

# You Can't Wrap Herring in an iPad: Digitization of Sacred Jewish Books, the Stripping of Embodied Ritual, and Implications for Jewish Education

*Owen Gottlieb*

All of us were raised this way, even those of us who don't believe in God; we have religion because we have the Law. For us all books are religious. Study is religious. Each page and each letter on the page has its own special character, even the white spaces between the letters are holy. A little boy is honored when he carries his papa's prayer book to synagogue on the Sabbath. In the family, when Papa opened his book, all the house becomes quiet. "Sha, Papa reads," the mama says to the children, and all the house respect it when there is study inside. When a book is left open, we put a cover over it, for respect. When it is worn out we give it a burial. It's like a living thing. All writing has something of holiness. Even when it's only a newspaper, it shouldn't be used for anything but study. So it is in the marketplace also. Because we are Jews, we don't wrap herring in a printed page.

—Jacob Koved in Barbara Myerhoff's  
"We Don't Wrap Herring in a Printed Page"<sup>1</sup>

But on further analysis we started to ponder some Talmudic questions. Now that we have an actual Torah on our iPad, can

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we take it into, ahem, the lavatory? Does this app make our iPad into a holy book?

by tzvee at 6:45 PM 5/24/10

Labels: apple, bible, humor,  
inventions, iPad, iPhone

—Tzvee's Talmudic Blog<sup>2</sup>

As Jacob Koved's description illustrates, the Jewish people's relationship with the printed book and page is performed and propagated through embodied book rituals. Koved mentions the burial and covering of books. The tactile intimacies of Jewish book ritual extend to the *kissing* of books. In many Jewish synagogues, homes, and other locations where sacred books are carried and found, if a prayer book or other sacred book with the name of God falls to the floor, it is lifted from the floor and kissed. Before closing the prayer book, people kiss the book. Prayer books are drummed on and clapped with the hand during davening. Rabbi Arthur Kurzweil teaches and demonstrates the tradition that when studying Talmud, and faced with a passage that strikes one as unjust (such as a misogynist passage), a learner sometimes slaps the page of the text where one disagrees or takes issue with the text.<sup>3</sup> He then quickly notes and demonstrates that when one particularly finds a section delightful or beautiful, one can kiss the text. Here the relationship with the text is embodied along a spectrum of relationship from protest to intimacy.<sup>4</sup> Ritual objects, including books, also have ritual boundaries placed on their location. Signs by the synagogue bathroom remind congregants to leave their tallitot on the hanging rack outside the bathroom. Though it often goes unwritten on these signs, congregants know to also leave prayer books outside the bathroom as well.

Koved's description of the generalization of rituals to the secular newspaper page demonstrates that these book and print rituals carry the relationship with sacred text beyond the walls of the strictly religious and into secular and the weave of broader Jewish identity. Anthropologist Barbara Myerhoff's study, including Koved, took place in the 1970s with senior citizen immigrants in Venice, California. Today, we find Jews using newspaper pages for arts and crafts projects and wrapping gifts (less often for herring). What Koved may have been reflecting was a culture in which rabbinic rulings regarding the treatment of secular Hebrew print

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sometimes suggested that secular print should also be afforded special status.<sup>5</sup> Zev Gries has pointed out that regarding the spread of print culture for Jews: “Ostensibly secular literature was in fact deeply connected to and influenced by the world of the sacred, and moreover was totally alienated from that great revolution in the lives of the Jews of its time—migration to America.”<sup>6</sup> The generalized reverence for newsprint has changed since Koved’s time. Yet today, Jews still kiss books, use a *genizah* to store and then later ritually bury worn or damaged sacred books, and in Jewish bookstores, ritualized cardboard sheets are used to cover the floor before sacred books can be stacked on that floor space. How can we better understand such book ritual?

Myerhoff provides the following definition of “ritual,” claiming that each element of the definition points to ritual’s special task of persuasion:

Ritual is an act or actions intentionally conducted by a group of people employing one or more symbols in a repetitive, formal, precise, highly stylized fashion. Action is indicated because rituals persuade the body first; behaviors precede emotions in the participants. Rituals are conspicuously physiological; witness their behavioral basis, the use of repetition and the involvement of the entire human sensorium.<sup>7</sup>

Beyond this definition, Myerhoff has also explained that a ritual is a form that gives meaning to its content and that rituals perform work, including the presentation of symbols, messages, and allusions. Rituals make root metaphors, part of ideology, momentarily visible.<sup>8</sup> All of these aspects help to explain the notion that “ritual is very often the means by which subjects make themselves known to themselves.”<sup>9</sup> Jews come to know themselves through their rituals.

