

# Jewish Books in Review

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*The Haj.* By Leon Uris. Double-day, 245 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10167. 1984. 566 pages. \$17.95.

Reviewed by David C. Gross

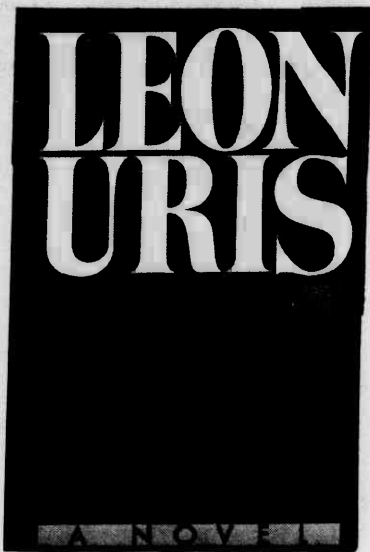
Leon Uris, whose novel *Exodus*, describing the struggle for the establishment of Israel, was a worldwide bestseller, is a writer with a passion — in all of his books dealing with Jewish themes he seeks to show that the Jewish people have been targets for nearly two thousand years, and now, in the twentieth century, despite the Holocaust, they have created a Jewish state, built on the foundations of justice for all, that will be for all time a haven for all Jews in need.

For many years literary circles buzzed with rumors that he was working on a sequel to *Exodus*, assuming that he would bring the story up to date from the War of Independence to today. Instead, Uris has produced a powerful, memorable novel that tells the story of Palestinian Jews and the Palestinian Arabs prior to Israel's establishment and during the early years of Israel. And the story is seen and told from the Arab side.

This is no easy task for a Jewish writer, particularly one who has become known as a partisan of Israel. And yet Uris has succeeded admirably in his task. What emerges is an insightful explanation of why, for nearly four decades, the Arabs have persisted in seeking to kill Israelis rather than sit down and talk peace.

As perhaps might have been expected, most reviewers have criticized the novel as being too one-sided, too strong in its delineation of the Arab side, with little or no attempt to show where Israel erred.

We'll make some admissions: Uris is not a great novelist in the way Dickens was. Some of the language could have used a sharp copy editor. That having been said,



what emerges from the pages of this book is a carefully researched work portraying what the Arabs did, how the vast majority of them were manipulated by morally corrupt leaders, how their religious faith led them to a position of seeing Israel as "evil," and how the vast majority of Arabs continue to blind themselves to the truth.

Put another way, *The Haj* explains how, from the very beginning of the Zionist movement, the idealistic Jews who came to Palestine sought to live in peace with their Arab neighbors but were rebuffed virtually at every turn, and how this extremist fanaticism of the Arab masses and the vile leadership of many of their political personalities has continued — to this day — to build a house of hate whose foundations sooner or later must collapse.

Uris does not say that the Arab people are inherently evil and blood-thirsty. He simply cites their own teachings that emphasize blind obedience — to the head of the family, the head of the village, the head of the community — and shows how this has led to the present situation. As one of the few Arabs in the novel who favored a peaceful coexistence with the Jews puts it: We, the Arabs, are consumed with hate, and they, the Jews, are

filled with love. And unless we learn to love, we are doomed.

The *Haj* in the novel's title is the muktar of the fictional village of Tabah. Although illiterate, he is wise in the ways of leadership. When a kibbutz is set up nearby in the years before Israeli statehood, he at first fumes and rages. When he gets to know the kibbutz head, on a man-to-man basis, he admits first to himself and then to the kibbutznik, Gideon Asch, that he considers the Jew his only true friend because only with him can he be open and honest. With everyone else in the Arab world he must maintain a false front. Asch and the *Haj* become close but secret friends.

When the United Nations proclaims a Jewish state and an Arab state in British-mandated Palestine, in 1947, the Tabah villagers, led by Ibrahim, the *Haj*, flee to escape the coming war — committing the most terrible mistake of their lives.

What was once a community of peaceful villagers becomes a group of Arab refugees. Women are raped by merciless Iraqi soldiers. Hunger and suffering abound. For a while Ibrahim and his family hide in the caves of ancient Qumran near the Dead Sea, but then they are forced by famine to join thousands of helpless Arab refugees in miserable camps supported by the west. The only time the Arab states appear on the scene is to recruit fedayeen, precursors of today's brainwashed PLO terrorists.

