

## PREFACE

We study the roots of Jewish history to explore who and what Jews are, where they have lived, when the momentous events in their history have occurred, and why. We study the roots of Jewish history to better understand Jews' identity, community, beliefs, rituals, and discipline. We study the roots of Jewish history to try to comprehend why others feel and act the way they do towards Jews, to debunk innocent misunderstandings, and to combat deliberate mischaracterizations. We study the roots of Jewish history because, as modern Jews, it is our privilege and our duty.

This book documents the origins and evolution of Judaism and the Jewish people. The history of the Jews is, as Rabbi Dr. Shalom Coleman observes, "drenched in the blood of suffering and triumph." These trials and tribulations have shaped the past, present, and future of the Chosen People, though the most important value of Judaism remains the meaning and loving-kindness that it offers ordinary Jews each day.

But the study of Judaism is more than a study of one religion. It is, as Dr. Coleman artfully and thoroughly describes in the pages ahead, an education in history, politics, economics, law, philosophy, and the arts and sciences. It is an examination of geography, archaeology, and anthropology. It is a lesson in persecution and perseverance. And it is, as most great accounts of humanity are, infused with selfless love and ferocious hate, promising birth and tragic death.

As such, and especially because western societies are built on Judeo-Christian values, this book should appeal to more than just Jews. The world today, from Darfur to Iraq, is engulfed in conflict. Yet, as Dr. Coleman notes, hope springs eternal. Religion, including Judaism, plays a key role in both phenomena. Whether conservative Christianity in the United States or fundamentalist Islam in the Middle East, religion is—sometimes for better, too often for worse—a significant factor driving local and global affairs.

As Dr. Coleman indicates, this book, meant to "whet the appetite of the reader for more detail and further reading," is not the end, but in fact the very beginning of a lifelong journey of religious study. As the culmination of Dr. Coleman's own life's study of Judaism, he bequeaths to us his encyclopedic knowledge of the Jewish people, passing to us the responsibility to continue it.

The narrative and meditations that follow are very personal to me. Rabbi Dr. Shalom Coleman represents my own roots in Jewish history, as he is my loving, devoted, generous, inspiring grandfather.

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