



Arguing with God: A Jewish Tradition

By Anson H. Laytner

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As an old proverb puts it, 'Two Jews, three opinions.' In the long, rich, tumultuous history of the Jewish people, this characteristic contentiousness has often been extended even unto Heaven. Arguing with God is a highly original and utterly absorbing study that skates along the edge of this theological thin ice—at times verging dangerously close to blasphemy—yet also a source of some of the most poignant and deeply soulful expressions of human anguish and yearning. The name Israel literally denotes one who 'wrestles with God.' And, from Jacob's battle with the angel to Elie Wiesel's haunting questions about the Holocaust that hang in the air like still smoke over our own age, Rabbi Laytner admirably details Judaism's rich and pervasive tradition of calling God to task over human suffering and experienced injustice. It is a tradition that originated in the biblical period itself. Abraham, Moses, Elijah, and others all petitioned for divine intervention in their lives, or appealed forcefully to God to alter His proposed decree. Other biblical arguments focused on personal or communal suffering and anger: Jeremiah, Job, and certain Psalms and Lamentations. Rabbi Laytner delves beneath the surface of these 'blasphemies' and reveals how they implicitly helped to refute the claims of opponent religions and advance Jewish doctrines and teachings.

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Editorial Review

Review

Anson Laytner has explored the anguish of the believer with moving eloquence and passion. (Elie Wiesel)

In this age after the Holocaust, Anson Laytner's book speaks with extraordinary force. This survey of the tradition of 'arguing with God,' one of the most distinctive and inspiring elements in Jewish faith, covers a wealth of neglected or undiscussed sources. He shows clearly that this unique perspective runs through the seams of Jewish religion and history from the Bible down to today. Written with scholarship, sensitivity, and even humor, this book will richly reward all its readers. (Rabbi Irving Greenberg, president of CLAL, the National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership)

This is a book that needed to be written. Anson Laytner has brought together familiar and unfamiliar material and analyzed it historically and theologically. The sources that Laytner has assembled have a power and a relevance that leap out from the page. (*Modern Judaism*)

About the Author

Anson H. Laytner is Director of the Jewish Federation Community Relations Council of Greater Seattle. He is the editor of Points East, the periodical of the Sino-Judaic Institute, and has written The Wheels of Observance: A Growth Guide to the Jewish Holidays. His articles have appeared in Conservative Judaism and the Middle East Review. Rabbi Laytner lives in Seattle, Washington, with his wife and three daughters.

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