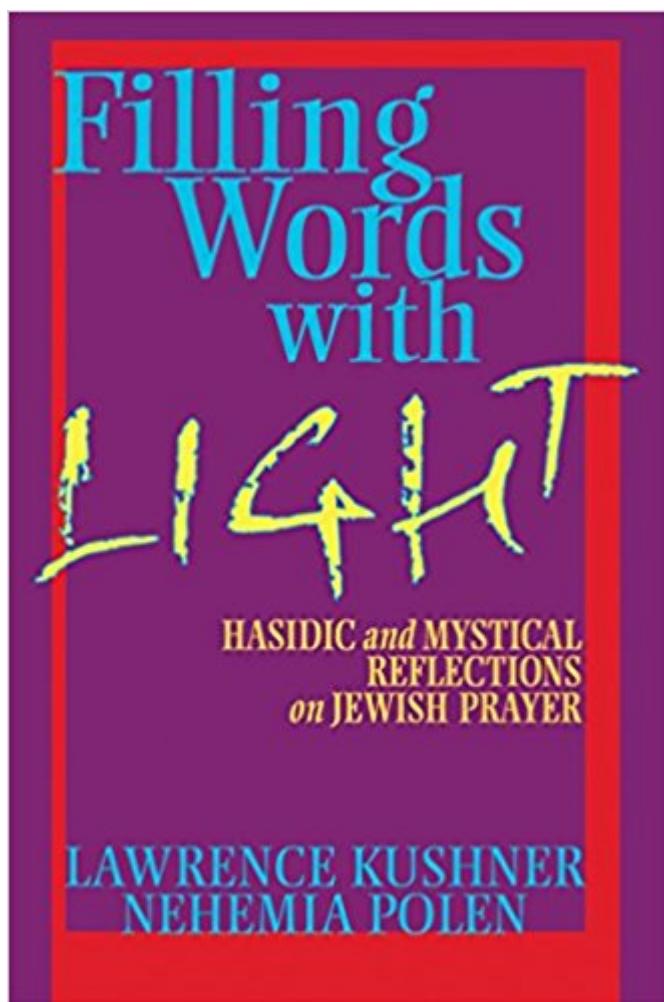


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# Filling Words With Light: Hasidic And Mystical Reflections On Jewish Prayer



## Synopsis

Breathe New Life into Your Prayer with the Wisdom of Kabbalah and the Hasidic Masters Jewish mystics teach that every word a person utters in prayer should radiate light. Even the letters of the words of prayer carry sparks of the Divine that yearn to join together in holiness. In this inspiring spiritual companion, Reform rabbi Lawrence Kushner and Orthodox rabbi Nehemia Polen join together to provide a window into the liturgy for people of all backgrounds by offering fresh insights and meditations that bring the traditional prayerbook to life. Drawing from the Torah, Zohar and ancient and contemporary Hasidic masters, Kushner and Polen reflect on the joy, gratitude, compassion, mystery and awe embedded in traditional prayers and blessings, and show how you can imbue these familiar sacred words with your own sense of holiness. Insightful, fresh and wise, *Filling Words with Light* will enrich your understanding of the prayer book and guide you on how to put more of yourself into the holy words of the Jewish tradition.

## Book Information

Paperback: 176 pages

Publisher: Jewish Lights; 1 edition (July 1, 2007)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1580232388

ISBN-13: 978-1580232388

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.6 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 6.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 stars 4 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #773,589 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #77 in Books > Religion & Spirituality > Judaism > Hasidism #419 in Books > Religion & Spirituality > Judaism > Kabbalah & Mysticism #502 in Books > Textbooks > Humanities > Religious Studies > Judaism

