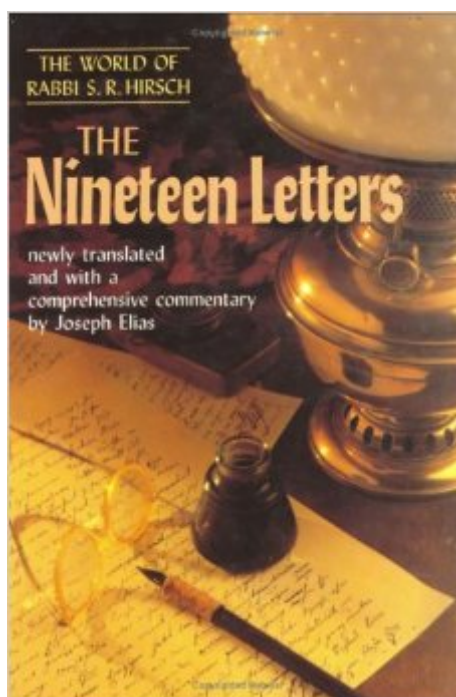


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The Nineteen Letters: The World Of Rabbi S. R. Hirsch



Synopsis

The veracity of Judaism is always being challenged in every age, in every culture. So what is Judaism's response? First published in 1836, *The Nineteen Letters* a written correspondence between a Rabbi and a student in doubt as to the meaning and value of his Jewish identity - remains as relevant today as when it first appeared. In upholding the tenets of Judaism, the author tackles the issues of assimilation, secularism, modernity, reform, and the difference between a self-centered world-view vs. a God-centered world-view. Grounded in history and tradition, and spanning the theological, philosophical, and the practical, the author shows how a life steeped in adherence to Divine commands leads to an uplifting experience of profound meaning and personal fulfillment. This enduring classic now includes an in-depth, contemporary commentary, and the result is an inspiring guide to a renewed appreciation of Judaism: both a brilliant portrayal of the Torah's timeless teachings and a unique presentation of its relevance in our own day and age.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The basic structure of the book is as follows: at the beginning, a character invented by Hirsch expresses his disenchantment with Judaism, and Hirsch responds. At this point, one might think that Hirsch argues in favor of the Torah being a Divine invention that Jews should therefore obey. Instead, Hirsch assumes this to be the case (thus immediately winning the argument by his criteria) and goes off in an entirely different direction. Hirsch focuses on the reasons for the ritual mitzvos (that is, the details of the parts of Jewish law not obviously related to ethics). Why did God (according to Hirsch) command us to do all these things? Hirsch says that the overall purpose of

Revelation was to make the Jews a role model, leading to the perfection of humanity. In particular, writes Hirsch, the purposes of non-ethical Jewish law are to isolate the Jews to keep them distinctive and to orient Jews towards divine service through symbolic acts; for example, the mezuzah aids in the "Consecration of our home as a sanctuary of God and of our life in it as service of God." (p. 182). Whether the world has in fact been significantly perfected is, of course, a difficult question. Finally, Hirsch criticizes conventional Jewish education and other Jewish philosophers. As to the former, Hirsch asserts that Jewish educators do not focus enough on Bible (as opposed to Talmud), and that they often mummify the laws by not focusing on the spirit behind those laws.

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