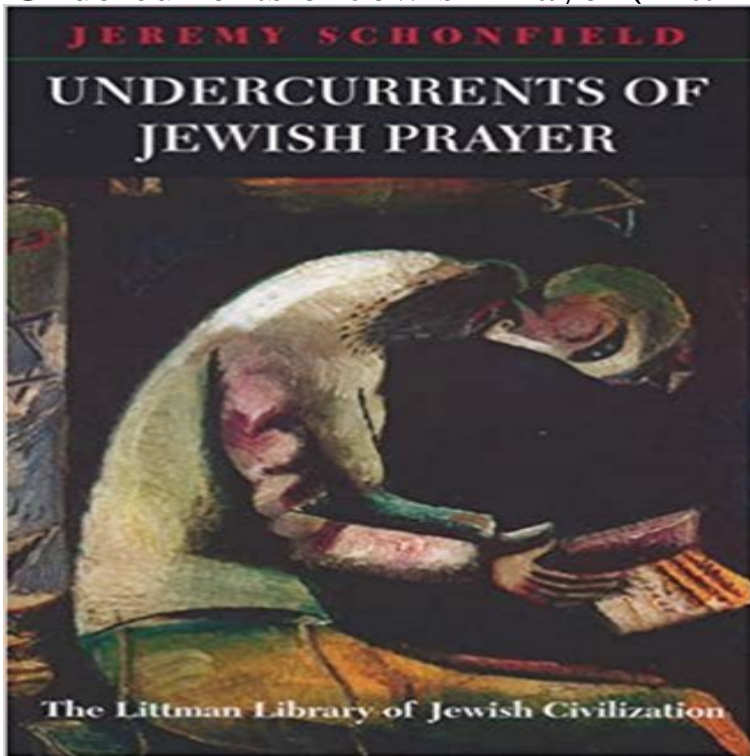


Undercurrents of Jewish Prayer (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization)



Jews encounter the prayer-book - the Siddur - more often in their daily lives than any other text, yet it is mysteriously absent from their otherwise comprehensive curriculum of study. The present work, the first to examine this paradox, explains this as a reluctance to engage with the intellectual and emotional questions that the liturgy generates. Submitted to close examination, Jewish prayer is shown to be less a deferential dialogue with an attentive deity than a liturgy of protest in the face of the chaotic unpredictability of the human condition, a protest qualified only by joyous recognition of God's role in ensuring life itself. This ground-breaking work studies the opening sections of the morning liturgy using methods traditionally applied to talmudic and midrashic texts. Close analysis of each textual layer, and not merely the surface meaning, demonstrates that because the liturgy is composed of citations drawn from other texts, the echoes of the original context reverberate in the new composition and form a countertext to the words on the page. It further shows how the emotions generated by these texts are tempered by the individual's location - home and later the synagogue - as well the fact that they are recited when facing the dangers of the day ahead. The resulting chorus of ideas, linking everyday life to the sacred narrative from creation to exile, demonstrates the philosophical sophistication of rabbinic spirituality in offering poetic

insight into an ultimately tragic vision of reality. *** With Undercurrents of Jewish Prayer, Jeremy Schonfield asserts his undeniable right to be accepted into the first rank of Jewish liturgical scholars ... no-one who completes this superb book will be able to look at a prayer book in the same way again. Schonfield sets the tone for his approach in the first three chapters, preparing his reader for an analysis that will be minute, lateral, creative, and highly convincing, as well as informed throughout by the authors broad scholarship ... a collection of jewels. ~ Charles Middleburgh, Jewish Chronicle

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