Making Prayer Real: Leading Jewish Spiritual Voices on Why Prayer is Difficult and What to Do about It.
Edited by Rabbi Mike Comins.
Jewish Lights Publishing, 2011.

There can be little doubt that there is a widespread problem with prayer, and its focus, in many highly acculturated and educated Western societies; yet for all the advances in life style and material accomplishment it is also true that many of us feel more alone, more uncomprehending, more lost than we suspect our parents, and certainly our grandparents,were.

The Holy Grail for any rabbi (pardon my metaphor) is to create a service experience where worshippers feel that they leave with much more than they had when they came in. To realise this dream many different ways forward suggest themselves – more Hebrew or less, more music, more silence, more 'creative extras' that can be attached without subverting the Jewish essence of the moment too much, and so on.

In Making Prayer Real, Rabbi Mike Comins has divided his collection of thoughtful pieces into four sections: The Spiritual Dynamics of Prayer, Beginning to Pray, Growing and Healing Through Prayer, and Embracing Traditional Jewish Prayer. Contributors include Brad ShavitArtson, Tirzah Firestone, Lawrence Hoffman, Naomi Levy, Rami Shapiro and David Wolpe, to name but a few, a stellar cast indeed, skilfully woven together by the editor's light hand.

In the fifth and final section Building a Prayer Practice, Comins and his contributors have created a series of twenty four 'practices' for those who wish to deepen their engagement with Jewish prayer, some simple, some demanding and a few quite challenging. His conclusion makes it clear that Making Prayer Real is not just for lay people but actually for his rabbinic colleagues, especially those who 'go through the motions' with the liturgy week in/week out.

Apart from anything else, Making Prayer Real would be a wonderful study group text for a Chevra of rabbis, or a group of lay people and rabbis to share.

Highly recommended!

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh