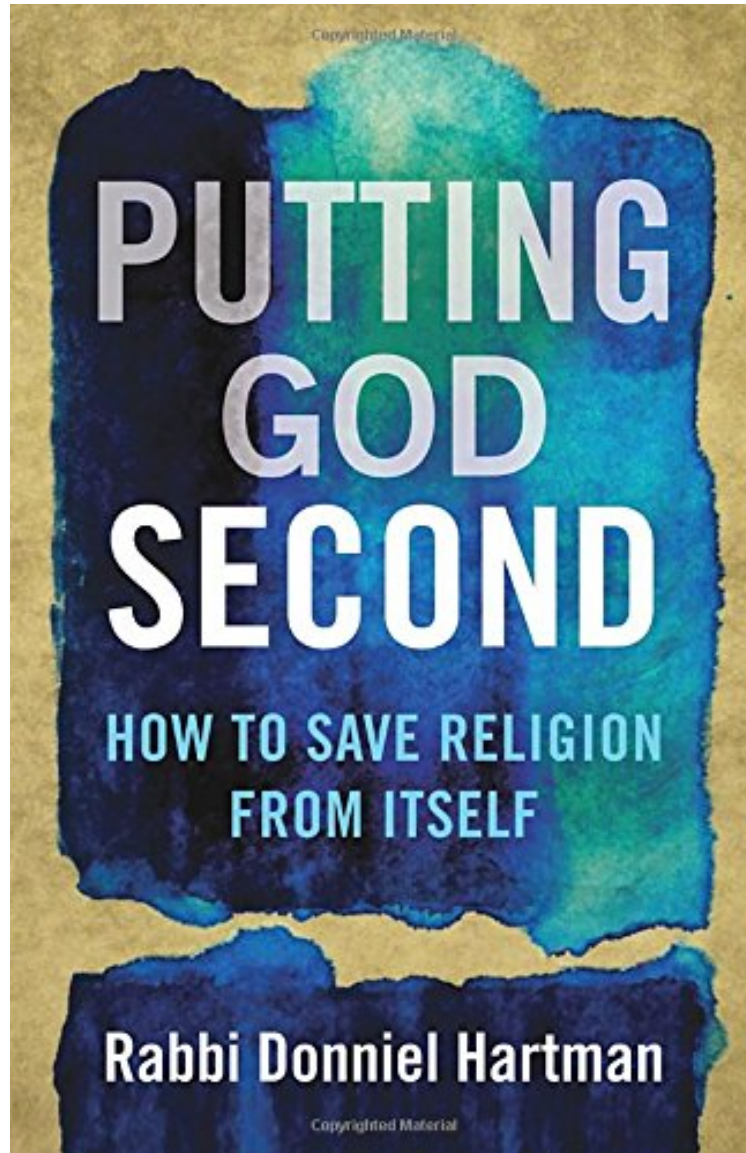


## Putting God Second: How to Save Religion from Itself

*Donniel Hartman*

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**Donniel Hartman : Putting God Second: How to Save Religion from Itself** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Putting God Second: How to Save Religion from Itself:

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Excellent book that reminds the reader of the common humanity of man and the need for respect and consideration.By Bruce WolfVery insightful look at religious priorities. Donniel Hartman writes of the importance of recognizing that we must be aware of others in our world and that they have worth. We cannot be lost in overdedication to God. We are all part of the human race, with worthiness and abilities, as

well as the need for respect. In this current age of increasing tribalism, his advice is very well placed. This book is well organized and should be read by all who are concerned with humanity. It would be especially worthwhile for our politicians and extreme fundamentalists of all persuasions. 15 of 17 people found the following review helpful.

Compelling, Refreshing and Uplifting

By DSP

Putting God Second is one of the most refreshing, enlightening and affirming books that I have read. As a provocative guide to contemporary religions challenges and as a celebration of its aspirations, this is a compelling and uplifting exploration of faith. Each chapter takes the reader on a biblical adventure, offering an exciting investigation of core religious principles and contradictions. The careful rendering of biblical context to create a moral and ethical critique of religions aspirations and limitations is artfully done. Ultimately, the book proves to be energizing in its analysis and offers a meaningful prescription for spiritual renewal. Written with a clear love for Bible and God, Rabbi Hartman provides a fascinating view on what man has done to God and what God has done to man. Boldly confronting inherent inconsistencies in religious practice and principle, Hartman speaks clearly to the struggle facing religious leaders legitimately seeking to reconcile contemporary moral imperatives within the complex tapestry of traditional faith and fidelity. As Hartman writes, it is precisely those who pursue the most intense and consuming intimacy with God who can so often become, as a result of this very form of devotion, less able to hear Gods voice. Using Judaism as a lens on monotheism, Hartman examines how faith guides us towards good but also inadvertently blinds us, at times, to doing good. Still, Hartman goes further by empowering readers to interpret and to own their religious narrative, seeing the practice of faith as a principled responsibility. By focusing on the credible origins of the cognitive dissonance that many good people find in mainstream religion, Hartman validates the struggle many have had with traditional faith. Putting God Second provides a compelling explanation and context for that dissonance, and thereby invites those feeling left outside to come back in and to take ownership of the consequences of their ideologies. As Hartman effectively argues, unless we are willing to put God second, we make it impossible for God to fulfill the role in our lives that, according to religion itself, God most yearns to fulfill. Given monotheism is rich in tradition, durable in foundation, and serves so many so well, it also requires insight from those who love it and long to improve it. Rabbi Hartmans book is a thorough investigation and invitation to return to the core principles of religion and a call to the faithful to re-engage religion with strength, clarity, and humility. Rabbi Hartman also takes a bold leap in challenging conventional religious authority from the inside as a respected Jewish scholar, author and speaker. He explains that he is driven by the internal cultural war being fought over the moral soul of Judaism, not merely being waged between competing chapters and verses but rather because it defines the essence of ethical responsibility. to save religion from itself. In the process, Rabbi Hartman takes us on a compelling journey and makes a profound impact. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Wonderful book, no matter what your faith

By J. C. Beadles

Everyone of all religious faiths should read Rabbi Hartman's profound and very readable book. He basically deals with why religious people often don't live up to the tenets of their faith. I'm not going to try to summarize the author's thoughts, but they remind you of Lincoln's quote that "it's not whether God is on our side, but whether we are on God's side." Rabbi Hartman's discusses why even religious people fail ethically in real life, starting with Biblical times and running through Israel's wars and the terrorism of the 21st Century. He gives the reader thoughts on how we all can do better ethically. Not to be missed.

Why have the monotheistic religions failed to produce societies that live up to their ethical ideals? A prominent rabbi answers this question by looking at his own faith and offering a way for religion to heal itself. In Putting God Second, Rabbi Donniel Hartman tackles one of modern lifes most urgent and vexing questions: Why are the great monotheistic faiths Judaism, Christianity, and Islam chronically unable to fulfill their own self-professed goal of creating individuals infused with moral sensitivity and societies governed by the highest ethical standards? To answer this question, Hartman takes a sober look at the moral peaks and valleys of his own tradition, Judaism, and diagnoses it with clarity, creativity, and erudition. He rejects both the sweeping denunciations of those who view religion as an inherent impediment to moral progress and the apologetics of fundamentalists who proclaim religions moral perfection against all evidence to the contrary. Hartman identifies the primary source of religions moral failure in what he terms its autoimmune disease, or the way religions so often undermine their own deepest values. While God obligates the good and calls us into its service, Hartman argues, God simultaneously and inadvertently makes us morally blind. The nature of this self-defeating condition is that the human religious desire to live in relationship with God often distracts religious believers from their traditions core moral truths. The answer Hartman offers is this: put God second. In order to fulfill religions true vision for humanity an uncompromising focus on the ethical treatment of others religious believers must hold their traditions accountable to the highest independent moral standards. Decency toward ones neighbor must always take precedence over acts of religious devotion, and ethical piety must trump ritual piety. For as long as devotion to God comes first, responsibility to other people will trail far, far behind. In this book, Judaism serves as a template for how the challenge might be addressed by those of other faiths, whose sacred scriptures similarly evoke both the sublime heights of human aspiration and the depths of narcissistic moral blindness. In Putting God Second, Rabbi Hartman offers a lucid analysis of religions flaws, as well as a compelling resource, and vision, for its

