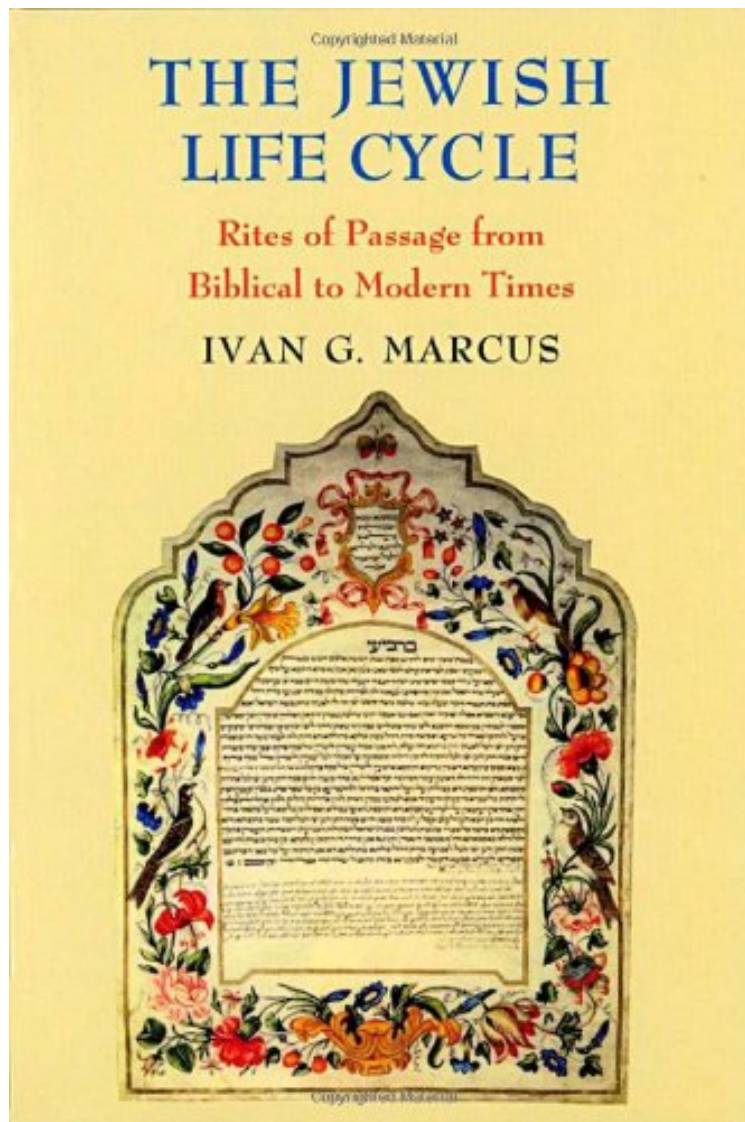


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The Jewish Life Cycle: Rites of Passage from Biblical to Modern Times (Samuel and Althea Stroum Lectures in Jewish Studies)

Ivan G. Marcus

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In this original and sweeping review of Jewish culture and history, Ivan Marcus examines how and why various rites and customs celebrating stages in the life cycle have evolved through the ages and persisted to this day. For each phase of life--from childhood and adolescence to adulthood and the advanced years--the book traces the origin and development of specific rites associated with the events of birth, circumcision, and schooling; bar and bat mitzvah and confirmation; engagement, betrothal, and marriage; and aging, dying, and remembering. Customs in Jewish tradition, such as the presence of godparents at a circumcision, the use of a four-poled canopy at a wedding, and the placing of small stones on tombstones, are discussed. In each chapter, detailed descriptions walk the reader through such ceremonies as early modern and contemporary circumcision, weddings, and funerals. In a comparative framework, Marcus illustrates how Jewish culture has negotiated with the majority cultures of the ancient Near East, Greco-Roman antiquity, medieval European Christianity, and Mediterranean Islam, as well as with modern secular and religious movements and social trends, to renew itself through ritual innovation. In his extensive research on the Jewish life cycle, Marcus draws from documents on various customs and ritual practices, offering reassessments of original sources and scholarly literature. Marcus's survey is the first comprehensive study of the rites of the Jewish life cycle since Hayyim Schauss's *The Lifetime of the Jew* was published in 1950, written for Jewish readers. Marcus's book addresses a broader audience and is designed to appeal to scholars and interested readers.

"Informative, clear, and well written. This comprehensive guide is historical ethnography at its best." Association of Jewish Libraries Newsletter "If you have ever wondered where on the broad spectrum between halakha and superstition a Jewish custom fits; if you have ever yearned to know its history, its significance and its variations in communities throughout the world and in time; if you have ever compared it to similar customs in Christianity, Islam, or pagan belief; if you have ever sought to take a fascinating journey into Jewish history and folklore--then Ivan Marcus's feat of scholarship and literary pleasure is the next book you should read." Sherwin B. Nuland MD, author of *How We Die* and *Lost In America: A Journey with My Father*. "This is a compendium that will help affirm wellworn practices and maybe even stimulate the restoration of others. A fascinating read." Samuel Heilman, Author of *When a Jew Dies* "There is nothing as comprehensive, historically oriented, and accessible to a broad readership as *The Jewish Life Cycle*." Martin S. Jaffee, University of Washington "The Jewish Life Cycle is an absolute delight! This book surpasses all previous work in the field and constitutes a significant intellectual achievement that will justly inform and entertain a vast array of readers." Dr. David Ellenson, President Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion "A work of true distinction: authoritative in its research, masterful in the elegance of its simplicity and unified by a richly illustrated thesis of laudable sophistication." Ismar Schorsch, Chancellor of The Jewish Theological Seminary of America About the Author Ivan G. Marcus is Frederick P. Rose Professor of Jewish History and Professor of History and Religious Studies, Yale University. He is the author of *Rituals of Childhood: Jewish Acculturation in Medieval Europe*.