Realizing the Vision

David Blumberg

The written word has been the key mode of expression for the Jewish people throughout its history. Books are the cultural treasures we have inherited, the fruits of our nation, and everyone with a heart who understands man and the book are eternally intertwined. This is not just to the Jewish people worldwide, but to the entire world.

The National Library renewal project heralds a new era for both the State of Israel and the history of our people. For the first time, it allows every individual the opportunity to connect directly to our cultural heritage. In his thought-provoking essay, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, in the following pages, describes how the development of Judaism is intimately intertwined with a tremendous technological revolution – that of the written word. The National library renewal project, first and foremost as the leading research library in the humanities and Jewish studies.

In addition to its role as an academic library for the Jewish people and the citizens of the State of Israel, in its new home adjacent to the Knesset, the government seat of the State of Israel, the National library the status of a public benefit corporation, passed by the Knesset in 2007, which conferred on a signiicant milestone was the National library law. This law deining its goals and roles, regulating its activity, and enhancing the library building which will safeguard the intellectual treasures of our people and preserve them in Jerusalem, as the leading research library in the humanities and Jewish studies. Next to the building will be “letters of light”, an environmental work by renowned sculptor micha Ullman based on the ancient Kabbalistic text Sefer yetzira (book of Creation) and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the library was launched in 2008. The National Library of Israel since 2008.

Our deep sense of shared purpose accelerates us toward fullling our vision of the National library in its new home as an institution for the knowledge of the history of our people and the lives of our ancestors.”

In 1985, on the anniversary of the exile of the Jews from Spain, the Jerusalem chapter of the b’nai b’rith established the national library for the Jewish people. One individual central to turning this dream into a reality was Dr. Chaim Nachman Bialik, in his work “The Hebrew book”, “… our people, which is naturally inclined to cherish and ponder over books, has at all times derived spiritual satisfaction from delving into this treasure-house, which individual giving him his favorite comfort” (Bialik translated by Minnie Halkin).

The National Library renewal project is grounded in the information revolution of the 21st century.

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A Library for the Twenty-First Century and Beyond

Lord Rothschild

It is more than fifteen years since our Foundation, Yad Vashem, brought together a committee to consider how the National Library could be restructured to serve the needs of Israel and the Jewish people.

This endeavour offers Israel a “once in a lifetime” opportunity to add to the many illustrious institutions which the State has created in the course of its short life since 1948. We already have a democratic society, a parliament, an army, universities and museums. What we do not yet have is a National library to the international standard expected of Israel.

This is about to change. Thanks to the support of our Foundation, we now have the opportunity to create a library which fulfils the needs of the 21st century and beyond, with a wide range of other collected materials, are to have a permanent home and one where it should be – and wherever possible, in the Middle East. It will serve to define and expand the role and purpose of the National Library in today’s digital world as we live through the most important revolution in terms of knowledge since the invention of the printing press. Our library will continue to veerote the book, but at the same time we have to be as engaged with pixels as we are with ink and paper. We have to serve a virtual, global community as well as a local constituency.

We have to plan seminars, exhibitions, music, concerts and photography to augment and support the Library’s role in education and research. The Library will have the responsibility of nothing less than preserving and illuminating the history of Jewish civilization. The opportunity comes at just the right time for our “up-and-coming” nation. The revolution in information technology allows us to create a universal library, accessible throughout the world and hopefully, with no geographic centre of gravity. Now, at long last, it is more than fifteen years since our Foundation, we now have the opportunity to create a library in today’s digital world as we live through the most important revolution in terms of knowledge since the invention of the printing press. Our library will continue to veerote the book, but at the same time we have to be as engaged with pixels as we are with ink and paper. We have to serve a virtual, global community as well as a local constituency.

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For a few years our treasured books were scattered, with no geographical centre of gravity. Now at long last, these volumes as well as those yet to be written, together with a wide range of other collected materials, are to have a permanent home and a place where it should be – in the heart of Jerusalem. It is astonishing that for “the People of the Book” it has all taken so long.

The National Library of Israel

Excerpts from remarks delivered at the President’s Residence in Jerusalem, October 2014.
A New Home for the National Library of Israel

David S. Gottesman

Ever since I started elementary school, I have always enjoyed my visits to libraries. Whether in grade school, college or graduate school I was fascinated by the ability to roam and explore any subject that caught my interest. As I began working, I was able to visit many libraries around the world and always was intrigued by the way in which they presented users but would attract thousands of people for whom knowledge and connection. Although the digital age has enhanced the ease for human beings to connect and interact through the internet and other rapidly developing technologies, irrespective of where one is situated, there is still a great need in the 21st century for an inviting and inspirational physical meeting space.

The idea of a new National Library of Israel is one of the great projects of the Jewish people. What makes this new library different to any other in the world? What is its special relationship between Jews and books?

When Anson Arzt and his daughter Kasia published their secular crate, they...and the great historian Simon Dubnow, who often argued that Jews inhabit language even more than land. The great historian Simon Dubnow, who often argued that Jews inhabit language even more than land.

The Talmud tells a story of Rava who was waiting for Rava to turn up to a lesson, but Rava was late because he was spending extra time at afternoon prayers. Rava says to Rava, “Look at this; he is forgetting the holiness of eternity and immersing himself in the pleasure of this world!” (Kalikkay talmud). In is there any other religion in the universe that would consider prayer a kind of secular pursuit – the pleasures of the world – compared to the eternity that you get in prayer? I don’t know any other religion that has to make study higher than even prayer itself. Indeed, the festivals are called in the Torah shabbat kedosh; the word mitzvah, is another name for Torah itself because from the very onset, in synagogue and in the Temple itself, these places were not just of prayer but of reading and interpretation of the sacred texts. Books, and the arts of reading and writing, studying and teaching, interpreting and expounding, are all things absolutely fundamental to Judaism. For instance, a few years ago I was asked by the British Secretary of State for Education whether it felt strange beginning a new year -bool Shankman - a different time from everyone else. I replied that you when you celebrate the New Year depends on what is really important in your life. What is the most important thing for Jews? It's school. It's learning, so the Jewish New Year is one of the parts of the world always begins at the same time as the academic year. The Secretary of State asked: Should Rabbis, do you have something to help us to explain, a saying, a sentence, to help us encourage a year of literacy?” I said, “What do Jews do at this time of the year?” We say, “yidn, shreibt un yidn, shreibt un. The National Library of Israel | Katvenu b’sefer...
was the invention of writing. Writing was, in effect, the invention of the alphabet. In the timelapse of history, that simple technology allowed human knowledge to become cumulative and expand beyond the capacity of a single human memory. What was the first writing system in history? It was a system based on Semitic script. Writing has been independently invented seven times in different parts of the world: mesopotamian cuneiform, egyptian hieroglyphics, the Chinese ideograms, the indus Valley script, the Minoan script known as Linear A, and later on Linear B.

But there is a problem with writing. Whether writing takes the form of pictograms, or ideograms, or alphabets, those early writing systems all involved a very large number of symbols, from the Chinese, which had about 40,000 different symbols – to even the most stripped-down, basic, hieroglyphic systems, which got down to 800 symbols. That is still astronomical enough. When there is writing in the form of these pictograms or ideograms, the result is a hierarchic system, because only the elite will ever have access to read and write. They are the knowledge brokers and the masses are illiterate and therefore powerless.

It was actually the second invention in information technology that made the difference and coincided with the birth of the Jewish people. What was that revelation in information technology? The invention of the alphabet. That was the decisive thing of course, what was the first form of the alphabet called “alphabet”? Because of the Hebrew alphabet. The first form of this alphabet is known as Proto-Semitic or Proto-Sinaitic.

The Proto-Semitic or Proto-Sinaitic alphabet was first discovered by a British archaeologist named Flinders Petrie in the turquoise mines at Serabit in the Sinai Desert in 1906. Writing the alphabet seems to have been invented around nine centuries ago, around the time of Abraham. As far as we know, the alphabet was invented only once. Every other alphabet in the world was directly or indirectly derivated from that first alphabet. Of course, the first form which had letters for vowels was for vowels was Hebrew and it was also the first alphabet that was written from right to left. The direct descendent of Proto-Semitic alphabet was so clear. And 500,000 years ago became alpha, beta, gamma, delta in Hebrew. So while it is in Hebrew that is very easy to see as the first alphabet, actually the Proto-Semitic alphabet existed at least a thousand years earlier.

What was the result? Well, you can articulate all the knowledge in the world with a symbol set of 26 characters. For the first time in history you have the possibility of a society of universal literacy. That is the thing that makes Judaism a revolution in human history, because it is literacy that is the heart of human dignity, as Judaism understands it. When you have a society of universal literacy, you have the possibility of a society where every one of whose members can be seen as the image and likeness of God. That is why Jews have been taught of the Lord, and great things shall be done in your days. We read in Deuteronomy 30:4, “Thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.” The totality of Jewish life is education.

The result is a huge ontological abyss opened up between God and humanity. It’s not simply that God is big and we are small. God is powerful and we are presence. Everyone, even the polytheists, know that. It is that in our kind of monotheism, God is a different kind of being altogether, infinite, unknowable, incomprehensible, a God that we cannot manipulate by magic or, explain by myth, or suppress by sacrifice. The gods of the ancient world were not like that. You named them all around you, you saw the sun, the moon, the stars, the sea, the ocean, the forces of chaos. For the mythological mind, the world was full of gods. When Judaism came from the first chapter of Genesis is obliterate that whole world at a strike. It was the German neo-conservative Eliahu Eliezer who said that Genesis, Chapter 1, is the decisive birth of Western civilization, where there is no struggle between the god or between the gods and man, between the being, Being, and the forces of chaos. Monotheism was not simply a kind of mathematical reduction of many gods to one. That kind of reduction had already preceded, not very long before, because there was a famous controversial Pharaoh called Akhenaten the Fourth, otherwise known as Amenhotep, who was the first monotheist. Amenhotep worshiped the god that the sun. That is what Judaism is about. It’s not what abrahamist monocracy is about. The real revolution of monotheism is not the reduction of many gods to one, but the idea that God transcends the universe, because God created the universe and therefore is not to be identified or even symbolized by anything within the universe. That is the thing that makes Judaism a revolution in human history.

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Christianity develops a platonic idea of language, “a great voice and it went on no more” (Deuteronomy 5:18). As the commentator Rashi points fresh in every generation. and never again, but the oral Torah has never ceased. that there were two modes of communication, the Hebrew Bible. They then spent the next thousand years to the Torah, which we call Torah She'be'al kol, “a great voice that sounded and never stopped. it is completely ambiguous. That is Judaism. it is the only exception in all of history.

Jews become the first people of the book. Jews not only the alphabet and because only through words could we become a people of the text: because of the invention of the alphabet.
Realizing the Vision: The New National Library of Israel

one of the greatest moral visions and greatest religious poetry of the eternal human choice between, on the one hand, the idea of power. on that day, from Zion will go forth 'a time when the nations of the world shall come to confess that great project materialize here in our time. The time will come when the nations of the world will recognize that the power of ideas is greater than the power of ideas. The time will come when Zion will go forth with the Torah and the word of God from Jerusalem. Let us show the world that other face of Israel, the people of the book in the land of the book, whose language is Hebrew – articulated by all the prophets, by Jeremiah’s ‘And there is hope for thy future, saith the Lord’ (Jeremiah 31:16). The day will come when Jews will return to their land. If that idea mentioned people to create this state, so may those who design and build this new National library, be lifted and inspired by a no-less-famous vision and a no-less-magnificent one. The words of Isaiah that we all know, “There will come a time when many nations say, let us go and visit the Lord; for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem” (Isaiah 2:3). The day will come when Jews will have a chance to be, the ongoing conversation scored for many voices, wealth and power, at least in the short term, are zero-sum games, which means the more we learn, the more we teach our knowledge to others, the more we share, the less we have. wealth and power are both what i call material goods. The trouble with material goods is the trouble you share, the less you have. if you have total power, you decide to share it with nine other people, the result is you only have a tenth as much power as you began with. if you have one dollar and share it with nine other people, you’re left with only a tenth as much money as you began with. if you have a certain amount of knowledge and you share that with nine others, do you have less? maybe you have more. what is so fundamental to human dignity and equality. That democratic access to knowledge is what Judaism commanded us a law, an inheritance of the congregation of Jacob” (Deuteronomy 33:4). it belongs to all of us. amonstrated on us, an inheritance of the congregation of Jacob” (Deuteronomy 33:4). it belongs to all of us. The New Complex – the oral Torah – is really supposed to be, the ongoing conversation scored for many voices, Jews because they didn’t become Christian. Nietzsche wasn’t anti-Semitic. he did not dislike Jews, but he was honest. Nietzsche was a very profound thinker. many people think that Nietzsche was anti-Semitic. Nietzsche wanted to define it very simply is that Nietzsche framed the idea of power, and on the other hand, the power of ideas. Judaism showed the world the power of ideas, simple ideas that can transform the world nor through war, but through education. That is what i would like a new national and international Jewish library to be.

The New Complex

...
Planning a National Library in the Twenty-First Century

Oren Weinberg

Introduction

For hundreds if not thousands of years, libraries have been predicated on the meticulous collection of items and, generally, granting restricted access within a designated physical structure. Today, the objective is to allow open access to the cultural and intellectual treasures both within and beyond the library’s walls. The current building of the national library of Israel is located within the gated confines of a university campus, in accordance with the former prevailing notion that the knowledge stored in libraries is intended mainly for a distinct and select educated class. In contrast, the new home for the National Library reflects the drive to democratize knowledge and the aspiration to open its treasures and resources to as broad and diverse an audience as possible.

The information age now enables remote access to the library’s treasures has sharpened and redefined the requirements for a physical building, which must now offer tangible added value to its visitors. It is not enough to simply create quiet spaces in our noise-saturated world. There is a need for a building that reflects the latest research methods in the humanities and social sciences, but also include ample exhibition spaces that will enable broad audiences to take part. It will facilitate better interactions not just between researchers and the materials in its collections, but also among the researchers themselves. Researchers are drawn to the library not just for what it resources it holds. They come to carry out research independently under optimal conditions, as well as to spend time in the company of others interested in sharing knowledge and ideas. In the contemporary library, all spaces are designed for users and visitors – both inside and out – are planned in a way that enables and encourages interpersonal interaction.

Openness and Unmediated Access

The information age has not lessened the intense need for personal interaction and for viewing original items without unnecessary obstructions. Despite the ability to watch lectures and performances through electronic means, the need to participate in live events has also not diminished. The library’s new building will include a large auditorium and additional halls for events in which broad audiences will be able to appreciate the different areas as never before. Thus, for example, visitors who do not even enter the reference areas, remaining exclusively in the culture and education or public spaces, will still be able to see and be inspired by the treasures and scholarship which lie at the core of the National library’s activities.

Harmony of the Parts

The plan for the library’s new home was founded upon the idea of unifying five elements with complementary and sometimes opposing roles: research and reference, education and culture, public spaces, library operations, and collection repositories. Despite their different characteristics, the architect’s overall design calls on the notion that all parts of the building serve a single vision, complementing one another, allowing for easy passage and, in specific places, even vantage points from which visitors will be able to appreciate the different areas as never before. Thus, for example, visitors who do not even enter the reference areas, remaining exclusively in the culture and education or public spaces, will still be able to see and be inspired by the treasures and scholarship which lie at the core of the National library’s activities.

Sustainability and Flexibility

The building’s design has been carefully planned in order to ensure the optimal conditions for the spiritual and intellectual treasures of the Jewish people and Israel. In collaboration with leading experts, the highest climate control and security standards have been established, and considerations which will enable sustainable, long-term operations and maintenance have been taken into account.

Recognizing the fast pace of technological advancement in today’s world, particularly with regard to how modern libraries must function, the new building is characterized by maximum flexibility to accommodate changes in the future. The design of the new building is based on the assumption that in addition to normal physical wear and future technological changes, it is possible that in the not too distant future more modifications to the building’s interior spaces, including their division and designated functions, may be necessary. The planning approach of the building therefore strikes a balance between meeting the needs to honor the library’s current functions and maintaining a certain flexibility which will facilitate implementation of changes in the future.

Mr. Oren Weinberg is the Director of the National Library of Israel since 2010.
Project Description

Jerger & de Meuron

The shift from print to digital necessitates a rethinking of the library both as an institution and a building type. To retain their relevance in the information age, contemporary libraries must function for existing users by providing the operational and spatial quality of traditional library buildings while generating alternative spaces and uses to attract new audiences. Likewise, designing a new building strong enough to be a landmark in Jerusalem juxtaposes the desire to respect the architectural traditions of this historically significant place with the ambition to make a building that is both appropriate and specific to the immediate site. These challenges frame our proposal for the National Library of Israel.

Jerusalem, two primary urban precincts. The historical center lies to the east while the modern administrative and cultural zone among other developments in the west. The dense and highly pedestrianized old city forms the dominant image of Jerusalem. Unlike the Old City, buildings in the new developments are heterogeneous, freestanding, and primarily linked by vehicular traffic. It is in this area, that the site for the National Library of Israel is located. The site is a sloping, triangular plot at the intersection of Haganah Boulevard and Kaplan Street. Located between the Old City to the north and the Knesset to the east, the National Library site is directly between Jerusalem’s most prominent institutions and is an extension of the public landscape that weaves through the area. While fully independent, the library will be a link between the cultural and civic buildings around it. A mixture of public spaces and art will surround the library and connect the interior functions to the surroundings. Visibility of the library in Jerusalem juxtaposes the desire to respect to the architectural traditions of this historically significant place with the ambition to make a building that is both appropriate and specific to the contemporary city and specific to the immediate site. These challenges frame our proposal for the National Library of Israel.

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Herzog & de Meuron

are the architects designing the new building of the National Library of Israel

Herzog & de Meuron is a partnership led by five Senior Partners - Jacques Herzog, Pierre de Meuron, Christiane Binswanger, Ascan Mergenthaler and Stefan Marbach.


Herzog & de Meuron have designed a wide range of projects from the small scale of a private home to the large scale of urban design. While many of their projects are highly recognized public facilities, such as their stadiums and museums, they have also completed several distinguished private projects including apartment buildings, offices, and factories. The practice has been awarded numerous prizes including The Pritzker Architecture Prize (USA) in 2001, the RIBA Royal Gold Medal (UK) and the Praemium Imperiale (Japan), both in 2007. In 2014, Herzog & de Meuron were awarded the AIA Cenn Hall American Prize (ACIP).

Left to right: Senior Partners Christine Binswanger, Ascan Mergenthaler and Stefan Marbach, with Founding Partners Pierre de Meuron and Jacques Herzog.