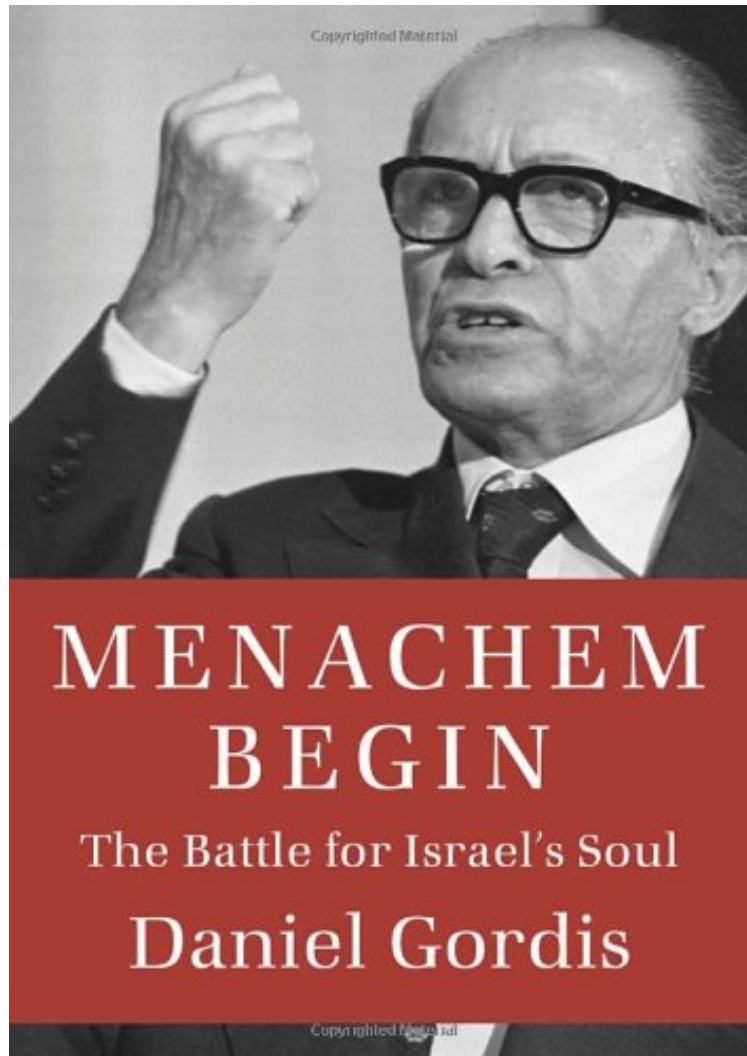


(Library ebook) Menachem Begin: The Battle for Israel's Soul (Jewish Encounters Series)

## Menachem Begin: The Battle for Israel's Soul (Jewish Encounters Series)

*Daniel Gordis*

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**Daniel Gordis : Menachem Begin: The Battle for Israel's Soul (Jewish Encounters Series)** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Menachem Begin: The Battle for Israel's Soul (Jewish Encounters Series):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Has known the late PM very well: worked with ...By dan pattirHas known the late PM very well: worked with him very closely as his chief spokesman and advisor on media and public affairs (1977-1981) after completing a three years term with rival Labor PM Rabin. PM Berin's decision to ask Pattir to join him was hailed as an important manifestation of backing strongly him media relations during the term which