repair.

A stimulating and sure-to-be discussed critique of monotheism. Kirkus sIn this accessible exploration of how faith in God can determine and influence personality, Hartman (*The Boundaries of Judaism*) successfully engages with what he believes to be the most fundamental question of our time. He notes that the causes of the worlds great conflicts have begun to shift from national and secular politics to religious ones. Given this, Hartman wonders whether religion actually makes believers treat others with more compassion and kindness. Despite his own deep commitment to Judaism, the rabbi does not flinch from exposing many examples, including some from the Bible, that argue against the idea of religion as a force for good. Using his own religion as his lens, Hartman analyzes the phenomena he labels God Intoxication and God Manipulation; in the former, obsession with paying attention to the divine leaves less room...to be aware of the human condition, and in the latter, God is drafted in the service of human self-interest to advance an individuals personal interests and agendas. Hartman makes a powerful case that believers should both judge the word of God and be inspired and instructed by it, and that putting people first is the real way to follow the divine will. Publishers WeeklyEminently readable, constructively controversial and profoundly spiritual...This book is not for the spiritually faint-hearted. The Jerusalem PostThis is an intellectually lively work that illuminates and advances the conversation on religious faith. Putting God Second paints a portrait for religion in the modern world and makes the case for a view of religion in which love of persons and an affirmation of their dignity, integrity, and worth stand at the center of religious faith. In doing so, Hartman rescues religion from both its most reactionary exponents and its cultural detractors who would bind religion into fundamentalist straitjackets. Rabbi David Ellenson, director of the Schusterman Center for Israel Studies at Brandeis University and author of *Jewish Meaning in a World of Choice*Putting God Second addresses the most critical issues facing religion in the modern world. As Hartman brilliantly argues, its too simplistic to join Hitchens, Dawkins, and Harris in reducing religion to the cause of centuries of bloodshed and hatred, or to side with those who only see in religion the inspiring teachings that ennoble humanity. Instead, Hartman offers a sophisticated and compelling analysis of the flaws within Jewish scriptures as a model for other monotheistic faiths, and outlines a remarkable new way to keep our relationship with God from overshadowing our responsibility to Gods many children. Rabbi Rick Jacobs, president of the Union for Reform JudaismA work of deep faith that takes todays challenges to faith head onrooted in the tradition, yet alive to the new. Religious self-criticism is essential to twenty-first-century peace. Rabbi Donniel Hartman shows why and how. James Carroll, author of *Christ Actually*Putting God Second is a must-read book for anyone who is looking for a fresh take on religion and religiosity of all kinds. Its powerful argument invites people of all faiths (or no faith) to re-examine the basic premises of religion altogether. Only a faithful Jew could put forth such a challenge, and Rabbi Hartman does it spectacularly. Abdullah T. Antepi, Chief Representative of Muslim Affairs, Duke UniversityAbout the AuthorRabbi Dr. Donniel Hartman is president of the Shalom Hartman Institute and the author of *The Boundaries of Judaism*, coeditor of *Judaism and the Challenges of Modern Life*, and coauthor of *Spheres of Jewish Identity*. He is the founder of some of the most extensive education, training, and enrichment programs for scholars, educators, rabbis, and religious and lay leaders in Israel and North America, and is a prominent essayist, blogger, and lecturer on issues of Israeli politics and policy, Judaism, and the Jewish community.