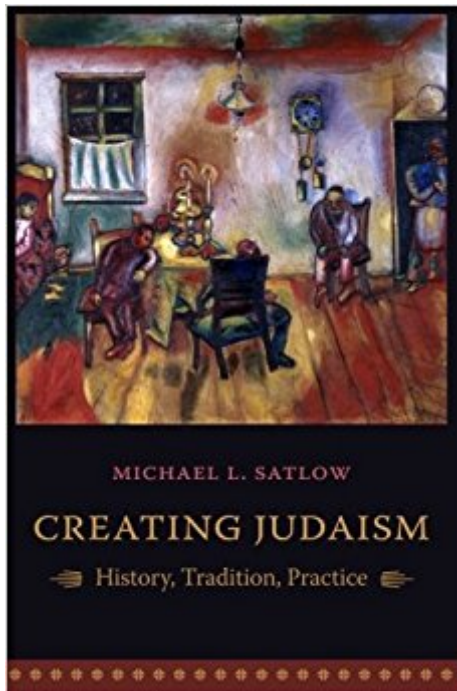




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# Creating Judaism: History, Tradition, Practice



## Synopsis

How can we define "Judaism," and what are the common threads uniting ancient rabbis, Maimonides, the authors of the Zohar, and modern secular Jews in Israel? Michael L. Satlow offers a fresh perspective on Judaism that recognizes both its similarities and its immense diversity. Presenting snapshots of Judaism from around the globe and throughout history, Satlow explores the links between vastly different communities and their Jewish traditions. He studies the geonim, rabbinical scholars who lived in Iraq from the ninth to twelfth centuries; the intellectual flourishing of Jews in medieval Spain; how the Hasidim of nineteenth-century Eastern Europe confronted modernity; and the post-World War II development of distinct American and Israeli Jewish identities. Satlow pays close attention to how communities define themselves, their relationship to biblical and rabbinic texts, and their ritual practices. His fascinating portraits reveal the amazingly creative ways Jews have adapted over time to social and political challenges and continue to remain a "Jewish family."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This book will give readers a new perspective on a very old product of human creativity. (CHOICE)

Michael L. Satlow is associate professor of religious studies and Judaic studies at Brown University. He is the author of *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity* and *Tasting the Dish: Rabbinic Rhetorics of Sexuality*.

I bought this book because of Michael's excellent Podcast of "From Israelite to Jew". He concluded the Podcast before the birth of the Rabbis and promised he would write a book explaining the phenomena. This book is a light attempt at the subject and up until modern times. On the positive side, I enjoyed the 35,000 feet view of the evolution of Judaism. He touched on the history in a perfect manner and showed us milestones of how Judaism twisted and turned throughout the centuries. He showed the beginning of Jewish philosophy with Philo, through the RAMABAM, Kabbalah, Chasidism and eventually to the break-off sects during the emancipation of Jews in Europe. He hit it on the nose in explaining how Judaism morphed into what it is today. As a historian, he briefly showed what has happening in parallel in the non-Jewish world and how it could have influenced Jewish thought. I enjoyed this perspective very much. As a Jew, we sometimes dive deep into the technical part without ever seeing a birds-eye view of where we came from and how we got it here in terms of thought. We study Torah, HALACHA and Talmud as a type of competition of who can be most overloaded with Jewish thought without really sitting back and understanding the triggers and origins of these thoughts and practices. The real problem of this book is that it was too light for such an important subject. Michael skims over the history and in several instances says, "it would take too long to explain in detail". Again if you, the reader, are looking for a light version of Jewish thought history than this is a perfect book. If you want a little more intelligent meat, than you will be left hungry with this book. But Michael is a very good writer and I promise you will not be bored. This book is for beginner plus Jews. You have to have some background to Judaism and know a little about the history and practices but you do not have to be an expert. I would recommend reading a beginners book on Judaism before reading this. For non-Jews, I think this book can be interesting as to see how religion can morph because of social changes and reality on the ground. Last his bibliography is very good at the end. Enjoy!!! I know I did.

I had to buy this for a Jewish studies class at my university. As someone who is actually Jewish, I found it to be very interesting, well organized, and had good comparisons thrown in (ie., if you are Christian the author will help you understand). Great background and history. My only complaint is the kindle version is very strange. The page numbers are way off, which is frustrating because I had to write essays with citations from this book!

This book gives a great overview of Judaism through the ages and how it evolved into what it is today.

Had to read for class. Wouldn't again if you paid me.

I got this book after listening to prof. Satlow's Podcast "From Israelite to a Jew" which dealt with formation of Judaism in the post-exilic period. The book is an intriguing study of what do we mean by Judaism. The modern understanding of Judaism turns out to be a 19th century construct which greatly simplified the real state of affairs. Satlow defines Judaism as a conversation or a family of conversations between the Jewish people of various localities and time periods. The Jewish people is the persistent constant through history while the sets of rules and practices that constitute Jewish religious beliefs and observances are a multiplicity of intertwining currents that constantly alter their course depending on historical time, locality and social environment. As a graduate student in the study of religion, and as a Jew from Soviet secular background who is interested in his religious heritage, I appreciate the complexity of Jewish intellectual and religious landscape which Satlow has painted. The book is very readable and while a rigorous academic inquiry also bears the personal touch of the author's beliefs. The book can serve as a great introduction to the study of Judaism as well as a thoughtful inquiry into its roots. I highly recommend to anyone interested in Judaism and its history. The bibliography at the end of the book is very helpful for further reading. It includes books and scholarly articles for a more in depth study.

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