



Mourning a Father Lost: A Kibbutz Childhood Remembered

Avraham Balaban

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Returning to the kibbutz of his childhood to attend his father's funeral, Avraham Balaban confronts his buried yet still intensely painful childhood memories. Comparing the kibbutz of today with that of his early years, the author weaves together two interrelated stories: a sensitive artist growing up in the intensely pragmatic world of Kibbutz Huldah and the rise and fall of a grand yet failed social experiment. As he moves through the seven days of sitting shivah for his father, Balaban experiences an expanding cycle of mourning—for self, family, the kibbutz, and Israel itself. With a poet's keen voice, Balaban pens a poignant, frank portrait of the emotional damage wrought by the kibbutz educational system, which separated children from their parents, hoping to establish a new kind of family, a nonbiological family. Indeed, he realizes that he is mourning not the physical death of his father, but the much earlier death of the father-child bond. Only the unwavering love of his remarkable mother rescued him. Readers will see the kibbutz movement, and Israel in general, with new eyes after finishing this book.

In the process of unearthing his earliest memories, Balaban meditates on the mechanism of memory and the forces that shape it. Thus, he examines the varied layers—familial, societal, and national—that establish individual identity. During the shivah, he discovers the tremendous power of words in shaping one's world, on the one hand, and their redemptive power on the other.

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