

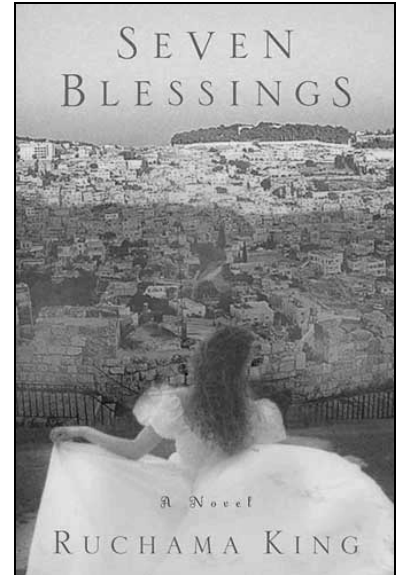
READING GROUP GUIDE

Seven Blessings *A Novel*

by Ruchama King

St. Martin's Press

ISBN: 0-312-30915-5 (hardcover)



Introduction to *Seven Blessings*

The closed, secret world of matchmaking in contemporary Israel provides the titillating pivot for a story that explores the intricate relationship between love and faith. *Seven Blessings* maps out the complicated lives of five expatriate women and men whose search for a soul mate, in many ways, mirrors their search for God. In this land of miracles, seeking the right match, whether between singles, husband and wife, student and teacher, or man and God, becomes a quest that open the Bible to us in a new way.

Reading Group Guide Questions

1. In *Seven Blessings*, the Torah is practically a character in its own right. Sometimes the Torah becomes a barrier to intimacy, and sometimes an enhancer of intimacy. Discuss. What other roles does the Torah play in the characters' lives?
2. Beth's religious issues first get sparked when she considers the idea of teaching. How does the theme of public versus private play out in various areas of her life - particularly public shame and private shame?
3. Both Binyamin and Akiva are playing a self-image game – call it impression management. Who is more self-deceiving – Binyamin or Akiva?
4. All the characters come to Jerusalem for different reasons. Compare and contrast the reasons.

5. Is falling in love a skill that can or even must be learned?
6. Can the Yetzer Hara – unbound illicit desire – be a positive and necessary force in the life of a pious person, or is it always to be subdued and/or stomped out? By the end of the novel, what insights might Tsippi have come to about ‘the secrets of desire’?
7. Even though all the women in *Seven Blessings* lead a traditional religious lifestyle, how might their Torah observance have differed from their grandmothers’ observance of the Torah?

Praise for *Seven Blessings*

“Arranged marriages will never look the same. Ruchama King transforms the life of Orthodox Jerusalem into the universal terms of love and courtship—and, yes, real intimacy and self-fulfillment. A perceptive and charming book.”--Risa Miller, author of *Welcome to Heavenly Heights*

“Ruchama King is herself a great matchmaker—between the sensual and the ethereal, between subtle storytelling and startling revelation. Her novel moves with grave I have not encountered. What a loss it would have been to have never read it, or for her to have never written it.”

--Stephen J. Dubner, author of *Confessions of a Hero Worshipper* and *Turbulent Soul: A Catholic Son's Return to His Jewish Family*

“I really enjoyed this book. Ruchama King knows Jerusalem, its matchmakers, and the Americans who wind up there looking for love and connection to each other and to God. It made me laugh and it touched my heart. It's a truly wonderful read.” --Naomi Ragen, author of *The Ghost of Hannah Mendes*

“*Seven Blessings* is a wonderful literary alchemy that combines Malamud's ‘The Magic Barrel’ with Potok's *The Chosen*. Set in Israel and shadowed by the teachings of the Bible, this is a novel that wears its heart on every page and reveals the secrets and mysteries of how should on earth manage to find the match that they are fated to marry.”

--Thane Rosenbaum, author of *The Golems of Gotham* and *Second Hand Smoke*

“It is a rare event for a way of life to be portrayed with a fresh, intelligent artist's eye. *Seven Blessings* is such an event—an absolute knockout of a first novel...It's hard to write a page-turning story about religious people, but King has done it, and with tremendous charm. This is a funny, revealing, wonderful book!” --Alice Elliott Dark, author of *Think of England* and *In the Gloaming*

Author Biography

RUCHAMA KING lived, studied, and taught in Jerusalem for ten years. Her short stories have appeared in various magazines and journals. She now lives in New Jersey with her husband and children. *Seven Blessings* is her first novel.