

6 Jewish Spiritual Paths – A Rationalist Looks At Spirituality. By Rabbi Rifat Sonsino. Published by Jewish Lights Publishing, 2003.

How can we make Jewish Life more meaningful? Is a frequently asked question, and the word that most commonly figures in given answers is 'spirituality'. Rifat Sonsino writes about the phenomenon of Jewish Spirituality, particularly as it is discussed and conceptualised in a contemporary context.

The perspective from which he approaches the subject is that of a rationalist who nevertheless recognises both the power of a deliberate spiritual content in religious activities (not nearly as much of a *sine qua non* as one might expect) as well as the lack of a spiritual dimension in so many areas of contemporary Jewish life.

To the \$64,000 question about how best to address this perceived lack, Rabbi Sonsino proposes a variety of active and passive approaches, identifying key areas in which what might be called 'spirituality work' may be performed, including study, prayer, ritual and good deeds. In each he quotes extensively from colleagues who take a variety of approaches, and acknowledges that he has always find the greatest spiritual potential in the study of Jewish texts – a position that this reviewer empathises with wholeheartedly!

Some aspects of this book may grate on British ears, particularly those for whom a rational, intellectual, reasoned stance represents one of the greatest achievements of 20th century Progressive Judaism. Nevertheless, they must acknowledge that this does not offer enough to questing Jews in the 21st century who seek much more than the provision of food for their minds.

6 Jewish Spiritual Paths is one of the better offerings of this growing genre, and should be required reading for rabbis and lay people alike.

Becoming a Congregation of Learners by Isa Aron PhD. Published by Jewish Lights Publishing, 2002 (Second Printing).

"I have seen the future...and it is called Becoming a Congregation of Learners"! That might have a somewhat grand ring to it, even a hint of revolution, but both are extremely appropriate. This book is a minutely detailed, meticulously planned road map to the future for every congregation – it is powerful and persuasive, and for many it will be absolutely terrifying.

Becoming a Congregation of Learners is all about changing our synagogues from the arid, boring, non-engaging places they have become over the last thirty years into vibrant, committed centres of activity, Jewish learning and spirituality.

Emanating from the Synagogue 2000 concept, this weighty book is the first of two volumes the contents of which, if put into practice, will change all our lives for the better.

A tiny quibble might be that there is too much detail (the message could have been just as well put across with 50 or so less pages) and that the overwhelming nature of the change described in all its stages may so terrify some readers as to make them make the mistake of dropping the book in horror! But if it is true that all great developments in United States Judaism work their way across the Atlantic in two decades or so, then Becoming a Congregation of Learners is on its way and we cannot afford to ignore it.

Becoming a Congregation of Learners (and its companion volume The Self-Renewing Congregation – to be reviewed separately) should be compulsory reading for all rabbis and synagogue Councils, as well as for rabbis in training.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh