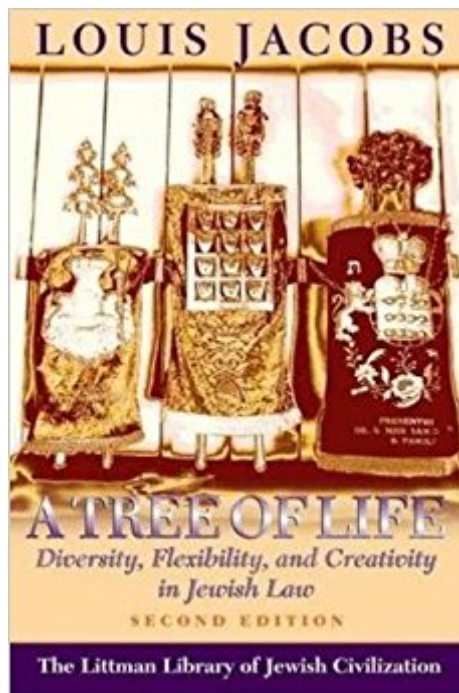




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Tree Of Life: Diversity, Flexibility And Creativity In Jewish Law (Littman Library Of Jewish Civilization)



Synopsis

The central thesis of *A Tree of Life*, now revised and expanded, is that social, economic, theological, and even political factors have always played a part in framing of Jewish law, as has consideration of the wider ideals of Judaism. Through discussion of historical and contemporary halakhic responses to a wide range of issues, Louis Jacobs shows how the halakhic system has demonstrated its potential for vitality, creativity, and sensitivity. Louis Jacobs's call, in the last chapter, for a non-fundamentalist approach to halakhah was a cause of controversy both when the book was first published in 1984 and subsequently. The new introduction written for this edition responds robustly to the criticisms raised, and also summarizes new developments, both halakhic and scholarly, in the various areas covered.

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Customer Reviews

"Louis Jacobs demonstrates a profound scholarship in the second edition of this important work. The breadth of source and the volume of analysis are truly extraordinary." -- Reuven Livingstone, *Jewish Chronicle*

Louis Jacobs, founding rabbi of the New London Synagogue, was a renowned scholar with an international reputation as a lecturer. He was the author of *The Jewish Religion: A Companion* (1995) and of many other distinguished books, several of them published by the Littman Library,

including *Beyond Reasonable Doubt* (1999), *Hasidic Prayer* (paperback 1993), and *Theology in the Responsa* (paperback 2005), as well as an edition and translation of Zevi Hirsch Eichenstein's *Turn Aside from Evil and Do Good* (1995). He died in 2006.

Forgiving Louis Jacobs repetitive self-pitying polemic concerning his "disbarment" from the Orthodox establishment in England, this book is an excellent and wide ranging review of the flexibility which the Halacha has historically shown in comparison with the paralysis that has struck Halachic Judaism since the Enlightenment. Although the historical analysis is not as deep as Neusner, this book is much easier to read, and highly recommended for anyone willing to view Halacha as a way of life, without being bound to fundamentalist thought. If you are interested in the development of Halacha, this is an excellent introduction with many interesting and classic examples.

Out of all the books I have come across on the development of halakha (Jewish law), this may well be the most important. Rabbi Jacobs, an adherent of the historical school, illustrates that Jewish law is not - and never has been - a closed system that ignores the outside world. As the book notes "considerations beyond the purely halakhic have always played a big part in the making of halakhah, both in its original formulation and in its subsequent development. Throughout the ages halakhic rulings have been influenced by rabbis' attitudes towards the wider ideals and demands of Judaism and by social, economic, theological, and even political considerations." The publisher notes that "The most controversial element of *A Tree of Life*, when it was first published in 1984 and subsequently, was its final chapter, 'Towards a Non-Fundamentalist Halakhah'. The new introduction written for this edition responds to criticisms raised from both the right and the left wings of the Jewish world, and also summarizes further work that has been done by scholars in the various areas that the book covers. The bibliography and notes have been expanded, and the format of the book has been enlarged to allow the copious notes to be set at the foot of the page."

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