

A Rabbi in Books - Like a Pig in Mud

As I write this, we are just putting away the last boxes from the annual Beth David Used Book Sale. For four years now, Rose Ackermann, Kathy Kraus and Judith Altman have been marshalling the forces of dozens of volunteers to set up, sort, sell, and repack for next year, thousands of books; and to greet and welcome buyers, give advice, help carry, and offer book boxes. To all who helped out, thank you and Yishar Koach!

In the old days at Beth David, we had bingo. Many of our members turned out to run this smoke-filled fundraiser for our synagogue, and it helped us meet the budget for many years. Still, my heart would sink, when I would meet someone at the hospital or the supermarket, and they would say - "Oh yes Rabbi - I know your synagogue- I've been there forBingo!"

Now , I'm proud when a stranger says to me - "Oh yes, I was at your synagogue for the book sale." What a noble venture for us, called in Hebrew *Am HaSefer*, even in Arabic *Umm il-kitab* - People of the Book. Not only does our book sale encourage reading, literacy, thought and culture, we are actively recycling, providing a social night out for many, helping to support the synagogue and its programs, and making the synagogue and the Jewish people look good in the eyes of the community - what can only be described as *Kiddush HaShem*, a "Sanctification of God's Name." So again, to Rose and Kathy and Judith and all who helped, *Yishar Koach*, and may you all go from strength to strength!

So, what did I do at the book sale? I had the wonderful opportunity to be a "docent", sort of a personal shopper, at the Judaica tables. People came over, and I was able to say - "Can I help you? are you looking for something special?" If they wanted to learn Hebrew - "Hmmm.... How about this workbook?" If they were looking for a basic book about Judaism... I would recommend this or that, mostly Kushner's *To Life*.

But my favorite "clients" were members of our own Jewish community who were looking to grow Jewishly - here, I got so much nachas by saying - "How about *As a Driven Leaf*- a powerful, emotional book about early Judaism." or - "Looking for something in Jewish History? Here's *Jews God and History*, a little one-volume Jewish History that reads like a detective novel, which I remember reading while on the subway in NY, and its being so gripping that I missed my stop! Twice!" or "something really stirring and inspiring - How about *Last of the Just*?" "Something for light reading? - buy this book—Nathan Englander's *For the Relief of Unbearable Urges* (trust me, it's light reading). Or my favorite - "Rabbi, I'm going to Israel soon, how should I prepare?" And then I said, several times, "Take *Exodus* by Uris, and then *The Source* by Michener. No, don't take the paperback - take the hardcover, the print is bigger!" Greater pleasure than this , it's hard to imagine.

Here's my encouragement for this year, until the next book fair - read those books you bought, and if you didn't buy the books I recommended , then go out and buy them , or get them from the library and read them - they are all great Jewish books, which will help you grow Jewishly. And for next year's book fair - cull your bookshelves and please donate all kinds of books (we're already collecting), but for me, selfishly, please, provide the rabbi with some joy - go through your own Judaica book collection at

home, and donate more Jewish books to the book fair, so that we can pass the joy of Jewish reading and Jewish learning and growth to others.

Eliezer Havivi