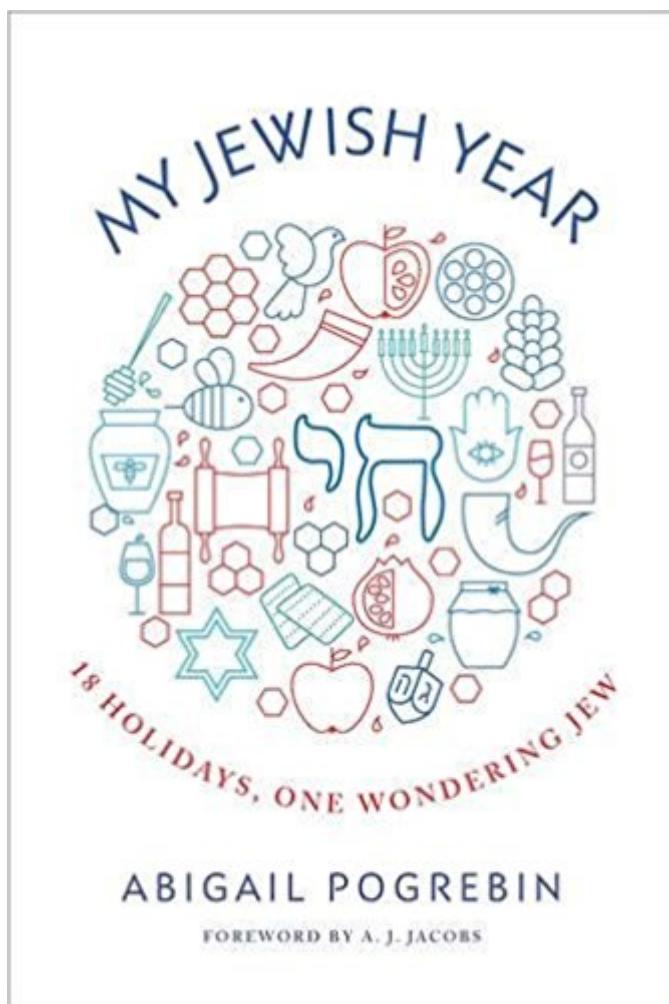


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# My Jewish Year: 18 Holidays, One Wondering Jew



## Synopsis

The much-dissected Pew Research Center study of 2013, “A Portrait of Jewish Americans,” revealed that most U.S. Jews locate their Jewishness in their ancestry and culture—not in religion. Abigail Pogrebin wondered if perhaps that’s because we haven’t all looked at religion closely enough. Although she grew up following some holiday rituals, Pogrebin realized how little she knew about their foundational purpose and current relevance. She wanted to understand what had kept these holidays alive and vibrant, in some cases for thousands of years. Her curiosity led her to embark on an entire year of intensive research, observation, and writing about the milestones on the Jewish calendar. *My Jewish Year* travels through this calendar’s signposts with candor, humor, and a trove of information, capturing the arc of Jewish observance through the eyes of a relatable, wandering—and wondering—Jew. The chapters are interspersed with brief reflections from prominent rabbis and Jewish thinkers. Maybe you’re seeking an accessible, digestible roadmap for Jewish life. Maybe you’d appreciate a fresh exploration of what you’ve mastered. Whatever your motivation, you’ll be educated, entertained, and inspired by Pogrebin’s unusual journey—and by *My Jewish Year*.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Journalist Pogrebin (*Stars of David: Prominent Jews Talk About Being Jewish*) uses her former column for the Forward as a launching pad to take readers on a spiritual and intellectual journey. Here, she explores the Jewish calendar of holidays and observances (including Rosh Hashanah,

Yom Kippur, Passover, and Shabbat), combining both cultural and theological explanations with often hilarious autobiographical detail. Each major Jewish holiday is explored in turn, with Pogrebin visiting a variety of synagogues and partnering with rabbis and friends as she fasts, prays, and worships. Throughout this engaging read are funny anecdotes intertwined with deep spiritual reflection. Verdict: A modern take on a pilgrim's journal, this account will offer insight for Jewish and non-Jewish readers alike. Readers who are interested in becoming more observant will find it especially worthwhile. "My Jewish Year is an amusing, intelligent, and often incandescent approach to modern religious practice....The true treat of Pogrebin's work is its refusal to settle on 'correct' means of observance; instead, it draws from multiple expressions of Jewish holidays, from Orthodox practice to near-secular articulations, to paint a rich picture of diverse religious life....[Pogrebin's] desire to connect more meaningfully to an ancient and learned tradition is infectious, and audiences are likely to find much here to replicate. My Jewish Year is an invaluable text, both for learning about Jewish holidays and for understanding how contemporary people work to find personal meaning in inherited traditions." Foreword Reviews "Can a 50-something neophyte glean meaning about herself and the world from observing all 18 annual Jewish holidays in a year of personal exploration? Pogrebin (Stars of David) provides a vigorous and moving affirmative answer in this insightful, clever, funny, and compulsively readable volume that will lead newcomers to seek out her other writings. Having grown up with her Jewish identity 'a given, not a pursuit,' Pogrebin believed that there was more to 'feel than I'd felt, more to understand than I knew.' She is guided by an eclectic group of teachers, including rabbis from all modern denominations, who provide different lenses through which to view ancient, and sometimes obscure, holidays as relevant today. Her exploration begins with Elul, the Hebrew month that precedes the Jewish New Year, that provides an opportunity to gear up for that holy day with daily self-examinations; typically, her account of trying to learn how to blow a shofar every morning, and integrate her experiment in observance with her family routine, is both humorous and inspiring. Even knowledgeable Jews will find wisdom and new perspectives in these pages." Publishers Weekly "Recent years have seen a number of books published in which an author commits to following the oft-neglected tenets of a religion—think A. J. Jacobs's *The Year of Living Biblically* (2007) or Rachel Held Evans's *A Year of Biblical Womanhood* (2012). Here, putting her own spin on this formula, Pogrebin charts her own successful and illuminating course through a year of Jewish holidays. This personal but also thoroughly researched book chronicles a year of celebrating 18 Jewish holidays deeply and committedly. Each chapter features background information about the holiday and conversations with experts but also the

author's sometimes funny and sometimes poignant attempts to do them well. The book is a frank reckoning with the author's own heart, but it's also about the myriad ways Jews relate to each other. Jewish and non-Jewish readers alike will appreciate this thoughtful and intimate journey through a very Jewish year." *Booklist* "Pogrebin's process is to learn about a holiday prior to observing it. Excerpts from interviews with contemporary Jewish sages frame each chapter, so the book offers a treasure of Jewish wisdom and the clear sense that many gifted teachers provided directions to this wandering Jew. *My Jewish Year* is a testament to the power and the promise of adult Jewish education, as well as to the transcendent value of Jewish time. Ultimately, and movingly, [Pogrebin] finds herself at the end of the year reawakened to 'klal Israel, the whole of Israel: a shared inheritance, and reverence for a calendar that has kept us intact.'" *Lilith* "Praise for Abigail Pogrebin's *My Jewish Year*" To understand the Jewish calendar, Abigail Pogrebin immersed herself in its rhythms and rituals for a full 12 months. Her riveting account of this experience serves as a lively introduction to Judaism's holidays and fast days and opens a window on how Judaism is actually lived in 21st-century America."

Jonathan D. Sarna, Professor of American Jewish History, Brandeis University; author of *American Judaism: A History* With wit, warmth, and the fierce, searching curiosity that is her trademark, Abigail Pogrebin takes us on an intimate, powerful journey as she reckons with her faith and commitment, and in so doing, gives us the gift of exploring our own. This book will speak to everyone who wonders why we do what we do, and isn't content with the answer that our fathers and mothers did it before us. I absolutely loved it. *Dani Shapiro*, author of *Devotion* A superb point-of-entry volume for anyone who wants to bring Jewish holidays into their lives, and a great refresher course for veterans who need their holidays re-energized.

Pogrebin's style is engaging, and her insights are deep. *Rabbi Joseph Telushkin*, author of *Rebbe and Jewish Literacy* "In *My Jewish Year*, Abigail Pogrebin takes on the holiday cycle with a keen mind, an open heart, and a generous sense of humor. This is the perfect gift for anyone thinking about moving up another rung on the ladder of Jewish observance; or for exploring the tradition for the first time." *Joshua Malina*, actor in *Scandal* and *The West Wing* "Abigail Pogrebin's candid exploration of Judaism via 18 core holidays is not only informative but also extremely relatable, for Jews and non-Jews alike. Her journey to locate modern-day meaning in these religious traditions; some of which are thousands of years old; is both relevant and soulful." *Lauren Bush Lauren*, Founder and CEO, FEED Projects "Abigail Pogrebin's journey through the Jewish year is honest, illuminating, entertaining, and incredibly brave. She is willing to go deep into a complex religious culture to find out if and how it

has meaning for her, and in so doing, lights the way for the rest of us. Even if you read every word of her project in the Forward; as I did; you will find new material and so many fresh, surprising insights in this remarkable book." ;Jane Eisner, Editor-in-Chief, ForwardPraise for Stars of David:>Consistently engaging....Pogrebin says this book grew out of her efforts to clarify her own Jewish identity. But you don't need to be on such a quest to enjoy the wide range of experiences and feelings recorded here. ;Publishers Weekly;>Pogrebin not only succeeded in securing access to dozens of celebrities, but also managed the difficult task of getting them to open up about a facet of their very public lives that generally has remained private. ;The Forward;>A great read. ;Women in Judaism;>A provocative and enjoyable book for Jews and gentiles alike. ;Library Journal;>Stars of David is an endearing book done with skill and taste. ;New York Post;>A fascinating book. ;The Charlotte ObserverPraise for One and the Same:>Spot on. An honest explanation of how multiples feel about the relationship into which they were born. ;Newsweek;>An immensely satisfying, enlightening read. ;BookPage;>A fresh alternative to traditional how-to guidebooks for parents expecting two or more. ;Twins magazine;>This book about what it means to be a duplicate is smart and revealing and wise;>and, well, singular. ;The Daily Beast;>Pogrebin's candor about her own twinship [is] endearing. . . . A juicy read. ;Bookslut

Abigail Pogrebin's immersive exploration of the Jewish calendar began with her popular 12-month series for the Forward. Now, in *My Jewish Year: 18 Holidays, One Wondering Jew*, Pogrebin has expanded her investigation;>confusing it with more of her personal story and exposing each ritual's deeper layers of meaning. Pogrebin is also the author of *Stars of David: Prominent Jews Talk About Being Jewish*, in which she discussed Jewish identity with 62 celebrated public figures ranging from Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg to Steven Spielberg, from Mike Wallace to Natalie Portman. Pogrebin's second book, *One and the Same*, about the challenges of twinship, is grounded in her own experience as half of an identical pair. Most recently, she published "Showstopper," a bestselling Kindle Single that recalls her adventures as a 16-year-old cast member in the original Broadway production of Stephen Sondheim's flop-turned-cult-favorite, "Merrily We Roll Along." Pogrebin's articles have appeared in *Newsweek*, *New York magazine*, *The Daily Beast*, *Tablet*, and many other publications. Pogrebin was formerly a producer for *Ed Bradley*

and Mike Wallace at CBS News' 60 Minutes, where she was nominated for an Emmy. Before that, she produced for broadcasting pioneers Fred Friendly, Bill Moyers, and Charlie Rose at PBS. A frequent speaker at synagogues and Jewish organizations around the country, Pogrebin has for seven years produced and moderated her own interview series at the JCC of Manhattan called "What Everyone's Talking About." Abigail Pogrebin lives in New York with her husband, David Shapiro, and their two teenage children. A.J. Jacobs is the editor of What It Feels Like and the author of The Two Kings: Jesus and Elvis and America Off-Line. He is the senior editor of Esquire and has written for The New York Times, Entertainment Weekly, Glamour, New York magazine, New York Observer, and other publications. He lives in New York.

This is a wonderful description of Judaism, and how it is practiced in different ways by Jews of different stripes but all part of klal yisrael---the whole Jewish community. Ms. Pogrebin explores the way others celebrate our common faith and with a truly open heart---something many people are simply unable to do. She describes what she experienced in a way that puts the reader right there with her, without judgment or condemnation of anything that she sees or hears for the first time. There are so many portions of this book that strike very close to home and her descriptions of what she drew from what she saw, heard and felt nearly put me in tears. So much of this book had special meaning when portions first appeared as essays in The Forward newspaper, but put together as a whole gives what she writes even greater meaning. I see this as a volume to which I will return over and over again.

Wonderful account of Jewish holidays with respect and humor. It greatly expanded my knowledge of a culture and religion I had only known a little bit about. I am enriched.

Beautifully written and researched, and the personal stories make this very engaging.

Wonderful kindling of memories. Beautifully written. A talented lady.

This book has made it so much easier for me to understand and appreciate the orthodox lifestyle that my family member has chosen.

This is a difficult book to review; it's well written but the word "like" almost never comes to mind while reading it. The premise is interesting - a non observant Jew takes on the major holidays for a

year. Not just the typical three days per year but the "real deal"...all the fast days, all the extended holidays, all the preparation....from blowing of the shofar for a full month (plus or minus a bit) to the weekly Shabbat this is no small feat. For those who are wondering how the weekly day of rest is recorded, don't worry - the author just selected a couple for the purpose of the book. Otherwise, it's all here including the guilt (yes, what would a book about Jewish observance be without guilt...?), the struggle with self, the surprising connections that seemed to take on new meaning at the most unexpected times. The book is not without some faults; there is a bit of "name dropping" but overall it's fairly restrained and interesting...also, the author doesn't limit herself to celebrity persona only...there are ample "regular" folks with names that are unlikely to generate any recognition along the way. There is ample awkwardness both in the actual attempt to participate and make a meaningful connection...for this I applaud the author for resisting the temptation to portray a seamless spiritual experience or make light of the meaning behind the experience no matter how elusive. The author fully recognizes the fact that many Orthodox follow these traditions throughout their entire life so it might be considered "no big deal"....on the other hand, it is the very fact that many were brought up in this way that makes it feel so foreign, so unattainable, so intimidating to the non-observant.

Gave it as a gift, which the recipient is very happy with.

Great read.

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