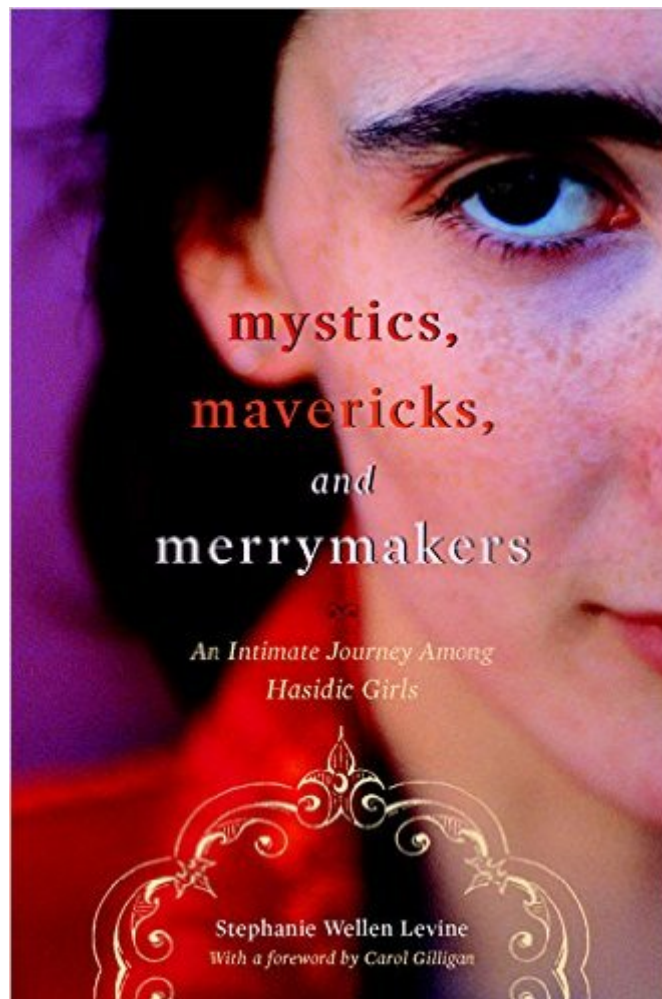


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Mystics, Mavericks, And Merrymakers: An Intimate Journey Among Hasidic Girls



Synopsis

From the ardently religious young woman who longs for the life of a male scholar to the young rebel who visits a strip club, smokes pot, and agonizes over her loss of faith to the proud Lubavitcher with a desire for a high-powered career, Stephanie Wellen Levine provides a rare glimpse into the inner worlds and daily lives of these Hasidic girls. Lubavitcher Hasidim are famous for their efforts to inspire secular Jews to become more observant and for their messianic fervor. Strict followers of Orthodox Judaism, they maintain sharp gender-role distinctions. Levine spent a year living in the Lubavitch community of Crown Heights, Brooklyn, participating in the rhythms of Hasidic girlhood. Drawing on many intimate hours among Hasidim and over 30 in-depth interviews, *Mystics, Mavericks, and Merrymakers* offers rich portraits of individual Hasidic young women and how they deal with the conflicts between the regimented society in which they live and the pull of mainstream American life. This superbly crafted book offers intimate stories from Hasidic teenagers' lives, providing an intriguing twist to a universal theme: the struggle to grow up and define who we are within the context of culture, family, and life-driving beliefs.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I loved "Mystics, Mavericks, and Merrymakers." Levine portrays a wide range of Chassidic teenage girls with depth and respect. Rebels, mystics, popular girls, and geeks all come to life on these pages. I had so much fun getting the inside scoop on the Lubavitch community and the girls' various thoughts and adventures. "Mystics, Mavericks, and Merrymakers" entertains like the best novels, but the fact that it's nonfiction gives it even more power because we're reading the truth (Levine does

explain that some aspects were fictionalized in order to maintain the girls' privacy). The pages abound with perceptive characterization, rich description, and a wonderful sense of place. My favorite part of this book involves wonderful chapters that describe individual Chassidic girls. Also, I was amazed how much I learned about Orthodox Jewish observance and Chassidic thought from reading this book. Dietary laws, prayer, holidays, dress codes, sexual relations, Chassidic philosophy, and so much else comes up. What really surprised me was how much insight this book gives into the lives of teenage girls, and people in general, outside the Chassidic world. In the introduction, and more thoroughly in the conclusion, Levine discusses how surprisingly well-adjusted many of these Lubavitch young women are, and she offers thoughtful, sensitive suggestions about what this community can teach the rest of us. But she never lets us forget that the community is terribly hard for the girls who can't or won't fit in, like those who stop believing, or who lack the desire to become Chassidic wives and mothers. What impressed me most is this: "Mystics, Mavericks, and Merrymakers" describes a small pocket of the world in a way that makes it seem universal.

I read this book as a non-Jew who was interested in Hasidism. This particular book attracted me because I am the parent of two teen-age daughters. Having close contact with the problems my daughters face in the modern world I felt would help me understand the issues of Hasidic young women. Although the book is not designed to give a rigorous introduction to Hasidism, I am quite delighted by Stephanie Levine's work and the chance it has given me to have a glimpse into the spiritual and mundane issues of modern Lubavitch Hasidism. Far from being a broad review of young Hasidic women, Levine focuses on the Lubaticher sect of Hasidism and its community in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn, New York. She spent over a year living with and interviewing the students, teachers, and parents associated with the Bais Rivka Lubavitch high school, a girls-only school. Hasidic girls have very little contact with males outside their immediate families. Their religious beliefs allow them only the slightest contacts with the world outside their community. Popular videos and music are not allowed and dietary restrictions only allow eating in the most kosher of restaurants. The "mavericks" part of the title has to do with the rebellious response that the young women sometimes bring to these severe restraints. The "mystics" aspect of the title has to do with the deeply spiritual aspects of Hasidism where every thought and action of an individual's life has cosmic implications as the community does all it can to bring about the coming of the messiah. The last chapter of this book, "Into The Future," begins with a wonderfully clear and concise description of Lubavitch mystical beliefs.

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