## Customer Reviews

"A wonderful collection of insights into prayer, collected and reworked by a team of contemporary masters. Will add depth and insight to your prayer life!"<sup>1</sup> Rabbi Arthur Green, author of *Ehyeh: A Kabbalah for Tomorrow* and *These Are the Words: A Vocabulary of Jewish Spiritual Life*<sup>2</sup> Kushner and Polen are unparalleled in their ability to translate the most arcane and difficult insights of Hasidic masters into terms that are stunningly applicable to the human condition. Each and every page is testimony to their affection for the sages they cite and their regard for the

prayers those sages address. For a spiritual commentary on the prayer book, this is the book to own. *Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman, editor of the My People's Prayer Book: Traditional Prayers, Modern Commentaries series* "This book will surely open the heart of anyone opening a prayer book. The inspiring gems of insight by two great scholars seem to literally sparkle right off the pages. So much wisdom, made so accessible." *Rabbi Elyse Goldstein, editor of The Women's Torah Commentary and The Women's Haftarah Commentary*

Engage Body and Soul with the Holy Words of Jewish Prayer From personal gratitude as we greet the day, to affirming in community Judaism's steadfast devotion to God, prayer encompasses the expanse of our daily lives. In *Filling Words with Light*, Lawrence Kushner and Nehemia Polen offer new interpretations, flashes of insight, stories, and reflections on the words that compose the Jewish liturgy and enrich our understanding of how and why we pray. Following the order of the traditional prayer book, Kushner and Polen examine the concepts, phrases, and words of prayer, including: \* Acts of love \* Serving in joy \* Blessing \* Commandments \* Repentance \* Healing \* Torah study \* Reverence \* Sabbath lights \* Yearning ...and much more

*Filling Words with Light*, by Lawrence Kushner and Nehemia Polen, is subtitled "Hasidic and Mystical Reflections on Jewish Prayer." And that is just what this work is. This book is meant to be a companion to *Jewish Lights My People's Prayer Book*, but it certainly is a stand-alone volume. Kushner is a particularly adept student of what is now called neo-Hasidism. He combs Hasidic sources, both old and new, to interpret parts of the prayer book from a vantage that is decidedly non-dualistic and non-hierarchical. His work a kind of deeply informed Reform Judaism; it is neither lazy nor dismissive about the need for a connection to the Jewish past. It is just selective in the use of those sources (just like more Orthodox modern commentators) and aware of the need for new meanings to for old words.

For Jews, finding meaning in prayer can be difficult, depending particularly on one's personal theology. But who better to turn for help than to Lawrence Kushner, who teamed with another writer to produce this book. That said, the key to reading this book may be to keep expectations low. It will not transform your prayer experience. Only a fraction of the book resonated with me. "*Filling Words with Light*" offers Kushner's and Nehemia Polen's commentaries on about 70 snippets of prayers. And the commentaries themselves are based on Hasidic and other mystical sources. In some cases,

the commentaries seem only tangentially related to the prayer. In some other cases, the mystical insights are inaccessible. But there are a few gems in this book that will enhance your prayer experience. Your gems may be different than mine. But I know I appreciated the insight into Psalms 150:6, which is: Without some intervening force, our souls would leave us in a split second. And you know Who is doing the intervening.

When you are depressed, you are not only unhappy, your will is weakened. You are unable to act. You have lost the 'good fight.' Sadness is a confabulation of an evil side. Sometimes it leads you astray, causing paralysis which results from sadness and depression. This is manifested by our self-destructive side, our own personal internal enemy. This book explains how to overcome the darkness to see the 'light.' LIGHT means life, the ultimate awareness. The tree of life corresponds in mystical imagery to "the One without end." The tree of good and evil corresponds to a world of multiplicity, division, corporeality, and tangible reality -- 'the world of action.' The goal is to balance the two trees. To balance our power to act, our self-assertion with the humility of being selfless, then we can perform wonders. Rabbi Kushner of San Francisco and Rabbi Polen of Boston break down the Yiddish words into multiple meanings and interpret the Jewish liturgy so that even a Christian can appreciate their concentration on prayer, and each day being a renewal of life, a new beginning. They have both written for the Jewish Lights, and Polen is the author of THE HOLY FIRE about Warsaw. Both are professors of Jewish spirituality and thought.

I'm so glad I have this book on my bookshelf. I have learned some important things about the meanings of prayers, which makes my life more meaningful to me.

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