

'A perfect bat mitzvah gift'

By Sharon Marks Altshul

IN 2005, Aliza Lavie's book *Tefillat Nashim* was published in Israel. The Hebrew best-seller was translated into English under the title *A Jewish Woman's Prayer Book* and won the 2008 National Jewish Book Award. Lavie researched and gathered prayers for women's milestones from a variety of Jewish traditions through the ages, with special prayers for the Sabbath, holidays, and important dates of the Jewish year, prayers to mark the range and scope of life events from pregnancy and childbirth to tragedy and death.

Recently, she published a new book in hardcover, *Iconic Jewish Women: Fifty-Nine Inspiring, Courageous, Revolutionary Role Models for Young Girls*, for an English-speaking audience. This edition was adapted from her book in Hebrew published last year with the stories of over 70 women of distinction.

Touted as "A perfect bat mitzvah gift," *Iconic Jewish Women* is divided into 59 chapters, each with a brief biography of a particular Jewish woman. At the end of each biography are "Add your voice" suggestions for the bat mitzvah girl, with a vast range of ideas to explore, give back, see something new, and get out of your comfort zone.

Lavie discovered the prayers of Fanny Neuda, written in German, when researching *Tefillat Nashim*. The prayers were not originally for publication but were translated into Hebrew and Yiddish. In Chapter 38, in a short piece on Neuda, Lavie informs us that there was a special prayer for young women – essentially a prayer for a bat mitzvah – that was also in the book. Jewish women in the Holocaust were said to hold onto Neuda's prayer books.

At the end of the book, there is a timeline that begins with the biblical Sarah in the 18th century BCE and goes to contemporary times with Rachel Freier. The women Lavie had chosen to highlight are "revolutionary and

broad-width," from Shulamit Aloni to Sara Schenirer.

The chapters, however, are organized in alphabetical order, beginning with Jewish spy Sarah Aaronsohn and ending with poet Zelda. Aaronsohn's story might be a bit shocking for young readers, but the concluding story of Zelda's poetry is uplifting.

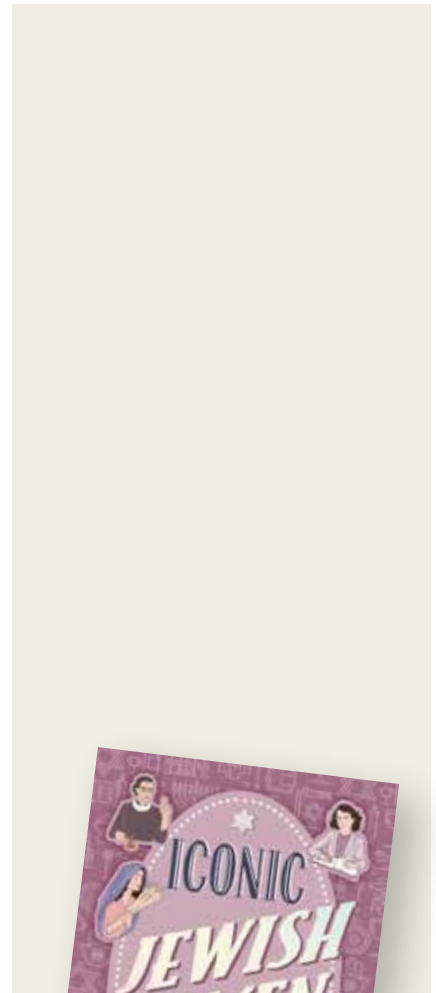
While bar mitzvah celebrations are more or less customary in Jewish tradition, the celebration of a bat mitzvah is still evolving. Besides a comprehensive glossary at the end of the book, various suggested bat mitzvah blessings are included. At one Israeli synagogue, the parents and grandparents were handed a copy of Rabbanit Oshra and Rabbi Zvi Koren's blessing on page 337, with Lavie's book credited at the bottom of the card.

Is there a right way to celebrate a bat mitzvah? In families, the ceremonies can vary greatly. Lavie offers parents good advice in her introduction: "Your job is to listen to the dreams and wishes of the bat mitzvah girl, to search with her the ceremony, activity or celebration that will give the occasion meaning and remain with her years later."

Iconic Jewish Women has a plethora of ideas and suggestions for the bat mitzvah girl to find inspiration.

Lavie's list of accomplishments, besides authoring multiple books, includes serving as a senior lecturer at Bar-Ilan University and as a former member of the Knesset, where Lavie served as chairperson of the Committee on the Status of Women and Gender Equality and chairperson of the Committee to Combat Women Trafficking and Prostitution. After leaving the Knesset, she served as chairperson for the Herzl Center.

Deena Glickman is credited with the English translation of this Gefen Publishing House publication. ■



**Iconic Jewish Women:
Fifty-Nine Inspiring, Courageous,
Revolutionary Role Models
for Young Girls**

Aliza Lavie

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