With this ritual-performative framework in place, I now turn to the specific historical roots of Jewish book rituals. The heritage of Jewish book rituals is descended from the ritual relationship with sacred writing prior to print. The prohibition of the destruction or erasure of the written name or names of God (*mechikat Hashem*), is, in part, the genesis for the treatment of scrolls, manuscripts, and later printed books.<sup>10</sup> For example, the Babylonian Talmud (redacted 600 C.E.), in *M’gillah* 26b, sets out that a Torah scroll that is too worn for use is

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hidden/buried (“they hide it” [*gonezin oto*]) next to a Torah scholar or can also be buried next to a student of law (*halachot*), not of the level of Torah scholar. From the same root as *gonezin*, comes the term *genizah*, a verbal noun meaning both the act of storing away and a place of storage.<sup>11</sup> The *genizah* became a location for the storage of sacred writing containing names of God that could no longer be used due to wear or damage. Habermann recounts that ceremonies of burial took place once storerooms were full and that these ceremonies included song, dance, and sword play.<sup>12</sup>

Habermann notes that the term *sefarim genuzim* (books to be hidden away) appears in the Talmud.<sup>13</sup> Given that the same Hebrew word, *sefer*, is used for both preprint and print books, there does not, at first, appear to be a distinction between the two; however, this is not the case. An examination of the laws regarding *sefarim* and *beit hakiseh* (the bathroom) provides evidence of differentiation between the sacred standing of print and preprint. At least as early as the *Mishnah Berura* (1894–1907),<sup>14</sup> printed books were accorded the status of holiness and the attendant rituals. *Mishnah Berura* 40:4 reads: “All *sefarim*, whether in writing or in print have holiness” and specifies that *sefarim* are not to be brought into the bathroom (*Mishnah Berura* 43:25).<sup>15</sup> However, in years much closer to the advent of printing (the Gutenberg press was invented in mid-fifteenth century), the Radbaz<sup>16</sup> (1479–1573) denied print’s holiness. In his discussion of laws regarding *beit hakiseh*, Rav David Brofsky translates: “The Radbaz (3:513) adds that since printed books are NOT written in *ketav ashurit* (the print used for a *sefer Torah*), but rather in other shaped letters, they lack *kedusha*, and therefore may be brought into a bathroom.”<sup>17</sup> Though this is a sample of only two rulings, albeit from widely cited rabbis, these two rulings seem to reflect the acceptance and flourishing of the new media, namely print, in the years between print’s advent and the nineteenth century.

Today, rituals around Jewish print are learned primarily through experience, witnessing, and modeling. This point is well illustrated by the *absence* of these rituals from the contemporary ArtScroll siddur. In his recent in-depth study of the materiality of the ArtScroll publications, Jeremy Stolow notes within the various ArtScroll siddurim, “the inclusion of detailed written instructions regarding the mechanics of ritual performance. Information that is left implicit or only briefly discussed in most other Jewish prayer

books is meticulously laid out in the ArtScroll text . . . attending to all manner of routine, exception, and even quite extraordinary occasions.”<sup>18</sup> Despite the details regarding when, how, and what direction to bow and the order, exclusion, and inclusion of prayers for different occasions, the ArtScroll siddurim make no reference to how the siddur *itself* should be treated, held, or covered, where it should or should not be taken or placed, when it is customarily kissed, or how, when it is worn, it should be treated. Even the ArtScroll siddur, with all its attention to strict ritual instruction for the uninitiated, does not address Jewish book rituals.

