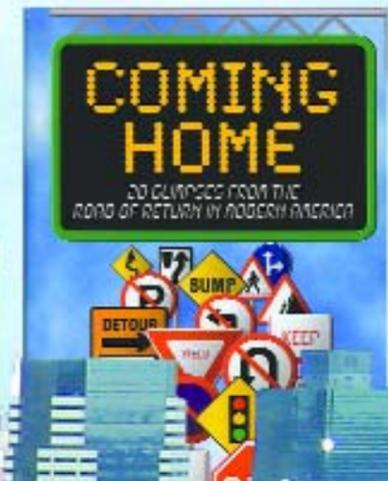
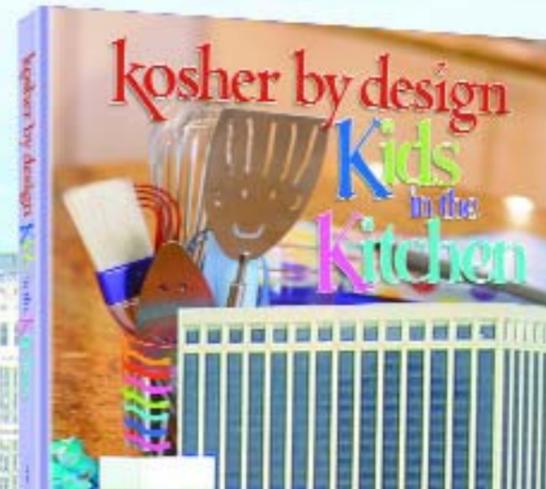
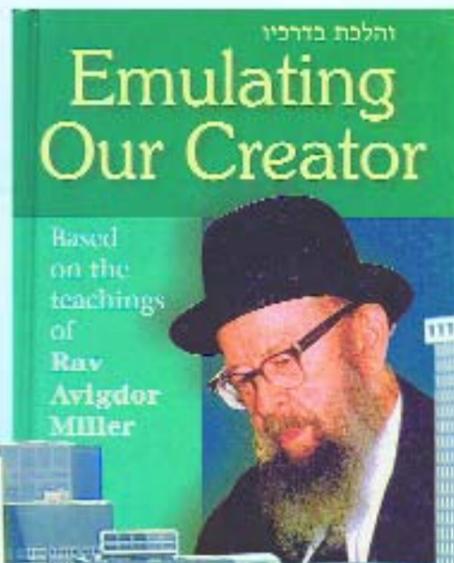
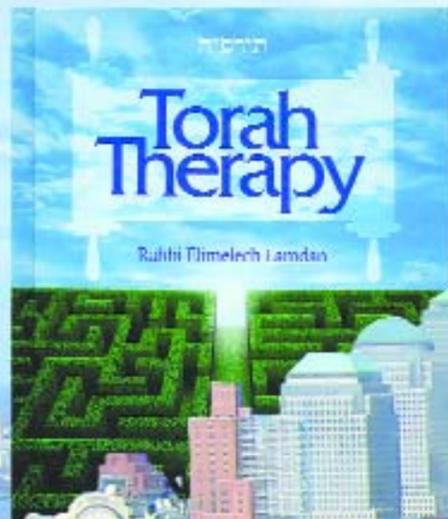


Will it Sell in New York?

Where can you go when you want to escape for a while, learn new things, become inspired, let your imagination flow, or discover tools for changing your life? Where can you do this without ever leaving the comfortable confines of your living room couch? In the pages of a good, entertaining, thoroughly captivating and engrossing new book.



by Esther Heller

“Frum people love to read,” says Miriam Zakon, editor at Targum Press. “They like books that speak to their lives. The *baal habayis* will pick up a Gemara in his free time. The *avreich* might read something lighter such as a kiruv book, Rabbi Tatz, or Rabbi Keleman.

“People like strong stories. You read *The Miracle Next Door* and you say, ‘Wow!’ You feel you can reach higher than you are. The stories often have impact with an immediate lesson. Ahuva Gray, for example. Hers is an interesting story that makes people feel, ‘I can be a better person.’

“The daily readers are also quite popular. They’re very short. People want something quick. A nugget of wisdom, on a regular basis. At the same time, however, people want novels. Long novels.

“Our theory on leisure reading is that women read books about family and men read thrillers. The thrillers give vicarious excitement; everyone is either all good or all bad. They’re fun. As for *shalom bayis* ▶▶

and *shidduchim* stories, everybody loves those.

“Some of Targum’s bestselling authors are Rabbi Lawrence Keleman, Rabbi Akiva Tatz, Libby Lazewnik, Sarah Shapiro, Gila Manolson, and Doron Kornbluth. Rabbi Yitzchak Yaacov Fuchs’ seforim *Halichos Bas Yisrael* remain classic bestsellers.

“Novels don’t have a long shelf life: one to one-and-a-half years. And then there are the books that inexplicably keep on selling and selling. “*No Greater Treasure* by Shoshana Lepon sold well in its time, and years later it keeps on selling. With every book, you do your best. But each book has its own *siyata d’Shmaya*.”

Mrs. Zakon has noticed that the quality of books has gone up. Educated people want quality writing. *Baalei teshuvah* writers are a tremendous resource, far out of proportion to their numbers. They bring the standard up for everyone. The more writers, the higher the standards that can be produced.

Readers should know that although passing books along to other people is wonderful, if you love and want *frum* books, sometimes you should buy a book rather than borrow it. “If you feel you’re gaining so much from books, it’s *hakares hatov*, showing your appreciation, to buy a book and help the industry,” says Mrs. Zakon.

Sun Inside Rain is a recent example of a well-written, high-quality book. Mrs. Zakon remembers thinking, when she first read the manuscript, “*If this doesn’t sell better than other books, let’s all go home!*” It did sell better. Which proved that people do want good writing.

“More manuscripts are submitted now,” Mrs. Zakon notes. “Everyone is doing more. We used to do fifteen titles a year. Now we do forty. There’s room out there.”

Changing Times Mrs. Zakon recalls, in her childhood and teen years, going to public libraries for books. “Now you can’t go there anymore. They’ve become poison to anybody, not just fanatics.

“We have to do everything now,” she explains. “The secular books are no longer appropriate for us. Our lives are so different now from those of secular writers; their world doesn’t resonate with us anymore.”

Targum currently publishes books on issues that “no one talked about five

THE CURRENT BESTSELLERS AT EICHLER’S FLATBUSH BOOKSTORE:

- *Kosher by Design: Kids in the Kitchen*, by Susie Fishbein
- *Silver Spoon Cookbook*, by Devoiry Ginsberg and Leah Schapira
- *Codex Judaica Chronological Index of Jewish History*, by Mattis Kantor
- *One Shining Moment*, by Rabbi Yechiel Spero
- *The Will*, by Chaim Greenbaum
- *Just One Word: Amen*, by Esther Stern
- *Divine Whispers: Stories that Speak to the Heart and Soul*, by Chana Weisberg
- *Lamed Vav*, by Shlomo Carlebach
- *Mirrors and Windows*, by Malky Feig
- *Yours Truly*, by Chava Rosenberg

“Books have become like candy. There are now many different types, a wide variety to choose from, and people like to just pop into a bookstore and try out the latest flavors”

years ago.” In the recent *Heart Rhythms*, for example, a woman leaves her husband because of domestic abuse. “We consider issue books very carefully,” Mrs. Zakon explains. “We’re not the first to deal with an issue; we don’t want to be involved with controversy. We go on what the *rabbeim* are saying and what the other media are publishing. I don’t know if I would have put this book out five years ago.”

Reb Eli Meir Hollander, of Feldheim Publishers has observed that women prefer reading inspirational short stories, novels, cookbooks, and books on prayer. Men also like inspirational short stories, as well as halachah, biographies, and Torah classics.

What kinds of books are popular?

“Books that address important issues that are constantly relevant to most people’s lives,” says Mr. Hollander.

