



# Association of Jewish Libraries REVIEWS

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## Reviews of Nonfiction Titles for Adults

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**Ellenson, David.** *Jewish Meaning in a World of Choice: Studies in Tradition and Modernity.* Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 2014, 376 pp. \$36.00. (9780827612143).

Distinguished professor, intellectual and Jewish denominational leader, David Ellenson provides a short account of his intellectual development in the preface to *Jewish Meaning in a World of Choice*, a collection of essays written throughout his career. As he relates, Ellenson personally felt the tension during his childhood of being a Jew in the South and the resulting feeling of both belonging and exclusion. He describes also the influence of his professors who taught him that much of modern Jewish history (or at least modern intellectual Jewish history) could be viewed through the question of how Jews responded to the challenges of modernity while simultaneously trying to maintain and affirm their Jewish identity: "all of the essays in this volume center on a description and examination of the multivalent push and pull between Jewish tradition and Western culture."

The book is divided into four parts. Part 1 is titled "Shaping Jewish Life in an Open Society". In this section six chapters spread out topically over hundreds of years, from discussions of Esriel Hildesheimer and Samson Raphael Hirsch to a quick survey of denominationalism in the United States. In two of the six chapters that comprise Part 2, "Searching for a Balanced Theology", Ellenson pays tribute to his teacher, Eugene Borowitz (and describes his contribution to modern Jewish thought) and argues for the inclusion and toleration of LGBT Jews within the Jewish community. Part 3 is titled "Visions for Israel" and discusses, among other topics, Geiger, conversion in Israel and Zionism in the Reform movement. The fourth and final section is about "Rabbis and the Rabbinate" and contains articles about Rabbi Hayim David Halevi and Rabbi Elezer Berkovitz among others.

This excellent compilation of articles demonstrates Ellenson's range and interest in a broad array of topics concerning modern intellectual Jewish history. The book has both academic articles and articles written for a more general audience, but even the former are written clearly and easily accessible to the latter.

The central tension running through Jewish intellectual history for David Ellenson is how Jews respond to the challenges of modernity while simultaneously trying to maintain and affirm their Jewish identity.

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