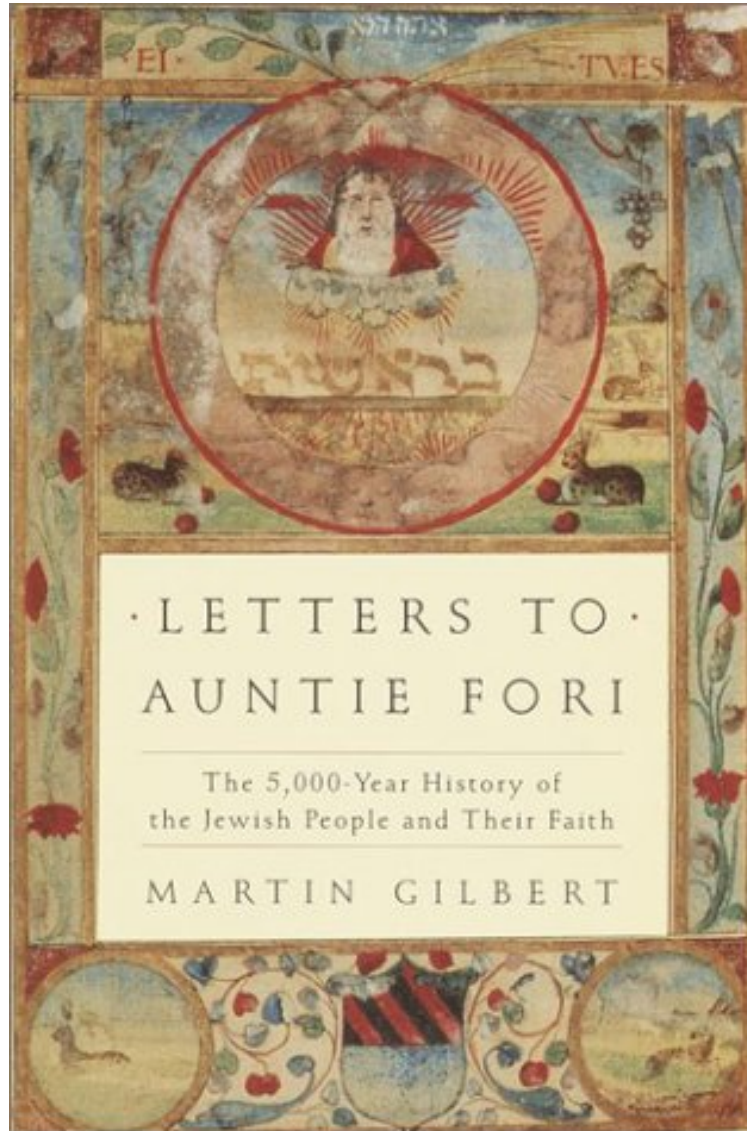


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Letters to Auntie Fori: The 5,000-Year History of the Jewish People and Their Faith

Martin Gilbert

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Sir Martin Gilbert, renowned author of many authoritative works of history and biography, speaks in a charming, personal voice in this fascinating volume, the saga of five thousand years of Jewish life laid out in a series of intimate, storytelling letters to a lifelong friend. Sir Martin first met Auntie Fori in 1958, when he arrived in New Delhi with a letter of introduction from her son, a fellow Oxford student. Their friendship flourished for forty years through correspondence and visits to the capitals where her husband, the diplomat B. K. Nehru, was posted. Then, at her ninetieth birthday celebration in 1998, Auntie Fori told her adopted nephew that she was not of Indian birth but was actually Hungarian and Jewish. She did not know what this Jewish identity involved historically or spiritually and she asked him to enlighten her. In response, Sir Martin embarked on the series of letters that have been gathered to form this book, shaping each one as a concise, individually formed story. He presents Jewish history as the narrative expression of the timeline of the Jewish faith, and the faith as it is informed by the history. Starting with Adam and Eve, he then brings us to Abraham and his descendants, who worshiped a God who repeatedly, and often dramatically, intervened in their lives. The stories of Genesis and Exodus lead seamlessly on to those of the eras when the land was ruled by the Israelite kings and then by Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, Greece, and Rome the Biblical and post-Biblical periods. In Sir Martin's hands, these stories are rich in incident and achievement. He then traces the long history of the Jews in the Diaspora, ending with an unexpected visit to an outpost of Jewry in Anchorage, Alaska. Ranging through almost every country in the world including China and India he maintains a chronological structure, weaving in the history of other peoples and faiths, to give Auntie Fori and us a sense of the larger stage on which Jewish history has played out. The last fifty letters are devoted to an explanation of Jewish faith and worship, intertwined with the history and observance of holy days and festivals. These letters are fascinating in their objectivity and at the same time infused with a deep personal warmth. Written for one beloved friend, Letters to Auntie Fori brings to life the events and sequence of Jewish history with a special charm that will endear this volume to readers old and young.

.com Martin Gilbert's Letters to Auntie Fori is a proud, 140-part epistolary history of the Jews as well as a parsing of the basic tenets of the faith and the meaning and form of its holy days and ritual observances. Beginning with the first chapter of Genesis, Gilbert follows his people through five millennia, concluding with the founding of Israel and, briefly, the political and religious Middle-Eastern turmoil of the present day. Especially interesting are his chapters on the Diaspora, as well as brief summaries of Jewish heroes in World War I, the dark horrors of World War II, and short recitals of Jewish luminaries in industry, politics, sports, and the arts and sciences. Though Gilbert is hardly a disinterested narrator, his erudite informality (the recipient of his letter-chapters is a well-educated and elderly friend effectively innocent of any knowledge of Judaism) serves his complex subject admirably. --H. O'Billovitch From Booklist Gilbert is an esteemed historian and biographer. The "Auntie Fori" of the title is an elderly citizen of India who was born a Jew in Hungary. Having lived into her nineties in relative ignorance of Jewish history and culture, she asked her longtime friend to help her learn the history of the people to whom she still believed she belonged. The result is this compact, breezy, and thoroughly enjoyable survey. Gilbert begins with the Creation myth, and his analyses of some of the more enigmatic episodes from the Old Testament are both provocative and insightful. His chapters on the medieval Diaspora eloquently describe both the triumphs and the travails of Jews from Spain to Mesopotamia. Finally, while skirting the explosive political issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he illustrates the enduring ties, both emotional and physical, that link Jews to the land that forged their national identity. For those, like Auntie Fori, hoping to understand the Jewish past and present, this book is a treasure. Jay Freeman Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved From the Inside Flap Sir Martin Gilbert, renowned author of many authoritative works of history and biography, speaks in a charming, personal voice in this fascinating volume, the saga of five thousand years of Jewish life laid out in a series of intimate, storytelling letters to a lifelong friend. Sir Martin first met "Auntie Fori" in 1958, when he arrived in New Delhi with a letter of introduction from her son, a fellow Oxford student. Their friendship flourished for forty years through correspondence and visits to the capitals where her husband, the diplomat B. K. Nehru, was posted. Then, at her ninetieth birthday celebration in 1998, Auntie Fori told her "adopted nephew" that she was not of Indian birth but was actually Hungarian and Jewish. She did not know what this Jewish identity involved historically or spiritually and she asked him to enlighten her. In response, Sir Martin embarked on the series of letters that have been gathered to form this book, shaping each one as a concise, individually

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