

CBT Library Highlights: Bringing Heaven Down to Earth 11/24/09

Bringing Heaven Down to Earth: 365 Meditations

From the wisdom of the Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson

Compiled and interpreted by Tzvi Freeman

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Picture the 1970's in all its confusion and liberation. Picture a 15 year old high school drop-out who went looking for wisdom 'in all the wrong places,' as the song says. He tries Eastern religion, radical politics, hitch-hiking around the world, vegetarianism, and encounter groups, to name a few. But, as he says in his introduction, "my soul's stomach was as empty as ever." Rabbi Tzvi Freeman was that young 'seeker' who, in 1975, left a promising career as a classical guitarist to study Chassidic mysticism after a 'chance encounter' with a traveling student of the Lubavitch Rebbe. Later Freeman went on to study at Lubavitch yeshivas for 9 years and received his rabbinical ordination.

Calling the Rebbe "an orthodox rebel, a traditional radical" and a 'maverick', who created leaders who could go out and bring Jewish youth and adults back to their roots, Freeman both quotes and paraphrases the Rebbe's teachings in this unusual book. It is organized into 365 short 'meditations' –some only a few pithy words long, others covering much of a page– which are meant for contemplation and inspiration. They are reminiscent of Zen *koan* in the sense that some, on the surface, appear to hold contradictions within themselves. They are loosely organized into 24 topics such as Nature and the Miraculous, Making a Living, Healing, Acts of Beauty, Science and Technology, etc booksnooks@aol.com with additional appendices and a glossary at the back (including the Seven Noahide Laws.) One could read one musing a day, as the number 365 suggests, in order to view the world through the lens of that 'theme' for the day. Or one could browse in page order. Or open a page at random. Or find a topic which needs clarification in your life and read that section in depth. Most chapters are free standing and Freeman invites the reader to invent their own structure and address their own needs from his book.

Not every meditation will engage every reader but I found most of them succinctly profound and resonant with layers of possible meanings and applications to life. The cumulative effect is one of deep reflection, even quietude. It is a book for contemplation and slow digestion, not for quickly covering ground. I actually read this book on Shabbat, bit by bit, over the course of 9 or 10 months, reading only what I felt I could profitably absorb at one sitting.

I recommend that you do the same, whether during a spare moment at shul each week or in a comfortable chair in your own home.