Experimental Program Finds New, Expanded Use for Talking Books

Children in special education classes at the Magen David Yeshiva School in Brooklyn are making wonderful progress in learning and reading Hebrew, thanks to a JBI pilot program that uses Large Print books in combination with audio recordings. First, second and third graders with dyslexia, or another learning disability, have, in effect, a “private tutor” who sounds out the words into their headphones as they read.

According to Carrie Idler, speech and language consultant at the school, “In general, it’s easy to work one-on-one with children, but with a whole class, it’s difficult for teacher and student. The JBI audio and Large Print materials, especially in combination, are invaluable.”

JBI narrator, Victor Persik, records a Talking Book for the blind and visually-impaired. Now, a Talking Books pilot program assists learning disabled youngsters.

Carrie’s words are backed by results: Although the program has just begun, already three students out of 26 have graduated from special education to mainstream as a result of their improved comprehension!

JBI Now Recording the Jewish Quarterly Magazine

The Jewish Quarterly, a fascinating window into the world of contemporary writing and culture from the U.K., is the newest addition to JBI’s FJC Periodicals Series. It will now light the inner worlds of JBI clients with its own brand of lucid, intelligent and thought-provoking essays, poetry, fiction and book reviews.

Recent articles in the Jewish Quarterly covered far-ranging topics such as the rise and fall of shahs, the tangled history of Jewish calendars, and the Second World War as depicted in Israeli and Japanese children’s books.

Other publications offered by JBI include The New Republic, Commentary, Tikkon, Moment, and The Jerusalem Report. We also record our own monthly JBI Voice, a compendium of articles from a wide variety of publications.

For our Braille readers, we publish a monthly anthology, The Jewish Braille Review, whose content parallels that of the JBI Voice. Our Russian subscribers enjoy their own audio magazine which pays special attention to the literary and cultural interest of the Russian community.

Mission Statement

JBI International
(founded in 1931 as The Jewish Braille Institute) seeks the integration of Jews who are blind, visually impaired and reading disabled into the Jewish community and society in general. We assist those whom we serve to relate to the religious, educational, cultural and communal life of the Jewish people. Our scope is international and we serve those of all ages and backgrounds.
JBI Read-In Teaches Charity

The JBI Great National Jewish Read-In has just completed its 26th successful year! The Read-In is an experience that teaches Hebrew School children the importance of charity, helps build our Children’s Audio and Braille Libraries, and turns reading into competitive fun for sighted Jewish children across America. Participants ask family members or friends, or local businesses to sponsor them by donating a suggested amount, perhaps $5, for every book the student reads during the event — conducted during the months of October, November and December. The excitement builds as students follow the fundraising progress and see their school’s results on the web.

Donations go to the JBI Children’s Library, containing Braille volumes and audio books for children ages 5 through 15. They include nursery stories, folk tales, picture books, young adult fiction, poetry, Judaica and textbooks. It’s a library for blind parents who want to read to their children, and for blind children and young adults who want to keep up with their sighted classmates and friends.

The Read-In’s grand prize is a $1,000 U.S. Savings Bond, with valuable gifts such as digital cameras for runners-up and recognition certificates, souvenir baseball caps, and other prizes for all. The most lasting prize is the satisfaction of helping build a better world for boys and girls just like themselves who happen not to be able to see. This year’s winner is Andona Zacks-Jordan, from Temple Anshe Hesed in Erie, PA! Andona, who is an avidreader, once again raised over $2,000 for blind children through JBI’s Great National Jewish Read-In. Congratulations, Andona!

Dr. Abraham Nemeth: Teacher, Inventor and Volunteer

We are proud to count a remarkably inspirational man, Dr. Abraham Nemeth, among those who help us edit and compile our audio and Braille texts. Blind since birth, Dr. Nemeth, who turned 87 last October, lives a life that defies disability. In 1985, he retired as Professor Emeritus of Mathematics at the University of Detroit Mercy. Since then, his achievements for members of the blind community — and especially for the Jewish blind — rival even his remarkable academic career.

Dr. Nemeth devised a multitude of tools used by blind individuals, including a circular Braille slide rule and the internationally used standard Braille system for writing math, aptly termed the Nemeth Braille Code for Mathematics and Science Notation. Also, while teaching himself to play piano, Dr. Nemeth discovered there was no Braille music dictionary for reading music signs in Braille; so, in 1954, he wrote one himself.

