

Book Notes - Rabbi Steven Rubenstein

Catch – 67 by Micah Goodman

I've been reading a good deal of Israeli fiction lately. Most of the books are not wrapped up in the 'big ideas' of the State of Israel; just books about people who happen to live in Israel. Last fall at Kol Nidre services I encouraged people to think of Israel as more than a place that needs our support, a place that we need to worry about. Of course, I do want our congregation to support Israel in a host of ways. But part of the original Zionist dream was for Israel to be a cultural center that would nurture Jews throughout the world. Israel can certainly be that today if we drink from the waters of Israeli culture.

I won't do more than mention the novels I've been reading because I want to focus on the one non-fiction Israeli book that I read recently as well. Here they are:

Three Floors Up by Eshkol Nevo – If you'd like to read this one, you can also join us on Sunday, March 3rd for the 1st of our Israel Book Club events. More info. here: <https://www.cbahm.org/event/three-floors-up.html>

The People of Forever Are Not Afraid by Shani Boianjiu – Interestingly, this book about three friends growing up and the way their service in the IDF changed their friendship and their lives overall, was written in English even though the author is Israeli.

A Horse Walks Into A Bar by David Grossman – This one won the Man Booker International Prize

One Night, Markovitch by Ayelet Gundar Goshen – This is from the same author as *Waking Lions* that I've spoken about at the synagogue.

Enough about fiction. I'd like to strongly recommend Micah Goodman's book *Catch-67: The Left, The Right, and the Legacy of The Six-Day War*. This

non-fiction book was a best seller in Israel and is both a primer for the development of Zionist/Israeli political thought from the time of Theodor Herzl up to today and a pragmatic look at the way the Six-Day war's legacy is a contemporary politics where everyone is right and everyone is wrong.

Perhaps the most far-reaching insight that Goodman has is related to the Israeli psyche, not its politics. Early in the book, Goodman dwells on the fact that Israelis have opinions about all sorts of things, but their opinions about the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians isn't only emotional, it is about their identity. As he puts it, "to object to an Israeli's position on the conflict is to object to his or her core identity." By presenting the attitudes and approaches of both the right and left fairly, and by suggesting that one possible way forward is to work for a less-than-final peace plan in the near-term, Goodman is trying to encourage true dialogue.

Goodman's title references Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* and the sense that there is no way out of the current dilemma. But he does so while suggesting that understanding each other is a good first step towards progress.