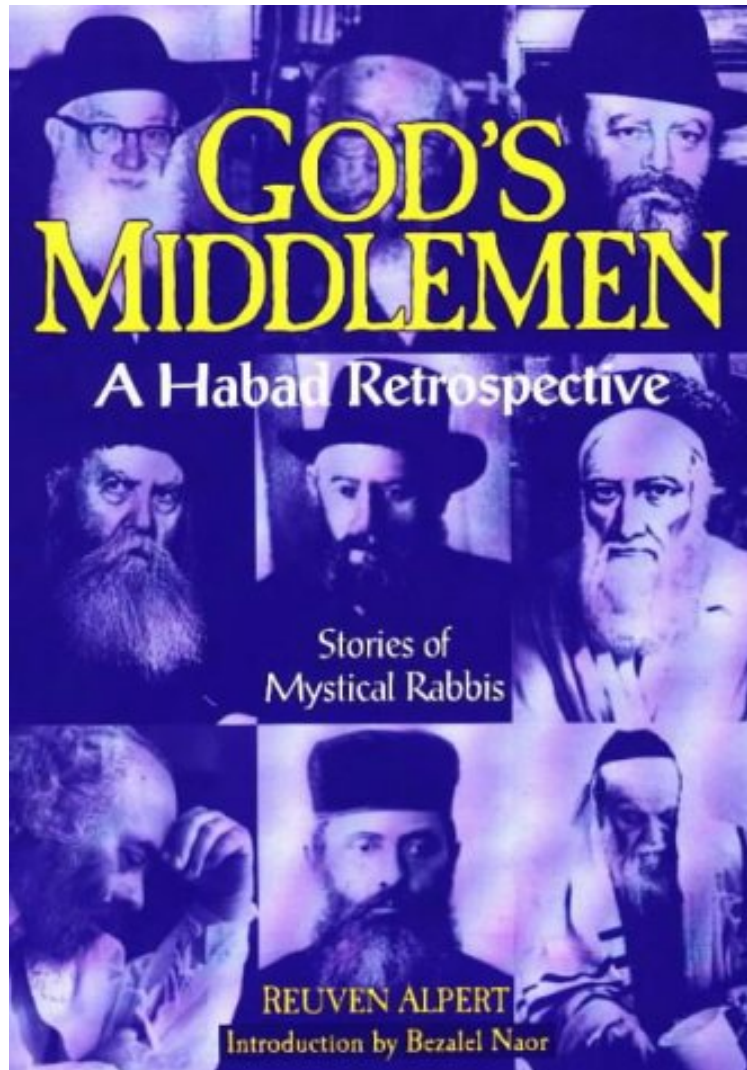


# God's Middlemen: A Habad Retrospective/Stories of Mystical Rabbis

Reuven Alpert

DOC | \*audiobook | ebooks | Download PDF | ePub



DOWNLOAD



+

READ ONLINE

#4357737 in Books 1998-03Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 .65 x 5.90 x 8.011, #File Name:  
188399117X124 pages | File size: 61.Mb

**Reuven Alpert : God's Middlemen: A Habad Retrospective/Stories of Mystical Rabbis** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised God's Middlemen: A Habad Retrospective/Stories of Mystical Rabbis:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. important scholarly introduction to chabad chassidusBy Stephen M. TolanyThe first third of this book is a 48-page introduction to the history of the Chabad-Lubavitch chassidus written by Bezalel Naor, and the remainder consists of revealing and fascinating anecdotes about individuals and events in the movements, told from a personal perspective by "Reuven Alpert." The anecdotes are certainly worth reading, but what

makes this book a "must-buy" is the introduction. Naor is not only a committed Orthodox Jew with ties to Chabad that go back for generations in his family, but also a respected scholar in academic Jewish studies. (His long introduction printed with his translation of "Orot" by Rav Kook is also indispensable, by the way.) In 48 crisply written pages (including extensive footnotes. . . read them all!) Naor's narrative sums up the history of the leaders of Chabad chassidus, and gives a "prehistory" of the earlier chassidus that predated and led to Chabad. Also included is some information about the opposition to chassidus and the way Chabad leaders related to their non-chassidic rabbinic colleagues. The discussion is always from a traditional, "frum," Orthodox, friendly point of view (indeed too friendly at times, see below), but also makes extensive use of the most recent, cutting-edge university scholarship from leading academics. In short, Naor's essay benefits both from his being a real "insider" in the world of Chabad chassidus, and from his being an "outsider," a detached scholar capable of putting things into the larger context of Torah thought and history. As another reviewer here pointed out, the essay doesn't extensively discuss the most recent, 7th Lubavitcher Rebbe, the late Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, but perhaps this is an important corrective, since most people are already far more familiar with his life and activities than they are with his six predecessors. If Chabad as a movement is to be properly understood, it's clear that its ENTIRE history should be studied, and not just its most recent chapter. This makes Naor's essay especially helpful for readers who would like to be able to view and understand the recent dramatic developments in Chabad/Lubavitch within the context of the complete history of this unique movement. I gave the book only four stars, because I caught Naor quoting a passage from a book out of context in a way that, frankly, seems deliberately intended to mislead and give us the impression that the author's point of view was precisely the opposite of what it actually was. On page xviii, Naor describes the court of "the Maggid of Mezherich" by quoting an extensive description of it given by Solomon Maimon in his famous autobiography. (Maimon, who began his life as a traditional "illui" (child prodigy) and talmid chacham (rabbinic scholar) eventually abandoned his traditional Jewish religious lifestyle and wandered across Europe to Berlin, where he became a recognized scholar of philosophy. As a young man, he visited the court of the Maggid of Mezherich and writes in his autobiography that at the Sabbath meal the Maggid shocked him and the other guests by somehow possessing clairvoyant knowledge of their names and the towns they had come from. Maimon reports that he was again awed when the Maggid delivered a sermon that wove together biblical verses that had been given by each guest, so that it seemed to each man that the verse he had given was expounded in a way that was connected to and revealing of some personal aspect of his unique spiritual life. Naor takes great delight in presenting this story, pointing out that it's especially noteworthy since it isn't the testimony "of a hasid, but rather of a skeptic [Maimon] who would go on to Koenigsberg to become an authoritative interpreter of Kant's critical philosophy." What Naor fails to tell you (and not even in a footnote!) is that Maimon goes on to say that he later became convinced that it had all been an elaborate trick, and that the Maggid had had "spies" who had provided him with all his information so that he could awe people with his "powers." As far as the sermon, upon further reflection Maimon became completely convinced that it was all smoke and mirrors, completely superficial, and lacking any real substance. (All the Maggid did was harp on the idea of "bittul ha-yesh" over and over again.) We get the picture here that the Maggid is a mediocrity, a bit of a charlatan, and no real great spiritual master. Moreover, Maimon continues his firsthand description of the Maggid's court by recounting with disgust "excessive" behavior he witnessed on another occasion: After a certain man came before the Maggid and proudly announced that his wife had given birth to a baby girl, the Maggid shouted "a girl?!" and commanded his followers to give the man a thorough beating! They carried out his wishes with zeal, laughing as they flogged their poor victim! Say what you will about the credibility of this "skeptic," the heretic Solomon Maimon, in relating the description of a chassidic leader, but do not bring him as one who attested to the Maggid's greatness and holiness, when he explicitly stated just the opposite, that he was an "uncultivated" man! Not being an expert in the Chabad literature or the other sources, I was unable to examine Naor's other quotes and citations. My advice to you is to buy this book, read it, but make sure to look up his sources whenever possible!

