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Rabbinic Stories (Classics Of Western Spirituality) (Classics Of Western Spirituality (Paperback))



Synopsis

Stories from the main works of classical rabbinic literature, which were produced by Jewish sages in either Hebrew or Aramaic, between 200 and 600 CE.

Book Information

Series: Classics of Western Spirituality (Paperback)

Paperback: 352 pages

Publisher: Paulist Press (May 1, 2002)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0809140241

ISBN-13: 978-0809140244

Product Dimensions: 6.2 x 0.9 x 9.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 13.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

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Customer Reviews

Despite the superb quality of the rabbinic stories themselves, I found this book a tremendous disappointment. The first problem is with the selection of stories for this volume. Rubenstein would like to provide a "standard corpus" of rabbinic stories, yet he states at the outset that he has selected only stories about the sages themselves and has excluded stories that expand on biblical narratives (p.4). Maybe this decision can be justified, but Rubenstein makes no attempt to do so, and as a result leaves out many wonderful stories that would surely have to be included in any "standard corpus" (including, for example, the story of how Abraham came to reject his father's idols, or the story of how Joshua forgot 300 laws). What makes the decision particularly odd is that some of the stories included do not involve the sages -- for example, Alexander Macedon and the Faraway King (contrasting one Gentile's justice with another one's greed) or the Martyrdom of Hannah and her Seven Sons -- while others (for example, those in the chapter on suffering) involve sages as characters but are really "about" a theological issue. The second problem involves the format of the book. The stories are grouped thematically, which is fine, with an introduction to each chapter and sometimes to each story. Rubenstein admits in his general introduction that the individual introductions presume familiarity with the story, which means that the reader has to flip

back and forth from introduction to story. To make things even more complicated, a lot of important information (definitions, notes on wordplay, explications of difficult passages, and so on) is provided in endnotes, forcing the reader to flip from intro to story to endnotes and back again.

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