

# IN THE BEGINNING . . .

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For years, at AJL Conventions I've heard that Arlen would be meeting, but she never met me, and I supposed that she only associated with R&S (the Research and Special Libraries Division of AJL). Now, at last, I know that Arlen is no lady. In this issue of *Judaica Librarianship*, the mysterious Arlen is unveiled as RLIN when Joan Aliprand describes the arduous process whereby the Research Libraries Group (RLG) adds non-Roman scripts such as Chinese, Cyrillic, and Hebrew to its automated bibliographic system—the Research Libraries Information Network (RLIN), a process in which co-editor Bella Weinberg played an important part.

Not only have I learned that RLIN is a *what*, not a *who*, but I have also learned that our R&S colleagues—who I had assumed were hatched knowing how to design, input, and access bibliographic alphabet soupworks such as OCLC, PALINET, UTLAS, Etc., in any language—must struggle to master the technology and bend it to their will. Aaron Wolfe Kuperman's description of his mighty struggle with the bi-directional angel of Hebrew word-processing is only slightly less awesome than Aliprand and Friends' heroic efforts to introduce a Hebrew-Yiddish capability into fickle RLIN. Which brings me to the point of this ramble—now that it has been disclosed on these pages how much time and effort our R&S colleagues expend in upgrading Judaica libraries and in making library cataloging and service more accurate and efficient, isn't it time for SSC (Synagogue, School, and Center) libraries to join them? Not only to draw from, but to contribute to their efforts?

At least some of us. SSC libraries are as uneven as an unpaved Maine road after a spring thaw. We run the gamut from rudimentary-rocky to sophisticated-smooth. A synagogue library, yet in the closet, and open a few hours a week, doesn't have to automate, but there are many substantial SSC libraries with rich collections and impressive circulation statistics. According to a survey taken recently by the Jewish Book Council (see my article in this issue), only two SSC libraries (I now know of three more) have automated in-house library procedures: circulation, overdue notices, and catalog card and label production. One is even linked up to the Cleveland Public Library database, but I don't believe many of us have standardized our cataloging records so as to be able to link up with a bibliographic network such as RLIN. Rita Frischer's central cataloging project for synagogue libraries in Southern California (which will be described in our forthcoming issue) is a step in that direction, but even this cataloging may not conform to the specifications of a national network, for which catalog records must conform to MARC standards and be modified further to meet the requirements of a particular system. If we are going to persuade our Boards to fund the expense of hardware and retrospective conversion (inputting all the records in our card catalogs into the computer), we must first ask some hard questions—not about automating in-house—that's a given; but about joining a network.

SSC libraries are ineligible to join the Research Libraries Group; they can, however, use the services of RLIN through a broker known as CLASS or acquire a "search only" account on RLIN. Thus an SSC library of modest means will be able to access cataloging records in English, Yiddish and Hebrew, and numerous other languages, enabling the library to use the information to catalog its own books, or to determine where a particular book that it doesn't own can be found. Does this mean that members of an SSC library can interloan the book? Only if an agreement is reached. Do RLIN cataloging records give Weine, or Elazar numbers? No, although the standard Dewey numbers and LC subject headings that can be found on many records will be welcome. Will SSC library patrons need to search a large database for research projects? We don't know. When the capability of online searching is made known to library patrons, we may be surprised at the number who may avail themselves of the facility.

By becoming less isolated, and more a part of the larger library world, the SSC library may raise its institutional status. And if SSC libraries find that it doesn't pay for them to belong to RLIN, we can start our own network: "SMILIN" (Smaller Library Information Network)!

My co-editor enjoins me to remind you that just as computerization always takes longer than anticipated because of the attention that must be paid to detail, so too, do the editors devote a great deal of time to reviewing every aspect of JL, which explains delays in publication. We have added 1987 to the date of this double issue to reflect the currency of the information contained in it. We hope that future issues of *Judaica Librarianship* will appear twice a year with the cover date matching the calendar date.