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*Ruth Westheimer, Gil Sedan*

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*The Secret Strength of the Druze*



DR. RUTH K. WESTHEIMER AND GIL SEDAN

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**Ruth Westheimer, Gil Sedan : The Olive and the Tree: The Secret Strength of the Druze** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Olive and the Tree: The Secret Strength of the Druze:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. The Israeli Druze By S. Cranow The Druze of the Holy Land Situated in the north of what is recognized today as the Modern State of Israel, lies a community that is a minority within a

minority. The Arabs are minorities in Israel and the Druze are a minority amongst the Arabs. Little is known about these hill dweller who have villages in the Carmel, Galilee and Golan. Their religion is secret even amongst themselves, their history though available to all is by and large unstudied. The Israeli Jews go up there for great deals, good food and warm hospitality. The Druze are known for the loyalty to the state. They serve in the Israeli Defense forces and have lost a high proportion of their numbers in the IDF defending the country, even a higher proportion than Israeli Jews do. The Druze believe in a concept of taqiyyah which abides them to go along with the sovereign of where they live. Dr. Ruth Westheimer, noted author on many books on sex, has delved into this little known community with the help of Gil Sedan. Her research started off as a documentary which then turned into a book. She has a Jewish background and is both a survivor of the Holocaust and a veteran of the Jewish Haganah. Her book is very even handed and those who know nothing about the Druze will find this book to be both a light read and very informative. Not many are able to plumb into the depths of the community as she has. She covers several topics in this book such as relations to the state, religion, customs and more. As noted earlier the Druze are loyal to the state of residence, and there are Druze in Syria, Lebanon and Israel. Each Druze community is loyal to the state and their own people. The Druze loyalty to Israel has put some friction between the Israeli Druze and the others. Yet they believe in loyalty to the Druze. Such a stance has alienated them from other Arabs. As for religion it is very secretive even amongst themselves. Most Druze are not religious in fact they have few rituals and very few religious commandments. Like Muslims they are to refrain from adultery, alcohol and smoking. Most of them though do smoke. The ones who know and study the religion are called the "Wise ones" and the ones who are the majority and secular are known as "Ignorant ones" When a Druze becomes observant they shave their head, grow a handlebar mustache and wear a turban like hat. In the Druze religion both men and women are deemed equal and both can become knowers of the religion. This equality extends onto other areas of life. Both can work and hold jobs and pursue education. A woman can also divorce a man as a man can divorce a woman. Once they are divorced however, there is no going back. The equality does not extend into all areas of life. While the Druze way may not include honor killings that are present in Arab culture it is still there. Both male and female Druze are not allowed to marry outside of the community, for men the penalty would be banishment, loss of inheritance, children not part of the community and for a woman the penalty is death. The Druze have been known to carry out this penalty. This is followed more strictly in Israel than it is in Syria or Lebanon. The religious extremist among the Druze have tried to limit women's freedom but have not been successful. They wanted women in the home and not be allowed to drive a car. The community did not listen. In Israel the Druze identity is more solid and reinforced than it is in other countries. In Arab countries they identify themselves as Arab while in Israel they are definitely Druze. As noted earlier the Druze are loyal to the state but that special relationship has been strained at times. While the Druze serve in the army, other Arab like Muslims and Christians go to university and get higher paying jobs. When the Druze leave the army they are often lagging behind in education and are often unemployed while their Christian and Muslim counterparts are working and building homes for their family. The Druze are often treated with both trust and mistrust and do not have the same opportunities as the Jews do. This has caused tension between the communities. The Jews and Druze have been allies since post World War 1. Yet the Druze are not treated equally and in many respects lose out. Another factor complicating things has been Israel's favoritism of the Christians over the Druze when Israel invaded Lebanon. Some of the Druze revolted and joined the Lebanese Druze against Israel. Not all Druze identify with Israel some have identified with the Palestinian cause and have advocated against serving in the IDF. The Druze of the Golan are a different category, being Syrian citizens under Israeli occupation. After the 1967 war they found themselves under Israeli rule and at first they availed themselves of the many opportunities it provided them. Yet when Israel returned the Sinai desert to the Egyptian they started becoming more Syrian. The author makes it like they appreciate living in Israel but if the land is ever returned to Syria they will be asked why they were so cozy with the Israelis. Another interesting aspect of their religion is the belief in reincarnation. They believe that after they die they will be born into another Druze body and this is something that they believe strongly. They have stories of memories and of knowing people from past lives. The book gives a brief sketch of their overall history, on how they came to live in Israel and a bit more in depth view of their relationship with Israel. If you wish to learn more about the Druze this is a good place to start.

