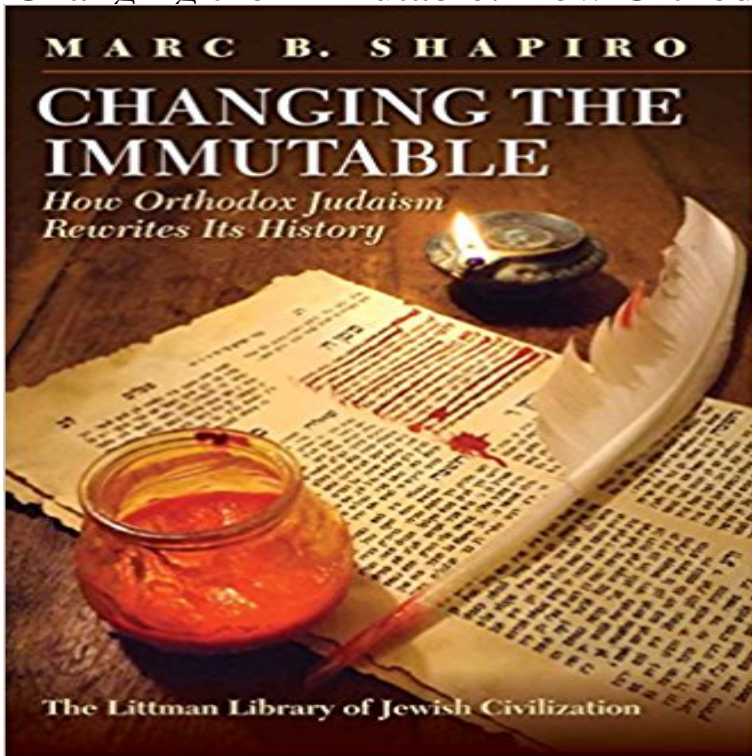


Changing the Immutable: How Orthodox Judaism Rewrites Its History



Changing the Immutable focuses on how segments of Judaism's Orthodox society have taken it upon themselves to rewrite the past by covering up and literally cutting out that which does not fit their own world view. For reasons ranging from theological considerations to internal religious politics to changing religious standards, such Jewish self-censorship abounds, and author Marc B. Shapiro discusses examples from each category. His analysis is illustrated by a number of images of the original texts next to their censored versions, together with an explanation of what made them problematic and how the issue was resolved. Shapiro considers the concepts of history that underlie such changes, looking at how some Orthodox historiography sees truth as entirely instrumental. Drawing on the words of leading rabbis, particularly from the haredi world, he shows that what is important here is not historical truth, but a truth that leads to observance and faith in the Sages. He concludes with a discussion of the concept of truth in the Jewish tradition, and when this truth can be altered. Changing the Immutable also reflects on the paradox of a society that regards itself as traditional, but, at the same time, is uncomfortable with some of the inherited tradition, and thus feels the need to create an idealized view of the past. Shapiro considers this in context, detailing precedents in Jewish history dating back to talmudic times. Since the objects of censorship have included such figures as Maimonides, Bahya ibn

Pakuda, Rashi, Naphtali Herz Wessely, Moses Mendelssohn, the Hatam Sofer, Samson Raphael Hirsch, A. I. Kook, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, and J. B. Soloveitchik, as well as issues such as Zionism, biblical interpretation, and attitudes to women and non-Jews, Shapiro's book also serves as a study in Jewish intellectual history and how the ideas of one era do not always find favor with later generations. *** Just two weeks after its publication, Shapiro's book is the number-one bestseller on Amazon in its category - a notable accomplishment for an academic book that includes (untranslated) rabbinic rulings, talmudic texts, and medieval commentaries. -- New Jersey Jewish News, May 2015 *** This is a fascinating book because Marc Shapiro is a professional historian, and to a historian nothing is more important than the facts, but he is also an Orthodox Jew, and so he understands that for an Orthodox Jew there are some values that trump the recording of the facts. -- Rabbi Jack Riemer, South Florida Jewish Journal, June 2015 *** Shapiro's new book is a must read for all who want to understand how the current slide to the right is radically reforming Judaism to fit within the cacophonous landscape of contemporary values. -- Rabbi Dr. Shmuly Yanklowitz, Jewish Journal, June 2015 *** Shapiro's scholarship has been so important, in part because of Orthodox's own success at covering up inconvenient aspects of its past. -- Ezra Glinter, Forward, July 2015 (also published in Haaretz) *** One of the most popular and controversial writers in the

Modern Orthodox world today, most famous perhaps for publicizing little-known - and often radical - positions in Jewish law and thought. -- Elliot Resnick, The Jewish Press, July 2015 *** Shapiro takes the reader down a proverbial rabbit hole and into the underbelly of the ?aredi community, an Orwellian-like world of mind control by the clandestine suppression of ideas. Changing the Immutable is an outstanding work, meticulously describing the bubble of artificial religious truth surrounding ?aredi communities. -- Fred Reiss Ed.D., San Diego Jewish World, August 2015 *** The book is a cri de Coeur, suggesting that truth should be a timeless commodity. Yet, the book has another, larger meaning. It outlines how Jewish tradition, a highly decentralized and in a modest way, a plastic entity, is shaped and changed. -- Susan M. ChambrÃfÃ©, Jewish Book World, October 2015 *** ...the outstanding product of a master of rabbinic literature and an extraordinarily sharp-eyed and meticulous scholar. The book should be accessible to the widest possible readership, including traditionalists; therefore, one hopes that it will be translated soon into Hebrew. -- Adam Ferziger, Marginalia, a Los Angeles Review of Books, February 2016 [Subject: Jewish Studies, Religious Studies, History]

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