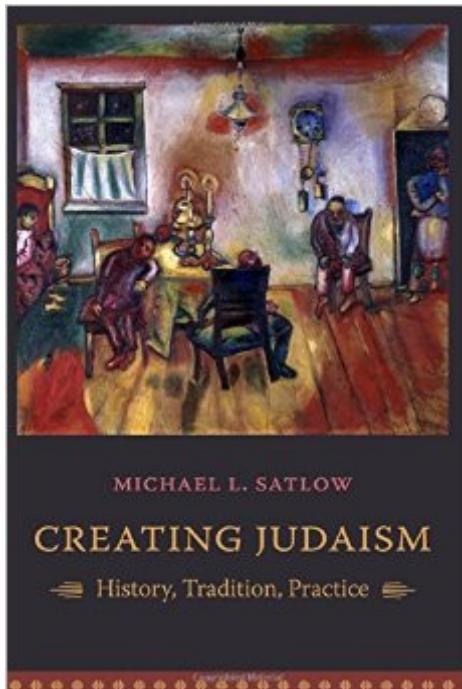


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Creating Judaism: History, Tradition, Practice



Synopsis

How can we define "Judaism," and what are the common threads uniting ancient rabbis, Maimonides, the authors of the Zohar, and modern secular Jews in Israel? Michael L. Satlow offers a fresh perspective on Judaism that recognizes both its similarities and its immense diversity. Presenting snapshots of Judaism from around the globe and throughout history, Satlow explores the links between vastly different communities and their Jewish traditions. He studies the geonim, rabbinical scholars who lived in Iraq from the ninth to twelfth centuries; the intellectual flourishing of Jews in medieval Spain; how the Hasidim of nineteenth-century Eastern Europe confronted modernity; and the post-World War II development of distinct American and Israeli Jewish identities. Satlow pays close attention to how communities define themselves, their relationship to biblical and rabbinic texts, and their ritual practices. His fascinating portraits reveal the amazingly creative ways Jews have adapted over time to social and political challenges and continue to remain a "Jewish family."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I bought this book because of Michael's excellent Podcast of "From Israelite to Jew". He concluded the Podcast before the birth of the Rabbis and promised he would write a book explaining the phenomena. This book is a light attempt at the subject and up until modern times. On the positive side, I enjoyed the 35,000 feet view of the evolution of Judaism. He touched on the history in a perfect manner and showed us milestones of how Judaism twisted and turned throughout the centuries. He showed the beginning of Jewish philosophy with Philo, through the RAMABAM,

Kabalah, Chasidism and eventually to the break-off sects during the emancipation of Jews in Europe. He hit it on the nose in explaining how Judaism morphed into what it is today. As a historian, he briefly showed what has been happening in parallel in the non-Jewish world and how it could have influenced Jewish thought. I enjoyed this perspective very much. As a Jew, we sometimes dive deep into the technical part without ever seeing a birds-eye view of where we came from and how we got it here in terms of thought. We study Torah, HALACHA and Talmud as a type of competition of who can be most overloaded with Jewish thought without really sitting back and understanding the triggers and origins of these thoughts and practices. The real problem of this book is that it was too light for such an important subject. Michael skims over the history and in several instances says, "it would take too long to explain in detail". Again if you, the reader, are looking for a light version of Jewish thought history than this is a perfect book. If you want a little more intelligent meat, than you will be left hungry with this book. But Michael is a very good writer and I promise you will not be bored. This book is for beginner plus Jews.

Publisher: Columbia University Press (December 19, 2006) Language: English ISBN-10: 0231134886 ISBN-13: 978-0231134880 Tyler Kranjac's rather dramatic and not particularly informative 1-star review has not been received favorably by the public; probably because of the lack of a real review, perhaps also the images conjured in the minds of his readers of his attempt to get himself uncircumcised. But having read Satlow's book, in a strange way, I think that Tyler has a point. While Satlow does indeed introduce many points of interest to the non-specialist, there are serious limitations in his method, in his logic, in his theology, and in his scholarship. I address each of these, in no particular order, in the coming paragraphs... The Book: Chapters 1. Promised Lands: Compares American versus Israeli Judaism 2. Creating Judaism: Origins 3. Between Athens and Jerusalem 4. The Rabbis 5. Rabbinic Concepts 6. Mitzvot 7. The Rise of Reason 8. From Moses to Moses 9. Seeing God 10. East and West In addition, the book provides a useful historical timeline and, especially for the non-Jewish reader, a glossary of terms. Method: Satlow's approach is non-essentialist - that is, as he describes, there is no such thing as "Judaism". There is no set of core beliefs that delineate it. We are dealing with a family of Judaisms, some of which have overlapping characteristics, others have none; all authenticate themselves "locally"; but there is no "standard" or canonical Judaism by which we might adjudge one flavor to be more authentic than another. There is no "essence" of Judaism, no defining characteristics.

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