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Important Scholarly Introduction to Chabad Chassidus By Stephen M. Tolany The first third of this book is a 48-page introduction to the history of the Chabad-Lubavitch chassidus written by Betsalel Naor, and the remainder consists of revealing and fascinating anecdotes about individuals and events in the movements, told from a personal perspective by "Reuven Alpert." The anecdotes are certainly worth reading, but what makes this book a "must-buy" is the introduction. Naor is not only a committed Orthodox Jew with ties to Chabad that go back for generations in his family, but also a respected scholar in academic Jewish studies. (His long introduction printed with his translation of "Orot" by Rav Kook is also indispensable, by the way.) In 48 crisply written pages (including extensive footnotes. . . read them all!) Naor's narrative sums up the history of the leaders of Chabad chassidus, and gives a "prehistory" of the earlier chassidus that predated and led to Chabad. Also included is some information about the opposition to chassidus and the way Chabad leaders related to their non-chassidic rabbinic colleagues. The discussion is always from a traditional, "frum," Orthodox, friendly point of view (indeed too friendly at times, see below), but also makes extensive use of the most recent, cutting-edge university scholarship from leading academics. In short, Naor's essay benefits both from his being a real "insider" in the world of Chabad chassidus, and from his being an "outsider," a detached scholar capable of putting things into the larger context of Torah thought and

history. As another reviewer here pointed out, the essay doesn't extensively discuss the most recent, 7th Lubavitcher Rebbe, the late Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, but perhaps this is an important corrective, since most people are already far more familiar with his life and activities than they are with his six predecessors. If Chabad as a movement is to be properly understood, it's clear that its ENTIRE history should be studied, and not just its most recent chapter. This makes Naor's essay especially helpful for readers who would like to be able to view and understand the recent dramatic developments in Chabad/Lubavitch within the context of the complete history of this unique movement. I gave the book only four stars, because I caught Naor quoting a passage from a book out of context in a way that, frankly, seems deliberately intended to mislead and give us the impression that the author's point of view was precisely the opposite of what it actually was. On page xviii, Naor describes the court of "the Maggid of Mezherich" by quoting an extensive description of it given by Solomon Maimon in his famous autobiography. (Maimon, who began his life as a traditional "illui" (child prodigy) and talmid chacham (rabbinic scholar) eventually abandoned his traditional Jewish religious lifestyle and wandered across Europe to Berlin, where he became a highly regarded scholar of philosophy. (Immanuel Kant is reported to have said that no one understood his ideas as well as Solomon Maimon!) As a young man, Maimon visited the court of the Maggid of Mezherich and writes in his autobiography that at the Sabbath meal the Maggid shocked him and the other guests by somehow possessing clairvoyant knowledge of their names and the towns they had come from. Maimon reports that he was again awed when the Maggid delivered a sermon that wove together biblical verses that had been given by each guest, so that it seemed to each man that the verse he had given was expounded in a way that was connected to and revealing of some personal aspect of his unique spiritual life. Naor takes great delight in presenting this story, and pointing out that it's especially noteworthy since it isn't the testimony "of a hasid, but rather of a skeptic [Maimon] who would go on to Koenigsberg to become an authoritative interpreter of Kant's critical philosophy." What Naor fails to tell you (and not even in a footnote!) is that Maimon goes on to say that he became convinced that it had all been an elaborate trick, and that the Maggid had had spies who had provided him with all his information so that he could awe people with his "powers." As far as the sermon, upon further reflection Maimon became completely convinced that it was all smoke and mirrors, completely superficial, and lacking any real substance. (All the Maggid did was harp on the idea of "bittul ha-yesh" over and over again.) We get the picture here that the Maggid is a mediocrity, a bit of a charlatan, and no real great spiritual master. Moreover, Maimon continues his firsthand description of the Maggid's court by recounting with disgust some "excessive" behavior he witnessed on another occasion: After a certain man came before the Maggid and proudly announced that his wife had given birth to a baby girl, the Maggid shouted "a girl?!" and commanded his followers to give the man a thorough beating! They carried out his wishes with zeal, laughing as they flogged their poor victim! Say what you will about the credibility of this "skeptic," the heretic Solomon Maimon, in relating the description of a chassidic leader, but do not bring him as one who attested to the Maggid's greatness and holiness, when he explicitly stated just the opposite, that he was an "uncultivated" man! Not being an expert in the Chabad literature and some of the other sources, I was unable to examine Naor's other quotes and citations. My advice to you is to buy this book, read it, but make sure to look up his sources whenever possible!

