



## Jewish Passages: Cycles of Jewish Life

By Harvey E. Goldberg

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### **Jewish Passages: Cycles of Jewish Life** By Harvey E. Goldberg

American or Middle Eastern, Ashkenazi or Sephardi, insular or immersed in modern life—however diverse their situations or circumstances, Jews draw on common traditions and texts when they mark life's momentous events and rites of passage. The interplay of past and present, of individual practice and collective identity, emerges as a central fact of contemporary Jewish experience in Harvey E. Goldberg's multifaceted account of how Jews celebrate and observe the cycles of life. A leading anthropologist of Jewish culture, Goldberg draws on his own experience as well as classic sources and the latest research to create a nuanced portrait of Jewish rituals and customs that balances the reality of "ordinary Jews" with the authority of tradition.

Looking at classic rites of passage such as circumcision and marriage, along with emerging life-milestone practices like pilgrimage and identity-seeking tourism, *Jewish Passages* aptly reflects the remarkable cultural and religious diversity within Judaism. This work offers a new view of Jewish culture and history with the individual firmly situated at their center by blending anecdote and historical vignettes with rabbinic, midrashic, and anthropological insights; by exploring Sephardi and Ashkenazi traditions as well as modern ideologies; and by bringing into sharp relief the activities of women and relations with Gentile neighbors. As such, this book provides a unique window on the particulars—and the significance—of personal and communal acts of identification among Jews past, present, and future.

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## Jewish Passages: Cycles of Jewish Life By Harvey E. Goldberg Bibliography

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## **Editorial Review**

From Publishers Weekly

In this often fascinating book, Hebrew University anthropologist Goldberg uses his discipline to shed light on the tremendous diversity within Judaism regarding various passages of life. Drawing on ancient and modern texts and rituals, he examines the stages along life's way from its beginnings (birth, circumcision and naming) to its center (marriage, pilgrimage and the creation of identity), and its end (death, mourning and remembering). For example, Goldberg traces circumcision to its most ancient meanings in biblical times and then examines the ways that various Jewish communities through history have retained the meaning of circumcision while adapting the practices associated with it to their own cultural milieu. For example, Goldberg writes that circumcision among Libyan Sephardim is an elaborate ritual in which the infant boy's eyes are made up with cosmetics, like a girl's, but a rigid gender separation is otherwise preserved. In his comments on birth ceremonies and rituals, he restores the role of women to a central place within the Jewish community by looking at how those ceremonies connect with other aspects of Jewish life. Goldberg concludes that passages and rituals along the way of the Jewish life cycle not only mark individual identity but also tie that identity closely to a community. Four appendices contain an outline for a circumcision ceremony, a ceremony for naming a daughter, a commentary on the tefillin and the shema' [the Shema; Deuteronomy 6:4-9] and elements of the marriage service and blessing. Despite a sometimes dense academic tone, Goldberg's richly detailed book offers a marvelous tour of the markers of Jewish life and community. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From [Booklist](#)

The cycles of Jewish life that Goldberg examines are beginnings (birth, circumcision, and naming); rituals of education; marriage; and death, mourning, and remembering. Goldberg writes that life-cycle ceremonies are one of the axes around which Jewish life is organized. He points out that Jewish practice is also shaped by an ancient textual tradition, expressed in the Bible and elaborated in the Talmud, which has continued through the Middle Ages up until the present. Goldberg, a professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, explains the roots of an anthropological approach to Jewish culture, offering readers a distinct portrait of rituals and customs. A glossary will help readers not familiar with Hebrew words, and four appendixes explain the circumcision ceremony, the ceremony for naming a daughter, the tefillin, and the elements of the marriage service. *George Cohen*

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Review

"An anthropologist of Jewish culture draws on his own experience, plus classic sources at latest research, to create a portrait of Jewish rituals and customs."--"The Bookseller"

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