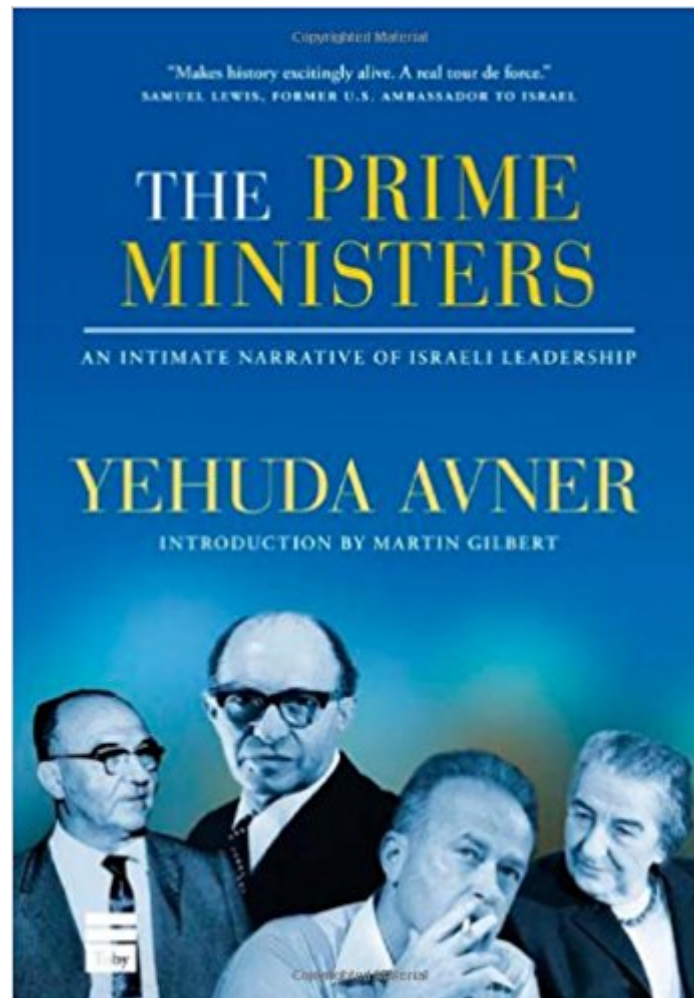




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The Prime Ministers: An Intimate Narrative Of Israeli Leadership



Synopsis

The Prime Ministers is the first and only insider account of Israeli politics from the founding of the Jewish State to the near-present day. It reveals stunning details of life-and-death decision-making, top-secret military operations and high level peace negotiations. The Prime Ministers brings readers into the orbits of world figures, including Menachem Begin, Yitzhak Rabin, Ronald Reagan, Jimmy Carter, Henry Kissinger, Yasser Arafat, Margaret Thatcher, Princess Diana and the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Written in a captivating literary style by a political adviser, speechwriter and diplomat, The Prime Ministers is an enthralling political memoir, and a precisely crafted prism through which to view current Middle East affairs. The Prime Ministers is the basis of a major documentary produced by Moriah Films, the Academy Award-winning film division of the Simon Wiesenthal Center.

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Customer Reviews

Avner, born in Manchester, England, arrived in Palestine in 1947 as a dedicated 19-year-old Zionist, on the eve of the birth of the Jewish state. He eventually entered Israel's foreign service and served as speechwriter, secretary, and advisor to four Israeli Prime Ministers • Levi Eshkol, Golda Meir, Yitzhak Rabin, and Menachem Begin. This often-fascinating insider's account of the careers and personalities of these leaders is a semiautobiographical rendering of Avner's own experiences during critical episodes in Israeli history, especially during the War of Independence. Occasionally, Avner's narrative is overly gossipy, but for the most part this is a revealing story of how these men operated in moments of both calm and crisis. Avner

reserves his greatest admiration for Begin, and his near-worship of the man is likely to discomfit many in Israel and in the U.S. Overall, this book provides valuable insights into many of the key events and personalities in the history of Israel. --Jay Freeman

... a gripping, intimate, intricately detailed and fast-paced account of Israeli politics at the highest levels...a front-row seat to the drama of Israeli statecraft in moments of crisis and triumph, tragedy and joy. I couldn't put it down. --Bret Stephens, The Wall Street Journal...one of the most remarkable accounts we are ever likely to get of how Israel has been governed over the decades...All of it is here...the intellectual arguments made and those that were not marshaled; the decisions taken and those that were ducked...the ultimate insider's account. --David Horowitz, The Jerusalem PostIt is extremely rare that a skilled diplomat is placed at the pinnacle of power across several Israeli governments and can truly deliver an insider's perspective with such skill and clarity... a must-read for anyone seeking to understand Israel. Dore Gold, Former Israeli Ambassador to the UN. ...the rare kind of history which comes alive for any reader, and will stay with them long after they finish the book. --Samuel Lewis, Former US Ambassador to Israel...a sweeping tome of Israeli politics and history. --Hillary Rodham Clinton, US Secretary of State...a fascinating account of someone who was an eye witness to many historic moments in the history of the Jewish state...provide[s] insight into the actions of our nation's leaders and offers important lessons for the future. --Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister of Israel...a sweeping tome of Israeli politics and history. --Hillary Rodham Clinton, US Secretary of State...a fascinating account of someone who was an eye witness to many historic moments in the history of the Jewish state...provide[s] insight into the actions of our nation's leaders and offers important lessons for the future. --Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister of Israel

