

Sikkum

A Bookshelf of Jewish Books and Books Jews Should Read

The Store That Mama Built by Robert Lehrman, Macmillan, 1992. Always on the lookout for good family literature with a Jewish theme, we have recently discovered a real winner. This book can be read by eight to fourteen-year-olds and read aloud by adults to children five and up. It is a fictionalized account of the author's aunt's life story: a Russian Jewish immigrant widow and her five children trying to launch a grocery store in Central Pennsylvania. Should Mama sell non-Kosher meat? Should they seek out customers in the poor neighborhood the kids in school call "Niggertown"? Should they stay open after sundown on Friday? Should they extend credit when they themselves are deeply in debt? The book engages both children and adults and generates many important discussions about Judaism, ethical values, and acculturation.

Nancy Fuchs-Kreimer

The Telling by E.M. Broner, Harper, 1993. In direct yet elegant prose, writer, academic, and ceremonialist Ester Broner, author of the transcendentalist liturgical novel, *A Weave of Women*, chronicles the fifteen years of feminist seders that she and her "seder sisters"—Bella Abzug, Letty Cottin Pogrebin, and Gloria Steinem, among others—have created in order to reclaim their history as Jewish women.

Kathrine Kurs

Understanding Essays on the Hermeneutic Of Max Kadushin by Peter Ochs, University of South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism, Scholar's Press, 1990. A collection of essays on Max Kadushin's pioneering efforts to uncover the logic underlying our inherited tradition of early rabbinic commentaries on the Bible. Of particular interest to me was Ochs's own attempt to do postmodern Jewish thought, informed by the philosophic tradition of C.S. Peirce. Ochs gave me a new appreciation of the value of what Kadushin was trying to do in books like *Organic Thinking*, *The Rabbinic Mind*, and his commentary on the *Mekilta*. Ochs's book and essay are must reading for anyone

serious about using midrash as a source for modern Jewish thought.

Norbert Samuelson

The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke, edited and translated by Stephen Mitchell, Random House, 1982. In these late years of the twentieth century—murderous, angry, and frightening—the work of the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926) becomes a window through which we can rediscover our own Jewish religious experiences, if we permit his generous gifts to awaken anew our hesitating hearts. Rilke is a stunning source of luminous visions and healing intuitions. His words sing surprising truths often new to our souls, truths that embrace us with the irresistible energy of love and of redemptive understanding.

Eduardo Rauch

People of the Body: Jews and Judaism from an Embodied Perspective, edited by Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, SUNY, 1992. A collection of fourteen essays that focus on attitudes toward and representations of the body in Jewish culture and literary texts, this ground-breaking volume serves to remind us, as Eilberg-Schwartz maintains, that "Jews do not simply read and write books." As people with bodies, Jews have long worried about how to understand and manage their bodies. Illuminating the experiences of men and women in a variety of communities throughout Jewish history, these essays explore ways in which bodily concerns have helped shape past and present conceptions of Judaism and the Jewish people.

Ellen M. Umansky

Land, Labor, and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict by Gershon Shafir, Cambridge University Press, 1989. Basing his analysis of Israel's founding fathers and mothers on diaries, correspondence, minutes of meetings, and other primary source material, Shafir shows that once they were in Palestine, virtually all of what the early immigrants believed about Zionism proved useless. Their foremost problem was how to exclude Arabs from a labor market which, if open to

Arabs, would deprive Jews of a "European" standard of living. The norms of Hebrew labor, national ownership of land, collective/cooperative agriculture, and militant confrontation with the Arab "enemy" did not emerge in conformity with ideological blueprints, but rather were chosen (after other failed alternatives) because they enshrined or rationalized this exclusion.

Ian Lustick

Silence, Simplicity, and Solitude: A Guide for Spiritual Retreat by David A. Cooper, Bell Tower, 1992. This book, with chapters on the tradition of spiritual retreat within Judaism as well as Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam, can be useful for those interested in beginning a meditative practice and for those already engaged in one. The second half of the book can help answer a common question regarding meditation and/or spiritual retreat: "Am I doing it right?" For those who believe they are, this book provides the tools for further insight and enrichment.

Mark Sirinsky

Arguing with God by Anson Laytner, Jason Aronson Inc., 1990. Laytner's subject is the long Jewish heritage of "laments and dirges, complaints and arguments, all protesting God's mistreatment of His people." In separate chapters he examines arguments with God in the Bible, the rabbinic use of these biblical arguments in the Midrash, argument motifs in the standard liturgy, *piyyutim* of protest, and the arguing with God motif in Hasidic tales, folk songs, and modern Yiddish and Hebrew poetry. The chapter on the *piyyutim* (poems written for insertion in the liturgy) is the core of the book. These *piyyutim* asked, after the massacres during the Crusades, and after pogroms, Why are You silent?, where are Your miracles now? Laytner argues that the insertion of old or new *piyyutim* of protest into the existing liturgical structure is consistent with tradition and is needed to give some balance to the praise and thanksgiving that still dominates fifty years after the Holocaust.

David Curzan