All religious groups have codes to guide the lives of adherents, but the Druze, Dr. Ruth tells us, are especially interesting. She has observed the Druze's special art of adjustment in all walks of life, whether religious or secular, and for all people, young and old. Their key is an ancient custom called a-takiyya. During times of communal stress, the Druze refrain from accentuating their religious identity, thus reducing the possibilities of conflict with neighboring groups and allowing them to concentrate on internal community building. According to Druze custom, they predate the Hebrew people in the area surrounding Palestine particularly in Syria, Lebanon, and Israel. Thus, like many "native" peoples, they do not feel bound by the customs and religions brought into the area by later settlers. This, of course, has led to a long history of strife with their neighbors. Consequently, the Druze people have had to build an inner strength of individuals and community in order to survive as an identifiable ethnic group. Through stories, personal encounters, and historical context, Dr. Ruth Westheimer describes with great warmth the roots of that

strength, how the story of the Druze has played out over the millennia, how they influence today's situation in the Middle East, and what Westerners can learn from them and their way of life.

The Strangers among Them PBS looks at culture of Israels most loyal Arabs Jonathan Mark - Associate Editor In the first week of the intifada, a Jewish soldier was killed while defending Josephs Tomb.Or at least most Jews assumed that it was a Jewish soldier, for so closely do we equate the Israel Defense Forces with the Jewish state. But this dead soldier, Madhat Yusuf, was a Druze, a mysterious sect of Israeli Arabs who live primarily in Israels north country. If the intifadas first week was marked by Yusufs death, in the first week of this years war, Hezbollah rockets pounded Beit Jann, the Druze village where Yusuf lived. Our wars are their wars.And yet, a new PBS documentary, The Olive and the Tree shows one Israeli admitting that she didnt know very much at all about who the Druze are.This PBS film, focusing on the humanity rather than the politics, is primarily the result of Jewish talent and philanthropic money. Its executive producers are Michael Greenspan and Dr. Ruth Westheimer. But in a twist on the Jewish obsession with our own continuity, the obsession here is with Druze continuity. The surprising conclusion is that an iron wall against accepting converts and intermarriage may be a good idea.Asked whether Jews would be considered intolerant if they erected such a wall, Westheimer said, Absolutely. But I would say, in the case of the Druze, intolerance is even crucial for survival.There are only about 700,000 Druze left, according to PBS, with 115,000 living in the Galilee, in the midst of more than 7 million Israeli Jews, Christians and Muslims.Prof. Fadel Mansour, a Druze theologian, explains in this documentary beautifully filmed in the ancient stone villages in the Galilee hills that ever since the Druze were persecuted following their own version of Islamic reformation in the 11th century, theyve become mysterious by choice. It was a reformation, however, that never diluted piety or strict observance, such as taboos on eating pork, drinking alcohol, or smoking. Shauka A-Maasha, a baker shown near his pita oven, like many of the Druze in the film, seems to be a Druze equivalent of centrist Orthodox. He is earning a degree in psychology, but says psychology has all the answers but our faith has more precise answers, better answers about raising children, and more traditional answers at that.If a mothers loyalty is to her child, the childs loyalty is not only to the village but to the country. It helps that they also believe in a quick reincarnation; a belief that makes dying in the IDF less terrifying.As Beit Janns Sgt. Fuad Azzi tells Westheimer, In my previous life I was called Fuad Saad. Only my last name changed. I lived here then, too. I was in the Border Police and I was killed in Lebanon in 82.You