

Laufer, Nathan. *Rendezvous with God; Revealing the Meaning of the Jewish Holidays and their Mysterious Rituals.* Maggid Press, 2016. 310 pp. \$27.95. (9781592644551).

In this insightful book, Laufer presents a cohesive and coherent message about the Jewish holidays, their meaning, rituals and liturgy; sacred time and sacred space, and the Jewish people's initial and ongoing relationship with God.

The author contends that each of the major biblical Jewish holidays (Passover, Shavuot, Rosh ha-Shana, Yom Kippur, Sukkot and Shemini Atzeret), their biblical themes, and subsequent developments, allowed the celebrant to re-experience the very events they are meant to celebrate. This re-experience is "reenacted through liturgy, readings and rituals of the revelational event that the holiday commemorates." Each year, by celebrating the Jewish holidays, the people of Israel could relive their first "honeymoon" year with God as a nation, and focus on these core foundational Jewish concepts.

Chapters 1-5 explore each of the major Jewish holidays as the author focuses on the specific aspect of the divine revelation pertaining to each holiday and how the rituals, liturgy and biblical readings give expression to that event. Chapter 6 focuses on the Mishkan and how its sacred space reinforces the sacred times of the holidays. Chapter 7 focuses on the Shabbat and its expression of sacred time. Chapter 8 discusses the post-biblical holidays of Purim and Chanukah and the modern holidays of Yom ha-Shoah, Yom ha-Zikaron, Yom ha-'Atsmaut, and Yom Yerushalayim. Chapter 9 wraps up the entire book by explaining how the themes of the holiday as articulated in the book could enrich our experience of the Jewish holidays and help us relive "our rendezvous with God."

The book is clear and accessible and will be of great interest to the beginner and expert alike. It is a profound work that will enhance not only one's understanding of the Jewish holidays but also one's experience of them.

David Tesler, Yonkers, NY

Levitan, Chana. *That's Why I Married You: How to Dance with Personality Differences.* Jerusalem; New York: Gefen Publishing House, 2016. 197 pp. \$12.95. (97896522908287).

The observation that many couples have "Personality differences" is not profound, but what remains unrecognized is how many people are blind to the kinds of differences that attract and then pull apart relationships. This book was written based on the author's research and more than 25 years as a family therapist. During her research Levitan discovered that a difference that attracted the couple during courtship may become a source of tension and frustration when married. Levitan helps the readers see their spouse and the world from another perspective. Marriage is not based on thinking alike but rather thinking together and working as a team. Teamwork requires respect for each other and an understanding that your differences are the opportunities to build stronger relationships. This book continues the sound advice and information from the author's first book, *I Only Want to Get Married Once: Dating : Secrets for Getting It Right the First Time*.

While the author is an observant Jew, this is not a Jewish themed book. It has Jewish values, but the only Jewish reference is in a footnotes. I highly recommend this book to singles, couples, and marriage therapists; it will be suitable for most libraries.

Daniel D. Stuhlman, Temple Sholom Library, Chicago, IL

Lichtenstein, Tatjana. *Zionists in Interwar Czechoslovakia: Minority Nationalism and the Politics of Belonging.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016. 473 pp. \$50.00. (9780253018670).

This scholarly work focuses on the role Zionists played in the shaping of national identity in interwar Czechoslovakia. Beginning with an overview of Austro-Hungary, the author argues how the Jews—divided by language, economics, region, and observance—coalesced into a dubious ethnic group that would receive minority recognition. Activists worked with the Czech government, from its inception in 1918, to secure a Jewish voice in order to present Czechoslovakia to the world as a true "melting pot," advanced, cosmopolitan, and democratic. Efforts stemmed in part from a reaction to historical

Jewish powerlessness, which would presumably be abolished through a combination of ethnic pride and Czech patriotism. Jews were encouraged to acculturate, and speak Czech instead of German or Yiddish. Youth clubs, such as Maccabi, further promoted the farmer-warrior-athletic ideal.

Yet this attempt at hybrid identity failed and only resulted in conflict. The Zionist-Hebrew schools that replaced the traditional *cheder* mostly prepared students for either assimilation or Aliyah. Confused youth drifted toward leftist or secular movements; rural, pious Jews were further marginalized. In short, the author surmises, the regional Jews never became cohesive and respectable enough, like the Slovaks, to be a political force, yet remained distinctive enough to suffer persecution. This paradox became more tragic following the annexation of Czechoslovakia by Nazi Germany, in 1938, and the fate of many Zionists.

Well researched, with maps and footnotes, this book underlines the dilemma of diversity. Recommended for college libraries with Jewish/European Studies.

Hallie Cantor, Yeshiva University, New York, NY

Light, Richard A. *Jewish Rites of Death: Stories of Beauty and Transformation*. Santa Fe, NM: Terra Nova Books, 2016. 142 pp. \$23.95. (9781938288555).

Richard A. Light has focused his life's work on teaching spiritual development and studying and practicing meditation. He graduated from the University of Colorado and spent time studying in a yeshiva in Jerusalem and in the rabbinic program at the University of Judaism in Los Angeles. He is actively involved in *taharah* (preparing Jewish bodies for burial) and has been the President of a local Chevrah Kadisha for the last eighteen years. Light has also authored *Final Kindness: Honoring K'Rovei Yisrael: Preparations for Burial of non-Jews Who Are Part of the Jewish Community*, *To Midwife a Soul: Guidelines for Performing Tahara*, and *Exploring the Soul of Taharah* with Avivah Erlick.

This book is mostly a collection of short essays by a variety of authors organized by chapters including: Aging & diminishment; accompanying the dying; accompanying the dead, mourning and grief; *taharah* experiences; practical considerations—planning for death and when death occurs; a five-page glossary of Hebrew terms, and an index.

Jewish Rites of Death is not a 'how-to' manual but more of a guide to Jewish spiritual living with some beautiful photographs and some moving poems. Light has brought together some thought-provoking essays by a variety of very different authors. The most interesting and unique content focuses on the *taharah* experience. All in all, this book takes a different approach to the topic of Jewish rites of death and is a worthwhile addition to individuals and institutions who have large Jewish collections.

Nathan Rosen, New York, NY

מחזור קורן לסוכות *The Koren Succot Mahzor*. Hebrew/English edition. Jerusalem: Koren Publishers, 2015. 1465 pp. \$34.95. (9789653016590).

Sukkot, or Feast of the Tabernacles, is among the most complicated Jewish holiday liturgy to navigate. Known as the "Season of Rejoicing," there are so many rituals attached to this multi-day festival that a good guide is required. *Koren's Mahzor for Sukkot* meets this need by providing a beautiful and clear resource for use during the entire holiday. It begins with an erudite introduction to the holiday, its season, and related themes, by the highly articulate and thoughtful former chief Rabbi of the UK, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks. The liturgy is clearly organized (Evening prayers, First and second holiday days, Intermediate days, Intermediate Sabbath, Hoshana Raba, Shemini Atzeret, Simchat Torah, and conclusion of festival) and all prayers and prayer instructions are translated into elegant and readable English on pages opposite the Hebrew text. The *Mahzor* also includes the Mishnaic Tractate of Sukkah with translation, and a helpful guide to the laws of Sukkot for the eight-day observance in Israel and for the nine-day festival for those outside of Israel. The new *Koren Mahzor Sukkot* is a welcome addition to the Jewish library and Synagogue shelf, and it is recommended for use by both novice and expert alike.

David Tesler, Yonkers, NY

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