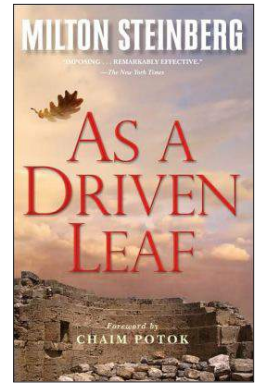


# As a Driven Leaf

Milton Steinberg



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1996, 477 pp.

The age of the Talmud is brought to life in a breathtaking saga. This masterpiece of modern fiction tells the gripping tale of renegade talmudic sage Elisha ben Abuyah's struggle to reconcile his faith with the allure of Hellenistic culture. Set in Roman Palestine, *As a Driven Leaf* draws readers into the dramatic era of Rabbinic Judaism. Watch the great Talmudic sages at work in the Sanhedrin, eavesdrop on their arguments about theology and Torah, and agonize with them as they contemplate rebellion against an oppressive Roman rule. But Steinberg's classic novel also transcends its historical setting with its depiction of a timeless, perennial feature of the Jewish experience: the inevitable conflict between the call of tradition and the glamour of the surrounding culture.

In his illuminating foreword, specially commissioned for this edition, Chaim Potok stresses the contemporary relevance of *As a Driven Leaf*, "This novel of ideas and passions... retains its ability to enter the heart of pious and seeking Jew alike."

## Discussion Questions

1. Amram keeps Greek books away from Elisha to ensure that the boy will grow up as a complete Jew. How can we insure that our children will carry on the Jewish tradition?
2. The Passover haggadah recites the narrative of the talmudic sages in B'nai Brak discussing Pesah. The commentaries suggest that the all-night session was held to consider rebellion against Rome. What do you think of rabbis engaging in political activism?
3. The patriarch of the Sanhedrin was descended from the House of Hillel. Some believed this birthright protected the office, while others held that the position should have to be earned. How should we select and retain Jewish leaders today?
4. Greek culture and Roman oppression led many to question Jewish values, such as whether a slave has rights, whether the details of the Law hold any meaning, and whether practical considerations outweigh the demands of Jewish jurisprudence. What tenets of Judaism are being challenged today? How are we responding?
5. The death of Meir's children struck a great blow to Elisha's faith. How can we keep our faith when we are tried by life's

vicissitudes?

6. The clash between the Greek and Jewish cultures split the community of ancient Palestine. In what way do Jews today find ourselves in similar circumstances? How should we respond?
7. Elisha is deeply troubled by his new doubts. What aspects of Judaism have caused you to doubt?
8. Discuss Job's challenge to God, "Wilt Thou harass a driven leaf?" Why do you think Steinberg chose this for his novel's title?
9. Elisha observes that circumstances are leading to the end of the Jewish people. Do you think that Jews in America are at risk of vanishing? Explain your answer.
10. "Revelation must be either accepted or rejected." Do you agree that faith and reason are fundamentally incompatible?
11. Judaism outlived its persecutors because Judah ordained a new generation of teachers and Akiva continued to expound the Law in prison while awaiting his martyrdom. How can Judaism assure its survival today, when it faces few pressing external threats?

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