

IN THE BEGINNING . . .

Bella Hass Weinberg
Co-Editor

In the mind of the layman, libraries are often associated with cultural experiences, and the job of the librarian is considered an easy, pleasant one, with the mere prerequisite—a love of reading. In the Jewish world, with its tremendous respect for books and learning, libraries are placed on an even higher pedestal, and the librarian is often termed a *yode'a sefer*—“knower of the book.”

In contrast to the layman's perception, the typical practicing Judaica librarian—although often a bibliophile—reports that his or her job allows minimal time for reading or perusal of little more than the title pages of books. Today's professional Judaica librarian probably spends more time reading the professional literature of the field than scholarly or even popular works in Jewish Studies.

The layman's expectation for a journal entitled *Judaica Librarianship* is, consequently, that it would be filled with articles on Jewish culture and focus on the themes of books. When presented with an actual issue of JL, the layman expresses surprise at the preponderance of technical articles in our journal. It is this editor's opinion, however, that the technical article is precisely what the Judaica librarian needs. It is true that Judaica libraries are repositories of Jewish culture, but without a mastery of the techniques for organizing such collections, we cannot effectively transmit that culture to our user communities.

In my experience with several graduate schools of librarianship, I have encountered the type of education which emphasizes that libraries are cultural institutions, and focuses on preaching “philosophy of library service” without adequately teaching students the skills needed to provide that service. In my view, it is axiomatic that libraries and librarians exist to provide service to their user communities, but it is the responsibility of those educating librarians—whether through classroom teaching or *publications*—to go beyond that axiom.

What are the concrete skills that we would like to see in the “crackerjack” Judaica librarian? A background in Jewish studies is generally assumed. If the librarian works in collection development, a familiarity with the major bibliographies and trade catalogs and a knowledge of the international book trade are necessary. For the cataloger, we generally require multi-lingualism—most frequently, knowledge of Hebrew, Yiddish, Western languages, Slavic languages or Arabic—plus an understanding of general cataloging and classification theory and systems, and of the specific systems applied to Judaica. From the reference librarian, we demand familiarity with the structure of indexes, bibliographies, etc., as well as with the tools created by catalogers. The synagogue or school librarian responsible for all the above functions has to have a measure of all these skills, plus a talent for public relations. For the rare book librarian, we assume a knowledge of the history of Jewish printing and of descriptive bibliography. And so on for the other specialties—a combination of general library science knowledge and the unique characteristics of Judaica.

In this issue, we feature columns and full-length articles designed to provide the professional Judaica librarian with authoritative, current information in his/her area of specialization and in cognate fields. (The editors emphasize accuracy and readability as well, which sometimes has a negative effect on currency.) Changes in cataloging rules for Hebraica; new Judaica subject headings from the Library of Congress; recent Judaica periodicals, acquisition tools and reference works; and recommended books for Jewish children are among the categories of information we trust will be essential reading for librarians working in those respective areas, and of interest as well to those in related areas to help keep them abreast of developments in the field.

Our reviews are written by experts who can, off the “top of their heads,” provide addenda and corrections to published Judaica reference sources. In our full-length articles, a basic familiarity with library science and with Jewish concepts is assumed, and our contributing authors provide insights into and analysis of many facets of our field.

We also welcome historical articles and essays on the place of Judaica libraries within the Jewish cultural tradition. While we do not review individual works of adult or children's literature, we publish surveys of bibliographic interest, analyses of themes and genres in Jewish literature, and interviews with contemporary authors. Original essays on the philosophy of Judaica library service are encouraged as well.

We hope our readers agree with the delimitation of the scope of our journal and that you find the articles we publish relevant, informative, and well written. The technical image of our journal is a tribute to the sophistication of our profession, which demands much more than a love of culture and reading. Let us know whether *Judaica Librarianship* is helping you provide better service to your user community. Please share your specialized knowledge with your colleagues by writing for *your* professional journal.