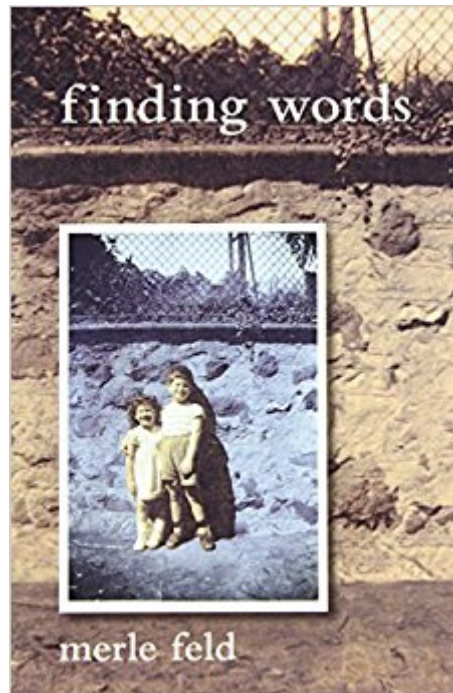




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Finding Words



Synopsis

Merle Feld is an acclaimed poet and playwright whose work has been featured in numerous books, including *The Torah: A Women's Commentary* and *Mahzor Lev Shalem*. As a scholar-in-residence, she has helped clergy and communities across North America use poetry as a powerful means of spiritual expression. Her latest poetry collection, *Finding Words*, explores the subtle beauty and stark challenges of family, the complexities of adult friendships, the struggle to center a life on what is meaningful and nourishing, and the holiness to be found in ordinary moments. Moving and accessible, *Finding Words* is a great gift for your friends, family, and congregants. It provides thoughtful content for a unique and powerful adult education program, as well as readings for worship services. The companion study guide features discussion questions to help readers and educators plumb the depths of the poetry and to ponder the Jewish sources and human feelings behind the simple yet powerful words.

Book Information

Paperback: 104 pages

Publisher: Urj Press (November 5, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0807411620

ISBN-13: 978-0807411629

Product Dimensions: 8.9 x 5.9 x 0.6 inches

Shipping Weight: 7.2 ounces

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (5 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #1,046,539 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #171 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > History & Criticism > Regional & Cultural > Jewish](#) #1491 in [Books > Textbooks > Humanities > Literature > World Literature](#) #13610 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > Poetry](#)

Customer Reviews

Someone once told me that when a tree grows, it grows from the inside out. That is why it makes rings, as it circles around itself and expands. I was told that is how you know the age of the tree. Each ring represents a year of experiences. In *Finding Words*, Merle Feld draws those contours for us, around and around her life, showing us the way her life has expanded into ever widening circles. As she "found words" to describe those experiences, what we find in her poems are layers of strength, wisdom and courage. Merle's book is full of beauty, not just because it is so raw and real and human, but also because when reading it you get the sense that she mined deep into her soul

to find these words. In that deep, deep place she found the kind of word-gems that one might expect from a soul like hers. It's true that I am biased, because Merle has been one of my great teachers. But isn't that what is so incredible about a person - the way they impact you? For this reason I want to give others the opportunity to read this book. Finding Words does what poetry does best: it takes what the Torah calls the *tohu vavohu*, the primordial chaos that swims inside us all, and makes some sense out of it. In her first poem, she talks about this very learning from the Torah and expands upon the Genesis story. While not exclusively Jewish, her poems reveal a great deal about Jewish sensibilities and way that culture with its rich texts and traditions impacted her life. One of my favorites: "There's only one question And the only answer is to keep crying, to cry daily, the way one is supposed to write daily, or pray daily, as a discipline." Here she does not reveal the content of the question, and she has the audacity to suggest an even more vague answer: "keep crying." But don't we all know what it is, to ask over and over through tears? This one poem is just a beginning. Once you start to read this book, you will crave a taste of the world she has created. You'll have to read it for yourself to get a true sense of its power. Finding Words is about naming what needs to be named: the struggles, the longings, and the joy of little details. Merle Feld conjures these experiences with her words in such a simple way that it seems like it must be magic. Her poems are messy enough to convey the truth that great writers do not have to find the best, most precise, most articulate way of saying something. What is important is finding the words that bring forward the chaos of your own heart. In bringing that chaos to the surface and putting it down on paper, Merle makes sense of that which defies order. She gives words to the ineffable. That is what is so comforting about her poetry. I want to express my great gratitude to Merle for teaching me to cry, to write, and to trust in my heart's desires. I hope I can convey to the world even a small drop of the potency of her words.

During a recent blizzard everyone in my neighborhood was housebound for a couple of days. Not me! I curled up with Merle Feld's newest book of poems - "Finding Words" - and was immediately transported into another world - a world filled with people I knew and loved, places I had been to, and of so many experiences I had lived through. How can this be? How can another person express so perfectly my thoughts and feelings about so much in my life? Merle has certainly "found the words" - the words of her poetry went straight from her heart to mine. In plain and simple language (one that someone as unpoetic as myself can understand) she brought back, so vividly, so many memories. The poem, "I notice, but do not attempt interpretation" (p. 33), spoke so perfectly to me about the mixed blessing of what is so often defined as "success". "Nearing the end" (p. 42) made

me think of my father, and how years later the emptiness remains."In that apartment" (p.72) reminded me of those early years of family struggles."The walk" (p. 30) drove home one of the hard truths about being a mother. But then a poem like "Giddy" (p. 56) made me smile - both at the form and the content. A wonderful tale about window-washing, of all things! As I sat there and read and pondered that long snowy afternoon, I think that Merle's poems evoked in me almost every emotion I've ever had. I laughed, I cried, I smirked, I nodded wisely, I hurt, I questioned, and I thought - for a long time. The following day, a dear neighbor (also snowbound), shared the following with me after she read Merle's book: "If I could write like Merle, the poem "She visits" (p. 67) is the poem I would write, using precisely her thoughts and words, because I've had that very experience. I found myself crying when I read it. I was simply stunned!" Merle writes from her heart - and directly into the heart of all her readers, not just mine. That is her great gift - one that should be treasured and shared.

I keep buying and giving away copies of Merle Feld's FINDING WORDS, so now I don't have a copy to refer to while writing this review, the gist of which is that normally I don't look twice or long at poems because they're either too self-conscious and precious, or too pretentious and obtuse, but these poems yanked and pulled, invited and warmed with their humility, depth, angst, and love, humor, honesty. I even read them out loud: at a neighborhood pot-luck, a poem about the unique satisfactions of nursing a baby; for a solstice gathering, a confession about the desire to look through your adult child's bulging Hefty bags before the department of public waste takes them to the dump.

This book is an easy read with poignant insights to the human experience. You will re-read the poems. 5 stars

I don't read much poetry but her words are lovely and thought provoking. The books sits on my nightstand and I read a poem or two before bed. Often they bring memory of events in one's own life.

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