



The Book of Jewish Women's Tales

Barbara Rush

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Whenever anyone tells a tale, that tale sends a message to the listener. When a Jewish storyteller tells a tale in a Jewish setting, that tale sends a Jewish message. And when a Jewish woman tells a tale to other Jewish women, she sends a Jewish woman's message: how to act as a Jewish woman - toward her community, toward other people, and toward God. This book is a collection of such women's tales and an analysis of their messages. The Book of Jewish Women's Tales consists of seventy-five stories, told and transmitted within the last two generations by Jewish women from around the world - from places as diverse as Ethiopia, India, Azerbaijan, Yemen, Greece, Eastern Europe, Israel, and the United States. The majority of the stories were culled from the Israel Folktale Archives, a repository of almost 19,000 tales; others Barbara Rush collected personally. Each story begins with an introduction in which Rush identifies its origin, its theme and meaning, and any other pertinent information about the tale, such as the biblical or talmudic passages to which it relates. The volume also includes sources to encourage further study of Jewish women's tales. The book is divided into sections, including life-cycle events such as birth, marriage, motherhood, aging, and death; holidays in the yearly cycle and Shabbat; and sections dealing with women in Israel and the strength of women. Some of the tales read like traditional fairy tales filled with supernatural beings, fairy godmothers, and royalty; others are romantic tales; still others deal with rites of passage and conflicts between men and women or among women. The stories have two things in common: in all of them the women emerge as strong, victorious, and clever, and all of the stories, while they have universal appeal to women, contain distinctly Jewish messages. The heroine does not merely win her beloved; their children carry on the teachings of the Torah.

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