In short, Uris tells it like it was and like it is. He wishes there were some way to reach the mass of Arabs, to show them that they have been exploited by pro-Hilter Muftis and a variety of venal leaders who care nothing for their well-being. He ends his book on a dismal note, for to date no one, including the author, has found a way to cut through the lies and distortions that have been fed to two generations of Arabs in order to keep the anti-Israel pot boiling.

Those critics who assail Uris's new novel as being too partisan and one-sided are right: It is totally on one side, the side of truth.

David C. Gross, an author in his own right, is the editor of *The Jewish Week* (New York).

## How Many Jewish Mothers Does It Take To Change A Light Bulb??

By Beverly Davis

**QUESTION:** How many Jewish mothers does it take to change a light bulb?

**ANSWER:** (Said with a "Jewish" inflection): Don't worry about it; I'll sit here in the dark.

**QUESTION:** How many JAPS does it take to change a light bulb?

**ANSWER:** Two. One to call Daddy and one to open a can of Tab.

Chances are you've already heard at least one of these jokes; perhaps you've even laughed at them. Whether or not they are funny is not the issue. What is important is what they imply about Jewish women. The Jewish mother is seen as a manipulative individual who gets people to do what she wants by stimulating guilt. The Jewish American Princess (JAP) is depicted as lazy and self-indulgent, a girl/woman who relies on Daddy for everything, while reserving her deepest concerns for such matters as keeping a trim waist.

It is not surprising that Jewish women are the subject of the current (long) wave of ethnic jokes — all groups have been subjected to this at one time or another. What is amazing is the response to these of the Jewish community. Long active in vigorously opposing stereotyping of minorities, and with an honorable and productive record of working to reduce prejudice of all kinds in this country, the community is strangely silent about the jokes being made at the expense of Jewish women. Worse, many seem to embrace these stereotypes — witness the "I am a JAP" tee-shirts or, more painful, children sporting the legend "JAP in training."

Like all stereotypes, those of Jewish women are caricatures of certain traits — some good and some negative — which, for whatever reasons, are attributed to Jewish women. Most American Jews today trace their origins to the eastern European shtetls, a harsh world much unlike the singing environment of "Fiddler on the Roof." It was a world where a man was ex-

pected to steep himself in religious law. The woman had to be strong, capable, loving and hard-working; often she was the main support of the family economically as well as spiritually. It was she who dealt with the outside world of commerce and maintained a home in which she passed down to her children the cultural and religious practices — a turn-of-the-century "Supermom."

When these women came to America — the golden land — their roles changed gradually. With material success they were relieved of the need to work outside the home and were able to turn their considerable energies to matters of family. The resulting image of these women was the Yiddeshe momma, the revered old lady of the kitchen, famous for using food as an indication of her love. But somewhere along the time-line something went awry. Like Dr. Jekyll turning into Mr. Hyde, the Yiddeshe momma became the Jewish mother. So, for example, the loving concern for her children, pride in their accomplishments, and high expectations that were in earlier years considered attributes, have now been caricaturized into the American Jewish mother, that guilt-producing, over-protective interfering force to be dealt with as long as her child shall live.

While these good "Jewish" qualities were taken and twisted to create the Jewish mother, a different dynamic was at work in the creation of that most negative of stereotypical images of Jewish women — the Jewish American Princess. There, with help from some Jewish novelists, negative traits were blended together and affixed to Jewish women. As a result, today a young Jewish woman may be caring, serious and conscientious, but if she is even minimally well-dressed and well-groomed, chances are she will be labeled — by Jews and non-Jews alike — as a JAP. That implies she is a spoiled, self-centered, materialistic and shallow creature — a manufactured product that somehow got a Jewish label. Of course you don't have to be Jewish to be a JAP or a Jewish mother, but these are images that floated in our society with a distinct Jewish tag.

It is ironic that the Jewish community, which has worked for years to fight the destructive stereotyping of minorities in this country, are so passive about raising their voices against negative stereotypes of Jewish women. Clearly, it is time to end the proliferation of Jewish mother and JAP "jokes," and we need to apply the same energies to fight this stereotyping that we have used for others.

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Beverly Davis is President of B'nai B'rith Women, which will be launching a program on this theme in mid-September.

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