“We have had a very long and, for us, a very meaningful association with Dr. Nemeth for more than 50 years,” said Dr. Ellen Isler, JBI International President and CEO. “He helped us produce our first Hebrew Braille Bible.”

JBI’s Hebrew Braille Bible was the first book of its kind, combining the oldest language, Hebrew, with the newest one: Braille. Following the Bible, JBI enlisted Dr. Nemeth to work on several Braille prayer books. “What Dr. Nemeth does requires a lot of textural knowledge as well as a perfect knowledge of Hebrew Braille,” Dr. Isler said. “There aren’t many people who have the combined knowledge needed to do this editing and compilation. He is a unique resource.”

Dr. Nemeth’s current work for JBI is the conversion of The Complete Artscroll Siddur (by Nosson Scherman) into Braille. The Artscroll Siddur is the most popular Orthodox Siddur in use today.

To learn more about this remarkable man, visit our website at http://www.jbilibrariy.org/jbi_points/index.html

(The above is taken from an article published in the Detroit Jewish News. Photo is courtesy of American Printing House for the Blind.)
ABROAD

JBI Senior Summer Camp in Russia

- JBI’s Senior Summer Camp in Russia serves over 15,000 people. While we work hard to provide our library materials to the large number of those who need our services, we also focus on the individual. With the support of our donors we hope to do yet more for those who have already suffered enough.

As summer approaches, so do rare days of happiness for scores of elderly Russian and Hungarian men and women who are vision-impaired or blind, homebound and sometimes completely isolated. JBI whisked 500-600 seniors from Moscow, St. Petersburg and cities in Hungary to the countryside for nine days of fresh air, companionship and activities. Participants enjoy music, good food, Sabbath candle-lighting services, therapeutic regimens, lectures and festivities. Most of all, they reconnect to their capacity for happiness.

Two recent vacationers sent us a note which expresses just how genuinely appreciative they are of the respite:

“[...] We wish this wonderful time in Uspenkoye (not far from Moscow) could last longer. In the big city life for visually-impaired is so difficult... in the JBI Summer Camp all is different: there is freedom, fresh air, so many wonderful flowers. After lunch we always gathered in the lounge and had a great time: talked, recited poetry, listened to talking books, exchanged opinions on various topics... it is wonderful to communicate and meet each other! The JBI Camp gives us energy for a long time.”

A van of Russian seniors visits the JBI Senior Summer Camp, a nine-day retreat in the Russian countryside. Right: The Camp offers seniors social interaction, companionship and therapeutic activities as well as religious observance.

2005 Haggadah Outreach Introduces 1,500 to JBI

- JBI’s Annual Haggadah Outreach Campaign once again reached over 1,500 visually-impaired individuals around the world, introducing them to the unique, free services of The JBI Library. Our outreach work consists of everything from events at Jewish Community Centers and Ys in New York and Southern Florida, to advertisements in such widely circulated publications as the Jewish Journal of Great Los Angeles and the Jewish Press, to banner advertisements on the websites of Ha’aretz of Israel and The Jewish Chronicle of London. Part of JBI’s mission is to let those who need us — in the United States, Israel and around the world — know about us! The very first call that came from Israel via our new toll-free number was from a visually-impaired woman in Safed.

New Children’s Low-Vision Clinic Coming Soon!

- Work is beginning on a dedicated Children’s Clinic within JBI’s Low-Vision Clinic at the Sourasky Medical Center (Ichilov Hospital) in Tel Aviv. With the help of The Israel Charitable Foundation and other donors, JBI will be able to offer the hundreds of young children who are treated each year at the clinic a welcoming environment, including a congenial, more child-friendly waiting room and examination stations equipped with instruments specially designed for use with children. The additional space will enable us to devote more time each month to treating more of these deserving children. Currently, the Low-Vision Clinic sees children only once a month.

The Medical Center is one of the largest hospitals in Israel and serves the greater area of Tel Aviv/Yafo. Among its patients are severely vision-impaired children, adults, new immigrants, veterans of the Israel Defense Forces and victims of terrorism.

For more information about the free services of The JBI Library, call 1-800-433-1531 or visit JBI online at www.jbilibrary.org
JBI Talking Book Discussion Groups on the Rise

JBI Talking Book Clubs bring JBI Talking Book subscribers together for stimulating discussions. The steady rise in their popularity is explained in the words of one member who told us, “The Club keeps us all reading and thinking. Almost no one ever misses a meeting. It makes me — and I believe all of us — feel like we’re still a part of things.”

