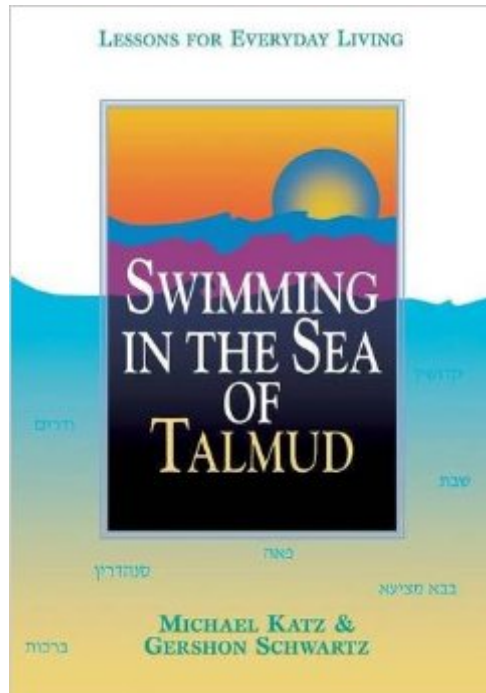


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Swimming In The Sea Of Talmud: Lessons For Everyday Living



Synopsis

A clear, accessible guide to reading and understanding the Talmud. This book offers a unique introduction to the study of the Talmud and suggest ways to apply its messages and values to contemporary life. Imaginatively conceived, this volume is recommended for both individuals and group study sessions.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Along with the Jewish Bible (the Tanach), the Talmud is central text of Judaism. Consisting of two components, Mishnah (oral law) and Gemarrah (Rabbinical discussion of the Mishnah), the voluminous words of the great Rabbinic Sages expound on every conceivable subject and their rulings make up the whole of modern Jewish practice and belief. It is the Talmud that turned the ancient worship of the God of Abraham by the nation of Israel into the religion of Judaism. Although learned Jews spend their lives immersed in Talmud study, for less knowledgeable Jews it is a sorely and unfortunately neglected area of Jewish study. Indeed, many modern Jews would be hard pressed to explain exactly what Talmud is. Their are many reasons for this of course, but certainly a primary one is that the language style and method of the Talmud is virtually incomprehensible to the untrained mind. (even in translation) Although the Talmud is divided into tractates dealing with broad subjects such as prayer, damages, relations between the sexes, holy things etc., it is not truly subdivided in the way in which we moderns are accustomed. There is no index and laws and rulings on different subjects are found throughout the work. Thus while a "sugya" or section of Gemarrah may begin by discussing a certain mishnah, it will soon be sure to ramble in a thousand directions

as the words of different sages with different opinions are recorded with no reference to when they lived or when they spoke or often, whose opinion prevailed. Even the most advanced rabbinic students of Talmud need help comprehending the meaning, turning to the great Rashi or to their own teachers. Immersing oneself in Talmud is truly like being lost in an open sea.

Rabbis Katz and Schwartz have written a lucid introduction to talmudic study. Talmud is voluminous, encompassing many tractates divided into six orders of study. If you were to read a page a day (front and back of each) it would take seven and a half years to complete the task. Indeed, many people do just that in an exercise known as "daf yomi" which basically means the front and back of a page very day. The first few pages of this book are an introduction, explaining what Talmud is and the method of study. Then the main body of the book offers short quotations of talmudic text. Each quotation is followed by a few paragraphs explaining, in plain language, what the text means. This explanation is necessary because the text of Talmud is very cryptic and cannot be studied without someone more knowledgeable explaining what is going on. Also, the text fits into a very narrow context, at times, and the reader needs help in understanding what this context is. After this explanation, there is another section of "drash" which is commentary that goes beyond the text. The authors write a drash for each of the quotations. This drash makes the text applicable to our lives in the modern world. The authors use modern day examples to illustrate the points that were made so many centuries ago. If the reader spends a few minutes examining the cryptic language and then learns the meaning by reading further, he/she will gain a good, albeit elementary idea of the method of study talmudic scholars utilize. In fact, Talmud study is even more difficult when studied from the original text. The text is in a mixture of Aramaic and Hebrew. There are words and idioms that relate to the time the text was written over a millennium and a half ago.

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