

Librarian's Lobby

By Daniel D. Stuhlman

Hebrew Electronic Books

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Electronic books have their advantages and disadvantages. Electronic books have been around since 1971 when Michael Hart typed in the "Declaration of Independence" on a Xerox Sigma V mainframe at the Materials Research Lab at the University of Illinois. Hart's vision was to make books available to everyone. The mission of a library is to make books and other intellectual content available by gathering, storing and enabling retrieval of the collected content. Hart's vision was that the greatest value created by a computer was its ability to store, search, retrieve, and distribute what was stored in out physical libraries.

Project Gutenberg was born to save and distribute texts in a format that the largest audience could read. That meant using plain ASCII text for no selection of fonts, graphics or page design. In 1971 sending a 5 k file to 100 users was difficult and costly. No one had home computers in those days. By 2001 Project Gutenberg completed its 10,000th online book and today they claim 28,000 books and more than 100,000 if their affiliates are included. Today they offer books in a variety of formats – plain monospaced ASCII, Plucker, HTML, PDF, EPUB with and without images, MOBI, AVI, EPS and more. Not every book is in every format. All of these materials are in the public domain.

The advantage of electronic books is their availability. A library can not afford the cost of purchasing all the books they want or the building and shelf space to store them. A terabyte¹ hard drive can now be purchased for less than \$100 that will hold a million books. Hebrewbooks.org was founded in order to preserve old American Hebrew books that are out of print and/or circulation. Their mission was originally to preserve the Hebrew works of American Rabbis from the early part of the 20th century. Their mission expanded to include all Torah *Seforim* ever printed. Currently their web site claims to have 32,551 books for free downloading. In their blog they claim to add 300-400 books per week. The books can also be printed and bound.

A couple of weeks ago a friend called with a question about a quotation. She wanted the original Hebrew source of, "Wearing *tephilin* is like reading from the Torah." Using books.google I found the book² that contained this quotation. The source is *Pesikta Zutrassa*, Shemos 13. Since I never heard of this book I needed to investigate. I found the book in Hebrew University's Library. The book was written in the 19th century by

¹ A terabyte equals 1024 gigabytes or 1,099,511,627,776) bytes. The count assumes that only the text is preserved. If the book is scanned and saved as a PDF file a book will take 3-20 megabytes.

² The book that quoted the sentence is: *Tefillin: Making the Connection..* / by Yisroel Ehrman. Feldheim Publishers, 2000.

Toviah ben Eliezer and has another title *Lekah Tov*. I went to Hebrewbooks.org and found the book. Below between the arrows is the section that contains the original.

תורה, ד"א ולזכרון בין עיניך למען תדעה תורת ה' כפיך. (נו) סיכן אמרו כל המניה תפילין כאילו קורא בתורה, וכול הקורא בתורה פטור מן התפילין, (נו) ת"ל וירא אלהים

The quote is not very profound or even poetic and the meaning is not exactly clear. It may be taken out of context, but that was not the issue; the friend wanted the quote and I was able to find it. The below is a reprint of the title page.



If the book would have been in my personal collection, I could have found the quote easier and more quickly than searching on line, but I did have that option. Searching on line was easier than visiting a library and picking the book off the shelf.

Searching and reading small sections of books is a great advantage of electronic books. Reading entire book online is still challenging even though many companies want to sell you readers and many publishers are making electronic versions easy to purchase. One big complaint I have with the purchase on an electronic book is there is no residual value. If one has a paper book when you are done reading it you can put in on the shelf, let someone else read it, donate it to a good cause or even use it as a door stop. An electronic book has no value when you are done.

Daniel D. Stuhlman is president of **Stuhlman Management Consultants**, Chicago, IL, a firm helping organizations turn data and information into knowledge. We are looking for new clients and opportunities. Visit the web site at Stuhlman.biz to learn more about knowledge management and what our firm can do for you. Previous issues of **Librarian's Lobby** can be found at: <http://home.earthlink.net/~DDStuhlman/liblob.htm>. **E-mail author**.