

Book Notes Rabbi Steven Rubenstein

After a recent Facebook post about a book that I used as part of our Thursday afternoon Conversation Cafe, someone suggested that I might consider letting people know what I've been reading on a regular basis. I am withholding her name so that no one blames her directly for this idea!

Actually, this idea is very appealing to me. Several years ago I read *Ten Years In The Tub* by Nick Hornby. It was a collection of his columns for *The Believer*, a literary magazine. Each month, he'd start his column with a list of 'books purchased' followed by a list of 'books read'. Hornby is a British writer who has written novels and screenplays such as *About A Boy*, *High Fidelity*, and was nominated for an Oscar this year for the movie *Brooklyn*. His articles are hilarious, interesting, and practical. They are like listening to your (very funny, very British, soccer-loving) friend talking about the books he's been reading. I loved it and came across some of my favorite books through his book. That said, something else I appreciated was that Hornby recognized that not everyone will like every book. And while he was pretty careful not to make the column about slamming particular books, he wanted his readers to know that it is OK to simply not care for a particular book.

Now is the time to say the following---I am no Nick Hornby. I'm sure that is true in a wide variety of ways, but the main thing to consider is that while Hornby aimed to be quite broad-based in terms of what he was reading, I will likely let you know about Jewishly-relevant books. Although, who knows? I have a variety of reading interests so you never know. I hope you enjoy.

For now, I'll just mention the book that I wrote about in that Facebook post a while ago.

Last year, Etgar Keret published a memoir called *Seven Good Years*. If you aren't familiar with Keret, you should be. He is among the most popular contemporary Israeli writers. While this is a book of non-fiction and Keret regularly writes journalistic pieces, the large majority of his work is in the short story. Actually calling them short stories is too big. He writes really short short stories---often just 2-3 pages. His stories are at times hysterically funny, and at others heartbreaking. They can be a bit bizarre too. Unlike many of the most famous Israeli writers of previous generations who wrote about the big ideas of the State of Israel, Keret's stories focus on day-to-day life of people in Tel Aviv.

Getting back to *The Seven Good Years*, Keret's memoir is written in short chapters (in my opinion, an underrated element in literature) about the time between the birth of his son and the death of his father. Like his short fiction, the memoir is both funny and touching. When we read one of the chapters at Conversation Cafe, someone mentioned that Keret's writing feels poetic even though it is prose---and that's in translation. So, I'd recommend Keret's memoir. And when you are done, check out one of his short story collections.