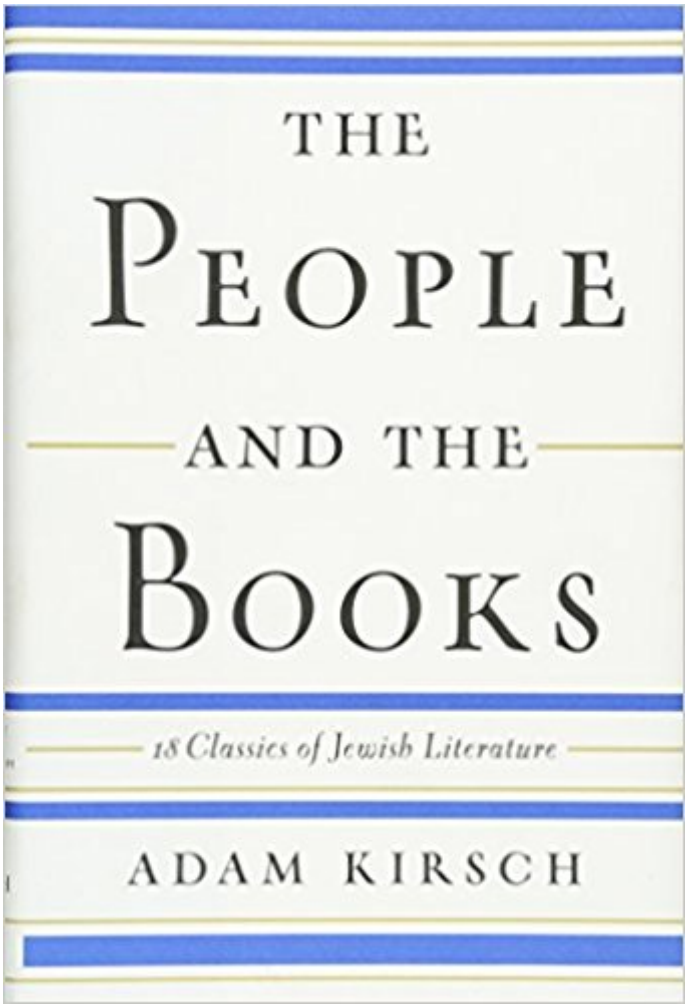
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The People And The Books: 18 Classics Of Jewish Literature



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Synopsis

An essential exploration of a rich literary tradition from the Bible to modern times, by a Ã¢â ¬Å“rare literary authorityÃ¢â ¬Â• (New York Times Book Review) and Ã¢â ¬Å“one of our keenest criticsÃ¢â ¬Â• (Washington Post).Jews have long embraced their identity as Ã¢â ¬Å“the people of the book.Ã¢â ¬Â• But outside of the Bible, much of the Jewish literary tradition remains little known to nonspecialist readers. The People and the Books shows how central questions and themes of our history and culture are reflected in the Jewish literary canon: the nature of God, the right way to understand the Bible, the relationship of the Jews to their Promised Land, and the challenges of living as a minority in Diaspora. Adam Kirsch explores eighteen classic texts, including the biblical books of Deuteronomy and Esther, the philosophy of Maimonides, the autobiography of the medieval businesswoman GlÃƒÂ ckel of Hameln, and the Zionist manifestoes of Theodor Herzl. From the Jews of Roman Egypt to the mystical devotees of Hasidism in Eastern Europe, The People and the Books brings the treasures of Jewish literature to life and offers new ways to think about their enduring power and influence.

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Customer Reviews

Ã¢â ¬Å“[A]n astute and accessible introduction to 18 Jewish literary classics... [Kirsch's] laser focus on these works' most topical themes makes them feel so urgent that curious readers of any religious persuasion will want to read them all.Ã¢â ¬Â• - Dara Horn, Wall Street JournalÃ¢â ¬Å“Lucid, vivid and likely to provide helpful instructionÃ¢â ¬Â¦ [Kirsch] has, like Simon Schama, a keen eye for the

revelatory detail in discussing his historical subjects.Ã¢â ¬Â• - New York Times Book ReviewÃ¢â ¬Å“Anyone looking for a single-volume introduction to Jewish civilizationÃ¢â ¬Â¦ will find nothing better in printÃ¢â ¬Â¦ A deeply serious meditation on the meaning of Jewish existence.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬Å“[A]n entertaining and enlightening review of eighteen classic works and, at the same time, JudaismÃ¢â ¬â„¢s most important ideas and ideals. It deserves to be on the Jewish bookshelf along with the eighteen books it opens for its reader.Ã¢â ¬Â• - Jewish Book CouncilÃ¢â ¬Å“Through profiles of eighteen indelible figures and chronicles...Adam Kirsch uncovers the unfailing excitements of a living, creative, and abiding civilization. And more: in this superbly clarifying panorama, he illumines how in the history of ideas Jews, despite so many permutations of approach, have faithfully adhered to a single sublime Idea.Ã¢â ¬Â• - Cynthia OzickÃ¢â ¬Å“The people of the book are often unaware of the books of their people. Kirsch opens, unfurls, and illuminates the great works of Jewish tradition and history; he is our intellectual Sherpa, guiding us sure-footedly through the heights.Ã¢â ¬Â• - Rabbi David Wolpe, author of David: The Divided HeartÃ¢â ¬Å“LuminousÃ¢â ¬Â¦ The secret of the Jews, [Kirsch] shows, is found within these classic works. Anyone interested in penetrating that secret should read The People and the Books.Ã¢â ¬Â• - Jonathan D. Sarna, University Professor and Joseph H. & Belle R. Braun Professor of American Jewish History, Brandeis University

Adam Kirsch is a poet, literary critic, and the director of the masterÃ¢â ¬â„¢s program in Jewish studies at Columbia University. He is a also columnist for Tablet and a contributor to the New York Times Book Review and The New Yorker. He lives in New York.

