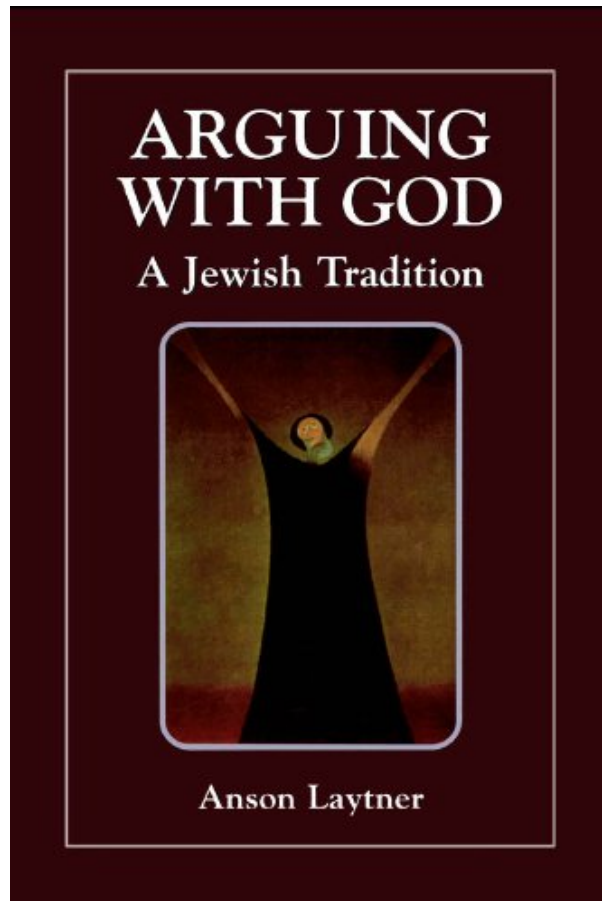


ARGUING WITH GOD: A JEWISH TRADITION BY ANSON LAYTNER



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ARGUING WITH GOD

A Jewish Tradition



Anson Laytner

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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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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.

- Sales Rank: #450430 in eBooks
- Published on: 1977-07-07
- Released on: 2013-03-15
- Format: Kindle eBook

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Most helpful customer reviews

16 of 16 people found the following review helpful.

A CHALLENGING AND MUCH NEEDED WORK

By A Customer

Arguing With God: A Jewish Tradition provides a much needed scriptural and historical basis for a theology of protest. After the Shoah, and in a world where new violence is all too frequent, some find the accepted ways of thinking about and dealing with God inadequate. Laytner provides another option for those who find the other models of faith inadequate or impossible. He grounds his work in scripture and in tradition, showing that arguing with God does not represent such a radical break from the past. It also rooted in the idea that we must defend those who are unjustly suffering, and this is a much needed ethic in our world. Whether or not you end up pursuing this tradition yourself, Laytner's book is a must for anyone interested in exploring ways of thinking about God and being religious in a world of suffering.

10 of 10 people found the following review helpful.

An inspiring and insightful work

By Shalom Freedman

This work shows that there is a long Jewish tradition of addressing, and contending with G-d. In face of the evils of the world the Jew is not simply silent and accepting but dares to question G-d. This is true in the Psalms, and in Job as it is later true with Rabbi Yitzhak Levi of Berditchev, and l'havdil Elie Weisel.

The profound idea that one comes closer to G-d, even when one dares to challenge G-d is one central theme of this very important work. Reading it one understands how one can remain a believing Jew while crying out against the evils of the world, and asking G-d, "Why?"

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