

**JEWISH LITERACY  
MICHAEL LOTKER  
FURTHER READING**

[\* = my suggestions for your first purchases]

**Jewish Theology/General Information**

Morris N. Kertzer & Lawrence A. Hoffman, *What Is A Jew*, Collier, 1993. An excellent readable introduction to Judaism for Jew and Christian.

\*Alfred J. Kolatch, *The Jewish Book of Why*, Jonathan David Publishers, Inc. 1981, and *The Second Book of Why*, 1985. Widely available and very readable collection of questions and answers about Jewish practice, customs, etc.

\*Harold S. Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, Avon, New York, 1981 (available widely in paperback). A classic work on the most fundamental problem of religion.

Harold S. Kushner, *To Life! A Celebration of Jewish Being and Thinking*, Little, Brown and Co., Boston, 1993. A wonderfully upbeat modern view of the joy of taking Judaism seriously.

Harold S. Kushner, *How Good Do We Have to Be? A New Understanding of Guilt & Forgiveness*, Little, Brown and Co., Boston, 1996. Great discussion of being in relationship with God along with a very different take on what happened in the Garden of Eden.

\*Dennis Prager and Joseph Telushkin, *The Nine Questions People Ask About Judaism*, Simon and Schuster, Inc., New York, 1981. Simple, direct, compelling analysis of why intelligent, rational people should be religious.

\*Joseph Telushkin, *Jewish Literacy*, William Morrow and Company, Inc. New York, 1991. A wonderful resource, the book devotes a page to a page and a half to key topics of Jewish literacy.

\*Stephen M Wylen, *Settings of Silver*, Paulist Press, 1989. If you want more detail than Kertzer & Hoffman in an extremely readable volume written to a college level reader, this is it.

**Spiritual Approaches**

Irving Greenberg, *The Jewish Way: Living the Holidays*, Summit Books, New York, 1988. A wonderful book which provides a much deeper spiritual insight into Shabbat and the Holidays.

\*A. J. Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951. An amazingly beautiful short book on the meaning of the sabbath.

Lawrence Kushner, *Invisible Lines of Connection: Sacred Stories of the Ordinary*, Jewish Lights Publishing, Woodstock, Vermont, 1996. A wonderful, readable collection of stories.

\*Lawrence Kushner, *Kabbalah, A Love Story*, Morgan Road Books, New York, 2006. A wonderful work of fiction that teaches Kabbalah along the way.

David J. Wolpe, *The Healer of Shattered Hearts: A Jewish View of God*, Henry Holt and Co., New York, NY, 1990. Very deep and moving book about relationships with God.

### **Jewish Law and Sources**

Richard Elliott Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?*, Harper & Row, 1987. A fascinating look at the documentary hypothesis of the Bible and how it was written.

Harry Gersh, *The Sacred Books of the Jews*, Stein and Day, 1968. An excellent overview of Jewish sources including Bible, Talmud, Midrash, Commentaries and Codes, Responsa, Maimonides Guide to the Perplexed, Kabbalah and the Zohar, and the Siddur (prayerbook).

Mark Dov Shapiro, *Gates of Shabbat*, Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1991. A wonderful guide for Jewish sabbath observance including how to get started (a little bit at a time).

Chaim Stern, Editor, *On the Doorposts of Your House*, Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1994. All the prayers for the home with English, Hebrew, transliteration and commentary.

### **Bible and Torah**

If you want to get a flavor for the degree of commentary and discussion that Jewish tradition invests in the sacred texts, start with one of these three Torah commentaries.

- *\*The Torah; A Modern Commentary*, G. Plaut, editor, Union for Reform Judaism, 2005 (Reform),
- *Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary*, The Rabbinical Assembly, The Jewish Publication Society, 2001 (Conservative),
- *The Chumash, Stone Edition*, Mesorah Publications, 1993 (traditional).

### **Antisemitism**

Harry James Cargas, *Shadows of Auschwitz: A Christian Response to the Holocaust*, Crossroad, 1992. A very moving discussion of what happened from a Christian perspective. Includes the most powerful commentary on Holocaust photographs that I've ever seen.

\*Dennis Prager and Joseph Telushkin, *Why the Jews: The Reason for Antisemitism*, Simon & Schuster, 1983. More than any other source, this book helped me make sense of this difficult and emotional subject.

Art Spiegelman, *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, (in Volumes I & II), Pantheon, 1973 & 1986. These two volumes tell the story of the author's parents who survived the Holocaust. What makes it unique is that it is done in comic book fashion with the Jews depicted as mice, Nazis as cats, etc. Not at all childish.

Elie Wiesel, *Night*, Bantam Books, 1960. Elie Wiesel is a recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize who has published widely on his experience as a Holocaust victim. All his books are moving and insightful.

Simon Wiesenthal, *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness*, Schocken Books, 1998. This moving book tells of Wiesenthal's experience as a concentration camp slave. He was asked to forgive a dying Nazi soldier who had brutally murdered Jews. His refusal and story is

interesting and moving but especially so in light of the second part of the book where a long list of thinkers responds to his refusal to forgive.

### **Interfaith Understanding**

James. D. G. Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways*, SCM Press & Trinity Press, 1991. A highly respected scholarly discussion of the factors that led to the beginning of Christianity.

George B. Grose & Benjamin J. Hubbard, eds., *The Abraham Connection: A Jew Christian and Muslim in Dialogue*, Cross Cultural Publications, 1994. Expanding the dialogue to a triologue.

Leon Klenicki & Geoffrey Wigoder, eds., *A Dictionary of the Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, Paulist Press, 1984. Jewish and Christian scholars write brief (2-3 page) essays on 38 interesting topics.

Arthur J. Magida, ed., *How to Be a Perfect Stranger: A Guide to Etiquette in Other People's Religious Ceremonies*, Jewish Lights Publishing, 1996 (Vol. I) and 1997 (Vol. 2). A brief overview of the beliefs and religious ceremonies of 37 different religions.

Gerald Sigal, *The Jew and the Christian Missionary: A Jewish Response to Missionary Christianity*, KTAV Publishing House, 1981. A Jewish scholar addresses 67 scriptural issues in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures – useful if you are curious as to how Judaism addresses such issues.

### **History**

Karen Armstrong, *A History of God*, Ballantine Books, 1993. This is a wonderful history of how ideas about God evolved focusing on Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Paul Johnson, *A History of the Jews*, HarperPerennial, 1988. There are many excellent books on Jewish history; I have found this one especially helpful.

Stephen M. Wylen, *the Jews in the Time of Jesus*, Paulist Press, 1996. An excellent, readable introduction for those especially interested in these times.

### **Jewish Humor**

Henry D. Spaulding, ed., *Encyclopedia of Jewish Humor*, Jonathan David Publishers, 1969. A wonderful collection of Jewish Jokes and stories.

Joseph Telushkin, *Jewish Humor: What the Best Jewish Jokes Say About the Jews*, William Morrow and Company, 1992. Great jokes along with interesting analysis.

### **Reference**

*Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Keter Publishing House Jerusalem Ltd., Jerusalem, 1972. The standard reference source for all things Jewish in 16 large volumes. It is now available on CD-ROM.