Review of The People of the Books, 18 Classics of Jewish Literature by Adam Kirsch review by Jerry WoolpyKirsch covers works chronologically from Philo (15 BC to 45 CE) to Sholem Aleichem (1859 to 1916). His summaries are forthright and readable, even of works that if read in the original would be tedious and boring to the average reader. They include: Philo of AlexandriaÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Exposition of the Laws a philosophical gloss on the Torah, JosephusÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ The Jewish War, Pirkei Avot, Yehuda HaleviÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Kuzari, a defense of Judaism, Benjamin of TudelaÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s tour the Jewish world, Moses Maimonides Guide of the Perplexed, The Zohar, Tsenerene a Yiddish paraphrase of the Bible intended primarily for use by Jewish women, Spinoza, GlÃƒÂ ckel of HamelnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Yiddish-language Memoirs, Moses MendelssohnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s from a pious Jewish background to the foremost philosopher of the German Enlightenment, Hasidism of the Baal Shem

Tov, Solomon MaimonÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s secular philosophy, Nachman of BratslavÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Hasidim Tales, Theodor HerzlÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Zionism, Sholem AleichemÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s stories about Tevye the Dairyman, and some important history along the way. From my limited background as a Reform Jew listening to various Rabbis and studying Torah assiduously I found the book fascinating and an intellectual challenge to anyone who takes Judaism at face value. I am left wondering what our present congregations are for: mostly to keep us in the fold and unquestioning? Why donÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t we question our history of insecurity and hopelessness? Why donÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t we focus on the place of God in our history and the reason for the mitzvoth that provide a formula for living peaceably? Why are we still crazy about The Land when that is just a metaphor for accepting Mosaic Law? Is our history just too deep for the understanding of our people? I love this book. DonÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t read it if you are content with your present view of Judaism.

This is an unusual book. "Classics" of Jewish literature are gathered here, as the author promised. But not all of them are normally treated under that head. So Adam Kirsch has exercised a selective principle of his own, one hard to categorize. He has chosen texts that are roadmarks identifying way stations in the long trajectory of the people of Israel, later known as the Jews, through their history. He knows that the trip has been a bumpy one, to put it mildly, beset by disappointments, which were absorbed & interpreted in various ways. He does not pretty it up or disguise the difficulties. Rather, he acquaints the reader with them, in a fresh voice, so that one feels one is encountering the difficulties and the interpretative stratagems for the first time, even if some of it is familiar. For example, I have taught Spinoza in Modern Philosophy classes and yet the Spinoza of his chapter on the Theologico-Political Treatise is described with finely-etched accuracy (rare even among philosophers!) simplicity and sympathy. And so it goes for each one of his cast of characters and accompanying dilemmas. He gives the reader a rare eagle’s eye view of this long caravan winding through time. It becomes a single narrative, yet without any forced unity -- more like real life, in other words. One more thing about it that strikes me: the narrator’s voice. It’s got a rare timbre to it, a mixture of objectivity -- neutrality even between points of view -- and yet extreme gentleness and grace. It’s mostly that quality of voice that gives one courage to follow the story that Adam Kirsch here encourages us to know and remember.

Interesting selections. Makes a good case that these are important, nevertheless, and hold valuable keys for the understanding of Jewish civilization. A bit of a light touch, especially when it comes to

philosophy and theology although, in his defense, he never claims to be either. But a bit deeper dive in some of the materials would be appreciated.

A very good survey of Jewish thought through the ages, and a wonderful reminder for all of the deep, diverse and ever evolviing philosophical and literary contributions of an enduring culture. While the authors of the various works highlighted in this easy read certainly were informed by the faith and religious teachings of the Jewish communities in which they were raised, this book is not so much about religion as it is about the vitality of Jewish thought in the many places where Jews both thrived and suffered over time. An excellent starting point for those who are unaware of a history that is so much more than the Bible to Holocaist to Occupation narrative that forms the core of popular knowledge concerning the role of Jewish thinkers throughout history.

Kirsch mixes up facts with his own opinions. The selections are pretty good and broad. It has been said that if three Jews are in a room, four opinions on every subject will be there also. In this book, Mr. Kirsch presents his own opinions as authoritative. This is sad for readers who are not familiar with the source materials, so I hope readers will next explore those source materials.

Cynthia Ozick called Adam Kirsch one of America’s best literary critics. However his book is more than a work of literary criticism. It is a very interesting meditation on the questions that Jews have tried to address over the centuries pointing out how the answers have varied, but the questions have persisted. Each of the works examined is emblematic of a different effort to face up to these issues. This is a very interesting book.

Love the book from start to finish. Tremendous view about jewish philosophy and meaning throughout scriptures, books, thoughts. From beginning to current days. Is not scholarly. Just a piece of beaut which makes a must to be read.

If you read widely in the area of religion, you may find this a little shallow. A good gift for someone who is interested in religion but not well-read.

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