



Murder in Jerusalem

By Batya Gur
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Introduction

Deep in the bowels of Israel's official television station, Channel One, a beloved set designer is crushed to her death by a marble pillar. Widely believed to be an accident, the tragedy is initially treated as a sad afterthought to the larger concerns of the bustling and chaotic newsroom—with stories of political unrest, labor violence and religious fundamentalism dominating the headlines, both on the air and in real life. However, when another of the station's employees, the only person to see the set designer before her untimely death, also suddenly dies, it quickly becomes apparent that these deaths are not accidental—and Police Chief Superintendent Michael Ohayon is called in to survey what eventually becomes a tangled multiple murder investigation, with roots that dig much deeper than anyone could have imagined.

Murder in Jerusalem is the final installment in Batya Gur's acclaimed mystery series featuring Michael Ohayon. Through Ohayon's investigation of the two mysterious deaths at Channel One Gur reveals the conflicting, violent interplay between the media, government and religion in present-day Israel, and highlights the various disputes, both secular and spiritual, tearing away at the solidarity of the Jewish state. Ohayon's murder investigation evolves from a relatively simple examination of two individual deaths to a spiraling conspiracy that reveals the challenges faced by modern Israelis as they struggle to reconcile their tumultuous existence in the present with the horrors of the past. *Murder in Jerusalem* is a thoughtful and layered work that explores the contradictory undercurrents of a vibrant but dangerous land, where idealism and belief may hold more value than even life and death, and provides a fitting close to the careers of both Michael Ohayon and Batya Gur.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why do you think Batya Gur set this novel at Israel's 24 hour newschannel? What significance does the media play in the larger story of the murders and the subsequent investigation?
2. Of all the characters in the book, did you see anyone as truly admirable or principled? Why or why not? Is idealism portrayed as a good or bad concept in the book?
3. There are constant references in the book to Ohayon's having given up smoking. What larger idea was the author was trying to convey with Ohayon's struggle to fight his addiction to nicotine?
4. What did you think of the parent-child relationships depicted in the book? Was there a common thread among how Eli and Tzilla, Arye and Niva, and Ohayon all treated their children? What might this say about the generational divide in modern-day Israel?
5. If the story of *Iddo* and *Eyman* is the story of how "civilization—the power of the intellectuals, the academics—has suppressed the originality, the spontaneity, the spirit and sentiment of the people," how does that story serve as a metaphor for Israel's real life challenges?
6. Discuss the physical structure of the Channel One offices. With hidden entrances and confusing hallways, how does this relate to the story, both literally and metaphorically?
7. How did you view Arye Rubin as a character? Did you feel he was a sympathetic character or a villain? What about Benny Meyuhas and Sroul?
8. At one point in the book, as Ohayon listens to Arye Rubin recount his past and present actions, he thinks to himself, "And so, in old age, you finally understand what it is to identify: To identify is a moment of identity." What do you think this means and do you agree with this statement? Do you think that Ohayon truly identified with Rubin?
9. There has been speculation that the author wrote this book with the knowledge that she might soon lose her fight with cancer. Is there anything in this book that indicates this possible awareness of human mortality?
10. How does the conversation between Ohayon and his son in the final scene relate to the events that precede it, and did you find it a fitting conclusion for the book?

About the Author

Batya Gur lived in Jerusalem, where she was a literary critic for *Ha'aretz*, Israel's most prestigious newspaper. She taught literature for over twenty years and wrote five other Michael Ohayon mysteries: *Murder Duet*, *The Saturday Morning Murder*, *A Literary Murder*, *Murder on a Kibbutz* and *Bethlehem Road Murder*. She passed away in 2005.