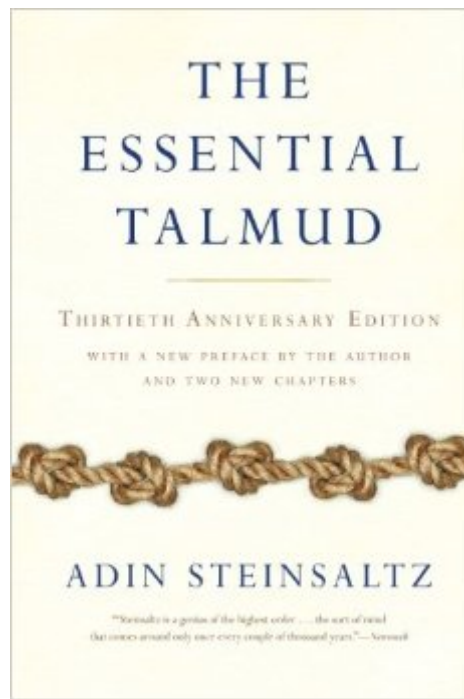


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The Essential Talmud



Synopsis

The Essential Talmud is a masterful introduction to the beliefs, attitudes, and methods of the sacred text by which the Jewish people have lived and survived through the ages-by the renowned Israeli rabbi, scholar, and teacher. Rabbi Steinsaltz is the first to capture the flavor and spirit of the Talmud as a human document and to summarize its main principles as an expression of divine law. This expanded edition features a new preface by the rabbi, a historical overview of life in the times of the Talmud, and an in-depth look at the content and appearance of the original Talmudic page. This seminal volume makes abundantly clear the importance of the Talmud in the lives of modern Jews. "This book is indispensable to those, Jews and Christians alike, who would like to gain an insight into what it is that moves the contemporary Jew." (Rabbi Solomon S. Bernards, B'Nai B'rith Anti-Defamation League)REVIEW: "Offers a fascinating introduction to the codified oral tradition." (Christianity Today)

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Rabbi Steinsaltz, one of the most respected Talmudists of his generation, has devoted significant effort to introducing the Talmud to a wider audience and encouraging people to actually read it rather than merely read about it. Starting to read the Talmud without some idea of what it is and what it is about would be a very frustrating project, however, and this book is intended to help bridge that gap."The Essential Talmud" is divided into three sections, covering history, content and method. The historical section gives a very traditional account of the origins of the Talmud in the oral Torah, and its compilation and editing in Palestine and Babylon. By "traditional" I mean that this

is essentially the account that the Talmud gives of itself or that can be filled in from other rabbinic literature. Whether or not this history is completely accurate, it is a significant part of the Talmud's self-presentation and of its authority, and throws important light on both the Talmud's content (largely the teachings of prior masters) and its methods (the obsessive quest to identify the authors of and reconcile the various teachings). In short, it is very difficult to understand the Talmud if you do not understand where the Talmud believes it came from, and Rabbi Steinsaltz's chapters on history are very helpful in that regard. He then goes beyond the Talmud itself to offer a brief history of Talmudic exegesis, and some very interesting information on the printing and persecution of the Talmud. The second section of the book covers the structure and content of the Talmud. Here Rabbi Steinsaltz offers a very concise summary of the topics touched on by the various tractates of the Talmud.

Adin Steinsaltz is second to none in the field of Talmudic studies. A translator and editor of the magnificent Steinsaltz edition of the Talmud, he heads the Israel Institute for Talmudic Publications, one of the primary institutes for the discipline. Author of more than 60 books, Rabbi Steinsaltz's writings are what first introduced me to the interesting and complex world of the Talmud in an accessible and engaging manner. The Talmud is not part of the shared Judeo-Christian tradition; this is a development of rabbinic Judaism after the divergence of the paths. Steinsaltz states that if the Bible constitutes the cornerstone of Judaism, the Talmud is its central pillar. The Talmud arose from the writings of teachers and the wise in Palestine and in Babylonia from the aftermath of the destruction of the second Temple up until the early Middle Ages. Steinsaltz traces this history in the first part of the text, from the periods of oral tradition, to the tannaim (the period of Hillel and Shammai), the compilation of the Mishnah, the amoraim (interpretations), and the final redaction and printing. Steinsaltz also looks at the various times of the banning and burning of the Talmud. He points out that without the Talmud, the Jewish communities might well have ceased to exist, which is one of the reasons why persecutors sought to limit or destroy the books. In his second section, Steinsaltz looks at the structure and content of the Talmud. While the Talmud consists of the Mishnah (a book of halakhah, the laws, written in Hebrew), and the Gemarah (the commentary on the law), in fact there is much more to Talmud than this.

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