I was so taken by The Prime Ministers, that I moved heaven and earth to meet the author, Yehuda Avner, on a recent visit to Israel. Mr. Avner (please call me "Yehuda") graciously showed up at a cafe in his building and ordered an orange juice to my cafe latte. Dressed simply in a windbreaker, shirt, and slacks, Mr. Avner immediately radiates an impression of being a wonderful listener. Rather than telling me more stories, he asked first what I had thought of his book. When I responded that I thought it was actually a love story, his eyes lit up, and he confirmed my view, saying that while he admired and respected all of the Prime Ministers that he wrote about, his real love was for Menachim Begin. Part of this is because Begin, like Avner, was the first Prime Minister who was "religious." Mr. Avner told a wonderful story (not in the book) about a disagreement

between himself and former Prime Minister Rabin, who could not understand Mr. Avner's unwillingness to work on Shabbat, despite an international crisis. When Avner finally showed up after the Sabbath had ended, Rabin responded scornfully, "Oh, now you are here when it is really too late." Mr. Begin, on the other hand, confined himself to synagogue and his home on the Sabbath and did not ask his staff to work. Clearly, Mr. Avner has many more tales to tell, some of which will appear in a second installment of his book that he is presently working on. For now, I am left with the memory of a man who observed and played an important role in the formative years of the Jewish state and who relates his experiences in a warm and personal way. When I commented that I enjoyed the book because of its total absence of negative stories, Mr. Avner said, "So you noticed!" This is the beauty of being with Mr. Avner: you will never hear anything nasty or unpleasant. Only the beautiful is on display from this beautiful and wise man.

At 18 years old, British-born Yehuda Avner sailed on the rusting steamship, the Aegean Star, for the land of Palestine. Tired of the increasing anti-Semitism in his hometown and inspired by passionate supporters of a Jewish homeland, including the fiery Menachem Begin, Avner settled in Palestine. Little did he guess that his British background and his skillful powers of articulation would lead him to become an advisor and speechwriter to Israeli prime ministers including Levi Eshkol, Golda Meir, Yitzhak Rabin and Menachem Begin. In that role, he was privy to and recorded countless conversations of major historical consequence: Testy talks between Rabin and Jimmy Carter; between Begin and Ronald Reagan, and confidences shared by Golda Meir to Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci. Avner's book is part memoir but more significantly, a fascinating and illuminating history spanning the years from Israel's birth as a modern state through the early 1980s, when Avner became ambassador to England. The book is filled with revealing conversations and history that only someone whose job was to be there and record the events could possibly know. While Avner worked for all the prime ministers mentioned above, he worked longest for Menachem Begin, and more than half the book is about Begin: from his early years working against the British to help Israel gain independence, his years living underground so as to keep the British from arresting him, his political fights with left-wing adversaries, and his seemingly come-from-behind political victory and years as prime minister. I was moved to learn much I did not know about Begin, in particular, his ability to put Jewish brotherhood above any personal or political end: while he could easily have held a grudge against Rabin, who ordered the Palmach to fire on the ship the Altalena, from which Begin was sailing with other Irgun fighters, Begin never withheld support while Rabin was prime minister during wartime. The two grew to have great respect for one another. The book may contain

more detailed reconstructions of conversations than some may have wanted, but Avner's front-row seat through decades of modern Israeli history is often riveting, including the true history behind the successful Israeli attack on the Iraqi nuclear power plant at Osirik; the daring and dangerous raid on Entebbe; and the ongoing battle on the part of prime ministers to make American presidents understand the true needs for Israeli security. The section that deals with the friendship that grew between Menachem Begin and Anwar Sadat is especially touching, as is the heartfelt letters exchanged by Menachem Begin and Jehan Sadat, widow of Anwar Sadat, after the death of Begin's wife, Aliza. This is just about as good as first-person history can get.

"Tevye the Milkman and Other Tales" by Sholem Aleichem likened the precarious existence of the Jewish people to a Fiddler on the Roof. One slip may be fatal. Mr. Avner, who served under four Israeli Prime Ministers - Levi Eshkol, Golda Meir, Yitzchak Rabin, and Menachem Begin - through several wars, including the major 1967 Six Day War and 1973 Yom Kippur War - shares the innermost thoughts and emotions of these outstanding leaders of the small, precarious nation. It is amazing how close (G-d forbid) the Jewish state has come to utter annihilation, only to be pulled from the abyss by these intrepid leaders. An understanding of some Yiddish and Hebrew is helpful in appreciating this tome, although trying to read Hebrew by way of English transliteration is difficult and annoying. For me, the most poignant (and ironic) parts of the book were toward the end during the exchange of sentiments between Jehan Sadat (wife of assassinated Egyptian President Anwar Sadat) and Menachem Begin upon death of their respective spouses. Unlikely as it should have been, they had forged a life long bond which transcended politics and religion. It gives one *tikvah* (hope) for peace. The most boring part for me was Begin's exhortation to the United Nations, which came across as a long winded, tortuous *d'var Torah* (Torah lesson). Although no Shakespeare, with apologies to Mr. Avner (he "Shakespearized" speeches for Begin), the book is a very well written, fast read. Wish I had an autographed copy (I bought the Kindle edition). Maybe someday. Very highly recommended.

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