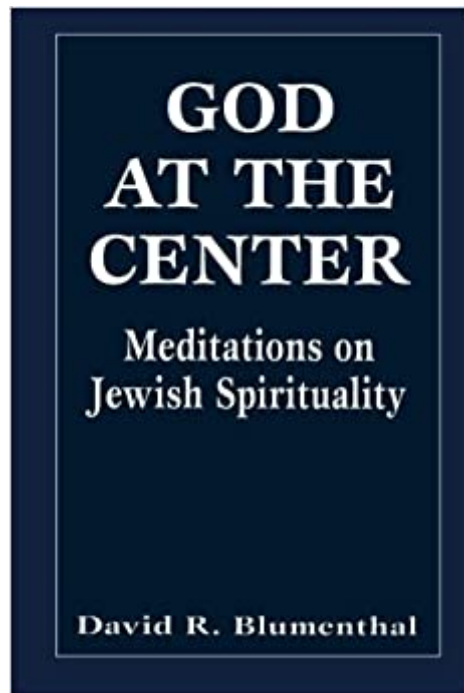




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God At The Center: Meditations On Jewish Spirituality



Synopsis

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Customer Reviews

David R. Blumenthal is a professor of Judaic studies at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. He is one of several esteemed scholars who contend that Moses Maimonides was not a pure rationalistic philosopher but a mystic, or, more precisely, a philosophic mystic. His view is that a person needs to first understand subjects philosophically and then they can move on to a post-philosophic, post-intellectual, post-cognitive religious experience. In other words, a human's ultimate goal is not understanding, as many maintain Maimonides taught, but a religious experience. People need to aim for this religious experience, and not stop when they think that they have an understanding of the universe and its laws.

This book is a set of dvar torahs (commentaries on parts of the Torah) based loosely on the work of Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev, an 18th-c. Hasidic rabbi. The first half or so of the book is a bit too mystical and abstract for my tastes. But the later essays are much more eloquent, especially those related to prayer and to the High Holy Days. For example, one of the better essays discusses the concept of kavannah (or "intentionality" in the context of prayer) from a wide variety of perspectives. Kavannah can mean focusing on the literal meaning of words, but may also mean considering the words' context, or of how they fit into the broader needs of Jews and/or humanity, or one's presence in the greater congregation of Jews (whether present or past), or awareness of God's power and/or

varying conceptions of God.

This is a top notch book. It is written following the weekly Torah portion, read each week in the synagogue. Essentially it is Dr. Blumenthal's supra commentary on parts of Rabbi Levi of Berdichev's Kedushat Levi. It's a book of Torah teaching and learning, not a staid academic reasearch book on Chassidim. The author is from the old line of conservative Rabbi's who lead the creation of Judaic Studies in America along the line's and learning of Abraham Joshua Heschel. It's a level of scholarship and feeling for Judaism that is too missing by most non Orthodox teachers today.

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