

Sage Tales – Wisdom and Wonder from the Rabbis of the Talmud  
by Rabbi Burton L. Visotzky.  
Jewish Lights Publishing 2011.

The pages of the Talmud are replete with stories of the Sages of the rabbinic period that educate and sometimes entertain in equal measure. In Sage Tales, Rabbi Burton Visotzky, Appleman Professor of Midrash and Inter-religious Studies at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, brings his over-forty years' engagement with rabbinic texts to some of the best tales of the Sages and presents them in a manner that does justice both to the texts themselves and his own scholarship.

The book is divided into twenty two chapters, one for each letter of the Hebrew Alphabet, followed by two appendices, the first with the full text of each of the stories cited, the second a who's who of rabbis and others mentioned.

Each chapter commences with a brief introduction to the text under consideration and then after the text itself a commentary follows which explains the text and explores some of its principal themes and ideas. The commentaries are written in an immensely approachable style and with commendable clarity, so no one should assume that because this is a book looking at Talmudic texts it is opaque or unduly challenging. It isn't! But it is extremely rewarding.

Sage Tales lends itself to many uses, both personal and public, and will be a great means of introducing students of all ages to Talmudic material.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh