

The God Upgrade: Finding Your 21st Century Spirituality in Judaism's
5,000-Year-Old Tradition by Jamie S Korngold, with a
Foreword by Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis.
Jewish Lights Publishing 2011.

I wasn't sure that I was going to enjoy this book when I started it, nor could I decide whether I would want to spend time with its author, but as I have enormous respect for Harold Schulweis, and as I suspect he doesn't write forewords for those for whom he doesn't have respect I persevered, and I am very glad that I did so.

Jamie Korngold is clearly a maverick, and rejoices in that status; as a rabbi, and indeed as a rabbinic student, she has never hidden from the problems that she has with God, (faith in and duty towards) and instead of allowing them to make her cynical she has tackled them head on. The God Upgrade is her attempt to show how antiquated thinking, classic imagery and language get in the way not just of faith but of active and real engagement with the rich heritage of Judaism.

Her framework, which is both witty and clever, is that of computer software and its regular upgrades. So The God Upgrade is divided into five sections: The Issues With God 1.0; Upgrades Through the Centuries; Twentieth-Century Upgrades; God 2.0-God in the Twenty First Century; Judaism 2.0 – A New Understanding of God Enables a New Understanding of Judaism.

Korngold is unsparingly honest, revealing all the things that drive her crazy or have acted as barriers to her communication with God and/or Judaism in the past, her assumption being, and I fully agree with her, that many lay people (and possibly many rabbis less open than she) will feel, or have felt, identical emotions to her own.

The God Upgrade is a funny, provocative (in the best sense) and timely book for the early years of the twenty first century, written in a style that carries the reader along. So how do I feel about Jamie having read the book? Jealous of her professional life as The Adventure Rabbi, admiring of her honesty, and pretty sure we'd get along very well indeed!

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh