

IN HONOR OF JEWISH BOOK MONTH

MINIATURE JEWISH BOOKS

A Special Genre: online and in the museum case

Many years ago, when my husband was in rabbinical school, one of his professors invited him (and me, by spousal extension) to join an esoteric elite group, the Society of Jewish Bibliophiles. For our \$3.00 “student membership,” we were privileged to attend monthly meetings at the Harmonie Club in Manhattan where we got to admire the extraordinary books of Judaica the members brought to display for their fellow bibliophiles. (We also enjoyed a buffet dinner or hors d’oeuvres *and* were gifted with the books being published by that year by the Society. It was probably the best \$3.00 we ever spent!)

One month, the program featured miniature Jewish books – full texts, the biggest of which was no larger than 3 inches. When we arrived, members of the Society were milling around talking to one another. We entered the display hall eager to see their treasures. The usual configuration of baize-covered display tables was set up, but the tables were empty. Where were the books? What was going on?

We looked around, confused, and then noticed something odd. Small groups of people were clustered around one or another member of the Society who was reaching into an inner pocket of his suit (all the members were men in those years) and carefully pulling out a tiny book for others to gawk, gape, and gasp at.

Spotting Dr. Bamberger, our sponsor, we asked what was going on. I can no longer quote his exact words, but basically he assured us that bibliophiles were light-fingered thieves with no scruples at all when it came to book ownership and not a single member would dare leave a precious tiny volume unprotected for fear of it disappearing into the pocket of a fellow collector! (A sidebar: Before teaching at the rabbinical school, Dr. Fritz Bamberger had been editor of *Esquire* and *Coronet* magazines. Ask us about his connection to the Sarajevo Haggadah, which you may know about if you read Geraldine Brooks’s novel *People of the Book*.)

It was our introduction to miniature books, a number of which we now own (mostly in facsimile editions).

Thinking about Jewish book thieves reminds me of another HUC-JIR professor who – in the loud, booming voice of an energetic octogenarian – instructed his students that “the entelechy of a book is to be read. If you see a book and it’s clear that it isn’t being read, it’s yours, boys” (the rabbinical students were all male then). So much for honor among thieves – or the code of ethics of bibliophiles.

A few words about miniature books:

“The enduring popularity of miniature books is not at all difficult to fathom. They are to be sure novelties of printing, occasionally deluxe editions that afford a skilled printer an opportunity to display technical virtuosity. Indeed, for collectors, these diminutive volumes represent marvels of craftsmanship – miniscule technical wonders that combine form and function within a stringent set of physical constraints.

“But for students, businessmen or travelers, the main attraction of these diminutive books has been their convenience and portability. Miniature books are quite literally ‘handy,’ containing information in small, lightweight packages that could be carried and consulted anywhere...

“The compactness of small volumes was an especially strong selling point for peripatetic Jewish merchants who were enjoined to fulfill God’s commandments ‘when sitting at home and when going on a journey, when lying down and when rising up’ (D’varim/Deuteronomy 6:7).” The preface of a 16th century prayer book justified the need for such tiny books “... now that Jews come and go, travel and wander from nation to nation, city to city, and place to place with goods for sale as well as their other necessities...”.

Hundreds of Hebrew books – prayer books, haggadot, bibles, devotional literature, reference texts, and works of philosophy and theology have been printed in miniature books in Amsterdam, Antwerp, Djerba, Furth, Jerusalem, London, Offenbach, Paris, Venice, Warsaw and the United States over the past 500 years.

They spoke to a need infinitely more easily satisfied in the age of the internet.

THE MINIATURES ON DISPLAY

Seder Birkat HaMazon – The Blessings After the Meal, hand-printed by Raphael Fodde at the Pardes Rimmonim Press in Woodmere, NY. Five hundred copies printed on handmade paper. 1990, Tishri 5751. Fodde was a master printmaker, etcher, sketcher and bookbinder. A vintage 1926 hand-cranked printing press occupied the place of honor in his studio.

Seder Minchah v'Arvit, prayers for afternoon and evening services, was handprinted in 315 copies by Raphael Fodde.



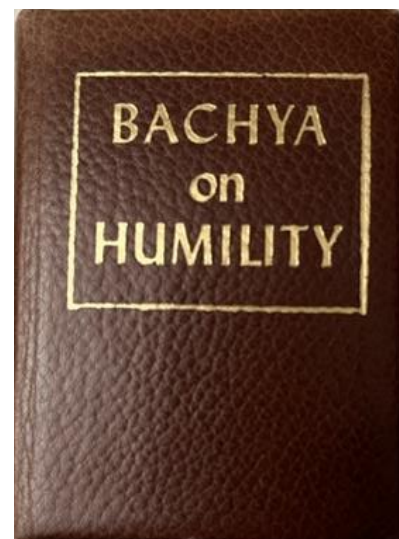
We have indicated “was” for Fodde’s work but he may still be involved in printmaking. However, a number of years ago he was arrested for forging and offering for sale what would have been the second extant copy of a rare Haggadah. He pleaded guilty at his trial. There is more information online; we didn’t pursue it.

