

The Rituals and Practices of a Jewish Life – A Handbook for Personal Spiritual Renewal.

Edited by Rabbi Kerry M. Olitzky and Rabbi Daniel Judson. Jewish Lights, 2002.

There was widespread controversy a few years ago when a President of the CCAR published a spiritual manifesto that seemed to call for an abandonment of intellectual rigour in Progressive Judaism in favour of the performance of more mitzvot. Whether he actually said what was inferred was lost in the debate, but he certainly opened up the vital area of what Liberal Jews in the 21st century can do to enhance and deepen the spiritual quality of their lives.

For Rabbis Olitzky and Judson, and all the colleagues and lay people whose testimony they reproduce, part of the answer is in 'doing Jewish'. So they go through a range of rituals all too easily ignored by many of us – including wearing Tefillin and Tallit Katan, Mikveh, Kashrut, Recitation of Blessings - explain their performance, discuss their value, and encourage their practice.

Like one or two similar examples of the genre, The Rituals and Practices of a Jewish Life may grate on a more cynical British readership, but the editors are to be thanked for their contribution not only to a greater understanding of the rationale behind some ritual actions, but also for encouraging a greater degree of willingness to experiment.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh