



Souls on Fire

Elie Wiesel

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In *Souls on Fire: Portraits and Legends of Hasidic Masters*, Elie Wiesel reenters, like an impassioned pilgrim, the universe of Hasidism. "When I am asked about my Jewish affiliation, I define myself as a Hasid," writes the author. "Hasid I was, Hasid I remain." Yet *Souls on Fire* is not a simple chronological history of Hasidism, nor is it a comprehensive book on its subject. Rather, Elie Wiesel has captured the essence of Hasidism through tales, legends, parables, sayings, and deeply personal reflections. His book is a testimony, not a study. Hasidism is revealed from within and not analyzed from the outside. "Listen attentively," Elie Wiesel's grandfather told him, "and above all, remember that true tales are meant to be transmitted - to keep them to oneself is to betray them." As a critic appearing on the front page of *The New York Times Book Review* has written, "The judgment has been offered before: Elie Wiesel is one of the great writers of this generation." Wiesel does not merely tell us, but draws, with the hand of a master, the portraits of the leaders of the movement that created a revolution in the Jewish world. *Souls on Fire* is a loving, personal affirmation of Judaism, written with words and with silence. The author brings his profound knowledge of the Bible, the Talmud, Kabbala, and the Hasidic tale and song to this masterpiece, showing us that Elie Wiesel is perhaps our generation's most fervid "soul on fire."

Souls on Fire Details

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Author : Elie Wiesel

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Aryeh says

If, as I did, you expect this to be a scholarly work of carefully researched historical accuracy, you will be sorely disappointed. However, if you pay attention to the title (portraits and legends), you will get exactly what you are expecting. I should have known, from reading earlier Wiesel, that this would be more along the lines of 'Sages and Dreamers' (and even includes some of the same stories). There are many ways to tell truth, and this is truth as much as anything, it just wasn't what I expected. Worst: It overlaps a lot with earlier works and is very disjointed, in places becoming more of a collection of sayings. Also, as there is zero cross referencing the reader who may be interested in a particular Rebbe will have to do all research on their own instead of being pointed in the right direction via citations. Best: A very good and coherent section on R. Nachman of Breslov including a telling of the Rooster Prince story. *In brief, it is just ok. Read other Wiesel first to get a feel for his style, otherwise you will be lost in this one.

Stevie says

Pretty good characters trying to make up for a lack of a Messiah.

Anne Hamilton says

For over ten years, I've absolutely loved Charles Osborne's Souls on Fire, an orchestral rendering of this book. It's splendid, glorious, inspiring.

However, in *finally* getting around to reading the book which had been the spark behind Osborne's symphonic song suite, I find myself curiously disappointed. Maybe I set myself up for it: there are many gold nuggets here but the song is missing.

In other circumstances, I might have rated it much higher... but in the end, it seemed fragmented. It held out the promise that the mosaic would eventually come together to show the full picture but that never eventuated.

Fergus says

Coming of age can be a tumultuous episode in our early life. But there are two ways to take it: the easy way... or the much more difficult way.

And if you are a person who now can stand alone, on your own two feet, chances are you've taken the hard way: The Path Less Taken...

Two paths diverged in a wood - and I

Took the one less travelled by
And that has made ALL the difference.

Robert Frost was right.

And Frost was SO much like the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism. Okay, maybe a little tamer...

Excuse me, Baal Shem WHO? You're losing me.

Just think, for a second, back to La Siècle des Lumières - the Enlightenment that made heroes of all freethinkers, like Voltaire and Rousseau. Got it? Only they weren't so freewheeling in Eastern Europe - the land that time forgot.

Hidden over in the obscurity of old Poland - whose myths and legendary figures the 'cool' thinkers of the West chose to ignore as backward - a rugged individualist who was also a radical traditionalist and Jewish man of the cloth was setting rationalism on its ears. All by himself.

Rebbe Baal Shem Tov.

Have we forgotten his name? Perhaps we never even heard of it? Tant pis pour nous autres!

Okay, then - Wiesel will spin more than a few marvellous, mysterious, magical tales about him for you, if you've got the time.

You see, Baal Shem Tov had IT: DVEKUT, a direct line to God Himself.

And if a lifetime of murderous pogroms and nighttime alarms had taught him anything, it was: just stand peacefully in the midst of it all and don't be troubled.

He said that, no matter what, every thought we think if followed to its roots will lead us back to God.

Oh, he was wild and boisterous, as some faithful souls can be, but in the end there can be no doubt for us, after reading this wonderful book about his and his followers' miraculous exploits... that he had IT. He had found real PEACE.

And these tales and legends about him will make you feel ALIVE.

Here's a koan for you. Why did Boddhidharma go west to Poland?

The correct answer is, to sit at the Baal Shem Tov's feet, to deepen his satori!

If you get this book, you may find that it's the only inspirational guide you need for getting through each day with a smile.

Worked for me!

Jennifer says

This book has affected me more deeply than any other I can think of.

Billy says

To read about the Hasidic masters was for me a struggle, a voyage into confusing and, for me, uncharted waters. Intense, often angry, sometimes joyful men, they seem to suffer from mania and depression. An ultimately tragic story. Where is redemption? Where is healing and grace? Where is God?

Hannah Petosa says

Very fascinating if you are interested in Hasidism. Personally, was hard for me to get through but great tales.

Marshall says

Eli Wiesel is a fantastic storyteller, the book is engaging and thoughtful. One can find magic, inspiration, and consolidation of many of the stories.

Rgusterman says

Stories told of stories old. At times joyful and at times haunting. Nonetheless a deep warmth permeates throughout as we are guided through Wiesel 's personal journey into Hassidism.

Jacob Lloyd says

Elie Wiesel's telling of the lives and tales of the Hasidic masters is at turns beautiful and unsettling, humorous and poignant. The lives and tales themselves call to mind the sayings and stories of the Christian Desert fathers. Wiesel's own voice, and his largely implicit foregrounding of the tales against the backdrop of a post-Auschwitz world, add a modern literary layer to these essentially spiritual tales.

Jon Iskow says

Exceptional story telling, and what a wonderful description of Hasidism in its beginnings and the colorful characters it espoused.

Parts of it were hard to get through, the meaning deeper than I could grasp and largely escaping me. In addition, it was hard for me to follow all the various names of the Rabbis and keep them straight. The lessons they taught and the stories they told are beyond compare and some of the greatest advice I have ever heard, however that didn't stop my eyes from glazing over at points.

Sean says

Passionate, intriguing

Fascinating sketches of Hasidic legends. Thought provoking and stirring at the same time. Some passages are beyond bearing and yet retain exquisite and heart-wrenching beauty.

David Amsel says

Smooth and surprisingly linear for a book on Jewish Mysticism. Great personal stories from Elie about his family and personal struggles with the legends.

Jane says

I asked a friend for a good book on the history of the Hasidic movement, and he gave me this. What a gem. Wiesel writes with a magical blend of poetry and scholarship, but above all, he writes with his heart.

Devin Harazmus says

The book *Souls on Fire* by Elie Wiesel is really a collection of sayings and stories about 18th and 19th century Hasidic Jewish masters, who were leaders of a conservative religious Jewish movement in Eastern Europe. The book does not analyze or study Hasidic Judaism or its masters. Instead, it tells stories about the Hasidic masters. These stories give the reader a good understanding of some of these Hasidic masters. I found the book *Souls on Fire* by Elie Wiesel to be somewhat difficult to follow for someone who has no prior knowledge of the Jewish religion but I found its history to be very interesting.
