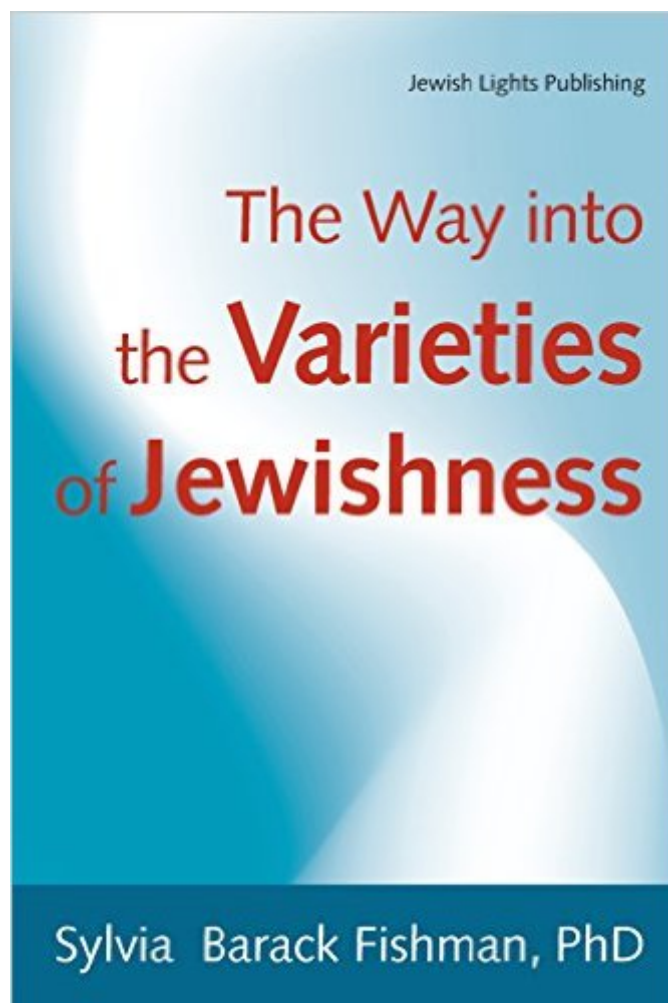


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The Way Into The Varieties Of Jewishness



Synopsis

An accessible introduction to the many ways Jews understand Jewishness and identify themselves and their communities throughout history and today. For everyone who wants to understand the varieties of Jewish identity, its boundaries and inclusions, this book explores the religious and historical understanding of what it has meant to be Jewish from ancient times to the present controversy over "Who is a Jew?" Beginning with the biblical period, it takes readers era by era through Jewish history to reveal who the Jewish community included and excluded, and discusses the fascinating range of historical conflicts that Jews have dealt with internally. It provides an understanding of how the Jewish people and faith developed, and of what the major religious differences are among Jewish movements today.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Just when you were wondering what would be the book to send friends and family alike for the Holiday season, along comes a miraculous response to your quest. This incredibly readable book offers us all, an insightful and sympathetic analysis of the historical roots of Judaism together with the many varieties of Jewishness that have unfolded in contemporary America. Tracing the continuum of diversity from biblical times through the 2000 years of diaspora life, Fishman explains how being Jewish and Jewish culture evolved in interaction with widely different cultures yielding diverse outcomes. Similarly, we are led through the story of American Jewry through the continuous development of the Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, Renewal and Secular

movements, all of which contribute to the culture and ethnic capital of American Jews. Finally, Fishman offers an innovative typology of Jews by Choice together with a sensitive discussion of the challenges faced by conversionary households who themselves bring a new source of energy and commitment to American Jewry. Following the analysis of both the richness and comparative strengths and challenges of the different branches of American Jewishness, demonstrating how each in turn, has learned important lessons from the other, Fishman turns her critical eye to the horizon of the next generation of American Jews. In so doing, Fishman suggests an agenda for those seeking to sustain American Jewishness. The renaissance of Jewish life so vibrant in an important minority of American Jews reported by Fishman, needs to be linked to the less affected vast majority of American Jews. This may be attained by developing enhanced social networks, opportunities for informal and experiential youth and adult education as well as the structured experience of Jewish Peoplehood through engagement with other Jewish communities in Israel and worldwide. This is a book that is informed by the latest thinking of the American Jewish renaissance it describes, yet written in a language every American, Jew and non Jew alike, can both understand and identify with. This rare combination indeed, makes it a must for all your Holiday reading. David Mittelberg

For anyone - Jewish or non-Jewish - who wonders about Judaism, my colleague Sylvia Barack Fishman has written a highly accessible and engaging account of the "varieties" of ways in which Jewishness is expressed. What is unique, and in some ways breathtaking about this book, is that Professor Fishman places contemporary practice and beliefs in historical context. She provides readers with a scan of more than 3000 years of Jewish history. Her historical descriptions do not merely tell the story of how the Jewish people and Jewish traditions evolved, but she helps us understand how texts and history shape present-day behavior and identity. Fishman is an expert on Jewish family issues and the book will be of special interest to those who are joining Jewish families and/or converting to Judaism. But even for those who are familiar with the story, the book is a gem and gives one new perspective on what it means to be Jewish.

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