



What It Means to Be Jewish: The Voices of Our Heritage

By Ina Abrams

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What It Means to Be Jewish: The Voices of Our Heritage By Ina Abrams

In this collection of past and present story-telling, scholarship, and spiritual autobiography, the many facets of the Jewish identity—both ancient and modern—are illuminated by a multitude of writings and recollections on history and exile, literature and art, selfhood and victimization, immigration and opportunity, and thought and belief. Indeed, such a vast array of first-person voices forms a chorus that both documents and contextualizes the history, tradition, and culture of the Jews.

As Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler points out in his Foreword to this wise, well-assembled, wide-ranging anthology, *What It Means to Be Jewish* "takes us on a journey from biblical times to today, intertwining the words of Hillel and Louis Brandeis, Mark Twain and Winston Churchill, Martin Buber and Philip Roth, Golda Meir and Yitzhak Rabin into a multicolored tapestry of literary and ethnic diversity that reflects the rich and universal texture of Jewish living and Jewish life.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Several years ago, when Ina Abrams began what she calls "a renewal of my life as a Jew," she began wondering how *practicing* Jews saw the world. She collected the most compelling answers to that question in the anthology *What It Means to Be Jewish: The Voices of Our Heritage*. The volume--a grab bag of quotations from scripture, rabbinic tradition, pop culture, politics, literature, and poetry--is arranged thematically, including chapters pondering the topics of covenant and identity, Jewish holidays and culture, Jewish immigrants to America, the Holocaust, and prayer. Most of Abrams's selections are "first-person writings": a young writer's memories of his first Hasidic wedding in Brooklyn, for instance, or a child's poem describing the "last butterfly" that flies over the wall of the ghetto at Theresienstadt. A strikingly large number of the contemporary writers included here are women, including Cynthia Ozick and Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. *What It Means to Be Jewish* collects Judaica's greatest thoughts, in a format that's easy to read and hard to put down. --Michael Joseph Gross

From Publishers Weekly

Abrams crafts a portrait of Jewish experience, identity, religion and culture through the words and eyes of contemporary thinkers. Though she includes traditional biblical and Talmudic sources, the strength of this anthology is its focus on 20th-century voices, from Elie Wiesel and Golda Meir to Woody Allen and Letty Cottin Pogrebin. Abrams, who previously published four books on medical issues under the name Ina Yalof, says forthrightly that "when male and female authors wrote equally well on the same topic," she usually gave preference to the women's writings; until the 1970s, women's voices were "often too gentle to be heard." Themes include identity, education, language, life cycle, holidays, humor, immigration, Holocaust, Israel, prayer and Jewish wisdom; non-Jewish writers reflect on Jewish inspiration in a section called "How Others See Us." Deborah Lipstadt's moving account of the first time she was counted in a minyan (prayer quorum), Amos Oz's portrait of his father on the night of Israeli independence and Maurice Samuel's description of shtetl streets "as tortuous as a Talmudic argument" are among the intriguing stories that could motivate readers to seek beyond the limits of these pages. Each section contains an introduction, but the brief identification of sources needs expansion. Abrams reproduces her own path back to Judaism, attained partially through the guidance of books, rabbis and teachers. This anthology, too, may well lead readers Jewish and non-Jewish to deepen their study of the rich resources of Judaism.

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From Library Journal

Abrams, a writer on medical subjects, here offers a bracing and fascinating anthology that includes writers as various as Alan Dershowitz, Anita Diamant, Golda Meir, and George Washington on the various meanings of the Jewish experience in America. By no means do these writers speak with a single voice but then dialog is a crucial part of the Jewish tradition. This is not always comfortable reading, as writers confront the Holocaust, anti-Semitism, and the controversy surrounding the identity of modern Israel which is also as it should be. Abrams has created a fine and compulsively readable collection, illuminating for Jews and non-Jews alike. Highly recommended.

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Carla Arbogast:

Do you have favorite book? If you have, what is your favorite's book? Reserve is very important thing for us to understand everything in the world. Each publication has different aim as well as goal; it means that e-book has different type. Some people feel enjoy to spend their time to read a book. They are really reading whatever they take because their hobby is actually reading a book. Think about the person who don't like examining a book? Sometime, person feel need book if they found difficult problem or perhaps exercise. Well, probably you'll have this What It Means to Be Jewish: The Voices of Our Heritage.

Nathan Hutchison:

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Patricia Ackermann:

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