

Speaking Torah: Spiritual Teachings from around the Maggid's Table. Vol.1: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus; Vol.2. Numbers, Deuteronomy, the Holiday Cycle by Arthur Green with Ebn Leader, Ariel Evan Mayse and Or N. Rose.
Jewish Lights Publishing 2013.

Since his unsurpassed biography of Nachman of Bratzlav, Tormented Master, Art Green has produced a series of fine books, among which Radical Judaism may prove to have the most lasting effect. In the two volumes of Speaking Torah he returns to the world of the Hasidim, within whose spiritual, mystical and intellectual realm he is very much at home.

Following a note to the reader and a superb introduction to the seminal first three generations of Hasidism (1740-1815) from whose ranks the commentaries are drawn, we follow the books of the Torah, divided into their individual parashiyot, and, much more briefly, Shabbat and the festivals. The style of approach is immensely effective: a small section is taken from the Torah text of the week, followed by a piece of Hasidic commentary from a named Hasidic source. The section is then concluded by a 'Round Two' in which Green and his collaborators discuss important themes and ideas.

There are detailed notes on sources and authors at the end of volume 2, but what makes Speaking Torah a real landmark in the illustrious bibliography of Jewish Lights Publishing is that it may be read from right to left as well as left to right, for selections of the commentaries on all the English sections are reproduced in Hebrew!

Speaking Torah is thus an excellent introduction to the Torah commentaries of close colleagues and traditionaries of the Maggid of Mezritch for those whose interest in such material is just beginning, as well as more seasoned students; it also opens up to a much wider readership some of the Hasidic material that would otherwise have hitherto been readily available only to specialists.

All in all, Speaking Torah should have a place in every collection of Judaica, and should become a favourite in adult education programmes everywhere.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh