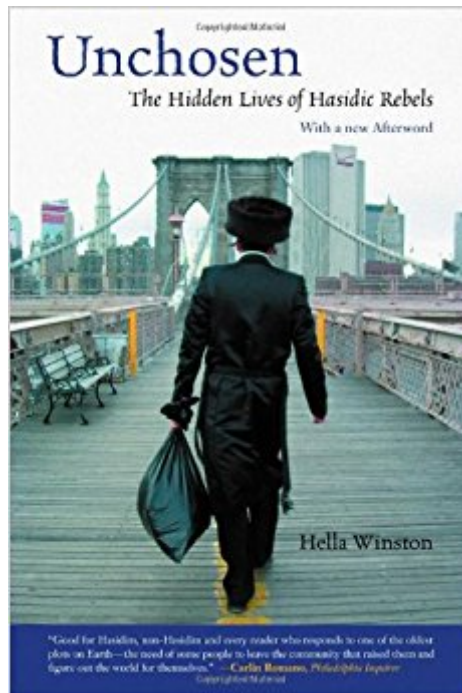


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Unchosen: The Hidden Lives Of Hasidic Rebels



Synopsis

An exploration of Hasidic Jews struggling to live within their restrictive communities—and, in some cases, to carve out a new life beyond them. When Hella Winston began talking with Hasidic Jews in Brooklyn for her doctoral dissertation in sociology, she was surprised to be covertly introduced to Hasidim unhappy with their highly restrictive way of life and sometimes desperately struggling to escape it. Unchosen tells the stories of these “rebel” Hasidim, serious questioners who long for greater personal and intellectual freedom than their communities allow. She meets Malky Schwartz, who grew up in a Lubavith sect in Brooklyn, and started Footsteps, Inc., an organization that helps ultra-Orthodox Jews who are considering or have already left their community. There is Yossi, a young man who, though deeply attached to the Hasidic culture in which he was raised, longed for a life with fewer restrictions and more tolerance. Yossi’s efforts at making such a life, however, were being severely hampered by his fourth grade English and math skills, his profound ignorance of the ways of the outside world, and the looming threat that pursuing his desires would almost certainly lead to rejection by his family and friends. Then she met Dini, a young wife and mother whose decision to deviate even slightly from Hasidic standards of modesty led to threatening phone calls from anonymous men, warning her that she needed to watch the way she was dressing if she wanted to remain a part of the community. Someone else introduced Winston to Steinmetz, a closet bibliophile worked in a small Judaica store in his community and spent his days off anxiously evading discovery in the library of the Conservative Jewish Theological Seminary, whose shelves contain non-Hasidic books he is forbidden to read but nonetheless devours, often several at a sitting. There were others still who had actually made the wrenching decision to leave their communities altogether. In her new Preface, Winston discusses the passionate reactions the book has elicited among Hasidim and non-Hasidim alike. Named one of Publishers Weekly’s Ten Best Religion Books of 2005. Honorable Mention in the 2012 Casey Medals for Meritorious Journalism

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review. While other excellent studies by Sue Fishkoff, Stephanie Wellen-Levine and Lis Harris have examined the inner lives of Lubavitcher Hasidim in a mostly positive way, this account distinguishes itself by focusing on the "rebels," not just among the Lubavitch but in other Hasidic communities as well, including the insular and right-wing Satmar sect. Winston, a doctoral candidate in sociology at CUNY, unfolds a world-within-a-world, where some young Hasidim sneak televisions into their apartments in garbage bags, change clothes on the subway to frequent bars in Manhattan and blog about their double lives online. She builds fascinating case studies, inviting readers into her interviewees' conflicted, and often painful, lives. One chapter profiles a famous Hasidic teacher who in fact no longer believes; another offers a walking tour of a Hasidic 'hood (slang for neighborhood); and another chronicles the hopeful and inspiring story of Malkie, a college-age woman who is building a sort of halfway house for others, like her, who have chosen to leave Hasidism. Winston shows us a Hasidic underworld where large families and a lack of secular education have resulted in extreme poverty and some serious at-risk behavior among youth. Her story of courage and intellectual rebellion will inspire anyone who has ever felt like a religious outcast. (Nov.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The Jews that are this book's subjects are members of the extremely insular Satmar in Brooklyn, one of the largest Hasidic groups in the U.S. Responsible for bearing and raising as many children as possible to husbands they have met only once or twice before marriage, the women are expected to focus on maintaining a Jewish home. The men are obligated to study, and they must pray three times daily. The author, a secular Jew whose mother is a Holocaust survivor, wanted to talk to them for her doctoral dissertation in sociology. Some of these people, Winston found, are able to cope fairly easily with the compartmentalization required of such a life. Others suffer terribly, and often alone, not wanting to live as hypocrites, but also knowing that making the decision to

