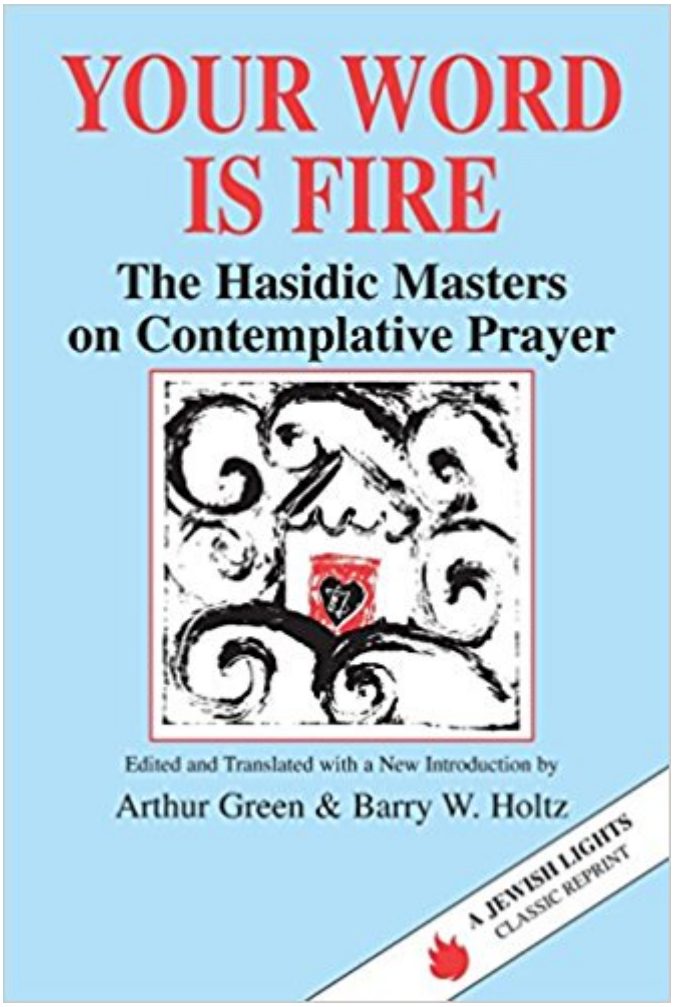
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Your Word Is Fire: The Hasidic Masters On Contemplative Prayer (A Jewish Lights Classic Reprint)



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Synopsis

The power of prayer for spiritual renewal and personal transformation is at the core of all religious traditions. Because Hasidic literature contains no systematic manual of contemplative prayer, the texts included in this volume have been culled from many sources. From the teachings of the Hasidic MastersÃ¢â ¬â ¢the Ba'al Shem Tov, the Maggid Dov Baer of Meidzyrzec, and their immediate disciplesÃ¢â ¬â ¢the editors have gleaned "hints as to the various rungs of inner prayer and how they are attained."Hasidism, the Jewish revivalist movement that began in the late eighteenth century, saw prayer as being at the heart of religious experience and was particularly concerned with the nature of a personÃ¢â ¬â„¢s relationship with God. The obstacles to prayer discussed by the Hasidic mastersÃ¢â ¬â ¢distraction, loss of spirituality, and inconstancy of purposeÃ¢â ¬â ¢feel very close to concerns of our own age. Through advice, parables, and explanations, the Hasidic masters of the past speak to our own attempts to find meaning in prayer.

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Customer Reviews

Opens up some of the more accessible realms of the Jewish inner life.

"According to Hasidism, the authors tell us, 'There is no higher sacred act than that of helping another to discover the presence of God within his own soul.' Green and Holtz have themselves performed just such an act."Ã¢â ¬â ¢Lawrence Fine, JudaismÃ¢â ¬Å“Opens up some of the more accessible realms of the Jewish inner life.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â ¢Eugene Borowitz,

ShÃ¢ ¬â„¢maÃ¢ ¬Å“Elegantly constructedÃ¢ ¬Â¦a work equally useful to the scholarly and general reader.Ã¢ ¬Â•Ã¢ ¬â ¢Joel Rosenberg, genesis 2Ã¢ ¬Å“A new generation of Jewish scholars has endeavored to make both the spiritual contents and the religious setting of Hasidic teaching accessible to the modern student and seekerÃ¢ ¬Â¦. This fine bookÃ¢ ¬Â¦belongs on the shelf of anyone interested in a Jewish understanding of prayer as a way of knowing God.Ã¢ ¬Â•Ã¢ ¬â ¢YaÃ¢ ¬â„¢Qub ibn Yusef, Gnosis MagazineÃ¢ ¬Å“[They] have translated the Hasidic masters with sensitivity and honesty; they do not attempt to blur or avoid the often highly erotic imageryÃ¢ ¬Â¦. By making the words of the Hasidic masters accessible in English [they] have added new wings to our prayer.Ã¢ ¬Â•Ã¢ ¬â ¢James B. Rosenberg, The Jewish Spectator

Words that are so simple, yet so profound: this illuminated text collected by Reb Green is often used as a simple yet direct means to prayer. A collection to carry with you and treasure.

Let me just say that if your reading this then buy this book now... fate has brought you here. Read this book over and over and be enriched and renewed angain and again---connected to the ONE source of ALL.