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. REVISED REVIEW: important scholarly overview of Chabad By Stephen M. Tolany The first third of this book is a 48-page introduction to the history of the Chabad-Lubavitch chassidus written by Betsalel Naor, and the remainder consists of revealing and fascinating anecdotes about individuals and events in the movements, told from a personal perspective by "Reuven Alpert." The anecdotes are certainly worth reading, but what makes this book a "must-buy" is the introduction. Naor is not only a committed Orthodox Jew with ties to Chabad that go back for generations in his family, but also a respected scholar in academic Jewish studies. (His long introduction printed with his translation of "Orot" by Rav Kook is also indispensable, by the way.) In 48 crisply written pages (including extensive footnotes. . . read them all!) Naor's narrative sums up the history of the leaders of Chabad chassidus, and gives a "prehistory" of the earlier chassidus that predated and led to Chabad. Also included is some information about the opposition to chassidus and the way Chabad leaders related to their non-chassidic rabbinic colleagues. The discussion is always from a traditional, "frum," Orthodox, friendly point of view (indeed too friendly at times, see below), but also makes extensive use of the most recent, cutting-edge university scholarship from leading academics. In short, Naor's essay benefits both from his being a real "insider" in the world of Chabad chassidus, and from his being an "outsider," a detached scholar capable of putting things into the larger context of Torah thought and history. As another reviewer here pointed out, the essay doesn't extensively discuss the most recent, 7th Lubavitcher Rebbe, the late Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, but perhaps this is an important corrective, since most people are already far more familiar with his life and activities than they are with his six predecessors. If Chabad as a movement is to be properly understood, it's clear that its ENTIRE history should be studied, and not just its most recent chapter. This makes Naor's essay especially helpful for readers who would like to be able to view and understand the recent dramatic developments in Chabad/Lubavitch within the context of the complete history of this unique movement. I gave the book only four stars, because I caught Naor quoting a passage from a book out of context in a way that, frankly, seems deliberately intended to mislead and give us the impression that the author's point of view was precisely the opposite of what it actually was. On page xviii, Naor describes the court of "the Maggid of

Mezherich" by quoting an extensive description of it given by Solomon Maimon in his famous autobiography. (Maimon, who began his life as a traditional "illui" (child prodigy) and talmid chacham (rabbinic scholar) eventually abandoned his traditional Jewish religious lifestyle and wandered across Europe to Berlin, where he became a recognized scholar of philosophy. As a young man, he visited the court of the Maggid of Mezherich and writes in his autobiography that at the Sabbath meal the Maggid shocked him and the other guests by somehow possessing clairvoyant knowledge of their names and the towns they had come from. Maimon reports that he was again awed when the Maggid delivered a sermon that wove together biblical verses that had been given by each guest, so that it seemed to each man that the verse he had given was expounded in a way that was connected to and revealing of some personal aspect of his unique spiritual life. Naor takes great delight in presenting this story, and pointing out that it's especially noteworthy since it isn't the testimony "of a hasid, but rather of a skeptic [Maimon] who would go on to Koenigsberg to become an authoritative interpreter of Kant's critical philosophy." What Naor fails to tell you (and not even in a footnote!) is that Maimon goes on to say that he became convinced that it had all been an elaborate trick, and that the Maggid had had spies who had provided him with all his information so that he could awe people with his "powers." As far as the sermon, upon further reflection Maimon became completely convinced that it was all smoke and mirrors, completely superficial, and lacking any real substance. (All the Maggid did was harp on the idea of "bittul ha-yesh" over and over again.) We get the picture here that the Maggid is a mediocrity, a bit of a charlatan, and no real great spiritual master. Moreover, Maimon continues his firsthand description of the Maggid's court by recounting with disgust "excessive" behavior he witnessed on another occasion: After a certain man came before the Maggid and proudly announced that his wife had given birth to a baby girl, the Maggid shouted "a girl?!" and commanded his followers to give the man a thorough beating! They carried out his wishes with zeal, laughing as they flogged their poor victim! Say what you will about the credibility of this "skeptic," the heretic Solomon Maimon, in relating the description of a chassidic leader, but do not bring him as one who attested to the Maggid's greatness and holiness, when he explicitly stated just the opposite, that he was an "uncultivated" man! Not being an expert in the Chabad literature or the other sources, I was unable to examine Naor's other quotes and citations. My advice to you is to buy this book, read it, but make sure to look up his sources whenever possible!

