



Prayers & Meditations for Friday Evening: Jewish Religious Writings with Gender-Neutral & All-Embracing Translation & Commentary

H. G. Gerjuoy

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For either individual or communal prayer and meditation, for each prayer, this book provides -- (a) Hebrew or Aramaic Jewish text in both Hebrew and transliterated Roman orthography, (b) literal or almost literal English translation, (c) expressive, free, penetrating, or poetic English rendering that reveals some of the deeper allusions or meanings, and (d) commentaries. About a third of the book comprises selections that may be bases for meditation. From the author's preface: "As I prepared this book, I tried to picture readers whom I might be addressing. One such is a young adult who feels coerced to attend a prayer service. I hope to provide that reader with content that will help her or him feel that attending the service is not time wasted. Another (or possibly another part of the same) reader is one who has been ill treated, perhaps because of the reader's gender or gender preference, or perhaps because of some other physical or cultural baggage carried by the reader or others. I hope to point toward a path that moves from blaming to cooperative problem solving, and transcends both rebellion against and submission to coercive authority, offering compassion, forgiveness, reconciliation, release, and understanding to both oppressors and the oppressed." Selected excerpts from the commentaries in this book: "Strictly monotheistic Judaism regards body and spirit as dual aspects of one creation by the one and only God, and so considers erotic pleasure, in an appropriate setting, to be a holy blessing." "Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel said we should live life as if it were a work of art." "Rabbi Zalman Meshullam Schachter-Shalomi, a founder of the Jewish Renewal movement, proposed that the laws of kashruth be extended to take into account the environmental, ethical, and social contexts in which food is produced and consumed. The extension, known as 'eco-kashruth,' has [been] accepted by many. To be eco-kosher, food must be sustainably produced and consumed. . . . Exploitive or unhealthy working conditions of those who . . . produce food or bring it to the consumer may also render it [non eco-kosher]. [So may producing or distributing] food [in ways that contribute] to undesirable climate change." "We recognize that every people, like every individual, has a unique destiny and, therefore, in some way is specially chosen." "Exodus 23:2 commands: 'Do not follow the crowd to do wrong.' This . . . may imply that popular wrong is worse than idiosyncratic wrong. Recently, weapons of war have become so powerful they could exterminate all life on our planet. Is war our time's outstanding popular wrong?" "May we see through whatever hideous masks our imaginations paste over the faces of those we blame for our pain, those we label our enemies. Those masks often cover fearful and suffering human faces like ours. Let us realize that others may be tempted to hurt us because they blame us for their pain, or fear we may hurt them, just as we may be tempted to mistreat others by our belief that they mistreat or have mistreated or may mistreat us. "Abuse does not give the abused license to recycle abuse." "The Hebrew word for peace is linked etymologically and by pronunciation with the Hebrew words for completion and for making a final payment on a debt. Thus, in Hebrew, absence of peace connotes incompleteness and imbalance. . . . Absence of peace also connotes an unfulfilled obligation, hence an injustice. Through its association with . . . settling a debt, absence of peace suggests that someone owes someone, and that therefore attaining peace means moving from . . . where one party has a temporary unfair advantage to . . . where the relation [is] balanced. Thus, before peace is achieved, implicitly there is lingering injustice." "The [Hebrew word for peace] does not connote inactivity [but rather] harmonious activity."

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