


high-potential women.

Common sense suggests that Jewish organizations can compete for top talent by creating workplaces where professionals pursue fulfilling careers and contribute their best *because* they are leading decent, meaningful, personal lives. The current economic recession presents a stumbling block to that line of reasoning since many Jewish organizational leaders may feel compelled to cut jobs and ask the remaining staff to step up and do more.

An alternative scenario is to see this economic crisis as the cue for a serious conversation about the structure and goals of our work. What

if every Jewish organization could shift the measure of value, from time commitments to task commitments? Performance would be measured by results rather than face-time. People would work smarter, not harder. Colleagues might collaborate more effectively within departments and as cross-functional teams. In this scenario, senior executives might view flexible schedules and job shares as a pragmatic approach — to keep more professionals employed and allow more women to stay viable in the leadership pipeline. Above all, we would begin to see the Jewish community as a model for intelligent work-life policies and as the reflection of our deepest moral values. 

Book Recommendations for the President

On the occasion of the presidential inauguration, Sh'ma invited an array of thinkers to share a book with President Barack Obama. You can post your suggestions on shma.com.

B'reisheet

The first book of the Torah establishes the principles of civilization: God created all; the universality that human beings are created in the *Tselem Elohim*; the particularity, that the children of Abraham and Sarah are chosen to bring special blessing to the world and given the land of Israel; the obligation to pursue *tsedek u'mishpat*; and the responsibility of civic leadership to implement these principles.

Rabbi Yehiel E. Poupko is Judaic Scholar at the Jewish United Fund/Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago.

mind, even as they contradict, never indulging the extremes of any of them.

Kinney Zalesne is co-author of the best-selling *MICROTRENDS: The Small Forces Behind Tomorrow's Big Changes*.

The Holocaust Is Over, We Must Rise From Its Ashes

by Avraham Burg

In 2006 I visited an antifascist squat in Erfurt, Germany, based inside the factory where the crematoriums had been manufactured. I was enamored with the work of these activists, hav-

ing devoted themselves to preserving historical memory of the Germans' perpetration of the Holocaust and fighting the resurgence of antisemitism in Germany's east. However, I was also disconcerted by the fact that these squatters had employed a rule under which no criticism of Israel was permitted to be voiced on the premises of their squat. Having traveled to Germany from Israel shortly

after the summer's Lebanon war and Gaza incursion, I explained to them that Israel has many enemies and detractors, but far fewer friends that offer admiration, respect, and a compassionately critical voice.

Israel needs friends who care for it deeply, but not blindly. It is for that reason that I recommend the latest work by Avraham Burg, the former speaker of the Israeli Knesset and chairman of the Jewish Agency. Burg's book offers a

Too Close to Call: The Thirty-Six Day Battle to Decide the 2000 Election

by Jeffrey Toobin

Too Close to Call recounts — no pun intended — the five-week Floridian drama that made George W. Bush president. Lucidly written, with a lawyer's attention to detail, Toobin's book reminds us that history often turns on a needle's edge — 537 votes, one Supreme Court justice — and, thus, that seemingly inconsequential actions and events can reverberate well into the future.

Ben Birnbaum, a senior at Cornell University, is writing his honors thesis on John McCain's comeback in the 2008 Republican presidential primaries.

"If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I?"

The best Jewish wisdom is not even in a book but rather in Hillel's twin questions above. In part a recipe for personal balance, these questions are also a north-star for leadership — reminding our president to simultaneously and aggressively advance interests that compete with each other: self and other, party and nation, America and the world. The challenge is to keep them all top of

brave assessment of Israel's self-destructive intellectual tendencies and a clear pathway out of such darkness and into the light. To be a true friend to Israel and the Jewish people, President Obama should read this work to understand the predicament of the Jewish people and the means to address the challenges we face.

Daniel Sieradski, former publisher of *Jewschool.com* and *JTA's* Director of Digital Media, is an activist writer and filmmaker devoted to exploring alternative forms of Jewish cultural expression.

few years, give the book to your daughters so that they will begin to know the redemptive grace of friendship and love. Then, read it again for the sheer pleasure of absorbing a brilliantly crafted and intimately drawn story whose characters will stay with you long after you read the last page.

Susan Seely, a community activist in Newport Beach, CA, works and lives with her husband Arie Katz, founder of the Orange County Community Scholar Program.

The Book Thief

by Marcus Zusak

Read *The Book Thief* and understand how an otherwise good and decent populace can become so beguiled by hate and aggression that they find themselves swept into war. Share the book with your administration so that they might wield more responsibly the power of their words — to build and to destroy, to shatter and restore. In a

"If Not Higher"

by Y. L. Peretz

In what kind of topsy-turvy world is an inconsequential Yiddish language instructor invited to suggest reading selections to the U.S. president? Only in America does such chutzpah exist. So, of the vast stores of Yiddish literature that could be of use to President Obama, I'd suggest Y.L. Peretz's "If Not Higher." This story recounts a Hasidic rabbi whose believers imagine his liturgical abilities to be so powerful that when he prays he is transported directly to heaven. A skeptical Litvak decides to follow him and finds that the rebbe is actually disguising himself as a common worker to help the poor and infirm, an act that convinces the Litvak of the rabbi's holiness and moral rectitude. The simple moral of Peretz's story is that moral action is more important than words, even prayer. And God knows we could use some action — moral and otherwise.

Eddy Portnoy teaches Yiddish language and literature at Rutgers University.

Ostrich Feathers and Global Commerce

Plumes: Ostrich Feathers, Jews, and a Lost World of Global Commerce

Sarah Abrevaya Stein (Yale University Press, 2008, 256 pp, \$30)

REVIEWED BY SHULAMIT REINHARZ

One day, Sarah Abrevaya Stein, an historian and private collector of illustrated works in Yiddish, came across a book by Leybl Feldman (1940) with the grandiose title, *Oudtsboorn, Yerushalayim d'Afrike*. How could Feldman imply that this small town in the South African province of the Western Cape deserved comparison with Jerusalem, Stein wondered. Was it because Oudtsboorn had its own Diaspora — in North Africa, the Ottoman Empire, France, Great Britain, and the United States — wherever ostrich feathers flew?

Stein's study is much more than this charming story. For various compelling reasons, it is a historic breakthrough. As she informs us, "Economic historians...*have not interrogated* the involvement of ethnic communities...in the shaping of individual commodity chains. Cultural historians...*have...avoided* the terrain of supply. Historians of modern global com-

merce, colonial economics, and consumer culture...*have neglected* Jewishness as a category of analysis. And, finally, scholars of Jewish culture *have been understandably wary* of linking Jews to the global market in luxury goods — or to the proliferation of capitalist markets in colonial settings — for fear of reinforcing anti-Semitic stereotypes." (7-8) The result? "*Little serious research* on Jews' involvement in transnational or trans-hemispheric commerce..." (8) [italics added] Until *Plumes*. Stein is not interested in standing alone, however. She argues forcefully that "we must dispel the stigma associated with linking Jews to capital and international exchange," (8) and get on with the studies.

In her lively introduction, Stein enumerates how "Jewishness was an asset to many in the feather trade." (9) But she also argues that "it would be misleading to pin Jews' success in feather commerce on [their] general traits." (9)

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