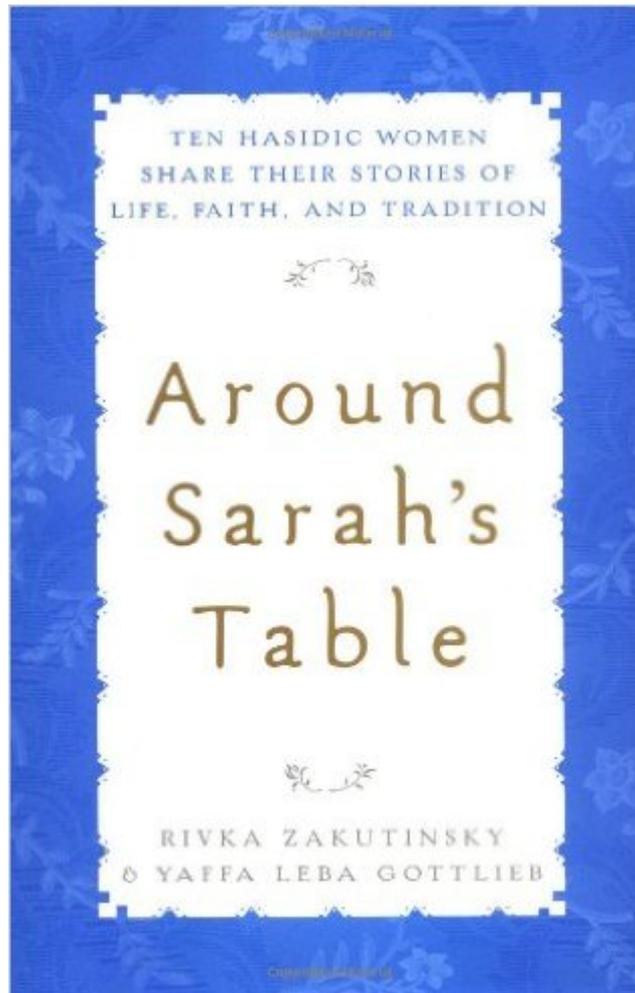


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# Around Sarah's Table: Ten Hasidic Women Share Their Stories Of Life, Faith, And Tradition



## Synopsis

In the tradition of Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* and *Holy Days* by Lis Harris, Rivka Zakutinsky and Yaffa Leba Gottlieb show the inner workings of a fascinating community of women that few outsiders will enter on their own. With humor and sensitivity, *Around Sarah's Table* focuses on the lives of ten Hasidic women and on the insights each gains from the weekly Torah reading, illustrating the ways in which each woman's life is infused with Judaism. Brooklyn, 1991: A few Hasidic women begin meeting once a week for lunch and intimate learning with friends. The few soon grow to many, from backgrounds as diverse as those of any other segment of the Jewish population. Gathered together by Sarah -- mother of thirteen, girls' high school principal, facilitator, connector, and hostess -- they called themselves the "Women's Tuesday Torah Luncheon and Study Group." From Reva the publisher to Rachel the mikvah maven, Klara the lawyer, Levana the rebbitzin, and others, the daily joys and sorrows of each allow us to see through the stereotypes to truly connect with the real women who lie behind those images. With the eyes, ears, and hearts of storytellers, Zakutinsky and Gottlieb generously introduce us to their very personal spiritual realm. Amidst a world filled with spiritual unrest and anxiety, *Around Sarah's Table* offers inspirational Hasidic and biblical interpretation gathered by women, for both women and men to follow. Less concerned with an academic approach to Bible study than with the traditional methods of "learning," the authors never seem to lose sight of how the ancient texts apply to their contemporary lives. Fast paced but reverent, *Around Sarah's Table* introduces us to the unique experience of living life as a Hasidic woman, and reminds us that beyond all the labels that tend to keep us apart, we are all very much alike.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 256 pages

Publisher: Free Press (October 23, 2001)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0684872749

ISBN-13: 978-0684872742

Product Dimensions: 8.8 x 5.7 x 0.9 inches

Shipping Weight: 11.2 ounces

Average Customer Review: 3.7 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (18 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #1,050,383 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #135 in [Books > Religion & Spirituality > Judaism > Hasidism](#) #145 in [Books > Religion & Spirituality > Judaism > Movements](#)

## Customer Reviews

What Amy Tan did for the world of Chinese women in "The Joy Luck Club," this book does for Hasidic women's culture. Riva Zakutinsky and Yaffa Leiba Gottlieb (both Hasidic themselves), have given the public a highly-readable, intimate window into a world that would otherwise be inaccessible to most outsiders. The result is an excellent book that will make you laugh, cry, and truly realize how the common humanity we all share can shine through outward differences. I plan to recommend this book to my neighbors, my local libraries, and readers of my Hasidism FAQ. Like "Joy Luck Club," it would make a great movie, too. If I were a film producer, I'd jump at the chance!

The ten women who gather around Sarah's Table every Tuesday for lunch and Torah study are very religious Jews, but definitely not plaster saints. (Is that a mixed metaphor?) They struggle daily with the same types of life challenges facing women (and men) the world over: caring for developmentally challenged children, coping with a serious illness in the family, becoming a step-parent, balancing home and personal life with a career. Oh yes, some of these women DO have careers outside the home. For example, there's Shaina, author of a series of Jewish children's books. And Reva, Shaina's publisher, whose husband encouraged her to start her business. Not to mention Klara, the attorney, whose strict Hasidic observance led her to open her own law firm rather than "sell out" to pressures to conform. Of special interest to the outside world will be the chapter on Tamar, who is seeking the right "match" for her older daughter. As you will learn from her story, Hasidic matchmaking is not the same thing as an "arranged marriage."

*Around Sarah's Table* (2001) is a set of 10 vignettes about Lubavitcher Hasidic women in modern American society. The ten women featured in this book are participants in a shiur (Torah class) held at lunchtime on Tuesdays in Sarah's home within Borough Park in Brooklyn. These women read a weekly parsha (portion), containing one or more quotations from the Torah and some commentary, and then discuss the lesson. Shaina is a convert to Hasidic Judaism from a Reformed family and has not had much contact with other Hasidic women. She and her husband have adopted two Down's Syndrome children and Shaina is running herself into the ground trying to do everything for her children. Shaina is a writer of children's stories and Reva, her publisher, strongly suggests that she spend some time away from her children, so Shaina arranges for a sitter so that she can attend the shiur. Reva started a small publishing house to provide stories suitable for instructing her own children in Hasidic values and has since expanded to an international operation. Her husband has

always encouraged her efforts, but lately he has been much troubled by his diabetes. His condition is serious enough to require shots and other medical assistance and the burden of his care has fallen mainly on Reva. She is feeling overwhelmed by her responsibilities. Tamar is a mother and homemaker who is concerned about a husband for her daughter Abigail. Her older children have been successfully married to compatible mates, but Abigail has not yet met a man that suits her. Moreover, a suitable mate for her younger son Ephraim has been found, but it is not appropriate for a young man to be married before his older sister. Rachel is a resident of Williamsburg, the oldest Jewish community in Brooklyn.

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