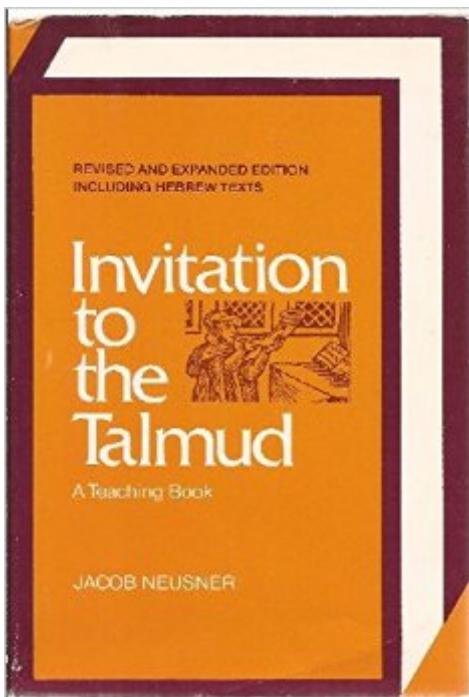


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Invitation To The Talmud: A Teaching Book



Synopsis

This book invites the reader to try to get in the Talmud. Nowadays, people are scarcely able to try. They do not know how to begin or where--or why. Getting into the Talmud is no easy matter, even for those Jews who are ardent to recover for themselves what their ancestors once knew. This invitation is to join a community of learning men and women, for Talmudic learning is collective. You do not "read" the Talmud, you "learn" it, preferably with a haver, or a fellow student, and always with a rabbi. Here, Neusner shall be your rabbi. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In this book, Neusner takes a single chapter of the talmud (5th chapter of brachot), and analyzes the text in the Mishnah, Tosefta, Babylonian Talmud, and Palestinian Talmud. For each of them he translates the text into English, and goes through it critically in his standard outline form. Essentially you get to be an armchair quarterback as he goes through the text and see how he derives insight into it. I have only limited experience studying Talmud, and have read a few other English language books on the subject. I didn't find anything in this book to be earth shattering, but it certainly was useful to see how a great academic mind like Neusner's handles differences between the four texts treatment of the same subject. Many of his insights and revelations are universally applicable and have provided me with greater insight and understanding to other areas of the Talmud. To the best of my knowledge, this is the only book that accomplishes its goals in this fashion. Many other books on the Talmud discuss it in general fashion, and provide the same information, but do not show how

it is applied. There are also some Talmudic translations which lack Neusner's critical analysis and insight. I would certainly not make it a "must read" for a person getting into Talmud study, but it was interesting.

I was deeply impressed by the argument made by Jacob Neusner in the introductory sections of the work. In it he defines the Talmudic world-view. He says it promotes rationality and hard argument, a way of encountering with precision and logic whatever claims are put forward. He sees the strength of this way of thinking, this way of taking nothing for granted. But he also roots this thinking in religious faith and content, in a special conception of holiness and service of God. Those engaged in Talmudic disputation are according to Neusner serving God in analyzing and interpreting the sacred texts of Judaism. He points to this Jewish definition of holiness through learning, study, dialogue, debate, intellectual activity as unique and special. He then gives a demonstration of what 'learning Talmud' is like by going through the Fifth Chapter of the Tractate Berachot and analyzing the Mishnah, the Gemara, the Rashi, the Tosefot on it. He also gives historical context to the whole enterprise of Talmudic learning.

This is a great book. What it will NOT do is teach you the Talmud; what it WILL do is teach you how to study the Talmud, or if you are not intending to study the Talmud, it will give you a taste of what studying the Talmud in earnest is like. Well-written and informative, this invitation is thorough and very organized. Here is a quote from the Foreword: "Talmudic inquiry is phrased as a singing conversation among open and rational minds, united by a devotion to reason and a commitment to unobstructed criticism, and dedicated to the cause of applying reason to the mundane issues of the work-a-day world." A refreshing thought for today's world, where many people seem to cling to belief as if it were a board from a sinking ship, that will save them, and regard reason as a blind alley.

This is a tough read. It covers a history of the Talmud - both Babylonian and Palestinian as well as an exegesis of several segments of each. The exegetical pieces are somewhat interesting, but it is very much the study of law in a religious sense - and the sacred argument rings through. It is a very scholarly book, and as a Gentile, I had significant challenges just getting through it. While Neusner does a great job discussing the importance of the Talmud, crossing that over to an approachable "invitation" is just not that easy to grasp.

good

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