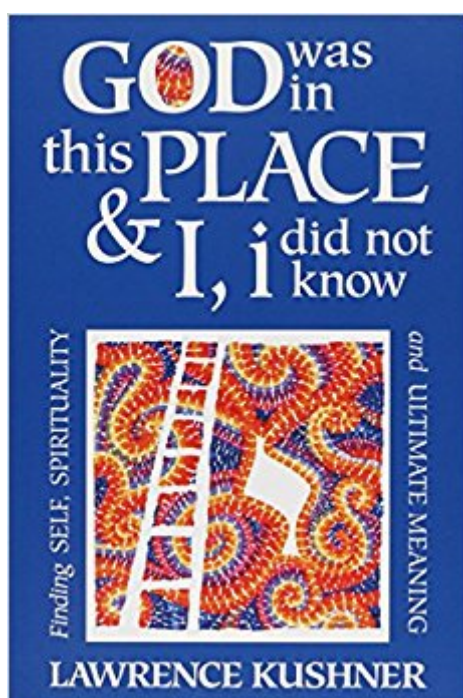


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# God Was In This Place & I, I Did Not Know: Finding Self, Spirituality And Ultimate Meaning (Kushner)



## Synopsis

Selected as a Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC) “Significant Jewish Book” • Jacob was running away from home. One night he lay down in the wilderness to sleep and had one of the great mystical experiences of Western religion. He dreamed there was a ladder, with angels ascending and descending, stretched between heaven and earth. For thousands of years, people have tried to overhear what the messengers came down to tell Jacob, and us. Now in a daring blend of scholarship and imagination, psychology and history, Lawrence Kushner gathers an inspiring range of interpretations of Genesis 28:16 given by sages, from Shmuel bar Nachmani in third-century Palestine to Hannah Rachel Werbermacher of Ludomir who lived in Poland two hundred years ago. Through a fascinating new literary genre and Kushner’s creative reconstruction of the teachers’ lives and times, we enter the study halls and sit at the feet of these spiritual masters to learn what each discovered about God’s Self and ourselves as they ascend and descend Jacob’s ladder. In this illuminating journey, our spiritual guides ask and answer the fundamental questions of human experience: Who am I? Who is God? What is God’s role in history? What is the nature of evil? How should I relate to God and other people? Could the universe really have a self? Rabbi Lawrence Kushner brilliantly reclaims a millennium of Jewish spirituality for contemporary seekers of all faiths and backgrounds. *God Was in This Place & I, I Did Not Know* is about God and about you; it is about discovering God’s place in the universe, and yours.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

God Was in This Place & I, I Did Not Know is about seven different ways to read the Bible verse quoted in its title (Genesis 28:16). The titular verse is Jacob's exclamation upon awakening from his vision of angels ascending and descending a ladder to heaven. For centuries, readers have tried to imagine what the angels were trying to tell Jacob; Rabbi Lawrence Kushner has now surveyed some of the most illuminating reflections on that question. The book's sources range from Shmuel bar Nachmnani in third-century Palestine, to Hannah Rachel Werbermacher of Ludomir, who lived in 18th-century Poland. Kushner blends these rabbinic interpretations with his own reflections on Jacob's vision in a strong, impassioned style. God Was in This Place is not only about the Jacob story, however; it is, most importantly, a brilliant book about the way that Scripture offers meaning: "Biblical words shatter and rearrange themselves before our sustained gaze," Kushner writes. "As we read in Jeremiah, 'My word is like fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer that shatters the rock.'" --Michael Joseph Gross

The interpretations of the Genesis (28:16) account of Jacob's dream of a ladder with ascending and descending angels by seven historical rabbis--one, Hannah Rachel Werbermacher, who lived in Poland 200 years ago--are gathered here in an arresting interplay of ideas and backgrounds. According to Massachusetts rabbi Kushner ( The Book of Letters ), this collection of views is "actually one long midrash, that is, fiction concealed beneath the apparent text of the biblical narrative." This imaginative volume is filled with reverence for the Hebrew word and the tradition that transmits as well the identity of its great teachers through the centuries. With considerable flexibility in blending ancient wisdom with contemporary illuminations, Kushner makes accessible to readers the richness and attractions of mystical inquiry. Copyright 1991 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

The idea behind God was in this Place and I, i did not know it is excellent. Take the famous line from Jacob at Beth-el, and see how it has been interpreted throughout the ages by various Jewish worthies. In the process, have them talk to Jacob in a kind of free form midrash, unshackled by time. And since the writer is Rabbi Lawrence Kushner, add a bit a personal reflection and home grown stories. All the elements are here, but the book never gets off the ground. In juggling so many elements in so short a space, Kushner gets lost, and the book lacks a real sense of forward

momentum or thrust. This would have been a good idea for two, maybe even three books. Kushner would have then allowed himself the luxury of exploring some of the very good themes he has laid down here and not fully explored.

I was hoping for something meatier- something that gave a new perspective on seeking out depth in biblical narratives. This is a well written book as all Rabbi Kushner's books are but it was for someone fairly new to Judaism texts and thought.

As a Christian, I wasn't that familiar with the concept of midrash. This helped to understand that. Also, it opened my mind to a new way to engage with scripture. The best way I can describe this book is that it is not dense, but it is deep. Read it with a women's book group, and we all enjoyed it.

I expected something scholarly and dry; but, this book is uplifting, thought-provoking and incredibly readable. After reading this, I purchased several more of Kushner's books and will probably read everything the man has written (and writes)!

I do really love this book! It was actually my first reading about Jewish Spirituality, and i have to say, what an excellent way to think and analyze the Bible they have. It will give you seven different views about Jacob and the ladder and what really happened there. I learned a lot of things, good and important things. So i will recommend it.

Kushner is brilliant, and this is one of his very best and most accessible books. Truly excellent analysis, filled with wonderful insights.

I discovered this book in a search for something new about the story of Jacob to enhance a short sermon. The book drew me into the world of 2500 years of Torah scholarship; into its great traditions of exposition, argument and story telling. The clear way in which Rabbi Kushner presents great thoughts of Torah scholars, his writing style, and love of their wisdom, allow the reader to "be" at once a yeshiva student and a friend worthy of intimate conversation. The chapter on De Leon - Rabbi Luria - which presents the 10 commandments as a circular system, offers unique insight. Rabbi Kushner's longing for the Messiah, which is so evident in his writing has added much to my understanding of my own faith. Rabbi Kushner's liberal use of story to explain on many levels that which is difficult to explain at all sheds a new light on the "parables" of Jesus! eagerly seek out

any word of a new book. It is a blessing that when other baby boomers were rejecting their faith and their heritage, Lawrence Kushner was embracing his, and doing all the hard work with the result that his readers are drawn to the Light. He is my most precious spiritual mentor.

Growing up and fed the Christian beliefs, it is eye opening to read perspectives from Jewish scholars. The rich analysis from those in the past provided incredible insights that I will be pondering for many days to come.

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