



The emerging story

— CHICAGO JEWISH STAR PHOTOS



By GILA WERTHEIMER
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

JONAH is the prophetic Book which is traditionally read during the afternoon service on Yom Kippur, and two recent books offer insights into it.

Jonah and the Meaning of Our Lives by Rabbi STEVEN BOB (Jewish Publication Society, 227 pp., \$19.95 pb) takes a contemporary, personal perspective.

Unusual Bible Interpretations by ISRAEL DRAZIN (Gefen, 175 pp., \$24.95) examines both Jonah and Amos.

Every child knows that the story of Jonah is the story of being swallowed by a whale, and being spit out, having learned a lesson.

Well, kind of.

Rabbi Steven Bob, who is senior rabbi at Congregation Etz Chaim in Lombard, draws on traditional sources, personal experiences and contemporary ideas to bring the story into our lives and deepen its meaning for us.

In what is a traditional style of Jewish learning, Rabbi Bob looks at the Jonah text verse by verse, turning to the commentators RASHI, ABRAHAM IBN EZRA, DAVID KIMCHI, DON ISAAC ABRABANEL and MALBIM.

He leaves room for references to BOB DYLAN, HILLEL, FRED ROGERS, Moby Dick and DON GIOVANNI, and relates relevant experiences and encounters he has had as a congregational rabbi.

To Rabbi Bob, the Book of Jonah is about second chances.

And more: "In this short book of the Bible," he writes, "we can find answers to the most important questions that people ask: Who am I? Why am I here? What provides meaning to my life?"

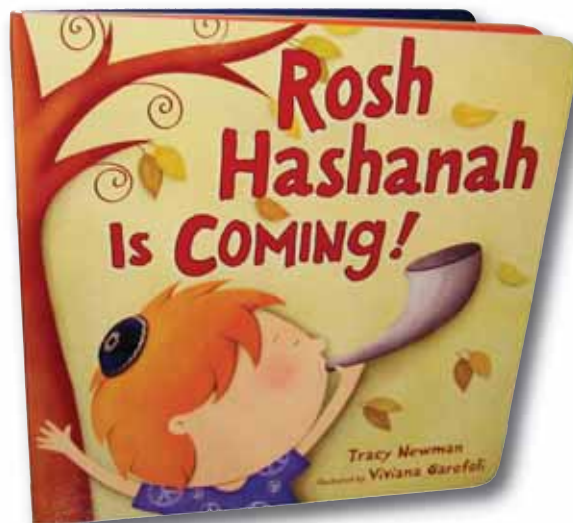
In the fifth volume of his series about biblical figures (the fourth volume, about RUTH, ESTHER and JUDITH, has also just been published), Israel Drazin, prolific author, rabbi and attorney, also comments on the text itself.

He goes as well into the Midrashim, explanations that go beyond the text, and, not surprisingly, cites some of the same major sources as Rabbi Bob.

Drazin devotes several pages to Christian interpretations of Jonah, and to views of Christian scholars.

To Drazin, the Jonah story is marked by its obscurity, its lack of clarity about the events it narrates, and their meaning.

In his view, the Book of Jonah is not at all about repentance and teshuva. Rather, its message is respect of the "other", that is, for all people. ☑



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IF YOU NEED A REASON TO BUY A CHILD A BOOK, you can always find one. But the upcoming holidays are made-to-order. What better way to start a New Year for a youngster than with a brand-new book (or two).

The available selection is great, with something for every taste. Here's just a selection of some of the newest ones for the holidays — your local Jewish bookstore is likely to have these, and plenty of others.

THE YOUNGEST KIDS ARE THE EASIEST to buy for, and another new board book is just right.

Rosh Hashanah Is Coming! by TRACY NEWMAN, illustrated by VIVIANA GAROFOLI (Kar-Ben, \$5.99) adds to the many titles for little ones.

It's in rhyme, with bright, cheery illustrations and because it's a board book, can be banged around and chewed on without any harm.

*"Crisp apples so sweet,
Dip in honey and eat.
Rosh Hashanah is coming."*

Cuddle up with a toddler and enjoy!

In **Maya Prays for Rain** by SUSAN TARCOV illustrated by ANA OCHOA (Kar-Ben, \$7.99 pb), Maya faces a terrible dilemma.

It's a glorious fall day and all of Maya's diverse neighbors are planning to take advantage of it — a picnic, a baseball game, an outdoor birthday party.

But it's also Shemini Atzeret, the holiday that, along with Simchat Torah, ends the celebration of Sukkot. And it's on Shemini Atzeret that Jews recite the prayer for rain.

What should Maya do? If she prays for rain, she's praying to ruin the plans of all her neighbors.

Rabbi to the rescue! Just in time to offer the explanation that lets Maya say the prayer.

Wonderful, slightly eccentric illustrations for a charming, spirited story for ages 4 to 9.

EXCEEDINGLY STRANGE, RABBIT-LIKE CHARACTERS illustrate the re-telling of the biblical story of JOSEPH and his rabbit brothers in **Joseph the Dreamer** written and illustrated by BECKY LAFF (Kar-Ben, 49 pp., \$7.99 pb).

In comic-book style, the well-known incidents of the many-colored coat, the selling of Joseph into slavery by his jealous brothers (after throwing him in a pit) and Joseph's rise in Egypt amongst the Egyptians (rendered as cats) are related, in abbreviated form.

IF YOU KNOW A CHILD who is a Star Trek fan, or if you're an adult who's a fan and wants to introduce the phenomenon — and its Jewish star — to a youngster, there's the perfect book for you.

Fascinating: The Life of Leonard Nimoy by RICHARD MICHELSON, illustrated by EDEL RODRIGUEZ (Alfred A. Knopf, \$17.99).

The publisher lists it as suited for ages 4 to 8, but 4 seems very young and children older than 8 will certainly appreciate the story. It makes a great introduction to the Jewish man who became Spock, and will spark a youngster's interest in the science fiction series that began airing on television in 1966.

In recognition of its 50th anniversary, there is a new film out and a new television series will premiere in January.

Fascinating opens in 1939, with "Lenny" in 3rd grade, making his first stage appearance — singing "God Bless America" at the Settlement House where he lives with his parents, brother and grandparents in Boston.

He's a hit, and his interest in performing is sparked.

In the synagogue, during the Priestly Blessing (he peeks, even though his father tells him not to look) he's fascinated by the way the men hold their hands, their fingers separated, two and two.

He sees the Hebrew letter *shin* that it makes. The entire experience stays with him, and decades later, he makes it universal, as the sign of greeting on his planet (Vulcan), and the phrase, similar to a blessing, "Live long and prosper."

LEONARD NIMOY died in 2015, at the age of 83. A young Jewish boy had followed a dream, and succeeded beyond anything his immigrant parents could have imagined even in their wildest dreams.

SIXTEEN STORIES OF MIRACLES, RELIGIOUS FAITH and life lessons comprise **The Sultan's Trap** by ZALMAN GOLDSTEIN (Jewish Learning Group, 261 pp., \$19.95).

My 13-year-old grandson MENDEL read all the stories and enjoyed them even though, he told me, they are really for younger kids, suggesting 8 to 10 year olds.

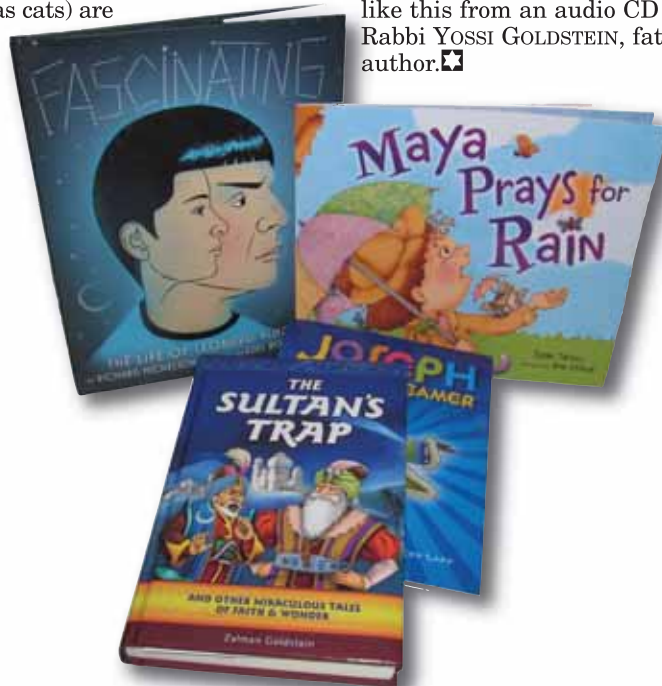
He happens to have an 8-year-old brother, SRULI, who so far, has read the title story. "It's a good story," he pronounced.

Mendel said he found the stories interesting, and that some are kind of strange, or unusual, "but in a good way."

He also said he likes the book's colorful, padded cover.

The boys were already familiar with stories like this from an audio CD by "Uncle Yossi", Rabbi YOSSI GOLDSTEIN, father of the book's author. ☑

KIDS BOOKS FOR THE HOLIDAYS & BEYOND



JEWISH LIFE