Gods Middlemen is a fascinating collection of stories of Jewish mystical rabbis from the Hasidic tradition known as Habad. Reuven Alpert has journeyed among the Hasidim and Gods Middlemen presents his meetings with remarkable rabbis and recollections of earlier masters of the Habad way. From Crown Heights, Brooklyn to Jerusalem, from White Russia to the Andes, we encounter well-known rabbis and unknown holy men through short, poignant stories of faith, exile, and hope. Running through the stories is the melancholic anticipation among the Habad faithful of the appearance of the long-awaited Messiah, particularly the expectations centered on the legendary Schneer-sohn dynasty of rabbis, culminating with the intense messianic fervor recently focused on the late Rabbi Menahem Mendel Schneersohn (d. 1994), the last of the Lubavitcher line of rabbis. Reuven Alpert's stories read like good fiction, providing intimate details of the rhythms, cadences, and flavors of Jewish spirituality, taking the reader into the heart of this vibrant mystical tradition. Gods Middlemen provides us with a glimpse into the essence of the Habad tradition through the lives of Jews who have experienced the ineffable of the Infinite within the inevitable sufferings of human experience. Gods Middlemen is introduced by Rabbi Bezalel Naor, who provides a succinct survey of the Habad movement.

From Library Journal In his fine introduction to this memoir, Rabbi Naor explains the basic difference between Habad and other branches of Hasidism: "Other Hasidic groups believe the way to God is through...simple faith; Habad teaches that faith must be studied as a science." Since his youth, Alpert has been a zealous student of the Habadic truth. Here, he recalls his encounters with some of the great thinkers, known and obscure, in the Habad movement. His portrayals are vivid and anecdotal. What emerges is an earnest and respectful account of one young man's religious quest and the multifarious ways in which his elders helped and advised him along the path. While general interest in the Habad movement may be limited, it does have a presence on many college campuses throughout the country, and while this is not a guide to Habadic practice, it does give a glimpse into its history, theology, and philosophy. Especially recommended for young people. Marcia G. Welsh, Guilford Free Lib., Ct. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. Gods Middlemen is an inviting, illuminating, and intriguing work. It is sure to provoke interest in a wide range of readers, from beginning students to scholars of Hasidism. Prof. Richard Sugarman, professor of philosophy and Jewish Studies, University of Vermont Gods Middlemen is a brief and highly readable history of the Hasidic movement through the Habad lineage, with a major section of stories about great rebbes and their followers. Tamar Frankiel, author of *The Voice of Sarah: Feminine Spirituality and Traditional Judaism* Bezalel Naor has written a helpful and reliable introduction to the Habad tradition. -- Moshe Idel, author of *Hasi-dism: Between Ecstasy and Magic* About the Author Reuven Alpert is a spiritual seeker and freelance writer. Bezalel Naor is a leading scholar and interpreter of Kabbalistic and Hasidic thought. He is the translator and commentator of *OROT* by Rav A. Y. Kook and

the author of numerous scholarly articles, reviews, and essays in the field of Jewish Studies.