The present (2012) Jewish Lights edition of "Your Word is Fire: The Hasidic Masters on Contemplative Prayer," is about twenty pages longer than earlier forms, due to an expanded Introduction. It was originally published in "The Spiritual Masters" series from the Paulist Press in 1977; that edition would be the subject of the earlier-dated reviews on this product page.My copy of the Paulist Press edition is an undated mass-market size paperback, with a lovely cover incorporating a nineteenth-century Central European Mizrach ("East"), used to mark the direction of prayer (facing Jerusalem), with designs made up of tiny Hebrew texts -- much of it, alas, too small to read in the reproduction, even when magnified.... (The use of a Mizrach was a traditional European Jewish practice, not associated specifically with the Hasidic / Chasidic Movement.)The short book (under 120 pages of texts) provides an interesting approach to a mystical, "charismatic," and popular strain in Jewish life, whose adherents are known, in a bold self-characterization, as the "Pious Ones." (They labelled their more traditionally-minded, and rigorously scholastic, critics as "Misnagdim," "Oppositionists," as though their opponents were the ones tampering with accepted theory and practice.)This is not the only movement in Jewish history known as "Hasidim," but it is the one usually meant when the term is used without further explanation. (Two other major groups are the "Chasideans," contemporaries of the Maccabees, and the "Hasidei Ashkenaz," or

"European Pietists," an elite movement in the twelfth-century Rhineland and Central Europe.)The Hasidic Movement emerged in the eighteenth century in Eastern Europe, and within a couple of generations had developed different branches, with distinctive ideas and practices, looking back to several influential teachers. According to the editors, their collection of statements regarding prayers and prayer practice consciously excluded several such inner-Hasidic divisions, specifically the Lubavitch (ChaBaD) and Bratslav movements. As a result, the selection is representative primarily of the earliest generations of Hasidism, namely the founder, known as the Ba'al Shem Tov ("Master of the Good Name"), the Maggid (preacher) Dov Baer of Miedzyrzec, "and their immediate disciples" through the later eighteenth century. (Yes, the literature is littered with variously-spelled Eastern European place-names, some of which have changed several times as borders were redrawn.)This self-imposed limitation on source documents makes good literary sense, albeit at the sacrifice of a fuller representation of the range of Hasidic thought. It also happens to correspond more closely to the somewhat romantic notion of Hasidic spirituality promulgated by, among others, Martin Buber, as against the more rigorous analyses of Hasidic thought and practice offered by Gershom Scholem (the leading historian of Jewish Mysticism in the Twentieth Century) and his followers. An implied endorsement of Buber's somewhat narrow view of "authentic" Hasidism should not be attributed to Green and Holtz, however. In fact, two of the three citations of secondary literature in their endnotes to the readings are to a (relatively) non-technical article by Scholem himself. ("Devekut, or Communion with God," in the volume "The Messianic Idea in Judaism, and Other Essays on Jewish Spriituality" (1971), where it is followed by Scholem's view of "Martin Buber's Interpretation of Hasidism."One of my (several) minor objections to the volume is the use of endnotes for the sources; I would have preferred them at ends of the quoted passages, instead of having to flip back and forth. Particularly because the notes are keyed only by page numbers -- the readings have no separate titles. Most of the notes are simply bibliographic (identifying the source of a passage), but a good percentage are explanatory, or acknowledge editorial re-arrangements of the text. The latter practice is understandable; in all too many cases, the writings were originally oral presentations mainly in Yiddish (the German-based vernacular of Eastern European Jews), taken down by followers, and published in Hebrew translation. The combination of sometimes repetitive oral style, and confused or conflated transmission, from time to time produces a muddle from which the original message must be extricated.

In their introduction to this volume the authors distinguish between the prayer of the practicioneers of Lurianic Kabbalah and the prayer of the Hasidic masters featured here. The complicated

symbolism and learning of the Kabbalists is contrasted with the simplicity and directness of Hasidic prayer. The Kabbalists are opening complicated locks with hidden keys, while the Hasidic masters are smashing the lock open with their own broken hearts. The Kabbalists are focusing on some cosmological tikkun of the world as a whole, while the Hasidic masters are focusing on individual devekut individual clinging and attachment to God. The excerpts given here can help the reader realize that service of God which is the holy essential duty of every Jew.

Your Word is Fire: The Hasidic Masters on Contemplative Prayer, edited and translated by Arthur Green and Barry W. Holtz, present short passages from Hasidic masters and their books.The main thrust of this slim volume is for use: this is not an academic book, but to be employed during moments of prayer of mediation. As the authors explain in the introduction:"The mystical ecstasy of the Hasidism flow from the rediscovery that God is present in all of human life. All things and all moments are vessels that contain his presence."This book fits nicely with Rabbi Arthur Green's long career of taking Hasidic elements of worship, and fitting them into contemporary Jewish needs. For Green, this concerns God's radical immanence in the world.The passages in this book are a compendium of such expressions of God, and are meant to facilitate such a view.

This is a wonderful, wonderful reader in Hasidic perspectives on prayer. The book blossoms with deep insights into the spiritual dynamic between God and humans. Please consider the following:"A father has a young child whom he greatly loves. Even though the child has hardly learned to speak, his father takes pleasure in listening to his words." (p. 102)There is something both bold and humbling about and such a perspective on prayer. God is not only King, but Father as well. The Infinite One is both large and small, far and near.Many of the different dynamics of prayer are explored in this work, each in its own section, and everything is referenced at the end of the book. The book opens with an academic essay that provides a good context for the Hasidic exploration of the vast sea of prayer, the experience of union with the Divine Presence (p. 80). As with most readers, any background knowledge of Hasidism is helpful, but at the same time not necessary to have in order to be touched by the wisdom of these mystics.I think, though, that this book needs to be approached as an open door to the myster of prayer. Rather than just being read, it should be tested: to approach God as a child who is unable to speak is a humbling thing. To persist, nonetheless, and draw close to God as God draws us and pulls us close is to experience God's love. The reader of this book will have some far reaching light as s/he travels and progresses down the path of such prayer.

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