Grace After Meals and Other Benedictions, facsimile of Codex Hebraica XXXII in The Royal Library, Copenhagen. The original was written in 1728/5488 in Nikolsburg, Moravia during the reign of Emperor Charles VI. The writer was Samuel ben Zvi Hirsch Dreznitz. This handwritten miniature (1969) features illumination and ornamentation, part of an extensive, highly valued artistic genre in both the general and the Jewish history of book-craft. Medieval illuminated books were usually bulky and “pulpit-size” volumes for use in the synagogue on festivals and study. By contrast, a single copy with all the care bestowed by an artist on such tiny works was a real treasure that could be owned by an individual. The ornate red binding of this book was specially designed for the facsimile.

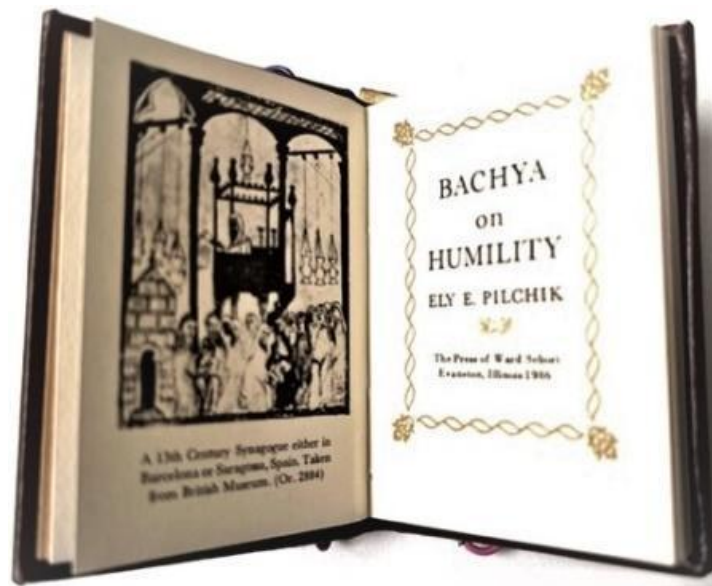


Bachya on Humility is a mini-treatise presenting an introduction to and the text of one of the “ten ethical gates” described by Bachya ibn Pakuda, a Jewish philosopher and rabbi who lived in Saragossa, Al-Andalus (now Spain), 1050–1120. His major book, translated into Hebrew by Judah ibn Tibbon, is called *Chovot ha’Levavot, The Duties of the Heart*.

This miniature book, with an introduction by Rabbi Eli Pilchik (z”l), presents the sixth “gate” – *sha’ar ha-kniah* – the Gate of Humility. Rabbi Pilchik, the longtime rabbi of Temple B’nai Jeshurun, delivered



ten sermons based on the philosophy of Bachya, of which this volume is one. The book was printed in 1986 by Ward Schori of Evanston, Illinois, a well-known and prolific printer of miniature books.



Siddur Tefilat Yisrael, an Ashkenazi prayer book, printed by Sinai Publishing, Tel Aviv, 1954 is an example of the kind of miniature in regular daily use by observant Jews away from home and without easy access to a synagogue service. It is also one of the smallest books in our display.





Meah Berachot, One Hundred Blessings, is an 18th century miniature book of blessings and prayers produced by Facsimile Editions of London in 550 copies. The original is part of a private collection in New York. Like the original, the facsimile is bound in a gold tooled leather case with hand-made silver clasps, bosses, and corner plates. In addition to the beautifully calligraphed text, the manuscript contains 30 miniature illustrations of the activities associated with the 100 blessings traditionally pious Jews seek to recite each day, including those of morning prayers, grace after meals, prayers on retiring at night, petitions for the safety of travelers, particular moments like seeing a beautiful rainbow, hearing thunder, wearing a new garment for the first time, etc. Each of the illustrations is headed by a cartouche, written in cursive Yiddish script, containing the relevant blessing preceded by directions on how to recite it. An accompanying, slightly larger volume by Iris Fishof describes the world in which the book was created, its art, and a detailed description of its text and illustrations.



Jonah is the ninth of a series of books presented in matchboxes as part of a delightful exhibition at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem called *Gadol v'Katan, Big and Little*, a delightful exhibit in 1986, to which we took our Confirmation class participants in that summer's Israel trip. These books and their illustrations, a series created especially for the *Gadol V'Katan* exhibit were made by the Israeli artist and miniaturist Meitavel. *Jonah* is printed on a 16-panel foldout.



Birkat HaMazon, Grace After Meals and Other Blessings, was written

and illustrated by Joseph Ben David of Leipnik in Darmstadt, 1732. It is the only surviving book by the artist that is not a Passover Haggadah. This facsimile was made by the Rosenbach Museum and Library in Philadelphia, 2007.

Here is another Birkat HaMazon book, described below. The illustrations appear on the next page.

Birkat HaMazon, Grace After Meals is a facsimile edition of a miniature manuscript from Amsterdam, 1738, is now in the collection of the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem. It is an unvoweled, illustrated Hebrew manuscript of twenty-four leaves. The facsimile was made by Cyelar Publishing Company, Ltd. In London in 1983. This copy is number 9 of an edition of 1,000. The facsimile was issued in a custom clamshell case.



Haggadah shel Pesah k'minhag k'k sefaradim, printed in Amsterdam in 1845 is a facsimile of a Haggadah that “features illustrations of all the signs and wonders that were done for our ancestors in Egypt.”

The illustration here shows six of the ten plagues. Can you name them?



The original Haggadah is in the Rare Book Collection of the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York, 1989. This copy is #65 of an edition of unknown number made in honor of the 65th wedding anniversary of Anna and Benjamin Lifton by their children Francine and Samuel Klagsbrun and Loretta and Robert Lifton.

The Budapest Seder Birkat Hamazon is a miniature book whose dedication page, in Hebrew, reads: "A small present from the important honorable bridegroom Koppel, son of the famous leader Jeremiah Broda, to the beautiful, humble virgin, charming bride Gitl, daughter of the venerable leader, the famous honorable Savel Leidersdorf. Made and written by the scribe Meshullam called Zimel of Polna in the year 5511/1751." The booklet is a facsimile edition of the original manuscript preserved in the Jewish Museum of Budapest. The facsimile was published by Helikon in 1991.



The next two books are bound in fine leather, both with gold stamping and gold edges.



This volume, in green leather (which looks brown in this photograph), is a woman's devotional text. It has an elaborate art nouveau clasp. Its floral blind-embossing was clearly meant to appeal to the sensibilities of the weaker sex.



The book, named for *Mirjam*, the sister of Moses, is a collection of Magyar vernacular prayers for Jewish women to read on each of

the special occasions and festivals of the Jewish year – *t'hinot* (similar to the one in the Haggadah for our TSWE women's seder); there is no Hebrew in the book at all. First published in 1897, it was written by Arnold Kiss (1869-1940) when he was rabbi of Veszprém (in Hungary). In 1901, he became chief rabbi of the Jewish community of Budapest. A second edition was published in 1904. This edition was published in May 1914; there may have been other editions in between.

In the white spaces surrounding the Table of Contents in the copy of *Mirjam* in the display are the dates of various familial birthdays, anniversaries and yahrzeits, some in ink and some written in pencil, beginning in 1934 and continuing through 1980 (this last in a very shaky, elderly handwriting).

1969. X. 4. Mészárosi utca
1968. IX. 29. m. 28. asztal

1970. 10. 14. Mészárosi utca 6. Törvényszék

Tartalomjegyzék.

Oldal	Oldal
Apa halálának napjának évfordula	517
Apa halálának napjának évfordula	522
Apa halálának napjának évfordula	528
Apa halálának napjának évfordula	533
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Apa halálának napjának évfordula	562
Apa halálának napjának évfordula	568
Apa halálának napjának évfordula	575
Apa halálának napjának évfordula	581
Apa halálának napjának évfordula	586
Apa halálának napjának évfordula	590
Apa halálának napjának évfordula	594
Apa halálának napjának évfordula	598
Apa halálának napjának évfordula	602
Apa halálának napjának évfordula	606
Apa halálának napjának évfordula	610

1971. 10. 14. Mészárosi utca 6. Törvényszék

1972. 10. 14. Mészárosi utca 6. Törvényszék

1973. 10. 14. Mészárosi utca 6. Törvényszék

1974. 10. 14. Mészárosi utca 6. Törvényszék

1975. 10. 14. Mészárosi utca 6. Törvényszék

1976. 10. 14. Mészárosi utca 6. Törvényszék

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1980. 10. 14. Mészárosi utca 6. Törvényszék

1981. 10. 14. Mészárosi utca 6. Törvényszék

1982. 10. 14. Mészárosi utca 6. Törvényszék

1983. 10. 14. Mészárosi utca 6. Törvényszék

1984. 10. 14. Mészárosi utca 6. Törvényszék

1985. 10. 14. Mészárosi utca 6. Törvényszék

1986. 10. 14. Mészárosi utca 6. Törvényszék

1987. 10. 14. Mészárosi utca 6. Törvényszék

1988. 10. 14. Mészárosi utca 6. Törvényszék

1989. 10. 14. Mészárosi utca 6. Törvényszék

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1992. 10. 14. Mészárosi utca 6. Törvényszék

1993. 10. 14. Mészárosi utca 6. Törvényszék

1994. 10. 14. Mészárosi utca 6. Törvényszék

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1998. 10. 14. Mészárosi utca 6. Törvényszék

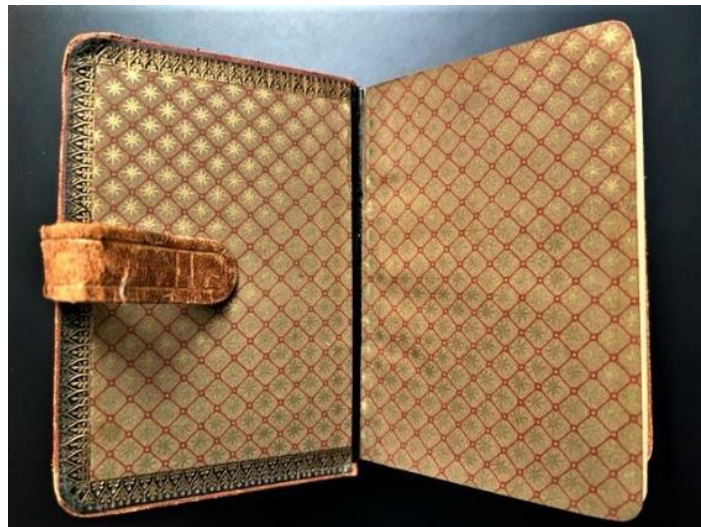
1999. 10. 14. Mészárosi utca 6. Törvényszék

2000. 10. 14. Mészárosi utca 6. Törvényszék

Draža Anyám:

Politzai Lőrincz, szül.
Weinberger Emma
szül. 1864 Január 4-én
meghalt 1927 Október 3-án
éget 72.2 kor, temetés 4-én d. a.
3. sor a rakaskerektől
12. temetőben: 40. szakasz
4. sor, 28. sz. (Chare-bár)
Lea (sz. 1871)
Faharcs. Tusch. 7. k. ng. n. n.
mészárosi utca 6-án
Tusch. 6-án

1934 - II/16 vas. 1942 - II/18 ptk.
1935 - X/14 ptk. 1943 - X/10 vas.
1936 - II/23 vas. 1944 - II/21 vas.
1937 - II/12 vas. 1945 - II/11 vas.
1938 - X/2 vas. 1946 - X/12 vas.
1939 - X/10 vas. 1947 - X/11 vas.
1940 - X/19 vas. 1948 - X/14 vas.
1941 - II/28 vas. 1949 - II/2 vas.
1942 - X/4 vas. 1950 - X/12 vas.
1943 - X/4 vas. 1951 - X/14 vas.



The second leather bound book is called **Tefilat Yeshurun** (the prayer of Jeshurun). Its English title is *The Form of Daily Prayers According to the Custom of the German and Polish Jews, with a new translation by Joseph Güns*. The book was printed in Austria and published in 1929 by the Star Hebrew Book Company on Canal Street in New York. The elaborate end papers are beautiful. The book was purchased that year by Benjamin Wasserman, whose name appears in an elegant handwriting on the flyleaf in both Hebrew and in English. He has also inscribed his address, 248 Court Street.

This prayer book, **Siddur S'fat Emet Heh-Hadash**, was edited and published by Rabbi Mordecai Cederbaum in Piotrkov, Poland in 1925.



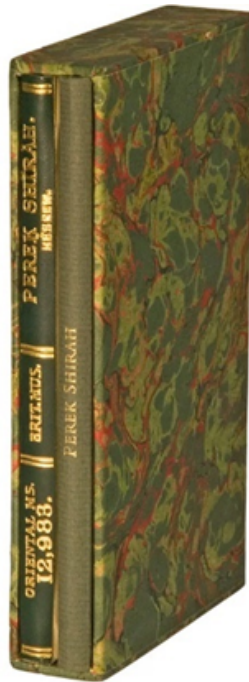
The leather cover is missing from the binding's spine, revealing the reuse of a page of Hebrew printing as a spine-stiffener. (There are scholars who specialize in deciphering the origins of pages that are so used. We knew one in Jerusalem.)

The most interesting feature of the book is an unusual personal note from Rabbi Cederbaum praising the publication and recommending it to the worshipers who, he assures them, will use it with satisfaction. Here is that text in Hebrew:



Seder Sefirat HaOmer - Facsimile of an omer calendar from Italy, circa 1800, from the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary. The word *omer* refers to the offerings of barley brought in the days between the second day of Passover and the festival of Shavuot. During each day of these seven weeks, a special benediction is recited and the day of the counting proclaimed. In this illustrated manuscript, each day is announced and accompanied by a biblical scene, starting with the temptation of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and concluding with the arrival of the Messiah.

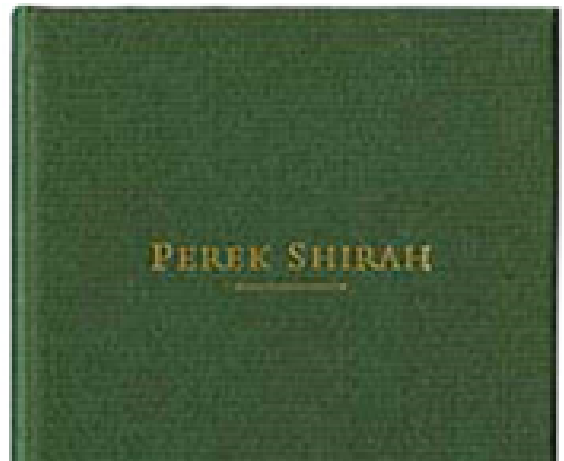
The illustrations in this miniature, in black ink on paper, each with a descriptive caption in Hebrew (some with errors both in spelling and content), are executed in a naïve folk style by an enthusiastic if not overly gifted artist.



Perek Shirah (“a chapter of song”) is a short, anonymous Hebrew tract containing a collection of sayings in praise of the Creator placed in the mouths of God’s creatures. All creation except human beings is represented – the natural and

supernatural orders, inanimate nature, the heavens and all their hosts, the world of plants, and the world of animals. *Perek Shirah* was one of the most popular and widely known Jewish texts in handwritten manuscripts as well as in printed books in the late Middle Ages and thereafter. Originating in the tenth century, this work reflects an acute awareness of the spiritual dimension of nature and the environment. It ends with the hope that study will be transformed into the good deeds that will win heavenly reward, reflecting the Jewish belief in the interdependence of education and prayer. Together, the hymns comprise a kind of cosmic song of praise to God. Most of the hymns are biblical verses, the greater part of them citations from Psalms.

The book on display here is a facsimile edition of ***Perek Shirah: An Eighteenth Century Illuminated Hebrew Book of Praise***. A charming Hebrew and Yiddish manuscript, the original was probably written in Vienna by Aaron Wolf Schreiber Herlingen of Gewitsch, probably the most famous Hebrew scribe of the eighteenth century. Its vellum leaves contain exquisite miniatures of many of the (non-human) “worshippers” within magnificent scenes from nature. A facsimile was published in 1996 by Facsimile Editions in an edition of 550 of which this is number 214. The facsimile is printed on a specially-milled paper in up to seven colors, hand-bound in aged vellum, and tooled as was the original, which is in the British Museum in London. *Perek Shirah* is housed together with a commentary volume in a hand-marbled slipcase. The commentary contains a short introduction explaining the origins of the *Perek Shirah* text, a translation of the original and a description of the manuscript.