Feldheim’s all-time bestsellers are: *All for the Boss*, *The Bamboo Cradle*, *Shemirath Shabbath*, *The Book of Our Heritage*, *Aneni*, *Just One Word*, *A Tzadik in Our Time*, *The Path of the Just*, *The Way of G-d*, and *Pathway to Prayer*.

“Audiences today expect better quality of production,” says Mr. Hollander. “More sophistication in design and cover

art, more sophistication in halachah books in English, and extensive footnotes. Cookbooks have become much more popular. On the other hand, the lifespan of a leisure reading book has become extremely short. After two to three months, it’s already old.”

Mr. Hollander believes that people read less now than they did twenty years ago. People are generally busier, and have other modes of entertainment competing for their time, such as computers.

Reb Shmuel Blitz, director of ArtScroll’s Israel office has a different view: “More people nowadays seem to be buying books. People are reading more today than, say, twenty years ago. There are less people going to the movies and watching television. And more people learning in yeshivos, and therefore more people reading *frum* books. It’s growing exponentially.”

Thirty years ago, when the company first started, they began with Tanach. Over the years, the company expanded in many different areas: siddur, Chumash, Gemara, Mishnah, and eventually *frum* leisure reading.

“People want to read good books, with a religious message, that will give them *chizuk*, and we try to produce the

best books we can for them,” says Mr. Blitz. “There’s a tremendous spiritual thirst among Jews, and we do whatever we can to slake that thirst.”

ArtScroll’s top bestsellers of all time are in the siddur, Chumash, Gemara, and Tanach categories. Some recent popular books for leisure reading are: *One Shining Moment*, *Mirrors and Windows*, and *The Will*.

Lakewood The Israel Book Shop is a Lakewood distributor that began publishing its own titles five years ago. Director Moshe Kaufman explains: “A distributor is one who brings the products of many authors and publishers to the shelves of bookstores around the world. A middleman of sorts. When you walk into a supermarket, you recognize the names of the products, but you don’t know the name of the wholesaler who deals with all the individual companies, and supplies their products to the grocery stores. It’s the same with publishing. In recent years, we have entered the field of publishing as well.”

How has the book market changed from years ago?

“In the past, it wasn’t like today, where every week it seems more and more books appear. Years ago, the ‘bookscape’ was a lot different. There weren’t so many books on the market.

“An example of a bestseller from that time would be something like the Hertz Chumash, one of the first Hebrew/English translations of the Chumash for the Orthodox market, which has been reprinted some forty times in large quantities, and still continues to sell today.”

“Nowadays, people, especially women and teens are very interested in novels and inspirational books. These are by far the best sellers today. An example of books we carry in this genre would be titles by novelist Eli Shekhter: *Pyramid Base*, *The Banker’s Trust*, *The Most Wanted List*, *Crosswalk*, and *Plan B*, which have all sold beautifully.”

Men, who gravitate more to the texts, have been drawn to a new series called *The Encyclopedia of the Taryag Mitzvoth*. “This has probably been our all-time bestseller for selling the most copies in the shortest time period,” says Mr. Kaufman. “Two printings had to be flown in by air from Israel — a very expensive proposition — in order to accommodate the demand, and it’s now in its third large printing.”

Some classics have been selling steadily for many years: the Metsudah line (Chumash/Rashi, *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*, Machzorim, Selichos, etc.),

known for their linear translation, and the Judaica Press Neviim series (twenty-four volumes, *Mikraos Gedolos* in English), often called “the pink-and-red,” for their cover design.

“There will always be the classics. But readers’ tastes have definitely changed over the years,” says Mr. Kaufman. “Books have become like candy; that’s how I like to describe it. There are now many different types, a wide variety to choose from, and people like to just pop into a bookstore and try out the latest flavors.”

Some publishers noted that most of their sales occur in the New York area. The bottom line in Jewish publishing is: Will it sell in New York?

Selling Books in Flatbush Eichler’s is the leading bookstore in the New York area. Reb Dovid Schulman, manager of Eichler’s Bookstore in Flatbush notes that his most popular books are novels, short stories, and cookbooks. The classics that sell throughout the years are:

The Maggid series, *Visions of Greatness*, and Weinstock’s *Tales for the Soul*.

