

Leonard Cohen remembered as a 'great liturgical writer'

by [Christian Century staff](#) in the [December 7, 2016](#) issue

Leonard Cohen, a Jewish singer, songwriter, poet, and novelist most widely known for his song “Hallelujah,” died November 7 at age 82.

Cohen, grandson of a Talmudic scholar, grew up in Montreal’s Jewish community.

“The first poetry that affected me was in the synagogue, in the liturgy and the Bible stories, and that would send shivers down my spine,” Cohen said in the documentary *Leonard Cohen: I’m Your Man*.

He became a Buddhist monk in the 1990s, which he didn’t see as conflicting with Judaism, according to interviews.

In the title track of his album *You Want It Darker*, released in October, he sings “*Hineni, Hineni*, I’m ready, my Lord.”

Cohen also published a dozen books, many of them poetry. Mordecai Finley, an LA rabbi whose synagogue Cohen attended in his final years, [told the New Yorker](#) that he often reads from Cohen’s collection of contemporary psalms, *Book of Mercy*, on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Cohen was “a great liturgical writer,” Finley said.

Psalm-like qualities are also evident in songs such as “If It Be Your Will” and “Come Healing.”

“This biblical landscape is very familiar to me,” Cohen said in a recent video posted on his Facebook page. “Once they were universal references. . . . That’s no longer the case today, but it is still my landscape.”