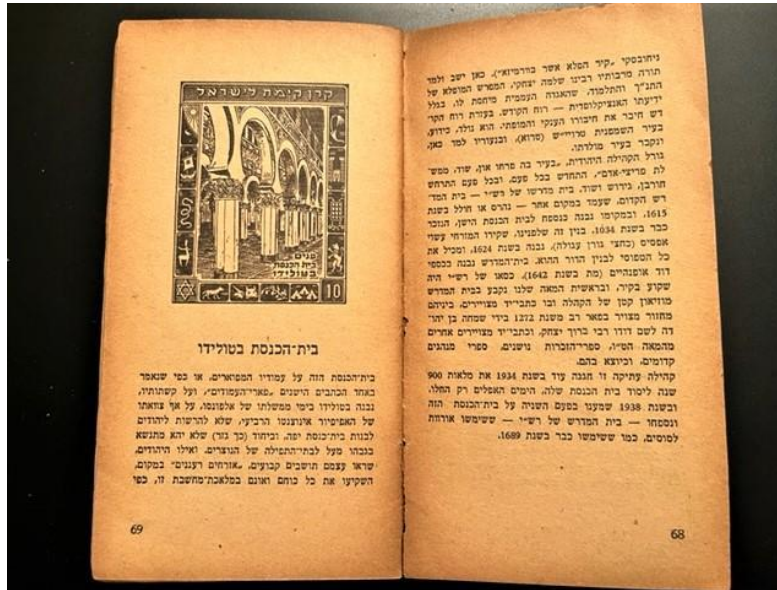




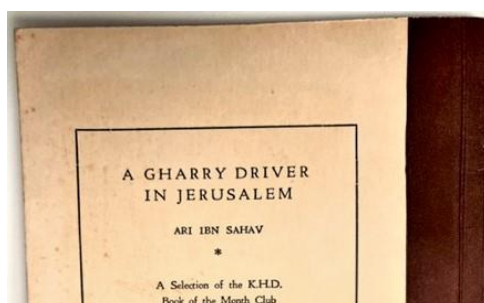
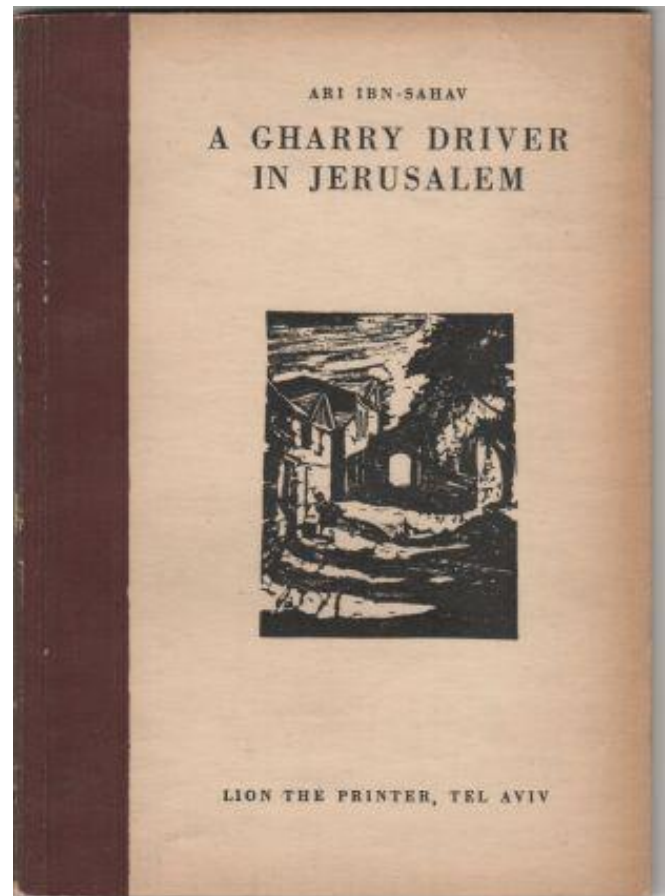
Here are two early paperback books from Palestine/Israel in the 1940s. The cover of the Hebrew language book reads ***Lo Nish'kah'kha Ha'Golah – We will Not Forget the Golah***. (It is interesting to note that author used the word *golah* – Diaspora, as distinct from *galut*, “exile,” the traditional term for Jews living outside the Holy Land). Published in 5708/1947-1948, it is a 141-page tribute to the devastated communities in which Jews lived prior to the Second World War from which Holocaust survivors were then making their way to the homeland, many with great difficulty. The aim of the book is to keep fresh the memory of these great European and North African centers of Jewish life in the minds and hearts of the new *olim* “and so our children will understand the

plight of Jews without a homeland among the nations for which there was no solution other than in the rebirth of a free land of Israel... Let the survivors come to build and be rebuilt.”

The drawing below shows a synagogue in Toledo, Spain, which became a church called Santa Maria La Blanca after the expulsion of the Jews in 1492. It is now a national monument.



The second book, ***A Gharry Driver in Jerusalem***, by Ari Ibn-Sahav, was published on January 1, 1947 by Lion the Printer in Tel Aviv with reproductions of nine woodcuts by Jacob Steinhardt. A *gharry* is a horse-drawn vehicle common in Egypt and India from the beginning of the 20th century and apparently also a principal source of transportation in pre-State Israel. The 92-page book contains six short stories originally written in Hebrew, translated into English by Sylvia Satten, together with a glossary of Arabic, Hebrew, Ladino, Turkish and Yiddish words untranslated in the text. Each story is a fictional vignette of the life of gharry drivers in Palestine, the lowly status attached to those who drove them, and the lives of the poor Jews and Arabs living there.



At the bottom of the back cover of the book is a blacked-out text that read "printed in Palestine."

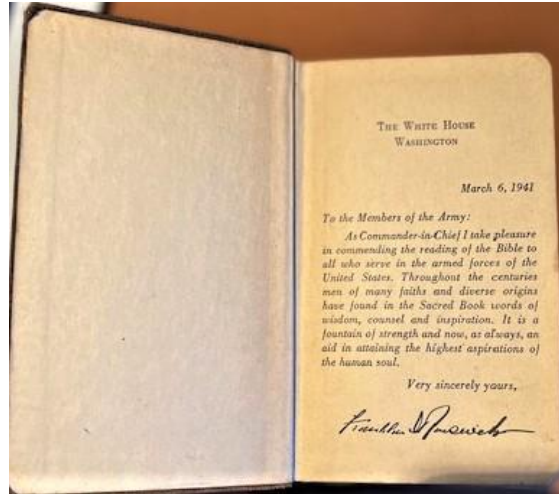
Above it is a full-page description of the book, identifying it as a “Selection of the K.H.D. Book of the Month Club. Membership in the K.H.D. Book of the Month Club is open to leaders of Jewish Youth Organizations and teachers in Educational Institutions.”

The author, who later Hebraized his name to ben Zahav, in 1943 wrote a book about Shylock, using Shakespeare’s protagonist as the starting point for a treatment of antisemitism in Western literature. He also wrote novels and poetry.

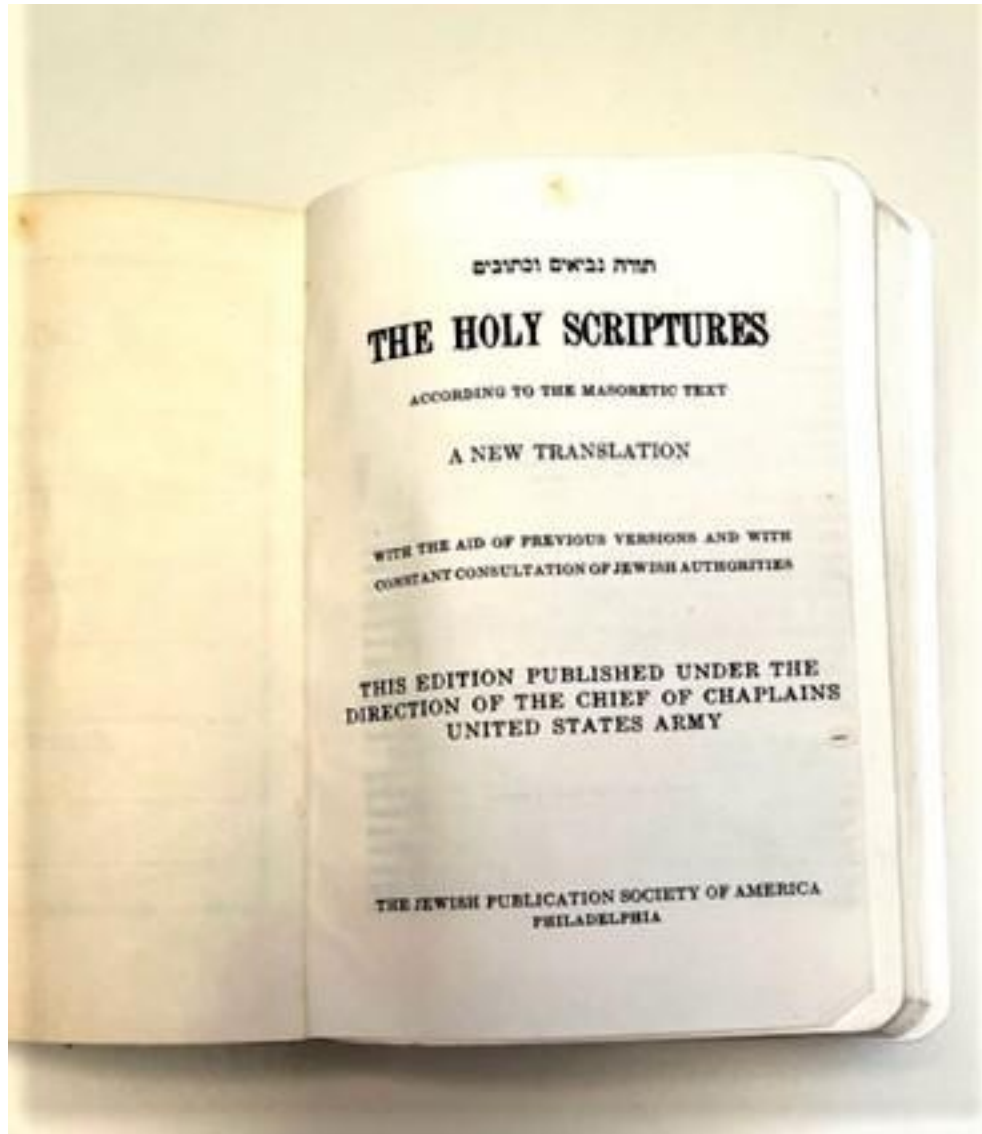
FOUR RELIGIOUS TEXTS FOR JEWISH PERSONNEL IN THE ARMED FORCES OF THE UNITED STATES