abandon the community's way of life would likely cause rejection by their families and community, and guilt about bringing shame on their relatives and abandoning their traditions. An important work of scholarship and an absorbing account of these Hasidic Jews. George Cohen Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This book was an eye opener, to me as well it seems to the author who thought she was writing about the quaint lives of Hasidic Jews in Brooklyn and instead ended up getting a view beneath the surface of the Fiddler on the Roof fantasy. Even though she is criticized as showing only the negative side of these communities, she does leave the reader with a clear understanding of why it is so difficult for people to leave--not just because they have no job skills or lack a formal education---but because they have come to expect and seek comfort from a supportive community where people will help you. Of course that help comes at a price and that's what she explores.

Well written. Having once flirted with joining the Lubavitch and being unable to give up science and rationality Or sitting beside my spouse in public. I could identify with much written here and left with more information beyond the Lubavitch Hassids.

An insightful book from an author who was allowed into this narrow world. It is not "anti" anything. It is just a good look at the difficult world that constitutes Hasidim. Lives, lived in the 19th century, today. Many will think this is love of God, but the world can love God without dressing like they came from 19th century Poland, or narrowing lives to the control of a small number of people, who are just people. Being a secular Jew, this type of thought disturbs me. One can still, believe, in God without controlling the everyday lives of others. Winston, does a good job.

This is now my second book on the Hasidic community. I felt Hella did a wonderful job of weaving her findings in with the stories of those she was able to interview. I longed to head to NYC and open a place for those who really needed a safe landing place as they sorted out their religion vs a relationship with God.

This book takes you into a world that few mainstream Americans know anything about. It doesn't trash the Hasidic life. The people interviewed and the lives exposed give a balanced view.

I'd initially thought that this would be a book in which each chapter would be the story of a single Hasid who had made a choice. While the author did introduce a bit less than one person per chapter, the book was mainly centered around the life of a Hasid named Yossi. Pros: The prose was very light, easy, and lean. There was nearly no sociology jargon. (And this book is FAR preferable to read in lieu of another, similar book-- "Becoming Un-Orthodox: Stories of Ex-Hasidic Jews"-- which was extremely bloated and jargon heavy.) Cons: One thing that I might like to have seen would have been at least one picture of some of these many people that were discussed. (Most of the people interviewed in this book were Satmar.) There are two things that make me wonder that: 1. Satmar is a huge (and ever growing) dynasty. If there were that many problems in that community, then it would not be growing at such a healthy clip. 2. How do I know that these situations are typical? If you pass through enough people with mental problems, you will find an Adam Lanza. But that does not mean that most people with mental problems are Adam Lanza. So how do I know that this description of Yossi was even typical? It does not help the fact that the author relied on his experiences so heavily. Verdict: Recommended.

It's a story of the struggle of the Hasidic youth who want to enter secular life. The struggles they encounter. The new life in our world that we take for granted like going to a movie, television, and flack they receive from their family. It's very interesting to learn how their lives differ from ours and how we take our lives for granted. The Hasidic live in a world of their own, with their rules and restrictions. You'll enjoy reading this book.

reads like a textbook.

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