“People buy books that are good,” says Mr. Schulman. “A novel that keeps the reader captivated.

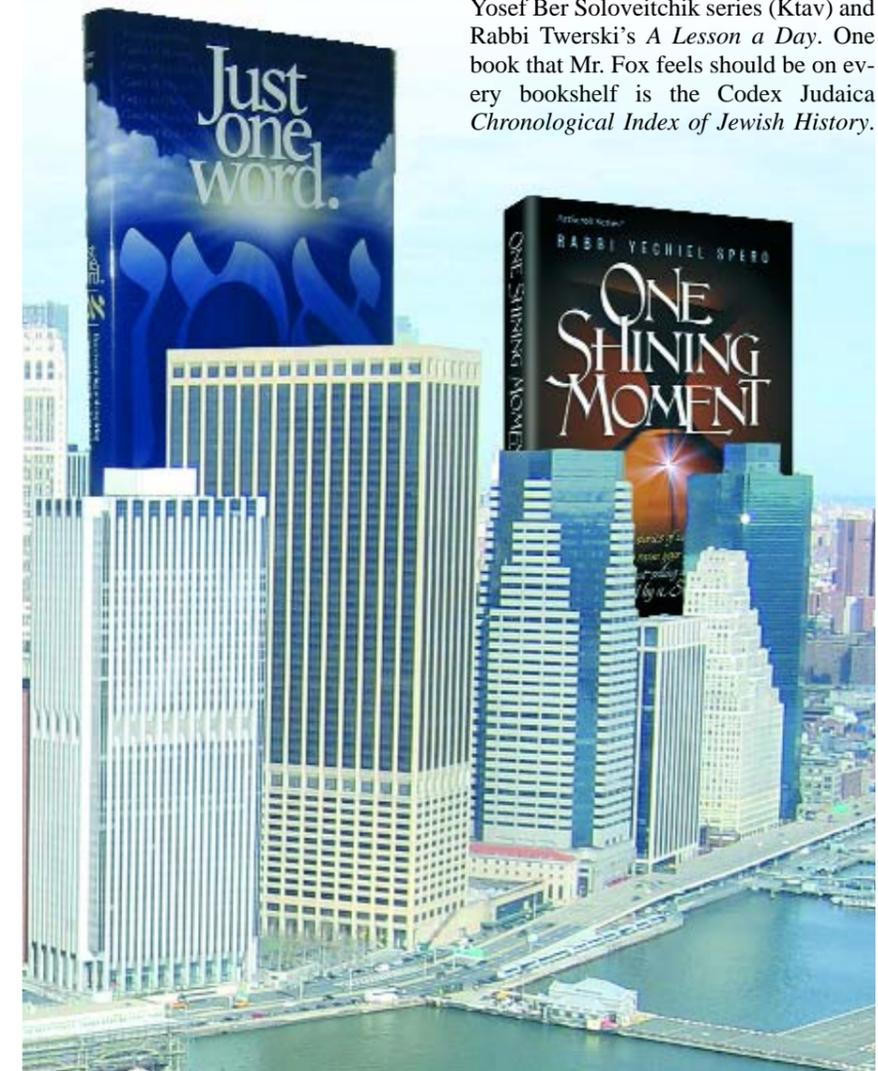
“There are a lot more short story books now. Today people have less time. If you buy a novel, get halfway through, and don’t like it, you’re stuck. But with a short story collection you can go on and read the next one.

“There are books about everything. “Someone came into our store and asked for a book about Jews of South Florida. We found one and ordered it for her.”

More books are coming out now and the number of publishers is growing. “People buy more books because there are more books to choose from now. And families are bigger.” Mr. Schulman observes. “On Chol HaMoed, they’re all buying books for their kids.”

Chicago “I have people coming into my store desperate, looking to buy a novel,” says Avi Fox, owner of Rosenblum’s World of Judaica in Chicago.

