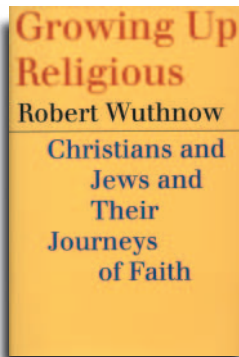




# Recent Books



*Growing Up Religious: Christians and Jews and Their Journeys of Faith*

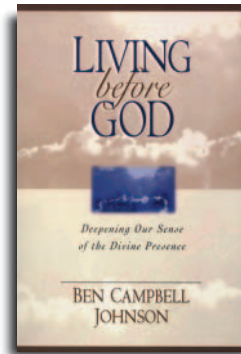
Robert Wuthnow  
Beacon Press, 1999  
249 pp., \$27.50

Wuthnow is “interested in the childhood experiences that give us clues about the nature of spirituality. Talking with adults about their religious upbringing has con-

vinced me that spirituality is much more deeply rooted in our personal histories, in our families and congregations, than in anything else” (p. xi).

In his research, Wuthnow and his team interviewed extensively two hundred American men and women who grew up religious and returned to religion in later life (transcriptions of 50-200 pages each). The team inquired about their upbringing, the values they learned as children, their parent’s religious practices, how they celebrated holidays and attended religious services, how they matured, and where their spiritual journey has led them. Wuthnow discovers that what brings adults back to a spiritual life has mainly to do with the way family and other relations formed around religious practice: memories of mothers, fathers, and neighbors whose everyday acts were imbued with spiritual meaning.

No wonder he concludes, “Spirituality has been most effective in shaping the values of children when it has been practiced at home as well as in formal organizations. In the past, people practiced spirituality at home under the most diverse (and adverse) circumstances. The lesson from this history should be that spirituality is likely to survive as a feature of American childhood—if parents and grandparents are committed to its importance” (p. 236, his emphasis).



*Living before God: Deepening Our Sense of the Divine Presence*

Ben Campbell Johnson  
William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000  
142 pp., \$15.00

Ben Campbell Johnson invites readers to explore ways to enrich their relationship with God and to deepen their sense of God’s presence amid

the daily round. In *Living before God* he outlines several spiritual practices that are helpful in fostering a more consistent relationship with God. “‘Living before God’ defines one of the inescapable realities of our being in this world. We have no choice about the fact of ‘being before God,’ only about how we posture ourselves in God’s presence. Some people seem to live most of their lives without ever noticing the One who is their most attentive audience. Others attend God on occasion. Most of us need help in learning to live this great adventure” (p. ix). Campbell feels that many suffer from the “life-sleep” disease, living blind to the real world. People need to enter a process of awakening.

Following introductory discussion of the reality and nature of spiritual awareness, including a fascinating excursus on the “art of wondering,” Campbell describes various spiritual ways—he calls them “postures”—to live fully and intentionally in the presence of God. Questions he deals with are, for example, What does it mean to truly listen to God? How do we discern God’s word for us? Can God be trusted? How can God be noticed in an ordinary day?

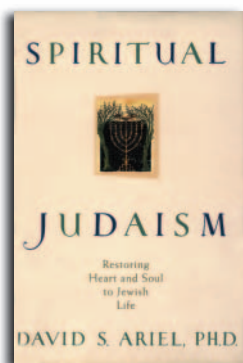
Each chapter concludes with insightful suggestions for journaling designed to let readers experience each specific posture in a concrete way, as well as with several questions intended to aid reflection on the ways of being before God.



### *Principles of Jewish Spirituality*

Sara Isaacson  
Thorsons, 1999  
181 pp., \$11.00

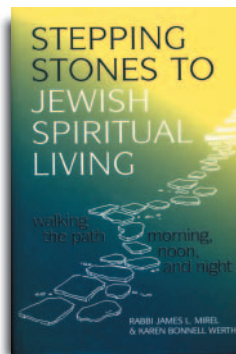
Isaacson explores the vibrant heart of Jewish spirituality. Her aim is “to show the relationship between the practices and ideas of Judaism and the underlying spiritual bedrock on which they are based” and to demonstrate “the inner significance which runs consistently through the outer structures” of the Jewish culture (p. vii). This introductory guide consisting of three parts traces spirituality in the history of the Jewish people, spirituality in the life of a Jewish person, and spirituality in the cycle of the Jewish year. Among others, *Jewish Spirituality* addresses the Jewish concept about God, prayer and ritual, work and rest, eating and drinking, how the Kabbalah fits into the totality of Judaism, and the significance of festivals, feasts, and fasting.



### *Spiritual Judaism: Restoring Heart and Soul to Jewish Life*

David S. Ariel  
Hyperion, 1998  
318 pp., \$21.95

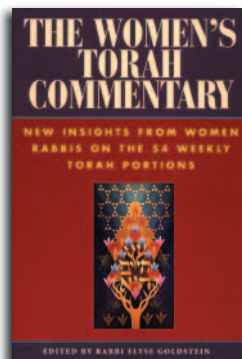
*Spiritual Judaism* is for seekers who wish to discover (or rediscover) the spiritual teachings and customs of traditional Judaism. Ariel tries to show how one can incorporate those spiritual traditions into modern practice and live an authentic spiritual Jewish life. He presents an enlightened view of Judaism as a living source of inspiration that draws faithfully on the past but looks boldly to the future. Though this rich treasury of perceptive understanding of spiritual explorations in daily life is intended especially for Jews, it will be helpful also for those living outside the Jewish community who want to delve into the experience and wisdom of the best of the spiritual traditions of Judaism.



### *Stepping Stones to Jewish Spiritual Living*

James L. Mirel & Karen Bonnell Worth  
Jewish Lights Publishing, 1998  
201 pp., \$21.95

How can we bring the sacred into our busy lives? *Stepping Stones* provides suggestions to transform the ordinary into the extraordinary. This is an innovative yet practical guide to greater mindfulness and thanksgiving that brings spirituality into our everyday lives. Chapters are arranged according to the cycle of each day—from sunrise to midnight—and feature creative new rituals, inspiring passages from traditional Jewish texts, prayers, poems, blessings, acts of *kavanah* (spiritual intention), and more. Each chapter contains two types of learning activity: Study, where the authors discuss concepts in Judaism which underpin spiritual practice; and Walking the Path, where daily activities are described and contemplation is encouraged. Mirel and Werth truly understand how to offer the rich tradition of Judaism for the spiritual seeker.



### *The Women's Torah Commentary*

Rabbi Elyse Goldstein, editor  
Jewish Lights Publishing, 2000  
474 pp., \$34.95

An international array of women rabbis—representing all movements within Judaism that ordain women—joined forces to comment on the 54 weekly Torah portions or *parashah*. Every *parashah* is explicated by a different woman. The insightful and distinctive interpretations in this first comprehensive commentary on the Torah by women will enrich the reader's perspective of the Five Books of Moses. The editor Rabbi Goldstein explains the uniqueness of this Torah commentary: “We . . . offer our own brand of homiletic, our own feminist sensibility and sensitivity, and our own list of questions. Like the rabbis of old, we innovate while trying to stay true to the text. Like the rabbis of old, we are faced with the tension of creating a new interpretation while safeguarding the sacredness of the text” (p. 39).

The anthology of homiletic explanations is accompanied by a brief, splendid introduction on the history and the role of women in rabbinical studies and in the rabbinic. Besides a glossary and suggested further reading—with an emphasis on a women's and a feminist perspective—a special feature of this book is that the female contributors are introduced in an appendix of 25 pages.