



## Jewish Stories of Love and Marriage: Folktales, Legends, and Letters

By Sandy Eisenberg Sasso, Peninnah Schram

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**Jewish Stories of Love and Marriage: Folktales, Legends, and Letters** By Sandy Eisenberg Sasso, Peninnah Schram

*Jewish Stories of Love and Marriage* offers a treasury of tales that speak to the tenderness and passion, difficulties and blessings of love. Jewish tradition overflows with love stories from the Bible, Talmud, and Midrash. Folktales continue the tradition, and contemporary writers highlight the way their faith and love interweave and enrich each other.

From Adam and Eve to Song of Songs, from legends of Solomon to the letters of Alfred and Lucie Dreyfus, these are stories of heartbreak, devotion, and celebration. They tell of how people fall in love and how they grow in love. The narratives are as old as the Bible and as new as the twenty-first century. They come from places as far-ranging as Yemen and New York. The relationships are heterosexual and homosexual, arranged and spontaneous, young and mature. Though the stories reflect the times and places in which they were told, they have a universal message about longing and romance, relationship, respect, and commitment.

Noted storyteller Peninnah Schram and Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso collect these narratives and letters for the first time, inviting readers to delve into these stories for entertainment and inspiration, at engagements, weddings, and anniversaries, to recall what once brought people close and what continues to hold them in love.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

Schram and Sasso, in a synergistic collaboration of storyteller and rabbi, have created an engaging compilation of Jewish love letters and love stories. Beginning with tales about the love relationships of biblical couplings (from biblical accounts, many interwoven with rabbinic midrash), the book also includes Jewish folktales about courtship, fascinating love letters by Jewish historical figures (including between Alfred Dreyfus and his wife Lucie), and a diverse collection of contemporary stories of meeting, love, and marital union. The collection highlights both the differences and the commonalities between contemporary love and marriage, and unions from ages past. In part a celebration of modern, romantic love, this book is also about the covenantal relationship between members of a couple (gay as well as straight), as well as love's subtleties, conflicts, and hardships. The book concludes with a chapter designed to help a couple to write their own love story. Likely to appeal to a broad range of readers, the book is will be of particular value to those celebrating a wedding or anniversary (one's own, or that of a friend or family member). (*Publishers Weekly*)

To some, love stories can be boring, repetitive, and unrealistic. Not so with these stories. The editors collect tales from the Bible, folklorists, and contemporary sources to provide a tapestry of tales that remind us that love is love, and it can grow in surprising places. Jewish and non-Jewish readers alike will appreciate how the love stories are grounded in Jewish identity but in a way that covers a multitude of relationships, whether between two women or in an arranged marriage. From Miriam standing up to Moses and being revered for her wisdom to a woman whose first meeting with her husband convinced her he was a jerk, the stories in the collection repeatedly return to the theme of *bashert*, or destiny: God is in his heaven, and he is making matches. It's a sweet reminder that every love story is as special as the individuals who make it. (*Booklist*)

*Jewish Stories of Love and Marriage* is a must-have addition for any Jewish library, not to mention the perfect gift for any Jewish engagement or wedding. . . .Buy the book. Read the book. Then take the authors' advice and pen your own family's love story. (*Jewish Post & Opinion*)

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The volume presents both familiar love stories and the unusual—ranging from the better-known biblical Song of Songs to love letters from a husband showing appreciation for his wife's ordeal during childbirth. The stories inform those who have little knowledge of Judaism, and deepen the understanding of those who are already familiar with its tenets. Well-researched in archives and libraries, and well-documented, the material here is full of different voices. . . .[W]hat makes this book truly a treasure is the sharing by the authors of the most intimate feelings in their own lives. . . . It is clear that both authors are loving and loved. The reader feels loved as well. In fact, he or she might think, 'These authors are so concerned about me that they included instructions for writing my own love story.' What a rich volume for anyone and everyone. (*Jewish Book Council*)

Love is universal. But there is a special Jewish flavor to it. And that flavor can be savored on every page of this beautiful book. Reading it is like going to one hundred Jewish weddings—and being inspired by the

story behind each one. It will make you want to shout ‘Mazel tov!’ (Ari L. Goldman, author of *The Search for God at Harvard* and *Being Jewish*)

Traditional and modern voices of Jews in love vibrate through this anthology of tales and letters which includes biblical, Talmudic, and medieval folk tales as well as letters and personal narratives of modern rabbis and philosophers. Some of the stories are classic tales, others are refreshing and little-known intimate narratives, yet all affirm the bond of love in Jewish courtship and in family life. This lovely collection of tales should be the first on any list of wedding gifts. (Dan Ben-Amos, University of Pennsylvania; editor of *Folktales of the Jews*)

Who can comprehend God? Who really understands human love? Jewish mystics have long suggested that you can’t possibly know one without the other. After reading this fascinating collection, I think they’re right—and I yearn even more for that sweetness, human and divine. (Jon M. Sweeney, author of *When Saint Francis Saved the Church* and *The Pope Who Quit*)

*Jewish Stories of Love and Marriage* includes everything from love letters and folktales to how to write the story of your own love and marriage! It is beautifully and uniquely imagined and assembled. (Dan Wakefield, author of *The Story of Your Life: Writing a Spiritual Autobiography*)

This lovely book of stories about love and marriage from biblical times to the present is inspiring and hopeful. It would make a delightful gift for new couples and anniversary celebrations, yet will be equally helpful to clergy and seminarians. (Rev. Debra W. Haffner, president, Religious Institute)

A unique celebration of love in Jewish stories, Jewish lives, and Jewish letters through the ages, this collection will delight readers at various stages of the love cycle. Anticipating that its rich content will stimulate readers to want to record their personal love story or offer their own perspective on this enduring theme, the authors provide a handy set of questions, prompts, and suggestions to get them started. (Gail Reimer, founding director, Jewish Women's Archive)

If you need a story for an engagement, a shower, a wedding, an anniversary—any celebration of love between two partners—Rabbi Sasso and Peninnah Schran provide an excellent resource. They select love stories from an unusual combination of genres. (*Storytelling Magazine*)

#### About the Author

**Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso** is director of the Religion, Spirituality, and the Arts Initiative at Butler University and is a national speaker on women and spirituality and the religious imagination of children. She is rabbi emerita of Congregation Beth-El Zedeck in Indianapolis, where she served for thirty-six years, and is the author of numerous highly acclaimed books for both adults and children. Her children’s book *The Shema in the Mezuzah* won the 2012 National Jewish Book Award for Best Illustrated Children’s Book.

Peninnah Schram is professor emerita of speech and drama at Yeshiva University. An internationally renowned storyteller, she travels across the United States and other countries as a featured presenter at storytelling festivals and conferences and as an artist-in-residence. She is the author of twelve notable books of Jewish folktales and has received numerous prestigious awards, including a Covenant Award for Outstanding Jewish Educator and the National Storytelling Network’s Lifetime Achievement Award.

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