

Acceptance Speech by the Recipient of the Judaica Reference Book Award

Irene Heskes
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Thank you all for this wonderful endorsement of my lifelong dedication to the subject of Jewish music. It is a particular satisfaction to be honored by the Jewish librarians who labor in behalf of the creation, preservation and dissemination of the printed word in Jewish life. Beyond this honor to me and to my book, I believe that the award also pays a tribute to Jewish music itself, as a topic that is important to Judaic literature and learning. Not only the domain of the cantor and folksinger, Jewish music may rightfully take its place within the purview of Jewish education and scholarship, of research and history, of tradition and culture. We Jews are a specially musical people and throughout our history, melody along with text/words have had a creative partnership in ensuring our survival. Indeed for the Jewish people, the concept of music is central to the human spirit—for music, as we recognize it, is both the most universal and yet most personal of all God's gifts to mankind. For us, over the millennia, it has served to express spiritual matters and chronicle the calendar of the year and the cycle of life, and to bind us in historical continuity from past into present and forward to the timeless future ahead. But most of all, Jewish music is the essence of our Jewish selves. The Yiddish writer Isaac Loeb Peretz has left us with his description of such a personalized music: "For each

man is a musical instrument and the life of man is a song, whether a joyous or a sad song. When a man completes his song, it leaves his body and this song—this life-soul—joins a great chorus before Almighty God. But if a man live without a song, without a melody of his soul, his life has been a mere screech, a sigh, a cry-out; it has been no life at all. Without his special song, he has not lived truly a life."³

Thank you again for this honor to me and my book, and best of all, to the field of Jewish music.

³Peretz, I.L. "Mishnas Khsidim." In his: *Ale Verk*, vol. IV: *Khsidish*. New York: CYCO, 1947, p. 180.

פרץ, י.ל., "משנת חסידים." אין זיין: אַלע ווערק
בד. 4: חסידיש. ניו יאָרק: ציקא, 1947.

An active lecturer, Irene Heskes' two currently requested topics are: "The Evidence Lives On: Holocaust Songs as Historical Documents" (with music illustrations) and "Yiddish Popular Songs on the Bowery at the Turn of the Century: The Great 'Eili Eili' Controversy" (based upon current work in progress for a book to be published by the Library of Congress).

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³A clue to ascertaining whether or not a book is rare is to check Ch. B. Friedberg's *Bet Eked Sepharim*, 2nd ed., Tel Aviv, 1951. If Friedberg does not indicate pagination, it usually means that he did not see a copy of the book, and it is probably rare.

⁴The year 1600 has often been used as a cut-off date for rarity based on age alone. When it moved into its new quarters, the Jewish Theological Seminary Library set the date 1750 for inclusion of materials in its rare collections, allowing for such exceptions as Americana, where later dates are used as criteria.

⁵Hayim Liberman in his *Ohel Rachel* (Brooklyn, N.Y. 1980) deals with the obscure Eastern European presses of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

⁶For a discussion of the effects of controversies on Hebrew books, see Moshe Carmilly-Weinberger's *Sefer Va-Sayif* (Book and Sword, New York 1966).

⁷Physical characteristics such as colored paper, vellum leaves, fine bindings, and marginal notes contribute to rarity. Rarities may also be hidden—binding boards should be inspected, especially in the case of oriental prints, as they sometimes contain leaves of rare books or manuscripts.

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