His most popular books are the Rav Yosef Ber Soloveitchik series (*Ktav*) and Rabbi Twerski’s *A Lesson a Day*. One book that Mr. Fox feels should be on every bookshelf is the *Codex Judaica Chronological Index of Jewish History*. ▶▶



“It’s flying out of our store.”

Mr. Fox feels that the most significant accomplishment in Jewish publishing is the ArtScroll English Talmud. “More people study *daf yomi* today than ever before. It’s now possible for anybody to study. They can do it, thanks to ArtScroll. Even the first volume of the Yerushalmi Talmud has grabbed the attention of many people. It wasn’t like this fifteen years ago. The publishers have created a *kiddush Hashem*. Not everyone has the capacity to learn without English tools.”

Mr. Fox believes that fifteen years ago the emphasis in the American Jewish community was on raising money for Eretz Yisrael. Now the focus is on strengthening and sustaining Jewish learning and studying.

Is there anything lacking in the books published today?

“There’s a lack of fiction on a high-quality level. There’s no reason why more quality fiction can’t be made available, and channeled through the *frum* publishers. Readers want quality. If it’s available, they’ll buy it.”

Do you sell *Mishpacha* magazine in your store?

“Yes.”

What do your customers think of it?

“Very positive. I have customers who reserve their copies ahead of time. There’s nothing else out there that’s like it.”

The Library Ilana Shalom runs a lending library in Har Nof, Jerusalem, with over 1,000 books. The women who use her library are all avid readers. Many of them come every week to check out new titles. They’re looking for novels, inspirational stories, and self-improvement books, in that order. Popular novelists are Yair Weinstock, Chaim Eliav, Libby Lazewnik, and Rachel Pomerantz. For inspiration, Sarah Shapiro. And for self-help, Rabbi Twerski and Rabbi Frand.

“The ladies want something new, something to relax with,” says Mrs. Shalom. “Novels are first on their list, something to sit back with in the evening

RABBI MOSHE DOMBEY, ztz”l, A PIONEER IN JEWISH PUBLISHING

Born and raised in Detroit, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Dombey studied under Rav Aaron Soloveitchik at Beis Medrash I’Torah in Skokie, Illinois. After coming to Israel, he became a successful teacher in what was then the fledgling *baal teshuvah* movement. He taught at Ohr Somayach and Neve Yerushalayim, and was known for his clear thinking and expression. Over the years, he taught halachah to thousands of girls, both *baalos teshuvah* and those born to Torah-observant families. As one woman commented, “To this day, when I prepare tea on Shabbos, concentrating on all the laws involved, I think of Rabbi Dombey.”



He was respected as a *talmid chacham adir* and “a *baal koreh's baal koreh*.”

Most of all, he was a teacher. He went into publishing as a teacher; publishing was an extension of his teaching.

Rabbi Dombey started Targum Press twenty-five years ago, as a translation press. Hence the name *Targum*, translation. It started with one electric typewriter in an apartment. Rabbi Dombey translated *Halichos Bas Yisrael* into English. “He was always the heart and soul of the office,” editor Miriam Zakon relates.

He became ill eleven years ago and defied death several times. Two and a half years ago, he was critically injured in an automobile accident. In his hospital bed, Rabbi Dombey could be seen with seforim on one side and his laptop on the other. He never let his physical condition stop him. He fought death so valiantly that “nobody thought he would die.”

“He was Targum Press,” comments Mrs. Zakon. He fashioned it into what it is today. In the acknowledgement page of virtually every book, he is thanked personally by the author. His funeral was attended by nearly all the authors in the Jerusalem area, no matter where they published.

Many years ago, a story of this author's was supposed to appear in one of Targum's anthologies. Two weeks before publication, it was suddenly pulled out of the collection. Although the Targum staff apologized, I was amazed that Rabbi Dombey took the time to talk to me; I was an unknown, unpublished writer. He apologized personally and then he kindly and patiently explained in detail what had happened. Despite my disappointment, I realized that I was the fortunate recipient of one man's greatness.

after a long day. To help them take their mind off their lives. They all say they spend too much time reading, but they

just can't put the books down!”

Not so surprising, for the People of the Book. ■

