

IN THE BEGINNING . . .

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Judaica Librarianship is expressive of the relationship between large academic Judaica libraries and smaller school, synagogue, and community center libraries. It offers articles specific to each and relevant to both. As Judaica librarians become more sophisticated because of the discipline demanded by the new technology; better educated as more universities and schools of continuing education offer courses in Judaica librarianship and Jewish studies; and more in touch with each other through organizational contacts, networking, and workshops, the dichotomy between the academic library and the small library narrows . . . Like the Children of Israel, Judaica libraries, despite their differences, are One. We have similar goals: to encourage Jewish learning and to transmit its values and practices regardless of the size of our collections and staff and whether or not we are organized to support a faculty or teach in the library through reader guidance, with book discussions and other media.

Too often, the librarian of the smaller Judaica library—professional or volunteer—feels apart from the larger library world. Nothing could be further from the truth. The article on the history of Jewish libraries in the **Encyclopedia Judaica** (V.11, pp. 190 ff.) describes how a modest Talmud Torah in Verona of 1650 matured into the present vast library of the Roman Jewish community, and how other major Judaica libraries developed similarly or even from a single individual's collection. No library, despite its size, should be taken casually or be regarded as unimportant. This statement carries implications for the library's selection policy and for its organization and administration. A too broad, simplified classification scheme which does not lend itself to expansion as the library grows often has to be completely redone. Each library must regard itself with the utmost respect, dignity and seriousness of purpose even when fiction composes a large part of its collection; for that fiction mirrors the Jewish experience. The thirst for learning and romance with the written word is characteristic of Jews. Regardless of size, the Judaica library is part of that tradition.

I am continually surprised and edified to learn of the variety of Judaica libraries and to see how they tailor their collections and programs to fit their agenda and clientele. Most of us are familiar with the types of libraries mentioned above, but possibly not with the types of libraries I have recently come to know as Library Consultant for the Task Force on Art and Literature in Jewish Life of the Commission on Synagogue Relations of the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York. Jewish Old Age and Nursing Homes have Judaica collections which feature large print and talking books. The demand for Yiddish materials in these formats has not yet been met, however, much to the consternation of inhabitants of such Homes. Some Federation hospitals also have Judaica collections in their patients' and staff libraries; and residences for exceptional Jewish children hope to develop Judaica libraries suitable for the handicapped and emotionally disturbed Jewish child. Jewish social workers need a library of resources about the Jewish perspective on social problems so that their counseling of clients is consonant with Jewish ethics and values. Jewish summer residential camps for children have Judaica libraries and informal book discussion programs.

Some innovative changes are occurring among the diverse Judaica libraries. The widely separated day and synagogue supplementary Hebrew schools of Suffolk County, New York, will soon benefit from a Judaica bookmobile service complete with traveling librarian, who will also be in charge of a large central Judaica library for the county under the initiative of the Suffolk Association of Jewish Schools. The libraries of the Central Queens and the 92nd Street YM/YWHA's and the Jewish Community Center of Bensonhurst have been asked to add popular Judaica in the Hebrew and Russian languages for Jews for whom those are first languages. Two of the most interesting libraries I have visited are the Jewish Youth Library in Boro Park and the library of Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. One has been established to serve the young children and parents of a traditional community; the other to maintain the memory of a sacrificed one. I will share my visits to these and other libraries with you in this and succeeding issues.

We need each other's help and sense of fellowship. In this and future issues of **Judaica Librarianship** we will share knowledge, techniques, and insights into the special world of Judaica libraries. We want to hear from you. What articles would you like to see on these pages? Please let us know.