



Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children

Rabbi Dr. Leslie A Schotz

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Dr Peter Pitzele writes, "In her ground-breaking *Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children*, Rabbi Leslie Schotz has made an original and inspiring argument for the importance of a multi-faceted approach to spiritual direction of young children within the Jewish community. Her book, with its informed survey of the existing literature, will be of immense value to educators and clergy who are challenged with passing on traditional values to children and families in the 21st century. What Rabbi Schotz realizes so clearly is the necessity of approaching the children with many different modalities. Implicitly she extends the by-now familiar insight of multiple intelligences to apply to the soul by suggesting that there are multiple pathways to reach the inner life of children. Resisting the pull of purely knowledge-based and rote-driven approaches to education, Rabbi Schotz is willing to experiment with yoga, music, meditation, journaling, and special kinds of children's literature. Moreover, she models the skills of reflective presence and spiritual listening which are the real tools of spiritual direction. Her book traces her progress and that of two enlightened teachers in developing new approaches to spiritual direction for children. These approaches seek to nourish the inner life of the child. While recognizing the need for a certain level of preparation for her students, Rabbi Schotz is willing to go to unusual lengths to cultivate their innate spiritual gifts. She records her attempts and those of her team to read and to reach each child. She tells eloquently of many small interactions in which we see her penetrate the initial deflections of students who are understandably wary and bored with enforced religious education. Bit by bit we see her win their trust and open their eyes and hearts. Above all what Rabbi Schotz shows us is the power of caring curiosity. She is willing to be eclectic and inventive, to adapt and to explore. While her book inventories the many methods she pressed into the service of spiritual direction, its real story is the journey of a committed rabbi to find the heart of learning and longing in her students. Her lively observation of the lives of her students brings home the quality of attention she brings to her task, making it clear that spiritual direction can only be undertaken by a person who is herself spiritually awake. Reading Rabbi Schotz's book, I was reminded of the familiar Chassidic story of the prince who thinks he is a chicken. After many physicians attempt to cure him, the prince is finally restored to sanity only by the sage who is willing to join the prince where he is, pecking about for food under the table. To direct the soul of the child one must first discover the nature of the soul, its place, its needs, its ways of growth. Such an approach demands empathy and a deep faith that each child is already longing for the gentle touch of spiritual direction. Unlike education with its preconceived curricula, spiritual direction requires intimate and patient acts of cultivation. This book will encourage and inform those who wish to find a children where she or he is and to celebrate how each is made "in the image of God." Included is a Spirituality Survey for Jewish Students, a Methodological Bibliography: Resource Material for Teaching Ideas that Require Modification in Application to Hashpa'ah/ *Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children* and a *Spiritual Direction Book List for Jewish Children: Bibliography of Resource Material to Read to Jewish Children in Hashpa'ah / Spiritual Direction*.

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