

My People's Prayer Book, Volume 10:
Shabbat Morning – Shacharit and Musaf (Morning and Additional Services)
Edited by Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman.
Jewish Lights Publishing 2007.

With volume 10 of this extraordinary and unique series, Rabbi Larry Hoffman and his team have reached the morning and additional services for Shabbat; the format is the same as with the previous nine volumes, each text featured being commented upon from a variety of perspectives, including the biblical, the mystical/chasidic, the feminist and the historical, as well as the comparative treatment of the chosen prayers in modern Jewish liturgies. The text is preceded by a short but excellent essay by Gordon Tucker on the ways in which the Shabbat liturgy helps to structure the time of Shabbat.

Among the prayers and Psalms analysed in volume 10 are Psalm 136, the mystical poem-prayer El Adon, and the Kedushat Hayom prayer when Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh coincide. But the crowning commentary in volume 10 is on Shir Hakavod the 31 stanza poem called Song of Glory in English, and emanating from the pietistic circles of the medieval Chasidey Ashkenaz. The commentaries on this poem are restricted to Hoffman himself, the historical analysis, and that of Ivan G Marcus, writing from the perspective of medieval piety, and each is brilliant.

Jewish liturgy is a fascinating subject, and the great strength of this series is that it has opened up the prayer book of the Jewish people to a wide readership, and provided us with a variety of approaches that are both pertinent and informative. It says much for the editorship of Larry Hoffman, and the quality of the team that he leads, that volume 10 maintains the high standard set by its predecessors, a standard that shows no sign of diminishing.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh