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The Book Of Letters: A Mystical Hebrew Alphabet (Kushner)



Synopsis

In calligraphy by the author. Folktales about and exploration of the mystical meanings of the Hebrew Alphabet. Open the old prayerbook-like pages of The Book of Letters and you will enter a special world of sacred tradition and religious feeling. More than just symbols, all twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet overflow with meanings and personalities of their own. Rabbi Kushner draws from ancient Judaic sources, weaving Talmudic commentary, Hasidic folktales and Kabbalistic mysteries around the letters.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The Book of Letters: A Mystical Alef-Bait is written in English, but the format is classically Talmudic. The book opens from right to left, ending on the page where most readers are accustomed to beginning. Lawrence Kushner, a Massachusetts rabbi whose writings have helped restore a mystical dimension to popular Judaism in America, wrote The Book of Letters in beautiful calligraphy that is reproduced on every page of this finely bound edition. The text does not so much analyze or explain the letters of the Hebrew alphabet as play with them, teasing their forms and functions for hints of their significance. Noting that aleph, the unpronounceable first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, is also the first letter of the names of the first man (Adam), the first Jew (Abraham), and the herald of the last man (Elijah), as well as the first letter of the first commandment, Kushner notes that "The most basic words there are begin with the most primal sound there is." The Book of Letters is full of seriously playful insights like this. It's a marvelous

guide to meditation, a primer for students of Hebrew calligraphy, and a fun introduction to learning Hebrew. --Michael Joseph Gross --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Once upon a time, a very long time ago, a tribe faced life and death. Their conqueror demanded the people bow down to his pagan idols. This tribe of Semitic peoples always lived by the law of the land they were in. But this they could not do. For these tribes of Hebrews lived by the word of one God, as understood thousands of years earlier on Mt. Sinai. This God, who had neither face nor name, breathed commandments into their collective souls. One of the bedrock 10 commandments prohibited the worship of idols. Should this tribe bow down to a conqueror's idol so that they could live? Or should the Jewish people resist, preserving their tribal soul, but risking survival? One band of Jews refused to bend their knees to the idol. Led by Judah and the Maccabees, they rose up against the Seleucid king and reclaimed their temple. This minor military victory 2,100 years ago •the first recorded battle fought over religious freedom• became a tribal holiday called Hanukkah. It is a celebration for all people who refuse to betray themselves. Over the years, Hanukkah traditions evolved. One was the giving of money to children, who would then give a portion to the needy. Another tradition involved the giving of the written word. ``It was a custom in the old days to give books on Hanukkah,' said Rabbi Joel Schwab of Temple Sinai in Middletown. It made sense. The Jews, forced to flee to far corners of the earth, were unified and preserved by the written word. In America, Jews enjoyed religious freedoms unheard of in their history. In their drive for assimilation, Hanukkah became ``the Jewish Christmas.' There was the Hanukkah bush, Hanukkah stockings and an orgy of lavish gift-buying. These were the bitter Hanukkah ironies. The holiday celebrating the rejection of false idols found American Jews bowing before the idol of consumerism. The holiday rejecting assimilation found American Jews mimicking the holiday of the dominant religion. Recently, though, Jews have begun to reclaim Hanukkah. A Jewish renewal is spreading across America among Reform, Conservative and Orthodox Jews. Synagogue attendance is up. A conference in New York City this month sponsored by the Jewish Renewal movement (see sidebar) brought an overflow crowd of 2,000 people. Many baby-boomer Jews who abandoned religious involvement in their earlier years are finding that middle age brings them back to Judaism in a search for answers. This year Hanukkah shows up early on the modern calendar. The first night begins Sunday, Nov. 27, nearly a month before Christmas. This gives it room to breathe and assert its own identity. Perhaps then it is time to go back to the tradition of Jewish book-giving for Hanukkah. After all, Jews have historically been called the people of the Book. Sales of Judaica books have taken off over the past 10 years with new publishing houses springing up like

fig trees in the Negev desert. The books have also attracted an audience among Christians, who are enriching their own beliefs by taking a second look at their Jewish roots. What follows on pages 4-5 is a sampling of some of the best books available. The list is by no means comprehensive, but a starting point in a search for your own Jewish book life. Area bookstores will be glad to fill orders for books not in stock. Books ordered early this week should arrive in plenty of time for Hanukkah. Happy Hanukkah and a happy reading. Home references- The Book of Letters: A Mystical Hebrew Alphabet. (Mike Levine Times-Herald Record)

It would make a great gift for Jewish children studying for their Bar or Bat Mitzvah, but also for anyone interested in this ancient language. Rabbi Kushner does a fantastic job explaining each letter.

It is another side to means the Hebrew character. I understand now the philosophy why they are write like that and what is the correlation in between human and the true G-d Adonai Eloheem

Love the insight!

Lawrence Kushner is a great author and more than one of his volumes rest on our bookshelves. I bought this for my husband and he pretty much devoured it. The book says it is meant for children but we both disagree with the idea that "only" children will get value reading this book. Yes, get it for your child if you want but don't hesitate to open it up just for yourself especially if you are interested in some of the kabbalist ideas on Hebrew letters.

Amazing calligraphy well formulated. Loved the right too left hand writing style.

This little book is a sweet, mystical addition to any library. Expect to learn something new, but don't expect a substantive text. It's more like an illustrated mystical alphabet for adults than an in-depth test. Also? This text is really good as a resource for calligraphers! :)

I am working with this book right now it is a good source of information.

Beautiful book with its calligraphy and the scraps of wisdom that illustrate each Hebrew letter. Inspiring.

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