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# Experience: Thinking, Writing, Language, and Religion (Modern & Contemporary Poetics)

*Norman Fischer*

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**Experience: Thinking, Writing, Language, and Religion (Modern & Contemporary Poetics)** Norman Fischer
By what narrow path is the ineffable silence of Zen cleft by the scratch of a pen? The distilled insights of forty years, Norman Fischer's *Experience: Thinking, Writing, Language, and Religion* is a collection of essays by Zen master Fischer about experimental writing as a spiritual practice.

Raised in a Conservative Jewish family, Fischer embraced the twin practices of Zen Buddhism and innovative poetics in San Francisco in the early 1970s. His work includes original poetry, descriptions of Buddhist practice, translations of the Hebrew psalms, and eclectic writings on a range of topics from Homer to Heidegger to Kabbalah. Both Buddhist priest and participant in avant-garde poetry's Language movement, Fischer has limned the fertile affinities and creative contradictions between Zen and writing, accumulating four decades of rich insights he shares in *Experience*.

Fischer's work has been deeply enriched through his collaborations with leading rabbis, poets, artists, esteemed Zen Buddhist practitioners, Trappist monks, and renowned Buddhist leaders, among them the Dalai Lama. Alone and with others, he has carried on a deep and sustained investigation into the intersection of writing and consciousness as informed by meditation.

The essays in this artfully curated collection range across divers, fascinating topics such as time, the Heart Sutra, God in the Hebrew psalms, the supreme "uselessness" of art making, "late work" as a category of poetic appreciation, and the subtle and dubious notion of "religious experience." From the theoretical to the revealingly personal, Fischer's essays, interviews, and notes point toward a dramatic expansion of the sense of religious feeling in writing.

Readers who join Fischer on this path in *Experience* can discover how language is not a description of experience, but rather an experience itself: shifting, indefinite, and essential.

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