



Essential Judaism: A Complete Guide to Beliefs, Customs & Rituals

By George Robinson

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What happens at a synagogue service? What are the rules for keeping kosher? How do I light the Hanukah candles? What is in the Hebrew Bible? What do the Jewish holidays signify? What should I be teaching my children about being Jewish?

A landmark reference, here is an indispensable one-volume guide to the religious traditions, everyday practices, philosophical beliefs, and historical foundations of Judaism -- everything you need to know about being Jewish. In *Essential Judaism*, George Robinson has created the accessible compendium that he sought when he rediscovered his Jewish roots as an adult. Robinson illuminates the Jewish life cycle at every stage, and lays out many fascinating aspects of Judaism -- the Kabbalah, Jewish mysticism, the evolution of Hasidism, and much more -- while keeping a firm focus on the different paths to living a good Jewish life in today's world.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Essential Judaism: A Complete Guide to Beliefs, Customs and Rituals is a brief but comprehensive layman's handbook to Jewish prayer, worship, festivals, customs, history, language, philosophy, and ideology. Its author, George Robinson, returned to synagogue after a 20-year absence and found himself utterly confused about the basics of his religion, despite having attended Hebrew school. He looked far and wide for a reference work that would help him get his bearings but did not find one; so he wrote one himself.

Robinson's background as a journalist proved to be an asset in this project, which shows evidence of much detective work, the results of which are plainly described and clearly organized. Robinson is sensitive to the many perspectives of contemporary Judaism without being mealy-mouthed. His work is a triumph of diplomacy and clear thinking; his overview of Hebrew Scripture, and his excellent Kosher primer, would be worth the price of this book in themselves.

From Publishers Weekly

Ten years ago, Robinson entered a Reform synagogue for the first time since adolescence. He became an active congregant, but he discovered in his reincorporation of certain rituals and practices that he "was often baffled" by what occurred in the synagogue. This expansive tome attempts to provide the essentials of Judaism for novices, outsiders and those who, like Robinson, rediscovered their heritage as adults. It's an excellent introductory resource, vast but accessibly organized. Robinson first covers the most ritually significant Jewish prayers and walks the reader through a typical Shabbat service. He presents the basic facts about holidays and the Jewish calendar, then explores Jewish life-cycle rituals from bris to burial and includes a catch-all chapter on other practices such as Kashrut. By beginning with Jewish practice, rather than history or law, Robinson centers the core of Judaism in everyday life. The book's second half is a whirlwind tour of Torah and Talmud, Kabbalah and Jewish philosophers, with a key explanatory chapter on historical developments such as Hasidism and Zionism. Notably absent is the history of the Holocaust and the founding of Israel; Robinson notes that the Judaica sections of most bookstores already overflow with such historical information, and he explores instead the scope of Jews' reactions to those events. This is a valuable, sensitive one-volume guide to Jewish practice. (Mar.)

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From Library Journal

Written by an informed layperson for a popular audience, this book can be understood and appreciated by Jew and non-Jew alike. Robinson, a former syndicated columnist, writes as a committed Reform Jew attempting to fairly present the viewpoints of the various modern Jewish movements (Conservative, Reconstructionist, Orthodox). The book is divided into nine chapters that focus on such issues as prayer and ritual, festivals, the life cycle, the Hebrew Bible, the Talmud, and Jewish mysticism. The appendix contains some key documents, a time line of major events, and a discussion of what is kosher. There is also a helpful glossary of Jewish terms. The book is extremely readable with a clean layout and highlighted sidebars. The best introduction to Judaism remains Milton Steinberg's concise *Basic Judaism* (1947), but this book is a welcome addition to the subject. Highly recommended for most libraries.

-Paul M. Kaplan, Lake Villa Dist. Lib., IL

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Betty Jordan:

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