Readings from the Holy Scriptures for Jewish Members of the Armed Forces of the United States, published by the National Jewish Welfare Board 1942 with a greeting from President Roosevelt dated March 6, 1941. The volume contains selections from every book of the Tanakh in 512 pages.



The Holy Scriptures according to the Masoretic Text – a new translation. This edition was published in 1945 under the direction of the Chief of Chaplains of the United States Army. The title page includes a Hebrew superscription listing the three parts of the Tanakh: Torah, Ni'vee-eem and K'tuvim (the Five Books of Moses, the Prophets, and Writings). This edition, 1136 pages long, includes the entire Hebrew Bible in English translation.



Prayer Book for the Jewish Personnel in the Armed Forces of the United States was published in 1958 by the Commission on Jewish Chaplaincy of the National Jewish Welfare Board.

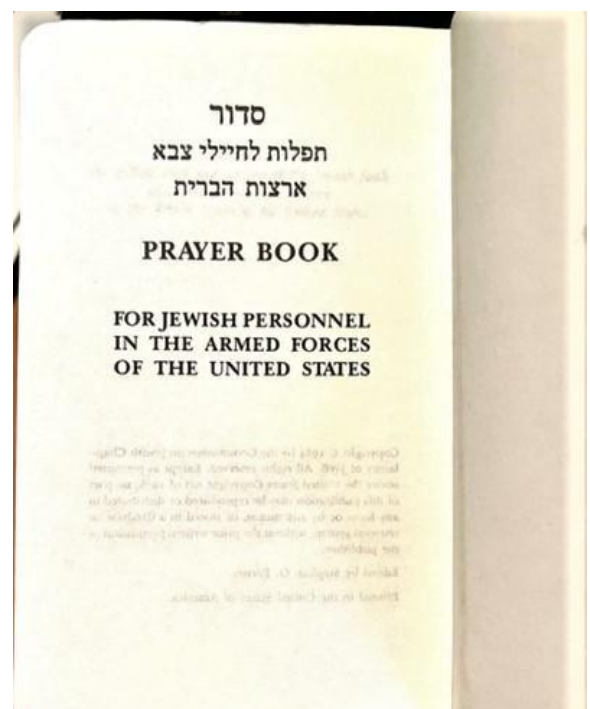
This 470-page volume “is not intended for general use by the civilian population. Its shortened and compact form has been designed for the specific purpose of use by military congregations.... It is hoped that this prayer book will not only be a source of inspiration to the Jewish personnel in the Armed Forces and a link to the chain of faith that binds them to their homes and their families while they are in

the military service, but that it will also be a means of strengthening their loyalty to their religious tradition both during and after their years in the Armed Forces.”

The prayer book includes, in addition to traditional worship services, a 100-page section of prayers from the *Union Prayerbook* (Reform).

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The Prayer Book for Jewish Personnel in the Armed Forces of the United States, published in 1984, includes a full Hebrew title: *Siddur Tefilot L’Hayilei Tzva Artzot HaBrit*. Four hundred and sixty-three pages in length, it follows the traditional text of the Hebrew prayers, but “the new English version is not meant to be a literal translation but rather a



more modern, free rendition designed to reflect contemporary idiom and language.”

This prayer book incorporates prayers from the liturgical texts of the Orthodox, Conservative and Reform movements.

Both the 1958 and the 1984 siddurim contain a very moving prayer that begins

“Far from home and those I love,
I find my thoughts turning to them with affectionate longing.”

During the two years my husband served as a chaplain in the U.S. Navy, he read this prayer at every Shabbat service in our congregation in the Commodore Levy Chapel at the naval base in Norfolk, VA and then in the Jewish chapel at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina. This was 1965-1967, the early years of the buildup to the Vietnam War and many of these service personnel were heading soon to what was then rather deceptively called “West Pac” (i.e., the western Pacific). The prayer never failed to bring tears to the eyes of the sailors and Marines (and to the rabbi as well).

NMP