

A Touch of Torah: Divrei Torah, Midrashim, Poems and Essays

Anne Lowe

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A Touch of Torah is a joyous celebration of faith, discipline, and community that works to bring biblical teachings into the present day.

Anne Lowe's *A Touch of Torah* compiles short, friendly talks regarding the teachings of the Torah, aimed at a contemporary audience.

First given weekly at her conservative synagogue, each d'var Torah is based on thoughtful readings of selected verses extracted from Genesis through Deuteronomy. They are focused on words, ideas, or phrases that were resonant to Lowe. She elaborates on these, often rephrasing verses and placing them in a modern setting to argue their relevance to current situations.

While many of the talks are witty and humorous, others touch on difficult topics, including the 2011 shootings in Tucson, the continuing second-class status of women in the world, twenty-first-century slavery, and more. They also address the Torah's conflicting versions of God with honesty, and highlight the frustration of being told to "believe and accept" even when a teaching appears to make no sense or seems cruel. Its perspective is that each person should strive to make the world better for others, and that disciplined listening to the Torah will be rewarded.

Its approach is balanced. The book highlights and celebrates Judaism's encouragement of questioning and curiosity, and the faith of a people "extremely small in number," but "huge in heart, in intelligence, and in humanity." Also included are poems, stories, midrashim, essays based on personal reflections, and a few beloved recipes.

Brief, insightful, and warm, each chapter is a thoughtful attempt to clarify a Torah excerpt. Due to the conversational and personal style of the writing, its introduction to Judaism is akin to that of a family, not just a religion. Reflections on good times shared within the community are convincing in this regard.

The original poetry, much of it rhyming, is characterized by evocative imagery and emotional intensity. "Porcupine on Noah's Ark" has all the qualities of an excellent children's book, telling a humorous story in spry rhyming verse that portrays the plight of a porcupine on the crowded vessel; avoided by all, only its mate will offer him a hug. Simple, lovely illustrations and calligraphy add to the charm of the book's design, though its errors in punctuation and missing, misused, misspelled, and extra words are distracting.

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KRISTINE MORRIS (July 30, 2019)

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