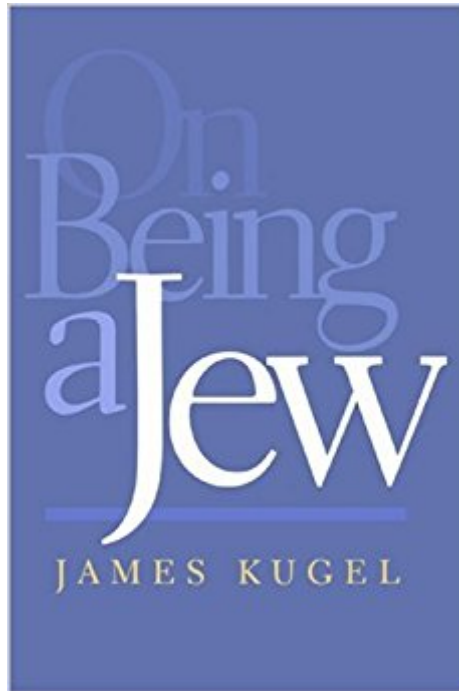




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On Being A Jew



Synopsis

Composed as a meandering dialogue between a wily Syrian-Jewish banker and an American graduate student of literature, this engaging book explains all the basic beliefs and practices of Judaism • Jewish teachings on intermarriage and conversion, keeping the Sabbath, prayer and Torah, midrash and mitzvot, and God's presence in the world. Although the book has plenty of the "how to" of religious practice, *Being a Jew* is in the end an eloquent reflection on Judaism's deepest theme: living life as a way of serving God.

Book Information

Paperback: 202 pages

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Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars • See all reviews • (6 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

While I take issue with some of his views, especially those on non-Orthodox religious Judaism, Kugel's book deserves attention because of its unique approach. Instead of explaining Jewish religious traditions in humanistic terms, as do most contemporary defenses of traditional observance (Orthodox and non-Orthodox), Kugel does what Yehuda Halevi did for medieval Jews. Like Halevi's, Kugel's is not a rationalist approach. He describes the life of observant Jews as it is experienced by (at least some of) those who live it. His quirky reading of the tradition has a charm and attraction that shouldn't be written off.

Kugel is a treasure for those of us who care deeply about our response to God. And thanks Mr. Kugel for whatever you have done in your life to be such a help to the rest of us. I'm an 84 yr old (Roman Catholic) Christian.

A mamiferous animal is considered Kosher if it chews the cud, if it has a hoof and if the hoof is cloven. Of the many interpretations or reasons of these rules given through time by the Sages of the Scriptures, there is one which comes to mind when reading James Kugel's book. The hoof is hard. It is cloven to show the uncompromising distinctiveness between right and wrong. That is the law! Chewing the cud is a symbol of mercy, of going over what is presented to find some flaw. That is clemency. Eating only Kosher animals is to keep these two apparently contradictory properties firmly in mind. In "On being a Jew" Kugel shows how the Law and Clemency are intimately interwoven in the fabric of Jewishness. It shines a bright light on our centuries-old traditions and beliefs. A wonderful book for the convinced, the sceptic and the bewildered.

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