In Florida, we now have 26 groups! They are made up of retirees and working people from all walks of life and religions. One of our most recently established groups counts a former dean, retired teachers and attorneys among its members. After several members of this chapter heard an enthralling television interview with Bruce Feiler, an award-winning journalist and the author of Walking the Bible, they requested that we provide them with copies of the Talking Book so that they might hear and discuss it. We immediately recorded the book and sent them copies. A lively discussion ensued, whetting their appetites for more reading and more stimulating discussion. These readers will now experience far less of the isolation that blindness and visual impairment often bring the elderly.

The JBI Talking Book circulating library contains over 13,000 titles of audio books in English, Russian, Yiddish, Hebrew, Hungarian, Romanian and Polish, and now Spanish.
It won’t come as a surprise to anyone that the fastest growing population in America is Spanish-speaking and that among that population a large number are Jews. We at JBI are happy to report that we are ready and able to respond to the needs of those among them who are blind or visually-impaired.

In Southern Florida in particular, the Spanish-speaking population has swelled as waves of immigrants flee dismal economies and political unrest in South American countries. The new Jewish population in Florida is so large that during the High Holy Days, a sign on a local synagogue proclaims, “Yom Kippur en español!” But Spanish-speaking Jews have been settling throughout our country for years. Today there are approximately 55,000 in the United States, living primarily in New York, Miami, Chicago and Los Angeles.

Rabbi Manny Vinas, for example, leads the Lincoln Park Jewish Center in Yonkers, a vibrant and diverse bilingual community. He is also the founder and publisher of Tora Tropical, the first Spanish-language Jewish newspaper with a circulation of 15,000. He was born in Miami to Jewish parents exiled from Cuba and traces his family roots to Spain.

“I receive approximately 100 to 150 e-mails every week from Jews requesting the Torah in Spanish,” says Vinas. And with more Latin American Jews coming to the U.S. every day, it is a growing population that needs the materials that JBI provides.”

In recent years, many people have requested that JBI add Spanish to its roster of Talking Book languages. So we are now building that collection as an addition to our holdings in English, Russian, Yiddish, Hebrew, Hungarian, Romanian and Polish. And for those who need us but are still in their homelands, our Talking Books travel the world to bring them the light of learning and the companionship of good reading.

I find it a real privilege to be able to extend a welcome to the latest wave of American Jewish immigration. If you are a native Spanish speaker, perhaps you would also like to contribute, by volunteering to record books for us in the JBI Studios, located in New York City. Volunteers are urgently needed. Please pass it on and contact us at 1-800-433-1531. Thank you.

And gracias! 

Judy E. Tenney
Chairman
Become a Member of JBI’s Tikvah Society

Membership in The Tikvah Society is open to anyone who makes a gift by will or enters into a life income arrangement (insurance policy, trust, IRA or gift annuity) with JBI. Through their thoughtfulness and planning, these individuals help ensure a bright future for the vision impaired and blind worldwide.

For more information or to become a member of The Tikvah Society, please visit our web site at www.jbilibrary.org or contact Beth Rudich at 1-800-433-1531.

Letter of Thanks

Thank you ever so much for your telephone call to me and for the wonderful Large Print Haggadah. I have needed one for several years, since being diagnosed with having Macular Degeneration. Sending this to me was a real "mitzvah"... I can’t tell you how much I appreciate having this to use at our family Seder.

Wishing you and yours a
Happy Pesach,
Sandy R., Safed, Israel

Use Your “Voice” as a JBI Studio Volunteer!

One way to help support JBI is to volunteer to work in the JBI studios. All you need is a love of literature and an interest in making the printed word accessible to people who are blind, visually impaired, physically disabled or learning disabled. (JBI materials are available free of charge.)

JBI records approximately 300 books a year, plus periodicals such as The New Republic and the Jerusalem Report. The books range from best sellers like The Devil Wears Prada to the history of Western Europe, from Madeline Albright’s autobiography to Bummy Davis vs Murder Inc. We’ve even recorded cookbooks.

Trained by JBI studio personnel, volunteers name books and magazines and/or serve as directors during recording sessions. Working together, the narrator reads as the director monitors the recording for clarity, pacing and pronunciation and corrects and edits mistakes.

With the largest audio library in the world of books and magazines of Jewish and general interest, JBI’s collection continues to grow because of volunteers who are the heart of our recording program. If you’re interested in volunteering, please call JBI’s 24-hour volunteer hotline at (212) 889-2525, ext. 300, and leave a message for Lisa Kirsch. ♦