The kissing of books, in particular, is a custom (*minhag*) and apparently not directly connected to Jewish law, but related to the customs of kissing a mezuzah upon entering a home or kissing one’s tallit after touching it to a *sefer Torah*. The kissing of sacred books is a subject seldom included in how-to texts of modern American Judaism. Neither the Conservative Movement’s *A Jewish Guide to Religious Practice*<sup>19</sup> nor the Reform Movement’s *Jewish Living*<sup>20</sup> discuss the topic. Likewise, texts for those new to Jewish ritual such as *Living Judaism*<sup>21</sup> or *Choosing a Jewish Life*<sup>22</sup> do not discuss the topic. A rare exception to the rule is Aryeh Kaplan’s *The Handbook of Jewish Thought*, vol. 2, which contains an entire section on Jewish book and sacred text rituals including kissing practices.<sup>23</sup>

A Google search in fall 2010 for “kiss and siddur” revealed discussions of book rituals on sites including WikiHow: “Never leave a book face up when left open alone. Never place a book on the ground. Traditionally, Jews kiss a dropped prayer book or religious item because they contain the name of God.”<sup>24</sup> The search also revealed another website with the following book-ritual directives:

Because a Siddur contains the Name of God, it is treated with reverence. Do not carry a Siddur with you into a bathroom. Do not put it on the floor. If you drop a Siddur, pick it up immediately. After dropping it, the tradition is to kiss it as you pick it up. Close the Siddur before leaving it unattended. Some people also kiss the Siddur as they finish using it, and take care to always put it down with its front cover up. When a Siddur is worn beyond repair and has outlived its usefulness, it is not thrown away. It is buried respectfully, like a human corpse. Your nearest Jewish funeral home will be happy to help you dispose of it properly<sup>25</sup>

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What is special about this set of directives is that they are found in a *web-based siddur* (<http://www.siddur.org>). The author, Jordan Lee Wagner, created a transliterated, color-coded siddur that was not included by his publisher in his book *The Synagogue Survival Kit*. He writes: "So I have converted the Transliterated Siddur to web pages and here it is! Individuals may print or download my transliterations and use them as a companion to *The Synagogue Survival Kit*, or as a companion to your Hebrew-English Siddur, or you can just visit this site for occasional reference. I hope it is helpful."<sup>26</sup> Wagner posted these words and his siddur in 1997. Here it becomes clear that sacred books and digital media are increasingly mutually defined. In contradistinction to the supposedly exhaustive ritual instructions in the ArtScroll siddur, it takes an online digital siddur to address print-based ritual.

Today, the Reform siddur can be read on a mobile phone, alongside [siddur.org](http://siddur.org) and numerous online siddurim including [opensiddur.org](http://opensiddur.org), [idaven.org](http://idaven.org), and [onlinesiddur.com](http://onlinesiddur.com). There are many siddur apps for the iPhone (many of which are Orthodox and in various *nusachim*, styles based on geographic tradition) and numerous Jewish sacred texts for the iPhone and iPad ranging from Psalms to Torah to Talmud. In July 2012, the Schottenstein Talmud was released by ArtScroll, which will likely have large scale implications for Talmud study. In some Reform congregations, prayer services already use digital projection. As far back as 2007, Rabbi Matthew Soffer, then a rabbinical student at HUC-JIR/New York, lead a series of services at the college using digital projection of the siddur and informed the community that "several of our congregations and *minyanim*, including Woodlands Community Temple, are already engaging in this kind of LCD Liturgy experience."<sup>27</sup> By March 2011, the Annual Convention of the CCAR offered professional development programs including "Using Technology to Strengthen Our Voices" with a section on "Visual *T'filah*."<sup>28</sup> While print siddurim, with the exception of those in braille, are clearly "visual," here "visual" has ironically come to mean "digital projection." Media literacy and production educator Steve Goodman has written that of all the "competing and overlapping modes of mass communication, the dominant form of language has become the image."<sup>29</sup> Here, in a new digital vernacular for the synagogue, the notion of "visual" with regards to *t'filah* has shifted to mean the technology of digital image projection.

