



Unchosen: The Hidden Lives of Hasidic Rebels

By Hella Winston

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Honorable Mention in the 2012 Casey Medals for Meritorious Journalism

When Hella Winston began talking with Hasidic Jews for her doctoral dissertation in sociology, she was excited to be meeting members of the highly insular Satmar sect. While several Jewish journalists and scholars have produced largely admiring books describing the Lubavitch way of life and that group's outreach efforts to unaffiliated Jews, very little has been written about the many other Hasidic sects in the United States. Unlike Lubavitchers, members of these other groups are raised to avoid all unnecessary contact with outside society, including contact with other Jews. Winston's access was all but unprecedented.

As a nonobservant Jew with little prior exposure to the Hasidic world, she never could have guessed what would happen next—that she would be introduced, slowly and covertly, to Hasidim from Satmar and other sects who were deeply unhappy with their highly restrictive way of life and sometimes desperately struggling to leave their communities. First there was Yossi, a young man who, though deeply attached to the Hasidic culture in which he was raised, longed for a life with fewer restrictions and more tolerance. Yossi's efforts at making such a life, however, were being severely hampered by his fourth grade English and math skills, his profound ignorance of the ways of the outside world, and the looming threat that pursuing his desires would almost certainly lead to rejection by his family and friends. Then she met Dini, a young wife and mother whose decision to deviate even slightly from Hasidic standards of modesty led to threatening phone calls from anonymous men, warning her that she needed to watch the way she was dressing if she wanted to remain a part of the community. Someone else introduced Winston to Steinmetz, a closet bibliophile worked in a small Judaica store in his community and spent his days off anxiously evading discovery in the library of the Conservative Jewish Theological Seminary, whose shelves contain non-Hasidic books he is forbidden to read but nonetheless devours, often several at a sitting. There were others still who had actually made the wrenching decision to leave their communities altogether.

Already called a "must read" by Hasidic blogger "Shtreimel," *Unchosen* tells the fascinating stories of these and other rebel Hasidim, serious questioners who long for greater personal and intellectual freedom than their communities allow. In so doing, *Unchosen* forces us to reexamine the history of these communities and

asks us to consider what we choose not to see when we romanticize them.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. While other excellent studies by Sue Fishkoff, Stephanie Wellen-Levine and Lis Harris have examined the inner lives of Lubavitcher Hasidim in a mostly positive way, this account distinguishes itself by focusing on the "rebels," not just among the Lubavitch but in other Hasidic communities as well, including the insular and right-wing Satmar sect. Winston, a doctoral candidate in sociology at CUNY, unfolds a world-within-a-world, where some young Hasidim sneak televisions into their apartments in garbage bags, change clothes on the subway to frequent bars in Manhattan and blog about their double lives online. She builds fascinating case studies, inviting readers into her interviewees' conflicted, and often painful, lives. One chapter profiles a famous Hasidic teacher who in fact no longer believes; another offers a walking tour of a Hasidic 'chood (slang for neighborhood); and another chronicles the hopeful and inspiring story of Malkie, a college-age woman who is building a sort of halfway house for others, like her, who have chosen to leave Hasidism. Winston shows us a Hasidic underworld where large families and a lack of secular education have resulted in extreme poverty and some serious at-risk behavior among youth. Her story of courage and intellectual rebellion will inspire anyone who has ever felt like a religious outcast. (Nov.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

From [Booklist](#)

The Jews that are this book's subjects are members of the extremely insular Satmar in Brooklyn, one of the largest Hasidic groups in the U.S. Responsible for bearing and raising as many children as possible to husbands they have met only once or twice before marriage, the women are expected to focus on maintaining a Jewish home. The men are obligated to study, and they must pray three times daily. The author, a secular Jew whose mother is a Holocaust survivor, wanted to talk to them for her doctoral dissertation in sociology. Some of these people, Winston found, are able to cope fairly easily with the compartmentalization required of such a life. Others suffer terribly, and often alone, not wanting to live as hypocrites, but also knowing that making the decision to abandon the community's way of life would likely cause rejection by their families and community, and guilt about bringing shame on their relatives and abandoning their traditions. An important work of scholarship and an absorbing account of these Hasidic Jews. *George Cohen*
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Review

Complex and heart-wrenchingly compelling. --Caroline Leavitt, *Boston Globe*

"Winston . . . builds fascinating case studies, inviting readers into her interviewees' conflicted, and often painful, lives . . . show[ing] us a Hasidic underworld where large families and a lack of secular education have resulted in extreme poverty and some serious at-risk behavior among youth. Her story of courage and intellectual rebellion will inspire anyone who has ever felt like a religious outcast." --*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

"Good for Hasidim, non-Hasidim and every reader who responds to one of the oldest plots on Earth—the need of some people to leave the community that raised them, and figure out the world for themselves." --Carlin Romano, *Philadelphia Inquirer*

"Dives fearlessly into a fascinating topic . . . Winston channels the exhilaration of her subjects' newfound freedom, without losing all compassion for the disappointed—even angry—community they are leaving behind." --Holly Lebowitz Rossi, *Dallas Morning News*

From the Trade Paperback edition.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Jennifer Burritt:

Have you spare time for just a day? What do you do when you have much more or little spare time? Yeah, you can choose the suitable activity regarding spend your time. Any person spent their particular spare time to take a stroll, shopping, or went to the actual Mall. How about open or maybe read a book eligible Unchosen: The Hidden Lives of Hasidic Rebels? Maybe it is being best activity for you. You already know beside you can spend your time with the favorite's book, you can cleverer than before. Do you agree with it is opinion or you have other opinion?

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Dollie Simmons:

Reading a e-book tends to be new life style in this particular era globalization. With looking at you can get a lot of information that will give you benefit in your life. Having book everyone in this world can easily share their idea. Guides can also inspire a lot of people. Plenty of author can inspire their own reader with their story as well as their experience. Not only situation that share in the ebooks. But also they write about advantage about something that you need example. How to get the good score toefl, or how to teach your young ones, there are many kinds of book that you can get now. The authors nowadays always try to improve their ability in writing, they also doing some exploration before they write to their book. One of them is this Unchosen: The Hidden Lives of Hasidic Rebels.

Chung England:

This Unchosen: The Hidden Lives of Hasidic Rebels is great publication for you because the content which is full of information for you who else always deal with world and have to make decision every minute. This kind of book reveal it data accurately using great organize word or we can state no rambling sentences within it. So if you are read the item hurriedly you can have whole data in it. Doesn't mean it only offers you straight forward sentences but hard core information with beautiful delivering sentences. Having Unchosen: The Hidden Lives of Hasidic Rebels in your hand like finding the world in your arm, info in it is not ridiculous just one. We can say that no book that offer you world within ten or fifteen tiny right but this reserve already do that. So , this is certainly good reading book. Heya Mr. and Mrs. stressful do you still

doubt in which?

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