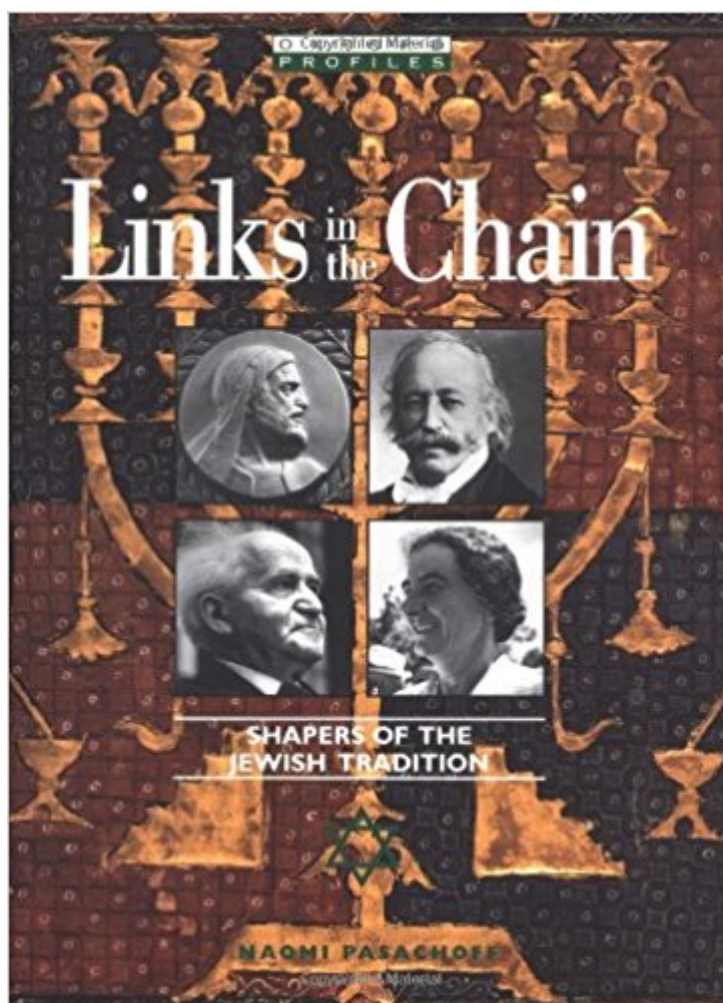


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Links In The Chain: Shapers Of The Jewish Tradition (Oxford Profiles)



Synopsis

"Judaism, or that which has united the successive generations of Jews into one people, is not only a religion; it is a dynamic religious civilization."--Mordecai Menachem Kaplan, from *Questions Jews Ask* (1956) In assessing what their Jewish identities mean to them, Jews today sometimes describe themselves as links in a chain of tradition that stretches back to biblical times. In this collection of biographies of Jewish thinkers from ancient times to the present, the links in that chain come to life through the dramatic stories of 41 shapers of Jewish tradition. From Hillel, whose teaching more than twenty centuries ago set Judaism on its post-biblical course, to Yitzhak Rabin, the Noble Peace Prize-winning Prime Minister of Israel who helped to broker a peace settlement between the Israelis and the Palestinians, these men and women all left an indelible mark on Jewish practice, scholarship, or nationalism. In individual biographical essays, Naomi Pasachoff explores the contributions of philosophers, poets, and philanthropists; of mystics, statesmen, and scholars; of religious organizers and Zionist leaders. In so doing she uncovers surprising facts about well-known figures. For example, Theodor Herzl is widely honored as the father of the modern state of Israel, but did you know that he once dreamed of leading all the Jews of Vienna to St. Stephan Cathedral to undergo mass baptism? Readers who recognize Rashi as the most famous of all biblical commentators may be startled to learn that his concise style was a function of his tight budget. The book includes suggestions for further reading, an appendix, a glossary, and an index. Illustrations and photographs accompany the text, and a biographical fact box for each profile provides for easy reference. All these features make *Links in the Chain* an ideal introduction to Jewish role models for younger readers and a vital reference for all interested in Jewish history. Moreover, the book is a reminder that Jewish tradition is still evolving and that each reader has the potential to contribute to it. 41 extended essays profile the lives and contributions of Jewish heroes, including: Johanan ben Zakkai, the spiritual and intellectual leader who reshaped Jewish life after the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. Dona Gracia Nasi, the outstanding 16th-century leader who led the equivalent of an underground railroad to lead fugitive Marranos to safety. Rebecca Gratz, said to have been the model for the character Rebecca in Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*, who spearheaded the development of Jewish Sunday schools in the United States. Leopold Zunz, whose transformation of Jewish scholarship in the 19th century ultimately led to the existence of Judaica departments and programs in major universities. Lily Montagu, whose unsatisfying Orthodox childhood as a child of privilege in Victorian England transformed her into a 20th-century leader of British and world liberal Judaism. Isaac Mayer Wise, the early leader of Reform Judaism in the United States, who conceived of and helped bring into existence many of the institutions of contemporary American Judaism. Eliezer Ben

