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A Year with the Sages: Wisdom on the Weekly Torah Portion

Rabbi Reuven Hammer
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Accessibility is the name of the game with *A Year with the Sages.* For those seeking a more academic take on the weekly Torah portion but who don't have higher level divinity degrees, this companion from Rabbi Reuven Hammer is an exercise in scholarship.

Each week's parsha commentary is laid out in three sections: an explanation of the text, a d'rash based on the works of the sages, and a d'rash drawing on Hammer's personal experiences. For those looking to deepen their knowledge of Jewish thought, the middle dr'ash is a blessing. Drawing from decades of studies of the sages, Hammer selects passages and explicates them in a fashion appropriate for a first encounter with the text. These daily samplings render the intimidating endeavor of engaging with the vast works of the sages accessible.

The second dr'ash for each reading is a personal reflection based on Hammer's own experiences. They are a rich resource for leaders, especially leaders of spiritual communities, who are looking for guidance on stewarding with integrity and care. Average readerships may find less to inspire introspection in these selections; some have a self-congratulatory edge, drawing upon Hammer's extraordinary life experiences in a way that's not wholly relatable, and discussions of decision making in the rabbinical court trend esoteric. Moments that contemplate the human experience, including dr'ashes that discuss the lives of refuseniks who fled the USSR, are more welcoming.

Lovingly academic, *A Year with the Sages* is an ideal companion for readers looking to add a touch of scholarly inquiry to their weekly Torah study. It is perfect for those interested in a daily dose of Jewish thought, and is designed to delight the intellect and deepen understandings of Judaism throughout history.

JESSIE HORNESS (July/August 2019)

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