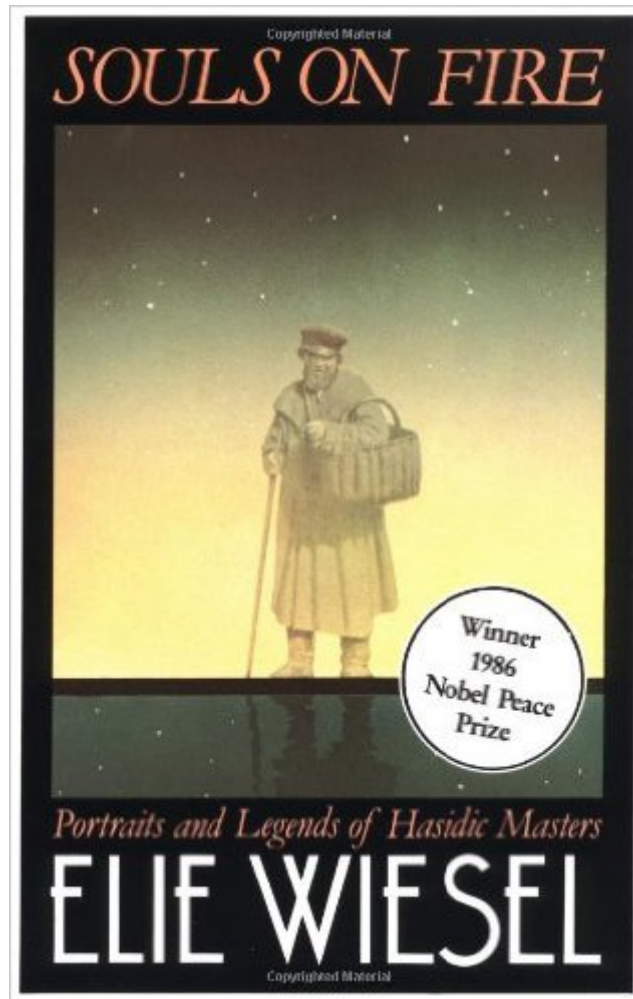


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Souls On Fire: Portraits And Legends Of Hasidic Masters



Synopsis

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".

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Elie Wiesel describes himself as neither philosopher nor historian but "merely" as a "storyteller who transmits what was given to him, as faithfully as possible, yet lending it his own voice and intonation." He does exactly that in *SOULS ON FIRE: HASIDIC PORTRAITS AND*

LEGENDS. Before reading this book, I only knew what little of Hasidism one can absorb from watching the Habad Lubavitch funding appeals on Public Television and from casual reading of such novels as Potok's THE CHOSEN. I did know that dancing played a part in Hasidic prayer, but hadn't a clue as to why. SOULS ON FIRE didn't make an instant Hasidic expert out of me, but it did give me a feeling for the history and traditions of a movement that, in the years of the holocaust, played a major, if indirect, part in the preservation of Eastern European Jewry and its culture. (It made reference to the dancing, too.) The modern Hasidic movement seems to have started with the Baal Shem Tov (1700 - 1760). (Baal Shem Tov translates as Master of the Name.) Passed from the Baal Shem Tov through succeeding generations of disciples, some of whom also became Masters, or Rebbes, in their own generations, the movement survived, and even thrived in a much less than friendly environment. Eventually it had spread to three geographical areas; the Ukraine, White Russia, and Poland. In each area there were individual Rebbes who taught their own brand of Hasidism and who had their own fervent followers. Since Wiesel's approach to his subject is to let the various tales and parables of the Rebbes speak for themselves, it's my intention, in this review, to do the same but on a very limited scale. A few comments follow: Baal Shem Tov: "Whoever loves God exclusively

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