Yehudah, the father of modern Hebrew, who nearly singlehandedly transformed Hebrew from an ancient religious language into a spoken modern one.

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Customer Reviews

Grade 9 Up?Pasachoff's title is logically divided into three sections: forerunners responsible for the foundation of Judaism, the shapers of modern Judaism, and those in the forefront of establishing the Jewish State of Israel. There are over 40 life histories ranging from Maimonides (Moses ben Maimon) to Lily Montagu to Yitzhak Rabin. Each four-to-five page account gives background information, the reason for the individual's prominence, and some personal information that adds interest and readability. Many of the biographies are of well-known figures but there is also a generous sprinkling of lesser-known men and women. If read as a whole, this volume gives young people an excellent foundation knowledge of the leaders in Judaism. The four branches of Judaism?Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist?are all fairly represented. The style, although pedantic at times, captures and holds readers' attention. Myriad black-and-white photographs and reproductions vitalize the text. The organization of the book facilitates research. A glossary defines terms that may not be easily understood by those outside the Jewish community. A chronology details events from 586 B.C.E to 1996. The index lacks detail and primarily makes note of people and places but not content. Still, this is an excellent addition to collective-biography sections and is useful for reports, background on Judaism, or as a text for a confirmation class.?Malka Keck, The Temple Tifereth Israel, Beachwood, OHCopyright 1998 Reed Business

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The Jews have a long, interesting history that has been shaped by many fascinating people. These people have been scholars, judges, soldiers, and politicians who have shaped Jewish values and philosophy, kept the religion and culture alive during perilous times, and created the modern state of Israel. This book, part of the publisher's Oxford Profiles series, presents biographies of 41 leaders from different historical periods and explains their contributions to Jewish tradition. The book is divided into three sections. "Laying the Foundations" covers postbiblical ancient times through the Middle Ages; "Shapers of Modern Judaism" includes the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries; and "Shapers of the Jewish State" deals with the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The last section covers only people instrumental in forming the state of Israel. The first two parts include leaders from all over the world. The Baal Shem Tov, Martin Buber, Theodore Herzl, Hillel, Isaac Luria, Maimonides, Moses Mendelssohn, Yitzchak Rabin, and Chaim Weizman are among those found in this volume. Although men predominate, Beruriah, Rebecca Gratz, Golda Meir, Lily Montagu, Gracia Mendes Nasi, and Henrietta Szold are included. Each section begins with a historical overview. The individual biographies, around five pages long, appear in chronological order. They are illustrated with portraits and artifacts. Sidebars summarize the key points such as birth and death dates, education, and accomplishments. A bibliography, generally listing three or four titles, appears at the end of each article. A glossary, a chronology, and a general bibliography complete this work. Although written for middle-school students, this book can be used and appreciated by older students and adults. It is easier to read than the Encyclopedia Judaica (Keter, 1972) and provides more information on the individuals it covers than The Encyclopedia of Judaism (Macmillan, 1989). Links in the Chain places the biographies within a historical context so that readers understand the importance of the subjects' contributions to Jewish cultural development. This source is useful for school, public, and synagogue libraries.

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