



Reverend Katz Library

New Book Reviews

September 2025

This month, we are fortunate to have added some varied and interesting books to our collection! We invite you to read the reviews of some of the new books recently received and to come and make your selection from our wonderful collection of books at the Reverend Katz Library. These are some of the interesting new books awaiting you.

Melanie Phillips, *The builders stone: how Jews and Christians built the West – and why only they can save it.* HIS PHI

Western civilization is at a critical inflection point. The Hamas-led pogrom in Israel on October 7, 2023, which resulted in the largest and most barbaric single slaughter of Jews since the Holocaust, presented the West with a clear choice. Would it support civilization or barbarism?

It did not choose civilization. By lining up with Israel's enemies, either through active support or by undermining the Jewish state's attempt to defend itself against a genocide enemy, the West's political and cultural classes put wind in the sails of those out to destroy both the West and civilization itself. What this starkly illuminated was that Western elites had lost not only their conscience but also their minds.

It has often been said that the Jews are the canary in the coal mine. A society that turns on the Jews is a society in deep trouble. The reaction to the October 7 onslaught showed just how much trouble the West is in. It revealed a culture in an advanced state of decay and disintegration. More than that, it also pointed to why that was so. Even more remarkably, as this book will show, the explanation suggests that the Jewish targets of this onslaught could become the West's salvation.

The fact that the Jews were the target of this explosion of hatred and malice wasn't an incidental by-product of Western decadence. The unprecedented onslaught occurred because the Jews are central to Western civilization – a society against which the West itself has venomously and self-destructively turned. The culture wars over race and gender that have so roiled society in recent years are but the latest manifestations of the same story. October 7 turbo-charged the West's decades long process of cultural suicide.

After a depraved pogrom perpetrated by barbarians who slaughtered more than 1,200 Israelis, dragged some 250 of them back into Gaza as hostages to be abused or murdered, and vowed to repeat the exercise until Israel was destroyed, one might have thought people in the West would resolutely stand up for the defence of the innocent against the very great evil. Not a bit of it. Sympathy in support for Israel lasted a few hours. What then erupted was a tsunami of brazen, frenzied Israel hatred and antisemitism. (pp. 1-2)

Lee Kofman and Tomer Paluch, *Ruptured: Jewish women in Australia reflect on life post October 7* LIT KOF

The world feels ruptured, but sometimes it is through the cracks that the light gets in.

In this powerful collection of essays, thirty-six women, including Ramona Koval, Dani Valent, Kylie Moore-Gilbert, Kerri Sackville, Deborah Conway and Rachelle Unreich, reveal how their lives in Australia were irrevocably changed by the events of October 7. From race-walker Jemima Montag's account of competing in the Olympics as a Jewish athlete, to actress Dena Amy Kaplan encountering

hostility when she speaks against Jew-hatred, and author Elise Esther Hearst's attempts to find solace in making comedy, *Ruptured* is both an exploration of the profound rift created in the wake of that devastating day, and an attempt to mend it.

Julie Esther Silverstein and Tami Schlossberg Pruwer, *Chutzpah girls 100 tales of daring Jewish women* BIO SIL

An ancient prophetess, a culinary anthropologist, a computer scientist, and a prime minister are just a few of the one hundred heroines who share space in this gem of a book by Julie Esther Silverstein and Tami Schlossberg Pruwer. *Chutzpah Girls: 100 Tales of Daring Jewish Women* is a timely and inspiring collection of short biographies of exceptional women who span different cultures and eras. Each vignette is accompanied by a vibrant portrait illustrated by a Jewish female artist.

Merriam-Webster defines "chutzpah" as supreme self-confidence, nerve, or gall. The women showcased here have all this and more. Some of the women may be more recognizable to modern readers than others: Anne Frank, Gal Gadot, Golda Meir, and Ruth Bader Ginsburg are just a few. They are certainly more well known today than Ada Yonath, Chani Lifshitz, Helen Suzman, and Sheyna Gifford. Yet each is remarkable in her own right. All of their stories remind us of our potential, encouraging us to reach further than we might otherwise. These are women we should know and know now.

By choosing to feature remarkable women, and not merely women of renown, Silverstein and Pruwer are exemplifying their own chutzpah. Ordinary women can and will do extraordinary things. And should you ever doubt this, just open up this gorgeous book to any page and begin reading.

A brief timeline of Jewish history helps keep us rooted in these iconic women's own eras. The illustrations are evocative, and there is a special section in which girls can record their own stories, achievements, and moments of chutzpah.

This lively book will be a valuable resource in classrooms, libraries, and homes alike.

Doug Gold, *Saving Elli* HOL GOL

A gripping true story of sacrifice, sabotage, survival and impossible choices, in the darkest days of war. One child. Two years in hiding. Three lives in mortal danger.

In Nazi-occupied Amsterdam, near Anne Frank's house, another Jewish girl is hidden. Her name is Elli. Her father has been executed at Mauthausen concentration camp. Her mother is fleeing for her life. Elli is next.

To save her, resistance couple Frits and Jo Hakkens must risk everything, concealing her in a secret space above the ceiling. With shrewd cunning and unflinching courage, they outwit the Gestapo, survive relentless searches and face betrayal from those they once trusted.

By night, Frits forges ID papers; by day, he sabotages warplanes at the Luftwaffe plant. Jo works in the shadows, aiding Jewish fugitives and smuggling underground newspapers through a city crawling with enemy patrols. But, with the Germans closing in, how much longer can they hold out?

Renaud Leblond, *The swimmer of Auschwitz: the incredible true story of the Olympic hero who swam for his life* HOL LEB

The extraordinary story of Olympian who was imprisoned in Auschwitz and survived to tell his story. Alfred Nakache, a Jewish child from Constantine, never imagined that he would one day swim for France at the Olympic Games in Berlin in 1936, nor that he would achieve a world record, as he did in 1941. As a child he was petrified of the water and yet, somehow, through sheer willpower and determination, he rose to become one of the very best swimmers in the world. That was until 1943, when he was banned from the pool - and in the same year, deported and sent to Auschwitz.

Not knowing if he would ever see his wife and daughter again, Alfred battled on, through the humiliation and the pain, even defying the guards by swimming in the water reserves of Auschwitz. Somehow - miraculously - he survived, swimming every day until the end of his life.

The Swimmer of Auschwitz is the unique, true story of a forgotten hero, told with remarkable power and simplicity.

Stefan Zweig, The last miracle: Jewish stories LIT ZWE

This collection from one of the great writers of Europe's Jewish diaspora shows the heat of individual passions blazing out against the levelling forces of history. In stories that move back through time from the First World War to Ancient Rome, we encounter heroes and bookworms, visionaries and gadabouts, patriarchs and rebel children - all tied together across the centuries by their faith and by the intensity with which they live and die.

In 'Mendel the Bibliophile', a bookseller's obsession with his wares blinds him to the progress of war and the threat it poses to his own life. Monomania is also an overpowering force in 'Downfall of the Heart', in which an aging father cannot accept his daughter's embrace of new freedoms. 'The Miracles of Life' is a masterfully ironic tale, which plays with the tension between faith and morality, society and individual, against the backdrop of 16th-century Antwerp and the Dutch rebellion against Spanish rule. 'In the Snow' sees a Jewish community in medieval Eastern Europe fleeing the violence of a Christian sect. And in the longest piece in the collection, the novella The Buried Candelabrum, we go all the way back to the ancient world, where the recovery of a sacred seven-branched candlestick stolen during the sack of Rome will become a young boy's life's mission.