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TITLE INFORMATION

FROM THE TRENCH TO THE BENCH

Navigating the Legal System & Finding Your Spiritual Path Along the Way

Herb Dodell

Self (330 pp.)

\$9.99 e-book

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BOOK REVIEW

A debut work offers a guide to the law, with a dollop of spiritual counsel.

Dodell has no dearth of experience in law—he’s practiced for half a century in myriad capacities, including as a prosecutor and judge. This manual draws on that expert background, providing a tour of those areas of law most likely to be pertinent to the average citizen. For example, the author discusses how to prepare for small claims court, and what legal remedies are available for a victim of hate speech online. Dodell scrupulously prepares the reader for whatever eventuality: there’s advice for those who want to petition for a restraining order and for those served one. Some of the guidance is eminently practical; for example, there are sections on how to find a lawyer, how to negotiate the payment, and how to be a helpful client. There is a delightful absence of hyper-technical legalese—sections often begin with a plainly worded question that captures a common legal need. For example, when it’s time to cover personal injury law, Dodell begins with the query: “What happens if someone takes a slug at you?” The majority of the book is devoted to civil law, but one chapter at the conclusion of the work addresses the possibility that the reader has been accused of a crime. One conspicuous lacuna is bankruptcy law, though there is a brief consideration of it in the midst of a discussion of tenant and landlord disputes. Somewhat incongruously, the author includes some spiritual perspective as well, largely drawn from his own encounter with the Kabbalah. This theological detour is almost entirely confined to the introductory chapter and a very brief concluding one. Dodell contends that his spiritual devotion improved his legal decision-making, but also concedes that benefiting from the law advice in the book in no way hinges upon accepting that same path. Nonetheless, this is an admirably clear and comprehensive source work for the layperson.

A fine and thorough reference book for those in need of basic legal instruction.

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