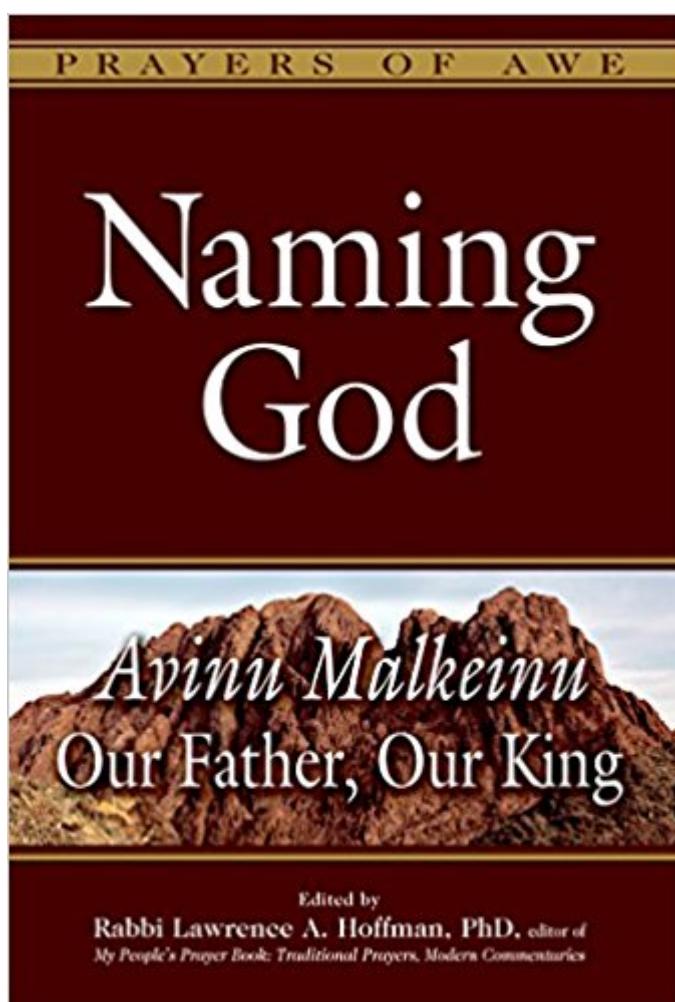


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# Naming God: Avinu Malkeinuâ€"Our Father, Our King (Prayers Of Awe)



## **Synopsis**

An in-depth exploration of the complexities "and perhaps audacity" of naming the unnameable. Almost forty contributors from all Jewish denominations and from around the world wrestle with Avinu Malkeinu and the linguistic and spiritual conundrum it presents, asking, "How do we name God altogether, without recourse to imagery that defies belief?" •

## **Book Information**

File Size: 6683 KB

Print Length: 336 pages

Publisher: Jewish Lights; 1 edition (June 22, 2015)

Publication Date: June 22, 2015

Sold by: Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B01HT6D9Y6

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #634,646 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #30 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Religion & Spirituality > Judaism > Prayerbooks #145 in Books > Religion & Spirituality > Judaism > Prayerbooks #472 in Books > Religion & Spirituality > Judaism > Theology

## **Customer Reviews**

Found gems of spirituality upon which I continually ponder. I will return to this book for subject matter to enhance lessons and springboard discussions. Great job!

Very interesting book. I highly recommend it.

The origin of one of the most significant prayers of the Jewish High Holiday service - Avinu Malkeinu, "Our Father, Our King" which many Jews find meaningful and inspiring, is based on a story told in different versions, which is most-likely a legend. It sustained its viability because of the music that was attached to it, not its words, which became

controversial because of its depiction of God as a masculine figure. The Talmudic version in Taanit 25b tells about a draught. Rabbi Eliezer sought to cause rain to fall by saying <sup>24</sup> twenty-four blessings, but was not answered. Rabbi Akiva led after him, and said [just three parallel lines]: Our father, our king, we have sinned before you. Our father, our king, we have no king other than you. Our father, our king, for your sake, have mercy upon us. And the rain fell.<sup>25</sup> Undaunted by the masculinity in the prayer, its anthropomorphic depiction of God, its almost disrespectful notion that we can teach God what is good for the divine sake, its magical ability to produce rain, and ignoring that the story highlights that a short prayer succeeds where a long one fails, Judaism expanded Rabbi Akiva's prayer, made it far longer than the rejected recital by Rabbi Eliezer, and turned it into one of the most significant High Holiday prayers. Remarkably, although not at all surprising, while Jews stand for the reading and singing of this prayer to show its importance, beat their hearts with their fists as a sign of penitance during recitation, most of the congregation has no idea of its history, when it first appeared in a prayer book, that it exists today in many versions, many women dislike it, or how the multitude of metaphors in it should be understood. This book will help people understand the prayer. This book, *Naming God*, is the sixth very informative volume edited by Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman that focuses on Jewish High Holiday prayers, the holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Rabbi Hoffman collected several dozen rabbis and scholars who explain the prayers. The prior books focused on *Unetaneh Tokef*, *Kol Nidre*, *Ashamnu* and *Al Chet*, *Yizkor*, and the universalism in the prayers. This volume contains articles written by several dozen rabbis and scholars of all Jewish denominations, men and women. The book is divided into seven parts and two appendices: two overviews, the liturgy (five articles), the music of *Avinu Malkeinu* (two articles), precursors, foundations, and parallels (eight chapters), how the prayer book editors deal with naming God (four chapters), Masculine imagery and feminist critique (five chapters), and the use of God's names (thirteen chapters). There is an appendix on *Avinu Malkeinu* though time and a second one on alternatives to *Avinu Malkeinu*. The book also has a dozen pages of notes and a half dozen pages of glossary. The book is easy to read, very comprehensive, and readers will learn much by reading it. For example, Rabbi Tony Bayfield discusses the radically different views of God by Rabbi Ishmael and Rabbi Akiva. The former thought that God is transcendental while the later felt that God is imminent. The *Avinu Malkeinu* prayer, based on a legend about Rabbi Akiva, follows his position and uses his language where he sees God being present, and speaks to God metaphorically as father and king.

. "A model of divinity that does not partake of personhood can hardly be expected to cultivate

personhood in man." - Yochanan Muffs

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