With this shift to digital come questions of *minhag*, such as: “Should I kiss my iPad when I’m done praying?” And halachic questions such as: “Do I bury a broken iPhone with iSiddur on its hard drive” or the question “tzvee” posed on his blog: can he take his iPad with the Torah app into the bathroom? In 1999 Rabbi Mordechai Friedman tackled the halachic question of whether the erasure of God’s name from a computer screen (such as while scrolling) was a legal instance of erasing God’s name, *mechikat Hashem*. Noting that in fact that glowing phosphors and liquid crystal displays included absorption and rearrangement, he rules the process of screen display as equivalent of character-writing. Despite this rendering, he uses precedent that if there is not the *intention* (*kavanah*) to sanctify while writing, that writing can be erased.<sup>30</sup> This line of reasoning could also be applied to taking a mobile device into the bathroom. Digital humanities scholar Matthew Kirschenbaum’s understanding of the physical inscription of computers at the level of the hard drive would likewise fall under Friedman’s ruling.<sup>31</sup> Both “tzvee” and an author named “Adam” on the Rusty Brick blog<sup>32</sup> come to the conclusion that the iPad and iPhone can both be taken into the bathroom so long as sacred text apps are closed. This is so because there are prohibitions in the Talmud against prayer and thoughts connected to prayer in the bathroom—completely separate from issues of *mechikat Hashem*.

But a person cannot kiss an app—certainly not the way one kisses a book—and you can’t wrap herring in an iPad even if you wanted to do so. Myerhoff emphasizes the physiology and tactility of ritual—the sensual. Stolow emphasizes the attention to materiality in the ArtScroll siddur as a pathway to authenticity, noting the feel and smell of leather- and imitation leather-bound books.<sup>33</sup> To go a step further than Stolow, the smell and feel of leather transcends the printed book in the realm of Jewish ritual, as they sensorially evoke the leather straps of the *t’fillin*, which the worshiper binds to arm and head. The practice of *t’fillin*, of course, is derived from a literal reading of Deuteronomy 6:8 (one of the texts included inside the *t’fillin*): “Bind them [these words] as a sign on your hand and let them serve as symbol/ornament on your forehead.” Like the mezuzah, holding scripture fixed to the Jewish doorpost, the *t’fillin* boxes are bound to the skin, touched, then kissed. The Jewish book experience is sensual and sensorial. Could plastic carry the Jewish



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book ritual? And what are the deeper reasons to maintain Jewish book ritual?

Beyond the tactical halachic questions, questions on a broader level of values and cultural heritage arise. Jacob Koved knew the value of learning and books as sacred in connection to Jewish life, and specifically Jewish book rituals. He recounts the burial of books, the covering books out of respect, the understanding of a book as “like a living thing.” Letters on a page—writing *and* print—are holy. If rituals are pathways through which Jews make themselves known to themselves, then does the loss of print rituals mean the loss of the aspects of identity they carry? The rituals around the written sacred word are maintained in the synagogue through the hand-scribed Torah scroll (the *sefer Torah*) and the many rituals surrounding the *sefer Torah* itself. Perhaps in the near future, the Jewish people will require the continued use, if at least in a ritual sense, of a printed book.

For those Jews who do not use electronics on Shabbat, the printed book will remain in use in at least in the near future, thus preserving book ritual on the Sabbath. Jeffrey Fox, a modern Orthodox rabbi was interviewed in 2010 in the *Atlantic* by Uri Friedman. Friedman writes that Fox “believes that e-readers—like other electrical appliances that don’t generate light and heat—are technically permissible on the Sabbath but should not be used because they are a step away from forbidden activity and because, in epitomizing our weekday existence, aren’t appropriate for the Sabbath.” When Fox looks to the future, he believes that the Orthodox community may come to reevaluate its stance on electricity on the Sabbath, not only due to e-readers but because of homes becoming completely wired in the next fifty to seventy-five years. In such a situation, Fox believes that Jews will have no choice but to use electronic devices on Shabbat.<sup>34</sup> In the long term, the Orthodox community could face the loss of print-book rituals. For those denominations shifting to digitally projected prayer text and perhaps even the use of electronic tablets even on the Sabbath today, the possibility of the wide-scale dropping of book rituals could be close at hand. The loss of those rituals could very well mean the rapid loss of an important, if unarticulated, connection to communal values.