were killed, and then what? asks Westheimer.Then, says Azzi, I was born to my mother. At the age of three it was suddenly like a dream. I began to recognize people from before. I knew names. I knew where our lands had been and our house.Death is hard for us, says the sergeant, losing friends. But, at a certain stage you have a sense of relief to know that maybe, maybe youll meet him again and become friends. Maybe hell be born to other people and, God willing, hell remember who he was in the prior life and come see his friends and get to know his parents.Death is less problematic than modernity. Says the narrator, For Druze parents whose kids grow up in close contact with Jews, theres a lot to worry about When Druze youngsters go off to the big Jewish city, the strength of their roots is on the line.Druze villages closer to secular Jewish communities are losing their uniqueness faster than the remote villages.Najwa, who lives fives minutes from Dania, a Haifa neighborhood, says, I know that in Dania the teenagers do a lot of things, lets say, that my son wouldnt do.Adds her husband Ghassan, Because we live in a western culture with huge temptations, our disappearance, our assimilation into Israeli life and the loss of our uniqueness will happen very quickly. Compare our behavior today with 10 years ago. Its like night and day.One Druze lieutenant in the IDF air force confronts the dilemma: Why not traditional and modern? Wheres the contradiction? I can enjoy the mainstream and still retain Druze values and identity. I can enjoy Jewish friends, have fun, have a drink and meet girls, but in the end I remember my home and family the bottom line is being Druze, marrying a Druze woman.After all, If I date or marry a Jewish girl my family will abandon me. Its as simple as that. Theyll cut me off. No Druze would give up the warm home where you grew up and the togetherness of family, where theres always someone to count on. When youre alone its difficult. To give up all that to marry a non-Druze? Its just not worth it.But Najwas daughter, Ayal, says, Im not sure there will be Druze Everyones going in different directions, leaving the village. There will be Druze, but not like today.Dusk is coming to the culture. The film notes, Yesterdays shepherds and farmers are todays teachers and scientists the olive groves are growing smaller by the year. PBS/Channel 13 (NYC) broadcast The Olive and the Tree: The Secret Strength of the Druze on Sept. 17 at 3 p.m. and Sept. 19 at 4 p.m.From the Author"I've written many 'how to' books, but the lessons that I learned from the Druze, and that I want to pass on to you, are not about the subject for which I am best known. Instead the Druze show us how much of an impact families can have on their children, even against seemingly insurmountable odds." --Dr. Ruth WestheimerAbout the AuthorDr. Ruth K. Westheimer is best known for her pioneering work in the field of media psychology, specifically sex. Her doctorate from Columbia University, however, is in Interdisciplinary Study of the Family, and she has created several books and documentary films investigating the subject. The documentaries on which The Olive and the Tree and Shifting Sands are based aired on PBS stations across the country. Dr. Ruth teaches seminars at Yale and Princeton and is working on several new books to add to her collection of works on sex.Gil Sedan has worked for the past thirty years as the Arab Affairs correspondent of Israel Television Channel One and the Jewish telegraphic Agency Jerusalem bureau. He has filmed numerous documentaries on the Arab minority in Israel,

most recently on the Arab town of Umm al-Fahem, controlled by the Islamic Movement. Sedan was editor and host of the Arabesque Middle East television magazine, the only bilingual (HebrewArabic) regional program. Sedan majored in Middle East History at Tel-Aviv University, and earned an MA in journalism from the University of Missouri. He guest lectured on Middle East history at the University of Florida (2000) and presently teaches television reporting at two colleges in northern Israel.