included the entire historical Egyptian-Israeli peace process, from President Sadat's flight to Jerusalem in November 1977 to the signing of the first-ever peace treaty in March 1979. I refrain from reviewing neither Daniel Gordis's new book, nor any new publication about PM's Begin, because: 1. I haven't read yet the book; 2. I won't write new reviews about this subject until I conclude the writing and submit to the publisher by my own new book about Begin and the peace process as an exclusive insider. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. *The Other Side of the Story* By Alan Zucker The narrative of Israel's founding is usually dominated by the Ben-Gurion perspective. Menachem Begin is depicted as the terrorist before independence and the one that nearly divided the army over the Altalena. Danny Gordis does an excellent job of providing a well-balanced counterpoint and paints an interesting portrait. Begin is an interesting man. A complicated man. And a true Jewish hero whose story should be told. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. An important book about a fascinating leader. By myrnaI have read and enjoyed many of Daniel Gordis' books and I always feel that I'm back in college, sitting in the classroom of my favorite professor and lecturer. That being said, I do find that his books read like award-winning novels rather than text books. Mr. Gordis' most recent book is a great way to learn about the fascinating and complex life of Menachem Begin, one of Israel's true founders and exceptional leaders. In addition, the reader will get a comprehensive and succinct history of the formation and growth of Israel during Mr. Begin's life. Obviously, my 5 star rating for this book is my very strong recommendation for all to read, learn and enjoy.

Reviled as a fascist by his great rival Ben-Gurion, venerated by Israel's underclass, the first Israeli to win the Nobel Peace Prize, a proud Jew but not a conventionally religious one, Menachem Begin was both complex and controversial. Born in Poland in 1913, Begin was a youthful admirer of the Revisionist Zionist Zeev Jabotinsky and soon became a leader within Jabotinsky's Betar movement. A powerful orator and mesmerizing public figure, Begin was imprisoned by the Soviets in 1940, joined the Free Polish Army in 1942, and arrived in Palestine as a Polish soldier shortly thereafter. Joining the underground paramilitary Irgun in 1943, he achieved instant notoriety for the organization's bombings of British military installations and other violent acts. Intentionally left out of the new Israeli government, Begin's right-leaning Herut political party became a fixture of the opposition to the Labor-dominated governments of Ben-Gurion and his successors, until the surprising parliamentary victory of his political coalition in 1977 made him prime minister. Welcoming Egyptian president Anwar Sadat to Israel and cosigning a peace treaty with him on the White House lawn in 1979, Begin accomplished what his predecessors could not. His outreach to Ethiopian Jews and Vietnamese boat people was universally admired, and his decision to bomb Iraq's nuclear reactor in 1981 is now regarded as an act of courageous foresight. But the disastrous invasion of Lebanon to end the PLO's shelling of Israel's northern cities, combined with his declining health and the death of his wife, led Begin to resign in 1983. He spent the next nine years in virtual seclusion, until his death in 1992. Begin was buried not alongside Israel's prime ministers, but alongside the Irgun comrades who died in the struggle to create the Jewish national home to which he had devoted his life. Daniel Gordis's perceptive biography gives us new insight into a remarkable political figure whose influence continues to be felt both within Israel and throughout the world. This title is part of the Jewish Encounters series.

Gordis is at his best in making a complicated narrative accessible. He boils down Begin's long life, full of controversies, into clearly crafted prose. . . . For those not familiar with the riveting story, this certainly serves as an enjoyable and important introduction to this fascinating man. *The Jerusalem Post* Fast-paced and informative. . . . Regardless of how readers feel about Begin's adoration or condemnation they are sure to find this biography compelling, fascinating, and enthralling. *St. Louis Jewish Light* Gordis's perceptive biography gives us new insight into Begin's life and into how his influence continues. *The Kentucky Democrat* Gordis captures, in clean, clear prose, the heart of Israel's founding and formative years: the soaring idealism and bare-knuckle pragmatism, the shows of Jewish unity and the bitter feuds, the inspiring stories of survival and the depressing anecdotes of violence. Its a good place to start for the contemporary reader curious about one small but central clump of the tangled roots of the Middle East's current turmoil. . . . A solid work that insightfully considers Begin's personal characteristics even as it provides context for his place in history. *Christian Science Monitor*, 10 Best Books of March Gordis's clearly written and engaging book tells Begin's story well and, perhaps more importantly, makes a fine contribution to the study of his character. *Jewish of Books* It has fallen to Daniel Gordis to pen the gold-standard text in Begin studies. . . . The achievement of Menachem Begin is twofold: the illumination of a complex but pivotal figure in Jewish history, . . . and the guiding of the Jewish people toward a better understanding of themselves. *Commentary* Thoughtful and well-written. *The Wall Street Journal* An immensely thoughtful and nuanced biography [by] one of Israel's important public intellectuals. . . . Beautifully written and insightful, [it] is an important contribution to contemporary scholarship about the political history of the modern Jewish state. *National Distinguished academic* Gordis distills the essence of Begin's long, storied, and contentious career [in this] concise and exciting political biography. *New York Journal of Books* Gordis writes well about Begin's personal qualities . . . capturing both his character and his place in Israeli history. *Publishers Weekly* The story of Menachem Begin is an inspiring story of Israel, and his legacy is one that lives with us still. Daniel Gordis

