

## Books For Discussion

The Union for Reform Judaism recommends two **Significant Jewish Books** each quarter for individuals and book groups. Study and discussion guides are available at <http://urj.org/books>.

### A Pigeon and a Boy: A Novel by Meir Shalev

(Schocken, 311 pp., \$25)

**M**eir Shalev was born in 1948 on Nahalal, Israel’s first moshav, making him the same age as the State of Israel. His latest novel is a story of midlife and renewal, written in a storytelling style replete with echoes and imagery from the Bible, Israel’s history, and nature.

Yair Mendelsohn, a middle-aged Israeli guide specializing in bird-watching tours, is languishing in a loveless marriage. He receives a second chance when his mother gives him a gift of money and urges him to find a home of his own—a home he loves. In the north of Israel, he finds a small, run-down house overlooking the Jezreel Valley: “I went to find myself a home... A home that would heal, and soothe, and build me as I built it,” Yair recounts, echoing the words of the Zionist folksong (“we came to the land to build and to be built”). Through this renovation project, he rediscovers the love of his youth, Tizrah, a vivacious, earthy woman who now runs a construction company with her father called “Meshulam Fried and Daughter, Inc.”

Intertwined with Yair’s story is a second tale that takes place before his birth, during Israel’s War of Independence. It is the story of a young man (called “the Baby” because he is short and chubby) who is a skilled pigeon handler, trained by the Haganah for battlefield communications. Images of war are juxtaposed with descriptions of the pigeon handler’s gentle traits (“A homing pigeon must love her home; otherwise she will not wish to return to it,” he quotes his teachers). Mortally wounded, the Baby dispatches his last pigeon with a message—to the girl he loves in Tel Aviv. The content of this message is the secret that connects the two tales in this lyrical nov-

el rooted in the land and lore of Israel.

### To Heal a Fractured World: The Ethics of Responsibility by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

(Schocken, 280 pp., paperback \$14)

**J**udaism contains mysteries, but its ultimate purpose is not mysterious at all. It is to honour the image of God in other people and thus turn the world into a home for the divine presence,” writes Jonathan Sacks, chief rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of Great Britain and the Commonwealth. “One of Judaism’s most distinctive and challenging ideas is its *ethics of responsibility*, the idea that God invites us to become, in the rabbinic phrase, his ‘partners in the work of creation.’”

In this book Rabbi Sacks addresses the central place of social justice in Judaism. He traces the origins of such Judaic concepts as *simhah* (which is usually translated as “joy,” but actually means “the happiness we make by sharing”), *tzedakah* (“charity seen as justice”), *hessed* (“deeds of kindness”), and *tikkun olam* (“mending the world”). Drawing on a vast range of material from Bible and Talmud to personal anecdotes, he describes what acts of

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#### Life, Faith, and Cancer: Jewish Journeys through Diagnosis, Treatment, and Recovery, edited by Doug Kohn

This volume of essays by rabbis, cantors, and other Jewish professionals, all of whom have experienced cancer, addresses fundamental questions such as “How do I keep going after a cancer diagnosis?” and “How do I maintain my connection to Judaism and God?”

#### Resilience of the Soul: Developing Emotional and Spiritual Resilience in Adolescents and Their Families

Rabbi Edythe Mencher counsels families and congregations on how to shore up inner strength and respond to teen depression, eating disorders, binge drinking, substance abuse, and more.

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responsibility mean for the individual and for the world.

The greatest danger he sees to this ethic is the attitude that someone else will do what needs to be done. “Yes, if we do not do it, someone else may.

But we will then have failed to understand why we are here and what we are summoned to do.” If we listen carefully, he writes, we hear “the voice of God asking us, as he asked the first humans, ‘where are you?’” □