Daniel Boyarin has noted that “there is an implicit Jewish ideal of community as that which is obtained in the course of the shared . . . task of rearticulating how to be Jewish.”<sup>35</sup> The task for Jewish



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educators in the case of book ritual is to help the Jewish community understand the way in which book rituals have carried and communicated crucial defining Jewish values—from the sacred nature of all learning, to respect for the tools of learning, to respect for human beings. This last step can be understood through a typical turn of Talmudic rhetorical reasoning, the *kal v'chomer* argument (all the more so): If the book is respected through emulating the treatment of living beings (burial, kisses, acts of covering), all the more so does an *actual* living being, made, as the Torah teaches, *b'tzelem Elohim* (in the image of God) (Gen.1:27) demand respect and care.<sup>36</sup> Through contrast, the rise of digital texts can illuminate for Jewish educators that book rituals have, perhaps largely subconsciously, transmitted these values through modeling and performance, as opposed to discussion and explicit written description. Likewise, educators can emphasize that now, amid the shift to digital, is precisely the time to bring that transmission to full consciousness, to nurture the development of new digital-sacred-text ritual. Perhaps we will kiss our iPhones before closing our sacred apps and have burial ceremonies when recycling hard drives. It would be a *shanda, haval* (a great shame), and a significant loss to Jewish culture were we to shed our *embodied* love of texts as our books turn to . . . bits.

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## Notes

1. Barbara G Myerhoff, "We Don't Wrap Herring in a Printed Page," in *Number Our Days*, 1st ed. (New York: Touchstone, 1980), 91–92.
2. "tzvee," "Does the iPad Torah App Make our Device Sacred?" *Tzvee's Talmudic Blog* (May 30, 2010), <http://tzvee.blogspot.com/2010/05/does-ipad-torah-app-make-your-device.html>.

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3. I address the ethical problematics of this embodied custom at the conclusion of this paper and in the final endnote.
4. Arthur Kurzweil, "What Does the Talmud Say about How Often Partners Should Make Love and Why Should I Care?" (workshop at Elat Chayyim MIKVAH: The Spirit of Generosity, Isabella Freedman Jewish Retreat Center, Falls Village, CT, August 16, 2012).
5. See Brofsky's discussion of Rav Moshe Feinstein's ruling in *Igros Moshe*. David Brofsky, "The Laws of Prayer—*Yeshivat Har Etzion*. Shiur #15: *Keriyat Shema*—Problematic Situations and Places (2)," <http://vbm-torah.org/archive/tefila/67-15tefila.htm>. Perhaps there were similar rulings in Koved's community growing up. Myerhoff does not provide Koved's biographical data; Feinstein lived 1895–1986, was born in Belarus, and emigrated to the United States in the 1930s.
6. Zeev Gries, *The Book in the Jewish World : 1700–1900*, English ed. (Oxford and Portland, OR: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2007), 8. This book is one of the few studies on the history of the Jewish book. In it, Gries argues that the Jewish national identity is an exception to the framework that Benedict Anderson lays out in *Imagined Communities*. The Jewish world had many vernacular languages at the time of print including Judeo-German (Yiddish), Judeo-Spanish (Ladino), and Judeo-Arabic. Rather than a vernacular language creating an imagined community of modern Jewish nationhood, it was the sacred language of Hebrew in print that created a sense of modern nationhood. *Ibid.*, vii. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1993).
7. Barbara Myerhoff, "We Don't Wrap Herring in a Printed Page: Fusion, Fictions, and Continuity in Secular Ritual," in *Secular Ritual*, ed. Sally Falk Moore and Barbara G Myerhoff (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1977), 199.
8. *Ibid.*, 8, 16 (Introduction).
9. Barbara Myerhoff and Deena Metzger, "The Journal as Activity and Genre: Or Listening to the Silent Laughter of Mozart," *Semiotica* 30, no. 1–2 (1980): 104.
10. Rituals specific to written text, as opposed to printed text, such as customs of not touching text on scrolls are not the subject of this study. Here, I am concerned primarily with the genesis of print and print-based rituals and their later manifestations.
11. Abraham Habermann, "Genizah," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 7, 2nd ed., ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 460; Yehoshua Horowitz, et al., "Genizah, Cairo," *ibid.*
12. Habermann, "Genizah," 460.
13. *Ibid.*

