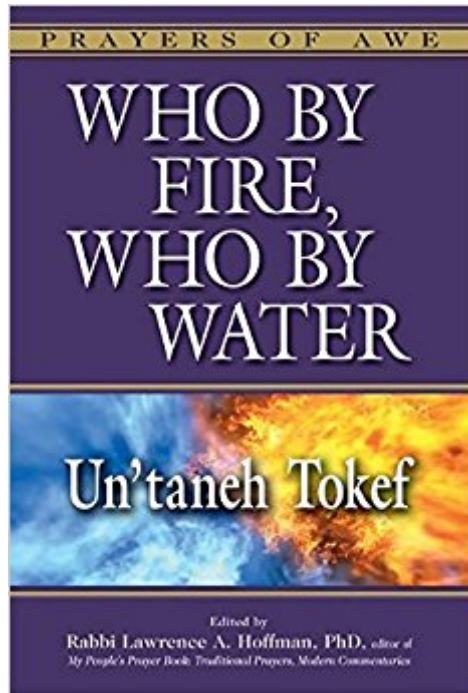




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Who By Fire, Who By Water: Un'taneh Tokef (Prayers Of Awe)



Synopsis

The most controversial prayer of the Jewish New Year—what it means, who wrote it, why we say it. Over forty contributors who span three continents and all major Jewish denominations examine Un'taneh Tokef's theology, authorship, and poetry through a set of lively commentaries. Men and women, scholars and rabbis, artists and poets trace the history of Un'taneh Tokef and connect the prayer to its biblical and rabbinic roots. They wrestle with the personal and community impact of its deeply moving imagery, probe its haunting message of human mortality, and reflect on its call for sanctity, transformation and renewal.

Prayers of Awe: A multi-volume series designed to explore the High Holy Day liturgy and enrich the praying experience for everyone—whether experienced worshipers or guests who encounter Jewish prayer for the very first time.

Contributors: Merri Loving, Arian, Rabbi Tony Bayfield, D.D., Rabbi Sharon Brous, Dr. Marc Brettler, Dr. Erica Brown, Rabbi Ruth Durchslag, Psy.D., Rabbi Edward Feinstein, Rabbi Elyse D. Frishman, Rabbi Andrew Goldstein, Ph.D., Dr. Joel M. Hoffman, Rabbi Delphine Horvilleur, Rabbi Elie Kaunfer, Rabbi Karyn D. Kedar, Dr. Reuven Kimelman, Rabbi Lawrence Kushner, Rabbi Noa Kushner, Rabbi Daniel Landes, Rabbi Ruth Langer, Ph.D., Liz Lerman, Rabbi Asher Lopatin, Catherine Madsen, Rabbi Jonathan Magonet, Ph.D., Rabbi Dalia Marx, Ph.D., Ruth Messinger, Rabbi Charles H. Middleburgh, Ph.D., Rabbi Rachel Nussbaum, Rabbi Aaron Panken, Ph.D., Rabbi Or N. Rose, Rabbi Marc Saperstein, Ph.D., Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso, Rabbi Jonathan P. Slater, D.Min., Rabbi Brent Chaim Spodek, Rabbi David Stern, Rabbi David A. Teutsch, Ph.D., Rabbi Gordon Tucker, Ph.D., Dr. Ellen M. Umansky, Rabbi Avraham Weiss, Rabbi Margaret Moers Wenig, D.D., Dr. Ron Wolfson, Rabbi David J. Wolpe, Rabbi Daniel G. Zemel, Dr. Wendy Zierler

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Customer Reviews

Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman, PhD, has served for more than three decades as professor of liturgy at Hebrew Union CollegeâJewish Institute of Religion in New York. He is a world-renowned liturgist and holder of the Stephen and Barbara Friedman Chair in Liturgy, Worship and Ritual. His work combines research in Jewish ritual, worship and spirituality with a passion for the spiritual renewal of contemporary Judaism. His many books, written and edited, include seven volumes in the Prayers of Awe series: *Who by Fire, Who by Water*âUn'taneh Tokef; *All These Vows*âKol Nidre; *We Have Sinned: Sin and Confession in Judaism*âAshamnu and Al Chet; *May God Remember: Memory and Memorializing in Judaism*âYizkor; *All the World: Universalism, Particularism and the High Holy Days*; *Naming God: Avinu Malkeinu*âOur Father, Our King; and *Encountering God: El Rachum V'chanun*âGod Merciful and Gracious. Hoffman also edited the ten-volume series *My People*â*Prayer Book: Traditional Prayers, Modern Commentaries*, winner of the National Jewish Book Award; and coedited *My People*â*Passover Haggadah: Traditional Texts, Modern Commentaries*, a finalist for the National Jewish Book Award (all Jewish Lights). Rabbi Hoffman cofounded and developed *Synagogue 2/3000*, a transdenominational project to envision and implement the ideal synagogue of the spirit for the twenty-first century. In that capacity, he wrote *Rethinking Synagogues: A New Vocabulary for Congregational Life* (Jewish Lights). Merri Lovinger Arian is on the New York faculty of the Hebrew Union CollegeâJewish Institute of Religion and its School of Sacred Music. In addition, she serves there as *Synagogue 3000*'s consultant on liturgical arts, supervising rabbinic and cantorial students in the art of leading and creating worship collaboratively. Rabbi Tony Bayfield, CBE, DD (Lambeth), is president of the Movement for Reform Judaism in the United Kingdom. He teaches personal theology at the Leo Baeck College in London. He contributed to *We Have Sinned: Sin and Confession in Judaism*âAshamnu and Al Chet, *Who by Fire, Who by Water*âUn'taneh Tokef, and *All These Vows*âKol Nidre (all Jewish Lights). Dr. Marc Zvi Brettler is the Dora Golding Professor of Biblical Studies at Brandeis University. He contributed to all volumes of the *My People's Prayer Book: Traditional Prayers, Modern Commentaries* series, winner of the National Jewish Book Award, and to *My People's Passover Haggadah: Traditional Texts, Modern Commentaries*; *Who by Fire, Who by Water*âUn'taneh Tokef; *All These Vows*âKol Nidre; *May God Remember: Memory and Memorializing in Judaism*âYizkor; and *We Have Sinned: Sin and Confession in Judaism*âAshamnu and Al Chet (all Jewish Lights). He is coeditor of *The Jewish Annotated New Testament* and *The Jewish Study Bible*, which won the

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He was selected as an inaugural Avi Chai Fellow, known as "The Jewish Genius Award." Rabbi Karyn D. Kedar teaches matters of the spirit to groups throughout the U.S. She is senior rabbi at Congregation B'nai Jehoshua Beth Elohim in the Chicago area, and the inspiring author of *The Bridge to Forgiveness: Stories and Prayers for Finding God and Restoring Wholeness*; *Our Dance with God: Finding Prayer, Perspective and Meaning in the Stories of Our Lives*; and *God Whispers: Stories of the Soul, Lessons of the Heart* and contributed to *May God Remember: Memory and Memorializing in Judaism* •Yizkor; *Who by Fire, Who by Water* •Un'taneh Tokef; and *All These Vows* •Kol Nidre (all Jewish Lights). Rabbi Lawrence Kushner is one of the most widely read authors by people of all faiths on Jewish spiritual life. He is the best-selling author of such books as *Invisible Lines of Connection: Sacred Stories of the Ordinary*; *God Was in This Place & I, I Did Not Know: Finding Self, Spirituality and Ultimate Meaning*; *Honey from the Rock: An Introduction to Jewish Mysticism*; *The Book of Letters: A Mystical Hebrew Alphabet*; *The Book of Miracles: A Young Person's Guide to Jewish Spiritual Awareness*; *The Book of Words: Talking Spiritual Life, Living Spiritual Talk*; *Eyes Remade for Wonder: A Lawrence Kushner Reader*; *I'm God, You're Not: Observations on Organized Religion and other Disguises of the Ego*; *Jewish Spirituality: A Brief Introduction for Christians*; *The River of Light: Jewish Mystical Awareness*; *The Way Into Jewish Mystical Tradition*; and co-author of *Because Nothing Looks Like God*; *How Does God Make Things Happen?*; *Where Is God?*; *What Does God Look Like?*; and *In God's Hands*. He is the Emanu-El Scholar at San Francisco's Congregation Emanu-El and an adjunct professor of Jewish mysticism and spirituality at Hebrew Union College •Jewish Institute of Religion. Rabbi Lawrence Kushner is available to speak on the following topics: •Jewish Mystical Imagination •Rymanover's Silent Aleph: What Really Happened on Sinai •Zohar on Romance and Revelation •What Makes Kabbalah Kabbalah •Sacred Stories of the Ordinary: When God Makes a Surprise Appearance in Everyday Life Click here to contact the author. Rabbi Noa Kushner is founding rabbi of The Kitchen. One part indie-Shabbat community, one part San Francisco experiment, and one part tool kit for DIY Jewish practice. The Kitchen is building a connected, spiritually alive Jewish generation and a new resonance approach to religious life. She contributed to *Who by Fire, Who by Water* •Un'taneh Tokef, *All These Vows* •Kol Nidre and *We Have Sinned: Sin and Confession in Judaism* •Ashamnu and Al Chet (all Jewish Lights). Rabbi Daniel Landes is the director and rosh hayeshivah of the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem. Pardes brings together men and women of all backgrounds to study classical Jewish texts and contemporary Jewish issues in a rigorous, challenging and open-minded environment. Rabbi Landes is also a contributor to the *My People's Prayer Book: Traditional Prayers, Modern Commentaries* series, winner of the National

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- Nurturing the Spiritual Imagination of Children
- Tell Me a Story: Reading the Bible and the Religious Imagination of Children
- Filling in the Blanks: How Women Read the Bible
- Women and Judaism: A Personal Journey
- Midrash as a Tool for Spiritual Reflection

Rabbi Jonathan P. Slater, DMin, was ordained at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America and has a doctor of ministry degree from the Pacific School of Religion. He is the author of *Mindful Jewish Living: Compassionate Practice* and codirector of programs at the Institute for Jewish Spirituality, as well as an instructor in meditation at the JCC in Manhattan and other venues. He contributed to *Who by Fire, Who by Water*—Un'taneh Tokef, *We Have Sinned: Sin and Confession in Judaism*—Ashamnu and Al Chet and *All These Vows*—Kol Nidre (both Jewish Lights).

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and Memorializing in Judaism •Yizkor, Who by Fire, Who by Water •Un'taneh Tokef, All These Vows •Kol Nidre, and We Have Sinned: Sin and Confession in Judaism •Ashamnu and Al Chet (all Jewish Lights). Dr. Wendy Zierler is professor of modern Jewish literature and feminist studies at Hebrew Union College "Jewish Institute of Religion, New York. She is translator and coeditor with Rabbi Carole Balin of *To Tread on New Ground: The Selected Writings of Hava Shapiro* (forthcoming) and *Behikansi atah* (Shapiro's collected writings, in the original/Hebrew). She is also author of *And Rachel Stole the Idols* and the feminist Haggadah commentary featured in *My People's Passover Haggadah: Traditional Texts, Modern Commentaries* (Jewish Lights), a finalist for the National Jewish Book Award. She contributed to *May God Remember: Memory and Memorializing in Judaism •Yizkor, Who by Fire, Who by Water •Un'taneh Tokef, All These Vows •Kol Nidre, and We Have Sinned: Sin and Confession in Judaism •Ashamnu and Al Chet* (all Jewish Lights).

Anyone expecting Rabbi Hoffman's book to contain imaginative and sermonic material built on but unrelated to the true history, content, difficulties, and relevance of one of the most moving prayers of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, will be pleasantly surprised, because the book does not do so. Rabbi Hoffman offers his readers a wealth of information about the poem/prayer Un'taneh Tokef and introduce them into the history of prayers, why the ancients set aside a special prayer book, called machzor, for holidays, when and why poems, such as Un'taneh Tokef, were added to the service, who wrote this poem, why, and what meaning it can have for us today. The book includes essays by over forty rabbis and scholars from three continents, from all the major Jewish denominations, from mystics to rationalists, from halakhics to dancers. There is a legend that the poem was composed by a rabbi who suffered martyrdom. Rabbi Hoffman presents the legend translated into English from its original Hebrew source, analyses it, and shows that while the tale is inspiring and meaningful, it is not true. One contributor translates Un'taneh Tokef, offers a line by line commentary, and shows the sources of the poet's imagery, and the difficulties that exist in virtually every line because it is composed in ancient poetic Hebrew, because it is a composite of at least two original poems, and we do not know what the editor of the composite intended to convey. The book defines Un'taneh Tokef as "And let us acknowledge the power (of this day's holiness)." Some contributors point out the difficulties they see in the ideology and theology of the poem. Others highlight the seeming contradiction between the poem saying that a person's fate is sealed on Yom Kippur, while it later says that "repentance, prayer, and charity help the hardship pass." The primary image of the prayer/poem is God possessing tablets or scrolls in which He

inscribes the deeds and destinies of human beings. This notion predates Israel. The people of ancient Mesopotamia held the identical idea. Many of the writers in this volume found this view of God disturbing. Do we want to portray God anthropomorphically, like a forgetful king who needs to write himself post-um notes to prompt him to remember to act? Another central idea of the poem is that God is involved in producing evil. Is he responsible for the holocaust? Did he cause men and women to have cancer? Another idea is that "penitence, prayer, and charity avert the evil decree" (or, as translated in the volume, "help the hardship pass"; the book explains the difference). Yet, experience has shown that this is simply untrue. A fourth disturbing picture in the poem is the people passing passively before God like ignorant unthinking sheep, a view that is antithetical to the heroism of Abraham who argued with God about Sodom and Gomorrah. Should these ideas be understood metaphorically and, if so, how? Writers offer their positive suggestions, such as the poem is telling its readers that this is a time to wake up, to take notice, to see the fragility of life, to consider how judgments are formed and sealed, to change, to abandon despair and apathy, to set goals, to reshape our character, to challenge and take control of our fate and our destiny, to reject the notion that we are helpless before nature and God, decide to control our reactions to events that we cannot control. Victor Frankl, who survived years in a Nazi concentration camp, understood this when he wrote: "Human freedom is not freedom from conditions, but freedom to take a stand toward the condition." Readers will obtain a new understanding of this important prayer and the new understanding will aid them in seeing other High Holiday prayers more meaningfully.

The first site offering the book at a discount to the original publisher. Good price

Some things are lightning rods of controversy. Un'taneh Tokef is one of them. "Who By Fire, Who By Water" is a collection of Rabbis and other Jewish thinkers as they converge and offer their own thoughts and opinions on the controversial piece of Jewish literature and what it means in regard to the Jewish new year. For those seeking a fascinating look into one of the hotly debated topics of modern Judaism, "Who By Fire, Who By Water" is a core addition to any Judaic studies collection.

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