

12-31-2017

“And Let Her Works Praise Her in the Gates”: A Tribute to Pearl Berger

Edith Lubetski

Yeshiva University Libraries, lubetski@yu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ajlpublishing.org/jl>

Recommended Citation

Lubetski, Edith. . "“And Let Her Works Praise Her in the Gates”: A Tribute to Pearl Berger." *Judaica Librarianship* 20: 16-18.
doi:10.14263/2330-2976.1288.

“And Let Her Works Praise Her in the Gates”: A Tribute to Pearl Berger

Avot d’Rabbi Natan (18:1) compares the Sage, Rabbi Elazar to a merchant who is asked, “Have you fine oil? Have you balsam oil? Have you spikenard oil?” and the people find that the merchant has everything [they require]. So it was with R. Elazar b. Azariah. When a disciple came to him and inquired about Scripture: he enlightened him, and when he inquired about Mishnah, Midrash, Halakha, he enlightened him. When the disciple departed he left laden with [intellectual] wealth and blessing.

And so it was with Pearl Berger. When she retired from her position at Yeshiva University (YU), she left the library world that much richer, laden with her contributions.

How does one compress a lifetime of achievement into one article? Not possible. But, let me try to cite a few highlights, and group them, in the tradition of many liturgists, as an acrostic:

P is for her professionalism: Pearl was committed to bringing the YU libraries to the highest level of professionalism. One example: She decided to put the card catalog online only when Hebrew could be integrated into the catalog record. Thus, YU pioneered in this area, working with Virginia Tech Library Systems (VTLS) to produce an online catalog that could read Hebrew characters properly, and therefore became one of the first Unicode-compliant online library catalogs in the US. YU cataloging has become a model, followed by many other libraries—even the Library of Congress.

E is for her having enhanced the YU collections through preservation; and through digitizing important works, namely: the Prague Bible, Rabbi Norman Lamm’s sermons, and more recently synagogue newsletters. She also directed the cataloging of special collections such as rabbinic texts and Sephardic materials.

A is for Acquisitions: YU’s holdings increased exponentially on her watch with the purchase of thousands of e-books and e-journals, as well as numerous online databases. Besides purchasing books outright, Pearl led us into the era of Patron Driven Acquisition.

R is for Renovation: She worked vigorously on every aspect of the newly completed Gottesman Library renovation.

L is for Leadership: Pearl made sure the YU libraries were always at the forefront of innovative trends. She envisioned the library as a learning center, and introduced Libguides, the EBSCO

Discovery Service, e-reserves, Ask a Librarian, Chat, a library blog, and Twitter. She created a library Information Technology Department, and redid the library website.

If the YU staff is committed to excellence, it is because we've had an inspiring leader. Pearl is a person of integrity; she is smart, conscientious, hard-working, clear-thinking, and committed to excellence. In short, she is inspiring.

According to studies, the top motivator of employee job satisfaction is “the opportunity to use one’s skills and abilities.” Pearl gave the YU staff members the opportunity to excel at their jobs, encouraging all to develop professionally, share ideas, and use their abilities to the fullest. And she gave them credit for their significant accomplishments.

Pearl was consistently caring and understanding. When faced with budget cuts, she agonized over how to balance the cuts with the needs of the library, while taking into consideration the lives of those working in the library. She was always fair to all the library departments and kind to all the staff members. In short, a *mentsch*.

Pearl not only demonstrated her leadership skills within the library, but her advice and insight were regularly sought and highly valued within the university. To show just how much she was appreciated, YU, at the 2015 commencement exercises, bestowed upon her a Medallion of Honor.

It is not only within the university that Pearl achieved such standing. As past president of the Association of Jewish Libraries, METRO, and the Council of Archives and Research Libraries in Jewish Studies, she has earned the admiration of those who have worked with her in the wider library community. In fact, in 1997 she was chosen by CARLJS, along with Zachary Baker and the late Herb Zafren, to participate in a fact-finding mission to the National Library of Lithuania, in Vilnius. Zachary relates that, sadly, in this once “Jerusalem of Lithuania,” there was no kosher food. But Pearl saved the day. From her trusty suitcase full of kosher food that she had shlepped from New York, she hosted delicious Shabbat meals for the trio.

When she announced her retirement on ha-Safran listserv, many colleagues in the AJL responded with accolades. Here are just a few of the many comments: Suzi Dubin said: “You have always been an inspiration to me and an outstanding asset to the community.” Heidi Lerner characterized her as “a model of grace, elegance and professionalism.” Many, such as Noreen Wachs, indicated the pleasure they had working with Pearl on the Council. Esther Nussbaun concurred: “I was privileged to have worked closely with you on the AJL Board and Council and to have benefited from your wise counsel. Being in the same New York City community, I was always aware of your professional knowledge and skills and witnessed your talented leadership.”

Elliot Gertel summed it up: “The institution, our association, and the profession have all benefited greatly from your wonderful contributions, your knowledge, and your wisdom.”

We wish that Pearl may go *me-ḥayil le-ḥayil*, from strength to strength, in her retirement. And as Chaya Wiesman said, “I am sure you will bring all of your formidable energy, knowledge and experience to the next phase of your life.”

And so, we wish you: עד מאה ועשרים!