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Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom



Synopsis

This classic work collects Rebbe Nachman's conversations and teachings ranging from comments on practical everyday topics to fundamental teachings about joy, faith and meditation, and explanations of the mystical kabbalah. The conversations were recorded verbatim, giving a vivid picture of the atmosphere surrounding the Master, his wit, directness and wisdom. Also included is an account of Rebbe Nachman's adventure-filled pilgrimage to the Holy Land at the height of the Napoleonic wars in 1798.

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Customer Reviews

The content here is beyond classic- it is essential. The story of the difficult voyage to the land of Israel (being captured, trouble at sea, etc. etc.) is amazing to read first hand, as a primary source. The "Wisdom" and sayings of Rabbi Nachman, though, might benefit from a little more organization, and longer quotes to add some context. By just having a few lines on a topic, with a bewildering number of allusions, we are left to struggle to comprehend. It is more a reflection of Rabbi Nachman's totally encyclopedic knowledge of Tanakh (Bible), Talmud (Oral Law and commentary), Zohar (main work of kabbalah), etc. Don't let that deter you. The discussions are very profound - why Jews should study a law from Shulkhan Arukh (Code of Jewish Law) every day, for example, was like a lightning bolt of insight. Rabbi Nachman was clearly a tzaddik (holy man), and lived an unusually ascetic life (not usually approved of in Judaism). Putting the pieces together, we do certainly benefit, and the book only strengthens his legacy.

This is a reprint of the Aryeh Kaplan translation of a Breslov classic by Reb Nosson (Nathan) of Breslov. Reb Nosson was the chief disciple and official scribe of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov. As such, he sought to compile his Rebbe's teachings for future generations. Reb Nosson writes in his introduction to this volume: "I have therefore recorded a small portion of his saintly ways, from his earliest perception until his departure from this world in peace. I myself heard some of the accounts from the Rebbe's holy lips. Others were gleaned from those who knew him during his lifetime. Much of what is written here was seen with my own eyes." "Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom" contains first-hand anecdotes from the life of Rabbi Nachman, an account of his pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and a selection of lessons that he gave to his disciples. Many well-known Breslov sayings are found in this book, such as: "Every man [person] can attain the highest level. It depends on nothing but your own free choice...for everything depends on a multitude of deeds" (p.29) and "Worldly pleasures are like sunbeams in a dark room. They may actually seem solid, but one who tries to grasp a sunbeam finds nothing in his hand." (p. 112). This is also the source for the list of Ten Psalms that are recited for "Rebbe Nachman's Remedy." In short, this book is a goldmine of wisdom and a must-have for anyone interested in Breslov teachings.

Here it is, Rebbe Nachman in all his shame and glory, for all to see. Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom is a compendium of his sayings and teachings, taken from a wide variety of sources. Most come from his students, taking notes while he speaks. This can become quite post-modern at times. The note takers will comment on the text, explain that there was more the Rebbe taught, but that they can't remember it. At other times they explain that the Rebbe read their notes, and made changes. What we have is a fluid fusion of texts (of sorts), the very kind of production one can expect from early Hasidic sources. (In a way, it is much like the treatises of Aristotle. His two ethical works, the Eudemian and Nicomachean Ethics, are notes taken by his students. Consensus is that Nicomachean is the more complete and fleshed out. Was Nicomachus a better note taker, or did Aristotle just have a bad lecture day when Eudemus was in class?) So much for the structure of Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom. The content varies widely. There are silly things like the Rebbe's advice not to eat raw onions. There are lots of pseudo-scientific theories of health and nutrition. The Rebbe is against modernity, and not afraid to sound ignorant and bull-headed when on that topic. His attitudes toward sex in all its forms most people would find abhorrent or at least down right stupid. Yet for all this, Rebbe Nachman delivers many fresh and new insights into being Jewish. His ideas about the centrality of the tzaddik, the holy man, and isolation and individual prayer, in itself are a radical departure from standard forms in Judaism. Jews going off into the woods to talk to

God? Yes, that is radical for Judaism where community usually supersedes the individual. Where group forms of worship are the norm. It is all here, unadulterated. Dive right in; this is a rich mine to plumb.

Within this book (which was actually written by Rebbe Noson, Rebbe Nachman's disciple, and translated by Aryeh Kaplan) are powerful quotes and stories from Rebbe Nachman which I strongly believe that everyone, Jewish or not, can gain insight into the world and themselves. Besides the actual content of the book, the dust jacket hides a beautiful brown leather cover material. This is an aesthetically beautiful book to be sure, but most important is the genuine wisdom which it contains; the contents of this book has the capacity to truly benefit the reader's life.

Excellent!

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