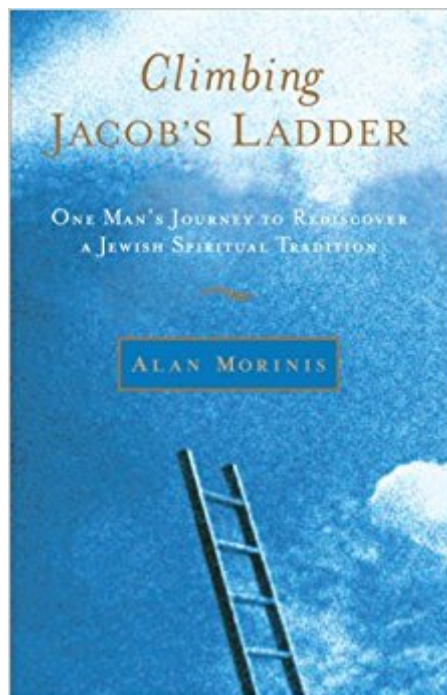




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# Climbing Jacob's Ladder: One Man's Journey To Rediscover A Jewish Spiritual Tradition



## Synopsis

Jewish by birth, though from a secular family, Alan Morinis explored Hinduism and Buddhism as a young man. But in 1997, in the face of personal crisis, he turned to his Jewish heritage for guidance. In his reading he happened upon a Jewish spiritual tradition called Mussar. Gradually he realized that he had stumbled upon an insightful discipline for self-development, complete with meditative, contemplative, and other well-developed transformative practices designed to penetrate the deepest roots of the inner life. Eventually reaching the limits of what he could learn on his own, he decided to seek out a Mussar teacher. This was not an easy task, since almost the entire world of the Mussar tradition had been wiped out in the Holocaust. In time, he found an accomplished master who stood in an unbroken line of transmission of the Mussar tradition, and who lived in the center of a community of Orthodox Jews on Long Island. This book tells the story of Morinis's journey to meet his teacher and what he learned from him, revealing the central teachings and practices that are the spiritual treasury and legacy of Mussar.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

How can a person be generous to the poor when his own bank account is almost empty? Mussar, a thousand-year-old Jewish spiritual tradition, offers answers to this and many other questions regarding the distance between religious ideals and everyday realities, as Alan Morinis explains in *Climbing Jacob's Ladder*. Morinis, a Canadian baby boomer who grew up to become a Rhodes Scholar, anthropologist, and film producer, discovered Mussar teachings at the low point of his midlife crisis. After he made some high-flying business deals that crashed, Morinis found

reassurance in the Mussar idea that human life is holy and people can improve themselves. And Mussar, a system of ethical discipline conceived by Orthodox Jews to help them meet the demanding requirements of observant life, does seem perfectly designed for readers seeking step-by-step instruction for building or rebuilding their spiritual lives. In *Climbing Jacob's Ladder* Morinis tells the story of how he used Mussar to climb back up to holy life and invites readers to come along on his ascent. --Michael Joseph Gross --This text refers to the Unbound edition.

This moving account of a secular Jew's search for spirituality begins with his explorations of Eastern religions in India and ends with his quest's eventual culmination in Jewish tradition. Born and raised in Toronto, Morinis won a Rhodes Scholarship and earned a Ph.D. in anthropology at Oxford. After teaching at different universities in Vancouver, he became involved in filmmaking and abandoned academia. He was successful for many years but his business finally failed. During his resulting depression, he turned to Judaism for solace since his investigation of Eastern religions had proven fruitless. He learned about Musar (ethics, morality), a little-known Jewish movement that emphasizes the study of Judaism's ethical writings and their practical application. The need for a teacher to guide him beyond his reading led him to a rabbi in Far Rockaway, N.Y. For the next three years, Morinis traveled frequently between Vancouver and New York. What he learned is incorporated in this well-written book which sets forth the teachings of Musar, often through parables told to Morinis by his teacher. These homilies make a profound connection between belief and behavior. The narrative also reveals the story of the author's life, including the impact of his studies on his relationship with his physician wife and their two daughters. The achievement of personal growth through spirituality is richly demonstrated by this touching account of the author's journey to Judaism. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Unbound edition.

It is amazing to see one's man journey to find holiness and how he is currently helping others. After reading this book you will feel inspired to respect others and help yourself develop soul traits to happiness. Easy reading also.

I have recently begun to study Mussar within a group setting at my synagogue. In general, when I jump into something like this, I like to read additional material - material not a part of the course curriculum. Alan Morinis is considered to be a "mussar maven" and it was great to read about his life and what led him to this study. I would recommend this to anyone looking to understand how the

Mussar can play an important role in one's life. I've been in this group for about 4 months now, and my life has changed....for the better.

Yes, love this book. Excellent

This book and its interesting content is easy to read and fascinating to follow this man's journey. If interested in learning about Mussar this is a good place to start. The book arrived in excellent condition and in a timely fashion.

Written in the style of Tuesdays with Morrie - middle-aged Jewish guy, plodding through life's ethical dilemmas, connects with older, wiser Jewish man and learns much about himself and the world around him - Climbing Jacob's Ladder is an exceptionally well-crafted book. The guru figure of this book, though, is not a self-styled professor, saddled with a debilitating, terminal illness. Rather, he is, Rabbi Yechiel Perr, dean of an Orthodox Yeshiva, who is steeped in an age-old ethics-based tradition, known as Mussar. The book's author, Alan Morinis, is effective on numerous planes. For one, he makes the somewhat arcane theoretical underpinnings of Mussar accessible to a larger audience: You don't just have a soul; you are a soul. Second, Morinis breathes new life into some of the perhaps stultified practices of Mussar. An example here is when he presents Heshbon Hanefesh/moral inventory in a manner that subtly deviates from the more statistics-based, quantitative approach introduced by its original author and heads toward a more descriptive, qualitative approach - one that empowers readers to move beyond simply identifying moral lapses to understanding their causes and finding solutions. An intriguing question that winds its way through the book is whether Mussar, as a discipline originally devised to help observant Jews adhere to the strictures of Orthodoxy, can be adapted for use by those who wish to remain part of broader society, even as they crave a more ethical, spiritual life. Morinis, on more than one occasion, poses this question to Rabbi Perr, and his mentor typically responds in oblique fashion. Whether or not we are to call Morinis' book and the endeavors it has spawned Mussar, his work has inspired (and moved to action) a wide array of people, many of whom are clearly not Orthodox. For those who personally know Rabbi Perr, this book holds an additional attraction. Morinis paints a stunningly vivid verbal portrait - one that seems to capture a great deal of the venerated dean's aura, from his imposing physical presence to the complex and seemingly contradictory facets of his personality. As someone who had studied in Rabbi Perr's Yeshiva for a number of years, I will often refer to the images presented by Morinis, and experience a tingling sense of the dean's, or (as we refer to him)

the Rosh Yeshiva's presence - one that tides me over, in between our all too infrequent phone conversations.

I am enjoying this story of a man's search for himself. It's written so that it's easy to read.

An easy and insightful outline of a philosophy that leads to a way of life that can be more rewarding and, dare I say, happier.

Excellent starter book for studying mussar.

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