

President's Message January 2008

The *genizah* is a place for storing religious books that are out of date or otherwise not used anymore. This issue will arise as our congregation moves to adopt the new prayer books. The old prayer books will either have to be sold or given to another temple, or stored in a *genizah*.

Books and ritual objects containing the name of God cannot be destroyed according to Jewish law. We have a *genizah*, of sorts. Ours consists of several tubs containing books and are stored downstairs, next to Mike Weiner's classroom. Our Hebrew school students take great care placing outdated materials in these receptacles.

It is also a Jewish custom to honor the dead by burying books with the casket. This custom was observed recently when we put our beloved congregant, Richard Herson, to rest. It is worth noting that he was probably one of the most well-read of our fellow congregants.

The most famous *genizah* discovered was in Cairo. I now quote from page 406 of the [Encyclopedia Judaica](#) found downstairs in the Jewish Center, in the bookcase outside the lift. "The Cairo *genizah* was found in the attic of the [Ben Ezra Synagogue](#), whose worshippers had preserved ancient Palestinian customs, and in which Maimonides, his son Abraham, and other great scholars had taught. This synagogue was built in 882 on the ruins of a Coptic church sold to the Jews. In 1890 it was rebuilt, but the attic was not touched. The attic was situated at the end of the women's gallery; it was without doors or windows and could only be reached by means of a ladder through a large hole at the side."

In 1896, [Solomon Schechter](#) traveled to the Cairo *genizah*. There, he was able to assemble about 100,000 pages, which he took back to Cambridge University. Schechter and other researchers were able to synthesize this material, publishing their results in several scholarly books.

Caves were also used as *genizot*. The most famous documents found in these caves are the Dead Sea Scrolls. One archeologist who worked with these scrolls was the noted Yigael Yadin. His earlier career was as head of the Israeli Defense Forces, appointed to that post by [David Ben-Gurion](#).

Two weeks ago, before I personally undertook this "study," I knew little if any of this material. It is amazing what treasures lie downstairs in the bookshelves of the Jewish Center.

Shalom,

Jim Arvesen (917-941-4332, arvesen@att.net)

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