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Sages And Dreamers: Portraits And Legends From The Jewish Traditions



Synopsis

Twenty-five portraits of figures from the Jewish tradition explore the mysteries of Jewish existence and themes of humility, silence, loyalty, and truth.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Reflections by the Nobel-winning philosopher and novelist on the prophets, scribes, and rebbes who comprise the histories and myths of Jewish folklore. Most of these essays were originally given as lectures at the 92nd Street Y in New York, and even in written form they preserve the tone and tempo of extemporaneous speech. The style is anecdotal rather than scholarly, and Wiesel does not hesitate to bring his opinions to bear (such as on the story of Jephthah, for instance, of which he declares, "This story is...so frightening that I wish it could be erased from Scripture"). Such an approach is bound to have its drawbacks, and Wiesel's treatment of the Bible leaves much to be desired: It is to his credit that he examines it as a narrative of spiritually resonant stories rather than as a scholarly text, but he seems rather too anxious to draw particular conclusions (especially in regard to the paradox of suffering) from passages that do not necessarily support his view. His consideration of the Talmud is much more insightful, and his tales of the great Hasidic rebbes form the best part of the book: a fascinating mosaic of hagiography and legend. Behind all of these accounts is the tragic awareness, sometimes explicit but usually unspoken, of the catastrophe that would ultimately strike the Jews of Europe, a catastrophe that Wiesel himself witnessed and survived. His book provides clear testimony of the survival, not only of an individual soul but an entire history. Informative and moving: a rich collage. -- Copyright ©1991, Kirkus Associates,

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I recommend this to anyone who wants to understand the sages better.

A fabulous book, by one of the great thinkers of our time. This book was recommended by a dear friend, and it is so uplifting and edifying. A must read for spiritual explorers. I keep going back to it again and again.

Very complete analysis of the biblical characters. Pulls info from Tanach, Midrash, Talmud. it is actually a written transcript of speeches. So the style is lively. Would definitely recommend it.

Love this author. Good service, thank you

As a person who reads the biblical texts continually , this book provides such a lovely color commentary . Reb Wiesel reads like a song . Given his background it is inspiring to read such beauty .

I was held captive by this book for two weeks in August, when I would traditionally be reading beach fare. I picked it up because the author is Peace Nobelist and Holocaust survivor, Elie Wiesel. What could he tell me about the future of Israel in this history of Jewish sages and dreamers, some of whom lived in Israel and others in exile?A brief note about myself: although I'm not Jewish, I became an enthusiastic Zionist at age 13, after reading "Exodus" and "Mila 18" by Leon Uris. Now, 50 years later, I'm not so certain.Please help me, Dr. Wiesel!"Sages and Dreamers" begins with Noah and, as the author puts it: "Let us begin at the end--I mean, at what could have been the end, not of a story but of history itself."All the way through this extraordinary book, Wiesel stares the end in the face. The apocalypse. The endless night.Jephthah follows Noah, and sacrifices his daughter. This is the man who most resembles Israel's current leaders. "He was a judge in Israel. He fought for Israel. He saved Israel. His name ought to evoke relief and gratitude--yet it resonates in the darkest recesses of our religious imagination like a warning."What Jephthah had forgotten was that judges are "supposed to be compassionate as well as fair. A judge is supposed to hold high the value, the sanctity of human life." He killed his daughter because he thought the sacrifice was part of a pact he had made with God to save Israel."Sages and Dreamers" is divided into three parts: "The Bible;" "The Talmud;" and "The Hasidic Tradition." There are twenty-five chapters (originally

lectures), each about "a man or a woman whose inspired life story [the author] found intriguing and demanding of investigation." Four of the lectures in the Talmudic section form what seems to me to be the heart of this book. The four sages in these chapters witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. Rabbi Akiba, the main figure, was born around the year 40 of the Common Era. He was already married with adult children before he began to study the Torah. "'If it were not for him,' says the Talmud, 'the Torah would have been forgotten.'" In the core episode, Rabbi Akiba and three of his friends, also sages, entered the 'Pardes,' the orchard of forbidden knowledge. "One lost his mind, another lost his faith, a third lost his life--and only Rabbi Akiba entered in peace and emerged in peace." The author explores in depth what happened to each of the four sages, and why. In order to do this, he moves backward and forward in time: from the parting of the waters at Creation; to the Roman persecution of the Jews (when the four friends went on their metaphysical adventure); and ultimately forward into the darkness of Birkenau. Is it possible that what the four sages saw in the orchard of forbidden knowledge was the future? We are more fortunate than we know that Elie Wiesel still stands witness. What will happen when he dies? We will still have his books. It is up to all of us to read them and remember.

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Elie Weisel mines the Tanakh, Talmud, and hasidic legends for characters to analyze under his astute microscope. Weisel's prose is always magnificent, and this book is no different. He turns the texts and traditions over, this way and that, finding that we really didn't know what we thought we did about these characters. Under Weisel's skilled pen, the kingdom of darkness haunts the background of these tales, adding poignancy to events long past.

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