

Book Review: "Devil in Jerusalem" by Naomi Ragen

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Devil in Jerusalem
By Naomi Ragen

This is a very well-written, gripping, and suspenseful novel that is based on true horrendous events among Jews, Christians, Muslims, Atheists, and indeed all people. Although depressing, the story needs to be told to protect vulnerable and insecure people from falling into the grip of cult leaders who lead innocent victims into believing that the cult leader is a "messiah," a "god-like" figure, a man or woman who knows the ultimate truth, who is in conversation with angels and God, who is defending his gullible flock from demons, and aiding them to climb to loftier heights, to become what he or she claims God desires them to become.

Some of these cult leaders milk their followers of their wealth or part of it, leaving them to live in harsh conditions that is "better for them," which "helps clean them," while the cult leaders live in huge mansions in luxury, even flying in multi-million dollar planes.

Many of these leaders are sick psychopaths who derive unnatural pleasure from being able to control and manipulate people. Some, as the "messiah" in this tale enjoy hurting their followers and getting others to hurt people as they watch, or, as an American cult figure did, he poisoned hundreds of his flock.

While this book does not address it, there are many, too many, “ultra-religious” leaders, who although not reaching the level of a cult leader, also take advantage of insecure, often insufficiently educated people leading them to think that what they are teaching is true religion, while what they are saying is untrue. They attract many followers, even well-educated men and women, and cash in on them by taking donations and ego-bursts. They demand the observance of practices that reasonable religious leaders consider absurd and demeaning, even demonic, behaviors that cut off their congregants from friends and neighbors.

Naomi Ragen’s tale of a Jewish cult leader in Jerusalem is based on some true events that occurred in Israel, but while Jewish it is an unfortunate universal tale. Irony is too weak a word to describe the striking similarities of the Jerusalem cult leader to what occurred in ancient times in Jerusalem’s Valley of Hinnom, called Gehinnom in Hebrew, which came to be the word for “hell,” where pagan priest were able to convince their followers to deliver their children to burn them as sacrifices to their god.

Ragen’s tale is the story of a loving couple, an educated woman and her loving husband who is not as educated as his wife, who is a well-meaning luftmensch, a man with his head in the clouds, who does not like to work. They are Americans from good families who moved to and settled in Israel because of their love of Judaism. He thinks that he should spend as much time as possible studying Talmud for he was told that this is what God wants. However, he soon becomes attracted to the study of Kabbalah, Jewish mysticism, which he really does not understand, and falls under the influence of the “messiah,” a charismatic, bearded, highly disturbed rabbi with a restricted group of followers who teaches practical Kabbalah. Although the husband spends time “studying,” he finds time to produce children. Soon, with half a dozen kids, and with little or no help from her husband, tired, feeling lost, and confused, she also falls under the “messiah’s” control.

What follows is bizarre, cruel, and unbelievable. She is led to do things no rational person would do. Brainwashed and convinced that what she is watching is good for her and her children, she looks on as her children are tortured, beaten, burned, forced to eat vomit and feces. She allows the “messiah” to do tormenting things to her and to her husband, and to cause her to afflict her husband, and he her.

This is a powerful tale, a story well-worth one’s time to read and enjoy, for Naomi Ragen is a superb writer. But it is also a reminder that there are many in society today, even in Israel, who take advantage of people, and we must beware and not

passively and naively trust all that we hear and see even when the words and acts are spoken and performed by a black garbed saintly-appearing rabbi.