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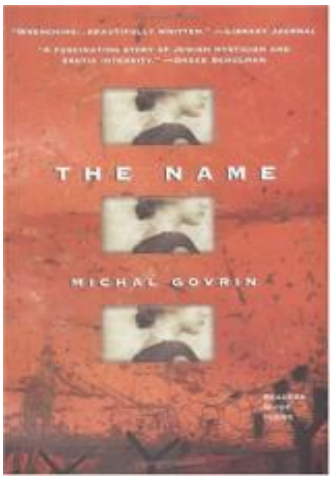
The Name

by Michal Govrin



About the Book

The recipient of two of Israel's most prestigious literary awards, **The Name** tells the story of Amalia, a daughter of Holocaust survivors who seeks desperately to remake her life and escape her history. Named for her father's first wife?a concert pianist who perished in a death camp?Amalia finally seeks refuge in an ultra-Orthodox seminary where she encounters a fierce, charismatic rabbi who preaches a fiery Kabbalistic Judaism, and embraces a life of passionate penitence. It is the starting point of a strange and hypnotic journey that takes the reader from the earthy and erotic to the spiritual and sublime?marking a powerful, disturbing, and unforgettable debut.

Discussion Guide

1. Do you think it's true that our names always influence our fate in some way? Are we, in reality, burdened with whatever freight the name carries for our parents?

2. How does Amalia's name seem to play a role in her fate? Discuss the different aspects of this.

3. Discuss the similarities between erotic passion and mystical passion. To what extent do you think these are similar feelings, directed at different loves?

4. Isn't religious passion often a sublimated form of erotic passion? Or is that a statement of secular bias? Isn't it possible that we are all born with a natural yearning for God that finds replacement or dilution in earthly passion? Discuss these intertwined roles in Amalia's case.

5. To what extent are the themes of The Name, while Jewish, accessible to readers of other faiths? Are they more accessible to religions with a mystical core?

6. Discuss the emotional and psychological legacy of the Holocaust for the children of survivors. Talk about your experiences of this or those of people you know. Is there an event in the non-Jewish world that has had a similar collective impact?

7. How does Amalia's father's survival shape Amalia's world? For better? For worse?

8. Discuss Amalia's search for atonement. Why does she feel the need for atonement? What are the symbolic implications of weaving the prayer shawls? Discuss the role and meaning of other rituals of redemption, tikkun, or repair.

9. Talk about Jerusalem: in what way does the city itself become a character in this book? In what way does the city's complex personality mirror Amalia's own?

Author Bio

Michal Govrin is a writer, poet, and theater director. She received her Ph.D. at the University of Paris and currently teaches at the School of Visual Theater in Jerusalem. She divides her time between Jerusalem, Paris, and Princeton, New Jersey.

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