14. The Mishnah Berura is the six-volume commentary on the *Shulchan Aruch* by Israel Meir Ha-Kohen Kagan (the Chafetz Chaim) (1838–1933).
15. Brofsky, “The Laws of Prayer.”
16. Rabbi David ben Solomon ibn (Abi) Zimra (Spain, Eretz Yisrael, Egypt)
17. Brofsky, “The Laws of Prayer.”
18. Jeremy Stolow, *Orthodox by Design: Judaism, Print Politics, and the ArtScroll Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 116. While there are serious limitations to Stolow’s *Orthodox by Design*, due to what appears to be Stolow’s limited knowledge of the Jewish world beyond his highly specific focus on the ultra-Orthodox publishing practices of ArtScroll, it is nonetheless highly valuable as a pioneering study of materiality of the Jewish Book. Stolow does not notice or, at least, does not make mention of the omission of book rituals from the ArtScroll siddurim. Given his focus on the materiality of the book, and his discussion of ritual performance, this point regarding the omission of book rituals is one of the important corollaries to Stolow’s study.
19. Isaac Klein, *A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1979).
20. Mark Washofsky, *Jewish Living: A Guide to Contemporary Reform Practice*, rev. ed. (New York: URJ Press, 2010).
21. Wayne D. Dosick, *Living Judaism: The Complete Guide to Jewish Belief, Tradition, and Practice* (New York: HarperOne, 1998).
22. Anita Diamant, *Choosing a Jewish Life: A Handbook for People Converting to Judaism and for Their Family and Friends*, 1st Pbk. Ed. (New York: Schocken, 1998).
23. Aryeh Kaplan, *The Handbook of Jewish Thought*, vol. 2 (Brooklyn, NY: Moznaim Pub Corp, 1992), 87, sec. 9:22.
24. WikiHow, “Be Respectful in a Jewish Environment” (this page was last modified 20:01, 4 December 2010 by Anonymous). Based on work by Jack Herrick, Maluniu, Charlie Kreitzberg and Difu Wu, wikiHow user(s) Viral, DeFender1031, *Skaterboiva*, and Anonymous. <http://www.wikihow.com/index.php?title=Be-Respectful-in-a-Jewish-Environment&action=credits>.
25. Jordan Lee Wagner, “A Guide to Using the Transliterated Siddur” (February 4, 1997), <http://www.siddur.org/introduction/>.
26. Jordan Lee Wagner, “How the Transliterated Siddur Got Started” (February 4, 1997), <http://www.siddur.org/introduction/synagogue-survival-kit>.
27. Matthew Soffer, “Thursday Kavanot, (notes from Student-led Morning Service, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, New York)” (November 29, 2007), 2.

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28. "CCAR New Orleans: The 122nd Annual Convention of the Central Conference of American Rabbis" (CCAR, Promotional Brochure, Fall 2010).
29. Steven Goodman, *Teaching Youth Media: A Critical Guide to Literacy, Video Production, & Social Change* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2003).
30. Mordechai Friedman, "The Sanctity of God's Name: Erasing Sacred Texts from a Computer Screen," *Alei Etzion* 8 (n.d.), vol. 8, <http://www.haretzion.org/torah/yeshiva-publications/154-alei-etzion>.
31. Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, *Mechanism: New Media and the Forensic Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008).
32. Adam, "iPhone With Jewish Apps Allowed in the Bathroom?" *Rusty Brick's Blog* (May 24, 2010), <http://www.rustybrick.com/jewish-iphone-siddur-bathroom.html>.
33. Stolow, *Orthodox by Design*, 167–70.
34. Uri Friedman, "People of the E-Book? Observant Jews Struggle with Sabbath in a Digital Age," *The Atlantic*, December 21, 2010, <http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2010/12/people-of-the-e-book-observant-jews-struggle-with-sabbath-in-a-digital-age/68289/#>.
35. Daniel Boyarin, "Voices around the Text: The Ethnography of Reading at Mesivta Tifereth Jerusalem," in *Ethnography of Reading*, ed. Jonathan Boyarin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 230. Writing in 1992, regarding an Orthodox milieu, Boyarin noted that this task has generally been a male endeavor. Today, in progressive Judaism, women including Marcia Falk, Anita Diamant, Vanessa Ochs, and hundreds of others have been leading the community in the creation of new Jewish ritual.
36. And here one must confront the problematics of the embodied custom of slapping a page of Talmud in protest as earlier discussed. While this action may be understood as an exuberant exhortation in the name of justice, does it also carry an outdated embodiment of corporal punishment? If books are to be understood as stand-ins for living things, then perhaps, again, a new protest custom is in order.