

Jewish Books in Review

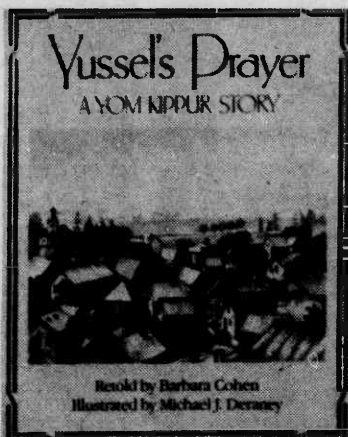
Holiday Law and Love for Children

Yussel's Prayer: A Yom Kippur Story. by Barbara Cohen; illustrated by Michael J. Deraney. Lothrop, Lee & Shepard, 105 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016. 1981. unpaginated. \$7.95 (ages 4-8).

Reviewed by Marcia Posner

On Yom Kippur we are not only enjoined to fast and pray, but to pray with all our heart and mind, for only these prayers allow the gates of heaven to open and our prayers to enter God's presence. Both Midrashim and modern stories have been written on this theme. Barbara Cohen has enlarged upon the tale to create a beautiful new picture book. **Yussel's Prayer** is a story of the power of pure and innocent piety as opposed to the ineffectiveness of rote prayer.

Yussel, an uneducated orphan lives in the barn of Reb Meir — the richest man in town, who sits by the eastern wall of the synagogue — is refused permission to attend shul on Yom Kippur; he must go to the fields and tend to the animals. All day long Reb Meir and his sons sit in the synagogue and pray, but while they pray their minds are on worldly matters. Reb Meir only begins to pay attention to what is happening in the synagogue when he notices that it is long past dark, yet his rabbi has not yet concluded the prayers. What could be delaying him? Meanwhile, Yussel observes Yom Kippur in his own way. He fasts all day, and when evening draws near, the untutored Yussel prays to God the only way he can — with a tune on his reed pipe. Suddenly, in the synagogue, the rabbi began to chant the Ne'lah prayers, signaling the end of the service, his face suffused with joy. At last a prayer was said that was holy enough to open the gates of heaven. You can guess whose it was.



Many children's book illustrators have drawn their interpretation of the shtetl in recent years. Michael J. Deraney's beautifully modelled and textured drawings provide us glimpses of the vast forest, plains, and rivers beyond the closely spaced houses with their steep pitched roofs and narrow lanes. The expressions shown on the faces of the village's inhabitants speak volumes. He shows us the world without and the world within the shtetl — the rich house among the poor, social class distinctions, and the struggle for *yichus* (honor) which were so much a part of shtetl life. In so extending the text he helps Cohen to keep the shtetl from becoming a cliché. Particularly moving are the illustrations of Reb Meir's moment of self-revelation, which have a mystical, surreal quality not unlike the art of Maurice Sendak.

Yussel's Prayer is a welcome addition to the ever-increasing library of children's and young people's books by this talented author which either reflects an aspect of Jewish life or reinterprets traditional stories.

Dr. Marcia Posner is a library consultant. "Jewish Books in Review" is a service of the JWB Jewish Book Council. Reprinted with permission.

Jewish Experience Around the World

The Diaspora Story: The Epic of the Jewish People Among the Nations. By Joan Comay; Random House, 201 East 50th Street, New York, NY 10022. 1981. 288 pages. \$15.95.

Reviewed by Jeffrey S. Gurock

Were Joan Comay's **The Diaspora Story** a scholarly contribution to Jewish historiography, criticisms would immediately be raised about the inevitable gaps in attempting to span so much of our history in one limited volume. But this richly illustrated and beautifully photographed informal history of Jewish life in the lands of their dispersion over more than 3,000 years and across six continents in an art book. As such it doesn't need to conform to strict methodological canons. And like most pictorial studies, it doesn't attempt to offer a profound reinterpretation of the history of Jewish exile. Rather, it permits the documents and art collection reproductions, derived from Tel Aviv's Museum of the Jewish Diaspora to tell the story of Jewish survival within both accepting and hostile host societies.

Part I explores the varieties of synagogue, communal, life-cycle and linguistic rites, ac-



tivities and expressions which contribute to the uniqueness of Jews from each of the corners of the world.

Part II attempts a brief history of the toleration of Jews from the 8th Century B.C.E. to the present. The final chapter examines the impulses and motivations which led the Jewish return to Zion in our era.

In each section, the narrative is interrupted by frequent digressions underscoring either a particular event, personality, or artifact which highlights the period or institution under study. **The Diaspora Story** is for scholar and layman alike an enjoyable work which whets one's appetite to visit the Israel-based center which inspired this book.

Project

(Continued from Page 1)

But it was the rapid consensus on the Joint Venture Agreement, the legal core of the project, that produced the greatest euphoria. It is that agreement and the still-to-be-concluded lease agreement, that will form the basis for the organizational votes.

The Joint Venture Agreement begins: "The institutions join together in this joint venture for the purpose of developing, constructing, maintaining and operating certain joint and individual facilities on a common tract of land...to provide an enriched opportunity for the institutions to design and promote a dynamic and rewarding Judaic experience in this community.

"The institutions further desire to create in this joint venture a constructive and positive interaction and harmonious relationship between the Institutions and other Jewish organizations in this community; to develop a heightened awareness of Jewish cultural, educational, historical and religious activities; to obtain an active and involved commitment by Jews in this community to affiliate with the Institutions and to identify and support Jewish charities and causes; and to create an enriched appreciation by the Charlotte Jewish Community of its Judaic heritage and the importance of the preservation and perpetuation of this heritage."

The agreement spells out who gets which tract on the property; describes the joint educational facility, the recreational facilities, and how maintenance and upkeep will be paid.

It spells out specific agreements between the foundation and each institution, so there is no question of who can do what. For instance, athletic facilities would be reserved as the JCC's area but Temple recreation program would have access.

It confirms the long-standing plan to build the educational and recreational facilities first, the sanctuaries and fellowship halls following at a later date, with the Foundation pledged to assist the Temples in their fund drives.

The Joint Venture Agreement embodies the principles of autonomy for the individual organizations, the key passage of which states, "each institution shall maintain its individual autonomy and continue to have the right to determine the use and operation of the property conveyed or leased to it."

Some of the language in the 30-page document may yet be changed, but there was substantial immediate delight that so much was accomplished.

Though formal sessions ran from 9:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. with few breaks, informal discussions continued during meals, breaks, and on into the night. Many had only a few hours sleep during the weekend.

During the weeks ahead, you'll be hearing much more about the project. Diagrams of the site depicting various stages in Gene Warren's planning have been posted all around the community. You can begin to get familiar with the site and how it will look for them. You'll also get numerous opportunities to ask questions.

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home economist **bulk foods**

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