expertly recreates that epic and passionately passes that tradition on to his readers. Anyone wishing to understand Israel's past as well as its current affairs must turn to Daniel Gordis. Michael Oren, author of *Six Days of War* Whether you adored Begin or reviled him, whether you thought he was the best prime minister Israel ever had or the worst, you will appreciate and learn from Gordis' fascinating portrait of a memorable man. Deborah Lipstadt, author of *The Eichmann Trial* Daniel Gordis' new and wonderfully written biography of Menachem Begin makes the case for a fresh look at the Israeli prime minister who made peace with Egypt. The portrait he paints of Begin is that of a man of singular devotion not just to the State of Israel, but also to the Jewish people. His passionate belief in both drove him, and it is that passion and the intellectual depth behind it that Gordis finds appealing and in need of resurrection in Israel's political class today. After reading this compelling book, most readers are likely to agree. Dennis Ross, *The Washington Institute* A unique biography of a seminal leader many Jews think they know but don't really understand. Like the best works of history, Gordis' intellectual biography of the man who helped restore Jewishness to Israeli identity is of urgent contemporary relevance, as American Jews struggle with the meaning of Jewish peoplehood in their own lives. Passionately argued, beautifully evoked, this biography will become an indispensable part of the contemporary Jewish bookshelf. Yossi Klein Halevi, author of *Like Dreamers: The Story of the Israeli Paratroopers Who Reunited Jerusalem and Divided a Nation* Writing a balanced, eloquent biography of one of the most polarizing figures of our time would seem impossible, but Gordis has done it. This is a riveting recounting of the passionate, meticulous, triumphant, dark, pivotal peacemaker, Menachem Begin. David Wolpe, rabbi, Sinai Temple, and author of *Why Faith Matters* Menachem Begin was a man of great contradictions, and Gordis' biography captures all of them in a remarkable manner. It deals in a brilliant way with the complex personality and heritage of Israel's sixth prime minister. Gordis is not only precise, honest, and insightful, he is also a deeply talented and sensitive writer. That's why his *Begin* is a man of flesh, blood, mind, and soul, a multi-dimensional historic figure who made a vast contribution to the founding of the Jewish state and to the way it has redefined itself in recent decades. Ari Shavit, author of *My Promised Land: The Triumph and Tragedy of Israel* About the Author Daniel Gordis is the award-winning author of *Saving Israel*. His previous books include *If a Place Can Make You Cry*, *The Promise of Israel*, *Home to Stay*, and *God Was Not in the Fire*. He is a regular contributor to *The Jerusalem Post*, and has written for *The New York Times*, *The New Republic*, and *The New York Times Magazine*, among other publications. He is Senior Vice President and Koret Distinguished Fellow at Shalem College in Jerusalem. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

**Introduction** One of my most vivid college memories is of Menachem Begin. It was November 1977, the first semester of my freshman year. The radio was on, and I heard the news that President Anwar Sadat of Egypt had accepted Prime Minister Begin's invitation to come to Jerusalem. I can still picture the moment. The doorway in front of me, my roommate's desk to the left. The cinder-block walls we'd painted soon after we'd moved in. I leaned my head against the door frame, closed my eyes, and prayed that Begin would stay alive long enough to see the process through. I knew virtually nothing about Begin then. I'd lived in Israel for a couple of years as a young child but had been all too happy to depart, and subsequently ignored Israeli politics almost entirely. I still cared enough about Israel, though, that the newscast stopped me in my tracks. The prospect of peace in Israel was so stunning that, for the first time in my life, I found myself begging some power out there to take care of Menachem Begin. It may have been the first time that I truly prayed. #### Four years later, on my honeymoon in Hawaii, I was walking back from the beach with my new wife when we stopped to peer into a local newspaper vending machine. Israel Bombs Iraqi Nuclear Reactor, the headline said, and we both laughed out loud. People in Hawaii, it seemed, would believe anything. Back at the hotel, we absentmindedly turned on a brand-new cable network called CNN. Israel, it reported, had destroyed Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor. The attack had been ordered by Menachem Begin. We asked ourselves and each other questions people had been asking about Begin for decades: Had he just made the world safer, or had he recklessly endangered it? Was the attack reprehensibly irresponsible, as the United States would soon claim, or was it the courageous step of someone who knew better than anyone else how to safeguard the future of the Jewish people? #### I never met Begin, never even saw him in person. But he is an indelible part of my freshman year, my honeymoon, and many other subsequent moments I will never forget. When my wife and I eventually moved our family to Israel many years later, countless taxi drivers, listening to the news of whatever calamity was unfolding at the moment, would turn around to tell me, You know what this country needs? We need Menachem Begin. It was not only the taxi drivers. Even Israel's left-leaning newspaper, *Haaretz*, which had regularly railed against his policies, sometimes wondered wistfully when the next Begin would appear. In 2012, twenty years after Begin died, *Haaretz* published a long retrospective on his life entitled *Menachem Begin: The Man Who Transformed Israel*. And several months later, when Israel was caught up in yet another international crisis, a *Haaretz* column noted that in 1977, it was Menachem Begin who began to extricate Israel from its isolation. It is unclear if there is anyone willing and able to do so in 2013. Everyone, it seems, misses Menachem Begin. I wrote this book to find out why. I wanted to understand how someone so polarizing, so controversial, in his own country and abroad, can appear today as the soul not only of Israel's best self but as a living fusion of Jewish consciousness and national aspiration. #### All of Israel's founders made extraordinary journeys, but it is hard to imagine any of them enduring an odyssey anything like Begin's. He fled the Nazis, lost his parents and brother, was imprisoned by the Soviets and hunted by the British. Condemned by Albert

Einstein and Hannah Arendt in the pages of *The New York Times*, scorned by Israel's political elites, portrayed by many as a demagogue, and relegated to the political opposition for twenty-eight years, he served as prime minister for six years, and in that time made peace with Egypt, received the Nobel Peace Prize, and destroyed Iraq's nuclear reactor. He also led Israel into its most unpopular war, resigned as a result of the war's dark course before his term was completed, and went into seclusion for almost a decade. An orator who thrived on crowds, he was almost never seen or heard from again. When he died, though, tens of thousands of people choked the streets of Jerusalem, desperate to make their way to the Mount of Olives, where he was buried. They hadn't forgotten him. They wanted to say good-bye. And they wanted to thank him. To thank him for what? What was it that Menachem Begin evoked in Israelis and in Jews worldwide? Loved by many, reviled by others, his life and the principles to which he was committed touched something profound in Jews almost everywhere. The key to Begin's abiding grip on the memory and fascination of Israelis and Jews around the world was bound up with his unabashed, utter devotion to the Jewish people. Committed to Israel though he was, Menachem Begin's life was a story of commitment first and foremost to the Jewish people. Many of Israel's founders Hebraized their names (Ben-Gurion actually required diplomatic personnel and civil servants above a certain rank to do so). David Ben-Gurion was born David Grün. Ariel Sharon's original last name was Scheinermann. Golda Meir had been Golda Meyerson. But Menachem Begin did not change his name. His Jewish roots were the only roots that he needed or wanted; when called upon to testify before a commission of the Knesset toward the end of his life, and asked to state his name, he answered, simply, Menachem ben Dov ve-Chasia Begin. It was not an Israeli name, but a Jewish one. It was a reminder that Israel mattered only if the Jews mattered. He never became the toned and bronzed Israeli in the new tradition of Dayan, Sharon, or Yitzhak Rabin, nor a self-invented member of the old guard like Ben-Gurion. He had no need for that. His devotion to Israel was an irrepressible facet of the European Jew he had always been, and unlike many of Israel's founders, he saw no reason to leave that tradition or legacy behind. In the age of the new Jew, Begin carried with him a fierce pride in what he had inherited. The love that Israelis and Jews around the world felt for him, regardless of what they may have thought of his policies, derived in large measure from his having reminded them who they were and would always be. This book is the story of Menachem Begin's life, but it is also the story of what he evoked in Jews, of what he said to the world about Jewish history and the Jewish people, and of the legacy he bequeathed to the state he was instrumental in creating.###Given how fascinating, perplexing, controversial, and beloved he was, it should come as no surprise that Menachem Begin's life has been thoroughly researched. He is the subject of several biographies, including the recent comprehensive treatment by Avi Shilon, *Menachem Begin: A Life* (recently translated from the Hebrew). Other biographies have been written by a longtime friend and advisor (Harry Hurwitz), by foreign journalists (Eric Silver and Ned Temko), by an Israeli journalist (Eitan Haber), by those who served with Begin in the Jewish underground or worked with him in government (Aryeh Naor, among others). Other writers composed biographies even when he was still in office (Aviezer Golan and Shlomo Nakdimon), and another wrote a volume with a psychological bent (Ofer Grosbard), seeking to get to the core of what animated him. Memoirs, such as Hart Hastens *I Shall Not Die*, include lengthy personal recollections of Begin. Yehuda Avner (Begin's colleague, friend, and English speechwriter, who subsequently served as Israel's ambassador to Australia and the United Kingdom) is the author of *The Prime Ministers*, which has done more than any other book to bring Menachem Begin to the attention of an English-reading generation that knew little of him. All of these books have contributed immensely to this volume. In addition to these and other biographies, Begin was covered widely in the press, both in Israel and abroad. There are voluminous archives at the Menachem Begin Heritage Center, the Jabotinsky Institute in Israel, and Israel's National Archives. And, because Begin lived not long ago, there are still scores of people alive who had extensive interaction with him. Many of those people were kind enough to be interviewed and to contribute further insight to this study. This book makes no attempt to offer itself as a definitive biography of Menachem Begin. It takes no stand on what Begin would have thought Israel ought to do today. Nor does it pretend to cover every dimension of Begin's fascinating, multifaceted public and private life. Many of the events in which Begin was involved are still shrouded in mystery or mired in controversy. I have adopted the positions that seem to me supported by the strongest evidence, but I am fully aware that on some key issues, deeply knowledgeable people disagree on key facts and interpretations. In a book of this length, there are, of necessity, many dimensions of Begin's life that are either addressed far too briefly or left altogether untouched. Drawing on research already done and coupling it with new archival work and numerous new interviews, my goal was a century after Begin's birth to bring his extraordinary life to the attention of an even wider audience and to look at his life through the lens of the passion he still evokes. What was the magic of his draw? What was it about him that touched so deep a nerve in Jewish people, as well as in non-Jews, in Israel and throughout the world? I hope that this book will help address those questions. Perhaps most important, I hope that this book will lead us all to examine once again what it was about Menachem Begin's view of the world that led him to defend his people with such devotion, and what it is about rediscovering his legacy that might prompt us to do the same.