



## Jews and Words

By Amos Oz, Fania Oz-Salzberger

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**Jews and Words** By Amos Oz, Fania Oz-Salzberger

**A celebrated novelist and an acclaimed historian of ideas, father and daughter, unravel the chain of words at the core of Jewish life, history, and culture**

Why are words so important to so many Jews? Novelist Amos Oz and historian Fania Oz-Salzberger roam the gamut of Jewish history to explain the integral relationship of Jews and words. Through a blend of storytelling and scholarship, conversation and argument, father and daughter tell the tales behind Judaism's most enduring names, adages, disputes, texts, and quips. These words, they argue, compose the chain connecting Abraham with the Jews of every subsequent generation.

Framing the discussion within such topics as continuity, women, timelessness, and individualism, Oz and Oz-Salzberger deftly engage Jewish personalities across the ages, from the unnamed, possibly female author of the Song of Songs through obscure Talmudists to contemporary writers. They suggest that Jewish continuity, even Jewish uniqueness, depends not on central places, monuments, heroic personalities, or rituals but rather on written words and an ongoing debate between the generations. Full of learning, lyricism, and humor, *Jews and Words* offers an extraordinary tour of the words at the heart of Jewish culture and extends a hand to the reader, any reader, to join the conversation.

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## **Jews and Words By Amos Oz, Fania Oz-Salzberger Bibliography**

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## Editorial Review

From [Booklist](#)

\*Starred Review\* Oz and his daughter, a historian, combine their considerable talents to examine the role words and language have played in binding the Jewish people to their heritage. Although neither is religious (nor, for that matter, a believer), both find rich meaning in the words of the Bible (as well as the commentaries that followed). They theorize that the reason Judaism has survived is more about texts than faith, with “controversy built into them from the start.” Exhibiting eye-popping feats of literary scholarship and stunning swoops into the minds of writers, readers, and rabbis, the authors clearly relish the richness of their topic. The familiar subjects are here (the role of humor in Jewish writing), but the duo goes much further than expected. What about the important part questions have played in the writings, starting with Genesis? A wonderful chapter recounts the role of women writers and shows how the author of Song of Songs might have been female. The text grapples with what it means to be a Jew, especially with God optional, and how Judaism might never have survived without the decision of fathers and mothers to impress the importance (and sweetness) of learning on children early and often. This is a book to read, think about, and discuss because, as the ending notes, “every time we read a text, we author it in our own image.” --Ilene Cooper

Review

"In *Jews and Words* boisterous excitement over words and ideas generates a little paradise beyond politics. It opens up a garden of play and joy, of dispute without hate and passions without victims.' (Independent) 'Filled with chutzpah, wisdom, humor, and common sense... The authors have added meaningfully and joyfully to the continuum they celebrate. Readers will come away from this entrancing meditation needing to add comments of their own.' (Jewish Book World) '*Jews and Words* is a wonderful, a great essay. It will resonate not only in the ears of Jews, but also in the mind of any secular intellectual who retains a certain sensitivity for the wealth of words in our book-religions. The line 'Ours is not a bloodline but a textline' is a drum beat for those who hear the special connotations, and for everyone who embraces the eighteenth-century Enlightenment without forgetting those religious motifs that deserve translation without annihilation.' (Jurgen Habermas)"

From the Author

An excerpt from *Jews and Words*

Jewish continuity always hinged on uttered and written words, on an expanding maze of interpretations, debates, and disagreements, and on a unique human rapport. In synagogue, at school, and most of all in the home, it always involved two or three generations deep in conversation.

Ours is not a bloodline but a textline. There is a tangible sense in which Abraham and Sarah, Rabban Gamliel, Glickel of Hameln, and the present authors all belong to the same family tree. Such continuity has recently been disputed: there was no such thing as "Jewish nation," we are told, before modern ideologues deviously dreamed it up. Well, we disagree. Not because we are nationalists. One purpose of this book is to reclaim our ancestry, but also to explain what kind of ancestry, in our view, is worth the effort of reclaiming.

We are not about stones, clans, or chromosomes. You don't have to be an archeologist, an anthropologist, or a geneticist to trace and substantiate the Jewish continuum. You don't have to be an observant Jew. You don't have to be a Jew. Or, for that matter, an anti-Semite. All you have to be is a reader.

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