

ReThinking Synagogues - A New Vocabulary for Congregational Life by
Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman.

The Spirituality of Welcoming - How to Transform Your Congregation
Into a Sacred Community by Dr Ron Wolfson.

Both by Jewish Lights Publishing, 2006.

As scholars, respectively, of liturgy and education, Larry Hoffman and Ron Wolfson must have made one of the largest ever practical contributions to American Jewry in the 20th century by two individuals. Yet having read these two books I am convinced that their supreme legacy will be the Synagogue 2000 and 3000 projects that are the subject of these volumes.

Just short of 31 years into my rabbinic career I read first Larry's, then Ron's, with a sense of buttons being repeatedly pressed, points of great wisdom and eminent practicability being made, and a real and realistic path to a successful congregational future being mapped out.

Those familiar with the S2 and S3K projects will be aware of much of the content, but here in two volumes the creators of this towering vision set out the history and the practical steps for making our congregations into sacred communities. Hoffman details the history, the ethos, the concepts and the underlying inspiration, as well as some of the successes and challenges along the way; Wolfson fleshes this out with pages of practical ideas and programmes to follow through.

Above all what I found so inspiring, and also terrifying because of the monumental challenge it poses in Anglo-Jewry, was the route to transforming a synagogue culture from one of blame (the norm) to one of honour, and of the necessity of placing God at the centre of everything we do; some of the concepts are bound to meet significant resistance in the UK, as they did in the US, but courageous rabbis should not hesitate to challenge their Councils and congregants, and try some of them out.

These two books should be read together, thought about very carefully, and then acted upon. They are inspirational, and irresistible!

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh