reference works are produced and used in order to facilitate and enhance Torah learning, then Judaism would commend and encourage their use. If, on the other hand, reference works are produced and used in order to short-cut and circumvent the long, intensive, and toil-filled process necessary for Torah learning, then I believe that Judaism would not simply not recommend, but would also abhor the use of such reference works.

Distinctions need to be made regarding the use of reference works for lomdim (specialists and experts in the field of Torah and Halakhah) and for amkha (the masses of Jews learning on a regular basis, in fulfillment of the mitzvah of Torah). Certainly we cannot contemplate or imagine a rav or a posek (halakhic decisor) arriving at a major, precedent-making, novel, and original halakhic decision or approach based on examination and analysis of a quick-reference halakhic volume, or of a secondary, "do-it-yourself" halakhic compilation or digest, and certainly not through "study" of primary sources in translation. We would not expect a physician to render a diagnosis by consulting a layman's medical reference volume or a judge to issue a verdict by researching the 1990 edition of All You Ever Wanted to Know About Law. We likewise do not expect the serious-minded, astute, and scholarly student of Torah to gain the broad scope of Torah knowledge from the quickie, "do-it-yourself" digests, anthologies, and compendiums.

Torah study and knowledge, our Sages taught, is acquired by means of forty-eight qualities, which require time, effort, understanding, sharp discussion, and deliberation, to name just a few. None of the forty-eight qualities suggest or tolerate the "instant" or "express" method.

Historically, the classic talmid hakham was one who was fluent and conversant in the classical sources and texts, which were written and studied in Hebrew. Indeed, it is not at all surprising that Hazal (our Sages) were chagrined and disappointed when the Torah was translated into Greek ("as the day when the golden calf was made"). Studying the Torah in a foreign tongue was viewed as taking a giant step away from the traditional mode in which Torah was to be transmitted. Today, when Torah is being taught to many more students than in previous generations, we tend to compromise on one of the most essential elements necessary to achieve excellence, fluency, and competence in the Torah material being studied—the language. Our generation seems to bask in the "glory" of abundant English translations of Talmudic, medieval, and contemporary Judaica classics being disseminated, marketed, and used not merely among the uninitiated or newcomers to Torah study, but among Bene Yeshiva (yeshiva students) and lomdim as well, if not more so.

The element and vital experience of amalat shei Torah (the labor involved in mastering primary Jewish texts) or the horeven (the struggle and toil) over a piece of Ramban, Midrash, Rashi, or Mefudos ultimately leaves the potential lamdan with skills and tools that will in the long run allow him/her to study on his or her own. This, after all, is one of the main goals of any good system of education!

The "instant," "express" approach skips over the toil, time, effort, usage, and investment necessary to appreciate the language of Torah—the actual text. The "instant" translation/quickie-reference/compendium/anthologies approach also removes from students the opportunities and necessary experiences of actually handling the seforim [books], leafing through the dapim [leaves], familiarizing themselves with the particular nuances, flavor, phraseology, methodology, and derekh [approach] of a given mefarsh (commentator), sefer, and even of a masekhet [tractate]—all critical features of the art of being a true talmid hakham (scholar/student).

When the primacy of genuine Torah learning is maintained and the study of the original sources is carefully safeguarded, it then becomes part of the talmid hakham's...
agenda to augment and reinforce the learning process with additional reference materials and sources. It could even be postulated that a reference work that may serve as a learning aid or tool could and should be used, as long as it hails from a legitimate and credible source.

A quick glance at a \textit{daf} (leaf) of the Talmud or of an entire Talmudic tractate reveals many and varied supplementary reference-like sources, aids, and tools. These include the cross-references of the \textit{En Mishpat - Ner Mitsvah} (which gives easy access to the Rambam's and Karo's codes), Rabenu Hananel's highlights of the Talmudic text, the Rif's digest of the Talmud's discussion, the Rosh's compendium of Halakhic elements in the Talmudic text (plus the \textit{Kilsur Piske Ha-Rosh} by his son Rabenu Ya'akov Ba'el Ha-Turim - an "abridged" version), the Hilufei Girsa'ot to verify differing textual emendations, the Metargem translating foreign terms and phrases found in Rashi and Tosafot, plus the many indexes (e.g., \textit{Sefer Sedeh Tosifim}, by Bezalel Ranshburg) designed to facilitate use of \textit{selarim} and \textit{mefarshim}.

Judaism and reference librarianship are not antithetical when the latter is used to augment, supplement, enrich, and reinforce the primary sources of Torah study. Throughout the generations, great scholars and authors have produced supplemental reference works, digests, and compendiums to enhance, help review, and reinforce knowledge previously gained and transmitted through more detailed, difficult, and demanding sources, particularly Talmudic and legal texts and commentaries. This was the intent of Rishonim such as the Rif and the Meiri in the area of Talmud study and commentary, of R\' Yosef Karo in authoring the \textit{Shulhan Arukh} to enable students to review the highlights of the longer and more detailed \textit{Bet Yosef}, or of the Arukh Ha-Shulhan, who systematically reviewed and highlighted previous Talmudic and legal opinions before rendering his own \textit{pesak}. Many examples can be cited of major and minor reference works authored throughout the ages with the sole intent of augmenting and facilitating study and scholarship. Some of the works reinforced the efforts of the accomplished scholar, while others enabled the less able or more pressured layman to pursue Torah study on a regular basis. The latter was certainly the Rambam's intent in authoring the \textit{Yad ha-hazakah}. It is interesting to note that, whereas the shorter, more systematic, and condensed works served the immediate needs and concerns of a learned and interested laity, these very same works also served as the basis for further intensive, in-depth, analytical, and refined commentaries by scholars. What better examples need one cite than the \textit{Shulhan Arukh} of Karo and the \textit{Yad ha-hazakah} of Rambam! I don't believe that this approach was necessarily a result of the fact that "earlier decisions [are] again scrutinized, justified and interpreted." (J.M. Baumgarten, as quoted in your editorial), because of negative responses to halakhic codes etc., but rather because continued probing, verification, and analysis of previous texts and sources is the very essence of the \textit{Torah shebe-'al peh} (oral law) mode of learning. Whether or not "abridged" reference compendiums such as Karo's \textit{Shulhan Arukh}, \textit{Yad ha-hazakah}, \textit{Arukh ha-shulhan} or \textit{Haye Adam} can or should be compared to the contemporary proliferation of secondary, abridged, and super-abridged "sources" is left to the reader.

Your point about "certain rabbis [who] have expressed negative opinions on indexes to halakhic codes that may allow the layman to decide questions of Jewish law" is well taken. It is not, however, to be interpreted as a universal rejection of reference works. Deciding questions of Jewish law is a highly specialized, intricate, and difficult process, requiring much learning, training, and apprenticeship (shimush), which when missing may create confusing and erroneous impressions and conclusions for the unlearned or amateurish pseudo-posesek. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein \textit{z\text{}l} was opposed to having his responsa published in an abridged English edition for similar reasons. The compilation and study of codes, however, have become part and parcel of standard Torah learning and curricula, and continue to serve as springboards for further in-depth scholarship and novellae (hidushim). Moreover, the fact that the Mishnah and Talmud were originally compiled as a concession to \textit{yeridat ha-dorot} (the decline of the generations), is proof of the foresight and wisdom of our ancestors in recognizing the need to introduce innovative, creative, and even radical approaches to assure continued and consistent Torah study. If only all of contemporary Jewry were well versed in the Rambam's \textit{Yad ha-hazakah}!

Sincerely,

Rabbi Eliyahu Safran
Principal, Samuel H. Wang Yeshiva University High School for Girls
Hollywood, NY

ALEF BIT

July 6, 1990

Dear Bella,

Congratulations on another excellent issue of Judaica Librarianship. As I stated in my letter (JL, vol. 5, no. 1, Spring 1989—Winter 1990), I am most impressed with the quality and content of your work.

I would like to correct an error in the name of our computer users group. "Communal Computing" is the name of our group, which includes many librarians and Jewish educators. For information about membership, please contact me at the address below.

In response to Dorothy Wasserman's piece on Hebrew software resources, a more extensive list of Hebrew software packages on the market is appended. I was also pleased to read Ralph Simon's article on synagogue library automation.

Keep up the good work. I enjoy reading your publication.

B'shalom,

Glenn S. Easton
President
Communal Computing
20 West Gude Drive
Rockville, MD 20850-1150

Editor's Note: The name of the organization in Mr. Easton's prior letter was: National Jewish Computer Users Group. For the benefit of our readers, we are publishing the software directory. Some entries do not include complete addresses.

Directory of Hebrew Software Packages

(Note: Though not all are multiscript, bidirectional programs, they may be of use in the library setting.)

1. KESHET-PRINT (IBM)
Keshet Limited
P.O. Box 1537
Bethesda, MD 20817

2. Multi-Lingual Scholar (IBM)
Gamma Productions
Santa Monica, CA

3. PC/Hebrew (IBM)
H & A Consultants
P.O. Box 1468
Spring Valley, NY 10977

4. MacHebrew (Macintosh)
Linguis'ts Software
P.O. Box 580
Edmonds, WA 98020

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Erratum
The diacritics in Figure 2 of Joan Ali- prand’s article, “Hebrew on RLIN—An Update” (vol. 5, no. 1, Spring 1989–Winter 1990, p. 13), were inverted as a result of a printer’s error. Reprints of the article, with the figure correctly positioned, are available from the Research Libraries Group.

CHILDREN’S LITERATURE
June 3, 1990

Dear Ms. Weinberg,

I am writing to thank you for the [galleys of] two articles [from JL vol. 5, no. 1 that] you sent me for my paper on children’s Holocaust literature (“Historical Accuracy in Children’s Literature of the Holocaust,” by Freda Kleibrud, and the Sydney Taylor Book Award Acceptance Speech of Jane Yolen, for The Devil’s Arithmetic). They were both extremely helpful and I used them extensively for my paper, of course crediting them “in press.”

Your publication is an excellent one, and I look forward to new issues.

Again, many thanks.

Sincerely,

Mrs. T. D. Frank
Bethesda, Maryland

PS. I got an A on my paper.

RESPONSA
October 1, 1990

Dear Bella:

I am responding to your letter of August 16, 1990 and especially want to thank you for the copy of Judaica Librarianship, which I had not seen before.

I read your interesting editorial on page 3 of the Spring 1989–Winter 1990 issue (vol. 5, no. 1) and have sent copies of it to several friends. I hadn’t realized that there were people who are opposed to indexes for the reasons given. Somehow, this reminds me of the old discussions about
October 22, 1990

Dear Dr. Garfield:

I was very pleased to receive your letter concerning the latest issue of Judaica Librarianship, and shared a copy with Zachary Baker.

In your letter, you indicate that it is ironical that Zachary is at YIVO. This would have been true if the sought article had turned out to be in the YIVO Annual, but it was only cited in that journal. Since YIVO specializes in Holocaust research, that is not surprising. (I prepared an author-title index to the YIVO Annual some time ago, but no individual citation index to the journal exists.)

You also state that “Unfortunately, the YIVO journal was not selected as a source journal for the 1956–65 cumulation where I would have expected to find the full source entry.” The citation was in the 1974 volume of YIVO Annual, while the cited and sought article was in the Yearbook of the Leo Baeck Institute (1964).

Your search results are interesting, but I contend that given a reference question in which both the journal title and the year of publication are unknown, searching a citation index that does not include article title is a rather indirect method. As Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) shows, Bein published several papers in English-language journals, so there were multiple possibilities.

Like many other specialized Judaica librarians, YIVO cannot afford to subscribe to general indexes, nor does it currently have access to online databases. Zachary Baker is aware of SSCI, and is a crackerjack Judaica reference librarian. I believe that in the context of printed indexes specific to the field of Jewish studies, his search was both thorough and systematic.

Let me take this opportunity to let you know that I have recently corresponded with a member of your staff regarding ISI coverage of proceedings of conferences in Judaica librarianship that have been published in the journal.

Sincerely,

Bella Hass Weinberg
Editor

Best wishes,

Eugene Garfield, Ph.D.
President
Institute for Scientific Information
Philadelphia, PA

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